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PART 1

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LAND IN OUR OWN COUNTRY: THE ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN SOUTH-EASTERN AUSTRALIA, 1860 to 1914

Heather Goodall

This paper is about Aboriginal peoples' strategies and actions to forge meaningful lives for themselves in the face of the enormous pressures of colonialism. Its focus is on land, and particularly those small areas in south-eastern Australia which became 'Aboriginal Reserve'. To speak of reserves as the result of Aboriginal strategies seems incongruous: most Aboriginal speakers today are adamant that the reserves were concentration camps where, no matter how they might have felt about the land itself, their experience was of unrelenting segregation, repression and cultural assault by the agents of the government.

The people with these memories are usually talking about reserves at some time from the 1930s to the 1960s. There are older Aborigines, particularly from the coast or the south of NSW, who agree that the reserves were places of repression in those times but who also remember an earlier period, when they and their families controlled their reserves. For them, at least some reserves have been BOTH a source of independence AND, later, a place where independence was ruthlessly assaulted.

There are, on the other hand, some white Australians who regard any suggestion that the reserves were concentration camps as a wild exaggeration, a comparison with Nazi Germany which has no foundation in historical fact. Real parallels developed in the 1930s between reserves and what was then known about Nazi concentration camps, a comparison pointed out by William Cooper and other Aboriginal activists in 1939.¹ The impact of this increasing repression can only be understood in context. It ended a long period in which Aborigines had seen some of these reserve lands as a small portion of their traditional lands which THEY had won back and which they had then utilised as an independent economic and social base. We need to understand this Aboriginal land acquisition movement to appreciate the effect of the large-scale revocations of the 1920s and then the concentration policies of the 1930s.

The major period of reserve creation in NSW, 1860s to 1890s, was undoubtedly one where Aborigines were making their own history but it has been described as if it were just the opposite. There remains a persistent assumption that armed resistance was the only strategy open to Aborigines and that once the guerilla struggle was subdued, there was nothing at all left for Aborigines to do to exercise control over their lives under colonialism. The creation of reserves has usually been seen as signalling this loss of agency, because it is described as the total assumption of control by the colonisers over the survivors of the wars, who were 'rounded up' and 'herded' into these compounds by the newly created Protection Boards which intended from the very beginning to isolate them from the settler society except for a very narrowly defined labouring role.

In a few cases, Aboriginal insistence that they had won back some of their land has been supported by research, notably by Diane Barwick and Wayne Atkinson for the

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¹ Cooper to NSW Premier, B.S. Stevens, 20 January 1939, Premier's Department Correspondence Files (PDCF).

Cumeragunja and Coranderrk people and by Barry Morris for the Dhan-gadi.² Ann Curthoys has pointed out that Aboriginal demands for land were one of the pressures acting on the Government to push it into setting up an administration to deal with Aborigines. With very few sources available which showed Aboriginal motivations, however, Curthoys focussed her attention onto the missionary and other groups which lobbied politicians.³ There are now more sources accessible which make it clear that the handful of Aboriginal land demands which Curthoys noted were not aberrations but instead were clues to a broad movement across a number of regions in which Aborigines demanded secure tenure to land. While it is not surprising that Aborigines might have been asking for land, the questions which can be asked are why they were demanding land at particular times and in particular areas and on what bases they were making their claims.⁴

Early grants and reserves

It has been generally thought that Aborigines were uninterested in reserves and in agriculture over the early years of European settlement. Under Governors King and Macquarie, some tiny parcels of land were set aside under varying forms of tenure for individuals or small families of Aborigines, on which some agriculture was conducted. Until recently, it was believed that none had become a permanent residence. Barry Bridges drew from this his argument that Aborigines were to blame for their own dispossession, because they had, 'as a people, completely turned their backs on the opportunities extended to them for a settled life on the land' and 'Aborigines in areas settled in the nineteenth century came to be without any significant hold on land, but this was at least as much their own fault as that of the whites'.⁵

While the cultural differences in European and Aboriginal perceptions of land are now obvious, there may have been additional constraints on Aboriginal interest in land acquisition in the European sense: it may have taken time, for example, to learn the skills of European agriculture, although it was not entirely alien to indigenous semi-horticultural practices. A further factor may have been that in the aftermath of the 1789 epidemic, Aboriginal population numbers had not recovered sufficiently to exhaust the alternative sources of subsistence so the difficult and uncertain life of a small-scale agriculturalist was not seen as necessary. We know virtually nothing of the motives of Sydney Aborigines at this time, but one of the many factors which Bridges disregards is that of warfare. This was a period of continued resistance fighting in the Hawkesbury, Nepean and then in the related and communicating areas around Bathurst.

An example of the questions this raises are the 1819 land grants to Colebee and Nurranginy at Blacktown (then in the Land District of Bathurst), which Bridges believed were 'forfeited'. Macquarie made these grants in recognition of the two Dharuk men's role as guides for government punitive expeditions against the Gandangarra around Appin in 1816. There is evidence within Bridges' own examples to suggest that Aborigines regarded the

² Barwick 1972; Morris 1985.

³ Curthoys 1982:36-7, 56.

⁴ See also Johnston 1970:49.

⁵ Bridges 1970:92, 106.

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taking up of land under such circumstances as collaboration with the enemy. In what must have been a complex situation it seems unwise to see Aboriginal refusal to take up some land grants as a rejection of tenure over their land. Among the more sensible alternative interpretations is that such refusals indicated continued hostility and covert resistance in supposedly 'defeated' and 'pacified' tribes. The historical evidence is more ambiguous still, however, as the expeditions 'led' by Colebee and Nurranginy were conspicuously unsuccessful in locating any Aborigines and the possibility that the two Dharuk men were collaborating with and protecting not the invaders but the Gandangarra cannot be ignored. Finally, the land was not abandoned by Aborigines, although as the names of the holders changed the documentary records became obscured. Dharuk people, descendants of the original holders, continued to own and live on these pieces of land until the 1940s. These earliest grants are therefore part of the wider story addressed in this paper: that of persistent Aboriginal attempts at reasserting their ownership over their land.⁶

It seems clear that the handful of reserves set up under the Protectorate in Victoria involved more government intent to 'round up' and limit Aboriginal movement, and the increasing missionary activity there after 1860 was definitely aimed at segregation.⁷ It is not clear how Aborigines viewed these reserves until 1859 when, independent of the government Protectors' activity in other areas, Goulburn Valley people began to petition for some of their land to farm as compensation for loss of their traditional economic resources. These Taungerong and Woiwurrung members of the Kulin Confederacy met officials themselves and also recruited a series of Whites to carry their demands for land to government. They chose 1200 ha of farming land close to a culturally significant site on the Archeron River. Driven off by local Whites the Kulin persisted, squatting on another site which was finally reserved for them as Coranderrk. There they began farming wheat and then hops, pioneering the crop in the area as Barwick has documented, throughout the 1860s and 1870s.⁸ At least some individual Aboriginal farmers in the east also sought land, asking missionaries for assistance to petition the government.⁹

The movement

It is from the early 1860s that we begin to find sustained evidence of Aboriginal action in NSW too over land. This developed into such a widespread phenomenon that it is legitimate to recognise it as a movement, although it was not a formal or centrally organised body, did not have a name, an office or spokespeople. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Aboriginal statements that remain from the period that communication between communities was active and that Aborigines were closely watching what those in other areas decided to do to meet the problems they shared.¹⁰ There were three types of strategies, although they were not mutually exclusive and reflect variations in surviving evidence rather than necessarily indicating differing Aboriginal tactics. The first was that where Aborigines made direct approaches to the government or press, leaving us their own words about what they wanted and why. In the second, Aborigines recruited a local white figure (perhaps a policeman or priest), or a missionary to convey their demands, which we

⁶ Bridges 1970:97; Brook 1983:7-15; Bickford 1981:7-17.

⁷ In, for example, the Gippsland area, see Attwood 1986.

⁸ Barwick 1972:21.

⁹ Attwood 1986:97.

¹⁰ For example, John Atkinson to J.M. Chanter MP, 4 November 1887, Colonial Secretary-In Letters (CSIL), Box 1/2667, 87.12756.

therefore have only secondhand and perhaps distorted by the messenger. The third is where Aborigines took direct action, occasionally buying or leasing land, but more usually by reoccupying and squatting on some of their land and beginning to build huts and plant crops. We know of these actions only where tenure was retained or where the land was eventually reserved by the Crown 'for the use of Aborigines' in recognition of Aboriginal occupation, so it still may not be possible to trace all the occasions on which Aboriginal communities took action to gain some of their land.

The clearest example of Aborigines demanding land directly is that of Cumeragunja, a community closely connected to the Kulin, some of whom had moved to Cumeragunja when the Victorian government began interfering in Coranderrk affairs in the 1870s.¹¹ William Barak was a senior Coranderrk man who had been involved in leading a number of Kulin strategies for independence, including the 1859 land demands and the earlier joint decision of clan heads to take part in the Victorian Native Police force, in an attempt to stem the loss of *Kuri* life and gain negotiating power with La Trobe.¹² Barak was visiting Maloga (the mission forerunner to Cumeragunja) in 1881 when the Aborigines there formulated their demands, in wording very similar to that of the Kulin in 1859, for:

a sufficient area of land to cultivate and raise stock.that we may form homes
for our families.and in a few years, support ourselves by our own industry.

Their requests were made, they argued, as compensation because 'all the land within our tribal boundaries has been taken possession of by the Government and white settlers'.¹³ This community was heavily involved with Daniel Matthews, the missionary who had founded the Maloga farm and mission, and it may be that his views of appropriate aims for the community were influential, but the continuity of Cumeragunja demands with Coranderrk aspirations and phrasing suggests that the strongest influence was from within the Goulburn Valley Aboriginal community itself.

The Cumeragunja demands were maintained consistently, being repeated to a local journalist in 1886, after the Aborigines Protection Board had ignored calls to give land directly to family groups, then appearing again in a petition presented to the Governor in 1887¹⁴ and yet again in the same year in the letters of John Atkinson and his brother, William Cooper, later to become a major political activist.¹⁵ These two letters amplify the demands made already. Atkinson explained that he had tried to save money to buy a selection but had found it an 'utter impossibility' because Aborigines in the area could not gain constant work, indicating that as the area converted to intensive wheat agriculture, Aborigines were being squeezed out of the earlier, permanent work they had gained in the area's pastoral industry. Cooper's letter is even more important in giving an insight into the

¹¹ Barwick 1972:47. The spelling of Cumeragunja varies greatly. I am using one which is derived from that used by William Cooper and Jack Patten in the 1930s, is consistent with current Aboriginal spelling (Koori Information Centre, pers. com.) and gives a fair indication of pronunciation to an English speaker.

¹² Fels 1986:255-6. Through this paper I have used both the words 'Aborigine/s' and *Kuri/s* (alternative spellings *Koorie* and *Koori*) when referring to the people who use the latter word to name themselves, ie those living in coastal and southern NSW and Victoria. People in north-west NSW and Queensland refer to themselves as *Mari* (alternative spelling *muri*). When referring to people in all regions I use 'Aborigine/s'.

¹³ Barwick 1972:47-9.

¹⁴ *Riverine Herald*, November 1886, see Barwick 1972:49.

¹⁵ Atkinson to Chanter, 4 November 1887; Cooper to Chanter, November 1887, CSIL: Box 1/2667, 87.12756.

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motives for the demand. While repeating his brother's plea for land as a source of economic independence, he called on the government to secure 'this small portion of a vast territory which is ours by Divine Right'. Cooper was using the language of Christianity to which he had been recently converted but the concept was not Christian: he was insisting on recognition of Aboriginal rights of prior ownership.

While the Coranderrk and Cumeragunja people have left us the greatest evidence of their own statements, there was not necessarily any less Aboriginal agency in the second strategy, in which white officials were recruited to articulate and convey Aboriginal demands. In 1872, this was occurring on the Braidwood goldfields, when Aborigines from the south coast and the highlands areas met in a large ceremonial gathering at which they also held discussions about strategies to meet the current crisis. The local police officer, Martin Brennan, recorded the result:

When the festival was over, sixty-two blacks called upon me. Jack Bawn and Alick were the leaders of the deputation. I asked Jack what they wanted. He replied, 'We have come to you to intercede for us in getting the Government to do something for us. Araluen Billy, our king, is old, and cannot live long; my wife Kitty and self are old, too. I have assisted the police for many years, and we want to get some land which we can call our own in reality, where we can settle down, and which the old people can call their home. Everyone objects to our hunting on his land, and we think the blacks are entitled to live in their own country'. I replied that I would do what I could for them, and inform Jack Bawn of the result. On 29th March, 1873, I sent [the government] a comprehensive report covering eight sheets of foolscap, detailing their treatment, condition, customs and aspirations. Shortly afterwards I received instructions through the Police Department to survey forty acres of Crown Lands in whatever locality Jack Bawn desired as an Aboriginal Reserve. Jack desired the land fronting the Shoalhaven River at the base of the Jingeras, where fish, birds, and wild animals were plentiful.¹⁶

Jack Bawn and his people were unable to occupy this land because of hostility to them from surrounding white farmers, but they continued to press Brennan to ask for their land. In 1882, when the NSW government appointed George Thornton as Protector to inquire into the conditions of Aborigines, Brennan told him:

I have known blacks in the Braidwood and Coast districts very intelligent, who have been and now are excellent farm labourers, and whose aspirations at all times were to be allowed some land which they might call their own in reality; which they might cultivate unmolested for the use of themselves and their families; and where the aborigines of the surrounding districts might meet periodically for the purpose of holding coroborees and other exhilarating games.¹⁷

Similar Aboriginal decisions to recruit white men to convey their demands seem to lie behind other responses to Thornton's inquiry. From Gundagai a reply to the question about what aid might be relevant came as:

Some land to cultivate. They say they are driven away by owners of land there are two tribes. A piece of 'land on the river for each ...'

The Nundle report was:

¹⁶ Brennan 1907:213-4.

¹⁷ Report of Protector 1883:11.

Where there are tribes such as are at the Richmond River and other places, it would be a source of great pleasure for them to have hunting grounds reserved for their purposes.

From Moama, the area which would become Cumeragunja, the response was predictable:

The Blacks at Maloga are desirous of getting land allotted to them to cultivate for their own support.

At Armidale the conflict between Aboriginal aspirations and settler interests was evident:

The half-castes who are rather intelligent are very anxious to get a grant of land from the Government, stating they are well able to manage it, but the general opinion is that they are better without it.

From Arakoon, the area at the mouth of the Macleay, where three Aborigines were reported to have begun cultivating vacant land well before 1883, the police commented:

Aboriginals are very proud of calling a piece of ground their own.¹⁸

These reports of Aboriginal desires were recorded before the Protector began to implement any policy, although Thornton had made it clear in his preliminary report, in August 1882, that he believed reserves to be one sensible tool to assist Aboriginal self-sufficiency. The demands were not, therefore, a creation of the government, artificially stimulated to allow the government to segregate and contain Aborigines: instead it was to a great extent an Aboriginal initiative which was pushing the government along the path of recognition of Aboriginal rights to some of their own land.

Recruiting officials to call on government for land was not the only option and the *Kuris* in the Burragorang Valley won perhaps the most spectacular victory using this strategy in a different direction. They recruited the assistance of the local Catholic priest, Father Dillon, who raised enough cash in 1876 to buy a 40 ha farm called St Joseph's on the junction of the Cox's and Wollondilly Rivers. Partly freehold and partly conditional purchase, St Joseph's was handed over to the Aborigines, who from that time, entirely independently, made 'a very fair living rearing stock and growing maize' and supported an extended family group of around 50 people until the 1920s.¹⁹ When the Church attempted to enhance its finances by reasserting its ownership over the freehold section in 1908, the Aborigines there stated that they regarded the land as their own, refusing to recognise the Church's authority over the farm.²⁰

The danger of recruiting Whites to convey Aboriginal demands was that the aims of government and church were not the same as those of Aborigines, so their demands were open to distortion. This occurred in 1890 in relation to Jervis Bay, where, like others on the coast, *Kuris* were seeking land but where missionaries were also looking for a foothold. Daniel Matthews, by then in conflict with Aborigines at Cumeragunja who rejected his authoritarian control, was considering a mission on the coast, where he would 'gather together all the blacks on the coast between Port Stephens and Twofold Bay', that is from two-thirds of the length of the NSW coast!²¹ It was well known by the 1890s that such a relocation proposal would be resisted by Aborigines, but there were nevertheless south coast *Kuris* around Sydney and at Jervis Bay itself who felt the plan might at least give them access to some land for themselves. There were 16 *Kuris* who were prepared to sign

¹⁸ Ibid., 11-25.

¹⁹ APB Register of Reserves, Folio 30.

²⁰ Fr. Considine, Burragorang Parish, to Cardinal Moran, St Mary's, 9 November 1908 (Catholic Archives)

²¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 December 1890.

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the petition asking the government for land, although they DID NOT ask for missionary supervision. Matthews and the other churchmen involved had clearly had a hand in drafting the petition, but the result was an uncomfortable mixture, where the mission aims, ('we want to learn to live like Christians'), were often swamped under the anger of phrases which appear to have arisen from more direct Aboriginal drafting:

We, the native blacks about Sydney, ask you if you will be kind enough to give us a piece of land at Jervis Bay, where we can make a home for ourselves and our people. We have been hunted about a good deal from one place to another, and we find it hard to get a living for ourselves and our children, but if we get a chance and some help from the Government we might in time get a living. As it is we find it very hard. Drink and a hard life are killing us off. White people ought to be very good to us for they got our good country for nothing. We don't want them to pay us for it, but they ought to help us to live. We would like our boys and girls to learn to read and write like white children, and we want boats and nets for fishing, so we can get money for our work and learn to live like Christians.

We are left wondering if, in any case, the phrase 'to live like Christians' had the same meaning to missionary and Aborigines, or if the latter regarded it more as a level of material affluence or access to power.

Often, Aborigines chose to use the third strategy: direct action. In a few cases, they were able to buy land either freehold, like the Bell family near Yass in 1881, or by leasehold or permissive occupancy, like Willie Price at Port Stephens, William Ridgeway at Tea Gardens and most importantly, William Drew at Kinchela.²² Generally, lack of funds or of access to the bureaucracy prevented such formalisation and Aborigines simply reoccupied their own country, squatting, building, and planting crops. The decisions to take such action were unrecorded, as were the events themselves, but when the government began to make inquiries in 1882, the existence of the reoccupations became clear. The Pelican, Shark and both Fattorini Islands in the Macleay River near Kempsey, for example, were not notified as reserve until 1885, but in 1883, police were reporting that up to 40 Aborigines, of whom they named the heads of families, had been in occupation for some years, clearing and cultivating the land.²³ At Gloucester, 60 Aborigines were supporting themselves fishing and growing vegetables on a portion of 35 ha of Church and School lands of which they had 'taken possession'.²⁴ Along with three farms at Port Macquarie, where Aborigines had 'taken possession', another example is Killawarra, near Wingham, where 25 ha had been occupied and parts of it cultivated by Billy Johnston for a year before the land was reserved in 1882.²⁵ On the south coast, the parallel situation was commonly reported, as at Tathra, near Bega, where the reserve was notified in 1883 for 'George Cohen and family who have resided on it for a number of years. 3 ha. cleared and enclosed, 1 ha. under cultivation'.²⁶

These were not random and transitory campsites but were the results of active decisions to take back some of their land, like that of 'Frank' at Nambucca Heads, who 'occupied Brushy Island nearly two years ago (before 1883)' and that of the Guris of

²² APB Register of Reserves, Folios 160,53,92,68.

²³ Ibid., Folios 69,70,71.

²⁴ Report of Protector 1883:23.

²⁵ APB Register of Reserves, Folios 60,61,65,73.

²⁶ Ibid., Folio 20.

Cabbage Tree Island, who were farming the island in 1893 after 'They themselves took possession (of it) a few years back'.²⁷ Some reoccupations may have been less recent, with land occupied residually from the early days of the invasion (at least) becoming agricultural bases over time. This was the case with St Clair, outside Singleton, where Aborigines had been camping since at least the 1850s and where they had already brought in a number of crops of maize, tobacco and potatoes, before the area was finally reserved in 1890.²⁸ Rollands Plains, near Port Macquarie was similar, where police reported in 1887: 'Been occupied by the Aborigines for years and four acres roughly cleared in which they have planted maize and pumpkins'.²⁹

There were three consistent elements in all these Aboriginal demands for land, direct or indirect. First, Aborigines were asking for land as an economic base from which to participate in the capitalist rural economy. They usually planned agriculture or small-scale grazing, or, in the major alternative, the south coast Aborigines often planned the reserves as residential bases from which to fish for the market as well as for subsistence. This was not so different from contemporary non-Aboriginal expectations of a 'selection', but the nature of the title Aborigines requested was different. They called for full ownership but without the power to sell the land [i.e. inalienable freehold], in order to ensure that they could pass the land on to their descendants. The final element was unique and central to all the Aborigines' demands: they were not asking for just any parcel of productive land. They were asking for land within their traditional country. William Cooper's 'small portion of that vast territory which is ours by Divine Right' was the clearest statement, but the sentiment was strongly present in each of the requests, usually expressed as something like: the right to land 'in our own country'.³⁰ Although the concept was not expounded in detail, it is clear that Aborigines were arguing that their ownership of land was sanctioned by the highest level of tradition and religion, a concept which was at least analogous to, and certainly as forceful as, the liberal democratic concept of 'rights'.

The response

The NSW government responded positively to this movement among Aborigines. At least some of the land Aborigines had reoccupied or demanded became Crown land reserved 'for the use of Aborigines' (thereby creating records which allow us to follow the later history of these lands). There were 31 reserves created between the 1860s and 1884, most notified or prepared for notification before the Aborigines Protection Board began functioning in 1883 (See map 1). Most were a great distance from areas where armed conflict was still occurring, so there seems no indication that they were created to protect Aborigines from actual fighting in the way that Northern Territory missions would later claim to have done. The argument has been put that the State was pushed by missionaries into a recognition of Aboriginal poverty and (belatedly) extended its newly developing 'welfare state' role to cover this group.³¹ Why, then, were the reserves only in these particular areas? They did not simply reflect Aboriginal population distribution, which was high not only on the north coast but also in the north-west and far west of the state, while impoverishment cannot be assumed. Sue Johnston has calculated that Aboriginal self-

²⁷ Ibid., Folios 80,186; APB Report 1893.

²⁸ APB Register of Reserves, Folio 41.

²⁹ Ibid., Folio 60.

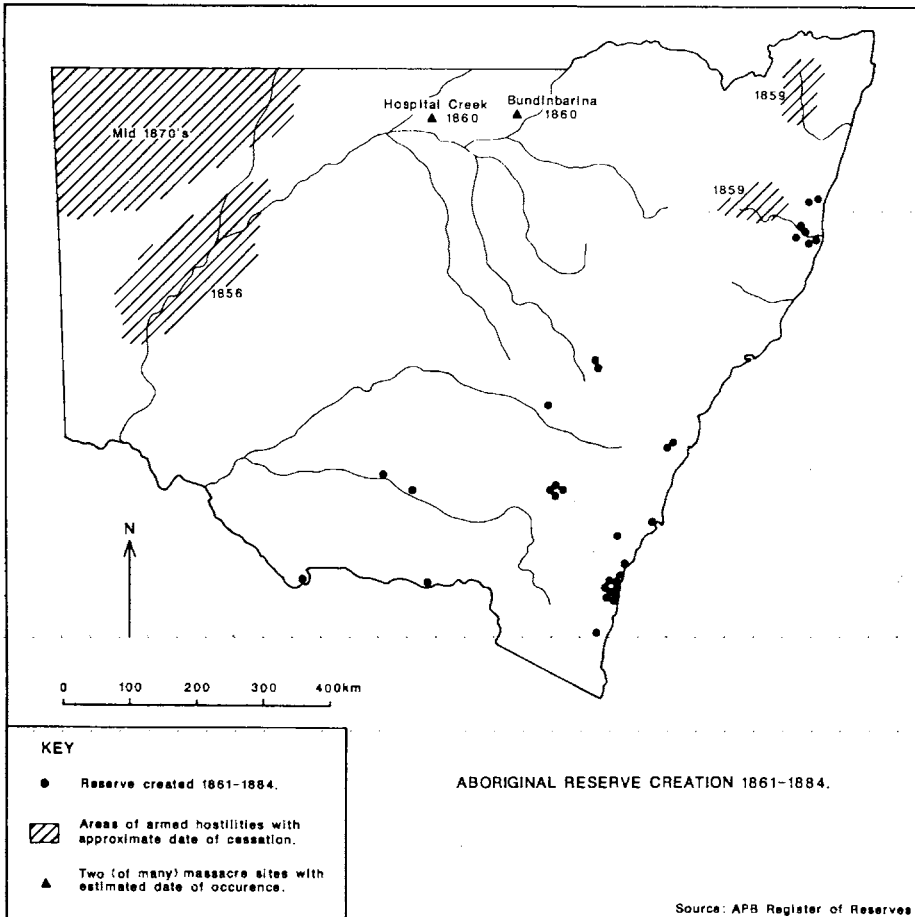
³⁰ Cooper to Chanter, 16 November 1887, CSIL.

³¹ Curthoys 1982.

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sufficiency was in fact high in the period around 1880, with 81% of the Aboriginal population self-sufficient from a mixture of wage or ration labour and more traditional subsistence foraging.³² One implication is that Aboriginal impoverishment was not evenly distributed across the state, but was concentrated in particular regions, so the question becomes why this should have been the case.

The greatest proportion of these reserves, 26 of the 31, were created because Aborigines had demanded them or had already reoccupied the land and begun farming. If we include Cumeragunja, in spite of some involvement by the missionary Matthews, this makes 27 out of 31.³³ The creation of these reserves was not the implementation of a government policy to segregate but the achievement of a victory for Aboriginal communities in their attempts to regain some of their land, although the title fell far short of the inalienable freehold for which Aborigines were asking.



³² Johnston 1970:76.

³³ Compiled from APB Register of Reserves; Reports of Protector, 1882, 1883; APB Reports and Minutes, 1884 onwards; NSW Government Gazettes.

The reason the government responded favourably was that Aboriginal demands for land were seen as compatible with its own aims for Aborigines and for the population in general. In the particular circumstances of Aborigines, the government of course had the precedents of the supervised segregation reserves in Tasmania and Victoria to attract those of its members who wished to enclose impoverished or 'troublesome' Aborigines. However, the more influential advisors like Thornton laid most stress on granting smaller pieces of 4 ha or so to hand over unsupervised, taking up the old argument that association with a single patch of land and practice in the skills of agriculture would 'cure' Aborigines of 'nomadism', while self-sufficiency would not only be cheap but would 'cure' them of 'pauperism'. The earlier apparent 'failure' of agricultural reserves in the 1810s and 20s was balanced by the unarguable presence of successful Aboriginal farming in the 1880s. The incoming Protection Board was quick to take credit for having worked educative miracles in establishing Aboriginal farming, and the fact that Aborigines had already been living on and farming these areas before they were reserved was conveniently overlooked in the Board's later reports.³⁴

In a more general context, this was a period when 'Closer Settlement' and 'Selection' were powerful political slogans, and the requests of Aborigines for land to set up self-sufficient small-scale agricultural concerns was entirely consistent with populist visions of a stable society of 'yeoman' farmers. Aborigines framed at least some of their requests for land in the language of the populist movement and were very conscious of 'free selection'. One Aboriginal family had a selection with between 200 and 300 sheep at Coonabarabran in 1882,³⁵ while others had been trying to gain land in that way. John Atkinson of Cumeragunja, as an example, said in his 1887 letter:

I want a grant of land I can call my own...Having for several years tried to save enough to pay for a selection I find it an utter impossibility. We know that grants of land have been made to the aborigines in other parts of New South Wales. Be good enough to give our tribe a trial.³⁶

Other occasional uses of the word 'selection' by Aborigines or their supporters about these independently settled reserves suggest that Aborigines were using the language of 'free selection' to strengthen their demands and to make them explicable to whites. They were, nevertheless, making a very different case for land, insisting, as we have seen, on inalienable title and on land in culturally significant areas.

While Aboriginal demands were different to those of non-Aboriginal 'free selectors', they did not arise equally often in each region of the state. There was not, in other words, a movement for land which reflected simply the presence of Aborigines. This is shown in the outcomes of the movement (map 1), with reserves limited to only a few regions, which were not those with the highest proportions of the Aboriginal population. This uneven distribution of reserves was a product in part of local social, economic and demographic conditions. Despite the inclination of government to respond favourably, Aborigines did not get every piece of land they demanded, finding themselves always in conflict with local white land hunger and racism. The examples of white hostility discussed earlier towards Jack and Kitty Bawn on the Shoalhaven and towards Aborigines near Armidale were not unusual, with a clear case being that of Bob Tobonts who requested land in 1886 on the far north coast Rous River. He was rejected after advice from the District Surveyor that:

³⁴ Reports of Protector 1882, 1883; APB Reports 1884 onwards.

³⁵ Report of Protector 1883:20.

³⁶ Atkinson to Chanter, 4 November 1887, CSIL.

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...the land applied for is rich bush suitable for agriculture and *if reserved would lock up the land from settlement*, the habits and inclinations of the aborigines being not favorable to the settled and continuous labour required for clearing and cultivating the land.³⁷ [My emphasis.]

This area was not only fertile, but one where the local economy was booming at this time with new technology and the expansion of dairying and so white population growth was rapid. Facing this intensity of competition, it seems that Aborigines on the far north coast could not formalise their tenure over the land they had squatted on or even keep an informal hold, instead they were pushed onto less fertile, sandy campsites.

While this example suggests that the answer lies in economic and social analysis, it is too simple to see white opposition as the limiting factor to Aboriginal success in securing land, because there seem to have been very few Aboriginal requests or actions to secure land in regions where reserves were not created at this time, in, for example, the north-west or far west. Aborigines in these areas fought hard to stay within their own country during the 1930s, so there is no reason to believe they were less attached to their land than people in other regions. This means then that there were some situations where Aborigines decided to try to get land and others where they did not. The focus must therefore be shifted from the white response back to the process of Aboriginal decision-making: Under what conditions did Aborigines decide to push for recognition of their rights to land?

The conditions for the demand

It is not yet possible, given the limits of the available sources, to analyse the bases of these land demands in Aboriginal cultural or social terms. What can be done is to explore the material context in which the demands emerged. One condition common to all Aboriginal demands for land was rapid intensification of European land use in their traditional area. After the most violent periods in the invasion of each region, Aborigines were rapidly drawn in to work in the settler economy, both pastoral and agricultural, in as short a time as five years even in pastoral areas where armed resistance had been most fierce such as the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee, the Gwydir and, later, the lower Darling Rivers.³⁸ This occurred because it offered an advantage to employers of accessible and increasingly skilled labour which gathered some of its own food, built its own housing and was committed to permanent residence in areas many white labourers regarded as too remote. Despite an awareness of their exploitation, there were advantages for Aborigines, too, in consistent employment and continued access to their land. This form of labour organisation became more entrenched as employment became more discontinuous and seasonal in all industries. It continued as long as property size allowed Aborigines to continue to subsidise pastoralists with subsistence foraging, for example until the mid-1930s in the Walgett North and Brewarrina districts. As I have suggested elsewhere, internal colonialism is a useful theoretical tool to begin to approach analysis of this type of economic and ideological relationship in NSW, although as yet many questions remain unanswered.³⁹

However, the stability of this form of labour and land organisation did not persist in the south and east of the state. The gold rushes caused rapid changes to land use in their immediate vicinity in the 1850s and as well shifted adjacent areas such as the South Coast

³⁷ Internal report, Under-Secretary for Lands to Principal Under-Secretary, Treasury, 3 July 1886, CSIL Box F1/2594, 86.6915.

³⁸ Curthoys 1973:110, drawing on Reports of various Commissioners for Crown Lands.

³⁹ Goodall 1982:22-4, 48-56.

from low intensity timbering and cattle raising to high intensity land use of agriculture to feed the rising population on the goldfields. This in turn led to the rising populist pressure to 'unlock the land' to settle the many new settlers after the diggings had been exhausted. The first government attempt to do this was the Robertson Land Act of 1861, which was largely ineffective except in the south-west, where large pastoral properties were fenced (making shepherds redundant) then broken up into smaller holdings with denser flocks. Then land use intensified again as the wheat boom took hold. Although less directly affected by the 1861 Act, the north coast was also undergoing rapid intensification of land use as new grasses and new technology expanded dairying, but the rate of white population growth was not even. Settlement from the north rapidly populated the northern rivers area but left the middle coast, from the Hunter to the Nambucca Rivers, to a much slower rate of development. The central and northern inland slopes and the western plains were not affected at all in this decade by such intensifying land use.⁴⁰

It was from the areas which were affected by changes in land use that the first Aboriginal demands came. The deputation to the policeman Brennan arose from an 1872 meeting of goldfields and south coast Aborigines. The earliest direct demands for land which resulted in reservations came from the south coast in the 1860s and 1870s,⁴¹ as did the Aborigines who migrated impoverished and angry to the shores of Port Jackson, drinking, begging and demanding fishing boats and land, to the great irritation of the NSW government and the Sydney population.⁴² The effective Aboriginal recruitment of missionaries occurred from the area affected only slightly later, the south-west around the Murray and Murrumbidgee, where Aborigines like John Atkinson and William Cooper, who had formerly worked on pastoral properties, found their employment had become at best intermittent and at worst, as family block wheat farming took over, non-existent. What all these Aborigines had in common was increasing impoverishment because not only had they lost their former employment, whether for wages or rations, but they had also lost access to their land, for either economic or cultural use. *Kuris* on the north coast had less urgent economic needs as their traditional subsistence base was wider, including the sea, estuaries and rivers, and so they were less threatened by European land use, but their employment and their access to their land were becoming less reliable. They appear to have responded with similar strategies of direct action and appeal to government on both the central and far north coast areas, but as suggested earlier, the far north coast communities were not able to hold on to the land they reoccupied in the face of the rising pressure of white population. Thus only the mid-coast reoccupations were recorded as reserves.

The limited effectiveness of the 1861 Act was addressed in a new Land Act in 1884, which increased the pace of land use change on the coast and began the penetration of selection and some agriculture onto the central and northern slopes, the northern half of what became the Central Division. The Western Division remained untouched, and so too did the form of labour organisation of the large pastoral properties there. Between 1885 and 1894, when the next Land Act was passed, the Aborigines Protection Board recommended the creation of 85 reserves for the use of Aborigines, and 47 of these (55%) were validations of Aboriginal occupation (31) or responses to Aboriginal requests for land which was then occupied immediately (16). All of these reserves created on Aboriginal demand were on the

⁴⁰ Jeans 1972 is a useful historical geography for this period.

⁴¹ APB Register of Reserves, Folios 1, 2, 10, 30, 31, 100, 110, 141. See also NSW Government Gazette, 1874:2458.

⁴² Report of Protector 1883:3-8; Curthoys 1982:49-51.

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coast or in the south-west, with the exception of two on the northern slopes. The south coast reservations were, like those of the previous two decades, usually on sandy, coastal land, intended as a residential base from which to fish. All of the others were already under cultivation when notified or were intended for immediate preparation for cultivation.⁴³

Land use had begun to change in the north of the Central Division and there were some Aboriginal requests for land there. An unsuccessful one was made by a group of 16 'adult half-castes Aboriginal' [sic] with their 19 children, for 30 ha on the Borah Creek near Narrabri, 'for school and agricultural purposes' in 1890. Their letter was written for them by F.L. Wortley, a man of Afro-American and European descent, who may have been married into the *Mari* group. As it was to do on other occasions, the Protection Board used Wortley's absence of Aboriginal descent to reject the claim of the 16 people who were Aboriginal, although it did add that the land in question did not seem suitable for agriculture.⁴⁴ There were, however, few demands from these areas compared with the earlier high demand from coastal *Kuris*. The difference may lie in the effect on labour needs and organisation on the northern slopes, where new technology penetrated only slowly and so pastoral and agricultural employers continued to need high levels of labour. Not only did this protect some Aboriginal employment, but it encouraged employers to request the creation of Aboriginal reserves on top of existing Aboriginal pastoral camps, rather than forcing newly unemployed Aboriginal pastoral workers to move towards the nearest town.⁴⁵ While obstructed by more fences and small employers, Aboriginal access to their land was not so totally severed in this situation as had been the case in the south-west.

These encapsulations of Aboriginal pastoral camps were among the 45% of reserves created in this decade without Aboriginal request, however important these pieces of land might become to Aboriginal communities in the future. The Protection Board was finding that employers were not the only group of Whites interested in requesting the creation of reserves.⁴⁶ Rural town authorities had recognised that reserves could serve their purposes too, which were to have true segregation areas to contain Aboriginal town camps out of sight but not out of reach. Aboriginal women had become increasingly important for home domestic labour and for heavy institutional domestic labour like hospital laundries, while sexual relations between white and Aboriginal townspeople, exploitative or not, were commonplace although not often acknowledged.⁴⁷ This first decade of Protection Board control of reserve creation showed the Board to be still highly responsive to Aboriginal demand but to act also on demand from white pressure groups. The next attempt to implement closer settlement was the Land Act of 1894. This coincided with an economic depression and a restructuring of the pastoral industry which shifted stock out of the ecologically fragile Western Division to increase the stock densities of the smaller pastoral holdings on the northern slopes and plains. In the decade to 1905, the Protection Board proved less responsive not only to Aboriginal demand but also to white townspeople's calls for segregation reserves. Most of the 45 new reserves created in this decade were in the northern half of the Central Division, and were encapsulations of existing Aboriginal camps. While there continued to be a few Aboriginal demands for land in this decade in spite of the severity of Aboriginal unemployment, the Board found little land available. It

⁴³ Compiled from the APB Register of Reserves, APB Reports and Minutes, 1885 to 1894.

⁴⁴ L. Wortley to Attorney General, 8 February 1890 CSIL Box 5/5978, 90.4626.

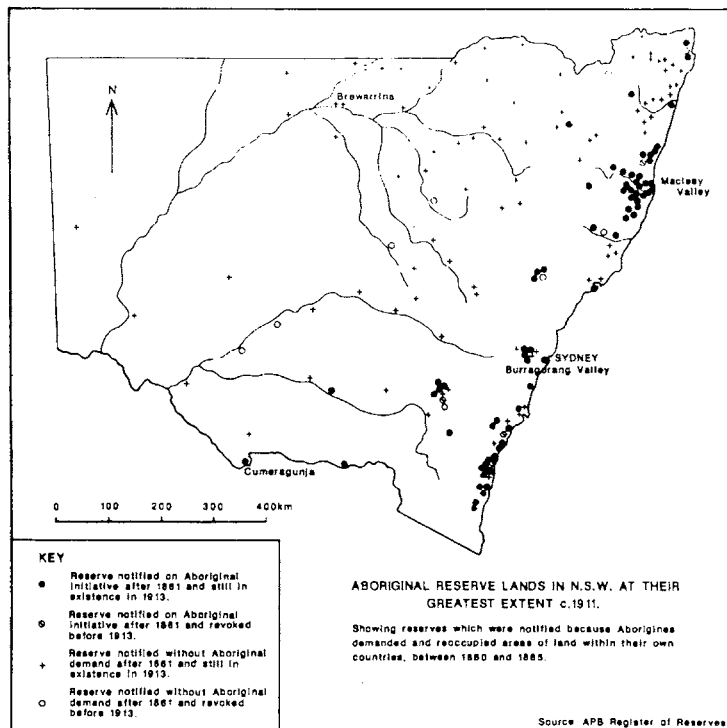
⁴⁵ APB Register of Reserves and APB Reports and Minutes.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Goodall 1982:156, 161.

turned instead to the Cumeragunja model of 'family farm blocks' on existing, larger reserves to satisfy Aborigines calling for land at Warangesda, on the Murrumbidgee and Burra Bee Dee near Coonabarabran, both areas being affected by the land use changes of that decade.⁴⁸

By 1905, the lifting of the worst of the depression and drought of the previous decade led to a revitalisation of the closer settlement lobby, leading to new land laws. One early effect was a stabilisation of the process of Aboriginal reserve creation. Aboriginal demand had slowed virtually to nil, but in any case there was no land available for reservation which was not sought also by white would-be selectors. Aborigines had to turn their attention from attempts to secure more land to defence of those pieces they had already won. At the height of Aboriginal holding of reserve lands in 1910, there were 115 reserves totalling 10,400 ha. Of these, 75 (65%) were created on Aboriginal initiative.⁴⁹ Most continued to be held independently of the Protection Board: 11 resident APB managers had been installed by 1910 to supervise Aborigines on reserves, but only 3 of them had been imposed on independently settled Aboriginal reserves, the rest were on reserves created on white initiative. As is clear from map 2, the Aboriginal-settled reserves were all in the areas where European land use had intensified but where there had been a rate of white settlement slow enough to allow at least some land to be available to Aborigines to reoccupy and hold.



⁴⁸ APB Register of Reserves; APB Report 1895.

⁴⁹ Compiled from APB Register of Reserves; APB Reports and Minutes; NSW Government Gazettes.

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In the Western Division, Aboriginal employment may have fallen as stock levels were reduced, but Aborigines retained access to land and overall the organisation of the industry did not alter. In these areas, Aborigines did not request land nor did they attempt to reoccupy specific patches. In part this may have been simply pragmatic: there was little land suitable in these areas for small-scale agriculture and areas large enough to give self-sufficiency in pastoralism were not likely to be made available as reserves. But it seems just as important that the conditions of both employment and access to land remained relatively stable, so that Aborigines did not at this time face the pressures with which those further east had to contend.

The peak of Aboriginal demand for land in NSW seems to have been from the 1860s to the 1890s. This is the same time span as Aboriginal attempts to gain land in Victoria and also in South Australia, where Graham Jenkin has documented a parallel process of Aboriginal moves to secure land by lease, purchase or reservation, using methods similar to those used in NSW.⁵⁰ Perhaps this can best be seen not as a phenomenon of one state, but as a movement around the temperate, south-eastern agricultural belt. Despite differing state 'Aboriginal affairs' policies, Aborigines developed similar strategies, to use the contemporary 'free selection' movement to regain some of their own land, for their own purposes.

How successful a strategy?

The success of this Aboriginal strategy in NSW may be evaluated on many different criteria. One is the complex question of how many people benefitted. Were they individuals? Men? Women? 'Traditional' social units like extended kin-ordered families, or newly created 'nuclear family' units? Such questions are still difficult to answer from sparse sources, and need to be pursued further, but there can be some suggestions made. It seems that in 1910, between 1,500 and 2,000 Aborigines were living on or in association with the independently settled reserves.⁵¹ This meant that around 25% of the enumerated 7,300 Aboriginal population had a knowledge of and an interest in these pieces of regained land. Oral evidence suggests that in the later years, these lands were seen as being owned primarily by one person, usually a man, or a married couple, but that there were mutual expectations that kin-members would come to live and work on the land and share its produce at different times of the year, according to the seasonal economy of the district.⁵² Another criterion is the nature of benefits arising from land acquisition and this is also a complex question: Aborigines were seeking to ensure their continued association with their country, and the social and cultural results are difficult to assess. The economic results are easier to measure, and give at least some base from which to consider social and cultural processes.

The land Aborigines were able to gain as reserve did give them secure access and residence in their own country as long as the reserve remained in force and they were assured that this would be forever. Aborigines were told that, like the blankets handed out by police once a year, these pieces of land were a direct and permanent gift from Queen Victoria, an explanation consistent with the legal fact that the land was 'Crown land'. They were

⁵⁰ Jenkin 1979:126-131.

⁵¹ APB Report 1910, Appendix B.

⁵² Interviews with Jack Campbell (re Burnt Bridge) 1978-1980; and with Reuben Kelly (re Bellbrook) 1987.

assured, too, that as long as they stayed on the land, particularly if 'utilising' it by farming, the land would always be theirs.⁵³

As a means to self-sufficiency, the reserve lands gave mixed results, but this reflected the variable quality of the land rather than limitations in the skills of Aboriginal managers. The south coast reserves had seldom been intended by *Kuris* to be agricultural areas and were used mainly as secure residence areas from which to fish. The south-western *Kuris*, particularly at Cumeragunja, were intensely eager to farm but they were disadvantaged by their small plots of land and lack of capital. Although the reserve was notified in 1883, disputes between the missionaries and the government delayed any start to farming, prompting the further *Kuri* demands in 1887, which included Cooper and Atkinson's requests for 65 ha each. This was an extremely modest demand for a period when 350 ha plus capital outlay was considered necessary to provide a family in that area with a comfortable living. What they in fact received was a 11 ha 'family farm block' on the Cumeragunja reserve in 1888. Neither the missionary body then controlling the reserve nor the Protection Board which took over the administration in 1897 could afford the capital outlay necessary for adequate irrigation. Arable land on the original 750 ha reserved was limited and the hostility of surrounding white land holders prevented expansion for some years. Modest extensions were made in 1893 and 1900 but all the land remained flood prone. By 1898, however, 20 'family farm blocks' of varying sizes existed on an area of 120 ha of the reserve. The *Kuri* farmers demonstrated their skills early, returning wheat harvests at or above the area's average in bushells per acre, but neither their skill nor their determination could provide returns adequate to support the families to whom the blocks had been allocated.⁵⁴

The Lewis and Wedge families at Yass were on indifferent land, suited in many years to grazing rather than farming. Nevertheless, these farms were reported by local police to be producing a 'modest living' throughout the later years of the century, and in 1901 the Protection Board tried to entice the Yass town *Kuri* population out to a new reserve adjacent to the Lewis's land.⁵⁵ The Bells, on better land at Blakeney Creek, were more successful, producing 15 tonnes of potatoes in 1894, with 4 ha under wheat and 200 fruit trees planted.⁵⁶

In the Burragorang, the fertile independent farm at St Joseph's continued to support a community of *Kuris* into the new century. The land came under threat in 1889, when the section which was conditional purchase was resumed for railway reserve and then applied for by a local white farmer. The Protection Board stepped in to defend Aboriginal tenure and secured a Reserve for the Use of Aborigines over the section.⁵⁷ By 1908, the focal person in the St Joseph's community was one of the original *Kuri* farmers, Mary Toliman (or Tolami), also the midwife for the whole valley, who was living there with her second husband, a *Kuri* called Longbottom (whose relations lived in the Wollongong-Thirroul area), and her daughter, Selena, who had married William Albert Shepherd. There were

53 H. Davis to Select Committee on Aborigines Protection Board, 1937, Minutes of Evidence, p.45; Chris Davis to Prime Minister, 21 January 1937, NSW Premiers Dept Correspondence, A37/193; Brennan 1907:212-16 for use of 'Queen' symbol; for additional discussion see Goodall 1987.

54 APB Register of Reserves, Folios 170, 5; Barwick 1972:52.

55 APB Register of Reserves Folios 141, 143; APB Report 1901.

56 APB Register of Reserves Folio 160; APB Report 1984:2.

57 APB Register of Reserves Folios 30, 56.

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others, including members of the Sherritt, Riley and Anderson families, who lived and worked on the farm over the years, on both reserve and 'church' land. Despite escalating attempts by the Catholic church to regain the land after 1908, these families hung on, in turn defying and conciliating the church and remaining economically independent by keeping the farm going until the 1920s.⁵⁸

The mid-north coast reserves were undoubtedly the most successful economically because the climate and the fertility of the soil allowed farming to go ahead with little capital outlay. Nevertheless, most were uncleared and required back-breaking labour to prepare the land for crops, making a mockery of the rejection of Bob Torbonts' 1886 claim on the Rous river because '... the habits and inclinations of the aborigines [are] not favourable to the settled and continuous labour required for clearing and cultivating the land'.⁵⁹ Herbert Davis, for example, recalled in 1937 how his family had cleared Rollands Plains, a reserve north-west of Port Macquarie:

That was a standing dense scrub. That was cleared by me and my brothers
The land was given to us on condition that we cleared it. We fulfilled all conditions and cleared the land and fenced it off and resided on it for over 30 years. The land, when a standing scrub, was valued at 2 pounds per acre ... It is and was valued at 42 pounds per acre after we had cleared it.⁶⁰

Another family of Davises had similar memories about Euroka Creek, later called Burnt Bridge, which they and John Mosely had begun to farm in 1894. The Protection Board originally assessed both Rollands Plains and Euroka Creek as 'suitable for grazing only' but after a few years of *Kuri* labour, reclassified the lands as 'suitable for cultivation'. In only 2 years, the Davis and Mosely families at Euroka had cleared and cropped 10 ha with maize, planted fruit trees and vegetables and begun raising chickens. By 1899, their maize crop yielded 800 bushells with the 'greater portion' of the land now cleared, with potatoes planted. The families had built barns for storing their produce and 'comfortable slab and bark dwellings' for themselves.⁶¹ As they later argued, the Moselys and Davises had transformed the lands to 'smiling properties' and 'very desirable farms without any assistance from the government'.⁶²

A similar recognition of *Kuri* labour and determination was made by local police in relation to the Forster reserve, in 1908:

The Aborigines at Forster have been living on the reserve about 20 years and many of the tribe have lived about there for the last 50 years. Many years ago, several of the respectable residents applied to the Lands Department, when the present site was granted for their use. The Land was then a dense Scrub, and now the whole of the Reserve is cleared and securely fenced. The whole of the work of clearing and fencing has been done by the Aborigines themselves. The Aborigines have built several very good cottages on this reserve, and

⁵⁸ Ibid.; Catholic Archives, Burragarang Parish; Interviews with Jack Campbell; Family history reconstruction by Gloria Ardler, La Perouse family history group.

⁵⁹ CSIL Box 1/2594, 86.6915.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Evidence, NSW Select Committee on Aborigines Protection Board, 1937:45.

⁶¹ APB Register of Reserves Folio 24; APB Report 1899:5.

⁶² J.J. Moloney to NSW Premier B.S. Stevens, 1 July 1937, PDCF A37/193.

fenced off nice gardens where they are now growing Lovely Potatoes, Cabbages, Etc.⁶³

Even the rich alluvial flats around the Macleay, Nambucca and Bellinger Rivers required hard clearing before they could be made productive, as James Linwood and others recalled in the 1920s about their lands on Fattorini and Pelican Islands, where their labour in fencing and planting was often heart-breakingly washed away in floods.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, these reserves were the ones which came nearest to fulfilling the *Kuri* desire for self-sufficiency, where labour-intensive, under-capitalised farming could support an extended family. As the Protection Board described the lower Macleay reserves in 1899:

They are all cleared and cultivated, maize being chiefly grown. On the whole the Aborigines are in a fairly flourishing condition, having horses and sulkies of their own. They have also provided themselves with boats, those supplied by the Government having worn out.⁶⁵

If the land movement strategy had some success in economic terms, how far was this at the cost of Aboriginal identity? These *Kuri* small farmers of the north coast were using their profits to buy consumer goods similar to those bought by white small farmers, with reports of *Kuris* furnishing their houses with curtains, pianos and other physical symbols of European culture. The admiration of the Protection Board and local police was surely not consistent with an adherence to Aboriginal values, as Whites understood them. The *Kuris* of the Macleay, Nambucca and Bellinger Rivers appeared to be living the perfect example of



'An Aborigine on the Hawkesbury River with his garden', c. 1890, photo acquired by Mitchell Library in 1920. Courtesy Mitchell Library.

⁶³ Senior Sergeant Hogan, Taree, to Sub Inspector Edwards, Kempsey, 29 November 1908 CSIL Box 5/6990,08.943.

⁶⁴ J. Hull to NSW Premier, 13 August 1937 PDCF A37/193.

⁶⁵ APB Report, 1899:5.

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the 'civilised' lifestyle to which the Board hoped all Aborigines would aspire. Yet the appearance did not accurately reflect what was a far more complex reality. These *Kuri* farmers were involved in some of the most recent ceremonial activity in the state, continuing modified initiation ceremonies in this area until at least the mid-1940s. During the earlier years of the twentieth century, some of the *Kuris* with the longest experience of secure tenure over and independent cultivation of reserves were also those with a most detailed knowledge of traditional philosophy.⁶⁶ Some of the families who participated in the most recent ceremonies had been most tenacious in demanding and defending their rights to independent cultivation and secure title over reserve land which they, too, clearly regarded as a 'small portion of a vast territory which is ours by Divine Right'.⁶⁷ It might be argued that the success of their land strategy was one factor which had given these communities the security to create a lifestyle which 'made sense' in their own terms, developed from their own traditions as well as from what they found useful in European material and cultural life.

Building pressures

While the land movement made clear gains, there were pressures building up to erode even the small-scale independent economic and social base that had been achieved. These were reflected in increasing populations on these reserves, reducing any chances of economic self-sufficiency. One cause was the worsening social conflict between Aborigines and Whites as Aborigines attempted to gain equal access to the services of country towns. Schools were the focal point of these tensions and from the 1880s local Whites managed to close the public schools, one by one, to Aboriginal students. Although in the 1870s the Aboriginal children of Kinchela, for example, could only attend school for around four months a year, as they spent the rest helping their parents in agricultural work on the Drew's permissive occupancy,⁶⁸ *Kuris* nevertheless were very interested in gaining access whenever they could to the developing school network. By 1900, the five families at Burnt Bridge were seeking full-time enrolment for their 20 children in the Euroka Creek Public School, but whenever the children tried to enrol they were sent home because of white parental objections. The Aboriginal families began petitioning for their own school in September 1900 and after persistent requests a 'special' school, for Aborigines only, was eventually opened in 1905 on the reserve.⁶⁹ This was only the last in a sequence of segregated schools opened on independently farmed reserves: first Forster, in 1891, then Rolland's Plains, Pelican Island, Kinchela and Wauchope in 1892, and Cabbage Tree Island in 1893.⁷⁰ Simply the presence of the school, with its white teacher there most days, increased the level of surveillance under which *Kuris* lived. As well, the school was a magnet for *Kuris* from elsewhere, suffering school exclusions in other towns. In their petition, the Burnt Bridge *Kuris* pointed out that if a school was established other Aboriginal families would come to live there, and such migration towards the increasingly scarce resource of schooling seems to have occurred on this and other farmed reserves.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Interviews with Jack Campbell; Morris 1985.

⁶⁷ Macleay *Argus*, 7 April 1925.

⁶⁸ Department of Education Files, Kinchela Aboriginal School file.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Burnt Bridge Aboriginal School file.

⁷⁰ Fletcher 1977:100-5, 287.

⁷¹ John Mosely, George Davis and others to Department of Public Instruction, 9 April 1900, Department of Education Files.

Population had increased too in the worst of the Depression and drought of the 1890s and early 1900s, as Aborigines found themselves facing high unemployment (probably disproportionately so although there is difficulty tracing unemployment rates in this period).⁷²

The encroachment of local Whites was another and more ominous threat. The Protection Board demonstrated its willingness to support Aboriginal residence, but this often meant a loss of independence. When Aboriginal tenure of the richly fertile Drew permissive occupancy at Kinchela was challenged in 1899, the Board stepped in, securing the Drew's residency, but at the cost of transforming the title into Aboriginal Reserve.⁷³

As the economy improved after the drought broke in 1904, and the push for 'Closer Settlement' regained impetus with a new Act in 1905, the right of Aborigines to 'lock up the land' was attacked. Whites wanting land for the expansion of their own properties near Deniliquin, for example, tried to have the residential reserve there revoked in 1907, but there were enough employers of Aborigines' labour in the immediate vicinity to squash the plan.⁷⁴ *Kuris* at Forster had to organise their own defence in the same year, when local Whites seeking town expansion tried to have the only watered portion of the independently farmed reserve revoked. The police strongly supported them, as noted earlier, but it was John Ridgeway himself who wrote letter after letter to the Protection Board and the Premier demanding more secure tenure for his family and other Aboriginal farmers.⁷⁵

This coincided with the Board's own 1907 attack on independent farming at Cumeragunja. Barwick has suggested this fitted a pattern of attack on Aboriginal community independence, by removing land and then children, marking the shift from *laissez faire* to aggressive dispersal which occurred in Victoria in the 1880s and in NSW in the 1900s. Cumeragunja was first simply because higher existing levels of control meant it was easier to implement the new policy before the Board gained new legislation.⁷⁶

In fact, from 1907 the Board was being heavily pressured by the NSW Premier to protect the security of Aboriginal tenure and actually extend the area of reserve land. Aboriginal protests, supported by those of non-Aborigines, over the attacks on Aboriginal residence at Colimo and Forster in 1906 and 1907, as well as *Kuri* demands at Roseby Park in 1907 for more land in order to farm, led the Premier to take the matter up.⁷⁷ This interest may then have been reconfirmed by the vocal protests of Cumeragunja farmers. The Board responded enthusiastically to the Premier's concerns, and circularised police to report on all likely new sites for agricultural reserves.⁷⁸

The Board did not seem to see its actions at Cumeragunja as a contradiction of this general commitment to increasing reserve land or Aboriginal autonomy. It saw itself to be in financial difficulties at the time because of state budget cuts over the Depression and drought period and it appears to have regarded the Cumeragunja take-over as a one-off solution to what it believed would be short term problems. Cumeragunja presented the only

⁷² APB Reports show population rises on reserves.

⁷³ APB Register of Reserves Folio 74.

⁷⁴ Colimo bundle CSIL, Box 5/6944,07.229.

⁷⁵ John Ridgeway to Thomas Garvin, APB Chairman, 13 July 1908, CSIL, Box 5/6990,08.943.

⁷⁶ Barwick 1972. I made similar assumptions in Goodall 1982:73-5.

⁷⁷ Secretary, APB to Under-Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 9 July 1907; Under-Secretary, Treasury to Premier, 20 July 1907, CSIL Box 5/7030, 07.398 and 07.7299.

⁷⁸ Memo, Secretary, APB to Chief Secretary, 1 September 1908, CSIL Box 5/6990, 08.124.

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large area of reserve land which would be suitable for profitable agriculture without huge capital expenditure. Warangesda was less fertile and the family farm blocks there had not been successful at all because of this, while the Aboriginal community there was showing more signs of revolt at Board interference than at Cumeragunja at this time. Brewarrina, the only other possibility in terms of land area, was not suitable without major capital investment. Cumeragunja was simply the only choice for the Board to increase its own self-sufficiency. The intervention at Cumeragunja did not therefore signal an inevitable Board intervention on all other independently farmed reserves. Instead, the Board planned its 1909 legislation with both an increase in aggressive dispersal AND an increased reserve area with more guarantees of permanent Aboriginal tenure. Although in retrospect these two policies are in obvious contradiction, at least part of the latter aim became law in the regulation protecting Aboriginal farmers' rights to the profits of their crops, as their private property.⁷⁹

The more important change occurred in the Board attitude to reserve land when it became obvious around 1910 that the dispersal activities would be very expensive, particularly because of the need to run 'training homes' for the children being removed. This campaign to take children away was the most cherished of the Board's new policies, an emphasis which increased with the rising influence at this time of the removal policy's architect, R.T. Donaldson. In any conflict between the independence of Aboriginal land and the continuation of the child removal policy, the latter would inevitably win. From 1911, when the Board recognised that the need to expand its own financial base was not merely a short-term expedient but a long-term necessity, it ceased to defend Aboriginal tenure against the rising tide of white 'closer settlement' demands and by 1915 it had begun to seize Aboriginal reserve land itself to rent to Whites to 'supplement' its income.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the Board was not the catalyst for the loss of this land, it merely acquiesced in the process. The real force, as might be expected, was the upward trend in the wider economy, reactivating the demand for closer settlement. Having lost Board support, Aboriginal protests were overridden by the massive pressure through local Lands Boards to take their proven, productive lands to give to white farmers, who saw the reserves as land still to be colonised.

Conclusion

The Aboriginal land rights movement in NSW in the late nineteenth century demonstrated the parallel development of strategies by communicating Aboriginal communities to counter the problems arising from intensification of rural capitalist land use. The movement was not centrally organised or formally constituted, but information flowed from community to community, maintaining an awareness of others' wins and losses in the attempts to secure access to country and to create an independent economic base. These interconnections clearly linked some areas in NSW with some in Victoria, and it may be that the South Australian Aboriginal farmers of the 1870s were also aware of these more easterly Aboriginal actions. Regardless of diverging state policies and differing levels of missionary activity, Aborigines from the 1860s to the 1890s, around this whole south-eastern agricultural belt, can be seen to have generated parallel strategies, focussed on land, to lay their bases for the future. The communities were well aware of the closer settlement movements, and attempted to use the 'free selection' language and ideology to

⁷⁹ Regulation 32, Aborigines Protection Act, 1909; NSW Government Gazette No.92, 8 June 1910, p.3063.

⁸⁰ APB Minutes and Reports. For a more detailed discussion, see Goodall 1982:73-82.

their own ends. In NSW, this Aboriginal strategy led to the notification of 74 reserves between 1861 and 1894, 64% of the total number of reserves created over that time.⁸¹ The creation of reserves in NSW in this period was largely a reflection of the strength and persistence of Aboriginal demand, even though the reserve title and the overall area of land were unsatisfactory. Far from this being a period of Aboriginal inaction and loss of agency, it was a time when Aborigines were indeed making their own history.

The response of government in NSW to Aboriginal land demands was generally positive because those demands were compatible with the broad social aims espoused by both liberals and conservatives. The policy of the State towards Aborigines in general, however, was not coherent until at least 1910, because before that the government refused the Protection Board's demands for a strong legislative base on the Victorian model. Between 1883 and 1910 the Board responded to pressure, rather than initiating new policy, and in practice Aboriginal demand as an effective source of influence. The Board found itself also the focus of demands from different groups of non-Aborigines, such as employers, missionaries, rural town authorities and later would-be selectors, whose demands might at times be in conflict with each other and sometimes were directed through other arms of government, such as the administrations for land or education, which put the Board in conflict with these other public service bodies. The Board's practice of responding to demand led it to sustain for some time what were in fact contradictory policies of supporting independent Aboriginal farming and land tenure while developing plans to disperse Aborigines aggressively, but the contradiction was exposed by the Board's own poverty and the independent lands fell victim.

In spite of, or rather because of, the success of Aboriginal farming, most of these independently settled reserves were lost to 'closer settlement' or its successor, 'soldier settlement', between 1916 and 1927. The area of reserve lands was slashed from 10,500 ha to 5,200 ha and 75% of this loss was from the north coast. Only a few of the independently settled reserves, like Burnt Bridge or Bellbrook, survived unscathed. Most were lost altogether or were leased out to Whites, making them just as inaccessible to the Aboriginal farmers.⁸²

This massive loss of both the lands themselves and of the development strategy they had embodied was one of the two catalysts for the regional Aboriginal political movement which emerged on the NSW coast in 1924, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA).⁸³ The relationship was direct: the period of most rapid land loss was 1922 to 1923 and the movement had become public within a year, with defence of reserves and an ongoing land settlement programme as its major platform. The impact of the loss of these lands was intensified because they had been gained as the result of an Aboriginal victory, symbols of independence and hope for the future.

Each of the prominent activists of the movement was associated with the independently settled and farmed lands. Fred Maynard, the AAPA president, had been born in the Hunter area in 1879: his uncle was Tom Phillips, one of the Aboriginal farmers who settled and farmed the St Clair reserve, outside Singleton. This reserve had been encroached on by missionaries then made an APB station in 1916, but had only been closed altogether in

⁸¹ Compiled from APB Register of Reserves, APB Reports and Minutes.

⁸² Compiled from NSW Government Gazettes, Department of Lands Reports, APB Reports and Minutes. See Goodall 1982:115-128, 216-228.

⁸³ Goodall 1982:228-252.

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1923.⁸⁴ S.W. Ridgeway was secretary: William and John Ridgeway had been fighting for land against white encroachment at Tea Gardens and Forster since the early years of the century, and had only lost Forster in 1923.⁸⁵ J. Johnstone was vice-president, a member of the family which had settled the Wingham reserve in 1882 and lost it to revocation in 1921; Johnstone was an activist who continued his organising into the later 1930s organisation, the Aborigines Progressive Association.⁸⁶ James Linwood spoke to the 500 *Kuris* gathered at the AAPA meeting at Kempsey in 1925: he had cleared and farmed Fattorini Island in the Macleay since before 1883, only to be forced off the fertile lands when it was revoked in 1924.⁸⁷ Joe Anderson and his brothers had worked St Joseph's farm in the Burragorang: that land was finally lost to revocation in 1924, after which Anderson and his family moved to Salt Pan Creek camp in Sydney and began making political speeches around the Markets and Domain. Joe was eventually filmed by Cinesound News in 1933, as 'King Burraga', continuing with his plea for land:

There is enough fish in the rivers for us all and [enough] land to grow all we want.⁸⁸

Finally, Jane Duren conducted a strong and bitter campaign to protect her people's land at Bateman's Bay from town encroachment from 1925 until her decision to join the platform of the AAPA to advocate land and justice for all Aborigines in a series of public meetings in 1927.⁸⁹

The nineteenth century Aboriginal land rights movement was then a crucial element in shaping the Aboriginal response to the conditions of the 1920s. The popular memory of the independent reserves has been overlaid since the 1920s by the trauma of concentration on reserves since the 1930s. Nevertheless, the concept of independence through land and country has persisted as part of the framework for Aboriginal politics through to the present.

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⁸⁴ APB Register of Reserves, Folio 41; APB Minutes 1916-1923; Maynard family researches: personal communication; Miller 1985:107-110, 116-137.

⁸⁵ Letterhead, AAPA, F.G. Maynard to K- B-, 14 October 1927, PDCF A27/915; J. Ridgeway to T. Garvin, 13 July 1908, CSIL Box 5/6990,08.943; APB Register of Reserves, Folios 52,92.

⁸⁶ Letterhead, AAPA, op.cit.; APB Register of Reserves, Folio 65; *The Australian Abo Call* [J. Patten ed.] No.1, April 1938, p.2.

⁸⁷ Macleay *Argus*, 7 April 1925; J. Hull to Premier, 13 August 1937, PDCF A37/193.

⁸⁸ Interviews with Jack Campbell, concerning Salt Pan Creek Camp, 1927 to 1932; Cinesound News Review, No. 100, 1933 (National Film Archives).

⁸⁹ Jane Duren to King George V, 14 June 1926, Bateman's Bay Public School files, 1925-7, Department of Education Files; *Evening News*, 16 November 1927; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1927.

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COMING IN? THE YANYUWA AS A CASE STUDY IN THE GEOGRAPHY OF CONTACT HISTORY

Richard Baker

They took them in there [to Borroloola], bunched them up, got them going and dumped them. (Steve Johnson¹.)

Introduction

Steve's quote reflects the Yanyuwa view that Northern Territory Government Welfare Officers were responsible for bringing the Yanyuwa in to Borroloola. This article examines in detail this move from bush to town life. In so doing I test the relative merit of conflicting views that Aboriginal people were 'rounded up' or came in to European settlements of their own volition. An understanding of the move from bush to town is of great importance as this move has been one of the most fundamental processes in Aboriginal history. A fuller understanding of this process is provided when oral sources are considered and used in conjunction with available written sources.

The Yanyuwa today number about 200 and mostly live in the Northern Territory town of Borroloola. The 1986 Australian census recorded Borroloola's Aboriginal population as 465 and the non-Aboriginal population as 182. This settlement is located 700 km south-east of Darwin by air or 1,000 km by road. Borroloola is located about 80 km inland from Yanyuwa traditional country, which is the Sir Edward Pellew Group of islands and the adjacent coastal areas of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Figure 2 illustrates the area the Yanyuwa say was the country of the different Aboriginal groups in the Borroloola area before European contact.

Borroloola was established as an European settlement in the early 1880s and for a brief period flourished as a staging point for Europeans and their animals. It was on the main overland droving route from Queensland to the Northern Territory and on to Western Australia.² The impact of Europeans in this period was focused on the Borroloola area and the Yanyuwa were mostly isolated from direct contact. Their contact was essentially optional: passing boats could be approached and those interested in having greater contact with Europeans could move into Borroloola. Those groups living closer to Borroloola however had no option but to be in contact with Europeans. European introduced disease

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1 1987 Tape 30A 26 min. This and all subsequent references to tapes refer to recordings I made which are now lodged with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies. In Baker (1989b) I discuss the methods used first to collect this material and secondly to transcribe it so that the location to the nearest minute on the tape is known.

2 The largest number of Europeans ever to be in the region was probably in 1886, when many gold-diggers passed through on their way to the Kimberley gold fields. McMinn, the customs officer at Borroloola at the time, reported that, in three months of 1886, 1,500 people with 3,000 horses passed through Borroloola. South Australian Public Record Office, 566/41:6 of copy of letter sent by McMinn to Parsons, Description of social and economic conditions Borroloola: draft report to Government Resident.

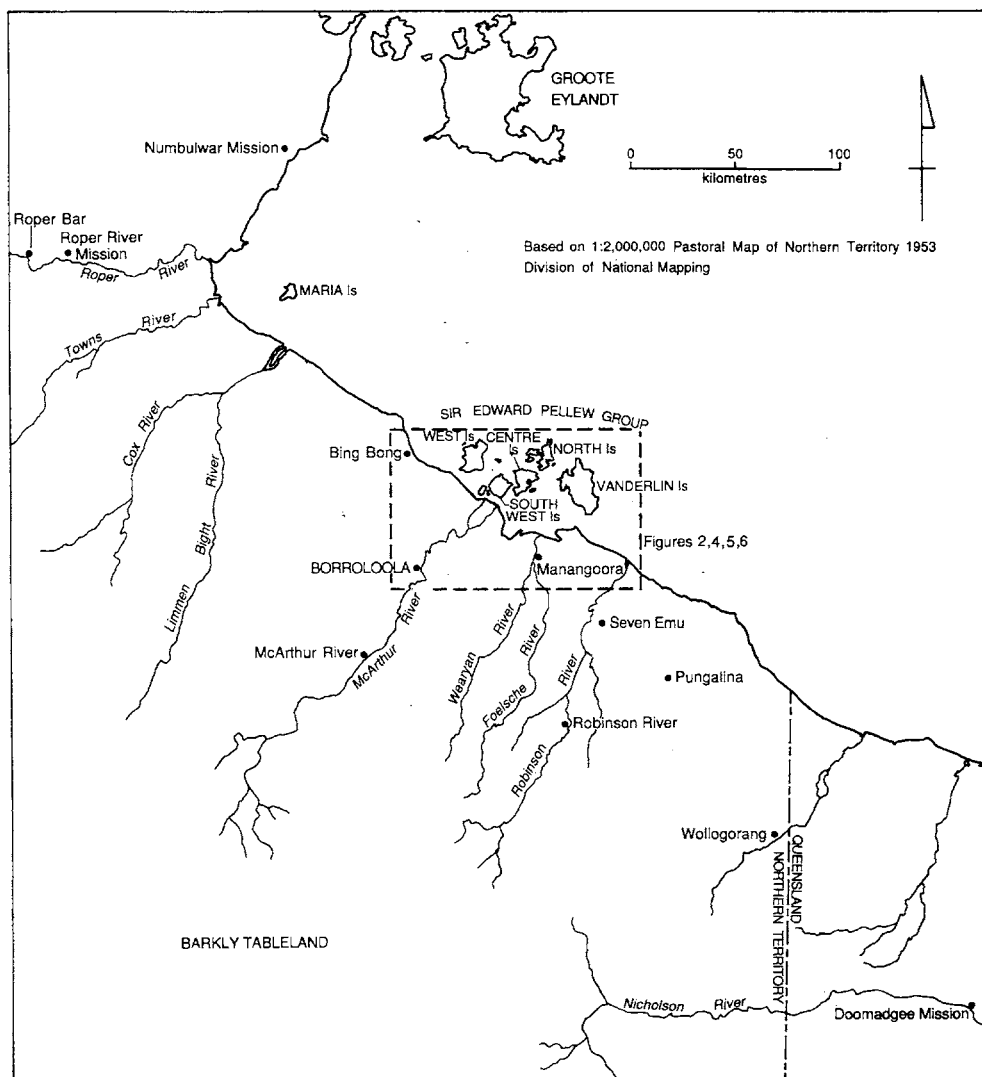


Fig 1: Borrooloola region, NT. Maps and diagrams in this article were drawn by Debbie Canty, Geography Department, University of Adelaide, and Jennifer Sheahan, Cartography Unit, RSPacS, ANU.

and violence led to a rapid decrease in the population of Aboriginal groups in the immediate vicinity of Borroloola. The Wilangarra people in particular declined in numbers and while there are a few people alive in Borroloola now who had Wilangarra ancestors the language is no longer spoken and the Wilangarra are no longer regarded by Aboriginal people in the area as a land-owning group.

The Yanyuwa as a result of their close links with the Wilangarra have assumed responsibility for what was once Wilangarra country. Borroloola itself is now regarded by Aboriginal people as Yanyuwa country although as figure 2 indicates this has not always been the case. As Annie Karrakayn notes³ 'other language properly for here now, Wilangarra little bit like Yanyuwa'.⁴

This article focuses on the history of a group of people who identify as Yanyuwa. It needs to be noted that in the area as well as linguistic based social divisions there is the mythologically based semi-moiety system that cuts across linguistic divisions. This semi-moiety⁵ system is outlined in figures 3 and 4. These two social systems are discrete but their members intersect. A good example of this comes from the Lurriyari Wubunjawa area (see figure 2) which is close to the boundary of Yanyuwa and Garawa country. This division is of little consequence as Aboriginal people who lived in the area would always have been at least bilingual. Many people describe themselves, as Rory Wurrulbirranguu does,⁶ as 'me Yanyuwa-Garawa'. When discussing this area people were more concerned to impress on me that all the area is Mambaliya semi-moiety country.⁷

'Coming in' or 'letting the blacks in'

An expression that the Yanyuwa and many other Aboriginal groups use to describe the move from bush to town is 'coming in'.⁸ Loos in his discussion of European-Aboriginal relationships on the north Queensland 'frontier' uses the term 'let the blacks in'.⁹ In doing so he is writing about the European perspectives of the Aboriginal move from bush to town. I will concentrate on another view of the process. With the benefit of oral sources that Loos and other historians have often ignored¹⁰ it is possible to present Aboriginal perspectives on the move from bush to town.

The issues of people coming in and being let in have rarely been addressed by Australian historians. Reynolds briefly discusses how Aboriginal people came in and makes the point that 'these events have rarely been studied by Australian scholars although they

³ 1983 Tape 19A 60 min.

⁴ On another occasion (1987 Tape 67A 34 min.) Annie noted the similarities between the two languages by saying 'Wilangarra that's mate for that Yanyuwa'.

⁵ As Layton (1980:8) notes from his field work in the nearby Cox River area (see figure 1), these 'semi-moieties are analogous with the father-son pairs in an eight sub-section system'.

⁶ 1987 Tape 68A 26 min.

⁷ Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, makes this point (1987 Tape 19A 38 min.). Tim is fluent in both Yanyuwa (his father's first language) and Garawa (his mother's first language).

⁸ Whylo Widamara, 1986 Tape 15A 12 min., for example, talks of how the last Yanyuwa man remained living in the bush until 'this time when citizen[ship] been open he come in then'.

⁹ Loos 1982:161.

¹⁰ Anderson's 1983, 1984 use of oral sources in his work on part of the area Loos's work is concerned with, highlights the failings of Loos in considering such sources.

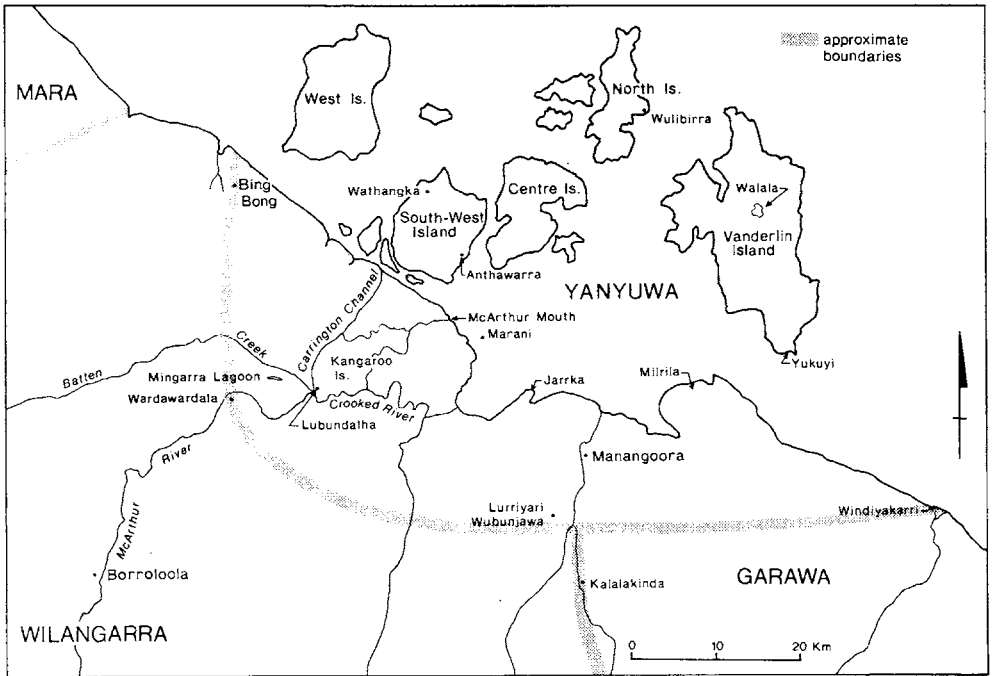


Fig. 2: Yanyuwa 'proper country', pre-European settlement.

YANYUWA SOCIETY			
Moiety A		Moiety B	
semi-moiety Wuyaliya	semi-moiety Wurdaliya	semi-moiety Rrumburriya	semi-moiety Mambaliya- Wawakarriya

Fig.3: Yanyuwa social groupings.

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must have been repeated a hundred times over'.¹¹ This article makes a step towards rectifying this situation. In providing a detailed case study of what was a common process, I raise many factors of wider relevance.

A fundamental issue in contact history is to what degree contact was the result of Aboriginal people coming in and how much resulted from Europeans going out into Aboriginal country. This issue is examined in detailed by Stanner who, from his field experience in the Fitzmaurice River area of the Northern Territory in the 1930s, notes that 'for every Aboriginal who, so to speak, had Europeans thrust upon him, at least one other had sought them out'.¹² Building on this view Stanner argues elsewhere that Aboriginal people 'co-operated in their own destruction by accepting a parasitic role which enabled them to live peaceably near the intruding whites'.¹³

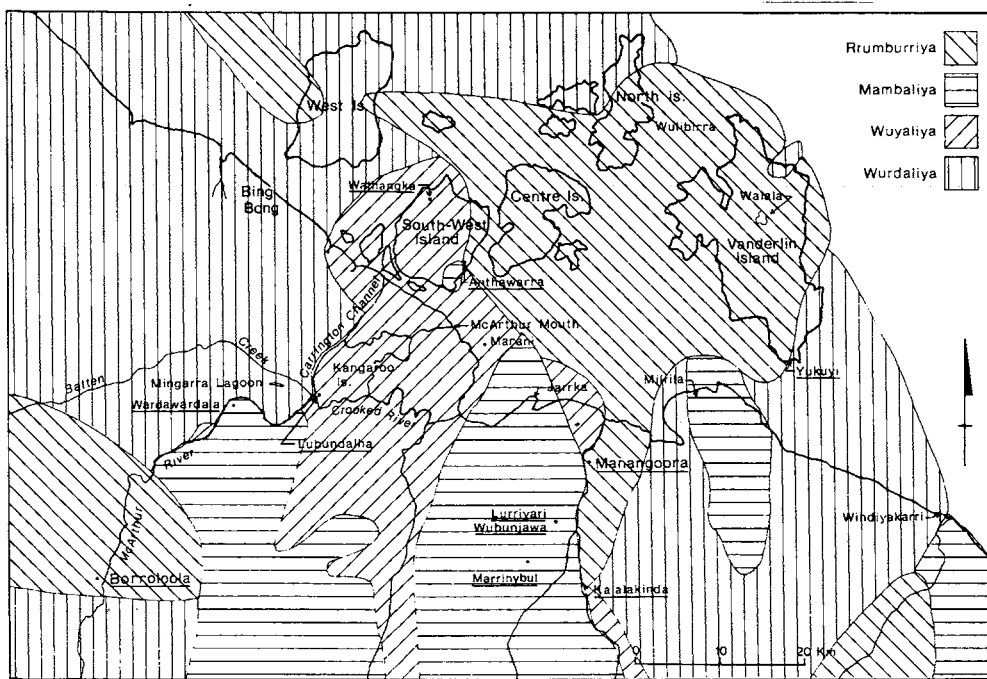


Fig. 4: Land belonging to each semi-moiety in the Borroloola area.

¹¹ Reynolds 1987:63.

¹² Stanner 1958:101. This article also appears in Stanner 1979 where this passage is on page 48. Sansom 1980b:11 coined the expression the 'Stanner corrective' to describe this equation of contact.

¹³ Stanner 1979:5.

The Yanyuwa example shows that there was not a single reason for Aboriginal people coming in. To hold such a view glosses over the fact that different groups came in for different reasons, at different times and in different places. Moreover, different individuals within groups came in for different reasons and indeed, as I will illustrate, some people came in on a number of different occasions for different reasons each time. Hence, when the group is considered as a whole, many factors were responsible for the collective move from bush to town.

As I will show, it is also important to go beyond asking *why* people came in and examine *how* people came in. To illustrate this, I will first analyse the move the Yanyuwa made from bush to town in terms of the more standard question of why they came in. I will then show that it is possible to map how the Yanyuwa came in.

Why did people come in?

From the life histories I have recorded from Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area¹⁴ it is possible to group seven major categories of reasons for people coming in. These are:

1. Longing for stimulants, for example, tea, sugar and tobacco. European tobacco was particularly important. The Yanyuwa had an appetite for this drug prior to European contact through the trade of Australian narcotic plants¹⁵ and the Macassan source of tobacco. A mild stimulant was also made by soaking pandanus nuts in bark coolamons.
2. Desire for staple foods. As well as new foods¹⁶ and stimulants, Europeans brought with them food, such as flour and sugar,¹⁷ which was essentially the same as existing food types. These foods were very attractive due to the volume they could be obtained in and the great saving of labour they represented. McGrath aptly describes flour and other such European foods as 'fast foods'.¹⁸
3. Economic necessity, due to environmental damage. This factor certainly needs to be considered for Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area because of the great damage cattle did to such important resources as water, water lilies, freshwater turtles and small mammals.
4. Curiosity about Europeans, their lifestyle and material goods.

¹⁴ Life history information was recorded from 54 adult Yanyuwa, 21 Garawa, 8 Mara, 6 Kurdanji, 2 Wambaya, 1 Arrente, 1 Alyawara, 1 Nunggubuyu, 1 Jawoyn and 1 Kunwinku people.

¹⁵ Mounted Constable R. Stott, who was stationed at Borroloola, collected a sample as part of the large ethnographic collection that he sent to the South Australian Museum in January 1910. Accession number A 1796, labelled 'Narcotic, native tobacco *Nicotiana suaveolens*'. The species identification was presumably made by Museum staff at the time the collection arrived.

¹⁶ The Macassans brought new food types as well, long before the arrival of Europeans. While one of my main informants, Tim Rakuwurlma, (1982 Tape 1B 38 min.) is disparaging about the Macassan lack of dress, 'he got no trousers only sarong', he concedes 'but he got proper good tucker' and mentions rice in particular.

¹⁷ Prior to European and Macassan contact, flour had been made from grinding a variety of seeds and fruits and the honey of native bees was collected. The latter was also added to a drink made from lemon-grass and water (discussed by Johnson Babarramila 1987 Tape 65B 7 min.), which represents a precursor to the sweet tea commonly drunk in the area now.

¹⁸ McGrath 1987:125.

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5. The fact that surrounding groups had already come in. This would have been a great attraction to those still out bush due to the social and ceremonial opportunities that large gatherings would have provided.
6. Disease. Introduced diseases may have considerably affected people still living in the bush and had a destabilising effect on traditional life, forcing people in to town.
7. Security, providing protection from both Europeans and other Aboriginal people. For example, people give one reason for leaving Vanderlin Island as fear arising from a traditional killing carried out by a Yanyuwa man, in 1928.¹⁹ Myers notes how a similar occurrence played a role in the Pintupi move into Haasts Bluff.²⁰ Through oral histories, Myers documents how some people came in attracted by food but others were 'fleeing revenge parties and others attempting to evade the repercussions of wife stealing'. This implies that people left through fear of both the toughness of Aboriginal law²¹ and the intervention of white law.

Of these categories, the first three are essentially economic reasons and could be labelled as categories of a 'super waterhole'²² theory. Such a theory argues that Aboriginal people always gathered at places of plentiful economic resources and that European settlements merely offered new and better waterholes. The last four reasons are all social. The fourth and fifth can be grouped together as part of a 'super ceremony' theory which stresses that Aboriginal people came together whenever possible for social reasons and that European settlements provided a new means for (or cause of) such gatherings.

Another distinction can be made between the super waterhole and super ceremony factors. In general, the former occurred first and the latter, in turn, was dependent on the first. That is, for people to be attracted into European settlements for social and ceremonial reasons there had to be Aboriginal people already there and those already there generally came in for super waterhole reasons. Many people came into Borroloola for the first time to attend ceremonies. Obviously, in such cases, others had already made the move in and in the process created a pull for others to do so. Clearly, then, super waterhole and super ceremony factors are interrelated. Each person who came in because of any combination of the above factors, or of one single factor, created a further incentive for others to do so.

The Yanyuwa view of 'coming in'

When asked directly why everyone had moved into town, Yanyuwa people inevitably replied along similar lines to Pyro, who said²³ '[welfare²⁴ went] mustering up all the

19 The Borroloola Magistrates book (Northern Territory Archives, F267) lists the case of 'Gilbry' on 14 April 1928. Harney (1946:128) also mentions this killing.

20 Myers 1986:34.

21 As the Yanyuwa police aide, Billy Rijirmgu, put it, the punishment for breaking Aboriginal law was often capital 'he's gone...[but] with white man law at least you get a chance'.

22 McGrath (1987:20) uses this term to describe the attraction cattle stations had for Aboriginal people. I use the term in more general sense to refer to the attraction various types of European settlements had for Aboriginal people.

23 1987 Tape 63A 30 min.

24 The term 'welfare' is used by the Yanyuwa to describe both individual Northern Territory Welfare Branch officers and collectively the Northern Territory Welfare Branch. I use the term in this same dual sense.

people there, old people from every station'.²⁵ However, during all my field work it was nigh on impossible to find anyone who was actually picked up by the welfare officers. It is worth exploring this apparent paradox.

It took several months' work, being referred from person to person, before I eventually found a number of Garawa people who actually were picked up from Wollogorang and Robinson River stations in the late 1950s²⁶ by a welfare officer and brought into Borroloola. However, even in these cases it appears that at least some of those picked up came in willingly. Those picked up from Wollogorang station for example told me²⁷ that they had been 'starving for tucker'. After further discussion,²⁸ it was explained that this situation had arisen because the station manager's wife had been 'jealous' of Aboriginal women and refused to give them any rations. Apparently her jealousy was caused by the relationships her husband was having with Aboriginal women.

If, in several months' work, I could only find a few individuals who were brought into Borroloola as they were 'starving for tucker', where does this leave the view that 'welfare been rounded up everyone'. It is worth breaking this statement in two.

1. Was it welfare?
2. What does 'been rounded up' mean?

In answering these questions a third question will be answered as well: was it everyone who was rounded up?

Was it welfare?

Patrol officer Evans lists the Aboriginal population of Borroloola in 1949 as 31.²⁹ He lists by name 28 people and all of these are Yanyuwa apart from one Queensland man who married a Yanyuwa woman. As outlined above, these Yanyuwa people had already come in for a variety of reasons. Annie Karrakayn describes³⁰ how many Yanyuwa people came in before the arrival of welfare and emphasises the role one Yanyuwa woman had in bringing people in:

All the families belong to island, they all up here now...[in] Borroloola...Banjo's daughter was married to whitefella here and that's the way they been come here and stay here.

²⁵ Others to use this or similar expressions in this way include Dulcie Walwalmara, who describes (1987 Tape 66B 34 min.) how welfare 'been muster him all about'; Roger Makaranyi, who says (1987 Tape 69A 18 min.) Aboriginal people were 'rounded up like a cattle' by welfare; Dinny Nyliba who told me (1983 Tape 9B 15 min.) that 'welfare been muster up all the people' and Musso Harvey, who describes (1987 Tape 51B 36 min.) how welfare 'started to muster all the people'. McGrath 1987:2 documents similar expressions from Aboriginal people in the Ord River area of Western Australia. She quotes Amy Laurie describing how a European 'started mustering all the blackfellers and quietening them all down...like horses'.

²⁶ Musso Harvey, who was working with the welfare officer involved, describes picking people up from these locations (1987 Tape 22A 25 min.).

²⁷ 1987 Tape 47B 15 min.

²⁸ 1987 Tape 47B 32 min.

²⁹ 'Report on visit to Borroloola District'. Report to Director of Native Affairs dated 9.8.49. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS: F315 Item 49/393 A2 (a copy is also in F1 48/15).

³⁰ 1983 Tape 19A 88 min. Bella Marrajabu similarly (1986 Tape 15A 73 min.) discusses how 'they already been here'.

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Banjo's other daughter was later married to another European and Annie notes³¹ how people also came to Borroloola to see her and to obtain tobacco.

The police based in Borroloola and the rations they issued to the 'aged and infirm' were an important factor in people coming in before welfare's arrival. Lenin Anderson,³² who has lived virtually all his life at Manangoora and is therefore in a unique position to comment on the move of Aboriginal people from there to Borroloola, notes that people moved in before welfare:³³ 'the police started to drag them into Borroloola, give them ration, then the welfare took over'. Whylo Widamara recalls³⁴ how Ted Heathcock, the policeman at Borroloola in the late 1930s, came out to Vanderlin Island and told his father ' "you got to shift to Borroloola, got all this kid" '. Whylo remembers that they came in because of a promise of schooling but they had to 'wait for school, we never went to school...wait, wait, wait, wait, nothing. Not long [ago] that school been come...when I been working stockman'. He also recalls³⁵ that when questioned about when the school would arrive the welfare officer replied ' "ah not long now [until you get a] school" ' and concludes that the welfare officer 'used to tell liar that old fella'.

Ruth Heathcock, who lived in Borroloola and Roper Bar in the 1930s with her husband, Constable Ted Heathcock, recalls³⁶ that Aboriginal people then were living in town in camps that

were established because people were getting old and there wasn't the care [out bush], their young ones were going away for work and things like that. So at least the Aboriginal Department established camps and they were near whatever police station,...but there wasn't schooling for them unless they were taken down to the mission...

Ruth goes on to explain that the missions involved were at Roper River and Groote Eylandt, and that a number of Aboriginal families moved to these locations if they had relations there, so that their children could go to school. She also notes³⁷ that the Aboriginal trackers employed by the police 'brought the old people' into Borroloola and adds that other old people came on their own accord as they were getting 'decrepit and they knew they would be supplied [with rations]'.

A common explanation given by Aboriginal people for first coming in to Borroloola was to attend ceremonies. This process was occurring long before the arrival of welfare. Rory Wurrulbirrangunu, for example, describes³⁸ how he first came to Borroloola for a ceremony when he was a young man (probably around 1920) and notes that Aboriginal people 'want to live here [in Borroloola]...people [from] every place no matter where from, they come up big fella business [ceremonies] ... I been come along my father'. Rory concludes by noting how he and his father 'been go back long country now, go home now'. Many others, however, once in town, did not make this return trip and those who did go

31 1987 Tape 37B 15 min.

32 Lenin's father was Andy Anderson, the European leaseholder of Manangoora Station from the 1940s until his death in 1972, and his mother was a Garawa woman. Andy's death is discussed by the Pollards (1988 Tape 5B 27 min.) who were the welfare officers at the time.

33 1987 Tape 67A 32 min.

34 1987 Tape 13A 3 min.

35 Ibid. 4 min.

36 1986 Tape 29B 28 min.

37 1986 Tape 30A 12 min.

38 1987 Tape 68A 30 min.

back had begun a pattern of return trips to town separated by shorter and shorter spells in the bush. The very last couple to come in did so in the mid-1970s and, like many before them, came in to attend a ceremony. Maisie Charlie in translating their description³⁹ of why they came in notes how relations went out to their camp and brought them 'here for that ceremony and they been stop here for good then'.

Before and after the establishment of the welfare depot at Borroloola, periodic collapses of the small Gulf stations, due to bankruptcy or death of the owner-managers, led some Aboriginal people to move into Borroloola. Ricket Murundu gives an example of this when he describes⁴⁰ the owner-manager of Pungalina and how 'soon as he died everyone shift from there'. An interesting aspect of this example is that, while Ricket moved west back to Manangoora, his sisters moved east into Queensland. He describes how they 'kept going to Wollogorang, keep going to Doomadgee'. His sisters are still in Queensland, having moved further east still to Burketown.

Two important points have been raised by this section. First, it appears that the only people to be physically brought into Borroloola by welfare were the small group of Garawa people. Secondly, by 1949 as a result of a variety of factors at least 27 Yanyuwa people had already moved into Borroloola.

'Been rounded up'

Yanyuwa people today use many European expressions that they have picked up from their long association with the cattle industry. Individuals have described to me how the police been 'quieten us down',⁴¹ how 'this [is] my country, this [is] my run',⁴² how when young they were 'like a green colt',⁴³ how someone was a 'little bit jackaroo',⁴⁴ how all the young people 'are very hard to wheel out now'⁴⁵ and how 'we're trying to catch him up and break them young boys in'.⁴⁶

The use of the terms 'been rounded up' or 'mustered up' are further examples of cattle work imagery being applied to people. To view 'been rounded up' as the welfare physically picking people up is to put mainstream Australian English connotations on an Aboriginal English term. Such an interpretation overlooks the way it works, like all the examples above, as a metaphor inspired by cattle times. Moreover, within this metaphor it needs to be realised that cattle can simply be rounded up by going to where they have gathered themselves. While cattle can be rounded up by whip cracking stockmen roaming the country, they can just as effectively be rounded up by stockmen going to the waterholes where cattle congregate in the late dry season.

Like cattle that are fenced up in yards, after they have rounded themselves up at a waterhole, the Yanyuwa have become aware of their decreasing independence only some time after they made the move into a central spot. Herein lies a core issue of the 'we been rounded up' view. It is, essentially, a retrospective perspective. Hence it is only after it

39 1987 Tape 49A 4 min.

40 1987 Tape 35B 13 min.

41 Nero Timothy 1983 Tape 14A 5 min.

42 Laura 1987 Tape 48B 33 min.

43 Don Manarra 1987 Tape 35A 21 min.

44 Musso Harvey 1987 Tape 52A 8 min.

45 Gordon Milyindirri 1987 Tape 17B 38 min.

46 Ibid. 42 min., he was referring to the need to get them to understand the old ways.

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happens that people can wonder, as Annie Karrakayn does,⁴⁷ 'how this whitefella came over us'.

The complex cycles of dependence that came with town life provide an answer to Annie's question. Reliance on European food, medicine, schooling and the associated loss of use of (and eventually knowledge of) Aboriginal equivalents, all led to increasing cycles of dependency on Europeans and their goods and services. The move into town *per se* did not change the Yanyuwa. For example, they attempted to keep up hunting and gathering from this new base. In pre-contact times people had come together in large groups and later dispersed. The Yanyuwa, like other groups,⁴⁸ regarded the move into European settlements, like pre-European moves to favoured locations, as temporary. Only with hindsight could they see that this was not the case and that things had radically changed. There were now too many people in one place for the surrounding bush to support. As Annie Karrakayn notes⁴⁹ 'too many people used to live around and not enough kangaroo, not enough anything, goanna because big mob...too many people'. Changes unforeseen at the time of the move were creating increasing dependence on European goods and services.

As well as being retrospective, the 'rounded up' perspective the Yanyuwa have of their history is a collective view. It is an explanation of what happened to the group and not to individuals, hence people say 'we got rounded up' and 'I got rounded up'. Herein lies the explanation of the apparent paradox that I mentioned above. While individuals were not rounded up, from a retrospective view the Yanyuwa as a group were collectively rounded up.

How did people 'come in'?

Introduction

The retrospective and collective Yanyuwa belief that they had been rounded up is essentially the result of the Yanyuwa asking themselves 'how did we end up where we are today?'. Much of the European analysis of the coming in process is based on a similar methodological framework. The question often asked is 'how did they end up where they are now?'. Reasons can be found and factors given such as the seven listed above. Researchers in some cases have argued about the relative importance of these different factors but some also have argued that a single reason has been *the* reason for people coming in.

It is possible, however, to go beyond such approaches and actually examine how people came in. This can be done by using life history information in conjunction with mapping both these lives and overall changes in settlement patterns. This mapping of settlement patterns needs to be done on two scales. On a large scale it is possible to map the changing patterns of where people were living and on the smaller scale it is possible to map the changing internal patterns of individual camps. As I will show, mapping the process of the Yanyuwa move from bush to town raises findings that necessitate a radical redefinition of the more usual question, 'why did people move in?'.

By asking people where they lived when, it is possible to map individual lives and build up a picture of how these people made the transition from bush to town. The resulting picture is a complex one. Not only did different individuals come in for different reasons, but many individuals came in many different times for different reasons. This pattern of coming in and going back out is best illustrated by an example.

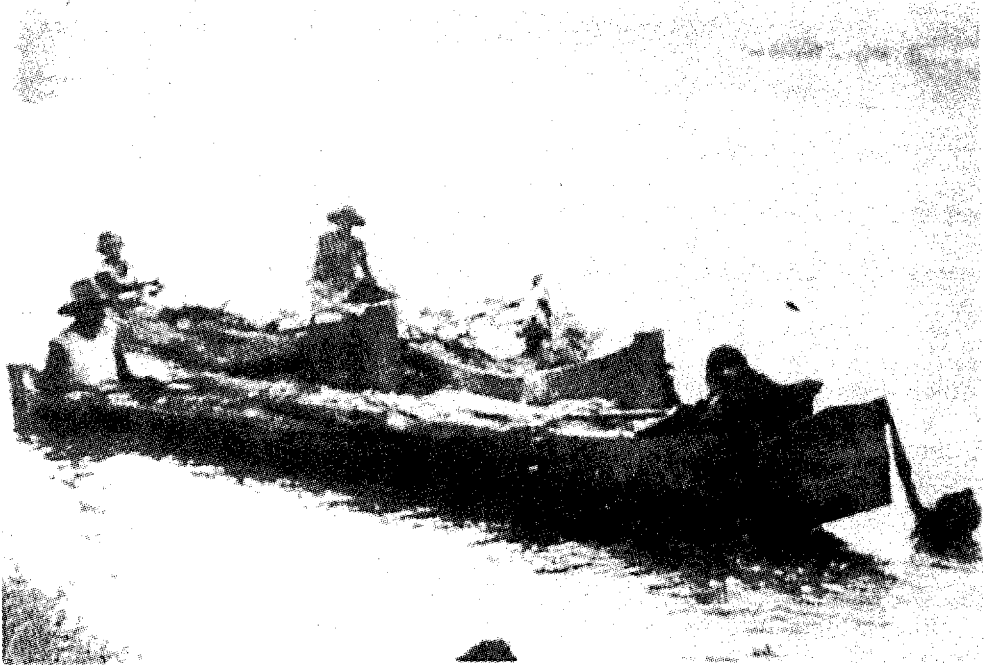
47 1987 Tape 48B 14 min.

48 See Read and Japaljarri 1978.

49 1987 Tape 48A 26 min.

An individual example: Tim Rakuwurlma

Tim Rakuwurlma was born late last century on Vanderlin Island. His childhood was spent moving around this island and nearby mainland. The Rrumburriya seasonal movements mapped in figure 5 are based largely on what Tim told me about this period of his life. Tim first came into Borroloola in about 1915. He describes⁵⁰ how he came in to attend a ceremony and ended up staying for a while with his sister, who had a job with a Chinese gardener. Soon after, he and an older brother got a job working with Captain Luff, a European trepanger. They worked for a number of years before returning to Vanderlin Island.



Dugout canoe carrying paperbark, c. 1955. (left) Tim Rakuwurlma. Ted Harvey collection, AIATSIS.

For most of the 1920s and 1930s, Tim remained on his island country. He and his brother and their families travelled in dugout canoes around Vanderlin Island and often visited nearby areas on the mainland. The time they spent at each location appears to have been longer than when Tim was young. Europeans had established settlements at two of the Rrumburriya favourite camping spots, Yukuyi and Manangoora. While he had visited these places often before Europeans went there, with the arrival of the Europeans he and his family spent longer of each year at these locations. At both places there was casual employment available (trepanging at Yukuyi and salt gathering at Manangoora) for which supplies such as tobacco and flour could be obtained. During this period Tim travelled by

⁵⁰ 1987 Tape 51A 8 min.

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canoe to attend ceremonies at Manangoora, Bing Bong, Wathangka, Anthawarra, Roper River and Borroloola. As well as going to Borroloola for ceremonies Tim made visits there to bring in turtle shell that he traded for tobacco and flour but Vanderlin Island remained his base. His contacts with Europeans at Yukuyi, Manangoora and Borroloola appear to have been fuelled, in part, by the taste for European food he had developed while working for Luff.⁵¹

His two oldest sons spent their early years on Vanderlin Island but, as one of them recalls,⁵² their lives changed dramatically in about 1940:

We left that place because of the law, government, that policeman wanted everybody to stay in one place. I don't know why they never trusted [us] just to I suppose quieten us down, to know the law...my father couldn't stay out there he had to come in...he wanted to stay out there but...because that policeman said 'you want to keep them one place where he can look after them with rations and that' or send them out to work when the cattle station was...short of men. So my father went to work droving out to Queensland, Boulia...

On his return from droving, at the time of World War Two, Tim was based at Borroloola as the army discouraged Aboriginal people from going bush. He lived in the Yanyuwa section of the Malarndarri camp (discussed in detail below). Tim, however, managed to keep visiting his country by working for the army, carrying supplies out to the army base at Anthawarra on South West Island in his dugout canoe. After the war he spent much of his time with his family moving by canoe between Borroloola, Vanderlin Island and Manangoora. Manangoora was their most permanent base and when I visited the old camp site my Aboriginal guides could all point out where Tim's camp was (see figure 7). In the 1950s and 1960s, Tim lived in Borroloola and his visits to the island occurred during the school holidays. His movements became more and more restricted due to the time his children spent at school and the work he did for welfare. Medical problems also made it increasingly difficult for him to paddle out to his islands.

Tim's life has always centred on ceremonies. In his younger days he made long trips by canoe to participate in ceremonies and, more recently, he has flown in light planes to other Aboriginal communities for ceremonies. A turning point in his personal history, and that of the Yanyuwa in general, was in 1950 when the last major ceremony to be held out bush in the Borroloola area occurred. Since 1950, all ceremonies have been held in town and this has tended to reassert the importance of town at the expense of the bush. Whereas previously ceremonies involved those who had made the move into town returning to the bush, subsequently the few people left living out bush in order to keep up their ceremonial obligations had to make a trip into town. Once a person had made the initial step of working for Europeans, a cycle of increasing dependence on European goods and services was created that eventually led people into town. Once in town this process of increasing dependence was further intensified.

This brief summary of Tim's life has introduced three particular issues that need to be examined in turn:

1. People did not necessarily stay in town once they had come in; there was a lot of coming and going.

⁵¹ Tim describes (1987 Tape 36A 14 min.) how, while working for Luff, he became used to European food such as flour and jam.

⁵² Nero Timothy 1983 Tape 14A 6 min. This is the same incident that Nero's father's brother's son Whylo describes above.

2. Employment with Europeans was an important factor in bringing people in. People often entered the European sphere through a series of stepping stones of longer and longer periods of employment. In some cases such alignment was an important survival tactic during the 'wild times'⁵³ when Aboriginal people not associated with a European boss were often indiscriminately killed.

3. The locations in which the Yanyuwa took up employment and became aligned with European bosses are places where the Yanyuwa had previously seasonally congregated.

Coming and going

For a long period a number of people continued to live out bush when relations lived in Borroloola and there was contact between town and bush people. The bush and town Aboriginal people came together particularly for ceremonies and to trade prized bush foods such as dugong⁵⁴ for prized European items such as tobacco. Musso Harvey recalls how, from about 1920 to 1940, his grandfather remained a 'bush man'⁵⁵ and occasionally walked into Borroloola taking with him 'big mob of dugong on his head, take him to Borroloola, half of the dugong...give it relation they give him tucker, ration, little bit tea, sugar, tobacco'. Musso notes that his trips to Borroloola were limited to only a day or two.

Coming in involved a gradual process of longer and longer stays in town with an associated growing attitude that Borroloola was home. A turning point in each person's life came when that person came to regard Borroloola and not the bush as home. Steve Johnson, who has lived his whole life on Vanderlin Island,⁵⁶ is well placed to comment on the move from the islands into Borroloola and the subsequent gradual decrease in return visits. His following quote shows how the cattle industry disrupted the learning about country that had previously been passed on from generation to generation. Steve can remember a period when older people continued to go out bush every dry season:

In the cold weather, like May, June...they'd all be out on their walkabout, most of them...the old timers like Tim [Rakuwurlma], Peter and all that mob, most of the young ones were away working [on cattle stations] of course but it is when those old fellers got too old, well that's it, all the young fellers never came down much.⁵⁷

Clearly the passing on of knowledge of country from one generation to the next was limited by the younger generation being away working. Steve goes on to say⁵⁸ that when he travelled up the McArthur River in the 1950s 'you could see where they had been,...camps on just about every bend...you could see signs where they had been just about everywhere'. With time, however, these trips became both less frequent and shorter. As Steve recalls people would say

⁵³ This is the term Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area use to describe the violent period that came with European settlement of the area.

⁵⁴ This marine mammal is a particularly prized food source to the Yanyuwa (see Bradley 1988). It was hunted from dugout canoes (see Baker 1988) and today is hunted from aluminium dinghies.

⁵⁵ Another fiercely bush-orientated man of this era earned the title 'bushranger' for his commitment to the bush.

⁵⁶ Steve Johnson's father (also called Steve Johnson) was a European trepanger who lived most of his life there with Steve's mother, a Yanyuwa woman.

⁵⁷ Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 31A 2 min.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 6 min.

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'Oh well we've got to go back to Borroloola now'...that's common when they are out on a holiday trip...It has got into the state where they couldn't get out of Borroloola because they might miss something...because everyone else is in there and everyone watching one another and that's it. I think that is what they live on now...that's their life, they hang around so they don't miss anything...⁵⁹

Steve here notes a crucial shift in Yanyuwa political locus. Where people are is the centre that holds people and this local political geography clearly had shifted. It was a turning point in Yanyuwa history for Borroloola and not the islands to be regarded as home. Steve recalls⁶⁰ that this first occurred in the 1950s when people making the trip out to Vanderlin Island began to say things to him like 'ah, looks like we will have to stay in Borroloola now, that is our home'. Another factor limiting return visits to the islands is outlined in Reay's account of Borroloola in the early 1960s. She notes that while some old people continued to paddle canoes 'in the vicinity of Borroloola, they and their relatives thought it was risky for them to...undertake a long...journey in a dug-out canoe to the islands'.⁶¹

Another changing aspect of bush trips is the Monday to Friday working week introduced by welfare.⁶² Those employed by welfare obviously could only go out bush on the weekend or during longer holidays from work. Those employed tended to be the same prominent community leaders who owned dugout canoes and who otherwise would have been taking their families out bush. With time even those people not working tended to wait for the weekends to go out bush.⁶³

Ted Harvey, the welfare officer at Borroloola from 1954 to 1959, recalls⁶⁴ that by the time he was in Borroloola, Yanyuwa trips to their islands were only 'for a couple of weeks, but it was more like we go for a holiday'.⁶⁵ Steve Johnson, from the perspective of his island home, similarly recalls⁶⁶ how, in the late 1960s, 'they started to slacken off and stay in the Loo'.⁶⁷ All their trips got shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter until there were none.

The decline in frequency and the duration of such trips was gradual. Ted Harvey could write⁶⁸ in January 1955, for example, that '75% of natives have left camp and are located at various points along the river as far as the mouth'. Welfare not only had a role in

⁵⁹ Ibid. 10 min.

⁶⁰ 1987 Tape 26B 43 min.

⁶¹ Australian Land Commissioner 1977:1327.

⁶² Discussed by Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 31A 10 min.

⁶³ This pattern of those with jobs, and therefore with the least time, making the most trips is continued today in Borroloola. It is those with jobs who own cars and boats that are needed to make trips. Billy Rijirngu describes (1987 Tape 55B 4 min.) how he uses his annual leave from his job as a police aide to go bush.

⁶⁴ 1987 Tape 3B 6 min.

⁶⁵ One needs to be wary of European dismissive comments comparing Aboriginal trips to holidays because much of Yanyuwa pre-contact life could be seen by Europeans as a holiday. Fishing, travelling in boats and camping on beaches are all associated by Europeans with holidays.

⁶⁶ 1987 Tape 32A 13 min.

⁶⁷ A local colloquialism for Borroloola.

⁶⁸ Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 52/948 Pt 2, E.O. Harvey letter to Director of Welfare Branch, 31 January 1955.

encouraging people to make the initial move into Borroloola but as Annie Karrakayn notes⁶⁹ they played an active role in making sure people came back to Borroloola from subsequent bush trips:

Every time when we used to come down here to bush this way, that welfare used to come down too, follow us and take us back. 'You better go back.

Might be kid might get sick.' And that we used to take notice.

Welfare, however, probably needed to do little to encourage a process that was self-generating. A major factor in this self-generating process of Borroloola becoming more important is the significance of birth and conception sites to the Yanyuwa. The growth in Borroloola's importance was further assisted by the reciprocal process of people losing touch with traditional country. As a result people lost some of the intimacy that they had with the land and today people often express a fear of country that has not been used as much as it once was.

Alignment

The move from bush to town life was a gradual process and not a 'one or the other' decision. Sometimes the stepping stones in this process were Europeans living away from Borroloola carrying out labour-intensive economic activities such as trepanging and salt working. These employers needed labour and in exchange offered both access to coveted supplies such as tobacco, tea and flour and the protection that involvement with a European gave. Such involvement enabled people to stay on their land and to avoid the larger adjustments that came with moving into town. Annie Karrakayn gives a good description of this stepping stone process describing⁷⁰ how 'all the people used to work' trepanging for Steve Johnson on Vanderlin Island 'first [and] then they used to work for that salt [for] Horace Foster' at Manangoora. Annie similarly speaks of⁷¹ how her father had progressed from 'first for the salt and for that timber [sandalwood cutting] and he [later] worked on cattle stations and droving'.

By working for a European one became known as one of 'their blackfellas' and so was set apart in European eyes from 'myall' relatives still in the bush. This view, that a dichotomy existed between 'myall' and 'civilised' Aboriginal people, embodies the assumption that 'civilising' was an irreversible one-way process. It was a view at the core of much official policy on Aboriginal people and was firmly embedded in the assimilation ideals of the Northern Territory Native Affairs Branch and the Welfare Branch which succeeded it.

This view may have had some validity for a society as a whole, in the sense that there was a general shift from bush to town life. For the individual, however, it was illusory. An individual on holiday from work could go bush and return to traditional patterns of life. One must then be careful in assessing European comments on the 'nomadic' state of Aboriginal people. In 1948 the Native Affairs Branch patrol officer Syd Kyle-Little⁷² visited the Foelsche River area and reported: 'When I reached the Fulche [sic] River I met a party of nomadic natives'. While these individuals were not working for anyone at that time there is no reason why they might not have been doing so previously; the nearby Manangoora salt

69 1987 Tape 33B 43 min.

70 1987 Tape 37A 9 min.

71 1987 Tape 37A 15 min.

72 Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F315 49/393A 2, Report on Patrol of Borroloola District.

works had been operating for 30 years⁷³ and there had been small-scale pastoral activities in the area for at least 40 years.

'Big places'

The European settlement of the Borrooloola area was shaped in many ways by the existing Aboriginal land use and settlement patterns. While it is generally acknowledged that Aboriginal people moved in to European settlements it is important to note that the reverse process also occurred. Europeans often went to Aboriginal settlements and as a result most European settlements in the area are located on old Aboriginal camps. What were previously seasonally occupied Aboriginal camps became occupied year round and the first step of the coming in process was initiated.

Figure 5 reconstructs an idealised seasonal round for Yanyuwa bands. There were probably between 12 and 16 such groups before European settlement and these groups tended to travel around and live off the land belonging to the semi-moiety of the male members. This reconstruction is idealised in that each group probably did not visit all these locations each year and they would sometimes have come together for ceremonies at locations other than the ones indicated. Visits also would have often been made to visit relations who lived on other country. In recounting their past movements people often mentioned favoured camping spots. Ten locations are particularly stressed and are referred to as 'big places'. They are underlined in figures 4, 5 and 6.

Mapping details of individual lives illustrated the importance of these 'big places'. By plotting the location of births (see figure 6) areas that were foci for occupation can be highlighted. Births before the establishment of European settlements at these locations are shown and the approximate date of each European settlement is given. This bush births map indicates that every European settlement in the area is located where Aboriginal people had previously been seasonally concentrated. As well as this birth data, the amount of archaeological evidence at these sites also indicates their importance prior to Europeans settling there. Scatters of stone artifacts are found at all the 'big places'. Borrooloola itself was a focus for Aboriginal activity before European settlement. Even though it was the first location of European settlement in the region, I was able to record information on two births there before the arrival of Europeans.⁷⁴

All of the 'big places' have specific features that made them favoured camping spots. Manangoora, for example, provided an important base from which the rich cycad resources of the area could be exploited. Manangoora also provided the location on the Wearyan River closest to the sea with fresh water resources and as such was an important base for the exploitation of marine resources.

The mainland 'big places' were all linked by well defined footpaths that followed favoured routes between these locations. Such routes usually linked a series of favoured camping spots (often lagoons). The two island 'big places', Wathangka and Anthawarra,

⁷³ A salt licence was granted by the Borrooloola police (Northern Territory Archives, F275, Borrooloola Police Letter Book, 15 October 1918).

⁷⁴ Information on birth places was collected by asking individuals with known birth dates about the location of ancestors' birth places. By examining known age differences between generations, an estimate of average generational age differences was made of 20 years for mothers and children and forty years between fathers and children. These figures are obviously only broad guesses. There can, however, be no doubt that 'big places' were big before Europeans came, as many births calculated by this system occurred many decades before Europeans arrived.

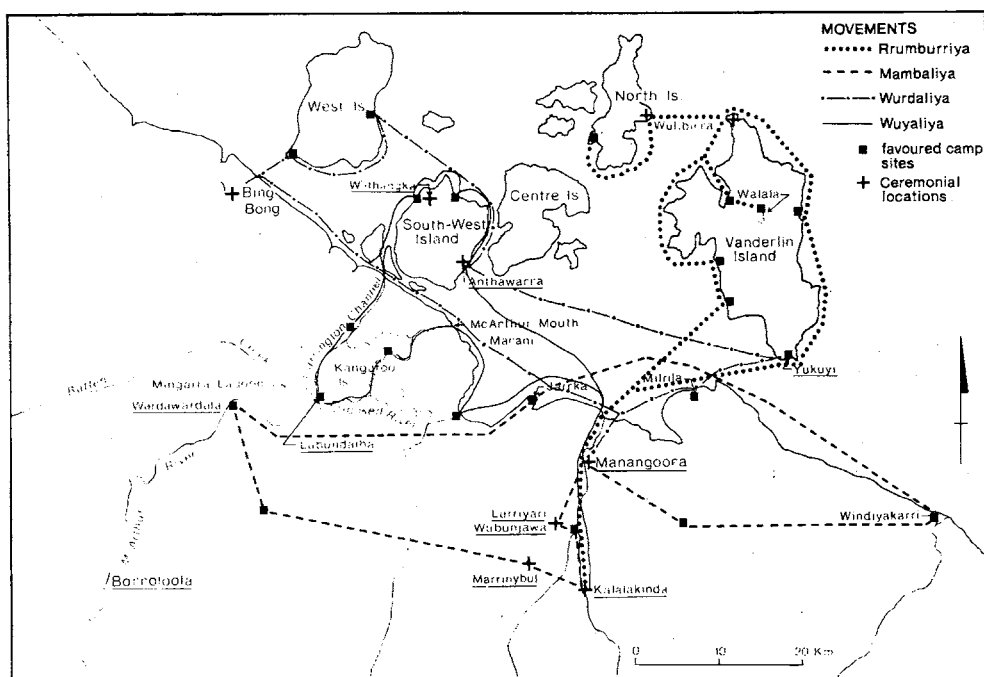


Fig. 5: Band seasonal movements.

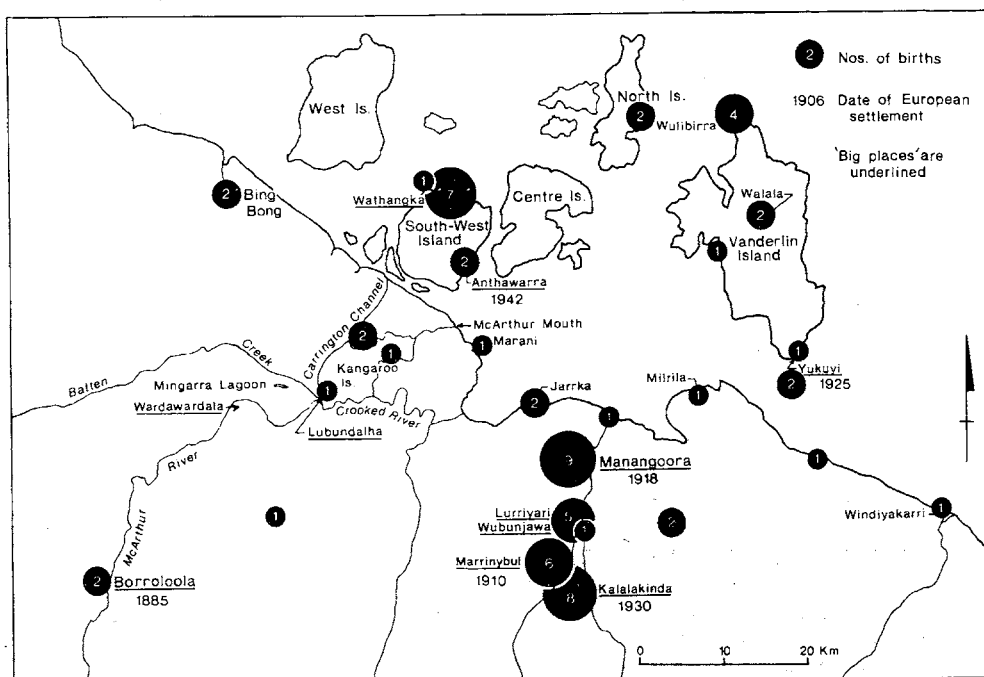


Fig. 6: Yanyuwa bush births.

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have two of the most reliable water supplies on the islands and are also both well located in open sea voyage by hugging the coastline of South-West Island.

The most significant locational factor for mainland 'big places' is the close juxtaposition of fresh drinking water and associated mainland food resources with easy access by river to marine resources. For the Yanyuwa such sites represent the best of both marine and mainland worlds. The conditions that made these sites attractive to Aboriginal people also encouraged Europeans to settle at them. From the earliest European settlement there was a need for lagoons for horses and cattle.⁷⁵

Figure 6 also shows how Aboriginal settlement was focused along the major rivers of the area. As well as being an important resource zone the rivers were the 'highways' along which Aboriginal people moved. Until recently, in the absence of all-weather roads, the rivers were also the main routes for Europeans. European settlement patterns and land use hence reflect the previous existing Aboriginal cultural landscape of the area.⁷⁶

This example also illustrates how European patterns of life influenced Aboriginal settlement patterns. The European use of the McArthur River in particular led to changes in Aboriginal settlement patterns. What had previously been favourite locations to camp at, butcher dugongs and maybe stay just for a day or two became more permanent camps from which contact could be made with Europeans travelling up the river.

An important process that occurred at 'big places' was the incorporation of Europeans, to varying degrees, into the Aboriginal economic and social sphere. As Anderson notes from his research in Cape York on Aboriginal relationships with European bosses, the degree to which bosses could be successfully incorporated into Aboriginal society depended on the length of time bosses stayed.⁷⁷ The two longest staying bosses in the Borroloola area lived at Yukuyi and at Manangoora. Both were successfully incorporated into local Aboriginal society.

Three 'big places': the stepping stones in the coming in process *Yukuyi*

Steve Johnson (senior) came to the Pellews in 1910 and trepaned at a number of sites that the Macassans had used. In about 1925 he established a permanent base at Yukuyi on the southern tip of Vanderlin Island and brought up a large family there with his Aboriginal wife, Harriet Mambalwarra. Harriet was a Wurdaliya woman from West Island and, once they started living together, it followed that Steve Johnson (senior) was given the skin which made him 'straight way' married to his wife. This meant that he became a Rrumburriya man which happens to be the land-owning semi-moiety for Vanderlin Island. In Yanyuwa eyes, his attachment to Vanderlin Island was illustrated by his long association with the area.

⁷⁵ Mirgarra lagoon (see figure 2), for example, was a police horse paddock as early as 1889, Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 31 August 1889.

⁷⁶ The 'cultural landscape' concept was developed by the American cultural geographer Carl Sauer. In his seminal 1941 article he eloquently argues for the importance of a cultural perspective in historical geography. Sauer saw the cultural landscape as the expression on the landscape of a given culture's economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns. Baker 1989a explores in detail the cultural landscape concept and the relevance it has to Aboriginal history.

⁷⁷ Anderson 1983:428.

The commitment of Steve Johnson (senior) to the area is stressed today by the most senior *ngimarringki*⁷⁸ for this country⁷⁹ in the following terms: 'Him been finish there again, along Vanderlin, never go to hospital long Darwin, go back long his country nothing'. His son, Steve Johnson (junior),⁸⁰ has lived his whole life on Vandelin Island and, as the only permanent occupant of the islands since the 1950s, has played an important role in 'looking after' the islands in the eyes of the Yanyuwa people now resident in Borroloola. He has continued traditional burning practices and has safeguarded various sites of significance.

An excellent example of the high regard in which Steve is held, is contained in the following quote from Irene Kanjujamarra. I was asking her how one couple⁸¹ managed to stay out on their traditional country by themselves right up to the 1970s and she explains how Steve was responsible for this by making sure they had the supplies they needed:

He [Tyson] stayed there all the time because if he needed sugar or tea leaf or something like that, flour,...Old⁸² Steve would...send order with them, Old Steve was really good for people, very helpful, helped people everywhere, you wouldn't get stuck out there with him around. Because we got stuck out there quite a few times, he'd come to the rescue all the time, yeah. That is why a lot of people like Old Steve, a real help, he'd do anything for people...he was born there.

As mentioned above in Tim Rakuwurlma's life history the arrival of a European 'boss' at Manangoora led Aboriginal people to spend longer each year at this location. Yukuyi became a regular stopping point in the seasonal movements of Yanyuwa people. Tobacco and other sought after European items were obtained either through trading items such as dugong meat or by working trepang for Steve Johnson. Johnson's resources were however limited and his supplies could support only a few people at any given time. If the two large camps that subsequently formed elsewhere in the region are examined in detail it is possible to see how Yukuyi was an early step in a gradual process of the Yanyuwa spending longer of each year camping in larger numbers at single locations.

Manangoora

Yanyuwa and Garawa mob they been come there, live there one mob...long that place, Manangoora, they all been come there for work for salt...all the Yanyuwa people been all come there, from island too, island mob they been come there live one mob, Yanyuwa and Garawa they're good mates (Ricket Murundu)⁸³

Manangoora became the biggest of the big places. As Ricket notes, Manangoora was a stepping stone in the move from bush to town. His comment on Yanyuwa and Garawa

78 This is the Yanyuwa term that is usually translated as owner. The Yanyuwa are *ngimarringki* for their father's country and *jungkayi* for their mother's country. The latter term is usually translated by the Yanyuwa into English as 'manager'.

79 Tim Rakuwurlma 1983 Tape 7A 33 min.

80 All references to Steve Johnson in my footnotes are to Steve Johnson (junior). His father died before I first visited the area.

81 Tyson Walayungkuma and Rosie Marikabalinya.

82 'Old' is a term of respect many people, including many older than him, use for Steve Johnson (junior).

83 1987 Tape 35B 20 min.

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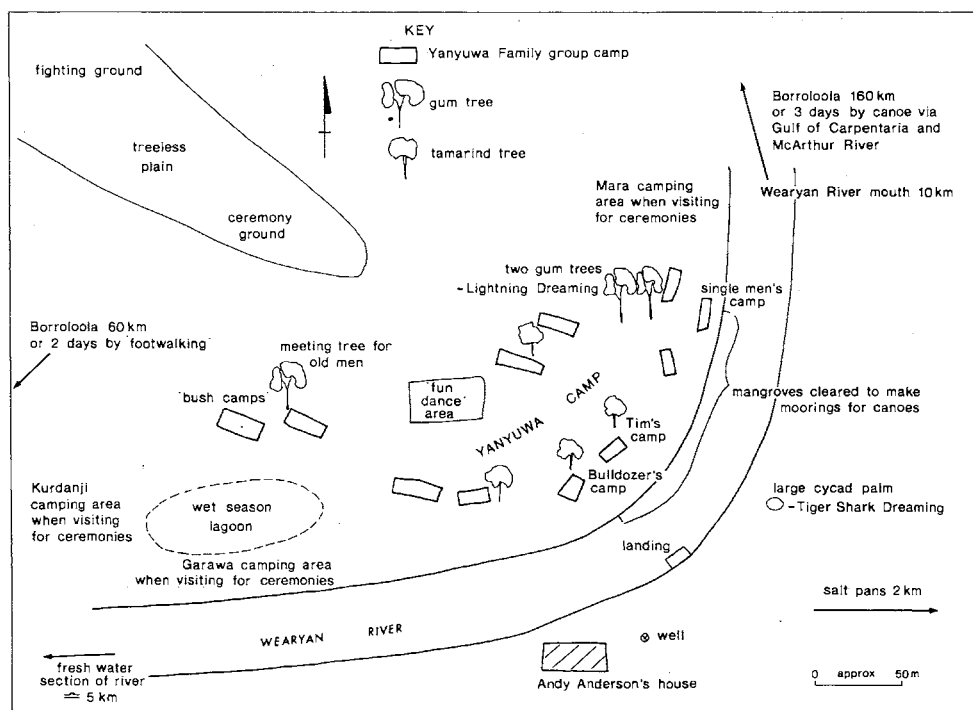


Fig. 7: Manangoora homestead and Aboriginal camp.

becoming 'one mob' at Manangoora illustrates how coming in involved the establishment of new alliances. Manangoora had been an important ceremonial site for both Yanyuwa and Garawa people long before the arrival of Europeans. The process of becoming 'one mob' was a development of a ritual association that already existed, rather than a break from tradition.

Manankurra is the Yanyuwa name for an area on the lower reaches of the Wearyan River. I will use the spelling Manangoora after the station of this spelling, which is located on the Wearyan River about 15 km from its mouth and about 80 km by road from Borrooloola. There are three major river crossings between the area and Borrooloola (the Wearyan, Foelsche and McArthur) and as a result the area can still be cut off from vehicle access for three to five months a year during the wet season. Due to this isolation there has been little European economic development on the coastal area east of Borrooloola. Pastoral activity has remained at little more than the subsistence level of producing cattle to eat⁸⁴ and capital improvements have been minimal. Another subsistence activity in the area was tobacco growing. It proved a great attraction to Aboriginal people and a number of people have described to me how they walked to Manangoora from surrounding areas when they were 'starving' for tobacco.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ As the current leaseholder for Manangoora told me (1987 Tape 28A 11 min.), most properties in the area are still run 'just for killer [bullock ready for eating] sake'.

⁸⁵ Isaac Walayungkuma, for example, (1986 Tape 11A 73 min. and 1987 Tape 38B 3 min.) describes walking to Manangoora from Seven Emu station to get tobacco.

The Manangoora area was of great ritual and economic significance to Aboriginal people before European contact. Dense stands of cycads in the area were a greatly prized food source and are still prominent in Yanyuwa mythology. Leichhardt passed within 15 km of Manangoora in 1844 and in doing so passed through the area that has dense stands of cycads. In his journal he gives a detailed description of the methods used by Aboriginal people in the area to remove the toxins from cycads.⁸⁶ The significance of the cycads as a food source lies in their seasonal dependability and the fact that, after treatment, sliced nuts could be stored until required and then baked into loaves. As a result, cycads formed an important part in the diet of large ceremonial gatherings in the area.

The Manangoora area is also ideally situated for the exploitation of both terrestrial and marine resources, it is just downstream of the fresh water limits of the Wearyan River. This enabled easy access in canoes, both upstream for fresh water resources and downstream to the rich dugong and turtle hunting areas formed by the shallow water between the mainland and the Sir Edward Pellew Group.

Patrol officer Kyle-Little, who passed through Manangoora on 8-10 October 1948, notes that nine 'natives of the Yanyula tribe were employed by Mr Anderson to work his salt pans'.⁸⁷ He also notes that Andy Anderson was living with an Aboriginal women and that they had two 'half-caste' sons. Kyle-Little records that 'approximately 60 natives (living a nomadic life)...were camped on the opposite side of the Wearyan River to Mr Anderson's establishment'.⁸⁸ Kyle-Little also stresses⁸⁹ the abundance of food there:

Manangoora is an old established tribal ground and all the natives of the Borroloola district visit this country when on walkabout or holiday period.

There is an abundance of native foods, i.e., cycad palm nuts, yams,⁹⁰ wallaby, unlimited supplies of fish, dugong, etc.

Archaeological remains indicate the long history of Aboriginal use of the Manangoora area. The concentration of ceremonial earth-works in the area gives an indication that Manangoora has long been ritually significant. A high density of stone artefacts similarly testifies to an intensive use of the area before Macassans and Europeans introduced steel and glass, which replaced stone as the raw material for tools. Middens of shellfish⁹¹ (some of considerable age as they are eroding out of river banks) in the area also testify to the long history of use.

Another indicator of the importance of the area before European settlement is the number of people born or conceived there before Europeans arrived (see figure 6). One such person was Tim Rakuwurlma's younger brother, Leo Yulungurri, who was conceived there in about 1905. Tim notes⁹² that his parents were at Manangoora then to 'get munja,⁹³ sit

⁸⁶ His journal was published in 1847 but original notebooks and journal held by the Mitchell Library in Sydney (accession numbers, C155, C159) have the most detailed descriptions.

⁸⁷ Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CA 1078, Native Affairs Branch CRS F315 Item 49/393 A2:1 of Report relative to mines and cattle stations employing native labour in the Borroloola district.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p.2.

⁹⁰ The Manangoora area also has an important 'yam dreaming' site. This is described by Annie Karakayn 1987 Tape 40B 27 min. It is located at Lhurnunda, 3 km downstream of Manangoora.

⁹¹ As elsewhere in the region near the coastline *Kurruyuyu* (*Anadara granosa*) predominates.

⁹² 1987 Tape 51B 18 min.

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down long ceremony too, young man [initiation]'. The current leaseholder of the area has told me⁹⁴ that there must have been 'big mobs here' before Europeans arrived, because of the number of ceremonial earth-works in the area. Steve Johnson⁹⁵ also cites these features as evidence for the importance of the area before Europeans arrived. Ricket Murundu⁹⁶ describes how an ancestor of his 'lived that place [when] no whitefellas been before' and told me⁹⁷ how there was a 'big camp there...before that whitefella...Old Foster'. Jerry Rrawajinda similarly notes,⁹⁸ 'Manangoora we belong to that place, all this whitefella been come after, they're looking for bloody country'. Tim Rakuwurlma⁹⁹ stresses the mythological significance of the area before Europeans, stressing that his 'dreaming shark' made the well at Manangoora 'before that whiteman been come up'.

Ceremonies were an important reason why people came into Manangoora and often they remained there after the ceremonies had finished. Dinny Nyliba, when describing¹⁰⁰ how in his grandfather's times 'people been all come from every country' for Kunabibi ceremonies, says 'sometimes they been have them at Manangoora that is why people been sit down there, poor bugger, just work for bread and beef that is all'.

The first European to reside permanently in the area was Horace Foster, who commenced working salt at Manangoora in 1918.¹⁰¹ He set about organising the gathering of salt from a seasonally flooded salt pan using Aboriginal labour in this labour-intensive enterprise. The salt pan had been worked occasionally before by Steve Johnson (senior) but he did so from his base on Vanderlin Island and sailed across in a lugger to get the salt.¹⁰² A significant aspect of the salt gathering was that it was strictly seasonal. Steve Johnson told me¹⁰³ how people only worked 'from July to about October [when it] started to get too hot and the king tide used to come back into the salt pan'. The work was highly flexible also in that the quantity gathered depended on the amount of salt ordered. Annual salt sales varied, for example, in the years 1929 to 1942, between nil to 147 tons. The average annual figure was 26.5 tons.¹⁰⁴ The salt was gathered up by raking it with a flat

93 The local Aboriginal English term for cycads.

94 1987 Tape 57A 45 min.

95 1987 Tape 27A 9 min.

96 1987 Tape 69A 37 min.

97 1987 Tape 35A 46 min.

98 1987 Tape 13A 36 min.

99 1987 Tape 71B 39 min.

100 1987 Tape 8A 32 min.

101 He was issued the salt licence granted by the Borroloola police (Northern Territory Archives, F275, Borroloola Police Letter Book) on 24 June 1918.

102 Nora Jalirduma (1986 Tape 2A 21 min.) worked for Johnson at this time and describes working getting salt for him and also subsequently for Foster. Annie Karrakayn also discusses working the salt on 1986 Tape 37A 11 min. and Ricket Murundu on 1987 Tape 35A 40 min. An early European description of working salt in the region is in Tom Turner's Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney MSS 1336, letter of 26 July 1907.

103 1987 Tape 27A 11 min.

104 All figures are from report titled Darwin Salt Works, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 43/89 dated 25 November 1943. The average figure has been calculated from figures given in this report. The report also notes that the boost in sales in 1941 to 147 tons was the result of 'Queensland buyers...lodging larger orders'.

hoe into large heaps which were then bagged. The bags were subsequently kept out of the rain under 'bough shades' until the arrival of the boat that carried them away.¹⁰⁵

It appears that Foster chose the location of the station to take maximum advantage of the existing concentration of Aboriginal people in the area. Foster stayed until his death in March 1941 when he accidentally shot himself.¹⁰⁶ Foster's presence at Manangoora dramatically changed Aboriginal settlement and movement patterns in the area. Whereas previously people had only gathered there seasonally, they now established a permanent residence. A large camp of people grew up on the opposite side of the river to Foster's house. Permanent settlement there had the advantage of safety from European violence, for, as Dinny¹⁰⁷ recalls, they 'never had trouble nothing...because [Foster] know people' who camped there. Ceremonial activity continued in the area after Foster's arrival with the more significant ceremonies being held a discreet distance away from the European homestead.

Economic life also continued much as before due to the abundance of bush tucker around Manangoora. Manangoora served as a base from which people could hunt. Annie Karrakyn recalls¹⁰⁸ how, when she lived there in the 1940s with her parents, they used 'to go up the river look for sugar bag, goanna...fish...camping out for one week, might be two week'. European items such as tobacco, flour, sugar and tea would have been added to the existing economy. The addition of flour would have reduced the labour-intensive work women did preparing cycads to produce the bush tucker equivalent of bread. The European boss at Manangoora, however, did not always have flour and when this happened he relied on Aboriginal people to provide them with cycad equivalents.

Figure 7 is a reconstruction of this camp as it is remembered by a number of individuals who lived there. It shows that a three-fold division of contact with Europeans developed. Women living on the European side of the river obviously had the most contact with Europeans. On the 'Aboriginal side' of the river, closest to the boat landing, lived people who worked the salt and assisted in the loading and unloading of stores when a boat arrived. As in other camps in the region of the European contact period, the more experience Aboriginal people had had with Europeans, the closer they lived to them. Significantly, the two closest camps to the European side of the river belonged to Tim Rakuwurlma and Sam Birribirikama¹⁰⁹ who both had a long history of working for Europeans. Other families lived near Tim's and Sam's camps but further back from the river. Another group of people who had less to do with Europeans and who typically spent more time away carrying out traditional hunting and gathering activities lived further still from the river in the 'bush camp'. The European-Aboriginal divide at Manangoora was such

105 Nora Jalirduma who worked the salt describes this sequence of work on 1987 Tape 13A 19-22 min.

106 Accounts of his death were recorded from Ruth Heathcock 1986 Tape 29B 3 min. (the European nurse who travelled from Borroloola in a dugout canoe to treat him), Bessie Kithiburla 1987 Tape 46A 2 min. (one of the Aboriginal people who took Ruth there), Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 27A 34 min. and 1987 Tape 33A 33 min. (he was there with his father) and Pyro 1987 Tape 63B 20 min. (who travelled with his father by foot to Borroloola to notify Heathcock). The *Northern Territory News* of 19 November 1983 has an article describing Heathcock's version of her role in the incident.

107 1987 Tape 8B 14 min.

108 1987 Tape 37A 10 min.

109 My informants described these camps as belonging to Tim and Sam respectively but also explained how their families also lived with them.

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that Lenin Anderson can state¹¹⁰ that his father, Andy Anderson, never went across the river. Anderson, like Foster before him, was, however, incorporated into Aboriginal life in many ways. He had a series of Aboriginal wives, relying often on bush tucker that they provided and he employed many Aboriginal people to gather salt on the nearby salt pan.

When the Yanyuwa recall their days at Manangoora they stress the seasonal round of movement that initially occurred from this base. People continued to visit the other 'big places'. It is significant, however, that those stressing the seasonal range from Manangoora are older individuals. With time people spent longer of each year at Manangoora and made fewer movements to other locations. The reminiscences of younger people stress the semi-permanent life-style that developed here.

When talking about their association with Europeans at Manangoora, Aboriginal people often mention the useful skills they obtained in the process. Aboriginal people chose to live there, so they must have made a conscious decision that the advantages of living there outweighed the disadvantages. In particular, they stress the opportunity to learn English. However, because of the sexual demands placed upon them, by the boss and other European men who visited, women are somewhat ambivalent about their time there. Eileen Yakibijna, for example, values what Aboriginal people learnt at Manangoora and describes how things were all right, at least for her, as she was not pursued by the European boss.¹¹¹

He been teach us English now...he used to teach us work, gardening and horse hair boil him, put it in sun and teach us how to speak English and cooking...good man all right but he used to be looking for girl all the time, not along me, he was good man along me, good friend, only for those other people.

Like other old camps, Manangoora has become a symbol for many Yanyuwa people of what was. Older people still hold it very dear and are keen to return to the area. Significantly, younger people (who have never lived in the area) do not share the passion of their parents. Ricket Murundu, who was camped at Manangoora with his wife for most of the period I have had contact with the area, told me¹¹² how Aboriginal people

still want that country Manangoora, because we're not going to leave that country because we been born there...and all the white people been come push around Aboriginal people from that country...and people today scattered...the welfare scattered him...I don't know why...everybody been say 'I think we'll have to go, welfare got to cart people down Borrooloola...'...we want that country really, because we been born long that country. And why them European been come and push everyone, pushing everyone, trying to claim that country. I don't know where he come from that bloke.

Adding potency to this view of Manangoora representing the past, is the fact that the last local ceremony to be held away from Borrooloola took place there in early 1950.¹¹³ Ted Evans, the newly arrived welfare officer in Borrooloola, writes that this ceremony left

110 1987 Tape 57A 26 min.

111 1986 Tape 26B 17 min.

112 1987 Tape 35B 2 min.

113 Patrol officer Ted Evans visited the Manangoora area in February 1950 and noted the gathering of people for this ceremony in his report Patrol to Wearyan River a Report to Director of Native Affairs dated 10 March 1950, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F315 Item 49/393 A3.

Borrooloola deserted. On visiting the Aboriginal camp, he found it 'had been almost abandoned except for about a dozen people'. Three of these people subsequently paddled Ted to the site of the ceremony, at the junction of the Wearyan and Foelsche Rivers, where he found 'some 300 Aboriginals had assembled there from places as distant as the Queensland border to the east and the Roper River to the north-west'.¹¹⁴ Queenie Ngarambulirri, who with her husband and children travelled in a dugout canoe from Roper River for this ceremony, notes¹¹⁵ 'only that ceremony now been bring us back' to the Borrooloola area. She also recalls¹¹⁶ how after the ceremony she and her husband decided to stay at Borrooloola: ' "We will have to stop here now, too far to go back " ' Queenie goes on to say that 'children been go school now' was a major reason why they stayed in Borrooloola. Subsequently ceremonies in the region have all been at ceremony grounds in Borrooloola. As Musso Harvey notes: 'that last one too that time...rest we had in Borrooloola'.¹¹⁷ For Ricket Murundu, this event represents the end of a phase in Yanyuwa history: 'everything finish, we been have last ceremony, finished no more'.¹¹⁸ And after that we been move'.¹¹⁹

The presence of Evans at the 1950s ceremony adds to the current symbolic significance of Manangoora and this last ceremony held away from Borrooloola. 'Ted Evan times' is a short-hand expression many people use for this time. It was from Evans, at this ceremony, that many Aboriginal people in the area first heard about the ration post the Natives Affairs Department had established in Borrooloola. Hence many people date their 'rounding up' from this time. The beginnings of my unravelling of the rounded up paradox occurred when I could find no one who was actually brought in by Evans. While numerous people spoke of this as the time of getting 'rounded up', Musso Harvey, who accompanied Evans, told me¹²⁰ that Evans 'didn't force them, to go. He just told them for old people...look after them for medicine...a lot of old people moved in and stopped [in] Borrooloola'. On another occasion Musso again stressed¹²¹ that 'no one picked up from Manangoora...they come up themselves'.

The lure of rations in Borrooloola was a major factor leading people to 'come up' themselves. Lenin Anderson describes how in the years following Evans's visit there, those few people who stayed at Manangoora were enticed into Borrooloola by the promise of rations. He recalls¹²² that those coming back to Manangoora for brief visits would tell those Aboriginal people still living there, 'oh ration now, the government giving us ration

114 Both quotes from Ted Evans come from a typescript he supplied me with. I have lodged this with AIATSIS as part of the Borrooloola History File. He also recounts details of his time at Borrooloola and his visit to Manangoora on 1987 Tape 44A 34 min.

115 1987 Tape 14A 19 min.

116 Ibid. 14 min.

117 1987 Tape 22B 11 min.

118 Ricket is revealing a Manangoora-centric view of the world here. Ceremonies did continue in Borrooloola but not at Manangoora, the place most important to him.

119 In 1988 the Yanyuwa with the help of John Bradley of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority organised a major walk from Borrooloola to Manangoora with the aim of educating younger Yanyuwa people of the mythological and economic resources of the areas traversed.

120 1987 Tape 51A 40 min.

121 1987 Tape 22A 25 min.

122 1987 Tape 57A 39 min.

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now, we don't have to work'. Lenin concludes 'so that's why they started to get led into Borroloola'.

The best way to illustrate the complexities of the coming in process is to give the example of the move one family made from Manangoora to Borroloola. Annie Karrakayn, who was a young woman at the time, describes¹²³ how she and her family had previously lived year round at Manangoora and says, 'only welfare now been make us go out there'. When I asked her how they did this she replied, 'Well I don't know, that's his job from government. I can't understand, just took us back'. Detailed questioning, however, revealed that welfare did not physically take her family back. Annie gives the following account of what Evans told people:

You better come up now, all your children you got to bring all your children back for school...no food in the bush you can come, bring your children and yourself you can get ration now in Borroloola.

Annie adds that

we didn't understand that time too we just been come we used to frighten for whitefella, to talk, to talk back to them...¹²⁴ He used to come in...his Land Rover and tell us you better come down to Borroloola for tucker. Anywhere they used to look for the people hunting around for the people...I been come along *libaliba*.¹²⁵

Annie here expresses the subtle nature of 'rounding up'. If people were not able to 'talk back' to welfare they had little option but to do as they were told. People were not directly brought back by welfare, they paddled their dugout canoes into Borroloola; however, they were indirectly brought back by the combination of welfare's authority and inducement of rations.

As already mentioned one couple did not come in and stayed living out bush in the Manangoora area until the mid-1970s. Annie explains¹²⁶ that this was because the husband was 'really bush man'. When I asked her if her father 'was a bush man too', she replied, 'ah nothing, my daddy been working [for Europeans] all his life'. Annie goes on to cite her father's work history (quoted above) as proof of his contact with Europeans. Herein lies another reason why Evans could 'round up' people so easily; most of them had already been in and out of the European sphere and in particular had a liking for the rations that came with life with Europeans.

A further reason why Annie's family moved in is that older relatives were already living in Borroloola. Annie describes¹²⁷ how when she was a young girl in the 1930s her family travelled regularly between the Sir Edward Pellew Group and Borroloola. On one visit they found out that the police were distributing rations to the aged and her father's parents decided to stay in Borroloola and live on these: 'when they get that ration now all the old people...used to stay there now'.

123 1987 Tape 37A 12 min.

124 Annie on another occasion described (1987 Tape 33B 19 min.) how people moved into Borroloola as 'we have to go there because used to take word for welfare'.

125 Aboriginal term for dugout canoe used in Aboriginal languages over much of the Northern Territory coast -line. The term is Macassan in origin.

126 1987 Tape 37A 15 min.

127 1987 Tape 39A 12 min.

Another factor in Annie's family's move in to Borroloola from Manangoora involves Annie's 'half-caste' brother. Annie describes¹²⁸ how Ted Evans told Annie's father that he had to bring this young boy into Borroloola and quotes Evans as saying ' "old man you've got to give me that boy now, so he can go to school so he can learn about for you " '. It is also possible that the increasing numbers of people at Manangoora was making it hard for the surrounding bush to support all the Aboriginal residents of the camp. Annie recalls¹²⁹ how 'in those days little bit of food used to be around the place, too many people'.

Yet another factor that needs to be considered in Annie's family move to Borroloola is a tidal wave associated with a cyclone in 1948 that destroyed the previously productive European-run vegetable gardens at Manangoora and for many years caused the previously productive soil to be too saline for vegetables.¹³⁰ Hence Evans's offer of rations in Borroloola came at a particularly opportune time as supplies of European food in the area to supplement bush tucker were limited.

Another reason for leaving Manangoora raised by Annie was the need Aboriginal women had to get away from European men. She recalls¹³¹ how when visiting Europeans arrived 'we used to be frightened for whitefella too, run away when I been young girl, we used to run away bush...when we used to see that whitefella come, we run away now'. She goes on to note how people used to say to each other, 'Maybe they want a girl all this whitefella coming here' and how 'old lady, maybe [safe from] white people, not young lady we used to run away'. Annie on another occasion notes,¹³²

Whitefella really greedy for all the girl...they used to go greedy for girl, just take away 'nother girl, 'nother girl, 'nother mob of girl used to run away in the bush. I saw this when I been kid. All the whitefella used to just come up 'hey can I take your wife, I'll give you this one [indicates smoking tobacco]'...and sometime run.

Eileen Yakibijna, also attributes¹³³ the move in from Manangoora to Borroloola, at the time 'that welfare man told them to come for [rations]', to the need to 'run away from' the European boss of Manangoora who 'been want to marry young girl'.

Malarndarri camp

Malarndarri is the name for the old camp on the east side of the McArthur River at Borroloola. It was established as a camp in 1916, when the policeman moved all 'unemployed' Aboriginal people across the river. The policeman concerned noted how because 'the Blacks camped here are a nuisance...I have instructed all the blacks not employed to remove their belongings etc to the other side of the River'.¹³⁴ From this time until 1969 this was the home of all Borroloola's Aboriginal people apart from the very few

128 Ibid. 34 min.

129 1987 Tape 35B 46 min.

130 Discussed by Steve Johnson and Lenin Anderson 1987 Tape 26B 32 min.

131 1987 Tape 48B 16 min.

132 1987 Tape 48A 29 min.

133 1987 Tape 13B 20 min.

134 The Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, Letter titled Re Blacks Nuisance Town 4 December 1916. Only the very oldest Yanyuwa individuals can remember the move to Malarndarri. Jerry Rrawajinda who is in his late 70s and was in town as a young boy can just recall the move here (1987 Tape 13A 40 min.).

who worked and lived in town. Malarndarri hence became the home of those Aboriginal people who came in to Borroloola.

This section focuses on the period from 1950 to 1970 when, as a result of Aboriginal people coming in to Borroloola, Malarndarri became a big camp. It was both much larger and more permanent than any of the 'big place' camps had been. By the mid 1950s in the wet season there were over 200 Aboriginal people in Borroloola and all but a few lived at Malarndarri. Before 1950 there were probably never more than 40 Aboriginal people living in Malarndarri but this figure rapidly increased in the early 1950s after the opening of welfare's ration depot.

Figure 8 was drawn by taking a variety of people to the camp and asking them about features still visible. Many frames of old humpies are still visible (see next page) and my informants could tell me who had lived in each. The huts were made from timber frames, flattened kerosine drums and paperbark. As supplies of paperbark soon ran out around the camp it was brought to the camp in dugout canoes from elsewhere (see p.36).

In recent years the lack of Aboriginal contact with the 'white side' of the river has been used against Aboriginal people trying to assert their rights over land here. In a public meeting when this issue was raised Musso Harvey forcefully made the point¹³⁵ 'we had to stay Malarndarri, that was our land over there. We could not come in this side. If we come this side policeman would say "no this not your place, your place over the other side. Stay out there" '. Malarndarri was the result of strict policing of a policy of segregation. Initially made by the police, this policy was subsequently enforced by the welfare officers. An illustration of how welfare continued the segregation is contained in a dispute between the welfare officer and the Borroloola missionary in 1954. The missionary was keen to hold evening services but was thwarted as welfare prohibited both the missionary from visiting the camp after dark and Aboriginal people being on the 'white side' of the river after dark. The District Superintendent visited Borroloola and reported on this dispute. He supported the welfare officers' upholding the 'unwritten law at Borroloola, that all natives must be across the river, in their own camps, before sundown'.¹³⁶

The time spent at Malarndarri is now seen by many as the good old days. The manner of the establishment of Malarndarri, and the strict policing of the rules on where Aborigines could and could not live that maintained the existence of the camp, are rarely commented on.¹³⁷ Instead positive aspects of the camp are stressed. It is only through examining the written records that the strictly policed segregation that defined Malarndarri becomes clear.

Malarndarri camp was on a high river bank. This location provided a vantage point to watch out for any strangers. There was plenty of time to prepare for visitors as the main route to the camp was by canoe across the river. When European men came across 'humberging'¹³⁸ for women, young women could disappear into the scrub. A long-time

135 1987 Tape 53A 36 min.

136 Les Penhall, report on Borroloola, 27 July 1954. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 Item 52/606. The dispute outlined above is described in this report.

137 Musso Harvey's comment (see above) is the only one I have heard either publicly or in all my questioning, that European authorities compulsorily defined Malarndarri as an Aboriginal camp.

138 Aboriginal English term for sexual harrassment. It is usually used in the form 'humberging whitefellas'. Also used to describe the activities of other people who are making life difficult, for example, politicians, drunks, etc.

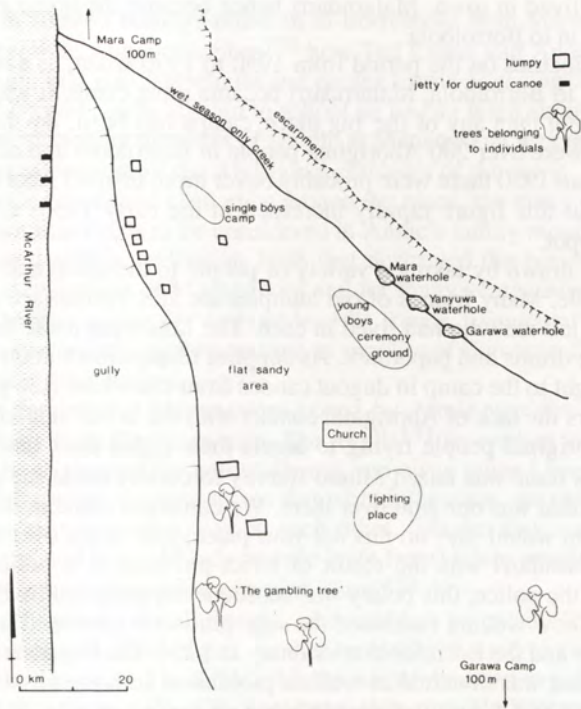


Fig. 8: Malarndarri camp.



Malandarri camp ruins, 1986: Rachel Muyurkulmanya, Eileen Yakabinja, Elizabeth Walngayiji. Richard Baker Collection.

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European resident of Borroloola describes¹³⁹ how, when they moved across the river away from Malarndarri, the Yanyuwa 'lost something very special, on the other side of the river they had their privacy' and then goes on to note how previously 'they could see if anyone was driving up to the side of the river' and that this allowed mothers to take daughters into the bush to hide from white men who would come across looking for women.

Like Manangoora, Malarndarri has become to many Yanyuwa people a symbol of what was. They often say 'things were good then'. It is significant also that a rock and roll band from Borroloola, that is particularly conscious of the need for the younger Aboriginal people in Borroloola to hold on to traditional knowledge, have called themselves the Malarndarri Band.¹⁴⁰ This symbol of the good old days is not what one would label 'traditional life'. Life at the Malarndarri camp was in many ways an artifact of contact with Europeans. Malarndarri represented a way of life that the Yanyuwa themselves developed to accommodate changing circumstances.

A significant feature of the camp was the autonomy of the people living there. Aboriginal people and Europeans alike have commented to me on the independence Aboriginal people enjoyed there and the authority of 'Aboriginal bosses' of this camp. Dinah Marrngawi recalls¹⁴¹ how her father had the nickname 'Government' because 'he boss for Aborigine...long Malarndarri camp'. European accounts also stress the control over their affairs that Aboriginal people had here. The film-maker Roy Vyse¹⁴² describes a 'council of old men' meeting to discuss a proposed marriage. Tas Festing, a former Borroloola welfare officer, describes¹⁴³ an 'Elders' Council' consisting of Tim Rakuwurlma, his brother Banjo and two other old men. Likewise, when I asked Ted Egan, the welfare officer at Borroloola briefly in the mid-1950s, if Aboriginal people 'were left to run their own show across the river', he replied¹⁴⁴ 'Oh totally'.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the camp reached its peak in population, many Aboriginal people went across to work on the 'white side' of the river but would return each night to the camp. Traditional hunting and gathering was carried out from the camp and the daily running of the camp was mostly left to Aboriginal people. Eileen Yakibijna recalls¹⁴⁵ how people went from Malarndarri 'hunting, camping and they used to count like Friday, Saturday, Monday, they used to ... come back every ration day ... back from the bush'. This ability to keep hunting and gathering¹⁴⁶ is an important factor in the high regard that Malarndarri is now held in. Younger people who were brought up across the river after Malarndarri was deserted never learnt the same degree of bush skills as older generations brought up at Malarndarri.

139 1987 Tape 73A 6 min.

140 As well as being a conscious identification with the past, since most of the band was conceived and born at Malarndarri, this name follows the traditional pattern of names coming from the place where people are conceived or born.

141 1987 Tape 61B 20 min.

142 South Australian Museum, Archives, Accession Number 1676, *Diary of trip to Borroloola* July 1954.

143 1986 Tape 25 18 min.

144 1988 Tape 6B 22 min.

145 1988 Tape 2A 4 min.

146 As Amy Bajamalanya notes (1987 Tape 20A 7 min.) 'that time we been learn to go hunting'.

In 1969 Malarndarri was abandoned. The Yanyuwa moved across the river and their life changed dramatically. When I took people back to the camp to collect information about the times when people lived there, nostalgia and sadness about having left the camp often surfaced. Consider, for example, the comparisons made in the following conversation between life in the past at Malarndarri and life subsequently across the river.¹⁴⁷

Bella Marrajabu - We should camp long here... we don't like there amongst the whiteman.

Eileen Yakibijna - ... more better here we've got to come back soon.

Bella Marrajabu - ... too many white people... too many [Aboriginal] people too from [the Barkly] Tableland and Mara side all mixed up here.

Bella's comments on Aboriginal people getting 'mixed up' since leaving Malarndarri stresses the distinct Yanyuwa identity of Malarndarri. There were separate Mara and Garawa camps respectively downstream and upstream of Malarndarri. This spatial separation occurred in the directions of the respective countries of the Mara and Garawa and clearly defined the Yanyuwa as distinct from both. Eileen's comment 'we've got to come back' to Malarndarri highlights another important factor in the coming in process, that of closing options. Unknown to her Aboriginal people can no longer move back because Malarndarri is now part of the Borroloola township and sections have been subdivided and sold to Europeans.

Why did people stay in town?

It is pertinent to consider the bold claim Stanner makes:

Nowhere, as far as I am aware, does one encounter Aborigines who want to return to the bush, even if their new circumstances are very miserable. They went because they wanted to, and stayed because they want to.¹⁴⁸

This article has illustrated that such a statement is simplistic both in terms of why people went in and why they stayed. I have illustrated how many indirect reasons contributed to what might superficially be seen as an entirely voluntary process. Likewise, the question why people stayed is equally complex and to say 'they wanted to' ignores this complexity.

To understand why people stayed, once they had moved in, it is necessary to examine the cycles of dependency that were created by moving in to town. One facet of dependency that came from living in town is how reliance on European food meant a decrease in both the use and knowledge of bush tucker. Isaac Walayungkuma, for example, describes¹⁴⁹ how when people came in:

We're hungry now [for flour] we forget about that bush tucker, we don't think about that bush tucker...we lose all our everything...all this tucker here...we have been get that flour now, we been grow up that flour all the time...[before] we been tuck out that munja,...bush tucker, but we been forget about it now...we been live on that flour now, whitefella tucker...and we don't think about bush tucker now, we finished now, lost him.

147 1987 Tape 74A 5 min.

148 1979:49 but originally published in 1958.

149 1986 Tape 11A 80 min.

Musso Harvey also says,¹⁵⁰ 'when they got that ration that's when they got spoilt then, they had to be there [in Borroloola] all the time for ration'. Pyro similarly notes¹⁵¹ the significance of the pull of sugar and tea bringing people into Borroloola;

A lot of people couldn't go back bush, old people¹⁵² when they been eat that tucker for whitefella, they couldn't live in the bush...might be half a year out here¹⁵³ and go back long town, might be two or three weeks that's all.

The questions, how people ended up in town and why they stayed there, are ones some Yanyuwa people give great thought to. Consider Annie Karrakayn's response¹⁵⁴ to my question: 'Why do you reckon everyone stayed in town?'

Yes, because they like town...I don't know what they thinks, themselves...but I'm thinking all the way from way back, I'm thinking all the time when I go to sleep too, I'm thinking anything, everything, what was happening for people, when all this whitefellas came, might be other people just don't care about things, they are just doing their own business, not thinking about what good or what right or bad...[recently] first time when the people came strong, people to speak for white people...we tell him 'we got to go back to our land too all you mob white people, take our land away now, we've got to have half too for our kids, when we dies, so kids can live in our land'. That's the way we been talk about it...we been thinking, just from that welfare now. 'What we doing, all this welfare come over us...What we just let this people talking to us we got talk back to them too'. Me and Eileen was talking, nobody else.

Annie makes two particularly important points here. First, that people only retrospectively become aware of the consequences of coming in; it is something to ponder after the event. Secondly, people tend to act as individuals, 'just doing their own business' and do not at the time usually consider the collective results of their individual actions. As Annie so succinctly puts it, people tend to act as individuals without thinking 'about what good or what right or bad' about their actions.

It is also worth quoting from Musso Harvey about the reasons people came in and stayed in. He notes¹⁵⁵ how, once people moved into town, they 'got that way they could not go back in their way because they got plenty tobacco, plenty tucker, and free ration'. Musso, like many other Yanyuwa people, can now see very clearly the ramifications of easier access to rations that came with the arrival of welfare in the area. He remembers¹⁵⁶ how 'before only the old people get a ration when that policeman there, the old people, the old blind one, not young people'. Musso also stresses¹⁵⁷ that old people did not have young people to look after them 'because that's the only time, young people gone to work on the cattle station...all the old people stay behind, let the welfare look after him'. Clearly then, like the move many Yanyuwa people made earlier into Manangoora, the move into Borroloola had unforeseen consequences.

150 1987 Tape 22A 11 min.

151 1987 Tape 63B 13 min.

152 Meaning here 'those who moved in'.

153 This conversation was recorded on an outstation, so Pyro uses 'here' to refer to the bush.

154 1987 Tape 48B 4 min.

155 1987 Tape 24B 32 min.

156 Ibid. 33 min.

157 Ibid. 35 min.

Another important factor in people coming in and staying in is schooling. Schooling was a major factor in bringing in those individuals who attempted to stay out bush.¹⁵⁸ As Musso Harvey notes,¹⁵⁹ the school worked to 'draw the old people in' from the bush. Musso goes on to tell how a number of families 'used to come into Borroloola and go out in the islands, live around the islands' but that, as children reached school age, trips became restricted to school holidays.

An examination of one family's history shows the significance of school in bringing people in. Eileen Yakibijna recalls¹⁶⁰ how she 'been stay bush all the time' but eventually came into Borroloola after her eldest child was taken to Borroloola 'for welfare school' after a welfare officer 'been tell us to go back long Borroloola, take your kid'. Isa Yubuyu, Eileen's daughter, describes being brought in and remembers¹⁶¹ how her mother initially refused to come in and told the welfare officer 'no I'm not going there that's not my home, my home is Manangoora'. Isa lived with relatives in town for some time before Eileen came and took her bush again. They were, however, soon visited again by a welfare officer, who persuaded her to return to Borroloola. As Eileen recalls,¹⁶² 'I didn't like it but they been say "You've got sick kid¹⁶³ here"...I been come away then, with them. And I'm still here now, down here all the time, get a job'.

Another factor in keeping Aboriginal people in Borroloola, once they had moved in, is the attachment they have to the place of conception, birth and where people 'grew up'. The latter sort of attachment is illustrated in Isa Yubuyu's answer¹⁶⁴ to my question, why do so few people live on outstations: 'They like it in town because they grow up in town'.

After moving into Borroloola many Yanyuwa were recruited to work on cattle stations and were away from their 'proper country' for long periods. What young people learnt about Barkly Tableland country during this period was often at the expense of the passing on of knowledge about their own country. The resulting decline in knowledge about Yanyuwa country that came with spending so long away from it was important in making coming in a long-term matter and not a temporary event. When individual lives are examined it becomes clear that those who moved into Borroloola in welfare times did not stay long in town but soon went out to work on the large cattle stations of the Barkly Tableland. As many of these same people had previously been working on the small Gulf cattle stations, coming in involved a transfer of labour from small to large stations. On the small stations there had been greater scope for Aboriginal economic independence as a large proportion of the diet was still hunted and gathered by Aboriginal people. On the larger stations Aboriginal people were further incorporated into the European economy. There was much less chance for hunting and gathering skills to be passed on to the next generation.

It was the younger generation that got jobs on stations, while older people tended to stay out bush. Such a situation, however, was not tenable, as those out bush were getting older and no longer had the young people around to assist them. Moreover, the young

158 As Whylo's above quote illustrates the *promise* of schooling was a factor in enticing people to move in.

159 1987 Tape 51B 33 min.

160 1987 Tape 62B 4 min.

161 1988 Tape 4A 12 min.

162 1987 Tape 13B 6 min.

163 Eileen's daughter, Isa, describes (1988 Tape 4A 22 min.) how a health worker had visited Eileen's bush camp and reported the sick children to the welfare officer in Borroloola.

164 1987 Tape 69A 1 min.

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people were not learning all the bush skills that the older generation knew, so it was becoming increasingly difficult (even if they had chosen to) for them to return to the bush. Steve Johnson describes¹⁶⁵ how younger people working on cattle stations had the dual effect of making life more difficult for those out bush and making the return to the bush of those who had left unlikely: 'most of the younger people was away working and they never got a chance to get to learn how to live off the land like the old fellers did because they were away...and when [those left in the bush] got too old to hunt they gradually sort of got into Borroloola and stayed there'. Steve goes on to note how when the young people did come back to Borroloola 'it was too late anyway they didn't know enough to go back out'.

The questions, why people originally came in and why they are, or are not, going back to their country, are obviously inter-related and research into both the contemporary and the historical periods throw light on each other. In this examination of why people came in, I have a valuable information source in the very few people who stayed on their country until very recently. The last couple to come in did so in the late 1970s when they were too old to fend for themselves alone in the bush. Their plight, alone out bush, with no one to assist them in their advancing years, provides a highly symbolic ending to the coming in process. Their situation provides the extreme example of the fact that those who moved into town affected the viability of life for those left out bush. Ironically, this final stage in the coming in process occurred at the same time as a going back process had begun in areas closer to Borroloola with the outstation movement.

Conclusion

By using oral sources and presenting detailed case examples I have demonstrated the complexity of the coming in process. The view I came to early in my research that welfare physically brought everyone in from the bush was misleading. However, equally misleading is the view that Aboriginal people gave up their bush life out of choice. What actually happened involved a multitude of factors and the issue of control over land was crucial. It is not possible to delineate a single reason why people came in because there are many different reasons.

Initially the Yanyuwa did not come in at all, but Europeans went to the 'big places' where Yanyuwa were already camping seasonally. The Yanyuwa started to spend longer each year at these places and in so doing the gradual process of coming in was initiated. Nevertheless, in many ways the Yanyuwa move from bush to town was forced upon them. Their response to this situation was to attempt to shape for themselves the patterns of this process. Coming in therefore needs to be seen as an interactive process involving both changing circumstances resulting from European contact and Yanyuwa responses to these circumstances. Situations of created dependency play an important role in the first factor, and Yanyuwa attempts to incorporate the new into the old are important in determining the second factor.

The analysis of coming in presented has relevance to other times and places in Australia. It is vital that researchers examining Aboriginal history become more conscious of the value of geographic perspectives to their work. It is, for example, important that historians learn to 'read' the current cultural landscapes to see how past Aboriginal landscapes are often reflected in this landscape. The pattern revealed by the Yanyuwa case study of locations that were seasonally occupied by Aboriginal people becoming the foci of European settlement is likely to be repeated in many other areas of Australia.

165 1987 Tape 27A 2 min.

Acknowledgements

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BLACKGIN'S LEAP: A WINDOW INTO ABORIGINAL-EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN THE PIONEER VALLEY, QUEENSLAND IN THE 1860s

Clive Moore

Introduction

On the road twenty kilometres north of Mackay the traveller skirts Mt Mandurana, once known as Mt Johansburgh, a brooding impressive mountain dominated by a rocky precipice several hundred metres high. Nestling at its foot is the rambling verandahed Leap Hotel where locals will readily tell you how the hotel, and the mountain, more commonly known as The Leap or Blackgin's Leap, got their name. The story is that in the 1860s, the first decade of European settlement in the Pioneer Valley, an Aboriginal woman pursued by the Native Police chose to leap off the precipice rather than face her tormentors; and that her baby survived, caught on a bush in a shawl, rescued and brought up by some early settlers. The traveller might then ask how many Aborigines still lived in the district and be told, without hint of embarrassment, none; but that there were lots of local Blacks, the descendants of the Kanakas brought out from the Pacific islands to work on sugar plantations last century.¹

The story encapsulates Aboriginal-European relations around Mackay in the Pioneer Valley, and the wider South Kennedy Land District of Queensland in the 1860s, with its combination of destruction and kindness. Thea Astley used the legend as the basis for her novel *A kindness cup*,² and Nicola Tareha's thorough literary-historical analysis *The legend of the leap* provides valuable background information.³ The Leap legend is worthy of further detailed historical investigation as a window into the era and the Queensland frontier.

Stages can be discerned in the relationship between Aborigines and Europeans in the South Kennedy district: first contact and initial resistance (1859-1864); evenly matched warfare (1864-1868); Native Police ascendancy (after 1868); and 'letting in' (1864-1870s). But there was not an even transition from initial puzzlement and overtures of friendship to anger and warfare, leading to a subduing of the Aborigines. Some were 'let in' to a limited extent as early as 1864 and 1867, but 1867-68 were also difficult years for Whites when Aborigines seemed to be winning on the pastoral stations and had thoroughly demoralised the settlers. There is an interesting difference between the cooption of Aboriginal labour by agriculturalists in the Pioneer Valley and the continued antagonism they faced from pastoralists. The role of the average settler has been obscured deliberately, as there can be little doubt that they killed as many Aborigines as did the Native Police. But it suited them better to leave a record for posterity stressing Aborigines (the troopers) killing Aborigines (the locals).

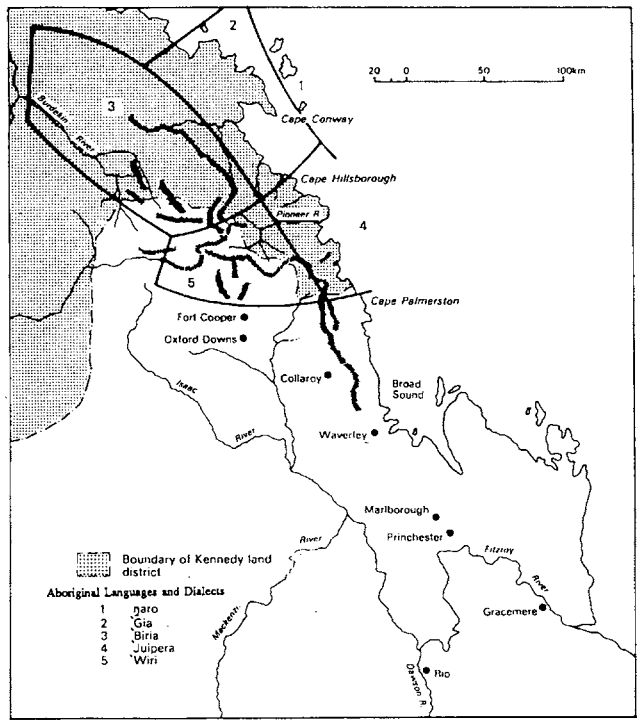
Aborigines died in large numbers by means similar to those used in other frontier

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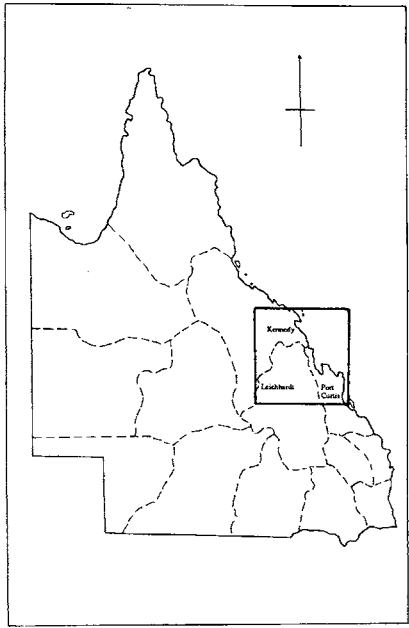
1 Moore 1985.

2 Astley 1974.

3 Tareha 1986.



Map 1: Area map, Queensland. C. Moore.



Map 2: Aboriginal languages and dialects, Kennedy district. C. Moore.

districts: deliberately shot by settlers and the Native Police, probably also poisoned by settlers, and inadvertently killed by introduced diseases and environmental changes. The major difference was two men, George Bridgman and Pierre Bucas. Bridgman attempted to preserve Aboriginal lives and harness their labour. Years before similar reserves were begun in other regions of Queensland, Bridgman created a safe haven on his pastoral properties from the mid-1860s and took on the role of protector on a government-sponsored reserve at Homebush from 1870.⁴ Unfortunately his and the government's interest waned from the mid-1870s and altering circumstances made Aboriginal labour less attractive to cane growers. Father Bucas was appointed as Catholic priest for the Mackay district in 1869. A colourful character, he had been involved with Maoris in New Zealand before coming to Australia. At Mackay Bucas involved himself with the Aborigines and in 1874 purchased land in a coastal area now known as Bucasia, where with the help of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and later the Sisters of Mercy Bucas established Marara orphanage for Aboriginal children. The orphanage provided a home for large numbers of Aboriginal children, its population varying between forty-five and ninety-three, and also provided a focal point for Aborigines on the north side of the Pioneer Valley, many of whom camped in its vicinity. Bucas left the district in 1880, returning in 1887. Unfortunately the children suffered ill health and in 1885 they were transferred to Neerkol, near Rockhampton.⁵

The Pioneer Valley had a more secure economy in the 1860s than most areas of the Queensland frontier, because its young sugar industry bolstered the flagging pastoral industry. Noel Loos concludes for North Queensland as a whole that between 1861 and 1897 on the pastoral, mining and rainforest frontiers the primary aim was to dispossess the Aborigines of their land to exploit its resources. The major force used came from the paramilitary Native Police, aided unofficially by the settlers. Generally in North Queensland extermination was preferred to 'letting in'; but Loos concludes that on the rainforest frontier settlers found the battle too slow and costly and entered into a treaty with the resisting Aborigines, and that on the sea frontier, where fisherman needed Aboriginal labour, they were coopted by force or meagre economic incentives.⁶ However Loos' schema has no place for an enlarging agriculture frontier as found in the Pioneer Valley.

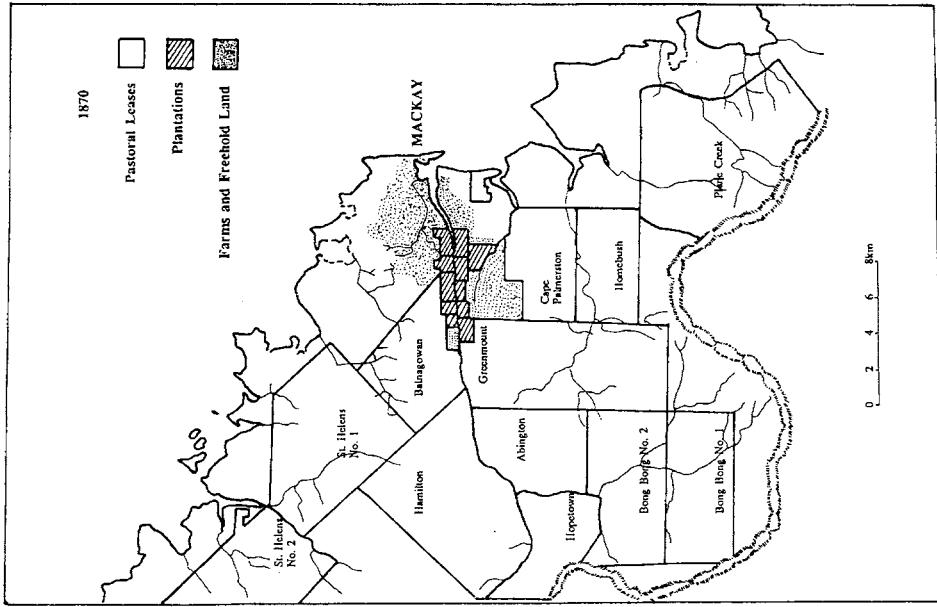
The South Kennedy district and neighbouring North Leichhardt district in the 1860s conform to the general pattern throughout North Queensland and Australia; but there are differences. North Leichhardt, over the ranges to the west, can be equated with North Kennedy: settler response was not surprising, given the depressed circumstances in the pastoral industry and the number of stock and settlers killed.⁷ But in South Kennedy, particularly in the Pioneer Valley, agriculture was of equal importance to pastoralism. There was not the same sense of economic insecurity, and although there were stock losses, few European lives were lost. Settlers in the Pioneer Valley had less direct motivation to kill Aborigines, and by the end of the 1860s had a strong economic incentive to employ them as agricultural labourers. The early 'letting in' around Fort Cooper (Nebo) in North Leichhardt and in the Pioneer Valley relates to the policies of Bridgman and Bucas, and to the labour requirements of a nascent agricultural settlement, before the supply of Melanesian labour was steady and secure.

⁴ Detailed correspondence on the Mackay Reserve is contained in Queensland State Archives (QSA), LAN/A1 94, No. 19; see also Evans 1971; Hoskin 1967, Chs. 1 and 2.

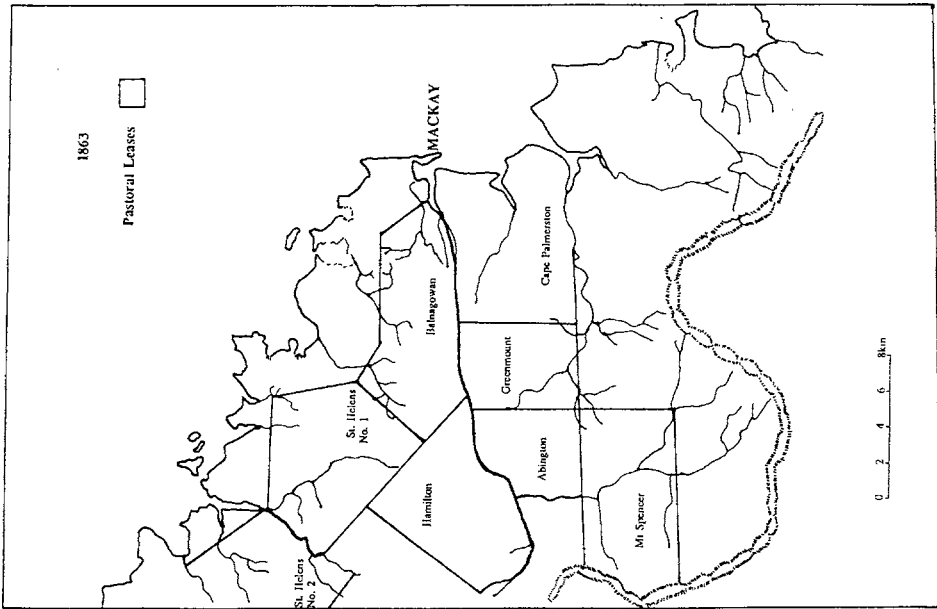
⁵ St Patrick's Parish 1958; Tareha 1986:15.

⁶ Loos 1982:160.

⁷ Allingham 1977:178; Loos 1982:189-247.



Map 4. Land use, Mackay district, 1870. C. Moore.



Map 3: Pastoral leases, Mackay district, 1863. C. Moore.

BLACKGIN'S LEAP

This paper will place the incident at Blackgin's Leap into the context of European settlement during the 1860s and confrontation with the Aboriginal people. Detailed examination will be made of the weaponry available in the 1860s and the role of the Native Police on the frontier. The conclusion attempts to estimate the pre-1860 size of the Aboriginal population in the Pioneer Valley.

The incident at Blackgin's Leap

The Leap is near the 1860s northern boundary of *Balnagowan* pastoral run, on the north side of the Pioneer River. Originally named *Shamrock Vale* it was marked out by John Mackay but initially applied for by John McCrossin, both members of the first European expedition to enter the valley in 1860. McCrossin was later allowed to substitute *Abington* run further down the valley for *Shamrock Vale*. John Mackay applied for *Shamrock Vale* but never stocked it. He claimed to have verbally sold *Shamrock Vale* to Louis Gerald Ross in 1862, when the latter was driving cattle north from John Cook's station east of Armidale. The original 1863 licence was issued to Ross, though John Cook seems to have been the major partner from the beginning. The station was renamed *Balnagowan*, the eastern half resumed in 1869 to make way for agricultural settlement. Ross was drowned in 1870, leaving Cook sole owner.⁸

The incident that led to the 'Leap' story can be pinpointed to 1867, when Aborigines were hunting and spearing cattle on *Balnagowan* station. In February, John Cook found one cow dead from spear wounds and one speared and hamstrung but alive. He telegraphed for the Native Police who did not arrive until April, led by Acting Sub-Inspector Johnstone, a local man from Landsdowne in the valley.⁹ They patrolled for several days along the north side of the river, coming across several Aboriginal camps, one inhabited by upwards of 200 Aborigines. The *Mackay Mercury* reported that:

They were dealt with in the usual and only effectual mode of restraining their savage propensities by the officer and party, so that we may now hope that life and property will be safe for a time on the other side of the river.¹⁰

The oldest written version of the 'Leap' story seems to be that by G.M. Hess, recounted when he was seventy-three, remembering his twenty-eighth year:

One Sunday morning Jim Muggleton and Mr Hess were fishing on the town side of the river, when they saw blacks running up towards where Barnes was on the opposite bank, and they gave the alarm. He was speared through the arm and was left for dead. Hess and Muggleton pulled across the river in an open boat, and rendered assistance. A lieutenant in the Native Police named Johnston [*sic*] went in pursuit, and the male and female blacks separated. Some of the latter climbed on to the summit of The Leap, and one of them, rather than be captured, jumped from the top of the mountain and was smashed to pieces - hence the name.¹¹

Hess does not mention an Aboriginal child surviving, and Nicola Tareha's analysis casts some doubt on the possibility. Mackay local historian John Williams, who knew the children of the pioneer European families, said that they had knowledge of the Leap

⁸ QSA TRE/17, No. 335; Kerr 1980:10-11.

⁹ *Port Denison Times*, 27 March 1867, 13 April 1867; *Mackay Mercury*, 24 April 1867.

¹⁰ *Mackay Mercury*, 24 April 1867.

¹¹ *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:14.

incident, but not of a child surviving.¹² But an Aboriginal baby was rescued at about that time and brought up by James and Mary Ready who were among the earliest settlers in 1862.¹³

Another, extremely colourful, version comes from Bryan Scott, a great-grandson of the Readys, who suggests that the Aborigines were being pursued after the massacre of a Price family, and that the baby, wrapped in a shawl which had belonged to the family, was rescued by James Ready junior.

Jimmy Ready rode, after cornering the tribe under police supervision, unarmed bar a bullwhip and mounted on a black thoroughbred stallion, up the side of what was known as Mt Johansburgh, and now the Leap, after the gin jumped with her child clad in the shawl of the Price family, and was picked from the scrub bushes at full gallop and riding life and death under a hail of spears.

The child was reared with the Readys and was educated and became later a talented singer, and married a white man, and shared equal cut to properties, cattle and monies. Her son, a half caste, received a distinguished medal from the Queen, in rescuing a man who lost a leg when he fought off a shark with a pocket knife.¹⁴

John Williams has suggested another variation: that the events took place in 1865 and that during the 'dispersal' that took place after the attack on John Barnes, the Aborigines split into two groups, one climbing The Leap with the Native Police in pursuit, the other heading off to Crow Hill near Walkerston. The Native Police massacred the Aborigines at The Leap then moved on to Crow Hill where a child was found by Mr Johnson (*sic*) of *Greenmount* after the 'dispersal'. This version is based on the fact that the first baptism performed by the newly arrived Church of England minister at Mackay in April 1867 was of a five-year-old Aboriginal girl Lucy Landsdown 'taken after a displacement of natives by native police' at Crow Hill.¹⁵ The 1865 date may be wrong as the evidence for the attacks on Barnes indicates 1866 or 1867, not 1865.¹⁶ It seems more likely that the Crow Hill child was the survivor of an earlier massacre.

To further complicate matters, Henry Ling Roth, who lived in the district from the 1870s and wrote the first history of Mackay, is most emphatic that it was an Aboriginal man who jumped over the cliff, not a woman.¹⁷ There is also a story that The Leap child was a boy named Billy Howard, later placed in the care of Father Bucas, but this may have been the son of the child rescued at The Leap. Ken Manning, a local Mackay historian, was told by an Aboriginal family that the Aboriginal woman in the incident had been living nearby with a European man and that the child was theirs. After a domestic quarrel she is supposed to have climbed the mountain and suicided. The Leap mountain may have been named by Mrs Turner of The Ridges and later of Mandurana near The Leap, after a

¹² Tareha 1986:18, 66-67.

¹³ Manning 1983:4-5; *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:14.

¹⁴ *Mackay Mercury*, 27 January 1977.

¹⁵ Holy Trinity Church of England Baptismal Register, Mackay, 20 April 1967; Williams 1967:7; *Mackay Mercury*, 27 January 1977.

¹⁶ G.M. Hess, who claimed to have witnessed the attack on Barnes which related to the Leap incident, was not in the district before 1867. There seem to have been several attacks on Barnes's gardens, which culminated in 1867. See *Mackay Mercury*, 24 October 1866, 4 March 1905; *Queenslander*, 23 March 1867; *Port Denison Times*, 27 March 1867.

¹⁷ Roth 1908:106.

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small waterfall on the mountain which reminded her of a similar place near her home in England.¹⁸

The Ready family version has some flaws: James Ready junior was born in 1864, so presumably it was his father who did the rescuing;¹⁹ the Native Police usually tried not to let their activities be observed by settlers; and the scrub was too thick to allow riding at full gallop, so the infant would have had to find her way through about three kilometres of bush to get down to the nearest road to be picked up. It also seems unlikely that a small child could survive a fall of several hundred feet. The references to the shawl belonging to the Price family remain mysterious. Some locals say that the shawl was found close to the baby but that the child was not wrapped in it. Others suggest what seems too precise a memory, that the shawl was caught in a tree and broke the baby's fall.

There is no inquest file on the deaths of the Price family nor has any contemporary government or newspaper report been found, but oral testimony collected by Ken Manning in the 1940s and 1950s suggests that a Price family did disappear while travelling overland in the early 1860s. Price seems to have worked cattle for J.A. Macartney on *Waverley* station at Broadsound in about 1861 and was so taken with the country that in the early 1860s he set off to overland his wife and child northwards, presumably heading for *St Helens* station. When J.A. and W.G. Macartney and R.W. Graham established *St Helens* in 1863 J.C. Binney was employed to drive the first mob of cattle north. In about 1959 his daughter told Ken Manning that a man named Price had arranged to pick up some overlanding gear at Rockhampton on behalf of her father but had subsequently gone missing.²⁰

The most substantial evidence for the survival of a child after a 1867 massacre at The Leap comes from baptismal and marriage certificates. Readys were staunch Catholics and the baptismal register at St Patrick's church shows Johanna, an Aboriginal child christened on 22 July 1867, with James and Mary Ready as the Godparents. Their daughter Mary, christened the same day and reared with the Aboriginal girl, said that she was christened Johanna Hazeldine (*sic*), but called Judy. Her account may be partly tainted by family memory of the massacre of the Fraser family at *Hornet Bank* station on the upper Dawson River in 1857, or the larger massacre of nineteen on *Cullin-la-Ringo* station on the Nonga River in October 1861.²¹ The Readys would have known William Fraser, a son who was away from *Hornet Bank* at the time of the massacre, as he was later manager of *Grosvenor Downs* station on the upper Isaacs River when the Readys were based at Fort Cooper (Nebo) and *The Retreat (Mt Spencer)* in the early 1860s.²² In 1931 Mary Coughlin (nee Ready) said that after the Fraser massacre the surviving son told the police the tale of horror:

...so the white people made war on the Aborigines and attempted to kill every black they came across. One gin in particular, carrying a little piccaninny ran mad and jumped from a tremendous height to the ground below and was killed instantly, but the baby was unhurt. From that day this place was called 'The Leap'. My father with another man, Mr Allen took the baby, but no one would keep it as they were all afraid of the blacks threats, but my parents took

18 Tareha 1986:21-22.

19 *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:10.

20 Letter from Mr Ken Manning, 1 June 1989.

21 Fitzgerald 1982:141-2; Reid 1982; QSA COL/A23/3038, A22/2790.

22 *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:12.

the responsibility and brought her up and got her educated. She was christened Johanna Hazeldine, and I am sure many of the older residents of Mackay know her as Judy. In later years she married a white man named George Howes. She is now dead, but leaves a grown-up son who is living in Hampden and a daughter in Sydney.²³

Mrs Coughlin identified the children as Bill, who saved a man from shark attack at Eimeo near Mackay, and Esme who became a Sister of Mercy; although Nicola Tareha suggests that Esme may have been a domestic servant for the Sisters.

There seems no doubt that a massacre occurred at The Leap in 1867 and that the survivor was a female Aborigine, probably about two or three years old. The incident opens a convenient window into the 1860s frontier. One question that immediately comes to mind is whether the woman jumped or was forced over? The answer seems fairly clear: the woman and probably others from her tribe were forced to jump. There are caves at the top of the mountain that the Aborigines used, presumably for temporary shelters while out hunting in pre-1862 years, and also as hiding places when under attack post-1862. They may not have expected the Native Police to pursue them to the top of the mountain, then found themselves with no option but to face the troopers' carbines or go over the precipice. Conjecture perhaps, but a similar incident occurred in 1861 on *Albina Downs* station near Comet while Native Police were chasing Aborigines in retaliation for the Wills massacre at *Cullin-la-Ringo*. Second Lieutenant W. Carr reported that his force pursued a large group of Aborigines to the top of a perpendicular cliff:

when finding themselves surprised and nearly surrounded, they made no stand - their loss was heavy - and I consider that many were killed from falling over the cliffs.²⁴

Carr does not bother to state how many were shot at close range and how many were forced to jump. The circumstances are similar at The Leap, and the policies and previous actions of the Native Police well known. Johnstone's oblique report on having employed the 'usual and only effective mode of restraining their savage propensities' does not allow us the luxury of presuming other than that the woman and a number of other Aborigines were deliberately massacred. The remainder of this article will examine the role of the Native Police on the Queensland frontier, assess the efficiency of European weapons in the 1860s and attempt to estimate the size of the pre-1860 population of the Pioneer Valley.

The Native Mounted Police Force

Henry Reynolds correctly describes the Queensland Native Police as 'the most violent organisation in Australian history'.²⁵ It operated more like a unit of a defence force than a police force, patrolling recently settled areas 'pacifying' and 'dispersing' Aborigines, euphemisms for exterminating whole tribes. The Leap massacre was one of many. The Kennedy division of the Native Mounted Police was formed in 1862 but was not an

23 *Mackay Mercury*, 1 September 1931. Her husband is sometimes identified as George Howard, not Howes, but their 17 October 1887 marriage certificate shows him as George Howes, a labourer and widower aged thirty, born in Oxfordshire, England. Johanna Hazeldine had no parents listed, but was recorded as a twenty-three-year-old domestic servant born at Hazeldean near Mackay. This would make her three years old in 1867. Tareha 1986:6; Manning 1983:5.

24 Enclosure with letter No. 3038, Second Lt W. Carr to Capt J. O'C. Bligh, 7 November 1861, QSA COL/A23.

25 H. Reynolds in the *Weekend Australian*, 11-12 March 1989.

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effective force before about 1866, assisted particularly by the introduction of telegraph stations which speeded communications. The Native Police were back in the valley by October the same year,²⁶ although they did not return to *Balnagowan* until December, much to John Cook's disgust, as Aboriginal resistance still troubled him, with Aborigines hunting his cattle, stampeding them, killing a few and generally making the cattle wild and uncontrollable. When he pursued them they disappeared into the impenetrable scrub. In February 1868 Cook telegraphed the Nebo Native Police, the closest permanent unit to Mackay, but finding them unavailable contacted another patrol at Bloomsbury.²⁷

The frequency of Aboriginal attacks in the district led twenty-eight leading citizens, including the owners of all pastoral properties as well as the major planters and town businessmen, to petition the Colonial Secretary in March 1868 for the immediate establishment of a Native Police base at Bloomsbury, eighty kilometres north of Mackay.²⁸ Although initially refused in May 1868, the request was agreed to by the Colonial Secretary a short time later as necessary even in a time of economic recession, probably influenced by a June report by the Commissioner of Police after a tour of inspection, which supported the petition.

A Native Police barracks was established at Bloomsbury by the middle of the year. The North Kennedy Native Police were also reorganised with two 'flying detachments' equipped with double supplies of horses, one group to patrol constantly from Townsville to Bowen, the other from Bowen to Mackay.²⁹ This redeployment altered the balance in favour of the settlers, although as Noel Loos points out, prolonged and often determined resistance continued until the 1880s. The Native Police at Bloomsbury could be sent for one day and arrive the next. During the late 1860s and early 1870s the Bloomsbury Native Police patrolled the Pioneer Valley and the surrounding coast, forcing the remaining Aborigines off stations and away from settled areas. Some fled to the coastal islands while others moved west into the foothills of the ranges, their last strongholds. The terrain was very suitable for Aboriginal resistance and conflict continued for many years. The Nebo Native Police detachment was not removed until 1878, and that at Bloomsbury continued to operate until 1880, when the last two troopers stationed there were reassigned to the ordinary police, one to Mackay and one to Bowen.³⁰

European weaponry

Social historians have not dealt in detail with European weaponry and attacks on Aborigines in Queensland during the 1860s, too often generalising on the period from scraps of information. There is need for more detailed studies of the Aboriginal-European relations in the first decade after Queensland separated from New South Wales, a transition period in the development of firearms, and a decade crucial to the expansion of the frontier to the north and west.³¹

²⁶ Diary of J.E. Davidson, 17-18 October 1867, JCUNQ Library.

²⁷ *Mackay Mercury*, 7 March 1868.

²⁸ In Letter 1271, Memorial from settlers at Mackay, 18 March 1868, with T.H. Fitzgerald to the Colonial Secretary 17 April 1868, QSA COL/A105.

²⁹ *Mackay Mercury*, 8 July 1868; *Port Denison Times*, 5 September 1868.

³⁰ Loos 1982:58.

³¹ The only substantial book on the Queensland Native Police is L.E. Skinner's *Police of the pastoral frontier* (1975). Gordon Reid's *A nest of hornets* (1982) also deals with the late 1850s. Noel Loos's *Invasion and resistance* and Dawn May's *From bush to station* (1983)

Frontier conflict in the 1860s revolved around the use of guns of an almost outmoded design, mostly muzzle loading. Within the decade European military technology developed so that weapons could be multiple-loaded with cartridges, the forerunners of modern repeating rifles. Although individuals may have owned more sophisticated weapons, most of the frontier conflict of the 1860s depended on the use of smooth bore cavalry carbines, usually Enfield style, and muzzle loading shotguns, muzzle-loading pistols and the occasional revolver.

The 'Enfield'³² carbines were muzzle loading 20-bore guns, ignited by percussion cap, generally charged by a paper cartridge, and often equipped with a captive ramrod system for reloading on horseback. The carbine was a shorter evolution of longer barrelled guns, very useful for use while mounted or in a confined space. The paper cartridges containing gunpowder and shot had to be loaded straight down the barrel: the cartridge was ripped open, the powder exposed and poured down the barrel right to the base, then the rest of the paper was added as a wad, followed by either round ball or shot which was rammed home with the captive ramrod. Loading took around ten to twenty seconds from a standing position, or longer on horseback, and required using both hands. Double barrelled carbines worked on the same principle. Depending on the charge used (and the larger the charge the larger the kickback and the less the accuracy) a smooth bore carbine loaded with a lead ball could kill a human, if hit in the torso or head, at about thirty to forty metres. The lead ball, five-eighths of an inch across, spread on impact, making a small entry and a large exit. If loaded with shot the range was a little longer, and chances of killing were still good as the 10-ball Swan Drops in use could easily lodge in two or three victims. The guns were more difficult to load from horseback, and shooting a moving target from a moving horse was also difficult. Muzzle-loading guns were subject to misfiring, through faulty manufacture of the paper cartridges and because powder soon became damp and would not ignite in the tropical conditions. It was never possible to load up one's carbine or pistol in the morning with perfect certainty that it would fire later in the day.

The troopers in the Native Police were issued with 'Enfield' single-barrelled carbines until 1870, when these were replaced by Sniders. Occasionally they also had double-barrelled carbines or even muzzle-loading single shot pistols, and also sabres, particularly after 1865 when the Queensland Volunteer Force was disbanded and their weapons were passed on to the police and Native Police.³³

Officers in the Native Police, pastoralists and other settlers used single- and double-barrelled carbines and rifles, muzzle-loading single- and double-barrelled shotguns and muzzleloading single- and multiple-shot pistols, as well as the occasional five or six-shot revolver. The shotguns, known as fowling pieces, were a standard weapon used on pastoral

cover the whole 1861-1897 period, while Anne Allingham's *Taming the wilderness* (1977) concentrates on the 1860s in North Kennedy.

32 Authentic Enfield cavalry carbines had a 21-inch barrel and a .577-calibre 25 bore. All arms issued to the Queensland Native Police were 20 bore. The New South Wales Police in the Northern District pre-separation were armed with 'yeomanry' pattern carbines, smooth 20 bore, circa 1844. After 1855 supplies of 'cape' pattern double-barrel smooth bore carbines became available and were issued in pre-separation Queensland. A further supply was of 'Native Foot Police' pattern carbines of 20 bore, with single 31.5-inch barrels. Letter from Mr J.S. Robinson, 21 March 1989.

33 I am indebted to Messrs Brian Rough, Ian Skennerton and Stan Robinson of Brisbane for sharing with me their knowledge of the weapons used in Queensland by settlers and government officers such as the Native Police, and for practical instruction in the use of the guns described here; Skennerton 1975, 1978; Johnson 1975:46-50.

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properties in the 1860s. Like the carbines they were slow to load. A solid lead ball was almost impossible to use because of the kick from the large charge needed to move it and most shot-guns used one and a half ounces of shot. An 1860s shotgun could kill at twenty-five to thirty-five metres, but beyond that distance only peppering could be achieved. Single-shot pistols were as primitive as the carbines. The revolvers were mainly five- and six-shot weapons, ignited by percussion cap and loaded through the cylinder. The user could either reload using a captive device, pouring powder and shot down each chamber, or could carry spare cylinders or paper cartridges. Revolvers were accurate to about fifteen to twenty metres, depending on whether the target was still or moving.³⁴

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century European military technology developed repeating weapons that could be loaded once but fired often, and improved the accuracy and range of breech-loading weapons. The American Civil War (1861-65) and European wars helped stimulate these improvements.³⁵ Single-barrelled revolvers and rifles were available in Australia in the 1860s, but one difficulty with the latter was the escape of gas and flame from the breech, a problem that was never satisfactorily solved until the invention of the Snider breech-block.³⁶ Sniders could kill at fifty to sixty metres and were cleaner, more efficient weapons with a faster rate of fire.³⁷ Enfield and Snider style carbines and rifles used the same five-eighth inch lead balls, which at close range simply tore the victim apart. In the space of ten years the efficiency of weapons increased dramatically. Although private individuals may have imported sophisticated revolvers and advanced breech loading weapons during the 1860s, the Queensland government did not buy Sniders for the Native Police until 1870. The extermination of several hundred Aborigines in the Mackay district in the 1860s was accomplished almost entirely with muzzle-loading weapons. Bridgman and Bucas estimated that the majority of the deaths were caused deliberately by the Native Police, the remainder dying from introduced diseases and at the hands of individual settlers. There is no evidence that the Native Police patrolled the area more than about twice or three times a year before 1866: there was no easy way to call them before the telegraph was installed in mid-1866, and patrols were spasmodic until the Bloomsbury base opened in mid-1868. But even given the limited size of the patrols and the type of weaponry available during the 1860s, the Native Police could easily have killed several hundred Aborigines between 1862 and 1870, most in three years 1868-70. The Native Police patrolled in small groups and seldom had time to fire more than two volleys in an attack; although they often pursued Aboriginal groups for several days, killing some each time they were encountered. There is every likelihood that four- to six-man patrols could kill fifteen to thirty Aborigines at one time, and there is a record of the Native Police killing 59 Aborigines

³⁴ See also McGuffie 1957; Blackmore 1965:58-71; Garavaglia and Worman 1984:167-70.

³⁵ Watrouse 1975:9-10.

³⁶ Jacob Snider of New York introduced a system to convert Enfield muzzle-loading rifles and carbines. The barrel was shortened by five centimetres at the breech and a slightly wider new breech fitted to accept Boxer's brass cartridges, pushed in with the thumb. The space behind the cartridge was fitted with a breech block hinged on the right and held in place by a spring-loaded pin situated near the base.

³⁷ There is discrepancy between the level of accuracy often claimed for Enfield style carbines and Sniders and that attested to by present-day users of the same guns. For instance Richard Broome suggests that Snider carbines were accurate to 500 metres but users of identical guns in Brisbane today make no such claims. Broome 1988:105.

during one reprisal on the Burdekin.³⁸ They certainly could have killed several hundred Aborigines over a few years. The picture that emerges is of attacks on Aboriginal camps on foot by stealth. The possibility of troopers following orders to call on their quarry to 'Stand in the Queen's name' and fire warning blank charges is so remote as to be laughable. The number of deaths presumed here does not exceed the destructive capabilities of the Native Police, but there is also no doubt that settlers mounted their own posses and went out hunting Aborigines, and although there is no proof from the Mackay district, poison may also have been used. The number of deaths purposefully inflicted may have been much higher. It is far easier to estimate the number of local Aborigines killed by regular-sized Native Police patrols, than to hazard a guess at the number of deaths inflicted by individual settlers. European settlement in the South Kennedy region began in 1862, increasing rapidly to 111 males and 45 females by 1864. Separate statistics are available for Mackay and the Pioneer Valley from 1868: 208 males and 132 females in the town; and another 235 males and 83 females in the district. The European population continued to rise, and alongside it the Melanesian population, with a total district population of 1,400 by 1871.³⁹

The punitive expeditions in the early decades of settlement often degenerated into murderous hunts. In their published reminiscences and in interviews with Ken Manning and myself, oldtimers in the district were loath to recall details of hunts, except in situations where they seemed reasonable in the defence of lives and property.⁴⁰ Except in situations such as the aftermath of the *Hornet Bank* and *Cullin-la-Ringo* massacres, when Aboriginal hunts were implicitly sanctioned by the government, it is rare to find details of settlers making up vigilante groups. But mentions survive in reminiscences, such as G.M. Hess's admission that after some attacks on shepherds in the 1860s messages were sent out to stations to arm all hands.⁴¹

One hundred times more numerous and better armed, though perhaps more timorous, the European males of the district are likely to have killed as many Aborigines as the Native Police ever did. European women also wore pistols and revolvers and could handle shotguns, carbines and rifles. A conspiracy of silence covers their deeds. There is no record of more than about twenty Europeans, usually shepherds on outstations over the ranges to the west, dying at the hands of the Aborigines. Justification of the Aboriginal deaths is usually expressed in relation to the 1857 Fraser or 1861 Wills massacres well to the south, not because of any local deaths. Research for this paper has unearthed only one exact name (Roberts, presumed killed by Aborigines in 1862),⁴² one reference to a shepherd, and oral testimony but no documentary evidence of the massacre of a family named Price, who could reasonably be said to have been killed by Aborigines in the Pioneer valley during the 1860s.⁴³

38 Letter from Dr Noel Loos, 4 April 1989. There is only one piece of evidence from the Mackay district which indicates numbers killed. In 1874 Edward Denman was shown fourteen skulls perforated with bullet holes, on land which had formerly been part of *Balnagowan*. He was told that some years before the Native Police had 'dropped on niggers' at the spot. *Mackay Mercury*, 13 August 1975.

39 *Queensland Statistics*, 1864 Census:10; 1868 Census:4-5, 9; Moore 1985:128.

40 Manning 1983:4; see also Allingham 1977:18-79.

41 *Jubilee of Mackay* 1912:14.

42 Inquest 62/149, QSA JUS/N4.

43 Loos 1982:189-247, particularly 197-98; letter from Mr Ken Manning, 1 June 1898.

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Uncaptioned photograph taken by Richard Daintree at Mackay, c. 1869. It is part of a larger photograph which includes Europeans. C. Moore collection.



Uncaptioned photograph, by Boag and Mills, professional photographers, in 1872. It appears in H.L. Roth, *The discovery and settlement of Port Mackay*. Queensland, Halifax (UK), 1906:77. Courtesy Oxley Library.

The Aboriginal Population

By the classification of George Bridgman and Father Bucas, based on languages and dialects, there were four distinct Aboriginal groups within one hundred kilometres or so of Mackay: the *Juipera*, who inhabited the coastal end of the Pioneer Valley; the *Kungalburra*, whose country was between Mackay and Broadsound to the south; the *Toolginburra*, in territory to the west of the *Kungalburra*, probably also including the area around *Fort Cooper*; and the *Googaburra*, on the islands off the coast.⁴⁴ Norman Tindale revised this division in his *Aboriginal tribes of Australia*. His description of the groups in the Pioneer Valley and surrounding region is as follows: the '*Juipera* (*Juipera*) from *St Helens* to Cape Palmerston, including the area which became the Homebush reserve; the '*Koinjmal* (*Kungalburra*) on a narrow band along the coast from Cape Palmerston to and around Broadsound; '*Barada* (*Toolginburra*) inland from the '*Koinjmal* as far as Oxford Downs and Nebo; backed to the west by '*Bar:na*; then the '*Wiri* (*Widi*) inland from the '*Juipera*; with the '*Gia* and '*Biria* to the north, from the coast west; and the '*Njaro* (*Googaburra*) on the Whitsunday Islands and the coast at Cape Conway.⁴⁵ More recently the '*Juipera*, '*Wiri* and '*Biria* have been reclassified as dialects of the one language, which covered the whole Pioneer Valley, its hinterland and the headwaters of the Burdekin River.⁴⁶ It is wrong to think of any of the language groups as distinct tribes, as their relationships through territory, kinship, marriage, totemism, language and ceremony would have overlapped and intersected. Their territory boundaries focused on sacred sites and had indefinite merging boundaries marked by natural features.

There are no 1860s estimates of the original size of the Aboriginal population of the valley, but E.M. Curr, quoting Bridgman and Bucas in 1880 as his sources, suggests that:

During the eight or ten years which followed [1860], about one-half of the aboriginal population was either shot down by the Native Mounted Police and their officers, or perished from introduced loathsome diseases before unknown.

The Black troopers, however, are said to have been the chief destroyers.⁴⁷

Considering their lack of immunity to common European diseases, Aborigines must have suffered substantially from introduced diseases. There is no way of knowing if introduced diseases killed large numbers of Aborigines in the region before 1860, but given quite substantial contacts between Aborigines and Europeans in the Whitsunday Islands during the 1850s there is the possibility that the 1860 population of the wider region had already been depleted by epidemics.⁴⁸ Based on Curr's paraphrase of Bridgman and Bucas' evidence, one could presume that twenty to twenty-five per cent of the 1860 Aboriginal population had died from introduced diseases by 1870.⁴⁹ Noel Loos suggests that the extent of deaths from introduced diseases can be compared with the effect of the Black Death in Europe during the Middle Ages. If this is correct then the pre-1860 Aboriginal population of the Pioneer Valley may have been larger than the 1,000 estimated here. The

44 Curr 1886-7, III:44-45.

45 Tindale 1974:165-66, 168-71, 176, 182, 190.

46 I am indebted to Professor R. Dixon of the Australian National University for his advice on the classification of these languages and dialects.

47 Curr 1886-87, III:44.

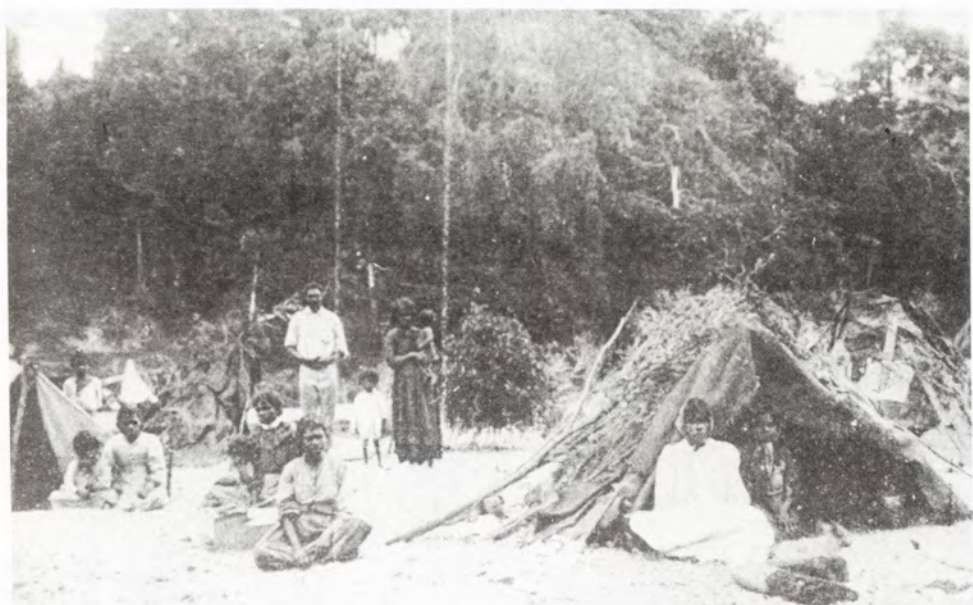
48 Rowland 1985, 1986, 1987.

49 If disease-caused deaths were large scale, even if only to a similar extent as for immigrant Melanesians in the district or migrant labourers in the Pacific, then this factor is important. Moore 1985:244-73; Shlomowitz 1989.

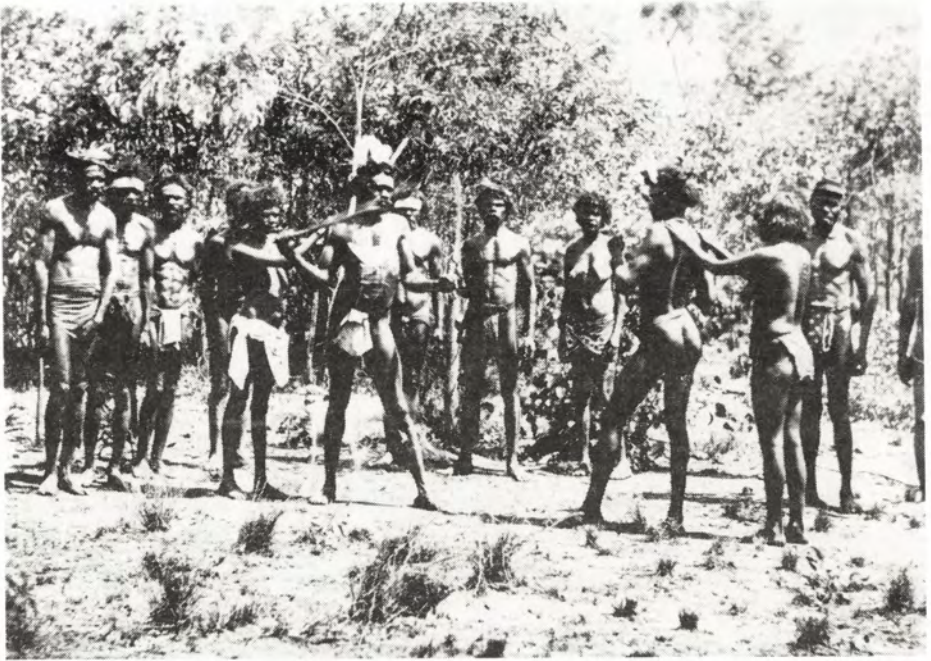
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Clive Moore notes: 'This photo must be from around the mid 1880s as it is in a book of photos held in the Sugar Research Institute library at Mackay. Other photos in the book would date it at 1883-1885.'



'Village Settlement, Bed of Pioneer River, Mackay, Queensland', Postcard, 1890s, photographer unknown. C. Moore collection.



'Mackay Aborigines', c. 1880. Courtesy Oxley Library.



'Mackay Aborigines', c. 1872. Courtesy Oxley Library.

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problem is why Bridgman, who spoke the 'Juipera-'Wiri-'Biria language and was in contact with the Aborigines, showed no sign of being aware of larger numbers of deaths from disease.

We know that 100 Aboriginal males and presumably similar numbers of women and children from the 'Juipera group existed in 1863.⁵⁰ Then there is Acting Sub-Inspector Johnstone's April 1867 report of one camp on the north side of the river of more than 200 Aborigines, although these could have been the same people who visited the settlement in 1863. Edward Denman of *Etowrie* estate remembered a corroboree on *Inverness* plantation in 1874 in which 400 Aborigines took part.⁵¹ In 1875 Bridgman said that he had about 300 under his charge: 100 of all ages and sexes resided on or near the reserve; another 100 were working for planters; and the balance lived by hunting, with no fixed abode. A similar report in 1876 gave the reserve population as floating between 100 and 200, which is after a measles epidemic which killed large numbers of Aborigines and immigrant Melanesian labourers.⁵² One of E.M. Curr's correspondents numbered the 'Barada (*Toolginburra*) tribe at forty men, forty women and twenty children in 1880.⁵³ And a mid-1880s photo of Pioneer Valley Aborigines shows thirty-eight: thirteen men, thirteen women and twelve children, all of who appear to be in good health.⁵⁴ Given that enough Aborigines lived around Bloomsbury to warrant keeping a Native Police barracks operating there until 1880, with Bridgman's 300 and others living in the western end of the valley and on the islands off the coast away from European settlement, it seems fair to estimate the lower bound of the pre-contact population of the Pioneer Valley at about 1,000, which fell to 500 in the ten years 1860-1870.

Deliberate extermination seems to have ended about 1880 but loss of territory and their original way of life, disease, malnutrition, lack of hygiene exacerbating problems caused by congregation for long periods in one place and the adoption of clothing, all caused the Aboriginal population of the district to decline steadily during the remainder of the century. Many of the small number remaining in the early twentieth century died in the 1919 influenza epidemic. In December 1920 Jimmy Porter and Andrew, said to be the last two Aborigines in the Mackay city area, were removed to Palm Island Reserve off Townsville. To close the epoch the city Health Inspector visited their camp on the bank of the river, destroyed their dogs and burnt their gunyahs.⁵⁵ Johanna Hazeldine, the child from the tragedy at Blackgin's Leap in 1867, was one of the few survivors, although others still lived in rural areas outside Mackay, some married to immigrant Melanesians. Most of the pre-contact Aboriginal population had been destroyed.

In 1978 Rose Mooney, a South Sea Islander married to one of their descendants, called for a memorial to be placed at The Leap to commemorate her people. Her cry was supported by the oldest descendant of the Ready family but there was no community response.⁵⁶ Perhaps it is time it was built.

⁵⁰ Diary of Abijou Good, 24 September to 4 October 1863, JCUNQ Library.

⁵¹ *Mackay Mercury*, 13 August 1975.

⁵² Report to the Board appointed to establish a settlement for Aborigines near Port Mackay, for the quarter ending June 1875; and, Report of the Reserve Trustees to Secretary for Lands, 4 May 1876 QSA LAN/A1 94, No. 19; *Mackay Mercury*, 13 November 1875.

⁵³ Curr 1886-87, III:45.

⁵⁴ Photo held by the library, Sugar Research Institute, Mackay.

⁵⁵ *Mackay Mercury*, 27 December 1920.

⁵⁶ *Mackay Mercury*, 13, 16 January 1978.

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'FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT'? A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF ABORIGINAL POLICY AND PRACTICE AT MOOLA BULLA, EAST KIMBERLEY, 1910-1955.

Hilary Rumley and Sandy Toussaint

This paper seeks to document and explain why one of the original intentions behind the proposal in 1909 to establish Moola Bulla, designated at different times as a 'Native Station and Settlement', a 'Cattle Station' and a 'Native Station',¹ 'to be worked by the natives for their own benefit'² was only ever realised in part and why the recommendation to close the station was reached in 1954.³ Through an analysis of archival materials, supplemented by reminiscences of some of those who lived and worked at Moola Bulla, this paper attempts to assess the ways in which policies of control and management of Aboriginal people were implemented at one specific locality in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia.⁴

This view from the archival record reveals a number of issues concerning the development of Aboriginal policy and practice in the north of the state. Firstly, it shows how the plan for a specific strategy of control evolved over several years from a number of different sources and how both the ideas and actions of field agents in the north differed from those of administrators and politicians in the south. As a result, the purpose of an institution such as Moola Bulla seems always to have been dogged with ambivalence, depending from whose perspective its history is read. Contradictions over the years between official policy and actual practice are clearly evident. Secondly, the archival record of Moola Bulla is revealing for what it says about prevailing attitudes concerning the future of Aboriginal people. From the belief that Aborigines were dying out to the acceptance that they were not, archival materials relating to Moola Bulla show how policies and practices accommodated to such changing beliefs. In particular, it is interesting to note how views about the labour force potential of Aboriginal people developed, as well as how the administrative problem posed by increasing numbers of people of mixed descent was dealt with. The paper aims to show that, official rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, Moola Bulla was established, worked, maintained and disposed of not for the benefit of Aboriginal

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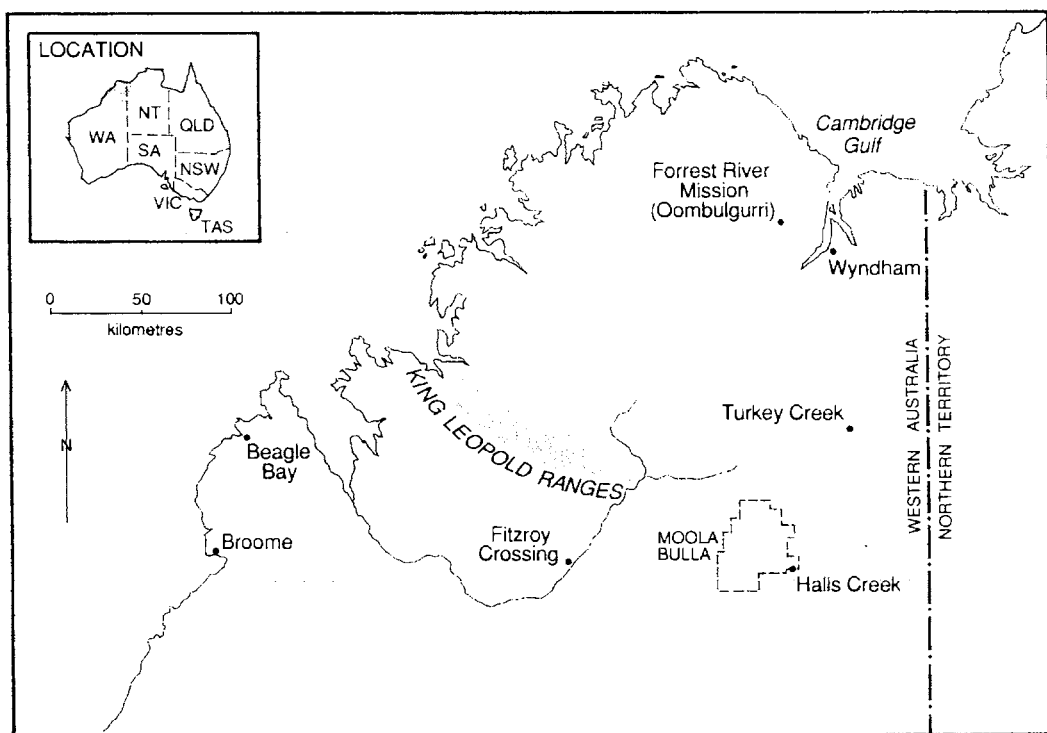
¹ Annual Reports (AR) of the Department of Aborigines/Natives Affairs.

² Moola Bulla native station No 653, 95/18:6

³ AR 1954.

⁴ This paper forms part of a broader piece of research on the archival and oral history of Moola Bulla. The present paper represents an overview based on archival sources. More details of Aboriginal perspectives are contained in recordings made and held by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Hall's Creek, WA (see Toussaint 1988; Wrigley, 1988).

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Moola Bulla and the Kimberleys, WA. Drawn by Ian Heywood, Cartography Unit, RSPacS., ANU.

people, but for the benefit of the pastoral industry and the state government treasury.⁵

Moola Bulla undoubtedly played a significant part both in the lives of many Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley, as well as in the pastoral industry in the north of the state. In 1952 it was reported that the station had the largest concentration of 'natives' in the State,⁶ yet some three years later the property had been sold fairly abruptly by the government to a private pastoralist and the Aboriginal population had been relocated.

Most accounts of the formation of Moola Bulla stress its intended primary function of resolving the problem of cattle killing by Aborigines in the East Kimberley.⁷ The government's growing concern at this time to appease the pastoral lobby by reducing the increasing Aboriginal depredations on cattle in the area appears to have been the catalyst, yet the idea of forming a 'native settlement' had existed for a number of years. In a letter in

⁵ A similar conclusion was reached in part by Biskup in a newspaper article published some six years after Moola Bulla was sold: 'Moola Bulla had never been an institution run primarily for the benefit of the natives: it was, in fact, established in the interests of the East Kimberley pastoral industry ...' (*West Australian*, 28 August 1961).

⁶ AR 1952.

⁷ Biskup 1973; Bolton 1953; Long 1970; Rowley 1970.

1901 to H.C. Prinsep, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, C.J. Annear, the telegraph stationmaster at Fitzroy and an agent of the Aborigines' Department, pointed out that:

Relief to the infirm, under the present system, will doubtless become more costly each year, and I think everyone knowing this country agrees that the Government have a difficult problem to solve in dealing with the natives, but one which all agree should be taken in hand as soon as possible.

As a means of minimising, if not entirely doing away with, the loss at present entailed by supplying relief to the infirm natives and those requiring it temporarily...and as means of improving the welfare of the natives generally.

[T]he Government [should] set apart a sufficient area, erect suitable buildings thereon, say, for a staff of three or four men, and place upon it stock likely to be remunerative. A suitable site...could be found at the foot of the Leopold Range, close to the Hall's Creek telegraph line, and about 50 miles East of here. To make this Institution self-supporting, I would suggest that horses, cows and the Angora goat for breeding purposes be placed upon it. There is always a ready sale for horses and cattle, and the hair of the Angora is a valuable commodity. I firmly believe that this suggestion, if adopted, and placed in charge of an honest and intelligent officer, and worked on business lines would, in the course of a few years, pay its expenses, and leave a fair sum to go towards relief elsewhere.

[T]he natives at present receiving relief here or anywhere within a radius of sixty miles could be concentrated there, thereby doing away with relief at many places.⁸

The main concerns behind Annear's suggestion at this time centred on the cost and efficiency of providing relief to indigent Aborigines. Although cattle-killing by Aborigines had been a growing problem to settlers in the Kimberley during the last decade of the 19th century, this was not specifically mentioned by Annear as prompting his suggestion. Some local officials, such as Annear, recognised, albeit paternalistically, the necessity of providing relief to Aborigines whose lands were being alienated, whose natural foods were rapidly declining and who were contracting a variety of introduced diseases.

At about the same time, police were becoming increasingly engaged in patrolling and protecting the property of settlers and arresting Aborigines for cattle killing. They concurred in the general idea of setting aside land for Aborigines for rather different reasons than those mentioned by Annear. Prinsep noted a report from the constable at Argyle Police Station:

... a large reserve being made for aboriginal purposes,...would be a good thing not only for the natives but for the district generally, as it would be the means of keeping the natives under continual supervision of police, and away from the stocked or cattle country, thus being an advantage to the various landholders.⁹

In his 1903 Annual Report, the Chief Protector of Aborigines gave a further reason for the formation of a 'native settlement' in the Kimberley:

The present Resident Magistrate and Medical Officer [in Wyndham] has again urged the formation of a large native settlement in the unoccupied country west of Cambridge Gulf. The time will come when something will have to be done in the way of collecting natives on certain portions of the Kimberley districts, and, if possible, training them to be of service, and to earn their

⁸ AR 1901:10.

⁹ AR 1902.

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living by their labour; and I would recommend that an area be decided upon and reserved from anything but temporary occupation, so as to be available in the future.¹⁰

This need to consider the work potential of Aborigines was reiterated in the 1904 Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines in a section referring to the East Kimberley. With reference to 'the native question', Prinsep noted that:

... much attention has been called to the necessity of preserving such a valuable source of labour for the future, looking at the question in a practical manner, aside from its humane aspect.¹¹

Cattle killing became increasingly prevalent in the Kimberley during the first years of the 20th century as European settlement increased and Aboriginal people were increasingly alienated from their land. Some police considered that cattle killing resulted from:

...the leniency of the magistrates towards native offenders, who formerly received sentences of about two years, but now in most cases a sentence of one to six months is inflicted.¹²

Others appeared to show a greater understanding of the situation when they attributed it 'to the scarcity of bush food'.¹³

Government relief measures were not able to cope with the food problem and Aborigines in many localities were becoming dependent on settlers killing beef for them. After his appointment as Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1907, C.F. Gale took up the challenge of dealing with 'the native question' in the Kimberley somewhat more vigorously than had his predecessor. In his 1908 Annual Report, he dealt with a number of specific matters, including those of 'Rationing Indigent Natives' and 'Kimberley District and Cattle Killing'. On the first of these, he found the system of rationing to be unsatisfactory from an administrative point of view and noted that:

The question of establishing reserves where natives can be kept and rationed is one that has been under consideration for many years past...the initial expense of a scheme of this sort will be great, but ... will be far cheaper in the long run than the present system.

The Government have...power to resume any lands for the benefit of the aborigines, and there is no reason...why industries, whether agricultural, pastoral, or both, should not be worked by the natives under Government supervision. Farms and stations could be established throughout the State where the old could be cared for, and the young taught to become useful servants...these stations...could eventually be made self-supporting.

These Government institutions would become a labour-recruiting station
...¹⁴

On the second of these matters, Gale noted an increase in the numbers of Aborigines in the Kimberley being convicted of cattle killing or 'being in unlawful possession of meat'. He went on to point out that:

¹⁰ AR 1903.

¹¹ AR 1904.

¹² AR 1906.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ AR 1908.

our present system of punishment is not acting as a deterrent to this form of crime: many holding the opinion that natives look upon a term of imprisonment as more of a holiday than anything else.¹⁵

Furthermore, Gale noted the high costs of transporting Aboriginal prisoners and keeping them in gaol and stated that such figures formed:

another strong argument in favour of creating the station reserves... General complaints are continually being made by pastoralists in the Kimberley division of the depredations committed by natives among the cattle herds, and I feel sure that any scheme advanced by the Government that would have a tendency to decrease this form of crime would be hailed with delight by those engaged in the industry.¹⁶

Responses from pastoralists to a request in 1908 from Gale asking them to indicate whether they would be prepared to kill enough beef (either gratis or for compensation) to satisfy the needs of Aborigines in country surrounding their stations had apparently been discouraging.¹⁷

In 1909, Gale considered that cattle killing was the most serious question in Aboriginal affairs facing the government at that time. In addition, he pointed out:

Our native gaols are full to overflowing, and their upkeep is an enormous yearly expense to the country.¹⁸

During this same year, the suggestion was again put forward that the government purchase a cattle station 'on behalf of the natives'. This time, a seven-page special report outlining the case and detailing a specific proposal was put forward to the Premier, to the Minister in charge of the Aborigines' Department and to Gale, the Chief Protector, by James Lisdell, a travelling inspector in the Kimberley. Lisdell's proposal recommended:

a new and I am sure a beneficial and successful departure from the present system of treating bush natives.¹⁹

It was the result, he wrote, of:

a careful study of the present unsatisfactory position of the bush natives, the unavoidable but heavy expenditure in relieving indigents, the great prevalence of cattle killing, the large percentage of natives being sent to prison weekly, the utter uselessness of that system of punishment as a deterrent and the large expenditure of public money in Police and prison charges, for which no money is received.²⁰

If Lisdell's reasons are indicative, it would seem that he gave as great, if not greater, emphasis to the situation of Aborigines as he did to that of the pastoralists. In fact, Lisdell's proposal went far beyond addressing the single issue of reducing Aboriginal depredations on settlers' stock. In his explicit recognition of the reasons for these killings and the inevitable consequences which were, at that time, flowing from them, Lisdell's views were both critical of government and sympathetic to Aborigines:

Unfortunately through want of forethought past Governments have totally ignored the aborigines in dealing with the pastoral lands of East and West

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Bolton, 1953:149.

18 AR 1909.

19 Moola Bulla native station file No. 653,95/18.

20 Ibid.

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Kimberley, with the present consequence of forcing the bush natives to raid the cattle, simply because there is no other meat for them.

[P]ast governments have leased all the best of the pastoral lands and river frontages, without giving the slightest consideration to the requirements of the few thousand bush natives. There is not a single acre of the country - not a single foot of river frontages that the natives can call their own... In the early days, before the country was stocked...both Kimberleys were a paradise for natives, and all varieties of meat could be caught, with very little labour... Stocking up of the country has completely destroyed and hunted all the ground game... They have no meat, so is it any wonder they have taken to cattle killing... If in the early days, before stocking up took place, the Government had reserved large blocks of good virgin country, every 150 miles apart, where there was plenty of natural food, the present unsatisfactory state of affairs and heavy gaol, Police, and indigent expenses would not exist. There is nothing to be gained now by resumption, and the creation of large native reserves, simply because there is nothing on them to eat. Now the only real and economical remedy is to feed the natives with their own meat and self grown vegetables.²¹

Paternalistic in flavour, Lisdell's proposal seems to have resulted from a pragmatic yet somewhat humanitarian assessment of the situation which had developed in the area. Lisdell reported that he had already located suitable station properties near Hall's Creek which the owners wanted to sell and which he suggested that the government purchase 'on behalf of the natives'. The fact that tentative negotiations were already under way earlier in 1909 is evident not only from Lisdell's letter, but also from Gale's Annual Report:

I am pleased to say that the suggestion of forming native settlements is receiving that consideration from the government which it deserves, and any scheme aiming in the direction of keeping the natives from this continuous cattle-killing, and thereby emptying our native gaols, must commend itself to anyone giving the matter the deep thought necessary to grasp the present most unsatisfactory conditions existing between the Government, the native race, and those who are developing the cattle and other industries.²²

During the latter half of 1909, investigations proceeded on valuing the properties, stock and gear, ascertaining the anticipated costs and savings of the proposal. Eventually in February 1910, a lump sum offer was made by the government to Messrs Meinsen, Green and Shepherd, the respective owners of Nicholson Plains, Greenvale and Mary Downs stations near Hall's Creek. The sentiments expressed by Gale in 1910 in advising the government of the advisability of going ahead with the project reflect views prevalent among many government officials at that time:

I feel confident that under careful management, the settlement will become self supporting almost at once. It would tend to make the aborigines more contented with their lot, as they would then have a home where the young and old might be cared for, and where the adults could find employment and provisions when they required them.

History, I suppose will repeat itself, and in the course of time the native race will be a thing of the past. When this happens the Government, by purchasing the above properties will have the satisfaction of knowing that

²¹ Ibid.

²² AR 1909.

they have done their best for the amelioration of a decadent race, and future Governments will have a valuable asset to dispose of, when this state of things comes to pass.²³

Some of the contradictions and ironies which underlay the formulation of Aboriginal policy and which were to become more apparent over the years of Moola Bulla's existence can already be detected in statements such as these. Local agents, inspectors and others in the Kimberley had been urging the formation of a 'native settlement' in the area for a variety of reasons. But their expressed concerns with the welfare of Aborigines became overshadowed by the government's need to satisfy the pastoralists and reduce the costs of Aboriginal administration. On the one hand, Gale was predicting the demise of the Aboriginal population and he thus indicated that a 'native settlement' in the Kimberley would go some way to 'smooth the pillow of the dying race'. On the other hand, Gale argued that such settlements would be valuable in their capacity as training and recruitment centres for Aboriginal employment in pastoral and domestic work.

The government was evidently convinced that the enterprise would be a good commercial proposition. Its offer was accepted and possession taken of the three stations in August 1910. The property totalled an estimated 860,000 acres and contained over 11,000 head of cattle and 283 horses. It was estimated that up to 600 Aborigines would come within the influence of the settlement. The first manager was a former stock inspector, A. Haly. The settlement was initially known as Nicholson Plains Station, then Mount Barrett Station, and by 1911 was being referred to as Moola Bulla. It is not altogether clear what the precise origin and meaning of the name is. One source states that the name meant 'plenty tucker' and was suggested by Daisy Bates.²⁴ Another source taken from an Aboriginal oral history suggests something quite different.

Old man, call im Boolabulla, kangaroo ibin cookim. Mr Haly bin come from old station, find im old Boolabulla cookim kangaroo the end of the creek ...

Ibin ask im... 'What's your name?' 'Boolabulla'. Im bin call im Moola Bulla.

Mr Haly bin say 'I'll call im Moola Bulla now this one country' he bin say.²⁵

Haly wasted no time in undertaking improvements to the property. Buildings, windmills and paddocks were erected and wells deepened. Cattle were variously branded, speyed, sold or slaughtered. Haly was particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities and importance of horse-breeding, an activity which he had earlier stressed because of what he considered the eminent suitability of the property for such a purpose. In his view, Moola Bulla could potentially supply sufficient horses to meet police requirements for the whole of the north of the state as well as the annual demand in the Kimberley.²⁶ Haly's first Annual Report contained some interesting observations about relations between Whites and Aboriginal people:

[E]very encouragement has been given them to come in and settle here. Beef has been supplied to them according to the number in camp, at times as many as three beasts a day being killed. Tobacco has also been supplied at the rate of one stick per week to each adult. For years the natives have been hunted by the police and imprisoned for cattle killing, and at the start we had great

23 Moola Bulla native station file No. 653, 95/18.

24 Biskup 1973:100.

25 Transcript of oral history (Toby) taken by Audrey Bolger at Kunja camp, near Hall's Creek, 20 March 1982.

26 Moola Bulla native station file No. 653 95/18.

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difficulty in overcoming their suspicions and persuading them they had nothing to fear in settling here...unscrupulous travellers spread dreadful tales amongst them of the ultimate intentions of the Government, which tended to make them unsettled and suspicious. However a great deal of this has been overcome and the radius of the settlement's influence is gradually extending...during the past month there has been quite 300 settled here ...

As much work as possible has been got out of the natives. All the stockwork is done by native boys under the supervision of a head stockman. A large number have been employed round the head station assisting men doing improvements, while native women look after the milking cows and goats, water the large vegetable garden, do the house work and assist generally. The camp natives gather firewood each morning, before being supplied with beef.²⁷

It should be noted that payment for such employment was only in the form of rations, such as beef, flour, sugar, tea and/or blankets and clothing. Minimal cash wages were not paid until after the Second World War, and award wages were not introduced until 1968, through the Federal Pastoral Industry Award.

Haly concluded his first report with the observation that results so far at the settlement had been satisfactory. No complaints of cattle killing in the vicinity of Hall's Creek had been laid during the twelve months since the establishment of Moola Bulla. Gale's Annual Report for the same year contained the following additional observations:

As it will be impossible to keep all the natives constantly employed on the station,...it is further proposed to train the children to become useful servants, and the settlement will eventually become a labour-recruiting centre for the adjoining stations.²⁸

In noting 'the earnest desire' of the Government to foster further development in the Kimberleys and the need to endeavour to improve relations between 'the Government, the native race and those who by their capital and labour are trying to develop the cattle and other industries in the Northern portion of the State', Gale urged the establishment of further settlements like Moola Bulla.

By 1912, Gale believed that 'the native settlement scheme' at Moola Bulla had proved itself successful. Cattle killing in the vicinity was decreasing and hence government expenses for gaoling Aborigines were significantly reduced. This same year, a 'native feeding depot' was established at Violet Valley near Turkey Creek (see map) with the aim of further reducing depredations on stock by killing beef supplied from Moola Bulla.

In his 1913 Annual Report to the Chief Protector 'relative to the condition, treatment, feeding, etc., of the Aborigines on Moola Bulla station', Haly noted:

that as times goes on the natives are realising more and more that Moola Bulla Station is there for their special benefit...the number of natives in camp has greatly increased... Besides killing for them at the homestead the natives were encouraged to assemble at the various yards where the mustering parties were at work and fed there, thus avoiding the concentration of too many in one camp.²⁹

Like most other government employees and pastoralists, Haly failed to appreciate the significance of hunting dogs kept by Aboriginal people. He regarded the number of dogs

²⁷ Moola Bulla native station file No. 652/993.

²⁸ AR 1910.

²⁹ Moola Bulla native station file No.662/14.



'Moola Bulla pastoral station: station homestead' c. 1910-1918. Courtesy Battye Library.



'Moola Bulla pastoral station: working with cattle' 1916. Courtesy Battye Library.

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kept by Aborigines to be a serious problem, but realised that any action on his part to interfere with them on the station would be met with resentment and suspicion. So he suggested that:

The police could greatly assist us by making patrols and when coming upon natives' camps away from the station break all spears and shoot all dogs and start the natives into the station. I feel that after a time the natives would learn that it was to their best interests to remain at the station.³⁰

Haly further reported that over thirty 'native boys' were employed 'stockkeeping, and mustering, branding, horsebreaking, butchering', while 'a large number of camp natives' had been employed cutting and stacking bush hay for the dry season. Blankets and clothing were being distributed 'as an extra means of inducing the natives to visit the station'.³¹

Some of these comments about the means whereby Aboriginal people were induced to visit and settle at the station are borne out by an elderly Aboriginal man living at Hall's Creek in the early 1980s:

Old Haly would make drop of tea and cake, everything you know, people would work with cook trying to get you there. He bringinim every wild people from out at hill, they got no clothes. They got something like that, you know, frontside, their own turnout, you know...some men and strong boy they go in shorts, they got cook with them,...and the wild people,...they don't know, they haven't come in in this state yet...and all got tea, flour, and everything like that, sugar, tomahawks, you know belong cuttim wood, small axe...go through to the old people who round there, fetchim to come to know *gadia* [white man] Haly.³²

Most of Gale's 1913 Annual Report on Moola Bulla detailed the healthy financial position of the settlement and described various improvements and developments. The station was proving very profitable for the government and at the same time prison costs continued to be reduced. In the last paragraph Gale referred briefly to the Aboriginal population, noting that 'unemployed natives have recognised Moola Bulla as their home' and that preference in employment was being given 'to the younger generation with a view to teaching them different branches of work in connection with the handling of cattle and horses'.³³

The following year, 1914, saw a severe measles epidemic tragically proving fatal to numerous Aborigines on Moola Bulla and surrounding stations. As Haly put it: 'Judging from diminished numbers that have visited the settlement, I can only conclude the mortality was very heavy'.³⁴ In addition, the Kimberley was suffering from a drought which reduced the station's profitability. Yet, work developing the station continued steadily, and Gale was more than enthusiastic about the future prospects of the settlement:

I unhesitatingly say that the Government have a splendid asset in the Settlement for the future use of the Aborigines Department. Not only is it self-supporting at the present moment, but its future capabilities are great. Already it has been instrumental in saving the Government an annual

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Transcript of oral history (Pincher Long) taken by Audrey Bolger at No.1 Reserve, Hall's Creek, 18 March 1982.

³³ AR 1913.

³⁴ AR 1914.

expenditure of over £10,000 incidental to the upkeep of native gaols...and with a bold development policy the Settlement will carry cattle in numbers to make it a big payable proposition. In view of the future refrigerating and meat works at Wyndham, a profit should eventually be made sufficient to materially reduce the Parliamentary vote yearly given to the Department.. From an aborigines' standpoint, the Settlement has been a continued success, and the result has exceeded my anticipations.³⁵

Late in 1914, Haly wrote to Gale informing him that two Hall's Creek constables had been charged with 'improperly using police equipment for cattle killing'. Haly protested strongly about the police killing cattle on Moola Bulla, pointing out that:

they are setting a bad example by indiscriminately killing in the bush... [T]his matter of killing by the police...is detrimental to the best interests of Moola Bulla...especially as the Resident Magistrate is of the opinion it is not necessary for the police to go out and kill as there is a local butcher.³⁶

Apart from the sheer hypocrisy of a situation in which police were committing the very crimes for which they were arresting Aborigines, another comment can be made in respect of this extraordinary case. The two police constables had pleaded that their offence was 'established custom'. The questions of 'established by whom?' and 'for how long?' remain unanswered and, while the scale of cattle killing by police may not have been extensive, it nevertheless remains that numbers of reported incidents of cattle killing by Aborigines in the area over the years could well have been exaggerated and Aborigines wrongly accused and convicted. The case was referred to the Commissioner of Police in Perth who, early in 1915, had the constables concerned removed from Hall's Creek.³⁷

In 1915, A.O. Neville replaced Gale as Chief Protector of Aborigines, a position he was to hold until his retirement in 1940. In the same year, Haly was obliged to take eight months' sick leave from his position as station manager at Moola Bulla. Neville and Underwood, the Minister of the Department of Aborigines, made a tour of the north of the State in 1916, visiting Moola Bulla in June of that year. They were impressed with developments at the station which, Neville wrote, 'was not only fulfilling the purpose for which it was established, but [was] also proving a financial success'.³⁸ But Neville cautioned:

The station should not, however, be classed as a trading concern, and I intend to recommend its exclusion accordingly. The object of such a station or settlement is primarily to rear a sufficient number of cattle with which to supply the natives with meat, and by so doing induce them to cease their depredations amongst cattle owned privately, and if it can do this, and also dispose of a sufficient number to make it a remunerative concern, so much the better. Its primary object, however, being the maintenance of the natives, it can in no way be classed with other State trading concerns.³⁹

Haly continued as manager of Moola Bulla until the end of 1918, when he was transferred to the Wyndham meatworks. Although archival evidence indicates that Haly, with a background in stock inspection, had energetically and competently overseen the

35 Ibid.

36 Moola Bulla native station file No. 2760/14.

37 Ibid.

38 AR 1916.

39 Ibid.

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establishment of the station, it is hardly surprising that the viability and profitability of the pastoral side of the settlement had engaged most of his time and attention. While not unmindful of the Aboriginal residents of Moola Bulla, Haly's reports suggest that they were a lower priority than improvements to the property, cattle and horses. In his final report (1918), Haly made a statement which is indicative of his attitude and practices:

Every effort is made to keep as many employed as possible, where it is found that their labour will in some way recompense for the cost of feeding and clothing them. In this way they are kept out of mischief.⁴⁰

The dependency of the northern pastoral industry on Aboriginal labour had been highlighted by the years of World War One, when many white workers had left to join the armed forces. Unlike Gale, Neville not only recognised the value of Aboriginal labour, but believed that pastoralists ought to pay minimum cash wages to their Aboriginal employees. Despite his efforts, Neville was never able to make this view prevail during his whole time in office.

At the end of World War One Moola Bulla took on the additional function of training returned soldiers in station work. In an arrangement with the Commonwealth Department of Repatriation, eight men were to be provided with six months' training, 'with a view to their ultimate settlement in Kimberley'.⁴¹ In 1920, Neville reported that the whole area of Moola Bulla station had, by Proclamation, been declared a reserve for Aborigines. While Neville stated that experience had shown that the reserve of 750 ha. around the homestead, which had been declared when Moola Bulla was first acquired, was 'not nearly large enough', it seems that his unstated concern was that lands not formally reserved for Aborigines would be made available for settlement by returned servicemen.⁴² The establishment of a chain of reserves in the far north, to which Aborigines could retreat in the face of expanding pastoral settlement, was part of his overall management plan.

At this time, G.C. Trenouth, a former head stockman, was acting manager of Moola Bulla until T. Woodland was appointed manager in March 1921. During the early 1920s, the station's profitability declined, partly because of changes in management and partly because of drought conditions. Yet in 1923, the station still paid some £8595 directly to Treasury. 1925 was apparently the worst season on record and the first time Moola Bulla reported a loss but, reported Neville, 'I found the natives contented and happy, and the indigents well cared for'.⁴³ Despite financial losses, Neville continued to report favourably on the station's success in fulfilling the purpose for which it was established:

[I]t was never intended to be a money making concern, but it has been our endeavour to make it pay its way, which up to this year it has succeeded in doing and has thus obviated the expenditure of the many thousands of pounds annually which were formerly required to defray the cost of the prevention of cattle killing by natives.⁴⁴

Under Neville, Moola Bulla and similar northern settlements began to acquire a different role in the management and control of the Aboriginal population. The system of stations was to be, in Neville's own words, one of:

⁴⁰ AR 1918.

⁴¹ AR 1919.

⁴² Biskup 1973:103-4.

⁴³ AR 1925.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

providing future homes for the Aboriginal population in the far north ... Undoubtedly as this country becomes settled it will be necessary for aborigines within it to repair to these reserves, and the time is not too far distant when these settlements...will remain the only permanent homes and hunting grounds of the erstwhile possessors of the land.

At any time if it should be deemed expedient or desirable to establish complete segregation, it can be accomplished with the least difficulty on these areas. At present, beyond excluding the white man and affording sanctuary and sustenance for the natives, complete segregation is not aimed at.⁴⁵

By the late 1920s, Moola Bulla's success as a cattle station was creating some of the problems which Neville had anticipated. Neville reported:

Owing to its success as a cattle and stud station, the real and original purpose of its establishment is liable to be overlooked and there are already those who begin to talk of cutting up the property and disposing of it for closer settlement... t would be a sorry day for the natives in East Kimberley if this institution was ever abandoned as a native station, and it should always remain to supply permanent sanctuary for these people so long as any number of them are left, even in the days of closer settlement, which may eventually come about.⁴⁶

During the 1920s, the number of Aboriginal people in the main camp at Moola Bulla was reported as varying between 140 and 170. In 1928, Woodland, the manager, reported that an average of 55 Aboriginal people were employed doing station work and repairs to roads. For an Aboriginal person at Moola Bulla to be classified as 'employed' still meant working for no monetary reward. Any payment received continued to be in the form of food and clothing.

August 1929 saw the commencement of a school for 'native and half caste' children, with Mrs Tuohy, the storekeeper's wife, as the teacher. The children were reported to be very keen and in the first four months of the school's operation, numbers in attendance increased from 24 to 35. By 1931, according to archival evidence, the Moola Bulla school had become 'quite a popular institution', with children reportedly being 'sent in from far and wide' and 'making excellent progress under Mrs Tuohy'.⁴⁷ The school's reported popularity continued into the early 1930s, leading to the suggestion of the need for a dormitory for Aboriginal children being sent in by pastoralists.

In 1932 Neville reported that 60 Aboriginal people were employed for stock and station work, road building and maintenance, wagon and pumping work. 'The work done by the natives is a credit to them', wrote the Chief Protector.⁴⁸ By the mid-1930s, over two hundred Aboriginal men, women and children lived in the main camp at Moola Bulla. In addition to satisfactory results in the cattle sector, good results were also being reported with sheep and other stock. Woodland noted in 1935 that:

Seventy natives were employed doing stock, tanning, road and general work during the year... The tannery is being carried on by natives under the

45 AR 1926.

46 AR 1928.

47 AR 1931.

48 AR 1932.

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supervision of the bookkeeper and manager. The natives take an interest in the work. Leather to the value of £58 was sold during the year.⁴⁹

In this year, Neville commended the 'efficient management' of the station to his Minister, but urged that additional buildings be provided to accommodate school children and a clinic. The number of children in the Moola Bulla school had by this time reached 48.

During the latter half of the 1930s, Neville's reports continued to show the importance of Moola Bulla as a profitable cattle station run by his department. On average, some sixty Aboriginal people were employed at tannery and general work on the station and, as Woodland described the Aboriginal employees in the tannery, 'The natives do good work'.⁵⁰ At this time, Woodland's reports indicate that Moola Bulla was taking on additional functions. By 1937, a clinic had been established at Moola Bulla and the nurse immediately began to treat a range of minor ailments and sores while taking charge of 'all half-blood girls'. Moola Bulla also began to function overtly as a detention centre. Woodland reported in 1936 that:

Two natives were transferred for detention at the Station, one being sent from Broome and one from Forrest River.⁵¹

A graphic account by Alfie Gerrard, an Aboriginal man who was taken from Wyndham to Moola Bulla as a boy, refers to some young men being sent to the station in 1938 from Forrest River Mission.⁵² The missionary priest arranged for these five young men to be sent to Moola Bulla because, according to Gerrard:

[T]hey used to go out and play around with the single women, their girlfriends. They got caught and for punishment were sent to Moola Bulla for hard labour.⁵³

Gerrard later described an incident involving these men, which occurred while the manager and the teachers were away on holiday. Two white stock-men, left in charge of the settlement, were jealous of the sexual relations between these men and some 'beautiful half-caste girls' and according to Gerrard, chained them by their necks to a tree for a week in the sun, with a four-gallon drum for a toilet and a slice of bread a day. As additional punishment, the stockmen forced them to submit to electric shocks, flogging and a further week of being locked up in a small room. One of the Aborigines had his testicles cut by one of the white stockman. At about the same time, an Aboriginal police tracker was shot and killed by the other stockman. The five Aboriginal men eventually got away from Moola Bulla and returned to Forrest River Mission. In Gerrard's view, the fact that nothing was done about the complaints, which the Aborigines registered with the police, resulted from the 'thick discrimination' which was prevalent at that time, allowing white people 'to do anything' to an Aboriginal person.⁵⁴

Increasing numbers of children at Moola Bulla made accommodation problems acute during the late 1930s. Annual reports from Neville and Woodland at this time also began to distinguish between 'full-bloods' and 'half-bloods'. For example, in 1938, Woodland reported that out of an average number of 189 Aboriginal people at Moola Bulla, there were 'forty-eight other than full-bloods', of whom 12 were working. In detailing what seemed

49 AR 1935.

50 AR 1936.

51 Ibid.

52 Gammage and Spearritt 1987:55-63.

53 Ibid:61.

54 Cf. Gammage and Spearritt, 1987.

like relatively extensive improvements to beef houses, garages, troughing and windmill installations, Woodland also noted that 'a shade for the half-blood girls has been built'.⁵⁵ In the same year, Neville wrote:

Moola Bulla Native Station is fast assuming an institutional character due to the compulsory accommodation there of increasing numbers of half-caste children...there must soon be a hundred children there.⁵⁶

Again, and on the basis of such projections, Neville urged the necessity of additional buildings. The impression given by Neville that Moola Bulla was becoming an institution of its own accord suggests that policy was not determining practice. Yet departmental policy was inevitably shaping the institutional character of Moola Bulla, as was apparent in the very next paragraph of Neville's 1938 Annual Report:

The Department has long recognised that the moral and spiritual training of youngsters should go hand in hand with secular training... Long ago a promise was given to the Presbyterian Church authorities that should we ever establish a missionary at Moola Bulla, that Church should receive the first opportunity of supplying one.⁵⁷

Accordingly, an agreement was reached between Neville's department and the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia that a minister and his wife would be stationed at Moola Bulla to take charge of the spiritual side of the settlement and run the school. So in 1939 Moola Bulla acquired the further role of a mission, with the arrival of the Reverend. and Mrs Hovenden. The missionaries reopened the school, which had been closed for twelve months and instituted regular weekly church services.

Alfie Gerrard's recollections, referred to earlier, confirm these developments and add further details about institutional practices at Moola Bulla. Alfie and his brother Dick were taken to the settlement from Wyndham in 1937. He recalled:

They picked up all the half-caste kids from all over the east Kimberley area and the west Kimberley and put them all in that settlement... They were picked up from all the cattle stations around this area, and even the towns, any half-caste kids. They didn't care much for the full blood, only for the halfbreed. Anyone that had a bit of colour was put in there •

And we had to be Christianed. All new boys that came in were flogged on the Saturday morning. Dick my brother and I, we got the biggest bloody hiding that morning. I don't know why. Don't ask me why it happened, what it was all about, but they had to Christian the boys by giving them a good flogging.⁵⁸

Gerrard described the good times they had with the 'old fellers' and in the stock camps. New sorts of relationships developed among Aboriginal people in the institutional setting. Foster parents 'claimed' particular children and took a special interest in them. Peer groups took on additional significance to children who had been removed to Moola Bulla and separated from their families. During the wet season, Aboriginal people would come to the

55 AR 1938.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Gammage and Spearritt 1987: 55-56.

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station from all over the area.⁵⁹ There would be sport days and holiday corroborees, the holding of traditional ceremonies, older people taught the children to throw boomerangs and spears, to fish, to hunt and to gather bush tucker. Memories of happy times at Moola Bulla, which were associated by most Aboriginal people with freedom from institutional constraints, contrasted with the harsh discipline and punishment and the meagre payments which Aboriginal workers received.

The beginning of World War Two heralded a number of significant changes, both short and long term, for Moola Bulla and its residents. 1940 saw the retirements of both Neville as Commissioner of Native Affairs and Woodland as the manager of Moola Bulla. The new manager of the station was A. George. During his first year at Moola Bulla, dormitories were erected for boys and girls. School and church activities continued under the direction of the missionary and his wife, and profits of nearly £7000 went from Moola Bulla to the state treasury.

War conditions were to create great demand for Aboriginal labour. Bray, Neville's successor, acknowledged in his 1942 report the large part which Aboriginal labour was playing in maintaining the state's rural and pastoral industries. He also noted:

Perhaps our policy for educating and training of the natives for rural and pastoral occupations may reveal its wisdom. The training facilities for this policy are limited...more settlements are required. The untrained pool of native labour is still large. It should be taken in hand more vigorously and trained to the establishment of a rural peasantry...there is no reason why there should not be an even greater reliance on native labour after the war ...

[I]f able-bodied natives [were] not working, [they were] ordered to work and if they failed to obtain it they were removed to the settlements for disciplinary correction... After periods of disciplinary treatment in settlements the previously indifferent natives offered for outside employment.⁶⁰

Although the war years under George's management saw a growth in the size of the cattle herd, as well as an increase in the numbers of Aborigines employed, whether willingly or not, at Moola Bulla (95 people in 1945) Bray reported in 1945 that there was a great need for institutional activities, which were almost lacking at that time. The school had closed down in 1943 and many of the 'half-caste' children were sent to school at the Beagle Bay mission. Plans were being proposed to develop the station into a 'modern Native Institution', which seems to have meant constructing extra buildings for the 'welfare of natives'.⁶¹

The immediate post-war years witnessed an unprecedented focus of public attention in Western Australia on matters relating to Aboriginal labour in the north of the state. Aboriginal stockmen in the Pilbara went on strike in 1946, their actions assisted by a sympathetic local white man, Don McLeod. Events in the Pilbara had repercussions for Aboriginal station workers in the Kimberley, who were reported as 'showing signs of unrest'⁶² and an increasing awareness of their value to the pastoral industry. At the time of Bray's retirement in 1947, the lack of suitable staff was being cited as the main reason for the 'unbalancing effect upon the general effectiveness of the Department's welfare efforts at

⁵⁹ Similar accounts of the 'good times' at Moola Bulla are to be found in the transcripts of numerous oral histories held by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Hall's Creek, W.A.

⁶⁰ AR 1942.

⁶¹ AR 1945.

⁶² Biskup 1973:236.

Departmental institutions'. Shortly after Bray's retirement, the state government decided to appoint a magistrate, Bateman, to undertake an inquiry into the 'Aboriginal problem' and to make appropriate recommendations. As far as Moola Bulla was concerned, apart from the fact that it was self-supporting, Bateman reported critically and at length on the Department's management of the station:

To refer to Moola Bulla as a native institution in its present run-down state would be palpably absurd. Beyond the fact that dormitories are provided for a number of children, there is nothing to distinguish this station from any other station in the North.

The main objective in the establishment of Moola Bulla in the first instance was to reduce cattle killing by the natives but it may be assumed that another objective was the advancement and development of the Kimberley natives and there was every reason to anticipate beneficial results in this direction. Unfortunately however it has not been developed in the manner designed and in recent years it has suffered a regrettable decline. The failure of Moola Bulla to progress according to plan undoubtedly is due chiefly to the war and its aftermath but there appears to have been a certain amount of lassitude on the part of the Department also...it is surprising that some attempt has not been made during the last two years to effect some improvements.

The lack of institutional buildings is as extraordinary as it is regrettable, not even a school-room or a dining-room existing... If one excepts the verandahs of the girls' dormitories, no accommodation is provided for the working natives. The Department has circularised all stations in the North requesting them to provide better housing for their working natives. While this action may be commendable in itself, it is a strange request coming from an authority which has made no effort itself to provide housing for many of its own native inmates.

I believe there is a good future ahead of this institution, but it should be developed along institutional lines and not merely as a cattle station.⁶³

In 1948, Middleton was appointed to replace Bray and he brought with him more of a commitment to 'native welfare', which was to signify a change of emphasis at settlements such as Moola Bulla. In his first Annual Report for 1949, Middleton wrote:

The institutional side of Moola Bulla in the past has been subordinated to the primary business of cattle and horse pursuits, but the ensuing year will, I am confident, see tremendous changes.⁶⁴

In Middleton's first year as Commissioner, George was convicted of an offence under the Brands Act and dismissed as manager of Moola Bulla. This was fortuitous as far as Middleton's plans were concerned, because the change of managership allowed him to replace George with a Manager-Superintendent in the person of C.L. McBeath, a former policeman, travelling inspector and Acting Commissioner of Native Affairs. Middleton wrote that McBeath's appointment:

has immeasurably strengthened the position of the Department which now has an efficient manager, as well as a sincere altruist, to handle the new policies to be introduced at Moola Bulla. The native inmates were delighted with the move, as the transfer has given them a sympathetic and understanding leader...

⁶³ Bateman Report 1948:11.

⁶⁴ AR 1949.

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Plans are now in hand for the creation of Moola Bulla to be the show place of the North, and in the hands of the present manager, there is every indication that these plans will soon materialise.⁶⁵

Middleton's optimistic expectations for Moola Bulla seemed to be realised. Early reports from McBeath reversed the emphasis given to stock and station matters by previous managers in their reports. His first Annual Report in 1950 dealt extensively with Aboriginal education, welfare and health matters at the station. He had initially made an exhaustive inquiry into complaints of maladministration by the former manager and found all institutional aspects chaotic and most of the inmates depressed and sullen.⁶⁶ Noting that education ranked high in the field of native administration, McBeath reported that the station school had reopened in 1950 with Mr and Mrs Gill as teachers and a total of 53 children in senior and advanced kindergarten sections. The newly appointed teachers had also commenced voluntary night classes for adults, quite a few of whom, wrote McBeath, showed 'a pathetic eagerness to learn to read and write'.⁶⁷

The new Manager-Superintendent also provided details of the employment situation at the station. His report indicate that Aboriginal workers at Moola Bulla began to receive cash wages almost a year before most Kimberley pastoralists started paying money to their Aboriginal employees:

Of the total of 34 adult castes 22 are males and 12 females. All males are employed, 10 being in receipt of wages ranging from £1 to £6 per week. Duties include mechanics, handymen, yard-builders, fencers, stockmen and butchers. Two caste girls are paid wages at the rate of 10 shillings weekly. A special rate of wages has already been approved for this station but can only be implemented with caution and discretion as the majority of stations in the East and North Kimberleys as yet have not placed their workers on a wages basis...

The caste people here are mainly good types... The station proper caste population are both industrious and well behaved. The male full-blood workers are engaged mostly as stockmen, and all have worked exceptionally well. No day has been too long or too hard.

The older people attend to the general work about the station such as woodcutting, sanitary removals, gardening, hygiene squad, labouring and domestic work.

It would seem that all the inmates are appreciative of the improved conditions which I implemented after taking over, and that they have expressed this feeling in their readiness to perform the tasks allotted to them to the best of their ability.⁶⁸

At the same time that McBeath reported on his first year as Manager-Superintendent of Moola Bulla, the District Officer for East Kimberley, J. Rhatigan, forwarded his comments, advice and recommendations on matters relating to Aboriginal labour in the region.⁶⁹ He was concerned with what he considered a potential 'half-caste' problem in the East Kimberley. With reference to Aboriginal women, Rhatigan pointed out that:

65 Ibid.

66 AR 1950.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

full-blood domestic labour is cheaper than the half-caste, and therefore the station people will be reluctant to employ half-caste female labour whilst the full-blood labour is available.⁷⁰

In addition, Rhatigan anticipated future problems among 'coloured' males who, in his opinion, would not be prepared to continue working on stations for low wages. In order to meet the increasing demand for skilled labour in the region and to improve the wages and living conditions of 'coloured' workers, Rhatigan advocated the urgent establishment of a manual training school at Moola Bulla:

These people and their progeny are the potential labour of the North...and will be the mainstay of labour under the trying conditions of the tropics. It only remains for us to place the facilities at their disposal whereby they can, and will, become competent tradesmen.

[T]he half-caste population is increasing. The demand for skilled labour is also increasing...

[A]t Moola Bulla...we already have the foundations on which to work ... the provision of facilities with which to train coloured children as engineers, mechanics, carpenters, saddlers, etc., would make Moola Bulla the show place of the West and, in addition to meeting the station's own labour problems, would benefit the whole pastoral industry.⁷¹

As far as 'full-blood' Aboriginal male workers were concerned, Rhatigan was of the opinion that little needed be done for them, apart from a general improvement in their living conditions, because they were 'perfectly happy and contented' as stockmen on stations, 'which would experience great difficulty in functioning without their labour...'⁷²

An issue which had been raised in the late 1930s and which was again a subject of discussion between the manager of Moola Bulla and the department during the mid to late 1940s, continued to be a cause for administrative concern in the 1950s. This was the issue of managing 'half-caste' and 'full-blood' Aboriginal people at the same institution. This issue was clearly apparent in McBeath's first report. Bray had earlier written to George in 1944 that the provision of full institutional facilities at Moola Bulla should be restricted to 'full-bloods' and that 'native children with white blood in their veins' ought to be sent to a new and separate institution proposed for the West Kimberley, where he considered they could be more easily administered away from the 'detrimental' influence of 'full-bloods'.⁷³ A similar argument was made by McBeath in 1950:

I might mention that educational aspects will never be completely successful at this station until it is possible to transfer the camp children to special institutional accommodation and thus remove them from the camp influence of the adult full-bloods, parents and otherwise. This same influence, although often arising from the love of the parents, and others, for the child, is completely undesirable from our standards and can only delay the progress of the child to such an extent that it becomes retrogression. Nomadic habits and tendencies must be eliminated if the child is to be given a sense of

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Moola Bulla native station file No. 993/332/28

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responsibility sufficient to take its place in the community both economically and in other respects.⁷⁴

McBeath also referred in his first report to staffing, by which he meant both the unsuitability of some staff and the impossibility of securing the services of a competent head stockman, with the result that he was compelled to take on a considerable amount of additional responsibility. Missionary activities at the station had ceased during the war. A visitor from the United Aborigines Mission had conducted religious services at Moola Bulla in July 1949 and McBeath considered that the station badly needed the services of what he called a 'Missionary-Welfare Worker'.

By 1951, over 230 Aboriginal people lived at Moola Bulla. Cottage accommodation for 'half-caste families' was well under way and ablution blocks were being constructed. A spinifex shed was constructed for junior school classes and Aboriginal employees had been engaged in re-timbering and stockyard construction. Middleton reported that:

The natives in the area are encouraged by the educational facilities offered to their children and an improved approach to their welfare. Perhaps their response to these improvements can be gauged by the fact that no police action at the station was necessitated during the year. It is a credit to them that such a large concentration of people can be so law abiding.⁷⁵

Improvements to the station continued during 1952, with educational activities being given the highest priority by McBeath. The number of children in the school had increased to 73. Sewing classes provided for the older girls by a young Aboriginal woman of mixed descent were proving popular and successful and plans for some form of technical education for the boys were being developed. McBeath had introduced organised recreational activities at the station, including basketball, cricket, darts and weekly sound pictures. He reported: 'All these sports and functions are greatly enjoyed by the people here.'⁷⁶ As far as employment was concerned, McBeath's remarks reflect not only the continuing significance of Aboriginal labour on the station, but also prevailing attitudes about the way in which work value and remuneration were measured according to skin colour and the extent of the mixture of 'black' and 'white' blood:

All 19 adult male castes are employed in the various sections of the institution, or Station side as stockmen, mechanics, carpenters, yard builders, fencers or trainees the rate of remuneration being according to ability and aptitude, and all are very satisfactory in their particular branch of employment ...prior to my taking over, the caste person was treated in a similar manner to the bush type of native.

As in the past the male full bloods are mostly engaged on stock work, the balance performing such duties as pumping, gardening, fencing, yard-building, general labouring, hygiene, etc., and the younger ones as trainees in the various sections... I have endeavoured to place both caste and full-blood youths in employment for which they appear best-suited, and not allocated according to rule of thumb methods... The old view of stock work for boys, and domestic service for the girls without any exception has been well and

⁷⁴ AR 1950.

⁷⁵ AR 1951.

⁷⁶ AR 1952.

truly exploded... the native can be very capable if only given the opportunity and training when young enough to absorb instruction.⁷⁷

McBeath noted that a general wages scale had been implemented at Moola Bulla at rates ranging from ten shillings per week for trainees to award wages. He ensured that all wages were paid in cash or by cheque, deploring the practice generally followed on other stations at that time of extending credit to Aboriginal employees through the station store.

Drought was experienced in the Kimberley in the early 1950s and efforts were made at Moola Bulla to improve the water supply. By 1953, over 260 Aboriginal people lived at the station. Given the optimism expressed in published reports, various schemes being proposed and the improvements being effected at this time, Middleton's recommendation in 1954 to close Moola Bulla comes as nothing short of surprising. The official reasons which the Commissioner gave for his recommendation were as follows:

It has long been felt desirable that this Department should be relieved of the responsibility for the administration and management of pastoral and agricultural properties, mainly because it was found that such responsibilities have seriously hampered and curtailed the functions and duties of the department's welfare officers stationed on these properties.⁷⁸

Accordingly, Middleton stated, six such establishments had been disposed of over the previous five years. As far as Moola Bulla was concerned, the Commissioner noted that:

this 1,100,000 acre cattle station has been an administrative bug-bear for some considerable time...the management of such a huge property...has imposed on the welfare and clerical staff of the department a crushing and disproportionate burden of work and responsibility. The long drought condition...over the past two or three years...made the situation quite unbearable and a strong recommendation was made to the Hon. Minister for Native Welfare urging that the department be relieved of the responsibility of the cattle station and that the institutional section of the settlement be transferred to a new site adjacent to the new Hall's Creek township.⁷⁹

Middleton anticipated that all employable Aboriginal people from Moola Bulla would find work on stations locally and that his department would then only have institutional responsibility for indigent adults and children. Cabinet agreed to set up a committee to report on Middleton's recommendation which, at its first meeting, agreed on five specific points. These points are noteworthy on a number of counts, not the least of which are the virtual absence of reference to the Aboriginal occupants and the mention of the issue of oil and mineral exploration as a factor involved in the decision to close Moola Bulla:

1. That Moola Bulla as a native cattle station and welfare institution should be closed.
2. That the Native Reserve be cancelled and the land handed back to the Lands Department, less such portion of it as may be required by the Native Affairs Department.
3. That the Lands Department appraise the property and stock and have the land sub-divided into areas suitable for re-selection under pastoral lease, subject to payment for improvements and excision of an area not exceeding 10,000 acres for Native Affairs purposes.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ AR 1954.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

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4. During the transitional period the Lands Department to manage property and dispose of stock in collaboration with the Native Affairs Department.

5. If the foregoing recommendations are adopted, the work of the Mines Department in regard to oil and mineral research will be considerably simplified.⁸⁰

The speed with which the decision to dispose of Moola Bulla was reached was in marked contrast both to the way in which policy had been implemented in earlier years at Moola Bulla and to the way in which proposals to transfer the institutional section of the settlement were to proceed.

In two sections of his 1955 annual report headed 'Moola Bulla and the Kimberleys' and 'Natives and Publicity', Middleton attempted to answer criticism being levelled at his department through the press from a variety of organisations and individuals. This report is remarkable in its expressions of contempt for what Middleton variously called 'destructive whites'; 'uninformed, vexatious busy-bodies'; 'enemies of the State'; 'parasites' and 'social non-descripts'. He dismissed the criticism as the work of 'communist stirrers' (among whom he singled out Don McLeod) and proceeded to justify the decision to dispose of Moola Bulla on the grounds that it was, among other things, in the best interests of the Aborigines. He maintained that the station had outlived its usefulness and 'was no better fitted to train young natives to stock work than any other Kimberley station'.⁸¹

Despite previous agreements that the welfare needs of Aboriginal people from Moola Bulla would be adequately safeguarded and despite the assurances of Mr and Mrs Goldman, the successful tenderers for the property, that everyone working and residing on the property would be kept on, and maintained,⁸² the fact was that when the Goldmans took possession of Moola Bulla in July 1955, the Aboriginal population was evicted. Middleton's Annual Report for 1956 refers to the influx of 'Moola Bulla evacuees' to the United Aborigines' Mission in Fizroy Crossing (see map) and quotes the words of a missionary who, he said, was given less than twenty-four hours' notice of their arrival:

Early in July approximately one hundred and fifty-seven people arrived from the Moola Bulla Government settlement. The increase was overwhelming at first, but all measured up to the extra work and responsibility and so the job of settling in was accomplished. Tents were flown in by Native Welfare and extra food stuffs arrived within a few days, thus temporary accommodation and dining facilities were arranged.

Many were the telegrams received from the managers of cattle and sheep stations throughout the Kimberleys, seeking employees. We arranged for workers to go to stations between Derby and Hall's Creek and further. The demand was so great that not all the stations could be supplied with labour.⁸³

The whole incident received wide media coverage and was the focus of debate in state parliament. The Department of Native Welfare was criticised for mishandling the situation and a number of groups and individuals protested against what had happened. For example, the Victorian Branch of the Council for Aboriginal Rights wrote to the department as follows:

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² AR 1955.

⁸³ AR 1956.

[You have] been guilty of a great breach of trust as far as the Aborigines are concerned. The property should never have been sold at all, but having determined that you would do so, it is unbelievable that no business-like arrangements were made with the new owners regarding the large numbers of Aborigines living there. As it is just not possible that any government department conduct its affairs in such an inefficient manner, there is apparently some more sinister reason for this neglect. We wish to protest most forcefully against your inexcusable behaviour in this matter and request that you take immediate steps to provide decent facilities for these people in their own district.⁸⁴

In a letter dated 18 June 1955, the Labor Women's Organisation (Perth) wrote to the Commissioner of Native Welfare asking:

what benefits the natives who have improved the reserve by their labour have received, or will receive, from the benefits of the sale?⁸⁵

Debate concerning the sale of Moola Bulla continued intermittently for several years, the issue occasionally providing politicians with material to criticise their opposition. Many of the questions asked at the time remain unanswered. It is difficult to see in what ways the view of the station as being 'for the benefit of the Aborigines', which was expressed at the time of its establishment, reiterated at intervals over the years and again at the time of its eventual sale, was ever, or could ever, have been realised. Aboriginal people who lived at Moola Bulla over the years had very little choice in the circumstances. For many people of the Kija language group, it was their traditional country. Other people were forcibly removed or detained there. Many were born on the station, while others died and were buried there. The experiences of Aboriginal people at Moola Bulla station reflect the authoritarian, institutional regime to which they were subject, yet also show that people retain some positive memories of life at the settlement. Aboriginal people adapted to changing administrative and managerial requirements, developing strategies aimed at either accommodating to, or resisting, such requirements by drawing on aspects of their own cultural traditions and social organisation.

Aboriginal people contributed to the viability and profitability of the station, as they had done elsewhere in the pastoral industry,⁸⁶ and to that extent they certainly 'worked' Moola Bulla. But they were never consulted about policy decisions which directly affected them, nor did they benefit from improvements to, or the sale of, the property. The following comments typify Aboriginal sentiments about Moola Bulla:

Oh, real good place Moola Bulla was before, sorry we lost that place. Don't know why they sold that place. Break Aboriginal heart, yeh, Moola Bulla got everything because the white man grow that place up, you know, cattle and everything like that... Aborigines done most job in that place, not white people. Aboriginal done a lot of yard building, fence, they done everything in that station, not most the white people. Yes, we bin sorry we left that place. Don't know why welfare mob sold that place... We like to get Moola Bulla

⁸⁴ Moola Bulla native station file 993.3/53.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Berndt and Berndt 1987.

Policy and Practice at Moola Bulla

back...that what we thinking about... Moola Bulla better country than this one. Good place, plenty bush tucker as well.⁸⁷

Examining archival materials and taking account of Aboriginal reminiscences makes it difficult to refute the conclusion that Aboriginal people did not receive any special benefit from policies developed and practices employed at Moola Bulla. The real beneficiaries, both short and long term, of Moola Bulla's existence as a 'native cattle station' which was worked by Aboriginal people, were the Kimberley pastoral industry and the state government treasury.

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⁸⁷ Transcript of oral history (Colin Barrett) taken by Audrey Bolger at No.1 Reserve, Hall's Creek, 17 March 1982.

CECIL COOK, SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT AND 'HALF-CASTES' IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY 1927-1939

Tony Austin

Dr Cecil Evelyn Cook was Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory between 1927 and 1939. In the face of a widespread eugenicist view that Australian Half-castes¹ were to be counted among the 'unfit' of Australian society, Cook sought to develop a means of dealing with the Half-caste 'problem' in the NT.

A number of coalescing elements of the confusing intellectual ferment known as 'Social Darwinism' are of significance for an interpretation of Cook's work. Much was said about race and about the place of Aborigines in a racial hierarchy. The emergence of the eugenics movement resulted in a good deal of scientific and pseudo-scientific thought about the effects of miscegenation and the place of people of mixed 'blood'. Opinions about how young people of mixed descent were best brought up were influenced by the views of the emerging psychology branch of the medical profession about the nature of the juvenile and juvenile delinquency. Their upbringing was influenced also by the views of social reformers about the role of state and philanthropic institutions in the care of delinquent, neglected and intellectually handicapped youth. A marriage of the emerging, interlocking sciences of anthropology, psychology and eugenics with the evangelical progressivism of urban social reformers, resulted in extreme controls over the lives of many young people, and not least NT Half-castes.

Northern Territory legislation

Formal recognition of the Half-caste 'problem' was provided in the Aborigines Act of 1910, progressively strengthened in the period to 1939. The Ordinance differentiated little in its provisions between Half-castes and other Aborigines and the stultifying controls exercised over people's lives applied to both groups. However, Full-blood people would remain subject to the provisions of the Ordinance for life. Half-caste males, at age eighteen, could aspire to significantly improved rights if raised in an institution, by Half-caste parents considered to be 'civilised', or by parents one of whom was European or Asian. In law, the only qualification to full citizen rights was that adults could not consume alcohol. Adult females remained under guardianship unless legally married to, and living with, someone 'substantially of European origin or descent'. Moreover, the Chief Protector could resume guardianship over any adult if, in his opinion, it became necessary or desirable in the presumed interests of an individual for him to do so.

Two homes were established for Half-caste children. The popular and bureaucratic belief was held that Half-castes deserved, as a consequence of the European part of their ancestry, a

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¹ The term 'half-caste' is perjorative and is used often to differentiate unnecessarily and unhelpfully between Aboriginal people. It is used here, however, since, in law, a distinction was made during the period under consideration which had major implications for the way different groups of Aborigines were treated. It, and other terms such as Full-blood, White and Quadroon, are written as proper nouns.

chance to assimilate to White society. This, it was assumed, could happen only if they were removed from all Aboriginal influences. Attention concentrated particularly on girls - out of some vague respect for women, less than vague disgust at the thought of women with White 'blood' cohabiting with Aboriginal men, and in the knowledge that Half-caste girls were prized as casual sexual partners by White males in a preponderantly male North.

Schooling would equip children taken from their mothers at an early age with skills to enter the workforce, also at an early age - the girls as domestic servants and the boys, in the main, as stock workers. This would enable them eventually to make their way as self-sufficient citizens in a White Australia, and meanwhile would assure White residents of a cheap workforce. The last factor was to stand in the way of every major proposal to improve the upbringing of those in the Darwin home. Suggestions that children's welfare would be better catered for by off-shore missions away from the corrupting influences of urban areas, and recurring proposals for the establishment of industrial settlements - again in remote parts - were not acted on for cost reasons, but also because of the adverse effects on employers.

Living conditions and schooling in the homes were poor. Calls for some form of industrial training to make the boys employable when pushed out of the home at age fourteen were ignored. What passed as training for domestic service for girls involved little more than doing the jobs needed to keep the home and its inmates clean and orderly; occasionally some needlework was taught. Former inmates of the Darwin institution recall harsh discipline, wholly inadequate schooling and meals that were poor both qualitatively and quantitatively.²

At the Bungalow in Alice Springs, conditions were shocking, a cause for much media and parliamentary comment and a string of official and semi-official reports all of which recommended major change. Even by the often primitive standards of 'Centralian' housing, the iron sheds that passed for dormitories, kitchen and dispensary were appalling. Education and training were in many ways poorer than in Darwin. As in Darwin, vocational training was virtually non-existent. However, a considerable number of girls were sent to service in South Australia and a number of boys obtained positions on pastoral properties in the NT and South Australia. Only in 1933, when the children moved to the recently vacated Telegraph Station, could living conditions be described as anything like adequate. And even then, on sanitary and space grounds, there were constant official calls for the erection of a purpose-built institution. Commonwealth parsimony ensured that none was ever constructed.

Anthropology, officialdom and the Half-Caste

Aborigines were still, by World War Two considered to be irremediably child-like and insufficiently intelligent to adapt to the dominant culture. Women were said to be naturally promiscuous and insufficiently caring about their children. There was, however, some heightening of scientific regard between the wars: by the 1920s race scientists were increasingly inclined to compare the capacity of Aborigines with the 'feeble-minded' of White society rather than with Neanderthal humanity.

² Valentine McGinness and Daisy Ruddick, personal communication. Herbie Laughton says much the same thing about the Alice Springs home. See 'Breakfast was one slice of bread: A "Half-caste" boy in the Kahlin Compound, told by Val McGinness to Kathy Mills and Tony Austin', *Northern Perspective* 11 (1), 1988; 'Talking about cruel Things': Girls' life in the Kahlin Compound, by Daisy Ruddick as told to Kathy Mills and Tony Austin, *Hecate*, 15 (1), 1989.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropologists in Australia had little to say about Aborigines of mixed descent until the 1930s and then the pronouncements of men like the eminent Professor A.P. Elkin and a young, not yet eminent W.E.H. Stanner, were marked by some confusion. Administrators would have to make policies for Half-castes primarily on the basis of beliefs born of their own observations about them and about Full-blood people, community reactions and perhaps some knowledge of scientific theories abroad. Those studies were, for the most part, carried out by psychologists with an interest in anthropology at a time when there was relatively little differentiation between the work of anthropologists, medical psychologists and biological scientists.

Few commentators argued with the contention that the European part of Half-castes' ancestry meant that their potentialities under White leadership were superior to those of other Aborigines. As Baldwin Spencer put it, not unambiguously:

The mother is of a very low intellectual grade, while the father most often belongs to the coarser and more unrefined members of higher races. The consequence of this is that the children of such parents are likely to be, in most cases, of much greater intellectual calibre than the more intelligent natives, though, of course, there are exceptions to this.³

But, while they were superior to other Aborigines, they remained well below the level of Whites. Elkin noted, a decade and a half after Spencer's pronouncement, 'those whites who have worked with half-castes and blacks all admit the superiority of the former'.⁴

It was most commonly argued in the NT, both by officials and other Whites - some of them sympathetic to the plight of Half-castes - that they somehow inherited 'the evil tendencies of both black and white intermingled and intensified'.⁵ Visitors to the North took home with them the northern view that even 'the most sophisticated, women especially, will listen to the call of the wild',⁶ that 'Breed and personality will show...in spite of [a favourable] environment',⁷ that 'whatever is done for the half-caste must be done with a full realisation of the primitive emotional instincts, inherited from the black forebears, which are likely to persist for a long time'.⁸

Popular vilification was largely a consequence of shame about the thought of Whites mixing their 'blood' with that of allegedly inferior Blacks. It was a result of guilt about the prospect of people of White ancestry living in degraded circumstances with Aboriginal people. It resulted also from fear that their supposedly superior White ancestry rendered Half-castes more capable of acts of resistance to the settlers and of assuming a leadership role in such action. This demeaning regard received sustenance from the pronouncements of much of the scientific community and particularly the findings of eugenicists abroad.

Eugenics

Eugenicists commonly asserted that 'dysgenic imbalance' in society was the result of the greater incidence of physical, mental and moral degeneracy inherited by members of the lower classes. So it was that this social stratum included many of the criminal, alcoholic, pauper and 'defective' elements that were expanding in such a way as to threaten to

³ Spencer 1913:2. See also SAPP, No. 26 of 1913, Elkin 1929a:28, 1929b:40-44.

⁴ Elkin 1929a:28.

⁵ Elkin Papers, Litchfield to Secretary SPCC, 11 August 1930.

⁶ Terry 1927:201.

⁷ Wilkins 1928:223.

⁸ McCann 1959:79.

overwhelm the 'superior' classes.⁹ The need to prevent 'degenerates' from breeding, while encouraging the propagation of people with 'desirable' traits, warranted 'scientific' state intervention in the lives of both the degenerate and those considered potentially debased.

Leaders in the movement, like Francis Galton, Karl Pearson and Madison Grant, were among those arguing also for the replacement of 'inferior' races by the 'superior', with Aborigines ranked among the 'very lowest species'.¹⁰

In the period to the mid-1920s, there was much scientific adherence to notions of reversion and racial inferiority in people of mixed descent. It was argued that 'miscegenation commonly spells disharmony - disharmony of physical, mental and temperamental qualities ... A hybridised people are a badly put together people and a dissatisfied, restless, ineffective people'.¹¹

Disharmonic procreation was said to result in physical abnormality¹² and a greater incidence of disease in children, delinquency, alcoholism, prostitution and feeble-mindedness.¹³ The more unlike one another the races, the more undesirable was miscegenation.¹⁴ Even those who took issue with this position, were inclined to assert that the reason for feebleness in the off-spring of mixed mating was not racial mix, but the fact that the parents were 'diseased, licentious, or feeble-minded'.¹⁵ This kind of conclusion played into the hands of those who regarded Aboriginal parents as suffering from all these disabilities.

American IQ studies showing the superiority of Anglo-Saxon immigrants over Negroes,¹⁶ also showed Mulattoes - by virtue of their Western European heredity - to be intellectually superior to Negroes, but inferior to Whites.¹⁷ This was corroborated by studies elsewhere, some of which indicated that intelligence in children was commensurate with the amount of White 'blood' they possessed.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the disharmonies evident in racially mixed people were apparent also in the mental realm: a greater number than among either Blacks or Whites were 'muddled and wuzzle-headed'.¹⁹ These conclusions appeared to be supported in Australia by limited testing during the mid 1920s and 1930s by Fry and Pülleine at Hermannsburg. They compared the intelligence of a small number of Full-blood and Half-caste children 'in groups of sexes of equivalent age and length of time at school' and cautiously concluded:

The most definite result of this grouping was to show a superiority of scholastic attainment by the senior boys with white blood over that of their full-blooded

⁹ McCallum 1982:20.

¹⁰ Madison 1916:28; cf. Boaz 1938:144, 157.

¹¹ Davenport 1917:56; see also Stoddard 1925:120.

¹² Jennings 1930:280-3.

¹³ Mjoen 1921:50-2.

¹⁴ Gates 1929:335; see also Bailey 1924:17.

¹⁵ Castle 1903:234.

¹⁶ For example Brigham in Haller 1963:151; see also summary of research findings in East 1923:134-7, Viteles:1928; for an example of the spread of this information in Australia, see Elkin 1929b.

¹⁷ For example, Castle 1926:153. For Hawaiian evidence showing similar intermediate results, see Gulick 1937:43-5.

¹⁸ For example, Eells 1933, Hunter and Sommermier 1922, Garth 1922, 1927.

¹⁹ Davenport and Steggerda 1929, Jennings 1930:284-6.

companions. It is tempting to draw a conclusion that the full-blooded children are retarded in mental growth with increasing age to a greater degree than children with some degree of European ancestry. The numbers are too few to warrant this deduction however.²⁰

An even more limited, though perhaps no less influential, study by Taylor and Jardine, corroborated the findings.²¹

The most extreme wing of the eugenics movement - that which, among other things, advocated sterilising the 'unfit' in society - found little support in Australia. Australian eugenicists appear generally to have acknowledged some environmental influences on individuals' make-up. Moreover, eugenics in Australia was in decline by the late 1920s and through the 1930s as professional opinion increasingly conceded the influence of environment. Eugenic assumptions about the adverse biological effects of race mixture were seen by a growing number of scientists and others to be backed by inadequate evidence.²² But conclusions denying the inferiority of racially mixed groups were rejected by many White Australians, especially those with large numbers of Half-castes in their midst, who clung to the earlier scientific justification they had found for their prejudices. In the NT, Half-castes comprised 13.6% of the non-Aboriginal population in 1938-39, and in Darwin and Alice Springs the Homes brought the proportion of Half-castes to Europeans to 16.4% and 57% respectively.²³

Progressivism, psychology and institutionalisation

Eugenics was an extreme element of the broad, complex movement of progressivism which took root in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia. Increased state intervention was justified in the interests of improving national strength through various means of social engineering aimed at making society more 'efficient'.²⁴ Progressivists, who did not hold with eugenic views, nonetheless shared a concern about rates of juvenile crime and the alleged spread of immorality among the young, which was thought to endanger middle class power. The implications of this for the treatment of young Half-castes was profound.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the types of behaviour said to suggest delinquent proclivities proliferated and became causes for legislative palliatives.²⁵ Alleged juvenile moral decay was sheeted home largely to working class parents said to be careless about, neglectful of, and to have less concern for, family.²⁶ Medical judgements were sought increasingly by officials looking into the condition of the Australian working class. As those judgements failed to give working class mothers much credit for desirable child-rearing practices, it was concluded that parents would be happy enough to abandon children declared 'neglected' or otherwise destined to delinquency, to state care designed to manufacture some semblance of the ideology of 'family' critical to progressivist notions of the moral society. The implications for Aboriginal parenthood are clear.

²⁰ Fry and Pulleine 1931:155-6.

²¹ Taylor and Jardine 1924:277-8.

²² Haller 1963:181; Elkin 1929b:42-4.

²³ Donovan 1981:1.

²⁴ Roe 1984.

²⁵ Barbalet 1983:193ff.

²⁶ Barbalet 1983:195, Kociumbas 1983:chs 1, 5, 6; May 1973:23-4; Reiger 1985:ch.2.

From the 1890s, psychiatrists were prominent among doctors publishing works on eugenics and ways of reducing the number of hereditarily unfit in the population.²⁷ However, an insistence on treatment - frequently in institutions - through re-education of what were seen as maladjusted personalities,²⁸ implied that it was a combination of hereditary and environmental factors that resulted in mental deficiency and disease. During the 1920s and 1930s behaviourism caused psychologists to wrestle with the problem of assigning weight to heredity and environment as determinants of delinquent behaviour.

But lingering notions of instinct psychology added weight to the practice of consigning children to homes. The proposal that the habits of their remote ancestors had become, in delinquents, driving 'instincts', 'tendencies' or 'inner forces'²⁹ and that instinct existed in its purest form in the most 'primitive' societies,³⁰ was entirely in keeping with prevailing views about the nature of the Half-caste. There was considerable biomedical acceptance of the Lamarckian recapitulation theory that the various stages in the mental development of the child retraced in its major outlines the mental history of the race from 'primitive' times.³¹ As G. Stanley Hall explained, 'hard conditions like homelessness, imperfect food and health, and...sexual precocity' in adolescence were likely to result in reversion to or arrest at the 'savage' state of childhood.³² Cyril Burt explained the 'anthropological conception of moral degeneracy' which showed some link between defects in intelligence and arrest in moral development, suggesting 'that the moral defective is a biological throw-back or reversion - a return by some freak of inheritance, to a primitive or even pre-human type'. The tell-tale facial features that typified these 'degenerates' were those of the 'savage'.³³ Segregation was recommended. The theory remained acceptable among Australian anthropologists well into the 1920s.³⁴

Medical opinion was inclined to see education as a palliative for mental defectiveness and the threat it posed for social order.³⁵ Medically defined levels of mental ability became important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and children who failed to conform to the standards currently defined as normal for specific age and gender groups were classified as physical and mental 'defectives'; they were a menace to the 'healthy' children; their sexual instincts were likely to be precociously developed and many were of a criminal type; their proclivities were detrimental to the well-being of the nation.³⁶ Special institutions for the sub-normal - a label that encompassed an astonishing number of school children - providing the low-level general education and training that would typify Half-caste homes in the NT to the mid-30s, were urged as a means of helping children and so reducing crime and immorality.³⁷

27 Garton 1986:25.

28 Cashen 1980:73ff; McCallum 1982:30.

29 Cashen 1980:76; Stocking 1962:246.

30 Jones 1980:127.

31 Stocking 1962:244.

32 Hall 1915:45, 47.

33 Burt 1969:39, 302.

34 Gower 1902; Rudd 1909:765-6; Pitt-Rivers 1923:499.

35 McCallum 1982:18; see also 'Report of the Committee on the Feeble-minded', *Australasian Medical Congress Transactions*, 1914.

36 Kociumbas 1986:27.

37 See, for example, McCreery 1908, Sutton 1911, Smith 1912:3-7.

The link of Half-castes with delinquents appeared to be demonstrated with the publication in 1917 of an account by S.D. Porteus of intelligence testing he conducted with delinquent boys and Aboriginal children. The latter, most of them of mixed descent, compared more than favourably with delinquent group, but were shown to be markedly inferior to 'normal' White children; it followed, by implication, that they were predisposed to delinquent behaviour.³⁸

Homes for children.

As astonishing number of children were considered to be in need of institutional care. Evangelical Christians were at the forefront of efforts to remove children from their kin and confine them where they could be educated and trained out of their alleged delinquent proclivities.

Institutions for orphan or destitute children assumed complete guardianship of inmates until age eighteen³⁹ They were poorly staffed and conditions were harsh, both by today's standards and those of the time. Contact with parents, when known, was infrequent and strictly controlled in the supposed interests of children's moral welfare. As well as inculcating middle class morality, the schools in institutions aimed to develop useful members of the labour force, literate and skilled in a trade or other occupation. Apprenticeship for the boys and domestic service for girls - under exploitative conditions - were the norm.

While the actual range and number of institutions grew during the early twentieth century, the pretexts for removing children from their families proliferated and many more children were committed to state care, a smaller percentage of them was being consigned to institutions. A growing belief in the importance of the environment in children's upbringing had brought large, impersonal, barracks-like institutions into disrepute by the time the Half-caste homes were established in the NT Boarding-out schemes were introduced, under which destitute or neglected children were placed in selected families as foster children to be brought up in what were considered 'natural' conditions. There was an increased tendency for institutionalisation to be seen as a last resort. Further, those institutions that remained - in fact which proliferated - became somewhat more humane and a cottage system began to emerge. There was a growing official recognition of the need to provide as much of a normal home environment as possible as well as education, social, moral and religious training - not just the bare necessities of life.⁴⁰

Cook and the Half-castes

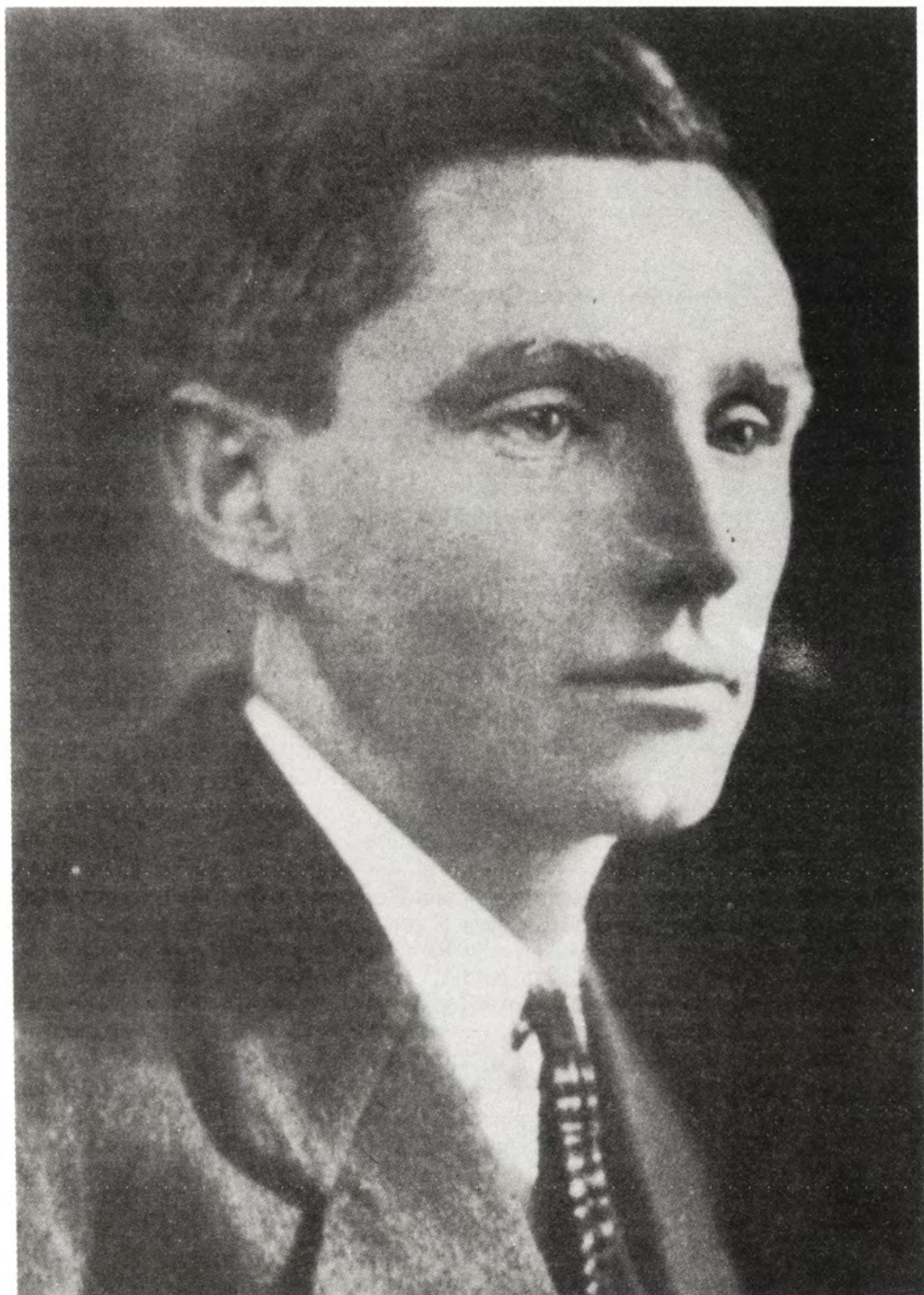
Cecil Cook commenced as Chief Protector in February 1927, at the age of twenty-nine. His family had migrated from England when he was an infant and he grew up in central west Queensland where his father worked as a general practitioner in Barcaldine.

After studying Medicine at the University of Sydney, some of his earliest professional experience was as Medical Officer in the Hughenden and Longreach hospitals. He later took a post-graduate Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and spent three years as Wandsworth Research Fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. As part of the work of the fellowship, he was appointed in 1925 to conduct an investigation

³⁸ Patens 1917.

³⁹ Much work has been done on the development of Australian institutions by, for instance, Brian Dickey, John Ramsland, Noeline Williamson and Elizabeth Windschuttle.

⁴⁰ Dickey 1977:177ff., Davey 1956:41.



Dr C.E. Cook, 1923. Courtesy Ms Robyn McIntyre.



'The Bungalow' (original building in Alice Springs), H. Basedow, 1921, Australian Archives ACT.

into the epidemiology of leprosy in the NT and Western Australia. The following year he conducted an investigation into hookworm in North Queensland.

Cook's work in the NT was noticed by John McLaren, Secretary for Home and Territories - the Commonwealth Department responsible for the Territory. McLaren was impressed by the young man's work and played a hand in his appointment.⁴¹

Cecil Cook trained and matured during the period of progressivist intellectual ferment dubbed by Michael Roe 'the onslaught of vitalism'.⁴² It is clear that he was heavily influenced by that ferment and carried with him to Darwin a progressivist selection of the views of psychologists, anthropologists, geneticists and eugenicists about the racial hygienic fate of Australian society. But he appears to have kept abreast of recent research in the area of race mixing. His work in the North coincided with a period of growing scientific attack

⁴¹ McLaren to Pearce, 19 June 1925, AA CRS A1 28/8706. For details of earlier appointments, see AANT A659 39/1/643, Park to McLaren, 9 September 1924, McLaren to Park, 14 October 1924; A1 37/15140, Kragen's notes of interview with Cook, 15 June 1927.

⁴² Roe.:1984:1.

on eugenic assumptions about the adverse biological effects of race mixture. This is evident in the policies he pursued.

On the other hand, the crusade-like paternalism of the progressives⁴³ is nowhere more apparent than in Cook's policies. The nationalist concern for racial well-being, translated into Australia's White Australia Policy, was perhaps the most vital driving force in Cook's policy making. This is apparent in his preoccupation with the welfare of women rather than men. But that, in any case, was a hallmark of the progressives - a reverence for women as mothers, a concern for their welfare and their children's and a major concern with venereal diseases so potentially inimical to White racial welfare.⁴⁴ In addition, Cook was concerned that a predominantly Coloured northern population would comprise a left-wing revolutionary element in Australia. That was entirely the kind of thinking that helped motivate the proponents of institutionalisation and the progressivist upholders of efficient state control of those parts of the population in need of welfare assistance. Notions of *laissez-faire* in the nation's affairs, long since on the wane, suffered further with the onset of the Depression. That disaster began only two years after Cook commenced work in Darwin.

Cook's 1931 view of the fact of a growing number of people of mixed descent never really changed and his policy of 'breeding out the colour' by inducing Half-caste women to marry European men is the best-known element of his welfare policies: it represents an ultimate eugenicist solution.

The women could not, he believed, be expected to have any interest in marriage to Half-caste males their own age because of the difference in their education and upbringing as a consequence of a policy, before his time, of bringing in to the Homes mainly girls. By marrying Whites, the women would themselves stop bearing illegitimate mixed-descent babies, and the children they did have would be fair-skinned and possess genetic attributes conducive to good health in the tropics. Moreover, marriage would prevent White males from cohabiting with Aboriginal women. Cook put it this way:

The excess white male population living in rural districts, deprived at present of the company of women of its own race, is denied any opportunity of making homes. These men live, therefore, for the most part in camps many of which are a very low order and closely approximate to those favoured by the aboriginal. It is only a matter of time under these conditions before cohabitation with the aboriginal female follows. This cohabitation is attended by moral, economic and physical deterioration of the individual which react unfavourably upon the development of the Territory generally. Many such men would be prepared to marry half-caste females and make decent homes. Provided the girl has been reared to a moderately high standard there can be no objection to such a mating resulting as it does in the white man rearing a white family in good circumstances instead of a half-caste family under degrading conditions. Experience shows that the half-caste girl can, if properly brought up, easily be elevated to a standard where the fact of her marriage to a white will not contribute to his deterioration. On the contrary under conditions in the Territory where such marriages are socially accepted among a certain section of the population, the results are more beneficial than otherwise since the deterioration of the white is thereby arrested and the local population is stabilised by the building of homes. It is not to be supposed that such marriages are likely to produce an inferior generation. On the contrary a large proportion of the half-caste female population is derived from

⁴³ Ibid.:9-10.

⁴⁴ Ibid.:13ff.



Sleeping quarters, 'The Bungalow' (Jay Creek), 1928. Photograph by Dr W.D. Walker.



Institutionalised children at 'The Bungalow' (former Overland Telegraph Station), Alice Springs, 1934. Courtesy National Library of Australia.

CECIL COOK, SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT AND 'HALF-CASTES'

the best white stock in the country whilst the aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value - intelligence, stamina, resource, high resistance to the influences of tropical environment and the character of pigmentation which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European.⁴⁵

Another dimension to the problem was the need to eliminate the breeding of Asian-Half-caste offspring which created 'a position of incalculable future menace to purity of race in tropical Australia'.⁴⁶

Cook's increasing concern during the 1930s is demonstrated by the almost comic fretting about the nature of the racial mix of school children. In annual reports to 1928, it was sufficient to record the number of Half-caste and Quadroon children and to differentiate those with Malay ancestry. Between 1933 and 1937 however, the school population was shown to include Octoroon, Quadroon, European-Aboriginal, Afghan-Aboriginal, Afghan-Half-caste-Afghan, Chinese-Aboriginal, Half-caste-Half-caste, Half-caste-Chinese-Half-caste, Half-caste-Chinese-Aboriginal, Malay-Half-caste, Aboriginal-Half-caste and Cingalese-Half-caste.

The government, said Cook, had to decide whether it wanted in the North a predominant and virile Coloured population living at White standards and competing with Whites on equal terms, a predominantly Coloured population regarded as an inferior section of the community competing with Whites on the basis of low wages and thereby eliminating White labour or an 'ever increasing coloured population of revolutionary frame of mind excluded by statute from industry and maintained on Government relief'.⁴⁷ His argument was decidedly shaky to the extent that he all but ignored the presence of Half-caste males in the marriage stakes. But he had a sure political instinct designed to make Canberra sit up and take notice.

The matter was sensitive politically, and Cook had to withstand criticism in the southern press, the House of Representatives and by southern welfare bodies and academics.⁴⁸ In the face of much contrary opinion⁴⁹ he insisted that there would be no atavism.

⁴⁵ Cook to Weddell, 27 June 1933, AA CRS A659 40/1/408.

⁴⁶ Cook to Morley, 28 April 1931 AA CRS A1 96/6595.

⁴⁷ Cook to Weddell, 27 June 1933. AA CRS A659, 30/1/408.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *Herald*, 8 June 1933 in AA CRS A659/40/1/408; A1 35/3951, Helen Baillie in 'Notes of Deputation Representing Aborigines and Various Associations Interested in Aboriginal Welfare Work, which Waited upon the Minister for the Interior at Commonwealth Offices Melbourne, on Wednesday, 23rd January 1935 at 2.30 p.m.'; E.J. Holloway article in *Herald*, 12 June 1934; Patrol Boat Captain Waterson quoted in *Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1939; A1 34/6710, Marriage of Half-Caste Women, nd, with copy of cable Giles to Brown, nd; A1 38/23077, Litchfield to Perkins, 21 December 1933; PD 28 June 1934, 1 August 1934.

⁴⁹ Stanner and Elkin were two of a number of people who considered that the incidence of regression - about which little was known in Australia - might offset attempts to eliminate colour: Elkin Papers, Box 68, File 145, newspaper cutting, nd, giving Elkin's view; AA CRS A659 40/1/408 cutting, *Sydney Sun*, 11 June 1933, 18 June 1933 for Stanner's opinion. Queensland's Chief Protector J.W. Bleakley was another: see AA CRS A1928 4/5, cutting *Daily Mail*, 7 June 1933, 8 June 1933, *Brisbane Courier*, 7 June 1933, *Telegraph*, 7 June 1933.

In 1938 Cook felt able to claim that, with few exceptions, marriages approved in the six years since the policy was implemented, had proved 'eminently successful'.⁵⁰ In fact though, Cook revealed that on the whole he was not fussy about whom the girls married when he informed the Administrator that 'general consent' was given to such marriages, but that formal approval could not be given to officiating clergymen in two cases where the proposed bridegrooms had not yet chosen their brides.⁵¹ There is evidence of girls jumping at the opportunity to marry a White man in order to get out of the Home; the success rate of such unions is said to have been low.⁵²

Cook's concern about 'revolutionary' elements in the population developed further as unemployment worsened during the Depression. Here was a difficulty he had early tried bravely and ambitiously to come to grips with. Without reference to Canberra, he induced the Government Resident in 1930 to promulgate the Apprentices (Half-castes) Regulations. Under its provisions, as amended following intense lobbying by pastoralists, the North Australian holder of an employment licence lost the entitlement to employ Half-caste youths under that licence. Instead, Half-castes between the ages of 16 and 21 could, with the approval of a protector, be apprenticed for up to two years to work in the cattle industry. Wages and other working conditions were improved considerably. The Chief Protector was given the power to order that for every ten, twelve or eighteen Aborigines employed on a station, one, two or three Half-caste apprentices respectively should be engaged. He had the power, however, to waive the requirement should the employment of Whites be adversely affected.

Few matters concerning Aborigines and Half-castes generated so much heat and voluminous correspondence. In three years of tortuous negotiations subsequently forced on him by Canberra, Cook argued that some kind of employment scheme was critical to the future of Australia's North.⁵³ He painted a picture of a Territory with a majority fast-breeding Coloured population in as few as fifteen or twenty years' time. They would be indolent, destitute unemployed providing 'a profitable field for revolutionary agitators and be numerically sufficiently strong to threaten the peace, order and good Government of the Territory'. Or they would compete as cheap labour displacing Whites from jobs. Either way, a dangerous situation would come about. Industrial and social unrest leading to racial conflict were inevitable, he said, in a small community like the NT. should the proportionately large Coloured population maintain different standards from Whites.

In spite of trenchant opposition from pastoralists, aghast at the principle involved and mindless of the small numbers, Cook, with the support of the North Australia Workers' Union and the churches, won the day.

There was never any real change in the kinds of employment considered appropriate for Half-caste people. In the case of the girls this can be explained in terms of society's view of

⁵⁰ Chief Protector, Annual Report 1937-8:24.

⁵¹ Cook to Weddell, 31 May 1932, A1 32/3578.

⁵² Barbara Bartells, NARU Seminar, 8 October 1987; Daisy Ruddick, pers. comm.; National Library of Australia, Manuscripts Collection, MSS 5574, Australian Inland Mission, (AIM) Box 187, Folder 3, North Australia Patrol (Darwin), Report on the Darwin situation from the point of view of the AIM, 26 June 1937 by Rev. C.T.F. Goy.

⁵³ The essence of the debate is contained in AA CRS A1 33/479, 'Extract from Notes of a Deputation from the Central Australian Graziers' Association to the Minister for the Interior at Stuart' 11 July 1932, 'Extract from Notes of a Deputation from Pastoral Representatives to the Minister for the Interior at Darwin' 24 July 1932, Allen to Parkhill, 24 June 1932. See also Austin in Stockley *ed* 1989:128-141.

their capacity and their place in life, on established practice and on Cook's desire to see them not make a career but rather play their part in breeding out colour. This, in turn, was in keeping with the progressivist view that the place of women was in the home raising healthy, well-adjusted children. There was, though, increased diligence in attempts to find Half-castes work with acceptable employers.⁵⁴ To Cook's credit, a nurse training scheme was implemented on a small scale and he won the right to negotiate a higher wage for young employees he considered worthy. On the other hand, the considerable control that had long been exercised over workers' earnings was strengthened further.

Cook also began - for the first time in the NT - to give serious thought to the employment needs of adult Half-castes. He was particularly concerned about women formerly living as destitutes and prostitutes in town and, in recent years, detained in the Kahlin Compound. But he was concerned also for men who had grown up in Darwin to compete in the unskilled market with a superfluity of White labour and most of whom were 'perennially destitute, a prey to agitators'.⁵⁵ There is insufficient space to provide detail; it suffices that while some of Cook's ideas were unrealistic, a sometimes successful effort was made to provide work.

Less enlightened is the tight control he sought always to exercise over the lives of adults. Cook argued strenuously against agitation by Half-caste people, supported by the North Australian Workers' Union, for exemption from the Ordinance.

At age twenty-one, unless the Chief Protector had concluded they were incapable of managing their own affairs, Half-castes obtained full citizenship rights with the one important proviso that they could not legally consume alcohol. It took eight years of pressure to have the Ordinance amended in 1936 to allow the Chief Protector to declare somebody to be no longer deemed a Half-caste. The northern Administration's opposition to exemption provides perhaps the clearest indication of its stultifying paternalism.

A vigorous advocate of Half-caste drinking rights, Cook pointed out, was the Communist Party. He and police chief Stretton, in a familiar refrain, saw the movement for full citizenship rights as a revolutionary plot whereby Half-castes would be 'enlisted by the Communists in their projected campaign of violence' in exchange for a campaign winning their rights⁵⁶ and any concession was 'liable to be hailed by that Party as a victory on behalf of the Half-caste and a service which should win the Party some prestige'. Moreover, by granting the 'privilege' to one section of the Half-caste community, it would worsen the already difficult task of controlling alcohol sales to those denied drinking privileges. The ensuing resentment in those remaining under the Chief Protector's control would obviate their having 'full confidence in that Officer as...guide, philosopher and friend'; this alienation of the Half-castes' imagined confidence in the Chief Protector was undesirable. But more to the point, Half-castes were 'improvident, careless and for the most part perennially destitute. Liberty to indulge legally in alcohol is calculated to aggravate their present distress'.⁵⁷ Indulgence risked 'social degradation for himself and actual bodily harm

⁵⁴ Chief Protector, Annual Report 1929-30:5, 1930-31:8.

⁵⁵ Cook to Weddell, 18 February 1933, AA CRS A1 33/4332.

⁵⁶ Comment by Dr Cook, CMO, North Australia, nd, Stretton to Weddell, 21 July 1931, Cook to Weddell, 20 July 1931; F1 39/408, Carrodus to Weddell, 10 August 1936, Stretton to Weddell, 18 August 1936, Kirkland to Weddell, 18 August 1936. A452 52/539.

⁵⁷ Comment by Dr Cook, CMO, North Australia, nd, Cook to Weddell, 20 July 1931. A452 52/539.

to the rest of the community'.⁵⁸ The same, of course, might have been said of many Whites. In fact it is likely that, given the opportunity, Cook would also have denied them drinking rights. Nevertheless, after a lengthy battle by a small group of determined Half-caste men, a concession was granted by Canberra. The new rule was administered cautiously and it was not uncommon for exemptions to be revoked. In practice, the change required people to make a conscious decision to foresake part of their heritage - to cease to associate with Aborigines or with Half-castes of whom authorities did not approve.

Cook remained a firm advocate of institutionalisation of children - and also of single, adult women. Early in his time in the NT the Chief Protector dismissed a suggestion that a cottage system of care be contemplated. While appearing to accept the principle, he argued that the morals of the senior girls precluded them from exercising a supervisory role in a cottage.⁵⁹ In later years, when he claimed to have solved the problem of immorality among inmates, he still failed to contemplate this more enlightened system of care. He was also unmoved by calls for the boarding out of Half-caste girls.⁶⁰

The only serious consideration given to boarding out related to Quadroons and Octoroons. Minister John Perkins appealed to families and institutions down south to take children in.⁶¹ But this Cook actively opposed, since it involved sending them interstate. Significant numbers of Quadroon females, married to Whites, would be a means of breeding out discernible colour in their offspring.⁶² In what amounted to a criticism of the efforts of the Half-caste Homes, and because they were considered to 'have more intelligence than cross-breeds with a preponderance of aboriginal blood',⁶³ school-age girls were sent to board at the Darwin Convent. There, authorities agreed, they would be provided with a better opportunity in life than if they stayed at the home.⁶⁴ In Alice Springs, where there was no convent, they remained at the Bungalow. Some of fairest looking children had been sent south in the past, though South Australian authorities looked askance at the practice. Now Cook argued for their retention in the Territory 'with a view to limiting factors of depopulation'.⁶⁵ For this reason, presumably, he also ended a long-standing practice of sending Alice Springs girls to work in Adelaide. In later years, Cook maintained that the Ordinance was not usually applied to Quadroons and Octoroons. However, he vehemently opposed suggestions that they not be covered by the legislation. As it happened, a Supreme Court ruling in 1937 deemed them not to be covered. Cook failed in an energetic attempt to have the Ordinance changed.⁶⁶

It is not possible here to detail Cook's attempt to induce Canberra to improve the quality of the Homes, which remained poor - worsened by overcrowding resulting from the

⁵⁸ Cook to Weddell, 12 August 1932, A452 52/540 file 2.

⁵⁹ Cook to Weddell, 3 October 1927 A659 39/1/15880.

⁶⁰ 'Memorandum by Members of the Board of Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide as to the Protection and Care of Aborigines', October 1931; Perkins to Cleland, 12 December 1932, EP Box 61, Item 73.

⁶¹ Details on A1 34/6800.

⁶² Cook to Weddell, 1 March 1929, 11 June 1929, A431 46/3026.

⁶³ Secretary Prime Minister's Department to Brown, 16 August 1930. A431 48/961.

⁶⁴ Weddell to Deane, 20 March 1931, Cook to Giles, 30 April 1934, Carrodus to Brown, 9 May 1934, Brown to Hensche, 11 September 1935, Weddell to Brown, 29 October 1935, A1 34/5541.

⁶⁵ Cook to Giles, 30 April 1934, A1 34/5541.

⁶⁶ Details on AANT F1 37/734; F1 39/408; NTAS F68, C25.

much more earnest effort Cook made to bring in children from rural areas. The attempt he did make is evidence of some faith in manipulation of the environment as a means of improving the minds and morals of Half-castes, even if he lacked sufficient faith to give more modern forms of care a try.

This faith is further shown by his perhaps belated efforts to improve schooling. Throughout the period to World War Two there was general agreement about the type of schooling that was most appropriate for the children. Education should embody a strong vocational element, though no real attempt was made to provide it. It was agreed equally that a modified curriculum should be taught in light of the children's presumed inherited intellectual defects and the environmental disadvantages of their past: moreover, there had long been deep suspicion among northerners about educated Aborigines and Half-castes, who were regarded as potential ring-leaders in crime and defiant behaviour. No doubt schooling also threatened the superior image Whites had of themselves.

The more Cook thought about it, however, the more he criticised both the notions of vocational training and a modified curriculum during the primary years. More - and more efficient - schooling was part of the progressives' platform:⁶⁷ the children, Cook insisted, were entitled to the same period of elementary education, based on the same curriculum, as Whites. This left room for only minimal vocational training which in any case, he believed, was most appropriately carried out on the job. He disagreed with the NSW Director of Education who considered Half-castes incapable either of education beyond Year 3 or of aspiring to full citizenship. Cook retorted that they could and would do better. They had the ability and, moreover, 'It is patently unreasonable to expect any person, especially a coloured one, whose education has stopped in the vicinity of the Third Grade standard, successfully to compete for employment in a white community where the average standard of Education is Sixth Grade'. Half-caste children were capable of handling the full curriculum: 'the backwardness of a certain number of coloured individuals should not preclude others, more nearly approaching the white norm, from the opportunities of full education available to white children'.⁶⁸ With the reluctant support of education authorities, Cook saw to it that facilities and staffing of schools in the homes was improved considerably - especially in Alice Springs. It seems no coincidence that within two years of Cook's departure from the Territory, inmates began winning highly competitive scholarships to secondary school in open competition with non-Aboriginal children. In fact, by the time Cook left the Territory, a foundation had been laid for real subsequent improvements in northern attitudes towards, and employment prospects of, Half-caste people.

Cook was clearly influenced by the growing body of international evidence showing people of mixed descent to have academic ability and other desirable human qualities. Virtually alone among northern officials he was sufficiently abreast of the latest anthropological and psychological evidence to question the pessimistic determinism of eugenicists. His policy for Half-castes, it is true, was premised on an extreme biological solution. While that was taking place however, the domestic, social and economic environments of Half-castes were to be manipulated in the interests of greater social acceptability and mental and moral improvement. In these respects Cook was remarkably progressive. This was not understood in the southern states and was resented in the North.

On the other hand, the controls he continued to exercise over the lives of adults - while in keeping with the views of most Australians - and his attempt to engineer a biological

⁶⁷ McCallum 1985:58.

⁶⁸ Cook to Abbott, 16 December 1937, F1 38/521.

solution to the Half-caste 'problem', makes him an extremist among progressivists. His biological engineering was persisted with at a time when race scientists were beginning to turn against eugenist solutions finding favour in Fascist Europe.

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THE LEGEND OF THE GOOD FELLA MISSUS

M.E. McGuire

The dominant historical myth about the relation between white women and Aborigines portrays the former as kind mistresses and the latter as objects of their maternal care. This paper attempts to retrieve and evaluate what white women could see, speak and know of Aborigines - and especially the images through which white women represented their contact with Aborigines and Aboriginal Australia - in the century before World War Two. Although the 'good fella missus' has a number of faces, individual struggles and differences are less important to this analysis than the power and persistence of the myth. The good fella missus is a pioneer outfacing Aboriginal hostility, and bringing succour to their destitution. She is the missionary seeking salvation for her black brethren. She tends the sick, clothes the naked, and soothes the dying. She is also the literary woman enshrining herself in a position of benevolence and authority in race relations. She has sisters in the other colonies of the British Empire such as the memsahibs of India. She enters the annals of Australian history at about the time that Victoria came to the throne - a monarch who herself evolved into the imperial mother - cultivating an interest in the solicitude for her far-flung native subjects. In the democratic sphere a similar role was assumed by that symbol of service, Florence Nightingale.¹

The conventions of the myth were modified and renewed from generation to generation. The process began with the emigrant gentlewoman, the pioneer's wife who acclimatised to all that was strange and new in the antipodes. She was succeeded by 'Australia's daughter', whose girlhood friends were Aborigines and who, as a dutiful child and mistress, fulfilled her obligations to those less fortunate than herself. Australia's daughter gives way in her turn to the modern urban woman of the twentieth century who ventures into unknown Australia as writer, artist or anthropologist. The legend of the good fella missus is a gender myth. In all her manifestations, the contours that bind her are the same: goodness, natural or Christian piety, and female authority. The name missus indicates her position as mistress of servants, herself one rung below the master. It is also a nationalist myth: the good fella missus is always a bushwoman, finely attuned to the outback environment that is so alien to the imperial metropolis, and, increasingly, to the Australian city. The colloquial, creolised irregularity of the title 'good fella missus' - popularised in the nineteenth century - itself enshrines a nationalistic impulse. This figure is a constant presence in the violent history of race relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but her presence has largely been censored.

First generation: The colonial mother

The records of culture contact that we have are those left, for the most part, by

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¹ Florence Nightingale, in a copy of a 'Form of return sent from England to His Excellency the Governor of Western Australia in 1860, to shew, firstly, the sickness and mortality in schools attended by native children, and secondly, the diseases for which the natives are admitted into colonial hospitals'. Mitchell Library MS 1358A.

gentlewomen. Surveying the surviving nineteenth-century verbal and visual images of Aborigines, one is startled firstly by how much these women wrote. Surfacing in letters, journals, emigrant guides, fiction, cookery books, local histories, memoirs, travellers' tales, and religious tracts, the cumulative effect of their Aboriginal anecdotes is remarkable. In all, the good fella missus is the central subject. Aborigines and Aboriginality reflect her desires and fears. The images that occur most frequently are gynaecological, sexual and mortuary. The second thing one notices is how rarely the gentlewoman drew or painted Aboriginal subjects. The large imbalance between verbal and visual material alerts us both to the strength of the literary tradition which women could tap, and to the taboos against what gentlewomen could see for themselves. These taboos were physically expressed in the spatial boundaries established by class, race and gender.

The relationship of gentlewomen to colonial society was shaped by the ways in which its white segment protected and exploited them.² The good fella missus was always, in fact or in fiction, a mother: motherhood confers authority on the colonial woman, licensing her to speak. She has her children gathered about her within the sanctuary of her home. A window might disclose a scene of wild beauty, but inside all is gracious tranquillity. She is tutor to her children. From her they learn the rudiments of botany and ethnography. From her they hear tales of empire in colonial and familial histories. It is evening - that time cherished by Victorian gentlefolk for reflection and intercourse - when she gathers her children around her to teach them stories. They meet about the hearth, country symbol of domestic comfort. The flickering fire throws into relief the tales of travel and adventure, of suffering and savagery - always in contrast to their own intimate and felicitous self-enclosure. The archetypal erudite mother figure appears in 1841 in the first book published for Australian children; her emblematic significance was established by its title, *A mother's offering to her children*.³ Female status was defined by the amount of protection afforded by the husbands, fathers and brothers who mediated between the exterior world and that domestic interior inhabited by women and children. As witnesses to the violence against the Aboriginal nation, they were protected by self-interest and ethnocentricity.

They knew about the natives before they ever emigrated. Aborigines had entered the colonial world naked. Their natural environment was conceived as one of sex, sinfulness, discomfort and dirt. Nakedness, the symbol in impurity in social life, was associated not only with sexual invitation and transgression, but also with the pollution of dirt, the tyranny of poverty, and the absence of religion - each an affront to British notions of propriety and progress. When Botany Bay was still a penal settlement the convict Margaret Catchpole could confess candidly in a letter home of her inability to 'know how to look at them, such poor naked creatures'. Catchpole can express pity and bewilderment because she is safe in her master's house when Aborigines visit: 'They behave themselves well enough when they come into our house for if not we would get them punished'. Even though she cannot look at them, she says, 'I for my part, I do not like them'. She knows of the Aborigines only from hearsay - for example, outside the town 'they are very saucy for they always carry with them spears and tommyhawks so that when they can meet with a white man they will rob them and spear them'.⁴ The shelter and sanctity of homestead life is opposed to the wilds of Aboriginality. Inside versus outside is the primary spatial opposition used to separate the domesticated domain of white women and the imaginary

² Alford 1984.

³ Barton 1979.

⁴ Catchpole quoted in Heney: 24.

savage life of Aborigines. On the outskirts of settlements would be found the boundary posts beyond which no Aborigines could proceed unclothed or after nightfall. The division of time between night and day equated to the difference between productivity and dissipation. In the country, the fences around the home paddock served the same function, and night time was blackfellow time. These differences of costume, time, and space - clothed and naked, day and night, inside and outside - represent the property-based and propriety-bound codes ensnaring the vision of gentlewomen. The absence of stable signs of domestic comfort - a fitful open fire instead of the blazing white-washed hearth - in Aboriginal life underpinned these women's own supremacy. They enter the annals of Australian history as the vessels of civilisation.

By the 1840s there was a ready market for Aboriginal subjects. There was a vogue in the newspapers for verse lamentations about the Aborigines which revived the *ubi sunt* (where are they now?) theme employed in mediaeval Latin poetry to celebrate the deeds of the dead and gone. The mother's lament and a call for Christian justice were heard loudest during the nineteenth century in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's cabin* (1852). Importantly, this novel was not about American aborigines, but about African slaves who, unlike the Indians, could attain freedom in British Canada. Stowe's concerns had been anticipated in Eliza Dunlop's poem of 1838, *The Aboriginal mother*, later set to music by the ubiquitous Isaac Nathan, whose daughter's rendition of the song brought tears to the eyes of her audience.⁵

Mrs Dunlop found her sources in newspaper reports of the Myall Creek massacre and in drawing room conversation. An Aboriginal woman had survived the massacre. In the poem Dunlop places a babe in this woman's arms and writes in the voice of the bereft mother. This is the colonial female voice of the nineteenth century: the mother speaking to her child. Dunlop's heroine has all the noble virtues of a wife and mother, namely love and devotion, and all the physical weakness and ignorance of woman. Who will lead them now?, Dunlop asks,

Now who will teach thee, dearest,
To poise the shield, and spear,
To wield the *koopin*, or to throw
The *boomerring*, void of fear;
To breast the river in its might;
The mountain tracks to tread?
The echoes of my homeless heart
Reply - the dead, the dead!

The ode erects its neoclassical order out of the incipient disorder of deeds of blood, and finds resolution in a Christian God. It is the poet who brings the blacks' cry of murder to Him, and this, in the myth of the good fella missus, is what matters: the implicit idealisation of the relationship between sterling mother and Aborigine. She is next to God in the house of good government. When Mrs Dunlop's poem was attacked by the Sydney press, ostensibly because her heroine sounded too much like a North American Indian, Dunlop replied that her object was 'awakening the sympathies of the English nation for a people rendered desperate and revengeful by continued acts of outrage'. She makes it plain that her authority derives from her gender, denouncing attempts to 'shade with ridicule ties stronger than death, which bind the heart of woman, be she Christian or savage'.⁶ The form of the poem provides more evidence about how gentlewomen could see the other, the alien. Dunlop uses

⁵ Dunlop 1981; see also De Sallis 1967:108-109.

⁶ Dunlop quoted in De Sallis 1967:103-105.

two literary conventions, neoclassical and Gothic. Just as the poet reconciles Aboriginality with motherhood, the grisly murders and fires (the excesses of the Gothic mode) are restrained by the measured formal progression of the dirge. These already stereotyped conventions, one of harmony and balance, the other of fear and danger, are mirror images of each other. Holding the mirror is a gentlewoman.

Visual images by women also obey the prevailing conventions. In the 1820s Augustus Earle painted urban Aboriginal portraits and drew Aboriginal caricatures for what was a popular market throughout the British Empire. Until the late 1840s, von Guerard and Glover enlivened their sublime and picturesque landscapes with Aboriginal figures. These three visual conventions - the portrait, the cartoon, and the romance - were the dominant means for representing Aboriginality in art.⁷ In addition there was historical and ethnographic documentation. Nineteenth-century women worked in all these genres, but there is no female equivalent to Earle or von Guerard - or at least not with the same professional status.

The paintings we do have show that Aborigines could be drawn only in formal social gatherings or, equally formally, as part of the landscape. The latter convention is very much in the ascendant, and the Aboriginal figures invariably appear in miniature in the middle or far distance. This can begin to be explained by the taboo against nakedness which prohibited female artists from drawing the human figure from life, and wives from seeing their husbands naked below the waist. To date I have found only one watercolour that deals exclusively with racial violence. In the 1820s Mrs Collett sketched a hunting scene near Port Macquarie. *The dismounted rider* (Mitchell Library) shows a spreading landscape. Two figures struggle in the foreground: framed by a tree and thrown into relief against the landscape, a dismounted soldier wrestles with a wild Aborigine. In the far distance an officer on horseback pursues a naked running figure bent close to the ground. The men in the foreground enact the struggle between Jacob and the Angel, those in the background, a hunting scene borrowed from the sport of gentlemen. Mrs Collett's reliance on biblical and neoclassical motifs betrays an inability to represent the reality of violence.

I have found only two sketches depicting Aborigines as part - a peripheral part - of the white social world. These watercolours record the gubernatorial festivities celebrating the monarch's birthday in 1838. Martha Berkeley's *The first dinner given to Aborigines* (Art Gallery of South Australia) and Mary Stephen's *Feast given to the natives by Governor Gawler* (Mitchell Library) have many elements in common. Governor Gawler and his guests have moved out of the hall of residence into the landscape where the Protector of Aborigines has assembled his charges.⁸ A dozen gentlewomen are among the spectators, witnesses to the charity of government and its attempts to assuage and domesticate the Aborigines. Mary Stephen depicts the gentlewomen standing with their backs to us in voluminous clothes and bonnets. The Governor, with his uniform and cockaded hat, stands with an aide in the centre of the gathering, the circle completed by a crescent of draped Aboriginal figures. Excluded from this circle *en fete*, a wild Aborigine with feathers in his hair and paintings on his body sits chained in the foreground shadows. The coercion of this recalcitrant outsider makes perfectly plain the conditions of entry for Aborigines into polite society.

Rendering the savage as an animating part of the grand landscape was a tradition in professional painting reaching back to the seventeenth century. As a genre, it survived in

⁷ The most useful general survey of early visual representations of Aborigines is I. and T. Donaldson 1985.

⁸ Watts 1890:82-83.



Emily Manning, *Ironbarks*, 1838 (Mitchell Library)



Mrs George King, *A group of Swan River natives*, 1842 (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts)



Mary Stephens, *Feast given to the natives by Governor Gawler*, 1838 (Mitchell Library)

Australia well into the nineteenth century. How much it was a European habit is demonstrated in the work of 'Australia's first woman artist', Sophia Campbell.⁹ She painted the Five Islands off Wollongong with lightning striking over the Pacific and silhouettes of gesticulating Aborigines on the distant hills. This pictorial convention was part of the colonial woman's imagination. Eliza Brown, in her *Narrative of a journey* (1851) in Western Australia, wrote,

there were some places that presented a grand looking picture to the eye; forests of banksia trees; the sun lighting up the gorgeous transparent flowers, for the most part of a rich orange colour; others lilac, and some white, were sometimes seen below us, in a valley wending between rugged hills. It only wanted a party of natives uttering their wild shouts and poisoning their quivering spears to give animation to the wild landscape...

'However', she adds, 'we were quite contented that the picture had not this finishing touch.'¹⁰ This use of humour to deflect the fearful is highly characteristic.

Once their travels were behind them, gentlewomen sketched the landscape of their new homes. Aborigines and any sign of Aboriginality are normally excluded from these pastorales. This convention belongs equally to the colonial nineteenth century and to the domestic discourse of women. Emily Manning's sketchbook, now in the Mitchell Library, is representative. It begins with sketches from her sea voyage, and of the sea's strange creatures. Back on land, she sketches from her window. One pencil drawing, *Ironbarks*, shows, from this elevated perspective, a fenced road and bridge between the stands of eucalypts. It takes a moment to discern under the trees the figure of a tribesman. In rendering Aborigines as part of the landscape the gentlewoman makes it plain that she is culture, they nature.

Part of the legend of the good fella missus is that she travels beyond the home paddocks seeking out the novelty and strangeness of the Australian bush. The 'lady's point of view' was regarded as a legitimate and refreshing perspective on the colonies by the 1840s. Louisa Meredith's *Notes and sketches of New South Wales* (1844) is the best known and most quoted traveller's tale, but it was only one of a number, always anonymous but gender-specific.¹¹ Unlike Louisa Meredith, whose relationship to Aboriginal society was that of the 'imperial prude', Ellen MacPherson represents her relationship to the Aboriginal world as personal and felicitous.¹² We take up MacPherson's text, *My experience in Australia* (1860), at the point where she moves from the homestead to the creek: 'One of the most interesting features of the landscape in the vicinity of our station was an encampment of aborigines, about a quarter of a mile from our cottage.' The distance between the author and her subject is negotiated by her husband:

I was naturally very anxious to learn all I could about this strange race, and their encampment was a source of great interest to me. It used to be a very favourite resort of ours in the evenings, and my husband would get into conversation with some of the more sociable individuals, and try to extract from them all the information likely to interest me, but they were very chary in communicating anything touching their ways and customs.¹³

⁹ Kerr 1982.

¹⁰ Brown in Cowan 1977.

¹¹ Meredith 1973.

¹² The phrase is from Foucault 1976:3.

¹³ MacPherson 1860.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOOD FELLA MISSUS



A NATIVE BURIAL PLACE

Ellen MacPherson, A native burial place, 1860, from *My experiences in Australia*.



THE BLACKS' CAMP.

Ellen MacPherson, *The Blacks' camp*, 1860, from *My experiences in Australia*.

Like Louisa Meredith's, MacPherson's information is of two kinds - that received by way of the inter-racial 'patois' from her husband's enquiries, and that received by way of her husband's accounts of his earlier history as a pioneer in the north, tales of hair's-breadth escapes and gruesome murders. The things likely to interest her are also of two kinds, and reflect conflicting desires. She seeks ethnographic evidence of Aboriginal culture - the desire to penetrate mystery; and evidence to disprove Aboriginal claims to the land - the desire for self-justification. She writes both as scientist and squatter's wife.

Back home in Scotland, MacPherson's sketches were engraved as illustrations to accompany her text. Discussion of Aboriginal ways and customs is isolated in two central, detachable chapters (as it was in Meredith's *Notes and sketches*). MacPherson supplements her discussion with a sketch of the Aboriginal encampment, and a sketch of one of their mysteries, a burial place. In order to depict her relationship to the Aboriginal world affirmatively, she creates an Arcadia. The wilderness has turned out to be a land of trees, plains and running water, full of flora and fauna which she describes at length and with 'intense enjoyment'. The setting of the encampment is rendered like a gentleman's park. (The colonists found land that had been kept clear by Aborigines for hunting and pasture with groups of trees and bushes left standing at intervals, and the comparison with a gentleman's park was a common one.)¹⁴ The encampment is seen whole in the middle distance on the flat adjoining the creek. The camp is a theatre with a backdrop of forest. The central focus is provided by tall trees which do not begin to branch, as MacPherson noted in her text, until many feet above the ground. Setting the scene are her 'dark friends', moving about in preparation for evening, squatting by fires and reclining in conversation. They are draped in simple shifts. Their shelters are carefully observed in an arrangement whereby they face in much the same direction but from discrete positions. Against the landscape, the Aborigines look like so many Gullivers in Brobdingnag. To MacPherson they remained properly in the landscape, they made such unsatisfactory servants: they preferred their life of '*dolce far niente* to the working hours of the farmer' [sic]. The Aborigines were continually moving their habitation, and what she cannot sketch is the transience of their encampment. Her neoclassical rendering of the scene necessarily gives it stability; it is only in her text that MacPherson gives voice to her repugnance against the instability and impermanence she sees in Aboriginal life. Their peripatetic behaviour underlines their shiftlessness and unpredictability. Writing in a Scottish winter, she prefers to see them in the middle distance, draped in a red blanket for a touch of romance amid the grey-green trees.

MacPherson attributes the Aborigines' presence to the liberality of her husband, not to their claim that the property was 'their *tourai*, the little domain which belonged to them and they to it'. Her husband can speak with them in the jargon she describes as a kind of prison slang. A lady does not deign to make herself understood to foreigners' like Mrs Plornish in *Little Dorrit*. MacPherson notes the Aboriginal resistance to her husband's process of extracting information. She finds them most resistant to discussing death. Her second sketch, of a burial place, represents her triumph:

They have a great dislike to hear death spoken of, or the names of their deceased friends mentioned. Not far from our station was one of their burial places, and as I was anxious to visit it, after one or two ineffectual attempts to find it by ourselves, we repaired to our friend 'King Sandy', and asked him to direct us to the spot. He shuddered and literally turned *pale* when we broached the subject, and when we pressed it said in a low tone: 'No, no, too much dibble, dibble, sit down there'.

¹⁴ See, for example, the pioneer writings in [anon]. 1936.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOOD FELLA MISSUS

Her husband prevails on 'one more valiant than the rest' to conduct them in the right direction. As they approached this 'terrible spot' their guide departs 'like an arrow': 'We walked on to the place indicated, and under the spreading branches of a monster cypress pine, the first of these graves met our view'. In MacPherson's illustration the view is dominated by eucalypts dwarfing the cypresses and the burial mounds beneath them. The composition is carefully observed with the mounds aligned in their separate positions and with carvings on the gum trunks adding authenticity to a scene without human figures. Again her prospect is from the middle distance and a band of distant forest completes the scene.

I could not but remark the fitness with which they had chosen the site of their cemetery, under the shadow of the gray ironbark, and the sombre cypress pine - a spot that nature seemed to have planted for such a purpose.

In MacPherson's text the Aborigines are circumscribed and dictated to by nature bountiful. She moves closer to examine the carvings, 'rude representations of weapons, such as the boomerang, waddy, etc., and others supposed to delineate opossums and other kinds of game'. These 'hieroglyphics' are the closest approach she can find to literacy: 'they have no written alphabet, nor indeed any means of recording past events'. With no records, no history, the basis of their land claims must be doubtful. The culture of the dead can be read like that of ancient Egypt and, like ancient Egypt, safely consigned to the past. Graves and burials are amongst the commonest Aboriginal subjects. One could sit alone and draw them, like a lady on her Grand Tour sketching the ruins of Rome. The burial place becomes a symbol not of native customs, but of the extinction of the race. MacPherson undercuts the conventional elegaic mood of Romanticism by conjuring up frontier stereotypes of savagery. In the north Aborigines exposed their dead in the trees. In the north they feast on the dead. As in all such travellers' tales, her savage imagery culminates in Gothic descriptions of the corroboree. Naturally she sees one for herself, and can only compare the 'scene of wild diablerie' to German dramas in which the leading players have sold their souls to the devil.

A distinctive narrative persona emerges from these popular memoirs by emigrant gentlewomen of the mid-nineteenth century. When they ventured into print it was invariably with protestations of verisimilitude. They emerged from their world of domesticity in the hope of enlightening and amusing their readers. The autobiographical self is subordinate to the exposition of her subject, life in the colonies. She is the squatter's wife and it is civilisation that kills the native.

Besides MacPherson's two sketches, I have found only one other published image attributed to a woman. In 1864 a sketch by Mrs King appeared as an illustration in a missionary journal. Here she lines up a group of male Aborigines to display their physiognomies, costumes and weapons in an attempt to illustrate each season and ceremony in their forms of dress. She is exemplifying what must be learnt about Aborigines in order to accommodate and redeem their ways and customs within the Christian code. The assumption is plain: one need only know and control the men.¹⁵

The most public and independent vessel of civilisation in the 1840s was Caroline Chisholm. Her writings, soliciting the emigration of young women, demonstrate the prevailing preoccupation with native welfare and native rights, made more pressing in Australia by the publicity given to racial violence. Her writings illustrate how gentlewomen could make what use they wanted of the Aborigines: Chisholm uses the

¹⁵ Mrs George King, 'A group of Swan River natives', in Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, *Quarterly Paper*, xxxiii, April 1845.

unholy reputation of the Australian colonists as a finger on the sore of the contemporary conscience. She follows the convention of the lament over the passing of the tribes, a convention traceable in women's writing to the seventeenth century and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1678). In her *Prospectus* of 1845, Chisholm's stated ambition is 'to break up the Bachelors' Stations' with a leaven of two thousand young women of good character:

If the happiness of her own children does not induce England to adopt prompt measures to secure this blessing to the Colony, the gradual destruction and extermination of the aborigines *demand* it from her justice!¹⁶

This rhetorical rendering of the theme of parent and child makes no connection between the settlers' and the Aborigines' lives. It is only in private, in a letter to the Secretary for the Colonies, Earl Grey, that she can allude to the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women by bachelors and squatters. The 'frightful' numerical disparity of the (white) sexes is a:

crying and national evil from which flows misery and crime, I dare not dwell upon, and to this unnatural anomaly of the human race in that Colony, may be traced in a great degree the gradual but certain extermination of those unfortunate tribes the Aborigines of New Holland; they, the original holders of the soil, demand the speedy and parental interference of a humane Government.¹⁷

Elsewhere, Chisholm is silent, and makes only one other reference to these original owners. Riding on her white horse on her last inland journey to Bathurst, she has one Edenic glimpse of the Aboriginal world, represented by a group moving through the bush tracking bees with birdsdown. Aborigines had no place in her vision of a productive Arcady of villages and church spires.

It was rare for white women to acknowledge white men's exploitation of black women even, as in Chisholm's case, from motives of expediency. Aboriginal familial life had, by the end of the eighteenth century, been distorted to fit the outlines of Christian marriage. Blake's now famous engraving, *A native family*, reflects the unilateral symbolic imposition of the form of the bourgeois family. A warrior advances with his weapons, a mother follows with a babe-in-arms and chattels, and behind her comes the future in the figure of a small boy. This engraving appeared in Captain Hunter's *Historical journal* (1793). The frontispiece in the same volume, engraved by another hand, depicted defenceless, naked, black womanhood under the gaze of officers and gentlemen.¹⁸ The first picture illustrates the dominance of man, the second, the fertile vulnerability of woman alone. White women lost to Aboriginal society were also imaged in this way. The best known example is Mrs Eliza Fraser of the *Sterling Castle*; her story is given in *A mother's offering*, where she is saved by God.

Gentlewomen readily and vigorously agreed that the status of the Aboriginal woman was worse than that of a slave, and that their black husbands were the brutes of creation. Amongst the most common scenarios in the life of the good fella missus is one in which she rescues a trembling and cowering Aboriginal woman from the waddy of her enraged husband. In fact, Aboriginal society presented a mirror image of the gentlewoman's own sexual and economic repression.¹⁹ The Aboriginal deaths and burials that dominate the white female discourse on Aborigines are equalled in number only by demonstrations that

¹⁶ Quoted by Kiddle 1950:83.

¹⁷ Ibid:246.

¹⁸ Hunter 1968:xxvii, 261. A native family is discussed in Smith 1960.

¹⁹ On the oppression of Aboriginal women see Evans 1982 and McGrath 1978.

Aboriginal women are no more than beasts of burden. Aborigines, like the weather, function in narratives as metaphors for the author's sense of being. It is only *in extremis* that a gentlewoman can see in Aboriginal women her sisters in oppression.²⁰

In fiction, set-pieces reflecting the gentlewoman's confident belief in the brutishness of Aboriginal women's lives are used to illuminate and comment upon the trials of the heroine. The Australian fictional heroine in the nineteenth century characteristically appears *herself* - for the nonce - as a social slave aspiring to independence and self-reliance; she is commonly, like Jane Eyre, an orphan and a governess; and the plot turns on how and whom she marries. The heroine encounters Aborigines when she herself is desolate and near-destitute, and the Aborigines or Aboriginality reflect back her desolation and destitution. Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morrison* (1854) is typical. At the lowest point in her career, when Clara the emigrant girl has been forced into service below her station and when she despairs of ever attaining the man she loves, she meets Black Mary, an elderly Aboriginal woman who comes to chop wood, and whose narrative function is to offer a grotesque parody of womanhood and a portent of the terrible fate of old women alone.²¹ Much as the canon of Australian literature would be enriched by the admission of neglected women's writings, it is a mistake to assume that these writings provide an alternative history of race relations. Recent attempts by some feminist critics to suggest that the course of imperial conquest would have run smoother had women been in charge constitute a belated revival of the legend of the Good Fella Missus.²²

Second generation: Australia's daughter

Australia's daughter was a fearless bushwoman educated by her sterling mother and the environment in which she grew up. She has a 'natural' relationship to the bush and its creatures. Her parents projected the ideal relationship between settler and savage as a feudal one. She fulfills her obligations to those beneath her. In this guise, she is recognisable in the writer, artist and botanist, Louisa Atkinson. Later in the nineteenth century she is recognisable in the novelist Rosa Praed, whose deployment of Australia's daughter as heroine and the Aborigine as savage in her fiction - not excepting her autobiography, where she writes, 'I love the blacks' - should be notorious.²³

To date I have located only two homestead portraits that include Aboriginal figures, one by an Australian daughter and the other by an emigrant clergyman's wife. The compositions, one from New South Wales, one from Western Australia, are comparatively close. The first, Ellen Bundock's *Yugilbar* (c.1850, Mitchell Library), depicts the ideal relationship between settler and savage. The second, Janet Millett's *Holy Trinity Church, York, Western Australia* (c.1869, private collection), symbolises the clergyman's mission.²⁴ In both, Aboriginal figures are cast into the foreground shadows. An analysis of Bundock's picture must suffice here. Ellen Bundock's painting of Yugilbar is in marked contrast to most homestead portraits because she locates Aboriginal figures in the home

²⁰ Annie Baxter provides an example. See Frost 1984:100 and 'Annie Baxter and her journal 1834-68' in Adelaide 1988:38.

²¹ See Smith 1980.

²² Dale Spender is representative of this trend in Spender 1988: 195-199.

²³ Praed 1904:4.

²⁴ Millett 1980.

unholy reputation of the Australian colonists as a finger on the sore of the contemporary conscience. She follows the convention of the lament over the passing of the tribes, a convention traceable in women's writing to the seventeenth century and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1678). In her *Prospectus* of 1845, Chisholm's stated ambition is 'to break up the Bachelors' Stations' with a leaven of two thousand young women of good character:

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Elsewhere, Chisholm is silent, and makes only one other reference to these original owners. Riding on her white horse on her last inland journey to Bathurst, she has one Edenic glimpse of the Aboriginal world, represented by a group moving through the bush tracking bees with birdsdown. Aborigines had no place in her vision of a productive Arcady of villages and church spires.

It was rare for white women to acknowledge white men's exploitation of black women even, as in Chisholm's case, from motives of expediency. Aboriginal familial life had, by the end of the eighteenth century, been distorted to fit the outlines of Christian marriage. Blake's now famous engraving, *A native family*, reflects the unilateral symbolic imposition of the form of the bourgeois family. A warrior advances with his weapons, a mother follows with a babe-in-arms and chattels, and behind her comes the future in the figure of a small boy. This engraving appeared in Captain Hunter's *Historical journal* (1793). The frontispiece in the same volume, engraved by another hand, depicted defenceless, naked, black womanhood under the gaze of officers and gentlemen.¹⁸ The first picture illustrates the dominance of man, the second, the fertile vulnerability of woman alone. White women lost to Aboriginal society were also imaged in this way. The best known example is Mrs Eliza Fraser of the *Sterling Castle*; her story is given in *A mother's offering*, where she is saved by God.

Gentlewomen readily and vigorously agreed that the status of the Aboriginal woman was worse than that of a slave, and that their black husbands were the brutes of creation. Amongst the most common scenarios in the life of the good fella missus is one in which she rescues a trembling and cowering Aboriginal woman from the waddy of her enraged husband. In fact, Aboriginal society presented a mirror image of the gentlewoman's own sexual and economic repression.¹⁹ The Aboriginal deaths and burials that dominate the white female discourse on Aborigines are equalled in number only by demonstrations that

¹⁶ Quoted by Kiddle 1950:83.

¹⁷ Ibid:246.

¹⁸ Hunter 1968:xxvii, 261. A native family is discussed in Smith 1960.

¹⁹ On the oppression of Aboriginal women see Evans 1982 and McGrath 1978.

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Aboriginal women are no more than beasts of burden. Aborigines, like the weather, function in narratives as metaphors for the author's sense of being. It is only *in extremis* that a gentlewoman can see in Aboriginal women her sisters in oppression.²⁰

In fiction, set-pieces reflecting the gentlewoman's confident belief in the brutishness of Aboriginal women's lives are used to illuminate and comment upon the trials of the heroine. The Australian fictional heroine in the nineteenth century characteristically appears *herself* - for the nonce - as a social slave aspiring to independence and self-reliance; she is commonly, like Jane Eyre, an orphan and a governess; and the plot turns on how and whom she marries. The heroine encounters Aborigines when she herself is desolate and near-destitute, and the Aborigines or Aboriginality reflect back her desolation and destitution. Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morrison* (1854) is typical. At the lowest point in her career, when Clara the emigrant girl has been forced into service below her station and when she despairs of ever attaining the man she loves, she meets Black Mary, an elderly Aboriginal woman who comes to chop wood, and whose narrative function is to offer a grotesque parody of womanhood and a portent of the terrible fate of old women alone.²¹ Much as the canon of Australian literature would be enriched by the admission of neglected women's writings, it is a mistake to assume that these writings provide an alternative history of race relations. Recent attempts by some feminist critics to suggest that the course of imperial conquest would have run smoother had women been in charge constitute a belated revival of the legend of the Good Fella Missus.²²

Second generation: Australia's daughter

Australia's daughter was a fearless bushwoman educated by her sterling mother and the environment in which she grew up. She has a 'natural' relationship to the bush and its creatures. Her parents projected the ideal relationship between settler and savage as a feudal one. She fulfills her obligations to those beneath her. In this guise, she is recognisable in the writer, artist and botanist, Louisa Atkinson. Later in the nineteenth century she is recognisable in the novelist Rosa Praed, whose deployment of Australia's daughter as heroine and the Aborigine as savage in her fiction - not excepting her autobiography, where she writes, 'I love the blacks' - should be notorious.²³

To date I have located only two homestead portraits that include Aboriginal figures, one by an Australian daughter and the other by an emigrant clergyman's wife. The compositions, one from New South Wales, one from Western Australia, are comparatively close. The first, Ellen Bundock's *Yugilbar* (c.1850, Mitchell Library), depicts the ideal relationship between settler and savage. The second, Janet Millett's *Holy Trinity Church, York, Western Australia* (c.1869, private collection), symbolises the clergyman's mission.²⁴ In both, Aboriginal figures are cast into the foreground shadows. An analysis of Bundock's picture must suffice here. Ellen Bundock's painting of Yugilbar is in marked contrast to most homestead portraits because she locates Aboriginal figures in the home

²⁰ Annie Baxter provides an example. See Frost 1984:100 and 'Annie Baxter and her journal 1834-68' in Adelaide 1988:38.

²¹ See Smith 1980.

²² Dale Spender is representative of this trend in Spender 1988: 195-199.

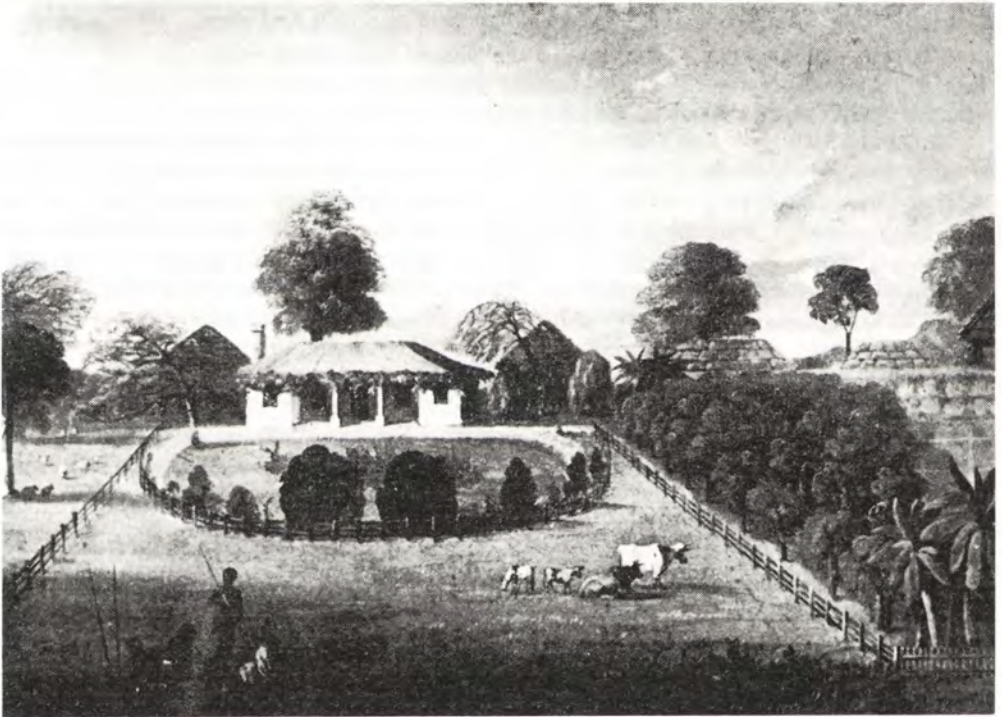
²³ Praed 1904:4.

²⁴ Millett 1980.

landscape as part of the rural economy. We need first to sketch in the family history which forms the subtext of the painting.²⁵

The property at Yugilbar stretched back along a bend in the Clarence River and was established as a sheep run, by Bundock's brothers, in the 1830s. They were the children of William and Mary Ogilvie, pioneer settlers in the Camden district with dynastic aspirations. Establishing themselves as master and mistress to Aboriginal servants meant some adjustment was necessary for the Ogilvies. They endeavoured to learn all they could of Aboriginal ways in order to manipulate power and exercise control more efficaciously and, through Aboriginal knowledge, to subjugate the wilderness more effectively. Learning the local Aboriginal language was a priority. Their son Edward, when he came to tame Yugilbar, acted on the same principles. He first took possession of an Aboriginal boy, Puldoon, to be not only his servant, but his aide and go-between. Later in life, Tom Roberts painted Edward Ogilvie as the gentleman squatter. Later still, Donald Friend painted him wrestling with an Aboriginal warrior in a symbolic trial of strength - an image taken from Ogilvie's memoirs rather than life.²⁶

Ellen Bundock did not travel to Yugilbar till some twenty years later, around 1850. Her journey, with two small children, took on epic proportions in local history: 'the bush held



Ellen Bundock, *View showing original Yugilbar homestead*. c.1850 (Mitchell Library)

²⁵ G. Farwell in McBryde 1978 Murray-Prior 1973.

²⁶ Roberts, *Squatter's Castle* (1894, Mitchell Library) and Donald Friend, *Edward Ogilvie Wrestles with Toolbillibam* (date unknown, private collection). Both are reproduced in Farwell 1973.

no fears for her'.²⁷ Her mother had the singular distinction of being the only gentlewoman to enter government dispatches for her capable management and good sense in race relations. Mary Ogilvie, through her acquaintance with the local Aborigines, had prevented the wrongful arrest of a black man, and averted any shedding of blood on the Merton property at Camden. The blood, as Governor Darling noted dolefully, was shed elsewhere. Here again we meet the favoured archetype of the pioneer heroine, with her ameliorating influence on the violence of white settlement. In the local archives the women of the Ogilvie family are credited with a tradition of humanitarian actions and attitudes towards the Aborigines: 'the Ogilvie girls love the blacks'.²⁸

Ellen Bundock's painting, a watercolour, decorated the lid of a lady's workbox. It commemorates the original Yugilbar cottage. The scene conforms to the pictorial tradition of Arcadian pastoral. The thatched cottage is seen as day draws to an end, nestling in the centre. Veracity, that prime Victorian narrative merit, has been the artist's aim; she is telling the story of daily life. This hybrid, mixing the ideal and the real, gives this unassuming painting its poignancy. The squatter is nowhere to be seen; instead we see the fruits of his labours in the tranquil hour before evening, across the home paddock to the dwelling catching the last of the sun. The neat perspective of the enclosure composes the scene. Outside the fence, to the left, sheep are grazing (they later got foot-rot); on the right, a band of semi-tropical bush trees testifies to the lushness of the river country and to the labour involved in its domestication. A small family of cows, in the English county tradition, is set within the home paddock beneath the ring of an English garden, standing and resting in monumental profile; like the house, they catch the last of the light. Also placed within the enclosure are four Aboriginal shepherds. They hold, in miniature, poses of Greek athletes with spears. Their bodies are draped in blankets, at least one of which is of the ubiquitous red, the preferred colour to place against a dark skin. (In Van Diemen's Land, Thomas Bock painted Lady Franklin's Mathianna in the red dress she favoured for her charge.)²⁹ The Aborigines shrouded by shadows and the cows in the light presage the future.

Memoirs are written in the first person; as long as they construct a lost past, romance is present. In their recollections, Louisa Atkinson and Mary Bundock - child of Ellen and hence a second-generation Australian daughter - were children at a time when the land still belonged to gentlemen squatters, before 'their' Aborigines were degraded by contact with the lower classes. They themselves are witness to the passing of Aboriginal life. The habit of literacy was one of the marks distinguishing Australia's daughter from others less fortunate than herself; as for her sterling mother, writing was her way of sustaining intellectual life in isolation. Australia's daughter remembers Aborigines as part of her childhood. Unlike the Aborigines, she can tell their stories to an urban audience ignorant of such contact. She maintains a doubly privileged position, in relation to her subject and to her audience. She writes herself as the child of culture sympathetic to the children of nature, the Aborigines. This manifestation of the good fella missus is recognisable in Katherine Langloh Parker translating Aboriginal myths and legends. The writer becomes the heroine. By the second half of the nineteenth century Australia's daughter constituted a tradition, one to which Rose Praed and Mary Gilmore subscribed in the name of Australian nationalism and identity.

27 Daley 1966:82.

28 Murray-Prior 1973:68.

29 Bock's painting is reproduced in Dutton 1974 and Thomas 1988.

James Atkinson cited the journeys he had made into the wilds 'with no other attendants than two Black natives, on whose fidelity I could rely'.³⁷ His frontispiece is a picture of a white explorer on horseback accompanied by two liveried natives on foot. One of these can be identified from Louisa's 'Recollections' as the Jim Vaugh who had once saved the life of her father. Perhaps the second attendant in James Atkinson's picture is the Aboriginal character who, in his daughter's text, plays the part of Bennelong, the Aborigine corrupted by his contact with white society after the demise of his white master.

Louisa Atkinson tells stories of the loyalty and affection extended to her family by Aborigines because of her father. Apart from his book, and what she heard of him, Louisa never knew him; he had died shortly after she was born in 1834. Louisa wrote, 'They attach themselves warmly to those who show them kindness, and are ready to exhibit their friendship in various ways'. One such exhibition of friendship happened some six years after her birth, when the Aboriginal friends of James Atkinson came to commiserate with his widow. This anecdote, which is also recorded in *A mother's offering*, is included ostensibly to illustrate the 'peculiarities' of Aboriginal attitudes to death, especially the burial of the possessions of the dead.³⁸ Louisa Atkinson writes,

A gentleman, to whom they were much attached, had died, leaving a widow and young family; a number of natives assembled to visit her, and see the new inmate - born since they had been there last; after gratifying their wish to see all the orphans, the widow exhibited a lock of her deceased husband's hair. Instantly horror and grief siezed upon the party; men and women bowed their heads and wept, till at length one woman approached and whispered, 'Missis neber you show that to black fellow; neber any more'.

Atkinson, like her mother, is careful to render this autobiographical episode anonymous in order to make it representative of the excesses of Aboriginal behaviour in general. The anecdote is important to our reading precisely because of the autobiographical element. She places herself, as the 'new inmate', at the centre. The episode expresses not only the trauma of her father's death, not only her privileged position in relation to the visitors, but also her initiation into Aboriginal Australia.³⁹

It would require another paper to make a parallel reading of *A mother's offering* and the 'Recollections'. Such a reading needs to be grounded in its historical context; that is, in the context of the progressive colonisation of the hinterland from Berrima to the Shoalhaven. Suffice it to say that the most important likeness is that they both frame their pictures of Aboriginal society as vignettes drawn from a dying and soon to be extinct race. There are two important differences. In the first place, Atkinson in the 1860s is addressing an adult audience which she rightly suspects is mostly hostile to her subject:

It is a matter of course to pronounce them the lowest scale in the human ladder; the last link between man and monkey; a degraded people incapable of improvement; beyond the pale of civilization, and destitute of religion, and recognising only an evil spirit.

The second important difference is how Atkinson goes out into the landscape to make her observations. Where the mother and her brood met the Aborigines as servants and visitors to their homestead, Atkinson desires to study them in nature. She improves on Barton's

³⁷ Atkinson 1975.

³⁸ Muir 1980:28-29.

³⁹ There are many accounts of the welcome to white children born in Aboriginal land. See, for example, McCrae 1966:100.

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Gertrude and the widow Mrs Doherty bring succour to a dying Aborigine, 1857, probably engraved from a drawing by Louisa Atkinson (from Gertrude the emigrant girl)

example in adopting the tools of natural history to identify and classify Aboriginal customs. An instance of the daughter advancing on her mother's teaching occurs when Atkinson returns to Berrima to verify and measure relics of Aboriginal culture. In *A mother's offering*, a medical gentleman had wanted to have the bones of a black man dug up from a nearby burial site, an incident included to demonstrate the strength of Aboriginal superstition. This request is refused. In the 'Recollections', Atkinson returns to this burial place. She discovers the grave to be one hundred by forty feet,

of a gentle conical form, covered with herbage, and surrounded at its base with trees, which, on their sides fronting the mound, were carved in forms suggesting the native shield and boomerang - weapons used chiefly in war.

There could be little doubt but that the tumuli is all, or in part, artificial...

Because 'the blacks cannot, or will not give any information', Atkinson can only report the speculation that the flat below was the scene of a great battle, and that the survivors assembled to bury the dead and mark the site. This mediaeval fancy is contrasted to the present time when Aborigines 'neglect the carving of the trees' and bury their dead expeditiously in anthills.

In her attempts to identify and translate social systems, Atkinson can read only those signs that show order, discretion and good management. Most of her studies were made not at Berrima, but at the Shoalhaven, where her widowed mother had sought refuge with her children from a hostile world. Here Atkinson was witness to a festival.

One one occasion, when the remnants of three different friendly tribes had assembled for a grand *corroboree* or dance, I made a plan of the encampment; each tribe was slightly apart from the other, divided by a sort of street. Thus, the inviters were clustered in the centre, having, I think, seventeen camps; the Picton tribe on the right hand, five camps; and the Shoalhaven on the left, comprising ten or eleven gunyahs; consecutively forming a village.

She noted that though their dwellings might be close together, 'yet each was so arranged that its open side was turned from its neighbours'. What she cannot comprehend is the temporary nature of an otherwise excellent arrangement. To her mind, the dirt and disorder of the campsite, with its 'May Fair scatterings of rags...conspire to make change desirable'. The analogy of the camp to a village breaks down. There can be no conformity between stability and hygiene and impermanence and dirt.

The legal and social position of widows and single women is a dominant theme in Louisa Atkinson's fiction. Her first novel, *Gertrude the emigrant girl* (1857), initiates the central subject of Australian fiction from a woman's point of view for most of the next century. What Atkinson writes in the 'Recollections', not of Aboriginal marriage in general, but of one particular Aboriginal marriage, is shaped partly by her mother's trials in the white world. Among Jim Vaugh's wives was one Nelly, who had removed herself from her husband to live on a low island in the river with a female companion. Nelly claims the land 'all about' to be her own. The two women had a canoe and 'appeared to support themselves by fishing':

It was but necessary to mention Nelly to the chief to arouse the savage in him; then he would swear, stamp his feet on the ground, yell and threaten her with instant death...

If these threats of Jim Vaugh were repeated to Nelly, they produced the most extravagant laughter and enjoyment; she would beg again and again to have the piquant scene rehearsed, at each time clapping her hands, dancing, shrieking, and laughing in all the extravagance of savage mirth. Her enjoyment was shared in a lesser degree by the little blind dame.

The savage extravagance of the couple's behaviour in this role reversal is a burlesque upon her own mother's powerlessness after the death of James Atkinson. Certainly this tale contradicts Louisa Atkinson's generalisations about Aboriginal domestic relationships, in which the men are the lords and masters of all women.

What white women wrote of Aborigines was a reflection of their own circumstances. Who knows, for instance, whether Langloh Parker would have taken such an interest in the 'Noongahdburrah' people had she not been lonely and childless, and had she not been saved from drowning in childhood by an Aboriginal servant; It is surely significant that the white women who made ethnographic and anthropological studies of Aboriginal society were themselves childless and usually spinsters.

Third generation: The modern woman

With the end of the Victorian era, the generation of rural daughters gives way to the young urban women who become the professional writers, artists and anthropologists of the twentieth century. Like the sterling emigrant gentlewomen, they too have to make a journey to find Aboriginal subjects in central and northern Australia, and their writings too take on the dimensions of adventure and romance in uncharted country.

In fiction, the good fella missus was further popularised in the first decade of the century by Jeannie Gunn's *The little black princess* (1905). Besides the myth of her husband as the good Maluka, we find the usual colonial traditions; the mother weaving stories for her children and the kindly white mistress who adopts and trains an Aboriginal 'orphan'. All that has changed is the setting, from the bush to the never-never. The 'little missus' of *The little black princess* walks out into the landscape with her Bett-Bett and older Aboriginal women. From them she learns the names and habits of the bounteous flora and fauna in the rich country of the Roper River. Baldwin Spencer, who reviewed this, Gunn's first book, is one in a line of male anthropologists who enthused about the contribution white women could make to a fuller understanding of Aboriginal life:

On her lonely station in the Never-Never Country, with no white woman within a distance of a hundred miles, Mrs Gunn, the 'good-fellow missus' of the homestead, lived amongst and learned to know the natives. The result is seen in this little book, with its glimpses of native life, such as we have never had before.⁴⁰

In the 1930s, Elkin called upon 'the wives and daughters of station managers, settlers and officials to carry on the work of Mrs Langloh Parker and Mrs Aeneas Gunn and depict for us the life of the native women and children'.⁴¹ While it is for male anthropologists to pursue the serious business of the religious rules and social regulations of Aboriginal society, the proper study of woman is woman: 'the women's life, and that part of men's life which is passed with the women and children, reveal the essential and natural humanity of the Aborigines'. Elkin, introducing Phyllis Kaberry's *Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane* (1939), continued: 'The male anthropologist is apt to feel, and rightly so, that he as a man should respect the taboo and not pry into the preserves of the other sex'. There is not a little prurience here, and incipient voyeurism. Elkin charmingly confides his ignorance of woman:

the male worker refrains from reasons of courtesy and delicacy from enquiring into some aspects of a woman's life. He is not a physician.

⁴⁰ Spencer in Gunn 1947:7, from the *Argus* 21 December 1905.

⁴¹ Elkin in Kaberry 1939:xvii-xxxi.



Phyllis Kaberry with Aboriginal women, Kimberleys c. 1937 (Private Collection)

Aboriginal women had a gynaecological rather than a cultural identity. Female sexuality, like the desert country, was uncharted territory. Kaberry had set herself the task of mapping this unknown in an attempt to write Aboriginal women into the realm of the sacred.⁴²

The novel in the twentieth century continued to be the main site for the female discourse on marriage and morality. Some years before Kaberry began her pioneering research in the north-west, Katherine Susannah Prichard had journeyed there in search of Aboriginal metaphors for her fiction. *Coonardoo*, a novel about good and bad marriages serialised in the *Bulletin* in 1928, found its tragedy in the conflict between the repressed sexuality of the whites and the 'natural' sexuality of Aborigines. It is in this novel that the failures of the good fella missus first come under scrutiny. Before turning to *Coonardoo*, it is important to know how closely Katharine Susannah Prichard's writing career conforms to the pattern of literary production we have traced so far.

⁴² Letters from Kaberry to Durack 1935-1939, private collection. I am grateful to Dame Mary Durack for her generous assistance.

Prichard began writing a serial for *New Idea* in 1906, 'Letters from the Back of Beyond', taking the form of monthly letters from a young governess to her mother! Her first novel, *The pioneers* (1915), was a saga of frontier life. Prichard fits exactly into the tradition of female fiction that began in Australia with Catherine Helen Spence and Louisa Atkinson. Her central subject was, like theirs, what it meant to be female in a country that offered new opportunities for work and pleasure. The good fella missus of *Coonardoo* is a bush heroine who had been a school teacher, married a drover, and who, as a widow, managed her cattle station with wisdom and courage - shades of Mrs Dougherty in *Gertrude the emigrant girl*. Atkinson's first novel was also first published serially, and when their books appeared in volume form, both authors felt a preface was necessary to disabuse readers of their misconceptions. The novels come from life but they are also works of the imagination. The characters are not drawn from real people. Atkinson wrote, 'far too sacred are the affairs of her neighbours to the writer of *Gertrude* to be rudely brought before the public and bartered for gain'.⁴³ Explicit in her preface, and implicit in Prichard's, is that the Aboriginal characters are drawn from life; Atkinson must 'borrow from nature' to truthfully depict this 'peculiar nationality'; Prichard tells us she approached the Chief Inspector of Aborigines for Western Australia to verify her 'drawing of aborigines and conditions' in their 'natural state', and not, as her audience might know them, as the 'poor degraded and degenerate creatures [in] contact with towns and the vices of white people'.⁴⁴ While her *Bulletin* readers objected that Prichard idealised the Aborigines, the real controversy of *Coonardoo* was that the plot turned on the white hero's repressed desire and unspoken love for a black woman, and that one of the main characters was a 'swaggering gin-shepherd'.

The exploitation of black women raised by Chisholm in the 1840s did not become a political issue again until the late 1920s. In Western Australia a school teacher at the Mount Margaret mission, Mary Bennett, documented the conditions of black women from her own observations, from court cases, and from government reports. In the backblocks white men could boast of having a 'fresh native girl every week'.⁴⁵ Feminist groups in the cities called unsuccessfully upon the mercy of the Federal Government to appoint Women Protectors of Aborigines in central and northern Australia. In the 1930s, Olive Pink repeatedly brought the problem to the attention to her fellow anthropologists in Sydney, before she left the profession disillusioned with its inefficacy.⁴⁶

Prichard's good fella missus, Mrs Bessie, will have no white stockmen working with her Aborigines, and she steadfastly refuses to entertain the gin-shepherd, Sam Geary. When he visits on business, his women remain outside the home at the woodheap. Mrs Bessie observes with strict attention the boundaries between white and black lives. In the mornings, the Aboriginal women she has trained as servants wash and dress before they cross the verandah, and they returned to their camp in the evenings. She prides herself on not interfering in their tribal lives and will have no Christianising of them.

Although she had lived and worked like a man, so long in the Nor'-West without the least respect for conventional ideas which hampered her in anything she wanted to do, her white woman's prejudices were still intact.

⁴³ L. Atkinson 1857:preface.

⁴⁴ Prichard 1956:foreword.

⁴⁵ Bleakley quoted by Bennett 1930:113.

⁴⁶ Nolan 1962:46-48; Olive Pink Correspondence 1932-54, Elkin Papers, Fisher Library, University of Sydney.

'Mrs Besie had fits of loathing of the blacks'; she knew of this 'singing to make a woman business, as she called it, and did not like it'.

She was disgusted by practices she considered immoral until she began to understand a difference to her own in the aboriginal consciousness of sex. She was surprised then, to find in it something impersonal universal, of a religious mysticism.

It is of course Prichard who wants to uncover a more sacred idea of female sexuality than that diseased idea offered by her own society. In the novel, it is her Coonardoo who is being sung a woman, and Prichard has Mrs Bessie recall a glimpse of this ceremony:

Wandering along the far side of the creek once, she had come on a half-circle of men squatted before a little girl, and singing to her breast. They looked as if they were worshipping her, squatted there on the wide plains under the bare blue sky. And they were in their own way, she imagined, venerating the principle of creation, fertility, growth in her.

Here it is the men who 'worship' her, and in Prichard's fiction, male and female symbols are constructed as opposites and complementaries: active and passive, fire and water, insemination and sustenance. Marriage and motherhood remain the ultimate destiny of woman. Coonardoo is the well in the shadows of a harsh and unforgiving male landscape. She has none of the ambivalence of Prichard's white heroines, but rests secure in her wordless acceptance of a phallogomorphic world. It is the white man's repression, the repression that Hugh has inculcated from his mother, that destroys her.

Even deeper and more unconquerable than the silence on the sexual exploitation of black women is the taboo against white women as objects of the black male gaze. In the records, black velvet is always female; Aboriginal men were feared as rapists, yet half-castes always have black mothers. Apart from the white women lost to Aboriginal society on the frontiers in the first decades of settlement, I have come across only one instance of a white woman living black in over a century of writing. She appears in Ernestine Hill's first collection of traveller's tales, *The great Australian loneliness* (1945). Married to an Aborigine, her name is Mrs Forbes, but Hill prefers to call her Mrs Witchetty. Hill was as bewildered by Mrs Witchetty's choice of Aboriginal life as the sterling mothers had been that Aborigines proved so reluctant to exchange their culture for civilisation. Of all the 'hair-raising thrillers' to be found in unknown Australia, the story of Mrs Witchetty takes the cake.⁴⁷

If women in Victorian ideology were the slaves of their husbands, in the twentieth century, after Freud, they were the slaves of their sexuality. Freud himself had drawn on the work of Spencer and Gillen to support his thesis in *Totem and taboo* (1913). Relying on a similar construct of the Australian Aborigines as living primitives in *The elementary forms of religious life* (1915), Durkheim argued that men are concerned with the sacred, women with the profane. It was this mythic devaluation and ghettoisation of female life that Kaberry wanted to explode. Like Margaret Mead, she contrasted her findings to her own society. Her analysis of marriage and divorce in *Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane* reads like a resume of the themes of female fiction - what is a good marriage and what, for a woman, does independence mean? The Aboriginal women Kaberry met in the north-west were much more assertive than Prichard's characters.

Kaberry has left us an image of the white observer of Aboriginal life. This comes in her chapter, 'The Duties of Women in Marriage'. Writing that 'women, on their side, were equally tenacious of their rights, and if the husband persisted in his infidelity, they might

⁴⁷ Hill 1945:271-275.

leave him permanently', she describes a quarrel that breaks out when one woman accuses her mate of being unfaithful:

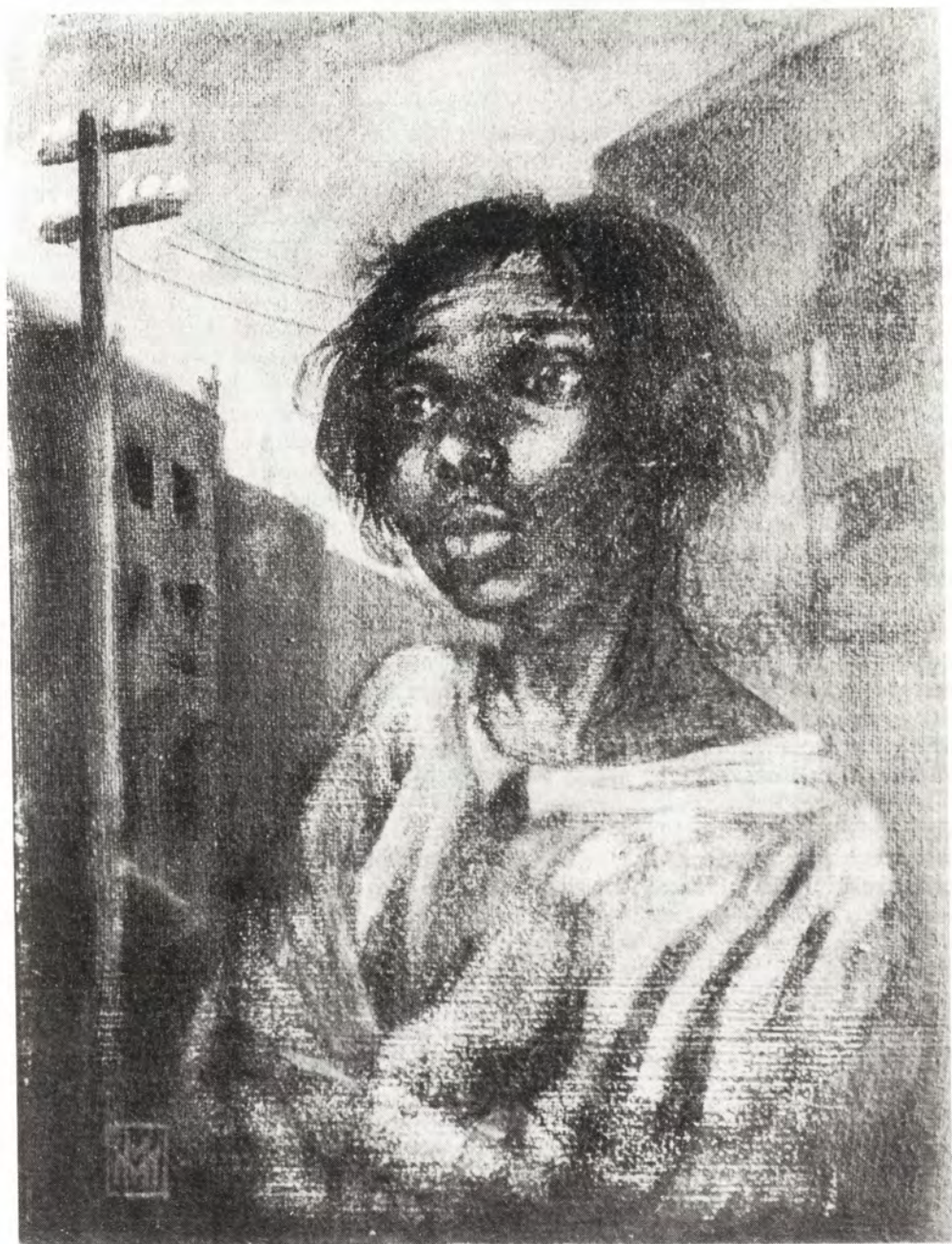
Barudjil, in the heat of the argument, picked up his boomerang, banged him, then grabbed a tomahawk to enforce her point...Wanbierin rolled up his swag and departed, hurling obscenities and an occasional boomerang at her, which she avoided easily, but which came unpleasantly near where I was standing diligently making notes.

The conscientious observer is contrasted ironically to her dangerous environment - a contrast between self-control and untrammelled passions; this incongruity is one of the hallmarks of the good fella missus.

In the 1940s painters with political aesthetic convictions similar to Prichard's, like the German emigre expressionist Elise Blumann in Western Australia and the social realist Marguerite Mahood in Melbourne, revived the Aboriginal portrait genre which female artists had eschewed since the nineteenth century (Georgiana McCrae had painted a miniature of her Aboriginal female servant as early as the 1840s). Elizabeth Durack continued to work in a related vein in the 1950s and 1960s. More important than the renewed interest amongst painters in Aboriginal subjects in the modern period, however, was the appropriation of Aboriginal forms. Margaret Preston is often cited as the first painter to take Aboriginal art seriously on an aesthetic level. Her education was, I would argue, something like Prichard's. Like a good modernist she turned to the Sydney Museum for its reserves of an art that was both abstract and representational. Later at Berowra she sought out the rock carvings along the coast and the carved trees in the hinterland. There was a distinct change in her art and her writings when she travelled north and met living Aboriginal artists. Such was the perverse balance of cultural power in the 1940s that it was commendable for Margaret Preston to paint in a derivative 'Aboriginal' manner but wrong for Namatjira to paint like a white artist.

The type of the Good Fella Missus reached its most fantastic proportions in the diminutive figure of Daisy Bates. She came to Australia as an emigrant girl aspiring to marry into the squattocracy. She went droving and mustering, accompanying her husband like a man, but it proved a bad marriage. Bates became a journalist in London and returned to Australia to make a study of the controversial treatment of Aborigines by the Western Australian government. In the epigraph to her findings Bates quoted Florence Nightingale: 'Can we civilize these people without killing them?' Her ambition to become a professional anthropologist was thwarted by Radcliffe-Brown.⁴⁸ She retreated to central Australia - the desert was a cheap place to live - and began to promulgate the myth about herself as the grandmother of the tribes that congregated at Ooldea, a traditional meeting place on a trade route, near a fresh-water spring. Here she made her camp, drawing a circle around it through which only she and the tiny bush creatures she loved could cross. From her lookout, she charted the passage of the stars, trying to fit them to the Aboriginal stories she was told.

⁴⁸ White 1980; see also White 1985:introduction.



Marguerite Mahood, 'Aboriginal girl', 1942. Courtesy Mr Martin Mahood.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOOD FELLA MISSUS

Here she learnt to name the flora and fauna, and to track and hunt. In her tent, she had her volumes of Dickens, and she would read with a mixture of fear and amusement his caricatures of eccentric old women. Bates became what she feared.

Each day Bates would dress formally and cross into the Aboriginal world. She became as notorious as the Aborigines along the transcontinental line. She was the only woman in the country who publicly lived alone with adult blacks. She would write only of 'full-bloods', because 'half-castes' filled her with horror as the ill-begotten fruits of miscegenation. She tended the sick and clothed the naked; she counted on her fingers the last of the tribes. Her serial, 'My Natives and I', published in Brisbane's *Courier-Mail* and in the Adelaide *Advertiser*, became the best-seller *The passing of the Aborigines* (1944). The subtitle of this book is less often quoted: 'A lifetime spent among the natives of Australia'. She was her own heroine and she knew where her model lay, as the article 'Our pioneer women and our natives' (1936) indicates:

Think of it! I am thinking now of real live women who were not afraid, whose daughters were old when they told me the tales their mothers had told them of wild, savage sortees ending in quiet tea-drinkings... Great stress has always evoked just those qualities of steadfast endurance, which are characteristic of our race, but my mind ever rests on their influence with the natives.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The legend of the good fella missus died with Daisy Bates just after World War II. That the fiction enjoys period revivals only indicates the power and attraction of this myth in white society, despite the ample witness of past and present Aboriginal women and men to the contrary. While there are important differences between the three generations, and while some of the individual women cited are praiseworthy for challenging the ignorance and racism of their society, what matters here is the continuity of the supremacy of the Good Fella Missus. Her hallowed status in Australian history must be dismantled, and the dark side with Aborigines illuminated. Only then perhaps will we find a balance between the horror and the good in the relationship between white women and Aboriginal society.

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⁴⁹ Bates in [anon] 1936:93-99.

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'HEATHEN POLYNEE' AND 'NIGGER TEACHERS' Torres Strait and the Pacific Islander Ascendancy

Steve Mullins

All too often historians have approached Torres Strait as if the patterns of contact there were little more than extensions of those that occurred on mainland Australia. Rarely have they made sufficient allowance for the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies were fundamentally different from one another, nor have they seemed willing to put aside preconceptions accumulated during their scholarly excursions onto Australia's pastoral frontier. Yet for Torres Strait even the term 'frontier', if it implies one-way movement and a single active force, is to some extent misleading. A number of forces converged in the region to create the cultural and social order we now see, and any explanation which takes as its starting point a simple two-sided frontier is inappropriate.

It is hardly surprising therefore that social scientists, used to making sense of complex patterns of social relationships, and increasingly historically-minded, have written the best accounts of Torres Strait culture contact. The most notable have been the anthropologists Jeremy Beckett and David Moore, and the sociologist Nonie Sharp.¹ More recently the linguist Anna Shnukal also has made a valuable contribution with her accounts of the indigenisation and creolisation of beche-la-mar, or Pacific Pidgin English, by the Torres Strait Islanders. In the course of this work Shnukal detected what I think was the most significant process of culture contact in Torres Strait; that which took place between the Torres Strait Islanders and Pacific Islanders who arrived in the region in the 1860s and 1870s aboard beche-de-mer, pearl-shelling and missionary vessels. Shnukal's analysis of the origins of the language she called Torres Strait Creole, published in this journal in 1983, led her to suggest that, 'the dominant external influence in Torres Strait between 1870 and 1940 was not European. Rather, European influenced South Sea Islanders assumed the role of cultural middle-men, transmitting their own version of European ways and language to the Islanders of Torres Strait'.²

I propose to consider the role of the Pacific Islanders in the Strait, especially in relation to the formation of an elite class on the islands, a class initially composed of Pacific Islander maritime workers and missionary teachers, and subsequently of people of mixed Pacific and Torres Strait Islander descent. Shnukal, in a later article, describes this elite, as

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¹ Beckett 1964, 1977, 1978, 1987; Moore 1979, Sharpe 1982.

² Shnukal 1983:185.

does the anthropologist Jeremy Beckett in his recent book. They both suggest that it emerged in the twentieth century - Shnukal just after the turn of the century³ and Beckett, if I read him correctly, in the 1920s or 1930s.⁴ However, I think the Pacific Islanders were well and truly in the ascendancy by the late 1870s, and that by the mid-1880s their influence was already beginning to wane.

Pacific Islanders first arrived in the Strait in the mid-1860s aboard Sydney-based beche-de-mer vessels diverted by their owners from the declining Pacific trade. By 1870 there were about seven vessels in Torres Strait waters employing some 150 Pacific Islanders, the vast majority of them men.⁵ They were left to work from beach camps on the north-eastern and central islands while their employers ferried produce and supplies between Sydney and the Strait. The camps had European overseers, but it was also common for Pacific Islanders themselves, generally Polynesians with long experience in the Pacific trade, to be left in charge. Pacific Islanders also skippered the luggers that roamed about the islands in search of new beche-de-mer grounds, and fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood to supplement their rations. The discovery in 1869 of commercial quantities of pearl shell caused a rush of vessels from the Pacific trade, and by 1872 about 500 Pacific Islanders were at work in the fishery.⁶ At the time the Torres Strait Islanders numbered no more than about 3000 altogether.⁷

Then in 1871 the London Missionary Society, literally following in the wake of the trading masters, placed Loyalty Islander evangelists and their families on the islands. The society used these evangelists, or teachers as they were known, to pioneer their mission stations throughout the Pacific. They were generally recent converts who had been given only a few years of secular and religious training, though the first Torres Strait contingent consisted of some more experienced men and women. The Society believed that the teachers were more effective when left to their own devices, and it was not unusual for a year to pass between the missionaries' visits.⁸ These were generally brief, often no more than a day or two.

Thus, almost from the beginning of the colonial occupation of the Strait, which I date from the north-westerly season of 1863-1864, there were Pacific Islanders virtually unsupervised by Europeans living amongst the Torres Strait Islanders. In the space of

³ Shnukal 1985:231-232.

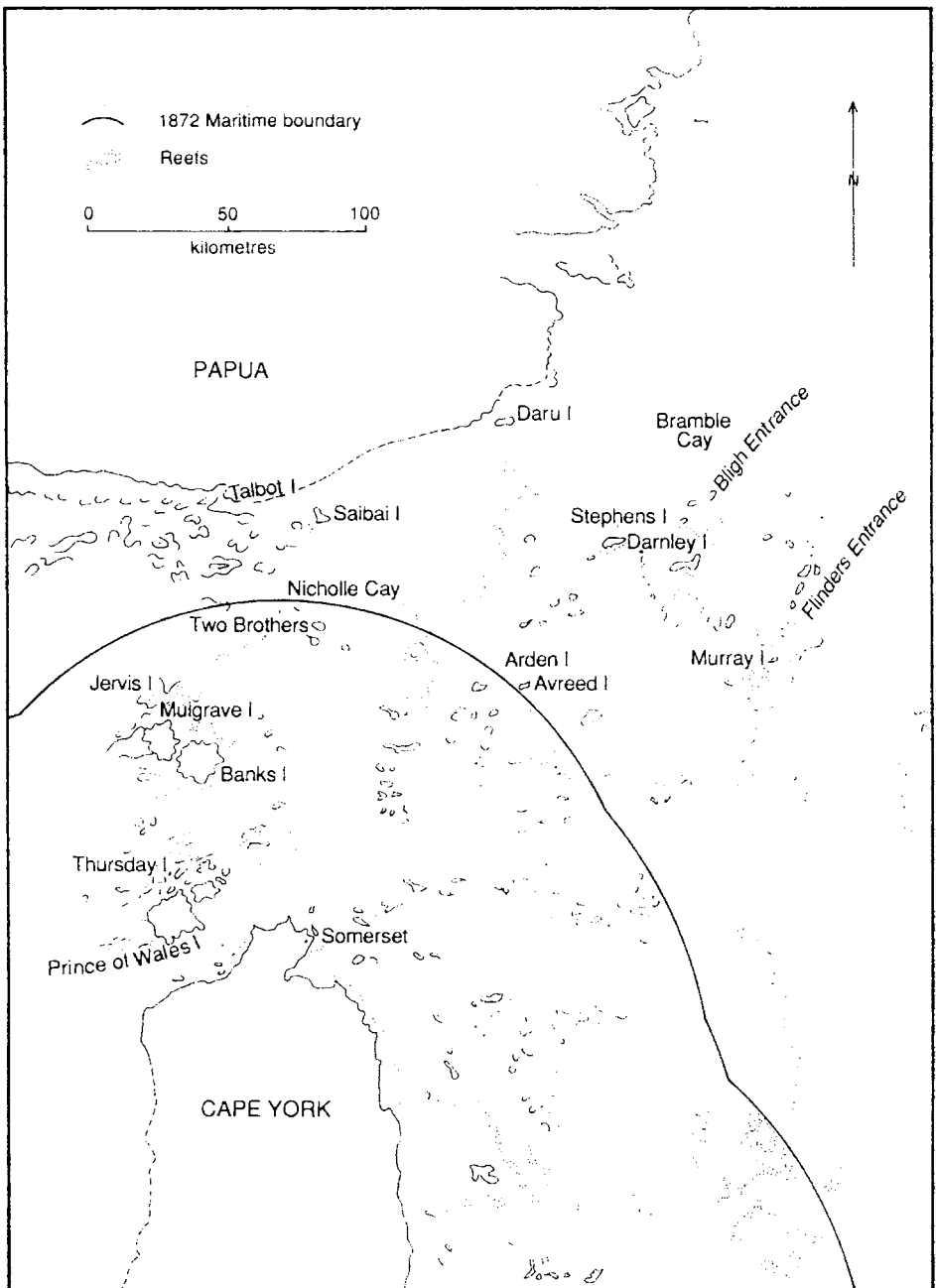
⁴ Beckett came across a 'skipper class-crew class' relationship on Badu (Mulgrave) while undertaking fieldwork there in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In his book he writes that this structure belonged to 'colonial Torres Strait rather to metropolitan Australia', but the fact that he uses the term 'colonial' to denote a relationship rather than an era makes it difficult to grasp his periodisation. In another place he suggests the class structure had its origins in 'the racial stratification of earlier years'. But this also is ambiguous as to time. Beckett 1987:164-170.

⁵ Frank Jardine to Col. Sec., 1 November 1870, Somerset Letter Book, 1869-1871, ML B1414.

⁶ In a private letter to A.H. Palmer dated 15 August 1872, Jardine estimated that there were between 300 and 400 Pacific Islanders in the Strait, but in September the same year he told the governor that there were about 900. The second figure may have included Torres Strait Islanders. Jardine to Palmer, 15 August 1872, Palmer-McIllwraith Papers, OL OM64-14; Normanby to Commodore Stirling, 2 December 1872, QSA, GOV/G2.

⁷ Mullins 1989:518-524.

⁸ Samuel McFarlane, 5th Voyage of the *Ellengowan*, 2 April 1875, Papua Journals, Council for World Mission Archives.



North Queensland Maritime Boundary, 1872, from Colonial Office Minute, 14 January 1878, CO 234/38. AJCP reel 1932, 1878. Map drawn by Ian Heywood, Cartography Unit, RSPacS, ANU.

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twenty years between the mid-1860s and the mid-1880s their presence changed the Torres Strait communities so that they came to resemble those in the Pacific which had been brought under the sway of the Pacific maritime trade and the Christian mission. It was nothing short of a remarkable cultural metamorphosis.

By the mid-1880s most Torres Strait Islanders were at least nominally Christian. But they had been instilled with the teachers' brand of fire and brimstone Protestantism which had been indigenised in the Pacific. The missionaries generally saw no harm in allowing the Torres Strait Islanders to continue to perform their traditional dances and ceremonies, as long as they were of the secular kind and did not promote what they saw as immorality.⁹ But the teachers were adamant that their congregations should cast aside old customs. On many islands traditional dances were forbidden, and new ones, brought from the Pacific and taught by Pacific Islanders, replaced them. When the Islanders gathered for 'May meetings' or to open new churches the day began with volleys of rifle fire, and there were long processions accompanied by the singing of Pacific-style hymns. There were also weddings and baptisms followed by Pacific Islander-style feasts. As the missionary Harry Scott wrote in 1884, 'South Sea teachers bring South Sea fashion'.¹⁰

Pacific Islander skippers introduced other changes. Most importantly they taught young Torres Strait Islanders the work practices of the maritime trade. In his recent book Beckett describes how skippers and teachers together managed to inculcate a work ethic.¹¹ However, it needs to be said that, 'despite the harsh discipline on the boats', Torres Strait Islanders seemed to relish life in the maritime trades. The speed with which they took to the work cannot be adequately explained in any other way. For instance, in a matter of two or three years between 1871 and 1873 practically the whole population of Mabuiag (Jervis) was at work in the fishery. Soon they were dependent on what they earned on the boats, neglected their gardens, and, like the Pacific Islanders before them, took to the vices of other colonial seamen.¹²

Perhaps the most striking outward sign of change was that by the mid-1880s the Torres Strait Islanders had gathered in central villages. In the north-eastern islands they had formerly lived in dozens of small scattered beach communities, each surrounded by a bamboo palisade. By the mid-1880s the palisades were coming down and a few large villages had sprung up near the mission houses and churches. In the south-western, central-western and central islands the change was the more remarkable because in the past the people had moved according to the seasons. They now constructed more substantial dwellings, the teachers showing them how to build in the Loyalty Islander style. Although these houses went up first in the western islands to replace flimsy temporary huts, the practice soon spread to the north and north-eastern islands where the traditional houses had been large and sound. The anthropologist A. C. Haddon wrote after his first visit to the Strait in 1888, that 'a somewhat variable South Sea type house' prevailed everywhere, and that the new type was accepted 'not so much because it was better than the old, as because it was associated with the new order of things'.¹³

⁹ McFarlane, 6th Voyage of the *Ellengowan*, 10 May 1875.

¹⁰ Harry Scott to foreign secretary LMS., 15 August 1884, Papua Letters 1872-1927, B3 F4 Jb.

¹¹ Beckett 1987:105-107.

¹² A.W. Murray to foreign secretary LMS 8 September 1873, Papua Letters 1872-1927, B1 F1 Jc.

¹³ Haddon 1912:105-106.

It is difficult to know when Torres Strait Islanders first began to speak beche-la-mar, but some appear to have adopted it in the very early years of the colonial occupation. When the missionaries arrived at Erub (Darnley) in 1871 an Erubian leader called Dubat communicated with them in a kind of broken English that must have been beche-la-mar.¹⁴ Shnukal maintains that by early in the twentieth century Torres Strait Creole, the indigenised version of beche-la-mar, was the lingua franca of the Strait and the primary language of some communities.¹⁵ While it is easy to see how beche-la-mar allowed for the transmission of new ideas in a society that had previously spoken three languages, its adoption and transformation into Torres Strait Creole also illustrates the process by which a new order came about.

For decades before the colonial occupation, Torres Strait Islanders had traded with the crews of passing ships. They learned key European words; 'knife', 'axe', 'more', 'good', and many others. But the crews and passengers on these ships generally did not speak beche-la-mar. They were Europeans, Lascars and Malays, and they communicated with the Islanders in a haphazard kind of broken English.¹⁶ When beche-la-mar arrived in the Strait the Islanders recognised many of the words and associated the language with Europeans. As Shnukal points out, later in the twentieth century many Torres Strait Islanders believed their Creole to be English. But although beche-la-mar was inextricably associated with European wealth and power, it was introduced to the Torres Strait Islanders by the Pacific Islanders with whom they were in constant contact.

Shnukal also shows that Torres Strait Creole acquired much of its phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics from the traditional Torres Strait languages.¹⁷ But there is also evidence which indicates that at a very early stage Pacific Islanders changed the traditional languages. By the mid-1870s the teachers were producing religious texts in the indigenous tongues. They found it difficult to pronounce some Torres Strait words, and in translation these were changed. In 1878, a government official who had been in the Strait since before the teachers arrived, wrote that under their tuition the Torres Strait Islanders were adopting new pronunciations of old words, and introducing new words that were neither English nor traditional Torres Strait.¹⁸ Sidney Ray, the linguist with the 1898 Haddon expedition, agreed that many biblical and Pacific words had become part of the traditional languages, and that the pronunciation of some sounds had become more nasal after the arrival of the teachers.¹⁹ Thus, the dynamic process by which Torres Strait Creole evolved provides a useful analogy for the wider process of change that was going on. The notion of the European in the background encouraged the adoption of beche-la-mar, but interaction between Pacific and Torres Strait Islanders determined how it evolved into something new - Torres Strait Creole.

Shnukal describes the Pacific Islanders of this early period as 'cultural middle-men', and calls them the 'chief lieutenants' of Europeans.²⁰ Beckett writes that they played 'a

14 Murray and McFarlane, Report of a Voyage to New Guinea 1871, Papua Journals.

15 Shnukal 1983:175.

16 Ibid.:178-179.

17 Ibid.:175.

18 Henry Chester to Col. Sec., 15 January 1878, QSA, COL/A252, in-letter 338 of 1878.

19 Haddon vol.3 1907:3-4, 166-169, 187-191.

20 Shnukal 1985:227, 220.

curious mediating role’ between Europeans and Torres Strait Islanders.²¹ But I think this sells them short. True, administrators, traders and missionaries succeeded in establishing a colonial order in the Strait, and the progress of that order was expedited by the emergence of a new cultural order. But the new cultural order came about by a process that had a logic of its own. Pacific Islanders were no more the passive agents of colonial order than Torres Strait Islanders were its simple, uncomprehending victims. For the most part Torres Strait Islanders were willing and able to take advantage of the changing circumstances that confronted them, and the Pacific Islanders were intent on creating an order of their own; one that was familiar to, and convenient for, themselves.

Pacific Islanders working in the Strait were not the innocent victims of unscrupulous sailing masters of popular history books. After 1872 most of them were legally engaged either in Sydney or at one of the Queensland ports.²² Many of them were professional seamen capable of using sophisticated strategies to improve their wages and conditions. The first large-scale strike that we know of occurred in 1872. In August of that year Frank Jardine, the police magistrate at Somerset, Cape York, reported that the crews of the pearl-shelling vessels *Woodbine*, *Melanie*, and *Western Star*, in all about 150 men, had:

struck work altogether, and on the principle of ‘might makes right’ have ousted the whites and are doing just as they please.²³

Eleven of the ringleaders eventually were brought before the Somerset bench and charged with either ‘insubordination’ or ‘refusal to obey lawful commands’, which were infringements of their seaman’s articles, and in effect industrial offences.²⁴

The Torres Strait pearl shell fishery was only a few seasons old when the strike occurred. Three years later a Somerset official could write that the Pacific Islanders were showing:

a disposition to strike work in a body, with the hope thereby of obtaining their discharge, so that they may demand better wages in the competition there is here.²⁵

By the late 1870s industrial disputation was endemic in the fishery. In 1877, the first year of the Thursday Island bench, 125 cases were heard concerning infringements of labour agreements made under the provisions of the Merchant Seamen’s Act. The next highest number was at Townsville with 31, and the total for Queensland in the same year was 215.²⁶

After the 1872 strike Frank Jardine wrote, with typical facetiousness, that:

The great grievance and thorn [for the masters] is the South Sea Islander who will not remain the heathen Polynee that he was, but keeps pace with the times, and is already becoming too civilized and knowing to give twelve months service for a butcher’s knife, a ninepenny tomahawk, and a dab of red ochre quarterly on each cheek, as was the case in the ‘old times’, but has

²¹ Beckett 1987:92.

²² Mullins 1989:230-231, 327-340.

²³ Jardine to Palmer, 15 August 1872.

²⁴ Somerset Water Police Log, 2 August 1872, RHSQ collection.

²⁵ C. D’Oyley Aplin to Col. Sec., 15 April 1875, Somerset Letter Book, 1872-1877, QSA, CPS 13c/G1.

²⁶ Statistics of Queensland for 1877:160-161, JLCQ vol.XXVII. 1879:67-268.

already learned the love of money, is a good judge of Queensland rum, and uses a toothbrush.²⁷

Clearly the Pacific Islanders had a lively sense of their own interests. But it took more than that to win concessions from tight-fisted pearling masters. Their success, however we judge it, depended for the most part on the fact that they were able to take advantage of a chronic labour shortage brought about by the way in which labour trade regulations were applied in the Strait.

After 1872, when Queensland extended its maritime boundary to 100 km from the coast, the government refused to issue licences under its 1868 Polynesian Labourers Act for newly introduced Pacific Islanders to work in maritime industries.²⁸ For a while it even forbade masters to engage time-expired agricultural labourers at Queensland ports.²⁹ However, in 1875 the regulations were eased and time-expired men, and those who already were experienced seamen, were allowed to be employed as long as they were signed on ship's articles and written permission was obtained from the government.³⁰ In 1876 James Merriman and Co. did manage to get 75 newly introduced Solomon Islanders onto the pearl-shelling grounds by way of a licence issued by the governor of New South Wales, but the Queensland authorities put such impediments in its way that it eventually abandoned the enterprise and never tried it again.³¹ By 1873 there were virtually no 'green hands' going to the Strait.

Queensland's determined stance on the issue can be explained in two ways. Firstly, at the time the policy was being formulated all questions involving the Torres Strait fishery were being referred to either Attorney-General Samuel Griffith or his close colleague Treasurer William Hemmant. They were opponents of the labour trade and did all in their power to ensure that the system was not extended, especially to areas where Pacific Islander employment could not be properly supervised. On the other hand, those in favour of the labour trade thought of it only in terms of the survival of the sugar industry. If the 1868 Act was extended to workers in the Torres Strait fishery, essentially a Sydney-based industry prosecuted in British-registered vessels, any ensuing unfavourable publicity regarding their treatment might provide ammunition for those seeking to have the Act repealed. It simply was not worth the risk, and Griffith and Hemmant were left to impose regulations as they saw fit.

The regulations they came up with ensured that only a particular class of Pacific Islander worked in Torres Strait. Experienced men, many of them missionary educated, they were in fact an elite when they arrived. Attractive rates of pay caused them to continually renew their contracts, though few were willing to sign for the three years

²⁷ Jardine to Palmer, 15 August 1872.

²⁸ W. Hemmant to Col. Sec., NIW, 20 March 1876, QSA, COL/A241, in-letter 3485 of 1876.

²⁹ Telegrams - C. Pennefather to Col. Sec., 8 January 1873, Fred Fahlby to Col. Sec. 1873, QSA COL/A178, in-letter 71 of 1873; Rosengren to Col. Sec., 6 March 1873, COL/A180, in-letter 403 of 1873; Fenwick and Scott to Col. Sec., 24 March 1873, COL/A181, in-letter 575 of 1873; Hunter to Palmer, 28 July 1873, COL/A190, in-letter 2508 of 1873.

³⁰ Proceedings of the executive council re shipping Polynesians as seamen, 2 July 1874, QSA, COL/A215, file 1722 of 1875.

³¹ Col. Sec. NSW to Hemmant, 18 March 1876, QSA, COL/A231, in-letter 3485 of 1876; Henry Chester to Col. Sec., 1 August 1876, Somerset Letter Book 1872-1877; McFarlane to foreign secretary LMS, 13 November 1876, B1 F5 Ja; Chester, Report on the Fisheries of Torres Straits, 24 April 1879 (1-2), QV & P vol.2, 1979:947-949.

normal in the sugar industry. They preferred to renegotiate with their employer at the end of each season, or to offer their services to a more liberal master.³² In the mid-1870s 'apparatus boats' were introduced to the industry and more Torres Strait Islanders were employed to help alleviate the labour shortage, but this only strengthened the Pacific Islanders' hand. They were able to monopolise the better paid positions of 'hard hat' diver and swimming boat skipper, and earn sums far in excess of those paid to other colonial seamen regardless of origin.³³ A competent 'hard hat' diver could bring in £100 a season, while a top hand might make as much as £300.³⁴

By 1872 these relatively affluent Pacific Islanders were living on practically every inhabited central and north-eastern island³⁵ and, as noted above, after 1871 they were joined by the teachers who were equally independent-minded. The missionaries like to depict the teachers as faithful servants and saintly 'Uncle Tom' types. But closer examination reveals them making business arrangements with men in the fishery, both black and white; visiting each other in their own boats to discuss pay increases and other policies to put to the missionaries; moving their stations to places that suited them better and, on the one day of the year the missionaries visited them, playing the one-dimensional role the missionaries wished to see.³⁶

Initially the masters were happy to see the teachers, regarding them as the agents of that essential arm of British civilization, Christianity, which complemented the other two arms, British commerce and law. Indeed it was William Banner, a pioneer of the fishery, who suggested that the London Missionary Society go to the Strait in the first place.³⁷ But the masters soon began to resent the manner in which the teachers exercised their influence over their employees. The government officials at Somerset also thought of them as disruptive of the colonial order. Some of the teachers had sent Frank Jardine a letter asking him to be lenient with the ringleaders who had mobbed and beaten two of their European officers. But Jardine was convinced that the teachers had encouraged those who took part in the 1872 strike. He wrote:

I blame them in a great measure for most of the rows and bother with the men employed in the fisheries, as they are a mischievous, lazy, and psalm singing lot, and make the stones for the others to throw... It is neither wise, nor just, to leave a lot of ignorant nigger teachers (pardon the paradox) to their own

³² Report of J.A. Peterson to Col. Sec., 28 July 1881, QSA, COL/A231, file 4091 of 1881.

³³ The boats were from four to eight tonnes, carvel built with two standing lugs and a jib, and drew about a metre and a half of water. Before 1875 most pearl shell was gathered by free divers from what were known as swimming boats - a swimming boat crew consisted of about ten to fifteen men. The 'Apparatus' boats, that is boats equipped with air compressors and 'hard-hat' diving suits, were manned by a diver who was also the skipper, a tender to watch the compressor, and a few deckhands.

³⁴ Extracts from letters of LCarey of HMS *Conflict* giving account of Pearl Shell Fisheries on the north and north-west coast of Australia, no.3, 28 January 1876, RNAS, Labour Traffic and Pearl Shell Fisheries 1873-1880, reel G698/21; Henry Chester to Col. Sec., 24 April 1879, QV & P vol.2 1879:943-945; Aplin to Col. Sec., 3 March 1879, Somerset Letter Book 1872-1877; Lt. de Hoghton to Commodore Wilson, 22 September 1879; Further Correspondence re Pearl-Shell etc., Fisheries, (3-6), QV & P vol.2 1880:1161-1166.

³⁵ Jardine to Palmer, 25 August 1872.

³⁶ McFarlane to foreign secretary LMS, 2 March 1879, B2 F3 Jb; McFarlane to foreign secretary LMS, 6th Voyage of the *Ellengowan*.

³⁷ King 1909:48.

devices, and the sooner the Rev. Mr. McFarlane returns to look after his flock the better for all concerned.³⁸

Like most other Europeans in the Strait, Jardine did not object to the aims of the mission but its methods. He was clearly prejudiced against the very idea of Pacific Islander teachers, and the attitude was not uncommon. Even the Queensland governor expressed the opinion that it was 'quite preposterous' to think that any good could result from the teachers' presence in Torres Strait unless they were closely controlled by missionaries.³⁹

At first the teachers found it impossible to compete with the more worldly attractions the pearling masters offered both Pacific and Torres Strait Islanders.⁴⁰ However, the situation on the north-eastern islands was unique and it was there that they had their greatest early successes. Although the fishery had begun in the north-east, from 1870 the islands became progressively more remote from the centre of activity. Furthermore the 1872 rectification of the maritime boundary left them beyond Queensland's jurisdiction. This meant that for the purposes of Queensland's 1868 Act, and the Imperial Kidnapping Act of 1872, the north-eastern Torres Strait Islanders were regarded as Pacific Islanders and treated as such. In other words, between 1872 and 1875 the regulations excluded them from work in the pearl-shelling industry, which at the time was carried on within the boundary.

The evidence that this prohibition was being actively policed is sparse, but appears to be conclusive. In August 1874, the schooner *Margaret and Jane* under the command of Henry McAuley was seized by the Somerset water police for carrying Pacific Islanders from Erub (Darnley) in north-eastern Torres Strait, to southern Torres Strait without being licensed under the Kidnapping Act. McAuley was initially charged with two offences; that he carried a Pacific Islander woman without a licence, and that he brought eight Massid (Yorke) Islanders to be signed on at Somerset claiming that they were from southern Torres Strait.⁴¹

McAuley appeared before the vice-admiralty court in Brisbane. He was acquitted on the first charge when the court determined that the woman had stowed away on the vessel. The second charge was also dropped, though the reason for this is not clear.⁴² But the fact that McAuley thought it necessary to pass the Massid (Yorke) Islanders off as southern Torres Strait Islanders indicates that both the authorities at Somerset and the pearl-shelling masters understood that it was illegal to employ northern Torres Strait Islanders in southern Torres Strait.

A letter from Charles Beddome to the Brisbane immigration agent in July 1874 provides more evidence of this. He wrote seeking permission to bring 150 north-eastern Islanders to his pearl-shelling station at Naghir (Mt. Ernest) which was within the 100 km. limit. He claimed that the men were both 'willing and anxious to engage... but cannot be

³⁸ Jardine to Palmer, 15 August 1872.

³⁹ Normanby to Secretary of State, 4 April 1872, despatch 30, CO/234/29, A.J.C.P., reel 1924, 1872.

⁴⁰ At this time the operators of pearl-shelling stations generally accepted the responsibility of providing for the families of their employees. McFarlane to foreign secretary, L.M.S., 27 July 1874, B1 F1 Jd; McFarlane, Voyage of the *Ellengowan*, 15-26 October 1874, Papua Journals.

⁴¹ *The Queen v Margaret and Jane*, QSA, CRS/153, 1874.

⁴² Ibid.

brought as they come under the Kidnapping Act of 1872'.⁴³ Then in October 1874 Jardine's successor as Somerset police magistrate, Charles D'Oyley Aplin, inquired of the government whether Islanders from northern Torres Strait could be employed in Queensland waters. The opinion of the law officers was that Aplin was 'not bound' to seize vessels that arrived at Somerset with northern Torres Strait Islanders who wished to be entered on ship's articles, and that an officer in his position had a 'large discretionary power'.⁴⁴ Given Aplin's opinion that employment in the fishery was beneficial for the Islanders, it is safe to assume he allowed them to be signed on in the 1875 season.⁴⁵

Thus, for three years, while most central, south-western and central-western communities were tied up in the frenzied activity of the pearl-shelling industry, the north-eastern Islanders were at home with the teachers. Their islands also attracted a population of Pacific Islander deserters and time-expired men who had opted out of the pearl-shelling industry to live beyond Queensland's jurisdiction. The teachers had always relied on the support of other Pacific Islanders, especially their fellow Loyalty Islanders. In 1871 they were elated when Carl Thorngren's *John Knox* arrive at Erub (Darnley) shortly after they had been landed by the missionaries, because many of the crew were friends of theirs from Lifu.⁴⁶ The whole crew of the *John Knox* immediately deserted and some of them helped the teachers establish their stations.⁴⁷ When the teacher Mataika left Erub to begin work amongst the people of Mer (Murray) he took Tom, 'his excellent fellow-countryman', with him.⁴⁸ Gucheng, the principal teacher at Erub, employed another of the *John Knox* deserters, Citania, as his assistant teacher.⁴⁹ Another teacher had his cutter manned and skippered by Loyalty Islanders, and the Somerset officials believed that it was common for Pacific Islander maritime workers to steal from the pearl-shelling stations to assist the teachers when they were short of provisions.⁵⁰

In the north-eastern islands a window of opportunity opened for the teachers and they took advantage of the circumstances to establish a stronghold from which they eventually Christianised the Strait. They probably also were helped in this by a devastating measles epidemic which killed an estimated twenty per cent of the indigenous population in 1875.⁵¹ Torres Strait Islanders did not believe in death by natural causes, and when it occurred they blamed malevolent magic. There is no doubt that they associated the new sickness with the new religion, and for them the epidemic was a massive display of its supernatural power.⁵² It is also possible that the teachers exploited the hysteria caused by

⁴³ Charles Beddome to immigration agent, 9 July 1874, QSA, COL/A196, in-letter 1365 of 1874.

⁴⁴ Law officers' opinion re Aplin's letter of 29 October 1874, noted 'inform him accordingly', QSA, COL/A200, file 2309, of 1874.

⁴⁵ Aplin, Report on the Pearl Fisheries of Torres Strait, 3 March 1875, Somerset Letter Book 1872-1877.

⁴⁶ McFarlane 1888:49-50.

⁴⁷ Jardine to Col. Sec., 1 October 1871, Somerset Letter Book 1869-1871.

⁴⁸ W. Wyatt Gill, 1876:215.

⁴⁹ Murray, 14 May 1873, Papua Journals.

⁵⁰ Chester to Col. Sec., 7 June 1876, Somerset Letter Book 1872-1877.

⁵¹ Chester to Col. Sec., 14 July 1882, QSA, COL/A344, in-letter 4004 of 1882.

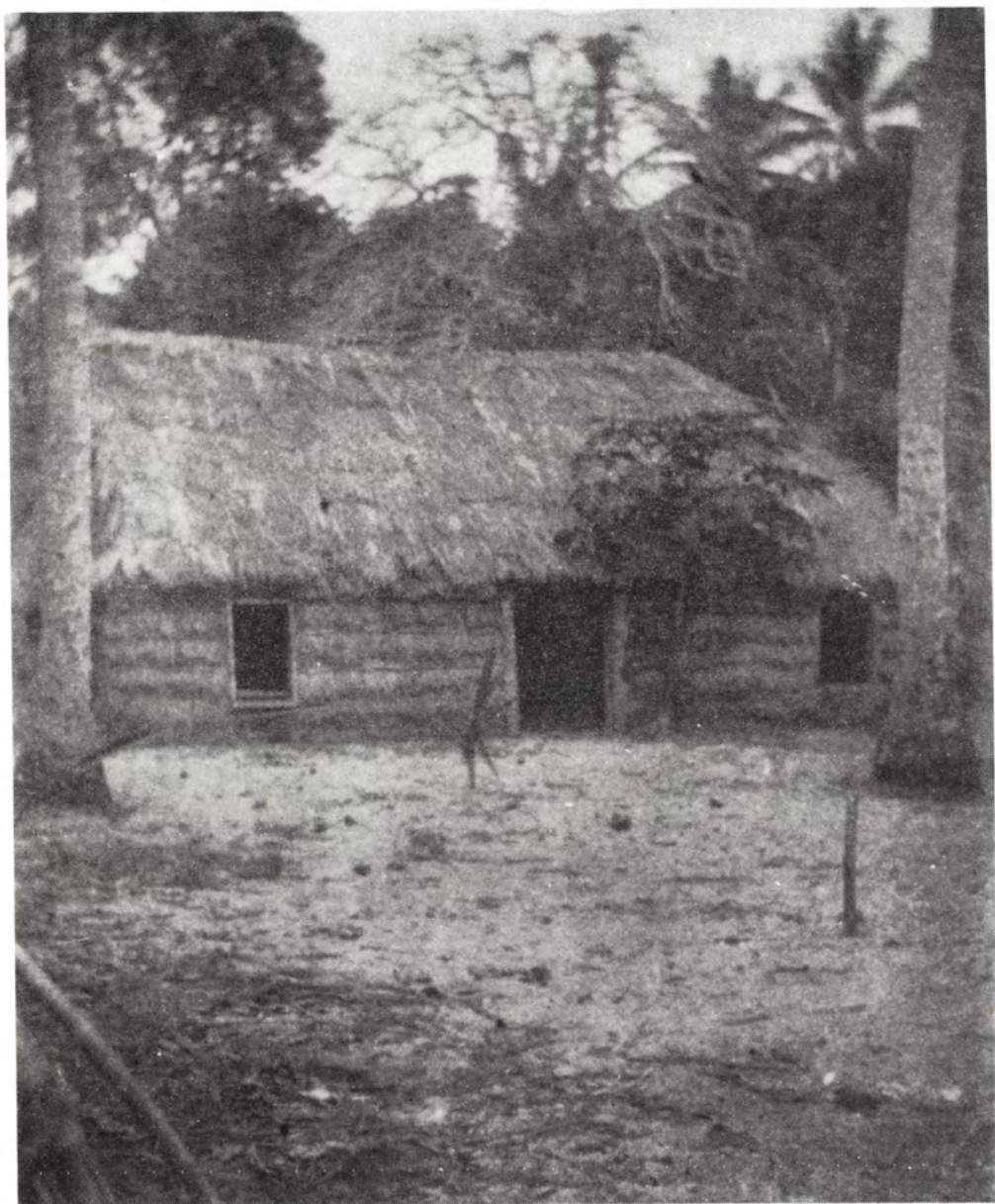
⁵² Haddon, vol.5 1904:298-307; Elia to McFarlane, March 1878, encl. in McFarlane to foreign secretary, LMS, 10 May 1878, B2 F2 Jb.



'Joe Rotummah's House on Darnley Island, 1898'. Oxley Library no. 65445.



'Darnley Island Court House, 1898'. Oxley Library no. 65493.



'First church on Darnley, 1875'. Onslow photo album, Mitchell Library px A4358 -1.

the epidemic in order to win converts and further entrench their authority.⁵³ Whatever the case, by the late 1870s they were the most influential men in most Torres Strait communities, and in the north-eastern islands they had established what Beckett has described as a 'stern theocracy'.⁵⁴

The critics of the mission wrote disparagingly about the intellectual ability and character of the teachers, but the masters were more concerned about the fact that teachers encouraged both Pacific and Torres Strait Islanders to question their employers' authority. On islands where pearl-shelling and mission stations were in close proximity there was often intense animosity between masters and teachers. On Mabuiag (Jervis) the masters objected to the teachers' practice of taking money from helplessly drunk divers. The teachers answered that it was common on their home islands to fine drunken seamen. The masters regarded the taking of roll-calls at Sunday service as an attempt to intimidate those who did not attend. The teachers considered they had a perfect right to keep check on their congregations. The teachers also kept women at the mission houses while their men were out in the boats. They claimed they did this to protect the women against the unwanted advances of other men. The masters thought they did it to satisfy their own sexual appetites.⁵⁵

On these kinds of issues the masters may have been able to claim the high moral ground, but their criticisms were motivated more by the desire to undermine the growing influence of the teachers amongst their employees. The antagonism was essentially a product of a conflict of authority. Likewise there were Pacific Islander skippers who were not afraid to test the authority of their employers. They were generally old hands with crews to back them up and authority of their own. In normal circumstances the balance of power remained with the masters and they were able to hold the mens' support if a few were being openly defiant. But when the men were well supplied with cash and alcohol was freely available, things were less certain. By the late 1870s the masters were beginning to look for a steadier and more tractable workforce in the ports of south-east Asia.

Between 1872 and 1880 the number of Pacific Islanders in pearl-shelling dropped from about 500 to 320, and by 1885 it was 175. This is despite the fact that by then the overall workforce had increased to somewhere near 1000.⁵⁶ As Pacific Islanders became less willing to accept the role the employers wished to impose upon them many left the European-dominated industry. Some went of their own accord and others were squeezed out.

53 For nearly four years before the epidemic the teachers were under the sole guidance of Archibald Murray. He was a preacher of a 'highly spiritual character', and the highlight of his career was the Tutuila revival 1839-41 at Samoa. The revival followed an influenza epidemic which swept through all Samoa, but it was most dramatic at Tutuila where Murray was stationed. According to Gilson he exploited the hysteria caused by the epidemic to win converts. Given the teachers' habit of calling the wrath of God down on the Torres Strait Islanders it is possible they followed Murray's example in 1875.

54 Beckett 1978:215.

55 Mrs J. Tait Scott, Cruise in Torres Straits in the 'Jessamine', 28 Feb.-2 March 1881, Papua Journals; McFarlane to foreign secretary, LMS, 16 June 1882, B3 F1 Ja; Thomas de Hoghton to Charles Pennefather, 8 September 1879, encl. in Pennefather to Chester, 19 December 1879, encl. in Chester to Col. Sec., 5 January 1880, QSA, COL/A288, file 460 of 1880.

56 Chester to Col. Sec., 3 June 1880, QSA, COL/A295, in-letter 3582 of 1880; John Douglas, Thursday Island (Report of the Government Resident for 1885), (2) QV & P vol.1 1886:489-493.



Traditional beehive huts on Darnley, 1975. Onslow photo album.

Since the earliest years of the fishery they had tended to meld into the local population. This process continued in the 1880s, and probably intensified as the workforce was restructured.

There are no figures to make an exact estimate of the number of Pacific Islanders who joined the island communities. Certainly the total does not account for all who drifted from the pearl-shelling industry. Some of them can be traced to beche-de-mer vessels operating from Cooktown to islands off the New Guinea coast, others went south to the sugar

plantations. But the number who remained in the Strait was nonetheless considerable, probably more than 200. After a tour of the Strait in 1881 a missionary wrote:

I found it extremely difficult to get at the natives for South Sea men, they are quite a plague at some of the [mission] stations.⁵⁷

Some lived by fishing and gardening, some owned their own beche-de-mer boats, others operated beche-de-mer boats owned by Europeans. This last group managed to remain fairly independent, only having to deliver their product to Thursday Island three or four times a year.

The influence of the Pacific Islander elite diminished considerably after the mid-1880s, but as Shnukal and Beckett show it was not extinguished. That the three of us uncovered convincing evidence of it over such a wide span of time indicates that it was deeply rooted in Torres Strait society. Even in recent times people of mixed Pacific and Torres Strait Islander descent continued to dominate the affairs of a few communities, and it might be argued that they still wield the bulk of political and economic power in the Strait. Yet they are, and have long been, an integral part of Torres Strait society, and perhaps that is why it is so difficult to define adequately their role in the early contact period. What we can say is that they were not simply cultural middlemen or mediators. They were forging their own destiny, and in the process they helped created what is now Torres Strait's living culture.

The essential components of this new culture were in place by the mid-1880s, and while it was different from the old, it was not necessarily inferior to it. Certainly it was a culture more suited to the times. The fact that the people were predominantly Christian, were willing and capable workers, lived in village communities, and in many cases could read and write,⁵⁸ encouraged local government officials to view them more sympathetically and to actively work to promote their welfare. However, after the turn of the century officials with long experience in the region were replaced by professional bureaucrats who brought to the Strait ideas about 'native policy' formed on the pastoral frontier. For the next half century Queensland's oppressive protectionist regime denied Torres Strait Islanders, who were Christian and law-abiding Australians, the most basic human rights. The memory of those years has tended to obscure the fact that a century ago, as Shnukal says, Europeans were not the dominant external influence in Torres Strait.

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⁵⁷ J. Tait Scott to foreign secretary LMS, 5 April 1881, B2 F5 Jb.

⁵⁸ Haddon, vol.3 1907:166, 187-250.

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ISOLATION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEPROSY PROPHYLAXIS IN AUSTRALIA

Suzanne Saunders

In October 1930 an article entitled 'When will Australia adopt modern prophylactic measures against leprosy?' appeared in *The Medical Journal of Australia*. In tone the article was authoritative and persuasive. It was also demanding, although not as persistently critical as the accusation implicit in the title would suggest. Nevertheless, it brought to bear on the Australian situation a decade of international research and experience which indicated that Australia was not attuned to world-wide developments in leprosy prophylaxis and was unnecessarily tardy in introducing progressive methods of treatment. The author of the article was Sir Leonard Rogers who, with his colleague and co-researcher Ernest Muir, was pre-eminent in the international field of leprosy treatment and research. As a result of twenty years' work amongst the leprosy patients of India and continued international research, he became increasingly convinced that the compulsory, total segregation of persons suffering from leprosy was not only inhumane and ineffective but counter-productive and this was the crux of his message to the Australian medical fraternity.¹

In essence Rogers argued his case against the Australians on two fronts: that an isolation policy deterred leprosy patients from coming forward for treatment, and that once confined to a lazaret the standard of treatment in Australia was considerably below that available in other countries. Rogers was quick to point out that current policy had not resulted in a diminution of new leprosy cases being recorded each year; on the contrary, the incidence of the disease had continued to increase and was acknowledged to be reaching epidemic proportions in the Aboriginal populations of northern Australia.² It will be argued here that it was the racial origins of Australia's leprosy patients and their social and economic position in Australian society which was the single most influential factor in determining Australia's approach to leprosy prophylaxis.

At the time of Rogers' appeal for a more enlightened and humane approach to leprosy treatment, Australia had three main centres for the internment of leprosy patients. The most modern and comfortable of these was the small lazaret attached to the Coast Hospital in New South Wales, which was home to less than ten people. A full-time medical officer and nursing staff were in attendance and the patients, all of whom were European or Asian, were afforded the highest standard of treatment available to leprosy patients in Australia. The second institution was on Peel Island, off the Queensland coast. It also had resident nursing staff but the thirty-five patients were attended by a doctor only on a weekly basis. A little

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¹ In a paper read at the Pan Pacific Science Congress, Sydney, 1923, Rogers had presented similar views but had provoked no reaction.

² On 'epidemics' see Curson 1985 and for statistical data see Saunders 1986 and Davidson 1978.

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under half the patients were Aboriginal, but the next quinquennium was to see a dramatic change in the ratio of Aboriginal and European patients. The Northern Territory's leprosy patients, all of Aboriginal descent, were accommodated on Mud Island, Australia's third main institution. No nursing staff was provided and visits by a medical officer were rare; those patients desiring treatment were obliged to administer their own. Such were the conditions at Mud Island that four female patients were segregated in an isolation ward at the Darwin hospital, as internment at the lazaret was seen to be detrimental to their moral and physical well-being. A new leprosarium for the Northern Territory, situated on Channel Island in Darwin Harbour, was opened in 1931. It was to this leprosarium that seventeen Aboriginal patients from Western Australia were transferred from their temporary accommodation at Cossack in 1931, to be joined shortly after by the twenty-six patients from Mud Island and those isolated at the Darwin Hospital. In the three remaining states leprosy cases were rare and those few reported were accommodated at infectious diseases institutions.

For many years the seriousness of leprosy in Australia and the extent of its spread was greatly underestimated, but by 1930 recognition of the problem could no longer be avoided. At the fifth session of the Federal Health Council, held in 1931, leprosy was reported to be 'perhaps, the most pressing problem of the moment' in tropical medicine, with the incidence of the disease corresponding 'very roughly with the degree of prevalence of coloured persons in the population'.³ While Cilento's latter statement was misleading, a steady increase in the number of admissions to leprosy institutions had been evident during the preceding decade. However, by 1927 the total number remaining in institutions had been reduced through the continued practice of repatriating those not holding Australian citizenship and the high death rate in Australian leprosy institutions.

In the following decade figures soared. In Queensland patients were admitted to Peel Island at the rate of ten per year; by 1940 the number and racial mix of the patients was thought to warrant a second institution and the Fantome Island Leprosarium for Aboriginal patients was opened in that year.⁴ In the Northern Territory the increase was even more dramatic with admissions to Channel Island averaging twenty-four per year. In 1939 all but ten of the 129 patients isolated there were Aboriginal people. The inconvenience of transporting the increasing number of Western Australian patients to the Northern Territory resulted in the establishment of a leprosarium at Derby on the northern coast of Western Australia in 1936.⁵ This institution was exclusively for Aboriginal people and it supplemented the small isolation unit for Europeans in the south of the state. Sixty-five Aboriginal patients were immediately incarcerated at Derby, and by 1945, a Commonwealth funded survey program had resulted in a total of 430 Aboriginal people from the north-west being diagnosed as suffering from leprosy.⁶ Only in New South Wales was there evidence of a weakening of the endemic foci and increasingly those admitted to the leprosarium at the Coast Hospital had contracted the disease outside Australia.

In a superficial way the treatment of leprosy patients in Australia could be seen to be very similar to that in other countries, although the differences that were to become embarrassingly acute by the end of the 1930s were already in evidence a decade earlier. As in other parts of the world, leprosy patients in Australia were treated with chaulmoogra and

³ Cilento 1934.

⁴ *Annual Reports of the Department of Health, Queensland, 1929-1940.*

⁵ Saunders 1986:133.

⁶ Davidson 1978.

hydnocarpus oils, vegetable derivatives of the East Indian chaulmoogra tree. This centuries-old cure had been given twentieth-century sophistication when the production of the oil had been greatly refined and intra-muscular and subcutaneous injections had been substituted for the traditional nauseating, and less effective, oral treatment. The injections were extremely painful and often associated with debilitating side effects (Channel Island patients were given regular 'holidays' from treatment) but with even the faintest hope of a cure patients were usually willing to submit to the exacting regime. Internationally, this changed treatment, when combined with early detection, a balanced diet and hygienic living conditions brought about a significant increase in the number of patients responding positively to treatment. The condition of these patients was frequently referred to as 'cured' in the medical literature of the period but could have been more accurately described as 'disease arrested', as the high level of relapses was widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, treatment was significantly better and chances of arresting the disease greatly increased.

Isolation policies, or their absence, bore a direct relationship to the success of treatment. At the Calcutta leprosy institution, where the new treatment regime had been introduced, patients had been 'rendered bacteriologically normal and uninfected by weekly injections' of the oils. The Americans' record in Hawaii and the Philippines was both well documented and impressive. Under the most favourable conditions, such as those prevailing in Hawaii, the number of patients clinically cured of the leprosy was as high as 64%.⁷ It was an exemplary achievement, but one which could only be obtained when patients were treated during the the initial stages of the disease. Commencing treatment early was the key to success, as was illustrated by the dramatically low 8% cure rate among advanced cases at the same American institution. Australia's compulsory isolation policies determined that ideal conditions for treatment could never be obtained, as the number of patients certified as lepers while still in the very earlier stages of the disease was low indeed. Understandably, with so little hope of a cure, treatment tended to be perfunctory, with neither patients nor medical staff hoping for more than the possible chance of reducing the gross physical destruction which the disease could so readily cause. Hence, while treatment in Australia appeared to be comparable to that available in other countries, the results were significantly different.

Australia also had legislative powers over leprosy patients very similar to those in other parts of the world, but while countries such as Malaya, the Philippines and some West Indian countries either introduced legislation which granted more personal freedom, choice of institutional or out-patient treatment and greater discretionary powers for doctors and law officers,⁸ Australia was more rigidly enforcing strict regulations or, as in the case of the Northern Territory, introducing new repressive legislation as leprosy spread through the Aboriginal population. When the first Australian case of leprosy had been discovered in Queensland in 1855, detention and isolation of lepers had been provided for under the Public Health Act. All other colonies, except Tasmania, had similar legislation. After the federation of the six Australian colonies in 1901, the new states maintained the right to administer their own health services and to develop policy, except in the area of quarantine which became a federal concern. The Northern Territory alone was subject to federal policy, as from 1911 it was controlled by the Commonwealth government, which enacted legislation specific to the Territory. By 1930, most states had expanded Public Health Act clauses dealing with leprosy, so as to more clearly define isolation provisions. Queensland and the Northern Territory dealt with the problem with specific legislation and had,

⁷ For greater detail see Rogers c.1925.

⁸ Saunders 1986:36-40.

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respectively, the Leprosy Act of 1892 and the Ordinance for the Suppression of Leprosy of 1928.

In Australia the enforcement of isolation policies had the same negative effects witnessed in countries with similar legislation. When the prospect of isolation, with little hope of either cure or release, was the immediate and inevitable result of a diagnosis of leprosy, patients were understandably reluctant to come forward for treatment. This was true of both European and Aboriginal patients. Europeans, fearful of the stigma and the social and economic repercussions for their families, delayed seeking medical assistance until it was unavoidable or, when a diagnosis of leprosy was mooted, refused to submit to tests which would allow a conclusive diagnosis. In New South Wales, where the majority of patients were European, legislation stipulated a patient's certification as a leper must be based on bacteriological as well as clinical proof of the existence of the disease. This was also true in Queensland but in practice applied only to Europeans. This measure was thought to be essential when the result was confinement for life in an institution, but it compounded the difficulties of treatment. Some doctors colluded with patients in avoiding an accurate diagnosis while others, whose experience made a clinical diagnosis possible but who were unable to substantiate it with bacteriological evidence, were bound to declare the person non-leprosy. In either case the result was the same: the patient did not receive treatment. For Aboriginal patients in Queensland and patients in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, a clinical diagnosis was sufficient for commitment to a leprosarium. In no state was the level of infectivity of the various types of leprosy taken into consideration, although decades later the decision to isolate a patient was often based on this assessment and during the 1930s it was an important determining factor in other countries.

The negative effects of these stringent isolation policies were twofold. Obvious even to the most ardent advocates of compulsory isolation was the fact that many people suffering from leprosy remained in the community in an infective state for a much longer period of time than if they were free to seek medical advice without the threat of internment. Where isolation was seen to be the principal means of eradicating the disease, this rendered the prophylaxis almost ineffective. Even more significant, in the light of overseas research, was the number of patients in the early stages of leprosy who went untreated. Only when the disease advanced to a stage where detection was no longer avoidable did the patient come forward, but by then the chances of successful treatment were greatly reduced. Regular examination of the patient's contacts was considered to be an essential component of modern leprosy prophylaxis but the authorities' ability to consistently screen all contacts was also seriously affected by the adverse reaction to compulsory isolation.

The Aboriginal people were perhaps even more efficient than Europeans at avoiding detection when suffering from leprosy. Unlike the white community they had no long-standing tradition of fear associated with leprosy. It was to them a new disease which they accommodated within an already developed understanding of the causes of illness generally. It was inconvenient and often debilitating but did not provoke rejection. During the 1930s, large numbers of Aboriginal people lived in isolated bush communities, usually on their traditional lands which had highly significant religious and ritual associations. Some still followed a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Bitter experience had taught that those found by the authorities to be suffering from leprosy would be sentenced to a life of imprisonment in alien country. Impending visits by medical officers or, more often, mounted policemen would often result in lepers being hidden or whole groups of people moving into inaccessible country to avoid inspection. Thus, they gained the chance to avoid or temporarily postpone the humiliating experience of being chained like a criminal and transported, often in conveyances built for animals and subject to the curious, prying eyes

of the townsfolk who made no effort to hide their revulsion, to be finally incarcerated in a total-care institution from which there was little hope of emerging alive.

Despite the evasive measures adopted by Aboriginal people, they were isolated in increasing numbers in northern leprosariums, but their predilection for escape whenever the opportunity presented itself made the selection of island sites for leprosariums a necessary corollary to the isolation policy. Hence, as island leprosariums in other countries were closed Australia established new ones: Channel Island in 1928 and Fantome Island in 1940, both Aboriginal institutions. The one notable exception was the Derby leprosarium where perhaps the disastrous experiences of the lock hospitals on Dorre and Bernier islands earlier in the century had taught that there was little to be gained from such practices.

The accusation that leprosy prophylaxis in Australia was repressive and outdated should not have been entirely unexpected as it had been foreshadowed from within the ranks of the Australian medical profession. In 1926, E.H. Molesworth published an article in *The Medical Journal of Australia* on 'The leprosy problem' in Australia.⁹ Much of his argument was based on the theory of European racial immunity to leprosy engendered by the demise of susceptible stock, a premise not widely supported by leprologists. He also alleged that diagnosis in Australia was inefficient and haphazard, making the isolation of those detected grossly unfair. Despite the different suppositions, Molesworth concurred with Rogers' argument against compulsory isolation. In summary he wrote:

if it be conceded that we are naturally resistant and a relatively immune race, that by far the greater part of our population is outside the bounds of a climate favourable to leprosy and that our conditions of life and housing are very unfavourable to this disease, that the hope of a cure will induce more patients to come into the open than any restrictive legislation, if these or even most of them be admitted, what is the rhyme, reason or justice in continuing the existing practice and condemning fellow countrymen to an indeterminate incarceration, to a fate which they fear with some reason to be worse than that reserved for a convicted burglar or in New South Wales at least even for a convicted murderer?

The editorial of that 18 September issue of *The Medical Journal of Australia* lent Molesworth unqualified support. Claiming leprosy sufferers to be a powerless minority group, it alleged that other less infectious and more deadly diseases were not treated by isolation, an inexplicable position unless the traditional fear of ugliness and evil associated with leprosy be acknowledged. 'A leprosy infection is a misfortune, not a disgrace' it argued. 'If lepers were as common in Australia as consumptives, this measure would be refused on social, economical and humanitarian grounds.'

However, it is evident that in Molesworth's article and in the editorial, the writers referred only to leprosy in the European community with scant attention being given to the Aboriginal situation. And it was in the Aboriginal community that most leprosy patients were to be found and certainly, by 1930, in sufficient numbers to have a significant influence on policy. The preponderance of Aboriginal patients gave rise to the situation in Australia where, to the Western tradition of fear associated with leprosy, the stigma of it being a 'native disease' was added. As the Aboriginal people were seen to be socially inferior and considerably below Europeans in the evolutionary process, circumstances were ideal for the rigid enforcement of isolation policies. Moreover, Aborigines were considered to be a significant threat to the health of the European community, particularly in tropical Australia, a factor which gave added impetus to a wider policy of institutionalisation of the Aboriginal population generally. This perceived threat to European health was particularly

⁹ Molesworth 1926.

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prevalent in areas where the Aboriginal population was greater than the European, as was the case in the northern regions of Australia. In the Northern Territory the small, widely-scattered White population was only a fifth of the Black and was thought to be vulnerable to 'native diseases'. Thus the medical care provided to the Aborigines was dispensed with clear economic and political motives and to promote the process of colonisation; the garb of altruism with which we have traditionally draped dispensers of Western medicine of past years has worn fearfully thin.

In positions of increasing power in 1930, and consequently major determiners of leprosy policies, were two medical officers, C.E. Cook and Sir Raphael Cilento, respectively the Chief Medical Officer of the Northern Territory and Director-General of Health, Queensland. Both were vociferous isolationists to whom others less knowledgeable in the field of leprosy looked for guidance. Such was their influence that even J.H.L. Cumpston, Director-General of Commonwealth Health, who was aware of the trend away from compulsory isolation and island sites for leprosariums in other countries, and sensitive to the criticisms of his colleagues in the international arena, allowed himself to be persuaded that modern prophylaxis was inimical to the solution of the leprosy problem in Australia. This is not to suggest that Cumpston was in any way gullible or an ineffectual administrator but rather that public perceptions of the low status of Aborigines were all-pervasive and the arguments presented by Cook and Cilento powerful. Also, Cook and Cilento, both persuasive and compelling writers, validated their claims with the use of scientific data drawn from the Australian experience, which they claimed were determined by variants not replicated in other countries. The first of these was the living conditions of the Aboriginal people, among whom the greatest number of leprosy cases was to be found.

The dramatic improvement in the condition of most Aboriginal leprosy patients during the first few months of treatment, a phenomenon noted by many leading leprologists, suggested that high standards of nutrition and hygiene were imperative for successful treatment. The living conditions of Aboriginal people were abysmally poor. With the encroachment of a settled white community into Aboriginal lands, the hygiene provided by a semi-nomadic lifestyle broke down and the traditional food sources which had kept the Aborigines a healthy race for thousands of years, gave way to a diet so imbalanced that illness was inevitable. Treatment under these conditions was doomed to failure from the outset, which effectively negated any opposition to legislative measures to institutionalise all Aboriginal leprosy patients regardless of the stage, type or infectiveness of their disease.

For the same reason any system of release, discharge, out-patient treatment or parole was seen to be inappropriate for Aboriginal patients. Once removed from relatively hygienic leprosarium surroundings, where regular balanced meals were supplied, a resurgence of the disease was likely. In Australia, limited discharge was extended to European patients in New South Wales and to a lesser extent in Queensland, but only after the patient had returned negative bacteriological tests for a prolonged period of time, usually in excess of two years. In 1937 Cilento argued through the pages of the *International Journal of Leprosy* that a system of parole and outpatient treatment in Australia was not possible in 'respect to coloured persons'.¹⁰ Elaboration of this statement was not made but implicit was the view that the low standard of living and education of the Aboriginal people militated against successful treatment administered other than through isolation.

Further complicating the issue was Aboriginal resistance to Western explanations of disease, a factor which continues to compound Aboriginal health problems today. Given no evidence that Western medicine was capable of curing leprosy, Aboriginal people had little

¹⁰ Cilento 1937:49.

incentive to submit to the painful process of weekly injections and nauseating tablets. Even within the leprosariums, only strict discipline ensured that all patients received regular treatment. The inability of the authorities to compel patients to undergo treatment except in an institutional setting left little doubt in the minds of the isolationists that segregation was essential.

If Cook and Cilento needed further substantiation of their case, they found it in the geographical distribution of the Aboriginal patients. The northern regions of Australia, where endemic leprosy was to be found among the Aborigines, are sparsely populated. During the 1930s, and indeed to some extent today, living conditions were primitive, transport expensive and irregular, and isolation extreme. Under these circumstances, even if Aboriginal people could be induced to report for treatment, the difficulties in establishing health clinics were thought to be insurmountable. To be effective, numerous clinics would be required, the funds for which were unattainable in the difficult economic conditions of the depression years. Nor during this period had Aboriginal welfare become an issue, and governments generally parsimonious in providing medical facilities in remote communities were even more reluctant to shoulder the responsibility of providing adequate health care for Aborigines. With the cost of supporting and treating a patient in a total care institution in the Northern Territory running at below £38 per annum, the amount increasing in other states according to the number of European patients accommodated, institutional care had economic advantages over out-patient care in remote communities.

Thus armed, Cook and Cilento were able to either persuade or over-rule anti-isolationists in Australia. They argued that successful treatment meant institutional care, but they were not able to offer the high standard of treatment which might have softened the injustices of the isolation policies. It was in the area of treatment that the Australian case for isolation broke down and the authorities continued to isolate patients in institutions which they could not, or would not, adequately fund. Indicative of this gross lack of commitment is the willingness of the authorities to allow various orders of the Catholic Church to shoulder full responsibility for the daily care and nursing of the patients in Aboriginal institutions, a duty which they discharged faithfully under conditions of great deprivation. In the Northern Territory alone were salaried staff employed, an expense which was dispensed with in 1942 when most residents living north of Adelaide River were evacuated. Among the evacuees were most of the ten European patients from Channel Island, thereafter making Channel Island almost exclusively an Aboriginal institution. When new staff was sent to the island in 1943 it was Catholic nuns who were recruited.

Long tradition ensured that isolation policies attracted wide public support and, as laudable as the anti-isolationists' sentiments were, extensive public education would be needed before they could be widely accepted. Both official and common language made use of such terms as the 'leper' whom it was thought necessary to 'arrest' and those patients reported to have 'absconded' were labelled 'escapees'. When legislation and official action lent support to popular fancies a change of attitude among all but a few was impossible. Thus, reports of escapees were not uncommon, like that of an 'escaped leper' in the Sydney area in 1944, who although 'not considered dangerous' was nevertheless described in the daily paper in great detail for easy identification.¹¹ Inevitably, the seclusion in which leprosy sufferers were treated served to heighten the mystery and, hence, the fear surrounding the disease. Those found to have the disease were whisked away to become inmates in a total-care institution and rarely afforded the opportunity to attend to personal affairs or to farewell relatives. Often the possessions they left behind were burnt and their

¹¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December 1944.

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departure total and final. It was not until the post-war years that the visiting of Aboriginal leprosy patients was in any way facilitated or encouraged.

Whether in support of compulsory isolation or advocating its gradual abandonment, all those of the medical profession involved in the debate agreed with two of the three components of successful prophylaxis as put forward by Cook. In response to Molesworth, Cook asserted it was 'highly desirable that a prompt and genuine effort be made:

(a) To hasten the successful termination of the system [of isolation] a thorough investigation into the incidence of the disease for the purpose of insuring the isolation of all patients deemed infective;

(b) To ameliorate the condition of those isolated by the provision of improved lazarets and inaugurating a system of leave parole for patients who have responded to treatment;

(c) To provide for the outdoor treatment of lepers found in non-infective stages and for the regular examination of contacts and discharged persons.'¹²

It was to be through the institution of these last two policies that the Australians would seek to justify the first.

Regrettably, not even Cook's first, and sound policy (if one accepts the tradition that leprosy patients should be isolated at all) was instituted in the spirit in which it was written. Aboriginal patients, and Europeans in the Northern Territory, were isolated regardless of their infectivity. This included children suffering from the neural form of leprosy which was often self-aborting. Moreover, in the leprosariums were many 'burnt-out' cases in which the disease had run its course leaving patients incapacitated to varying degrees but no longer infective.

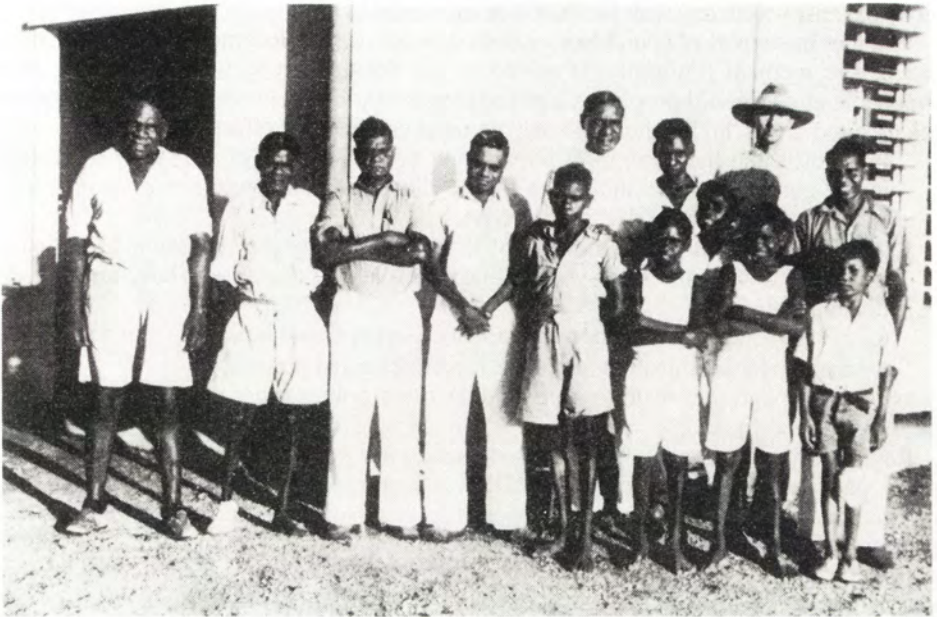
Nor was Cook's second and most humane policy of improvement in living conditions and parole regulations observed. Writing of this issue in 1924 Cook had admonished:

If the community abrogates to itself the right to deprive those unfortunates of their liberty and to add to the horrors of incurable disease, the miseries of lifelong imprisonment, surely it also assumes the responsibility of housing them in comfort and in endeavouring to ensure that their dragging years of decline shall pass with a minimum of suffering. Too long the leper has been an outcast and the object of public persecution rather than practical sympathy. It is to be hoped that the Lazaret of the future will be haven of refuge sought by the leper, rather than a loathsome prison to be avoided if need be by suicide.¹³

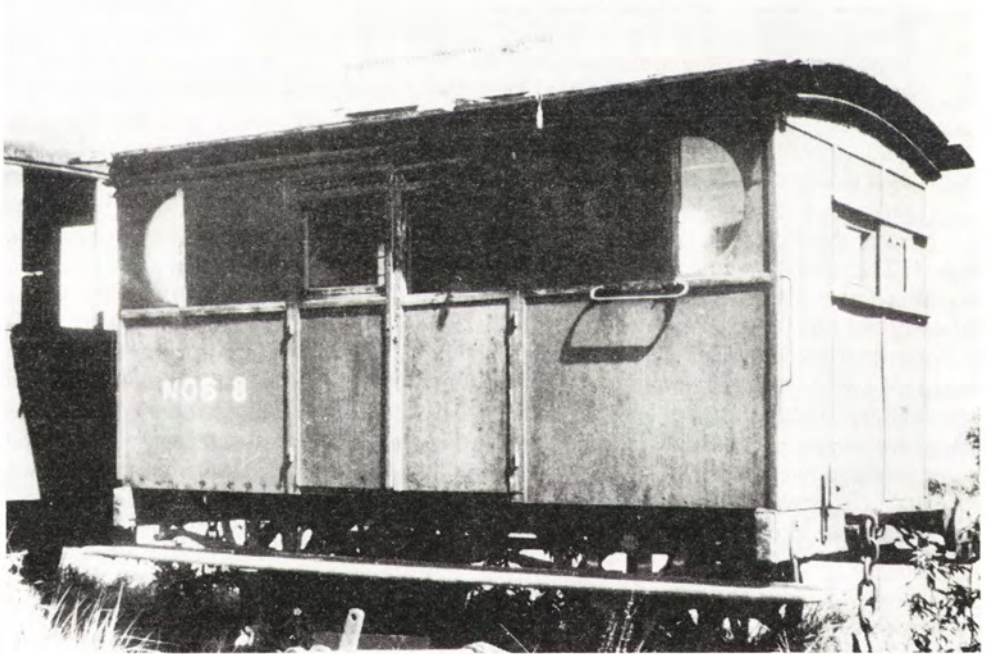
Neither the Northern Territory leprosarium, for which Cook was directly responsible from 1927 to 1939, nor any other leprosy institution in Australia during this period became anything more than a poorly equipped, prison-like detention centre in which inmates listlessly and idly passed away the days. At Channel Island some initial attempts were made to house and feed inmates at a reasonable standard, but as the leprosarium population increased government parsimony ensured that funds for extensions and maintenance were unavailable. Situated on a cheerless, low-set and waterless island surrounded by dense mangrove swamps, conditions deteriorated as the vegetation was used for firewood, the water shortage became acute and the overcrowding in the Aboriginal quarters scandalous. Patients were provided with no education, no training and, except for a few, no purposeful work. It was a place of death and only the indomitable spirit of some of the patients saved

¹² Cook 1926.

¹³ Cook 1924.



Aboriginal leprosy patients gather outside the recreation hall on Channel Island during the visit by a Salvation Army worker, c. 1946. Courtesy V. Pedersen.



Converted cattle truck used for the transportation of leprosy patients on the North Australian Railway until 1939. Courtesy J.Y. Harvey.

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it from being a complete hell-hole.¹⁴ Peel Island Leprosarium fared somewhat better as the increased proportion of European patients guaranteed greater community awareness and involvement, and a more liberal level of government funding. Nevertheless, in comparison with institutions for the mentally ill and those for patients suffering venereal diseases, the standard of care and the facilities at Peel Island were indicative of low government commitment to much beyond interning leprosy patients. During the 1930s leprosy prophylaxis in Australia continued to focus on protection of the community rather than relief to the sufferer, a tradition which was undergoing marked change in many other countries.

The depressing living conditions endured by the patients were not alleviated by the prospect of possible release. Cook's 1926 parole scheme attracted Cilento's support, but although it operated in a limited way in Queensland amongst European patients, it was never introduced into the Northern Territory. Nor was limited release or any form of contact with families encouraged during this period. From the period 1932 to 1938, of the two hundred and twenty patients admitted to Channel Island only twenty left the island, not all of them legitimately, as included in the discharge figures are those who 'escaped' and avoided further detection.¹⁵

During the same period sixty-two patients died, providing graphic support to the popular notion amongst the patients that they had been sent to Channel Island to die. The Queensland record is a little more positive, again because of the higher proportion of European patients. For the period 1925-37, of the hundred and twenty-six admitted to Peel Island, forty-two had been discharged with ten being readmitted some time later. With thirty-four deaths, the proportion of deaths was similar to that on Channel Island.¹⁶ Western Australian figures for a later date, 1937-1945, indicate that the death rate was slightly lower with one hundred and forty-six deaths among four hundred and eighty-eight admissions. Eleven per cent of patients, almost exclusively from the group suffering neural leprosy which responded most readily to treatment, had been discharged as cured, causing Dr Musso, under whose immediate jurisdiction the leprosarium fell, to comment that 'lepomatous cases have very little chance of discharge under present conditions of treatment'.¹⁷

The third component of Cook's policy, upon which the success of the entire approach was dependent, and which would go some way towards legitimising compulsory isolation, was the least effectively practised. Without exception, it was agreed by leprologists that crucial to the eventual control of the disease was a thorough, systematic and regular examination of all contacts of a recognised sufferer for a period of three to five years. The Third International Scientific Conference on Leprosy, held in Strasbourg in 1923, adopted a resolution expressing the need for such a measure and it was the one point of agreement between Rogers and Molesworth, and the isolationists Cook and Cilento. Such examinations had the benefit of minimising the period in which an infective person was unaware of his condition, and consequently not receiving treatment, thus exposing friends, family and work associates to possible infection. It also had the advantage of increasing the chance of successful treatment resulting from an early diagnosis. An isolation policy administered in conjunction with an effective survey system might have gone some way to

¹⁴ Saunders 1986.

¹⁵ Saunders 1986: Chapter 5.

¹⁶ Cilento 1939:205.

¹⁷ Davidson 1978:178-182.



Aboriginal accommodation huts on the denuded Channel Island, c. 1937. Courtesy Commonwealth Archives.



Channel Island patients prepare for a fancy dress party, c. 1939. Courtesy Therese Puertelano.

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reducing the incidence of the disease in northern Australia, but attempts to fund and administer such a program were never seriously entertained. This resulted in the indiscriminate incarceration of leprosy patients, which afforded neither the patient nor the community protection or profit.

In the Northern Territory no regular medical surveys of Aboriginal communities were carried out until 1951. Prior to this the detection of leprosy patients was mostly a matter of chance, which involved mounted policemen to a far greater extent than it did medical officers. 'Leper suspects' were brought in, often in chains, for examination, with little or no attempt being made to trace contacts. Even where annual inspections of mission stations were conducted by medical officers, and where the relatively settled community would facilitate closer scrutiny, no systematic surveys were conducted. In Queensland, Cilento documented one incident in which 'a complete list of the families yielding suspected or proved cases has been made, and every member of these families is under examination at intervals of three months', but this was the exception rather than the rule.¹⁸ More often the lack of regular surveys was explained with the disclaimer that 'it is particularly difficult to trace contacts among natives, because they rarely know their own relationships'.¹⁹ It was 1938 before Musso arrived in Western Australia on Commonwealth funding to conduct a systematic survey of the endemic regions of that state; prior to this periodic 'round-ups', usually resulting from the agitations of pastoralists, had sufficed.

Molesworth, addressing the problem of leprosy prophylaxis in Australia in 1926, had suggested that 'control of the Aboriginal side of the [leprosy] problem may be impossible or impractical [and] with the rapid dying out of the Aborigines...this problem will probably solve itself'.²⁰ However, within a very short time the fallacy of the 'dying race' theory became evident, leaving Cook and Cilento with the pressing dilemma of the spread of leprosy rapidly reaching epidemic proportions across the north of Australia. It is evident that the difficulties they faced were compounded by vast distances and isolated communities, by the extreme state of poverty and ill health of the Aborigines, and by the cultural barrier which resisted the incursion of Western notions of disease and medicine. However, although claiming special circumstances Cilento and, more persistently, Cook based their arguments on the scientific grounds of epidemiology rather than face the overwhelming issue of Aboriginal welfare.

While scientific arguments were promulgated to justify isolation policies it is evident that, in Australia, to the emotive and stigmatising tradition of leprosy had been added the aspersion that it was a 'native' disease. Control of the disease through repressive legislation further intensified the stigma associated with leprosy. During the 1930s, at the height of the epidemic, policy-makers were advocating institutionalisation in various forms as a solution to the 'Aboriginal problem', and although humanitarian or paternal motives were espoused, economic and social motives usually predominated. Thus, isolation of leprosy patients provided yet another justification for the restriction of Aboriginal movement and control over the lives of those considered a social threat and an economic burden. Also, while leprosy remained a disease of the Aborigines, little professional interest would be taken in its etiology or its patients. Not only were the doctors inadequately equipped and trained to treat leprosy, but in the three large Aboriginal institutions, Channel Island, Fantome Island and Derby, doctors were obliged to combine their attendance at the leprosariums with numerous other duties, their area of responsibility often covering

¹⁸ Cilento 1939:202.

¹⁹ Cilento 1939.

²⁰ Molesworth 1927:389.



'Catholic staff on Channel Island at the burial of Martina, a leprosy patient from Bathurst Island'.

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extensive tracts of sparsely populated country. No experts in leprosy arose from within the Australian medical profession. Treating leprosy patients generally, and Aboriginal patients in particular, was neither lucrative nor prestigious employment. Those few who evinced some interest in the disease were generally heavily committed to other fields of endeavour, as were Cook and Cilento, who were principally health administrators, and Molesworth, who divided his time between a thriving private practice and research in dermatology.

For as long as Australia remained indifferent to the welfare of its Aboriginal population, compulsory isolation of leprosy patients would continue. Leprosy prophylaxis, employed as were so many other areas of tropical medicine as a colonising tool in the north of Australia, had as its primary aim the protection of the white community and little interest was shown in the disease or those who became the victims of both disease and society. Because of the preponderance of Aborigines amongst leprosy sufferers, the Australian authorities vigorously enforced a policy which resulted in total isolation for all Aboriginal and most European leprosy patients. There can be little doubt that had Europeans been the most severely afflicted group a more humane approach would have been adopted and a higher standard of treatment offered. For almost thirty years Australia, which was internationally recognised for its progressive approach to medical research and treatment in many fields, denied leprosy patients adequate treatment and trenchantly enforced a negative and inhumane policy. This was despite the fact that neither funds nor medical expertise was available to support the high level of institutional care necessary for such a policy nor to effectively carry out the systematic surveys which were essential for success. Australia's isolation policy was finally abandoned in the 1980s and Derby, the last of the leprosariums, closed in 1986. Frequent delays in Aborigines seeking treatment for leprosy today indicate that memories of isolation linger yet.

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ABORIGINES, EUROPEANS AND THE CRIMINAL LAW: TWO TRIALS AT THE NORTHERN SUPREME COURT, TOWNSVILLE, APRIL 1888

G. Highland

On successive days in April 1888, James Comes and William Hugh Nicholls appeared at the Northern Circuit Court in Townsville, charged with violent offences committed against Aboriginal women. Although the two cases were unrelated, both men came from the mining community of Thornborough on the Hodgkinson River, and both trials resulted in convictions and prison sentences for the accused. At the time, the results of the trials were considered so extraordinary that they prompted the presiding judge, Mr Justice Cooper, to remark that he supposed Comes and Nicholls were the first two men in Queensland to be 'found guilty of an offence against a member of the aboriginal race'.¹ An analysis of the trials in their social context not only offers some conclusions as to why the two convictions were obtained in 1888, but also provides insights into the workings of the legal system, the changing European attitudes to Aboriginal policy and the relations between black and white on the mining frontier during the period.

The conviction of James Comes had its genesis at the Union Camp, where Comes had been living along with sixteen or seventeen other Europeans. The Union was about sixteen miles from Thornborough, a town which at the height of its economic prosperity in 1877 had a population of one thousand, as well as a school, two banks, a hospital and a school of arts. By 1888, however, Thornborough was in decline. In that year the combined European and Chinese population of the entire Hodgkinson field was estimated at three hundred and fifty one. This consisted of one hundred and four Chinese, of whom fourteen were miners and ninety were engaged in business and gardens, and the rest Europeans - sixty-two quartz miners, five carters and timber-getters, thirty-four tradespeople and farmers, and one hundred and forty-six listed as women and children.²

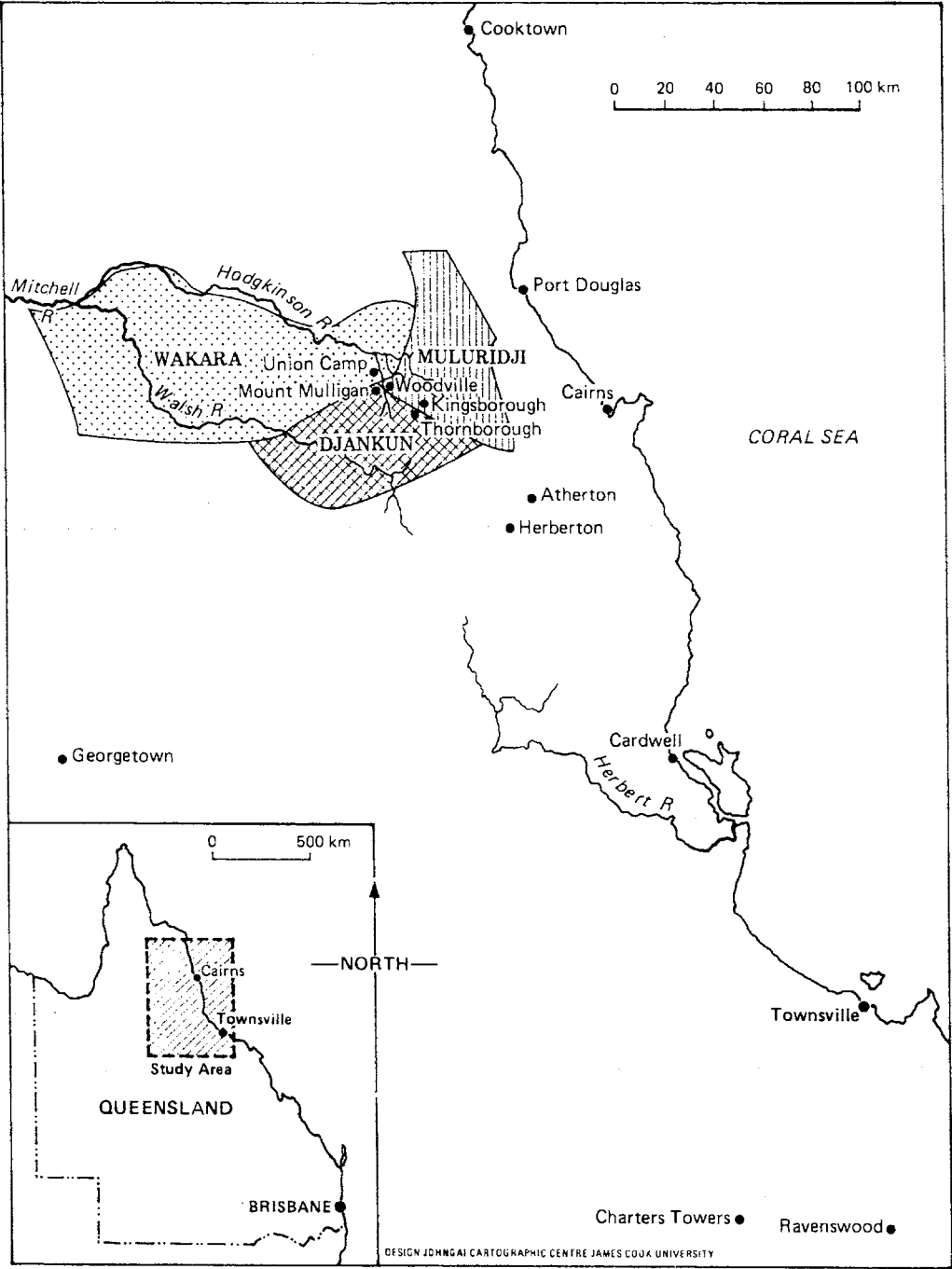
Comes was one of the Hodgkinson's carters, although it is likely he was already in gaol when the above estimate was taken. He was born in England and had come to Australia in 1834, aged fifteen. After mining at Ravenswood, probably in the early 1870s,

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¹ The accounts of the trials of Comes and Nicholls are to be found in *Townsville Herald*, 14 April 1888.

² Because of rushes elsewhere, the Hodgkinson goldfields were practically deserted by 1891; figures drawn from Kirkman 1982:178-185 and *Mining Wardens' Reports for the Year 1888*, Hodgkinson Goldfields, QLC, V&P, 1889:473.

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Townsville-Cooktown region. Map drawn by John Ngai, Cartographic Unit, James Cook University.

he became a long term resident of Thornborough. On New Year's Day, 1888 he committed the offence for which he would be sent to prison. He was sixty-nine years of age.³

From what little we know about Comes, it appears that he was not considered to be particularly violent by the other Whites at the camp; according to witnesses at his trials, 'he seemed to be quiet and harmless', one person remarking that: 'In his general manner of being...he would not hurt a child'.⁴ However, after having had several draught horses speared by Aborigines from a nearby fringe camp, the old man began carrying firearms - sometimes a rifle, at other times a revolver - with him whenever he went out. After lunch on the first of January, Comes discovered that another of his horses, a foal, had been taken. Stephen Allen, an engineer at the camp, remembered seeing him at about two o'clock that afternoon. Noticing the colt revolver slung in a pouch across his shoulder, Allen said: 'Hullo Jim, are you on the war path again?' Comes answered in an angry tone that, '[the blacks] have got or eaten my foal and I would warm them up for it'. Referring to an earlier incident, to be discussed below, Allen warned him not to 'make a bloody fool of yourself again.' In reply Comes said, 'I don't know what I am about and if I don't, no one can tell me'.⁵

Following this exchange, Comes rode to the fringe camp on the other side of the Hodgkinson. After unsuccessfully chasing a man named Jim Bau Bau for about twenty metres down the river, he wheeled his horse and confronted a woman named Polly, who, with her small child resting on her shoulder, was standing on the bank with two companions. From about ten yards away Comes, with his arm already extended, aimed his revolver and fired. The bullet passed through the baby's thigh and made two wounds in the mother's neck. While Polly staggered across the river to obtain help, Comes trained his gun on an Aboriginal man and forced him to collect up all the spears from the camp.⁶

Unfortunately for Comes, his actions took place only about 250 metres away from a store run by Sarah and Hugh Wason. A large group of Europeans, both locals and visitors, had gathered on the veranda of the store for the New Year's festivities. In the midst of their drinking and rejoicing they heard the danger cry of the Blacks, followed by the crack of Comes' revolver, and they saw his outstretched arm and the puff of smoke curling over his head after the gun fired. On his way back to the store with the newly acquired bundle of spears, Comes was met at the side gate by several of those who had witnessed the incident. While Stephen Allen grabbed the horse's bridle, Hugh Wason dragged its rider off the saddle and a miner named Thomas Scully seized the revolver. By this time, according to witnesses, Comes was in an excited state. He said at first that: 'I don't know nothing about it', but soon after declared that there were two or three white men at the Union Camp that he would like to shoot, that he was an old man with only a few more years to live, and that if he got hung it would not be for a Black. He turned to his friend Allen and said: 'I thought you would be the last one to do this. You offered to poison a bag of flour for me.'

³ HM Jail, Townsville, Description Register, Queensland State Archives (QSA) A-45965, Townsville *Daily Bulletin*, 3 April 1888.

⁴ The police court depositions are contained in the criminal files of the Supreme Court. Testimonies of Thomas Scully and Stephen Allen in QSA, Supreme Court, Northern District, Criminal files Z1331.

⁵ A report in the *Wild River Times* claimed that Comes' worry at losing his horses had 'driven him insane'; however, insanity was not offered as a defence at his trials.

⁶ Jim Bob Bob was also referred to as Jim Bau Bau and Big Kangaroo. Testimonies of Allen, Scully, Sarah Wason, Charles Maines and Hugh Wason in QSA Z1331.

As the others tied Comes up, Allen set off for Thornborough to report the matter to the police.⁷

Before approaching Polly's attacker, Scully and Allen went over to see how she and her child had fared after the shooting. The mother was sitting, exhausted but still conscious, with her baby in the dry river bed. Scully noticed that the three wounds were bleeding and tried to console the woman by saying to her: 'You hard fellow, you Polly'. After telling them that 'Jimmie Comes did it', she walked up to her employer of four or five years, Sarah Wason, to have her wounds dressed. That evening Comes, who by this time had been untied, approached Polly at the back of the Wason's house. She lifted up a stick and said that if he came any closer she would kill him. Two days later she was taken to the Hodgkinson District Hospital where she was treated by Dr Edward Fitzgerald, who later reported that the wound was not fatal.

On the night of 1 January, Allen returned to the Union Camp with Constable William Montgomery, who met Comes and told him that he had heard that he had shot a 'black gin' named Polly. Although he replied at first that 'he did not think he had shot a black gin', Comes later conceded that 'if he had shot the gin it must have been an accident as the revolver went off'. After inspecting the victim, Montgomery arrested her assailant at eight thirty the next morning.

Comes appeared at the Thornborough Police Court on the thirteenth of January before Justices of the Peace Thomas Templeton and Robert G. Miller, charged with 'shooting with intent to murder an Aboriginal woman named Polly'. Surprisingly, given the turn of later events and the weight of evidence by Montgomery, Allen, Mrs Wason, Scully and Dr Fitzgerald the prisoner was discharged. Polly was present at the trial but she did not testify, the deposition recording only that: 'The Black Gin was produced and the wound exhibited before the Court'.

Undeterred by the findings of Templeton and Miller, Constable Montgomery obtained a warrant and re-arrested Comes at Jacksons Street, Kingsborough on 25 February. On 12 March, Comes once again appeared at the Thornborough Police Court, this time before the Police Magistrate A.H. Zillman, charged with 'shooting with intent to do grievous bodily harm to one Polly, an aboriginal woman at the Union Camp on the first day of January, 1888'. The evidence on this occasion was similar to that presented at the earlier sittings. Montgomery, Allen and Scully once again testified, while Hugh Wason replaced his wife Sarah in the witness box. Dr Fitzgerald, who by this time had begun a practice at Albion near Brisbane, was not called upon to give evidence, although Charles Maines, a goldfields orderly from Thornborough and a visitor to the Union Camp on New Year's Day, was. All of the witnesses except Montgomery claimed to have seen Comes ride in the direction of the fringe camp just prior to the shooting and return with the bundle of spears, and also to have heard the sound of the gun going off. Two of them, including Allen, told the court that they actually saw Comes fire the shot. Allen's testimony was substantially different to that of the first hearing where he claimed he did not see the prisoner shoot Polly. Comes, who was represented by a Townsville solicitor, George Roberts, reserved his defence. He was committed for trial at the next criminal sittings of the Northern Supreme Court in Townsville.

Like Comes, William Hugh Nicholls initially appeared at the Thornborough Police Court. Charged with a capital offence, he was committed to stand trial at the Supreme

⁷ According to another source, Comes' statement to Allen was 'You bugger. I did not think you would do this. You offered to shoot them for me'. *Townsville Herald*, 14 April 1888.

Court after several witnesses had deposed that they had seen him beating an Aboriginal girl named Maggie. As in the Comes case, Nicholls' victim was a female domestic servant.

More is known about Maggie's death than about her fifteen years of life. She was born around the year 1871 and probably made her first visits to Thornborough at the age of eleven, with other members of her people, who had been 'let in' to the town in 1882. By the age of twelve she had begun working as 'a sort of irregular servant' for a Mrs Earlstone. Soon after, she moved into the home of a twenty-six-year-old miner named William Nicholls. She worked for Nicholls, his wife and several children for three years. By the time she was fifteen Maggie was pregnant.⁸

On 19 October 1887 Nicholls left the family house in search of his employee. When he went next door to a deserted humpy formally owned by a Mrs McQuade, he found Maggie lying on her stomach at the doorway and tried to get her to come home. Believing as he did that 'it was necessary sometimes to chastise aboriginals', Nicholls picked up a stick as thick as a shovel handle and gave the girl three to four hard blows to the head. She screamed several times but did not respond when he said to her: 'Maggie, get up and go home'. Nicholls then lifted her off the ground by the hair. She fell back down when he let go. After he had lifted her up again she tried unsuccessfully to walk with the aid of a stick. Nicholls raised his own stick above his head and brought it down on her back. She cried out 'Oh master!' or 'No master!' and fell down. He then swore at her, once again ordered her to go home and raised his foot as if to kick her. Nicholls' brother was present during all of this but did nothing to intervene. When Mrs Nicholls arrived on the scene she put her arm under Maggie's and with her husband's assistance helped the girl home, where she was wrapped in a blanket and placed in the fowl house. The following day Nicholls was observed chopping down a sapling about sixty yards from his house by Mary Ann Lewin, a white domestic servant employed at the nearby Commercial Hotel. After seeing him take the sapling back to his house, the witness heard screams from Maggie and the sound of blows.⁹

Three days later, Constable Montgomery received reports of the incident and went to Nicholls' house to investigate. He asked to see Maggie and was shown to the fowl house where the girl was lying on her back with a blanket rolled around her. After examining her naked body and finding what he took to be 'marks of violence on it', he told his host that, 'he had heard he had been beating the black gin'. In response, Nicholls admitted that he gave her 'two or three light touches with a stick' when she would not come home. Maggie was now unconscious. Montgomery reported the matter to his superior and returned in about half an hour with the senior constable and Dr Fitzgerald. The doctor found five or six slight abrasions of the skin as well as a contusion on the head, and realised that she was dying. Following Fitzgerald's examination, Nicholls was arrested and Maggie was taken to hospital. Later that afternoon the prisoner admitted to Montgomery that he had 'chastised the gin with a whip', and that 'the gin sang out very loud and that might have been what the people were talking about'.

Maggie died that night. The next morning Dr Fitzgerald performed a post mortem examination on her body. Although Maggie's heart, lungs and other internal parts were healthy, the doctor considered that she would have 'suffered great pain in consequence of a

⁸ The fact that Maggie lived with the Nicholls family and not in a fringe camp at the edge of Thornborough suggests that she may have been a 'civilised Aborigine' from another area. *Mining Wardens' Reports for the Year 1882*, Hodgkinson and Mulgrave Goldfields, QLC, V&P 1883-4:1558.

⁹ *Townsville Herald*, 14 April 1888.

prolonged confinement'. Her empty stomach indicated that she had not eaten for some time. Fitzgerald found the haemorrhage between the skull and scalp produced by the blow and considered that this was a sufficient injury on its own to have killed the girl. The post mortem revealed that the primary cause of death was 'injury and neglect during confinement', and the final cause, 'the subsequent ill-treatment the gin was subjected to'.

Comes and Nicholls were brought before the Northern Supreme Court in the second week of April. The trial of Comes, charged with 'wounding with intent to murder and wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm', took place first. After stating the case, the Crown Prosecutor, Mr Virgil Power, called Stephen Allen as the initial witness. Allen told the court of his conversation with the defendant on New Year's Day regarding the loss of Comes' foal and his consequent desire for revenge. He then related how he had watched the prisoner's activities from Wason's store and how he had seen and heard the shooting. He identified Polly by the dress she was wearing that day. After denying that he had ever offered to poison a bag of flour for the prisoner, Allen related that he went to Thornborough to notify the police. This testimony was almost identical to the one Allen had provided in the second Police Court trial, and as such, it conflicted with his account at the first hearing. Unlike the earlier witness, Thomas Scully did not change his story in any of the hearings. He maintained once again that he had seen and heard Comes shoot Polly and that he had inspected her wounds and those of her baby. He also related how he had wrenched the revolver, loaded in five chambers, from the defendant. Two further witnesses, Charles Maines and Hugh Wason, supported the previous evidence.

After calling upon Constable Montgomery, who supplied the court with details of Comes' arrest and the first Police Court trial, the Prosecutor summoned Dr Fitzgerald, who stated that judging from the nature of Polly's wounds the shot had been fired from above the victim and that the revolver produced before the court was the likely weapon. Polly herself was the final witness. However, after telling the court that she had been to school but had learnt nothing, the judge considered that she did not understand the nature of an oath, and she was discharged.

The defence called no witnesses, confining its case to a statement by the prisoner, who told the court his version of how he had lost his foal. He explained that he had crossed the river and asked Polly if she had seen it. When she said no, he rode towards eight or nine Aboriginal men camped on the bank of the river. On his approach, they all ran away except one who had a spear in his hand. Comes drew his revolver and put it at full cock, commanding the man to hand up his spear. He placed his gun across the pommel of his saddle and bent down to pick up the spear, whereupon the revolver accidentally discharged. Comes claimed that he had no idea that Polly was standing in the direction his revolver was pointing.

The jury took ten minutes to find Comes guilty on the second count of wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm and he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Mr Justice Cooper explained that it was only the prisoner's age and infirmity that prevented him from passing the heaviest sentence allowed by law - not as a punishment upon Comes, but in order 'to check the lawless gross cruelty with which the race to which Polly belonged was treated'. The judge observed that the prisoner was 'one of the first men ever found guilty in Queensland for an offence against an aboriginal'. He expressed satisfaction that the verdict was proof of 'the advancement and enlightenment of the community at large'.¹⁰

The next day, Nicholls came before the court charged with murder. After the prisoner had pleaded not guilty, the prosecution called Mary Ann Lewin, who told the court that

¹⁰ Ibid.

while washing in the back yard of the Commercial Hotel she heard and saw Nicholls beat Maggie about two hundred yards away near the doorway of Mrs McQuade's old humpy. She also said that on the following day she observed the defendant chop down a sapling and take it inside his house and subsequently heard the sounds of blows and of Maggie screaming. This evidence was corroborated by the the second witness, Theodosia Watson, who had seen the events from only forty yards away. The third witness, Mary Ann Gielis, heard screaming on both Wednesday and Thursday, but saw nothing as she was inside her husband's hotel on both occasions.

Once again, Constable Montgomery was called by the prosecution to give details of the arrest and statements made by the prisoner while in custody. He also provided an account, later supported by Dr Fitzgerald, of Maggie's condition when she was in the Nicholls' fowl house. Following Montgomery's testimony, an orderly named Joseph Kavanagh reported on the girl's unconscious state while at the Thornborough hospital. He also provided hearsay evidence that an Aboriginal man named Billy Matthews had beaten the patient, and told the court that the prisoner had visited him on the night of Maggie's death and said that 'the gin was diseased'. Dr Fitzgerald then took the stand and presented the results of his post mortem examination, saying that: 'The damage to the whole system sustained from the blow would certainly hasten death'. On the treatment of Maggie while in the Nicholls' fowl house, he said: 'She had no bed of any kind to lie on. It was not a proper place for anyone in the condition of the gin. Proper care had not been taken of her'. The final witness for the Crown, Dr Joseph Ahearne, the Government Medical Officer of Townsville, supported the evidence of Fitzgerald, remarking that he was 'of the opinion that in the state of health the gin was, the blow sustained would have hastened her death', and that 'from the state of the gin's stomach, twenty four hours or probably more must have elapsed since she partook of food'.

As in the earlier trial, the defence declined to call any witnesses. However, Stephen Allen deposed that he had known Nicholls for the last eleven years and that the defendant had a wife and several children and his character had always been good. The jury took one hour and ten minutes to find the prisoner guilty, not of murder, but of the lesser charge of manslaughter. Before sentencing, Mr Justice Cooper remarked that the defendant had been 'found guilty on very clear, in fact, almost conclusive evidence', and that he was 'probably the second man in Queensland that had been found guilty of an offence against a member of the aboriginal race'. Cooper said that although Nicholls had 'been undoubtedly guilty of a great deal of cruelty and cowardice', he did not 'wish to harrow the prisoner's feelings by dwelling on the details of his perfectly abominable crime'. The judge said that if he were to consult his own feelings he 'would unhesitatingly send [the] prisoner to penal servitude for life'. In his position, however, he had to deal with the case 'without passion and without feeling'. Although he was very sorry that the prisoner's wife and large family 'should be placed in the position they were', the decision of the court was that Nicholls should be sentenced to penal servitude for seven years.¹¹

Comes and Nicholls were not, as Mr Justice Cooper said at the time, the first Whites to be sent to prison in Queensland for offences committed against Aborigines.¹² However, the results of their trials were sufficiently remarkable to warrant an editorial in the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² In 1883 Cooper sentenced a Townsville man, Edward Camm, to penal servitude for life for 'having carnally known and abused' an Aboriginal child named Rosie; *Queensland Law Journal*, 2 July 1883:136-137.

Townsville Herald which pointed out that the two convictions were 'the distinguishing feature of the sittings of the Circuit Court'.¹³

The editor of the *Herald* was referring to the fact that while the proceedings of the court were consistent with legal theory, they did not conform to contemporary practice. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, and more particularly since the Victorian trials of *R v Peter* and *R v Jemmy* in 1860, the law had acknowledged that Aborigines were in possession of both the rights and obligations of British subjects.¹⁴ Cooper agreed with this principle when he said, at the sentencing of Nicholls, that he wished to 'deter other men from committing these abandoned acts of gross cruelty to the members of any race'. But the judge admitted that this theoretical position had little practical authority when he spoke out against the 'lawless gross cruelty with which the [Aboriginal] race...was treated'. This perception was shared by the editor of the *Townsville Herald*, who pointed out that hitherto 'some people have considered it almost a meritorious act to kill or wound a blackfellow'.¹⁵

Why then did the theoretical and practical elements of the criminal law act in unison at this time? There had to have been a willingness on the part of the witnesses to testify before the court and of the twelve jurors to provide a verdict not tainted by prejudice. To understand why this occurred on the 10 and 11 April 1888, it is necessary to know something of the legal system, and of the societies of Townsville and Thornborough at the time of the trials.

The crucial factor in the convictions of both men was that the cases for the prosecution did not depend on the testimony of Aboriginal witnesses, but were based on the accounts of Europeans - five in the case of Comes, six in the case of Nicholls. Aside from the obvious question of racial prejudice influencing the reception of Aboriginal testimony, the admissibility of such evidence was undermined by practical difficulties in the courts of nineteenth-century Australia. As Castles explains, there were two basic ways in which the conduct of trials involving Aborigines as witnesses could be seriously affected.

First, there was the basic difficulty of communication when an Aboriginal witness had no knowledge of English, or at best only a rudimentary understanding of the language. This situation was exacerbated when reliable interpreters could not be found. Secondly, as Burton J. of New South Wales outlined it, insuperable difficulty could ensue 'where a proposed witness had been found ignorant of a Supreme Being and a future State.' Under the prevailing notions of English law, sworn testimony could not be received in such circumstances.¹⁶

According to these principles, Mr Justice Cooper ruled the testimony of Polly inadmissible in the Comes trial as she 'did not understand the nature of an oath'.

A comparison with research undertaken by David Philips on two other Supreme Court trials in 1888 - one in Western Australia, the other in Victoria - illustrates the importance of European witnesses to securing convictions in cases involving violence against

¹³ *Townsville Herald*, 14 April 1888.

¹⁴ Dauntton-Fear and Freiberg 1977:45, Castles 1982:516; Cranston 1973:63.

¹⁵ The failure of the criminal law to act in accordance with its principles has been noted by modern commentators such as Cranston 1973:66. Allegations of racial bias in Supreme Court trials were levelled also in February 1989, when an all White jury in Broome, WA, found two Whites not guilty of the murder of an Aboriginal man; *Townsville Bulletin*, 25 February 1989.

¹⁶ Castles 1982:532-533.

Aborigines. In the Western Australian trial, a shepherd named Michael Griffin was charged with the brutal murder of an Aboriginal man named Marabool. The defence counsel called no witnesses. Unlike the trials of Comes and Nicholls, however, all of the prosecution witnesses were Aborigines. The defence asserted that as 'the only witnesses were natives', the jury 'should not...depend upon such evidence, unless it was materially corroborated'. The judge agreed, emphasizing in his summation that the prosecution depended entirely on 'the evidence of the black witnesses', and stating that: 'the story was of so brutal a nature that one hated to believe it...It might be that it was an outcome of the barbarous habits of the blacks, but that a white man could be guilty of such brutality it was hard to believe'. Griffin was acquitted.¹⁷

In the second case, Frederick Wilson and Martin Holly were tried at Hamilton for the rape of an Aboriginal woman named Jenny Green. Although much of the evidence for the prosecution came from Mrs Green, her husband Tommy and another Aborigine, Billy Gorry, all three witnesses could understand English and had spent considerable time living at the Lake Condah Mission Station. In the words of the presiding judge, Mr Justice Webb, the three were 'all intelligent witnesses and speaking the English language fairly well'. Nevertheless, the defence counsel, Sir Bryan O'Loughlen, attempted to discredit their evidence, saying that he 'knew very little of the manners of the blacks, but would leave it to the jury to judge of their social morality, and to consider how far their words and oaths should be respected against those of Christians who understood and revered the Bible'. Fortunately, the accounts of the Greens and Gorry were supported by that of a white witness, Joseph Rawlinson, described by Webb as 'a thoroughly reliable witness, an elderly and apparently respectable farmer'. The jury found Wilson and Holly guilty and they were sentenced to eighteen years' imprisonment with hard labour and two floggings. In analysing the trial, Philips wondered 'what would have happened if the jury had been asked to convict, and the judge to sentence, for a capital crime, on the word of a number of Aborigines alone, without any corroborating "reliable" and "respectable" white witnesses'.¹⁸

As in the Victorian and Western Australian cases, the presence of European witnesses was essential to the successful prosecutions of Comes and Nicholls. Given that the mining frontier was notorious for its 'brutality and callousness', and that the miners working there probably resorted more easily to the use of firearms than was the case in pastoral areas, it is perhaps surprising that nine of the eleven Europeans who willingly testified in the trials of the two men lived, like the defendants, on the Hodgkinson gold-field - in the town of Thornborough or at the Union Camp about 20 km away.¹⁹ Events in and around Thornborough at the time of the offences committed by Nicholls and Comes suggest a potential for retributive European violence towards Aborigines. At the Union, where the assault on Polly and her child took place, the sixteen or seventeen Whites were considerably outnumbered by the fifty or sixty residents of the Aboriginal fringe camp across the river. According to Bell, a 'state of armed watchfulness seems to have been taken for granted among settlers' in the area from around 1883 to the early 1890s.²⁰ This comment is supported by the depositions of the Comes trials. During the second Police Court hearing, Charles Maines and Thomas Scully both told the court that it was common practice to

17 Philips 1987:35.

18 Ibid. :34.

19 Loos 1982:79.

20 Bell 1978:21.

carry firearms for protection against the Blacks when looking for horses. Scully also mentioned that he had recently been 'stuck up by a blackfellow' who threw a stone at him. Numerous witnesses reported that local Aborigines had frequently been guilty of spearing the horses of Europeans, and Comes himself was said to have 'suffered considerably from the depredations of the blacks'. Constable Montgomery reported that:

Many complaints have been made about the blacks. They have been reported for spearing horses. I have met the blacks often with spears and without them. As a rule they generally have spears with them. They use them for hunting. It's a matter of notoriety that they spear horses.²¹

While this kind of friction between Black and White was typical around settlements on the northern mining frontier in the 1870s and 1980s, Thornborough was different. By 1888, the residents of the town and surrounding area had for the previous six years tried to use conciliation rather than brutal conflict in order to reconcile their differences with the neighbouring clans. In 1882, a local station owner named John Byrnes encouraged a small group of Aborigines, probably from the Djankun tribe, to visit Thornborough in an attempt to stifle their resistance. The members of this first group were fed meat and potatoes and, according to the mining warden, Lionel Towner, were 'kindly treated both by the inhabitants of the field and the representatives of Government'. Soon there were around 150 people camped two miles from the town. Assisted by a government subsidy, the local European residents raised money to supply the Aborigines with rations on a continuing basis. In the first year, Towner reported that 'the blacks...have always shown themselves willing to do work when obtainable'.²² By 1883 he said that the 'aboriginals have now become an institution'.²³ At the time of the offences committed by Nicholls and Comes, Hugh Wason was receiving an allowance of three pounds a month from the government to supply the fifty to sixty Aborigines at the Union Camp with rations. These people came not only from the Hodgkinson clans, but also from the Muluridji of the Lower Mitchell and the Wakara, whose country to the north west of Mount Mulligan had not yet been invaded by Whites.²⁴

Although the Thornborough scheme had government support it was, according to Loos 'regarded as unique and not as indicating a new initiative to be taken with frontier Aborigines'.²⁵ In his 1896 'Report on the Aborigines of Queensland', Archibald Meston commented that the action of the Thornborough residents 'was successful in effecting a reconciliation between the two races, and the blacks of that district have given very little trouble since...Would that all other settlers had adopted a similar system: it would have been well for them and all concerned'.²⁶ As the trial depositions indicated, the Thornborough initiative did not completely eliminate Aboriginal attacks on the new settlers and their property. Neither did it make the Europeans in the district put down their guns. A punitive expedition was launched on a Muluridji camp near the Mitchell River in 1891

²¹ Testimony of Montgomery in QSA U1331.

²² *Mining Wardens' Reports for the Year 1882*, Hodgkinson and Mulgrave Goldfields, 1883-4; Loos 1982:101.

²³ The Queensland government spent some £190 per annum on the Thornborough relief camp, *Townsville Herald*, 10 November 1888.

²⁴ Maines and Wason, QSA Z1331.

²⁵ Loos 1982:102.

²⁶ Meston 1896:11.

by a local station owner named J.F. Crowley, killing at least three people.²⁷ However, the action of the residents of Thornborough was a unique example on the mining frontier of an attempt to pacify local tribes through the supply of rations rather than brute force. Its uniqueness may have contributed to the willingness of sections of the community to report the crimes of Comes and Nicholls to the police, and to testify at the subsequent trials.

It is more likely, however, that the actions of the European witnesses were motivated by the particular nature of the offences committed by Comes and Nicholls. The victims of both crimes were female domestic servants; they had been known to the white residents for several years, and were considered to be reliable workers. As well as this, both defendants had committed earlier offences. Nicholls was reported to the police after a series of particularly callous beatings and mistreatment of Maggie extending over several weeks. Similarly, Comes had been counselled about his behaviour prior to the wounding of Polly; it was believed that he had shot Polly's husband two months before his attack on her.²⁸ There is also an indication in the Comes case that what the European residents considered to be appropriate behaviour away from settlement was not to be tolerated near a camp or town. The manager of the Union Mine, Crosbie, told Stephen Allen on the day of the offence that 'This sort of thing can't go on under our noses', before instructing him to send for the police. Finally, both attacks were considered to be unprovoked. As Sarah Wason pointed out when speaking of Comes' victim, Polly: 'I never knew her to spear horses or do any harm to the white population'.

Those present on the day that Comes shot Polly were in universal agreement that the matter should be dealt with by the law. However, there was widespread indignation after he was convicted. According to A.H. Zillman, Hugh and Sarah Wason 'incurred much public ill-feeling' over their part in the case. Similarly, the reported murder of a Chinese man by Aborigines 18km from Thornborough was blamed on the result of the trial by the *Cooktown Independent's* correspondent: 'That the blacks should dare to commit such an outrage so close to the town shows that Comes' affair is bearing fruit. Sub-Inspector Garraway came up to investigate the matter, but could do very little, I fear, for the "poor blacks" must not be touched at all'.²⁹ A letter to the editor of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* from H. Witt of Cooktown echoed these sentiments.

It is a pity that the policeman who had charge of Coombes was not better employed in protecting the property of settlers instead of letting the blacks do as they like and then haul a man up for trying to save himself from being cleaned right out. Considering the circumstances of the case a reprimand ought to have been sufficient, and Coombes is entitled to the sympathy of every bushman.³⁰

Whether or not James Comes was entitled to this sympathy, he certainly received it. A petition circulated in Cairns, Port Douglas, Charters Towers, Ravenswood, and on the Hodgkinson and Herbert calling for the old man's release. Among the 1164 signatures on what remains of the original document are those of Hugh Wason and the two Justices of the Peace who presided over Comes' first hearing at the Thornborough Police Court - Thomas Templeton and Robert G. Miller. In Port Douglas, where 167 people signed their names, a parliamentarian named W.C. Little addressed the electors at the Masonic Hall, thanked them

²⁷ Bell 1978:21.

²⁸ Testimony of Allen and Scully, QSA Z1331.

²⁹ *Townsville Herald*, 19, 26 May 1888.

³⁰ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 24 April 1888. 'Coombes' is a misspelling.

for returning him at the recent poll, and declared that he would do his 'utmost above all things to release James Coombes' [sic].

The efforts of Little and the other petitioners were unsuccessful. After the Colonial Secretary instructed him to consider the petition, Judge Cooper saw no reason for changing the sentence he had imposed, saying that: 'The petitioners, of whom there must be many hundreds, seem to think that the Prisoner's act was quite justified because, as they allege, he suspected the blacks with whom the gin was standing at the time of having destroyed a foal of his. I have no sympathy whatever with such views, and must always decline to do anything which could be construed into meaning that I have any other feeling than abhorrence for such an act as the prisoner's'. On 28 September 1888, W.C. Little sent a telegram to the *Cairns Chronicle*: 'the Colonial Secretary can do nothing in the manner of releasing James Coomes'.

The editor of the *Cairns Chronicle* was a most resolute defender of both Comes and the current European treatment of Aborigines in general on the northern frontier. In pointing out what he considered to be the injustice of the Thornborough man's sentence, the editor accurately described Comes as being '70 years of age, in ill-health, and a long resident on the Hodgkinson, where he is universally respected'. He then called Comes' statement at the Supreme Court trial a 'straightforward explanation'. The readers of the *Chronicle* were not told, however, of the ways in which this explanation conflicted with the testimony of every witness brought before the court. According to the *Chronicle* the court's guilty verdict was achieved because of the ignorance of the Townsville jury:

Crowded Townsville has no conception of the losses experienced by settlers north of its town, nor of the particular circumstances under which such an accident as the wounding of Polly could occur. Northerners who are daily suffering from the outrages perpetrated by the blacks, comprehend but too well the position, and no jury north of Townsville would have convicted the accused.³¹

In contrast, the editor of the *Townsville Herald* agreed with the court's decision, writing in relation to the trials of both Comes and Nicholls that 'the jury would have shown a highly reprehensible bias if they had returned verdicts of acquittal'. The hypothesis of the editor of the *Chronicle* that a different result would have occurred had Comes been tried north of Townsville may, however, have been a correct one. While the testimony of the Thornborough witnesses gave the prosecution, in the words of Mr Justice Cooper, 'clear, almost conclusive evidence', the verdicts were also a product of the society from which the jury was drawn.³²

Townsville, unlike those communities to the north, was not a frontier settlement in 1888. While the white residents were reading in newspapers about the conflict which was still being waged less than 160 km away, their black neighbours, living in fringe camps at North Ward and Ross Island, had been adapting to a post-frontier society for over half a generation. They had begun to perform casual work for the white colonisers and were no longer considered a threat to European life or property.³³ All over Queensland, as resistance was broken, European attitudes changed from the advocacy of violent 'dispersal' at the hands of the Queensland Native Mounted Police to one of protection, culminating in

³¹ Ibid., 26 May 1888.

³² *Townsville Herald*, 14 April 1888.

³³ Griffin 1983:134-145.

the first Queensland Aboriginal Protection Act of 1897.³⁴ The verdicts in the cases of *R v James Comes* and *R v William Hugh Nicholls* were consistent with these changes as they occurred among Townsville residents in the late 1880s. *The Herald's* editorial linked the desired shift in general policy to the two trials when it commented on the favourable verdicts by stating that:

The aboriginal population is fast decreasing. It is questionable whether or not the maintenance of the various bands of black troopers is not a more expensive process of dealing with them than would be the plan of confining them to certain districts and supplying them with food &c. They want but little here below, nor want that little long, and surely the colony can afford to adopt a humane policy towards them as a change to the very cruel and utterly demoralising one that everyone knows is expressed by the medium of the black troopers.³⁵

Similar ideas found voice in the same paper almost a year later:

The time has arrived when the Government should make some exertion to provide for the remnants of the tribes still in existence...[There] must be a limit to the constant harassing to which the blacks are subjected by the sleuth-hound-like tactics of the Native Mounted Police. Whatever excuses might in the past have been advanced as its *raison d'être* have now become nugatory, and it is necessary that some other and widely different system should come into force in our dealings with them.³⁶

Letters to the editors of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, *Townsville Herald* and *North Queensland Telegraph* also occasionally concerned themselves with ameliorating the condition of the Aboriginal remnant. One letter by 'Black Maria' stated that 'We have taken their country from them ... and the least we can do is to make some effort to "ease them off" a little more gently in a more Christian-like manner'. 'Maria' called for an association to 'be formed amongst the philanthropic members of our community on the same lines as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, with paid officers'.³⁷

Such an organisation had its beginnings in Townsville in 1889, with the formation of a branch of the Queensland Aborigines' Protection Society, its members consisting primarily of the town's religious leaders. Like its parent body in Brisbane, the Society had the following aims:

(1) To watch over the interests of the Aborigines of this colony - to prevent them from violence as far as possible, and from the evils of intoxicating drink, opium and other vicious influences. (2) To obtain clothing and suitable provisions for them. (3) To induce respectable families to adopt juvenile Aborigines and educate them. (4) To establish a station or stations in suitable districts where they may be collected, and religious education and industrial training imparted. (5) To obtain suitable recognition and help from the government.³⁸

³⁴ Fitzgerald 1982: 210-211.

³⁵ *Townsville Herald*, 14 April 1888.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 April 1889.

³⁷ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 March 1888.

³⁸ *Townsville Herald*, 31 August 1889; letters 9668, 8928 and 8169 of 1889, QSA Col/A 5951.

ABORIGINES, EUROPEANS AND THE CRIMINAL LAWS

While these views were particularly strong in Townsville they were also evident in other northern centres at the same time and the results of the two trials should be seen in this light. In 1888 a meeting of all eight northern members of parliament was held in the Legislative Committee rooms in Brisbane to discuss 'the possibility of ameliorating the condition of the aboriginals of North Queensland'.³⁹ There were also calls to government from local residents for assistance in setting up ration stations similar to the one at Thornborough from such areas as Herberton, Cairns, Cardwell and Atherton in 1888.⁴⁰ Around the same time, the Townsville papers received letters to the editor from correspondents in Georgetown, Cardwell, Cooktown, and the South Kennedy calling for greater protection of Aborigines and the abolition of the native police.⁴¹ In some areas this was because the local clans were no longer considered a threat; a letter from Georgetown said that the existence of a native police camp nearby was 'a useless expenditure of the people's money', and pointed out that: 'It would be far better if the money thus saved was spent on improving the roads'.⁴² In rainforest areas, where the mounted police were ineffective, protection was seen as an alternative in halting resistance. A writer from Cardwell suggested that protective stations for the Blacks be set up in the region to stop the slaughter of horses and bullocks by Aborigines for food.⁴³

The trials of Comes and Nicholls were noteworthy in the 1880s because they were rare examples of the criminal law acting to protect the interests of Aboriginal people. Although the results of the two trials were unusual as far as the practical application of the law was concerned, they were consistent with changing European attitudes towards Aboriginal policy at the time. In 1888, Europeans in North Queensland were faced with the choice of continuing to advocate the violent 'dispersal' of Aboriginal clans by the native police, or of providing for the surviving tribes by setting aside reserves and supplying rations. Almost a decade later the decision was made with the passing of the 1897 Aboriginal Protection Act, but as the aftermath of the Comes trial revealed, in 1888 the future direction was still uncertain. In supporting the verdicts of 10 and 11 April, the *Townsville Herald* referred to Comes and Nicholls as 'wanton and cruel cowards'.⁴⁴ In deploring the sentence of James Comes, the *Cairns Chronicle* described him as being 'universally respected'.⁴⁵ On the northern mining frontier in 1888, it was possible for one person to be both of these things.

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³⁹ *Townsville Herald*, 27 October 1888.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 6 April 1889; Loos 1982:102-105.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5 January, 27 April 1889.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 26 May 1888.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29 September 1888.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 April 1888.

⁴⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 26 May 1888.

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DEALING WITH THE LEGACY OF THE PAST: ABORIGINES AND ATOMIC TESTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Kingsley Palmer

In this paper I outline some of the events that have affected a group of Aboriginal people who now live in the far west of South Australia. The history of their contact with non-Aboriginal people has been one of alienation and dispossession as well as a requirement to respond to the variety of differing (and sometimes contradictory) government and mission policies. The complexity of the policies, the diversity of the issues and the variety of agencies involved have affected the Aborigines in significant ways. Although Aborigines have been generally powerless to alter or influence these policies, they have been active participants in the processes that have so immediately affected their lives. Decisions made by Aborigines today in a new era of choice are also made in the context of the past, so that the physical consequences of actions taken sometimes many decades ago bear upon those choices and confound them. What I describe here are the circumstances that surround these events in order to demonstrate why it is that contemporary choice is constrained by dilemmas that have their origins in the past.

The setting

The southern Pitjantjatjara belong to the western desert cultural bloc and formerly inhabited regions of the central and southern Great Victoria Desert. They now represent a fairly homogeneous linguistic group, though formerly they were distinguished by named dialect units and by physical occupation of defined ranges of territory. The Pitjantjatjara first encountered European Australians about the turn of the century and subsequently migrated from the desert to government settlements, ration depots and missions of the desert fringes. One such location became a siding on the Trans-Australian railway line at a soak called Ooldea where the philanthropic Daisy Bates also lived, dispensing rations and medicine to a population of between 300 and 400 Aborigines from 1919 to 1935. The United Aborigines Mission (UAM) subsequently established a mission at Ooldea Soak in 1933. The Aborigines continued to visit their desert homelands from Ooldea, though these visits became less frequent as the years passed. The UAM, unlike Daisy Bates, had a vested interest in distributing rations in order to maintain a client population of Aborigines. The children of the desert people were raised in the mission dormitories, with the tacit consent of their parents, and taught to eschew their language and culture.¹ The U.A.M. policy, which was hostile to any accommodation with traditional culture, affected traditional life, ritual and to a lesser extent language retention, particularly among the

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¹ Berndt and Berndt 1951:134; Brady 1987:41.

children who were accommodated in the dormitories.² However, like the Lutherans who followed them, the UAM missionaries were ultimately unable to break down traditional culture. Moreover, the mission was unable to sustain its position at Ooldea both because of practical difficulties experienced at the site and because of internal political squabbles within the organisation itself.

In 1952 the UAM withdrew from Ooldea and the Aborigines were abandoned to travel west by train to Cundeelee, north to Ernabella or to be taken up by the Lutherans who were eager to gain a toe-hold in this remote area of SA.³ Some Aborigines did travel west, but those who went north were persuaded to return to Ooldea by the Native Patrol Officer MacDougall, who claimed that he was concerned that they might perish of thirst in the remote station country beyond Bulgunnia where he found them. Whatever his real motives, arrangements were made to have the people picked up by truck from Ooldea on their return there by train.⁴ They were then taken to join their relations who were camped close to the present site of Yalata some 140 km south of Ooldea, under the supervision of Lutheran missionaries from Koonibba mission west of Ceduna.

At the same time and coincidentally the Australian government alienated a large portion of the southern Pitjantjatjara lands for British atomic bomb testing. This land was used for tests and trials until 1963 and the range was finally closed in 1968, but remained a prohibited area because of the contamination resulting from the tests and because some high-level radioactive waste was buried there.

The development of the atomic test site at Maralinga⁵

In the years after World War Two, both Britain and Australia expressed the view that the development of a nuclear deterrent that was independent of the USA was essential to maintain peace as well as being a means of thwarting the imperialist aspirations of Soviet Russia. A British A-bomb could be used as a counterbalance to the USA whose global hegemony in the post-war years was a matter for concern in Whitehall. In these precarious balancing games, Australia under Menzies became a willing pawn. Implicit in the development of a British nuclear deterrent was both Britain's desire to demonstrate its status as a world power and its ability to test the bomb at a suitable site. When discussions on British testing in the USA broke down in 1950, Prime Minister Attlee accepted a suggestion that Australia could provide a suitable test site.⁶ The Minister for Supply, Mr Howard Beale, said in 1955:

England has the know how; we have the open spaces, much technical skill and a great willingness to help the Motherland. Between us we should help

² For example, see Turner 1950:63-95.

³ For a detailed account of these events, see Brady 1987.

⁴ There is no evidence that Macdougall had any knowledge of the plans to develop an atomic testing site in the region at this time although it is possible. However, he had been urged to discourage Aborigines from settling in the vicinity of the Woomera Rocket Range Reserve and it seems likely that it was his desire to keep Aborigines away from this general area that inspired his actions rather than any real fear that they might die of thirst.

⁵ A detailed account of the tests and the political background to them is found in Milliken 1986

⁶ 'Australian Collation' (Aust. Col.) Submission RC800 to the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia: 550701.

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to build the defences of the free world, and make historic advances in harnessing the forces of nature.⁷

The 'open spaces' were to be the Australian off-shore islands in the Indian Ocean called Monte Bello and later the mainland test sites at Emu and Maralinga in the Great Victoria Desert.

At the time it was understood that Aborigines had lived in these mainland areas and that it was possible (though perhaps unlikely) that some Aborigines might still be living there. Indeed the Patrol Officer attached to Woomera (the rocket testing facility some 500 km east-south-east of the A-bomb test sites) was required to determine the numbers of Aborigines in the desert regions which later became the test sites. One man was scarcely able to give an accurate account of the Aboriginal population over 100,000 square kilometres. Even with the appointment in 1956 of an additional Patrol Officer,⁸ it was evident to the Patrol Officers themselves, as well as the Royal Commission (set up in 1984 to inquire into the conduct of the tests) that there were Aborigines living in the prohibited area during testing.⁹ It was also clear that at least one family of Aborigines traversed and camped in the test area incurring considerable contamination,¹⁰ and that others suffered hardship and perhaps death as a result of being told to evacuate their lands.¹¹ Others may have experienced sickness and perhaps blindness as a result of contact with contaminated clouds following one of the tests.¹²

While efforts at controlling Aboriginal movements were well intentioned from a health and safety perspective, the development of the British nuclear deterrent and Australia's role in it had two fundamental consequences for Aborigines. They were cut off from their lands, being unable to revisit their country as they had done when they lived at Ooldea. Equally significant was their awareness that their land and its sacred sites and water-holes were being devastated by enormous explosions; the emotional and psychological stress that this certainly engendered has never been, and can probably never be, properly evaluated. One elderly man stated:

At Yalata we were still thinking about country, but they put a block on you, like a paddock, shut. There were soldiers at Watson [the railway station]...*Piling* [rockhole] no good *kapi* [water] no good. Wiluna rockhole we can't trust him, we can't trust him water near Maralinga.¹³

Another woman stated:

When we were sitting at Tallawan [Yalata] we didn't want to come to our countries. MacDougall said you have to sit down, *ngura wanti* [leave your country altogether] smoke *panya* [be mindful of]. MacDougall told us you not to go back because danger[ous]...the old men were feeling no good. He was crying for his country. The bomb finished it.¹⁴

⁷ McClelland *et al.* 1985:9-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*:311.

⁹ *Ibid.*:309-24, 379-80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*:319-23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*:380.

¹² *Ibid.*:174-94.

¹³ Interview 18.1.85. Data in this paper are based on fieldwork conducted with Maggie Brady between 1981 and 1989 at Yalata and Oak Valley.

¹⁴ Interview 16.January 1985.

MacDougall, one of the Patrol Officers, saw the development of the test site as a matter of 'world security'¹⁵ and the safety of the Aborigines as something that could be accomplished by reconnaissance, census and vigilance. A.P. Elkin, the Australian anthropologist, and at the time one of the few experts on Aborigines, was pragmatic and cynical rather than radical when recruited to the government's Guided Projectiles Committee. Elkin said, 'As the project has been decided by the Empire leaders, our task is to see that the Aborigines' well-being is not interfered with in any way - not to waste energy in futile protest or abstract arguments'.¹⁶

The assumption underlying Elkin's statement was that Aborigines, secure on their mission stations, must be kept safe and their 'well-being' assured. Aborigines were, he believed, in a transitional stage which would eventually result in their developing into citizens and becoming fully assimilated or integrated¹⁷ Australians. Elkin wrote in 1958, 'The aim of all these schools, Mission and Government, is to prepare the children for their contact and association with the new order which has overtaken them'.¹⁸

The potential effects of the bomb tests on the sacred sites and on the socio-religious life of Aborigines was ignored because it was considered irrelevant. According to Elkin, in time Aborigines would leave their traditional ways and lifestyle behind, and all of its associations, and would develop into 'modern' men and women with singular and identifiable characteristics.

However, despite the assertion by the Lutheran missionaries at Yalata as late as the 1970s that 'the influence of...rites is gradually diminishing as the effects of education and Christian conviction supply satisfying answers to many things previously classed as mystical',¹⁹ ritual life did remain strong. Despite being cut off from their homelands, prohibited from revisiting sites of ritual and spiritual importance, and despite the energetic intervention of Christian missionaries, beliefs in and knowledge about the land remained a central focus of the Aboriginal way of life on the mission.²⁰ The southern Pitjantjatjara continued to hold their country through ritual practices and the telling of myths. They travelled to ritual gatherings held in communities to both the north and west and received visits from the members of these communities, who in turn practised and kept alive the ritual life. While living at Yalata they resisted incorporation into the wider Australian population by retaining an essentially Aboriginal lifestyle composed of mobile kin-based hearth groups. Government policies, however, allowed for the alienation and destruction of land, the importance of which to Aborigines was considered to be overridden by the

15 McClelland *et al.* 1985:159.

16 Elkin 1947.

17 Elkin did not see these two 'stages' of incorporation into non-Aboriginal Australian society as mutually exclusive. According to Elkin the aim of assimilation was to help Aborigines 'become an integral part of our Australian way of life' (1958:9). Elkin did not use assimilation to mean that Aborigines would become indistinguishable from non-Aboriginal Australians. It was a process whereby Aborigines would become fit to be citizens in terms of economic, political, religious, recreational and social criteria (*ibid.*). The distinction between assimilation and integration as expressed in the implementation of government policy is more clearly made by Berndt and Berndt (1988:524).

18 Elkin 1958:20. The attitude of the time is best summed up by the title of the cover illustration of Elkin's 1958 pamphlet on citizenship, 'In the old world: Artist. In the new world: Stockman' (Elkin 1958).

19 Yalata Mission n.d.:2.

20 Cf. Brady 1987.

exigencies of international politics. The problem for the Pitjantjatjara in the 1950s was that government policy, much influenced by men like Elkin, assumed that the Aboriginal relationship to remote desert tracts was no longer important, because other interests and priorities had taken its place. In fact they were wrong in their assumptions. The Aborigines suffered the consequences, persevering in a land-oriented culture and belief, while the object of that belief was out of reach and its physical integrity brought into question.

New policies: self-determination and self-management

While the last major bomb test at Maralinga took place in 1957, minor site trials, continued until 1963 during which large quantities of highly radioactive contamination (principally plutonium-239) were scattered over the range continued until 1963. The range was finally closed in September 1968. Meanwhile government policy towards Aborigines was changing. There was a shift from assimilation to self-determination.²¹ Aborigines were no longer seen as unimportant or merely as material to be moulded into a form useful and acceptable to the broader Australian community. Rather they would, as a result of Government policy, acquire equality with European Australians by participating in decisions that affected their own lives.²² The new policies stressed the importance of Aborigines in their own right and recognised that land was an important spiritual and (to a lesser extent) economic base.²³ Development for Aboriginal people could be achieved, so it was argued, if Aborigines owned the land they lived upon and had a say in the governance of their communities and the administration of their affairs.

In practice this meant a number of things.²⁴ For the southern Pitjantjatjara (some years behind their northern kin who received freehold title to their lands in 1981) it meant the awarding of land rights to part of their traditional lands as a result of the *Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act (1984)*, legislation of the South Australian parliament.²⁵ The passing of the legislation, modelled on the South Australian *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act (1981)* paved the way for reoccupation of the lands, an act which the southern Pitjantjatjara had anticipated by moving from Yalata to Ooldea and later to sites south of Maralinga in 1982.²⁶ Subsequently in 1985 they established an outstation some 160 kms north west of Maralinga and called the site Oak Valley.

The granting of land rights, the subsequent reoccupation of homelands and the policy of governments which helped to make all this possible significantly altered the *status quo* for the southern Pitjantjatjara. Formerly they had been barred from their lands which had been blasted and contaminated by atomic tests, and had little choice but to live at a mission upon which they had become increasingly dependent. Latterly, they had reoccupied their lands, had been consulted by government officials, parliamentarians, a State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and been told that not only did their opinion and aspirations count for something, but the governments, both State and Federal, wanted to hear it and act upon it.

²¹ For details of the shift see, for example, Hamilton 1987, Palmer 1987, Sanders 1982.

²² For a descriptive account of what politicians mean by the policies of self-management see, for example, Viner 1978:3443 and Hand 1987:2.

²³ Altman 1987:37 notes that foods derived from the bush per annum accounted for 46% of the total kilocalorie intake and 81% of the total protein intake (figures expressed as a mean of totals). The economic implications of this are also discussed by Altman.

²⁴ Sanders 1982:5.

²⁵ See Toyne and Vachon 1984 for a history of the Pitjantjatjara struggle for land rights.

²⁶ Palmer 1990.

The return to the desert was not without its problems. Parts of the eastern portion of the land the Aborigines chose to repossess and to live upon was now contaminated. Moreover, the processes to be employed to determine the extent of the contamination and, most important of all, who might pay to clean it up, caught the southern Pitjantjatjara in a complex web of interactions that brought with them their own particular problems.

Living with the legacy of Maralinga

In 1984 the Hawke Labor Government initiated a Royal Commission to investigate the British nuclear tests in Australia. The terms of reference set out an inquiry into whether the tests were safe, properly conducted and the Commissioners were to have 'particular regard' to the number of people affected by the tests including 'Aboriginals and other civilians'.²⁷ The Commissioners, one of whom was Aboriginal, took evidence from many Aboriginal groups and received substantial submissions prepared on their behalf. Many Aboriginal issues were addressed in the final report and five of the seven recommendations mentioned Aborigines. The Commission also uncovered many documents detailing the contamination and damage to Aboriginal land or land within the existing prohibited area at Maralinga.

The Aboriginal component in the Royal Commission was important because it was meant to symbolise Australia's concern for her indigenous people. To some extent the Aboriginal agenda overshadowed other aspects of the inquiry. It allowed the government to indicate through the vehicle of the Commission that the act of testing bombs in Australia was a British decision, supported by those with Anglophile tendencies with general (but predictable) colonial attitudes to those Aborigines who might be inconvenienced. Mr Alan Butement, the Chief Scientist to the Australian Government, said of MacDougall, whom he thought over-zealous in his concern for the Aborigines: 'He is apparently placing the affairs of a handful of natives above those of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.²⁸

The Commission was hailed by some commentators as a timely act, which would unmask British duplicity, identify injustice done to Aborigines and potentially pave the way for just restitution. In many respects it accomplished all of these, but for the Aboriginal participants there were difficulties of a more practical sort. The Commission was investigating events that had for the most part taken place thirty years before. While the documentary sources were relatively easily tapped, much evidence representing the Aboriginal point of view had to be presented in the form of oral testimony. In preparation for the Royal Commission the writer and another researcher (Maggie Brady) worked for some months collecting information on the use of the land, how the people migrated in to Ooldea, the move to Yalata, and recollections of the bomb tests. Being asked to recall events that had taken place so long ago was a perplexing and sometimes confusing process. Some memories were also very painful, some were embarrassing. For example, people had to explain why they (or perhaps their parents) left the land, perhaps why they were unable to return. Some people were only children when they had walked in to the mission at Ooldea. The exact location of some rockholes was forgotten. People's confidence in the country and their ability to survive in it had been eroded. Many rockholes, without regular visits for maintenance, would have become silted up and the water difficult to recover. One man stated, with reference to his relative lack of knowledge about the land, 'I was in the

²⁷ McClelland *et al.* 1985:2.

²⁸ Quoted in Milliken 1986:94.

mayi [food]²⁹ too long'. By this he meant that he had been away from the land and living at the mission for so long that much knowledge about the land and how to survive in it was lost.

There were also some events that people would prefer to forget. After she had given evidence at Maralinga, and the official party had departed, an Aboriginal woman who had spoken wept because she found the memory of the past and the recollection of those who had died so painful. Several key Aboriginal witnesses who gave evidence when the Royal Commission sat at Maralinga anticipated payment or recompense for their role. Instead of any immediate payments to settle the business, there were protracted discussions about 'compensation' for loss of use of the land, or actual damage incurred either to the land or to people as a result of the tests. The process raised Aboriginal people's expectations but, at the time of writing, no compensation had been paid to individuals. This tended to confirm, for some, that governments promised much but did very little.

Return to Oak Valley had been undertaken on the assumption that land beyond the Maralinga section itself was safe and uncontaminated. The Royal Commission raised questions about the extent of the contamination that made Aborigines increasingly uneasy about the land they lived upon. Many stories of contamination were unsupported by fact but the findings of very low levels of contamination at Oak Valley in 1987 tended to confirm a view held by some that the land had indeed been made too dangerous to live upon. While reassurance came from many quarters, living at Oak Valley was never quite the same again.

The desire of an increasingly self-conscious Australian government to slough off the mantle of colonialism caught the Aborigines in its inexorable processes. Making the facts of the tests clear and developing a proper understanding of the consequences of testing atomic devices, particularly in terms of environmental contamination, were matters that were rightly accorded a high priority. However, the Aborigines were involved in processes, largely beyond their control, which were the responses of others to events that had not been of the Aborigines' making. The Commission was legitimated by reference to events that had taken place in the 1950s. In that it sought to provide a framework to remedy past wrongs it was justified. But the process to accomplish this was not an unalloyed pleasure for the Aboriginal people who endured much hardship and heartache in Australia's attempts to right Australia's wrongs.

Return to the land

The development of Yalata from 1952, first by the Lutheran Church and subsequently by community advisors, had aimed to provide employment and an economic base, good housing, a health service, water, showers and access to other services in the nearest town (Ceduna) 200 km away. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent in this endeavour over many years. However, progress in achieving these goals was slow. Funds for housing were not made available until the 1980s, the highly saline drinking water supply was inadequate, business ventures like a sheep station were often on the verge of collapse, employment opportunities were limited. The community was often paralysed after alcoholic sprees that brought everything to a standstill.³⁰ In 1982, when some of the southern Pitjantjatjara voted with their feet, so to speak, and left for the Maralinga lands, they did so because the

²⁹ *Mayi* means vegetable food (often in contradistinction to *Kuka*, meat) but is used in this context to mean mission food (rations) which included flour, but could also include tinned meat.

³⁰ Brady and Palmer 1984.

opportunity of living on their traditional lands and away from the disruptions of community life was the more attractive alternative. However, the sums of money that had been spent did have positive results. By 1988 there was a large and well-equipped school, a new modern store, and an Aboriginal-controlled health service; over a dozen new houses had been built between 1985 and 1988, and there were increased employment opportunities, particularly with the implementation of the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP).³¹

Successive governments have provided funding for outstations because it is considered that outstations provide a better future for some Aborigines. It is argued that by allowing Aborigines to live in the manner and in the places that they choose, away from the destructive aspects of settlement life, a better future might be had.³² For the Oak Valley residents, as for other Aborigines who have chosen to move to outstations, there is a price to pay for abandoning the main settlement.

By leaving Yalata the Oak Valley residents gave up any real and immediate opportunity to gain benefits from the progress that had been made at Yalata in providing modern facilities and improving health. Oak Valley has few of these benefits. The outstation is eight hours drive from Yalata across poor dirt roads. There is no potable ground water and all supplies for drinking must be delivered by truck from the railway at Watson 160 km to the southeast, though in good seasons some is now available in tanks supplied from water catchment sheds when it rains. There are no houses, no toilets, no showers.³³ The health service operates out of a caravan or more usually from the back of a Toyota. People sleep on the ground, are prey to frequent and multiple infections and depend upon an irregular supply of store food delivered once a fortnight from Yalata. While Oak Valley is, on the positive side, peaceful, for there is no alcohol permitted, it is isolated. Children receive a very partial education and employment opportunities are few.

Commercial enterprises are more or less non-existent and there is little opportunity to develop economic activities. Tourism is occasionally discussed but the desert is very remote and lacks spectacular vistas or recreational opportunities. Moreover there is very substantial resistance from many Aborigines to allowing non-Aborigines to enter the lands. Mining is seen as equally problematic by the Aborigines, and exploration to date has revealed nothing of commercial worth. Community development projects, in a community that lacks any superstructure, where cash available for capital works is extremely limited and where there is no training and no supervision, are difficult to implement or sustain.

Not all Yalata people have returned to Oak Valley, indeed a substantial portion of the Aborigines remain at Yalata, building upon some of the progress that has been made there. There is considerable movement between the two settlements, but both have developed their own separate identities marked by differing attitudes to the return to the desert. Some Aborigines at Yalata consider that return to country is counter-productive to the process of allowing Aborigines to take a place in the governance of their own affairs, since major decisions about community programmes, capital works and employment schemes are made at Yalata and controlled by the Yalata Council. The divisions that surface when the Yalata residents' views are held in contradistinction to the views of the Oak Valley residents perhaps sum up some of the difficulties facing Aborigines in the post-self-management era.

31 For a detailed account of the scheme see Sanders 1988.

32 See for example, Commonwealth of Australia 1987:13-16; Coombs 1977:3.1-3.4.

33 Since this paper was first written in 1988 some progress has been made at Oak Valley in the provision of services. By the end of 1989 the community had limited shower facilities and a small solar-powered refrigeration unit.

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Moving away from settlements to outstations consolidates cultural values and re-establishes links with the land. On the other hand, there is a diminution of the possibilities with respect to economic opportunities, services are more difficult and more costly to provide. In a community where there is no reticulated water, no ground water within 50 km that could be used even for washing, no electricity and no houses, demands that government bodies should spend huge sums on the development of a community infrastructure are financially, and practically, unrealistic. Nevertheless, it is also true that it was never the wish of the Aboriginal people to have a settlement created at Yalata, or to have huge sums invested in it. That choice was made for them in the context of the diverse events already described.

The pendulum of government policies

The southern Pitjantjatjara have responded to a variety of government policies and missionary activities over the last seventy years. These policies and activities are manifest in a series of disconnected processes which have been typified by inconsistency. One policy or series of actions sought to remedy or ameliorate an earlier one, which in turn had been implemented for the good of the Empire or of Christ's kingdom on earth. In these processes the Aborigines were forced, as generally powerless participants, to generate strategies to accommodate the changes, most of which, historically at least, they were unable to influence or alter directly. This resulted in their being faced with a series of dilemmas, often insidious choices resulting from circumstances and conditions which were not of their own making.

Settlement at Ooldea (which was a matter of choice) was attractive because of the provision of rations. But the UAM was an active participant in the process by providing the rations as an attraction offered to recruit converts to the Christian faith. The failure of the UAM to maintain the mission and the squabble over who should take responsibility for the people who lived there meant the residents had to decide where to go next. However, the decision was also important to two other groups of people who set about attempting to influence it. MacDougall was unwilling to see people scattered across the Woomera Rocket Range and forbade the people to go north. The Lutherans, who were eager to have the Aborigines in their mission, trucked them south. The relative proximity of Yalata and the offer of care and rations to be provided there meant that it became the realistic choice for the majority. However, the location was far from being their preferred destination, being yet further away from their desert homelands than Ooldea had been.

Meanwhile, return to that desert had become not only impractical, but forbidden. It suited the British and Australian governments in the 1950s to believe that the land was of no importance to desert Aborigines, and that the area, which was an ideal place to perform the tests, was more or less empty. Later, as government ministers, advisors and the voting public recognised the importance of that land to the Aboriginal owners, the Aborigines were permitted to return to areas they had been encouraged to leave. However, blasting a people's land with atomic devices is not without its repercussions. Radioactive contamination lingers, seeding doubts as to the safety of the land. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of dollars had been spent establishing the community at Yalata, which had the effect of ensuring that it was the place where the services and opportunities were provided. The Aborigines did not wish to have their settlement located at Yalata, nor did they wish to be persuaded that their future lay with separation from, rather than association with, their culture and their land. Once people were moved to Yalata, the sums of money allocated for community development were spent at that location, not on a settlement in their own country. Moreover it is unlikely, in the near future at least, that

massive expenditure would be made available to duplicate at the outstation the facilities already provided at Yalata.

The results of the past are not necessarily immutable but maybe their mark is indelible. It was perhaps because of this that the southern Pitjantjatjara chose the term 'Maralinga Tjarutja' to describe their new identity as owners and occupiers of the Maralinga lands. They said they wanted the word 'Maralinga' included in their title. This was not because it was in any way a traditional term. It was not even Pitjantjatjara. It was a word borrowed from another language by non-Aborigines to identify a place where a particularly non-Aboriginal activity occurred.³⁴ However, the southern Pitjantjatjara considered that their past was tied up with what had happened at Maralinga and their present was strongly affected by the consequences of what had happened there also. They wanted non-Aborigines to understand the importance of these events to their past and present. Now that Aborigines in Australia are being given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own affairs they have choices which were not afforded them in the past. But these choices are not made in a vacuum, for the events of the past have repercussions which are not of Aboriginal making. The development of self-management in the contexts described here has meant for the southern Pitjantjatjara that they can now start to determine their own affairs, and make choices about their future. However, they now face a series of dilemmas in making these choices. These are as much a product of the past and their alienation from the decision-making process, as they are a part of the present and their inclusion in it.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Acknowledgments

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34. The site was named Maralinga on 25 November 1953 by Mr A. Butement who was the chief scientist of the Department of Supply (Milliken 1986:72) at a meeting which was held, presumably, at Salisbury, SA (Symonds 1985:233). Milliken (1986:3) erroneously claims that the term was introduced by Aborigines to describe the range and meant 'field of thunder'. Mr Butement, on being asked, stated that he could remember nothing about the matter so 'there was no point in keeping on with me about it. (pers comm 1 July 1988). In fact the word is derived from a language of the Cobourg Peninsular in the Northern Territory, which means 'thunder'. It was probably taken by Butement or one of his colleagues from a popular Aboriginal wordlist which in turn had extracted it from Curr, *The Australian race* (1886, vol. 1:268-9). *Tjarutja* is a Pitjantjatjara term. *Tjaru* is a spatial adverb which has the meaning 'down from, south of', while *tja* is an associative suffix, meaning 'of' or 'from'. (See Institute for Aboriginal Development 1987:138; 131.)

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SHARING THE PAST: ABORIGINAL INFLUENCE ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE, A CASE STUDY FROM NEW SOUTH WALES

Colin Pardoe

Aboriginal demands of researchers in the last decade for control, accountability and information have influenced the way we approach archaeology in a number of ways. In this article I offer just two examples of this. First I will discuss the way in which Aboriginal epistemological perceptions of their past have led me to abandon the term prehistory and to seek models for siting my work that embrace both the historic and prehistoric perspective. Second, I will discuss my response to Aboriginal requests for information from scientists and the way in which community reports form part of a model for research based on the interests of both archaeologists and Aborigines, and on the goals of collaborative assessment.

Aboriginal Australians have regularly objected to a European view of the past that makes a distinction between history and prehistory.¹ While they make conceptual objections to such a structural disjuncture, this is compounded by the chronological problems which place a 200-year-old event in the Aboriginal past into a prehistory of European chronology: '... Australia, the only continent whose prehistory ended with the Industrial Revolution' (Mulvaney and Golson 1971:vi). This chronological and conceptual blurring led to a view of Aborigines as 'Stone Age people', relict primitives. It is important therefore, working with Aborigines in the field of archaeology, to try to address this point, to consider the relation between history and prehistory from other points of view.

Braudel (1960) proposed a model for historical studies which not only clarifies the place of academic disciplines in Aboriginal perception, but also offers a model which, as a heuristic device for viewing the past, seems far more fruitful than arbitrary and confining distinctions between history and prehistory. He distinguishes the history of 'events' from that of 'conjuncture' and 'the long duration'. The history of events is studied at the level of the individual and in the shortest term. Conjuncture is an intermediate time-scale greater than a human life span where longer term cycles may be described. Examples might include European colonialism, ritual behaviour in patterns of burial or the impact of chang-

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¹ The then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies forwarded a motion to educational bodies that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history is the history of Australia, and as such can not be segregated or relegated to the outskirts of Australian society or to "pre-history" '. (Resolutions from the AIAS biennial conference, Canberra, May 1988). Golson (1986:3) notes that 'what we called the prehistories of Australia and New Zealand were in fact the histories of Aboriginal Australian and Maori predecessors'. See Trigger (1985:34-35) for a similar North American view.

ing technology. The history of the long duration is clearly most closely related to archaeological interest and method, where history is moulded by what might be seen as external factors such as 'structures of population density, basic social and economic relations of exploitation and dependency, patterns of disease and relationship to the land' (Gosden n.d.). The long duration is the kind of view that interests me as an archaeologist: the relationship between people and environment, genetic models of population structure, and the evolution of systems of social and territorial organisation. Our knowledge of this long duration, however, is invariably gained through putting together histories of events and individuals.

My concern as an archaeologist, and one who studies ancient human remains, has been to construct a model for research which acknowledges Aboriginal interest and control without sacrificing scientific rigour (Pardoe 1985). Another part of this model has been to produce 'community reports' for Aboriginal people in the areas where I have been working. These are written not only because I know archaeology is of great interest to everyone, but also because it is through information about scientific research that Aboriginal people can assess the value of such work and start to play a more active role. Community reports are an integral part of a collaborative assessment (Pardoe 1989, in press) which should apply not just to significant and sensitive remains in the form of burials and human skeletons, but to all archaeology. Archaeology can be at its most invigorating by combining these two perspectives (see, for instance, Pardoe 1988a & b, Pardoe and Webb 1986 and the report below).

The story of two burials at Cowra in New South Wales is reproduced below in the form that it was written for Aboriginal communities in the area. The second burial in the report was dated to between 100 and 150 years ago, well within European settlement of the area. People were extremely interested in how late the burial was. One comment by Mrs Agnes Coe was very relevant to this discussion. She compared this individual with 25,000 to 30,000-year-old burials from Lake Mungo, further to the west. She suggested that this burial was even more important being so recent, since it showed the continuity of Aboriginal culture well into the late 1800s.

So in the field of burial archaeology, an event such as the Mungo I burial at 27,000 years ago is just one building block which may lead us to make statements about the 'long duration', the cultural and biological processes which shaped Aboriginal history. One of the Cowra burials, which took place no more than 150 years ago, well within a European historical time frame in Australia, is another of those events. Each event gains significance from different perceptions.² The following report highlights single events in a person's life. By seeking patterns from many individuals it is possible to investigate the longer term.

² This is a point taken up by McBryde (1985:2), Sullivan (1985:147-150) and Chippindale (1988). From an anthropological perspective, Rose (1989) states: 'The past is kept accountable to the needs of the present because there is no *single* instance of present authority' (my emphasis).

ANCIENT ABORIGINAL BURIALS
AT COWRA, NSW

a report on the study of
two skeletons
spanning 7,000 years

by Colin Pardoe

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies

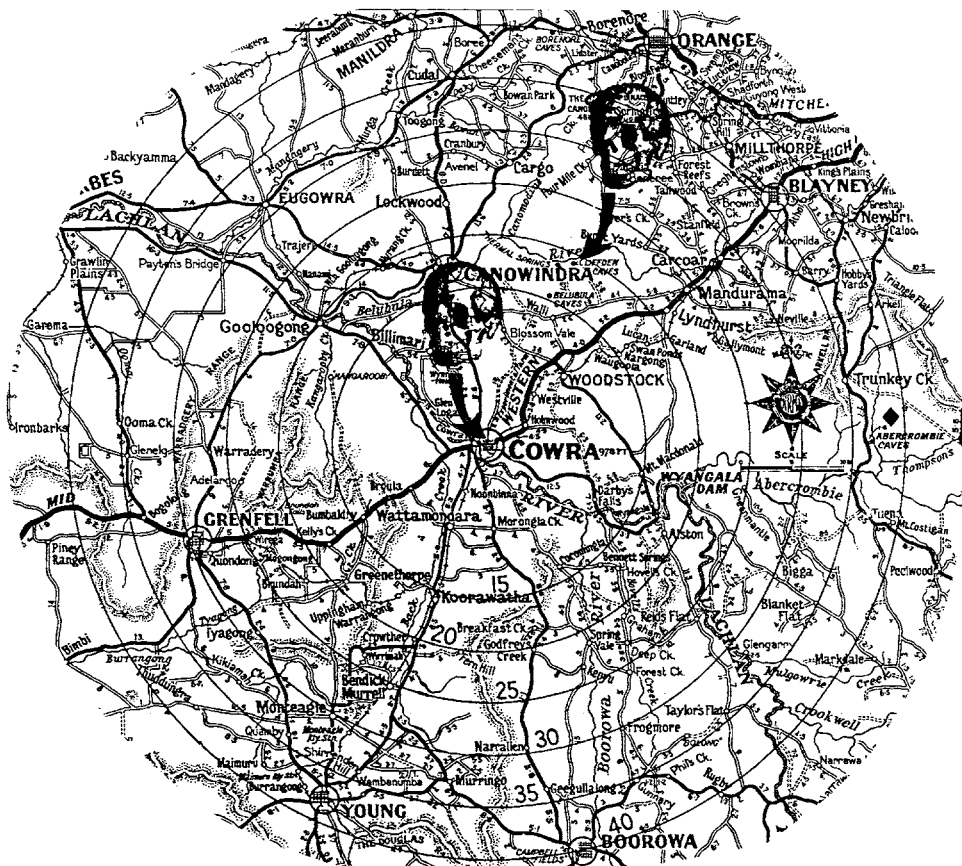
GPO Box 553,
Canberra,
ACT 2601

October, 1988

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ANCIENT BURIALS AT COWRA

7,000 years ago, the weather was cooler than today. The climate around Cowra was probably moister. At that time, (about 300 generations ago) an Aboriginal hunter fell to his death down a cave. Later, maybe 1,000 to 2,000 years ago, an old man was buried overlooking the Lachlan River and the present day town of Cowra. Today, the lives of these two people; their deaths and burial can give us information about the past. That is what this report is for.



Location of the Cliefden Caves and Taronga Drive skeletons. The diamond on the right is the site of the Abercrombie rockshelter. This archaeological site was excavated by Ian Johnson in 1976.

CLIEDEN CAVES

These caves are about 20 km northeast of Cowra near the south shore of the Belabula River. Entrance to the cave is through a hole on the side of a small hill. The hole is about 20 by 40 cm and immediately inside is a drop of about four meters. From this small chamber a narrow, low passage winds into the hill. At the end it opens into a sloping chamber up to two meters high and about six by ten meters in area. The bones were in and on the soil at the lower edge. On the other side is a shaft leading a short way up.

In the cave there was no evidence of smoke from torches, human disturbance, stone or bone tools. The skeleton is incomplete, with bones only coming from the lower part of the body.

Who was he?

The great size of the bones make it clear that not only was he male, but that he was at the upper size limits. The lengths of both the thigh and shin bones were compared with other studies to estimate how tall the Cliefden caves man was. This comes out at about 1.77m (5' 9").

His age is difficult to tell. From some of the arthritis (I'll refer to this below) he could have been an older man, say over 40 years old. But there are other factors at work here. It is probably reasonable to assume that this person was no younger than about 35-40 when he died.

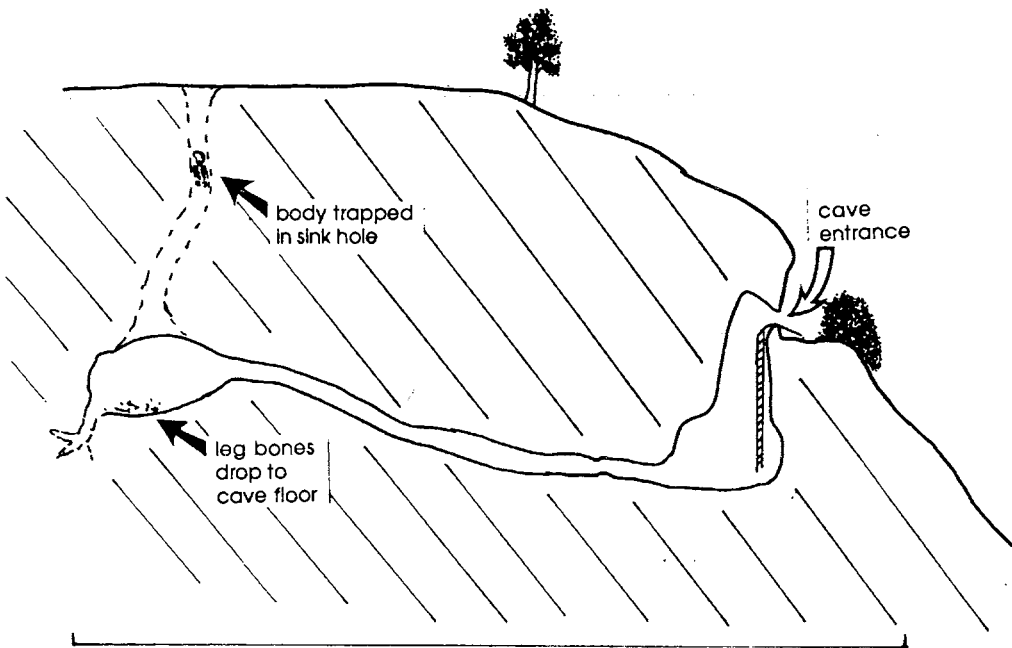
His knee-cap has long spurs, or roughened spikes on it. These are often the result of overworked or torn tendons. Small growths from arthritis are also on the ends of the shin bones, at the ankles. This might be expected as a natural result from the active life of a hunter. The arthritis probably had more to do with his overall size, build and activity than with age. The rugged, hilly terrain of the limestone country was probably to blame.

An adult skeleton carries information about childhood. Lines form in bones when growth stops for a short period at times of starvation or disease. A thin cap of bone is formed across the area of growth at either end of the bone. When growth restarts, this cap, or line, is left behind as a permanent marker of the stressful event. Seven lines are visible in the X-ray of the shin bone. This is probably the result of seasonal food shortage or perhaps an annual disease.

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How Old?

The age of this man's death has been radio-carbon dated using a small piece of bone. The method is to look at different ratios of carbon in the bone, since these change with time. He died between 6,250 and 7,520 years ago. That is something like 250 to 300 generations in the past. There are few older skeletons in the country.



Mud map of the cave. We needed a rope ladder to climb down into the cave. I think the rest of the body is entombed in the hill, part way down a sink hole.

Death by Misadventure

I think that the Cliefden Caves man was not buried there, but instead that he died in an accident. Only the lower part of the body is present and there is no evidence of human intervention. The tiny cave entrance and immediate drop would have made it almost impossible to enter without a rope. It would be difficult for a large man to get in (at 6' 1" and 75kg, I just managed it by breathing out!) and impossible to move a body through. It seems unlikely that he entered here, became trapped and died: only subsequent vandalism would account for the present array of bones left in the chamber.

One solution to the mystery is death by misadventure. The blocked passage rising from the highest point in the chamber may have been a chimney or sink-hole 7,000 years ago when the glaciers and ice were disappearing. This stone age hunter may have fallen and died in the vertical passage. Ultimately, some of his bones dropped into the chamber and rolled to their present location, while the upper part of the skeleton remains entombed within the now plugged chimney.

Archaeology

This man who died here about 7,000 years ago has allowed us a glimpse into the human conditions of life at the time. This is a reminder that the so-called easy life of man the hunter is not without risk.

He was a large man, adapted to a difficult terrain as we can see by the rugged muscles and bones. He suffered from repeated privation in childhood as measured by growth lines in the bones. This might have been annual 'lean times' in winter; much like our own Christian time of Lent. His arthritic condition was no doubt made worse by advancing years and the wet chill of winter. And finally he died a violent death, perhaps falling down the hole while he was hunting.

THE TARONGA DRIVE BURIAL

This burial was disturbed when the footings for a house were being put in. Some children found the skull in a soil heap. Carol Gartside and Luke Godwin of National Parks and Wildlife Service organised a mechanical sifter and gathered together most of the bones and some stone tools from the site. I have been fortunate enough to study these at Canberra.

The burial was on the south-western side of the hill to the north of town, just near the top with an outcrop of boulders. From the site you can look over the valley, down the the Lachlan River about a mile (1.5 km) in the distance.

The picture shows the bones that are preserved. Most of the ends are lost - not from the sifting as you might expect, but from the effects of being in the soil for so long.

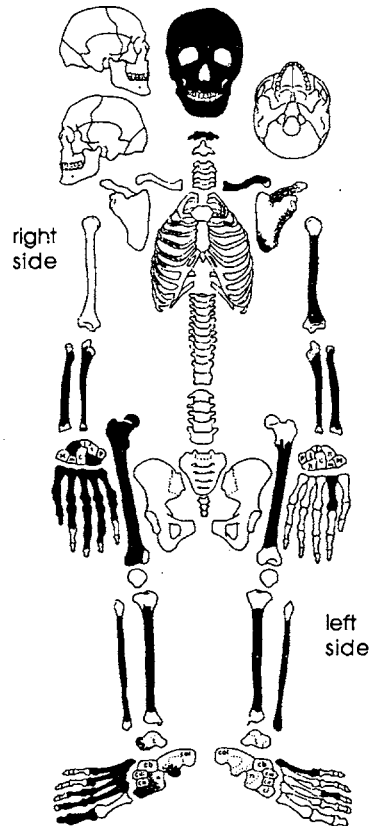


Diagram showing the bones recovered from the Taronga Drive burial. As you can see, most of the more fragile parts of the skeleton have not survived. I do not think this is the fault of the mechanical sieving that was used to recover the bones. Most of the long bones have the ends worn away. This is caused by erosion in the soil, not from breakage. Perhaps some of the bones, like the backbone, part of the ribs and the right upper arm were in another pile of soil that was taken away.

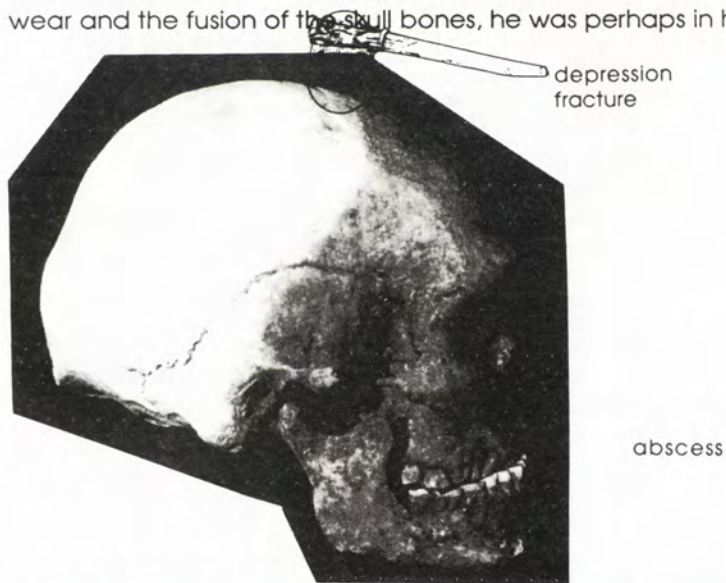
Who was he?

Although many of the bones are missing, and others are very much eroded, there is still a lot to be learned about this man. Like the Cliefden Caves man, the size and shape of the bones tell us that he was male. In overall size he was above average, but not quite so large as the Cliefden Caves man. He was probably an inch or so shorter.

Muscles attach to bone. The pull of the muscles affects the bone growth at that spot. Bigger, stronger muscles produce larger, more rugged spots of attachment on the bone surface. The Taronga Drive man was particularly well muscled on the calf and back of the thigh. This is very similar to the other one, and reflects the rugged nature of the country. On his arms, all the muscles associated with throwing are particularly pronounced, more so on the right side than on the left.

At some time in his life, he got hit on the head. This left a small, circular depression in the bone about the size of a one cent piece.

As he got older, his teeth wore down to stubs. This exposed the pulp chamber and infections were able to form at the tips of the tooth roots. These are called *apical abscesses*. He suffered from five of these abscesses. It is difficult to tell at what age he finally died. From the tooth wear and the fusion of the skull bones, he was perhaps in his 50's.



The Taronga Drive man from the side. At the top is the small *depression fracture*, caused by a blow to the head. This picture and the front view show the advanced tooth wear. You can also see a couple of small abscesses of the tooth roots. The difference in colours on left and right sides are where the back of the skull was exposed for a short time (perhaps a couple of months).

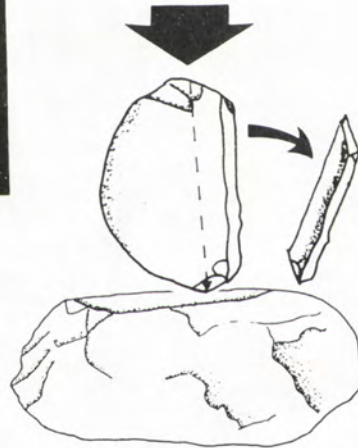
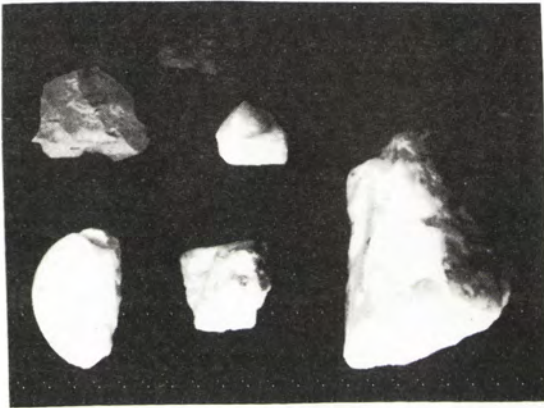
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How old?

I don't know the age of this burial, although there are some rough estimates that can be made. The preservation of the bones is not extremely good, with the thinner and more delicate ends gone. This is partly to do with the soil conditions. The burial is not too recent (or else the bones would be in a better state). It is not extremely ancient (or else the bones would be more eroded).

The stone tools that were in the area are mostly quartz, shattered to make thin, rectangular pieces for hafting on to handles. This is a fairly recent kind of technology. Mind you, the tools are not necessarily from the burial, since the whole thing was disturbed before archaeologists could examine the area.

All in all, this burial is probably in the range of 1,000 to 2,000 years. It is not likely to be any younger, but it could be much older.



The rounded piece of quartz on the lower left in the photo has been broken using a hammer and anvil technique. This shows up on the waste piece as crushing of the ends. A thin rectangular piece is broken off and that is the part hafted to a handle for cutting. At the Abercrombie rockshelter, excavated by Ian Johnson of Parks in 1976, at least 95% of the stone in the site was quartz. Most of it was waste resulting from attempts to use the local vein quartz.

Ancient life

This man went through the initiation rite of manhood where the front teeth are knocked out. You can see on the skull where the teeth have been cleanly extracted. The bone has *resorbed*, or shrunk back and there was not any infection. This initiation rite has been found throughout the world, but nowhere is it as common as in Australia. The oldest example of it comes from the Darling River, about 6,000 years ago. The ancient spread of this rite is unknown for most of the southeastern part of the country. That is something I am now studying: where it occurs, how long ago, how many people in the area had it done, whether women had it done as well.



teeth
knocked
out

abscess

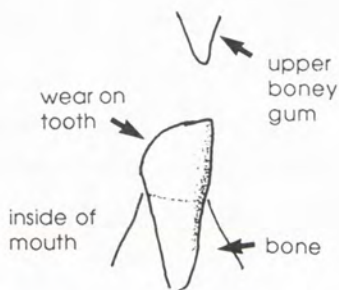
Photograph of the Taronga Drive man. Notice the way the gum line has receded at the front where the teeth were knocked out. This is normal when teeth have been lost. The ritual of tooth avulsion is widespread throughout Australia. The number of teeth knocked out varies. This case of two central incisors is common, but one tooth or as many as four may be lost.

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With the front teeth knocked out, his lower front teeth shouldn't have been worn very much. However, they were and this wear is not the usual wear from teeth grinding together, but curves from the inside, up and out. This would happen if you were to chew strips of leather to soften it, or draw plant fibre (like bark) to make string. Here is a quote from a man writing in 1897 about his reminiscences of life on the Lachlan River:

The blacks made fishing and bird-catching nets from the bark of the currygong tree, which they chewed into fibre with their teeth. The fishing net they stretched with sticks into the shape of a bow, one woman being placed at each end of it.

Here is a case of being able to see into the past, and into the events of this man's life. From an examination of his teeth, we are able to get an idea of his daily life.



Tooth wear on the lower front teeth. You can see on the previous picture that he would not have been grinding his lower teeth against the upper gum. Also the curvature of the wear is not what we normally see. It is easy to imagine that he would have often found it necessary to chew leather or plant fibres to make tools and equipment. The drawing shows what the tooth looks like from the side.

The Institute library has some information on the Cowra area, although not much archaeology has been done there. I've listed below some books and articles that are relevant.

Information about Australian Tribes. by "H.P.", in *The Australasian Anthropological Journal* (1896-97).

Abercrombie Arch Shelter: an excavation near Bathurst, NSW. by Ian Johnson. in *Australian Archaeology* (1977), volume 6, pages 28 to 40.

Prehistoric human skeletal remains from Cowra and the Macquarie Marsh, New South Wales. by Colin Pardoe and Steve Webb. in *Australian Archaeology* (1986), volume 22, pages 7 to 26.

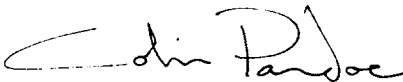
A request

I would like to find out how long ago the Taronga Drive man died. As I said, I'm interested in finding out about the age and distribution of tooth avulsion. This person's bones would be a great help in establishing that. Information like the age helps in our overall pictures of the ancient past, especially when so little is known of the archaeology for this specific region. It is also something that makes me very curious: is the age anything like my estimate?

What would be needed is a small amount of bone, about half of the fragments of rib bone that are left. This would be completely destroyed in the chemical process and from it we would get a date to within about 100 years. I realise that it can be disturbing to have this happen. Rest assured that I won't go ahead without permission. If the community doesn't want this dating done, it's no big deal. If you do, I will certainly get the information back when it comes out (it can take up to six months).

If you have any questions about this report, or on archaeology in general, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at the Institute, or phone (062) 461 111.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Colin Pardoe'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Colin' written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name 'Pardoe'.

Colin Pardoe

P.S. I'd like to thank Adrian Hart at the Institute for all the photographic work he has done on this and the other reports. Also, my thanks to Carol Gartside and Luke Godwin of National Parks and Wildlife Service for the opportunity to do this study.

STOP THE PRESS!!

Following the request to find out how long ago the Taronga Drive man was buried, I was given permission by the Local and Regional Land Council to use some of the bones. These were tested for the amount of different forms of carbon in them. From this we can work out how long ago he died.

What an embarrassment! I had thought he died at least a thousand years ago, but it turns out that it was only about a hundred years. The earliest date for his death would be about 1850 AD up to the late 1800's. That will teach me to make guesses on disturbed evidence.

Even so, I think this is still very interesting. It brings our view of the ancient past right up to within a few generations of the present. The stone tools that may have belonged to the man, his tooth avulsion, and the wear on the teeth all give the age a special significance. This is how archaeology eventually catches up with the present.

I returned the remains, stone artefacts and community report to Erambie mission at Cowra in 1988. The radiocarbon date was agreed to on the basis of the information in the report. In June 1989 William 'Badger' Bates, of National Parks and Wildlife Service, and I assisted in the reburial on mission property.

If my search for a model of investigating the past which avoided arbitrary distinctions between history and prehistory stemmed from Aboriginal concerns, community reports emerged from Aboriginal demands for information from archaeologists about the work we do. Community reports are a way of placing the assessment of scientific value firmly in the hands of Aboriginal people. This form of collaborative assessment places the scientific value of archaeological practice firmly beside religious, personal and political considerations, not against them. Aboriginal control and collaborative assessment are part of a process that has seen Aboriginal involvement in the practice of archaeology increase dramatically in the last decade.

I was recently asked (by Cliff Foley, Aboriginal Heritage, National Parks and Wildlife Service, New South Wales) whether I thought things had really changed in the relationship between Aborigines and archaeologists. My reply was that it never occurred to me, starting out in archaeology and skeletal biology, that I would be following my current path. It never occurred to me that conceding ownership of remains, accountability to Aboriginal groups, seeking permission for research, assisting with reburials,³ and working with Aboriginal people involved in archaeology would become a natural and necessary part of the discipline. For me at least, things had changed dramatically and for the better.⁴

The history of events is interesting in its own right. When seen in Braudel's framework of the 'long duration', the events outlined in the preceding report illustrate changing research paradigms in Australian archaeology and in the study of ancient (and not so ancient!) human remains. The burials at Cowra make it explicit that there are alternative perceptions of time and significance, and in so doing highlight the multiple interpretations of history that derive from the archaeological record.

Acknowledgements

Chris 'Gozza' Gosden brought Braudel to my attention and his interpretation of that work in archaeology has clarified much of my own work. Penny Taylor's influence is more than considerable and she remains my favourite critic. My thanks go to Isabel McBryde, Val Chapman and Peter Read for valuable comments. I thank also the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW) for their original support and involvement. Both the community report and this paper have been made possible with funding from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian Research Council.

³ I am opposed to reburial of any skeletal remains. The value of these to archaeology and understanding the past is inestimable. However, as I have argued elsewhere, it is not my decision. By accepting Aboriginal ownership and control of their ancestors' bones, I accept their decisions on the disposition of those remains. My optimism stems from the hope that by demonstrating the value of skeletal studies the day may come when Aboriginal people might wish to preserve those remains 'in the name of science'. Bones and burials may represent death and all the attendant qualms of our culture, but through the information held in their structure they contain evolutionary history. And evolution is about nothing if not life.

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⁴ See McBryde (1986) for an overview of changes in the last few decades that the archaeological discipline has been going through.

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Erratum

Vol 13 p. 157. The price of *Australians: A historical atlas* should read \$720 the set, not \$270

Ivory scales: black Australia and the law. Kayleen M. Hazlehurst ed. University of New South Wales Press, Sydney. Pp. xx + 291, bibliographies, index. \$19.95 .pb.

Ivory scales is a collection of 15 essays by different authors focusing largely, to use the editor's words 'on the contemporary functional and dysfunctional aspects of criminal law in its application to black Australians'. The topics covered include, among others, the high Aboriginal imprisonment rate (John Walker, Fay Gale and Joy Wundersitz), the viability of Aboriginal community justice mechanisms (Nancy Williams), the difficulties Aborigines face when interrogated by the police (John Coldrey).

The editor, Kayleen Hazlehurst, an anthropologist and Senior Research Officer for the Institute of Criminology, has carefully balanced the contributions of lawyers, Michael Kirby, James Crawford, Garth Nettheim, John Coldrey, Peter Hennessy, Mary Fisher and John McCorquodale with those of non-lawyers; geographers Fay Gale and Joy Wundersitz, anthropologists Nancy Williams and Dorothy Parker, criminologists John Walker and Greta Bird, educators David Hope and Roderick Broadhurst.

There are several common threads linking all the authors and the editor. Firstly, each has spent a substantial part of her/his professional life working on what can be broadly categorised as Aboriginal justice issues. Certainly none can be accused of being an 'instant expert'. Secondly, the authors are highly regarded and, in the main, very senior members of their respective professions. Their views are influential - even if not always acted on - in the corridors of power. Thirdly; they are all non-Aboriginal.

No doubt all of the authors considers herself-himself to be 'pro-Aboriginal'. Certainly most of the authors have tried to use their professional expertise to benefit the Aboriginal community. One example, from among many that could be cited, is Professor Nettheim's consistent work exposing the iniquitous abuse of human rights for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland.

The editor is to be congratulated for ensuring that all the articles are attractively presented and clearly written in a style accessible to Higher School Certificate and college students. This is fortunate as the main market for this book is likely to be in that area. At last many schools and colleges have Aboriginal studies as a course in its own right or as a segment of other courses, but there is still a lack of well written, accurate course materials. The extract from a police record of interview (pp.83-84) graphically demonstrates an Aboriginal murder suspect's total inability to comprehend the caution. This is the type of material a non-Aboriginal lecturer needs to bring home to non-Aboriginal students, the magnitude of the disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal suspects in police custody (although an interesting class discussion could follow comparing the probable responses to police questioning from other disempowered sections of the community)¹

¹ Pat Carlen, *Magistrates' Justice*. London 1976.

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Existing specialists in the 'Aboriginal industry' will find little new material in many of the contributions, especially those from Garth Nettheim on the norms of international law applicable to Aboriginal peoples and from James Crawford, Peter Hennessey and Mary Fisher on the Australian Law Reform Commission's proposals for the recognition of Aboriginal customary law. The book's main value to such specialists is the ease of reference in collecting so many useful articles on the same broad theme into one volume.

All readers, whether raw students or specialists, are likely to agree with Mr Justice Kirby when he states in his foreword:

Any fair reader of these pages will put this book down with a sense of disquiet, and even shame at the way the Australian legal system had operated in relation to Aboriginal Australia.

Whilst the book effectively provides data on recent developments, such as Nancy Williams' account of community justice mechanisms for the Yolgnu at Yirrkala, it is sadly but not surprisingly inadequate at pinpointing the underlying changes that are needed before non-Aboriginal Australians can cease to feel 'disquiet, and even shame'. Dorothy Parker claims that 'on the whole it is unlikely that most lawyers will be sympathetic to the pursuit of major structural change...in broader political and economic relations'. The contributions to *Ivory scales* are all written by professionals, and this harsh criticism almost certainly extends to the non-lawyer contributors.

Nettheim came close to recognising the need for major structural changes in the conclusion to his article: 'the claims of Aboriginal people on Australia are claims on our sense of justice, not on our sense of charity. They will not be met by handouts'. The changes he was advocating were those in the Holding Resolution of 1983 - but this never went as far as accepting the Aboriginal right to self-determination.

The editor, significantly, notes that Euro-Australian government and service delivery administration for Aborigines has moved into that stage of 'autonomy/accommodation', but clarifies this as the 'growing recognition that still more autonomy should be *granted* to Indigenous Australians' (emphasis added).

Increasingly, indigenous peoples around the world are claiming the *right* to autonomy, such a right flowing from their conviction that they are sovereign peoples and as such entitled to self-determination. There are cogent legal and moral arguments in support of this view.

Ivory scales is a useful collection of essays that should be found in all college libraries. The danger is that so far there is no equally accessible and well-produced book presenting materials written by Aborigines themselves arguing the right to autonomy.² So unless lecturers place articles written in publications such as *Land Rights News* on reading lists students are likely to complete Aboriginal Studies courses without realising that the *right* to autonomy is being claimed by Aborigines in Australia.

The University of New South Wales is the home of the Aboriginal Law Centre. I hope that the University of New South Wales Press, which published this book will soon publish a companion volume, thus giving the Aboriginal movement the chance to present its view alongside those of the academically prestigious contributors to this book.

Pamela Dilton
Barrister and Solicitor

² This debate is canvassed by various articles in *Bulletin of the Australian Society of Legal Philosophy* 1985; however this journal is not accessible to most students and the articles are not written by Aborigines. An excellent article written by the Aboriginal author Darryl Cronin is 'Land rights: is that all we really want?' in *Land Rights News*, September.1988.

Black diggers. By Robert A. Hall. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989. Pp. xv, 228, +. Bibliography, index. \$19.95 p.b.

How many Australians realise that possibly more Aboriginal people were in the northern front line during World War Two than white civilians, and that remote communities were bombed and suffered casualties? Or that one Torres Strait Islander in every four of the entire population served in the armed forces, one of them, Kamuel Abednego, a commissioned officer in the United States Army? Some 3000 Aborigines enlisted, often in the face of provocative difficulties imposed by changing regulations or discriminatory recruiting officers. A further 3000 people worked closely with the services as civilian labour. In addition, possibly 250 more performed vital patrol and other military duties in remote areas. Not only were they unpaid and lacking any formal standing, but until 1961 the public was ignorant of the service performed by such (very) irregular units (pp.111-12).

All Australians must be made aware of the contents of this critical, yet unpretentious pioneering study, while it should be compulsory reading for senior military command. That this carefully documented study is written by a serving army Major associated with the Australian Defence Force Academy, is an encouraging sign that the modern services possess an integrity so lacking half a century ago. Sections of Major Hall's book are a damning indictment of senior military command for its racist assumptions and decisions, although these were matched by many senior native affairs administrators. Brigadier E.M. Dollery, officer in charge of Northern Territory Force, stands out as a man with genuine humanitarian concern and foresight, whose progressive ideas were doomed by his seniors. He merits greater attention.

Aboriginal people's role in the war is a classic example of Stanner's 'conspiracy of silence'. While Papuan 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels' achieved patronising acclaim, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions rarely signified. Until Hall's book stirred consciences, the Australian War Memorial ignored their fundamentally national role. Although the RSL praised Aboriginal veterans after the war, it appears to have forgotten its worthy intentions today. Hall found that even contemporary newspapers ignored what should have been significant items (pp.29-30). The Torres Strait Islanders were never mentioned either in the Melbourne *Argus* or the Sydney *Morning Herald*, while the latter carried only eight articles throughout the war's duration, referring to Aboriginal participation, only one of them concerning an enlisted man.

Hall's initiative has opened a rich vein for future investigation. The following themes of great relevance to indigenous history are amongst those meriting more intensive research. In the first place, more needs to be said about Aborigines in World War One. The army high command in 1939 ignored their previous service record, and in its prejudice assumed that 'normal' diggers would refuse to serve with them; no expert advice was sought. Even late in the war, when Dollery and Major W. Groves, Deputy Assistant Director of (Army) Education and a professional anthropologist, proffered sensible advice for future policy, it was rejected. Senior officers also ignored the reality that the 'normal' troops and Aborigines, whether enlisted men or civilian labourers, enjoyed mutually good relations, even if tinged with patronising racist sentiments.

Senior Command also acted arbitrarily without any consideration of consequences for local people. Despite strong protests from the local naval commander, all Torres Strait Islands luggers were impounded, beached and made ready for burning for the anticipated Japanese invasion (p.36). The population was left without means of fishing or trading, with dire consequences for health. Decisions by Lieutenant-General Gordon Bennett were

equally heavy-handed, when he rejected the sage advice of his commander in the Kimberleys (p.110).

Fears that Aborigines would assist the enemy seemed imbued in senior command, and an army Intelligence Officer was asked to report on security in Cape York. That they chose a man from the Gulf country probably explains the racism and nonsense in his report. Even though the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland labelled it 'false and malicious', there was a strong possibility that all Aborigines would have been evacuated from Cape York (pp.119-22). Already Hope Vale Lutheran Mission had been the target of army Intelligence. The missionary was interned and the community transported by truck convoy to Woorabinda, 1000 km away. Of the 235 persons involved, sixty died within ten months (p.116).

Control of Western Australian Aborigines was no less draconian or panic-ridden (pp.122-32). Hall adds much new evidence to Peter Biskup's account of the war years in *Not slaves not citizens*. H.I. Bray, the Commissioner of Native Affairs, appears moderate at times in comparison with army decisions. Consider the following statements by Bray, however, and judge his fitness for his post.

1. Concerning his *approval* of 'corrective discipline' (1941?): 'elsewhere, except in Germany, I doubt whether methods such as these have been adopted in dealing with the forced labour of natives...' (p.24).
2. Concerning opposition to an Aboriginal military unit (1942): 'a corps would...disturb the peaceful employment conditions of the Kimberleys, and possibly station owners would be bereft of their ordinary labour requirements' (p.108).
3. Concerning claims by communists (1944): 'that the natives possess an intelligent capacity, but you know as well as I do that this is not so, and their future rests mainly in the hands of a benevolent and sympathetic white administration' (p.128).

The missions do not emerge unscathed, as instances occur where local concerns (chiefly control over Aborigines) conflicted with the best interests of the Aborigines and with the undoubted wartime emergency. Cases where Aborigines were hired for labour, but all wages were paid to the central mission authority, and where 'light' duties included heavy manual labour, seem difficult to defend (e.g. pp.169, 174-6).

While missionaries and pastoralists tended to emphasise the bad consequences of the military presence for Aboriginal society, Hall's unbiased study reveals positive aspects. Of particular relevance was the marked increase in employment. Whether labour was paid or unpaid, generous rations improved diet for entire families. Further research should test the claim (p.144) that the crime rate at Alice Springs declined by seventy-five per cent. R. and C. Berndt's *End of an era* (1987) presumably appeared after the book was completed, but it includes further important material relating to these social issues.

Hall accepts at face value an army source, that communal cooking improved health (p.150). Whether it was the mass kitchen, or simply better fare, is another matter. Was this the influence upon the later Northern Territory administration which produced the massive and socially unfortunate communal facilities at Maningrida? The situation at Alice Springs is neglected by Hall. To judge from the comments by Vic Hall in *Outback policeman* (1976, pp.198-200) conditions there in the Native Labour Camp merit investigation.

Surely one of the saddest social aspects touched on by Hall concerns the personal history of many returned veterans, who so soon became forgotten second-class citizens. The most depressing example of what might have been, must be Warrant Officer Leonard Waters, from Queensland. He enlisted in the RAAF as groundstaff. By dint of solid study he improved his rudimentary education and qualified for aircrew, graduating fourth in a class of forty-eight. This must have entitled him to a commission, but even after 95 operational

sorties as a fighter pilot, that promotion did not eventuate. Keen to start an aerial taxi service after his discharge, he lacked necessary finance, so he reverted to his former life as a shearer (pp.62-4).

There is interesting new material on Donald Thomson's wartime career, illustrated by some of his valuable photographs. In ongoing research, I hope to shed more light on Thomson's failure to receive funding, possibly due to a miscarriage of justice. The account here needs elaboration (p.87). Hall uses Thomson's name for the people, Balamumu (p.100), but this term would not gain acceptance today.

This well-illustrated book is one of the most significant contributions to Aboriginal history within recent years. I noted typing errors only on pp.76, 138, 143, 147. The format is pleasing and the text is clear, interesting, but disturbing.

John Mulvaney
Australian National University

For their own good: Aborigines and government in the Southwest of Western Australia 1900-1940. By Anna Haebich. University of Western Australia Press for the Charles and Joy Staples South West Region Publications Fund Committee, Nedlands, 1988. Reprinted 1989. Pp.413. Illustrations, maps, index, bibliography. \$17.50 p.b.

This powerful book is the published version of Dr Haebich's PhD thesis 'A bunch of caste-offs: Aborigines of the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900-1936'. Haebich explains that she undertook the topic at the suggestion of Nyoongar researchers, who maintained that the recording of family histories, which she had originally intended, was an Aboriginal prerogative. Instead, the researchers guided her 'to the task of unravelling the tragic sequence of events which devastated their community early this century'. Haebich has completed the task with meticulous care and in enormous detail. The result is a description of events and policies quite as terrible as anything which occurred elsewhere in Australia in the same period. The picture justifies the assertion that Western Australia has been, unnoticed by the other states, the hidden villain of Aboriginal history.

Haebich begins her account with a description of Aboriginal agricultural farms at the turn of the century and their gradual decline, partly through the farmers' failure to meet the conditions of occupancy, but more because of the Whites' desire for their properties. She pursues the 1905 Aborigines Act in some detail, with good reason since it remained the oppressive guiding principle and justification for acts of bureaucratic cruelty for the following three decades. We follow the rise and fall of Carrolup Native Settlement, the fringe and town camps of Perth and of the wheat belt. The infamous Moore River settlement, founded in 1918, receives the attention of several sections and the chapter entitled 'institutional life' details the hideous life of the inmates, almost all of whom had been moved there by force. Of all Australia's Aboriginal settlements, Moore River seems to have come closest to the 'one big reserve' concept, often suggested by mercifully seldom attempted.

After World War One, discrimination in schools, employment, facilities and housing put an end to many of the traditional, but unofficial, living areas in the southwest. Nor was there anywhere else to go except to Carrolup and Moore River. Nyoongars came last in the ordering of preferred settlers: the priorities were returned Australian soldiers, returned British

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soldiers, munition workers, civilians, and last of all Aborigines. A constant disregard for law undermined even the provisions of the 1905 Act. Haebich, using many verbatim accounts, outlines instances of families taken without warning by the police and sent away to Moore River, minus horses and dogs, to a terrible diet, flourbag clothes, little work for the adults and little schooling for the children. At Laverton, Nyoongars were decoyed into the police station with an offer of free food, then immediately locked up for transportation to the settlement. There a fifteen-year-old girl was imprisoned for a total of sixty-four days in a year, in a tiny windowless hut known as 'the boob', for repeatedly absconding to rejoin her family. Throughout the period the Aborigines Department bore much more relationship to the administration of an army of occupation than to an instrument of a peaceful and democratic state. It is fortunate for white Australians that the Nyoongars were not numerically strong enough to take forcible measures to oppose the ceaseless oppression which they endured for so long. Surely they were entitled to do so.

Instead the Nyoongar leaders, particularly the Harris family, combined in orderly protest to try to interest the press, white supporters and the government in their predicament by use of the petition and the delegation. They met with little success, though they may have been influential in the general increase in the criticism of the Department in the middle 1920s which culminated in the Mosely Royal Commission of 1934. Even then their evidence, along with much else, was discounted in Mosely's bland recommendations. The resulting 1936 Native Administration Act was worse than that of 1905, since the definition of Aboriginality was broadened to include almost everybody of Aboriginal descent, and there were much more stringent rules about cohabitation. Haebich is cool towards the achievements of Chief Protector Neville's autocratic reign from 1915 to 1940.

In an epilogue Haebich finds that forty years had brought no improvement in the lives of the 3000 Nyoongars in the south. 'Most were trapped in a cycle of poverty characterised by long periods of unemployment, deplorable living conditions, malnutrition, disease and premature death'.

For their own good was deservedly the joint winner of the Western Australian Week Literary Awards for the best work of non-fiction. Haebich has complete mastery over academic, official and personal sources. In her use of oral material she provides yet another lesson, if one were needed, that oral history is much better used simply like any other historical source and not agonised about. She is sympathetic towards the Nyoongars, and, unlike many writers who have not spent enough time talking to Aborigines, keeps the information about the white officials to a minimum. Elsewhere the relation of this book to the earlier thesis is a little too apparent. Fifty pages of detail might profitably have been cut. For instance, the Aborigines Act Amendment Bill of 1929 receives four pages, but since the Bill was defeated, the section could have been omitted altogether.

Haebich writes dispassionately and with very little comment from herself, evidently believing that the facts are quite appalling enough to speak for themselves. Here she follows Manning Clark's advice that a good historian is like a bus driver, who having chosen the route, then allows the passengers to observe whatever they want out the windows without comment. My own preference has generally been to grab the microphone at intervals to explain to the passengers my version of what they have just seen. Thus I felt a little flat on reading Haebich's rather prosaic, though tragically accurate, epilogue. I would have liked a little more guidance from her, perhaps a summary at the end of every chapter of what had been the themes, the undercurrents, or the moral issues raised. This history, better than any other regional history, explains exactly what life was like for Nyoongars of the period, and the picture is so bad that I felt the need for something stronger, or more poetic, or more reflective, than this sentence from the last paragraph: 'Discriminatory laws and a

repressive administration had shaped them into second-class citizens and, rejected and despised by the white community, they had become outcasts in their own land'.

For the discriminatory laws were in practice *incredibly* discriminatory, the administration was as dreadful, and the use of illegal force was as blatant as anything in our history. Where does this knowledge leave us as white Australians? I would have liked a little discussion from the author.

Once, in March 1974, Charles Perkins took part in a Perth television debate about Aboriginal Affairs. He rose to declaim that the Western Australian Liberal-Country Party government was the most racist political party in the country's history. There was immediate uproar as all the Nyoongars in the audience, mostly the same people of whom Haebich writes, tried to communicate their own personal experiences. The televised debate and the week which followed it was a time of furious passion, but of the kind that is not reflected in this book. This is not a suggestion that every historian should share the anger or despair of the people described, not necessarily seize the microphone to add an extra voice. But I felt so angry after reading Haebich's book that I wanted to share my anger with her. But she does not allow me to. She keeps her distance. She is content to describe the events (which she does mercilessly enough) and let the issues resolve themselves in the minds of readers.

These observations express, of course, only the personal preference of another writer of Aboriginal history, and the majority of readers may well be thankful that Haebich does not intrude herself into the text. It is less a criticism than an observation of how differently we historians, equally committed, approach our subject. Haebich's is a fine book. Though at times a little laborious, it should be essential reading for all students of Australian history. It will be the starting point for the time when someone begins the mammoth task of putting together the regional histories into a general multi-volume history of Aboriginal Australia.

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Poonindie The rise and destruction of an Aboriginal agricultural community. By Peggy Brock and Doreen Kartinyeri. South Australian Government Printer and Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Planning, Adelaide, 1989, Pp. viii + 120, bibliography, index, black and white illustrations. \$14.95 p.b.

This brief memoir, on a South Australian Anglican mission near Port Lincoln, provides an excellent model for the production of a series on mission and government settlements across southern Australia. It should prove of great value to contemporary Aboriginal communities, because ancestors from so many districts were brought or came here between 1850 and 1894, when it was closed and its people dispersed. Apart from its documented chronological narrative and index, its great bonus consists in twenty-five pages of genealogies of Poonindie people and their descendants, together with a number of photographs of the residents.

The Aboriginal Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment and Planning and the South Australian Government Printer merit praise for publishing such a well-produced

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and well referenced study in a pleasing format. Their publications are setting the pace and standard for other states.

Although university theses have been written on Poonindie, no systematic study has been published since its founder (Bishop) Mathew Hale wrote his story in the 1880s. Most importantly, this study is based upon the primary archival sources including the official mission records; numerous footnotes to each chapter identify the sources; there is a good bibliography. One useful contemporary account which is not listed is J.W. Bull, *Early experiences of life in South Australia* (1884), an Aladdin's cave of anecdote on so many South Australian matters.

Poonindie mission exemplifies so many of the racial problems and human tragedies involved in the first two generations of European settlement. The then Archdeacon of Adelaide, Hale, established Poonindie with the best of intentions, but in 1850 nobody could be anything but misguided. He witnessed so much misery amongst Adelaide and Murray River district people, that his solution was to transplant them to another place remote from European disruptive influences. Of course he did not consult the people concerned and ignored the Port Lincoln district Aboriginal people whose land he settled upon. His site was so close to Port Lincoln that even the ideal of total separation never applied.

Under Hale's management, people and pastor at least felt mutual respect, but later superintendents did not share Hale's sincerity. They certainly never sanctioned his policy of virtual Aboriginal self-management. Even so, for a time it became home to some sturdy families who, like contemporary people at Coranderrk, attempted to model their lives upon European rural mores. Their success was such that they attracted the jealousy of white workers, while greedy settlers coveted their rather poor estate.

Hale established the community as a Native Training Institution, but with his early departure that aim was forgotten. In any case, the authors pose the question, where would residents have been able to apply their training in their rural seclusion? It is a terrible indictment of the trustees that, once political and local self-interested pressures grew, they abandoned the settlement without a struggle. The forlorn story is indeed 'a gross example of greed and inhumanity' (p.75).

Poonindie offers a case study for those wishing to examine in detail the social consequences of being Aboriginal during a time of European colonisation. The initial appalling mortality rate is documented. Of 110 people admitted to the institution by 1856, 29 had died; 44 more died by 1860, although others were admitted; a high proportion of these deaths was of babies (pp.23-6). The diseases are familiar and devastating. Measles killed ten of the ninety people in 1875; six died from typhoid fever in 1878; it was whooping cough in 1881; between 1856 and 1860, 28 died from tuberculosis and that remained a constant killer (pp.24, 38-9).

Even Hale used dismissal from Poonindie as a form of social control. Later superintendents applied this policy without remorse, thereby expelling a member of a family from now familiar surroundings and economic support (pp.39-43). When opportunities arose to lodge claims for a land grant, Aboriginal claimants with good credentials invariably lost out to white settlers (p.70). When the institution's lease was terminated, the trustees received £1000 compensation to be spent on Aboriginal needs. Few ever benefitted and the account evidently went 'missing' (pp.67-8).

As a person who has visited Poonindie and written a short essay on it in my *Encounters in place*, it is interesting to note that I emphasised European cultural features, in addition to many of the matters already mentioned. These authors barely mention the important role which cricket played, so early in the history of Australian cricket. The oddly

designed church-cum-school-cum-residence is illustrated but never described, although it is a gem of vernacular architecture.

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The Torres Strait: people and history. By John Singe. Revised, paperback edition. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1989. Pp.261, Black and white plates, bibliography, index. \$19.95 p.b.

Torres Strait Islanders: custom and colonialism. By Jeremy Beckett. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987. Pp.251, Black and white plates, bibliography, index. \$39.50.

When John Singe published the first edition of his book *Torres Strait: people and history* in 1979 it was at a time when the majority of white Australians had little, if any, knowledge or understanding of the history and culture of the Torres Strait Islanders, Australia's only indigenous Melanesian minority group.

The first edition, published by the University of Queensland Press, was a useful introductory text for anyone contemplating a more detailed study of the complexities of Islander life and custom. Illustrated with romantic etchings from historical sources, such as the *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, it was readily available and reasonably priced.

As Singe had worked as a high-school teacher in the Torres Strait and had married into Islander culture, his opinions were to be respected. While Singe wrote from the point of view of a cultural outsider, he at least had some direct association with Islander life. The style of writing was easy and colloquial. It was the only text that included a chapter on the coastal Papuan people and their marginal position in the Torres Strait region prior to the ratification of the Torres Strait Treaty. The final chapter, titled 'The islands today', was an accurate, if somewhat uncomfortable, account of life in the Torres Strait in the late 1970s. The point made was that physical and spiritual exploitation of the Islanders by white bosses and governments had produced a profound state of unhappy lethargy amongst once proud and resourceful peoples.

Singe, it seems, then left the Torres Strait and moved south. According to the author's biography, Singe has now returned to the Torres Strait and lives on Muralag (Prince of Wales Island). The second, revised paperback, edition of the book, published in 1988, has also been published by the University of Queensland Press and is now attractively illustrated with well-produced black and white historical and contemporary photographs. It is therefore interesting to compare the two editions.

The second edition is a complete reprint of the first edition and, according to the author's foreword, the new edition incorporates a small number of changes which have been added without difficulty to the original text. The only major addition to the text has been the adding of the final chapter titled 'The Islands (1988)'. This chapter examines the Islander demands for independence which, while political undercurrents for many years, finally made the pages of the southern press in 1988. The calls for political autonomy, independence, or self-determination documented by Singe were once again symptoms of an old malady; Islander dissatisfaction and frustrations with the bureaucratic structures of state and federal authorities and countless policies which have only served to emphasise Islander marginality in Australian cultural life.

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Singe sees the struggle for autonomy as an indicator of hope for the future of Islander people in the Torres Strait. The final chapter is tinged with bitterness and anger. It seems that this has replaced the sadness and disappointment reflected in the final parts of the 1979 edition. Perhaps this is a true reflection of Islander feelings in the Torres Strait today.

Despite Singe's claim in the foreword that the text has been revised, and that he was gratified to find that only small changes were required, a number of serious errors that may have been excusable in the 1979 edition should have been corrected in the 1988 revision. The majority of errors appear to relate to his apparent dislike of the activities of coastal Papuans in the Torres Strait. For example, in the 1979 edition Singe states that dugong is readily available for sale at the Daru market (p.143) and that 'Queensland dugong end up as Papuan dinners' (p.144). These comments are repeated in the 1988 edition (p.131) without any reference to the successful dugong conservation programmes in the Torres Strait which have been highly effective in eliminating the commercial exploitation of dugong. Signs in the Daru market make it plain in English, Kiwai and Motu that dugongs are protected animals in Papua New Guinea. Readers of this book would be advised to refer to the proceedings of the *Torres Strait Fisheries Seminar* for full details of the complex nature of fisheries rights in the region and for details of the many policy decisions made and implemented by the Papua New Guinea and Australian governments. Singe also makes a rather stinging attack on the Torres Strait Treaty, which was signed in 1978 but which only entered into force in 1985, calling it a piece of 'foreign policy naivete...now widely recognised as unworkable' (p.235).

It is disappointing to see no substantial update of the chapter on the Papuan people who also share the resources and waters of the Torres Strait. The Treaty serves to protect the rights of both Torres Strait Islanders and Papuans but Singe, despite his period in Papua New Guinea, fails to acknowledge not only the genuine rights of Papuans to free access across the Torres Strait but also the long-standing cultural and kinship linkages between coastal Papuans and Islanders. The increase in movements of Papuans indicates not only the extreme poverty and neglect felt by coastal people in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea but also the comparative affluence of the Islanders, at least from Papuan eyes. It seems extreme to state that 'The Papuan villages throughout the island [Saibai] serve as staging posts for the Papuans engaged in illegal fishing and immigration' (p.235) and inaccurate to say that: 'To the Papuan from an impoverished village in P.N.G., sitting in his dinghy in the open sea, the lines of demarcation means nothing'. The lines of demarcation were first established over one hundred years ago and the Papuans are well aware of their place in the political scheme of things. Few Papuans, apart from some Daru Islanders, can afford the luxury of an aluminium dinghy nor the expensive petrol needed to run one. Lack of economic development of opportunities for earning cash have, in fact led to a resurgence of the use of canoes along the south west coast.

If the call for Torres Strait Islander political autonomy has now lost some of its impetus, at least publicly and in the media, it has been replaced by moves calling for the exclusion of Papuans from the islands and threats that Islanders will no longer cooperate with federal and state instrumentalities in the region.

The use of the present tense in Singe's text is also confusing, particularly in the chapter entitled: 'Portrait of three islands: Muralug, Saibai and Nahgi'. For example, in his discussion on social and economic conditions on Saibai, Singe states: 'There is an aimlessness about the place. The only employment available is through the D.A.I.A.' (p.185). This exact statement appeared also in the 1979 edition (p.201). Does it refer to the period of the late 1970s or is this still apparent in 1988? If corrections have been made to the text would it not read better in the past tense with the name of the state authority

amended to the Department of Community Services? In fact the first time the Community Services Department is mentioned is on page 237 of the new edition. This is too late in the text for readers unfamiliar with the earlier edition. It is also unfortunate for new readers that the Queensland Department of Community Services is not listed in the otherwise useful index.

Both editions contain glossaries of language words used and basic bibliographies for further reading.

Singe has produced a slightly updated edition of his 1979 book. The 1988 edition is, however, only partially successful and should not be read without reference to the 1979 edition. It leaves one with the feeling that the 'insider-outsider' may not, after all, be in any better position than the real outsider to make meaningful the complexities of minority cultures.

From the viewpoint of the professional anthropologist, the 'outsider on the inside', Jeremy Beckett in his book *Torres Strait Islanders: custom and colonialism*, published in 1987, examines the Torres Strait Islanders' sense of marginality and resentment at their place on the periphery of white society.

Beckett's book is well-crafted and polished, the result of a long academic career, and while written for an academic audience, it is also directed at the growing educated Islander population. The book begins and ends with a description of a tombstone opening (the celebration of the unveiling of the tombstone which ends the official period of mourning) which, according to Beckett, has an abstract meaning as a celebration 'of the continuing capacity of Islander society, on the mainland as well as in the Strait, to call its members to customary order' (p.235).

To anyone who has sought a deeper understanding of the internal politics of the Torres Strait islands, or the cultural history and music of the Islander peoples, the previous writings of Beckett have been fundamental. This recent study serves more than any other text to put contemporary issues into historical and cultural perspective.

Beckett first commenced fieldwork in the Torres Strait in 1958, a period characterised by entrenched internal colonial rule. The direct paternalistic rule of state and federal governments has, during Beckett's association with the region, been replaced by 'welfare colonialism' (pp.16-17). The state has attempted to manage the social and political problems posed by the presence of depressed and disenfranchised indigenous groups in an affluent and liberal-minded democratic state by direct economic expenditure through the welfare system.

Islanders may not have been dispossessed of their lands, like the mainland Aboriginal peoples, but they did lose control over the marine resources which provided them with economic and cultural advantages over their neighbours. The economically and politically independent Islander became the ward of the 'white state'. Torres Strait Islanders retain little control of the economic fabric of their lives. Perhaps, in a culture that still remembers its history, this provides some clues for the calls for political self-determination of recent years.

Beckett examines custom and colonialism from the point of view of the Baduans and the Murray Islanders. No two islands in the Torres Strait could reflect the inherent differences in Islander life more than Badu and Mer (Murray). The Meriam-speaking people of the eastern Torres Strait have a rich and proud cultural heritage. In terms of fertile garden lands, the Murray Islands may still be seen as the most affluent islands in the Strait. For this reason 'the Meriam made gardening the basis of their economy' (p.114). By contrast, Badu, with its rocky hills and open grasslands, had little fertile land for gardening but was surrounded by waters rich in turtle and dugong. The Baduans were fighters. It is perhaps

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understandable that Badu became the home of the most entrepreneurial group in the islands dominated by a strong family leadership, established under the forceful leadership of Tanu Nona during the 1930s and 1940s.

The division between western and eastern Islander culture has been carried over to the mainland by migrant eastern Islanders, by far the largest single group of Islanders in towns such as Townsville and Mackay, who attempt to hold fast to their traditions. The social and economic reasons for Islander outmigration to the mainland are also examined in detail by Beckett in the chapter 'The society of Islanders'.

Torres Strait Islanders: custom and colonialism is not only the product of Beckett's thirty years of research experience but is also a continuation of the long record of cultural history research in the region which first began with Alfred Cort Haddon in 1888. The Torres Strait has an important place in the history of anthropological research. Haddon returned to the region in 1898 with a party of British researchers and the results of the expedition, published between 1901 and 1935 as the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait*, are the most important documents on pre-colonial cultural history of the Torres Strait Islander peoples. Beckett's research follows on from these foundations, for he documents a succession of new changes and influences on the people of the region. He shows that, despite these changes, the sense of identity has been sustained by 'Island custom', the practice of which 'implicitly and at times explicitly, proclaims continuity with the Torres Strait of Haddon's day and beyond' (p. x).

The hope for the future of the Islander people lies in the continued capacity to practise 'Island custom' by themselves, and for themselves, as well as the maintenance of their pride and confidence in themselves as a resolute people in spite of their position on the geographical and political margin of white Australia.

Torres Strait Islanders: custom and colonialism is sparsely illustrated. As only two photographs are sourced, most appear to be from the author's own collection. A list of abbreviations used, comprehensive bibliography, and a useful index are included. In a decade's time, Jeremy Beckett's book will still be relevant, not only to white Australians but also to the Torres Strait Islander people themselves.

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Up rode the troopers: the black police in Queensland. By Bill Rosser. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1990. Pp.211. appendix and notes, one black and white sketch.

The subtitle suggests that Bill Rosser is offering a brief history of the Native Police Force, which operated from 1849 until 1897 in Queensland. This is not the case. So far no comprehensive history has been written on this force, which had as many as 250 white officers and black troopers and may have killed as many as 5000 Aborigines who got in the way of the European pastoral settlement of Queensland. L.E. Skinner did an admirable job with his *Police of the pastoral frontier*, published in 1975, but that covered only the first ten years of the force's history. Former police officers, such as E.B. Kennedy and A.L. Haydon, published books with titles which suggested histories of the force but were little more than personal reminiscences. Some scholars have recently looked at historical aspects, particularly the force's effects upon Aboriginal-European relations in Queensland, but a full study of Queensland's black police is still needed.

Bill Rosser set out to write a book about the early days of the Queensland Native Police Force but, instead, has written the story of Cyclone Jack, an old Aborigine he met in Urandangie in far western Queensland, during the course of oral history research. It turned out that Jack (no other name is given) was possibly 'the last vestige of the beleaguered Telemon tribe', a reference to the people who had lived near Fassifern in south-east Queensland when the pastoralists arrived. Most importantly, Jack (born about 1900) related what his father had told him about the attack by a detachment of Native Police on Aborigines in the Dugandan scrub near Telemon station just before Christmas 1860.

In those days, those police were bad news...They were a mob of blackfellers from other tribes that lived a long way away...My grandfather and his friends tried to run because they knew what to expect. These police had guns and they knew how to use them. They were taught by the white Pom officers. The first to go down was his uncle. The rest of the mob ran for their lives but they were not quick enough for the guns. My grandfather was one that lived to tell the tale.

Three of the Telemon people died in the attack. Jack's grandfather grabbed his (Jack's) father and escaped into the bush.

The police, led by Lieutenant Frederick Wheeler, had been called by local settlers after Aborigines had stolen sheep, threatened shepherds and robbed their huts. Without warrants having been issued, Wheeler ordered his troopers to go into the scrub, surround the camp and disperse them. They were out of his sight, and thus out of control, for about half an hour. At the inquiry into the Native Police held by a Select Committee of the Queensland Legislative Assembly early the next year, Wheeler was asked what he meant by dispersing. 'Firing at them. I gave strict orders not to shoot any gins. It is only sometimes, when it is dark, that a gin is mistaken for a blackfellow, or might be wounded inadvertently.' Asked whether he thought it proper to fire upon the Blacks in that way, he replied: 'If they are the right mob, of which I had every certainty.' In its report, the Select Committee, heavily stacked with representatives of the squatters, noted that Wheeler appeared to have 'acted with indiscretion' on this occasion and recommended that he be transferred to another district but praised him as a 'most valuable and zealous officer'.

Over several days Rosser recorded more details of this and other incidents as told by Cyclone Jack. Then he checked the story against the evidence given by witnesses to the 1861 Select Committee and other official sources. Jack's account, handed down from grandfather to father to son, proved to be substantially correct. It is a rare demonstration of accuracy in oral history, where people have had little access to written records over the

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years. Further, it is another of the sad tales of the subjugation, dispersal and decrease of Aboriginal peoples. Rosser tells it with artless simplicity, even naive surprise, as he learns from Jack and from the records. This book, however, is not so much a history as the story of a venture in historical research and a chance meeting with a remarkable old man, who, as far as his memory served him, was able to tell it as it was.

Rosser has reproduced the 1861 Select Committee's evidence and much of the evidence in a large appendix. This is a wise move, as it may encourage other writers to take a closer look at the methods used in dispersing Aboriginal people on the early pastoral frontier in Queensland and the attitudes behind them.

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The lost children. Coral Edwards and Peter Read eds. Doubleday, Sydney, 1989. Pp. xxv + 197. black and white illustrations, index. \$19.95.

Reaching back. Queensland Aboriginal people recall early days at Yarrabah Mission. Judy Thomson. ed. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989. Pp. xiv + 136, black and white illustrations, maps. \$12.95.

Last century concerned humanitarians in Britain expressed concern for the 'coloured' subjects of the Empire. The Anti-Slavery movement in the 1830s, having succeeded in having slavery abolished in other parts of the British Empire, turned its attention to Australia. The Aborigines Protection Society was formed. Thus began the Protection Era, which history has disclosed certainly did not protect Aborigines but rather imprisoned them.

The missionaries and other philanthropic Europeans shared the misguided belief that Aboriginal children were the key to success in their task of 'civilizing the natives'. They contended that if only the children could be removed from tribal influences at a tender age they could be assimilated - in other words brought up in the ways of the white people. The removal of Aboriginal children from their parents has been a policy in all Australian states at different times. In NSW the treatment of Aboriginal children by authorities charged with protecting them is only now being documented - one hundred years after the establishment of the Aboriginal Protection Board.

In his introduction to *The lost children*, Peter Read states, 'In Australia today there may be one hundred thousand people of Aboriginal descent who do not know their families or communities. They are the people, or descendants of people, who were removed from their families by a variety of white people for a variety of reasons. They do not know where they have come from. Some do not even know they are of Aboriginal descent'.

The lost children is a significant contribution to the history of dispossession of Aboriginal people and will go a long way towards helping non-Aborigines realise that the history of black/white relations in this country is a very sad one indeed. This book is a very powerful and often disturbing oral history in which thirteen people describe what it was like being removed from their families, living in institutions or with white families, and knowing nothing about their own history or culture. In these first-hand accounts we learn of their agonising search for their families, and empathise with their feelings before the first reunion and their reconciliation problems in searching for their Aboriginal identity.

My only criticism of this book is the way in which it is divided into sections. This made it difficult to follow through on any particular person's history. I found the lack of continuity in this regard disruptive and confusing. Having to refer back to previous sections in order to trace a life history detracted from the effectiveness. However, it is a valuable book. It fits into the whole tapestry of dispossession of Aboriginal people in Australia and is essential reading for those in pursuit of a true and complete Australian history.

In 1897 the Queensland government, in its desire to protect Aborigines from the white population, proclaimed the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act. Protectors (often police officers) were appointed with the power to move Aboriginal camps from the outskirts of towns, to control the movements of Aborigines from one locality to another and to relocate Aborigines on reserves. This Act was applauded by white people as an innovative model for other states but for Aborigines it spelt the end of freedom to control their own lives.

In 1898 Dr W.E. Roth, the Protector for the Northern Region of Queensland, wrote favourable reports to the Queensland government about the new mission at Yarrabah. In another role as Inspector under the Queensland Pearl-Shell and Beche-de-mer Fisheries Act, he travelled on the Queensland government ketch, the *Melbider*, collecting the 'half-caste' children up and down the coast. These children, after being hunted, caught and removed from their families, were escorted by police over long distances and finally settled at Yarrabah. 'Miserable and bewildered, speaking different languages and little English, they soon found themselves baptised, given new names and expected to conform to a totally new way of life with no hope of ever returning to a birthplace where their birth was not even recorded.'

In 1901 Yarrabah was proclaimed a reformatory and apart from children, many adults began to be transported to Yarrabah from other parts of Queensland, including Fraser Island. At this time too, the first inhabitants of the Yarrabah area gradually 'came in' to the mission because it had taken their land; other Aborigines from all over North Queensland were arbitrarily picked up and transported there. The Aboriginal population at Yarrabah was indeed a heterogeneous group - there was not even common language let alone a kinship system or a social structure. The ingredients for unhappiness, misery, unrest and disharmony were present right from the start. On reserves and missions at this time, white authority was imposed. Children were taken from their parents and raised in single-sex dormitories. The view was that extremely rigid training was necessary to overcome the 'wildness' in the children. Yarrabah was no exception to this type of inhumanity. This book contributes to the knowledge we already have of absolutely heart-breaking dispossession and alienation of Aborigines.

It is again a collection of oral histories of many people. They give first-hand information of the grim life they were forced into as interns at Yarrabah. Like *The lost children*, I find its division into sections disconcerting when following the full history of a particular contributor.

I found the anointing of Lorna Schrieber as Queen of Yarrabah a bitter pill to swallow. I personally would like to know the circumstances under which an Anglican Bishop anointed Lorna Schrieber Queen of Yarrabah. When the British settled this country, there was little regard or understanding for the culture of the original inhabitants who survived for over 40,000 years as an egalitarian society. Social control was not in the hands of a leader or a chief. It was in the hands of mature men (and women) who had graduated through the many phases of the 'law'. Government by consensus prevailed. Leadership and status were not inherited. One of the first insults meted out to Aborigines was the designation of individuals as 'king' or 'queen' by many white ethnocentric imperialists. Often these people

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were given inscribed brass plates to wear around their necks. However, these symbols did not denote respect or deference from the white people. They were merely useless tokens. Anointing Lorna Schrieber only reaffirms and perpetrates the reprehensible regime of 2000 years of white paternalism, ethnocentrism and imperialism.

Judy Thompson says it all herself about this book when she writes 'This is not a definitive history of the early days of Yarrabah Mission'. The emphasis in this book is on those who left and the time has come for someone to take up the challenge to write a definitive history of Yarrabah with the main emphasis on those who stayed. Sister Muriel Stanley-Underwood, Major Wakefield and Teresa Livingstone are a few of the many people who made their mark on the history of Yarrabah, yet there is no mention of their place in this history of Yarrabah. I look forward to the day when I can read a complete, all-inclusive account of Yarrabah's history and hope it will be in the near future.

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Review Editor's note: Pearl Duncan was the first Aborigine to qualify as a teacher in New South Wales. She taught for two years at Yarrabah in the early 1950s. (See her own story in *Fighters and singers: the lives of some Australian Aboriginal women*. Isobel White, Diane Barwick and Betty Meehan. eds. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp.40-54).

The story of the falling star, told by Elsie Jones, with drawings by Doug Jones and collages by Karin Donaldson, for The Western Regional Aboriginal Land Council. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989. Coloured illustrations. \$19.95 p.b.

This book represents a splendid idea - to tell Aboriginal legends in a lively illustrated format, so that young and old, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, can enjoy them and learn from them. The format is original and innovative. The pages are montages, with photographs of Paakantji people and places, together with a few drawings, on coloured backgrounds, with each page a different colour. The people in the illustrations are all doing something interesting, camping, cooking, enjoying a barbecue, or listening to the old people telling a story or explaining the landscape or the rock paintings.

The narrator of the main story is Elsie Jones, who heard it from her Granny and from other old people who in turn heard it when they were young from other old people. Once there was an evil old man in the camp who told the camp-dwellers they should move because something bad was going to happen, but many did not believe him. They heard a great rumbling noise and some fled before a great ball of fire came down and some were burnt. Behind it came enormous rains so that many were drowned, except those who had managed to reach higher ground. Those who survived the fire and the flood left paintings on the stones to tell others that they had travelled south.

Of great importance is the involvement of the Paakantji people in the production of the book. Apart from three columns of acknowledgements for tasks performed there is a list of 200 people whose photographs appear. There are also two pages giving words and phrases in the Paakantji language and an explanation of how to pronounce them.

In conclusion this book is a triumph for the Paakantji people, the Western Regional Land Council and the Aboriginal Studies Press. What triumph to win a place on the best-seller list!

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Guests of the Governor: Aboriginal residents of the first Government House. By Isabel McBryde. Friends of the First Government House Site, Sydney, 1989. Pp xvi + 62, black and white and colour illustrations, bibliography.

There is much in the history of the contact between Europeans and Aborigines that remains to be satisfactorily elaborated. This is particularly true concerning those who - whether by choice or force of circumstance - quickly crossed the 'beaches' that bordered the others' culture. The names of a number of the Europeans who made this journey - William Buckley, Eliza Fraser, James Morrill, Narcisse Pelletier - are reasonably well-known, even if much is lost from their stories. The names of those Aborigines who early journeyed the other way are not so well-known, and the stories of their lives are also generally obscure.

Originally delivered as the third Foundation Day lecture, *Guests of the Governor* is now printed in a handsomely illustrated monograph by the Friends of the First Government House Site. In it, Isabel McBryde has taken as her subject the lives of those Aborigines who mingled with the Europeans at Sydney in the first decades of the British colonisation of New South Wales.

Three figures dominate the story: Bennelong and Colbee, captured by the British in November 1789, in an honest but misguided attempt to build bridges, and Bungaree, who sailed with Flinders and P.P. King on their voyages of exploration. About these cluster a number of others, interestingly often related by blood or marriage: Yemmurawannie, who with Bennelong accompanied Phillip to England in 1793; Arabanoo, the young man captured in December 1788, who then chose to remain with the newcomers before his death from 'smallpox' in May 1789; Nanberree, John White's 'gamekeeper'; Gnunga-a-ngunga, who sailed on the *Daedalus* to Nootka Sound, seeing also the Hawaiian Islands; the wives of Bennelong and Colbee; Boorong, the girl raised by the Johnsons; Baloderree, who commenced a profitable trade with the whites at Parramatta, but who then became their enemy after some convicts destroyed his canoe; Bondel, who accompanied Captain Hill to Norfolk Island in 1791; Moowat-tin, who assisted Caley in his botanical labours.

McBryde elaborates the lives of these people as well as the surviving records allow, pointing to what were for them extraordinary events produced by contact with European culture, and to the great changes that accompanied this contact. However, in view of the paucity of the records, she has also attended to European responses to the Aborigines. Developing the idea that the first Government House provides us with a 'window' onto otherwise dimly seen circumstances, in this part of the work she neatly traces the ways in which British attitudes towards primitivism changed in the period, one sign of which was that the settlers in New South Wales were progressively discouraged by those in authority at home from returning with Aborigines.

An appropriate recognition of the complexities of culture contact at Sydney informs this study; and it offers much judicious comment based on careful readings of texts. I should wish to question McBryde's assessment at only a very few points, the most

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significant of which is that in view of Marsden's having told Dumont d'Urville that Bennelong lived with Governor Phillip in London, it may be that he and Yemmurrawannie were not so neglected in England as she implies. (On the other hand, it may be that Marsden's information is not accurate.)

McBryde is struck equally by the extraordinariness of the situation described by Malaspina in 1793:

We have seen gathered and cared for with the greatest kindness, several [Aboriginal] Boys and Girls - Others, both men and women, although entirely naked and disgustingly dirty, have been admitted to the same Room where we were eating and have been regaled with one or other dainty from the same Table. At times we have heard entire Families salute us with several shouts in English; at times in the principal streets of the Colony itself they have danced and sung almost the whole night around a campfire, without anyone molesting them (pp.39, 43);

by the rapidity of the deculturation and decimation of the Port Jackson Aborigines, exemplified in Bungaree's sad later life as described by Angus:

He lived poor fellow, for some years and saw the kangaroos and opossums chased from his domains; but he gloried in a cocked hat, excelled in a bow, knew a fresh arrival instinctively, and welcomed him to 'his country' with all the form of a master of the ceremonies, and concluded by begging a dump (a small silver coin then current) to drink the stranger's health (p.45);

and by the failure of British policies to produce a satisfactory outcome to the inevitable conflict and clash of ways of life and of values:

three reserves were set up - at Georges Head, Blacktown and Elizabeth Bay. Huts were built, gardens established and convicts assigned to assist the Aboriginal families in working the land. Governor Macquarie showed intense interest in the venture, often visiting his 'settlers', particularly Bungaree who was at Georges Head. However, most of these failed to meet the Governor's expectations. Of Aboriginal expectations we have no record. The aims of economic self-sufficiency and independence were laudable but the 'social engineering' involved was inappropriate and resisted. By 1823 the reserves had been abandoned, and the school at Parramatta closed (p.45).

In drawing these contrasts, McBryde carefully avoids the mistake of representing Aborigines as passive victims only. The people she writes of joined with the British partly because they saw advantages (status, goods) in doing so. Particularly interesting here is her pointing to Bungaree's use of jest to obtain a measure of control. Neither does she see Aboriginal culture as timeless, unchanging. As history tells us, all cultures change, even if in ways imperceptible to contemporaries. However, as is only too evident, the changes forced on Aboriginal culture at Sydney in the decades about the turn of the nineteenth century were not of this gentle sort. Rather, they were so massive and so rapid that they could not be absorbed. Even so, there were some Aborigines who sought to travel as the new winds and tides set. McBryde's general comment on Bennelong, Gnunga-a-ngunga and Bungaree is a haunting one:

The voyages these Aboriginal people made are impressive. One regrets the sparse record of their experiences of and reactions to, the different worlds within and beyond Australia to which they were exposed. Even more impressive is their command of new skills, and their ability to adapt and succeed in ways of an alien society.

We can only hope that time may uncover some further records about these people. In the meantime, we have Isabel McBryde's sensitive and scholarly account as a guide.

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