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ABORIGINAL
HISTORY
Special Volume in honour of Diane Barwick

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Diane Barwick May 1984.
Photograph supplied by Richard Barwick.
We dedicate this volume of *Aboriginal History* to the memory of Diane Barwick. She was one of the journal’s founders and its first editor. But Aboriginal history in its wider sense was also pioneered by Diane. In Australia she was one of the first to explore the anthropological perspectives in historical documents, or interpret her anthropological data from an historical viewpoint, at a time when disciplinary boundaries kept the two perspectives apart. When the Australian Historical Association first included Aboriginal history in the program for its annual conference (that of 1982), it was to Diane that the convenors of the symposium looked to present the concluding ‘overview’. In the early 1980s she inspired many of us to follow her lead in exploring cross-disciplinary research. As a scholar of great distinction she encouraged us not only by example, but also by her readiness to share her deep knowledge, to advise and to assist.

*Aboriginal History* the journal owes so much of its continuing existence to Diane’s initiative, energy and enthusiasm as editor during its foundation years. Since her death those of us who inherited the task of editing the journal, in attempting to maintain the standards she set have realised just how high those standards were. Diane was not only a superb researcher and writer; she was also an imaginative, meticulous, and above all a dedicated editor. *Aboriginal History* must be regarded as one of the most important achievements of her all too brief life.

At the time of the journal’s inception in 1977 there existed growing concern among Aborigines and non-Aborigines to discover and record neglected facets of Australia’s history since 1788 — an awareness of the need for research on the fate of the first inhabitants in this period. Before the 1960s Australian history had been written almost entirely from the point of view of the newcomers, with little reference to the experiences of the Aborigines. There were some important studies of the impact of settlement on Aboriginal communities, but these remained isolated examples. In the 1970s they were supplemented by the first detailed analysis on an Australia-wide basis presented to a growing readership by the late Charles Rowley in his three-volume history of contact between Aborigines and settlers. These were the first in an important series of publications from the ANU Press. But there was as yet no journal devoted to this kind of history to present ongoing research as its results emerged. The need was pressing and Diane and her associates, particularly Niel Gunson, set out to establish the kind of journal which would meet it. Thus *Aboriginal History* was founded.

Diane’s death brought to us all a sense of deep and abiding loss, the loss of personal friendship and the loss of intellectual leadership. It is still hard to accept, still keenly felt. At the time there were many tributes: on radio, in the press and in professional journals. One of the first of these, on radio, came from Bob Reece, who with Diane edited the first volume of *Aboriginal History*.

The sudden and tragic death of anthropologist Diane McEachern Barwick on 4 April brought to an end a vigorous academic and public career devoted to securing justice for Australia's indigenous peoples, the Australian Aborigines. Dr Barwick possessed that combination — so rare in Australia today — of absolutely scrupulous scholarship and passionate conviction, and her reputation and influence have reached far beyond her actual published work. A Canadian by birth and a graduate in anthropology from the University of British Columbia, her first job was at the Victoria Museum in Vancouver where she worked on the Indian tribes of the north-west Pacific coast.

When Diane arrived in Canberra from Canada in 1960 to do her research on the Aborigines of Victoria, the policy of assimilation was under attack from Aboriginal and other quarters. She discovered amongst the part-Aboriginal people of Coranderrk, Lake Tyers and the other old Victorian reserves far more of the traditional culture patterns than anyone had expected to survive.

In the historical dimension of her work Diane Barwick was also able to reveal the extraordinary way in which white Australian society had conspired to perpetuate the much-loved idea that Aborigines were essentially feckless, that they could never adjust to the new economic conditions created by the invaders. If the people of Coranderrk had been allowed to have their way, if their land had not been given by a fickle colonial government to neighbouring farmers, the pattern of Aboriginal history in Victoria might have been different.

As it was, a powerful self-fulfilling prophecy continued unchallenged until the emergence of a new generation of Aboriginal activists in the 1960s. It is almost as if the collective psyche of white Australia needed Aboriginal failure to reinforce its own sense of achievement in transplanting European society into a sometimes difficult environment. Given her concern for justice, it is not surprising that Diane Barwick was a driving force in the campaign to have ownership of the Framlingham and Lake Tyers reserves vested in the people who regarded those places as their homes. A notable victory during [the period of] the Fraser government was the transfer of Framlingham in the Western District: an achievement which was largely due to her exhaustive historical research and skilful advocacy.

My own acquaintance with Diane came about through our involvement in the journal Aboriginal History, which we helped to establish in 1977 and which she edited from 1978 until 1982. Most academic journals depend upon the devotion and hard work of a small band of workers, and this was no exception. Over the years Diane lavished an enormous amount of time on editing articles, corresponding with contributors, correcting galley proofs, and so on. She was a most exacting critic and never pulled any punches when she saw sloppiness of any kind. Her sometimes brutal honesty could bruise people, but they usually came to recognise that the intent was constructive and truth-seeking. She was not an academic point-scoring.

As well as possessing such critical and analytical skills, Diane was an extraordinary repository of knowledge about the Victorian Aborigines in particular, about government policy and about the people who were involved with Aborigines in different ways: protectors, missionaries, crown lands commissioners, police, amateur ethnographers and so on. Only a tiny portion of this knowledge ever found its way into print and her death has meant, among other things, the loss of a unique resource. Her published work, extensive as it is, is only the tip of the iceberg. One consolation is that she was always more than generous with knowledge towards colleagues and students whom she considered worthy of using it and consequently she has had a significant influence on two generations of anthropologists and
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historians.

'As an anthropologist, Diane Barwick reminded us that people of less than the full Aboriginal descent are Aborigines too. As an historian, she rescued from anonymity the people who had paid the highest price for the establishment of a new European society in the southern hemisphere.'

The tributes given at the moving memorial gathering of her friends and colleagues held at University House on 17 April 1986 captured the range of Diane's personal and academic qualities. The speakers that afternoon included Ken Inglis, Nancy Williams, Diane Bell and Colin Tatz. With the consent of those concerned we present here some excerpts from the tributes made at the time, for they focused on just those qualities of Diane which we all hold so dear.

Ken Inglis had known Diane in the early days of her doctoral research on Victorian Aborigines:

'I first met Diane about twenty-five years ago, in Adelaide. She had just begun the research for her PhD thesis about regional affiliation and group identity among Aboriginal migrants in Melbourne. Diane McEachern, aged twenty-two, was studying part-Aboriginal people, as the phrase then was, in Victoria. Judy Inglis, a few years older, was studying part-Aboriginal people in South Australia. Not many scholars anywhere were studying part-Aborigines in 1960; and Diane and Judy taught each other a lot about an enterprise that was both anthropological and historical and couldn't help being political.

In Marie Reay's 1964 symposium, *Aborigines now*, Diane gave a historical sketch of the three thousand or so people of Aboriginal ancestry living in Victoria.2 The book contained also an essay on the dispersal of Aboriginal families in South Australia from 1860 to 1960, drafted by Judy Inglis and completed after her death by Diane.3 She had also gone through Judy's papers with love and tact and skill and given me the advice I needed on what to do with them.

'As a scholar Diane learned to cross with ease the border between the territories marked out for anthropology and history. In the short run, that perhaps didn't help her academic reputation, in a world where most anthropologists don't read history and most historians don't read anthropology.

'In 1977 she was a member of the group who founded the journal *Aboriginal History*, and she edited six volumes of the journal in the next six years. When she resigned to get on with other work the Chairman of the Editorial Board wrote to her saying: “You have been largely responsible for putting us in the right direction and setting high scholarly standards, and your wider contacts in the world of Aboriginal affairs and anthropology have greatly enriched our experience...” She stayed on the board, and wrote for later editors a document rich in wisdom and wit. I quote: “Because the journal has an important service function in acquainting laymen with linguistic, archaeological and anthropological evidence as well as oral and written historical records, the editors have a special responsibility to ensure a broad coverage of the field, and to assist authors to make their ideas and jargon intelligible to non-specialists.”'

2 Barwick 1964b.
3 Inglis 1964.
ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1987 11:1

‘Niel Gunson, her colleague and comrade from the beginning of the journal, wrote at the
time of her death: “Her wise counsel, her knowledge and contacts, her dedication, and above
all, the distinctive impress of her personality, will be sorely missed, though in our hearts we
know that she has lit a lamp for us to follow. Her memorial must be our renewed dedication.”

In 1979 the journal published a remarkable scholarly aid edited by Diane with Michael
Mace and Tom Stannage, the Handbook for Aboriginal and Islander History. “We agreed,”
the editors wrote, “that there was an urgent need for a manual providing information for
Aborigines beginning research on their own history.” So they found about thirty collabor­
ators and got the manuscripts from them in three weeks. Three weeks! Isabel McBryde tells
me that the vision for this Handbook was above all Diane’s; hers was the driving force. It is
full of fundamental information, conveyed with a sure sense of what the beginning scholar
needs to know, and marvellously clear. It has been reprinted several times and is much used
by undergraduates. Like all Diane’s work, the Handbook exhibits both theoretical insight
and meticulous detail. Whoever attempts a thorough account of Diane’s life and work will
need to consider how she described herself in the list of contributors to the Handbook.
Everybody else gives an academic or tribal title or address. Diane Barwick is merely “45 Waite
Street, Farrar, A.C.T. 2607”.

‘At 45 Waite Street, Farrar, and at desks temporarily occupied here and there in the
ANU, she gave what time she could spare to completing her book on Victorian Aborigines.
Rebellion at Coranderrk was long delayed by two commitments: a commitment to other
people’s lives and a commitment to perfection. The book will now be, among other things,
a memorial. The reader’s report to the publisher says this: “The painstaking research, the
perceptive judgments of people and events, and the brilliant prose . . . combine to produce a
magnificent account . . .” The publisher, this assessor goes on, “may have a classic on its
hands; certainly it has a landmark manuscript, one which occupies a place in Australian
literature and historical writing akin to the great transitional paintings in the history of art
movements”.

‘When Diane resigned from editing Aboriginal History the biggest job on her desk was to
write one of five volumes in an Oxford history of Australia; her volume was to encompass
Aboriginal life from forty thousand years ago to the present. While planning for that she
gave generous help to another multi-volumed project, for a bicentennial history of Australia.
She convened a symposium on that project at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies;
she helped organise a conference on Aboriginal participation in the series; and she remained
an indispensable adviser on matters large and small. The quantity, quality and texture of
what those books deliver about Aboriginal life will owe much to her counsel.

‘On the morning of her death Diane told her husband Richard that she could now see
how the Oxford book had to be constructed. She had found a model in Canadian writing
which clarified her long thinking about how to tell the Australian story. Diane’s unwritten
general history is a profound loss to scholarship. But as Niel Gunson says of the journal,
she has lit a lamp for others to follow. Younger scholars she has inspired and educated,
Lyndall Ryan, Ann Curthoys and others, know as they grieve that her work will live on in
theirs. Lyndall Ryan in a note to a colleague speaks of her as “brave, rigorous, warm and
supportive”. In some sense the support goes on. Whoever takes over that unwritten book
will get immense help from Diane.

‘Those other scholars will also get much help from Richard. He is now embarking on a job
of sorting and finishing and depositing of the kind Diane did for others. He is using a memo
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Diane prepared for Irene Rowley, based in turn on one she prepared for Patricia Stanner. Richard too has been a maker of *Aboriginal History*. His designs for the cover of every issue, his and Diane's joint note, 'A memorial for Thomas Bungaleen', his piece on the likely identification of an aeroplane on an engraved Warlpiri pearlshell which is the basis of his superb cover for the 1982 issue — these glimpses of a shared work help the rest of us to celebrate their partnership.

Nancy Williams, a colleague from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, concentrated her tribute to Diane on her work with the Institute, and the values and commitment that shaped it:4

‘Diane was a passionate woman, and a woman of great compassion. To celebrate Diane as a friend and as a person is to understand her — at least in large measure — as a scholar. Her achievements as a scholar aptly memorialise her because they grew out of the values and commitments to people that were basic to her personality: a passionate commitment to fairness, honesty, openness, and equality.

‘Diane called her values those of the 1950s: work is a good thing, commitment to finish a job started is not to be compromised. To want to accomplish significant things is good, and to receive recognition for achievement is just. Along with that went a fierce dislike of dishonesty, misrepresentation, and carelessness. For her, ends never justified means; and she was willing to bear the criticism of ideologues when defence of truth demanded.

‘It was perhaps because Diane was “a product of the fifties” as she defined it that she achieved so much despite not having the security of a tenured position, something she should have had on the basis of her excellence in teaching as well as her scholarship. Nevertheless, she gained the recognition of scholars whose opinions she held in high regard. That was the reward she valued most of all, and was a tribute to her own energy and dedication. She knew the value of her work and she persevered. She was strong in her convictions and true to herself.

‘Diane was a foundation member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, and the first woman elected to the Council of the Institute. She had served the Institute longer, in more varied and influential roles, than any other member, and during most of her twenty five years of service to the Institute she held no renumerated position. She cared deeply about the Institute, and her involvement in its life was both a reflection of her commitment to the purpose for which it was established and of her perception of the changing society in which it functioned.

‘In 1981 she urged the development of research and training programs which try to meet the needs and wishes of the Aboriginal communities, particularly those in southern Australia, which have been relatively neglected by the Institute. “In my view,” she said, “training [Aborigines as researchers] and expansion of Institute information services ought to be a priority for the future.”

‘The late Professor Stanner's voluminous papers are housed in the Institute; Diane went through all of them, organised them and catalogued them As always, she worked with the dual aim of enabling appreciation of a scholar's achievement and of giving all who might be interested efficient access to their work.

‘At the time she died she was nearing completion of the first and major phase of an Abo-

4 Dr Williams's commemorative address was also published in *Canberra Anthropology* 9(1), 1986:1-3.
ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1987 11:1

original biographical index — a project of which she was the chief architect. This index will be a tangible memorial to her personal values realised through disciplined scholarship. It is already in existence in the Library of the Institute: twenty-two file-drawers containing some twelve thousand cards with entries including the names of Aboriginal individuals, biographical information about them and the sources of the information. It is a practical guide for Aboriginal people in search of their family history. And it will grow on the foundation she so carefully and caringly built.

‘Diane was what she did. Nothing except her love for Richard, her husband, and Laura, her daughter, was more important than her work. Nothing could please her more than a friend or colleague telling her that they had read something she had written, had understood her argument, and as a result had learned something important or seen something in a new light. And if the appreciation of her scholarship went along with an accolade for her writing style, the lucid way she had presented her argument, then she was exhilarated.

‘She was an absolute equalitarian: perhaps that was why she became part of a network of sisterhood that was for her an essential aspect of feminism (although she rarely used that term) — for her the sisterhood was always translated into support for particular women in particular situations who had not received recognition or advancement, or had been subjected to unfair treatment simply because they were women. And sometimes there was a triumph to share. Diane extended the same generous help to all who approached her: workmates, unknown and struggling junior scholars to the most respected and distinguished. Diane would sit down and write pages of criticism, always mixed with gentle encouragement. She saw the worth and value in every person’s work.

‘Diane had a very special gift of perceiving when a friend — or even a relatively new acquaintance — was in some kind of distress, and of responding empathetically and generously, whether with her time or some material effort. Few of us here have not been rescued from some pain by Diane’s acts: a sympathetic conversation, an understanding letter, an expression of support, or of indignation at an injustice.

‘Since her death I have been reminded, as have many others, of Diane’s sense of humour, her sharp wit, her infectious and hearty laugh.

‘Diane inspired us, and she has left us much. We will not forget.’

Diane Bell, a close friend as well as anthropological colleague, spoke at the memorial service of the significance of Diane’s anthropological research:

‘... I would like to quote from Diane: “Although the concept of equity has not figured in the development of anthropological theory, it is an implicit concern of a major area of anthropological research.”’

There followed the most exacting documentation of the Framlingham people’s case: it was, the editor wrote, a “tale of the remorseless denial of justice to them [that] wrenches the readers’ conscience... [and] clearly demonstrates that academic enquiry need not be soulless.”

‘However, Diane did not rest there, she provided a context within which we could read the case-study. Drawing on the North American and New Zealand experience, she set out the claims of Fourth World peoples on the nation state and explored the modes of dispute settlement available to them. It is only recently that it has become fashionable for anthropologists

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to debate this complex of issues: Diane provided her analysis in 1979 and had lectured on
the material at ANU in the previous year.

'This ability to locate her work within a comparative framework was evident in Diane's
work on the Treaty for a just settlement between Aborigines and white Australians. In her
article "Making a treaty" she contrasted overseas experience of treaties with that of Aus­
tralia and wrote: "The Aboriginal Treaty Committee has reminded other Australians that the
Queen's representatives have never invited the Aborigines to negotiate their future." Diane's
work did much to create the conditions under which such negotiations might occur. That
she wrote anthropology which mattered is evident in the heavy reliance placed on her work
by scholars such as Professor Charles Rowley. In his Outcasts in white Australia her 1964
doctoral thesis, "A little more than kin: regional affinity and group identity among Abo­
goingal migrants in Melbourne", is the most heavily referenced work of the volume.

'Not surprisingly, Diane's carefully crafted essays have become enduring classics: for
example, "Economic absorption without assimilation: the case of some Melbourne part-
Aboriginal families" of 1962 and "And the lubras are ladies now" of 1970. And I am sure
that her 1984 paper in Aboriginal History, "Mapping the Past", of which we only have Part I,
will become the basis for future research and provide a model for all those who attempt to
reconcile disparate sources. Working with the amateur ethnography of nineteenth-century
pastoralists, parsons and public servants and modern anthropological accounts of territorial
and linguistic boundaries elsewhere in Australia, Diane produced an innovative, meticulous
and balanced account of Victorian clans in the period from 1835 to 1904.

'Diane recognised all too clearly that the anthropological preoccupation with traditional
society shaped both public and professional understandings and sympathies. In reviewing the
reviewers of Phillip Pepper's book You are what you make yourself to be, she commented:

Except for a few students sent to study acculturation in the 1950s and 1960s,
anthropologists virtually ignored the southern communities which had stubbornly
preserved their identity despite the abandonment of [their traditional] rituals.

When anthropological writing did filter into school textbook definitions of Abo­
inginal culture, these antiquarian preoccupations seemed to confirm popular belief
that Aborigines who had lost their ceremonies had lost their culture.

'Anthropologists, she contended, should pay more: attention to the impact of missionaries,
administrators, police, pastoralists and politicians on traditional life as well as to the lives of
Aboriginal evangelists and reformers.

'Meeting Professor Bill Stanner's challenge that we needed to know more of the lives of
influential individuals and the folk history of communities to reach an adequate appreciation
of policy implementation, Diane introduced us to the world of Louisa Strugnell Briggs —
and wisely reminds us that the battles of "This most resolute lady" were "not less heroic
because they were domestic" and cautions us regarding the trend of revisionist histories to
overlook the process of accommodation.

'It is in writing of her friends that the interplay of Diane's scholarship and personal

7 Barwick 1980.
8 Pepper 1980.
9 Barwick 1981b:82.
10 Barwick 1985b:221.
warmth is most evident. In her celebration of the life of Aunty Ellen, the pastor's wife, in *Fighters and singers*, Diane confessed:

I did not plan, all those years ago, to write her life story. I do so now as a tribute to a woman who deeply influenced my life. What she taught me about the responsibilities of daughters, wives and mothers re-inforced — and made me appreciate — the example of loving instruction given by the women of my own family. What she told me of the past has shaped my work for over 20 years. All that I have written has something of Aunty Ellen in it.

I had the good fortune to meet Diane in 1974 and I am well aware that since then there has been something of her in all I do also. I know I am not alone in this.'

11 Barwick 1985a:175.

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This volume of Aboriginal History is devoted to studies in biography, life history and anthropology, the abiding interests of Diane Barwick, to whom it is dedicated. It contains biographies of individual Aborigines and histories of Aboriginal communities living in remote or urban conditions in many parts of the continent. Some papers describe Aboriginal experiences from the early days of European settlement, others are concerned with the present and the immediate past. In addition there are commentaries on the collection and presentation of Aboriginal history.

When we first sought papers for this volume we received enough promises for two commemorative volumes. The second volume is in preparation and we hope to publish it quite soon. It will contain a full bibliography of Diane Barwick’s writings.

Isabel McBryde
Isobel White
Judith Wilson
March 1989.
Richard and Diane Barwick 1961.
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TWO CLEAR MINDS

Dorothy Green

I am not an anthropologist, so cannot contribute anything to the subject in which Diane Barwick was so distinguished and humane a worker. But her voice, in its humanity, its dedication to reason and justice, speaks across 140 years to an early observer of the relations between Aborigines and white invaders: Alexander Harris. If due attention had been paid to what he had to say in his book *Settlers and convicts* (1847) many of the tragic mistakes which have bedevilled black-white relationships might have been avoided. It is their absolute honesty and freedom from cant which bring Alexander Harris and Diane Barwick so close together across a century; reminding ourselves of their closeness helps to sustain a faith that justice and reason will not fail.

In the first place, Alexander Harris recognised that his countrymen had invaded Australia: he did not embrace the doctrine of *terra nullius*. At the same time he was a realist. It was no longer possible when he wrote for the white invaders to get up and go home. In any case, part of the problem was that ‘home’ had thrown out the majority of the white men, convicts and poor settlers, who were hence under the necessity of trying to survive elsewhere.

‘It is quite clear to me,’ he wrote, ‘that it is rather the mode in which we seize and hold the soil that does the mischief than the act itself.’ After elaborating his argument about the plight of convicts and poor whites, he concedes that Aborigines regard the whites as a nation of robbers, robbing out of mere wantonness, and not from the pressure of necessity. They understand no theories about capital and labour, and pauperism and emigration: all they feel is that they are wronged; all they see, the fact that it is done by those who are rich already, and do not want the soil for subsistence; not by the poor, who might be justified.

‘If . . . there is anything is anything to be done for the civilisation of the blacks,’ he concluded ‘and to prevent their utter extermination, it will be found in the encouragement of the amicable relations which so easily establish themselves between them and the small settler.’

In essence this was a class solution, arising out of Harris’s definition of what constituted an Australian, made very clear in his novel *The emigrant family* (1849). For him an Australian ‘native’ was anyone born in the country, whether he was white, Aboriginal, or negro like the ‘hero’ of his novel. The dispossessed were to be encouraged to make common cause:

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Dorothy Green is well known as a poet, biographer, teacher and literary critic. Her recent publications include *The music of love, a collection of critical essays* (1984), and *Henry Handel Richardson and her fiction* (1986). She is a founder and active member of Writers Against Nuclear Arms and was co-editor of its publication *Imagining the real: Australian writing in the nuclear age*. In 1984 she was awarded the Order of Australia, and in 1987 an Honorary Doctorate of Letters.

1 Harris 1847:417.
2 Harris 1847:421.
3 Harris 1847:420.
'Missionary efforts, I am afraid, will long, if not always, be the "voice and no more".'

In a striking passage of sympathetic imagination, Harris, himself a genuine if unorthodox Christian, looks at colonial Christianity with the eyes of a black man:

'You!' he [the Aborigine] says, 'you who tie one another up, and flog one another within an inch of life, for some little hasty word; you who begrudge one another enough to eat; you who deprive me of my hunting grounds, only to increase possessions for mere possessions' sake; you, a people divided into two classes, the one hateful and the other contemptible, the tyrant and the slave; you who keep, and clothe, and train men to human slaughter as a trade — you teach me to be better! — Me who walk the forest free, who appropriate no more than I need, who never fight but as a deeply injured man, who would not lay your bloody lash upon my dog, much less my brother; who "in wrath remember mercy", and give even the public culprit, against whom I am to direct my spear at the command of the tribe, his shield to defend himself with, — YOU CONVERT ME!

The comment that Harris appends to his speech might have been Diane Barwick's: 'Oh! that mankind would have but common sense.'

Justice, reason, unsentimental caritas, experience, all join these two rare spirits. How well they would have understood one another!

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4 Harris 1847:421.
5 Harris 1849:342.
6 ibid.

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INVENTING ABORIGINES

Bob Reece

This article is in two parts. The first is by way of a preamble which looks at Aborigines as a category and the way in which that category has been 'assimilated' into a national historiography. The second part is a specific discussion of Aboriginal-European interaction in the early European occupation of the Perth area. It seeks to question the general application of the dispossession-resistance interpretation of Aboriginal responses and to suggest that, at least in this case, accommodation with Europeans was something for which Aborigines strove. It also suggests that the European presence, particularly during the early period of settlement, was an important new variable in the politics of Aboriginal inter-group relations.

In an important sense, Aborigines are both an invention and a product of European colonisation of Australia. It seems an obvious point to make, but when the British first came to Australia in the late eighteenth century there were no Aborigines (with a capital 'A'). Instead, there were possibly as many as 600 identifiable groups or peoples possessing pretty much the same technology and social system but differentiated in their own eyes by very specific kin, geographical, linguistic and other associations. Partly for the sake of convenience, partly out of ignorance of these differences, Europeans referred to them collectively as 'Indians', 'aboriginal natives', 'Australians', 'black natives', 'blacks', 'blackfellows' and finally, 'Aborigines' or 'Aboriginals'. So the aboriginal peoples or indigenes of Australia became 'the Australian Aborigines' or simply 'the Aborigines'. Some use was made of local group names in the nineteenth century after the period of frontier conflict had ended and the remnants had become a source of antiquarian curiosity and philanthropic concern. But by the early twentieth century few of the names had survived in the Australian popular consciousness and today it would be hard to find any layman who could volunteer more than one or two names.1

As with the American Indians, the handful of Aborigines who are known historical figures largely owe their status to bloody conflict and the obstruction of European settlement. In Western Australia, Yagan and Pigeon are now being seen by some historians as resistance

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1 When I teach Aboriginal history I ask my students to name half a dozen North American Indian tribes and leaders and then to do the same for the Aborigines. The response is predictable, although things may be changing now that Aborigines and Aboriginal issues such as land claims are more prominent in the media and some Aboriginal history is finding its way into school texts. When I was a child at school in the Riverina in the 1940s a steady diet of Western films and comics meant that I could rattle off the names of a few dozen Indian tribes and warriors. The only Aborigines I encountered were on cards in packets of Weetbix.
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figures, although this rather distorts or over-simplifies their historical roles. Aboriginal groups who have become well known in recent times — the Gurindji and the Pitjantjatjara for example — also owe their fame to their obstruction of European-Australian economic interests.

So the Aborigines were invented as a convenient, if fictitious, entity or category, but the whole process of dispossession, depopulation, acculturation, segregation and institutionalisation (including legal definition of who was an Aborigine) over the next hundred years was to fulfil the linguistic prediction by manufacturing Aborigines as a relatively homogeneous social group — possessing a diverse cultural heritage but a fairly uniform historical experience at the hands of Europeans. While they were seen collectively as the indigenous people, however, they were not accorded any legal constitutional personality appropriate to that status. Indeed, that question has still not been settled, but the emergence of Aborigines as an identifiable political minority in Australia since the 1930s is now putting pressure on the lawyers to reconsider the usefulness of conventional European concepts such as ‘settlement’ and ‘conquest’.

Historians have been as much the perpetrators of categorisation as other Australians. Together with anthropologists, we have given the term ‘Aborigines’ further legitimacy — even going to the extent of suggesting that, in the nineteenth century, Aborigines constituted a national political entity.

Having invented and manufactured Aborigines, we are now producing their past as part of a national historiography. Although doubt has been cast on the validity and usefulness of national historiography itself, and while regional and thematic approaches have become more common, there still seems to be a na"ive need to generalise about ‘the Australian experience’ — something which has become all the more pressing with the Bicentenary. Part of this is a need to generalise about ‘the Aboriginal experience’, a concept which is similarly problematical.

The reasons for the marginality of Aborigines in Australian historical writing during the first half of this century have been widely canvassed. But although Aborigines have returned to the national stage, the rendering of their history has been subject to distortions of the kind that make all attempts at national historiography suspect. The concept of ‘resistance’ has made it possible to generalise about ‘the Aboriginal experience’ at a time when Aboriginal issues have been a matter of wide political concern and this has not been without its beneficial effects. However, we need to test not only the general validity of the ‘resistance’ interpretation against the historical evidence, but to question the attempts to produce a kind of national historiography for the aboriginal peoples of Australia. This does not mean, of course, that European Australians cannot or should not write Aboriginal history, but that they should be more cautious in writing about an entity which has been fictional until recent times and of using concepts which have the effect of giving credibility to that fiction. They should also be careful not to present themselves as writing history for Aborigines as surrogate

Aboriginal nationalists.6 This would be presumptuous as well as silly.

In the last decade the old orthodoxy that European occupation of the Australian continent was essentially peaceful (that the Aborigines 'simply faded away') has been replaced by a new orthodoxy. We are now told that Aboriginal reaction to the European presence was characterised by 'resistance', indeed, that it is maintained today by Aboriginal activists and groups seeking land rights. The broken black figures in our city parks should not be seen as 'alcoholic derelicts' but as 'patriots' passively resisting the European lifestyle and its accompanying ethic.

Evidence of massacres and individual killings across Australia has led Henry Reynolds to ask rhetorically if we should 'make room . . . on our memorials, cenotaphs, boards of honour and even in the pantheon of national heroes . . .' for Aborigines who 'fell defending their homelands'.7 Although it may not have been the intention, the dispossession-resistance 'model' or interpretation of Aboriginal-European interaction is now a powerful academic orthodoxy which is being incorporated in tertiary as well as secondary level school texts. Perhaps the only serious academic challenge to it has been Noel Butlin's effort to demonstrate on the basis of statistical extrapolations that epidemic diseases and Aboriginal inter­necine strife were more important than European violence in the dramatic depopulation of south-eastern Aborigines in the nineteenth century.8 Butlin has enlarged the demographic dimensions of the problem by suggesting a much larger original population than has been hitherto believed. At the same time, however, he has reduced the moral dimensions of the problem with his emphasis on disease and the consequent reduction of resource competition between Aborigines and Europeans. A proper critique of his methodology and his conclusions has yet to be made, although Diane Barwick seriously questioned his use of nineteenth-century sources.9

The concept of 'resistance' raises almost as many problems as it solves. Loaded with connotations of the anti-colonial movements of the period since the Second World War, particularly the struggles of the Vietnamese against the French and the Americans, 'resistance' and 'resistance fighter' have become part of the anti-colonial polemic. Brought into the arena of Aboriginal-European conflict in Australia commencing in the late eighteenth century, they can produce some gross distortions. To take one example, the task of Barry York and Fergus Robinson's The black resistance, published in 1977, has been described by Humphrey McQueen as establishing that violent struggle by Aborigines against foreign invasion was an ongoing and continent-wide response. This they achieved by choosing to interpret every example of Aboriginal attack on Europeans and their property as 'resistance' or 'warfare'. More recently, Ian Roberts10 and Lorna Lippmann11 have attempted to trace a genealogy of resistance from 1788 to Noonkanbah.

6 See e.g. Christie's introduction to his Aborigines in colonial Victoria 1835-1886, 1979.
7 Reynolds 1982:201.
8 Butlin 1983.
9 Barwick 1984.
10 Roberts 1981.
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From the Aboriginal side, conflict with Europeans arose from misunderstandings, European notions of property and exclusive use of land, European sacrilege of sacred sites and objects, competition over women, revenge, and a host of other factors which we probably do not yet understand. In some situations there does seem to have been a reflexive opposition to the European presence from the outset. In others it seems to have developed after years of contact. As Reynolds himself says, 'the evidence . . . suggests that Aborigines attacked and killed Europeans for a variety of reasons'. Precisely, and it is wrong to subsume all these reasons under the rubric of 'resistance' and create the impression that it was all of a piece.

It can be seen that 'resistance' has served a useful purpose in overthrowing the notion that the Aborigines simply 'faded away'. Henry Reynolds, Noel Loos and others have performed an important service in quantifying the conflict (particularly in Queensland) and revealing Aborigines as far from passive victims of European onslaught. In so doing, however, they have created the impression that 'resistance' of some kind was the typical Aboriginal response to the European presence from one end of the continent to the other.

In their enthusiasm to document the bloodiness of the process of colonisation, Reynolds and others have not been so interested in documenting and highlighting that other major characteristic of Aboriginal-European interaction: accommodation. Perhaps this in itself is a reflection of the character of Aboriginal political action during the decade when Reynolds was preparing The other side of the frontier: a period which was typified by sometimes violent physical confrontations between Aborigines and police and by the belligerent rhetoric of the Black Power movement in Australia. Reynolds himself was quite explicit about the political purpose of his book, emphasising that it 'was not conceived, researched, or written in a mood of detached scholarship'. By contrast, we are now going through a period during which Aboriginal political action is relatively low-key. As Hugh Stretton has reminded us, what we seek to find in history has a great deal to do with our perception of the world around us.

Reynolds provided some evidence of Aboriginal efforts to reach agreement with the newcomers, but this was overshadowed by his greater interest in conflict and its causes. In fact, the Aboriginal desire for accommodation was more marked than Reynolds acknowledges.

Rather than depending on the dispossession-resistance model which seems to be the basis for Reynolds' analysis, we should look at the accommodation model which has been used in the historiography of other parts of the British Empire, notably the African colonies. In his analysis of nineteenth-century West Africa, for example, Ronald Robinson described the way in which the European presence became an important variable in the indigenous political systems of that area. Alliances with Europeans sometimes allowed indigenous élites to maintain their position longer than they might otherwise have done. Instead of a system of 'divide and rule' in which the colonialists called the shots, there seems to have been one of 'ally and rule' in which the interests of certain indigenous groups were promoted at the

14 Address to the Australian Historical Association conference, Adelaide, August 1986.
expense of the colonising power.

Although the aboriginal peoples of Australia did not possess the hierarchical social systems which characterised West Africa, they had their own mode of political interrelations. Alliances were made with neighbouring groups through trade and exogamous marriage and, although kin relationships did not prevent conflict, they probably limited it to manageable dimensions. What is clear is that groups who lay beyond the perimeters of kin, trade, and linguistic ties were perceived as being rather like enemy aliens. There are boundless examples in contact history of the vilification of distant groups of Aborigines as ‘cannibals’ and so on. George Grey told a story about the people north of Perth who counselled him in 1838 ‘indiscriminately to shoot everybody I saw’ on his planned journey to the north-west coast.16 Miago (Migo), a Swan River man who accompanied J.L. Stokes to that area on board the Beagle a year earlier, freely expressed his desire to kill some of the northern men he met with and seize their women.17

The problem for the historian is that these political relationships between Aboriginal groups and the ties which underpinned them are difficult to reconstruct from the surviving evidence. For example, there is as yet no reliable account of the groups who inhabited the Swan coastal plain: the descriptions made by Lyon,18 Armstrong19 and others during the early 1830s are confused and contradictory. Perhaps they were so intertwined by kinship links over hundreds of generations that they were always shifting in composition in spite of fairly clear territorial divisions. However, it is possible to identify four main groups: ‘Yalagonga’s people’ (Yallagonga), occupying the left bank of the Swan in the immediate area of Perth; ‘Monday’s people’, occupying the right bank of the Swan from Guildford down to Heirisson Island; Midgegooroo’s people’ south of the Swan; and ‘the Murray River people’. For the sake of convenience, the first three groups can also be referred to collectively as the ‘Perth Aborigines’, who numbered about three hundred in 1829. According to Armstrong, Yalagonga’s group tended to ally itself on the basis of kin relations with another group north of Perth, while Midgegooroo’s group was allied with Monday’s group.20

There is no evidence that the Aborigines of the Swan coastal plain generally opposed the presence of the first European settlers. According to Armstrong, when the Europeans made it clear that they were taking up permanent residence ‘some of them became hostilely disposed to the settlers — but others cared or thought little about it, until they began to find the kangaroo and other game getting alarmingly scarce’.21 They told Armstrong that ‘on the whole, they have treated the settlers well; for that, if any native strangers had attempted to settle among them in the same way, they would have done all in their power to destroy them’.22 What they did, however, was to contest the Europeans’ exercise of exclusive ownership and control of land and its resources. This took the form of ‘theft’ of flour and other

16 Grey 1841, I:293.
17 Stokes 1846, I:58, 74-5. Migo is a variant spelling for the same name, see Tilbrook 1986.
18 Lyon, Perth Gazette, 1833.
19 Armstrong, Perth Gazette, 1835.
20 Armstrong, Perth Gazette, 1835.
21 Armstrong, Perth Gazette, 1835.
22 Armstrong, Perth Gazette, 1835.
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goods from houses and storehouses, ‘raids’ on crops and gardens and ‘attacks’ on livestock. If the Europeans would not agree to share the fruits of the land, it was necessary to take them by force. As marsupials and yams disappeared and access to land and water was denied by proprietorial Europeans, Aboriginal needs became more marked and their methods more desperate. When Europeans intervened to protect their property, they often killed Aborigines or seriously injured them. Sometimes they were attacked by Aborigines, although the mortality was heavily to the cost of the latter. Nor was this only due to the superiority of firearms over spears. Many Europeans were entirely ruthless in their defence of their own or their masters’ property and there were no real disincentives to the taking of Aboriginal lives.

The shooting of Yagan and his brother Hegan in July 1833, following the deaths earlier that year of his other brother, Domjum, and their father, Midgegooroo, seems to have persuaded the Perth Aborigines that an agreement was needed with the Europeans to prevent further loss of life. Since the beginning of settlement in 1829, at least sixteen Aborigines had been killed and twice that many wounded in the Perth area representing a major loss to an adult population as yet largely unaffected by European-introduced diseases. According to Miago and Monday, after the killing of one of the European boys who had shot Yagan, the Aborigines had been anxious that the Europeans would kill more of them if they took more European lives in revenge and had immediately gone off and killed one or two members of Monday’s group.

The *Perth Gazette* inferred from this that they are afraid of retaliating upon us; and suspect their numbers, by being so much reduced, will be rendered unequal to cope with the neighbouring tribes.

Armstrong believed that killings of this kind were due to the need to appease the spirits of the dead, ‘and not from any motives of policy to keep the numbers of their neighbours on a level with their own, and to preserve the “balance of power”’. However, the death of Yagan had apparently resulted in closer links between his group south of the Swan and Yalgonga’s people in Perth itself, who had suffered the greatest loss of numbers.

Miago and Monday, evidently delegated by the Aboriginal groups on both sides of the lower Swan, waited on Lieutenant-Governor F.C. Irwin in September 1833, complaining that shooting was too severe a punishment for theft and that it was wrong to endanger the lives of other Aborigines for the actions of one individual. For example, in the incident involving Domjum, Yagan’s brother, at Fremantle in April 1833 two of his companions had been severely wounded. Miago and Monday wanted what the *Perth Gazette* called an ‘amicable treaty’ or an ‘amnesty’ to prevent any further shootings and retaliatory spearings. They maintained their right to retaliate against any individual who injured them, but were concerned about the cost in lives that European retaliation usually meant. They were also bitterly opposed to the government’s idea of conciliating the more distant Aboriginal groups, stressing that the latter were still in possession of their hunting grounds. According to the *Gazette* ‘they argued that as we had deprived them of their game, they ought to be the

23 Green 1979:70-94.
24 *Perth Gazette*, 7 September 1833.
25 *Perth Gazette*, 7 September 1833.
27 *Perth Gazette*, 7 September 1833.
objects of our consideration'. At the same time, they expressed the wish that Europeans would go into the bush with them and 'boo' (shoot) or help spear any members of another group that they encountered. Irwin pressed for a friendly meeting of all 'tribes', but he also acknowledged the Perth Aborigines' loss of sustenance as a result of European settlement and offered what amounted to compensation:

His Honour . . . proposed, that if they were at any time distressed for food, from casual circumstances, their kangaroo or other resources failing them, they might come into the town, and they would be supplied with provisions; they described that we had taken possession of their hunting and fishing grounds — and that our dogs had driven the kangaroo 'far away' They privately told Mr. Armstrong . . . that they found mutton was a very good substitute.

A year later, Governor James Stirling decided to set up a 'Native Institution' near the 39th Regiment barracks at the foot of Mount Eliza to the west of the town, a traditional camping place of Yalagonga's people. And although its official rationale was to train Aborigines in fishing and agricultural techniques which would render them self-sufficient once more, it in fact served until 1838 as a ration depot which was well patronised. The Aborigines of the Perth area had largely abandoned their traditional seasonal movements and were effectively 'attached' to the settlement in the same way that had happened in Sydney almost fifty years earlier.

The constant presence of Aborigines in the town of Perth was met with mixed feelings by the European inhabitants. Nakedness and the carrying of spears aroused protest and when retributive killings of other Aborigines took place in the very streets there were demands that the constables should clear them out altogether. One of these incidents, the ritual killing of a woman by a number of men in St George's Terrace in April 1838, led to the prosecution and conviction for murder of an elder called Eli-a (Helia) who had earlier told Stirling that he would assist the government in preventing incidents of this kind taking place in the public eye. Stirling and his Advocate-General, George Fletcher Moore, were certainly aware of the implications of prosecuting offences *inter se* and made it clear in their private discussions that it would be unwise and impractical to attempt to enforce British law in this way. This was a significant accommodation from the European side.

The *Perth Gazette* carried protests and petitions designed to rid the town of these 'nuisances', but it also reminded its readers of the responsibilities they now had towards the Aborigines of the Perth area, whose friendship was the best insurance against attack on the settlement by outlying groups. Fears of this kind had been present from the outset of settlement and an informal alliance was in the interests of both parties. According to the *Gazette*, all possible protection was to be given to the Perth Aborigines against attack by their traditional enemies, instances of which were becoming increasingly common as the availability of bread and other items attracted distant groups to the town. Indeed, the tone of official and editorial pronouncements on the Perth Aborigines from 1835 onwards was

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28 *Perth Gazette*, 7 September 1833.
29 *Perth Gazette*, 7 September 1833.
31 *Perth Gazette*, 21 October 1837.
Another accommodation was reached in 1835 when the Perth Aborigines seem to have abandoned, albeit reluctantly, what they had earlier seen as their right to exact retribution on Europeans who had killed or injured any of their number. After a series of ‘thefts’ of flour from a hut at the foot of Mount Eliza, a carpenter called Mackail fatally shot an Aboriginal boy called Gogalee, son of Yalagonga, who had not been involved. Mackail was quickly removed to Fremantle’s Round House Gaol, as much for his own safety as anything else, when the Aborigines insisted that he be handed over to them for the traditional punishment of spearing. Delegations representing all the groups in the Perth area visited the prison each day to see if he was still being held and it was only after the most strenuous efforts that they were persuaded to accept flour and blankets and an assurance that Mackail would be banished from the colony. The *Gazette* attached particular importance to this case, which it saw as threatening the ‘good understanding’ reached earlier with Yalagonga’s people. The main significance of the Mackail case, however, was that it revealed the inability of the Aborigines to enforce their own system of retributive justice on Europeans and their acceptance that incidents of this kind would be settled by what they called ‘the white people’s law’.

Apart from the celebrated episode involving Midgegooroo and Yagan, who were outlawed and killed as a result of a chain of events stemming from the ‘theft’ of flour at Fremantle in April 1833, there were no major conflicts between Aborigines and Europeans in the Perth area during the first decade of settlement and certainly nothing which could be interpreted as Aboriginal attempts to drive away the Europeans. Nevertheless, the uncertain demeanour of Aboriginal groups living outside the perimeter of those known to be more or less friendly created a good deal of anxiety within the small European community. The principal fear was that some of the ‘wild blacks’ would join forces with the local groups and wipe out the entire settlement.

It was in the area of the Murray River, sixty kilometres south of Perth, that the first major conflict in the colony’s history took place in October 1834. Stirling had granted Thomas Peel a huge parcel of land there and Peel was evidently anxious that his possession of it should be brought home to the local Aborigines, who had been attacking stock and had killed one of his servants. In the resulting attack by soldiers under Stirling's orders, now known as the ‘Battle of Pinjarra’ but in fact a daybreak raid on an unsuspecting Aboriginal camp, at least thirty Aborigines were killed. Stirling made it clear to the remnants of the group that he intended this as a ‘lesson’, not just to the Murray people but to all Aborigines who attacked European property, and that if they sought revenge for their punishment his troopers would ‘destroy every man, woman and child...’

Nor did the lesson go unheeded. In March of the following year there was information through Miago that the Murray people were ‘anxious to seek a reconciliation’. According to the *Perth Gazette*’s report of its conversation with him, their proposal was that an *emissary*... shall wait upon the Governor, confiding in a pledge of security, and shall receive His Excellency’s sanction for the introduction of his

32 *Perth Gazette*, 21 October 1837.
tribe, when the whole will be assembled, and will present themselves before him, soliciting his future favour and consideration. For the observance and strict fulfilment of this treaty on the part of the Murray men, we have the guarantee — a pledge by-the-by not much required — of the principals of the Swan tribe that they will resent any infringement of the solemn compact. 35

Stirling responded positively to this and authorised Miago to bring the remnants of the group to Perth for the meeting. When it came to the point, however, the Murray people could only be persuaded to go as far as the military barracks at Mandurah, where they were told that the government as well disposed towards them. Rumours, possibly malicious, continued amongst the Perth Aborigines that the Murray people were preparing to avenge Pinjarra and it may be that they were opposed to Miago's diplomacy and any agreement between the government and the Murray people which might weaken their own alliance with the government. What Miago's interest was in all this is not clear, but he can be seen as one of the first of those Aboriginal mediators or ‘brokers’ described by Michael Howard in his work on the south-west of Western Australia. 36 Significantly enough, Miago was one of the first Aboriginal constables appointed by Stirling's successor, Governor Hutt, in Perth in 1891.

The picture that emerges from the Swan River situation during the first decade of European occupation is of a number of local Aboriginal groups who were not essentially inimical to the European presence, sometimes seeing it as a form of sanctuary or protection against traditional enemies. They were willing to share their resources, principally land, with the newcomers and when this proved impossible they attempted to make compensatory arrangements which would supply them with food and other items. They attempted at first to bring the Europeans within their own system of justice, including retribution for death or injury, but when this proved too expensive in terms of European response they were then prepared to allow the European system of justice to prevail in the event of offences committed against them. If there is anything that can be helpfully described as ‘resistance’, it is the series of Aboriginal attempts by means of force to share the food resources which the Europeans had derived from land they never ceased to think of as theirs. The whole process of interaction was characterised by a series of accommodations or adjustments made by people who did not appear to have had an essentially hostile reaction to the European presence but were acutely aware of the Europeans' power to impose their will if need be by force of superior arms. Indeed, they were anxious to use that power as a means of strengthening their position vis-à-vis outside Aboriginal groups who were feared enemies.

It is difficult to know how ‘typical’ the Swan River example was and there is no point in merely substituting ‘accommodation’ for ‘resistance’ as the key to an understanding of Aboriginal-European relations in Australian history. There is a real need to look more closely at other specific examples of interaction and to be sceptical of simplistic generalisations. Resistance and accommodation can each be seen as forming part of the spectrum of Aboriginal-European relations. There is also a need to be sceptical of the validity of a national Aboriginal historiography, no matter how useful it may be politically to Aborigines and their supporters. There is a need to decolonise Australian historical writing, but let it be done more carefully than good intentions might otherwise dictate.

35 Perth Gazette, 28 March 1835 (emphasis in original).
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CRITICS, REVIEWERS AND ABORIGINAL WRITERS

Judith Wright

It is only very recently that literary critics and historians have been faced with the new phenomenon of Aboriginal writing in what have been traditionally their fields. The question of what critical standards they are to apply to this new literature and history is a thorny one, and has already become something of a battleground.

The 'literature of protest' in Western terms has of course a long history of its own. Minorities, and individuals, who feel themselves oppressed by the dominance of elements in their own society have often been able to express that sense within the literary modes and conventions of that society. But in the case of Aboriginal writers — part of an indigenous enclave of people within a society whose standards and criteria, as well as language, they may not feel the slightest compulsion to take as models — something new faces the critic working within his or her own literary tradition and culture. For the critic of today, a new tenderness of conscience may demand a questioning of critical method and a new look at literary styles and standards as they may be seen by the writer working wholly outside the acceptations of Western culture.

Some critics and reviewers have chosen to stick to their lasts and speak de haut en bas as the standard-setters of a culture to which these new contributors must submit themselves. They apparently feel themselves unable, even unwilling, to accept a need to evolve a different aesthetic and critical method to take account of the aims, strengths and limitations of indigenous protest writing. They would presumably insist that an established literature and a language impose their own necessities, and that judgements can only be made in the terms they have laid down. But it is an uneasy position, and one that a colonising culture such as ours is increasingly forced to question.

By what divine right have we established our own critical standards? Our long traditions of critical writing, for instance about poetry or the novel or the short story, are adapted to deal with the conditions and traditions of a social development very different from any milieu which Aboriginal writers live in or have to draw upon. And they are brief indeed when compared with the traditions of Aboriginal language, oral literature, oral history, evolved within a wholly different world-picture — one moreover which we have ignorantly despised and in most cases and places destroyed altogether. Can we apply the critical standards we use in evaluating new contributions to our own literature by those who inherit and live within the dominant culture and language, to those who have had no such education, training and background — and who, moreover, may bitterly and thoroughly reject all the bland assumptions of that culture and feel that language an alien imposition?

Honest critics may have to admit that the tools of their trade — their education in linguis-

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tic and critical methods, their expertise in the history and growth of the literature of the West, their knowledge of structural and grammatical practice and their own sensitivity and judgement within their literary background — need re-examining if they are to apply them to the literatures of protest without embarrassment. Critics are not, they may argue, equipped with political or social expertise. If Aboriginal writing is to be regarded as a ‘special case’ for which allowances must be made, they want nothing to do with such muddying of the waters of critical judgement by questions of morality, politics, and historical revision. Unfortunately, this critical dilemma can result in a refusal to try to criticise the work at all. So the Aboriginal voice, with all it has to say to us, may be silenced by critical consent.

If the critic of the drama, poetry and the novel is faced with new problems, what about the critic of historical writing? Here again, immense questions wait to be raised.

Some are visible in Sean Regan’s review of James Miller’s book, *Koori: a will to win*, in *Overland*. Regan chooses to take his stand on the criteria of Western historical method and ‘disinterestedness’ in recording ‘the facts’; and on these grounds objects to Miller’s ‘lack of methodological consistency’, his ‘playing fast and loose with the facts’ and his ‘double standards’ in regarding verbal communication from Europeans as ‘hearsay evidence’ and from Aborigines as ‘oral history’. ‘Dispensing with considered academic judgements, he can simply trade in invective . . . None of this would matter if the book was only intended as propaganda’, writes Regan. ‘But it is also being pushed as serious history.’

Now let us look at some of the work which has in the past been ‘pushed as serious history’ by early — and sometimes by late — Australian historians. Stephen Roberts’s *The squatting age in Australia* — my edition March 1964 but practically unchanged from the original (1935) edition — was part of the historical education of most students of Australian history as late as twenty years ago. Its first indexed mention of Aborigines (p.87) is under Gipps’s governorship in 1839, by which time of course the Hunter Valley had long been occupied, with very considerable bloodshed and deep controversy over land occupation, without treaty or compensation by the occupiers — a cause, among others, of the virtual dismissal of the first Attorney-General of New South Wales, Saxe Bannister, in 1826. (Bannister does not rate a mention in Roberts’s history.) This ignoring of all previous Aboriginal resistance to occupation by whites allows Roberts *carte blanche* in dealing with the notorious Myall Creek case. His account of the ‘rule of terror’ in the ‘new districts’ attributes the terrorisation to the side of the Aboriginal occupiers of the land: ‘scarcely a mail arrived, scarcely a party got through, without news of native-outrages’, while under Gipps’s governorship — so unpopular with the squatters — ‘[t]he natives became unbearably impudent . . . seven or eight years of virtual terror set in after 1837’, Aborigines were ‘completely amoral and usually incapable of sincere and prolonged gratitude’ (p.333). Though Roberts admits that ‘rumours of atrocities by squattting parties’ were frequent and that there was ‘some degree of truth’ in rumours of undue cruelty, his account of the confrontations is scarcely lacking in double standards or disinterested in recording the facts. The dominant historical culture can hardly claim the kind of objectivity Regan demands of James Miller — Roberts was Challis Professor of History at Sydney University, the most respected in Australia, influential for years after his retirement.

Moreover, written records for the first decades of the occupation of the Hunter Valley
and the outside districts are few, and for the most part made by those whose livelihood was threatened by the Aboriginal resistance. Does ‘objectivity’ lie with those who had a monopoly of the written record, or with those who already had an oral tradition and good cause to remember the treatment they received?

Historians, then, as well as literary critics, are having problems in setting up criteria of objectivity in Australian, and Aboriginal, history. In our bicentennial year, it is urgent to address them.

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CAPTURED DISCOURSE, CAPTURED LIVES

Colin Johnson

The translation from speech to writing, especially writing considered suitable for public consumption, involves editing which is massive in its proportions and implications.¹

Gularabulu, a collection of oral stories told by Paddy Roe and transcribed and edited by Stephen Muecke, is an important work in that possibly for the first time an attempt is made to present Aboriginal discourse as it is spoken rather than how the editor thinks it should be rendered into a written form. Stephen Muecke followed this work with another and perhaps more ambitious text in which he made use of the transcribed discourse of Paddy Roe, but within this volume the discourse is of secondary importance and becomes a signifier to the position of the Aborigine in modern Australia. Aboriginal discourse is captured. Paddy Roe the storyteller becomes discourse segments imprisoned within the standard English text of Stephen Muecke, and his country suffers the same fate in being captured within the graphics of Krim Benterrak. Paddy Roe thus becomes a simile of the Aborigine as convict and his country as land owned by the invader. Discourse signifies reality and Paddy Roe and his stories are segregated within the rigid walls of European theory. The text Reading the country² can be read not as constructing a theory of nomadology as declared on the title page, but as Paddy Roe as discourse serving time under the gaze of European critics, Barthes and Foucault. The language, the discourse of the nomad loses its mobility, loses its freedom, and standard English, not content with being introduction or footnote, enters to share the body of the text. The Aboriginal discourse thus is a signifier to the reality of Aboriginal communities being penetrated and manipulated by European advisers. Furthermore, Paddy Roe as discourse has been collected and placed within this volume in much the same way as Aboriginal artefacts are placed in a museum.

Aboriginal discourse as calcification.

An observer visiting the Northwest of Western Australia will see that Paddy Roe and his people in the Kimberley, in Broome suffer as a calcified colonised society. This calcification may be read from many texts of anthropology. In other texts such as English and the Aboriginal child³ another and more covert aim may be read. This is the assimilation of Aboriginal

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¹ Stephen Muecke in Roe 1983:v.
² Benterrak, Muecke and Roe 1984.
³ Eagleson, Kaldor and Malcolm 1983.
discourse into standard English. This urge to do away with, to replace Aboriginal discourse is also seen in such texts as *Banggaityerrri*, a so-called life story of Jack Sullivan. In such works Aboriginal discourse must be translated, that is assimilated completely into the standard English of white Australia. This attitude to Aboriginal discourse signifies an ideological position. Aborigines are to be forced into the majority culture. Assimilation on the discourse level signifies an ideological commitment to assimilation on the social level.

Opposed to this are the modes of traditional discourse and Aboriginal languages. But are these viable alternatives? Increasingly, traditional discourse is being made over into an artefact. It is becoming fossilised, and the young people are turning away from the remains. The languages of their communities are becoming objects of shame, ridiculous monuments of stone-age culture. This is only too evident in a work such as *My country o f the pelican dreaming*. All effectiveness and social dynamism are monopolised by the coloniser's institutions. If an Aborigine needs help it is to them he applies, and if he does something wrong it is by them that he is punished — and if his story is to be written, it is to be written by the coloniser and in the coloniser's own discourse. Even the discourse of the educational system to which the Aborigine sends his children belongs to the coloniser, and what is learnt within such a system signifies the things of Europe rather than those of his country — though perhaps a few tokens of Aboriginality are thrown in as a goodwill gesture. Aborigines when they enter such a system are taken by the hand and escorted to their places. Children soon learn that they are there to be educated into a life-style and discourse that is not their own. A foreign culture is thrust upon them and they recite by rote words from a foreign tongue. If they fail to master the dominant discourse of standard English, they are relegated to the discourses of Kriol or Aboriginal English, and those who do achieve a fluency in standard English fall into a linguistic dualism. In the situation in which Aborigines find themselves this bilinguism is a necessity. Standard English is a condition for all culture, for all communication and progress, and is seen as the future discourse of all Aborigines. Thus Aboriginal languages are put on the defensive, as are the varieties of Aboriginal English which must be apologised for, or reconstructed, or translated, or explained. Rarely are they accepted. They are constantly under discussion and study. They are constantly under threat.

**Discourse under threat**

Separation between native language and cultural language is not peculiar to the colonised, but it cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism. Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two tools, but is the participation in two psychical and cultural realms. Two worlds are symbolised; two discourses are in conflict, and it is the mother discourse or language of the colonised which is devalued. In 1986 a sign appeared in the sky with the launching of the AUSSAT communications satellite. It meant that it was now possible to flood the whole of Australia with the majority discourse of standard English.

This sign signifies the subordinate position of Aboriginal modes of discourse. These may be taught in a few schools, may be heard on a few radio programmes, but possession of them is not enough in Australia. If an Aboriginal person wants a job, wants to secure some sort of position, the dominant discourse must be mastered. Everyone knows this, and so the Abo-

4 Shaw 1983.
5 Shaw 1981.
rigines themselves, especially the young, are discarding their languages. They feel ashamed of them, declare that they know them not, hang their heads as they mumble that they talk like everybody else.

If we take this into account when examining the *life stories* collected by Bruce Shaw there is little cause to wonder that Jack Sullivan and Grant Ngabidj surrendered their discourse to him. They had little choice. It was either this, or writing their own books, and their subordinate position made it difficult for them even to think of this; but if they had done so, it might have resulted in them becoming aware of their position in modern Australia. Of course, this never occurred, and so in the volumes produced by Bruce Shaw we find little comment on the political position of the Aborigines. It is only when we turn to books written by Aborigines with some control over their work, that the subordinate position of the Aborigines is examined. Thus writers such as Robert Bropho and Elsie Roughsey by keeping control over their work are able to question the white dominance directly. They to some degree manage to seize the dominant position for Aboriginal discourse.

When an Aborigine suddenly is confronted by a white person with a tape recorder, it is only natural for a self-censorship to come into play. The Aboriginal person conscious of his or her subordinate position is extremely careful to tell the white person what she or he expects to hear. The Aborigine suddenly becomes tongue-tied, suddenly hesitates as the past two hundred years of oppression weighs on his or her shoulders. He or she remembers the time when to open one's mouth, to speak the truth could and often did mean death. *His* culture is filled with accounts of men opening their mouths to receive in exchange for their words of defiance a bullet; *her* culture is filled with accounts of women being raped and murdered.

Until the advent of Robert Bropho and Elsie Roughsey, the only way, apart from sitting down with a recording white man or woman and giving him or her your words, was to write in standard English. Thus the Aboriginal writer had to waste a lot of his or her creative imagination and energy in acquiring a style acceptable to the readers of standard English. Even now, non-standard English needs words of apology. Thus Robert Bropho's book is foreworded by a publisher's note apologising for his Aboriginal English and Elsie Roughsey's book has an afterword explaining away her discourse. But this marks an advance, for in the past Aboriginal writers had to express themselves in a discourse not their own, that is they had to assimilate themselves into the majority discourse for publication. Even then, they found that they were not just writers or Australian writers, but Aborigines writing in standard English, and were not judged on merit. By writing, they exposed themselves to the contradictions set up by the assimilation policy, and found that there was really no assimilation, except for the wound in their souls.

The dominant discourse is a dialect of power

The majority culture for some time now has sought to image Aborigines in dubious productions termed *autobiographies*. Often altruistic motives are given for producing these compromised volumes. A fine example of this genre is *I, the Aboriginal*, by Douglas

7 1980.
8 1984.
Lockwood, who mined an Aboriginal man for source material. This is a journalistic production with the subject matter tightly controlled and rendered down into prose suitable for public consumption. I doubt that the I of the story had any choice in the discourse used. Other Aborigines, usually sportspersons, for example Lionel Rose and Evonne Goolagong, are taken over and defined by journalists. Then there are the biographies, such as that of Sir Douglas Nicholls, written by people for a number of reasons, such as to show the white majority that the subject is exactly like one of them, or to serve as models for Aboriginal youngsters. Naturally, the role model is set out in standard English discourse as this is a prime requisite for Aboriginal achievement in Australia.

In the 1960s, the taping of life stories (life histories) was popularised by the American social anthropologist, Oscar Lewis, who turned his tapes into best sellers, possibly with the help of judicious and thorough editing. The Australian anthropologist, Bruce Shaw, followed the American lead to produce three volumes. These are essentially anthropological texts extending the methods of American social anthropology to Australia. His attitude to Aboriginal discourse is discussed by him in the introductions to his texts. His justification for rewriting the texts, which we must remember are anthropological volumes published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, is worth quoting:

Tampering with the original expressiveness worried me at first, until I realised that it was unrealistic to expect the general reader to wade through 200 pages written in the original style.

Shaw’s ‘general reader’ can only be read as a European. It is difficult to accept the text as being ‘told to Bruce Shaw’ when he has consciously failed to reproduce the Aboriginality of the discourse.

Stephen Muecke is at the other extreme. He is deeply conscious of Aboriginal discourse and takes pains to transcribe it accurately, but his volumes Gularabulu and Reading the country are flawed in that the discourse of Paddy Roe is barricaded between slabs of standard English. Paddy Roe thus is reduced to a discourse which is to be read by the European. Kriol or Aboriginal English is presented as an interesting artefact which may be measured and deciphered by the tools of European criticism.

It is noteworthy in these white productions that there is an absence of critical and political comment on the part of the subject. There is no analysis of Aboriginal-being-in-Australia, though, as I have written, a close reading does reveal that the text as a whole does signify the true position of the Aborigine in Australia.

Subordinate discourse

It is only when an Aborigine becomes a writer and turns toward putting his or her life story down, that we find a text different in discourse and subject matter. Elsie Roughsey wrote An Aboriginal mother tells of the old and the new, then watched it being edited, but there has not been the wholesale rewriting as practised by Bruce Shaw or the massive

9 1962.
10 1975.
11 See for example Lewis 1965.
12 Shaw 1981:3.
framing and intrusions of Stephen Muecke. Elsie retains control, as much as she is able, of her work, and this results in reflections on the Aboriginal-being-in-Australia.

I wondered so much about all this. We have drifted so far away from that life, and have gladly marched forward into that life that really is hurting us, to care not to go any further.14

When Aborigines write and put down their words, reflection and analysis enter, and although the immediacy of oral discourse is lessened, this in no way detracts from the Aboriginality of the text. We have but to compare Elsie’s discourse with that of Shaw to realise the difference in feeling, and in reading such a text there is no sense of losing oneself on the tracks of the prose as Shaw would have us believe. Perhaps it is the act of writing itself, of consciously or unconsciously being in control of your voice which makes for a stronger narrative. In a sense to the Aborigine, writing is more important than being recorded in that it allows you to keep control of your material and tell it how you feel it should be told.

Control of discourse signifies control of being

We read the effect of this control in Robert Bropho’s book *The fringedweller.*15 This is the least tampered with of Aboriginal life stories and is mercifully free of long forewords, introductions and afterwords explaining, conceptualising and doing all sorts of things to Aboriginal discourse in exactly the same way that the white people have been doing physically to Aboriginal people since the first European ships sailed along our shores.

A discourse of Aboriginality

Robert Bropho’s text presents us with mixed signals. It is both a polemic and an autobiography. Robert Bropho as the Fringedweller expands his life outwards to encompass all fringedwellers. His text is not so much the life story of Robert Bropho, but of an entire people living on the fringes of white Australia. Community is foremost, and this is signified by the cover, which shows a family pressed together into a collective whole.

The discourse of presentation

The covers of the texts we have been discussing are significant. A reading discloses the state of Aboriginal-European relations in Australia. The cover of *Reading the country* is a reproduction of a painting by Krim Benterrak, a non-Aborigine. From it we read that the land is bounded, the horizon vague and indistinct, with a central image shaped like a prison. It reminds us of Elsie Roughsey’s words:

> We thought we were aiming for a better life to be treated fairly and equally. But as years were going out on us in our lives, we soon found we were rounded by wire nettings and fences, and we found living in this modern life, we had lost.16

The covers of Bruce Shaw’s books disclose a non-Aboriginality. The pelican illustrating the cover of *My country of the pelican dreaming* is a bird done in a naturalist style. It is only a bird, lacking a dreaming essence. *Banggayerri*’s cover might belong to any story of a cattle station. A large male figure dominates the composition in medium close-up and below his chest

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15 1980.
16 1984:234.
are the buildings of the station. There is no Aboriginality there. The male figure might be
the founding patriarch of a cattle empire. If we contrast these two covers with that of Elsie
Roughsey's text, immediately we are in the presence of Aboriginality. The cover is a repro­
duction of a painting by her husband, Dick Roughsey. It wraps the text around and shows a
group of figures, a community or family standing on a jetty facing across a river towards the
natural greenness of the far shore. The people are black and clad in European clothing. Three
of the figures, whose backs are in the foreground, hold Aboriginal weapons. The only in­
trusion of Europeanness is the clothing and jetty. The foreground figures are the elders and
they stand back while the younger people stand on the jetty over the river and gaze at the
far bank. Immediately the question springs to mind: are they standing there attempting to
read the future, or are they waiting for a European boat to ferry them across?

These covers point towards the inner text and are texts in themselves. From them we are
able to read certain things: the essential whiteness of Muecke's book, the manipulated texts
of the 'told-to' of Bruce Shaw; the confrontation of Roughsey's community with the future;
and Robert Bropho's group solidarity. From the covers if we continue on to the texts, we
are able to read the degrees of compromise presented in the discourse.

Biography and life history in the dominant mode of discourse, although utterly compro­
mised as to their mode of presentation, perhaps do have a value as bound texts in signifying
the position of Aborigines in modern Australia. The dominant discourse is a social marker
signifying Aboriginal subordination, and perhaps this is all we might expect from such texts
in which the voice of the Aborigine has been denied expression. It is only when the Abo­
rigine as writer or story-teller retains his or her own discourse that we find an authenticity
of presentation. For it is not only what is said that is important, but how it is said, especially
in the case of Aborigines, who until recently were denied a voice and a discourse of their
own.

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FROM SYDNEY TO TINGHA:

EARLY DAYS IN THE ABORIGINAL-AUSTRALIAN FELLOWSHIP

Jack Horner

Charles Leon, when he was President of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (AAF), informed me that after William Ferguson died in 1950 the *kooris* of Sydney were helpless. Apathy ran very high. \(^1\) The Aborigines Welfare Board still controlled the news of ‘the dark people’ in the state, \(^2\) the white people were building their post-war suburban homes and the *kooris* were ‘knocked right and left’. When the Fellowship voluntarily disbanded in August 1969, its work done, Leon commented: ‘What the Fellowship did in ten years was fantastic; people were hearing for the first time that Aborigines were subject to discrimination and under separate laws’. \(^3\)

In the AAF’s first five years (it was founded in 1956), most people, black or white, who took part in the advancement movement were moved by social conscience rather than reason, and few had graduated from universities. Whether influenced by Namatjira prints, or the more radical Don McLeod and his 1946 strike of Aboriginal station hands in the Pilbara, or the co-operative ideals of the Anglican priest Father Alf Clint, \(^4\) or by something else, the white people felt strongly that race relations in Australia might be better.

The movement’s social history tutors were Mrs Mary Bennett and Dr Charles Duguid, both veteran field activists. The FCAATSI (Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders) enthusiasts as yet were unacquainted with the works of Fay Gale and Jeremy Beckett; many anthropologists of that time (and, indeed, journalists like Colin Simpson) were concentrating on Aboriginal people living a tribal life.

In the mid-1960s the national Aboriginal advancement body, FCAATSI, was a loose affiliation of (at most) sixty-seven voluntary associations. Just why a single-minded concern for Aborigines should have seized so many middle-class white people in Australia in the 1950s is a mystery. You might call it a miracle.

Sending soldiers to distant lands during the Second World War broke our sense of isolation. But the motivation to help the Aboriginal cause possibly had more connection with the

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\(^1\) For Charles Leon’s comment on apathy see Horner 1974:170.

\(^2\) Goodall 1987.

\(^3\) For report of Leon’s speech at the disbandment of the Fellowship on 20 August 1969 see *Fellowship 1969*; a verbatim account is in J. Horner’s personal files, Canberra.

\(^4\) Father W.A. Clint (1908-1980) was the Director of the Australian Board of Missions Christian Community Co-operative Society from 1957 to 1962. In 1962 the society was renamed the Co-operative for Aborigines Ltd.; it still exists as the Tranby Co-operative College, Glebe, Sydney.
atomic bombs dropped on Japan, the 1950 British rockets aimed over Pitjantjatjara country in South Australia, and the outrageous atomic explosions at Woomera in 1953 and 1956.

We were stirred to notice, for the first time, dark men standing outside the rural post offices. In 1952 a Melbourne committee called the Council for Aboriginal Rights publicised a Darwin strike; a Sydney body, the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, came together in support of an Aboriginal woman leader, Pearl Gibbs; a second Melbourne association, the Aborigines Advancement League, sparked off a generous response from the public, for Aboriginal welfare. Doug (later Sir Douglas) Nicholls in 1957 travelled to Laverton, Western Australia, to help a committee investigate physical poverty in desert tribes overwhelmed by the compulsory loss of their land made necessary by the Maralinga tests. Nicholls returned to Melbourne much affected, and our movement took a new and compassionate direction.

When I became Honorary Secretary of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship in Sydney in September 1958, almost at once I was whirled into taking my first ‘field’ trip to Tingha, in the cold, forested mountains of northern New South Wales. My wife Jean drove the car. We were asked to look at Aboriginal reserves (an illegal activity for white folks), and to check complaints about policemen harassing Aborigines. It was all new to us. The white members of our committee were ignorant; the black members put up with that, convinced that we would change.

Jean and I stopped for refreshment at Quirindi, where I recalled that Herbert Groves and Charles Leon (the first two Aboriginal Presidents of the AAF) had told me there was a reserve, Walhallow Station, at Caroona, nine miles (14.5 km) away. Groves had been handyman there during the Depression; and Leon had remembered that, in the 1890s, a friendly squatter had bequeathed that land to local Aboriginal families. As I thought I owed something to Groves and Leon, I was determined to look over their former home.

School was just out at Caroona. The segregated Aboriginal primary school stood well apart from the village. White children and dark children, walking in separate clusters, passed one another without speaking. The young Aborigines, I noticed, were either unnaturally quiet or else in skittish high spirits. I watched them for a while.

On an impulse, I interviewed the teacher at Walhallow Aboriginal School. At first he described his hopes for the children. Then, all at once he fumed as he told me of the mutual dislike the station manager and the teacher had for one another. Their personal feelings, pent up by the frustrations of the station and the need to set up one's authority, caused endless quarrelling. The constant loneliness made it worse. For months past they could not address one another without shouting. Their clash of authority, expressed over the school gate, touched everything in their day's work.

As for teaching the children, he was encouraging them to grow a vegetable garden to supplement official rations. He was resigned to their cultural deprivation, he said, he would mention penny-rulers, or lounge chairs, in his lessons and then remember that they had never seen such things. He might raise their tolerance for other people, and then recall that they must conform to arbitrary rules from the manager. (Once there had been a milking herd at Walhallow, but the people now used powdered milk.) For most teachers, he admitted, appointment to a segregated Aboriginal school was a lower grade posting, despised but accepted for the sake of promised promotion. Usually the teachers stayed for two years.

The manager had been seven years before the mast; he knew how to give orders. Those were his qualifications. He drove us round the station in a big truck, not allowing us to meet the blacks as I had no authority. That was a blessing: I had no wish to be thought his friend.
Opening of new house for Aboriginal family, Armidale, November 1958.

Photo: Jack and Jean Hornet.
He was, after all, the manager and I would need to maintain my goodwill with the Aboriginal residents. Walhallow was a large village of scamped fibro cottages, unpainted and uncared-for, built by the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board in 1949. As we roared around, children cheered us like royalty.

Three boys were waiting for us by our Morris Minor, eager to talk. At first their questions came slowly, till they accepted us. There was no point in attending school, they said. Flight to Sydney was their high ambition, although they were aware they had few skills. High schools offered them little hope. The lessons there had little relevance to their lives.

‘Where does it get me a job, mister?’ one boy asked me, earnestly. ‘This was my first year at Quirindi. I can stay nex’ year, if I like. If I stay here, it means fencin’ for the farmers, like Dad done, or fruit pickin’. Maybe I’ll learn to shear, if I’m lucky.’

‘The best jobs on the farms go to the white kids,’ another boy said. ‘Their families get the pickings.’ He threw a stone unerringly at a distant tree, and grinned at his skill.

So their lives revolved around seasonal work, and for much of the year the parents would need to stretch the money out. When we exhausted the subject of jobs, I turned to talk about life on the station:

‘The manager — what’s he like?’ I asked.

‘Huh. Not much. Not like the one before him There was cows and horses and everything.’

This opinion impressed me at first, but I found later that a nostalgia for the previous boss was part of the life upon stations. That made the current manager fair game for calumny. Since the manager (and his wife, called matron) ran the reserve community by a fairly strict interpretation of the regulations, the residents concluded that his loyalty was directed to the Welfare Board rather than to them.

‘What’s the place for the best jobs round here?’

‘The railways,’ the boys said together. ‘At Where It’s Crook.’

Werris Creek was an important junction, with a large shunting yard. I wondered at their choice of arduous labour in the goods vans; but a trade, with consequent promotion, was always possible in the railways service.

Tamworth, then a fast-growing city, had recently formed a small committee of middle-class white people, to help the local Aboriginal families. They raised money with home-made cakes at market stalls, so they could be independent. A clerk at East-West Airlines was the honorary secretary. After listening to his story, I warned him politely of the dangers of dispensing charity, which, in Pearl Gibbs’s experience, had crushed the natural pride of Aborigines.

I urged the secretary to keep the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship informed of any racial discrimination in the city, so that with this evidence we could stir a government department. We were hoping to become the Sydney agent for all the small country committees supporting the riverbank Aboriginal communities. This reminded him that the Welfare Committee at Wellington (the Tamworth Committee’s inspiration), which had begun as a social concern by the churches in 1944, still stood behind any Nanima Reserve Aborigines appearing in the courts, to prevent legal discrimination.

Staying overnight at the old Uralla Hotel, we walked slowly down the Uralla main street, savouring the Victorian atmosphere. Bright moonlight fell upon little weatherboard shops with their curved corrugated-iron roofs, casting the brick footpath, wooden posts and hitching-rails into shadow. No electricity. Above us the shop pelmets advertised: HAIRDRESSER, BUTCHER, DRAPERY. Across the wide street, I noticed a large building on a
knoll dominating the whole street — a police station. Neat lawns, plant pots guarding the entrance with small firs.

Groves had told me that in former years the police officers in New South Wales had been agents for the Aborigines Protection Board, taking girls from their mothers to become ‘apprentice’ domestic servants for squatters and well-to-do people. Few ever saw their parents again. So here was a symbol of suppression. (The practice continued in 1958, under a civil-service power, not using the police.) Police officers in 1958 had a mandate, as Board agents, to enter a reserve cottage to ‘inspect’ it, ostensibly for cleanliness; yet they also laid charges at this time if they saw liquor laws being breached in the hut.

We arrived in Armidale the following day, to find a carnival mood. The Armidale Association for the Assimilation of Aborigines (AAAA), consisting of university staff and townspeople, had raised money to build a new suburban home, decorated of course in the latest fashion, for an Aboriginal family. New South Wales Chief Secretary, the Hon. G.A. (Gus) Kelly, was to present the house that historic day. The idea of donating a new home for a good family was well-meaning and popular, full of whitefella notions that by changing the environment you change the human being. The whole committee enthused: they had ‘bled Armidale white’ for funds, they said, and were both relieved and excited.

The AAAA had begun by accident. About fifteen months before a famous Australian writer, Kylie Tennant, had given lectures on Australian literature at the University of New England. The wives of the Arts Faculty conveyed their thanks with a party in her honour. Over tea, they told her that they were anxious to help the local Aboriginal people, but they had not met them. ‘Why not now?’ the author said, encouragingly. So they piled into their cars and drove to the town dump. There the dark women and the white women, practical as always and with no condescension at all, discussed the needs. When the faculty-wives heard from the dump-wives that Father Kelly, a young Catholic priest, was keen to build houses, they formed the committee to support him.

At the new home, the Minister, Gus Kelly joined Aborigines Welfare Board members and Armidale city councillors, sitting in light canvas chairs on the veranda. White people made up the crowd; the new tenants were the only blacks in sight. After many formal speeches the Minister, extending a pink plump hand to the Aboriginal man, gave him the symbolic Yale key. From the crowd there came fervent clapping. Afterwards Jim Warburton, the director of the University of New England’s Adult Education Department, told me that because Aboriginal youngsters rarely got past second year at high school, the AAAA Committee had decided, as their first priority, to create scholarships.

‘It’s in our line of work.’ Warburton said, ‘they could continue school here in Armidale.’

5 The housing committee in 1958 comprised Mrs Susan Stock, Evelyn Moore, Dr L. Goddard, Mrs Joan Llewellyn, Max Sewell, Des Murray. Evelyn Moore (of the Armidale Teachers’ College), as original convener of the committee, from September 1957 to July 1958, was responsible for much of the organising work; Mrs Stock took over as convener in August 1958. The committee had spent fourteen months raising donations, organising concerts. The townspeople of Armidale and the university people were equally involved in the enterprise. The Association later founded a kindergarten centre and a clubroom for Aborigines in the city. See also Dawn 1959:1-2. Evelyn Moore represented AAAA at the first FCAATSNI Conference in Adelaide, January 1959.

6 See Tennant 1959; see also Bandler and Fox 1983.
In contrast to affluent Armidale, Tingha was depressed. Some cottages were in disrepair. By chance, our car followed a horse and buggy into town; it was driven by an Aboriginal woman, and was carrying one small son and a full shopping bag. Suddenly they veered off the road through dismal, featureless bush to where stood the last few tin huts on the old Tingha Reserve. At one time the Aboriginal population here had been large; from 1908 to 1933 the Christian Evangelical annual religious conventions had been crowded out. In 1958 it seemed almost deserted.

As I slowly walked towards the hut, praying for courage, the woman was unpacking groceries in the kitchen. She looked out, expressing astonishment at seeing a white man.

'We've not seen a white man here since the welfare officer, Mister Green, two years ago,' she exclaimed. I thought at first she was angry but I waited, not venturing further. I knew that policemen and Board officers often barged into cottages by habit. Minutes went by.

The woman appeared at the lintel, smiling uncertainly, sufficiently worried not to give me her name. She was dark, not heavily built, simply dressed, standing with her head on one side as though listening for something. She brushed back her hair with her hand in a characteristic gesture, and I saw that she had no ornament but a wedding-ring and a hair-clip. Her straightforward manner impressed me. She showed no fear at all. I think she thought I was a salesman.

I explained who I was, and about the Fellowship.

'Oh yes, white people say they will do things,' she commented, matter-of-factly, but her deep-set sepia eyes did not blaze with anger. She stared with full appraisal, wondering what crazy human being had been thrust at her. Her cynicism of white men's good intentions hit me hard. I was aware.

We talked placidly of the Welfare Board, and of the policemen at Tingha and the powers given by the Protection Act.

'The sergeant, he comes here from time to time and looks us over. But when I want some blankets, I have to go to the police station.' She sized me up, taking her time. 'Don't go much on him, myself, he rouses on the men when they're boozed. Says the Board obliges him to do that. I think he gets a lot of fun at our expense.'

The serious eyes challenged me. 'Every year,' she went on, 'he organises a Christmas party for the dark children.' No flicker of amusement, but mockery was in the voice. I snickered; and her reply was a sad weariness of spirit. She didn't need to tell me she despised all policemen.

'Here, I've got work to do.' She called to the two children inside not to do something. Turning to me, she gave me a name: a leading Aboriginal family in town, people we could trust. I thanked her and walked away, part shamed, part excited. I tried to conjecture historical reasons why Aborigines did not get on with the state police force.

The family she spoke of proved to be most helpful. Three married sisters, each with a young family in her cottage, and the two strong-minded grandparents headed the family. One sister had a husband away from town, droving for five months. They were all too cautious to speak much about policemen, merely saying they had a 'down' on dark people. It surprised and stirred us, though, that they accepted the Horners as their friends. We were introduced, and swept into the family presence. Conversation was in a sparkling mood, as the women showed us a family collection of gems, discovered in the old alluvial Tingha mines. Their laughter was infectious. Despite the appearance of physical poverty, as I perceived it — simple weatherboard homes with hessian walls inside — they had ignored it. The
Side elevation of new house.
Photo: Jack and Jean Horner.

Homes at Tingha, November 1958.
Photo: Jack and Jean Horner.
eldest daughter had just finished third year at high school, they told us proudly.

I was still perplexed as to what actions would expose any injustices: probably the best method would depend on the circumstances. I had much yet to learn about the life of the Aborigines. But, thanks to this Tingha visit, I had met individual Aboriginal people who not only demonstrated their sensitive family ties but also accepted themselves. It was exhilarating. All my middle-class fears of Aborigines had vanished. I would accept them just as they were.

That public opening of the suburban Armidale home had brought together the University of New England people busy in AAAA, and Professor A.P. Elkin of the Aborigines Welfare Board. Out of this academic contact, there grew an idea for two successive Adult Education weekend conferences in May 1959 and May 1960 at the Armidale campus, when the leaders of many rural ‘assimilation associations’ helping the riverbank murris would confront the responsible officials of the state welfare boards with some open discussion of state policies, on the ‘cross-cultural debate’ principle. There we met Ruth Fink and Charles Rowley (then Principal of the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Sydney).

Diane McEachern (not yet Barwick), whom the kooris in Fitzroy, Melbourne, first met in October 1960, was still making Aboriginal friendships and writing her notes when she was invited to speak at the third FCAATSI conference in Brisbane at Easter 1961. Her talk, on the Canadian Indians of the west coast, had her audience enthralled: it was possibly the first time that Aboriginal radicals had listened, without scoffing, to any anthropology. In FCAATSI executive members suddenly became aware of our lack of knowledge in this field, and through Judy Inglis, Lester Hiatt and Marie Reay we learnt much about the mutual obligations of Aboriginal kinship and totems, and the distribution of the tribes right across Australia. Through many conversations with Aboriginal men and women in New South Wales I was slowly gaining in my mind a picture of the past, but it was years later, in 1968, that Professor W.E.H. Stanner opened up the questions of post-1788 Aboriginal history.

It was Diane Barwick’s influence that ensured that the scholarly history, while being strictly fair to the motives of both sides, would show more clearly how it looked to Aboriginal eyes.

7 Stanner 1968.

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TARRA BOBBY, A BRATAUALUNG MAN

Bain Attwood

In the last decade biographical writings have provided much-needed Aboriginal accounts of the history of their interaction with Europeans in Australia. Nearly all of these life histories have been oral-based, transmitted by their subjects or by others who have known them.1 It has been much more difficult to provide voices for individual Aboriginal men and women who lived in the nineteenth century, but several recent essays have shown that it is possible to provide from the documentary record some indications of the perspectives of this historically inarticulate group.2

In the case of Tarra Bobby, he left no written sources for he was illiterate, but a scouring of the correspondence of missionaries and government officials, the reporting of provincial and metropolitan newspapers, and the writings of ethnographers provides some of the pieces from which Tarra Bobby’s life can be reconstructed. The record is, nonetheless, undeniably patchy, and so I have adopted two approaches: firstly, where I have been unable to learn anything directly because the sources are simply not extant, I have described the wider social context in which he lived (this method seems sensible for the ‘individual’ and ‘society’ are not mutually exclusive entities, especially in traditional Aboriginal societies where the notion of a discrete individual personality is particularly problematic); and secondly, where the evidence is much fuller, I have dwelt on particular incidents in Bobby’s life, using these as a window through which we might look upon some of the main strands of his life history.

Tarra Bobby was probably born in the late 1830s or early 1840s, to the Brataualung clan, (part of a wider regional grouping known as the Kurnai), which claimed the country from Cape Liptrap west of Wilsons Promontory and east of the Tarwin River, to the mouth of Merrimans Creek and inland towards the south bank of the La Trobe River. He seems to have been a member of a residential group (or band), the Yauung, which was centred on Warrigal Creek and the Tarra River3 (named after an Aboriginal guide, Charley Tarra, who accompanied the Polish explorer Count Paul de Strzelecki into the area in 1840 as well as a pastoral company established the following year). While Bobby would have been given an Aboriginal name at birth, and acquired another at initiation, he was generally known to European settlers and among Aborigines by his European name; he probably became known as ‘Tarra Bobby’ because Europeans wanted to distinguish him from two fellow tribesmen

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3 Notes (Howitt Papers (a), 1053/4a); Fison and Howitt 1880:228; Howitt 1904:77; Tindale 1974:203.
who had been given or taken the same name, while such a connection with the physical world was consonant with traditional Aboriginal culture.  

The Brataualung had established some sort of *modus vivendi* with European pastoralists soon after their intrusion onto their tribal land in 1841. While they had been initially suspicious and watchful, they soon initiated contact with these whites, and friendly relations were eventually forged between them.  

It seems that the Brataualung had had some earlier relations with Europeans — sealers and whalers who had based themselves around Wilsons Promontory and Corner Inlet in the 1820s and 1830s — and when the pastoralists came they may have believed their presence would also be only small-scale and seasonal. However, a small town soon grew up which became Port Albert, and several runs were established nearby. Yet the Brataualung, instead of attempting to drive the Europeans off their land, began working for the settlers in return for food and other goods. They attempted to incorporate the newcomers into their kin-based society by sharing their knowledge of the land, exchanging names, and providing sexual companionship.  

These relatively harmonious relations lasted until July 1843 when several white men — perhaps runaway Vandemonian convicts living on the beach at Port Albert and trading illegally in grog — killed some Brataualung men who, in turn, chose to kill ‘one big fellow white man’, a leading stockholder in the district, in an attempt to restore the *status quo* upset by these deaths. The squatters responded by mounting a brutal reprisal raid which caused considerable loss of Brataualung life, and the amicable relations in the area broke down completely; the Aborigines moved away from the Port and its surrounding runs, and avoided any further contact with whites for several years.

After withdrawing from white settlement in 1843, however, the Brataualung found it difficult to survive: the loss of access to indigenous food sources and the ravages of European-introduced diseases took a heavy toll; by 1848 they numbered less than fifty and were reportedly in ‘a very unhealthy state’, suffering from respiratory problems, influenza and malnutrition. Mainly as a result of their impoverished and weakened condition, but also because they were attracted to some aspects of white society, particularly its material goods, they started to move in to European settlement, initially camping at two stations on Merri-mans Creek, Coady Vale and Erin Vale, as well as on smaller stations around Port Albert. Later they moved hesitantly into the tiny settlements of Tarraville, Victoria and Alberton which lay within three or four miles of one another. Ranging more freely once again over their tribal land, they found a much-changed world and soon learned that to survive they had to adapt to the colonists on terms not of their own making.

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5 Port Phillip Patriot, 21 January, 4 February, 22 March 1841; Port Phillip Herald, 23 March 1841; Brodribb 1978:30-32.
6 Port Phillip Patriot, 6 May, 10 June 1841, 15, 29 August 1842; Committee on Immigration 1842:53; Port Phillip Herald, 19 May 1843; Charles J. Tyers to Superintendent, Port Phillip, 1 February 1845, 45/324 (Public Record Office (PROVic), Series 19); Bride 1969:243.
7 Robinson Journal, 8, 25 June 1844; Select Committee 1845:45; Mackaness 1941:10; Gippsland Standard, 25 September 1912.
8 Tyers to Superintendent, Port Phillip, 29 December 1849 (New South Wales Archives Office (NSWAO), Series 4/1141.2; Tyers to Superintendent, Port Phillip, 7 March 1851, (Tyers Diaries); Aborigines, return to an address 1853:19-21; King Daybooks, 6 February 1849.
Tarra Bobby left no written records; this portrait might be said to be the only document in which he speaks directly to us. Even though it is an image produced by a professional photographer, Charles Walters, and tells us as much about the way he and some other Europeans saw Aborigines in Victoria in the mid-19th century, it nonetheless serves to counteract the view of Bobby encoded in the writings of missionaries and government bureaucrats: of an inveterate and weak-minded drunkard, a nomadic and immoral troublemaker, adrift between two cultures. Here he appears in European garb but his bearing and the shield convey a sense of purpose and dignity rooted in his own culture. In most of the other sensitively-rendered portraits in the album in which this photo appears, the subjects are not accompanied by the symbols of traditional Aboriginal culture. Perhaps this suggests that either Bobby chose to be photographed in this way or that Walters realised it was appropriate for him to be portrayed like this.

Photo: C.W. Walters, courtesy of the Museum of Victoria.
As they moved onto pastoral runs some squatters, realising they now had the upper hand, demanded that the Aboriginal men undertake small jobs in exchange for food, tobacco and tea. At Coady Vale pastoralist Patrick Coady Buckley soon grasped that the Brataualung could be used for other work, and began employing the men as bark strippers and potato harvesters. At Tarraville another settler James McAlpine also engaged several Aborigines, including Tarra Bobby, for different tasks. When almost all of the white labour force left for the goldfields in the summer of 1851-52, Aborigines were employed as stockmen, shepherds, sheepwashers and reapers in the district, winning praise from settlers who were surprised by their willingness and ability to do such work. The Brataualung, however, generally preferred to survive by other means and continued to gather traditional foods where these were available, supplementing them by begging money and food at the stations and in the small towns.

In this context of social and cultural upheaval, Tarra Bobby could hardly be said to have been born into traditional Kurnai society, but nonetheless he grew up in an Aboriginal world which retained considerable strength and vitality in the midst of enormous change. The Brataualung maintained strong links with their tribal land, and upheld customary beliefs and practices. Two clan headmen, known as Old Morgan and Old Darby, assumed important roles in Bobby’s early years, imparting tribal knowledge and laws, and exercising considerable influence over him and other young Brataualung men. In the early 1850s they convened an elaborate initiation ceremony in which Bobby and some other Kurnai boys became young men and were given new names, their childhood names becoming secret ones. Sometime later Bobby was chosen for the important tribal position of messenger (lewin or paiara), whereby he was entrusted to communicate important messages to the Brataualung as well as to other Kurnai clans, calling them to ceremonies or to resolve disputes through formal mechanisms.

Although he grew up in this traditionally-oriented milieu, Bobby was also drawn to European society. He became part of a small cross-clan group of young Brataualung and Braiakaulung men who developed a feeling of comradeship among themselves which was not as narrowly based on kinship and territory as such bonds were formerly. These youths adopted European dress, developed a strong taste for alcohol, tobacco and smart clothes, and became fervent gamblers and sharp card players. In the late 1850s they moved about together between Sale, the other small towns and the stations in the district, as well as going to Melbourne on several occasions. While they became well known to some of the European

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9 Tyers to Superintendent, Port Phillip, 23 January 1851, 7, 3 February 1851, 3 February 1852; Tyers to Colonial Secretary, 15 January 1853, 9 February 1854 (Tyers Diaries); King Daybook, 2 December 1854, March and April 1855; Buckley Journal, 21 October 1849, 25 February-1 March 1850, August 1852, 26-21 October, 1 November 1853, 19 April-6 May 1854, 8-15 April 1854, 4 September 1856; Aborigines, return to an address 1853:18-21; Thomas, Journal of Gippsland visit, 31 December 1860 (Thomas Papers, Item 16); Thomas to President of Lands and Works, 2 February 1859, A1859/642, 9 February 1859, B1859/707, 19 April 1859, A1859/2089, 14 September 1859, A1859/4968 (PRO Vic, Series 2896); Notes (Howitt Papers (a), 1053/4a).

10 Notes (Howitt Papers (a), 1053/3a), 1053/4a); Fison and Howitt 1880:191, 193, 199, 210, 230, 251-53; Bulmer to Howitt, 15 April 1880 (Howitt Papers (b), Box 1, Folder 6); Howitt 1886:413-14, 1887:passim, 1904:617-18; Smyth 1878:40.

11 Thomas Journal, 21 October 1857 (Thomas Papers, Item 4); Gippsland Guardian, 3 September 1858; Thomas to President of Lands and Works, 13 September 1858, C1858/4760, 18 October 1858, C1858/5425, 15 February 1860, A1860/761, 22 February 1860, B1860/3817, 28 February 1860, A1860/1007 (PRO Vic, Series 2896); Select Committee 1858-59:58.
settlers, such as Angus McMillan on Bushy Park station, their presence and particularly their heavy drinking in camps on the fringes of the townships often caused alarm and fear, and brought complaints about drunkenness and their harassment of passers-by for food, tobacco, grog and money.12

The most serious incident of this kind was in Sale township late one evening in August 1858 when Tarra Bobby and another Aboriginal man, Billy Login, accosted a similarly drunk man, a local white resident Richard Dothwaite, for money; he angrily refused and lurched at Billy. In the struggle which followed both Aboriginal men struck Dothwaite down with sticks and robbed him.13

Dothwaite was found dead the following morning and the Aborigines quickly decamped when they realised what had happened. They were rounded up later by the police and local settlers and brought before an inquest conducted by the local coroner, Dr Alexander Arbuckle. While he was well known to these men, (having provided them with medical care over several years), and McMillan acted as interpreter, Bobby and Login were confused by the proceedings and accused one another of striking Dothwaite. The jury decided that Dothwaite had died as a result of blows to his head, but ruled there was insufficient evidence to conclude who had inflicted them. Subsequently, however, further police questioning adduced more evidence, and Bobby and Login were committed to stand trial for murder at the Melbourne Criminal Court the following month. Together with another Aboriginal man, Jemmie Scott (who was to act as witness), they were given into McMillan’s custody, to be taken by steamer from Port Albert to Melbourne; on their arrival there on 11 September they were taken to Pentridge Gaol.14

For Tarra Bobby and Billy Login, Dothwaite’s death, their arrest and subsequent detention were undeniably traumatic, the more so because they would have recalled or known of the brutal reprisals which had followed previous Aboriginal killings of whites. Their anxiety worsened as they left their kin and country, and were transferred to the strange surroundings of a large prison within Bunurong territory. While relationships between the Kurnai and their former clan enemies had improved since the late 1840s Tarra Bobby and Billy Login might nonetheless have felt uneasy. The only source of comfort came in the familiar face of William Thomas, the Guardian of Aborigines, whom they had met the previous year in Melbourne.

He acted as a solicitors protector, acquainting himself with the case, securing legal counsel for them and briefing the lawyer on several occasions. Throughout their lengthy detention he visited them almost daily, taking them food and speaking to them for hours at a time, explaining ‘white man’s laws when they find any killed’, and lecturing them on the ‘crime of drunkenness’, telling them it had brought them to gaol. On one occasion, Billy or Login parried ‘what for white man bring us rum?’ On Sundays Thomas preached on ‘the evil of sin’, and he and a young Aboriginal convert sang hymns to them. Much of the time the two men were ‘very low spirited’ and ‘very dull’, but they apparently brightened up at seeing the Guardian, and while they were less pleased when he scolded them they nevertheless came to depend upon his attention and repeatedly urged him ‘to come tomorrow’; he was at

12 Harrison n.d.; Leslie and Cowie 1973:29; Gippsland Guardian, 7 August 1857; Select Committee 1858-59:33, 75.
13 For a discussion of other aspects of this incident and the trial see Attwood, forthcoming, Chapter 5.
14 Gippsland Guardian, 3, 17 September 1858; Regina vs Tarra Bobby and Billy Login, (PROVic, Series 30, Unit 219, File NCR 2370).
least ‘a friend’, somebody in an alien environment who could provide some reassurance and partial relief from the stultifying boredom of their prison cell. Their trial was repeatedly postponed as all the witnesses failed to appear and each time, after having been taken to court, instructed by Thomas on how to behave in the dock and been attired in new clothes to ‘appear respectable’, Tarra Bobby and Billy Login were returned to Pentridge.

With each delay, they grew more anxious, becoming particularly distressed when some fellow prisoners convicted of capital offences were executed at Pentridge. Billy Login was so terrified Thomas ‘could scarcely pacify him’, and the Guardian actually only made matters worse by taking ‘the advantage to press the equity of our laws against one taking the life of another’. As the day of their deferred trial drew nearer in mid-November, both men became extremely uneasy and afraid. On the sixteenth and seventeenth of that month they were taken to the Court, but their trial did not come up, and it was the nineteenth before they were finally placed in the dock, only to be discharged by the judge and placed in Thomas’s care. (In the absence of prosecution witnesses the case could not be tried, as English law prohibited accused persons from testifying.) Bobby and Billy Login, relieved and scarcely believing their good fortune, went with Thomas to his residence where they were given food and shelter for the night. The following morning before the sun had barely risen, they were ready to leave and by 7.00 they set off for their own country after thanking Thomas profusely.15

On their return, they found their kinsmen and some local whites intent on finding a way to alleviate the condition of Aborigines in the area. The Brataualung and most of the other blacks were more than ever now remnant populations, struggling to eke out a meagre existence on the fringes of European society. The Brataualung repeatedly told a doctor in Tarra-ville, Mr G.D. Hedley, that they wanted ‘a spot which they could call their own’ — a reserve. In April 1859, perhaps on Bobby’s initiative, a small group of Kurnai men travelled to Melbourne to call on Thomas, having heard that the Woiworung, the Taungurong and the Ngurai-illam-wurrung clans had secured a reserve in the Upper Goulburn area on the Acheron River. Simon Wonga, a ngurungaeta or leader of the Wurundjeri-balluk clan of the Woiworung, introduced them to the Guardian but he suggested they return to Gippsland and talk to some of the local pastoralists. They did so but three months later returned to see Thomas again, impatient with the inactivity of local white settlers and the government.16 Their interest in obtaining reserves was fuelled further by Tarra Bobby, but not before the young Brataualung man had tangled again with the law.

In February 1860, he, Billy Login and a few other Aboriginal men set off for Melbourne, stopping at the Anderson’s Creek gold diggings. There they seem to have fallen foul of a European man, (perhaps because they might have harassed him for food and money), and he fired upon them; the trigger-happy digger was charged with assault and fined £5, and the

15 Thomas to Surveyor General, 10 January 1859 (Thomas Papers, Item 7); Thomas to President of Lands and Works, 13 September 1858, C1858/4780, 21 September 1858, C1858/5404, 29 September 1858, D1858/5134, 18 October 1858, D1858/5425, 26 October 1858, C1858/5596, 2 November 1858, D1858/742, 10 November 1858, D1858/5979, 17 November 1858, C1858/6206 (PROVic, Series 2896).

16 Thomas to President of Lands and Works, 21 September 1858, C1858/5045, 19 April 1859, A1859/2089, 14 June 1859, B1859/3170 (PROVic, Series 2896); Thomas Journal, 13 April, 5 June 1859, Journal of Gippsland Visit, 31 December 1860 (Thomas Papers, Items 4, 16).
money was handed over to Bobby and Login, but the former had received a severe eye injury. They travelled to Melbourne where Thomas took him to hospital; Bobby was reluctant to remain as, like other Aborigines, he associated illness with locality. After being operated upon he was ordered to rest for two weeks and was persuaded to stay by Thomas who visited him frequently.17

When he was discharged from hospital, Bobby travelled to the Aboriginal Reserve on the Acheron River where he found many Aborigines busily working the land 'like white man' under the guidance of a teacher, Robert Hickson.18 He was most excited by what he saw, and on his return to Melbourne gave Thomas 'a glowing account of blacks working hard, making Paddocks &c. &c.', telling him 'blackfellows Gippsland by and by like that'. (Within months, the Aborigines encountered settler opposition and were shifted in September 1860 against their wishes to another site, Mohican Station.) Much of Bobby's buoyant optimism was due to the fact that the Taungurong had bestowed a young woman, Annie, upon him in accordance with the practice of exchanging women between distant clans.19 In the Brataualung and other Kurnai tribal groups there were few young women available as partners for men because the customary marriage laws required men and women to marry exogamously and men far outnumbered women in the small population.20 By this marriage, Bobby may have assumed certain responsibilities within the Taungurong clan and soon after, perhaps acting in the formal capacity of a messenger, he travelled to Gippsland to carry news about the Acheron Reserve. In June many Kurnai — reportedly about a hundred — went there to see the new reserve.21

On his return to Gippsland, Bobby spent some time working as a reaper, earning 'plenty of money', and early in 1861 he returned to Melbourne where he spent his wages freely on clothes and drank heavily. Thomas scolded him for drinking and his 'wandering', telling him to stay with his wife and new-born child; Bobby responded by asking for money for a fare on the steamer so he could repeat the journey he and Billy Login had first made in September 1858 when they were escorted to Melbourne to stand trial, but Thomas refused, and Bobby had to go on foot.22

In July 1862 he returned to Melbourne with other Kurnai tribesmen and they waited on Thomas, complaining they had not been supplied with food or blankets by the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, and asking him to secure the release of a kinsman serving a sentence in Pentridge Gaol. The Guardian angrily told them they should 'stop in their own country' and cursed the newly-founded Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines for not ensuring this. But they stayed and, with other Aborigines, drank heavily. In mid-August, Bobby fell ill and was taken to hospital in a drunken stupor. Once more Thomas visited him, attempting 'to impress upon his mind about drink', and after a spell in

18 Thomas to Secretary, CBPA, 26 July 1860 (Australian Archives (AA) Brighton, Series B312, Item 3).
19 Thomas to President of Lands and Works, 11 April 1860, B1860/1862 (PROVic, Series 2896).
20 Thomas, Journal of Gippsland visit, 31 December 1860 (Thomas Papers, Item 16); Return on tribes, numbers, and sex of Aborigines in Gippsland, 20 July 1863 (AA Brighton, Series B312, Item 9).
21 Gippsland Guardian, 29 June 1860.
22 Thomas Journal, 3 January 1861, Report, 1 January 1861-June 1862 (Thomas Papers, Items 5, 7).
hospital Bobby was discharged into Thomas's care and put on the road to Gippsland. 23 By January 1863, however, he was back in Melbourne again, this time with Billy Login, and once more they were 'in trouble', with Login being gaoled for a short period. (Thomas aptly described them as 'companions in tribulation'.) He provided them with food, tobacco and tea and packed them off to Gippsland before they could run foul of the law again. 24

Back in Gippsland, relations between Aborigines and Europeans were beginning to undergo a fundamental change through the coming of Christian missionaries into the area. Some of the Brataualung met one of them, Friedrich Hagenauer, in May 1861 at Tarraville, as the Moravian missionary made an investigatory journey through south-western and central Gippsland, but 'Old Morgan' was the only one to express any interest in Hagenauer's mission which he hoped to found at Bushy Park. Hagenauer may have endeared himself to 'Old Morgan' by giving him a few small presents. They renewed their acquaintance the following February when Hagenauer returned to Gippsland to start his mission, and once more later in 1862 when he visited Port Albert again and urged the Brataualung to return with him. While a small block of land had been set aside near Alberton, there was little likelihood of the Aborigines occupying it, but they were reluctant to move away from their tribal land to where Hagenauer himself was seeking land for a mission station in the face of government and some local opposition.

In the meantime, 'Old Morgan' became more perturbed about the future of his young kinsmen, and particularly their liking of alcohol, and it would seem he came to regard the missionary as someone who could play a role similar to his own as tribal headman. In May 1863, the old man travelled to Sale to see the missionary and, again moved by Hagenauer's purpose and kindly manner, he resolved to seek out some of the young men; he talked to them late into the night, urging them to go to the missionaries. The following morning several of them arrived at the Hagenauer's house, telling him 'Old Morgan' had sent them. The following month the Hagenauers and a large group of Aborigines, including a few Brataualung men, moved to a site on Lake Wellington where they had been granted land. Later, 'Old Morgan' himself went to this new station, Ramahyuck, (where he died in December 1864). 25

Some of the Brataualung, however, preferred to stay in their own tribal country or at least were reluctant to move onto Brabiralung land where Ramahyuck lay. Tarra Bobby, Annie, and another Brataualung man, Bobby Coleman, chose in the winter of 1863 to go to another newly-founded station, Coranderrk, near Healesville. It had been reserved in June after John Green, a missionary layman who had replaced Hickson at the much-disliked Mohican Reserve in March 1862, and forty Woiworung Aborigines had abandoned Mohican and chosen a site at the junction of Badger Creek and the Yarra where they were later joined by the Taungurong. 26 The Woiworung and Taungurong were eager to live in a European manner, many converted to Christianity, and the work of developing the land was under-

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23 Thomas Journal, 11, 18 July, 11, 17 August, 8 September 1862 (Thomas Papers, Item 5); Hagenauer to Reichel, 19 May 1862 (Moravian Mission, MF 166).
24 Thomas Journal, 30 January, 1 February 1863 (Thomas Papers, Item 5).
26 CBPA, 1st Report 1861:4-5; John Green to Secretary, CBPA, 28 July 1863 (AA Brighton, Series B312, Item 9).
This drawing of Ramahyuck appeared in the *Illustrated Australian News* in 1869 (1 January, p.5), accompanying an article penned by Hagenauer in which he portrayed the mission in biblical terms as 'a city on the hill'. This Moravian missionary also depicted the Aborigines in the area as having been in a desperate condition of murderous savagery, and contrasted this with a picture of regeneration brought about by the preaching of the Gospel: 'Five years ago the reader would have found a wild thickly timbered piece of country where he now finds a beautiful small native Christian village.' For Tarra Bobby and other traditionally-oriented Aborigines, however, missions such as Ramahyuck were deeply alien and disturbing places, and they tried to remain out of the clutches of their fervent missionary superintendents.

Photo: La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria.
taken energetically and with a speed the Central Board considered ‘truly astonishing’. They identified closely with the place they had chosen and were optimistic about their future there, regarding John Green with ever-increasing respect and affection, and responded to a style of management which allowed them ‘to rule themselves as much as possible’.

It is unclear why Tarra Bobby decided to go to Coranderrk; it could have been on Annie's initiative, the result of her wanting to live among her own people, but as I can learn nothing about her I can only speculate and she must remain a shadowy part of Bobby's life history. While Bobby was probably as impressed by the early development of Coranderrk as he was by that at Acheron, and built a hut there, he was not to become one of its pioneers. He had only limited tribal standing among the Woiworung as by convention only individuals born on Kulín land could acquire clan membership and 'speak' for their land. Like many traditionalists, he had little interest in (and was actually distrustful of) the missionaries and their religious faith and, despite prolonged periods of residence on Coranderrk, he continued to regard it or any other mission station as an alien environment. He continued to draw much of his sense of purpose and confidence from a traditionally-oriented Aboriginal world rather than one influenced by missionaries and other Europeans. His authority lay among the Brataualung and it was to his own country and kin that he was repeatedly drawn, as well as to Thomas in Melbourne.

In the mid-1860s Bobby was 'often on the road' between Ramahyuck and Coranderrk, acting the role of messenger and mediator in an attempt to persuade more Kurnai men to go and settle at the Healesville station where there was more prospect of finding marital partners. In doing this, Bobby caused considerable disruption on the mission station, especially in May 1866 when he persuaded about twenty-five to leave including some who had already made a commitment to Ramahyuck by building small cottages, and one who was under special religious instruction. This enraged Hagenauer and forced him to move quickly to obtain some young women from Western Australia in order to 'settle' the men down. The two men clashed again in an inter-tribal dispute in Gippsland which came to a head in 1868; the previous August, a Kurnai man had died in Sale, and some of his kinsmen had suspected sorcery and planned a revenge party upon the assumed perpetrators, the Brataualung, Braiakaulung and Brabiralung, who were on Ramahyuck. Hagenauer, however, had intervened to prevent this, but several months later some traditionalists decided to resolve the dispute and called on Aboriginal men on Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers Mission Stations to meet at Lake Victoria for a formal, staged 'fight'. It seems many of them were only reluctant participants, and when Hagenauer and the local police intervened they returned to Ramahyuck with him. Tarra Bobby, however, was extremely annoyed by the missionary and police action which had prevented him and a few other traditionally-oriented men from settling the dispute. Bobby told the policeman he would go and see Robert Brough Smyth, the secretary of the Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, in Melbourne and lay a

28 Barwick 1968:14; Green to Secretary, CBPA, 28 July 1863 (AA Brighton, Series B312, Item 9).
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complaint against Hagenauer and the police who had ‘interfered with the arrangements of
the Blacks who had a perfect right to do as they pleased’.31

Bobby presumably returned to Coranderrk, but it is unlikely he stayed for long; some
evidence suggests that he was on poor terms with many of the Aborigines there as well as
Green. A clergyman familiar with Coranderrk, Rev. Robert Hamilton, claimed that Bobby’s
conduct was ‘as a general rule . . . intolerable’ as he was ‘an inveterate drunkard and a perfect
moral plague’. His drunkenness and ‘disorderly and riotous conduct’ may have led to re­
peated expulsions from the station.32 And when Thomas died in 1867, Bobby lost a kindly
benefactor and a convenient place of refuge, both of which had been an important focus of
his life for almost a decade. He also increasingly felt he had been abandoned by his kin who
had either died or adopted a lifestyle alien to him. Although he continued to be drawn to his
own country, by the late 1860s the few remaining Brataualung were no longer living on their
traditional land, while Billy Login, for example, had ‘settled down’ on Ramahyuck and been
converted by the missionaries. In the early 1870s, Bobby’s sense of isolation was compoun­
ded when Annie seems to have died. Throughout this time, Bobby’s health continued to
deteriorate, and he was forced to spend periods in hospital in Melbourne.33

In the context of a growing determination of the Board and missionaries to enforce a
policy of segregating Aborigines on reserves, Bobby’s poor health and his lack of either
European protectors or an extended kin network left him extremely vulnerable. His peri­
patetic movement between Coranderrk, Melbourne and Gippsland became increasingly un­
acceptable to Brough Smyth and the missionary managers for whom he was the antithesis of
their ideal — they saw him as a wanderer and a drunkard, dissolute, lazy and heathen. But
so long as they disagreed as to who should take responsibility for him, Tarra Bobby could
evade their paternalistic rule.

Green saw little point in Tarra Bobby being sent to Coranderrk for he would not ‘settle
there’, while Brough Smyth who claimed to be ‘well acquainted’ with Tarra Bobby saw
little point in sending him to Ramahyuck because he was ‘not quite right in his mind’ and
he always found ‘his way back to Melbourne’, and the autocratic secretary reserved the right
to decide where he should go.34 Hagenauer was also unhappy with the prospect of Tarra
Bobby being on Ramahyuck, especially after an abortive mission to Port Albert in the spring
of 1872 to persuade Tarra Bobby to go on to Ramahyuck. Bobby had eluded him and the
local Police Magistrate (who had earlier detained him on a charge of vagrancy), and escaped
back to Melbourne, prompting the Police Magistrate to remark to Hagenauer ‘There you are,
we’re done’.35

In early 1873 Bobby grew impatient at the Board’s refusal to allow him to leave Coran­
derrk. He walked off the station late one night, travelling about fifteen miles before two men
sent by Green caught up with him; he refused to return to Coranderrk with them but they

31 Hagenauer to Brough Smyth, 25 September 1868 (Hagenauer 1865-72).
32 Argus, 24 April 1874.
33 Thomas Journal, 5 December 1864, January, June 1865, June 1867; CBPA, 5th Report 1866; Gipps­
land Mercury, 27 April 1874; Gippsland Times, 28 April 1874.
34 John Green to Secretary, BPA, 23, 26 February 1873 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 163); BPA,
Minutes, 7 March 1873 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 3).
35 Gippsland Mercury, 27 April 1874; Gippsland Times, 28 April 1874.

51
got the police at Lilydale to take him into their charge. The next morning a buggy was sent from Coranderrk and Bobby returned ignominiously to the station. The following month the Board, ignoring Smyth’s counsel, decided Bobby could go to Ramahyuck on the condition he stay there. A week or so later, Bobby again journeyed by steamer to Port Albert, selling a pair of new blankets the Board had provided him and once ashore alleging they had been stolen, and then taking another steamer to Ramahyuck. After only a few days he found once more that he could not ‘agree with the other blacks’ (as he later expressed it) and left, hoping to get back to Port Albert but the steamer captain — who was on good terms with Hagenauer — refused to take him.36

Bobby stayed in the district apparently, but in late August he was arrested in Sale as a vagrant, cautioned and discharged on the condition he go to Ramahyuck. It soon became apparent he was deeply distressed; while he was treated compassionately by Aborigines and the missionaries at Ramahyuck, he believed that he was being poisoned. His behaviour suggests he was suffering acute paranoia, although this psychological condition clearly owed something to his continuing belief in sorcery. Hagenauer mounted a ‘strict watch’ on him but late one evening Bobby slipped away from the station, and even though Hagenauer informed the police and sent some men out into the bush to look for him Bobby eluded them and made his way back to Melbourne and Coranderrk.37

By the following February he had again shown a desire to return to Gippsland, and in early April he arrived at Ramahyuck and was taken in by an Aboriginal couple John and Emily Ellis. He shared their cottage and food for a few days, but then moved out and took shelter under a bark mia-mia. He declared the Ellis’s cottage to be ‘poisoned’ and refused to take food from anybody, claiming it too was poisoned. On April 12 he went off Ramahyuck after telling Hagenauer he wanted to buy bread which ‘would not have any poison in it’; he returned to the station later but then left again, moving around the neighbourhood for about a week, begging at stations. (At one station where his requests for food were rejected Bobby angrily told a passer-by ‘he would not remain there because he could not get anything to eat.’) Eventually he was tracked down by Hagenauer, but Bobby adamantly refused to go back to Ramahyuck or to the Sale hospital ‘to starve or die’, as he believed he would be poisoned at either place. He could not stay out of the clutches of the missionary, however, and was arrested on a charge of vagrancy. On April 27 he appeared in court where the magistrate, Mr W.H. Foster, decided it would be useless to send him back to Ramahyuck and so remanded him for a week whilst he awaited instructions from the Board. Out of court the coroner, Arbuckle, declared Bobby was insane.

By then the matter had already taken on another dimension as on April 20 the Argus had published a letter by the overseer of the pastoral station near Ramahyuck where Bobby had gone on the twelfth, which told of a blind Aboriginal man being denied food and shelter by Hagenauer and forced off the station because he refused to do any work. The following week both local newspapers reported the case from the metropolitan source, noting it was

36 John Green to Secretary, BPA, 20, 26 February 1873 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 163); BPA, Minutes, 7 March 1873 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 3); Gippsland Mercury, 27 April 1874; Gippsland Times, 28 April 1874.

37 Gippsland Times, 26 August 1873, 28 April 1874; Gippsland Mercury, 27 April 1874.
‘a very grave charge indeed’; Hagenauer also refuted the allegations in letters to the *Argus* and the local newspapers. A few days later another settler savagely attacked Hagenauer in the columns of the *Gippsland Times* for ‘a glaring case of inhumanity to a wretched black on the part of one who is supposed to be, and who certainly ought to be, the friend and protector of the Aborigines’; in the same edition, one of the newspaper’s correspondents claimed parts of Bobby’s story were exaggerated, but argued there was sufficient truth in it to justify an inquiry ‘with the view of ascertaining how the mission station is really managed’ for ‘the fact . . . seems undeniable that he has neglected the duty which it was his Christian office to have discharged by properly caring for the poor blackfellow at the mission station’.

These allegations and the unfavourable publicity upset both Smyth and Hagenauer, and the two strong-willed and headstrong men angrily disagreed over what action should be taken. Smyth demanded an explanation and accused the missionary of neglecting his duty. Hagenauer had not refused Bobby food, clothes or shelter, but he undoubtedly saw him as a threat to the mission station and certainly wanted to get him removed. He responded to Smyth’s criticism by telling him it was ‘well known’ that Bobby was ‘silly’ and ‘often out of his mind’, and argued that he was ‘unmanageable’ and could not be compelled to stay on Ramahyuck or any other station; ‘it would be very desirable for the sake of himself and public justice, if he could be placed in an institution for such people’, he suggested. Smyth took umbrage at Hagenauer’s recommended course of action, claiming the missionary had ‘usurped a power [to determine residence of an Aborigine] that can be exercised only by the Government’. The Board, however, sided with Hagenauer and recommended Bobby be sent back to Melbourne. In early May Bobby appeared in court in Sale, where he was remanded further and handed over to the police who transferred him to Melbourne a few days later.38

It seems that the Board had decided Bobby was insane and should be confined to a mental asylum and immediately set in train the procedures for committal stipulated by the colony’s 1867 Lunacy Statute.39 Within days of his arrival in Melbourne, the Board asked the Government Chief Medical Officer and a general practitioner to examine Bobby, who was in the custody of the police, believing they would either decide that Bobby was insane or at the very least rule that he was a proper person to be detained in a mental institution — the Act construed insane as ‘any person . . . found . . . idiot lunatic or [to be] of unsound mind and incapable of managing himself or his affairs’. Both doctors, however, refused to perform the role they were so often called upon to play, legitimising a decision by another party that an alleged lunatic was insane; between them, they decided that Bobby was suffering from hepatitis, lumbago, gastric problems and blindness, but neither concluded that he was insane. The Chief Medical Officer decided he was merely irritable because of his detention, and recommended he should be allowed to return to his own country; the other doctor suggested that Bobby be cared for on one of the mission stations.40 They advised the justices or magis-

38 *Argus*, 20 April 1874:5; *Gippsland Mercury*, 20, 24, 27 April 1874; *Gippsland Times*, 21, 25, 28 April, 2, 5, 9 May 1874; Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 23, 27, 28 April, 1, 6 May 1874, Mr W.H. Foster to Secretary, BPA, 4 May 1874 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 164); Secretary, BPA to Hagenauer, 20, 27, 29 April 1874 (AA Brighton Series B329, Item 2).

39 31 *Victoria*, no. 309.

40 Dr Gibson to Secretary, BPA, 16 May 1874, Chief Medical Officer to Secretary, BPA, 19 May 1874 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 164).
rates considering the case accordingly, but the Board apparently persuaded them otherwise, and Bobby was committed.

At this time, it was relatively easy to get people admitted to mental asylums; among the confined were not only inmates who were insane but also those whose insanity was questionable, or merely a nuisance to their families or to society at large, and dependents who had no one to look after them. Victoria at this time lacked a sufficient number of other institutions, such as benevolent asylums, to house the poor and the helpless, and the mission stations were not yet regarded as places for dumping aged and ill Aborigines, but as potentially viable economic units.

It is possible that Tarra Bobby was suffering from the terminal form of syphilis, but the understanding that this could cause insanity only emerged clearly late in the nineteenth century. For much of this period, lunacy was linked to immoral behaviour rather than directly to any physiological causes; the most salient symptom of insanity was thought to be a failure or perversion of moral sense, and it was believed it could be brought on by ‘intemperate habits’. By this criterion many ‘tribal Aborigines’ were at risk of being considered ‘insane’ by the missionaries, and several other traditionally-oriented Aboriginal men were to follow Tarra Bobby to mental asylums in Victoria after they had been labelled as dangerous troublemakers or ‘restless wanderers’ who had inexplicably rejected ‘the comforts of civilised life’ on the mission stations.

When the necessary procedures were completed, the police took Bobby to Kew Mental Asylum, a 320 acre reserve on the Yarra River. Perhaps it was just as well Bobby was practically blind, for he could not see the world he was leaving and the one he was entering; had he turned around before crossing the threshold of the institution he would have looked over the Yarra Valley, which had become very familiar territory to him and towards the mountains through which he had passed so many times on his way to Brataualung territory. Ahead lay the imposing facade of the asylum, its buildings looking more like a gaol than a hospital. On entering, Bobby was placed in ‘the receiving ward’ where he would have been sedated while the medical officers studied his case before classifying him as suffering from delusionary insanity and drafting him into a ward.

The asylum was like a gaol or a workhouse, and its inmates were regarded and treated as prisoners ‘to be watched, guarded and fed’. With its confined sense of time and space, it constituted a nightmarish institutional world which Bobby had spent much of his life avoiding and here, unlike the mission stations, there was no chance of escape short of death. There were no procedures for allowing those in an enfeebled state of health to be transferred to another institution, and it was virtually impossible to get round the surveillance of the warders. Not surprisingly, very shortly after his admittance, Bobby’s anxiety began to take

41 James 1877:95-97; Foster 1981:103.
42 Gippsland Times, 16 October, 18 November 1875; BPA, 12th Report 1876:32; BPA, 17th Report:15; Bulmer Papers, Paper 7; Bulmer to Howitt (Howitt Papers (a), 1053/3a); Showalter 1987:111.
44 James 1877:121-22; Case Records, Tarra Bobby (Kew Asylum Records).
45 James 1877:140-41, 158-89, 162, 182-83.
its toll on his weak constitution. Perhaps once more feeling that he was being poisoned and
continuing to associate illness with location, he began vomiting his food. He was transferred
to the hospital where an unspecified abdominal disease was diagnosed and medical aid was
administered; his condition, however, continued to deteriorate, and on 7 June he died, little
more than two weeks after his admission.47

In many respects Tarra Bobby's life was representative of the experience of many Abo­
iginal men in colonial Australia. Born into a community which was suffering the effects of
loss of tribal land, disease and conflict and yet curious about European society, Bobby had
grown up in two strikingly different milieu. He had developed a strong allegiance to tradi­
tional Aboriginal beliefs and his own country, and he played an important role as messenger
within that tribal world. But European culture also drew him not only as a provider of
material goods but also as a source of different social and cultural mores, and for a time he
acted as a mediator between that society and his own. Yet his attraction to European society
also had serious and unforeseen consequences, for it tended to bring Bobby into direct con­
flict with aggressive whites as well as the 'white man's laws' (to the point of his nearly losing
his life). Initially this did not blight his enthusiasm for European society, and he eagerly
embraced what he saw as the potential in Aborigines 'sitting down' on reserves. Before very
long, however, he became disillusioned with these, rejecting paternalistic missionary control
and becoming alienated from those Aborigines who seemingly embraced missionary teach­
ings and mode of life. Coincidentally, though, his own tribal world disintegrated beyond the
point in which it could sustain him in any meaningful social and economic way. In this
situation of growing powerlessness, Bobby adopted a variety of strategies for surviving. They
ranged from an escape into alcoholic oblivion at one extreme to a turning back to his tradi­
tional religious world on the other. Just as importantly, he learned how to exploit those with
power and authority, in particular government officials and missionaries, manipulating them
to his own advantage. But this in turn caused considerable conflict with these agents of
colonialism as they tried to suppress traditional cultural expressions and any other behaviour
deemed to be disruptive of their regimes. They came to see and label Bobby as 'mad' rather
than merely 'bad'. In choosing to live off Aboriginal missions Bobby needed both a com­

47 Case Records, Tarra Bobby (Kew Asylum Records).
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THE TALE OF WALLAMBAIN AND PHILCHOWSKI

Bruce Shaw

One of the better-known tales of the Kununurra district tells how in 1913 a European émigré named Rudolph Philchowski was speared to death by an Aboriginal called Wallambain. The story appears in written European sources; it is also passed on in local Aboriginal oral tradition. Hence it is well suited for showing some of the advantages in having available oral and written versions of the one incident, of having both ‘anthropological’ and ‘historiographical’ materials at hand. As well as this methodological consideration there is the importance of the story itself. Taken alone it might be a relatively minor footnote to our knowledge of Aboriginal history. But it belongs in fact to a distinctive genre of frontier tale. Wallambain shares a place with others like Major (died 1908), Nemarluk (died 1932-46) and Pigeon (died 1897) as an outlaw figure in our stories of Aboriginal resistance.1 Wallambain’s story will be retold by amalgamating the different oral and written versions roughly along the lines of the tale of Major written up some years ago.2

The two written versions of the tale come from the same pen, that of the Western Australian author Mary Durack. They are separated by more than forty years and so contain slightly different subject matter and interpretations. They cannot be considered as independent accounts however because the second version clearly built upon the first. The first was a newspaper article published in 1931 under the title ‘Rudolph Philchowski: tale of a north-west tragedy’.3 The later version appears in the second of Durack’s family histories Sons in the saddle and draws upon the diaries of her father Michael Patrick (M.P.) Durack in particular and an Aboriginal account from her informant and friend Johnny Walker.4

I recorded three oral versions during fieldwork in Kununurra from 1973 to 1974 and confirmed them at proof-reading sessions in subsequent years. The longest came from Johnny Walker, Mary Durack’s source. So we have two different accounts from one person told from an Aboriginal perspective. My other two Aboriginal sources were Banggaldun Balmirr and

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1 For Pigeon’s story see Muecke, Rumsey and Wirrunmarra 1985, and Pedersen 1984; for Nemarluk see Pye 1973. See also Shaw’s articles on Major and Nemarluk forthcoming in the Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography.
2 Shaw 1983b.
3 Mary Durack’s sources on this occasion were the oral testimonies of white people who lived in the district in 1913, including her father M.P. Durack, her mother Bess, Bill Jones, and a family friend named Charlie Flinders (personal communication Mary Durack). Mary herself was born that year in Adelaide.
Jack Sullivan. Both of their versions are short. Banggaldun's story is fragmentary. They have been edited into the published memoirs of both men, but they are used little here as source material. I prefer to go back to the original transcripts for that purpose.

The Tale.

Background to Philchowski.

Little is known about Philchowski's European origins. Durack reported what were probably local speculations among the whites of the district as well as her own that he was 'a Count of the German Aristocracy', who evidenced 'education and breeding', and that he had fled his home country 'following a political disagreement with the Kaiser'. Men like Philchowski were often found on Australia's frontiers. The anonymity of the single men's camps offered havens for those seeking to leave behind an unsatisfactory past (as they still do). Moreover, wars and economic depression in Europe stimulated immigration to Australia in the early decades of this century.

Stock records and popular books about the east Kimberley reflect this in the names of station employees, for example, Sullivan, Drugamuller, McKenzie. The name Philchowski is not in fact of German origin. It is Polish. And in Poland it was not uncommon for an ordinary citizen to purchase the title of Count upon settling into a new district. Poland had many Counts (personal communication, an 'ethnic' writer). From an Australian point of view however anyone whose name and nationality was Austrian or Polish, etc. was probably designated German.

By all accounts Philchowski had been living in the Wyndham district 'a good many years before the war broke out', so he was a well-known identity. He ran a store at Carlton Reach, a place on the Ord River south of present-day Kununurra from which he sold alcohol and procured Aboriginal women for white travellers, according to Johnny Walker's communication to Mary Durack. This shows that he had a relationship of some standing with Wallambain and probably other Aborigines of the area. It is commonly held in criminology that a very high percentage of homicides occur between people who know each other.

Philchowski in fact lost his job through those activities. M.P. Durack had him dismissed because of the delays in store deliveries caused by teamsters dallying at the place. Later Philchowski had the mail run from the port of Wyndham to several of the cattle stations. It may have been on one of these mail runs that the incident with Wallambain occurred, though this is not clear. He is otherwise characterised as 'workin all over' on cattle stations such as Ord River Station and Rosewood.

6 Durack 1931.
7 Durack 1931.
8 Mary Durack suggests that Philchowski's store was probably more substantial than the two canvas tents and bough shed where purportedly he lived and kept his liquor supplies (personal communication).
10 Shaw and Walker 1975:46.
Prelude to the incident.

The events which led up to the spearing of Philchowski had their beginnings at Rosewood where he was in the company of a man named Jim Crisp who, in turn, was speared to death some years later. Crisp proposed that they stay at Rosewood a couple of nights and then work and travel together but Philchowski preferred to head off immediately to Wyndham. Johnny Walker detailed the route that he followed: from Rosewood to Argyle Downs Station, to Hicks's Creek on Argyle, to Thompson Spring, Cocketoo Spring, and the Eight Mile creek. This was part of the old cattle droving route to Wyndham. Philchowski made his camp in the locality of the Eight Mile between the present-day bitumen road and the old stock road. There is a creek in this area today named Philchowsky's Crossing.

Durack's newspaper story recounts that on a July morning Philchowski stopped briefly at Ivanhoe Station and said that he was on his way to Spring Creek Station. Presumably he was coming from Wyndham, travelling in the opposite direction from that given in Johnny Walker's 1975 version. In the Durack version Johnny said that Philchowski went with a man called Joe Fagan to Spring Creek and then took on the mail run.

Discovery of the body.

The circumstances of the spearing were not clear in the earliest written accounts because they were unknown. They are revealed later from Aboriginal sources. The newspaper version describing Jim Crisp's discovery of Philchowski's body has a dramatic quality which is most likely Durack's. In Crisp's eye-witness account as reported by Durack:

There was the billy near the ashes of a fire, and the camp pitched under a large iron-wood tree, behind the trunk of which a man was lying upon the ground. Jim came nearer, and, as the figure remained motionless, decided that the fellow was sound asleep. 'It's Philchowski,' he said to himself, and called his greeting, hoping to rouse him from his dreams. But the slumber was too deep. 'Hello, Phil, old chap!' he cried again. The words died from his lips. A pool of blood had trickled down upon the sand, staining the golden grass with its crimson hue. He bent and touched the prostrate form. The handle of a spear was protruding from the back of the shoulder, and it was only then that he realised the truth. Philchowski was stone dead.

Johnny Walker might well have heard this description from Crisp, and Johnny might also have been one of Durack's earlier sources (as well as a source for her later version) because both versions are very similar.

He look, he can see the, see the calico, what they covered him over with the old broken calico. Seen all the pack there and saddle, everything, an lyin about any way . . . 'What this?' . . . He standin on horseback. 'Hey, you avin a good sleep?'

11 Jim Crisp's death is reported in Durack 1983:360-61 and in Johnny Walker's memoirs (Shaw 1987: 191-4), so we have another tale, only very much briefer, from European sources and in oral (Aboriginal) testimony.

12 Mary Durack's notebook records that an Irishman called Joe Fagan took up Spring Creek Station and that Philchowski formed a kind of partnership with Fagan after his (Philchowski's) dismissal from Carlton Reach. At the same time Philchowski ran the mail service between Wyndham and Halls Creek (personal communication).
Hey, you avin a good sleep? . . . e jumped off. He lift the calico. He said, 'Hey you avin a good sleep? What's wrong with you?' He lift the cal— Oh goodness almighty, thousands a blue flies come out of it. An e look properly, the man got killed! . . .

Crisp rode in haste to Ivanhoe Station to tell the news: 'By this time it was almost dark, and, crossing to his own camp, Jim saddled up his horse and rode wildly through the night to Ivanhoe.'

E jumped on, oh e never stopped. He drove the horses there sixty miles an hour, seventy mile an hour must be. Drivin them to report to Billy Jones. E was manager . . .

This is corroborated by M.P. Durack's diary. Dated 25 June (the 1931 newspaper article gives July) 1913, it reads tersely:

About 11.30 last night Jim Crisp arrived on his way down from Auvergne. He reports that he found the body of a man he believes to be Philchowski at the Eight Mile, evidently killed by blacks. Jones, Montgomery, self and three boys proceed to the scene of the murder. Found the body as described by Crisp, spear wound in back of shoulder. Held inquest. Returned verdict of wilful murder. Buried the body close by . . .

The spearing.

For the circumstances of the spearing itself we must turn largely to the oral versions which here come into their own. In the tale as told to Mary Durack by Johnny Walker, Philchowski was approached by an Aboriginal man named Wallambain (Woolambine) soon after he made camp at the Eight Mile. Perceiving Philchowski as a friend Wallambain asked for gifts of food and tobacco. This request Philchowski dismissed peremptorily with a verbal insult. Wallambain left in anger, made plans to kill Philchowski, approached him with stealth, speared him in the back and so the deed was done. This is common, with relatively minor differences, to all the versions.

In the version told to me by Johnny Walker the setting up of Philchowski's camp was described in fair detail: choice of site, making of the fire, laying out eating utensils, etc. Wallambain's approach came next, also given at length: attempts by his friends to dissuade him from going, the verbal interchange between the two men, and Wallambain's rebuff. Wallambain then returned to his companions and made his preparations (sharpening the spearhead) while they remonstrated with him. And as in Durack's version he then speared Philchowski while he sat reading a newspaper beneath a forked tree. The dying man fired several shots from his revolver.

In Jack Sullivan's briefer account the firing of the revolver comes at the beginning of the tale under different circumstances. In Jack's version Philchowski came upon a group of...

13 Shaw and Walker 1975:51. As part of the preparation for this article I re-transcribed the Wallambain-Philchowski narratives given by Johnny Walker, Banggaldun and Jack Sullivan. In due course transcription errors were uncovered but of a 'punctuation' type where I had (perhaps intentionally) missed a word or phrase that was repetitive. Two exceptions in Johnny Walker's version are a confusion between 'swears' and 'swings', and I missed the word 'limb'.

14 Durack 1931.
15 Shaw and Walker 1975:51.
Aborigines clustered beneath a boab tree at the camp site. He rode down upon them drunkenly firing into the air to scatter them, and it was this belligerent act which precipitated Wallambain's retaliation.

There are some differences of opinion on the way in which Philchowski was speared. Jim Crisp in the source already cited reported that the spear was left in the dead man's back. Johnny Walker stated just as certainly: 'I s'pose when e tap im e pull the spear out and e run away . . . See e never left no spear on it. You understand? E might be, go through here, like up here some way. Hm? A shovel spear y'know, very very y'know very shovel iron'. M.P. Durack's diary entry supports this. And Banggaldun in his version stated that: 'E biin sneak up. That man e was siddown like this, readin book. Oh well e come too [very] close. Put a shovel spear ere . . . E's come, shovel spear right through [meaning through the fork of the tree].'

Irrespective of whether the spear was thrown or thrust or whether more than one spear was brought into play as in Jack Sullivan's narrative, the versions agree on the accuracy of the death stroke. It might be fair to say that such differences reflect inaccuracies in the transmission of the tale but that they do not otherwise tell us much one way or the other about the various cultural assumptions behind them.

Events immediately after the killing.

Nearly all versions agree on what took place next. Foodstuffs and other items in Philchowski's camp were disturbed, scattered about or destroyed. The European version of 1931 makes much of this, though such details are omitted from Durack's later version. In the newspaper article:

The natives had not come there for food. Bread, meat and onions were strewn haphazardly about. Tea and canned goods, of unknown value to them, had been emptied out upon the ground. The girths and saddles of the dead man's horses were slashed about in sheer wantonness.

The destruction of material goods in stories of this kind appears in European eyes almost as heinous as the crime of killing. It is interesting that by this time in the white takeover of the east Kimberley some Aborigines did not yet appreciate the value of tinned goods and tea. Settlement began three decades earlier around 1880. In Johnny Walker's longer version the use of bottle-glass for spear-heads is mentioned when a different group of Aborigines visited the dead man's camp through the curiosity of some of their womenfolk:

They took everything what they can, what they can think like. All the tomato sauce they spill it. Waterberry [Worcester?] sauce they spill it. Pickle bottle they spill it. Chutney bottle they spill it. They didn't want it. They didn't know how to eat it, you understand? Now they wouldn't spill it . . . But why they spill them stuff for, because they want the bottle for spear head.

18 Shaw and Balmirr 1982:164.
19 Durack 1931.
20 Shaw and Walker 1975:50.
The food is not mentioned by Banggaldun. Jack Sullivan made a passing reference to it: 'they put the spears into im an, took all eat everything, the bone, tucker an everything. Leftim with none,' which suggests that some food items were consumed.

The inquest.

Many death stories told for this region often have the caveat that a victim's body by law should be left as it was found till a police officer could be brought to the scene. It is not surprising, then, that on the day following M.P. Durack's actions the body of Philchowski was exhumed by the Wyndham police. The apparent lapse in etiquette on M.P. Durack's part might be explained by the considerable power exercised by station owner/managers of the time. But often enough the police were too far distant to make feasible the normal requirements of law. Jack Sullivan notes, for instance: 'Course he wasn't,' all smashed like. E was they gotim when e was, just y’know ripe. E was just about stinkin there when they foundim. And Johnny Walker's version mentions blue flies swarming when the calico covering was lifted off Philchowski. (It is interesting that Wallambain presumably covered the body afterwards. Or was it one of the others?)

Punitive expeditions.

Incidents of this kind were usually followed by police patrols to enforce European law by apprehending the killer(s). It was usual also for punitive measures to go beyond arrest, trial and gaoling, and the spearing of Philchowski by Wallambain appears to have been no exception. In her newspaper tale Durack alluded to the patrols: 'For three weeks they sought among the hills and gorges and in the pindan country. Every night the ranges for miles around were dotted with the natives' signal fires as they warned one another.' However by 1983 she had turned up more suggestive evidence: There is no direct evidence for the sort of retribution often said to have followed the killing of a white man by Aborigines, but . . . [and here she cites a man named Roy Phillips, who wrote to his mother on 20 September, 1913]: 'You will be glad to hear that Philchowski was amply avenged, though I would not say anything about it if I were you.' In fact during this decade — and in the decades that immediately preceded and followed — there was a drive on the part of white authorities to round up Aboriginal groups clinging tenaciously to isolated pockets in the region about the Ord river. This took a variety of forms. In about 1907 or 1908 a relatively large group of Aborigines was shot to death on

23 Durack 1969:343; pindan, 'belonging to the bush or wild country'.  
24 Durack 1931.  
25 Durack 1983:290. Personal letters are likely to be highly credible says Gottschalk, with the proviso that 'they are less likely to contain the testimony of a skilled observer, since they frequently are intended to exert influence or to create an impression, since they often are not private and confidential but are intended for all the members of a family and a circle of friends' and, 'etiquette and convention frequently require expressions of politeness and esteem that may deceive the reader not familiar with the customs of the letter-writers' region (1945:18-19)'. This last warning seems particularly appropriate to our present case.
WALLAMBAIN AND PHILCHOWSKI

Ningbing Station. Major was hunted down and shot by white police and trackers near Spring Creek in 1908. The tracker Quartpot, who, Johnny Walker tells us, accompanied the Wyndham police to inspect Philchowski's body, also took part in this earlier punitive expedition. In 1909 the roundups of 'bush' Aborigines for cattle spearing, etc. reached a peak, with ninety-five arrests and sentencings. This went on intermittently, with another peak of twenty-six arrests in 1921. The government ration stations of Moola Bulla and Violet Valley were founded in 1910 and 1911 respectively. Jim Crisp was speared on Bullita Station in 1919. And in 1926 many Aborigines were killed by a police punitive expedition in the Forrest River area. Clearly this was a turbulent period in east Kimberley history.

The police party did indeed arrest an Aborigine by the name of Jillambin. They found him near the Keep River — reported in the 1983 version — and he was probably the same person mentioned in the press report of 1931 though his name is not given. Jillambin's trial was held at Wyndham. It lasted four hours. The man was sentenced to death. Roy Phillips said: 'The trial of the blackfellow for the murder of Philchowski did not take long. Parker had a hopeless job trying to defend him, especially with a jury of bushmen. They found him guilty in about three seconds.' In the newspaper version: 'They took him into Wyndham, found him guilty, and imprisoned him.'

There is no further account of Jillambin's final end aside from a brief comment that Wallambain's brother-in-law, who may or may not have been the same man, died at Carlton Hill Station. Jillambin was unlucky to have been found carrying Philchowski's revolver, which made him guilty by association. It was common practice for artefacts of all kinds to be passed from hand to hand through the kinship and ceremonial networks. Jillambin was also said to have been one of the people who remonstrated with Wallambain before the slaying.

Durack introduced another Aboriginal character, who does not appear in any of the other versions of the tale. The man Boxer, who has his own place in the oral tradition of the region reportedly held a grudge against Wallambain and set out in his pursuit. At a sandstone outcrop they had a duel (firearm against spear) in which a bullet fired by Boxer struck Wallambain in the shoulder. Wallambain made good his escape however and later was said to

26 Shaw 1981:36-40.
27 Wyndham Courthouse Records.
28 Alfie Gerrard in his reminiscences gives an especially harrowing account of Moola Bulla life from the perspective of Aboriginal children of the 1930s (Gerrard and Shaw 1987:55-63).
29 Wood 1927/28.
31 Shaw and Walker 1975:49.
have worn the bullet around his neck as a trophy. The two men met some time after and settled their differences amicably.

There is further oral testimony that points indirectly to a punitive expedition in the Eight Mile Creek area. From where we stood at Dingo Spring, Joe Nurungin (who died early in 1987) once pointed towards Cockatoo Spring saying laconically that in the early days ‘a big mob of blackfellers’ was shot there. And Jeff Djanama told of the spirit of a baby girl that appeared near a hazardous stretch of highway close to the Eight Mile, saying that she had been abandoned in a cave (rock shelter) nearby by her mother when being pursued by the police. Jeff thought the incident occurred not long before the spearing of Philchowski. Whether or not we can accept a fit between these tales, it is evident that the area around the Eight Mile is reputed to be a place of early-day killings and has its own ghost story.

Endings.

By now the oral versions of the story have come to an end. Johnny Walker’s narrative told to Durack closed with the wrongful arrest of Jillambin. In the version he told me Johnny described how Philchowski’s camping gear and horses were disposed of and at my request repeated the circumstances of the spearing. Banggaldun in his version ended with Philchowski’s death, stressing the path taken by the spear through the tree fork. On the first telling Jack Sullivan closed the tale at the point where Jim Crisp found the body, but during subsequent proof-reading he noted, as Johnny Walker did also, that Crisp himself was speared to death in later years on Bullita Station.

Durack’s versions end on several ironic notes. In the 1931 article Philchowski’s military background is confirmed by a letter found among his effects directing him to return to Germany to join the First World War. Durack observed that if Philchowski’s life had taken a different turning he might well have met his end on a European battle-field. In her 1983 version she praised the Aborigines stationed at Ivanhoe who cared for the female members of the family in contrast to the dangers presented by so-called ‘bush blacks’. Both Durack’s versions noted Jim Crisp’s later death.

Commentary.

There are some questions of definition. In its oral form the story has some of the elements of legend. The minimal definition of a legend holds that it is ‘a folktale with a simple narrative motif purporting to relate the experiences of real individuals or happenings in the past, the actors in which can be human, supernatural, or both’. (King, 1964:384). Furthermore, such a sage ‘may recount a legend of something which happened in ancient times at a particular place – a legend which has attached itself to that locality, but which will probably also be told with equal conviction of many other places’.  

Legends are not as reliable as other kinds of testimony, according to Vansina, who groups them with epics and fables as sub-types under the heading ‘Tales of artistic merit’. He associates legends with the edifying element, epics and fables with dramatic and imaginative elements respectively. Legends have a historical content which is often not allowed to get in the way of a good story, hence he says they are transmitted in an ‘uncontrolled’ fashion and
violence can be done to facts. In legends, 'Causes and motivations are invented, and historical personages are given a personality, or imaginary ones introduced'. Yet if the transmission of the legend has been done with care, 'it can serve as a source for the history of the psychological attitudes of a people'.

Our tale does not take place in the remote past but in recent history. It relates the experiences of two principal characters and it is attached to a specific locality. There is an edifying element in that my storytellers were often at pains to have me understand the implications of different episodes. The supernatural element is not present but there is in the written versions an element of mystery about both men — as much a literary device I think as a reflection of what was known about them — while in the oral versions Wallambain is painted as a man with special qualities as a warrior. Here similar motifs are present in other Aboriginal narratives but there is little danger of confusing the Wallambain-Philchowski tale with others.

So the story of Wallambain and Philchowski is not in nature purely legendary, though it does contain elements of legend. It seems better suited to another approach, that of stories classified as 'Tales concerning local history', which are likely to contain material of a 'more exact and coherent' form than that found in general histories. Vansina recommends taking both local and general historical tales together to spell out their links more clearly.

At another level there is the scheme of classification suggested by Muecke, by which tales from the west Kimberley were divided into mythology (called bugaregara), tales of the supernatural (devil stori), and legends (trustori). In 'trustori', 'the characters of the story are human and can be located in time and space, within the memory of the narrator. The heroes of these stories can also perform fantastic acts'.

As I have said already, Wallambain and Philchowski are personages definitely located in time and space. There are written historical records about them. The spearing of Philchowski took place a year after Johnny Walker was brought to the east Kimberley from Darwin as a boy aged between ten and twelve years. By his own account Johnny heard the tale from other Aborigines, and probably at the time it happened. The 'trustori' quality of the fantastic is not fully developed but there are elements such as surprise and, to European readers, perhaps a touch of the bizarre (for example, the path of the spear through the fork of the tree, the cloud of blue flies, and the desire of another group of Aborigines to view the body).

From my conversations with Johnny Walker there emerged a string of anecdotes on deaths in the harsh north-west environment, often enough brought about by the victims themselves through suicide, arrogant behaviour towards Aboriginal warriors as in Philchowski's case, or as a result of carelessness such as travelling without water. It seems to me that this and other tales like it might be called 'death stories', a subcategory of 'trustori'.

On yet another level: (1) All the versions have a 'common core' about which they largely agree. (2) It is possible to separate out factors characteristic of the culture from which any given version stems. (3) Interpretations of motive in different versions likewise reflect political viewpoints past and present in the teller's culture. (4) Similarly the characters of the actors in the stories are interpreted according to the cultural backgrounds of the tellers.

40 Shaw 1987:298-300.
In general most inconsistencies in the various narratives may be explained by combinations of the above factors. The main question is not to establish necessarily the ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ of the different versions but to see what the agreements and dissonances tell us about culturally-directed thoughts and actions as they are revealed through the events narrated and the ways in which they are narrated. At the same time certain elements in a tale may appear more likely from two or more alternatives because of agreement between some versions; for example, whether or not the spear was left in Philchowski’s body.

Most stories of Wallambain and Philchowski begin by describing an initial confrontation between the two men which establishes motive for the attack. After this the tale moves swiftly from motive to preparations on Wallambain’s part and the attempts of kinsmen to dissuade him from taking action, or in one version the role of Aboriginal women in encouraging him to the deed. Then there is the act of the spearing itself, followed by an aftermath: disturbance of the camp, discovery of the dead man, the European inquest and punitive expedition, and a person brought to justice.

In Durack’s two accounts most of the suppositions, figures of speech and social relations that are reported have a distinctively European ambience. They are representative also of the periods in which they were written and the style that form of writing called upon. There is the element of privacy of Roy Phillips’s letter to his mother. There is the literary style of the 1931 newspaper article, done with touches of humour and irony that are distinctive to Mary Durack, and the more objective and neutral reportage of her family history.

The oral sources contain also the flavour of Aboriginal culture. The sharpening of the shovel spear is an effective motif relatively common in these sorts of death stories. Here it helps to build up dramatic tension and marks the shift from one episode to another. There is the spearing itself, with the forked-tree motif in some versions. And Philchowski’s reactions at the point of death, described so closely as to include the number of times he fired the revolver or spun round, must surely be reported by eye-witnesses.

Durack, who had found no motive in 1931, pursued it in her 1983 version, questioning Johnny Walker and other unnamed Aborigines, who met in a group. From this she concluded: ‘The story that was then unfolded with quiet objectivity seems reasonably convincing.’ In this version it is the breaking of a previously held friendship and understanding between the two men over the procurement of women. Wallambain expected prestations of food, etc. under Aboriginal rules of etiquette and was understandably incensed when these were denied by Philchowski. It is a misunderstanding that appears elsewhere in dealings between Aborigines and whites throughout Australia’s earlier history as a prime source of conflict. The verbal insults that appear as motive in the other oral versions could be equally inflammatory. Banggaldun’s account in its brevity simply omits the prelude to the spearing. Jack Sullivan’s testimony on the other hand offers a different cause for enmity, namely Philchowski’s drunken firing upon the group of which Wallambain was a member. (During proof-reading Jack gave considerably more detail, which went into the final published version.)

42 Durack 1983:288.
43 These included principally Ernie Chapman, Daylight, Bulla, Mandi, Banggaldun and occasionally Billy Joe (personal communication, Mary Durack). Billy Joe is mentioned in Jack Sullivan’s memoirs; see especially pp.83-86 recounting his mistreatment at the hands of police.
44 Durack 1983:288.
All this faithfully reflects the state of race relations on that 1913 frontier, and some European attitudes of the 1930s. The expectation of a master-servant relationship on Philchowski’s part stands out clearly in his dealings with Wallambain: on the one side arrogance and rough-speaking and on the other resentment and a desire for revenge. On both sides of that frontier the final recourse was to force of arms. Those references to ‘wanton’ damage of the girths and saddles and to cattle-spearing on Wallambain’s part suggest forcefully the nature of a ‘guerilla’ action of the kind practised by many Aborigines in most parts of Australia. The actions of the two men were wholly consistent with the political context of the time.

The characterisation of Wallambain and Philchowski shows the partialities of the different versions. Durack dwells almost exclusively on Philchowski’s character, while that of Wallambain receives greater weight from the Aboriginal narratives. Philchowski is painted as a German aristocrat who is chivalrous towards European women — though his behaviour towards Aboriginal women may have observed other standards — and he is an ex-military officer. This last fact lends credence to the Aboriginal descriptions of his provocative actions. Durack in an end note says that he was a man of quick temper who for that reason lost two jobs. If we accept this accounting, Philchowski largely brought his death upon himself. But he was unlucky too in the protagonist he chose.

Three independent testimonies confirm the characterisation of Wallambain as a ‘man eater’. Grant Ngabidj narrated how Wallambain once leapt into a pool and caught and killed a fresh-water crocodile. Grant remarked that Wallambain, ‘was a game-looking old man, a proper bad one, like a policeman. Just like a policeman grabs you and chucks you into a motor car, this bloke would hook up a spear and kill anybody, women or men.’ (Grant would then have been about nine years old.) Jack Sullivan speculated that because he was a murderer Wallambain may not have been reborn in the Aboriginal way after his death but may have gone to hell instead! And Durack noted an Aboriginal report which stressed Wallambain’s physical size. He was described as ‘that-one-all-a-same-big-fella-boab-tree’. In short, the bundle of traits that we call the characters of the two men might have been sufficient alone to precipitate violence between them.

The foregoing suggests a number of working principles to which we might well adhere when researching Aboriginal (oral) narratives. (1) It is a distinct advantage to have both
oral and written testimonies to hand because dates, names and core elements may be corroborated more precisely. Durack's *Sons in the saddle* was invaluable to the writing of this article. (2) It is helpful also to have a broader context such as a regional history in which to place a focused narrative like that of Wallambain and Philchowski. (3) General works on Aboriginal history and anthropology similarly are valuable, \(^{51}\) though I have not made great use of them here. (4) It is important when analysing these tales to take into account their political nature. Hence Wallambain should be numbered with other Aboriginal resistance figures. (5) We should also take into account what Vansina called 'the psychological attitudes in a people's history', along with the events themselves. In fact the insights we have from people's reactions to events are often qualitatively more important than the events themselves — though it is true we would not have one without the other.

Conclusion.

The tale of Wallambain and Philchowski must be numbered among the few that have come down to us which tell of a confrontation between an Aborigine and a European that ended in success for the Aborigine. Wallambain succeeded in killing Philchowski and in not being caught for it. We are told in one account that he died later at an unspecified time on Newry Station. Against this success we might weigh the unknown cost in lives taken on the punitive expedition and the wrongful arrest and punishment of another man.

In many parts of Australia it is still possible to do this kind of research, in northern communities especially. Such work in its turn becomes source material for other students and helps to generate more studies and insights. For example, several recent writers have used the published narratives of Grant Ngabidj and Jack Sullivan to good effect in the historical analysis of an event, a study of frontier mores, or as sources for ideas on methodology or theory.\(^{52}\)

In other parts of Australia however the task of recording oral traditions like the story of Wallambain and Philchowski, and a host of other topics, is ever more difficult as Aboriginal storytellers of the older generations become fewer in number each year. We found this at first hand when current work began for the Oodnadatta Aboriginal community — in a 'transition zone' with a scant handful of very old persons. We were ten years too late. The present situation in Kununurra is comparatively better though most of the elders with whom I worked have either died since or are prevented through ill health from taking an active part any longer in community life.

On this side of the research frontier\(^{53}\) scholars in Aboriginal history have always been very thinly spread over the many topics of anthropological and historical interest. The loss

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51 For example Reynolds 1982 or Berndt and Berndt 1964.
53 The 'other side of the research frontier' implied here is represented by those Aboriginal storytellers who become actively involved in joint ventures, collaborative autobiographies etc., to record parts of their tradition for future generations. This notion was well understood, and well received, by the men and women with whom I worked in the east Kimberley. It is acknowledged similarly by Oodnadatta folk.
of Diane Barwick is sorely felt both as friend and sympathetic researcher. One day our sources will be predominantly the note books of those of us who, like Diane, had the good fortune to do in-the-field recording while that was still possible.

Text.

Bruce Shaw and Johnny Walker, recorded at Kununurra, 24 and 29 July, 1973.\(^{54}\)

Right, this is, Phil Firsky [sic]. E was a, e was a German. He workin all over on Ord River everywhere. Rosewood, everywhere. Waterloo, everywhere. So, e go, I think e pulled out. He come into Wyndham. This chap that we was talkin about that got killed at Bullita, Jim Crisp, he was workin the same place, at Rosewood. A'right. Anyhow, he said, 'What about wait a couple a nights, here? An go down the river an work a couple a, you an I travel together?' You understand? 'Ohh.' this old feller said [in a drawling voice], e said, 'Ohh I'll fuck along on ahead a you.' E said, 'You catch me up. You smart young feller,' e said to im That's it.

Righto. He left Rosewood, come to Argyle. Wire[?] Yard, come to Argyle. Down, from there from Argyle, to Hicks's Creek. To Thompson Spring, to Cockatoo. When e come to Cockatoo, he went to Eight Mile. This Eight Mile down ere, where the dam site road turn off goin to the, goin to the dam. Just, back just a couple a mile back this way. Might as well say six mile or seven mile back. Righto.

Anyhow e pulled his pack off, just below the road. Below just a minute, 'scuse me. [To himself]. E ad new road on top, the old road in the bottom yeah. [To me]. In between two road anyhow. New road on top side, on Eight Mile, another old road, at the well just there. You might ave noticed it. You went up that road? It's a well in there. Eight Mile Well they call. Used to be. But e fell down. Just sand like. Righto.

An that bloke pull off his pack, on a big, great big h'ironwood tree just like that, with a fork. E's about, fork about that high. An e sort of grow up, you understand? Beautiful shade. Limb all over. Anyhow e pulled is pack off there. An line is pack up. Righto.

He went up an got a billy can a water, burnim[?] leftim inis camp. An e went up an got a lot a fire, made a fire. Put his billy can on, fire. An pull all the dishes out an. well y'know laid is table out. Pulled his knife an fork an beef an tucker out. Ah. A'right.

Righto. Anyhow. E ada, e was makin then, e was makin is tea, old blackfeller come down. Blackfeller calla, Wallambain. E dead at Newry. E's a man eater. Understand? Eat you, eat me. Ah see. That's to murder you, you understand? Murder you, murder me. That's it. What they call a white man, marramballa. That's the white man y'see. You marramballa, me marramballa [marranbalang/nj].\(^{55}\) Well, dannarra[?] they call me different too. I dono what they mean half caste. They callim some other word. Yeah well that's all right.

Well. This old blackfeller come down. E said, I go askim for tobacca.' Is name, is name Wallambain. That feller dead at Newry now. Anyhow this is brother-in-law —  e died at Carlton —  e said [in a whisper], 'Don't go. Don't go.' E said, 'E might shoot you.' That's it. 'Ah,' e said, 'I'll give it a go. I'll give it a chance.' Right, e left a couple a spear back, oh nearly from ere to that, Grant's camp. E only took one spear an one woomera.

An now, when e heard, this white man look an see this old blackfeller comin. E said,

\(^{54}\) Shaw and Walker 1975:46-54, 109.  
\(^{55}\) Kofod 1978:325.
'Goodday.' E said. E said, 'Goodday.' Anyhow, hoho, old blackfeller laugh, 'Ha ha ha ha.' Y' see? That's it. 'You gotta ngundju?' That's the first word e said. Y'know what that mean? 'You got tobacco?' Ngundju. They callim ngundju. Tobacca. That's it.

E said, 'I got no tobacco for a bloody blackfeller like you. Get out, you bloody stinkin old thing.' That's it. Anyhow old blackfeller said, 'Woyawuyangu,' e said to language [I think Johnny was improvising here]. Understand? They talk in the language. E said, 'You cheeky bugger eh?' [wangala, 'be angry,' mad; wariwung, 'cheeky', aggressive].56 See? 'Get out you blackfeller bastard, you too stink.' Well that's it. See? 'Get out.' 'Oh, you woyawuyang u,' e said. So e walked away. Back to is mate, is brother-in-law. E said [in a whisper], 'I'll go back killim that man. Letim tuckout dinner . . .' He said, 'No don't you do it.' He said, 'Will only cause you trouble. Police will chase us.' Other bloke said to him like that. 'Ha ha ha ha ha,' he said, 'No-more,' he said, 'Me number one.' That's it.

Ah so he sharpened the shovel spear on the sandstone: sharpen it, sharpen it, sharpen it. Long spear. Well he came up way, look, here this bloke layin down on that, what I was telling you this while ago, with ironwood tree reading a big newspaper . . . [end of tape].

E picked up his revolver, all loaded ready. So's accordin to blackfeller, e just went bang, bang, bang. An e counted five shots anyhow that's all. No more about it.

B.S.: Oh so that blackfeller told the story. That's how you know?

Yeah well that's what we was told by, through them. See? I never seen it. But they was just, we biin just told. Righto.

They packed up on Durack Folly range. They was on the Durack Folly range. They packed up, they went over to, what they call stock route, it Four Mile Gap. They went over to another spring. An a, one woman here, is daughter. That feller's daughter — is father died — his daughter ere, Mary. Blackfeller callim Yundubain. E was there. An e was only a little lad like, little girl. E said, 'Daddy. Daddy, we wanta go seeim that marranbalang.' Marranbalang's the white man y'understand? 'We no-more savvy what kind im '

All right. There, next morning they all come down. Bloody lucky. Y'know nobody biin on that road. Nobody biin on the road. Anyhow they come down. They took everything what they can, what they can think like. All the tomato sauce they spill it. Waterberry sauce they spill it. Pickle bottle they spill it. Chutney bottle they spill it. They didn't want it. They didn't how how to eat it, you understand? Now they wouldn't spill it. Yeah but why they spill them stuff for, because they want the bottle for spear head. Understand?

B.S.: What mob were these? What people were they?

Ah Miriwung mob. Big Wallambain, this old Wallambain dead at Newry ere. This is is daughter, one of is daughter ere. One a his daughter passed away ere. One a his daughter workin down to, down to Carlton down ere. Another one passed away down ere backa the hill up ere. Long long way anyhow. About ten or twelve mile from ere. Yes well all right.

Anyhow they ada look. All the girl ada look at the marranbalang y'know. Dead one. They pulled the calico up an ada look atim. Righto. They covered im an they took what the best part they could. Tucker line flour tea an sugar. An one boy biin in that moba man, that, e know how to use a rifle. You understand? E know ow to use revolver, e know ow to use


Anyhow they took the revolver. An this old blackfeller, that, this feller died now, he got the revolver [chuckled], he put it in the hair belt. Just the hair belt you understand? Hair belt. Blackfeller hair belt. He put it in there. He carried the revolver an away they went. Back to the camp. A'right. An they report. Righto.

Anyhow well Jim Crisp come along, two day, three day after. This bloke that was got kill at Bullita. He come along after. An e seem e can see a moba horses. E seen, horses there belong to whatsaname. Ahh God I can't thinka that feller came now dead there. Anyhow [chuckled] right e said, 'Oh horses still there.' He said, 'Oh e must be round ere.' E look e can see the, see the calico. What they covered im over with the old broken calico. Seen all the pack there an saddle everything, an layin about anyway. Righto. Anyhow.

What's this ahhh . . . Ah goodness I can't thinka that bloke's name now. I just called is name not long awhile back. Anyhow Jim Crisp come along. He said, anyhow, he standin on horseback, 'Hey, you avin a good sleep? [Pause]. Hey! You avin a good sleep?' he mentioned his name but I can't thinka his bloomin name. I forget. Anyhow. Oh e jumped off. He lifted the calico. He said, 'Hey you avin a good sleep? What's wrong with you?' He lift the cal- oh goodness almighty, thousands a blue flies come out of it. An e look properly, the man got killed! E jumped on, oh e never stopped. He drive the horses there sixty miles an hour, seventy mile an hour must be. [Chuckled]. Drivin them to report to Billy Jones. E was manager. Bill Jones. E died somewhere round bloody New Guinea somewhere. Where e went, I dono where e went where e die.

Anyhow. Well e reports in there. Well e couldn't go away you understand? E found a man. E ad to stay there. They send boy called Alec. E died at Lissadell. They sentim there with a letter. Jim Crisp wrote a letter, an Bill Jones wrote a letter. See Jim Crisp can't report to, Bill Jones. So, what Bill Jones, e told Bill Jones Bill Jones write is own letter. Nother bloke wrote is own letter, when e found im. How e seen im an how e was layin down an all this sorta thing. Righto.

Boy went away that night. Got a horse that night they mustered, they went away, all that night they got there daylight, to Wyndham. To report I think it. Buckland was there I think it. Sergeant Buckland. So report e givim a letter. E said, 'Now put your horse in the police yard,' e said. E ada look at the letter, 'Hm man got kill. By the black, at Eight Mile spring.' That's it. Open another letter, 'Ah this word from old Bill Jones. Ah Jim Crisp report to Bill Jones. Oh that's all right.'

Righto. 'Quartpot an Killy, muster them horses up putim together.' He said, 'Man got, passed away up there we gotta go an, ava look atim.' Righto. 'Pack up a sulky.' Police on the sulky. Only one tracker. An sergeant stop back. An another bloke, nother tracker stop back. Three policemen was in Wyndham. Two stop back an one come out. They come out. Out there, at Ivanhoe. They pick up Jim Crisp. They left the horses there an the pack an everything. They took Jim Crisp out withim. Two police boy. An I think two more boys from Ivanhoe. Went out with them, to givim hand.

An out there, where e buried. They buried im just ere not far off is, off to where that tree where they killedim.. Just there, If I ada good eye I can take you with the motor car if you got a motor an take you show you all that places. Yeah well a'right.

Anyhow now, the police ada look at it an done somethin an that's all. They got all the pack. They putim on the sulky all you know. The, halfa the gear not worth it like y'know.
That bita broke up gear e not worth it. You might as well chuckim on the rubbish heap. Ah half the pack an half the saddle was all right. Righto. An anyhow.

Well station boy, got them horses belong to Philchowski. They drovim down, two Ivanhoe boy, into ere like. See, to Ivanhoe. An they bury, after they buried the man like, police come back. So. Ah, this Jim Crisp, e was there at Ivanhoe. While them boy brought them horse poll- ah, ohh goodness what that man name anyhow? Ah brought that horses down to Ivanhoe. Then ah, this, this like a, this police boy, one police boy stop there. One went on. I dono which one stop, might be Quartpot might be Killy. Well then, when it was, Jim Crisp like took them horses down. Y'know takim to Wyndham for sale. See you might as well get rid ofim. It's no good keepin. Givim to somebody else. Yeah. Well that's all right. That finish. That part finish . . . [pp.46-54].

B.S.: Philchowski was under the ironwood tree reading a big newspaper?57
Yeah. That’s what they say y’see.
B.S.: An, Philchowski had a revolver?
Yeah.
B.S.: Now, I missed that part. How did Wallambain kill Philchowski?
Well e kill e, y’see e ad is bed. Like say I got a a bed like that. I got all, I might ava, I might ava squirt [pistol] ere y’understand. When e killedim e sorta, ‘Hoooh.’ Well e sorta, well accordin to they, what word what we heard y’see, through them. He sorta swinga, ‘Ohhhh.’ He sorta swear e said, ‘You black bastard.’ He spins around like this [matching action to word]. He picked the revolver. Bashes[?] this he went that way you understand? Bang bang bang bang. Well I say, the [. . .?] pick the revolver an got too much you understand. You only got five bullet in it.
B.S.: An Wallambain threw the spear at him?
Oh e shotim first. E killedim first.
B.S.: With the spear?
Yeah, yeah. E killedim first. Then e, sort of fall down, y’see. I s’pose when e tap im e pull the spear out an e run away y’see? E musta done that way. See e never left no spear on it. You understand? E might be, go through here, like up here some way. Hm? A shovel spear y’know, very very y’know very shovel h’iron. Course you know yourself what sort of iron it is, shovel. [p.109].

57 When I was recording these versions more than ten years ago a group of us on one occasion visited the Eight Mile, but we could not ascertain the exact spot where the encounter took place. One tree had indeed a forked branch but aside from that it was little more suggestive of the real site than any other tree. We did establish however that the place of the killing was not at Philchowsky’s Crossing itself but about half a kilometre further south, close to one of the old cattle roads, which could just be made out between the trees.
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GROWING UP IN QUEENSLAND

Bowman Johnson talks to Andrew Markus

Andrew Markus was in Brisbane to gather material for *Australians 1938* in the series *Australians: A historical library* (Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987), when he talked to Bowman Johnson at the Born Free Club in December 1983. A copy of the transcript of the conversation is deposited with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

In 1906 Cherbourg, part of the original large Barambah holding 250 kilometres northwest of Brisbane, was reserved for an Aboriginal settlement. William Porteus Semple was superintendent from 1924 until the early 1950s. ‘Bjelke’ refers to Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, former National Party Premier of Queensland. Cargoon Station is about 140 kilometres west of Charters Towers.

I was born on Cherbourg on the first of January 1924. It was called Barambah then. I was born in the Aboriginal hospital, the one they had before they built the new one. One of my parents came from nearby and the other one from Clermont, Blackall, in the central district of Queensland, from the best part of Queensland. People on my side, they were all rounded up. My father told me they brought him down in chains. They just ran them up, they took my father into Cherbourg on a chain. He must have done something. I can’t give you the full impact or anything, because it’s too hard to understand. My parents never talked much about the old days. The old people don’t think there is anything left to talk about the old days. They shot them down. It must have been hard, because they couldn’t even understand, what was what, who’s who, just walking into a place, taking over from them and they don’t even understand what you are trying to do, and you don’t understand what they are up to, it must be terrible, it must be awful. We wouldn’t know how them old Aborigines felt. They wouldn’t know what they shot them in the first place for. They even poisoned the water hole, poison the flour. We don’t understand them things, why they do it.

There wasn’t many houses then on the mission, a few houses for the white officials, and for the school teachers. When I came along my parents were living in a house, the second house from the end, at a place called Broadway. The house had a veranda on it, a dining room and a kitchen. Veranda onto the kitchen. Used to be a lot of people living in the place, a lot of people from my mother’s and father’s places. Some people had huts and things like that. I seen a lot of people live in the huts, tin huts and like that. There were dormitories for the boys and girls. That’s mostly for children who didn’t have parents, some wayward children.

There was a lot of people there, it was getting onto the thousand mark when I was running around. They had jobs and my father used to do a lot of ploughing around the place, and before that he was a carpenter. He built the place we lived in; he was on the carpenter gang that built that place. My father did a lot of ploughing on the reserve and a lot right around the district, for different people. They grew peanuts and potatoes and some lucerne,

Andrew Markus teaches Australian history at Monash University. His publication of the letters of William Cooper (Allen & Unwin 1988) is reviewed in this volume. He is currently working on a study of policies towards Aborigines in the inter-war period.
People lived in different parts of the reserve. The old people mixed pretty well. They did not teach the young boys in my day. They just mostly talked in language when I was young. We just grew up and learnt from them, that’s all. We learnt the way we learn English, the same way; just listening to them and watching them they had some things they went through. They didn’t teach us their language, only bits here and bits there. They didn’t teach us because the white race took over, that’s what really happened, that’s what all the things about today, like Bjelke and them say we got no claim on this land now but the point is they took the land off us in the first place. The old people they just gave things up, didn’t bother to hang on to their tradition once they got sent to the Cherbourg Aboriginal settlement. But they used to have a lot of corroborees, pretty well every week, and we used to go and see them. The superintendent didn’t try to stop them. The parents would go to the corroboree. They used to have corroborees pretty well every week, different tribes. Some corroborees they had they didn’t allow us to go and see. That was from the old tribal people. They would say to keep away. It was taboo or whatever they called it. Then the young people used to go and play leap [leapfrog?], what you call the game leap, go and play that till the corroboree finished and then go home with the parents.

The old people gave us a little bit of lesson, education. That’s it. We had no way of getting in correspondence with each other whatsoever. You only have to take my grandmother and my grandfather, they couldn’t talk one word of English. I didn’t have anything to do with them, just what my parents told me. The old people couldn’t talk to anybody but to themselves, and they didn’t all talk the one dialect. They couldn’t talk to the superintendent and all that. He couldn’t understand what they were talking about and they couldn’t understand what he was talking about. They didn’t explain things that was wrong and all that. And just imagine before that when they used to roam the country free, how could they understand what the white man wanted, and the white man understand what they wanted. There was no way they understood each other.

Cherbourg or Barambah as it was called then, that’s mostly made up from half-caste people. There were very few full-blooded people there. Black people that had half-caste children, they used to round them up, that’s where most of the reserves started from. There weren’t too many full-blooded when I was going to school, and I think there is less now. They also took kids away from their parents. I wouldn’t know why, I just know that it was done. There was a lot we didn’t know. Put them in homes down here in Brisbane. Because they were fair children, they took them away from their parents. Mostly fair children. They were taken away when they were babies, small. A lot of them don’t even know their parents. They used to put them in homes, reserves and all that. They used to have a lot of them children at Purga, outside Ipswich, that was a home for Aboriginal Children run by the Salvation Army. They also took them when they were older. They sent a lot of people to Palm Island settlement when they got older. Perhaps they couldn’t control them or thought they couldn’t control them.

When we were kids there we did a lot of swimming in the reserve, go down to the gully to do swimming. There was plenty of water there when I was young; even after school we would run down to the gully and have a dip, have a swim around. Then mostly the weekend in the pond. We always been go out in the bush when we were young, travelling around. But it was totally, completely different to what the old fully-blooded Aboriginal went through.

They used to give us rations. Yes, we used to get rations. Rations were alright, I never
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went short of food. We had clothes to go to school every year before it starts school, they used to give us clothes. They look after us. They were alright. I wouldn’t exactly say that the education was the one that Aborigines wanted, really wanted, but they just wiped it all to make out they didn’t understand. They still try to make out that we do not understand what we really want.

I was going on six when I went to school and I went for eight years. Before I turned fourteen years of age we didn’t have no work, we had school to attend to. We went five days a week, from nine in the morning. Lunch at twelve, go back in at one and out at three. Something like that. They had three teachers and they had a couple of teachers’ aides, the aides were Aboriginal people. They treated us alright. I got treated alright by my teachers. It was just like any other school that you went to, you just learnt in them days, no matter if you went to white school or not. You still had slate and pencil, you didn’t have books then, you could rub anything out that was wrong, and start all over again with the slate and pencil. We only went up to fourth grade. You went for eight years and it only took you to fourth grade.

They taught us to read and write. To go to Sunday School on the Sunday. We had different churches there. The ministers and the priests and all of them came from Murgon to teach you. We used to hold services then like they hold services here, no different. You go if you want to go. Most people used to go in those days.

The superintendent of the reserve, Semple, he was alright to me. If he done something wrong to someone else its not my place to say so. He had a very big interest in Aboriginal people, old Semple, I’d say that about him. Most of the people running the reserve, they had an interest in Aborigines because that was their job, but because you were black they thought you wasn’t as good as what they were; they treated you as like you don’t come up to their expectations, just something down there and that’s it. You don’t become aware of it until you start to get up a bit in age. If you couldn’t talk for yourself you were just treated like, you can say, an animal as far as I was concerned. You seen it happen often enough. I couldn’t describe that, such an incident, because the feelings totally different to what you going to describe it. I haven’t the faintest idea why they used to do those things, I haven’t the faintest idea why they do them today.

I used to go off the reserve with my parents when they used to go around to the different farms and all that, working. When my mother and father used to travel around we used to go around in a buggy; it was my father’s buggy, and horses. I would be out there with him for a few weeks or a month or two. We used to go around from places to places, he used to work on the farms. You were lucky to get work in those days, and a few bob is all you’d get.

As we grew up, well, just before I left the settlement, we had to get permits just to walk into Murgon, that was three and a half mile away. And if you left the reserve in them days, they used to give people exemption papers, but that paper wasn’t much good ‘cause they could give it to you at any time and they could take it back from you any time. The exemption was supposed to mean that you were entitled to the same thing as everybody else, all white people. They could take it back off you any time they wanted to. It wasn’t worth the thing it was written on.

You wasn’t free to do what you wanted to do. You had to get a permit to go to Murgon, well some people they bothered about, but some people didn’t. They didn’t bother about when I left the mission. I left the mission a few times and they never bothered me because I always went out to work at wool or to find a job and all that. If you wanted to go to Brisbane
you mightn’t ask ‘em, you just buzz off, then they’d get white police after you then, but if they didn’t care about you they wouldn’t bother to get anyone looking you up. They had black and white police on Cherbourg when I was young. There was a few, half a dozen, six or seven. They had gaols. I was in and out of there, I suppose for disobedience, trying to overstep the rules. The policeman or the superintendent, they’d say lock him up and they have to turn around and lock you up. They just put me in there, they never bashed me up. I was fourteen when I finished school. I then went to work on a station, outside of Charters Towers. The employers used to write into the settlement for workers. They would write letters from all over the place. The overseer on the mission, he would find out who’s leaving school and what you want to do, and they send you out to these jobs what they got there. You tell him, I’ll take that job. They used to send you out, I forget what they call them, but they used to give you papers and you used to take them out to the people that sent in for you. They used to send out a paper which you give to your boss where you’re going to work. It was a position. You go out there, you had to stay there what was stipulated, they made you stay there for that time, for six or twelve months. If you got sick of the place you couldn’t leave. If you tried, they would send you to Palm Island. That was a penal settlement. At first I worked on a cattle station. Done all cattle work. Ride bucking horses, mustered up cattle, go out mustering nearly all the time, we were out mostly a week, sometimes two weeks. You mustered up all the cattle, bring them back in, dip them all and take them back from where you got them from. I enjoyed it. It seemed alright to me. I worked for these big money people, their name was Manning, they owned a lot of property. They owned Cargoon station, they had race horses and everything. They used to go away and buy prime bulls and that, from the exhibition show here in Sydney [Brisbane?], they were rich people I worked for. They were pretty good to me. They used to take me into Charters Towers, the boss and that. There were four of us there at the time, I was the youngest. We lived in a little room for stockmen. I lived in there, and we had a room to ourselves, and some others had two in one room. Depends what size the room was and all that. All the stockmen were living together. But when I first went out to the station with this joker, I can’t remember his name, there was a chap there that was born there, around there, he used to sit in the kitchen. They used to serve him meals in the kitchen, with all the white stockmen, which they didn’t do to me and my mate who went there. We sat out in the veranda, in the shelter there. They didn’t serve us in the kitchen when they served all the others, there was something like this out on the veranda, we had a table. We had proper tucker there. Except the trouble they had all our plates and mugs and things marked. They did that because we were black, separate plates and things for blacks. I can’t remember what I got paid. It was about 70 cents a week. Some of it went to the bank and the Aboriginal Affairs Department. Say you got paid 60 cents, well they would take something like 20 cents out of that. That’s all they used to take out of mine. Something to that effect. You didn’t know how much you had in the bank, but you had a fair idea. I got most of my money back when I grew up. I got what I thought I had. I don’t know why they took it out, but I suppose they took it because they had to pay for yourself to live on the reserve. Then when I was about fifteen, still in my teens, getting up in the late teens, I came back to Barambah, Cherbourg. I didn’t like being way up there, I wanted to go home to my people. I went to rural school then. That’s where they taught me carpentry and all that. This school was on Cherbourg. I never went to the one in Murgon. See, they used to send them
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in to Murgon, but there was no need when they built their own. The teachers were all white. I've been in and out there for years, I just go off to work and then come back and get that job again.

I went out to Springsure too, I forget what's there now. That's when I was blacktracking there, and that's when they fed me on the tank stand, gave me my meal under a tank stand. I worked there with the police. You would go out with the policeman, he goes to the cattle station and you go with him, to check up horses and cattle station and what's happening to them and all that. Not like today you just phone them up. Then in 1947 I went to Melbourne. I was down there then and came back in 1948. Tracking just seemed to come naturally to black people. They just followed tracks and then see what makes them tracks and see if a little fresh or cold, something like that. No one teach you tracking, just pick it up yourself. When I was young, I have been out hunting with the old people. We used to go mostly in the night-time, go out for porcupines; mostly had dogs them time, the dogs would get the porcupines. Might'en be much good at it, but I've been working with police force and tracker boy. The police treat me properly, the only thing I had against them was giving me meals on the tank stand. I didn't think that was right. I'd sooner have meals on the cell veranda, but that was it, you couldn't tell them in those days what was what. You can't tell them today what's what, they don't want to listen to you. I don't see where we have advanced at all, only in education, not in being recognised as a human being in Australia, the only thing we have advanced was a bit of education. That's all I can see the difference.

Cherbourg, Queensland, 1949; the babies in class in the sun.
Photo: Dixon collection, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
THE TWO JOURNEYS OF DIANNE WESTMACOTT

Peter Read

Nobody knew for sure just who Dianne’s parents were. They knew only that in July 1946 Mr and Mrs Westmacott had gone to Wagga for a couple of days and come back with a three-week-old baby. She had black hair and olive skin. To the cousins and rural workers of the property it was pretty clear that Dianne wasn’t Anglo-Saxon. But what was she? Some speculated Negro; others maintained, in the local vernacular, that ‘she had wog in her’. It was even whispered that it might be even worse: poor little Dianne might be ‘dark’. Everyone had their theories – except Dianne. She didn’t even know that she was adopted.1

In the 1940s the New South Wales Department of Child Welfare gave no suggestions that substitute parents should tell their children that they were adopted.2 Nevertheless it was an unusual adopted child that did not have a suspicion that there was something a little odd in its relations with its parents. So with Dianne. She wondered why her mother had not been discharged from the hospital at the same time as she, and why she was told always to pin her hair back ‘because you look dark’. During a card game she heard her uncle say to the others that he hoped that Dianne’s ‘bad blood wouldn’t come out’ as she grew older. When she was about nine she overheard an aunt ask another aunt, ‘Doesn’t Dianne know who she is?’ In response to her question Dianne was told, ‘Don’t you know? Your father was a Negro’. For an adult that would have been proof enough, but for a nine-year-old it caused only anxiety and confusion. What could it mean?

No one would elaborate and she was too frightened to inquire further. Nor did she realise the significance of other children seeing her as different. ‘I was always being called blackgin when I was a kid. I’ve always remembered fighting over me colour.’

Peter Read recently published A hundred years war: the Wiradjuri people and the state (ANU Press). He worked for some years in Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation and is co-editing (with Coral Edwards) The yearning of my soul: accounts of journeys to Aboriginal identity, and writing a biography of Charles Perkins.

1 This article is based on the case history of Dianne Westmacott, who in 1983 approached the Aboriginal organisation Link-Up for assistance in finding her family and identity. The information is drawn from the file and from a recorded conversation with Ms Westmacott (Sydney, February 1987). I am grateful to Dr Richard Barwick, Ms Westmacott and the co-ordinator of Link-Up, Coral Edwards, for permission to reproduce the material. To protect the identity of both the adoptive and natural families, surnames have been changed or omitted. At the time of these events, the writer was employed as a co-worker of Link-Up.

2 Until 1969, two New South Wales State Government authorities were charged with the care and protection of Aboriginal children: the Aborigines Welfare Board and the Department of Child Welfare. Children who were sent to the Aboriginal homes at Cootamundra and Kinchela were in the care of the Board; most others fell under the jurisdiction of the Child Welfare Department, which also handled all adoptions. Instructions that adopted children should be told of their status were not given until the mid 1970s, but parents were at no time advised to tell their children that they of Aboriginal descent. Since 1982 it has been departmental policy to place Aboriginal wards with Aboriginal foster parents.
When she was ten Dianne’s mother became ill from a heart complaint. The family left the Parkes property and went to live in the Sydney suburb of Granville. Steadily her condition worsened. She promised Dianne that one day she intended to return to Parkes to die: Dianne felt that she wanted, in her last days, to tell her something important. She was denied the chance. After a long illness Mrs Westmacott died leaving Dianne, now fourteen, in the care of her father, with whom she had never enjoyed good relations. Dianne recalled that after her mother’s death she had heard stories of him telling people in Sydney that he was tired of living with an old crock. He told Dianne that if she had been sixteen, she would have been thrown out of the house. As it was, he said, she would have to stay home and look after him.

[When mum died] my godmother came down from Parkes to get me, and said, ‘I’ll take her and bring her up’ and all this, and Dad said, ‘No, she’s gotta stay and look after the house’, and ‘there’ll be no one to look after me’, and all this sorta garbage. But when Dad used to go to work I’d bring my friends in who were wagging school. He said I was uncontrollable and not looking after him properly. He went away to Parkes with this girl and I said, ‘I’m coming too’, and he said, ‘No, you’re staying to look after the house’. I was fourteen and left in the house, and in them days they were real strict, and my next-door neighbour rang up the welfare and the welfare lady came and got me. He didn’t even know I was charged. I was taken off Dad and charged with being neglected and exposed to moral danger.

It was at the magistrate’s hearing, from which Dianne was released back into the care of her father, that she learned for the first time that she was adopted.

He tried to disown me in court and that’s when it came up. The judge said, ‘You cannot disown an adopted child’. [When we were outside] I said to Dad, ‘I am adopted, am I’, and he said, ‘Yeah, your mother’s some bloody wog’. And I started getting a chip on the shoulder then. And I got uncontrollable. When I found out I was adopted I went around and terrorised Dad and threw rocks in his house and everything. I was a real bastard with a real big chip on me shoulder. And bashed up people and just got out of hand. I just was uncontrollable and hated Dad — it was just the way he said it and nothing I done suited him. You’d cook him a meal and he’d start picking at it or throw it out, and the floor wasn’t polished good enough and he was bringing women home. Mum was only dead two weeks and he had a woman in the house and I asked him why he did it, he said, ‘Well, if its just thrown at you, you take it’, and he was just a pig... In the end I got terrified of him and used to push cupboards up against the door. I started to get scared of him because of what the girls told me and that.

So Dianne was in court again, charged this time not with being neglected and exposed to moral danger, but with being an uncontrollable child. She was ordered to the Parramatta

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Children might be removed from their parents in two ways: first by charging them with 'neglect' (in effect, with being neglected), second by charging them with 'being uncontrollable'. If the first charge was found proven, a child was likely to be declared a state ward, for foster or adoptive placement; if the second, the placement was more likely to be a reformatory. In both cases, unless adopted, a child remained in the nominal care of the Minister for Child Welfare.
Girls Home. After three months she was transferred to a government hostel.
In the meantime I'd been raped and when they found out I was pregnant they
sent me down to Myee [another hostel] and I stayed there till Debbie was born.
And then Mrs Donaghue [the mother of the rapist] — they were all rich — and
she come down and said she wanted the daughter, it was the first grand-daughter
on the Donaghue side and all this garbage. And I was only fifteen and a half.
They threatened me with [how] she could get it taken off me because she had
the money, and even the Matron at Myee told me, 'Well you're better off letting
that baby go, and letting it go to rich people.' And I said, 'No way, 'cause this
is my baby', 'cause I'd lost my mother and I was going to keep her. So she tried
to get Debbie and she said, 'Well, we'll take you out to Cobar with us'. And
when Colin got out of jail I married him to keep Debbie. Even the priest said it
was a hypocritical marriage, that I was only marrying the father so that I could
keep the child. They had this threat over me that I would lose her because I was
under age, all this hogwash. And he was always coming home smashing you up,
he was an alcoholic and I finally left him, and I haven't seen him now for twenty-
three years.

Still Dianne was no nearer the truth about her origins, but it now appeared that her
relatives had no better idea than her father exactly who her real parents were. Like him,
they discouraged her efforts to find out. Dianne's uncle told her husband:

  If I told her about it, everyone'd get hurt, and if I told her, a mob of blokes'd
go through your house and smash the house up, and you. They used to say to
me, 'Look, we don't know what nationality you got in you, we just know your
mum came home to the property with you, that's all'. And I even used to think,
'What am I, a Mafia's daughter or something?'.

False lead followed false lead. Dianne went to Broken Hill hoping to find someone who
looked like her. At Walgett an old koori heard her story and remarked that she probably
had been stolen from his own tribe.

In about 1965 Dianne's husband Colin hired a private detective who somehow discovered
that the name of her natural mother was Catherine Violet Gibson, nee Boys.4 From her
birth certificate (issued in her adopted name) Dianne knew that she had been born at the
Wagga Base Hospital on 3 July 1946. With this information she visited the hospital to try to
find out more about her family.

  I was thirty-four when I went to Wagga Base and said, 'I want to find out some
information about my parents'. He didn't know I was adopted and he said,

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4 It is not clear how Colin Donahue managed to do this. Perhaps he saw the adoption order held by
Mr Westmacott (certificates at that time named the natural parents). The secret of natural identity is
very jealously guarded by state authorities. Though some states now allow adopted adults to see their
natural birth certificates at the age of eighteen, at the time of writing no decision has been made in
New South Wales. Normally adoptees have to ask the Adoptions Branch for special consideration to
have contact made with the natural parents. If a favourable decision is taken by the Branch, it may be
more than a year before contact is made. Then, of course, it is possible that the natural parents may
not want to see the child.
'When was you born?'. I told him the dates and he said, 'Well we've had a flood and we mightn't even have the files', but lucky he found this big book. And he got intrigued and he started to tell the story [of a baby named as Gibson] and he said, 'It's a funny thing, there's only two babies born that day and you don't look like the Gibson baby to me because it was a little boy.' I said, 'Was there another baby?'. He said, 'You sure this was the hospital you were born in?' and I said, 'Yeah, its on my birth certificate', and then he said, 'Well there's another little baby and her name is Boys, Caroline Boys.' He said, 'It must be you because this baby had “dark skin”, and all this. And she was put up in the nursery away from its mother and the other little baby went home with its mother... And then the superintendent of the hospital said he shouldn't have been telling me all this information because it was under the Welfare Act and all this. Then [despite this warning] I went to the Registrar's Office and it was only a young girl there and I asked for my birth certificate under the name of Caroline Boys. She was going through this big book, and as she was looking I'd already seen everything before she got to it. It had stamped across it ‘Under the Welfare Act’ but she didn’t notice. She was looking on this page and I was looking on that page, and I’d already seen it all. And then she looked and said, ‘Oh, I'm not allowed to tell you nothing.’ I said, ‘It doesn’t matter mate, because I've just seen it all.’ And it had ‘father unknown’.

Dianne’s trip had, in a sense, been futile. She had already known her mother’s name. The records did not specify any nationality. Why had her mother allowed her child to be described as ‘dark’ without giving further information? Who was her father? It seemed that records could help no longer. Only her mother could provide the information denied to Dianne for thirty-five years. Five years later the combined efforts of a firm of solicitors, the Adoptions Branch of the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services and Jigsaw, an organisation of adopted people, had failed to bring her any nearer to the whereabouts of her mother.

It was in March 1983 that Dianne phoned Link-Up, the Aboriginal organisation established to help Aboriginal fostered or adopted adults to find their families. In the course of the conversation we asked why she thought that she might be Aboriginal. She replied that the Aboriginal counsellor at the school which her children attended had assured her, by her colouring and features, that she was.

Our experience in Link-Up has been that most of the people who imagine, through hints by welfare officials or family members, that they may be Aboriginal, are in fact of Aboriginal descent. It was on this basis that we suggested that she write to the Adoptions Branch again to ascertain if all the information she knew about herself was correct. The reply, which closely followed the departmental guidelines about the release of ‘non-identifying information’ to adoptees, merely confirmed what Dianne already knew. She wrote to Link-Up:

I got a letter from Youth and Community Services but I already know all the little parts they wrote me. They said her first names, not the surname, made out that’s all they knew but you could tell they must have seen a file to give me what they said... The only thing I didn’t know was that she lived, the last they heard, on the Riverina. So maybe if I look for her in the area. Her surname is Boys I think I told you anyway well thank you again...
Like the other agencies, Link-Up could make no progress in finding Dianne's natural mother until it had more biographical information. After several months we discovered that Catherine Violet Boys had been born in Melbourne. Link-Up wrote to Dianne:

We learned this morning that mum, Violet Gibson (as she's known at Adoptions) and Violet Boys (as she's known at Births Deaths and Marriages) was born in Melbourne. If she was 26 at the time of your birth and you were born in 1946, that means that she was born in 1920.

This means there is a chance that we might be able to get hold of her Birth Certificate, if you'd like us to do that. We haven't been able to find out much about your dad as yet, but that can come later if you'd like that. In the meantime, if you'd like to try for information about your mum, could you sign this form [requesting the Certificate] and we'll send it on to Melbourne . . .

The Certificate was returned to Link-Up. We wrote to Dianne:

. . . the important news is on your mother's side, we think. It says, as you'll see, that your mother's mother was Gladys Ann, nee - - - , born at Echuca. Echuca is where the big Cumeroogunga mission nation was (and still is) and - - - is one of the well-known families from there. We can't be certain yet, but it looks as though you could be related to the - - - of Cumeroogunga . . .

Could you let us know what your feelings are now, and what you'd like us to do. Ring us up if you'd like to, and reverse the charges . . .

Dianne replied:

. . . Yes, could you go on with every thing you both have got a lot of information, that's for sure. I hope soon we will meet someone that knows my five brothers and sisters, seeing I was the 6th child.

P.S. Where is Cumeroogunga?

If my mother was alive she must be 65.

Diane Barwick was a person Link-Up often turned to when help was needed in tracing Victorian Aboriginal families. We wrote to her enclosing the birth certificate of Dianne's mother, asking if the information corresponded to any of the genealogies which she had compiled. She replied not with a letter but a parcel. It contained a copy of Scarlett Epstein and David Penny's *Opportunity and response*, which included her history of Cumeroogunga.5 There were photographs of family members, genealogies and a photocopied article about a distinguished forebear she had written for the *Australian Dictionary of National Biography*. With the package came a long excited letter explaining, in short, that it was time for Dianne Westmacott to come home.

She was related, it seemed, to two families who ultimately trace their ancestry to Old Maria, born in 1815, a member of the Wolligatha clan of the Pangerang tribe, whose language was known as Yotta Yotta or Yorta Yorta. What was more, her relatives would welcome her with open arms and loving hearts. 'Your client,' wrote Barwick, 'would be welcome in the homes of any member of the Victorian Aboriginal community.' The letter ended with a moving paragraph. She did not, of course, intend that it should ever be published, but it stands nevertheless as a moving tribute to her contribution to the continuing cause of Aboriginal pride and self-identity:

5 Barwick 1972.
TWO JOURNEYS

I hope this will be of some help. You and Coral [Edwards] are doing a job that William Cooper [the famous Victorian activist] would have approved: bringing home the children so cruelly taken away. He fought it all his life, and his kinsmen have continued — on a national basis — to take pride in their Aboriginal ancestry and help others to understand the importance of the Aboriginal heritage. I am confident that your client will be gladly welcomed by a host of relatives if Link-Up can help him/her 'go home'. They have never stopped grieving for the children lost to their community.

All good wishes

Diane

The first journey of Dianne Westmacott, to find her identity and her people, was almost at an end. She knew now that she was a direct descendant of a famous Victorian family who, through six generations, trace their ancestry to pre-invasion times.

Link-Up's next step, after consultation with Dianne Westmacott, was to travel to Melbourne. We learned the address of one of Dianne's oldest and closest relatives, her great-aunt, who lived in a Melbourne nursing home. Following our usual practice we proceeded cautiously at the meeting: no one could know in advance what old memories might be revived at the mention of Dianne, nor whether her birth had been known about at all. There was no problem. It turned out that Dianne's great-aunt was living at the time with her mother: she knew about the baby and how Dianne's adoption had been arranged. Photos were exchanged and in November 1984 Link-Up wrote to Dianne:

We have some good news for you, as we have just been to Melbourne to find out some more about your family. After asking about a bit, we went to see Mrs ..., who is your great-aunt. She is a lovely old lady, about 77, who lives in a nursing home in ..., Melbourne. She knew a lot about your mum, and another sister ... What's more, she'd love to see you some time if you can get to Melbourne, and is only sorry that she can't have you to stay, but being in a nursing home, its not possible.

So what we'll do now, as soon as possible, we'll go and see your mum with your photo, and explain what's happened so far. Then we'll get back to you and bring you up to date, and if all goes well, we might be able to introduce you to her ...

There was plenty that might not go well, for the initial contact with natural mothers (or children if it is the parents who approach Link-Up) is the most difficult task of all. Almost all natural mothers remarry. Frequently they do not tell their husbands, or later children, about the adopted child. No one can be contacted in advance to test the waters, for neither the sisters nor closest friends of adopting mothers can be assumed to know about the birth of an adopted child. Link-Up's policy is to approach the natural mother at the time when she is most likely to be alone, but if she is not, to ensure that the conversation takes place in private.

It was at about 2.30pm, in early December 1984, that we approached Catherine Violet Anderson, nee Boys, at her Sydney home to inquire about her adopted daughter. When we asked for her by that name she guessed — like most adopting mothers — what we had come about. She came out onto the veranda so her husband, watching television inside, could not hear. Yes, she was Dianne's mother. Yes, she would like to see her photograph. Yes, she would like to meet her, and had been thinking about her a lot recently following some publicity about adoptions in a magazine. But no, she had not told her husband nor any of
her other four children about their adopted sister. The first meeting would have to be in secret, but, so as not to arouse the suspicions of her husband, it must be at a place where Catherine normally might be found. He and the children would be told after she had met Dianne.

Before the meeting we again visited Dianne to explain that the whole of a future relationship can depend on the first crucial few hours. It was good to take along a photo album, to talk about the children and the recent past, but not to dwell on childhood unless asked. Above all, we urged her to avoid, for her mother's sake, those vital questions which had gnawed at her for so long: why was she adopted, and who was her father? It was better to wait to be told without asking, though this might take hours, weeks, even years.

The meeting was to take place at a cafe at the Westfield Centre, Parramatta, at 11am on 14 December. At 10.30 we picked up Mrs Anderson at the end of her street, as she had suggested, so her husband would not see the car. She waited in the cafe while we went to meet Dianne at Parramatta Station. We walked to the cafe, introduced them to each other, and left. A week later Dianne wrote to Link-Up:

... Anyway all went well I let her do the talking 11.30 right through to 4.30, boy I know where I get my talking from. We met again at my place the following Thursday, she gave me a jewel box she got me at 18 years. She is a nice lady but I still feel just a friend I don't feel like her daughter but I guess that's natural. So she wants to meet a lot, but she is always telling me about the whole family all the time, she is wanting to meet my mob, she said she will try to come to Linda's 21st so she will meet the whole family my Linda looks a lot like her ...

Many people are worried at first that they seem no more than friends to the parents they have just met for the first time. But for Dianne, the two years after they met brought no improvement. In 1987 she still felt outside the family circle. She had met few other relatives, her mother had still not acknowledged her publicly, she had not met her great-aunt, and her Aboriginality was regarded by her mother as something best forgotten.

[At the first meeting] she said she would've known me anywhere in the street. We sat down and had a cup of tea. She said she went to Wagga looking for me when I was fifteen, 'cause she'd know me anywhere in the street, but she never found me. She always thought I was well looked after, but then she got onto her family. She keeps getting off 'em and onto her other [Anderson] family. And I didn't want to put too much on her at first, 'cause I might've frightened her away, and I just said, 'Where's my real father?' and she said he died of a heart attack and she explained she was with this other bloke.

[Q: Did she explain how you came to be adopted?]

She'd left the first two children with the grandmother and she went with this bloke and fell pregnant, and then the bloke turned out to be married from somewhere, so she said she wasn't getting rid of me until she was in the hospital and the matron said these people are wealthy and they can't have any kids and they would like to adopt the baby. She didn't sign the papers till five years later, but she let the matron take me up to the nursery and she never seen me again, she only seen me the first time. She couldn't drag me from pub to pub because she was cleaning pubs and stuff. And then she came down to Sydney and met Mr Anderson and she got married and had two other kids to him. She kept me a big secret. All the four are together, but nobody knew about me ... She didn't
do too much talking about the past, she was talking about general life, she just kept jumping away from it all the time. Even now I've gotta ask her, and I still haven't asked her, why she called me Caroline. 'Cause she keeps getting off it, and she just doesn't seem to wanna talk about it.

[Q: Did she know that you knew that you were Aboriginal?]

Yes, I showed her the pictures of the ancestors that you gave me, and they're really black. She goes, 'Where did you get these from?'. I said, 'Link-Up found them', and I showed her the articles and that. She took photocopies of them all 'cause she said, 'That's interesting, I might start tracking down a few of my relations.' That will help her — I don't think she knows many of her people. She told me she didn't know she was Aboriginal till she was nineteen.

[Q: Have you ever met the two daughters she had to Mr Anderson?]

No, she never ever says their surname or their addresses when she's talking about them, even though she's always talking about poor Shirley this and poor Shirley that . . . That dark guy Greg I was with [in 1986] said, 'I'd give her a big miss, 'cause if she was going to say anything, she'd be saying, "Why don't you come up to the club and I'll bring it out now?" It's a bit past a joke if you've gotta be sneaking round all the time.' And she didn't like him because he was black. I thought she might have had a bad experience with black people, but I don't know.

[Q: How did she come to meet him?]

I picked her up. She wanted to come to Linda's twenty-first, well Greg was living here, I was going with him for nine months. I said to her, I've just gotta fly down here and pick Greg up' . . . Soon as she seen him coming, she said, 'Oh, you're not going with him, are you?' I said, 'Yeah, that's my old man.' She said, 'No, I'd give him a big A', she said, 'because you'll end up in hospital with a broken jaw or something,' she said . . .

[In the end] I started to get a little bit mad with her, because she's not bringing me out, not even slowly bringing me out, you know, and I have asked her was she ashamed of me, and I have asked her was she prejudiced. She reckons she's not. But she's hiding me in the closet, its nearly two years . . . She's sorta going along like we're just friends, and I don't feel anything. Sometimes I feel more angry 'cause she not doing anything.

That's what was happening when I used to fight with me step-dad. That was our twenty-year feud, because he wouldn't tell me the truth. It built up inside me and I don't want it to happen again 'cause I had a real big chip on my shoulder. I start getting [the same feeling] when I'm with her.

Dianne's story, though in its way unique, is also typical of those of many other adopted Aboriginal adults. It was, and is, common for adopting parents to hide the facts of birth and racial descent, sometimes out of some psychogenetic fantasy that some day 'blood' will 'out'. Many parents do not realise how desperately their children will want to know their origins. Baffled by discrimination against their children in school, they can offer no help beyond a reassurance of their own love. Twenty years of good relationship between parent and child can be ruined by the search for natural parents, the real identity, but it is also not unusual for an adoption, as in Dianne's case, to break down completely.
Though some reunions are spectacularly successful, many do not follow the fantasies long rehearsed in the minds of separated children. In the twenty, thirty or forty years between birth and reunion, parents remarry, or die. Families can disintegrate. Young adults who want to begin to live as Aborigines often find that the degree of Aboriginal identity in their families, (which can range from passionate involvement to offhand denial) does not match their own expectations or desires. Though Dianne didn't particularly want further counselling, follow-up work can go on for years after a first meeting. Every six months Link-Up people meet together for a weekend of talk and relaxation. It is here that some find a new Aboriginal community, a second family, but even people who have formed good relationships with their natural kin-folk are strengthened by companionship with others in similar positions. They seem to be the only ones who really understand how difficult it is to begin living an Aboriginal identity after a lifetime on the other side. For, as all the people who have found their families through Link-Up know, the reunion is the end of one journey but the start of another.

So Dianne's second journey has begun. She now identifies as a *koori,* and has cousins to stay. She has that satisfaction of being able to put a face on a natural parent which only those who are adopted know. Above all she has an answer to those questions which *kooris* ask each other when introduced: 'What's your name?' 'Where are you from?' 'Who are your people?'

Like other adopted Aborigines, Dianne probably will not arrive at the goal which hovers seldom nearer than the far horizon: how to feel completely comfortable and secure within both the immediate and distant family circle. Even if, as is her present plan, she decides to contact her great-aunt, there are months or years of awkwardness, ignorance or anxiety. The loving hearts of the Victorian *kooris* will need to be understanding as well as sympathetic. But it is the returning children who have to change the most. Dianne Westmacott stopped growing as an Aborigine on the day she was adopted. On the day she met her mother she was thirty-seven years younger, as an Aborigine, than her contemporaries who stayed behind in the communities. To find peace as an Aboriginal family member she has to put aside the fears, the attitudes, the memories, the ignorance; probably in modern Australian society there is no journey which requires greater courage of herself nor understanding of others.

Like hundreds of other people who in the last five years have set out in search of a family and an Aboriginal identity, Dianne Westmacott will find that each year will bring her closer to what she has been denied. There will be rewards on the way: flashes of insight, annual visits, people to stay, family secrets, a place in the albums, invitations to weddings and funerals, midnight-to-dawn conversations, unexpected phone calls, *koori* stickers on the kids' suitcases. Unlike the first journey, the second journey never ends. But it is the journey, not the arrival, which matters.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

When I first met Diane Barwick in 1961 she was concerned about the extreme disadvantages under which Aboriginal people lived. Diane committed her life to the righting of those inequities through meticulous scholarship. It is in appreciation of her leadership in this area that I offer this paper on Aboriginal inequality within the juvenile justice system.

The current publicity being given to Aboriginal deaths in custody serves to highlight the wrong and inappropriate detention of Aboriginal people by a justice system that has failed to deal equitably with these people. For a people who make up such a small proportion of Australia’s total population the high rate of deaths in custody, some ninety-seven between 1980 and 1987, serves as a stark reminder of the inability of our justice system to deliver equity to Aboriginal people, especially to young men.

Since most of these young men would not have died if they had not been held in custody, the serious question which must be asked is: why are they being detained in such large numbers? Criminological theory, which followed the exponents of social Darwinism and later the ecological approaches of the Chicago school, led to a firm belief that crime is, to a large degree, the result of poor socio-economic circumstances and squalid living conditions. There is still considerable popular support for the view that crime is largely environmentally determined.

Empirical evidence, however, offers little support for this entrenched and popular view. Enormous inputs of money into Aboriginal health, housing, education and welfare have not reduced the reported crime rate or the disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal youths and young adults being taken into custody. Nor has the introduction and growth of Aboriginal legal aid changed the disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal males committed to gaol or to detention centres.

For some years, and in conjunction with associates Rebecca Bailey-Harris from the Law School and Joy Wundersitz in the Department of Geography at the University of Adelaide, I have been studying the way in which the justice system operates differentially towards Aboriginal youth. We have found no evidence that Aborigines commit more offences than their non-Aboriginal counterparts or that their socio-economic position moulds them towards criminal behaviour. Rather, our research has shown that the whole justice system operates in favour of the mainstream middle-class ‘norm’. Aboriginal people, being primarily

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1 The work was made possible by the co-operation of the South Australian Department for Community Welfare, which gave us access to the computerised records of young offenders.
outside the basic rationale upon which justice is predicated, are severely disadvantaged in all their dealings with agents of the Australian legal system.

Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system in Australia was clearly documented by Eggleston. Her studies showed that in the mid-sixties Aborigines were much more likely to be arrested, refused bail and sentenced to imprisonment than were non-Aborigines. This situation does not seem to have changed in the intervening years. In fact, in spite of huge government expenditure to improve socio-economic conditions in the twenty years since Eggleston first collected her data, it would appear that the situation has deteriorated rather than improved. Although no precise comparison with the Eggleston study is possible, our statistics, taken at a different time, in a different place and with a different population of Aboriginal people, suggest that the position for Aborigines in relation to justice may now be actually less advantageous than it was twenty years ago. This conclusion is confirmed by studies closer to Eggleston’s area. We have searched our very large data base for evidence that Aboriginal youth are more criminally inclined than are non-Aboriginal youth but have found no support for such an hypothesis. Nor have we been able to find the oft-assumed causative links between crime and socio-economic conditions. Indeed our data would suggest that all such popular theories defining social disadvantage as causing criminal behaviour have dubious roots. The popular beliefs, and their overflow into policy making, may arise from people mistaking symptoms for causes and confusing the end result, namely high crime statistics, with actual criminal behaviour. It would appear that the whole issue has been approached from the culturally and socially blinkered point of view of the mainstream middle-class ‘white’ agents of the law. Our studies suggest that Aborigines, rather than being greater criminals than other Australians, are actually greater victims of our justice system. But so persuaded are we as to the equity of a justice system based on British principles that it is easier to impute greater criminal behaviour to Aborigines than it is to examine the possible inequities of our legal system. Thus the cry more regularly heard is for a study of the causes of Aboriginal crime rather than for a study of inequities in our justice system.

Our analysis of the very extensive computer-based records held by the South Australian Department for Community Welfare, dating back to 1972, has shown that Aboriginal youth are massively over-represented in all areas of the juvenile justice system and that this disproportionate position has not improved over time. Aboriginal youth stand out from all other ethnic groups as well as from mainstream Australians in their very high visibility in all criminal statistics.

There are several stages in any criminal justice system. In the juvenile system in South Australia youths are first apprehended by police, at which point a decision is made whether to warn or to charge. If police decide to press charges then young people can be either arrested, that is, taken into custody, or allowed to go home and later issued with a summons. In South Australia each case on which a charge has been laid is referred through a pre-trial process or filtering mechanism known as a screening panel, which decides to refer the youth either to a children’s aid panel, where he or she will be warned and counselled but will not

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2 Eggleston 1976.
3 Gale and Wundersitz 1985.
4 Martin and Newby 1984.
ABORIGINAL YOUTH AND AUSTRALIAN JUSTICE

have any penalty applied or a conviction registered, or to send the youth to court for trial. At the court stage various penalties can be applied, detention being the most serious outcome of a court trial.

At all of these points in the juvenile justice system in South Australia Aboriginal youth appeared to be treated more harshly than any other group.

At the point of initial apprehension by police, Aboriginal youth are 8.6 times more likely to be charged than are other Australian-born youths. The next most likely ethnic group to be charged are youths of Greek descent, and they are apprehended only 1.9 times as often as other Australian-born youths. At the point where police must decide whether to charge by means of an arrest or to issue a summons we find that Aboriginal youth are 25.5 times more likely to be arrested rather than issued with a summons in comparison with other Australian-born youth. Even the disadvantaged position of youths of Greek descent has deteriorated only marginally at this point. Their arrest versus summons rate is 2.4 times greater than other Australian youth.

When we look at the filtering or screening process we find the extreme difference continues. Whilst youths from the Greek community, still the closest in treatment to Aboriginal youths, are directed to court rather than to aid panels almost 2.5 times as often as other Australian youths, Aborigines are being referred to court 22 times more frequently than are other Australian youth.

Not surprisingly, therefore, at the sentencing stage we find that, per capita, Aboriginal youth are even more outrageously over-represented. In fact our figures suggest that Aboriginal youth are 56.5 times more likely to be given detention orders than are other Australian-born youths. At this point of greatest severity in the system the only other group facing disadvantage, namely youths of Greek descent, are over-represented by 5.3 times.

The disadvantaged position of Aboriginal youth is thus evident in all areas of the system but is seen most severely at the point of sentencing. Given the outrageously disproportionate rate at which Aborigines are taken into custody by police and placed in detention by judges and magistrates, is there any reason for the community at large to be surprised that these people feel so hopelessly ill-treated by the system?

These figures are quoted at a state level, combining all apprehensions across the state. But if we break these figures down into regions we find even more disquieting contradictions. Aboriginal youth in the far north of the state are likely to be arrested about 38.5 times more often on a per capita basis than are non-Aboriginal youth. By contrast, Aboriginal youth living on Yorke Peninsula are arrested 148.5 times more often than non-Aborigines in the northern areas, but for Aboriginal residents of Yorke Peninsula the chances of detention are more than 535 times greater than those of their non-Aboriginal neighbours. These figures may be somewhat inflated, given the very small number of appearances available for analysis at the regional level. Nevertheless, it is evident that extreme regional differences do exist, which cannot be explained in terms of variations in Aboriginal behaviour.

Even when we take two country towns seemingly comparable in every way we find enormous differences in the treatment of Aboriginal youth by the whole gamut of the justice system. Similarly, there are considerable variations to be found from one metropolitan area to another. We are therefore faced with the conclusion that the much-vaunted British justice system does not deliver equal justice to Aboriginal people and that the degree of its inequitable delivery disquietingly varies from place to place.

Using the large data base available we tested a number of factors and subjected them to
a considerable degree of statistical analysis. Although we were unable to prove or to disprove that Aboriginal youth commit more serious offences or offend more frequently than do non-Aboriginal youth, we have been able to demonstrate that they are substantially over-represented in every sector of the justice system and that the degree of over-representation varies enormously from one place to another. It does not seem possible to account for the differences purely in terms of Aboriginal behaviour.

Similarly, we have not been able to prove that poor socio-economic conditions cause criminal behaviour. However, we can show that distinct socio-economic disadvantages which Aborigines face do affect how they are processed by the justice system. Two critical social factors were found to have an impact upon whether Aboriginal youths are arrested, whether they are sent to court rather than to an aid panel, and whether they are sentenced to detention. These two variables concern employment status and household structure. No other socio-economic factors were seen to carry much significance. Aborigines who are unemployed are more likely to be arrested and taken into custody than are those who are working. The latter are more likely to be released and later issued with a summons. Similarly, unemployed Aborigines are more likely to be sent to court than to an aid panel and eventually to be sentenced to detention rather than fined.

Given the very high rate of unemployment in all Aboriginal communities, the tendency to treat all unemployed persons differently, whether they be Aboriginal or not, inevitably means that relatively more Aborigines will be given the harsher of the options at each point in the justice system. From the point of view of the agents of the law, this discretionary process appears quite logical. Police, with some justification, argue that a person in employment is less likely to abscond and is easier to issue with a summons than is one who is unemployed. Similarly, the police and social workers who make up the screening panels, which determine whether a youth is sent to court or not, perceive a court appearance as seriously handicapping the future of an employed person but as having less effect on one who is unemployed. A sentence of detention ensures that an employed person will lose that job and this is viewed as a double penalty. It cannot apply to the unemployed. Furthermore, those in employment are more able to pay fines and more likely to obey bond conditions. So these options appear as more practical sentences for employed persons than they do for those who are unemployed.

Whilst we have not been able to prove that unemployment causes crime, in spite of the theoretical and popular views on the issue, we can show that unemployment causes differential treatment by the justice system. Clearly, Aborigines are severely handicapped by this factor.

Aboriginal youth are also disadvantaged in the legal system by their household structures. Nuclear families in the conventional sense are relatively infrequent among Aboriginal people. Aboriginal families tend to live in household aggregations somewhat different from those of the mainstream middle class. Whilst the household formations may have very sound cultural bases and valid economic reasons, they nevertheless disadvantage Aboriginal youths when apprehended by police. Aboriginal youths living in nuclear households were found to be three times less likely to be taken by arrest initially and issued with summons than were those living in more complex households. At the final stage of the justice system it is also

5 Gale and Wundersitz 1982.
clear that household structure plays a part, with significantly more youths from nuclear families being given a fine or a bond in preference to detention in comparison with those residing in other forms of household.

Again from the point of view of the agents of the law these appear to be realistic decisions. Youths living at home with their parents will be much easier for police to find when the time comes to issue a summons, and they are equally seen as more likely to fulfil the conditions of a bond or a fine than are those living in more complex households or persons who appear to move regularly from one household to another.

Thus the more serious of all the possible outcomes which are imposed upon Aboriginal youth at each point of the justice system reflect the needs of the operators of the system rather than the best interests of the individual Aborigines concerned. And it appears to be the structure of the legal system rather than the overt racism displayed by individual agents of the law that most determines the differential and less advantageous treatment given to Aboriginal youth. Looked at in racist terms it appears, at least from the individual agent's point of view, largely unintentional. The extent to which it is consciously discriminatory is decided more on class than racial lines; but Aborigines who are apprehended also happen to be at the bottom of the class ladder.

Aware that Aborigines feel highly discriminated against by police, we set out to test the extent to which conscious racism was operating at the point of arrest. We used a number of statistical tests in attempting to ascertain the extent to which police might determine an arrest or screening panels refer a case to court on racist grounds. Logistic regression analysis was eventually found to be the most suitable form of testing for the large data file. What we found was that the racial identity or ethnicity of a person appears to play a seemingly minor role in the police decision to arrest and only a slightly more significant role in the screening panel's decision to refer offenders to court. In both cases the purely racist factor was quite minimal in comparison with the two other factors already identified, namely unemployment and household structure.

To determine whether actual overt racism was still operating, even after allowing for socio-economic factors, we had a control carefully for other variables. Given the enormous variation from one region to another, we decided to take matched pairs of Aborigines and non-Aborigines residing in the same areas and possessing comparable socio-economic and demographic attributes and offending histories. When matched pairs were tested we still found no cause for concern over racist actions by police or other agents of the law. That is, if we take one hundred Aboriginals and one hundred non-Aborigines from the same areas and match them on all available socio-economic criteria, whilst at the same time controlling for their criminal record, we cannot show that Aborigines were treated differently from non-Aborigines.

However, this matching process was difficult to achieve in any valid statistical manner because so very few 'whites' matched 'blacks'. The main reason for this was not the difficulty of finding non-Aboriginal youth who possessed comparable socio-economic, demographic and residential criteria to Aboriginal youth but that those who did seldom possessed similar criminal records. It would appear that police charge Aborigines differently even from non-Aborigines who are socio-economically similar. We could not determine the reason for this. Why should Aborigines from identical residential areas and comparable socio-economic backgrounds be charged so differently from non-Aborigines? Are those two groups of young people from similar living conditions really committing quite different offences? We could
find no evidence for this in either our household surveys or from the participant observation studies we undertook.

The alternative answer would be to suggest that police are using entirely legal processes to discriminate against Aborigines; that is, police charge Aborigines differently from the way in which they charge non-Aborigines and as a result the remainder of the justice system unintentionally treats them differently also. Once particular charges are laid against Aborigines they are treated according to those charges quite comparably with non-Aborigines from similar socio-economic and residential backgrounds.

This then brings us back to our main finding from the statistical analysis, namely that the structure of the juvenile justice system disadvantages Aboriginal youth, and as a result they can be treated differently in a manner which is entirely legal and 'just'.

Furthermore, we found that many of the welfare measures aimed at assisting Aborigines and other disadvantaged youth may actually operate against their best interests. The juvenile justice system is a highly discretionary system. The police officer on the beat and the social worker on the screening panel have wide discretionary powers. It is the decision of an individual, or at best the decision of two individuals, which determines whether a particular person is arrested and whether he or she is sent to court. In a system like ours, where there is both a high level of discretion and primarily a rehabilitative rather than a punitive goal, then inevitably the decisions taken will operate in favour of those people who best fit society's perceived norms.

With a primarily rehabilitative goal in operation it is entirely logical for a police officer to use his or her discretion to avoid arrest for an employed youth or one living in a 'stable' family situation. Indeed, to arrest such a youth except on the most severe charges would be quite contrary to the rehabilitative goal. It scarcely rehabilitates young people to cause them to lose their jobs or take them away from the support and/or disciplinary action of their parents. The prime and indeed proper function of the juvenile justice system, that of rehabilitation, requires a highly discretionary mechanism which in turn inevitably advantages some youths but disadvantages others; and Aborigines become the most disadvantaged.

There are also a number of areas where active attempts to assist Aborigines through welfare mechanisms appear unintentionally to disadvantage them. Take, for example, one of the functions of solicitors in Aboriginal legal aid services. The advent of legal aid for Aborigines has led to a much greater representation of Aborigines in court than was previously the case; in fact, Aborigines are now represented more often than are non-Aborigines. In the juvenile justice system which we have been studying over three quarters of all Aboriginal cases are represented by a solicitor whereas less than half of the non-Aborigines appearing in court have legal representation. But this has not always been to the advantage of Aboriginal youth. In fact, in seeking the best interests of their Aboriginal clients legal-aid solicitors frequently request adjournments so that social background or other reports can be made available. It is not difficult to lodge such a plea for an Aboriginal client.

In our analysis of juvenile-court proceedings in South Australia we found that approximately one-quarter of all Aboriginal cases were adjourned whereas only one-twentieth of the non-Aboriginal cases were given an adjournment. This means two things: Aboriginal youth experience more delays before their cases are finalised; and in the case of custody adjournments they are held much longer in custody, before being convicted, than are non-Aborigines. This is especially disadvantageous: not only are Aborigines more likely to be given adjournments, but they are also more likely to be held in custody during the adjournment rather
than placed on bail. This is clearly a case of being disadvantaged for 'their own good'. In view of the fact that several of the reported suicides whilst in custody have taken place prior to a final trial or conviction, the differential use of such well-intentioned measures must be seriously questioned. But, as it stands, the whole rehabilitative structure of the juvenile system encourages solicitors to seek adjournment, even if they are custody adjournments. Thus, even before being convicted, Aborigines stand a much higher chance than do non-Aborigines of being held in custody and that, ostensibly, for their own good.

With so many 'just' forces apparently operating against them is it so surprising that Aborigines feel seriously and hopelessly discriminated against? To such an extent that suicide may result?

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A few words of comment on Hermann Klaatsch and his ideas on the evolutionary significance of the Aborigines are invited by Brigitte Stehlik's introduction to her translation of Klaatsch's account of his visit to Melville Island in 1906.¹

In an address to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1907 Klaatsch informed his audience that his objective in investigating the Australian Aborigines was to 'attack the difficult problem of the origin of the Australian blacks, and of their importance in relation to the whole development of mankind'.² In judging their relevance Klaatsch proceeded from a polygenist view of human evolution in which a primitive group of higher Primates — the 'Propithecanthropi' or earlier ape-men — had divided into western and eastern branches at a very early date, each subsequently splitting into races of men and apes. He claimed to see affinities between the gorilla, Neandertal man and Africans, and between the orang, Pithecanthropus, Aurignacians and the populations of Australia, the Pacific, southern Asia and Europe. Believing the Aborigines to be 'coeval' with Australia itself he agreed with his contemporary Otto Schoetensack that a transition from an ape-like fore­runner of man to homo proper had probably occurred in Australia. In the Aborigines he believed he had found preserved 'one of the oldest stages of mankind'.³

Klaatsch did indeed note T.H. Huxley's earlier comments on the resemblances of Australian Aboriginal skulls with those of fossil men recovered from Europe but he ignored Huxley's urgings for caution in assessing the significance of this.⁴ The osteological similarities he alleged existed led Klaatsch to infer that they shared other physical traits such as skin pigmentation. Indeed Klaatsch went further still and thought they were linked culturally and linguistically.

It should be stressed that many of Klaatsch's contemporaries also pursued rather idiosyncratic ideas on human evolution. Numerous physical anthropologists of his time thought that modern man was very ancient and that racial types were relatively stable for even hundreds of thousands of years. Hence, the notion that fossil specimens could be linked to specific living populations could be earnestly proposed. If one assumed, as did Klaatsch, substantial interconnections between biology, culture and even language in human evolution

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¹ Stehlik 1986.
² Klaatsch 1907:577.
³ Klaatsch 1908:160.
⁴ Huxley 1873:93.
then the propensity for tenuous similarities in anatomy, or in elements of culture or technology to be used to support inferences of the existence of a host of unrelated analogous features between certain contemporary peoples and the prehistoric populations of Europe become more understandable.

And so the evolutionary anthropologists of this period examined not only the physiology of 'primitive' peoples but were also interested in their socio-cultural institutions as a source of information on human development. Australian and Tasmanian Aborigines were very prominent in this as they were regarded as among the most primitive and archaic and therefore especially revealing about the primeval state of man. In the several decades to 1920 many writers proposed a great antiquity for the Aborigines and, in fact, for a century the associated idea that they were the surviving representatives of a primitive original human race was a not uncommon component of speculations on their origin.

In Klaatsch's writing the inferring of cultural similarities on the basis of perceived anatomical affinities was particularly blatant. Believing that the Aborigines, as a 'stationary remnant of primitive humanity', were related to the human branch which gave rise to the modern populations of northern and central Europe he unhesitatingly stated that 'the excellent qualities we find in the social life of the Australians today may be transferred to it'. Like so many anthropologists of the time Klaatsch saw in Aboriginal society the underdeveloped antecedents of many institutions and practices of societies at a higher stage of development. For instance, convinced that they had no religion Klaatsch nevertheless saw in their 'child-like ideas' the germ of the process that had led to full religious systems elsewhere.

Even in linguistics Klaatsch believed the Aborigines were of value in revealing the earlier state of man. He claimed to have found a solution to the problem of the origin of the 'Indo Germanic' languages, asserting that Australian Aboriginal dialects contained not only words resembling those in these languages but the remnants of primitive speech.

Klaatsch was responsible for some enduring work as an evolutionary anatomist but many of his ideas on the role of Aborigines in human evolution were somewhat off-beat at the time and appear ludicrous now. It is important, however, to remember that the racial preconceptions of researchers like Klaatsch weakened their ability even to make accurate firsthand descriptive observations. This is illustrated in Klaatsch's instance, for example, by his conclusion that the Aborigines were so primitive as to lack all traces of a marriage system and family structure.

5 Klaatsch 1923:151.

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WANGKAJUNGA WOMEN: STORIES FROM THE DESERT

Audrey Bolger

When Phyllis Kaberry published Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane in 1939 this was a lone contribution to the understanding of the position of women in Aboriginal society for, until then, anthropologists had concentrated almost exclusively upon the role of men. Since then the balance has been redressed somewhat in the publications of other women, both anthropologists and historians, but there is still a need for more research concentrating on women's place in Aboriginal society and particularly on the changes brought about by contact with white Australians. In most cases this contact took place so long ago that it is now only possible to piece together the story of the impact from historical documents. However, in a few cases the contact is very recent and it is still possible for the women themselves to tell us what happened, how their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren have changed as a result of this contact.

In 1982 I spent five months with the Wangkajunga community1 documenting the stories of women who in recent years moved from a traditional life in the desert to residence on pastoral stations. These women now live in a new village, Kurungal, built at Christmas Creek station, which is situated approximately a hundred kilometres south-east of Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. But they are desert women by origin and forty years ago their people were still living in the desert. The older women thus have clear memories of desert life as well as of their move to the fringes of pastoral stations and eventually to Christmas Creek.

The Wangkajunga move out of the desert took place comparatively recently; most adults over the age of thirty-five were born in the vicinity of the Canning Stock Route and older people lived in the desert until well into adult life. It was probably during the years of the Second World War, when the Canning Stock Route was reopened due to fears of a Japanese invasion of the north,2 that many of the present Wangkajunga community had their first contacts with white people and began the movement which eventually brought them to Kurungal. Many older women talk about first seeing white people, bullocks, camels, etc. during this period. Tindale noted that some Wangkajunga people, or south-west hordes of the Kukaja, appeared near Billiluna before 1940 and were known to Capell as Julbre.3 Others, referred to by Tindale as Kukaja of the eastern hordes, appeared from east of the Canning Stock Route in 1953 and some of these people were then taken to Halls Creek in government vehicles.4

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1 This research was made possible by grants from the University of Western Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
3 Capell 1940:425-30.
4 Tindale 1974:43.
Southeast Kimberley and desert region through which Wangkajunga women travelled.
ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1987 11:2

It is not clear exactly why the movement out of the desert took place. Mary Walmajarri people, whose country was farther north than that of the Wangkajungas, were drawn into Billiluna station when it was established in the 1920s, and to Balgo Hills Mission when that was set up a few years later. It is quite possible that normal inter-tribal contacts with their Walmajarri neighbours led some Wangkajunga to Billiluna and Balgo. However, other events probably contributed.

In some cases people became isolated and could not survive in the desert when their economic groups were wiped out by pastoralists and police in retaliation for the spearing of bullocks. In other cases desert Aborigines were deliberately sought out by pastoralists who feared the depredations of 'wild blacks' and tried to encourage them to settle near the stations. Finally, there is some evidence that a period of extreme drought in the 1940s forced many people to move north in search of food and water.

Wangkajunga people arrived at Christmas Creek by a variety of routes. Some followed the tracks of relatives and friends in a north-westerly direction and eventually arrived at Koolena, a sheep station adjoining the southern boundary of Christmas Creek which operated between 1947 and 1953.5 Here they had their first taste of station life, learning fencing, shepherding and the milking of goats. Those who were still there when the station closed in 1953 then moved north to Christmas Creek, where a number of Walmajarri people and a few Wangkajunga had already settled.

Other Wangkajunga travelled up the Canning Stock Route and arrived at Billiluna station or Balgo Mission. From there some drifted on to other stations and made their way through Ruby Plains, Lamboo and Bohemia Downs stations, eventually arriving at Christmas Creek. Others were forcibly transported from Billiluna to the Aboriginal feeding station at Moola Bulla, near Halls Creek, and later made their own way to Christmas Creek when they heard of relatives being there.

Evidence for the arrival of Wangkajunga people at Christmas Creek is contained in the reports of the Department of Native Welfare where the Aboriginal population of Christmas Creek station is shown as having increased from 100 in 1952 to 180 in 1963. Since then most of them have remained in that area, apart from a period in the early 1970s when many of them were expelled from the station following the introduction of the Pastoral Industry Award. However, by 1978 most had returned to Christmas Creek and in 1980 they were granted an excision of 255 hectares of land about a kilometre from the station homestead. Houses were begun the following year and the first eleven were completed at the end of 1981. In early 1982 Wangkajunga people moved from the old camp by the station homestead to Kurungal village and into the first houses in which they had ever lived.

Older women, particularly, have been through immense changes in their lifetimes, moving as they have from a traditional life-style in the desert to camping and working on stations and finally to the new housing complex in which they live today. Although they have now been at Christmas Creek for many years, older women retain vivid memories of their early lives in the desert and constantly talk about returning to their country one day. The following accounts contain the reminiscences of some of these women who were born in the desert and spent their childhood years and much of their early adult life there. The stories tell of traditional life in the desert, travelling with their parents and close relatives, meeting other

5 Bolton 1953:330.
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relatives and people from neighbouring tribes, observing ceremonies. During that time they were also gradually learning their place as women in the society, including the skills necessary for survival in the harsh desert environment.

In addition, there are memories of their earliest contacts with white Australians and of intermittent residence on the fringes of cattle stations or missions before coming to Christmas Creek. From the early contacts they gained some knowledge of the artefacts of white society. Later, as contact became more intense, they learned a little English and a few skills which enabled them to be incorporated into station life to some extent.

The four women whose experiences are documented in this paper were all in their late fifties or early sixties and their stories were told in either Wangkajunga or Walmajarri and translated by one of the young women, Eva Lawford. These women did speak some English but preferred to tell their stories in their own language and were more comfortable and fluent when doing so.

Many of the childhood stories are idyllic. Mary Jarju described life in the desert area west of the Canning Stock Route thus:

Mother and father used to go hunting, with a dog. Big mob of dog we used to have — dingoes. My mother, when she used to go hunting she used to cook the meat out bush and bring it to us when it was cooked. Except for father — he used to bring back raw meat and we used to cook it in the camp. We used to eat and eat and eat. Full up we used to go sleep. We used to live by hunting. Meat used to be there. Every morning we used to eat meat and night-time we used to eat meat.

Next morning we used to go to another waterhole. We used to walk, walk, walk till we used to get to that waterhole. Mother and father used to go hunting again. They used to dig for water. They used to give us drink of water with bark, bark from a tree. I mean coolamon. Until we got big in bush just by eating bush tucker . . . That’s what we used to do — just walk to waterhole to waterhole, and hunting all kinds of bush tucker. Bush potato, goanna, snake, blue tongue, *jarran* [a species of goanna].

Mum used to do the hunting, and Dad, we was small see and it was too far to walk around with them . . . We used to play around at the camp and my sister was in charge of us because she was the biggest in the family. Then we went to another waterhole and we found lots of potatoes, bush potato, everywhere. So we started digging them. All of us was digging for that bush potato . . . Then we went again, walking, walking, and we found *bugarra* [bush seeds] and we was gathering them . . .

Eventually, and, as far as Mary knew, without expecting to, they arrived at Billiluna. Then we saw this lake. The main lake, Blue Lake Paraku. We walk and walk and we came to a house — Billiluna station. One manager was there, Dick Ron. Dick Ron used to manage Billiluna station long time ago, when I was a kid. We lived there in Billiluna with all the other people, stayed there now. Then we went again back to the bush, straight back to Jalyirr.

There were other visits to Billiluna but they were spasmodic. As a young married woman Mary still lived much of the time in the desert and it was some time before she gave up her nomadic life.
Christmas Creek at Chestnut; Wangkajunga women fishing.

Wangkajunga women sharing a catch.
Then my father died. When I was walking away, I saw this people, I met them on Canning Stock Route with the cattle. They told me that my father died then. I was sad, crying. Then I went back, went back to Billiluna, stayed in Billiluna little while, then I went nother way, you know . . .

From there we went to Government Well — that’s right out on Canning Stock Route. Me and my husband we was going from place to place. From there, from Government Well, we went to another rock-hole. We went from there one place called Brengi, me and my husband had dinner there. From that waterhole we went to another place. We was getting near Gordon Downs area but we never go right in because me and my husband we were frightened. Next day they saw us and they brought us to Gordon Downs.

I didn't like it in Gordon Downs, I went to Sturt Creek. We stayed there for a little while. We went back to Billiluna. We bin stop there for a little while, in Billiluna. From there Balgo next stop, We bin go from Billiluna to one spring. We bin have water there and we bin go to this old Balgo, old Balgo Mission. Me and my husband was living there now. We bin live there for a lo-o-o-ng time until Gracie was born . . . When Gracie got big, she went to school, and my husband died.

Now I'm living with Sundown [her present husband] and I'm living here at Kurungal, Christmas Creek — after Balgo. I'm staying here now.

Although children travelled with their families as they moved camp, all the women told about being left with other children or with grandmothers for much of the time while the adults went on long hunting and gathering expeditions. Sometimes this led to near tragedies as Jeannie James, another of the women, explained:

While my mother was out walkabout, we were playing on the sandhills. And she lit the fire far away in the distance . . . We were sitting on the plains, near the grass, and we saw the fire far away . . . Then the fire was getting closer and closer . . . I was trying hard to pull my little sister, Mary Ann, we were both small then . . . Mary Ann was fat, a fat little girl. I was still pulling her away as the fire was getting closer towards us, the fire was getting bigger and coming closer. Our mother came back crying when she saw the fire coming closer — our mother came back from long way and she thought that we were getting burnt. As I was pulling Mary Ann away from the fire, she got burnt — I was small too when I was helping my little sister, Mary Ann. Jimmy Angie [her brother] was there too, he was same size as Anthony [about four years old] . My mother was crying, I started to cry too, she hugged us and was crying with us . . . While we were at the camp some of our relatives had a big argument over Mary Ann.

The Law was a vital part of life for these women during their childhood and they have vivid memories of the ceremonies they observed. Jeannie James, who is now the ‘boss woman’ at Kurungal, described one of the ceremonies which she saw as a child in the desert:

All the men were throwing water. They were throwing the water and the clouds were forming. Lots of people were coming into that place where we were staying and they were doing wiril marnan and kurtal marnan — for water or making rain. Wiril and kurtal are the two birds that bring lots of rain . . . My father and his brothers — that’s three altogether — were rainmakers . . . They were doing wiril and kurtal from the west and they did wiril from the other direction, calling all
the women together, and that was the last dance they did. After that the younger people went out and got darraku [special ceremonial plant food] for the old people and in that way they end the ceremony.

Many of the women's parents and relatives had had little contact with white people but the level of knowledge varied considerably. When Jeannie had her first experience of white people and stations as a small child it was evident that her father already knew a good deal about them:

We stayed in Jalyirr a bit longer and then headed north with our father. We made a camp at Wangkuparongka, the crossing there. Next day my mother and aunty got some goanna and came back to the place where we stayed and cooked it. In the afternoon we headed north and there some people were mustering cattle at Pungkapurtal . . . For the first time we saw a windmill and we were little kids then. We asked our father what that thing was going around and he told us that was a windmill that pumps the water . . .

We went over the sandhill and then we followed the river bed. As I was walking I found two watermelon. I ran then to my father and asked him what these two big things were. My father said 'That's a watermelon, you eat it. Bring the watermelon over here.' We busted it — the watermelon was red — and we ate it . . .

My family and I came to a stock-camp. As we were coming closer some of our relations found us. While we were at the stock-camp they gave us some tucker and meat to eat. When the stock-camp finished we moved on to old station. We stayed at old Malan and one day people had corroboree, especially for us from the south . . . My family and I were new people from bush. We were going with the stockmen and the cooks.

The family still did not settle on a station or mission at that time and for many years Jeannie moved between the stock-camps of the marginal desert stations and the desert proper. Her upbringing and the skills she learnt were almost entirely traditional, and visits to stations, where she was introduced to clothes and to foods such as flour, sugar, tea and beef, remained peripheral to her main childhood and adolescent experiences. In a later story she tells of another bush hazard:

Then one day my sister and I went to get the water, where they were grinding lugarra [seeds] . . . I was a married woman at the time. Our people told us to get water from the place for water called Pilur. As we were coming back there was lots of grass. We were carrying the water with billy cans. We didn't know the snake was coming from the other side. Pilur is a rock-hole . . . The snake that bit me was a rock snake. Some people were coming towards us and Dora's sister-in-law called out, 'My cousin has been bitten by a snake.' Some old people said, 'Snake that bit you, you can't get better from that snake.' Dora's sister-in-law said, 'Aunty, can you see the blood on her? See her leg, that's where the snake bit her.'

When we got back to the camp I put the billy of water next to my mother, then I lay down and went to sleep. I thought I was asleep but I was unconscious from the snakebite. My father was close by, he was a mapan [medicine man]. My father got up and felt me, that I wasn't breathing . . . After I passed out mapan, which is my father, sucked the wound. He sucked it again, until he
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... finished sucking it. That's when I got my breath back again. Then they gave me cold water to drink. And after that I talked like a little child saying baby words - nyanya - because my mouth was paralysed and I couldn't talk properly ...

As the years passed, Jeannie James and her husband, Jimmy James, spent more and more time on the stations and less in the desert. Her daughter, Julia, was born in the vicinity of Bohemia Downs station about 1940. Eventually they came to the Christmas Creek area and began working around the Emmanuel stations, of which Christmas Creek is one. Jimmy worked as a windmill-man and fencer, so most of their time was still spent in bush-camps away from the main station homesteads. Jeannie helped her husband with his work but also continued her own hunting and gathering activities, which provided welcome additions to the rations with which they were now provided.

Along with the rest of the community, Jeannie and Jimmy were twice expelled from Christmas Creek station in the early 1970s and it was only after they returned to the station the last time that they settled down in the old camp next to the station homestead.

A third woman, Violet Jimpirriya, came from Warlpiri country well to the south-east of Wangkajunga country. Her childhood was spent in that area.

My name is Violet Jimpirriya. I lived with my mother, father and my grandmothers, grandfathers and people who were with me and I knew them. We wandered around Mungga area which is south-east of Stanmore Range or Point Moody. We lived on porcupines and bush potato, snakes, goanna, bush flour, and all the other tucker in the bush. We drifted round from place to place and I was young then.

We went north and we found all these bush potatoes - little ones they were growing, and we dig them up and we was cooking them there. We stayed there one place now - my father was there, mother and all the people - and we went hunting for porcupine. We killed a lot and I only cleaned mine half way - I left one side because it was too prickly. Then we cooked it and they are really nice and tasty to eat, with a lot of fat.

This lifestyle continued for many years, during which time Jimpirriya appears to have had no contact with white Australians, nor does she mention hearing stories about them or eating any of their foods. She was still living in the desert after she married and her daughter was born.

Then I climbed up this big sandhill and I left my little daughter sitting under the shade and there I found this bushy-tail rabbit. I killed it and the next morning I found a snake and I killed it. From there we set off again walking and carrying our belongings - our digging sticks and coolamon, water coolamon, and another coolamon with our food and everything. Of course we was walking naked, naked - one we was walking round in the bush. Only with rabbit's fur in front of us and back. All the rest of the body was naked.

Then from there we found these seeds everywhere - black and white and brown grinding seeds. We were busy now collecting them for our food and I told my grandmother to get my little girl, so that us women we can be busy on the seed, collecting them, separating the stone and sand, only putting them clean one on top of the coolamon.

From there we took off again, We bin walk, walk, walk till my grandmother died there - half-way - in one waterhole named Mindarru. She died there and
I was crying for her you know. Crying, and I hit my head. I hit my head with a stone till blood came out, big mob of blood came out.

Soon after this Jimpirriya's family travelled north and had their first contact with white people. It is not clear why they moved away from their own land — Jimpirriya's account gives no indication that there was anything unusual about this — and it could well be that their usual area of land exploitation was simply extended because of an abnormally dry season or similar natural event. However, it seems clear from her account that some of their relatives had already moved north to the stations, and it may be that they were deliberately following their tracks, without realising where they would lead them.

We was walking, all our people same way we was walking. Over the sandhills, just living with bush tucker. We bin walk, walk, walk. We bin look all over and see Balgo Hills. I am from the Warlpiri tribe really and we was coming down to Western Australia. We was nearing, Jalyirr area we was nearing now. We bin have a camp there at Catfish Tank. That place — before that the Kartiya [white people] was shooting all the people there when they was sleeping, before, you know. We got there just maybe after, I think, just after them we got there.

From there we bin find all the Billiluna stockmen. They was mustering cattle and Chumley [a Walmajarri man now living at Pinnacles near Christmas Creek] was there, young man. They had donkeys carrying all the tucker, and camels, and all the piyirm there, all the blackfella, and might be two kartiya were there. They were mustering cattle that side, near Lake Gregory. That was all Billiluna area. Oh, they were frightened of us — all the bushmen, bushmen — where's that people from? They bin look now. They’re Warlpiri people, different people this lot, naked one. They bin look — oh, they bin know me. ‘Oh, Jimpirriya, that young girl, Jimpirriya, that’s her, coming up.’

They gave us clothes, that kartiya gave us shirt and things when we had a rest there. Shirt and trousers and we looked funny wearing them. We just laugh — laughing at one another. They gave us meat for the first time. We never know, we never eating meat. We just used to porcupine and kangaroo, emu, goannas, snakes, possum, rabbit. We used to those kinds of meat but we had never have bullock meat before. So they gave us salt meat and bullock fresh meat. We ate it and we were sick.

The stockmen then persuaded Jimpirriya's family to go back to the station with them. This was in keeping with government policy of the time, which was to bring all Aborigines in to settlements where they could be civilised and controlled.

We stopped there with them long time. From there we bin go with them now:

‘We better go now, we’d better take you mob back to the station.’
‘Oh, we’ll walk.’
‘No, too far, you don’t want to walk. Just think about Mungga area, that’s too far far away in the Warlpiri side. Too far, we’ll take you mob with camel. You have a ride on camel before?’
‘No, we did never ride on camel but ... only all the kids can go, all the children. Us people we can walk.’
‘Well, all the women, we can take them. All the men can walk, O.K.?.

So we agreed to go on the camel. They put us on top, all our gear and everything. All the kartiya gave us a bag for all our bush tucker. There was a bag to
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put all our stuff, *kanti* [yams] and everything, potatoes. So we put them in and we climbed on that camel — all the kid — might be three men on one camel and all the kid then man on another camel. All like that. Four camels. And the other lot were donkeys. They had all the stockmen’s gear. We bin go with the camel now. Slo-o-w walk. Walking, walking, over the sandhill.

We made a camp in one rock-hole . . . They gave us flour now, white man’s tucker. And we said, ‘Oh, ashes, they’re giving us ashes.’ I didn’t know how to make a damper. So the first damper I made, I put a lot of water and I didn’t do it properly, you know, make it a bit hard and soft, how they make damper. I threw it on the fire and my sister [one of the women with the mustering team] asked me, ‘Hey, what’s that you put on the fire, that’s not the way to do it. I’ll show you how to make a damper.’ So she made a damper for me. She fed the other people and me and my little daughter . . .

So we pack up again. We bin walk-i-n-g, walking, slow walk like camel and we bin all laughing you know when that camel was swaying. We came out in the station now. They left us over that side, under one big gum tree. Because we were different people — and they went to camp, Chumley and them, to tell them we were there, all the bush people. All the people came and visited us from camp. They started crying at us. So we all cried at one another. My grandfather was there, who went before me, my stepfather, stepmother, they went before me, first time.

So we went to the camp and this Billiluna manager asked them to bring us up to the station next morning to give us clothes. So we was living there now in Billiluna. And I started to learn their language, Ngarti. Because when I came from Warlpiri area I was speaking Warlpiri and Ngaripi — two language. But when I came down here to Western Australia I spoke Ngarti, Wangkajunga, Kukaja, that’s all I spoke.

I stopped in Billiluna. So we started this, we started walkabout, going walkabout from the station, and coming back to the station. From there we bin get a boy, my granny [grandson], Wilfred Steven from Christmas Creek. They sent him to pick us up, to invite us to the dance. So we all cried, we cried at him — then we sent him to Gordon Downs and he pick up all the people from Gordon Downs. They bin meet us and we bin pack all our camels. We was off to Christmas Creek. Walking night and day, same time hunting. We didn’t starve. We had a lot of food and we knew the waterhole, the country, the people knew. They showed us people where the waterhole was . . .

Close up now, closer, we bin look. ‘Oh, hill there, hill, Bohemia Downs boundary.’ We crossed that river again, Bohemia Downs river, and come out near the station, bit further up. We made a camp there, ‘Oh, we better light a fire to tell them people that we are here.’ So we light a fire — sign — give them sign that we there near their country, you know. So we keep going, walk-i-n-g, walk walk, walk, walk. We came out at Krakijarti, not far from this hill over here. That little creek there. We got painted there, painted ourselves *woneiga* [sacred] style — red paint. So that afternoon we would come in.

We saw all the people over there, at Christmas Creek you know. We bin coming in where these State Houses is now, and where that tank is, right there.
Christmas Creek; Wangkajunga women making bush damper.
All the people was there on the hilltop. We bin come in dancing, dancing, dancing. We took Wilfred in, gave him to his mother and all his relations at Christmas Creek and they started crying.

And they tell them, ‘Oh, some people there Warlpiri people.’ So they visited us, looked at us. ‘Oh, we know you, Jimpirriya, yes. You coming up from Warlpiri, Kakarung you come out, come up from that way. Yes, well, what you going to do now?’ ‘I got to stop here at Christmas Creek now.’

So I’m here now. I bin come from my country. Followed my grandfather, with my granny, but my granny died halfway. And I’m right here. I came young woman and I’m getting old here. So I’m going to live here for ever, at Christmas Creek. That is the end of my story.

The fourth woman in this generation, Nellie Janpi, was a Wangkajunga woman belonging to a descent group identifying with the area east of the Canning Stock Route in the region of Tobin Lake. She gave a graphic account of her first contact with white people and of the years when she and her family were introduced to station life.

Me and my family, my husband and the rest of the people, we were living right at the end of the Canning Stock Route. In one waterhole named No.1 Well, deep well. We were living there hunting food, specially nuts and thing, goanna, and rabbits and all the bush tucker. We were living like that. Then one day we saw a dust coming. We looked, ‘Hey, there’s something coming up!’ Black, it was, all black. We didn’t know that it was all the men from Billiluna station with Wally Dowling in charge. He was the head stockman who used to take cattle from Billiluna across the Canning Stock Route, to Kalgoorlie I think. And we looked at them and we tried to run away. We ran away and hid ourselves, right, but some of the men they started to speak in our language, Kukaja. Because we knew a little bit of Kukaja. They started talking to us now. ‘We countrymen. We taking this bullock, pass them over to other lot. Men they waiting over that side there.’ So we talked to them and we said, ‘Yea, okay then, we’ll wait here for you mob.’

Then they took the bullock, and brought out other bullock. So we went with them from No.1 Well. We made a camp there and keep going. Every well we was camping. Men were riding with the horses and us people was walking. We had no children. We walking, was walking with them, when the men was droving cattle across the Canning Stock Route. And Elsie Thomas was a little girl then, and my brother, July Mananta — walking, walking, walking. Same time hunting. And sometimes the men used to give us food. But we didn’t know nothing about tea-leaf and sugar, and flour or tin stuff. We didn’t know nothing.

Walking, walking, walking, walking, walking slowly. When the men used to stop to give the cattle a rest we used to stop. Have a rest too. Sandhill over sandhill, just sand. No trees — little bit of trees — mulga trees. Walking. We came to one well called Government Well. We made a camp there. Slow walk the next morning. Cattle was slow. And we were slow and we went hunting at the same time. We knew the waterhole. Hunting for food, kangaroo. My husband, Bluey Thomas, he used to be a good hunter before. Slowly, the cattle were moving. Slowly, we was walking. And g-o-o-o other side Tangku, straight across to Billiluna station, took the cattle. We was nearing Billiluna and we made a camp at
Paraku. That's the main lake. They call it Blue Lake sometime, all the people, when they come from there. But Paraku is the blackfella name. We made a camp there, with the cattle. Made a camp and the next morning we went round it hunting as usual. Hunting for food. There's a lot of tucker there, bush tucker. Like bush nuts, potatoes, *jerilkwaja* [little potatoes], bush onion, and bush flour, *hagarra*. We were getting them, filling up our bags or coolamon.

Then they looked at us now, all the Billiluna people. 'Oh, they got some bush people too.' Strangers, they didn't know us. So we stayed there with them. Then we went to Balgo — some of us, all of us, I know, those who came from Canning Stock Route. We bin go Balgo. We lived there for quite a while, when that mission wasn't built. They only had stone houses, antbed houses. Not right up the top where the new Balgo is but the old Balgo.

Then we didn't like it there so we went back walking, walking over that land, over the desert. We didn't have any kids, only some other people had kids. Walking and hunting, looking for water, staying in one waterhole for one night until we got to Bohemia Downs, the new one. We stayed there one night, near the river. From there we went to Tangku, Tangku Spring. There used to be a station there, Koolena. Koolena station and Sam Thomas was the boss there. He had sheep and we was working for him. That's where my son, Mickey Thomas, was born. We lived in Tangku Spring in Koolena station. We lived there all our lives with Sam Thomas. We used to work for him, learning how to keep house clean, men used to learn how to build yards, muster the sheep or take them from one waterhole to another, looking after them. Some men used to go round with Sam to build yards. He used to have an old truck there. And he used to come in to Christmas Creek to get his mail. And we used to go for walkabout to the spring, Tangku Spring, from the station. We used to go there walkabout or for holiday.

Then one day some other people, other bush people, they speared a bullock for Sam and Sam was mad at us too. So he rang the police, he sent a message to the policeman, over the wireless. And when that policeman came, we ran away. We used to run to Tangku Spring and jump in that water, go right underneath, swim and come up the other side in dry land. Inside in dry land. Come out the other side in dry land. That's why the policeman didn't catch us, till after they had other men with them, blacktrackers. So they caught us, took us to the courthouse, to Fitzroy. We didn't know nothing about court. So they let us women and children stay in Christmas Creek and they kept the men in gaol for three days from spearing that bullock.

So now I'm living here in Christmas Creek. When I was bushman we never have no clothes, but when we came here to Christmas Creek, all the people who were living here before us, they came from the bush too but they had clothes on and they showed us how to wear clothes when Victor Jones was manager here.

Long time ago. That is the end of my story.

Although all these women have had to change their life-styles to fit their new circumstances, they have never completely adapted. A few years ago there was no choice but to work at the station, but now all are receiving pensions, either in their own right or as the wives of pensioners, and none have chosen to continue station work. Instead they are happy to spend much of their time in the traditional hunting and gathering pursuits they
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learned in their childhood, sometimes taking along grandchildren to teach them some of their skills.

In addition, they are all important Law women and have contributed to the revival of women’s Law which has taken place in the Kimberleys in recent years. In this respect they have responsibilities to teach younger women and also spend much of their time travelling to meetings and ceremonies in other communities. Their lives continue to be as full and satisfying as in those earlier days they recall so vividly.

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Wangkajunga women collecting sugarbag.
It is generally supposed that Aborigines have been fighting a losing battle against invasion for the last 150 years in South Australia. They have succumbed to disease, violence (including wholesale slaughter in massacres), alienation of land, denigration of their culture or way of life, and alcoholism. On the whole they are viewed as passive victims, fringe-dwellers, at the bottom of the socio-economic heap. It is acknowledged that a few Aboriginal people in remote areas of the north and west of the state have survived on lands which in the past have been of marginal interest to agriculturalists or pastoralists. These Aborigines have not intermarried with non-Aborigines, have retained their own languages, cultural and religious life and social systems. While this view of Aboriginal history does reflect the Aboriginal past, it does not acknowledge the positive role Aboriginal people have played in maintaining themselves and their identity as Aborigines in these adverse conditions.

In fact Aborigines in South Australia have survived on a much larger scale than is generally acknowledged and it is the people in the southern part of the state who have survived against the greatest odds. Many survived on missions or government stations, yet others survived independently of such institutional structures. For instance the Adnyamathanha in the Flinders Ranges maintained a vibrant cultural life while being employed in the pastoral industry; they did not move on to a mission until 1930. Others in the southeastern part of the state maintained themselves on small farms and seasonal employment, retaining an independent existence from Point McLeay, a large mission at Lake Alexandria.

These are people who have survived to the present as identifiable groups of Aboriginal people, although they in turn are often amalgams of peoples who could not survive independently. There were others who survived for years or even decades in extremely adverse conditions, but who may no longer be identified with the same communities existing at an earlier period. This phenomenon has been recognised by historians of American and Canadian Indian history who have been revising the history of early contact between Indians and Europeans in the realisation that the survival of present day Indians does not necessarily reveal the most successful survivors of the early years of contact.¹

Similar revisions need to be undertaken for Aboriginal history as well. For instance in South Australia there are few known descendents of the Aboriginal people who originally lived on the lower Eyre Peninsula while those who can trace their ancestry to this area are widely dispersed and do not necessarily identify with the area. Yet when Europeans first established a settlement at Port Lincoln, the hostility of the Aborigines nearly drove them

¹ See, for example, Trigger 1976.
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away. This Aboriginal resistance was maintained spasmodically for fifteen years after settle­
ment. Aboriginal 'outrages' are remembered by the local European community, but there is
no direct Aboriginal memory as the people later died or dispersed.

This paper will take up some themes raised by Diane Barwick in her Ph.D. thesis, 'A little
more than kin: regional affiliation and group identity among Aboriginal migrants in Mel‐
bourne'. It will investigate the survival of one group of Aboriginal people who, perhaps in
past, would not have been deemed to have survived because they maintained their identity
as an Aboriginal community without retaining a 'traditional' culture, language or religion.2

Barwick postulated that Aboriginal identity can exist independently of these factors and
showed how strong regional affiliations were maintained in Victoria despite the loss of pre-
European cultural ties and knowledge.3 The people under consideration here established a
community on an Anglican mission, Poonindie, which was set up 15 kilometres north of
Port Lincoln in 1850. I argue that, although Poonindie people came from many different
localities and most of the early recruits died, they laid the foundations enabling the establish­
ment of a new, strong, Aboriginal communal identity. Although the mission was closed in
1894, there are many southern South Australian Aboriginal families who trace their descent
to Poonindie.

Another theme touched on by Barwick which is elaborated here is that Aboriginal people
have not always been passive recipients of external actions and decisions, but have made
choices about their own lives.4 The options facing them have not always been wide, but they
have been there. I shall show that the early recruits for Poonindie went there by choice and
left if they did not like it and, that throughout its history, people could always leave if they
chose. They were not imprisoned on the mission. The move to Poonindie and the mainte­
nance of the community were important in Aboriginal survival.

The written sources for a history of Poonindie are voluminous, but come from the autho‐
rities; very few were generated by Aboriginal people and even these were directed towards
the authorities and therefore did not necessarily represent Aboriginal private views. After
ninety-five years, oral history can add little or nothing to the story of the mission. I have,
therefore relied heavily on biographical data of Aboriginal residents to build up a picture of
life at Poonindie. Biographies of a few individuals might be misleading, as it could be argued
that those for whom there is extensive data were exceptional in some way, either because
they were noticed by the authorities as being particularly co-operative and dependable or
alternately because they were troublesome and needed disciplining.5 Both types are cer­
tainly well represented in the Poonindie data. However, by extending the accumulation of
biographical information to more than 250 people, although much of it is scanty — for in­
estance, a name and date of marriage or death — enough information can be accumulated to
delineate certain trends in behaviour, movement patterns, and levels of skills. This informa­
tion can, for some periods, be corroborated by statistical data.

2 Barwick 1963.
3 Barwick 1963:66.
4 For example, Barwick 1963:321.
5 Barwick and Stanner might disagree with this statement as they advocate that 'an examination of the
folk history of Aboriginal communities and the lives of influential individuals is essential for an ade­
quate understanding of policy implementation.' Barwick 1985:185.
Map showing location of Poonindie Native Training Institution on Eyre Peninsula, South Australia.

Poonindie in the mid-1960s. St Matthews Church, still standing, was built from stone and bricks fired on the site by Poonindie people in 1854.

Photo: South Australian Public Record Office.
The methodology of collective biography, developed out of necessity for this study, has antecedents in the work of American and British historians, in both political and social history, since the early twentieth century. More importantly for this study collective biography is possibly the way of the future for Aboriginal history. Traditionally Aboriginal interests and concerns have been very localised. Their economic system required that they remain in small, family based food gathering groups and even when they came together in larger gatherings for ceremonies or exchange, these groups of perhaps a few hundred did not compare in size with the large social units of the western world of the nineteenth century. This is not to suggest that they did not have contacts with people far afield. It is well documented that trade routes extended across the continent but direct social contacts did not extend such distances. Since the European invasion Aborigines’ primary affiliations and concerns have remained at the local level despite attempts to politicise them through pan-Aboriginal movements. Aboriginal people tend to be suspicious of those who have ‘gone to Canberra’ or moved away from the local community into the wider world. Aboriginal interest is still focused at the family, local and community level. It is likely that in future Aboriginal historians will move on from the biographical or autobiographical account to write collective biography, some have already done so.

Poonindie Native Training Institution was an Anglican mission which survived for 45 years to the mid 1890s. Archdeacon Mathew Hale, the future Bishop of Perth and Brisbane, established the mission fourteen years after Europeans came to South Australia.

Hale wanted to try an experiment by isolating his prospective Aboriginal charges from the influence of their own people and from the corrupting influence of many of the settlers in Adelaide. His original choice of location was Boston Island off the coast from Port Lincoln, but he had to abandon this plan because of lack of water on the island.

Hale planned to recruit his people from an Aboriginal school in Adelaide where they had already been exposed to western education, could read and write and were on the path to becoming Christians. He had observed that Aboriginal children sent to the school progressed well at their lessons, but their training stopped when they left school. They either returned to their people in the bush, or, after being employed briefly, strayed aimlessly around Adelaide with no role in either Aboriginal or settler society. Hale planned to continue their training by teaching them, in a protected environment, skills by which they would be able to maintain themselves.

Three years after the establishment of Poonindie Hale’s recruitment policy was forcibly altered. The Adelaide school had closed so he had to accept local Port Lincoln people, making isolation from the local Aboriginal population difficult, while the government insisted he accept any people of mixed descent the Protector of Aborigines sent him. This recruitment policy continued with minor modifications until Poonindie was closed in 1894.

Hale left Poonindie in 1856 to become the first Bishop of Perth. A Trust was then established of three members including the Bishop and a government appointee. This Trust was responsible for running the mission and appointing its staff. It hired a series of superintendents and farm overseers all of whom lacked Hale’s breadth of vision. Increasingly over the
years they became less interested in the welfare of the Aborigines and more concerned about the mission as an end in itself.

While the administrators' views of the function and purpose of Poonindie changed over the years, the mission continued to be a vital base for Aboriginal survival and the maintenance of an Aboriginal identity.

Despite a death rate so high that most of the first generation of recruits did not survive more than ten years at the mission, the people established the basis for a very stable, skilled, self-respecting community. Available biographical data suggest that the perceived advantages of Poonindie outweighed the high morbidity and mortality rates. In the second decade the survival rate greatly improved and a generation grew up most of whom either had been born there or had come as children. They developed a strong affinity for the place. As a result threats of temporary or permanent dismissal were the principal instruments of discipline. People who were dismissed stayed in the district and returned when the bans were lifted.

Many indications in the biographical data suggest that most people stayed not because of force or necessity. Many could have left to work as labourers or moved to other missions, but most chose to stay despite the strictly regimented lifestyle imposed upon them.

I shall use a few of the biographies I have collected to illustrate the importance of this kind of data in reconstructing the history of the Poonindie people.

There is virtually no information on the Aboriginal cultural background and lifestyle of the first generation of people who went to the mission. Hale, unlike the German missionaries of the period, saw no value in recording details of traditional Aboriginal life. There is acknowledgment in the records that old values, beliefs and allegiances survived the move to Poonindie. There are a few indications that the first recruits did not instantly modify their behaviour to suit western expectations. But on the whole this line of enquiry did not prove fruitful. On the other hand, the collected biographies can be used to show that, with all its rigours, life at Poonindie was valued because it offered new skills, nourishing meals and protection from European harassment and exploitation.

Initially Poonindie was a death trap with a high mortality rate from disease, especially pulmonary complaints. Between 1850 and 1856 twenty-nine of the 110 people who went to Poonindie died (all young adults). In the following five years fifty per cent of the residents died. Yet there was no mass exodus from the place (other than to the cemetery). It is conceivable the chances of survival were equally poor in other areas. However, a later missionary superintendent failed in a concerted attempt in 1869 to attract people from the upper Murray River area, from which many of the first recruits had been drawn, because of Poonindie's reputation as a place of death. This suggests that the mortality rate deterred newcomers but was not enough to offset the advantages of the mission perceived by those who lived there.

The following three biographical sketches illustrate the options facing Poonindie people in the early years.

Kandwillan was one of several young people brought to Poonindie by Archdeacon Hale from the Adelaide Aboriginal school on Kintore Avenue before its closure in 1853. He had been a good student and could read and write well. He and his wife-to-be, Tandatko, who

9 South Australian Parliamentary Papers, no. 193, 1856:5.
was also a successful pupil at the school, were among the first eleven recruits sent to Poonindie in 1850. They were married by Hale in 1851. Kandwillan worked hard, was intelligent and quick to pick up new skills. He was one of three who learnt to play the flute. He and Tandatko were baptised by Bishop Short when he visited Poonindie in 1853. In the same year Hale sent Kandwillan to Adelaide to have his portrait painted by Crossland, a well established artist of the time. This was one of a number of trips Kandwillan made to Adelaide. On any one of these he could have chosen not to return, but each time he was anxious to leave Adelaide and go back to his home at Poonindie.

In 1852 Kandwillan committed such a serious (unspecified) misdemeanour that Hale dismissed him. This upset the whole mission including Hale, so a day later Hale relented and allowed him back. After Tandatko died in December 1856, Kandwillan remarried but his second wife died less than two years later in 1858. He died on 7 May 1860 probably only in his late twenties. Kandwillan, like the other men on the mission engaged in a variety of tasks on the farm, including ploughing, shepherding and clearing land. He helped with prayers and church services in Hale's absence. Such was his devotion to Poonindie that he remained voluntarily at the mission despite the humiliation of temporary dismissal, the death of both wives as well as many of his friends.

The second example, Mempong, provides the only fully documented case of a person who ran away from Poonindie. She originally came from the Murray River and went to Poonindie in the winter of 1851. A few months later she married Keure who treated her roughly on a number of occasions. Keure and Mempong moved to Adelaide where he died of consumption and two days later Mempong disappeared. The authorities claimed she had been kidnapped by a former lover and threatened the Murray River Aborigines who camped on the Adelaide parklands with expulsion if they did not find and return her. They said she had gone back to the Murray, so a search was instituted and she was found at Moorundie by the Sub Protector of Aborigines who sent her down to Adelaide. When she learnt she was to be returned to Poonindie she became distraught, claiming she would die if this happened. She was allowed to stay at Moorundie, an indication that people were encouraged, but not physically forced, to go to Poonindie. Hale believed that if people were forced to go against their will they would pine away and die. The express purpose of Poonindie was to save Aborigines so they could become 'civilised' and Christianised, not to incarcerate them and kill them.

Monaitya, the third case, was another graduate of the Adelaide school, having been there for five years, but the move to Poonindie seems to have unsettled him. Hale's attempts to find him a wife failed. First he suggested Maria, who had been a servant at Government House, but had taken to drink and loose living before she left the mission. Next Hale tried to match him with Puiscumba, who had been abandoned by a European shepherd. Monaitya refused to co-operate with Hale's marital plans; there were complaints that his behaviour was disruptive and he was dismissed in April 1851. He returned to Adelaide and subsequently to his people in the bush.

12 Hale's Diary, 20-21 August 1852, PRG 275.
13 Moorhouse to Hale, 2 November 1953, PRG 275 130/199.
14 Moorhouse to Hale, 2 June 1854, PRG 275 130/203.
15 Hale's Diary, 18 April 1851, PRG 275.
From such biographical material we glimpse the human realities of early Poonindie. People were not herded onto the station against their will. Although many must have been frightened by the high mortality rate, few ran away. The discipline imposed by missionaries led to the dismissal or voluntary withdrawal of people like Monaitya. But most followed the examples of Kandwillan and Tandatko and helped to establish the basis of an extremely successful farming enterprise which survived for 45 years. Many were converted to Christianity, some with such enthusiasm that they proselytised amongst their own people. They formed a community working together for a common end. The great tragedy of these early, idealistic times was that very few survived them. The people who established Poonindie as a viable community did not live to appreciate the results of their co-operative work.

In 1853 the terms on which the government funded the mission were changed. Henceforward the mission was required to accept any Aboriginal people of mixed descent who might be sent there by the Protector of Aborigines. In 1860 all government monetary support was withdrawn but the conditions remained. As a result an increasing number of people, particularly children, of mixed descent arrived at Poonindie. There was also an influx of people from Western Australia sent by Mathew Hale who had left Poonindie in 1856 to become Bishop of Perth. His concern for Aborigines continued in the west. He took an interest in an Aboriginal school in Albany run by a Mrs Camfield and arranged for a number of its graduates to go to Poonindie. They were a mixed blessing. Among the most highly educated of the Poonindie people (a number taught in the school) they also included several men who did not conform to institutionalised life. These were either dismissed because of their disruptive behaviour or left of their own volition.

The 1860s and 1870s were a period of consolidation for the mission. The mortality and morbidity rates dropped while the birthrate increased. The mission became self-supporting and the men became highly skilled in farmwork and in western sports. In this period Poonindie produced the top shearers and ploughmen of the district as well as excellent cricketers and athletes. The men were in demand as shearers on surrounding properties and many would leave Poonindie during the shearing season to work on properties where they could earn higher wages. Men who earned ten shillings per week for skilled work such as shearing at Poonindie could earn fifteen or even twenty shillings elsewhere. But there were compensations in living at Poonindie: free housing, rations and medical attention, as well as free schooling for themselves and their children. Few families left the mission permanently in search of higher wages. They stayed with their own, self-supporting community.

Most of the biographical information on individuals available for this and later periods concerns men. The only period in which women are mentioned frequently was between 1876 and 1878, when there was no superintendent at Poonindie and a matron was put in charge of the women and children. Nevertheless it is clear from the records that while the women were as highly educated as the men, they were not given opportunities to develop or use their skills. One of the women from Western Australia taught at the school for several years before marrying but women generally were occupied with domestic duties and sewing. The women could earn some money cleaning communal areas, cooking and sewing for the orphan children, or working as servants for the staff. Mrs Randall, the short-lived matron, clashed with a number of the women, temporarily dismissing them when they refused to

16 Despatch from the Governor of South Australia 7 May 1852 in Somerville Collection vol. 1:3.
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comply with her often petty and dictatorial directions. This appears to have been the only period when women were dismissed for reasons other than ‘immorality’, i.e. adultery.

Most of the overseers’ and superintendents’ reports were concerned with the behaviour and productivity of the men who were the heads of households and whose work on the farm was seen as maintaining the mission. They undertook the full range of farm activities. They did the ploughing, sowing, harvesting, clearing land (although non-mission Aborigines who moved through the district were often employed to do this unskilled work), shearing, boundary riding, and droving sheep to winter pastures north of Poonindie and shepherding sheep there (the last tasks unsupervised). They also did maintenance work on the mission such as thatching, painting and carpentry. The mission always employed a European cook/butcher and Poonindie men were never trained in blacksmithing or mechanical repairs, so machinery was sent to Port Lincoln for repair. Some of the men were skilled at handling oxen and horses including breaking in horses.

Two of the men from Western Australia taught in the school. Some of the most committed and literate Christians helped with church services in the absence of the missionary. One of the men became a lay preacher and evangelist. The men and their families were reasonably mobile. Poonindie was their home base, but they left frequently in search of casual employment elsewhere or to visit Adelaide, or the missions at Point McLeay and Point Pearce. They also could be forced to leave when temporarily dismissed for a misdemeanour.

The following biography describes the fortunes of the Limberrys. Daniel Limberry is mentioned in many reports because he was on the whole a productive member of the community, while his wife, Mary’s domestic duties go unmentioned. She is only noticed when she is branded by the matron, Randall, as disruptive and immoral.

Daniel Limberry came originally from the Murray River and arrived at Poonindie in the 1860s. In 1869 he accompanied Superintendent Holden on a recruitment drive along the Murray from Wentworth in New South Wales to Blanchetown in South Australia. The respect Limberry commanded among the people they met impressed Holden. In November of 1869 he married Mary, formerly known as Agnes Hooper, who had apparently had an unhappy childhood while being raised by a European woman. She first married in her early teens and subsequently attended school at Point McLeay mission for a year. There she lived for a time with Jack Hooper before deserting him and moving to Poonindie where she was baptized just before her marriage to Limberry.

While Holden remained superindent the Limberrys were well treated and trusted. Daniel worked without supervision as the boundary rider. After Holden’s departure, the supervising matron accused Mary of theft, stopped her rations and harassed her children forcing them to lie about their mother’s activities. Mary left her family to escape her persecutor. Later the same year Daniel was dismissed for refusing to reveal who had supplied him with alcohol. After six months he was re-admitted, but not his wife. Later he took charge of droving sheep to Poonindie’s outstation at Moonabie to the north. In subsequent years the Limberrys were sometimes on and sometimes off the mission. Their marriage seems to have been shaky as

17 Holden to Hawkes, 16 August 1869, SRG 94 1060.
18 Taplin to Holden, 13 June 1877, SRG 94 1061.
19 Holden to Hawkes, 8 November 1869, SRG 95 1064.
20 Blackmore to Hawkes, 6 November 1877, SRG 94 1061.
both had extramarital affairs. They finally left Poonindie in the mid 1880s. Daniel spent some time with the Salvation Army and then seems to have found a good living, independent of institutions, working on pastoral properties.\(^{21}\)

The Limberrys, particularly Mary, found the restraints and morality of mission life too constricting, yet it was many years before they made a permanent break with the mission. In their absences they left their children at Poonindie, stayed in the district and in close contact with their friends at the mission. This pattern of moving on and off was similar to many other Poonindie families.

The final phase of the Poonindie mission was dominated by an authoritarian superintendent, J.D. Bruce, who penalised those who stood up for their rights and whom he viewed as a threat to his authority. There were also increasing pressures from the local Port Lincoln community to have the Poonindie lands resumed by the Crown and subdivided as working men's blocks. Poonindie was such a successful farming enterprise — it produced the best wheat and wool in western South Australia — that the locals considered that it must, therefore, include the most fertile and productive land in the district. They believed firstly that the land was too good for Aborigines and secondly if Aborigines could do so well on the land, others could do better. By 1895 the mission had closed and most of the land was subdivided and sold as a result of the political pressure of the local community and the loss of missionary commitment of the Anglican Church, and more particularly the role of three Trustees responsible for the mission who negotiated its closure.

The biographies of two families of brothers (the Adams and the Solomons) who came to Poonindie as children in the first ten years of its operation and stayed closely associated with the mission illustrate well how different people with strong commitments to the community fared under different administrations and how overseer, later superintendent, Bruce's influence determined the course of the lives of Poonindie people and their descendants long after the mission closed.

The Adams brothers, Tom and Tim, were brought to Poonindie in 1855 by their white father on the death of their Aboriginal mother. The parents, Thomas senior and Kudnarto were the first European man and Aboriginal woman to be legally married in South Australia.\(^{22}\) While Kudnarto was alive the family had a licence to farm a section of Aboriginal reserve near Clare. On her death the licence lapsed and Thomas Adams, an unskilled labourer, was unable to support his sons so he took them to Poonindie.

The brothers did well at school and became skilled farm hands. Tom the elder was the top shearer in the district for many years. As well he learnt to thatch and do maintenance work around the mission. He assisted with prayers and church services in the absence of the superintendent. His younger brother, Tim, was also very competent, particularly as a shearer. In the late 1860s and 1870s Tom was probably the most highly regarded Aborigine at Poonindie. He worked so effectively and efficiently that he was paid at a higher rate than any other Aboriginal man at the mission. Nevertheless he rightly resented the fact that non-Aboriginal labour employed at Poonindie was paid at an even higher rate. Both the Adams frequently left Poonindie to find more highly paid work on other stations, particularly at shearing time. They were in high demand as shearsers. Tom was also a good sportsman, he

\(^{21}\) Hawkes to Hale, 18 March 1895, PRG 275 130/206.

\(^{22}\) South Australian, 28 January 1848.
was an excellent cricketer (Poonindie had its own cricket team) and athlete.

Tom Adams married Louisa Milera, the widow of Frederick Milera, one of the earliest Poonindie residents. Tom and Louisa had nine children, seven born at Poonindie. Tim married four times. His first two wives died at Poonindie. He had four children by his second wife. The Adams family made many attempts to regain access to the land they had lost when Kudnarto died, but without success. By the 1870s Tom Adams had shifted his attempts to the Poonindie district to get the land he really identified with, because it was where he had grown up, but with equal lack of success.

In 1882 the fortunes of the Adams brothers changed at Poonindie. J.D. Bruce, who had been the overseer since 1878 was promoted to superintendent. He did not like either of the Adams. He resented Tom's privileged position at the mission and took away his privileges and, in the process, Tom's commitment to his work. Tom did not see why, after having worked so hard to build up Poonindie he should be pushed aside and not receive any recognition for his work. He took to drinking, had domestic problems and finally left Poonindie in 1887 to settle at another mission, Point Pearce, on Yorke Peninsula.

Tim seems to have become restless after his second wife's death, and although he married again, he left his children at Poonindie for long periods of time while he moved around. When he was at Poonindie he also clashed with Bruce. Bruce believed the Adams initiated any acts of insubordination at the mission. Tim moved to Point Pearce, probably about the same time as his brother.

Tom was not particularly happy at Point Pearce and continued his attempts to gain land near Poonindie. His last attempt was in 1907, twenty years after he left the mission. This time he was successful, but ironically his wife and children were settled at Point Pearce by this time and did not want to move. The descendants of the Adams family stayed at Point Pearce.

The Solomon brothers, George, John and Emanuel, like the Adams, were the product of a marriage between a white man, George, and an Aboriginal woman, Rathoola. The family obtained a licence to farm a section of land near Rapid Bay on Fleurieu Peninsula. Rathoola died in 1858 and the family therefore lost access to their land. George senior sent his oldest son, George, to Poonindie, the second son, John, to a friend in Enfield and kept the two youngest children himself. In 1860 or 1861 he sent John to Poonindie and in 1870 his third son, Emanuel. George was blind and sick and died in 1878 when he was twenty-eight years old. John and Emanuel survived.

Like the Adams brothers, the Solomons were highly regarded at Poonindie. John married Louisa Connelly, one of the girls who had come from Western Australia. They were a hard working couple. Mrs Holden, the superintendent's wife depended on Louisa's help with domestic work. They left Poonindie briefly in 1874 because John was dissatisfied with his wages, but soon returned as Louisa missed her West Australian friends. John won many local ploughing contests and in 1883 entered himself in the Australian championships at

23 Protector of Aborigines Letterbook vol. 3, 7 February 1867, GRG 52/7.
25 Moorhouse to Colonial Secretary, 13 January 1851, GRG 52/7.
26 Holden to Hawkes, 20 June 1974, SRG 94 1062.
Ballarat. He was also a good horseman and obtained work breaking in horses. The couple had no children.

Emanuel Solomon married Jessie Milera (a daughter of Louisa Adams' first marriage) who died of tuberculosis in 1881. With this second wife, Amelia, he had four children. The Solomon brothers, like many others at Poonindie frequently left the mission to work on neighbouring properties. In 1878 John worked for an overseer, who had been sacked from Poonindie, at double the wage he could earn at the mission. But despite long absences he always returned to Poonindie.

The major divergence in the fortunes of the Adams and the Solomons occurred as a result of Bruce's appointment as superintendent in 1882. He especially liked and favoured the Solomons. When the mission was closed and the land subdivided, Emanuel Solomon was the only Poonindie Aborigine to be allocated land, though many others applied. Bruce helped John in his applications to farm Aboriginal reserve land in the area and in his farming and fishing ventures. Some other Poonindie men failed to obtain licences to farm reserve land because of the bad character references Bruce wrote for them.

While Emanuel Solomon was the only Aborigine to obtain land at Poonindie, other Aboriginal men (including John) obtained leases on Aboriginal reserve land, but lacked security of tenure. By taking up land among the local settler farmers, the Solomons effectively relinquished their links to the Aboriginal community. They were, of course, known to be of Aboriginal descent, but conformed to European ways and had little to do with other Aboriginal people. John survived as a farmer and fisherman in the district until 1946. He was well known in the area because of his alleged gift for long range weather forecasting. His brother's family were raised as Europeans. Most of them eventually moved away, some to Port Lincoln, others further afield. Although those who stayed in Port Lincoln are proud of their Aboriginal ancestry, they are viewed with suspicion by Aborigines in the town because of their failure to identify with them either socially or culturally. Those who moved away have become indistinguishable from the general community.

The contrasting fortunes of the Solomons and Adams highlight two aspects of Aboriginal survival and identity. Both families survived genetically. One as an independent family in a European world but as long as its members remained on the Poonindie lands they were strongly identified with the old mission. John Solomon was caretaker of the Poonindie church in the 1940s. He was said to be very proud of the building and of his association with it, including a memorial chair in memory of his wife Louisa. He did not deny his ancestry and early associations with the Aboriginal mission, yet on the other hand he was not a member of an Aboriginal community. Did he and his family have any other option? They wanted to remain on Poonindie lands, the only way they could do it was as independent farmers, not part of an Aboriginal community, they therefore lost their group identity as Aborigines, which affected the identity of their descendants.

The other family, the Adams, continued to be part of an Aboriginal community but not necessarily from choice. Tom Adams had tried repeatedly to obtain land in his own right, but when the opportunity finally arose his family decided they preferred the companionship of the Aboriginal community to living as an isolated family unit. Today many descendants of the Adams are living in the general community, but they have the choice of maintaining a strong Aboriginal identity or not, options not open to the Solomon brothers in the 1890s.

The biographical data I have collected show that Poonindie did not destroy Aboriginal

27 Bruce to Blackmore, June 1883, SRG 94 1048.
identity. It was, on the contrary, important in forming it. It has often been claimed that in­
stitutions of this sort gave only negative reinforcement to Aboriginal people — we are
different, we are inferior, we are dependent, we are a dying race, we are second-rate citizens.
Whatever may have been the case at other institutions, this was not true of Poonindie. At
the time of its foundation Poonindie served as an escape route for Aborigines who had found
that life in Adelaide trapped them between two equally unattractive cultural alternatives.
Their material base had been undermined so that they could not physically survive, nor
could they maintain their cultural and religious life without support from the invaders.
European society, on the other hand, was not open to them on terms that offered them self-
respect and positive roles to play. Poonindie gave them a home, protected them from the
predatory colonial society and isolated them from the tug of other Aborigines who attempt­
ed to cling to their pre-colonial ways of life. Most of them chose to stay at Poonindie, des­
pite the threat of death and disease, rather than face the uncertainties of a hostile outside
world.

During the 1860s and 1870s the survivors developed into a stable community. They had
either come as young children or had been born there. Their geographical isolation and
diverse origins worked against the maintenance of any specifically Aboriginal customs, but
they had a strong sense of community. Although they suffered frequently from incompetent
and harsh supervision, most of them stayed on even when they might have earned much
higher wages in rural industry outside.

Some might argue that the Aborigines at Poonindie survived without a strongly Aborigi­
nal identity. Defining the Aboriginality of the Poonindie people is difficult because it is not
emphasised in the records. Nevertheless there is evidence that the people at Poonindie had a
strong affinity for the place. The children identified with ‘wild blacks’ in their leisure time
activities pretending to throw spears. Kinship structures typical of Aboriginal communities
survived with emphasis on extended, rather than nuclear families. At the time the closure of
the mission was being negotiated, several men signed a petition (including the Solomons)
asking for part of the Poonindie lands to be set aside for them so that they could continue to
live as a community maintaining themselves by farming, fishing and collecting guano.28 This
suggests that the Solomons’ first choice, along with others on the mission, was to remain
part of the community rather than to operate as independent farmers. It was only after this
option had been closed off that applications were made for independent allocations of land.
Thus the historical record indicates that Aboriginal people stayed at Poonindie because it
was an Aboriginal community. Although their communal identity included a strong affinity
to place, it did not depend on the maintenance of any element of their pre-colonial cultures.

Poonindie was in many ways a highly successful Aboriginal community. It produced an
educated population of skilled and unskilled workers. It provided housing, food and medical
services, long before any such social services were available to the general community. Its
farming and pastoral activities made it self-sufficient. It was not dependent on handouts
from either government or private charity. That is not to say that the standard of living was
high. It was not. It was very basic. The housing was substandard with primitive water and
sewerage services. But at Poonindie no person was faced with the Destitute Asylum by be­
coming unemployed, sick or old.

28 South Australia Legislative Council Papers, 5 September 1895:291-92. Guano is the excrement of sea­
birds and used as a fertiliser.
Training at Poonindie included not only the 3Rs but also agricultural and sporting skills. Poonindie men were among the best shearsers in the district. They generally won all the prizes in district ploughing matches in the late 1870s and early 1880s. They played regular cricket matches against Port Lincoln teams and played several matches against St Peter's College (the top Church of England boys' school). So Poonindie people had much to be proud of in their community. They were excellent at cricket and athletic competitions. They were said to have produced the best wool and wheat in the western districts of South Australia. Although they were underpaid as individual workers, the fruits of their communal efforts made them self-supporting and ensured that they were never destitute.

All this hard work was destroyed because local settlers coveted the land and successfully pressured the Poonindie Trustees into negotiating the closure of the mission with the government in 1892 so that the land could be opened for selection. The terms agreed upon ignored the welfare of the Poonindie Aborigines. The Trustees abrogated any responsibility for their future, merely stating that the government must find them positions in other institutions. The Poonindie community broke up. The majority of the people was sent to Point Pearce on Yorke Peninsula, a smaller number went to Point McLeay near the Coorong, one man returned to the bush and a few stayed in the area in the hope of obtaining land.

Many of the former inhabitants continued to think of Poonindie as 'home'. Tom Adams wrote on hearing of Bishop Hale's death in 1895, seven years after his own departure, 'it is very hard for us to think of our dear old homes and white people living there and we've got to pass by like strangers . . . although I did not belong to Poonindie when it was taken away, still we all love our dear old home.'\(^{29}\) Despite its ignominious end, Poonindie had an important part to play in the survival of many Aboriginal families now living in the southern half of South Australia, several hundred of whom can trace their descent from Poonindie.

\(^{29}\) Tom Adams to Hawkes, PRG 275 130/207.

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GRG: Government Record Group; PRG.

SRG: Societies' Record Group.
This study concerns an Aboriginal group from Perth and the towns of Western Australia who call themselves Nyungars. Nyungar was originally the word meaning 'man' or 'person' in the dialects of the Aboriginal language once spoken in the south-west of Western Australia. Nowadays, the first language of Nyungar people is English.

In pre-colonial times, the Nyungar people's lands were limited to the south-west corner of the State as shown on the map. With the onset of colonisation, however, many Nyungar were forced from their lands.

The Swan River Colony was established in 1829 when it is estimated that there were around 6000 Nyungar people living in that region of the colony. By 1901, three years after the Western Australian Colonial Government had assumed control of Aboriginal affairs, this number had dropped to an estimated 1500. Despite this devastating reduction of the Nyungar population, and the accompanying dispossession of their lands, the government had not enacted any policy which effectively broke the association of the Nyungar peoples with their lands.

This situation changed with the passing of the 1905 Aborigines Act. This act, ostensibly protectionist in its objectives, gave the government power to rule the everyday lives as well as the futures of individual Aboriginal people virtually as it saw fit. It also gave the government control over persons of mixed descent who, previously, had been largely free of the control of special Aborigines legislation. The Government was now able to remove the children of mixed descent from their parents and place them in special missions and settlements, to be brought up wholly within these institutions, away from the influence of their Aboriginal families. The policy of segregation of Aboriginal people from the wider community and Aboriginal children from their parents was rigorously pursued. By the mid-1920s, nearly 15 per cent of the Nyungar population was interned at Moore River Native Settlement 100 km north of Perth and south of Moora. The number held at the settlement continued to grow over the next decade.

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1 Douglas 1975:5.
2 Map 1 is reproduced with permission of R.M. Berndt and the University of Western Australia Press. His map is a modification of the one drawn by Tindale (1940). Daisy Bates (1985) also includes a map of the area drawn by her secretary between 1936 and 1940.
3 Berndt 1979.
4 Western Australian Census 1901, quoted in the Handbook of Western Australia, 1905, vol. 5.
This policy of segregation, forced migration and internment over a period of nearly fifty years, effectively broke the association of people with land for a large proportion of the Nyungar people. It was an era of institutionalisation, pauperisation and disenfranchisement which continued until 1951 when the Federal Government formally adopted assimilation as its Aboriginal policy. At a meeting of State and Federal ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs, held in that year, a statement of principles of assimilation was formulated to which all authorities subscribed. The settlements were closed, and most of the special legislation affecting Aborigines was withdrawn.

With this development there began a dispersal of the Nyungar people. Although many remained in the south-west, others migrated north in search of work, and also, adventure. They worked on the stations throughout the north, but seem to have established centres of Nyungar population only in the towns along the coastal strip between Geraldton and Broome. My research was conducted among one of these coastal groups, an extended kin group of 161 individuals. Part of the purpose of this paper is to explain how they came to be located in the north. I call them the McNish family.

The Nyungars of the northern coastal strip and those of the south-western corner type one another as 'Northerners' and 'Sou'westers' respectively. The differences between them lie primarily in their relationships to the regions they occupy.

The original countries of the Nyungar are located in the south-west. For those Nyungar who still live in that region the particular areas of the south-west, identified with and occupied by the members of particular extended kin groups, are their own, spiritually, historically, and socially. A Sou'wester will speak of 'my country' and include in this both the towns and the countryside within the area so identified.

The Nyungar of the northern coastal strip are different. They do not speak of 'my country' but of 'my town'. They travel the long distances between the towns inhabited by their families and tell stories which concern only the road and not the country lying beyond. It is not until they reach the outskirts of the town that the stories conveying historical and spiritual association begin, and these stories nearly all concern their own groups of kin. It is as members of an extended kin group come to be buried in a town that spiritual association of the group with the town develops. But this develops only if people of that kin group continue to live there; growing up, raising their children, tending the graves of their dead and growing old. Through this process they come to identify themselves with the town. They may live elsewhere at various times, but that town is home and they will wish to be buried there.

The Nyungar people exhibit a number of structural variations in the organisation of their kin groups which are related systematically to a set of organisational principles, or norms. I will present examples of such variations with a view to demonstrating this relatedness.

I seek to show that in order to understand the regional and structural variations observable among Nyungar kin groups, they should be viewed within the contexts of (a) the history of extended family groups, and (b) the life experience of key individuals within those groups.

The word 'family' has a range of uses among Nyungars. It can refer to the children of the person speaking, or the large kin group from which the kin network is recruited and, rarely, it can refer to the kin network itself. More usually, the kin network is referred to as 'our lot',

7 Australia, Department of Territories 1961.
or 'mob' or 'that part of the family'. The words lot and mob themselves have a range of uses and are not restricted to the indication of kinship based groups. There is thus no Nyungar term which is used specifically to refer to the kinship based group I refer to as the kin network. Hence the necessity to provide a sociological term which characterises its most obvious features — a kin-based group which co-operates economically and socially, whose members associate intensively with one another and who are inter-connected in a variety of ways. In contrast, there is a Nyungar term for the large kin group from which the network is recruited. This group is always said to be 'all-one-family' and no other use is made of this phrase.

The all-one-family is a cognatic descent group. The basis on which the kin network is recruited from this larger group is what may be termed the 'rearing-up' relationship. 'Rearing-up' is the Nyungar gloss for child rearing. A rearing-up relationship exists between the individual and those whom that individual was reared-up with and reared-up by; and also between the individual and those whom she is currently rearing-up.

The Nyungar system encourages extensive identification of matrilateral kin with lineal kin. Thus, the children of siblings, sisters in particular, are taught to regard their matricousins as siblings. Aunts are in many circumstances equated with the child's mother. Just as sisters tend to rear their children up co-operatively, their daughters may in adulthood rear their own children up co-operatively. If that happens, then these children will address their mothers' cousins as 'aunty' and will regard one another as siblings although they are in fact second cousins.

This results in a wide range of kinfolk who possess various types of rearing-up relationships with one another. If diligently pursued it can result in a very large number of closely associated kinfolk indeed. In the recruitment of the kin network, kin relationships are important but, in and of themselves, they are not enough. In order for these relationships to be effective they must be enacted. In the enactment of kin relationships the primary focus is on rearing-up, but continuous economic co-operation and an intensive pattern of association are also requirements. These effective kin relationships constitute social relationships and also pattern associated behaviour. Given this, it may well be asked what purpose does the all-one-family, the cognatic descent group, serve?

The all-one-family is an exogamic unit. The degree of relationship above which marriage or any sexual liaison is forbidden depends on the group's history. Usually, sexual liaison is forbidden between cousins of the third degree or less. However, in certain circumstances this may be extended to fourth cousins or more. As an example, I turn to the all-one-family of which my subject group is a part. This all-one-family is split into two networks. This split occurred during the young adulthood of the third ascending generation of the all-one-family. Previously to this time the descent group was a large kin network, itself part of another descent group. A split can occur when a kin network is large, not because of feuding or enmity, but because there exists within the network a natural division of kin dividing it into two distinct sections, each descended from an individual in the fourth ascending generation. Each of these sections will be fairly large in numbers and have four generations represented in those numbers. These factors make it possible for each section to co-operate economically within itself and to establish lines of authority independently of the other.

Within the constituent networks of the McNish all-one-family, the older people and their children well remember their formerly close relationship with members of the other network. They no longer co-operate economically or closely associated with those people, but they still identify those people as their sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles. They have rearing-
up relationship with all of them. The descendants of people who have a rearing-up relationship are barred from forming any sexual liaisons up to the third generation of descent. These descendants are in fact fourth cousins (see Diagram 1).

During the time when this group operated as a single set of effective kin, the children were taught that whether they were siblings, first cousins or second cousins, they were 'all family', and so the degree of their genealogical relationship ought to make no difference in their behaviour toward and treatment of one another. They should all be just like brothers and sisters. These children referred to one another's parents as aunty and uncle, whether the person so addressed was their parents' sibling or in fact their parents' first cousin. The grandchildren of these sibling-cousins are fourth cousins. They are still regarded as kin, too close to marry, but not because of their genealogical relationship. Strictly speaking, it is the social relationship of their grandparents, who are sibling-cousins, which precludes them marrying.

There are other options that may be taken by individuals which will result in a quite different kind of split in the network. These options are open to individuals as a result of their history of relationships with one another. For example, it would not be unusual to find within the same generation of a kin network twenty years difference in the ages of the oldest and youngest member of that generation. Owing to a variety of circumstances, the older person may have played a major role in the rearing-up of the younger person. The younger then looks to the older primarily as a parent rather than a sibling or cousin. In adulthood he/she visits that person daily or even lives with her, and rears his/her children up under the guidance and with the help of that older person. This older person will most usually be a woman and she may similarly have played an important role in the rearing of other individuals in addition to her own children. It can happen in adulthood that individuals may choose to affiliate themselves with the older person rather than with their own parents. This pattern of affiliation lays the groundwork for a future split in the network. Such a split, when diagrammed genealogically, will not result in the lineal pattern of the previous example but in a lateral pattern that is the result of affiliation rather than descent (see Diagram 2).

In order to explain the pattern of a lateral split in a kin network, personal histories and personal affiliations must be taken into account. Individuals are free to affiliate with either their matri-kin or their patri-kin, and with either their male or female relations. Despite this freedom, it is the case that people tend to affiliate with their female matri-kin in preference to all other kin.

The Nyungar people have a saying that kin tend to 'fall on the mother's side'. This is evidenced in a number of ways. People tend to know their matri-kin better than their patri-kin. When a marriage is established, whether it be a de facto or legal marriage, the couple tend to live near and associate more with the woman's family. Responsibility for children rests with the mother and her kin. In the event of the mother's death or her failure to conform to the norms of motherhood, her mother, aunts and sisters will often become responsible for the child, rather than the father or any of his kin. In Nyungar households, it is always a woman who is in charge.

Given these facts of social organisation, it has been tempting to describe the Nyungars as

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8 It is worth noting here that according to Bates (1985) the Nyungar of the Perth area had matrilineal descent of their moieties and semi-moieties. It is quite possible that the present-day Nyungar practice of 'falling on the mother's side' is a survival of the pre-colonial kinship system. I am indebted to Isobel White for bringing this to my attention.
NYUNGAR FAMILIES

a case of matriliny according to a jural model; but this has not been possible. Descent does not pattern behaviour among Nyungar people, and the tendency to 'fall on the mother's side' is a trend rather than an absolute proclivity. Some groups appear to be recruited almost exclusively on the basis of matrilineal descent from a known female ancestor, others from a male ancestor. The two constituent networks of the McNish family, for example, are descended from two brothers. In one, network membership is recruited exclusively out of the matri-kin, that is the descendants of the daughters but not the sons of the male ancestor. In the second, membership is recruited from the descendants of both the sons and the daughters of the male ancestor. However, it was predominantly the female descendants of those sons and daughters who remained within their own family network, the male descendants often choosing to follow their wives' preference for maintaining associations among their own families.

While it is usual for men to follow their wives, or 'go the woman's way', some men do persuade their wives to go against common practice and go the man's way, that is, to live near and associate predominantly with his family. But this seldom happens and its rare occurrence is evidence of the strength of the expressed tendency to fall on the mother's side. There are other expressions which, when they appear in conversation, take on the character of generally accepted truths or maxims. 'A man can look after himself', it is said, 'a woman can't'. And further, 'a woman goes with people who are not her own, they'll never look after her or give her a home. They don't have to'.

These are neither statements of rules, nor of principles of social organisation. Rather, they are comments on trends of action interpreted according to a matri-centred ideology. The notion that it is proper to fall on the mother's side is a vaguely formulated expression of the same ideology. There are a number of ways in which people may conform to this ideology in their everyday lives, some optional and completely open to choice, others less so. The vagueness of the formulation of ideas expressing matri-centredness is not an indication of the weakness of the injunctions to fall on the mother's side. It is an indication that the Nyungar system is one which is open to a high degree of manipulation by the people who live according to it. This is attested to by the considerable variation of behavioural patterns with regard to pattern of association after marriage, recruitment of network membership, the reckoning of descent, and patterns of affiliation.

The particular pattern exhibited by a kin network is the result of its history and its present circumstances. For example, the sons of one particular kin network are encouraged to bring their wives into the family, that is, to go the man's way rather than the woman's. The women who accede to their husbands' wishes in this regard run the risk of being sanctioned within their own families owing to the grave insult they offer through such behaviour. However, the members of the men's families conform to common practice in other ways. Their households are run by women, they know their matri-kin better than their patri-kin, ultimate responsibility for children rests with the women, and so on. However, it will be the father's mother, aunts and sisters rather than the mother's corresponding kin who share this responsibility for the children with their mother.

A census of this kin network shows that in the generation now coming into adulthood, there is an abundance of boys but relatively few girls. Unless this family can circumvent this demographic chance by going the man's way rather than the woman's, their numbers will be sharply reduced owing to loss of membership through death and recruitment of their sons to other families through marriage. The parents of boys coming into adulthood must retain
their sons and their sons' children if the kin group is to continue as a viable kin network. The women who marry into such a network must alter their own ideologies of marriage and affiliation, re-evaluating the relative importance of paternity versus maternity, and the marriage tie versus the ties of matr-fiilation.

In another case, an elderly woman appeared to be without ties to any kin group larger than that comprising her own children and her grandchildren. This woman was one of those who was taken away from her family as a child, in the years when it was the practice of the Aborigines Department to put Aboriginal children into care at the discretion of the Department's agents. Now elderly, she knows who her relations once were. But as her knowledge is only a child's knowledge she cannot place most of them on a genealogy.

Some families lost many children this way. Dispersed, they have little chance of being re-united with their kinfolk. Some will have married into other groups, and successfully become members of various kin networks. Their responsibilities lie within those groups, not their natal groups. Others, as in the example quoted above will have failed, for various reasons, to become part of any kin group, and instead seem to be in the process of founding new networks which have only tenuous associations with other cognatic descent groups. Perhaps such a kin group will eventually become the basis of a new all-one-family. But at present, such a group will necessarily be small in numbers and without the interconnecting ties with kin in other towns which typify Nyungar kin networks.

Another group was also somewhat small in numbers, but for different reasons. Like the above example, this network lacked membership in a cognatic descent group. But unlike the above example, this network was entirely lacking in elderly people. On questioning, further peculiarities appeared. The members of this group had only tenuous kin links with one another. They were able to give only sketchy genealogical information about themselves and their claimed relations. Nevertheless they attempted to operate as though they were a kin-based Nyungar network. These people, as in the example of the elderly woman, were mission or settlement children. Now grown, they are without known or effective kin ties within the Nyungar world. The rules of social obligation which promote economic co-operation and the operation of a network of association and communication can operate only among people who have effective kin links with one another. People who have no relations are at a great disadvantage.

With regard to the size of a kin network, there is some evidence to suggest that this may be related to general economic circumstances. One kin network seemed at first to be small in numbers, in comparison to other Nyungar kin networks. However, four generations were represented and the age-sex ratio appeared to be unexceptional. The genealogy of this group showed that their membership seemed to have been recruited more selectively than is normally the case. Ordinarily, recruitment of a kin network will, in the second descending generation, include all the daughters and some of the sons of the founding parents, as in Diagram 1. However, this kin network, when diagrammed genealogically, revealed a lateral pattern of affiliation, as in Diagram 2. As pointed out earlier, in order for such elective filiation to take place among lateral kin, particular kinds of rearing-up relationships must exist among them. But there seemed to be other reasons which maintained selectivity of membership in this

9 This group was contacted by my colleague, Patricia Baines. I am grateful to her for sharing her experience with me.
NYUNGAN FAMILIES

Diagram 1: Lineal filiation

Diagram 2: Lateral filiation
case, in that there were apparently many other kin with whom the senior members shared rearing-up relationships.

In this kin network income was derived primarily from the earnings of those members who were employed. As a group, they were noticeably better off than other larger kin networks which numbered 150 or more individuals.

One such network was part of the McNish all-one-family group. With 161 individuals, it was the largest kin network known to me. The McNish all-one-family numbers over three hundred individuals and so both its constituent networks of kin are quite large. The adult members of both networks claim to know one another well.

This is in marked contrast to the smaller, better-off group who acknowledged all their kin but claimed that they did not know them very well, and that they ‘never have much to do with them’. In the large kin networks, like the McNish’s, income is derived primarily from pensions and other social security and welfare payments. At this point, it is worth quoting Collman’s reading of Sahlins:

Sahlins . . . suggests that kinship systems which encourage an extensive identification of collateral kin with lineal relatives command greater surpluses and generate more intensive economic systems than systems that emphasize lineal descent. The key factor is the relative isolation of the immediate family or domestic group from the rest of the community. The more isolated the domestic group, the lower is the total societal production and the smaller the economic surplus beyond basic needs. Sahlins’ point is that lineal descent systems tend to isolate the basic domestic group more than systems that extend domestic ties along collateral lines. Although he does not say so, his analysis suggests that a domestic groups that wanted to justify isolating itself from the wider community might adopt a kin ideology that stressed lineal filiation or descent.10

In the Nyungar system, which emphasises laterality rather than lineality in group recruitment, people may in certain circumstances push this option to its extreme in order to increase the size of the group, as the McNishes seem to have done. Economic advantage may be gained by this means, because more incomes are made available to the group and more options are therefore present for individuals to seek aid in time of hardship. However, a group which was relatively well-off would gain no advantage by being recruited into a larger one. Their economic well-being would be eroded by the demands of their less well-off kin. The well-off group may therefore seek to protect its standard of living by limiting its size. They may do this within the Nyungar system by not taking full advantage of the option for extensive identification of matrilateral kin with lineal relatives.

I did not systematically collect data on incomes and consumption habits within these smaller, apparently more affluent groups. However should such a study be undertaken it might be expected to show a positive relationship between a group’s size and its income, taking into account other historical factors such as have been discussed and which will affect the size and composition of a group. These features of size and composition thus provide clear indications which mark a group that, for example, has lived in poverty for a considerable period of time.

The McNish family is one such group. On first observation there appeared to be an un-

10 Collman 1979:392.
usually small proportion of adult men within the group. Yet when a genealogy was compiled it showed a more even distribution of age and sex; as time went on and field observation continued, these men began to appear on the scene. Some arrived singly, down from the north where they had contract jobs on road works projects or mining ventures. They stayed for their holidays and would then board the bus back north. Others arrived in groups of three or more by car. They stayed for varying periods of time until they became too much of a nuisance through excessive drunkenness and ‘noisy’ behaviour and then were urged on.

To all appearances, these were the marginal or peripheral men of Black American ghetto studies. Questioning revealed that this kin network moved north two generations ago in response to a number of factors, among them the availability of work on the pastoral stations. Employment dropped in the pastoral industry around the early 1960s and Aboriginal men and women could no longer find work in the north. The women could get additional support from the government on account of their children, but the men could not. The family seems to have depended for its income primarily on pensions and other social security and welfare payments for the last twenty years. As a consequence of the economic importance of women, other developments have occurred.

The matri-centred tendency has become absolute. In this kin group women never leave their matri-kin and will leave their husbands more readily than women from other families. Formerly, in the reckoning of descent they emphasised links established through kinship with the father of the third ascending generation. But now they emphasise links through his wife. Formerly the preferred choice of residence on marriage, that men go the woman’s way, was not necessarily the way all men chose to behave. Most men in fact did follow their wives, but some of them brought wives ‘home’, that is to their mother’s homes. As well, most of the men of two generations ago in the McNish group successfully established marriages and fathered children.

This is in contrast to the present adult generation of the kin network. The men bring their wives home, but the women do not stay, preferring to live among their own kin. The greater proportion of these men have failed to establish successful marriages, and few have fathered children, at least that they are aware of.

In the McNish family, there is evidence that this situation may change by the time the present generation of adolescents becomes adults. Their older brothers and younger uncles generally look for station work, road work and other forms of unskilled, rural oriented labour when they are in search of work. The young boys talk about apprenticeships, truck driving and working on building sites. Few yearn for work on a shearing team or a cattle station. They admire big machines and the men who operate them. As well, their contempt for drunken people is immense. If they can find steady, well-paid work in occupations that conform to their present ideals and aspirations, then the kin network may change again in response to the increased respect and authority the men will gain as a result of becoming steady sources of income to their relations. Ideologies of marriage and affiliation will swing away from the extreme of the matri-centred continuum.

Beckett and Collmann both found among the Aboriginal groups they studied that

11 See for example the work of Charles Valentine (1968) and Elliot Liebow (1967).
the status of men relative to women was dependent on whether or not a man had steady employment and whether or not he lived with his wife and children on a regular basis. Beckett’s and Collman’s evidence of men’s status included women’s loyalty to the ties of marriage, men’s authority within the household and the preference in the affiliation of children with their matri-kin versus their patri-kin. There is evidence of this trend among the Nyungars, both in the present and historically.

Knowledge of the history of a Nyungar all-one-family is central to an understanding of its constituent kin networks. With this in mind, let us take a closer look at the history of the McNish family.

The McNish all-one-family has a long and well-established history of association with the northern wheatbelt region of Western Australia, as is shown in the mission records at New Norcia and those of the Moore River Native Settlement. The McNishes are remembered by the older people from other Nyungar kin groups as a large and cohesive group. As the older women of the family tell it, the core of the family in the Moore River days (as they term their sojourn there) was the strength of the relationship between three brothers, Charles, David and Ronald. In their young days it is said that they were very wild, but they grew up to be men of steady purpose. Charles retained a reputation for a fearsome temper that could be roused easily. David and Ronald married women from the South, but Charles married a woman named Elizabeth Jones from the Kimberley region.

Elizabeth Jones was the daughter of a part-Aboriginal woman and a white man. Her father was an adventurer, and one of his ventures was a cattle station in the Kimberleys. Elizabeth was born in town and grew up on the cattle station. She and her brother and sisters were brought up as their father’s children, in the station house, unlike the Aboriginal children of many white pastoralists of that era. The majority of these men left their children by Aboriginal women to be brought up by their Aboriginal relations. When she was nine years old, Elizabeth’s father sent her away to a mission in the Kimberley region. He sold his pastoral lease the following year.

The new lessee had not arrived to take over the station by the next year when Elizabeth’s father sent his remaining Aboriginal children to join Elizabeth at the mission. When the mission priest came for the children, their father wept and told them that the station would ‘always be your home’. As he had already given up the station, he obviously knew that his children could never return to their old life there, and so it is difficult to know why he said this. But he may have meant that they would be able to find camping grounds on the station. Perhaps he foresaw their future and that of their children as making their living by providing a pool of ready labour for whoever ran the station. His children, however, understood him to mean that the station was theirs and that they would live there again as the cocky’s children when they left the mission.

Elizabeth’s father never returned to the north-west and if he ever thought about his Aboriginal family again, it can’t have been with any feeling deeper than fond regret. He died in Victoria. His Will described him as retired, unmarried, with no dependents. He left nothing to any of his Aboriginal family. Elizabeth, aged eighty-two when I knew her, still believed that her father would never have left his family unprovided for and that it was all a dreadful mix-up.

Elizabeth ran away from the mission at the age of eighteen. She made her way back to town to find her mother. Two years later, she was sent by ship to Fremantle and then by train to the Moore River Native Settlement. There she met Charles McNish and, at the age of
twenty-four, she married him.

The McNish family remained a united group while the three brothers all lived. But after Charles died, Elizabeth began to talk of going back to the Kimberley town. Her husband and children had been employed on stations, progressively working their way northward for many years. The Gascoyne River region was becoming well-known to them. Then, rural employment began to drop and the Aborigines were the first to be affected. With the old man dead, and no hope of employment in the area with which they were most familiar, the wheatbelt region, Elizabeth and her children went north. Over the years, they found sporadic employment on the stations in the Gascoyne region. Elizabeth went to work on a station in the Kimberleys with one of her daughters. When that job finished she and her daughter went to the Kimberley town.

Those of Elizabeth McNish’s children who now lived in and around the Gascoyne region would occasionally see their relations who had remained in the wheatbelt. Elizabeth’s elder daughters had all married boys from the south and they too retained their kin links within the south-west. Certain of the wheatbelt McNishes came north and affiliated with the northern McNish group. Children of the northern McNishes similarly went south to the wheatbelt and came to associate predominantly with that branch of the family. And although they continued to assert that they were ‘all-one-family’, it was evident that two separate networks of kin had formed.

For example, in 1975, one of the young men was involved in a road accident. He required medical attention that was available only in Perth. He was transferred from the district hospital at Carnarvon, accompanied by his mother. He would always need medical attention and his mother decided that he should remain in Perth. So she brought her dependent children down from the north and established residence in Perth. This move considerably reduced the distance between themselves and the wheatbelt McNishes, putting them within two or three hours travelling time of one another, whereas before it was an entire day’s journey from one group to the other. Now the two sections of the Gascoyne McNish family are a full day’s journey apart.

But despite their new proximity to one another, the family in Perth and the family members of the wheatbelt towns did not re-affiliate with one another. No regular visits were exchanged. The family now in Perth pursued their extant links with the family in the Gascoyne. These two sections of the network maintained the unity of their group though regular visits. Some people from the Gascoyne came to Perth to live with or near their aunt; some of their aunt’s children returned to the Gascoyne to marry and to live. Neither section showed any signs of splitting away to form a new, independent network of kin.

Elizabeth McNish never went back to the wheatbelt region. At one point, twelve years went by before she visited her family in the south, though many of them had come to the Kimberley town to see her. She finally went to the Gascoyne on the occasion of the funeral of her eldest grandson. The next year, her late husband’s sister Kitty McNish died at Moora.

Elizabeth had been close to her sister-in-law in the old days. They had helped rear-up one another’s children and their children were still fond of one another, or so the evidence of their conversations suggested. As well, the dead woman had been as important a force behind the formation of her kin network as Elizabeth had been within her own. But Elizabeth did not go to her sister-in-law’s funeral and neither did any of the family living in the Kimberley town. The family in the Gascoyne and at Perth all attended however, and were embarrassed to find Elizabeth not there and further embarrassed that she sent neither a card
nor flowers to the children of the deceased. 'We never got word,' said Elizabeth. But she never did send a card.

Elizabeth's neglect in this regard is unusual and must be taken as being of signal importance. Nyungar people place high priority on the idea of respect for the dead; showing respect for the dead is acknowledgement of one's historical relationship with the deceased person. This person need not have been kin. For example, it is proper to go to the funeral of a non-kin person who was a close and significant associate in a social situation which has long since ceased to exist, such as a mission or a settlement, or a station camp. 'He was a good old soul. We ought to go to his funeral.'

In failing to even acknowledge the death of her husband's sister, Elizabeth effectively denied her once close relationship with that woman, and by extension with the rest of her family-in-law. Symbolically, she devalued her affinal ties with that family.

Elizabeth's apparent urge to return to the Kimberley town is the result of her childhood experience. When she was taken from her family and placed in the mission, she was deprived of what she saw as her birthright, that is, her station life. She was also deprived of her mother. For the next nine years, until she was eighteen, it was her consuming desire to get home and find her mother. It was interesting that in the course of telling her story, Elizabeth never spoke of a similar desire to find her father. Her identity throughout her life seems to have been based on her mother's heritage of place. She was an Aboriginal woman of the Kimberley town and that was all Elizabeth, in the end, desired to be. Next to this desire to live in her mother's country, Elizabeth's established identity as a woman of a well-known Aboriginal wheatbelt family seems to have counted for little. She never denied her children's cultural heritage as Nyungars, but it became apparent that she had ceased to claim it for herself.

According to the influences of history and events occurring in the lives of individuals, kin networks arise out of cognatic descent groups. Kin networks serve to join groups of kin located in a set of towns into a single social unit. This social unit reflects the history of the individuals who constitute that unit through features of social organisation and group composition and through the identification of individuals with places which they regard as their 'true' or 'real' homes. This relationship between kin group membership and place forms the basis of social and personal identity among Nyungar people.

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Wedding group, Moore River, Western Australia, 1930.

Photo: Colbung collection, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
A CHANGE IN STATUS FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN?

ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN THE AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE

Carol Bradley

European Ideology and Aboriginal Women.

In studying the history of relations between Aboriginal people and European Australians, it is apparent that the mid-1960s marked something of a watershed in the official interest in Australia's 'race relations'.

Following the Social Sciences Research Council's 'Aborigines' Project', the publication of Rowley's major trilogy in 1970-71 did much to highlight the destruction of traditional Aboriginal society and the plight of Aborigines in contemporary Australia.

Certain analyses of 'race relations' at that time led to studies of biological differences, based on a concept of race, and subsequent research attempted to establish differences in intelligence quotients. More recently, the academic emphasis has shifted to a concept of 'ethnicity' which focuses on cultural rather than biological differences between groups.

This approach tends to explain the subordination of minority groups in terms of culture in one of two ways, neither of which are mutually opposed. The first is the 'culture of poverty' thesis, positing a cycle of deprivation that breeds distinctive cultural traits, such as immediate gratification of needs and lack of motivation, which are inexorably at odds with the spirit of the Western work ethic. It has been used to explain the position of the poor in

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1 Official documentation throughout the period of European settlement reports on separate incidents involving Aborigines and Europeans. But little analysis was made and little action was taken other than punitive measures against the offenders — usually found to be the Aborigines. Many of these accounts, together with parliamentary reports, are published in one volume by Stone (1974). Among anthropologists, A.P. Elkin was notable for being among the first to document the effects of the invasion of European settlers on Aboriginal society.

2 Charles Rowley was appointed the Director of the SSRC's Aborigines Project, 1964-1967. The resulting series *Aborigines in Australian society* contained the trilogy which examined the position of Aborigines throughout what he called 'settled' and 'colonial' Australia.

3 See for example the work of psychologists A.R. Jensen (1969, 1975) and Hans Eysenck (1971).

4 Lewis 1966.
Mexico, blacks in the United States, Irish gypsies and Australian Aborigines. An analysis of this type comes dangerously close to blaming the poor for being poor. The second cultural explanation revolves around the concept of 'racial prejudice' which the ethnicity argument posits as a misplaced hostility based on ignorance and inadequate appreciation of differences in culture.

But cultural differences do not per se explain why Europeans are dominant. Racial prejudice, although it may describe a mechanism for maintaining and reinforcing European domination, does not explain why this occurs in the first place. Essentially, European domination of Aboriginal people in Australia is based on the key issue of ownership. Ownership and control of the three basic economic resources — land, labour and capital — ultimately result in economic and political power and hence control in the cultural, social, and ideological spheres. Where there is European control, there is racist ideology.

The ideology of European superiority has been — and still is — used as a justification for the appropriation of land and subordination of indigenous people. In Australia it has been used to justify both the disinheritance of Aboriginal people from their land and their enforced change of lifestyle from nomadism to settlement.

The seizure of Aboriginal land was justified simply by the view it was not being put to 'proper' use in the Lockean sense. It was argued that as the 'natives' were so primitive they had not developed any form of agricultural system, the land was being wasted, and hence Europeans had every right to take and 'develop' it. The ideology of European supremacy was implicit in the view of one West Australian politician who argued: ‘I think it will be a happy day for Western Australia, and for Australia at large when the natives and the kangaroo disappear'.

Overtones of the European cultural superiority theory are so widespread and so entrenched in Australian society that they even extend to staunch supporters of Aboriginal rights. Advocating citizenship for Aborigines in 1944 Elkin considered that assimilation of Aborigines into European Australian society would represent (for Aborigines, not Europeans) a ‘cultural advance'. A firm believer in government assimilation policies, which were first mooted during the 1930s, Elkin regretted the problems faced by the 'incurably nomadic full-bloods'. The underlying sentiment is that the traditional Aboriginal way of life is pathological but unfortunately untreatable.

If European settlement in Australia has radically transformed the lives of all Aborigines, it

6 Kathleen F. Hill's research report for the Australian Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (1985) remarks on the 'lack of Aboriginal motivation' and the development of a hand-out mentality. The report dismisses the idea that special programs should be developed for Aborigines.
7 A recent critique of ethnicity (together with now discredited socio-biological analyses) for continuing to reify 'race' and for ignoring the particular ways that racial boundaries are created, is given by Gillian Cowlishaw (1986).
8 For an historical account of how Western racism developed from a need to rationalise the dispossession and the exploitation of non-European peoples, see Mervyn Hartwig 1972.
9 Debate on Settlers' Protection, 14 January 1892. Western Australia Parliamentary Papers, Perth, vol.2, 1892.
10 Elkin 1944.
is the women who have faced the most severe changes. Aboriginal women have been en­snaired in a double bind of European ideology: they are considered inferior because they are Aborigines and they are considered inferior because they are women.

The role of ideology in the subordination of women has been more than adequately covered elsewhere. However it is important to recognise that the notion of male superiority, and with it an acceptance by both men and women of the 'naturalness' of women's inferior position in society, was introduced with European settlement. Subject to a two-pronged attack by the use of racist and sexist ideology, Aboriginal women have been system­atically debased by European Australia.

Changes in Employment in the Northern Territory since the 1960s.

From the end of the Second World War until the beginning of the 1960s assimilation policies intensified efforts to encourage Aborigines onto settlements within the Northern Territory. Some analysts believe that the primary motive among government circles was simply to keep Aborigines out of towns like Alice Springs and Darwin. However, it is fair to say that, from the mid-1960s onwards, settlements came to be regarded as transitional, to teach Aborigines European ways and turn them into 'useful' members of Australian society.

But it seems that this training did not include the European notion of a fair wage for a fair day's work. Cash wages were not paid to any Aborigines working on government settle­ments. Free accommodation and rations were offered, together with a small amount of pocket money. This amounted to $7.20 a week in the Northern Territory in 1969.

In the rest of Australia, until the late 1960s, legislation relating to Aborigines was the responsibility of each state. Accordingly, the restrictions and constraints placed upon Abori­ginal people varied considerably from one state to another. However, one feature that all Aborigines of full descent held in common was that they were not included in the national census count. As members of the Australian population, one could say that officially they simply did not exist. During the 'period of reconsideration' the 1967 referendum showed overwhelming electoral support for the rights of all Aborigines to be included in the census, and for the Federal Government to assume responsibility for legislation relating to all Aust­rian Aborigines.

In 1969 the Training Allowance Scheme was introduced into the Northern Territory by the Federal Government. As no unemployment benefits were available to those living on missions or settlements, the training allowance payable under the scheme meant some

11 One of the most influential contemporary accounts, which uses the Althusserian concept of ideology in the subordination of women in Western society, is Juliet Mitchell's essay 'The Longest Revolution', first published in New Left Review in 1966. See also Mitchell 1984.

12 The rape of Aboriginal women and the resultant spread of venereal disease among Aboriginal communities is discussed by Bobbi Sykes (1985). In Elkin's early work on Aboriginal-European relations and the growing dependency of the Aboriginal people on European society, attention is drawn to the demands for sexual services made upon Aboriginal women.

13 Altman 1980.
alleviation of hardship for many. Considerable numbers of Aboriginal men and women drifted into the settlements from cattle stations, towns and bush communities, and by 1973 over 4000 Aborigines in the Northern Territory were employed under the scheme.

However, if the object of the scheme was to provide training in useful skills and thus enable Aboriginal people to enter the labour force provided by the European economy, it was a failure. Few vocational training facilities had been provided, and there was a lack of properly skilled staff to carry out the training. The training allowance became a euphemism for low pay for low status work. At rates well below award wages, the scheme was later to be condemned as a ‘disguised form of handout’ by a Senate Standing Committee in 1975. The Training Allowance Scheme was terminated by Australia’s Labor Government in December 1973.

In 1972 the Labor Government established a Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and a National Economic Strategy for Aborigines (NESA) was introduced. Recognising the high unemployment levels among Aborigines and the poor socio-economic conditions under which many lived, the strategy focused on the need to improve Aboriginal standards of living by making opportunities available for them to enter the paid workforce.

Several government agencies have been involved in employment and training programs introduced under NESA. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Development Commission, the Commonwealth Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations each have areas of specific responsibility. The many programs devised include grants and loans for the establishment of Aboriginal enterprises, for land and property purchase, provision for special works, study away from home, and subsidies for employers to provide on-the-job training and work experience under the Training for Aborigines Program.

Government employment.

When the Northern Territory achieved self-government in 1977, a major expansion of the public service took place and it is now a major employer in the Territory. Departments of both the Commonwealth and Territory governments operate in areas which bring them into contact with many Aborigines, and both areas of the public service recognise that they have a particular need to employ staff who communicate well with Aboriginal people. Accordingly some public-sector jobs have been identified as requiring the ability to communicate effectively with Aborigines and a knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture.

This ‘identification’ of particular posts has established opportunities for ‘Aboriginal experts’. Indeed whole career structures have been created within the public service which call for expertise in Aboriginal affairs. Recently the public service has begun to recognise that Aboriginal people themselves are experts in their own culture. Consequently some Aborigines are being recruited to fill vacancies for ‘identified’ jobs especially those positions which provide an interface between government departments and their Aboriginal clients.

The effects of policy changes on Aboriginal women.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s much has been done to improve health and education in rural Aboriginal communities. Health clinics and schools have been and continue to be run by European specialists. However, growing recognition that involvement is desirable has created employment opportunities and the chance of greater economic status for Aboriginal women in rural communities.
The introduction of bilingual education in the Northern Territory has gone some way to returning to Aboriginal women their traditional role as educators. The recognition that women as parents play an important part in the development of their children's education is resulting in Aboriginal women now being successfully employed as teachers and teachers' aides, educating the children in their own language and giving them an education and pride in their traditional values and skills.

The Aboriginal Health Worker Program introduced in the early 1970s provides training through an apprenticeship system of teaching, with trainees receiving practical instruction working alongside nursing sisters and also attending short courses at centralised training centres. Many Aboriginal women have successfully trained as health workers.

By combining the traditional and Western medical systems for the benefit of their people, women in the Northern Territory have achieved a high degree of success in this field. Many are becoming highly skilled clinical workers, in some cases running their own health centres, which may be seen as an indication of their improved status in the rural communities.

Women are increasingly voicing their opinions on community decisions that affect family life and their role as educators of young children. Although they face an uphill struggle against entrenched male attitudes, they are taking more responsibility in areas of community life which European ideology has posited as male domains.

But if rural Aboriginal women have made some gains in the last decade or so, perhaps it is in the cities that more gains have been made. Although the position of women in the work-force has been well researched over the last decade, little attention has been given to Aboriginal women as workers other than in the rural areas and in communities. Research by the author in 1984-85 on Aboriginal employment in Darwin has highlighted the position of Aboriginal women in the urban workforce. The 1981 census shows the total working population of Darwin at 29,897. The sixty-three organisations interviewed employed a total of 13,200 people. Of a total of over 3500 workers employed in the private sector organisations interviewed, 1400 were women. But the number of Aboriginal women employed in business firms is negligible, amounting to 0.35 per cent of the private-sector work-force.

One might infer from this very small number employed that Darwin's private employers (who are overwhelmingly European and overwhelmingly men) are racially prejudiced and discriminate against Aboriginal women. Perhaps they do, but the issue is more complex than a simple matter of racially discriminatory recruitment. Many of Darwin's private employers say they do not employ Aboriginal workers because Aboriginal people rarely apply to them for jobs.

Why should this be? Perhaps the answer lies in the work experiences of Aboriginal men and women. The 1984-85 survey discovered that of over two hundred Aboriginal people interviewed in Darwin, most had had their first jobs in European-run firms and many had

14 Tynan 1983.
15 Hargrave 1982.
16 Moeckel 1983.
17 208 Aborigines were interviewed, of whom 87 per cent currently held jobs. The numbers of women and men were broadly equal. Ages ranged from teenagers to people in their sixties, but most were in their twenties and thirties, with 11 per cent in their forties and just over 6 per cent in their fifties.
subsequent experience of working in the private sector. Many said they had disliked the work, the pay and employment conditions, and their bosses. Indeed when asked what sort of organisation they would prefer to work for, very few (less than 2 per cent) said they thought a non-Aboriginal business firm was best. In view of the unpleasant experiences of so many Aboriginal workers in private companies, perhaps it is not surprising that they avoid them when looking for a job.

Yet in Darwin's public sector positive recruitment policies have led to a dramatic increase in the opportunities available. Changes in official attitudes in the public service mean that Aboriginal women have succeeded in being recruited for 'identified' jobs. Exact numbers of Aboriginal women employed in the Northern Territory Public Service are not easily assessed, but in areas such as social security, education, health and employment and of course the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, there are Aboriginal women working in administrative and liaison jobs, making a contribution to the provision of services to the Aboriginal community.

Over the last ten to fifteen years an increasing number of Aboriginal-run organisations have been established. They vary in objectives and in size from small co-operatives involved in the production of arts and crafts, or the provision of specialised services for a local community, to nation-wide organisations such as those providing accommodation or legal aid to Aborigines. Although in Darwin the numbers employed are small, jobs have been created for Aboriginal people and some women hold responsible jobs within the Aboriginal-run organisations.

The research highlighted that Aboriginal women workers had stayed on at school longer than men, and attained a higher level of schooling. They were also far more likely to continue their formal education after leaving school — mainly in clerical training. Not surprisingly, office work figures highly among the occupations of Aboriginal women, where most Aboriginal men in both the public and private sectors are unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers.

Despite the high levels of Aboriginal unemployment, currently running at over 40 per cent, these workers are committed to the idea of working for their living and, in common with most Australians, see unemployment as highly undesirable. The strong views held towards sexual equality in the workforce are particularly noticeable. While recognising that Australian society exercises constraints on men and women by restricting training and employment opportunities available, most Aboriginal people of both sexes feel that in principle there are no jobs that either sex cannot perform equally well.

There can be little doubt that this positive action in recruitment and training within the public service has created a space for some Aboriginal women to enter the employment market. The continuing campaign for equal employment opportunities over the last decade

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18 The problems of identifying Aboriginal employees proved difficult in the two largest departments interviewed in the Northern Territory Public Service. Figures have been published by the Public Service Commissioner's office on the numbers of Aborigines the NTPS employs, but given the difficulty encountered by some departments in identifying their Aboriginal workers, there would seem to be room for concern about the validity of the official figures.

19 Similarities in different levels of schooling also occur outside urban areas. For example Elspeth Young's study (1985) of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory notes that young women in rural communities are more likely to continue post-primary classes than young men, who may have to spend considerable time away from home undergoing training for their initiation.
WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

has resulted in more jobs being made available for Aboriginal women, some of whom have good jobs and economic independence. However, there is evidence to suggest that such a dramatic change in the status of Aboriginal women in such a relatively short period is not unprecedented.

A Historical Comparison.

Diane Barwick documented a rapid increase in the status of Aboriginal women in Victoria between 1860 and 1886.20 Barwick's line of argument is that this increase was a consequence — although an unintended one — of the European administration's decision to settle the tribes in mission and government stations.

Barwick notes that early histories of Aboriginal society gave very little information about the traditional roles of women, although she does point to Howitt's recognition that older women exercised considerable political influence among the Victorian Gippsland linguistic groups. However, by and large the evidence available pointed to a traditionally patriarchal society and, despite Howitt's case, Barwick leans towards this view.

The decision to settle the semi-nomadic tribes and train them in agricultural practices was based on the administration's belief that this would turn them into self-sufficient peasant farmers. But Aboriginal social relations and political practices were not taken into consideration by the European station managers. As a result, the mission station life severely disrupted not only the semi-nomadic life-style but also traditional inter-personal relations. By failing to take these into account, Barwick argues, station life totally undermined the men's economic and political authority. On settlement the men 'suddenly and voluntarily abandoned certain rights and powers, allowed and encouraged new economic and religious roles for women, and invited their political participation'.21

Meanwhile, the women were encouraged by the missionaries to take up suitable occupations, working in their gardens and selling their arts and craftwork. Sewing, embroidery, and lace-making were also encouraged, and the degree of success was so high that one Aboriginal woman received a letter of thanks from Queen Victoria for a lace collar she had made and sent as a gift. If the men were dismal failures as small landholders and horticulturalists, the women achieved economic importance. Moreover, by conforming to the expectations of the mission station, they found a niche for themselves within the church and respectability as homemakers. The 'lubras', it was said, were ladies now.

But what did it mean to be a lady in the Victoria of the 1880s? Under the law it certainly did not mean having achieved 'personhood'. For, as in Britain during this period, a woman's identity was conflated with or under the direction of a father or a husband. A married woman as a separate entity was non-existent as far as legal rights were concerned. As one feminist writer succinctly stated 'her body, earnings, children and domestic services belonged to her husband'.22

What is particularly interesting about Barwick's analysis, is the parallels that can be drawn between those Aboriginal women on the Victorian mission station and Aboriginal women in contemporary Australian society. In recent years Aboriginal women have gained through

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20 Barwick 1970.
taking advantage of the education and training and jobs provided by European society. Many
have the status of holding clerical and administrative or semi-professional jobs.

The similarity between these contemporary Aboriginal women and Barwick's 'ladies' of
the 1880s is striking. Today's women have gained some degree of economic independence,
and some hold positions with a degree of respectability and prestige. As with the women of
the Victorian missions, they have taken advantage of the provision of schooling and training
in order to do so. As with the women of the Victorian missions, their improved status has
occurred within a period of two decades or so. And as with the women of the Victorian
missions, their success has been due to the fact that they have conformed to the expecta­
tions of European society.

But there is a point at which the parallels between the position of Barwick's mission
station Aborigines and contemporary Aborigines diverge. Today's Aboriginal women have
been channelled into roles deemed appropriate for women, in the same way as Barwick's
'ladies' were. Some have made considerable achievements in their chosen field. But the
similarity between their situation and those of the Victorian mission diverges if we consider
the relative position of Aboriginal men. We should be aware of the danger of assuming that
because Aboriginal women have office jobs they have succeeded where the men have failed.

Unemployment figures show a higher level for Aboriginal men than for women. In the
Northern Territory registered unemployment among Aboriginal men is about three times
higher than that of Aboriginal women.23 But we cannot interpret this as indicating that
Aboriginal women are better off than their men. Research into the provision of services to
Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory suggests that many women may not claim
unemployment benefit because they either do not know they are eligible, or they lack the
confidence to make their claim.24 Regulations do not permit married women to receive
unemployment benefit in their own right, as official policy is governed by the European
model of men as heads of the nuclear family and responsible for the economic maintenance
of their dependent wives. But for Aboriginal people this model may not hold. The tradi­
tional role of Aboriginal men was never that of the European-style breadwinner. A man's
kinship obligations may take priority over financial support for wives and children, and the
failure of administrations to acknowledge this has led to much economic hardship for
women. This is particularly so in Aboriginal communities where jobs are scarce.25

Where Aboriginal women and men have succeeded in entering the work-force it is likely
that the men have jobs as manual workers, but we should not conclude that women office
workers are faring better economically than their menfolk. The research in Darwin, for
example, showed that for the same length of working week, women's wages were well below
that of men, with average wages of $253 a week compared to the men's weekly average of
$300. Although there were very few Aborigines in the top income brackets of more than
$674 a week, none of the women in the survey earned more than $577 a week.26

Historically, clerical work has been considered more prestigious than unskilled or semi-
skilled manual work. Initially a male domain, over the last fifty years or so office work has become defined as a female occupation. The introduction of new technology within the last ten years has revolutionised office procedures and has reduced the level of skill necessary in today’s offices to low-level routine work. This has in effect devalued a major area of women’s work. What was once a relatively high-status occupation has been reduced to a level of semi-skilled repetitive routine.27

It remains true that the promotion of the ideals of equal employment opportunities in both the Northern Territory and the Australian public services and the ‘identification’ of certain jobs has created a space for Aborigines. However, a closer examination of the facts reveals that in practice Aboriginal men have a better deal.

The few senior-level ‘identified’ posts within the public service are not evenly distributed among men and women; most of them are held by men. Indeed, the higher up the hierarchical public service ladder the ‘identified’ job, the more likely it is to be filled by a man. And of the small number of Aborigines in the Northern Territory who have received university, professional or management training, most of whom are employed in the public service, less than 3 per cent are women. This is ironic, given that education and training plays such a significant part in Aboriginal women’s lives.

The same point of course applies to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in Australia. The key to equality in the workforce is not merely a question of the time spent on education and training, nor on the qualifications gained as a result. Equality in the workforce depends rather on a critical examination of the areas of work which are available to women, and the lifting of restrictions on those areas of work denied to them.

Despite the liberal ideals of Australian society, the fact remains that power and authority remain in the hands of European men. And women, particularly Aboriginal women, continue to suffer the politics of exclusion. Where opportunities exist for Aborigines, it is largely the select few Aboriginal men who have been groomed for the senior positions.

Aboriginal Women in their own Milieu.

The focus so far in this paper has been the position of Aboriginal women in the context of the broad Australian society. At this point it may be worthwhile to relate this to the position of women in Aboriginal society.

Until comparatively recently, most serious writing on Aboriginal culture has been remarkably blind to the question of gender. The focus has centred on the recording of what remained of ‘contemporary stone-age man’ before ‘he’ and ‘his’ culture disappeared completely. A notable early exception was the anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry, who was better able to grasp an understanding of gender relationships than most in her profession, and argued that there was equality among the sexes in Aboriginal society.28

By pointing to this glaring omission, recent writings have redressed the imbalance by establishing that women played a significant part in traditional Aboriginal economic, religious and political culture. This is not to argue that Aboriginal society held no divisions of labour

27 Crompton, Jones and Reid 1982.
28 Kaberry 1939.
based on gender. But as independent producers and as distributors of food, as the decision-makers in deciding where to camp and when to move on, women exercised considerable power within Aboriginal culture at large. As partakers in their own rituals and ceremonies, exercising their rights and responsibilities for their own sites, women held power and autonomy from men. As women from Borroloola have explained: 'We talk for our hunting business, ceremony business. We used to go hunting ... and feed the men too ... And we having other ceremony, our own with the woman herself, that important, nobody see ... Men never used to boss over the woman. We are bosses ourselves...'  

I argued earlier in this paper that a double-pronged attack, using racist and sexist ideology as its justification, has systematically subordinated Aboriginal women within European Australian society. But there has been a third prong in the attack, one that has affected Aboriginal women in their own milieu. For the change from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one on a European-run settlement itself had a negative impact on the position of women within traditional Aboriginal society.

The mass migration of European settlers and in particular the spread of pastoral stations was accompanied by the settlement of Aborigines. Ever-diminishing traditional hunting grounds were increasingly taken over as grazing ground by pastoralists. Encouraged, or in some cases forced, to settle in specific areas by government administrations, the Aborigines’ ability to hunt and gather even their most basic foods was increasingly restricted. Once their role as chief suppliers of food was taken over by European suppliers, either through the cash economy or the distribution of rations, women no longer held such a crucial position. White settlement in Australia in effect meant that as vital producers within the traditional economy women were simply made redundant.

In the first instance, this analysis seems to contradict Barwick’s argument that women’s status in traditional society was low, and that it was as a consequence of settlement — and one might add, assimilation — that the women’s status increased. But perhaps an explanation for this apparent contradiction is that it is perfectly feasible, indeed highly likely, that by the 1860s Aboriginal women’s status had already been undermined by contact with European settlers. The protection afforded by the stations, not least from marauding European males, the development of a camaraderie among black and European women and, I would suggest, their enhanced economic value, would have helped to re-establish Aboriginal women’s self-confidence and esteem. If Aboriginal women did not gain a new position of prestige, but rather re-gained some of their traditional status, this would go some way to explaining why it was that Aboriginal men appeared to relinquish political power to their women.

29 Comparative work on hunter-gatherer societies by Hiatt (1970) shows that where gatherable foods occur in abundance, women are more important than men as food providers. The same point is taken up by Bell and Ditton (1980), who conclude that as Aboriginal desert women produced up to 80 per cent of the diet, they were critical to the survival of the group. In these areas, as hunters of small game and as gatherers of plants, it was the women who provided the mainstay of the Aboriginal economy.
30 Bell (1983).
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Summary.

I have argued that recent work has established that traditionally men and women occupied separate spaces in pre-contact Aboriginal society, which gave a symmetrical relationship to the sexes. Women held autonomy in their religious sphere, they held autonomy over their land, they held autonomy in their economy. Certainly they occupied a distinct place within their society but above all the evidence shows that, unlike in Western society, Aboriginal women were not inferior to men.

Today there can be no doubt that the position of Aboriginal women in contemporary Australian society has changed dramatically since the mid-1960s. And the changes have been for the better. In Darwin, certainly, Aboriginal women are literate, better educated than the men, socially aware, and committed to their work. Some of them have good jobs and many are ambitious for their future.

The emergence of Aboriginal-run organisations has allowed men and women to arrange some aspects of their own lives and has created the space for women to share responsibility and work in parallel with men. By recruiting Aborigines to act as ‘brokers’ between the departments and their Aboriginal clients, the public sector has provided openings for women. This is particularly true within the health service, where Aboriginal women are highly successful as health workers.

And yet an overall view of the public service shows that, despite some degree of success, Aboriginal women are most frequently found as ‘assistants’ to European qualified staff, or working in routine clerical jobs. The very few senior-level ‘identified’ jobs reserved for experts in Aboriginal affairs, that are not filled by European men, are more likely to be filled by an Aboriginal man than an Aboriginal woman. And in order to satisfy bureaucratic criteria, in particular to qualify for government grants, Aboriginal organisations are required to run very much along European-imposed lines. With their hierarchical structures and the gender-based division of labour some, though not all, Aboriginal organisations can appear remarkably similar to European ones.

Despite their ambitions and their commitment to work, Aboriginal women find themselves constrained by the restrictions placed on them by European patriarchal ideology. Despite their belief in the value of equality at work highlighted by research in Darwin, they nonetheless have had to conform to the sex-roles imposed on women at work in Australia. And despite their former independence, where they are not in positions of paid employment they have been designated as dependent on men.

This leaves Aboriginal women with a double challenge. For, notwithstanding equal employment campaigns, Aborigines have yet to be recognised by many non-Aboriginal employers as being as capable of doing a good job as European workers. And Aboriginal women, in common with all women, have yet to be recognised as being as capable of doing as good a job as men. The racist and sexist ideology in early-settler Australian society which ensnared Aboriginal women in a position of subordination remains alive and well in contemporary Australian society.

Yet I have maintained that their position has improved dramatically since the changes brought about by the ‘period of reconsideration’. And so it has. But compared to what? Compared to the position of European women? Compared to the position of Aboriginal men? Compared to the position of European men? Or perhaps compared only to the position of Aboriginal women before the mid-1960s.

Perhaps the less restrictive government approach in the last twenty years has meant that
Aboriginal women have been merely regaining some of their lost ground. Perhaps the day is dawning when they will be able to re-establish the position they previously held in traditional Aboriginal society. What is certain is that all people in Australia who are concerned with the ideals of equality have something in common with Aboriginal women. They may even have something to offer them. And more than that, they have something to learn from them too.

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Caring for country, the carrying out of traditional responsibility for the land, is a process of great importance for Aboriginal people. If the country is neglected it will become infertile and fail to provide sustenance; and the integrity of its spirit guardians and progenitors will no longer be maintained. Such truths are essential to the fabric of Aboriginal society. They form the basis for definition of Aboriginal traditional land ownership, conventionally understood by non-Aborigines to conform to recognised principles of inheritance, of which descent is perceived to be the most important. But adequately caring for country means being able to visit it and witness its preservation, living in close proximity to it where practical. This has not always been possible. Environmental, economic, political and social factors have, both before and since non-Aboriginal settlement, caused shifts in Aboriginal population and have forced people to adapt their systems of land inheritance accordingly.

Before the influence of non-Aboriginal society became strong, the system of land responsibility would, from time to time, have broken down because of the demise of key people in small population groups. When that occurred spiritual responsibility was transferred to other groups and individuals not necessarily linked to the former owners through descent. In addition the individual skills and capabilities of people were recognised, and only those with much to contribute would be taught all the ritual details which would then enable them to instruct others. This body of knowledge might well be withheld from others perceived to have little interest or skill in such matters.

Non-Aboriginal settlement has introduced other pressures leading to similar adaptations. The establishment of pastoral station homesteads, mining camps, telegraph stations and small towns caused Aborigines to move from their original country, sometimes virtually on a permanent basis. Many groups developed new distributions of birthplaces, conception places and places of residence, the spatial extent of which by no means corresponded with that of the country of their own ancestors or of the mythological beings associated with them. In these new places people cared for the country, taking on a primary spiritual responsibility which otherwise they were unlikely to have held.

Transformations such as these demonstrate the essential dynamism of Aboriginal customary beliefs and practices. Their existence has come sharply into focus in the process of Aboriginal land claims, during which the conventionally accepted definitions of traditional land ownership have been challenged. The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 states that before claimants can be granted freehold title to the territory for which they carry responsibility they must be able to prove that they are ‘traditional owners’.

Dr Elspeth Young, a senior lecturer in Geography, University College, University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, has, over the last decade, conducted research on contemporary socio-economic transformation in remote Aboriginal communities. She has also worked as a consultant on Aboriginal land claims in Central Australia.
According to Subsection 3(1) of the Act traditional owners are ‘a local descent group of Aboriginals who
(a) have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for the land; and
(b) are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over that land.’
The interpretation of this definition, as Toohey comments, leaves scope for variations. However the conventional definition, accepted by Toohey in the earliest land claims under the Act such as the Warlpiri and Kartanganurru-Kurintji claim stresses spiritual affiliation transferred through the patriline, from father to children. Hiatt, along with others, attributes this narrow description to the acceptance of Radcliffe-Brown’s interpretation of human-land relationships and inheritance of rights in Aboriginal society. In the course of subsequent land claims this definition has been questioned. A plea for the recognition of ambilineal descent groups, people who have inherited their responsibilities through either their mothers or fathers, was made for the Uluru claim, and later the Land Commissioner accepted that the children of women of a patrilineal descent group, commonly referred to as kurdungurlu in central Australia, also held spiritual responsibility for the land. While in the Utopia claim this was not interpreted as a ‘primary’ responsibility the later judgement on the Willowra claim did accept this definition in its entirety.

Changes such as these did much to bring the terms of the Land Rights Act closer to the reality of Aboriginal definitions of responsibility for land. However there remained other groups and individuals who, in the course of presenting evidence, claimed primary spiritual responsibility but did not even fit comfortably into these broader definitions of descent. They based their claims on birthplace, conception place, mythological links and a number of other avenues of descent. All of these, as Hiatt summarises, have been recorded in existing ethnographic material. But they have previously received only scant acknowledgement in anthropological interpretation. The need to reassess definitions of land ownership reflects, as Hiatt acknowledges, the fact that their characteristics have been studied and analysed during a period of significant social change. Throughout the 20th century structures of land ownership have continually been disrupted or even destroyed. It is therefore scarcely surprising that recent findings on these issues have increasingly had to accommodate the transformation resulting from the history of non-Aboriginal settlement.

Oral history provides a valuable body of knowledge about these changes and adaptations. During land claim hearings many people have described not only their lines of inheritance of land ownership and the responsibilities which these entail, but also events which have affected their contemporary residence patterns. These two components together account for present human-land relationships. They are inextricably linked. Here the stories of some of the

1 Toohey 1984:38.
2 Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1979.
3 Hiatt 1984b:12.
4 Layton 1983.
5 Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1980a.
6 Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1980b.
7 Hiatt 1984b:21.
8 Hiatt 1984a:1.
Anmatyerre people of central Australia are related, and considered in terms of responsibility for land. Most of the people concerned currently live in Mt Allan and Ti Tree, two Aboriginal-owned pastoral stations recently the subjects of claims for re-designation as unalienable Aboriginal freehold land. Two main themes emerge. First, individual claimants, living in the community and universally accepted as holding spiritual responsibility for part of the land under claim have been cited as traditional owners although they did not conform to conventional lines of descent. Some of these cases have been accepted by the Aboriginal Land Commissioners and some rejected. Regardless of the legal interpretations behind acceptance or rejection, a prime reason why these claims were made was that, through the influence of the pastoral industry, these people had resettled on land other than that of their paternal and maternal ancestors.

Secondly in both claims many people accepted by descent as traditional owners of the land in question were acknowledged to have spent most of their lives living elsewhere. While this did not affect their recognition as traditional owners it did affect their knowledge of the country, both of its spiritually significant sites and of the economic resources which it contains. They might know little about the ceremonies, and associated songs, dances and illustrations and the evidence which they were able to present in land claim hearings might therefore be sparse and deficient. For them the land claim hearing provided a significant opportunity to learn from others, and compensate for the deficiencies in their knowledge of a vital part of their cultural inheritance. Ironically, as the stories from Mt Allan and Ti Tree demonstrate, a number of those responsible for this teaching process were the same people whose claims for recognition as traditional owners were most dubious, and in some cases ruled to be unacceptable within the terms of the Act.

The Anmatyerre Mob: environment, social organisation and contact.

The Anmatyerre people, whose language is closely linked to Arrernte (Aranda), live some 200 km to the north, northwest and northeast of Alice Springs in a number of communities located on pastoral stations (Figure 1). Mt Allan and Ti Tree, both on Aboriginal-owned stations are the largest Anmatyerre groups and their combined populations of between 450 and 500 would account for about 40 per cent of present day Anmatyerre. Both communities lie within land defined as Anmatyerre territory in customary terms but while Ti Tree lies at the heartland of that area, Mt Allan is on the extreme western edge, bordered to the west by Warlpiri country belonging to groups now resident in Yuendumu.

Compared to their Warlpiri and Arrernte neighbours the Anmatyerre are today a comparatively small population group, probably only about fourteen hundred altogether. Spencer commented that the Anmatyerre had declined in number even as early as the late 19th century, a pattern which he attributed to the effects of drought in the 1880s, coupled with population dispersal following conflict with early European settlers on Anmatyerre country. Meggitt also commented on the relatively small number of Anmatyerre, and suggested that the expansion of Warlpiri into western Anmatyerre country around Anningie
Figure 1: Anmatyerre country.
had occurred partly because of population decline. This movement appears to have affected responsibility for land in that region, with both Warlpiri and Anmatyerre claiming traditional ownership. Intermarriage is another factor. As Meggitt further stated, this eastern Warlpiri expansion did not appear to have caused enmity, the two groups frequently intermarried and the Warlpiri apparently felt that the Anmatyerre were 'almost Warlpiri'. Although their languages belong to distinctly different families (Arandic and non-Arandic), Anmatyerre and Warlpiri social organisation is similar, with both being divided into eight major subsections forming two moieties between which preferred marriages occur. Linkages formed by marriage, either between Anmatyerre and Warlpiri, or between different Anmatyerre groups, led to linkages between different countries and created an interdependence which was a crucial element in carrying out ritual responsibilities. (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Warlpiri/Anmatyerre subsection terms and linkages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warlpiri</th>
<th>Anmatyerre</th>
<th>Warlpiri</th>
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<tr>
<td>J/Nampijinpa</td>
<td>Mpetyane</td>
<td>J/Napangardi</td>
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<td>J/Nakamarra</td>
<td>Kemarre</td>
<td>J/Napaljarri</td>
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<td>Ju/Napurrula</td>
<td>Perrwerre</td>
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<td>J/Nangala</td>
<td>Ngale</td>
<td>J/Nungarrayi</td>
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</tbody>
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= This symbol links first choice marriage patterns
[ This symbol links fathers with children

Anmatyerre country is, by central Australian standards, rich in water, game and vegetable foods. It was therefore attractive to non-Aboriginal settlers. The explorer Stuart ascended a prominent hill on the northern boundary of Ti Tree (later named Central Mt Stuart) in 1860, and by 1870 surveyors of the route for the Overland Telegraph had also traversed Anmatyerre country from south to north. The first stock drovers arrived during the same year. Thereafter Anmatyerre territory came increasingly under pressure as pastoralists settled in the region, and conflicts occurred, particularly when drought caused competition for scarce water supplies. These led to Anmatyerre attacks on the Barrow Creek telegraph station (1874) and on the Annas Reservoir homestead which was burned to the ground in 1883. Reprisals following these attacks caused the population dispersal referred to by Spencer. However the formal establishment of the non-Aboriginal pastoral industry in the area, with the alienation of Anmatyerre land for cattle station leases did not occur until the early 20th century. The leases on Pine Hill and Coniston were granted during the war years (1916 and 1917 respectively), Napperby station was set up in 1919 and Ti Tree followed in 1927. By 1933 almost all Anmatyerre country had been alienated for pastoralism. But some western regions, in general with less accessible supplies of surface water, were still unalienated, although grazing licences had been established over them. Mt Allan, within this region, did not become a separate pastoral lease until 1949.

The alienation of Anmatyerre land, and the period when it occurred, had a profound

13 Warlpiri terminology distinguishes between males and females, designated by the initials J and N respectively (for example Jampijinpa and Nampijinpa); for Jupurrula and Napurrula the first vowel also changes; Anmatyerre terminology makes no such distinctions.
Napangardi and Napanangka giving evidence at Mt Allan claim.

Angintye waterhole.
effect on population distribution. In time of need, people congregated near the homesteads of the cattle stations, hoping to get rations of food and sticks of tobacco. Some adults began to work to develop the properties, both directly with the stock and in domestic jobs, and they became relatively permanent inhabitants of the homestead camps. Other members of their families visited frequently, and also joined these camps from time to time. People still ranged over other parts of Anmatyerre territory but the numbers involved would have been much smaller than before non-Aboriginal settlement. And as more and more of the land was alienated the possibilities for moving freely about their territory, and caring for it according to Aboriginal law became much more limited. The separate experiences of Mt Allan and Ti Tree people illustrate how these circumstances subsequently affected primary responsibility for land.

**Mt Allan.**

Resettlement had two main effects on the way in which customary land responsibility was conducted at Mt Allan; it caused some members of the local descent groups to take up residence elsewhere; and it led to the identification of other individuals who, long resident in the community and well versed in ritual knowledge, did not belong to the conventional local descent group but were accepted as traditional owners. The modern distribution of traditional owners of Mt Allan country is a good indication of the first element (Figure 3). In 1982 these people who were not at Mt Allan itself lived in comparatively large numbers at Laramba (Napperby) and Yuendumu, and in smaller groups in Pinehill, Willowra and Ti Tree. Some also lived in Alice Springs. According to oral accounts given by older members of these groups their families gathered at Pinehill, Coniston and Napperby when these stations were established prior to 1920. Coniston and Napperby homesteads were both located close to permanent waterholes/soakages in the beds of the Lander and Napperby rivers, places where Anmatyerre had always met for large ceremonial gatherings, and which were important camping spots in times of drought. These two stations therefore drew Aborigines to places with which they were already familiar, and which were of considerable religious significance for them in any case. Mt Allan country, with no large permanent waterholes and no station homestead with tobacco and rations, was thereafter used only periodically. However, important sacred sites on Mt Allan were still cared for, ceremonies were maintained, and the knowledge was held, at least among older generations.

In 1946 another settlement, Yuendumu, was established under government auspices close to Mt Allan. Although planned principally for Warlpiri people who had already gathered at ration depots at Tanami, over 400km to the northwest, others also came to Yuendumu. In particular Anmatyerre, traditional owners of country within the reserve surrounding the new settlement, gathered there as a principal local land owning group. These people were also traditional owners of adjacent country on Mt Allan. A final significant element in the resettlement story is the transfer of part-European Anmatyerre children to Alice Springs under assimilation practices. Such children were institutionalised in the town from the 1940s onwards and, although they maintained contact with their Anmatyerre relatives back on the cattle stations, became part of the urban population.

This pattern of settlement was well established when the Mt Allan lease was taken out in 1949. According to D.D. Smith, son of the first station owner, the country was uninhabited when his family arrived. He and his father went to Yuendumu to recruit Aboriginal labour, and returned to Mt Allan with a number of families, all of whom were related to each other.
Figure 3: Traditional owners of Mt Allan country living outside the community. Size of circle indicates numbers of people.
and were traditional owners of parts of the new lease. These families formed the core of the new workforce, and have remained in that position ever since. They had returned to their country.

The experiences of other Mt Allan people were different. Those who had moved to Coniston at an early stage intermarried with traditional owners of Coniston country, and remained there with their relatives as part of the labour force. Although such intermarriage patterns would have occurred before non-Aboriginal settlement, the change of residence would have been less clearly established. They developed a strong attachment to Coniston, one which survived even the aftermath of the massacre following the killing of Brooks, the dingo scalp collector, on neighbouring Mt Denison in 1928.\textsuperscript{14} They ‘grew up’ Coniston station, and certainly were involved in the maintenance of ceremony there as well as periodically back on Mt Allan. But in the 1960s things changed. The station changed hands and, coupled with the introduction of award wages for Aboriginal stockmen, a large Aboriginal population was no longer welcome at Coniston. These families dispersed, some returning to Mt Allan and others to neighbouring stations such as Willowra and Mt Denison. Today there is no permanent Aboriginal population at Coniston. Mt Allan families who had gone to Napperby, however, remained there. One of these families, represented in the 1980s by eight siblings and their descendants, described how their father, ‘Old Jangala’, whose country lay partly in eastern Mt Allan and partly in western Napperby, had settled at the homestead in the early years and had become one of the key stockworkers. They were all born there, and were brought up knowing something of the lore concerning sites on Napperby itself. But they never visited that part of their father’s country on Mt Allan. Subsequently some members of this family dispersed, some to Ti Tree, and, in the case of those of part-European descent, to Alice Springs. None then went back to Mt Allan.

The final element in the Mt Allan resettlement history stems from the purchase of the station by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission in 1976, and the subsequent land claim. Following the purchase some Mt Allan families, principally those who had been working on Mt Denison, returned, thereby reinforcing the maintenance of ceremonial responsibility for Mt Allan country. That move was regarded with scepticism by some non-Aborigines, who attributed it to a desire to share in the monetary profits which might be available. As far as the Anmatyerre were concerned, it was a move essential to the maintenance of the true ‘law’ in that area. The land claim process itself kindled further feelings about the need for traditional owners to be living back on their own country, and led to the establishment of two homeland centres on Mt Allan, one of which was set up by members of ‘Old Jangala’s’ family, who had until then lived all their lives on Napperby. Alice Springs based members of this family have also recently spent lengthy periods back on the station.

In terms of the ritual knowledge of Mt Allan’s traditional owners this rather complicated history of population movement has been important. During the collection of evidence for the land claim it became clear that a high proportion of the traditional owners living at Mt Allan itself were descended through either their fathers or mothers from the J/Napangardi and J/Napanangka groups whose major responsibility was the honey-ant dreaming sites on the western side of the lease. J/Nangala and J/Nampijinpa groups, responsible for dingo dreaming sites on the eastern side, were living, as already mentioned, in Napperby, and

\textsuperscript{14} Cribben 1984.
ANMATYERRE COUNTRY

Showing Nampijina and Nampangka the country. Anmatyerre from Alice Springs visit sacred sites.
J/Nungarrayi and J/Napaljarri groups, whose country covers the southern portion of Mt Allan, were mostly in Napperby or Yuendumu. When these people were interviewed it became clear that few of the dingo dreaming group had much direct knowledge of the country in question, and some of the third group were in the same situation.

The problem was particularly severe for the women, who on marriage had often moved even further afield and had had little contact since. But once intense discussions began the community solved the problem according to their own convention. It became clear that one old man, resident on Mt Allan ever since the start of the station and himself holding primary spiritual responsibility for honey-ant dreaming sites, was also extremely knowledgeable in much of the other lore. Thereafter he deliberately worked with members of the other groups, accompanying them on site visits, relating the stories of the travels of their mythical ancestors and even pointing out where previous members of their families had passed away. Much of this information was already known to those concerned, but they had never had the opportunity to actually visit the country and see the places about which they had learned while growing up far away. The experience was particularly poignant for those Anmatyerre who, because of their European ancestry, had been moved to Alice Springs. For the first time they not only heard the songs and watched the dances which celebrated the spirits of their country, but also travelled through it and gained a new identification of prime importance to them. Altogether the transmission of knowledge needed to support the land claim was of vital importance for the future survival of Anmatyerre customs and beliefs in the area. People were able to learn not only lore handed down orally through generations, but could examine these stories in their spatial context. The false separation between lore and primary knowledge of country, essentially an artefact of recent resettlement, ceased to exist.

As the above examples suggest, residence on the country could be an important element in gaining the ritual and ecological knowledge needed to demonstrate traditional ownership. The Mt Allan community in 1982 also included many people who could not, by descent, claim to be traditional owners but who had lived there for between thirty and forty years and clearly had a very deep understanding of these matters. A number of these individuals were listed by the Anmatyerre as traditional owners. They included a group of women, all Nungarrayis, who were the wives of a number of the first Mt Allan stockmen, many of whom were Jangalas. Some of these women were Warlpiri and some Anmatyerre, and the country of their parents and grandparents included areas around Nyirrpi (150km to the west of Yuendumu), Mt Wedge (about 20km south of Mt Allan) and Mt Leichhardt (to the north of Coniston). While resident on Mt Allan they had learned the rituals appropriate to women's ceremonies in two of the main territories within the lease. Their husbands had played highly significant roles in transmitting this knowledge. Most were Jangalas who were *kurdungurru* for honey-ant dreaming sites associated with western Mt Allan. But, because for decades they were the only Aboriginal residents on the station, they had also carried much of the lore concerning other parts of the lease. Such information included the basic stories, songs and paintings central to both men's and women's rituals concerning land. They had passed on the appropriate knowledge to their wives who had maintained it ever since. During the land claim process these women transferred much of this lore to other women who, by descent, were the recognised owners of the country but who had for years been resident elsewhere. The women as a group discussed at length the inclusion of these Nungarrayis in the list of owners, and finally decided to place them as responsible for
Napangardi and Nungarrayi perform *yawulyu* ceremonies for Mt Allan country. Performers and organisers include women resident elsewhere and longterm Mt Allan residents who have carried ceremonial responsibility.
the J/Nungarrayi country because they belonged to the same subsection. Although evidence for their knowledge was strong the Aboriginal Land Commissioner in the end dismissed their claim because it was not ‘based in any way on any principle of descent’. However two other claimants, also put forward because of long residence and the obvious practice of ritual necessary for primary spiritual responsibility, were accepted. The difference here was that these individuals could also claim a descent principle, in both cases based on association with shared mythical ancestors whose dreaming tracks passed through both the country of their parents and through Mt Allan. The Aboriginal Land Commissioner this time accepted that ‘Perceived descent from a common mythic ancestor is a principle of descent which conveys the notion of common ancestry . . . deemed by the members of the group to be relevant for recruitment to the group’.16

Thus, while length of residence in itself was not sufficient, that coupled with a definition of descent held by the Anmatyerre themselves was acceptable. This enabled a decision within the terms of the Act, but, as the Aboriginal Land Commissioner acknowledged, the failure to find a legal means of including the Nungarrayis indicated that the Act itself might not fully represent Anmatyerre social reality. In other words in this case the Act could not deal with cases arising through circumstances caused largely by Aboriginal resettlement in historical times.

Ti Tree.

Anmatyerre from Ti Tree, like their kin and friends at Mt Allan, have also experienced marked changes in residential patterns because of the establishment of non-Aboriginal pastoral properties. But in contrast to Mt Allan, Ti Tree station, because it was set up before many of the neighbouring properties such as Anningie, Willowra or Stirling, was a focal place for Aboriginal visitors from around 1920. Many who then came to work on the property, and to bring up their children at the original homestead at Tea Tree Well or later beside the new homestead adjacent to the Hanson River, were Anmatyerre from that country. But some came from further afield and did not, in conventional terms, belong to local descent groups. However their descendants were included as claimants in the Ti Tree land claim. One of these families is today represented by the widow, children and grandchildren of an Arrernte man from Yambah (close to Alice Springs) who was one of the first ‘boss’ stockmen on Ti Tree. All except his widow, Nangala, were born on the property, and all the adults clearly played an important part in local ceremonial life. Their application for recognition as claimants was primarily based on the perception by the rest of the community that they performed this role, and also, with younger members of the family, that they were conceived and born on Ti Tree. In Nangala’s case another factor was her traditional ownership of sites on Mt Barkly to the west, sites associated with the bush plum dreaming track which also traverses Ti Tree. These arguments were accepted by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner.17 But the names of other claimants, also put forward by the community because of long residence on the station, were excluded. In those cases, as with the Nungarrayis on Mt Allan, knowledge was not a sufficient cause for recognition of traditional ownership.

15 Aboriginal Land Council 1985:12.
16 Aboriginal Land Council 1985:11.
There was no proof of descent by any recognisable principle.

Resettlement had also affected the ritual knowledge held by people who clearly belonged to local descent groups on Ti Tree. Some of the more recent history of population movement within the area is of interest in this case. In the early 1970s, when negotiations over the purchase of the property by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission first began, the Aboriginal population of Ti Tree was concentrated in a single main camp, beside the station homestead. Although some families in this camp were interested in moving eastwards to Woolla Downs, formerly a separate lease but incorporated into Ti Tree in the late 1950s, they had not been encouraged to do so, although that location was close to significant sites for which they were responsible. During this period two applications for excisions of small areas of the property were also granted. One was for an area of one square mile for the establishment of a new settlement for Aboriginal families who had long been living on Aileron station, Ti Tree's southern neighbour. By August of 1975 this community, Pmara Jutunta, commonly called New Place, had a population of around 120. Because it was a planned community, on a sub-lease of land held within a non-Aboriginal owned pastoral station, it was seen by all outsiders at least, as completely separate from the Aboriginal community at Ti Tree homestead. This distinction was further emphasised by New Place's association with the Lutheran Finke River Mission and its strong anti-drinking stance. When Ti Tree became an Aboriginal property the independence of New Place was still stressed, and in fact early discussions about the presentation of the land claim were marked by anxieties as to whether this group would oppose or disrupt the process. Some people assumed that when Ti Tree became Aboriginal freehold land this Aileron mob would be told to 'go back to where they belonged'. The realities proved to be somewhat different.

Early discussions about the families of Ti Tree's traditional owners revealed that some of the key figures, both men and women, lived at New Place and were in fact members of the Aileron mob. It transpired that their years of residence at Aileron had been a classic case of the development of an attachment to a particular employer, and working on a specific station, a characteristic which appears time and time again in the workforces of long-established central Australian cattle stations. Children and grandchildren had been brought up on Aileron, and visits back to country on Ti Tree had been infrequent and often short. Women in particular had rarely come back. When they returned to Ti Tree in 1975 their links with their kin who had remained there were reinforced, but ceremonial life, partly because of the mission influence, remained fairly inactive. The land claim process changed this situation. A resurgence of interest in ritual, and particularly with places associated with ancestral beings, drew the traditional owners from New Place increasingly into prominence and eventually they became highly enthusiastic about reinforcing their knowledge of the stories they had been told by their own older relatives. They also participated in ceremonies, and some older women who initially had said firmly that they could not dance because they had never learned how to perform the rituals, were eager to take part. This educational process, a filling in of information which, because of resettlement, had not been transferred to two entire generations, was carried out by senior people from the Ti Tree community. As at Mt Allan these teachers included some long-term residents not recognised as members of local descent groups although many of the teachers were traditional owners.
Population Movement and Land Responsibilities — Dealing with a problem

These brief examples illustrate how Anmatyerre people in central Australia have dealt with some of the problems affecting their care of the land, problems which have stemmed primarily from their resettlement following non-Aboriginal settlement within their country. They have essentially made the best of whatever situation in which they found themselves. Where they have had to accept living far from their own ancestral country they have, if they have had the appropriate skills, learned the lore necessary to look after their new country; and when the opportunity arose they have transferred this information back to those who, like themselves, moved away and could not return. If they were fortunate enough to remain in the country of their ancestors, they then ensured that they not only maintained the necessary knowledge, but also passed it on to others where appropriate. These strategies were not new. They were undoubtedly used in the past when population groups became non-viable. But they were adapted to a new situation, a situation where far more Anmatyerre than ever before had to live away from their land and under pressures which made it very difficult for them to care for that land as they felt necessary. An important message emerging from this is the universal belief which the Anmatyerre, and indeed all other Aborigines, had that all country must be cared for. And caring for country was first and foremost a spiritual affair, through which its ecological and environmental future would be assured.

The land claim processes for these two Anmatyerre groups also cast further light on the whole problem of the correspondence between the definition of ‘traditional owners’ and ‘primary spiritual responsibility’ as enshrined in non-Aboriginal legal terms, and the Aboriginal interpretation of these terms. Despite the considerable degree of flexibility with which successive Aboriginal Land Commissioners have used the terms, there is still a lack of correspondence. This brief description of settlement history, and subsequent assumptions of ritual responsibility, further illustrates the important interconnections between anthropological understanding and historical inquiry.

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There were headlines in August 1980 about the confrontation between the AMAX Corporation, planning to drill for oil on Noonkanbah Station on the southern border of the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and the Yungngora Aborigines who had recently acquired the lease. It was seen then as a dramatic development in the conflict between miners and Aborigines, but memories are so short that Erich Kolig’s book reminds us of the events themselves, the previous history of the region and the later happenings.

We are fortunate to have two separate reviewers who, like the book’s author, had intimate knowledge of the 1980 situation and a lasting involvement with the Aboriginal people concerned. They saw the events from different viewpoint. The first review is by Stan Davey and the second is by Rod Dixon.

Review by Stan Davey, Community Development Consultant, Darwin.

Kolig’s book presents useful insights into Aboriginal conceptions and philosophy establishing the importance of Noonkanbah Station to the Yungngora and Kadjina people of the Fitzroy River Valley. The religious foundations outlined by Kolig provided the people with inspiration and determination in their conflict with government bureaucracy and the mining companies. Kolig effectively captures the inherited world perspective which formed ‘the Aboriginal point of view in the matter’ and presents ‘some of the shapes and events of the past and present (which) assume a distinctive form when seen through the Aboriginal prism’ (p.9).

Between 1900 and 1930 desert Aborigines from the southern Kimberley moved to the Fitzroy River Valley to join the Nygina, Gunian and Bunapa speakers indigenous to the area. The newcomers ‘through the infusion of the vitality of belief and lore’ revived traditional culture in the region ‘and shaped the station into a religious centre and its Aboriginal community into a mainstay of traditional culture in the area’ (p.19).

The hostile and degrading conditions which the people residing at Noonkanbah confronted daily during their involvement with the pastoral industry are presented. These provide evidence for Kolig’s conviction that the ‘two major ingredients’ in the struggle were the ‘enormously strong attachment to land’ and ‘the fear and loathing that this community had for Europeans’ (p.9). Additional reasons for the latter are well documented in the chapters on ‘Pacification, martyrs & guerillas’ and ‘The work force’. In August 1971 the Noonkanbah community packed up and left the station.

The chapter ‘Diaspora’ highlights the agony of the community in exile at Fitzroy Crossing following their ‘walk off’. Here the difficulties of the pastoral regime were replaced by confrontations with bureaucrats and missionaries engaged in the Aboriginal industry. In his analysis of this period Kolig is unable to find anything but an ‘awkward amalgam of warped...
attitudes forming the official front with which Aborigines had to deal’ (p.57). This sug-
gests an absence of understanding by Kolig outside a narrow anthropological perspective. The brief given to officers from the Department of Community Welfare (DCW) was to work with communities, respect their traditional values and assist in enabling them to achieve their own goals. As Kolig points out additional anthropological knowledge may have helped these officers to have comprehended the relationship differences which brought about the separation of the people into two incorporated bodies, Kadjina and Yungngora. It may also have helped to minimise some of the tensions which subsequently arose.

In my experience the DCW officers concerned followed their brief closely, listening to the aspirations of the communities and supporting the plans they enunciated. For instance the communities rejected the Housing Commission style of housing. The Kadjina and the Bayulu (from the neighbouring Go Go Station) were then assisted to purchase their own brickmaking machine and erect their own stores. The Kadjina were also supported to obtain a mustering plant. Faced with refusal by station managers to contract them, it was the support of the DCW and its officers which finally won them a contract. And there was much more. The story of the Noonkanbah people’s struggle would not be weakened by allowing anthropological observations to comprehend the whole context in which the Kadjina and Yungngora operated including the fact that some bureaucrats shared in the drama alongside the people.

It is possible that public support for the communities would have been stronger if the underpinning philosophy of the people presented in the chapter entitled ‘The sanctity of the land’ had been spelt out at the time. Aboriginal understanding of the spiritual content of their land still needs to be made significant to the dominant Australian society. (For example some bureaucrats, politicians, mining and pastoral interests still use, to effect, the claim that sacred sites are fabricated capriciously.) Kolig’s expose could well contribute to an increased public awareness, although it is unlikely that the pristine picture he presents was unaltered even at the time of the Noonkanbah struggle.

In the section ‘Reclaiming the land’ there seems to be some misjudgement in his assess-
ment of the dynamics at play within the communities following their voluntary exile. The branding of the younger leaders of the breakaway Kadjina group as a ‘fun loving’, ‘bunch of lively young people’, as if they made their decisions from that stance, ignores the fact that decisions made were concluded only after consultation with the elders of their group who permitted them the role of spokespersons. The role of Friday Muller, in spite of his greatness, is overstated and ignores that of his first lieutenant Ginger Ngungawilla who in some respects appears to have had equal if not greater authority. It was he who stood up to the Noonkanbah Station manager and delivered the message that the people would no longer work for him. It was Ngungawilla who went with a group to Strelley to examine their education system and came back to establish the Noonkanbah independent school. He assumed no special privileges from his leadership position and remained with the community throughout. Similarly the role of the women does not rate a mention by Kolig. When the community moved to Noonkanbah it was the women who maintained the school camp on the edge of Fitzroy Crossing and by their frugality saved, through the Isolated Children’s Assistance Scheme, sufficient money to commence the independent school. Their operation of services such as the community store was an essential element in the struggle.
1979: Noonkanbah men block an entrance to the station against AMAX and the Western Australian Mines Department. Photo: Kimberley Land Council Newsletter.
In the last three chapters Kolig provides a broad outline of events up to and including the
government invasion of the P Hill sacred site in August 1980.

The legal challenge by the Noonkanbah people to mining applications before the Broome
Mining Warden’s Court and the impotency of the Aboriginal leaders in these circumstances
are discussed. This is followed by a lengthy dissertation on why Aborigines are not really
conservationists and why they chose to oppose mining more than pastoral activities. The
latter topic needs deeper consideration than that provided by Kolig. For example to argue
that ‘pastoralism fitted quite well with the image of traditional food procuring methods; . . .
Thus traditional ways of thinking did not hinder greatly the acceptance of pastoralism’
(p.126), ignores the ready involvement of other Aborigines in the mining industry at the
turn of the century. Rowley1 notes that in Western Australia ‘by the time of the 1905
(Aborigines) Act, some Aborigines were self employed in mining’ and ‘there had been
periodic attempts by police to round up Aborigines from their mining and to take them back
to the stations’. The Nyungamata who rushed up from the Pilbara to support the Noonkan­
bah stance in 1980 had survived mainly by mining since the early 1950s. When it came to
a matter of survival ‘traditional ways of thinking did not hinder greatly the acceptance of
mining and its accommodation.

Finally Kolig’s account fails to highlight the extreme political and physical pressure
exerted by the Western Australian Government during the period 1978-1980, including the
numerous ministerial visits to Noonkanbah with their attempts at persuasion, the use of
ridicule and threats, the overriding of the authority of the Western Australian Museum, the
conflict between the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Western Aus­
tralian Government and the extensive use of police force. These coercive pressures culminat­
ing in the notorious ‘convoy’ of police and miners, did not escape ‘the Aboriginal point of
view’ and it would be worth examining Aboriginal perceptions in relation to these factors.
Nor does Kolig show the importance of the Noonkanbah events in rallying Aboriginal leaders
from the north (Arnhem Land) and from the south (the Pilbara) and presenting a show of
Aboriginal solidarity not previously experienced.

Overall Kolig’s treatise provides much useful and some essential background material but
cannot claim to be THE Noonkanbah story.

Review by Rod Dixon, Darwin Institute of Technology.

This is a short book, but the most extensive account yet published of the controversy
surrounding attempts by AMAX Corporation to drill for oil on Aboriginal sacred sites in the
Kimberley district of Western Australia from 1977 to 1980. The sites were located on an
Aboriginal owned pastoral lease — Noonkanbah Station — in the Fitzroy River Valley. The
lease had only recently been granted to the Yungngora Aborigines and provided them with
an opportunity to escape many of the pressures of life as fringe dwellers around the nearby
town of Fitzroy Crossing.

The Western Australian Government has already put on record its version of these events
— in a booklet entitled Noonkanbah — the facts — described by Professor R.M. Berndt as ‘an
appalling document . . . of truth and half truth’.2 Kolig sets himself the task of ‘capturing,
as much as possible for an outsider, the Aboriginal point of view in the matter' (p.9).

The first section of the book, ‘Losing the land’, relates early European/Aboriginal contact in the Fitzroy Valley and the post-contact history of settlement by Western Desert Aborigines on Noonkanbah. Kolig’s account tends to present Aborigines as the almost passive victims of awesome, externally-sourced determinations, understating their agency or autonomy from these determinations. This presentation is perplexing given an apparently contrary tendency in some of Kolig’s previous writing. It is still more perplexing when one discovers that many of the Aborigines of whom he is writing were not people who were tied to the Fitzroy Valley, enduring European occupation of their lands because of spiritual links to ‘country’ but rather had dislodged themselves voluntarily from their desert habitat and moved en masse into areas [of the Fitzroy Valley] already occupied by whites’ (p.82 emphasis added). Moreover they kept on coming even as, in some cases, their families were shot down around them (p.34), to become unpaid workers on European pastoral leases.

As pastoral workers, Kolig notes, they gave Europeans everything they possibly could, everything dear to them, their labour, their knowledge of the land, even ritual knowledge to a select few — all to people for whom, Kolig writes, they had feelings only of ‘fear and loathing’ (p.9), ‘disgust’ and ‘deep rooted aversion’ (p.49).

What intention underlay their coming and their staying? Kolig suggests an ad hoc collection of contributing factors — the harshness of the desert (p.31), more brutal circumstances elsewhere (p.18), the magnetic draw of European commodities (pp.31, 32) and a desire to escape the loneliness of being left behind in the desert (p.33). An analysis of Aboriginal oral history might have provided some further insights. But while Kolig admits oral tradition to his account when it relates to myth and religious beliefs, he is surprisingly dismissive of oral history, particularly when it varies from the European account. For example, ‘Due to the lack of official records on this era, one can no more than state the oral traditions for what they are worth; interesting documents in themselves but to be taken cum grano salis as a reflection of the past’ (p.23). For Kolig, discrepancies between the Aboriginal and European account of the same events are either to be accounted for as lacunae in the European account or deviousness in Aboriginal oral tradition.

Such inconsistencies and contradictions may in fact be direct evidence of differently culturally ordered Aboriginal and European historiographies. As Sahlins reminds us, an event in one culture may not be an event in another: ‘An event becomes such as it is interpreted. Only as it is appropriated in and through the cultural scheme does it acquire an historical significance.’

Perhaps to understand the Aboriginal perspective on, inter alia, the Noonkanbah events, requires identifying such ‘deviations’ and reading backwards from them to the cultural scheme that generates them through its specific appropriation and ordering of contingent circumstances.

In his discussion of Aboriginal responses to change, Kolig outlines ‘two pivotal and diametrically opposed viewpoints’. On the one side the viewpoint of Aboriginal society adjusting and adapting to European introduced change. On the other, the ‘soap bubble theory’ which

4 For a somewhat different perspective see Kolig 1980.
5 Sahlins 1954:xiv, original emphasis.
sees Aboriginal society poised in delicate spiritual and cultural balance which, when disturb­ed, will damage Aboriginal society beyond repair (pp.141-42). Kolig argues that these positions 'fall short of reflecting a sensible and authentic picture of the actual position' (p.142). Yet there is some evidence of at least the latter approach in a number of places in the book. I have already referred to a tendency, in the early chapters, to understate Abo­riginal agency in the periods of initial contact. A related tendency in some parts of the book is to see Aboriginal culture not as seeking to reconsider, creatively, the changing world in its own terms but as collapsing under the disintegrative processes of westernisation — ‘the creeping, yet fast advancing weaning process that led them farther and farther away from the remaining vestiges of what was pre-European in origin’ (p.38). Where Aboriginal culture has maintained its essential forms, as at Noonkanbah, it appears to have done so only because it has been ‘topped up’ by uncontaminated culture carried into the region by desert migrants (p.39). While undoubtedly the original Aboriginal population of the Fitzroy Valley was close to extinction by the early twentieth century, had they maintained population numbers at pre-contact levels, Kolig’s view appears to be that their culture would nevertheless have undergone ‘agonising decline’ and disintegration in the face of westernisation. But this is not Kolig’s final position. On page 142, he writes:

Aboriginal tradition has never been so rigid as to totally resist new realities and reject innovations. A doctrinaire insistence on immutability notwithstanding, religion itself has most probably changed over the millennia and certainly in the most recent decades, without losing its traditional flavour.

while, looking to the future, he notes:

Aborigines, as they have always done in the past, will work out viable and in­
telligent solutions to what initially may appear to be insurmountable problems.

Doing so has always been their recipe for survival (p.142).

So why then a partial lapse into the ‘soap bubble’ or ‘fatal impact’ theory? One possibility is that Kolig is in fact residually attached to the idea that Aboriginal culture cannot persist under changed material conditions as anything other than a debased ‘survival’ of a pristine ‘traditional culture’. He writes (p.143) of Aborigines coming to terms with European intrusions by ‘gradually revising and reshaping their religious philosophy so as to make it amenable to modern practices’. For Kolig this means ‘Aborigines will come more and more to maintain only small pockets of traditionalism in a world increasingly dominated by in­
terests which Aborigines share with the wider society’ (p.143). Is it not equally possible that Aborigines — interpreting, and interacting with the wider society from within their own worldview, may actively appropriate change, transforming the intrusions of European society in ways reproductive of the Aboriginal cultural system (notwithstanding internally wrought changes to it)? For example, in the case of the Argyle Diamond Mine (to which I presume Kolig refers on page 143 when he writes of Aborigines being forced to give up sacred sites under the allurement of large sums of money) it is possible to identify, (in addi­tion to the obviously negative effects of the European development and compensation arrangements), a transformation of elements of the intrusion into opportunities for strengthen­ing ties of relatedness within the Aboriginal society of the region, in terms of revitalised winan or exchange practices.6

6 Dixon, forthcoming.
THE NOONKANBAH STORY

The Noonkanbah events provide Kolig with a contemporary opportunity for detailed research into Aboriginal responses to externally induced change. They particularly provide an opportunity to collect and analyse Aboriginal accounts of their involvement in the events, their interpretation of these events, the origins of these interpretations in an \textit{a priori} cultural system and the internal changes to this system resulting from its exposure to conflict with a radically different cultural system. Unfortunately, lack of time and resources appear to have denied Kolig the possibility of carrying out such detailed research.

His book is, nevertheless, a welcome contribution to the growing literature on the interaction between Aborigines and resource developers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


\textemdash \textit{The silent revolution} Philadelphia, 1981.


1976: Kadjina and Yungngora women with the truck brought by 'chuck in'. Their work was essential in the struggle. Photo: Jan Richardson.

As far as books are concerned Festschriften often form an ambiguous category: neither fish nor fowl; neither bird nor beast. Sometimes they consist of random essays concerned with a diverse range of subjects and presented in a manner as if the contributors have attempted to distance themselves from both the person honoured and their fellow authors. At other times the essays appear to have been forced to conform to a common interest either of the editor or to reflect the interests of the person to be honoured. But occasionally there are collections of essays in which the authors appear as individuals, pursuing their own interests while at the same time acknowledging the stimulus and support of the person honoured. So it is with this collection and the late W.E.H. Stanner could have wished no greater compliment.

The volume has an excellent introduction outlining Stanner’s life and work contributed by the editors and an extensive bibliography of Stanner’s writing compiled by Diane Barwick and Judith Wilson. Both are models of the kind of supportive material that should appear in a Festschrift but unfortunately is so often lacking. The bibliography contains 432 items presented in date order including published and unpublished writings each carefully cross referenced. The editors’ introduction is balanced and judicious. Stanner was a complex person whose career and interests were quite unlike those of many of his contemporaries in anthropology. His interests were broad and individual, his writings idiosyncratic and often abstruse. Rarely did he conform to prevailing trends or ideas. Instead he pursued his own interests, set his own academic aims and standards and wrote not only from a deep knowledge of human culture but also with a strong moral commitment to humanity. With style and wit he perhaps reached more deeply into the Aboriginal psyche than has any other anthropologist of non-Aboriginal descent and struggled long and hard to convey the Aboriginal sense of values and life in a rapidly changing world.

The volume contains eight papers, three on non-Aboriginal topics. These include a paper by Sir Raymond Firth on Tikopian humour, a discussion by Michael Young of the refusing of gifts during ceremonial exchanges in Kalauna, Goodenough Islands, Papua-New Guinea and finally a paper by Marie Reay on ritual among the Kuma of Highland New Guinea.

The remaining papers are perhaps of greater interest to readers of this journal. Jeremy Beckett re-examines one of the cults (German Wislin) that appeared before and during World War I in the Torres Strait area. Using earlier accounts and his later fieldwork he reveals how difficult it is for an anthropologist to reconstruct history from oral traditions, particularly when there is a reticence to discuss such matters. Ken Maddock examines Stanner’s suggestion that Aboriginal ritual involves aspects of sacrifice and, somewhat predictably, presents a more structuralist interpretation. However, he has some interesting things to say on the differences between van Gennep’s approach to the structure of ritual and the work of Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss on sacrifice and ritual. Stanner was fascinated by Durkheim’s attempts to understand Aboriginal religion even though he disagreed with Durkheim’s basic premises. Maddock unfortunately does not refer to this work.
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Harold Scheffler in a closely argued piece re-examines Meggitt's kinship material on the Warlpiri. Concentrating on kin classes he disagrees with Meggitt's analysis of the relationship of the kin categories with wider aspects of social structure although he ends by agreeing with Meggitt that kinship can only be fully understood as part of wider Aboriginal culture.

In quite a different style Nancy Williams provides a case study of Aboriginal decision making in the Northern Territory. She shows how complicated decisions are arrived at by people living in small, closely-knit communities and how different are the processes from the type of 'decisions' forced upon Aborigines by the bureaucratic representatives of the modernising industrial society of the Australian state. Williams manages to convey two of Stanner's concerns in this paper: his interest in life-as-action and his understanding of indigenous reactions to the modern world.

The longest paper in the book, and certainly the most detailed, is by Diane Barwick. In a brilliant piece of detective work she traces the life of a remarkable Victorian Aborigine, Louisa Strugnell Briggs. The paper reflects all that was so fine in Diane's work: her tremendous grasp of people, of period and of place; her control of sources and her sense of empathy with the Victorian Aborigines past and present; her scrupulous honesty and commitment to truth. The investigation takes the reader on a long and complex journey from the little-known world of the Bass Strait sealers to the gold-fields of Victoria and the Aboriginal stations of Coranderrk and Cumeroogunga. On the way all kinds of strange people are encountered and diverse scraps of information and obscure sources are pieced together until the reader arrives, exhausted but wiser, at some kind of resolution. Diane entitled her contribution: 'This most resolute lady: a biographical puzzle'; the first part of her title could also have been applied to Diane herself: a very resolute lady indeed.

There is much in this volume to interest the general and the specialist reader. I am sure it would have been a collection of which Stanner would have been proud.

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Judith Wright's book is, in her own words, an 'account of the campaign conducted by the Aboriginal Treaty Committee (ATC) between November 1978 and December 1983' (p.284). It is that, but is much more. It is a discourse, written simply and elegantly, on the unhappy relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. The central theme is the occasion for and the need to bring these peoples together by a treaty between them.

This book is about the idea of a treaty, and in particular about the work of the ATC. This committee (listed at p.ix) combined the talents and energy of a number of non-Aboriginal Australians. Some, such as Judith Wright, Nugget Coombs, Charles Rowley and Bill Stanner, were able to look back at relations between the peoples of Australia over long lifetimes of reflection and experience.
The ATC grew out of an invitation by Dr Coombs to a number of his friends to consider 'general issues and principles' concerning 'reforms and benefits for Aborigines' (p.1). Chapter 1 explains the background to this invitation.

The modern period of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations began on a positive note with the changes to the Constitution brought about by the 1967 referendum. Aborigines were now recognised as members of the Australian community, and the Commonwealth was granted a plenary power to deal with matters relating to that membership. That potential has never been fully utilised, and shortly after the referendum there followed legal developments which revealed clearly that the terms on which the Aborigines might be said to be members of an Australian community were far from settled.

One such development was the decision in the Gove Land Rights case decided by Mr Justice Blackburn in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory in 1971. In essence, the judge held that as a matter of law, and following precedent cases, the Australian colonies became such on the basis that they were 'settled' by English colonists, in territory which was 'practically unoccupied' and peacefully annexed' (as the Privy Council had put it in an 1886 case followed by Blackburn J.). This view of the basis of colonisation rejects the competing categories of colonisation by 'conquest' (such as occurred, for example, when Australian forces occupied German New Guinea in 1914), or by 'cession' from the local rulers (such as occurred, for example, when Cakobau purported to cede Fiji to the Crown in 1874).

Certain legal consequences followed the settled colony principle. One of these was applied in the Gove case; that upon colonisation the Aborigines did not retain in the lands they then occupied any proprietary interest which might have existed according to their own systems of law. (In contrast, if either of the other two bases for colonisation had been accepted, these interests would have continued to exist, although subsidiary to the law that the colonising power might have introduced).

Three other consequences also followed, (and their application may be seen in nineteenth century cases). These were, first, that the legal status of Aborigines has been defined by English law as modified by local statute. This formal equality before the law in some respects placed the Aborigines at a grave disadvantage in the legal system as may be seen in the application of the rule that only Christians could give evidence in the courts. (This rule allowed the killing of Aborigines to go mostly unpunished). On the other hand, this principle did not mean that colonial law might not differentiate in its treatment of Aborigines from other races, and of course the massive edifice of lawful discrimination erected in the latter nineteenth century was not (though not completely) dismantled until the second half of the twentieth. Secondly, the law applied to Aborigines both in their dealings with non-Aborigines and less obviously (from the point of view of the needs of the colonisers) in their dealings with each other. Thirdly, and allied to this last matter, Aboriginal dispute settlement procedures were not recognised by colonial law and their use would in many cases have been a breach of that law.

The events surrounding the Gove case and the reactions to it illustrate themes that have been central to debate.

First, the perception that the problem is a legal one to be solved through legal action in the courts, whether domestic or international. There has thus been, on the part of non-lawyers as much as lawyers, an occupation with legal doctrine and 'law-talk'.

Secondly, a recognition that the debate takes place within a distinct political economy. The land claimed by Aborigines is a valuable commodity for powerful pastoral and mining
interests. Resistance to Aboriginal claims has been in part by way of denying that Aborigines should have any particular place in the legal system.

Thirdly, governments, represented by both politicians and public servants, have played a largely reactive role in the unfolding of events.

Fourthly, in so far as the debate has been concerned with whether there might be a treaty, there has been a polarisation of attitudes between, on the one hand, Aboriginal spokespersons who claim that the government must recognise (or even restore) 'sovereignty' to the Aborigines and, on the other, government spokespersons who refuse to countenance negotiation on the basis that the Aborigines are not currently amenable to the law in the general way as other citizens.

Fifthly, however, there are many Aborigines who take the view that the debate is not primarily about a treaty but about more concrete matters such as land rights, education, health, housing, legal aid, the recognition of Aboriginal law, and generally about compensation for the loss of lands.

These several themes are apparent in the history subsequent to the Gove case which Judith Wright's book recounts.

The central concern of the Yirrkala of the Gove Peninsula was of course to assert their ownership of their traditional lands. They lost the case, but that loss led eventually to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* 1976. Initiated by Whitlam and completed by Fraser, the Act created a framework for land claims in the Territory which is far more effective than the common law doctrines asserted in the Gove case could have been. As Judith Wright records, the underlying basis of the Gove case was also undermined by a resolution passed unanimously by the Senate on 20 February 1975 at the instance of Senator Bonner. 'It called on the government to recognise that Aborigines had had “prior ownership” of “this entire nation” and should be compensated for their dispossession' (p.31).

But Judith Wright argues that by 1976 the Australian government's commitment to Aborigines had eroded in the face of opposition from mining companies and investors. To Nugget Coombs, Judith Wright, and the others of the about-to-be-formed ATC, there was a need 'by some instrument that would be irrevocable' to bind the Commonwealth 'to honour its responsibility to legislate for and protect Aboriginal rights under the 1967 referendum mandate' (p.28).

Chapter 2 elaborates the background up to Dr Coombs's calls to his friends to form the Treaty Committee. There is here an account of conflicts in the 'Uranium Province' (Northern Territory), of the Fox inquiries, of the circumstances of the signing of the Ranger Agreement, and of the emergence of the Australian Mining Industry Council as a powerful lobby group working for mining interests and in opposition to Aboriginal claims.

In Chapter 3 Judith Wright turns to examine how it was that there was not from the beginning of colonisation any treaties with the Aboriginal peoples. This short account of the landmarks in the legal history is of course far from complete, but it captures the essential matters clearly. It reveals that Colonial Office officials, Governors, colonial officials and settlers were far from clear about just what status in the legal system the Aborigines did occupy. For some purposes they were aliens (and could be killed as enemy outside the protection of the law), for other purposes (to bring them within the authority of the courts) they were subjects. What is clear is the process described by Professor Stanner and quoted by Judith Wright: 'meeting, sporadic violence, a general struggle, and the imposition of terms by the stronger — which always appeared wherever settlement went' (p.60).

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The legal history is taken up to the *Coe* case in 1979. The claim made in this case did not relate to any particular land, although it may have been aimed at the Ranger negotiations. The claim, by a non-traditional Aborigine purporting to act on behalf of ‘the Aboriginal people of Australia’, asserted the continuing sovereignty of those people over the lands of Australia, and relief against the deprivation of those lands. This litigation indicated how far some Aboriginal views on the legal position had shifted since the *Gove* case. Another such indication was the call by the National Aboriginal Conference for a treaty between the Aborigines and the Commonwealth government.

The group that formed the ATC saw that their role was to educate and stimulate the non-Aboriginal community to accept the notion of a treaty. At several points Judith Wright emphasises that their role was to be played in the non-Aboriginal community. The rest of the book is an account of the work of the Committee until the point where it began to be wound down following a conference at the Australian National University which brought together lawyers to canvass the options in both domestic and international law for a treaty. The landmarks of this work are recorded and their significance analysed, from Dr Coombs’ appearance on television, to Stewart Harris’s book *It’s coming yet . . .* to the ATC’s *Newsletter*. (The book is valuable indeed as a case study of how a small public-interest lobby group might function).

Intertwoven in this account is a history of the recent efforts of Aboriginal communities around Australia to assert their claims. There is thus recorded the work of the National Aboriginal Conference to propagate the concept of a Makarrata; the Noonkanbah episodes; the several ventures of Aborigines into international forums, such as the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, and The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples; the High Court decisions in the *Koowarta* case and the *Franklin Dam* case; and the work of the Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs on its reference to consider the feasibility of a Makarrata (see *Two hundred years later*, as the report of this Senate committee was entitled).

It emerges clearly from Judith Wright’s account that the Aboriginal communities are far from united in their objectives. This underlines the emphasis the author gives to the need to allow these communities the time and the resources to develop their capacity for self-management, out of which will grow an ability and a confidence to enter into a treaty.

Towards the end of its existence, the ATC came to be concerned to explore how international law might be a vehicle for challenge to the ‘settled colony’ principle in the International Court or in Australian courts, or be seen as a body of legal norms that supported the call for a treaty, or even as a means for requiring the Australian government to enter into a treaty. Judith Wright’s account reflects the fact that there is an amount of incoherence in just how the ATC and some of the Aboriginal groups thought that these lines of approach might be pursued. Are they complementary to one another, or alternatives?

Judith Wright appears to favour an approach suggested by a Canadian lawyer (Russell Barsh) who works for the Micmaq. This is that the Aborigines may be regarded as a ‘people’ (rather than as a minority), and that as such they have a right recognised by contemporary international law to choose how their right to self-determination should be exercised. That is, they might choose ‘what form of political association they wanted with the occupying powers’ (p.269). The choice might be for complete independence as a state, for some form of federal association, or for assimilation (see at p.268). Judith Wright is obviously attracted to this approach for that it renders irrelevant the many objections to solving the sovereignty
issue through domestic legal challenge. (There is an excellent summary of just what these objections are, which should give pause to those who seek to reverse the settled colony principle through the domestic legal regime).

The final chapter, written by Dr Coombs, is a frank statement of the obstacles ahead for the realisation of the treaty concept. The most basic issue is seen to be the difference in approach to sovereignty over the territory of Australia; some Aborigines argue that it remains vested in them, while the government argues that as a matter of fact and law it is not. The chapter praises Paul Coe's view expressed at the ANU conference in November 1983 (not 1984 as the book records) that the two parties might reserve their position on this issue while talking about how powers might be divided between the two (pp.299-300).

Beyond this matter, there are other obstacles: the opposition of powerful commercial interests; the division of power between Commonwealth and State governments; the lack of will on the part of politicians to attempt to lead public support; the prevailing legal view of the status of Aborigines; the lack of acknowledgment of an Aboriginal 'people'; argument about what form compensation to the Aborigines might take; and the lack of a tradition of representation in the Aboriginal communities.

But the final chapter concludes on a positive and practical note. Dr Coombs argues that by 1988 negotiations might begin for a treaty if a certain strategy was pursued: action to encourage Aboriginal self-management and decision making in their communities, and possibly local/regional government in some areas; an educational program to raise the level of European-Australian consciousness of the need for recognition of Aboriginal rights; an increase in Commonwealth power; joint study of issues of principle on which Aboriginal and European-Australian attitudes divide; and action to procure an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (pp.306-307).

The book concludes with a fair statement of just where the debate had reached by June 1985, when the manuscript appears to have been completed. It demonstrates that at that point the treaty idea was far from clearly completed.

At the time this review is written (September 1987) Prime Minister Hawke has, with a view to a Bicentennial settlement, attempted to place such a concept back on to the political agenda, although the politicians are more prone to favour talk of a 'compact' rather than a treaty.

Reaction to Mr Hawke's proposal has revealed that in 1987 we are little closer to achieving a treaty. The only way ahead with Mr Hawke's proposal is to see it as a starting point for the process outlined in this book. No progress will however be made beyond this point unless there is a full appreciation of the history of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships and of what a treaty might mean. This book is essential to such an understanding.

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For six months during 1983-84 Dr Coombs reviewed the role and operations of the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) at the request of the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. His report was tabled in Parliament in February 1985. The paper now published contains those parts of the report in which Coombs proposes a new statutory body to replace the NAC. These detailed organisational proposals are preceded by thirteen pages in which he discusses the differences between Aboriginal and White Australian modes of leadership and decision making, partly to explain the failure of the NAC and partly to validate the arrangements proposed for the congress that would replace it. The new proposals are to be seen as tentative, for Coombs recommends the calling of a national Aboriginal convention specifically to discuss and perhaps modify the constitution of the proposed Congress.

The sequence of an unsatisfactory Conference, to be followed by a constitutional Convention to establish a permanent Congress, highlights dramatically some of the inherent difficulties in achieving or maintaining a multi-cultural society. The present policy of multiculturalism, as applied to those ethnic groups that have established a conscious presence in Australia comparatively recently, appears to be to tolerate, and sometimes mildly to encourage, diversity in family and religious life, but to stop far short of providing separate political, legal and economic institutions. For Aborigines the policy goes much further and the encouragement of diversity is more positive. Most of the resources for the development of special social forms that take account of Aboriginal distinctiveness come, however, from the Commonwealth government rather than from Aborigines themselves; thus to a large extent the Commonwealth calls the tune. Furthermore the Commonwealth, even more than the States and the Northern Territory, is necessarily concerned with developing Australia-wide institutions, whereas Aboriginal praxis traditionally was, and largely remains, focused on local and inter-personal relations. Thus the problem is how to establish a forum where Aboriginal interests can be articulated in a national context, in which both Aborigines and non-Aborigines would have confidence, and which would not, by its very success, destroy that diversity it is designed to protect and express. For it is clear that the more Aboriginal individuals become effective advocates for Aboriginal interests in the wider society, the greater the likelihood that they will diverge from the ways of living and thinking of their more traditionally oriented compatriots.

Thus there is curious and endearing similarity between many of Coombs's proposals and those that were briefly but noisily and sometimes violently made by university and college students in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Students then, like Aborigines now and since time immemorial, were suspicious of elected or selected representatives who assumed plenipotentiary powers, and hence devised elaborate procedures for reporting back, for mandating and recalling, hoping to ensure that no poppy had a chance to grow tall. Coombs does not, of course, draw this parallel with student activism; it would hardly have helped his case with the Minister or Parliament to have done so. Nevertheless there is a parallelism to be seen in his proposals for open meetings, bars to re-election to office, and continual consultation of the electorate. His own involvement with students in the 1970s reinforces this impression.
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of history repeating itself.

This makes good sociological sense, for there are many aspects of what Evans-Pritchard once called 'ordered anarchy' to be found both in traditional Aboriginal society and in the Utopian and unfulfilled goals of the students of the 1970s. Yet we have to ask whether Coombs's good intentions and constitutional inventiveness are more likely to succeed than the posters and slogans of students in revolt fifteen years ago. Is the Congress, despite its constitutional safety devices, likely to escape Michel's iron law of oligarchy any more than did the now-defunct Conference? If it were to succeed, would this be at the cost of a profound change in Aboriginal society? Or should we view this change, whereby Aboriginal polity would become less parochial and slightly more hierarchical, as a boon rather than a bane? These are questions only Aborigines can answer, and they are unlikely all to agree on what answer to give. Meanwhile we should be grateful to Dr Coombs for suggesting a way out of the present doldrums.

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The recent alarming increase in the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody has once again focused considerable media and public attention on the complex issues surrounding the high levels of Aboriginal involvement in all facets of the Australian criminal justice system. Yet the reasons for this involvement are still poorly understood and attempts to develop and implement practical justice programs to redress the obvious disadvantages experienced by Aborigines have been few and far between. The volume under review makes a major contribution in this latter area because it brings together a collection of papers which focus on practical alternatives. The majority of these papers (some twenty in all) were presented at a three-day workshop convened in April-May 1985 by the Australian Institute of Criminology. Envisaged as the first in a series of such workshops, its aim was to be 'action-oriented'. In line with this, many of the papers presented describe new programs or schemes currently being implemented in Australia and overseas in the areas of policing and community self-regulation.

The volume is divided into five sections. Section 1, entitled 'The community', contains offerings by Shane Houston from the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, Craig Somerville from the Western Australian Aboriginal Legal Service, Roberta Sykes from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, and Patricia Lowe, a clinical psychologist with the Broome Regional Prison in Western Australia. All have a common theme of self-determination: of returning to Aboriginal people power and control over their own future. The most important contribution to the first section (and perhaps one of the most important in the whole volume) is that from Roberta Sykes. Her ability to speak from personal experience and to approach the issues from an Aboriginal rather than a non-Aboriginal perspective, enables her to identify some fundamental concerns. The main points
which she makes — that Aborigines are the victims of a racist criminal justice system and that the solution for this will not be found within the Aboriginal community — are not new but they were forcefully and cogently argued. To date, much of the onus for Aboriginal involvement in the justice system has been placed on the Aboriginal ‘offender’ and on his or her community. Yet if the system itself is at fault, then the solutions needed to rectify Aboriginal disadvantage will be different from the ones normally proposed. In line with this, Sykes rejects those projects, such as the police aide schemes, which are designed to integrate Aborigines into the lowest levels of the justice hierarchy. She argues instead that Aborigines must be given positions of authority where they can have direct influence on policy and practice. The emphasis, then, is on giving Aborigines power to change the system and its ‘machinery of legal discrimination and oppression’ (p.25).

It is disappointing that most of the subsequent papers in this volume fail to adopt this system-focused perspective advocated by Sykes. This failure is particularly obvious in Section 11, simply entitled ‘Policing’. In line with the workshop’s emphasis on practical initiatives, the three contributors in this section focus on various schemes implemented to improve Aboriginal/police relations. Mark Pathe, from the South Australian Police Department, describes the establishment of a police aide scheme in the Pitjantjatjara lands, which was one of the recommendations of a project team set up in 1984 by the South Australian Commissioner of Police. In view of Sykes’s earlier criticisms of such schemes, Pathe’s assurances that ‘police aides will not be at the bottom rung of [the] police hierarchy [but] will be experts in their own right’ (p.45) sounds somewhat hollow. In the second paper, Bill Galvin describes the establishment and functions of the New South Wales Police Aborigine Liaison Scheme, while in the final offering of this section, Lynn Roberts provides an honest and somewhat critical analysis of the Special Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal/Police Relations originally set up in Western Australia in 1974-75 following the now infamous Skull Creek incident. Of particular interest is her description of a method of self-policing developed by the Strelley community. Yet overall, this section is extremely disappointing. None of the contributions tackle the crucial and complex issues of police methods and practice — an area which is rapidly becoming a major research concern overseas, especially in the United Kingdom. Because police are located at the interface of the community and the justice system and have wide discretionary powers to determine who comes into the system and under what circumstances, an understanding of their role is of vital importance in understanding Aboriginal involvement in the criminal justice network. The lack of attention given to these issues in this volume is therefore disturbing.

Sections III and IV contain the real focal points of the workshop. Section III, entitled ‘Community regulation in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Canada’, contains five papers which, as the section heading suggests, describe systems of self-regulation implemented within indigenous communities in overseas countries, with particular focus on Australia’s near neighbours. Again, emphasis is on practical initiatives with four of the five papers describing specific schemes currently in operation. Ambika Prasad, from the Fiji High Commission in Australia, describes the dismantling (in 1970) and the subsequent reinstatement (in 1980) of Fiji’s traditional village-based administrative system. Peter Bayne details the establishment and operation of the village court system in Papua New Guinea which gives locally appointed magistrates, supported by village peace officers, the power to deal with matters likely to cause disturbances of the peace in the village. The community justice program operating in West Auckland, New Zealand, and the concomitant involvement of the
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Te Atatu Maori Tribunal or community court, is the subject matter of the third and fourth papers in this section, presented by Michael Brown (himself a Maori and Judge of the Henderson District Court in Auckland) and Kayleen Hazlehurst respectively. These four contributions provide a useful international perspective on the problems faced by indigenous groups, especially those with a history of domination by a colonial-based justice system, and the attempts now being made to redress some of the inequities through empowering, albeit in a limited sense, local administrative structures. Yet wisely, none of the papers recommend the application of these schemes to the Australian situation, recognising that what works for one community may be totally inappropriate for another.

The fifth and most thought-provoking paper in Section III makes no attempt to describe a specific program. Instead, Paul Havemann, from the University of Saskatchewan, presents a critical and well-balanced assessment of Canadian approaches to the problems of indigenous over-representation in the country’s justice system. The trends he describes and the questions he poses are equally applicable to Australia. For example, he questions whether the Canadian criminal justice code is a just system of laws for indigenous people and whether the justice system itself is a fair and effective mechanism to enforce such laws. He also refutes the popular assumption that minority group over-representation can be traced to these people’s ‘conspicuous criminality’ (p.126). Of crucial relevance, however, are his comments regarding the process of indigenisation versus accommodation. Indigenisation, which involves the recruitment of indigenous people into those sections of the justice system where there is frequent interaction with minority group members, has become the preferred policy in Canada at the expense of accommodation, that is, the establishment of autonomous agencies controlled by indigenous people themselves. Yet Havemann clearly sees accommodation as the only viable alternative. His paper contains important implications for Australia where a move towards indigenisation is already in evidence, as exemplified, for example, by the attempts currently being made to recruit Aborigines into state police forces.

The fourth section of the volume, ‘Community regulation in Australia’, contains six papers, three of which (those by Syddall, Davis and Coombs) were not presented at the workshop but are reprinted from other publications. The emphasis is on the implementation of programs at a community level which are designed to give people some input into those decision-making processes associated with the dispensation of justice and a measure of autonomy in the maintenance of order within their own community. The only paper in this section which does not have a specific Aboriginal focus is that by Wendy Faulkes. She describes the Community Justice Centre Scheme in New South Wales which uses mediation as a mechanism for settling disputes within families and between neighbours, fellow workers etc. It is also the only scheme of those described which operates within an urban environment. The remaining five contributions all focus on self-regulatory programs functioning within or proposed by Aboriginal communities living in rural or remote areas of Australia. For example, MacDonald describes indigenous courts which exist within reserve-based Aboriginal communities in Queensland to deal with breaches of by-laws ‘relating to the orderly government’ of the community (p.153). Syddall presents a highly personal description of his attempts as a white magistrate to improve the delivery of justice to traditionally-oriented Aborigines in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia. He eventually played a major role in the formulation of the 1979 Aboriginal Communities Act, which allowed ‘Aboriginal communities to make rules to apply within community lands’ (p.168) in relation to such matters as anti-social behaviour, drunkenness, littering etc. In conjunction with this
came the appointment of Aboriginal justices of the peace who were empowered to deal with by-law breaches 'in a community setting' (p.169) under the supervision of white magistrates. At the time Syddall wrote the paper, the scheme had been introduced into five communities.

In a third paper, Davis describes the operation of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Community Justice Project which, according to Davis, aims to 'accommodate . . . Aboriginal law and social control mechanisms within the present judicial system' (p.187). At present limited to a pilot scheme on Elcho Island, one unique aspect of this project is the use of genealogical information to identify those kin who bear traditional responsibility for exercising specific social control over the offending individual. Once identified, such kin are included in pre-court discussions with the magistrate regarding the handling of the case and possible sentencing options. The intention, it seems, is to rely on traditional Aboriginal methods of social control to deal with breaches of European law.

Although the schemes described in these three papers are interesting, none encourage optimism that Aborigines are being re-invested with real decision-making autonomy, largely because in most instances it is still European-based laws which the Aborigines are being asked to implement. With respect to the Queensland scheme for example, the reader must seriously question whether the by-laws implemented by the Aboriginal Courts and which regulate social behaviour, hygiene, dog control etc., represent still further evidence of European intrusion into Aboriginal life. Similarly, although Syddall writes with enthusiasm and optimism about the Western Australian scheme, the accompanying paper by Hoddinott dispels much of this optimism by detailing the problems which the scheme has encountered during its relatively brief period of operation in selected Aboriginal communities. In particular, she describes the growing discontent among Aboriginal justices of the peace who, in effect, are being required to dispense a ‘foreign legal system’ within their own community.

It is the proposals put forward by the Yirrkala people of Arnhem Land as described by H.C. Coombs in the reprinted paper, which seems to come closest to returning real control to the community itself. One suspects that this is due, at least in part, to Coombs's personal skills as a listener and recorder since it was his task to act as scribe and 'cultural interpreter' for the community in its attempts to define 'a place for Aboriginal customary law within the Australian legal system' (p.201). These proposals include the setting up of a Law Council to, among other tasks, formulate rules governing the maintenance of social order and to establish a community court to deal with breaches of these rules. Of unique importance is the inclusion of customary law within the list of 'rules' to be upheld and the decision that the composition of the community court will be flexible to allow members of the offender's and the complainant's family to sit on that court.

The fifth and final section of the volume, entitled 'Future directions', is mainly given over to Hazlehurst's summary of the main issues covered by the workshop. Interestingly, some of these were not dealt with in the formal papers. This highlights the difficulty of judging the content of a workshop on the basis of the papers presented since it is often in the discussion periods that the most informative material and innovative ideas emerge. For this reason, it may be profitable in any future publications of this nature to include a discussion section at the end of each major group of papers so that the reader may gain some insight into participant reaction to the formally-presented material.

Although the issues covered by Hazlehurst are far-reaching, her main emphasis, like the workshop papers themselves, is on the Aboriginal community and its 'response' to offending. In Hazlehurst's own words, 'Case studies presented here . . . have strongly indicated that a
community-oriented response system would not only have an impact on the offender it could progressively improve and give new purpose to the home environment' (p.228). Underlying this focus is a strong positivist assumption that the solution to the problem of Aboriginal over-representation in the judicial system lies, at least in part, in revamping and rebuilding community-based mechanisms of traditional problem solving and social control. Certainly, such an approach has merit. Yet it is not the only avenue of change which needs to be explored. As both Sykes and Havemann point out, the justice system itself must also become the focal point for detailed study and change since its inbuilt racism is also likely to be a major contributor to Aboriginal over-representation. It is this vital area which the volume largely ignores and which constitutes its greatest weakness. In line with this, many of the Aboriginal participants, according to Hazlehurst, considered that a more acceptable emphasis for future workshops would be that of 'criminal justice reform rather than Aboriginal criminality' (p.241).

Yet, despite this criticism, the volume makes a major contribution in disseminating information about those initiatives currently being undertaken in this country to redress some two hundred years of dominance by an essentially alien justice system. By providing a forum where those involved in the delivery of justice can exchange knowledge and ideas, Kayleen Hazlehurst and the Australian Institute of Criminology have fulfilled an important function.

Joy Wundersitz
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This unusual book is one of a series of specially commissioned volumes created to mark the bicentenary of European settlement in Australia. It represents the joint efforts of different specialists whose expertise extends over a wide range of disciplines. This diversity, both in terms of specialist expertise and also in the book's format and different styles of writing is at once its greatest strength and weakness. This book has been lavishly produced in a modified magazine format that includes numerous colour plates ranging from the size of a postage stamp to one multi-page panoramic colour fold-out. It also has numerous inserted boxes containing odd bits of information running the gamut from diagrams of landform evolution to Aboriginal myths. The overall initial impression is that this volume was intended to provide 'something for everyone', from serious scholarship about Aborigines and early Australian history to semi-fictionalised 'gonzo journalism'. What will appeal in the volume to some readers will not appeal to others, and any reader looking for consistency or unity within the book as a whole may be disappointed. On the other hand, this book contains some excellent chapters and provides a good update on important aspects of Australian Aboriginal studies.

The first five chapters, which deal with prehistory and palaeoenvironments are especially
important, along with subsequent chapters on Tasmania, south-western Victoria, the south-eastern highlands and special topics such as Aboriginal exchange networks which include significant amounts of archaeological information. These chapters are among the best in the book and provide a compelling testimonial to the progress made in Australian archaeology over the last twenty-five years. The style and general level of detail offered in these chapters is well suited to communicating important regional discoveries in Australian prehistory and their ecological and geological context. The chapters on Australian prehistory in this book offer one of the best non-technical introductions to the subject published anywhere so far. Nothing like this could have been written around 1960, and this part of the volume stands as a tribute to the energy and attention to detail in Australian archaeology since then. The only question now is whether this level of productivity will continue for the next twenty-five years.

One theme of special interest in this section is the matter of long-distance exchanges of material objects like stone axes (hatchets), body decoration, canoes, ritual paraphernalia and other items, and the implications of these exchanges for contact and for social and genetic changes between and among Aboriginal societies. This includes outside influences by such non-Aboriginal societies as the Macassan trepang fisherman who made regular visits to the north coast of Australia prior to the period of European contact. These studies indicate a shift in emphasis within the field of Aboriginal studies away from the stereotype of Aboriginals as essentially conservative, internally-driven societies to a view of Aboriginal cultures as open systems with possibilities for rapid change under certain circumstances. The ability of archaeology to trace such contacts through the study of trade and transport of material objects is matched by proto-historical studies based strongly on archaeological evidence (such as that of the Macassans), which is emerging as an important new direction in Australian archaeology.

The final two chapters in the book also offer good summaries of the period of European contact, providing, among other things, interesting contrasts between the ways different European ethnic groups, such as the Dutch and the English, viewed Australia (and particularly the indigenous inhabitants of Australia). As in the field of archaeology, opportunities for analysis in Australian contact history abound. For example, one can infer quite different colonial 'policies' from the behaviour of the early Dutch explorers and the English who first came to Australia. These well-written and well-researched final chapters enhance this book and complement the historical themes developed by the archaeologists.

For this reviewer, the biggest disappointment arose in the ethnographic and ethnohistorical chapters, although this, of course, is very much a matter of opinion. For anyone who enjoys uncontrolled descriptive ethnography, dressed up in several cases (the chapter on southeast Tasmania being a particularly egregious example) in a kind of fictionalised first-person style, this part of the book will have special appeal. For example, after a visit by Europeans, we find this passage about the Tasmanians:

Two days later, the white bird had gone.
The men argued about the strangers. 'Were they spirits?' If so, they were strangely uncertain of their environment. They held clumps of soil in their hands as if they had strange properties and they blundered through the bush. 'If they are spirits of our ancestors', the deformed man argued, 'how have they forgotten how to live in the bush, why do they not wear red ochre, and why do they not sing?' (p.311).
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Perhaps. But this kind of invention certainly is at variance with other parts of the book. Indeed, within this same chapter the style shifts abruptly to a more descriptive and scholarly treatment of Tasmanian ethnohistory. Similar problems arise in the chapter on an Aranda ceremony where the reader has difficulty distinguishing actual behaviour, as noted through direct observation or informant testimony, and normative, idealised descriptions of ceremonial activities and beliefs. As with the Tasmanian chapter, there is valuable information here along with useful insights, but also some serious confusion. The chapters on Kaytej women and Mardujarra kinship are more coherent and offer insights into the contrast between real and ideal aspects of Aboriginal behaviour — a theme which Australian social anthropologists seem better able to deal with, at least in this volume, than ethnohistorians. Ethnohistory promises to become an important part of Australian Aboriginal studies, and some important contributions from it are already apparent in this volume. But the uneven quality of ethnohistorical research presented in this volume also indicates that this approach is just getting under way and has a long way to go before it can match the results of archaeological and ethnographic studies in Australia.

In the Introduction, the volume editors note the absence of any direct participation by Aborigines in the preparation of this book. They point out that 'Some potential Aboriginal contributors declined invitations to write because they considered that any bicentennial enterprise was necessarily a celebration of their people's dispossession, extermination and degradation (p.xvi)'. Similar sentiments have often been expressed by Native Americans, who prefer to present their views on the European colonisation in the form of alternative history rather than in the context of the colonial point of view. It seems profoundly ironic to this reviewer that the very act of attempting to translate and appreciate the historical character of the indigenous peoples of Australia should fail in this case to incorporate their own strongly held views about their past and the effects of European contact on their past history and present experience. So the volume Australians to 1788 represents a sincere but ultimately biased view of Aboriginal culture history based upon inescapably pro-European assumptions and expectations. One cannot reasonably expect the descendants of what was left of an indigenous population to celebrate the dispossession and even genocide of their ancestors. It is unfortunate that one of the most serious attempts yet to produce a scholarly yet readable and accessible treatment of Australian Aboriginal culture history had to occur under these circumstances, without the benefit of that alternative view of history that only the Aborigines themselves could provide.

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Frontier, a sequel to the author's The other side of the frontier, deals chiefly with the attitudes and behaviour of white settlers to the Australian Aborigines. He sketches out the generations of guerilla warfare, cites the evidence for white brutality, then goes on to discuss the
Euro-Australian preconceptions — religious, ideological and racist — that channelled the course of white-black history. He even pays white decency its due, however slight its influence. He devotes the final third of the book to the origins and course of the Aboriginal land rights controversy, pointing out legal dissimilarities between Australian law on the subject, on the one hand, and Canadian, United States and New Zealand law, on the other.

Professor Reynolds is not the disinterested academic historian, discoursing on the Medes and Persians, and this book is the product of deep outrage, as well as deep research. The former is the source of some of the book's special strengths and of its weaknesses. His message is that what the Europeans did in Australia was 'invade' rather than 'settle' and that their inhumanity to the Aborigines matched the worst that Europeans did to native peoples in Siberia, North or South America. Mild books would not deliver this message effectively, and Reynolds's Frontier, like its North American counterpart, Francis Jennings's The invasion of America: Indians, colonialism and the cant of conquest, is a scholarly bellow of rage.

A justified bellow, without doubt, but bellowing is not always an effective way of expressing every nuance of fact and interpretation. Many of the subdivisions of the chapters of this book consist of a topic sentence of outrage followed by several pages of quotes and anecdotal material in support of the first sentence, that is, a drone of outrage. Soon the informed reader is convinced of the fact of white brutality and ethnocentrism and wants some analysis. Did the brutality and narrowness of attitude vary from time to time and place to place? What was the nature of the modus vivendi whites and blacks finally reached? Of course, it was a matter of setting up a caste relationship, but as Eugene Genovese and Gilberto Freyre have shown in their studies of masters and slaves in, respectively, the United States and Brazil, such relationships include all kinds of subtleties, which often have long range influence.

Outrage implies that those committing the outrages had a choice to do otherwise, a preconception that can divert a historian's attention away from matters in which volition played little part. On page 190 Reynolds writes that perhaps the single most important element that the settlers brought with them from Britain was their Western and revolutionary concept of private property. If the history of the Aborigines is at all similar to that of Amerindians, Eskimos, and Maori and other indigenes of Pacific islands, the most important element the invaders brought with them was disease, a much more efficient killer of adult, child, foetus and embryo than musket or rifle or even starvation. Where disease reduced indigene numbers to a fraction of white numbers (as, for instance, in North America, Argentina and New Zealand), Neo-European societies now exist. Where it did not, though killing many, as in nations like Mexico, societies dominated by indigenes or people of mixed native and invader ancestry exist. Where it played only a limited role, as in South Africa, no amount of brutality has served to make the whites into a majority population. Disease played a major role in white-black relationships in Australia; and Noel Butlin has made a brave beginning on considering its effects in his book, Our original aggression. Professor Reynolds prefers a moralistic to an epidemiological approach, eschews statistics and barely mentions the subject of imported infections.

The weakness of any purely national history is lack of perspective. (The weakness of multi-national history is shallowness, but one thing at a time). If all is relative, then national history is perforce purblind. In the last two hundred years a palaeolithic people and an industrial people struggled to control the land of Australia. The latter, not surprisingly, won.
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How great were their sins in doing so? Were there any real possibilities of a co-operative rather than a competitive relationship between the two peoples? Can such a relationship be built now? Has such ever been created between conquerors and conquered at any time and in any place where the differences in their cultures and physical appearances were as great as they were between Aborigines and Euro-Australians? These are vital questions that cannot be considered fruitfully within the bounds of strictly Australian history. Professor Reynolds in his two frontier books has made an admirable start on telling the Aborigine-white story, making it possible for Australian historians to go on to the next step, anthropologically and quantitatively sophisticated analysis made with reference to indigene-invader histories of other societies. The effort to make such reference pays off in interesting and fruitful questions. For instance, as an American I am fascinated by the total lack of formal treaties between Aborigines and white government. Amerindian-white history in the United States is punctuated with scores of treaties which are source materials for constant litigation in our courts. Why such an extreme contrast, given that the cultures of the invaders in both cases were very similar? Why did not the native Australians utilise the many available horses and meet the invaders in the interior grasslands with fierce mounted resistance? Was this contrast an effect of time differentials? The warriors of the pampa had generations to produce equestrian cultures before the full Argentinian onslaught, the Aborigines only a few years.

Perhaps I should conclude by assessing Frontier not in terms of the book I wish Professor Reynolds had written (which probably cannot be written until the history profession digests his kind of book), but in terms of the task he set out for himself. He obviously wanted to produce an unimpeachably scholarly study showing white Australians exactly what white-Aborigine history has been like. (There certainly seems to be a need for such a study: Robert Hughes’s statement that the Aboriginal woman ‘was merely a root-grubbing, shell-gathering chattel, whose social assets were wiry arms, prehensile toes and a vagina’ (Fatal shore, p.16) is as naive as it is racist.) Yes, the Aborigines have survived, which is more than can be said of the Guanches, Arawacks and Beothuks, but that is more a matter of having a whole continent in which to disperse (‘skulk’ was probably the nineteenth-century word for this) than of white compassion.

The human species will need all the genetic and cultural variety it can muster to get through the next few generations alive, and Professor Reynolds suggests that we, the successful invaders, look at our histories with clear eyes and do all we can to preserve the surviving indigenes of Australia and, presumably, of all the old European empires. He has made his case splendidly. I pray that his books find a wide and attentive audience.

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In 1937 William Cooper, a retired shearer from Cumeroogunga, New South Wales, was seventy-six and living in Melbourne. He was to take his part in the Day of Mourning at Sydney, on 26 January 1938; and though he did not speak at the Aboriginal deputation to see the Prime Minister, J.A. Lyons (and the Minister for the Interior, J. McEwen) on 31 January, many of the Ten Points there formally presented were his views. He had expounded political aims for Aboriginal people — in particular, a full Department of Aboriginal Affairs and a representative in Federal Parliament — for nearly five years in his letters.

In Blood from a stone, Andrew Markus has selected and edited the original letters of William Cooper, written from Melbourne suburbs between September 1933 and March 1940. For any student of recent Aboriginal history, not only of Victoria but of the eastern states, this is an instructive collection. Cooper, born circa 1861, a Joti-Jota leader from the Murray and Goulburn Rivers district, had been spokesman for communities in central Victoria and western New South Wales. In 1933 he left Cumeroogunga for Melbourne, and became honorary secretary of the Australian Aborigines' League, a political gathering of the city's small Aboriginal population. He wrote a good letter. Of the fifty-three documents reprinted here, forty-one are his, mostly letters for Prime Ministers (Lyons to Menzies), or Ministers of the Interior, offering what were then new political ideas for racial tolerance.

Marcus has carefully chosen the documents to show Cooper's liberal policies for Federal government responsibility. (Until the 1967 referendum the states alone had authority.) A few speeches and articles by Shadrach James, Cooper's nephew, are quoted from newspapers and a Christian students' journal, 1929-30. From September 1933 to March 1934, Cooper sent circular letters to state ministers, asking them for permission to distribute a petition intended for King George V among Aboriginal people on reserves. It may be inferred that when these requests were ignored, Cooper was convinced that state governments were too negative. Most of the remaining letters in the book addressed the sympathies of the Federal Minister for the Interior, 1934-37, Thomas Paterson, once a Gippsland farmer.

Cooper was courteous and deferential in writing, occasionally personal in pressing upon the Minister's good nature, but consistent in argument. He was firm and persuasive. The State authorities had run repressive policies on the assumption that the dark people, for their own good, should be controlled in the interests of the employers, whether cattle men, orchardists or farmers. Cooper now proposed citizenship rights for all Aborigines, and political representatives to safeguard their interests.

The petition intended for King George circulated, and by 1935 had attracted 1814 signatures. The King was asked 'to do his utmost in taking suitable steps in preventing the extinction of the Aboriginal race, obtaining better conditions for all [and] ... power to propose a Member of Parliament, to be chosen by my people to represent them in the Federal Parliament' (Document 5, letter: Cooper to the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines). As Markus observed in the Introduction to the book, Cooper kept the petition as a tactic of last resort. He presented it to the Lyons Government in October 1937; then conceived the idea of the Day of Mourning on Australia Day (prior to the promised meeting with the Prime Minister), and found William Ferguson to organise it in Sydney.
While the letters clearly disclose Cooper's political and social ideas, well before their time, other documents show his influence on the Australian Aborigines' League. An AAL delegation to Paterson in February 1935 deplored the lack of citizen rights on reserves, requested Aboriginal political representatives, and called for a department in Canberra with a sympathetic secretary. (Sir Hubert Murray of Papua was the model.)

The League's constitution, accepted in February 1936, possibly owed its existence to the dedication of a new friend, the Victorian Railways official Arthur Burdeu who became the first AAL President. But the aims reflect ideals Cooper espoused. The AAL wished to preserve the old culture, and yet called for the 'uplift' of all people to full European culture. The (state) Chief Protectors at that time assumed that mixed-descent people were brighter than the 'primitive' folk; their regulations drew these distinctions. Cooper insisted from his Victorian experience that this was not true. There must be British nationality for all dark people.

Anticipating the Canberra conference of Ministers and Chief Protectors (April 1937), Cooper sent them a long letter of policies sought by the AAL. Aboriginal affairs should be federalised, or else the states should co-ordinate their efforts. Rich states would share costs with poor states. Whatever their 'caste', Aborigines should live independently, with land set aside for self-reliance and development. Cooper had an astonishing vision of social change, made possible not by rigid divisions of colour as the official philosophy ran then, but by degrees of a civilising progress, with no advantage of one class over another. Education and industry, both vocational and academic, would be the civilising agent. All 'approved' Aborigines would be entitled to social service benefits.

When the Protectors' conference plumped for two opposing social methods — in effect, apartheid for the 'primitives', assimilation for the 'near-whites' — Cooper despaired of real change, and lectured Paterson on the capacity of Aborigines to pick up civilisation: 'We want our yet uncultured brothers to get the uplift we have received, but we claim it should be done by plan.' He urged that North Australia be developed by Aborigines in preference to non-British Europeans, and he was well aware of Hitler's treatment of the Jews. He suspected that the Federal Government flirted with the restrictive policies of the United States, South Africa or Western Australia.

After successfully tackling Stevens, the New South Wales Premier, over the poor water-supply at Cumeroogunga, Cooper released the petition to Cabinet, and then announced the Day of Mourning. A fortnight later, just after Christmas Day 1937, he promoted a symbolic National Aborigines Day to all Christian denominations, asking them to touch the white conscience with special sermons on Aboriginal matters, on the Sunday near Australia Day. This was eventually arranged by the Chairman of the National Missionary Council of Australia, and the first such sermons began in January 1940. National Aborigines Day is Cooper's monument.

One appreciates Cooper's courage in lecturing the prime ministers, and in handling his daring social dreams with honesty and patience. He may not have had Patten's oratory, and Ferguson openly disagreed with his idea of a non-party political man in Parliament; but in writing these letters, he revealed his vision of a united and free Aboriginal people.

In arranging the documents and penning a perceptive Introduction, Markus deepens our understanding of Aboriginal history. In all details the book's presentation is excellent: but with much turning, the leaves of my review copy tended to lift out.

The broad introduction places Cooper's 1933-40 campaign in its context: towards the
close of a long, non-violent Aboriginal militant tradition of petitions and deputations. (On isolated reserves, there were occasional supportive strikes.) Markus traces this history, from the original (and successful) land claim in 1859 for the Coranderrk site near Healesville, then the Maloga Mission petitions of the Joti-Jota in the 1880s, to the deputations for civil rights: William and Norman Harris and Arthur Kickett (1906, 1928) in Perth and Charles Frederick Maynard (1925, 1929) in Sydney. The last major deputation was Ferguson's, mainly of Cumeroogunga people, at Canberra in 1949.

Markus shows that Cooper's general argument for the unity of the Aboriginal people came from his conviction that 'distinctions on the basis of race were spurious'. On this point, Cooper was sure of his ground. A long life's observation among Aboriginal families of southeastern Australia gave him sufficient proof to deny the truth of official racial policies.

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Dickson, A.C.T.

BOOK NOTES


Except for a new preface, this is a reprint of the 1975 volume, then titled *Exclusion, exploitation and extermination*. Raymond Evans and Kay Saunders write in their preface 'it is reproduced here in its original form to stand as ... a conscientious product of its time'. It is good to see it in print again, since it has a wealth of historical information about Queensland's race relations and was one of the first of its kind. Those readers who have concentrated on European-Aboriginal relations will learn that these are reflected in European relations with both Chinese and Melanesians. All three non-European peoples were treated as virtual slaves, whose labour was exploited to increase the prosperity of the dominant masters. Whenever the 'slaves' showed resistance or independence, they were treated with the utmost brutality, even actual killing. When Aborigines killed Europeans, as at Hornet Bank and Cullin-la-Ringo, revenge took a toll of Aboriginal lives out of all proportion to the original murders.

Raymond Evans has written about the Aborigines, Kathryn Cronin about the Chinese, Kay Saunders about the blackbirded Melanesians. All three contributions include exhaustive lists of archival sources.


This issue is on *Anthropology and human rights*. It has interesting contributions by anthropologists well known in Australia, namely Roger Keesing, John Waiko and Barbara Glowczewski.

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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

Typescripts must be double-spaced and with ample margins to allow for editorial marking. Submit two hard copies and keep one. Footnotes should be as brief as possible, typed on a separate sheet and numbered consecutively throughout the paper. A short form of citation should be used for footnote references (e.g. Saunders 1976:27). The bibliography, on a separate page, should show the author’s name and full publication details as given on the title page of the work, listed alphabetically by author and chronologically for each author. Tables and maps should be submitted in final form (except for size), on separate sheets, numbered on the back, and accompanied by a list of captions and photographic credits. Once manuscripts are accepted, authors may wish to submit final versions on computer disks using only Microsoft Word (Version 3 or 4) for IBM (MS DOS) or Macintosh computers.

Authors should follow the usage of Style manual for authors, editors and printers, 4th edn (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1988).

Footnote style:

1 Rowley 1971:107; see also Barwick 1981.
2 Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
3 Fison and Howitt 1880:96.
4 See Cox 1821.
6 Berndt and Berndt 1965:xiv.
7 Colonial Secretary —In Letters (CSIL), 30/1722.
8 L.E. Threlkeld to A.M’Leay, 15 July 1831, CSIL, re Land 120,31/5527 (in 45/514).

Bibliography entries:

Details of authors’ names must be given as on title page; do not abbreviate. Journal titles and descriptions of documents and other archival material must be given in full.

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