

Aboriginal History

Volume twenty-one 1997

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Aboriginal History aims to present articles and information in the field of Australian ethnohistory, particularly in the post-contact history of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Historical studies based on anthropological, archaeological, linguistic and sociological research, including comparative studies of other ethnic groups such as Pacific Islanders in Australia will be welcomed. Issues include recorded oral traditions and biographies, narratives in local languages with translations, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, resumes of current events, archival and bibliographical articles, and book reviews.

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Aboriginal History is administered by an Editorial Board which is responsible for all unsigned material in the journal. Views and opinions expressed by the authors of signed articles and reviews are not necessarily shared by Board members. The editors invite contributions to either the journal of monograph series for consideration; review will be commissioned by the review editor.

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Introduction

This edition of *Aboriginal History* appears late, for which the Editorial Board apologises both to authors and readers. The reasons for the delay are many, including the mounting pressures in recent years on already severely pressured academics. Staff cuts, the burden of increasing teaching, research and administrative workloads supported by fewer resources, and the increasing pressure of demonstrating productivity via publications, have all been factors.

The Editorial Board trusts that readers will agree that this volume of *Aboriginal History*, the twenty-first, proves a worthy successor to the preceding twenty. As a newcomer to the board, I find that Volume 21 evinces the wide and broadening scope of Aboriginal historical inquiry. Its contributions probe the Aboriginal past in many parts of Australia, from the Bass Strait islands of Tasmania to Beagle Bay in the far north-west of Western Australia, from Hindmarsh Island near the Murray mouth to Arnhem Land, and from the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales to the northern reaches of Cape York Peninsula. In addition to the diversity of geographical locations, Volume 21 presents readers a well-balanced mix of the disciplines comprising Aboriginal Studies. Thus, it brings together material originating in archaeological, anthropological, ethnobotanical, economic, environmental, political and community welfare studies as well as from the methodologies familiar to historians trained in a more traditional historiography.

In commending Volume 21 to its readership, I thank its joint editors, Rob Paton and Di Smith, who conceived the volume plan and brought it to fruition under in difficult circumstances, and also Ingereth McFarlane, who assisted them greatly. In addition I thank the board chair, Peter Read, for his guidance; my friend and colleague, Gordon Briscoe, for easing my way into my present position; and the Manning Clark Professor of Australian History at the Australian National University, Ann Curthoys, for finding *Aboriginal History* permanent premises within her department. Finally, our graphic designer, Tikka Wilson, must be congratulated for her diligent, expeditious effort in ensuring that Volume 21 could emerge from the chrysalis in which it had lingered far longer than anyone wanted.

Ian Howie-Willis
Managing Editor
History Department, The Faculties
Australian National University
June 1999

Errata

In the last issue of *Aboriginal History*, vol. 20, we moved to a new typesetting system and had a few hiccups with special fonts. The Editorial Board extends apologies to all of the authors and thanks them for their forbearance.


Rob Amery's article, 'Kaurua is Tasmania: A case of mistaken identity' had several special linguistic characters on pages 46 and 47. On page 46, paragraph 4, the second sentence should read: Robinson has consistently omitted to write the initial velar nasal [ŋ] irrespective of the following vowel. In paragraph 5, the first line should read: The letter u is used for the vowel [u] as in 'put' as well as the vowel [ʌ] as in 'but'.

On page 47, paragraph 5, lines 1 and 2 should read: For instance, in a Tasmanian word transcribed by Charles Robinson, we simply don't know whether 'u' should be pronounced [u] as in 'put' or [ʌ] as in 'but'. However, it may be safe to assume that final 'er' is pronounced [ʌ] or [ə] as in English 'butter'...

Luise Hercus and Grace Koch's article, 'A native died sudden at Lake Allallina', had music fonts. The rhythmic features on page 145 should have been represented as follows.


RHYTHMIC FEATURES

In most cases, when words are used ending with *-ngera*, a distinctive dotted or syncopated rhythmic pattern is used.

1934 version  = mar-ga-nge-ra (staff 2)

1968 version  = li-la-nge-ra (staff 1)

Words without the *-ngera* ending use a non-dotted rhythmic pattern:

1934 version  = da-bu-ra-ya-la (staff 3)

1968 version  = a-pi-nya-ra li-la-nga

One place where the word with the *-ngera* differs from the above analysis is in the 1968 version on the word, *nganhagera*. This word uses a syncopated figure which returns to the normal *-ngera* pattern when the following word, *diyagera* is sung.

 = nga-nha:-nge-ra

 = di-ya-nge-ra

The structure of the melody, the melodic range, and the distinctive dotted rhythmic pattern generated by the extra syllables in "*-ngera*" make the tune recognisable as the same for both versions, even though there are differences in the first melodic phrases.

Frederick David McCarthy (1905–1997)

F.D. McCarthy was an outstanding pioneer of Australian archaeology, museology and Aboriginal rock art research. He joined Sydney's Australian Museum staff in 1920, a lad working as a library clerk. Eventually he moved departments, through Birds and Reptiles until, in 1932, he was promoted as Curator of Ethnology. He held this post, with increasing stature, until his appointment in 1964, as the first Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

McCarthy's museum career spanned those depressed decades when museums were the Cinderella of cultural institutions, neither commanding support from the public nor the private sector. Those lack-lustre decades of Depression, War and Reconstruction evidently affected administrators. For example, in 1932, when the Harvard University Museum offered to donate the museum a motor vehicle, the offer was rejected, even though the museum had no vehicles, because it could not afford the running costs. Consequently, although anxious to gain field experience, McCarthy could not leave base. As field recorders of Aboriginal rock engravings and paintings, therefore, McCarthy and his volunteer weekend team made day trips by train at their own expense. Numerous sites which they laboriously surveyed and sketched have since been destroyed by Sydney's urban sprawl, so these records are the sole testimony to many prehistoric art galleries.

Because McCarthy lacked any formal training in anthropology, he enrolled at the University of Sydney in 1933 for the diploma of anthropology. His future wife, Elsie Bramell, also took that diploma and assisted him to curate and catalogue museum collections which had been amassed under lax curators. When they married in 1940, however, Public Service regulations compelled Mrs McCarthy's resignation, so he spent the next two decades without staff assistance. Undeterred, Fred McCarthy published over 300 papers between 1931 and 1988, two thirds of them while at the Australian Museum.

McCarthy's most significant publication for archaeologists was written jointly with his wife. *The Stone Implements of Australia* (1946) was the most systematic study yet attempted to bring order into the classification and functional purpose of Aboriginal artefacts. For many years it was the basic reference for all archaeologists. Art researchers, however, may credit McCarthy's primacy in the serious evaluation of Aboriginal arts and crafts on a national scale. Published as attractive museum handbooks, his well illustrated *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* (1938) and *Australian Aboriginal Rock Art* (1958), sold more than 100,000 copies.

When the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land was formed in 1948, McCarthy was invited to join the team as archaeologist and anthropologist. This recognition provided opportunity to work amongst traditionally oriented people and proved a stimulating experience; a number of publications resulted. His collabora-

tion with Margaret McArthur while they were based at Oenpelli, provided them with an opportunity to study and quantify the role of women and the time they spent in the food quest. In later years this has gained recognition as a classic paper, anticipating the concerns of the 'Man the Hunter' conference of the late 1960s. Another field opportunity offered in 1961 when he studied clan dances at Aurukun, Cape York. He described forty-three dance events and collected the decorated materials used for the future National Museum.

McCarthy vainly attempted to interest people in the protection and conservation of Aboriginal art sites and other items of heritage. This was in 1938, when the citizenry of Sydney smugly celebrated the sesquicentennial year by ignoring the first Australians. McCarthy urged legislation to protect places and to prevent vandalism, one of the first to publish on such matters. Greatly daring for those insensitive times, he named several overseas scholars who had visited Australia and departed with archaeological collections which should have been housed in Australian museums, but no legislation existed to prevent their actions. Fred McCarthy was then decades ahead of public and government thinking. He must have sensed achievement, as Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, however, when he convened a national conference in 1968, on the nature and protection of Aboriginal sites and antiquities. The battle for State legislation was almost won by the time of his retirement in 1971, but McCarthy soon realised that the next struggle was to ensure that State Acts were effectively implemented by the appointment of sufficient qualified staff.

Fred McCarthy was a very modest but sincere man, whose interests were diverse and his application total. Although he had little formal academic training, his publications covered broad fields of Melanesian, Polynesian and Indonesian ethnography in addition to his Australian mainstream work. In 1980 the Australian National University admitted him, *honoris causa*, to the degree of Honorary Doctor of Science. The Academy elected him to the Honorary Fellowship in 1990. He died in Sydney on 18 November 1997.

As time passes, his name will be remembered for his unselfish and lonely role in championing research into, and the preservation of, the Aboriginal past. During his retirement years he lodged his diaries and field manuscripts in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, including a massive compilation on the art of the Sydney region. He generously donated his library to the National Museum of Australia.

In 1993 Fred McCarthy's colleagues and friends met at the Australian Museum. A special volume of the *Records of the Australian Museum* (Supplement 17), a festschrift edited by Jim Specht, was presented to him on that occasion. The volume includes an invaluable bibliography compiled by Kate Khan. For further details of Fred McCarthy's career, refer to Kate Khan's article (pp. 1-15), and see also my 'Sesqui-centenary to Bicentenary: reflections on a museologist' (pp. 17-24).

D.J. Mulvaney

Mick Miller

Mr Michael (Mick) Miller, a great Aboriginal and Australian leader, died on 5 April 1998 in Cairns, Queensland. I attended the funeral at Saint Monica's Cathedral on 11 April 1998. Mick, as everyone knew him, was buried at the Beam Section Martyn Street Cemetery, Cairns. The gathering both at the Cathedral and the graveside drew the largest crowd of people ever witnessed. The Cathedral was filled to standing room only and spilled out on the surrounding gardens and road.

Mick was married twice: to Patricia O'Shane with whom he had two children (Lydia and Marilyn), and to Barbara Russell: they had one son (Michael). Mick was the son of Michael and Cissie Miller of Palm Island, and the eldest of seven children (seven girls and two boys). Mick was educated at Mt Carmel College, Charters Towers. He excelled at sport. His greatest accomplishments, however, were first as a qualified school teacher and secondly as a political leader and ideologue. He graduated from Kelvin Grove Teacher's College in Brisbane in 1959 and from there took up a teaching post at the Cairns North State Primary in the same year.

Mick's political career began when he joined the Advancement League and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). With his first wife Pat O'Shane, he travelled to Sydney to campaign for Aboriginal civil rights in 1969, which was where I first met them. Aboriginal rights to citizenship had not been gained in Queensland. They came to explain what life was like living under the oppressive and infamous Queensland race legislation.

Mick took an active role in FCAATSI and in 1971-2 he became Vice-President. At the same time he started the Aboriginal Legal Service and was instrumental in fostering the growth and development of the Aboriginal Medical Services in the 1980s. Prior to that, however, Mick and his close friend Clary Grogan, were employed by the national trachoma and eye health program with Fred Hollows. He was equally responsible for another famous struggle for land by the Koowatta family against the Queensland Government.

Mick spearheaded the struggle between the Federal and Queensland governments in their dispute over the creation of local governments for Aborigines. Here, the Fraser Government created the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self-Management Act, a legislative instrument that went some way to moderating the conflict between Aborigines and the state's oppressive stand against Aborigines in Queensland.

Similarly, the struggle with Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) in 1989, and other foreign mining companies saw Mick lead his people once more. Mick travelled the world supporting such struggles and did so while jeopardising his own personal and economic security. After the election of the Hawke Labour Government in 1983, that Government asked

him to inquire into education, training and employment and the 'Miller' report still stands as the basis of government programs in this area. Following this success he involved himself in local development, helping to establish Aboriginal housing and health worker training bodies.

Mick modelled himself on people like Paul Robeson and Martin Luther King and he passed away on the 30th anniversary of King's death. Like the black American response to King, Aboriginal people saw in Mick much of what they liked and admired. So too, like black Americans, Aborigines have lost a great leader.

Gordon Briscoe

A Tribute to Isobel Mary White

Isobel White, or Sally, as we have all known her with such deep affection and respect, was for long a much valued member of the Aboriginal History Editorial Board. It was with deep sadness that we learnt of her death in August 1998.

Sally was a very special person within her family, 'an important person' to Charlotte, Nicholas and Jonathon and their families. The family was at the core of her life, throughout all its changes. Whether based in London, Texas, Missouri, Melbourne or Canberra, the love that sustained this core was unchanged.

Sally was important to all of us—in so many different ways. She had a remarkable breadth of understanding of, and sensitivity to, others, responding to our diverse lives and concerns. In these concerns she so often sustained us. Caring for people, she never drew back from that sustaining role, however demanding. Luise Hercus tells me that Sally once said to her: 'I feel like a wailing wall'. That can perhaps raise a flash of guilt. How often did we impose on the kindness so freely offered?

Sally was a remarkable person; it is appropriate to begin with her human qualities. We will all long remember her courage, her determination, above all her integrity and directness in relations with others. She cared intensely for people, concerned that justice and honesty should prevail in human dealings, both personal and collective. Social justice and equity were important principles that informed her decisions in relation to wider society and political action.

Born and brought up in England, Sally's youth was spent first in Harrow, then later in Birmingham when her father took up an appointment as Headmaster there. Brilliant at mathematics, Sally went straight on from school to read Economics at Cambridge. This was in Milton Keynes' department. She completed the course in 1933, one of those women students accepted by the Cambridge academic establishment, though not to the extent of being actually awarded a degree. At the completion of her studies at Girton she was awarded a Travelling Scholarship for 1934/1935 to undertake research in Canada on migrants and outworkers. At this time her concerns for society also prompted her to be politically active, both in England and in Canada. On her return from Canada she became an energetic member of the Fabian Society. Her professional work in these pre-war years was with both private firms and Government, as a factory inspector and personal assistant to senior management. In 1938 she married Michael White, brilliant young scientist. During the war both were engaged in government service and spending much time in London experienced the years of intense bombing. At the end of the war she was also caring for two small sons.

After the war Michael moved to appointments in the United States, where the family spent in all ten years before he took up the chair of Zoology in Melbourne. In

Melbourne Sally met with grace the demands on her time and energies as a professorial wife, caring mother and grandmother. However, she also began a new career in Anthropology. It has brought her international renown. How did this transformation of Cambridge-trained economist, then wife and mother, to anthropologist occur?

While in Missouri and when the children had grown to school age, Sally took up academic study again. Building on her concerns with social questions and society, she chose Anthropology. In Melbourne she maintained this interest, first through the museum and the Victorian Anthropological Society then from 1964 as a member of the staff of the new Department of Anthropology at Monash University. Her students there remember her as a dedicated, inspiring teacher. Rigorous and incisive in her own work, she encouraged them to achieve the same standards. As adviser, supervisor and examiner she soon earned Australia-wide recognition.

For her own research she chose to consider the roles of women in Aboriginal society. This focussed on Desert groups, with major field work in the late 1960s and 1970s often in collaboration with linguist Luise Hercus and musicologists Catherine Ellis and Helen Payne; (see White 1970; Hercus and White 1973; White 1973; White 1977; White 1979; White and Payne 1992).

She brought fresh insights to research from the breadth of her own intellectual background and personal experience, as well as an independent creative stance. Her work was innovative, exploring hitherto neglected areas that are now regarded as central to the discipline. It resulted in a number of important published articles, and the research papers on Central Desert Women lodged with Monash University.

Field work was a major part of her life in those two decades, often combined with Michael's field work on the Nullarbor and in Western Australia. At Yalata on the Nullarbor she worked over many years from 1969 with the women of that community, especially Alice Mangkatina (Alice Cox) and her family (see White 1985a).

Of this she wrote:

What I looked forward to most as I approached Yalata on each of my visits was Alice's beautiful welcoming smile. (*Fighters and Singers* 1985b, p. 214).

The women at Yalata shared their lives with her in ways very important to her, taking her on bush trips and introducing her to significant places such as Pidinga. They often called her kapali (grandmother).

This made her think of Daisy Bates (she says 'uncomfortably' *Fighters and Singers*, 1985a, p. 215). The comment brings to my mind her major work of the 1970s and 1980s, the editing of Daisy Bates' *Native Tribes of Western Australia*. This book was the product of meticulous historical and anthropological research. It brought to scholarly readership Mrs Bates' serious anthropological recording of the societies of Western Australia. It is a significant contribution to Australian anthropology, and to the history of anthropology in Australia. Its editing, and analysis of the complexities of Daisy Bates' life and work with Aboriginal groups engaged all those intellectual qualities we associate with Sally's research. It shows so clearly her incisive, yet objective, non-judgemental and sensitive command of analysis. It is a magnificent achievement. Appropriately it was launched in December 1985 by her friend Ken Colbung, himself a Nyungar of south-western Western Australia. He then chaired the Council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, a body of which Sally was long an active Member.

From the early 1980s Sally was an active member of the Editorial Board of *Aboriginal History*. She was review editor for many years, and co-editor with Judith Wilson and Isabel McBryde of the two special volumes honouring Diane Barwick (vols 11 and 12). Her wide intellectual interests, acumen and extensive international experience and contacts made her a magnificent editor and Board Member. We all benefitted from her wisdom and her counsel offered in friendship. Her special expertise in ethnohistory, melding history and anthropology, is shown in the beautiful paper 'The birth and death of a ceremony', published in *Aboriginal History* 4(1) (White 1980).

Sally's commitment to Aboriginal anthropology has continued in recent years. When direct research was no longer possible she remained involved through the Editorial board of *Aboriginal History*. She still examined theses, and was always there in an advisory role for friends and colleagues.

Her research and writing from the 1960s are major contributions to Aboriginal studies, both empirically and theoretically. We think of significant books such as:

- the Daisy Bates volume (*The native tribes of Western Australia* 1985c)
- *Fighters and Singers* edited with Diane Barwick (and Betty Meehan)
- the school text book *Before The Invasion*, co-authored with Colin Bourke and Colin Johnson;
- the volumes of *Aboriginal History* for which she was co-editor and review editor.

There are also important articles, such as that on dogs (their roles in hunting and social relation with Aboriginal people) at Yalata (1972) and chapters in books edited by others such as Fay Gale's *Women in Aboriginal Society* (1970); R.M. Berndt's *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the 70s* (White 1977); Caroline Larrington's *Feminist Companion to Mythology* (with Helen Payne 1992); and Julie Marcus' *First in their Field* (1993). There is also her major research report on desert women lodged with Monash University.

For Sally her intellectual interests were matters of exploration, of ever seeking new understanding. They were driven by that perception and wisdom she brought to all her living, and was so generous in sharing. We have so much to thank her for, and to celebrate in her memory.

To her family, especially Charlotte, Nicholas and Jonathan we extend our deepest sympathy in their personal loss.

May I end by adapting the wording Sally, Diane and Betty chose in their dedication of *Fighters and Singers*, to Shirley Andrew.

To Sally,

Who knows about scholarship and learning and cares about people.

Isabel McBryde

Australian National University

and

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
Canberra

Note

This tribute builds upon the eulogy I was honoured to be invited to present at the funeral service in Canberra on 28th August 1998. A similar tribute, but focussing on Sally's contribution to Australian Anthropology will be included in a forthcoming issue of *Canberra Anthropology*, with the agreement of both Dr Peter Read, Chairman, *Aboriginal History* editorial board, and Dr Patrick Guinness, editor *Canberra Anthropology*.

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Colleen Shirley Smith, MBE, AM, 1928-98

Colleen Shirley Smith, or 'Mum Shirl' as she was known across Australia, died on 28 April 1998 in Sydney. Born on Erambie government reserve, New South Wales on 25 November 1928, she was one of nine children born to Isabelle and Joseph Perry. She attended the reserve school conducted by Roman Catholic sisters.¹ It was this Catholic school which shaped her life, allowing her to exercise her maternal instincts in a powerful way on behalf of her immediate, extended and institutional community, which she assumed was her family. But Shirley was a woman of her time in that she came from a government institution with large permanent populations of women and children: reserves were largely creches where Aboriginal men came and went as a surplus rural workforce. Shirley's early pattern of life reflected both the growth of the Catholic church as a rural institution caring for Aborigines, and that of Aboriginal women following their casual-working male partners around NSW. Then she became liberated from government legislative subjugation in 1968, commencing a new phase of life coping with urban culture.²

In caring for Aborigines in NSW, the Catholic church was a newcomer. Its colonial role focused attention on Irish migrants or their offspring.³ Aborigines featured on a small scale in the church's drive to religious pastoral work. In the larger towns, Catholic establishments emerged after World War I and it was during this time that they began taking Aboriginal orphans, fringe-camp and reserve children into their schools. In some places where Aborigines lived in numbers, and were prevented from attending town schools, the church contracted with the Aboriginal Welfare Board (AWB) to operate schools. Cowra and Erambie government reserve was such a place and Mum Shirl emerged out of these circumstances.

In the 1930s a gradual migration of people of Aboriginal descent reflected concerted attempts to escape legislative subjugation from the then infamous *Aborigines Pro-*

1. Hereafter referred to as Catholic rather than Roman Catholic.

2. The *Aborigines Protection Act*, administered by the Aborigines Welfare Board, was repealed in 1968, but as race law control loosened so other child welfare laws tightened. This meant almost no change as Shirley now attended the Children's Courts at YASMA and Darlinghurst and the Central and Darlinghurst Courts when her friends and relatives were in conflict with general laws. The urban culture crashed in on all new Aboriginal migrant families perplexed about their new social circumstances and puzzled about matters as simple as where to go, what to do and how to do it.

3. See C.M.H. Clark, *A History Of Australia*, vol. I, pp. 93-4, but see also, vols. II to V, Melbourne University Press, 1962-1981.

tection Act⁴ by gaining 'exemptions' from the Act, or exempting themselves by moving to Sydney from the Riverina region.⁵ The latter area had been settled by white, mostly Scottish and English, sheep and wheat farmers, in the 1830s. By the 1850s they had well-established Aboriginal labour forces. Aborigines from this area were the first to move to urban areas after WWII. In 1930 Shirley's parents moved from Erambie closer to Cowra; Erambie was a reserve 'too far from town'. She moved to Sydney in the 1950s and had a family of her own. In the same decade she moved back to Erambie to care for her sisters' families while they took on casual work around NSW during the post-war boom. In the early 1960s Shirley returned to Sydney to help care for the family of her nephew, Patrick Wedge, who had been shot by police at the Petersham Railway Station. Meanwhile, Shirley's own children were removed to AWB custody—the girls to Cootamundra; the boys to Kinchela.⁶ Through her own efforts she eventually regained the custody of her children. Soon after, Shirl's brother, Laurie (the Bat) Perry, was gaoled for a series of offences and she acted as a carer of his children. Following her own contact with the AWB, she arranged for her brother's family to be allocated an AWB house near Newcastle. All the while, Shirley gained valuable skills attending to her own affairs and dealing with the government. She put these skills to good use in visiting children and adults of her own volition, or on behalf of other acquaintances and relatives.

Shirley was a member of a small number of disparate Aborigines who moved, after WWII, from camp conditions in the La Perouse sand-hills (known as 'Frogs Hollow') into temporary government accommodation at the abandoned military barracks of both Kensington and Kingswood. In 1968 this group numbered no more than 1,000 people, but increased following Aboriginal people's emancipation from the infamous AP Act by the Askin Government in 1968, triggering a huge rural exodus across NSW.⁷ There followed a period of urban cultural adaptation to police, the law, housing, child care, education, health and housing. Aborigines experienced confusion both in Blacktown and the slums of Sydney. These people were migrant Aboriginal families and individuals seeking a better life in the city. Such circumstances suited Shirley's skills. She involved herself in the activities of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs (FAA)—a welfare centre in Sydney Haymarket. She learned to use other charities such as Matthew Talbot's and St Vincent De Paul's for clothing and food. Shirley thereby became well known to Aborigines and to whites as someone to be contacted when either charity was needed or disaster emerged; whether in the city or rural towns of NSW.

I was a student at the Sydney Technical College when I first met Mum Shirl in 1966. Shirl participated in the FAA auxiliary with Flo Grant, Ruth and Herb Simms and others who helped at the FAA fetes. In 1970 I was a member of the Aboriginal Legal Service Council. This council, formed through pushing by young Aboriginal migrants to Sydney, was supported by lawyers such as Hal Wootton, Bob Debus, Gordon Samu-

4. See Jack Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom: A Biography*, ANZ Book Co., NSW, 1974.

5. See C.D. Rowley, *Outcasts In White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, vol. II, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1971, pp. 41–61, 107–30, 232–4, 383–5, 390–401.

6. Ian Howie-Willis, 'Kinchela Home', in D. Horton, *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, pp. 548–51.

7. Rowley, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–85; see also, W.D. Scott and Company, *The Problems and needs of the Aboriginal of Sydney, a report to the Minister for Youth and Community Affairs*, NSW Government Printer, Sydney, 1973.

els, David Isaacs, the late Paul Landa and Garth Nettheim. Its radicals were people such as the Jewish lawyers, intellectuals and students, among whom were Bob Debus, Peter Tobin, Eddy Newman, Paul Torsillo, Ross McKenna and Peter Thompson, and Aborigines such as Paul Coe (Mum Shirl's nephew), Garry Foley and Garry Williams. Aborigines who migrated to Sydney in the late-1960s and early 70s brought with them a rural reserve and fringe-camp culture. Having only just been shaken free of government control as a rural population, this brought them face-to-face with city police. Determined to oppose police control, they imagined that a legal defence was possible against 'white colonial oppression'. When the ALS commenced I was appointed field officer and David Collins the first solicitor.

Mum Shirl's relationship with me developed quickly. She gave the Redfern ALS an authenticity among local Aborigines that the FAA lacked, and so the service widened in popularity in NSW and beyond. Other community needs emerged and Mum Shirl supported me in my efforts to develop a 'free' Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS). On this matter I called a public meeting at the South Sydney Community Aid Office. Those who attended were myself, Mum Shirl, John Russell, Ross McKenna, Dulcy Flowers, Leonard Smith, Fred Hollows.⁸ Shirl was instrumental in raising funds and interest among the Catholic population for support. Fathers Ted Kennedy and Frank Brennan were later to link that support to the AMS. I left Redfern to return to my home in Alice Springs in late-1972 but my friendship with Mum Shirl continued. Soon after I was one of the demonstrators who saw her become a national icon by standing with Stuart Harris (the journalist) between the demonstrators and the police at the Canberra tent embassy. They formed a human barricade endeavouring to stop Commonwealth police from demolishing the embassy on the orders of William McMahon's coalition government. In later years she was also instrumental in planning Pope John Paul's two visits. By then she had gained official recognition, her honours and awards including an MBE, an AM and appointment as a special commissioner for NSW Corrective Services. With Mum Shirl's passing, Aboriginal Australians have lost a wonderful leader and the Catholic Church a gracious ambassador.

Gordon Briscoe

8. G. Briscoe, 'An Aboriginal Model', in B. Hetzel, M. Dobbin, L. Lipmann and E. Eggleston (eds.), *Better Health for Aborigines?*, University of Queensland Press, 1974.

Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA): One God, One Aim, One destiny

John Maynard

Opposition to the invasion of this country is not some new-found strength that Aboriginal people have suddenly discovered. It did not spring from the Mabo decision or the Native Title Act 1993, nor was its birth a result of the vibrant period of the 1960s, which culminated in the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra. The groundswell of Aboriginal resistance to domination has been ongoing since Cook and the *Endeavour* first appeared over the horizon. It did not cease when the last gunshot was heard on the frontier. Resistance has taken many forms since 1770, from small encounters, to guerilla warfare, open warfare and the war of words. The formation of the first politically organised and united Aboriginal activist group, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) began in 1924 under the leadership of Charles Fredrick Maynard.¹ This group proved a revelation and inspiration to Aboriginal people of their period and into the future. The AAPA saw, for the first time, Aborigines voicing their disapproval by holding street rallies, conducting meetings and conferences, utilising the power of the media through newspaper coverage, writing letters and petitions to Government and King George V about the injustice and inequality forced upon Aboriginal people. This form of resistance has now been ongoing for over seventy years, gaining in momentum and strength with each passing year. Until recently, little was known of the AAPA or its leader Fred Maynard. To appreciate the legacy of, and the momentum created by the AAPA, it is vitally important to examine not only the formation of the AAPA, the platform it took and the people involved, but why the AAPA was stopped.

The story of Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association is one that holds special significance for me, as he was my grandfather. He sadly died eight years before my birth so I unfortunately never gained the opportunity of coming into contact with this remarkable Aboriginal patriot. In late 1993 I went to the Wollotuka Aboriginal Education Center at the University of Newcastle. My intention at that point was to ask advice on how best to go about gaining further information regarding my grandfather's activities during the 1920s. I received some good advice and also finished up enrolled in the Diploma of Aboriginal Studies, which I completed in 1995.

¹ Broome 1982, p. 166.

Throughout my studies I continued with my research centred on both my grandfather and the AAPA. In early 1996 I was fortunate to receive the Stanner Fellowship. The fellowship is awarded every second year to an indigenous scholar and is a very competitive and prized honour. The Fellowship offered me the opportunity to work in and research an area of Aboriginal history for possible publication. It provided me with the financial freedom over a four month period to travel in excess of 10,000 kilometres throughout New South Wales and Queensland, speaking to and recording many family members and people who had recollections of either the AAPA or my grandfather. This oral history was substantiated by extensive reading and researching archival material at the NSW State Archives, the Mitchell Library and many other less prominent libraries and historical societies. I received great support and encouragement from many notable historians like Dr Peter Read, Dr Heather Goodall and Jack and Jean Horner, who readily gave time and advice. This article is the result of those months of constant travel and work. It is important to all members of my family as it highlights the high levels of commitment and sacrifice that my grandfather made in battling to improve Aboriginal conditions at a most difficult time in Aboriginal history. Certainly the story of Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association has been for a long period another missing chapter of Australian history. Its telling certainly reveals that the birth of an awakening of Aboriginal political consciousness was much earlier than it was, and still is, perceived to have been by a majority of people.

From the very outset the AAPA was to set a precedent for Aboriginal protest groups. Its aim was to improve the material conditions of Aboriginal people and end political oppression.² Members of the AAPA were very vocal about the loss of Aboriginal reserve lands in New South Wales. From 1913 to 1927 Aboriginal reserve land in New South Wales fell from 26,000 acres to only 13,000 acres.³ Over 75 per cent of this land loss occurred on prime coastal land.⁴ Aboriginal people had successfully settled, cultivated, maintained and independently farmed this land virtually right up to the point when they were forcibly removed from their farms at gunpoint by the police.⁵ The AAPA opposition to this land theft was blunt and to the point. They had land as their prime requisite, demanding enough land for every Aboriginal family in the State in order to provide economic independence.

Their most scathing attack was directed at the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board. Even today the Protection Board is justifiably looked back on by Aboriginal people as a sinister government organisation, held in both fear and contempt. The AAPA insisted on the right of Aboriginal families to 'protect' their children from the 'Protection Board'. It was the Board's policy to remove Aboriginal children from their families.⁶ All-encompassing amendments to legislation concerning Aborigines implemented by the Board in 1915 were instrumental in Aboriginal children being classified as neglected and hence institutionalised, simply on the basis of their Aboriginality.⁷ Peter Read reports that

2. Grimshaw 1994, p. 281.

3. Goodall 1988, p. 6; see also Goodall 1996.

4. *ibid.*

5. *ibid.*

6. Read 1996a, p. 206; see also Read 1996b.

7. Grimshaw 1994, p. 290.



managers of reserves when filling out committal notices for the Board, simply wrote 'for being Aboriginal'.⁸ The practice of removal was condoned and sanctioned by the Board under the guise of the so-called 'apprenticeship scheme', which involved the taking of these children (a high percentage were girls) and relocating them in different parts of the State to be used and abused as child labourers for white farmers.⁹

The AAPA also made demands for Aborigines to be able to live in areas of significance

to their various groups. They pioneered the call for Aborigines themselves to control administration and direction of Aboriginal affairs. The coverage of the AAPA's demands encompassed the entire spectrum of Aboriginal bitterness, focusing on both land rights and civil rights. As Goodall notes, the organisation was clearly saying 'We want rights over our own land, our own country', but as well they were saying they wanted access to full rights and privileges of citizenship.¹⁰ This was directed at every aspect of securing equal rights with other Australians. After all, Aboriginal people were being used and abused in the workforce, they were paying taxes, so why should they be denied access to public schooling, hospitals, swimming pools and the streets of the towns.¹¹ However, the massive loss of reserve land and the way of life it had offered were the two catalysts which ignited the AAPA into existence. Each of the prominent members of the AAPA suffered and were affected by this land loss and the independent Aboriginal farmlands that it involved.¹²

AAPA president Fred Maynard was born at Hinton in the Hunter Valley on 4 July 1879.¹³ His uncle was Tom Phillips, one of the Aboriginal farmers who had settled and farmed St Claire reserve outside Singleton. This reserve had, in the first instance, been encroached upon by missionaries then taken over by the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board in 1916. By 1923 it was closed off to Aborigines altogether.¹⁴

Fred Maynard rose to prominence as a public speaker, voicing his disapproval at the suffering of Aboriginal people. Maynard proved to be a man of great sincerity, vision and compassion. He had the ability to inspire an audience and through his

8. Read 1982, pp. 5-7.

9. Kondek 1988, p. 175.

10. Goodall 1988, p. 6; see also Goodall, p. 1996.

11. *ibid.*

12. Goodall 1990, p. 22; see also Goodall 1996.

13. Oakenfall 1994, p. 672.

14. Goodall 1992, p. 22; see also Goodall 1996.

speeches, his political views and general dissatisfaction with Aboriginal treatment was heard. This was viewed by the white authorities with some alarm, as they believed he was inciting revolt. It was because of his stance that he was denied the right to visit and speak on Aboriginal reserves.¹⁵ He was charismatic, dignified and eloquent and the major driving force behind the birth of the AAPA.¹⁶

Maynard formed the nucleus of the organisation around an impressive array of Aboriginal individuals. These included William and John Ridgeway, who 'had been fighting for land against white encroachment at Tea Gardens since the early years of the century, and only had only lost Forster in 1923'.¹⁷ J. Johnstone was named vice president of the AAPA. He was from a family which had settled the Wingham reserve in 1882, only losing it to revocation in 1921.¹⁸ Johnstone's role in Aboriginal activism would continue over the ensuing decades and he also played a part in the later Aborigines Association headed by Bill Ferguson. James Linwood was another active member of the AAPA. He had been given approval to farm in 1883 and worked tirelessly to clear and cultivate 20 acres on the fertile Fattorini Islands in the Macleay area of northern NSW.¹⁹ By 1889 Linwood had three homes, two ploughs and one harrow, and his return on his maize crop of £156.0.8 had seen him rise out of debt.²⁰ He was also to feel the anguish and disillusionment of being forced off his land when it was revoked in 1924.²¹ Linwood was to prove an accomplished speaker and it was he who addressed one of the AAPA's first public meetings, held in Kempsey in 1925, attracting a crowd of over 500 Kooris.²² Joe Anderson, along with his brothers, had worked St Josephs farm in the Burragorang valley: that land was also lost to them through revocation in 1924.²³ As a result, the family was forced to relocate to the Salt Pan Creek camp in Sydney. It was from the harshness of this injustice that he was enlisted and rallied to the cause of the AAPA. Joe was to become a prominent figure, and he started making speeches and demands for Aboriginal rights in and around the Sydney Markets and Domain during the 1920s. Jane Duren also rallied to the cause, having seen her people's land slowly encroached upon and swallowed up around Batemans Bay. She fought a strong, bitter and vocal campaign against such land loss. As a result she decided to align herself with the AAPA platform.

The popular memory of the independent NSW reserves was fresh in the minds of all of these people.²⁴ So too, was the bitterness burnt and etched into their consciousness at the loss of those lands. This was overlaid by the new harsh and reduced reserves which were to prove more like concentration camps with their strict curfews and denied access to Aboriginal leaders like Fred Maynard.²⁵ Confinement on these

15. Kondek 1988, p.175.

16. Kondek 1988, p.176.

17. Goodall 1990, p.23; see also Goodall 1996.

18. *ibid.*

19. Morris 1989, p.93.

20. *ibid.*

21. Goodall 1990, p.23; see also Goodall 1996.

22. *ibid.*

23. *ibid.*

24. *ibid.*

25. Goodall 1990, p.1; see also Goodall 1996.

reserves would prove to be a method by which the NSW Government sought to assimilate Aboriginal people and destroy the structure of their society and religion. Aboriginal people were forced off their land and incarcerated into an environment of control which stripped them not only of land, but also of their dignity and culture. The result was forced dependency which is still in evidence to this day. The managers of these reserves had enormous powers over resident Aboriginal people, including: the right to search Aborigines, their dwellings and belongings at any time; to confiscate their property, read their mail, order medical inspections, confine children to dormitories, expel Aborigines to other reserves and break up families.²⁶

The senior members of the AAPA enlisted the support and sympathies of some notable white people. The NSW Aboriginal Protection Board caught wind that an organisation was beginning to blossom in December of 1923 when a white woman, Mrs. Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton, contacted them putting forth a request to care for so-called 'incorrigible Aboriginal girls'.²⁷ (The only reason they were classified as incorrigible was because they refused to take the abuse and ill treatment dealt to them and repeatedly absconded or defied their employer²⁸). The proposed care put forward by Mrs McKenzie-Hatton revolved around a home being set up for these girls with funds hopefully to be provided by the Government. The proposal had been carefully planned by, and had full backing of the Aboriginal people connected with the AAPA. It was an Aboriginal controlled initiative that had the support of Aboriginal communities, who directed girls in need to the home. Sadly, however, the Protection Board stopped any hopes of funds being supplied for the proposal. Nevertheless, with or without funds, the home began operation at Homebush in Sydney in 1924.²⁹ This home operated through 1924 and 1925 in direct opposition to the Protection Board and government controlled homes. The Protection Board was infuriated by this 'blatant' opposition to its authority and repeatedly directed the police to harass the home which was under constant surveillance, even going as far as to call in a Crown Solicitor who could find no legal loophole to have the home closed.

Mrs McKenzie-Hatton had come to NSW from Victoria prior to 1923 where she quickly came to the notice of Kooris in Sydney and the North Coast.³⁰ She was especially concerned at the heartfelt loss of Aboriginal families for their children and, much to her credit, took it upon herself at personal cost, to travel the State in search of the stolen children that had been swept up in the so called 'apprenticeship scheme'.³¹

The members of the AAPA emerged in to full public view in February 1925, when the Association was officially launched. Mrs McKenzie-Hatton held the position of secretary.³² It is worth noting that all other office bearers were Aboriginal. Over the next six months, McKenzie-Hatton travelled extensively on the north coast spreading the news of the formation of the AAPA and developing contacts with Aboriginal communi-

26. Parbury 1988, pp.87-88.

27. Goodall 1982, p.229; see also Goodall 1996.

28. *ibid.*

29. *ibid.*

30. *ibid.*

31. *ibid.*

32. Goodall 1982, p.230; see also Goodall 1996.

ties. The Protection Board, ever watchful and vigilant, refused her permission to visit reserves or stations. 'On one of these trips and with the co-operation of the Koori community at Nambucca Heads, McKenzie-Hatton removed an Aboriginal girl from the Protection Board's control on the reserve at Stuarts Island'.³³ The Protection Board were at a loss as to what action to take. The response, however, from Aboriginal communities with the opening of the girls home at Homebush in the face of Protection Board antagonism and the removal of the girl at Nambucca Heads from the control of the Board signaled that these victories carried immense significance. The AAPA had struck a chord with the people: at last some of their own were playing the white authorities at their own game and hitting back at what had seemed an insurmountable wall of control.

News of the AAPA now spread like a brush fire through Aboriginal communities from as far south as Batemans Bay to Lismore in the north and west to places like Angledool Station. Fred Maynard operated the Association's central office from Addisons Hall, 460 Crown Street, Sydney, but he was prompted by the response to make trips to the north coast. Maynard said he was amazed by the enthusiastic response that the AAPA were generating: by August it claimed eleven branches and a membership which had expanded to numbers in excess of five hundred.³⁴

Besides Mrs. McKenzie-Hatton, the AAPA had the aid of another white person who supported the Aboriginal stance, Mr J.J. Maloney. Mrs McKenzie-Hatton had instigated a campaign of writing letters to the press. However, few were ever published. One exception to this rule was the Newcastle newspaper the *Voice of the North*. The editor, Maloney, who was a staunch nationalist, was impressed by Aboriginal leaders like Maynard and Lacy and printed whatever they had to say. Maloney, to his credit, had been penning editorials on the need to save the Aborigines as early as 1922. At the time, this was a most unusual occurrence as few white people questioned the 'doomed race' hypothesis that was expounded in newspaper articles of the time by high profile politicians and academics. For example, on 30 January 1920, Premier Sir Joseph Caruthers, in an interview in the *Macleay Argus* stated that 'the Australian Aborigine will soon be but a memory to those who people this continent'.³⁵ American anthropologist, Dr William Lloyd Warner was another exponent of the 'doomed race' theory of the period, and when on a visit to Australia in 1927, he suggested to a reporter of the *Telegraph* (20 October 1927) 'that it was tragic to think that the happiest people in the world should be doomed to extinction', but such was his conviction on the issue, he went on to say, 'the fate of the Australian blacks will be that of the American Indian—they will vanish from the face of the earth'.³⁶ Three days later, in another article in the *Telegraph* (23 October 1927), the writer suggested that, 'now that the Australian Aborigines are dying out...[i]t has been suggested that the Australian artist, B.E. Minns be commissioned by the Federal Government to supply some artistic memorials of our passing black brothers'.³⁷

This was the stigma Aboriginal people and the AAPA confronted as a result of the mentality of the period. The AAPA, due to its success, was now perceived by the Pro-

33. Goodall 1982, p.231; see also Goodall 1996.

34. *ibid.*

35. *Macleay Argus* 30/1/1920.

36. *Telegraph* 20/10/1927.

37. *Telegraph* 23/10/1927.

tection Board as a serious threat and the Board initiated ways of undermining and blocking its progress. They directed the majority of their attacks at Fred Maynard. At a meeting in Newcastle in late 1925, Maynard addressed a large crowd where he further emphasised the AAPA's stand that all Aborigines receive freehold land, and initiated a call for the cessation of the removal of Aboriginal children by the Protection Board. He also called for a royal commission into Aboriginal affairs and wanted the unconditional and complete abolition of the Protection Board. Maynard stressed that 'the board had outlived its usefulness and that Aborigines required a new system of administration...without the foolish patronage which affects to regard them as children'.³⁸

After this attack by Maynard, the Protection Board became more enraged and intensified their own attacks against him personally. First, they tried to discredit him by claiming he was not Aboriginal at all, but rather an American Negro or South African 'Black'. The facts were that Maynard's roots lay with the Worimi people of Port Stephens. On the registered birth certificate of his aunt Caroline, on 31 May, 1859 his great-grandmother Mary is noted as an 'Aboriginal woman born at Port Stephens (who can read)'. Mary had married Jean Phillipe (anglicised as Phillips) in 1846. Phillipe had arrived in Australia from the Isle of France (Mauritius). Some say that he may have jumped ship whilst in Australia.

When this approach to discredit Maynard failed due to the strength of his strong family ties with his people in both Wonnarua and Worimi country, the Protection Board then tried to implicate him in a sexual scandal.³⁹ They attempted to tarnish Maynard's name by making public a letter he had written to a fifteen year old Aboriginal girl who had been taken from her family at the camp at Dunembrol property by the Protection Board and put into the apprenticeship scheme. She was placed on a property remote from her family where she was subjected to rape by her white employer. She was sent to Sydney to have her child who died soon after birth. Incredibly, the Protection Board then sent her back to the same place of employment and abuse at Angledool Station.⁴⁰ Through the extensive Aboriginal community network, news of this girl's plight reached the AAPA in October 1927.⁴¹ Maynard wrote to her offering help in bringing the man responsible to justice. He asked the girl for particulars of the assaults, which would be necessary in proving paternity. It seems it was this aspect of Maynard's letter, as much as his criticism of the Protection Board, that the Board felt would tarnish and discredit Maynard's reputation. Quite the contrary happened. Once the Board were forced to publish the full contents of Maynard's letter, and, rather than diminishing him, the contents actually enhanced his already imposing reputation. In the letter, Maynard savagely attacked the Protection Board for affording no protection for Aboriginal girls whatsoever:

...These white robbers of our women's virtue, who take our girls down and laugh to scorn yet escape their obligations every time. The Act and the Board it empowered insulted and degraded all Aboriginal people, and it aimed to exterminate the noble and ancient race of Australia. These so-called civilised methods of rule,

³⁸. Maynard 1925, p.5.

³⁹. Kondek 1988, p.176.

⁴⁰. Goodall 1982, p.246.

⁴¹. *ibid.*

under the christianised ideals so they claim, of civilising our people under the pretence of 'love' were nothing more than downright hypocrisy and stink of the Belgian Congo. These Tyrannous methods have to be stopped. We are not going to be insulted any longer than it will take to wipe the Act off the Statute book. That's what our Association stands for: liberty, freedom, the right to function and act in our own interest, as right thinking citizens, not as non-intelligents devoid of all reason. That is how we are placed under the law of the Statute book. Anything is good enough, a blanket, a pinch of tea and sugar, anything thrown at us. Are we going to stand for these things any longer? Certainly not! Away with the damnable insulting methods, which are degrading. Give us a hand; stand by your native Aboriginal officers and fight for liberty and freedom for yourself and for your children...⁴²

Unfortunately for Maynard, this letter had been intercepted and opened by the manager of the property who sent it on to the Protection Board. Even so, it is highly likely that the girl would have been too frightened or threatened to allow him to take legal action on her behalf. The Protection Board was further concerned by this challenge to their authority. When the AAPA applied for official registration of the organisation as a company, the Board tried unsuccessfully to block the registration. The Board referred to the stereotypical view of Aboriginal people, stating that the AAPA, excepting Mrs McKenzie-Hatton, were Aborigines 'incompetent and of poor character' which the Board would in due course expose and make evidence against them available to the Registrar General.⁴³

Jane Duren pushed notice of Aboriginal discontent to prominence by sending on 14 June 1926 a letter to King George V in which she stated the complete dissatisfaction in government that Aboriginal people felt. Her letter pointed out the utter unfairness and hypocrisy of a system that went as far as to exclude Aboriginal children from public schooling.⁴⁴

The year of 1927 proved to be the most active one for the AAPA and its members. They continued their vehement attacks on the Protection Board and continued to bombard the press and government with letters, petitions and demands. They conducted their third annual general meeting and the resolutions endorsed were to form the basis of a petition that was sent to the then Premier of NSW, Mr Jack Lang. Their demands, as from the outset nearly four years earlier, had not wavered:

...Restore to us that share of our country of which we should never have been deprived...⁴⁵

The petition also insisted that Aborigines who were incapable of working the land were only in that condition due to neglect and because of government policies, which had endorsed oppression and prejudice. It went on to demand that it was the government's responsibility to provide and care for these people. In the petition the AAPA also reiterated their stance on the demand for the cessation of the Protection Board's policy of taking Aboriginal children from their families. They wanted the Board scrapped completely and replaced by an Aboriginal administrative organisation controlled and

42. Maynard to K-B 1927.

43. Goodall 1982, p.236; see also Goodall 1996.

44. Goodall 1982, p.237; see also Fletcher 1989.

45. Goodall 1982, p.241; see also Goodall 1996.

operated by educated Aborigines. They went on to stress that Aborigines be afforded the full privileges of citizenship.⁴⁶ The Protection Board's response to the petition was predictable and took their usual racist stance by categorising Aboriginal people as incompetent and incapable of managing their own affairs. They went so far in their opposition to Aboriginal demands for land as to reply to the government:

...The Board knowing the nature of the Aboriginal is of the opinion that in most cases the property would be quickly disposed of for more liquid assets...⁴⁷

The Protection Board went on with their attack by voicing their opinion of Fred Maynard:

...He was a man of illogical views who, in the Board's opinion, was more likely to disturb the Aborigines than improve their conditions.⁴⁸

When knowledge of the Protection Board's attack reached Fred Maynard, his response to this open display of racist prejudice and aggression inspired him to pen one of the most eloquent and powerful statements ever written by an Aboriginal activist:

I wish to make it perfectly clear on behalf of our people, that we accept no condition of inferiority as compared with European people. Two distinct civilisations are represented by the respective races... That the European people by the arts of war destroyed our more ancient civilisation is freely admitted, and that by their vices and diseases our people have been decimated is also patent. But neither of these facts are evidence of superiority. Quite the contrary is the case. Furthermore, I may refer in passing, to the fact that your present scheme of old age pensions was obtained from our more ancient code, as likewise your child endowment scheme and widows pensions. Our divorce laws may yet find a place on the Statute Book. The members of the Board [the AAPA] have also noticed the strenuous efforts of the trade union leaders to attain the conditions which existed in our country at the time of the invasion by Europeans—the men only worked when necessary, we called no man 'master' and we had no king. We are therefore, striving to obtain full recognition of our citizen rights on terms of absolute equality with all other people in our land. The request made by this Association for sufficient land for each eligible family is justly based. The Australian people are the original owners of this land and have a prior right over all other people in this respect. Our request to supervise our own affairs is no innovation. The Catholic people in our country possess the right to control their own schools and homes, and take pride in the fact that they possess this privilege. The Chinese, Greeks, Jews and Lutherans are similarly favoured and our people are entitled to precisely the same conditions.⁴⁹

Maynard categorically denounced the claims made by the Protection Board that it was adequately providing for the aged and indigent Aborigines, referring to the Board's reference to the generosity of ration and blanket as a 'sneer'.⁵⁰ He also attacked the Board's integrity by calling its refusal to agree to a royal commission, as proposed by the AAPA, as proof that the Board was afraid to face the consequences and truths such an inquiry would uncover.⁵¹ The Protection Board replied again with only an

46. Goodall 1982, p.242; see also Goodall 1996.

47. Goodall 1982, p.247; see also Goodall 1996.

48. *ibid.*

49. Maynard 1927.

50. Goodall 1982, p.244; see also Goodall 1996.

expanded version of its earlier letter. They completely avoided the crucial issues and a carefully worded statement did not disguise the fact that the Board did assume Aboriginal people were 'inferior':

The Board cannot concern itself with the controversy regarding the inferiority or otherwise of the Australian Aboriginal race as compared with Europeans, its duty being to ensure that the remnants of that race now living within this State receive benevolent protection and every reasonable opportunity to improve its condition...⁵²

The AAPA disappeared from mainstream public view after 1927. As yet there has been no concrete explanation uncovered for this apparent break up and disintegration of the AAPA's organisational and network structures.⁵³ There are three main ingredients that were probably instrumental in the AAPA's demise. The first was obviously the onset of the Depression, which had a major bearing on the operation of the AAPA. Money would have been a major concern to the group. Maynard's children say that work days for their father on the wharf became few and far between. A more disturbing scenario was brought to light by Uralla elder, Mr Reuben Kelly. In interviews he stated that 'Fred Maynard was a great man, the genuine article, but he could not make the people understand'. Reuben said 'You could see it in his eyes, he suffered for the people'. Reuben was adamant that Fred Maynard was undermined from within his own group. Reuben concluded 'our people are too often bought and seduced by promises and accept the crumbs and carrots dangled before them'.⁵⁴ There may be some evidence of Reuben's view in a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (15 November 1927). The report described a meeting at the Chapter House of St. Andrews Cathedral, Sydney between the Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney, Revd D'Arcy Irvine and the chairman of the Australian Board of Missions the most Reverend J.S. Needham and seven Aborigines of the AAPA. The report said that the 'natives' sought the opportunity of stating their claims for racial equality with whites and other concessions. The report went on to say that 'for the most part, the President of the "natives" Progressive Association, Mr. F. G. Maynard, a self educated Aboriginal acted as spokesperson, although associates punctuated his remarks with interjections'.⁵⁵ This article may support a suggestion of internal differences inside the AAPA structure.

However, the major reason for the AAPA's breakup was without doubt based in police and Protection Board harassment. The AAPA conducted three annual conferences before being forced out of existence by police acting on behalf of the Protection Board.⁵⁶ The organisation's demise served as a caution to William Ferguson, who later founded a separate organisation with an almost identical title—the Aborigines Progressive Association.⁵⁷ This suggestion can be substantiated by a statement by Bill Ferguson to Charles Leon, made a decade after the AAPA ceased. When Leon pointed out the existence of the earlier AAPA organisation, Ferguson replied: 'Yes I've heard of them,

51. Goodall 1982, p.245.

52. *ibid.*

53. Goodall 1982, p.249.

54. Maynard 1996 interview with Reuben Kelly.

55. *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 November 1927.

56. Howie-Willis 1994, p.75.

57. *ibid.*

they held three annual conferences but they were hounded by the police acting for the Board'.⁵⁸

One can arguably conclude that the Protection Board brought a sinister and increasingly hostile approach to bear on the AAPA. Members of the Maynard family, in reflections on their early childhood, all agree that threats were made against their father especially in relation to his family.⁵⁹ It was a case of stop the political agitation, or suffer the consequences. Maynard's personal position with a young family was obviously precarious. Nevertheless, whether Maynard would have pressed on publicly with the fight remains unanswered. Whilst working in the early 1930s in his capacity as a wharf labourer in Sydney a large container fell from a crane and struck him. He was seriously injured and spent nearly twelve months in hospital, one leg broken in six places. His health was further complicated by the fact that whilst in hospital he developed sugar diabetes, and his body was covered in sores from being confined to bed for so long. Maynard, a big powerful man, eventually was able to leave hospital, but his health had been seriously impaired. Eventually he contracted gangrene and had a leg amputated. He died on 9 September 1946.

It is feasible to assume that the Protection Board, with the apparent demise of the AAPA, assumed that all Aboriginal confrontation would now cease. The Board sought to stop the source of Aboriginal protest by silencing the AAPA, but the ground swell had begun and could not be stopped. The seeds were sown and would come to full fruition once again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and continue to this day. It may be difficult to imagine or comprehend the opposition this pioneer group faced seventy years ago and to understand its considerable impact. This paper springs from the desire to observe and acknowledge the pain and suffering felt by our Aboriginal forebears in their resistance to white domination and to recognise their important contribution to our lives today. These people were brave enough to stand up and speak out in a time when it was not socially acceptable or safe to do so. Aboriginal Australians must draw strength and capitalise on their predecessor's achievements until justice and equality prevail for all Aboriginal Australians.

Certainly the story of my grandfather and the AAPA is one of triumph and courage. From the ashes of what many believed had perished have risen the buds of an Aboriginal movement that continues to this day.

There are still many unanswered questions and some mysteries surrounding both Fred Maynard and the AAPA. What of his young life and family background? There are accounts of him as a young man having travelled widely in a variety of jobs, working as a timber-getter on the north coast, a drover, a gold prospector with his own horse team in the Kimberleys and Flinders Ranges, a photographer and nurseryman with his own shop in Sydney.⁶⁰ There are also long periods when knowledge of his whereabouts and actions is obscure or missing. Will conclusive evidence come to light to resolve the question of the demise of the AAPA? Finally, what measure of hardship did he endure or

⁵⁸. Horner 1994, p.26.

⁵⁹. Maynard (1996) interviews with Shirly Maynard, Mary Kondek, David Maynard and Mervyn Maynard.

⁶⁰. Maynard (1996) interviews with Shirly Maynard, Mary Kondek, David Maynard and Mervyn Maynard.

witness that inspired him to rise up and speak out so strongly and eloquently against the atrocities leveled at Aboriginal people? I sincerely hope to resolve many of these issues with further research.

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The role of the Catholic missionaries at Beagle Bay in the removal of Aboriginal children from their families in the Kimberley region from the 1890s

Christine Choo

Preface

This paper is an edited version of the submission which I made to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families. In particular it addressed Term of Reference (a): 'Trace the past laws, practices and policies which resulted in the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families by compulsion, duress or unique influence, and the effects of those laws, practices and policies'. I drew on the research I had undertaken for a doctoral thesis: 'Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900-1950', University of Western Australia.

In addition to this written submission I made a verbal submission at the HREOC hearing in Broome among the descendants of the children who had originally been removed to Beagle Bay Mission. My submission and the contents of my PhD thesis were made available to the Broome Aboriginal community as a contribution to their own preparation the Inquiry. This was a practical way in which the historical research could be used by the Broome community for their own purposes.

Introduction

From the turn of the century, soon after the establishment of the Aborigines Affairs Department in Western Australia in 1896, a symbiotic relationship developed between the Church and the State, in particular the Catholic missionaries who ran the mission at Beagle Bay and the Aborigines Department. This enabled Church and State to collude in the development of policies and practices which instituted and encouraged the removal of Aboriginal children from their families in Western Australia.

From as early as 1840 John Smithies of the Wesleyan Church had begun his ministry to the Aborigines through works of charity and the creation of a school for Aboriginal children.¹ The Catholics also engaged in similar works through the initiatives of the Benedictine missionaries Salvado and Torres, who established the mission to

Aborigines at New Norcia about 128 kilometres north east of Perth in 1846.² However, it was the missionaries at Beagle Bay, in the north-west of the State who persistently pressed government authorities to formalise the State's power to remove 'part Aboriginal' children from their Aboriginal families.

The relationship between Church and State benefited both through the development of policies and practices in Aboriginal affairs. In the most minimalist analysis it becomes apparent that by this arrangement the missions gained control of Aborigines, particularly the children, whom they could evangelise and draw into their flock, while the State saved funds in the long run by subsidising the Church missions who took in and cared for Aboriginal children and families. However, the situation was much more complex. The State depended on the Church's support and backing for the moral justification for the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The Trappist and Pallottine missionaries of Beagle Bay were instrumental in leading the government towards instituting policies for the removal of 'half-caste' and 'part Aboriginal' children from their families and transferring them to missions and other institutions. In Western Australia the *Aborigines Act 1905* formalised this arrangement and enabled the Aborigines Department to act with impunity. Throughout the period, from the last decades of the nineteenth century to recent times, both Church and State maintained a tenuous and sometimes antagonistic relationship, each party remaining suspicious of the other yet needing to work together in 'handling' Aboriginal affairs. Contrary to the commonly held view that the Missions acted in response to government policy on the separation of Aboriginal children from their families in Western Australia, the State could not have legislated for the removal of children in the *Aborigines Act 1905* and subsequent legislation without the encouragement and compliance of Church agencies.

Ostensibly the children were removed 'for their own good' and to rescue 'half white' children from their 'savage' backgrounds, to give them an education and to prepare them to enter the workforce. However, in reality, Aboriginal children who were removed from their families were stripped of their cultural heritage and their identity as Aborigines belonging to particular families or *country*. They were given limited formal education and were trained to become the servants of middle class European families, station hands and pastoral workers, labourers engaged in menial work for which employers could not find workers. The missions were dependent on Aboriginal labour to maintain their institutions. The policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families served to provide a powerful means to control a cheap source of labour. For the Church it was a tool of evangelisation.

The Mission at Beagle Bay

Beagle Bay mission was established in 1890 by French Trappist monks with the encouragement of Bishop Gibney, the Catholic Bishop of Western Australia. For ten years the Trappists laboured to establish their community and mission on the Dampierland Archipelago in this remote region of north-western Western Australia, 120 kilometres north of Broome. The Trappists, a contemplative order, were gentle in their approach to the local Aboriginal tribes. Attempting to attract to their mission as many as possible of

1. McNair and Rumley 1981.

2. Stormon 1977.

the tribal people of the region, they drew to the attention of the authorities what they considered to be the devastating impact of the pearling industry on the local Aboriginal tribes, and particularly on the women. The increasing concern about the sexual abuse of Aboriginal women by the masters and crews of pearling vessels expressed by the missionaries, concerned individuals and the Aboriginal administration authorities in Perth contributed to the formulation of policy on the control of women in the Aborigines Act 1905.³

The missionaries in Beagle Bay and Broome were vocal in their condemnation of the evils of contact between Aboriginal women and Asians, particularly the Malays. As early as 1892 the Trappist monks were aware of the practice whereby women were given to pearlers and their crew for sex in exchange for tobacco, flour and other provisions. They believed that the relationships with Malays, Manilamen,⁴ Japanese, Chinese and Indian pearlers were a real source of corruption. Soon after the Trappists arrived in Beagle Bay, Father Alphonse Tachon had asked the women to give up those practices but such a proposition 'caused a general outcry especially among the women'. Father Alphonse had been told that had a native made such a proposition he would have been killed, indicating that the sexual relations between the women and lugger crews had by then been established and were valued by the women of the Beagle Bay area.⁵ The monks found that, in their attempts to evangelise the Beagle Bay people, they could not reach the women and that the women would remain outside the chapel during services.⁶

Lugger crews, too, came to expect that the services of Aboriginal women and girls would be freely available to them and on occasions were prepared to use force to gain access to them. On 31 January 1899 C.J. Daly, an Australian born missionary who had been appointed Native Protector at Beagle Bay, took a statement from Felix Nordintarra, a NjulNjul⁷ leader of the Beagle Bay area converted to Christianity,⁸ who lodged a complaint about a Malay named Ah Mat. Ah Mat had approached Felix's young daughter for sexual intercourse at Alligator Creek and when he was refused, he brought Felix a bottle of gin and a bag of flour as enticement. Again Felix refused to hand over his child but he did so when Ah Mat threatened him with a revolver.⁹ At Alligator Creek, fifteen miles from the mission, there was a pearling station of about forty to fifty luggers, each lugger having six crew comprising chiefly Malays, Manilas and Japanese. Daly noted that it 'would be good if the natives could be protected from fully mixing with these coloured people and likewise the coloured people from mixing with them'.¹⁰

3. Choo 1995.

4. *Manilamen* was the common name used to refer to Filipinos.

5. Father Alphonse, Beagle Bay to his Aunt in France, 20 May 1891, collected and translated by Sister Brigida Nailon and included in Brigida Nailon c1987. See also Bishop Gibney, Diary, *Sunday Times*, 4 December 1927.

6. Abbot Ambrose of Perth to Abbot of Sept Fons, France, 4 August 1892 included in Nailon c1987.

7. NjulNjul was the predominant language group of the Dampierland Peninsula around the Beagle Bay area.

8. Nailon and Huegel 1990: especially pp. xii, 1.

9. Public Records of Western Australia (SROWA), Aborigines Department, Acc 255 52/99: *Beagle Bay Trappist Mission*, File Note, Information from Aboriginal Felix Nordintarra taken by C.J. Daly, Native Protector, Beagle Bay, Native Affairs, 31 January 1899.

The procurement of Felix's daughter by Ah Mat was reported to the police at Broome. Ah Mat was arrested and brought to trial for supplying Aborigines with intoxicating liquor; no mention was made of sexual intercourse with the child.¹¹ Supplying Aborigines with liquor was one offence for which it was possible to collect hard evidence which could lead to prosecution while sexual intercourse between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men was more difficult to prove and depended on the admissions of the concerned parties.

Interestingly, the missionaries tended to favour the Manilamen, many of whom were Catholics from the Philippines, above other Asians like Malays, Chinese or Japanese. At the turn of the century, Thomas Puertollano, a Manilaman who had come to Broome as a diver, married a 'half-caste' girl from the mission and settled down at Disaster Bay where he planted a thriving garden the produce of which he sold to passing luggers.¹² Thomas and his family became staunch supporters of the mission and were themselves supported by the mission. Father Nicholas Emo had taken on a special ministry to the Spanish-speaking Filipinos or Manilamen who worked on the pearling luggers and who visited the ports along the north-west coast, including the centres of Derby and Broome.¹³ A number of Manilamen were married to 'mission girls' under Catholic rites of marriage and their families had strong links with the missionaries. Although the Travelling Inspector G.S. Olivey strongly disapproved of the unions he noted that these Church-sanctioned marriages between Asians and Aboriginal women appeared to be happy.¹⁴

In 1901 the German Pallottines took over Beagle Bay Mission after the departure of the French Trappist order.¹⁵ The Pallottines were tough and practical men who belonged to a religious order with an apostolic focus, different in temperament and approach from the contemplative Trappists.¹⁶ The Pallottine priests and brothers included tradesmen and workers who could turn their hand to any form of labour. They were responsible for rebuilding the mission and establishing a clear plan for the evangelisation of the Aborigines of the Dampierland Peninsular. The Pallottines acknowledged that the Catholic Church's mission to the Australian Aborigines was a

10. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 52/99, Letter, C.J. Daly, Native Protector, Beagle Bay to H.C. Prinsep, Perth, 13 March 1899. Daly's suggestion that segregation be introduced was implemented in Sections 36, 39, 40-43 of the Aborigines Act, 1905.

11. Under *The Wines Beer and Spirits Sale Act 1880* (44 Vic. No 9) it was an offence to supply or sell spirituous or fermented liquor to Aborigines except in lieu of wages. Amended as *The Wines, Beer and Spirits Sale Act 1880 Amendment Act 1886* (50 Vic. No 26)

12. Durack 1969, pp. 78-79, 201-203.

13. Father Nicholas Emo was a Spaniard who had arrived in Beagle Bay in 1895 to join his brother Trappists. He remained in Broome after the Trappists left Beagle Bay.

14. Report on Broome of G. S. Olivey, Travelling Inspector, Annual Report of the Aborigines Department (ARAD) 1901; ARAD 1903.

15. The Pallottines belonged to a Catholic religious order of the Pious Society of Missions (later renamed the Society of the Catholic Apostolate) established by Vincent Pallotti in Italy in 1835. It was a relatively young missionary order when its members arrived in the Kimberley. The German Pallottines came from the mother house at Limberg.

16. The work of apostolic religious orders is essentially focussed on works of the Catholic church 'in the world', for example education, health and welfare activities, while the contemplative religious orders focus on seclusion 'from the world' and prayer in support of the work of the Church in the world.

particularly difficult one, and attributed this difficulty not to the Aborigines' lack of intelligence but to their nomadic nature and lifestyle and their preference to remain within their own territory. When the Pallottines came to Beagle Bay in 1901, their recommended method of evangelisation was to work with the young members of the community. The Pallottine approach was articulated by Father Walter in his 1928 account of his time at Beagle Bay:

For Aborigines, correct mission method is to let them get used to a settled lifestyle and regular work without using force or restricting their freedom. Only love and a friendly approach can lead to success, not harshness or force. As soon as possible, children can be removed from the adult camp and the nomadic ways of their parents, and be housed in dormitories on mission premises to be educated at school and in trades

...It is not the duty of a Missionary to repress a child's Aboriginal nature and for this reason the children are given as much freedom as possible to follow their customs and practices. From time to time all children are allowed to attend ordinary corrobories (under supervision) and to hold their own corrobories. Outings are utilised to make them sufficiently familiar with bush craft to survive, and one competes with another to catch snakes, lizards, kangaroos and other game, and to study animal trails.¹⁷

The Pallottine approach to evangelisation—to settle the people and to remove the children—was the one they had adopted at Beagle Bay. Subsequently, through the active pursuance of this policy by the Pallottine missionaries in Western Australia, this approach influenced the development of the State's Aboriginal affairs policy and practice throughout the period 1900–1950.

In 1901, although Beagle Bay Mission was transferred from French Trappists to German Pallottines, little changed for the Aboriginal people who lived there. Luggers continued to anchor in the creeks and bays along the coast of the Dampierland Peninsula and lugger crews continued to have contact with the local people. The Pallottines complained of 'the evil influences of the Asiatics' and asked for a constable to be stationed at Beagle Bay during the lay-up.¹⁸ By 1903, the police had begun to make regular patrols along the coast to monitor the contact between Asian men and Aboriginal women as a result of continual agitation from the mission and those responsible for other coastal centres like La Grange. On one such patrol near Beagle Bay in January 1904, Police Constable F.B. Cunningham reported the sighting of luggers off shore at various locations accessible to Aboriginal camps where flour, rice, tobacco and other provisions were found when the camps were searched. A couple of mission women had admitted staying on a lugger for two days and a night. Aboriginal groups found camping close to where luggers were moored were ordered to move on. The biggest concern was the fact that the Asians were supplying the Aborigines with liquor, and for this they were arrested, brought before the courts and found guilty.¹⁹

The missionaries were not alone in their opposition to social and sexual intercourse between Asians and Aborigines. Their protests were supported by people in

17. Walter 1982, p.124.

18. ARAD 1902, 1903.

19. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 153/04: *Broome, Beagle Bay, Cygnet Bay*.

authority in the Kimberley and those who acted as agents for the Chief Protector of Aborigines, for example the police, magistrates, protectors of Aborigines and travelling inspectors. Strong opposition was voiced by F.W. Tuckett, the Postmaster at La Grange Bay, who in June 1900 wrote a confidential letter to H.C. Prinsep, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Perth, expressing his moral outrage at the social and sexual intercourse between Aborigines and Asians.²⁰

The missionaries used every opportunity to express their concern about what they considered to be the abuse of Aboriginal women by Asian lugger crew. In June 1904 Father Nicholas Emo, who was aware of the Western Australian government's appointment of Doctor Roth to inquire into 'the Condition of Natives', condemned the practice of procuring Aboriginal women 'for immoral purposes by the Asiatiques' as being more cruel than actual physical ill-treatment. He put forward the mission approach, which favoured the establishment of large reserves, where Aboriginal people could live under Government supervision, and the establishment of small local reserves outside the towns where Aboriginal people worked:

The aboriginals should be compelled to return to these reserves at nightfall, and Asiatics and whites, other than officials, excluded. Steps should also be taken to enforce the placing under proper control and the educating of those unfortunate half-caste and black children who are to be seen in Broome streets, acquiring all the worst vices of Asiatics and blacks and fast qualifying for 'loafers' and a burden on the State.²¹

These and other suggestions put forward by the missionaries were seriously considered and many, like the declaration of 'prohibited areas' and the transfer of 'part-Aboriginal' children to educational institutions, were later implemented.

The missionaries were influential in suggesting policy directions to the government authorities. In July 1904, in response to Father Emo's letter and representation from Father Walter of Beagle Bay, Doctor Blick, the Acting Resident Magistrate of Broome, gave the missionaries provisional approval, subject to ratification by the Chief Protector of Aborigines, 'to collect and train both in elementary and technical education the fatherless half-castes and other aboriginal children who were destitute in Broome'.²² This marked the beginning of the policy of actively seeking out and removing Aboriginal children of mixed parentage from their Aboriginal environments in the Kimberley and placing them in missions and other government institutions established to provide for their education and training. The recommendations of the Roth Report supported this approach, which was formalised in the *Aborigines Act 1905*.

20. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 103/100: F.W. Tuckett, *La Grange Bay, List of Aborigines, their Conditions etc.* Confidential Letter, F.W. Tuckett, La Grange Bay to H.C. Prinsep, Chief Protector of Aborigines (CPA), Perth, 16 June 1900.

21. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 153/04, Letter, Father Nicholas Emo, Broome to Doctor Blick, Acting Resident Magistrate (RM) Broome, Native Affairs, 30 June 1904. According to Father Emo there were 35 'half-castes' of both sexes and both Christian and non-Christian living in Broome.

22. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 153/04, Letter, Dr G. Blick, Acting RM, Broome to CPA, Perth, 16 July 1904. Both Father Nicholas Emo and Father Walter gave evidence to the Roth Inquiry along these lines.

Development of government policy on the removal of children

Government policy on the removal of Aboriginal children with non-Aboriginal parentage to missions and government institutions changed from a laissez faire approach of the nineteenth century to the development of strong legislation in the *Aborigines Act 1905* and subsequent even harsher legislation, *Aborigines Act Amendment Act 1936* (also referred to as the '*Native Administration Act 1936*'). The *Aborigines Act 1905* formalised many of the administrative policies and procedures for the stricter control of the lives of Aborigines which the missionaries and government authorities had been suggesting for years. It was the moral outrage of the missionaries, 'upstanding' community members and government instrumentalities in the Kimberley which contributed to the introduction of the harsh legislation.

Prior to the *Aborigines Act 1905*, although European authorities favoured the removal of children of mixed parentage from their bush environments, they did not have the legal authority to force parents to give up their children.²³ A person deemed to be Aboriginal and subject to the *Aborigines Act 1905* was one who was an Aboriginal inhabitant of Australia, a 'half-caste' who was the *de jure* or *de facto* spouse of an Aboriginal person, a 'half-caste' who habitually associated with Aborigines or a 'half-caste' child under the age of sixteen years old (Clause 6). The Chief Protector was made the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and 'half-caste' child under the age of sixteen (Clause 8) and thereby acquired the authority to deal with Aboriginal children in whatever manner he saw fit. One immediate and direct result of the exercise of this authority was the removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children with non-Aboriginal parentage.

Most of the 'half-caste' children who were transferred to Beagle Bay prior to 1907 had been placed there with the permission of their parents, usually their European fathers, who took some responsibility for the children's care and education. As the European population in Western Australia grew, the increasing numbers of children of mixed racial background became an embarrassment to State government authorities and politicians. As early as 1902 Henry Prinsep, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, had sent a circular letter to all Protectors and Government Residents in Western Australia requesting information about the numbers of 'half-caste children in [their] district who could be induced to enter one of the institutions now existing within the State for their care and education'.²⁴ The only recorded response from the Kimberley, from Wyndham, indicated that there were two such children whose mothers would not part with them. It was virtually impossible to make an accurate assessment of the mixed-race population in the Kimberley largely due to the vast distances in the region and non-disclosure.

23. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 122/02: *Replies to Circular Letter re. Half-caste Children in WA Who Could be Induced to Enter Missions*, Circular Letter 6/146, H. Prinsep, CPA to all Protectors and Government Residents in WA, February 1902. This circular requested information on any half-caste children in their districts who could be induced to enter one of the existing institutions for their care and education. The replies to this circular from all parts of the state indicated that where such children had been located, almost all the mothers could not be induced to part with their children, and where the parent had agreed, the arrangements for the children's removal were undertaken hastily in case the mother changed her mind.

24. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 122/02, Circular Letter 6/146, Henry Prinsep, CPA to all Protectors and Government Residents in Western Australia, February 1902.

As a result of this inquiry Prinsep decided to wait for another year or two when he would be able 'to interfere with more legal authority'.²⁵

The government's decision to strictly enforce the *Aborigines Act 1905* after its introduction resulted in the big influx of the first generation of 'half-caste' children who were brought to Beagle Bay mission from the Kimberley area in 1907. Police and protectors were instructed to collect all children of mixed ancestry for placement in missions and government institutions. Many of these children were accompanied by their mothers who settled in 'the Colony', that is, the Aboriginal community outside the mission compound. The Pallottine brothers were in charge of the boys while the St John of God sisters who had arrived at Beagle Bay in 1906 cared for the girls.

The effect of the implementation of the *Aborigines Act 1905* in the Kimberley was a fourfold increase in the number of children received at Beagle Bay Mission as the following tables show. There was a dramatic increase in 1909, when the government authorities, on the instruction of the Chief Protector, mounted a special campaign to pick up all part-Aboriginal children in the Kimberley. Table 1 indicates the dramatic increase in the number of new children who were sent to Beagle Bay Mission between 1895 and 1909. Table 2 shows the number of children cared for by the missionaries at Beagle Bay Mission between 1910 and 1936. The figures in Table 2 are incomplete because the Annual Reports for those years did not provide the information necessary to compile the table.

Beagle Bay Mission's response to government initiatives to remove children

Following the *Aborigines Act 1905* the Beagle Bay missionaries were willing to take as many children as could be transferred to the mission. Among the children and young people who were removed to the mission were those who were considered to be in moral danger. The missionaries wished to rescue the young people, especially the girls, from sexual interference by men. In 1906 Father Walter pressed the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Prinsep, to send the 'neglected native children in the Nor-West' to the mission 'at once' and at the same time requested government assistance for the maintenance of the children on the mission, making an attractive offer to the Chief Protector:

If the Government will assist me for a few years [at 1shilling per day per child] in the maintenance of 30 [of the fifty] of these children, I will gladly take, without question of remuneration, as many more as it will send me from the Nor-West. ... many full blood and half-caste children (your wards, Sir, according to Section 8 of the *Aborigines Act*) may be found roaming about Broome and other North-Western towns, beginning the worst and most unhappy lives. If the police sent me only the most obvious cases, the number of children on the mission would be about 200.²⁶

Prinsep, in considering this offer, recognised its value to the department although he noted that Father Walter probably made the offer with a view to 'increasing the numbers of his religious denomination'. The mission's offer would relieve the State of the burden of the responsibility for the care and education of Aboriginal and part-Aborig-

²⁵ SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 122/02, Comment on Note Number 1/285, Henry Prinsep.

²⁶ SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 24/06, Letter, Father G. Walter, Superior Beagle Bay Mission to CPA, Perth, 12 October 1906.

Table 1 Children at Beagle Bay Mission, 1895–1909

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1895	3	1900	1	1905	9
1896	2	1901	1	1906	7
1897	1	1902	3	1907	16
1898	0	1903	3	1908	16
1899	2	1904	12	1909	36

Total number of children admitted to Beagle Bay mission by 1909 = 111

Note that these figures represent the number of children who were admitted to the mission's care.

Source: SROWA, Aborigines and Fisheries, AN 1/3 Acc 652 1436/09: Beagle Bay Mission—Number of Children Receiving Education

inal children while the State would be seen to be doing something for these children by providing a subsidy to the mission for their care. Beagle Bay Mission received a subsidy of £500 for the year, which was a little less than the amount suggested by Father Walter.²⁷

In response to Father Walter's appeal that children be sent to the mission Prinsep instructed the Protectors, Police and Travelling Inspectors to collect Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal children from around the Kimberley and to send them to Beagle Bay Mission. He acknowledged that the parents did not want to part with their children and that they could not be forced 'unless it is proved that the surroundings are likely to bring the children to lead vicious lives'.²⁸ The missionaries, delighted with this response, claimed that by then (1907) every child over the age of seven in the mission area was in their care and they hoped that the custom of giving children into the care of the missionaries would be extended to the whole Dampierland Peninsular. As the care of the 'half-caste' children was of particular concern to them, the missionaries hoped to have control of all such children in the Kimberley.²⁹

The increased responsibility of the mission in providing education and training for Aboriginal children with mixed race backgrounds called for the presence of female missionaries. Up to this time there had been no female missionaries in the Kimberley. Nine sisters of St John of God arrived from Ireland via Kalgoorlie and Subiaco to Broome and Beagle Bay on 6 June 1906 'to take charge of the native children there'.³⁰

27. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 653 11/15: *Grants to Missions*, Memo 696/06, H. Prinsep, CPA to Under Secretary Re. Subsidies to Missions, November 1906.

28. ARAD 1907.

29. Report of the Beagle Bay Mission to CPA, ARAD 1907.

30. SROWA, Aborigines, Acc 255 24/06, Letter, Father J. Bischofs, Protector of Aborigines, Beagle Bay Mission to CPA, Perth, 8 May 1907.

Table 2 Children at Beagle Bay Mission,¹ 1909–1936

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1920	105	1920	na ³	1930	107
1911	94	1921	80	1931	110
1912	131	1922	na	1932	117
1913	147	1923	70	1933	na ³
1914	143	1924	72	1934	na ³
1915	130 ²	1925	80	1935	na ³
1916	132 ²	1926	87	1936	124
1917	na ³	1927	83		
1918	na ³	1928	90		
1919	na ³	1929	91		

(1) These figures are taken from the Annual Reports of Beagle Bay mission.

(2) = Children at school

(3) na = Not available: the figures were unavailable in the Annual Reports. The language of the Annual Reports is sometimes ambiguous and it is difficult to determine whether the figures refer to total numbers of children at the mission or to children who were being educated at the Mission. These figures should be taken as an indicator of the trends in the population of children at Beagle Bay. About 20% were supported by the state, the rest were supported entirely by the mission or with minimal financial assistance from their fathers.

Source: Annual Reports of the Aborigines Department, 1910–1936

The presence of the St John of God sisters at Beagle Bay enabled the mission to expand its intake of Aboriginal children.

The number of children at the mission increased from around 60 in 1907³¹ to 94 in 1909, a situation which prompted the Pallottines to request a capitation grant from the government.³² Not only did the Pallottines press the government authorities to send more 'half-caste' children to the mission, but the missionaries also were proud to announce that in 1907 they had responsibility for the care of every child over seven years of age in the Dampierland Peninsular.³³ They acknowledged that, since the sisters had arrived, the mission had been able to give the Aboriginal children in their charge an education equivalent to that offered to European children in the Catholic primary schools in Perth.³⁴

31. ARAD 1907.

32. SROWA, Aborigines and Fisheries Department, Acc 652 1003/09: *Beagle Bay Mission—Copy of Report on Mission since 1900*.

33. ARAD 1907: 12.

34. ARAD 1907: 12.

Support from James Isdell, Protector of Aborigines in the Kimberley

The removal of Aboriginal and 'caste' children from their families had the full support of the Police as well as that of the Travelling Inspector and Protector of Aborigines in the Kimberley, James Isdell, who was convinced that such a move was absolutely necessary for the future welfare of the children. His statement in his annual report for 1909 indicates his attitude towards the Aboriginal mothers:

The half-caste is intellectually above the aborigine, and it is the duty of the State that they be given a chance to lead a better life than their mothers. I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.³⁵

James Isdell, who visited Beagle Bay Mission in 1908, stated in his report on the visit that he was satisfied that the Mission was doing 'a great and good work to these waifs and strays from the native camps' and that they were 'being well taught and equipped with serviceable and useful knowledge for their future life'. He concluded his report by stating that the 'rescuing of waifs and strays from the bad contaminating influence of natives' camps and training them at this Mission is well worthy of deep consideration by the Government and the support of the general public'.³⁶ Isdell's support for the mission was significant for the mission's credibility with the government authorities in Perth, whom the missionaries regularly approached for funding, and who later adopted the missionaries' plan for the widespread removal of Aboriginal ('half-caste' and 'quarter caste') children from their families for placement at the mission. It was Isdell who persistently urged the Chief Protector of Aboriginal Affairs and his Department to take a more active role in the removal of 'half-caste' children from their Aboriginal families. He did this by bombarding the Chief Protector with submissions, reports and letters on the topic, taking an active part in identifying and locating the 'half-caste' and 'mixed blood' children in the Kimberley and personally making arrangements for their removal. The mission's willingness to care for the children, and the presence of the St John of God sisters, facilitated the pursuance of the policy of removal. In November 1908 Protector James Isdell wrote from GoGo Station in the East Kimberley to the Chief Protector of Aborigines,

I would again draw your attention to the necessity of steps being taken to have removed to the Mission Station Beagle Bay the many half-castes on Fitzroy River amongst them are girls who will assuredly go to the bad within the next twelve months, and we will have a repetition of the Noonkenbah Station cases where a half-caste girl has already two children by white fathers. I consider it a great scandal to allow any of them to remain with the natives. Station managers have asked to have them removed. A few of these girls will simply be prostitutes if allowed to remain another twelve months. A proper outfit and system should be adopted so as to collect them all, as previously recommended by me.³⁷

35. ARAD 1909.

36. ARAD 1908: 20. The full text of Isdell's report on the Beagle Bay Mission included in ARAD 1908 (pp 19-22) provides a good description of the Mission from the perspective of an observer who was not a missionary or associated with the missionaries.

37. SROWA, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 652 106/09: *Half-castes East and West Kimberley*, Letter James Isdell, GoGo Station to CPA, Perth, 13 November 1908.

The Chief Protector of Aborigines responded to this letter by giving Isdell the authority to make all necessary arrangements to remove all 'half-castes' under sixteen years of age to the Mission.³⁸

Following instruction from the Chief Protector of Aborigines to collect all the 'half-castes' in the Fitzroy Crossing area, Isdell undertook this sorry task in October 1909. On this trip Isdell reported that he had 'pretty well cleaned the Fitzroy District' of 'half-castes', leaving only nine adults, three babies and two ten year olds who could not be reached because they had gone away into the bush. During the 33-day journey in extremely hot and difficult conditions, when the temperature reached 110°F in the shade, Isdell walked on foot while the children of various ages whom he had collected took turns to travel in a mule cart. Two children had to be sent forward to Derby because they became very ill. A number of children attempted to escape into the bush and a couple succeeded in breaking away from the group. When he reached Derby, Isdell delivered 19 children to the police for transfer to the mission, convinced that 'looking after a wild lot of half-caste kids like young kangaroos [was] a strenuous undertaking'.³⁹ The children were later sent from Derby to Broome. A small group of youths were sent to Drysdale River mission in the far north of the Kimberley, where Benedictine monks had established a mission in 1907. These young boys assisted the Benedictines in their work on the new mission.⁴⁰

At Beagle Bay life was regulated and institutionalised. All children of school age were cared for in the confines of the dormitory and the mission compound. They were allowed to visit their families in the Colony for a picnic or an outing only once a month, although they could see them across a fence every day. The children were not allowed to speak their own languages or practise their traditions and customs. They were locked in the dormitory at night. Because most of the children who had been transferred to Beagle Bay in these early years had European fathers, the missionaries were determined to educate and train the children in European ways. By providing these 'half-caste' children with training the missionaries intended to 'rescue' them from their 'native ways'.

Role of the St John of God Sisters and the provision of educational opportunities for Aboriginal children in the Kimberley

In June 1906, nine Sisters of St John of God came to Beagle Bay Mission.⁴¹ The presence of the sisters, whose main responsibility was to care for the Aboriginal children who were being sent to Beagle Bay, made an enormous difference to the activities of the mission. In his letter informing the State Treasurer of their arrival in Beagle Bay the Bishop of Perth, Bishop Gibney pressed for the removal to the mission of 'several hundred half-caste children in the Kimberley district who [could] be made useful citizens'.⁴²

38. SROWA, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 652 106/09, File Note, C.F. Gale, CPA, 15 January 1909, instructing that wire be sent to James Isdell, Halls Creek, "You have authority to make all necessary arrangements to collect all half-caste girls and boys and transport them to Beagle Bay Mission via Broome by Bullarra".

39. ARAD 1910.

40. SROWA, Aborigines and Fisheries, Acc 652 106/09.

41. ARAD 1907; Mechtild 1961, pp. 6-7; Durack 1969, chapters 17 and 18; Zucker 1994, chapter 7.

The arrival of the St John of God sisters at Beagle Bay marked a watershed in the operation of the mission, particularly in the mission's ability to care for women and children. The presence of the sisters, with their feminine and maternal influence, released the Pallottine brothers from household chores and freed them for 'men's work', that is planting, building and cattle work on other parts of the mission. The sisters also had a settling effect on the mission. Reflecting on the sisters' contribution, Father Walter wrote in 1928:

Their active contribution and prayerful lives helped mould the Mission. With maternal care they devoted themselves to the children and nursed the old and the sick. The nuns also took charge of the school which now had 90 boys and girls who often tested their patience. Untamed children, used to the freedom of the bush, took time to settle into Mission routine.⁴³

From the time the sisters took over the school at Beagle Bay in 1906 through to the 1950s, the children were given as good an education as the sisters were able to provide. It was equivalent to primary-level education in the State schools. As the aim of the missionaries was to prepare the young people for the workforce, a functional education at primary school level was thought to be sufficient for both girls and boys. This was the standard education available to all children (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in the Kimberley. Parents who wanted their children to further their studies beyond primary school level sent their children to boarding schools in the south. Such an option was practically and financially unavailable to Aboriginal children. The racist social environment in Australia, in which Aborigines were actively discriminated against and treated as uneducable outcasts, meant that Aboriginal children were effectively excluded from education under the State school system. Their education was confined to that provided in missions and government institutions. Beagle Bay mission, therefore, did provide well for the children in their care by giving them the best education they could offer.⁴⁴

The missionaries' plan was to provide education and training to Aboriginal young people who showed promise so that they could then return to their communities to work with their own people. This was clearly a developmental approach to evangelisation which was in line with the Pallottines' original focus in their work in the Kimberley. Bishop Raible had written to Archbishop Prendiville in December 1940:

What I have in mind in particular is social and parochial work in connection with catholic action. The growing half-caste population calls for workers that [they] respect from their own ranks and the sooner we take the necessary steps to secure a thorough training of these workers, the better it is.⁴⁵

It was only in the late 1940s and the 50s that young Aboriginal people who were considered to have the potential for further post primary education were sent to Catholic

42. Roman Catholic Archives of the Archdiocese of Perth (RCAAP) C21 1/4, Bishop of Perth to the Hon. Colonial Treasurer, 22 May 1907.

43. Walter 1982, p. 168.

44. Haebich 1988, pp. 82, 85, 260–61. Later, the Pallottines set up boarding facilities in Rossmoyne for this purpose in 1955. Until the 1970's when the first senior high school was built in the Kimberley, all parents who wanted their children to receive secondary school education had to send them to boarding school in Perth or elsewhere. This option was not available to poor families and Aborigines.

45. Bishop O. Raible to Archbishop Prendiville, 5 December 1940 in Nailon c1987.

institutions in the south-west. The Pallottines established a hostel for Aborigines in Rossmoyne in 1955. Young people whom the missionaries considered had special talent or potential were selected for transfer, their parents' permission was sought and they were sent south to board at Rossmoyne while attending Catholic secondary schools or undertaking apprenticeships.

Impacts of the removal of Kimberley Aboriginal children from their families

The removal of children from their families had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, where it was acknowledged that 'half-caste' children included children whose fathers were Asians and men who were other than Aboriginal. The policy concerning the removal of children was used to 'rescue' Aboriginal children with mixed-race backgrounds from their 'primitive' bush environments and immorality and to train them as a cheap labour force for Europeans. The girls were trained as house servants and the boys as tradesmen and station hands.⁴⁶

One of the most significant effects of the transfer of children to the dormitories which occurred between 1900 and the 1950s was the loss of contact with the older members of their families and communities, and consequently the erosion of their knowledge of traditional life. Generations of Aboriginal women who lived on Beagle Bay mission have spoken about their sense of loss of culture, and their attempts as children to maintain contact with the older people in order to obtain information about the old ways, which the missionaries frustrated. As children they were not allowed to talk about their parents or enquire about them; they were forbidden from speaking their own languages, among themselves or with the older people in the Colony; the parents who lived in the Colony were not allowed to visit or make unregulated contact with the children. However, the old people ('grannies'), parents and the boys and girls did make contact across the mission fence. They also had the opportunity to teach and learn a little of their indigenous languages and about their bush food when they went on outings and picnics with their relations. The women elders who had knowledge of the traditional ways would take these opportunities to teach the young girls about their culture. The girls would volunteer to run errands to the camp in order to see the elders in their bough sheds. The 'grannies' would save wild honey, cooked kangaroo or damper for the children.⁴⁷

Despite the prohibitions imposed on the maintenance of their indigenous culture, both the elders and younger people who lived on the mission attempted to maintain some remnants of their values and cultural practices. Women were active in this role. There were elders on the mission, women and men, who did hold knowledge of sacred songs, dances, designs and sacred objects and who continued to practice their own traditions including initiation ceremonies for selected men and boys. Although the children learned some of the dances and songs, their participation remained at the level of the uninitiated.⁴⁸ They were aware, however, of some of the taboos related to the traditional practices and were told not to approach certain locations in the bush which they later realised had been identified as sacred ground or places where sacred objects had

⁴⁶ See Haebich 1988 for the impact of the legislation in the South West of Western Australia.

⁴⁷ G. Ah Mat, interviewed by the author in Darwin, 26 June 1992.

⁴⁸ B. Hancock, interviewed by the author, Darwin, 26 June 1992.

been kept.⁴⁹ As they grew to adulthood, few mission children were initiated into the deeper aspects of their cultural practice. The children's mission upbringing instead initiated them into the mysteries of the Catholic faith and the European way of life. While a great deal of the local culture and languages have been lost through the mission policy of active prohibition, in the 1950s missionaries who were anthropologists themselves studied the languages and began to combine Aboriginal and European expressions of Christianity in Catholic ritual.⁵⁰

Concluding remarks

Between 1901 and World War II Beagle Bay mission steadily increased its operations and influence in the Kimberley, developing a symbiotic relationship with the Aboriginal Affairs Department as it offered a practical and relatively cheap option for the care of Aboriginal and 'half-caste' or 'mixed race' children in the Kimberley. The Department, in turn, provided the mission with young people whom the missionaries hoped would become the foundation members of the Aboriginal Christian community in the Kimberley. By World War II the mission had established a community of Aborigines who were raised as Catholics, deeply entrenched in Catholic values and culture. The mission encouraged the young people whom they raised to marry other young Catholics within their community and to raise Catholic families. The missionaries' hope was that the Aboriginal Catholics, whom they cared for and carefully taught practical skills while providing them with a religious education, would eventually leave Beagle Bay Mission to evangelise their 'less civilised' brothers and sisters in communities throughout the Kimberley. In the process of this evangelisation, however, many of the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley who came under the influence of the Beagle Bay mission lost contact with their families and communities. Generations of others have been traumatised by loss of identity. Yet among many of the Aborigines who have been raised at Beagle Bay Mission there is an ambivalence in their attitude towards the missionaries and the Mission itself because for them it had become home.

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⁴⁹ McCarthy, G. Ah Mat & B. Hancock, interviewed by the author, Darwin, 26 June 1992; V. Kanagae, interviewed by the author, Broome, 9 July 1992; R. Bin Amat, interviewed by the author, Broome, 10 July 1992.

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'I hope you will be my frend': Tasmanian Aborigines in the Furneaux Group in the nineteenth century—population and land tenure

Irynej Skira

Abstract

This paper traces the history of settlement of the islands of the Furneaux Group in Bass Strait and the effects of government regulation on the long term settlements of Tasmanian Aboriginal people from the 1850s to the early 1900s. Throughout the nineteenth century the Aboriginal population grew slowly, eventually constituting approximately 40 percent of the total population of the Furneaux Group. From the 1860s outsiders used the existing land title system to obtain possession of the islands. Aborigines tried to establish tenure through the same system, but could not compete because they lacked capital, and were disadvantaged by isolation in their communication with government. Further, the islands' use for grazing excluded Aborigines who rarely had large herds of stock and were generally not agriculturalists. The majority of Aborigines were forced to settle on Cape Barren Island, where they built homes on a reserve set aside for them. European expansion of settlement on Flinders Island finally completed the disenfranchisement of Aboriginal people by making the Cape Barren Island enclave dependent on the government.

Introduction

In December 1869 Thomas Mansell, an Aboriginal, applied to lease a small island. He petitioned the Surveyor-General, 'I hope you will be my Frend...I am one of old hands Her, and haf Cast and have large family and no hum'.¹ Unfortunately, he could not raise £1 as down payment. Mansell's was one of the many attempts by Aboriginal people in the Furneaux Group to obtain valid leasehold or freehold and recognition of their long term occupation.

The main occupation began with the arrival of sealers in the islands. Soon after the settlement of the colony of New South Wales in 1788, the sealing grounds of Bass Strait were discovered. The sealers, who were of European descent, quickly reduced the seal population to the point that, by 1810, sealing was uneconomic and, by 1827, the animals

¹ Thomas Mansell to Surveyor-General, 8 December 1869, Archives Office Tasmania (AOT) Lands and Survey Department (LSD) 1/39/153.

had been virtually exterminated. Those sealers who stayed on, eked out a living by bartering seal and wallaby skins, muttonbirds, and other produce to passing ships for spirits and other items. Some of these men took Aboriginal women as 'wives' with whom they had the next generation of Aboriginal children.² By the second half of the nineteenth century, the sealers were so in name only. They were now a self-contained Aboriginal community with some European immigrants also copying their lifestyle.

In this paper, I trace the population growth of the Aboriginal people in the Furneaux Group and provide a history of their land holdings, their claims to that land and their relations with the Tasmanian government affecting their tenure.

The beginning of permanent settlement

The first permanent settlement in the Furneaux Group may have been as early as 1820. The journals of George Augustus Robinson, Aboriginal Protector, and official papers record the names of 49 sealers, most of whom operated at some time in Bass Strait.³ Settlements were established on Preservation, Woody, Tin Kettle, and Gun Carriage (Vansittart) Islands in the relatively sheltered waters of Franklin Sound (Figure 1). Gun Carriage Island was the largest, covering an area of 446 ha, and was large enough to accommodate several sealers and their families, while the others covered about 90 ha each. These islands were well wooded, with fresh water available from springs. They provided sheltered anchorages, garden land, small areas of native pastures for grazing animals, proximity to Flinders and Cape Barren Islands for game such as wallaby and waterfowl, proximity to the depleted seal colonies, and above all to muttonbird colonies for muttonbirding.⁴

Demographic change and land tenure to 1860

There are no reliable population figures for the Furneaux Group prior to 1840. In 1832 the two Quaker missionaries James Backhouse and George Walker met several sealers in Hobart, who told them that there were 16 men, 16 women and six children living on Gun Carriage Island. From our knowledge of the sealers described in Robinson's journals, we can assume that this represented most of the population at that time. During the 1840s several visitors saw similar numbers of children and groups of huts scattered around the islands. There were also Aboriginal children on other islands in western Bass Strait, but within a few years these families had left, making the Furneaux Group the only region in Tasmania with an expanding Aboriginal population.⁵

From these accounts and Surveyor-General Robert Power's report of his visit in 1848, it seems that the total population during the 1840s and early 1850s was probably not more than 50 to 60 people, including children. By 1857 the population was said to number about 90, which was probably an over-estimate compared to the reliable, lower figures we have before and after that year.⁶ Some of the people are known to have been

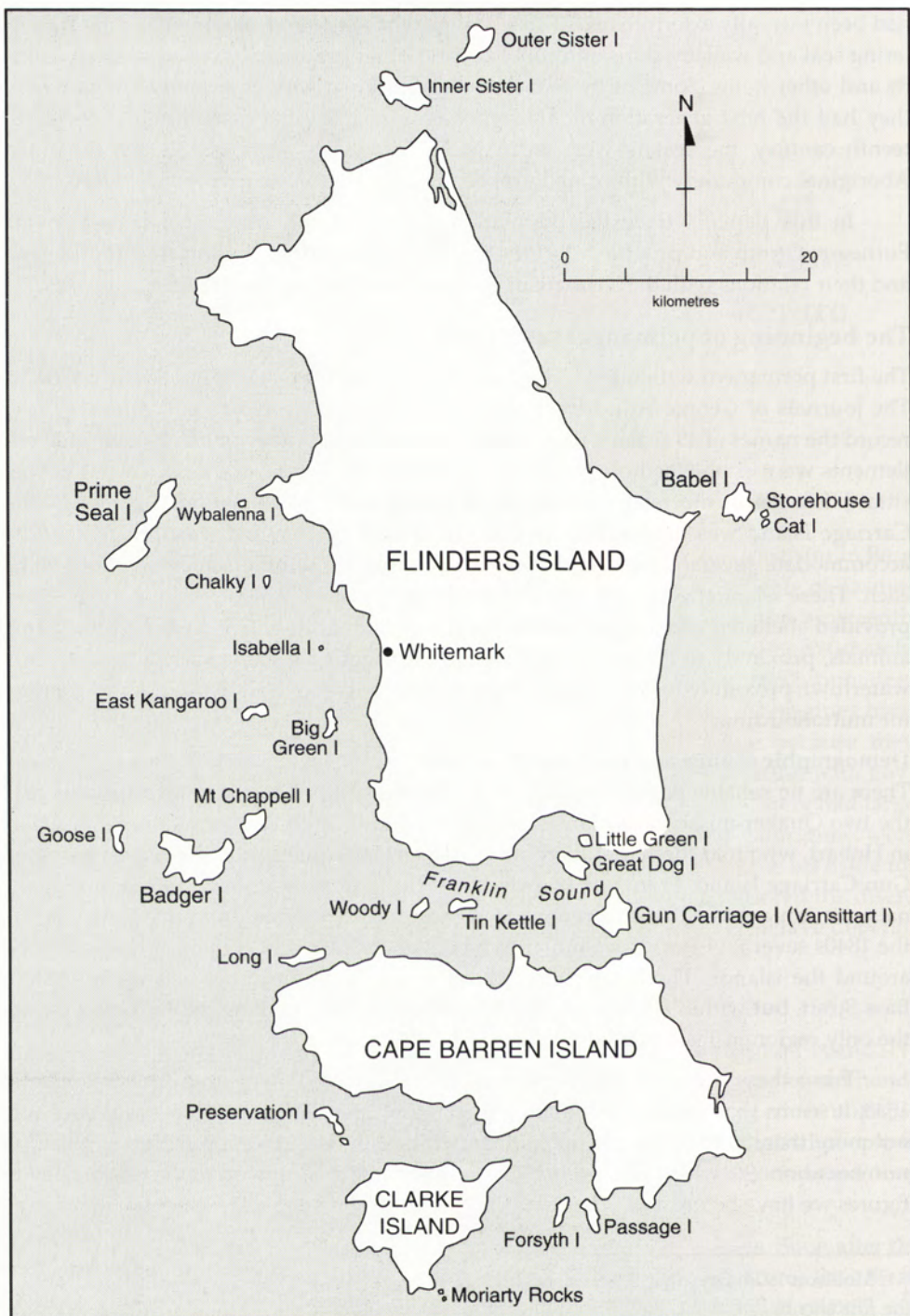
2. Mollison 1974; Drysdale 1991; Friend 1992, p. 127.

3. Plomley in Robinson 1966, 1987; Cumpston 1973; Ryan 1996.

4. Scott 1828; Murray-Smith 1973, p. 173; Edgecombe 1986, p. 97; Skira 1990, p. 77.

5. Backhouse & Tylor 1862, p. 38; Robinson 1966, 1987; Broadfoot 1845, pp. 187-189; Stokes 1846, p. 451; Pasco 1897, p. 142; Tindale 1953, p. 19; Robert Clark to George Washington Walker, 27 May 1846, Walker Papers W7/1, University of Tasmania Archives; Elwes 1854, p. 253.

6. Report of Surveyor-General Power on islands in Bass Strait, 1848, AOT Colonial Secretary Office (CSO) 24/66; Davis 1995, p. 281.



Map of the Furneaux Group, Tasmania

European immigrants, but the majority were sealers and their families who had been in the region for up to 30 years. Many sealers lived to a relatively advanced age, averaging 69 years. This can be compared with the mean life expectancy in Australia of 47 years for males for the period 1881-90, the period for which vital statistics are first available for Australia.⁷

Despite the small population in the Furneaux Group, in 1848 Colonial Secretary James Bicheno sent Power to place some control over the inhabitants by extracting rent to the value of their holdings. This was just one year after the Aboriginal settlement at Wybalenna had been closed and the lease for Flinders Island advertised.⁸ As the officials in Hobart did not know what to expect on the islands, Power's instructions were not specific, but he was enjoined to use his own judgement in each case, for the government knew that most of the occupiers were sealers and 'the like class of people'. However, they appear to have expected only a low income return because rent was to be charged 'so as to secure the Government from loss, and to affect a kind of registration and only demand what is likely to be obtained'.⁹ This was the first administrative inspection of the sealers domain since they invaded Bass Strait in 1798.

Power issued tickets of occupation for one year for a fee of 1/- per year to 16 sealers on Clarke, Woody, Gun Carriage, Cape Barren, and Tin Kettle Islands. Flinders Island was let to Malcolm Laing Smith from 1850 for ten years at £30 per year.¹⁰ Smith had once been a Commandant at Wybalenna and had previously lived on King Island in western Bass Strait for several years, so he was accustomed to rough living. Included in his lease were a bullock dray, water cart, and yokes from the Aboriginal settlement, and other items deemed essential for anyone wishing to rent the islands. Additional chattels were 18 sheep on Isabella Island and about 150 cattle, mostly running wild, on Flinders Island. He was also given the privilege of pasturing stock on Prime Seal and Big Green Islands, and several other smaller islands lying between them and Flinders Island.¹¹ These stock were originally attached to Wybalenna but there was no suggestion of returning them to the Aboriginal community on the islands.

During Power's visit Thomas Beedon, a sealer, applied to lease Badger Island, the first application known to be made by a member of the community. It was refused on the ground that the lighthouse staff on nearby Goose Island required access to firewood which was only available from Badger Island.¹² Beedon's application together with Power's report upon his trip led the government to consider reserving the islands for Aborigines, but a decade passed before action was taken.

7. Plomley & Henley 1990, p. 50; Cumpston 1989, p. 95.

8. Colonial Secretary to Surveyor-General, 19 July 1848, AOT LSD 1/51/355; *Hobart Town Gazette* 7 December 1847, p. 1197, 4 January 1848, pp. 11-12, 17 April 1849, p. 216.

9. Colonial Secretary to Surveyor-General, 19 July 1848, AOT LSD 1/51/359.

10. Surveyor-General to Colonial Secretary, 12 March 1849, AOT LSD 1/51/361; Memorandum of lease of Flinders Island to Malcolm Laing Smith, no date, AOT LSD 1/4/49.

11. Stokes 1846, p. 265; AOT LSD 1/4/111; *Hobart Town Gazette* 4 January 1848.

12. Thomas Beedon to Surveyor-General, 21 July 1848, AOT LSD 1/51/441; Colonial Secretary to Surveyor-General, 26 March 1849, AOT LSD 1/51/442; Thomas Beedon to Colonial Secretary, 22 March 1849, AOT CSO 25/2/3021.

In September and October 1854 Power returned to the Furneaux Group accompanied by the Anglican Bishop of Tasmania, Francis Nixon. The two men took advantage of the government's 90-ton schooner, the *Beacon*, on its resupply voyage to the light-houses of Goose and Deal Islands to visit the islands. It seems that there was no particular official reason for the visit, and there are no records to indicate whether Nixon had a role in shaping government policy towards the inhabitants. It was 11 years since his first visit. The strong physical and spiritual attractions of the islands with their distinctive inhabitants and lifestyles, and a chance for Nixon to do some landscape painting, were sufficient incentives to justify the trip. These attractions and the slower pace of life on the islands compared to the rest of Tasmania, have induced a range of visitors, from clergymen to naturalists, to come there ever since.¹³

The visitors found Wybalenna in ruins. The church was used as a barn and remained so until the 1970s. Nixon and Power then made their way into Franklin Sound arriving at Gun Carriage Island on a weekend. Many of the people were away muttonbirding on nearby Great Dog Island which Power said was the principal muttonbird colony. Next day the Aborigines returned to greet their visitors, and at the Sunday service the congregation numbered 28 people, the majority of whom were Aborigines.¹⁴

From Gun Carriage Island, Power and Nixon sailed to Preservation and Clarke Islands. On Preservation Island they found two brothers, one of whom was James Allen, a former medical officer at Wybalenna who lived on Clarke Island with his wife and their eight children. He had been on the island for eight years 'living a secluded and semi-savage life...becoming as rough and wild as the uncultivated scenes around him'.¹⁵ Power served notices to quit upon both Allen brothers because of default in rent payments. The rent for Clarke Island in 1848 was 5/- per year and probably similar in 1854. Although James Allen drowned in 1856, the family was not evicted until 1860. Ten years later the family was still renting and attempting to purchase Preservation Island.¹⁶ The reluctance to quit occupation upon official notice was a trait of many Aboriginal and European inhabitants of the islands. In most cases they had nowhere else to go, except to another island, and this is what they usually did. The government had no means to enforce its notices. Official visits were infrequent and it was too expensive to station a crown bailiff or police officer with a boat and crew in the region.

The only semblance of bureaucracy came through the special constables appointed amongst the inhabitants at their own request. The appointments seemed to be for the benefit of the appointee, not the government. James Munro who lived on Preservation Island, appears to have been the first person appointed in 1831, although there was apparently some confusion in official circles about this. The reason he gave for his request to be appointed was that he could not control immigrants and fugitive convicts for his own protection unless he had the authority to evict them. Similar rea-

¹³. Nixon 1857, p. 17; Murray-Smith 1986, p. 210.

¹⁴. Surveyor-General to Colonial Secretary, 24 August 1854, AOT LSD 1/51/365, 3471; Nixon 1857, pp. 45, 118; Ratcliffe 1975, p. 50.

¹⁵. Nixon 1857, pp. 50, 52.

¹⁶. AOT Treasury (TRE) 21/1/83; Surveyor-General to Hamilton Allen, 6 January 1860, AOT LSD 2/2/838.

sons were used by the Colonial Secretary in the appointment in 1836 of Malcolm Laing Smith as magistrate at Circular Head in northwest Tasmania, an ambit that took in King Island; of David Howie as special constable to King Island and the other northwest islands in 1846; and of David Kelly, formerly of Gun Carriage Island, and living on Long Island when he was appointed in 1857.¹⁷ Both Munro and Kelly were sealers. It was not until the 1870s that any Aborigines were appointed as constables.

Power and Nixon were suitably impressed by their visit. According to Power:

Every encouragement may be given to these Islanders who are Pilots to people in distress or in case of shipwreck, men to be depended upon and as members of their small community impeachable in manners and conduct.¹⁸

But were Power's dealings with the Islanders sufficient to enable the formation of an informed opinion? He was an outsider who made sporadic visits and there is not any evidence that he made any real effort to pursue the concerns of the Islanders.

Where Bicheno appeared to recognise that the Islanders were a special people because of the links to the Aboriginal women through their relationships with the sealers, he seems to have opposed the granting of special privileges to them. On receiving Power's first report, Colonial Secretary Bicheno summed up the government's attitude as acting '...with a view to preventing the growth of any rights which might interfere with the future resumption of certain islands in Bass's Strait by the crown'.¹⁹ An earlier statement by the British Parliament that native inhabitants were presumed to have a right to their land irrespective of European intrusion conflicted with Bicheno's view. His policy was to give the Islanders no special consideration. The Islanders' expectations based on their previously unchallenged occupation were certainly different, but the government showed little real interest in their social and economic welfare as evinced in its lack of action in reserving islands for the community.

Demographic change and land tenure from 1860 to 1870—a decade of loss

In March 1862 Archdeacon Thomas Reibey paid the first of three visits to the Furneaux Group.²⁰ Reibey's trip is important as it marked the first of regular visitations by Church of England pastors over the next 40 years, as emissaries to the Aborigines to bring them into the fold of the Church. On his first visit, Reibey was accompanied by the vicar at George Town, Reverend John Fereday, who took the first photographs of the Aborigines of the Furneaux Group. These were group portraits taken on Chappell Island during the muttonbird season. Fereday knew the sealers and their families well, as his diocese had included the Furneaux Group since 1846.

17. Superintendent of Police, Launceston, to Colonial Secretary, 3 October 1825, AOT CSO 1/131/3165, James Monro [sic] to Colonial Secretary, 18 January 183, AOT CSO 1/576/185/13061; Colonial Secretary to Malcolm Laing Smith, 4 June 1836, AOT LSD 1/70/67; Surveyor-General to Chief Police Magistrate, 25 August 1857, AOT LSD 1/51/532; Colonial Secretary's Office to Surveyor-General, 21 August 1846, AOT LSD 1/52/252; *Hobart Town Gazette* 8 January 1835, p. 26, 1 September 1846, p. 992.

18. Surveyor-General Power to Colonial Secretary, 13 December 1854, AOT LSD 1/51/378.

19. Colonial Secretary to Surveyor-General, 19 July 1848, AOT LSD 1/51/355; *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1837 [425] Volume 7.

20. TPP 1862. Number 17, p. 3, Letter from Reibey on Islanders in the Straits; TPP 1863. Number 48, pp. 4, 5, Half-caste Islanders in Bass's Straits.

In late March 1866 Reibey paid his third and last visit. It coincided with the commencement of the muttonbird season, and there was no opportunity to make home visits. However he baptised eight to ten children born since his previous trip in 1863. This low number of children indicates a slow growth in the Aboriginal population, which is to be expected, as no new people were absorbed into the Aboriginal community until a decade or so later.

In this decade, a host of guano speculators applied to buy or lease nearly all Tasmania's offshore islands in order to exploit their presumed guano resources.²¹ The government had no policy on the lease or purchase of islands; it seems to have operated on a crisis management basis. Since 1850 Tasmania had lost one third of its male population to the Victorian gold rushes which made the government desperate to find incentives to hold people. On advice from Surveyor-General James Calder, the government suspended from sale as of 24 December 1860 all Tasmanian islands (except Bruny Island in the south) to safeguard a possible lucrative resource from a possible single owner.²² However, it permitted applications for occupation to be received and considered as circumstances arose.

It was during this period that the importance of muttonbirding was documented by John Thomas, a government surveyor. In 1861 Thomas spent several months in the Furneaux Group inspecting and surveying selections recently applied for. His survey maps and reports are the first to describe the islands in terms of their human inhabitants and natural resources. He gave the location of huts, peoples' names and the state of the muttonbird colonies, which reflected government understanding that muttonbirding was the major economy of the community.²³

Thomas had a low opinion of the Aborigines, possibly because they were reluctant to provide him with information, and when they did, it was often contradictory. To him they were '...evidently a much indolent, shiftless race of beings'.²⁴ In contrast, he had nothing to say about the Allens or any other Europeans, whose lifestyles were no different. What the Aborigines thought of Thomas can only be surmised, but he may not have had the patience or tact required to understand their lifestyle and environment. His surveys probably frightened them because, if guano was found on an island they occupied, outsiders could take up leases and the Aborigines could lose their homes. They regarded the islands, for which they paid little or no occupation fees, as their own. Thomas remarked that guano had already been removed from Cat and Chappell Islands by Hobart merchants, an exercise that must have worried the muttonbirders going to Chappell Island.

Generally the islands were occupied by one or more Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal families who kept a few cattle and sheep. There was very little cropping as the prevail-

21. TPP 1861. Number 38, Guano correspondence.

22. Robson 1983, p. 467; *Hobart Town Gazette* 8 January 1861, p. 26; Surveyor-General Calder to Colonial Treasurer, 24 December 1860, AOT LSD 1/50/430; Askunas and Crowther to Surveyor-General, correspondence regarding guano deposits on islands, 1861, AOT LSD 1/69/270-299.

23. Department of Environment and Land Management Tasmania (DELM) Dorset 4 maps and reports; Skira 1997a, p. 121.

24. DELM Dorset 4, Woody Island report.

ing westerly winds were destructive to crops. Nobody lived on Babel, Cat, and Storehouse Islands, located off the central east coast of Flinders Island. Their large muttonbird colonies were not exploited at that time because of their remoteness. Overall, Thomas found the guano resources to be largely non-existent, except on Cat Island where a large colony of gannets nested. As a matter of course, the promotion of guano hindered the Aborigines, because the public scramble for guano leases brought the islands to the attention of European farmers, who were interested in the islands for grazing purposes.

Some new leases had been issued to Europeans at this time for terms of up to 14 years.²⁵ But when missionaries began to take an interest in the Aboriginal community, the names of Aboriginal lessees (albeit very few) appear in the government rent books.²⁶

Flinders Island

The Aborigines viewed Flinders Island as a large hunting ground. The sole place of habitation on the island, Wybalenna, reminded them of the suffering of their kinsmen.²⁷ After Malcolm Laing Smith's lease expired in 1860 the government offered a 14 year rental for Flinders Island. Charles Nantes and James Hutton, prospective lessees from Victoria, accompanied the two clerics, Reibey and Fereday, in March 1862.²⁸ When the clerics decided to cut short their visit, Nantes and Hutton re-hired the *Gift* and stopped off at Waterhouse, Clarke and Cape Barren Islands. They were disappointed with all three as none showed promise of extensive agricultural worth. Cape Barren Island had just been extensively burnt and they found no land fit for grazing:

I have said before that the scenery is beautiful, and it was after the wearisome toil in climbing our last ascent in these islands sitting down and enjoying the grand and magnificent prospect, my smoke and my rest, I felt a regret, almost a personal regret, that such a scene of beauty and extensive area of country should be so comparatively waste and valueless.²⁹

Nantes' opinions were much echoed, as the island was virtually unoccupied and considered 'barren' by early prospective land purchasers.³⁰ It was totally unsuited for farming and therefore an ideal repository for the unwanted Aborigines. Later efforts by the government to turn Aborigines into agriculturalists on land largely unfit for farming failed.

²⁵ John Riddle, lease for Vansittart Island transferred to Elizabeth Bishop from 20 January 1872, AOT LSD 209/2/219; G. A. Robinson Jr., lease for Woody and Tin Kettle Islands from 1 November 1860, AOT LSD 209/2/224.

²⁶ Lucy Beedon applied to occupy Badger Island in December 1857. Together with her brother, James, they placed a deposit and eventually paid off fifty acres each on Badger Island beginning in 1868; George Everett leased Passage and Forsyth Islands in 1860 for £6/8/- and £5 per annum respectively. George Everett, lease for Passage Island from 1 December 1860, AOT LSD 209/2/227; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 9 December 1862, AOT LSD 2/2/924; TRE 21/2, 21/2/49; DELM Dorset 7/70, 71.

²⁷ TPP 1862. Number 17, p. 3.

²⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette* 4 February 1862, p. 185; Howard 1991, p. 78.

²⁹ *Geelong Advertiser* 14 May 1862.

³⁰ Howard 1991, p. 85.

On the basis of Reibey's and Fereday's representations, the government recognised that the Islander community was different from other Tasmanians but adhered to the principle of priority in occupation. For example, James Allen who had been given permission to occupy Clarke Island in 1847 immediately attempted to evict John Thomas, a sealer. Thomas complained and demanded protection.³¹ He was not evicted for he continued to occupy and pay rent on what was a very small portion of the island for several years. The government likewise assisted the sealers by evicting trespassers.

Similarly, arguments of occupation occurred among the sealers themselves.³² On Gun Carriage Island, John Riddle leased the whole island for £15 per year until 1860. Other sealers and their families who lived on the island were told to move and brought their grievances before Fereday. The government promised to protect the sealers and their families against 'the oppression they complain of' and to cancel Riddle's lease if it continued. Within the year, the sealers Thomas Beedon and Edward Mansell moved to Preservation Island. John Riddle had the legal right to evict illegal occupiers (such as the other sealers) which tied the government's hand, despite its promise to cancel the lease.

Reverend Fereday had acted for the inhabitants of the Furneaux Group in their land deals with the government since at least 1854. In December 1862 he applied on behalf of George Everett and James Beedon for Preservation Island and the Inner Sisters respectively. In September 1864 he asked the Surveyor-General to prepare leases for George Everett on Preservation Island, Robert Dunbar on Little Green Island, Elizabeth Davis, the widow of the superintendent of the Goose Island lighthouse, on Big Green Island and John Smith for 500 acres at Hogans Point on Cape Barren Island.³³ The lease for John Smith was next to his lot to purchase and is the first known record of any land deals done by Aborigines on Cape Barren Island. In many of the cases however, the Aborigines found that the leases had already been taken by outsiders and thus were unavailable.³⁴

Fereday's assistance to the Aborigines was not all positive. He frequently held money provided by the inhabitants to pay rent and land purchases because communications between the islands and the authorities in Hobart were very slow and unreliable. In 1866 he used their money on other things, and James Beedon of Badger Island, for example, was required to pay up his balance or forfeit the island. Fortunately no one who put their trust in Fereday was severely disadvantaged by his embezzlement. It did not have criminal repercussions upon Fereday who continued to act on their behalf until his death in April 1871 in a horse and cart accident near George Town.³⁵

31. Surveyor-General to Hamilton Allen, 6 January 1860, AOT LSD 2/2/838.

32. Reibey to Surveyor-General, 4 April 1862, AOT LSD 1/51/652. TPP 1863. Number 48, p. 5; John Riddle lease for Vansittart Island transferred to Elizabeth Bishop from 20 January 1872, AOT LSD 209/2/219.

33. Fereday to Surveyor-General, 9 December 1862, AOT LSD 2/2/924; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 2 September 1862, AOT LSD 1/51/636; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 20 September 1864, AOT LSD 1/51/642; Boothman to Fereday, 23 May 1865, AOT LSD 1/51/644.

34. Thomas Mansell to Surveyor-General, 8 December 1869, AOT LSD 1/39/153; G. Everett to Surveyor-General, 15 July 1870, AOT LSD 1/31/617.

The Aborigines were unsuccessful in the art of political lobbying on their own behalf. The occasional letter of petition from the community brought the subject of land alienation to the attention of the government but no action seems to have resulted. It was only when concerned missionaries and influential European lessees became involved in their welfare that the government took notice, and even then action was belated. One of the lessees, Benvenuto Smith, informed Calder that Chappell Island was the last remaining muttonbird colony for the Aborigines and the best in the Straits.³⁶ The Aborigines, if deprived of their only means of obtaining a livelihood would starve and 'become paupers'. The island, Smith argued, had to be reserved for them. In response to this complaint Jules Virieux, an outsider who had purchased 50 acres on Chappell Island, was ordered to remove his stock from the island. The problem was further aggravated shortly afterwards when the apparent lack of government will to grapple with the issue saw another block of 50 acres sold on Chappell Island.

In order to address the hardships of the Aborigines, in 1868 the government promised to reserve some islands for the Aboriginal people. However, the inspection by a surveyor, Richard Hall, may have hindered the Aboriginal cause. Hall had visited the islands in 1866 to survey those parts selected by both Aborigines and non-Aborigines.³⁷ In his report to Calder, Hall extolled the agricultural virtues of the islands, while mentioning that the Aborigines did not work hard but were occupied in sailing boats and catching muttonbirds. The government was dilatory in most of its dealings with the Aborigines and Hall's report would certainly not have helped. The report was also unfair in its accusations that Aborigines did not work hard. The biggest difference between Aborigines and non-Aborigines was the Aborigines' lack of cash income, which put them at a considerable disadvantage. Their principal income came from muttonbirding, which would have provided them with a sum of money to spend on items they could not otherwise afford, but left little extra for capital accumulation, for land purchase or rent.

Demographic change and land tenure from 1870 to 1890—Cape Barren Island

On 7 February 1870 a census for all of Tasmania included the Furneaux Group as a separate entity for the first time. The population consisted of 242 people comprising 138 males and 104 females. There was no breakdown of ethnic origin, but in 1872 Canon Marcus Brownrigg, on his first visitation to the Furneaux Group, estimated the total population to be 227 of whom only 84 or 35 percent were Aboriginal, or 'half-castes' as they were then called. The term 'half-caste' had been used by Robinson in 1830, and by 1870 had become commonly used in Australia to describe people of mixed race.³⁸ The number of Aborigines represented by this percentage approximates closely to that derived from genealogical data.³⁹ The growth in population since Reibey's visit in 1863

35. Surveyor-General to Colonial Treasurer, 19 February 1868, AOT LSD 1/51/465; Ronald Gunn to Colonial Treasurer, 13 February 1868, AOT LSD 1/51/471; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 27 February 1868, AOT LSD 2/3/1005; *Church News* 1 May 1871, p. 74; *Examiner* 20 April 1871.

36. Benvenuto Smith to Surveyor-General, 26 June 1866, AOT LSD 1/53/619.

37. Surveyor-General Calder to Survey Office, 14 February 1868, AOT LSD 1/53/621-623; *Hobart Town Gazette* 23 July 1867, pp. 1331-1332; DELM Dorset 7/70, 71; 8/21.

38. Brownrigg 1872, p. iv; Robinson 1966, p. 179; *Australian National Dictionary* 1988, p. 303.

39. Tindale 1953, p. 19.

was mainly in the non-Aboriginal population which had increased by some 94 people with only about eight additions to the Aboriginal population.

The Aborigines still resided on some of the smaller islands although some had moved to Cape Barren Island. In February 1871 Fereday found Edward Mansell and Richard Maynard, two of the original sealers, living on Passage and Long Islands respectively, while George Everett occupied Woody Island. On Cape Barren Island were William Brown and a man called Lawton at Munro Bay (several kilometres east of The Corner) and, it seems, also several Aboriginal families at various other locations around the coast.⁴⁰

Many Aborigines found keeping up lease or purchase repayments impossible and very few became landowners. It was only after they had petitioned Governor Du Cane when he met with them on Goose Island in August 1871 that land was subsequently granted to them on Cape Barren Island.⁴¹ Du Cane was a progressive governor with a genuine interest in all Tasmanians and would have made his views known to the Premier. The Aborigines wanted land granted to them which they could call home with security. They expressed two main grievances to him. They deplored the destruction of muttonbird nests, eggs and chicks on Chappell Island by cattle straying from land owned by Virieux.⁴² They also protested against being forced to move from land they occupied by non-Aboriginal lessees, principally Robert Gardner and James Walden Gardner, Launceston merchants who had managers to look after their numerous holdings in the Furneaux Group.

The government was constantly reminded of the plight of the Aborigines. For example, in December 1871 George Everett further complained about Jules Virieux's stock again, using the emotional argument of the '...injury being done to us and our children'.⁴³ He further stated:

The rest of the halfcastes in Common with myself have been led to hope that the Government intend to reserve Chappell Island for our use we therefore cannot help feeling the greatest alarm at seeing the only Rookery available to us being daily destroyed and ourselves and our children left to starve.

To police the removal of stock from Chappell Island, Everett, a crown bailiff, was appointed in April 1872 to be stationed on nearby Badger Island. Hogan Group, Erith Island (all north of Flinders Island), Moriarty Rocks (near Clarke Island), Ninth Island and Tenth Island (off northern Tasmania) were reserved for sealing, and the Chappell Islands and Cat Island for muttonbirding. Except for part of Chappell Island none of the other islands had yet been designated as leasehold or freehold.

The other main muttonbird colony in the Furneaux Group, Great Dog Island, was not reserved because it was held under lease by Robert Gardner at £112/10/6 per annum in 1877. The rent was the same as he was paying for the whole of Flinders

⁴⁰. *Church News* 1 April 1871, pp. 58–60. By the end of the decade the population remained virtually unchanged as the census for 1881 indicates there were 252 people in the Furneaux Group, consisting of 137 males and 115 females, including 11 people on Goose Island.

⁴¹. Lieutenant-Governor Du Cane to Colonial Secretary, 14 August 1871, AOT CSD 7/45/833.

⁴². *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Volume 4, p. 107; George Everett to Surveyor-General, 8 December 1871, AOT LSD 2/4/54/6158[1].

⁴³. George Everett to Surveyor-General, 30 November 1869, AOT LSD 1/51/459.

Island, which he held until 1886. Gardner ran dairy cattle on the island and rented out the extensive muttonbird colony each year.⁴⁴

By 1873 nine islands were leased by non-Aborigines who in most cases made their homes on them. The few Aborigines to hold leases were James Maynard and Henry Beedon who separately held the lease for the Northern Sisters from 1872 to 1878, and James Everett who leased East Kangaroo Island in 1874.⁴⁵ The rapid removal of the Aborigines from other islands to Cape Barren Island continued and was completed by the end of the 1870s, less than 20 years after they first paid rent to occupy those islands. In 1883, 28 islands were leased by non-Aborigines, of whom Walden had nine, paying between £1 and £21 rent per year. The only Aborigines renting or owning any island property other than on Cape Barren Island in 1883 were Lucy Beedon and her brother, James, on Badger Island, where they ran up to 1,400 sheep, some of which belonged to other Islanders. Most of the islands suitable for farming were now occupied, and in the years 1873 to 1882 from 6,000 to 13,000 sheep were grazed annually in the Furneaux Group. Generally the islands were occupied by one family with income from mutton-birding supplementing that from farming.

The move to Cape Barren Island was made during the 1870s. Grant deeds were issued for land on Cape Barren Island in 1873 to George Everett for five acres, John Smith for ten acres, William Brown for eight acres and Thomas Mansell for five acres. One year later John Maynard obtained deeds for five acres on Cape Barren Island.⁴⁶ The land was sold to the Aborigines for £1 per acre, a unit sum comparable with the charge for larger blocks sold elsewhere in the Furneaux Group. Other Aborigines to obtain grant deeds were R. Maynard, 40 acres on Long Island in 1875, James Beedon, 50 acres on Badger Island in 1876 and Lucy Beedon, 51 acres on Badger Island in 1877.⁴⁷ Several Aborigines also attempted to purchase land on other islands, and although they were able to pay deposits and several instalments, eventually had to sell to non-Aborigines. Thus George Everett managed seven instalments on 50 acres on Preservation Island before James Allen purchased the block in 1877. Within two years Allen had transferred his lease of crown land on the island to John MacLaine. In contrast Europeans obtained much more of the freehold on Cape Barren and other islands.⁴⁸ After this, the tide turned. No more disposal of islands in the Furneaux Group occurred after these sales, with the exception of Flinders Island.

For the Aborigines, the move from the smaller islands to Cape Barren Island did not solve their problems. They complained through the missionaries, and in May 1880 Brownrigg enquired of the Surveyor-General whether the Aborigines were allowed the privilege to hunt game on Flinders Island. If that was taken away, then they had no land that they could call their own. It was only two years previously that they had petitioned the Governor to reserve the whole of Flinders Island for them. In response the govern-

44. AOT TRE 21/2/335; AOT TRE 21/2/246; Murray-Smith 1979, p. 65.

45. AOT TRE 21/2/224, 399; AOT TRE 21/2/233.

46. AOT TRE 21/2/294; AOT TRE 21/2/295.

47. AOT TRE 21/2/298; AOT TRE 21/2/300; AOT TRE 21/2/301.

48. AOT TRE 21/2/112, 117, 302; Memorandum from Deputy Commissioner of Crown Land, 25 September 1879, AOT LSD 16/41/724. AOT TRE 21/2/294-303; AOT LSD 209/2/177; Ayde Douglas, lease for Waterhouse Island from 1 June 1859, AOT LSD 209/2/178.

ment withheld from sale the western portion of Cape Barren Island covering 2428 ha (6000 acres) for the Aboriginal community.⁴⁹ The area consisted of scrub and lagoons, unsuitable for agriculture except by dint of much work and money, but many of the people had already made their homes in the area. With Brownrigg in charge the people chose The Corner as the site for their new township and through a lottery drew subdivisonal lots. A store was to be opened, probably to compete with the one on Long Island owned by Thomas Barrett. During his visit in 1881 Brownrigg and the Aborigines discussed matters of rules and regulations, and muttombirding on Chappell Island.⁵⁰ A year later little progress had been made because of fear in the lack of security of tenure, and the government not providing direction for the administration of the reserve through leases or sale of blocks.

Demographic change and land tenure from 1890 to 1900—Flinders Island

There are no population statistics for the Furneaux Group in the 1891 census, but according to Bishop Montgomery who visited annually between 1891 and 1901, there were then about 110 people living on Cape Barren Island including about 60 children.⁵¹ Ten years later, in the 1901 census, the Aboriginal population numbered 157 people. Total population figures are absent but would have ranged between 275 and 400 people. This includes about 17 households on Flinders Island in 1899, most of whom were involved in muttombirding.⁵²

The two-fold increase in the population since April 1881 was mainly due to the influx of non-Aboriginal settlers to Flinders Island, which was opened for selection following a favourable report on the island by surveyor John W. Brown in 1887.⁵³ The land was of good quality, but its relative isolation from the Tasmanian mainland required, according to Brown, the 'right class of colonists' to be induced to settle on Flinders Island. By the 'right class', he meant people from the United Kingdom, not local Tasmanians or mainlanders. His advice was not heeded as the majority of initial selections were taken up by Aborigines or non-Aborigines already with holdings in the Furneaux Group.

From 1889 crown land on Flinders Island was sold in blocks ranging from 15 to 320 acres, the latter being the maximum allowed by the *Waste Lands Act, 1870*. The sales caused major changes in the lifestyle of the inhabitants. People who lived on the small offshore islands used Flinders Island to gather firewood, hunting of wallaby for skins and meat, and taking of other wildlife such as waterfowl for food. Under increased immigration employment opportunities were created and gradually Flinders Island

49. Memorandum from Deputy Commissioner of Crown Land to Inspector of Police, 5 May 1880, AOT LSD 16/43/962; Petition from Half-castes to Surveyor-General, 14 December 1878, AOT LSD 2/4/54/6158/[6]; *Hobart Town Gazette* 15 February 1881, p. 246.

50. Brownrigg 1979, p. 184.

51. Montgomery 1892, p. 229; *Church News* 1 March 1892, p. 614. In 1892, 81 adults signed a petition of which 70 were Aborigines. The majority of the signatories lived on Cape Barren Island. In December 1893 members of the Victorian Field Naturalists' Club who visited estimated that there were about 250 people on the islands in the proportion of half Aboriginal to half non-Aboriginal (*Australasian* 30 December 1893).

52. TPP 1901. Number 38, p. 249, Lands and Surveys Report; *Church News* 3 October 1899, p. 1123.

53. TPP 1887. Number 62, pp. 3–5, Report on Flinders Island.

developed, while the offshore islands became deserted as they could only provide limited and short-term opportunities.⁵⁴

The settlers attempted to farm but had little to show for their labour after several years. The quality of the land was generally inferior compared to areas of mainland Tasmania. The island was said to have climatic advantages, particularly for the growing of fruit and vegetables, but suffered from a chronic lack of water during the summer. Many experienced difficulty paying their bills in the mid 1890s due to a depression that gripped much of Australia from 1890. These included Robert Gardner, although in his case it may have been due to oversight as he was frequently behind in payments even on his island leases. Default in payment resulted in fines and overdue charges levied.⁵⁵

In the 1890s the occupation of Flinders Island was slow and confined to the western side. Only a few of the isolated lots were taken up. This was attributed to the lack of roads and safe anchorages for boats, as there were just three jetties, all on the western side.⁵⁶ There were some land speculators but they were hampered by the restriction of good agricultural land to the western coast; the eastern half had problems with drainage, destruction of timber by bush fires and remoteness. The remoteness made it difficult for the authorities to locate road reserves and value land, which was variable in quality prior to selection. These problems remained largely unresolved until the land clearance schemes of the 1950s. However, the establishment of a Road Board in 1906 and its successor, the Flinders Island Council, led to a great increase in selection from 1911 with 109,171 acres sold in that year. The majority of Aborigines missed out on the benefits of the land boom as Cape Barren Island was bypassed as soon as Whitemark on Flinders Island became the administrative centre for the Furneaux Group.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The history of settlement in the Furneaux Group provides an illustrative chronicle of the difficulties encountered by Aboriginal people in obtaining rights to their land. Unfortunately, it was an all too common occurrence in Australian history—the indigenous population becoming victims of erratic and insensitive government regulations imposed on a distant community who had few resources to challenge them. At times, the government administrators did appear to acknowledge that the Aborigines on the

54. In the first two years 37 non-Aborigines selected 5518 acres. One of the first purchasers was T. H. Holyman who placed a deposit of 10/- on a 15 acre block on 26 June 1889 paying it off on 22 August 1889 for £14/10/-. Holyman was a son of William Holyman, a master mariner with extensive interests in Bass Strait shipping (the Holymans later became involved with air transport, the family company becoming Ansett Airlines). The other European families of Collis, Gardner, Holt, MacLaine, Robinson and Virieux had already been in the islands many years, while the others were new immigrants from mainland Tasmania and Victoria. In contrast 14 Aborigines took up a total of 344 acres, ranging in size from 15 to 53 acres. The majority of people in both groups paid off their land in annual instalments over fourteen years, many of the residents getting the money from muttonbirding. The cost of land was £1 per acre regardless of situation or size of block. TPP 1890. Number 65, pp. 3, 6, Survey Department Annual Report; AOT TRE 21/5/14, 134–197.

55. *Examiner* 18 February 1907; AOT TRE 21/7/56, 86; 21/8/107.

56. TPP 1903. Number 31, p. 23 Survey Department Annual Report; TPP 1894–95. Number 39, p. 11, Survey Department Annual Report.

57. Skira 1997b.

eastern Bass Strait islands were entitled to some redress, but this acknowledgement did not result in action that benefited the Aboriginal people. Despite putting pressure on government, using the resources available to them, the Bass Strait Aboriginals ended up confined to a small proportion of what might rightfully be considered their land. The poignant request of the Aboriginal writer, 'I hope you will be my Friend' was ignored by a government which was far removed from the Aboriginal community, both in geographical distance and in spirit. Although this situation may be changing with recent High Court decisions, land rights and their relationship with government continue to present a significant problem for contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginals.

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The tourist corroboree in South Australia to 1911

Michael Parsons

'Corroboree', the public dance-music events staged by Aboriginal people for a settler audience,¹ emerged in Australia in the nineteenth century as a cultural product jointly negotiated between two cultures. During the process of negotiation, four major framings of corroboree can be identified. Of these four, three were often only witnessed by invited guests:

- the 'peace corroboree', marking a new state of co-operative relations between Aboriginal people (representing the newly-occupied country) and the Crown (representing the new occupiers). The beginnings of this tradition in Aboriginal-settler relations can be traced to a performance organised as part of a diplomatic encounter by 'Koggie, the Native Chief of the Cow-Pasture Tribe' for Governor John Macquarie.² Macquarie thereafter adroitly co-opted this protocol to form a part of the annual Parramatta feasts.³ In Adelaide, Governor Gawler adopted this 'peace corroboree' framing with his own annual Queen's Birthday meetings with Aboriginal people. In 1839, following the *Maria* massacre, the corroboree in Adelaide was specifically understood as 'calculated to restore those former peaceable relations which we hope will long subsist between us and our friendly native tribes.'⁴
- the 'command performance' corroboree, a re-statement of the above, but now orchestrated by the new occupiers as a joint act of homage to the Crown. This

1. Ronald and Catherine Berndt observe that: "'Corroboree" has passed into English as a word for all Aboriginal ceremonies and rituals and entertainments involving singing and dancing, and social effervescence generally.' (Berndt & Berndt 1985, p. 320) As anthropologists they find 'it is too vague a term, lumping sacred and nonsacred together in an undifferentiated way, without adding anything distinctive to compensate for it.' By drawing attention to the framings of the settler-corroboree rather than categorising what was exactly being enjoyed by their audiences, this article points to how this non-differentiation came about. Thus in this article, the term 'corroboree' refers to the public events, commonly called 'corroborees' by both Aborigines and Europeans with, as I shall explain, jointly negotiated meanings.

2. Macquarie 1956, p. 9. This private performance of a corroboree was something of a diplomatic encounter, since Macquarie and Koggie were in the position of allies, following the eruption of the 'cornfield wars' that saw Koggie flee the Cow Pastures to escape attacks from inland Aboriginal groups.

3. Bruce & Callaway 1991, pp. 78-104; Reece 1967.

4. *South Australian Gazette*, 25 May 1839, also quoted in *The Egotist*, 4 June 1839.

was itself a re-framing of the corroboree as a traditional act of welcome, but also functioned for settlers as a handy piece of ready-made uniquely local pagentry that could be included on the program for notable official visitors. Especially, standing in the shadow of the 'peace corroboree', it was an appropriate welcome to bestow on vice-regal visitors. Thus in 1856 a Mr McIntyre, of the south-eastern district of South Australia, is reported 'riding around the country kindly collecting natives to perform a very spirited corroboree' for the Governor on an official visit. The corroboree at night, and the kangaroo hunt during the day that preceded it, were the only two activities organised.⁵

- the 'gala' corroboree, the commoner's imitation of the vice-regal 'command performance' corroboree to mark significant social occasions. This drew on both the framings already described, but allowed all colonial notables to play at being Governor, while, like him, enjoying and entertaining new arrivals with a suitably novel, uniquely local, entertainment.⁶

The 'bleeding' of meaning from one framing to another allowed any significant colonial occasion—anything from the visit of English footballers in Rockhampton in 1898⁷ to the South Australian Commercial Travellers Club Charity Fancy dress Football Match⁸—to add a vice-regal tang to a commoner occasion through the staging of a corroboree. Similarly, in the fourth, the commercial or touristic framing of the corroboree, the performers and promoters were able to trade on the sense of privilege and occasion established by all the co-existing framings of peace corroboree, command performance and gala corroboree, enhancing its commercial value.

It is this last framing of the corroboree which is the focus of this article. The touristic framing of the corroboree has been seen as a 'prostitution' of the 'real' corroboree, an interpretation which ignores the validity of the tourist corroboree as a new cultural artefact in its own right,⁹ or it has been characterised as a product of the twentieth century, ignoring the long tradition of active marketing of this artefact.¹⁰ This article will argue, using primarily South Australian sources, that the tourist corroboree, an Aboriginal-initiated and organised cultural performance, was a significant and successful attempt to

5. *Register*, 27 February 1856.

6. As the Melbourne-based *Table Talk* commented on 21 January 1887: 'Ever since British rule was established in Australia, an aboriginal "corroboree" has always been considered an amusing, if not a particularly edifying spectacle for distinguished visitors'.

7. *Advertiser*, 5 May 1898.

8. *Register*, 7 September 1911.

9. Manning Clark, for example, pictures 'the few survivors... reduced to prostituting the corroboree.... held out their skinny arms, cupped their hands and asked their white audience to "gib a penny, Mister"' (Clark, 1968, vol. 4, pp. 222–3). Clark's sole reference for this interpretation was Noah Shreeve, miscalled by Clark 'Noel' Shreeve, whose *Short History of South Australia* was published in 1864. Shreeve's account, however, has no reference to skinniness, and no such quotation as 'gib a penny mister'. Rather, he tells of Aborigines explaining that they held corroborees 'for a pit of fun, the same when you got fiddle', and refusing to 'corroboree' on demand, suggesting that he return two days later for the scheduled performance (Shreeve 1864, p.36).

10. See McCannell's characterisation of the indigenous cultural tourism enterprises of 'ex-primitives' as post-modern, in McCannell 1992. Also time-specific studies, such as Altman 1988, which contextualise Aboriginal tourism as a response to latter-day political and economic opportunities.

use symbolic goods to engage in the settler economy throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹¹

From cultivating forests to cultivating forests of symbols

Aborigines were adroit in accommodating to the settlers' market economy, not simply occupying a subservient position in the labour market, but as sellers in a vital market for both tangibles and intangibles, for physical and symbolic goods. As access to their land and its raw materials, their economic capital, was progressively denied them, Aborigines seized upon the opportunity to market their cultural knowledge and skills, their symbolic capital, and convert it, not just into hand-outs of odd foodstuffs and token goods, but hard currency.

In Adelaide this shift is particularly well documented. Aborigines first entered the settlement economy as independent dealers in firewood, since they alone were held to have the right, conferred by their common law position as original inhabitants, to forage for wood on Crown land.¹² In the first place this was for their own use. But later it was reported that the Police and the Protector of Aborigines had been ordered to stop 'disfigurement of the trees on the Park Lands.' The conditions of the order, issued by the Governor, indicated that the Aboriginal 'spoliation' of the Park Lands' trees, had been exacerbated by the fact that in their foraging for timber, subsistence had given way to small business. The ability of Aborigines to cut Park Land trees unimpeded, had obviously attracted a non-traditional market among some settlers. Thus Aborigines were permitted now only:

to cut sufficient wood for their own fires at night, but, on no account, are they to be allowed to hawk it about for sale, and if detected in doing so, they are to be prosecuted for theft, and the parties receiving it will be charged with receiving stolen goods, knowing them to be stolen.¹³

The Aboriginal entrepreneurial spirit was not to be so summarily suppressed. Denied access to their natural heritage for supplying their timber business, they looked to their cultural heritage. By 1845, the year following the Governor's order, Adelaide's indigenous population, which had been cultivating their forests for trade, had begun to turn their attention to cultivating the forests of symbols for precisely the same reason.

Corroborees and firewood were interlinked in the public mind of early colonial South Australia. Thus while 'A Townsman' in 1840, writing to complain of natives cutting down trees in the Parklands for firewood made no mention of corroborees, the *Reg-*

11. The evolution of the Aboriginal 'tourist corroboree' tradition in South Australia and elsewhere is treated at greater length in my Ph.D thesis 'Encounters in Touriculture: indigenous cultural tourism in contested domains' submitted to Southern Cross University.

12. The common law rights of indigenous inhabitants were clearly understood at the time, as shown by McNeil 1989. Despite the attempt in South Australian settlement to declare all land as Crown land, the right of the Aborigines to the fruits of the land, including timber, was accepted.

13. *South Australian Register*, 24 April 1844. That the question of Aboriginal self-employment was at issue, rather than employment, was made clear in later judgements by the Police Court Magistrate. For example, in May 1850, 'Koimpa, alias Jack, an aboriginal native, was brought up for cutting timber on the Park Lands, but as he merely obeyed the instructions of a lime burner named Chamberlain, the case was dismissed' (*South Australian Gazette and Mining Journal*, 5 May 1850).

ister newspaper in reply sympathised, adding 'It is impossible for our readers who do not reside in North Adelaide to form any idea of ...the nuisance of their beastly corroborees, the noise of which is so frequently carried far into the night.'¹⁴ These corroborees, however unwelcome to the colonial elite who inhabited North Adelaide, quickly became a regular event; W. A. Cawthorne's diary indicates that the Aboriginal-organised 'Sunday corroboree' was a regular feature of Adelaide social life in 1845.¹⁵ That the corroborees were performed on Sundays indicates that they were intended to attract, as they did attract, settler interest; the spectators almost certainly contributed something for the performance.

Certainly by 1847 payment for the Sunday corroborees was an established practice. Complaints from the North Adelaide residents had continued through the 1840s,¹⁶ and in 1847 Matthew Moorhouse, the Protector of Aborigines, was ordered by the Colonial Secretary to tell the 'Natives encamped near Adelaide' that 'this is now a Christian country' and the Sabbath must be kept holy; that they were therefore to 'abstain from making noise on Sundays'. Exasperated, Moorhouse replied that:

I have told them repeatedly not to corrobory on the Sabbath, but crowds of Europeans visit them on this day, and offer them money, and the Natives find it more profitable to listen to them than to me. Last Sunday I believe they made nearly two pounds by their performances.¹⁷

This was not merely haphazard collection of monies donated at a settler initiative. There is evidence of Aboriginal initiative in the timing, especially the regularity of the Sunday events against strong discouragement, and the publicity of these events. Thus in 1844 the *Adelaide Observer* reported that:

A numerous assemblage of the Aborigines of this district took place a few days since, on the Park Land, at which a large deputation was appointed from among their number, for the purpose of inviting into Town a distant tribe which has not (it is said) been regularly inducted into the Metropolis. It is a singular fact that one of the Adelaide tribe made it his business to communicate the circumstance at our Printing Office, as a matter of news, and seemed to be very anxious that it should appear in the ensuing publication.¹⁸

Visits to Adelaide from Murray Lakes and Murray River Aborigines in the 1840s anxious to see the sensational new developments in Adelaide meant that Adelaide's Kaurra people frequently found themselves hosting corroborees under Aboriginal protocol. The business opportunity offered by these events was seen very early. As corroborees were a regular outcome of such visits, it is probable that this forthcoming event was the

¹⁴. *South Australian Register*, 19 August 1840.

¹⁵. For example, the entry reading, without further explanation, 'went to Sunday School twice, to Chapel twice and to the Corroboree once.' W. A. Cawthorne, *Litterarium diarium*, 23 March 1845, A104, Mitchell Library, Sydney. Cawthorne, though, had more than a passing interest in corroboree, having published accounts in the *Register* in March and June 1844, taken notes on well-known Adelaide Aboriginal identities Captain Jack and King John's corroboree songs on 29 January 1844 and witnessed the Mt Barker tribe's performance on 20 May 1844.

¹⁶. For example, *South Australian Gazette and Mining Journal*, 6 December 1845, and 11 April 1846.

¹⁷. Letter from Moorhouse, Protector of Aborigines, to Colonial Secretary, 10 November 1847, also quoted in Hampton & Mattingley 1988.

¹⁸. *Adelaide Observer*, 9 March 1844.

'news' being advertised to readers. Thus within ten years of European settlement, Aborigines were not only organising corroborees for cash, but issuing advance 'press releases' about them as well.

On the other side of the exchange, the 'peace', 'command performance', and 'gala performance' framings of the corroboree had fostered a ready market amongst the well-to-do for corroboree paintings as either souvenirs of or substitutes for performance, fostering its position as a must-see attraction for the settler-tourists of Australia.¹⁹ This was reinforced by the ease with which the corroboree fitted European notions of the picturesque, making the corroboree an essential for artistic experience in Australia. Thus the first one-man show in South Australia, of George French Angas's watercolours of 'South Australian and New Zealand scenes, natives and artefacts', held in Adelaide on 19 June 1845,²⁰ included 'Portraits of the Aboriginal Inhabitants'. These were in fact studies of the 'Kure Dance' which Cawthorne had described in the *Register* the previous June.²¹ When S. T. Gill took part in a Glasgow exhibition in November 1845 entitled 'South Australia As It Is', his offering was 'A Corroborie and other drawings'.²² In April 1846, John Michael Skipper, who had painted a corroboree in 1840, took a party of well-connected city and country friends to observe a corroboree in the Park Lands.²³ In November 1846, Gill's young pupil, W. A. Cawthorne, already, as noted above, a keen watcher and student of corroboree performances, was planning to enter an Amateur Artists' Exhibition with a painting of a 'Corrobberee'.²⁴ This interest in the picturesque corroboree was so marked as to draw satire, as in S. T. Gill's later painting 'The newly arrived' which depicts the gullibility of new settlers in accepting any hasty performance as their share of the 'corroboree'. But the satire is also testament to the success with which the corroboree had, through an informal joint negotiation, and despite the express discouragement of the colonial elite and the government, emerged as a form of commercial entertainment. From this point on, joint negotiation became more explicit, as a series of joint venturers undertook the staging of corroborees in South Australia.

The joint venturers—artists and theatricals

It was the artistic enthusiast of corroboree, W. A. Cawthorne, who was the first of these entrepreneurs, although he was not motivated by commercial interest. In August 1847 Cawthorne was elected onto a Provisional Committee to form a Mechanics' Institute in

19. Particularly among the well-to-do, settlement in Australia was often perceived as a temporary expedient, with return to Britain as the eventual goal; even among those who saw their settlement as permanent a touristic mentality is observable in letters home.

20. Appleyard, Fargher & Radford 1986, p. 26.

21. *Register*, 15 June 1844. The article, with the byline 'C', can be found in Cawthorne's 'Rough Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives', reprinted in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, South Australian Branch, Session 1925-6*. The *Register* in 1885 mistakenly ascribes the earlier *Register* article to Angas. The Kure Dance article from the *Register* was quoted in full by Angas himself in his two volume work published in 1847, but credited to a friend who has frequently witnessed its performance' ie Cawthorne.

22. Appleyard, Fargher & Radford 1986, p. 27.

23. Entry for 31 March 1846, the Diary of Miss Mary Thomas, later to become the second wife of John Michael Skipper. V1058/26A (typescript) Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

24. W. A. Cawthorne Journal on microfilm 1846—1848 B229, 1849—1859 B230 CY2141 Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Adelaide.²⁵ The following year at the Institute, in a public debate with the Crown Solicitor Charles Mann, he argued that nurture rather than nature was responsible for the differences between the civilised and the uncivilised. As a promotion for the debate 'several persons interested in the natives' solicited contributions for a special subscription corroboree to be held in the Park Lands on the evening of Monday 11 December 1848.²⁶

This event displayed elements that were to be a later feature of entrepreneurial joint venture corroborees. Firstly, it was openly promoted through print media. Circulars were spread all over Adelaide giving notice of the event.²⁷ A report was placed in the *Southern Australian* of a 'grand corroboree to be celebrated...near the Company's Mill.'²⁸ Secondly, the fee was collected in advance of the performance. This collection outpaced the former ad-hoc collections which, according to Moorhouse, had averaged around £2; the Monday subscription corroboree raised 'upwards of four pounds', in advance.²⁹ (With an audience of at least a thousand persons,³⁰ this was not impressive per capita income, although the attendance was a triumph for the organisers and a pointer to its financial potential.)

This success was in part a response to the framing of the event as part of the Mechanics Institute debate, promoted by persons of good standing in the community and as, so to speak, a recital of 'civilised' or 'civilisable' behaviour.³¹ Thus the press gave attention to Aboriginal professionalism, recording that they 'instructed the new comers to keep at a proper distance with a civil 'so' and a patronising 'all right' [which] seemed to be highly pleasing to the stranger whites.'³² The performers wore clothes 'without being ordered to do so, but simply in deference to the white man', and the performance dealt with contact themes, including 'a brief attempt at English colloquy, in which a *nonchalant* aboriginal was supposed to tell a stingy settler, who denied him a mouthful of bread, that he could get plenty at the Port.'³³

If this reflected a degree of stage-management by Cawthorne and his supporters, who could point to the ability to 'civilise' the uncivilised it also impacted upon the performance's perceived authenticity as a ritual tradition, a question that was to later assume greater importance. '[T]he late affair was merely at the request of three or four white men...simply a dramatic performance,' declared the *Southern Australian* newspaper.³⁴ Furthermore, heralding future complaints regarding commercial corroborees, the paper commented, that 'the Corroboree of last Monday was remarkably dull', perhaps due to 'the fact of the ceremony not being spontaneous'.

25. W. A. Cawthorne Journal op. cit. 18 August 1847, Mitchell Library. Sydney.

26. *Register*, 13 December 1848.

27. *Adelaide Times*, 18 December 1848.

28. *Southern Australian*, 8 December 1848.

29. *Register*, 13 December 1848.

30. *Adelaide Times*, 18 December 1848; *Register* 13 December 1848.

31. It is interesting to note that amongst the audience 'were several natives who professed themselves too much civilised to join in a corroboree'. *Register*, 13 December 1848.

32. *ibid.*

33. *ibid.*

34. *Southern Australian*, 15 December 1848.

The further development of the commercial corroboree in South Australia was checked by the 1850s Victorian gold rushes. The loss of the South Australian European labour force to the goldfields stimulated the rural demand for Aboriginal workers. To meet this demand the Government closed the Native school in the Park Lands and discouraged Aboriginal visitors to the city; Aboriginal economic activity was diverted to rural industry. Simultaneously, however, in newly-prosperous Victoria, the jointly-negotiated development of the corroboree led to the framing of the commercial corroboree as theatre of spectacle.

The corroboree as theatre: a Victorian interlude

In 1855 Melbourne's Queens Theatre announced their New Year's holiday surprise, a 'Corroboree' in which 'Native Blacks will give their War Dance, Hunting Songs, &c., &c.'³⁵ The *Melbourne Age* informed its readers that the attraction had 'draw[n] good houses' and that the party had performed 'several of their native customs—the war song and dance, hunting-song, &c. much to the amusement of a crowded audience'.³⁶ The *Melbourne Argus* also reported that:

The main feature...for the last two nights has been the introduction of native dances or corroborees, performed by the aboriginal natives of this colony. The dances are characteristic...consisting for the most part of violent, muscular exertion. The 'Old Man' corroboree, the 'Kangaroo' corroboree, and a third dance, peculiar to the natives of this colony, are the dances selected. The house was well attended on both occasions, many new arrivals conceiving it to be a treat to witness the natural dances of the aborigines.³⁷

Despite the success of the Queen's Theatre engagement it was not repeated. Four years later in Ballarat, however, another attempt was made by Aborigines and producers to stage mainstream theatre corroborees. At that time, at their camp at the Swamp, Aborigines could be periodically found entertaining 'groups of well-dressed Europeans, both males and females' with corroboree performances for one shilling each.³⁸

In May 1860, just prior to the Queen's Birthday, the corroboree performances of visiting Ararat Aborigines were apparently so well patronised that the whole group was 'invited to perform at the Royal Theatre'. Their performance 'completely astonished the audience', according to the Lamplough correspondent to the *Ballarat Star*:

After the first piece was over, one of them appeared at the footlights, and announced a programme of what would be exhibited before us. In his intelligence and manners he was a pattern to hundreds I have seen of Europeans attempting to address an assemblage. One of them has gone up the country for 50 more, and a grand evening's entertainment is to be given by them at the Royal.³⁹

The framing—the literal framing—of the corroboree within the proscenium arch paralleled a tendency for settlers to perceive Aboriginal performance through their own theatrical experience, which at that time included a great emphasis on spectacular effects.

³⁵. *Argus*, 3 January 1856; *Argus*, 4 January 1856.

³⁶. *The Age*, 2 January 1856.

³⁷. *Argus*, 3 January 1856.

³⁸. *Argus*, 13 March 1857. Reprint from *The Ballarat Times*.

³⁹. *Ballarat Star*, 21 May 1860, reprinted in *Argus*, 22 May 1860.

In 1867 a corroboree in Ballarat was produced by a purveyor of pyrotechnic displays. It was reported that:

A curious effect was produced by the glare of the colored lights thrown upon the group as they went through their diabolic looking manoeuvres, which appeared to partake very much of the scenic qualities of the celebrated opera, 'Der Frieschutz'.⁴⁰

(*Der Freischutz* was a popular opera at the time⁴¹, and its Wolf's Glen scene offered a convenient morphic resonance between the corroboree and European cultural experience.⁴²)

Many other references could be given of Europeans appreciating the tourist corroboree by comparing and contrasting it with their own dance-theatre.⁴³ Theoretically, therefore, a potential was present for corroboree performances to develop and obtain legitimacy in the European mainstream theatrical domain, as the existing 'tourism' infrastructure of the time.⁴⁴ But in practice Aboriginal performers appear to have been unable to build careers in the mainstream theatre and other sections of the non-itinerant entertainment industry in major cities. In Ballarat, as in Melbourne, there were no repeat performances even after a highly successful season of Aboriginal entertainment. Nor was there yet a significant return to the purely Aboriginal-initiated and -managed tourist corroborees. Instead, the corroboree developed in joint venture arrangements with European vested interests from outside the mainstream theatre industry.⁴⁵

The joint venturers—publicans and sportsmen

If the Mechanics Institute promoters used corroboree as a concert item, as a sign of civilisation, others were at the same time promoting corroboree as a form of sports spectacle, for profit. Publicans and sporting association executives were the most prominent of these. In many cases these two roles were combined, for publicans often acted as sports officials and outdoor entertainment impresarios, since the hotel itself, as an attraction, was limited in size and scope, and was well supplemented by a crowd-pulling outdoor 'event'.

This triple linkage of hotels, sporting events and corroboree was in South Australia most strongly exemplified in the Kensington area, east of Adelaide. In September 1850 publicans there organised a spear-throwing contest with a hundred Aboriginal participants, offering 'a variety of cheap prizes for different events... to give new colo-

⁴⁰. *Ballarat Star*, 2 April 1867. The reference to 'Der Freischutz'. Weber's romantic opera subtitled 'The Fiend of the Forest', reflects a perception of Aborigines as demonic, more clearly seen in the *Ballarat Evening Post* review of the same date: 'The spectacle of a number of fantastically dressed paint-streaked blackfellows cutting their capers under the light of coloured fires and to the music of clattering sticks, had a very weird effect, and produced the impression of demons at their orgies.'

⁴¹. *Der Freischutz* was one of the earliest operas performed in Adelaide. Adelaide theatre-goers first saw it in August 1840 when the Argyle Theatre re-staged the successful Sydney production (*Adelaide Guardian*, 26 October 1839). *Freischutz* arias were also popular as concert recital pieces. For example it was reported in 1850 in Adelaide that 'Mde Cranz gave her long promised concert—*Scena* from the *Freischutz*' (*South Australian Gazette and Mining Journal*, 5 May 1850).

nists an opportunity to witness the rude methods by which the aborigines secured their daily food. Their hotels naturally did a roaring trade throughout the afternoon.' ⁴⁶

Given the success of events in the Park Lands commercial corroborees were the logical next step. Private Aboriginal ceremonies were still held in Kensington in 1847 'at the bend downstream in Hallett's Rivulet [from the] bootmaker's shop in Bridge Street.'⁴⁷ As settlement built up this encouraged development of the commercial corroboree in the area. In 1855 the March Report of the Protector of Aborigines reported 'boisterous' corroborees being frequently held in Kensington 'encouraged thereto by liberal donations in money, and by supply of strong drink most reprehensibly furnished them.'⁴⁸

The hotel-corroboree link emerged elsewhere in South Australia during the nineteenth century. Thus in 1872 the *Register* reported that in Kapunda 'a number of natives from the Murray were induced to perform at the Sir John Franklin Hotel.' The performance was 'well attended' and a set fee was charged the spectators. Perhaps to offset the negative associations of the linkage with the hotel's patronage, the paper noted that 'proceeds will be devoted to supplying the aboriginal players with lines and hooks for fishing'.⁴⁹

Nonetheless the association of hotels with alcohol as well as with corroborees fed into the growing double exposure, in the colonial imagination, of the images of Aborigines and intoxication. (As such it was to rebound on Aboriginal performers' ability to capitalise on their break into the mainstream sports-entertainment industry in Adelaide in 1885.) The readiness of hotel-promoters to insist on Aboriginal participation in pre-arranged events occasionally exacerbated this association in the minds of missionaries and others concerned with Aborigines' welfare. Thus when, in 1860, a well-advertised corroboree performance in Kensington⁵⁰ was something of a failure, the *Advertiser* reported that 'many more "blackfellows" would have assembled, but it

42. A fascinating example of how the consonance of this opera's Wolf Glen scene with corroborees was felt by both Europeans and Aborigines was recorded by Sir Roger Therry. He recounted how, 'a gentleman, himself a native of the colony' around 1854 'took a party of Jervis Bay and Illawarra blacks to the Sydney theatre, to witness the opera of 'Der Freischütz' chiefly with the view of observing what effect the incantation-scene would have upon them. The scene in the Wolf's Glen rivetted their attention. They exhibited great excitement at the circle of skulls in the glen; the mystic casting of the seven bullets; Zamiel, the red man with the long fingers; the toads, and frogs, and other reptiles on the ground; the firing of the gun, and fall of the bird, &c. Six or seven years afterwards this gentleman visited Jervis Bay, and 'was surprised to witness' the incorporation of several aspects of the Wolf's Glen scene into 'one of their moonlight entertainments... They painted their bodies red and various other colours to represent the characters in the opera; with boughs of trees they constructed the glen; guanans [sic], frogs and other animals were supplied by their native forests. The firing of the gun and bringing down the bird, and, in short, all the principal scenic incidents of the opera, were imitated with amusing mimicry' (Therry 1863, p. 297).

43. See, for example, Mitchell 1834, vol. 2, pp. 4-6, or Mary Thomas in 1846 (extracts from the diary of Miss Mary Thomas, V1058/26A, typescript, Mortlock Library, Adelaide).

44. Notwithstanding the fact that the theatre at this time had a somewhat doubtful reputation. In 1839, the proposal for a subscription theatre in Adelaide, prompted the giving of assurances that it would be 'upon a scale of propriety and selectness, which will ensure it the patronage of families...to the exclusion of promiscuous and incidental support...The want of innocent recreation is strongly felt in Adelaide' (*Adelaide Guardian*, 26 October 1839).

appears they had obtained alcohol and became intoxicated'. In this case the commercial corroboree had been pressed forward despite the death of a member of the group. Unabashed, the promoters announced that a 'grand corroboree is to celebrate his funeral'.⁵¹

The link with sport meant that Aborigines playing sport and Aborigines dancing 'corroborees' also became linked in the public mind as a form of theatrical spectacle. This view was reinforced by the promoters. Their marketing of Aboriginal sporting fixtures and Aboriginal corroborees virtually did not distinguish between the two, with advertising appealing to their crowd-pleasing entertainment value.

By the 1880s it was the elder statesman of the brewing industry and noted sports patron Edwin Smith and his gadfly protege, the Football and Cricketing Association secretary John Creswell who featured prominently in assisting the staging of the most spectacular and financially successful corroborees in Adelaide.⁵² The South Australia Cricketing Association had the lease on the Adelaide Oval, and under Creswell's impresario management style not only organised football and cricket matches there, but also fireworks displays and moonlight concerts. Following the strong success of Aboriginal cricket as an entertainment spectacle in Victoria, it was not surprising that Creswell should become involved in similar events in South Australia.⁵³

It was not Creswell, however, but the Aborigines of Point McLeay Mission who first proposed a match be played on the Adelaide Oval; in October 1880 the South Australia Cricketing Association first agreed to a request from John Wilkins 'on behalf of Pt McLeay natives asking if South Australia Cricketing Association could arrange a match against 18 of them'.⁵⁴ The Association agreed, but two months later Point McLeay missionary Frederick Taplin 'expressed a wish that the Association would quash the Match

45. Fringe itinerant theatre was another option. Some Aborigines pursued acrobatic careers in roving vaudeville or burlesque bush shows. Some became famous as stars of touring colonial circuses, such as Ashton's trick rider Mongo Mongo and the Aboriginal contortionist Combo Combo. (St Leon 1993; *Ararat and Pleasant Creek Advertiser*, 20 August 1867). Con Colleano became one of the world's greatest circus tightrope acts, after performing in Australia as a 'Royal Hawaiian.' (St Leon 1993) A more recent version of this tradition may be seen in side-show Boxing Tents, and the rodeo circuit.

46. Smith [1973], p. 50. This was by no means the earliest such event in this area: see Stephens 1889, p. 484.

47. Manning 1976, p. 12. This area is now a recreation reserve.

48. *Observer*, 2 June 1855.

49. *Register*, 26 March 1872.

50. *Register*, 4 October 1860. The advertisement appeared as a news item, under the heading 'Native Doings'.

51. *Advertiser*, 5 October 1860.

52. 'As a sports administrator, Creswell became a 'household name' in South Australia.' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 6, p. 144. He was founder and secretary of the South Australian Football Association and secretary firstly of the Kensington and Norwood Cricket Association in 1881-83 and after, the South Australia Cricketing Association until his death in 1909. Smith was owner of the Kent Town Brewery and Mayor of Kensington and Norwood from 1867-70 and 1871-73 and Mayor of Adelaide from 1879-81 and 1886-87. He was a Member of Parliament from 1871-93.

53. It was Thomas Wentworth Wills's Aboriginal cricket team from the Western District of Victoria which famously toured England in 1867, supplementing the entertainment value of their cricket-playing with exhibitions of traditional sports.

as he was afraid of the effect on some of the Aborigines if they got into Adelaide.' The Association decided not to proceed.⁵⁵ A further attempt in 1882 also failed.⁵⁶ Creswell became Secretary the next year.

In May 1885 around one hundred Aborigines from Point McLeay Mission and Yorke Peninsula were assisted by the Government to visit Adelaide during the week of the Queen's Birthday and hold 'a tribal meeting' and perform a corroboree in the Exhibition Grounds, for a small admission charge 'for their own benefit'.⁵⁷ Creswell quickly seized his opportunity. That afternoon he negotiated with them to play the first football match held between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teams in Adelaide and also negotiated an agreement on behalf of South Australia Cricketing Association with the Aborigines for the corroboree to be transferred from the Exhibition Grounds to the Adelaide Oval on 29 May for a half share of the proceeds. He obtained last-minute permission from the Adelaide Town Clerk for the performance, and had it advertised in a large notice in the 28 May afternoon edition of the *Express and Telegraph*.⁵⁸

The first football match, despite its short notice, was an unqualified success.⁵⁹ Due to the demand a second was held at the Adelaide Oval on Tuesday 2 June 1885, attracting a crowd of several hundred people.⁶⁰ The corroboree, in contrast, on the 29 May attracted a crowd of 20,000.⁶¹ At approximately one-sixth of Adelaide's population, it was by far the largest event ever staged on the Adelaide Oval in the nineteenth century. In fact, due to overwhelming public demand, three corroborees were held. The second was on 30 May at the Adelaide Oval, at the request and in the presence of the Governor, and the third at the Kensington Oval, on 3 June, organised by the Kensington and Norwood Cricketing Association.

The *Express and Telegraph's* review of the first of the three corroborees is representative:

It is many years since the residents of Adelaide have had the opportunity afforded them of witnessing a real native corroboree on anything like a large scale, and the announcement that such a novel exhibition would take place on the Adelaide Oval on Friday evening created a great deal of interest.... [But] it was a very tame affair. Those who went to witness a genuine and hearty corroboree of the olden time were grievously disappointed; but this was in a great measure due to the dreadful crush of people, larrikins and larrikinesses having it all their own way.

This was a reference to the 'rushing' of the event by the crowd who threw down the hurdles which had been erected to keep a performance space clear, and to the general noise of the crowd, which 'almost drowned out' the women's chanting. It appears from

54. South Australia Cricketing Association Minutes 11 October 1880, Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

55. South Australia Cricketing Association Minutes 8 December 1880, Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

56. South Australia Cricketing Association Minutes 5 September 1882, Morlock Library, Adelaide.

57. *Register*, 28 May 1885

58. *Express and Telegraph*, 28 May 1885, Afternoon Edition.

59. *Adelaide Observer*, 30 May 1885.

60. *Express and Telegraph*, 2 June 1885, also 3 June 1885.

61. *Register* 30 May 1885. The estimate appears reasonable. The same week 30,000 attended the Queens Birthday Review (*Pictorial Australian*, June 1885). It was also estimated that 12,000 to 15,000 were already on the ground before all the gates were thrown open before a surging crowd (*Advertiser*, 30 June 1885).

the account that the performers did not complete the program due to the crowding and general confusion.

[L]arge numbers swarmed in on the 'free list', and augmented the already immense crowd...from 12,000 to 15,000 people...£200 was taken, and this sum does not nearly represent the number of persons present. The grand stand was packed to double its capacity, there was not standing room on the lawn, and the cricket ground itself was densely covered...Half of the proceeds, after deducting expenses, will be handed over to the Protector of Aborigines, who will in turn pass the money onto the blacks and the other half will go to the association.⁶²

The South Australia Cricketing Association's net profit for the two corroborees amounted to £101.7.5, which meant that the corroboree netted over £200 profit.⁶³ In comparison, the final gate-takings for South Australia Cricketing Association that year for all cricket matches were £157.19.6, while the two English vs Australia Tests netted £84.18.9.⁶⁴

The *Express and Telegraph's* review of 'Saturday Night's Corroboree' is worth quoting at length for the clarity with which it indicates the multiple framings of corroboree which informed the tourist corroboree. The reviewer reported that the dancers entered:

singing at the same time 'God Save the Queen'—'an expression of loyalty so unexpectedly and pleasingly displayed was duly acknowledged by the Governor and appreciated by the onlookers. Meanwhile the lubras had begun their chanting and beating on opossum skins, and a large number of torches placed in the corroboree reserve were lighted. In addition, colored lights and some fireworks were let off, so that the whole scene became exceedingly picturesque. About thirty-five black-fellows were prepared to take part in the proceedings. They were naked with the exception of a trunk, and the exposed parts of their bodies were marked in a variety of ways, but upon what principle is best known to themselves. Some were merely smeared with white, whilst others had white or red lines across the breast and back and down the legs. Anyhow as they moved about amongs the flickering lights they presented a very grotesque appearance. The first part of the programme consisted in the representation of a mob of kangaroos hopping about and stooping down as if feeding...The imitation was not all bad.

This, the first act, was repeated at various points all around the circle of spectators, so that all might have a fair chance of seeing the performance. The second act was no doubt intended to be a little satire on civilization...Most of the blacks belong to the blue-ribbon organisation and having been weaned from the 'cup' apparently desire to disseminate the principles they have embraced. There is a wealth of suggestion to temperance advocates in this long-wanted novelty, and a new mine of anecdote and illustration might be opened up and put to use. The idea of the blacks was to dramatically represent the action of 'liquoring up', and for this purpose they went down on their knees—possibly to signify that drinkers were weak-kneed—and all lifted alternately with each hand. This was repeated three times until the semi-circle had been concentrated. Then the darkies stood, went through some pantomime, and suddenly fell down, yelling and tumbling about. By this they meant to signify intoxication, but it was

⁶² *Express and Telegraph*, 30 May 1885.

⁶³ South Australia Cricketing Association Annual Report 1884–1885.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

considerably different from the conventional stage impersonation... The last part of the corroboree consisted of a native dance, supposed to be in honour of success of the kangaroo hunt. Some of the performers decorated themselves with gum leaves in the orthodox fashion, and standing in line the blacks shook their legs and assisted the lubras in their accompaniment. The last 'event' was a 'saltwater' dance by about a dozen of the Yorke's Peninsula blacks, but what it meant was not clear. Altogether the corroboree, being of a peaceable character, was not so wild or startling as might be expected... but at the same time the frequent applause showed that the spectators were satisfied with what they saw. At the conclusion the Aborigines again sang 'God Save the Queen' and the affair terminated.⁶⁵

This corroboree, performed at the request of the Governor, Sir William Robinson, and during the festivities of the Queen's Birthday, was a confluence of all previous joint venture corroboree framings, of the 'peace corroboree', the 'command performance corroboree', the 'gala corroboree' and, in its various guises, the 'commercial corroboree'. Also present was the tradition of 'sports' corroborees, with South Australia Cricketing Associations promotion of the event and the concurrent inaugural 'Black Vs. White' football matches. It also presaged the 'missionary corroboree' with its temperance movement-play segment by Aboriginal Blue Ribbon Army members.

Given that up to twenty thousand people had rushed to see a corroboree on 29 May 1885, and at least another five thousand had paid to see a performance on 30 May, it was a tribute to the level of demand and client satisfaction, that on 3 June, 1800 attended a corroboree by eighty Aborigines in 'uncertain weather' at the Kensington Oval. It was reported that the dancers 'went through precisely the same manoeuvres as they did on the Adelaide Oval.' Coloured lights and fireworks lit the dance area on the lawn in front of the pavilion, with more light provided by 'bottle torches and bags saturated with tar and kerosine mounted on iron bars.' As at the Adelaide Oval, the performance concluded by Aborigines singing the first verse of the National Anthem 'for which they were loudly cheered'.⁶⁶

It was expected that, due to the success of the corroborees, it would be made an annual event. The Aborigines Friends Association, however, opposed the idea. Consequently in June 1886, a number of the original Point McLeay Mission group of performers led by Archie Blackmore en route to Adelaide to perform a corroboree were intercepted by police at Mt Barker. A compromise agreement was personally hammered out between them and the Protector for them to get free rail passes to seek work at Morgan instead. This was not before 60 to 70 had given 'a mild corroboree' at Strathalbyn 'in the presence of a large gathering of residents, who were attracted by the novel proceedings'.⁶⁷ and another corroboree in Mt Barker.⁶⁸

As is detailed below, the commercial joint venture corroboree then underwent another remarkable transformation, and emerged as a missionary fundraiser. The sportsmen, however, were not deterred from the exploitation of indigenous cultural tourism. In January 1889 the South Australia Cricketing Association finalised arrange-

^{65.} *Express and Telegraph*, 1 June 1885; reprinted *Advertiser*, 1 June 1885.

^{66.} *Observer*, 6 June 1875.

^{67.} *Register*, 9 June 1886.

^{68.} *Mount Barker Courier*, 18 June 1886.

ments for the Maori Football and Fireworks Show to play on the Oval for three days, which netted them a handy profit of 'about £50 to £60'.⁶⁹

The joint venturers—missionaries and friends

Early missionaries sometimes saw as 'corroborees' Aboriginal rituals that were rarely witnessed in cities and towns.⁷⁰ In November 1821, NSW missionary William Walker told a colleague 'it was of too shocking a nature too unseemly—too disgraceful to describe—were not my duty concerned, my curiosity could never prevail on my sense of delicacy, to visit a Corrobaraa'.⁷¹ Missionary opposition to 'corroborees' has come to be framed in these terms by modern writers. For example, Point McLeay's founding missionary George Taplin is often quoted as declaring that

The dances of the women are very immodest and lewd...I have seen dances which were the most disgusting displays of obscene gesture possible to be imagined, and although I stood in the dark alone, and nobody knew I was there, I felt ashamed to look upon such abominations.⁷²

But this is only half of what Taplin actually wrote. The extract actually begins:

At night, what the white men call a corrobory, but which is called by the Narrinyeri ringbalin, is the favourite amusement...in most ringbalin only the men dance; the women sit on the ground and sing. The songs are sometimes harmless, and the dance not indecent, but at other times the songs will consist of the vilest obscenity. The dances of the women are very immodest and lewd...

It is an oversimplification to suppose that missionary opposition to 'corroboree', and especially the tourist corroboree, which was far more likely to consist of Taplin's 'harmless songs', was based on prudery. For the missions, the concern was primarily social control, to restrict Aboriginal people from being able to enjoy their traditional patterns of seasonal movement and from achieving a measure of economic independence.⁷³ A similar concern can be traced in mission reaction to Aboriginal employment in rabbit-hunting. The 1885 Yearly Report of the Aborigines Friends Association stated that rabbit hunting

^{69.} South Australia Cricketing Association Minute Book. Mortlock Library, Adelaide. Meetings of 15 January 1889, 12 February 1889. Another engagement was finalised at the end of April that year, *ibid.*, 30 April 1889.

^{70.} An exception is that recorded by W. A. Cawthorne. On the Queen's Birthday in 1844, in the the Adelaide Park Lands he:

saw natives in large bodies—strode over to them—found them all straggling about comprising various tribes—Some of them were performing that curious ceremony of inaugurating young men into manhood—which is done by laying them down on their backs & smearing their bodies all over with red ochre & grease—& then a female comes forward & plucks out the hair of the pubis!!!! The men finish the work.

This initiation ceremony was clearly not intended as general entertainment, unlike the corroborees dealt with in this article.

^{71.} quoted in Gunson 1974, p. 73.

^{72.} Taplin, in Woods 1879, pp. 37–8, also quoted, for example, in Berndt & Berndt 1985, p. 381 and Bruce & Callaway 1991. Taplin's confession that he was watching alone and in secret is suggestive of a prohibition on male viewing of this women's dance. A 1995 Royal Commission into Narrindjeri women's beliefs accepted evidence that the Narrindjeri did not possess a tradition of 'secret women's business' as allegedly there was no record of its existence. While not a definitive record, Taplin's diary is at least a possible indication of such business existing.

affording as it does full employment for all able-bodied natives [is] a considerable hindrance in several respects...the nomadic life of the rabbit hunter together with the high wages earned and consequent extravagant and improvident habits encouraged, call up serious doubts as to any real benefits afforded by this means of livelihood. The work, however, is one that suits the Aboriginal taste.⁷⁴

If rabbit-hunting suited the Aboriginal taste, corroborees did so even more. Corroborees, even more than hunting skills, were a form of cultural capital that could be readily converted into economic capital, rousing even more the hostility already shown to rabbit-hunting. But the predilection of the powerful for 'peace', 'command performance' and 'gala' corroboree framings, ensured the social acceptability of the corroboree performance. With the continuing bestowal of a vice-regal imprimatur, it became difficult for missionaries to resist the legitimacy of demands to view corroborees.

When the *Register* queried, in its coverage of the first Adelaide Oval corroboree 'whether those responsible for the management of Point McLeay and Point Pierce institutions gave the sanction to this revival of a barbaric performance'⁷⁵ the reaction showed how bitterly this patronage of the powerful was viewed in mission circles. The Rev. Mr Cox, Chairman of the AFA, denied that any such sanction had been given by the Point McLeay committee, and averred that 'they have had to incur the obloquy of persons in high positions in consequence of the antagonistic positions they have taken.'⁷⁶ This was intrepid, given that the Governor, Sir William Robinson, had personally requested the second Saturday evening performance.⁷⁷ Cox concluded by declaring that the AFA and the Point McLeay Mission in concert with the police had always tried to prevent Aborigines attending the Governor's Queen's birthday assemblies in Adelaide 'well knowing that moral and physical damage was the constant result'.

Despite personal and professional crisis, mission superintendent Frederick Taplin joined the controversy.⁷⁸ It was not moral or physical damage that he deplored; his objections were more those of an aggrieved commercial competitor. Mission stations

73. In its 1888 Annual Report the Aborigines Friends Association approvingly noted how in NSW and Victoria 'measures have been taken for more completely controlling the aborigines; the people being to a large extent restricted in their movements' (Aborigines Friends Association Minutes Book Annual Report 1888 Mortlock Library, Adelaide).

74. Aborigines Friends Association 30 June 1885 Yearly Report Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

75. *Register*, 30 May 1885.

76. *Register*, 1 June 1885.

77. Letter from John Creswell, Secretary, South Australia Cricketing Association, to Thomas Worsnop, Adelaide Town Clerk, 28 May 1885, Adelaide Council Archives TCD Accn. 2530, Box 154, Loc.128/0/3, No. 1351. The Governor had missed the Friday night performance because he was already committed to attending the Vice-Regal Command Night, at Garner's Theatre, as part of Her Majesty's Birthday Celebrations. *Register* 29 May 1885.

78. Taplin had resigned as Superintendent of Point McLeay along with head teacher J. A. Ophel and his daughter on 4 May 1885. The withdrawal of his resignation was accepted on 18 May 1885. The AFA Committee had responded to the resignations by the appointment of a sub-committee 'to examine the whole circumstances of the institution with a view to reducing the expenditure.' (Aborigines Friends Association Committee Minutes 4/5/1885). On 28 May 1885 the AFA Committee resolved to accept a sub-committee recommendation that all mission purchases and sales over £10 were in future to have the prior approval of the Secretary of the Aborigines Friends Association. Notably, the current bank balance of £221.2.10 was not much more than was earned by the Adelaide Oval corroborees two days later.

were supported by the Government and the public, he claimed, to 'cultivate industrious habits'. This program had been more or less successful, 'but now a new danger has arisen.... bands of aborigines trooping through the country towns earning money by means of a beastly exhibition.' In this they were aided by 'a well-meaning Government' providing 'a special free train' to take people to Adelaide, as well as by a 'sharp business man'.⁷⁹

Creswell was not deterred. Immediately following the successful Aborigines vs Wanderers football matches, he wrote to the AFA seeking their support for another match. The Association replied that they 'could not in any way give their consent', specifically linking their refusal to 'the recent congregation of natives for the corroboree'.⁸⁰

Taplin's problems with the 'persons in high positions' and their fancy for the 'gala corroboree' framing were to persist. In August 1887 Taplin wrote to Protector Hamilton, refusing his request that the proposed Point McLeay Mission delegation to a Royal Geographic Society of South Australia conference in Adelaide in September be allowed to hold a corroboree.⁸¹ The corroboree, however, went ahead. Seventy-seven Aborigines from Point McLeay and Point Pearce Missions visited Adelaide, and under the auspices of the Society, held a corroboree at the Jubilee Exhibition.⁸²

The patronage of the powerful had proved too strong for the missionaries, and by the end of the year the AFA itself was shepherding Aborigines to the Jubilee Exhibition, supervising 'the encampment at the Exhibition with the meetings and entertainments in the city'; the AFA Annual Report added 'Although we strongly disapprove of natives being permitted to frequent the centres of population, an occasional opportunity of visiting the city may prove helpful and elevating to the young people'.⁸³

It was also to 'prove helpful and elevating' to the Mission. The two corroborees performed at the Jubilee Exhibition played to packed houses with 4,500 attending the first night.⁸⁴ This earned the Point McLeay Mission £16 from the Jubilee Exhibition promoters, whose chief was Sir Edwin Smith.⁸⁵ Further 'entertainments' provided by the Aborigines for the Adelaide public during the visit earned the Mission another £5.7.6.⁸⁶

⁷⁹. *Register*, 3 June 1885.

⁸⁰. Aborigines Friends Association Committee Minute Book, 18 June 1885, Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

⁸¹. South Australian Archives GRG 52/1/1887 No. 177, p. 268.

⁸². *Observer* 10 September 1887.

⁸³. Aborigines Friends Association Committee Minutes Book Annual Report 30 June 1888, Mortlock Library, Adelaide. The press supported the Aborigines Friends Association's change of heart. Only a year after police intervened to prohibit a repeat of the 1885 Adelaide Oval corroboree, it was reported that 'The announcement that a number of aboriginals would perform at the Exhibition met with general favour. Adelaide people have not now many opportunities of seeing a number of natives in the city' (*Register*, 7 September 1887; *Observer*, 10 September 1887).

⁸⁴. *Register*, 7 September 1887; *Observer*, 10 September 1887.

⁸⁵. Aborigines Friends Association Annual Report 30 June 1888. Smith's patronage of cricket and football in South Australia has been noted above. He was vice-president of the Exhibition organising committee, and the event's personal guarantor following the withdrawal of Government support for the venture.

⁸⁶. Aborigines Friends Association Committee Minutes Book Annual Report 30 June 1888, Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

Taplin also allowed his charges to play in a South Australia Cricketing Association-organised football match, which netted the Point McLeay Mission another £2.16.9 profit.⁸⁷ Along with the sale of souvenir basketware and woven mats, Aboriginal contributions to Point McLeay Mission income in 1887, as an outcome of their Adelaide performances, totalled £25.4.3. This was more than the annual salary of the newly-appointed Point McLeay Mission school matron.⁸⁸

The missionary fund-raising corroboree, which simultaneously harked back to the Mechanics' Institute display of corroboree as civilised concert piece, and competed with the sportsmen's corroboree as entertainment and skill exhibition, was thus implemented reluctantly and late in the century. It was a turning point in the development of 'joint venture' corroboree performance. In terms of what was being presented, it was in many ways the beginning of the staged tourist product that was to be offered to visitors at various mission stations during the early twentieth century.

Ironically, this drew largely on Aboriginal utilisation of the quasi-theatrical formats adopted by the Band of Hope, Blue Ribbon Army and similar temperance groups at their meetings. Many Point McLeay residents had become members of the Band of Hope temperance society established there in 1882 which 'provided an outlet for talent and self-expression'.⁸⁹ The temperance 'satire on civilisation' at the Adelaide Oval on 29 May 1885 certainly drew on this background; its performers had almost certainly attended, and possibly performed at, the special forty-fifth anniversary of the South Australian Total Abstinence League and Band of Hope Union, which ended in Adelaide on May 25.⁹⁰ On 2 June 1885, Harry Hewitt, Archie and Frank Blackmore and two others recited and sang hymns at a City Mission Hall temperance meeting; Hewitt told the audience that 'at the Point McLeay Mission fortnightly temperance gatherings took place, when songs, recitations, dialogues, &c., were given.'

By 1895 the AFA, in contrast to its earlier attitude to corroboree performances, actively encouraged a tour of Adelaide by the Point McLeay Mission Glee Club because of its ability to raise funds for the mission. While the Glee Club periodically disbanded as its members went shearing, the Aborigines Friends Association Annual Report showed that the Club in 1900 made over £209 for the Point McLeay Mission through its concerts.⁹¹ The Glee Club's popularity was used by the AFA to boost support for its AGMs, held in the Adelaide Town Hall. In 1898, a massive exhibition of mats and baskets and other local products was added.⁹²

87. Aborigines Friends Association Minute Book 1888 Annual Report. Mortlock Library, Adelaide.

88. Jenkin 1979, p. 182.

89. Jenkin 1979, p. 187.

90. *Register*, 26 May 1885. As captain of the Aboriginal football team then playing in Adelaide, Hewitt did not miss the opportunity to advertise 'the fact early next month he would bring down twenty men to play football, all of whom were members of the Blue Ribbon Army. They then intended to hold special [temperance entertainment] meetings, for which they would prepare' (*Register*, 3 June 1885). This was the South Australia Cricketing Association-scheduled match of July 6, which, as has been seen, was vetoed two weeks later by the Aborigines Friends Association.

91. Jenkin 1979, p. 226.

92. The sales success of these items, led to mat and basket weaving becoming included in the Point McLeay Mission school curriculum in 1904 (Jenkin 1979, p. 227).

In 1908 passenger-boat owners began operating weekly tours to the Mission for summer holiday-makers at Goolwa. Some 2000 tourists visited over the summer of 1908–9, enjoying singing performances and buying mats and basketware as souvenirs.⁹³

The apotheosis of the missionary corroboree came with Point McLeay Mission's participation in the Commercial Travellers Club Charity Fancy Dress Football Carnival at the Adelaide Oval in 1911. The annual Commercial Travellers Club carnival had become a 'a settled institution' in Adelaide, since its inception in 1907. In 1911, 40,000 were expected to attend to experience not only fancy dress football, but 'a galaxy of oddities', and people 'making asses of themselves' for charity along with the whole gamut of side-show and circus spectacle—and for the first time, a corroboree.

This event encapsulated all available framings for the tourist corroboree. It was a 'peace corroboree' in that it was specifically perceived as being 'as perfect a reproduction of their old war dances as the laws of decency and their personal ability permit', but in the context that a 'proper corroboree' cannot be seen except 'in the faraway haunts of the blacks', that is, that the truly warlike dances were no longer a part of settled South Australia.⁹⁴ The 'command performance' framing continued with the attendance of the Governor, who paraded across the Oval between a guard of honour of six hundred boy scouts. The 'gala' corroboree framing was clear in the secular, non-governmental gala nature of the event. The charity focus of the event did not disguise the fact that it was the major annual promotion for commercial travellers and their industry. Courtesy once again of the South Australia Cricketing Association, the corroboree was to be staged on the Adelaide Oval. Finally, there was the 'missionary corroboree' framing. It was reported that 'The mission was delighted to fall in with the suggestion' of a corroboree 'as the mission has been selected as one of the beneficiaries this year'.⁹⁵

The joint-venture corroboree had become well and truly framed by previous framings of the corroboree. At the same time, the result of the various manoeuvrings by competing non-Aboriginal interests had relegated the corroboree to a side-show. Aborigines, always a social side-show in colonial society, now found as corroboree performers that if the the world of the side-show was to be their lot, they might as well dispense with the joint venture. Accordingly, the joint venture began to give way to independent groups as primary holders of the tourist corroboree tradition.

The independents

In 1905 Harry Hewitt, leader of the 1885 Adelaide Oval corroborees, was acclaimed for leading twenty 'local aboriginals, with the assistance of their friends from the neighbouring towns' in a corroboree at the developing tourist town of Victor Harbour.⁹⁶ 'Almost the whole town turned out to witness the event' which 'lasted for about two

^{93.} *ibid.*

^{94.} *Advertiser*, 7 November 1911.

^{95.} *ibid.*

^{96.} In 1886 the Port Victor District Council had asked police to remove the Aboriginal camp, because of its smell, 'before the influx of visitors during the Christmas holidays' with the exception of old Poole 'who will be allowed to remain in the house purchased for him by the Council.' Poole was at that time himself a visitor attraction (South Australian Archives GRG 52/1/1886, 22 December 1886).

hours' and 'a good collection was taken up'. The corroboree was presented as a war dance, the performers 'dancing in their fighting array with waddies and actions of a warlike character. Weird and strange white markings decorated their bodies, making them look hideous...they wore fantastic headdress, and had leaves around their ankles.'⁹⁷ Presaging behaviour that was to become common in future corroboree performances, it was reported that 'a visitor intends taking a photograph of the corroboree party, in all its warpaint'.

Three features of Hewitt's corroboree deserve comment. The first is that the event was independently organised, without joint-venture partnership of any sort. This style of independent organisation had continued since the first Park Lands corroborees. In Clare, in 1860, for example, about twenty Aborigines near Clare were reported to

enliven us every evening with their corrobories...Two or three times during the performance one of them carried round a hat, stating that the smallest contribution would be thankfully received.⁹⁸

Corroborees in the Adelaide Park Lands were particularly likely during the months of April and May, when groups would travel into town in anticipation of the Queen's Birthday celebrations and blanket distribution—'When the moon rises early they make a diversion among themselves called "corrobbery" and to get money from the white people.'⁹⁹ These events were pre-planned, rather than *ad hoc*; Noah Shreeve, writing in 1864, gave an account of his visit to the camp one Saturday evening. When he asked to see a corroboree that night or Sunday he was told to return on Monday, when a performance was planned.¹⁰⁰

Shreeve had also noted that this group, educated at Point McLeay Mission, could 'read write and speak English'.¹⁰¹ The importance of writing English was underlined by the appearance, in March 1872, of the following advertisement in the *Express and Telegraph*:

Wanted to give Notice that there will be a BLACKFELLOWS CORROBBOREE on the Nth Park Lands, at 8 o'clock pm THIS EVENING March 5. This is a genuine announcement. JACK FISHERMAN, GEO. BENNET.¹⁰²

Reviewing the performance the next day, the *Advertiser* reported that:

in compliance with an advertisement in the *Express*, a blackfellows corroboree was held on the Nth Park Lands on Tuesday evening. Some eight men, daubed over with whitening paste, danced to the monotonous chant of four lubras. There was a large number of spectators and the blacks seemed to get a good many copers.¹⁰³

These corroborees were organised in a milieu where 'travelling shows' of great variety were a characteristic form of entertainment in South Australia and elsewhere. In

⁹⁷. *Advertiser*, 11 February 1905

⁹⁸. *Register*, 13 February 1860, quoted in Noye 1986, p. 218.

⁹⁹. Shreeve 1864, p. 36.

¹⁰⁰. Shreeve 1864, pp. 38–9.

¹⁰¹. *ibid.*

¹⁰². *Express and Telegraph*, 5 March 1872 2A. While the name of the former is at least suggestive, it has not been possible to ascertain whether either man or both men was or were Aboriginal.

¹⁰³. *Advertiser*, 6 March 1872 2D.

1883, for example, the Nardoona Minstrels, a 'burnt cork' blackface troupe, gave concerts in Mt Barker, and were applauded for their "talkey-talkey" nigger business'.¹⁰⁴ In Melrose, in 1890, travelling Aborigines held a corroboree; one of the group advertised the fact, as other travelling showmen did, by going around the township beforehand ringing a bell.¹⁰⁵ In 1898, in Broken Hill, 'Poolamacca' Aborigines were to be found performing corroborees at the 'Proprietary paddock' for the local population, 'with the view of raising funds to provide them with means of combating the coming winter'.¹⁰⁶ The same year at Beltana, in the Flinders Ranges, 'nearly all the town turned out to see a corroboree held by the blacks ... [the] spectators sat on almost precipitous rocks that rose above the flat that the natives had chosen'.¹⁰⁷ In 1904 in Wirrabara over a number of days thirty to forty Aborigines entertained 'A large number of spectators...with their corroborees and exhibitions of boomerang-throwing [at which] Some of them are very expert, particularly Old Black Warrior who wears an old grey belltopper, bearing the words, "King Warrior"'.¹⁰⁸

In 1896 the *Bulletin's* theatre gossip column reported that:

An aboriginal theatrical co. has started operations in Queensland. Some 53 blacks of both sexes are running the show on approved 'white lines', commingled with the 'corroboree' element. The 'co.' pitched its tent at Cooperoo last week, and the whole district turned out to witness the first performance. The 'manager' was a stalwart nig. who announced that the admission was a silver coin: 'children one fellow penny'.¹⁰⁹

This theatre company may have been the group responsible for the most successful side-show of the 1896 Tenterfield Show held that month, a corroboree in 'full war paint' held in the evening under electric light.¹¹⁰ Hewitt's 1905 corroboree therefore was typi-

^{104.} *Mount Barker Courier*, 3 August 1883.

^{105.} *Observer*, 6 April 1895.

^{106.} *Observer*, 7 May 1898.

^{107.} *Observer*, 3 November 1898. This corroboree was described as follows: '

the actors, naked from the waist, were painted with broad white bands over face, neck, arms and body. Some of them had great feather erections on their heads and wore a kind of sporran made of wool. The leader carried in each hand a Maltese cross of wood, each point having a bunch of white feathers attached, and others had the same shaped frame with scarlet threads wound across and across. An old man, clothed in a long coat that looked like a high priest's robe, stood in front beating two boomerangs, and chanting a low monotonous song, to whose time the naked feet of file warriors stamped and beat in unison. The women kept the fire going, and one joined the 'high priest's' chant and beating her hands.' Cawthorne in his description of the Kure dance termed the the wool-wound cross a 'palyertatta'.

(This is also referred to by Tindale & Lindsay as a 'paljatata' or 'thread-cross ornament'). It is featured in Angas's watercolours of Kuri dance performers (Tindale & Lindsay 1963, facing p. 96) and in W. A. Cawthorne's drawing in the *Illustrated Australian News* of the Ngadjuri's Kure dance that was to be performed for the Duke of Edinburgh in SA in 1867. G. W. Stacey's and A. Horrocks's memoirs of Clare Valley corroborees, as quoted in Noye 1986, contain similar descriptions.

^{108.} *Advertiser*, 23 April 1904.

^{109.} *Bulletin*, 14 March 1896. This was reported in the regular column 'At Poverty Point'.

^{110.} *Brisbane Courier*, 16 March 1896. Holding of a 'Blacks Corroboree' was part of the Show's pre-publicity. *Brisbane Courier*, 3 March 1896 and 4 March 1896.

cal of a continuing tradition of independently organised 'strolling player' performances.

The second characteristic of Hewitt's corroboree was its seaside location. Aborigines at the end of the nineteenth century clearly used tourist corroborees to support their annual return to traditional summer campsites. Thus in the summer of 1897 Aborigines, returning to their traditional camp sites at Glenelg, began once again to perform corroborees for Adelaide residents.¹¹¹ In January 1898, it was reported that 'cartloads' of Aborigines had arrived and held a corroboree on a Friday evening. Though no 'admission price' was mentioned, this enterprise clearly had a commercial aspect, being performed in the height of summer in the tourist and holiday season, when the premier beach suburb was in full carnival mode.

By this time, professional Aboriginal corroboree dancers were more alert to 'introducing too much of the European element', and the demand for an 'authentic' presentation. Thus, in this performance, fifteen performers 'stripped to the waist' performed 'a tribal war dance. The body of each native was gloriously painted; plumes bedecked the head, while a plentiful display of leaves and feathers encompassed knees and hips of some performers'. They danced 'with zest' and 'the warlike attitudes at times assumed were quite in keeping with the fierce and fiery eye characteristic of the blacks of Australia in moments of rage'.¹¹²

That same summer it was reported that residents at Grange, a little further north on the Adelaide coast:

were treated to a real aboriginal corroboree last night. 18 full-blooded blacks took part in an entertainment, which was held on the beach and all the natives were in their proper war-paint.¹¹³

In April 1905, it was reported that 'over a dozen' Aborigines of the 'Tury tribe' from Mr W. H. Bowman's station gave a corroboree at Colley's Reserve, Glenelg.

The event proved a great attraction and hundreds of people gathered around the blacks who were in their 'warpaint'...the spectators became so interested that, notwithstanding the efforts of Sir Jenkin Coles, who was in the ring, the space became so circumscribed that the blacks could not continue the entertainment.¹¹⁴

Such corroborees continued along Adelaide beaches for at least a decade, displaying varying degrees of spontaneity, planning and organisation. In 1907 Aborigines, who had been observed 'gathering for some time at Henley Beach from different directions, making camp in the dunes near the seashore...(this week introduced) several corroborees into the programme and they proved interesting and remunerative.' Grange's summer holiday-makers also received a visit from these performers.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *Advertiser*, 13 October 1897.

¹¹² *Advertiser*, 31 January 1898.

¹¹³ *Advertiser*, 10 March 1898. This account was disputed by 'Wopshot' who claimed that the corroboree was performed reluctantly, at the instigation of well-known resident J. T. McLean (*Advertiser*, 12 March 1898).

¹¹⁴ *Advertiser*, 3 April 1905. From 1890 to 1911, Sir Jenkin Coles was Speaker of the South Australian Parliament.

¹¹⁵ *Register*, 18 May 1907.

The third characteristic of Hewitt's corroboree worth noting is its emphasis on 'war dance' and 'actions of a warlike character'. This emphasis was a response to a new framing of the tourist corroboree. In 1887, the year of the Jubilee Exhibition 'sham battle' corroboree, the *Illustrated Australian News* had featured an article entitled 'War Dance of the Natives'. It reported that:

The Australian Aborigines are rapidly disappearing... The natives which remain uncivilised are only found in the back blocks of the Northern Territory and Western Australia; but they are miserable and treacherous at best. Occasionally a tribe may be found...willing for a consideration to interest strangers by an exhibition of a war dance.¹¹⁶

The 1887 Jubilee Exhibition 'sham battle', like the 'old war dances' of the 1911 Commercial Travellers corroboree, was not a re-enactment of the past, but an evocation of the present, as representation, especially, of the Northern Territory frontier. Re-awakening and sustaining public patronage of corroborees in Adelaide were the dispatches from the Spencer and Gillen expedition to Central Australia. Accounts of corroborees were often featured in their press reports.¹¹⁷

The Northern Territory frontier had become a new framing of the corroboree reproduced by the Aboriginal seaside entertainers and strolling players at the end of the century. At the same time, it had become a new location for the tourist corroboree, as Northern Territory Aborigines began to exploit their symbolic capital in the new settlement context.

Conclusion

In Adelaide within the first ten years of settlement, the town's Aboriginal population had begun meeting a growing demand from newly-arrived Europeans for 'corroborees'. The settlers' valuing of such symbolic goods was, for Aborigines, a reinforcement of the value and status of their traditional cultural practices and beliefs. It was, therefore, also a threat to those Church and State authorities endeavouring to have them repudiate such practices and beliefs and replace them with their own.

Making these authorities' task more difficult was the fact that settler small business, in particular publicans and others in the outdoor entertainment industry, seized the opportunity early to take a position in the market as promoters and impresarios. They arranged or booked venues, assisted with staging, props and effects, and in advertising and promotion of the product. For many settlers and visitors in Adelaide (and other capitals) the corroboree became a 'must-see' tourist attraction, and grew to become metonymic for Aboriginal culture.

The 'tourism corroboree', along with other aspects of Aboriginal cultural tourism, is located within a moving colonial political economy of the sign. In South Australia in the nineteenth century it absorbed influences from Victoria and moved northward into the Northern Territory with the moving frontier, where it continues to flourish. In this movement signs of the quest for equality, independence and identity abound, by both colonised performer and colonising audience, and are negotiated in complex attempts

¹¹⁶. *Illustrated Australian News*, 20 August 1887, pp. 148–154.

¹¹⁷. Reproduced from the Melbourne *Age* in the *Advertiser*. An example is 'The Blacks of The Interior' entirely about corroborees, written by Spencer himself, *Advertiser*, 10 August 1901.

at satisfying competing and complementary demands within an overarching framework of a growing asymmetry of power relations.

Elsewhere, the implementation of policies of social isolation, the alienation of traditional lands, and the removal of children from their parents were to have long-lasting impacts. In the immediate instance, a corroboree performance was an ideally portable, and seemingly inalienable product, requiring no access to traditional lands. However, in the long term, the breaking of the nexus of the physical and the symbolic, in which the performance of corroborees were embedded, was to have a transforming effect. Formerly the social reproduction of cultural capital had required access to land for the performance of ritual, and the instruction of children. It is no wonder that modern day Aboriginal cultural tourism has arisen in the context of the restoration of this nexus, of land rights and Link-Up. For some, however, the enduring consequences of this double dislocation from land and from children, was also to demand a reconstruction of ethnicity, giving rise to an emergent authenticity in their touristic products.

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The Birrinydji Legacy: Aborigines, Macassans and mining in north-east Arnhem Land

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Abstract

For some clans in north-east Arnhem Land, the Dreaming-being Birrinydji is the king, boat captain and blacksmith. He is at once the minerals of the ground and the land itself, and Yolngu (Aborigines) are born in his image and ceremonially enact his will. Yet Birrinydji represents the technology and power possessed by non-Aborigines, but not Aborigines. The perception is that following the days when Indonesian fishermen from Macassar frequented the northern coast, Balanda (non-Aborigines) have become wealthy at Aboriginal expense by exploiting the resources of the Aboriginal domain. In an analysis of Aboriginal oral history and of the spirit-being Birrinydji, I account for widely varying attitudes by Yolngu towards mining and exploration. One of the principal questions I ask is, what is the relevance of the view held by some Warramiri, Dhalwangu and Gumatj clan members that at some point in the distant past, under the tutelage of Birrinydji, Aborigines themselves were miners and they fashioned metal tools from locally occurring iron-ore outcrops?

Contemporary Arnhem Land

The geographic focus is the Aboriginal community of Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) and also the homeland of Dholtji in Australia's Northern Territory, approximately 500 kilometres east of the regional capital of Darwin. The largest settlement in north-east Arnhem Land, Galiwin'ku was established in 1942 by the Methodist Overseas Mission. The community is home to approximately 1500 out of a total Yolngu population of 5000. The traditional Aboriginal owners of the island share their homeland with eight other closely related clan groups, whose country lies in the immediate vicinity of the settlement. Dholtji is a small outstation to the north-east of Galiwin'ku and has a population of perhaps ten people, but only during the Dry season.

The people of north-east Arnhem Land are known as Yolngu, but they have also been referred to in the literature as Murngin¹ and Wulamba.² Dualism is the defining feature of the Yolngu universe. Each person is born into a patrimoiety, named Dhuwa or Yirritja, as well as a patrilineal land-owning clan which again is either Dhuwa or

1. Warner 1969.

2. Berndt & Berndt 1954.

Yirritja. Each member possesses rights to certain lands through their father, for it is the father who confers clan identity, but clan members also have interests in the land of their mother and their mother's mother. In this paper attention is focussed on the Yirritja moiety Warramiri clan, and in particular the views of the ex-leader of the clan, the late David Burrumarra M.B.E.

The traditional owners of Galiwin'ku and Dholtji are land owners in the eyes of the Australian law. Yolngu property rights came under the national spotlight in the 1960s, when Aborigines living at nearby Yirrkala took their case against the mining company Nabalco to the Supreme Court to determine who owned the land. As is well documented³, the judgement was that while Aborigines belonged to the land, it did not belong to them. The court did not recognise community or group land interests and the decision was that Aboriginal property rights had been wiped out with the assertion of sovereignty by the British in 1788.⁴ The decision of the court prompted the establishment of a commission of inquiry into granting land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory. This led to the enactment of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976*, and the formation of land councils to pursue land claims on behalf of traditional Aboriginal land owners and to act as liaison with regard to development proposals. Aborigines, who make up 25% of the Northern Territory's population, now own over 50% of its land mass. The form of title is inalienable or Aboriginal freehold. Aborigines hold title not just for themselves but for future generations. The land cannot be sold or given away.

Introducing Birrinydji

For at least 200 years, fishermen from southern Sulawesi, the Macassans⁵, made annual voyages to the Arnhem Land coast in search of the exotic delicacy, trepang, which they would sell to the Chinese. Yirritja moiety Warramiri clan members once had a pivotal role mediating relations with Macassans. In a process that was to be echoed elsewhere in Australia by European colonists, Macassans bestowed the title Rajah (king) on certain Aboriginal elders who would act as their brokers. In turn, these leaders would regulate trade in highly desired foreign goods with inland Aboriginal tribes.⁶ The last Rajah of Melville Bay and Dholtji was Ganimbirngu⁷ who was the father of David Burrumarra, the immediate past Warramiri clan leader from Elcho Island.⁸ Dholtji was the place where Matthew Flinders encountered the Macassan fleet in 1803⁹ and where great festivities are described as taking place on shore as up to sixty praus and a thousand men reconnoitered prior to their return to Sulawesi.¹⁰ Following the departure of

3. Williams 1986.

4. A decision that was overturned in the Mabo 2 High Court case in 1991.

5. This is an expression used by Aborigines to refer to all foreign trepang (bêche-de-mer) fishermen. While primarily from Macassar, boat crews were drawn from many of the islands of eastern Indonesia.

6. Thomson 1949.

7. Macknight 1979.

8. McIntosh 1996a. Rather than bestowing the gorget upon Aborigines, Macassans offered Burrumarra's father a ceremonial mast, flag and sword.

9. Flinders 1813. Flinders named the surrounding islands after 'the venerable gentlemen' of the English East India Company.

10. Berndt & Berndt, 1954.

the Macassans in 1907 and the establishment of missions in north-east Arnhem Land in the 1920s, places such as Dholtji became all but deserted.

In 1988, eighty years after the end of the Macassan era, David Burrumarra promoted the view amongst those who would listen that mining on his land at Dholtji would help restore wealth and status to Aboriginal people—a wealth and status that had been usurped firstly by these itinerant voyagers from Sulawesi and then later by white settlers. For the aging Aboriginal leader there were no doubts. Mining was a part of Aboriginal history and it was an avenue to the good life. Since time immemorial, coastal haematite outcrops had been transformed into iron-bladed tools by Yolngu working under the guidance of the Dreaming figure Birrinydji, a being in the image the boat captain and blacksmith, known in some accounts as 'Captain Cook'. In the Gulf of Carpentaria Aborigines say that the Dreaming era came to an end with the arrival of non-Aborigines.¹¹ In the same way, following first contact with the Macassans, north-east Arnhem Land Aborigines are said to have lost the skills and technologies of the 'new world'.¹² Burrumarra sought a return to this 'golden era'.

Under provisions of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976*, Aborigines must respond to requests for a meeting with potential developers not less than every five years. In 1988, as with previous negotiations, Burrumarra's position remained the same, though he lacked support from many members of his clan. The destruction of sacred sites in the vicinity of the Nabalco bauxite mine at Gove was still fresh in people's minds, even twenty years on. While close family did not question Burrumarra's authority as the spokesperson for the clan or Birrinydji, some Yolngu saw him as attempting to sell off the country to Balanda for his own personal gain. Others saw his views on the past as obscure and anachronistic and they objected to mining exploration, even while acknowledging that the land in question was sacred to the memory of a 'timeless' partnership that was once deemed to have existed between Aborigines and non-Aborigines through Birrinydji. As Burrumarra said:

Birrinydji had the mind of a Balanda, but the skin was not the same. Birrinydji has brown skin but his law is for all, not just for brown and white, but black as well, and all the people of the world...Birrinydji was the king just as my father was king. My father was also a servant...When he looks in the mirror he sees Birrinydji, but also the whale and the octopus.¹³ The Warramiri honour all three.¹⁴

Warramiri oral history tells a tale of first contact and a history of race relations that is at odds with contemporary historical accounts of the Macassan era. This paper revolves around discussions with Burrumarra and other members of the Warramiri clan and Yirritja moiety on the history of iron-making in Aboriginal Australia. It examines the relevance of this history in the way that Aborigines in north-east Arnhem Land are responding to requests for access to their country by mining companies.

11. Trigger 1992.

12. McIntosh 1994b, in a parallel story, refers to how Burrumarra could fly in the days before the mission. Upon entering community life in the 1940s, he lost this ability.

13. Warramiri totems.

14. McIntosh 1996a.

Burrumarra's dream

In the weeks following a 'yes' decision to mining at a Northern Land Council meeting held at Galiwin'ku to discuss the possibility of exploration in the vicinity of his outstation, Burrumarra had a dream which sparked considerable discussion. In the dream Burrumarra's younger brothers were clearing land for an airstrip at Dholtji¹⁵, at this ceremonial centre for Birrinydji. In complying with Burrumarra's wish, the brothers were planning to make Dholtji the large settlement it had been both in the days of, and prior to the Macassan era.

The brothers had nearly finished the airstrip when their bulldozer was halted by an obstacle. It was a huge gold nugget. 'This must belong to Birrinydji' they thought, and went off to get their older brother. The Warramiri leader stared at the find and understood that the wealth of the white men could be theirs once again, and he reflected on the past. Birrinydji was the rich minerals of the earth, the transformed haematite, the source of the technology that made foreigners wealthy and allowed them to dominate Aborigines. He bent down to pick up the prize and, as he lifted it and held it in his arms, Birrinydji, Burrumarra's Aboriginality and his Dreaming went into the ground and out of his life. He had the wealth of the Balanda and that was all that he had. To savage the earth for its 'spirit', as in mining, was to lose one's identity and become like the Balanda. By resisting the temptation one would maintain one's Aboriginality but also one's poverty.

Dreams like this have their counterpart in recorded Yolngu mythology. In the Yirritja moiety Gupapuyngu clan there is the story of Djuranydjura, the dingo, who meets Macassans on the beach in a first contact narrative.¹⁶ The Macassans want to give the dog matches, but they are rejected for Djuranydjura uses fire sticks and has always done so. The visitors offer the dog rice to eat, but Djuranydjura is happy with his lot, there being plenty of fish in the creeks and kangaroo in the bush to meet his needs. When the Macassan offers the dog all that he has, Djuranydjura replies that if that was to be the case, then he would be the Macassan and Macassans would be Aborigines. On this note, both parties retreat to their place of origin.¹⁷

For Aborigines, the Djuranydjura narrative is both a story of defiance and of loss. On the one hand it appears as a statement of Aboriginal pride and self-sufficiency and it is told in school culture classes as such. On the other hand, as more detailed variations of the myth attest¹⁸ it is an affirmation that Aborigines were dependent on non-Aborigines for the things that they came to find essential following contact with the Other, i.e. metal tools, cloth, dug-out sailing canoes and so on. For instance, in one extended version of the myth linked to a different site, Djuranydjura is a black male dog, though following contact with Macassans he becomes female and white. This change of status sanctioned both trade and sexual relations between Aborigines and

¹⁵. Dholtji is a loan word, from the Portuguese via Macassans meaning 'the gift'. Dholtji is the gift of Birrinydji to the Warramiri people.

¹⁶. McIntosh 1992; 1994a; 1996a.

¹⁷. Of note is the fact that no trepanning occurred at the site of this mythical encounter on Howard Island. Macassans regarded this site as strictly off limits. P. Lanhupuy pers. comm. 1988.

¹⁸. see McIntosh 1992; Warner 1958.

Macassans according to Burrumarra.¹⁹ The rock that represents the Macassan who met the Dog in this variation is an 'increase site' for Yolngu at Elcho Island. Prior to fishing expeditions, Yolngu rub and sing to the rock, which is suggestive of the way Aborigines benefitted materially from trade with the visitors, (though attributing the wealth of the Other to an Aboriginal Dreaming).

In Burrumarra's Warramiri clan, the anti-social Dog Bol'lili is credited with a similar dramatic turnabout in Aboriginal fortunes. Instead of the Dog changing colour, in this narrative, at the 'beginning of time', Warramiri Aborigines were white and rich and Macassans black and poor, and Macassans worked for Aborigines. It was Bol'lili's refusal to co-operate with Macassans that led to Aboriginal loss in relation to outsiders.²⁰ As with the Djuranydjura narrative, this is an outside story, though no known variations inspire the same sense of independence as with Djuranydjura.²¹ The inside version of both these encounter narratives is that of Birrinydji and it is far more harrowing.²² Both Balanda and Yolngu were once united by a single law. They lived in their own lands and, as sovereign nations, respected each other's domains. But with the coming together of peoples in history and the ensuing struggle over access to resources, Birrinydji's law emerged as the guiding principle for Yolngu in race relations. According to Burrumarra, Yolngu are 'soldiers for Birrinydji'. The belief inspires pride in one's heritage and of oneself as the owner of the land. 'Black for black and white for white' is one way a senior Yolngu referred to this inheritance. The myth also inspires resentment at Balanda for growing rich at Aboriginal expense and also dismay, for Aborigines once had this wealth and then lost it. For people such as Burrumarra, regaining wealth and control of one's land is part of Birrinydji's plan. This was the Warramiri leader's dream.

Theoretical overview

The historian Campbell Macknight has called for an analysis of the way the memory of the often turbulent indigenous experience with Macassans has been transformed by Aborigines over time and is relevant in contemporary politics.²³ Keen likewise has suggested a need to '...trace trajectories of transformation in relations, powers, trends, events, and the forms into which people try to shape their worlds'.²⁴ In this paper I ask, 'What is the relation between giving an account of the past and realising a future?' What happens when 'timeless' truths of the Dreaming are in conflict with prevailing or available data?

Bloch²⁵ referred to a distinction between systems by which we know the world in a practical sense and systems by which we accommodate history and keep the law. This was equated with Marx's distinction between ideology and knowledge. For the Warramiri there is knowledge of the Macassan past that pertains to everyday communication, (recently introduced to Arnhem Land schools is a course on Macassan history) and

19. Beckett 1993 says there is a desire to both unite with the Other and yet simultaneously to maintain a separate identity and preserve local autonomy.

20. Warner 1958.

21. Bulunha, the white male Dog, has this role.

22. see McIntosh 1996b.

23. Macknight 1972, p. 317; 1986, p. 72.

24. Keen 1994, p. 296.

25. Bloch 1977.

there is knowledge of Macassans applicable to ritual communication amongst elders in a ceremonial setting (e.g. Birrinydji comes from the land of the Warramiri and drew all outsiders to Arnhem Land by the strength of his *marr* or desire). 'Outside' (or public) and 'inside' (sacred or esoteric) are apt labels for the distinction. According to Bloch, anthropological analysis must take into account the changing meaning of the past in the present. Answers to questions such as: what is known about Macassans, what is possible to know, and who has the right to speak on this subject, reflect the interaction of emic and etic perspectives. The ancestral being Birrinydji is constituted in the ever-changing relations between Aborigines and others, and Yolngu decision making with regard to mining reflects the ever-changing understanding of this Dreaming.

In the 1960s, Warramiri Yolngu worked with historians charting Macassan sites along the coast. The subject of Birrinydji was not raised, and one of the reasons was that 'inside' truths and available or prevailing 'outside' data did not address the same questions, and some Yolngu wanted to keep it that way.²⁶ For Burrumarra, only the Birrinydji narrative was seen to provide answers to questions such as: What brought the Macassans to Arnhem Land? Why do some Aboriginal Dreamings refer to ancestral figures in the image of the Macassan? Why have some Yolngu a ceremony for iron and not others? Burrumarra did not know that in the 1700s, Sama Bajau, or sea gypsies, were scouting for the Macassans—seeking out new areas for exchange and exploitation. Similarly Yolngu were also not privy to the political events in Southern Sulawesi in the 17th century, when the Dutch, in league with the Bugis, took Macassar by force and changed the nature of sea trade in the Indonesian archipelago for ever. What they did know was that Macassans were white and rich and Aborigines black and poor, and Aborigines had to work for the visitors to get what they wanted in the way of trade goods. Their autonomy was threatened, and it was the Warramiri leader Bukulatipi, who lived in the mid-1800s, who is credited with coming to a realisation about the nature of Birrinydji. His views, passed down through many hands and interpretive processes, are upheld as 'timeless' truths of the Dreaming.

Easy access to iron since the advent of the mission at Galiwin'ku in 1942 has resulted in a change of status for Birrinydji. As a foundational story for clans such as the Warramiri, can it simply vanish into obscurity? Following Sahlins,²⁷ existing interpretations are seen to be put at risk by Burrumarra. Sahlins says that just as history is culturally ordered, so too are cultural schemes. Meanings are revalued as they are practically enacted. We take risks with our understandings, and as a result, culture is historically altered in action. Rudder²⁸ has written about the changing nature of 'inside' accounts as new discoveries are made on the 'outside'. Everything that exists has an 'inside' equivalent, which may or may not have been revealed at a particular point of time, allowing the 'inside' to always appear to be unfolding before one's eyes. This was central to Burrumarra's understanding of the need for mining. Aboriginal history was suggestive of a potential that was yet to be realised, and he was testing the waters. Burrumarra believed the time was right for mining, but was uncertain of the extent of support for

26. Burrumarra pers. com. 1988. No Birrinydji sites were visited despite the fact that some coincide with trepang sites.

27. Sahlins 1981.

28. Rudder 1993.

his interpretations of the significance of Birrinydji. Burrumarra's appeals to the Dreaming are based on a desire for an end to the poverty which for so long positioned Aborigines on the margins of non-Aboriginal society. The question is how, in giving his account of Birrinydji, does Burrumarra hope to make the future coincide with his vision of the past? And what becomes of Birrinydji in the process?

Historical overview

Published studies of the Macassan trepang industry do not correspond with what many older north-east Arnhem Landers say of the past. For instance some Yolngu posit waves of contact prior to the arrival of Macassans, yet historians like Macknight are adamant that this was not the case. In giving an overview of the Macassan trepang industry, Macknight says:

It began in about AD. 1700 and continued on until the early years of this century. For most of the nineteenth century, and probably the hundred years before that as well, at least a thousand men made the voyage each year...their product was exported to an international market. Their object was purely commercial, for they themselves had no use whatsoever for trepang.²⁹

Aborigines were involved in diving for trepang, smoking and curing the sea slug, fishing, building smoke houses for curing, cutting firewood and digging wells.³⁰ Not only were they wage labourers, they also stockpiled turtle shell, pearls and trepang and exchanged these for trade goods such as axes, knives and tobacco.³¹ There was a degree of mutual trust between Aborigines and the visitors and certain Macassan boat captains had a basic knowledge of Aboriginal culture, languages and place names.³² The visitors had no interest in changing Aboriginal lifestyles or of exploring inland rivers for the purposes of colonization.³³ By the late nineteenth century however there was a growing concern by Australian authorities about the trepang trade. The Macassans were not paying taxes and there were questions about their treatment of Aborigines. In 1907, after continued pressure for Europeans to take control of the industry, the Government prohibited the entry of these peoples, and a major chapter in Australian history came to an end.³⁴

Yet for even the most casual observer of life in north-east Arnhem Land, it is apparent that for Aborigines this was not the end of the story. A significant number of Yolngu ceremonies are 'shot through' with Macassan references:³⁵ healing rituals are held in honour of Allah; sand sculptures of boats lie alongside Aboriginal graves and bamboo flagpoles symbolic of Birrinydji are found in practically all communities.³⁶

The most perplexing aspect of Aboriginal accounts of past encounters relate to the history and politics of skin colour. Told in the present, such stories are in accord with a

²⁹ Macknight 1976, p. 1.

³⁰ Worsley 1955, p. 3.

³¹ Macknight 1972, p. 308; Worsley 1955, p. 3.

³² Macknight 1972, p. 303

³³ Warner 1969, p. 449.

³⁴ Macknight 1986, p. 73.

³⁵ Worsley 1955.

³⁶ McIntosh 1996a; 1996b. In one ritual, Yolngu enact the planting of Birrinydji's flag in the ground at Dholtji.

belief that at one time some Yolngu enjoyed an affluence and influence comparable to that of outsiders. Warramiri Yolngu say that the first visitors to the Arnhem Land coast were black,³⁷ the next wave were golden-brown³⁸ and then finally whites³⁹ arrived. The pattern of contact correspondingly went from equality and reciprocity (the souls of dead Aborigines went to live in the homelands of the black voyagers); to a time when Aborigines and outsiders lived in harmony (they grew rice and made cloth and locally produced pottery and iron); to a time when trepangers, Japanese pearlers and then Europeans exploited and mistreated Aborigines.

Warramiri history, as relayed by Burrumarra, details how pre-Macassan voyagers would hunt for the whale along the Arnhem Land coast with their long spears, and then kill, carve and eat the beast following a pattern that was incorporated by Yolngu in ritual. Thus Burrumarra would say that Aborigines upheld the law of the whale, but they would use 'manikay, bilma and yidaki' (song, clapsticks and didjerido). Both Aborigines and outsiders were partners in maintaining the sacred order of the universe. With Macassans, the situation was similar but also different. Aborigines owned the ceremonies for iron and, as I describe later, they sing about the transformation of haematite into metal tools. However there is no corresponding sense of Aborigines and Macassans being united in a sacred partnership, though the Birrinydji stories infer that this was the case in the pre-Macassan era. As land owners and holders of this sacred law, Aborigines had the ability to transform 'red rock' or haematite. All their material needs were satisfied, for the Other worked for them.

Iron use in north-east Arnhem Land

There are no records of Aboriginal iron-making in pre-colonial Australia and similarly only scant references to the mythological significance of iron to Aboriginal populations in the early years of European settlement. Reynolds shows that some groups had terminology for the various products of the blacksmith's trade and had worked iron weapons while the metal was hot.⁴⁰ He also says that there was an early and widespread adoption of the use of iron by Aborigines following contact with Macassans though Warner suggests that the use of metal by Yolngu may have preceded the arrival of Indonesians. Wooden planks with nails attached would have been continually floating onto the coast from the north and north-west and might have been extracted and used as fish hooks.⁴¹

A major outcome of the Macassan period was an appreciation of iron's unique qualities and it became a highly prized item of trade.⁴² Particularly valued items were the tomahawk and knife, the detachable harpoon head, shovel-nose metal spear and the small metal bowl used in long wooden smoking pipes. According to Thomson,⁴³ the Yolngu were good at working in metal, making fine spear heads by beating out cold odds and

37. Wurrumala or whale hunters. See McIntosh 1995a; 1995c

38. The Bayini.

39. Macassans, Japanese and Europeans.

40. Reynolds 1990, p. 48.

41. Warner 1969, p. 450. Macknight, 1972, p. 304–305 says there is little evidence to support this view.

42. Warner 1969, p. 450; Macknight 1972, p. 305.

43. Thomson 1949, p. 5; 1957, p. 31.

ends of scrap metal and rigging screws, but there is no suggestion that such techniques were passed on as a result of contact with Indonesians. He writes:

[Aborigines]...made fish hooks and even knives from the nails and other fragments of iron that they salvaged from planks of driftwood, or iron from water tanks and trepang boilers of wrecked ships.

One of their most enterprising ventures in quest of iron occurred in Melville Bay where the Royal Air Force had anchored drums to serve as mooring buoys for...flying boats which had to refuel there. The [Aborigines], alive to the value of this iron within their reach, cut the drums adrift, beached them and cut them up into sheets of iron to be beaten into spears.⁴⁴

Just as there are no records of Aborigines mining and smelting ironstone, there are no records of Macassans making metal tools on the Australian coast, although they definitely had an interest in prospecting. Earl was stationed at Port Essington in the early 1800s and conducted a regular trade with the trepangers. He says that in the vicinity of Elcho Island and Arnhem Bay:

This part of the coast is apparently the termination of a granite range, and is said by the Macassars to abound in minerals, among which they mention tin, but...appears to me to be antimony-ore which will yield perhaps two-thirds of its weight in metal.⁴⁵

Searcy traversed the coastline in the late 1800s and he also mentions this interest by Macassans. At a trepang smoke house in Melville Bay he:

found specimens of quartz and ironstone, in one which a speck of gold could be distinctly seen...There was also a stack of manganese, which commodity for some reason the Malays [Macassans] took to Macassar.⁴⁶

Elcho Island was also a source of 'red pigment' for the Macassans but their interest in this material is not clear.⁴⁷ According to Burrumarra it could have been one of two types. Macknight⁴⁸ says that Burrumarra had suggested this red clay was perhaps that which Aborigines collect from nearby Howard Island. Called Miku, it is dug out from a cleared area known as Gulpulu, burnt on the fire and then applied to the body in preparation for ceremonies. The alternative was the Dhuwa moiety red rock Rratjpa which is the source material associated with Yirritja moiety iron production. This red laterite is found in abundance in the cliffs at Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island, adjoining an old Macassan trepanging site. It is haematite (70% iron),⁴⁹ a variety of iron-ore used not only in the production of steel but commercially in the production of red paint.

Could Arnhem Land have been a source of raw material for local and overseas iron production? Macknight's detailed study of the Macassan trepang industry has shown that the visitors usually spent not more than a week or two in any location, but there are various recordings of visitors having to spend extended periods after being shipwrecked or failing to catch the trade winds in time for the return journey to

44. Thomson 1957, p. 31.

45. Earl 1842, p. 141.

46. Macknight 1976, p. 44.

47. See account of Daeng Sarro in Macknight 1979, p. 183.

48. Macknight fieldwork notes 1967.

49. Dana 1949, p. 484.

Sulawesi. In normal circumstances however, as Macknight⁵⁰ infers, it would be '...most unusual...during a voyage of this character'. Yet one could certainly imagine the types of situations where iron-making might have become a necessity say, for example, if the anchor was lost at sea or if nails were required to repair the praus and there were no other craft in the vicinity to lend assistance.

The process of iron manufacture does not require elaborate machinery. Any place where raw materials are available will suffice. In fact, techniques which might have been practised in Arnhem Land in the past are still carried on throughout eastern Indonesia today. As Reid says:

The characteristic Southeast Asian bellows—two vertical tubes with pistons lined with chicken-feathers, pumped by an apprentice sitting above them—is everywhere still in use. The remaining equipment is very basic—anvil, various hammers, a cutting wedge, tongs, scraper, and a bamboo full of water for tempering the steel.⁵¹

Harrison and O'Connor describe the process in more detail. They write:

A furnace simply consisted of a sort of circular...pit, three or four feet in diameter, dug in compact earth...The pit was connected with a circular hole above,...through which the smelters subsequently added supplies of charcoal...After igniting the charcoal they closed the mouth of the pit by means of earth to keep back the heat and...to melt the ore. They then allowed the molten metal to flow out by tapping the lower part of the furnace and the slag was separated.⁵²

Macassans may well have made iron on the Arnhem Land coast and Aborigines of Burrumarra's clan either witnessed this or participated in its production. The many Aborigines who travelled to Macassar during the 200 years of the trepang trade would also undoubtedly have come across the industry. For instance Burrumarra, drawing his knowledge of the iron-making process from oral history and the songs of Birrinydji says:

Birrinydji used the 'red rock' from the beach, not bauxite, that's only for Gunapipi.⁵³ [The red rock is] called Ratjpa...and comes from Djang'kawu [a Dhuwa moiety ancestral figure]. At Cape Wilberforce they call it Mirrki, red sand of the sunrise. Red rock is intelligence for all mankind, the source of wealth and power of Balanda and Yolngu—from it comes all the technology—axes, knives and hammers.⁵⁴

While the 'red rock' is linked to Dhuwa moiety ancestral and totemic themes, Birrinydji is Yirritja. When the raw material is transformed by fire it enters a new domain separate from its former associations. Thus while in the Dhuwa moiety there are countless myths about Ratjpa, none is associated with iron production.

Details of iron-making are recorded not only in oral history and Yirritja mythology but also in art, song and in the personal names of Yirritja Yolngu. In the Warramiri

50. Macknight 1972, p. 309.

51. Reid 1983, p. 19.

52. Harrison & O'Connor 1969, p. 313.

53. Sacred Dhuwa moiety ceremony.

54. Burrumarra pers. comm. 1988.

clan alone, over 20% of the registered first names of clan members are drawn from the Birrinydji theme and in other coastal Yirritja clan groups, the figure is less but averages over 10%.⁵⁵ Cawte⁵⁶ details one song about knife manufacture in his book on the Warramiri. In this and related songs, the singer identifies himself with the technology of Birrinydji as well as the manufacturing process. It goes thus:

Ngayum djangu latimi
I am the blade
Ngayum djangu djidami
I am the handle
Ngayum djangu wambalmi
I am the long knife
Ngayum djangu butumi
I am the wood for a handle
Ngayum djangu rrawarra
I am the steel template.

Berndt also refers to Warramiri ceremonies associated iron-making.⁵⁷ He says the Gwolwunbuma, Lil'garun, Mararaguma, or Jandyaralguma, are connected with the shovel-nosed iron-bladed spear, the knife and the axe. Elkin likewise, in one of his Warramiri recordings from north-east Arnhem Land says that:

The song of the anvil describes vividly the darting of sparks and the 'cry' or resounding noise when the heated iron is struck with the hammer.⁵⁸

Burramarra says that all of these songs are from Birrinydji and are related generally to the idea of white and black men working together, for the legacy of this Dreaming being is centred on the concept of a partnership between peoples under the one law.

The Birrinydji legacy

In the 1940s, the Berndts found pottery fragments at a Macassan trepanging site at Port Bradshaw in north-east Arnhem Land. Aboriginal informants stated that such pots had been made by them from local ant hill in the pre-Macassan past. Songs recorded by the Berndts talk of this production.⁵⁹ According to Aboriginal oral history, pottery making was a woman's job and it was the legacy of Birrinydji's wife, Bayini, to her historical female counterparts, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The same was the case for both cloth manufacture and weaving. Rice production, likewise, was carried out by Aboriginal women in Gumatj, Dhalwangu and Warramiri clan territories⁶⁰ and informants can still point out the old paddy fields which today are usually associated with large fresh water billabongs. The rice has turned into rakay, the water chestnut, another significant Yirritja moiety totem. But there was and remains considerable variation in Aboriginal accounts of this 'pre-Macassan' period. As in the dog stories, they entail a

55. See Appendix.

56. Cawte 1993, p. 44.

57. Berndt 1949, p. 221.

58. Elkin 1953, p. 91.

59. Berndt & Berndt 1947, p. 136. Subsequent analysis of the pottery fragments has not revealed their age, but has indicated that their origin was Indonesia, in all probability the Kai Islands of Maluku. See Key 1969.

60. Berndt and Berndt 1954, p. 37; Mountford 1956-64, p. 295.

paradox. Stories stress Aboriginal wealth and self-sufficiency but also their subsequent loss in relation to outsiders. As the Berndts suggest, Aborigines did not desire to imitate the Bayini, preferring their own way of life and while the two groups co-existed, they did not seem to be willing to learn from each other. The Bayini, they say, kept the secret of weaving to themselves.⁶¹

In contrast to the occupations and technologies of the female ancestral being Bayini, the mining and smelting of iron-ore was work for men, and Birrinydji, the 'man of iron', instructed Aborigines in this trade. According to Yolngu, references to the making of iron are thus wrongly attributed to the Macassan era. They say it was in the 'pre-Macassan' or Murrnginy⁶² period, the 'golden age' of Birrinydji. According to Burrumarra:

Macassans had Birrinydji in common with Arnhem Land but the spirit of Birrinydji is Dholtji. All things came to the Warramiri from Birrinydji and then to other clans.

While some of Burrumarra's interpretations regarding Birrinydji may be of recent origin, there are oblique references to this Dreaming figure going back to the first recorded anthropological interviews with Yolngu in the 1920s.⁶³ More recently Cawte⁶⁴ described Warramiri bark paintings showing Birrinydji at work by his furnace. In a perspective drawn from a region some hundreds of kilometres to the south-west of Elcho Island, MacInolty and Wainburranga describe Birrinydji as 'Captain Cook'. They write:

Captain Cook was a Yirritja man...All these people from the Rembarrnga side, from Warramiri side, Gupapuyngu, [Golpa], Dhalwangu, Balamumu, Gumatj...have a corroboree for him...When Captain Cook died Yirritja people took it over. My mob...took over his song too. They call it barrambarra...material stuff, blankets, calico. All the sort of stuff we have—it's got a song...He was very kind to Aboriginal people in the early, early days...He didn't interfere. He knew not to interfere...People know he had white man's power, white man's things. He came to the good law. But when the new Captain Cook's came over—bad things happened. They started shooting people then. New Captain Cook people...They are the ones who have been stealing all the women and killing people. They have made war...They wanted to take all of Australia.⁶⁵

While MacInolty and Wainburranga are referring to the impact of European colonists in Australia and there is no mention of Macassans, the parallel to the way Yolngu speak of waves of contact is immediately apparent. Indeed, as the Berndts record, while the Macassans appear to have been welcomed initially, relations deteriorated in the last phase of contact in the late 1800s. They say, 'In the old days...trading partnerships were established between the two groups. These involved reciprocal obligations and created classificatory ties of kinship.'⁶⁶ In the final stages of the industry, '...the Aborigines began to feel that they were being exploited'.⁶⁷ Alcohol was introduced as a means of

61. Berndt and Berndt 1954, p. 38.

62. Murrnginy or Murrngin, was the word that Warner 1969 used to refer to Yolngu. It means 'the iron age of Birrinydji' according to Burrumarra.

63. Warner 1932; 1969.

64. Cawte 1993, p. 42–46.

65. MacInolty & Wainburranga, 1988, p. 356–359.

66. Berndt & Berndt 1954, p. 47.

paying Aborigines leading to violence on both sides. It led to prostitution in the Macassan camps and the death of many Aborigines by gun or sword.⁶⁸ There were many murders of crew members as well. The atrocities described by Searcy⁶⁹ are linked to this time.

Comparing MacInolty and Wainburranga's account with the views of Burrumarra is equally enlightening. Burrumarra said that there are one Birrinydji and five Bayini, one for each of the Yirritja clans linked to this law. All Warramiri are descended from Birrinydji and Bayini. He said:

Birrinydji and Bayini are for Dholtji. All things come from Birrinydji. Two thousand years ago people came to our land. They had a job to do. They wanted to make the land and the people strong. It was at Birrinydji's command that they came. The iron in the ground acted like a magnet, drawing them in. Birrinydji was like a blanket over the land. Everything came under him. He was both 'white' and 'black'. He was very rich and had many things. He was an iron-maker. Bayini made clothing, planted rice and directed Yolngu women in this. Birrinydji came from the ground, from the gold beneath. Visitors to Dholtji had settlements all along Cape Wilberforce. There were thousands of people, men, women and children...When we followed Birrinydji's law, we prospered. But then things started to go wrong. We wanted only good but bad came too...We turned our back on the laws of Birrinydji and we lost everything. There is great sadness in our memory and this is why we don't like to bring it up. Today we follow the laws of Birrinydji. We have only the song and the ceremony but we have lost the ability to make iron. But if we follow this law, maybe these things will come to us again.⁷⁰

Aboriginal people as far away as Groote Eylandt and Western Australia knew of Birrinydji, Burrumarra believed. They referred to him as 'Captain Cook', Balanda, Ngapagi, Munanga, Wurupanda or Wurubalanda.⁷¹

The stories of 'Cook' and Birrinydji deal with the sacred 'inside' meaning and origin of those items introduced by Macassans and Europeans and also the consequences of encroachment and exploitation. The Dog stories throw considerable light on the predicament of Aborigines, for as stated, these narratives are outside versions of this same story of loss. In Yolngu cosmology there are two sets of dogs.⁷² The ones who live with people as pets and are given skin names, personal names and considered almost as family members, are referred to as Wunggan or Waatu. Then there are the wild dogs, whose names Warrang or Wakinggu mean literally 'having nothing and belonging to no-one'. These are terms of abuse used by Aborigines, for to be wakinggu is to be without kin and without skin. As Kolig and Rose describe,⁷³ the characteristics of the dingo are used by Aborigines as a measure of how humans should behave. Yolngu do not kill for pleasure, share what they have and eat only what they need. They do not mate indiscriminately but live according to complex social laws. In other words, by putting

⁶⁷. Berndt & Berndt 1954, p. 110.

⁶⁸. Berndt & Berndt 1954, p. 47.

⁶⁹. Searcy 1909; 1912.

⁷⁰. Burrumarra quoted in McIntosh 1992, p. 101.

⁷¹. All of these terms refer to the 'whiteman' ie. Europeans and Macassans.

⁷². McIntosh 1992; 1994a.

⁷³. Kolig 1978; Rose 1992. Kolig's work was in the Kimberly, and Rose in the Victoria River district.

themselves in the place of the dingo in myths of first contact, Yolngu are making a statement about their own anti-sociability, impoverishment and potential dependency upon the Other. They are one with the visitors, as the pet dog is to Aborigines, but they do not live according to the social laws which the visitors once upheld and wished to share; i.e. the laws of the first 'Cook' that some Yolngu label 'Birrinydji'. At one time Aborigines prospered and lived the good life, but now the myths suggest that they live as dogs baying at the heels of the Other, and this is to be resisted at all costs. Human beings should not act this way.

Contact history has created two types of people in Warramiri cosmology—Yolngu (and other black-skinned peoples) and Balanda. Yolngu possess the songs and dances for Birrinydji but, because of the dog, are powerless to alter their status except by appeal to the Dreaming. Balanda have the technology necessary to extract and transform haematite into abstract wealth, but they can never totally dominate Yolngu because Birrinydji is an Aboriginal law.

While the visitors initially wanted to share their wealth, Aborigines rejected them, and later voyagers did not respect Yolngu rights (i.e. the new 'Captain Cooks'). As time went by, non-Aborigines got richer and whiter and more and more ignorant of the law, and Yolngu got poorer and blacker and, according to Burrumarra, the dances of Birrinydji became more and more popular. When gifts were presented by Macassans to Aborigines in trade, which often occurred at the end of the season,⁷⁴ Aborigines would hold great ceremonies on the beaches honouring Birrinydji, not the visitors, for it was an acknowledgment of the partnership that once was, and must be again in the future.⁷⁵ As in Burrumarra's dream, the desire was and still is to be able to have all the benefits of the Balanda way of life without losing one's identity as an Aborigine or control of one's land.

The dilemma of mining

Stanner⁷⁶ says that for Aborigines the present is determined by the past. There is a complete subordination of history to the ideology of the Dreaming. Burrumarra would have agreed. To follow the law and realise a pre-ordained future, mining must occur, but only on Aboriginal terms. But then there is the legacy of other creational figures such as Lany'tjun, the founder of the Yirritja moiety. Each Yirritja Yolngu clan was ascribed certain territories by Lany'tjun to care for, at the 'beginning of time'. So there is a tension here, and this was evident in Burrumarra's dream. For many Yolngu mining is not an option and the very idea of non-Aboriginal companies drilling on Yolngu land evokes a deep bitterness, especially in the Gove area. Some see Birrinydji, and consequently their Aboriginality, as being vulnerable to such desecration. For example when satellite mining exploration photos were taken in the Gapuwiyak area in the late 1980s, without Aboriginal consent, Birrinydji was seen in the shadows running from the camera.⁷⁷ This

⁷⁴ Berndt & Berndt 1954, p. 46.

⁷⁵ Burrumarra pers. com. 1992; McIntosh 1995c. This same ceremony was performed during a visit by the Governor-General to Elcho Island in 1988.

⁷⁶ Stanner 1984.

⁷⁷ Yepaynga pers. comm. 1988.

fear of mining by Yolngu is well documented. In relation to a painting of Birrinydji with the metal tools of his trade, Cawte says:

Warramiri contemplating Birrinydji are supposed to ponder why their 'iron age' was lost...Does an iron age destroy itself because mining violates the earth?⁷⁸

In the case of Bol'lili's and Djuranydjura's encounters with Macassans, the dogs appear to accept their fate as being poor and subservient to whites. Yet in other versions of these narratives, the encounters provide motivation for social action designed to reverse an undesirable situation. Rose for instance says that Aborigines believe that by making public the atrocities perpetrated by 'Cook', changes in the laws defining relationships between Aborigines and non-Aborigines will result.⁷⁹

While Burrumarra linked the extraction of bauxite and the production of alumina at the Nabalco plant at Gove with Birrinydji's iron-making, he was against the mine from the outset because of a failure on the part of developers to consult with Yolngu. Yet as far back as the 1950s, Burrumarra and other Yolngu leaders had tried to negotiate mining deals for the extraction of bauxite from the Wessel Islands. In the plan that was envisaged,⁸⁰ Aborigines would have a controlling interest in the project and there was a guarantee that no sacred sites would be interfered with. The negotiations entered into with missionaries and others predated by over twenty years the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the powers it grants Aborigines.

The Warramiri leader was also involved in discussions leading to the establishment of land councils in the Northern Territory. For him, such representative bodies are, in part, the realisation of Birrinydji's plan for Yolngu. Here was a body funded by non-Aborigines whose charter was to act in ways conducive to Aboriginal interests, hinting at the time when both whites and blacks were followers of the one law. The implication of course is that Birrinydji only exists so long as there are divisions in material well-being between cultural groups. From Burrumarra's perspective, mining should be allowed on Aboriginal land but only as long as Balanda respect Yolngu wishes, listen to the land owners and share equally in all proceeds. Many Yolngu make their decision on mining on the basis of this Dreaming precept.

In the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) gives Aborigines the power of veto over development. In the case of mining exploration at Dholtji in 1988, while Burrumarra's dream did not change his feelings on pushing ahead with the project, his family marked off so much of the exploration zone as sacred and 'no go' areas that it was not feasible for the company to proceed. In 1996, two years after Burrumarra's death, the present day leader of the Warramiri, Wulukang, said 'no' to mining even though a majority of Burrumarra's family were now in favour of opening up their land. The country was too sacred.

In an ideal world, support for development projects on indigenous land would come from indigenous people themselves. They would have a comprehensive understanding of any potential impacts and as a group delineate areas of land suitable for an agreed project from within their territories. With the support of other potentially

78. Cawte 1993, p. 68.

79. Rose 1984.

80. While it attracted the interest of several companies, it did not proceed.

affected indigenous peoples, they would embark on a project or negotiate directly with companies of their choice. They would enter into contracts as equal partners, be employed in the ventures, and monitor progress through to completion and rehabilitation of the land. In the real world however, indigenous people contemplating development are forced into a position where they must think about the contemporary nature of their identity as Aborigines and their marginalisation as a community in relation to non-Aborigines. I have often heard it said that if a company demonstrates a willingness to get to know the people, comes to an understanding of the struggles they are engaged in, and are willing to share in the wealth that will be generated by doing business on Aboriginal land, then a 'yes' answer will not be uncommon for access to Aboriginal land.

For a range of reasons, many connected to his own family history, Burrumarra's answer for his own country was always 'yes', though the history of race relations in north-east Arnhem Land worked against his wish. The people, as a whole, usually say 'no'. Past and bitter experience with mining companies, as well as damage to sacred sites, environmental pollution, and the social impacts of royalty payments, all weigh heavily on people's minds when mining decisions are being made. But at the very least, the 'fact' of iron-making on remote Arnhem Land beaches provides an alternative to the sharply contrasting views that to say 'yes' to mining means selling out one's inheritance (as when Birrinydji went into the ground), while saying 'no' results in the maintenance of cultural difference and poverty (as with Djuranydjura). For Burrumarra, mining on Aboriginal terms would mean one could be wealthy and simultaneously maintain one's sense of identity and power. To him, this was the legacy of Birrinydji.

Conclusion

The sequence of events in time implicit in an 'inside' reading of the Macassan past can be interpreted as providing guidelines for attaining a desired future, progressively, in the here and now. The essential ingredients are the rebuilding of ties of reciprocity, and respect for land and sea rights. Bakhtin⁸¹ speaks of such a perspective as historical inversion. History is something yet to be achieved. Myths about paradise, a golden or heroic age, or an ancient truth which are in no way a part of the past, can only be realised in the future. Oral traditions relating to Birrinydji represent a potential, a dream of how things should be if the law is followed. In the scenario presented here, Burrumarra brings to the fore a perspective on the past which is considered anachronistic by many. Burrumarra professed certainty, but his dream indicated otherwise. Aborigines throughout the Arnhem Land region no longer believe that the technology of whites comes from an Aboriginal Dreaming and that in order to enjoy material prosperity, one has to follow the law of Birrinydji and hence go through clans such as the Warramiri to obtain highly prized items of trade. The significance of Birrinydji is being revalued, but to what end? Proclamations by Burrumarra on Birrinydji reflect the group leader's conceptions of Warramiri social identity—where they have come from and where they should be going as a people. Warramiri history is an ideology that links Aborigines, Macassans and other non-Aborigines, and provides a commentary on present day lifestyles and the status of relationships. Rather than a passive device for classifying histor-

⁸¹ Bakhtin 1981, p. 147.

ical events, the Birrinydji narrative is a program for orienting social, political, ritual, and other forms of historical action.⁸² For Burrumarra, the proclamation of the Land Rights Act and the growing influence and affluence of Aborigines in Australia has created the circumstances whereby mining can and should occur. That the two go together—a social environment of reconciliation and the willingness of mining companies to enter into negotiations with Yolngu—is seen to be a part of Birrinydji's plan. It is the realisation of the Dreaming in the here and now. History will have achieved its potential.

Appendix

Balandad—engineer or iron worker.

Banul—'exhaust' pipe for smoke emission.

Banuwanu—handle for a knife.

Batingarra—Birrinydji's iron worker. He makes knives and swords and puts handles on them.

Batiti—knife maker.

Birrarrapi—the iron furnace of Birrinydji.

Bongguna—a lead or iron chest.

Damung—iron of Birrinydji.

Dhatu—chimney.

Djarrimili—iron.

Djimbuluku—an iron post.

Duwarniny—smoke from a large chimney or furnace, like at Gove.

Guthadjaka—iron worker.

Lalanbarri—copper or iron.

Lalanggutha—iron.

Lati—knife.

Layipu—iron cooking pots of Bayini.

Mulung—knife.

Munbirrngu—iron worker in the image of Birrinydji.

Nepa—knife.

Rrawara—large knife or sword/steel template.

⁸². Turner 1988, p. 23.

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The Last Man: The mutilation of William Lanne in 1869 and its aftermath

Stefan Petrow

Regarding the story of King Billy's Head, there are so many versions of it that it might be as well if you sent the correct details.¹

In 1869 William Lanne, the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal male, died.² Lying in the Hobart Town General Hospital, his dead body was mutilated by scientists competing for the right to secure the skeleton. The first mutilation by Dr. William Lodewyk Crowther removed Lanne's head. The second mutilation by Dr. George Stokell and others removed Lanne's hands and feet. After Lanne's burial, Stokell and his colleagues removed Lanne's body from his grave before Crowther and his party could do the same. Lanne's skull and body were never reunited. They were guarded jealously by the respective mutilators in the interests of science. By donating Lanne's skeleton, Crowther wanted to curry favour with the prestigious Royal College of Surgeons in London, while Stokell, anxious to retain his position as house-surgeon at the general hospital, wanted to cultivate good relations with the powerful men associated with the Royal Society of Tasmania. But, perhaps because of the scandal associated with the mutilation, no scientific study of Lanne's skull or skeleton was ever published or, as far as we know, even attempted. It seems that Lanne was mutilated to satisfy the egos and 'personal ambition' of desperate men, who wanted a memento of Tasmania's last man, as the newspapers of the time called him.³

Unsurprisingly, the Lanne affair has held an enduring fascination for scholars of Tasmanian history.⁴ Lanne's mutilation symbolised the dispossession of land from the Tasmanian Aboriginals and its carving up by racially intolerant and violent white settlers, generally indifferent to the rights of the indigenous population. Furthermore, it illustrated the hegemony scientific knowledge sought to establish over fundamental

1. UT, W9/C1/9 (7), James Backhouse Walker Papers, Ling Roth to Walker, 3 June 1896.

2. Ryan 1981, p. 214.

3. Turnbull 1994, p. 19 rightly claims that 'personal ambition' could be 'as strong a motive for the procurement of remains as the desire to further scientific knowledge'.

4. Bolger 1973, pp. 181–2; Bonwick 1870, pp. 393–400; Cove 1995, pp. 47–9; Ellis 1976, pp. 115–25; Murray 1993, pp. 514–16; Ryan 1981, pp. 214–17.

human rights such as a decent burial, even for a member of a supposedly inferior people, who was officially categorised as a Protestant.

However distinguished some of the work, no single writer has examined the Lanne affair in its full complexity. All writers have relied on a handful of sources and in particular the account of one newspaper, the Hobart Town *Mercury*. There are at least two problems with this approach which justify a study of the Lanne affair. First, the *Mercury* has been uncritically accepted as the voice of public opinion. The *Mercury* reflected the essentially conservative and idiosyncratic opinions of its owner John Davies, the ex-convict and member of the House of Assembly. But in 1869 some nine other newspapers were published in Tasmania and all had something to say about Lanne's death. In some cases, the editorial view followed the *Mercury's* line of demonising Crowther as the main offender. Other newspapers, however, supported Crowther and directed acerbic comments at Stokell and his supporters in the Royal Society of Tasmania. All the papers published many letters from readers and thus provide us with a more varied response than can be gained from reading the editorials and help us to penetrate the thicket of innuendo, rumour, and allegation that surrounded the affair.

The second problem with accounts of the Lanne affair is the tendency to recount, following the *Mercury*, the events surrounding the mutilation of his body and the desecration of his grave as simply a story of scandal. This article will widen the angle of vision and consider in more detail the following issues raised by Lanne's mutilation. One issue, given inadequate attention in previous writing, was the extent to which Tasmanians at the time reflected on the guilt and shame of the past treatment of Aborigines. But arguably anger at Lanne's indignity had little to do with his Aboriginality or his status as the last 'full-blooded' male Aboriginal. After spending his early years in the company of Aboriginal people, Lanne ultimately decided to adapt to white society and in particular the whaling community of Hobart Town. Tasmanians were therefore concerned that what happened to Lanne as a resident of Hobart Town could happen to them. They strongly reacted to the unregulated and indiscriminate dissection of bodies in the hospital. In fact, the head of a dead whiteman had been decapitated and substituted for Lanne's. Public criticism of the management of the hospital resulted in Tasmania's first Anatomy Act being passed in 1869 to provide some protection for dead bodies. They denounced the practice of body-snatching and asserted the right of everyone to be buried without the fear of later interference with their grave. They questioned whether scientists, however important the reason, were justified in flouting the law and the moral standards of the community. Important as these reactions were, perhaps the crucial dimension of the Lanne affair was political. Lanne's mutilation made such a great impact on society, not because he was the so-called 'last man', but because of the political situation in 1869.⁵ William Crowther was a political opponent of the Dry Government, which used Lanne's mutilation as an excuse to discredit Crowther. In many ways, the most interesting point is how Crowther struggled to avoid the Dry Government's attempts to punish him politically and professionally for mutilating Lanne and what these struggles tell us about the morality of public men in this period. But

5. Governor Du Cane wrote of the 'very considerable excitement' throughout Tasmania, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Letterbooks of Confidential Despatches sent to the Secretary of State, Governor's Office 27/1, Du Cane to Secretary of State, 21 April 1869.

Crowther was a scientist as well as a politician and his commitment to science impelled him to mutilate Lanne's body. Why were scientists interested in Aboriginal skeletons?

Spirited debates by ethnologists, comparative anatomists, archaeologists, and others on the origins of the human race occurred in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶ Dividing people into races and studying their physical similarities (and differences) became a popular field of study. From these studies it was thought possible to rank the races, to draw conclusions about their chances of survival, and to establish how close some races were to animals. Remote and so-called inferior peoples, such as the Tasmanian Aboriginals, attracted growing interest. Thomas Malthus identified the Tasmanian Aboriginals as second from 'the bottom of the scale of human beings'.⁷ Scientific theories nourished 'a racist ideology' that purportedly explained the superiority of Europeans over the indigenous population, which, because of its moral and intellectual inferiority, was on its way to extinction.⁸ When Europeans settled in Van Diemen's Land in 1803 between 5,000 to 7,000 Aboriginals were living there.⁹ The census of 31 December 1861 recorded the existence of two males and six females, although 'a considerable number of half-castes' lived in the Bass Strait islands off the northern coast of Tasmania.¹⁰ For the purposes of racial science, 'half-castes' were useless and were ignored. Racial scientists required 'bodies, or parts of bodies, in a fit condition' and of 'high racial purity' to underpin 'the certainty of their findings'.¹¹

After Charles Darwin published *The Origin of the Species* in 1859, we find 'a remarkable upsurge of interest in the morphological and anatomical investigation' of the Australian and Tasmanian Aboriginals in an effort to discover vital evidence for comprehending human evolution.¹² As there was 'immense prestige to be won by contributing to original knowledge in the field of human evolution', Aboriginal bodies were much sought after.¹³ Of all the body parts of interest to scientists from the early nineteenth century, the most crucial was the skull, which was measured to show that Tasmanian Aboriginals had 'smaller, less developed brains' than other peoples and proved that they were 'the missing link between ape and man'.¹⁴ Indeed, in 1863 T.H. Huxley, Darwin's close friend, referred to Aboriginal skulls as proof of Darwin's theory of evolution.

Such confident pronouncements were based on the relatively few skulls housed in British museums and scientists were anxious to acquire more specimens.¹⁵ In 1861 the Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle, wrote to the Tasmanian Governor, T. Gore Browne, asking him to obtain for the Ethnological Society of Oxford a skull of a male and female Aboriginal native.¹⁶ Newcastle only wanted the skulls provided Gore

6. The complex history of this period and earlier is best approached by reading Stocking 1987; see also Reynolds 1987, pp. 111–129 and Turnbull 1994, pp. 5–20.

7. Cove 1995, p. 45.

8. Ryan 1985, p. 49.

9. Reynolds 1995, p. 4.

10. *Examiner*, 21 January 1864; Ryan 1981 for 'half-castes'.

11. Turnbull 1991, p. 110.

12. *ibid.*, p. 109.

13. *ibid.*

14. Reynolds 1987, p. 117; Ryan 1981, p. 214.

15. Plomley 1962.

Browne could find them 'with propriety' and 'without injuring in any way the feelings of the few Aboriginal inhabitants who still survive'. In 1863 Gore Browne sent Newcastle a skull of indeterminate sex.¹⁷ He noted that there was 'no difficulty in procuring skulls, but, owing to the mixture in the burial places', it was extremely difficult to say with certainty that the skulls belonged to Tasmanian Aboriginals. 'Several gentlemen', he continued, 'have promised to exert themselves to obtain specimens for me'. Their task was not easy. As one collector noted in 1874, Tasmanian Aboriginal skulls were 'rare objects' and were not held 'in anything like abundance'.¹⁸ Tribal custom was important here. Some tribes placed skulls in holes in the ground and covered them with leaves and dirt; other tribes burnt their dead and thereby contributed to the scarcity of skeletons.¹⁹ In the late 1860s the rarity of Aboriginal skeletons, 'the application of evolutionary principles to human history', and William Lanne's status as the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal male gave his death much greater significance to the scientific community than his life ever had.²⁰

William Lanne 1835–1869

One of five children, William Lanne (sometimes called Lanny or Lanney) was born at Coal River in about 1835.²¹ In 1842 Lanne's family was taken from the west coast to the Aboriginal settlement at Flinders Island. After many died of disease, the remaining 44 Aboriginals were moved to Oyster Cove, south of Hobart Town, and Lanne was admitted to the Queen's Orphan Asylum on 28 December 1847. Here he was 'partly educated'. According to one account, he wrote 'a fair hand', 'read well', and was 'said to be intelligent'. Lanne received some religious teaching and was designated a Protestant. In January 1853 Lanne was apprenticed to William Rumney, a farmer at Clarence Plains, on the eastern side of the River Derwent.

How long he stayed with Rumney is uncertain but he eventually found his way to Oyster Cove. While living at Oyster Cove, Lanne was regularly taken out on whalers and 'acquired a partiality for a sea-faring life'.²² Aboriginals were valued by whaling masters for their 'great power of vision' and were employed as mast-headsmen. Lanne sailed with the *Aladdin* and later the *Runnymede*. To his fellow sailors, Lanne was known as 'King Billy': he was popular, being regarded as 'a good natured, jolly fellow, and an amusing companion'. The *Mercury* described Lanne as 'a bluff young gentleman', whose favourite topics of conversation were the rations he received from the government, 'boating amusements', and 'sundry outdoor healthful occupations'.²³ Some contemporaries painted a less ebullient picture. Doctor Joseph Milligan, 'the last Protector' at Oyster Cove, thought Lanne was a 'very docile boy and youth' and was 'stupid and

16. Australian Joint Copying Project, Colonial Office series, CO/280/358/5032, Newcastle to Gore Browne, 26 December 1861.

17. *ibid.*, Gore Browne to Newcastle, 20 March 1863.

18. Davis 1874, pp. 4–5.

19. Barnard 1890, p. 606.

20. Reynolds 1995, p. 202.

21. *Mercury* (M), 13 November 1866, 5 March 1869; AOTSWD 28, Register of children admitted and discharged from the male and female Orphan School 1828–1863, p. 23 boys; AOT Correspondence file on William Rumney; Bonwick 1870, pp. 283–4 393–5.

22. *ibid.*

23. M, 13 November 1866, 12 July 1867.

dull of apprehension'.²⁴ Attempts to teach him religious principles were 'a signal failure'. These different perceptions can be reconciled. No doubt Lanne felt comfortable and happy with his sailing companions but was less inclined to communicate or co-operate with the authorities, who had presided over the decline of his people.

Views differed on other matters. According to one account, Lanne was 'not particularly proud of his ancestry'.²⁵ The evidence for this view is slight. When his portrait was taken by Charles Woolley for the Intercolonial Exhibition in 1866, Lanne disliked the photograph, intimating that it was 'too black for him'. Other evidence indicates that he was proud of his Aboriginality. In 1864, after complaining that rations for the settlement were too low, Lanne told Colonial Treasurer Charles Meredith that 'I am the last man of my race, and I must look after my people'.²⁶ Lanne was very popular with the Aboriginal women at Oyster Cove, who described him as a "'fine young man—plenty beard—plenty laugh—very good, that fellow"'.²⁷



William Lanne. Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Archives Office of Tasmania

Apparently Lanne believed himself 'every inch a king' and sought out English royalty. In November 1866, before leaving for England, Lanne said he hoped to have an audience with Queen Victoria, although we do not know whether this desire was fulfilled.²⁸ In January 1868 Lanne, dressed in 'a blue suit with a gold lace band round his cap', attended the Hobart Town Regatta to meet the Duke of Edinburgh, who received him with 'kindly consideration'. Lanne did not produce any children. Unlike most whalers, he did marry, becoming the fourth 'husband' of Truganini, a much older Aboriginal woman.²⁹ Despite his links with the remaining Aboriginals, Lanne probably felt more comfortable at sea and carousing in pubs with his sailing companions than living at Oyster Cove.

24. Bonwick 1870, p. 394.

25. M, 5 March 1869.

26. AOT Colonial Secretary's Department (CSD) 4/77/231, Meredith to Tarleton, 5 December 1864.

27. Bonwick 1870, pp. 186–7.

28. M, 13 November 1866.

29. Agnew 1888, p. 479; Ellis 1976, p. 116 says Lanne was the third husband.

On 4 March 1868 Lanne boarded the *Runnymede* for a long voyage.³⁰ He returned 'fat and unhealthy' in February 1869. After receiving his wages, Lanne lodged at the Dog and Partridge public-house, a popular haunt for whalers, prostitutes, and other low-class Hobartians.³¹ There Lanne enfeebled his constitution by indulging his propensity for beer and rum. He fell ill and was supplied with medicine from Dr. Thomas Smart's dispensary. After a week, he contracted choleraic diarrhoea and received medical treatment for another week. On 3 March, while dressing to go to hospital, Lanne died.³² As an honorary medical officer at the General Hospital, Dr. Crowther obtained a coroner's order and sent the body to that institution's dead-house.

Mutilators and body-snatchers

William Crowther had long been desperate to obtain an Aboriginal skeleton to send to Sir William Flowers, curator of the Royal College of Surgeons' Hunterian Museum. Crowther co-owned land adjoining the Oyster Cove settlement.³³ In 1862 his co-owner Henry Harrison Pybus offered to take responsibility for the Aborigines at Oyster Cove for £500 and to look after them on his property. This would have given Crowther 'prime access to the bones and skulls he so coveted' but the government refused, thinking £500 too much. Lanne's death provided Crowther with his last opportunity and he asked the Premier and Colonial Secretary Richard Dry for the skeleton.³⁴ A member of the Royal Society Council, Morton Allport, had already contacted Dry with the same request.

In October 1866 Crowther had topped the poll for the seat of Hobart Town but resigned from parliament when Dry refused to include him in the ministry. Perhaps trying to win back an acidulous political opponent, Dry now graciously put it to the Royal Society Council that 'you may find it not incompatible with the interests of our local Institution to waive your claim' to Lanne's skeleton in Crowther's favour.³⁵ However, the Royal Society, which had close links with government and received an annual government grant of £5,000, asserted that its right to 'the skeleton of the last male Aboriginal' of Tasmania was 'altogether paramount to that of any other scientific institution in the world'.³⁶ Dry apparently inclined to the Royal Society's view that 'discredit' would attach to any government which allowed 'so essential an element of a national collection to be lost to the country'. Dry probably felt that further offending Crowther by denying his request was less of a political risk than giving Lanne's skeleton to the Royal College of Surgeons and offending the Royal Society. But the Royal Society admitted 'the claims which science in general has upon these valuable relics'. It intended to photograph the skeleton 'on a large scale' and present copies to the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons and other interested institutions. Casts of 'specially interesting'

30. M, 5 March 1869.

31. Chamberlain 1988, p. 240; *Critic*, 5 October 1923.

32. M, 4, 27 March 1869; soon after his death, a licensee sought payment for ale and rum that Lanne had owed him since 1866 see AOTCSD 7/24/150.

33. Pybus 1992, pp. 166-8.

34. UT RSA/A/4, 174-5, Crowther to Dry, 4 March 1869, Dry to Royal Society Council, 4 March 1869; State Library of Tasmania, Allport Library, Morton Allport papers, Letterbook 1868-1871, Allport to Dowdell, 20 April 1869; Rimmer 1981, p. 97.

35. *ibid.*

36. AOTCSD 7/23/127, Agnew to Dry, 5 March 1869.

parts of the skeleton would also be provided. This was a strong assertion of authority by the oldest colonial scientific body against its metropolitan counterpart, represented in Hobart Town by the overblown arrogance of William Crowther.³⁷ But whatever his inclinations, Dry was a deeply religious man and wanted to ensure that Lanne first received a Christian burial before countenancing the Royal Society's request. Dry assured Crowther that if an opportunity arose while he was in government to secure a skeleton for the Royal College of Surgeons from 'the graves of Aborigines without violating the feelings of individuals or of the community', he would place 'no impediment' in Crowther's way.³⁸

Aware of the anxiety of Crowther and the Royal Society to secure an Aboriginal skeleton, on 4 March Dry instructed Dr. George Stokell, the recently-appointed house surgeon, not to permit 'any mutilation' of Lanne's body.³⁹ After telling the steward and storekeeper Charles Seager and the attendant James Weare of Dry's instructions, Stokell met Crowther in the street.⁴⁰ Crowther told Stokell that Dry had 'given' him Lanne's body and he intended to have it. Stokell countered with Dry's instructions that the body should not be touched or mutilated. Crowther then invited Stokell to his house. Stokell foolishly accepted this transparently suspicious invitation and arrived at the agreed time of 8.00 p.m. Crowther was absent but his wife 'kept him talking' for some time. Stokell finally left and arrived at the hospital at 9.00 p.m. He discovered that Crowther and his son Bingham had spent nearly an hour at the hospital. Stokell entered the dead-house to find that Lanne's skull had been removed and had been replaced by the skull of a white man, whose body had been placed in the adjoining dissecting room.

Remembering Dry's promise to the Royal Society, Stokell told its Secretary, Dr. James Agnew, of the mutilation.⁴¹ Agnew consulted two other members Morton Allport and J.W. Graves. They decided to prevent the mutilators from getting the rest of Lanne's body by cutting off his hands and feet and hiding them in the Society's museum. It seems that Dry knew nothing of this mutilation, which was against his instructions, and it is unclear when he was told.

Strangely, Dry appears not to have made plans to bury Lanne. This responsibility was undertaken by Captain James Bayley, owner of the *Runnymede*. At the request of Graves, a well-known friend of the remaining Aborigines, Lanne's funeral was held at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday 6 March to allow for the attendance of all the colonists who desired 'to assist at the obsequies' and to show 'some outward token of respect' for 'the last male Aboriginal Tasmanian'.⁴² Lanne's coffin was covered with a black opossum skin rug as a symbol of the Aboriginal people.⁴³ On the rug were placed two native spears and waddies, 'round which were twined the ample folds of a Union Jack, specially provided by the shipmates of the deceased'. Was this supposed to indicate the supremacy of the British over the fierce Aboriginal fighters? If so, it was misplaced

37. MacLeod 1988; Winter 1972.

38. *M*, 8 March 1869.

39. AOTCSD 7/23/127, Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869.

40. *ibid*.

41. *M*, 8 March 1869; *Evening Mail (EM)*, 12 March 1869.

42. *Tasmanian Times (TT)*, 6 March 1869.

43. *M*, 8 March 1869.

symbolism as Lanne was anything but a fighter. Four white lads, who had crewed with Lanne on the *Runnymede*, carried the coffin. The pall-bearers were Captain Hill of the *Runnymede* and three 'coloured' seamen—John Bull, a native of the Sandwich Islands, Henry Whalley, a 'half-caste' native of Kangaroo Island, South Australia, and Alexander Davidson, an American. The chief mourners were Captain McArthur of the *Aladdin* and Captain Bayley. Other mourners included almost all the masters of vessels in port, numerous members of the whaling fraternity, the Mayor James Milne Wilson, many 'old colonists and native born Tasmanians'. As the funeral party moved along Liverpool Street and into Murray Street to St. David's Church, 'it gathered strength, and was followed by a large concourse of spectators'. Reverend F.H. Cox read the church service. Up to 120 mourners left the church for St. David's burial-ground in Davey Street, where Cox read the second part of 'the impressive burial service' of the Church of England.

Word of the mutilation had spread. Indignant at 'so unwarrantable desecration', prominent citizens asked Dry to exhume the body for examination.⁴⁴ Dry proposed that the grave be guarded until Monday morning when an enquiry would proceed and two municipal police constables were so deployed. But late on Saturday night, the police were ordered to leave the graveside and soon after Lanne's body was removed. At 9.00 a.m. on Sunday morning the gravedigger discovered the coffin exposed, a skull lying next to the grave, and blood on the ground. Traces of blood allegedly stopped at the gate opposite the stores of the Anglo-Australian Guano Company in Salamanca Place, in which Crowther had an interest.

At 9.30 a.m. on 8 March, Dry sent for Alfred Kennerley, Chairman of the Hospital Board and a member of the Royal Society Council, and they questioned Seager, Weare, and Dan, the hospital's barber.⁴⁵ All testified to the presence of Crowther and his son in the dead-house between 8.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m., although they could not say for certain that they were carrying anything as they left. Dry acted on this evidence of Crowther's guilt. He instructed Kennerley to suspend Crowther as an honorary medical officer until he could satisfactorily explain the points raised in the evidence.⁴⁶ Dry also wrote to Crowther, asking him why he had, *prima facie*, ignored the instructions not to mutilate Lanne's body. The Hospital Board also withdrew permission for Crowther's son to study at the hospital. All the letters written to and by Crowther and the evidence given at the enquiry were published in the newspapers in an attempt to damage Crowther's reputation.

Anxious to find Lanne's body, between 4.00 and 5.00 p.m. on 8 March, Crowther arrived at the hospital gate with his son, Superintendent of Police Richard Propsting, and a number of others.⁴⁷ Crowther forced his way into the hospital and headed for the old infirmary. Stokell arrived and ordered Crowther to leave. Crowther responded by hammering in a panel of one of the wards and forcing the door's lock. Finding 'masses of fat and blood' which he assumed to be Lanne's but no bones, Crowther and his party left. Crowther made no effort to explain his actions but later in a letter to the press accused Stokell of removing Lanne's head.⁴⁸ Rumours began to spread that Lanne had

44. TT, 8 March 1869; AOTCSD 7/23/127, Bayley, McArthur, and Colvin, 6 March 1869.

45. EM, 8 March 1869.

46. *ibid*, 8 March 1869; AOTCSD 7/23/127, Dry to Kennerley, Dry to Crowther, 8 March 1869.

47. M, 9 March 1869.

not been dead but merely 'in a trance' when his head was removed.⁴⁹ Another rumour claimed a doctor had 'trifled with the skin of the remaining extremity, (the procreative member)'. Without a full and open enquiry, eccentric claims like these were bound to flourish.

As Colonial Secretary, Dry was politically responsible for the General Hospital and he decided to appoint a fuller Board of Inquiry into 'the circumstances attending the mutilation' of Lanne 'with the view of ascertaining when, and by whom, such mutilation was effected'.⁵⁰ The chairman was the Recorder of Titles, William Tarleton, who had previously been Police Magistrate of Hobart Town; the other members were the respected old colonists and public-spirited businessmen Charles Colvin and Isaac Wright. Crowther declined to appear before the Board as evidence had 'already been taken and published by the Government *ex parte* and judgment pronounced against me in the matter'. Stokell testified that Crowther called him 'a fool to suppose that a paltry little place like Tasmania had a better right' to Lanne's body than London.⁵¹ Stokell denied cutting off the head but admitted removing Lanne's hands and feet. Stokell's weak justification was that, as Dry had given Lanne's body to the Royal Society, he was not acting against Dry's orders.

Dry was determined to keep Crowther on the defensive. To test Crowther's allegation that Stokell was the guilty party, the government prosecuted Stokell for removing Lanne's head.⁵² The case was heard in the Police Court before Mayor Wilson, who was associated with the Dry Government, and not before a Stipendiary Magistrate, who would be more impartial and independent. Crowther was examined by the prosecutor Chief District Constable Alfred Jones and Stokell's defence counsel Solicitor-General R.P. Adams. Crowther conceded little. He wrongly claimed that he had only accused Stokell 'inferentially' not directly. But generally Crowther declined to answer any questions about his role, if any, in the affair on the grounds that he might incriminate himself. The government failed to trick Crowther into admitting his complicity or guilt. But, as no evidence was produced to incriminate Stokell, the Mayor dismissed the case.

Meanwhile, the Board of Inquiry foundered over a difference of opinion. Wright and Colvin wanted to extend the scope of the enquiry to include the circumstances surrounding the removal of the body from the grave, while Chairman Tarleton held that to do so would require the permission of Dry.⁵³ When Dry decided not to extend the scope of the enquiry, Colvin and Wright resigned. Satisfied with the evidence taken by Tarleton and given at the Police Court, Dry ended the enquiry. As Crowther had refused to explain why he violated the order not to mutilate Lanne's body and as he tried to induce the public to believe Stokell was responsible, Dry felt justified in dispensing with Crowther's services at the General Hospital.⁵⁴ Crowther refused to be bound by Dry's directions but Dry dismissed his protests. Twelve hundred of Crowther's sup-

48. EM, 10 March 1869.

49. *Leader*, 12 March 1869.

50. AOTCSD 7/23/127, Dry to Tarleton, Colvin, and Wright, 12 March 1869; EM, 12 March 1869 (emphasis in the original).

51. M, 13 March 1869; EM, 12 March 1869.

52. M, 16 March 1869; EM, 15 March 1869.

53. EM, 16 March 1869; AOTCSD 7/23/127, Dry to Tarleton, 17 March 1869.

54. AOTCSD 7/23/127, Dry to Crowther, 3 April 1869, Crowther to Dry, 5 April 1869.

porters petitioned the government to reinstate him, claiming the evidence was unreliable and that the poor and sick needed his services.⁵⁵ Dry and the Hospital Board stood firm, relenting only to allow Crowther's son to recommence his medical studies if an honorary medical officer was willing to take him as a pupil.⁵⁶

The aftermath of the Lanne affair

While in itself an interesting if not bizarre episode in Tasmanian history, what happened to Lanne's body does raise wider issues, touching on key institutions, including the hospital, the police, the government, the Royal Society, and the largest urban cemetery, St. David's. It also prompted consideration of moral issues of more relevance to Tasmanians of the late 1860s than the demise of the Aboriginal population. But the Lanne affair did cause some Tasmanians to reflect on their past and present attitudes to Aboriginals and that issue will be dealt with.

European views on the treatment of Aboriginals had always been 'deeply ambivalent' and such was the case in 1869.⁵⁷ According to the anonymous correspondent to newspapers, 'Job Muggs', a 'large portion of society' still regarded Aboriginals with 'far less consideration than they are accustomed to bestow upon their dogs or cattle'.⁵⁸ Few cared, claimed 'Job Muggs', that Aboriginals had suffered 'robbery, murder, and rape' and numerous other indignities since first settlement. No surprise, then, that the 'shameless atrocity' perpetrated on Lanne's body was viewed by the religious community with 'comparative indifference', while the rest of the population 'merely laughed' at what had happened.

Humour was certainly one response. Ridicule was the theme of poems published in newspapers.⁵⁹ Some enterprising souls tried to cash in on Lanne's death. On 16 April an advertisement announced the display of a complete, full sized bust of Lanne by the artist Franciso Sante, which Hobartians could see for a small sum.⁶⁰ In the storage rooms of Walch and Sons and Birchalls' bookshops 'numerous' busts of Lanne's head produced by Charles Woolley could be found.⁶¹ In June 1869 advertisements in the *Cornwall Chronicle* melodramatically contained just the words 'Look Out for KING BILLY'. On 2 July it became clear that the words referred, not to Lanne's resurrection from the dead, but to King Billy Sheepwash Tobacco, a product from Ducroz, Nichols & Company.⁶² A recent writer has suggested that the title King Billy was a joke, signifying 'a partially domesticated animal who could imitate European behaviour and was harmless and amusing'.⁶³ Alternatively, it could be seen as an affectionate nickname and a joke which the good-humoured Lanne shared. The curiosity evoked by the chance of seeing Lanne's skeleton—and not the exhibition of salmon smolts as the organisers

55. *ibid*; *M*, 9 April 1869.

56. *EM*, 27 March 1869; *M*, 22 April 1869.

57. Reynolds 1995, p. 82.

58. *Cornwall Chronicle* (CC), 12 March 1869, letter by 'Job Muggs'.

59. *Leader*, 23 and 30 March, 30 July 1869.

60. *EM*, 16 April 1869.

61. *Examiner*, 10 April 1869.

62. CC, 2 July 1869.

63. Cove 1995, p. 44.

claimed—might explain why 12,960 people visited the Royal Society's museum in 1869, nearly double the number of visitors for any previous year.⁶⁴

Certainly, Tasmanians made more fuss about Lanne after his death than when he was alive, as a Crowther supporter Charles Dowdell noted: 'Did Lanney have a friend while knocking about the streets tipsy; when he travelled wanting? when he died?'⁶⁵ Ignored by the government and the Royal Society, Lanne's 'only true friend' was Captain Bayley, 'who had put his hand in his pocket, and given the money to bury poor Billy', claimed Dowdell. Bayley, a wealthy man, was certainly not Lanne's only friend, as the number of seamen who attended his funeral showed.⁶⁶ Whalers contained numerous black seamen from all parts of the world and Lanne no doubt did build strong friendships amongst that modestly-paid and close-knit community.

Apart from any respect he might have had for a good seaman or his responsibility as Captain to bury a dead crew member, possible explanations for Bayley's benevolence might be guilt or shame. The *Tasmanian Times* thought that many colonists 'probably' regretted, 'perhaps with compunction, the extirpation of the original occupants' of Tasmania.⁶⁷ British views on the affair were a consideration. The colonists had already attracted infamy by failing to provide for 'the comfort and protection of these unhappy victims of advancing civilisation'. The Lanne affair 'lowered us at once to the level' of savages and would, thought the *Tasmanian Times*, attract further opprobrium from 'foreign critics'.⁶⁸ At a time when the stigma of being a convict colony was in retreat, publicity over Lanne's body might deter British immigrants from settling in Tasmania.

The *Mercury* stressed the 'numerous cruelties' that Aborigines suffered 'at the hands of depraved men'.⁶⁹ Not only dispossessed of their land, their children were taken away and their women were 'treated most shamefully by ruffians'. The *Leader* also expatiated on the Aborigines 'long tale of suffering and oppression'.⁷⁰ Alcohol and tobacco introduced by colonists, squatters and their dogs, 'the lawless and licentious violence' of bushrangers and shepherds, and the guns of convict constables helped destroy the Aboriginal people. Government policy consummated 'the exterminating policy of the early settlers'. Aborigines were first placed on 'bleak and barren' Flinders Island and then transferred to 'an unhealthy swamp' at Oyster Cove, where they 'died off like rotten sheep'. Thus the government dealt with 'a difficult social problem' and saved much public expenditure. Under this onslaught, the extinction of the Aborigines was assumed to be inevitable.

Throughout the Lanne affair, no mention was made of the offsprings of sealers and Tasmanian Aboriginal women living in the Bass Strait islands and little thought was given to Lanne's wife Truganini. The *Leader* did note how 'the feelings of the poor survivors at Oyster Cove have been cruelly wounded' by the indignities to which Lanne's body had been subjected.⁷¹ Feeling 'very low spirited' since hearing on 13

64. Royal Society of Tasmania Annual Report 1869, 81.

65. *TT*, 20 April 1869; *M*, 20 April 1869.

66. Chamberlain 1988, pp. 103-4, 327-8.

67. *TT*, 6 March 1869.

68. *ibid.*, 9 March 1869.

69. *M*, 5 March 1869.

70. *Leader*, 12 March 1869.

March 1869 of her husband's death, Truganini considered that she had been 'treated cruelly by the authorities' because she had not been allowed to attend Lanne's funeral and believed she should have been given 'a mourning dress'.⁷² When she heard of Lanne's mutilation, she vowed that 'nothing would induce her to become an inmate of the hospital, where she might be treated as he was after death'.

As Tasmania was probably the only place in the world able to 'boast' of burying its last male Aboriginal, Charles Gaylor proposed 'some slight memorial in honour of that eventful occasion'.⁷³ If two thousand residents contributed two shillings and sixpence, £250 could be raised. The response to Gaylor's proposal was mainly positive. A 'Native' thought that more than £250 could easily be raised to erect an 'historical and substantial record of the demise of the last male aborigine of this enterprising colony'.⁷⁴ The memorial would show the world that in Tasmania 'not only the last remains of Europeans are respected, but also those of every other creed and country, from the Chinese down to the poor black aborigines'. Put in this way, the memorial might be read as symbolising the triumph of a superior civilisation over a supposedly inferior people. For 'Half Crown', however, the memorial would have a more noble purpose. It would make 'amends for the wrongs our ancestors inflicted' upon Aboriginals and would 'mark their extinction by some public recognition of their former inheritance of this, their own kingly empire'.⁷⁵

The other side of this view was expressed by 'KPX', who regarded Gaylor's proposal as 'a grim jest'.⁷⁶ Raising money for a memorial would only draw attention to a scandal that should be 'covered for ever by a veil of oblivion' rather than by 'perpetuating the miserable story by a monument'. Even if Tasmanians built 'the best monument we may, we can only preserve the memory of our disgrace, not atone for it'. Shame prevailed as no monument was built.⁷⁷ For Reynolds, this soul-searching and confessing to the ill-treatment of Aboriginals 'eased the conscience without having any political or economic implications—moral concern was politically safe and provided no legal purchase'.⁷⁸ This might have been so for the governing and wealthy classes but for other Tasmanians, and especially the humble white folk and 'coloured' seamen with whom Lanne associated, sadness was genuine.

Attendance at Lanne's funeral was one way of showing 'some outward token of respect' for Aboriginals.⁷⁹ It exhibited 'our appreciation of their merits, and our sorrow for their extinction'. As noted above, the funeral service did genuinely honour Lanne and was attended by a cross-section of Tasmanian society. But it raised questions about

71. *ibid.*

72. *Examiner*, 3 April 1869; Crowther 1974, p. 22; Agnew 1888, p. 480.

73. *EM*, 15 March 1869; Gaylor was the Tasmanian-born son of ex-convict and publican Charles Gaylor, see AOT, Correspondence file on Charles Gaylor.

74. *ibid.*, 16 March 1869.

75. *TT*, 18 March 1869.

76. *ibid.*

77. In 1911 the idea of a memorial to Aboriginals was raised again, with the suggested location being St. David's Park but nothing eventuated, *M*, 21 November 1911, letter by Reg. H. Meaburn.

78. Reynolds 1995, p. 201.

79. *TT*, 6 March 1869.

Lanne's religious beliefs. The *Cornwall Chronicle* claimed that Lanne died 'in reality a Pagan, although nominally catalogued and placed in the census' as a member of the Church of England.⁸⁰ Like his fellow Aborigines, Lanne could 'repeat mechanically the name of God, and even the words of a few hymns' but they were not 'ever in the true sense of the word Christians'. In return for taking their land, the colonists did not give Lanne or his people 'the comfort of dying Christians' or 'while living the benefits of practical civilisation'. 'Job Muggs' claimed to have conversed and mingled with the Aborigines at Oyster Cove and assessed 'the effects upon them of their contact with the civilization of the white man'.⁸¹ He found not 'the smallest indication of any beneficial change having been effected'; attempts 'to christianize these poor heathens' had failed.

But even if Lanne had not been a Christian, few condoned his mutilation or the removal of his body from the grave and the way the graveside had been left by 'two competing parties of resurrectionists'.⁸² In England body-snatching for dissection or any other purpose had traditionally aroused intense opposition across classes.⁸³ In Tasmania the wilful neglect of cemeteries had attracted public criticism in the 1860s but 'the desecration' of Lanne's grave raised 'public indignation to no ordinary pitch'.⁸⁴ According to the *Mercury*, this response showed that 'the common people have a better appreciation of decency and propriety than such of the so-called upper classes and men of education'. Such men had perpetrated 'a flagrant outrage from which the greatest ruffians in Tasmania's worst days would have shrunk'. If the offenders were not punished by the law, they should be socially ostracized 'by making them marked men, targets for the finger of scorn'. The *Cornwall Chronicle* thought the government should have taken greater precautions to stop 'so foul and barbarous a sacrilege' on Lanne's grave.⁸⁵ The act would have 'a most pernicious influence on the morals of the people'. It will teach citizens to 'treat with contempt' the rites of Christian burial. The consensus was that the offenders should be punished. The *Examiner* believed that Tasmanians were opposed to the emergence of a 'race of body-snatchers' and supported their 'severest repression'.⁸⁶ 'Humanitas' told readers of the *Tasmanian Times* that stealing a body from the grave had 'always been regarded with abhorrence and indignation' in 'all civilised countries'.⁸⁷ As the grave had been desecrated, the trustees were obliged to reassure their parishioners that corpses would be safely interred in the future.⁸⁸

The only cleric to make a public statement was Reverend F.H. Cox. He thought 'nothing more loathsome than the mutilation of the unburied corpse of the poor Aboriginal, unless it be the violation of his grave immediately after the rites of Christian burial, and the impunity which has been granted to that profane and indecent act'.⁸⁹ He further believed that Crowther deserved 'reprobation' for making 'false accusation' to

80. CC, 10 March 1869.

81. *ibid*, 12 March 1869.

82. TT, 22 March 1869, letter by 'Humanitas'.

83. Richardson 1987, pp. 89, 99.

84. M, 9 March 1869; for the state of cemeteries, see Petrow 1993.

85. CC, 10 March 1869.

86. *Examiner*, 11 March 1869.

87. TT, 22 March 1869.

88. *ibid*, 18 March 1869.

89. EM, 10 April 1869.

protect himself. But Cox was an ally of Crowther's and admired his work for the poor. Espousing 'the gospel of forgiveness', he seemed willing to exonerate Crowther. He wrote off the whole affair either as defensible in the interests of anatomical science or as a 'hoax' or practical joke redolent of 'medical-student morality' but certainly not 'an unpardonable sin'. Cox exhibited that 'practical tolerance for the idiosyncracies of fellow men' that was 'a product of life in an isolated city'.⁹⁰

Cox's tolerance had its limits, however. He was intent on punishing the body-snatchers and, with three church-wardens, approached Mayor Wilson.⁹¹ If body-stealing was illegal, they asked Wilson to proceed against those who stole Lanne's corpse. Wilson replied that body-stealing from a burial-ground was 'not a statutable offence' in Tasmania. He judged that any prosecution at common law would probably not secure a conviction. In any case, Wilson's duty was to adjudicate cases not to act as a public prosecutor. He noted that a bill would be introduced into parliament next session to regulate the methods for appropriating bodies 'to the purposes of anatomical science'. Apart from the legal difficulties, it was unlikely that the government would prosecute its allies, Stokell and his confreres at the Royal Society. No doubt the government would have liked to prosecute Crowther and his party, who 'recklessly left the grave in an unseemly state, either from disappointment, or to excite indignation against the actual body-snatchers' but this opportunity was not available.⁹²

Further enquiry might also force the Dry Government to explain why it asked the much-maligned municipal police to guard the grave and not the territorial police, over which it had control.⁹³ The role of the municipal police was questioned. It was alleged that Superintendent Propsting personally discharged the police from the grave at 11.30 p.m.⁹⁴ Those same police, rumour had it, were 'shortly afterwards seen in company with the party who carried the body away'. An investigation by the Police Committee of the Hobart Municipal Council found that 'certain' constables had neglected their duty and left their beat without permission.⁹⁵ They were 'admonished, and allowed to return to their duty'. Nothing was said about Propsting's role, although it was generally believed that he had been bribed to order his constables away from the grave.⁹⁶ The independence of the two members of the Police Committee was challenged.⁹⁷ Mayor Wilson had played a dubious part in the affair by presiding over the sham trial at the Police Office, while Alderman David Lewis was an anti-Crowther member of the Hospital Board.

Interestingly, the *Tasmanian Times* felt that no eyebrows would have been raised if the government and the Royal Society had, with the consent of the trustees, of St. David's burial-ground, 'decently' taken Lanne's body from the grave and placed it in the museum.⁹⁸ This reading of events was surely right. The outrage centred on how the

90. Bolger 1973, p.182.

91. *M*, 15 April 1869.

92. *EM*, 12 March 1869; *M*, 12 March 1869.

93. *TT*, 9 March 1869.

94. *EM*, 10 March 1869.

95. *TT*, 7 April 1869.

96. Bolger 1973, p. 181.

97. *Leader*, 9 April 1869.

98. *TT*, 2 April 1869.

body was removed. Few pardoned the scientists' rash action, but there might have been support for eventually letting Lanne's body be preserved in the museum in the interests of posterity. According to the *Mercury*, the men of science should have embalmed the body and after a decent interval 'raised the bones for preservation'.⁹⁹ The *Mercury* wondered whether financial gain was a motive. Some English scientific societies would pay handsomely for Lanne's skeleton and this 'might prove a sufficient solatium for any local obloquy' directed at the culprits. The *Examiner* thought that the scientists had erred. Lanne had been 'born and bred in civilization' and therefore his skeleton would not be 'the exact type of his race'.¹⁰⁰ The *Examiner* suggested that digging up appropriate sites on Flinders Island would supply plenty of skeletons 'to satisfy the scientific societies of Europe if the business was discreetly managed'.

If European scientific societies deserved censure, the role of the Royal Society of Tasmania was not above reproach. The oldest scientific society in Australia, the Royal Society was comprised mainly of gentlemen scientists.¹⁰¹ Few members could claim impressive scientific credentials and even fewer had the expertise to provide informed observations on the significance of Lanne's skeleton. But it was true that the Royal Society had taken an interest in the Tasmanian Aborigines since 1848, when Joseph Milligan became Secretary. The Royal Society then saw it as part of its duty 'to keep a record of the Tasmanian Aborigines'. In 1857 it arranged for a photographer to obtain 'accurate representation of their form, features, and colour, singly or in groups'.

The involvement of the Royal Society in the Lanne affair was defended by its Secretary, Dr. James Agnew, also a member of the Royal College of Surgeons. He held that 'every enlightened individual' would support the Royal Society.¹⁰² Lanne's skeleton should have been 'preserved to all futurity in our Tasmanian museum' but this was denied by 'the contemptible vanity (if not a baser feeling) of a single individual'. Agnew also defended the decision to cut off Lanne's hands and feet. The skull was 'the most valuable' part of the skeleton and, once it had been taken, removing the hands and feet had not 'the slightest consequence'. The Royal Society was not prompted by 'mean, selfish, or sordid motives'; 'the interests of the people at large were alone consulted'. This was stretching the truth and was no justification for mutilating Lanne but showed some contrition. While Agnew's motives might have been pure, the same cannot be assumed of Morton Allport, who later sent Aboriginal skeletons to European collectors.¹⁰³

Tasmanian attitudes to the claims of 'science' were more sceptical than the most recent commentator on the Lanne affair has suggested.¹⁰⁴ Generally, Tasmanians attached 'small importance' to science, especially its more esoteric and non-utilitarian branches, and did not condone the actions of 'the demented votaries of science'.¹⁰⁵ As 'Humanitas' put it, 'they who worship at the shrine of science do little honour to their

99. *M*, 9 March 1869.

100. *Examiner*, 13 March 1869.

101. Winter 1972, pp. 6, 21, 64.

102. *EM*, 20 March 1869.

103. Davis 1874, p. 5.

104. Cove 1995, pp. 52-3, 177, 183.

105. *Examiner*, 10 April 1869 and see the article 'The Value of Science in Tasmania' in *ibid*, 9 July 1869.

goddess, when they choose the dark hours of midnight and the place of graves for performing their orgies'.¹⁰⁶ 'Job Muggs' was close to the mark when he suggested that 'morbid Curiosity' rather than science motivated the mutilators and body-snatchers.¹⁰⁷ Equally curious and worthy of preservation, argued 'Job Muggs' was the effect of civilisation on the Aborigines. The museum should therefore also contain 'the skeleton of the first White man who murdered a Black one and debauched his Gin, and the first bullet and bayonet that sped the messages of death to the vitals of a native heathen, or the first piece of manufactured hemp that choked a poor wretch convicted of crimes he was ignorant of until taught them by the example of his European instructors'. Here satire was used effectively to highlight how colonial museums provided one-sided views of relations between colonists and Aborigines and shaped perceptions of the colony's history.

The loose management of the hospital received its share of criticism. Evidence given to the various enquiries revealed that dead bodies left at the hospital and not claimed by family or friends were dissected by medical students.¹⁰⁸ Unless the management was improved, wrote the *Mercury*, 'public confidence' in the hospital would be lost and it might have to close.¹⁰⁹ People did not want dead bodies 'treated with an indignity from which, applied to a dog, a sensitive mind would revolt'. The keys to the dead-house were available to all the honorary medical officers. Most 'freely exercised' their right of access and rumour had it that 'strange things had been done before this in that same dead-house'. The *Mercury* suggested that one hospital official should be responsible for ensuring bodies in the dead-house were respected. The honorary medical officers must be refused permission 'to hack and hew bodies of those who die in the Hospital for their own amusement, or the instruction of their pupils'. Stokell was severely criticised for incompetence. He should have closed or sealed the dead-house and asked for a warder or territorial policeman to guard the door.¹¹⁰ Stokell was also at fault for cutting off Lanne's hands and feet. His future at the hospital was in doubt.

But the more serious offence was cutting off Lanne's head and all the evidence pointed to William Crowther and his son as the culprits. The Hospital Board, at the behest of the government, had little choice but to suspend them. As Crowther was about to stand for election to the Legislative Council seat of Hobart as an opponent of the Dry Government, the timing was politically convenient. This made the Hospital Board, wrote the *Tasmanian Times*, 'the cats-paw of the Government in damaging a political opponent and creating political capital out of the gross neglect of duty' by Stokell.¹¹¹ As the Hospital Board also contained 'at least three personal enemies' of Crowther, it willingly supported the government's decision. Since the mid-1860s, Crowther had agitated against the Dry Government's policy, supported by the Hospital Board, of inadequately funding the hospital and keeping it as a pauper institution.¹¹² Crowther wanted it to become 'an independent charity supported by patients' fees as

106. *TT*, 22 March 1869.

107. *Tasmanian Catholic Standard*, 20 March 1869.

108. *EM*, 12 March 1869.

109. *M*, 9 March 1869.

110. *TT*, 9 March 1869.

111. *ibid*, 12 and 13 March 1869.

112. Rimmer 1981, pp. 96-7.

well as by philanthropic subscribers'. Crowther irritated the board by regularly giving prescriptions to working men who obtained free medicine from the hospital's dispensary.

Crowther's defence in a letter to Dry on 8 March—subsequently published in the press—damned him further in many people's eyes.¹¹³ He accused Stokell of cutting off Lanne's head, feet, and hands 'for the purpose of creating a sensation'. Crowther thought the proceedings against him savoured 'too forcibly of the Star Chamber and the Inquisition'. The whole affair reeked of 'political bias and intrigue'. Nowhere in his letter did Crowther deny that he was an accessory to the act, that he was directly or indirectly involved, or that he had any knowledge of who was involved. The *Mercury*, owned by Crowther's enemy John Davies, discounted Crowther's claim of political bias.¹¹⁴ Crowther was not a political power and no political grouping would have arranged 'such an outrage on decency, and then laid the charge of it on the Doctor to injure him politically'.

Crowther had made a tactical error by accusing Stokell. Logically it made little sense. Stokell had more to gain by keeping the decapitation secret than by making it public, as it exposed his failure to take proper precautions to guard Lanne's body. The Royal Society had already been promised the corpse and Stokell had no reason to remove Lanne's head. More importantly, argued a correspondent to the *Evening Mail*, it was morally wrong to accuse another, whom you know to be innocent, of your own crime; it was wrong to 'bear false witness against thy neighbour'.¹¹⁵ According to 'N', disobeying Dry's orders did not involve 'great moral delinquency' and Crowther's 'honour might have been unimpeached had the matter ended there'.¹¹⁶ But, in a 'base and most cowardly' act, Crowther attempted to fix the blame on the innocent Stokell, whose career might have been destroyed. 'N' conceded that Stokell's conduct was not blameless but he had the honesty to admit that he had cut off Lanne's hands and feet and removed the body from the grave. Also reprehensible was Crowther's failure to protect his son from his 'most revolting' conduct. Crowther, his enemies rightly declared, was a man without scruples.

The affair did not divert Crowther from contesting the seat of Hobart in the Legislative Council. On 18 March his supporters reaffirmed their loyalty at a public meeting.¹¹⁷ One of his supporters said the election was not intended 'to prove who had the black man's head, but rather to show how the white man might live'. When Crowther was elected, 'not a word more would be heard about King Billy'. Crowther was opposed by Alfred Crisp, who was backed by prominent members of the Royal Society and who were Crowther's 'most active and bitter' detractors.¹¹⁸ Members of the Royal Society Council included T.D. Chapman, Treasurer in the Dry Government, and Alfred Kennerley, Chairman of the Hospital Board. John Davies, Dry's Attorney-General W.L. Dobson, and Alderman David Lewis of the Hospital Board were fellows of the Royal

113. *EM*, 10 March 1869.

114. *M*, 12 March 1869.

115. *EM*, 21 April 1869, letter by 'Spectator'.

116. *M*, 19 March 1869.

117. *TT*, 19 March 1869.

118. *CC*, 27 March 1869; *TT*, 20 March 1869.

Society.¹¹⁹ Despite this opposition, Crowther won easily. In his victory speech he attacked the press and his opponents for making 'political capital' out of 'King Billy's head' and said he had lost no sleep over the accusations made against him.¹²⁰ The *Examiner* was struck by Crowther's callous disregard of his wrongdoing.¹²¹ Notwithstanding the election result, the *Examiner* believed that 'the great majority' of Tasmanians viewed Crowther's action with 'the greatest repugnance' and an offence against 'honour, morality, and common decency'. But the Dry Government deserved censure too. It did not approach the affair impartially or seek to apportion blame and punishment where appropriate. The government had advice from its own legal officers that Crowther had committed a misdemeanour by taking Lanne's head and, if convicted, was liable for imprisonment or fine.¹²² Dry did not want a quick trial in a neutral court. He tried to injure a political opponent by prolonging the affair and failed badly.¹²³

Shortly after his election Crowther had another reason to gloat. The Royal College of Surgeons in London awarded him a 'gold medal' for his 'valuable and numerous contributions' to their Hunterian museum.¹²⁴ This honour had been bestowed on only four others. But, despite strenuous efforts and Dry's unexpected death in August 1869, Crowther was not immediately reinstated as an honorary medical officer. In September 1869, at a public meeting, Crowther's supporters presented him with a purse of 240 sovereigns as thanks for his 'unremitting and disinterested services' in attending without charge 'the suffering poor' of Hobart Town.¹²⁵ Harking back to the colony's convict origins, Crowther said that 'the ruffianism and high-handed injustice' with which he had been excluded from the hospital 'could not have occurred, or been tolerated, in any other place on the surface of the globe than Tasmania'. That was special pleading. Crowther's dismissal was the minimum punishment for disobeying Dry's orders and well within the rights of the government to impose.

In seeking revenge, Crowther resorted to more than slurs on Tasmanian society. On 1 October, this 'apostle' of the Railway and Progress Association, vented his 'personal antipathy' against the James Milne Wilson Government by voting with the anti-railway lobby against the Main Line Railway Bill.¹²⁶ The *Mercury* noted that 'KING BILLY again plays an important part in our public affairs, and Tasmania jeopardises its Railway'.¹²⁷ In early 1870, Crowther was no doubt elated at the news that Stokell's probationary period as house surgeon had ended and that he would not be reappointed.¹²⁸ The Wilson Government intended to appoint an experienced full-time senior administrator to reorganise the management of the hospital and Stokell was considered too inexperienced for such an important position. Equally, it could have been punishment

119. *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 1869, pp. 69–74.

120. *EM*, 23 March 1869.

121. *Examiner*, 27 March 1869.

122. *EM*, 17 April 1869.

123. AOTCSD 7/23/127, Dowdell and Fisher to Dry, 26 May 1869; *TT*, 21 April 1869.

124. *Examiner*, 20 April 1869.

125. *TT*, 28 September 1869.

126. *M*, 2 October 1869.

127. *ibid.*

128. Rimmer 1981, pp. 97–8; Historical Committee of the National Trust 1966, p.181.

for failing to protect Lanne's body. Stokell later moved to Campbell Town in Northern Tasmania, where he died in obscurity in 1878.

In the 1870s Crowther forged a successful political career. In 1876–77 he was minister without portfolio in Thomas Reibey's government and in January 1877 Reibey reinstated him as an honorary medical officer.¹²⁹ From December 1878 to October 1879 Crowther was Premier, the first doctor to hold that office.¹³⁰ He remained in politics until his death in April 1885. Crowther's memory was perpetuated by an imposing statue financed by public subscription and erected in Franklin Square, in January 1889.¹³¹

No such memorial was ever erected for Lanne. In a sense, though, Lanne did leave a memorial behind. In August 1869, William Dobson, Attorney-General in the Wilson Government, introduced the Anatomy Bill to regulate the practice of anatomy.¹³² Based on the English *Anatomy Act* 1832, this rendered 'lawful a system which for many years was unlawful', said Dobson. It allowed legally qualified doctors and students licensed by the Colonial Secretary to practice anatomy, provided the relatives or executor of the deceased agreed and provided the deceased did not express his opposition to anatomical examination. A breach of the statute would result in three months imprisonment or a £50 fine. During debate on the bill in the House of Assembly, the lawyer W.R. Giblin suggested that, to make regulation 'as complete as possible, and provide for every emergency', the bill should make removing a body from a cemetery after burial a misdemeanour. As the common law made an offender liable for two years imprisonment for criminal misdemeanour, Dobson saw no necessity for taking up Giblin's suggestion. But thanks to Lanne, the *Anatomy Act* 1869 protected future dead bodies from indiscriminate dissection in hospitals.

Concluding remarks

Scientists were desperate to study Lanne's skeleton for what it could reveal about human evolution. But we have no evidence to show that any studies of Lanne's skeleton or skull were ever carried out. It seems that his body parts were ultimately disposed of in various ways. According to Ryan, Stokell made 'a tobacco pouch' out of part of Lanne's skin, his fellow Tasmanian scientists grabbed other body parts (the ears, the nose, and part of one arm), and his arms and feet were kept at the museum, but Ryan seems to have no compelling evidence to support these assertions.¹³³ Plomley notes that the curator of the museum, Morton Allport, sent five skeletons to Europe between 1870 and 1875 but does not indicate whether Lanne's skeleton was one of them.¹³⁴

As for Lanne's skull, we can do nothing but speculate, as the leading protagonists appear not to have left any diaries or letters divulging its ultimate resting place. We do, however, have the recollections of Dr. Thomas Christie Smart, an Alderman and an honorary medical officer at the Hobart General Hospital in 1869. According to Smart,

129. Rimmer 1981, p. 105.

130. Crowther 1969, p. 502.

131. *ibid.*

132. *M*, 1, 8, 9 September 1869.

133. Ryan 1981, p. 217.

134. Plomley 1962, p. 6.

Crowther kept the skull at his house until he decided what to do with it.¹³⁵ Some months after the decapitation, Crowther told Smart that an islander from a whaling ship, was 'very ill in a house on the old wharf'. Crowther did not expect the man to survive and suggested to Smart that, if the body was sent to the hospital, 'no enquiries should be made by the authorities after his death'. Wise to Crowther's intentions, Smart thought it best that the man not be sent to the hospital, 'as he would certainly make no promises to shut his eyes' to any interference with the body. In the event, the man died and the body disappeared. Smart suggested that Crowther took the body, using the skeleton as 'a proper setting to the stolen head'.

According to Smart, it was 'well known that the supposed skeleton and head of King Billy' was sent by Crowther to the Royal College of Surgeons in London.¹³⁶ In return, Crowther was made an honorary fellow in 1874. In 1887 Agnew also noted that the skull was sent to the Royal College of Surgeons, although, perhaps to vex his rivals for the skull, he asserted that Lanne was not a 'pure-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal, claiming that he had the blood of a New South Wales Aboriginal.¹³⁷ Some evidence casts doubt that the skull was sent to London, as an analysis of catalogues of skeletons and skulls donated to the Royal College of Surgeons did not find any donations from Crowther.¹³⁸ Pybus stretches credulity by imaginatively suggesting that the skull did not reach London because sailors, irritated by the smell, threw it overboard.¹³⁹ Another possibility is that Lanne's skull was sent to the University of Edinburgh. After Crowther died, a skull found in his collection was donated to Edinburgh, his son Dr. E.M. Crowther believing it to be Lanne's.¹⁴⁰ Recent investigations by scientists at the University of Edinburgh revealed that the skull in the university's collection was not Lanne's.¹⁴¹ It is difficult to prove beyond doubt that Lanne's skull was sent to the Royal College of Surgeons by Crowther. The College's collection was destroyed by German bombers in World War Two, and Plomley's later study of contemporary correspondence and catalogues sheds no light on the skull's fate.¹⁴² Given Crowther's efforts to secure Lanne's skull for the Royal College of Surgeons, it was ironical that in 1881 the curator of the Hunterian Museum, Sir William Flower, publicly 'questioned the value of craniology' in determining scientifically the place of different races in human evolution.¹⁴³

If it cannot be said that science made good use of Lanne's skeleton, did Tasmanians learn anything from the Lanne affair when his wife Truganini, supposedly the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal, died in 1876?¹⁴⁴ In the short term, the answer is yes. In 1876 the Premier was Alfred Kennerley and his government politely but firmly

135. UT Walker papers, W9/C4/1 (12), Walker to Ling Roth, ? 1896.

136. *ibid.*

137. Agnew 1888, p.479.

138. Plomley 1962, p. 6.

139. Pybus 1992, p. 169.

140. Plomley 1962, p. 8.

141. Murray 1993, p. 516.

142. Plomley 1962, p. 6.

143. Lorimer 1988, p.420.

144. According to Ryan, the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal to die was a woman called Suke, who died on Kangaroo Island in 1888, see Ryan 1981, p.220.

rejected two bids by the Royal Society for Truganini's body, expressing a desire 'to prevent the recurrence of the unseemly proceedings' which occurred after Lanne's death.¹⁴⁵ This time precautions were taken. At the hospital, the body was guarded by a constable.¹⁴⁶ To foil the chances of body-snatchers, the government departed from the funeral program announced in the press. Instead of burying the body at noon on 11 May, the government authorised the Superintendent of the Cascades Gaol, Superintendent A.H. Boyd, to remove the body from the hospital at 11.00 p.m. on 10 May. Next day, Truganini was buried in a grave not far from the front door of the chapel behind the walls of the gaol and secure from the machinations of body-snatchers. Boyd was instructed not to permit the removal of Truganini's remains from the grave 'without a written Order from the Governor-in-Council'.¹⁴⁷

Ultimately the scientists triumphed. In December 1878 the Royal Society secured control of Truganini's skeleton from the government of W.R. Giblin, a strange decision by that sane and brilliant man, on the condition that it would not be 'exposed to public view but be decently deposited in a secure resting place where it may be accessible, by special permission, to scientific men for scientific purposes'.¹⁴⁸ Did Giblin know that he was about to lose office to William Crowther and act to frustrate his successor? Whatever the reason, the condition was broken in 1904 when the skeleton was placed on public display in the local museum, where it remained until 1947.¹⁴⁹ Despite many lofty pronouncements of its significance, Truganini's body, like Lanne's, was never the subject of close scientific investigation.¹⁵⁰ But unlike Lanne, Truganini's body was not mutilated. Her body was cremated and, true to her wishes, on 1 May 1976 the ashes were scattered over D'Entrecasteaux Channel, safe forever from the demands of ambitious and unscrupulous scientists.¹⁵¹

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145. UT RSA/B/16, Gilmore to Agnew, 10 May 1876, 19 July 1876.

146. M, 12 May 1876.

147. UT RSA/B/16, Gilmore to Agnew, 19 July 1876.

148. Ibid, Moore to Agnew, 6 December 1878.

149. Ryan 1981, p. 220.

150. Plomley 1987, p. 191; Cove 1995, pp. 142–3.

151. Ryan 1981, p. 220.

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'In view of the obvious animus'. The discrediting of Ralph Piddington

Geoffrey Gray

In March 1934 AO Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, addressed the Royal Commissioner who had been appointed to 'investigate, report and advise upon matters in relation to the condition and treatment of Aborigines' in Western Australia. Pat Jacobs, Neville's biographer, relates a version of events which Neville was eager to convey:

Neville gave [H.D.] Moseley [the Royal Commissioner] the background to some of the more damaging personal criticisms he had had to bear with. He mentioned [Ralph] Piddington, [A.P.] Elkin's research student, who had displayed some erratic behaviour while in Western Australia—causing Elkin concern. He'd been seen drunk and waving the *red flag*! His file was handed to Moseley without comment by Neville; what it contained was, by inference, enough to discredit his criticism of Neville.¹

Jacobs' narrative highlights the successful attempt by Neville to discredit Piddington by scrutinising his personal behaviour, to avert the veracity of the allegations made by Piddington, and the inadequacies of Neville's department. By this strategy the seriousness of the allegations made by Piddington about the ill-treatment and conditions of Aborigines at La Grange Bay in Northwest Western Australia are expunged.

Piddington's allegations were serious.² They dealt with the sexual violation of Aboriginal women, beatings of both Aboriginal men and women, a fight between an Aboriginal man and a white man 'over' an Aboriginal woman, provision of alcohol to Aborigines, and the misappropriation of government rations designated for aged and infirm Aboriginal people. He claimed that the abuses at La Grange were typical of the state affairs in Western Australia generally.³ It is my contention that there was a deliberate effort by Neville to mislead the Australian National Research Council (ANRC), his

1. Jacobs 1991, p. 226. Piddington was not Elkin's research student. Piddington's research was supervised by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and S.D. Porteus. Piddington had left for London in September 1932. See also Wise 1985, p. 115, whose error appears to be replicated by Jacobs. Cf Gray 1994, pp. 217–245.

2. A earlier paper, (Gray 1994), examined why, particularly in the first half of this century, Australian academics were so supine when it came to making public criticism of the treatment, conditions and welfare of Aborigines. For Piddington's detailed allegations see Gray 1994, pp. 222–225.

Minister (W.H. Kitson) and the Royal Commissioner (H.D. Moseley), with regard to the substance of Piddington's allegations, and with regard to the recommendations made by a departmental inquiry and police reports. The consequences for Piddington were considerable. With the exception of a short period with the Australian army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs between 1944 and 1946 Piddington never worked in Australia again.

The ANRC, the body responsible for sending anthropological researchers to the field,⁴ uncritically accepted Neville's charges regarding Piddington's 'erratic and intemperate' behaviour. Neither the ANRC Executive Committee nor its Committee for Anthropology interrogated Piddington's allegations of ill-treatment and abuse of Aborigines at La Grange. Despite Piddington's allegations being only part of a series of damaging public revelations and allegations regarding the treatment and welfare of Aborigines in Western Australia they gave him no support.⁵ The ANRC's position was in part fuelled by the belief that Aborigines were on the road to extinction, and their desire to effect a balance between their research program—if the anthropological research 'is not done now...it will never be done'⁶—and maintaining sound relations with the government (particularly Neville). They recognised that Piddington's conduct had created a 'very uncomfortable atmosphere regarding the Council and anthropological research generally'.⁷ However, in dismissing Piddington's allegations, and ignoring public disquiet about the treatment and welfare of Aborigines, the ANRC was seemingly prepared to accept such conditions and treatment as, at least, inevitable and continue unchallenged. Like Neville they emphasised Piddington's personal behaviour. A mitigating factor in this assessment was Neville's reluctance to inform the ANRC of the accuracy of Piddington's allegations.

Neville also failed in his fiduciary duty to Aborigines. It is obvious, from a reading of the departmental files that the abuses Piddington detailed in his interview with *The World*, and in his earlier discussions with Neville, were substantiated by a departmental inquiry and police reports. Police who had interviewed Aboriginal workers who worked for the sandalwood cutters at La Grange stated that their evidence supported the allegations made by Piddington. Moreover they recommended the removal of John Spurling, the local protector. Neville ignored this recommendation and took no action to protect Aboriginal workers from these employers.

3. From interview given by Ralph Piddington to *The World*, January 14, 1932. National Library of Australia (NLA), MS 482, 859B. This relates to events at La Grange which are outlined by Neville. State Archives of Western Australia (hereafter SAWA), ACC993, 27/36. This is a restricted file. Copies of this file were provided on the condition that I 'respect the confidentiality of any personal information about Aboriginal people'. Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Affairs Department, to author, 21 December 1995. I would like to thank Cedric Wyatt, CEO, for permission to quote from this file.

4. This research was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. See Peterson 1990; Gray 1997.

5. See Biskup 1973; Haebich 1988; Jacobs 1990.

6. Radcliffe-Brown to Gibson, 4 April 1930. 155/4/1/9, Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives (hereafter EP). This view was shared by Radcliffe-Brown's successors Raymond Firth and A.P. Elkin.

7. Sir George Julius to Raymond Firth, 21 October 1932. 155/4/1/10, EP; see also Gray 1993, pp. 23–28.

'Trying to do me personal injury'

Piddington was eager to establish a sound working relationship with Neville, and like Elkin and SD Porteus⁸ who had worked in the Northwest, was appreciative of the support Neville and his departmental officers provided him and his wife⁹ in the field. He visited Neville in March 1930 before he left for La Grange, and on his return six months later, when he discussed matters concerning the treatment and conditions of Aborigines at the Government Feeding Station, and the behaviour of the white employers of Aboriginal labour. In his discussions he stated that the local protector of Aborigines, John Spurling, was an unsuitable person and accused him, in association with other employers of Aboriginal labour, of defrauding the Aborigines' Department of rations. Neville, appreciative of Piddington's tact and discretion, promised to inquire into Piddington's allegations.

Before Piddington's second visit, Neville suggested that Piddington should not stay at La Grange because of the 'circumstances surrounding [your] last visit'.¹⁰ When Piddington sought clarification Neville assured him that there was no reflection on his personal conduct. Rather Neville was motivated by considerations of Piddington's 'personal comfort in view of the circumstances which have arisen since you were formerly at La Grange'.¹¹ Piddington had, perhaps inadvertently, caused Spurling to take offence; Spurling wrote that as Piddington and Gerhardt Laves, a linguist also sponsored by the ANRC, were leaving La Grange, only Laves, 'the gentleman', bid Spurling farewell and thanked Lucy¹² 'for having made bread for him and for washing his clothes'. Piddington did not have the 'decency to come and thank the woman for her services'; he also accused Piddington of engaging in local politics by supporting the local postmaster and his wife who were 'trying to do me personal injury' and causing 'trouble amongst the natives'.¹³ On the way to La Grange (in June 1931) Piddington visited Neville, who assured him that his allegations expressed on his previous visit had been investigated.¹⁴ This was the last occasion that Piddington spoke with Neville.

Piddington's earlier allegations had been investigated by Jack Woodland, manager of Moola Bulla Government Station. Piddington's allegations were not the first made against Spurling and the sandalwood cutters, Leonard Bilston,¹⁵ George Hatch,

8. S.D. Porteus who conducted psychological investigation among Aborigines in Northwest Western Australia guaranteed the government that any material they had filmed 'would [not] in any reflect upon the handling of the natives' in that state. Porteus to Neville, 20 November. SAWA, ACC 993, 133/28. Porteus was professor of Clinical Psychology in the University of Hawaii (see Gray 1994, *passim*).

9. Piddington and Piddington 1932, p. 342. It should be noted this was Piddington's first wife, (named Marjorie as was his second wife), who had taken anthropology at the University of Sydney.

10. Neville to Spurling, 10 April 1931. SAWA, ACC993, 133/30 (hereafter ACC993, 133/30).

11. Piddington to Neville, 24 May 1931; Neville to Piddington, 3 June 1931. ACC993, 133/30

12. Spurling was accused of abducting 'the Aboriginal woman Lucy'. SAWA, ACC993, 27/36 (hereafter ACC 993, 27/36). While at La Grange Elkin stayed with John Spurling, 'an elderly man', who was in charge of the Government Aboriginal feeding station at La Grange. The cooking was done 'for the most part, by a nice black gin, helped at times by a Malay-black half caste'[Lucy]. Elkin to Sally Elkin, 13 October 1928. 1/1/1/1, EP.

13. Spurling to Neville, 22 September 1930. ACC993, 133/30.

14. Memo, 20 June 1931. ACC993, 133/30.

Leslie MacLaughlin and Albert Smith. Sergeant Simpson of Broome police had reported 'along similar lines but [his] contained more serious allegations'. Inspector McGuiness, also of Broome, had recommended to his superiors in Perth that Spurling be 'relieved of his responsibilities'. McGuiness, in receipt of a later report by Simpson, who had interviewed Aboriginal workers who worked for Spurling and Leonard Bilston at La Grange stated that their evidence supported the allegations made by Piddington. However, this evidence could not be used in a prosecution against these men. Because they were by Aboriginal witnesses their statements had less weight in a court. These accounts support the allegations made by Piddington of the removal of government rations by Spurling and Bilston; incidents of fighting between Bilston (and others) and Aboriginal men: 'Bilston and Smith fight Ghandi because they want woman and Ghandi no want go with them'; sexual relations between the white men and Aboriginal women: 'Bilston sleep along Lucy'.¹⁶

Woodland reported to Neville that Spurling was 'on the spot and must know what is taking place'; if Spurling was unable to control the abuses by the sandalwood cutters, who were 'not fit to be in the vicinity of a native depot', he should be dismissed.¹⁷ Nevertheless, contrary to the evidence presented in the Broome police report, and that from Woodland, Neville declared to his Minister that Woodland's report 'more or less' exonerated Spurling. He took no action other than revoking Bilston's permit to employ Aboriginal labour, and he instructed Spurling not to have Bilston, Hatch, MacLaughlin or Smith within the confines of the government feeding station.¹⁸

'[Some] persons have not justified your confidence'

Piddington left Perth for Sydney just before Christmas Day, 1931. In early January the following year he was interviewed¹⁹ by the Sydney weekly, *The World*, during which he criticised the treatment and conditions of Aborigines in Western Australia. Piddington's allegations were not dissimilar to those he had previously made to Neville. He claimed that the abuses at La Grange were typical of the state affairs in Western Australia generally: 'we cannot be surprised if our attitude is recognised for what it is...absolute indifference to the sufferings of the native'.²⁰

Piddington's allegations of ill-treatment followed on those made by Mary Bennett, who 'considered herself an informed and experienced spokeswoman on Aborigines', and involved in the Women's Movement.²¹ Jacobs describes her as having the reformer's zeal to do something about Aborigines particularly the plight of Aboriginal women. Bennett had severely criticised the government and like Piddington made alle-

15. Leonard Bilston Jarvis was convicted in Broome on 27 March 1937 for 'sexual intercourse with a native, and 'employing natives without permits'. George Hatch was charged with 'sexual intercourse with a native women' but was not tried as he had left the area before the trial. Memo to Chief Secretary, 16 April 1937. ACC993, 27/36.

16. Neville, 'Resume'. ACC993, 27/36.

17. *ibid.*

18. This is extensively detailed in ACC993, 27/36. Neville stated that the association between 'Bilston & Co. and the natives at La Grange...has caused us a considerable amount of worry and trouble for some six years'. Memo to the Minister (Kitson), 2 July 1936. ACC993, 27/36.

19. For a full transcript of the interview see Gray 1994, pp. 22-224.

20. 'Aborigines on cattle stations are in slavery', interview given by Ralph Piddington to *The World*, January 14, 1932.

gations of slavery, sexual violation of women, starvation, dispossession, violence and appalling living and working conditions. In April 1932 Bennett had declared in a letter to the *ABM Review* that Piddington's 'courageous exposure of conditions in North-West Australia entitles him to gratitude from all who deplore the ill-treatment of the native Australian race'.²² The overall effect of this public criticism was not only to challenge Neville's authority and control of his departmental officers, but it also challenged the integrity of the protectors, and, of course, brought Western Australia's treatment of Aborigines to the notice of the world.²³

Neville, on being told about Piddington's now public allegations, believed they were contained in a report to the ANRC Committee for Anthropology, and he therefore sought a copy from Raymond Firth, acting chairman of the Committee and professor of anthropology in the University of Sydney.²⁴ Firth assured Neville that Piddington had made no report to the Committee.²⁵ Firth did, however, ask Piddington to supply Neville with a copy of the interview.²⁶ This he did not do, claiming not to have a copy, although Piddington explained to Neville that Neville's concerns, fuelled by rumour, were 'greatly exaggerated':

I presume that the reference is an interview which I gave to a representative of The World newspaper upon my return. There was no reference to your department except in regard to the retrenchment of Mr Mitchell which I deplored. I merely gave my views on the failure of our governments to provide adequate machinery to deal with the problem of the aborigines. I did not keep a copy of the interview.²⁷

This was not strictly correct as the newspaper report specifically referred to La Grange Bay, and Piddington's observations of 'slavery of natives, trafficking in lubras, and the murdering and flogging of [A]borigines by white men', and the claim that the West Australian government was 'indifferent to the abuses'.²⁸ Nevertheless Neville was content with Piddington's explanation until he received a copy of the July 1932 issue of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend* which contained extracts from Piddington's interview.²⁹

21. John Spurling wrote to Neville that Mrs Bennett 'left for Beagle Bay about the same time as Mr Piddington'. Spurling to Neville, 4 November 1931. ACC 993, 130/33. It is unclear whether they met.

22. M.M. Bennett, *ABM Review*, 15 April 1932.

23. Jacobs 1990, pp. 200–204.

24. Neville to Firth, 26 April 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

25. Firth to Neville, 9 May 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

26. Neville to Firth, 15 June 1932. ACC 993, 133/30. Neville added cryptically that he 'should really like to know what Mr Piddington had to say, in view of incidents which occurred while he was here'.

27. Piddington to Neville, 11 June 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

28. However in a newspaper interview in July 1932 Piddington was more circumspect: "In Western Australia the problem of the aborigines is tacitly ignored and in spite of the efforts of the Aborigines Department (under the direction of Mr A.O. Neville) and various humanitarian organisations, the native is generally regarded as a dog, and is deemed unworthy to be regarded as a human being". *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1932.

29. Neville to Travers Buxton, Secretary, The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 26 August 1932.

In a strongly worded letter Neville wrote to Firth: 'I cannot help thinking that Mr Piddington must have known perfectly well to what was alluded when he was asked to supply me with copies of any statement...It can only be assumed that he was not desirous of the Department perusing it'. The department, Neville continued, was willing to receive fair criticism but Piddington's statements were exaggerated, and did more harm to 'the cause of the aborigines than the illicit acts which occasionally occur. They reflected discredit on the government and its officers as well as on that true body of men the Northern pioneers who have, with few exceptions, always treated the aborigines well'. Nor could the events Piddington referred to 'have taken place without the full knowledge of the Department'. In fact Neville claimed that at no time were the

interests of the natives better conserved than at present, any episode of an untoward nature being promptly reported to the Department which decides the action taken. To say that 'the aboriginals and half-castes have neither human rights nor protection' is sheer nonsense, since there are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the State no less than a hundred persons who are authorised to afford protection, and are continually in touch with the Department personally in that connection.³⁰

Piddington's 'extraordinary abuse of the hospitality...extended' by Neville put all future research in the state in jeopardy. Neville expressed his concern: 'nothing has happened since the Committee [for Anthropology] was first appointed likely to act so detrimentally to that work here as the publication of his unsupported statements'. This was somewhat disingenuous of Neville. He knew, as the files reveal, that Piddington was mostly repeating what he had previously told Neville in June 1930, and had observed on his return to La Grange, and that the action by the department to cease these abuses was inadequate. Neville was therefore well appraised of the position. Neville used it as an opportunity to further restrict the possibility of outside criticism by insisting that future researchers were to submit any criticism first to his department which would afford Neville the opportunity of refuting or investigating any allegations. Piddington, Neville told Firth, would not be welcomed.³¹

Firth hoped for a speedy resolution. He praised Neville for the 'facilities which you have extended to our field workers in the past...services which have been greatly appreciated by us here'.³² Aware of the seriousness of the complaint by Neville for the continuance of research in Western Australia,³³ Firth wrote to Piddington asking him for a reply to Neville's letter. Could Piddington produce 'evidence for your general statements, and did you at any time inform Mr Neville or other officers of such evidence before reporting in the Press?'; was there any explanation 'you might be prepared to make which would be acceptable' to Neville. If Piddington could not substantiate the

30. Neville to Firth, 26 August 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

31. *ibid.*

32. Firth to Neville, 7 September 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

33. Firth was cognisant of Neville's sensitivity regarding criticism of the treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia and had noted that Neville took criticism of the treatment and conditions of Aborigines in Western Australia as reflecting on the competence of the department. He added that in any event such criticism was 'quite likely to be ignored'. Firth, 'Notes on Anthropological Field work near Broome', 3 May 1932. 161/4/1/85, EP. Firth and Piddington discussed these matters. See for example Piddington to Firth, 11 September 1932. 159/4/1/61 EP. See also Firth 1998.

charges with whatever material he had at his disposal he had to withdraw them. Firth emphasised that other anthropologists would be asked to give assurances that they 'will not make statements reflecting against the administration without first giving the administration an opportunity of refuting or investigating these charges'. Neville wanted the ANRC to take 'action in the matter'.³⁴ Piddington, who departed for London at the beginning of September, assured Firth that Neville was misinformed.³⁵

The Executive Committee of the ANRC viewed with 'concern the possible results of [Piddington's] action which will undoubtedly create a very unfavourable atmosphere regarding this Council and anthropological research generally'. They too demanded an explanation from Piddington. The Executive was in agreement with Neville that Piddington should first have given Neville the opportunity of either refuting or investigating his statements.³⁶ Alexander Gibson, honorary secretary of the ANRC, assured Neville that the Executive Committee was in 'entire agreement' with him, and that Piddington's action constituted a 'grave abuse of the hospitality [you] extended to him'. Gibson declared that 'should any further research work be contemplated in Western Australia, every effort will be made to prevent a recurrence of such incidents'.³⁷ That may well have been the end of the matter.

Quite unexpectedly Neville received a letter from Arthur (Dick) Povah³⁸ who had recently completed 'a most exhaustive and extensive tour of the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory' where the 'sole topic of introduction' were the letters 'recently printed in the Eastern States and the Perth press'.³⁹ He observed that some of the 'persons in whom your department has given open access to the natives...have not justified your confidence', particularly Withington⁴⁰ and Piddington. Povah alleged that Piddington had 'intoxicating drink' in the presence of Aborigines and that his presence was 'detrimental' to Aborigines at La Grange. Povah advised Neville to 'study up this particular case'.⁴¹

Any doubts Neville may have had about Spurling were now forgotten; Povah's letter 'shed fresh light' on Piddington's behaviour and presented an aspect of the matter 'entirely new' to Neville. Piddington had, he wrote to Povah, been a 'source of considerable worry to us while he was in the North and did his best to upset the relations between the Department and one of its officers [Spurling], an officer who in my opinion is carrying out his duties effectively'.⁴²

34. Firth to Piddington, 8 September 1932. 159/4/1/61, EP.

35. Piddington to Firth, 11 September 1932. 159/4/1/61, EP.

36. Julius to Firth. 21 October, 1932. 155/4/1/10, EP.

37. Gibson to Neville, 21 October 1932. NLA, MS 482, 803 (e).

38. He described himself as a 'Kimberleyite, whose children are Kimberleyites and whose every penny for many years has been invested and distributed in the Kimberleys'. Povah stood for the 1932 state election as Independent Country Party. SAWA, ACC993, 313/32 (hereafter ACC993, 313/32).

39. Povah referred specifically to those letters written by Mary Bennett, 'Mr Gallagher, the Rev Schenk, and an interview with Mrs Drysdale'. See also Jacobs 1990, pp. 200-204.

40. Withington was a medical doctor who accompanied Porteus. SAWA, ACC993, 133/28.

41. Povah to Neville, 20 September 1932. ACC993, 313/32.

42. Neville to Povah, 3 October 1932. ACC993, 313/32.

Armed with Povah's allegations he set to work to discredit Piddington. He sought information from the Commissioner of Police adding that Piddington had published a 'wholly unwarranted attack...upon the Departments, including yours'.⁴³ Povah, encouraged by Neville's reply, provided explicit questions for Neville to investigate:

I suggest you call for a report from Sergeant Simpson...Ask for a statement re (1) sobriety. (2) The reason Piddington was summoned to the Police Station Broome...in reference to serious complaints about taking household natives away from their employment...(3) Whether his influence was beneficial or detrimental to the natives. A report on Piddington's general conduct (1) and sobriety, from Constable D. Harris...A Report from Constable Harper...re sobriety and Drunkenness while driving. and in connection with (2) as mentioned in Simpson's report...A report from Both Cont. Sheridan and Harper...as to whether they reported Piddington over a Red Flag incident.⁴⁴

However the police report Neville asked for was strong on hearsay but lacked specificity. Piddington 'was said to be addicted to drink and always carried a supply...with him'; police had seen Piddington under the influence of alcohol but none had seen him drive 'whilst in this condition nor whilst in the company of natives'. He was said to have 'commented adversely upon the treatment of Aborigines' in the Fitzroy District although he had not visited there; neither of the police officers would comment on Piddington's influence on Aborigines. Removing Aborigines without proper authority had been noted and Piddington, who was unaware he had transgressed the law, ceased the practice. With regard to 'taking away the female native 'Topsy', in the employ of Mr Povah, Piddington had been cautioned'. Finally Piddington's attendance 'at a convivial evening' when the 'Red Flag' and communist songs were sung⁴⁵ had been reported to the appropriate department in Perth.⁴⁶ Despite these statements Neville encouraged the police commissioner to push the investigation along as Piddington continued to 'traduce' the state.⁴⁷ Casting round for further evidence to discredit Piddington Neville sought Spurling's opinion with regard to Piddington's sobriety, removal of Aborigines without proper authority or 'any other such incident of like nature'.⁴⁸ Spurling could add nothing new although he did offer the opinion that Piddington's conduct 'was hardly in keeping with the position he had', and added that Laves had formed the 'opinion that Piddington was mad'.⁴⁹

Despite the paucity of evidence Neville hinted in a letter to Firth that he had been investigating 'certain allegations' against Piddington, and he had 'unfortunately established certain facts which possibly the Committee ought to be aware of'. They were of such a 'damaging nature' to Piddington's reputation he would not supply the information if Piddington was no longer working under the auspices of the ANRC.⁵⁰ Firth had

43. Neville to Commissioner of Police, 4 October 1932. ACC993, 133/30.

44. Povah to Neville, 20 October 1932. ACC993, 313/32.

45. K.A. Donaldson, memo, 25 October 1932. ACC993, 133/30. Raymond Firth writes that Piddington was 'what was called rather 'wild' at times. The 'Red Flag' / Internationale incident was such a wild prank. He and some friends got a bot (sic) drunk and wanted to annoy the good bourgeoisie: it was comic, not serious. But it marred the seriousness of his allegations'. Letter to the author, 20 February 1993.

46. Memo, Harper 5 November 1932; Memo, Sheridan, 13 November 1932. ACC993, 133/30.

47. Neville, memo, 17 November 1932. ACC993, 133/30.

48. Neville to Spurling, 6 December 1932. ACC993, 133/30.

resigned to take up a position at the London School of Economics. Elkin, who had replaced him, told Neville he was sorry to find that Piddington

did not observe those principles of courtesy which would be expected of him, especially where your Department and yourself are concerned, for you have been wonderfully kind and helpful to our workers, not least to myself. The Executive has realised all along the tremendous help you and the Minister afforded me, both financially (through transport and hospitality) and scientifically (through allowing me to work unhampered on your stations).

He added that it was unfortunate that Piddington's reputation was 'also at stake'. Nevertheless, further action would be left to the Executive Committee of the ANRC.⁵¹

Neville was no doubt heartened by Elkin's sentiments. He found further support from William Morley, secretary of the Association for the Protection of Native Races (APNR). Morley wrote that he had seen Piddington's article, but, that the 'statements conveyed no authentic information of facts'; he had sought substantiated evidence from Piddington which he failed to supply.⁵² This was a view also expressed in the editorial of the *ABM Review*.⁵³ By April 1933 the Executive Committee of the ANRC, who thought Piddington had had 'ample time' to provide an explanation, concluded that as he was 'unable to supply any satisfactory explanation...his statements were without justification'. They advised Neville of this adding that they 'greatly deplored' the actions of Piddington, and stated Neville could make 'such use as you may think desirable of this letter'.⁵⁴

It seems Neville was content, finally, to leave the matter there. He advised his Minister that it did 'not seem necessary' to take any further steps in the matter.⁵⁵ Piddington's allegations had not received support from the ANRC nor the humanitarian bodies such as the APNR or the Australian Board of Missions. Quite the contrary. They were in general agreement in deploring Piddington's failure to substantiate his allegations of mistreatment of Aborigines. Neville was able to set out the conditions for future anthropological researchers in Western Australia, which had as its keystone that any complaints about his departmental officers and/or the treatment of Aborigines be

49. Spurling to Neville, 16 December 1932. ACC993, 133/30. Spurling remembered Piddington's behaviour as 'exempary (sic) on his first occasion, here untill (sic) falling out with Mr Gerhardt Laves' (*ibid*). Laves wrote to Radcliffe-Brown that 'apart from a wearisome sora with Ralph over not too significant issues' (Laves to Radcliffe-Brown, 8 August 1930. 159/4/1/53, EP). Piddington had written earlier that 'Gerhardt, who appears to be staying here indefinitely, is the only feature of our field work which can definitely be described as a hardship, since the flies and mosquitoes have not bothered us as we expected they would and the climate is, at present, perfect' (Piddington to Radcliffe-Brown, 16 July 1930. 159/4/1/61, EP). These are the only comments I have located which make reference to tensions between Laves and Piddington.

50. Neville to Firth, 14 December 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

51. Elkin to Neville, 26 January 1933. ACC 993, 133/30. For a discussion about the relationship between Elkin and Neville see Gray 1996; 1997.

52. W Morley to Neville, nd, (?May 1933). ACC 993, 133/30.

53. The Australian Board of Missions publication. It stated that 'It is [Piddington's] manifest duty to...substantiate these allegations'. *ABM Review*, August 1933. p. 77.

54. Gibson to Neville, 7 April 1933. NLA, MS 482, 804 (c).

55. Memo, 20 July 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

directed to Neville, or to the ANRC, who would instruct its researchers to make complaints or criticisms through them. Moreover, he was assured that Piddington would not return to Western Australia. The matter seemed finished—'apparently nothing more can be done in regard to the entire business now'—although he did, at the request of Gibson, 'make known...the information' concerning Piddington's behaviour which he had hinted at in an earlier letter to Firth.⁵⁶ This information was later formalised by the ANRC into a series of 'charges' against Piddington.

The ANRC had uncritically accepted Neville's explanation, and his unsubstantiated allegations against Piddington. The ANRC Committee for Anthropology, and its Executive Committee, did not investigate Piddington's allegations, rather they voiced their criticism of Piddington and expressed their concern that Piddington's actions made it difficult for continued anthropological research in Western Australia. It was Piddington's personal behaviour that was subjected to scrutiny and found wanting. Added to this was the lack of desire by the ANRC to put the research program at risk by offending Neville and the West Australian government.⁵⁷ The appalling conditions and treatment of Aborigines were expendable in the pursuit of fast disappearing scientific data.⁵⁸

'I will be entirely frank'

Piddington's reply, which was not received by the ANRC until late August 1933, was a spirited and detailed defence of his allegations. He had delayed attending to Firth's letter of 8 September as he knew Firth was coming to London. Piddington wanted to discuss matters with Firth before replying to the ANRC.⁵⁹ He assured the ANRC that he would 'present the facts in chronological order and will be entirely frank on my attitude'. He stated that he had observed 'certain abuses'. Camped at the Government Feeding Station were several men who worked at a sandalwood camp some miles inland. The relations between these men and the Aborigines was 'extremely unsatisfactory'. He informed Ernest Mitchell,⁶⁰ then Chief Inspector of Aborigines (Broome), that Aboriginal women had been sexually violated and Aboriginal men and women were beaten; that quarrels had arisen between the white men and the Aboriginal husbands of these women, on one occasion leading to a fight in the presence of Spurling, who took

56. Neville to Gibson, 8 August 1933; Neville to Firth, 14 December 1932. ACC 993, 133/30.

57. Firth commented that it is 'a bit anachronistic in decrying the 'supineness' of anthropologists sixty years ago. It is easy to say this now, but I wonder what you would have done in 1932/3 if you had been responsible for a research programme?' Firth to author, 20 February 1993.

58. Piddington, like other scientists at the time, expressed the view that 'everything that could be known about them [Aborigines] should be discovered immediately, as the natives were rapidly dying out'. From the *West Australian*, 11 June 1931.

59. See Gray 1994, pp. 228–30 for the full text.

60. 'Mr Mitchell combines an extensive knowledge of the mentality of the aborigines, based upon years of observation, with a keen appreciation (too rare amongst white men) of their estimable qualities', Piddington and Piddington 1932, p. 342. Mitchell was retrenched as a part of the Government policy of reduction of expenditure. Ernest Gribble wrote that at the Royal Commission into the Forrest River Massacre that 'Inspector Mitchell stated to myself, JC Thomson and Dr Adams individually that if there was anything unsavoury in the story of Hays death he would keep it out of the court for the sake of the fair name of his native state'. ER Gribble, 'Sidelights on the Royal Commission of 1927', ML MSS 4503, 15/7. This suggests that Mitchell was not a reliable witness.

no action in the matter; that liquor had been given to the Aborigines by these men; that Government rations, destined for the consumption of old and sick Aborigines at the Feeding station, were being used to support able-bodied Aboriginal employees at the sandalwood camp, as well as the white men working there. He pointed out that these abuses took place with the 'full knowledge' of Spurling, who was 'obviously incapable' of doing anything to stop them, and he 'therefore suggested' that Spurling was an 'entirely unsuitable person to hold the position which he did'. He left the matter with Mitchell who placed it before Neville. On his return to Perth he discussed the matter with Neville, who promised to look into it. Eight months later, Neville informed him that he had sent an investigator to La Grange who had reported that Piddington's allegations were greatly exaggerated. Piddington had 'not the slightest doubt that this report was prompted by the investigator's desire not to find any facts which might reflect upon the administration of the Aborigines Department'.⁶¹ Neville told him that 'he saw no need to take any action beyond (1) a reproof to Mr Spurling in which he insisted that the white men should no longer camp within the grounds of the Feeding Station and (2) the cancellation of the white men's permits to employ aborigines'.⁶²

Upon his return to La Grange Bay, in June 1931, Piddington found the white men camped not at the Feeding Station but at the Government Cattle Dip, a mile or so away. They had been employing natives in defiance of Neville's edict, the sole effect of which was thus to exonerate them from the payment of the fee for a permit to employ Aborigines. He did not collect 'concrete evidence' at La Grange Bay, since he was primarily interested in the 'purely scientific' work he was carrying out for the ANRC. His assertion that the abuses at La Grange Bay were typical of the state of affairs in Western Australia was an assessment 'largely based upon information supplied' by Mitchell. He was adamant that he had supplied Neville 'with information as to my public statements'. Neville had ignored 'the fact' that Piddington drew the Department's attention to the 'serious abuses' at La Grange Bay which were 'known to both my wife and myself as a result of several months residence there', and he considered the action taken by the Department was quite inadequate to the situation, which was 'proved by the fact that the state of affairs...had not materially altered when I returned'. He emphasised that his 'attack has throughout been upon the general attitude of white people towards aborigines and not upon the Aborigines' Department in Western Australia'. Finally, he expressed regret that members of the Council should have been troubled with this matter, although his action 'throughout [had] been justified by the need for reducing as far as possible, those abuses in connection with the treatment of aborigines which are beginning to be regarded in other countries as a national disgrace to the Commonwealth'.⁶³ Piddington's detailed and specific explanation was not accepted by the ANRC. They did not alter the view.

61. Piddington to Committee for Anthropological Research (ANRC), 17 July 1933. 159/4/1/61. EP.

62. Neville, 'Memo of conversation with Piddington', 20 June 1931. ACC 993, 133/30. See also 'Resume' in WASA, ACC 993, 27/36.

63. Piddington to Committee for Anthropological Research (ANRC), 17 July 1933. 159/4/1/61. EP. The full text can be found in Gray 1994, pp. 228-230.

Travers Buxton, honorary secretary of the London based Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, wrote to Neville that he had read Piddington's explanation to the ANRC and noted that Piddington had not withdrawn or modified his allegations.⁶⁴ Neville was annoyed he had not been informed and wrote to the chairman of the ANRC Committee for Anthropology: 'I feel sure you will realise how important it is that any matter prepared by Mr Piddington for publication should be reviewed by those most concerned before it is issued to the public'.⁶⁵ Sir Hal Colebatch, Agent-General for Western Australia and a past Minister in charge of the Aborigines' Department, took particular offence to Piddington's statement that the West Australian government was 'indifferent to abuses of natives'; a statement that was 'grossly untrue' and 'grossly offensive to the Government'.⁶⁶ Neville was again assured by the ANRC that Piddington's conduct had brought discredit upon the ANRC, himself and 'scientists as a whole', and that they would not again employ Piddington.⁶⁷ Elkin wrote a personal note to Neville saying he was 'very sorry that the unpleasant incident had occurred'.⁶⁸

At the end of August 1933, in response to his Minister's increasing concerns about public criticism of the treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia, Neville provided him with a resume of Piddington's allegations, Neville's evidence of Piddington's behaviour, and the actions Neville had taken. He assured the Minister that Piddington's allegations had been thoroughly investigated and Spurling had been 'completely exonerated of dishonest practices' and acts of immorality as Woodland had considered 'him past that sort of thing on account of his age'. Neville had contacted Ernest Mitchell. He did not support Piddington's allegations, rather, Mitchell inferred that Piddington had come under the influence of the postmaster's wife, who had used the opportunity to 'further her own extreme views'.⁶⁹ Piddington's statements were based on erroneous information 'which he was gullible enough to accept as true' and he had placed an 'utterly wrong construction on many incidents of every-day occurrence in the North'. Piddington was 'young and inexperienced [and] ignorant of native matters, or how people live in the back country'. Neville accused Piddington of trying to 'blacken the name' of Western Australia using material Neville had 'officially' told him was false.⁷⁰

Nevertheless the constant public criticism of the department was having an effect. There were reports and correspondence in the *West Australian* that Aborigines were in slavery, accusations of sexual abuse of Aboriginal women, starvation, ill-treatment and physical violence.⁷¹ In September 1933 the West Australian Parliament voted for a Royal Commission⁷² into allegations concerning the treatment of Aborigines generally, 'particularly in regard to statements appearing in the press recently'.⁷³ Neville assured

64. Buxton to Neville, 12 July 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

65. Neville to Elkin, 14 August 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

66. Colebatch to Piddington, 26 July 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

67. Gibson to Neville, 31 August 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

68. Elkin to Neville, 6 September 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

69. This view is not supported by Mitchell's evidence before the Royal Commission, see Jacobs 1991, pp. 233-34.

70. Minute, 25 August 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

71. Jacobs 1991, pp. 200-212; Reynolds 1998.

72. See Jacobs 1991, pp. 213-242.

73. Neville to Buxton, 18 September 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

both Travers Buxton and Elkin, the Royal Commission was not directed at the department. Neville was confident that Piddington 'shall be sorry' once his allegations were subjected to examination by the Royal Commissioner.⁷⁴

Although not in direct response to the Western Australian Royal Commission Neville's allegations against Piddington were taken up, again, by the ANRC. The reports had 'caused grave concern' to the Executive Committee who had notified the Rockefeller Foundation that had they been in possession of Neville's report they would not have supported Piddington's application for a Rockefeller funded fellowship to London, and, until they received a satisfactory explanation they would not make available any funds for his return to Australia.⁷⁵ They regretted this course of action, but nonetheless enjoined Piddington to agree with their decision: 'you will of course realize that the fellows and research workers sent out to distant regions under its aegis must maintain a high standard of conduct otherwise great discredit is likely to reflect on the Council and indirectly on other scientific workers'. Having made their judgment they invited him to make comment.⁷⁶

The reason for this belated attack on Piddington is unclear but it may be inferred that with the appointment of Elkin as professor of anthropology at the end of December 1933 the continuance of the department of anthropology was no longer under threat; therefore the problem of placing fieldworkers in Western Australia, and Piddington's likely return to Australia, caused both Elkin and Gibson, who had previously demonstrated that they disapproved of Piddington's behaviour, to take some decisive action. It would seem also that the ANRC did not want to be caught out should the Royal Commission make an adverse finding about Piddington (and by implication the ANRC).

The Rockefeller Foundation did not support the ANRC's decision nor agree with their judgment about Piddington; they doubted 'the objectivity of those who would prefer charges against [Piddington], since they would appear to be officials who might have been irked' by his criticisms.⁷⁷ They expressed no wish to discontinue Piddington's fellowship. This did not alter the resolve of the Executive Committee of ANRC who, at Elkin's insistence, did not change its previous decision concerning Piddington's further employment.⁷⁸

'In view of the obvious animus'

Piddington expressed surprise that he had not been given the opportunity of replying to the charges concerning his conduct. Neville accused Piddington of misconduct, drunkenness, singing the 'Internationale', waving the Red Flag, abducting an Aboriginal woman, and removing Aboriginal men from a government reserve without permission. Piddington was told of Neville's charges by Stacy May of the Rockefeller Foundation;⁷⁹ he had not received any acknowledgment from the ANRC regarding his

⁷⁴ Neville to Elkin, 19 September 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

⁷⁵ Gibson to Edmund Day (Rockefeller Foundation), 23 December 1933. 155/4/1/2, EP.

⁷⁶ Gibson to Piddington, 23 December 1933. NLA, MS 482, 859A.

⁷⁷ May to Gibson, 31 January 1934. 155/4/1/2. EP (copies were sent to Piddington and Copland). See Gray 1994, and Mulvaney 1990, for further discussion.

⁷⁸ Elkin to Julius, 28 February 1934. 155/4/1/5; Gibson to Elkin, 21 March 1934, 156/4/1/12, EP.

response of the previous year. He was anxious he would not be funded by the ANRC on his return to Australia, and sought reassurance that this was not so.⁸⁰ On the same day he wrote to Neville, seeking his support:

I understand that it has been suggested to the ANRC, by whom I do not know, that while in Western Australia I sought out natives in order to obtain anthropological information without obtaining permission from the constituted authorities. ...As the administration of native affairs in Western Australia is under your direction you will at once see the dual absurdity of such a charge. In the first place the obtaining of anthropological information from natives is not an offence under the Aborigines Act of Western Australia. In the second place, as you know, I interviewed you prior to both of my expeditions to the north-west, and you, as the 'constituted authority' were fully aware that I was carrying out anthropological research, nor did you at the time raise any objection to my so doing beyond suggesting (during our interview of June 1931) that for my own sake I should not return to a district where I had incurred a considerable amount of unpopularity by drawing attention to the maltreatment of natives.⁸¹

Neville replied that he was unable to recollect the detail nor was he able to consult the file as it was before the Royal Commission; nor did he declare his central role in the charges made against Piddington. He did, however, point out that Piddington's authority applied only to native reserves, and disingenuously added 'whether any action of yours outside such reserves caused the suggestion to be made I am not in a position to say'.⁸² Neville was unable to agree with Piddington's version of events as this would require him to acknowledge that Piddington had not only informed him but that much of Piddington's allegations had been substantiated by both Woodland and independent police reports.

Piddington replied to each charge, and hoped that 'in view of the obvious animus with which they are preferred', the ANRC would reconsider its position. He did not withdraw the substance of his statements although he gave an undertaking, should the Council grant him 'further facilities for study', to 'observe all formalities and to establish as harmonious a relationship as possible with Government officials'. In the event of 'any abuses coming to my notice, to report them directly to the Council, and to the Council only, leaving it entirely in their hands to do what they think fit in the matter'. He was contrite and apologised for any embarrassment he may have caused the Council.⁸³ Neville, who was offered the opportunity to respond, was equally unrepentant: 'the evidence in my opinion is so definite in regard to his intemperate habits that his attempts to belittle the matter do not impress me'. He emphasised that Piddington did

79. May to Piddington, 30 April 1934. ANL MS 482, 859A.

80. Piddington to Gibson, 13 April 1934. NLA, MS 482, 859A.

81. Piddington to Neville, 13 April 1934. NLA, MS 482, 859A.

82. Neville to Piddington, 23 May 1934. ACC 993, 133/30. This correspondence between Piddington and Neville was not presented to the Royal Commissioner. Neville addressed the Royal Commission in March. He had granted permission to Piddington to camp at La Grange: 'I hereby accord you [Piddington and his wife] such permission...to camp at La Grange for a period of six months...[I]f you should happen to visit any other centres under the control of the Department it will be necessary for you to notify me'. Neville to Piddington, 8 May 1930. ACC 993, 133/30.

83. Piddington to Gibson, 24 May 1934. 156/4/1/61. EP See Gray 1994, pp. 235-37 for the full text.

not deny the assertions of misbehaviour but 'merely [denied] having conducted himself in a manner likely to bring discredit on the ANRC'.⁸⁴ Piddington's original allegations of mistreatment of Aborigines was lost in the welter of allegations about his erratic behaviour and intemperate habits.

Gibson, keen to explain the ANRC's case against Piddington to the Rockefeller Foundation, pointed out that Elkin had spent the 'greater part of two years in North-west and Central Australia, among...the same people [Aborigines] and the same type of [government] people as those with whom so much friction' had occurred in the case of Piddington. Laves conducted his research in the 'same territory and they worked together part of the time'; there was 'no hint of any trouble whatsoever with him', whereas Piddington's actions and general behaviour caused a 'great deal of dissatisfaction, even if not actual resentment'.⁸⁵ The ANRC therefore felt that it was 'not possible to ignore the representations of an official of Mr Neville's standing...whose [written] report...is the base of this correspondence'.⁸⁶

By uncritically accepting Neville's allegations against Piddington the ANRC had placed itself in a difficult situation. Douglas Copland, fellowship adviser to the Rockefeller Foundation for the Social Sciences in Australia and New Zealand, brought some perspective to the matter. He wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation that after discussion with George Julius, president of the ANRC, and Alexander Gibson, three points arose with regard to Piddington: firstly, his indiscretion in giving an interview to a newspaper concerning the treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia during his research work; secondly, the report that he was observed drunk on a number of occasions; and finally, the report that he was observed singing the 'Red Flag' and might thus be a communist. He concluded there was nothing in the third matter to concern the ANRC,⁸⁷ and although 'I can say quite frankly that there are some grounds for thinking that Piddington did enjoy liquor from time to time during his field work' this was not sufficient grounds alone to determine the matter. The first problem was, however, 'rather different'. The ANRC 'would find itself embarrassed' sponsoring field work by Piddington in Western Australia, where the authorities would be 'definitely unwilling at the moment to extend to him the facilities' they usually extend to research fellows in anthropology.⁸⁸

Copland was concerned that the Rockefeller Foundation could see the action against Piddington as being personal and not based on academic considerations.⁸⁹ Such a view finds support in Gibson's comment that Elkin was 'not very favourable to including Piddington again in the team of anthropological workers'.⁹⁰ Copland expressed his concerns to Gibson adding he had an 'uneasy feeling that we may be letting the Rockefeller Foundation down if we decide at this stage that Piddington cannot

⁸⁴ Neville to Gibson, 15 September 1934. NLA, MS482, 859A.

⁸⁵ Neville states in his memo to his Minister regarding Piddington's allegations that in Woodland's report there was a letter from Laves 'offering to support Spurling in the event of trouble following Piddington's charges'. Memo, 25 August 1933. ACC 993, 133/30.

⁸⁶ Gibson to May, 4 July 1934. NLA, MS 482, 859A.

⁸⁷ Cf Gray 1993, pp. 23-28

⁸⁸ Copland to Van Sickle, 27 June 1934. 156/4/1/12, EP.

⁸⁹ Copland to Gibson, 3 August 1934, 156/4/1/12, EP.

⁹⁰ Gibson to Elkin, 6 September 1934. 156/4/1/12, EP

be sponsored as a field worker. The accounts of his research abroad are uniformly good, and he is clearly an able student'. He suggested that on Piddington's return to Australia further discussion concerning his academic future would need to take place.⁹¹ A view also taken by the Rockefeller Foundation.⁹²

It was Elkin who offered a way of easing the discomfiture Piddington was causing. It was both expedient and intellectually authoritarian.⁹³ He understood Copland's point of view, and that of the Rockefeller Foundation. He suggested that for the sake of the Foundation the ANRC should grant Piddington a fellowship when he returned. Before they took that course of action, however, there were several considerations. Firstly, the availability of funding. He enclosed a budget of expenses 'to which the ANRC was committed for the next twelve months' adding that 'you will notice that this barely leaves enough to grant a Fellowship to Piddington'. Secondly, sending Piddington to Western Australia would be 'hardly possible' as they had to 'consider Mr Neville who has helped us considerably with research work in Western Australia'. Finally, there was the problem of 'proper' anthropological research. Elkin had had no 'definite report' of his work in London 'merely a statement that [Piddington's] interest has been transferred to an aspect of Psychology'.⁹⁴ Elkin would thus not be able to personally recommend that Piddington should be sent out 'to do Psychology, for I do not think that the expenses involved in Professor Porteus' expedition, and Piddington's second expedition, were justified'. Elkin concluded, that should Piddington be 'discreet [and] work solidly at anthropology', it might be wise for the Council to give him work in Northern Australia.⁹⁵ Fortunately for the ANRC Piddington found work at the London School of Economics 'devoting himself to the study of African problems and languages in preparation for his field research fellowship'.⁹⁶ Piddington was not included again in the team of anthropological workers. He never again worked in an Australian academic institution.

'Mollifying government sensitivities'

Elkin had previously shown himself to be tactful and discreet in his dealings with Neville and other government agents.⁹⁷ He always stressed to the relevant government authority that a research worker would cause no trouble to either whites or Aborigines. Phyllis Kaberry,⁹⁸ the first anthropological researcher sent to Western Australia after

91. Copland to Gibson, 27 June 1934. 156/4/1/12, EP

92. May to Gibson, 3 August 1934. 156/4/1/12, EP.

93. Mulvaney 1993, p. 124.

94. This was not so; he had received several reports of Piddington's work from Raymond Firth, such as that in January 1934: 'As for Piddington's work here is concerned, I learn from Seligman that he has submitted some quite good articles to him, and I think he has learned quite a lot from Malinowski and at the other seminars here. He should do much better work than before, and I hope that you will find room for him'. (Firth to Elkin, 28 January 1934. 159/4/1/61 EP).

95. Elkin to Gibson, 18 September 1934. 156/4/1/12, EP. Cf 'I know that the Executive will hesitate before changing its previous decisions with regard to any further employment of Piddington. In any case, there may not be sufficient money to consider his application. I certainly think that Mr Eggan should be obtained to do work in Australia, and should be given first preference'. Elkin to Julius, 28 February 1934. 155/4/1/5, EP.

96. Gibson to Copland, 10 December 1934. NLA, MS 482, 804 (a).

Piddington, was described by Elkin as a 'quiet, sensible person...who will not, I am sure, cause you any problems such as were unfortunately caused by a previous worker'.⁹⁹ Firth thought Elkin 'went too far in mollifying government sensitivities'.¹⁰⁰ Thus Elkin cast anthropology at the service of government rather than enabling anthropology to critique government policy and practice.¹⁰¹ This ensured critiques of Neville's administration, cases of mistreatment, and poor conditions of Aborigines would not be placed in the public domain. The ANRC revealed itself to be a timid academic institution acting in sympathetic collaboration with a government agency. Both Elkin and the ANRC were guided by expediency.¹⁰²

The Royal Commissioner exonerated Neville and the department. Neville, by carefully culling the files presented to the Moseley Royal Commission, ensured that any damaging information in them was under his control. Neville was unwittingly assisted by the Royal Commissioner who acknowledged in his report that he had read little of the files, rather relying on his own observations for the conclusions he made. Piddington's file, as it now exists, emphasises Piddington's erratic behaviour and intemperate habits as the problem, and the accusation that he acted out of malice against Neville and the West Australian government; a view presented by Neville to his Minister, W.H. Kitson, the ANRC and the Royal Commissioner. It was a view they accepted.

The evidence of Aborigines was not called for. The Royal Commissioner was unable to accept evidence from Aborigines although he was to examine the treatment of Aborigines, and the serious allegations made about the 'maladministration of matters affecting Aborigines'.¹⁰³ He found nothing adverse at La Grange Bay. Despite the police being satisfied that many of the abuses outlined by Piddington had occurred there was no possibility, as the law stood, of a successful prosecution using only evidence from Aborigines.

Despite some changes which arose from the Royal Commission it was obvious on Spurling's retirement in January 1936 that little had changed at La Grange Bay. The new protector, George Hodges, discovered that one of Spurling's last acts was to grant a general permit to George Hatch who was in partnership with Bilston. It was evident, stated

97. Elkin's conduct in the field between 1927 and 1928 had established a type of researcher acceptable to Neville and the West Australian government. He showed himself to be approving of Western Australian government policy and practice, to be tactful and discreet and he had not publicly (or privately) challenge the existing order, involving the treatment and conditions of Aborigines. Elkin also wrote a confidential report for the ABM on E.R. Gribble, superintendent of the ABM Forrest River Mission. He recommended the removal of Gribble. This was accepted by the ABM board. The report helped establish Elkin as the church authority on Aborigines and mission work. Gray 1996; 1997.

98. 'In 1934 Miss Kaberry spent a little over six months in North West Australia, mainly in the Forrest River—Wyndham District, studying the social organisation, working mostly through the women. The purpose of this was to supplement the work that I had done there through the men in 1928'. Elkin, Annual Report of Committee on Anthropological Research, 1935. 161/4/1/81, EP. She returned in 1935–36.

99. Elkin to Neville, 18 April 1934. SAWA, ACC653, 120/25.

100. Letter to author, 20 February 1993.

101. Cowlshaw 1990; Gray 1994; 1997.

102. This is elaborated in Gray 1998.

103. Jacobs 1991, p. 214.

Hodges, that Bilston had been employing Aborigines 'under the lap' which was known to Spurling who had 'been working hand in glove [with Bilston] for years'.¹⁰⁴ It is clear from this that Neville was unable to control the behaviour and action of Spurling. Neville was no doubt poorly served by Spurling but he had, nevertheless, sufficient independent evidence that Piddington's allegations regarding Spurling had substance.

There is no doubt that the allegations of mistreatment caused considerable embarrassment to Neville and the Western Australian government both nationally and internationally. Reports of massacres of Aborigines by police and settlers in central and northwest Australia had aroused considerable disquiet in the south eastern states and in Britain.¹⁰⁵ Neville was under pressure defending himself and the department against attacks both within and outside the state; such criticism was internalised by Neville who felt that it reflected on him and his department. Paul Hasluck in his autobiography recalled that Neville tried to 'make his job more important than any of his administrators, departmental or ministerial, thought it was' by asserting himself as 'virtually the sole proprietor of aborigines in Western Australia'.¹⁰⁶ Anna Haebich comments that from the late 1920s Neville was 'assuming an increasingly tyrannical role in Aboriginal affairs....[H]e dominated his Ministers...who had little experience in Aboriginal affairs...He brooked no opposition to his ideas from his own colleagues and others working with Aborigines'.¹⁰⁷ Piddington, by publicly criticising the treatment of Aborigines inadvertently, 'stirred up the community and provoked old antipathies',¹⁰⁸ and was therefore subjected to the full rancour of Neville. Neville, perhaps unreasonably, saw in Piddington, as he did in anthropology, an ally who would support his efforts, provide an objective voice of support. In this his expectations were unfulfilled.

Thus Neville, by acknowledging Piddington's version of events, would have not only caused added problems in the administration of Aboriginal policy but also have eroded his authority. He therefore had little choice but to deny and discredit Piddington, hence his persistent trivialising of Piddington's allegations, and his focus on Piddington's erratic behaviour and intemperate habits. He was fortunate that in the ANRC he found willing and uncritical allies, who were more concerned with the continuance of the research program than the conditions and treatment of Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁹ We are therefore led to a conclusion that reveals a determined effort by Neville to mislead the ANRC, his Minister and the public. The beneficiary of this deceit was Neville himself. The sandalwood cutters and Spurling benefited indirectly as did the ANRC and anthropological research. Aborigines and Piddington were the losers.

In the November 1936 issue of *Man*, Piddington wrote a short comment on the Report of the Royal Commissioner. He noted that

The Report is a comprehensive and carefully balanced summary of the evidence presented to the Commission. But, since there is no doubt of the Commissioner's

¹⁰⁴ Hodges to Neville, 31 January 1936. ACC993, 27/36.

¹⁰⁵ These included the Onmalmeri (Forrest River) Massacre in the Kimberley in 1926 and the Coniston Massacre near Alice Springs in 1928. See Green 1995.

¹⁰⁶ Hasluck 1977, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Haebich 1988, p. 255.

¹⁰⁸ Jacobs 1990, p. 201.

¹⁰⁹ Firth to author, February 1993.

thoroughness and impartiality, it seems that such evidence has not been adequate to reveal the extent and seriousness of the abuses which, it is admitted, occur in 'isolated cases'...[A]n itinerant Commissioner must necessarily experience difficulty in reaching a true appreciation of the position.¹¹⁰

Little had changed.

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¹¹⁰. Piddington 1936.

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Problematising Aboriginal nationalism

Julia Martínez

The modern concept of nationalism is a highly contested phenomenon. It provokes debate at both a theoretical and an emotional level. The idea of an Aboriginal nationalism is no less complex. This article discusses a range of perspectives on Aboriginal nationalism and relates them to theoretical debates. The works of Benedict Anderson and Anthony Smith are discussed in some detail. Both these theorists regard the nation as a 'modern' construct. They posit a range of conditions and processes which have enabled different peoples to generate a sense of nationalism. These models are advanced as useful tools for the ensuing discussion of Aboriginal nationalism and whether such a phenomenon exists or has ever existed in the modern sense. Their theories are necessarily problematic when viewed from a post-modern perspective which highlights the plural nature of identity, but the very gap between the 'modern' and the 'post-modern' allows us to historicise nationalism. Thus, the period of the 1960s and 70s sees the development of a 'modern' pan-Aboriginal nationalist movement while in more recent years writers have highlighted the diversity of Aboriginal thought.

Any discussion of nationalism must begin with an attempt to define this elusive phenomenon. Benedict Anderson considers nationalism not as a political movement nor as a synonym for racism, but as a sense of patriotism or 'love of country'. He seeks the answer as to why 'modern' nations should 'command such profound emotional legitimacy'.¹ The nation, he defines as 'an imagined political community' which is both 'inherently limited and sovereign'. The term 'imagined' refers to the way in which its citizens are able to conjure up a mental image of their nation. It does not imply that the nation is false or unreal, but rather, that it is an abstract concept. He describes the nation as a community because, 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'.²

According to Anderson, post-colonial nationalisms were not so much reactions against colonialism, as extensions of the colonising process. He argues that colonialism encouraged the spread of nationalism by introducing indigenous peoples to Western 'modernity' in the form of administration, education, increased mobility, and mass-communication.³ Modernity brought with it a new mode of apprehending the world, where notions of time and history were reshaped. The modern concept of history is 'an

1. Anderson 1983, p. 4.

2. *ibid.*, p. 6.

3. *ibid.*, p. 4.

endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present'. Modern time is marked by 'temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar'. It was this reshaping of time which enabled individuals to conceive of their 'imagined community', allowing them to imagine the 'steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity' of all the other members of that community'.⁴ Anderson attributes this to the advent of mass-communication in vernacular languages made possible by print-capitalism and the dissemination of novels and newspapers. These forms of communication assumed a collective body of readers who share a common language and a common interest. In the minds of the readers, the national community became tangible.⁵

Western education played a key role in the development of nationalism outside Europe. It introduced indigenous peoples to the trappings of nationhood: 'common citizenships, popular sovereignty, national flags and anthems'.⁶ It also provided an indigenous intelligentsia with a knowledge of various models of revolution and alerted them to the growing international movement for universal self-determination. Colonial administrative systems instituted not only standardised education programmes but also, in cases such as Indonesia, introduced a new *lingua franca*, which made it possible for people from different language groups to communicate and so share their common experiences of colonialism. It was from this system that a young western-educated nationalist leadership emerged.⁷

Three colonial institutions which Anderson highlights as the building blocks of nationalism are: the census, the map, and the museum. The colonial census categorized the indigenous population, constructing identities that accorded with the preconceptions and administrative needs of the colonists.⁸ In Indonesia, for example, the Dutch tended to represent all 'Indonesians' as *inlanders* or natives, regardless of their ethnolinguistic background.⁹ The use of the colonial map as a logo for nationalists proved to be a powerful symbol of the nation, while colonial museums through their attempts to capture and study the indigenous culture, created a visual and written representation of 'native' cultural identity.¹⁰

Anderson's paradigm of post-colonial nationalism is problematic, however, as it suggests that a nationalism formed of heterogeneous peoples must necessarily be contrived and therefore without legitimacy. He does not allow that these nationalisms might engender emotional loyalty from the people or that indigenous peoples might reclaim the right to define their own cultural identity. It is here that Anthony Smith's contribution is useful, as it concentrates on the notion of *ethnie*, the 'collective cultural units' which make up nations.¹¹ His definition of *ethnie* is sufficiently broad to encompass linguistically heterogeneous communities. He argues that *ethnie* need only be similar 'in those cultural traits in which they are dissimilar from nonmembers'. These traits may include food, music, and the arts or even simply pigmentation as in the case of

4. *ibid.*, pp. 23–6.

5. *ibid.*, p. 32.

6. *ibid.*, p. 81.

7. *ibid.*, pp. 116–121.

8. *ibid.*, pp. 164–5.

9. *ibid.*, p. 122.

10. *ibid.*, pp. 175–8.

11. Smith 1986, p. 13.

Black Americans.¹² Smith suggests that nationalism relies on the 'rediscovery and revitalization of ethnic ties and sentiments'. This, he argues, involves tracing kinship ties, popular mobilisation, the elevation of religion, language and customs and a rewriting of history to emphasise a unique collective past and destiny.¹³

These theories posited by Anderson and Smith provide a useful framework within which the development of 'modern' Aboriginal nationalism might be considered. Anderson points to the role of colonialism and the links between nationalism and modernity. In contrast, Smith takes the stance that post-colonial nationalisms rely on cultural or ethnic ties which engender emotional loyalty from their people. He asks us to consider the importance of kinship, language, and historic links with the land. In the case of Australia, Anderson's model appears relevant to the discussion of Aboriginal nationalism in the 1960s and 70s. The introduction of multiculturalism as a national policy proposed an alternative 'post-modern' form of the nation which did not rely on a single homogeneous culture or heritage. Stephen Castles, in discussing the legitimacy of the modern nation-state, argues that while the state has moved beyond national borders in response to demands of the global economy, in the face of homogenisation of world culture, cultural difference has become increasingly valued as each ethnic group seeks to reestablish their cultural heritage.¹⁴ This shift in emphasis has ramifications for the Aboriginal peoples in Australia in that it has legitimised the concept of nations within a nation and provided a less restrictive model for debate.

This paper now turns to discuss the development of Aboriginal nationalism and exploring these theoretical frameworks. As a non-indigenous Australian I have relied upon the writings of various Aboriginal activists and writers to understand the various positions and perspectives on nationalism. The complexity of this subject undoubtedly renders it beyond the scope of any single article. My limited aim is to consider both 'modern' and 'post-modern' forms of Aboriginal nationalism in twentieth century Australia. The term pan-Aboriginal is used to refer to a 'modern' sense of the nation, in that it is conceived of as an Australia-wide phenomenon. This is contrasted with the idea of 'traditional' lands as the basis for the individual Aboriginal nations and the sense of community attachment which is demonstrated by those who identify themselves with their people; Nyungars, Nangas, Yolngus, Kooris, Murris and others.¹⁵

Early notions of nationhood suggested that the nation was based on the common heritage of a people. In this sense, prior to colonisation there was no Aboriginal nation as the Aborigines did not comprise an homogeneous group. There were some 500 'separate traditional communities', each speaking their own language or dialect.¹⁶ Customs differed from region to region, accentuated by the diverse ecologies of the Australian continent. Rather, one might argue, there were many small Aboriginal nations. Aranda men in the 1930s emphasised the distinct territorial divisions between peoples, explaining: 'Our fathers taught us to love our own country, and not to lust after the lands belonging to other men'.¹⁷ The kinship system which ordered relationships within

12. *ibid.*, p. 26.

13. *ibid.*, p. 145.

14. Castles, et al. 1990, pp. 188, 140.

15. Mudrooroo 1995, p. v.

16. Reynolds 1987, p. 8.

'tribal' groupings strengthened the sense that those in other 'tribal' groups were 'outsiders'. In this sense, there was no pre-existing pan-Aboriginal nation and no common history on which to base a sense of nationalism. According to modernists, however, this 'construction' of nationalism, is common to all nationalisms, including those of Europe which were created by the suppression of regional differences, dialects and cultures.¹⁸

The development of a pan-Aboriginal nation can be expressed in terms of the colonial model presented by Anderson, which suggests that the common experience of colonisation provided the catalyst for the development of a pan-Aboriginal identity.¹⁹ When the British arrived in 1788, Australia was judged to be '*terra nullius*' and the Aboriginal people were not acknowledged as the owners of their tribal land.²⁰ Whilst they were nominally accepted as British subjects, they were not initially considered as a potential workforce, as was the case in most other colonies. Anderson assumes that colonisation brings the trappings of a modern European culture to at least a portion of the indigenous population, but this was not initially the case in Australia. In the 1937 federal conference on Aboriginal policy it was decided that the destiny of Aborigines was 'their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth' but this official statement of assimilation was nevertheless based on a narrow and limited form of citizenship for those of Aboriginal descent.²¹

Before that time, it was assumed that the Aboriginal people would simply die out and that it was the duty of the state governments to 'smooth the dying pillow.' Aborigines were to be 'protected', which in practice resulted in their losing all personal freedom. Ironically, it was the harshest aspects of this policy which produced the first seeds of nationalism. In keeping with the White Australia policy, it enshrined the principle of racism which gave the Aborigines no choice but to consider themselves as a 'race apart'. 'Full-blood' Aborigines were segregated from white society and deprived of their civil rights. Their culture was threatened by institutionalisation and an insistence on Christian values and codes of conduct. As Bain Attwood commented, 'the more consistently and rigorously authoritarian and oppressive colonial racial policy and practice has been, the more the conditions for a common Aboriginal identity have grown'.²²

Colonial oppression, however, according to Anderson, is not sufficient to account for the development of nationalism. It required the tools of modernity: common language to facilitate communication; the education of an intelligentsia to lead the nationalist movement; and a means of mass-communication to allow the community to experience a sense of simultaneity and uniform purpose. In Australia, the first of these conditions was achieved gradually, as more and more Aborigines came to use English as their *lingua franca*, taught, in many cases in mission schools. This enabled Aborigines from different language groups to communicate with each other. As for the other conditions, one might argue that they were not fulfilled until the 1960s. The education of an

17. Broome 1994, p. 14.

18. Hutchinson 1994, p. 4.

19. Broome 1994, p. 17.

20. Reynolds 1987, p. 12.

21. Broome 1994, p. 161.

22. Attwood 1989, p. 150.

Aboriginal intelligentsia was linked with the government policy which dictated that 'half-caste' children be separated from their parents and sent away to be raised and integrated into white society. One outcome of this policy was the presence in the 1960s and 70s of a substantial group of western-educated nationalists.

Tracing the education of Charles Perkins, for example, demonstrates the link between 'colonial' administrative policies and the creation of an Aboriginal intelligentsia. At the age of nine, in 1945, he was taken from Alice Springs to Adelaide where he was raised in a white, Christian, middle-class atmosphere. His life there, according to Peter Read, 'imbued in him a faith in pan-Aboriginalism not shared by his community at the time'. Read notes that '[m]any of today's national and community leaders share Perkin's background of cultural dislocation at an early age'.²³ From Adelaide, Perkins moved on to Sydney where he completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney. His educational pilgrimage eventually led him to the capital, Canberra and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Charles Perkins' sense of Aboriginal nationalism resulted from his experience of the modern Australian educational and administrative system. This gave him a view of Aborigines that was national rather than regional. Other Aborigines who could similarly be regarded as the vanguard of Aboriginal nationalism include Paul Coe, Michael Anderson, and Kevin Gilbert.

Gilbert discusses the emergence of an Aboriginal intelligentsia in his book *Because a White Man'll Never Do It*, published in 1973. He quotes Wootten of the Aboriginal Legal Service as saying:

There is now a new breed of Aboriginal—the angry, articulate young men and women, proud of their Aboriginality, deeply concerned for their people all over Australia...determined to demand justice now...They alone have the enthusiasm, the courage and the eloquence to overcome the apathy and selfishness of white Australians and to unite their own people all over Australia a great forward movement.²⁴

This group of Aborigines most closely corresponds to Anderson's notion of a radical young nationalist intelligentsia. Where the Australian experience differs from other continents, is in the degree of acceptance of this pan-Aboriginal message. Perkins acknowledged that his views were not accepted by his home community. During the 1960s and 70s, however, there was a tendency to attribute this resistance to a lack of communication, or a failure on the part of Aboriginal communities to take on the lessons of modern education, rather than the inadequacy of the nationalist model.

With Aborigines spread out over Australia's vast area, any form of pan-Aboriginal communication was impossible without modern technology. Even so, communication with remote Aboriginal groups remains difficult. Anderson's discussion of mass-communication and the dissemination of ideas via printed material assumes a high level of literacy and access to printed materials. During the 1970s, however, when the nationalists were engaged in promoting their movement, these avenues of communication did not exist in rural Australia. Gilbert, describing the situation in the 1970s wrote:

23. Read 1990, pp. xiii–xiv.

24. Wootten in Gilbert 1973, p. 130.

Very few blacks read regularly and consistently, even about their own movement. One reason is that not a few are illiterate. It is this group whom Bobbi Sykes tried to reach and alert about the Embassy when she did her trip through the Northern Territory last year. Others, particularly the reserve and slum-dwelling blacks of the south, can read because schooling was enforced. But many have never become adept enough at it to enjoy it and the content of an average newspaper is of no interest anyway, because none of it has any apparent bearing on their lives...Only television has managed to crack this situation a little bit...²⁵

He suggests that the spread of communications via the television will have a positive effect on their movement. Again, the idea is raised that their cause was not necessarily perceived as having 'any apparent bearing' on the lives of Aborigines as it fell outside the scope of local concerns. Jeremy Beckett discussed this issue in relation to the election of a New South Wales state representative for the Welfare Board. He commented that: 'it has never been possible to find a candidate known to everyone. The only one whose name is remembered and occasionally mentioned, Bill Ferguson, was related by marriage through his brother to the Carowra Tank people'.²⁶ This suggests that the kinship system which gives cohesion to Aboriginal communities could be used to strengthen the case for a national 'imagined community'.

Viewed from a post-modern perspective, this reluctance of some sectors of the Aboriginal population to embrace nationalism corresponds with the general questioning of nationalism in its modern form. While Anderson claims that an intelligentsia spread the ideology of nationalism, there is evidence that some Aborigines were not inclined to be led by intellectuals. Furthermore, other Aboriginal intellectuals, such as Pat O'Shane, have criticised this form of nationalism.

One reason for the ambivalent position of Aboriginal intellectuals was the perception that they had cast their lot with the 'whites' and that their work is led by 'whites'. In the early stages of its development, the Aboriginal intelligentsia was aided by various white organisations which sought to advance the Aboriginal cause. The role of the church was crucial in providing an Australia-wide network of support.²⁷ Similarly, Communists such as Donald McLeod, and Frank Hardy worked with Aborigines, encouraging them to unite in protest against the government. Using Marxist rhetoric, Hardy claimed: 'While black men are in chains, no white men can be free'.²⁸ These 'white' activists tended to regard the Aborigines as one people, as 'black' thus giving strength to a concept of Aboriginal nationalism based on colour.

Aboriginal activists of the 1930s promoted not so much a separate Aboriginal nationalism as the inclusion of Aborigines within the Australian nation. William Ferguson, for example, the president of the Aborigines Progressive Association, wrote in 1940 to the Governor-General, pleading for full citizenship for Aborigines. He wrote: 'we do not expect wild Aborigines living in the remote part of Australia to be made citizens'.²⁹ Ferguson appears to be advocating a form of citizenship based on 'civilisation'. This is

25. Gilbert 1973, p. 111.

26. Beckett 1988b, p. 134.

27. Franklin 1976, p. 137.

28. Hardy 1968, p. 49.

29. Ferguson in Franklin 1976, pp. 151-2.

not to suggest that he regarded the exclusion of 'tribal' Aborigines as permanent. While in 1938, anthropologist Dr Donald Thomson was arguing for 'inviolable reserves of tribal lands' in order to prevent further 'detrribalisation', Ferguson and Jack Patten were arguing that 'uncivilised blacks' were 'willing and eager to learn when given a chance'.³⁰ Nevertheless, they were conforming to the criteria of citizenship imposed by the Australian nation rather than seeking to promote a separate Aboriginal nationalism. The criticism they expressed in the manifesto 'Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!' reveals their anger at the treatment of Aborigines under the so-called Protection system, but focuses on the potential for improvement in the Australian nation. They ask that Aborigines be allowed to claim 'ordinary citizen rights'.³¹ As the organisers of the 1938 Day of Mourning & Protest, they wrote representing 'The Aborigines of Australia' appealing to the:

Australian Nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to FULL CITIZEN STATUS and EQUALITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.³²

By the 1960s, however, there emerged a group of Aboriginal activists who were more anti-colonial in their outlook. Following Anderson's model, they took their inspiration from overseas examples. In particular, Black Americans such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King provided role models. The American Black Panther Party which began in 1966 with a message of militant 'Black Power' inspired some Aborigines to follow their lead. An Australian Black Panther Party was formed in 1972 in Brisbane.³³ They copied the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and like their American counterparts made demands for: 'and, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace'.³⁴ Aboriginal activists such as Gary Foley and Paul Coe showed that like the Americans they had considered the use of more aggressive tactics. Paul Coe said:

To me, the idea that the Aboriginal people will one day pick up the gun, to use it perhaps, to build their own separate state or find some other way of ensuring that the race *does* survive, is a just one. It's something that I'm not frightened of because it is something that's just got to happen.³⁵

Many were frightened by such a concept and it would be wrong to suggest, that all Aborigines were influenced by the 'Black Power' movement. Ted Fields wrote: 'We Aborigines do not identify with the colour black. Our identity is based on a much deeper spiritual awareness of ourselves as a people'. Evonne Goolagong, he noted, does not identify herself as black: 'She identifies as Aboriginal, which is more national and specific'.³⁶ These contrasting views demonstrate the nationalist push for 'state' power on the one hand, and the search for a spiritual, or emotional sense of 'imagined community' on the other.

30. Horner 1974, pp. 56-58.

31. Ferguson cited in Horner 1974, p. 59.

32. Horner 1974, p. 199.

33. Franklin 1976, p. 207.

34. Marable 1984, p. 122.

35. Cited in Gilbert 1973, pp. 105-6.

36. Cited in Harris 1972, p. 103.

The student Freedom Rides of the early sixties similarly were, in part, inspired by the Black American model. They were, according to Charles Perkins, a response to the press coverage of the American civil rights movement. Many students were cautious in their approach to the tour, however, as nobody wished 'to be seen aping American students'. Nevertheless, in a letter describing the proposed tour, Perkins chose to enclose a pamphlet written by Martin Luther King which expressed his method of 'non-violent direct action'.³⁷ Unlike the American Freedom Rides however, those in Australia were dominated by white protesters.³⁸ Chicka Dixon commented that:

Looking back on the movement, from the time we went on the 1966 Freedom Rides...things have changed tremendously. In those days you could only get two blacks involved—me and Charlie Perkins—with a lot of white students on a bus. Today when you ask blacks to move on a certain issue, you can get a heap of them.³⁹

A decade later, in 1972, the Aboriginal movement demonstrated its desire for independence with the Aboriginal 'Tent Embassy' which was erected on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra. The group of 'nationalists' appointed a High Commissioner, Michael Anderson, and flew an Aboriginal flag of green, red and black. The green symbolised the land, the red, bloodshed, and the black stood for the Aboriginal people.⁴⁰ The use of symbols such as the flag, the protesters suggested the possibility of creating an Aboriginal nation, with all the official trappings of other modern nation states. This differed conceptually from the 1938 vision of Aborigines as citizens of Australia.

The Embassy's central demand was for land rights. Their protest took its inspiration from indigenous peoples throughout the world who had fought for land rights. Using the medium of television, their cause was able to gain support from Aborigines all over Australia. The demonstration had a broad appeal and was supported by conservatives such as Sir Douglas Nicholls, Australia's first Aboriginal knight, who visited the 'Embassy' to show his approval of their work.⁴¹ This unity suggests an emerging pan-Aboriginal feeling in the 1970s. As Chicka Dixon declared: 'As long as I breathe I'm black...of course we down south haven't got our culture, we haven't got our language, but we have the feeling that we belong...we're black Australians'.⁴² At the time, some suggested that the 'Embassy' was simply evidence of Communist interference, but Gilbert confirmed that, '[f]rom its inception to its demise, the Aboriginal Embassy was a totally Aboriginal thing'.⁴³

While some Aboriginal intellectuals might have accepted western models of nationalism, other saw this as a betrayal of the spirit of Aboriginal culture. Pat O'Shane, in discussing the proposed treaty between the Aborigines and the Australian government, said that:

37. Read 1990, p. 100.

38. Franklin 1976, pp. 102–3.

39. Cited in Gilbert 1973, p. 32.

40. Franklin 1976, p. 210.

41. *ibid.*

42. Cited in Broome 1994, p. 184.

43. Gilbert 1973, p. 28.

...the proponents of the issue...loudly and persistently proclaim the Aboriginal nation. To be honest, I don't know what constitutes a nation, but my understanding is that a nation is defined by territory and some form of central government.⁴⁴

This concept, she argued 'is entirely alien to Aborigines'.⁴⁵ Her criticism has been taken up by others who have sought to reconceptualise the Aboriginal nation in a way which might allow for the diversity and plurality of the Aboriginal peoples.

Another criticism of the nationalist model was that it did not take sufficient account of the contrast between the Aboriginal practice of 'finding the common mind of the group as against the self-assertion of individualistic European leadership'.⁴⁶ This issue was considered by Gilbert who wrote:

Aborigines have not taken kindly to those in their midst who have assumed to be 'leaders'. A strong reason is a uniquely Aboriginal individualism which does not accept the right of anyone to speak for them without long and exhausting prior consultation.⁴⁷

These arguments, however, assume that Aboriginal nationalism must define itself in terms of its 'traditional' culture in order to be considered legitimate. A modern phenomenon of Aboriginal nationalism, however, did not need to be 'traditional' in order to inspire a sense of love and loyalty from its followers.

Anderson argues that in terms of creating a new national culture, one must take into account the influence of colonial structures. His discussion of the colonial map, census and museum can be applied to the case of Australia. Aboriginal nationalists did take the colonial map of Australia as defining the boundaries of their nation. This was in contrast to the many Aborigines who identify themselves according to their own 'traditional' land. Vincent Lingiari, for example, said: 'My people are Gurindji, who live in Wave Hill area. That me countr'.⁴⁸ This can be contrasted with the words of Coral Edwards, co-ordinator of Link-Up, who said:

Aboriginality means to me that you come from the land. It's your land, Australia, the trees, the grass, the seas, the deserts, the rainforests, are all linked with yourself. It's something nobody can take away from you.⁴⁹

This definition of the land has expanded the Aboriginal territory to encompass the whole of Australia. Instead of relating to one specific area, the nationalist identifies with everything from deserts to rainforests. This image of the Aboriginal nation comes from the representations of Australia produced by the television and the tourist industry. Ironically, these images have been produced as part of an effort to encourage Australian nationalism in general, and as such have become the 'imaginings' of multi-cultural Australia.

British attempts to create a census of Aborigines, 'saw Aborigines wherever they were as being all the same, and the various clans, groups, tribes, and communities experienced colonisation in very similar ways'.⁵⁰ Early twentieth-century categorisations

44. O'Shane 1991, p. 154.

45. *ibid.*

46. Harris 1972, p. 109.

47. Gilbert 1973, p. 139.

48. Cited in Hardy 1968, p. 71.

49. Bowden & Bunbury 1990, p. 17.

tended to define Aborigines purely in terms of race. They were either 'half-castes' or 'full-bloods', terms which carried connotations of 'semi-civilised' or 'primitive'. It was not until the 1960s that the Commonwealth government decided against making 'distinctions among people of Aboriginal descent, opting instead for self-identification and/or recognition by a community'.⁵¹ The choice remained, however, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, implying an acceptance by the state of a national Aboriginal identity. Despite this, the choice for many Aborigines was to designate 'their people' as those belonging to their clan or local community.

Anderson's argument that the colonial museum attempted to capture the 'essence' of the 'traditional' culture is similarly true of Australia. Australian writers have portrayed the Aborigine as part of Australia, the 'timeless land'. Desert Aborigines have become a national emblem, 'represented as black, male, bearded and scantily dressed, holding a spear and with his eyes fixed on some distant object-all against a background of scenic splendour'.⁵² European representations of Aboriginal culture have tended to concentrate on the image of the noble savage. Aboriginal artifacts such as the boomerang have become items for sale by the tourist industry, along with performances of corroborees and 'bush tucker' restaurants. This issue has recently become an important focus for Aboriginal activists who have reclaimed the right to define their own identity, to write their own history and to resume custody of their culture.⁵³

Another important aspect of nationalism is the role of language. According to Anderson, the language of the colonial administration allowed heterogeneous peoples to develop a common language. The use of English as the *lingua franca* by Aborigines has provided the means for communication across Australia. In some cases urban Aborigines who use English as their first language have adapted the language to suit their own needs. In Adelaide, for example, 'the Lingo', which is made up of a limited number of Aboriginal words and phrases interwoven with English, serves as a symbol of Aboriginal identity.⁵⁴ On the other hand, those who are attempting to regain their community ties, have been supported by institutions such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) which broadcasts in Aboriginal languages to the people of Central Australia. One Aborigine commented: 'there is no doubt that hearing your own language on radio and television contributes to a sense of identity and pride'.⁵⁵ Another explained: 'You have to know your language because you'll never be able to learn your Dreaming and if you don't know your Dreaming you can't identify where you belong'.⁵⁶ While this sense of identity emphasizes the tribal over the national, the promotion of languages such as Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri need not work against a sense of pan-Aboriginality.⁵⁷ A post-modern understanding of nationalism would suggest that there is no need to eliminate cultural diversity in order to achieve a sense of nationalism. This form of pan-Aboriginal nationalism is expressed by

50. O'Shane 1991, p. 148.

51. Beckett 1988a, p. 207.

52. *ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

53. Pam Johnston in Langford Ginibi 1994, p. 49.

54. Beckett 1988b, p. 83.

55. Bowden & Bunbury 1990, p. 29.

56. *ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

57. *ibid.*, p. 35.

Mudrooroo who wrote: 'Us Mob are many mobs, but we all come from that great tree which is Australia'.⁵⁸

The importance of land is a theme which recurs in all discussions of nationalism. A 'love of country' can be operate simultaneously at both a continent-wide phenomenon and in a more local sense. Smith writes: 'nations need homelands...historic territories in which 'our ancestors' lived and which we carry in our hearts'.⁵⁹ In the case of pan-Aboriginal nationalism this is particularly apt. While individual communities have laid claim to their traditional lands, the issue of Land Rights has been a unifying force precisely because land is a symbol which carries meaning for all indigenous Australians. Patriotism is often expressed in terms of being 'of the lan'. This sentiment was conveyed by Banjo Woorunmurra who declared: 'We don't want money, we want our land. Our spirits are in our land. Our old people are still in the land, our motherland, our dusty old land'.⁶⁰

According to Smith, another factor which engenders a sense of national pride is the writing of nationalist histories and the creation of national heroes. Aborigines today are forging their own history to create a new nationalist identity. For example, Aboriginal writer, Mary Coe published a rewriting of Australian history in 1986 which presented the Aboriginal people as agents who resisted colonial oppression. 'The final images in the text are of a land rights demonstration and the Aboriginal flag emblazoning the back cover—"we have survived as a nation"'.⁶¹ Smith argues that writing about a 'golden age assures each generation of its distinctive heritage against the assimilative pressures and temptations of modernity, which might otherwise swamp them'.⁶² Rejecting the modernist notion of artificially contrived nationalism, he argues that: 'Traditions, myths, history and symbols must all grow out of the existing, living memories and beliefs of the people who are to compose the nation'.⁶³ The development of Aboriginal oral history in a written format has helped to transmit to a wider audience histories composed of myths and memories.⁶⁴ This is particularly true of the 1990s, but even in the 1960s there was a move to regain a knowledge of 'tribal custom and belief' in the face of cultural assimilation.⁶⁵

It is difficult to discuss forms of nationalism without placing them in the context of the state. The nation-state of Australia remains dominated by non-indigenous, colonial structures. Attempts to establish some degree of economic or political self-determination have been largely unsatisfactory. The consequences of thinking nationally rather than locally has been most severely criticized in discussions of the role of ATSIC. Papers published by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1994 emphasised the need for a decentralisation of funding with community-based organisations effectively bypassing ATSIC. This leaves open the question of what form a centralised Aboriginal state

58. Mudrooroo 1995, p. vi.

59. Smith 1986, p. 213.

60. Broome 1994, p. 196.

61. Ariss 1988, p. 137.

62. Smith 1986, p. 213.

63. Smith 1991, pp. 358-9.

64. Barwick 1988, p. 32.

65. Gilbert 1973, p. 131.

might take. Michael Mansell argued that the 'best way to provide the power for Aboriginal self-government is to build that right into the Australian Constitution...' ⁶⁶ These sentiments have been echoed in the 1998 Convention which considered the new constitution for an Australian Republic. ⁶⁷ Mansell describes a framework for 'self-government' in which:

There may be any number of Aboriginal communities in Australia operating a form of self-management process in their own territories under the broad political umbrella of the Australian nation. ⁶⁸

Nevertheless, he puts this forward as a compromise and voices the hope that one day these communities might come under the umbrella of an Aboriginal nation.

Writing in 1995, Mudrooroo argues for a shift of focus for political power from the national to the community level, stating: '...if Us Mobs want to establish an Indigenality from the grass roots up, we must use the extended family as its political foundation'. ⁶⁹ Smith gives a similar argument for nationalism in his critique of Anderson. He focuses on 'not only patterns of family...but also the values, symbols, myths and memories that are transmitted through these channels'. ⁷⁰ Aboriginal values are inextricably linked to the family and the memories that are passed on from one generation to the next. Much of the revival of Aboriginal culture relies on a this process. Hetti Perkins, mother of Charles Perkins, for example, saw the beginning of a 'massive Aboriginal revival of self-confidence and willingly filled the role of traditional granny and aunty'. ⁷¹ Through the family Aborigines can gain a sense of the unique ethos of their culture which centres on 'tolerance, compassion, humour, and the emotional warmth of personal relationships'. ⁷² Taking account of the importance of family, H. C. Coombs has argued that a new model of self-government for Aborigines should not be determined in advance, 'but should emerge slowly from local meetings all over the country'. ⁷³ It is worth noting the difference between this method of communication and the 'modern' means of communication cited by Anderson as necessary to nationalism.

In Ruby Langford Ginibi's book about her Bundjalung people, the Koori people are divided into three types: 'traditional tribal people, the mission bred ones...and the urban Koori'. Langford Ginibi emphasises however, that they are 'all one mob'. ⁷⁴ She writes: 'In our Koori way, we all want to go back to where we came from originally, it is like a magnet that keeps drawing us to the places where we were born to find our extended families'. ⁷⁵ The importance of place and family indicates an 'imagined community' based on clan connections. Nevertheless, her book also acknowledges the presence of other Aboriginal nations and gives a sense of common cause, which allows us to conceive of a federation of Aboriginal nations. Langford Ginibi's adopted daughter

66. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994a, p. 29.

67. See also Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994b, p. 7.

68. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994a, p. 29.

69. Mudrooroo 1995, p. 31.

70. Smith 1990, p. 18.

71. Read 1990, p. 6.

72. Barwick 1988, p. 27.

73. Coombs cited in Reynolds 1996, p. 147.

74. Pam Johnston cited in Langford Ginibi 1994, p. xi.

75. Langford Ginibi 1994, p. 1.

Pam Johnston is one of the Gamilerori people. She describes the Bundjalung as but one of Aboriginal Australia's many nations. Nevertheless, her involvement in the book adds to the sense of Aboriginal 'inter-national' cooperation.⁷⁶

Another aspect of nationalism highlighted by Smith is the need for national heroes.⁷⁷ Aboriginal heroes who have appeared on television and so into the homes of Aborigines, include writers such as Kath Walker, the dancers of Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, the painter Namatjira, and the actor Ernie Dingo. Sporting heroes have similarly played an important role in promoting Aboriginal national pride. There are numerous examples of footballers, boxers and Olympic athletes. The most recent of these, Cathy Freeman, demonstrated her power as an Aboriginal national hero when she ran the victory lap at the 1994 Commonwealth games holding not only the Australian flag, but the Aboriginal flag, the symbol of the Aboriginal nation. The flag which combines red for the land, black for the people and yellow for the sun, the symbol of life, sent a message to all Australians and Aborigines in what was perhaps the most persuasive experience of simultaneity to date. At that moment, the Aboriginal 'imagined community' was a reality, conveyed instantaneously using the technology of satellite into the minds of each Aboriginal.⁷⁸

Mandawuy Yunupingu, lead singer and song-writer of the band Yothu Yindi, unlike early nationalists who were dislocated from their traditional lands and culture, combines a sense of nationalism with a deep attachment to his own land and clan ties. He takes his sense of Aboriginality from the traditions of his people, the Yolngu, in Arnhem Land. Though Yothu Yindi serves as a symbol for Aborigines across Australia, Mandawuy describes the band as a 'contemporary voice for us Yolngu'. The name itself refers to the kinship system of the Yirritja and Dhuwa people, who together make up the Yolngu.⁷⁹ Mandawuy was educated as a Yolgnu but was also taught English in a mission school. Today, he is principal of the local school which teaches both 'authentic Yolngu schooling' and the standard Australian curriculum.⁸⁰ For Mandawuy, his immediate community is the Yolgnu, however he also has a national vision which is wider than pan-Aboriginality. He believes that:

Together in the twenty-first century we can construct a unique way of life here, inspired by the traditions of Aboriginal Australia and of Europe and Asia. Land rights for Aboriginal Australians are in the best interests of all Australians. Land rights must respect the contributions made by those people who have immigrated here over the past two hundred years, as well as recognising the place of those who have always belonged to this land.⁸¹

Nationalism for Mandawuy is not about loyalty to one group, one culture, but is manifested in three distinct but connected layers: loyalty to clan, to pan-Aboriginality, and finally, to a truly multicultural Australia.

76. Pam Johnston cited in Langford Ginibi 1994, p. xi

77. Smith 1986, p. 213.

78. Brennan 1995, p. 184.

79. Yunupingu 1994, p. 1.

80. *ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

81. *ibid.*, p. 11.

The relationship between the 'Aboriginal nation' in whatever form it might take, and the Australian state is one which has yet to be reconciled. The literature produced by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1994 focuses on the sharing of Aboriginal culture with non-indigenous Australians. By promoting the diversity of indigenous cultures and the richness is their heritage they envisage a 'genuine celebration' of Australia's cultural diversity.⁸² This theme was taken up at the 1998 Convention to discuss the formation of an Australian Republic. The Council imagined that this historical event might provide the forum for reconceptualising the Australian nation-state in such as way give a central place to indigenous Australians.⁸³

This paper has shown that Aboriginal nationalism and the Aboriginal nation have been conceptualised in many forms by Aboriginal groups. The theories of Anderson and Smith provide us with a means of analysing the phenomenon of 'modern' pan-Aboriginal nationalism as it appeared in the 1960s and 70s. In addition, by considering the tension between their theoretical models and the range of Aboriginal attitudes, this paper uncovers a counter-movement which regards the modern nation as inappropriate as an expression of Aboriginal 'love of country'. In keeping with a 'post-modern' version of the nation, new models of Aboriginal nationalism emphasise loyalty to clan, to family and this reflects the many Aboriginal nations. Nationalism as a pan-Aboriginal phenomenon has not been replaced by this model so much as enriched by it. The notion of a federation of Aboriginal nations; each with its own sense of community, ensures a stronger base on which to found a national 'imagined community'.

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82. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994b, p. 5.

83. *ibid.*, p. 7.

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Remembering Past Environments: Identity, place and environmental knowledge in the Tumut region of New South Wales

Ruth Lane

If someone spoke about Black Andrew, well the older people and the ones that pass it on, they'd know exactly where it is but now it's no more. And it'll probably be given just another name, a forestry number. Just a number now.¹

This comment was made by Joan Kell, a long-term resident of the Tumut region of New South Wales. Black Andrew was a pastoral property which was purchased by the softwood company, Sintoff Pty. Ltd., in 1991 and subsequently planted to pine. The spread of pine plantations is the most recent of a sequence of land-use changes in the Tumut region and Joan Kell's comments reflect a widespread concern among local people about their changing landscape. Name changes connected with new forms of land use mean that it is no longer possible for local people to talk about the country in the way that they used to.

Local perspectives on environmental change are related to personal histories and identities that are vested in the landscape and the relationship between identity, place and environmental knowledge is affected by dramatic changes in land use. The quote above suggests that the transformation from pastoral lands to pine plantations entails a linguistic change that alters the relationship between people and land, distancing them from land which was once familiar. A better understanding of the links between identity, place and environmental knowledge has valuable applications for land management, particularly in the context of community consultation about environmental issues.

The fieldwork that this paper draws on was conducted between 1991 and 1993 as part of a master's thesis in geography, titled 'Local Environmental Knowledge and Perspectives on Change: A case study in the Tumut region of New South Wales'.² The aim of the project was to gain an understanding of how people perceive environmental changes in country that they have lived in for many years, in order to inform consultative processes about land management and land use change. Two aspects of local knowledge emerged: the detailed memories of changes in specific places at specific

1. Tape transcript JK 053-4 p. 14.

times (ie. a knowledge based on empirical observation), and a more emotional experience of changes over time and responses to them. This paper deals with the more subjective aspects of local environmental knowledge and its connection with a sense of place and identity. In a separate paper³ I address the potential of local knowledge to inform scientific understandings of relationships between vegetation change resulting from changing land use and changes to the shape and flow of watercourses.

According to anthropologist Keith Basso,⁴ there are three ways in which local communities involve themselves with geographic landscapes. These are observation, utility (ie. they may modify the landscape to suit their needs) and communication (ie. they formulate descriptions and other representations and share these socially). Basso is particularly interested in the symbolic aspects of landscapes, the shared cultural conceptions that are evoked in talking about them. Some aspects of anthropological studies such as Basso's, which focus on indigenous knowledge, also have relevance to colloquial knowledge of places among non-indigenous people. Knowledge of place names and some of the stories associated with them bind together different groups of people within local communities.

The Tumut region began the transition from a landscape primarily influenced by Aboriginal land use to one dominated by European land use in the 1820s and 1830s, when early pastoralists with sheep and cattle usurped the Wiradjuri, Ngunnawal and Walgalu peoples from the Tumut River valley. Since then, land use in the region has undergone successive phases that have impacted on the type and extent of vegetation cover and on the shape of creeks and rivers. The general trend has been towards more intensive land use, assisted by government incentives for closer settlement and by changing agricultural technology. There are some recent exceptions to this trend, however, where intensive land uses such as dairying and millet cropping have been replaced by grazing beef cattle. Land-use patterns have changed dramatically within living memory. Pine plantations have replaced native forests and pasture lands and a dam on the Tumut River at Blowering has altered the patterns of stream flow and flooding.

I recorded interviews with approximately fifty people who had lived most of their lives in the Tumut region, and spoke with many more in less formal situations. I deliberately sought out informants who encompassed a range of different backgrounds and life experiences in this region because I wanted to explore the ways in which differing life experiences reflected the kinds of memories people had of environmental changes over time. There were equal numbers of men and women and a mix of people who had never held land and people linked to land-holding families. I focused on ten of these people as key sources. Two of the ten, Vince Bulger and Minnie Freeman, were Kooris

2. Lane 1995. I was inspired to undertake this study because of work I was involved in in my role as a curator at the National Museum of Australia. We were preparing a travelling exhibition about the human and environmental history of the Murray-Darling Basin, largely funded by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to further its agenda of education for sustainable land use. Local communities were involved in the development of the exhibition and contributed their own interpretations of the history of their regions and environments.

3. Lane 1997a.

4. Basso 1988, p. 100.

who had links with Brungle station, commonly referred to as 'the mission', which operated as a reserve for Aboriginal people under the auspices of a government appointed manager until 1942. John McGruer held a property on the Tumut River flats south of Brungle and adjoining Pine Mountain where his family had been since 1860. Aubrey and Gloria McGillveray were more recent arrivals to the Tumut River flats, with Gloria's family taking up a small dairy farm at Tarrabandra on the western side of the river in the 1920s.

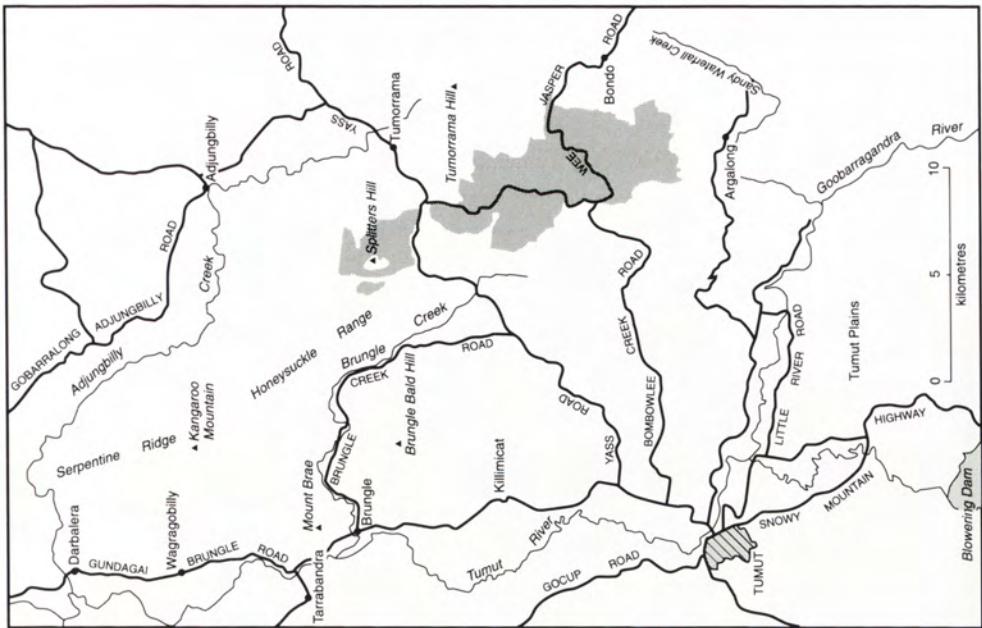
Mark and Sheila Garner, Beryl Margules and Joan Kell had all lived in the higher country around Tumorrana. Mark Garner and Beryl Margules both came from pioneering settler families that owned land in the higher country around Tumorrana. Joan Kell grew up on a 200 acre (81 ha) block which her parents selected at Tumorrana. Jack Herlihy and his sister-in-law, Hazel Herlihy, were the last landholders left at Argalong, to the south of Tumorrana. The Herlihy family had been significant landholders there for several generations but most of this land is now covered with pine plantations. Tommy Kent worked at Argalong as a miner during the 1930s and 1940s, earning a rough living extracting small quantities of gold from the creeks.

Despite the very different histories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the region, I asked similar questions of each, as I was keen to establish an approach to local environmental knowledge and perspectives on change that could accommodate all local people. While I believe this approach has practical value for land management, it may emphasise commonalities between Aborigines and settlers where a different approach could have shed more light on the differences which I sensed were present, but found difficult to define.

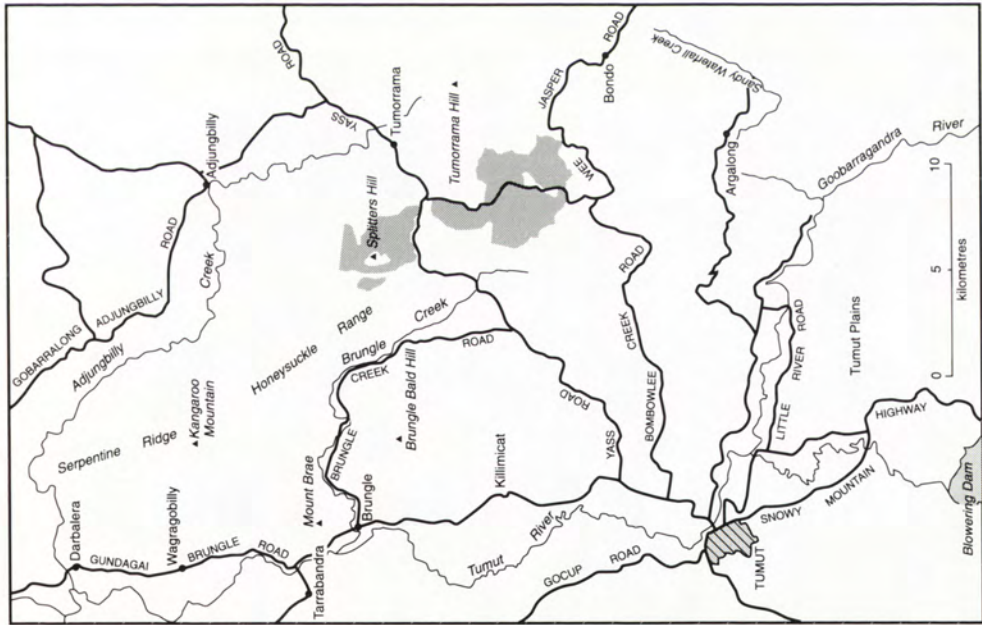
Interest in history is a common response to the loss of remembered places. Peter Read discusses this in relation to the responses of residents of the town of Adaminaby, on the western side of the Snowy Mountains, some years after it was inundated by a dam in 1956–57 as part of the Snowy Mountains Scheme.⁵ Most of the people interviewed were no longer engaged in the land use they had been involved in for most of their lives. Their perspectives, now that they were no longer using the land for economic purposes, were attuned to conservation and aesthetic values rather than economic ones. They had become more aware of the history of the region and were concerned that memories be recorded before they were lost.

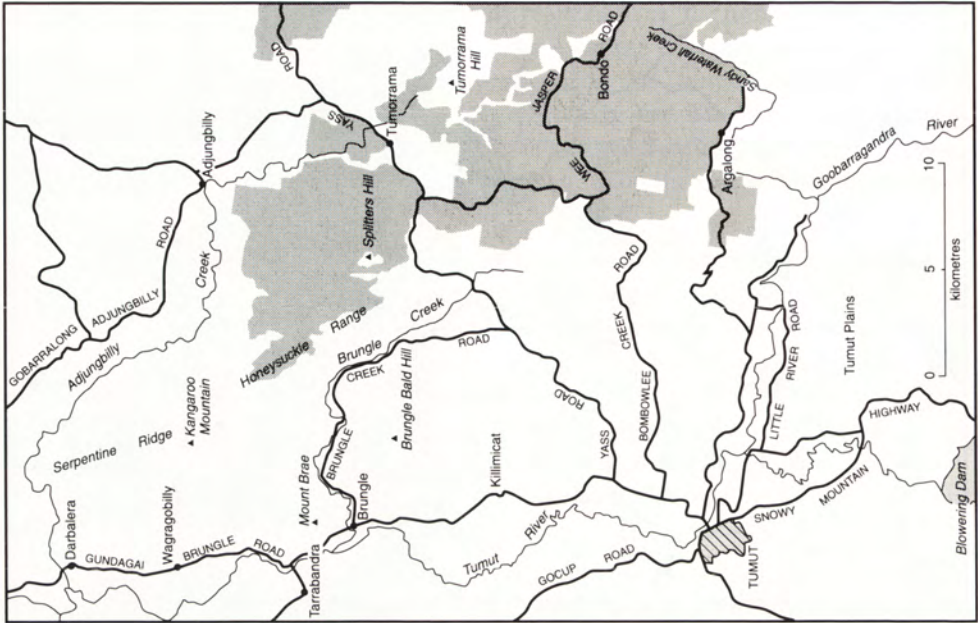
All ten key informants felt very strongly about particular parts of the region, some steadfastly holding out against land-use changes with which they disagreed. Their ages ranged from 65 to 83 years, and their childhoods and earliest memories spanned the years from 1920 to 1940. There were patterns in the kinds of stories these people related about their lives in this country and those of their families, which provide clues to the way that their memories of past environments were structured. I have grouped their stories into three rough categories—ancestor stories and genealogical landscapes, journey stories, and stories of labour and hardship.

5. Read 1992.

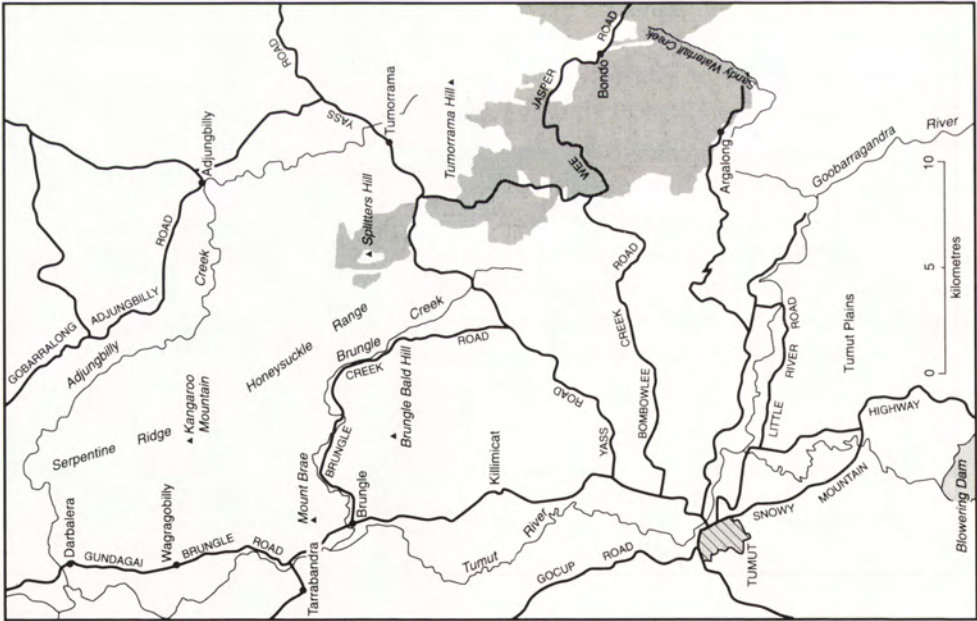


Spread of pine plantations over time in the Tumut region: left, 1956; right, 1961





Spread of pine plantations over time in the Tumut region: left, 1971, right, 1990



Ancestor stories and genealogical landscapes⁶

At our first meeting, most of the people interviewed volunteered an account of how their families came to be in the region and which places were significant to their families' histories. These stories took different forms, but I broadly classed them as 'ancestor stories'. Most of my non-Aboriginal informants were connected in some way with land-holding families, some of whom had come to the region in the late nineteenth century. Recounting the stories of their relatives' journeys to the country served to reinforce their own position and identity in relation to the land. Mark Garner related a story about an epic journey made by his ancestors, who travelled from Yass to Tumorrana and camped inside a hollowed-out tree on the way. Beryl Margules explained how her grandfather had established the first mail run in the district from Tumut to Bookham and how this had involved lengthy journeys on horseback through rough country, fording both the Goodradigbee and Murrumbidgee Rivers.

Despite or because of the social disruption caused by the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents, there was great interest among Kooris in mapping kinship lines and in tracing geographical movements of their ancestors. Vince Bulger, who had spent portions of his childhood living with his family on Brungle station, told how Aboriginal elders at Brungle station had spoken about a battle that was fought before white settlement between Ngunnuwal and Wiradjuri tribes. The Wiradjuri were returning to the high country after holding initiation ceremonies at Mudjarng (now known as Pine Mountain) when they were ambushed by Ngunnuwal who wanted to rescue a woman who had been kidnapped by Wiradjuri men. Vince Bulger was very interested in mapping out this story in the landscape. He thought that the most likely spot for the ambush was the place where the road follows the creek through a narrow gorge between Millers Hills and Honeysuckle Range. Surveying the landscape, he picked out the path that would have been the best route for walking this way.

The accounts people gave of journeys made by their ancestors have symbolic significance. By referring to these journeys they define their own identity in relation to the land. The country and places they refer to form part of their genealogy. In this way, the physical landscape is related to family history. It gives a dimension to each person's identity that connects his or her life to a deeper time frame, which is mapped with reference to the features of the landscape. American anthropologist Stephen Foster describes a similar emphasis on the importance of land and history to the expression of personal identity among residents of Ashe County in North Carolina:

The land brackets history, is its theatre, its ground. Land situates the transit of the person within history; the person is encompassed by the history of the land and place. Pioneering ancestors came to the land and there gave birth to their descendants. Present-day descendants expect eventually to be laid to rest in the land, while hoping for history to continue to flow on through the land once their own lives are over. Thus blood and family lines are inextricably interwoven with the history of land and place.⁷

⁶. The term 'genealogical landscape' is drawn from the title of a paper by Allen 1990.

⁷. Foster 1988, p. 168.

The sites of old graveyards aroused strong emotions. Burial places were among the most powerful symbols of past lives in the country and of the connection between people and the land, and past and present generations. The cemetery where Aboriginal people were buried at Brungle was listed on the Register of the National Estate in 1991 in recognition of its significance to the Koori community. Vince Bulger explained that his father and grandfather were both buried there and that when he died he wanted to be buried alongside them. However one of his sons, also named Vince Bulger, remarked that no-one really knew the sites of all the Aboriginal graves at Brungle and that it was quite likely that unmarked graves were dispersed over the site of the old Brungle station. Beryl Margules, who had spent her childhood and much of her adult life on her father's property in the plateau country around Tumorrana, expressed concern about the unmarked graves in the old cemetery at Tumorrana. It was the first cemetery that had ever been used in the Tumorrana district, but no one had been buried there for sixty-five years. She explained that many people, mostly miners or members of poorer families in the district, were buried there. More wealthy families used the cemetery in Tumut.

Journey stories

The journeys people recounted from their own personal experience helped to recall discrete periods in their lives. Retracing these journeys brought back memories of the people associated with them, and prompted comparisons of the current environment with memories of environmental features which have changed over time. For example, Joan Kell's journey to school on her pony was associated with her childhood at Tumorrana. A sudden snowstorm could turn a regular journey to school into a perilous adventure. Joan Kell remembered turning back home one morning because she felt it was too cold to continue safely. Her family held a small property at Tumorrana and was forced to sell up because their block was not large enough to support the family adequately. Tommy Kent and his brother and father made a meagre existence from gold mining in the creeks around Argalong, on the lower slopes of the Snowy Mountains. They used to ride bicycles from Argalong to Tumut when they needed to replenish supplies in the 1930s. Tommy Kent became so familiar with this route that fifty years later he was able to describe the different soil types along the way. He had acquired his knowledge of soil types while working as a gold miner in the district.

Beryl Margules described how she used to drive stock from the markets at Brungle up to the family's property at Tumorrana. She pointed out a particular hill on Honeysuckle Range beside the old stock route, which, she explained, had a very different vegetation on it to any other in the region. 'Different soils, different rocks,...I don't know why; I'd go over there when the heather came out.'⁸ Seeing the hill prompted Beryl to relate a story about a schoolteacher who gave birth to a baby girl when the 'heather' was in flower and named her 'Heather'. This area has since been identified by botanists working for the National Botanic Gardens as having several rare plant species and is likely to be made a reserve for nature conservation (Geoff Butler pers. comm.).

Minnie Freeman spent her early childhood on Brungle station, but like many Aboriginal girls of her generation, was taken away from her family at a young age and

⁸. Tape transcript 050-1, p. 14.

placed in the Cootamundra Girls' Home and only retained dim memories of her parents. She later returned to Brungle with her husband, Ned Freeman. The country Minnie Freeman knew best was the vicinity of the old Brungle station and the road between Brungle and Tumut. Over the years she had traversed this road on horse back and by bicycle. Now her relatives drive her back and forth when she needs to visit Tumut. She observed changes in the Tumut River and its anabranch Nimbo Creek since the construction of Blowering Dam and described the impact that these changes had on Kooris living at Brungle.

Stories of labour and hardship

Another kind of story that was often recounted when people spoke about their memories of the country was one of physical labour or hardship. Like the journey stories, these also referred to a physical experience of the country associated with former times. Physical work was one of the ways in which people changed and were themselves changed by their physical environment. Memories of labour were usually related to particular forms of land use and were often associated with memories of people they had worked with. Minnie Freeman and Vince Bulger, who lived on Brungle station when it was administered by the Aborigines Protection Board with strict rules about conduct and movement, were made to work for their rations as were all the Kooris living there. The men mostly did station work and the women worked in the dairy. Vince Bulger expressed mixed feelings about this period. While he resented the authoritarian regime, he was proud of the fact that the community supported itself through collective labour and had some warm memories of a time when Koori families lived together and maintained some links with older generations.

Sheila Garner and her husband Mark Garner purchased a small block of land at Tumorrana after their marriage in the late 1950s and lived there throughout the 1960s. During this period when their three children were young, Sheila Garner learnt to make cakes using the slow burning timbers that were all that was available and impressed women from lower lying country who had access to more suitable timber. Some of the people interviewed had been involved in clearing native timber at Tumorrana for pastoral purposes. Vince Bulger described the labour he put into clearing fallen timber while working as a stockman on Red Hill Station in the 1940s and 50s, and clearly enjoyed recalling stories about men that he had worked with. Beryl Margules remembered helping her father to clear native trees from a portion of their land at Tumorrana, which was later sold to the Forestry Commission and is now planted with pines. It upset Beryl that the marks of their labour had since been extinguished by the new land use.

Some people also spoke about the physical labours of their ancestors in the country. Both Jack Herlihy and Mark Garner, descendants of pioneering landholders at Argalong and Tumorrana respectively, described with a sense of awe the labours of their ancestors in clearing the country of virgin forests. One of Jack Herlihy's complaints about the Forestry Commission and its impact on the landscape was the way that the marks of the labour of early European settlers in the country were extinguished:

It's a sort of an automatic thing. There's no sentiment or any attachment to what the pioneers did in the early days. They've just completely wiped them altogether.⁹

For similar reasons, Tommy Kent was upset to find that one of the gold mine shafts at Argalong had been filled in. The old shaft was evidence of the labour of the miners who used to work it. His memories of life as a gold miner at Argalong in the 1930s and 1940s were very much memories of hard work and harsh living conditions.

Joan Kell pointed out the old post and rail fences along the roadside as we drove up to Tumorrana. To her the old fence posts triggered memories of the skills and labour that went into making them in the days when everything was done manually. Mark Garner related stories passed on to him by older relatives that indicate that early pastoralists had deliberately drained the swamps at Tumorrana by digging channels. A heavy log was hitched to a team of bullocks and dragged through a swamp until water flowed freely through the channel created. It was arduous work and stories were passed down through Mark Garner's family about the endurance of particular bullockies.

There was a great deal of consensus among local people about changes to creeks in the higher country of Tumorrana and Argalong. In general, they believed that creeks which had their catchments converted from pastureland to pine plantations had become silted and in some cases had a reduced flow. Sheila Garner went to school at Argalong in the 1930s. When she returned there recently for a school reunion she was totally disoriented among the pines and could hardly recognise Big Sandy Creek because it had become much smaller and narrower than it used to be. Hazel Herlihy recalled an incident from the 1950s when her young daughter made a dangerous crossing of Little Sandy Creek when it was in flood. She then explained that such floods have not occurred for many years and related this to the reduced run-off from pine plantations.¹⁰

Aboriginal relationships to land at Brungle

Aboriginal perspectives on land around Brungle highlighted the very different histories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this country. Vince Bulger and Minnie Freeman had both lived on Brungle station during their childhood and had been compelled to leave against their will. The life at the Station had involved a social network, a home site and shared labour. Although there were many unhappy memories associated with this period, the land itself remained very important to these Kooris, as a site of shared memories and links with past traditions. All the areas of Crown land in the vicinity of Brungle were significant places for local Kooris, however the land which used to be Brungle station was the most contentious area at Brungle. Brungle station consisted of 365 acres (148 ha), classified as Crown land and administered by the Aborigines Protection Board. All but 16 ha of this was leased to a local grazier in 1956 under a ninety-nine year lease. It remained a source of great resentment for Vince Bulger and other Kooris I spoke with, who regarded it as 'Aboriginal land' or simply 'our land'.

⁹. Tape transcript 049, p. 11

¹⁰. See Lane 1997a for a more detailed analysis of such comments which relates them to scientific understandings of the impact of changes to vegetation in catchments to surface run off.

This deep felt sense of ownership seems to be similar to that held by Aboriginal people in regard to old reserve lands elsewhere in south eastern Australia and differs to perceptions of ownership held by non-Aboriginal people. Historian Heather Goodall tracks the specific interpretation of legal title to reserve lands back to their creation as designated farming reserves in the late nineteenth century, and their description by officials at the time as 'land grants'.¹¹ She analyses the complex sentiments about these lands as follows:

These beliefs about the reserves and their title represented a new layer of meaning about land, its ownership and its significance, which the experience of colonialism generated among Aboriginal landowners and which came to be inscribed onto the land itself. These concepts were not 'traditional', but they grew out of the strength of the emotional bonds between traditional owners and their lands, as well as continuing Aboriginal desires to organise their social future, their plans, residence and economy, around the land they regarded as their own...¹²

She goes on to explain that,

the lands acquired a further layer of meaning which arose from the everyday experiences of their Aboriginal residents over decades. ... So the richness of daily life was experienced there repeatedly over those decades, and the memories of the everyday events, as well as the knowledge of the past meanings of the land, and the hopes for the future, were all embedded within the boundaries of those reserve lands. Thus an intense new web of significance and meaning was being laid down on these lands through this period of colonisation, adding to the traditional meanings for land.¹³

Goodall's interpretation seems to offer a good basis for understanding the complexities of Aboriginal relationships to land at Brungle.

Pine Mountain, just south of Brungle, is a local landmark because of its distinctive vegetation of black cypress pine (*Callitris endlicheri*). The black cypress grows only on the granitic soils of Pine Mountain making it a unique and eye-catching feature in the landscape. Known to local Kooris as 'Mudjarnj', it was used by Aborigines living on Brungle station for initiation ceremonies. Vince Bulger pointed out that Mudjarnj was the closest Crown land to Brungle (apart from the town common) and this may have been partly why the old people living on Brungle station used it for initiation ceremonies. He said that ceremonies were still carried out there up to the turn of the century. Vince Bulger himself had seen engravings on rocks there. He was keen to document these and to substantiate the area's wider significance to Kooris before he died, so that Pine Mountain could be claimed as Aboriginal land.

Pine Mountain has also attracted the attention of nature conservation agencies. In 1984, a report was prepared by New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, apparently in response to an anticipated Aboriginal land claim, about both nature conservation values and Aboriginal cultural resource values of Pine Mountain. This report concluded that 'It is considered quite likely that management of the land by Aborigines as a "sacred place" will preserve its nature conservation and landscape val-

11. Goodall 1996, p. 102.

12. *ibid.*, p. 103.

13. *ibid.*

ues. Although it is recognised that there is no guarantee this will occur...¹⁴ In 1987, a report on Aboriginal sites in the Tumut Shire was prepared by National Parks and Wildlife Service archaeologist, Sue Feary, who drew on Vince Bulger's knowledge of the area for assistance. It included the comment:

The existence of the Aboriginal Mission at Brungle has facilitated the retention of some traditional knowledge, which points specifically to Pine Mountain Range as being a place of considerable significance.¹⁵

The acknowledgment by a government agency of the significance of Pine Mountain to the local Koori community may help to promote a broader recognition of the continuity between Kooris living in the region today. It acknowledges a history of Aboriginal land use which provides a far broader perspective of human history in the region than the brief period of pastoral land use.

Use of the Brungle Town Common was overseen by the Brungle Common Trust, a body of five members elected every three years under the auspices of the NSW Government in line with the Commons Management Act 1989 (NSW). This body was responsible for the day to day administration of the Common and, in conjunction with the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the development and implementation of a plan of management. Vince Bulger, however, felt that landholders effectively had more rights over use of the Brungle Town Common than Kooris. A sign on the gate forbade camping there and was a source of resentment to Vince Bulger. Aboriginal people had always camped along this stretch of Nimbo Creek, which had a continuity of Aboriginal use stretching back for thousands of years before Europeans entered the region. During the years when Brungle station was operating, Aboriginal women living there took their washing to the town common and washed it in the Nimbo Creek, spreading it out on fences and trees to dry. Minnie Freeman explained that before the dam there were little sandy beaches, the water was warmer and not so fast flowing, and children swam in the river. The common continued to be used by Kooris for fishing and picnics, although they now caught trout where once they caught native fish and crayfish. This aspect of use was permitted by the Trust and was clearly very popular on weekends when the weather was fine.

Public rights to land in the Tumut region

Public lands were a particular focus in the comments people made about changes to the landscape. With the successive waves of occupation and land use, land that was previously 'public' land has been effectively alienated from local people through incorporation into new land-use industries. For example, at Argalong and Tumorrana most of the tensions were connected with the Forestry Commission's acquisitions of land for pine plantations. Some land that had previously been Crown reserve, such as the school ground at Argalong and some parts of the travelling stock routes, had become pine plantations.¹⁶ Within the lifetime of my informants, transformations in land use had effectively restricted public rights of access to land and resources. Anger and grief were common responses. Many people felt that they had rights of use and access to these

¹⁴ Unpublished report, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service 1984.

¹⁵ Report on Aboriginal Sites in Tumut Shire, National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1987.

¹⁶ Lane 1997b.

places on the grounds of their family history in the country. Removal of these rights undermined aspects of their identity which were based on the past activities of themselves and their ancestors in those places.

Crown land reserves were particularly important in the lives of people who were not landholders. This was because they were more reliant on the resources of these lands than those who held their own land. Tommy Kent during his time as an itinerant gold miner at Argalong, and Kooris, Vince Bulger and Minnie Freeman, during their time on Brungle station, all experienced land in Crown reserves more closely and over a longer period than had landholders. Crown lands were also important as home sites for many people. At various times, people who could not afford to buy land were permitted to live on the reserve lands beside creeks. For example, Tommy Kent and his father and brother were able to lease a small piece of land for their hut in Ration Gully at Argalong during the 1930s. While working over creeks around Argalong for gold, they camped in the Crown land beside the watercourses. Vince Bulger and Minnie Freeman both recalled a Koori couple, Emma and Charlie Penrith, who were permitted to live on a small Crown reserve on the river bank near Brungle Bridge¹⁷ near to the property where Emma Penrith worked as a domestic servant.¹⁸

Those who did not own land sometimes indicated that they viewed reserves as places they could use for their own purposes and felt they had informal rights to use these places. Tommy Kent still used the reserves to collect fire wood.¹⁹ When he worked at Argalong in the 1930s, Tommy and his father and brother often killed native birds and animals to eat and supplemented this with steamed nettles for greens. The 'bush tucker' usually came from Crown lands. Vince Bulger described one reserve that we passed on the Wyangle Hill as 'reserved for me to get goannas' and explained how Kooris cooked goannas in underground ovens.²⁰

All the local people I interviewed conveyed a strong sense of obligations and responsibilities connected with the maintenance of Crown reserves. They were frequently critical of Government Pasture Protection Boards or lessees whom they considered responsible for maintenance activities such as mending fences and controlling noxious weeds and animal pests. Aubrey and Gloria McGillveray, who ran a small property on the river flats at Tarrabandra across the river from Brungle, complained about weeds spreading along roadside reserves at Tarrabandra. There is a long history of complaints of this kind throughout Australia dating back as early as the 1850s when landholders expressed concern about governments not controlling weeds in reserve lands.²¹ Landholders, local councils and Pastures Protection Boards are all obligated by the Local Government Act 1919 (No. 41) (NSW) to control weeds in lands for which they are responsible.²²

17. Tape transcript 034, p. 6.

18. This was probably during the 1930s and 40s.

19. Tape transcript 055-6, p. 5.

20. Field Notes VB 5/8/93, p. 1.

21. Wright 1989, p. 86.

22. Parsons and Cuthbertson 1992, p. 4.

Conclusion

The term 'community' has become topical in the rhetoric of ecologically sustainable development, along with frameworks for community participation in land management and restoration programs. Movements such as Landcare, which arose in rural Australia in the mid 1980s, and has since expanded to take in community based projects in urban areas, rely upon the motivations of local people to address land degradation problems in areas for which they feel a sense of responsibility.²³ Landcare is related to a shift in government approaches to land management towards a greater emphasis on local people as agents for change, recognising that they have a greater capacity to address some forms of land degradation than have government agencies. However, the rhetoric of community consultation and participation needs to be matched by a better understanding of local environmental knowledge and local perspectives on environmental change.

Local people accumulate knowledge about the country both from prior generations and from their own experiences, and this knowledge is closely related to aspects of their identity which are vested in the landscape. Much of this knowledge is untapped by professionals in newer land-use industries, who usually have broader understandings about the causes and processes of change, but lack a knowledge base specific to the country which they manage. The perspectives of local people provide important information about both environmental and social impacts of new forms of land use. For some places, local people may be the only readily available source of information about changes to that land during their lifetime. Their recollections can be important supplements to sources that are more general, such as historical records and scientific understandings of the causes and processes of environmental change.

Clearly there are important connections between local environmental knowledge and perspectives on change and the sense of rights and responsibilities that people feel towards land. These sentiments are closely linked to personal, family and cultural history. In the Tumut region of New South Wales I detected both similarities and differences between Aboriginal and settler sentiments about land with the most obvious difference being in perceptions of ownership and rights to land. However, this paper has barely scratched the surface of a rich and complex web of emotions about land, history and identity. A better understanding of these interconnections and how they apply in different cultural and geographic contexts is very much needed in order to set environmental change in a human context and to relate changes occurring now to a long history of human influence and activity in Australian landscapes.

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Christie Palmerston: A reappraisal

R.M.W. Dixon

George Watson or Nyiyija (c1899–1991) was a magnificent indigenous scholar. He was well-versed in the language, legends, songs and customs of his own Dulgubarra Mamu people, from east of Innisfail in northern Queensland. He also had a useful knowledge of Waribarra Mamu, Jirrbal, Girramay and Ngajan (other dialects of what I call the Dyirbal language). George was one of my main teachers and my close friend from 1964 until his death. He recorded more than 20 texts and traditional stories, his own life story (in three long instalments), other historical narratives, an account of olden-day medicines and the like. He helped in the compilation of a fair-sized dictionary across ten dialects of Dyirbal, with equivalents supplied in the 'mother-in-law' avoidance style for most words from the everyday language style. Together with biologist Tony Irvine, we identified about 700 species of flora, and documented their uses. And George explained the grammar to me, and answered all of my questions.¹

George's birth was the result of a casual encounter between his Mamu mother, Jar-rabirran, and a white carrier, Arthur Watson. As George told the story, his mother had intended to kill him at birth (the fate of most 'half-caste' babies at that time and place) but her sister intervened and said she would bring George up with Polly, her own 'half-caste' child. In fact George spent most of his early years with his mother's father, Nyaywi, who passed on the age-old inheritance of his people—how the world came to be as it is, the uses of important plants in the rain forest, and how one should behave in the Mamu way.

Over the years that I knew George he talked often of his grandfather Nyaywi and of the life they lived together around Jordan's Creek (a tributary of the South Johnstone River) in the jungle between Ravenshoe and Millaa Millaa, North Queensland. Early on, I enquired about George's grandmother, Nyaywi's wife. 'I never knew her', George replied, 'she was shot by Palmerston, before I was born. Palmerston used to come and shoot up a whole camp of blackfellows, those that didn't manage to run off into the scrub. He got my grandmother, had an intercourse with her, and then shot her dead'.

Christie Palmerston had been born about 1850 (place and parentage unknown). In 1869 he was charged with theft at Rockhampton and sentenced to jail for two years. In 1878 Palmerston was advertised as wanted by the Cairns police for an unspecified fel-

¹ See the published grammar, Dixon (1972), and an informal account of doing linguistic fieldwork in the area in Dixon (1983).

ony. On the positive side, he marked out tracks from the inland mineral fields to the coast—from the Hodgkinson Gold Fields to Port Douglas, and from Herberton to Mourilyan (near Innisfail, then called Geraldton). He styled himself 'Christie Palmerston, Explorer'. He has a reputation among the white population as an intrepid traveller, who 'opened up' the country. The Aborigines knew him as a bloody murderer.

George and I had long planned to document the story of Palmerston, but didn't get around to it until 15 July 1984. This was the last text George recorded and it was shorter than the others. He was about 85 years old at the time and drifted into senility just a couple of years later. Still, the essence of the story is crystal clear.

Translation of the Palmerston story, as told by George Watson

(The full text of Watson's story is included at the end of this article.)

Palmerston, he was going around with Dungginyu (called in English Paddy One-hand or Paddy Brooks). Dungginyu was leading him around (acting as a guide through the jungle); they came to our camp back here and saw my grandmother.

Palmerston raped her; soon after he shot her with a gun.

Then my grandfather (Nyaywi) returned, and called out 'Where's my wife from here?'

One of Nyaywi's friends replied, 'Palmerston killed here, down river there, at Garru (a place on the South Johnstone River)'.

'Oh yes?' Nyaywi replied.

'Yes. Dungginyu came with Palmerston, brought him here, and Palmerston frightened us away. But Palmerston grabbed her, and raped her over there, and shot her. It's a pity you didn't come back from your trip, earlier. You might have saved her. Shall we go and kill Dungginyu in revenge?'

Nyaywi answered, 'No. It doesn't matter, ignore him for the time being! Just let it go for now! She's dead'.

'Aren't you angry?'

'No.'

Nyaywi's friend replied, 'Alright, but Dungginyu will keep on leading Palmerston around to rape and murder more of our people'.

Nyaywi insisted, 'Ignore him for a while! Later on we'll take revenge on Dungginyu, who was left behind by Palmerston when he returned to Innisfail. We will soon kill him in revenge. We will spit a curse at him, and as a result he will die'.

Nyaywi's friend said, 'Alright, but surely we should get together a posse to go for him, to kill Dungginyu'.

Nyaywi said, 'No, let him go for now. Ignore him for a while!'

The friend asked, 'Aren't you angry?'

'No. I'll stay here for a while longer. I'm not angry.'

'Will we be all squared up, talking to all of them?'

Nyaywi explained, 'Bye and bye I'll spit a curse at all of them. So that they (Dungginyu and his group) will be dead and gone'.

Comment

This story epitomises Nyaywi's attitude to life and death. It was impossible to kill Palmerston since he lived in Innisfail, and when he ventured into the forest he was heavily armed and always alert. But Nyaywi's friend suggested that they should take their revenge on Palmerston's guide, Dungginyu—seek him out and kill him. Nyaywi knew that such a course would court trouble; Dungginyu's people would then be likely to undertake a revenge attack on Nyaywi's people. He preferred a different path. Nyaywi was an Aboriginal shaman (so called 'Aboriginal doctor') possessed of extra-human powers. He planned to blow a curse at Dungginyu and his associates, as a result of which they would die inconspicuously.

Palmerston's diaries, and a number of documents associated with his career, have recently been published in a volume *Christie Palmerston, Explorer*, by Paul Savage.² This is of mixed value. In one way it is most useful, making available the journals and other source material.³ In another way it is amazing, with Savage attempting to explain away or justify Palmerston's evil ways. Savage explains the necessity for Palmerston's frequent murder of Aborigines:

Towards any who resisted or rebelled against subordination to European requirements, or who stood in the way of European goals, utter ruthlessness was legitimate, even mandatory. In his diaries Palmerston disclosed actions and, in his *Figaro* interview, attitudes which would be outrageous in an Australian today. At that time they were not exceptional.⁴

He then comments:

Although none of these incidents can be regarded as exceptional, it is conceivable that they occurred with unusual frequency in Christie Palmerston's journeys: that he was especially prone to shoot. There is some evidence to support that conclusion. Such incidents occur in all his diaries. ... On his return journey from Herberton to Mourilyan in 1882 Palmerston had repeated armed clashes with local Aborigines, whereas Douglas passed through the same area a few weeks earlier without one.⁵

Palmerston used Aboriginal guides, who stayed with him partly out of fear. There is no doubt that he was trigger-happy, and would shoot on sight. Certainly he was attacked by Aboriginal groups, who wanted to kill him before he could kill any more of them. But—and this is the story of the whole take-over of Australia—the gun is mightier than the spear.

Palmerston's nastiness was by no means confined to his behaviour towards Aborigines. After he himself discovered gold on the Russell River in 1886 there came the inevitable rush. Palmerston then set up a protection racket, demanding one pound

² Savage 1989. A second edition, Savage 1992, adds additional material but nothing that is relevant for this paper.

³ Although it must be noted that many of the 'explanatory' footnotes are misleading or erroneous. For instance, we are told on p. 132 that edible wood grubs are called "Jumbur" in the local language; in fact the name is Jambun. On p. 131 Palmerston mentions 'the full-sounding voice of the scrub turkey' but a note says, "Dr Catton reports that the scrub turkey does not make any call"; in fact, the scrub turkey does make a sonorous grunting sound.

⁴ Savage 1989, p. 30; 1992, p. 33.

⁵ *ibid.*

per head from each Chinese digger on the field, 'using armed Aborigines to back the demand, he permitted no-one to leave the field until he had paid up. He also forcibly prevented Chinese from bringing any meat on to the field in competition with the butchery he had established himself'. Savage the apologist states, 'If this was illegal extortion, it was remarkably modest in scale and legalistic in form'. One Chinese did bring a suit against Palmerston before the Police Magistrate in Innisfail; the magistrate found the charges proved. Savage explains this as due to the 'eccentric views' of the magistrate.

Palmerston's journals are probably accurate in describing his encounters with Aborigines. It is likely that George Watson's maternal grandmother was raped and murdered during the 'South Johnstone trip', 12-23 July 1886. An account of this was published in the *Queensland Figaro* in 1887 and is reprinted in Savage's book.⁶ Palmerston identifies two of his 'boys' (i.e. Aborigines) as 'Younganoo' and 'Nurrimpee'. It is probable that 'Younganoo' is Palmerston's attempt to transcribe the name Dungginyu (identified as his guide in George Watson's narrative). There were two encounters with Aborigines on this trip:

a) 20 July 1886—'Here we were surprised by a hostile tribe of Aborigines that had been watching our movements the preceding day. Although they came upon us rather suddenly, a few shots soon dispersed them'.

b) 22 July 1886—'Later on, we topped a high spur, along the summit ran a large and freshly-used native path, going about east, which we followed till 3 p.m., when it led us straight into an Aborigines' camp. We saw the blacks before they observed us, and when I spoke to them they crashed through the jungle in the most terror-impressed disorder...'

Although we cannot be certain, it is most likely that 22 July 1886 was the date of the rape and summary murder of Nyaywi's wife. This would have been about 13 years before George Watson was born. And it was just on 98 years later that George set down the story on tape.

The entry on Palmerston in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*⁷ includes the following: 'Respected as a consummate bushman, Palmerston was on unusually close terms with the Aborigines whose allegiance he won by not interfering with their women and by his firmness and skill as a shot'. One part of this needs to be rewritten.

6. Savage 1989, pp. 181-9; 1992, pp. 190-8.

7. Bolton 1984.

The Palmerston story, told by George Watson in the Mamu dialect of Dyirbal

(Watson's Mamu account of Palmerston's actions was recorded on 15 July 1984 at Boogan, near Innisfail, Queensland.⁸)

1. Bamajin^a / balay bayi bayi-rri-nyu^b Dungginyu^c-ngunjin-da/
 name THERE HE twist-REF-PAST name-GEN-LOC
 Palmerston, he was going around with Dungginyu.
2. Dungginyu bayi bagul munda-munda-nga-nyu/ ngana-ngu
 name HE HIM-DAT REDUP-lead-APASS-PAST WE-GEN
 mija-gu bani-nyu/ yalu-ngarru/ ngaygu
 camp-DAT come-PAST TO.HERE MY
 gumburrin-an.gu bura-nga-ygu/
 mother's mother-DAT see-APASS-PURP
 Dungginyu was leading him around (as a guide through the jungle); [they] came to
 our camp back here and saw my grandmother.
3. Banggul balan wadi-n/ gilul minba-li/ gama-nggu/
 HE+ERG HER rape-PAST bye-and-bye shoot-PURP gun-INST
 He (Palmerston) raped her; soon after he shot her, with a gun.
4. Anyja ngagirrin ngurba-nyu nganba-nga-ygu/
 NEW TOPIC mother's.father return-PAST call.out-APASS-PURP
 Then [my] grandfather (Nyaywi) returned, and called out:
5. 'Wunyjan yangum ngaygu?'/
 WHERE+FEM FROM.HERE MY
 'Where's my [wife] from here?'
6. 'Bamajin-du minba-n/ balay-balbulu/
 name-ERG shoot-PAST THERE-LONG.WAY.DOWNRIVER
 Garru-ngga'/
 place-LOC
 [One of Nyaywi's friends replied:] 'Palmerston killed her, down river there, at Garru
 (a place on the South Johnstone River).'
7. 'Ngayi?'/
 yes
 'Oh yes?' [Nyaywi replied].
8. 'Nga, Dungginyu-gu bani-ma-n yalu-mba-n/
 yes name-ERG come-COM-PAST TO.HERE-TR.VB-PAST
 ngana-n.gu yarrnga-nga-ygu /
 WE-DAT frighten away-APASS-PURP
 'Yes, Dungginyu came with him, brought him here, and he frightened us away.

8. The following phonetic conventions are followed: *j* for laminal stop, *ny* for laminal nasal, *ng* for dorso-velar nasal, *n.g* for *n* followed by *g*, *rr* for apical trill, *r* for semi-retroflex rhotic continuant, / for the end of an intonation group.

Abbreviations used in examples are: APASS, antipassive; COM, comitative; DAT, dative; ERG, ergative; FEM, feminine; GEN, genitive; IMP, imperative; INCH, inchoative (intransitive) verbaliser; INST, instrumental; LOC, locative; PURP, purposive; REDUP, reduplicated; REF, reflexive; REL, relative clause marker; TR.VB, transitive verbaliser.

9. 'Ngana warrjila-bi-n jinggali-nyu/ yalgay-gabun-da
WE scattered-INCH-PAST run-PAST path-ANOTHER-LOC
jinggali-nyu'/
run-PAST
'We all ran, scattering, all running in different directions.'
10. 'Banggul nyima-li/ anyja balay-bawal banggul balan
HE-ERG grab-PURP THEN THERE-LONG.WAY HE-ERG HER
wadi-n/ anyja minba-n/
rape-PAST THEN shoot-PAST
'But he grabbed her, and raped her over there, and shot her.'
11. 'Nginda gulu ngurba-yarra-nyu bani-nyu/
YOU NOT return-START-PAST come-PAST
'[It's a pity] you didn't come back [from your trip, earlier, you might have saved her].
12. 'Ngurri ngana yanu-li balga-lnga-ygu^e bagul?'/
IN TURN WE go-PURP kill-APASS-PURP him-DAT
'Shall we go and kill him [Dungginyu] in revenge?'
13. 'Yimba/ miju-gani mugu-ban/
no take.no.notice of-KEEP.DOING-IMP NO MATIER-EMPHATIC
mugu-ban jarra/ anyja guyi-bi-ngu^f/
NO MATIER-EMPHATIC let.go-IMP NEW.TOPIC dead-INCH-REL
[Nyaywi answered:] 'No. It doesn't matter, ignore him for the time being! Just let it go
for now! She's dead.'
14. 'Nginda bayi^g gulu guli-bi-ny?'/
YOU HE NOT ANGRY-INCH-NON.PAST
'Aren't you angry?'
15. 'Yimba'
no
'No.'
16. 'Ngayi/ Dungginyu-gu bayi munda-munda-li'/
alright name-ERG HIM REDUP-lead-PURP
[Nyaywi's friend replied:] 'Alright, but Dungginyu will keep on leading him
[Palmerston] around [to rape and murder more of our people]'.
'
17. 'Miju-gani/ gilū bayi ngurri
take.no.notice of-KEEP.DOING-IMP bye.and.bye HIM IN TURN
nganaji/ banggul bamajin-du galga-ngu/
WE HE+ERG name-ERG leave-REL
[Nyaywi insisted:] 'Ignore him for a while! Later on we'll take revenge on him
(Dungginyu), who was left behind by Palmerston (when he returned to Innisfail).
18. 'Ngana bayi ngurri gilū guyi-ma-li/
WE HIM IN TURN bye.and.bye dead-TR.VB-PURP
buybu-li/ buga-bi-li'/
spit.a.curse.at-PURP dead-INCH-PURP
'We will soon kill him in revenge. We will spit a curse at him, and as a result he will die.'

19. 'Ngu/ ngana margany-bi-li yanu-li bagul/
 alright WE posse-INCH-PURP go-PURP HIM-DAT
 dungginyu-nyan.gu balga-lnga-ygu'/
 name-DAT kill-APASS-PURP
 [Nyaywi's friend said:] 'Alright, [but surely] we should get together a posse to go for him, to kill Dungginyu.'
20. 'Yimba/ janyja jarra/ miju-gani'/
 no now let go-IMP take.no.notice of-KEEP.DOING-IMP
 [Nyaywi said:] 'No, let him go for now. Ignore him for a while!'
21. 'Nginda bayi gulu guli^h waynyji-ny?'
 YOU HE NOT angry rise.up-NON.PAST
 [The friend asked:] 'Aren't you angry?'
22. 'Yimba/ ngaja gilu jadanggu nyina-ygu/ ngaja gulu
 no I bye.and.bye long period stay-PURP I NOT
 guli waynyji-ny./
 angry rise.up-NON.PAST
 'No, I'll stay here a while longer. I'm not angry.'
23. 'Gilu-ma yalbaraⁱ nyina-ny/
 bye.and.bye-QUESTION squared.up stay-NON.PAST
 wurra-nja-ny bagumanggan-an.gu'/
 speak-TO.ALL-NON.PAST THEY-DAT
 'Will [we] be all squared up, talking to all of them?'
24. 'Ngaja gilu bagu.manggan-an.gu buybu-lnga-ygu/
 I bye.and.bye THEY-DAT spit.curse.at-APASS-PURP
 'Bye and bye I'll spit a curse at all of them.'
25. 'Munya-bi-li buga-bi-li'
 finished-INCH-PURP rotten-INCH-PURP
 'So that they [Dungginyu and his group] will be dead and gone.'

Notes to the story

- a *Bamajin* is the name Palmerston, rendered into Mamu phonology.
- b The verb *bayi-l* means 'twist, stir round, wring'; here, with the reflexive suffix, *bayi-rri-y* means 'go around with', 'hang out with'.
- c Dungginyu (also called Paddy One-hand or Paddy Brooks) came from the tribal group near Innisfail, which was hostile to Nyaywi's group.
- d The verb *yarrnga-l* is 'frighten away' or 'chase away'. Its subject can be a flood, a fire, a fierce dog, or (as here) a gun-happy whiteman.
- e The verb *balga-l* means 'hit with a rigid implement, held in the hand' or 'kill' (a normal consequence of being hit in such a manner). See also line 19.
- f There are two ways of unambiguously saying 'kill'—through adding transitive verbaliser -*ma-l* to noun *guyi* 'spirit' or to adjective *buga* 'rotten'. Similarly, 'die' involves adding inchoative verbaliser -*bi-l* to either *guyi* or *buga*. See also lines 18 and 25.
- g Here (and in line 21) the intransitive subject phrase includes both *nginda* 'you' and the masculine determiner *bayi* (in other contexts, equivalent to 'he'), with the same reference.
- h Adjective *guli* 'angry' and verb *waynyji-l* 'go up, rise up' here form an idiom 'get angry'.
- i Adjective *yalbara* means 'all squared up after a dispute', 'freed of previous troubles', 'on a normal plane again'.

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On the ethno-ecology of mallee root-water

James C. Noble and Richard G. Kimber

The eucalypts of the mallee species thrive in deserts and droughts, but contain water in their roots which only the native inhabitants of the country can discover...A very long root such as I have mentioned might give nearly a bucketful of water; but woe to the white man who fancies he can get water out of the mallee...it is an Aboriginal art at any time or place to find it.

Ernest Giles¹

Having cut the root into six-feet lengths and tied them in a bundle, he looped his belt around the bundle and hung it vertically from a tree, the lower ends being placed in the water bucket...Half an hour later we had our first drink and though the water to me seemed slightly woody, it was quite good...Tuck had found these trees often of great value to him. 'Many's the time they've been all I've had—an' don't I know it', he added grimly.

Archer Russell²

There is now an extensive literature, based primarily on early historical accounts, describing the ability of Aborigines to live in environments which, when viewed through European eyes, were regarded as quite inhospitable and virtually uninhabitable because of the paucity of drinking water. The frustration experienced by European explorers seeking water in these landscapes is epitomised by an excerpt from Ernest Giles' journal of his 1872 expedition into Central Australia:

We had wandered amongst such frightful rocks and ungodly places, that I began to think it was useless to search any further for water, but yet the natives were about, burning the grass, and raising fresh fires in all directions; it appeared to me they must get their water from the hollow spouts of some trees, and from the roots of others...I should greatly like to catch a native; I'd walk him off alongside my horse, until he took me to water.³

As European exploration of the hinterland gained momentum during the nineteenth century, expedition journals increasingly provided details of the comprehensive

1. Giles 1889, 1, p. 45.

2. Russell 1934, p. 101.

3. Giles 1875, pp. 42, 43.

Aboriginal knowledge of the ecology of these arid communities which enabled them to access various sources of drinking water during their periodic journeys.

Water is of basic importance for Aborigines and for all the natural species. It is no exaggeration to say that a great deal of their (traditional) everyday as well as religious life is focused on this particular theme...⁴

Such knowledge was particularly important in the semi-arid dunefields and sand-plains across much of central and southern Australia where many vegetation communities were dominated structurally, and floristically, by multi-stemmed mallee eucalypts (*Eucalyptus* spp.) (Figure 1). Here permanent sources of water in the form of natural wells⁵ and 'soaks' were comparatively rare because of the generally porous nature of the soils and resident Aborigines often relied instead on a particular source, the 'water mallee', to provide much of their drinking water. To the astonishment of early European observers, the roots of such mallees were seen to provide abundant quantities of clear, usually tasteless, drinking water shortly after being dug up by Aborigines.

After first describing the distribution of Aborigines throughout the mallee and the original perceptions of these landscapes by European explorers, the anatomy and morphology of eucalypt root systems will be briefly described before presenting some empirical data on the morphology of mallee root systems, root-water contents and stem xylem water potentials (ψ_x) obtained during ecological studies undertaken over a ten-year period (1977-87). These will also include root-water data obtained in collaboration with Aborigines in South Australian mallee country near Yalata. The results of these studies will finally be summarised and discussed in the context of a conceptual framework describing the development and distribution of water mallees.

Aborigines in the mallee

During the early part of the nineteenth century, anthropologists recognised a distinct group of Aborigines located along the lower Murray Valley:

The terms *Mallegoondeet* and *Millegoondeet* are very precise in their application, as indicating the men of the *Malle* country, or the inhabitants of the banks of the Murray, which is known for a very considerable portion of its stream, by the native name of *Mille*.⁶

The mallee dwellers of southeastern Australia were still recognised a century later by Tindale as constituting a distinct ecological group.⁷

The Ngarkat north of the Tatiara country on the borders of South Australia and Victoria were at home only in territory covered by low-growing mallee (*Eucalyptus* spp.) scrub, on whose water-bearing roots they were utterly dependent for liquid on an otherwise almost waterless karst plateau...The aborigines of the mallee scrub belt...[have] abilities as pragmatic ecologists...The Ngarkat people could tell by the stars when different plants were ready for harvesting and they made long journeys to get the food. Water was from mallee roots during these journeys.⁸

4. Berndt 1972, p. 179.

5. Cunningham 1973, pp. 365-9.

6. Parker 1854, p. 12.

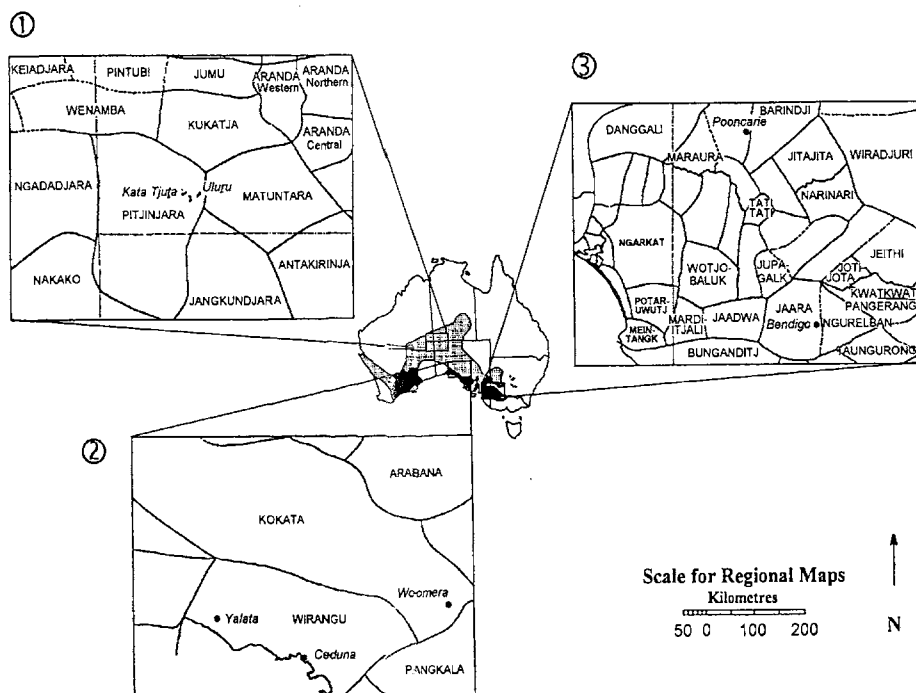
7. Tindale 1959, p. 41.

8. Tindale 1974, p. 134.

Unlike the more sedentary riverine groups, they often spent indefinite periods 'inside' until forced out by extended drought periods. They could then only gain access to perennial streams or permanent waterholes by following clearly defined paths designated by the riverine Aborigines who referred to the visitors as *Malikuunditj*,⁹ the same as *Malleegoondet*, and usually pronounced as 'Malleegunditch'.¹⁰

The distinctiveness, and ecological diversity, of the areas occupied by Aboriginal groups in the southeastern mallee are obvious in Figure 1 where there are clearly more distinct areas delineated in region 3. Whether this diversity reflects some degree of ecological specialisation amongst mallee dwellers, or whether it was due more to the presence of the Murray river, is uncertain. Nonetheless, the higher density of discrete Aboriginal groups in this Region (>30 compared with 5–10 in the other two Regions) suggests that Aboriginal people found these mallee/riverine regions far from unproductive. Tindale estimated average population size of most Aboriginal groups to be around 450;¹¹ the overall population carrying capacity of Region 3 appears to be substantially higher than the other two, possibly partly due to a more favourable climatic regime as well as a more productive riverine environment (Figure 2).

Figure 1 Locations of three sets of Aboriginal groups by region: Region 1, Region 2 and Region 3

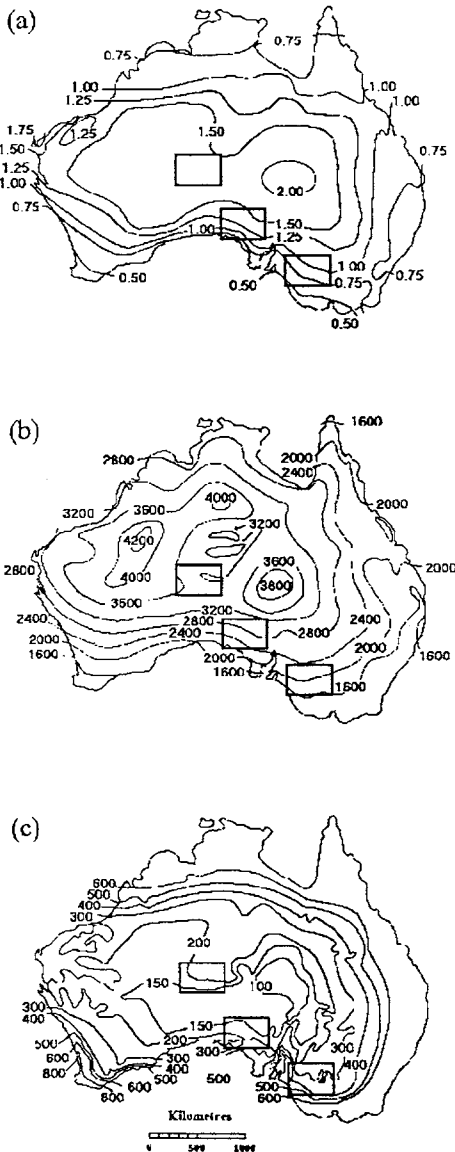


9. *ibid.*, pp. 62, 65.

10. The suffix '*gundidj*' simply indicates 'people from' and is found in many names of Aboriginal groups in Victoria, e.g. *Yambeet-gundidj* (L. Hercus, pers. comm.).

11. Tindale 1974, p. 110.

Figure 2 Locations of the three Aboriginal groups along three climatic gradsects (a) annual rainfall variability (<0.5 =low & >2.0 =high); (b) annual evaporation (mm), and (c) median annual rainfall (mm) (After Parkinson 1986)



In this study the three regions were deliberately selected along a northwest-southeast axis to compare Aboriginal groups in areas differing in relative importance of mallee communities. Region 1 exemplifies an area where mallee was significant but not predominant; Region 2 an area where part only comprised mallee-dominant areas; and finally Region 3 typifies an area where mallee vegetation was generally predominant throughout. The regions were also aligned along a rainfall gradient-oriented transect, with the least arid located in the southeast (Region 3) and the most arid (Region 1) at the north-western end of the transect.

Malikuunditj was probably a regional name used in a rather loose way by several distinct groups. The Wotjobaluk, for example, whose base was primarily the Lake Hindmarsh area (Figure 1, Region 3) where there was abundant water and food, might have used the word when referring to others in the same Region such as the Ngarkat to the west, implying that they were from an area of mallee scrub with inferior resources. The latter, in turn, could have used the word when referring to the Wotjobaluk, as well as other tribes such as the Baraparapa to the east in what is now the Cohuna district of northern Victoria, because they felt their own productive areas of country the best in the Region.

Although use of the term *Malikuunditj* was not recorded by Tindale in other mallee areas of

Australia, 'mallee' was certainly widely used in the context of the water mallee. The Kokata territory north-west of Woomera for example (Figure 1, Region 2), an area described by Tindale as '...some of the most inhospitable country in Australia',¹² is drawn out in another ecotonal relationship along the 'belt of forested mallee country' since the water-bearing mallee roots...

determine not only their patterns of living but also influence their need for sufficient amicable relationships with surrounding peoples to enable them to repair to permanent water supplies in times of drought.¹³

The Kokata comprised a community of around 450 people who migrated south from an area northwest of Lake Gairdner before settling in the Woomera area in the second half of the last century. Unlike the few large groups of 600 or so people such as the Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, Walpiri and Wadjari, they were unable to exploit a wider variety of foods, especially plant foods, and were thus unable to hold a larger group of people together as a single community.¹⁴ Wirangu people—the original inhabitants of the Yalata area—often talk about 'water trees', and mention particularly the 'red mallee' *ngapari*, also called *gangu* or 'kung mallee', which they say mainly occurred in the northern parts of their country. Kokata people came gradually into the area and continued the practice of using the red mallee.¹⁵

There is little doubt therefore that most Aboriginal groups, including those of non-mallee areas, throughout semi-arid and arid Australia were aware of the existence of drinking water in the roots of certain mallee eucalypts, as well as individuals of other tree species. However, local knowledge of the general proximity of such trees remained of paramount importance when travelling along established trade routes.¹⁶ Aboriginal people travelling through unfamiliar territory were still exposed to considerable risk, especially during hot weather. In October 1963, a family group of six Aborigines near Laverton in Western Australia attempted to walk to Cundeelee, a locality never previously visited by any of them.

The group travelled west along the Laverton–Maralinga track and turned south at Neal Junction. The going became hard and they found no waterholes. The water trees petered out.

Three of the group subsequently perished and the rest struggled on until much later they...found some water trees, dug the roots with sticks, and sucked the sap from them.¹⁷

European perceptions of the mallee

Aborigines clearly used, and still use, the term 'mallee' in a quite specific sense to describe a particular individual within a local population of multi-stemmed eucalypts. In contrast, Europeans have generally used 'mallee' in a much broader sense to define either plant communities dominated by populations of multi-stemmed eucalypts, or

12. *ibid.*, p. 213.

13. *ibid.*, p. 114.

14. *ibid.*, pp. 110–11

15. L. Hercus, pers. comm. *Ngapa* is the word for water throughout the Lake Eyre Basin.

16. Johnston 1941, pp. 33–5.

17. Allan 1964, p. 34.

geographical regions, as in the Victorian Mallee. Despite the large mallee regions across southern Australia, substantial areas of it also occur throughout central areas of the continent. These were first described by Giles in the mid-1870s in somewhat indifferent terms after travelling through

the dreary scrubs covered with the normal timber—that is to say, a mixture of the *Eucalyptus dumosa* or mallee, casuarinas or black oaks, the sight of the country from any of these hills is truly frightful; it seemed as though the scrubs were to end only with our journey.¹⁸

Part of this antipathy was due to the underlying 'hideous spinifex, which both we and the horses dread like a pestilence'.¹⁹

These communities were subsequently described twenty years later in more prosaic style by Baldwin Spencer, leader of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia in 1894:

For the first time also we met with *Eucalyptus gamophylla*, one of the Mallee gums, that is, those which have a bole or bossy stem often not conspicuous above the ground from which arise a number of small branches.²⁰

This coppicing growth habit of mallee eucalypts, when combined with the confinement of the terminal foliage to a narrow canopy zone, characterises the distinctive appearance or *facies* of these unique communities which have traditionally been regarded as transitional between the arid or Eremaean zone and the sclerophyll forests of more humid regions.²¹

One of the earliest references in European literature occurred in Westgarth's *Australia Felix*,²² published in 1848, describing how the '...Wimmera...traverses a region of sand and heath, succeeded by jungle and mallee scrub...[Note] *Eucalyptus dumosa*.' Europeans however, initially spelt the word in remarkably different ways. *The Australian National Dictionary*²³ records an even earlier newspaper reference in *The Standard* (Melbourne) of 7 June, 1845 (2/6)—'The stock...are with all possible expedition driven into an almost impenetrable scrub, termed by the natives "Malley"'. Later, *The Port Phillip Herald* of 16 March, 1847 (2/5) recorded how 'The place of habitation of this interesting reptile [*sc.* the Mindai] is the Marlis or as it is perhaps more properly called in Mr Ham's new chart—the Mallee Scrub'. Kenyon later referred to Ham's map of 1846 which '...gives the present spelling and states that it was the name given by the blacks to the *Eucalyptus Dumosa* (*sic*)'.²⁴ Kenyon also described how Henry Wade, the surveyor responsible in 1847 for delineating the boundary line separating Victoria and South Australia, first spelt it 'Marlie' and later 'Marlee'.²⁵

While Edward Eyre was the first to record Aborigines extracting root-water from mallee eucalypts following his epic journey across southern Australia in 1840–1,²⁶

18. Giles 1889, II, p. 232.

19. *ibid* I, p. 56.

20. Spencer 1896, p. 59.

21. Wood 1929, p. 363.

22. Westgarth 1848, p. 27.

23. Ramson 1988, p. 383.

24. Kenyon 1916, p. 42.

25. *ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

Mitchell had earlier described Aborigines obtaining drinking water from roots without actually specifying the types of trees involved.²⁷ In Victorian mallee communities, early European observers such as Cairns²⁸ referred to 'weir mallee' while much later Massola²⁹ claimed water was '...also obtained from the roots of some of the eucalypts, which the natives called Weir-mallee.' Beveridge³⁰ described yearly journeys through '...the very barrenest portion of the barren Mallee Scrub' undertaken by Aborigines travelling to a dry lake whose sediments contained a bright red ochre used for decorating their bodies and 'opossum' cloaks. When their supplies of water contained in wallaby skin bags ran dry, they resorted to '...the root of a peculiar kind of mallee, which they call *weir*, from whence they obtain a supply of sweet and limpid water, even in the warmest weather'.

Ernest Giles and subsequent explorers, as well as early natural historians and anthropologists such as Stirling,³¹ also provided later accounts of water being extracted from roots of other trees including non-mallee eucalypts such as black box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*) and non-eucalypts such as desert kurrajong (*Brachychiton gregorii*) and needlewood (*Hakea leucoptera*). According to Anderson³² the latter tree is '...one of the western species from the fleshy roots of which water can be obtained, the aborigines digging up the roots and placing one end in slow fire.' This however, was the only reference seen in the literature regarding the use of fire to assist in the extraction of root water. References to root-water, and particularly mallee root-water, published over the past 163 years are shown in Appendix 1. Despite this extensive historical record, there are probably few, if any, non-Aboriginals today capable of identifying water mallees in the field with any degree of confidence.

Mallee root anatomy

The root is a fundamental component of the whole plant performing several major functions including anchoring the plant to the soil, absorbing any available nutrients and water present in the rhizosphere, as well as providing habitat for a wide range of soil micro-organisms. The close relationship between plant and soil originates with the primary root or radicle emerging from the germinating seed.

The radicle first emerges as a simple cylindrical structure but with subsequent secondary growth, particularly in perennial species, clear tissue differentiation occurs. These tissues, characterised by distinctive cell types, are comprehensively described in most botanical texts.³³ Secondary root growth following division of cambial or meristematic cells generally results in new cells maturing either as secondary xylem or as secondary phloem elements. In this paper attention will be focussed on those found in the xylem because they conduct water and minerals from absorbing root surfaces.

26. Eyre 1845, pp. 244, 254.

27. Mitchell 1839, pp. 196, 199.

28. Cairns 1858, pp. 22-5.

29. Massola 1966, p. 270.

30. Beveridge 1889, pp. 27-28.

31. Stirling 1896, pp. 65-66.

32. Anderson 1947, p. 14.

33. Esau 1977, pp. 215-54.

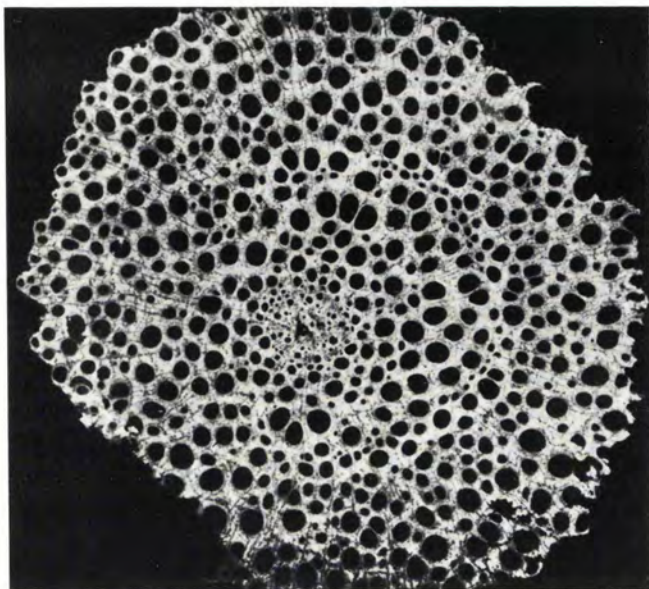


Figure 3 A small water-bearing root of the mallee *Eucalyptus transcontinentalis* (syn *E. oleosa*) from Ooldea, South Australia. The root was 5.5mm in diameter with an available pore area of 32.3% (after Cleland 1939).

The cells produced in the secondary xylem tissue are characteristically hard and heavily lignified vessel elements or tracheids in contrast to the thin-walled, delicate phloem elements. In mature mallee roots, xylem tissue develops through slight shortening and widening of individual cells combined with perforation, or even complete loss, of the end walls or septa. These modified cells ultimately form pipe-like structures called vessels (Figure 3)—the larger the plant, the larger the root and its constituent vessels, some reaching one metre in length and 8 mm in

diameter following secondary growth (D.J. Carr, pers. comm.).

Mallee root architecture

As an individual plant develops over time, the root system develops a particular morphology or architecture³⁴ which, whilst not necessarily species-specific, may often characterise a particular functional group or guild. These differences in morphological traits may contribute to an individual's ecological fitness enabling it to grow and reproduce more successfully than other plants in particular environments. The effectiveness of a root as a 'forager' for resources will depend strongly on its architecture although root systems are less rigidly programmed than shoot systems.³⁵

Root system dynamics of seedlings and annual plants can be readily quantified experimentally using hydroponics or root observation boxes (rhizotrons). However, they all have serious shortcomings since none realistically replicate the heterogeneous, three-dimensional nature of soil.³⁶ Three-dimensional studies of mature and large perennial, woody plants such as the mallee eucalypts, are extremely difficult to undertake in the field. Consequently the efforts required to safely excavate the substantial volumes of soil necessary to even partially expose individual root systems of established trees and shrubs,³⁷ are usually strenuously avoided.

34. Bell 1991, pp. 100–1.

35. Begon et al. 1990, pp. 94–5.

36. Harper et al. 1991, pp. 3–7.

37. Mackie-Dawson and Atkinson 1991, pp. 25–30.

Natural erosive processes occasionally expose the architecture of root systems to a considerable depth.³⁸ For example, root systems of mature mallee eucalypts can often be delineated following streambank erosion of cliffs along the Murray River. As shown in Fig. 4, there are two major types of roots in mallee eucalypts, shallow plagiotropic roots which extend horizontally, and deep geotropic roots.

The two root types are often discriminated on a functional basis however, as pointed out elsewhere,³⁹ much has still to be learnt about the functions of morphologically dissimilar roots in eucalypts. Geotropic roots are commonly called 'sinker roots' because their main functional attribute is generally ascribed to their ability to extract

soil moisture from as deep as 28m.⁴⁰

Tree and shrub species possessing this latter capability are commonly described as phreatophytes.



Figure 4 View of the root system of an established pointed-fruit mallee (*Eucalyptus socialis*) at 'Kerribee' west of Euston, N.S.W. showing horizontal 'feeder' roots and vertical 'sinker' roots.

An additional feature of mallee eucalypts is their ability to store soil moisture in significant quantities as free, gravitational water in shallow, lateral roots. Some individuals, because of the long vessels found within large roots, are capable of storing significant volumes of free, gravitational water. In some ways, this capacity to tap into water reserves at depth and then store it close to the surface is not unlike the phenomenon of hydraulic lift⁴¹ whereby subsoil moisture absorbed by deep roots is elevated and then released in the upper soil profile during the night to be later resorbed by roots during the following day. This nocturnal efflux of water from surface roots may also flush localised depletion zones surrounding roots thereby enhancing nutrient uptake in drying soils.⁴² By

measuring oxygen stable isotope ratios of water within plants, it should be possible at some future stage not only to determine the sources of water stored in mallee roots, but also to provide information on competitive interactions and water use patterns under natural conditions.⁴³

38. Cremer 1993, p. 43.

39. Tippet and O'Brien 1976, pp. 619-20.

40. Nulsen et al. 1986, p. 365.

41. Caldwell and Richards 1989, p. 1.

42. Dawson 1993, p. 573.

43. Walker and Richardson 1991, pp. 148-55; Ehleringer and Dawson 1992, pp. 1077-8.

Another phenomenon which has received very little attention for water relations of mallee eucalypts is root fusion. In a way, this resembles a form of clonal growth whereby two genetic individuals or 'genets' become a single physiological 'individual' because of significant interchange of water and nutrients. Root fusion has been recorded between mature trees of mountain ash (*E. regnans*) with living bark persisting on leafless stumps for at least 40 years where adjacent vigorous trees are growing within a radius of 1-2 metres.⁴⁴ Live stumps, where the bark growth has completely covered the top of the stumps, presumably due to root fusion, have also been observed by one of the authors (JCN) in softwood forests in eastern New South Wales.

Whether such linkages occur frequently, or at all, between mallee eucalypts has yet to be established but if they do occur, the ramifications for the growth and survival of linked plants in these arid climates could be profound. Studies of root systems in comparable Mediterranean-type communities in both Californian chaparral⁴⁵ and Chilean matorral⁴⁶ have found a low incidence of root fusion. These findings lend support to the hypothesis that root fusion is likely to have greater adaptive significance by providing increased anchoring in tree communities subjected to high winds, especially where root systems are relatively shallow because of either high water tables or bedrock close to the surface.⁴⁷

Mallee trees and shrubs in Western Australia effectively redistribute 8% of the annual rainfall with 3% lost as interception and 5% ending up as stem flow. On an individual shrub/tree basis however, around 15% of the rain falling on the canopy can be lost as interception while 25% flows down the stem.⁴⁸ This stemflow may enable significant accession of rainwater to subsoil moisture reserves via annular pathways of the rhizosphere surrounding sinker roots thereby circumventing any water repellence imposed by hydrophobic soils commonly found in mallee hummocks.⁴⁹

Field studies of water mallees

(i) Root-Water at Yalata, South Australia

In February 1981, preliminary field observations of water mallees were undertaken in collaboration with two local Aborigines, Messrs Jack May and Hugh Windlass, in mallee country approximately 30 km northwest of Yalata (31°29'S, 131°51'E). The first water mallee sampled was a large pointed mallee (*Eucalyptus socialis*) (Figure 5) bordering an extensive grassland plain dominated by speargrass (*Stipa* spp.).

After a brief preliminary examination of the tree and local surroundings, the two men, both of whom carried short steel bars or jemmies, then proceeded to slowly circle the tree at a radius of approximately 10-15 metres out from its base while closely examining the soil surface. On sighting an imperceptible surface irregularity, presumably in the form of a very slight rise, the jemmy was then jabbed into the ground (Figure 6a). An underlying root was found, the jemmy was used to scrape away the surface soil,

44. Ashton 1975, p. 877.

45. Saunier and Wagle 1965, p. 750; Kummerow et al. 1977, pp. 174-6.

46. Hoffman and Kummerow 1978, p. 67.

47. Keeley 1988, p. 366.

48. Nulsen et al. 1986, pp. 367-8.

49. Bond 1964, p. 123; Anon. 1972, p. 2; Wetherby 1984, pp. 1-2.



Figure 5 A water mallee (*Eucalyptus socialis*) growing on the margin of an open area in a mallee community near Yalata, South Australia.

and the exposed root was then severed with a tomahawk. The end of the severed root was then grasped in both hands and prised up until approximately four metres of root lay on the surface (Figure 6b). The excavated root was cut into four segments, each c. 1 m in length, which were then held vertically over a billy to collect the freely running water (Figure 6c). Approximately two minutes later when only occasional drips were falling, the segments were placed in large, double-thickness plastic bags and sealed with rubber bands.

Water volumes collected in the billy were recorded using a measuring cylinder and water samples placed in small plastic containers for later chemical analysis. Root samples were likewise taken from two smaller water mallees and from three non-water mallees nearby (duplicate roots from each replicate shrub).

Four surface-soil samples (0–10 cm) were also taken adjacent to each root sampled and sealed in smaller, double-thickness plastic bags. Soil and root samples were weighed before and after oven-drying (24 hours at 95°C) upon returning to the laboratory. Total root length of each sample was also measured.

Percent water content of water and control mallees at Yalata did not differ significantly (Figure 7a); however significantly more water per unit length of root was held by water mallees (Figure 7b) due to their larger roots and constituent vessels. Although the root-water was quite clear when it was first collected, it rapidly became brownish after an hour or so of exposure to sunlight, due possibly to precipitated tannins although the taste remained unaffected. Tietkens⁵⁰ also recorded that water obtained from desert oak (*Casuarina decaisneana*) in Central Australia '...is cool—quite cool—colourless and refreshing; but I have noticed that upon exposure to the air for a few hours it becomes a



Figure 6a: On sighting the root, the jemmy was jabbed into the ground.



Figure 6b: About four metres of severed root were prised out of the ground.



Figure 6c: The root is held over the billy to collect the water.

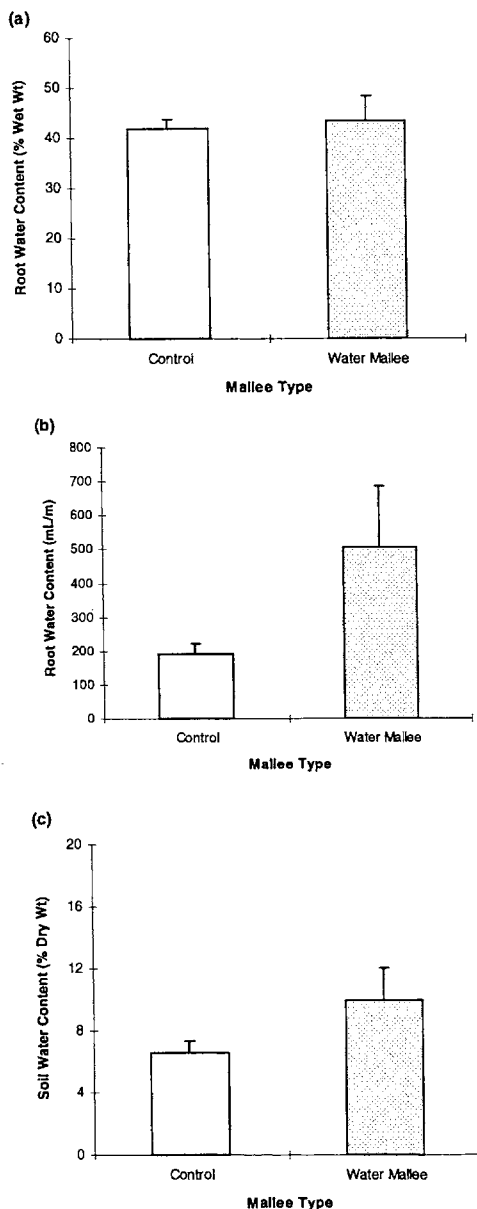


Figure 7 (a) Percent root-water contents of water and control mallees at Yalata; (b) comparative root-water volumes per metre root segment; and (c) comparative surface-soil (0–10 cm) water contents adjacent to root sampling sites

pale-brown colour, such as would be noticed in water into which a piece of bark had been dropped'.

Subsequent analysis of root-water samples obtained from the three water mallees at Yalata showed a surprisingly wide range in both pH (5.27, 6.81 and 7.23) and electrical conductivity (451, 570 and 1,166 μS respectively), possibly reflecting variations in site quality. The best water quality was undoubtedly that obtained from roots of the first water mallee sampled (Figure 5).

The water contents of surface soils adjacent to water mallees at Yalata were also higher than those adjoining control mallees (Figure 7c). Whether these differences could be attributed to hydraulic lift and efflux of water from surface roots is not known. Tracer techniques such as deuterium (D_2O) labelling of roots⁵¹ may resolve the issue. Differences in soil depth or more efficient capture of surface runoff may also have an influence on localised soil water storage.

(ii) Root-water at Pooncarie, New South Wales

Several large paddocks on 'Birdwood' Station near Pooncarie (33°24'S, 142°36'E), a site of intensive field studies into mallee fire ecology,⁵² were surveyed from internal roads and tracks nine months later to determine

50. Reported also in Magarey 1895, p. 650.

51. Caldwell et al. 1991, pp. 423–4.

52. Noble 1989a, pp. 170–8; 1989b, pp. 170–5; Noble and Vines 1993, pp. 271–6.



Figure 8 (a) Above, a putative water-mallee (*Eucalyptus socialis*) located on 'Birdwood', Pooncarie, N.S.W.; and (b) Below, gravitational water running freely from a relatively small root of the same mallee tree.



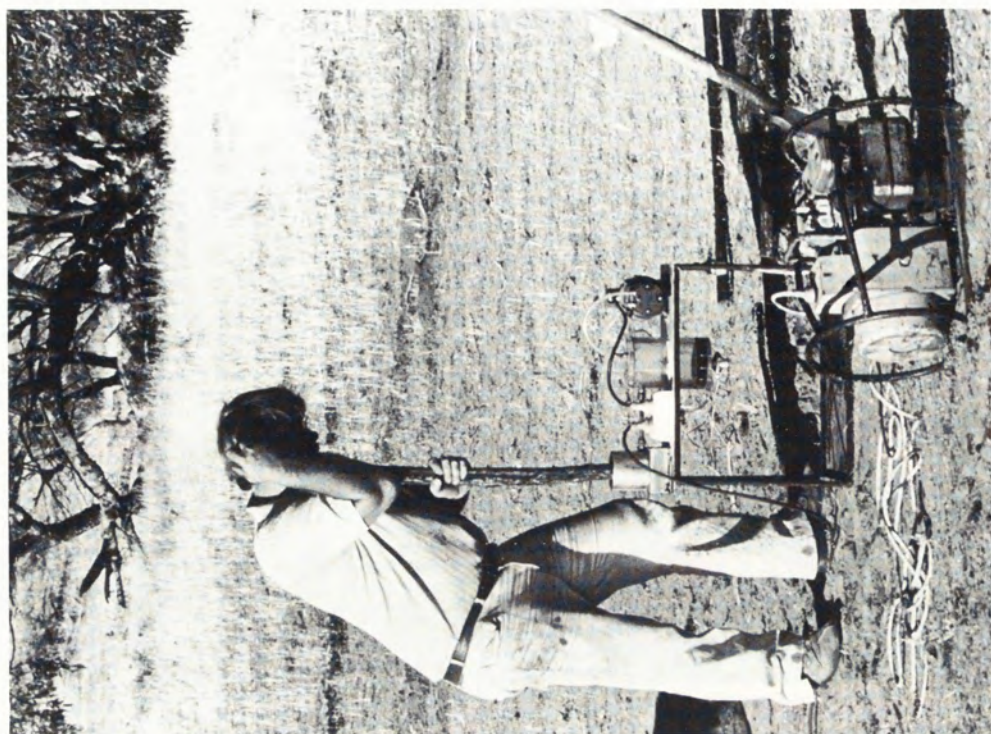


Figure 9a (left)
and 9b (right)



whether the information gained from Yalata could be used to identify potential water mallees. This pilot survey resulted in only four individuals being selected for testing. One particular mallee (*Eucalyptus socialis*) in Back Paddock (Figure 8a and 8b) possessed lateral roots that readily provided freely running water. In addition, the discovery of a substantial portion of a grinding stone near the base suggested that the tree may have been an important Aboriginal site in the past.

Some mallee root-water can be obtained by blowing into one end of a severed root (Figure 9a) although it is hard work. Accordingly, a zero vacuum pump was constructed using a small (2 Kva) portable generator driven by a 189 W petrol engine (see Figure 9b). Root-water extracted passed through a 12 mm diameter tube into a thick-walled perspex cylinder (10 cm diameter and 20 cm deep) where it could be bled directly into a measuring cylinder through a tap.

Root-water content obtained per vacuum indicated clearly that the roots of the first water mallee, where the stone artefact was found, contained considerably more gravitational water than the other water mallees despite the latter having higher water contents per unit root length (Table 1).

Table 1 Root-water obtained from four water mallees at 'Birdwood' station, Pooncarie, NSW

	Water extracted per vacuum (mL/m root)	Vacuum-ex- tracted water (% total water content)	Total water content after vacuum extraction & oven-drying (% wet wt)	Total root- water content (mL/m)
Back paddock				
large root (5 cm)	70.7	24.2	55.4	292
small root (2 cm)	7.5	7.1	38.5	106
Mallee Vale Tank	36.7	9.6	45.3	382
Mallee Vale Soak	22.0	9.4	51.0	235
Mallee Vale Flat				
10 m from base	17.0	4.8	33.6	558
15 m from base	58.0	10.3	34.4	563
19 m from base	6.5	2.4	31.8	275

(iii) Physiological benefits

Any ecological or physiological benefits resulting from these comparatively high root-water contents are difficult to ascertain. Given that wildfires generally occur in the summer when temperatures are high and soil water levels are low, one reason for the mallee's ability to re-leaf so quickly after such fires may be the proximity of these 'reservoirs' of free water. Further, water mallees with their higher volumes of free root-water may be even more resilient to periodic fire.

In November 1991, the plant-water status of mallee plants growing in contrasting fire treatments was measured on 'Birdwood'.⁵³ Dawn xylem water potential (ψ_x) of shoots taken from smaller 'whipstick'⁵⁴ mallees showed little variation, irrespective of fire history, averaging -4.3 MPa. Nonetheless, ψ_x was significantly higher (-2.9 MPa) in shoots taken from water mallees (Figure 10). Similar results were obtained for mallee seedlings and coppices in Wyperfeld National Park⁵⁵ while the dawn water potential of another mallee species, *Eucalyptus behriana*, growing near Melton, 40 km northwest of Melbourne, ranged from -2.0 to -4.4 MPa according to season.⁵⁶

Table 2 Measurements using roots from three species of burnt and unburnt mallees at 'Birdwood', Pooncarie, NSW

(i) Burnt	<i>E. dumosa</i>	<i>E. socialis</i>	<i>E. foecunda</i>
Mean root diameter (cm)	1.7	2.0	1.2
Dry wt/length (g/cm)	2.9	1.5	1.0
Water content (% wet wt)	21.7	38.7	43.7
Water volume (mL/m)	79.7	95.3	75.6
(ii) Unburnt			
Mean root diameter (cm)	1.7	1.7	-
Dry wt/length (g/cm)	2.2	2.3	-
Water content (% wet wt)	39.4	39.9	-
Water volume (mL/m)	140.6	152.2	-

Because it has been suggested elsewhere⁵⁷ that root dysfunction may be responsible for inducing mortality of mallees subjected to multiple decapitation by fire, roots of mallees at 'Birdwood' with contrasting fire histories were also sampled by mechanical means prior to oven-drying to see whether root-water contents varied markedly. Results obtained from these preliminary observations suggest that, as at Yalata, there were no major differences between burnt and unburnt mallees, in terms of percent water content. Despite the limited number of water mallees sampled, it is apparent that water volumes per unit root length had declined substantially, by 43-66%, in the burnt mallees (Table 2).

Conclusions

During the 60,000 years or so of their occupation of this continent,⁵⁸ Aborigines have acquired a remarkable ability to recognise, and often manipulate, many complex ecological processes and their interactions throughout a wide range of ecosystems. On this basis, they have often been described as the original Australian ecologists⁵⁹ who, prior to the arrival of Europeans, had successfully adapted to what in today's parlance would be described as 'sustainable land use' although it appears that they may also have been involved in the extinction of some of the megafauna surviving the late Pleistocene.⁶⁰ As Tindale⁶¹ has pointed out, '...the dominant factors enabling survival [of Aborigines] in

53. Using an established technique (Scholander et al. 1965, pp. 339-42, Ritchie and Hinckley 1975, pp. 165-250), dawn stem xylem water potential (ψ_x) was measured by sampling terminal shoots from replicate plants in the following treatments: (i) unburnt controls; (ii) burnt once three years earlier (1978); and (iii) burnt twice at two-yearly intervals (1978, 1980). Shoots (7-10 cm in length) were cut from mallee coppices regenerating after fire and lower leaves removed until 5-6 terminal leaves remained, and the lower ends of shoots immediately placed in the pressure bomb to record ψ_x . Replicate shoots of water mallees were also obtained by firing a shotgun into the taller canopies. Sampling commenced at 0500h and finished at 0630h.

54. Noble and Mulham 1980, p. 127.

55. Wellington 1984, p. 362.

56. Myers and Neales 1984, pp. 498-505.

57. Noble 1982, p. 158.

58. Roberts et al. 1994, pp. 575-6; Chappell et al. 1996, pp. 543-4.

59. Tindale 1959, pp. 40-2; Tindale 1974, pp. 110-11.

60. Flannery 1994, pp. 199-207.

61. Tindale 1959, p. 40.

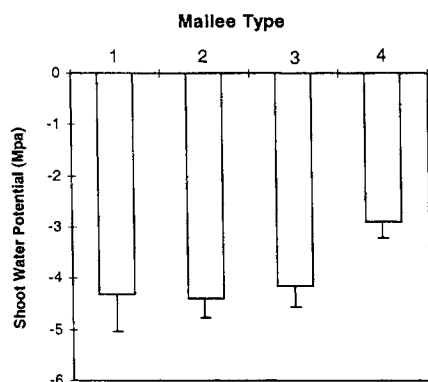


Figure 10 Dawn xylem water potentials (ψ_x) of shoots from smaller mallees of differing fire histories and larger water mallees at 'Birdwood', Pooncarie. Key to mallee types: (1) Unburnt mallee controls; (2) Coppices of mallee burnt once three years previously; (3) Coppices of mallee burnt one and three years earlier; (4) Unburnt water mallees

the Australian environment revolved around the successful maintenance of four chief items—food, water, shelter, and territorial integrity. 'Sadly, there is little understanding today of how Aborigines coped in meeting these needs in mallee communities. This is especially so in the mallee-dominant ecosystems of southern Australia which have been massively transformed by European agricultural systems and where much of the traditional ecological knowledge has either disappeared entirely, or is rapidly disappearing.

Because water mallees are generally scarce, or of low density, it is difficult to undertake demographic studies which would indicate the critical factors regulating their distribu-

tion, abundance and population regulation in different mallee ecosystems. A preliminary conceptual approach to modelling the population ecology of water mallees is shown as a flow diagram or state framework⁶² in Figure 11 illustrating the complexity of various factors dictating the probability of a water mallee establishing in an appropriate niche. Not only does the initial fire disturbance need to be of sufficient intensity to promote the necessary seed rain required to swamp the ant harvesters, usually referred to as predator satiation,⁶³ but timing and intensity of subsequent rainfall events is critical. While such events are essential to promote germination during optimum soil temperatures, some seed may also be dispersed by rainfall redistribution to 'safe sites' where there is minimal interference from established plants, either in gaps following death of old individual mallees or along the ecotones where shrubland communities adjoin open grasslands. Finally, any seed germinating in such favoured sites must also have the necessary genetic potential or fitness required to develop into a water mallee.

A search of the relevant literature initially suggested that the Australian Aborigines were unique in their ability to extract free-running water from tree roots. It is of interest to note however, that the indigenous inhabitants of northern Cameroon can access drinking water from the surface (0–20 cm) lateral roots of the shrub *Lannea humilis*, and possibly other *Lannea* species as well (J. Seghieri, pers. comm.). These shrubs generally grow on highly degraded soils and possess roots with specialised water storage organs, visible as swollen sections or root bulges (Seghieri 1995), which yield free drinking water after cutting.

⁶² Westoby et al. 1989, pp. 269–70.

⁶³ O'Dowd and Gill 1984, p. 1052; Wellington 1989, pp. 158–9.

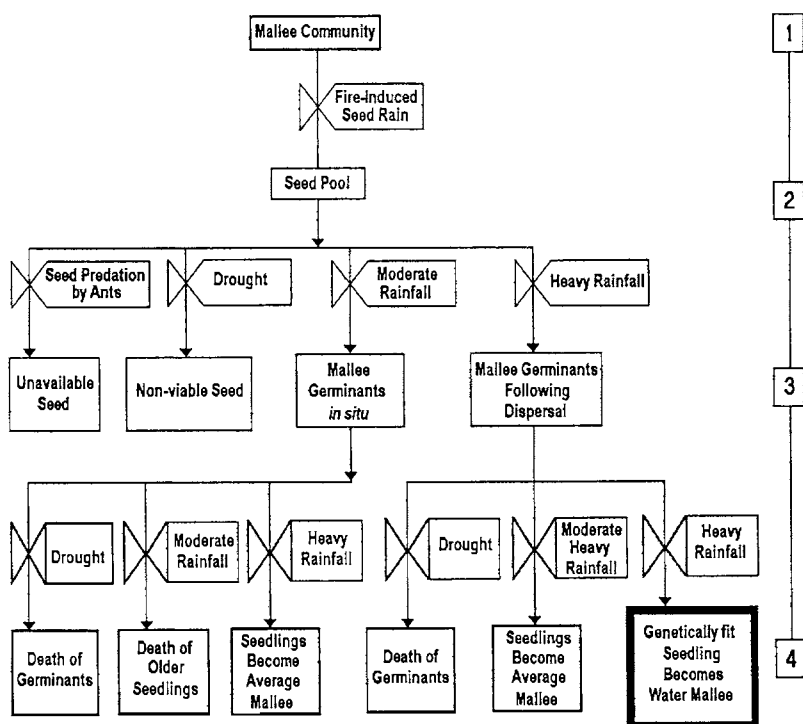


Figure 11 A framework for the population ecology of water mallees.

Whilst the roots of some plant species growing in the Kalahari Desert, particularly *Raphionacme burkei* and *Tylosema esculentum* are sometimes so moisture-filled that the water literally drips out of them (R. Hitchcock, pers. comm.), mostly the !Kung have to first cut up the roots and tubers of these and other species such as *Coccinia rehmanii* and *Citrullus lanatus*, before then squeezing the moisture out.⁶⁴ Even then, the roots of *Citrullus lanatus* are only utilised in periods of severe drought when people are under stress because it is so bitter (R. Hitchcock, pers. comm.). Similarly, although *Raphionacme burkei* is very valuable because of its moisture content and general abundance, the moisture extracted is often so bitter that it has to be sweetened with *Terminalia* leaves.⁶⁵ No record could be found of Native Americans using root water for drinking purposes although the Seri Indians of northwestern Mexico obtained water by macerating stems of the barrel cactus (*Ferocactus wislizenii*) as an emergency source of water.⁶⁶

64. Silberbauer 1981, pp. 275–7.

65. Campbell 1986, p. 83.

66. Felger and Moser 1985, pp. 262–3.

The Aborigines of today are not survivals with a stone-age culture. They are our contemporaries, modern men and women, motivated by the same basic urges as ourselves, but with a different way of living, a different outlook, different values. And difference does not, necessarily, imply inequality.⁶⁷

It is our hope that this review will promote future ecological, ecophysiological, and ethno-ecological studies of the water relations of mallee eucalypts, particularly in the context of their utilisation by Aborigines. Preferably such studies will be undertaken with the active collaboration of those people who continue to rely on these unique resources scattered throughout arid Australia.

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⁶⁷. Berndt and Berndt 1964, p. 8.

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Appendix

Chronology of published observations on the collection of root-water

1832, Bogan River, east of Nyngan, NSW

'We saw, that around many trees, the roots had been taken up, and we found them without the bark, and cut into short clubs or billets, but for what purpose we could not then discover.'

'They seemed busy, digging at the root of a large tree...I discovered that they dug up the roots for the sake of drinking the sap. It appeared, that they first cut these roots into billets, and then stripped off the bark or rind, which they sometimes chew, after which, holding up the billet and applying one end to the mouth, they let the juice drop into it.' (Mitchell 1839, pp. 196, 199)

1840-41, Vicinity of Mount Barren, WA

'...their experience at once points out to them the lowest levels where the gum-scrub grows, and where they are sure of getting water from its roots, with the least possible amount of labour...'

'In cases of extreme thirst, ...the toil of digging for the roots would be well repaid by the relief afforded. I have myself, in such cases, found that though I could by no means satiate my thirst, I could always succeed in keeping my mouth cool and moist...' (Eyre 1845)

1853, Murray River

'With respect to the 'Mallee', which covers so large a portion in the vicinity of this river, it may not be uninteresting to mention that there is a root of a particular kind of this shrub well known to the natives, which being cut into strips and placed in a pannikin or other vessel, has the property of exuding water from within, which slowly dropping out of the wood, is thus preserved for the thirsty traveller.' (Kinloch 1853)

1858, Murray River, Victoria

'During a recent visit to the Murray, where I had often heard of this useful shrub, my friend, Mr Peter Beveridge, rode with me into the Mallee, accompanied by one of his native stockmen, who, on our approaching the edge of one of the plains, at once pointed out the tree.'

After cutting a yam stick about 5-6 feet (150-180 cm) long and tracing the roots discernible by a small crack on the soil surface, the root was prised out of the ground until about 15-20 feet (4.5-6 m) of root had been laid bare. After breaking the roots into 3-4 feet (90-120 cm) segments and stripping off the bark from the lower end of each, they were reared against the tree with their lower ends placed in a collecting pannikin.

'It grows upward of twenty feet (6 m) high, and scarcely differs in appearance from those around to the eye of a stranger, but easily to be detected on the brownish tinge of its leaves.' (Cairns 1858)

1860, North of Euston, NSW

'On the sandy soil at the edge of the Mallee, we saw the water-yielding *Hakea*, which was to me quite new. One fine tree seemed so full of water that the outer bark, to the height of a foot from the ground, seemed quite saturated.'

While resting our horses at Mr Ross's, we had also leisure to experiment on the water-yielding *Hakea*. The first root, about half an inch (1.3 cm) in diameter, and six or eight feet (1.8-2.4 m) long, yielded, quickly and in large drops, about a wine glassful of really excellent water.' (Morton, W.L. 1861, pp. 128, 132)

1860–1938

'Trekking along the old pad, a discussion arose on the theory that, as a last resort, sufficient water can be found in the roots of trees to maintain life. Wells was of the opinion that the theory was good, but impractical in reality. At last, to settle the question, a root was grubbed up from a bloodwood as the most promising tree upon which to make the test. About half a wine glassful of fluid was obtained, whilst they drank a much greater quantity from the kegs to enable them to continue the work of testing!'

'It was finally declared a theory only, impractical as far as the trees in this desert were concerned. In mallee country further south it was said that Aborigines did obtain water from the mallee trees, but a white man would need an axe to obtain the roots and the exertion of delving would cause the transpiration of more moisture from his body than he could possibly derive from the tree.' (Steele & Steele 1978, p. 77)

1861

'...my brother and I had gone in for the roots of the hakiea (*sic*), or prickly mallee. It being virgin ground, untrodden by sheep or cattle, it was easily pulled up in lengths of 20 or 30 yards (18–27 m). We cut it in pieces of about a foot and placed it upright in a tart pot and billy and soon got a good drink each, and with that had to make shift until we reached Narr.'

'The boys left me, and that was all I saw of them during my stay at Tolorgawank, but I often came across their camps, and the heaps of havea (*sic*) roots was something astonishing. You could see them piled up like small hay stacks at all their camps; in the summer time they had little else to depend on.' (Everard 1883, pp. 17–18)

1872, Central Australia

'A white man would die of thirst while digging and fooling around trying to get the water he might know was preserved by the tree, but not for him; while an aboriginal, upon the other hand, coming to a mallee-tree, after perhaps travelling miles through them without noticing one, will suddenly make an exclamation, look at a tree, go perhaps ten or twelve feet away, and begin to dig.'

'In a foot or so he comes upon a root, which he shakes upwards, gradually getting more and more of it out of the ground, till he comes to the foot of the tree; he then breaks it off, and has a root perhaps fifteen feet long—this, by the way, is an extreme length. He then breaks the root into sections about a foot long, ties them into bundles, and stands them up on end in a receptacle, when they drain out a quantity of beautifully sweet, pure water. A very long root such as I have mentioned might give nearly a bucketful of water...'

'There are a few other trees of different kinds that water is also got from, as I have known it obtained from the mulga, acacia trees, and from some casuarina trees; it depends upon the region they are in, as to what trees give the most if any water...' (Giles (1889, vol. I, p.45)

1876, Central Australia

'Water is also procured from the hollow eucalyptus trees; also very commonly from the roots of trees. They select the proper roots, break them in pieces and stand them on end in a wooden dish, which catches all the water that is in them. By this means they often travel far away from any permanent water.' (Forrest 1876, p. 320)

1883, Between the Lachlan and Darling rivers, NSW

Grows chiefly on sandy or light loamy soil throwing out numerous lateral roots 6–12 inches (15–30 cm) below the soil surface.

Roots located by jabbing spear or sharpened stick into the ground, 6–8 feet (180–240 cm) from base. The root is exposed by removing the covering soil with a wooden shovel for 20–30 feet (6–9 m) before cutting into 1.5–2 foot (45–60 cm) lengths and standing on end in a receptacle. After draining, the last of the water is expelled by the Aborigine blowing down each root segment. 'The roots chosen are—with the bark on—about the size of a man's wrist, ... The water is beautifully clear, cool, and free from any unpleasant taste or smell.' (Bennett (1883, p. 215)

1888

'We are indebted to the aboriginals for a method of obtaining water, and that from a source in which we should perhaps least look for it. This simple method, which had best be given in the words of those who have had much intercourse with the blacks, is now given, and no adult in Australia should be ignorant of it.'

'There is no doubt that a knowledge of this method of obtaining water would have been the means of saving the lives of some people who have suffered one of the most terrible of all deaths—death from thirst.' (Maiden 1888, pp. 481–2)

1888–89, North of Queen Victoria Spring, WA

'We were now in the desert proper for several days, and in a depression round some stunted trees we could see where natives obtained water out of the roots, as broken roots were strewn about.'

'They showed me how to look for the water in the mallee root. Look for a likely tree, one with dark green leaves and without any dead limbs, or look for the fine little cracks in the surrounding ground. By pulling the roots up, and then breaking them into pieces and either sucking, or standing them up in a vessel or dish, the water percolates out. I have drunk the water and made tea out of it. It has a slight eucalyptus flavour. I have seen many places even in the desert where the blacks had resorted to this water supply, the ground being strewn with pieces of roots.' (Luck 1988, pp. 125, 130)

1889, Northwest Victoria

'The roots of this tree grow near the surface, and run laterally, sometimes for thirty of fort feet, without any appreciable differences in diameter.'

'These roots they tear up and break into short lengths, which pieces are placed on end in an improvised *coolamen*. In half-an-hour the roots will be drained quite dry. From half-a-dozen such roots—that is, twenty or thirty feet long—as much as three or four gallons of water will be procured.'

'The water is very nice and cool, having the very faintest sub-acid flavour, which makes it a most delicious, as well as refreshing beverage for hot and thirsty travellers.' (Beveridge (1889, pp. 27–8)

1891, Victoria Desert, WA

Unknown—'...It requires, however, the knowledge of an aboriginal to hit upon the proper tree, for which there are probably some outward signs only known to them, because my own efforts led me only accidentally to a root holding water, after trying a good many before without obtaining a drop.'

'The supply from such sources is scarcely better than that obtained from the roots of the mallee. This last-mentioned supply is no doubt in many places often resorted to, and when the proper kind of root is found yields a splendid, clear, and cool water, that at times drips rapidly from the broken roots when they are held vertically.'

'The 'wanna' and the 'wera' are the constantly accompanying implements of the blacks of the interior, and are frequently used during the whole day for the purpose of digging, either for water or food. The wanna is used for loosening the soil, or as a lever

when roots or stones require lifting, and with the wera the loosened stuff is scooped up.' (Helms (1896, p. 254)

1893

'[The] only water they get all through the summer is drained from red mallee roots, piles of which may be seen in some parts of the scrub...' (*South Australian Register* 1893)

1894, North of Queen Victoria Spring, WA

'...the quantity of mallee root heaps, suggested the possibility that the natives could obtain from them sufficient moisture to live upon. I think now that this is most unlikely, and that the roots are only resorted to when travelling or in time of great need.' (Carnegie 1898, p. 43)

1895

'Trees growing in hollows between ridges will have greater abundance of water than those growing on the ridge tops.'

'A native goes to a water-tree, and tries the ground at from four feet to five feet (1.2-1.5 m) from the stem; or, if guided by 'bulge' or 'crack', finds the root at once...Then dropping spear or stick he grasps the root with both hands, and straddling its bed, shakes, and pulls up the root to its points.'

'The red mallee of the west coast of South Australia is very porous, and the water gushes out at once when set on end. On the Scotia Blocks (S.W.) of New South Wales the natives make high stacks (four feet or so) of the drained roots; why is not evident.' (Magarey 1895, pp. 648-51)

1903, in proximity of Camp 39 near western end of the Mann Ranges, NT

'...triodia sandhills, with occasional currajong and clumps of mallee. I noticed that the currajongs existing in these sandhills are frequently, if not invariably, surrounded by a ring of fresh mallee...Is this phenomenon a consequence of the noted storage capacity for water of the currajong?'

'The young shoots of the currajong are chewed as a substitute for water by travelling desert tribes, and water can be obtained from the cut tap-root by setting fire to the foliage to expel it.' (Basedow 1915, p.126).

1904, Southwest NSW

'Those selected are generally from 1 to 3 inches in diameter, and are easily dug up, as in many cases they extend laterally as far as 10 feet without varying much in thickness, and are not more than 9 or 10 inches below the surface. A good root, say 10 feet long and 2¹/₂ inches in diameter, would yield a quart of water, which, though not very palatable to those unaccustomed to it, is liked by those who have used it for a long time.'

'There is a large extent of country, without any permanent surface water, between the Darling, Murray, and Murrumbidgee Rivers. This was occupied by the Berriait tribe, who, when the surface water failed them, obtained a supply from the Mallee, a species of Eucalypt, and from one of the Hakeas. At times of drought they were forced to go to the rivers for water...' (Howitt 1904, p. 51)

1911, Near Skeleton Soak, northwest Victoria

A Mr Wiltshire and companion J. Cornell nearly perished while out tracking a lost horse. They '...dug up the roots of the mallee, which for a time allayed the pangs of thirst.' (*Pinnaroo and Border Times*, 8 December 1911)

1914–15, Northwest Victoria

'Water, almost pure, can be extracted from the roots of one species of the Mallee growing in certain situations: about a quart will drain from two or three roots perhaps in half-an-hour.' (Kenyon 1914–15, p. 43)

1919, Ooldea, SA

'...water bush (growing round soak, native name wilbala), Ngabbari (mallee), Ngalda (mallee with water-bearing roots), and one or two species of acacia, are scattered widely over the district; but most of the largest trees have been cut down to supply the engines and workmen with firewood.'

'A mallee tree here and there also shows itself above the mulga and sandalwood, but there are very few mallee trees left in the vicinity of Ooldea.' (Bates 1919, pp. 76, 78)

1924

'Needle bush (*Hakea leucomyxa*), Red Mallee (*Eucalyptus oleosa*) and even the Box (*E. microtheca*) afford another means of procuring water. Their roots are dug up, cut into short lengths, and placed to drain in a *pirrha* or wooden bowl.'

'Quite a quantity of fluid is yielded that has been stored up by these plants. It is not very nice to the taste, but in that dry sandy desert any fluid that is drinkable is good.' (Horne & Aiston 1924, p. 50)

1926, Great Australian Bight, SA

'Very soon we emerged from the scrub on to an open plain, almost circular in shape, about 10 acres (4 ha) in area, level as a bowling green, covered with tall dry grass which undulated in the breeze like a golden wheat field, and with very large mallee, as is usually the case, along the edges... Tommy seized his tomahawk, I took the quart pot, and we started our walk round the edge of the timber, when, after proceeding a few chains, Tommy stopped, and pointing to a mallee, said: 'That feller.'

'Tommy went half a dozen yards (5.5 m) from the trunk into the open ground, and, driving his tomahawk into the ground, started a sort of costeen scratch with the six yards as radius. Presently he struck a root, cleared the earth away from it a bit, chopped it across, and then taking one end in both hands stripped it up along the surface away from the tree, and soon had about six feet (1.8 m) of root, a finger in thickness, exposed. By similar prospecting we soon got a sufficient supply of roots, and then proceeded to break it up into lengths of about eight inches (20 cm). These were carefully peeled and stood up in the quart (1 litre) pot to drain off the moisture, which exuded plentifully on fracture; the operation was slow, but I assisted by blowing through cane, and finally the quart pot was nearly full of water.'

'The tree was a fine one, about 15 feet (4.5 m) in height, the trunk and main stems were quite clear of twigs or branches, and were covered with snowy white bark. The foliage formed an umbrella-shaped top to the tree, and had a very bushy appearance, the leaves seemed shorter and broader than those of the ordinary mallee, were of a vivid green, and had a bright shiny look. It is hard to describe this tree, because I can think of no tame tree, so to speak, with which I can compare it.' (Gee 1926, pp. 61–3)

1926, Ooldea, SA

E. oleosa reported as water mallee at Ooldea; *E. incrassata* and *E. dumosa* as water mallees in desert country. (Black 1926)

1928, South of Alice Springs in vicinity of hill country on 'Angas Downs' or 'Curtin Springs'

'Among a clump of big scrub-mallee growing in a dip below the ridges, Tuck halted the train and waited for me to come up. 'Water-bearing mallees,' he said nonchalantly. 'See 'em?'

'No, that I can't. Where?'

'Why here ... all round ... lots of 'em ... We'll hoosh down and have a look at 'em.'

'The trees I now noticed, had roots with sections growing alternately above and below the ground, and all the roots were long and twining. With Tuck wielding the shovel a root was soon exposed and torn from the ground. It was thirty feet (9 m) long and no thicker than a man's wrist ... it is in reality an underground stem or rhizome. In each rhizome, which often contains a length of fifty feet (15 m) or more, is enough water to sustain a man for a day.'

'... when hung vertically, the 'roots' discharge their water freely and would soon empty, the flow may easily be checked by holding the 'root' in a horizontal position ... Thus Nature has provided the aboriginal with a natural waterbag.' (Russell 1934, pp. 100-2)

1937, Scotia region, southwest NSW

'It is said that there are still to be found out there the relics of Nanya's occupation, and the piles of long-withered mallee roots from which, stripping the bark and draining patiently, for thirty years his people obtained their supplies of water in many cruel droughts.'

Nanya was the last full-blooded chief of the region, 'a Cuthero man of the country on the verge of the Darling', who eluded police for over thirty years before he and his remaining tribal members finally moved to Lake Victoria. (Hill 1937, pp. 276-8)

1939, North of Ooldea, SA

Root water seen in most quantity in superficial radiating roots of *Eucalyptus transcontinentalis* ['perhaps only a variety of *Eucalyptus oleosa*'] radiating from the butt for 30-40 feet (9-12 m).

Usually only 1 inch (2.5 cm) below the surface of sandy soil, they could be readily pulled up in lengths of many feet. 'They are relatively brittle and on examination consist almost entirely within the layer of bark of closely set tubes just visible to the naked eye'.

'Broken into lengths and held vertically aloft over the mouth or on end in a receptacle, water drips freely, sometimes almost in a stream, whilst by blowing at the upper end it gushes and bubbles forth from below.' (Cleland 1939, pp.8-9)

1943, Victorian Mallee

'Nature, as if to make amends for the scarcity of water, provided a perennial supply in the roots of several trees.'

'Many explorers, including Major Mitchell, record the methods by which water—'beautifully clear, cool and free from unpleasant taste or smell'—was obtained. The roots were dug from the ground, cut into foot billets and sucked as in the act of smoking, or allowed to drain into skin water-bags.' (Morris 1943, p. 167)

1944, Ooldea, SA

'Some of the bush natives came in this week with stories of great hardships even for natives, who are generally very tough. They returned after a nice rain, thinking the rock holes to the north [of Ooldea] would be full, but they found no water and had to subsist

for five days on water obtained in small quantities from the roots of a certain type of mallee.' (Turner 1950, p. 113. This account was taken originally from the *United Aborigines' Messenger*, July 1944).

1953, 'The waterless Kochia country, contiguous with the boundary fence between New South Wales and South Australia.'

'They lived by spearing the scrub kangaroo and by hunting lizards and digging out the eggs of the termites; water, such as they needed—which wasn't much, for the blackfellow never 'soaks' like the white man—they usually obtained from the roots of the red mallee and needlewood trees.' (Russell 1953, p. 61)

1954

Description of root-water collection. (Charnley 1954)

1963, Neal Junction, ENE of Laverton, WA

'In dry seasons when the water holes dried up they lived from the moisture sucked from the roots of the mallee-like water tree.' (Allan 1964, p. 34)

1966

'Beginning in the south, there are considerable stretches of mallee scrub composed of low-growing many-stemmed species of *Eucalyptus* (*E. dumosa* A. Carr., *E. oleosa* F.v.M., etc), as in Eyre Peninsula and near the Murray. Many of the mallees have surface-spreading water-bearing roots.'

'The long superficial and almost horizontal roots of a number of species of mallee (Eucalypts) yield considerable quantities of very good water. These roots can be readily detected and then exposed with a yam stick, and sections pulled and stood on end in a wooden vessel and the water collected. A piece of such a root held erect may drip water almost in a continuous stream of drops.' (Cleland (1966, pp. 114, 139)

1966, Murray mallee, southwest NSW

'Armed with an axe or a tomahawk, anyone lost in the mallee, who knew the water-bearing type of tree, could get a drink by draining short lengths of the roots into the dented crown of his hat—provided, as Andrew remarked grimly, that he was not yet on the edge of delirium and had the mental stamina to endure the slow process.' (Broughton 1966, pp. 98–9)

1966–69, Victorian Mallee

'Water was also obtained from the roots of some of the eucalypts, which the natives called *Weir-mallee*. They are recognisable by the comparative density of the foliage.'

'These trees have long horizontal roots only a few inches below the surface of the soil. After digging them up the natives broke them into short lengths, and up-ended them, making sure that the end farthest away from the tree was at the top. Good clear water soon dripped out from them, a root of 15 to 20 ft (4.6–6.1 m) yielding between a pint and a quart (0.6–1.1 L)'. (Massola 1966, p. 270; 1969, p.73)

1969, Scotia mallee, NSW

'In 1923 the first artesian flow in the south spilled out over country where the Nanya tribe had once kept themselves alive by tapping the meagre reservoirs stored in the roots of mallee trees.' (Hardy 1969, p. 182)

1972, North of Mt Crombie towards Mt Harriet, NT

The mallee belts between the sandhills continued for about four miles, with a few desert kurrajong trees (*Brachychiton gregorii*) yielding food seeds and edible flowers and roots.'

'The factors, in general order of importance, that determine choice of campsites by the Pitjandjara can thus be summarised as follows:

1. The presence of water in spring, soak, well, rockhole, or (least attractive) tree roots.'

'Five miles out [northern piedmont of Mt Crombie] mallees (*Eucalyptus* spp.) began to appear and several other species of *Acacia*. The mallee roots yield water...'

'Men also wave *Eucalyptus oleosa*, water mallee branches, in the air to fetch cold, rain-laden southerly winds.' (Tindale 1972, pp. 233, 236, 244)

1972, Southern Kimberley, WA

'In addition, emergency water can be obtained, for example, from some trees and/or their roots or from underground deposits of coagulated frogs.' (Berndt 1972, p. 179)

1973, Between Lah and Jeparit, Victoria

'Old local people speak of soaks and of water in holes in red sandstone outcrops scattered here and there through that country; and these must have been known to the Aborigines and have supplemented that which they carried with them in skin bags or obtained from Mallee roots.' (Massola 1973, p. 130)

1974

'Other distortions of the symmetrical patterns [of tribal lands] may come when the people of a tribe are adapted to particular ranges of food or special water-using habits. Thus we notice that the Kokata tribal territory [running westward from Woomera] is long drawn out along the belt of mallee forested country in which they find their water-bearing roots...'

'In general open mallee plains have few distinguishing marks, a whole area many miles across may be useful only insofar as it provides a vast series of temporary homes. The trees yield water from their roots but it is a wasting supply, since once used the locality cannot be used again.'

'The Ngarkat tribe, which inhabits the mallee scrub country south and east of the Murray River, is an example of a nomadic people without a fixed nomenclature for its homes. The Pindiini tribe may be cited as another group where a different grove of mallee trees has to be chosen for each day's shifting camp. They also live in a land without many names, except for a few places providing more stable conditions for habitation, and these become key clan places where their ancestral beings reside.' (Tindale 1974, p. 40)

1975, Wyperfeld National Park

'Hakea or mallee gum roots, chopped into foot lengths and allowed to drain into a bark dish, provided good clear water.' (Allan 1975, p. 4)

1978

Water, apart from rock-holes and soakages, is sometimes obtained from '...a few unusual sources such as the forks of large gum trees, the roots of certain trees (which are dug out, cut into foot-long (0.3 m) pieces, and drained into wooden dishes), and even dew.' (Tonkinson 1978, p. 23)

1989, Scotia mallee, NSW

'Water was obtained from the roots of red mallee or waterbush, and the women dug white ants or ants eggs out of the earth, shaking them expertly on a coolamon of bark, which they put on the hot ashes to roast for a while.' (Withers 1989, p. 124)

Diane Bell, the Ngarrindjeri and the Hindmarsh Island Affair: 'Value-free' ethnography

Richard Kimber

NgaRRiNDJeRi WURRUWARRIN: a world that is, was, and will be (1998). By Diane Bell, Melbourne 1998. Pp. 688.\$29.95.

It was my pleasure to be present at the launch of *NgaRRiNDJeRi WURRUWARRIN* in Alice Springs in 1998. Professor Diane Bell and I had had intermittent friendly associations almost from the commencement of her fieldwork in central Australia over two decades ago. By sheer chance, at the very moment she recognised me in a local coffee shop and reintroduced herself, I was recommending a PhD student to read her *Daughters of the Dreaming* (1993 edition). She kindly invited us to what transpired to be a very successful launch. This friendly association of over twenty years, together with my respect for her hard years of work in central Australia, have made it difficult to review the book in question. Some friends might feel that they are obliged to write a glowing tribute, others that they should make an honest attempt to be objective, and to make constructive criticism. I have taken the latter stance, and trust that an honest hard-edged appraisal is preferable to sycophantic approval.

The initial appearance and feel of the book is appealing. Even though I found the mix of upper and lower case in the title word *NgaRRiNDJeRi* irritating, and wondered at the choice of this spelling instead of *Narrinyeri*, anyone with even the vaguest understanding of Ngarrindjeri country would appreciate Muriel Van Der Byl's cover illustration of a pelican against the background of sun, sand-dunes and water. However, as a book can truly not be judged by its cover, what of the contents?

As I understand is conventional for many readers, I browsed on the photographs, acknowledgements and bibliography first. The latter is selectively copious—Newland (1899), Lewis (1922) and Russell (1953) are amongst strange omissions—and the research assistants who located the material, as well as many others, are fulsomely acknowledged. Although I found it odd that the aerobics class and anonymous contributors of bacon and eggs were included, it is a pleasure to see generous acknowledgement. In contrast the photographs in my copy, with the exception of that of Muriel Van Der Byl (p. 51), are poor reproductions, and do no service to the Ngarrindjeri people, their country and craftwork, the author or the publishers. Why so little use was made of the excellent illustrations that are available in Angas (1847) and other early illustrators is a puzzle: although Professor Bell states that the '[women] appear muted and in the

background of most of the early colonial records', including those by Angas (p. 433), they are still present.

The maps are only a little better than the photographs, with both the 'Area of Study' (p. xvi) and the 'Field Work Area' (pp. 24–25) omitting numbers of sites of significance in the written and oral accounts; and the two crucial ones of 'Kumarangk' (p. 551) having several place-names that are somewhat indistinct. In addition the list of 'Neighbours' (p. xiv) includes the 'Narrunga' of Yorke Peninsula, who were not traditional neighbours at all, and otherwise only partially equates with the map on p. 30.

The use of informative sub-headings throughout the book is commended and, whilst I was surprised at the considerable number of omissions—for instance, swans and fire (both several mentions), the significant locality 'Morrundee' (p. 301) and Captain Jack (p. 428), the index is substantial. At the same time, it does not always allow easy discovery: numbers of named barrages were constructed 1934–1940 but, whilst these are alluded to in the text (e.g. pp. 258–259), 'barrage' is only found under Goolwa. Further to this, the brief list of 'Ngarrindjeri terms' (pp. xiii–xiv) includes 'Krowali' which, by being identified as 'Blue Crane, White Faced Heron', does not tell a reader without ornithological knowledge that this is one-and-the-same bird until much later in the book (pp. 117, 213). In addition 'Oroodooil' (p. xiii) appears to be an incorrect variant spelling of 'Ooroondooil' (p. 683), and Eylmann is incorrectly spelt throughout.

The prologue is important in that it sets the scene and indicates that the book, whilst considering a number of aspects of Ngarrindjeri culture, is also about a feminist anthropologist declaring herself an 'ethnographer' and asserting that she will be presenting 'value-free' writing about the 'proponent' women associated with the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission (pp. 35–36). Whilst it is also true that Professor Bell indicates that Ngarrindjeri men are to be mentioned, the fact that the book will be constructed by means of 'a feminist reading of the sources' (p. 38) indicates that men will be but fleeting shadows in the background of women's activities, rituals and beliefs, and the 'proponent' women's voices. No reader should be surprised when this proves to be so.

In many ways the following set of questions the author asks are crucial to both her presentation and to those present-day Ngarrindjeri whom she quotes.

Can people who no longer live a 'tribal life', like that of the peoples of central and northern Australia, or the people of the Plains and Pueblos of North America, expect to receive the benefits of legislation that requires evidence of 'tradition'? What is 'tradition' in this context? These questions have arisen in previous cases. Each new case brings new speculation and contesting of the concept of 'tradition'. Can traditions be changed? Be relearned? Be reasserted? Can there be a tradition of innovation? Are anthropologists part of the 'invention of culture'? (p. 13).

With the exception of the question 'What is tradition?', I believe that the answer is 'Yes' to all questions, so that the greatest problems arise if anthropologists are part of, perhaps even the key figures in, 'invention of culture', and such 'invention' results in the indigenous people making conflicting, demonstrably false, and highly questionable claims. These allegations had all been made about certain of the anthropologists and certain of the Ngarrindjeri people before Professor Bell became directly involved in her research.

The author's inability to gain the cooperation of the 'dissident' women, or access to many important documents—a point reiterated later (p. 473)—is understandable in the context of Hindmarsh Island politics and legalities, but is to be regretted in that it means this book can only be a partial account of *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin*.

That 'the Royal Commission found fabrication in the oral accounts of the proponent women'—a serious and considered finding on the basis of the evidence presented by the 'dissident' Ngarrindjeri women and by a number of anthropologists (amongst others)—is not denied (p. 34). However this finding is in part challenged, it seems, on the grounds that 'Ngarrindjeri ethnography' is not 'the sole province of anthropologists' (p. 35). It never has been, as witnessed by the range of backgrounds of ethnographic writers listed in the Bibliography—a doctor, missionaries, geographers and an entomologist are amongst the writers who provided key historical references, and by the fact that numbers of the Ngarrindjeri themselves use their own ethnographic knowledge for tourist ventures and a very considerable range of associations with the wider public. The latter ventures and associations are clear examples of Ngarrindjeri people who do 'control the flow of knowledge', but Professor Bell is correct to point out that this is not always so (p. 35), and her own thoroughness in checking her writing with those Ngarrindjeri people who supported her (p. 32) is laudable.

Much as there is a considerable amount of information in the prologue that is valuable in indicating aspects that will be addressed and questions posed, there are elements which read as a narcissistic self promotion by the author. Such is not the case with other publications I have read by Professor Bell, nor is it so strongly the case with the rest of the book. However, it is difficult not to conclude that her last nine years in the United States of America, with strong interest in 'New Age prophets' (p. 1), have not—as one might expect—had a considerable influence. The voice is Australian, but there is no hint of editorial restraint, and the 'noise' is as American as Coca-Cola. (This is not a criticism so much as a reaction. It reflects that I am a fairly conservative person who, in King Canute fashion, does not drink Coca-Cola and, whilst applauding American democratic institutions and much else that Americans have to offer, attempts to fight being engulfed by monolithic American 'culture').

The above minor quibbles suggest that, despite a great deal of research, thought and concern to do the right thing by the Ngarrindjeri, the book was rushed in the printing stages. What, though, of the substance of the rest of the book?

After an initial fairly quick reading, four things particularly struck me.

First, it is a measure of the author's integrity that she not only admits at the commencement of the book that '[being] here and being there'—meaning in the Lower Murray area and in Massachusetts—'is becoming less distinct' (p. 33), but also reiterates this at the end (p. 595). That this led to her feeling 'dislocations in time and space' (*ibid.*) is a very honest comment. However it also suggests that she is inherently aware that, despite undoubtedly great labours, there are areas of Ngarrindjeri culture that she did not investigate as well as she would have wished. There is even a faint possibility that she may have thought that there were points at which she unwittingly inter-wove Ngarrindjeri and Native American cultures.

Second, that the Ngarrindjeri 'proponent' women and occasional males, who provided a relatively small amount of the 'weave' of the book, have been so tightly woven

into the author's own highly selective ethnographic illustrations, questionings, discussions and interpretations, is inherently problematic for them. It seems to me that their own comments will either remain part of the weave of the author's basket, or will be likely to be rent asunder wherever her weave is questioned and found lacking during the course of any critical assessment.

Third, and related to the first two points, is that it is difficult not to believe that the author has other than, sub-consciously, strongly promoted the predominant sacred circle imagery of the Native Americans (particularly that of the Cheyenne and Lakota peoples) during her discussions with the 'proponent' Ngarrindjeri people, and that in her own discussions she has then subconsciously extended the sacred circle imagery far beyond anything mentioned to her by the Ngarrindjeri people.

And fourth, the text is wonderfully well organised, in general very lucidly presented, and is commendably readable to a wide potential audience. Although I found it excessively questioning and 'wordy' in some places, that does not detract from its accessibility to interested readers.

I now turn to a constructively critical review of the main text.

The first chapter is called 'Weaving the World of Ngarrindjeri'. In an attempt to be objective when, after an initial quick reading of the book, I began a detailed consideration, I decided to check on what was known of Ngarrindjeri weaving, as well as the influences on the author to which she had alluded.

Taplin states: 'The mats and baskets are made of two or three kinds of rushes and flags' (1989[1879]:40). His later close observations led to an expansion which reads:

The Narrinyeri make a great many mats and baskets of different kinds. Most of them are made of rushes, worked together with a sort of stitch. Baskets and mats of various shapes are thus produced. Another kind of mat is made of the bark of the mallee scrub, dried and beaten into a fibrous mass. This is worked together with meshes, and makes a thick durable mat. Sometimes a quantity of the shaggy sea weed, which is found on the shore, is washed in fresh water and dried, and worked into the mat, forming a sort of shaggy nap. Such a nap would be used as a bed. (Taplin, in Woods, 1997[1879]: 43).

In essence, these observations were confirmed by Eyre, for near-neighbours north on the Murray (1997[1845]: 310–313), and partially corroborated a century later by the Berndts (1993: 96–102). Eyre also closely described and illustrated the different kinds of bone needles, indicating that the method of use 'in sewing was as we use a shoemaker's awl, the hole is bored and the thread put through with the hand...' (p. 310). As he details the kinds of baskets and mats made, and their purposes, and also illustrates four baskets and one mat, the implication is that use of a bone needle and a boring action was the key to their manufacture. The same items, and several more, are well-illustrated in a photograph in Taplin (1989[1879]: plate facing p. 64). The woven items are oval and rectangular mats; circular, oval and conical baskets; and circular baskets that might also be termed bags. The surviving smaller range of the same items, as well as some variations, are illustrated by the author (pp. 41, 56–57, 77, 79, 516). Although I may have over-looked it, 'Lare lar', the Ngarrindjeri word for 'circular' (Taplin, 1989[1879]: 127) does not appear to have survived in the author's records of present-day Ngarrindjeri language. However, whilst the above items often exhibited—or still

exhibit—circular form, and although the shelters they made were invariably described or illustrated as semi-circular (e.g. see Meyer, in Woods, 1997[1879]: 192; Berndt, et.al., 1993: 38), arcs were painted on shields (Taplin, 1989[1879]: plate facing p. 32), and other items such as spears and digging-sticks are circular in cross-section, what is striking in comparison and contrast with such as central Australian art is the *limited* amount of circular imagery (e.g. see Munn, 1973). Naturalistic or stylized naturalistic depictions are predominant in the illustrations that Taplin (1989[1879]) was given in the 1860s–1870s and that the Berndts collected eighty years later (Berndt, et.al., 1993). Similarly, the direct translations of nineteenth century to mid-20th century songs, legendary accounts and historical episodes (e.g. see various translations in Taplin, 1989[1879]; Taplin, in Wood, 1997[1879]; and the Berndts [Berndt, et.al., 1993]) rarely exhibit words or phrases that suggest circularity, with the exception of those aspects (e.g. seasonality, the shape and movement of sun and moon, etc.) that appear to be common to all human-kind.

Although one can assume certain practical concerns, there appear to be no records of what women or men otherwise talked about whilst making the baskets and mats. By inference from a near-neighbour group in an entirely different social situation (the meeting of two or more groups for 'festivities'), 'the females engage in a narration of family occurrences, such as births of children, marriages, deaths, &etc., not omitting a sprinkling of gossip and scandal...' (Eyre, 1997[1845], Vol. 11: 225–226). However, the only recorded explanations when the Ngarrindjeri were asked why they constructed their artefacts as they did was that the revered mythological hero Ngurunderi had 'made all things' (Taplin, in Woods, 1997[1879]: 55, 58): he had 'made everything for their use, and taught them to use their implements and weapons in hunting, fishing, and fighting' (Moriarty, in Taplin, 1989[1879]: 51).

The above early historical evidence associated with Ngarrindjeri basket-making has effectively been overlooked by the author. This being the case she states: 'The comparative literature on the sacred nature of weaving in other Indigenous cultures offers clues regarding Ngarrindjeri practice'. (p. 87).

Included amongst these indigenous cultures are, as the author indicates, numbers of Native American peoples (pp. 12–14, 139, 319–320, 600). There is no need to extensively detail the references to the significance of sacred circles in the language and imagery of the Native Americans to comprehend that these must be some of the images that the author had in mind. The images are not at all restricted to weaving, as Professor Bell is no doubt aware. Their whole world, in fact, is replete with circles, or with broken hoops that are sometimes seen as repairable, sometimes broken forever (e.g. see McLuhan, 1976; Powell, 1981). One quotation alone, which is probably as often quoted as any by a Native American, is illustrative. Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux, was the famous orator.

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its great power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the

nations hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children (in Brown, J.E., 1972: n.p.).

With such imagery apparently in mind, and with the author intending to use it to encourage the Ngarrindjeri to express themselves similarly (as the comment on p. 87 implies), it comes as no surprise to find that the Ngarrindjeri did at times express themselves in such ways. This does not in the least mean that their expressions were not other than genuine ones which had remained latent until tapped by the author. However, that the 'recurrent symbolism of the circle in Ngarrindjeri speech' (p. 87) was traditional is, as earlier indicated, somewhat doubtful, so that it would have been interesting to know the history of its apparently recent development. The chapter itself commences:

When we weave with the rushes, the memories of our loved ones are there, moulded into each stitch. And, when we're weaving, we tell stories. It's not just weaving, but the stories we tell when we're doing it. Daisy Rankine explains. Wukkin mi:mini means the women's business of weaving and all the cultural and sacred life which has been part of the Ngarrindjeri people's ancestry (p. 43).

A remarkable coincidence, surprisingly not used until later in the book, is that a Native American Spiderwoman's 'sacred moment of creation' was to spin 'the world into existence out of pure thought', thereby also creating the situation where ever after Native American 'women and...men weave blankets into tales of life' (p. 139).

Daisy Rankine's interesting comment is well developed in the section, 'Making Baskets: Making Family', where Doreen Kartinyeri reveals that, 'The tightness of the stitches is like the closeness of the family' (p. 67). This 'almost...throwaway line' proves to be a 'key to Ngarrindjeri symbolic representations of their world' (ibid).

Doreen Kartinyeri had—if I correctly interpret the section—previously held back this revelatory statement from Diane Bell and all other researchers from 1981 until 1996 (pp. 49, 66). As Professor Bell states, this was Doreen Kartinyeri's right, but it does seem a pity that this 'key' was not recognised by anyone prior to 1996. Still, as we all withhold some information, sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently, one should not really be surprised by this. It is a measure of the author's very genuine ability as an ethnographic recorder that she was able to draw so many strands of previously unknown ethnographic information from her 'proponent' Ngarrindjeri informants, then weave these strands together.

Numerous descriptions about weaving follow, many of them by Professor Bell in her own expansions upon Ngarrindjeri remarks. The weave the author creates is, in fact, an interesting combination of Austro-American feminist ethnographic writing technique and Ngarrindjeri comments about basketry. There is also a reasonable discussion about respect for the elders and seasonal influences, but what is later stated is that 'it is the feminist attention to reflexivity that allows the reader to understand the ways in which the ethnography is embedded in particular relationships forged at particular times by particular persons' (p. 460). This may be so, but as a male I am surprised that, although the children (male and female) still learn to weave and tell stories (pp. 44, 56), there is not a solitary quote from males about the craft of weaving. Even though it appears that traditionally the males could not only weave all that the women did but also wove distinctively different kinds of mats and baskets that were for the end-benefit of all (as well as some for male-only use) (p. 85), which suggests that the men might

have some useful comments to make, the focus is on the Ngarrindjeri women's knowledge. This is the 'gendered world' (p. 37) that the author promised from her 'feminist reading of the sources'.

That 'Making baskets: Making family' is, like the Native American woven rug-making, the 'key to Ngarrindjeri symbolic representations of their world' is, in many ways, an incredibly sad statement, given the author's documentation of their own realisation that their world was substantially (but not wholly) fragmented by the changes wrought after the coming of Europeans (p. 37). It is made even more poignant by the fact that none of the 'dissident' women cooperated with Professor Bell and that one of the 'proponent' families would not allow her to use material they had previously discussed with her (pp. 32, 36). In other words, it is a book which is likely, it sadly seems, to contribute to the continuation of polarisation between the Ngarrindjeri themselves, rather than weave the families together again.

It also seems that the imagery of weaving became so dominant in the author's mind that she then projected the imagery to unsustainable lengths. This is particularly so when she discusses *Wururi*, the female spider associated with the dispersal of languages. The postulation that the spider in question is the huntsman spider is reasonable, but the author is incorrect in stating that it is harmless (p. 138). Whilst it is fortunately true that they are harmless most of the time, in fact they are venomous, their venom breaks down cells, and on rare occasions their bites can result in an ever-enlarging sore that eats away at the flesh, and sometimes cause death. One might reasonably speculate that, because they were spiders commonly trapped in fires, and because on occasions they ate away at the flesh of people, this explains the similar mythology, which concludes with various groups of ancestral Aborigines eating away at portions of *Wururi*'s body. However feminist ethnographic speculation provides value free (?) 'powerful images' of spiderlings dispersing the language, and the speculation about huntsman spiders develops into a strong 'identification of that spider species' (p. 138). This is then given authority by referring to the previously mentioned 'Native American stories' of a Spiderwoman who—whilst not associated with explosions in fires, cannibalism or dispersal of languages as in *Wururi*'s case—inspires Native Americans to 'weave blankets into tales of life' (p. 139). It does seem to be drawing a rather long New Age feminist ethnographic bow, and to require a creative feminist reading of the speculated entomology, to make the connection.

Professor Bell is initially much more compelling in her development of many other aspects of the Ngarrindjeri/Hindmarsh Island study. For instance, she gives excellent attention to the creative Ngurunderi legend and, following Clarke (1995), emphasises the recorded variations of the tale and furthermore indicates that these variations should serve as a caution when considering the details (pp. 91–104). However, she does not herself exercise caution once she leaves the available texts and begins her feminist speculation. At one stage, for instance, she interprets the account that Ngurunderi's wives were drowned when they tried to follow him as illustrating their 'devotion' (p. 95) when, in fact, there is no indication in the quoted passage that this was devotion at all and, since all other accounts indicate that they were drowned because they were defiant of Ngurunderi's laws, their drowning in this instance may also be interpreted as an act of punishment for defiance—something the author herself appears to later accept

(p. 570). Similar free speculation is involved when, after stating that Ngurunderi's wives are fleeing him when she first begins to consider their role, she then comments:

[Perhaps] they also stand as a reminder of the independent ways of women in days of yore. What might we have learned of the flight of Ngurunderi's wives from their angry, vengeful and easily aroused husband had a senior woman been asked' (p. 101).

Since Penney is quoted with approval as having recorded that 'the [Ngarrindjeri] boys said their mothers and the old women were accustomed to tell them [tales]' (p. 432), this suggests that both females and males learnt similar accounts of Ngurunderi and other legendary characters—a point also made by the Berndts (Berndt, et. al., 1993). And since the Ngarrindjeri universally regarded Ngurunderi 'with reverence' (Taplin, in Woods, 1997 [1879]: 58), one might expect the author to have conceded the possibility that both men and women knew of Ngurunderi's deeds in universal ways. In fact, since we do not know who gave the information to the earliest recorders in most instances, senior women cannot be precluded from being amongst the informants. It is thus at least reasonable to suggest that we would have learnt from senior women that the wives owed their form as two women to Ngurunderi (Smith, n.d.: 318–319), and also learnt precisely what Police-trooper T. Moriarty of Goolwa noted. As the author made use of the Moriarty reference, she must be aware that 'the deception practised by his wives', rather than any 'independent ways', is at least one of the reasons given for Ngurunderi's anger, the details being:

Ngurunderi had two wives who caught a large fish and a small one. They gave him the small fish to eat, and baked the large one for themselves. When he ate his, he saw the large one, and became very angry, and said to them, 'You shall die for that, and all Tanganarin [local area people] shall die... (Moriarty, in Taplin, 1989 [1879]: 51).

A much-extended version of this, indicating that taboo fish were eaten by the 'wayward' wives, is given by Smith (n.d.: 320–322). As there is also evidence in records of near-neighbour River Murray people that large fish were specifically to be divided into three and shared (Eyre, 1997[1845]: 292)—a method probably devised by Ngurunderi and demonstrated to his wives—his anger is at least partially explained. Additionally, though, as the wives were also so irresponsible in their child-caring role that they lost two of the family's four children and left care of the other two to Ngurunderi (Taplin, in Woods, 1997[1879]: 57), it is reasonable to suppose that this is also what might have been learnt had a senior woman been asked.

The author, who acknowledges that she had read all but the Eyre reference, concludes:

It is, after all, the wives who precede Ngurunderi into the new lands. It is his pursuit of them that is the impulse for explorations of new lands, and it is their transgressions that vivify gendered food taboos. (p. 101).

The weighting is understandable given her stated intent in the Prologue but, as she also gives another account (over 500 pages later in a foot-note) in which Ngurunderi *precedes* the two wives in all but the very last stage of the journey (p. 633), the conclusion can also be perceived as limiting.

Another point that the author makes is that, in the ethnographic material available to her, the two wives are never named. To some extent this is true but, as the author

would realise, it is also true of many other secondary (if still important) characters in Aboriginal mythology Australia-wide, whether women or men have been the ethnographers or anthropologists recording them. (The Seven Sisters, of whom more later, are but one example of mythological characters whose individual names have rarely been recorded). In the Ngurunderi myth the point is that the wives are never recorded as apart from one another, and are—as would be expected in real life as well as the mythology—two sisters. Thus the earliest site name and reference to them in one of the author's key references is as the Two Sisters, not as the two wives (Berndt, et al., 1993: 224). At the point where they were drowned they are visible as two of three small wave-washed outcrops, the third being a net bag that they carried (ibid: 226). In the past, apparently as part of both men's and women's instruction in knowledge of their landscape, there were Ngarrindjeri people who made '[many] pilgrimages' to the nearest mainland point from which these outcrops were visible (Smith, n.d.: 331). Here the account of their demise, the final punishment inflicted by Ngurunderi because of his powers over the winds and waters, was given as follows:

They began to swim. The younger sister became weak: she removed her net bag and threw it away. After swimming on for a short distance, she drowned. The elder sister swam on for a little way but she too drowned. They were metamorphosed as three rocks: the Two Sisters (Maralangk the elder as the large rock and the younger sister as the smaller one) and Meruki as the smallest. They are there today: the Pages... (Berndt, et al., 1993: 226).

In other words, they were named, but their naming evidently derived from the Ngarrindjeri for 'Older Sister', 'Younger Sister'—and in addition, 'Net bag'. (As Taplin gives 'Marauwe' [alternative 'Maranowe'] as the Ngarrindjeri word for 'older sister', and one can reasonably presume that the outcrop Maralangk derives its name from this word, then I believe that it is reasonable to postulate that the given understood amongst nineteenth century Ngarrindjeri people would have been that the younger sister outcrop was named Tartangk or Tartilangk from their word 'Tarti', meaning 'Sister, younger' [Taplin, 1989 (1879): 137]. Present-day Ngarrindjeri and linguists would, presumably, be able to determine whether this speculation is appropriate or not. As above intimated, too, 'Meruki' is the Berndt's spelling of Taplin's 'Mererki', meaning 'Net bag' [ibid: 134]).

In contrast to the above illustrations of alternative variations on the author's weave, it is only fair to say that she well develops the usefully sub-headed sections from 'Life on the Mission: From Taplin's Time On' to 'Ngarrindjeri of High Literary Degree' (pp. 136). Certainly I agree that Daisy Rankine's writing of her life story is to be commended (pp. 135–136), and would hope that it is eventually published along with other Ngarrindjeri accounts, including Milerum's fascinating life-story. (The latter work, which apparently includes films, photographs, song-recordings, drawings, maps and note-books, is well-referenced in the index, and was recorded with the full cooperation of Milerum by the remarkable entomologist and ethnographer Norman Tindale. The collection, held in the South Australian Museum, has as custodian Milerum's grandson, and it is one of the main records upon which the author acknowledges she has been privileged to draw).

As previously indicated, I believe that the author's approach to the story of *Wururi* is feminist speculative ethnographic interpretation at its most extreme. Speculation can be useful, but in this presentation it is rarely 'value-free'. Professor Bell constantly

weakens her feminist case and, sadly in my view, in the process at times both misrepresents the Ngarrindjeri's 'world that is, was, and will be', and much of the clear historical ethnographic evidence that she read. Every chapter contains examples, but for the moment one further reference from Chapter 3 will suffice.

In her discussion of Captain Charles Sturt's and party's travel by whaleboat down the River Murray in 1830, she understandably does not query Sturt's perception that the Ngarrindjeri had lit large fires (a means of driving perceived demons away) because of their alarm at the exploration party's appearance, and correctly states that '*[we] do not know* what might have happened had he explored the hummocks and Murray Mouth in any detail. (my emphasis). However, she then uses the example of the later murder of Captain Barker by Ngarrindjeri men to state that, 'Watchful Ngarrindjeri men were poised, ready to intervene should Sturt's party violate their law by desecrating sacred sites or interfering with their womenfolk' (p. 151). Nearly three hundred pages later they are not only 'ready to intervene' but have deliberately gathered in sufficient numbers to 'overwhelm the invaders should they stray to close' (p. 429). Professor Bell *must* know, from her reading of Sturt, that he constantly did his best to make friends with all Australian indigenous peoples met—often by presenting gifts; that he forbade members of his party to interfere with women; that he did not deliberately desecrate sacred sites (which he could not be expected to know about); and that he was proud that during his travels and explorations during 1826–1846 he did not have any clashes with Aborigines which resulted in deaths of the latter. She *must* also know that one of her major sources, Taplin, states quite clearly:

I know several men who remember the arrival of Captain Sturt, and they tell of the terror which was felt as they beheld his boat crossing the Lake Alexandrina. (in Woods, 1879 [1997]: 3).

This tends to suggest that, rather than Professor Bell's speculative gathering of warriors ready to 'overwhelm the invaders', the Ngarrindjeri were much more likely to flee. (Although the re-enactment of Sturt's journey in 1951 resulted in the singing of a 'war song' and encouragement of young men to 'drive the white men back to the sea' [p. 146], there is no evidence that this was the original response. In fact, since Sturt's party had come down the River Murray, the logical exhortation at the time of Sturt's appearance would have been to 'drive the white men back up the River', rather than out to sea).

The author *must* also know, from her reading of Sturt, Woods and Bull (p. 429) and her initial acceptance that Barker was killed by the Ngarrindjeri (p. 151), that her suggestion that Barker was possibly drowned (p. 429) is misleading without including the other information which is in her preferred reference. This is that Barker had been speared before-hand and attempted to escape by fleeing into the water (Woods, 1997 [1879]: xvi). He was, according to a Kaurna woman who had been captured by the Ngarrindjeri, speared because he did not reciprocate friendly signs [Bull, 1884: 75]). Thereafter, according to other Ngarrindjeri evidence told to investigators at the time of his disappearance, 'his body was thrown into the stream and carried out to sea' (ibid:74): the author prefers the additional historical speculation that he was eaten.

Such mischievous speculation about the historical events casts considerable doubts on the veracity of the entire book, yet this should not be the case. Professor Bell and her numerous assistants have done much excellent research, and the author has

structured the contents exceedingly well, but then feminist ethnography/anthropology, New Age interests, difficulties in coping with time-zone changes during travels, changing interests and agendas, all seem to have contributed to a tearing of the weave of the book. Even when the author states that she 'can explore some...questions, but much will remain speculation' (p. 155), the speculation in 'Many Meanings: Few Recordings' (pp. 155–166) is, in my view, excessive. Thus whilst fragmentary recordings of songs which contain the same expression '*Pata winema*' are concluded, 'from the text and rhythm', to be '*definitely* the same song' (my emphasis), the follow-up discussion has numerous expressions of the 'may be', 'could be', 'would be' kind, which does not give the impression of confidence in this assessment. Her feminist reading of the records also results in her here, as in most of the book, considering the women's information first-and-foremost, and the male information last, whereas a simple chronological approach—even though it reverses the presentation—is at least as potentially useful, as the following summary demonstrates.

The available information from males is that it was a song sung during the most highly acknowledged male informant's initiation in 1882; and—the only expansive and 'quite explicit' commentary (given in 1964)—that it was to do with the greeting of strangers by Ngarrindjeri people who were gathering cockles at 'the Nine Mile' in the Goolwa area. The decades later accounts by women who could only give the most abbreviated of glosses indicates that it was a [presumed traditional] 'welcoming song', which is in accord with the detailed male description; that it was to do with the 'coming of white man, taking of land' (1988); and that it was 'a cursing the white-fellas song' (1997). There is no discussion of the changing Aboriginal and broader Australian politics of the times, or the agendas of the recorders, which—to speculate like the author—might have helped to explain the 1980s–1990s glosses to do with dispossession of land and cursing of 'white-fellas' as opposed to the other accepted traditional explanations. Instead we read pages of admittedly well-researched ethno-musical discussion, drawing upon information from Central Australia, the Roper River and elsewhere in Australia, aimed at proving that all meanings have relevance. It seems odd that, in contrast, no attempt has been made at a literal translation of the words, although one of the author's key references (which uses an older phonetic system with stress symbols) suggests the possibility that the word *Pata* refers to the 'swamp gum tree', and that '*winema*' may be the song-poetic form of either '*Winna*', a fishing net, or, more likely, '*Winne*', the word for thread (Woods, 1997 [1879]: 174, 177. Whether these are helpful suggestions or not requires consideration by a linguist.

Chapter 3, which primarily concerns singing and ceremonies is, apart from the Captain Sturt/Captain Barker mischief and the inflated discussion on songs, quite an interesting chapter. Accounts of the 1951 re-enactment of Sturt's journey, with the revered old Ngarrindjeri woman Pinkie Mack singing songs and the Ngarrindjeri men dancing, and all of the follow-up information on the gradual loss of traditional songs, dances and much of the language, is well presented (pp. 168–189). Similarly, the revival in interest in language, as well as the continuum in interest in singing (pp. 188–198), is excellently illustrated. Here Professor Bell very usefully draws upon wide-ranging studies by various experts as well as upon the ethnographic records. At the same time, given that the author relates that Taplin recorded a large gathering 'which included people ranging from Encounter Bay to the Darling River' (p. 173); that 'Pinkie Mack

could sing up the River to Swan Hill and down to the Coorong' (p. 170); and that relatively little is known about traditional songs and dancing—in part because Taplin was prudishly offended by both (pp. 168–169), it is surprising to me that the author did not make use of any of the references to the closely linked Lower Murray groups. If it is possible to refer to a Native American Spiderwoman in the same breath as *Wururi*, it is surely reasonable to present evidence which was apparently considered—the text and bibliography hint at this—but then rejected. Why Eyre (1845), in particular, was not considered, is such a mystery that I now briefly touch on his records.

It seems strange that the only reference to the locality at which Eyre worked—Morrundee [Moorundie] (p. 300)—, the most prominent early historical contact site north of Ngarrindjeri territory, is omitted from both the map on p. xvi and the index. Further, it seems remarkable that these particular Ngarrindjeri's near-neighbours should be overlooked when the author has, in general terms, been alerted to their significance by the Berndts (Berndt, et. al., 1993: 21–22), and when she has remarked upon a wide range of other groups. And it seems astounding that the author, having been so able to discover all kinds of holes in the woven fabric of other author's presentations by going back to original sources, has but the following reference to Eyre:

Fay Gale (1989)...urged a reconsideration of the early records and pointed to evidence in Edward John Eyre's journals of women's ceremonies (p. 460).

These accounts of women's ceremonies alluded to by Fay Gale—a rare approved author (pp. 462–463)—give the descriptive information that Taplin's prudishness eliminated (Eyre, 1997 [1845], Vol.11: 235–236); indicate that children practiced the dances of the adults; suggest that, whilst the women had their separate dances, all were witnessed by men (and vice versa); indicate that there was much ceremony in which both men and women took part in entirely complementary ways (ibid: 227–239); and also give other details about a wide variety of ceremonies which detail the gender roles (ibid: 332–367).

As all writers are selective in their use of references, perhaps the above are unfair comments, but it does seem odd that, despite the Berndts' hints and Fay Gale's urging and pointing, Eyre's account was omitted from consideration. (It would have illuminated Chapters One, Six, and Nine). Certainly Eyre was writing, in the main, about the Ngaiawong people—a group more generally included under the name Walkandi-woni or Rangmatmer by the Ngarrindjeri (Berndt, et.al., 1993:21), but the cultural similarities to the Ngarrindjeri were far greater than the differences.

Chapter Four, 'Family, Friends and Other Relations', indicates how it is that many of the people who identify themselves as Ngarrindjeri have, as with many other Australians, 'a multi-cultural heritage on which they can draw'. However, as Professor Bell indicates, their distinctive heritage lies in association with *ngatji* totems and relationships: 'the *ngatji* affiliation' is stated to be 'central to their identity as Ngarrindjeri' (p. 207). The author diligently leads readers through a section on the people 'Accommodating Change' (pp. 208–211); expands upon this; discusses the revival of men's non-sacred carving activities; and then indicates how it is that instinctive and emotional feelings become knowledge and belief. As all individuals on earth rely on instinct and express (or sometimes suppress) emotion, the comments by Ngarrindjeri people on these *miwi* matters are likely to be consciously or subconsciously assessed by all readers on the basis of their own experiences and beliefs.

The more I read of this chapter, the more I felt—as I had shortly after the start—that I was reading my way up a steep Coorong sandhill—a combination of two steps forward and one step back, then one step forward and two steps back. Considerable amounts of the first part of the book include reflections and descriptions such as the following:

Unfortunately this moment was not captured on video. Would it have been appreciated had it been? She told the story later but, without a context, the significance was lost (p. 221).

On the third day of the Long Walk in November 1996, Genevieve and I had joined the walkers at Cole's Crossing on the Finnis River. It was not an easy site to find and we were not the only ones who did a circuit of Mount Magnificent on the forest roads before catching sight of the support vehicles (p. 223).

This may be an attempt at a light touch, but it hardly advances the chapter. With due respect for the author and her great labour, I consider that even a moderate review panel of feminist anthropologists and a moderate feminist editor could have eliminated one quarter of the book without any loss to the Ngarrindjeri.

Chapter five, 'A Land Alive', has less of the above kind of padding, but has its problems. For instance, whilst in traditional times ecological concerns included prohibitions on—amongst other things—'[improper] use of resources, taking too much, eating too much' (p. 258), this dramatically changed with access to European technology. John Lewis, a stockman on the Coorong in the 1860's, recorded the inter-phase time:

[In] the Coorong proper there were mackerel and mullet, and a most delicious fish was a little one called the 'Kongolly', which came into the river once a year to spawn, and was there for about six weeks. The native men would never allow the women or the very young men to eat the fish until after the first moon.

Swan were numerous in the Coorong in those days, and the natives, after harvest, used to put...1 [pound] each in the 'pool', and go to the island opposite Touacherie Island, and shoot the birds as they came across. The one who got the most for the week was entitled to the pool, which kept him in rations all the year round...It was a great sin that so many beautiful birds were destroyed wantonly, as the natives could not eat one-quarter of what they shot (Lewis, 1922:11–12).

That the latter kind of wastage of resources continued for a century or more is suggested by the need to bring in a law to protect pelicans against excessive Aboriginal harvesting, as well as excessive destruction by the wider public (pp. 73–77), and by Doug Wilson's comment that, prior to the building of the barrages, 'you'd get two to three ton [of mulloway] at a time' (p. 259). As statements elsewhere in the book suggest that Goolwa's Ngarrindjeri population was but a few families prior to the 1934–1940 construction time, one might be forgiven for thinking that, even if some of the catch was salted, most of the fish had to be thrown away. However, Doug Wilson may have been a professional fisherman at the time, in which case wastage need not have been involved at all. In that the changing dynamics of Ngarrindjeri society are well-examined by Professor Bell in numerous other situations, with 'Finding Meaning in a Changing World: A constant' (pp. 474–482) a spirited defence against detractors, it is surprising that such evidence as the above was not considered, given that the modern Ngarrindjeri ecological concerns are so eloquently presented.

In another problematic section the author, after quoting Doreen Kartinyeri's account of babies dying, women having miscarriages, women in pain and rolling about in agony—apparently for days—when the jetty was being built at Raaukkan in 1879, comments:

In Taplin's journal (16–17/7/1879) I find a reference to the building of the jetty. There is no mention of the women's agony, but could we expect him to have recorded it had we noticed? (p. 269).

It is difficult not to assume that the reader is meant to think, 'No', but the author's own comments (pp. 105–106), and more particularly those sections of Taplin's journal quoted in Woods (1997 [1879]: 71–118), suggest that the answer would be a resounding 'YES!' Given that the answer is 'Yes', then one has a problem with Doreen Kartinyeri's evidence, not because it is not truly believed, but because it has no support-evidence in a situation where Taplin can reasonably be expected to have attempted to assist the women; recorded the women rolling about on the ground in agony in compassionate detail; read the burial services over those who were Christian converts; and to have sent a detailed account to the Government authorities in Adelaide. The author deals with this problem, but how well she deals with it is up to the individual reader to decide.

The later section on 'Burials...' (pp. 286–287) is well and compassionately developed, but is again undercut by failure to acknowledge those ethnographic records which create a challenge. For instance, three different reports by early recorders about the carrying of the corpses of children are conflated into one account that is implied to be aberrant (p. 303), yet Eyre, writing of 'the Murray and contiguous tribes', and distinguishing the differences between still-born children, unweaned children and older children, was quite specific that deceased '[infants] not weaned are carried about by the mother for some months, well wrapped up, and when thoroughly dry, are put into nets and bags, and deposited in the hollows of trees, or buried' (Eyre, 1845 [1997]: 346). If a weaver spider from North America can be used as evidence in support of a Ngarrindjeri myth, it is odd—to reiterate a point made earlier—that near-neighbouring Murray River people, with almost identical customs to the Ngarrindjeri, cannot be referred to. Even more odd is that, whilst several present-day Ngarrindjeri men and women of the proponent groups who were prepared to cooperate with the author emphasise that men had, and continue to have, particular rights associated with mortuary and other practices on Mundoo Island, even to the point where '[women] are not supposed to go to Mundoo or even mention the name' (pp. 296–298), there is no discussion by the author that indicates that these practices and restrictions are relatively recent developments. Evidence that this is so is implied by Police-trooper T. Moriarty of Goolwa, who noted that both Mundoo and Hindmarsh Islands were part of the territory of the large 'clan' of the Ngarrindjeri called *Tanganarin* (in Taplin, 1879[1989]: 50), and by Taplin, who further implies that Mundoo Island had a sizeable resident population; specifies one individual who had a special gift-exchange relationship with another person resident in another 'tribe' upstream on the Murray; records that the Mundoo group attempted to steal a young woman from the Point Malcolm group; further notes that in the ensuing fight 'the old women, as usual, bore a distinguished part'; notes that 'a lot of Mundoo blacks went and attacked the Lake Albert tribe'; and also records that 'the old enemies, the Murray and Mundoo clans, fell out', their quarrel being over a woman (in Woods, 1879 [1997]: 33, 71–72, 86, 111). As the author does not at all deny use of the island by

Ngarrindjeri families in the late nineteenth century (pp. 553), and is intent on proving that no Ngarrindjeri 'proponent' person lied during the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission, I reiterate that it seems strange that what appears to be excellent evidence for a continuing tradition of creative oral history is not considered. Perhaps, though, this is part of the 'work-in-progress' that over 250 pages later she mentions as involving the Ngarrindjeri women—but not, apparently, the men (p. 557).

Every chapter, every sub-headed section, in the book has this mixture of presentation. The genuinely good research, the genuinely good information, is constantly drowned in flood-waters of inflated feminist ethnographic discussion, or diverted into billabongs of personal detail. Sins of omission, justified or cloaked by the author's 'feminist reading' of the sources, are numerous and it is difficult not to conclude that the process obscures as much as it reveals.

No reader should deny that there is not some good information in the book, but no reader with even partial access to the books listed in the bibliography, or simply with a reasonable sense of history, will be likely to feel other than that they've occasionally been misled. Before going on to some additional positive comments, the following is a very brief selection of an encyclopedia of further reasonable questions that can be asked, and constructive criticisms that can be made.

Why is the return of whales to South Australian coastal waters 'confirmation of the wisdom of the [Ngarrindjeri] elders' (p. 318) more so than the unmentioned international bans on whaling and creation of marine parks?

Is the account of the 'birth of the white buffalo calf called Miracle in Wisconsin', and a statement by White Buffalo Calf Woman (p. 319), neither of whom are listed in the index, really significant in an account of the Ngarrindjeri interest in the return of whales? A coincidentally similar belief in one instance of the very different cultures (e.g. see Powell [1981] for a detailed account of traditional Lakota and Cheyenne culture and history) is purely that—a coincidentally similar belief.

How is it that whales were never historically recorded as for use in Ngarrindjeri transport, as Maggie Jacobs is quoted as saying? (p. 320). Such a world first is surely worthy of further comment.

Why is it that no Ngarrindjeri women are quoted about the special significance of whales to women when they are quoted extensively about many other aspects? The author states that 'No doubt the close kinship women expressed with the whale is a commentary on their recognition of a fellow warm-blooded mammal who bears live young, suckles them, and is extremely protective of them' (p. 321). Why is there 'no doubt' when she provides no evidence whatsoever that the Ngarrindjeri women have ever articulated this; when there is no evidence that indicates that Ngarrindjeri women considered that whales were other than descended from a mythological male; and when there is no evidence that the Ngarrindjeri used terms such as 'mammals' and 'calves' until relatively recent times—their traditional term was *kondoli*, as the author notes, with 'young' or 'small' the most likely identifying term for a 'calf' (Taplin, 1997 [1879]:137,141). And how is it that this *pure speculation* becomes a *given fact* of 'celebration of the protective nature of whales with their calves' (p. 427)? The author's further *speculation* about whales, women, grass-trees and fire was not, since she does not quote them, supported by a shred of such a suggestion from the Ngarrindjeri women. We are

asked to 'imagine the spout of the whale, the steam rising from the fire, and how it replicates the shape of the grass tree' (p. 321). I can imagine 'the spout' and 'the steam' without at all perceiving replication of 'the grass tree'. Without meaning any offence at all to the Ngarrindjeri by my speculation, why not imagine, in a decidedly male image, that the spout—which in the mythology is related to a 'fire (warm blood) inside' the mythological male whale (p. 321)—, is the visible representation of the whale's penis, which replicates the grass tree? Given that the mythological whale's fire was 'placed... in a grass tree, where it remains today and may be brought out by rubbing' (p. 321) and the author's reference to Ngarrindjeri 'firestick marriage' (p. 322), this speculated interpretation seems at least possible. Furthermore, since in one version of the Ngurunderi myth it is Ngurunderi who frees his two wives from the grass-trees (Smith, n.d.: 317–319) and, to use a central Australian expression as the author intermittently does in support evidence, 'poking about with a hot fire-stick' causes pregnancy and they have four children, the speculation is even more logical. It is, nonetheless, totally unprovable, as with the author's speculation.

Whilst use of the imagination is to be encouraged, it is doubtful whether the author has done herself or the Ngarrindjeri a service by asking for it here. Her own words are apposite: 'The postmodern turn in anthropology—which nurtures the "invention of tradition" debates, where discourse becomes a "free play of signifiers"—limits the ability of members of dominated communities to circulate their own signs, stories and meanings'. (p. 421).

Doreen Kartinyeri is quoted as saying that she had learnt 'about the story' of the Lower Murray —'the landscape as a gendered body' as the author puts it—from her Auntie Rosie some time prior to 1954. However, she only perceived this 'story' in a revelatory way herself when, in 1954, she happened to see 'the shape of the womb and the ovaries' when glancing at a school map (p. 270). Surely this is deserving of some comment at this point of time in the book, given that Victor Wilson is on record as having said to Doug Milera that he first perceived a similarity to a woman whilst studying an aerial map of the Murray Mouth and adjoining country in April, 1994; that he proposed telling Doreen Kartinyeri this; and that—still in April 1994—Doreen Kartinyeri is reported as saying, whilst being shown the map and responding to Victor's comments, 'Yes, I can see it now'. This evidence was all considered by the author in her close reading of the Royal Commission evidence. If Doreen Kartinyeri has 'been called a "fabricator" by Commissioner Stevens' (p. 48), then it is a pity that evidence which could be interpreted as fabrication has not been effectively countered by the author. No-one at all need doubt that, as the author states, '[before] Hindmarsh Island became a household name in Australia, Doreen Kartinyeri's work was well known to researchers in the Aboriginal field', in particular with regard to her 'extensive research into Ngarrindjeri families' (p. 48), and one can also agree with the author's later statement in defence of Doreen Kartinyeri that 'there is a distinct difference between deliberate fabrication and the ongoing process of meaning-making in an oral culture' (p. 425), but these are not the problems in the context of the above.

In relation to the preceding, it also seems odd that a school map, known to have had 'vivid colours', could not be located (p. 624) when all schools in South Australia had one in the 1940s–1960s period, and when the author had a team of researchers assisting her. As a student in South Australian country and city schools from 1944–1956

I too recalled the map and, upon making one telephone call, found that it was a 1941 'Map Of South Australia' which was 'Published By The Education Department of South Australia For Use In Schools', and that it was prepared by 'L. Moore, Government photolithographer, Adelaide'.

In contrast to the preceding five chapters, Chapter 6, 'Signs and Sorcery', has numerous strengths in the presentation and, whilst one might question certain comments and assertions in a relatively minor way, is more truly illustrative of the continuum of Ngarrindjeri beliefs than all that precedes it. The reason for this is, I believe, that the author does not have to attempt major reconstructions of the broken weave of Ngarrindjeri culture here, and therefore does not intrude with pages of feminist speculation. In other words, the Ngarrindjeri people's own voices are heard more strongly than in the preceding chapters. The chapter thus provides an excellent conclusion to Part One.

Part Two, 'The Politics of Knowledge', is by far the strongest section of the book. Chapters 7, 'Respecting the Rules: Oral and Written Cultures', opens the section. In many ways it is a greatly expanded version of the Prologue, and at times reads as though it is a prepared anthropological lecture which has incorporated Ngarrindjeri evidence. The author raises a considerable number of points that have become increasingly significant in Australia in recent years, of which one brief extract will suffice to illustrate a complex issue.

In early 1996...[Henry Rankine] had alerted me to a problem in dealing with written sources when I first sought access to the Tindale papers in the South Australian Museum. In Henry Rankine's view, there was information from his father, Clarence Long, and other Ngarrindjeri with whom Tindale worked, that was not to be read by women, and the whole manuscript was to be treated respectfully. Even published texts that contain transcriptions of what had been said required permission. The word is still owned (p. 363).

However sympathetic other people are to the Ngarrindjeri, or other Aborigines who make similar statements, every person in the wider society tends to take a different stance, depending on her or his concept of democracy, the degree to which the experiences is known to have been shared or paid for, and so on. Had Tindale's proposed book about Clarence Long, *The World of Milerum*, been published in the 1960s, as 'Old Tinny' told me he had originally hoped, there can be no doubt that it would have been respectful of both Milerum and Ngarrindjeri culture in the context of the time. That does not mean, as Henry Rankine indicates, that he would now accept that it should all be in the public domain. How does one deal with such matters? Professor Bell discusses the numerous facets well in a later section (pp. 439-441). However, to extend the point, does each and every writer who wishes to quote from Taplin's *South Australian Aboriginal Folklore* (1879), which includes 'transcriptions of what had been said' in the 1860s-1870s, require permission to use an extract when in many instances there is no evidence which man or woman told Taplin and his other contributors the material quoted? This is not a criticism, but a question stimulated by the author's interesting and thought-provoking discussion.

Many such moral and other issues are raised, the Ngarrindjeri themselves indicating how they are grappling with them, and also pointing out that, treasure-troves though the records of such as the Berndts' and Tindale's records may be, they are not infallible (e.g., see pp. 396-398). As with all chapters, the sub-headings, such as 'Whose

Knowledge? Whose Rules?', 'The Trouble with Books' and 'Staying Silent: Speaking Out', are commended as giving genuinely good guides to those readers who may wish to 'dip and browse', or students and researchers wishing to consider specific issues.

Much as the chapter is generally recommended to the interested reader of anthropological/ethnographic texts, there are numbers of problems, two of which—the first serious and the second minor—provide sufficient illustration of my concerns.

The first is the author's questioning of the 'dissident' woman, Bertha Gollan, born in 1920, who was considered by the judge of the Royal Commission to have told the truth when she stated that she—as with other 'dissident' women—had never heard of 'women's business' in general; never heard of specific sacred significance to do with the waters around Hindmarsh Island; and never heard any suggestion by older women that 'there might be any secret knowledge to be passed...[on]' (p. 381). Although she was not able to talk with Bertha Gollan, who had spent forty-five years in the crucial Ngarrindjeri country under consideration, the author is not content with one of her own assessments of stated lack of knowledge—'There are silences and there are lacunae' (p. 403). Thus it is that, keeping in mind her determination to remain 'value-free' in her writing, she chips away at Bertha's statements by alluding, amongst other things, to her jobs, fair skin and three other people's recorded knowledge of *putari* practice (pp. 381–404). The latter term, it will be noted, was not at all mentioned in the quoted statements by Bertha Gollan, but the author then concludes: 'Bertha Gollan's ignorance cannot be explained by an absence of *putari* practice when she was growing up, or when she was a mature woman' (p. 404). This feminist understanding, which—to reiterate—stands in contradiction to Bertha's clearly stated evidence, is explained—it is *implied*—by either the older women deliberately withholding knowledge from Bertha Gollan because she disobeyed laws, by Bertha herself withholding knowledge or—again by implication from elsewhere in the book—, by Bertha being an uninterested descendant of the 'old people' (p. 424). The strongest *evidence* provided for this is a quotation from Doreen Kartinyeri who remarked, 'Surely she would have learned more' (p. 404). I admire the fact that the author, in something that can be fairly assumed to have been akin to forty-five minutes of specific discussion in forty-five days of field-work, was able to learn more than Bertha did in forty-five years of direct association with the crucial country and numbers of the most significant 'old people'. And I am surprised that in the nearly 50 years of Bertha's adult life prior to the Royal Commission none of the 'proponent' women—all of whom know her well—discussed with her or the other 'dissident' kinfolk the crucially significant understandings about Hindmarsh Island, the sacred waters and *putari* practice. The author does not substantially challenge the statement that Bertha and everyone else in the small Raukkan community 'knew everybody's business and that they were in and out of each other's houses all of the time' (p. 381). There is no information given that indicates that Bertha Gollan, along with other 'proponent' and 'dissident' women alike, did not have understandings about child-bearing, acting as a mid-wife, and generally knowing what to do about the placenta and umbilical cord (the latter directly associated with *putari* practice)—in fact, this is admitted (p. 404). However, the author does not question that the 'ritual exchange aspect may have fallen into disuse' well before 1930 (p. 494). And there is honestly stated evidence that the author read out detailed historical notes about navel cords to the 'proponent' women, which mentioned and explained the word *putari* (p. 226); there is evidence that

some of the 'proponent' women only knew about the use of the *putari* in very indirect ways associated with a great-grandmother, ascribing other uses to it than those traditionally known (p. 337); and there is a hint that the word was not remembered by a 'proponent' woman in another instance (p. 404). As the key 'proponent' woman Doreen Kartinyeri states, this does not mean that she was a 'fabricator' (p. 404), nor does it mean that any of the other 'proponent' women were fabricators. What it does suggest, though, is that they had informative, perhaps even revelatory, discussions with the author, who had detailed ethnographic records in hand during the discussions. As there is no information presented which suggests that the 'dissident' women were afforded the same 'proving up' of evidence, this might partially explain why there were, and apparently still are, differences in comprehensions by the 'proponent' and the 'dissident' women about the sacred *putari* practice.

Secondly, just as there are—as the author states—speakers who 'glide onto another topic so gracefully that...the move would be almost undetectable' (p. 402), so the author occasionally 'glides' in her writing. It would, I suggest, be an unusually knowledgeable person in the general Australian public, let alone an overseas readership, who would comprehend that the reference to 'the Warumungu land claim, 1984', sandwiched as it is in between extensive comments about Ngarrindjeri people (p. 403), is a reference to a land claim in the Tennant Creek area of the Northern Territory rather than something to do with one of the Ngarrindjeri clans.

Chapter 8, 'Sorting the Sources: Writing about the Lower Murray', commences with the sub-heading, 'Who has Fabricated the Ngarrindjeri?'. There are some genuinely interesting questions raised about many aspects—again the sub-headings give excellent guidance—but the author is too intent on enjoying a game of skittles with the majority of writers mentioned to consistently allow her own views the clarity they deserve. A diligent sixty-three pages later it is difficult not to conclude that, apart from the 'proponent' Ngarrindjeri women with their 'feminist tradition' traceable through 'blood lines' dating back to the nineteenth century (p. 468), no-one has told the truth. This being a bit too extreme, the author pulls back on the reins a little, and allows herself—the modestly unnamed 'not just any woman' researcher (p. 460)—and feminist anthropologists Fay Gale and Deane Fergie (p. 469) to join the 'proponent' women in a race to the winning post. Everyone else is under the whip, some women for not being declared feminists back in the late 1930's and at the time of the World War II bombings of Pearl Harbour and Darwin (pp. 460–462); Catherine Berndt for *numerous entirely speculated failings* (463–467); others, through having blinkers of various kinds, being subconscious fabricators; and especially modern 'armchair anthropologists' (p. 472) and—in the next chapter—the 'dissident' women (pp. 518–520). Even those who admit that their work is incomplete, and Tindale, whose 'unrivalled' material was a 'rare privilege' to read, are given flicks of the whip, if not thrashings (pp. 439–443). Taking the broadest view, Professor Bell ably demonstrates that *everyone* is trapped by her/his (but mostly his) world view, and by the limitations of their gender, interests, understandings of language, availability of documents and time for research.

The chapter has two further sections worth mentioning. First, the question, 'How might a feminist ethnography of the Lower Murray be constructed?', is obviously placed here rather than in the 'Prologue' to prepare us for a 'value-free' feminist 'construction' instead of a simple ethnographic 'presentation' in the final two chapters. The

answers to the question are followed by, 'Finding Meaning in a changing World: A constant', a section in which the author usefully reminds readers of the fact of 'the dynamic nature of Aboriginal societies in their pre-contact past, as well as their ability to adapt, absorb, and survive today' (p. 475), and the Ngarrindjeri's 'fierce determination to care for place they hold dear' (p. 482). It is an interesting, thought-provoking, passionate section: all readers are likely to find matters of interest in the discussion.

At this stage the author has worked hard to prepare readers for what I believe are her two most important chapters. To use a favoured image, there has been a long weaving process, and all readers must look forward with keen anticipation to these final chapters to see how they complete the weave. As always, the author provides much excellent information, and much interesting discussion. And, to some extent to pre-empt the chapter, I fully accept that men cannot experience menstruation and childbirth, and therefore 'have no knowledge based on direct experience' (p. 535).

In one of the few light touches in the book, Chapter Nine's first character under the chapter title, 'Womens Beliefs, Bodies and Practices', is 'Pope Joan' (p. 483). Although she is not in the index, and it is doubtful that most young readers would know her by this name, it is nice to be reminded of a feminist Premier who worked hard and well, was a 'breath of fresh air' in Australian politics, and had and still has an agile mind and a sense of humour. (I suspect that her Ngarrindjeri connections are limited, though).

The trowel is used rather heavily in her initial discussion of gendered roles, with the gender 'reversals' being stereotypes in themselves—the 'ambitious woman who speaks her mind, heads a government or a church' is contrasted with the man who 'makes school lunches' (p. 483). (I incidentally find that having made school lunches, I join the author's 'Possible, but rare' category.) Still, the intent is 'to establish what Ngarrindjeri women were actually doing', and in particular whether 'it is possible to argue for the existence of knowledge that was...gendered and kept apart' (p. 484). (The emphasis, it should be noted, is primarily on practices of 50–100 years ago.)

One cannot strongly argue against the examples she gives to support her statement that, 'for the most part women are gathering and men are hunting' (p. 485). Although her quoted reference to 'shellfish gathering' as a 'constant chore for Tangani women' (p. 484) can be challenged by the excellent account of men expertly doing the same (Smith, 1924, pp. 205–207), which also means that other stated sex-specific tasks can also be challenged, this does not deny that the author is essentially correct when she writes: 'For the Ngarrindjeri, the division of labour is better understood in terms of a continuum rather than a sharp either/or division' (p. 486).

Professor Bell asks again, 'What were the women doing? Reclamation [of what they were doing] is the first step in the feminist ethnography...' (p. 489). One can but wholeheartedly agree that 'making women visible' is desirable, if at times difficult (p. 489–490).

She well develops the understanding of the sacred term *miwi*, known to both men and women, indicating variant perceptions (pp. 490–496). And one need not at all challenge the fact that the birth of a child meant that the mother, mid-wives and other women were, on all possible occasions, the only people present, but if men also 'knew about the birth rituals and the associated symbols' (p. 496), then they also knew quite a

bit about birth. The answer lies in the fact that, although men were normally not present at a birth, on rare occasions they were, and had to deliver the baby. (The Berndts recorded this fact on p. 142 of *A World That Was* [1993], a page used by the author for two other quotes to do with birth). Furthermore, as the author also knows from her reading, '[as] soon as a child is born, the information is conveyed to the father, who immediately goes to see the child and to attend upon the mother, by carrying firewood, water, &c' (Meyer, quoted by Taplin, in Woods [1997(1879):13]). As the author would also know from her reading, the men's camp was close enough for them to be able to hear the first cries of the new-born baby, and on his first visit the husband was 'usually' accompanied by 'some older men (his own and his wife's relatives)' who 'would talk about the child, predicting what kind of an adult it would turn out to be'. (Berndt, et. al., 1993:143-144). However, to reiterate, I accept that the historical ethnographic records and oral history records of the senior Ngarrindjeri women indicate that under conventional circumstances only Aboriginal women were present at a birth, and that under modern situations in hospitals this is also conventional. I similarly accept that menstruation was 'women's business' (pp. 508-509), even though, since by far the majority of historical ethnographic recorders about menstruation were men, it is clear that the Ngarrindjeri men had considerable understandings of the 'greater details of the rituals, taboos, practices and key relationships', including that they knew the food taboos, knew and respected that they should avoid women at such times, and also clearly recognised if women had neglected the rules of menstrual blood disposal (pp. 508-514). The author emphasises all of the statements of restriction that the Berndts recorded (Berndt, et. al. 1993: 153-154) but, after paraphrasing a few sentences, overlooks two sentences. Professor Bell's words read:

During the day she sat over a fire, much the same as at birth; at dusk she moved to the women's camp, where she stayed with older women (p. 510).

The Berndt's reference she is using reads:

During the day she would sit over a fire that was built in a hole... '[There is no reference to 'much the same as at birth' because, as Taplin indicates (1989 [1879]: 48-49), the position was distinctively different]. 'If a man inadvertently came nearby and saw the girl and women, he might ask, 'Makambitj lewun?' (Why Sitting?) They would reply, 'lewun p'ringk piningi-angk' (Sitting straight down on two buttocks); this remark implied that a woman was menstruating (Berndt, et al., 1993: 153).

That the author should have missed seeing these sentences in a little over one page that she has otherwise extensively paraphrased and commented upon seems remarkable, even given that this is a feminist reading of the sources. My own interpretation of the Berndt reference is that both men and women accepted that a man might inadvertently walk so close that he could perceive the young woman sitting in a way that he instantly knew to be unusual; that his question might have been expected but was doubtfully necessary, more likely being a form of excuse acceptable to the women; and that their answer was unambiguously understood by the transgressing man. This does not in the least deny that, generally speaking, men were warned away by defining markers or the vociferous calls of the senior women a century and more ago, or that today's Ngarrindjeri men don't have restrictions of associations with their partners or wives at times of menstruation.

The evidence the author presents for female initiation is excellent—as far as it goes, and given that she has no intention of dwelling on the fact that the young men went through a variation of the same operation as but one part of their initiation, and that this had ceased being performed at much the same time as the women's operation (Berndt, et. al. 1993: 155, 178). There being no living people who could give her details about the cicatrization associated with female initiation, Professor Bell understandably draws upon the ethnographic record. A particular point she makes is that '[as] with other rituals where women's knowledge about women's bodies was transmitted, men were excluded' (p. 514). Although the majority of the account she presents suggests this, Tindale's evidence, also quoted, is that '[long] cuts were made by men but only short ones by women' (p. 515). It seems odd that this point, which totally contradicts the author's emphatic statement about the exclusion of men, should be overlooked in the rest of the three pages of discussion. And if 'one can infer...[depilation] from other sources' (p. 517), it seems odd that the author cannot infer from Eyre's eye-witness accounts, writing about the culturally related people upstream on the River Murray, how the cicatrization was managed. There she would have found nearly three pages of detailed description, acknowledging differences in form and patterning of the women's 'tattooing' amongst the various River Murray and other 'tribes' (Eyre, 1997 [1845], Vol.11: 340), and including the following clear statements about the ceremony that was closely associated with the onset of menstruation: '[The] person [young woman] whose back is to be tattooed is taken out early in the morning and squatted on the ground with her back towards the operator (always a male), and her head bent down between the knees of a strong old woman who is sitting on the ground for that purpose: the back is thus presented in the best position to the operator, and the girl, as long as her head is held firmly in its position, cannot possibly arise until it is all over' (Ibid: 341). After giving the details of this and another witnessed operation, he gives yet another, in which he further states: 'At this ceremony many other natives of both sexes, and of all ages were standing looking on; but so little did they commiserate the poor creature's sufferings, that the degree of her pain only seemed to be the measure of their laughter and merriment' (Ibid: 343).

'Always a male' is Eyre's 1840's eye-witness wording about the operator, and almost a century later Tindale's most senior and knowledgeable Ngarrindjeri informants (perhaps including women, though the author does not tell us) reported the same use of a male operator for the most severe cuts. One cannot discount the possibility of there having been women-only gatherings for the initial associated ritual, although that the Berndts' record is of the 1870's end-point of time for the operations, and that the author accepts that the last remaining senior initiated Ngarrindjeri woman had had incomplete knowledge (p. 517), may well explain their variant account. Interestingly, too, whilst no-one can deny the remarkable amount of highly detailed information that the Berndts recorded, the author herself questions their reliability over certain religious matters (pp. 175–176), including what Catherine Berndt recorded from this last initiated woman, the legendary Pinkie Mack (pp. 463–468).

A more minor point is that, in later accepting a Seven Sisters Story (pp. 579–580), the author gives such an abbreviated account that she forgets to mention that the Elders who instruct the Seven Sisters in their pre-initiatory training, then operate upon them,

thereby introducing women's initiation, are implied to be—in the reference available to me—all men (Smith, n.d.: 345–350).

Much as I am prepared to be corrected, the above evidence suggests that the author's woven basket looks, at this point, more like a section of wire-netting fence, and that even that has a hole in it. The author herself created this without the slightest assistance from either 'proponent' or 'dissident' Ngarrindjeri women, which I suggest illustrates one of the problems with a 'value free' feminist reading of the ethnography. So intent has the author been on pointing out that men were 'excluded' that, in effect, she only sees the colour red when she looks at a rainbow.

Most readers (other than 'value free' feminists?) would probably expect the sub-heading 'Marriage' to follow major discussions about the traditional significance of birth, the onset of menstruation, and initiation. Even though the institution of marriage in Ngarrindjeri society has always involved a woman and a man in an open ceremony, which means that one cannot discuss exclusive women's activities very well, and even though numerous minor references are scattered throughout the book (one incorrectly referenced in the index), the author declines to comment in any detail on this major institution. It is a pity that an editor did not request Professor Bell to provide a sub-heading here, so that she could better synthesise and expand upon her own comments, as well as those of the early ethnographic recorders. Taplin, for instance, gives quite a sympathetic portrayal of the marriage ceremony, even though the evidence is that a male relative is always 'formally giving' the young woman, and that there is no evidence to indicate that the woman other than 'signifies her acceptance of the giving by making a fire for her husband' (1989 [1879]: 35). The author has, admittedly, earlier considered and basically rejected this information because it does not tell her what should, in her view, be heard from women (there is no evidence that women did not give Taplin the information) about a 'firestick marriage' (p. 455), and despite the fact that in Taplin's expanded reference (used with approval by the author in other matters), he notes:

Although the consent of a female is not considered a matter of the first importance, yet it is always regarded as desirable (Taplin, in Woods, 1997[1879]: 10);

It is regarded by the females as very disgraceful not to be *given away* in exchange for another (Ibid: 11. Taplin's emphasis), and;

A woman is supposed to signify her consent to the marriage by carrying fire to her husband's wurley, and making his fire for him. An unwilling wife will say, when she wishes to signify that she was forced into marriage with her husband, 'I never made any fire in his wurley for him' (ibid: 12).

The author apparently justifies the elimination of such evidence by giving emphasis to Taplin's deliberately limited questionnaire (p. 455), rather than considering his and his wife's decades of direct involvement with the Ngarrindjeri. (Even though a fair case could be made that the above understandings derived from Taplin's wife's discussions with Ngarrindjeri women in the 1860s–1870s, and furthermore that they were essentially true, it would also be correct if the author were to point out, as she does of other women recorders elsewhere [pp. 459–469], that Mrs. Taplin is not a known early feminist).

In contrast to the preceding critical comments, the same chapter's sections from 'Women's Bodies: The Subject of Inquiry' through to 'Closing the Circle' (pp. 520–544)

contain much good information about prostitution, the 'half-caste' problem, infanticide and abortion, and an excellent discussion of 'women's business' which draws upon a wide range of sources (pp. 528–542). The author's discussions of the reasons 'why women draw an ever-tightening veil of secrecy around their business', and the existence of 'women-only spaces' (p. 527) are well-presented, yet how much they are feminist constructs and how much they are associated with the much-modified cultural constructs of present-day Aborigines (I doubt all are feminists) is difficult to know. In essence, though, I fully accept that there are aspects of 'women's business' in all societies, and that in Ngarrindjeri society these existed, to some muted extent, over a century ago. I also accept that there is a faint echo of this women's initiatory ritual in what young Ngarrindjeri women are told today by their mothers and other senior women about menstruation, and that a strong degree of separation of husband and wife is likely to prevail during modern births in hospitals.

This leads us to Chapter Ten, the final chapter. It is entitled 'Sacred Orders: A weave of clans, stories and sanctions', and the first word beneath this is *Kumarangk*, one of the traditional site names on Hindmarsh Island which, in recent years, has tended to become a largely revived, if not widely accepted, term for the whole island (p. 545).

Since the author's purpose includes defence of the 'proponent' Ngarrindjeri against the summarising views of the Royal Commission into the 'Hindmarsh Island affair' that they 'fabricated' information, and since she has closely studied what has been available to her from the Royal Commission records, one of her primary aims, one would have thought, was to prove that there was nothing of significance in the following accounts. These references preceded the Ngarrindjeri 'dissident' people's claims of fabrication, and were so universally reported Australia-wide that they are only summarised here. (Those also noted by the author in any detail are referenced in page numbers in brackets).

From 1988–1993 there were proposals for development of a bridge from Goolwa to Hindmarsh Island, and the media indicated that there was much opposition to these proposals by a wide range of people. No evidence was publically forthcoming in these six years that the Ngarrindjeri had any objections based on religious beliefs to such a bridge. In 1993 reports of archaeological sites temporarily halted the beginnings of bridge work. (As the summary in the prologue indicates, Professor Bell effectively does not report on this period.)

In March 1994 Dr. Lindy Warrell, anthropologist, mentioned to some Ngarrindjeri people, Tom and Ellen Trevorrow, that it was a 'pity' that the Ngarrindjeri women did not have the same kind of women's law as did Aboriginal women of desert areas. 'It would be nice if there were some women's business', she said. (These remarks, regarded as significant by the Royal Commission and, to my knowledge, all other commentators on the 'Hindmarsh Island affair', are overlooked by the author.)

Within a brief time a group of Ngarrindjeri women discussed the issue of 'women's business' with regard to Hindmarsh Island and surrounds. Shortly afterwards, whilst studying an aerial map of the Hindmarsh Island to Murray mouth area, Victor Wilson, a Ngarrindjeri man, is reported to have said to his friend Doug Milera, 'This is a woman and I'm going to Doreen Kartinyeri to explain it and find out about it'. At much the same time the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs contacted an Aborig-

inal and Torres Strait Islander Commission officer and, after reportedly stating that the archaeological evidence was insufficient to stop the bridge development, is also quoted as saying that 'something of cultural significance' was required. A day later, on 13 April 13 1994, Doreen Kartinyeri stated to an executive of the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs that she was a custodian of 'women's business'. (None of this was considered significant enough to be noted in the author's summary in the Prologue, and is effectively not considered in the book.)

Over the next month Mr. Wilson called a meeting of women to discuss 'women's business' to do with Hindmarsh Island, as the men had no knowledge of 'men's business' there. For the first time in recorded history a woman, Doreen Kartinyeri, announced that she knew of 'women's business' to do with Hindmarsh Island. No other Ngarrindjeri woman, at this stage, claimed to know any such knowledge. Later Mr. Milera pointed out to Doreen Kartinyeri that the Hindmarsh Island to Murray Mouth area was 'in the shape of a woman's privates', to which she is quoted as responding, 'Yes, I can see it now'. (Professor Bell's only comment on any of this is a brief dismissal, without reference to the specific words. Apparently a 'Barbecue, Goolwa wharf' on 5 June [p. 5] is of greater significance.)

For this information not to be given due consideration is, surely, to place a feminist bomb under all of the evidence of the 'proponent' people. No matter how well she has taken their contradictory and confusing claims of belief (as the Royal Commission found them) and given them order, and no matter how strongly people may hold to these beliefs, the woven basketry of the Ngarrindjeri seems to me to have been blown to shreds by this 'value free' obliteration of those records which prove 'difficult'.

Whilst the above brief summary is of information either wholly or substantially omitted from the author's considerations, it is only fair to report that the majority of events of significance thereafter, from 1995–1998, are well recorded. Thus, for instance, she notes that feminist anthropologist, Dr Deane Fergie prepared a 32-page report, marked 'To be read by women only' and therefore not publically available, which was submitted on 4 July 1994 (pp. 468–469). The rest of the 1994–1995 developments, which had been accurately enough summarised in the prologue (pp. 5–70) and on occasions usefully touched-upon in the first nine chapters, are also developed and extended in both Chapter 10 and the epilogue.

At this point it is worth recalling that the author presented evidence which, in the main, suggested that Ngurunderi, a male creator figure, was believed responsible for the creation of by far the majority of features in the Ngarrindjeri lands (pp. 91–104). Certainly, although they normally came from beyond the territory of the Ngarrindjeri, there were contradictory accounts which should not be dismissed, as with additional creator figures (*Ibid*). However, by-and-large the emphasis was on his deeds, and the author quotes with approval the 'metaphor of land as body', in which all Ngarrindjeri lands are the symbolic body of Ngurunderi himself (p. 264). If this male body is the author-approved landscape, and if—as she accepts—Ngurunderi had a camp at Goolwa (pp. 364, 570–572), then she appears to have proved a pervading maleness in the River Murray lands on either side of the River at Goolwa, on Hindmarsh Island and as far as the Murray mouth and all associated lands and waters. However, the author is also correct to indicate that there are genuine complexities in the mythology.

Professor Bell has drawn upon excellent records to indicate that there was 'A Complex of Clans' who once had associations with Hindmarsh Island (pp. 49–554), as well as to indicate that a 'Complex of Activities' was associated with the greater Goolwa area (pp. 554–558). She is correct to indicate that the landscape is not entirely fixed, the Murray mouth, in particular, having moved in historically recorded times (p. 567). (Interestingly, the comment in one of the Ngurunderi myth-accounts that 'the ground came up and formed a bridge across the river' at the Murray mouth [Smith, n.d., p. 327] may refer to an historically ancient low river. Newland also comments on the changes to the vegetation and landscape there, largely the result of European interference [Newland, 1926, pp. 185–186]). She is correct to indicate the concerns that the Ngarrindjeri have over burials that are located on development sites (p. 546), and to be outraged at shocking graffiti (p. 547). She is, I believe, correct about many things, and there is no chapter in the book that does not have sections of merit.

What, though, of other matters in the chapter? The name Kumarangk is not, as the author indicates, the name for Hindmarsh Island as a whole in the early ethnographic records, nor from her own initial investigations (p. 545). The Berndts appear to have attempted to obtain a translation of Ngarrindjeri place-names whenever possible, and to quote them throughout the text, the maps and their translations (1993). Despite what are almost certainly excellent translations of many words and recorded conversations, they did not manage a translation of the site-name Kumarangk. The author's statement that it is a name 'said to mean the place of pregnancy' (p. 545) is reasonable speculation on the basis of the evidence she presents, but is certainly not conclusive (p. 631). This is a relatively minor matter, on the one hand, but has important ramifications given certain of the 'proponent' women's comments, some of which are applied to the entire island. As I have earlier touched on this matter, I turn to another consideration.

As earlier intimated, I believe that the author's sifting of the ethnographic record has indicated that Ngurunderi may have had a camp-site in the Goolwa area. Assuming this to be so, it must have been a local Ngarrindjeri group variant on the otherwise much more highly detailed accounts which suggest that Ngurunderi travelled and camped elsewhere (e.g. Smith, n.d.: 317–331; Berndt, et.al., 1993: 223–230). Police-trooper Moriarty's references to Ngurunderi (in Taplin, 1989 [1879]:51–52)), surprisingly not used by the author to assist her presentation despite Moriarty having been based at Goolwa, seem to support the possibility of this variant, even though specific sites are not given. (At the same time, a legendary character called Kortuwe, who did have a hut 'near Goolwa' [Meyer, in Woods, 1997(1879): 204], may have created a confusion in transmitted oral memory, especially given that the *far-distant* 'Nurunduri' used a line to cast to the souls of people in the Goolwa area, and that these souls were thereby drawn to his homeland where they were 'allowed to live in Nurunduri's hut' [Ibid:206]). Since Ngurunderi's deeds and site creations appear to have been universally known amongst the Ngarrindjeri, it is a pity, assuming such a camp-site existed at Goolwa, that the locality was not noted as with so many other site names. Those Ngarrindjeri who stated a specific locality, precisely where the proposed bridge was to be built (pp. 571, 573), unfortunately appear to have made no statement to such effect prior to the late 1990's. This does not mean that they are wrong, but it is not the best way to make a compelling case, especially given the very detailed records which indicate that Ngurunderi travelled and camped elsewhere. It appears from the evidence which most clearly sug-

gested to the Royal Commission that fabrication was involved (that to do with Hindmarsh and Mundoo Islands and the waters to the Murray Mouth), took attention away from other information that the 'proponent' Ngarrindjeri knew about Goolwa. (The author also located a Tindale reference that indicated that a mythological being called *Jekejere* was amongst other creative beings in the Goolwa area. However, a late and very brief comment after the author's reading of the Tindale records [364] to her late 1990's Ngarrindjeri informants—'Yes. He was one of those fellows' [p. 573]— is a limited Ngarrindjeri statement of support, no matter how significant *Jekejere* may once have been).

A problematic issue is the section, 'The Meeting of the Waters: Home for *Ngatji*' (pp. 562–570). The author makes appropriate comment when she states that, '[pinpointing] a precise location for a site such as the 'Meeting of the Waters' makes little sense' (p. 567). However, this seems to undermine certain of her Ngarrindjeri informants' statements to both her and to the Royal Commission about significant localities: a 'shifting physical reality' (ibid) that stretches from the Murray mouth to at least Tailem Bend (p. 268) isn't necessarily a great deal of help to the 'proponent' people's case when, for many of them, their memories do not clearly pre-date the 1934–1940 construction of the five barrages. This does not at all seem to me to deny the significance of the 'meeting of the waters' as *amongst* sites that are significant for *ngatji*, and I am surprised at the lack of understanding of the term that—as the author earlier indicates—the 'Counsel Assisting the Commissioner' appears to have had (pp. 386–389). I am also surprised to find, given the clear evidence presented for the very different, though flexible, geographically based groups who once comprised the Ngarrindjeri (208–218) and what *ngatji* means (pp. 199–218), that one of the informants has stated that 'Kumarangk...is the central point for the Ngarrindjeri people and...that's why all the *ngatjis* are there. That's their area' (p. 569). This does not at all accord with other evidence presented in the book or elsewhere and, despite the author referring to it all as 'just...an idea' (p. 210) and to 'various competing positions on Ngarrindjeri traditions' (p. 116), it is this kind of recent Ngarrindjeri statement which allows the Ngarrindjeri to be challenged by a Royal Commission or developers. If it is an emotional statement which combines genuine belief with dramatic overstatement (as it seems to me to be), then it would have been helpful for the author to have pointed this out rather than left the statement as a contradiction of numerous other statements.

On another matter altogether, many people would agree with the Ngarrindjeri that *ideally* it would be best if the various 1930s barrages could be removed so that the waters met naturally once again to correct damage to the physical and spiritual environment (562–570), yet practicalities with today's greater Goolwa area and the provision of fresh water suggest that this is not a likely solution today to the various environmental problems. One could continue with an exhaustive discussion of the numerous elements within this chapter, but one more illustration will suffice. The subsection 'The Pleiades: Stories of Sisters, The Seasons and Survival' allows readers to see the strengths and weaknesses of the author.

The author states in the prologue that she has 'found nineteenth century references (Taplin 1873:18) to the Pleiades' (p. 16). This, it transpires 565 pages later, is *one* reference that was repeated in 1873 and 1879 (Taplin, in Woods, 1997 [1879]:xlii, 18). It refers to stars called 'the Manchingga' who are identified as 'warriors', and has no men-

tion whatsoever of either the Pleiades or the Seven Sisters! Any reading of Taplin will indicate that 'warriors' are armed fighting men, at times identifiable by the spears carried by the combatants or by specific mention (e.g. see Taplin's description of Captain Jack [ibid:90–91]), whilst women are always separately identified by group or individual name if also involved (e.g. [ibid: 70, 111]). Meyer similarly stated that the 'stars were formerly men' (Meyer, in Woods, 1997[1879]: 201).

There are no known records of Seven Sisters for the Ngarrindjeri in any of the other nineteenth century ethnographic sources quoted by the author, nor—despite the author's speculation—is there any evidence that Tindale managed any accounts by the very oldest people whom he interviewed, including the parents of David Unaipon (pp. 126–128, 581). However, as a result of Mrs. K. Langloh Parker's publications of 1896–1898, the Narran River (New South Wales) Noongahburrah people's account of 'Meamei the Seven Sisters' (1978: 43–47) became widely known. Later books by a number of authors through to the 1930s popularised the Seven Sisters story. These included a c.1933 school book by Thomas, *Some Myths & Legends Of The Australian Aborigines* (n.d.), which included as its first story an abbreviated version of the Parker myth account under the title, 'The Story of the Seven Sisters and the Faithful Lovers' (ibid:12–14). This latter account was not geographically located, thus giving the impression that the story prevailed Australia-wide. At much the same time as these accounts were being published, Aborigines from the central desert regions were migrating in increasing numbers to Ooldea and Port Augusta, with occasional Aborigines from other parts of the Lower Murray River, Point Pearce and the west coast of South Australia, Culcairn and Menindee in New South Wales, Victoria and sometimes even Western Australia, also finding their way to the Ngarrindjeri country (Berndt, et.al., 1993: 511–552). The Ngarrindjeri women had also increasingly been having unions with Europeans, some of whom may have known the Seven Sisters story through their reading.

How much the above influences had impact on the older generation of Ngarrindjeri people and their beliefs *we do not know*. Thus the Berndts, whose many publications attest to their major interest in mythology (e.g. Berndt, et.al. 1993), including that of the Seven Sisters, and who interviewed the most senior and knowledgeable Ngarrindjeri people whom they could locate in the period 1939–1943, were not told a Seven Sisters story. What they were told, however, was that amongst the '[movement] of some stars in the Milky Way...[one] of the seven young men stars went over to the [six] girls and stayed' (Berndt, et.al., 1993:164). The six girls were not identified as sisters, but were collectively known as *Yatuka* (ibid).

I suggest that it is at least possible that these 'seven young men stars' were 'the Manchingga warriors' referred to by Taplin, although the name given by the Berndts is *Ngalwara* (ibid). However, as it is best to remain open-minded about the ethnographic record, there must be a possibility that the Seven Sisters story was amongst the myths being told by the people who migrated to Ngarrindjeri country from elsewhere in the late nineteenth century, that it was also being introduced to Ngarrindjeri children in schools in the 1930s (and possibly earlier), or—less likely, that it had been overlooked by the nineteenth century recorders.

Professor Bell ably develops the case for it being a myth that had been overlooked by the nineteenth century recorders, and well demonstrates that it is a myth with a continuum of understanding and belief by present-day Ngarrindjeri people. (All readers

with an interest are referred to the comprehensive index references to the Seven Sisters.) However, she again undercuts what is excellent research and reflection. Her assertion that Taplin's 1870s Manchingga stars were Smith's 1930 Seven Sisters is an unproveable assertion on the basis of the evidence she presents (pp. 581–582, 586). Her assertion that Taplin's 'warriors' were 'women warriors' is, in the face of all available evidence, pure speculation which becomes asserted fact (pp. 581–582), and it is not inconceivable that the suggestion may subconsciously have come from the author reading about the Native American 'brave warrior woman', Buffalo Calf Road Woman (Powell, 1981, Vol.11: 964). Her comment that dandelions are a replacement for some native flowering plant is sensibly logical but not proveable (pp. 574–575). Her reference to Karloan's initiation is to the six girls *yatuka* in Karloan's and the Berndt context, not to the Seven Sisters (p. 584), even though I acknowledge that she presents a very strong case for the number of stars to vary depending on the myth-teller, and for use of Seven Sisters by Tindale's key informant (p. 586). And she appears to conflate Albert Karloan's actual male initiation with Unaipon's Seven Sisters myth that tells how males introduced female initiation (p. 584).

None of the above critical comments deny that the author has written other than an excellent case for a Seven Sisters story being a long-term Ngarrindjeri tradition. However, the alternative possibility, that it was a mythology introduced in the late nineteenth century, has not been examined. If, as I believe that I have demonstrated, Taplin's Manchingga were male warriors, then the possibility must be that there was an introduction of the Seven Sisters story after the 1879 date of publication. The evidence presented by Karloan, Milerum and others to, respectively, the Berndts and to Norman Tindale, does not, I believe, prove otherwise, even though their dates of birth were in the 1864–1870's period (Berndt, et. al., 1993: 3–7). Had the myth been a Ngarrindjeri one of pre-European times, one would have expected, on the basis of all other mythological information presented, that nineteenth century records of Ngarrindjeri place-names in the Ngarrindjeri country indicated this, as they do other major mythologies. None are presented by the author. However, if the mythology was introduced late in the nineteenth century this lack of place-names would be understandable given the pressures then being placed upon Ngarrindjeri culture, whilst the more recent historical records and the oral history evidence presented by present-day Ngarrindjeri have complementary credence.

In essence, then, one can conclude that a Seven Sisters story did exist in Ngarrindjeri culture, and that it still survives. The only point of contention is at what time it was introduced and, as the author indicates, it is evident that, at the time of the Royal Commission, the advocates on behalf of the Ngarrindjeri, and the Ngarrindjeri themselves, were sadly unconvincing (p. 586).

The epilogue, 'Whither?' advances the prior chapters by considering heritage legislation and other developments and, as might be expected and as I believe should universally be approved, is sympathetic to the Ngarrindjeri people.

In summary, I admire the great research and endeavour that has gone into this book. In general it is a readable ethnography. The progressive development from chapter to chapter is excellent, and a feminist reading of the sources has, from one perspective, provided a useful balance to the conventional male ethnographic and

anthropological references. From another perspective, however, I believe that such a feminist reading is not remotely 'value-free' (as the author promised). Whether the book may also have unwittingly contributed to a further tearing of the Ngarrindjeri weave or not will depend on the Ngarrindjeri people's perceptions, and also how every reader individually interprets the information.

I regret to say that, much as I respect Professor Bell for her direct involvement with various Aboriginal peoples over the last twenty-plus years, and for her research and her publications, I found *NgaRRiNDJeRi WURRUWARRIN* a severely flawed book.

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Reviews

Eastern and Central Arrernte to English Dictionary. Compiled by John Henderson and Veronica Dobson (Arandic Languages Dictionaries Program). Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1994. Pp. ix + 773. \$49.50

Arrernte, spoken in and around the Alice Springs region, is one of the principal Aboriginal languages of Central Australia. Most Arrernte speakers are now bilingual in English; yet increasingly Eastern and Central Arrernte (the variety described in the present work) is being taught in schools around Alice Springs and heard in local government and media.

The Arrernte language includes dialects (defined linguistically in terms of mutual intelligibility) that are referred to in current practise in Central Australia as the Southern, Western, Eastern and Central Arrernte *languages*, and belongs with other closely related languages—Lower Arrernte, Anmatyerre, Alyawarr, and Kaytetye—to a group called by linguists the Arandic language family. Eastern and Central Arrernte has close to 2,000 speakers, Arrernte in the broader sense between 3,000 and 4,000 speakers, and the whole Arandic language family around 6,000 speakers (R.Hoogenraad p.c.). (Older spellings of the language name include Arunta and Aranda; the spelling Arrarnta is currently being used for the western dialect in Lutheran publications.)

The Arrernte language gradually came to the attention of the scholarly world after the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line, completed in 1872, introduced a European presence into Central Australia (see Taylor 1980).

The earliest published vocabulary of Arrernte seems to be that collected by Christopher Giles at the Charlotte Waters Telegraph Station on 10 December 1875 (Taplin 1879: 89–92, 142–153, 156); the language name is there said to be "Arrinda" (pp. 91) and the tribal name "Antakerrinya" (Antikirinya is now the name of a dialect of the Western Desert language which borders on Lower Arrernte to the west). Further wordlists from the Charlotte Waters language, collected by F.J. Gillen and R.E. Warburton, were published in Curr 1886 (vol. 1, p. 418–421), along with a third wordlist in essentially the same dialect, collected by E.F. Belt from Macumba River (pp. 424–5). In the same volume were published two wordlists collected from Aboriginal people at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station by John H. London and J.F. Mueller (pp. 412–415). Curr recognised similarities between the Alice Springs data and that of Charlotte Waters. In 1888 and again in 1891 Constable Willshire published booklets which included vocabularies of the dialect of Alice Springs (Willshire 1888, 1891).

The establishment of the Finke River Mission at Hermannsburg from 1877 (Henson 1994: 9) brought into contact with the Western and Southern Arrernte people a series of Europeans who began to study the language seriously for their practical com-

municative purposes. One of the first missionaries, Hermann Kempe, in 1891 published an article on the grammar and vocabulary of the Aborigines of the Macdonnell Ranges (Kempe 1891). Other early works on Arrernte grammar, based in part or whole on the data of the missionaries, were published by Matthews (1907) and Planert (1907).

In the meantime, from the 1890s, the scientific expeditions of Horn and especially Spencer and Gillen led to the accumulation of much ethnographic information on the Arrernte people with associated terminology (a "glossary of native terms used" is included in Spencer and Gillen 1899/1969: 645–657 and 1927: 609–628). In 1907, however, in an article in which he includes an Arrernte wordlist and compares it with two Luritja vocabularies, Basedow complains that in spite of a wealth of data on the names and customs of the Arrernte people

so fehlt es doch an einem zusammenhängenden Wörterverzeichnis der Sprachen derselben ('yet there is lacking a comprehensive word index of their languages' [translation by HK]) (Basedow 1907: 207).

This lack would remain for a long time. The missionary Carl Strehlow undertook considerable ethnographic research on the Arrernte and Luritja peoples, which was published in Europe (C. Strehlow 1907–1920). He also intended to compile and eventually publish a comprehensive work on the Arrernte language:

[ich] hoffe in einiger Zeit selbst eine zusammenhängende Arbeit über die Aranda-Sprache veröffentlichen zu können. ('[I] hope some time to be able to publish myself a comprehensive work on the Aranda language.' [translation by HK] (C. Strehlow 1908: 698).

Unfortunately Carl Strehlow died in tragic circumstances (for which see T.G.H. Strehlow 1969) before he could realise this ambition. Nevertheless a 223-page manuscript containing an Aranda-Loritja vocabulary has survived his death. His son T.G.H. (Ted) Strehlow continued his father's documentation of Arrernte, especially the Western Arrernte dialect (Altuliperre). He recorded numerous mythical texts, wrote a grammar of Aranda, and wrote major works on Arandic ethnography and Arandic songs (see T.G.H. Strehlow 1934, 1944, 1947, 1971). He, too, had a large dictionary file, rumoured to contain over 30,000 entries; but he also died without having his dictionary published, and access to the dictionary card file has not been allowed. (For his biography see McNally 1981.)

In 1959–60 Ken Hale elicited a wordlist of about 400 items from ten localities within the Arandic-speaking area. Remaining unpublished, this *Arandic Word List* has only been in circulation among linguists; however the core 100 words of the list were published in Hale (1962). A 160-word list from seven Arandic dialects/languages was included in Menning and Nash (1981), with much of the data having come from Hale's notes.

From the early 1970s the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs has conducted language courses in Arrernte and other Central Australian languages. As a support for these courses it has produced 'simple explanations' and/or 'learner's guides' for various languages (eg. Green 1984, 1994). The first Arrernte language materials produced were in the Western (Hermannsburg) dialect, which has received a certain institutionalised standing through its use in Lutheran religious contexts (preaching, liturgy, hymnody, Bible translation). In 1975 a course was begun in the East-

ern Arrernte dialect. In support of this language course a succession of wordlists was produced: *Aranda-English English-Aranda Vocabulary* (1979), *Eastern Arrernte Learner's Wordlist* (1985), *A Learner's Wordlist of Eastern and Central Arrernte* (1991). By this time the Central dialects, such as those spoken in Alice Springs and Santa Teresa, were being described in similar terms to the Eastern dialects, such as those spoken at Alcoota and Harts Range, but considerably different from Western Arrernte, which in most circles uses a different orthographic system.

In the late 1970s indigenous language programs were initiated at Yipirinya School in Alice Springs. A full grammar of Mparntwe Arrernte was produced in 1989 (Wilkins 1989). Furthermore, in 1984 the Institute for Aboriginal Development began a long-term Arandic Languages Dictionary Program (see Breen 1984). A dictionary of the north-eastern Arandic language, Alyawarr, was published in 1992 (Green 1992; cf. the review by Koch (1993)).

The present work by Henderson and Dobson (henceforth ECAED) represents by far the most comprehensive compilation of Arandic vocabulary that has been published in the 120 year history of recording Arandic languages. That absence of a comprehensive guide to Arrernte vocabulary, lamented by Basedow already in 1907, has finally been rectified.

The ECAED is aimed at Arrernte speakers learning to read and write their own language and translate it into English, as well as for aiding learners and teachers of Arrernte. The avoidance of technical linguistic terms shows that the non-literate Arrernte speaker is held in mind; while the diverse array of example sentences shows concern for the non-Arrernte speaker.

The cover illustration is of an unmistakable Central Australian landscape, taken from a painting by Arrernte contributor Therese Ryder. There is a seven-page section on how to use the dictionary, including a page of 250 Arrernte suffixes; an introduction containing information on where Arrernte is spoken, dialect differences, notes on orthography, grammar, handsigns and kinship; the main dictionary; an English word finder list consisting of 130 pages; and a table of pronouns.

One ingenious innovation of this dictionary is the use of 'flick animations' to illustrate some of the handsigns. These consist of sketch in the bottom right hand corner of a series of pages, which as you flick, illustrates the movement of the handsigns. Use of handsigns and sign language is a major part of Central Australian Aboriginal culture (for a full explanation see Kendon 1988) and it is commendable that the ECAED has highlighted this fact by including such sketches and flick animations.

The phonology of Arrernte (as of all Arandic languages) is complex; this can present a challenge to the construction of an orthography (for a discussion of some issues, cf. Koch (1993), Breen and Green (1995)). The orthography represented in the ECAED was decided upon in a meeting of Arrernte speakers and linguists in July 1978, with some adjustments being made subsequently. While many examples of alternative spellings and inconsistencies in the orthography could be pointed out, to do so would be to overlook the reasons behind these inconsistencies. In some cases the compilers of the ECAED have deliberately refrained from standardising the orthography. Deciding on an orthography and standardising it can be as much a political issue as it is a linguist-

tic one; and if an orthography is to be a practical tool for the language community concerned, then it is the speakers themselves who should make decisions on these issues.

The dictionary offers a wealth of information for semanticists. Words are cross-referenced for near synonyms, homonyms and near homonyms, antonyms, words in the same semantic field and senses in the same semantic field. Generics and classifiers are marked in an accessible way; for example, the third sense of *thipe* reads 'A general word for fleshy flying creatures which goes before a word for a particular type.'

Dialect differences, speech register (such as 'avoidance register') and literal translations (where necessary) are all marked on each entry. Place names, which are too often left out of bilingual dictionaries, are also included. Entries often have numerous example sentences; many of these are taken from texts, as can be seen from the wealth of cultural and encyclopaedic information they contain.

The ECAED is a major contribution to Australian Aboriginal linguistics; with rich information on morphology and semantics written in a user-friendly style, it will no doubt be a much used resource among Arrernte communities, language learners and language enthusiasts.

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Benang: From the Heart. Kim Scott, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle (Western Australia), 1999. pp. 500, index. \$19.95

In the transition from colonial to Western Australian government control of 'Native Welfare', from the turn of the century to the 1970s, *Benang: From the Heart*, the work by an Aborigine of southern Western Australian (WA) Nyungar descent, Kim Scott, *Benang*, is a reconstruction of his family remnant's past. It is a story of the struggle to come to terms with: legal deprivation, parsimonious and oppressive governments, white bigotry, black resignation and society-wide terror, indifference and paternalism. This review of Scott's latest book focuses on four aspects of the novel: the writer's intent, the sources, textual imagination and quality of authorship.

By way of introduction, the reconstruction of the historic and the anthropological past is difficult both for writers of fiction and scholarship. Books by non-Aboriginal writers such as Helen 'Demidenko'-Darville's *The Hand That Signed the Paper* (1994) and Eric Wilmot's *Pemulwuy* (1987) and more recently, Christopher Cyrill's *Hymns for the Dawning* (1999) have all fallen foul of the pitfalls of writing novels by giving the impression that the story is drawn from primary historical sources. Such works attempt, but generally fail, to give an impression of historical authenticity. It is even more difficult for writers of the fringe, such as some Australian Aborigines, to also tread this dangerous literary route. The main reasons are that their identity itself is so difficult to define precisely, and that it is under constant change where society itself is—paradoxically—constantly homogenising and atomising.

What are the writer's intentions? First, Scott endeavours to reconstruct his own biography and the past of his extended family placed in setting of white settler society. He does this through the use of archival material (letters, inquiry evidence and protectors' reports), other biographical writings, oral sources and his own imagination. This material is cleverly woven into a story of alienation, brutality, indifference, loss, unscrupulousness, ignorance, death and renewal. The story is told mostly from the perspective of four close relatives—Jack Chatalong, Sandy Two Mason and Will and Auntie Kathleen Coolman together with a number of other 'aunts' (one of whom is his natural mother) and carers, who are the writer's main heroes. Opposed are the villains: Ernest Solomon Scat, Tommy Scat (father), Auber Neville (Chief Protector of Aborigines) and Constable Hall.

Second, the writer's story is that Harley's grandfather Ernest Solomon Scat, a Scottish immigrant (also an employee of the Chief Protector, Neville), is to blame for most of his grandson's (Harley's) problems of identity, as well as his sexual and moral dilemmas, frustrations, self-doubts and loss of a 'glorious' past. The story begins with an exposé of the grandfather's and Harley's cultural demise. Ernest Solomon Scat has left what wealth he has to the grandson. Harley faces the Supreme Court and is acquitted of murdering his own father Tommy Scat.

Harley's reconstruction of his own and his family's past is told mostly from the three uncles' memories and a search through grandfather Ern's old records. Scott reconstructs a seemingly authentic but lost past where his great grandparents, through the ideology of eugenics ('racial improvement') believes society is capable through racial breeding of creating what Scott says is 'the-first-Whiteman'. The Aboriginal grandparents are of mixed descent but believe they are 'white'. This deception is caused because

they are free of any controlling influences from the Chief Protector of Aborigines. This person is an administrator whose actions are governed by WA's infamous 'Native Welfare' laws. The paradox is that those charged with administering the protection policies, the protectors, the police and the 'mixed-descent' relatives are all deluded into thinking that Harley's family members are not Aboriginal. Similarly, the writer is determined to expose the truth of his own identity and, apart from a series of authorial intrusions which express the grandson's hate and contempt for Ern Scat, the uncles are allowed to be the spokespersons supported by documentary archival and occasional references from the Protector's reports, letters and various evidence from Royal Commission transcripts. The grandson's true 'aboriginality' emerges, in spite of Ern Scat's delusion and relentless pursuit of the boy's economic, cultural and biological improvement. According to the writer, the fact of his identity is there for all to see and understand. But, as a mechanism for tension, it is also there to make contemporary whites feel intimidated through his presence, his intimate knowledge of his 'aboriginal' past and his articulation through his public persona as a singer.

Scott, in common with many writers dealing with historical subject matter, has to reconstruct his past in this way because he wasn't there. To give flavour to the reality of Harley's search for his identity Scott combines archival documentary and oral material with imagination and skill. The tensions are created by setting up a complex of contradictions of sexual relationships. First are the grandfather's numerous sexual liaisons, in particular with Kathleen (Ern's legal wife) and Topsy (Kathleen's daughter), whom Ern takes as his defacto, and Tommy Scat's mother—in which two races are mixed, and finally there is an ever-present hint of a homosexual relationship between Ern and Harley.

Scott also pits individual freedom against formal legalised social control of Aborigines, despite which Ern and Sammy One Mason manage to live free lives at a distance from the Protection legislation and the Protector's searching gaze. Similarly, he contrasts personal freedom with the contradictions of camp life, the Protectors' powers to enforce Aborigines' removal from wherever they might prefer to be, and the functioning of the hospital and school systems, which impose on them a 'native identity' which many deny.

Critically, Scott considers socio-economic class as a hidden motive force. Thus, Ern sees wealth as a leveller among white people whereas Harley sees it as both corrupting his relations with his pristine past of poverty and as a barrier to achieving authentic bonds with his Aboriginal relatives. Powerlessness is another such force: marginality breed it own ignorance and resignation to the State's legal oppression, white prejudice and institutional and country town bigotry.

At the same time Scott contrasts the device of 'the known' (for instance police and protector knowledge of legislation) with 'the unknowable' (for example Aboriginal camper and labourer ignorance of the law, and Aboriginal ignorance of themselves, their authentic pristine culture and the hunting-gathering skills this confers).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Scott brings to his task a wide range of stylistic techniques—tight sentence structure, short chapters, aphorisms, metaphrases, syllogisms and a parochial imagery to stress Aboriginal moods, Aboriginal stoicism and Aboriginal story. In addition he uses paradox, ambiguity and contradiction, tautology

and pleonasm (most obviously the purposely repetitive 'Fuck, fuck, fuck') all to excellent effect.

In my view, Scott has written one of the very best novels I have read by an Aborigine. He has skilfully compiled a work projecting the complex nature of people who partially escaped the clutches of the WA policies of 'protection' and 'assimilation' from colonial times to the 1970s. But, at the same time provides a complexity of which many people who claim Aboriginal identity in post-contact and colonial Australia could accept as real.

Two major weaknesses, however, do impose themselves on the reader. One is the length of the work—fully 500 pages—though perhaps this is forgivable in the light of some novels about Aborigines by those who are not. Xaviour Herbert's 'Aboriginal' novels spring to mind here: these extraordinarily long works traverse similar territory to that covered by *Benang*. The other fault is Scott's over-use of archival sources without placing them in their chronological context. This weakness may lead some to believe the novel is really history, but such an impression would be false, for *Benang* remains fiction despite its historiographical appurtenances. Sources of an historical nature must go through both a long critical review by historians prior to their acceptance as historic fact whereas Scott's usage makes no attempt to assess in duly critical, historiographical manner what is being written. His criticism remains bound in a personal rather than historical dimension—levelled, instead, at individuals like the grandfather, the protectors, the police and reserve carers.

Because of its complexity, and literary qualities, this work deserves to be discussed in schools and universities that teach Aboriginal studies, in media presentations attempting to probe Australian socio-historical issues and, I hope, in Aboriginal political circles for a long time to come.

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In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories. By K. Schaffer. Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995. Pp. 320. \$35.00

I found reading the first two-thirds of this book quite a chore. I had agreed to review the book after what I interpreted as a rather desperate request from Luise Hercus, and then did not begin reading it until my deadline was uncomfortably close. It seemed too late to pass to someone else what I was finding an increasingly bitter cup. It is not that Kay Schaffer is not good at what she is doing. The book is the very model of post-modernist writing, using as it says on the back cover, 'recent post-colonial, feminist, and post-structuralist theories, as well as the ethnographic data'. It has the lot. Indeed, it could be set as a textbook for students to explore post-modernism.

Schaffer analyses the many interpretations of the Eliza Fraser story from those that appeared immediately the survivors of the *Stirling Castle*, shipwrecked in 1836,

returned via Fraser Island to colonial society, through later nineteenth century accounts, to the 'modern reconstructions' such as Michael Alexander's history, the paintings of Sidney Nolan, Patrick White's novel, *A Fringe of Leaves*, the film by Tim Burstall and David Williamson to what Schaffer refers to as the 'oppositional voices' of the *Noh Eliza* by Allen Marrett, Gillian Coote's documentary film, and the paintings of the Aboriginal artist, Fiona Foley.

I am familiar with other accounts of European colonists, male and female, who were shipwrecked and lived with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people for much longer periods than the six weeks Eliza Fraser lived with the Aborigines at Fraser Island. (It was named after Eliza's sea-captain husband who did not survive his time on the Island. His death is one of the never-to-be solved mysteries.) Yet none of these survivors, for example James Morrill and Barbara Thompson, have attracted anywhere near the same attention from succeeding generations as Eliza Fraser. Kay Schaffer has done a good job of showing how the stories and creative responses have reflected the corresponding societal values and the unique personal vision of the more gifted ones, investigating the way the human condition has been depicted to represent masculinity and femininity, the powerful and the marginalised, the self and the other. Inevitably we keep examining how class, race, gender, and national identities have been manipulated in different ways to fulfil varying functions. This is hardly surprising, partly I admit because of the success of post-modernist and feminist writers.

In her preface, Schaffer makes clear her interest in the Eliza Fraser stories:

The historical dimension of the project presented an interesting set of intellectual conflicts. It tested my delight in and commitment to post-modern perspectives against my considerable affection for and skill at historical research; it tested my knowledge that there is no 'real' person to be found in the archival materials which mark a life against my keen desire to know more about the actual woman and the times in which she lived.

She notes that her 'tenacious curiosity' carried her through the five years' work that took her to many fascinating places in Australia and overseas. Feminist post-modernists clearly enjoy their work.

I am not sure why Schaffer feels she has to dichotomise 'post modern perspectives' and 'her affection for and skill at historical research'. Post-modern perspectives have been around for quite a while now and assert their influence to varying degrees throughout the profession, not only on those who define themselves as post-modernist. To me, Schaffer's exposition of her theoretical position seems unnecessarily laboured in chapter 1, 'Her Story/History: The Many Fates of Eliza Fraser' and sometimes repetitively so throughout. I really thought the academic debate was past this first principles stage. We now know why post-modernists display the scaffolding from which they have constructed their edifice, their text. Other writers also challenge their sources, understand that they are making subjective judgements to the best of their ability, and realise that their interpretations will be challenged, certainly not least by post-modernist and feminist writers. It is the tone of confident triumphalism that perhaps most irritates those historians whom post-modernists seem to see as 'the other'. And I suspect some post-modernists get great satisfaction out of that. Thus, on p.142:

Read in terms of the modern artist as a tortured genius, Mrs Fraser's betrayal of Bracefell parallels a betrayal in Nolan's own life. In terms of modern art and art

criticism, the ways in which the artist transforms the trials and traumas of his life are of interest because they became, through his creative and liberating role, exemplary models for the rest of society: his insights become our redemption; as prophet and seer, he speaks for us. It is not my intention to subscribe to these critical premises. Post-modern critique has shattered this particular set of beliefs, revealing the politically grounded nature of its 'neutral' perspective and deconstructing its universal disguise.

Well, of course, post modern critique has not swept away this sort of criticism, or this particular set of beliefs, except in post-modernist circles. In a section on 'The Role of the Modern Artist' Patrick White is found wanting with great assurance (pp.173-5). History, of course, is fiction (p.194).

Sneja Gunew asserts, on the back cover, it is 'accessibly written'. It is easy enough to read. There is a smattering of post-modernist vocabulary which my five years of Latin allowed me to take in my stride, but this was not the real problem for me—I stress *for me*—which made reading this book a chore. It was really a series of essays tied together by the theoretical analysis. So many creative responses to the Eliza Fraser stories had to be deconstructed that we had to revisit the site time after time and the conclusions reached were *reductio ad clarum, ad clarissimum* in fact: gender, race, and class. And finally, I did not really conclude that the Eliza Fraser stories *seriatim* could bear the weight of theory Kay Schaffer imposed upon her/them. Or if they could, I couldn't. However, post-modernist, post-colonial, feminist and post-structuralist theorists will love it.

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One Land, One Nation: Mabo—Towards 2000. Frank Brennan, University of Queensland Press, 1995. Pp xx + 232, index. \$18.95

The introduction states that we cannot undo all the injustices of the past but that we can 'own our history.' Owning our history involves indigenous and non-indigenous peoples accepting responsibility for each other so that life within 'one land, one nation' is attractive to all. Why history is required to justify such a position is unclear as little further reference is made to events before the decision in *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*¹ ('the Mabo case'). The book covers considerable legal material but does not come to terms with the history of the common law in Australia. Readers would be unaware of the powerful way in which the law justified the taking of the land and resources of the indigenous peoples and subjected them to government by alien institutions;² nor would they be familiar with its continuing assumption that its non-indigenous values are an objective and universal point-of-viewlessness.³ Its difficult legacy for indigenous peoples seeking to use it to reassert their rights is 'the problem of challenging a form of

1. (1992) 175 CLR 1.

2. See generally Williams 1990.

3. MacKinnon 1983, pp. 638-9.

power without accepting its own terms of reference and hence losing the battle before it has begun.⁴

Brennan ends by questioning why Australians still think it is impermissible for indigenous peoples to make decisions about their land and its use. He also suggests that the High Court's decision in the Mabo case and the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) are the pillars for a bridge for reconciliation between the new and old inhabitants of Australia. The answer to the question is contained in the suggestion. The court and the parliament heard from, or consulted with, indigenous peoples but in the end the decisions were made by those institutions for reasons which they determined. These are not the institutions of the indigenous peoples. The policies preferred by the decisions are not the ones selected by indigenous peoples. Without accepting the existence of indigenous institutions and their government-type functions it is difficult to justify recognising the right to control such activities. That right is a right of government. The recognition of it depends on self determination. About self determination the author is equivocal. Without such recognition the High Court's decision and the legislation on native title are weak foundations on which to build reconciliation. In this context Brennan's book raises two issues of significance. To what extent can the past be used to imagine the future and what is the role of a non-indigenous person in imagining or 'dreaming of a better future' for Australia where that involves the indigenous peoples?

Brennan provides a clear and readable exposition of the complexities of the Mabo case. He is uncritical of the High Court's decision and exaggerates its significance. It is difficult to accept that it has ended the complaint by indigenous peoples that they have been denied their history. Justice Brennan, for example, blamed the crown for the dispossession of the indigenous peoples and absolved the common law. Justices Deane and Gaudron, however, accepted that the common law was at fault. That the foundation of the Australian legal system was not moved, as Brennan claims, is made clear by the effect of the decision. The common law determines whether or not native title has been extinguished by reference to what the crown did. The indigenous legal systems do not determine if 'ownership' or 'possession' was surrendered by reference to what the indigenous peoples did. He later refers to the decision as 'inherently conservative' and to the native title recognised as a 'very fragile form of title.' These descriptions are more accurate.

The book makes no comment on the justice of the High Court's choosing to create a native title able to be extinguished by the crown by executive act without legislation and without compensation. No other owner of property is subject to the first power. Where property is acquired under legislation the common law reads in a requirement for compensation unless there is a clear contrary intention. As the majority's rationale was that the common law should reflect prevailing community standards and not discriminate on the basis of race—'contemporary notions of justice and human rights'⁵—it is difficult to see why the court did not clearly limit the crown's powers in similar ways.

The reluctance by the majority to consider that the crown owed a fiduciary duty to indigenous peoples is also noted but not criticised. Brennan finds that the effect of the

4. Smart 1989, p. 5.

5. 175 CLR 1, Brennan J at 29.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Commonwealth) is that there will be no need to develop a separate jurisprudence of fiduciary duty provided that there are proper processes to deal with native title and to compensate for past dispossession. This is made doubtful by two matters which he discusses: where land was dealt with by the crown before the *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975 (Commonwealth) was passed and where the crown deals with all land, including that held under native title. In both situations native title holders may seek to assert a breach of fiduciary duty. It may not matter that a process has been established. The issue may be argued if indigenous peoples suspect that the crown is not acting in good faith or if the compensation funds are put into a general pool rather than a fund to compensate individual communities for property rights which were abrogated. The first is a real possibility.⁶ The second is the effect of the *Land Fund and Indigenous Land Corporation (ATSIC Amendment) Act* 1995 (Commonwealth). The Wik case⁷ had already raised these issues at the time Brennan wrote. Generally indigenous peoples would benefit if the crown was constrained by a fiduciary duty, including an obligation to act in good faith.

The second chapter, on the negotiation of the *Native Title Act* 1993 (Commonwealth), is a significant source document by someone who participated in that process. It is the best and most comprehensive account of contemporary Australian legislative practice. It shows that what is identified in the United States as public choice theory, in which governments and interest groups bargain over the terms of legislation as if negotiating the terms of a commercial contract, is well established in Australia.⁸ Brennan's narration shows how fragile is the trust required for a lasting reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Aboriginal leaders, who were negotiating with the government in good faith, found themselves embarrassed by the deal arranged by the special minister of state, Walker, for mining to proceed at MacArthur River unimpeded by native title, the reduction of their position to 33 flimsy principles by bureaucrats, the continuing concessions the commonwealth government made to the states and territories and their exclusion, as they were not a government, from the Council of Australian Governments' meetings.

The book contains a clear summary of the native title legislation and its effect. Whether native title in pastoral leases has survived because of the historic reservations in favour of Aboriginal people is considered. The situation in eastern Australia—where there are no reservations in favour of Aboriginal people—may be more complex than Brennan represents because of restrictions on the powers of colonial and state parliaments only removed by the *Australia Act* (Commonwealth and UK) in 1986 although the existence of native title on Queensland pastoral leases has been rejected by the Federal Court.⁹ He also deals with the differences between the rights over land held by native title holders and the traditional owners of land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act* 1976 (Commonwealth) which gives the Northern Territory government con-

6. *Attorney-General (NT) v Kearney* (1985) 150 CLR 500.

7. *The Wik Peoples v Queensland* (1994) 120 ALR 465.

8. See generally Farber & Frickey 1991.

9. Full Federal Court, Jenkinson, Hill and Lee JJ judgement No. QG34 of 1995, Brisbane, 1 November 1995 (unreported).

siderable room to argue for 'anomalies' to be corrected once it is forgotten that the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) was a carefully negotiated agreement.

The fourth chapter deals with the events which followed the enactment of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) including the litigation over the *Western Australian Land (Titles and Traditional Usage) Act 1993*. It converted the property right represented by native title into a statutory licence to traditional usage. This legislation was struck down in *Western Australia v Commonwealth* as infringing the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Commonwealth)¹⁰ in reasoning similar to that of *Mabo v Queensland (No 1)*.¹¹

The book then turns to the future and self determination. Brennan notes the changing meaning of this latter concept which was once thought to be the equivalent of sovereignty. In some recent formulations it becomes a synonym for reconciliation as a 'process through which indigenous peoples are able to join with all the other peoples that make up the State on mutually-agreed upon and just terms, after many years of isolation and exclusion.'¹² He does not note the irony, or the political power, which shift the dominant norms 'just as indigenous peoples think they are on the verge of gaining access to them.'¹³

Brennan sees considerable difficulties in meshing the customary laws of the indigenous peoples with the Anglo-Australian law. He refers to a 'romantic rhetoric about some monolithic and mythical Aboriginal nation which knew no conflict between ever-just elders and always compliant youngsters.' This unnecessarily diminishes the historic claims of indigenous peoples. It contrasts with alternative versions of history maintained by them. Some indigenous people claim that self-government, unrecognised by the common law, has not ceased for a number of peoples making it 'the longest surviving egalitarian system of government possibly in the world, one which balanced the rule of law with personal autonomy through a philosophy of respect for those who went before as well as those who come after us.'¹⁴ If some indigenous peoples believe the rhetoric to which Brennan refers this is not very different from the myths non-indigenous Australians believe about our institutions. There are progressive intellectuals who see in pre-industrial Europe the values of a society based on production and consumption within the home which they claim reflects a more humane model of society than the market society which replaced it.¹⁵ A mythical quality may underlie Brennan's belief that a human rights based jurisprudence in the hands of a common law judges may benefit indigenous peoples.

10. *Western Australia v the Commonwealth* (1995) 69 ALJR 309. This decision appears to have been given when the book was in press as, while it is mentioned on page 109, on pages 111 and 112 the issue is said to be still awaiting decision by the High Court and the Act is treated as possibly valid.

11. (1988) 166 CLR 186.

12. Daes 1993, 9.

13. Otto 1995, 73 citing in note 40 Benedict Kingsbury, 'Whose International Law? Sovereignty and Non-State Groups,' The American Society of International Law 88th Annual Meeting (1994)

14. Otto 1995, 131 citing Marcia Langton, 'Indigenous Self-Government and Self-Determination: Overlapping Jurisdictions at Cape York', in *Aboriginal Self-Determination in Australia* (Christine Fletcher ed., 1994).

15. O'Donovan 1985, pp 1 et seq.

He refers to the growing reluctance of young people to submit to such systems and the human rights issues involved. But is this just a problem of customary law or is it a generation issue present as a tension within many societies? The common law legitimises a regime of elderly male judges from privileged backgrounds punishing young people including increasingly disproportionate numbers of Aborigines. He writes that 'customary law is of little use in disciplining the young for alcohol-related property and motor vehicle offences.' The conflict between this, and a statement some pages on, that unyielding insistence on only one law may leave young people immune from the only law to which they feel accountable, are not resolved. The non-indigenous legal system is also ineffective as a deterrent because of the massive numbers of indigenous people who are processed by it. This has removed most elements of shame from it. Shame is a powerful sanction and, if internalised, produces non-criminal behaviour.¹⁶ Young Aboriginal people are more likely to be both shamed and rehabilitated by their own societies' laws.

The common law has recognised for a very long time that it exists in a world where there are other legal systems. It has a body of rules and processes known as conflict of laws or private international law for integrating these other systems into itself by recognising their effect. Under these rules, for example, the High Court has enforced Indian personal Islamic law without questioning that the relevant events had taken place in Western Australia.¹⁷ Brennan would require legislatures and courts to follow indigenous law in circumstances when all parties are indigenous people who consent to indigenous law applying. Emphasising the right of the individual to renounce membership of the self-determining group disempowers all individuals in the group from exercising their right to collective self-determination. There needs to be fairness but does that fairness require a personal choice? Common law courts enforce the law of a person's nationality on a person without respect to that person's wishes.¹⁸ It also enforces personal religious laws whether or not a party affected consents to them or not. A divorce decree of a Jewish religious court in Hungary, mediated through Israeli law, may well end the marriage of an Australian spouse whether or not they have consented to the operation of the religious law.¹⁹ So why has recognising indigenous legal systems been so problematical? The answer appears to be that Anglo-Australian law does not see them as the legal systems of communities exercising self determination. Other jurisdictions have not been so reluctant. In the United States the Congress has recently extended the criminal jurisdiction of Indian courts to all Indians in the territory of the particular Indian nation whether or not they are members of that nation. Such courts already exercise civil jurisdiction over non-Indians.²⁰

Brennan recognises the significance of collective rights in chapter 6 where he surveys other jurisdictions but does not return to that significance. He concludes that the

16. See generally Braithwaite 1989.

17. *Haque v Haque* (No 1) (1962) 108 CLR 230.

18. *R v Brentwood Marriage Registrar* [1968] 2 QB 956.

19. *Schwebel v Ungor* (No 1) 42 DLR (2d) 622.

20. 25 USC [United States Code] 1301(2) (as amended by *Defense Appropriations Act*, Pub. L. No. 101-938, 8077(b)-(d), (1990)) overturns the decision in *Duro v. Reina*, 495 US 676 (1990) that Indian tribes do not have criminal jurisdiction over non-member Indians for crimes committed on the reservation.

boldness of the Canadian Government shows up the conservatism of Australian governments. Canada provides, he says, a useful vocabulary for those in Australia seeking some recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty. This book fails to provide justifications for such developments within Australia. He excuses the High Court for not recognising the continuing sovereignty of indigenous peoples in the Mabo case or *Isabel Coe (on behalf of the Wiradjuri Tribe) v Commonwealth*,²¹ by stating that sovereignty cannot emerge from a court's declaration. This is inconsistent with American law in which the concept of domestic dependent sovereignty argued for in the Wiradjuri case was created by the decisions of Justice Marshall in a trilogy of cases in which the Supreme Court found that the tribal governments' authority predated, and survived, the United States' constitutional arrangements.²²

In the final chapter Brennan outlines a program of constitutional change to recognise the unique position of indigenous peoples by the centenary of Federation in 2001. He suggests that 4 senate seats could be allocated to indigenous peoples and that there be indigenous representation on a possible Council of Elders to advise the President of Australia on the exercise of the reserve powers now held by the governor-general as part of the royal prerogatives. As he concedes that party discipline has made senators representatives of parties rather than states it is not clear why indigenous senators would not also succumb to such discipline. The Senate itself is not a democratic institution with which indigenous peoples committed to democratic processes may wish to be associated. The reserve powers of the crown, on the Whig view of constitutional law, may not extend beyond encouraging and warning ministers.²³ Indigenous peoples may also wish to steer clear of this non-indigenous imbroglio.

Brennan also suggests the entrenchment of a prohibition of discrimination on the basis of race with the proviso that it would not be breached by measures taken to overcome disadvantages arising from race. He proposes that it be in the same terms as in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Commonwealth) which implements the *International convention for the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination*. That only permits affirmative action as a temporary measure. It was on this basis that the High Court upheld *Gerhardy v Brown*.²⁴ Most indigenous peoples would be reluctant to have their rights subject to time limits. He mentions, but does not expressly support, the federal parliament being given an express power to make laws for indigenous peoples. He also mentions the possible inclusion in the constitution of indigenous individual and collective rights, self-determination and the representation of indigenous peoples as a third tier of government and an Ombudsman for Indigenous Affairs to ensure that appropriate services exist for indigenous peoples in urban areas.

The comprehension of the past should not be limited by the present neither should, as Hume recognised, the limits of the present be continued inexorably into the future.²⁵ If the future of the indigenous peoples of Australia is to be a continuation of

21. (1993) 68 ALJR 110.

22. *Johnson v M'Intosh* 21 US (8 Wheat) 543 (1823), *Cherokee Nation v Georgia* 30 US (5 Pet) 1 (1831) and *Worcester v Georgia* 31 US (6 Pet) 515 (1832)

23. Bagehot 1993, 113.

24. (1985) 159 CLR 70.

25. Hume 1777, Sect IV Part II.

their past and present they are entitled to despair. While Brennan is concerned about the present position of indigenous peoples there is no account of the effect which the disempowerment of indigenous peoples in the past continues into the present. Disease, death, dispossession, poverty and racism are assumed or understated. The life expectancy of indigenous peoples in Australia is considerably shorter than of those in New Zealand, Canada or the United States. The sole responsibility of the central government in those countries for relations with indigenous peoples may explain this difference.²⁶ In Australia the rate of imprisonment of indigenous peoples by the states and territories, which was unbelievably high, has increased at the same time as these governments claim that they are implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Aboriginal and Social Justice Commission labels the policies which have produced this as racist.²⁷ Each of these people goes to prison as a result of a decision made by a magistrate or judge of the common law tradition who appears to be a willing participant in this national shame. Does reconciliation require that indigenous peoples forget the past and the present? Does down playing these issues make reconciliation more politically achievable? Archbishop Tutu of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has stated that reconciliation can only occur if all parties know what they are being reconciled about. 'You cannot forgive when you do not know what or whom to forgive.'²⁸ Brennan's restrained language justifies little change. Even government reports are less reticent than he is. The extraordinary resilience of indigenous peoples in the face of catastrophe does not emerge in this book.

Brennan states that a 'non-Aboriginal Australian such as myself can do little more than float suggestions which I have heard in my travels around Aboriginal communities over the years.' This is too restricted a role for a person of his background. Non-indigenous Australians have an interest in their own right that the political life of the nation reflects the claims of justice and liberty for all. A major insight which a lawyer can bring to such an inquiry derives from concepts of fairness. The past can be reconstructed, the present can be interpreted and the future can be imagined with justice. It is, of course, not enough to argue for the realisation of such rights in law. The political situation must support their emergence. However there is a dialogue between these two forces and one cannot be neglected. Brennan emphasises the limitations of the political power of indigenous peoples in achieving the recognition of their rights.

The owning of our history and our present by the reiteration of injustice and unfairness helps establish the normalcy of the claims of indigenous peoples. Their view of Australian law and politics as a result will be increasingly less marginalised. This book does not contribute to this process. In the context of the Keating government's rejection of the decision of the meeting of a wide group of indigenous peoples that any legislation on native title should be federal Brennan writes: 'Under the present Constitution and with the prevailing political ethos, the most Aborigines can achieve is to

²⁶. See generally Kunitz 1994.

²⁷. Paul Chamberlin 'Bureaucrats blamed for black deaths' *Sydney Morning Herald* June 28, 1994, 6.

²⁸. Alec Russell 'Tutu to lead commission on S Africa's bloody past' *Daily Telegraph* (London) 30 November 1995, 12.

have a Commonwealth government set national standards.' A few pages further on the author tells us that he was privileged to receive the last letter Stanner ever wrote. Stanner was fascinated by the different response to his evidence as an anthropologist by a Queensland judge to that which he had received from Wells J in Darwin fifty years before. He wrote: 'How do general ideas about human conduct change so quickly?' Stanner was too modest. The fact that he had once taken seriously the doctrine of equality before the law and forced its contents on Wells J in the context of an Aborigine has made its acceptance less uncommon if not normal among the judiciary. Brennan does write in his conclusion that the indigenous perspective must enjoy equal status with those of police officers, service deliverers or developers. But service deliverers do not appear to mean the administrators of the common law. It and its values, as well as those who enforce it, seem to enjoy a privileged position which cannot be justified if we truly own our history.

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Mabo: The Native Title Legislation: A Legislative Response to the High Court's Decision.
Edited by M.A. Stephenson, University of Queensland Press, 1995 Pp xxii + 209, index.
\$19.95

This book is a sequel to *Mabo: A judicial revolution: The Aboriginal land rights decision and its impact on Australian law* edited by M.A. Stephenson and Suri Ratnapala and published in 1993. A number of the authors from that volume discuss aspects of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) ('the Act') and related state legislation. The ideological divisions in the previous volume remain unchanged. Authors from Queensland, and the T.C. Beirne School of Law in the University of Queensland in particular, continue to see native title as a problematic tear in the seamless web of the common law. For them

the legislation has unravelled it into a larger hole extending to other layers of the social fabric. Authors from outside Queensland remain of the view that *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*²⁹ ('the Mabo case') was an overdue measure of social justice which the native title legislation, with its shortcomings, continues.

A piece of legislation passed in 1993 may not be of great interest to historians but a number of the articles raise significant historical issues. The volume itself shows the continuing disagreement in the Australian legal community about the extent to which the interests of indigenous peoples can, or should, be accommodated within Anglo-Australian law. This reflects the wider political divisions, both in the past and the present, over the place of indigenous peoples in the Australian state. The conservative parties have never explained why their concern for the protection of property rights, the family, religious values and of the continuity of tradition has not extended to those of the indigenous peoples.³⁰ This volume shows that number of lawyers have also not reflected on, or are unwilling to write about, this contradiction. If they had they may query the extent to which the Act overrides property rights and interferes with other indigenous traditions.

Sir Harry Gibbs, a former chief justice of the High Court, in his introduction again sets the tone for many of the Queensland writers who follow. He characterises the Mabo decision as opening a 'curious chapter' with the Act being 'no less remarkable than the decision which prompted its passage.' He reveals the opportunistic character of legal reasoning. He queries whether the Act does justice between those Aboriginal people who can establish that they hold native title and those who cannot. This is a problem deeply entrenched in all common law concepts of property. 'Property and law are born and must die together', wrote Bentham. 'Before the laws, there was no property: take away the laws, all property ceases. The organs of the law are symbiotic with property.'³¹ Land was, and is, a source of power and inequality in Australia. Gibbs has never argued elsewhere that this justifies abandoning concepts of property to establish a more egalitarian social order. Can he really believe the corollary of his statement: that no one should have their property rights respected because others have had their property rights violated?

Lumb deplores the Act as a further erosion of the rights of the states. The Act's origin in the power to legislate for people of a particular race in the Constitution extends federal power fettering the legislative and executive powers of the states over crown land. Connolly later returns to this theme. He also constructs a model of indigenous peoples' relationship with land to demolish it. He refers to arbitral bodies which are able to make recommendations about whether a government proposal to acquire native title land should, or should not, proceed in the event of a dispute. He states that this empowers these bodies to 'frustrate the governmental proposal altogether.' He continues: 'Now on any fair view, native title is a far more limited interest than freehold or leasehold, involving, at the most, intermittent use by a nomadic people. It may reasonably be questioned whether justice to the indigenous peoples really needs to go as far as this.' This description of all the interests of indigenous peoples in Australia in land as

29. (1992) 175 CLR 1.

30. See generally Markus 1996.

31. Offer 1981, pp. 11.

'intermittent use' indicates an unawareness of the views of a number of judges since Blackburn J in the Gove Land Rights case³² recognised the special relationship of the Yolgnu peoples to land. The summary of the effect of the tribunal is also misleading. The decision of the arbitral body can be overridden, pursuant to section 42 of the Act, by a territory, state or federal minister in the territory, state or national interest. This is not a power 'to frustrate...altogether.' Fraser also takes up the theme of the limitation of state rights in the specific context of commonwealth control over mining and dwells on the uncertainty the Act has introduced into mining law without mentioning other indeterminacies in mining law which may give the reader some perspective that native title is one among a number of uncertainties in mining law, many of which the mining industry is not pushing to resolve.

Forbes directs his polemics at a number of targets. Former chief justice Mason is criticised for stating that the declaratory theory of the common law is a fairy tale. The National Native Title Tribunal is attacked as a specialist tribunal, filled by 'selected enthusiasts', which destroys the standards maintained by the oldest courts of general jurisdiction, the Supreme Courts of the states. He claims its jurisdiction and procedures are unfair because parties will not get equal access to expert witnesses. Those witnesses will give evidence only for indigenous peoples. If this is a problem it is a problem before a court as well as a tribunal. The mining industry has been specifically selected for discriminatory treatment. The Act provides that a mining interest will not extinguish native title and fails to resolve whether native title to minerals has been extinguished. He fails to mention that it was the opposition's stand on the bill which led to the government's amendments, supported by mining interests, being defeated in the Senate.

Stephenson writes on the reservation in favour of Aboriginal peoples contained in pastoral leases. She considers the reasons for arguing that the reservations continued native title but concludes that the analysis by Brennan J is correct: the true nature of a lease is a grant of exclusive possession which excludes native title rights. Her analysis of Reynold's argument³³ for the continuation of native title hinges on whether the reservations were a 'contract, promise or engagement' made by the Crown which the colonies were unable to amend by virtue of *An Act to Repeal the Acts of Parliament now in Force Respecting the Disposal of the Waste Lands of the Crown in Her Majesty's Australian Colonies and to make other Provision in Lieu Thereof*.³⁴ This Act limited the powers of the states until the Australia Acts 1986 (Commonwealth and UK) removed them from the strictures of the *Colonial Laws Validity Act 1865* (Imperial). French J in the National Native Title Tribunal has held that the concern by the imperial government to protect the interests of the indigenous peoples in land did not fetter the power of the colony of Queensland to grant interests without reservations.³⁵ This decision is referred to in a footnote—which the index places on the previous page—but is not considered in any

32. *Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd* (1971) 17 FLR 141.

33. Reynolds 1993, p 120. Reynolds 1992, pp. 146–148.

34. 18 & 19 Vic c 56 (1855).

35. *In The Matter of the Native Title Act 1993 and In The Matter of the Waanyi Peoples Native Title Determination Application*, Application No. QN94/9 French J, President, Perth, 14 February 1995, (unreported), para 135.