

# 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 tipis 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.

## References

- Berndt, R.M. and C.H., with Stanton, J.E. 1993, *A World That Was*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
- Brown, J.E. 1972 *The North American Indians*. Aperture, New York.
- Bull, J.W. 1884 *Early Experiences Of Life In South Australia*. E.S. Wigg & Son, Adelaide.
- Eyre, E.J. 1997 [1845] *Journals Of Expeditions Of Discovery Into Central Australia, And Overland From Adelaide To King George's Sound, In The Years 1840-1*, Vol. II. The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide.
- Lewis, J. 1922, *Fought and Won*, W.K. Thomas & Co., Adelaide.
- McLuhan, T.C. 1976 *Touch The Earth*. Sphere Books Ltd, London.
- Meyer, H.E.A. 1997 [1879] 'Manners And Customs Of The Aborigines Of The Encounter Bay Tribe, South Australia', in Woods, J.D. *The Native Tribes Of South Australia*. Friends Of The State Library Of South Australia, Adelaide: 183-206.
- Moriarty, T. 1989 [1879] 'The 'Goolwa Clan' of the Narrinyeri Tribe', in Taplin, G. *The Folklore, Manners, Customs, and Languages of the South Australian Aborigines*. Govt. Printer, Adelaide: 50-53.
- Munn, N.D. 1973 *Walbiri Iconography*. Cornell University Press, London.
- Parker, K.L. 1978 *Australian Legendary Tales*. The Bodley Head in Australia. Sydney.
- Newland, S. 1926 *Memoirs of Simpson Newland*. F.W. Preece and Sons, Adelaide.
- Powell, P.J. 1981 *People of the Sacred Mountain*. Vols I, II. Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco.
- Smith, W.R. 1924 *In Southern Seas*. John Murray, London.
- Smith, W.R. (1930?) *Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines*. Farrar & Rinehart Publishers, New York, n.d.
- Sturt, C. 1969 [1849] *Narrative of an Expedition Into Central Australia*, Vols I, II. Greenwood Press, Publishers, New York.
- Taplin, G. 1989 [1879] *The Folklore, Manners, Customs, and Languages of the South Australian Aborigines*. Government Printer, Adelaide.
- Taplin, G. 1997 [1879]. 'The Narrinyeri', in Woods, J.D. *The Native Tribes Of South Australia*. Friends Of The State Library Of South Australia: xxix-181.
- Thomas, W.J. (1933?) *Some Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines*. Whitcombe & Tombs Limited, Melbourne, n.d.
- Woods, J.D. 1997 [1879] *The Native Tribes of South Australia*. Friends Of The State Library Of South Australia, Adelaide.