

# **Aboriginal History**

**Volume twenty-two 1998**

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

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## Introduction

This edition of *Aboriginal History* has been assembled by two co-editors, Neil Andrews and Brian Egloff of the University of Canberra. Their collection of articles preserves a nice balance between historical narrative and biography on the one hand and, on the other, the theoretical interpretations which these may prompt. Readers will be impressed by both the narrative and analytical skills evident in Don Baker's examination of the Aborigines who guided the explorer Thomas Mitchell, Thom Blake's account of the removal of Aborigines to Queensland's reserves and Rosita Henry's detailed assessment of the significance of Aboriginal participation in the 1993-94 dispute over the Kuranda skyrail near Cairns. Readers interested in how biography contributes to a wider history will find much to satisfy them in Richard Broome's tracing of the life of Fred Wilson, better known as 'Mulga Fred', widely assumed to be the Aboriginal model in the 'Mine tinkit they fit' Pelaco shirt advertisements. The 'Mulga Fred' article is complemented by John Maynard's profiles of Aboriginal jockeys and Malcolm Prentis's account of an ethnographer's dealings with Aboriginal informants. Sitting between these two groups of articles is Peter Read's comparison of the sense of belonging to land articulated by many Aborigines and particular non-Aborigines. A third group of articles consists of those in which the authors consider the implications for social theory raised by the historical events they examine. In this group are Robert Castle's and Jim Hagan's discussion of the means by which settlers in Australia created an Aboriginal workforce, Rob Foster's analysis of the myths surrounding 'paper yabber' or the messages Aborigines once delivered for settlers, Patrick McConvell's examination of genealogical imagery and ideology in affirming Aborigines' attachment to the land, Gaynor McDonald's study of Wiradjuri dispossession, and Barbara Glowczewski's discussion of the Yugun and Yawuru peoples of the Kimberley.

To complement the articles, Luise Hercus has brought together a wide-ranging suite of book reviews. They are a gauge of the variety of research now typifying Aboriginal Studies, and the increasing importance of this to the broader field of Australian Studies.

Readers will soon detect the interwoven themes of Aboriginal achievement and identity underlying this volume of *Aboriginal History*. Those of my generation—or at least those who grew up in Melbourne during the 1940s—probably remember that one Aborigine more than most others shaped our understanding. This was the man in the Pelaco shirt advertisements, the subject of the cover illustration and of Richard Broome's leading article for this edition. The power of the 'Mine tinkit they fit' advertisements in influencing views about Aborigines is seen in a personal experience. In 1949, the last year Pelaco used the advertisements, I was a pupil in a Sunday School that treated its pupils to a fancy dress parade. I went along as the chap in the Pelaco ads.

How to transform me from 'white' to 'black' boy for an evening was a problem my parents solved—a concoction of burnt cork and lanolin applied to all exposed portions of my skin and hair. My family thought I looked the part, and would certainly win first prize if I shouted 'Mine tinkit they fit!' often enough. To my dismay, however, my best friend took first prize as 'Groucho Marx'. Later that evening, my parents added injury to the judges' insult by discovering that the easiest way to remove my home-made greasepaint was to scour me vigorously with a scrubbing brush dipped in eucalyptus oil. If my parents had said, 'Son, an Aboriginal identity means pain and humiliation!' I would have understood.

Like the Pelaco advertisements, images of Aborigines, favourable and unfavourable, have long been at work in Australian society, subtly impinging on our thinking in often unexpected ways. To these are added the other influences discussed in this volume—urban myths and popular stereotypes, the exploits of Aboriginal sportspeople and the subjective opinions of early ethnographers. Then there is the impact on the public consciousness of Aboriginal missions, reservations and children's homes, of Aboriginal oral traditions, the jobs to which Aborigines have often been confined, and their associations with particular regions. All have helped mould our understanding of who Aborigines are and what they have accomplished. The special contribution of this volume is to help us all, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, see this understanding in truer perspective.

In acknowledging the contributions of Neil Andrews, Brian Egloff, Luise Hercus and the individual authors of the articles and book reviews, I make special mention of the work of our typesetter, Tikka Wilson, of Richard Barwick, who processed the illustrations and cover photography, and of our business agent, Tracey Watson. They eased the burden of production and distribution, for which the Editorial Board is most grateful. Finally and in mentioning the Board, I thank its members for their guidance. Without it this volume would be the poorer. Last, but not least, I would like acknowledge the hard work of Ingereth Macfarlane who was inadvertently omitted from the list of editors of volume 21. The Editorial Board apologises to Ms Macfarlane for this omission.

Ian Howie-Willis  
Managing Editor

# Seeking Mulga Fred

Richard Broome

At 7.45 am on 3 November 1948, Alfred Hirst, a railway repairer, discovered the body of an elderly Aboriginal man on the line at Horsham Station. Dr Basil Jones soon identified the body as that of Mulga Fred. The Adelaide Express had severed both legs of the deceased just above the ankles, and there were lacerations to the head and forearms. Death resulted from a fractured skull and shock from multiple injuries. First Constable John Slater reported that the deceased had no known relatives, no fixed address, and no property on his body, but readily identified him as Mulga Fred. His age was put at 74. Leonard Duffas, a railway assistant, saw the man known to him as Mulga Fred, alight from a Swan Hill train the previous evening. Mulga Fred inquired about the next train to Dimboola, and then headed for a meal. An hour later, Duffas saw Fred's swag on the waiting room floor with a half bottle of wine standing beside it. The assumption was that he had fallen from the platform while under the influence. Duffas reported that Fred smelt of liquor, although 'his walk was quite steady'. A half-eaten lolly was found near him and two more in his pocket.<sup>1</sup>

How was it that a Horsham doctor, police officer and railway assistant, instantly knew the identity of this Aboriginal itinerant who journeyed from Swan Hill and was bound for Dimboola? And why did the press throughout the region, two Melbourne dailies—the *Argus* and the *Sun*—and the *West Australian* in Perth, report his death, and with much regret, when few Aboriginal individuals were given press attention? The *Horsham Times* for instance, devoted two-thirds of a metre of column space to this news, under the title 'Old Mulga Passes On'.<sup>2</sup>

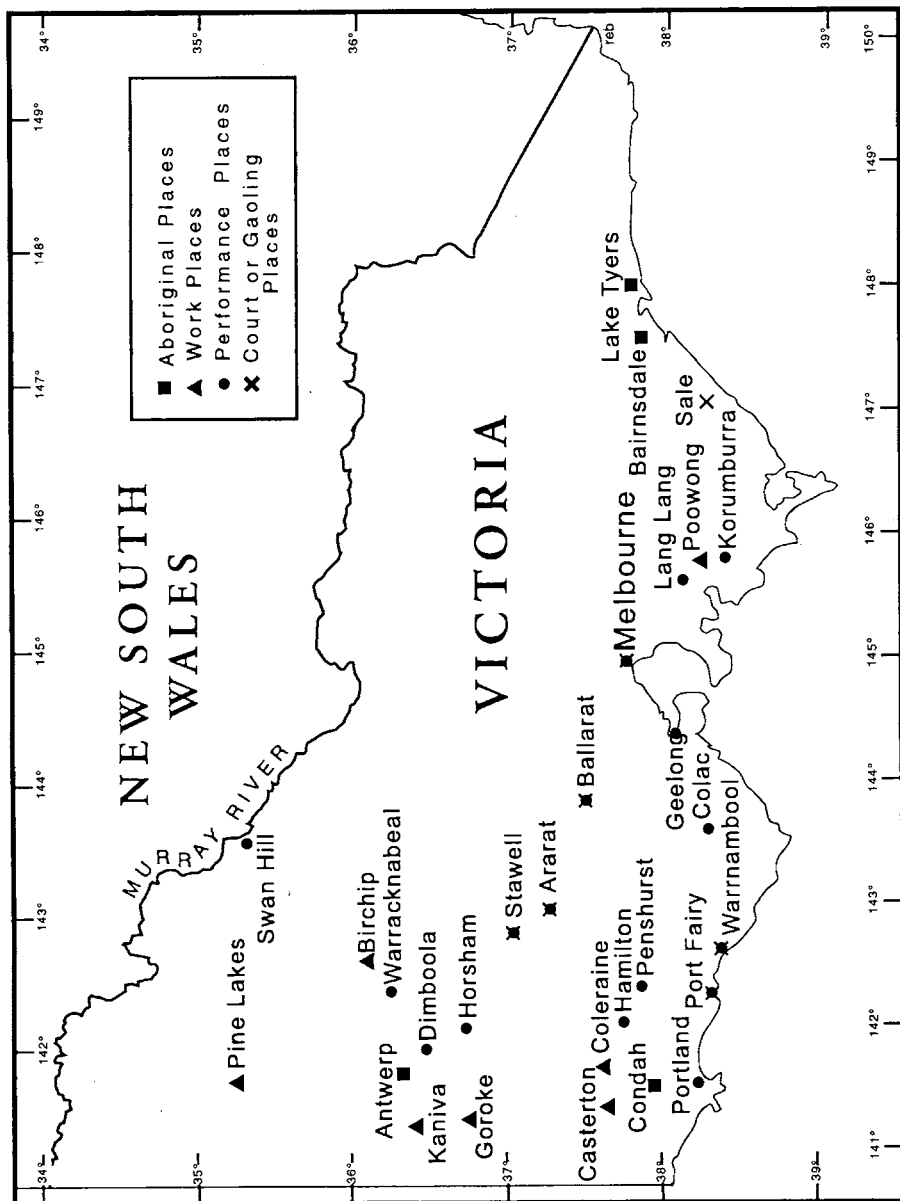
Who was Mulga Fred, what roles and identities did he hold, what meanings did his life have, then and now, and how can we know? The answers will illuminate how an Aboriginal man negotiated his way along the cultural divide in western Victoria in the first half of this century. I will argue that through a series of adaptations and appropriations of European roles and forms, Mulga Fred forged an identity and found a niche in western Victoria's folklore. He generated some official notice, considerable newspaper interest, and many memories for us to interrogate. Two other valuable sources exist. The first is an address to the Coleraine Historical Society in 1960, by E.R. Trangmar, a Coleraine storekeeper who knew Mulga Fred very well over two decades. The second is

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<sup>1</sup> Inquest on Mulga Fred at Victorian Public Records Office, VPRS 24, box 1605, no. 1704.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Swan Hill Guardian*, 5 November 1948; *Horsham Times*, 5 November 1948; *Argus*, 4 November 1948; *Sun*, 4 November 1948; and *West Australian*, 4 November 1948.





Map 1 Mulga Fred Wilson's beat, 1910c-1948.

an interview I conducted in 1996 in Horsham with a farmer, Don McCabe and a rural worker, Norman Flack, both of whom knew Mulga Fred for 15 years. McCabe has since developed a strong interest in Mulga Fred and has assisted me greatly.<sup>3</sup>

### A stockman and his Aboriginal heritage

There are no official records of Mulga Fred's origins, which is typical for Aboriginal people born in frontier areas. Trangmar, who in the 1930s prepared Mulga Fred's case for the old age pension, stated that Fred was born in 1874 at Alec and John Edgar's De Grey Station on the river of the same name, outside Port Hedland in Western Australia. However, police and other records give estimates that place his birth up to ten years earlier than the date Trangmar stated. He was originally named Fred Wilson, and was the son of Aboriginal parents, who worked on the property. Wilson was the name that later appeared in police records, but Fred also told Don McCabe that his name was Fred Clarke. When McCabe recently visited Port Hedland, his inquiries revealed both Wilsons and Clarks among the Aboriginal people still at De Grey. Mulga Fred's Aboriginal name is unknown, and his European name is contentious, but most evidence suggests it was Wilson.

It is certain that Fred Wilson was tutored in the traditions of his people and probably initiated, but no evidence of these remains. His father, a boss stockman, grew him in cattle work. Young Fred learned to ride with skill, to plait, to wield a stock whip, and to work with horses and tame them. Cattle work for him was a mixture of pleasure and pain as it was for many Aboriginal people.<sup>4</sup> Fred Wilson told Norman Flack of his job as a boy bringing in the saddle horses from a 25 hectare paddock 'sometimes I couldn't get them on foot, and they'd belt hell out of me. Take me into the saddle yard and get a trace and they'd belt hell out of me, then send me out again to bring those bloody horses in'. Wilson also told McCabe that in the off season, the stockmen used to collect pearl shell off the beach near Port Hedland.

The beach at Port Hedland became Fred Wilson's window to a wider world. Although some claim Wilson journeyed east from Perth by mule train, or overlanded from Port Hedland, it is more likely he left home by boat.<sup>5</sup> There was a regular cattle trade by boat out of Port Hedland to southern regions. Wilson told McCabe that as the tide dropped, the stranded boats were propped with sticks to keep them upright and the cattle driven onto them from temporary yards on the beach. He informed both Trangmar and McCabe that he left the west in this manner, droving some De Grey cattle to Sidney Kidman's property in South Australia, where he remained for some years. In 1906, after droving cattle to Adelaide, he ceased to be a stockman and soon wedded his life to Victoria. His beat within Victoria over a generation (see Map 1) stretched east-west from Lakes Entrance to the South Australian border and north-south from Swan Hill to Warrnambool. Three contexts shaped these movements, namely: the country

3. Trangmar 1960. Author's interview with Norman Flack, Horsham, 16 April 1996 and with Don McCabe, Horsham, 16 April 1996 and subsequent correspondence. Transcript in the author's possession. Further reference to these three views will not be accompanied by a footnote.

4. See McGrath 1987, pp. 49-94.

5. Ted Brown, *Wimmera Mail Times*, 8 December 1976.

rodeo and show circuit where he performed, his European workplaces, and his relations with Aboriginal people and places.

### Rodeo performer and his sense of masculine pride

Wilson opened a new era in his manhood when he entered Bronco George's Buckjumping Show in Adelaide. He rode 'King', the wildest horse of George's herd, to a standstill and won £5 (equivalent to about \$1,000 today). Bronco George immediately hired Wilson, who toured with the troupe in southern Australia. In 1908 the Mulder Brothers' poached Wilson and christened him 'Mulga Fred'. About 1911, Wilson joined Billy Kinnear's Buckjump Show as their star rider, bringing the name 'Mulga Fred' with him.

From that time, Wilson assumed the persona and identity of Mulga Fred, buckjump rider. One persistent story about Wilson is that he won the 1911 Melbourne Coronation Buckjumping Carnival, staged to celebrate King George V's ascension to the throne. The Carnival, which lasted 15 nights, was held under canvas at the Melbourne Hippodrome. It offered 30 of the wildest bucking horses each night, including 'Dynamite', 'Splinterwood' and 'Kyneton Kate', as well as bucking bullocks. Prizes ranged from £10 to £25, that is up to ten weeks' of a working man's wage. Unfortunately, none of the Melbourne papers, either daily or sporting, reported the nightly events.<sup>6</sup> However, there were daily advertisements in the *Argus* for the coming night's performance. For 13 nights the best rodeo men in the state tried and failed to ride one particular horse, 'Kyneton Kate'. On the fifth night the advertisement teased: 'Coronation Buckjump. Hippodrome. Tonight, Tonight. Kyneton Kate stills throws them all. Will she get rid of Mulga Fred tonight?'<sup>7</sup> Four nights later, an advertisement trumpeted 'Kyneton Kate still champion! Will Mulga Fred, the Aboriginal champion, win tonight?'<sup>8</sup> Mulga Fred twice failed to ride Kate, but no one else succeeded either.

The city press rarely reported rough riding. Indeed, these reports were advertising copy and not news items, and thus no information exists about the overall winner. The current historian of the Australian Rough Riders' Association formed in 1942, has no knowledge of the event.<sup>9</sup> However, *The Age* did contain one report of the first night's rough riding at the Hippodrome. The promoters had combed the state for the wildest horses and the best riders, and 'amongst the best of the riders was an aboriginal, who stuck like a plaster to the worst buckjumper and evoked tremendous applause by his fine riding'.<sup>10</sup> Was this Mulga Fred? There is no mention of any other Aboriginal rider at the carnival, so it is highly likely that this praise was being extended to Mulga Fred Wilson. The fact that he was the only rider who was given two attempts at 'Kyneton Kate', indicated his superior horsemanship.

Mulga Fred Wilson toured until the 1930s (see Plate 1). Billy Kinnear once wrote of his star rodeo rider that 'he was a wonderful horseman and could ride in any gear with

6. I checked the files of the following newspapers: *Age*, *Argus*, *Weekly Times*, *Leader*, *Sport*, *Sporting Judge*, *Australasian* and *Referee*, with no success. The Australian Rough Riders' Association journal, *Hoofs and Horns*, published from 1942, did not have an obituary of Mulga Fred Wilson.

7. *Argus*, 29 June 1911.

8. *Argus*, 4 July 1911.

9. Peter Poole, interview, 15 July 1997.

10. *Age*, 23 June 1911.

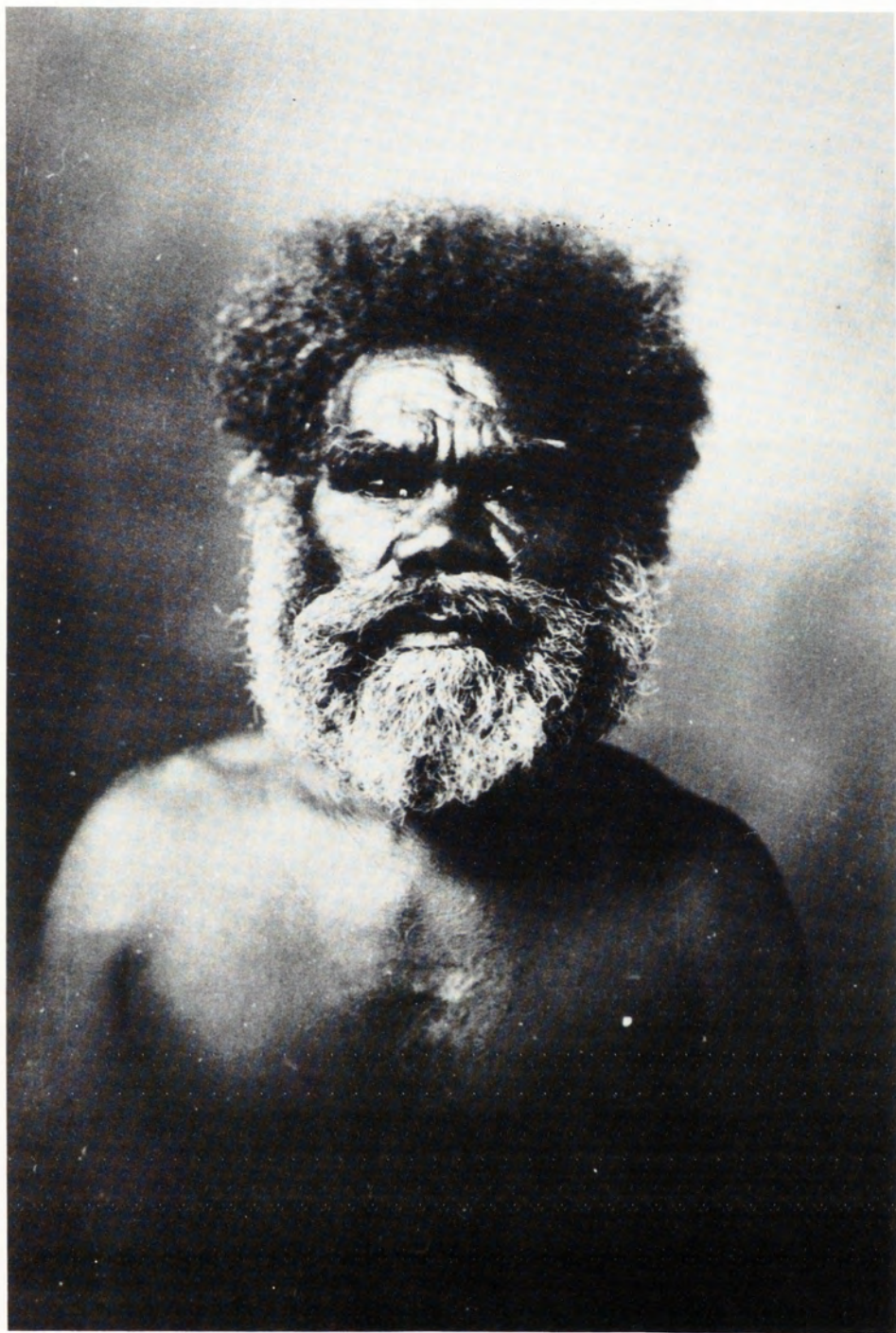


Plate 1 Mulga Fred Wilson in the 1930s, photographed by James McColl  
(Warracknabeal Historical Society).

or without assistance. He could vault on to a horse when it was in action, and ride it from head to tail'.<sup>11</sup> Thorpe McConville, of McConville's Wild West Show, told McCabe that Mulga Fred was his top rider along with Leo Lloyd. Wilson believed that riding a bucking bronco was just like playing music. Once the rhythm of the bucking was discerned you just went with it. Don McCabe claimed that Wilson gained the highest tally of points one rodeo season, but he missed a trip to North America because he was an Aborigine. Alan McPhee was sent instead. Another report claimed he was the Victorian state buckjumping champion in 1936, being thrown only twice in 36 rides.<sup>12</sup> As he was then about sixty, it is a claim that deserves close scrutiny, but no records have been located.

Wilson's identity was shaped by the masculinity of a rodeo rider: a man who could face seething horseflesh without flinching and often triumph by beating the bell. He rode buckjumpers at local rodeos after retiring from rodeo troupes. Norm Flack recalled that when the rodeo came to town, Mulga Fred would always have a ride. Surviving photographic images of Mulga Fred in newspaper files, local historical society archives and the Museum of Victoria depict his rodeo-styled masculinity.<sup>13</sup> One is of Wilson riding a buckjumper at John Mitchell's property 'Karnak' at Goroke, his balance sure as he leaves the seat after another lunge by the horse.<sup>14</sup> Others are full-length street images revealing a smiling and proud man in rodeo gear of boots, moleskins, jacket, shirt and kerchief around the neck. Several are more essentialised, bare-chested Aboriginal portraits. The best of these, reproduced here (Plate 1), was taken by James McColl in the 1930s at his Warracknabeal photography studio. It was displayed in his studio window for thirty years reinforcing Mulga Fred's mythology. In these images, his face is lined and his beard is ample. McCabe and Flack recalled he limped from a bad knee, a proud legacy from his rough riding.

As a buckjump rider Wilson was irrepresible. In the early 1940s, Don McCabe saw an inebriated Mulga Fred pestering his old boss McConville for a ride in a rodeo show at Casterton. Fred was climbing through the ropes saying 'me ride him, me ride him boss'. McConville finally relented and put Wilson on a horse that could spin and the horse went one way and Fred the other. He exclaimed as he picked himself up, 'bloody tricky horse, I'll come back tomorrow, and I'll ride them all'. Mulga Fred last rode in public at the Swan Hill Show in October 1948, a month before his death, aged about 74 years. Trangmar stated that he rode an exhibition on a horse called 'Tops Up', not only for the stipulated ten seconds, but right out. 'He so impressed the crowd with his horsemanship and courage that when a tarpaulin was taken round the grounds £150 was collected'. This is an enormous amount of money. Even if Trangmar exaggerated, and it was £15, it was still three week's basic wage, about \$1,000 in today's money. However, the *Swan Hill Guardian* gave another version of the day, merely recording that he gave an unscheduled whip cracking demonstration.

11. From *Hoofs and Horns*, reprinted in the *Horsham Times*, 5 November 1948.

12. Coleraine Albion, 27 January 1960. I have been unable to verify this due to the absence of press reports or rough riding association records.

13. See images in *Wimmera Mail Times*, 15 November 1976, 4 February 1994, and early 1997; *Coleraine Albion*, 6 February 1978; Warracknabeal and also Hamilton Historical societies; and images 223.04017-19, Victorian Aboriginal Photographic Collection, Museum of Victoria.

14. See *Wimmera Mail Times*, 4 February 1994.

Only traces of his skill were left—age had taken its toll, and added to this, his judgement was marred by a little too much drinking. Not to the credit of the crowd, they ‘enjoyed’ watching his pitiable efforts and when he had finished a man threw him some silver. The rest walked off satisfied with their fun at the expense of a very old man.<sup>15</sup>

Fred Wilson’s performances continued throughout his life. He fought occasionally in travelling boxing tents at agricultural shows—a further display of country manhood. However, he relied increasingly on his whip and boomerang. Trangmar claimed Wilson was an expert at plaiting, although Norman Flack disagreed. Certainly he made his own whip handles, several of which are displayed at the shire offices in Casterton. Wilson performed at major football matches, rodeos and country shows throughout Western Victoria. Don McCabe recalled him busking at the Casterton Show in the 1930s and 1940s. ‘He’d have a big circle of people around, and he’d put the hat down and of course everybody that walked past would throw sixpence in or a shilling or two bob. He’d finish up with enough money to keep himself’. He cracked cigarettes out of people’s mouths and hands. The *Horsham Times* reported that ‘every boy on the showgrounds...battled for the honor of having the cigarette paper struck from their fingers by the lash’.<sup>16</sup> Wilson lashed paper from hands while blindfolded, and cut paper from his own hand while lying down. There are many accounts of Wilson staging impromptu whip cracking exhibitions in the streets of Western District towns, with his hat down expecting a return. He also performed at Melbourne carnival and football fixtures. At the Melbourne Centenary Rodeo in 1935 he found himself destitute and in court for drunkenness and begging when, as he claimed, the show went broke and left him hungry. Yet he was picked up in Burwood Road with some food in his swag and a few copper and silver coins in his pocket. He had earned £4/15/0 whip cracking at a VFL match, but claimed ‘another blackfellow he rookem me for it’.<sup>17</sup>

Mulga Fred’s performances sometimes subverted the authorities. One story places him in Melbourne on 13 August 1921, the day of Archbishop Daniel Mannix’s triumphant return from overseas. Mulga Fred was busking in Bourke Street when he joined a crowd on its way to Spencer Street Railway Station to welcome Mannix. En route he accepted a dare to remove a police officer’s hat from six metres with his whip. His success landed him in court where he allegedly pleaded with some exaggeration: ‘I’m a native of Australia. I’m a fair dinkum Irishman, a Roman Catholic and a cobbler of Dr Mannix. I was on me way to the station to meet my old mate but this ‘ere bloke [indicating the police officer] couldn’t take a joke’.<sup>18</sup> Mulga Fred also subverted the Centenary festivities at Portland in November 1934. A grazier, John Mitchell of ‘Karnak’, Goroke, dressed him up for the Portland celebrations, held in the presence of the Duke of Gloucester (King George V’s third son). Flack recalled that Wilson ‘had a nice silk jacket on him, and white trousers, and those bloody long boots. He [Mitchell] had him done up perfectly’. Mulga Fred rode well and stayed on, very creditable for one who was then 60 years old. However, Wilson had ‘a few grogs’ and rain followed. He then

15. *Swan Hill Guardian*, 5 November 1948.

16. *Horsham Times*, 5 November 1948.

17. *Herald*, 3 July 1935. See also *Herald*, 7 June 1935.

18. *Australasian Post*, 25 February 1960. No reports of this incident were found despite a check for August 1921 of the *Age*, *Argus*, *Herald*, *Leader*, and the *Melbourne Truth*.

pestered the organisers for another ride. As Flack recalled, 'so they put him on and he goes out and the horse threw him off, threw him fair in this big pool of water. He looked up and the King's (sic) there and he's laughing'. No corroborative evidence for this story has been found in the Portland papers.<sup>19</sup> However, the Secretary of the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines, in March 1935 lamented that 'this Board has been very severely criticised on account of the conduct of this man during the Centenary celebrations'.<sup>20</sup> Fred had clearly subverted the occasion, yet the Board was powerless, as he was a native of Western Australia.

### **A horse tamer and his sense of worth**

Mulga Fred Wilson tamed horses throughout western Victoria and sometimes in Gippsland. He moved between John Mitchell's 'Karnak' property at Goroke; Fred Heenan's place at Clover Flat, Coleraine; Harry and Ellen Goode's property near Casterton; Nancy and Keith Edgar's place, 'Cuyuac' near Nareen; and Percy Williams' property at Kaniva. Horse taming was a patient business. Wilson remained for months on properties, breaking neighbours' horses as well. Such work reinforced his identity and status as a horseman and rural worker. Both Flack and McCabe watched Mulga Fred tame horses, not break them. They insisted his methods were the opposite of those who thrashed horses with wood or bags to break their spirit. His methods were intuitive about the right moment to act and how a horse would react.

Norm Flack recalled an incident when he was living near the Heenans of Clover Flats outside Coleraine. Some of the Heenans were champion riders themselves, and on this occasion the two Heenan boys were trying to break a spirited four-year-old untamed horse. Mulga watched their efforts for a while. 'The horse was going round and round and snorting and kicking. They couldn't get near him'. Mulga asked to be given a turn. He stood just over a metre from the rail and each time the horse circled, Fred moved in a few centimetres until the horse could not pass him. It stood before him, its head hanging. 'Mulga put his hand on him see. The horse would bolt round again and he'd come back again and within about half an hour he'd have the bloody halter on'. The Heenans told Flack, who was not there, about this incident with considerable admiration. It was a story which with each retelling, enhanced Mulga Fred's status as a horseman. Flack recalled their words to him: 'the old black bugger! We couldn't put the halter on that bloody horse if we'd stopped there for a week'.

Don McCabe saw Mulga Fred tame a future racehorse named 'Heather Doon' in 1946 at his uncle's (Harry Goode's) property, when Mulga was about 72 years old. McCabe watched as Mulga led the horse around by a lead with a bit in its mouth, this way and that, then in later sessions he put a bag on its back. The horse would flinch and rear. Each day McCabe asked Mulga Fred when he would ride 'Heather Doon'. Each time Fred would reply, 'tomorrow maybe'. Finally 'tomorrow' came. Fred tightened the saddle's girth, by placing the strap in his mouth and leaning against the horse's belly with his body and head, and wrenching it tight with a push and a movement with his head. 'Gee you could just about hear the aaah. He got it really tight ... he must have

<sup>19</sup> See the *Portland Guardian* and the *Portland Observer* for November 1934.

<sup>20</sup> Secretary to M.T. McLean, Chief Protector of Aborigines, South Australia, 18 March 1935. Personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

known she was going to buck'. Mulga then led 'Heather Doon' to a patch of sand. Young McCabe thought this was to ensure a soft landing if Mulga was thrown, but he later learned it was to provide a less firm footing to mitigate the horse's bucking. 'She bucked good enough to throw a lot of fellows, she had a bit of go in her. But he just rocked backwards and forwards like that you know. Just like it was a rocking chair. He was very loose in all his movements. He'd sort of go with the horse'. Fred Heenan recalled that 'at one Coleraine Show Fred rode a horse which had thrown five local riders. He rode the horse easily'.<sup>21</sup>

Fred Wilson was also a rouseabout and wool presser, and he cut posts and fenced, stripped wattle bark, carted hay, and did most other rural labouring work. Norm Flack recalled he 'was a very good worker' and had great stamina. Mulga Fred knew his own worth here, as he did with horse work, and was confident enough to turn stereotypes back onto his white workmates. Flack remembered threshing in a heat wave. 'He was on the stack with me, there were five of us on it, finished up there were three of us, the other fellows gave up, the heat beat them. Fred said 'come on you white buggers, help, get in. You say I don't work'. Flack claimed Wilson had good relations with his fellow workers. He had the prestige of being a good teller of bush yarns. 'It might take him a bloody half hour, but his was a good story, just a made up story, or something he'd heard, something the shearers had told him. We'd all laugh and he'd have a good old laugh. Oh yes he could talk.'

Some claimed other skills for him. One story asserts Mulga Fred was a Victoria Police black tracker, but Don McCabe recalled that Wilson once told him he could not track. There is no evidence that he worked for Victoria Police, although the archives would not reveal any casual horse breaking.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps it is an apocryphal story like the claims that he served in the Light Horse during World War I. This claim proved very unlikely after investigation with the Australian War Memorial. Ten Frederick Wilsons served in the First AIF, but none in the Light Horse. Also, as Mulga Fred Wilson was at least forty years old at the time of the outbreak of war and possibly more, and an Aboriginal man of full descent, it is unlikely that he would have been accepted.<sup>23</sup>

Fred Wilson had close paternal-dependent relations with his white employers, for instance with the Mitchells, who dressed him for the Centenary rodeo at Portland. These relations were close and enduring. Wilson returned yearly to certain properties for work, claiming them as part of his world. Don McCabe recalled that his uncle and aunt, Harry and Ellen Goode of Dunrobin near Casterton, provided Wilson with food, a hut, an outfit of new clothes and money when he went roving, but McCabe doubts he was paid formal wages. He added that Fred 'used to have meals with us', and believed the Mitchells probably treated him the same. At the Goode's he entertained guests with his stories. McCabe recalled that his Uncle Harry 'would be sitting up one end of the

<sup>21</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 11 August 1987.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Presland, the former archivist of the Victoria Police Archives, has compiled a list of black trackers in the Victorian force. In a telephone conversation with me on 15 February 1996 he confirmed that neither Mulga Fred nor Fred Wilson are on that list. He indicated that police records would not reveal casual employment.

<sup>23</sup> Research on War Memorial records by Darryl Bennet, research editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography project. Bennet to Broome, letter, 15 March 1996.



table and Fred down the other. Now to entertain you old Uncle would say, "Fred, remember so and so?" "Oh yes, good rider. Sit on a horse pretty good boss". "Ever ride against him Fred?" "Oh yes". "How did you go?" "Oh, me win". Longer and funnier yarns were also related in true bush tradition.

Florence Grinham and Fred Heenan of Clover Flat, who also offered Fred a hut, recalled that he walked to Coleraine for the day and returned by tea, bringing chocolate frogs for Grinham's children. Grinham recalled 'they would climb up on his knees and sit there eating their frogs'. Wilson often joined the Grinham's for a meal, but 'he would never put his hands or elbows on the table, and also waited for someone to serve up his meals before he ate. He would not take the food off the centre plate himself'.<sup>24</sup>

McCabe best illustrates the relationship Fred Wilson had with property owners on his beat—a mixture of white paternalism and Aboriginal kin dependence—when he recalled Wilson's periodic home-coming to the Goode's property.

When Fred would come home from a walkabout he would get to Casterton on the train and head for the police station to get proper food and go in for the night and the policeman would ring up Auntie that night. Oh it depended what hour of the night he came but he'd ring up. He'd ring up and say 'Oh Mrs Goode', he'd say. 'Our old friend's back. Oh yes, we've got him here', he'd say. 'Will I bring him out?' She would say, 'oh yes, bring him out'. It might be about two or three chain from the road up to the house, up the gravel drive. The house had a verandah all round and for some reason or other Fred would never let the policeman drive him to the house. He'd always get him to let him out at the road. Fred would walk half way up the drive and there was this little patch of lawn there. He'd sit there and he'd wait for his invitation to come any further. That was a part of it. So Auntie would say 'there he is', and she'd be peeping out of the kitchen window see, let him be for a while. He'd be there and nothing happened you see and after a while, he used to call her. 'Missus, hey Missus', you'd hear him yell out, 'Missus'. She wouldn't say anything for a while, she'd let him go for a while. 'Missus, I've been a naughty boy. Your boy's come home. I've been naughty'. He'd be singing this out to her. So she accidentally sees him and acts a big surprise. She'd have to walk out the back. 'Oh Fred, where did you come from?' 'Oh Missus, I have been a naughty boy'. 'What did you do naughty Fred?' 'Oh I got boozed', he said. 'I got boozed. I've been very naughty'. 'Oh well Fred go on over to the hut. I'll have something for you in a minute. He'd be a hell of a mess you know. His clothes would be hanging off him. He went away all done up a few months before. He would go up and she'd have a big pot of soup on ready for him and I'd take that over and Fred would get into that, probably the first decent feed he'd had for a week. He'd come good again. Oh God, he'd want to do everything around the place, he'd chop hell out of the wood. He'd got to make up for it. 'Oh, I've been bad' he would say'.

Both parties were performing and structuring this ritualised meeting. Mrs Goode maintained a studied indifference to Fred's arrival to increase his guilt, while Fred's cautious approach and contrite behaviour echoed Aboriginal meeting ritual and deference to powerful kin. Both were bound in a reciprocal relationship of mutual need and respect.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 11 August 1987.

<sup>25</sup> See Hamilton 1972, pp. 34–48 and Hallam 1983, pp. 134–6.

### Aboriginal man and his Aboriginality

The third force in the shaping of Fred Wilson's beat, his world, and his identity, was his Aboriginal friends. Little is currently known of this beyond glimpses in the European record.<sup>26</sup> However, Aboriginal people always seem present if not dominant in Wilson's life. Trangmar claimed that Wilson visited Condah Mission after working at Edgars and 'with his cheque he would buy a sackful of supplies and gifts for the people at the Mission. When he arrived there he was hailed as a black Santa Claus for it was always about Christmas time that he would appear there'. He believed that Wilson had a strong friendship with Hannah Lovett, an Aboriginal elder at the mission. Alick Jackomos stated that Mulga Fred stayed at Condah Mission 'for many years' and recalled him being at Mrs Lovett's funeral in 1946.<sup>27</sup> Official correspondence also recorded that Wilson was staying with 'a half-caste, Jack Harrison' of Antwerp in 1935.<sup>28</sup> When Fred Wilson made his last appearance at the Swan Hill Show in 1948, the month before he died, he did so in the company of Jackie Lovett, the Heywood footballer.<sup>29</sup>

Wilson also binged with Aboriginal friends in Victoria where Aboriginal people had freer access to alcohol. In March 1935 he and William Bull received 14 days' gaol for being drunk and disorderly in Bairnsdale. Ronald Glen, the manager of Lake Tyers Aboriginal Mission, wrote to the Board that they worked a stockwhip exhibition together, 'and are real nuisances in the district'.<sup>30</sup> When Glen forbade Bull from visiting town to obtain liquor, he replied that Glen had no power to stop him unless he made Lake Tyers as Bull's prescribed place of residence. And if he did that, 'he would not do a tap of work, and clear out if he wished'.<sup>31</sup> Wilson was again in court in Warrnambool in January 1938 charged with local Koorie, Chris Austin, for being drunk and disorderly. They were fined £2, in default 14 days imprisonment.<sup>32</sup> Wilson did not drink only with Aboriginal friends. He drank with independent-minded whites as well. After the 1933 Horsham Show, the local publican who ran the beer tent, forgot to collect one of his kegs from the showgrounds. Some sideshow operators (who were themselves marginal men) took it to the riverbank, inviting passers-by to join them, including 'Mulga Fred, whose gameness riding furious steers earlier in the day had attracted attention'.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson's drinking led to his being gaoled at least 15 times between 1927 and 1940, for periods ranging from one to 28 days, mostly for being drunk and disorderly. He was incarcerated predominantly in Warrnambool lock-up, but also in Geelong, Ballarat, Ararat, and Sale gaols.<sup>34</sup> He was not convicted after 1940. By then, police who knew

26. The records of the Koorie Oral History Project held at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Victoria) contain no mention of Mulga Fred. Telephone conversation with Christina Bourke, librarian.

27. Jackomos 1979, p. 12. Alick Jackomos, Kew, interview, 5 June 1997.

28. P. R. Biggin, Clerk of Courts, Nhill, to Secretary, APB, 6 May 1935 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

29. *Coleraine Albion*, 11 February 1960.

30. Ronald Glen to APB, 6 March 1935 in 1935 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

31. *Ibid.* See also Anderson 1995, pp. 22–37.

32. *Warrnambool Standard*, 4 January 1938.

33. Un-named press cutting dated 17 October 1933 held by the Horsham and District Historical Society.

Wilson as Mulga Fred, rider and whip cracker, gave him a bed when he was drunk and sent him on his way. The story of his ritual returns home to the Goode's property, reveals this approach. Indeed, evidence from the 1930s revealed similar treatment from the authorities. On one occasion Fred Wilson journeyed from Horsham, cast out of town by magistrate, E. Omant, to avoid a gaol sentence for drunkenness. He proceeded to Casterton and then to Dimboola to see some Aboriginal friends, where he soon found himself in the lock-up. The police in Stawell, Ararat, and Hamilton moved him on, and then the Apex Gymkhana lured him back to Horsham. Despite being dressed in boots, riding pants and a loud tie, he never arrived at the rodeo. A bottle of wine or two on Saturday night diverted him to Omant's Court, and then to Ballarat Gaol for two weeks.<sup>35</sup>

Fred Wilson was devoid of any 'chip on his shoulder' and was usually a genial drinker. Norman Flack recalled that when Mulga Fred was once at the Casterton Hotel a busload of people pulled up outside. He sprang to his feet, pulled off his hat, and soon after returned with a hat full of money and shouted all the white fellows in the bar. Wilson gave some fine performances on horseback or with a whip while inebriated. In August 1931 he was drunk in charge of a horse in Liebig Street, Warrnambool, at 11.15 pm on a Saturday night. 'He was singing out in a loud voice, and had attracted a crowd'.<sup>36</sup> Sometimes alcohol plunged him into the horrors and occasionally he became violent. He told one story against himself at the Goode's dinner table, about how while drunk, he burnt down the cook's tent on an irrigation channel construction job, in anger at the cook's disapproving wife. Norman Flack recalled a unique occasion when Wilson attacked him and his wife while he was drunk, because they had no cigarettes to give him. However, Flack added: 'he might work for three or four months and not have a drink'.

What lay behind these drinking bouts? It might have been an addiction, but the long periods of sobriety suggest otherwise. It was likely that Mulga Fred was following the bushman's tradition of work and burst, as Beckett has observed of other Aboriginal rural workers.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps his street performances, which disrupted respectability, formed an 'oppositional' culture, as detected by Beckett and later Gillian Cowlishaw.<sup>38</sup> Brian Hernon, a Horsham farmer who wrote to me, recounted that 'many years ago, Fred who liked an ale or two, went into a pub in our City of Horsham and ordered a pot of beer which then cost sixpence. He downed the beer, and the barman said 'that'll cost sixpence Fred', who smartly replied, 'you pinched our land so that's on the House', which reply was met with a loud laugh by all present. He was a likeable fellow by all accounts'.<sup>39</sup> The incident reveals a more overt political act by Wilson, while the yarn about it perhaps released unconscious tensions over land ownership among the white usurpers.

The Victorian Board for the Protection of the Aborigines held a jaundiced view of Fred Wilson. He was born a Western Australian, and thus the Board had no jurisdiction

<sup>34</sup>. *Victorian Police Gazette*, 1920-1948.

<sup>35</sup>. Undated clipping in the files of the Horsham and District Historical Society. See also his two court appearances in Melbourne in 1935, in which he was shown leniency and moved on, *Herald*, 7 June and 3 July 1935.

<sup>36</sup>. *Warrnambool Standard*, 4 January 1938.

<sup>37</sup>. Beckett 1964, p. 42. See also Ward 1958, pp. 71-111.

<sup>38</sup>. See Beckett 1964, pp. 32-47; Beckett 1958, p. 42; and Cowlishaw 1988, pp. 232-47.

<sup>39</sup>. Brian Hernon to Richard Broome, letter, 4 June 1996.

over him, which it readily acknowledged. Wilson's file under the name 'Mulga Fred', is thus a slim document. It only relates to his effort in 1936 to gain the old age pension, and two attempts to help him home to the West in 1935 and 1947— incidents worthy of scrutiny.

In May 1936, P.R. Biggin, the Clerk of Courts at Nhill wrote to the Protection Board as Mulga Fred had requested the old age pension. Biggin's version of Mulga Fred's life, claimed he left his people at Diamondina at the age of ten, bound for Perth. Mulga Fred arrived in Victoria in 1910, where he earned a living as a buckjumper and whip cracker at shows until recently. Biggin added:

I might say that this old fellow is well known and popular throughout Victoria. He is a fairly good type, as aborigines go. He occasionally allows himself to become the worse for drink, but he is never offensive. After the free, open life he has led, he does not want to go into a mission station. I do not think that he has very many more years before him, and in my opinion his case is one that merits favorable (sic) consideration.<sup>40</sup>

The Board replied that it had no power to assist Mulga Fred as he did not come under the *Aborigines Act 1928*, being born in Western Australia. In 1960, E. Trangmar explained to the Horsham and District Historical Society that 'I tried for three years to get him the pension'. After supplying all the details of his birthplace, age, parentage, life and character, it was granted 'on the condition that I would administer it for him. I still have his record book with his "markman's" cross, for Mulga could neither read nor write'. A minute by the Chief Secretary's Department in 1947 confirmed that Wilson was receiving the old age pension which was paid at the rate of 65/- per fortnight to Trangmar, 'who does it out to him'.<sup>41</sup> This payment was unusual at the time, but Wilson was in an unusual situation. He was a man of full descent who was not living in an Aboriginal institution, or in his home state, so the usual paternal carers were not relevant. He also had a strong advocate in Trangmar.

The Victorian authorities tried to repatriate Wilson. Ronald Glen, the Manager at Lake Tyers, initiated this in February 1935 after Wilson's drunken spree with William Bull. R.V. Cox, in charge of the Sale Gaol where the two were lodged, wrote to the Board giving yet another version of Wilson's age, origins, and history. The most significant fact was that Mulga Fred claimed he was from South Australia, and of the same tribe that killed Constable McColl in the Northern Territory. Cox added: 'Mulga Fred is a very low type of aborigine. He cannot read or write and is of low drunken habits'.<sup>42</sup> The Victorian Board wrote to its counterpart in South Australia, hoping to offload Fred, pleading that 'this Board has been very severely criticised on account of the conduct of this man during the centenary celebrations'. M.T. McLean, the Chief Protector in South Australia, said he had no knowledge of this man, had no place for him, and stated 'he would be just as difficult a character in South Australia as in Victoria'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> P.R. Biggin, to the Secretary, APB, 6 May 1936 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

<sup>41</sup> Chief Secretary's Department, 15 March 1947 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

<sup>42</sup> R.V. Cox to the APB, 14 March 1935 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

The issue of repatriation was raised again in 1946 and seems to have come from Wilson himself. The Melbourne *Sun* in October 1946 reported that he was considering returning to the West, as did the Melbourne *Herald* two months later.<sup>44</sup> The authorities in Victoria and Western Australia exchanged correspondence on the matter, the officials in the West indicating a willingness to assist. Rev G.L. Graham of the Hamilton Aborigines Uplift Society, sought Victorian help with passage money, which would be a 'humane act' as Mulga Fred is 'now an old man'.<sup>45</sup>

Why did Wilson raise this issue at this time? Constable J. Barry of Hamilton, who was asked for advice by the Victoria Aborigines Protection Board, replied that he did not think Mulga Fred would go to a benevolent home or to the West.

On the last occasion that Mulga Fred was detained in the Hamilton lock-up he stated that he intended to return to Western Australia but the sincerity of this expression cannot be verified. Personally, I am of the opinion that Mulga Fred originated the story of his return to Western Australia in order to gain public sympathy, which is readily forthcoming in this district. I do not think that he has any intention of returning to his native State.<sup>46</sup>

Wilson it seems, cleverly manipulated the public, stirring action in two Melbourne dailies and two state administrations.

Mulga Fred's influence in the Western District and in Victoria is really quite remarkable. However, his agency might have assumed far greater proportions than this escapade. When 'Sundowner', a columnist in the Melbourne *Sun*, announced Mulga Fred's imminent departure, he gave a resume of his skills with horse and whip and described him as 'one of the best known full-blooded aborigines in the country'. 'Sundowner' added: 'Most adult Australians have seen a representation of Mulga Fred. He is reputed to be the original of the proud black man in the shirt advertisement saying 'Mine Tinkit They Fit'.<sup>47</sup>

### Advertising icon and the politics of representation and appropriation

In 1906 Messrs James Pearson and James Law began to manufacture shirts in Melbourne. In 1911 and again in 1917, they transformed their business into a Melbourne-based company, named from their surnames, PEARSON & LAW Co, or Pelaco. The company adopted for its 'Made in Australia' campaign, an Aboriginal image, taken from a drawing by A.T. Mockridge of a robust and proud Aboriginal man striding along wearing nothing but a white shirt. The image, drawn in 1906 according to a partially obscured plaque on the wooden frame, is currently stored at the company's Maidstone offices for historical research purposes only (Plate 2).<sup>48</sup> The company adopted the slogan: 'Mine Tinkit They Fit', to accompany 'Pelaco Bill', as their icon came to be known. His image assumed dozens of variations over 40 years. No records exist about Mock-

43. McLean, to Secretary, Victorian APB, 28 March 1935 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

44. *Sun*, 3 October 1946 and *Herald*, 7 December 1946.

45. See correspondence in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

46. J. Barry, 1st Constable, Hamilton, to Secretary, APB, 15 March 1947 in personal file on 'Mulga Fred', Australian Archives (Victorian Branch), AA series B337, item 551.

47. 'Sundowner', *Sun*, 3 October 1946.



Plate 2 'Pelaco Bill' by A.T. Mockridge 1906 (Pelaco Pty Ltd.).

ridge to illuminate the origins of the painting, the campaign, or any association with Mulga Fred Wilson. The only interesting coincidence is that Pelaco was reconstituted in 1911, the year Mulga Fred Wilson reputedly won the Coronation Rodeo in Melbourne.

Pelaco's own scanty records date 'Pelaco Bill' from at least 1922.<sup>49</sup> This image quickly captured the public's imagination. At the company's annual meeting in 1926, a shareholder, J.L. Warren, reportedly congratulated the board on a successful year. He also expressed appreciation for the 'national character of the company's advertising, and stated that during his travels around Australia, almost the first thing that greeted him in every town was a Pelaco advertisement'.<sup>50</sup> In March 1927, Pelaco initiated an aggressive advertising regime, for 'Pelaco Billy', advertising in newspapers, window displays and hoardings up to 7 x 3 metres in size. Railway display windows were favoured because 94,000 people passed Spencer Street Station every day.<sup>51</sup> By the 1940s, Pelaco was the leading Australian shirt manufacturer with 1,000 workers at five factories in Melbourne, and at factories in Sydney and Brisbane.

Images of 'Pelaco Bill' were progressively transformed from Mockridge's simple sketch of a half-dressed, striding Aborigine. These images became moments of dominance as they made humorous but serious play on difference, blackness as opposed to whiteness, and on tropes of Aboriginal Otherness and primitivism. However, in the 1930s more sophisticated and ambivalent images emerged, including connections to the Anzac legend, with Pelaco Bill's face appearing on a war service medal pinned on a Pelaco shirt. In the pages of the 1930 annual report, the most racist version appeared, with 'Bill' striding along in a white shirt and tie with a straw boater and holding a cane, yet appearing ridiculous in bare feet and legs. An admiring Aboriginal woman in a stereotypical sack cloth dress looked on (see Plates 3 and 4). In the 1932 annual report, issued in March 1933, 'Bill' was pictured atop the new Pelaco building launching a boomerang, this time in white shirt, tie, and trousers. He was a very stylish 'Bill', except for possible primitivist echoes of the King Kong movie released in 1933. In 1935, 'Bill' was at his most sophisticated, being dressed in white shirt, tie, monocle, and holding a cigar in one hand and a top hat in the other, except, that is, for the bare legs. The slogan had become: 'Mine Tink It Plenty Quality'. Again the play is upon difference: black man-white shirt, primitive man-civilized performance. However, in 1936 the most positive and ambivalent image was created. 'Bill' was dressed in white shirt, tie and trousers standing before the flag, with the slogan: 'Mine Tink It Something To Be Proud Of'. The English was still incorrect, the play was still about white on black, but there was an assertiveness and pride about 'Bill': an Australian man, in an Australian shirt, before an Australian flag! 'Bill' was no longer a primitive, but assimilated to Australian life and at the centre of national identity.<sup>52</sup> And this was a year before the 1937 Native Conference opted for an assimilation policy. The company reported in 1938 that the new 'blackfel-

48. I inspected this image at the company's offices on 18 July 1997. My thanks go to the management of Pelaco, especially Margaret Martin and Mark Dumbrell, for allowing me to view the image and other written materials such as the staff news, *Pelacograms*. *Pelacogram* was the staff monthly magazine. Pelaco Archives, Maidstone.

49. *Pelacogram*, January 1922, Pelaco Archives, Maidstone.

50. *Argus*, 8 March 1926.

51. *Pelaco Annual Report*, 1926, p. 4 University of Melbourne Archives, Stock Exchange records, box 880.



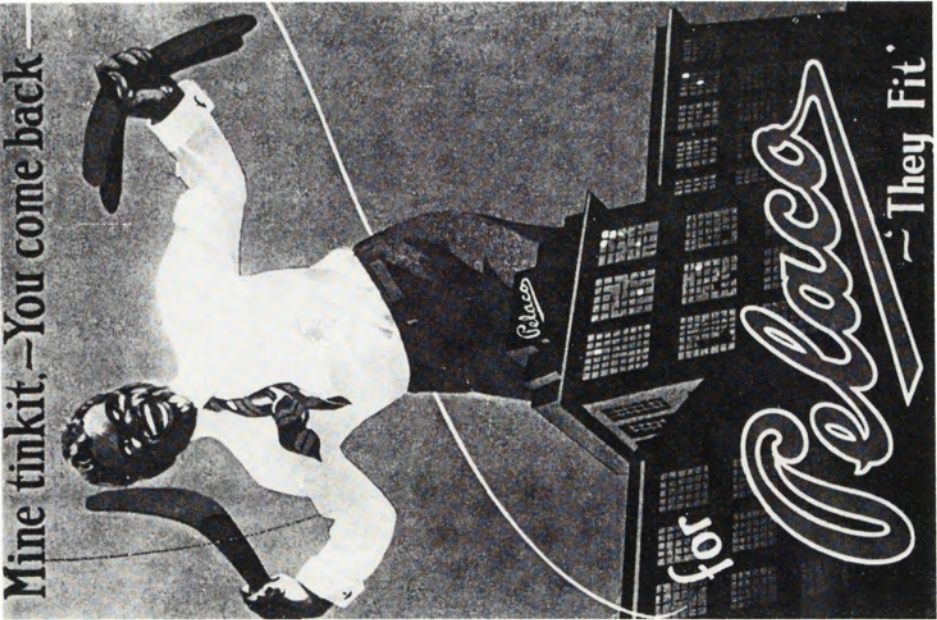


Plate 3 Advertising images of 'Pelaco Bill', 1930 and 1933 (Pelaco Pty Ltd., Annual Reports, 1930-36)





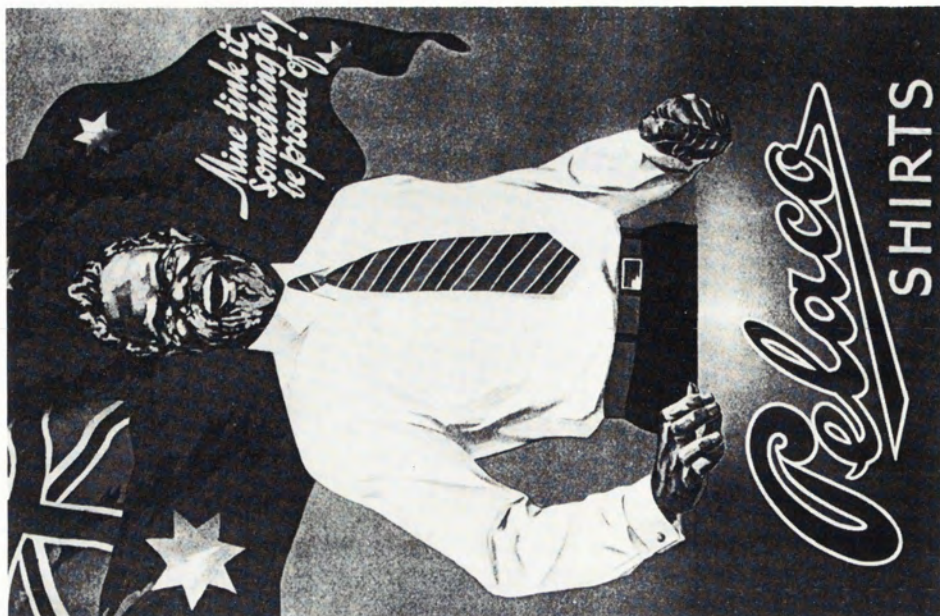


Plate 4 Advertising  
images of 'Pelaco Bill',  
1935 and 1936 (Pelaco  
Pty Ltd., Annual  
Reports, 1930-36)



low counter stands' (probably a celluloid head and hands holding a shirt) were very popular with retailers.<sup>53</sup> It is unclear exactly when 'Bill' in his many manifestations ceased as Pelaco's trademark. In 1940 the publicity department announced a new advertisement to 'replace the present blackfellow', but informants recall the advertisement being used until the end of the 1940s.<sup>54</sup> A fashion model, Bambi Smith, took over in 1950 with the slogan: 'It Is Indeed a Lovely Shirt Sir'.

The 'Pelaco Bill' advertising campaign was highly successful. 'Bill' was always depicted with a 'feel good' broad smile and there was much humour about the campaign. Some of it derived from the sense of difference discussed above. Other humour was situational. One image showed 'Bill' dangling from a cliff being saved by an Aboriginal friend who was holding his white shirt-tail. The slogan read: 'Mine Tink It Pelaco Never Let Me Down'. These images still have a strong recognition factor with those over 70 years old. Sid Swift recalled (not quite accurately) that it was unique at that time to see an Aboriginal person in advertising, while Reg Harvey remembered it was 'very Australian'. Doug Miller recalled that 'the very white shirt on a very black body certainly caught the eye'. Esme Donnan found the slogan most memorable and it became 'a phrase often used in our family in fun, to describe the appearance of a new piece of clothing ... I still quite often use the saying'.

All those questioned, recalled nothing 'derogatory' about its meanings, as David Donnan put it. Bernard Jacques who was born in 1910 and grew up in Perth, remembered the advertisement on railway hoardings, and recalled the report about 'the model's' death in the *West Australian*. Jacques added, 'I would strongly resist any suggestion today that it should now be claimed that any racial demeaning of Aborigines can be read into the "Mine Tinkit They Fit" slogan'.<sup>55</sup> Certainly it was less strident than some other interwar advertising, including Nulla Nulla, 'Australia's White Hope, The Best Household Soap', which 'knocks dirt on the head'. The advertisement featured an Aboriginal bust with brass plate, inscribed with the word 'dirt', being hit with a wooden spoon.<sup>56</sup> However, Gordon Treweek, who worked in the cutting room at Pelaco from 1940, said that the 'Pelaco Bill' campaign was discontinued because of sensitivity about race.<sup>57</sup> Susan Bailey, daughter of the then General Manager, K.S. Elliott, confirmed the company's growing concern over the advertisement.<sup>58</sup> Arthur Ramsey, who rose from delivery boy to Sales Manager between 1932 and 1974, recalled the advertisement was ended because Paton's advertising agency convinced the Pelaco

<sup>52</sup> *Pelaco Annual Reports, 1917-1958*, University of Melbourne Archives, Stock Exchange records, box 880. For other images of 'Pelaco Bill' see Cozzolino & Rutherford 1987, p. 129 and colour plate L.

<sup>53</sup> *Pelacograms*, 25 March 1938, Pelaco Archives, Maidstone. These counter stands can be seen in Cozzolino & Rutherford 1987, colour plate L.

<sup>54</sup> *Pelacograms*, 25 May 1940, Pelaco Archives, Maidstone.

<sup>55</sup> All the respondents were in their seventies. They were shown six Pelaco images in August 1996, and asked which, if any, did they recall, where did they see them, and what did they feel about these images at the time. The respondents were Sidney Swift, Camp Hill; David and Esme Donnan, Camp Hill; Douglas Miller, Camp Hill; Reginald and Florence Harvey, Camp Hill; Joyce Mackay, Camp Hill; and Bernard Jaques, Perth.

<sup>56</sup> Cozzolino Rutherford 1987, p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Gordon Treweek, Cheltenham, telephone interview, 5 June 1997. Notes in author's possession.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Bailey, Beaumaris, telephone interview, 25 June 1997. Notes in author's possession.

board, in the face of opposition from co-founder James Law, that the image was dated.<sup>59</sup> Did they mean by 'dated', not 'politically correct' in the emerging post-colonial world of the late 1940s, complete with a United Nations Declaration of Human Rights?

Was Mulga Fred Wilson the model for 'Pelaco Bill'? Many Victorians and especially those in the Western District, believed then and now, that he was. His obituary in the *Horsham Times* stated that 'his sturdy bewhiskered figure inspired one of Australia's most famous advertisements—the Pelaco advt.—"Mine Tinkit They Fit", and this was always a source of pride to him'.<sup>60</sup> 'Sundowner' told *Sun* readers he was reputed to be the model and Major Wilson, editor of the *Outdoor Showman* claimed that he was.<sup>61</sup> Judy Botterill, a researcher for the Hamilton History Centre informed me that 'I think there was no doubt that he was the man in the Pelaco ads. There are people in Hamilton who remember him meeting the goods train to collect a parcel of clothes from Pelaco—I believe that they kept him in clothes for the rest of his life'.<sup>62</sup> Nancy Edgar remembered in the late 1970s that Mulga Fred claimed he was the model for 'Pelaco Bill'.<sup>63</sup> Dorothy Brown of Dimboola recalled Mulga's 'lovely white shirts. But the rest of his dress included a patchwork coat, and a rope, which hitched 'em up above the worn sandals'.<sup>64</sup>

My chief informants, Don McCabe and Norm Flack, were unsure of the connection, Flack commenting, '[I knew] only what we read about it. But Fred never told us, never told me about that. But it was pretty common knowledge. It says in that book [a local history] I gave you Donny, that Pelaco did do it'. In 1976, Ted Brown who rodeoed with Fred, claimed Wilson spoke correctly, not like the slogan's broken English, a view McCabe and Flack also held. However, Brown claimed that 'the Pelaco Company photographed him [Wilson] for their shirt advertisements while he was working for Jack Briggs's Carnival as a whip cracker. He was paid 100 pounds and four shirts a year'.<sup>65</sup> This sounds plausible, but it attributes the campaign to a photograph and not Mockridge's drawing of 1906 (although the drawing could have easily been done from a photograph of Mulga Fred, not life). There is no evidence that Fred Wilson was cracking whips in rodeos before the First World War, but it was possible.

Pelaco has both affirmed and doubted the connection over the years. In 1978 the company expressed reservations about whether Wilson was the model for Mockridge's drawing.<sup>66</sup> Among some unsourced material sent to me by Pelaco in 1994, was an article apparently from a company publication. It claimed there never was a model for the campaign as the image was the creation of a Melbourne showman, 'Storky' Adams, now living in Hollywood. 'The idea came to him many years ago when he was travelling on a cable car from St. Kilda to the City, [he] noticed some outdoor advertising for

59. Arthur Ramsey, Surfers Paradise, telephone interview, 8 June 1997. Notes in author's possession.

60. *Horsham Times*, 5 November 1948.

61. *Sun*, 3 October 1948; *Outdoor Showman*, November 1948.

62. Judy Botterill to Richard Broome, letter, 4 October 1994.

63. *Coleraine Albion*, 6 February 1978.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Wimmera Mail Times*, 8 December 1976.

66. See clipping possibly from the *Coleraine Albion*(?) 6 February 1978 in the Horsham and District Historical Society's files.

Pelaco. One of the founders of Pelaco was a friend of Storky Adams and as a gesture of goodwill he presented the idea of the friendly aboriginal wearing nothing but a white shirt to the owners of Pelaco, and they in turn added the caption "Mine Tinkit They Fit".<sup>67</sup>

However, on Mulga Fred Wilson's death in November 1948, Mr K.S.Elliott, the company's General Manager since 1924, told the *Sun* that his firm had always regarded Mulga Fred as the model for the advertisement. The image added a touch of humour to the 'Made in Australia' label, which in the early days was often avoided by the buying public. Elliott remarked 'we were always happy to see his happy countenance. Perhaps in his way he did much for secondary industry in boosting the local product. We hadn't seen him for 18 months, but kept in touch through a local retailer'.<sup>68</sup> In 1976 Pelaco donated \$400 towards the restoration of Fred Wilson's grave in Horsham and in 1987 sponsored the inaugural Mulga Fred whip cracking competition at Hamilton during Wool Week.<sup>69</sup> Myth and reality became hopelessly entwined once Pelaco's own files contained Western District press cuttings alleging the Pelaco-Mulga Fred connection. In 1986, on its seventy-fifth anniversary, Pelaco's own version of its past stated that the company, around 1920, 'began advertising their shirts using an Aboriginal, Mulga Fred, wearing one of their gleaming white shirts, with the slogan 'Mine Tinkit They Fit'.<sup>70</sup>

The retailer to whom Elliott referred above, was probably E. Trangmar. In 1960 Trangmar stated:

On one occasion Mulga came to me and told me that he was to get a shirt every year from the Pelaco Company. He asked me to write and ask them for a shirt for him. The first letter, addressed to the company, brought forth nothing except a denial of all knowledge of any such arrangement. I then wrote to the manager, Mr. R.(sic) S. Elliott, personally. He knew of Mulga and the deal; he sent up two shirts, a cleaned smart suit and a pair of socks. He looked fine in his new clothes; he went off to Melbourne, to Fitzroy, where his fellow countrymen stripped him of his fine feathers; when he returned he was wearing their cast-offs.

Was the connection between Mulga Fred and 'Pelaco Bill' real, or was it convenient for both Pelaco and Mulga Fred to claim it was? Susan Bailey, Elliott's daughter, thought her father did not know who was the model for the advertisement, contradicting Elliott's view to the press in 1948 stated above. Bailey added that occasionally an Aboriginal man would come to the Goodwin Street factory of Pelaco in Richmond, claiming to be the model. James Law, the Company's founder, used to give him money.<sup>71</sup> Edna Scambler aged 89, who was Elliott's personal assistant for much of her working life at Pelaco from 1924 to 1967, vaguely recalled James Law saying that a man was used as the model for 'Pelaco Bill'. And she remembered several visits in the 1930s by a man, or different bearded Aboriginal men, who claimed to be the model for 'Pelaco

67. Sue Ryan, assistant to the Managing Director of Pelaco, to Richard Broome, letter, 26 August 1994, including a print of Mockridge's drawing and some photocopies.

68. *Sun*, 4 November 1948.

69. On the grave restoration see *Wimmera Mail Times*, 11 August and 15 November 1976. On the competition see *Wimmera Mail Times*, 7 August 1987.

70. 'Pelaco Shirts. Seventy-Five Years of Excellence, 1911-1986. The Pelaco Story', Pelaco Archives, Maidstone.

71. Susan Bailey, Beaumaris, telephone interview, 25 June 1997. Notes in author's possession.

Bill'. Edna Scambler said Law offered them tea but she knew nothing about money or clothing being given. She also recalled Law saying 'that's the third one who has claimed to be Pelaco Bill'.<sup>72</sup> Arthur Ramsey who was in Pelaco's administration from 1932 to 1974, believed that Mulga Fred was not the model, and that the advertising images were taken from Mockridge's original drawing. This of course begs the question, what inspired Mockridge: Wilson, his photograph, or something else? Ramsey claimed 'Storky' Adams, gave James Law the slogan (not the image as stated in the version above) to explain Pelaco's revolutionary move to standard sizes. He confirmed that Law, a tight-fisted Scot, gave Mulga Fred clothing and money when he visited the Richmond factory '£5, but in two lots, half now, half in a week's time so he wouldn't drink it too quickly'. Ramsey did not know if shirts were posted to Mulga Fred. He added that Pelaco paid for Mulga Fred's funeral to save him from a pauper's grave.<sup>73</sup>

We can perhaps never know whether Fred Wilson was the subject of this advertising campaign. In the end the 'truth' is less important than the reality that many thought that it was true, and still do. Whatever the 'truth', both Wilson and the company gained if Mulga Fred and 'Pelaco Bill' were identified as one, so both appropriated the other. Pelaco was content to associate its image with a great rodeo rider and Victorian public character, and Mulga Fred was happy to appropriate 'Pelaco Bill' as himself, gain more fame, the odd shirt and a £5 note. Mulga Fred Wilson was empowered and Pelaco went to the top in shirt sales.

### Mulga Fred and Western District memory

Since his death under a train in 1948, people, press and this historian have constructed Mulga Fred Wilson. Memories flow about him as people yarn about his riding and whip cracking. Fred Brown, a former fellow rough rider, described him as 'one of Australia's greatest rough riders and whip crackers', adding 'he was a fair dinkum Australian'.<sup>74</sup> The Western District press has published dozens of articles about Mulga Fred, and most historical societies in this region have files on him. A racehorse was named 'Mulga Fred' in the 1930s, several poems about him were published before his death, and a whip cracking competition was named in his honour.<sup>75</sup> Few other Aboriginal people attained such local praise prior to recent times. But then, few performed like Mulga Fred with horse, whip and on a billboard.

Mulga Fred Wilson was part of the landscape in many Western District towns, symbol of white dominance and white paternal care, and also to us, of Aboriginal agency. Recently John Clode, a poet from the region, published a poem about Mulga Fred extolling his horse and whip skills and his Pelaco connection.<sup>76</sup> Edna Smith of Kaniva, who when a child knew Fred, promotes him ardently, sending material on him to regional historical societies. She recently posted me a new poem, which began: 'Mulga Fred was a hero at the local show'.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Edna Scambler, Camberwell, telephone interview, 14 July 1997. Notes in author's possession.

<sup>73</sup> Arthur Ramsey, Surfers Paradise, telephone interview, 8 June 1997. Notes in author's possession.

<sup>74</sup> *Wimmera Mail Times*, 8 December 1976.

<sup>75</sup> *Warrnambool Standard*, 3 January 1938; *Wimmera Mail Times*, 8 December 1976.

<sup>76</sup> *Wimmera Mail Times*, January 1997.

<sup>77</sup> Edna Smith, Kaniva, to Richard Broome, letter, 22 January 1997.

Mulga Fred Wilson was his own man, living independently, moving when he chose, negotiating his way through country shows, pastoral properties, Aboriginal camps and missions, court-rooms and police lock-ups. He gained the pension when few in his circumstances did so. He engaged in multiple performances as rodeo champion, street busker, genial tippler and horse tamer, and appropriated the position and benefits of an advertising icon. His rodeo career, work skills and the Pelaco connection, empowered him. These roles, together with his adopted Victorian kin, forged his identity as 'Mulga Fred', Aboriginal man. Without his own land and ancestral kin he remained Aboriginal. In 1976 the Horsham and Coleraine Apex clubs remodeled Mulga Fred Wilson's grave after an attack by vandals.<sup>78</sup> The simple inscription,

Mulga Fred  
2-11-1948  
R. I. P.

was encircled—as was the original headstone—with an engraving of stockwhip and boomerang. These were the symbols of his two cultures: the European and the Aboriginal worlds, which he successfully negotiated.

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<sup>78</sup>. *Wimmera Mail Times*, 11 August 1976 and 15 November 1976. An article in the *Australasian Post*, 25 February 1960, confirmed that the original grave had a stockwhip and boomerang engraved on it.

# Settlers and the state: The creation of an Aboriginal workforce in Australia

Robert Castle and Jim Hagan

White settlement of Australia began a process whereby the Aboriginal people who had settled the Australian continent for 40,000 years were dispossessed of their land, economy, society and often their lives. Henry Reynold's '*Law of the Land*'<sup>1</sup> demonstrates the impact of the application of the doctrine of 'Terra Nullius' on Aboriginal society and the subsequent development of black-white relations in Australia. Land was the foundation of Aboriginal life—of an economic, religious and cultural system centred on hunting and gathering which provided a basis for a sustainable and stable society. The alienation of Aboriginal land and the resulting conflict as Aborigines resisted the spread of white settlement destroyed the economic base of that society and left the survivors in a marginal and dependent relationship with the European society that replaced it.

Dispossessed of their land and facing starvation from the destruction of wildlife as sheep and cattle replaced native animals, how were the Aborigines to survive? There were three main alternatives—by depending on handouts from their conquerors, by activities regarded as criminal such as stealing, begging and prostitution and by means of their labour. These alternatives faced many Europeans affected by the industrial revolution but Aborigines had few effective choices about their future as whites regarded the survivors of contact conflict as potential threats long after settlement had become established in particular areas.

This paper examines how Aborigines were induced into the white workforce in colonial Australia. The role of settlers and the subsequent interventions by the state are emphasised. Our focus is on the ways Aboriginal labour was used and abused, although this can only be understood in relation to the other two means of survival. In doing so we ask questions typically asked by labour economists and labour historians about any labour force: what was the pattern of production, what type of labour did it demand, how was that labour organised to produce, how was it paid and disciplined and what were the work processes and technology within which that labour force operated? In this case questions about the supply of Aboriginal labour and its motivation are also crucial because the majority of Aborigines continued to reject white society long after the process of invasion, resistance, and subjugation was completed.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Reynolds, *The Law of the Land*, Penguin, Australia, 1987.



We argue that the economic position of Aborigines in settled areas was shaped in particular by the process of land settlement, the effects of the convict system and the legacy of the substantial and bloody Aboriginal resistance to the white alienation of their land. We reject the notion that Aborigines were simply overwhelmed by the white invasion or that they were unable to adapt to European 'civilisation'. There were many instances of successful adaptation and where these occurred measures were often taken by settlers and the state to curb it. More usually though, Aboriginal people neither sought nor were given the opportunity to adapt to or participate in the white economy. Part of their resistance, like that of many indigenous peoples, was to reject the society of the invaders and attempt to maintain a limited or bastardised existence preserving some elements of their past. However, as the nineteenth century developed, this became harder and some involvement with white society became essential for their survival. It is this process that created an Aboriginal workforce on terms totally different from those applied to other workers in nineteenth century Australia, that we examine here.

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The development of New South Wales as a convict settlement was the prime influence on labour relations for the first half century of the colony's history. The free market for labour was subsidiary to a heavily regulated system of unfree labour. Convict labour presented the authorities with problems about how to make it work productively. At first, the Government tried physical coercion through floggings and withholding of rations, but despite acute food shortages, there were frequent complaints about convicts being lazy and sabotaging the work effort by discarding or hiding tools and equipments.<sup>2</sup> Some convicts were assigned to private farmers, mainly members of the NSW Corps, whilst others were retained to work on government projects in Sydney. For the first 30 years of settlement the government did not provide shelter for convicts, so a system arose whereby convicts worked part of the day for the government and had time free to work on their own account after 3.30pm, so that they could obtain shelter and extra rations.<sup>3</sup> This system evolved into one in which convicts could have the rest of the week free once they had accomplished their specific tasks.<sup>4</sup> This helped overcome shortages of labour and although later changed, provided greater incentive to work at the time. Payment for the extra work was in kind, food, shelter or, more likely, rum and tobacco. Until the 1820s, cash was scarce and rarely used for wages. An additional feature of the early convict labour system was that the government continued for many years to provide rations for those convicts employed by private farmers.<sup>5</sup> This subsidy made convict labour attractive to farmers despite its inefficiencies. The task work system also operated in rural areas with convicts working on timber cutting, building and harvesting in their free time.

This unusual combination of unfree and free labour met the colony's labour needs in the first thirty years of settlement. Rewards such as the granting of tickets of leave to

2. R. Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Collins, UK, 1987, p. 97.

3. Historical Records of Australia 1, i, 35.

4. J.B. Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies*, George Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1983, p. 36.

5. R. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 109.



good workers,<sup>6</sup> task work and the opportunity to earn outside of the convict system offset punishment for crime or breaches of labour discipline. For those who became free, small holdings of land were available as well as casual work. The absence of overseas markets limited growth and enabled New South Wales to manage its semi-closed economy with the available labour force.<sup>7</sup>

Before the expansion of the pastoral industry, the impact of white settlement on the Aboriginal population was limited to the Sydney coastal plain and small areas around Hobart and Launceston. Introduced diseases reduced the number of Aborigines,<sup>8</sup> and with the small European population mainly engaged in agriculture and town pursuits, Aborigines could still manage by hunting and gathering. A few of them gravitated to the towns. Some were domestic servants<sup>9</sup> but most lived by prostitution, begging and doing odd jobs like cutting firewood.<sup>10</sup> Though there was little economic contact, there were a few attempts by the authorities to encourage some Aborigines to become small farmers<sup>11</sup> and hence, according to some ethnological theories prevalent at the time, to move to a higher stage of development from that of the hunter gatherer. Such notions were common in the early 1820s. Anti-Slavery campaigner William Wilberforce wrote to Lord Buxton in 1821, encouraging such measures as would see freed slaves in the West Indies advance 'to the rank of a free peasantry'.<sup>12</sup> However, the Aborigines were not interested and this rejection of 'civilisation' was seen as an indication of their backwardness.<sup>13</sup>

It was the spread of sheep and later cattle which was to have the major impact on the Aboriginal population. The pastoral industry spread rapidly across the dividing range after 1820, and changed the economic foundation of the colony. By 1829, there were half a million sheep, and the value of wool exports rose from £34,900 in 1830 to £566,100 in 1840.<sup>14</sup> The white population increased from about 40,000 to nearly 130,000 in the same time.<sup>15</sup> This led to continuing conflict with the Aborigines as they realised that the white visitors whom they often welcomed at first had not only come to stay but had no respect for traditional customs and practices. The spread of pastoralism in the 1830s from Port Phillip and along the inland rivers of New South Wales led to guerilla war in many areas. The 'pacification' of the Aboriginal tribes, which involved dispossessing them of their land and disrupting hunting and migration patterns, took many years.<sup>16</sup>

6. Historical Records of Australia 1, 2, 625.

7. W.A. Sinclair, *The Process of Economic Development in Australia*, Longman Cheshire, Australia, 1983, pp. 22-3.

8. N.G. Butlin, *Our Original Aggression*, Geo. Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1983, p. 19.

9. J.B. Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

10. J. Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians*, London, 1870, republished as Australian Facsimile Editions No. 87, 1969.

11. B. Bridges, *Aborigines in European Employment in Eastern Australia to circa 1860*, Mimeograph, University of Wollongong, September 1988.

12. Anti-Slavery Society, Correspondence C106/30, Wilberforce to Buxton, 24 May 1821.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Davidson & A. Wells, 'Carving up the Country' in Burgmann & Lee (eds) *A Most Valuable Acquisition*, Penguin, Australia, 1988, p. 43.

15. *Ibid.*

16. M. Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*, Sydney University Press, 1979.

Since the shepherding system was very labour intensive, shortages of labour limited the spread of sheep. Although the sheep-shepherd ratio rose during the 1830s,<sup>17</sup> labour shortages were a major restraint on the expansion of the pastoral industry.<sup>18</sup> Even with this need for labour, only a few squatters considered using Aborigines as shepherds. The Aboriginal resistance was too fresh in people's minds in most areas, and most whites in the interior were always heavily armed. Nonetheless, individual shepherds sometimes came to terms with local Aborigines, exchanging rum and food for women.<sup>19</sup> These exchanges increased as the spread of sheep and the clearing of the land reduced the wildlife, and it became difficult for the Aborigines to survive. Spearing of sheep was common at first, but as settlers massacred Aborigines in reprisal,<sup>20</sup> the practice diminished and small bands of Aborigines had little option but to settle semi-permanently around the homesteads. Sometimes they received food from the squatters and occasional handouts of blankets from the government. In return, they gave some assistance in tasks like tracking animals, but at best only an uneasy truce developed. The abuse of Aboriginal women often resulted in conflict, but the power of the settlers' guns ensured that power passed to them.

This arrangement slowly developed into a bastardised parody of the convict labour system. A tied and reluctant group were partly incorporated into the labour force not through the payment of wages, but by a mixture of coercion and bribes in the form of rations, rum and tobacco. Despite the inequality of power implicit in this relationship, the Aborigines often took free time by simply moving off. In part, this allowed them to follow old patterns of tribal obligation and movement, but increasingly wandering off became a matter of necessity because of lack of food.<sup>21</sup> Later 'walkabout' became a weapon against the settlers as Aborigines removed their labour at times most inconvenient to the employer. The state took only a minimal responsibility for the welfare of the Aborigines, although in some cases they provided rations and blankets for settlers to give to the Aborigines. This system became increasingly the pattern later in the century as the frontier expanded outside of Southeastern Australia.

White settlers rarely considered paying Aboriginal labour in money. In part, this reflected the shortage of money outside the settled areas, which meant that free white labour was often paid by an order on a store or a cheque which was cashed at a shanty.<sup>22</sup> However, the idea that Aborigines could not understand the meaning of money was also common, as was fear that the money would be spent on alcohol.<sup>23</sup> The latter is hardly surprising, given the practice of white bush workers, and the importance of rum in exchanges between blacks and whites from the earliest days of the colony. Even in instances where promises were made of payment, such as those commonly made to the Native Police, money rarely changed hands.<sup>24</sup>

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17. W.A. Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

18. J.B. Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

19. B. Hardy, *Lament for the Barkindji, the vanished tribes of the Darling River Region*. Alpha Books, 1981, p. 56.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

22. R. Ward, *Australian Legend*.

23. M. Christie, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

In all colonies by the 1840s, Aborigines worked in planting and harvesting as well as cutting timber and bark.<sup>25</sup> White settlers often depended on Aboriginal help for tracking and in moving livestock across rivers, and payment (in kind) ensured a measure of co-operation.<sup>26</sup> Around the towns, the opportunities for independent existence became fewer and domestic service, odd jobs or welfare were the main lawful alternatives. The condition of town Aborigines particularly caused concern both in London and the colonies and led to measures such as the foundation of the Aboriginal Protection Society in 1838 and the extension of the protectorate system in Victoria, following the publication of the Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Aborigines in British Settlements.<sup>27</sup>

This concern did not easily translate into measures to improve their lot. Welfare services in the colonies were almost non-existent for whites as well as blacks. Strong demand for labour and the unusual age structure of the transported population meant that there was little unemployment and few aged persons. There was continual pressure on the colonial administration to cut expenditure so that welfare was among the lowest priorities, with spending on Aboriginal welfare the lowest of all. Some church groups were willing to assume responsibility, but missionaries tended to place spiritual salvation above earthly matters, and to gather Aborigines together and proselytise without encouraging or allowing any independence to their charges. As adult Aborigines continued to reject conversion, missionaries began to concentrate on children, and intensified measures to separate and 'civilise' them.<sup>28</sup> Some settlers such as the Rev. Joseph Docker in northeastern Victoria, tried to use an all Aboriginal labour force to tend their flocks, but despite support from Governor Gipps, harassment from other settlers and native police caused the experiment to fail.<sup>29</sup>

Depression in the pastoral industry in the 1840s, and the declining productivity of pastoral land reduced the demand for labour. The most productive land in New South Wales had been settled by occupying the valleys and waterways. By mid-century, only drier and less productive land remained and the process of expansion had been checked. Shepherds still controlled most flocks, and wool production still required a large permanent labour force. This pattern maximised the impact of pastoralism on the Aboriginal population and intensified the conflict between Aborigines and whites, as access to water was crucial to Aboriginal life.

Under prompting from the British Government, colonial administrations sought to curb the most murderous excesses of the settlers and recognise the equality of Aborigines before the law. Attempts were made to protect Aborigines from the ravages of the whites by gathering them together on missions and reserves, but no attempts were made to allow them to achieve economic independence of the state or missions in settled areas. On the frontier, the law of the settlers dominated with native police conti-

25. A. Pope, 'Aboriginal Adaptation to early Colonial Labour Markets: The South Australian Experience', *Labour History*, No. 55, May 1988, p. 7, A. Haebisch.

26. B. Hardy, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

27. Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), House of Commons, 26 June 1837.

28. M. Christie, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

29. Joseph Docker to Sir Geo. Gipps 31/12/1840 and Sir Geo. Gipps to Lord John Russell, 9/4/1841. Aborigines (Australian Colonies), House of Commons, 9 August 1844.

gents used extensively to 'pacify' Aborigines in these areas of recent contact. There was limited demand for the induction of Aborigines into a workforce. Where there was demand for Aboriginal labour there was little interest in regulating it apart from British government directions to prevent some of the grosser abuses which came to public attention. Protection and separation were to be the key concepts of government policy towards Aborigines, but few resources were to be applied to enable Aborigines to survive and prosper.

The official discovery of gold in 1851 had a major impact on economic relations in Southeastern Australia, and a devastating impact on the Aboriginal population. Not only did the white population increase from 400,000 in 1856 to 1,150,000 in 1861, but after the initial burst of gold fever died down, this increase led directly to pressures for more land to become available for pastoral and agricultural activities. This accelerated the process of dispossession in the settled areas.

The initial impact of gold, however, was to enhance the economic position of many Aborigines and to lead to their greater involvement in the white economy. Labour shortages became critical as many whites decided to abandon their hard and lonely life as shepherds to try their luck on the goldfields. The only alternative source of labour was the Aborigines, who now were often totally dependent on the settlers for charity.<sup>30</sup> They became crucial to the survival of the pastoral industry and in many areas of Victoria and New South Wales, Aboriginal labour replaced white labour. This change was most complete in the sparsely settled areas of Western New South Wales north of the Murray, where local Aborigines were able to combine sheep tending with elements of their traditional life-style. 'The people proved themselves not only quick learners, but also capable of working out an effective compromise between their dual obligation to the tribe and to the station.'<sup>31</sup> Some already had some experience as shepherds, but now they undertook a whole range of responsibilities. In some cases only two or three whites were left to run up to 18,000 sheep with the help of an Aboriginal workforce which now sheared the sheep, transported the wool in drays and sometimes ferried it across the Murray. Many learned to ride and were able to combine their traditional bushcraft with these newly learned skills.<sup>32</sup>

This work was largely carried out on the Aborigines' own terms with minimal supervision. Rewards in the form of food, clothing and even money were given out more regularly, but even so this Aboriginal workforce was now much cheaper than its white counterpart. White farmers often commented on the suitability of the Aborigines for station work, one maintaining he 'would never employ another European while the Aborigines did so well'.<sup>33</sup> However, other settlers found their refusal to become model European workers irksome, and lamented the failure of employment to bring the settled habits of 'civilisation'.<sup>34</sup> The unwillingness of the Aborigines to accept white society except on their own terms limited the use of a predominantly black workforce to

30. B. Hardy, *op.cit.*, pp. 84-90.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

32. Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council upon 'The Aborigines' Legislative Council of South Australia, 16 October 1860, p. 65.

33. *Ibid.* p. 87.

34. Christie, p. 148.

areas where there were few whites. As the gold rushes subsided, more white labour than ever before was available, and the use of Aboriginal labour declined.

However, some Aborigines used the skills acquired during the 1850s to remain in the workforce on terms not dissimilar to those of white workers. In the Western division, many Aborigines continued as shearers, while Aboriginal drovers were increasingly used to bring herds of sheep and cattle to Melbourne. Cash payment became more common and the tendency of these workers to converge on towns (especially Wentworth) to cash their cheques attracted considerable concern in the white community.<sup>35</sup> Their tendency to celebrate the end of shearing with a drunken spree was no different from the habits of white shearers, although it did cause white citizens to demand restrictions on black drinking. However, from the 1860s these Aborigines came increasingly into direct competition for jobs with whites, and with the employers' tendency to exploit them by short changing and low pay, their employment aroused considerable resentment.<sup>36</sup>

The kind of work that proved most acceptable to Aborigines was contract work or piecework. It did not require the direct supervision and discipline of day labour, and enabled the workers to operate at their own pace with often only minimal attention from whites. It often combined traditional with newly acquired skills. The seasonal and irregular pattern of the work enabled Aborigines to maintain many traditional rites and obligations. In this way, interaction with the white economy provided some Aborigines with a measure of prosperity and independence. Why was this pattern not followed and why did governments not encourage this type of economic independence which minimised the need for State expenditure?

The spread of pastoralism along the watercourses reduced Aboriginal access to rivers and waterholes and gradually destroyed any possibility that their hunting and gathering economy could continue. The Land Acts of the 1860s legalised this process, confirming the hold of the squatters west of the Divide, and spreading small and more intensive farming through coastal areas where maize and sugar could be grown. By the 1870s there was an increasing number of small farmers running sheep and growing crops. These small settlers themselves operated as casual and seasonal workers to supplement the modest earnings from their blocks. Not only did they have little demand for labour, but they were themselves competitors with Aborigines for contract and casual work. In these areas Aborigines were forced into camps and reserves around the towns as no semblance of their economy could co-exist with this more intensive type of settlement.<sup>37</sup>

Only in the drier less closely settled areas could Aborigines live something approximating their former life but even there it became increasingly difficult. The spread of fencing, which replaced the shepherding system, accelerated this process. It reduced the labour constraint on the expansion of sheep and cattle and pastoralism spread to remoter areas where the impact of herds on the environment was catastrophic. Waterholes which had previously only been used by Aborigines during winter

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<sup>35</sup> Hardy, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 153.

were used all year for watering stock and soon became polluted and dried up. The sharp hooves of sheep destroyed the fragile semi-arid grasslands and made the countryside prone to widespread erosion which compounded the effects on native game. Even in the drier areas Aboriginal groups became increasingly dependent on the goodwill of individual station owners and managers and had to survive on the fringes of the white economy.<sup>38</sup>

After the 1860s, opportunities for Aboriginal independence from within the white economy diminished rapidly. Increasing numbers of whites and more intensive development as a result of technological changes were prime factors, but the rapid fall in the Aboriginal population compounded the process. The impact of European diseases was intensified by the effects of poor nutrition from inadequate rations which they could less easily supplement through bush tucker. Widespread dependence on alcohol and rampant venereal disease also accelerated Aboriginal mortality.<sup>39</sup>

This led to the belief that the Aborigines were a 'dying race', and accelerated measures to isolate them from the debilitating effects of white society, and to the institution of policies of 'protection'. There had been early attempts at isolation of Aborigines around Melbourne and in Tasmania. Aboriginal settlements offered both secular and religious instruction, and to offset costs the Aborigines were required to work in and around the settlement in return for the right to live there. Overseers discouraged Aborigines from seeking paid work, as money provided a means to purchase the grog which they believed was the major corruptor of the race. At first it was difficult to get people to stay voluntarily and many walk outs occurred particularly after conflicts about traditional rites and attempts to separate children from parents. However, the alternatives became fewer, and where white settlement was denser, the protective model became the norm, and was eventually enshrined in legislation.<sup>40</sup>

Protective legislation was ultimately introduced in all states. These Acts reduced the legal status of at least full-blood Aborigines from free citizens to dependents of the state whose rights were severely constrained. They placed restrictions on residence, employment, assets and movement. The legislation was as close as white Australia ever came to the English 'Poor Laws', except that instead of the notion of 'less eligibility' (i.e. that conditions inside the Poor House were to be worse than those outside), there was no alternative outside. Unlike the Poor Laws which were designed to encourage independence, the Aboriginal protection acts were designed to induce dependence, for independence exposed Aborigines to the evils of white society.

But the need for protection was tempered by the need for economy in state expenditures. To minimise these, settlement Aborigines were made to work for their rations and shelter either on or outside the station, but not as free labourers.

Complaints about the capacities and motivation of these Aboriginal labourers were common and their inferiority was blamed on their Aboriginality.<sup>41</sup> Similar com-

38. Ibid, pp. 167-180.

39. Butlin, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

40. *Aborigines Protection Act* (Victoria) 1886; *Aborigines Protection Act* (WA) 1886; *The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* (QLD) 1897; *Aborigines Protection Act* (NSW) 1909; *Aborigines Act* (SA) 1911.

41. Christie, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

plaints about the unfree labour of convicts were forgotten. Still, this reluctant labour came to play a part in the white economy which persisted until well into the second half of the twentieth century. Employers had access to a seasonal labour force which it did not have to maintain at even subsistence levels. The state provided the subsistence and the employers were able to reap the benefits when planting, harvesting, mustering or shearing.<sup>42</sup>

In general, the more remote the area, the greater were the opportunities for Aborigines to go bush and maintain a fragile independence. However in North Queensland and the North West of Western Australia where the cattle industry needed cheap Aboriginal labour, legislation was passed to formalise the *ad hoc* arrangements of the past and ensure that Aborigines had to work for the cattle owners under conditions akin to serfdom. Continuing pressure from the Anti-Slavery Society was unable to prevent the development of a forced and tied labour system adapted from convictism, which grossly exploited Aboriginal labour.<sup>43</sup>

The notions of protection and segregation dominated official policy around the turn of the century but lack of resources meant that many Aboriginal people were able to remain outside of the reach of the oppressive, paternalistic system which developed. For some, this meant that absolute exploitation continued, but for those who could compete successfully with whites in a rural labour force, it meant that they faced increasing restrictions on their activities. Some of the successful Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal shearers and contractors were absorbed into the dominant society, but many after a period in the white economy, ultimately returned to their own people broken by alcohol, illness and disappointment at the empty rewards that nineteenth century Australia offered Aborigines. That process was accelerated by the drought and depression of the nineties, which destroyed demand for labour and pauperised a significant section of small white farmers and contractors. In south-eastern Australia, few Aboriginal people were left outside the grip of protective legislation by 1910. The economic position of Aboriginal people in twentieth century Australia was set and its legacy continues to the present day.

Why did economic relations between Aboriginal and white Australian develop in this way in the nineteenth century? Broadly speaking there have been three major explanations of this process—the exploitation hypothesis through the application to Australia of Wolpe's theory of internal colonialism; the helplessness hypothesis, that a primitive people too backward to comprehend the benefits of white civilisation were overwhelmed; and the adaptive behaviour explanation, that what occurred was a result of deliberate choices by Aboriginal people to distance themselves from white society.

Although a case can be made out for each, we do not believe that any provides an adequate explanation of the development of economic relations between blacks and whites when one focusses on the most important single aspect of that relationship, namely labour. Deprived of their land without compensation, the Aboriginal people had only their labour to provide the means of subsistence. The pattern of land settle-

<sup>42</sup> Castle and Hagan, 'Aboriginal Unemployment in Rural NSW 1883–1983' in Castle and Mangan (eds), *Unemployment in the Eighties*, Longman Cheshire, Australia, 1984.

<sup>43</sup> Castle and Hagan, 'Regulation of Aboriginal Labour in Queensland—Protectors, Agreements and Trust Accounts 1897–1965', *Labour History*, May 1996, (forthcoming).

ment, crops produced, and changing technology played a major role in the development of black-white economic relations as did the roles, both active and passive, played by government. These factors constrained the choices available to both Aborigines and Europeans, and any explanation needs to take them into account.

The theory of internal colonialism argues that European governments exploited a section of their own people in a way that was similar to their appropriation of a surplus from colonies through imperialism.<sup>44</sup> To some extent, this is true of Australian Aborigines, but in the nineteenth century, the surplus they generated was miniscule, and although economic exploitation of Aboriginal labour took place, it was not systematic or effective. There was virtually no basis for an economic relationship in the early years of the colony. Aborigines had little to trade and there was scant need for Aboriginal labour, given the existence of an unfree convict labour force. Even though there was a greater need for labour as the pastoral frontier spread, the resistance of Aborigines ruled out any widescale dependence on their labour until the gold rushes. This period proved the exception to the general pattern of black-white economic relations, but it was only temporary. Nonetheless it provides the most compelling evidence for the rejection of the helplessness hypothesis, although there are numerous other examples that Aborigines could adapt to white society when it suited them to do so.<sup>45</sup>

After the sixties, there was little general demand for Aboriginal labour, except in remote areas where cattle were the main product and with no land to provide even a semblance of their former hunting grounds, a marginal existence on the fringes of white society became the norm. Increasingly, some work became required in return for welfare, but it tended to be not very productive and was mainly seasonal. The model followed was a bastardisation of the convict labour system rather than the more coercive, and direct, systems of exploiting unfree labour used in other parts of the British Empire.

Aboriginal resistance to white civilisation is well documented, and for as long as there was an option, Aborigines tried to maintain their distance from it. This led to a change in the concept of the Aborigine as a 'noble savage' to the stereotype of the stupid, lazy individual who could not come to terms with white society. Evangelical Christianity and contemporary ethnology reinforced this view, and the resulting methods used to control Aboriginal labour inevitably led to the low expectations of the whites being fulfilled.

However, as the century came to a close, 'protective' legislation reinforced the marginal role assigned to Aborigines and dependence became less a matter of choice and more a matter of necessity. The most successful examples of Aboriginal labour operating in the white economy were where payment was by contract or piece work, and Aborigines often excelled as drovers, shearers, scrub-cleaners, fencers, ferrymen, timbercutters and harvesters. These tasks could be more easily fitted in with traditional obligations and lifestyles and were self regulating and under less direct supervision. It was this type of economic relationship, not wage labour, which offered some prospects

<sup>44</sup> M. Hartwig, 'Capitalism and Aborigines: The theory of Internal Colonialism and its Rivals', in Wheelwright and Buckely, *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, Volume Three, ANZ Books, Australia, 1978.

<sup>45</sup> Castle and Hagan, 'Turning Black into White', AHA Conference, Townsville, July 1995, Mimeograph.



for a measure of independence within a white dominated economy. However, this type of work brought Aborigines into direct competition with whites as small selectors striving to pay off their own land undertook contract work to supplement the meagre earnings of that land. The ethos of the Australian bush meant that contract work was prized by whites for precisely the reason that it was acceptable to Aborigines.

Cut off from the land, with few opportunities in the labour market, Aborigines became subject to legislation and institutions which *inter alia* attempted to force some labour from them in keeping with Victorian notions of public economy and the civilising effects of the work ethic. However, cash payments were rarely used to ease this transition and where they were used the State controlled their earnings through compulsory saving in trust accounts. There was no attempt to create a black working class. Indeed, every effort was made to prevent Aboriginal workers competing with white workers. Instead a pattern of paternalist control and Aboriginal dependence and segregation was preferred as a means of 'civilising' Aboriginal people. The process of subjugating the Aboriginal population was carried out by settlers with the willing assistance of the State. The exploitation of Aboriginal labour in Northern Australia was gross and led finally to State intervention. For the most part, whites in settled areas had little use for Aboriginal labour except as a seasonal labour force and it fell to the State to maintain them at other times. White society did not want Aborigines to develop as a working class or even as peasant farmers and the State took measures to prevent both outcomes. Aborigines formed a necessary part of the rural economy but not on terms that could give them equality or independence, and it is this legacy which set the pattern for Aboriginal involvement in the white economy in the twentieth century.

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# Exploring with Aborigines: Thomas Mitchell and his Aboriginal guides

D.W. A. Baker

Thomas Mitchell first arrived in Australia in 1827 as Deputy Surveyor General. He was skilful and experienced having served as a military surveyor in Wellington's army in Portugal and Spain and having spent five years after the war making surveys and plans of the main battlefields on which the British army had fought. He had also published in London a book entitled *Outlines of a System of Surveying for Geographical and Military Purposes*. So Mitchell combined practical experience with a theoretical understanding of the process of surveying. He was, perhaps, uniquely well equipped to begin the first scientific survey of a British colony.

His four predecessors in the office of Surveyor General had measured land grants, set out some Sydney streets and charted segments of the coastline but had done nothing to produce a general map of the colony by which alone the many land grants could be reconciled one with another.

A general map entailed covering the colony with a series of triangles calculated precisely by the use of a theodolite. None of the earlier surveyors had even attempted this task. When Mitchell arrived in Sydney there was not a theodolite in the colony fit for use but he managed to repair two damaged ones and then began the work of triangulation.<sup>1</sup>

By 1827, Mitchell's immediate predecessor, John Oxley, was dying so Mitchell at once became *de facto* Surveyor General and lost little time in triangulating the country southwards from Sydney as far as Lake George where he set out as accurately as he could a base line from which to calculate the distances between his trig points.

It was on this southerly surveying trip, begun in May 1828, that Mitchell first got to know some Aborigines and began his association with them as guides, an association which was developed and extended on his four journeys of exploration.<sup>2</sup>

These guides can be divided into four main groups which may be called hired help; passers on; camp followers; and, professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell to Hay, 3 March 1828. Sir George Murray Papers, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MSS. 46.8.7 f.8.

<sup>2</sup> This surveying trip is described in Mitchell, T. L., *Field, Note and Sketch Book 1828-30*, Mitchell Library, C42.

## Hired help

The guides referred to as hired help have certain common characteristics.

Mitchell found them and used them on the fluctuating margin of settlement, not in the far interior, nor around Sydney or some other town like Bathurst, but very probably on some squatter's run. They all had at least a smattering of English; some of them seem to have been quite fluent. With one or two exceptions, they all had a name which Mitchell recorded. Sometimes it was an Aboriginal name, sometimes a European name. If European, the name might have been given in a satirical or mocking fashion, eg 'Mr Brown'. Now and then the name was a combination of Aboriginal and European names. An example is 'Billy of Kerraway'.

A fourth characteristic is that they all seem to have had a degree of independence. They were not subject to Mitchell's orders but agreed to do a certain job for a set price. The job might be to assist with so many days' travel or to assist the survey team in reaching a certain destination. The price might be a tomahawk or a blanket or some similar material reward. The going rate, Mitchell discovered, was food and a blanket for ten days' work; such an agreement was usually reached by holding up the fingers of both hands.<sup>3</sup> The hired help now and then showed their independence by simply walking off the job if it became too onerous or obviously not worth the agreed price. No doubt, from time to time, there must have been misunderstandings about the terms of the verbal contract.

Finally, the hired help, having had some experience of white fellows for most, perhaps for all, of their lives, had a dislike and a fear for what they often termed the 'myall blacks',<sup>4</sup> those who had had no contact with Europeans. This fear, one might say, this terror of the myall blacks limited the usefulness of the hired help. They would never take Mitchell beyond the country they knew well. They would never venture into the unknown. This strong aversion of the hired help towards the myall blacks seems to be a striking example of the absence of any feeling of there being an Aboriginal community in contrast to the British community.

## Particular examples of hired help

One evening on the southern survey, Mitchell visited several Aboriginal families between Mittagong and Bowral and wanted one of the men to accompany his surveying party as a guide and interpreter but they were strangers to the land further south and frightened of the Aborigines living there. When Mitchell assured them that his party was well armed and that a guide would have nothing to fear, one of the Aborigines said, 'Ah, shoot de Buggers', but none would accompany him.<sup>5</sup>

When Mitchell reached Towrang, half way between Goulburn and Marulan, he enjoyed the companionship of a highly intelligent Aborigine called Primbrubna who agreed to travel with him for a while. In the evenings Primbrubna sang for his own pleasure and the entertainment of the white men. He began with a good performance of an English song, continuing with Aboriginal ones. Mitchell was very impressed with a

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Mitchell's footnote to 7 July 1828. Cf., 10 July 1828.

<sup>4</sup> See 'myall' in Ramson 1988, p. 415.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell, T. L., *Field, Note and Sketch Book 1828-30*, Mitchell Library, C42, 31 May 1828.

poetical kangaroo song. One verse described the weapons used in the hunt, another recounted an unsuccessful chase, a third was inspired by the night, the fourth celebrated the following daybreak, the next was about the chase renewed and, finally, there was the death of the kangaroo. Mitchell so admired this song that he persuaded Primbrubna to repeat the words slowly and, having written them down, he repeated them to the guide. The flatterer was then flattered because Primbrubna told Mitchell: 'Not stupid fellow you, like other white fellows'. Mitchell then discovered, by looking at the stars with Primbrubna, that Aboriginal astronomy was full of figures of men and animals, the moon having once been a black cockatoo, and so on.

The next morning, Mitchell was shown some marks on trees made with tomahawks a year earlier by Aborigines from Lake George which Primbrubna thought hostile. Soon after, to Mitchell's disappointment, Primbrubna left the surveyors to return to his own people.<sup>6</sup>

A little later, Mitchell found another Aborigine to act as a guide. He was called Billy of Kerraway and he, Mitchell and Mitchell's convict servant, called Bates, spent several days and nights surveying and sleeping in the deep and beautiful gorge of the Wollondilly. Billy and Bates looked after Mitchell's comfort very well. The bush bed on which he slept soundly was, he reflected later, the spontaneous handiwork of a robber and a savage.<sup>7</sup>

Billy, and other Aboriginal guides, Mitchell soon discovered, were enormously useful to the surveyors, especially at night when the Europeans often got confused and lost. The Aborigines, on the other hand, had what seemed to be an instinctive knowledge of the ground and a recollection, or *wea* as they termed it, as true as a compass, of the direction to any spot to which they chose to go.

The amazing accuracy of Billy of Kerraway's *wea* was demonstrated when the surveyors were camped at the head of the Wollondilly. One morning Mitchell, two other surveyors and Billy left the camp to visit a mountain about six miles (9.65 km) away through broken and rough bush which could be crossed only on foot. The party climbed the mountain and Mitchell sketched the surrounding country and took angles with his theodolite, being determined to finish before dark to not have to come back to this mountain a second time.

About an hour before sunset, Mitchell finished his work, descended to the spot where his men had made a fire, had a pot of tea and then the four of them started the six mile journey back to the camp. Billy, of course, was the guide and they all strode along, up one hill down the next, crossing ravines, pushing through thick scrub, scrambling across rocky places very contentedly for an hour or so after dark. But presently, Mitchell became impatient and said to one of his men, 'I wonder if this black rascal is taking us the way we came. We ought to be near the tents by this time; by God, I'll trust no man in future, but take the lead myself.'

And then, speaking to Billy, he said, 'Here, come back. Are you taking us to the tents, and have we to go up that damn black mountain?' Billy replied, 'Me *make a light* directly, me sit down tents directly. This way Massa.' And off he trotted taking the party

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 16-17 June 1828.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3 July 1828.

up the mountain which Mitchell doubted they had passed before. Up they went puffing and blowing, muttering oaths and damning Billy for going so fast.

At last Mitchell again lost his temper, stopped the party and angrily asked Billy where the tents were. 'Me find him directly,' said Billy and pointed ahead. Mitchell did not know where he was and said to Billy, 'Damn you, are we to cross that infernal mountain too?' 'Bale [no] Massa, me find him directly.' And after another hundred yards or so, the white men found themselves, to their astonishment, outrage and bitter disappointment, at the fire where nearly three hours before they had drunk their pot of tea.

Mitchell was about to explode but saw Billy jumping up and down, capering with delight and shouting, 'Me got him, me got him!' 'Got what?' demanded Mitchell. 'Budgerry pipe, ol murray budgerry pipe', showing a little black pipe about three inches long, for which he had brought Mitchell and his men all the way back by a different route. 'Now', said Billy, 'me make Massa and you (go ) tent directly.'<sup>8</sup>

So Mitchell had some quite considerable (if not always happy) experience of Aboriginal guides before he began his four journeys of exploration.

His first journey, in 1831, was northwards from Sydney to the Queensland border at Mungindi. Near Scone he tried to secure an Aboriginal guide but discovered that virtually all the Aborigines had been extirpated from the Hunter valley. Further north, near Murrurundi, an Aborigine from the Liverpool plains came into the camp and Mitchell recruited him as a guide by the present of a pipe. This unnamed man took the expedition to a station near Quirindi.<sup>9</sup>

Here Mitchell hired Jemmy, who, for the price of a tomahawk, agreed to conduct the expedition to the last northern station, a few miles beyond Tamworth. He was helpful to Mitchell's men showing them how cool, clear water could be obtained from a muddy pool by digging a hole in sand nearby.<sup>10</sup>

At this station, the overseer obtained for Mitchell another Aborigine called Mr Brown who agreed to join the party on condition he was given a tomahawk and blankets for himself and his wife. He was also fed and quickly became addicted to eating flour. Mitchell was most unwilling to waste flour and rationed his men to a pound a day. Mr Brown was eating two and a half pounds but was allowed to eat his fill, so highly did Mitchell value his services.

After a week travelling further north, Mr Brown saw evident signs of myall Aborigines, who had no contact with the white man, and was so terrified that he suddenly ran away to the south, without even asking for his tomahawk and blankets. For the rest of this expedition Mitchell travelled without the assistance of a hired or formal guide. He was, though, helped from time to time by Aborigines who 'passed him on' through their territory to that of their neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

8. W. R. Govett, 'Scrapiana or Note Book', Mitchell Library, B187, No pagination.

9. Mitchell 1839, vol. 1, p. 25.

10. Ibid., pp. 29-33.

11. Ibid., pp. 34-50.

The final example of the hired help is Bultje, a man for whom Mitchell had some affection and a great deal of admiration. Mitchell first met him on his second journey in 1835 on the western slopes of New South Wales not far from Peak Hill and found him very helpful in finding good water and grass. He met him again at the same place ten years later when he was beginning his fourth journey. On this occasion Bultje was just as obliging and guided Mitchell for four days to reach the Bogan River. For this he was rewarded with a tomahawk, a pipe and two figs (about 60 g) of tobacco. Before they parted, Mitchell sketched his singularly Socratic looking face and reflected that he must have also possessed the philosopher's wisdom to have survived where he was, placed between ignorant and often brutal stockmen and shepherds on the one hand, and myall Aborigines on the other.

Mitchell thought that the myall Aborigines would naturally regard those who accommodated themselves to the white men in the same way as he would regard a soldier who deserted to the enemy — that is, as deserving death. Mitchell was also impressed by the fact that Bultje had been living in the same valley for ten years. If this did not give him a valid claim to the soil, it proved, at least, that he had a strong attachment to it and a settled disposition. He thought, too, that Bultje must have had great difficulty in stopping the myall Aborigines from stealing his women and in escaping the anger of the white men when enraged by the depredations of savage Aborigines. He thought it was like running with the hares and hunting with the hounds.<sup>12</sup>

### Passers on

The process of passing on was by no means confined to Australian Aborigines. It was very common in many parts of the world where European explorers first made contact with indigenous inhabitants. It was a process by which people, confronted by strange, possibly threatening or dangerous pale faced intruders, tried to assist them through their territory with as little fuss and damage as possible. Such passers on, with one or two exceptions, knew no English. The passing on had to be conducted by some sort of pantomime or practical assistance.

Passers on probably had some degree of apprehension, some unease or even dread of the trouble which these strangers might bring with them. They were perhaps timid but not so much as to make them run away—though many Aborigines did just that. They had some aversion to the white man but not an implacable hostility such as Mitchell sometimes encountered, notably from what he termed the Spitting Tribe on the Darling near Wilcannia.<sup>13</sup> Passers on did not want to fight the white intruders but rather to get them through their territory with a minimum of trouble.

Mitchell's first expedition came to an end when a support party bringing up supplies was attacked, two convict servants killed and the supplies plundered. Six days after learning of this disaster, Mitchell was leading his men in their retreat southwards through wooded country that was full of holes and very hard going. The party soon learned they were being closely followed by many Aborigines. One of the convicts dropped behind, fell in with them and found a large iron tomahawk being brandished over his head. He made his escape but was obviously at the Aborigines' mercy.

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<sup>12</sup>. Mitchell 1848, pp. 13–18.

<sup>13</sup>. Mitchell 1839, vol. 1, pp. 245–8.

Meanwhile, the main body of the Aborigines, numbering a hundred or more (there were 18 whites) allowed themselves to be seen walking parallel to the route of the slowly moving bullock wagons, in lines of twos and threes as though escorting the foreigners out of their territory. Had they attacked they would surely have killed many, if not all, of the white intruders. The reason for this escort duty, almost military in character, was probably the fear that the white men might seek revenge for the killing of the two convicts; the escorts were simply very anxious to see the whites off their patch.<sup>14</sup>

Some days later, after Mitchell had buried the bodies of the two men killed, he was near Narrabri and about 30 miles (48 km) from the scene of the tragedy. He was leading his party southwards along the wheel tracks his wagons had made on their journey north and he came across a number of spears laid at right angles across the tracks. He dismounted and, approaching a group of Aborigines standing there, he picked up one of the spears and tried to explain that the wagon wheels passing over them would break them. Still the Aborigines would not remove them.

They then called loudly to their women who were at some distance under a tree and plainly invited the explorers to visit them. This invitation being refused, they then called the women over, divested of their cloaks and bags and made them stand before the white men. Each Aborigine seemed to have two women: one plump or fat, the other thinner and much younger. Each man stood before his women, bowing to one and then the other and giving a wave of the hand which Mitchell thought as gracefully intelligible as the gestures of French dancing master. The women showed no indication of fear, aversion or surprise. They seemed, rather, perfectly willing to supply the hospitality kindly offered by their men. The climax came when an especially attractive young girl was placed face to face with the expedition's second in command, George Boyle White. Mitchell abruptly ended the pantomime. He threw the spears off the track and ordered the bullock drivers to proceed. The Aborigines just disappeared.

Very soon, though, the track got soft so that the wagons seemed likely to be bogged. Even the horses began to sink through the surface crust. Earlier, the Aborigines had pointed down the track and then put their hands on their chests as if to indicate depth. They had then pointed to the east as if to show there was a better route there. And so it turned out. The Aborigines had successfully passed on the explorers without having to supply sexual favours.<sup>15</sup>

On his second expedition in 1835 Mitchell travelled down the Bogan to Bourke, then down the Darling to Menindee and then home by his outward track. The journey down the Bogan was assisted by a great deal of passing on. An early case was unusual in that the main guide knew a little English (in fact, *very* little) and had a name, Tackijally, which Mitchell recorded. On the first day they met, Tackijally took Mitchell down the dry Bogan to some ponds of water where they stopped for nearly an hour while Tackijally vainly cooed into the surrounding bush. At last a large and impressive man emerged whom Mitchell believed to be an important chief. Tackijally paid him much deference and steadfastly refused to tell Mitchell his name but the white men dubbed him the king. He did not appear to have seen a white man before.

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<sup>14</sup>. Ibid., pp. 120-1.

<sup>15</sup>. Ibid., pp. 132-5.



Tackijally guided the explorers for several days, although Mitchell believed, he did not want to but had been ordered to do so by the king. His services were of enormous value for the river was dry except for scattered water holes and Tackijally took the expedition straight from one water hole to the next without them having to follow the many dry bends of the river. Mitchell was amazed at Tackijally's detailed knowledge of the country.

Another advantage was that the party was perfectly safe from the danger of sudden collision with other Aborigines. Tackijally and other guides were always very cautious in approaching water holes, cooeing loudly from a great distance.

Tackijally guided Mitchell for a week while the king and others of his men travelled parallel with the explorers, sometimes in their company, sometimes unseen at a distance but always, one may be sure, keeping the white men under observation.

Near Nyngan the king and his compatriots had evidently come to the boundary of their territory. The great chieftain pointed out to Mitchell some distant figures seated under a tree and took him forward to introduce him to what Mitchell thought was the Bungan tribe. He then returned with Tackijally and his other men back to his own country.<sup>16</sup> It was a classical case of passing on.

### Camp followers

Camp followers were a diverse collection of Aborigines who seem to have little in common other than that they attached themselves to Mitchell's party and made themselves useful in one way or another. The main group of camp followers joined Mitchell's third expedition, into Australia Felix, or the western district of Victoria. But one member of the fourth expedition, into northern Queensland, must also be classed as a camp follower.

The first of them was Kitty of Lake Cargelligo. Mitchell had lost no time in recruiting John Piper as his permanent or professional guide for this journey. When they reached Lake Cargelligo, Piper disappeared one night and came back the next morning having somehow or other acquired a wife overnight from Aborigines two hundred miles distant from his home in Bathurst. So Kitty came marching behind Piper into the camp, loaded with a new possum skin cloak and various presents Piper has acquired with her. How Piper had arranged this important matter was a mystery to Mitchell but Kitty became a permanent member of the party.

She was a tall, strong woman with great presence of mind. Her face was strangely disfigured having a blind eye, opaque and white, the result, almost certainly, of smallpox. She made herself useful in various ways, sometimes even advising Mitchell about the route to follow when Piper was otherwise engaged.<sup>17</sup>

The first part of this expedition was down the largely dry bed of the Lachlan. One day, a bit south of Hillston, Kitty came back from the head of the expedition to tell Mitchell that there was water ahead and that there were Aborigines beside it. The party approached cautiously but the Aborigines were terrified and, as was very often the case, they fled leaving behind a boy, aged perhaps seven or eight, who was quite blind

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 193–204.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 37–8, 103–4, 135.

(again, probably due to smallpox) and a girl, aged about four, who sat down beside the boy. Presently the girl's mother appeared and she was persuaded by Piper and Kitty to join the expedition. Her name was Turandurey; her daughter was called Ballandella.<sup>18</sup>

Turandurey proved to be an excellent guide. She was a widow and about 30 years of age. She knew the country well and was adept at finding water. She could converse freely with the Aborigines of the lower part of the Lachlan and also with Piper.

Furthermore, Mitchell discovered, the Aboriginal men in this part of the world could not at once talk to each other. A convention demanded silence and patience for some considerable time while two men sat down a few yards apart waiting until it was proper to converse. This delay irritated Mitchell enormously. However, no such convention inhibited women and Turandurey's usefulness was therefore increased.<sup>19</sup>

When the party reached the Murrumbidgee they saw a group of Aborigines on the other side of the river and Turandurey stood boldly forward and addressed the men opposite her in a very animated and apparently eloquent manner. Mitchell admired her appearance and earnestness of manner and delighted in the confident authority with which she spoke. He thought he was very fortunate to have met with such an interpreter for she succeeded in persuading the Murrumbidgee Aborigines to swim the river and talk to him about the country. From these discussions, Mitchell was confirmed in his belief that the Murrumbidgee eventually ran into the Murray and that this larger river was joined at a greater distance by another river from the north — the Darling.<sup>20</sup>

At about the time when Turandurey was enlisted, two other young Aborigines attached themselves to Mitchell's party. They were both called Tommy and Mitchell's men, to distinguish between them, gave them chronometrical surnames: Tommy Came-First and Tommy Came-Last. Mitchell was always aware of the need to conserve his food supplies and did not want to support unnecessary camp followers and ordered that Tommy Came-First be told to leave the party. But Tommy refused. He said he would follow the party despite the 'Majy's' orders as he could always find possums in the trees. When Mitchell was told this, he was pleased by Tommy's independence and allowed him and Tommy Came-Last to remain with the expedition.<sup>21</sup>

Near the junction of the Murrumbidgee with the Murray an unfortunate accident occurred which made it impossible for Turandurey and Ballandella to leave the expedition, even had they wanted to. Ballandella fell from the cart in which she was riding and a wheel ran over and broke her thigh. Mitchell had a medical attendant who at once set the fracture in splints and the girl eventually recovered but for a long time she was immobilised and her mother obliged to nurse her.<sup>22</sup>

Towards the end of this third expedition, Turandurey, though as affectionate as any mother could be, decided to entrust her daughter to Mitchell's care. She probably despaired of ever being able to train her daughter in her traditional ways and realised,

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18. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 62–4.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–8.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–7.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 67.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

according to Mitchell's account of her feelings, that women were much better treated by Europeans than by Aborigines.<sup>23</sup>

After the journey was over, Turandurey got a new husband, King Joey from the Lachlan, and received two blankets as a wedding present from the expedition's stores. Ballandella was adopted into Mitchell's family and sent to school. Later she married and her descendants have been traced into this century.<sup>24</sup>

The last Camp Follower was a ten-year-old boy called Dicky who joined the fourth expedition on the northernmost cattle station on the Bogan. Although so young, he had an excellent local knowledge of the river and its waterholes which was very useful to the explorers. It was a very hot summer with temperatures up to 43° and water hard to find.<sup>25</sup>

A few weeks later, the party was travelling north along the Macquarie River through reeds and tall grasses. An incompetent bullock driver lost two of his animals and was quite unable to find them. He appealed to Dicky to go back with him and recover the lost beasts. Mitchell realised that it must have seemed very odd to the Aborigines that the white man who brought such large and easily traceable animals as oxen into their country should be unable to find them without the assistance of a mere child of their own race.<sup>26</sup>

Dicky stayed with Mitchell for the whole of the expedition and became a willing servant to Yuranigh, Mitchell's professional guide on this expedition. Yuranigh's affection for the boy seemed to Mitchell to be quite paternal as he instructed him how to behave. After the journey Mitchell took Dicky into his own home where he became a favourite with Mitchell's other children, five of whom were about Dicky's age or younger.<sup>27</sup>

### Professionals

The two professionals Mitchell employed have already been mentioned: Piper, on the third expedition, and Yuranigh, on the fourth.

Piper came from Bathurst and was originally known to Europeans as 'Piper's Boy' which became abbreviated to Piper. He was a young man in 1836; we might guess that he was 20 or 25 years old. He was old enough to take a wife but not old enough to eat the flesh of an emu. Had he done so, he believed, he would have suffered boils all over his body. Presently though, Piper decided that he was old enough to eat emu. The ceremony that would enable him safely to do so consisted chiefly in being rubbed all over with emu fat by an 'old man'. This task fell to a convict, John Richardson, who was 39. Once anointed by Richardson, Piper had no objection to eating emu.<sup>28</sup>

Piper spoke English reasonably well and agreed to accompany Mitchell wherever he went provided he was clothed, fed and allowed a horse. He proved invaluable. Fre-

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 265-6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 335-6, 339-40, 352. Brook 1988, pp. 63-76.

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell 1848, pp. 25-6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 64.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 415.

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell 1839, vol. 2, pp. 3-4, 29, 346.

quently he was able to persuade other Aborigines met with on the expedition's long march to pass the party through their territory. He was also often able to elicit geographical information from local inhabitants such as the course of rivers, the names of topographical features and so on.

Piper, along with the other Aborigines, made the 'white fellows' look rather stupid in the bush. They could read the tracks on the ground, climb trees or dive into the water far better than the British. In tracing lost cattle, speaking to 'wild black fellows', in hunting or diving, Piper, Mitchell acknowledged, was the most accomplished man in the camp.<sup>29</sup>

He was also the tallest and thought of himself as second in authority only to the 'Majj' himself. When Granville Stapylton, the real second in command, joined the expedition three weeks after it had begun, Piper went to Mitchell's tent and declared that 'That fellow has *two* coats', implying that Mitchell should give one of them to him. Piper, who must have experienced the transportation system at Bathurst and well knew the distinction between bond and free, despised the convicts and would act only on Mitchell's orders. He was, in short, a highly skilled and independent young man.<sup>30</sup>

If Piper had a weakness it was probably, like Mitchell's, a shortness of temper. He could quickly become frustrated and angry with people if they did not do what he wanted. Near Hamilton in Victoria for example, Piper found two Aborigines and tried to persuade them to come into the camp and talk to Mitchell. His knowledge of the languages spoken so far south was probably very slight and he made little progress. Finally, he was so enraged at what he thought was the unreasonable timidity of one of these men, that he hurled his tomahawk at him as he sidled off into the bush.<sup>31</sup>

Back in Sydney, at the end of the journey, Piper seemed to relish more than anyone else the triumph of the successfully completed expedition. Mitchell clothed him in his own red coat and gave him a splendid cocked hat and feather which had belonged to Governor Darling. Piper's portrait thus arrayed soon appeared in the Sydney print shops, an enterprising artist having drawn his likeness very accurately. But he soon tired of life in Sydney and became impatient to return to his own country near Bathurst. Mitchell carefully observed all the conditions of their agreement and decorated him

with a brass plate on which he was styled, not as usual 'King', for, Piper said, there were 'too many Kings already', but as 'Conqueror of the Interior' — a far more splendid title.<sup>32</sup>

Some years later, in 1843, Piper told a Bathurst surveyor that he would be willing to accompany Mitchell on another exploring expedition. When Mitchell heard this he was delighted because he was then planning his fourth expedition into northern Queensland to discover a route to the gulf of Carpentaria and he thought Piper's services would be invaluable to the success of the journey.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 338–9.

<sup>33</sup> Mitchell to Davidson, 13 November 1843. Letters of T. L. Mitchell to W. R. Davidson, Mitchell Library, A296.

Accordingly, when Mitchell set out for the north at the end of 1845 he took Piper with him and provided for him a horse and saddle, a double-barrelled shot gun, clothing, rations, blankets and so on. He also recruited another Bathurst Aborigine named Yuranigh. Soon the young boy, Dicky, joined up too.<sup>34</sup>

By the end of January 1846, when the party was camped for a few days near Nyn-gan, Mitchell was informed that Piper had heard that women were available close at hand and that he was planning to desert and take Yuranigh and Dicky with him in search of female companions. Mitchell felt betrayed by Piper and threatened by the loss of the other two Aborigines. He had Piper arrested and sent back under police guard to Bathurst where he could no longer suborn Yuranigh or Dicky.<sup>35</sup>

So Yuranigh replaced Piper as the professional for the fourth expedition. It was a change, Mitchell thought, for the better. He had nothing but praise for Yuranigh who became, he said, his 'guide, companion, councillor and friend'.<sup>36</sup>

Younger than Piper (for he would not eat emu), Yuranigh was small and slender in person but possessed of the most determined courage and resolution. His intelligence and judgment were so necessary to Mitchell that he always kept him at his elbow when travelling. He accepted his advice above that of any white man in his party.<sup>37</sup>

Yuranigh fully understood the character of all the white men on the expedition and could distinguish between the reliable convicts and the handful of recalcitrants who were not to be trusted. He was particularly clean in his person, washed frequently and always kept his glossy shining black hair well combed. Consequently he always had a clean and respectable appearance.<sup>38</sup>

Yuranigh seems to have been more skilful than Piper in securing local Aboriginal guides. He was more patient and less impetuous. Soon after reaching the Balonne, for example, the party came across a man and a woman fishing with nets. Yuranigh went up to them and returned with the man who left the woman behind to look after the nets. The man very willingly took the party further north and Mitchell was very impressed that Yuranigh had the skill to persuade him so easily and quickly though each scarcely understood a word the other spoke.<sup>39</sup>

Yuranigh was also a close observer of the country they passed through. He could draw Mitchell's attention to features of the landscape he might otherwise have missed. One frequent problem Mitchell faced when travelling along a river, especially if it were dry (as most outback rivers usually are), was to decide which of the two channels they came across was the main one. Yuranigh was seldom wrong in his judgment of such matters.<sup>40</sup>

He could also teach Mitchell about flora and fauna, showing him, for example, small differences between different species of fresh water mussels that he had failed to

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34. Mitchell 1848, pp. 25-6, 47.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-9.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 414.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 414-5.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

distinguish. Sometimes such advice was put very vividly. The crows of central Queensland, Yuranigh said, 'talked another language' from those near Sydney.<sup>41</sup>

When the journey was over, Mitchell provided hospitality for Yuranigh and Dicky in his own home and secured from the Governor a small gratuity for his 'guide, companion, councillor and friend'. Yuranigh had been to Sydney before and took a lot of pleasure in showing Dicky, who had never before seen a house, all the sights including a trip to the theatre.<sup>42</sup>

The holiday over, Yuranigh was engaged as a stockman, for wages and under a regular agreement, by a squatter with a cattle station in the northern part of the colony. He later returned to Molong and died there in 1850. Two years later, Mitchell arranged for his grave to be fenced and a headstone erected. This memorial, replaced in 1900, reads:

To Native Courage  
Honesty and Fidelity  
Yuranigh  
who accompanied the  
Expedition of Discovery  
Into Tropical Australia in 1846  
lies buried here  
According to the Rites  
Of his countrymen  
and this spot was  
dedicated and enclosed  
by the Governor General's Authority  
in 1852.<sup>43</sup>

Two questions should be asked about these Aboriginal guides: one, were they essential to the success of Mitchell's expeditions? And, secondly, were the guides acting, as it were, as nineteenth century Quislings, betraying their country to the white invaders and acting as collaborators in the destruction of their own society?

One cannot answer this first question with certainty but it is probable that Mitchell and his parties could have carried out extensive journeys in the interior without Aboriginal help because, in fact, they did so. On his first and second journeys, Mitchell had no professional help and at times travelled extensive distances without help from passers on, often without any contact with any Aborigines at all.

From the 20th of December 1831, when Mr Brown deserted the party, not far from Boggabri, until the end of January 1832, when Mitchell reached the Barwon near Mungindi, he received no Aboriginal guidance whatsoever. It was a period of six or seven weeks during which he covered 400 or 500 miles (643-804 km).<sup>44</sup>

Similarly on the second expedition, 12 days elapsed between the time Tackijally finished passing on the explorers till Mitchell again got some Aboriginal assistance near

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 225, 252.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>43</sup> Mulvaney 1989, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Mitchell 1839, vol.1, pp. 50-95.

the junction of the Bogan and the Darling. The travellers had covered about 120 miles (192 km) on their own resources.<sup>45</sup>

So it is clear that Mitchell and his men were capable of travelling extensive distances through the bush without Aboriginal guides.

However it is also true that the expeditions travelled more quickly, and therefore further, before their food supplies were exhausted when they enjoyed the help of Aboriginal guides. Guides made the journeys faster in two ways. Firstly, in helping Mitchell find the best route to take to his chosen destination. This, after all, is what guides are for. And, secondly, in tracking straying stock.

On all his journeys, Mitchell relied on bullocks and there was always the problem of stopping them straying at night time. They could not be too closely confined, for example by leaving them yoked to their wagons, because they had to graze and it often happened that, in search of grass, they wandered off out of sight and the expedition had to wait in the morning till all were found. Sometimes Mitchell felt as though he were a sailor at sea unable to move because utterly becalmed. It made him irritated and impatient and the Aboriginal guides, even young Dicky, were excellent trackers.<sup>46</sup>

We should also recognise, when asking whether guides were essential to the success of the expeditions, that guides made the expeditions safer. Whether hired help, passers on, camp followers or professionals, guides greatly reduced the risk of conflict with myall Aborigines. Guides were usually quicker than white men in apprehending danger. Passers on had, as one of their main aims, the avoidance of conflict. The mere presence of Aborigines in Mitchell's camp or *entourage* must have done something to alleviate myall Blacks' fears and suspicions. Piper and Yuranigh, as full time professionals, became skilled at warning of danger, at estimating risks and at placating hostility.

For example, at the end of March 1846, Mitchell was travelling up the Narran, a bit north of the Queensland border. He was assisted by two local guides Yuranigh had recruited. After the main party had made camp, Mitchell reconnoitred further on with Aboriginal guides. They approached some bush and Dicky, by an anguished scream, first drew Mitchell's attention to a black line of battle drawn up within the trees. Yuranigh halted but one of the two local guides went on and talked with the armed warriors. The other local guide urged Mitchell to go forward but Yuranigh would not advance another step though much pressed to do so. He declared that 'those fellows were murry coola', or very angry. So Mitchell prudently retired.<sup>47</sup>

In these several ways, then, guides certainly reduced the dangers confronting Mitchell, very real dangers as shown by the number of surveyors killed around this time.

Finally, were these guides traitors, betraying their country to the white invaders and acting as collaborators in the destruction of their own society?

Mitchell was frequently aware of what was at least a certain irony in the way Aboriginal guides were assisting the spread of European cattle that all too often endangered

<sup>45</sup>. Ibid., pp. 204–212.

<sup>46</sup>. Ibid., pp. 28; vol. 2, pp. 217–8. Mitchell 1848, p. 73.

<sup>47</sup>. Ibid., pp. 109–10.

or destroyed the Aborigines' water holes. In southern Queensland he once noted that the local Aborigines were doing everything in their power to assist him while his wheel tracks would probably bring the white man's cattle into their country and take it over.<sup>48</sup>

But putting the question in terms of traitors betraying their country is perhaps a mistake because it assumes that Aborigines had notions of broad Aboriginal loyalty and betrayal they probably lacked or, possibly, in some places, were just beginning to develop.

There seems to have been at that time little sense of an Aboriginal community. And without a sense of community the idea of loyalty to it is pretty well devoid of meaning. Aborigines in Australia had lived for many millennia with so little contact with the rest of the world that there could have been little feeling that they constituted a nation or a people; little feeling of us against them.

There is no reason to doubt that Aborigines had feelings of loyalty to family, tribe or clan but in the first half of the nineteenth century there could have been little feeling of an Aboriginal community. There was, rather, a multiplicity of Aboriginal communities.

Thus it became possible for colonial governments to recruit and use native police quite extensively from 1837 to 1900 in areas where the police were 'foreigners'. Similarly, the fear and antipathy shown by the hired help of the squatting districts towards the myall Aborigines indicates the lack of an Aboriginal community. Their plea to Mitchell was simply to 'shoot de buggers'.

Only once in all of Mitchell's journals was there a hint, but no more than a hint, of Aboriginal solidarity against the white men. Near Swan Hill, Mitchell left Piper and the two Tommies to try to discover from the local Aborigines the name of Lake Boga. There were a dozen men armed with spears and boomerangs. When Piper asked the name of the lake, he later reported to Mitchell, he was told very angrily 'I won't tell you'. They then said that there was '*too much ask*' about him and 'they blamed him for bringing the whitefellows there'. An old man called on the rest to kill him; two spears were immediately thrown which Piper parried with his carbine. He shot the foremost assailant in the jaw. The rest fled. The wounded man fell; Piper reloaded and killed him with a shot through the body. In Mitchell's experience, it was a unique plea for Aboriginal solidarity which clearly did not exist.<sup>49</sup>

These Aborigines at Lake Boga were no doubt myalls in Piper's eyes but they must have had some knowledge of the white invaders. They were only about 60 miles (96.56 km) from the junction of the Murrumbidgee with the Murray and must surely have heard about, if they did not actually see, Sturt's big canoe as it sailed the two rivers six years earlier; the memory of it was still vivid in the eyes of men living a little lower down the Murray.<sup>50</sup> Indeed it is quite likely that they had heard of the massacre on the Darling the previous year for the Darling Aborigines had danced a corroboree near the junction of the two rivers only about six weeks earlier.<sup>51</sup> They were probably aware,

48. Ibid., pp. 83, 90. Cf. pp. 14, 69–70, 306.

49. Mitchell 1839, vol. 2, pp. 143–4.

50. Ibid., p. 120.

51. Ibid., pp. 130–1.



therefore, that the white fellows were dangerous but they could not have known, as did the professionals and the hired help from the squatting districts, just how dangerous they were. They could not have known, nor probably could they comprehend, the enormity of the white man's expropriation of the land and the killing or driving off its original inhabitants and guardians. The very multiplicity of Aboriginal communities must have made it more difficult or impossible for them to envisage an overarching white community that would all too often destroy them.

So it seems too simple to accuse Mitchell's guides of treacherously betraying their country. Rather they were making, in their different ways, personal adjustments to accommodate themselves to the coming of the white man; seeking to fit into a new society they could neither evade nor understand. It was a predicament for which there was no solution.

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# Deported...At the sweet will of the government: The removal of Aborigines to reserves in Queensland 1897–1939

Thom Blake

Were the wretched remnants of an illtreated race to be treated as if they were worse than criminals? For that was what the Committee was asked to do. Were those poor creatures who had been all but exterminated either by bullet or disease by the European to be treated in that way and deported from place to place at the sweet will of the Government (B.D. Morehead, Legislative Council, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* 1901, vol. 87, p. 1144).

By removing the aboriginal against his will they were virtually denying his right to live at all. The Bill made them absolute slaves; they could do nothing without protectors, and the protectors could do just as they liked . . . To take them away from the bush and put them on distant reserves is everything that is stupid and bad (John Webber, Legislative Council, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* 1901, vol. 87, p. 1144).

When introducing the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Bill to the Queensland Parliament in 1897, Home Secretary Tozer remarked that section 9 was 'one of the most important in the Bill'.<sup>1</sup> The clause gave the Minister authority to remove Aborigines to reserves and was included on the recommendation of Archibald Meston. Meston was the principal architect of the legislation and the removals clause. It was part of the package of 'stern measures' he believed were necessary for the effective protection of Aborigines.<sup>2</sup> Despite Tozer's assertion about the importance of section 9, it provoked little comment or debate. Yet 40 years later when new legislation was implemented, the removals program had become the cornerstone of the reserve system.

By 1939 almost 7,000 Aborigines had been removed under the Act. The development of major settlements in southern, central and northern Queensland was only pos-

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1. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1897, vol. 78, p. 1629. The clause limited the removal of Aborigines to a reserved in the district where they lived. The powers of the minister were progressively extended. This clause was later amended to allow the removal of Aborigines to any reserve in the state.

2. A. Meston to W.H. Ryder, 23 August 1897, QSA COL/140 97/10750.

sible with the forced removal of Aborigines from all parts of the state. But the removals program functioned more than merely being a means for populating reserves. The removals process was a critical aspect of controlling and dominating Aborigines on and off reserves. Indeed, every aspect of indigenous life was affected by the removals program.

### The rationale and function of removals

From the outset, proponents of the removals program argued that, however regrettable, forcibly removing Aborigines to reserves was necessary on humanitarian grounds. They insisted the motive for such action was the care and protection of the remnants of 'a dying race'. From 1908, the Chief Protector maintained a register of removals which contained details of names, origin, destination and, importantly, the reason for removal. An analysis of this information reveals that the removals program fulfilled a variety of objectives: removing the old and unemployable from station and fringe camps; controlling behaviour in fringe camps, on settlements and labour relations; as means of extending prison sentences and punishment over and beyond the legal system.

When the reserve system was being established, one of the principal aims of the removals process was to ensure the 'absolute isolation' of all Aborigines from whites. From the very beginning of the removals campaign, Meston made it clear that not all Aborigines were to be targeted, only certain individuals and groups. After four years of his crusade, Meston acknowledged that he was deporting to reserves 'only those who are not employed and those who are roaming about demoralised and are doing no good for themselves'.<sup>3</sup> Home Secretary Foxton supported this policy when he told Parliament in 1901: 'it is the old people and possibly the young ones, with a fair sprinkling of others of middle age, who ought to be moved to reserves.'<sup>4</sup> More than one-third of all persons deported fell into this category: that is, those who were of no economic value or posed a threat to the health and well-being of the local community. A significant feature of the removals process is that despite its widespread and comprehensive nature, only rarely did it result in the removal of all Aborigines from a district. For example, between 1913 and 1930, 21 persons were sent from the Clermont district, yet this action did not result in the district being completely 'cleaned up' as ten years later 26 Aborigines were still living permanently in the district.<sup>5</sup> When a group of 19 Aborigines were removed from Tongy station 160 kilometres south of Mitchell in 1929, 12 were adults described as 'old and indigent' and the remainder children. Employable adults were noticeably absent from those removed.<sup>6</sup>

The phrase 'old and indigent' was used frequently as the reason for removal and was code for: 'no longer employable or useful'. Aborigines who had spent their working lives on stations were sent to a settlement when they could no longer be gainfully employed. In 1936 Charlie Maranoa was sent from Tinnenburra station in south-western Queensland to Woorabinda because he was 'too old'. He lived, however, another 30

3. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1901, vol. 87, p. 1145.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

5. Register of Removals, 1913-30, QSA A/64785; Protector of Aborigines, Clermont, QSA AUD/W41.

6. Register of Removals, 1929, QSA A/64785; R.A. Baker to J.W. Bleakley, 4 February 1931, QSA Transfer 1227/36 31/4586.

years after being removed.<sup>7</sup> The sick and disabled were also deported because they were not economically useful. 'Florrie' was deported from the Cairns district in 1913 because she was 'totally blind' and hence had 'no means of providing for herself' and Bundoo was deported from Duck Creek station in south west Queensland in the early 1900s when he became crippled.<sup>8</sup>

The sick were also removed if their particular illness was regarded as a threat to the health of the white community. The one disease which whites were most sensitive about was venereal disease. Any black suspected of this disease was quickly sent to a settlement ostensibly 'for treatment' but in reality to prevent contaminating the white population. Even when the type of illness an Aborigine might be suffering could not be identified, local residents sought to have that person removed to the settlement. On one occasion the residents of Taroom petitioned the Home Secretary to remove the 'half-caste Carbo' from their district because he was frequently going through the town and 'mixing with the members of our little community. We are afraid that whatever he is suffering from will spread amongst us'.<sup>9</sup>

Being infected by disease-carrying Aborigines was not the only type of contamination that concerned the white population. Equally disturbing, if not more so, was the threat to 'white blood'. Miscegenation was an issue that deeply concerned all those involved in Aboriginal administration from Meston onwards. J.W. Bleakley, while Chief Protector was particularly disturbed by the issue. In 1914 he stated:

The rescue and care of the young woman and children has now become a special feature of our work...in fact I might say is regarded as the most important portion of it.<sup>10</sup>

The reason for such a focus he added, was 'to keep the race clean'. Bleakley was referring to the 'Aboriginal race' but that was only part of the issue. The other and more critical agenda was to keep the white race pure. Clearly, a major purpose of the removals program was to isolate Aborigines and whites. Yet it was not to keep whites away from Aborigines, as was the intention expressed by Meston and others, but vice versa. The removals process were used to segregate the useless and the socially unacceptable, to places where they were out of sight and out of mind.

The second major role of the removals process was control. When the 1897 legislation was being framed, how effective the removals program would be in controlling the Aboriginal population was certainly not foreseen or contemplated. But after four decades, it became the single most important means of maintaining white hegemony and control over of the indigenous population throughout the state. The threat of removal served to exercise control in a number of contexts; in townships, on fringe and station camps, in labour relations and on settlements.

For Aboriginal groups and families who were allowed to live on station camps or on the fringes of country towns because of their economic value, their interaction with

7. McKellar 1984b.

8. Register of Removals, 1913, QSA A/64785; A. Meston to Under Secretary, Home Department, 13 June 1903, QSA COL/144 03/1524.

9. Residents of Taroom to Home Secretary, 5 December 1900, QSA COL/143 00/18523.

10. Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1913, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1914, vol. 3, p. 1023.

whites was carefully regulated. Any unacceptable behaviour could result in deportation to a reserve. Threats to whites or their property were not tolerated. In 1910 Speechley was deported from Boulia because he was a 'reputed cattle killer and horse sweater'. The local Protector claimed he found 'the carcasses of ten cattle in the vicinity of his camp'.<sup>11</sup> In 1912, Bertie Brown was removed from the Maryborough district for 'going about armed and killing cattle'.<sup>12</sup> In the same year, two women were deported from the Springsure district because they had supposedly been 'harassing sheep with large mobs of dogs'.<sup>13</sup> Crimes of even the most petty nature could result in deportation.<sup>14</sup> More generally, Aborigines were required to act appropriately in the presence of whites. 'Prostitution', 'trading in prostitution', 'drunkenness', 'threatening women', 'going about half naked' were all actions that resulted in removal.<sup>15</sup> Billy Newman was expelled from the Winton district because, in the Protector's words: 'he was a menace to society by attempting to indecently assault women—a confessed nymphomaniac'[sic].<sup>16</sup> Drinking alcohol, and not necessarily being intoxicated, could lead to deportation. Evelyn Serico was only six years old when removed to the Barambah settlement from the Gympie district because her uncle was caught consuming alcohol. She recalls:

Aborigines were not supposed to have beer. Of course it was reported. A few weeks later the police from Yandina arrived with a buckboard. We had to pack up straight away and leave. They took us into Yandina. We stayed the night in jail and they put us on the train the next day for Murgon...It was such a little offence.<sup>17</sup>

Even simply being *suspected* of committing a crime could result in deportation as Donald Gunn, member for Carnarvon, explained in the Legislative Assembly:

It is idle to say that all these people were removed for their own protection; too often they are removed to get them out of the district. If someone loses a fowl or sheep, an aboriginal is blamed for the theft, and when the matter is reported, the first thing the police do is to deport the aboriginal from the district. The Aboriginal has no court to which he can appeal, and I have known a man to be put in irons and thus deported to the settlement.<sup>18</sup>

Local Aborigines became convenient scapegoats when public outrage demanded a solution to a crime. When a Cairns resident, Peter Lumberg, was brutally murdered in 1905, the police were unable to identify immediately any suspects. In an attempt to solve the crime quickly, the police detained two local Aborigines, Tommy Tommyhawk and Tommy Norrigie. Although no evidence linked the men to the crime, they were detained in custody by the Inspector of Police under his authority as Protector of Aborigines. The police employed various methods to extract a confession from the men,

11. Under Secretary, Home Department to W. Hamilton, 8 September 1911, QSA COL/G250 708.

12. Register of Removals, 1912, QSA A/64785.

13. Ibid.

14. Probably the most extreme case was the removal of a family from Mt Isa to Palm Island because the father had supposedly stolen a torch (Rosser 1985, p. 23).

15. Register of Removals, 1908 and 1909, QSA A/64785.

16. Ibid.

17. Serico 1984.

18. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1919–20, vol. 134, p. 2563.

including tying a chain around their legs and hanging them from a tree! Despite this treatment, neither confessed. Yet instead of being released, the Inspector of Police then ordered their removal to the Barambah settlement.<sup>19</sup> The authority became a potent weapon in the hands of a police officer when fulfilling the dual functions of protector and prosecutor.

The threat of removal also served to regulate behaviour within fringe camps. Fringe camps were tolerated as long as they did not disturb the moral, visual and aural sensibilities of townspeople. Persons constantly quarrelling or causing fights were deported to a reserve. Fringe camp life was never totally secure with no bounds as to the reasons a Protector could give for removing a fringe dweller he disliked. The high-point of such irrationality was probably reached in 1929 when the Protector at Coen ordered the removal of 'Ulsana' and 'Annie' because they were 'dangerously affected by the moon'.<sup>20</sup>

The removals process was crucial in maintaining a servile Aboriginal labour force in Queensland. Aborigines played a vital role in the development of the pastoral industry in Queensland and the threat of removal was used as a means of inculcating the right attitudes to time, the virtues of work, the importance of compliance and reliability.<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal employees were ever conscious of the possibility of deportation, as Ruby de Satge, who worked on cattle properties in north-west Queensland, observed:

Well, when people didn't want to work they would be sent off. That's punishment for them. If they did anything wrong they'd get into trouble for it. There was no innocence in those days. They weren't allowed to say anything or back answer.<sup>22</sup>

Aboriginal workers lacked security in employment and a multitude of reasons could be provided to remove those who did not perform. The standard phases used for deportation to a settlement included 'will not work, a source of nuisance', 'absconding from hired service', 'refusing to work', 'has no regular employment', 'tired of work'. The threat of removal was a most potent and valuable weapon in the employers' arsenal of worker control and was critical in maintaining and regulating Aboriginal labour over successive decades.

While the majority of removals were from fringe camps and towns to settlements and missions, a percentage of removals comprised individuals being deported to other settlements. Settlement superintendents possessed an array of measures for disciplining inmates, the most severe being deportation to another settlement. When the Superintendent of the Barambah settlement, B.J.T. Lipscombe, appeared before the South Australian Royal Commission on Aborigines in 1913, he was asked how he dealt with 'refractory natives'.

I deal with them here. I sometimes threaten them that if they do not behave properly I will send them to Mornington Island. That usually has the desired effect.

19. T. Mowbray, Report into certain alleged Police Irregularities in connection with the Peter Lumberg Murder Case, 4 June 1906, QSA HOM/J27 07/9489.

20. Register of Removals, 1929, QSA A/64785.

21. Dawn May estimates that on stations in the more remote areas of the state, blacks outnumbered Europeans on a ratio of five to one. May 1986, p. 410. See also her work on the earlier period, May 1983.

22. Rosser 1985, p. 24.

They do not want to be sent to Mornington Island because they have heard from the other blacks what sort of place it is.<sup>23</sup>

On the question of how he dealt with 'loafers', Lipscombe told the Commission:

I would report the matter to the head office in Brisbane. Most probably the head office would issue a summons on the husband and very likely he would be deported. We would keep the wife and children here.<sup>24</sup>

Although no one was sent from the Barambah settlement to Mornington Island because of the logistical difficulties, Lipscombe and other settlement superintendents did deport troublesome and recalcitrant inmates to the other government settlements. Inmates were moved to and from the main government settlements of Barambah, Woorabinda and to Palm Island, and also missions including Yarrabah. More inmates, however, were moved for disciplinary reasons to Palm Island which was known colloquially as 'Punishment Island'. Whenever an inmate was deported to another settlement, it was a salutary reminder to all the other inmates the consequences of flouting the settlement regimen. Indeed, the threat of deportation to a distant settlement was the principal means for preventing inmates absconding from reserves and settlements.

Given the extent inmates did abscond, however, it was not a very successful deterrent. Some inmates were habitual deserters. In 1930, Bob Fogarty was sent to Palm Island from Barambah because he was a 'constant absconder and a bad example to others'.<sup>25</sup> After his removal to Palm Island he managed to return to his former settlement. He again absconded from Barambah, only to be caught and sent to Palm Island for the second time!<sup>26</sup> Fogarty's exploits were matched, if not surpassed by Bernie Turner. He first absconded from Barambah in 1929, was caught and returned to the settlement. Two years later he was sent to Palm Island for 'insolence and disobeying the Superintendent's orders'. Within months he escaped and made his way back to Barambah. He was returned to Palm Island only to desert once more. The Superintendent at Palm Island then refused to take him for the third time, so Turner became an inmate of the Yarrabah mission.<sup>27</sup>

The scope of removals program was progressively expanded as new avenues were found for its use. Specifically, the authority to remove was used as additional means of disciplining and punishing Aborigines over and beyond the legal system. Settlements served as a *de facto* gaols. When Aboriginal prisoners were released from gaol, instead to returning to their home country, they were deported to a settlement on completion of their sentence. In 1912, when Ned Cullen had finished serving a six-month sentence for 'assaulting his gin', he was deported to a settlement because the Chief Protector did not think it was appropriate he should 'return to his tribe'.<sup>28</sup> The power of removal was a convenient means by which the courts could extend the sentence of an Aborigine beyond the statutory limit. When Dick Holman was found guilty of stealing in 1913, the

23. Minutes of evidence of Royal Commission on Aborigines, 1913, p. 81.

24. Minutes of evidence of Royal Commission on Aborigines, 1913, p. 79

25. Register of Removals, 1930, QSA A/64785.

26. Register of Removals, 1932, QSA A/64785.

27. Register of Removals, 1929, 1931, 1932, QSA A/64785.

28. Register of Removals, 1912, QSA A/64785.

Bench of Magistrates ordered that 'after the completion of his sentence, he be removed to a reserve'.<sup>29</sup>

The authority to remove was also used to punish when the courts failed to secure a conviction. During the debate on amendments to the *Aboriginals Protection Act* in 1901, the Home Secretary freely acknowledged using his authority in this manner. He related the case of one man who he did not doubt had committed murder but was not convicted because 'there was no legal evidence that he had committed the murder'. The Home Secretary ordered his removal to a reserve and defended the action by claiming it was in 'the best interests of the whole district' and the person himself.<sup>30</sup> The removals process ensured Aborigines found little justice in the legal system. They confronted a system that presumed their guilt, rather than their innocence. When appearing before the courts, their fate was almost invariably sealed. Conviction or no conviction, they were separated from their country and kin. The only difference was the length of sentence and type of institution where it was served.

Despite the seemingly unlimited scope to which the removals process could be used to punish and discipline, in 1934 the *Aboriginals Protection Act* was amended to further curtail the civil liberties of the state's indigenous inhabitants. The power of removal was extended to allow the Minister to detain any 'aboriginals or half-castes' who in his opinion were 'uncontrollable', in an institution such as a prison, for an indefinite period. Removal was no longer confined to a settlement or mission. The definition of an 'uncontrollable' person was broad: someone who either was convicted under certain sections of the *Criminal Code* or was a 'menace to the peace, order and proper control and management of an institution'.<sup>31</sup> Thus an Aborigine deemed 'uncontrollable' could be imprisoned without trial for the term of his natural life, simply at the behest of the Minister. When this section was being debated the only objection were raised by James Kenny, member for Cook, who commented that such powers broke 'every tenet of British justice'.<sup>32</sup> Such remarks were rather belated as Aborigines had been denied any semblance of justice since the removals program had been instigated in 1897. The 1934 amendment was another extension of the comprehensive powers already in use.

As well as prisons, the authority to remove was used to regulate the movement of Aborigines from other institutions such as orphanages, asylums for the insane and lazarets.<sup>33</sup> Aboriginal inmates in these institutions, having recovered mentally or physically or become too difficult to manage, were sent to a settlement.<sup>34</sup> Some inmates spent time in several institutions before eventually arriving at one of the government settlements. They were a place of last resort, a convenient dumping ground for unwanted or troublesome inmates from other institutions.

29. Register of Removals, 1913, QSA A/64785.

30. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1901, vol. 87, p. 594.

31. *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts Amendment Act 1934*, s 9.

32. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1934, vol. 164, p. 1690.

33. Seventy-three removals between 1908 and 1936 were in this category.

34. See for example the case of Jack Gilbert who was removed from Goodna asylum to the Barambah settlement because he had 'recovered mentally' (Register of Removals, 1930, QSA A/64785).



The removals process was critical in forging links between the Aboriginal settlements and missions and other institutions which constituted Queensland's 'carceral archipelago'.<sup>35</sup> Aboriginal settlements were part of a network of institutions which were dedicated to control and discipline: prisons, orphanages, asylums, lazarets. Within this carceral archipelago, the Aboriginal settlements had a clearly defined position on its outer rim. Usually when white inmates of institutions such as prisons and lunatic asylums were disciplined and normalised, they were sent back into society. On the rare occasions when Aboriginal inmates were regarded as normalised, however, they were transferred not back into the white society but further away into the outer part of the archipelago, to institutions even more removed, at least sociologically and psychologically.

### Resistance to removals

Just as Aborigines in the nineteenth century vigorously resisted attempts to expropriate their land and destroy their culture, so too did their twentieth century counterparts oppose moves to separate them from their land and families. Aborigines did not willingly acquiesce to the removals program as writers such as Bleakley have suggested, rather they resisted in a spirited and sustained manner.<sup>36</sup> One of the most common forms of resistance was simply to escape into the bush when the police came with a removal order. In 1908 Chief Protector Howard reported that he had ordered two boys on Womblebank station in north-west Queensland to be deported to Barambah but they had 'absconded into the bush and [could] not be found'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, on Tinnenburra station in south-west Queensland, the McKellar family avoided deportation by fleeing, along with other families, shortly before the police arrived.<sup>38</sup> Others avoided removal by escaping across the border into New South Wales. Probably the largest group to move interstate were the Wangkumara people who originally lived in the far south-west of the state who moved across the border to Tibooburra district in the late 1910s.<sup>39</sup> In some respects, the move was fortunate for the Wangkumara. By moving as a group, they managed to retain their identity and language to a greater degree than if they had been dumped on a settlement.<sup>40</sup> Another group to escape deportation by moving across the border was a group from Hillview camp near Beaudesert. In 1926 the local Protector attempted to have them removed from the district because they were not 'fond of work'. But after obtaining approval for such action, he had to inform the Chief Protector that they were 'at present wandering in NSW'.<sup>41</sup> In 1935 Horace Hamilton, a resident in the Gayndah district, escaped to Tweed Heads when he became aware he was likely to be deported to a settlement.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Ellen Hocking fled across the border when a

35. Foucault 1977, p. 297.

36. Bleakley 1961, p. 195.

37. Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1907, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1908, vol. 3, p. 935.

38. McKellar 1984b.

39. Ibid.

40. Although they were later moved to Brewarrina in the 1930s by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, the Wangkumara language and some customs were kept alive by the some of the group. In 1985, a Wangkumara teaching program was devised and Wangkumara dictionary published. Huggonson 1990, p. 117.

41. Register of Removals, 1926, QSA A/64785.

number of the St George camp were being removed because they were 'indigent'.<sup>43</sup> Once interstate, escapees usually remained there as the effort required to locate and then capture them was beyond the resources of the department. The Chief Protector's attitude was that as such people were usually of 'a troublesome disposition', it was better to leave them.<sup>44</sup>

A more subtle form of resistance was adopted by Dave Wharton, who lived on the outskirts of Cunnamulla during the 1920s and 30s. As his daughter Hazel McKellar recounted:

There was never any attempt to round up the people as a group from the camp and send them away to the Mission. I think my father had a bit of political knowledge. He would have stood his ground if they had tried to send anyone away for no reason. He was around when they put the reserve there and there was this peg right alongside a cedar tree. It was a surveyor's peg and he said no one could ever shift him from there. He was right up to date on civil liberties.<sup>45</sup>

Wharton may not have been fully aware of the unlimited power the Minister possessed to remove the camp, but he was astute enough to dissuade local officials from taking any actions.

Even if removed to a settlement, resistance did not stop. Numerous attempts were made by deportees to return to their home country. Tommy Tommyhawk, who was wrongfully suspected of committing murder, was removed to the Barambah settlement twice and on both occasions managed to escape and return to his family in the Cairns district, a distance of more than 2,000 km.<sup>46</sup> A similar feat was achieved by four men who returned to Torrens Creek near Hughenden in June 1911 after being sent to Barambah in the previous year.<sup>47</sup> In 1913, two Coen residents successfully made their way home after being deported to Barambah.<sup>48</sup> These accomplishments were acknowledged even by Chief Protector Bleakley as 'remarkable feats of endurance'. He noted that to return home, these men had 'walked a good one thousand miles through unknown country, avoided populated places and subsisted on bush foods'.<sup>49</sup>

### The impact of removals

Despite spirited resistance, the removals program had a profound impact on Aboriginal cultural and social life.

The result of the removals program was quite different to that claimed by the proponents of the scheme. Rather than being for the 'care and protection' of the state's Aborigines, it contributed to the destruction of so much of their cultural and social life. As W.E.H. Stanner noted: 'every personal affiliation was lamed, every group structure

<sup>42</sup> Register of Removals, 1935, QSA A/64785.

<sup>43</sup> Register of Removals, 1915, QSA A/64785.

<sup>44</sup> Chief Protector of Aborigines to Commissioner of Police, 24 February 1922, QSA Transfer 1227/34 22/4782.

<sup>45</sup> McKellar 1984a, p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1905, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1906, vol. 2, p. 930.

<sup>47</sup> Register of In-letters, Home Secretary's Office, 1911, QSA HOM/B39 Aborigines.

<sup>48</sup> Register of Removals, 1913, QSA A/64785.

<sup>49</sup> Bleakley 1961, p. 195.

was put out of kilter, no social network had a point of fixture left'.<sup>50</sup> The consequences of removals has in recent years been well documented and publicised, including most recently the report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Bringing Them Home*, on the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.<sup>51</sup> But was the removals program a tragic mistake, a well intentioned exercise where the consequences were only realised afterwards? Can Meston and his successors be excused on account of ignorance?

Although historical and anthropological research in the past thirty years has greatly increased the non-Aboriginal understanding of the centrality of land in the Aboriginal world view, the significance of land and attachment to 'country' was well recognised even when the removals policy was being first implemented at the turn of the century. The proponents of the removals policy, however, cannot be too quickly excused for their lack of understanding. Meston was well aware of the affiliation Aborigines had to the land but felt their plight was so desperate, it was no time for 'rose water and sentiment'.<sup>52</sup> When amendments to the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* were being debated in 1901, A.C. Gregory claimed that to remove Aborigines from their own homes, 'would have the effect of destroying life more rapidly than was done by the wild blacks themselves'.<sup>53</sup> Of course, Gregory as a member of the ruling elite may well have been more concerned that his colleagues in the pastoral industry had ready access to cheap labour.

Gregory's comments, and those of Morehead and Webber quoted at the beginning of this article, indicate that even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Europeans were aware of the attachment Aborigines had to the land. In 1899 a Miles resident wrote to his local member of Parliament about the need to do something concerning the plight of the local blacks. He was not sure what could be done but was adamant that removal was not the solution. He commented:

The one thing you must make the Home Secretary understand is that the old blacks will not leave their old Yowrie. They say they will die here.<sup>54</sup>

A miner on the Cania goldfields near Warwick was similarly perturbed about the plight of the local Aboriginal population. The police had attempted to persuade them to go to a reserve but the miner believed, as he protested to his local MLA, that 'they want to die where they were born and have bred, and *would rather be shot than removed*'.<sup>55</sup> Even J.W. Bleakley, who served as Chief Protector for 29 years and instigated the removal of more Aborigines than any other Protector, was not oblivious to the effects of removal. In his volume, *The Aborigines of Australia*, Bleakley wrote:

It is inevitable that, to a people so clannish in their ideas, removal from their own country, with all its sacred associations, to another and entirely strange land, would be the cause of a good deal of hardship to them.<sup>56</sup>

50. Stanner 1968, p. 57.

51. Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997.

52. A. Meston to Home Secretary, 18 September 1900, QSA COL/145.

53. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1901, vol. 87, p. 1250.

54. W. Addison to Mr. Moore, 28 August 1899, QSA COL/143 99/12164.

55. E. Williams to W. Kent, 16 June 1902, QSA COL/143 02/9969.

56. Bleakley 1961, p. 195.

Clearly, the cultural and social significance of land was recognised by those who had even a rudimentary understanding of Aboriginal culture and society.

In exposing the impact of the removals program on Aboriginal society, it is evident that the declared reasons for removing Aboriginal people was a facade. As other commentators revealed, removals were used to discipline and isolate. But the rationale for the program was more comprehensive. It was used to control and dominate not only Aborigines on reserves, but on fringe camps, in towns and in the workforce. Aborigines lived with the constant fear that they could be removed, without warning, to a remote reserve. The trauma associated with removal was not confined to those who were removed but also affected those persons left behind. The sudden loss of a sibling, father, aunt, or grandparent created a sense of bewilderment and uncertainty in the camp, particularly when the reasons for removal were unknown. Few Aborigines remained unaffected by the removals program. If the sight of a trooper or policeman with a rifle evoked terror in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century it was a policeman with a removal order. The removals program came to be one of the principal means for controlling and dominating the state's indigenous population. Despite recognising the importance of the removals policy in 1897, Home Secretary Tozer would not have envisaged the critical role it would play in the development of the reserve system. By 1939, when a new Act was passed, more than 7,000 Aborigines had been deported to reserves. Removals became the technique *par excellence* for maintaining and extending European hegemony.

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## Research and friendship: John Mathew and his Aboriginal informants

Malcolm D. Prentis

Between 1879 and 1928, John Mathew (1849–1929) published two books and over 20 articles on aspects of Aboriginal culture, society and languages. In that period he gradually developed some repute as an ethnographer, linguist and student of Aboriginal society. He has generally been included in subsequent lists of pioneers of Aboriginal ethnography in the period from the 1880s to the 1920s. This was the transitional phase between the 'mere collectors' like R. Brough Smyth and E.M. Curr and the organised, systematic, academically-based professional researchers from the 1920s onwards. Histories of Australian anthropology which list the pioneers of the discipline still usually give the names A.W. Howitt, Lorimer Fison, W.E. Roth, W.Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, R.H. Mathews and John Mathew.<sup>1</sup> These men foreshadowed the professionalisation of the discipline. Some, such as Spencer and Mathew, actively promoted it. As largely spare-time and self-trained in the field, their work was necessarily less systematic than that of their full-time professional successors. Theories 'shaped their field studies' and they 'took a critical and constructive part in [the] formulation' of theory. They were motivated by a number of factors: the 'before it's too late' notion of preservation, curiosity, specific interest in confirming theories or ideologies about human nature and evolution.<sup>2</sup> The reputation of Spencer and Gillen has survived better than the others, for scholarly as well as political reasons. John Mathew shared many of these characteristics. But in certain respects, he was significantly different.

John Mathew was born at Aberdeen, Scotland in 1849. Following his father's death and mother's emigration and remarriage, he was sent to Queensland with his older sister and younger brother in 1865. There, the boys would live with their maternal uncle, John Mortimer, on Manumbar station, his sheep property in the south Burnett River valley, about 160 km north of Brisbane.<sup>3</sup> Mathew remained in or near this area until 1876, as station hand, gold-digger or country school-master. He abandoned teaching in Queensland for the Presbyterian ministry in Victoria, but maintained a strong interest in and contacts with Queensland, especially the Kabi Kabi (who now prefer to

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Berndt 1977, p. 538; Elkin 1958, pp. 226–227; Stanner 1968, p. 35; Cowlishaw 1986, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Elkin 1963, pp. 6–19; Elkin 1958, pp. 226–227; Elkin 1970, pp. 19–20; Cowlishaw 1986, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See Prentis 1992, pp. 466–480.

call themselves Gubbi Gubbi) and Wakka Wakka (or Waka Waka) people, throughout his life.

The voyage out to Queensland was eventful and ended at the Quarantine station at Dunwich on Stradbroke Island.<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal people had been moved out of the vicinity of the station for the sake of their health and to accommodate the immigrants. Life in quarantine was generally somewhat tedious. To relieve the tedium, there was the occasional birth, death, escape, fight and a bush-fire which lasted over a week and damaged the telegraph. Mathew first encountered Aborigines when they helped the immigrants fight the blaze.

Uncle John Mortimer met the boys and Jane at the wharf in Brisbane. Before heading up-country they stayed in Brisbane at the home of Tom Petrie, a member of the pioneer Scottish family, entrepreneur, explorer and 'friend of the Aborigines'. He spoke Kabi Kabi and later became one of the two best sources of information on the legends of the Kabi Kabi people.

The route to Manumbar took them via Durundur station, established by the Archer family from Scotland. Near the present town of Woodford, Durundur was about 100 km north of Brisbane. It was there, in April 1865, that John Mathew saw a large group of Aborigines for the first time. His recollection of that occasion 34 years later is revealing.

A bullock had just been slaughtered by the station hands, the blacks were congregated around the killing-place. A low white, with a feeling of gay superiority, swung the reeking, bleeding, lights and liver with a slap round the neck and on to the naked bosom and shoulders of an unoffending black woman. The gentle creature received this act of gallantry with a smile. I can never forget this disgusting insult and the meekness with which it was borne. It was at once an index and a type of much of the treatment which the natives have received from those who have taken their heritage away from them, and if the weaker side has retaliated is it to be wondered at?<sup>5</sup>

Mathew's humanitarian attitude was to be reinforced by his experience of life on his uncle's station and, with his eye for detail, was to provide the prerequisite for his studies of Aboriginal languages and societies in later years.

The five years John Mathew spent at Manumbar were crucial in that they introduced him to three great influences on his life: John Mortimer, the Aboriginal people and the Australian bush. Alec Mathew later recalled that Mortimer did not 'press us to do heavy work'. Soon after the boys' arrival at Manumbar in 1865, John Mathew started work on book-keeping and store-keeping. During shearing each year, he was busy every night with the shearers' tallies. He kept the times of the men engaged in sheep-washing, mustering, branding and other tasks. There were about a dozen shepherds at various points of the 100 square mile property and John would count out the rations for the pack horses to carry them out to the shepherds, some of whom were Aboriginal, twice a week. Some of the 20 or so musterers who brought the 2,000 cattle in for branding were Aboriginal as well. Most of the cattle were free-range and the boys later began

4. For a fuller account of the voyage and the sources on which it is based, see Prentis 1998, pp. 14-18.

5. Mathew 1899, pp. 81-82.

to help with stock-riding.<sup>6</sup> He also went on errands to Nambour and Maryborough, fairly hazardous journeys even in the 1860s.<sup>7</sup> While 'shepherding sheep or tailing cattle [John Mathew] studied English Grammar, German, French and Latin'.<sup>8</sup> He went further, as there is much evidence of geography and mathematics, with some science and a little Chinese as well.<sup>9</sup>

When John Mathew was working for his uncle, there were about 20 Kabi Kabi Aborigines employed on Manumbar, who camped there with their families. Mathew finished working on Manumbar in 1870, but went back for many visits afterwards. He got to know the Kabi Kabi people well—well enough for them to include both uncle and nephew in the tribe's classificatory kinship system. In the Kabi classificatory kinship system, John Mortimer was placed in Barang section. John Mathew, known as 'Young Mortimer' and as Mortimer's sister's son, was automatically assigned to Balkuin section.<sup>10</sup> Like Mortimer, Mathew respected them as persons, though devalued their culture at first. He came to speak Kabi Kabi fluently and later told R.H. Mathews, another prominent 'amateur' ethnographer that 'very few whites knew the Kabi language so well as I did'.<sup>11</sup> He reflected more deeply on and systematised that knowledge academically later.

One black employee saved him from drowning in a waterhole on Manumbar. This was Kagariu, alias Johnny Campbell, later a notorious bush-ranger who was hanged in 1880. Mathew was clearly fascinated by him and wrote an account of Campbell's career under the pen-name 'Walareyan' just after the execution.<sup>12</sup> He observed and remembered other incidents amongst the black employees on Manumbar which he was able to use later in analysing such matters as kinship. One incident concerned a 'tussle' between Kagariu and his wife. Kagariu called for help, not from the stronger of two men passing by, but from the younger and weaker, purely because he was in the same 'section' of the clan and was therefore a 'brother'.<sup>13</sup>

John Mathew's early interest in Aboriginal society and languages goes back to the personal rapport he developed with the Kabi Kabi people when working on his uncle's property in 1865–1870. He conducted more systematic field research in 1884, 1906–1909 and 1913, and even as late as 1923–24 while on his duty as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. He experienced Aborigines as friends first, rather than as scientific specimens, as was the case with Howitt and Spencer. He had first hand knowledge, especially of language, though he was not the first white man to know Kabi Kabi well, as Tom Petrie, whom he met in as 1865, had a very good knowledge of their language and stories. Mathew's continuing investigation

6. A. Mathew to R.Y. Mathew, 19 June 1929 (J. Mathew Papers, OM74–17, John Oxley library, Brisbane [hereafter JOL]).

7. J. Mathew, Notebook kept on Manumbar (Mathew Papers, JOL).

8. J. Mathew to J. Mortimer, 1 July 1879 (Mathew Papers, JOL).

9. J. Mathew, Notebook (Mathew Papers, JOL).

10. Fergus 1929, p. 588; Mathew 1910, p. 137.

11. J. Mathew to R.H. Mathews, 11 December 1907 (R.H. Mathews Correspondence, diary and working notes, 1893–1918, MS 1606/1, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [hereafter AIATSIS]).

12. See Appendix, person No. 13.

13. J. Mathew 1910, p. 137. See Appendix, persons 37–41.

involved the application of scientific methods, and linguistic methodology, learned in the process of both his self-education in the 1870s and university and theological studies in 1878 and 1882–86.

Mathew's research did not *begin*, as did that of others of his contemporaries, with some abstract scientific curiosity or with a pre-digested theory to check or an overseas patron to supply.<sup>14</sup> He got to know Aboriginal people at a much younger age as his neighbours and fellow employees. He was on close terms with some and learned to understand and even speak their language before it became an object of linguistic study to him. There was thus at this time no ulterior motive in his relationship with Aborigines. He remained known to and even respected by them fifty or more years later in some cases. After all, he had been allocated a place in the Kabi Kabi's sectional kinship system. Therefore, when he later wrote or spoke of individual informants he was automatically in a relationship with them and, as well, he often knew them more deeply as persons than some more 'scientific' observers would ever know their informants. He usually knew their Kabi Kabi (or Wakka Wakka) names and remembered their social practices and stories they had told him. He respected the stories' integrity, whatever he thought of the factuality of their contents. He could recall and interpret incidents he had observed, such as the fight between Johnny and Nelly Campbell. The ethnographic significance of the practices and stories emerged and was analysed later.

As E.M. Curr put it, concerning Mathew's contribution to his *The Australian Race*,

I attribute the fullness of his description...rather to his love of ethnological studies, which had led him to observe and remember what came under his notice, than to that ripe knowledge which results from long experience.

As Elkin puts it, Mathew may have got 'the best of both worlds', by the combination of face-to-face contact and systematic enquiry.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, there is only a little evidence in his note-books of the time of anything resembling 'field-work' conducted by Mathew while he lived in or near Kabi country from 1865 to 1875. There are not quite three pages on 'the Kabee-kabee Dialect'.<sup>16</sup> In many of his articles and in his books, however, he refers to observations made at that time. Many of these observations are repeated. For instance, Kagariu (Johnny Campbell) is referred to in his paper given in 1889 to the Royal Society of New South Wales, *Eaglehawk and Crow* (1899) and *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland* (1910). 'My blackboy', who carried the message stick, is also mentioned in all three.<sup>17</sup> These and some other black 'informants' show that he was observing the Aborigines closely while working at Manumbar. Jenny Lind he met as a little girl in the 1860s and again in 1906.<sup>18</sup> This is but an extreme example of the way Mathew liked to renew old acquaintances but at the same time check the memories of his informants in order to verify evidence.

14. For instance, Baldwin Spencer had gone on the Horne Expedition to central Australia, where black bipeds had distracted his attention from the green frog.

15. Elkin 1975, p. 16.

16. Mathew papers, JOL.

17. Mathew 1889, pp. 338, 408; Mathew 1899, pp. 10, 114; Mathew 1910, pp. 124, 137.

18. Mathew 1910, pp. 148, 160, 165. See the Appendix, person 31.



There is also more direct testimony by Mathew in his later works. In the preface to *Two Representative Tribes* he refers to being 'in constant touch' with Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka people for six years and intermittently for four years after that.<sup>19</sup> His first published work of scholarship was extracted from a letter he wrote to the Oxford Professor of Comparative Philology, Max Müller on 10 February 1879 from Mt Rothwell, Little River, Victoria, where he was managing a farm after completing one year at the University of Melbourne. Speaking of his Manumbar years, Mathew says of the Kabi Kabi language, 'I managed to learn something of its structure and to compile a vocabulary of some 600 words'.<sup>20</sup> This implies more than merely being observant: as his tantalisingly brief set of notes shows, he had been recording information. When through academic studies of English, Latin and Greek languages he acquired some interest and skills in linguistic analysis, the raw data was there to be studied.

He had read closely Müller's text, *A Survey of Languages* as well as the Rev. William Ridley's vocabularies of Kamilaroi and Dippil (a Kabi Kabi dialect) and a 'Mr Bunce's' vocabularies.<sup>21</sup> This letter makes clear that his scholarly interest started with language. This is not surprising given his inclinations and the importance of language and literature studies in an arts degree and in theological studies. It prefigures the importance of language in his later ethnography and it was an aspect of scholarship in which he had the advantage over other pioneer anthropologists. Social practice and language reflect each other. Stories embody and language structures moral and social meanings. He was becoming well-equipped to learn from language about social structure and function.

In the three years of farm management between first and second year University, Mathew kept himself busy increasing his knowledge of ethnology and linguistics as well as how to apply it to his knowledge of the Kabi Kabi and also broaden that knowledge. In early 1880, he heard of the project of E.M. Curr (1820–1889) to compile information about as many tribes as possible, using the questionnaire method. On 6 April 1880, Mathew wrote to Curr offering to supply a Kabi Kabi vocabulary for his projected work. Curr accepted gladly and forwarded the list of 124 English words and the 83-question questionnaire.<sup>22</sup>

Mathew responded to Curr's encouragement with his customary enthusiasm and returned the word list within a month. Curr sent his 'warmest thanks. It will be amongst my best contributions'. He also proposed that his young correspondent go further and suggested 'a short account of the tribe' based on the questionnaire (which was yet to be forwarded) and 'a Discourse on the Kabi language'. Curr found Mathew very obliging. He responded again very swiftly and Curr thanked him for taking 'so much trouble about this business'. The corroboree music sent was welcome, he suggested some pronunciation guides and told him to add more about the Kabi people if he wished. Above all, Curr said, he wanted 'FACTS'.<sup>23</sup>

19. Mathew 1910, p. xxi.

20. Mathew 1880b, p. 312.

21. Ibid.

22. E.M. Curr to J. Mathew, 8 April 1880 Mathew Papers, MS 950 D; AIATSIS, Elkin 1975, pp. 12–13.

23. E.M. Curr to J. Mathew, 7 May 1880, AIATSIS.

Gradually, with Curr's encouragement, the chapter on the Kabi Kabi grew in size and scope, with Mathew gradually adding more and more to the section on social system and culture. The delay between the initial flurry of enthusiasm in 1880 and publication enabled Mathew to complete his B.A. and M.A. degrees, including some study of linguistics, and to do additional specific research. Some he did by mail, for instance with Uncle John Mortimer at Manumbar who confirmed some details about marriage rules and the section system of kinship.<sup>24</sup> Then, at the end of his first year at the Theological Hall, 1884, he went north and spent September, October and November in Kabi Kabi country largely on field work to improve his chapter for Curr. With his facility with languages and knowledge of Kabi Kabi, and as he was well known to many Kabi people as 'young Mortimer', he could question the Kabi Kabi-speaking people in and around Manumbar very directly. The vocabulary was now built up to nearly 800 words, there were four pages of stories and dialogues and forty pages on the Kabi Kabi and their way of life.<sup>25</sup> Curr's project grew into a massive four-volume work, published in 1886-87 by the Victorian Government Printer, and covering about 200 tribes. John Mathew's piece, no. 166, on the 'Mary River and Bunya Bunya Country' took up 58 pages in volume III (1887). It was one of the three best and most complete contributions.

In 1880, Mathew had also completed a manuscript which was not published, 'Career of Campbell. The Aboriginal Bushranger, by Walareyan'. From internal evidence, it was written in August 1880, just after Campbell was hanged in Brisbane.<sup>26</sup> It is certainly in Mathew's handwriting. 'Waloreyan' is not just a *nom de plume*; it was copied from an Aboriginal boy well-known to Mathew at Manumbar, and mentioned in *Two Representative Tribes* as deformed.<sup>27</sup> Mathew family tradition states that Walareyan was a survivor of the native police raid on Manumbar in 1861. The boy must have made a strong impression: Mathew's son later lived in a house in the Melbourne suburb of Coburg named 'Waloreyan'.

The contribution to Curr's project left Mathew wanting to do more. Despite marriage, career and fatherhood all commencing in 1887 and 1888, he continued to work hard at his ethnology and Aboriginal languages. While ministering at Ballan (1887-89), he broadened his interest beyond just the Kabi Kabi and their neighbours. He followed the standard practice of researchers of that era, by sending questionnaires to observers or collectors all over the country.<sup>28</sup> He told his erstwhile pupil, Robbie Chirnside, in April 1888 of his activities.

I am still doing a little work in aboriginal lore making curious discoveries which are interesting to me if to nobody else and some of them may interest others some day.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> J. Mortimer to J. Mathew, 21 November 1881 (Papers in possession Dr. J.Y. Mathew, East Hawthorn, Vic.).

<sup>25</sup> Mathew 1887, pp. 152-209.

<sup>26</sup> Mathew 1880a. On Johnny Campbell, see Prentis 1991, pp. 138-151 and for a corrected and augmented version, Prentis 1998, pp. 52-71.

<sup>27</sup> Mathew 1910, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> See Burgess 1987, especially Appendices 1 and 2 on Mathew's research methods and questionnaires. Copies of the questionnaires are in the Mathew Papers, MSS 950, 969, 999, AIATSIS, and a few originals are held by Dr J.Y. Mathew.

One instrument was four foolscap pages, headed VOCABULARY OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE. It gave phonetic advice for transcription and at the end asked for any words additional to the 234 specifically requested, including any interesting sentences, 'lists of adverbs, and tables of declensions of nouns or pronouns, or the conjugation of any verb, whether complete or in part'. The list mostly consisted of nouns for topographical features, flora, fauna, parts of the body, attributes of people and numbers. There were pronouns but not many verbs. Some words sought were relationship names and some were religious in nature. There was also a one-page questionnaire of uncertain date requesting translations of English sentences. While the responses to these two language questionnaires would provide Mathew some insights into social structure and practice and cultural and religious life of the groups to which they referred, it was necessary to send out an ethnographic questionnaire, INFORMATION REGARDING AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES, again four pages long, setting out three dozen questions dealing with the identity and location of the tribe or clan, its rules and terminology about marriage and relationship, its ritual and beliefs, material culture and even physiognomy.<sup>30</sup> The introductory note illustrates the 'before it is too late' philosophy noted earlier and also Mathew's increased desire to systematise and render his enquiries more scientific and also reflects his successful linguistic studies at university and the Theological Hall.

In addition to the questionnaires, Mathew continued to conduct correspondence by letter on ethnographical matters with a smaller number of reliable informants. There is little evidence of this outside Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka country until rather later as, for instance, with correspondence with Daisy Bates in Western Australia. At this early stage, he wrote to friends on stations in the Wide Bay-Burnett area, such as James Steven at Taroom and George Anderson at Cow Wah, the latter of whom not only filled in the forms himself but organised others to do the same, conscientiously interviewing 'the blacks'.<sup>31</sup>

From these sources, Mathew was gleaning information from Victoria, north-west New South Wales, the Gulf of Carpentaria, the Monaro, north Queensland and elsewhere. The fruit of these questionnaires was not fully borne in time to be incorporated into Mathew's 1889 paper, but was very fully reported in *Eaglehawk and Crow* (1899). Most of the completed questionnaires are not dated and he kept blank forms to use for years afterward—for instance, some were filled in by himself on a field trip in 1923. It is clear many came in during the 1890s—for instance, the one from the Rev. Nicholas Hey of Mapoon on Cape York must have been from this period, because he only arrived there in 1891. Increasing quantities of published material were available in the 1890s, not least Curr's compilation, but he also closely read, *inter alia*, George Taplin on the Ngarinyeri, L.E. Threlkeld, William Ridley on the Kamilaroi, Fison and Howitt's *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* and R. Brough Smyth on Victoria.

29. J. Mathew to R.B. Chirnside, 9 April 1888, Chirnside Papers, MS 11127, La Trobe Library, Melbourne [hereafter LTL].

30. Physiognomy was used as evidence to back up his reflections on possible 'racial mixing' in the origins of the Aborigines.

31. Letters in the Mathew Papers, MSS 950, 969, 999, AIATSIS and Mathew 1875-76, JOI. and held by Dr J.Y. Mathew. George W. Anderson to J. Mathew, 20 January 1889 (Dr J.Y. Mathew).

Between April and December 1888, his intentions became more serious and grew in scope, despite the new responsibilities of career and family. He told his former pupil, Robert Chirnside in December that he had 'been doing a good deal of work lately', especially on the languages. He had made some interesting 'discoveries' and was 'engaged in putting them into book form with a view to publication next year'. He added:

I have also a comprehensive work in contemplation and have begun to collect materials for it. I propose to make a survey of the whole of Australia and to gather up all matters of importance referring to Aboriginal Life and Language. This may occupy from ten to twenty years if I be spared, and if I don't live to complete it I have no doubt that somebody else will take up the work.<sup>32</sup>

This correspondence confirms that the questionnaires date from the second half of 1888. Mathew's words also show no awareness as yet of the internal politics of the small world of Australian anthropology. However, the ambition he displays, when fulfilled in his 1889 paper and more particularly in *Eaglehawk and Crow*, would thrust him unwillingly into controversy and polemic. He was about to move beyond straight ethnographic reporting into analysis and even theory, where 'patents' were jealously guarded. He brought to this new phase of his studies attitudes widely shared: for instance, the notion of 'before it is too late' and of a 'doomed race'. But he differed, too, in that he had had first hand, long-term 'natural' contact with Aborigines and was deeply sympathetic to the Aboriginal people. His knowledge of philology, skills at textual analysis and musical ability were also somewhat unusual and were to be useful. He was knowledgeable and astute enough to avoid some of the pit-falls facing the amateur anthropologist. He was also not in thrall to any overseas, armchair theorists, even though widely read in their works. He had a critical appreciation of evolutionary theory, though he rejected social evolutionary ideas.

In 1889, John Mathew submitted his long paper, almost book length, to the Royal Society of New South Wales. It won him the Society's bronze medal and prize of £25 for an original work of scholarship. The paper was published at the end of the year.<sup>33</sup> The section on the description and classification of Australian languages was still rudimentary in scope and focussed on only two languages, nevertheless it took up over a fifth of the paper. He took up one of Curr's pet topics, the theory of the racial origins of the Aborigines and subjected it to critical scrutiny, along with those of several others and also presented his own theory. He took gentle issue with Fison and Howitt and the straight ethnographic reporting of family relationships provided raw material for Finnish ethnologist Edward Westermarck to question L.H. Morgan's 'group marriage' hypothesis which Fison followed.<sup>34</sup>

In the ten years between this paper and *Eaglehawk and Crow*, the accumulation and diversity of data increased. As Mathew's domicile allowed, he now began to delve into the languages and culture of the Victorian tribes in more detail. This was facilitated by

<sup>32</sup> J. Mathew to R.B. Chirnside, 3 December 1888, Chirnside Papers, MS 11127, LTL.

<sup>33</sup> Mathew 1889, pp. 335-449 and 2 illustrations at the end of the volume; loc. cit., vol. XXIV (1890), p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 339-400; John Mathew to R.H. Mathews, 8 June 1898 (MS1606/4(b), AIATSIS); Westermarck 1891, pp. 321, 546.

the return of more questionnaires during the 1890s. The extensive Scots Presbyterian clerical and pastoral network in Victoria no doubt helped. The Presbyterian Church's involvement with Aborigines in the Wimmera, at Coranderrk near Healesville north of Melbourne and at Ramahyuck in Gippsland provided him with an entree to Aboriginal communities, as well as contact with potential white informants who lived and worked with them, such as John Green and Joseph Shaw at Coranderrk. He visited Lake Tyers in 1890, and Coranderrk in 1891 and 1892. At Coranderrk, he met William Barak (1813–1903), sometimes called 'the last chief of the Yarra Yarra tribe', who had earlier been a very valuable informant for A.W. Howitt. Mathew was able to visit Aboriginal sites and communities during his annual vacation (sometimes spent at Healesville) and, in the early 1900s, when convener of the Church's Home Mission Committee, which was responsible for small, remote rural parishes, such as in the Wimmera. In July 1895, Mathew visited La Perouse in Sydney and interviewed several 'blacks and half-castes', taking advantage as usual of church duties.

John Mathew spent most of the October of 1906 in Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka country, mainly at Barambah Government Aboriginal Station, interviewing members of the two 'tribes', some of whom still remembered him. He retained some facility with spoken Kabi Kabi, an advantage lacked by most contemporary investigators. Barambah, renamed Cherbourg in 1931, is five kilometres from Murgon. It was established in 1905, initially for locals and people transferred from Deebing Creek Mission on Fraser Island and Durundur reserve near Caboolture. When Mathew visited Barambah in 1906, it was a raw, artificial community of several language groups numbering about 300, but already well on the way to self-sufficiency.<sup>35</sup> Mathew found that the time flew rapidly 'when...catechizing natives'.<sup>36</sup> Lack of notes on this visit make the identification of informants difficult, although many of those mentioned in *Two Representative Tribes* would have been amongst them.<sup>37</sup> One was Jenny Lind, whom he had met as a young girl: she was now a grandmother and 'Queen of the Wakka Wakka'.<sup>38</sup> He met several of her family, which helped with kinship and totems as well as language among the Wakka Wakka. 'Old Peggy' and her family were very helpful in the same way for the Kabi Kabi. His interview with Peggy strayed as *she* interrogated *him* on spiritual matters.<sup>39</sup> It is hard to imagine the scene with any other contemporary ethnographer. Another woman gave him a start in the neighbouring Gurang Gurang language.

In August 1907, when visiting Lake Condah mission in Victoria, he put his Kabi Kabi to unexpected good use in conversing with an amazed Mrs Maria MacDuff, a Kabi Kabi woman who lived there.<sup>40</sup> As Tanggauwanan, she had been taken to Victoria forty years before as a young girl and later married Isaac McDuff, from Swan Hill. She knew more than just the language, and 'had her little finger taken off when a baby at [the] third joint by spider web being tied around. Mathew had actually known her brother Davy well in the 1870s. Isaac, 190 centimetres tall and 108 kilograms, gave Mathew val-

35. Bleakley 1961, pp. 189, 199; Koepping 1977, pp. 159, 161, 162; Long 1970, pp. 102.

36. J. Mathew to D. Bates, 23 April 1907, Daisy Bates Papers, MS 365/97/folios 304–343, NLA.

37. Unless dated otherwise in Appendix, see for example, persons 7, 17, 27–29.

38. Steele 1983, pp. 243–244; Koepping 1976, pp. 32, 41.

39. Mathew 1907, p. 2. See Appendix, person 7.

40. Mathew 1910, p. 142; Maria MacDuff to J. Mathew, 12 September 1912, MS 950 (F) (9), (G), AIATSIS. See Appendix, person 1.

uable information about hair types and the phratrics (moieties), and also a long legend about an old crow. Mathew found the Lake Condah folk particularly informative.<sup>41</sup> Five years later, after he returned from a trip to Queensland, he wrote to Mrs McDuff with news from her 'country', also asking after her health.<sup>42</sup> This was surely an unusual degree of intimacy between informant and anthropologist.

In December 1907, he spent another day and a half at Lake Condah, taking down vocabularies and asking questions suggested by R.H. Mathews about myths, though not very productively.<sup>43</sup> It was difficult, when not able to spend weeks on the task. Sometimes, other problems intervened: earlier that year a visit to Ramahyuck was aborted because of the terminal illness of the missionary, F.A. Hagenauer.<sup>44</sup> In 1909, Mathew was busy again, taking copious notes on visits to Coranderrk, Lake Condah and Ebenezer in the Wimmera. His interest continued to be in language, stories, the totems and moieties and how they told each other apart. Monmoiko or Benjamin Manton at Ebenezer was very informative and consistent, as Mathew cross-checked some details three times over seven days.<sup>45</sup> At Coranderrk, he found only about six of the 60 residents 'can give information regarding aboriginal lore, so that opportunities for research will soon be gone forever'. The young people were 'ignorant of the ... lingo ... and are practically Europeans'. The Mathew family attended the mission church; John Mathew spoke at the service and a young woman sang a Sankey hymn to her own harmonium accompaniment.<sup>46</sup> Again, it was an unusual proceeding during 'scientific research'.

In 1908, Mathew renewed contact with his London ally, Professor A.H. Keane, asking him to write the preface for the new book he was writing on the Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka, which he was only too glad to do. Keane also seems to have been instrumental in persuading Fisher Unwin to publish it. He may even have suggested the title, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*, which fitted neatly in style with the recent titles by Howitt and Spencer.<sup>47</sup> In July 1910, 500 copies of *Two Representative Tribes* were published by Unwin.<sup>48</sup> Mathew's second book did not create anywhere near the same controversy as his first, although it was almost as widely reviewed.<sup>49</sup> More than half the volume now dealt with social structure and way of life of two specific tribes in some

41. J. Mathew, Notebook, MS950(F)(9), AIATSIS. See Appendix, persons 1 and 61 for further details.

42. M. MacDuff to J. Mathew, 12 September 1912, Mathew Papers, MS950, AIATSIS. An annotated transcript of the letter has been published in *Church Heritage*, vol. 9, no. 3, March 1996, pp. 191-194.

43. J. Mathew to R.H. Mathews, 11 December 1907, R.H. Mathews Correspondence etc., MS 1606/1, AIATSIS.

44. J. Mathew to R.H. Mathews, 6 June 1907, R.H. Mathews Correspondence etc., MS 1606/1, AIATSIS.

45. J. Mathew, Notebooks, MS950 (F) (1), (6) and (9), AIATSIS. See Appendix, person 62

46. Mathew 1909, pp. 1-2. According to Barak's biographer, the Coranderrk folk 'remained staunchly Presbyterian': see Wienecke 1984, p. 56.

47. J. Mathew to R.H. Mathews, 4 May 1908, 17 August 1908, 11 February 1909, R.H. Mathews Correspondence etc., MS 1606/1, AIATSIS; A.H. Keane to J. Mathew, 19 February 1908, 16 October 1909, Mathew Papers, n.d., MS 950, AIATSIS.

48. Publishing Notes in Mathew Papers, n.d., MS 950, AIATSIS.

49. E.g. *Nature*, 29 December 1910 (no author); *Man*, vol. X, no. 9, pp. 139-140 (by 'B.M.').

depth and so the controversial matters in the first chapter on origins did not bulk large in the comments. However, Keane's preface gave strong support to Mathew's origin theories and defended his scholarship against 'step-motherly' treatment by certain 'leading authorities'. He was, Keane asserted, 'immeasurably better informed than any of his opponents, Dr Howitt alone excepted'.<sup>50</sup> This support may also help to explain the more positive reception.

Between 1907 and 1913, Mathew's reputation definitely improved. Fison and Howitt died, he was reconciled with Spencer and was Vice-President of Anthropology at the 1913 A.A.A.S. Meeting. In June 1910, he read a paper to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria on pre-contact Victorian Aborigines, using linguistic evidence to highlight issues such as the close relationship of Victorian and Tasmanian Aborigines.<sup>51</sup> At the 1913 Meeting of the A.A.A.S., he presented material on the Gurang Gurang, neighbours of the Wakka Wakka and who had been settled at Barambah with them when he visited in 1906, 1912 and 1913.<sup>52</sup> The visits of 1912 and 1913 enabled double-checking earlier evidence as well as collecting new material. He continued to pursue the notion of 'light' and 'dark blood' classes (phratries or moieties), confirmed matrilineality and, in 1912, the Gurang Gurang vocabulary.<sup>53</sup> He was also able to question residents from as far afield as northern New South Wales and Burketown, on language, religious beliefs and practices, sorcery as well as relationships.<sup>54</sup>

In the middle of July 1914, the Coburg manse was visited for four days by David Unaipon (1872–1967), a Narrinyeri (Ngarrindjeri) man from Point Macleay, South Australia, well-known as a lay-preacher, author and inventor. The manse children were intrigued by his ideas about the feasibility of perpetual motion, but their father made good use of the visit and took down nine pages of notes, mainly legends, including an eaglehawk and crow story. Unaipon's desire to link Aboriginal and Christian spirituality is apparent in a story about a 'great and good Spirit whom they called the Father'. There was also information about words and relationships.<sup>55</sup>

John Mathew continued to extend his research, although it was interrupted badly by the Great War and by the preparation of his D.D. thesis in 1922 and 1923. When Moderator-General, in 1923 and 1924 he revisited Queensland and his old haunts. His penultimate visit was at the age of 75, in September 1924, before attending the Church's General Assembly of Australia in Sydney. He found the Burnett at Murgon in flood, and drove a hired jinker across a flooded creek to Barambah. As he told his wife:

I had a rare time with the blacks. Two old gins remembered me and were in ecstasy. One stretching out her hand said "Put it there." Another cried out "Kabarow! Kabarow! Kabarow!!!" ["Well done!" in Wakka Wakka] This was Jenny

50. A.H. Keane, Preface to Mathew 1910, p. xiii.

51. Mathew 1911, pp. 79–89.

52. Mathew 1913, pp. 433–443.

53. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 August 1912.

54. J. Mathew, Notebook, MS 950 (F) (6), AIATSIS.

55. J. Mathew, Notebook, MS 950 (Aa) (3) (ii); R.Y. Mathew, note in MS 950 (E) (1), AIATSIS.

Unaipon spent some time in Melbourne in 1914. He gave a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society on the history of his people and received financial assistance from new friends: see Jenkin 1979, pp. 251–252. See Appendix, person 77.

Lind the half caste—a wonderful vigorous specimen for 70 years of age ... I have added a little to my stock of folk-lore.<sup>56</sup>

Allowing for changing idiom, there is more respect and affection between researcher and subject expressed here than was customary, even in the 1920s. He returned the next month; he revisited Barambah on 8th October, taking down words there from Harry Ord, a speaker of Kiramai, the Herbert River language. He was continuing to send out questionnaires. These investigations and a visit to Lake Tyers in June provided information for an article in the *Australasian* in 1925<sup>57</sup> and four papers given to the A.A.A.S. meeting in Perth in 1926. The latter incorporated vocabularies of four languages of Queensland, and a substantial synthesis of research on Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices.<sup>58</sup> It was in the same year that he and Baldwin Spencer were appointed to the Anthropology Committee of the Australian National Research Council. They were the only living links between the pioneers of systematic anthropology and university-trained, fully professional scholars and field workers. Equally symbolically, they both died in 1929.

There are both similarities and differences between the other pioneers of anthropology and John Mathew. Unlike several of his colleagues, he was not acting as a local 'agent' for overseas theorists in search of evidence to bolster their theories ('jackals' to the 'lions', as Mathew put it). He did attempt later to find overseas allies, but only in self-defence. Indeed, his challenges to some of the pet theories of his contemporary Australian scholars were not motivated by preconceived theory, but by what he observed and was told by Aboriginal people. His fieldwork was perhaps more opportunist than some of his contemporaries in the sense that he was a very busy man with many other duties and interests, and would do research where, when and with whom he could. Admittedly, in later years, he was particularly interested to ask questions related to his *own* theories, but he collected data about anything (e.g. the music for a corroboree) from any Aboriginal person he encountered, male or female, young or old, Christianised or not.

Considering the importance of language in Mathew's work, few of the identified informants (nine) are specifically referred to concerning language or vocabulary. This may be attributed to the fact that the bulk of his information on Kabi Kabi came from actually learning to speak it as a living language in the 1860s. This was augmented, deliberately in the case of Wakka Wakka and Gurang Gurang, and incidentally with other tongues, while interviewing individuals on other matters in 1884, 1906, 1913 and 1924. His posted questionnaires of the 1880s and after also yielded much vocabulary, especially of other languages.

Only eight specific references are made to informants in relation to myths and legends, when the 'Eaglehawk/Crow' motif was very important to Mathew's origin theory. Again, he picked up Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka material in the 1860s, and much published research by others on other parts of the continent was also ransacked for

<sup>56</sup> J. Mathew to W. Mathew, 7 September 1924, from Murgon, quoted, Mathew 1973, p. 189 (original in possession of Dr. J.Y. Mathew).

<sup>57</sup> Mathew 1925.

<sup>58</sup> Mathew 1926a, pp. 524–540; Mathew 1926b, pp. 540–547; Mathew 1926c, pp. 547–550; Mathew 1926d, pp. 551–552.



folklore. Some came from correspondence, for example with Daisy Bates in Western Australia.

Many more informants are mentioned in relation to real or perceived differences in physical appearance of people, especially in relation to real or perceived differences between 'phratries' (moieties), another element in Mathew's trihybrid origin theory. Subjects canvassed included 'dark and light blood' (5), skin colour (3), stature (2), hair colour or curliness (10) and general appearance (4).

The most common uses of informants' material was to illustrate discussions of 'phratries' (moieties) or 'classes' and sections (36) and totems (14). Other matters of interview specifically noted included also religious matters in general (3), and seven dealing with the overlapping matters of healing, magic, quartz crystals and clever men and one on initiation. Funerary and courting customs, artefacts, points of the compass and infanticide are also discussed in relation to specific informants. His treatments of a range of other subjects, such as arithmetic and numbers and body decoration, do not refer to named or identified informants,

Of the identified 77 (witting or unwitting) informants listed in the appendix, 54 were male and 23 female. Mathew seems not to have intruded much on secret business, or sexual matters, except in fairly general terms. He seems from his own account to have got on as well with women as men, the incident at Durundur when he was not quite 16 showing evidence of a degree of respect for an unknown Aboriginal woman. The ages of his informants varied a good deal, but many of those who were elderly he had known when they were young. Most of his person-to-person work in Victoria was between the 1890s and 1912, so naturally he dealt there with mostly older people who remembered the 'traditional' ways better.

Mathew was aware of the pitfalls of talking to Aboriginal informants in English, which he had to do in Victoria, and was able to use Kabi Kabi and to an extent Wakka Wakka in interviews in Queensland. Acculturation needed to be 'peeled away', especially when he was dealing with Aboriginal Christians. However, it was not always clear how much acculturation had affected memories especially of the old religious beliefs. Mathew strongly affirmed that the Aborigines indeed *had* religion and that they were aware of a kind of 'all-Father' or supreme being. A good example of this dilemma was the few days he spent in 1914 with David Unaipon, who later published 'native legends' in a form compatible with his evangelical Christian beliefs. On a personal level, Mathew was quite keen to identify with and encourage them as fellow Christians.

As far as listed informants were concerned, most were contacted at or about Manumbar and Yabba in the 1860s and 1884, at Barambah Aboriginal station in 1906, 1912, 1913 and 1924 and at Victorian stations Ebenezer (one), Ramahyuck (one), Lake Tyers (one), Coranderrk (two) and Lake Condah (12). There were clearly others of whom record is lost, especially in case of Coranderrk, which he visited several times and the visit to La Perouse in 1895 yielded only one identified informant and little useful information. The exposure to Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka culture was most sustained. In the case of Victorian people, Mathew had to be content with shorter but more frequent visits to build up rapport and confidence. With revisits, especially to Lake Condah, he was able to check informants' memories and consistency by going over

some points three times in different ways. So, by adding a day or two at a time, he was able to cover and re-cover a lot of ground, especially at Lake Condah.

The interviewing methods of John Mathew were clearly not the same as more recent academic anthropologists, nor did he immerse himself to the degree some have done. It could be said that relationships of personal friendliness would have compromised his and his informants' 'objectivity' or accuracy. Inevitably, especially in Victoria when he was a clergyman, he was an authority figure, however friendly. Being associated with acceptable white people like John Green or Joseph Shaw or Ann Fraser Bon at Coranderrk would have helped him in some ways, but a too close association with figures like Hagenauer at Ramahyuck could easily have constrained both his informants' answers and his questions. At Barambah, on the other hand, he had the advantages of language facility, long-term familiarity and being actually related to the people he interviewed as a member of the Balkuin section of the Kabi Kabi, and also *not* being the government.

Despite being a white male authority figure, Mathew had various factors in his favour to put informants at their ease, not least his tact and his boyish enthusiasm. To attend chapel with the residents of Coranderrk and write to Maria MacDuff at Lake Condah were not the usual duties of an anthropologist. His less formal relationships with some of his informants could shake loose incidental, unexpected or unusual information on Maria MacDuff's missing little finger or Harry Ord's reference to dilly bags.

While those of John Mathew's Aboriginal informants who were, in some sense, friends but were also sometimes unwittingly scientific specimens or case-studies, they did not cease to be friends, albeit different from his white friends. It was not that they were inferior: he was strongly wedded to the Christian belief in the equality of all persons in the eyes of the Creator and he was also in awe of the richly nuanced languages and highly elaborate kinship systems of Aboriginal societies.

Though he was able to speak to a wide range of Aboriginal people on many subjects, he was heavily constrained by the nature of his calling, whereby he was restricted not only in time but geographically spread. He had to rely for information on inland tribes on informants who found themselves shipped off to stations like Barambah, such as Harry Ord, Wai (Maggie McLean) and Fred Ingham (numbers 72, 49 and 44).

The question whether Mathew's often less formal relationships with informants was a help or a hindrance to his anthropology yields no definitive answer. It was both. Considerations of Victorian manners and of Aboriginal secrecy limited direct information on sacred and sexual matters, but did not entirely prevent research on those matters. Matters of folklore and language were probably more forthcoming, given Mathew's interests and his ability to communicate. Some of his friendly informants were eager to please, and this could cut both ways. On occasions, they no doubt told him what he wanted to hear as well as occasionally delving into some more personal and family matters. It is hard to imagine another anthropologist being asked to look out for his informant's daughter who had moved to the big city, let alone doing it.

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## Appendix: John Mathew's Aboriginal informants

Unlike some of his contemporary anthropologist colleagues, John Mathew frequently named his Aboriginal informants. Sometimes, he adds interesting personal details which might be strictly speaking irrelevant to the point he is making. The list below is based on published works and research notes. It includes not only those interviewed in any formal sense but also persons he simply knew in the 1860s or observed. It does not include all individuals to whom reference is made in written questionnaires or in the papers and books of other scholars.

### Abbreviations

- AAAS    *Reports of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science.*  
 CPC    *Coburg Presbyterian Chronicle*  
 Curr    J. Mathew 'No. 166—Mary River and Bunya Bunya Country,' in *The Australian Race* by E.M. Curr (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1887), vol. III, pp. 152–209.  
 RSNWSW J. Mathew, 'The Australian Aborigines,' *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, XXIII (1889), pp. 335–449.  
 E & C    J. Mathew, *Eaglehawk and Crow* (Melbourne: Melville, Mullen & Slade, 1899).  
 TRTQ    J. Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland* (London & Leipzig: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910).  
 JRAI    J. Mathew, 'The Origin of the Australian Phratries and Explanation of some of the Phratry Names,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, XL (1910), pp. 165–170.  
 Steele    J.G. Steele, *Aboriginal Pathways in Southeast Queensland and the Richmond River* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1983).  
 VHM    J. Mathew, 'The Origin, Distribution, and Social Organization of the Inhabitants of Victoria before the Advent of Europeans,' *Victorian Historical Magazine*, I (September 1911), pp. 79–89.

### Contents

Informant numbers	State	Informant numbers	State
1–49	Queensland	72–76	New South Wales
50–71	Victoria	77	South Australia

## Comments on informant details

AGE [of the informant]	at the time of meeting Mathew
Language group	what some might call 'tribe', mostly Kabi Kabi or Wakka Wakka
Clan	the local group or 'horde' within the wider 'tribe'
Reference in published works	by John Mathew
Reference in notes, letters etc.	unless noted otherwise, held by AIATSIS

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Clan<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works<br>Reference in notes, letters etc.<br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered<br>Purpose of published reference | <b>Tanggauwanan</b><br>(Mrs) Maria McDuff<br>Lake Condah, Vic.<br>60+?<br>Kabi<br>Gundabora<br>12 miles from Maryborough, Qld.<br>•Moved to Vic. ca. 1867<br>•Married to Isaac McDuff, from NW Vic.<br>•Dherwain-gan section<br>•Opossum totem (muroirai)<br>•Batjala dialect, Fraser Island<br>TRTQ, 142, 160<br>MS950 (F) (9), (G)<br>14/8/1907<br>Language<br>•'classes' and bloods<br>•Language<br>•religion |
| 2 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Clan<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works  | <b>Yanbirinya</b><br>Davy<br>S.E. Qld<br>Young<br>Kabi<br>Gigabora<br>Widgee<br>•Mrs McDuff's brother (see no. 1), or once betrothed to her<br>•Barang class<br>•Nguruin (emu) totem<br>TRTQ, 146  |
| 3 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Language group  | <b>Wanggumbalu</b><br>S.E. Qld, not met,<br>Kabi   |

	Clan	Gundabora
	Locality of origin	South of Mt Boppel, Near Maryborough
	Other comments	•Father of Mrs McDuff •Balkuin section •Opossum totem (koroi)
	Reference in published works	<i>TRTQ</i> , 146
	Purpose of published reference	Phratries, 'classes' and totems
4	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Bondobin</b>
	Where contacted	not actually met, S.E. Qld.
	Language group	Kabi
	Clan	Dauwabora
	Locality of origin	North of Mt Boppel
	Other comments	•Mother of Mrs McDuff •Bondagan section
	Reference in published works	<i>TRTQ</i> , 146, 170
	Purpose of published reference	Phratries, 'classes' and totems
5	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Walareyan's twin sister (see no. 13)</b>
	Where contacted	Manumbar
	Age	infant
	Language group	Kabi
	Other comments	Killed as infant
	Reference in published works	<i>TRTQ</i> , 74-5
	Date of contact	1860s
6	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Kilkoi</b>
	Where contacted	Manumbar
	Language group	Kabi
	Other comments	Dherwain section
	Reference in published works	<i>TRTQ</i> , 137, 177
	Date of contact	1860s
	Purpose of published reference	'classes', quartz
7	<b>European name</b>	<b>Peggy</b>
	Where contacted	Barumbah
	Age	'old'
	Language group	Kabi
	Other comments	Mother of Arthur (no. 25)
	Reference in published works	<i>TRTQ</i> , 148 <i>CPC</i> , Jan 1907
	Date of contact	Oct. 1906
	Purpose of published reference	Table of relationships
8	<b>European name</b>	<b>Donald</b>
	Where contacted	Manumbar
	Age	boy
	Language group	Kabi
	Other comments	Lame from knife wound

- |    |                                |   |
|----|--------------------------------|---|
|    | Reference in published works   | TRTQ, 123   |
|    | Date of contact                | Curr, 176<br>1860s  |
| 9  | <b>European name</b>           | <b>Dick</b>   |
|    | Other comments                 | Married to Fanny (no. 10)   |
|    | Reference in published works   | TRTQ, 75  |
| 10 | <b>European name</b>           | <b>Fanny</b>  |
|    | Other comments                 | Married to Dick (no. 9)   |
|    | Reference in published works   | TRTQ, 75  |
|    | Purpose of published reference | Skin colour and statue  |
| 11 | <b>European name</b>           | <b>Dougal</b>   |
|    | Where contacted                | Manumbar; Yabber Station  |
|    | Language group                 | Kabi  |
|    | Other comments                 | •'poor, unfortunate wretch'<br>•handsome (high forehead, small nose)<br>•hanged: demoralised by goldfields    |
|    | Reference in published works   | TRTQ, 75<br>E & C, 77<br>RSNSW, 386   |
|    | Date of contact                | 1860s   |
|    | Purpose of published reference | Skin colour (TRTQ), Appearance (E & C).   |
| 12 | <b>Aboriginal name</b>         | <b>Buyu Marom (name means 'fat calves')</b>   |
|    | Where contacted                | Manumbar  |
|    | Age                            | elderly in 1888   |
|    | Language group                 | Kabi  |
|    | Other comments                 | Very attached to J. Mortimer and mourned his passing (in 1888); may have been 'Jerry' (see Prentis 1998: 31). |
|    | Reference in published works   | TRTQ, 107   |
|    | Date of contact                | 1860s   |
|    | Purpose of published reference | Mourning customs  |
| 13 | <b>Aboriginal name</b>         | <b>Walareyan</b>  |
|    | Where contacted                | Manumbar  |
|    | Age                            | boy   |
|    | Language group                 | Kabi  |
|    | Other comments                 | •arm difigured<br>•a twin (see no. 5)<br>•name used in poem for a place; son's house in Coburg                |
|    | Reference in published works   | TRTQ, 74  |
|    | Date of contact                | 1860s   |
|    | Topics covered                 |   |



- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 14 | <b>European name</b><br>Age<br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br>Reference in published works   | <b>Billy Lillis</b><br><i>fl.</i> 1890s<br>Kabi<br>Yabba?<br>criminal<br>pic, <i>TRTQ</i> ?   |
| 15 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Other comments<br>Reference in published works<br><br>Date of contact<br>Purpose of published reference   | <b>'one black boy'</b><br>Manumbar<br>boy<br>Kabi<br>yellowish-brown hair<br><i>E &amp; C</i> , 75<br><i>RSNSW</i> , 384<br>1880s<br>Colour of hair |
| 16 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Language group<br>Other comments<br>Reference in published works<br>Date of contact<br>Purpose of published reference              | <b>'a blackfellow'</b><br>Cow Wah, Qld. Woodford<br>Kabi<br>via George W. Anderson<br><i>E &amp; C</i> , 118<br>1890s<br>Description of initiation  |
| 17 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Clan<br>Reference in published works<br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered<br>Purpose of published reference | <b>(a woman)</b><br>Barambah?<br>older<br>Gurang Gurang<br>Burnett River<br><i>AAAS</i> (1913), 434<br>1906? 1913?<br>Gurang language<br>Vocabulary |
| 18 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Reference in published works<br>Purpose of published reference                        | <b>Tommy Cain</b><br>Yabba, Qld / Manumbar, Kenilworth area.<br>Elderly in 1907<br>Kabi<br>Yabba<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 74<br>his curly hair              |
| 19 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Date of contact   | <b>Ball Jakka</b><br>Yabba area, Qld ( <i>via</i> James Stevens)<br>Probably 60+<br>Kabi<br>8 March 1907 (letter)                                   |

	Topics covered	Big man, station worker, musket wound on forehead—great 'witch doctor' immune to bullets
20	<b>European name</b> Where contacted Age Language group Date of contact Topics covered	<b>Old Stubbins</b> Yabba area, Qld ( <i>via</i> James Stevens) Elderly Kabi 8 March 1907 (letter) Magic; quartz crystals. A 'clever man', healed Tommy Cain (no. 18)
21	<b>European name</b> Where contacted Age Language group Date of contact Topics covered	<b>Old Sunday</b> Yabba area, Qld ( <i>via</i> James Stevens) Elderly Kabi 8 March 1907 (letter) Magic
22	<b>Aboriginal name</b> Age Language group Locality of origin Reference in published works Purpose of published reference	<b>Tindabalu</b> 60+ Kabi Gympie <i>TRTQ</i> , 71 migration stories
23	<b>European name</b> Where contacted Age Language group Other comments  Reference in published works  Date of contact Purpose of published reference	<b>'my blackboy'</b> Manumbar late teens Kabi Poem "The Aboriginal Loveletter" in <i>Australian Echoes</i> <i>TRTQ</i> , 124 <i>Curr</i> , 176 <i>E &amp; C</i> , 114 1860s message stick
24	<b>Aboriginal name</b> Other comments Reference in published works Purpose of published reference	<b>Dwangin</b> Killed all her babies at birth <i>TRTQ</i> , 166 Infanticide
25	<b>European name</b> Other comments Reference in published works Purpose of published reference	<b>'one man I knew'</b> A 'clever man' <i>TRTQ</i> , 176 About magic

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|----|--|---|
| 26 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Language group<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works   | <b>Munojan</b><br>Kabi<br>•father of Arthur (no. 27)<br>•Balkiun section<br>•Kangaroo totem<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 148  |
| 27 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Language group<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works<br>Date of contact<br>Purpose of published reference | <b>Bujirgundau</b><br>Arthur<br>Kabi<br>•Dherwain section<br>•Emu or bunya totem<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 148<br>1906?<br>•Phratrries, 'classes' and totems<br>•Table of relationships  |
| 28 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Language group<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works                                   | <b>Jiani</b><br>Charles Beattie<br>Barambah<br>Wakka?<br>•Joroin section<br>•Goanna totem<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 148  |
| 29 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Language group<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works                                   | <b>Mujinbi</b><br>Aggie<br>Barambah<br>Wakka<br>•married to Jiani (Charles Beattie), no. 28<br>•Banjurgan section<br>•Sugar-bag or honey-ant (gayer) totem<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 148 |
| 30 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Language group<br>Other comments<br>Reference in published works   | <b>Kuneraman</b><br>Kabi<br>father of Peggy<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 148  |
| 31 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Other comments  | <b>Mal</b><br>Jenny Lind<br>Barambah<br>elderly in 1924<br>Kabi/Wakka?<br>•'half caste'<br>•Baranggan section<br>•Bunya tree totem  |

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|----|--------------------------------|---|
|    | Reference in published works   | <i>TRTQ</i> , 148, 160, 165   |
|    | Date of contact                | Steele, 243-4<br>1870s, 1906, 1924  |
| 32 | <b>European name</b>           | <b>Kitty</b>  |
|    | Where contacted                | Barambah?   |
|    | Language group                 | Wakka   |
|    | Other comments                 | •Mother of Jenny Lind (no. 31)<br>•Banjurgan section<br>•Bunya tree totem   |
|    | Reference in published works   | <i>TRTQ</i> , 148   |
|    | Date of contact                | 1870s?  |
| 33 | <b>Aboriginal name</b>         | <b>Maranger</b>   |
|    | European name                  | Mary  |
|    | Where contacted                | Barambah  |
|    | Language group                 | Wakka   |
|    | Other comments                 | •Daughter of Janny Lind (no. 31)<br>•Banjurgan section<br>•Bunya tree totem |
|    | Reference in published works   | <i>TRTQ</i> , 148   |
|    | Date of contact                | 1906  |
| 34 | <b>Aboriginal name</b>         | <b>Kanan</b>  |
|    | Language group                 | Kabi  |
|    | Other comments                 | •Father of Mickey (no. 35)<br>•Barang section<br>•Turkey totem              |
|    | Reference in published works   | <i>TRTQ</i> , 148   |
|    | Purpose of published reference | sections and totems   |
| 35 | <b>Aboriginal name</b>         | <b>Bulir</b>  |
|    | European name                  | Mickey  |
|    | Language group                 | Kabi  |
|    | Other comments                 | •Husband of Jenny Lind (no. 31)<br>•Dherwain section                        |
|    | Reference in published works   | <i>TRTQ</i> , 148, 160  |
|    | Date of contact                | 1860s?  |
| 36 | <b>Aboriginal name</b>         | <b>Buwanor</b>  |
|    | European name                  | Ben   |
|    | Where contacted                | Barambah  |
|    | Language group                 | Wakka   |
|    | Other comments                 | •Jenny Lind's son (no. 31)<br>•Banjur section<br>•Bunya tree totem          |
|    | Reference in published works   | <i>TRTQ</i> , 148   |
|    | Date of contact                | 1906  |
|    | Purpose of published reference | sections and totems   |

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| 37 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Language group<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works  | <b>Bual</b><br>Kabi<br>second husband of Kami, father of Kilkaibriu (no. 39)<br>'Career of Campbell' MS, 2   |
| 38 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br>Reference in unpublished works   | <b>Kami (female)</b><br>not met<br>Kabi<br>Yabba?<br>Mother of Johnny Campbell (b. 1846) (no. 40)<br>'Career of Campbell' MS, 2  |
| 39 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br><br>Date of contact<br>Purpose of published reference   | <b>Kilkaibriu</b><br>Kabi<br>Yabba<br>•Half brother of Kagariu (no. 40)<br>•Six feet tall<br>•Son of Bual<br>1860s<br>height (over 6 ft)   |
| 40 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works<br><br>Reference in notes, letters etc<br>Date of contact<br>Purpose of published reference | <b>Kagariu</b><br>Johnny Campbell<br>Manumbar<br>c. 1834–1880<br>Kabi<br>Yabba<br>•Bushranger<br>•Hanged for rape<br>•Very ugly, 5ft 3in, strongly built<br>•Dherwain section<br><i>TRTQ</i> , 137<br><i>E &amp; C</i> , 10<br><i>RSNSW</i> , 338<br>'Career of Campbell,' MS.<br>1860s<br>Height contrast with brother (6 ft or so) |
| 41 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Other comments<br>Reference in notes, letters etc<br>Date of contact  | <b>Nelly Campbell</b><br>Manumbar<br>young 1867<br>Kabi?<br>Wife of Johnny Campbell (no. 40)<br>'Career of Campbell' MS, 6-7<br>1867   |

- 42    **Aboriginal name**                      **Waruin1, Waruindh2, Warun3, Waroon4**  
       Where contacted                      Manumbar  
       Language group                      (mother) Kabi, (father) Wakka  
       Locality of origin                    Bunya Mountains  
       Other comments                    Nickname 'Monkey' or 'Wool' (3)  
    Friend of Turandiu (4)  
       Reference in published works      *TRTQ*1, 74, 137  
    *Curr*2, 176  
    *E & C*3, 11  
    'Career of Campbell' MS,4 7  
       Date of contact                      ca. 1870  
       Purpose of published reference    1 hair, "classes"  
    2 healing by crystal  
    3 woolly hair
- 43    **Aboriginal name**                      **Turandiu**  
       Where contacted                      Manumbar  
       Age                                      youth  
       Language group                      Kabi  
       Other comments                    •Bonda section  
    •friend of Warun (no. 42)  
       Reference in published works      *TRTQ*, 137  
    *Curr*, 178  
    'Career of Campbell' MS, 7  
       Date of contact                      1860s  
       Purpose of published reference    'classes' (*TRTQ*), Native Police story (*Curr*)
- 44    **Aboriginal name**                      **Borin?**  
       European name                      Fred Ingham  
       Where contacted                      Qld: Barambah  
       Language group                      Kiramai  
       Locality of origin                    Herbert River, Queensland  
       Reference in notes, letters etc    MS 950 (F) (6)  
       Date of contact                      8.10.1924  
       Topics covered                      words, sections  
       Purpose of published reference    Kiramai Vocabulary
- 45    **European name**                      **Andrew Ball**  
       Where contacted                      Queensland  
       Reference in notes, letters etc    MS 950 (F) (6)  
       Date of contact                      1912  
       Topics covered                      Section 'Bundie'
- 46    **European name**                      **Kabu (Kabie?) Williams**  
       Reference in notes, letters etc    MS950 (F) (6)

	Date of contact	1912?
	Topics covered	•funerary practices •words •courting practices
47	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	'2 Natives'
&	Where contacted	Queensland-Barambah?
48	Locality of origin	West of Burketown
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS950 (F) (6)
	Date of contact	1912?
	Topics covered	classes and totems
49	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Wai</b>
	European name	Maggie McLean
	Language group	Wulili
	Locality of origin	born Taroom, Qld
	Other comments	Name means 'sideways'
	Reference in published works	AAAS, 1926
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS (J.Y. Mathew collection, East Hawthorn, Vic.)
	Date of contact	1924?
	Topics covered	Word list
	Purpose of published reference	Vocabulary
50	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Barak</b> ['a blackfellow']
	European name	William Barak
	Where contacted	Coranderrk, Vic
	Age	181315.8.1903
	Language group	Woiwurrung, Kulin
	Locality of origin	Yarra River
	Other comments	Related to Wonga (chief Yarra)
	Reference in published works	VHM (1911), 82
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS950 (F) (6); (E) (1)
	Date of contact	1890s
	Topics covered	words, phratry names and hair
	Purpose of published reference	phratry names (curly and straight haired)
51	<b>European name</b>	<b>Mrs Richards</b>
	Where contacted	Coranderrk, Victoria
	Age	about 60 (1909)
	Locality of origin	Ballarat
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS950 (F) (1)
	Date of contact	Jan. 1909
	Topics covered	E & C, sections and hair
52	<b>European name</b>	<b>James Cortwine (or Portwine)</b>
	Where contacted	Lake Condah, Victoria
	Age	nearly 80 y.o. (d. 1907)
	Other comments	Could be no. 51

	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS950 (F) (9) Notebook
	Date of contact	Aug. 1907
	Topics covered	Distinguishing by hair Kurokaity and Kupaity moieties
53	<b>European name</b>	<b>unknown (1)</b>
	Where contacted	Lake Condah, Victoria
	Age	under 80 years
	Reference in published works	JRAI (1910), 166
	Date of contact	1907, 1909
	Topics covered	phratries
	Purpose of published reference	dark and light blood
54	<b>European name</b>	<b>unknown (2)</b>
	Where contacted	Lake Condah, Victoria
	Age	60+
	Reference in published works	JRAI (1910), 166
	Date of contact	1907, 1909
	Topics covered	phratries
	Purpose of published reference	dark and light blood
55	<b>European name</b>	<b>unknown (3)</b>
	Where contacted	Lake Condah, Victoria
	Age	60+
	Reference in published works	JRAI (1910), 166
	Date of contact	1907, 1909
	Topics covered	phratries
	Purpose of published reference	dark and light blood
56	<b>European name</b>	<b>unknown (4)</b>
	Where contacted	Lake Condah, Victoria
	Age	60+
	Reference in published works	JRAI (1910), 166
	Date of contact	1907, 1909
	Topics covered	phratries
	Purpose of published reference	dark and light blood
57	<b>European name</b>	<b>Mary? Harry? Edwards</b>
	Where contacted	Lake Condah (?), Victoria
	Other comments	Could be 52, 53 or 54
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS 950 (F) (9) Notebook
	Date of contact	18 August 1909
	Topics covered	Differences of hair between Kukokaity and Kapaithy moieties
	Purpose of published reference	



- 58     **European name**                     **Ernest Mobourne**  
        Where contacted                     Lake Condah, Vic.  
        Reference in notes, letters etc     MS 950 (F) (9) Notebook  
        Date of contact                       1907  
        Topics covered                       •Name of Condah  
    •Sections  
    •Story of tortoise and snake
- 59     **European name**                     **Peter Ewart**  
        Where contacted                     Lake Condah, Victoria  
        Reference in notes, letters etc     MS 950 (F) (9)  
        Date of contact                       14-15/8/1907  
        Topics covered                       2 Stories (discovery of fire and election(?) of a  
    King); Vocabulary
- 60     **Aboriginal name**                     **Wirimanda**  
        European name                       Jackson Stewart  
        Where contacted                       Lake Condah, Victoria  
        Age                                        about 60 years  
        Locality of origin                     near Lake Boga  
        Other comments                       'half caste'  
        Reference in notes, letters etc     MS950 (F) (9)  
        Date of contact                       14/8/1907  
        Topics covered                       Sections; stories; initiation rites; words;  
    Supernatural beings
- 61     **European name**                     **Isaac McDuff**  
        Where contacted                       Lake Condah, Victoria  
        Age                                        elderly  
        Locality of origin                       Murray River, Swan Hill  
        Other comments                       •6 feet 3 inches and 17 stone  
    •Married to Maria, Kabi woman (see no. 1)  
        Reference in published works     JRAI (1910), 167  
        Reference in notes, letters etc     MS950 (G)  
        Date of contact                       14/8/1907, 1909  
        Topics covered                       Crow story, phratry names and hair types
- 62     **Aboriginal name**                     **Monmoiko**  
        European name                       Benjamin Manton  
        Where contacted                       Ebenezer?/Lake Condah?, Victoria  
        Language group                       Purabura  
        Locality of origin                       Swan Hill, Victoria  
        Reference in notes, letters etc     MS 950 (F) (1), Notebook  
        Date of contact                       1909  
        Topics covered                       hair types and sections
- 63     **European name**                     **Ned McLennan**  
        Where contacted                       Ebenezer?/Lake Condah?, Victoria

	Age	about 60
	Locality of origin	Pine Plains beyond Lake Albacutya (Wimmera), Victoria
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS 950 (F) (1)
	Date of contact	1909
	Topics covered	Sections/totems
64	<b>European name</b>	<b>Woodford Robinson</b>
	Locality of origin	Loddon River, Vic.
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS 950 (F) (1) Notebook.
	Date of contact	1/2/1909
65	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Nganainganaitch</b>
	European name	Anthony Anderson
	Where contacted	Lake Condah?
	Age	70-80 y.o.
	Locality of origin	Richardson River (Bendigo-Murray)
	Other comments	•Plate presented by Duke of York (1901?) •'King of Birchip'
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS950 (F) (1) Notebook.
	Date of contact	1906? 1909?
66	<b>European name</b>	<b>Darby</b>
	Where contacted	Ramahyuck, Victoria (?)
	Locality of origin	Sale, Victoria
	Reference in notes, letters etc	MS950 (F) (1) Notebook.
	Date of contact	1906? 1909?
	Topics covered	Points of Compass
67	<b>European name</b>	<b>Frank Blain</b>
	Locality of origin	Allansford, Victoria
	Date of contact	1906? 1909?
	Topics covered	Sections/marriage rules
68	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Nganainganaitch</b>
	European name	Walter Johnson
	Locality of origin	Beaufort, Victoria
	Topics covered	Section names
69	<b>Aboriginal name</b>	<b>Bidhanin</b>
	European name	King Billy
	Where contacted	Ballarat, Victoria
	Locality of origin	b. Erchildoune, Victoria
	Other comments	5 feet 4inches, very hairy indeed, 'jewish nose'
	Reference in published works	<i>E &amp; C</i> , 75-6 <i>RSNSW</i> , 385
	Date of contact	(probably not in person) 1880s
	Topics covered	physical appearance
	Purpose of published reference	to establish 'Papuan' type

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| 70 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Reference in notes, letters etc<br><br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered   | <b>Old Kitty</b><br>Lake Tyers, Victoria<br>MS 950 (Ab) (1); 'Gleanings in Aboriginal Grammar' (typescript)<br>1891, June 1925<br>Unknown 1891; Language? 1925   |
| 71 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br>Reference in published works<br>Topics covered  | <b>unknown</b><br>Victoria<br>exceptionally intelligent<br><i>JRAI</i> (1910), 167<br>phratry names  |
| 72 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Reference in notes, letters etc<br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered<br><br><br>Purpose of published reference | <b>Harry Ord</b><br>Qld (Barambah?)<br>Gidabul?<br>Colinton, Washpool, NSW<br>MS950 (F) (6) Notebook<br>1912? 1924?<br>•Sections<br>•Magic, dilly bags, clever man<br>•myths<br>•words?<br>Language etc. |
| 73 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Other comments<br>Reference in published works<br><br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered<br>Purpose of published reference                              | <b>Old Peter</b><br>Milroy station, Culgoa River, NSW<br>very hairy<br><i>E &amp; C</i> , 76<br><i>RSNSW</i> , 385<br>1880s<br>hair<br>establish physical types  |
| 74 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in published works<br><br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered  | <b>Teacup</b><br>Between Bourke and Brewarrina, N.S.W.<br>children had straw-coloured hair and copper skin<br><i>E &amp; C</i> , 75<br><i>RSNSW</i> , 384<br>1880s<br>hair and skin colour               |
| 75 | <b>European name</b><br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered   | <b>Jemmy Lounge</b><br>La Prouse, NSW<br>claimed to be 80<br>26 July 1895<br>Vocabulary  |

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|----|---|--|
| 76 | <b>European name</b><br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered   | <b>Mrs Doctor Dobbyn</b><br>'Poolamacca' dialect<br>Broken Hill, NSW<br>1928 (second-hand, by mail)<br>Vocabulary  |
| 77 | <b>Aboriginal name</b><br>European name<br>Where contacted<br>Age<br>Language group<br>Locality of origin<br>Other comments<br><br>Reference in notes, letters etc<br>Date of contact<br>Topics covered | <b>Yungaipon</b><br>David Unaipon<br>At home, Coburg, Victoria<br>42 at the time (1872-1967)<br>Ngarrinyeri<br>Mouth of Murray, Pt Macleay, S.A.<br>Inventor, Lay preacher, first published Aboriginal author<br>MS 950 (Aa) (3) (ii)<br>11-14 July 1914<br>Spiritual beliefs, E & C myths , Relationships |

# Sharing the country

Peter Read

## Belonging

Belonging to the land, to most Indigenous Australians, is one area of Aboriginal identity which seems fairly straightforward. Not so to the growing number of non-Aboriginal Australians who worry that the moral basis of their sense of belonging is not secure. Nugget Coombs believed that not until a legal agreement was drawn up would the status of the non-Indigenous be illegitimate.<sup>1</sup> Judith Wright felt that the moral gulf between owners and occupiers can never be crossed.<sup>2</sup> Duncan Graham, who edited the book *Being Whitefeller*, reflected that the non-Indigenous find shelter and comfort on the proceeds of thieves and killers. Would the buried questions, he asks, like subterranean salt, seep to the surface and poison the future?<sup>3</sup> Manning Clark neatly reversed the concept of assimilation when he wrote

Sometimes when I stand in the Australian bush on a clear windless day I am visited with strange thoughts...I wonder whether I belong. I am ready, and so are others, to understand the Aboriginal view that no human being can ever know heart's ease in a foreign land, because in a foreign land there live foreign ancestral spirits. We white people are condemned to live in a country where we have no ancestral spirits. The conqueror has become the eternal outsider, the eternal alien. We must either become assimilated or live the empty life of a people exiled from their spiritual strength.<sup>4</sup>

Can, will, or should the non-Indigenous belong to Australia as the indigenous do? And if so, how? For several years now I have tried to think through some of the many complexities of post-colonial belonging, though each new article seems to reach a conclusion different from the one before.<sup>5</sup> I would like these articles to be read, like this one, as my thinking aloud on a problem which seems ever apt to haunt all those who have their emotional roots in one or other of the former colonies of Europe.

To be sure, there are no ultimate answers about belonging; but there are several positions to be asserted, negotiated or traded by every generation, and within each generation, by many Australians of differing experience and ethnicity. Many non-Aborigi-

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1. H. C. Coombs, interviewed by the author and reproduced in Read 1994b, p. 378.

2. For example, 'Bond With The Land' in Wright 1991, pp. 13-14

3. 'No Questions Please, We're Australians', in Graham 1994, p. 107.

4. Clark 1997, p. 14.

5. For example, Read 1995 and Read 1994a.

nal farmers feel that the Australian soil has become part of their blood. First generation migrants have different feelings of belonging to their Australian-born children; suburban householders often feel that they belong to the land differently to pastoralists, or boat-people. Nor, of course, do the Indigenous people occupy any single position. There are marked generational, as well as geographical, differences among Aborigines about whether non-Aboriginal Australians belong to or merely occupy the country. Australians of every variety need to talk to each other, and probably in ways which make us listen afresh. At an Australian Studies Conference about belonging in Copenhagen, 1995, I extracted parts of a dozen discussions which I had recorded with anthropologists and historians about how they felt they belonged in relation to the people and the land with whom they had worked—to fashion a make-believe conversation between them all. There were ten actors in the presentation, two of whom were the original speakers, who read their own lines.<sup>6</sup>

The paper below is the script of a reading at the conference *Cultural Implications of the Mabo Debate* held at Wagga, in 1994. For the presentation I arranged two interviews I had made in 1993–94 as part-debate, part-play, and further to point the strengths of emotional attachments shared, though in very diverse ways, by the protagonists, I asked the Koori and White readers to reverse the roles. Thus the part of ‘Malcolm Gray’ the pastoralist, including the words in italics, was read by Mr Hewitt Whyman, a conference organiser and Wiradjuri elder, and the part of ‘Uncle Edward’, the Victorian Koori, was played by Ms Julie Janson, the non-Aboriginal Australian author of *Black Mary* and *Gunjies*.<sup>7</sup> Though the original speakers are aware of the re-arrangement, I concealed the identities of the speakers for the presentation.

Reaction to the performance was mixed. Non-Indigenous members of the audience waited for Aboriginal reaction. The Aboriginal leaders and spokespeople were cautious, bemused, unimpressed, a little critical. Aborigines in the audience who were not community leaders or representatives of organisations were more sympathetic; those raised amongst horses, dogs and sheep well understood Malcolm’s heartfelt conjunction of land and work. Some questions were directed at the readers rather than the author. Hewitt Whyman (‘Malcolm’) was asked—‘well why *did* you chop all those trees down?’

## Two modes of belonging

The presentation began by my asking the audience:

Do non-Aborigines love the landscape? If so, do they love it in the same way that Aboriginal people love the country? And if they do, what gives us non-indigenous people the right to love this land which is, in one sense or another, stolen land?

For several years I have been studying these attachments to special places by non-indigenous Australians, especially in relation to country they loved which has since been lost to them, or destroyed. The people I have worked with include those from countries from which they have emigrated or escaped from and which they can’t return to, like Yugoslavia or Vietnam, and farmers driven from rural properties after drought

6. Published as Read 1997.

7. Published as Janson 1996.

or debt crises. They include townsfolk from villages now under water like Tallangatta or Adaminaby, people who are still mourning the destroyed city of old Darwin, suburban residents evicted to make way for a motorway in the Sydney suburb of Beecroft and people from ordinary private homes which have been burnt, knocked down or just sold. Many of the feelings of attachment, loss, and mourning, for these lost places are immensely strong.

The first speaker in this exchange is a White pastoralist who no longer lives and works on the country he was born on. I'll call him Malcolm Gray, who as well as farming land of Canberra, was also a high country sheepman. First he speaks of his feelings for that country, then how he felt after he was turned off this land that he'd been born in, and which he'd worked for fifty seven years.

The response is an Aboriginal commentary on Malcolm's predicament of losing his land. It was made by a Victorian Koori elder whose own country more or less adjoins the Snowy Mountains high plains to which Malcolm was so attached. For the purposes of the dialogue I've called him Uncle Edward.

Malcolm's country, to borrow (or is to appropriate?) an Aboriginal way of thinking, ran a hundred kilometres from one side to the other, from Michelago to the Murrumbidgee headwaters near Coolamon, north-south from Yiack to Tharwa. In a residence of 56 years Malcolm Gray knew that land 'as well as the average bloke knows his backyard'.

In a world where the sexes lived their lives more separately than today, the old bushmen had the greatest influence on the boy. One was named William. William showed Malcolm his own special places: *That's where Hi [I] used to turn the cattle.* Once William gave him the last of the tucker because a young feller needed it more than an old feller like him. *I could show you the exact spot where he was sitting. I can still hear the rattle on the slab floor when he came on to the verandah of that old hut. You'd always know who it was by the creaking of the slabs.* In the high country William taught him how stop the stock damaging the more delicate vegetation, to care for the rock wallabies. *Don't ring-bark that tree, there's not many of them. Keep your horse on the trot, don't canter or it'll be the signal for your cattle to panic.* William told him something he was to remember well later in his life *You can never take an old brumby away from where he was reared. He'll never ever do any good.*

On Saturdays from the age of nine or ten, Malcolm would travel by horseback up the road from Tharwa to Naas, then he'd return by the back country, visiting each station to pick up the mail. In the manpower shortages during the Second World War he droved and worked the cattle. He spent the summers up in the high country snow leases. He broke in his first horse at 15. The high plains and the mountains, the different seasons and the ever-changing weather, he believed, had entered his soul. *Above all for everyone who's lived in that country and loved it, is that feeling of peace.' You feel safe, you feel secure, everything's familiar, you're in control, you know the seasons. You've seen it all before.* He reckoned that the mountains made the character of the men and women who lived there, and that they were pretty tough people. There were deep memories of roaring fires in a mountain hut while the wind howled and the rain came down in buckets. Would have he had loved that hut so much, he wondered, would the memory have

been so vivid, if he had not spent the day working outside, and the previous half hour feeding and tending his horse in the pouring rain?

Perhaps because he spent so much of his life alone, Malcolm was perfectly content in solitude. Horse, dog and man made a team:

*Old bushies talk to them all the time. They make great conversation. And there's nothing more beautiful than to sit on your horse on the top of a high mountain and just look, just look about as far as you can see. There's mountains rolling away, gullies and gorges and all the different colours according to the angle of the sun, the time of the year and the temperature.*

Ultimately the mountains for Malcolm meant peace and a personal fulfilment.

*A bloke's not blabbing in the pub about what he could do, it's just something he experienced himself and you share the joy with yourself. There's some very special spots, very personal special spots, and I guess that everybody who lives in open spaces has some very special places where they feel security. I don't wish to go into a great spiel about faith and all that sort of thing, but there's some very special places where you can feel very near. And that's a great feeling.*

*The freshness of the eucalypts after a thunderstorm is something that has to be tested by one's senses. It could never be described. But the feeling of great peace which descends upon one when alone in these mountains brings with it a realisation of our great creator which cannot be experienced anywhere else. I offer my thanks for being privileged in having this great experience.*

Malcolm Gray's country was also socialised country. In 1952 he married Ann who ignored the advice, 'that little bloke's no good for anything off his horse'. Ann's family too had been in the district for over a hundred years. For 35 years they raised their four kids and lived at stations at places which are familiar names to Canberrans—Gudgenby, Honeysuckle Creek, and Naas. *We always lived within hearing of a running stream, and at Gudgenby you could predict the degree of frost by the sound of the water coming down the gorge.* I could take you to the exact spot. There were special places which burned into his memory and which he never forgot: the exact spot where he buried his best dog, where he mastered a particularly high-spirited horse, the well where he kept trout alive after catching them in the creek.

All their lives Malcolm and Ann knew that the Federal government would sooner or later resume the farming country in the settled valleys and hills which form the southern end of the Australian Capital Territory. *But we never dreamed it would come.* In 1968 Malcolm read in the *Canberra Times* that the 29 property owners in the Orroral valley would be given three months to 'treat', that is, to negotiate the removal of themselves, their stock and belongings out of the valley. There would be free agistment of cattle for the first year, leased adjustment in the second, then the government would resume the land. The Orroral valley was designated as 'low-level bushland recreation with provision for public access for bushwalking orienteering, camping, public appreciation and education'. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service planners believed that grazing was 'inconsistent with current Australian national park philosophy', recommended that the eastern portion of Gudgenby station be kept as open grassland, the western side to be allowed to 'regenerate naturally' and that any farmer who remained would find life pretty hard from now on.<sup>8</sup>



For the next two decades after Malcolm and Ann were invited to negotiate with the government about leaving, the multitude of government departments involved in the creation of the national park dithered about policy. Fourteen separate statutes were in force in the park's legislative management. For a time the graziers, almost all of whom had lived there all their lives, were allowed to remain only on a weekly basis. Improvements were pointless. There was no purpose in putting up a water tank, let alone a lucerne crop, if you didn't know whether you would be around to collect the water or the crop. Employees changed frequently both in the field and in head office. Nobody, in Malcolm's recollection, seemed aware of any kind of overall policy.

Grazing, not just on high country, but anywhere, had become unfashionable in the National Parks. There was a noticeable prejudice in certain areas of the government and the green movement, which, probably in answer to previous equally unbalanced assessments, devalued non-Aboriginal material culture. Though there were the remains of at least a dozen homesteads in the Orroral Valley, and much other evidence of European occupation in the area, it seemed that no government official wanted to know anything about them. A 1976 Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service assessed the cultural history of the area thus:

*There are no buildings in the area which, in our opinion, justify preservation, except the slab building near Bobeyan.*<sup>9</sup>

And now, one by one, the farmers were leaving. A survey carried out by Australian National Parks and Wildlife predicted that 'it should be possible to arrange alternative accommodation for these residents without undue hardship or great expense'.<sup>10</sup>

### Leaving the land

It was the 5th of March 1986. Malcolm's memories are only of pain:

*I'll never forget it*

*Bloody awful.*

*All the sheep, cattle, horses, the dogs, all our furniture, all our belongings, the whole lot—went.*

The last fifteen sheep were loaded into the trailer of the ute:

*A friend came out in his horse trailer and we loaded my horse. It was the last animal to leave the place.*

Malcolm's new property was a 3 500 hectare farm on the south central plains of New South Wales. It was productive country which, in 1994, Malcolm felt that he could respect but not love: *I doubt if it'll ever be that real home here, but it will be to Ann.* He had not tried to reset his roots into the plains; no, *belonging in new country has to come from within.* In the first years after the move, he felt totally alienated. One by one he sold his horses: there were no hills to ride on, so what was the point of keeping them?

A year after his arrival, he wrote a poem about the experience.

8. ACT Parks and Conservation Service 1986, p. 47.

9. Margules and Deverson Pty Ltd 1976, p. 15.

10. Ibid., pp. 6, 48.

*I was sitting out there on the front verandah and the wind was blowing across the stubble paddock with these great swirls of dust. It was dry and it was desolate and it was hot. And I thought to myself, 'My God, what have I done?'*

*The First Summer after Leaving the Mountains*

*As I stand out on this open plain  
I think of the place from where I came  
Where the everlasting daisies grow.  
That's where I would like to go.*

*Where the alpine ash grows straight and tall  
And the lyrebird to his mate he calls  
And the magpie with his joyous singing  
Sets the mountain ranges ringing.*

*For the mountain air is so pure and clear  
That every bird call one can hear  
Now the red dust blows about my feet  
And my body wilts from this dreadful heat*

*What I would give once more to roam  
In my beloved mountain home.*

The absence of the mountains was almost too much to bear. Worst was the feeling of terrible loneliness I suppose, a craving for familiarity. Malcolm's mind wandered ever to the mountains; I may be an oversensitive bloke, but memories come back every day. It might be the Coolamon Plain, up on the Snowy Mountains, it could be Murray Creek in behind Mt Bimberi, Gudgenby, or riding at Bobeyan with old William when I was a little boy. Could be rabbiting over on the Murrumbidgee River.

Few outsiders seemed to Malcolm to appreciate the achievements of the Orroral farmers, nor the depth of his own attachments. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* praising the Namadgi park for bushwalkers stated that the country was empty because the farmers had failed and abandoned their holdings. Malcolm wrote a reply (which the *Herald* did not publish) in which he argued that he and his fellow farmers had not walked off, but been forced off:

*We didn't walk off owing to failure, but because of Government Resumption and in some cases a leaseback with insecure tenure. The farmers loved and respected and worked with the land and the environment. ...*

*To say that these people failed is incorrect. Fine merino wool and cattle were produced on a viable basis. Orroral valley operated by the Gregory family and Gudgenby by the Bootes family, with its magnificent Hereford cattle are two classic examples.*

*As for people walking off, there are still families at Naas Valley that have remained for four generations. ...*

*My wife and I moved out because of resumption and insecure land tenure, not because of any failure.*

To the criticism that farmers had no place in national parks, Malcolm wrote his own private answer:

*I've smelled the sweat of a wild bush horse  
Felt the thrill of a reckless dash*

*As we've wheeled the mobs to the mountain yards  
To the tune of a greenhide lash.*

*The mountains at first were my cradle  
They later became my home  
Now the bosses who live in Canberra  
Tell me that in them I no longer can roam*

*I've seen the mists and the fogs in the valleys  
I've seen the beautiful sunset hues  
As they change with the season, the mountains  
To beautiful mauves and blues*

*The wildflowers that bloom in the mountains  
Come forth with each new spring  
How they survive through the harshness of winter  
Is truly a remarkable thing.*

*They tell me the hooves of my horses  
Or the trample of cloven feet  
Will kill all these beautiful flowers  
But this idea sure has me beat.*

*For a hundred years now and better  
Stockmen have used these hills  
And as I look over the country  
I certainly see no ills.*

*And now as I enter my twilight  
I think and look back on the years  
I'm forbidden to live in these mountains  
And my only response is my tears.*

Malcolm conceded that traditional Aboriginal knowledge of his country was greater than his: Whitefellers like himself lived on introduced food like rabbits and trout. I asked him if it was possible to say who loved the country more? He replied that he didn't know how much the Aboriginal people loved it, but, such was his own love for the land that he could not imagine Aborigines loving it any more than he did. Malcolm felt alienated and unhappy away from his country. He didn't survive by technology or labour, but by an intimate knowledge of the land. He followed similar management practices like burning the grasslands for renewed growth. He could recognise a multitude of species and name certain sites of personal or public significance. Living and working in the country endowed him, he believed, with moral responsibilities to protect certain species of plants and animals. He had an intimate affinity with animals, especially horses and dogs. He sprang from the 'chosen people', the old families who believed they knew it, spoke for it and cared for it. He was taught by older men; he felt he had a right of belonging conferred by birth, memory, long residence and his 46 years of work. Land was something to be loved, enjoyed, lived in and thought about, and also it was a duty, a care, a business, and an employment. Experience and memory created attachment, attachment was love, and farmers like Malcolm and Ann loved their particular part of the country to the depth of their beings.

### Uncle Edward's country

The differences between non-Aboriginal 'love' of country and Aboriginal attachments are great. Among the most important is that to Aboriginal people there is no intellectual barrier between the physical and non-physical. A boulder may be a boulder and a spirit-being simultaneously. In this enormously spiritualised Aboriginal landscape, animals speak their own language, spirits are objects, trees cry out, the earth weeps.

The response was made by Uncle Edward:

*He seems to think that the mountain men were the ones who opened up the hills and the mountains. But the way they opened the land was also to destroy it. They've left behind noxious weeds, they've left behind trails that can never ever be replaced by topsoil again because the hard-hooved animals that cross these trails, and the offspring of these animals are still roaming that land now. The erosion that goes along with all that is more desecration than the stockmen will ever understand...*

*The other part in that invasion of the high country, there was never ever any respect of the indigenous people of those areas and how they managed to use the land for thousands of years, and how the land provided for their needs in food resources. Now they don't seem to understand that a lot of the very special indigenous plants which are very important to Aboriginal people, which are part of their daily diet or are important as medicine plants, are almost non-existent in those areas any more. The same applies to the coastal area, where there's been any farming or development. Maybe compensation should be paid for that destruction, its something that will certainly be looked at under Mabo Native Title.*

*I can understand his relationship to that land in that time and that area, but he says there was no harm done by what they were doing, but in realistic terms there was a lot of damage. White farmers don't love the land in the same context as the Aboriginal people. Australian European people have lost contact with the land over the last 2 500-3 000 years....There's no comparison.*

*I can understand non-Aboriginal people who maybe come from a farming background and have a relationship with the land, and they see a similarity to the land they're using with where they came from, and they become very attached and very spiritualised as well, I suppose, to that country, and feel they're protecting and looking after it; but in realistic terms they're destroying it. But world wide there's an awareness of destroying the country, and people are becoming more concerned about it....I respect [that] in this context, yeah I do think they develop a spiritual relationship with the land.*

*Malcolm says 'I don't know how much Aboriginal people loved the land, but I couldn't love it more'. Well what he's saying is from his own personal experience. What he's done is never understand the Aboriginal loving of the land. He's never given himself time to understand, maybe never been given the chance to meet Aboriginal people to understand their love for the land; but what he's done is to look through his feelings and his life-span over that land, and he says he loves it. Sure, we understand when he says he loves the land, but he loves it because it's his. He looks at it, and he can see boundary paddocks, and he says 'I love this land because it's mine and no-one's going to come and take it, I want to hand it down to me grandchildren and their grandchildren.'*

*But the land was already handed down and loved by the Aboriginal people before this man came along with his love for the land. He's stolen the land to love it himself. He should have met the owners to understand how they loved it, so he can love it: he wouldn't have cleared the land then. If he loved the land he wouldn't have cleared it.*

*Maybe if they'd 've sat down with the Indigenous owners of this country and got an education about the land and the feeling for the land, then maybe this country wouldn't be so barren and empty now.*

*Maybe it'd be different if he hadn't cleared any land. Yeah, he's coming from a human-being basis. He's surviving, the land's accepted him, and he's giving it respect back by living in harmony with it. He's built himself a little hut at the corner of the bush spot, he's watchin the birds and the animals come each morning, yeah, he's just getting a bit of respect back from what he's contributing to the land.*

*Yeah, he feels for it more deeply and everything that's in the ecology of that area. And maybe he's connecting up with our ancestors, that spiritual side of things that's helping him.*

*They mightn't realise it, sometimes they might be camping on a particular spot that's a ceremonial ground, and those spirits will always be there. If he's sitting around the fire at night and he happens to hear the wind howling through the trees, he might think it's the wind, but it's actually the spiritual people talking to him.*

Malcolm also revisited his birth country and he also was bitter about its rapid degradation. Soon after he and most of the other families left the Orroral Valley, pigs, wild dogs, rabbits and noxious weeds multiplied. Fences fell down, houses lay empty, were demolished or vandalised. Gardens were overrun, pastures overgrown. He took his son James to have a last look at Horse Gully. *It won't be the same again.*

After all that the Indigenous people of this land have suffered, and are still suffering, it seems almost the last colonial insult to start claiming that the invaders love the land too. *But it's clear that they do.* We are serving no useful purpose in pretending otherwise

Is there hope of reconciling the two deep attachments? Have we come to the point when those of us involved in studying the relations between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, all of us anthropologists and linguists and historians, and artists and playwrights and poets and teachers—should stop making the non-Indigenous always the bad guy? Somehow we have to factor these powerful non-Aboriginal emotions into the already powerful and emotional Native Title equation—and into the even wider equation of national identity and belonging.

My question is this: do we need to be as pessimistic as Malcolm and Uncle Edward have been, or are there areas in which all of us Australians can combine? How do they relate to the other issues of the national debate, like dispossession, deaths in custody, identity, stolen children and belonging?

### **Claims and counter-claims**

The 1994 conference at which this paper was presented was impelled by the 1992 Mabo judgment, which, as Noel Pearson put it, threw the country into the social, political and psychological turmoil and confusion it had to have.<sup>11</sup> Another consequence of this turmoil was, I think, the increasing articulation by non-Aborigines of attachments to particular pieces of and rather more firm and more self-conscious than anything they had offered in the previous two or three decades. While most such statements were not

<sup>11</sup> Pearson 1996, p. 14.

exactly put in opposition to Aboriginal claims it would be a mistake to suppose that the authors were entirely ingenuous. The Prime Minister's and some Premiers' refusal to countenance the sharing of pastoral lands foreshadowed in the 1996 Wik judgment seemed to make the whole debate about belonging redundant, had it not been for the determination of local groups in many parts of the country to negotiate an accommodation of interests between the Indigenous people and themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Sharing memories of using the land has proved equally thorny, and for some time the national debate stalled at the general and theoretical. 'Uncle Edward' conceded that those who did not harm the land in any way might think themselves to be True Australians, a generous concession to a city sympathiser, but one which would not help Malcolm who genuinely loved—because he made use of—a particular stretch of land. An unnamed speaker on Radio National said:

We Aboriginal people don't believe that we have a monopoly of spirituality. But we believe that we've practised it a little longer. You can only have that if you're connected to the land and you come from the position of belief in what it represents.<sup>13</sup>

Pat Dodson wrote:

I don't think [non-Aboriginals] are excluded but I do think they've got to grow up and be part of the spirituality that's based on the law of the land. You just don't extend that to people unless they've demonstrated their maturity for it.<sup>14</sup>

A turning point toward the particular may have occurred in August 1998. Aboriginal ceremonial leaders drawn from several parts of the country arrived ritually to cleanse the site of the old Canberra Hospital (soon to be the location of the Australian Museum). During the ceremony they invited non-Aboriginal women to join the Indigenous women as they danced through the smoke of the ritual fires. Many of those women had participated at Canberra Hospital in their own rites of birth, sickness and death; and a child had been killed during the demolition. Not only did the invitation to the non-Aboriginal women seem an act of immense generosity, I thought it also significant because all those present were sharing a quite precise expression of belonging to that site. The Non-Aborigines danced because their memories attached them to that place, the Aboriginals danced because it was Aboriginal land.

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, at the Willandra Lakes National Park, where 16 property owners have signed individual agreements with Aboriginal negotiators.

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# Paper yabber: The messenger and the message

Rob Foster

## Introduction

One of the tasks often given to Aboriginal people on the Australian frontier was that of messenger, and the messages they carried, usually letters, came to be known by the Pidgin English phrase 'paper yabber' or, less commonly, 'paper talk'. The first part of the paper will examine characteristic features of the Aboriginal role as messenger, or 'mailman'. The second part is a study of the Australian folklore that sprang up around the practice, in particular the seemingly ubiquitous story of paper yabber and the 'tobacco thief'. In tracing the history of this story, and its variants, one not only gets an insight into the function of popular stereotypes, but also the mechanisms by which they are transmitted.

## The messengers

The utilisation of Aborigines as message carriers for Europeans developed very early on the Australian frontier and was an extension of the Aboriginal role as guide. Daniel Brock records an early example of this practice in his account of Charles Sturt's 1844 expedition to the Lake Eyre region. Early in the expedition the party stayed at Moorundie on the River Murray where Edward Eyre, the Aboriginal Sub-Protector, arranged for a number of Aboriginal men to guide them north. About a month out of Moorundie, Sturt used Jacky, one of the guides, to carry a dispatch for the Governor back to Eyre at Moorundie. On 13 October Jacky, with two companions, reappeared in camp holding up the return message from the Governor and saying 'Jacky—flour and tomahawk'. He had travelled 300 miles in eleven days on the promise of flour and a tomahawk. Several days later he set off with another dispatch to carry with him on his return journey.<sup>1</sup>

The employment of Aborigines as messengers was particularly characteristic of the marginal cattle country of central Australia where great distances often separated towns and stations, and where communications were difficult. From a European perspective, knowledge of the country and bush skills made Aborigines ideally suited to this task. Writing in 1902, Robert Bruce, owner of Coondambo Station in northern South Australia, indicated the frequency of the practice when he wrote that 'forty years ago blackfellows generally acted as postmen between stations'.<sup>2</sup> Despite what Bruce implies

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<sup>1</sup> Brock 1988, pp. 47–52.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce 1973, pp. 173–175.



in this passage, the practice continued to be a feature of outback life at least until the 1940s. Common sources of anecdotes on the subject are the expedition records of late colonial explorers and anthropologists,<sup>3</sup> colonial reminiscences of bush life,<sup>4</sup> and travel books, or books about outback life, published between the turn of the century and the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

Over time the Aboriginal role of message carrier took on more formal, even ritual, qualities. According to most accounts, it became customary for the message to be carried in the end of a cleft stick. Alfred Howitt, in his discussion of messengers and message sticks, provides the most detailed account of the practice, and an explanation of its significance. In reference to the Kamilaroi of New South Wales, Howitt stated that they had 'official' heralds who could travel safely between adjoining tribes and that because they were well known they had no need to 'carry any badge or emblem of office'. However, if employed as a white man's messenger the paper was 'fastened in the end of a split stick':

Carrying this before him, he might pass safely through an enemy's country, because he was seen to be the white man's messenger, and if any harm were done to him, the tribe of the white man would be very angry.<sup>6</sup>

Howitt employed the technique in his own dealings with Aborigines. Returning to Adelaide from the Cooper's Creek region in the 1860s, presumably when engaged in the Burke and Wills rescue expedition, he reached a point where he had to send one of his guides back to his country:

To ensure his good treatment by any white man he might meet on his way through the settlements, I wrote a sort of passport which I folded up and put into the end of a stick. I explained to him what it was, and when he sorrowfully started on his long journey he carried the stick perpendicularly in his hand in front of himself, as a sort of talisman which would ensure safety.<sup>7</sup>

This is the earliest account I have found to the use of the 'split stick' to carry messages. Writing in the 1930s, R B Plowman's description of the technique of carrying paper yabber indicates that nothing much had changed in the seventy years since Howitt departed the Cooper:

As [the messenger] approached he held his right hand extended before him at the full length of his arm. Firmly grasped in his hand was a stick about twelve inches long and a quarter of an inch in diameter. The top end had been slit for about five inches, and in this slit was an envelope. The top of the slit was tied with a piece of string to keep it closed, and the envelope was thus held firmly in place.<sup>8</sup>

As Howitt explains, the stick in which the paper yabber was carried served as a visible symbol of neutrality to members of other tribal groups that the messenger might

3. Lindsay 1893, p. 46; Tietkens 1961, p. 16; Gillen 1968, p. 303.

4. Bruce 1973, pp. 173-75; Millett 1872, p. 81; Tilbrook, H. No Date, *Reminiscences of Henry Hammond Tilbrook, 1889-1923*, Mortlock Library PRG 180/1-4. bk. 1 series 1. vol. 1, pp. 198-99.

5. Bolam 1927, p. 119; Brown & Studdy-Clift 1990, p. 100; Plowman 1933, pp. 130-132; Spencer 1928, p. 546; Warburton 1937, p. 150.

6. Howitt 1904, p. 688.

7. Ibid.

8. Plowman 1933, pp. 129-130.

encounter on his travels. Baldwin Spencer was of the same opinion when he wrote that the carrying of paper yabber in a cleft stick served as an 'emblem' which ensured the carrier's safety. He also noted the similarity to the traditional role of messengers:

The natives are quite accustomed to messengers travelling from tribe to tribe to summon distant groups to take part in sacred ceremonies. Such messengers always carried a token of some kind—very often a sacred stick or bullroarer. Their persons are always safe, and so this safety has been transferred to natives carrying 'paper yabbers' for the white man.<sup>9</sup>

In most accounts of paper yabber it was made clear that it was customary to give the messenger a reward for his services, often flour and tobacco, perhaps an article of clothing, or simply a 'feed'. In 1932 the adventurer, Michael Terry, recorded in his diary that he gave an Aborigine 'a hunk of meat and bread and 1 stick of tobacco' as payment for carrying a paper yabber.<sup>10</sup> Writing of his experiences on the west coast of South Australia in the 1880s the explorer Walter Tietkens made the point that Aborigines who carried these messages often had to travel large distances and pass through stations where they may not have been welcome, so he gave them a card to present at the stations along the way which read 'give him a feed and send him on'.<sup>11</sup> He added that if it had not been for the card of introduction the messenger would have been 'hunted'.

A feature of many of the accounts of Aboriginal messengers is that they were often told to illustrate the good character of the subjects. In *An Australian Parsonage; or, the Settler and the Savage in Western Australia*, Mrs Edward Millet wrote that the Aborigines on her station willingly carried letters, the 'safe conveyance' of which they undertook with 'great fidelity': 'The value of such trustworthiness can be easily understood in a country thinly peopled, where the nearest post-office is often very far away'.<sup>12</sup>

Tietkens wrote admiringly of the almost mystical endurance of the messengers who, perhaps having travelled hundreds of miles, would suddenly appear in camp and calmly announce 'paper yabber'.<sup>13</sup> In the diary of his exploration of country inland from Fowler's Bay in 1879, Tietkens records an anecdote about his guide, 'Wantem', which not only illustrates the tremendous distances the messengers covered, but also the apparent equanimity with which they undertook their task:

Preparing a packet of letters for 'Wantem' to take to Fowler's Bay; it may appear incredible, but this fellow has just walked up to the Hills & back, that is 160 miles. Tomorrow he starts for the Bay, 150 miles and the same distance back, total 460 miles, & precious little he gets to eat; certainly no meat, & he seems to take the order to go down to the Bay quite as a matter of course; he starts tomorrow with letters to England, Richmond, & Levi, besides a few unimportant telegrams.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup>. Spencer 1928, p. 546.

<sup>10</sup>. Terry, Michael, 29 August 1932, Diary of a prospecting expedition from Alice Springs to Laverton, 1932, South Australian Museum Anthropology Archives, A338.

<sup>11</sup>. Tietkens, W. H. No Date, Reminiscences of W. H. Tietkens, 1859–87, Mortlock Library PRG 1006/1, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup>. Millett 1872, p. 81.

<sup>13</sup>. Tietkens, W. H. No Date, Reminiscences of W. H. Tietkens, 1859–87, Mortlock Library PRG 1006/1, p. 93.

<sup>14</sup>. Tietkens 1961, p. 16.

In *The Trans-Australian Wonderland*, AG Bolam recorded another anecdote about Tietkens' use of Aboriginal messengers. Referring to his exploration of the Musgrave Ranges in the late 1870s, Bolam quotes Tietkens as saying:

A black used to carry my letters to Fowler's Bay. I put them in a forked stick, and said, 'Paper Yabber Yalata' (Yalata is the homestead station near Fowler's), and off he went without a word or a rag on his back, and brought my mail back, saying 'Paper yabber'—that was all the English he had.<sup>15</sup>

Of this great feat of endurance Tietkens admiringly observed 'No water on that one hundred miles, except Pidinga (a rock-hole about midway between Ooldea and Fowler's Bay). It was a wonderful service'.<sup>16</sup> The story was prefaced with the remark that it illustrated 'the reliability and loyalty on the part of the black'.<sup>17</sup>

The use of Aboriginal message carriers was usually a private matter but, as Brian Pope points out in a recent article, the Western Australian authorities made an attempt to institutionalise the practice.<sup>18</sup> In 1848 two Aboriginal men were employed to carry mail, by foot, between Perth and Bunbury. The experiment was sufficiently successful for the government to officially encourage the practice and when the government tender for the carriage of mail was advertised in 1849 it included a passage stating that 'with a view of giving encouragement to the employment generally of Aborigines, the Government will sanction these Mails being carried by Natives under the guarantee of the contractor'.<sup>19</sup> Pope notes that a significant number of those employed were prisoners, given the inducement of working off part of their sentence if they undertook the job. The scheme lasted until about 1853 when, among other reasons, the increased volume of mail made its carriage by foot, and over long distances, unrealistic.<sup>20</sup>

David Lindsay, in his account of the Elder expedition of 1891, gives one instance of how the use of Aboriginal messengers at Esperance in Western Australia was unofficially institutionalised. Esperance had a Telegraph Station, and whenever a message was received a flag would be hoisted to notify people at the neighbouring sheep station, who would then dispatch a messenger for it. According to Lindsay, the 'flag was hoisted very often during my stay, and the black messengers kept going backwards and forwards pretty often'.<sup>21</sup>

### The message

Out of the tradition of Aboriginal letter carriers there developed a body of folklore about paper yabber. The earliest paper yabber story I am aware of, and the most commonly told version, comes from a South Australian newspaper, *The Northern Argus*. Writing from Strangways Springs on 2 June 1869, a 'northern correspondent' offered his readers the following anecdote:

<sup>15</sup> Bolam 1927, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Pope 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 76–77.

<sup>21</sup> Lindsay 1893, p. 46.

Some of the blackfellows cannot understand the notes that are frequently sent by them to out-stations. An incident occurred some time ago of a rather laughable nature. One of the natives was sent from the homestead to an out-station with some tobacco, and a note stating the quantity sent. Going on his way, the parcel got rather heavy, so he thought he would lighten it by taking two sticks; but how was he to manage this without the note seeing him he could not conceive. At last he thought of a plan, and took the tobacco, feeling satisfied that no person would be any the wiser for it, himself excepted. In due time he arrived at his destination; the hutkeeper consulted the note, examined the parcel, and found two sticks missing. He immediately proceeded to the native, who was not a great way off, and addressed him thus; 'This note tell me you stole two sticks baccy.' The blackfellow gave a jump in the air and was fairly nonplussed, and he confessed his guilt. His ingenious plan of procedure was this: He put the note under a very large stone, covering it all with sand, went some distance away, and took the tobacco. He said he thought the note could not see him.<sup>22</sup>

While humorous anecdotes about Aborigines became commonplace in newspaper columns and published reminiscences by the late colonial period, the paper yabber story became a favourite, being repeatedly told, in various forms, up to the present day. The editor of the *South Australian Register* was so taken by the *Northern Argus* story that he reprinted it verbatim in his newspaper the following day.<sup>23</sup>

A variation of the story, under the heading 'Paper Yabber' was published in *The Young Men's Magazine* in August 1874. It was prefaced with an explanation of how Aborigines were used to carry letters between stations. This account varies from the original by focussing less on the messenger than the medium—the mysterious and powerful properties of paper yabber. The yarn begins with a description of an isolated shepherd being harassed by Aborigines who were making constant demands for flour and sugar. The shepherd told them he had no supplies but while returning to his hut a stone was thrown and he was knocked unconscious and then beaten to death with waddies. After rifling the hut the shepherd's assailants found no supplies but

one of the murderers conceived the brilliant idea of resorting to 'Paper Yabber,' and after a good deal of palaver a leaf was torn out of the Bible which the poor murdered victim had just been reading. The blacks, not, of course, understanding the mysteries of writing, and thinking that any Paper Yabber was all potent and could carry out the sender's wishes, fully believed that the torn leaf, which they put in a cleft stick, would if carried to a station obtain for them flour and sugar in unheard of plenty.

They then set off for the head station where they presented their 'credentials' to the overseer. Understandably suspicious at being presented with a blood-stained page of a Bible, the overseer dispatched men to the hut where the murdered shepherd was discovered. 'The blacks', we are told, 'were hunted down and swift vengeance fell upon them':

From that time to this Paper Yabber has been looked upon as the white man's exclusive spirit, faithful to him and to him only, and the very name is sufficient to quiet the most troublesome Far North Native. The murderers believed, and told

<sup>22</sup>. *The Northern Argus*, 2 July 1869, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>. *South Australian Register*, 3 July 1869.

their companions, that the Paper Yabber had betrayed them to the white man and there was no escape.<sup>24</sup>

According to the author, the incident demonstrated, to the 'simple minds' of the Aborigines, 'the dread power of Paper Yabber'. In this version, the story has become a parable; the superiority of the white man is manifested in paper yabber and any attempts to challenge it are surely and swiftly punished.

Perhaps the most elaborate account of the paper yabber story is that told by Robert Bruce in his reminiscences, published in 1902.<sup>25</sup> The version of the story he told was essentially the one told originally in *The Northern Argus*, but considerably embroidered. He began by establishing the context, explaining how Aborigines acted as 'postmen between stations' and how the letter they carried was 'inserted in the end of the cleft stick'. Like the 1874 version, he played up the idea of the mysterious power of paper yabber. The Aborigines, he wrote, 'thought it contained a familiar spirit devoted to the service of the white man'.

In this version, the Aboriginal messenger, Toby, is given the task of taking a few pounds of tobacco to a neighbouring station, together with a letter that, unknown to him, certified the amount in the parcel. While Toby could not see the tobacco he could smell and feel it:

Poor Toby was dying for a smoke, so he persuaded himself that the paper spirit could not know the correct tally of plugs, and that, therefore, if he (Toby) prevented it seeing him open the parcel he would be safe. Yes, that was the idea, and so, with many apologies, the white man's familiar was hidden under a log, while Toby removed himself and parcel to a place hidden from the spirit's view, where he appropriated one stick of tobacco; then, figuratively speaking, he patted himself on the back for his cleverness, took the letter gingerly again by its sustaining wand and went home.

Toby arrived at his destination and handed over his cargo to Mr. M\_ who immediately read the note, tallied up the number of plugs and, much to Toby's surprise, accused him of stealing one stick of tobacco:

'Him ruddy liar, that one paper yabba. Him no bin see 'em take him! What for him yabba like o' that!'

'All right! Him bin yabba you take 'em; Mr. A \_ bin give 'em you like o' that,' said Mr. M\_, holding up his hands and telegraphing the number of sticks with his finger, 'and you bin give me like o' that,' indicating one short. 'Now, trot out that stick or I'll thrash you!'

The latter argument was one too many for Toby, who produced his plunder with the remark, 'Looke here, Mitter M\_, that one paper yabba, him no ruddy good! Him ruddy greedy wretch, him too much tell'em lie! Me only bin take 'em that one bacca, when him bin sit down long a log!'

Of course his naive apology was too much for Mr. M's gravity, so Toby not only escaped a thrashing but was permitted to keep the tobacco, with the warning, however, that he would get a dressing down with a stockwhip if he tried a like

<sup>24</sup> *The Young Men's Magazine*, August 1874, vol. 2, no. 8, pp. 58–60.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce 1973, pp. 173–175.

experiment in future. It is needless to say that for some years subsequently a paper yabba was held in great respect.

Bruce's version of the story is essentially the same as the original 1869 version, but the elaborations are significant. The first of these is the 'context setting' introduction that was used in the 1874 variation—in both cases giving the story veracity by grounding it in the detail of lived experience. Perhaps the most interesting variation is the more complex denouement, characterised by the liberal use of Aboriginal pidgin. The author's familiarity with pidgin serves to underscore his authority on matters relating to the Aborigines, further strengthening the story's credibility. More importantly, Toby's seemingly 'simple-minded' language reinforces his 'simple-minded' appreciation of paper yabber. It is telling that when he is sent on the journey to the neighbouring station, Bruce refers to him not as Toby but as 'our simple friend'. The parable quality of the 1874 version is retained in this account, the final sentence assuring the reader that order had been restored with the Aborigines being reminded of white man's superiority.<sup>26</sup>

The anthropologist Baldwin Spencer tells the same paper yabber story in his book *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, published in 1928. He begins with an anecdote about his time at Powell's Creek in the Northern Territory and how, just as they were sitting down for their evening meal, two Aborigines appeared at camp carrying 'paper yabber' for one of their party. This gives him an opportunity for a scholarly digression on the significance of paper yabber—how the messages were carried in cleft sticks and how the use of such tokens ensured the messenger's safety as he or she travelled from tribe to tribe. Spencer then proceeded to tell his paper yabber story:

These 'paper yabbers' are a mystery to the unsophisticated native. On one occasion, a friend of ours sent a native with a small parcel of tobacco to a camp some distance away. At the same time he sent a message saying how many sticks the parcel contained. As a general rule a parcel such as this would be delivered intact, but the native knew what it contained and the temptation to open it and abstract a few sticks was too strong. When, on his arrival, he was taxed with the theft he was highly indignant with the 'paper yabber,' because he had hidden it away in the hollow of a log while he opened the parcel, so that it could not see what he was doing, and he thought that it had, in some unfair way, been watching him and had found out what he was doing and told the white man.<sup>27</sup>

The form of the story is much the same as the earlier versions, although in this instance the paper yabber story is told without great elaboration, and takes second place to a discussion of its 'social' context, an approach that perhaps reflects the author's awareness of his scholarly reputation. Nonetheless, the message being conveyed is the same; the simple-mindedness of 'the unsophisticated native'. For Spencer the idea of Aboriginal inferiority was not just folk wisdom, it was scientific fact. On one occasion he contemptuously dismissed missionary efforts to 'elevate' the Aborigines because 'abstract ideas' were 'utterly beyond' their comprehension.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the late

26. Tilbrook relates an abridged version of the same story. Tilbrook, H. No Date, *Reminiscences of Henry Hammond Tilbrook, 1889–1923*, Mortlock Library PRG 180/1–4. bk. 1 series 1. vol. 1, pp. 198–199.

27. Spencer 1928, p. 546–547.

28. Cited by Mulvaney & Calaby 1985, p. 126.

colonial versions which used Aboriginal pidgin to colour their telling, Spencer eschews it entirely. An explanation of this may lie in the fact that Spencer was an evolutionary anthropologist who romanticised 'pure and uncontaminated' Aboriginal people—the 'fossil culture' that was said to reveal the 'dawn of mankind'. He regarded those Aboriginal people who had 'lost' their culture as sad, if not contemptible, and he may have seen pidgin English as evidence of this loss, and somewhat demeaning to record.

In another variation of the story Aboriginal ignorance of paper yabber is exploited for punitive ends. In his book, *The Red Centre*, H Finlayson writes:

In the bad old days of early settlement undesirable bucks were got rid of by giving them 'paper yabbers' to deliver to distant neighbours. The note would read, 'Keep this b\_\_\_ moving,' and he would be immediately sent on to the next man, and so on, until after a months travelling he would find himself stranded, perhaps in a hostile country, hundreds of miles from his own country.<sup>29</sup>

On the west coast of South Australia a well-known message carrier called 'Mailman Jimmy' is said to have been sent off to Eucla carrying a sledgehammer by a station-owner he had apparently offended.<sup>30</sup> Although the subject of the story differs, the message remains much the same; only a simple-minded person would fall for the 'keep the b\_\_\_ moving' trick, or the 'sledgehammer' routine.

While cross-cultural communication provides ample opportunities for comic encounters, it is unlikely that the episodes described in the paper yabber folklore ever occurred. The very fact that the paper yabber episode concerning the 'tobacco thief' occurred so often and to so many different people lends perverse support to this view. This same story, adapted to local circumstances, appears to have been a universal tale on European frontiers. Consider, for instance, the following story from John Wilkins', *Mercury; Or, the Secret and Swift Messenger*, first published in London in 1641:

How strange a thing this Art of Writing did seem at its first Invention, we may guess by the late discovered Americans, who were amazed to see Men converse with Books, and could scarce make themselves to believe that a Paper could speak. . .

There is a pretty Relation to this Purpose, concerning an Indian Slave; who being sent by his Master with a Basket of Figs and a Letter, did by the Way eat up a great Part of his Carriage, conveying the Remainder unto the Person to whom he was directed; who when he had read the Letter, and not finding the Quantity of Figs answerable to what was spoken of, he accuses the Slave of eating them, telling him what the Letter said against him. But the Indian (notwithstanding this Proof) did confidently abjure the Fact, cursing the Paper, as being a false and lying Witness.

After this, being sent again with the like Carriage, and a Letter expressing the just Number of Figs, that were to be delivered, he did again, according to his former Practice, devour a great Part of the them by the Way; but before he meddled with any, (to prevent all following Accusations) he first took the Letter, and hid that under a great Stone, assuring himself, that if it did not see him eating the Figs, it could never tell of him; but being now more strongly accused than before, he con-

<sup>29</sup> Finlayson 1935, pp. 74–75.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Gara, personal communication, 18 December 1994.

fesses the Fault, admiring the Divinity of the Paper, and for the future does promise his best Fidelity in every employment.<sup>31</sup>

Except for the fact that figs replace tobacco and that the Native American doubly incriminates himself, the story is identical, even down to the moral contained in the final line of the parable where the social order of white superiority and native inferiority is restored and reinforced. A similar story, set in eighteenth century California, is told by the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter in his book *Oh, What a Blow that Phantom Gave Me!* A missionary gave his native messenger some loaves of bread to carry to a colleague together with a note stating their number. The messenger ate part of his cargo and, because of the note, was discovered. On a second occasion he was given four loaves to carry, of which he ate two, but this time he took the precaution of hiding the accompanying note under a stone while he committed his crime, believing that if the note did not witness the act he could not be found out.<sup>32</sup>

A close variant of the story is recorded by M. Ilin in *Black and White, The Story of Books*, published in London in 1942. Although the author is strategically vague about time and place, the context is clearly the American south during the era of slavery. The subject of the story 'Sambo'—fresh off the boat from Africa—is given the task of carrying a basket of four roast chickens and 'a little piece of white paper' to his master. Along the way he eats one of the chickens, convinced that it won't be missed, only to be confounded when the 'paper' gives him away to his master. Given the task a second time he decides to be more careful so before 'he began to eat he hid the paper under a stone'. It made no difference, the 'cursed paper . . . managed somehow to see everything and told the judge all about Sambo's little escapade!'<sup>33</sup>

Not only have paper yabber stories been told in a variety of colonial settings, and for a very long period of time, but they are still being told. On South Australia's west coast the exploits of Koolbarri, popularly known as 'Mailman Jimmy', are well known. Mailman Jimmy began carrying messages and mail between Moopina station, near Eucla, and Fowlers Bay during the 1870s, a round trip of 750 kilometres which he completed in three weeks on foot. According to the historian Tom Gara:

Mailman Jimmy is still remembered by many older residents of the west coast, both Aboriginal and European. I have been told by a number of Aboriginal and European people the story of the occasion when Mailman Jimmy smoked some of the tobacco he was supposed to deliver and was found out at the other end when the station-owner at Eucla read the note that Jimmy brought. On the next trip, Jimmy supposedly hid the note under a rock when he smoked the tobacco, but was still found out.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

The historical veracity of the story is, of course, irrelevant. The significance of the paper yabber story is that it served as a vehicle for a particular discursive category, that of the 'simple-minded blackfellow'. The humour of the story is built on a contrast between the

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Eco 1992, pp. 40–41.

<sup>32</sup> Carpenter 1976, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Ilin 1942, pp. 25–27.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Gara, personal communication, 18 December 1994.



old and the new, the simple and the sophisticated; the Aborigine is portrayed as unable, perhaps incapable, of understanding the ways of the white man's world. This was a common theme in anecdotes about Aborigines that began to emerge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Similar stories were told about Aboriginal encounters with the electric telegraph, the phonograph and European clothing. It was also the basis of humour in newspaper cartoons.<sup>35</sup> While presented as a distinctively Australian bush yarn, the North American versions of the story indicate that it had currency in a range of colonial settings for a very long period of time.

The story served as a sort of popular parable, rendering unproblematic the inferior status of the colonised subject. Indeed, some versions spell out the 'moral' by having the subject effectively 'acknowledge' his inferiority in the face of the 'awesome' and 'mysterious' power of the white man. To some extent the significance of the 'paper yabber' story lies in its very ordinariness: it is not set apart as a joke, as something amusing but unreal or untrue, rather, the teller always conveys the impression that the events were witnessed and that the story is authentic. The 'paper yabber' story provides a simple, but telling, insight into the way in which prejudice is 'naturalised' in popular culture.

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<sup>35</sup>. Foster 1994, pp. 236-240.

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## Aboriginal stars of the pigskin

John Maynard

I wrote this article in early 1996 during my term as the *Aboriginal History* Stanner Fellow, Australian National University. I wanted to impress that although much had been written about the participation of Aboriginal sportsmen and women, particularly in boxing, football and athletics, there had been little researched or written regarding their involvement with horse-racing. This article is the result of research during that period. Sadly the depth of my research was restricted by the limit of my stay of only four months and that I was also researching the awakening Aboriginal political movement of the 1920s. In mid 1998 I received a grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to enable me to encompass a far more exhaustive study on the aspect of Aboriginal involvement with the 'Sport of Kings'.

My present project has allowed me the financial time and freedom to explore all of the avenues of research I could not encompass during my time as the Stanner Fellow. The project, as with the original article, was conceived with the idea of publishing another important missing chapter of Australian Aboriginal history: detailing the instance of Aborigines' horsemanship since colonisation before exploring their subsequent introduction to horseracing. An important aspect of this present study will be the dispelling of long held myths and misconception that there has only been minimal Aboriginal involvement with horseracing. Many journalists, sports writers, historians and academics have in the past failed to observe significant and continued Aboriginal association with horseracing. This is in no way meant to deride previous written histories. Many of these were general studies of Australian horseracing, that only gave at best brief mention of Aboriginal involvement, or biographies of Aboriginal sportsmen and women, where the researchers have had limited knowledge of horseracing that limited access to information and resources. These have been instrumental in forming an opinion of limited Aboriginal involvement. My present research will not only reveal the significant depth of Aboriginal involvement, where dozens of Aboriginal riders have been successful on metropolitan tracks capturing some of racing's greatest prizes, but also why many researchers have failed to observe the presence of Aboriginal riders. In that sense, this article is now a prelude to a much larger canvas.

Prior to the British invasion in 1788, there were no horses on the Australian continent. Governor Phillip had acquired a stallion, three mares and three yearlings at the Cape of Good Hope *en route* to Australia. In the space of twenty years 117 horses are recorded in the colony.<sup>1</sup> The Aborigines first contact with horses were at once one of bewilderment and terror. Victorian Aborigines from around the Gippsland area indi-

cated that they were under the belief that the noise of gunfire came from a horse's nostril.<sup>2</sup> However, in a short time Aborigines shed their fears and displayed open curiosity and an appetite to learn how to ride the animal. Reynolds highlights instances of this, one early settler remarking that Aborigines had used sheets of bark as improvised saddles.<sup>3</sup> Another outback squatter was recorded in a Brisbane paper as saying 'that the blacks not only killed the cattle and attacked stations but also stole the horses.'<sup>4</sup> Another instance highlighted the interest and level of experimentation used by Aborigines in their quest for knowledge and skills in horsemanship: 'In 1884 a police constable found a stockyard in the bush containing two horses which were regularly fed and ridden by local Aborigines'.<sup>5</sup>

As rural British settlement took its course Aborigines were hunted and hounded. In most areas they were a people without land and frequently denied even their most basic requisites: as the ability to fend and feed themselves had been stripped away. Pastoralists were now in control of vast areas. The Aborigines moved onto the farms and stations in search of work. Aboriginal men became the backbone of the pastoral industry as stockmen, trackers and general farm labourers.<sup>6</sup> Women tended to fill domestic duties although many women also became accomplished stockriders. Once given the opportunity to ride a horse, Aborigines displayed an uncanny affinity and developed great skills as horsemen. One pioneer remarked in 1884 'I don't know what we pioneers should have done without the blacks for they can't be beat at looking after horses and cattle'.<sup>7</sup> Another squatter wrote 'Above all horse riding enchanted them' and 'they are ambitious to learn to ride and do not mind a few falls in acquiring the art'.<sup>8</sup>

Australia's first official horse race meeting was held in Sydney's Hyde Park in 1810. Officers of the 73rd regiment organised the three-day meeting.<sup>9</sup> The *Sydney Gazette* heralded the coming meeting:

The races commence on Monday the 15th October, and will continue until the Friday following with omission of the Tuesday and Thursday. The course has been completed at a very considerable expense and is esteemed a very fine one. Several handsome plates and other elegant presents, among which is a silver cup of 50 guineas value, given by the ladies of the colony, are to be contested for by the horses of subscribers to the race course; and a purse of 50 guineas will be given by the magistrates of the colony, free for all horses to be run on the last day.<sup>10</sup>

It was only natural, given their opportunity on horseback, that some Aboriginal men would venture now into the realms of horseracing at first acting as strappers and stable boys.

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1. Pollard 1981, p. 11.

2. Reynolds 1982, p. 20.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

6. Miller 1985, p. 28.

7. Reynolds 1982, p. 172.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Pollard 1981, p. 12.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

## Peter St Albans

The first officially recorded instance of an Aboriginal winning a major race was Peter St Albans in 1876.<sup>11</sup> Mystery and intrigue surrounds St Albans' background. However it is known that he commenced working as a stable boy for James Wilson at St Albans Stud, situated on the Barwon river about three miles from Geelong. The year 1876 also proved *Briseis* to be one of the greatest mares ever sired in Australia. The 'wonder filly' burst onto the Australian racing scene in the autumn of that year like a comet and raced into immortality.<sup>12</sup> James Wilson bred *Briseis* at St Albans by mating *Tim Whiffler* and *Musidora*. She was one of the first foals delivered at St Albans. She had her first race start at the Melbourne Cup meeting of 1875 where she carried 5 pounds (2.25 kg) overweight, at 4 stone 9 pounds, into third place in the All Aged Stakes.<sup>13</sup> In those early two-year-old races she showed promise but could not break through for a win. In fact by the time Wilson took her north to Sydney in the autumn of 1876 she was still a maiden. Peter St Albans was only twelve years old when he was given his first chance on *Briseis* in the 1876 Australian Jockey Club Doncaster Handicap.<sup>14</sup> The leading rider of the stable, Tom Hales, could not make the weight to ride *Briseis* in the Doncaster. Hales, much to his credit, was instrumental in pointing out to owner and trainer James Wilson that young strapper St Albans showed great ability as a horseman and had a special bond with the filly. Hales asserted to Wilson 'you had better give the ride to young Peter'.<sup>15</sup> Many ardent racegoers questioned Wilson's intentions in running *Briseis*, then only a two year old, in the demanding Doncaster, a race for all comers over a mile, ridden by an inexperienced twelve year old boy. *Briseis* and Peter St Albans rewarded Wilson's confidence by winning the Doncaster in 1 minute and 45.5 seconds, carrying 5 stones 7 pounds (34.6 kg), and clipping a half second off the race record.<sup>16</sup> It was recorded that the Randwick crowd 'cheered and celebrated for little St Albans and the filly'.<sup>17</sup> Three days after her Doncaster victory *Briseis* blitzed the opposition in the six furlongs Flying Handicap. The following day the paired *Briseis* and Peter St Albans, carrying 5 stones and 11 pounds (36.4 kg), took out the All Aged Stakes over one mile defeating, at weight for age, *Kingsborough*, one of New South Wales best horses.<sup>18</sup>

Seven months later in the spring of 1876 a similar story unfolded at the Melbourne Cup carnival. Stable jockey Tom Hales rode *Briseis* to victory in the Victoria Race Club Derby on the Saturday in a record time of 2 minutes 43.25 seconds. This was the second fastest time ever recorded anywhere in the world.<sup>19</sup> It was a different story for the following Tuesday's Melbourne Cup. *Briseis* was allotted 6 stones 4 pounds (39.6 kg) and Hales again could not make the weight. James Wilson this time needed no prompting and had no hesitation in handing the reins to the now thirteen year old Peter St Albans.<sup>20</sup> Another source states that rumoured skulduggery led to Wilson giving the

11. Pollard 1988, p. 2.

12. Ibid., p. 123.

13. Ahern 1982, p. 40.

14. Pollard 1988, p. 2.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 123.

17. Tatz 1995, p. 247.

18. Ibid.

19. Cavanough 1983, p. 41.

mount to Peter St Albans. '[S]tories of a jockies' ring at the time—stories that were subject of official inquiry and ultimate action' were circulating.<sup>21</sup> One humorous highlight of St Albans' Melbourne Cup ride was that he had to wag school. On Cup day the principal of the Geelong school he attended was asking other students where young Peter St Albans was!<sup>22</sup> His classmates informed the disbelieving principal that Peter was 'down in Melbourne winning the Cup'.<sup>23</sup> Ahern asserts '[w]hatever the truth of his real age, it is on record that one P St Albans was absent from the Connewarre Public School on 7 November 1876, Melbourne Cup day'.<sup>24</sup>

The Melbourne Cup of 1876 was one of high drama, intrigue and tragedy that can hardly be matched in its entire history. On Saturday 9 September, two months before the Cup, the *SS City of Melbourne* sailed from Sydney to Melbourne. Amongst her cargo were eleven racehorses, some of the most valuable thoroughbreds in the country, in the charge of trainer Joe Morrison. They included *Nemesis*, the winner of the Australian Jockey Club Metropolitan and favourite for the Melbourne Cup; two other well fancied horses, *Burgundy* and *Sovereign*; and *Robin Hood*, also highly fancied in Cup markets. He was regarded by many as the best horse in Australia after his wins in the 1875 Victoria Race Club Derby, Royal Park Stakes, Produce Stakes and the Australian Jockey Club St. Leger. On the Sunday morning the ship ran into a savage storm. Joe Morrison beseeched the skipper of the ship, Captain Paddle, to either take shelter in nearby Jervis Bay or return to Sydney as the high seas were endangering the lives of the valuable animals under his care. Captain Paddle refused to heed Morrison's advice and placed the ship and his cargo in great peril. Just after passing Cape St George the storm intensified to hurricane force. The ship was hit by a number of heavy waves; the wheel was smashed and the binnacle washed overboard. Chaos followed. The horses were panic stricken. Seven of them, including *Nemesis*, were washed onto the deck and killed. *Robin Hood* lost his footing and was trampled under foot by the other horses and despite all the efforts of Morrison he too died. Nine horses perished. The ship limped back to Sydney. One of the two surviving horses, *Chrysolite*, a colt was so sore he had to be carried ashore.

The disaster had repercussions for the upcoming Melbourne Cup. With so many of the top fancies now out of the running betting on the big race was paralysed. One macabre incident, highlighting the high corruption and violence of this period in Australian racing, ensued from the tragic loss of so much valuable horseflesh. The book-makers jestingly presented a purse to Captain Paddle, to the dismay and anger of the public, as a token of their appreciation for the part he played in the death of the horses. He had saved them many thousands of pounds in bets already laid on the horses which perished!<sup>25</sup> Yet the loss of all of these horses does not detract from the merit of *Briseis's* and Peter St Albans' win in the Melbourne Cup.

20. Pollard 1988, p. 124.

21. Ahern 1982, p. 42.

22. Pollard 1988, p. 2.

23. Hickie 1986, p. 162.

24. Ahern 1982, p. 42.

25. Cavanough 1983, pp. 38–40.

Before a crowd of 75,000 people, starting at 7 to 1, *Briseis* comfortably won the Cup by one and a half lengths in the time of 3 minutes and 36.5 seconds to become the first filly or mare to win the event. There were 33 runners in the Cup, the biggest field up to that time. *Briseis* and Peter St Albans got away to a good start and were always handy to the leaders before the young jockey made his move at the distance. *Briseis* drew alongside *Sybil* and under strong riding proved too good over the concluding stages of the race.<sup>26</sup> The *Australasian* recorded Peter's ride: 'The boy who rejoices in the name of St Albans—which, we presume, is merely his *nom de course*—rode splendidly, sitting down and driving *Briseis* home in a manner that would have reflected credit upon Hales'.<sup>27</sup> Another writer of the period, 'Augur', commenting on Peter St Albans' riding ability, wrote: 'as a lad St Albans was a more accomplished artist than three fourths of the adults' adding 'Mr. Wilson possesses a treasure in the lad he has named after his establishment, the youngster being a capital second edition of Mr. Wilson's eldest son, James'.<sup>28</sup> Augur's comments 'suggest very clearly that he was the illegitimate child of either Wilson Sr or his son James'.<sup>29</sup> When Wilson was 'chided after the race by friends who had not had the same confidence as Mr. Wilson in young Peter St Albans' he replied: 'You did not know as much as I did. The boy has ridden her in all her work. She goes well for him, as you know now.'<sup>30</sup> Such was the strength of *Briseis*'s Melbourne Cup win that two days later she frightened off the opposition in the Victoria Racing Club Oaks. Only two horses opposed *Briseis* in the Victoria Racing Club Oaks. *Briseis* concluded her remarkable sequence by winning the Oaks with Tommy Hales in the saddle. Incredibly *Briseis* was again saddled up on the Saturday, the final day of the carnival, in the Mares Produce Stakes for three year olds. Her winning run had ended. A tired and jaded *Briseis* battled on into second place beaten by *Pride of the Hills* and one and a half lengths.<sup>31</sup> *Briseis* never won another race and was retired to stud. Tragedy struck when she was about to be served by *King of the Ring*. She took fright when placed in hobbles and reared backwards and fractured her skull. Her death was a great loss to the Australian breeding industry.<sup>32</sup>

Peter St Albans came, by dreadful bad luck, within a short half head of winning back to back Melbourne Cups. The 1877 Melbourne Cup is best remembered as one of the great race's most celebrated attempts to clean up the country's bookmakers. It became known as the 'Savanaka coup'. James Wilson combined great horsemanship and training with shrewdness and an unrivalled ability to prepare a plunge on the bookmaking fraternity. One of the owners of horses Wilson trained was Herbert Power. He was a member of the original committee of 12 elected from the 25 original foundation members of the Victoria Racing Club when it officially came into existence on 9 March 1864. Power was a high profile owner starved of racetrack success. He had owned the 4 to 1 favourite *Feu d'Artifice* which had finished a disappointing fifteenth behind *Briseis* in the 1876 Melbourne Cup.<sup>33</sup> He exchanged *Feu d'Artifice* with promi-

26. Pollard 1988, p. 2.

27. Freedman 1990, p. 303.

28. Tatz 1995, p. 247.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

30. Ahern 1982, p. 42.

31. Freedman 1990, p. 303.

32. Pollard 1988, p. 124.

nent Bathurst breeder George Lee for a grey two year old from his stud at Leeholme. The colt was named *Savanaka*. He was a full brother to *Kingsborough*, one of the nation's top horses which had won the Australian Jockey Club's Derby, St Leger, Champagne Stakes and Sires Produce Stakes and the Victoria Racing Club's Melbourne Stakes.<sup>34</sup> *Savanaka* was entered in four two year old races. His introduction to racing was in the Maribyrnong Plate where he was unplaced. In his second start, he won the six furlong (1.2 km) Flying Stakes. In winning he defeated many top gallopers including *Pride of the Hills*, *Sultan*, *Tocal*, *Rapidity* and *Salisbury*. On the strength of that one two year old sprint victory Wilson felt he had a certain Melbourne Cup winner. Wilson convinced *Savanaka*'s owner, Power, of his belief that they had a certainty and they must not risk running him again for fear that the horse's true ability would be revealed. They had no hesitation in scratching the two year old from his other engagements. The horse was sent back to St Albans stud where he was quickly forgotten by the racing public.<sup>35</sup>

Thus commenced twelve months of careful planning for the ultimate racing prize, the Melbourne Cup. Behind the locked gates at St Albans Wilson set in motion one of the biggest betting plunges ever instigated. Wilson and Power hoped that, with no real form to access, the handicapper would allot the horse a light weight to carry. When the weights for the cup were released, the following year Wilson and Power had achieved their first objective. *Savanaka* was given a mere 6 stones 2 pounds (41 kg). 'Only four horses had received less weight and *Pride of Hills*, one of those beaten in the Flying Stakes, had been given 9 stones (57 kg).'<sup>36</sup> The second stage was to get the money on. What followed was 'the most sensational week's betting known in Australia up to that time'.<sup>37</sup> In one day alone *Savanaka* was backed to win over £40,000 (\$80,000). The average wage at the time was less than £2 (\$4) a week. Using the average wage in 1997 as a conversion rate it is equivalent to \$12 million!<sup>38</sup> The racing public's imagination was set alight. Nothing like the magnitude of this betting had ever been witnessed, all on a horse which had only two starts and never been further than six furlongs (1.2 km). Adding spice to the occasion *Chester*, a horse trained by Melbourne Cup winning maestro Ettienne de Mestre, was also receiving heavy support. He had won the Australian Jockey Club Champagne Stakes and Sires Produce and ran, what many thought, was an unlucky second in the Australian Jockey Club Derby before heading south to win the Victoria Racing Club Derby. After his Victoria Racing Club Derby victory his owner the Hon James White, Sydney's most successful owner, instructed his betting commissioner, a Septimus Stephens, to place a bet with leading bookmaker Joe Thompson of £10,000 (\$20,000) to £1,000 (\$2,000). Most reports from the period state that the bet was only taken by Thompson because of his belief that *Savanaka* was a certainty and all of his money was behind the avalanche on that horse. The third stage in the coup was ensuring that *Savanaka* was up to the task of winning the race. In this he fully vindicated his trainer's early confidence. In a private trial at St Albans he ran the Melbourne Cup distance of two miles in 3 minutes 33 seconds an incredible three seconds faster than the

33. Gadfly Media 1996, p. 78.

34. Hickie 1986, p. 159.

35. Ibid., p. 160.

36. Ibid.

37. Cavanough 1978, p. 43.

38. Gadfly Media 1996, p. 78.



race record set by *Don Juan*. Any doubts held by owner Power, trainer Wilson or plunge organiser Thompson were dispelled.<sup>39</sup>

Descriptions of the scene at Flemington convey the excitement and drama of the day 76,000 people packed the course. Some 37,000 alone came by train. The crowd was described as 'altogether too dense' and even the large grandstand, known as Bagot's cowshed, was left with hardly enough room to move in with many people injured in the crush. Then the rain came. Torrential rain fell. '[T]he grounds became a quagmire, squelching beneath thousands of trampling feet'.<sup>40</sup> Jockeys were compelled to wear overcoats during the parades in the enclosure.<sup>41</sup> The race itself was full of excitement. The start heralded the drama that followed. When the flag fell two runners, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Amendment*, were facing the wrong way. In turning too quickly they collided, losing many lengths in the process. From the jump the 100 to 1 bolter, *Fisherman*, set up a blistering pace. It was still leading when the field passed the abattoirs. *Savanaka* racing midfield was described as 'bolting under the proverbial double wraps behind *Waxy*'.<sup>42</sup> Shortly after disaster struck. *Fisherman* began to tire and dropped back through the field sharply. *Waxy* was unable to dodge the tiring *Fisherman* and fell in front of Peter St Albans. He miraculously avoided *Waxy* but in the process had pulled *Savanaka* to a virtual stop. Conservative estimates from judges state that the incident cost *Savanaka* 10 to 20 lengths.<sup>43</sup> *Chester* had avoided the scrimmage and came into the straight contesting the lead with *Glenormiston*. Shortly after *Chester* broke away. *Vagabond* moved to second. Over the final furlong Piggott, the jockey on *Chester*, relaxed thinking the race was won. *Savanaka* and Peter St Albans burst from the pack and charged down the outside, quickly overhauling *Vagabond*, and failing by a mere half head to grab *Chester* before the post. They finished some three lengths clear of *Vagabond* in a new Cup record of 3 minutes and 33.5 seconds.<sup>44</sup> The following day's Brisbane's *Courier Mail* report stated: '*Savanaka* came on at such a pace as has never been seen at the end of a two miles race in Victoria.' It went on to say: 'The performance of *Savanaka* fully justified the confidence reposed in him by the St Albans stable. Had he not been interfered with when *Waxy* fell he would have put *Chester* to his utmost, good colt as he is.'<sup>45</sup> In another press report, the *Argus* wrote, 'Though he *Savanaka* only carried 6.12 St Albans is such a mite of a jockey that he rode in a large saddle'. Ahern reinforcing that 'St Albans named for the stud where he worked and lived, was then only a boy, but apparently of more than average talent in the saddle'.<sup>46</sup>

What of the major players in the *Savanaka* coup? The owner, Power, was horrified that the public, fuelled by an unsympathetic media, turned on the St Alban's connection venting their pleasure at the failure of the coup. The newspapers highlighted the stealth and level of secrecy behind the plunge. They attacked the way the ability of the horse was disguised, pointing out that the stables' links with the big bookmaker Thompson

39. Cavanough 1978, p 44.

40. Freedman 1990, p. 302.

41. Cavanough 1978, p. 45.

42. Hickie 1986, p 162.

43. Ibid.

44. Cavanough 1978, p. 45.

45. Ahern 1982, p. 46.

46. Ibid.

was responsible for the plan. Power was distraught by this attack against his integrity. One newspaper gloated: 'the public gained intense satisfaction that the clever party at St Albans whose deeds are dark and ways mysterious, got bowled over' and that the Cup had instead been won by the 'Hon. James White, a man who races for sport, not money.'<sup>47</sup> An incensed Power responded to this attack by asking if this was the case could someone explain to him why White was paid in excess of £10,000 for his winning bet with Thompson on the cup. Power had to wait another 22 years until he finally achieved his much sought after goal when his horse *Merriwee* won the 1899 Melbourne Cup. After this victory Power was heard to lament that great win as it was *Merriwee* was not in the same class as *Savanaka*. He proclaimed to all who would listen that *Savanaka* had been the greatest beaten Melbourne Cup certainty of all time.<sup>48</sup>

Thompson for his part continued on his way as the biggest betting bookmaker in the country. He returned to England at the end of his Australian career in 1889 with a fortune reputed to be in excess of £100,000 (\$200,000). He set up offices in Jermyn Street, London. The Australian press kept the public informed of his whereabouts and exploits. He was reported as involved in a brawl at a London boxing match. Another gave prominence to his attempt to start a racecourse in San Francisco. His betting plunges in partnership with Lily Langtry on Australian horses at Ascot also grabbed the headlines. Because of her intimate friendship with the Prince of Wales the beautiful Langtry had been the talk of England. Langtry and Thompson procured the Australian galloper *Merman* for £1,500. They recouped their money in an avalanche as *Merman* proceeded to win in succession the Cesarewitch, Goodwood Plate, Goodwood Cup and Ascot Gold Cup, picking up another £100,000 in wagers. In 1903 Thompson returned on a sentimental journey to Australia where he was feted by the upper echelons of Victorian society. By 1909 at the age of 71 he was still on his English bookie's stand, betting big and still loudly proclaiming he was the king of the ring. He took time off for a short holiday cruise to Madeira and died on board the ship from a sudden heart attack.<sup>49</sup>

Peter St Albans went on to taste other triumphs on the track, winning the 1880 Victoria Racing Club St Leger, 1880 Hobart Town Cup, 1881 Victoria Racing Club Sires Produce, Ascot Vale Stakes and Geelong Cup. St Albans may have had to carry the blame for the loss on *Savanaka*. All jockeys are aware that they are only as good as their last winner. Defeat, especially on a good thing where big money is involved, demands a scapegoat. Weight troubles probably enforced his early retirement. He became a horse trainer. His best horse was *Forest King* who ran second to *G'naroo* in the 1891 Caulfield Cup. He died in 1898 aged only 35 years.<sup>50</sup> Jack Pollard, a doyen of Australian sports writing, states in his book *Australian Horse Racing* that Peter St Albans was Aboriginal.<sup>51</sup> Many other writers have expressed the same opinion including Colin Tatz who states, in *Black Diamonds*, that in late 1995 he reached the conclusion that St Albans was undoubtedly Aboriginal.<sup>52</sup> Most researchers including Pollard have expressed the opin-

47. Hickie 1986, p. 163.

48. Power is honoured today with the the Herbert Power Handicap run each year during the Caulfield Cup spring meeting. Ibid.

49. Ibid., p. 63.

50. Freedman 1990, p. 303.

51. Pollard 1988, p. 2.

52. Tatz 1996, p. xv.

ion that Peter St Albans was the illegitimate Aboriginal son of the stud owner James Wilson who paid a local labourer, Michael Bowden, and his wife to raise him.<sup>53</sup> Robert Windmill, who published a history of racing in and around Geelong challenged these conclusions. He questions the view that St Albans was the illegitimate son of James Wilson and raised at his expense by Michael Bowden and his wife. However, Windmill's argument is put forth without evidence. Colin Tatz emphasised this point noting that Windmill's account reads as:

Some reports say the lad was an Aboriginal who was either abandoned as a baby at St Albans stud or arrived one day of his own accord. However, another theory, which has been passed down from generation to generation, is that the young boy was, in fact the illegitimate son of James Wilson. It is suggested that to camouflage this fact he was named after the stud and raised by labourer Michael Bowden and his wife ... moreover, paintings featuring Peter St Albans with some of the famous Wilson horses indicate that he could have been European.<sup>54</sup>

As Tatz so rightly points out this theory of St Albans being European amounts to only a question by Windmill. Tatz concludes that it is unlikely that St Albans was European:

Aborigines were very often, in fact most often, assigned the names of their 'owners', or the homesteads and stations where they worked. This never occurred among non-Aborigines. Every other jockey in the history of the race since 1861 has a real name.<sup>55</sup>

'Illegitimacy usually resulted in the child taking his or her mother's maiden name. If you'll excuse the pun, even if Wilson Sr or Wilson Jr was the stud, no one has raised the question of who Peter's mother was.'<sup>56</sup> The famous Fredrick Woodhouse painting which features Peter St Albans standing alongside *Briseis* with stable jockey Tom Hales in the saddle has done little to settle the dispute.

### Merv Maynard

The modern era has produced talented Aboriginal riders like Lyall Appo, Glen Pickwick and Normie Rose to name just a few. The careers of two outstanding individuals are worth closer inspection. These two riders have some commonalties; they both rode in the Melbourne Cup, they have rubbed shoulders with royalty and they rode successfully on the international stage. They are Merv Maynard and Darby McCarthy.

Merv Maynard's father, Fred Maynard, was the founder of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association which formed in Sydney in 1924 and as such was a starting point and inspiration for organised political Aboriginal activism in this country.<sup>57</sup> Fred Maynard's call for land-rights, citizenship and equal rights for Aboriginal people had him labelled by white authorities as an agitator and troublemaker. His group was constantly hounded and eventually harassed out of existence by the police acting for the Aboriginal Protection Board.<sup>58</sup> Merv Maynard's recollections of his young years corrob-

53. Freedman, 1990, p. 303.

54. Tatz 1995, p. 248.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Broome 1982, p. 166.

58. Horner 1994, p. 27.

orate those of his brother and sisters that threats were made against their father about the well-being of his children and that this was one of the reasons why such a high profile Aboriginal activist slipped from the limelight and, in some sense, into hiding. There may have been other reasons. It will never be known if Fred Maynard would have publicly kept up his campaign after being badly injured, one leg being broken in six places, while working a wharf labourer. This eventually led to the amputation of the leg and his death in 1946.<sup>59</sup>

Merv Maynard began his working life washing bottles in a Lakemba chemist shop and, subsequently, as a delivery boy for the local Post Office. It looked at that stage as if the diminutive Maynard was in for a life of lumping mailbags.<sup>60</sup> However, on visits to his aunts and uncles in Newcastle he began to haunt the surrounds of Broadmeadow racecourse where he was noticed by a leading trainer, Keith Tinson. This was hardly surprising. Young Merv looked a natural jockey in the making, weighing a mere 4 stones 8 pounds (28.8 kg).<sup>61</sup> Things looked bleak when young Merv had to return to his mother's Lakemba home. Yet he was not to be denied and spent much of his spare time with his face pressed against the tin fence of Canterbury racecourse watching the activities of trainers, jockeys and stablehands at early morning track gallops and race-meetings.<sup>62</sup> One day Merv recognised a familiar face in Keith Tinson who had brought a couple of horses down to race at Canterbury. Merv called out to the trainer through a hole in the fence and Tinson obliged by asking attendants to let Merv onto the course where he spent the day tending to Tinson's horses. Tinson was impressed by the boy's keenness and energy. He offered the boy an apprenticeship as a jockey. With his mother's approval, Merv journeyed back to Newcastle with Tinson to begin his life in racing.<sup>63</sup> Back in the late 40's stable life was very hard. Seven days a week Merv's day would begin at 3 am. It was not until he was a full twelve months into his apprenticeship that he was allowed the time to attend a movie.

Merv could not have picked a more successful stable to join. Tinson had begun his training career back in 1928 and since that time his general knowledge of horses and breeding combined with the patience he would exercise with his animals had made him very successful. Tinson had learnt many points of horsemanship from his uncle Jack Hartigan, a former Maitland trainer. Tinson had won his first race with *Bonnie Merv* at Blandford, a private track owned by John Morrissey. He had tasted near continuous success from that humble beginning. He won 27 races with *Gallant Queen* including the Wallabadah Cup three years in succession. He trained at Rutherford up until 1941 when his team included the handy *Salivar*, *Valack* and *Cup Day*. Closure of the Maitland track forced him to relocate to Newcastle's Broadmeadow course. There he quickly established himself as the premier trainer in the north, heading the trainers list for the 1944, 1945, 1946 and 1949 seasons. He tasted big-time success in 1949 when *Denali* took out the Winter Handicap and the Australian Jockey Club Epsom handicap at Randwick ridden by Scobie Breasley. *Denali* was not the stable's only star, Tinson at this time had a

59. Goodall 1997, p.168.

60. Goodwin 1953, p. 50.

61. Howe 1983, p. 5.

62. Ibid., p. 7.

63. Goodwin 1953, p. 50.



Aboriginal jockey Merv Maynard with trainer Norman Dewsbury after winning the first Queen's Cup on *Salamanca* at the Randwick racecourse, Sydney, in 1952. They were photographed while awaiting presentation to the Governor-General.

very promising team which also included *Warrah King* and the ill fated *Auburn River* which was killed in a track accident after only two starts both of which he won by big margins. *Auburn River's* second metropolitan victory, with young Merv in the saddle, saw him blitz a field at Canterbury by 11 lengths.<sup>64</sup>

In his first season in 1948–49 Merv Maynard rode eight winners and quickly came to the notice of other trainers. His first success was at Wyong on 16 April 1949 when he won on the Tinson trained *Paragon*. The next season he rode ten winners including the winner of the Quirindi Cup. In a driving finish in that race his mount, *Exalted*, defeated the mount of Billy Cook.<sup>65</sup> There were many great riders at this time, a period often referred to as the golden era of Australian jockeys. This was the case not just on city tracks either but in the country as well.

On reflection Merv pointed out that old Roy James was one who had a major influence on his own riding. James was a riding grandad when Merv's career began. Years later James was tragically killed in a track work fall at Canterbury. Stan Davidson was another influence. He hung up his saddle just after Merv started riding to take on training. Merv said: 'I never saw Davidson at his best but never the less you quickly realised what a great rider he must have been at his peak'. Merv also remarked that Hickey, Thompson and Waterson were all great local riders of the period:

Neil Waterson was a very good jockey, a brainy rider, pretty to watch, real neat and polished in the saddle and a thorough professional. Importantly they were all horsemen. Some people might criticise me for saying it but in that area comparisons with today are lacking, there are many great jockeys today. But great horsemen in this modern era are a very rare commodity. In my early days the further you went into the bush you struck them just as good, on the other side of the range were the likes of the Kelly's and Walmsley's.<sup>66</sup>

The 1950–51 season propelled Merv Maynard into national racing prominence. He rode *Warrah King* to victory in the Australian Jockey Club Shorts handicap at Randwick and also the Queensland Turf Club Lightning Handicap at Eagle Farm. In the Lightning *Warrah King* whipped a smart field winning by three lengths.<sup>67</sup> The victory in the Lightning elevated *Warrah King* to favourite for the Doomben 10,000. If *Warrah King* had won the 10,000 ridden by the 18 year old apprentice it would have given the youthful Merv's career an enormous boost. Sadly it was not to be. Merv can still recall the voice of George Moore riding on his outside 'let him go son, let him go, it's your race' Merv replying 'not yet, not yet'.<sup>68</sup> Third on the home turn and hooked out on straightening he looked the winner when, suddenly, *Warrah King* received a severe check from the eventual winner, *Coniston*, and crashed heavily to the turf. Merv Maynard had 26 horses go over and past him. Miraculously the young jockey walked away from the fall with nothing more than a broken big toe and smashed dreams.

More disappointment was to follow in September 1951 at Randwick before a crowd of 68,000. Merv rode the 100 to 1 Queensland outsider, *Rinkeno*, in the Australian

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Author's oral interview Merv Maynard at Newcastle, 1996.

67. Howe 1983, p. 7.

68. Author's oral interview Merv Maynard at Newcastle, 1996.

Jockey Club Epsom Handicap.<sup>69</sup> Hugging the fence all the way, *Rinkeno* split through an opening and stormed home late, failing to catch the winner *Davey Jones* by the barest of margins in a photo finish. These disappointments were overshadowed by the fact that young Merv had come to the notice of many of the big time trainers. They now clamoured for the young Newcastle rider who was hailed as the 'Darby Munro of the bush' and 'Tinson's Goldmine'.<sup>70</sup> It is a measure of the success that Merv Maynard generated through this period, that it was not until the advent of Wayne Harris in the late 1970s that another northern apprentice was so sought after by the big stables for the major feature races of the Australian racing calendar. This a big statement when other top Newcastle apprentices during those intervening years included John Wade and Robert Thompson. However there is little argument when you consider that before he was 21, Merv in 1951, 1952 and 1953 had ridden in three successive Caulfield cups. He had also ridden in the Epsom, Metropolitan, Doncaster, Doomben 10,000, Doomben Cup, Mackinnon Stakes and the dream of every jockey, the Melbourne Cup. The 1952 Melbourne Cup saw the sensational *Dalray* justly win the event. Yet Merv had a great thrill in piloting three year old *Ocean Spray* for leading Sydney trainer Danny Lewis into eleventh placing behind the New Zealand champion. *Ocean Spray* had been well supported and was backed to win over £50,000 (\$100,000) in the Flemington two miler.<sup>71</sup>

Merv Maynard achieved a wonderful victory in 1952 that was to have repercussions 41 years later. He rode Sydney trainer Norman Dewsbury's horse *Salamanca* in the first Queen's Cup at Randwick on 11 October 1952.<sup>72</sup> The race in former years had been known as the King's Cup in celebration of the reigning monarch. In fact that was to be the case for this event as well. The race's history dated back to 1927 when the Duke (later King George VI) and Duchess (later Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother) of York visited Australia to open Parliament House. During their visit they attended several race meetings. To commemorate the royal visit the Duke's father, King George V, decided he would donate an annual trophy for a horse race in Australia. 'The principle clubs agreed that the race should be a weight-for-age race to be run in rotation around the capital cities... in the years before World War II it was one of Australia's most keenly contested races.'<sup>73</sup> The quality of the cup can be ascertained by noting some of the winners during this period – *Limerick*, *Valparaiso*, *Phar Lap* and *Rogilla* to name but a few. In 1952 the young Princess Elizabeth, recently married to Prince Phillip, was *en route* to Australia on their honeymoon. One of the Princess' engagements in Australia was to attend the running of the King's Cup and present the trophy. In East Africa news reached the young royals that the King had died and they immediately returned to England. Thus the race was renamed the Queen's Cup.<sup>74</sup>

The race itself in 1952 was regarded as nothing more than a contest between the two champions of the period, *Hydrogen* and *Dalray*. The other runners appeared to be there for nothing more than to make up the numbers. Merv Maynard had different

69. Howe 1983, p. 7.

70. Ibid., p. 8.

71. Ibid.

72. Bartle 1992, p. 24.

73. Freedman 1990, p. 448.

74. Ibid.

ideas. Approaching the long Randwick straight he let loose on *Salamanca*, a tough seasoned stayer carrying a featherweight 7 stones 2 pounds (45.5 kg), and raced to the front. The move caught the jockeys on the two champions, Keith Nuttall and Darby Munro, by surprise. They had been playing a cat and mouse game with each other.<sup>75</sup> When *Salamanca* quickly took the lead from *Headstockman* and set sail for the post it left them with far too much to do. *Dalray* made up a lot of late ground but Merv Maynard had pinched the race on the turn. The young rider proudly received the accolades of the crowd at the presentation made by the Governor-General. His only disappointment, one which he was to echo many times over the next four decades, was that only for the King dying he would have met the Princess.<sup>76</sup>

Merv Maynard was now firmly established amongst the elite riders in Australia, riding for trainers like TJ Smith, Danny Lewis, Harry Plant and Vic Thompson. Also riding for high profile owners like flamboyant restaurateur Azzalin 'the Dazzlin' Romano and newspaper magnate Sir Frank Packer. Merv recounts with humour his first meeting with Packer, a man he says who has been the only person who intimidated him with a sense of power. Merv, then only 20, received a call in Newcastle saying that Packer wanted him to ride his horse *Top Level* in the 1953 Caulfield Cup and that he wanted him to come to his Sydney office for a meeting. Merv was still a shy young man. On arriving at the *Daily Telegraph* office building in Sydney he did not enter through the front but went to the back where the newspapers were being loaded onto trucks. Asking one of the workmen 'How do I get to Sir Frank Packer's office?' the workmen looked Merv up and down and then pointed to a lift and replied 'See that lift over there boy, well get in that and when it gets to the top that's Sir Frank's office.' Merv followed the instructions. On alighting he found himself in what he describes as the biggest office imaginable with a great shining table endlessly stretching into the distance and only stopped by the imposing figure of the seated Packer. Merv laughs on looking back that if anyone else had been privy to the scene they would have split their sides laughing as Packer was down the other end booming out his instructions on how he wanted his horse ridden. The only part of Merv Maynard visible to Packer was the top of his head from his eyes up, which were peering up over the top of the large table at the distant owner. Merv jokes that even with all of Packer's expert tips and instructions *Top Level* still ran unplaced in the Caulfield Cup.<sup>77</sup>

It was around this time that he received the first of many lucrative offers to move away from Newcastle. The offer that Maynard jumped at was from the Chinese multi-millionaire movie mogul brothers, Run Run and Run Me Shaw. They offered young Merv a lucrative contract to be their stable jockey in Singapore and Malaya which he readily accepted. He was devastated when his former boss Tinson complained to the Australian Jockey Club and took steps to prevent Merv from accepting the position. Merv was out of his apprenticeship but because he was not 21 years old the Club deemed that he was under the control of Tinson. Merv to this day has the letter that the Australian Jockey Club hierarchy sent him stating that if he attempted to take the position with the Shaw brothers they would not issue him with a jockey's license. This

75. Howe 1983, p. 4.

76. Bartle 1992, p. 24.

77. Author's oral interview Merv Maynard at Newcastle, 1996.



would have resulted in him not being able to ride.<sup>78</sup> Subsequently top jockey Athol George Mulley gained the position after Merv had to turn down the offer. Mulley spent three seasons in Asia as the leading rider in a very lucrative environment. Merv, hiding his disappointment, continued successfully on the home front winning the Australian Jockey Club Cannonbury Stakes on the Vic Thompson trained *Gulf Palm*.

In 1953 Merv began an all too short a relationship with the horse that he regards as far and away the best he ever threw a leg over. Merv reminisced that during the four decades that he rode, on many occasions he would receive calls from different trainers asking him to ride one of their horses, many confided that they had unearthed a champion! Merv received such a call one late night in early May 1953 from a little known young southern district's trainer, Paul Graham. The horse was *Alinga*! He was a jet black gelding, by *Tetreen* from *Ray's Ornament*. He was bred and raced by AJ Maple Brown a wealthy grazier from the Goulburn district. *Ray's Ornament* was ridden by her owner in the Light Horse Brigade. Maple Brown had *Alinga* broken in when he was four years old to race at local bush country picnic races. However, in a very short time, it became evident that *Alinga* was something very special and far too good to just race in country and picnic events. From February 1951 to May 1953 *Alinga* had contested 31 races and won 29 of them carrying massive weights that today are totally out of the bounds of imagination. He was justly labelled 'the Bernborough of the bush' and he won an endless succession of picnic Cups including, the 1952 Boorowa Cup (10 stones 8 pounds (66.6 kg)), 1952 Goulburn and Merilla Cup (10 stones 11 pounds (67.95 kg)), 1952 Canberra Cup Picnic Rave Club (10 stones 9 pounds (67.05 kg)), 1952 Southern Districts Landgrove Cup (10 stones 13 pounds (68.85 kg)), 1953 Crookwell and District Corringle Cup (12 stones 6 pounds (78.3 kg)), 1953 Boorowa Memorial Cup (12 stones 11 pounds (80.55 kg)), 1953 Goulburn Merilla Cup (13 stones 4 pounds (83.7 kg)), 1953 Yass Ravensworth Gold Cup (13 stones 4 pounds (83.7 kg)) and the 1953 Canberra Picnic Race Club Cup (13 stones 12 pounds)! Remarkably the day after his victory in the Canberra Picnic Race Club Cup carrying that massive weight of 13 stones 12 pounds or 87.3 kg *Alinga* was saddled up to run in the ACT Canberra Cup. He carried 9 stones 10 pounds (61.2 kg) and toyed with the opposition to win easily by one and a half lengths. It was now evident to all and sundry that *Alinga* was far too good to be wasted racing around the bush for meagre prize money.<sup>79</sup>

Merv looks back with relish to that day of 6 May 1953 when he was in the Canterbury saddling enclosure receiving his riding instructions from Paul Graham. Merv's first view of *Alinga* striding into the enclosure is something he will never forget. He says that in 46 years of race riding this was the only time he experienced hairs on his neck literally stand on end by just the look of a horse. *Alinga* was a magnificent animal, a giant jet black gelding who fairly rippled with muscle and power. Merv remembers confiding to Paul Graham 'If your horse can gallop anything like he looks then you might have a champion'.<sup>80</sup> *Alinga's* city debut was in the 11 furlongs (2.2 km) Campsie Graduation at Canterbury.<sup>81</sup> Under the set weight conditions of the event *Alinga* carried for him what

<sup>78</sup>. Howe 1983, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup>. Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>80</sup>. Author's oral interview Merv Maynard at Newcastle, 1996.

<sup>81</sup>. Bartle 1992, p. 25.

must have seemed like a postage stamp of 8 stones 8 pounds (54 kg) in comparison to those huge weights he had carried in the bush. The bush champ was elevated to 3 to 1 and second elect in the betting markets for the event behind even money favourite *Audacious*, who was ridden by Jack Thompson. It was nothing more than an exercise gallop for *Alinga* who cruised to the post winning by one and a half lengths.<sup>82</sup> Sydney racing experts were unanimous in their praise of *Alinga* hailing him as the best horse to come from the country in years.

This initial gloss received a loss of tarnish in *Alinga's* next three runs. He was beaten by *Prince Dakhil* in a photo finish in the 11 furlongs (2.2 km) May Handicap at Warwick Farm. Then the unthinkable, he ran unplaced for the first time in his career in the 10 furlongs (2.01 km) Tattersall's James Barnes Plate at Randwick, again the winner being *Prince Dakhil*. Nine days later *Alinga* was back on the track. He was beaten into second place in a photo finish this time by *Royal Glitter* in the 13 furlong (2.61 km) Coronation Cup at Randwick. This race was staged by the Australian Jockey Club to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. A fortnight later *Alinga* was entered at Canterbury in the nine furlongs (1.81 km) Birthday Handicap. Unlike his last three starts, *Alinga* received huge betting support and was backed into 5 to 2 favourite. Third on the turn Maynard set *Alinga* alight and he swept past the leaders like they were standing still, eventually eased down on the line winning by four lengths and clipping a full second off the track record. This win was good enough for Sydney bookmakers to install *Alinga* as equal favourite with *Hydrogen* for the upcoming Doomben Cup. *Alinga* had no luck in Brisbane. He drew the extreme outside barrier of 26. The bush champ never got on the track and though second at the lever he faded in the run to the line. The winner was *French Echo* who *Alinga* had beaten pointlessly at their last meeting in Sydney. Only five days after his Doomben failure the 'iron horse' was saddled up for the Grafton Cup carrying top weight of 9 stones 3 pounds (58.05 kg). *Alinga* was driven to victory by Merv Maynard at his vigorous best just pipping by a half head *Britavah* ridden by renowned country jockey 'Skeeter' Kelly. Close up third, on *Ben Hero* was another top country rider, Bill Wade. There was still no rest for the hardy *Alinga*. Only fourteen days later he was back in Sydney where on 1 August 1953 he contested the Sydney Turf Club Cup at Rosehill. Well weighted at only 8 stones 6 pounds (54 kg), *Alinga* was immediately made favourite for the 12 furlong (2.41 km) event. It was another brilliant ride by Merv Maynard as he got the favourite home by a half length from George Mulley's mount *Lord Saunders*. The winners cheque was £2, 436 (\$4,872) with a gold cup valued at £300 (\$600) pounds.<sup>83</sup>

This victory was instrumental in *Alinga* being posted as an early favourite for the Caulfield and Melbourne Cups. *Alinga* was sent back to Goulburn for a short seven week let up. He returned to Sydney where he was entered in the 7 furlongs (1.4 km) Theo Mark's Quality Handicap at Rosehill. *Alinga* was beaten for early pace in the event but flashed home most impressively to finish fifth behind *Carioca*. *Alinga's* final lead-up race for the Australian Jockey Club Metropolitan Handicap was the 10 furlongs (2.01 km) Squatters' Handicap on the opening day of the 1953 Randwick Carnival. *Alinga* again received heavy betting support and was backed into 9 to 4 favourite for the

<sup>82</sup> Howe 1983, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

event. Disaster struck. *Alinga* was just making his move at the leaders when he suddenly faltered. Merv Maynard interviewed after the race said he felt *Alinga* stumble soon after straightening: 'I was just going around the leaders when *Alinga*'s leg seemed to go on him'.<sup>84</sup> It was apparent the injury was a serious one. When the horse was led back into the enclosure his young trainer Paul Graham broke down in tears. The horse was in obvious distress but the initial prognosis was that it was most likely torn ligaments in the rear nearside pastern. *Alinga* was floated back to his Randwick stables where it soon became apparent that *Alinga*'s injury was of a far more serious nature. The horse needed to be physically lifted from the float. Close veterinarian examination revealed that the near fetlock joint had been broken. Thereafter a 16 day battle was waged and every attempt made to save *Alinga*'s life. Efforts were instigated to patch up the shattered leg. Even a last minute appeal by a doctor to allow the horse to recuperate on his property failed and on 19 October 1953 under the direction of the RSPCA *Alinga* was destroyed.<sup>85</sup>

It was in 1953 that the leading Melbourne stable of the day brought Merv once more to the spotlight when, in the hope of securing one of Australia's best lightweight jockeys, they offered the young Novocastrian what at the time was one of the most fabulous offers ever made to a rider for his services in Australia. Maynard would get a retainer of £1,000. In addition to this 'grand' Maynard was to receive a £25 a week living allowance, the use of a car and a percentage of all placed mounts. 'Most jockeys some in even more demand than the Newcastle king of the pigskin would have rushed the offer but not the shy unassuming lad from the coal city'.<sup>86</sup> Merv, not wishing to leave Newcastle, refused the offer. *Alinga*'s death saw Merv Maynard step away from metropolitan racing for a while. He took to the country cup circuit where, over the next four decades, he amassed what is most likely the most impressive array of country cup victories ever attained in NSW. The three Muswellbrook, the two Cessnock and Port Macquarie and the Armidale, Lismore, Tamworth, Grafton, Kembla, Scone, Coffs Harbour, Quirindi, Wellington, Aberdeen, Denman, Gulgong, Mudgee, Taree, Parkes, Dubbo and Gulgargambone Cups were only some on the Maynard sideboard.<sup>87</sup> It was not uncommon during those days, especially at his home track of Broadmeadow, to see Merv riding three, four and five winners in a meeting.<sup>88</sup>

In 1958 Merv was finally tempted away from Newcastle when he accepted an offer to ride in New Zealand for trainer Larry Wiggins.<sup>89</sup> Whilst in New Zealand, Merv rode winners for top New Zealand trainer George Green including the Whangari Cup on *Ole*. He also rode for the American millionaire owner J De Bloiswack. Merv returned to Newcastle from New Zealand in 1959 and immediately took up where he left off winning races, including the important Newcastle sprint, the Newcastle Jockey Club Newmarket, on *Ammanulla*. In 1960 he took out his second Newcastle jockey's premiership, a feat he would have had far greater hold over had his services not been so sought

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<sup>84.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85.</sup> Howe 1983, p. 6.

<sup>86.</sup> Goodwin 1953, p. 50.

<sup>87.</sup> Howe 1983, p. 9.

<sup>88.</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>89.</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

after on metropolitan tracks and at the big carnivals in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. In 1960 Merv attained one of his career ambitions when he won the Newcastle Gold Cup for trainer 'Silent' Leo O'Sullivan with his imported English stallion *North Row*. O'Sullivan had achieved legendary status as the manager of the tragic boxing champion Les Darcy. Merv Maynard rode one of his great rides to get *North Row* home in a titanic struggle with second placegetter *Vintage*. The two horses staged a war over the concluding stages of the race. *North Row* gained the judges' verdict by an eyebrow.<sup>90</sup>

The culmination of this victory saw a jubilant Merv accept a position as rider for the leading trainer, Keith Daniels, in Singapore and Malaysia. Merv stayed in Asia for four years. His most important victories were in the Penang Cup on *Kerrie Dale* and the Sultan's Cup on *Kodama*.<sup>91</sup> He rode winners for the Sultan of Jahor and made many life-long friends, one of whom was Melbourne jockey Ken Smith. One man he rode for was wealthy Chinese tin mine owner WS Lim who took an immediate liking to Merv and his wife Judy. Lim provided them with the pick of any motor vehicles from his garage. Merv laughingly recalls driving around in a Jaguar, Mercedes and a little red MG Sports car. The downside was that Lim was forever at Merv's side for every minute of nearly every day. Not wanting to insult him, Merv and Judy had to tolerate this. One funny highlight of Lim's attraction surfaced when Merv received a request to ride in Kuala Lumpur. Lim was tied down with business commitments in Singapore and apologetically begged Merv's and Judy's forgiveness for not being able to accompany them. He provided a plane none the less and saw Merv and Judy off. Merv and Judy rubbed their hands with glee. At last they had given the adoring Lim the slip. That night in their Kuala Lumpur hotel room the phone rang and Judy answered the call. It was Lim. Judy asked him how the weather was in Singapore. Lim replied 'I not in Singapore'. Judy remarked 'Oh where are you then Lim?'. He replied enthusiastically, 'I in room next door.' He had finished his business commitments early and had arranged a later flight. He said how happy he was to surprise his friends with a late night dinner. Surprise them he did! Judy Maynard has no hesitation in describing Lim as one of the kindest and most genuine human beings she has ever met. Some years later his body was discovered in a Hong Kong hotel room. Sadly after the disintegration of his marriage he had died a lonely man!<sup>92</sup>

In 1964 Merv returned to Australia. The first meeting he attended was in the upper Hunter at Aberdeen. He obligingly booted home a treble of winners.<sup>93</sup> From this point on race riding took somewhat of a back seat position for Merv. With the connections he and Judy had made in Asia they established a thoroughbred bloodstock agency, selling horses to their contacts. Predominantly they sold to Singapore and Malaysia but over the years they also sold horses to New Caledonia, Macau, Hong Kong and South Korea. Merv began to spend more time tending to their horses and with business trips to Asia, than to race riding, until his involvement with riding was almost a part time occupation. He could not sever his links completely with racing and

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90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Author's oral interview Merv Maynard at Newcastle, 1996.

93. Howe 1983, p. 8.

the ensuing years continued to see him ride his share of winners adding all the time to his already impressive tally of feature race victories on country tracks.<sup>94</sup>

In 1981 Merv's riding keenness was rekindled when Judy was granted one of the first trainers permits issued to a woman. Merv and Judy were soon in the winner's list clocking up wins with *Patana* and *Prince Razzo* at Muswellbrook and Newcastle. The Maynard combination achieved a historical milestone with the grey gelding *No Score*. This plugging grey won two races at Randwick racecourse. On the first occasion he was partnered by Jack Thompson when Merv could not make the weight of 49 kg. But in his second victory, *No Score* was ridden by Merv in the 2,000 m Chester Handicap.<sup>95</sup>

Merv received a setback in 1982 when he was heavily thrown and trampled in the saddling enclosure at Newcastle racecourse. He was badly injured, suffering three broken ribs, a broken collarbone and a punctured lung and spent a week in the intensive care unit of the Newcastle Mater hospital. However Maynard's long career was marked by his professionalism. Always superbly fit and in prime physical condition, even after having turned 50, he showed the benefit by quickly bouncing back from his injuries and within three months was back riding winners.<sup>96</sup>

At the Newcastle Cup carnival of 1983 Judy and Merv were once more grabbing the headlines. The family combined successfully when *Mirror Jack* ridden by Merv won the opening event, the Maiden Handicap. *Mirror Jack* was owned by a group of Melbourne bookmakers and they proceeded to wreck havoc on the Newcastle bookmakers executing a superb and well kept plunge. They backed *Mirror Jack* in from 25 to 1 to 4 to 1 favourite. Under Merv's guidance and experienced hands *Mirror Jack* raced to the front at the jump and scooted away in the straight to win easily by two lengths.<sup>97</sup> Showing no signs of slowing down Merv continued on for the next decade doing what he had always done best, booting home winners. Maybe the numbers were no longer there but each season the name M Maynard continued to go up first on the semaphore boards at racecourses throughout New South Wales.

As stated earlier, the only regret ever expressed by Merv throughout his illustrious riding career had been the missed opportunity to have met the Princess who was later to become Queen Elizabeth II back in 1952 when, as a young 18 year old, he had won the first Queen's Cup. One night in early 1992, Judy Maynard answered a late night call. She was informed that it was the New South Wales Premier's department. They had just received notification from Buckingham Palace that Queen Elizabeth II had expressed the wish on her forthcoming trip to Australia to meet Newcastle jockey Merv Maynard. On her visit to Australia the Queen was to attend the fortieth running of the Queen's Cup and open a new stand at Randwick. She wanted to meet the man who had ridden the first winner of the event. Judy justifiably thought someone was pulling her leg but a further call from Australian Jockey Club Chairman, Bob Charley, confirmed Merv's royal audience. Merv and Judy went to Randwick on 22 February 1992 and before a large crowd, Merv Maynard shook hands with the monarch.<sup>98</sup> He spent some

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94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., p. 9.

96. Bartle 1992, p. 25.

97. Howe 1983, p. 9.

98. Bartle 1992, p. 24.

40 minutes talking to the Queen and Prince Phillip, both avid racegoers. Merv even tipped them the winner of the Queen's Cup. Both the Queen and Prince Phillip were impressed that Merv at 60 was still riding and getting up the occasional winner.

Having achieved this lifelong ambition there was now nothing more for Merv to do. On 1 August 1994 at the age of 62 he handed in his rider's licence after 46 years of race riding. Although he gave up race riding, Merv did not cease riding trackwork and in late 1998 he is still to be found, each morning at Broadmeadow racecourse riding a couple the same as he has done for the past 50 years. Merv Maynard was considered as one of the top Australian riders in a period regarded as the golden age of Australian jockeys. He rode against all the greats like Darby Munro, Billy Cook, Jack Thompson, Neville Sellwood, George Moore, Athol Mulley, Scobie Breasley, Bill Williamson and Lester Piggott and, in later years, generations of new top riders like Ron Quinton, Peter Cook, Kevin Langby, Malcolm Johnstone and Wayne Harris. Having ridden over 1,500 winners and ridden countless cup victories 'Merv Maynard is one of the legendary horsemen who have graced the pigskin in postwar Australia. There have been few finer ambassadors for the "Sport of Kings"'.<sup>99</sup>

### Richard Lawrence 'Darby' McCarthy

Richard Laurence McCarthy was born in 1943 at Cunnamulla, Queensland.<sup>100</sup> The son of an Aboriginal stockman, he was the eighth child in a family of 12, six boys and six girls. He gained an early horseback education riding brumbies on a Cunnamulla station. At the age of nine, to help support his large family, he went to work at Yakara station about 50 km south west of Thargomindah.<sup>101</sup> Yakara was owned by Charlie Easton, a keen racing man.<sup>102</sup> With his mother, five brothers and six sisters young McCarthy lived in a tent on the property. His job was to round up horses for the stockmen before the start of each working day.<sup>103</sup> McCarthy displayed a natural talent on horseback, his balance and skill evident to those who saw him in the saddle. He could ride wild calves and brumbies as well as any of the senior riders. When he was 12, Darby was taken to a small picnic race meeting at Thargomindah by his father and Charlie Easton. McCarthy recalls the day: 'I was given the ride on *Rusty* in a five furlongs sprint he jumped straight as a gun barrel at the start and led all the way.'<sup>104</sup> His winning ride impressed an enthusiastic Easton who nicknamed him 'Darby' after the famed jockey Darby Munro. The nickname stuck and in later years was a fitting accolade for a rider who would scale dizzying heights as a jockey.<sup>105</sup>

Darby McCarthy would prove to be one of the most naturally gifted riders ever to grace the Australian turf. Sadly, McCarthy's time at the top would prove to be only fleeting as his career stumbled with stops and starts plagued by controversy and personal problems. McCarthy could be compared to soccer's Irish wizard, George Best, as a gifted genius prone to bouts of erratic and unpredictable behaviour and to falling foul

99. Howe 1983, p. 9.

100. Weate 1966, p. 44.

101. Dawson 1990, p. 18.

102. Weate 1966, p. 44.

103. Dawson 1990, p. 18.

104. Weate 1966, p. 44.

105. Ibid.

of officialdom. Darby, like Best, was his own worst enemy yet blessed with a talent so rich it could only be termed 'God given'. He was not without advisers. Darby's eldest brother, Ted, had built up a reputation as a good jockey especially in the Toowoomba area until weight problems curtailed his career. Darby also befriended leading amateur rider Noel Thompson. In 1958 whilst in Brisbane visiting his sick father, young Darby attended the race meeting at Albion Park. He was standing watching the horses parade in the saddling enclosure where he was noticed by a well known trainer, Ted Hennessy. Hennessy was not slow in coming forward and having noticed young Darby's interest immediately asked him if he was in need of a job. The gleam in Darby's eyes was all the confirmation Hennessy required so Darby became apprenticed in October 1958. Ted Hennessy had stables at Hendra. He gave the young Darby his chance. At only his third professional ride Darby was victorious at Kilcoy.<sup>106</sup>

McCarthy's climb to the top of racing was under way. He rode his first city winner at Doomben on the 50 to 1 chance *Rio Sand*.<sup>107</sup> In 1960 Darby was dux of the Queensland Turf Club's Apprentice School. He was presented with a saddle by the Governor of Queensland, Sir Abel Smith.<sup>108</sup> Around this time a newspaper reader complained of a reporter's continual reference to Darby being Aboriginal. Darby, aged only 17, laconically replied:

I think the man is sincere and trying to be fair but he misses the whole point. If any newspaperman wants to do me a favour he can call me an Aborigine as often as he mentions my name—because that is what I am and if I am going to be a success it is important that I be known as an Aboriginal success.<sup>109</sup>

In his first three years in the saddle Darby chalked up over 100 winners with wins in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Feature races were not long in coming to the talented rider. He won the 1960 Brisbane Summer Cup on *Midswain* and the 1960 Brisbane Tattersalls Cup on Melbourne galloper *Dow Street*. He journeyed to Melbourne in 1961 for the spring carnival where he partnered *Dow Street* in Australia's premier race, the Melbourne Cup. He was unscathed when *Dow Street* fell in the big two miler. Darby was now spending a lot of time riding at important meetings in New South Wales. He was victorious on the Mal Barnes trained *Alspick* in the six furlongs (1.2 km) Ramornie Handicap at Grafton. *Alspick* was by *Avignon* out of *Estana*. He was sold as a yearling in 1957 for 125 guineas by the Melton Park Stud owners, former champion jockeys Edgar Britt and Harold James. In 1962 whilst still an apprentice, Darby came south. He partnered *Tamure* to win the Newcastle Gold Cup for Warwick Farm trainer Norman Turnbull. Darby's association with *Alspick* now hit a purple patch. In December 1962 they combined to win the Australian Jockey Club Summer Cup by eight lengths. Darby rode a great race hugging the fence. He was never worse than fifth and *Alspick* was steered through needle eye openings to race away with the event. They backed up on New Year's Day 1963 to win the Tattersall's Club Cup. Darby then formed a strong association with the Bobby Sinclair trained *Mullala*. On his first six rides on the horse, Darby recorded five wins including a brilliant victory in the \$20,000

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid., p. 45.

109. Tatz 1987, p. 58.

Stradbroke Handicap.<sup>110</sup> With his apprenticeship coming to a close and his services so sought after in the south, Darby transferred to Norman Turnbull's Warwick Farm stables.<sup>111</sup> Darby returned home to Queensland in 1964, now a fully fledged jockey. He repeated his previous year's victory by guiding *Cele's Image* to victory in the Stradbroke.<sup>112</sup> The year 1965 saw more important victories come the way of Darby McCarthy. He rode *Patient Polly* to victory in the Grafton Cup and won the Canterbury Cup on *Rakia*. He took out the rich Brisbane double in 1966 when he partnered *Castanea* to victory in yet another Stradbroke and then scored a great victory on *Apa* in the Brisbane Cup. Darby went into celebration mode and went out and bought himself a diamond tie pin and cuff link set worth \$5,000.<sup>113</sup>

Darby decided to see the world and Europe was his first port of call. The press back in Australia had a field day as they kept the public informed of the whereabouts of 'Dapper' Darby McCarthy. It was reported that he arrived at the races at Royal Ascot in a Rolls Royce complete with top hat and tails.<sup>114</sup> He was going to parties with Mia Farrow and Frank Sinatra and got drunk with Lee Marvin and Rock Hudson.<sup>115</sup> Darby decided to set up base in France. He was besieged with contract offers. He finally accepted an offer from a top French trainer, Maurice Zilber, who trained for the international art entrepreneur, Daniel Wildenstein. The contract was lucrative to say the least, including a retainer, bonuses for prizemoney won, a car and lavish home in Chantilly complete with a French maid. This was a world far removed from living in a tent on Yakara station. The boy from the bush had arrived as he wore \$400 pale blue suits to the races.<sup>116</sup> Darby rode for owners like the Rothschilds and Prince Aly Khan.<sup>117</sup> He rode in races in France, Germany, England and Ireland during his European stay.

Homesickness in 1968 prompted the return of Darby McCarthy to Australia and he took out the 1968 Doomben 100,000 on *Gay Gauntlet*. In one golden afternoon at Randwick in 1969 at the Australian Jockey Club Carnival he annexed the two premier events, taking out the Australian Jockey Club Derby on *Divide and Rule* and then, in the very next race, he rode *Brokers Tip* to an exhilarating victory in the Australian Jockey Club Epsom Handicap. Darby had scaled the heights of his profession. His ride on *Divide and Rule* was recorded as:

the horse was ridden a treat by McCarthy. So beautifully was he placed throughout by the 25 year old Aboriginal that many excuses came from many quarters in that they met with setbacks while the winner enjoyed a travel free passage throughout the race.<sup>118</sup>

The excuses were pretty lame, however, because Darby and *Divide and Rule* had coasted to the line some five lengths clear of the field. The victory on *Brokers Tip* in the Epsom was even more impressive. Trapped in a tight pocket for more than two and a half fur-

<sup>110</sup>. Weate 1966, p. 45.

<sup>111</sup>. Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>112</sup>. Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>113</sup>. Kennedy 1966, p. 10.

<sup>114</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>. Dawson 1990, p. 18.

<sup>116</sup>. Kennedy 1977, p. 10.

<sup>117</sup>. Tatz 1995, p. 251.

<sup>118</sup>. Racetrack 1969, p. 38.



longs Darby forced a passage, hooking out from behind four runners to charge down the outside and snatch victory from the Roy Higgins' ridden *Alrello*.<sup>119</sup>

The fairytale had reached its zenith that afternoon at Randwick. From there it began to form into something more akin to a nightmare as Darby's career hit a spiral rollercoaster descent. In an interview in 1984 he recalled: 'I've been right up on top and I've been way down there at the bottom. And, baby, believe me, it's a lot better being up.'<sup>120</sup> Darby was a man who had drank champagne with aristocracy and at one time owned 20 French tailor made suits.<sup>121</sup> That flash lifestyle was beginning to have an adverse affect on his career. It now took a nosedive.

McCarthy's drop from the top accelerated further in the mid 1970s when Victorian stewards disqualified him for seven years for allegedly conspiring to 'fix' a race at a lowly midweek meeting at Hamilton in Western Victoria.<sup>122</sup> On 30 March 1976 he was mentioned in the stewards' report. It stated that his mount had interfered with the beaten favourite. On 18 June, the Hamilton racing club charged Darby and the trainer, Bob Smeardon, with a number of offences. The investigation had been instigated by the trainer of the beaten favourite, George Rantall, who alleged that he had been approached to 'slow' the favourite. An unnamed individual who failed to appear before the inquiry was also charged. The inquiry went into its eleventh hearing and the stewards spent over six hours deliberating about the accusations and the evidence.<sup>123</sup> They announced that Darby McCarthy was disqualified for seven years. Smeardon was to relinquish his trainer's licence. The unnamed person was warned off racecourses for life. Darby strongly denied any wrong doing and pleaded his innocence from any plot, but it all fell on deaf ears. There is nothing worse for a jockey to contend with than the stain of wrong doing. Darby fought to clear his name. He lodged an appeal with the South Western District Racing Association and, largely with the help of a group of top lawyers including a later Victorian Premier, John Cain, and Victorian State Ombudsman, Sir John Dillon, his penalty was reduced to two years. But Darby never gave up the fight to prove his innocence. Further appeals were instigated and eventually the disqualification was dropped and all reference to the matter was to be removed from Darby's record.

Darby recalled filling in the form for his return to race riding: 'when I asked whether I should put in the disqualification when I went to get another licence they said no, it had been removed. There was no disqualification.' Darby could not believe it: '...Well if I haven't been disqualified, where is my house, my money and why hadn't I been able to make a living from racing for 10 months?'<sup>124</sup>

Insurmountable damage had been done. The calls for rides were no longer there and the backslappers only to pleased to associate with a winner were now no longer to be found. The episode had ruined Darby's marriage. He had begun to drink. He recalled: 'It wasn't a good time for me.'<sup>125</sup> To make matters worse Darby had continued

119. Ibid., p. 42.

120. Owen 1984, p 54.

121. Penton 1987, p. 236.

122. Owen 1984, p. 54.

123. Kennedy 1977, p. 11.

124. Dawson 1990, p. 19.

to spend in the fashion he had been accustomed to. Soon the money was all gone. Before it had been so simple. He would ride a few winners, fill his pockets with money and go out and buy cars and houses. He recalled: 'When I ran out I would do it all over again'.<sup>126</sup> Times were now so different. There was no easy way to replenish the coffers. He started selling off his property to get money, even his much valued tie pin and cufflinks which fetched only \$1,250. Darby found himself at odds with the police. He recalls the nightmare: 'I'd have a drink and I'd be a zombie, talking duck talk. People would see me and reckon I was on the grog heavy'.<sup>127</sup> Darby was faced with every jockey's dread, increasing weight troubles. He declared: 'drink was never the main problem. It was other things that got me. A friend put me on prescription drugs which I swallowed like smarties to keep my weight down'.<sup>128</sup> Darby says, frankly: 'In those days we were never warned of the dangers of mixing those kinds of drugs with drink'.<sup>129</sup> He discovered the body of his young brother dead after an overdose of the prescription drugs.<sup>130</sup> An attempted comeback with Victorian master trainer of two year olds, Cliff Fahler, came to a crashing end. Darby, still walking the tightrope of weight reduction drug taking, had put his arm through a plate glass window. It was nearly severed. The arm was saved but with restricted movement in the left wrist. Under enormous strain Darby buckled under the weight of his decline. 'He was admitted to a psychiatric ward for evaluation. He was discharged on his own cognisance but voluntarily booked himself into a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre'.<sup>131</sup> Darby dried out and began the slow climb back out of his own personal hell. He overcame obstacles over his weak arm to once more gain a rider's licence. In 1978 he made his comeback, this time in New Caledonia. He returned to Sydney and renewed his long time association with Mal Barnes. He seemed to be back on track. He and Barnes combined to take out the 1978 Tancred Stakes with *Hyperno*. But it was only a short lived return. Darby recalled: 'I wasted hard and got my weight down to 54.5 kilos but I wasn't getting any rides. It didn't seem worth it. I couldn't do it any more.'<sup>132</sup>

Darby remarried and packed up and headed back to Queensland to begin a new life as a trainer. With the backing of his old friend, Lloyd Foyster, he set up a training centre at Toowoomba's Clifford Park course. On 18 February 1984 he won his first race as a trainer when the 15 to 1 shot *Ptah* was first past the post.<sup>133</sup> He started out with 14 boxes and, with further additions from the Foyster string, life looked rosy for Darby. Yet he was not content. He approached the Federal Government through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs with the outline of a plan to set up a scheme where he could take in young Aboriginal kids and teach them the art of horsemanship. His brief stated that after his expert tuition these boys would be well placed to go out into the razor edge world of racing, equipped both mentally and physically to face the perils of big time

125. Owen 1984, p. 55.

126. Dawson 1990, p. 19.

127. Kennedy 1977, p. 11.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid.

130. Ibid.

131. Dawson 1990, p. 19.

132. Owen 1984, p. 55.

133. Ibid., p. 54.

racings. Not only that, McCarthy wanted to see young Aboriginal kids gain an opportunity like he had gained.<sup>134</sup> Darby said:

This is something I've always wanted to do. I've built up a lot of knowledge and I want to pass it on. I keep thinking how many other young black kids would have made something of their lives if they had been able to do this sort of thing.<sup>135</sup>

The Department thought the plan a good one and gave it the necessary support to set it up. Darby was enthusiastic about its operation. He would have boys in his care for some 13 weeks. During that time the boys would receive tuition on every aspect of life in and around a racing stable including learning to ride, mucking out stables, grooming, shoeing, feeding and every conceivable aspect of horse care. Darby was firm with the boys. He said they also needed to learn to do what they were told. He took them to the track each morning and attended race meetings. They were shown race videos which they then discussed. Two apprentices, Courtney Appo, and Darby's nephew, David McCarthy, came through the instruction and were immediately able to secure apprenticeships.<sup>136</sup> Sadly after some three years of operation the apprentice school was disbanded. Darby was disillusioned with the lack of drive and commitment on the part of many of the boys.<sup>137</sup> He also found the life of a trainer having to deal with owners a far more cutthroat world than that of a top jockey. He continued living on in the Toowoomba area and, in 1987, he unsuccessfully stood as the Australian Democrat candidate for the seat of Maranoa in the General election.<sup>138</sup>

In mid-1990 at the age of 45, Darby McCarthy initiated one more attempt at a comeback as a jockey. On Friday 28 July 1990 Darby was re-licensed by the Queensland Turf Club Committee. When given the news Darby was elated. The very next day saw him return to race riding at Brisbane's Doomben race course. His mount finished unplaced but Darby was nevertheless ecstatic. He remarked: 'It's hard turning your life around after 10 years but the old touch is still there and I want to ride.'<sup>139</sup> Despite Darby's enthusiasm and commitment to the task, the stark realities soon came to the fore. Although the heart was willing the body was no longer up to the task. Darby once more and for the last time pulled up the shingles on what was a remarkable career.

The accolades for Darby McCarthy's skill in the saddle are numerous. Colin Tatz has highlighted a few. Bert Lillye described: 'a marvellous pair of hands...a genius rider. No jockey was riding better in 1968 and 1969. He had a natural talent. He never worked at his riding as did George Moore.' Tom Brassel said: 'he is one of the finest jockeys I have ever seen—he was consistently good; a quite man, he was a thorough gentleman'. 'A very gifted rider' thought Pat Murray. George Moore's final words simply described Darby as 'a freak'.<sup>140</sup> For an all too brief a time, like that spring Saturday afternoon at Randwick when he won the Derby and the Epsom, Darby McCarthy had

<sup>134</sup>. Penton 1987, p. 282.

<sup>135</sup>. Owen 1984, p. 55.

<sup>136</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>. Dawson 1990, p. 19.

<sup>138</sup>. Tatz 1995, p. 250.

<sup>139</sup>. Dawson 1990, p. 19.

<sup>140</sup>. Tatz 1995, p. 250.

scaled the mountain of his profession. In the Sport of Kings at that time he was King of the World.

Peter St Albans, Merv Maynard and Darby McCarthy can be held high as beacons of Aboriginal achievement in a very intense, competitive and physically demanding sport. They achieved untold success across some of Australian racing's most exciting decades. They mixed it with the best of their profession, playing their part in the sheer exhilaration and excitement of Australian racing. Their stories vividly display them playing an active role through the pages of some of racing's most colourful and famous history.

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# Performing protest, articulating difference: environmentalists, Aborigines and the Kuranda Skyrail dispute

Rosita Henry<sup>1</sup>

During 1993 and 1994 the Cairns to Kuranda Skyrail became a hot political issue in North Queensland. The responses of the local community to the construction of this passenger cable car through the Barron Falls National Park and the newly listed Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, were varied but quickly became polarised as being either for or against the project. The Skyrail became a heated topic of debate in both the private and public domains, in the homes of local people, in the cafes and bars and other meeting places, eventually spilling out into the streets in the form of demonstrations, and into the rainforest itself in the form of the blockade and direct action by some of the protesters.

In this paper I explore the articulation of different Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal responses to the Skyrail. Although the responses were polarised as pro- or anti- the development, I do not interpret the Skyrail dispute as a simple binary contestation, either of values, world views, ideologies, or primordial loyalties. Nor do I see it as a mere struggle of two opposing social groups, the powerful against the powerless, Aboriginal against non-Aboriginal, greenie against developer, and so on. Rather, I attempt an escape from the categorical imperatives that otherwise constrain interpretation, by focusing my discussion on the discursive fields and practices which *produce* them. I develop my argument by highlighting a particular moment of protest within the Skyrail dispute. Such moments, I suggest, are the key to a better understanding of how political identities are made. Identities are not given, but are produced situationally. They are not something composed out of the inherent properties of individuals, but are the result of practice. The relationship between sameness and difference is produced and articulated performatively, and it is as such a productive enunciation that the Kuranda Skyrail dispute can best be understood.

I see the Skyrail dispute as a place making situation which is also a public performance of identity. Political identities are made through the 'articulatory practice'<sup>2</sup> of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on fieldwork conducted under the auspices of a small grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and forms the basis of a chapter in the author's Ph.D thesis. See also Henry 1995 and Greer & Henry 1996.

a discourse of sameness and difference. I am influenced in my perspective by the recent fascination among theorists with exploring the significance of the interplay between self and other in identity formation.<sup>3</sup> Michael Taussig for example, argues that identity 'has to be seen not as a thing-in-itself but as a relationship woven from mimesis and alterity within colonial fields of representation'.<sup>4</sup>

My focus is on the performative dimension of this interplay between self and other, sameness and difference. I do not mean that identity is merely a matter of self-representation, or a game people play by freely picking and choosing from a pool of cultural substance and then moulding masks to suit themselves. Rather, I take performance as a type of situated social practice by which people politically engage with one another and contest and negotiate the categorical identities that are structurally and historically produced. As Homi Bhabha writes:

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.<sup>5</sup>

Let me hasten to qualify my use of Bhabha here. Firstly, whereas Bhabha uses them synonymously, I make a distinction between 'cultural engagement' and 'social articulation'. My focus is on 'social articulation', that is, on the articulation of situated discursive practices through which place is made and identity constituted. My aim is to offer an analysis of how issues of conflict might be understood *other* than in terms which take racial and cultural differences as given.

Secondly, I also prefer to avoid the use of the term 'hybridity'. It has the potential to lead one to simply replace an interpretation in terms of binary opposites with one based on a holy trinity. In other words, the 'hybrid' becomes fixed as a third category which merely reinscribes the other two categories (coloniser/colonised) and the privileging of one over the other. As Robert Young writes:

Hybridity in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own anti-thetical structure.<sup>6</sup>

Hybridization however, is often presented as a politically radical means of liberation from past colonial dichotomies. Annamarie Jagose, highlights this in her analysis of the border *mestiza* figure in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

<sup>2</sup> Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Bhabha 1994; Fuery 1992; Fuery 1997; Gunew & Yeatman 1993; Kapferer 1995; Moore 1994; Taussig 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Taussig 1993, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> Bhabha 1994, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Young 1995, p. 27. See also Chow 1994, p. 131. Chow argues that what 'Bhabha's word "hybridity" revives, in the masquerade of deconstruction, anti-imperialism, and "difficult" theory, is an old functionalist notion of what a dominant culture permits in the interest of maintaining its own equilibrium...'

According to Jagose, Anzaldúa promotes the *mestiza* as the 'harbinger of a global miscegenation and hybridization which eliminates forever the possibility of difference and separation'.<sup>7</sup> Bhabha himself however would not agree. For Bhabha hybridization is not an escape from colonial power. Rather it is the *product* of colonial power and as Jagose points out in harmony with Bhabha:

...any prioritization of the *mestiza* must not be on account of her alleged ability to secure a space beyond the border's adjudication of cultural difference but on account of her foregrounding of the ambivalence which enables even as it destabilises the colonial relationship.<sup>8</sup>

On another front, Nicholas Thomas takes Bhabha to task for not adequately theorising heterogeneity in colonial discourse. Thomas questions Bhabha's view of colonial discourse as a 'singular and definable entity'.<sup>9</sup> Thus, hybridization, as constituting an active moment of resistance, may not be universal but may be specifically a product of British colonial discourse, in itself not a 'unitary construction'.<sup>10</sup>

Hybridization, for Bhabha, is colonialism's construct but it is a construct which resists its maker. Because it unravels as much as it knits dominant cultural power, it becomes an active moment of resistance. However, it is precisely this notion, that hybridity is a *product* of colonial power, that Thomas finds problematic. Thomas would grant to the colonized greater autonomy in their 'enunciations and strategies', an 'empowered practice' for which, he argues, Bhabha's approach does not allow.<sup>11</sup> However, Thomas's perspective is itself limited. His culturalist focus makes for a tendency to underestimate the oppressive nature of colonial regimes.

With these reservations about the concept of hybridity in mind, I find Bhabha's notion of 'active moments of resistance' enlightening, particularly his understanding that such moments are ambivalent ones in which sameness and difference are articulated, and political identities are made. The Kuranda Skyrail protest scene I describe below is, I argue, such an 'active moment'. I do not see it as productive of some new hybrid identity category. Rather, it is a productive moment of strategic action and resistance. Here I am in sympathy with Thomas who, following Bourdieu, advocates 'an understanding of a pluralized field of colonial narratives, which are seen...as signifying practices rather than elements of a code'.<sup>12</sup> I stress however that these signifying practices are *situated* practices and not simply cultural representations somehow remote from the colonial political regimes that have spawned them. As John Peters points out:

The improvisation of identity is wonderful if you have the cultural and finance capital to cushion you against the traumas of post-modernity, but most of the human species still lives out its days in localized spaces, dependent in various ways on the people they have known for years. The means of making one's identity a poetic work are inequitably distributed...We should neither drain the concept of culture of its ties to place and matter nor freeze it into absolute identity.<sup>13</sup>

7. Jagose 1993, p. 213.

8. Ibid., p. 224.

9. Thomas 1994, p. 45.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., pp. 58-9.

12. Ibid., p. 8.

13. Peters 1997, p. 91.



My focus on a particular localized moment of protest answers Thomas's call for a 'historicized, ethnographic approach' to colonial discourses.<sup>14</sup> I attempt to offer a means by which social conflict might be understood other than in terms of given racial and cultural differences. It is in particular in the study of human environmental relationships that the complex interface between indigenous peoples and others tend to be reduced to a matter of cultural difference, or of contrasting environmental values.<sup>15</sup>

### Protesting the Skyrail

Skyrail runs from the bottom of the range near Cairns, through the Barron Falls National Park and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, to Kuranda. Final state government approval for the construction of Skyrail was given in November 1993 and it was officially opened on 1 September 1995.

The concept of a Cairns-Kuranda cableway had been around since 1987 when a company called Global Research Pty Ltd. (the forerunner to Skyrail Pty Ltd) began investigating its feasibility. In June 1988 Queensland's Bjelke-Petersen government gave approval in principle for a cableway. Local residents opposed to the development had only just begun to gather forces when in December 1988 the designated 'Wet Tropics' area, through which the proposed cableway was to be constructed, was successfully listed as a World Heritage Area. The Queensland Government took a High Court action against the listing but in December 1989 the newly elected Labor Government withdrew this action and deferred the cableway issue until a Wet Tropics World Heritage management regime could be established.<sup>16</sup> Once the World Heritage area was declared, the urgency for people to protest against the cableway was apparently removed and it was not until 1993 that the issue resurfaced in the public consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

In anticipation of the government go-ahead, a group of concerned people, from both Cairns and Kuranda, met and formed an anti-Skyrail action group which they named PAKS (People Against Kuranda Skyrail). This group included not just environmentalists but also other residents of the Kuranda area worried about the effects of the Skyrail on their lifestyles. It included representatives from the Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Corporation, the Wilderness Society, and the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC). The group began to distribute a newsletter to keep people informed about the progress of its campaign. In response, some anonymous pro-Skyrainers put out their own newsletter—a form of 'seditious laughter',<sup>18</sup> to undermine the PAKS cause. They called themselves PAPAKS (People against People against Kuranda Skyrail). Their first newsletter began in the following vein:

14. Thomas 1994, p. 8.

15. See, for example, Strang 1997.

16. I am indebted to Bruce White for his *A Chronology of Documents, Letters, Media, and Events Telling the Story of How It Is that a Cairns-Kuranda Cableway Got to Be Constructed in a Djabugay Cultural Landscape*, unpublished manuscript submitted to Mr George Menham (General Manager, ATSIC), reporter under s 10 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act* 1984 (Cwlth) 1995.

17. Henry 1995; Greer & Henry 1996.

18. Butwin 1978.

Our mandate is to oppose the Greenie, Leftie, Pinko, Dole-bludger, Hippie, Feral, Artie Fartie, Mabo Do-gooder minority factions that will stop anything just for the sake of stopping it...PAPAKS are real world people who don't scoot around the rainforest lustfully hugging trees, but in fact hate and detest trees—just look at what the rotten, stinking trees did to Sydney recently—trees are killers!

The PAKS meetings throughout 1994 were regularly attended by a significant number of Kuranda Aboriginal people. I say significant because it is extremely rare to find Aboriginal people in Kuranda attending meetings which are driven by members of the wider non-Aboriginal community. Of a total of 76 people listed individually by name on the mailing and work group list of PAKS, 11 are Aboriginal and further newsletters were sent out on request to the Aboriginal settlements at Mantaka, Kowrowa, and Mona Mona. The formation of PAKS meant that Aboriginal people who were against the Skyrail could access allies in the non-Aboriginal community. PAKS organisers were just as keen to harness the support of Djabugay people against the Skyrail as Djabugay people were to use PAKS. As one woman put it to me,

They [PAKS] needed our support as well, so I think it worked both ways. They came in asking for our support you know really, and we helped them. So we helped each other...<sup>19</sup>

A cultural awareness workshop was arranged in Kuranda to promote goodwill and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal protesters, which I attended as an observer. A trained facilitator from one of the environmentalist groups organised the workshop at which a Djabugay Elder talked about the removal of her family from the Kuranda area to Mona Mona Mission in 1916, of her life growing up on the Mission, and the meaning of the rainforest to her people. The workshop facilitator also arranged a visit by women protesters to the old Mona Mona Mission site and a partnership system was formed there, in which non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women were encouraged to form pairs so that they could support each other in their combined campaign against Skyrail.

### **Direct action: spatial enunciations of protest**

PAKS members were not united on what form their protest against Skyrail should take. Many thought that PAKS should confine itself to attempts at raising public awareness through media coverage, public displays, peaceful marches, and letters, petitions, and submissions to the state and federal governments. Others thought that this was not enough and that direct action, such as blockades at the various Skyrail tower construction sites, was required. To this end 'non-violent direct action' training was undertaken by some of the members and a separate group was formed, the Barron Gorge Wildlife Action Group. Members of this group remained part of PAKS but engaged in independent actions to physically obstruct the construction of the cableway. Direct action included sitting within the boundaries of construction sites, erecting a bamboo platform at one of the tower sites to stop Skyrail's helicopter from moving equipment from the site, dressing up as endangered rainforest species, building a set and performing a skit inside the office of the Department of Environment and Heritage, and above all, 'tree sitting'. What the protesters called 'tree sits' involved volunteers climbing particular

<sup>19</sup>. Personal interview, 10 November 1995, Kuranda.

trees to prevent loggers from continuing to clear the tower sites. The tree sitters were supported by a ground crew which provided them with food and other requirements. One protester lasted 208 days in a tree before he was tricked into allowing police, posing as a television crew, onto his platform. He was removed by police using a block and pulley system and the tree was then felled.<sup>20</sup>

Aboriginal people of Kuranda also engaged in direct action against the Skyrail. Dancers from the Tjapukai Dance Theatre joined the protest demonstrations by performing their connection to the country with music and dance. Others painted placards and joined the street marches organised by PAKS, demonstrated at the tower sites, and supported the tree-sitters by bringing them food. Some Aboriginal youths even took their turn sitting in trees, although they tended not stay in the forest overnight.

Aboriginal views on the Skyrail however were as divided as the views of the general population. Some Aboriginal people in Kuranda saw it as an avenue for employment and in May 1992 the Chairperson of the Mona Mona Aboriginal Corporation wrote to the developer asking for a meeting to discuss how a proposed new agency—the Djabugay Ranger Land Management, Conservation and Protection Agency could assist Skyrail Pty Ltd.<sup>21</sup> These differences in response to the Skyrail *appear* to correspond to already entrenched patterns of conflict among various factions in the Kuranda Aboriginal community, represented partly by the various incorporated bodies and the divide between the so called 'historicals' (that is, people brought into Mona Mona mission from other country) and 'traditionals' (the Djabugay), but it is not quite as simple as that. The responses to the Skyrail are not adequately explained in such categorical terms.

What is revealed in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal responses to the Skyrail is an interrogation and undermining of the authority of categorical identities. Political manoeuvring with regard to the Skyrail, I argue, provided a forum for dismantling their hegemony.

To illustrate this more clearly I will describe a three minute scene from an anti-Skyrail protest at one of the Skyrail tower sites captured on video by one of the protesters. There were no media personnel at the site, only protesters, police and Skyrail logging contractors. In the video clip one of the Aboriginal protesters points out that this is not a performance for the media and therefore that they are not just putting on a show. 'We don't need no media. There's no media here. Our protest is from our heart and our heart is here'.

### **A moment in the performance of protest**

The protesters mainly comprise women and children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. They have seated themselves within the boundaries of a site to be cleared in the rainforest for one of the Skyrail towers. A number of the non-Aboriginal women and children are attached together around trees on the site with 'super-glue'. The police walk the Aboriginal protesters off the site which is cordoned off with yellow tape. The Aboriginal protesters then stand outside the tape barrier protesting verbally as the

20. *Cairns Post*, 11 January 1995, p. 1.

21. White 1995, pp. 22–23.

police physically remove, in some cases carry and drag, the non-Aboriginal protesters from the site. Some of the young girls are crying. It is apparent that at least one of them is in pain. They indicate that their super-glued hands had been torn apart by police.

The protesters then stand outside the barrier, with the police and the loggers within, watching the loggers start to cut the trees. The sound of chainsaws almost drowns out their voices as the protesters shout out to the police and the loggers.

I suggest that this scene represents a performative moment in which social inclusion and exclusion, sameness and difference, are articulated. It is in such moments that identity is constituted, place is made, and community defined. In this scene we see and hear Aboriginal women establishing their difference by calling on the historical specificity of their experiences to be recognised by the police and the loggers:

The Government wants us to shut up. We're like a herd of cattle. They herd us here and there on missions...Learn your history. We're the ones that suffered, not you. You don't even know our history.

On the other hand, we also hear them asserting their sameness—'We're Australians. We're all Australians here'. We see and hear them defining the idea of community, in the face of the state hegemonic power represented by the police and the loggers. A woman calls out to a distressed young non-Aboriginal protester by name and puts her arm around her to comfort her, while claiming to her audience of police, loggers and other protesters:

That's how much we know our locals in Kuranda. We're on first name basis. We mix. This is what you call caring. I'm loving up a white girl. We care for one another. We're here for one another. We're not here for ourselves.

This protest scene is indeed an articulatory moment—a moment in which place and identity are constituted. This performative engagement of the ideas of sameness and difference challenges and resists the entrenched binary oppositions of dominant 'games of truth'.<sup>22</sup>

### **A game of truth**

The initial task that PAKS set itself was a 'fact-finding' one. As noted in the PAKS Newsletter, 'most members of our group were assigned fact-finding tasks on which they will report at our next meeting'.<sup>23</sup> In February 1994 volunteers were called on to survey the Skyrail tower sites and count trees within 30m from each tower site. This is an indication of the form of discourse in which the debate was expressed. Much of the debate was waged in terms of disputed 'facts'. How much rainforest would actually be destroyed? Was it a fact that the total area to be cleared during the construction of the Skyrail would only be about half a hectare, as was claimed by members of the pro-Skyrail lobby group, or would the construction in fact necessarily entail swathe clearing? What in fact, if any, were the rainforest plant and animal species that would be adversely affected by the Skyrail? Was it a fact that the rainforest was safe from further destruction due to possible accidents during the construction phase? Was it a fact that the Skyrail would lead to fewer buses travelling up and down the range, thus relieving

<sup>22</sup>. Foucault 1988, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup>. PAKS Newsletter, 3 October 1993, p. 1.

Kuranda of some of the pollution and congestion caused by their parking in the village? Was it a fact that the Skyrail would actually result in greater protection of the rainforest by replacing more damaging walking tracks, or would it in fact simply supplement the already existing tracks and spawn the creation of new ones? Were there in fact Aboriginal sites of significance in the path of the Skyrail? In sum, the debate was waged in positivist terms, that is, people debated about what was true or false according to what were perceived as objectively provable facts and they called for environmental and social impact studies to be done to establish the truth or otherwise of the factual claims being made.

Again and again the pro-Skyrail lobby attempted to make the anti-Skyrail protesters look foolish by demonstrating that they had got their facts wrong. The article by freelance journalist Michael Sourial entitled 'Protesters, credible or farcical?' in the *Cairns Post* is a good expression of this discourse of the literal-minded.<sup>24</sup> Sourial argues that the actions of the protesters are farcical and he uses a particular action by an individual protester to support his case. This action involved one of the protesters super-gluing her hands together around a tree at one of the tower sites. Sourial writes,

The 'super-glue' incident was one of the true low points for this protest which has been marked by embarrassment. The protesters now, incidentally, deny that the young lady in question glued herself to the wrong tree, so let me clear up the doubt once and for all. I was there that day at Tower Site 5 and that protester definitely glued her arms around a tree which was neither slated to be cut, nor in the way of any of the work being done. She may as well have glued herself around a tree in Botswana for all the trouble she caused.

Yet, the authenticity of human action is not simply a matter of factual accuracy. What Keith and Pile wrote about the declaration of 'nuclear-free zones' applies, I argue, equally to the anti-Skyrail case.

Assessed in the spirit of literalism, such designations were always manifestly absurd—given the failure of the contemporary nuclear device to respect borders...So how should a nuclear-free zone be judged? As true or false? As real or metaphorical? As authentic or unauthentic? As true as a burning breast or as false as a bleeding heart?<sup>25</sup>

By her act the protester admits she did indeed intend to prevent that particular tree from being destroyed.<sup>26</sup> Both the pro-Skyrainers and the anti-Skyrainers were enmeshed in a game of truth which required them to legitimise their positions by resorting to what Lyotard, following Wittgenstein, calls 'the language game of science'.<sup>27</sup>

The Djabugay protesters too were swept into this game in order to legitimate their native title claims. They had responded independently of PAKS and, on another front by lodging a claim for the Barron Falls National Park with the Native Title Tribunal. The Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Council (DTAC)<sup>28</sup> had written already in October 1991 to

24. Sourial 1994, p. 8.

25. Keith & Pile 1993, p. 10.

26. Personal interview B3, January 1996, Kuranda.

27. Lyotard 1984, p. 28.

28. The Council was incorporated on 7 July 1992 and became the Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Corporation.

the State Minister for Environment and Heritage, and the Regional Director of the Department of Environment and Heritage, among others, asserting that the Djabugay are 'traditional owners' of the area and that the 'Barron Gorge is part of Djabugay spiritual heritage which should not be desecrated and spoiled'.<sup>29</sup> However, the developers were considered, by the Department, to have discharged their responsibilities and obligations under the relevant cultural heritage legislation, the *Cultural Record (Landscapes Queensland and Queensland Estate) Act 1987* (Qld) (the Cultural Records Act), and the Skyrail was allowed to go ahead.

A cultural heritage survey prepared for Skyrail under the legislation had concluded that there were no sites of cultural significance along the Skyrail route. Many Djabugay people were outraged by this report. They considered that it effectively 'denied them recognition of the continuity of their relationship with the country which the Skyrail traversed, and therefore their contemporary identity as traditional owners of this area'.<sup>30</sup> However, the response of DTAC expresses the hegemony of the scientific paradigm. The Chairperson of DTAC sent a letter to various government ministers and department directors questioning the 'professionalism and qualifications' of the consultant and noting that he was not a qualified archaeologist.<sup>31</sup>

In particular, the dispute focused on a number of scarred trees and stone arrangements. Although younger Djabugay people had been previously unaware of their existence, they did not doubt that these were their sites and that if they had to produce tangible evidence of their heritage, particularly for the purpose of establishing native title, then here it was. As one young woman put it:

Then came the time to go and visit the sites...I had only studied these things. The actual experience now to see it first hand...that was what gave me the drive. We had to protect that. Just the feeling, and I still get that feeling that has more or less kept me going all this time...It [the sites] was just another thing to reinforce it, that it is really true. I could actually say it was true, it was real.<sup>32</sup>

Four separate archaeological opinions were requested by Djabugay people in the hope that the archaeologists would provide the scientific proof required to establish the significance of the sites and therefore the overall significance of the Barron Falls National Park.

The debate was a positivist one waged in terms of scientifically provable fact. Were the scarred trees in fact Aboriginal shield or burial trees? Were the rings of stones in fact Aboriginal sites, or were they made by more recent visits by 'whitefellas' to the area, perhaps bushwalkers or timber cutters, or were they just old 'hippy' camps, as was one suggestion from the pro-Skyrail lobby group? Since the Aboriginal identity of the sites could not be established archaeologically, and Djabugay people could not make their voices heard within the dominant language game of science, they decided to enlist the help of the federal government by turning to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (Cwlth). A reporter, Mr George Menham, was appointed in accordance with section 10(4) of the Act to prepare a report for considera-

29. White 1995, p. 15.

30. Greer & Henry 1996, p.20.

31. White 1995, p. 53.

32. Personal interview, 10 November 1995, Kuranda.

tion of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Djabugay attempted to resist site based definitions of heritage by articulating their claims to the reporter in terms of a concept of 'cultural landscape'. The following quotation is an example of the kind of knowledge of a wider living landscape used by Djabugay to try to escape demands of the discourse of science, and to thus evidence the Aboriginal significance of the National Park and places along the Skyrail route. A Djabugay ranger explains what he told the reporter:

Yeah,...I told him also of how Damarri is now sleeping. I told him if he goes back in to the Cairns area, from Machans Beach turn off, Holloways, all of them, Yorkes Knob, and you're looking backwards and forwards and you look at the skyline, just of the mountains, you can see Damarri lying down. I told of Bunanda, how the water fairy came about, and how they used to climb up one side of the mountain of Red Peak and go down the other side where now they are building Skyrail—where the Yirriganydji could be, and the Djabugandji all camped below, once, when the Barron used to run that way. I told him of the camp there. Also the one in Woompera farm (Warrama) there, the camp there. Go back from Warrama, around the lookout; come into Mount Saddleback; from there along McAlaister Range (my area); walk back into Mona Mona; all that run. My grandma, being associated with that Red Peak and that place—travel along that ridge back into Mona Mona, and then back to Oak Forest. That's Guruminya side, you know. There's two sides. One Guruminya and one Gurubana.<sup>33</sup>

By phrasing their claims in terms of this kind of 'narrative knowledge'<sup>34</sup> and asserting a landscape based cosmology, as opposed to a site based one, Djabugay were asserting that the 'particular significance'<sup>35</sup> to them of places along the Skyrail route was based not just on those places as fixed and objectifiable markers of given past events, but on a continuing process of being in relationship with those places.

Kuchler makes a distinction between landscapes *of* memory, and landscapes *for* memory. A landscape is a landscape *of* memory when it is taken to be an *aide memoire*, a given surface for the inscription and capture of memories, whereas to take landscape *as* memory means that it is seen as a product of the *process* of remembering 'which is forever being transformed'.<sup>36</sup> I suggest that by their use of the concept of cultural landscape in connection with the Skyrail report Djabugay meant landscape *as* memory, landscape as a lived memory producing experience.

Barbara Bender notes that landscapes are not given but 'are created by people - through their experience and engagement with the world around them'.<sup>37</sup> According to Howard Morphy in Arnhem Land people learn about their landscape through the 'experiences and associations of their lives',<sup>38</sup> by travelling through the land and by events such as birth, marriage and death. It is the lived experience of these events which

33. White 1995. Page 84 of the document in an unpaginated appendix transcribed by White from an interview he conducted, immediately following a visit to Kuranda by Mr George Menham, 17 May 1995. Damarri is an ancestral being. Guraminya and Gurabana are moiety names.

34. Lyotard 1984 compares and contrasts 'narrative' and 'scientific' knowledge.

35. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (Cwlth) requires that a report under section 10(4) deal with the 'particular significance of the area to Aboriginals'.

36. Kuchler 1993, p. 104.

37. Bender 1993, p. 1.

38. Morphy 1995, p. 204.

creates the particular moments in which the landscape of the Yolngu is made visible. Djabugay landscapes can also be understood in such terms. Places are absent unless events give them a presence. In the contemporary context such events include political moments, like the Skyrail dispute. The authenticity of Djabugay claims to country was questioned within a language game of science which required the archaeological identity of particular sites to be established. However, cultural authenticity cannot be proved scientifically. Authenticity, I argue, can only be established outside of this game of truth, by the contemporary practices of remembering which make present the Aboriginal continuity of the landscape to Aboriginal people themselves. As one woman put it:

And actually, when we went further into the rainforest we came across other things. Elders started releasing what they knew about it. It started a whole awakening.<sup>39</sup>

It is their own sensory experiences of, and engagement with the country, and that of their forebears, upon which Djabugay base their claims. Landscape is a living memory domain for an ideology of a continuity of being in place. Djabugay people express their connection with land in terms of their feelings for, and experience of, a generalised domain alive with spiritual forces and beings, and having an agency of its own. For example, when the Cairns/Kuranda train narrowly escaped a rock slide on the track, two Djabugay women elders, whispered that the rock slide was actually Damarri's<sup>40</sup> response to the Skyrail.<sup>41</sup>

However, many of the non-Aboriginal protesters think of the environment similarly. They either anthropomorphise nature itself (usually as female) or think of it as alive with spiritual beings. One protester said that she firmly believed that that forest was alive with Aboriginal ancestral spirits. On one occasion while she was in the rainforest during the night or in the very early hours of the morning, she saw a tall Aboriginal warrior. She had heard stories from Aboriginal people of the existence of beings they call 'small men', so she had wondered why he was so tall but 'one of the Murris' told her later that there were also 'tall men'. This protester also related how she saw a giant cassowary appear behind her and on another occasion a cassowary head and then the face of an Aboriginal man emerging from a tree trunk. She said she was later told by Aboriginal people that their ancestors sometimes manifest themselves as cassowaries. She then said that the forest comforted her by telling her that it would look after itself against the Skyrail. Nature would have 'her' own revenge. As proof she, and another protester, recounted the number of times, since beginning operations, that the Skyrail has been 'out of action' due to storms and lightning strikes.<sup>42</sup>

39. Personal interview, 10 November 1995, Kuranda.

40. Damarri is also called Bulurru. Bulurru is how Djabugay refer to the Dreaming. Storywaters, or locations associated with the Dreaming as well as the ancestral beings associated with them are known as Bulurru. Bulurru is considered to be 'the source and condition of all life and is ever-present in the land and people'. Quinn 1992, p. 16. Some Djabugay people today think of Bulurru as 'our God', as distinct from the Christian God they were taught to worship in the mission. Others think of Bulurru as simply the Djabugay name for the one and only God, also the Christian God, which they have always worshipped.

41. Personal communication, 18 June 1995, Kuranda.

42. Personal interview, 24 January 1996, Kuranda.



## Environmentalists and Aborigines

In general, environmentalists think of themselves as being part of a political and moral crusade for a better world. Environmentalism has been characterised by Charles Rubin as being the heir to the anti-slavery and temperance movements and as therefore part of an ongoing saga of evangelical reform. He writes,

Indeed it is not far off the mark to say that environmentalism is the temperance movement of our time. We know that it wants to save the earth. But we forget just how much it wants to save us from ourselves.<sup>43</sup>

Environmentalism is thus based on a universalistic view of the world. Although environmentalists might 'act locally' they assume a common humanity and common, unilinear human destiny. What are thought of as 'traditional' Aboriginal ways of relating to the environment are celebrated as a contemporary expression of the way all humans must have once lived.

Environmentalists have turned to indigenous beliefs around the world, for inspiration and guidance on how to formulate an alternative human environmental relationship. Thus, indigenous people are seen as a source of guidance for alternative ways of being in nature, and have been romanticised as the 'first true conservationists'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, as David Trigger puts it, environmentalists have 'co-opted alleged indigenous ethics regarding land use to their own cause'.<sup>45</sup>

A number of writers have discussed the political relationship between environmentalists and Aborigines in Australia.<sup>46</sup> According to Julie Marcus the celebration of the traditional ways of life of Aboriginal peoples by environmentalists and new age mystics actually operates to further dispossess them. She argues that new age mysticism regarding Uluru is driven by universalising sentiments that deny the unique identity of Aboriginal beliefs. As Marcus puts it:

... attempts to tap into the power of the Rock are seen by local Aboriginal people as simply more of what has gone before—now settlers are mining Aboriginal culture rather than the land itself.<sup>47</sup>

Marcus and others view this as 'cultural appropriation'.<sup>48</sup> Environmentalists are seen as having appropriated Aboriginal culture and environmental values to further their own political cause. The celebration of indigenous environmental ethics is thus seen to be part of a primitivist discourse operating to the disadvantage of Aboriginal people.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, these new age values can also be turned around to serve indigenous interests. The concept of traditional culture, or notions of indigenous environmental values and knowledge, have become tools by which indigenous people all over the world can assert their rights in the contemporary context of nation state and international politics. For example, according to Terence Turner, when he first started field

<sup>43</sup>. Rubin 1994, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup>. Sackett 1991.

<sup>45</sup>. Trigger 1996, p. 55.

<sup>46</sup>. Anderson 1989; Burnam Burnam 1987; Cuthbert & Grossman 1996; Jacobs 1994; Marcus 1996, 1997; Sackett 1991.

<sup>47</sup>. Marcus 1997, p. 46.

<sup>48</sup>. Marcus 1997. See also Jacobs 1994 and Lattas 1997.

<sup>49</sup>. See Sackett 1991 and Marcus 1997.

work among the Kayapo in 1962, they were living in a village under the 'protection' of the Brazilian government's equivalent of Queensland's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and were dependent on this department and the missionaries. According to Turner, at this time the Kayapo were not self-consciously aware of the particular differences of their cultural practices in relation to other peoples in Brazil. To them their ceremonies and social institutions were simply the way they had always done things. As Turner notes:

They had, in short, no notion that their assemblage of received customs, ritual practices, social values, and institutions constituted a 'culture' in the anthropological sense, nor any idea of the reflexive role of that culture in the reproduction of their society and personal identities.<sup>50</sup>

A quarter of a century later when Turner returned to do further research and ethnographic filming in the area it was another story altogether. Turner found 'a new level of cultural awareness and self-consciousness'. Many Kayapo had begun to use the Portuguese word 'cultura' as well as the Kayapo word that comes closest in meaning, *kukr-adja*, as meaning 'a particular body of customary practices and lore which require self-conscious effort to preserve and reproduce' and 'concerted political action'.<sup>51</sup>

The Skyrail dispute provides an example of the process of development of such a 'new level of cultural awareness and self-consciousness' in the Australian context. It is a case of Aboriginal people actively and very strategically allying themselves with environmentalists in order to resist the powers of oppression.<sup>52</sup> Celebrating the idea of culture thus becomes a means for indigenous people to negotiate benefits for themselves within the context of contemporary political and economic relations which would otherwise leave them powerless. It is not simply a matter of environmentalists appropriating Aboriginal culture. Far from being helpless victims, Aboriginal people are active political agents. In the Skyrail dispute, Djabugay people forged an alliance with other protesters as a useful political strategy. Environmentalist discourse, and the valuing of traditional culture and of their status as the original environmentalists became a means for Djabugay to assert native title and heritage rights in the contemporary context of nation state politics. The Skyrail dispute also provided Djabugay with a means of asserting a unique identity as rainforest people in a context of an homogenizing stereotype of Aboriginality which contributes to their oppression. Andy Duffin, the chairperson of the Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Corporation is quoted in the *Courier Mail* as saying that 'it is the rainforest which keeps the Djabugay people going', and that 'their existence would fall apart without those forests'.<sup>53</sup> A Djabugay woman explained her involvement in the anti-Skyrail protest similarly :

This rainforest, that's where our foods are; that's where our people lived. They protected the area; they took care of it; and we have the same responsibility. But it sort of goes deeper than that again, that feeling that we got that we had to protect what rainforest is left; because you go into the future, you know. We tell our chil-

<sup>50</sup>. Turner 1991, p. 294.

<sup>51</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>52</sup>. Another example is the successful resistance to the building of the Todd River Dam in Central Australia. See Jacobs 1994.

<sup>53</sup>. *Courier Mail*, 28 May 1995, p. 1.

dren that we are the rainforest people. If there is no rainforest, you know, how are they going to believe that we are the rainforest people? They'll be asking what is a rainforest?...We are the rainforest people. I mean that was our survival, that rainforest, you know. That will continue to be our survival.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that they had their own political agenda does not mean that Djabugay were not genuine in their dealings with the other protesters. Arguments which suggest that people are using culture as a political tool, sometimes have undertones of cynicism. It is assumed that if something is political, it must therefore be unauthentic. However, I see political practice as part of the fullness of human being in the world. It is not unauthentic practice, and neither is the way indigenous people come to use the concept of culture. Similarly, I do not wish to appear cynical about the intentions of the non-Aboriginal protesters. An environmentalist discourse, which sought to establish the moral legitimacy of the protesters by romanticizing indigenous cultural practices and relations with the environment, was indeed evident in the Skyrail case. However, many of the environmentalists were also very sympathetically aware of the historical oppression and contemporary social and economic plight of Djabugay people. They hoped for the success of the Djabugay native title claim, not just because they believed that this would somehow put a halt to the construction of the Skyrail, but also out of a genuine sense of fair play. When Djabugay people eventually came to an agreement with Skyrail Pty Ltd, there was disappointment among the environmentalists but few recriminations. The Skyrail was being built in spite of their protests and they respected Djabugay people's realization that they could not fight this 'big monster' and therefore should focus on securing the best economic deal they could 'for the future' of their children.<sup>55</sup>

This is not to say that there were no tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal protesters. After the Cultural Awareness Workshop, an agreement was made that in order to have the Aboriginal voice heard, the non-Aboriginal protesters would refuse to speak to the media unless they first interviewed Aboriginal spokespersons. Although made with good intention, the agreement did not last long, however, because Aboriginal spokespersons were not always available when the media arrived, and environmentalists became frustrated at missing good opportunities for press coverage.

Even though one of the elders reflected that he was suspicious about the true motives of the environmentalists and whether or not they were in genuine support of the native title claim, most Aboriginal people saw the non-Aboriginal protesters as primarily working to help their fight for land rights. In fact, one woman referred to the protester who sat up a tree for 208 days, as 'a hero for Aboriginal people'.<sup>56</sup>

However, the universalist tendencies of environmentalism were well articulated in a speech delivered by one of the key participants in the anti-Skyrail campaign during a rally:

As a member of the local community, this is *our* forest, as a citizen of Australia, this is *our* National Park, and as a member of the international community this is

54. Personal interview, 10 November 1995, Kuranda.

55. Comments made by a Djabugay participant in a workshop organised and facilitated by the author on 'Responses to Development in the Kuranda Area', 26 June 1995, Kuranda.

56. Personal communication, 3 January 1997, Kuranda.

*our* World Heritage, *not* the exclusive property of Sky-Rail Limited. (emphasis in original)

These sentiments are also expressed in the slogans carried by the protesters—'Economy poisons Ecology', 'Parks and People First Molly, Not Developer's Fees', and 'No Development in World Heritage'. They voice not only the perceived incompatibility between environmental values and economic development, but also the conflict between individualism and communalism, private ownership and the commons. The protesters' placards, I suggest, can be seen as statements of communal title. They voice the protesters' reaction against what was seen as private appropriation of the commons. In contrast, through the native title claim and their direct protest action, the Djabugay were claiming the national park, not as common land, but as *their* land. The placards of the Djabugay protesters could be read as symbolic title deeds—'Skyrail Garri, Bulurru'—a claim legitimised by Bulurru, '...the source of life...the Good Spirit that protects life and Law'.<sup>57</sup>

Although Djabugay were claiming the Skyrail land as their land, and non-Aboriginal protesters were claiming it as belonging to all the world, the inconsistency does not appear to have been clearly recognised by either group. Perhaps this was because Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal protest against the Skyrail was expressed in terms of environmental values with which both groups readily identified, values which require the preservation of the rainforest. As an Aboriginal elder said in the Cultural Awareness Workshop:

...what I mean by the trees, those trees are our culture too...we don't like to see those trees being cut down and the ground, the bulldozers running over it. That's what I call desecration to the land you know.

Moreover they held in common other objections against the Skyrail. Although there were some anti-Skyrail protesters who were not locals, and the blockaders were joined by environmentalists from the south of Australia and even from overseas, most of the protesters were, in fact, residents of the area. For them, Skyrail did not simply pose a threat to the rainforest, whatever the cultural basis on which it might be valued. It also stood for an increased tourist threat to this embattled local community. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Kuranda were already feeling that the 'village in the rainforest' was no longer theirs. It had been slowly appropriated by developers for the use of tourists. As an Aboriginal woman said in the moment of protest examined above:

We used to roam those bloody streets in Kuranda. And where now?...Kuranda's polluted with tourists.

Loss of control over definition of place means loss of ability to define self. Skyrail provided the site for the spatialized politics that might enable people to reclaim their home place.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to avoid a culturalist approach which reduces contemporary political relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to given cultural differences, or contrasting environmental values. Although the protesters used

<sup>57</sup>. Duffin & Brim, p. 5.

'rhetorical strategies which drew upon categorical and/or stereotypical identities',<sup>58</sup> rather than simply taking these categorical identities as given, I have focused my discussion on the discursive fields and practices which operate to *produce* them. One such discursive field is the language game of science.

I have argued that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal protesters were caught up in the same game of truth, a game which constrained them to wage their dispute with government agencies and Skyrail developers according to the universalising claims of science. Within the terms of this game their assertions about identity in place, and connection to country, were inevitably made to look foolish.

Even though Skyrail may have been debated in terms of scientific facts, the underlying force driving the dispute really had nothing to do with fact. It was not about right and wrong trees, or authentic or unauthentic Aboriginal sites. Rather, it was about 'burning breasts' and 'bleeding hearts'.<sup>59</sup> It was an assertion that there are different experiences of being in this world, ones which refuse to be muted.

The Skyrail dispute was an expression of a particular mobilisation of place and identity. At issue was the way in which people, constitute identity and difference in terms of place, that is, the tie between people and place, symbolically expressed, I have suggested, by the protester's physical attachment of herself to the tree.<sup>60</sup> Such performances/spatial enunciations make their own statements, ones which attempt to escape the domination of the 'language game of science', and thus to give voice to other ways of being.

Although Skyrail protesters received some support from national and international environmentalist groups, and they drew upon what they thought of as a global environmental ethic to legitimate their claims, the campaign was essentially locally based and locally driven. The protesters' spatialized enunciations of their protest, their direct actions, were in fact statements of local resistance to what were perceived as globalizing structures of power, in particular the structures of power that support private development at the expense of communal values, and allow local heterogeneity to be stifled by the homogenizing forces of economic rationalism.

While actual cultural differences may indeed be apparent in the responses of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to the Skyrail, my point is that to see political practices as expression of cultural differences alone, is not only interpretively inadequate, but also operates to disenfranchise Aboriginal people by permitting them only to be cultural beings, and not political agents. It allows for strategic protest action on the part of Aboriginal people to be labelled unauthentic, thus effectively undermining any political force such action might have. Disputes such as the Skyrail are not expressions of given cultural differences. Rather they are situations in which discourses about such differences are contested and negotiated.

I developed my argument by highlighting a particular moment of protest within the Skyrail dispute. I argued that the Kuranda Skyrail dispute can best be understood as a performative production and articulation of sameness and difference, a dialectical

58. Moore 1994, p. 5.

59. Keith & Pile 1993, p. 10.

60. See Henry 1994.

play of identities. The Skyrail dispute produced moments of protest which allowed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of the Kuranda area to resist categorical identities and attempt to resolve the contradictions that such identities pose in the context of relationships to place that are contestable only because they are in fact shared.

As evidenced by the protest scene described above, in the performance of protest, actors not only challenge sameness by asserting their differences, but also, by engaging their differences, they refashion sameness, that is, their idea of 'community'. Such spatial enunciations of protest are about the negotiation and articulation of difference in the context of a collective articulation and situated practice of the social. The links I have described between the Skyrail dispute and the Djabugay native title claim reveals that this articulation of sameness and difference is not merely a matter of cultural values. In their political engagement with one another, people contest and negotiate categorical identities that are structurally and historically produced.

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# Master narratives and the dispossession of the Wiradjuri

Gaynor Macdonald

## Discursive spaces and contradictions

This paper and the concerns it raises developed from my study of Wiradjuri people's relationships to land, as part of a study of the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council's experiences with the New South Wales *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* 1983. At first, it seemed it would be straightforward to identify practices, values and speech acts through which Wiradjuri people understood and articulated these relationships. But as soon as I started to ask, what does land *mean* to Wiradjuri people today, I found I was writing defensively rather than descriptively. I was needing to convince, conscious of a refusal 'out there' in the world of potential readership, academic and non-academic, to acknowledge that Wiradjuri people, encapsulated in the centre of New South Wales' agricultural heartland, had *any* relationships to land after their 180 years' experience of colonisation. This paper does not look at those meanings I wished to write about, except briefly to contextualise my discussion. Instead, I look at the sources of my disquiet and the larger question which kept confronting me: *within what discursive space can one talk about Wiradjuri people having any meanings at all?*

This discussion takes place within political and theoretical contexts which currently debate issues of identity, Aboriginality/indigeneity, authenticity and entitlement. These debates predated but have assumed greater significance since the passing of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act* in 1993. The issue about who is or is not an 'Aboriginal person' in Australia has plagued policy makers for a century, and a history of changes in official definitions, as well as popular ones, attests to a preoccupation with discovering palatable criteria at different historical moments for the inclusion or exclusion of 'Aboriginal people' from a right to the benefits of the day (sometimes defined as benefits Aborigines receive, sometimes which non-Aborigines receive). Even though, since 1972, the Commonwealth Government has recognised the right of self-definition in its requirement that a person who claims to be Aboriginal be of Aboriginal descent and recognised as such by an Aboriginal community, in practice it is clear that there are still different shades of Aboriginality. These are likely to be voiced in terms of the presence or absence of certain cultural attributes (which make people 'real' or 'not real' Aborigines) than the previously popular 'biological' ones (full-blood, half-caste, quarter-caste).

Wiradjuri country encompasses approximately 80,000 square kilometres of central New South Wales. When you enter it for the first time, you will probably have come

from the east, through the city and then urban sprawl of Sydney and over the Blue Mountains to Lithgow, a distance of about 150 km. But even if you come into it from the semi-arid lands to the west, or the hills to the north and south, the presence you will read on the landscape will tell you that this land is peopled by white farmers rather than Aborigines. Roads and fences carve out fields of wheat and rape (appropriately one might say), and orchards, as well as endless paddocks for sheep. Every now and then is a small town or even large rural city. Even though there are probably more Wiradjuri than European place names (such as Dubbo, Cowra, Canowindra, Narrandera, Cootamundra), and there are many signs of past and present Wiradjuri cultural activity once one is off the beaten track, the farming scenery dominates. The landscape's message about Wiradjuri people is 'disappearance', because these signs in the landscape are read within a discursive space that implicitly interprets them as evidence of European activity. An 'Aboriginal' landscape should be definable as 'wilderness', 'untouched'—the irony being, of course, that Aboriginal people, including a great many Wiradjuri men and women, built a vast number of these New South Wales' fences, cleared much of the bushland, and picked the fruit in the orchards each year. This paper explores reasons why Wiradjuri people—as is the case for other Aboriginal people of New South Wales—have seemed non-visible within the landscape which they have continued to people and to shape, as well as bringing to it their own meanings and values.

Understanding the notion of 'Wiradjuri' requires a spatial referent. It is dependent on there being places called, collectively, Wiradjuri places, within which people are born and nurtured in ways of life which become characteristic of those named places. Land has meaning only in the context of discursive practices. The experience of 'Wiradjuri' is an experience of a matrix of social relationships which are activated within particular landscapes, which are themselves constituted in terms of the activating in space of those social relations. It is as they move through space: in and out of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spaces, in and out of known and kin-populated areas, and in and out of areas where they can use a Wiradjuri lexicon that Wiradjuri people experience through their bodies what it means to be Wiradjuri. Wiradjuri country emphasises the continuity of Wiradjuri people over time. It encapsulates the space and time of Wiradjuri as against all other spaces and times. It locates people vis-à-vis others, past and present.

Wiradjuri consciousness of space, and the ways in which it is constructed, is a system of knowledge that Wiradjuri people share but, like all systems of knowledge, it is not equally accessed or distributed. Various discourses are available by which Wiradjuri speak of the divisions within the landscape that make that landscape meaningful. These are frequently and not unexpectedly contradictory. They may emphasise the autonomy of the local area but also the commonalities of the region. They may prioritise economic or political or spiritual relations at different times, depending on context. They will differ according to one's age, or the ways in which one's ancestry is constructed in terms of a political landscape history. The idea of Wiradjuri country, which now includes approximately 20 different communities associated with rural towns and cities, has taken on new institutional expression since the passing of the New South Wales *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* 1983. This Act required that Local Aboriginal Land Councils be clustered into regions. Of the State's 13 regions, the Wiradjuri region was the only one which was based, by Wiradjuri choice, on the traditional language-speaking area. More recently, in response to the High Court's Mabo decision in 1992 recognis-

ing the prior ownership of Australian lands by indigenous peoples, they also formed a Wiradjuri Council of Elders in 1994 to deal with land, heritage and cultural issues on a regional basis.

But what really makes Wiradjuri space their space is their presence. The idea of land is the idea of presence, a writing of oneself onto the landscape: it is a humanising and socialising of that within which one is embodied. Presence is expressed in the stories of people which make places live, which bring people and place into relationship. These can be stories of events that took place, or part of journeys people make, historical events or places where people have lived and worked. They include heritage sites where Wiradjuri people of the past have left the marks of their presence, and sites which, even without those visible marks, they strongly believe are places their ancestors would have favoured and frequented. There are places associated with the presence of spiritual power, experienced as strong feelings of warmth, fear or apprehension. It is the notion of 'presence'—of self and others understood as part of particular selves—which characterises many of the Wiradjuri land-people speech acts and practices. This is a land-people relationship defined primarily in *social* terms, whether or not it also includes spiritual, economic or political dimensions or expressions. Land that has been alienated through its development by non-Wiradjuri and the erection of, for instance, fences prohibiting access produces a sense of loss. I remember when Cowra Wiradjuri people got their first land purchase through the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* provisions in 1985 that the older women spent time just being there, as if to give it or restore to it that social dimension, that presence, feeling it back into being 'theirs'. As Duncan and Ley have remarked, 'landscapes consolidate shared meanings; they act as community builders'.<sup>1</sup> Some stories of place survive generations, others do not. The significance of a particular story of place/people lies in its continuing relevance for constellations of social relations which themselves continue. New stories are continually being generated which link people and people, and people and place, including today of course, sites of political action in metropolitan centres outside of Wiradjuri country, such as the Tent Embassy in Canberra, a site of political protest which has always involved Wiradjuri people.

The Wiradjuri landscape is also contested space, space which defines contests between different groups of people: Wiradjuri and colonisers, Wiradjuri and Aboriginal migrants who have moved into Wiradjuri country, Wiradjuri who are local and those who are from other parts of the region. The existence—symbolic and material—of Wiradjuri country continually reproduces the relations between these contesting groups. Within the Wiradjuri landscape are smaller spaces which become foci for those relationships: containment in camps and missions, struggles over the right to sit on benches in the main street of town, who can sit and drink in the park, who 'owns' patches of the river, the right to put up signs and flags, the ten year struggle which raged over whether a drug and alcohol detoxification centre could be built among farming neighbours. There is a continual development of new cultural expressions of sociality, effort, protest and defiance. Power differences are inscribed in activities, in the ways in which people leave or enter their own domains, the ways they speak and deport themselves at home or in government offices, the spots they choose to swim at the river, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan and Leys 1993, p. 17.

There are known and safe places as well as places which are unknown, potentially unsafe. Outside of one's own country is always unknown to a certain extent: that country's kin and ancestors cannot be relied upon to look after you. Wiradjuri people returning to their own communities remind me of bell hook's words when she said that she experiences a joy at returning to spaces 'constructed in terms of understandings that form part of her sense of self'.<sup>2</sup> She also notes that for her these are places 'removed from the topography of racial oppression and discrimination'<sup>3</sup> and this also reflects the freedom to live out the Wiradjuri's own cultural values and practices, without fear of condemnation, once on their own land.

Landscapes are thus ways of seeing the world. They provide ongoing commentaries on established ways of doing things and divisions of privilege, reminding us of our position in the scheme of things: as Mills states, 'places encapsulate and communicate identity'<sup>4</sup>—space is constructed in gender terms, ethnic terms, racist terms. Mills argues that:

Each society's 'moral order' is reflected in its particular spatial order and in the language and imagery by which that spatial order is represented. Conversely, the social is spatially constituted and people will make sense of their social identity in terms of their environment. Their place of residence offers a map of their place in society.

The reserves are Aboriginal space: sites of self-valorisation and identification. So too are certain spots on the river, a particular corner of the park, or the benches in front on the supermarket. In the case of the reserve the land is now legally Aboriginal land. In the latter examples, the sites are contested—hence the redevelopment of the park, and the removal of the benches by the Shire Council to prevent further Aboriginal use. Spaces are hierarchised to reflect relations. Fences are designed to keep out, to prevent trespass. Regulations governed where Wiradjuri people could sit in the picture theatres, and which end of town they could live. A racist landscape is one which denies a Wiradjuri presence. The reserves kept Aborigines in: they were invisible, reinforcing messages of deprivation, poverty and loss which form the core of discourses of loss. Aborigines had 'no place' in Euro-Australian society and it was assumed they had, as a result, no notion of place important to themselves.

Colonisation creates new relationships of meaning. Meanings are contested and marked out by difference. The extent of difference becomes what is contested: you are not one of us. The idea of Aboriginal rights to land is genuinely incomprehensible to many non-Aboriginal residents of New South Wales, for whom the shifts in meanings are inevitable, taken for granted, and they do not understand them as their own means of maintaining power. Duncan has argued in a more general context that 'the landscape . . . is not merely the site where the political struggle takes place, it becomes the means by which each party attempts to defeat the other. As such the landscape is an important part of the practice of power'.<sup>5</sup> Expressions such as 'to place someone', 'to know one's

2. hooks 1991, p. 81.

3. Ibid., p. 80.

4. Mills 1993, p. 50.

5. Duncan 1993, p. 232.

place' in English are statements of power, a geographical language of social existence<sup>6</sup> which gives Wiradjuri people no place in contemporary New South Wales society.

The way in which the material world is organised is an encoding of dominant cultural meanings and discourses, and the Wiradjuri landscape is clearly imbued with messages of domination, containment and invisibility. However, since meaning is given to the organisation of space through practice, it follows that changes in practice will provide new interpretations of space. Wiradjuri people have, since the early nineteenth century, had to modify their understandings of their own spaces, and they have also understood that changes in racist relations cannot take place unless the physical relations of the material world are changed to allow for social change. They will remain powerless, peripheral, while relegated to reserves on the outskirts of town or given 'rubbish land' in land rights packages. They want to reinscribe themselves on the landscape meaningfully. Political action has been directed towards attempts to change unequal power relations through a return of lands so as to provide access to stable and secure space for community living, to develop economic autonomy, and to assert a Wiradjuri presence, socially, politically and symbolically.

The land rights movement has explicitly recognised the need to reconfigure land and material relations in order to resist or combat, and then change the conceptual and social relations of Aboriginal peoples' colonisation and relative powerlessness. It has been a demand that the colonisers reinscribe indigenous peoples on the landscape as peoples who experience their presence in that landscape in myriad ways but whose spatial and social presence has for almost two centuries been denied. Land rights rallies took place in the symbolically constructed sites of colonial domination: marches moved from Aboriginal domains (Redfern's Aboriginal Legal Service) to European domains (Parliament House in Sydney's Macquarie Street). The State Government, particularly through the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW), has attempted to restrict the interpretation of 'land rights' to a right to economic development and humanitarian (welfare) aid, thus reconfiguring its political dimensions. Economic autonomy has long been a Wiradjuri goal but only because Wiradjuri leaders have also understood that, without it, social and political respect do not follow. The opposition to land rights in New South Wales by, for instance, the National Farmers Association, was largely framed in terms of an extinguishing of rights on the grounds of culture 'loss'. But it was also an opposition to the statement implied in the very notion of allocating land to Aborigines. It suggested that the well established European discourses of power and privilege were flawed. Land rights legislation threatened to shift the grounds of meaning, and thus the grounds of power and privilege. A decade later, the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwth) met with a similar response.

### Competing discourses (1): colonisation

I have wanted very briefly to establish that there are a plethora of discourses and practices associated with the meanings of land from one Wiradjuri person to another, depending on how they are differently located within the Wiradjuri social world, and among non-Wiradjuri people, both Aboriginal and not. They range from strong essentialising beliefs that Wiradjuri people are of the land and are nothing apart from it, to

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6. Mills 1993, p. 160.

those who maintain that no relationship of any kind exists except perhaps ones influenced by political activists or some kind of sentimentality. However, whilst very different and often competing, these views have in common the fact that they largely take place within a single discursive field whose basic premise frames them all: this is, that when the Wiradjuri were colonised in the nineteenth century they lost their culture in the face of the moral and material superiority of their colonisers. Not only those who would deny Wiradjuri people any relationship, but also the most ardent Wiradjuri claims to spiritual associations with their land tend to be framed in relation to this premise, whether in support or refutation. This was the source of my own initial defensiveness.

It is not difficult to identify how such a discursive field could have developed. By the end of the nineteenth century, scholars and travellers were being encouraged to record the 'remnants' of pre-colonial lifestyles and languages in New South Wales. Once on the reserves or so-called fringe camps indigenous people were defined as cultureless. By the mid-twentieth century, influential anthropologists such as Ronald Berndt were referring to them as the people in a cultureless vacuum, caught between their traditions and modern Australian life, capable of adhering to neither—as if they actually had a choice of either. When I started my fieldwork in Wiradjuri country in the early 1980s I was told by one senior academic that I was wasting my time: there were no Aborigines left in New South Wales. Frequently members of the non-academic public would express surprise and ask if there were enough left to study or, conversely, react with a dismay that suggested I had joined a polluted sect.

The tendency to see indigenous people in south eastern Australia as little other than products of the colonial encounter has encouraged 'race' and 'colonialism' to be seen as more significant analytical concepts than, for instance, 'culture' which might focus on indigenous experiences, meanings and practices rather than just those framed by black/white relations. This in turn encourages a simplistic reading of the Wiradjuri landscape in terms of a loss of Wiradjuri power and the imposition of colonial power. Indeed, the roads, fences and powerlines are read as symbols of conquest by Wiradjuri people themselves, as they complain about restrictions on their access to sites and to the rivers and creeks. European signage and buildings can be sources of annoyance, defeatism as well as humour. They know that indigenous landscapes are assumed to have to equate with a European notion of 'wilderness', untouched by human hand. This is an impression one meets with among local Euro-Australians despite a now considerable literature which speaks of indigenous transformations of the material environment, through a variety of farming and agricultural practices, both prior to colonisation and in the post-colonisation period in which Wiradjuri and others demanded that land be made available for them to farm. The activities of farming sheep, building houses or engaging in the workforce are represented as evidence of assimilation into European lifeways rather than as an Aboriginal assimilation of European practices into their own frames of meaning. Goodall has demonstrated that prior to World War I, indigenous communities in south eastern Australia had reconstituted themselves after the waves of armed hostilities and depletions in their population and that, by the early twentieth century, up to 75 per cent were in economically self-sustaining situations, employed on stations, in towns and, in some cases, running their own farms on land provided to both individuals and communities by the State Government. Both the autonomy and the

entrepreneurial activities were undermined by progressive revocations of the allocated land (retrospectively legalised in the *Land Revocation Act* 1983 (NSW)), compounded by the effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s which saw renewed efforts to contain people on government-run reserves.<sup>7</sup>

A discourse of loss assumes, of course, a static model of culture such that roads and powerlines are assumed not to be able to become a part of valued Wiradjuri discourses, or that they serve only to destroy Wiradjuri culture rather than augment it in any way. Roads and powerlines are important means of communication for Wiradjuri as well as non-Wiradjuri, part of a changing repertoire of practices which continue to facilitate valued social relations, thus having some commonality with tracks and message sticks which once conveyed people and messages. Fences are a truer symbol of power in that they exclude. They prevent access to the river.

Members of the Wiradjuri Council of Elders dissent from this colonial discourse of loss. The Elders have refuted the depiction of the Mabo ruling, which recognised prior ownership of Australia, as the end of the doctrine of *terra nullius* in Australia, the doctrine which asserted they had no prior rights. They saw the decision as the reverse: as the legitimisation of sovereignty. It may have recognised that people existed on the Australian continent prior to 1788 but, by legitimising the British and then Australian governments' right to extinguish native rights, it continues, they believe, to legalise the colonisation of Wiradjuri country despite no treaties or declarations of war against the Wiradjuri. The Council has viewed the *Native Title Act* 1994 (Cwth) as yet another piece of retrospective legislation legitimising the theft of the vast majority of Wiradjuri lands. In fact, they sought to challenge the limitations of the Mabo decision as soon as they recognised them.<sup>8</sup> When Chief Justice Mason of the High Court rejected their claim to sovereignty and an additional claim that genocide had been practiced against Wiradjuri people, he allowed them to make an amended claim under the *Native Title Act* 1993 (Cwth). At the time, the Council of Elders reported in a newsletter that:

What is important about his decision is that he said the NSW and Federal Governments in Australia are not responsible for what the British Government did to Wiradjuri people when NSW was still a British colony. But our question is: well then, what is the relationship between the NSW Government and the colony it took over from? Does this lack of responsibility mean that Australia was not constituted properly when the colonies were handed over? Was Australia 'decolonised'? When? Wiradjuri people were colonised against their will and without their consent. If there was an act of decolonisation, the Wiradjuri people should have been consulted—but they weren't. So how did the colony become a State? Australian history is full of legal fictions. We have just seen the 'doctrine of *terra nullius*' overturned at last. It looks like we now have another one to fight: 'the doctrine of the act of state', which is supposed to hand over sovereign power to the Australian Crown.<sup>9</sup>

Although governments have, since 1983 when State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Frank Walker, recognised the then Wiradjuri Land Council's right to operate as

7. See, for instance, Goodall 1997.

8. *Coe v Commonwealth* (1993) 68 ALJR 110. See also *Sydney Morning Herald* 24 December 1993, p.3.

9. Wiradjuri Council of Elders 1994, p. 2.

a 'region' under the Land Rights Act, conceded the symbolic existence of Wiradjuri people, it is still the case that they do not exist as 'a people' in law. Current moves by several Wiradjuri communities to have traditional ownership of lands recognised through claims under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwth) and purchases through the Indigenous Land Commission may prompt a change.

It is the denial of their own presence that has been the Wiradjuri experience of colonisation. One Wiradjuri woman once described land rights to me as a desire for 'justice and recognition'. It was an apt summation. The recognition she was talking about is of themselves as a people. This means literally—as human beings, and as people who are defined and differentiated in terms of socialities, lifeways and landscapes. But despite late nineteenth century maps illustrating the extent of Wiradjuri country, there is no Wiradjuri landscape recognised, whether by law or by symbol. It is this which represents the denial of the Wiradjuri presence.

An influential book published on the state of affairs of Aboriginal people in New South Wales is a good example of a discourse of loss. David Pollard, reducing Aboriginal experience to one characterised by poverty rather than culture, argues that 'The distinct and life-sustaining relationship between Aborigines and the land...[which] was the element which most imparted meaning to Aboriginal life and without this basis Aboriginal theology and hence community could not survive' was destroyed by the end of the nineteenth century when the Aboriginal population became a 'scattered remnant hovering on the margins of country towns or surviving in pockets in the bush, confused, fragmented and desperate', eventually no longer having 'the wherewithal to follow a traditional life style'.<sup>10</sup> Although much of Pollard's historical construction sounds like wishful thinking rather than informed research, it is significant that he was writing his book in the 1980s, during the time that he was Senior Assistant Secretary to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Ministry responsible for the enactment and implementation of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW). This is the context for his contention that:

it is possible that New South Wales Aborigines might retain an especially deep attachment to land, even where they no longer live within the ambit of Aboriginal spirituality. It is difficult for most whites to see, however, that such a relationship can be of a different quality from that of a concerned white, say an ecologist or a conservationist.

As far as he is concerned, the 'havoc wrecked by white culture' and a 'lack of [spiritual] orientation' means that New South Wales Aborigines are irrevocably divorced from their past—including from land and kin. Pollard maintained that 'this divorce from the past is also a divorce from spirituality' without which Aboriginal people cannot sustain any social life. He was arguing against the position taken by Maurice Keane, Chair of the NSW Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines, who described the Aboriginal relationship to land as special because it had deep religious connotations. To this extent Pollard agrees that the Aboriginal-land relationship 'demands religious context to have meaning at all' but that leads him, in the case of New South Wales, to maintain that 'it is difficult to argue the "special relationship" of

<sup>10</sup> Pollard 1988, p. 48.



Keane, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we must assume that it does not, in fact, exist'.<sup>11</sup>

Ideologies always appear natural. It seems natural now to a great many Australians that Aboriginal land/people relations should be expressed in spiritual terms. And, in fairness to Pollard, he uses one of the best known anthropologists, Ron Berndt, to assert his case. Berndt argued in the late 1970s that whatever social practices might be amenable to revamping in southern Australia, 'One aspect which is not and which is (incidentally) basic to the Aboriginal heritage is Aboriginal religion—namely, its sacred and especially its secret sacred dimensions...For those who have lost that vital traditional linkage that encompassing sphere remains elusive—a mirage which is not amenable to transmutation'.<sup>12</sup> It could be expected that social commentators and politicians might, in the light of Australia's continuing colonial record, contribute to the reproduction of these theories of loss. But Berndt's comments raise a different issue. What is pertinent to Wiradjuri concerns is why it is that *anthropology*, despite an engagement over the past 20 years with critiques of colonial practices, with feminist perspectives, and new understandings of power and the subject, has not responded in greater measure with more informed models of culture and of change<sup>13</sup> and has thus contributed, implicitly as well as explicitly, to the privileging of a second discursive field which has acted, along with that of colonial loss, to further dispossess Wiradjuri people.

### Competing discourses (2): Dreaming

This second discursive field I will refer to as the 'Dreaming', an all-encompassing explanatory system within which all Aboriginal people are constructed and without which they do not exist as cultural beings. References to the 'Dreaming', to Aboriginal 'spirituality' and the social practices through which it is expressed, have become a privileged set of discourses about authenticity and land-people relationships which peripheralise, subsume, or even ignore relationships constituted in terms of, for instance, economic, political, social or legal dimensions. Whether or not one agrees that this privileging process is all pervasive, from a New South Wales subject position it assumes monolithic proportions.

The 'Dreaming' is an Australian version of Said's 'orientalism',<sup>15</sup> one against which I realise I have been continually pitted, as an anthropologist trying to make anthropological sense out of contemporary Wiradjuri experiences. Cowlshaw has argued that 'Aboriginalism' more generally is a form of 'orientalising'<sup>16</sup> but I am particularly interested in the concept of the Dreaming which is not commonly seen to have negative implications. Not that I recognised the workings of this discourse in my early work. As an unreflexive woman might experience patriarchal narratives, it had become the taken for granted, an oppression felt but not deconstructed. The 'Dreaming', too, is patriarchal, concerned with high (male) culture, male rituals, male spirituality.<sup>17</sup> The 'Dreaming' discourses have made up a master narrative which is elitist, patriarchal, exclusionist, and essentialist. In addition, the use of religion as an explanatory system

11. Ibid., pp. 56-7.

12. Berndt 1977, cited in Pollard 1988, p. 111.

13. But see recent studies by Austin-Brooks 1996 and Merlan 1998 for evidence of a change in approach.

carries with it the impression of prehistory, stasis and primitivism. The privileging of this particular explanatory framework is an act of domination, a discursive field which acts to subtly legitimate Wiradjuri colonisation in *moral* terms. Wiradjuri *social* or *economic* existences are devalued, rendered even non-existent. For almost half a century the Dreaming discourses have collectively maintained, in concert with the earlier but continuing colonial discourses with which they articulate effectively, that Wiradjuri people did not survive—that they are not 'real Aborigines'. In anthropological terms this is nonsense. Anthropological practice has never reduced any of its models of 'culture' to religion or metaphysics, or even ontology—except perhaps in this context. Indeed, anthropology emerged as one of the 'sciences' of the nineteenth century as a humanistic and post-theological study of human lifeways. There has been a slippage between the explication of characteristics of an Aboriginal philosophical and moral order and the culture of which that order is part at a particular historical moment. This leads to an assumption that the moral order is not capable of change or adjustment, an assumption clearly demonstrated by Stanner when he maintained that:

Aboriginal life has endured feeling that continuity, not man, is the measure of all. The cost in the world of power and change is extinction. What defeats the blackfellow in the modern world, fundamentally, is his transcendentalism. So much of his life and thought are concerned with The Dreaming that it stultifies his ability to develop.<sup>14</sup>

Stanner underestimated the desire and ability of Aboriginal people to change and develop because his own model blinded him to their creative efforts to encompass change. Had he desired, he would have been able to see these transformations around him in many parts of Australia, including New South Wales in the 1950s when he first wrote these words. He was not looking for change. For him, too, change signalled a loss of what Aboriginality meant to *him*.

The significance of the privileging of static religious or mythic explanations of Aboriginal societies is that these do not allow for continuities in cultural practices over time—'traditions', or 'customs'—to be valued unless informed by or expressed in terms of religious (mythical) beliefs. But Wiradjuri principles of transformation can be discerned in the social, political and economic dimensions of their experience *despite* the fact that there is no *mythic* language by which they now describe these practices. Their landscape is social rather than mythic, a history not quite become myth—which begs once again the question of the relationship between myth and history, past meaning—present meaning.<sup>15</sup>

The continuities, and the transformational principles by which Wiradjuri people construct themselves in terms of people and place are clearly informed by practices which are indigenous by 'tradition'. Wiradjuri people are not simply products of a colonial process, to be constructed in the oppositional terms of racism and oppression, although I do not deny the significance of these dynamics. My own work<sup>16</sup> has consistently demonstrated the adjustments and transformations which have allowed for Wiradjuri cultural continuities in the face of voluntary and enforced change, including

14. Stanner 1979, p. 36.

15. See, for instance, Sutton 1988.

16. Macdonald 1986, 1988b, 1993, 1998.

persistent attempts at their physical and cultural genocide.<sup>17</sup> Even those recent and much needed studies which have revitalised anthropology in New South Wales<sup>18</sup> through a focus on, for instance, colonial relations, resistance, racism, identity and citizenship, tend to implicitly reinforce the assumptions of cultural loss because they do not directly address issues of culture and continuity. The implication is that Aborigines are defined in terms of the state because they can no longer be defined in terms of the Dreaming.

The 'Dreaming' discourses have posited Aboriginal lifeways in terms of an indissoluble land-people-spirits nexus. If change takes place in any of the facets of this relationship, Aboriginal culture is deemed not to exist. But how important is an explanatory system, whether mythic or scientific or any other, compared to the practices it purports to explain: such as labour which produces food, tools, technologies of industry, fighting and medicine; or modes and contents of economic and social exchange; or strategies and negotiations of politicking and power; or the nurturing of the young and the old; or lovemaking, healing and camp/house keeping. And what happens to these practices if the mythic explanatory system by which they have been understood, linked, articulated, is no longer transmitted; if the vehicles for its transmission are forcibly suppressed—language, ceremony, movement in the landscape? Do they disappear? Do the people disappear? It would seem that, to some anthropologists and their readers at least, that they did. Anthropologists recorded rituals, authority systems and section systems, apparently unconcerned at the devaluing of centuries of knowledge about, for instance, medicinal plants and treatments, local ecologies, the usefulness of fire in land care, women's lives, the raising of children, how people understand their spatial relations.<sup>19</sup> The monumentalising of 'high culture' with its focus on great achievements (or what appear as their equivalents in non-western societies) marginalises much if not most of what culture is made up of. We need to know how and why have certain practices been valued over others by writers in different historical periods if we are to read these partial accounts (which all are by definition) for what they are.

The Dreaming discourses have limited the ways in which Wiradjuri and other Aboriginal people are understood to have acted on the ideas introduced by their colonisers. When Wiradjuri people made demands to their conquerors for land, there is no record of these demands having been made in spiritual terms—in order, for instance, to maintain ceremony or preserve particular sites. It is clear that Wiradjuri local groups differentiated different areas of land in different ways. Colonists seemed welcome in some areas while other intrusions provoked intense conflict. Because those areas were sacred? It is tempting to assume so, because the privileging of the 'Dreaming' discourse makes this seem obvious. But the historical record does not mention this, although it does include references to Wiradjuri people's economic, social and health concerns. Per-

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Salisbury and Gressor 1971; Hankins 1982; Read 1984; Gammage 1983, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Including, for instance, Beckett 1988, 1996; Morris 1989; Cowlishaw 1989.

<sup>19</sup> The most prolific writer in late nineteenth and early twentieth century NSW was R. H. Mathews, whose work best illustrates this trend. Others include Howitt 1904; Radcliffe-Brown 1929, 1930; and Berndt 1947. The topics they overlooked in New South Wales have been a focus of more contemporary interests in 'remote' Australia.

haps the early colonists were not tuned into a society which framed its land/people relations in spiritual terms, and just ignored or could not hear such comments. Perhaps Wiradjuri learnt quickly how to appeal to their market-driven colonisers on their own, economic, terms. What we do know is that the demands of Wiradjuri that have been recorded are expressed in *non-religious* terms: their desire to forage for their own foods, their rights as the original owners, their need for security of tenure to re-establish their community lives; their concerns about the polluting of waterholes by stock; and fences that denied them access.<sup>20</sup>

Povinelli has argued that Stanner was responsible for popularising the view, contrary to prevailing opinion of his time, that Aboriginal societies' cultural institutions were not determined by their modes of production but the reverse: economic practices were merely subject to the seasons, while 'land-tenure and social practices were organized by complex philosophical notions known as the Dreaming'. But she points out the cost of Stanner's efforts to have Aboriginal people recognised as having a sophisticated organisation:

[His findings] contradicted legal and popular opinion that Aborigines lacked any sense of proprietary interests in their land. It is, perhaps, deeply ironic that in order to present the proprietary interest of Aborigines, Stanner felt he had to demonstrate that economy and culture could be unhinged and that each differently influenced the shape and function of the social group.<sup>21</sup>

Stanner and Berndt appear to have been concerned not only to counter the primitivism of social darwinism through their appeal to Aboriginal religion but also Durkheim's primitivisation of Aboriginal beliefs as 'elementary'. They brought Aboriginal studies into a new era of respect, thus contributing to changed attitudes towards Aboriginal people themselves. But their models were holistic and homogenising and the focus on religion further contributed to the de-historicising of Aboriginal cultural experience in denying them the right to change. Stanner's separation of economy and culture profoundly influenced the framing of the Northern Territory *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* (1976) so that, in Povinelli's words:

Pragmatic everyday interactions between a stretch of country and a group of people were treated as side issues to the exegesis of the 'deep meaning' and 'spirit' of myth. Posited as direct and unmediated, the practicalities of economy paled in comparison to the elaborations of myth and totemism.<sup>22</sup>

She goes on to add:

Later legislation would further exacerbate the division between economic and cultural practice to the point that the effect of labor-action and economic practice on the spiritual/totemic relationship between human groups and the countryside was denied. Early political-economic theory postulated that laboring subjects created proprietary interests in things and that the mode of production determined the level of those proprietary interests. And colonial law settled Australia as *terra nullius* based on this assumption. But today current land rights legislation has

20. Gamage 1983; Read 1988; Goodall 1996; see also Reay 1949; Goodall 1988.

21. Povinelli 1993, p. 10.

22. Ibid, pp. 10-11.

swung full circle, denying virtually all correlation between laboring subjects and proprietary interests.

I would argue that it has, in addition, denied the correlation between socially and spatially constructed subjects and proprietary interests. Hiatt's 1984 review of the land tenure debate is a good example. He starts by noting the:

rich variety of criteria used by Aborigines to legitimate access to resources or claims to the land itself. Birthplace, conception place, previous occupation, father's deathplace, mythological links, as well as descent along various pathways, all can be found in the ethnographic record.<sup>23</sup>

He describes these as a tool kit, variously appealed to as and when appropriate, although noting that attempts to codify and prioritise them have rarely met with success. However, he then makes a subtle, almost indiscernible leap from 'legitimate access' or 'claims' to land, to the notion of 'title': 'It is well established that title to land is expressed symbolically through myth and rite, and that ritual performances are public affirmations of ownership'. Despite Hiatt's acknowledgement of social relations as a means by which people gain legitimate access to land, it is the mythic and ceremonial expressions of those relations which are privileged. I would argue that fights which arise when people are caught hunting in areas that do not belong to them are also public affirmations of ownership, as is the need to ask permission to gather medicinal plants in the country of others, the etiquettes required by visitors to a community, the desire for Wiradjuri signage in public places, and the politics of the traditional owners and the historical people (migrants).<sup>24</sup> Povinelli's focus, for instance, is on labour action, women's in particular, as an expression of proprietary interest.

Povinelli's argument is important for two reasons. She is challenging the dominance of the Stanner model, one for which Elkin and Berndt must take equal responsibility, which has privileged myth and totemism over economic and social practices. In addition, she wants to challenge 'the hegemonic employment by the state of political economic notions of work, leisure, subject, and object' which devalue indigenous understandings of labour and the labouring subject.<sup>25</sup> She notes:

There are, therefore two ways in which Aboriginal action is assessed in contemporary Australia and, more generally, how hunter-gatherer action is assessed worldwide. On the one hand, when the Aboriginal economy is the focus of study, it is assessed according to notions of productivity based on Western notions of what happens when intentional subjects labor in an insentient environment. Work is measured—the values it produces and the leisure it affords. On the other hand, when Aboriginal proprietary interests are the object of study, the productive relationship between laboring humans and the laboring environment is pushed to the background if not excluded outright. The rich symbolic/interpretive studies of Aboriginal conceptions of land are artificially and quite unproductively isolated from studies of Aboriginal land use.<sup>26</sup>

More than unproductively: destructively.

23. Hiatt 1987.

24. Macdonald 1997.

25. Povinelli 1993, p. 8.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Povinelli's is one of the few studies now appearing after almost 50 years which challenges the 'Dreaming' approach to understanding the dynamics of Aboriginal life-ways and their land-people relationships. Her central theme, that one must understand labour and the labouring subject from an indigenous point of view, specifically seeks to challenge the androcentric and de-historicised approach which has privileged male ceremonial activity. Her approach also calls for the labouring subject and the labouring environment to be understood in much broader terms than 'western' models of economics or work allow for. Beckett has also pointed out that, in the process of finding a nationally acceptable Aboriginality, 'the Aboriginal claimant for land was cast in the role of *homo religiosus* rather than *homo economicus* and the case presented in terms of sacred sites rather than hunting grounds'.<sup>27</sup> Others who have also moved towards alternative approaches include Wolfe and Cowlshaw.<sup>28</sup>

It seems no coincidence that the totalising mythic explanation of Aboriginal societies was popularised at precisely the time—in the 1960s—when their proprietary interests in land were being given their most forceful expression since their colonisation began—in land rights cases and in the framing of land rights legislation. It not only appealed to the age of 'new spiritualism' in Australia, it also proved a useful principle of exclusion. First there was an attempt to exclude all proprietary interests to land on the grounds that, according to Justice Blackburn in 1971, Aboriginal people did not own the land, the land owned them.<sup>29</sup> Ironically, Blackburn also remarked that the Milirrpum people had not shown the clan to have a significant economic relationship with the land claimed even though the spiritual relationship was 'well proved'. His implicit challenge to strengthen argument in this regard was not to influence the Northern Territory land rights legislation. The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cwth) allowed for claims to land where mythic relations could be demonstrated by 'traditional owners'—who became the 'real Aborigines' in consequence. The politics of Aboriginal identities were then given new force by the unsuccessful attempts in the 1980s by the Hawke Government to introduce national land rights legislation.<sup>30</sup> The problem of how to find a nationally acceptable definition of Aborigines continues into the native title era, with Justice Olney declaring that, in the case of the Yorta Yorta of northern Victoria, 'the tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgement of traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs'.<sup>31</sup> All this contributes to the simplistic and distorting equation that history eliminates culture.

A mere preoccupation with high culture is an insufficient explanation for this act of privileging. The suppression of the value of political, social and economic aspects of Aboriginal peoples' land relations has enabled the suppression of political economic models, or any dynamic and transformable forms of interrelating spheres of social/material/spiritual practices in relation to land, the recognition of which would have made it much harder to limit Aboriginal demands for justice.

27. Beckett 1988b, pp. 206-7.

28. Wolfe 1991, 1994; Cowlshaw 1987.

29. Blackburn 1971, pp. 270-1.

30. Beckett 1988, p. 13.

31. Olney 1998, p. 48.

There has been an unwillingness in Australia to acknowledge, for instance, that Wiradjuri people expressed a desire to become a part of the colonial economy, and that they fought vigorously for control of and return of their lands, often precisely in order to do so. The refusal to acknowledge such activity paves the way for the impression that indigenous people do not value their land except mythically. Historical records do show that European colonists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century knew that, for Aboriginal people, land and economic autonomy went hand in hand, that their economic activities were evidence of the differentiation of proprietary interests between neighbours, and that they persistently and continually refused to be moved off their lands even where land/people relations were no longer expressed in mythic and ceremonial terms. But these have not been part of the producing of historical knowledge<sup>32</sup> and at times it would clearly have been embarrassing to incorporate such values and practices into the *white* discourse of Aboriginal land-people relations. While loss of economic and social relations is directly attributable to colonisation, loss of mythic/religious relations can, in contrast, more easily be seen as an inevitable consequence of the meeting with the modern world: the attractive but fragile and primitive spiritual beliefs by which superstitious peoples organised their social and economic lives, destined to disappear with the advent of modernity. Constructed in these terms, it follows that, if the beliefs that are essential to their economic and social existence are deemed to have disappeared, all else—despite evidence to the contrary—will be deemed to have disappeared. Fragility of culture has been a myth of colonial justification.

Why have anthropologists focussed to such an extent on spirituality, ritual, ceremony, myth? Not only does it suggest an unanthropological preoccupation with 'high culture', it disallows the valuing of social or economic relations outside of its framework. It suppresses information about cultural continuities in the context of colonial relationships by stressing the exotic as absolute difference, thus denying the historical constitution of Aboriginal peoples. Maddock has argued that the language of 'sacredness' and 'spirituality' was only emphasised in relation to land and specific sites because of the political imperatives of the land claim process. He demonstrated how Aboriginal people themselves view other aspects of their culture, such as kinship, as equally important to their way of life.<sup>33</sup>

The politics of this might be quite understandable. In any dispute situation, a discourse which emphasises differences is both politic and useful and difference is, of course, a valued ingredient of the creation of meaning and of identity construction. The issue here is which notions of difference are privileged and why at any particular point in historical time. The clear separation between European and indigenous conceptions of land, one economic, one religious, probably lent itself both to anthropological preoccupations with exotica—despite rather than because of its own more dynamic models of culture as 'lived lives', as well as to the framing of a response to indigenous demands for rights in terms of *moral* responsibility rather than legal or political rights. Conserving the Aboriginal Dreaming has been articulated in much the same terms as conserving the environment. The two movements merge ambiguously at times, often to find they can be ill-matched bedfellows. And like the selective concern to preserve what are

<sup>32.</sup> But see Read 1988, and, more especially, Goodall 1997.

<sup>33.</sup> Maddock 1991.

defined as wilderness areas rather than address issues in environments with greater degrees of impact and thus greater consequences, the emphasis on 'Dreaming' allows for the conserving of the less socially and politically damaging indigenous societies. If they have a bit of religion or rain forest left, we will listen. If they claim Australia's agricultural heartland in central New South Wales, forget it. Hence the need for degrees of Aboriginality.

Not all subjects positions are equal. Some carry greater rewards and are more positively sanctioned than others, depending upon one's position within the particular as well as the wider discourses of power and privilege of which one's own position is a part. One challenges dominant positions at one's peril. The cost in terms of social power, approval and material benefits may be considerable—this applies to academic positions, political ones, and one's presentation of a native title claim. It is the *Native Title Act* 1993 (Cwth) which is now highlighting the influence of these discourses for claimants in New South Wales. Whether or not indigenous people in New South Wales will be seen to have continued their 'customary practices' depends on *which* customary practices are being deemed important in the perception of mediators and judges. Will it be possible to have New South Wales claims freed from debilitating discursive practices, promoted in the past by anthropology and popular opinion alike, which emphasise loss on the grounds of the moral/material superiority of the coloniser and the moral fragility and material irrelevance of Wiradjuri lifeways? The anger Wiradjuri people express from time to time about anthropological research arises from their perception that their presences have been as much denied by anthropology's concern with exotica as they have been by the farmer's fences.

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# 'Born is nothing': Roots, family trees and other attachments to land in the Victoria River District and the Kimberleys

Patrick McConvell<sup>1</sup>

Work is nothing. Born is nothing. That grandfather is roots just like grass - split up and go all over the place. If they claim the wrong place, they can kill them. N. Waterloo, 1992.<sup>2</sup>

In this quotation a respected lawman, living at Bulla, articulates a very common view among Aboriginal people in the Victoria River District, Northern Territory, about rights to land. Where you have worked or lived is irrelevant to these rights, he says. Where you were born is irrelevant. What is important is the inheritance of rights in land from the grandfather – a term which covers both father's father (*kaku* in Gurindji/Malngin/Ngarinyman) and mother's father (*jawiji* in Gurindji/Malngin/Ngarinyman). He uses a plant metaphor for this relationship, which in various forms is also very common currently in discussions of relationships between people and land in the Victoria River District ('VRD'), which will be analysed in detail below. The final sentence of the quotation underlines the grave penalties which traditional law can mete out to people who claim rights in any other way than through such inheritance.

The context in which this statement was made was that of research being carried out for a land claim being made under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* 1976 (Cwlth) ('Aboriginal Land Rights Act') for an area of land for which the speaker was himself a claimant. Later discussion also revealed that he had in mind also a contrast between this way of obtaining rights to land—which he thought was by and large

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Australian Anthropological Society Conference, Adelaide, 27-29 September 1995, in the session: 'Aboriginal Places in the Late Twentieth Century' convened by Jeremy Beckett and Francesca Merlan, while the author was at the Northern Territory University, Darwin. Thanks go to the participants in that session, the Northern Territory University, the Central Land Council, and above all to the Aboriginal people who talked to me about these matters, especially N. Waterloo, Jimmy Manngayarri and Spider Banjo.
2. Since the presentation of the paper in 1995, the man who said this has died. His name has been replaced by his initial, N. His place of residence, Bulla, is near Timber Creek in the Northern Territory; he was listed as a Malngin traditional owner in the Mistake Creek land claim Gray 1996, pp. 13-14; McConvell 1993.

congruent with the provisions of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act—and the claiming of rights in smaller areas of land which he had heard of as operating in neighbouring areas of the Kimberleys, Western Australia.

So we might wish to read this statement primarily in terms of current land-rights politics. The speaker is situating himself and co-claimants as behaving correctly within an Aboriginal tradition, implicitly contrasting himself to others who are not: far from receiving land as reward they should be facing traditional punishment. It is tempting perhaps to go further and propose that he and others are in the process of constructing this firm tradition of land-rights by descent in order to make it congruent with the operation of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act with its emphasis on descent, and by extension to interpret the Act as congruent with the constructed or reconstructed tradition, thus ensuring his own and his fellow Aboriginal claimants of the VRD's legitimacy as owners in Australian law, and casting doubt on others' claims.

Conversely, if it is true that people in Western Australia frequently put forward quite different grounds for claiming land, then, one might argue, perhaps this is motivated by the different kinds of contemporary procedures and laws available there under state law.

While it is certainly true that this discourse about traditional attachment to land is embedded partially in current land-rights politics, we should take care not to assume that it has no basis in a real tradition; nor, even worse, to assume that it is pointless to talk of traditional belief and practice since the filter of current ideas renders any view into past tradition opaque. Such stress on the 'construction' or 'invention' of tradition for political ends in recent work is only one side of the coin.<sup>3</sup> Such emphasis has too often come at the expense of recognition of the other side: the stability and continuity of aspects of tradition in many situations. The stability and continuity of aspects of tradition also provides us with a window into past realities and diachronic developments that an exclusive emphasis on 'construction' of tradition for present-day ends denies us.

In this paper I take the view, long unfashionable in anthropology and under even stronger attack today, that it is possible to reconstruct past practice and belief with some degree of accuracy, or at least to have a fair idea of the probability of different schemes having existed at different periods. Once such a reconstruction is done, it is also possible to compare this with what people are saying and doing now, and to gauge the effects of current and recent changes on their representations of the tradition.

In this case, I shall argue that the current differing perceptions of what constitute traditional rights to land in the VRD and neighbouring areas of the Kimberley Region of Western Australia are largely a reflection of different traditions of long-standing in the VRD and the Kimberleys. They are based on real differences in practice and belief which were present in the past and continue with only some modifications into the present.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Merlan 1998, pp. 210, 223, Clifford 1988 338–339, Briggs 1996. Keesing 1989. Anderson 1983. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

## Birth and conception

Anthropologists writing of other regions, such as the Western Desert, have listed 'multiple criteria of attachment' to land<sup>4</sup> including the birth and initiation sites of an individual or a close relation, particularly a father, or the death and burial sites of a relation, residence of an individual or parents, close ritual relationships and perhaps reincarnation beliefs in some areas. A combination of such criteria may be sufficient to lead to inclusion as a member of a local descent group with primary ownership rights in some areas. While they admit (sometimes rather grudgingly) that these factors can be the basis of significant ties to land, the possibility of basing a claim to primary traditional ownership on them is emphatically rejected by N., and by the majority of people in the VRD.

In this paper I shall not deal with the 'work' and residence aspect of the quotation from N., important though this can be for the formulation of claims to land outside the strict framework supported by him. I shall focus here on the 'born' part of the quotation. Here my experience supports the view N. has that people in the East Kimberleys, for whatever reason (and this will be discussed further below), put forward place of birth and conception as a very significant, even primary ground for claiming land. In contrast, I have never heard anyone in the VRD adduce place of birth or conception in claiming land; usually, it is not mentioned.

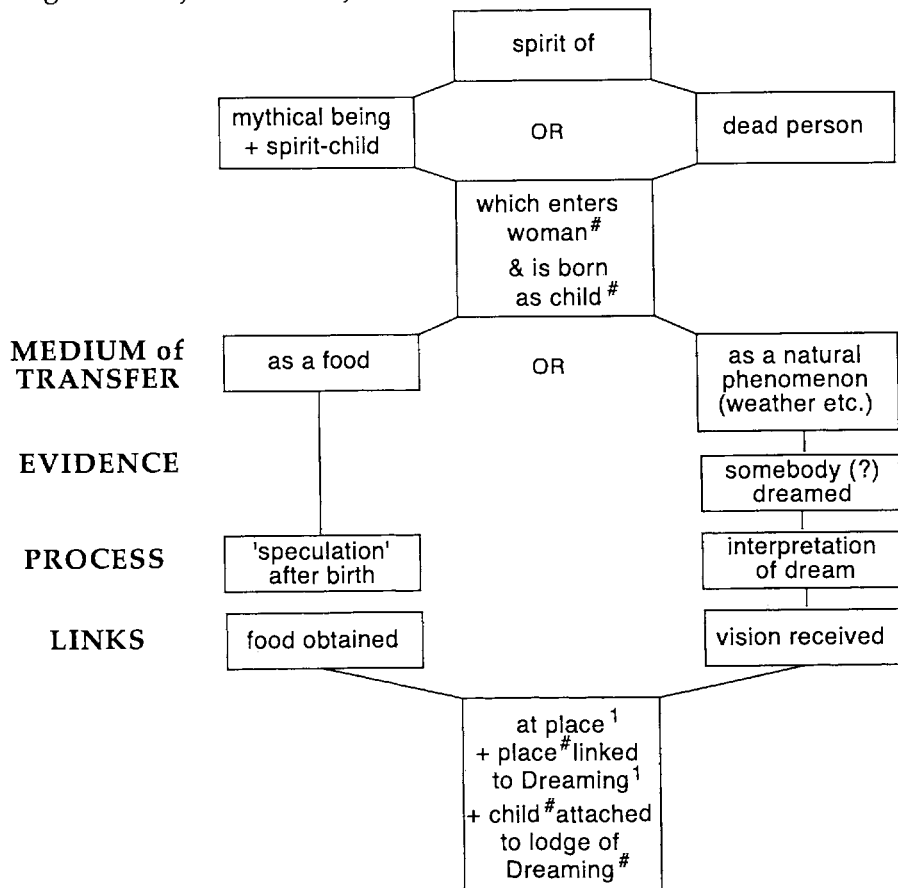
Connected with birth is another process relevant to attachment to land which has attracted much attention in the anthropological literature, partly because of its connection with the 'ignorance of paternity' debate, which I shall try to avoid here.<sup>5</sup> It is usually called 'conception' in the literature, although it is actually more related to 'quickening'—the mother's first physical awareness of pregnancy. Individual people are said to have a 'conception dreaming'. A small creature, substance, or spirit, enters the womb of the mother-to-be causing pregnancy or animating the foetus. Often this animating force is associated with a place where an animal was killed or food collected. The animal or other food (sometimes other things) is the conception dreaming of the individual when born. This complex is also often associated with a belief that a birthmark signals the identity of the conception dreaming, and sometimes that a dream by the father or mother announces the identity of the conception dreaming. There is considerable complexity and regional variation here which is worth further study—see diagrams A and B on *jarriny*.<sup>6</sup>

4. Tonkinson 1991, p. 70. Myers 1986, p. 136. Some anthropologists have argued that Western Desert attachment to land is at the extreme of 'flexibility' in a continuum throughout the continent (e.g. Layton 1986 p.26; Sutton 1998, p. 31); this feature has been linked to the extreme ecological conditions of Western Desert peoples. A contrary viewpoint sees less of a major divide between Western Desert and other groups in this regard. Keen 1997.

5. Hiatt 1996, pp. 120–141. In the Miriwung-Gajerrong Native Title claim in the East Kimberley Aboriginal evidence often links place of birth with place of 'conception' (or 'finding' of the child-spirit) although theoretically they could be different. See, e.g., Lee 1998, p. 97. Most of the words for spiritual conception and conception place in Arremte also mean birth and birth-place in some dialects (Henderson and Dobson, compilers 1994, pp. 69,97) although examples in the same source show that the two concepts are distinct i.e. a child can be conceived in one place and born in another.

# Kimberleys Conception Dreaming: *Jarriny*<sup>45</sup>

A: Kolig - Walmajarri etc. - Djarin

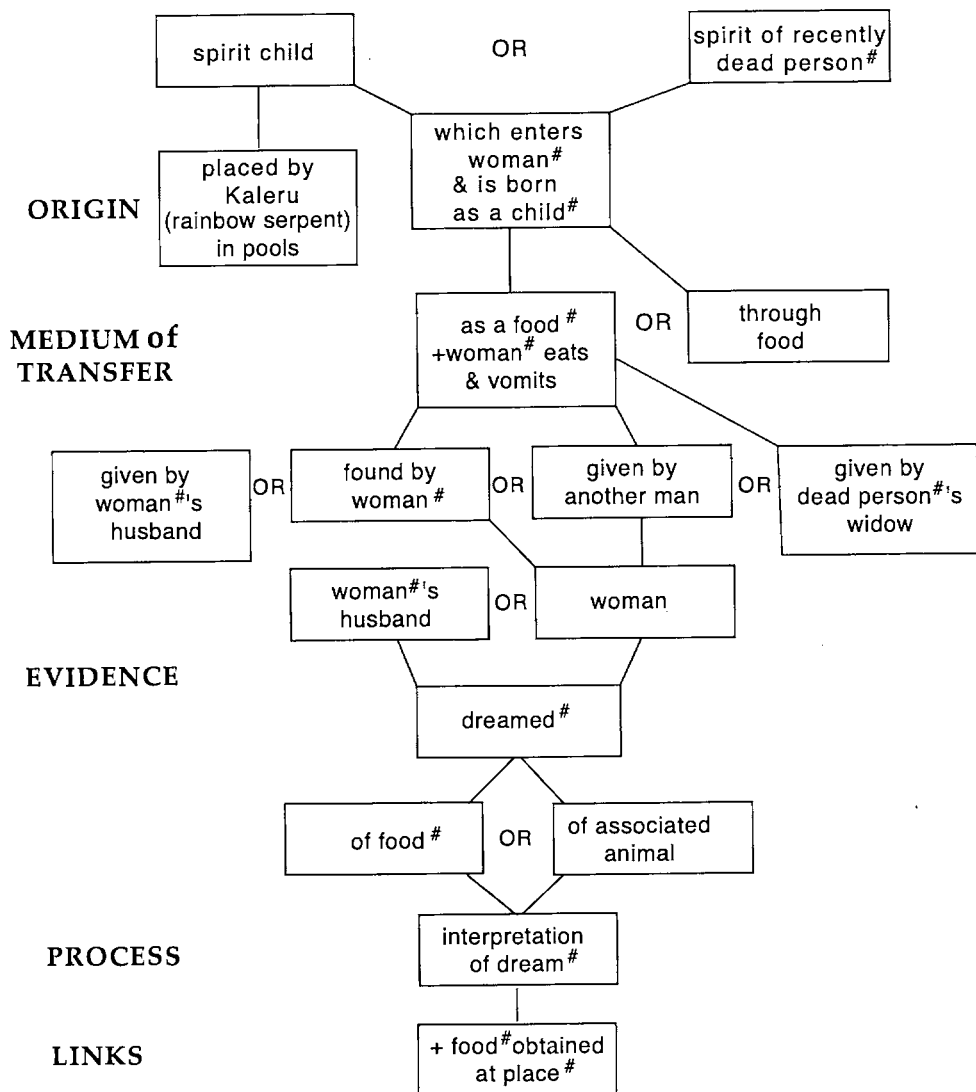


What is significant for our purposes here is that there is a widespread strong association in many regions between conception dreaming and attachment to an estate through recruitment to the local group which controls ritual related to the estate. Layton states that 'throughout much of the Northern Territory people may opt, if conceived outside their father's estate, to join the patriline associated with the estate on which they were conceived'.<sup>7</sup> There is regional variation in the conceptualisation of this associ-

6. Kaberry 1939, p. 393 notes variation between the Lunga and Djaru, among whom the father 'finds' a spirit-child and the Miriwung, where a woman dreams of it. Her 1936 article describes considerable differences between the North Kimberley and both the South-east Kimberley and Central Australia in the 'theory of conception', especially the lack of connection with local totemism (p. 392). Kaberry 1936 p. 396 also notes that the eastern tribes of the North Kimberley believe in reincarnation and assimilate this to conception beliefs. Strehlow records minor variations between the Western, Northern and Southern Aranda in conception dreaming beliefs. Strehlow 1947, pp. 86-91.

7. Layton 1986, p.27.

## B: Kaberry - Lunga (Kija) etc. - Djering



ation: among the Warlpiri the travelling dreamings deposit life-essences at sites which reemerge in the form of spirit-children to fecundate women who are near the sites;<sup>8</sup>

8. Glowczweski 1991 pp. 38-42. Among the Warlpiri, the *kurruwalpa* 'spirit-child' is usually ingested as food and the resulting pregnancy announced to the mother-to-be as she dreams, but it may also be announced to the father by an animal which he kills or to another relation. Sometimes the nature of the conception dreaming becomes evident after the birth of the child, through interpretation of a birthmark.

among the Arrernte, the spirit of the 'totemic ancestor' enters the chosen woman when she passes close to a spirit centre.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the apparent importance of this belief system in a wide range of areas, as far as I know it has only been brought forward twice as grounds for claim of traditional owner status in a land claim. These grounds were proposed for only a minority of the claimants and the cases were in Western Desert or heavily Western-Desert influenced areas. Given the orientation of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act to descent as the criterion, at least one of the Land Commissioners concerned had some difficulty in finding these claimants to be traditional owners under the Act.<sup>10</sup> It has been argued, however, that spiritual conception is a form of 'symbolic' descent in the Western Desert, directly from the totemic species.<sup>11</sup> One might expect further testing of this under the native title legislation, where descent is not stipulated as the primary criterion for establishing connection to land.

Statements by anthropologists about attachment to land and recruitment to local descent groups, in areas where conception dreaming is a factor, often embody a systematic ambiguity. On the one hand there is frequently a local idea that a person is connected to the area in which their mother received a 'conception dreaming' spirit into the womb. On the other hand it is also often stated that a person inherits land from his or her father. These two ideas are assimilated to each other by the fact that in most cases the place of the 'finding' or 'conception' experience is—happens to be, as it were—the father's country. Anthropologists sometimes say that the father manipulates the 'finding' experience to achieve this result, since in many areas it is the father's interpretation of an experience or his interpretation of his own dream which makes the link between a child and a place.

However the eventuality of estate obtained by conception and estate inherited by paternal descent not coinciding is not only a possibility but is recorded as occurring, in some areas, such as the Central Kimberley,<sup>12</sup> frequently.

9. Spencer and Gillen 1899, pp. 124–5; Strehlow 1947, pp. 86–91.

10. In the Yurrkuru claim Olney J. notes that Wafer and Morel, the authors of the claim book regard 'those who were 'born' or spiritually conceived at sites on Yurrkuru country' as having primary spiritual responsibility, but he does not list them as traditional owners because this connection does not derive from descent. Olney 1992, pp. 10–15. Note also here the equation of birth and spiritual conception and the quotation marks around 'born'—which is elsewhere, *Ibid.*, p. 9, equated with 'found'. Kearney J found that ancestors of some claimants in the Warlpiri, Kukatja and Ngarti claim were incorporated into the local descent group because of being 'conceived on a Dreaming Track within the estate and thereby linked with the country, being animated by its spirit'. Kearney J 1985, p. 6. In this case the links of the living descendants of such people were in the nature of descent which raised less difficulty in making the finding that they are traditional owners under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

11. Hamilton 1982, p. 102 cited in Sutton 1998, p. 31. Some anthropologists refer to the founding 'dreamings' as 'ancestors' of, or 'ancestral' to a local descent group, following the tradition of Spencer and Gillen 1899, and Strehlow 1947. This ideology is not present in regions where I have worked, such as the VRD where the dreamings gave laws and rights to early groups of people but did not father or give birth to them.

12. Kolig 1981, p. 35.



### The modern political role of conception dreaming

In the VRD, in my experience, Aboriginal people never talk about conception dreaming as a mode of attachment to land. The most explicit and strongest form of talk about attachment to land is in terms of patrilineal descent, or about patrilineality and complementary matrification (inheritance of rights from mother's father). There are some fairly vague beliefs about birthmarks being related to the killing of an animal at the early stages of pregnancy, but noone seems to attribute much importance to these matters, and people deny that this has any connection with land ownership, when asked. Birthmarks are more usually thought to be a sign that a child is a *yimaruk* (*wipilirri*)—a reincarnation of someone who has recently died. The connection between the conception dreaming and reincarnation beliefs will be explored further below.

Once again, there is a marked contrast with what is found among people to the immediate west in the East Kimberleys. When these people have taken part as potential claimants in claims under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act some of them have put forward as primary grounds for claim to a piece of land the fact that their 'conception dreaming' animal 'came out' from a site in the area.<sup>13</sup> This kind of talk is received with little enthusiasm by VRD claimants, and unless it is backed up by evidence about their membership of a group with estate and ritual inherited from a parent, little credence is given to it. One might attribute this to the relative naivete of the Western Australians in matters of Northern Territory-style land claims, compared to Northern Territory people who have more experience of this procedure, and who know that the law requires evidence in terms of descent.

I would hesitate to give too much weight to the pressure of the contemporary politico-jural system in explaining beliefs and practices. For one thing, the relative importance of birth and conception in this region has been recorded by anthropological observers beginning with Elkin and Kaberry in the 1930's at least, and continuing into the present, with evidence given to the Miriuwung-Gajerrong Native Title Claim.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, ethnographic and other descriptions of the VRD to the east do not record such beliefs (although beliefs in some respects similar but unrelated to rights in land are noted, as discussed further below).<sup>15</sup>

Certainly traditional beliefs are adapted to secure modern advantages, but the ways of doing this vary depending on the underlying system. It is instructive for instance to compare how migration of desert people north into the Kimberleys impacts on these systems, with a similar situation in the VRD. Kolig writes of the Fitzroy Valley, Central Kimberleys:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> E.g., McConvell 1993, pp. 30–31. In this example an elderly woman from Turkey Creek, since deceased, said that she obtained rights in an area as *kamerre* ('mother country') because her spirit 'came out' from there. This contrasts with Kaberry's observation that the conception site is usually in the father's 'horde country'. Kaberry 1939, pp. 42–44.

<sup>14</sup> Elkin 1933; Kaberry 1936; 1939; Rumsey 1996; Lee 1998. Toussaint 1999 pp. 93–4.

<sup>15</sup> Berndt 1950; Meggitt 1955; Rose 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Kolig 1981, p. 40. Kolig says that while land-use rights now related to conception dreaming, ritual lodge membership is now becoming a matter of local community rather than being recruited either by patriline or conception dreaming.

The conception sites of the younger Aboriginal generations, both those of Desert extraction and those originally indigenous to the Fitzroy, nowadays lie completely outside the reach of the Desert's mythical tracks. Conceptions, therefore can no longer be reasonably linked in a traditional way to the mythical traditions of the Desert. The elders concede that their children 'belong to this river' the *wunggur* country as the Fitzroy River and its surroundings are called by the Desert Aborigines. The younger generations' *djarin* derive from the spiritual forces of this region... This fact puts the elders in a terrible double bind.

On the one hand, the political implications of *djarin* [conception dreaming] are important for it automatically gives a person the right to use land associated with his conception... on the other hand overemphasizing this concept would mean the demise of the traditional Desert lodges ...

In the VRD it is the Warlpiri who have moved north into Gurindji country, into the northern Tanami and Lajamanu areas as a result of the government establishing settlements for them, and on to Wave Hill station then Wave Hill settlement (Kalkaringi) mainly because they went looking for work on the cattle stations of the southern VRD.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned above, the Warlpiri have a strong idea of conception dreaming whereas the Gurindji do not. For the Warlpiri, conception dreaming confers 'certain territorial rights over the [conception] site and ritual responsibilities in relation to the totem whether it is that of their clan or not'.<sup>18</sup> At Lajamanu, Glowcsewski reports that all the children born at the settlement are thought to have as their conception dreaming *Wampana* (Hare Wallaby), the main dreaming which passes though the area, and that, according to Warlpiri, 'this common totem confers on all the children a legitimacy of residence on the municipality lands, independently of their clan totems which give them rights over other estates'.<sup>19</sup> Many Gurindji, however, are sceptical of claims that children born at Lajamanu or Kalkaringi are 'traditional owners' or have any significant rights in the area because their conception was in the area. In the absence of conception dreaming beliefs in the area, people have attempted to use the nature of a site near Kalkaringi—*Karungkarni* (children-dreaming)—to support a case for spiritual affiliation of locally born children to the area. While some people publicly subscribe to this idea in a spirit of unity<sup>20</sup> it is not seriously entertained by many Gurindji. If anything, the idea that the Warlpiri have no land rights except in their grandparents' country far to the south, and should if possible return there, seemed, in the early 1990s, to be gaining ground among Gurindji.

To underline the dominance of descent ideology in the VRD as compared to the Kimberleys, I shall now explore some ways of talking about attachment to land in the VRD which are not found in the Kimberley to any extent.

### The parable of the plants

First I return to the quotation from N. with which I started. He talks of grandfathers being like *roots* of grass. No matter how far the grass goes and how many suckers it

17. Berndt & Berndt 1987; Read & Japaljarri 1978.

18. Glowcsewski 1991 p.38, my translation (PMcC).

19. Ibid. p.39, my translation (PMcC).

20. Dalton et al. 1995 p.84

throws up, it can all be traced back to one original root. So with people: they move around, live and work in different places, have children here and there, but all the children come back to the one root-stock - the grandfather.

This is a variation on a much more conventionalised metaphor about human relations and land found throughout the Gurindji-Malngin-Ngarinyman area of the VRD at least.<sup>21</sup> Father and child are referred to as *marnaru-jawuku*; by extension this two word phrase can refer to an agnatic group like the agnatic core of a local descent group which owns an estate. This compound term is also used formulaically in the context of oratory in sorcery divination ordeals to connote a group within which none should wish each other harm.<sup>22</sup> *Marnaru* means the trunk of a tree or main stem of a plant; *jawuku* a side branch. These words are not normally used in this form when referring to plants. The more normal forms are the related words *marna* 'base, trunk' and *japiyapi* 'end of something long, branch'.<sup>23</sup>

*Marnaru* and *jawuku* are also used to mean senior and junior lineages respectively within a larger agnatic group; to distinguish senior and junior generations where Omaha skewing neutralises the distinction;<sup>24</sup> and to refer to the main river versus a lesser branch, respectively.

In relation to links between local group estates, *marna* or *marna-marna* ('trunk') refers to the 'main' country where important dreamings (*maṅgaya*) 'dived' underground (*mamangkurl*); and *japiyapi* (branches) to affiliated countries through which dreamings moved.

The underlying cognitive image is of a plant or tree: here both 'roots' (*wirnturri*—also means 'horns') and branches function similarly in the metaphor vis-à-vis *marna*, the trunk. The western concepts of 'family tree' and even 'roots' in some senses are somewhat similar.

*Marnaru-jawuku* is a key phrase constantly used not only in discussions about land claims, but also in general casual conversations about kinship and land. The importance of patrification and patrilineality in this discourse is much in evidence. The strong emphasis in this conventionalised metaphor on rights and responsibilities stemming from one base—the father—leaves little room for the vagaries of chance inherent in conception and birth-based schemes of attachment to land.

There is another concept current in the VRD, particularly in the eastern part of it, however, which may relate to this metaphorical world of plants. This is *ngurlu*, matrilineal social totem.<sup>25</sup> *Ngurlu* also means 'seed' such as grass seed. While the parts of plants

21. Keen 1994, pp. 37, 169. Keen refers to another metaphor among the Yolngu of North-East Arnhem Land related to plants in which the 'branches' are open, revealed knowledge and the 'roots' secret knowledge. Farther afield, the 'botanical idiom' has been discussed by writers on Austronesian societies. McWilliam, for instance, analyses social and religious plant metaphors of the Atoni or Meto of West Timor. McWilliam 1997.

22. McConvell 1995.

23. The latter would appear to derive from a very old Pama-Nyungan root \**japi* 'end' which also turns up meaning 'foreskin, circumcision ceremony' both in the Pilbara and North-East Arnhem Land.; *jawuku* also probably descends from the same root, with a suffix of uncertain origin and meaning added.

24. McConvell 1988, p. 88; McConvell 1993, p. 59.

grow from the trunk and base, plants themselves also grow from seeds. Seeds are not attached to the ground from the start, but disperse over a wide area and germinate. In this metaphor children of women of the agnatic lineage are likened to seeds, leaving the plant, perhaps in contrast to the children of the male members who are the branches attached to the father and grandfather trunk. The *kurdungurlu*, the matrilineal guardian or 'worker' for sites and ritual, prototypically a child of a female patrilineal owner, is a *kurdu-ngurlu*, a 'seed-child' at least etymologically.<sup>26</sup>

It is risky to pursue this line of argument too far because the seed-matrifiliate connection is much more of a dead metaphor than the trunk : branch : father : son ratio which motivates a degree of productive and creative variation even today, as we have seen. Also it is a common error of anthropological interpretation to try to fit a number of disparate conceptual elements together into a single elegant scheme, when in fact they may be a contradictory jumble of elements which arrived at different times from different directions and do not form a coherent whole. The plant-seed metaphorical complex may be an incoherent amalgam of patrilineal and matrilineal elements of different origin. It is possible on the other hand that the plant-seed metaphorical complex was once a coherent whole, which has become internally differentiated and lost its underlying unity for the Aboriginal people of the VRD.

To make a sound judgment about which of these possibilities is more likely, we need to investigate the history of the elements involved more thoroughly.

### Jamarrarn

Another polysemous concept which is important in the VRD, but lacking in the Kimberleys as far as the literature informs us, is *jamarrarn*. This concept, too, like 'trunk and branch', is strongly associated with patrilineality. Similar concepts elsewhere have been named 'patrilects' but this rather suggests dialects inherited from the father in the manner of North-East Arnhem Land clan languages, whereas what we have here is not dialect in any normal sense. The senses of the terms current in the VRD are as follows:

- (1) a word uttered by a dreaming when performing acts in, or entering the estate of a local descent group, e.g. *pirrirtawu* is the word uttered by the Jurntakal snake when crossing the Ord River eastwards into the estate of the Malgin Yunurr group.<sup>27</sup>
- (2) the same word, used to address a member of the local descent group which owns the estate, e.g. the following could be said when addressing a member of the Malgin Yunurr group:

25. McConvell 1982 pp. 91-2; Rose 1991, pp. 82-3.

26. This is the Warlpiri form of the word, which is used only sporadically in the VRD.

27. McConvell 1993, pp. 74-75. Rose reports that the concept *jamarrarn* is not commonly used today among the people at Yarralin, and implies that its prominence in my reports is due to the land claim context of my research. Rose 1991, p. 87. Her reasoning perhaps reflects a variety of the 'constructionist' view I am criticising here. In fact most of the information on *jamarrarn* was gathered independently of land claim research. Ngaliwurru and Ngarinman elders from Yarralin were among those who gave me information, although some conceded that the concept and associated practices were in decline. Whether this decline is due to its alleged potential for introducing social division, as proposed by Rose, is not clear.

*Ngu-rna-ngku kuni ma-ni, Pirrirtawu*

I had a dream about you, Pirrirtawu

(3) the voice quality of members of the patriline of the local descent group, ultimately related to the voice quality of their major dreaming being, but inherited most directly from the father. Position of tongue, degree of opening of mouth, depth of voice, lisp etc are elements of this. As a 'genetic ethnotheory' this complements the 'ethnotheory' related to *ngurlu* which claims colour and texture of skin and hair are inherited from the mother. Once again though, care must be taken not to assume that these are really part of a single conceptual complex, or ever were.

(4) The point at which one group takes over from another in the singing of a songline, usually coinciding with the place at which the *jamarrarn* word was uttered by the dreaming.

(5) The whole stretch of a song, and the country covered by the songline, for which one group takes responsibility (i.e. from one *jamarrarn* in sense 4, to another).

There is some variation in the distribution of these senses: in the east of the VRD the senses (4) and (5) of the word, as boundary marker on a songline, are most prominent, while further west the senses (1)–(3) are emphasised. While Kaberry does not appear to have recorded the term among the Lunga (Kija) I did find the related term *jamarrarnku* in use, in sense (3) of voice quality. In Kija ritual perhaps less emphasis was put on the 'handing over' from group to group along a songline and thus there was less need for a 'boundary marker' to signal that.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly the link to land and song is made not only through possession of rights to a word but also more directly as a physical property of the individual inherited via the patriline from an originating dreaming.

In terms of our discussion of the modern political relevance of the concepts however, it must be noted that knowledge and use of the idea of *jamarrarn* appears to be in severe decline. This may be because the local agnatic descent group is less salient both in ritual and in everyday life than it was in past generations.

### Conception dreaming and reincarnation

The vocabulary and ideas to do with conception dreaming in the west are parallel to vocabulary and ideas about reincarnation in the VRD. As noted on the charts, one of the meanings of *jarriny* in the Kimberleys is the spirit of a dead person reincarnated in a new baby. This appears to be a rather minor meaning in that region, and its connection with the other sense of the word—a spirit child coming out of a site—is not completely clear. Kaberry does make clear that in the East Kimberley, we are talking of the ghost of a recently dead person and the reincarnation is mediated through food, but she does not draw out any other implications, e.g. whether a reincarnated person is entitled to claim any rights in the country they owned in their former life.

<sup>28</sup> I was told by Gurindji and Malngin leaders that dividing their songlines and dreaming tracks 'half-and-half'—strictly into sections at hand-over points is one of their distinctive cultural features, as compared to neighbouring groups. In all probability the contrast is not that stark, but some reality underlies this perception.

By contrast in the VRD it is the reincarnation sense of the concept which assumes dominance, almost totally submerging the sense of a spirit-child entering a woman directly from a site. The same term *jarriny* is not used in the VRD, but in Malngin *wipilirri* is used instead—Kaberry reports that this is the Malngin equivalent.<sup>29</sup> In fact *wipilirri* refers today almost exclusively to reincarnation, but it retains traces of the other meaning in that it also refers to birth marks which are thought to reflect marks on an animal as it was killed. Interestingly she does not report the absence or lesser importance of ideas of pregnancy caused by spirit-children in food among the Malngin. This may be interpreted as evidence for a loss of these beliefs in the last 60 years, although this is not a firm basis to support any conclusion. If the ideas have been lost, this change is more likely to have occurred as a result of the separation of Malngin and Lunga (Kija) social networks which occurred at the time of the westward move of Texas Downs homestead,<sup>30</sup> not due to any major change throughout the VRD.

Kaberry does mention one circumstance which does seem to support the idea that (at least some) Malngin once had a more standard Kimberley idea of conception dreaming, and also reflects on the cultural differences between the Lunga (Kija) and Malngin.

in [the deeper water holes] are the spirit-children placed there by the rainbow-serpent in the *ngarunggani* [Dreamtime]. These children become temporarily incarnated in fish, or in animals and birds near the pool, and after conception the species become the *djering* of the individual ... The man or woman does not associate every member of the species with the *djering*, but only the one killed at his or her 'finding' and as in this region there is no taboo upon eating it. Amongst the Malngin tribe a man avoids using his sister's name, and he will also refuse to give the name of her *wibeliri* [*djering* in Lunga] when asked for it, although he will name the species in any other context...the *wibeliri* is not merely associated with spirit-child but also with the personality. The *djering* or *wibeliri* is a totem for there exists between it and the individual a permanent socially recognised or institutionalised relationship.<sup>31</sup>

There is an assumption here, though, that the reason the *wipilirri* totem animal cannot be mentioned is that it is identified with the sister and therefore, like her, cannot be named. Alternatively one might argue that this 'taboo' results from the prohibition on speaking about sexual-reproductive matters associated with a sister, and the *wipilirri* would certainly come into this category.

The interpretation of birthmarks in the VRD is mostly in terms of establishing if a child is a reincarnation. Marks reflect wounds that the person may have suffered at their death; hence most open-and-shut cases of reincarnation concern souls of people who met violent deaths.

<sup>29</sup> Kaberry 1939, p. 194.

<sup>30</sup> McConvell 1993, p. 85. Texas Downs was a centre with a mixed Malngin-Kija bilingual population when it was located on the Ord River near the Northern Territory/Western Australian boundary. When the homestead was moved farther west into the Kija heartland in 1924, those who moved with it became more decisively oriented to Kija culture whereas those who relocated to Northern Territory stations strengthened networks with Malngin and Gurindji people in the east, gradually losing Kija-influenced cultural elements. The presence of syncretic systems on the boundaries and the possibility of local historical change does not invalidate the general point about long-term difference between regions being made here.

<sup>31</sup> Kaberry 1939, p. 195.

Farther east in the VRD, the term considered equivalent to *wipilirri* is *yimarruk*. This is, in my experience, solely used to refer to either the spirit of a person who has died and is finding a new body in which to be reborn, or to the person who is the reincarnation.<sup>32</sup> Since the reincarnation takes place in the (usually) short period in which the dead person's ghost lingers around its place of burial and nearby congregations of Aborigines, only people who die just before a baby is born are candidates to be selected as sources of *yimarruk/wipilirri*. Birthmarks seem to be the main sign to be interpreted; I have not heard of dreams, nor food and adverse reactions to it as playing any role.

Among the Malngin, people who have recently died have their name tabooed and in former times were called by a special name which referred to their place of death, burial or tree-grave exposure, with the suffix *-nyinin*. *Yimaruk/wipilirri* who are reincarnations of such people often took that death-place name as their common name; other nicknames of the reincarnation source may be used, and his or her subsection adopted as a second subsection. His or her Aboriginal 'bush name' which refers to an action of the dreaming, usually in the person's estate, will not be adopted, however.

The last point indicates that the *yimarruk/wipilirri* relationship stops well short of complete identification of the two individuals, especially where spiritual affiliation to land is concerned. One thing that everyone agrees on in the VRD, in my experience, is that being a *yimaruk/wipilirri* of a person does *not* entitle one to claim rights in his or hers group's dreaming country, nor sing his or her songs, nor use his or her dreaming designs. In the dreaming order you retain your status as child of your parents no matter what spirit entered your mother's body.

This is in contrast to the rights which can be gained from conception dreaming (possibly including its reincarnation form) in the Kimberleys, and elsewhere. However even there, there appear to be limits set. Spencer and Gillen report that a man who has gained access to a ritual group through conception dreaming may take part in all the ceremonies but will never gain the status of 'headman' (*alatunja*) unless he also belongs to the father's group by descent.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible that the reincarnation aspect of *jarriny* has also strengthened its position in the Kimberley in recent times too, due to contact with Christianity, but in a paradoxical way. While I was in Turkey Creek, a mainly Kija speaking community, in 1986-7 there was a considerable amount of talk among local Aboriginal people about the importance of local traditions of reincarnation. This had reached the ears of the local Catholic Church, and priests had begun preaching against the belief—presumably in line with the vehement opposition put up by the Vatican to religions emphasising reincarnation, such as Buddhism. Elements in the Church had been promoting varieties of syncretistic belief and worship for some years in the Kimberleys, but along different lines. In fact a process of syncretism was going on between these beliefs and Christian-

<sup>32</sup> Rose gives a wider interpretation to the term *yimaruk* as used by Yarralin (Ngarinyman and Ngaliwurru) people, saying it 'may be glossed as life itself ... part of an ongoing life process which infuses the whole cosmos' and implying that it does not only refer to reincarnation but also other 'conception' processes, without supplying details. Rose 1992, p. 59. I have not encountered these meanings of the term. *Yimarruk* is derived from the Wardaman word for 'shadow', *yimerruk*.

<sup>33</sup> Spencer & Gillen 1899, p. 126. Cf. Elkin 1964, p. 170 cited in Kolig 1981, p. 35.

ity, secretly, but under the noses of the local white Catholics. For instance a local Kija layman could preach at mass about the death and return to life of Jesus as an instance of reincarnation, Aboriginal style, adapting the Bible story to reveal the 'hidden' story of Jesus' rebirth as a baby, while priest and nuns sat by oblivious, because they could not understand the language.

It seems to me rather unlikely, however, that the conception dreaming complex including the reincarnation aspect was originally found throughout the VRD and Kimberleys and that the erstwhile main plank of the complex has been lost in the VRD in recent times, leaving only the reincarnation aspect and removing the connection to land ownership. It seems possible that the reincarnation beliefs were originally separate and found in the east and have become attached to the conception dreaming complex in the west through contact and diffusion.<sup>34</sup> The rather loose connection between the two aspects of *jarriny* could be adduced as evidence for this hypothesis.

### Dreaming totem (*kuning*) and the conception complex

Another concept which is strong in the VRD is that of *kuning* (east) or *kuningarri* (west). This is often the word used for a person's patrilineal dreaming—the main being which carried out actions in the group's estate which are celebrated in ritual. Kaberry mentions this word as having a similar sense in the east Kimberley, glossing it 'Dream totem', but other details about it are quite vague and seemingly contradictory; it is perhaps quite marginal in the area.

In some tribes [the Dream-totem *guning*] is inherited from the mother; in others from the father; elsewhere it may be some object dreamed of by either parent after finding the spirit child in a *djering*. It may be any natural species or material object, and acts as the representative of the individual in the dreams of other people. Its main function is to render some dreams significant, indicate the presence of a man or woman to others, and in some cases as a protector and warn of approaching danger.<sup>35</sup>

One of the intriguing things about these words is their relationship to the word *kuni*, 'dream' in Gurindji/Malngin/Nganyman from which they are obviously derived. In the case of *kuningarri*, the suffix *-ngarri* is commonly used in Kija and other Kimberleys non-Pama-Nyungan languages as a relative clause marker and to derive nouns/adjectives from nouns. It has been borrowed in a similar sense but with more restricted kinds of use, into Malngin. So *kuningarri* means literally '[something] connected to dream'.<sup>36</sup>

VRD people recognise the connection between this word for dreaming and a dream, and explain it by reference to a slightly difference sense of the term *kuning*. This sense is that of an image which is seen in a dream which recalls a particular dreaming, and thus signifies members of the agnatic group affiliated to the dreaming. Seeing such an image in a dream has the primary import that someone of that group will soon

<sup>34</sup> Kaberry's report that the reincarnation aspect is only present in the North Kimberley in groups to the east supports this interpretation Kaberry 1936, p. 396

<sup>35</sup> Kaberry 1939, pp. 196–7.

<sup>36</sup> The suffix *-ng* on *kuning* may be the Miriwung common nominal suffix, which is usually meaningless.



arrive; however it can mean that something significant, perhaps bad, will happen to a member of the group; it is also used to justify sorcery accusations against members of that dreaming group.<sup>37</sup>

The image may be a direct image of the primary dreaming being or its animal equivalent, e.g. an eagle taking off or flying, in the case of Eagle dreaming. A number of other less easily interpretable images are also available for each dreaming estate. Some of these images require fairly esoteric knowledge of sites or songs to interpret. An image of a man and woman copulating is a sign of the *jurntakal* (snake) *yunurr* (area), because two rocks are balanced on top of each other suggesting this at a site there. Water running through reeds is an image of the *Munpu* group because that image also occurs in the song for that estate. Other images are quite complex and specific, such as a stone being thrown at a person's back, signifying the *jurntakal wapa* estate.

For the people of the VRD, then, the relationship between the English words 'dream' and 'dreaming' is quite congruent with their own languages and conceptual system. Ideas that this conceptual complex is a colonial linguistic imposition invented by anthropologists are quite inappropriate.<sup>38</sup> However the nature of the relationship between the concepts is perhaps not the one attributed to it in some writings by non-Aboriginal commentators. Rather, to dream is to gain access to a system of signs which stand for what particular dreamings beings did in particular areas, which in turn points to the identity of a group of people related to the dreamings and country by patrilineal descent.

A relationship may also exist between this arrangement focussed on *kuning* in the VRD, and the conception-dreaming complex in the Kimberleys. Both rely on the idea that an image of an animal or natural phenomenon received in a dream signifies a particular dreaming, estate and the group of people related to the dreaming and estate by patrilineal descent.

However the implications of this signifying event are quite different in the two cases. In the VRD this simply points to the identity of an unknown human through their affiliation (a person arriving, a culprit of a crime). In the Kimberley, at least in the strong form of the practice as described, the interpretation of the dreaming image in the dream is *constitutive* of a person's membership of the group related to estate, one of the most important aspects of someone's social identity, not only in the past but also especially in today's era of land rights.

The attribution of social group membership to a new baby on the basis of a dream about its 'conception' is not consistently and uniformly applied, in either of the areas studied by Kolig and Kaberry, and there are also significant differences between them. In the case of Kolig writing of the Fitzroy Valley the 'dream' element is an optional alternative; more common is the interpretation of an eating event in waking reality. In the East Kimberley according to Kaberry, the 'dream' element is apparently obligatory, but if the father fails to have the requisite dream, the woman herself will. Kaberry provides little information about what the implications are of this assignment of conception-dreaming place for group membership or ritual life.<sup>39</sup> Kolig is non-committal

37. McConvell 1995.

38. Contra Wolfe 1991. Cf. also Wilkins 1993.

about who does the dreaming. Due to the current distance between 'desert people's' residence and their ancestral estates, and the political advantages he mentions of affiliation to local estates, nowadays there is much less chance, and less motivation, for the father to 'manipulate' his dream to ensure that his child has its conception site on his inherited estate.

Again, it seems quite likely that the identification of a totem in a dream may not have been an integral part of the conception dreaming complex originally in this region but could have been added to it over time. The origin of the dream identification element could be in a system somewhat like the one which exists today in the VRD for identifying groups, but not for assigning individuals to geographical origins, nor certainly for recruiting individuals to groups. Dreaming as a way to assign people to local groups seems to remain a rather marginal element throughout the region.

### Conclusions: history and neo-diffusionism

In this paper I have looked at some striking differences between how people in the VRD of the Northern Territory and the neighbouring Kimberleys region of Western Australia, respectively, relate themselves to tracts of land and the spiritual forces they believe to reside in the land. People in the VRD tend to promote descent models of affiliation to land, and reject claims based on birth place, conception dreaming, residence and other factors. The latter types of grounds for claim seem relatively common on the other hand among Kimberley people either in seeking outstations, in taking part in Northern Territory land claims as they occasionally do, or more recently in native title claims.

Various socio-political and legal circumstances in recent times would certainly have impacted on how people perceive their traditional rights and obligations, and how they decide to represent these in European designed contexts. Most recently the process of claiming land under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the Northern Territory in the last quarter-century has certainly influenced the thinking of many Aboriginal people in many areas of the Northern Territory, to the extent that terms like 'traditional owner' and 'responsible' (in the sense of 'spiritual responsibility' in the Act) have entered the Aboriginal English of general conversation, even among older people. On the other hand the absence of any land rights law in Western Australia until the recent development of native title, but the possibility for some people of obtaining (usually small) areas of land on the basis of a much looser and less regulated set of criteria, would have had its own different effects. Other earlier events, such as the movement of peoples away from their traditional land to a greater extent in Western Australia than in the Northern Territory, would have also made their mark on the weight they would tend to give to traditional schemes of spiritual affiliation and land ownership.

I have argued here that these modern socio-political contexts are not enough, in themselves, to explain how people have reacted, and the models that they propose for

39. Kaberry does indicate that in the case where a *jarriny* food is given to the woman by a man other than her husband, then it is not to that man's group that the child belongs but to her husband's, i.e. the result is the same as patrification. Kaberry 1939, p.42. There is little indication in her work about how, if at all, the place of encountering the *jarriny* can affect the child's group membership.

claims to land. Rather traditional patterns which differ in different areas, dating back to times before European contact, still play a significant role in conjunction with the modern contexts.

Major traditions of long standing which must be taken into account in explaining the differences in current models of attachment to land in the VRD and the Kimberley respectively include:

1. the presence of a strong 'conception-dreaming' complex in the Kimberleys, and its complete absence in the VRD;
2. a set of strong cultural and discursive patterns supporting descent models, particularly of patrilineal descent, in the VRD; while such models have been and are also present in the Kimberley, some of these supporting patterns are absent.

Arguing for this position has involved me in examining a number of the cultural phenomena of the entire region from the central Kimberley across to the VRD, and in putting forward proposals about what may have been the original forms of institutions at some past stage, and how they have changed. These proposals are certainly tentative, and require further research and questioning. What needs to be done is to formulate more specific hypotheses, hone our methods of cultural reconstruction, and develop more insightful theories of social and cultural change. Questioning of the entire project of cultural reconstruction is not what is needed now. Anthropology has had enough of such questioning; let us now try to move on.

Thomas notes that Radcliffe-Brown 'effectively assimilated all history to that which could only be imperfectly known and excluded it from the field of analysis'.<sup>40</sup> Australian Aboriginal studies were taken by Radcliffe-Brown to be the prime example of where history could only be 'conjectural' and thus worthless. Because of his foundation tenure of the first chair of Anthropology in Australia, Radcliffe-Brown was able to impose this idea as virtual dogma in Australian Anthropology long after his departure, despite his successor Elkin's interest in historical reconstruction and diffusion.

Kaberry's ethnography clearly reflects Radcliffe-Brown's strictures although there is interesting discussion of contemporary change, for instance of how children of white fathers are explained within the conception-dreaming model. She also hints at hypotheses about the temporal ordering of development of different institutions when she states that the conception totem 'developed out of, and is determined by, native beliefs about *Narungani* [Dreamtime] and spirit children'.<sup>41</sup>

By the time of Kolig's fieldwork, social and cultural change among Australian Aborigines was clearly on the anthropological agenda, and is in fact the main focus of his monograph.<sup>42</sup> For all that, though, hypotheses about what were the prior forms of organisation are not always clearly formulated, and methods of cultural reconstruction, including how evidence is assessed, are often glossed over.

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<sup>40</sup>. Thomas 1989, p. 21.

<sup>41</sup>. Kaberry cited by Toussaint 1999, p.48.

<sup>42</sup>. Kolig 1981

One problem is uncertainty about time frames being described, compounded by confusing use of the 'ethnographic present' for an indeterminate past time (tagged by the ubiquitous adverb 'traditionally'), as well as for the real ethnographic present:

Traditionally, a man's affiliation to a specific sacred lodge is usually determined by his conception, the *djarin* (The present tense used here, strictly speaking, refers to a condition past, for conception is no longer relevant to lodge membership).<sup>43</sup>

A few pages on we are told

...The established link of a man's conception and the mythological content or being that gave rise to his life associate him quite unequivocally with a particular lodge<sup>44</sup>

which can only be interpreted as a statement about the 'traditional' past in the light of the previous statement, but the time-frame is not specified and the tense is present.

Kolig, like other anthropologists, seems also on occasion to fall into assumptions that 'traditional' arrangements and beliefs in one part of Australia must have been similar to arrangements and beliefs in another part. In this case, appeal is made to Spencer and Gillen's and Strehlow's work among the Arrernte, perhaps because the effects of Western influence were thought to be less at the time in Central Australia:

a link is established between the *djarin*'s supposed locus and the creative Dream-time force that really gave rise to the new human life...Strehlow['s] ...description of the situation among the Aranda also holds true for the precontact situation of the Desert Aborigines now living in the Fitzroy area...<sup>45</sup>

Again, we must presumably amend this to 'held true [traditionally]' and the source of evidence for this identification of conception dreaming systems of Northern Desert groups in the past and the Arrernte is unclear. We know that Arrernte conception beliefs did and do differ substantially in detail from those in other parts of Australia, including the Kimberleys.<sup>46</sup>

Kolig elsewhere refers to his reconstructions of pre-contact belief and practices as 'hypothetical'—the product of hypotheses, presumably:

When measured against hypothetical precontact variety, present religious diversity has shrunk to proportions that are only sad reflections of past splendor.<sup>47</sup>

It would be instructive to learn what kinds of evidence contribute to these hypotheses—whether for instance analogy with the Arrernte played any role in their formulation, and what weight was given to different kinds of testimony.

What becomes clear from critical examination of such accounts is that anthropological discourse about connection to land among Australian Aborigines is inextricably embedded in a project of cultural reconstruction or 'culture history'. There is, however, a certain reluctance (perhaps based on the anti-historical bias of dominant schools of

43. Ibid., p.31.

44. Ibid., p. 34.

45. Ibid., p. 34.

46. Kaberry herself stresses this pointing out in particular that the Lunga (Kija) do not regard spirit-children as ancestors as the Arrernte do. Kaberry 1939, pp. 41–2.

47. Kolig 1981, p. 36.

anthropology) to engage directly with this project, or to assess what theories and methods are needed to carry it out adequately.

This problem recurs constantly in applied anthropological work on land claims, and in an even more heightened form in native title research. For instance, in examining the 'language group' model put forward in some recent land claims Rumsey discusses the probability of clan-like groupings having existed at a previous period in the following terms:

On the evidence presented at the hearing it is not clear that anything like the clan ever existed in this area [Finniss River]

there was ...at least a vestigial system of clan-like groupings [Malak-malak]

a tradition also survives (among older people at least) of clan-like groupings, albeit with less clear territorial associations than among the Malak-malak-Madngele [Jawoyn]<sup>48</sup>

It is speculated that drastic population loss in early invasion times might have led to the move from emphasis on clans to emphasis on language countries. Obviously this would not be the case where clan-like groupings cannot plausibly be reconstructed.

With this kind of hypothesis formation we are on the right track, I believe.<sup>49</sup> This would include both historical hypotheses about regions and development of theoretical models to cope with the interactions of such factors as population, social groups and land attachment ideology.

The ideological or conceptual side of such reconstructions, and its connections with reconstructed practices is often the most difficult. In the already very sparse early documentation of contact in the VRD and Kimberley this aspect gets little or no mention by practically minded explorers and cattlemen. Thomas bids us pay heed to the missionary accounts<sup>50</sup>—if only we had some! Thomas also advocates anthropologists paying more attention to the evidence of archaeologists. This is indeed good advice but with the kind of evidence archaeologists find (and look for) in Australia, almost nothing of the non-material side of culture can be discerned. There is one other source of evidence not mentioned by Thomas which has the potential to eclipse these other sources and is especially amenable to tracing the history of ideas: linguistic reconstruction, especially the tracing of changes in the meaning of key terms.<sup>51</sup>

In this paper I have only just made a start with the development of testable hypotheses about earlier forms of land attachment, organisation and belief in the VRD and the patterns of change this century, using local Aboriginal testimony, ethnographic writing, and linguistic methods mainly. I have found it valuable to break up complex and polysemous key terms into their component elements and compare their meanings in different regions. What I have found is an intricate pattern of variation, but one which, with some careful study, might reveal significant patterns of earlier forms and directions of change in meaning.

<sup>48</sup>. Rumsey 1993, pp. 197–8.

<sup>49</sup>. Models of historical change in Aboriginal land ownership patterns are also developed in Sutton 1998.

<sup>50</sup>. Thomas 1989 pp.14, 73.

<sup>51</sup>. McConvell 1990. McConvell 1997. McConvell and Evans 1997.

One of the inspirations behind this approach has been the concept of cultural complex developed in early Boasian anthropology and handled particularly insightfully by Sapir.<sup>52</sup> This involves a concept of coherence in culture which is neither 'shreds and patches' nor the kind of functionalism where everything fits equally well. It is possible to discern, in a complex, elements which are notably more divergent than others, and where often the local explanation smacks of an after-the-fact rationalisation. Isolating such a phenomenon, and bringing it together with other evidence on a wider scale, can lead to a historical hypothesis about why the complex came to vary in its coherence in that way. Quite often the explanation will involve diffusion of an element and its partial adaptation to the new complex.

Putting together evidence about key terms related to land attachment, I have begun to build up hypotheses along the following lines:

1. a basic system involving 'conception dreaming' and 'spirit children' is quite old in the Kimberleys, but there is no trace of such a system in the VRD in the period just before contact and probably going back considerably further.
2. the additional element of the 'conception dreaming' complex conferring primary rights to dreaming estate may be relatively recent, adopted first by desert peoples south of the Kimberleys.
3. it may be that peoples of the VRD once had a 'conception dreaming' system but lost it, perhaps around the time that the system of long 'travelling dreaming' songlines, which divide into sectors according to local patrilineal groups, became more solidly established;
4. the 'travelling dreaming' segmented track system was reinforced by the *jamar-rarn* concept tying individuals to a section of a dreaming's travels by inheritance of an aspect of personal identity (voice) from the father.
5. access to hidden knowledge through dreams appears to be a fundamentally distinct idea from either conception dreaming or patrilineally inherited dreaming, but has become (more or less loosely) attached to the former in the Kimberley (*jarriny*) and to the latter in the VRD (*kuning*).
6. Reincarnation of a recently dead person in a baby is also a fundamentally different idea from conception dreaming but has become loosely adapted to it in the Kimberleys. Reincarnation ideas may have appeared first in this region in the VRD perhaps in the north among non-Pama-Nyungan speakers and diffused west; however reincarnation beliefs have made no inroads on to fundamentally descent based schemes of land attachment found in the VRD.

Naturally any of these scenarios can be dismissed as 'conjecture' if one is so minded, but nothing is gained by this. My point is that they are initial hypotheses which can be modified, even disproved, by using a variety of evidence from history, anthropology, archaeology and linguistics. We cannot sidestep the questions of regional cultural variation, its origins and how long it has existed, either by pleading that there is no relevant evidence available, or by insisting on privileging contemporary political explanations over history. Any enquiry into native title, for instance, demands evidence of the time-depth and continuity of institutions and will require us to develop a robust methodology for dealing with them. This practical current need also underscores the more gen-

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<sup>52</sup> Sapir 1949.

eral need for the development of a diachronic anthropology which includes explicit theory addressing the conditions under which cultural elements diffuse and the conditions under which diffusion is resisted and traditions retained.

A key question in developing such theory is the relationship between conceptualisation of links between land and people and patterns of movement and settlement. More flexible types of attachment to land may be more congruent with social systems characterised by migration or expansion than with other less mobile systems, for instance. As we have seen, in the Central Kimberleys in the twentieth century, the migration of people north from the Western Desert has favoured the increased use of conception dreaming to link people to new areas. Perhaps this might suggest a more general model explaining the distribution of conception dreaming systems linked to local group membership in Australia in terms of migration or expansion in relatively recent times.<sup>53</sup> But such explanations, to be fruitful, must build in the possibility of countervailing forces in a dialectical fashion. Diffusion of conception dreaming ideas as a means of acquiring rights in land can be resisted, as we have seen in the case of the northward movement of Warlpiri into the VRD, where attachment to land by descent has been maintained, and supported by the absence of prior conception dreaming beliefs, and by metaphors and ethno-genetic beliefs emphasising patrilineation.

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# The meaning of 'One' in Broome, Western Australia: From Yawuru tribe to Rubibi Corporation

Barbara Glowczewski

In recent years Broome, a coastal tourist town in northern Western Australia, has been regularly in the headlines for Aboriginal land issues while its population doubled from 6,000 to 12,000. On Norman Tindale's map, Broome is located in the country of the Jugun tribe, north of the Yawuru tribe.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays local people say that 'Jugun and Yawuru are one' and that Broome is in Jugun-Yawuru country. In fact Jugun language is also known as 'Big Yawuru'.<sup>2</sup> The Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation which has been operating for over fifteen years originally included most Jugun families. Through different site surveys, protests and claims that have taken place in the name of Jugun and Yawuru country the patrilineal model of local affiliation proposed by early anthropologists<sup>3</sup> is now questioned as many people identify with the country inherited from their mother or in another way, through spiritual, ritual or marriage affiliation. The right to land of non Yawuru or non Jugun local people has also become an issue because several generations of indigenous people from other regions of Australia, including the Torres Strait Islands, have been settled in the town more or less forcibly through missions, orphanages and a rural exodus or been attracted by work. The advent of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) saw many local conflicts both between indigenous people themselves and with non indigenous people, but new alliances have built up an indigenous strategy concerning land management and town development, especially with the creation in 1994 of the Rubibi Working Group which is in the process of being incorporated as the Rubibi Aboriginal Land, Heritage and Development Council.

This paper discusses the way conflicts and alliances have evolved between the different local Aboriginal people and the role some women have played in this process aimed at an active Aboriginal participation in the development of Broome and a redefinition of the traditional language groups which have a right to this land. The different ways people identify with the country (through descent, spirit or the dreaming law<sup>4</sup>) and the evolution of Rubibi, the local Aboriginal representative body created to negoti-

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1. In this text tribe is used in the way the authors quoted or the Aboriginal people refer to it.

2. McGregor 1988, p. 77

3. Elkin 1927-1928 (unpublished notes); Radcliffe-Brown 1930-1931, p. 341; Elkin 1933, pp. 260-81 and 437-38.

ate development in Broome and reconcile different candidates for claims under the *Native Title Act* 1993 (Cwlth). It is important to stress that the process of bringing together all of the different claimants (Jugun, Yawuru and other locals) has evolved from an original tendency to homogenise and unite them under 'one voice' to the recognition of an inner dynamics where an even stronger differentiation into several groups is now encompassed by the current Rubibi representative body. Negotiations and mediations have outlined and strengthened differences between families which claim a specific identity by taking the geographic name of the place they identify with, such as the Goollarabooloo group, the Idar (Lake Eda) group, the Minyirr (Gantheaume Point) group or the Leregon 'clan', etc. Jugun, Yawuru and other Broome Aboriginal people are 'one' not as a homogeneous unit but more as a federation or a network of alliances between differentiated units, with some members having family in two or more units.

It is this process of unveiling identity diversification in the recent political structuring of the representative body that is the most interesting lesson of the 'Rubibi model'. It will be shown that the dynamics of identity reflects two influences. The first being the traditional process of local differentiation (based on country, language, rituals and kinship) which is reproduced through rules of exchange and secondly, the contemporary resistance to globalisation imposed by the Western lifestyle and bureaucratic and political structures.<sup>5</sup>

### Reconstructing the past

Custody of land has been transmitted in the Broome region for over a century with and against the disruptive presence of settlers. Local Aboriginal owners have had to adapt to blackbirding and massacres in Roebuck Bay and other killings, imprisonment or forced labour on pearling boats and on stations and exile away from Broome. A lot of Asian indentured labour was brought by the pearling masters from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Japanese divers and Chinese merchants gave birth to Broome's Chinatown. But the Aboriginal population was forbidden to mix with Asians. Different laws sent women to jail for prostitution when they dared live a married life with an Asian man. Children from European or Asian fathers were taken away and most grew up hundreds of kilometres away from Yawuru land, for instance at the Beagle Bay mission to the north or the Moore River mission to the south. But the attachment to the land of origin was strong and some two thousand Yawuru descendants still live in Broome, others being located in Darwin, the Pilbara, Perth and further away. They have learnt to share their land with Aboriginal neighbours who have come to town from bush communities on a permanent or temporary basis. One town reserve, Kennedy Hill is mostly inhabited by Bardi and Torres Strait Islander people the other by Karajarri, Nyikina,

4. Dreaming, widely used in Australia but rarely understood, is a dynamic concept encompassing different levels. Rather than a time of creation, it is a virtual space-time, where dreamers can communicate with eternal totemic ancestors and bring back new songs, designs and other collective memories. According to the context of speech and practice, dreaming refers to these eternal beings, the animals, plants or other phenomenas they embody as totems, the stories and song lines that tell of their journeys, the trails that materialise their presence on earth in the sacred sites, the power and the individual and collective identity embodied in their Aboriginal custodians. Glowczewski 1991, pp. 16-17 (Presses Universitaires de France). On 'law', see footnote 9.

5. Glowczewski 1998a, p. 347 (Berg).

Mangala and desert people. The majority of Yawuru people live in Homeswest houses in or outside of town.<sup>6</sup>

In 1987 a group of Yawuru women applied to a language funding body to initiate an oral history project. They wanted to find out from the Broome elders about traditional 'story places', what people were connected to them and the boundaries of the local languages. Having obtained a grant, they formed the Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group (*Jarndu* means woman in Yawuru) to record life stories and stories about country, some on tape and video. They found hundreds of toponyms corresponding to old camps or ceremonial grounds, special stones for increasing fish or turtle, dreaming tracks and song line sites on the coast, in the mangrove and offshore. In tracking down their places of origin, they discovered different genealogical links between the local families. They wanted to know if Broome country was Jugun or Yawuru because nobody seemed to really know. Most elders told them that Jugun and Yawuru are 'one' and share the custody of the land where the town was built. In 1991, I was asked to put this extremely rich data into a book form<sup>7</sup> and also to expand the research more specifically into a systematic reconstitution of the local genealogies. Thanks to the fantastic memory of some of the women elders, twelve main branches of Jugun and Yawuru descendants including over 2,000 people were identified. These genealogies were to be used as a basis for the Kimberley Land Council to prepare local native title claims.

In 1994, the Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group had developed into an incorporated resource centre with 16 Community Development Employment Program employees training in silk screening and office work, offering creche facilities and a Yawuru language program. The women's group also continued to help organise political meetings involved with land issues. Some men were worried about the women being involved with land matters. But the women repeatedly assured them that they did not mean to touch any land business that was restricted to men. In the end women's initiatives, inside and outside the group, helped to promote the political actions of the men. In 1992, when some Aboriginal and non Aboriginal residents of Broome started to oppose the idea of a crocodile farm being built on the marsh at the entrance of the town, the Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group sent its objections to different authorities including, in particular the then state Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. A video message was produced in July with a Jugun Yawuru woman telling the story of the Two Snakes associated with the place. She explained that destroying such *bugarri* (dreaming) places is 'really hurting us' and that if the 'snake' that sits there is touched 'maybe Yawuru people will be wiped out'. But the minister did not oppose the proposed development and the shire agreed to lease a block of the town common for the crocodile farm. Both the minister and the shire legitimated their decision by using a letter from the former chairman of the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation in which he did not object to the project. From the point of view of the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation this man, who in the meantime had been asked to resign for other reasons, was not considered representative of the Yawuru community. In fact the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation had invited

6. Jackson 1996, p.10 (North Australia Research Unit).

7. Glowczewski ed. 1994, 600 pages compilation of fifteen story-tellers with many archival photos, maps and genealogical boards and historical appendixes.

the proponent of the crocodile farm to several meetings to inform him about their objections to his project but he never came.

### **We still have 'law' in Broome**

In September 1992, the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation with the support of other Aboriginal people living in town organised a protest camp on the contested site and a month later a large tent was set up there to host a meeting of the Aboriginal opponents with the shire. Aboriginal people in town had not shown their dissatisfaction and anger which such assertiveness since a young boy was killed by the bouncers of a hotel years before and the Noonkanbah dispute in 1980.<sup>8</sup> The crocodile farm in this sense was a major event that strengthened in many local people the idea that they had a say about the future use of the country. People objected, asserting that Broome is not a crocodile country, that the feeding of the crocodiles (1,000 to be bred each year) would lead to the extinction of local fish, and that, if a crocodile escaped neither locals nor tourists would be safe. This last argument was supported by an environmental survey. But the main argument was cultural. The place was important for traditional activities, such as fishing and ceremonies.

The Kimberley Land Council, on behalf of the Yawuru people, made several applications for interlocutory junctions, both in the Supreme Court of Western Australia and in Federal Court of Australia, to prevent the issue of the lease. They were rejected. In the meantime the developer, a popular television personality, called for public support as his crocodiles were likely to die if they were not shifted urgently to this new site from his existing park in another part of town. His appeal was even broadcasted as a children's program. Five alternative sites were offered by the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation, but in January 1994 the crocodile farmer was granted a lease over 21 hectares of the original block. The following month, the Yawuru sought temporary protection of this land from the Commonwealth Minister of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs under section 9 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (Cwlth). The leased area was also included as part of the claim lodged by the Yawuru under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth). The Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs appointed as a mediator, Fred M. Chaney, a former minister, to investigate the situation and report to him on making a longer declaration before the protection provided under section 9 expired. The Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group offered its premises for the meetings.

Many elders from other parts in the Kimberley came to support the Yawuru people and to testify on the cultural importance of the site. The Kimberley Land Council appointed a lawyer and an anthropologist full-time to conduct the case and a report outlining eight aspects of cultural significance was submitted to Chaney. Chaney's report was examined by the minister who decided that the land would be protected by a declaration under section 10 for five years, a period after which the situation could be reconsidered if the local elders did not show continuing traditional and cultural usage of this place. The minister's decision relied on the particular cultural and sacred significance in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. After the Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group had stated that the place was associated with the very important Two Snakes

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<sup>8</sup> Hawke and Gallagher 1989, p. 317 (Fremantle Art Centre Press).

dreaming, the male elders confirmed the secret level of that story and that touching the place was dangerous from a spiritual point of view. They also explained that the site was on the path to a ceremonial ground where initiation still took place.

Interestingly, the area of the dispute did not seem to have a public name, but was referred to as the Dampier Creek marsh or the path to the ground called Garnin on Fisherman Bend. It has to be noted that the Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group took an important role in reviving the use of this ground. They made all the material and financial arrangements so that Yawuru law could be performed again in Garnin after some ten years of inactivity. Thanks to their effort, in 1991, two Yawuru and two Karajarri young men were 'put through law'<sup>9</sup> by Yawuru elders with the support of some Karajarri people of Bidyadanga (La Grange), and Nyikina and Mangala people of Looma (300 kilometres inland). For many years Yawuru boys and young men have been initiated by neighbouring tribes, in La Grange, Looma and Anna Plains. Some were initiated by Bardi people in One Arm Point or Djarindjin and Lombadina (Bardi settlements located some 200 kilometres north of Broome) or in the ceremonial ground the Bardi were given by Yawuru custodians to use for ritual purpose a few miles north-east from the entrance of the Broome town.

It can be noted that traditional support and participation of different tribes in the initiation of their respective boys seem to have always existed.<sup>10</sup> Such exchange was legitimated not only by intertribal trade all across the Kimberley, through the well known Wunan system, but also through Dreaming trails shared across hundreds of kilometres by groups of very different languages and different environments of the coast, desert and river. The support given by the elders from the south coast (Karajarri), the north coast (Bardi) and inland (Nyikina, Mangala, etc.) confirmed the cultural significance of the Broome region and especially the Dampier Creek area where, apart from the Two Snakes, The Two Men song cycle, a 'law' shared by most Kimberley and Western desert people<sup>11</sup> is significant.

9. 'Put through law' or 'going through law' in an Aboriginal understanding means being initiated. 'Law' refers to not only all the rules that constitute the rituals and other customs of Aboriginal society but also all the teachings and practices (such as dream interpretation, new songs and paintings) connected with the land and the dreamings.

10. Bates, Daisy no date (Early 1900s), Native vocabularies—Broome Magisterial District, typescript, Section 12, 2E:16; Social Organisation—genealogies, typescript, Section 3: 2L, 2M, 2N; relationship terms, typescript, Section 3: 5J, I; Native names of places, Section /3E, notebooks 7a, 11b (Canberra, National Library of Australia). ). Bates 1938, p. 22 (of 1966 reprint by Murray). Bates 1985, p. 163 (National Library of Australia).

11. The Yawuru film maker, Wayne Barker, has filmed the Balgo women's statement and dance related to this Two Men (*Watikutjarra*) law (*Milli Milli*, Australian Broadcasting Commission 1994). In an exhibition I organised in France in Grasse, Toulon and Paris with a catalog (Glowczewski 1991b with 30 painters from Balgo, Western Australia, and Lajamanu, Central Australia (where I have been working since 1979 with the Warlpiri people) some of the paintings were directly referring to the Two-Men dreaming (Glowczewski 1998b). The Two-Men law has been reported by many scholars, for instance, Tonkinson 1978, p. 110 (of 1991 reprint by Holt, Rinehardt and Winston).

### Tribes, clans and corporations

Tourists in Broome sometimes complain that they are not told much about local Aboriginal culture. While eating dinner at the Cable Beach Club they can have a feel of the old Broome and Beagle Bay mission atmosphere by listening to a cabaret version of the musical *Bran Nue Dae* written by the local composer Jimmy Chi who is of Bardi descent. If curious, they can take a walk along the coast following the Lurujarri Heritage Trail, from Broome up to Carnot Bay, with the Goollarabooloo organisation created by an Aboriginal man, author of a book also called *Gularabulu*,<sup>12</sup> an expression used by the inland tribes to refer to the coastal tribes in Broome and to the south and north of the town. The author of the book is a Gularabulu man, not because of his mother who was an inland Nyikina or his father who was European, but because he grew up with the coastal people between La Grange and One Arm Point. His story to officials and academics like myself in 1980<sup>13</sup> was that all the local Aboriginal custodians of the coastal country from Broome up to Carnot Bay (Jugun, Yawuru, Ngumbarl and Jabirr Jabirr) were extinct and he was given the custody of all this coastline before they died.<sup>14</sup> According to him, the Jabirr Jabirr legacy was confirmed as his daughter incarnated a *rayi* spirit of Jabirr Jabirr country. She married a Yawuru man and their sons 'went through law'<sup>15</sup> in Broome. The family established the Goollarabooloo organisation to look after the country. Until the early 1980's they had a little museum to exhibit some local artefacts and with the help of the Western Australian Museum's Department of Sites they mapped the Lurujarri Trail over a hundred kilometres along the coast to protect sites of cultural and archaeological significance, and take visitors on guided tours. With the success of this trail, the Goollarabooloo members claimed to be the only custodians of the country encompassing the coastline of the Yawuru, Jugun, Ngumbarl, and Jabirr Jabirr tribes.

Early in the eighties, some Yawuru families got upset by this monopoly and created the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation including Jugun families.<sup>16</sup> A Karajarri elder, Tommy Edgar, living in Broome was given by his wife's Yawuru father, Tommy Roe, the Yawuru ritual boards and the custody of the local Aboriginal law he shared with a centenarian Yawuru elder, Paddy Djiagween. In 1968 they, together with other Yawuru elders, recorded Yawuru song cycles.<sup>17</sup> It is during this process of Yawuru revival that the Yawuru Women's Group was set up to record oral history and to survey the places that were part of Yawuru land. One of the objectives was to discover the reality of the Jugun. Were they a different tribe or a clan of the Yawuru? Many Yawuru people, in their search for their family history received from the Aboriginal Affairs Planning

<sup>12</sup> Roe 1983 (whole book).

<sup>13</sup> Glowczewski 1983, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ackerman 1994, p. 99, referring to the long 'regency' of this Aboriginal man reports that the Yawuru people have recently contested the extension of Jugun country to the whole of the town as is represented on Davis map (and Tindale's map). But Ackerman ignores the fact that Jabirr Jabirr families (which are not extinct) are also claiming their traditional rights to the country north of Broome.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>16</sup> In the mid 1990s some Jabirr Jabirr families also decided to create their own representative body and in the framework of the Native Title Tribunal they entered a process of mediation over the Jabirr Jabirr land claimed by Goollarabooloo.

<sup>17</sup> Moyle 1981, p. 16.

Authority (AAPA) in Perth or the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra Norman Tindale's map that shows Broome in the country of the Jugun tribe and the Yawuru people as a separate tribe to the south of the town in the Roebuck Plain. But oral transmission was to the contrary. Most elders talked of Broome as Yawuru land, with Gantheaume Point being Jugun. For many locals Jugun was only designating a language variation of Yawuru.

At the turn of the century, the then Chief Protector of the North, Father Bishofs distinguished three 'tribes' referred to by their main place name: Gumbarn-nganyjal (Komberenial, Roebuck Plain) with a Yawuru (Yawor) language; Garnin (Karnen, Dampier Creek) with a Jugun (Tiogon) language and Minyirr (Menger, Gantheaume Point) with a Minyirr language.<sup>18</sup> In the same period, Daisy Bates established a Jugun (Joogan) word list but talked of the Yawuru (Yowera, Yauera) people of Broome.<sup>19</sup> Thirty years later, Father Worms did not differentiate the Jugun from the Yawuru but he distinguished three clans corresponding to the Bishofs' tribes (Minyirr in Gantheaume Point, Lirrigun or Leregon in Dampier Creek, Gumbarn-nganyjal in Roebuck Plain) plus a fourth clan to the south where the Thangoo Station was established (D'olbayi). He named other places but was not clear about their allocation between these four clans (his 1940 data differs from the 1944 data) and their connected totems.<sup>20</sup> All Worms' localisations are confirmed by local families who identify their fathers or mothers with those places, except for the name D'olbayi which is not in use. People refer to this country and local group as Yardoogara or Thangoo Station mob. Nevertheless it has been suggested by some locals that D'olbayi is Dolby, the name of a Yawuru man from this southern region, ancestor of a large family. Local elders identify hundreds of toponyms not recorded by Worms. This oral knowledge combined with the way family heritage is connected with some places suggests that there was more than four local 'clans', for instance the inland Lake Eda and Yajugan groups, centred around two important ceremonial gathering places.

So were the Jugun and Yawuru one before? For the last fifteen years, linguists have defined Minyirr as a dialect of Jugun itself locally known as 'Big Yawuru' distinct from the 'Small Yawuru' spoken by the Yawuru to the south of Broome.<sup>21</sup> In the 1980s and early 1990's most families who considered themselves as Jugun also identified as Yawuru so they joined the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation. It took a few years, discussions and conflicts before the Yawuru claims started to be recognised. It was only in 1992, when the Yawuru protested against the crocodile farm that the Western Australian Museum's Department of Aboriginal Sites, which through the registration of the sites of the Lurujarri Trail had acknowledged previously Goolarabooloo as the custodian for all these coastal sites,<sup>22</sup> agreed to sit in meetings with the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation and the Yawuru Women's Group to record what they had to say about the country.

18. Bishofs 1908, pp. 33-4.

19. Bates, Daisy no date (early 1900s), Native vocabularies—Broome Magisterial District, typescript, Section 12, 2E:16; Social Organisation—genealogies, typescript, Section 3: 2L, 2M, 2N; relationship terms, typescript, Section 3: 5J, I; Native names of places, Section /3E, notebooks 7a, 11b. (Canberra, National Library of Australia).

20. Worms 1940, pp. 213-282. Worms 1944, pp. 284-310.

21. McGregor 1988, p. 77; Hosokawa 1991, p. 5.

22. Bradshaw and Fry 1989, (whole report).



Other surveys and claims were already being prepared on behalf of the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation by the Kimberley Land Council.

Between 1992 and 1994 both the Western Australian Museum's Department of Aboriginal Sites and the Kimberley Land Council tried to organise a meeting of the Goollarabooloo organisation and the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation with no success.<sup>23</sup> The situation was tense and bitter. Opposition masked personal alliances as many had relatives in both groups. At the same time a different split occurred. One Jugun woman claimed that Broome was not Yawuru but Jugun, a different tribe according to Tindale's map. Chaney had mentioned this problem in his report but concluded that the linguistic distinctions between Jugun, Yawuru and the complexity of the descent patterns of the local population were not relevant as all people with authority to speak on the cultural significance of the site of the crocodile farm dispute seemed to agree. So who were the people with authority to speak? According to Chaney's report, a few initiated older or younger men of Jugun or/and Yawuru descent through their mother or father, and represented by the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation and Goollarabooloo. Some women elders were also granted this authority.<sup>24</sup>

### **Rayi spirits, descent and land ownership**

The *Native Title Act* 1993 (Cwlth), people say locally, forces them to formalise a system of land ownership that was not thought about in those terms before. As they say: 'everybody knew which country they belong...' Many conflicts have opposed the two corporations claiming to be representative of the Broome local owners but other conflicts involve Aboriginal organisations set up in Broome to represent tribes whose members live between the town, their settlements or outstations to the North (Jabirr Jabirr, Nyul Nyul, Bardi). Consequently, the question of defining the criteria of what makes an Aboriginal owner in the Broome region has become central to many discussions. Does land ownership have to do with descent or with others factors? Elkin who was the only one to discuss the Yawuru social organisation, simply identified the southern Yawuru with their southern neighbours the Karajarri tribe which he defined as patrilineal (it can be noted that Karajarri today do not all recognise patrilineality as the rule). Elkin differentiated the Yawuru (Jaur) from the Jugun (Djugun) people of Broome as part of the Dampier Peninsula tribes whose land ownership, according to him, gave more importance to the place of origin of a person's *rayi* than from where his or her parents came.<sup>25</sup> The founder and coordinator of the Jarndu Yawuru women's resource centre, Theresa Barker explains:

*Rayi* is a spirit-child who walks through the land. And any particular place he go, he has a special location, and this *rayi* stays there when it's time for a young mother to give birth. The *rayi* knows when it's time to look for his mother. So say for instance there is a young woman who wants a child and she belongs to the country. So this child walks around and follows this woman and takes this woman for his mother.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>24</sup> Chaney (1994).

<sup>25</sup> Elkin, A.P., 1927-28, Fieldnotes on Kimberley tribes (unpublished), Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra. Elkin 1932, pp. 296-333. Elkin 1933, pp. 266-71 and 437-39.

<sup>26</sup> Glowczewski ed. 1994, p. 95 (of 1999 version, see note 7).

For the elders today, *rayi* spirits are still very important at different levels to determine somebody's totem (*jalnga*) and place (*burru*). Contrary to Elkin's statement, women also have their own *rayi*. Some old and young women still dream today of their *rayi* or the *rayi* of their children. People, who grew in a town environment, testify to seeing these 'little people' every time they go to culturally significant places of their country, including the town's beaches, but also some streets and houses. In a situation where there are many marriages with non Aboriginals and where most people live in town far from the other Yawuru sites, or do not dream of *rayi*, descent is the most common way to claim one's language and country association. The descent through father, mother and all grandparents, the 'blood links' as the local people say, are a different means to determine someone's identity in terms of tribe and place of origin. A man or a woman can have several places, totems and languages inherited from both parents, or through his or her *rayi* spirit, or in another way. Even if a person does not live in the claimed place or speak the language, he or she can claim one or another according to different situations. In practice, ritual custody of law has also given some rights over the land to in-laws (a father-in-law in the Goollarabooloo claim, a son-in-law in the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation). Finally, Aboriginal people of non Yawuru descent but born in the Yawuru region, grown up by Yawuru people and initiated through local law sometimes also consider, and it can be recognised by others, that they have a right to the country. Such a local family for instance is considering claiming a place near a creek north of Broome that was traditionally the northern boundary of the Yawuru with the Ngumbarl, the latter is now almost extinct.

When the native title surveys started, the Yawuru spokesmen preferred to claim links to land through descent from a male or female ancestor, but very rarely in a unilinear, patrilineal or matrilineal way. Contrary to all previous anthropological data on the region, local people recognise a right to land through the mother as well as the father. It is an open question whether this striking contrast between the old assumptions and the current claims is only related to changing patterns of land ownership and kinship or if it is due to an earlier patrilineal bias in anthropology. I tend to suspect that it is a bit of both considering that very little ethnographic work has been done in the early days with these coastal populations, while the promoter of the patrilineal model, Radcliffe-Brown, tended to assume that all Aboriginal groups of these regions were patrilineal. We also know, especially since the mid 1970s, that even in groups who, such as the Central Australian Warlpiri, have an open patrilineal ideology, it is compensated by the importance of matrilineal kin and allies, who both have a custody role (*kurdungurlu*) in relation to the country and the ceremonies of the direct patrilineal kin (*kirda*).<sup>27</sup>

The remarkable pattern among the Yawuru and the Broome local population is that descent through mother or father is not conceived as unilinear along one gender (mother's mother, mother's mother's mother versus father's father and father's father's father) but as cross-gendered with gender changing every one, two or more generations (father's mother's father or mother's mother's father, etc.). In other terms the system is almost cognatic with exclusion of some relatives along the way, but only if they chose to 'follow the line' of an outsider of another tribe. One might say that with

<sup>27</sup>. Glowczewski 1989, p. 67 (Plon). Glowczewski 1991a, p. 27; Young 1996, p. 225 (Allen and Unwin and Aboriginal History Inc.).

such a bilateral logic everybody ends up being related as one entity: such is certainly one level of genealogical understanding when people say that they are 'all one family'. But on the other hand, there is a very strong sense of differentiation between some families and groups. The genealogical survey I undertook for the Jarndu Yawuru Women's Group shows that people locally divide themselves into twelve to fifteen main families with non unilineal descent and people from other groups recognise more or less the same segmentation. The political alliances between these families change all the time despite different marriages which at one level or another have linked each of these families to all of the others.

### **Clans, tribes, sections and the production of territorial identity**

The collections of local oral history and the analysis of the early records suggest that traditionally the forming of 'clans', 'tribes', language or local groups and their right to identify with the land or simply use it was stimulated by similar political dynamics and conflicts of interest to those described in the contemporary Yawuru community. One of the reasons we find it so difficult to draw territorial and linguistic boundaries in Australia is, not only because of colonial, social and economical change, but also because the forming of groups was the result of a constant process of recomposition.<sup>28</sup> This recomposition had at least two reasons: one being the social organisation which relied on kinship to reproduce itself and the other being the Aboriginal perception of land which focuses on places and trails rather than bounded tracts of land.

I have written elsewhere from my desert experience that land was conceived in a topological way as a medium that could expand or be reduced through practice: some places were saturated with the crossing of many trails belonging to different clans or local groups with different dreamings, but also to different tribal and language groups, while other places were like a no-man's land waiting to be identified through eventual imprinting of new events.<sup>29</sup> The consequence of such a moving landscape is that some places are shared by different groups as meeting places, while others do not have a specific affiliation, but the events connected with these places and the significance they produce can change with generations. It is very clear in the coastal case of the Broome region that some places were shared by two or even more tribal or language groups, for instance the big creek estuaries such as the Willie Creek. Such are the places where the support of different language communities was necessary to bring young men over hundreds of kilometres of ritual journey to be made into culturally responsible men. At the turn of the century, Daisy Bates recorded several of these long journeys and initiation cycles in different gathering places which are all remembered by elders as big 'law' meeting places.<sup>30</sup>

The strategic negotiations undertaken to define the path of initiation for each new initiate was part of the actualisation of the rights to land of the different families and

<sup>28</sup> On this flexibility of land boundaries and a critic of previous data, especially N. Tindale's map, see Sutton 1995, pp. 44–46 (Aboriginal History Monograph 3).

<sup>29</sup> Glowczewski 1991a, p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> Bates, Daisy no date (early 1900s), Native vocabularies—Broome Magisterial District, typescript, Section 12, 2E:16; Social Organisation—genealogies, typescript, Section 3: 2L, 2M, 2N; relationship terms, typescript, Section 3: 5J, I; Native names of places, Section /3E, notebooks 7a, 11b. (Canberra, National Library of Australia). Bates 1985, pp. 163–64.

language groups involved in the process. Through such rituals the custodian status was reinforced for some, but no one group could have the exclusivity with these places being by definition gathering places. A way to visualise the complex relationship here suggested, would be to conceive of towns located near a state border, in Australia or in Europe, as not belonging to one state but to two states. In the case of some Aboriginal places, it could even be three or more different clan or tribal groups which could share one area. Today families are asked, because of this western bias, to be exclusive in the definition of places for native title purposes. Some do play the game, but they keep reminding us that in the old days they were all 'one family'. And this oneness did not mean confusion but sharing different rights of land use in different circumstances.

Similarly to reproduce social organisation through kinship, alliances needed to be constantly renewed through marriages and other exchange processes, trade of goods or circulation of ceremonies. It is possible that the systems looked unilineal once the descendants of newcomers were associated not so much with a group but to a particular land. But different ways of recognising this connectedness to land must have also been operating. We need here to investigate the principles of land and/or dreaming transmission in relation to the marriage rules and the four sections model the Yawuru practised traditionally.<sup>31</sup>

Garimba man marries Barljarri woman, their children are Burungu  
 Garimba woman marries Barljarri man, their children are Banaga  
 Burungu man marries Banaga woman, their children are Barljarri  
 Burungu woman marries Banaga man, their children are Garimba

We can see that from the perspective of this sections system, the four sections are neither matrilineal nor patrilineal but both: it depends which pair is considered. Two pairs are in a reciprocal father to child relationship, forming two patrimoiety, while the other pairing of sections relates them in a reciprocal mother to child relationship forming two matrimoiety. A third partition of the four sections divides them into what the anthropologists have called the generation, alternate or endogamous moieties, represented here by the two pairs of spouses:

two generation moieties: Garimba/Barljarri and Burungu/Banaga  
 two patrimoiety: Garimba/Burungu and Barljarri/Banaga  
 two matrimoiety: Garimba/Banaga and Barljarri/Burungu

According to Elkin in the four sections system the two pairs of sections in a father to son relationship (one patrimoiety) were associated to one land; if this is true nothing allows us to deduce that land (and its totem) was handed over from father to son.<sup>32</sup> In fact, Elkin gave several examples in the Yawuru and Karajarri context of father and son having different totems (and places). He also noted that during the increase rites, even

31. All elders know their section or 'skin' name but most young people do not. It can be understood from the system that in case of a 'wrong' marriage between two people of not appropriate skins or with somebody from a non section system, the section of the child has to be connected to only one of the parent. In fact many Yawuru people acquired their section name through their mother when their father was non Aboriginal. Locally people sometimes call the section name 'tribe'.

32. Elkin 1932, pp. 296-333.

though both sections of a patrimoiety were present, only the members of one section were the leaders while the members of the other section assisted them.

...my informants stated definitely in a number of cases that the men of a particular section were in charge of the rite, and that they were assisted by the men of the other section of the patrilineal moiety.<sup>33</sup>

This ritual complementarity follows, in fact, the generation moieties' division which in the Yawuru system, contrary to the patrimoities and matrimoities, are named with reciprocal terms: *yarradugurjarra* and *yinirra*. Burungu and Banaga call themselves *yarradugurjarra* as opposed to *yinirra*. The two sections of the other moiety, Karimba and Barljarri, also call themselves *yarradugurjarra* and refer to the first moiety as *yinirra*.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that Broome's principle of ritual assistance which follows the generation moiety division, separating the two sections of a patrimoiety, plays the same role as the patrimoiety ritual division into *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* of the eight subsections system used by the desert groups.<sup>35</sup> It is essential to stress the importance of these generation moieties when considering that other western groups who do not have the four sections systems but practise ritual exchanges with the Yawuru people. The western groups also organise some of their rituals according to their own generation moieties. Such is the case of the Bardi coastal people (from Djarindjin and One Arm Point) and all the Western desert people.<sup>36</sup>

Brother and sister normally have the same section name as their mother's mother (and her brother) as well as their father's father (and his sister). In other words, if members of one section, in one area, share the same land and totems, the four sections system is as matrilineal as patrilineal. In fact, *mimi*, the term for mother's mother can also be used for father's father, while, *jamuny*, the term for mother's father can be used for father's mother. Similar cross-gender equivalence exist at other levels. Against all anthropological tradition, we should define an 'alternate matrilineal and patrilineal' system, where one inherits from the grandparents (because Ego has the same section as them) and not directly from the parents.

To determine the system of kinship principles ruling land ownership, sections are not enough. We also need to consider marriage rules which can change the apparent reciprocity of the section pairs into a non directly reciprocal chain of alliances between local groups. For instance a rule, reported by the Yawuru, forbids brothers and sisters to both find a spouse in the same group. This means that there is no reciprocal exchange between two groups but an alliance between at least three groups. For instance if the brothers of A marry in B, the sisters of A have to marry in C, the men of B can marry in C not in A. Another rule, expressed by Yawuru informants, forbids a one way alliance between two groups to be repeated at every generation which expands even further the number of groups involved in marriage exchange. Expansion of allies, in and out of the tribal group, necessarily means expansion of possible places of inheritance. Such expan-

<sup>33</sup>. Elkin 1933, p. 287.

<sup>34</sup>. Also reported by Daisy Bates in Bates 1985, p. 95. It is important to stress that generation moieties have been underestimated by Radcliffe-Brown for all of Western Australia, who did not understand the importance of Bates data White 1981, pp. 6-27.

<sup>35</sup>. Glowczewski 1991a, p. 137.

<sup>36</sup>. Tonkinson 1978, p. 75. White 1981, pp. 6-27.

sion of allies is present in the old genealogies and prevents the transmission of land from being systematic as the situation varies for different generations of the same group.

This suggests that the individual *rayi* connection to the land was traditionally critical, allowing the production of personal identities. Local people never seem to emphasise the father over the mother, while grandparents, grand-uncles and grand-aunts on both sides are certainly important. The identification with one or the other of the ancestors varies with personal experience. For instance some of the current ritual custodians are Yawuru though their mother's father or mother's mother's father. The Yawuru language is spoken by only a few people. But Yawuru kinship terms are widely used between members of the whole Aboriginal Broome community (Yawuru and non Yawuru), with many people not necessarily knowing the genealogical links which lead to the use of such or such a term towards a distant relative. Kinship as a learnt behaviour practiced in everyday life is more relevant here than the genealogical knowledge. The transmission of ritual custody over the last generations combined with the cross-gendering of the section system leads us to think that non lineal rules always applied to land ownership.

### **From an oral custody of land to a written title**

The ancestors of Broome families are identified with some specific places by most elders who generally know the place of their respective *rayi* spirits which can be the same or different from the place where the ancestors grew up. Generally the old people talk about the oldest among them as 'the last true Yawuru' but they identify with their ancestors' country all the descendants of mixed blood, initiated or not, up to five generations younger. Some of those families call themselves 'clans' without a one gender unilineal membership, but all their members are not necessarily aware of their country of origin. Some young people seek such information from the elders but others identify with Broome as a town and do not see a real difference between themselves as Yawuru and other Aboriginal people who grew up in town. Nevertheless the development of new strategies in relation to the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth), has led to the separate registration of some of those families into distinct corporations or claiming entities identifying with specific places.

In 1994, the High Court having unanimously confirmed the validity of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993*, a claim made by the Kimberley Land Council on behalf of the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation to the shores and sea from Cape Villaret to the north of the Broome was accepted as valid by the Native Title Tribunal. Goollara-booloo lodged its own claim over the town. Considering that full or unqualified beneficial ownership would be difficult to prove if there were opposing claims to the same land and if each of the applicants could not prove that they had exclusive possession, the Kimberley Land Council advised the Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation and Goollara-booloo, and also a more recent dissident group which called itself 'Djugan' that their chances were better if they united. In response they formed the Rubibi working group. The cover page of the first Rubibi newsletter, June 1995, produced by the Kimberley Land Council states:

These three groups met over several days to discuss Native Title rights and interests in the Broome region and to see if they could agree on how they should approach

Native Title claims. At the end of the meeting it was agreed by everyone that each of the three groups was made of people and families who have Native Title rights in the Broome region. It was agreed that the best way to deal with Native Title claims in the region was for the three groups to come together as one group and to speak with 'one voice' on all issues concerning both Native Title and Aboriginal Heritage. It was decided that the name for this new group should be Rubibi which refers to an important water place near Kennedy Hill and was a name traditionally used to refer to the Broome area.<sup>37</sup>

The Rubibi working group planned to become a prescribed body corporate, that is a legal entity under the new *Native Title Act* 1993 (Cwlth) established to hold the title on behalf of all the land holding groups. A Kimberley Land Council lawyer started to work on a constitution which would reflect the community's needs. When the first proposal was discussed in 1995 in a public meeting, interestingly, the names of the three groups—Yawuru, Djugan and Goollarabooloo—were not mentioned but instead a definition of membership was proposed which included all native title holders for the country between Willie Creek and Gourdon Bay.

The definition of a native title holder opened many family discussions. Is there a right to land for Aboriginal people who can prove a continuity of use and occupation of the land through economical or religious connections but who are of non-Yawuru or non-Jugun descent? Some people say that the right to use the land is not the same as having a title to the land. Others would like to give a right to the land to the 'historical people' whose parents were brought to the region as children. But the situation seems different from the Hopevale case in Queensland, as the majority of the people in Broome do recognise the Jugun and Yawuru descendants as the traditional owners. In fact some of the non-Jugun and non-Yawuru families who have 99 year leases through the Western Australian Aboriginal Land Trust have been worried that the native title process might question their right to their lease. In meetings, organised on one side by the Rubibi Working Group to discuss the proposed constitution and on the other by the Aboriginal Land Trust to review the way the Trust operates, these conflicting interests have been demonstrated but the rights of the lessees and the native title of the traditional owners were not questioned.

When the Rubibi Working Group was set up, the challenge was to form a future Rubibi Council which would represent all the families who have a right to land in Broome and Roebuck Plains down to Barn Hill. Over the years many families felt that they were not consulted adequately or that they might be excluded from the membership. People feared that once native title was recognised in the Broome area, the Council's executive might monopolise the decisions about land use instead of giving a share to all the families concerned. If the Rubibi Council was to be given native title for all the Yawuru country, any family request of land would have to be addressed to the Council. But then how would the Council decide the allocation of land to hundreds of entitled claimants?

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<sup>37</sup> The word *rubibi* according to some locals is an Aboriginal pronunciation of Roebuck Bay. It is denied by others: maybe Roebuck Bay term was chosen because it was close to the Indigenous Rubibi?

Some years ago, a few Aboriginal families of Yawuru or non-Yawuru descent were given leases on blocks of reserve land outside of town. Some are inhabited by extended families, others by smaller family groups, or stay abandoned because the lessee cannot afford to build. Other families who are recognised as having a right to the land were not given anything and often live in overcrowded Homeswest houses but are still hoping for a block of land. Since the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) was passed the Western Australian Aboriginal Land Trust has stopped granting leases to Aboriginal people in Broome. The reason given being that the Trust cannot afford to service the blocks with water and electricity. Some of the lessees already have difficulties with water and complain that the shire is not building a water reservoir on the reserve land or grading the roads. Another problem is that banks are unwilling to lend on the security of a 99 year lease. Collaboration between the shire and also Homeswest and the Western Australian Water Authority could be part of a regional agreement. Any unfairness could be remedied with new arrangements on native title land or in a local regional agreement. However the allocation of private blocks will be in competition with commercial ventures. If Aboriginal interest is linked with the town's development not just as a compensation for land but as direct Aboriginal involvement in the ventures and the promotion of Aboriginal culture, the Rubibi Council might become a model of a town-based Aboriginal self determination.

### **Towards local and regional agreements**

The first task of the Rubibi Working Group in 1995 was to negotiate the use of a tract of land at the entrance to Broome where a local pearling and fishing company wanted to build a shopping centre. The developer, Paspaley Pearls<sup>38</sup>, recognised the effect of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) and offered compensation for the use of the Yawuru site. The company also promised to build a language centre. Once the agreement was signed, \$150,000 was placed in a trust account for Rubibi. Many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Broome were happy as after the crocodile farm dispute it seemed that the reconciliation process was on its way. The Broome Shire entered an informal agreement to consult with Rubibi on any development proposal. Soon after some of the shire councillors and local lobbyists expressed their resistance to this move. On the Aboriginal side, discontent could also be heard as no language centre was built and the money was creating some jealousy. In fact the Paspaley compensation could not be used until Rubibi was incorporated with a constitution accepted by all its members. Many families were pressing for a place to be built for the elders on the sea shore near the law ground, Garnin. Meantime three of the elders passed away, the bitterness grew, and a local family, incorporated as the Leregon clan, put its own claim on this tract of land.

A new process had nevertheless been initiated. The Rubibi working group had meetings several times a week to consider the numerous development proposals, from sixty in 1995 to more since (tourist resorts and businesses, aquaculture, sand mining, housing, marina, etc.). It was believed that some benefit could be gained for Aboriginal

<sup>38</sup>. Paspaley Pearls was funded by a Greek immigrant who had the idea to adapt culture pearl to the Broome waters. The company is now run by his son and has real estate and other businesses in Broome, Darwin and overseas.



people in the long run if development plans take into account Aboriginal priorities. In an attempt to facilitate that process, the Kimberley Land Council arranged for a team of academics and practitioners from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to sit with the Rubibi group to draft a study plan as part of their research. Their report presents many interesting ideas and recommends among other things the establishment of a Broome Aboriginal cultural centre, a coastal park with 'cultural places' and a joint Rubibi-Shire Strategic Planning group.<sup>39</sup> Since then development has been discussed case by case. According to the 1995 first issue of the Kimberley Land Council news:

the pressure could be taken off people if a negotiated settlement was reached through a local regional agreement...This agreement would mean that Native Title holders would approve the development for certain areas of land, in return for a number of other benefits such as a joint management of parks, fishing and hunting rights, financial compensation for loss of land and participation in the decision making process about what happens in the area.

Such an initiative is believed to be at the heart of greater regional autonomy. Discussions for a Kimberley-wide regional agreement or for setting up a Regional Authority are still at a working stage between the Coalition of Kimberley Aboriginal Organisations and the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Commission. The long term hope is that a direct funding and service delivery arrangement with the Commonwealth will replace the current bureaucratic system which prevents real self-management. It has to be acknowledged that on a smaller scale, Rubibi has shown the way of how a local agreement could be undertaken. Sue Jackson, a geographer who has a long experience of the region and participated in the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology survey, has discussed extensively the Rubibi Working Group mediation process with the Broome Shire. Jackson stressed the inequality of power in structure, numbers and funding opposing the two parties. But she also insisted on the dedication of the Rubibi members involved who give their time and ideas benevolently in numerous meetings with the hope of a better future for their town and country.<sup>40</sup> Many are now directly involved in a Town Planning Framework.

Many meetings took place to draft a constitution proposal. After three years in mid-1998 an application was lodged with the Registrar for the creation of a corporate body, the Rubibi Aboriginal Land, Heritage and Development Council (Aboriginal Corporation). The main changes in relation to the first draft involved the structure of the Council and its modes of representation. After registering over 11 claims with the Native Title Tribunal, the Rubibi Working Group had 39 registered claimants who could act as the representative members. But the community felt that this list of claimants was not sufficient to defend the various interests of some of the 2,000 people represented by the Rubibi claims. In 1997 some registered claimants, dissatisfied with the constitution proposal, announced their decision to leave Rubibi. This lack of consensus in relation to the constitution was threatening the whole process of claims and agreements. If Rubibi could not provide a constitution including all the registered claimants, the registered claims would become invalid. Several general meetings were called in 1998 and it was decided that instead of an elected committee with a consultative body of nominated

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39. Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology 1995, p. 40.

40. Jackson 1996, pp. 32-3.

elders as originally proposed, there should be a General Assembly with four members (and two proxies) from each of the family group identified, plus different subcommittees to work on different issues.

The proposed constitution stated the following objectives: maintaining Aboriginal law, language and culture, and assuring the protection of the traditional country; promoting respect for Aboriginal law within the Broome region; relieving the dispossession, lack of educational opportunities, poverty, ill-health and suffering of the Rubibi Community by different means including the contribution to the cultural, social and economic development of the Rubibi Community; entering into land use agreements; taking and defending legal proceedings affecting native title rights and interests; receiving any grant, settlement, compensation, payment or other consideration, and contributing the same to either the Rubibi Aboriginal Charitable Trust or to its Charitable Objects; and performing the role and carry out the functions of a Registered Native Title Body Corporate and a Prescribed Body.

### Update

In July 1999, the Rubibi Aboriginal Land, Heritage and Development Council was still waiting for its incorporation under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (Cwlth). Some members who had left Rubibi came back while others resigned, being unsatisfied with the way their interests were represented. Despite this turmoil a decision group with several non Aboriginal staff members stayed involved in mediation processes, looking at propositions of joint ventures and promoting the construction of a regional Aboriginal cultural centre.<sup>41</sup> The main reason for Rubibi's instability and the constant conflict of interest between the families partly lies in the fact that some incorporated groups and individuals do not accept the maintenance in the Constitution of a Council of Elders which excludes many old people on the basis that they did not maintain a 'traditional' life. Considering the history of the region, tradition has been transmitted in many different ways: through ritual activities and language for only a few but knowledge of country and economic survival for the majority. Consequently the ritual elders who are a handful today are not the only leaders in the community. Contrary to a traditional Aboriginal power structure where the elders regrouped all the older generation, the current Rubibi Council model seems to privilege some people against others, excluding families who already suffered dispossession and denying self-determination to younger people who have the skills to bridge two worlds. The question is how to reconcile a traditional model with a western corporation structure where all descendants claim a right to have a voice.

The historical background, the socio-cultural foundations and the local strategies that have led a dispossessed urban population which has descended from traditional Aboriginal groups, European and Asian migrants, to reconstruct their local past has been discussed here. Creating a new form of 'oneness', the Rubibi entity is facing the

<sup>41</sup>. The Aboriginal Culture Centre working party involving many members of the Broome community and representatives from other communities of the Dampier Peninsula has conducted a wide scale survey on the needs of the region in terms of cultural maintenance, young peoples' training and creative incentive, but also economically sustainable ways to promote culture and protect the land. Glowczewski ed., pp. 1-59.

challenge today of respecting different local family identities and redefining its leadership structure while working towards a Broome development process aiming at reconciling the local Aboriginal community with the constantly growing non Aboriginal population. The conflict is currently tearing apart the whole community, but as some locals wisely say: 'you know us mob we hit first and then we talk'.<sup>42</sup>

### Acknowledgment

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<sup>42</sup> The Jarndu Yawuru Oral History project that I helped to put together (Glowczewski ed. 1994) was accepted in 1994 by the Aboriginal publisher, Magabala Books, who received a grant from the Australia Foundation for Culture and the Humanities to publish it: a reduced version of the original manuscript went to the printer in June 1999 but its publication is temporarily withheld for Native Title reasons. The families of 4 of the 15 storytellers involved were advised to keep their contribution for the Court. Considering the strength of the storytellers' testimonies as a proof of the cultural attachment with the land of many different families of Broome, I am not convinced that delaying publication is serving the purpose of the land claim, unless the strategy is to favor some against others. Unfortunately it is Broome politics.

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## Reviews

*Never Trust a Government Man. Northern Territory Aboriginal Policy 1911–1939.* By Tony Austin. NTU Press, Darwin, 1997. Pp.336. \$19.95 p.b.

The Commonwealth Government's administration of the Northern Territory began badly—by starting ten years later than it might have done—and was for years handicapped by the effects of those great world events in the first half of the century which ensured that the necessary financial and human resources were mostly unavailable. The world wars and the Depression certainly had decisive impacts on Aboriginal administration and not a lot was done in the first thirty years covered by Tony Austin's history of Aboriginal policy. This inactivity should have come as no surprise to any who heard the debates in the Commonwealth Parliament in 1902 and 1909 on the proposed transfer of responsibility for the Territory from South Australia. Almost all who spoke were concerned only about prospects for development and the likely costs and benefits of completing the north–south railway line. The one exception was Alfred Deakin, though he was an influential enough figure to have encouraged hopes that Aboriginal needs might be given some priority. It was during Deakin's second term as Prime Minister that Papua had been transferred from British to Australian control and in his third term that South Australia finally agreed to cede control of the Northern Territory, and Deakin intended that these changes should serve the interests of the indigenous people who in both places made up the overwhelming majority of the population. For Deakin one of the 'desirable features' of the proposal that the Commonwealth should take over the Northern Territory had been that it 'might be able to secure to the last remnants of the aboriginal races that better treatment which every civilized people must feel is part of the "white man's burden" cast upon us when we exploit the lands of native people'. Deakin had also drawn attention to the constraints on Commonwealth revenues and this remained the chief obstacle to any development of an active and interventionist program in Aboriginal affairs. Whatever was done had to be done on the cheap and there was never any prospect that the development of the Territory would be designed primarily to benefit the indigenous people.

Nevertheless the Fisher Labor government in 1911 had high hopes for the Territory's development and a vigorous and capable minister in E.L. Batchelor who was keen to 'ameliorate the present conditions' and help 'the preservation of the native tribes'. He appointed as chief protector and chief medical officer an apparently highly qualified and well informed young man, Dr Herbert Basedow, but he promptly resigned within two months of arriving in Darwin and two months later Batchelor had died at 46 of a heart attack. The appointment of Professor Baldwin Spencer to replace Basedow was an attempt to compensate for these setbacks but he could not stay more than twelve months. The nascent Aboriginal affairs unit dwindled away under acting

and otherwise engaged chief protectors in the war years and after, when it became a responsibility of the police chief.

The second full-time and reasonably well qualified chief protector and chief medical officer was only appointed in February 1927 when Dr Cecil (Mick) Cook was given the job—at least in the northern part of the Territory, since from March of that year the administration was split and the police sergeant at Alice Springs was transformed into Commissioner of Police and Chief Protector of Aborigines for Central Australia. Evidently someone in Melbourne thought the chief protector's job was one for a young man, for Cook was, like Basedow, not yet 30 years old when appointed. But within the year, having failed to win the agreement of the States to a national inquiry into Aboriginal affairs, the government engaged a much older man, the Queensland chief protector, JW Bleakley, to report on 'the status and condition of aborigines' in Central Australia and North Australia and to advise how to improve things. This was not a move calculated to reassure Cook that he had the confidence of the government that had appointed him.

The Great Depression meant that for most of Cook's twelve year term the government was reducing expenditure and was only rarely persuaded to add to his small staff. Apart from a handful of medical officers, his only field officers were police whose multitude of duties included serving as protectors of Aborigines. Law enforcement was their first priority and on several notable occasions police disgraced their service by behaving as violent oppressors rather than protectors. Between southern critics, unsympathetic administrators and judges, and ministers mainly concerned to dodge press criticism, the chief protector was never going to have an easy time and Cook was always outspoken and acerbic, never a cautious 'bureaucrat'.

Austin's history of these somewhat barren years is a good deal more than an account of Aboriginal policy, telling us much about how policy was (or was not) implemented and about incidents that helped to shape public opinion, policy and practice. He has mined both public and private archives thoroughly and has also drawn on the recollections of some participants in producing what is indeed 'the most detailed account yet' of Aboriginal administration in the Territory up to 1939. Some of his eleven chapters read rather as separate essays than as sections of the 'coherent account' he promises his readers. In the first, 'Creating the Inferior Race', he provides a confused and confusing overview of attitudes to and opinions about Aboriginal people during the whole period. He introduces the term 'progressivist' here but his 'general reader' has to wait until Chapter 6 to find any sort of explanation of the term. The next three chapters provide a mainly chronological account of the years to 1927, and the fifth deals with Bleakley's 1928 inquiry and report. The next, entitled 'A Progressive in Capricornia: Chief Protector CE Cook', takes us back two years to Cook's appointment to outline his views, then deals, much in the style of Andrew Markus's 1990 book, *Governing Savages*, with the Administrators of the Territory in Cook's time; with Joe Carrodus, 'the Commonwealth bureaucrat'; with ministers; with 'the humanitarians' (mainly Professor AP Elkin and the Sydney Association for the Protection of Native Races); with 'the southern Aboriginal lobby'; and finally with 'the northern bureaucracy'—Cook's small and always inadequate staff. (Austin in his introduction writes that his 'perspective throughout is...more northern, less southern' than Markus's.) Successive chapters then outline Cook's handling of issues relating to missions; to 'half-castes'; to the judicial

system; and to employment. A final chapter, '1937', covers the important events of that year and the next, leading to John McEwen's announcement of a 'New Deal' early in 1939, and to Cook's departure, and concludes with a summary account of the work of Cook's successor, EWP Chinnery, in the years up to the outbreak of war in the Pacific.

Austin's title 'Never Trust a Government Man' provides a fair indication of his point of view. (We are told that it is taken from 'a remark by an Alawa man: "Never trust a government man or an Aboriginal from Queensland"' but are left to speculate which government men and Aboriginal Queenslanders might have betrayed that Alawa man's trust, and how.) Southern politicians ('remote and inept political masters') and officials (mostly referred to as bureaucrats) are the whipping boys in this account. It is the indifference of politicians—not of voters—that Austin holds primarily responsible for the lack of action to improve conditions for Aboriginal people. The 'southern humanitarians' do not fare much better: their views too were 'confused' and 'paternalistically racist'. Austin does show some sympathy for the 'handful of frontier bureaucrats grappling with the "Aboriginal problem"' and gives Cook credit for his efforts. He can be remarkably generous, forgiving Basedow his proposal for 'a permanent tattoo for the purposes of easy identification' as 'part of what passed for enlightened humanitarianism at the time'. But more often we read of 'official apathy', 'bureaucratic procrastination', 'negativism', and 'a mixture of staff shortage, incompetence and lack of genuine concern' in the Territory administration. Other obstacles like the 'powerful pastoral lobby', entrenched prejudice in the north, and general indifference in the south, are also mentioned.

The politicians and public servants of earlier times than our own are easy targets, and Austin's tone of condemnation will appeal to many readers. But perhaps, after thirty years of very much more active interventions by government, producing many disappointments and unintended consequences, it might be time for a cooler, less judgmental, look at the difficulties, dilemmas, and doubts that troubled policy makers and administrators in this period when government was much more severely constrained than in our time.

Jeremy Long

*Karajini mirlimirli: Aboriginal histories from the Pilbara.* Edited by Noel Olive, Fremantle, 1997. Fremantle Arts Press. Pp 254, \$19.95

I worked in the Pilbara during the second half of the 1980s, eventually establishing Wangka Maya, the Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre in Port Hedland, after discussions with many Aboriginal people in the region. The role of the centre was (and I think still is) to record as much as possible, to store that and previously recorded material, and to train local people in these tasks. Much of the material was recorded in Aboriginal English and in local languages. Wangka Maya also ran an oral history project and participated in the Western Desert oral history project.

The Pilbara is even more of a Terra Nullius for Europeans than is the rest of Australia. It is somewhere 'over there' in the west for most easterners. If we know something about it, maybe we know about the stockman's strike and the Strelley mob. Otherwise we know the iron ore history, development with a capital 'D'. Few know



about the indigenous story of the region, or that it is home to the largest collection of rock-engravings in the world. Like most parts of Australia it has a rich indigenous history, and like most parts, this history is virtually unknown outside of the local Aboriginal community.

For these and other reasons I looked forward to this collection of stories, each told by one of the thirty-nine mainly Punjima and Yinhawangka (but other language groups as well). There are stories by old and young people which give a sense of the lives of people of the region, with the recurrent themes of working as stockmen, living on stations, children taken by welfare, the opposition of Aboriginal law with European law, relationships, travel, the good old days, and the problems facing Aboriginal people today: employment, alcohol, women's status.

While it is clear that Aboriginal people are talking (their photo appears at the beginning of each chapter), their voices appear to have been edited away, or, as the introduction puts it:

The process was to record an interview on cassette, then reduce it to a statement by eliminating the interviewer's questions and comments, or minor matters which detracted from the story's flow (p. 13).

Reduced, the key term here, tells us that we are getting less than what the speakers gave. It is an issue for oral histories such as this one, in how to represent the language of the story tellers. It is an issue that has been struggled with by others, and by others working not too far from the Pilbara. Stephen Muecke's representation of Paddy Roe's stories (Benterrak, Muecke & Roe 1984) is an example; the Western Desert oral histories, opting for a bilingual rendition, is another (Western Desert Puntukurnuparna and Wangka Maya n.d.). Perhaps the best representation of oral accounts today is to use multimedia, as in *Long time, olden time* (Peter and Jay Read 1993), presenting the written form together with the audio or video of the speaker, allowing the reader to appreciate that the language being used is different to middle-class Australian English (not the impression you would get from the present work). How to represent Aboriginal English in written texts has been discussed publicly in an exchange between Patrick McCornell and Bruce Shaw (*Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1985, No. 2: 74-78). Despite the bourgeoisification of the *Karjini* texts, bits of Aboriginal English are occasionally allowed to slip by ('In those days there wasn't any schools' (p. 32), 'The father belong to Slim Parker' (p. 103)), but generally this difference has been ironed out.

Noel Olive, the editor, is omnipresent in the stories because his guiding principles, set out in the introduction, serve to render the English as middle-class English. 'Written Aboriginal language is a non-Aboriginal construct'... 'The sooner the Aboriginal people take charge of their language and declare how it shall be written the better the chances of its preservation' (p. 13). Just as writing was non-Aboriginal (but presumably has become Aboriginal in the way that other cultural traits are appropriated as necessary), so surely is book-production, reading and recording stories. Aboriginal people have taken up language work, but it is a skill that needs to be learned and developed.

Why do we expect that Aboriginal people will have the expertise to decide on spelling systems for their languages? They need information so that the spelling system works and can be agreed upon by all speakers of the language. The local Aboriginal controlled language centre has consulted and run workshops on spelling systems for the region. It is doubtful that writing the language has any effect on its preservation,

except as a record in an archive. Languages must be spoken if they are to survive. And when the language is not used in oral history projects and even the distinctive use of English is not presented to the reader, we see yet again the privileging of the dominant variety of English at the expense of the vernacular (be it the local variety of Aboriginal English or the indigenous language). Even more disturbing, then, is the claim that: 'Every effort has been made to preserve the cultural idiom of the contributor's language in the course of the recording, in order to ensure the integrity of the message' (p. 14). The contradiction between the position of 'preserving the cultural idiom' and rendering into middle-class European English (what Olive calls 'conventional English' (p. 13), amounts to a mis-representation of the Aboriginal vernacular.

There is a debate in the art world about what is 'good' Aboriginal art. Is there an objective sense in which we can say that art is good art and not accept that all things Aboriginal are therefore necessarily wonderful? This same debate needs to extend to other aspects of Aboriginal cultural productions. We need to know a great deal more about the indigenous stories of Australia, but we also need to develop more sympathetic ways of hearing these stories, mediated by representations that deliver more of the 'cultural idiom' than we get in the present work.

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*Aboriginal English: A Cultural Study*. By J.M. Arthur of the Australian National Dictionary Centre. Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1996. Pp. 264. ISBN 0 19 554018 2 \$24.95

This attractive paperback book (attractive both in its cover and texture) exemplifies and explains many expressions common in various Aboriginal Englishes throughout Australia, as they have been recorded in print, either in newspaper items, novels, studies of Aboriginal English or in other books and manuscripts. There is an alphabetical index of all forms included, but the bulk of the book has the forms collected into chapters which illustrate and clarify Aboriginal concepts of culture, kin, interaction with whites and with the land, and the issue of survival of the culture. I am sure other readers will enjoy dipping into it as much as I have done and continue to do. Where the origin or first recorded use of a term is known, it is given, and the meaning and connotations of terms are briefly given at the introduction of the term.

The Acknowledgments state:

The work on the book was begun and funded almost entirely through the Australian National Dictionary Centre. Dr Bill Ramson, the first Director of the Centre,

agreed to support this project, at a time when Aboriginal English was receiving little attention, either in the scholarly or general community.

This work is much indebted to those Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors and editors, who, often against current publishing practice, insisted that their own words, or those of the oral testimonies they were editing, should remain in the language in which they were written or spoken—Aboriginal English. This book is a testament to their determination, and to all those authors who cared enough for language and for Aboriginal culture to record this distinctive speech.

Usages recorded are all referenced to their source and geographical placings as far as known. After an Introduction, which has short sections on a history of Aboriginal English, its status, the purpose of the book, sources, evidence, Aboriginal English and Aboriginal languages and the structure of the dictionary, there are eight chapters, a select bibliography (listing major sources, and an alphabetical index of all forms discussed and exemplified. the eight chapters are:

- 1 Always was, always will be
- 2 Kin
- 3 Us mob
- 4 Country
- 5 Living with whitefellas
- 6 The quiet run and the wild bush
- 7 Aboriginal way
- 8 Survival

Organising the usages into general areas based on the experiences of Aboriginal peoples is a serendipitous way to organise the material. Readers have no doubt come across dictionaries of Australian slang or similar compilations from elsewhere, which are also of great interest to browse through, but when all terms are organised alphabetically without subcategorising, there is more jumping from topic to topic. Within each chapter in this book, the words are organised alphabetically, but with each chapter taking a particular theme, there is more cohesion. Of course there are many terms which could belong in more than one of the above chapters, so Jay Arthur and those working with her no doubt had some difficult decisions to make. Also, as the Introduction states, no compilation could be exhaustive. As I read I occasionally came across words which reminded me of others, equally well known in the geographical area from which they came, which could have been included, but were not. However the book's purpose of giving the reader a broad across-the-country view of Aboriginal English usages and the cultural field behind them is well achieved.

My minor regret is that there is no pronunciation guide for the items included. For many words this is no problem at all—they are words any reader of English would recognise. However a number of words, mainly from traditional languages, really need a guide to pronunciation. Naturally I had no trouble with words from areas I have worked in, and in some cases variant spellings in different sources, if inspected judiciously, can help the reader deduce the correct pronunciation, but there remain a number for which a guide would be of great help. It could be that the information was not always available to the author and her team, but where it was accessible, it would have been good to include it.

To illustrate the style of entries, I include at random a couple of sample entries.

From Chapter 1:

**photo** *noun* [north-west NT] A rock painting.

1992 D.B. Rose *Dingo Makes Us Human* p. 107 [north-west NT] **Photo** [rock art] there all around Daguragu.

From Chapter 4:

**right through** *adverb* (Of a ritual, dreaming, or a song) completely mapping the span of its geographical relevance.

Aboriginal narratives often have a logic that is based on place rather than the internal logic of the narrative, because they belong to particular places and the connections between the places provide the connections in the story; the story is there to explain the landscape so that the shape of the landscape is the shape of the story.

1985 E. Malpangka *Aboriginal Women* p. 10 [NT?] But this land is our grandfathers' and grandmothers', their law, their dreaming goes **right through** strong, its our land. 1986 B. Shaw *Countrymen* p. 147 [Kimberley] He'd sing that one **right through** down and get another one and run it this way now to Halls Creek. 1990 P. Austin et al *Lang. & Hist.* p. 254. It's a long corroboree. Charlotte Waters that's the middle bit. They're Dreaming people blackfellers and women. I can sing it **right through** to Napperby from Riley Creek down from Napperby not far.

From Chapter 7 (p. 211):

**now** *adverb* A marker in a narrative of a sequence of events, either in the past or in the present, so it can sometimes be equivalent to *then* or *at that time/point in the narrative*.

While often adverbial, this is one of a series of punctuation terms used in oral narratives to mark changes in the narrative. See also ALL RIGHT and the introduction to this chapter for further discussion. (etc.)

Each chapter has a brief introduction of about a page, giving a background to the coverage of the chapter, sometimes giving a few words central to the thrust of the chapter. Thus in Chapter 1, **law**, **dreaming** and **culture** are highlighted. In the introduction to Chapter 4, Arthur states:

The country may be **mother** or **grandfather**, which **grows** them **up**, or is **grown up** by them. These kinship terms impose mutual responsibilities of caring and keeping upon the land and people. The terms **own** and **owner** are transformed in Aboriginal meaning into mutual interdependence rather than exclusive control.

The final chapter has words which are

manifestations of aspects of the indigenous Australian culture of the later twentieth century. They are the words of a people who have been confronted with violent change, and who, out of a struggle for survival, have created new concepts of Aboriginality.

The chapter includes the many regional words which are proudly used to denote Aboriginality in groupings larger than the pre-invasion clans or 'tribes' or 'language groups', and many words covering present and past living conditions, learning, toys and equipment. Words recorded that denote an Aboriginal person or people of specific areas, are:

**Anangu** (Central Aust., **Bama** (north Qld), **Goorie** (northern NSW), **Koori** (NSW) **Koorie** (Vic.), **Mardu** (north-west WA), **Murri** (southern Qld and northern NSW),

**Nunga** (southern SA), **Nyungar** (south-western WA), **Palawa** (Tasmania), **Warbo** (the Warburton Ranges), (the Gascoyne and Murchison Rivers region, WA), **Yolngu** (eastern Arnhem Land and nearby areas), and **Yura** (the Flinders Ranges area of northern SA).

This list is a salutary reminder to those who would promote Koori as an all-embracing substitute for Aboriginal. One cannot help feel that the populous south-east coast of Australia is as much insensitive to the views of those from elsewhere, whether the east-coaster is white or Aboriginal!

Other words and phrases include: **Baryulgil Square Talk** or the **slang** (English used at Baryulgil, northern NSW), **B.C.** (before Cook), **black**, **bush school**, **concentration camp**, **Jambun English** (English of the Jambun people, northern Qld), **knockout** (a rugby football competition—NSW), **Kriol** (the creole language spoken widely in north Australia), and **pay the rent** (a catch phrase from south-east Australia recognising and asserting the original and continuing ownership of Australia by Aborigines, and the obligation owed to the original owners by those who now hold control), and many others. Some, such as 'knockout' have negligible lexical meaning difference from the usage in mainstream English, but an enormously heightened connotative load.

I highly recommend this book.

Margaret Sharpe  
University of New England

*Wandjuk Marika: Life Story (as told to Jennifer Isaacs)*. By Wandjuk Marika, edited by Jennifer Isaacs. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1994. Pp.176. Preface, notes, index, map, colour and black-and-white plates. \$34.95 pb.

Wandjuk Marika, who died in 1987, was an elder of the Rirratjingu *mala* ('clan') who, with Gumatj people, were centrally involved in the struggle over bauxite mining on the Gove Peninsula. Dividing his life between Yolngu (Aboriginal) and Balanda (White) worlds, in the former he was a religious leader of Rirratjingu people, while in the latter he was known as an art administrator and artist, didgeridoo player, actor, and enthusiastic traveller. The bridging of these two worlds, which included his marriage to Jenny Home, a Balanda woman, is a theme that pervades the work.

The book is a compilation of reminiscences in Wandjuk Marika's own words, preserving his own variety of English, recorded by Jennifer Isaacs during his frequent visits to Sydney over the course of three years. The chapters, each of which has a dominant theme, have been arranged roughly chronologically by Jennifer Isaacs. They begin with his place of birth, identity, and his group's ancestral traditions and country, through memories of life at Yirrkala mission, his work on the Aboriginal Arts Board and work in film. The book is given some unity by the pervasive theme of learning from one's parents and other relatives, and teaching one's children. Wandjuk expresses, too, the often stated Yolngu ideal of education in both Yolngu and Balanda ways. At the end of each chapter Jennifer Isaacs has added explanatory notes.

The book is most obviously of relevance to Wandjuk Marika's family, but it has a lot to offer to others. It is refreshing to see in print a Yolngu person's own account of their beliefs about healing, sorcery and second sight. The non-Aboriginal reader will be

struck by the passages on love magic, where Wandjuk explains how two women kept appearing to him and invaded his body during a journey by road, and how he was cured by a *marrngitj* healer. I was interested in Wandjuk's account of the making of a film by Werner Herzog in which fictional ancestral beings were related to Wandjuk's country, and his resulting outrage. In such a representation, as in some ethnographies, Aboriginal culture of a region is treated as generic rather than specific.

Jennifer Isaacs' notes are careful and informative, and she has taken trouble over details, such as the spelling of Yolngu words. However, some aspects of the text will be obscure to those unfamiliar with Yolngu culture. For example, the use of 'clan' names in the text is often unexplained. An irritating aspect of the editing is the setting out of chunks of text as if they were poems, which has the effect of lessening rather than enhancing readability. As the result of the manner of the book's compilation, there is quite a lot of repetition. Nevertheless, the book is attractively designed, with copious colour plates as well as black and white photographs, including several illustrations of bark paintings. The book is a fitting tribute to a man whom many remember with fondness.

Ian Keen

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*Australian Race Relations 1788–1993*. By Andrew Markus, Allen & Unwin, 1994. ISBN 1 8637 3554 2, pp.226, \$24.95.

Andrew Markus has written a challenging overview of race relations which describes the position of British colonists and indigenous populations within Australia. He successfully broadens this perspective to include immigrants from south China and populations which migrated to Australia following the Second World War. His central thesis asserts that our European centric concept of race governs how we treat both indigenous people and migrants who have origins which are different from those of the dominant British culture.

*Australian Race Relations 1788–1993* provides a perspective of the legislative and social processes which operated to isolate and suppress Aborigines within British colonial society. The author discusses both the broad national context of race relations as well as offering specific examples which characterise the social values of the last two hundred years. The opening chapter discusses 'the idea of race in western culture'. Subsequent chapters treat 'dispossession', 'non-European immigrants', 'racial segregation', 'white Australia', 'assimilation' and 'the end of racial discrimination'. The reader is challenged by the author's association of government policy towards Aborigines with the treatment offered Chinese populations in their attempt to migrate and remain in Australia. Markus expresses some caution, but perhaps not enough, in the projection of specific case studies to the broader Australian community. It is maintained by the author that throughout Australia, British colonists did little to ensure the continuation of Aboriginal culture and in many instances they employed whatever means were at their disposal to eradicate the bearers of indigenous culture.

In the closing chapters of the book, shifts in the Australian post-war immigration policy are identified. During the period from 1965 to 1972, assimilation policies were

replaced by 'integration goals'. From 1973 to 1980, found overt racist policies unacceptable. Between 1980 to 1986, Markus identifies an attempt to slow down the rate of change and to reaffirm established Australian values as well as to modify immigration rules to favour those with European backgrounds. And, beginning in 1987 there was a strident attempt to address issues of access and equity as well as treat with Aboriginal matters within the framework of the Mabo High Court decision. Markus gives some thought to why, given that there has been so much change from a white Australia policy to a welcoming of a broader cross-section of foreign nationals, has the disadvantages faced by Aboriginals continued. Many immigrants to Australia encountered coldness and physical hostility. To some extent the success of immigrants was based upon their previous economic condition with generally speaking an improvement in the condition of the children of migrants. Yet, the situation as presented by Markus throughout the 1980s did not improve for indigenous people. Racial discrimination continued and poverty, poor health, early mortality and high levels of incarceration became a persistent feature of Aboriginal lower-class life. Change where it occurs is seen by the author as minor with racism continuing to be manifested by both mainstream society and its leadership.

On the whole the book is well conceived. The questions arises as to how much of the treatment of Aborigines was due to their being physically and culturally different from the British settlers and how much was due to their possessing a landscape which the invaders wanted. Having a belief system which is ethnocentric seems to fuel a righteous greed within humankind which denies those who are different from ourselves civil rights, ownership of property, status within the human community and ultimately the right to life itself. Perhaps the Australian experience had little to do with ethnicity, culture and race but everything to do with greed disguised in a racist paradigm which continues to be manifested today by our mean-spirited society.

Brian Egloff  
University of Canberra

*Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown.* Edited by Ann McGrath. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995. Pp. xxxi + 415. \$29.95.

*Contested Ground* is a large, well illustrated book of over 400 pages, comprising the state histories commissioned by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, with additional material by the book's editor, Ann McGrath. A Preface by Paul Behrendt, Director of the University of New South Wales Aboriginal Research and Resource Centre, introduces to an Aboriginal audience the white historians who wrote much of the book. We are informed by McGrath that Aboriginal authors were approached to undertake work for the Commission's History Project but with one exception they declined: had they found time to accept, their writing would, in all likelihood, differ markedly from the present volume.

The book contains chapters on each of the mainland colonies/states/territories—Heather Goodall on New South Wales, Richard Broome on Victoria, Henry Reynolds and Dawn May on Queensland, Peggy Brock on South Australia, Sandy Toussaint on Western Australia, Peter Read on the Northern Territory—and two chapters on Tasma-

nia, one by the Pallawah writer Maykutenner (Vicki Matson-Green) and one written by McGrath, prepared when it seemed that Maykutenner's chapter would not be completed. Authors were selected on the basis of their expertise and past records of engagement in Aboriginal political issues and of working with Aboriginal communities and organisations. We are not informed as to the brief presented to individual authors, nor the words allocated, although it is noted that the chapters have been substantially rewritten for this publication. A common approach is apparent, following the themes introduced in McGrath prefatory 'national story'. Most chapters begin with a brief consideration of pre-contact society and estimates of population size and provide substantive discussion of the process of dispossession, Aboriginal place in the European economy, the law and its administration, and resistance to European rule.

As with all such collections, the chapters are of uneven quality. At one extreme, the longest by Heather Goodall presents the yield of years of intensive research and reflection, a concise statement of arguments incorporated in her more recently published *Invasion to Embassy*. At the other extreme are bland summaries of published works. Sandy Toussaint's Western Australia focuses largely on governmental inquiries, legislation, and examples of impact on Aboriginal lives. Maykutenner's chapter sits oddly in this collection—in large part direct condemnation of government policies, drawing heavily on family recollections, loosely edited with meaning at times left obscure. It is not readily apparent, for example, why a government definition of Aboriginal based on self-identification, descent and community recognition gives power to determine who is and who isn't an Aborigine to the dominant class'.

The aim of the book to present readily accessible state histories, detailing current understandings of government impact on Aboriginal lives, has been largely met. We now have within the one cover 'the first colony by colony, state by state history of white-Aboriginal relations'. In terms of its contribution to the historiography of the subject it is, however, a missed opportunity. Some of the authors seek to do more than present narratives. Broome engages in a well-considered discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of different historical approaches in his Victorian chapter. Brock is concerned to specify patterns in the contact experience and to identify similarities and differences between South Australia and other states. Had the identification of variables been a major aim of the research project, with opportunities for the writers to engage in discussion with each other—assuming that this did not take place—then the book would have made a major contribution to historical knowledge. McGrath observes that the book highlights the need for further comparative analysis—one wonders when there will be a better chance for a team of leading scholars to engage in such a project.

After twenty-five years of intensive research we now have much detailed knowledge, but inadequate understanding of variation. McGrath takes up a number of important themes in her introduction, not least her excellent discussion of the administration of the law, but fails to justify the approach of the book. What is to be gained from a general state by state approach, rather than a study of regions? It cannot be assumed that the one law translated into uniform administrative practice within state borders. How significant, for example, was the difference between the impact of government on the lives of Aboriginal people in different regions of Queensland at various points in its history? What commonality is there in the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in the cattle country of various states? Given the very small post-contact indigenous populations of



Victoria and Tasmania, why allocate as much space to these states as to Western Australia and Queensland. Would it not make more sense to devote, for example, double the space to Western Australia, with separate chapters on the south-west and the north?

The concluding chapter fails to address these important issues. Rather than drawing together the major findings of the contributors, McGrath presents a revised English translation of her historiographical review first published in the French language journal *Le Mouvement Social*, which she concedes could well be read as an introduction. This final chapter should have been better directed to the needs of the present publication.

Andrew Markus  
Monash University

*Justice All Their Own: The Caledon Bay and Woodah Island Killings 1932–1933.* By Ted Egan. Melbourne University Press 1996. 244 pp. ISBN 0 522 84693 9. \$44.95.

In the course of one year in the early 1930s a few Yolgnu men killed eight foreigners whose presence had become unwelcome in their country. The first killings occurred on 17 September 1932 when five Japanese fisherman working the trepang beds at Caledon Bay on the north-east coast of Arnhem Land were speared to death. Japanese trepangers had been a regular and increasingly unwelcome presence on these coasts since the late 19C. In this case the behaviour of the fishermen had seriously affronted the fairly minimal social expectations of their hosts. The Yolgnu retaliated by deputing three young men to kill them. This was not the first time that Japanese fishermen had been killed in Arnhem Land. On this occasion however the actions of the Yolgnu were uniquely susceptible to intervention by the official legal system. One of the Japanese, Kinjo, had fled from the scene and lived to provide evidence of the deaths of his companions. By happenstance an Englishman named Fred Gray had also been present at Caledon Bay when the Japanese were killed. Gray only witnessed the aftermath but through his friendship with the local tribespeople was privy to all the circumstances. The Darwin authorities were presented with *prima facie* cases of murder when the accounts of Kinjo and Gray became publicly known.

About six months later other Yolgnu men killed two transient white men on a boat near Woodah Island about 75 km south-west of Caledon Bay. News of these killings did not however reach Darwin until late in 1933. The Caledon Bay killings had by then already prompted official decisive action. The fact that the criminal law appeared to have been broken was one causative factor. The central government had however also been drawn in. It could not be seen to allow the murderers of five citizens of an allied power go unpunished. The killings had also acted to inflame the antipathy towards tribal Aboriginals which was endemic in the local white community. Added to these influences was the frontier zeal of the Northern Territory Mounted Police. It was this official response which led to the last of the eight killings. In late July 1933 an armed party of Mounted Police entered Arnhem Land near Blue Mud Bay. A few days later Dhakiyara Wirrpanda speared and killed Constable Albert Stewart McColl who was detaining one of his wives, Djaparri, and three other Yolgnu women.

The response of officialdom in the Northern Territory in the 1920s and 1930s to the killing of whites by Aboriginal assailants was often brutal. In 1928 for instance

Mounted Police had massacred at least 31 Aboriginal people at Coniston north-west of Alice Springs in reprisal for the murder of one white man.<sup>1</sup> In this context the reaction of the authorities in Darwin to the Arnhem Land killings was not unusual. It was however especially determined because of their desire to punish the Yolgnu for the death of McColl who was officially at least one of their own. The Administrator and the Mounted Police made preparations to undertake a punitive expedition against the Yolgnu. Their plans were vocally supported by the local white and Asian community in Darwin and elsewhere in the north. The Administrator asked Canberra to send 20 rifles, 12 revolvers, 4 shotguns, 4,300 rounds of ammunition, bandoliers and field glasses. Canberra agreed while at the same time intervening to restrain the forces of retribution. The Coniston massacre and like events in the 1920s had already attracted international criticism. These critics were now joined by Australian religious and humanitarian leaders who protested to the Prime Minister, Joe Lyons, about the punitive intentions of the Northern Territory authorities. The Prime Minister and several senior public servants were concerned to ensure those responsible for the Arnhem Land killers were apprehended and treated humanely and according to law. In other words, that another round of 'official' reprisal killings did not take place. They began to seek a practicable and peaceful alternative to the re-entry of armed police into the Yolgnu country. Canberra's efforts proceeded in the face of open local hostility, scepticism and disgust. In any event in late 1933 the Prime Minister commissioned two Anglican missionaries to make contact with the Yolgnu people at Caledon Bay and investigate the killings. The missionaries did so, and were successful. In early 1934, with the assistance of Gray, a promise of safe conduct and the aid of the local Yolgnu leaders, they gained the agreement of the five killers, Dhakiyara, Mirera, Mau Mununggurr, Natjelma and Narkaya, to travel to Darwin to be reconciled with white authority.

When the five Yolgnu men arrived in Darwin Harbour on 8 April 1934 they quickly learned the official criminal legal system had no place for 'reconciliation'. They were arrested and imprisoned. A few days later all five were charged with murder. In August Mau Mununggurr, Natjelma, Narkaya were tried and convicted of the murder of Tanaka who was one of the dead fishermen. Dhakiyara and Mirera were then tried for the murder of an unknown white man believed to be Fagan one of the white transients. Both men were acquitted when the Crown failed to prove the indictment. Dhakiyara was kept in custody to face trial for the murder of Constable McColl. After a controversial and widely-publicised trial in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory he was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Three months later the High Court of Australia quashed the conviction. The High Court ordered that Dhakiyara be discharged as it had become impossible for him to obtain a fair trial at a new hearing.<sup>2</sup> The Canberra officials immediately asked the Darwin authorities to release Dhakiyara and to ensure that he was returned to his own country. Dhakiyara was released from Fannie Bay gaol the following day and disappeared forever. He is believed to have been murdered by members of the Mounted Police.

These are the events which Ted Egan documents in his book. He records the stories and rôles of all the major actors in great detail. Although inevitably it is the story of

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1. A 1929 official inquiry accepted that as many as 100 people were killed by the police.

2. *Tuckiar v. The King* (1934-35) 52 CLR 335 at 355.

the killing of McColl and the trial of Dhakiyara which is the centrepiece. The official versions of the events are presented through extracts from official correspondence, contemporaneous notes of the trials and the evidence of the key witnesses. The book also contains unofficial documentary records of the events including personal letters and extracts from contemporary newspapers and later autobiographies. Importantly it also contains records of the oral history of the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings. The oral history of the killings recorded in the book includes Yolgnu accounts, recollections and lore which Egan has collected in many interviews conducted since the 1950s. This history from 'the other side of the hill' allows the reader to see the killings in a context which is not revealed in either the official records or typical 'white' accounts and recollections. The noble exception to the latter is the oral account of his knowledge of the events provided by Fred Gray who was gifted to straddle the two different cultures. At the time this was for Gray a mixed blessing. It gave him however unique first-hand perspectives which Egan has used to enrich the value of the material he presents.

Egan successfully portrays the complex chain of events which make up the story of the 1932–33 Arnhem Land killings. It is as he himself describes it 'a great crime story'. This somewhat self-deprecating throw away line in the preface is apparently made to bolster the book's popular appeal. So is the movie-like promo on the jacket front: '[w]hen cultures clash, those with greater power seek to impose their values upon people held to be weaker or inferior'. If these devices succeed in increasing sales and readership of the book well and good. They run the risk however of diminishing its wider significance. This is not to say that Egan does not relate a story about 'murder', innocent accused, dishonest police, a biased judge and a small-town jury. He clearly does, and his re-investigation of the killings also often resembles the techniques of the Palermo investigating magistrates.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it to downplay its story of injustices wrought upon subjugated Aborigines by the processes of the criminal law and its impact on their lives and culture. Racial justice within the criminal law has happened again and again many times since, and continues to do so seemingly without end.<sup>2</sup> So that even if the book merely told a 'crime' story it is significant story worth both telling and reading. On this basis alone Egan provides another welcome addition to the growing body of non-anglo-centric scholarship in Aboriginal history.

The wider significance of the book derives from its historiography. The inclusion of 'great slabs of letters, reports, judgments and evidence' in the book has an important effect. It certainly doesn't make the book easier to read, or to follow the activities of the principal actors. The organisation of his material clearly initially troubled Egan. He comes close at one point to apologising to the reader whom he feared may find the documentary record tedious.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately he had the courage of his convictions, and the good advice of his supervisors. The outcome of his methodology is twofold. It enables

1. Stille, A., *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*, (London, Vintage 1996).

2. Eggleston, E., *Fear, Favour or Affection: Aborigines and the Criminal Law in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia*, (Canberra, ANU Press, 1976); Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report*, Vols 1–5, (Canberra, AGPS, 1991); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission, *Indigenous Deaths in Custody*, (Canberra, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1996).

3. p. 200.

Egan to enliven the story of the Arnhem Land killings. So that the personalities, qualities and complexity of the major official actors are revealed. This is particularly true of the trial judge Mr Justice Wells. The documents damn Wells in his misconduct of the trial of Dhakiyara and related misbehaviour. Yet they also show him to have not been an evil man, and ultimately himself a pawn in the wider political scene which emerged. There are inevitably no contemporary Yolgnu documents recording the events. Egan however makes a similar use of their oral testimony and testament. He demonstrates the presence of comparable social and political complexity amongst the Yolgnu actors and their families. In other words, the organisation of the book magnifies its significance by its display of the social reality of the killings and the trials. This is a hallmark of good social history and Egan's book has already been recognised in that domain. In 1989 it shared the History Award at the University of Adelaide.

The second outcome of his methodology was probably unintended. The book contains a significant 'legal' sub text beyond its description of colonial criminal 'justice'. The High Court appeal in *Tuckiar v. The King* did not subsequently become compulsory reading for all first-year law students. When students read *Tuckiar* it is generally in the context of studying the law of evidence, professional privilege and ethics. There are many reasons for this neglect. Amongst them is that the law report contains little background information about the events and processes which preceded the appeal. This was to be expected. It is axiomatic in modern western law that its processes are presented in an asocial and apolitical guise. Modern law in Australia in the 1930s was in full bloom, and the members of the High Court were exemplars of the capacity to 'legalise' the resolution of justiciable social conflicts. The way in which Egan documents his story now reveals much more of the 'legal' reality surrounding the Arnhem Land killings. In doing so he presents a rare insight into the actuality of the legal domain in Australian society in the 1930s.

These insights go to basic aspects of the system, law and authority which were present in the legal domain. The paradigms of official modern law still pretend that it not only monopolises legality, but that it is socially progressive, omnipresent and omniscient. These are powerful myths, and still have many and powerful adherents in this age of post or new modernity. In the 1930s these legal ideals corresponded with the idea of Australian society as a modern progressive western mono-culture.<sup>1</sup> 1932–33 was after all when Bradman's performance in the 'body line' Test Match series saw him join Phar Lap as a popular social icon.<sup>2</sup> And northern Australia and its indigenous peoples were seen as targets of progress to be overcome and on which the benefits of modern society were to be bestowed.<sup>3</sup> Egan reveals some of the reality of the legal system, law and authority which were present in this modern society.

At a general level it reinforces what contemporary legal historians have begun to tell us about the legal system.<sup>4</sup> It did not simply replicate the metropolitan experience.

1. This was an influential ideal. As late as 1970 Australian academics could still confidently pronounce that Australia in the 1930s as 'culturally and ethnically homogenous': see Aitken, D., Kahan, M. & Barnes, S, 'What Happened to the Depression Generation?' in Cooksey, R., (ed.), *The Great Depression in Australia*, (Canberra, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History 1970) 174 at 179.

2. Williams, M., *Australia in the 1930s*, (Sydney, Trocadero Publishing, 1985) at 53–57.

Specifically Egan's documentation shows that in the 1930s there was a distinctive colonial experience of law in the Northern Territory. Its legal system was not merely geographically distant from its modern southern core. It was distinctively different system and saw the judiciary, police and law 'bound together for sustaining the authority of the colonial state'.<sup>1</sup> The administration of the Northern Territory legal system was also beset by management problems typical of colonial societies.<sup>2</sup> It was not merely by chance that an incompetent judge presided at Dhakiyara's trial, or the Mounted Police were predisposed to violent responses towards tribal Aboriginals. Colonial regimes had great difficulty in attracting appropriately skilled public administrators and police.<sup>3</sup> In frontier colonies like the Northern Territory police maladministration of the law was encouraged by their functions and para-military culture.<sup>4</sup> What all this means is the reality of the Australian legal system in the 1930s was more complex than we, at least those of use who are lawyers, were taught to believe.

So was the law. Egan's book highlights two powerful myths about modern law in Australia when these events occurred. The first is the myth of the social omnipresence of official law. The documentary record shows that the 'rule of law' in the 1930s had a fairly shaky grasp of parts of life and government in the Northern Territory. This was tellingly described by Mr Justice Starke who said in the High Court appeal, referring to the detention of Djaparri and the other Yolgnu women, that it 'was, no doubt, necessary for the police to capture and handcuff the lubras if they were to achieve the object of their expedition, but the rules of English law cannot be cited in support of their action'.<sup>5</sup> There was in other words some aspects of Australian society which were 'without the law'. The second myth is law is exclusively a product of the courts and Parliament. The intervention of the Federal executive government and its officials in the proceedings reveals the significance of 'administrative law' properly so-called in the government of the modern state. Official law in this context was only one of a range of public policy factors to be considered in achieving a result which suited the national interest. Indeed, Egan suggests Canberra 'ran dead' in the Commonwealth response to the High Court appeal. The official documents also reveal some of the unresolved paradoxes of modern law. The principal instance in the case of the official law was its treatment of Dhakiyara. On the one hand its initial failure to prevent the abuse of his human, civil and proce-

3. For example see Langford Smith, K., *Sky Pilot in Arnhem Land*, (Sydney, Angus and Robertson Limited, 1935); Idriess, I. L., *Nemarluk: King of the Wilds*, (Sydney, Angus and Robertson Limited, 1941); Idriess, I. L., *Man Tracks: With The Mounted Police in the Australian Wilds*, (Sydney, Angus and Robertson Limited, 1946); Hatfield, W., *Australia Through The Windscreen*, (Sydney, Angus and Robertson Limited, 1939); Idriess, I. L., *The Cattle King*, (Sydney, Angus and Robertson Limited, 1936).

4. Neal, D., *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony: Law and Power in Early New South Wales*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

1. Anderson, D. M., 'Policing, prosecution and the law in colonial Kenya, c. 1905-1939' in Anderson, D. M. & Killingray, D., (eds.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1991) 183 at 198.

2. *Policing the Empire* at 5-8.

3. Ibid.

4. See for instance Killingray, D., 'Guarding the extended frontier: policing the Gold Coast, 1865-1913' in *Policing the Empire* at 106.

5. *Tuckiar v. The King* at 352.

dural rights was appalling. Yet ultimately it was the official law through the agency of the High Court which protected and freed him. The rôle of the judges of the High Court has its own internal contradictions. Mr Justice Starke, perhaps the most reactionary of the judges, was the most forthright in condemning the behaviour of trial judge and Dhakiyara's defence counsel.<sup>1</sup> Paradox is also evident in the 'administrative law' response. It generally assumed a benign and humane form which assisted Dhakiyara. But it was unable, unwilling or powerless to adequately protect him on his release from gaol and return to Arnhem Land.

The book also contains insights into a basic conflict between modern law and Aboriginal society. These insights are probably most marked for those like me who are newcomers to this field. In reading the record of the killings one is help struck by the apparent absence of criminal culpability on the part of those accused of murder. This is particularly so in the killings of the Japanese and McColl. In contrast to the presence of criminal intent the record portrays the killers as acting to defend or protect their society, its members or culture. In neither case did the Yolgnu perceive the killings as socially delinquent or 'criminal'. This aspect of the killing of McColl for example was acknowledged by Mr Justice Starke. His admonition of the trial judge included the criticism that Wells had not suggested:

for the consideration of the jury the possible effect upon uncivilised aboriginals of a police party capturing their lubras, and apparently endeavouring to capture the aboriginals as well...To uncivilised aboriginals, however, and particularly to the prisoner, the conduct of the police party may well have appeared as an attack upon the lubras and themselves, and provoked or led to the attack upon the police in their own defence.<sup>2</sup>

When Starke made these comments he was canvassing the possibility of a legal defence to the murder charge. His choice of words show his ignorance of the world in which Dhakiyara and the Yolgnu women lived. This world was, as Donald Thomson witnessed, and recorded in his remarkable photographs, a few years, an intact, cohesive and vibrant tribal society with its own law and legal system.<sup>3</sup> This was the world in which reality of Dhakiyara was constructed. It was the same reality which governed the actions of Mau Mununggurr, Natjelma, Narkaya when they killed the Japanese. It was not merely that the 1930s Yolgnu misunderstood 'the methods of administration and justice of the white man as it is at present applied to his affairs'.<sup>4</sup> It was that they belonged to a different and sovereign polity. From this political perspective the Yolgnu saw no relationship 'between the operation of their own legal code and that of the white man ...'.<sup>5</sup> It is this political conflict over legitimacy which is still central to the relationship between Aboriginal societies and official law and government. Egan's book adds

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1. Ibid at 351-55.

2. Ibid at 355.

3. Thomson, D., *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land*, (South Yarra, Currey O'Neill, 1983); Thomson, D., *Children of the Dreamtime: Traditional Family Life in Northern Australia*, (Ringwood, Viking O'Neil, 1983). See also Commonwealth of Australia, *Report on Expedition to Arnhem Land, 1936-37*, Dr Donald Thomson, (Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1939) at 6 & 11.

4. *Report on Expedition to Arnhem Land, 1936-37* at 11.

5. Ibid.

to our understanding of the social reality of this conflict between incompatible bases of legal authority.

This is a long review but this is an important book. Not only does it help us to understand the Aboriginal experience of modern law. It also helps us to understand the difficulty of ensuring justice in a complex modern legal system. Egan shows us again how legal justice and social justice are inseparable twins. This is a lesson which is relevant for governments today in their responsibility to make the law more 'accessible', just and fair for all citizens, black and white alike.

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*Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*. By H. Pedersen and B. Woorunmurra, 1995. Broome, WA: Magabala Books. Pp. xiii +216.

As many readers of this journal will know, Jandamarra was an Aboriginal man from the central Kimberley Ranges of WA, who led one of longest and most effective resistance campaigns against European settlers anywhere in Australia. He was born just before they first arrived in his Bunuba homeland in the 1880s and as a boy became their protégé and apprentice, developing outstanding skills as a rider, stockman and marksman—the best in district at over 100 yards according to one his European mentors. Although never formally deputised, he worked with the police, minding their horses and helping them to round up Aborigines accused of killing stock. In October 1894, having assisted in the arrest of seventeen of his own countrymen, he turned on the police, murdered his boss, Constable William Richardson, released the prisoners, captured a sizeable cache of firearms and ammunition and fled to the nearby ranges, from where he is said to have planned to mount a last-ditch campaign to oust all European settlers from the area.

This finally provided the settlers with the political leverage they needed to gain a free hand in dealing with natives. Indiscriminate reprisals against the Aboriginal population of the region had already been carried out several times before, resulting in scores of deaths for every one suffered by the colonists. But the hand of the police in such matters had always been constrained to some extent by the watchful eye of the colonial administration in Perth, the southern press, and the home office in London, which was still resisting the Western Australian colony's bid for independence in large part because of lack of confidence in the colony's ability to deal in an acceptable manner with its indigenous inhabitants. But now that there was the prospect of an armed insurrection led by one of them who was skilled in the ways of the white man, permission was at last granted by the police commissioner in Perth for the west Kimberley force under sub-inspector O.E. Drewry to swear in special constables and otherwise 'take such steps as you deem necessary to deal with the natives' (124). Following unsuccessful attempts to flush out Jandamarra's band from their stronghold in the Leopold ranges, the newly-deputised police parties swept up and down either side of the Fitzroy River Valley slaughtering hundreds of the Aboriginal people not yet on stations, many of them women and children, and most of them Nyikina, Warrwa, Unggumi, Mangala and Guniyandi people who would have had nothing to do with the insurrec-

tion. All in all it was 'the most sustained slaughter of Aboriginal people in Western Australia's history' (139).

For the next two and a half years, Jandamarra and his band managed to hide from police in the ranges and caves they knew so well. Perhaps fearful of further reprisals, they killed very few Europeans, but engaged in acts which dramatised their ability to do so at any time, for example by sneaking undetected into police encampments and stealing more firearms even as the police thought they had Jandamarra trapped in a cave, which he had left through another entrance unknown to them.

In all the Aboriginal accounts I have heard of this story, including Woorunmurra's, Jandamarra, more commonly known as Pigeon, is said to have been invulnerable to the Europeans' bullets because he was a magician, who knew how to concentrate his life force into his thumb, toe, or even move it out of his body altogether and hide it in a nearby pool of water (p. 153, cf. Muecke et al. 1985; Rumsey 1994). In this view, the only way Jandamarra could be killed was by another, equally powerful Aboriginal magician who knew his tricks. In all accounts, including the European ones, it was indeed another Aboriginal man that finally succeeded in hunting Jandamarra down: a police tracker from the Pilbara district, called Micki, or, in Banjo Woorunmurra's account 'Mingo Mick', who in April of 1897 faced Jandamarra down outside his hide-out at Tunnel Creek.

Although he is named as co-author, the role of Banjo Woorunmurra in this book seems to me an ambiguous one. The book is in the main a revision of Pedersen's 1980 Murdoch University BA honours thesis, the writing of which was stimulated by a conversation Pedersen had with Woorunmurra on a visit to Fitzroy Crossing in 1977 (p. xii). On one of Pedersen's subsequent trips to Fitzroy Crossing in 1985, Woorunmurra 'suggested that [Pedersen] write a book on Jandamarra based on his and other Bunuba people's oral histories, fused with police, newspaper and other written historical sources' (p. xii).

But though an exciting prospect, such a fusion 'proved much more difficult than [Pedersen had] imagined, for after further study of the written sources and several weeks discussion with Bunuba ones, Pedersen

realised that a white historian could not reflect in writing the essence of the Bunuba stories...

The integration of these stories into a western historical narrative is highly problematic. Much of the information is secret and cannot be written for general public consumption. Also Aboriginal perceptions of the past and explanations about why certain events occurred do not sit easily within western historical chronology and its understandings of cause and effect.

This book therefore does not pretend to be written from an Aboriginal perspective. That task awaits the creativity and insight of Aboriginal writers (p. xiii).

So in what sense is Woorunmurra a co-author of the book? His authorial voice is confined to the first six pages, which reproduce one of his previously published accounts of the Jandamarra story from an article in this journal (Muecke, Rumsey and Wirrunmarra 1985). Elsewhere his and other Aboriginal oral accounts are relied upon mainly for their historical value, for example to fill gaps in the official record of how many Aboriginal people were killed on reprisal raids (p. 136, cf. Muecke, Rumsey and Wirrunmarra 1985, p. 92).



Might another, more challenging form of collaboration have been possible? Obviously Pedersen could not write 'from an Aboriginal perspective' any more than Woorunmurra could be expected to conform to the conventions of 'western historical narrative'. But rather than accepting either of these alternatives as given, one could explore what goes on in the space between the two. Surely such a space has been opened up in this case by Pedersen's extensive collaboration with Bunuba people over the past twenty one years (not only on this book, but on plans for a feature film on Jandamarra, as alluded to on the back cover). We hear much in this book about how Pedersen the historian's understanding of the Jandamarra story has been transformed by his engagement with Woorunmurra and other Aboriginal people. But surely this was not a one-way process. What do Woorunmurra and other Bunuba people make, for example, of the figure of Ellemarra, who features prominently in the historical record as Jandamarra's Aboriginal mentor and partner in crime. What do they make of historical accounts of coordinated action by a band of fighters under Jandamarra's leadership, as opposed to the emphasis on Jandamarra as a solitary figure in all the Aboriginal oral accounts, including that of Woorunmurra, who said in 1985 that Jandamarra 'had himself, nobody else...he done his own battle...he didn't want to bring anybody in' (Muecke, Rumsey and Wirrunmarra 1985, p. 94).

And what are we to make of the fact that, notwithstanding the historical positioning of Jandamarra as a resistance fighter in this book, Woorunmurra himself consistently refers to him as an 'outlaw' (p. 1; cf. Muecke, Wirrunmarra and Rumsey 1985, pp. 89, 92, 95)? As I understand him, Woorunmurra is here using the word 'outlaw' in a way that derives neither from the dominant discourse of 'law and order' nor from any purely Aboriginal one, but instead draws upon both to try to account for what made Jandamarra the unique figure that he was.

When Woorunmurra says of Jandamarra that 'they couldn't kill him 'cause he was a outlaw' (ibid. 89), the transgressions he alludes to are not so much the ones against the European law as against the Aboriginal. Pedersen notes that Jandamarra's 'sexual promiscuity became legendary...[His] sexual activities broke Bunuba law as many of his girlfriends had kinship ties, or skin names, not right for him' (p. 77). What he does not note is that these transgressions were actually what Woorunmurra sees as the source of Jandamarra's magical powers: when asked in 1985 how Jandamarra knew how to put his life into his thumb, Wirrunmarra answered that it was by chasing after (i.e., having sex with) his 'father's sister', 'sister' and 'wife's mother':

SO the life was come OON and OON and OON  
so—that way he was sort of a WIT doctor  
but he was a OUTLAW  
because he had his life in his thumb  
(Wirrunmarra in Muecke, Rumsey and Wirrunmarra 1985, p. 91–92).

he wasn't a friend of anybody now  
he was on his own  
he was a outlaw  
(loc. cit., p. 89)

The complex relationship that Woorunmurra sets up here between Jandamarra's positions vis à vis the Aboriginal law and the European one, the notion of transgression as isolating but potentially empowering, and the mediating power of hybrid notions such

as Woorunmurra's wonderful invention 'wit doctor', are all topics of a sort that Pedersen eschews here in favour of a more conventional historiography. But one cannot fault him for the book he didn't write. As a work of redressive history this book is superbly well done. Pedersen writes with a narrative sweep that is unsurpassed among historians of the Australian frontier. Though his plumbing of the archival sources is extremely thorough he works them effortlessly into what can only be described as a 'rattling good yarn'—and one that urgently needs to be told to all Australians. It is the first book I have ever reviewed for a scholarly journal that I could read aloud to my children and have it hold their interest as well as it did mine. Kind of makes you jealous.

### Reference

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*Un Long Chemin Semé d'Objets Culturels: Le cycle initiatique aranda*. By Marika Moisseeff. 280 pp., illus. maps, bibliogr. Paris: Éditions de L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1995. 140 ff.

Pity contemporary anthropologists writing on the secret dimensions of Australian Aboriginal ritual. Whereas their forerunners could write about the most taboo components of sacred object, design, and narrative with little restraint or restriction, their ethnographic heirs, in particular those writing in English, are subject to all manner of ethical scrutiny, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The French, however—or rather the French who write up their research in their native language—still retain a measure of that pre-postmodern latitude for which they are famous, and as such can mix a heightened sensibility with less oblique references to materials now deemed 'off-limits.'

Marika Moisseeff is one such example of a French anthropologist who is able to resurrect sensitive turn-of-century source material—in particular the work of Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen—and to update—it with a psychoanalytic sensibility.

The product of this effort—first presented as a Master's Thesis at the University of Nanterre Paris X—now comes to us in book form, as *Un Long Chemin Semé d'Objets Culturels: Le cycle initiatique aranda*, which can be rendered as *A Long Path Scattered with Ritual Objects: The Aranda initiation cycle*.

If the book is successful it is because Moisseeff brings to it the training of both anthropologist and psychoanalyst, a training that allows her to give a new spin to an early masterpiece of Central Desert Aboriginal ethnography. In her rereading of Spencer and Gillen's 1927 work *The Arunta*, Moisseeff offers insight into the 'dynamic' (p. 17) nature of Aboriginal ritual, a nature often underappreciated by a small company of her fellow French seeking to generate atemporal theories out of the ceremonial life of the desert.

Moisseeff starts off her tripartite reading of initiation with a broad overview of the Dreaming ('The Geography of Aranda Dreaming'); continues with a stimulating analy-

sis of some of the Central Desert's most secret ritual paraphernalia, the *churinga*, ('The Anatomy of Aranda Dreaming'); and ends with a kind of psycho-social overview of ceremonial *mise en scène*—the term is Moisseeff's—of ritual ('The Staging of Aranda Dreaming').

Part One complicates the broad Spencerian and Gillenian assessment of the Dreaming (*alchera*), of the Aranda (known today as the Arrernte), that touchstone providing a spiritual, topographical, and ritual reference point for an Aboriginal cosmology saturated with marvelous beings, spirit-children, and other mythical creatures made manifest in rituals sites and ritual objects, and in the ceremonies that celebrate them. The first section of Moisseeff's book does this in various ways: by offering up a novel and provocative spatial assessment of the complexities of Eternity and related notions of permanence and change; and by scrutinizing the individualized dimensions of kin and gender-based ritual expression.

Moisseeff argues that Eternity for the Arrernte should not be seen as statically anchored in the past; it is, rather, 'the actualization of movement, a continuous motion in space and not the periodical reiteration of the past'. (p. 26). As such, innovation is part and parcel of the permanence of Arrernte religious practice, 'an invisibility generating visible forms' that exists independent of fixed notes of historical temporality (p. 41). Moisseeff further enriches this analysis by distinguishing two classifiable manifestations of that 'asubstantial movement' in the cosmological expression of identity: the 'différentiateur' (or 'differentiating') and 'associeateur' (or 'the associating'). In the former, the differentiating rubric of identity formation, Moisseeff includes those processes, all of which ultimately find expression in ceremonial activity, that relate to matters of gender and kinship. In the latter, associating category, Moisseeff places a variety of ritual cycles that touch on such matters of fertility and inter-tribal connectedness. (p. 50). But Moisseeff further complicates this bifurcation, by establishing the associative dimension of the differentiating rituals. It is in the crossvalent force of these two forms of dynamism that the identity and cosmology coherence of the Arrernte are established and maintained.

After wending through such spatial and social complexities, Moisseeff turns to one of the most potent and sacred physical manifestations of Arrernte cosmology, namely the *churinga*, those ceremonial objects linked to matters of fertility. (p. 83). This extended material analysis initiates, as it were, Part Two, and with it Moisseeff's 'Anatomy of Aranda Dreaming.' Once again, Moisseeff relies on oppositional vocabulary to assist her in her post-structuralist analysis of Arrernte myth, a bifurcation directly linked to the cosmological categories established in the opening chapters. The 'differentiating' *churinga* tend to be those objects that are overseen by individuals and which are shaped and engraved. The 'associating' objects, which Moisseeff also identifies as 'totemic', express a collective potency and are unadorned. Other distinction are noted. Whereas the collective *churinga* remain at the totemic sites to be deployed for ritual purposes, the personal *churinga* move through the landscape with their owners.

The distinction she establishes in Part One is further played out in her analysis of material culture, both in the execution of ritual and in the transmission of those objects required to sustain them. Thus, the *churinga* tend to possess either 'collective' or individual' potency while they are used, and later serve a similar dichotomous function when passed from one generation to the next, or from one group to another. And while

Moisseeff focuses most of her analysis on the wood and stone ritual objects, she provides similar assessments with regards to hairstrings. She concludes that the transmission of these objects is central to the physical and symbol transformation of Arrernte identity, both in individual terms and in a broader tribal sense.

In the third and final section, titled 'The Staging of the Aranda Dreaming', Moisseeff recapitulates her analyses in Parts One and Two by applying her vocabularies to a long and complex initiation ritual called *ingkura*. *Inkura*—which Moisseeff renders as *empreinte du feu* (literally 'the mark of fire') and which Spencer and Gillen labelled 'fire ordeals'—constitutes the cycle of ritual activities in which an initiated boy moves into the domain of initiated manhood. The series of ceremonies provides Moisseeff with further opportunity to advance her plurally cloven worldview of Aboriginal ideology, pairing up as she does the distinctions of the male and the female, the physical and the spiritual, initiated and novitiate, socio-centric and ego-centric. She concludes, as others have before her, that ritual performance enhances the ethnographers understanding of kinship and subsection responsibility. Indeed, she sees ritual acts as nothing short of actualizing moments in the dynamic of Aboriginal interconnectedness.

There is a risk, of course, in this kind of either/or differentiation when the templates and historical record Spencer and Gillen provided are tested against the realities of Central Desert ritual as they are now undertaken. Many of the so-called 'male' ceremonies scrutinized by Spencer and Gillen—including the *Inkura*—must be seen as environments of cross-gender negotiation, despite the single-sex nature of their actual execution. Women figure prominently in the arrangement of the events, and the actions of their males relatives carry direct social and ritual rewards for them *as* women, and as members of a kin group. Moisseeff is right to note that women participated to make boys into men, but that very same involvement can also make women themselves ritually prominent. As such, the social setting of post-sedentary Central Desert Aboriginal life now tends to deploy ritual as a form of collective and individual negotiation inexorably linked to all manner of non-ceremonial exchange, and it is a negotiation implicating both women and men.

Moisseeff is no doubt aware of this fact. But it is a fact that must reside beyond the scope of her critique, since she restricts herself to a rereading of classic (and often jumbled) British text relying on fieldwork that began more than one hundred years ago. Yet if the data have changed that does not diminish the power of the vocabulary Moisseeff generates to reinterpret Aboriginal cosmology. Spencer and Gillen offered Moisseeff a template by which to assess Aboriginal culture. Moisseeff, in turn, offers a template for others to do the same in more current and less distant settings of Aboriginal life.

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*Kunwinjku Spirit: Creation Stories from Western Arnhem Land.* By Nawakadj Nganjmirra, edited by Neil McLeod. Miegunyah Press, Melbourne. Map, drawings, paintings, photographs, glossary.

This is a beautifully produced book of drawings and paintings by the late Nawakadj Nganjmirra, a Kunwinjku artist of western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory,

together with some works by other members of his family—Ralph Nganjmirra, Peterson Nganjmirra, and Thompson Yulidjiri.

The paintings and drawings are set out under mythological traditions together with the basic stories in Kunwinjku and with English translations. They include major and minor 'dreamings' such as the creator figure Warramurrungundji and the dangerous being Luma Luma, myths associated with the Ubarr ceremony, stories about localised dreaming places and so on. These are interposed with very beautiful photographs of the associated landscape by Neil McLeod. The paintings reproduced include early examples of the artist's work on bark. An interesting feature of Nawakadj's art are the drawings in crayon—black on white paper, and coloured crayons on black paper in which the artist deploys a sinuous line, and infills solid masses with parallel lines. Here the artist introduces blue pigment together with equivalents of white clay, red and yellow ochres and black pigment. Works in the more recently developed medium of painting on paper, simulate the textures and style of rock art, while other use a different range of colours such as yellow on a blue-black ground.

While it does not inform the reader about the place of art in Kunwinjku life—for this one must turn to Luke Taylor's *Seeing the Inside*—the result is a rich corpus of Kunwinjku stories, paintings and drawings from the point of view of members of this clan. The book contains a useful glossary, however the dates and provenance of the works are not supplied.

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*Warrigal's Way*. By Warrigal Anderson. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia. 1996. Pp. 218. ISBN 0 7022 2909 1

This book is a great read, as Mudrooroo says on the jacket. Anyone who loved Hugh Lunn's *Over the top with Jim* will, like me, be unable put it down. Why? Because it's the story of a man who sees the best in most people, the funny side of every incident, and who writes very vividly and can make the smallest incident come alive. It is also a gripping morality story about how a young boy grew up and learned to read and write, escaping institutionalisation by luck and his own strength of character, as well as with the help of ordinary people, black and white.

The boy never attended school, because his mother was frightened that he would be taken away from her, as had befallen his older brother and sister. When he was ten he was forced to leave her, and accidentally caught a train going north instead of to Swan Hill. Fortunately he was lucky enough to find a droving team who took him on, taught him to work, and took him around Queensland and the Barkly Tablelands. The book is dedicated to the droving team, and especially to Ted Hanson, the team member who taught the boy to read and write, and hammered home to him the importance of education. While his travels were shadowed by the knowledge that there was a warrant out for his arrest, he learned and earned a good deal—so much so that the story sounds like a fantasy—if only every homeless boy could acquire such a good education from such selfless people!

There are a lot of interesting descriptions of work on droving teams in meat works, and seasonal farm work, as well as of the social life of the itinerant workers, Aboriginal, Maori, and white, who did the work in the '60s and '70s. There's also a description of construction work at Warrabri, but lacking in detail about Aboriginal life there. It left me wanting more information—was there really someone doing bark painting there?

Anderson writes in a colloquial style with plenty of rhyming slang, spoken language syntax, and splendid exaggeration. It is great fun to read and will provide many citations for the *Australian National Dictionary*. There are only a few typographical errors (e.g. Wahope Well for Wauchope Well p. 159).

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*Tammy Damulkurra*. By Derek Pugh and the Sunshine Girls, AIATSIS, Canberra 1995. Pp. 86. \$8.95 p.b.

Love, betrayal, and strict parents. The themes may sound familiar, but *Tammy Damulkurra* is not your average teenage novel. *Tammy* was written by Derek Pugh, a high school teacher working in a small Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land, in collaboration with a group of his students, all girls, aged between 13 and 18. In the introduction, Pugh writes that with *Tammy* he aimed to fill that gap that existed in reading material relevant for contemporary Aboriginal teenagers living in rural areas. Along with his 'Sunshine Girls', Pugh has indeed created a story which manages to address the both the universal themes confronting all young adults, yet also the specific difficulties and interests of young rural Aborigines.

*Tammy Damulkurra* tells the story of Tammy, a fifteen-year-old Aboriginal girl living in outback Australia. Tammy, strongly attached to her extended family and her best friend Elisa, falls in love with Johnny Manjulukau, a boy who she meets at the local disco. Complications arise when Tammy's parents find out about her relationship with Johnny and are less than impressed. They send her to stay with her relations in the bush, and it is here where *Tammy Damulkurra* sets itself apart most significantly from other young adult fiction, describing in detail traditional (and in some cases not so traditional) means of living off the land, with the odd dreamtime story thrown in here and there.

The fact that it was written partly by teenagers is the source of both the main strengths and weaknesses of this novel. While it does add an element of realism and integrity to the story, it has also lead to a rather over-simplified discussion of the issues raised. However, considering its short length such simplification is difficult to avoid, and in any case the novel's simplicity is one of its charms. It is a relief to find a novel for young people which so successfully avoids the trap of patronising or preaching.

Eleanor Thomas

*The Way We Civilize: Aboriginal Affairs—the untold story.* By Rosalind Kidd. University of Queensland Press, 1997. Pp 389. \$19.95.

When the colony of Queensland was granted self-government in 1859, seven thousand of its twenty-five thousand settlers lived in Brisbane, and the Aboriginal population, scattered throughout the colony, was estimated to be one hundred thousand. Assuming the land to be theirs, the settlers were slow to devise ways to govern those whom they dispossessed. For years there was intermittent warfare, and much of the 'dirty work' was performed for the settlers by 'Native Mounted Police' whose predations were investigated and exonerated in 1861. Local magistrates and justices of the peace were of little use to the Indigenous people; but as the frontier moved out west and north, the Indigenous people remaining in 'settled' districts had to be governed. Rosalind Kidd's book is distinguished by its sensitivity to the different views of good government which have been contested in the field of 'Aboriginal Affairs' in Queensland.

The 'industrial schools and reformatories movement'—developed in Britain to police the poor—identified sectors of the population whom the state should supervise. Queensland's *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act* (1865) included any child born of an Aboriginal or half-caste mother along with children destitute or associated with thieves, prostitutes or drunkards. Aboriginality was equated with moral hazard, and rescued children were to be taught basic skills. However, the government's commitment to this crusade was qualified in two ways. Missions and private humanitarian initiatives were so poorly funded that unpaid Aboriginal labour was essential to their survival. And the Native Mounted Police remained a menace to these institutions. In 1874 the government considered whether the Native Mounted Police should be replaced by ordinary police so that rationing and the issue of blankets could be the preferred mode of pacification. One Father McNab even suggested that Aborigines be allowed to purchase land. However, reform was slow. Though the procedures for taking Aboriginal testimonies were changed in 1876, homicide remained largely unchecked as frontier practice. A few reserves were gazetted in 1877, but they could not survive the settlers' land hunger. *The Queenslander* campaigned against these barbarous priorities in 1880. In 1884 Premier Samuel Griffith passed a law to regulate the use of Melanesian and Aboriginal coastal workers, but its enforcement proved a problem.

The humanitarian critique would not go away, however. Its institutional expression was a wave of mission formation, by Lutherans, Presbyterians and the Church of England, in the north of the colony and at Deebing Creek near Ipswich in the 1880s and 1890s. Exploiters of indigenous labour objected to the government's meagre mission subsidies, and even humanitarians had to admit that Aboriginal people did not always stay in the institutions set up to protect and reform them. The government was nonetheless receptive to Archibald Meston's proposal for a more systematic effort to manage the indigenous survivors, on a network of supervised reserves. In 1897, with the passing of the *Aboriginals Protection and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act*, the reformatories movement at last eclipsed the practices of licensed terror.

The reformatory strategies' victory was subject to 'exceptions' and had insufficient government financial support. Indeed, much of Kidd's 'untold story' has to do with the Protectors' siphoning money from trust funds (those under the Act had to be paid but were not allowed to spend) in order to subsidise what was supposed to be a public

service—'a complex web of negligence, fraud and misappropriation' (p. 130). Missions responded to financial stringency by finding in dormitory care the means to restrict the circulation of rations. The church/state bureaucracy of protection was difficult to standardise. Kidd's stories illustrate 'vested interests, unsuitable personnel, and the private agendas of diverse authorities' (p. 78).

Underfunded missions and settlements could not keep their residents well fed and housed and so added twentieth century illnesses such as hookworm and malnutrition to the conditions which opium issue and sexual contact had made endemic in the nineteenth century. One of Kidd's most fruitful themes is the tension between a medical inspectorate and a penny-pinching and locally capricious protectorate. Both State bureaucracies were set up around the turn of the century, but the medical interest was boosted when the Commonwealth created its own Health Department in 1920 with a special interest in tropical diseases. Kidd thus dates the Commonwealth critique of Queensland Aboriginal affairs policies not to Whitlam's initiatives (1973–5) but back to the 1920s.

Discovering high rates of sexually transmitted diseases gave reason to intensify state surveillance of Aboriginal life, and led in 1934 to the inclusion under the Act of half-castes and of people not on missions and reserves. Palm and Fantome Islands became more important as places to segregate those suffering from VD. Diet and the identification of lepers also became state concerns. The Protectors' responses to medical critiques were generally 'irritation, reluctance and miserly inflexibility'. They had also to contend with occasional critiques of their administration of Aborigines' trust accounts.

The Protectors were even less hospitable to the advice of anthropologists such as Ursula McConnel and Donald Thomson who both worked on Cape York between the wars and Caroline Tennant Kelly who found herself in Cherbourg in 1934. Anthropologists had only a weak institutional base (the Australian National Research Council) but officers from the Bureau of Census and Statistics could not be so easily excluded, and so demography began to affect official thinking—particularly the recorded increase in 'half-castes'. By 1939, when the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act* was passed, there were 3,000 settlement inmates, 3,500 Torres Strait Islanders, 3,500 mission residents and 7000 people in rural camps under the Director of Native Affairs.

The war raised the value of all labour, including Aborigines', but placed the darker Australians in new and worrying proximities with whites and raised the issue of the 'natives' loyalties. Kidd tells of the cavalier fashion in which those under the Act were moved around to cater to these new needs and fears. As always, she gives us the medicos' dutifully filed counts of illness and death. It is a miserable and infuriating story.

The war improved Aborigines' social security entitlements, to the advantage of their custodians, some treating such payments as institutional income. In the Torres Strait, Anglican missions passed on the child endowment in full and so did Cape York's Presbyterian missionaries, though not for parents whose children were in their dormitories. More money (from wages and social security) offered more chances for 'Protector' theft. 'Examination of departmental audit reports reveals many instances of police fraud on Aboriginal accounts.' (p. 179)



The gradual inclusion of Aboriginal and Islander people in the national social security system is part of a larger story which dominates the second half of Kidd's book: the attempt by the State to turn growing Commonwealth interest in Indigenous welfare to its own financial advantage, without losing any policy autonomy. Impoverished northern indigenes were a useful, if tricky, card for both Queensland and Western Australia to play in the game of federal financial relations. The other great theme for Kidd's second half is the Presbyterian fight to assert the land rights of the Wik and other Cape York peoples whose lands were rich in minerals.

Kidd argues that the systematic generation of Indigenous poverty was doubly useful to a series of Queensland governments (Labor and non-Labor) from the 1930s to the 1980s. First, Mission advocacy of Indigenous interests could be discredited by pointing to how poorly the cash-starved missions maintained their residents. Those doctors' files were useful, and there was more measurement of ill-health than ever after 1967 when the Queensland Institute of Medical Research made Aboriginal health research a priority. To the extent that missions sought greater subsidies, the State offered greater control (short of full responsibility) as well. Second, the State could shame Canberra into greater transfers of revenue, in the light of the large northern State's special disadvantages. Meanwhile, the State continued to use 'protected' workers' trust accounts as a source of investible funds and of loans to the State-run hospital system: a neat and cynical formula, held in place by patronage, Cold War rhetoric, public service secrecy and racist conviction.

Thus the Presbyterians were persuaded, in the mid 1950s, to abandon Mapoon mission (and the Department would also have liked them to give up Mornington Island, to take its residents to Aurukun). Those at Mapoon were supposed to go to Weipa, though church men and women in touch with people's feelings for home lands were uneasy about, and even opposed to, such a plan. The mining industry, discovering bauxite on the Mapoon and Weipa reserves, entered this feud of church and state. The missionaries saw mineral wealth as saviour, but clashed with the government about how best to relocate people. They were excluded from the government's negotiations with the miners, and in 1958 Comalco was given the lands it required, with only 7 per cent of the Mapoon, Aurukun and Weipa reserves left for Aboriginal use. The government pointed to mission neglect, while the mission insisted that improvement was contingent on Aboriginal land security. Presbyterian concerns on the west of the Cape were echoed by Anglicans, worried about the threatened relocation of Lockhart River and the continuing under-funding of Yarrabah. The Anglicans surrendered Yarrabah in 1960, and the Seventh Day Adventists yielded Mona Mona mission to the government in 1962. Bauxite mingled with Presbyterian grit to make the west Cape battle more protracted.

The Queensland government over-reached itself in re-locating Mapoon. Many Presbyterian authorities were attracted by the material inducements offered by the government, but they were embarrassed when the residents' opposition became widely known through the Aboriginal Advancement League in 1963. Presbyterian relations with the State government were further strained during negotiations about building the new mission at Weipa in 1965. Church men and women had ample opportunity to reassess the promise of mining and of 'assimilation' policies in the decade 1955-65. By 1968

Mornington Island's Reverend Belcher was declaring that 'the hot potato is the question of title to land.' (p. 253) In 1969 the church formally espoused indigenous land rights.

To the extent that the State was able to take over the churches' efforts, it fed a festering problem—the appropriate wage policy for settlement workers. Kidd shows that by the late 1950s, the unions were challenging the government's wage inequities for so-called 'slow workers' at missions and settlements and on pastoral properties. On the settlements this was not only a policy issue, but a budgetary problem: the State had never conceded the money required to run settlements for residents' benefit. Rations were out, low wages were in, by the late 1960s, and residents found it impossible to purchase enough food. To the State, the solution was easy: people should move away from the settlements and missions and get a job. Poverty was assimilation's spur. And Indigenous poverty remained a stick with which to beat the Commonwealth, by now (early 1970s) newly interested in helping the States to deal with indigenous poverty, poor housing in particular. When the State got Commonwealth housing money, it fought to spend it according to its own policy of inducing residents to leave reserves. Against federal policy, it also built crude shacks as 'transition housing', and it refused to start Aboriginal housing associations. Sub-standard dwellings could be justified by a regime that inspected, through an intensifying grid of surveillance, the degree to which residents of settlements were adopting the approved way of life. 'Parental competence' had become the concern of 'a network of social police' in the 1960s (p. 261). Such interpretations of responsibility exculpated the State in the health crises that racked Palm Island in 1972 and 1973. Kidd's final chapter includes important material on the Queensland government's deliberate under-policing of remote Indigenous communities. As the violence and disorder of these places became known, their aspiration to 'self-determination' was easier to question.

The Whitlam and Fraser governments attempted to confront Joh Bjelke-Petersen's administration of indigenous affairs, from 1972 to 1983. Kidd's material is consistent with the interpretation that that challenge was most powerful at the local level, when the Commonwealth offered better resources (including insisting on award wages in Commonwealth-funded programs) and so competed with the long tradition of Departmental patronage. If Kidd's splendid book has a weakness, it is that she does not adequately show the workings of colonial patronage—the colonial authorities' elevation of 'good' Indigenous people to positions of petty responsibility and greater material reward. Here and there we glimpse the micro-politics of such differentiation, but Kidd's focus is elsewhere—on questions of finance and political tactics in the wider political sphere. It is likely that intra-communal politics was exacerbated by an 'assimilation' program which rewarded the faster 'progress' of some individuals and families. In the 1970s, the Commonwealth's officials and programs began to weaken that reward system, not only by being an alternative source of patronage (for we cannot rule out the persistence of such a political dynamic) but also by governing in a more bureaucratically rational manner—most importantly, by submitting wage levels to the rule of industrial law. Kidd gives some credit to Bob Katter, the new the Minister for Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, (appointed 1983), for realising that union claims for equal pay on reserves could no longer be resisted.

However, if there is a history of the rise and fall of colonial patronage here, Kidd has not made it explicit. For an author interested in 'governmentality', she is curiously

insensible to the importance of patron-client relationships in a colonial theatre. You would think, from reading her, that the State government and missions were so foolish as to treat all Indigenous people in their power equally badly. Angela Burger's *Neville Bonner* and David Trigger's study of Doomadgee *Whitefella Comin* show that this was not so.

With the local struggles among colonial strategies as her ongoing background story, Kidd's final chapters feature the high policy jousts. When miners showed interest in Aurukun, the Presbyterians sought not to repeat their complicities in the Weipa and Mapoon debacles. The State overruled them with a 1975 Act authorising mining. When the Department began to face Aboriginal litigants, it blamed the missionaries. In March 1978, the Uniting Church (a product of the 1977 merger of the Presbyterians with Methodists and Congregationalists) was expelled from the Mornington Island and Aurukun missions. The Fraser government threatened legislative intervention in the residents' favour, but accepted a truce, much to the concern of the distrustful church. The Premier crowed victory, and the Fraser government attempted to finesse him with legislation. The Premier revoked the missions' reserve status and declared them shires. This gambit neutralised Fraser and substantially breached the truce agreement on residents' rights. The communities, robbed of land rights and self-management, waged a public campaign, in which the Fraser government was cast as passive and weak.

The distinct and valuable contribution of Kidd's work is her attention to tensions among colonial authorities: State/Commonwealth, church/state, medical/bureaucratic, union/employer. Indigenous agency is hardly visible, either as protest or (equally significant in explaining the Queensland system) as accommodation. Only in litigation are Indigenous people conspicuous, for her history is written from the State's own files, a chronicle of coping with crises occasioned by the collisions between diverse colonial authorities. Yet one fundamental point about Indigenous agency emerges with great weight. To the extent that Indigenous Queenslanders appear in our news media as unhealthy, disorganised, prone to violence and despair (and these are unavoidable themes of many reports) there is now Kidd's story of cynical, dishonest misgovernment to which we can turn for much explanation. 'Assimilation' was not only a doctrine of nationhood, it was also a disdainful preoccupation with the unfitness of inmates. It set up a sociological and historical schema for pathologising the victims of colonialism and for ennobling the intentions of their captors.

This way of seeing remains part of our intellectual legacy. Affirming Indigenous self-determination sets up new tests for Indigenous people. Their problems are still interpretable 'as aspects of an Aboriginal, rather than a governmental, problem' (p. 347). While applauding Kidd's effort to shift the interpretive emphasis from Indigenous pathology to governmental failure, I believe that the next step in the history of Queensland colonialism is to face up to the ways in which the term 'governmental'—in the properly Foucauldian sense avowed by Kidd—includes the agency of those Indigenous people for whom government was the source of 'uplift'. The mutual implication of the State, the churches and the upwardly mobile Indigenous person is an historical topic which awaits its author.

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*Archives in the Tropics: Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Townsville, 9-11 May 1994, Canberra, ASA, 1994. Price \$14, plus postage, from the Australian Society of Archivists Inc, PO Box 83, O'Connor, ACT, 2601.*

Henrietta Fourmile's paper, 'Who Owns the Past? Aborigines as captives of the Archives', published in this journal in 1989 (Vol. 13, No. 1), set the baseline for the Townsville conference of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA). As Baiba Berzins wrote in another seminal paper, 'Archivists and Aboriginal Records', Fourmile had asserted a claim for Aboriginal 'say in if not control over the way in which materials relating to their group identity are guarded, used and controlled.' (*Archives and Manuscripts*, Vol.19, No.2, Nov 1991; p. 197) Responding to pressure from Aboriginal people and organisations, a number of the major archival institutions in Australia had initiated projects aimed at disseminating their Aboriginal archival resources, but it was not until the Townsville conference that the professional body of archivists, the ASA, had shown any concerted interest in the issues relevant to Aboriginal and Islander archives. The Townsville conference put forward indigenous archives as the major single conference theme. Fabian Hutchinson reported to the Central Land Council, 'this one Conference has done more to raise the awareness of the profession about the special requirements of Aboriginal organisations and people for historical records, than any other single meeting in the last decade.'

Three papers on issues relating to Aboriginal archives are published in the proceedings. The first, 'Who's telling our story? Archives access, education and training for Aboriginal organisations in Central Australia', was given by Fabian Hutchinson in the session on education and training. Fabian was Information Services Supervisor at the Central Land Council (CLC) at the time and died in Darwin a few months afterwards while working on a project with the Northern Land Council. The paper urges the archives profession to pay sufficient heed to the alternative forms of safekeeping that some of these culturally-grounded Aboriginal organisations are developing. Hutchinson pointed out that Aboriginal communities' cultural property programmes are proactively aimed at 'keeping culture strong' and at gaining access to government and other institutional archives to gather information for land claims and family link-up. He outlined a program for the control or hand-back of Aboriginal archives, emphasising

the need for accelerated programs to identify, within all those major national and state institutions holding records in the field (AIATSIS included), all records (listed or not), of any current use for designated Aboriginal organisations having urgent objectives to fulfil, in areas of land interest and social justice, intellectual property and customary law, cultural and language maintenance. (p. 30)

Hutchinson noted that until 1989, when the Australian Archives paid some visits to the CLC and Mathew Platt began archival work at the CLC and the Tangentyere Council, there had been no engagement of archivists in this setting. He sketched the work of the Central Australian Archives Project in 1992-1993 at the CLC, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, the Tangentyere Council, the Institute for Aboriginal Development and the Yipirinya School. In 1990 Baiba Berzins had surveyed all NT archives and libraries holding Aboriginal records, including those in Aboriginal communities, and found inadequate storage and a general lack of staff expertise. In this context Hutchinson advocates appropriate forms of training for Aboriginals to self-

manage archival programmes and calls for support from the archives profession to achieve this goal.

The second and third papers on Aboriginal archives were given in the conference session on documenting Aboriginal and Islander experience. Henrietta Fourmile, of James Cook University, gave a paper, 'Aborigines as captives of the archives: a prison revisited', focusing on the control and dissemination of the Tindale genealogies, the originals of which are owned by the South Australian Museum, but which she regards as Aboriginal intellectual and cultural property. She outlined concerns about copyright, intellectual property rights, and the misuse of archives containing historical and anthropological information by Governments and mining companies hostile to land rights. She notes that the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 'does not offer us any protection of confidentiality concerning such records [as the Tindale genealogies], as under Section 6(1) the interpretation of the term "record" does not include "anything kept in a library, art gallery or museum for the purpose of reference study or exhibition"' (p. 120).

Fourmile's paper is an update, in the context of the Mabo judgement, of her 1989 paper, referred to above, on Aborigines as 'captives of the archives'. That image is based on a comment by Professor William T Hagen that 'to be an Indian is having non-Indians control the documents from which other non-Indians write their version of your history'. ('Archival Captive—the American Indian', *American Archivist*, Vol. 41, No. 2, April 1978; p. 135) It is worthwhile noting that Hagen's paper is primarily addressed to archivists: 'Archivists, please remember that you not only have real power over the Indian of history, the Archival Captive, but you can facilitate or frustrate the contemporary Indian's drive for justice in the courts' (p. 142).

The third paper was presented by Ysola Best and Kathy Frankland who had worked together on a project developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Resources Unit in the Queensland State Library. Until the Unit was established, they stated, 'no time had ever been devoted to documenting sources relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, thus rendering them virtually inaccessible' (p. 122). Improvements to access to the documentation occurred in recent years due to 'pressure from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves demanding the right to access information relating to their heritage, pursuing land claims, or the recognition of native title rights, and also through the reconciliation process and the recommendations of the Deaths in Custody Royal Commission' (p. 123).

Best and Frankland report that in response the Queensland State Library has not only indexed much Aboriginal archival material, but also provided remote communities with internet access to the index data bases. At the same time the Queensland State Archives, in conjunction with the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, have been compiling three guides to the archives of the Department and its predecessors and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander archives produced by other State agencies. The first of the guides was published later in 1994.

The papers on Islander archives, which have suffered alienation, loss and destruction as a consequence of resource deprivation, and dispersion as a result of war and changes in sovereignty, provide a useful comparative context for the presentation on Aboriginal archives. Karin Brennan's paper tracks the custodial history of the archives of the German colonial administration in Samoa which are shared by several nations

within the Pacific region resulting 'in the archives being alienated from the cultural heritage of the country to which they belong' (p. 109).

In his paper on archival training in the Pacific region, Peter Orlovich points out that Western Samoa, the Kingdom of Tonga, Nauru and the states of Kosrae and Chuuk (formerly Truk) in the Federated States of Micronesia have no archives directorate, no permanently appointed or professional archivist and no archival legislation (p. 19). Orlovich argues that archives can be best understood in their historical and administrative context and best made accessible in that context. He says that this is the only practical solution to helping people in the Pacific with their archives.

As far as Aboriginal records are concerned, the Townsville conference resulted in the formation of an Aboriginal Archives special interest group of the ASA and participation of representatives of the Society in the drafting of protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander information in libraries, archives and information services which were formally adopted by the Society at its annual meeting this year. Fabian Hutchinson concluded his report on the conference to the Central Land Council with the comment that 'it was a very positive experience...to feel that the profession, through its conferences at least, is starting to pay some regard to programs for Aboriginal archives, and is prepared to listen to Aboriginal viewpoints and requests for more appropriate treatment'.

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*Bushfires and Bushtucker—Aboriginal Plant Use in Central Australia.* By Peter Latz. IAD Press, Alice Springs. 1995. pp 400. hb 49.95. p.b. 34.95

This is a book which has value not only for botanists and ethnobotanists, but for a wide range of people—anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists and all those interested in the arid centre of Australia. It is the fruit of 'a lifetime's research' by Peter Latz, beginning with his first 17 years growing up among the Arrernte people at Hermannsburg Mission.

The section most likely to interest the general reader is Part One, which gives a general picture of human survival in the desert. The physical nature of this difficult country is surveyed—its climate and soils, and how the various plant communities are adapted to drought and unreliable rains. Some plants literally rise from the dead—the so-called 'resurrection plants', the leaves of which dry down to only 10% of water content and appear to be dead, yet within 12 hours of rain will turn green and revive.

Aboriginal people belonging to several different language groups have mastered the art of living in the desert—Arandic, Western Desert, Warlpiri and Warumungu, and Latz surveys their strategies for obtaining food and water not only for immediate needs, but for ensuring the continued survival of those resources. One whole chapter is devoted to the use and effects of fire. He suggests that the pre-European landscape presented a mosaic of areas in different stages of fire recovery and that this general pattern also occurred in other areas of Australia. Certainly there is evidence for it from Arnhem land, and from the dry sclerophyll forests of south-eastern and south-western Australia.

Animal species such as the bilby and the hare-wallaby have been found to be adapted to this pattern. Plants from these areas became dependent on Aboriginal burning—the Bush Tomato and the Desert Raisin, both important foods, become scarce in the absence of fire. The same applies to another *Solanum* species, *Solanum vescum*, the Kangaroo Apple of Gippsland, Victoria. Latz discusses the effect that the entry of Aborigines into the pristine Central Australian landscape was likely to have had, and adds weight to the now widely accepted view that the landscape encountered by the European invaders was largely an Aboriginal artefact.

A chapter on general plant use illustrates the importance of seeds as a food source. 67 species supplied seeds, 28 fruits, and only 12 tubers, in contrast to south-eastern Australia, where tubers were the main staples. He also draws attention to the importance of the skill of yandying, whereby the women were able to gather seed from the ground beneath plants and separate it from sand and rubbish by rocking it in a coolamon. Other plant products such as gum and gauls are also discussed, and he is at pains to single out plants which harbor edible grubs—Witchetty Bush, *Acacia kempeana*, for example.

Plant uses are not limited to material culture—plants used in ceremony, in song and art, in decoration and in children's play are also noted. Plants with milky sap, such as *Euphorbia tannensis*, Caustic Bush, are female sex totems, while pink-flowered *Ptilotus* species symbolise the male because of the penis-like shape of the flower, and the author remembers children playing teasing-games with this symbolism in mind. Part 2 of the book contains a list of plants, this occupies about 3/4 of the volume. Most plants are illustrated by a clear color picture or drawing, the botanical name, and a description of the appearance, uses, preparation, ecology and occurrence. All this is in clear plain English, botanical terms are minimal, and there is a small glossary. Forty *Acacia* species are listed, mostly used for their seed. Since many of the plants are not confined to Central Australia, workers in contiguous areas will find this a rich source of information. One of the most interesting aspects is the listing of names for the plants in up to 7 of the languages of Central Australia. Linguistically, this is almost unique; and only a person of Latz's qualifications and experience could have done it. Ethnobotanists are often frustrated by their inability to give correct names to plants mentioned in the ethnographic literature and language lists; there is no such difficulty here. An additional table in appendix 1 lists names for plants with no recorded or minor uses. Further tables list known nutritional values, a complete summary of all useful plants, medicinal plants, other uses such as implements or ceremonies, and many references. Table 4: 'List of species utilised in Australia but not in area researched' appears to be mis-titled—I think it should have referred to 'species utilised in Central Australia, but not in area researched'. Appendix 2 lists plant names divided into the seven individual Aboriginal languages—Alyawarr, Anmatyerr, Eastern Arrernte, Western Arrernte, Pintupi/Luritja, Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara and Warlpiri. To sum up, this is an invaluable reference for Australian ethnobotany, but will also be of great interest to a much wider audience.

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*Follow the Rabbit-proof Fence.* By Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara). University of Queensland Press, St Lucia. 1996. Pp. xiv + 136. ISBN 0 7022 2709 9. \$14.95.

This book tells the story of an extraordinary journey that deserves a place among the founding legends of Australia. Three girls aged about eight, ten and fifteen ran away on foot from Moore River Native Settlement (just north of Perth) back home to Jigalong. The journey lasted about nine weeks and covered over 1200 kilometres. For the most part they travelled through country they had never visited. And throughout the journey they had to hide because they were being hunted by police as escapees from the Native Settlement.

Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara) is the daughter of the oldest girl, Molly (we are only given the girls' European names, although apparently they belong to the Milangka section (p. 76)). She has written the story based on her mother's and her aunt Daisy's recollections and on examination of Government papers and newspaper articles of the time.

The book divides into four parts. The first part is a fantasy reconstruction of the encounters between Nyungar and Europeans in the early days of the settlement at Albany. The second part is a reconstruction of the movement of Aboriginal people into Jigalong, and appears to be based in part on family history. It provides the family background for the three girls, who had Aboriginal mothers and European fathers. The third part consists of the journey and the events that led directly to it. The conclusion tells briefly of what happened to the girls.

The extraordinary nature of the journey makes the description of that journey the strongest part of the book. Pilkington (Garimara) makes the story her own, adding in her own perceptions of the changes in landscape, especially of vegetation, that the girls noticed during the trip, as well as interpretations of what the girls must have felt. She imagines conversations, rendering them in a mixture of standard English, Aboriginal English and words from Aboriginal languages. She presents a fairly even-handed account of the abduction of the girls, noting the Superintendent's concern that the girls were being teased by the other children for having white fathers. She describes their encounters with people on the trip, and their homecoming (includingly, amazingly, a warm bath when they reached their aunt's camp on a cattle station).

In general Pilkington (Garimara) tells the story without much authorial comment, allowing facts and Government records to speak for themselves. An example is the sad irony that Molly, having saved herself and her younger sister from Moore River Native Settlement, then lost her first child Annabelle to Sister Kate's Children's Home in Perth and has never seen her again. Another example is the way in which a black tracker used to track down runaways from the home, and a 'muda muda' stockman wanted to turn the girls in. Occasionally Pilkington (Garimara) does interpolate comments, sometimes inaccurately, as for example the statement that in the boarding-schools for wealthy Europeans the children were 'likely to be given pleasant rooms that would be theirs for the duration of their schooling' (p. 72).

The story is written in the style of an Australian young adult book, and some readers will find the hackneyed writing in the descriptive passages offputting. Moreover, it is not always clear what parts are Pilkington (Garimara)'s reconstructions and what parts come from her mother's and aunt's stories. The story deserves telling again



in different ways. The range of readers could be extended, by publication of Molly and Daisy's Martu Wangka versions, (both for children and for adults), and also of their Aboriginal English versions.

There is a map which would be improved by the addition of a distance scale and by marking Moore River Native Settlement on it. There is a glossary of words from Aboriginal languages used -- we are told that these words are from 'Mardujara'. The publishers and the author are not familiar with the spelling systems used for writing Martu Wangka languages such as Manjiljarra. As a result the words are spelled inconsistently, based mostly on English spelling. Words of Aboriginal English such as 'pink-eye time' are also included.

Such criticisms aside, we must be grateful to Pilkington (Garimara) for bringing to light this epic journey. It was indeed a 'most wonderful trek' as Arthur Hungerford, the Jigalong Protector of Aborigines described it (p. 124). It would make a wonderful film.

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*Writing on the Backs of the Blacks: Voice, Literacy and Community in Kriol Fieldwork.* By Mari Rhydwen. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia 1996. x, 185 pp. ISBN 0 7022 2890 7. \$22.95

The author of this book, Mari Rhydwen, did her undergraduate studies in England, and gained her PhD from Sydney University, and now lectures at Murdoch University. English-speaking schoolmates shamed her into losing Welsh, her first language, and she thinks that perhaps her distress at this realisation was part of the motivation for working with Aboriginal people with endangered or lost traditional languages. Her book is a disturbing one, in much part, I feel, because she faces many of the entangled issues arising from both negatively prejudiced attitudes towards language, culture and people of many (pastoralists, administrators and educators) and well-intentioned (but perhaps at times counterproductive) work and attitudes of many others (administrators, educators, linguists and missionaries) to educate, mitigate or undo the negative outcomes of past history.

It is also a vaguely depressing or depressed book. Unlike some books that present us with possible very destructive outcomes of the way humans behave (environmentally, or socially) its final chapter does not attempt to convince the reader that there is light at the end of the tunnel if only we can in sufficient numbers pursue a certain course.

The book arose from work she was doing over a time of personal disruption for her through a marriage breakdown (though she gives due credit to her husband/ex-husband amongst those who offered advice and suggestions), and the Preface begins with the recounting of a dream which made her aware of the inner conflict her work was causing her. I do not feel she found a real resolution of it. Nor do I see a resolution to some of the issues she raises. It is an uncomfortable book, and for finding resolutions or accommodations in the long term we need a few such uncomfortable books.

Rhydwen worked in Kriol or creole-speaking areas of the Northern Territory, somewhat to the north of where I had worked in Kriol-speaking areas, and some 25

years later than my basic research in that area. In that time Aboriginal self-assertion has grown enormously, and Aboriginal control over who visits and works in research has taken over from Government Welfare Branch and cattle station manager control. Not only in the eastern states has Aboriginal suspicion of white researchers, their motives and their profit, and Aboriginal desires to keep their own worlds private become stronger, but this is increasingly being felt in remoter areas of the Northern Territory. Rhydwen states (pp. vii, viii) 'I decided to include writing about the experience of being a non-Aboriginal academic doing linguistic work on Aboriginal languages in Australia in the 1990s and the relationship between my socio-political role as linguist and the kinds of knowledge I acquired.' The problems and issues she discusses increasingly need to be faced.

After a Preface, where Rhydwen recounts her dream and the issues it brought awareness of, the book has ten chapters, a select bibliography, and an index. The chapters are:

1. Introduction
2. Church, State and Kriol Literacy
3. Kriol Communities
4. The Language Situation at Nauiyu Nambiyu (Daly River)
5. Writing: A human Rite
6. Variation in Kriol Literacy
7. Kriol and Control
8. Rabbit Creek Road
9. 'Any Story told Twice is a Fiction'
10. Ending

Rhydwen has a bias, which she is fair in acknowledging, of antagonism, dislike, or disapproval (call it what you will) of missionary work, but as she acknowledges, for any one who listens and observes and tries to work in 'the field', issues are not clear cut, and there has been good, as well as bad, outcomes of missionary and government policies and activities. She states (p. 164):

I have often been encouraged to believe that Kriol has been an American-based, white, male, imperialistic Christian-fundamentalist plot to deracinate Aboriginal Australia, and had I been able to prove it I would have done so. In reality, the activities of SIL (the Summer Institute of Linguistics) with regard to Kriol seem to have been neither more sinister nor more benign than those of any other institution involved with linguistic work and education in the Northern Territory, and although it is an SIL researcher who named and documented Kriol, its origins were laid down when the English first arrived in Australia. Pidgin English has been spoken since the arrival of the first fleet and Kriol is just the most recent manifestation of the linguistic changes caused by social upheaval. If the development of Kriol had been a conspiracy perhaps it would have been more successful.

Contrary to the information Rhydwen conveys in her book, it was an Australian female (myself) who (as far as I know) first documented the language we now call Kriol (formerly called 'Roper Pidgin'). The name Kriol was indeed settled on by an American male Christian, a member of SIL, but like other changes of name, it was in an attempt to avoid the negative connotations of 'pidgin', and to clarify that it was different from standard English (speakers often referred to it as Inggilij) that it was done. What's more,

it was I who first encouraged John Sandefur (the American SIL member) to work on Roper Pidgin before he even arrived in the Northern Territory. I am implicated in all the outcomes, good and bad, of linguistic work on 'Kriol'—although I am sure if I had not been involved, the time was ripe for others to have 'discovered' and researched the pidgins and creoles of the area—and launched the work of a Sandefur. I do not get a mention in Rhydwen's book, although we met during her work.

Rhydwen's initial research agenda came from her interest 'in the idea that people from literate cultures were different from those from oral ones, as Aboriginal cultures had been until the arrival of European colonisers' (p. vii). Her work began in the mid 1980s; Bilingual Programs had been started in many schools in the Northern Territory just over ten years earlier, and she was interested in researching 'the effects that the recent introduction of literacy was having on previously oral languages' (p. vii). Her confidence in what she was doing dwindled, but rather than abandon her work, she focused also on the experience of being a non-Aboriginal academic doing linguistic work on Aboriginal languages in Australia in the 1990s and the relationship between her socio-political role as linguist and the kinds of knowledge she acquired. She found other colleagues were frequently confronted by the same issues, which are of central concern to theorists in a number of disciplines.

One of the constraints Rhydwen elucidates is that of kinship in Aboriginal Australia. Even on the east coast of Australia, where the accepted newcomer is not given a kinship designation, it becomes clear that those to whom one 'relates' in one's work are a subset of the total community. In the Northern Territory the subset is determined by how you are related to those in the community, and the obligations to one group and the circumspection in dealing with another, as laid down in the accustomed kinship relationships. Obtaining the whole picture involves extrapolation, with the uncertainties this brings. Obligations to the community, to the individual real people, can clash with those towards the funding bodies and the requirements of doing PhD research. From other accounts and my own experience, it is clear that this is an increasing problem faced by researchers in Aboriginal Australia and in other ethnic and social groups in Australia. While this may be a source of regret to the ardent researcher, it is progress in that decisions are being made by those who might be subject to research.

Rhydwen runs up hard against the problem of the definition of a 'language'. What linguists would describe as dialects or dialectal variation in one language, the speakers, for local and wider political reasons, would insist are different languages. In my experience, the differences between the creoles spoken at Halls Creek, Barunga, Ngukurr, and Borroloola are easily tuned in to, and there is no real barrier to communication. Yet Aboriginal people from these different areas, and from Nauiyu Nambiyu (Daly River) are adamant that their 'languages' are 'different'. In addition, the spelling chosen for Barunga or Ngukurr Kriol is not perfect for other areas (or even for Barunga and Ngukurr), any more than English spelling is perfect for anyone's English. A number of questions arise, and Rhydwen discusses these, particularly in her central chapters (pp. 4-6).

Firstly, while there has been some standardisation of Kriol spelling for use in the Kriol *Holi Baibul*, a fair variation in spelling of Kriol (or the various creoles) has been permitted, even at times encouraged. While throughout its many variants in North Australia, the creole or creoles have similar phonology, there are a few differences car-

ried over from the traditional languages. In particular in the Nauiyu Nambiyu area the creole differs in phonology from that of the Ngukurr area. Also, Nauiyu Nambiyu people are not keen to promote their Ngan'giwatyfala as a language for literacy, nor do they accept it as 'the same' as Kriol. Some of its phonology is linked to the traditional languages of the Daly River area, and differs from the phonology of Barunga and Ngukurr Kriol.

Secondly, there is very little community need for written matter in Kriol. Communities are reasonably small, and in them spoken communication fulfils most functions. Increasing use of the telephone (as well as the older two-way radio) means speech is used for much communication between communities and within a community. For communication with the wider world or with officialdom, English (written and spoken) is used. Written Kriol is only used occasionally for written notices within the community, and such notices would probably have the same impact if written in 'fruit-martese'—that type of sometimes misspelt English often seen on notices outside shops. A carefully and rigorously worked out orthography is not necessary for such notices to be effective!

Thirdly, Rhydwen takes issue with the estimate of 15,000–20,000 speakers of Kriol. In part this is because Kriol is not uniform, and in part because for many, it is not a creole in the sense of their first language, but a pidgin mutually intelligible with the various creolised variants spoken in the north.

Rhydwen also raises the problem of the promotion of literacy as a basic human right. Here she notes the belief in Western culture that literacy is a basic cognitive tool and comments on its impact on oral cultures, 'fragmentary remnants of a cultural diversity that is rapidly shrinking' (p. 6). Literacy, like the presence of the observer, changes what was there. Literacy, as taught, is not value neutral either; wittingly or unwittingly literacy instruction pushes a cultural bias. It may empower; it may disempower. Or it may, in the hands of the 'underdogs' been seen by the governing group as a threat to a particular *status quo*, or 'too much education' for the masses may be seen as 'a bad thing'.

Rhydwen's chapter 2 is an excellent summary of the impact of church and state in the development of literacy. She discusses various reports (the Watts, Tandy, McGrath report and the Hale-O'Grady report) briefly, and to what extent their recommendations were followed, as well as critically evaluating their recommendations. Chapters 4–6 are central to her concern about orthography and the variation in the creole(s), and for some readers perhaps they are a bit longwinded on this issue. But, if not such easy reading as other chapters, they supply necessary data. Chapter 3 talks about the contexts in which Kriol was used, and what triggered the use of Kriol or English to her. Chapter 4, on the Nauiyu Nambiyu situation, goes into some detail on orthographical questions. Chapter 5 looks at the creole-speakers' preferred way of punctuating texts, which, Rhydwen found, was almost identical to the conventions used in English, even though she showed them other conventions. The chapter on Kriol and Control has a nice description of 'Backwards Kriol', which is modelled on one of the various 'pig-Latins' known for English. Chapter 8, 'Rabbit Creek Road' (Rapid Creek, in Darwin) discusses the problems of assigning some words to either English or Kriol, with, in many cases, a change of spelling, when there is no cogent reason to differentiate them. A Kriol speaker, Rhydwen found, would assert such a word was Kriol, whereas an English

speaker would assert it was English. In her teaching at Batchelor College, Rhydwen found students much more able to transcribe 'Kriol' written 'English-way' into Kriol spelling (though they did not all choose the same spellings) than to understand some texts written 'Kriol-way', citing *dimbagem* 'timber camp' as one of the extreme examples of problems (it could also be written *timbakemp* or otherwise). She concludes this chapter (p. 137):

Kriol speakers also read English for pleasure and in later visits to Kriol-speaking communities I witnessed more reading than I had previously; for example older men had copies of farming magazines and younger men and women had books in their camps. People often read such material to find out what is happening outside their immediate environment. This kind of material, produced for a wide audience in English, is what people want to *read*. If they want to know local stories or local news they *listen*. In view of this, it may be time to consider whether Kriol literacy is really necessary (emphasis added).

Chapter 9 contains a number of accounts, using pseudonyms, for composite characters based on her experiences (the communities are also kept anonymous), which illustrate some of the interactions and problems she faced, including when to use Kriol, and chapter 10 summarises what she has learnt. Chapter 10 also raises the issue of naming a 'language', creole or other, which creates a 'thingness' (to use her word) which is not necessarily there. (This issue also comes up in naming languages elsewhere, for example that spoken from the Gold Coast down almost to Grafton, for which there was traditionally no general name.)

There are a number of her statements that I feel introduce an unnecessary bias, although on reflection the bias is small. On p. 1 she states 'the introduction of literacy in both English and the vernacular in Aboriginal communities has been the result of a conscious attempt...to deliberately change Aboriginal patterns of language use.' I doubt if this was explicitly in mind by many who introduced literacy, who, it seems on my reading, to be more from a conscious desire to 'save souls', or change 'the primitive culture', especially in earlier times. On p. 27 she quotes a suggestion (not her own) that 'SIL has been keen to promote Kriol in order to facilitate Bible translation because of the enormity of the task of translating the scriptures into all surviving Aboriginal languages'. As I saw it, SIL was reluctant to start studying the creole(s), and a number who initially invested many of their years on traditional languages reluctantly had to concede that a creole had taken over as the main mode of communication. As this change was well under way by the time Rhydwen began her work, and SIL workers had responded with much more enthusiasm to the existence of Kriol, it is easy to understand how such a suggestion might be floated.

In all, the book is a worthwhile addition to the University of Queensland Press's growing publication list on Aboriginal language and culture.

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*Language in Evidence: Issues confronting Aboriginal and multicultural Australia.* Edited by Diana Eades. UNSW Press, Sydney 1995. xii, 289 pp. ISBN 0 86849 119 6 \$29.95.

Eleven authors, with expertise in the law and/or linguistics, and mostly employed in universities or tertiary institutions, have contributed to the ten chapters that make up the body of this book. I have heard four of the authors present in seminars the material they present in this book, and enjoyed 'hearing their stories' again. The whole book shows that while there has been much progress in awareness and catering for language difference in the courts, there is still much that needs to be changed, much that needs to become standard procedure.

The book is written for the hypothetical ordinary person, and does not presuppose expertise in linguistics or the law. The chapters are well written, and are organised into three general areas: Language in Court, Linguists in Court, and Offensive Language, as follows:

*Part 1: Language in Court*

1. International law, natural justice and language rights in Australia, Greta Bird, associate professor of law, Southern Cross University
2. Silence in court! Problems and prospects in Aboriginal legal interpreting, Russell Goldflam, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs
3. Aboriginal evidence in the cross-cultural courtroom, Michael Cooke, lecturer training Aboriginal interpreters at the Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics, Batchelor College
4. Tainted evidence: literacy and traditional knowledge in an Aboriginal land claim, Michael Walsh, lecturing in linguistics and Aboriginal studies, University of Sydney

*Part 2: Linguists in Court*

5. Linguistic evidence accepted in the case of a non-native speaker of English, Marie-Thérèse Jensen, lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University
6. Aboriginal English on trial; the case for Stuart and Condren, Diana Eades, senior lecturer in linguistics, University of New England, Armidale
7. What got lost? The place of electronic recording and interpreters in police interviews, John Gibbons, senior lecturer, Dept of Linguistics, University of Sydney
8. Linguistic analysis as evidence of speaker identification: demand and response, Heather Bowe, senior lecturer, Dept of Linguistics, Monash University, and Kate Storey, research consultant, Speaker Identification Consultancy Unit, Linguistics Dept, Monash University, also teaching in the Dept of Languages, Interpreting and Translating, Deakin University

*Part 3: Offensive Language*

9. Offensive language: a legal perspective, Bill Walsh, barrister
10. Offensive language: a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective, Brian Taylor, associate professor of German and director of the Language Centre, University of Sydney

The book has an introduction by Diana Eades, lists of 56 cases and 23 statutes cited, an extensive bibliography, and an useful index.

It is only quite recently that the issues of non-native English speakers in court proceedings in Australia has received much attention or study, although, as Eades shows

by quoting the Stuart case from early 1959, there was at least one case of a linguist presenting evidence much earlier. On the international front, an International Association of Forensic Linguists is only recently established with its own journal *Forensic Linguistics* (Routledge). In Australia and elsewhere, linguists may advise on needs for interpreters in the courts, on sociocultural differences in language use, and on voice identification from recordings.

In *Language in Evidence*, Bird's chapter sets the Australian scene, with its delineation of factors behind the reluctance to guarantee language rights, and describes positive developments that might bring substantive change in the 1990s. Bird states at the outset (p. 3):

Australia may be the most multicultural nation on earth; its citizens come from many cultural groups and speak a multitude of languages. The nation's legal system is based on the principle of *equality before the law* (author's italics) for all citizens and the Australian government has ratified international conventions and passed legislation, such as the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986* (Cth) designed to remove barriers to equality based on race, ethnicity or gender. In spite of this commitment to the worthy principle of equality and the passage of anti-discrimination legislation, language rights are not fully guaranteed in legal proceedings in Australia. The failure to guarantee these rights means in practice that 'it is futile to assert that persons are equal before the law'.

Bird's chapter is a foundation for all that follows. Goldflam's chapter takes this further into issues involving Aborigines, and looks at many of the issues from the point of view of the Northern Territory legal practice. Here the need for interpreters is recognised, especially under the Anunga rules, yet there is still very scanty use of interpreters, for a number of reasons discussed by Goldflam. The next two chapters focus on cases involving Aboriginal defendants and witnesses, from authors who were directly involved in court hearings on criminal matters and on land claims. Michael Cooke's account of a Coronial Inquest in 1990-1991 into the circumstances surrounding the killing of an Aboriginal man with a history of mental illness by police in the attempt to apprehend him highlights a number of disturbing issues arising from imperfect awareness of sociolinguistic and cultural rules in Aboriginal interaction on the part of lawyers involved, the inadequate use of interpreters, and the naive belief of some of the legal profession that 'word for word' translations give a true and adequate picture of what was said. Michael Walsh shows the paradoxes and complications that occur when a judging body has to assess information gained from different types of Aborigines, who Walsh points out, range from those fluent in a traditional language, living out of town in a remote area, whose closest approximation to English is a pidgin or creole, to those living in town, speaking standard English, literate (perhaps with university degrees), whose knowledge of traditional beliefs, practices and sites has been gained by reading or taking notes at meetings with the first type of Aborigines—in the same way as the anthropologist or linguist may have gained information. To government representatives, literacy and traditional knowledge have been regarded as in opposition. While in the legal system, the written transcript or written records are regarded as the definitive evidence, written submissions or evidence presented by Aborigines was ironically considered suspect. As Walsh points out, cases like the Kenbi claim, submitted by Aborigines, many of whom were thoroughly literate in English, and with similar living style to white city-dwelling Australians, will be increasingly submitted by similarly accultur-

ated Aboriginal groups in the more populated parts of Australia. Some in the legal profession and out of it find it hard to credit that such Aborigines have any 'tradition' of their own.

In Part 2, Jensen and Gibbons discuss cases where non-Aboriginal people with limited English were disadvantaged in legal proceedings, looking at the need for interpreters, the usefulness of analyses of proficiency in English, style and grammar. Appendices to Jensen's and Gibbons's chapters give the transcripts, PRIs (Police Record of Interview) and translations into English of interviews conducted with interpreter help. Bowe and Storey discuss the work of linguists in assessing the probability that two tape-recorded voices are of the same person. In all these areas linguists have been increasingly recognised as expert witnesses. This part also includes Eades's account of the cases of two Aboriginal men gaoled for murders: the Condren case, in which she acted as an expert witness, and the Stuart case of 1959, where Strehlow, fluent both in English and Stuart's mother tongue (Arrernte) gave evidence. Both men were convicted on the basis of police 'verbals'; both claimed innocence and appealed their sentences; both spent years in gaol before release, Stuart after serving a life sentence. In both cases, the linguistic evidence was clear that the accused could not have composed or dictated the alleged confession, which was couched in a style of English quite foreign to them. Strehlow's evidence, though convincing to us now, was discounted at a time when far less was understood of sociolinguistics and less known about Aboriginal forms of English; Eades's evidence was at length taken into account.

Part 3 consists of two chapters, the first a legal perspective and some history of changes in definitions and applications of the criminal offence of 'offensive language', and the second, an analysis and classification of swearing and the language of abuse, with a number of accounts of charges laid and opinions offered by judges and others, presented in Taylor's inimitable style. It is clear from both these chapters that working class and Aboriginal people are more likely to be charged with using offensive language, and professional people less likely so, and if charged, are more likely to have the charges dropped. What is also clear, is that what is regarded as swearing is rather tightly linked (or was so) to social class and status, as well as setting and interlocutors or hearers. Taylor points out that from the first white 'settlement' of Australia, Australia has had a reputation for its swearing, and Taylor comments on

the genius of the swearing system of English, certainly of Australian English, in the combining of the figurative uses of swearwords at the various taboo levels with a whole host of sentence types, whose meanings and levels of social acceptability are completely lost on anyone who has not grown up in the society that uses this sort of language. Other languages, for example German, which is related to English and some of whose swearwords, such as *Scheisse* for *shit* and *Arsch* for *arse*, are from the same origin as ours, do not have this same degree of complex interaction of the vertical and horizontal axes (i.e. literal meaning and grading of acceptability, both literal and figuratively) in their swearing language that English has (p. 224-5).

In his appendix, Taylor lists (with examples) 23 constructions where swear words or quasi-swear words (corresponding to his vertical axis) can be inserted to add vehemence or otherwise modify the meaning of the utterance. I include three examples (pp. 256-8).



**Pseudo-simile:** *as* + adjective = *as* + 'S'-noun = 'extremely'.

He's as lazy as shit.

**\*Pseudo-imperative:** 'S'-verb + noun/pronoun = indication of anger towards the person or thing referred to.

Fuck this pen! It won't write!

**'S'-word/phrase + (tag) assertion = negation of interlocutor's (A's) assertion.**

A. You cash cheques here, don't you?

B. Pig's arse (we do/we cash cheques). (= We certainly don't (cash cheques).)

Taylor describes how the ABC's 1992 documentary 'Cop it sweet' showed how young police routinely told anyone standing around to 'Fuck off', then arrested a mildly inebriated man for telling *them* to 'Fuck off'. The man was incredulous that they considered this swearing. Taylor shows how in many cases police reaction escalates a relatively minor situation into a major confrontation. The account I enjoy most in this chapter is the case where a man was fined in a Lismore court. In the presence of the Federal Minister for Land Transport, he used words to the following effect 'But what about the roads, mate? They are shit!' An appeal judge (and apparently the magistrate informally) considered it was a fair description of the roads! (Having travelled in that area about that time I recall one section of road that well fitted his description, and bore a sign which showed the locals thought so too.) The judge also was reported as having said that 'a word could not be offensive if it was used 50 million times a day in NSW' ('Dirt roads', *S-H*, 25 November 1996) (p. 234).

Taylor also makes a good case suggesting that for many Aboriginal people, our commonly used swear words referring to bodily functions and sexual organs are mainly used only as vehemence words (his 'S'-words), as (even where only English is spoken by them) traditional language words are widely used for such bodily functions and sexual organs. Not only Aboriginal people, but many whites also, use such words almost exclusively for vehemence.

This is a very worthwhile book.

Margaret Sharpe  
University of New England

*Aboriginal Enviromental Impacts*. By James Kohen. University of New South Wales Press, Sydney 1995. Pp.160. \$27.95.

It is possible both visually and from historical records to measure much of the human impact on the Australian environment during the past 200 years. The overall loss of trees, land erosion, the growth of cities and their suburban and industrial landscapes providing all manner of pollution to the air, rivers and surrounding seas to mention but a few. How to measure human impact on the continent for the thousands of years that preceded the arrival of the eighteenth century seafarers with home ports in Asia and Europe is more difficult. Aimed at the general reader Kohen's book attempts to establish the record of human impact by demonstrating a sequence of events, derived in the most part from archaeological and palynological records. The front cover of the book depicts fire, a theme which is central to his argument.

The timing of the arrival of the first inhabitants is given at about 50,000 years ago when low sea levels had increased continental and island land mass and reduced sea distances if island hopping. Timing of subsequent arrivals is not resolved until the arrival of the dingo about 4,000 years ago with a suggestion based on morphology of some isolation in the intervening years. However, during the intervening period 46,000 year period dates are given which place humans in the now arid and semi-arid desert areas on the mainland and in the forests of Tasmania. That the lead up to glacial maximum and the subsequent amelioration of climate would have been a slow process allowing for human adaptation to changing conditions and their presence in possibly un hospitable areas is not addressed. Similarly, neither is the continuing change of climatic conditions since sea level stabilisation and the gradual desertification of much of the continent. Estimates of population away from riverine and coastal areas are not discussed.

Mega faunal extinction is presented with discussions on tools, dwarfing, global extinction, climate, possible habitat, fire, overkill, trophic cascade and 'three conflicting models of mega faunal extinction' without a conclusion. That they survived at Trinkey until c7000 years ago indicates a late extinction and a long period of co-existence with the human population.

Hunting, gathering, the changing tool kit and its timing across the continent, leads the reader into the subject of intensification with the theory proposed by Lourandos based on Victorian data accepted. Increased population density equated with increased impact on the environment. There is a suggestion that remains of structures and eel-traps proliferate over the landscape as an indication of new technology and intensification whereas in fact they are restricted to a small area.

Fire is a theme which Kohen returns to many times and is the major environmental impact. The remains of fire show in the palynological record and archaeological sites. Ethnography informs of the mosaic burning carried out to promote growth and from this animals attracted to the new growth areas and availability of protein when the animals are killed. Destruction of mega fauna habitat by fire could have been a factor in their demise. Denudation by fire can cause soil erosion which in turn can cause silting. The pattern of fire management appeared to be beneficial to the environment. European fire hazard management allows for the reintroduction of plants and a subsequent reservoir of fuel for burning. The fire theme appears in most chapters.

Overall data are cited in a general way with perhaps further explanation required. For example, page 66 mentions prohibition on the size of shellfish collected, and mentions adults not eating fruit which falls to the ground. In the first instance this is considered as a conservation mechanism, no explanation is given for the second example. When women collect yams the burying of part of the yam is considered as another possible conservation mechanism, it is not until page 116 that this might be considered as incipient agriculture. There is a repetition of sub-themes with perhaps slightly different data. For example, on page 23 'the earliest dingo remains are not more than 4000 years old.' By page 86 'Archaeological evidence shows that it was established in parts of Australia by 3-3500 years ago'. Suggestions that north Australian axes may be 31,000 years old rates an exclamation mark but not a reference (page 71). The trading and sowing of seeds (page 116) also merits a reference. Andrew Cockburn on reduction of fire frequency and the decline of pseudomyine rodents (page 130) has an incorrect citation.

No maps are provided to assist the reader to locate the many sites and areas referred to. A table showing tool assemblages and their change through time would provide a focus for the various comments on tools. The change in size and attributes from say a Kartan artefact to a microlith might be easier to visualise with a few line drawings.

Doreen Bowdery  
The Australian National University

*The Son of Jimmy.* By Jack Gibbs, Historical Society of the NT, Darwin, 1995, 122pp. \$14.00. ISBN 0646233076. Available from the Society, PO Box 40146, Casuarina NT 0811.

This book is a light editing of transcriptions, ordered chronologically, of Jack Gibbs' tape recorded yarning.

He was born in 1918, the son of James Boland Gibbs (died 1963) of St Vidgeon station in the Gulf, and Nellie Narlilwarra, a Mara and Wandarang woman. He learned to be a stockman from his father, then worked around the Northern Territory and east Kimberley. He tells his tale in twenty-six short chapters such as 'Poddy dodging at Tipperary', 'Roper Valley to Alice Springs with horses', and 'Mustering at Aileron'. There are sixteen photographs. From 1948 he and his wife Nancy Croft were on and off at the Channel Island Leprosarium, then from 1954 the East Arm Hospital, until it closed.

The A4 size book with his fine colour portrait on the front is a good evocation of his life, 'the story of a yella fella, born in the bush and working on cattle stations and travelling all around'.

D.G. Nash  
The Australian National University

*A Life Together, A Life Apart. A History of Relations between Europeans and Aborigines.* By Bain Attwood, Winifred Burrage, Alan Burrage and Elsie Stokie. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1994. Pp. xiv + 232. \$24.95 pb.

Bain Attwood has done a great service to Aboriginal historical scholarship in editing the 'oral narratives' or reminiscences of Winifred, Alan and Elsie, the daughters and son of Charles and Elsie Burrage who managed or taught on three Aboriginal reserves in New South Wales between 1917 and 1940. The book is organised in three parts, a substantial historical introduction, the body of the work which presents memories of life on the Sevington, Cummeragunja and Moonahcullah stations, and an essay which attempts to assess the oral narrative as a reliable source for reconstructing history.

As might be expected the introduction places the narrative firmly in the context of protectionist government policy, the appalling negative side of which has led to so much present outrage, anger and recrimination. In a period when many managers were often poorly selected and acted harshly and unfeelingly the Burrages stand out as highly motivated and dedicated officials imbued with a missionary spirit. Currently managers such as the Burrages are condemned for their paternalism and their attempts

to 'persuade Aborigines to become white' though that was the approved policy of the day.

Since the renaissance of Aboriginal activism in the late 'sixties it has become difficult for the present generation to imagine how much defeatism and submissiveness fed the prejudices of officials who did not have the missionary idealism of the Burrages. Even when I was laying the groundwork for starting *Aboriginal History* in 1968 a senior and much respected anthropologist attempted to dissuade me on the grounds that such a publication would raise public expectations and the Aboriginal people would not live up to them. Fortunately he revised his opinions as a result of the growing activism. Joyce Mercy told me how she and others in her generation had passively accepted that they were supposedly backward in relation to white children until a dedicated school-teacher made them stay back after school until they had caught up with the others of their age. This was not making Aborigines white; it was making them equal.

In a time less concerned with grievances and reconciliation Attwood might well have placed the story of the Burrages in the Congregational tradition: Samuel Clode who instructed the Sydney Aborigines before his murder in 1799, the Hassalls who taught Aborigines in their Sunday Schools, L.E. Threlkeld at Lake Macquarie, George Taplin at Point McLeay, J.B. Gribble in the Riverina (afterwards with the Anglicans in Western Australia) and the London Missionary Society in the Torres Strait between 1870 and 1915. The Congregational missionary tradition was egalitarian and democratic in theory. Charles Lionel Burrage belonged to this tradition. His family had been 'staunch Congregationalists' for generations and he himself was ordained a Congregational minister in 1909. There was even a family tradition that they were related in some way to the great missionaries David Livingstone and Robert Moffat, and Charles Burrage's elder sister was a missionary in South India.

Apart from a number of letters written by Mrs Elsie Burrage to her family in 1917, the reminiscences consist of a narrative of life at Sevington and a postscript covering the later years by Winifred and a transcript of seven interviews by Bain Attwood with the three Burrage siblings held between November 1985 and February 1987. That Attwood almost agonises over the place of oral history may seem strange to historians trained to assess all types of evidence and who are painfully aware that any historical reconstruction can only approximate to what took place in the past, yet some of the issues raised in the terminal essay clearly justify the excursus. His informants had particularly sensitive consciences since they would not even read the intimate letters of their parents and were loath to offend both Aborigines and former officials.

As with all reminiscences not based on *aides memoire* memory was often faulty but the memories themselves resonate with responsibility, care, humour and affection. There are people in this story, real people, and the Aboriginal characters have a dignity often absent from those missions and reserves where an already humbled people were instructed to be humble. The book has illustrations and a map but no index. One hopes that if it is republished it is illustrated with the full complement of photographs in Alan Burrage's album.

Niel Gunson  
The Australian National University

*Torres Strait Islander Women and the Pacific War.* By Elizabeth Osborne. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press. 1997. Pp. xv + 271. \$29.95

Elizabeth Osborne's work is the latest contribution to a growing field of scholarly works devoted to understanding how Torres Strait Islanders have made and experienced their life-worlds. As a discussion of Islander women's recollections of their experiences during the second World War, it further deepens our understanding of how they, and many other Islanders, reacted to events that had such profound impacts on all Australians. Along with other recent publications devoted to Islanders, this work signals a significant turning of the scholarly wheel. Since the mid 1980s the number of published academic books devoted to Torres Strait Islanders has virtually surpassed the number of preceding works published over the past 100 years. What was once at the margins of scholarly attention has now assumed an important place in Australian literature. In part, this reflects the impact Islanders have had on national debates through issues such as the negotiations over the establishment of the Papua New Guinea-Australia border in the early 1970s, and the 1992 Mabo decision in the High Court. It also reflects the increased awareness that the inhabitants of Torres Strait have long been grappling with issues which are currently concerning the rest of Australia: identity, inter-ethnic relations, relations between Indigenous Australians and others, and the development of representative political structures which better articulate local concerns and interests.

In the context of the new dialogue between Islanders and mainstream Australians, Osborne offers a personal work, relying strongly on Islander women's recollections of their lives during the second World War. Osborne achieves this through the extensive use of quotes from Islander women. This allows the reader to engage with them more readily. Osborne balances these quotes with an analysis that seeks to explain the actions of government, church and military officials towards Islanders: these involved evacuation, enlistment and governmental policies.

This oral history methodology has much to offer, as it gives voice to those so frequently elided in historical discussions. It also requires some patience on the part of the reader, as a slow and revelatory relationship is established between reader and those speaking: tedious at worst and edifying at best. The burden for these relationships lies, as with all written works, at the level of textual structure and writing technique. However, in oral historiography, the narrative carriage also brings with it a substantial amount of analysis. Words are more often left in the mouth of the speaker, but their arrangement in relation to other's spoken words and the author's own words are crucial to meeting the oral historian's aim of resting history at the local rather than with abstractions. There is then, considerable weight put on the author's writing skills, as the structure of the text is designed to give validity to the spoken word. In pursuing this writing strategy Osborne seeks to redress the absence of speaking women in historical texts. While men are not clearly singled out as the source of this exclusion and the cross-cutting axis of race does not fall on whites, it is clear that Osborne identifies both gender and race as the two themes behind the exclusion of Islander women from Islander history. Less clear is why Osborne has chosen the second World War as the period through which Islander women should speak. Undoubtedly the events in the Pacific during the second World War had profound effects on Islanders, as Osborne and other writers note. They, with all non-military personnel, were removed from the major settlement of

Thursday Island and adjacent southern islands to places throughout Queensland. Unlike white women Islander women were treated as wards of the state and placed under the care of government and Church. Their words convey the confusion they experienced as a result of dislocation. However, an equally valid case could be put for an exploration of women's experiences during the Torres Strait pearling industry before and after the war, when gender relations were profoundly reorganised, or a more general exploration of women's migration to the mainland, to name two issues. With no clear reason for choosing this period it is difficult for the reader to assess the importance of the war in Islander women's lives as against other events and experiences in their lives.

Discriminatory evacuation and enlistment procedures are a recurrent theme in the first six chapters of the book. Interestingly, Osborne shows how anachronistic these policies were in light of the relationships Islander women were making with Islanders and non-Islanders alike prior to the war. Thursday Island was a bustling multi-ethnic town as the flourishing pearling industry attracted people from around the world. When evacuation commenced and the authorities organised the southern island's residents into groups for the ships to take out, Islanders found the evacuation procedures to be organised around race: white-black, and then internally differentiated as full-bloods and half-castes. These arrangements were the basis of the order of the evacuation, with whites first on the ships and half-castes last. By contrast, those women, children and the aged who resided on the northern Torres Strait islands were allowed to stay on their islands. As Osborne remarks, this was a curious decision, as they were likely to feel the brunt of any land invasion by the Japanese and were also regarded, as with other Islanders, as likely sources of labour for the Japanese. Osborne explains this policy as stemming from a regard by the authorities for the adverse effects arising from such a dislocation, a policy shared with respect to Melville and Bathurst Island residents. I am unconvinced by this argument as the military had shown a willingness to do whatever they thought was necessary for recruitment by reversing an earlier decision to not enlist Islander men on racial grounds, and then granting them half the pay of enlisted whites. Also, pre-war policy towards Aborigines and Islanders had rarely worried about their attachment to place, as evidenced during the war by the removal of southern island residents.

The remaining chapters focus on Islander women's experiences in Torres Strait. As with many other communities in Australia, they instituted blackouts and restricted the wearing of brightly colored clothes. Their fear of invasion seemed to be balanced by the strength of their Christian faith, expressed through prayer. Serving Islander men said that they regarded the women's faith as bolstering their own confidence. The issue of women's faith is an important one because Osborne regards it as marking a shift in Islander women's identity. Osborne argues that the development of the Mothers Union, a 'women only' organisation affiliated to the Anglican Church, allowed women to have more of a say in community affairs than tradition had previously allowed them. The critical hinge is said to be prayer. Through prayer Islander women were able to exert leadership in community and regional affairs. Small and large gatherings gave a sense of solidarity through a trying time. In addition, war-time prayer was said to continue a spiritual relationship to the corporeal and spiritual world which was common in pre-Christian religion. Hence, women gained a spiritual leadership they had not known

before. But at this point Osborne reverts to an earlier claim that this leadership was as peripheral in the Church as their influence in pre-Christian religious and ceremonial affairs.

My misgivings with this argument lie at two levels. One is the author's reliance on men and women's accounts and written sources of pre-Christian gender relations as wholly indicative of those relations. From these it would seem that women were entirely secondary in social life. However, some of what is elided or denigrated occurs because of the evaluation Christianity has made of particular practices. Sorcery and communication with spirits, practices that conferred great respect on a person, have been transformed from processes of agency into heathen beliefs. Women were participants in both, as well as being prominent in agriculture, birthing and relationships negotiated within a kinship framework. My second misgiving concerns the statement on page 170 that Torres Strait Islanders are a Melanesian people cut off from their heartland by the Australian border. This is a confusing statement as Osborne states in the previous sentence that it is important to understand religious change as amalgam of old and new practices and beliefs. The border, as it currently stands, is an open border, allowing freedom of movement within a designated area for Papua New Guineans and Islanders. Prior to its establishment in 1978 there were very few restrictions on movement between the southwestern Papuans and Islanders. The border has not stopped the flow of people, ideas, materials and beliefs. It seems that Osborne is unsure of how to account for both continuity and radical change.

There is a great deal in this book for Islanders, war historians and Torres Strait scholars. In taking women's experiences seriously Osborne reminds us that a masculine reading of history and a wholesale reliance on archival materials too often obscures the complexity of peoples' lives. By creating spaces for women to speak the explanatory sections are given depth. It is also a work about Australia, in the sense that many of the women's experiences during the war were not too far removed from those of mainland Australian women, as the northern island women kept their communities alive through difficult times and southern island women were evacuated from the region. Though this publication adds a missing dimension to the histories of Islanders and Indigenous Australian women, it ought not to be regarded as a work about memory or a series of interlocking biographical sketches. It is more historical than oral. This is a pity because despite women's voices appearing throughout the book, the expectation that we might gain an insight into their experiences beyond their words remains unfulfilled. This could have been remedied by following the lives of one or two women, and reflecting on how and why Islander women's memory has taken the forms it has.

Richard Davis  
The Australian National University

*Words of Our Country, Stories, Place Names and Vocabulary in Yidiny, the Aboriginal Language of the Cairns-Yarrabah Region.* Compiled and edited by R.M.W. Dixon. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1991. Pp. 312, xiv, maps and illustrations.

Yidiny (Y) is the indigenous language of the region which extends roughly from Cairns to Babinda, and many of the descendants of its speakers live at Yarrabah and other

towns in the area. Bob Dixon published *A Grammar of Yidiny* in 1977, and seen in that perspective, *Words of Our Country* completes his descriptive task by presenting a collection of texts and a comprehensive vocabulary. However, it also stands on its own as a paperback book which will engage the interest and attention of both popular and academic readers. For local Aboriginal people, it makes accessible a great amount of historical and cultural heritage which some caring members of their old people wished to pass on to future generations. For (local and other) non-Aboriginal readers, it presents a rich body of knowledge which contests the stereotype of traditional Aboriginal cultures and societies as being somehow 'primitive' and simple. And academic readers, whether anthropologists, botanists, linguistics, zoologists or whatever, will find in it a veritable goldmine of information and data, some of it systematised and some of it to be discovered as the gift of serendipity and other background knowledge.

Following its introduction, the book is in three major sections: stories, place names and vocabulary. The introduction provides an account of the recent history and the longer indigenous history of the region, its peoples and their language varieties, a simple account of Y phonology to enable the reader to understand and pronounce the Y forms (written in a practical alphabet) and a delightful description of Dixon's informants/consultants and how they worked together from 1970 to record as much as they could of the language and the culture and society of its speakers. Dick Moses (his main informant), Tilly Fuller, George Davis and other helpers are presented as interesting people and personalities in their own right.

The stories number twenty-four texts, and they include conventional and autobiographical narratives, as well as Storytime (Dreamtime) and current-era accounts. An interesting feature of Y conventional narration is that the narrator generally assumes the role of a main character and moves into the first person. The stories each are presented in numbered sections; the first lines are Y clauses and sentences, marked as intonation groups, the following lines are fairly close English translations with some bracketed material added to aid understanding. Notes close each text. This format is a good compromise among various possibilities, and it has the virtue of constantly associating the English translation with its Yidiny original. The stories themselves are interesting reading, and some tell of the Storytime heroes—Dammari and Guyala, Gulnyjarubay and Bindam—and how the country was formed, while others concern historical and ethnographic topics.

The short section on place names lists 140 or so place names with translations and sometimes folk etymologies, and these are presented again on two clear maps.

The vocabulary section occupies more than half the book and includes three parts: a Yidiny-English vocabulary, an alphabetical list of Yidiny words and affixes and an alphabetical English finder list. The main vocabulary is organised by semantic fields and parts-of-speech. Entries indicate dialectal affiliation and special affinal register forms. The glossing is excellent, giving both technical and popular translations, and the forms are often exemplified in appropriate sentences. Many floral and faunal species are given their proper Latinate designations, and botanists and zoologists will appreciate the systematised listings.

Throughout the book, Dixon cross-references Roth and earlier scholars' work as well as his own *A Grammar of Yidiny*. The two final alphabetical lists include cross-references to the earlier vocabulary and the grammar.



I recommend the book highly to all readers—all will find something interesting and engaging in it—and I commend the University of Queensland Press for publishing it in a paperback edition.

Bruce Rigsby  
The University of Queensland

*Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972.* By Heather Goodall. Sydney: Allen and Unwin 1996. Pp. i–xxiv, 1–421, plates, maps, notes, bibL, index. ISBN 1 86448 1498. \$29.95.

The aftermath of the Wik decision makes one wonder if there will ever be an end to the resistance that settler Australians have to accommodating the presence of the indigenous peoples they displaced in order to build contemporary Australia. Official and *unofficial* programs of massacre, dispersal and humanitarian aid have been undergirded by racist policies and attitudes which have ensured the continual exclusion of Aboriginal people from their rights as both indigenous landowners and as Australian citizens. Long structured into Australian thinking, this resistance emerges in various guises in different situations over the two centuries of colonisation. It is graphically and meticulously documented in the work of Heather Goodall, whose latest book, although focussed on New South Wales, says much about colonial and racist attitudes more broadly, both past and present. I thought I knew a lot about Aboriginal history in New South Wales, indeed much of it learned from Goodall's earlier work, but *Invasion to Embassy* is jammed packed with a century and a half of stories of effort, defeat and determination which left me dazed at the enormity of the struggle that generation upon generation have had to face in every part of the state.

What Goodall manages to convey so well is the complexity of these stories, from one time to another and one place to another as Aboriginal people responded to the local, state and national agendas which impacted on their lives. This comprehensive account blends generalised and specific histories to create a panoramic patchwork. The way in which Goodall does this, without losing the reader, is the great strength of this book. It contextualises the local in the broader picture, bunging a forceful and often confronting significance to seemingly isolated localised events, involving specific individuals and communities, but without losing the richness that comes from detailed case studies.

This approach provides the vehicle for Goodall's overall theme. This is expressed most succinctly when she begins to talk about land politics in the 1920s: 'This was a new spatial politics of exclusion and entry, defined and controlled by the incoming town whites but fought out on the very earth of Aboriginal people's own country' (p.174). Goodall sets out to demonstrate that Aboriginal people have consistently fought to regain control of at least parts of their own lands, arguing that they stayed as close to their own lands as possible, maintained a strong consciousness of their rights to land based on their prior ownership and that this has provided an important dynamic in the ways in which they responded to pressures which were at one moment assimilationist and the next segregationist. In the shifts in policy making Goodall traces the consistent demands for portions of land, demands which were expressed in various ways.

Overall, Goodall does support her thesis that Aboriginal demands for the return of and control of land has been persistent through the period of their colonisation. She also demonstrates the strong conviction that the return of lands was always understood by Aboriginal people as a right based on their prior ownership of 'this vast land which is ours by Divine Right', as put by William Cooper whose own efforts form a central motif of the book. What is not so persuasively argued is the thesis that different Aboriginal peoples were claiming the return of their own specific traditional lands rather than land in general and Goodall herself does not always address the ambiguity. There are also interpretative comments which sometimes are insufficiently substantiated by the data presented, leaving an impression that the argument might be being pushed too far. One example makes it difficult to generalise, although the picture Goodall paints is internally consistent and evocative.

Goodall's focus on relations between Aborigines and the state, rather than on the internal dynamics of Aboriginal interactions, means the thesis that people were demanding their own land, rather than land in general (and both, it would appear, were the case in different times and places) would be difficult to develop with her specific data base. But this is not to say that this was not the case. Indeed, Goodall would seem to have laid an important foundation for the next step of taking detailed local knowledge of systems of succession to land and movements of specific people through time and place so as to establish the ways in which land continued to be understood or was changed in Aboriginal perceptions.

The fine grained detail is what is so fascinating in Goodall's work. There may be a way to skim this 'magnum opus', as a colleague described it, but I found it difficult to do so as the text would draw me back into itself. It is well written and is deserving of the time it will take to read. However, it is also an example of the kind of history which is currently proving very difficult for many Australians to hear. As a laying bare of events, the majority of which have taken place during living memory, the book demands a witnessing of that history in such a way as to feel the pain and struggle which Aboriginal people in this country were and are going through. This book does not allow the luxury of locating colonisation as something that happened 200 years ago, for which 'we' have no current responsibility, but as an on-going process which started in the past and continues, and for which responsibility must be taken by those who hear this story.

The history and cultural experiences of the many different Aboriginal societies of New South Wales, whilst the subject of both anthropological and historical research in the past, have not been given much weight in comparison to other parts of Australia. Indeed, Goodall's critique of Elkin is a response to a long process of devaluation. This very accessible text should contribute significantly to bringing the Aboriginal experience of this part of Australia to the fore in public as well as in educational contexts. It celebrates the continuities and strengths of New South Wales indigenous societies whilst placing them firmly within the structures and relationships of the state - with effects which were certainly debilitating at times but which were also responded to in very creative ways as Aboriginal people sought to maintain their own sense of space and social relations.

Gaynor Macdonald  
Charles Sturt University

*From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory.* By Chris Healy. Cambridge University Press, Melbourne 1997. Pp. viii + 249. \$29.95 paperback.

Chris Healy explores six sites in which social memory has been (and is) articulated: white Australian memorials to Captain Cook (especially the cottage in Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens; Aboriginal narratives about Captain Cook; colonial Australian museums; schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (in particular local histories produced by Victorian school children and teachers in 1922); the Eureka Stockade; and captivity narratives concerning Eliza Fraser. Healy devotes a chapter to each of these topics examining various ways in which they have been remembered, memorialised, represented. His choice of topics seems to have been guided by his claim that 'the most powerful public historical narratives of Australian social memory date from the colonial period, prior to Australia becoming a nation in 1901'. It's a dubious claim. What about Anzac, for example?

More immediately what's social memory? It's a slippery concept and Healy attempts no rigorous definition perhaps because to do so would subvert the elusiveness and polysemy that he counts among its positive qualities. At the risk of oversimplifying, social memory could be characterised as a sense of the living significance of the past in the present. It is non-historicist (or anti-historicist?) in that its sense of the past is determinedly present-centred. This presentism Healy especially values, insofar as it fosters a mode of historical imagination that might lead to more truly postcolonial histories. As he comments, 'the dreams of colonialism [more dubiously he includes modernity as well] lie in ruins' (p. 1), but like ruins they still litter the intellectual landscape. Healy would like us to see and understand these traces of colonialism, not as something safely compartmentalised as 'the past' as conventional historiography allegedly does, but in something more like the presentist mode of social memory. His arguments have parallels with the work of Michel de Certeau although the latter gets only an occasional mention in the footnotes.

Like de Certeau Healy's writing is frequently obscure, his text dense, his prose tortuous. It is the obscurity not of postmodernism's playfulness but of postcolonialism's earnestness. In fairness, Healy is dealing with complex issues of epistemology, historiography, representation and remembrance. He is certainly not suggesting anything so simple as that social memory can provide a quick fix to the current problems of historiography. Rather, he is pleading for a reinvigorated historical imagination in which social (ultimately moral) purpose is given primacy over 'the facts'. His bugbear is 'positivist history', a term he (like other postcolonialist, poststructuralist, post-theorists) misleadingly applies to virtually any empirically-based historical study.

Perhaps it's in the nature of complex, abstract arguments that their proponents feel the need to construct convenient straw-men. Healy's is conventional historiography. On the first page of the introduction he declares: 'More often than not, the mission of [Australian] history has been to remember the triumph of colonising a continent and forming a modern nation state with destiny on its side'. How much longer can such caricatures continue to be trotted out to bolster the latest claim to having something new to say? Throughout the book, Healy invokes such caricatures of 'history' although it is sometimes difficult to discern which sense of the word he is invoking. In a discussion of the similarities and differences between history and memory he declares: 'History is

realist and rational, public and prosaic; it consists of disciplinary chronicles that aim to certify and tend to be universal in their aspirations' (p. 74). The irony is that this conception of 'history' is remarkably close to that put forward by conservative partisans for an alleged 'traditional' historiography, like Keith Windschuttle. Opposing judgements of value may be ascribed, but the problem with both is that historical scholarship (as I take 'history' to mean in this context) does not and did not necessarily conform to these strictures. And Healy must be well aware of the fact; his own footnotes are sufficient evidence of that. His characterisation reflects not the reality of historical scholarship but the demands of his own argument.

This raises the topic of Healy's rhetorical strategies. His book is no bland account of 'what happened when', nor a dry treatise on 'theory'. And there is no indication that Healy intended it to be. It is committed, impassioned, extravagant, imaginative. From close textual analysis he launches into extravagant speculation on history, memory and colonialism with a suddenness that I find disconcerting. Elsewhere he laces his exploration of colonial museum exhibits with assertions that are bold, to say the least, or less kindly opinionated and doctrinaire. Hyperbole abounds. I presume that these strategies are meant to be provocative, to subvert any conventional expectations of rational, restrained, orderly historical discourse. Too often it doesn't work. Too often I get the sense of an author overly concerned to display his own cleverness. His opening gambit falls particularly flat. Healy intersperses his introduction with slabs of text that appear to be entries from his own diary recounting his involvement with the Aboriginal protests at the 1988 bicentennial. I suppose this is meant to be self-reflexive. It collapses into mere self-indulgence. Perhaps irony was intended; if so it escaped me; I found it embarrassing to read.

Healy's Chapter Four, dealing with history teaching in Victorian primary schools during the first half-century after the introduction of compulsory education in Victoria in 1872, is his most successful. Or perhaps this merely reflects my own historiographic preferences, because here Healy is in his most historicist (to which word I attach no negative connotations) mode. He explains, why history was at first not taught in Victorian schools (because of its sectarian dimensions), then moves on to discuss the disputes over an appropriate school history in the late nineteenth century as nationhood loomed closer. The centrepiece of the chapter is an examination of the local histories, produced by Victorian school children and their teachers in 1922. As Healy explains his interest is in specifying 'the ways in which local historical imagination connects with and differs from the more universalist tendencies of national historical imagination'. He is particularly fascinated by the presence—sometimes prominence—of Aborigines in these local histories, commenting that this aspect is 'completely at odds with the received wisdom of a twentieth-century white historical silence about the Aborigines' (p. 123). Indeed, and one does not have to dredge social memory to find that there was no silence. For too long, Stanner's vast rhetorical overstatement of the 'great Australian silence' has been taken as literal truth. As Healy himself comments elsewhere, there has been 'a seemingly endless babble about Aboriginal people created by European Australians', which has impaired their hearing of Aboriginal voices (p. 45). But there was no white silence about Aborigines. Of course this raises the awkward question of why Healy (or any other non-indigenous Australian) would want to add to the babble; but that's too big to tackle here.

Healy's Chapter Two, 'Captain Cook and Death: Black Histories of Cook' provides some interesting explorations of Aboriginal historical narratives. His enthusiasm runs away with him in his introductory remark that 'These [Aboriginal] histories seem closer to the spirit of social memory in caring about the importance of being able to live with rather than simply accumulate knowledge about the past in the present' (p. 7). Invoking 'the spirit of social memory' seems perilously close to essentialising it; and 'simply accumul[at]ing knowledge about' the past suggests the prevalence of a perversely impoverished historiography that I, at least, have rarely encountered. After lengthy exegeses of a few Aboriginal narratives about Captain Cook, Healy's major point seems to be that these histories 'provide a powerful sense of the limits of non-Aboriginal social memory, a sense that the historical imagination of European modernity that we all inherit (although in distinctive ways) is not the only valid way of understanding the past' (p. 71). Healy is keenly aware of the dangers of over-emphasising the otherness of Aboriginal historical sensibilities; he expresses unease at the fact that he himself is appropriating Aboriginal narratives for his own argumentative purposes. His self-reflexivity on these scores is neither misplaced nor over-blown. Yet in the end it is the otherness of Aboriginal histories that secures their worth. 'In these [Aboriginal] histories we hear a whole range of alternative forms and plots which handle time/space differently, experiment with identity differently, juggle continuity and discontinuity differently and take as their structures not progress or heroism, but morality, culture, land and Law' (p. 71). Characteristically, Healy here insinuates his argument against an (unspecified) Western historiography structured around progress and heroism and by implication morally bankrupt while Aboriginal histories possess the admirable qualities of morality, culture and so forth. The implied dichotomy does justice to neither.

And that's the problem with *From the Ruins of Colonialism*. It is too diffuse, too grand; its targets are simultaneously too big and too narrow. Healy would like to open the historical imagination to new fields, to different modes of apprehending the past. That's fine. But his argument relies on the simplest of rhetorical devices: caricaturing the alternative. 'History' is reduced to a discourse of realism, rationalism, chronology, progress and triumphalism. The discursive diversity of history is repressed for the convenience of the argument. As much as I would appreciate further contribution to the critique of the strands of naive empiricism and progressivism that remain powerful in historiography, I fear that *From the Ruins of Colonialism* has little to offer in this regard. Any such contribution demands engagement with actual historical practices and theories, not belabouring an historiographic straw-man.

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'Living Under the Act': *Taroom Aboriginal Reserve 1911-1927*. By Scott L'Oste-Brown and Luke Godwin, with Gordon Henry, Ted Mitchell and Vera Tyson. Cultural Heritage Monograph Series, vol. 1. Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage, Brisbane, 1995. Pp. x + 110. p.b.

This is a fascinating exercise in local history. It recounts the brief history of the Taroom Aboriginal Reserve in central-western Queensland from its foundation in 1911 to its dis-

mantling in 1927 when the inmates were removed to the new reserve of Woorabinda some 240 kilometres away. The book's longest and most interesting section, 'Living Under the Act—Life on the Reserve' recounts the everyday lives of Aborigines at Taroom. Other sections detail the administration staffing and organisation of the reserve, the background to its establishment and eventual disbanding, and (rather too briefly) the state administrative machinery set up under the 1897 *Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. The text is enlivened with—a good selection of contemporary photographs and clear (though not always well-positioned) maps and diagrams. Four appendices provide additional data on the resident individuals and families of the reserve.

The book is based primarily on the oral testimonies of Gordon Henry, Ted Mitchell and Vera Tyson, all former residents of the Taroom Aboriginal Reserve. The acknowledgements suggest (somewhat equivocally) that two other Aboriginal persons Hubert Dooley and Heather Toby also contributed oral testimony. Oral evidence is supplemented by archival records from the Queensland State Archives and some Queensland government publications, as well as a limited range of published historical works. In the introduction the authors assert the empirical veracity of oral testimony, in a manner that may appear theoretically and methodologically naive. However it is not the authors' intention to problematise oral history. Rather, as they state in the introduction, it is to use oral accounts to show how the reserve inmates 'asserted their determination to exercise considerable autonomy in their own affairs'. In demonstrating this assertion of autonomy in the face of a massive apparatus of administrative control, the authors have been eminently successful.

Autonomy was not normally expressed in grand political gestures, although the book does include anecdotes about individuals who made a point of demonstrating to the authorities the fact that they would not be restrained. One was persistently sent to Palm Island for his misdemeanours, and just as persistently returned to Taroom within three weeks of being sent away. Another made it a point of honour to prove to the police that he always could and would escape gaol. More usually, autonomy was asserted through the daily commonplaces of life. The book recounts how the Aborigines of Taroom continued to hunt, both on and off the reserve, sometimes with, sometimes without the permission of the superintendent. Fights between Aboriginal individuals and groups were a common occurrence, and on at least some occasions the reserve officials were directed (successfully) by other Aborigines not to intervene. Traditional punishments were maintained on the reserve. Although the ultimate sanction of death was usually withheld because of potential conflict with the European legal system, the informants recounted one instance in which an alleged serious offender was judicially killed by other Aboriginal men. There is a fascinating section on death and burial. Traditional funerary procedures were followed as far as the actual grave site; there the superintendent would conduct a Christian burial service, after which 'the traditional ceremony would continue'. The Aborigines of Taroom Reserve seem to have had considerable success in carving out areas of social and cultural life away from the gaze of officials, and even where activities came under the official gaze, a good deal of success in maintaining a level of autonomy.

Yet Queensland had what was probably the most rigorously authoritarian system of Aboriginal administration of any Australian state at the time. How can we square the

remembrances of these former reserve inmates with the official pronouncements of, for example, J.W. Bleakley, who was Chief Protector through the major part of the period of this study? Perhaps they can't be squared. And this might suggest the extent of the gap between official discourses and the lived realities of peoples' lives - or should it be the remembered realities of peoples' lives? Perhaps we have come to believe all too readily that the rhetoric of senior administrators translated directly into the governance of peoples' lives. If so this book provides a welcome corrective.

The impact of the book would have been strengthened by a more comprehensive account of the 1897 *Aborigines Act* and the central machinery of its administration. Considerable detail is given—on local (Taroom) administrative arrangements, but the argument would have been better served by closer attention to central office policy and procedures. After all the book celebrates the 'ability [of reserve inmates] to maintain some degree of control over their lives in the face of a bureaucracy intent on establishing absolute authority over, and regulation of, every aspect of the residents' lives'. But the relevant bureaucracy was that based in Brisbane. To judge from the information in the book itself the petty officials of Taroom seem to have been relatively benign and/or ineffectual. To properly highlight the achievement of Taroom Aborigines in maintaining their autonomy, more detail is needed on the Act and its administration. The book devotes only two and a half pages to these issues, which fail to convey the extent to which the Chief Protector and his officials (formally) held power over Aboriginal lives.

In a few other instances, the information provided is a bit too sketchy. For example we are informed of an Arthur Conlon, an Aboriginal man of mixed descent, who 'would travel around the various reserves, missions and Government settlements making the residents aware of, and educating them about, their rights under the Act'. A remarkable individual it would seem. But I had never heard of Arthur Conlon before; neither had any of my colleagues. An Aborigine who in the 1920s wandered around the Queensland reserves telling the inmates of their rights deserves more than the scant two paragraphs devoted to him.

Local history it may be, but the book would be of relevance to anyone with an interest in the history of the institutionalisation and governance of Aboriginal people. It would also be of interest to the many Murrumbidgee who have some connection with the central Queensland reserves of Taroom and Woorabinda

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*Arguments about Aborigines: Australia and the evolution of social anthropology.* By L.R. Hiatt. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. Pp. xiv + 225. Index and bibliography. \$29.95 paperback; \$90.00 hardback.

Les Hiatt has packed an amazing amount of material into less than two hundred pages of text. His book ranges over a number of the disputes about the nature of Aboriginal society and culture that have exercised the minds of non Aboriginal scholars (and sometimes the not so scholarly) since the eighteenth century. Each chapter deals with a particular area of disputation: land ownership, marriage, the role and status of women, political organisation, religious beliefs, understandings of conception, avoidance

behaviour and initiation. All are dealt with in exemplary fashion. Hiatt's prose is clear, and his ability to explicate complex issues and arguments, without falling into over simplification, is admirable.

Although each chapter deals with a particular constellation of arguments about Aborigines, they fit together nicely as a loose limbed exploration of the evolution of social anthropology. The only exception is the prologue. Here, Hiatt sketches out the history and prehistory of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, beginning with the English anti slavery movement of the mid eighteenth century. The quality of the essay is not in doubt. But I am at a loss to understand what it is doing here. Presumably it is meant to support Hiatt's contention (in the preface) that the 'ancestry [of anthropology] is not quite as bad as [he] had been led to believe'. If so, the prologue is less than successful. Moreover, its relationship to the following chapters is at best tangential.

The dozen pages of the prologue could have been better devoted to explaining the intellectual circumstances that, from the eighteenth century onward, promoted European interest in Aborigines and thereby gave rise to the arguments of the book's title. As Hiatt remarks, these arguments originated in an assumption that Aborigines were 'exemplars *par excellence* of beginnings and early forms'. It would have been useful, then, to provide some elucidation of why nineteenth century scholars made this assumption about the primitivity of Aborigines and why primitivism was central to their anthropological endeavours. Hiatt merely makes brief reference to Darwinism in the preface, while elsewhere in the book evolutionism is dealt with more by implication than explication. These issues deserve more extended consideration, particularly in view of Hiatt's own statement that: 'All the arguments in the present collection have their own origins in the evolutionist tradition' (p.xii).

Actually, some of the arguments originated prior to evolutionism becoming the established paradigm of anthropology; all of them continued long after anthropology's shift away from evolutionism. With a skill born of long and close familiarity with these arguments, Hiatt guides the reader through their twists and turns and transformations. His perspective is that of the detached scholarly observer, offering little by way of judgement of the arguments apart from the occasional ironic observation. Even where Les Hiatt himself is the anthropological commentator under discussion, the author maintains his detachment. Each chapter, with the possible exception of the second and eighth, ends with some kind of review or summing up of its topic argument, although Hiatt avoids conclusiveness. Appropriately, all arguments are left hanging.

Of course, all the arguments with which Hiatt deals could have been expounded at greater length. The cast of argumentative contributors could have been expanded. The selection of topics of disputation could have been extended. Hiatt, however, remains within limits that allow his book to be digestible as well as informative, accessible as well as insightful. Within those limits *Arguments About Aborigines* is both comprehensive and comprehensible, making it suitable for the general reader, for the undergraduate student of anthropology, Australian history and other Australian and Aboriginal oriented studies, as well as for the specialist in those fields.

In the epilogue, Hiatt adverts briefly to issues of commitment and responsibility in anthropological research, and the relationship between Australian anthropologists and those who long provided the source material for their arguments. In his view, the



role adopted by many contemporary anthropologists, of activism on behalf of the Aborigines, represents a return to the philanthropically inspired studies of the pre Darwinian early nineteenth century. Perhaps so, but one does not need to go back a hundred and fifty years to find such parallels. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, A.P. Elkin, W.E.H. Stanner, Donald Thomson and others sought to connect their scholarship with their attempts to improve the lot of the Aborigines, however misguided their attempts may appear in hindsight. Similar comments apply to an earlier generation of anthropologists, including Walter Roth and Baldwin Spencer, although hindsight might decree an even more severe assessment of their endeavours. Perhaps the problem is that Hiatt treats this particular argument all too briefly, but he does suggest, misleadingly, that anthropological studies and the welfare of those studied were once completely disconnected and have only recently been reconnected.

Or perhaps it is the needs of his own argument. Hiatt is critical of the demand for an exclusively politically committed anthropology not, it must be noted, of the notion that anthropology may serve certain political or social purposes, merely of the insistence that it must necessarily do so. He argues (again all too briefly) that such over commitment to designated political ends would subvert 'the spirit of free inquiry' on which anthropological research is rightly based. Whether anthropology (or any other discipline) ever has been based on a spirit of free inquiry is a moot point, but Hiatt is, I think, correct in identifying postcolonial unease with the 'tainted origins' of anthropology as the inspiration for its repudiation. Indeed, insofar as this book has any polemical purpose, it seems to be to lighten the taint by showing how much anthropology has been concerned with academic disputation and how little with imperialist expansion. And if that is one of Hiatt's purposes, he has been quite successful, for the argumentative anthropologists of this book appear more as opportunistic foragers around the fringes of empire than as active participants in the colonial project

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*The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History.* By Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999, ISBN 1 86448 584 1, 375 + xxii pp, \$29.95.

Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus are well known for their contributions to Aboriginal history, where their publications have sometimes been controversial but are invariably based on thorough research. Given their shared interests and the fact that both are at Monash University, it is appropriate that they have combined their talents to produce a very useful resource. *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights* tells the history of Aboriginal political battles in many parts of Australia through a selection of documents largely created by Aborigines themselves. Many of these have not previously been published and they present important Aboriginal perspectives. Attwood and Markus note in their Preface that the book was produced 'in the belief that there is an urgent need to document the history of Aboriginal political activism, in part to enable the concerns which occupy a central place in contemporary Australian politics to be placed in historical perspective'.

The process of selection and the task of arrangement were difficult. A first attempt to short-list documents for the collection resulted in more than six hundred and this had to be 'painstakingly reduced' to two hundred. Documents are presented roughly in chronological order. A comprehensive index permits consideration of particular thematic issues such as health, land and trade unions. Key terms like 'freedom' and 'justice' are also indexed. *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights* begins with a substantial introduction. Four sections, each with an explanatory statement, follow. These deal with the nineteenth century, the 1920s to the 1950s, the 1950s to the 1970s and the 1970s to 1998. There are 41 illustrations.

The chosen documents range widely, reflecting different sources, regions, objectives and strategies. Oral histories recorded after the events they describe are not used. The 1846 petition 'of the free Aborigines Inhabitants of V.D.L., now living upon Flinders Island in Bass's Straits &c &c &c.' to Queen Victoria movingly comments that, 'Your Petitioners humbly tell Y[our] M[ajesty] that when we left our own place we were plenty of People, we are now but a little one.' Burruga, 'chief of the Aboriginal Thirroul tribe', tells *Cinesound Review* in 1933 that Aborigines require representation in the Commonwealth parliament. The activist and poet Kath Walker observes in a report of her national tour in 1962 that Aboriginal leaders must found be in each state 'because that is the missing link between the white man and the Aboriginal.' The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 26 January 1995 notes that Michael Mansell, national secretary of the Aboriginal Provisional Government, would work in his Hobart office that day, deliberately ignoring the Australia Day public holiday and nearby official celebrations. These and many other documents record in some detail a changing but continuing story of Aboriginal political activity.

As Attwood and Markus concede, some indigenous Australians are critical of white historians' attempts to present the Aboriginal past. Many Aborigines, however, are likely to join Charles Perkins, Ruby Langford Ginibi and Gallarwuy Yunupingu in welcoming *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*. Some historians will, no doubt, quibble with the book's emphases and, in particular, its omission of oral history interviews. But it still strongly reflects recent scholarly emphases on Aboriginal agency with indigenous viewpoints and voices providing the principal focus. Perhaps more convincingly than in any other publication, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights* demolishes the argument that Aborigines did not fight for political rights. It deserves a wide readership.

David Carment  
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*Prehistory of Australia*. By John Mulvaney and Johan Kamminga, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1999; pp. 480, ISBN 1864489502, pb. \$39.95

Effectively a third edition of John Mulvaney's classic synthesis, this book updates the material on Australian prehistory while maintaining the distinctive vision provided in his 1969 volume. With the assistance of Johan Kamminga, Mulvaney has once again described the findings of archaeological research using a structure that begins with an ethnographic image of life and looks backwards at the historical development of those lifestyles. While the current book has many more chapters than the 1969 first edition (23

compared to 6), the basic structure remains largely true to Mulvaney's method of archaeology in which the bones and stones of Australian archaeology are illuminated by the detail of historically recorded Aboriginal lifestyles. Depending on your view of archaeological theory and cultural continuity/discontinuity in prehistoric Australia, this methodological structure is either a weakness or the volume's greatest strength. This approach emphasises continuity and gradualism in cultural change, a view most obvious in Mulvaney and Kamminga's discussion of desert adaptations. In the central Australian deserts they opt for an image of early colonists gradually developing in situ to form the historic groupings. To achieve this view they reject interpretations of migrations, regional abandonments, new colonising and adaptive strategies in the arid zone. In particular they question the linguistic and genetic evidence for desert migrations (synthesised by McConvell), the evidence and interpretations of Veth that unoccupied desert areas were settled in the Holocene, and Hiscock's model of technological adaptations in response to desert migrations. Consequently the book consistently develops an image of Aboriginal cultures, rich in complexity and ideology, gradually adjusting to changed environmental and cultural circumstances through the long span of Australian prehistory.

This book is clearly designed to educate readers at the high school or informed public level, thereby providing a worthy competitor for the very successful introduction to Australian prehistory by Flood (i.e. *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*). Consequently *Prehistory of Australia* deals with all the major themes commonly discussed at the introductory level: what traces of ancient people remain, where people came from, when they arrived, what they were like and how they spread across the continent, how they 'conquered' the deserts, whether they killed the megafauna, how they made artefacts, how they used the coasts and colonised islands, what patterns and meaning exist in rock art, and the nature of historic culture contact. These topics are all explained in clear and non-technical language, and would provide a readable introduction to the subject for any reader. Lay readers are certain to find the abundant illustrations, the description of the variety of archaeological materials and the emphasis on rock art (3 chapters) an attractive feature of the volume.

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*Body and Soul: An Aboriginal view.* By Anthony Rex Peile (S.A.C.). Edited by Peter Bindon. Jointly published by Hesperion Press, Carlisle WA and The Pallottines in Australia, Rossmoyne, WA 1997. Pp 310, hb. \$50.00.

Father Peile had a long association with the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Although he worked primarily with Aboriginal people, he was widely known and respected by people of all races and occupations. He comes in a line of Catholic priest-scholars who, for more than 100 years, have published accounts of the languages, belief systems, social and cultural institutions of the Aboriginal people among whom they have lived in the numerous Catholic Missions in the Kimberleys. Arguably, foremost among these would be another Kimberley priest, Father E.A. Worms (SAC) who came as parish priest to Broome WA in 1930, remaining there for the next ten years. He

returned to the Kimberleys in 1948 for a further ten years. Worms published numerous articles on Aboriginal language and culture. Some of his linguistic analysis now seem somewhat dated, but the bulk of his works remains as a distinctive contribution to the documentation and understanding of Aboriginal culture.<sup>1</sup>

Father Peile came to the Kimberleys in 1959, by which time Worms was a well known and respected figure among the then small group of Australian anthropologists. In several ways Peile follows in Worm's footsteps. Worm was a bush worker, travelling with Aboriginal people in their country. Three years before his death he spent nine months undertaking research in Arnhem Land and Central Australia. Peile too travelled extensively, the maps of named places which are the endpapers to *Body and Soul* were compiled during field trips. They are only a fraction of the places he mapped. Some of the tracks followed more recently by researchers are described by locals as 'Father Peile's roads'. On visiting sites in the desert away from Balgo, one would be told, 'See father Peile, our Dad showed him this place years ago'. Above all, Peile followed Worm's position that Aboriginal views had to be explored from inside and through their own conceptual tools. In this, they were modern before their time, pre-modern if you like, rather than post-modern. Both saw that, as language was how people described the world, skills in the native language would be needed for their work. Above all both applied rigour to their work, gaining the insights they did over many years. Peile was at Balgo in the eastern Kimberleys for the best part of three decades. There he set up the Gogadja Research Centre to pursue his studies<sup>2</sup>.

Kukatja people are one of the many groups whose first language is a variety of what is often called the Western Desert Language. Kukatja's close relations are the other desert languages which are spoken as far south as Kalgoorlie. Recordings made at Cundelea and Kalgoorlie in the Western Desert dialect known as Wangkatja are readily understood at Balgo. Many Kukatja are closely related to the Pintupi people from western Central Australia. Balgo was set up as a Mission to desert people. Its short lived original location was close to Halls Creek within the Kimberley Ranges. It has been relocated several times and now sits on a headland overlooking, to the south, an enormous sea where the waves are seemingly endless sand dunes—Carnegie's 'spinifex and sand'. In this region lies the traditional home of the Kukatja, the collaborators and informants for *Body and Soul*. It is their desert bodies and desert souls that Peile reveals. In addition to its Kukatja residents, Balgo has sizeable numbers of Ngardi,

1. Among the more significant are 'Djamar, the creator: a myth of the Bad (West Kimberley), Australia'. *Anthropos*, Vol. 45 641–58; 'Djamar and his relation to other culture heroes', *Anthropos* Vol. 47, 539–60; 'Contemporary and prehistoric rock paintings in Central and Northern North Kimberley', *Anthropos*, Vol. 50, 546–66; 'Australian Mythical terms: their etymology and dispersion', *Anthropos*, 732–68. Worms died in 1963 leaving an unfinished work on Aboriginal religion which was completed for publication in German by Helmut Petri, a German anthropologist with Western Australian field experience (*Die Religionen der Sudsee und Australiens* (1986)). It was later translated into English and published as, Worms, E.A., 1986, *Australian Aboriginal Religions*, Kensington, NSW: Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit. A revised edition was published in 1998 by Spectrum Publications, Richmond, Vic.)

2. Gogadja is now written Kukatja. The earlier spelling will be encountered in the older literature.

Djaru, and other peoples. Peile worked with all these groups and while this book centres on the Kukatja much of the cultural material is equally applicable to these other groups.

While Father Peile studied the language of the Balgo people, particularly the Kukatja language, of which he acquired a rich knowledge, his primary interest was not merely understanding and documenting the language. Rather he tried to immerse himself in it to a degree where he could use his knowledge to allow the Kukatja to speak for themselves—to reveal how they perceived of themselves—as individuals who come into life and who die and who, during their life are subject to physical, emotional, spiritual forces—and how the individual seeks to exercise some control over these forces. In addition to what he learnt of Kukatja concepts of the human person and its condition, Peile was also interested in how the Kukatja language expresses the complexity of physical, cognitive and psychological states we all experience as humans. In addition he sought to understand what people saw as the underlying causes or explanations for our physical states, conditions about which we have knowledge only on the basis of observable symptoms.

Peile did not live long enough to prepare *Body and Soul* for publication. The difficult task of taking over the massive work he composed on his personal computer at Balgo, and rendering it down to a size that allowed it to be published as a single volume was undertaken by Peter Bindon. He edited out the Kukatja language content, apart from key words and the glossary, while retaining Peile's English translations of the original Kukatja. Bindon also adds occasional identified comments of his own. At the time of his death, Peile was also working on a dictionary of the Kukatja language which was completed after his death by another priest, Hilaire Valiquette. We owe a great debt to both Bindon and Valiquette for their vital contributions to giving us access to the fruits of Peile's long and dedicated work. Those of us who have seen parts of Peile's original work hope this present publication can be supplemented by access to the original with its Kukatja passages, even if only in electronic form.

In both content and form, *Body and Soul* recalls T.G.H. Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia*. Neither work would have been possible without a detailed knowledge of an Aboriginal language, in particular the fast disappearing vocabulary of the 'old people' who were born and came to adulthood in a world beyond the reach of Europeans, as discussed by Fr. Peile in his 14 page Introduction (see especially p. xix). Strehlow published a description of the Aranda language and Peile compiled a Kukatja dictionary. While Strehlow's debt to his linguistic knowledge is obvious almost from page one of *Songs of Central Australia*, Fr. Peile's is somewhat disguised in *Body and Soul* due to the editing out of the bulk of the quotes provided in the original Kukatja. While using the Kukatja and Aranda languages respectively to allow relatively unhindered access to Aboriginal people's voices reflecting on their own experience, both authors have gone to great pains to compare the beliefs of the Aboriginal people they lived among with other traditions. Sometimes this seems to detract from the points being made about the Australians, at other times it illuminates the place of their belief systems and associated behaviours within the broader context.

*Body and Soul* is a difficult work to review. In both its published and unpublished versions it contains a mass of data on a wide variety of topics. Chapter 1, entitled 'Life Cycle', covers pregnancy and birth, childhood, puberty, adulthood and death under

these sub-headings. Chapters 2 to 4 present the Kukatja view of the body: the 'Head and its Attributes', 'Trunk', and 'Internal Structures, Organs and Attributes'. Chapter 5 covers the Body's Operation, Chapter 6 Health and Sickness' and Chapter 7 the Treatment of Sickness. Then follow chapters on Animals and Health, Medicinal Plants concluding with the half page Chapter 10, Drowning and Resuscitation. In addition, there are 35 pages of references, and a further 35 page glossary, a Kukatja to English word list useful for following discussions in the main text. Several maps have been included: the endpapers are European style maps of the country around and to the south of Balgo with Aboriginal names over topographic features, while a Kukatja style map of an informants traditional country is reproduced on p. 34.

A strength of Peile's work is the detail given to poorly recorded or unrecorded aspects of life and belief. What do the Kukatja people think occurs at death? What causes it? Few Aboriginal accounts have been published. In particular it has not been centrally linked to the metaphysical, the spiritual world so often invoked in Aboriginal studies but usually left shallow, e.g., the spirit becomes a star in the Milky Way, or goes back to an ancestral waterhole or country. By comparison, read the account of death on pp. 32-3. Death occurs in a dream, 'it happens in a dream and it becomes true' Father Peile was told by Wiminytji, an elderly Kukatja man. Death occurs through evil supernatural beings (*kukurrpa*) taking a person's spirit from the body. These spirits evoke other images: two cats, one an old male and one an old female, and a butterfly which hangs around the body before death. The dead person's spirit is taken to a 'slippery hill near Jigalong' in the country of another Western Desert group where 'the evil spirits light a fire, cook the spirits of the deceased and devour them' (p. 31). These images exemplify how the Kukatja express their thoughts in a subtle interplay of related symbols which they share with each other—each one evoking a network of personal relationships, shared beliefs and common experiences. The essential difference between life and death consists in the permanent separation between an individual's body (their visible attributes) and their spirit (their invisible attribute). Peile documents the many types of events which may precipitate this permanent separation (especially in Chapters 6-7).

No other work known to the reviewers addresses such a range of topics as this does, for example, Peile has ten full pages on what Kukatja see as the 'injurious effects of arthropods' (pp. 184-94). Kukatja have told him:

In the *tjukurrpa* [Dreamtime], mites and ticks lived in areas of water, at soaks waterholes and billabongs. These water sources dried up and mites and ticks had to live where they could—in green grass, on green leaves, on man and animals. Mites, *putiny tjapiya*, which live in water in the arid interior belong to the order, Hydrachnidae. According to Kukatja mythology, these are the ancestors of all mites and ticks in the world today. (p. 194).

Chapters 6, 'Health and Sickness', and 7, 'Treatment of Sickness', are very revealing of the Kukatja view of the relationship between the physical and metaphysical aspects of a person. A state of good health or optimum well-being is described in terms of the body being 'cool' and 'dry' due to the presence of the spirit inside the body. This state is maintained by eating plenty of meat, drinking enough water, avoiding excessive heat and sweating, but also by avoiding evil forces which may come from a variety of sources. A person whose body becomes 'hot' because their spirit has been compro-

mised or even drawn out from their stomach via their feet must turn to external sources of aid to restore their 'cool' and their 'spirit'. These include the services of a traditional medicine man who has the power to see inside a person to detect the source of illness and hence extract it. In recording and analysing what his Balgo collaborators told him about the human condition or what he observed them doing or saying which threw light on their views, Peile had a number of goals. He wanted to understand some fundamental aspects of the world view of the people he lived among. He did this by recording the 'evidence' and then sifting through it and analysing it, comparing it with his own views and with those reported for other people around the world—peoples far removed in space, and often in time from the Kukatja. Peile also wanted to give others access to the mass of original data he had collected—texts, the dictionary, other linguistic and anthropological material his Balgo friends had provided him with over so many years—and to the insights he had gained. In the particular case of 'Body' and 'Soul', Peile's hope was that this information could lead to heightened understanding by outsiders of how Kukatja people perceive of themselves as individuals, as Kukatja and of the human condition generally, and that this would return benefits to the Kukatja, e.g., through more informed public policy and practice especially in health. In no way did Peile pretend to have uncovered all the answers, or to have arrived at a neat synthesis of Aboriginal beliefs or theories about the human condition. His aim was to lay out as best he could the facts available to him, and to try to understand them, to fit them together, without forcing them into any preconceived mould. Here again he was clearly the disciple of Worms of whom another priest wrote, 'He was careful about using Aboriginal terms to try to describe Christian values. For instance, he cautioned me against using the Gogadja people's word for spirit to help explain the Christian concept of soul.' (From J. Kearney SAC, Biographical note p. xiv to Worms, 1986). A reading of the section 'role of the spirit' (p. 96), among others, shows that Fr Peile would concur. Despite some similarities, the Kukatja spirit is not the Christian's soul.

In some places, his editor, Bindon, questions Peile's conclusions or points out seeming inconsistencies in the data presented. Some of the instances where it seems that Bindon felt compelled to interpose his own views or to reposition Peile's findings were probably ill-advised. For example, on p. 42 Peile discusses the Kukatja concept of intelligence and good sense and its relationship with the brain. Peile contrasts the meaning of the expression literally translated as, 'brain-without' which refers to the absence or non-functioning of that organ, and expressions literally translated as 'ear-without' *langa-parni* which have the extended or figurative meaning 'having no sense or understanding' since it is the word for 'ear' which has the extended more 'abstract' meaning, synonymous with 'intelligence' which in English is associated with the word 'brain', (as in 'he's got brains', or 'he is brainy'). Bindon's comment shows that he has failed here to capture the distinction Peile is making between the way in which English and Kukatja extend the meanings of words referring to body parts to more abstract concepts such as intelligence. The use of 'no-ears' (*langa-parni* in Kukatja) in a similar manner to the English, 'no-brains' is widespread in Aboriginal languages. Often translated by Aboriginal people as 'deaf' it has a wide range of meaning from 'deaf', i.e., cannot hear sound, to 'has a mental illness' (is 'crazy/mad'), 'lacks good sense' or 'is disobedient', 'you can't get through to him'.

Peile has left behind a rich legacy. We strongly encourage any serious scholars interested in accessing the understandings of Kukatja and other Aboriginal people about these most fundamental issues for all human beings to study this book. It is not a work to be read and understood in one 'hit'. Rather it is a work to be opened and reopened and pondered on. It is a challenging book, not so much for the language or form in which it is written, but rather in how 'foreign' much of the revealed thinking is to the Western mind. Peile mostly refrains from telling the reader what to think, how to interpret what is being written, but rather lets the many texts speak for themselves—albeit via his deliberately rather literal English translations. His digressions into what various 'experts' have to say about particular phenomena, or about what peoples in a range of other cultures are said to believe, are often just juxtaposed with the Kukatja texts.

*Body and Soul* is not a mainstream anthropological work. Like T.G.H. Strehlow, its author was someone apart from 'the rest'. Anthropology and Aboriginal studies have been well served by the divergent and almost alternative viewpoint taken and topics addressed by Peile. The pity is that *Body and Soul* was not published during the author's lifetime. An editor can only go so far in producing the product its author intended. If Peile had to cut it back to the size we now have, who knows what revisions to the text would have been made to convey the information he most valued. We have long awaited this work. Bindon and the publishers have done a fine job producing a work both scholarly and attractive which deserves a place with other Australian Anthropological classics.

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*Terrible Hard Biscuits, A reader in Aboriginal history*. Edited by Valerie Chapman and Peter Read. Allen & Unwin and Journal of Aboriginal History. Sydney, 1996. Pp. xv + 284. \$29.95 p.b.

In 1990 *Australian Historical Studies* published (with Allen & Unwin) *Through White Eyes*, a collection of eight articles dealing with aspects of Aboriginal history which had appeared in that journal in its first fifty years. Just two of those articles had appeared in the journal's first forty years: John Mulvaney's two-part survey of 'opinion and field-work from 1606 to 1929' (1958) and Peter Corris's brief article on racialism (1973); all the rest were published in the eight years preceding the bicentennial year. This relative neglect of Aboriginal history by the Melbourne based journal may have been one factor influencing the small group of historians in Canberra who in the mid-1970s set about the job of establishing a specialised journal, *Aboriginal History*, the first issue of which appeared in 1977. Twenty years later this journal (with Allen & Unwin) has published a first collection of articles chosen from the first nineteen issues.



The sub-title 'a reader in Aboriginal history' suggests that the book is envisaged as a useful text for students of the history of Aboriginal Australians since 1788, as well as introducing 'a wider readership to the journal's contribution to knowledge' of that history. The eleven papers, selected from some 200, range widely across the continent and over the 200 years of settlement. The writers represented include two Aboriginal authors and, as well as historians, some whose primary fields of study have been anthropology, archaeology and geography. The editors decided, with regret, to exclude linguistic material 'because of its more technical nature' but the selection gives a good impression of the range and variety of professional and amateur writing that this journal has presented.

Isabel McBryde, historian and archaeologist, has written an introduction which tells the story of the establishment of this journal and outlines the scope of 'Aboriginal history':

It encompasses the narratives and explanation of all those complex interactions between indigenous peoples and Europeans or others during the last three hundred years of what is often unhelpfully referred to as 'contact history'. But it is not only concerned with colonial encounters. It also includes accounts of the lives of Aboriginal communities in that period, life stories of families and individuals in their own countries.

She describes the growing interest in the subject and in the methods of Aboriginal history in recent decades, and in particular the focus on 'life histories and community histories'. The book includes one 'brief life' (written from a recorded interview): Bowman Johnson's 'Growing up in Queensland', an account of his Cherbourg childhood and schooling in the 1920s and 1930s, and of his experiences working on stations and as a 'black tracker'. Several articles could be regarded as community histories, notably Lyn-dall Ryan's account—in the first issue of *Aboriginal History*—of the unique Bass Strait group from the arrival in 1798 of the first ships hunting for fur seal up to the early 1900s. Elspeth Young's article describes how settlement at two cattle stations in Anmatyerre country affected people's links to the land, a study based on land claim work. Richard Baker outlines the 'contact history' of the Yanyuwa people and in particular the story of their movement to the Borroloola township.

Two articles deal with the early years of Aboriginal encounters with white settlement. Bob Reece examines the complexities of relationships between Aboriginal groups around the Swan River and between them and the colonists in the first decade. Philip Clarke deals with a parallel situation in his examination of the available evidence about the 'cultural landscape' of the Adelaide region at first settlement there. McBryde examines the historical record for accounts by early observers that provide evidence about traditional forms of exchange of goods and services between Aboriginal groups in Southeastern Australia.

Three articles deal directly with government policies in later periods and with Aboriginal influence on, and responses to, those policies and practices. Heather Goodall and Peter Read each write about government policies in relation to reserves in New South Wales. Goodall makes the case that the government was responding to Aboriginal pressure in establishing many of the small reserves in the eastern areas of the State in the late nineteenth century. Read contrasts the public concern expressed in Sydney in the 1930s about Aboriginal administration in the Northern Territory with the apparent indifference shown to the shifts in policy and practice which severely disad-

vantaged Aboriginal people nearer to home in country New South Wales. The last article in the volume is Scott Robinson's account of the 1972 'Aboriginal Embassy' protests and their impact, based partly on interviews with participants.

The intention that the book should serve an educational purpose is clear in the way each article is presented with an introductory note, side headings and marginal notes raising questions for consideration and referring readers to related sections of other papers in the collection. The 'general reader' may find these distracting and they certainly do nothing for the appearance of book, which does not share the elegant typography and layout of the parent journal. The footnotes of the originals have been replaced by Harvard system references in the text and relatively few endnotes. The system works well enough when the reference is just a 'name and date' but many of the references are lengthy, running over two and more lines, and readers may find them distracting. Some minor editorial improvements have been made, and an index is provided, but unfortunately fresh errors have been made in transcription. Robinson's article in particular has suffered with not only single words omitted (pp. 242, 252) but in one place most of a two-line sentence has been lost (p. 248), and Prime Minister McMahon makes his Australia Day statement on '16 January 1972' (p. 242). On the plus side it is worth noting that, although not all the illustrations with the original articles have been used, some (as in Elspeth Young's article) have reproduced rather better in the book than in the journal.

This collection provides a stimulating and accessible introduction to the subject, alerting readers to some of the subtleties and complexities of the responses of Aboriginal people to settlement in their lands and to government policy and practice. It deserves to be widely used and read by teachers and by students.

Jeremy Long

*Studies in Comparative Pama-Nyungan*. Edited by G.N. O'Grady and D.T. Tryon, Pacific Linguistics. Series C, No. 111. 1990. Pp. xxii, 279, maps, bibliography and index to language names.

Pama-Nyungan (PN) is a grouping of a large number of indigenous languages which covers the Australian mainland, excepting the Kimberleys and Arnhem Land. The name comes from two widespread forms for '(Aboriginal) man, person, people' in the northeast and southwest, respectively. Against the received view, Dixon argued that the PN languages do not form a genetic unity or clade, i.e. they are not descended from a common ancestral language in such a way that they are more closely related to one another than to any language(s) outside the grouping.<sup>1</sup> Blake examined pronominal systems from languages throughout Australia and, in contrast, concluded that PN is indeed a language family, while Evans considered stem-initial apical and laminal consonant correspondences across PN and non-PN languages and proposed that the PN

<sup>1</sup> Dixon 1980, p. 226; see now also Dixon 1997, p. 37, note 5, for a reconfirmation of his position.

languages merged stem-initial apicals and laminals as laminals.<sup>1</sup> Such a shared innovation would define PN as a true clade.

Geoff O'Grady wrote the introduction to this collection and he is the author or coauthor of six of nine papers: the book is his response to Dixon's position.<sup>2</sup> O'Grady reminds us repeatedly of Ken Hale's earlier claim that PN is the 'largest coherent linguistic genetic construct in Australia'. What is distinctive about O'Grady's approach here is his attention to the evidence that vocabulary or lexicon can provide for demonstrating common descent among languages. His methodology goes beyond the inspection of comparative vocabularies for obvious one-to-one sound-meaning similarities. Forms not only may undergo phonological change, but they may also change their meanings in ways patterned by metonymy, metaphor, widening, narrowing, etc. One must cast a wide net to find cognates (forms descended from the same ancestral form) that have undergone semantic change. For (an Indo-European) example, having judged that Russian *noga* 'leg, foot' and English *foot* are not cognate, one must push on to compare English *nail* and German *Nagel*, which are cognate with *noga*. And this set of forms must be set beside the set which includes English *foot*, German *Fuss* and the root of Russian *peshij* 'pedestrian, unmounted' and *peshkom* 'on foot', as well as with *pod* 'ground, base, foundation', to gain a fuller perspective on semantic change.

Knowledge of how semantic change can operate and the daring to try to recognise its courses in examining phonologically resemblant forms of disparate meanings across languages: these are O'Grady's specialties. It is fascinating to watch him work his magic especially in three papers here. In 'Wadjuk and Umpila: a long-shot approach to Pama-Nyungan', O'Grady compares two languages at the extremes of the continent and finds them plausibly relatable just on the basis of modern evidence. In 'Pama-Nyungan semantics: *brain, egg and water*', he explores sets of forms whose meanings include these senses and others, but the argument might be strengthened by more explicitly laying out just how these senses can be connected synchronically and diachronically. And in 'The Nuclear Pama-Nyungan universal quantifier *\*parntung*', he searches for its reflexes in more than a dozen far-flung PN and non-PN languages.

T.R. Hendrie's 'Initial apicals in Nuclear Pama-Nyungan', the longest paper of the collection, searches nine regionally diverse PN languages for cognate sets and concludes that Proto-PN contrasted *\*t*, *\*n*, *\*l* and *\*r* initially, as against Dixon's different reconstruction—but now note Evans' quite different view.<sup>3</sup> It's a pity that Hendrie still takes Tindale's trihybrid theory of Aboriginal racial origins seriously when later physical anthropologists and archaeologists have consistently failed to find supporting evidence for it. Its persistence is pernicious when some opponents of the recognition of traditional Aboriginal property rights in land justify European colonization and dispossession with reference to the Tindale position that the Murrayian and Carpentarian ancestors of modern Aboriginal people earlier dispossessed the original Barrinean negro owners of most of the continent.

O'Grady and D.T. Tryon's 'Early Austronesian Loans in Pama-Nyungan?' identifies eight forms they believe may have been borrowed very early before the later spread

1. Blake 1988 and Evans 1988.

2. Dixon 1980; see also O'Grady and Fitzgerald 1997.

3. Dixon 1980, p. 175; Evans 1988.

of PN languages across the continent. *\*payung* 'shelter, protection' and *\*mAya* 'language' are certainly striking. O'Grady and Tryon's suggestion that Cape York Peninsula was the probable region of contact should be detached from their proposal that northeastern Australia was the centre of PN dispersal in view of more recent stronger evidence pointing to an area south of the Gulf of Carpentaria as the centre of dispersal.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Alpher's 'Some Proto-Pama-Nyungan paradigms: a verb in the hand is worth two in the phylum' brings to mind Bloomfield's well-known reconstruction of full Proto-Algonquian inflected forms. Alpher corroborates certain of Merlan's views on verbal conjugations in Proto-Australian, but with specific reference to Proto-PN, which displays in his reconstruction a system that lacks the symmetry of many of its modern languages. Like O'Grady, Alpher too has Dixon in his sights.

Nick Evans' 'The Minkin language of the Burketown region' is thematically anomalous in focusing on a single language which doesn't even belong to the PN family, but it provides a fine example of what a talented researcher can wring out of limited vocabulary lists of poor quality to reconstitute features of a language. Minkin disappeared very early in contact history, but to judge from its available vocabulary, pronominal system and verbal systems (as well as certain lesser features), it can be placed in a Minkin-Tangkic family as a distant cousin to the more closely related Tangkic languages of the lower Gulf coast region.

In summary, this collection stands among the more notable works in Australian historical linguistics, and specialists will refer back to it for promising lines of inquiry, substantive and methodological, but like the historical portions of Dixon (1980), it should be taken as provisional and suggestive or provocative. Yes, there is a PN family, but just what languages it includes in what subgroupings and how it relates to the non-PN languages remain very much on the research agenda.<sup>2</sup>

I thank Nick Evans for helpful suggestions to update this review, originally written in 1992.

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1. Evans and Jones 1997.

2. See now also papers by Alpher, Breen, Evans, Fitzgerald, Koch and McConvell in Tryon and Walsh 1997; they all assume PN as a genetic grouping.

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*White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Civilization in Central Australia*. By Tim Rowse. Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1998. Pp. 255, \$49.95, h.b.

At the protests during February of 1999 in support of the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra, Yaluritja, an Indigenous man, came bearing small ration bags of tea, flour and sugar. He said that he wanted to give the bags to the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, so that he could regain the land and the life his ancestors had lost in exchange for the rations (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1999). The gesture, which was not accepted, was in part an ironic comment on the unequal power relationships between Indigenous people and other Australians, particularly evident in the rationing association, that have existed for over 200 years. In the vast majority of cases, nothing was given to the Aboriginal owners for their land. It was appropriated with force if necessary and the process was not explained to the owners. If something was given in these early interactions, it was either as a gift to reassure and disguise future intentions, or as a payment for services rendered, particularly in areas of exploration and guidance, and subsistence support.

In his book, *White Flour, White Power*, Tim Rowse thoughtfully explores later examples of the provision by whites of goods to Aboriginal people where the intentions were more sinister and focused on social control. The main theme of the book is rationing and how it was used by authorities and settlers in Alice Springs and its hinterland to achieve assimilation. Rowse does not propose to write a 'comprehensive history' of assimilation. He clearly states that there are other techniques and policies, such as the forced removal of children, which he does not wish to consider in this book. Also, Rowse presents an analysis of white intentions and actions, their supposed successes, failures and contradictions. As he states, this 'book should not be mistaken for Aboriginal history; it is a critical history of the culture of the colonisers, using non-indigenous sources', 'to comment on what the colonists did but also on what they thought they were doing'. Some Aboriginal voices still come through via transcripts of interviews conducted by the author and other anthropologists.

Rowse uses four ideas developed by Michael Foucault to underpin his analysis of the white rationing program. The first idea is christened by Rowse as the 'mobility of technique' and it refers to certain techniques of behaviour management that are 'transferable from one institution to another'. Rowse amply demonstrates the reality of this principle in relation to rationing. He provides numerous examples of rationing conducted by the government, pastoralists, missionaries and individuals. The second Foucauldian idea concerns the construction by the colonising group of a body of knowledge about those who are being governed. Rowse shows how this knowledge was used

to develop further techniques of social control, but that often it was wrongly conceived, particularly in the area of the strength of indigenous traditions. The third idea refers to modern government which is characterised by an emphasis on the 'enhancement of life' as opposed to the pre-modern form where government exercised a 'negative power over life and death'. The fourth idea is based on the concept of the norm, and in the case of assimilation, the norm to be achieved was set by the nature of town life, with the participation of its domestically ordered members in the mainstream labour market. These last two ideas in particular are crucial to Rowse's understanding of assimilation as a procedure of inducing Aboriginal people to adopt the same way of life as the colonists. To the reader, they provide a template for understanding the narrative as Rowse presents it, although the structure of the book does not always align with the Foucauldian analysis.

Rowse divides the book into three parts. The first part is devoted to how the colonisers gained so-called 'knowledge' of Aboriginal people from the rationing relationship. The argument is particularly strong when it deals with the settler concept of 'pauperism'. Early settlers and officials, it is argued, who wished to

provide a 'civilising' influence through the rationing program, were ridden with doubt about the ability of Aboriginal people to resist the allure of handouts and become decayed dependents. Rowse forcefully states that this misconception stemmed from the inability of the colonists to understand the reciprocal nature of Aboriginal culture and their resilience to imposed ideas of how they were.

The second part exhaustively documents and examines the 'abiding structures of Central Australian rationing'. These include rationed work for pastoralists (intended to induce a strong work ethic in Aboriginal people); supervised camps on the fringes of town where rations were used to impel Aboriginal people to adopt white social, culinary and educative standards; the separation of hinterland from town-based Aboriginal people and the exchange between Aboriginal people and missionaries, particularly at Hermannsburg, of the products of Aboriginal labour for food and clothing. The enduring theme that Rowse presents is again rationing as an agent of social control, and a technique from the white point of view that was often ineffective. He makes it clear that assimilation was an underlying aim of private settlers, missionaries and authorities alike before it became an official policy. The only criticism perhaps worth making is that Rowse could have offered a clearer indication of the difference between rationing and wage work, which was often rewarded with goods rather than cash. It is not entirely clear whether wage work qualifies as part of the rationing regime.

The final part attempts to define the 'norm' that assimilation was intended to impose upon Aboriginal people, and how rationing was to achieve this aim in three contexts: the pastoral industry, the Welfare Branch settlements and the town of Alice Springs. Rowse concludes that rationing was intended to induce a lifestyle based on town residence and participation in the mainstream labour market. He makes it apparent that the policy largely failed due to the resilience of Aboriginal people and the internal contradictions of the policy itself, which partly stemmed from a false dichotomy between town and hinterland Aboriginal people.

In the last chapter of his intelligent and persuasive book, Rowse examines the replacement of rations with cash and the emergence of self-determination as a new policy. He sadly notes that some elements of assimilation policy are still in use and this is

borne out by the recent decision of the Northern Territory government to axe bilingual language education for numerous Aboriginal schools (*Time Magazine*, 22 February 1999). It is apparent that the unequal power relationships, so eloquently articulated in Rowse's presentation of rationing, still exist, and that unfortunately, Yaluritja's action of returning the tea and flour will do little to change the status-quo.

Michael Bennett

*Dealing with Alcohol: Indigenous usage in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.* By Sherry Saggars and Dennis Gray. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998. PB, \$29.94, 240p.

At the beginning of this decade I reviewed an earlier book by Sherry Saggars and Dennis Gray, *Aboriginal health and society: The traditional and contemporary struggle for better health* (1991), for a very different audience.<sup>1</sup> The 'political economy approach' utilised to explore Indigenous ill-health, they contended, was significantly informed by 'the growing contradiction between health and the pursuit of profit under capitalism, and the contradictions inherent in the particular forms of medical practice which have evolved within capitalist societies'. In *Dealing with alcohol: Indigenous usage in Australia, New Zealand and Canada*, Saggars and Gray state that the political economy analysis remains 'the approach best able to explain differences in patterns of alcohol consumption and related harm between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples' and that it 'directs our attention to the ways best able to reduce that harm' (p. 84).

In terms of explaining differences, the authors review numerous theories (biological, psychological, social, anthropological) of indigenous alcohol use that have been proposed over recent decades, most of which invoke ill-defined mediating factors (depression, hopelessness, resistance). However, while the authors provide material consistent with their own model, rather than clarifying, I suggest, they have replaced the contents of the 'black box' between cause and consequence. In the political economy model it is 'marginalisation' which mediates between the structural conditions resulting from colonialism, and problems resulting from alcohol use. How marginalisation suffices where powerlessness, anomie and their like fall short remains unexplained.

While similar to other analyses that emphasise the role of political and economic factors, the political economy approach differs in that 'it does not treat those factors as discrete variables; and it treats current political and economic systems not as givens, but as shaped by history and differential power relationships' (p. 85). Emphasising the historical and contemporary parallels between the indigenous populations of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, Saggars and Gray insist that a model of indigenous drinking must take the experience of colonialism as a starting point. Acknowledging that there are many 'reasons' for indigenous people drinking, the authors contend that these are: 'themselves a function of relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous societies within the broader web of political and economic relationships. That is, they are symptoms of underlying inequalities'. As in their previous book, they add that 'inter-

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1. Hunter 1992.

ventions aimed solely at these symptoms—while alleviating some of the pain—will not address the underlying cause, and the symptoms will continue to re-emerge' (p. 88).

In terms of initiatives to 'reduce that harm' Siggers and Gray discuss (though in limited detail other than supply and promotion) various indigenous and mainstream responses—treatment, harm minimisation, supply reduction and demand reduction—which, by and large, to date have had 'limited impact' (p. 194). The authors suggest that this is, in part, 'because of the way the problem has been conceptualised. Many of the intervention strategies that are employed are based on views that the problems of misuse are the problems of individuals or arise from aspects of indigenous cultures' (p. 208). This is a view with which most workers in the field would probably agree, as they would with the authors' support for indigenous empowerment and control, and for their call for governments, organisations and individuals to address indigenous disadvantage—a big task. In terms of more specific approaches, the authors contend that 'most success in reducing excessive alcohol consumption and related harm appears to have been the result of structural interventions' (p. 169) that address the social environment of excessive consumption. Even so, as these do not address 'the underlying issue of colonialism', they have not resulted in significant improvements, leading the authors to conclude that 'the intervention strategies we have described merely tinker with existing political and economic systems that marginalise and exclude indigenous people, and perpetuate the inequalities they face' (p. 169). Thus the title of the concluding chapter—'Where to from here?'—emphasises the problem rather than suggests directions.

While clearly not intended, *Dealing with alcohol* will possibly leave some readers feeling fatalistic. Not that the association of social inequality and ill-health is new. For instance, Leonard Syme (1998) has explored the manifest association between social class and health status and the many purported contents of the 'black box'—mastery, self-efficacy, locus of control, sense of control, powerlessness, competence, hardiness and so on. He has proposed a related concept—control of destiny—the ability of people to be able to influence the events that impinge on their lives, suggesting that 'the possibility that inequalities can be traced not to differences in money, in social economic and political context, or in relative deprivation, but, rather, to differences in problem-solving skills and ability to access resources, would open a path to interventions' (1998: 497). Expanding on this idea in an ABC radio interview (Health Report, November 9, 1998), Syme comments on two consistent findings from empirical research. First, known risk factors are generally imperfectly related to specific disease outcomes, and second, psycho-social factors (such as social support and class) seem to be related to everything. 'The solution' Syme proposes, 'is that the psycho-social factors are related to the vulnerability and defences that people have to disease, not to what disease you get'. Given the enormity of the disadvantage experienced by indigenous Australians, it should then be no surprise that they have markedly elevated rates of morbidity and mortality from just about everything, including substance use.

This is also the case, as Siggers and Gray point out, for the other indigenous peoples discussed in this work. Unfortunately, even compared to these groups, indigenous Australians are distinguished by having the worst health status according to almost every measure. Steven Kunitz (1994) has explored this terrain, comparing indigenous populations in areas of what he calls 'Anglo settler colonialism'—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. A number of correlates emerge in his analysis



including health being worse in those nations where no formal treaty had been concluded between the colonising and indigenous populations, and worse also where States and Provinces retained responsibility for indigenous health rather than federal or national governments. Ironically, in that nation with the least equitable system of health care for the population as a whole (and the greatest socio-economic disparities), the United States, indigenous health is, comparatively, best. By contrast in Australia, where health care resourcing is probably least inequitable, indigenous health is worst. Kunitz points to the disadvantage of the disadvantaged in accessing resources, emphasising the importance in the United States of a well funded national program, the Indian Health Service, targeting that disadvantaged population.

While identifying commonalities, Kunitz's analysis also suggests that health status can be modified across groups with broadly similar historical and political experiences. There are, in fact, significant structural differences across these four populations which are probably important in terms of informing the differences identified by Kunitz. However, between and within these indigenous populations there are also uncountable instances of approaches to solving the problems confronting individuals and groups—what Saggars and Gray call 'individual agency' which, while not discounted by them is noted to be 'constrained by broader social structures' (p. 169). This is often despite persistent relative disadvantage which Syme (1998) and others (for instance, Wilkinson, 1997) have noted is a potent indicator of differential health status within, as well as between countries. Syme acknowledges the importance of social disadvantage as well as the difficulty of changing it. However, he suggests (1998), citing (as do Saggars and Gray) the Head Start program in the United States, that even among disadvantaged groups there are means by which individuals may influence their health outcomes by developing problem-solving skills. Similarly, increased problem-solving capability of organisations and communities has been identified as a fundamental component of 'capacity building' in contemporary health promotion (Hawe, Noort, King & Jordens, 1997). In Australia the Aboriginal adaptation of 'narrative therapy' following the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody might be considered an important instance (Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia, 1995).

While there are others, *Dealing with alcohol* provides the reader with a good review of theories of indigenous alcohol use. As have also others, the authors draw attention to the historical and structural precursors of problems arising from drinking and emphasise that 'indigenous people themselves must be enabled to determine their own goals and strategies for their achievement' (p. 207). This is not, however, a book that will satisfy those workers in the field—indigenous and non-indigenous—struggling to find innovative inroads into a tenacious problem causing enormous suffering. 'Detailed discussions of a possible theory' Syme (1998) contends, 'seem fruitless when they do not lead to a remedy' (p. 495). Is this an example of theory constrained by outcome? I think not. As do many indigenous people who remain resilient in the face of adversity, Syme clearly acknowledges the importance of social disadvantage and structural inequalities. However, while remaining committed to social change in the long term, he also remains committed to resisting fatalism in the short term:

insisting only on fundamental and revolutionary social change is dooming us to programs that will take years and generations to take effect. Since it is difficult to implement such major social change, it is easy to ignore inequalities because, they say, nothing can realistically be done about them. Moral outrage about inequali-

ties is appropriate but may be self-indulgent. If we really want to change the world we may have to begin in more modest but practical ways (1997, p. 9).

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Typescripts must be double-spaced and with ample margins to allow for editorial marking. Submit two hard copies and keep one. Footnotes should be as brief as possible and numbered consecutively throughout the paper. Do not use Harvard-style references, e.g. (Berndt & Berndt 1977) in parenthesis. We prefer footnotes with a short form of citation, e.g. Saunders 1976, p. 27. The references, on a separate page should be arranged in alphabetical order by author's last name and include full publication details as given on the title page of the work. Arrange works by the same author in chronological order. Tables and maps should be submitted in final form (except for size), on separate sheets, numbered on the back, and accompanied by a list of captions and credits (if applicable). Once manuscripts are accepted, authors should submit final versions on computer disks. Microsoft Word or RTF format is preferred. Please label disks clearly and include your name, short title of the work, whether PC or Mac, software and version. Authors should follow the usage of the *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, 5th edition, AusInfo, Department of Finance and Administration, Canberra, 1994.

## Footnote style

1. Rowley 1971, p. 107; see also Barwick 1981.
2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
3. Fison and Howitte 1880, pp. 96-108.
4. *Evening Mail*, 12 March 1869.
5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

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