

Aboriginal History

Volume 27 2003

Aboriginal History Incorporated

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Aboriginal History is a refereed journal that presents articles and information in the field of Australian ethnohistory, particularly in the post-contact history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Historical studies based on anthropological, archaeological, linguistic and sociological research, including comparative studies of other ethnic groups such as Pacific Islanders in Australia, are welcomed. Subjects include recorded oral traditions and biographies, narratives in local languages with translations, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, resums of current events, archival and bibliographic articles, and book reviews.

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Managing Editor, Ingereth Macfarlane; Review Editor, Luise Hercus; Copy Editors, Jenny Jeffery and Gillian Fulcher.

Contacting Aboriginal History

All correspondence should be addressed to Aboriginal History, Box 2837 GPO Canberra, 2601, Australia. Sales and orders for journals and monographs, and journal subscriptions: T Boekel, email: pboekel@bigpond.net.au, tel or fax: +61 2 6230 7054, www.aboriginalhistory.org

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WARNING: *Readers are notified that this publication may contain names or images of deceased persons.*

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Memorial plaque, Coniston Northern Territory, in memory of the 1928 Coniston Massacre. Photograph: George Serras, National Museum of Australia.

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Preface

Making peace with the past: remembering the Coniston massacre 1928–2003

The events that occurred on Coniston Station in late 1928 are not well known to the broader Australian public. Yet for the Aboriginal peoples of the region and for some other Australians the word 'Coniston' evokes a sense of dread. For Warlpiri especially the legacy of those terrible weeks endures 75 years later. People still talk of uncles, fathers, grandfathers who were killed along with aunts, mothers and grandmothers. The official enquiry found that 31 were killed. That figure is low; how low we don't really know. At the time Mounted Constable George Murray was considered a hero by some. He was exonerated by the later Commission of Enquiry as they said he acted in self defence. In truth he acted like a field commander at war — a general in the saddle who fought hand to hand just as he had done at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. He had willing accomplices, including two Aboriginal trackers. (See the article by Wilson and O'Brien in this volume for a detailed examination of these events).

Traditional Owners have for many years discussed the need for a commemoration, for a ceremony and a service of remembrance of the events at Coniston. The community was not unanimous about this. But on 24 September 2003 senior responsible men and women, with the assistance of the Central Land Council and with the permission of the pastoral lessees of Mt Denison Station, finally conducted such an event. The site chosen was Yurrkuru, or Brooks Soak, named in English for the old dogger and prospector who is buried nearby. It was his murder that brought deadly gunfire upon the culpable and the innocent alike. Men and women, now elderly, who witnessed the events, were at the recent ceremony. Some spoke and some wept. Representatives of the family of George Murray spoke sorrowfully of profound regret and they apologised wholeheartedly. The apology was accepted. The Northern Territory Police were represented and spoke of regret for the harm to all involved. Community members, young and old, spoke in language and in English about the past but mostly about the future.

After the speeches the senior women danced and, by the side of the road, a plaque was unveiled. Then the kids mobbed the stonemason as he tried to get on with his work on the plaque, getting it just right.

The text reads:

In 1928 near this place the murder of Frederick Brooks led to the killing of many innocent Aboriginal people across the region

We will remember them always.

Nganimparlu kapurnalu-jana manngu-nyanyirni

Tarrnngangu-juku

Nwern inenhenh kweteth iterl-arerlanetyenh

Aynanthe atewanthepe etelarerrantye

James Warden

24 September 2003



Liza Dale Hallett and her husband Martin together with artists from the Willowra community who created the banner they are standing in front of for the 75th anniversary of the Coniston Massacre. Photo: George Serras, National Museum of Australia.

Introduction

The papers submitted during 2002–3 for volume 27 reflect three strong and overlapping concerns in current research. These spheres of investigation are firstly the processes and outcomes of colonial occupation and control over land; the origins and effects of government policies on Indigenous people's lives and, thirdly, some of the ways in which Indigenous people have represented their perceptions.

Several of these papers are direct responses to Keith Windschuttle's work, or to the call for historiographical papers issued in the last editions of this journal, and most authors have framed their work in terms of the current public debates regarding the interpretation of historical evidence in the 'Aboriginal history' field. But the content of the work stems from a longer-running effort to bring together the detailed archival and oral history materials which illuminate how conflicts over land or identity have been lived out in specific times or places and how they continue to play out now. The cumulative weight of evidence in these detailed empirical studies makes for painful, unsettling histories.

As publishing becomes increasingly commercial and restrictive of space, academic journals such as this one remain a forum where full, detailed and, in Windschuttle's word 'accountable' investigation, reflection and referencing of this type is still not only accommodated but insisted upon.

We are pleased that this collection of papers demonstrates the *Aboriginal History* Board's policy of encouraging contributions from a wide range of writers: established and new scholars, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, presenting local, national and international perspectives.

Cole presents a consideration of the background and experience of Ella Hiscocks, whose life's work was at the sharp end of assimilationist policies in NSW from 1939–1969, where she was responsible for their delivery as Matron of the Cootamundra Girls Home. Robinson describes the experiences of Aboriginal children in Queensland, outside such official institutions, sent to work as domestic labourers. The anxieties and the concepts which informed assimilationist policies are further illuminated in Ellinghaus' comparative examination of legislation concerning interracial marriage in Australia and in the US.

Owen examines the tensions between the requirements for late 19th century East Kimberley police officers to uphold the law and yet meet settler pastoralists' demands for repression of local Aboriginal cattle killings. He shows the involvement of the Commissioner of Police in shifting this balance in favour of the pastoralists' interests. In the year of the 75th anniversary of the events at Coniston, Northern Territory, Wilson and O'Brien draw on the documentary evidences, recorded oral testimonies and Strehlow's unpublished diaries to refine our understanding of the complexities which surround

the events. Like Owen, they consider the often contradictory relationships between actions of individuals and governmental policies and practices.

The need for fine-grained attention to how general policies are enacted in particular places by particular people is clear from these studies. There are revealing ambivalences in Matron Hiscocks' dealings with the Aborigines Welfare Board and with the Indigenous girls in her charge, and at Coniston the character and military experiences of Constable Murray are likely to have contributed to his military campaign style response to the events. Similarly, Owen highlights the lack of training for police officers and the variations in the ways in which they individually enacted policies.

At a broader scale, Taylor, Schmitt and Roy review patterns of effects on Indigenous family structure as a result of colonisation in Victoria. Harris draws on his long-term research to present a critique of Windschuttle's 'massacre myth' arguments, with an informed refutation of his assertions concerning the role of missionaries.

From their different personal perspectives Maynard and McKenna make a series of important comments on the origins, outcomes and public reception of the 'history wars'. It could be seen, in some lights, as a positive sign that historical interpretation was a topic considered worthy of press coverage, were it not that the only mode of debate offered were adversarial binaries set up in the media, as both Maynard and McKenna point out. Carried out as if the debate had no impact on people's lives and self-perceptions, the implications of McKenna's observations on its impact 'at an everyday conversational level' are chilling:

Since the publication of *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, I have had several people on the south coast and in the ACT make remarks along the following lines. 'Mark, have you heard of the new book on Aboriginal history by Wind someone or other, a lot of these stories about how bad our history was aren't true you know. We didn't kill all the Aborigines. You should read the book.'

The hard-won space that had opened in the 1990s in which it was at least possible for a majority of Australian people to hear unfamiliar and difficult stories of dispossession and assimilation has been covered over with confusions.

[T]he crucial issue of the responsibility of a political community for past wrongs have been reduced to the rather more sterile one of the uses and abuses of history. Whatever possibilities for political reinvention made available by the High Court's refutation of the doctrine of *terra nullius* have now become bogged down in an academic dispute where claims of 'black armband' history square off against claims of 'historical denialism'. Only recently stirred to reflection about the moral underpinnings of the state apparatus, the deliberations of the Australian public have now been effectively suffocated in the name of discovering 'the truth'.¹

Maynard places this opposition to the telling of Indigenous histories in the context of long-term struggles for recognition from the 1920s on. Veracini provides a recent historical context for the current debates. Referring to selected salient published works in the field, he identifies a framework of sequential waves of tensions which run through the writing of Aboriginal histories in the last 15 years.

^{1.} Muldoon 2003: 189.

Self-representation by Aboriginal people is the third rich strand in the papers of this volume. Gibbs shows the personal and political meanings behind an Indigenous whalers' songs about his experiences in the Western Australian whaling industry. Willis sets out the context in which some rare Indigenous Victorian drawings on bark were produced, collected and exhibited, and the reception of these. Peters-Little examines the production of documentary television and film by Indigenous makers and about Indigenous people. As she points out, underlying cultural assumptions continue, often in an unacknowledged way, to not only underlie the ways in which people do represent themselves and others, but the ways in which they can – the tropes are deeply ingrained. To counter this, Peters-Little shows, requires identifying what they are before they can be left behind.

From this volume 27 on, in addition to a print version, the journal will be available on-line to subscribing libraries. Back issues of volumes 24–26 will also be made available online.

We have reluctantly had to increase the price of the journal for the first time in many years in order to cover its production costs. This will be effective from the release of the next volume 28, 2004.

The journal is the result of the largely voluntary labour of many people. Thanks to the members of the Board, the referees, Trish Boekel, Dick Barwick, Tikka Wilson and Jen Jeffery.

Aboriginal History Inc. and the journal are fortunate to have been invited to join the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, established in the History Program of the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University in 2003. This association will mutually benefit our shared interests. We acknowledge the support of the History Program with thanks.

The Board, the Australian National University and the friends and family of Peter Grimshaw suffered a major loss when he died suddenly earlier this year. A mainstay of the journal from its inception, as Neil Gunson's obituary shows, he is sorely missed.

Ingereth Macfarlane
ANU, Canberra
December 2003

Reference

Muldoon, Paul 2003, 'Reconciliation and political legitimacy: the old Australia and the new South Africa', *Australian journal of politics and history* 49(2): 182–196.

Nebinyan's songs: an Aboriginal whaler of south-west Western Australia

Martin Gibbs

Nebinyan was in his seventies when he met the ethnographer Daisy Bates in 1908. A renowned Nyungar songman of the Mineng people, whose country included the shores of Two Peoples Bay on the south coast of Western Australia, he had been moved in old age to the Government Settlement at Katanning, where their meeting took place. Their conversations ranged over the various details of traditional life in which Bates was most interested, but as night fell Nebinyan chose to recall his youth and perform for Bates a song cycle based on his work as a whaler on the south coast of Western Australia, in the 1860s.

In the recitative which dealt with Nebinyan's whaling experiences, the whole gamut of native feeling appeared to be expressed: the sorrow of Nebin, as he saw his fire (home) recede further and further away; the stealthy gliding over the water towards the resting whale, the sharp look out, the growing excitement as the huge fish was approached; the great seas that threatened to swamp the whale boat; the swift and sure harpooning; the final surrender of the whale; the triumphant towing back to ship or beach, and the great rejoicing over the whale feast – each of these formed a song in itself, and the actions peculiar to each stage were faithfully rendered. Many portions of the song which had become familiar through frequent recital were chorused by male listeners, who kept a murmuring accompaniment throughout the recital, these choruses encouraging the chief singer and urging him on to fresh efforts by the favour thus shown to his compositions. The words of the song were merely the names applied by the natives to the details connected with whaling, but the actions accompanying the recitative illustrated the whole proceeding. These recitals, which were however not very frequent, often continued until the small hours of the morning, singers and audience being often contentedly droned to sleep by the continuous reiteration.¹

Sadly, Bates did not record the words of the songs, the 'mere names' used to describe the whaling process, nor do her notes contain any further information on Nebinyan's career on the sea, or any further mention of Aboriginal whalers.

While Bates' published and unpublished works document a number of contact period songs from various Nyungar men and women, usually in more detail than she afforded Nebinyan's whaling cycle, her obvious focus was on salvaging information on

1. Bates 1985: 342.

traditional life and activities. Consequently, she rarely explored the significance of these narratives as other than pathos for what she perceived as the plight of the Nyungar people being diminished by forced interaction with Europeans. However, the few tantalising sentences of her description suggest that Nebinyan's choice of performance was far from random, but carried clear messages of a largely forgotten history of Aboriginal-European collaboration, as well as a story of participation and successful negotiation for personal power in changing circumstances. In the following discussion, we will trace the significance of Nebinyan's song.

Nebinyan the whaler

This paper is not the first time that the life and works of Nebinyan the songman have been documented in *Aboriginal History*. In 1980 historian and anthropologist Isobel White analysed the significance of another of Nebinyan's performances, also recorded by Daisy Bates during the 1908 visit to the Katanning camp.² That research is discussed in relation to the current study in a later section. However, White's paper also outlines Nebinyan's basic biographical details, which in this context suggest the circumstances in which he encountered whalers and whaling.

While White's research indicates some uncertainty as to the exact year of Nebinyan's birth, it is likely that he was born at Two Peoples Bay sometime around 1840.³ The bay is located only 25km east of King George Sound where, from the turn of the 19th century, increasing numbers of European vessels had been calling for wood and water. Contact between the Mineng and these travellers had generally been hospitable and of sufficient frequency for visitors of the 1820s to remark on the relative indifference of the Aboriginal inhabitants to the appearance and activities of Europeans.⁴

By 1826 the British government had decided to establish a small military settlement at King George Sound in order to secure the south coast against French claims. In 1829 this outpost, known as Fredrickstown and later Albany, was declared open for free colonists, coinciding with the establishment of a second settlement at the Swan River (Perth), situated several hundred kilometres away on the west coast. However, the early promises of agricultural potential and prosperity for both regions quickly proved to be false, bringing an abrupt halt to the early flow of migrants and capital. With neither minerals nor other export items readily apparent, the twin colonies spent the next decade under the threat of collapse.

One consequence of the near-abortive state of the colonies was that the European populations remained small. In particular, the greater region around the southern settlement, inclusive of Two Peoples Bay, numbered less than 300 white residents for most of the period from 1826 until 1850. During this period the diplomacy of the Mineng, exhibited in their earlier contact with short-term European visitors, extended to their dealings with the permanent settlers. Such was the close relationship that developed between the two groups that historian Neville Green has characterised it as a 'friendly frontier'.⁵

2. White 1980: 38.

3. White 1980: 38.

4. Green 1983; Ferguson 1987.

5. Green 1983: 68.

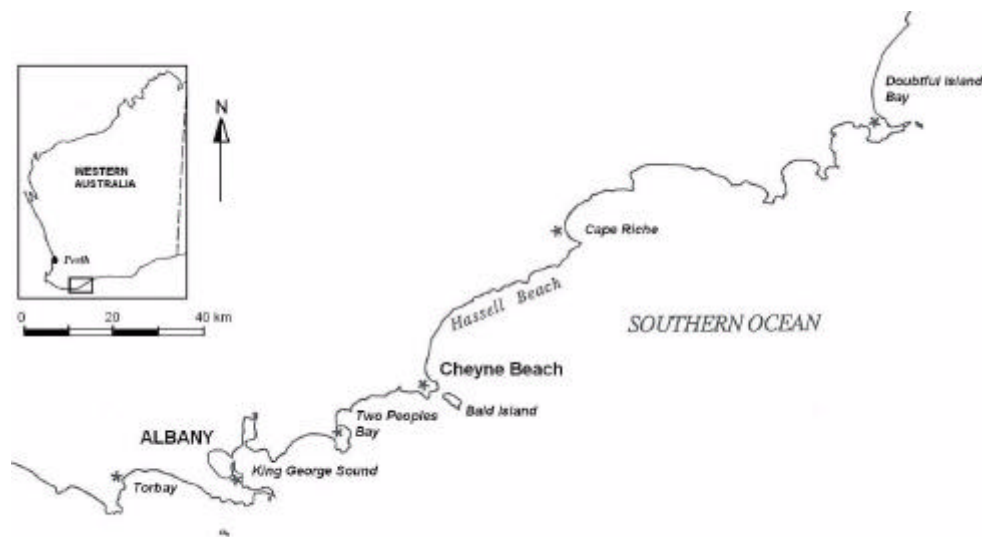


Figure 1: Whaling stations in Mineng country 1836–1879

While some of the colonists struggled to develop an agricultural industry, others began to look back to the sea and particularly at the Right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) and Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) which migrated along the coasts each winter. At this time whale oil was a major source of lighting oil and lubricant, while the baleen from whales' mouths served as the flexible material in items ranging from corset stays to coach springs. Whaling was a significant international industry and by the 1830s east coast Australian settlements had already profited from starting their own fisheries. American and French whaleships were starting to cruise along the Western Australian coast, enraging the colonists by taking what the latter felt was rightly a British resource. Although various proposals were made by Perth and Albany-based colonists to start a shore-based whaling industry, the financial situation of the small western settlements was so dire that it took nearly seven years before local merchants could scrape together sufficient funds to equip even a small whaling station.⁶

In the winter of 1836 an Albany merchant by the name of Thomas Sherratt was finally able to form a small whaling party on the shores of Doubtful Island Bay, located approximately 150km north-east of Albany. Little is known of this operation, other than a vague report that it had caught several whales and that the crews were said to include two Aboriginal women and one boy.⁷ The fortunes of the Western Australian whaling parties fluctuated through the late 1830s, although small seasonal shore stations were established progressively in various bays including, in 1842, at Two Peoples Bay.⁸ Many of Nebinyan's earliest childhood memories would therefore have been of the

⁶ Gibbs 1996.

⁷ *Perth Gazette* 24 December 1836.

⁸ Gibbs 1996: 423.

shore whalers camped each winter on the beaches of his home, as well as the foreign whaleships who still called into the bay for wood and water.⁹

Prior to the whaling era, Nyungar people, including the Mineng, had traditionally consumed whale meat only on an opportunistic basis when animals stranded on the beach or carcasses washed ashore. When this vast bounty of meat became available, it acted as a trigger mechanism for nearby groups to gather and feast.¹⁰ Meat was roasted or eaten raw and the people rubbed blubber on to their bodies. There was a festive air to the week-long gatherings.¹¹ Since whale was only accessible infrequently, exploitation by Europeans did not impinge upon the traditional Nyungar subsistence base. Conversely, when the shore whalers began regularly hauling carcasses back to the beach for processing, Aboriginal people flocked to the stations to spend the several months of the whaling season camped nearby to take advantage of the available meat.¹²

In contrast to so many contact situations, there are no documented accounts of violence or particular unrest associated with the operation of whaling along the south-west coast. Henry Reynolds has noted that maritime industries such as whaling were 'probably less disruptive of Aboriginal life than either mining or pastoralism' and fitted easily into the accustomed pattern of Aboriginal seasonal coastal use.¹³ The Western Australian whaling stations were small, seasonally occupied and normally required only a limited area of land for the tryworks and several other domestic and storage buildings. Although some ground might be cleared for gardens or to pasture small herds of livestock for supplies, this was generally limited to the immediate vicinity of the station and did not result in large-scale alienation of land and water sources that was the cause of so much frontier conflict. Since the whalers were only interested in the blubber and baleen, the uneconomic portions such as the meat were made available for consumption. This undoubtedly encouraged tolerant if not amicable relations between the people of the two cultures.

Although whaling did not impose upon traditional resources, Green has identified its consequences for coastal Nyungar groups.

It is important to realise that the whaling season was between May and September, the period when traditionally the Aborigines moved inland to hunt kangaroos and escape the heavy coastal rains. The whaling industry, therefore, must have had a marked effect on the economy of the Nyungar. When commercial whaling ventures failed or suffered a period of recession, the Aborigines were forced to rely upon traditional food harvests and returned inland across the areas where cattle were already replacing the kangaroo.¹⁴

As Green indicates, for local Indigenous people the advantages presented by whaling to some extent off-set the increasing alienation of traditional lands and resources, especially during the 1840s, when renewed European immigration to the west coast settlements saw increasing population growth and expansion. The regular

9. Haley 1948: 51.

10. Gibbs 1987: 47.

11. *Perth Gazette* 14 January 1837; Grey 1841: 276; Shann 1926: 96; Meagher 1974: 23.

12. eg Stokes 1846: 227.

13. Reynolds 1982: 175.

14. Green 1983: 184.

presence of Aboriginal men and women around the whaling stations, combined with local labour shortages which continued for several decades more, presented an opportunity for both groups.

Aboriginal whalers

It is difficult to know exactly when Nyungar first found their way on to the colonial whaling crews. The 1836 report of two Aboriginal women and a boy working at Doubtful Island Bay is unsubstantiated but cannot be completely discounted, as Aboriginal women had been working as crew on sealing boats elsewhere on the south coast.¹⁵ The first consistent reports of Aboriginal whalers emerged from both the south and west coasts in 1848.¹⁶

How the working relationship originally developed is unknown, although it may well have been that Aboriginal men and women had initially provided labour in return for access to whale meat. What is significant is that in the reports of the 1848 season at least some of the Aboriginal crew on the south coast were receiving payments equal to those of the non-Aboriginal crew, at a time when Aboriginal workers' wages in other colonial industries were far below those of their European counterparts. This bounty was redistributed amongst the community based on traditional norms.

One of these [men] had a full lay [payment] due to him. When they were settled with he distributed bags of flour, sugar, blankets, tobacco, knives ... amongst his friends. The black ladies now declare they will accept no husbands except they will go whaling.¹⁷

Whether or not this last threat had an effect is considered below, but suffice to say that by 1850 there were at least nine Aboriginal men employed on the Albany whaling parties.¹⁸ In that season, with the two stations requiring a total complement of between 24 and 28 men, the Aboriginal labourers comprised 30% or more of the workforce on the south coast.

On the west coast, with its higher density of European population, Aboriginal whalers received notably lower payments than the south coast crews. An 1850 report from the Bunbury station states that Jack Crow, an Aboriginal man working as an oarsman, was receiving three meals a day, a payment of 2 shillings and sixpence as soon as a whale was grounded and a further sum of 20 shillings (£1) at the termination of the season.¹⁹ This contrasts sharply with the more highly paid Aboriginal workers from Cheyne Beach, 70km east of Albany, who in the following year returned to Albany carrying lays (payments based upon a pre-determined percentage share of the profits) of £15 each.²⁰

15. *Perth Gazette* 24 December 1836; Nairn-Clarke 1842.

16. Seymour 4 September 1848; *Inquirer* 29 November 1848.

17. *Inquirer* 29 November 1848.

18. *Inquirer* 4 December 1850.

19. *Inquirer* 29 May 1850.

20. *Inquirer* 25 November 1851.

Table 1: Registered Aboriginal whalers

Name (alternatives)	First/last known years	Stations	Position
West Coast			
Bungor	1858	Pt Gregory & Castle Rock	boat hand
Bunyart	1856	Fremantle	boat hand
Jack Crow	1850	Bunbury	boat hand
Thomas Jincup	1862	Bunbury	boat hand
South Coast			
Bobby Candyup	1875	'East coast'	–
Cockellet	1863	Barker Bay	boat hand
Jack Hansome (alt. Ansum, Hansom, Handson, Hanson)	1861–1878	Torbay, Middle Island, Doubtful Island Bay, Cheynes Beach, 'East Coast'	boat steerer
Jack Hardy	1861–1877	Barker Bay, Cheynes Beach, Doubtful Island Bay, 'East Coast'	boat hand
Tommy King (alt. Jimmy King)	1867–1872	Cheyne's Beach, Cape Riche, 'East Coast'	boat hand
Mullipert	1878	'East Coast'	boat hand
Billy Nadingbert	1861	Cheyne's Beach	boat steerer
Nebinyan (alt. Nepenyan, Nebin, Boney, Bonaparte)	1862–1877	Middle Island, Doubtful Island Bay, Cheynes Beach, 'East Coast'	boat hand
Bobby Noneran (alt. Nornaran)	1861–1863	Torbay, Barker Bay	boat hand
Rattler Nuterwert, (alt. Rattler, Nutermut)	1861–1875	Torbay, Middle Island, Doubtful Island Bay, Cheynes Beach, 'East Coast'	boat hand
Dicky Taylor (alt. Dickey)	1861–1875	Torbay, Middle Island, Cheynes Beach, Doubtful Island Bay, 'East Coast'	boat hand
Source: <i>Western Australian Government Gazette</i>			

It is difficult to determine exactly how many Aboriginal men worked in the colonial whaling industry. Between the 1850s and 1870s some whaling masters published lists of their workers in the *Western Australian Government Gazette* as a means of invoking the *Master and Servant Act* to prevent disobedience or desertion of crew. Table 1 lists the Aboriginal men employed on the south and west coasts, providing some idea of the earliest and latest known dates of crew registration, and the stations on which they were employed. It is highly probable that other Aboriginal whalers have not been identified as such because of their use of European aliases, or because they worked with whaling masters who did not register their crews.

From the historical records available, the Aboriginal whalers working on the south-west coasts all appear to have been Nyungar, with the one exception of a man

brought from Tasmania.²¹ There is no sign of the coercion, kidnapping and displacement of Aboriginal crewmembers that characterised later maritime industries such as pearling and *beche de mer*, which operated on the northern Australian coasts.²²

This was the era of *Moby Dick*, with men in rowed whaleboats pursuing their prey with hand-thrown harpoons. Table 1 shows that most Aboriginal men worked as boat hands or pulling hands, who assisted in rowing the whaleboats and in other general station duties. Billy Nadingbert and Jack Hansome are listed as boat steerers, a skilled position in a whaling crew and one that attracted a higher wage. The registrations also demonstrate that some of the Aboriginal whalers worked on the south coast for nearly twenty years, with contemporary reports indicating that many were highly respected for their skills.²³ In the off-season, Aboriginal men also manned the whaleboat that was used by the pilot service in Albany.²⁴

William Whitecar, an American whaler who published an account of a cruise along the Western Australian coast in the late 1850s, commented on some of the skills and abilities of the Aboriginal whalers he encountered.

These people are remarkable for accuracy of vision and keen scent — for the former quality they are occasionally carried out by whale ships, for the purpose of looking out from the masthead, and I have been told by those who were ship-mates with them, that they could discern a spout or sail at as great a distance with the naked eye, as a practiced hand could with a glass.²⁵

Whitecar's comment is supported by an anecdote from the Cheyne Beach shore station, referring to Aboriginal whaler Jack Hardy's ability to clearly see whales and features invisible to the other lookouts.²⁶

Nyungar men were sometimes employed on foreign whaling vessels. For instance, in 1848 an exploration party investigating around Cape Riche, to the east of Albany, encountered a Nyungar man who claimed to have been to Sydney and Hobart aboard a French whaler.²⁷ In 1890, the writer Henry Lawson passed through Albany and recorded meeting an elderly Aboriginal man, possibly the same person, who had spent two years aboard a French whaler and was fluent in the language.²⁸

The fact that pelagic whaling vessels often contained an ethnically and racially diverse crew may explain both the ready incorporation of Aboriginal men on to the colonial shore crews and the relatively equitable payment that they received. However, we know almost nothing about the life of Aboriginal whalers on the Western Australian shore stations, including whether they were housed in separate quarters from their non-Aboriginal colleagues, as was the case on eastern Australian stations such as Two-fold Bay.²⁹ One exception is a rare surviving anecdote from the 1860s, when a cook,

^{21.} *Western Mail* 10 February 1927.

^{22.} Green 1981: 104; Loos 1982: 126-159.

^{23.} McKail 1927.

^{24.} Chapman 1979: 40.

^{25.} Whitecar 1860: 83.

^{26.} *Western Mail* 10 February 1927.

^{27.} *Perth Gazette* 29 July 1848.

^{28.} Lawson 1899.

^{29.} Davidson 1988.

newly arrived at the Cheynes Beach station, refused to serve a cup of tea to an Aboriginal whaler named Tommy King, saying that he did not sign on to 'wait on niggers'.

Tommy: 'Then put up your dukes.'

Cook: 'I'll knock you down with the fire bar. Do you think I'd dirty my hands fighting a blackfellow?'

Tommy: 'You white-livered cow! You're afraid!'

Cook: 'I'm afraid of no nigger.'

Tommy: 'Then that's right, come out and have a few rounds for fun.'

Captain Thomas, hearing strong language and high words, came on the scene.

'What's the matter, Tommy?'

'This white-livered cow refused to give me a cup of tea, me who went to a mission school, and is too cowardly to come out and have a few rounds even for fun: the cow.'

Captain Thomas then told the cook that he was engaged to cook for the men, and that he was to treat the crews, white men and natives, alike, or leave the job.³⁰

Captain John Thomas, the most highly respected of the south coast whaling masters, regularly employed Aboriginal men as crew and is responsible for many of the registrations listed in Table 1. In 1862, in the same period as the incident mentioned above, Thomas registered Nebinyan as a pulling hand to work on his late-season station at Middle Island, far eastward near the Great Australian Bight. At this time, Nebinyan would have been in his early twenties, although he may well have worked previously. Thomas' main station at Cheyne Beach was only 20km east of Two Peoples Bay and well within the boundaries of Mineng country. As the Two Peoples Bay station itself had operated for only a few years in the early 1840s, it is quite likely that Nebinyan's family had taken to spending their winters enjoying the whale meat bounty at the Cheyne Beach station, established in 1846. Employment on Thomas' crews was then an easy step for a fit young Aboriginal man.

Table 2: Nebinyan's whaling career

Year	Station	Position	Station manager
1862	Middle Island	boat hand	Thomas J
1863	Doubtful Island Bay	boat hand	McKenzie H
1866	Cheyne Beach	boat hand	Thomas J
1867	Cheyne Beach	boat hand	Thomas J
1871	'East Coast'	boat hand	Sherratt T
1877	Cheyne Beach	boat hand	Bruce JR & Bruce J
Source: <i>Western Australian Government Gazette</i>			

Nebinyan (sometimes listed as Bonaparte or Boney presumably because of the homonym with Napoleon), worked for Captain Thomas and several other whaling sta-

³⁰. McKail 1927: 23.

tions on the south coast over the next 16 years. From the crew registrations listed in Table 2, it is difficult to know whether Nebinyan worked as a whaler only every few years, or if this is simply a reflection of an erratic reporting process. One tantalising hint is that in 1910, when Daisy Bates took Nebinyan to the Perth Carnival as part of a contingent of Nyungar singers, she commented that he had not visited Perth 'since the whaling days'.³¹ It is possible that an already skilled whaler could have worked on the west coast for a time, although no supporting evidence for his employment has been located. The last record of Nebinyan's whaling career is in 1877, the final year that Cheyne Beach operated and only two years before the traditional open-boat whaling industry ended in Western Australia. By this time, Nebinyan would have been in his late thirties, having spent most of his life either observing or participating in shore whaling.

Nebinyan's songs

It is a great loss that, unlike so many other Nyungar songs that Bates recorded in full, she only described her impression of Nebinyan's whaling cycle (see citation in the introduction). A fuller accounting of the 'mere names' and the individual steps which Nebinyan identified within the whaling process would have been an invaluable insight into Aboriginal perceptions of an early European industry. However, from Bates' description, Nebinyan's whaling song cycle appears to be an accurate depiction of mid-19th century whaling operations, intermingled with the emotions and excitement of a young man on a great adventure.

All whale hunts began with a lookout sighting whales and signalling to the seven-man whaleboats to row in pursuit. The first part of the song, speaking of Nebinyan's 'sorrow' as the shoreline recedes, hints at the tensions and fear of the chase to come, not the least because Nyungar did not traditionally use watercraft and the open ocean therefore represented an unfamiliar and potentially terrifying environment. As many other Nyungar songs speak of the anger of the seas along the south coast, to move across them was obviously a courageous act.³²

The 'stealthy gliding' towards the whale reflects the careful process of rowing with minimal noise to avoid startling the quarry into flight. The 'swift and sure harpooning' and the 'great seas' suggest the frenzy of a whale attempting to escape, with the eventual 'final surrender' as the exhausted leviathan slowed and stopped, allowing the whaleboat to draw close and deliver the mortal blow with a sharp lance. The 'triumphant' hunters would then have to attach the whale to the boat and undertake the gruelling task of towing the carcass, sometimes for miles, back to the shore for processing. Once secured, the blubber would be cut (flensed) from the carcass and thrown into large iron cauldrons (trypots) where the oil was rendered out. However, it is a particularly Nyungar point of view that Nebinyan's story ends not with an accounting of the value of the oil, but with the 'great rejoicing of the whale feast', which certainly was not part of the recognised process, at least for Europeans.

Despite being part of a European industrial activity, it would appear that Nebinyan translated his experiences aboard the whaleboats into the form of a traditional

^{31.} Bates 1910.

^{32.} Bates 1985: 337.

hunting narrative.³³ Each song in the cycle represented a different stage in the hunting process, describing in word and action the nature of the quarry and the technique of the hunter(s) in stalking and killing the prey.³⁴ In Bates' descriptions of other forms of Nyungar hunting dances, she stresses that such technical details were of considerable interest to spectators:

As no two natives hunt alike, the methods of each are noted by spectators and performers, in order that some fresh hint may be taken in the mode of ... stalking.³⁵

There was no larger quarry than a whale. Yet, because of the demise of the whaling industry, Nebinyan's songs described an experience that was no longer accessible to the younger men of the Katanning camp, leaving his feats, in effect, unchallenged.

Although Bates was often privy to men's secret and sacred ceremonies, the open location and range of audience present at Nebinyan's performance clearly indicates that this was an informal and non-sacred 'camp song'. Berndt described such open performances as 'imaginative and inventive dancing and songs composed to translate for public enjoyment, if not information, contemporary events of everyday living'.³⁶ Contact situations 'depicting and interpreting the changed circumstances in which Aborigines found themselves', were a common theme, with remembrances of cross-cultural encounters and events sometimes enduring for many decades.³⁷ Nebinyan's whaling experiences were at least 30 years in the past by the time he performed in 1908, but were obviously well known favourites of his audience. During the same visit Nebinyan also performed for Bates the 'Kooranup' (heaven) dance, which appears to have descended from Nebinyan's grandfather's observation of a drill performed by marines from Matthew Flinders' vessel when it landed near Albany in 1801. Isobel White has analysed this performance and its significance.³⁸ Nebinyan's repertoire of performances was effectively a living compendium of Mineng contact experiences with Europeans.

Although Nebinyan's composition is the most comprehensively described, there are tantalising allusions to other instances of how Nyungar transformed encounters with the whaling industry into ceremony, song and ritual. The earliest reported example is from the late 1850s, several years after a small whaling station had opened at Port Gregory, 550km north of Perth. A European traveller camped near the Murchison River, 50km north of the station, recorded a dance being performed by Aboriginal men which 'imitated the killing of a whale as witnessed at Port Gregory, with an effigy made of bushes representing the whale'.³⁹ The use of such a large prop for the hunting performance is reminiscent of an instance recorded by Ronald Berndt at the Victoria River (NT) during the 1940s, where dancers employed a four-metre long 'crocodile' of paper-bark bound with twine as part of a their dance.⁴⁰

33. Bates 1985: 324.

34. Bates 1985: 327.

35. Bates 1985: 327.

36. Berndt & Berndt 1981: 387.

37. Berndt & Berndt 1981: 386.

38. White 1980.

39. Oldfield 1865: 256.

40. Berndt & Berndt 1981: 385.

Nyilgee, an elderly woman who had grown up in the Busselton area close to where a whaling station had once operated, sang to Bates of dreams in which she balanced and danced upon the back of a whale.⁴¹ Nyilgee also stated that in the southwest there had once been a whale totem, although the last of the totem kin (*mammang borungur*) had disappeared forty years earlier (c.1870s) 'with the departure of the whales'.⁴² Of the limited information Bates was able to collect concerning this group, she noted with some interest that stranded whales could be freely eaten by the *mammang borungur*, apparently without the dire consequences normally associated with the consumption of one's totem animal. Bates also reported in her notes that the 'whale totem men (*borlooloo galn'ga*) of the nor'west' had also 'died out', but provides no further information on their location or nature.⁴³ It is likely that in this instance, 'northwest' refers to the region of Roebourne and the Dampier Archipelago, an area where Bates spent some time, which was also closely associated with early foreign and colonial whaling activity.⁴⁴

It is interesting to speculate upon the correlation between the reported time of decline of the totem groups and the known cessation of whaling activity in both regions in the late 1870s. By extension, it raises the possibility that whales may have been adopted as totem animals as a consequence of the commencement of the whaling industry and the role of the whales within the post-contact economy and life of Aboriginal groups. Similar post-contact 'dreamings' and totems, sometimes involving objects of European manufacture, have been noted elsewhere.⁴⁵

Conclusion – Nebinyan the whaler: 'contact' as opportunity

Daisy Bates saw contact between Aboriginal and European populations as an ultimately destructive process and as such contextualised the contact era songs she recorded as a form of elegy for what she felt was a dying culture. In doing so, she overlooked the capacity of the Nyungar to exploit new opportunities and experiences to enhance and transform traditional systems and personal status.

At the broadest level, whaling provided the coastal Nyungar communities with a new set of economic resources. In the earlier years of the industry Nyungar chose to forego traditional seasonal movement towards inland hunting grounds, in favour of exploiting the by-products of whaling activity. In later years, as land alienation increased and consequently destroyed traditional resources or denied Aboriginal people access, whale meat provided Nyungar with an alternative source of subsistence. However, far greater benefits were to be accrued from personal and more intimate associations with the whaling industry.

The eventual integration of Aboriginal men (and possibly women) into the whaling crews might be seen from the perspective of the European industrialists as addressing labour shortages by exploiting Indigenous people's skills. However, the reverse is to consider what it provided for the Aboriginal youths who decided to participate. There

41. Bates nd.a: 36.

42. Bates 1985: 197.

43. Bates nd.b.

44. Gara 1983.

45. Mulvaney 1989: 27-28.

has long been recognition by historians and anthropologists that in contact situations, young Aboriginal men and women were quick to grasp opportunities to exploit new skills and economic resources to gain advantage within, or in some cases to side-step, traditional hierarchies.⁴⁶ In Aboriginal societies, power was mostly held by a gerontocracy that controlled privileged ritual knowledge as well as access to wives. Young men were denied marriage partners until their twenties and the attainment of higher levels of initiation, bestowed by the senior men, while girls were betrothed to far older partners. However, in the contact situation, a command of English could create for a young person a privileged and powerful role as intermediary between colonists and elders and consequently open opportunities for personal advancement.⁴⁷ In industrial situations, European appointed leadership roles such as 'head stockman' or 'boat steerer' not only potentially placed young men in command of their traditional superiors, but were invariably reinforced by increased payments and access to consumer items. Such appointments could create alternative or parallel power structures within post-contact communities.⁴⁸

For young Aboriginal whalers, such as Nebinyan, there were several potential rewards. First was the kudos of returning to shore after a successful hunt, combined with providing the mass of whale meat that would facilitate a feast. Second, the 'lay' payment would allow the purchase and distribution of considerable largesse to the community, which as noted above resulted in women declaring that 'they will accept no husbands except they will go whaling' – an avenue potentially unavailable to men who were older and otherwise more eligible for matrimony in principle.⁴⁹ Third, as in the examples cited above, promotion to a role such as 'boat steerer' created further seniority by potentially placing the Aboriginal whaler in command over both Aboriginal and white workers. Finally, the historical record attests that success as a whaler also created an avenue for acknowledgment, respect and economic standing within the European community.

For Nebinyan, whaling provided one further opportunity. In her notes, Bates honours him as the 'chief songmaker of his tribe and [composer of] many melodies which have become established as tribal ditties'.⁵⁰ Bates would have understood the implications of granting such an accolade. The fact that Nebinyan had received songs and dances such as the Kooranup from his grandfather indicates that he had probably inherited this position.⁵¹ However, to accrue status a 'songman' not only had to be able to perform well known songs, dances and ceremonies, but also create their own series.⁵² The novel experience of whaling provided Nebinyan with material to translate into song and dance, and consequently further facilitated his rise in standing within the traditional structure of Mineng Nyungar society.

46. eg Reynolds 1982: 131; Sharp 1952.

47. Kaberry 1939: 33; Sharp 1952; Reynolds 1982: 131; Harrison 2002: 365.

48. Harrison 2003.

49. *Inquirer* 29 November 1848.

50. Bates 1985: 342.

51. Elkin 1964: 295.

52. Stubington 1979: 15.

Having spent his life as a performer and knowing how to play his audience, Nebinyan's decision to sing his whaling cycle that night was almost certainly a carefully considered choice to send several messages, not just to Daisy Bates, but to the Katanning Camp as a whole. Despite advanced age, his songs reminded them of his past prowess as a hunter and his ability to provide for his community. Framed within the processes of a post-contact industry, he recalled successful associations, negotiations and status within the European community. By gathering to listen and urge him on, the audience acknowledged his continuing mastery as a respected songman. Many decades after he last rowed in a crew and received payment for a successful whale hunt, Nebinyan's whaling experiences continued to ensure him status.

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‘Nobles and savages’ on the television

Frances Peters-Little

The sweet voice of nature is no longer an infallible guide for us, nor is the independence we have received from her a desirable state. Peace and innocence escaped us forever, even before we tasted their delights. Beyond the range of thought and feeling of the brutish men of the earliest times, and no longer within the grasp of the ‘enlightened’ men of later periods, the happy life of the Golden Age could never really have existed for the human race. When men could have enjoyed it they were unaware of it and when they have understood it they had already lost it.

JJ Rousseau 1762¹

Although Rousseau laments the loss of peace and innocence; little did he realise his desire for the *noble savage* would endure beyond his time and into the next millennium. However, all is not lost for the modern person who shares his bellow, for a new *noble* and *savage* Aborigine resonates across the electronic waves on millions of television sets throughout the globe.²

Introduction

Despite the numbers of Aboriginal people drawn into the Australian film and television industries in recent years, cinema and television continue to portray and communicate images that reflect Rousseau’s desires for the *noble savage*. Such desires persist not only in images screened in the cinema and on television, but also in the way that they are discussed. The task of ridding non-fiction film and television making of the desire for the *noble* and the *savage* is an essential one that must be consciously dealt with by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal film and television makers and their critics. Yet, moving beyond the *noble* or the *savage* remains a difficult task. With underlying desires for the *noble* and the *savage* seeping into the colonial sub-conscious for centuries it is improbable such notions are likely to disappear after only three decades of Aboriginal self-determination and government policies on Aboriginal broadcasting.

What I intend to demonstrate are several examples where film and television makers use images and concepts that reflect Rousseau’s *noble savage* to describe Aboriginal people’s co-existence with and/or resistance to colonisation. This is not an essay that means to attack the works of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal film-makers, but to more-or-

^{1.} JJ Rousseau 1773, *The social contract and discourses*, cited by Gibson 1984: 144.

^{2.} Peters-Little, forthcoming.

less raise questions about why we perfunctorily slot Aborigines into *noble* and *savage* stereotypes. While it is generally thought that film and television makers underpin racist stereotypes,³ I say it is more complex than that for I am yet to meet anyone who makes a film for the sole purpose of inciting racial hatred. This is a point well noted by Aboriginal scholar Marcia Langton who contends that 'racial discrimination, while a problem, is not necessarily intentional but is a particular factor underlining specific and/or general encounters between Aborigines and film-makers'.⁴ While I intend to explore the *noble* and the *savage* stereotypes, I also maintain that what has become problematic in recent years is that the *noble* or positive pole has intensified in opposition to years of apparent negative representations of Aborigines as *savages*. Nevertheless, I assert that focusing on the *noble* pole is just as harmful as the *savage* pole, simply because Aboriginal people are neither *noble* nor *savage*.

Film critic Carol Lasaur states that Langton traces the history of representations of Aboriginal images, pointing out diversity of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal production techniques, aesthetics and politics as an alternative to the way non-Aborigines make films about Aborigines.⁵ I am not convinced of this argument. I believe that the production of Aboriginal film and television making have more in common with non-Aboriginal film and television making than we may imagine. After three decades of self-determination policies, and Aboriginal people arguing that they live with the problem and therefore know their own solutions,⁶ I think it is time to revisit the issue of Aboriginal self-representation in television from a different perspective that revives us from the self-determination rhetoric of the 1970s and the run-of-the-mill 1980s resistance approach.⁷ Various Aboriginal film and television makers assert that only Aboriginal people are capable of telling authentic Aboriginal stories,⁸ however I am prone to agree with the alternative theory expressed by Roland Barthes, that 'realism is, and has been from its very inception, something subjected to the creator and the personal choices they make'.⁹ I argue that filmmaking or storytelling can be a very personal thing, and that there is an attainable middle-ground, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal film and television makers to be capable of telling real Aboriginal stories, on the proviso that they make the conscious decision to avoid the pendulum swing between the *noble* and the *savage* representations.

In my attempt to critique the binary framework of *nobles* and *savages* that meet with long-standing colonial desires, I will demonstrate why *noble* and *savage* imagery has endured, and how it is an ever present reflection in Australian film and television making. This is not to say that fictional drama/cinema is more successful at excluding

3. Foley 1999: 2.

4. Langton 1993: 27–28.

5. Lasaur 1993: 4.

6. Bayles 1989.

7. Batty 2001 talks about the resistance model.

8. The issue of what is a 'real' Aboriginal film continues to divide Aboriginal film and television makers. For example, film-maker Darlene Johnson's documentary *The Making of Rabbit Proof Fence* was excluded from an Indigenous film festival in Adelaide in March 2002 on the basis that the film was about a 'white' film-maker. Johnson's film was excluded even though she is Aboriginal and the subject was Aboriginal actors in the film.

9. Barthes 1973.

stereotypes. On the contrary, I consider non-fiction mainstream television is the more progressive of the two genres. In this paper, I try to bring attention to the serious neglect of research and analysis of Aboriginal non-fiction broadcasting in the mainstream and ask why this should be the case. I am also curious as to why experts have preferred to engage in research and public discussions on the topic of Aboriginal drama and cinema (the highbrow culturally *noble*) and remote Aboriginal broadcasting, while clearly neglecting the role and the important contribution of mainstream non-fiction television (the lowbrow politically *savage*) Aboriginal program-making in south-eastern states of Australia. While I do not attempt to offer a recipe for the perfect Aboriginal film (and I would challenge anyone who thought that they could) I maintain that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal film-makers are expected to replicate *noble/savage* images and concepts in their film-making for various reasons that need serious discussion and scrutiny. I base this on the fact that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal television makers operate within a postcolonial society that rewards those who replicate such imagery and analysis, thus catering to the *noble* and *savage* demands from their audiences and readerships.¹⁰ I admit this as one who has made documentary films for television. I know that even I have tried to convert audiences and convince them of the importance of understanding Aboriginal history and people's concerns, and, at times, naively dallied with promoting Aborigines as *noble* beings in my own film productions. However, this is something that I now think, while perhaps appropriate for its time during the late 1980s, is no longer a functional way to proceed into the future. I will demonstrate why I believe this to be the case. This point is perhaps the key to understanding the overall emphasis of this paper. I draw from my personal experiences as a black film-maker who grew up in a multi-cultural society and has learnt to observe those colonial values I have internalised and/or resisted, with all the muddy parts that exist between the two. I also observe other good film-makers, who at some time in their filmmaking lives shared these same good intentions that I once had.

Terminology

To define a few key words: I will be referring to 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal' as those who are of Aboriginal descent and those who are not in preference to using the term 'Indigenous'. Some people choose not to use the word 'Aborigines' because they think it is offensive, with the only difference being that one is a noun and the latter an adjective. Occasionally I will refer to Aborigines as 'black-skinned' and 'brown-skinned', and non-Aborigines as 'whites' especially where there are references to 'skin-colour'. The issue of skin-colour is important to discuss in a visual medium such as film and television. The term 'mainstream broadcasting' refers to public television broadcasting such as the ABC and SBS and the commercial networks. 'Network' refers to the commercial channels privately owned and controlled. An 'Aboriginal documentary' is a film that could be made by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal film-makers, but the content and subject must be Aboriginal. The term 'non-fiction program' can refer to various non-fiction formats such as magazine, documentaries and news and current affair items. Although there are examples where people make the distinction between the independent documentary

¹⁰. In chapter 3 of my forthcoming book, *The return of the Noble Savage: by popular demand*, I discuss how funding and training become available for Aboriginal productions, what is being made, and who it is being made for.

and the television documentary, independent documentaries are documentaries made by film-makers not employed by the broadcaster. Since it is rare to see non-fiction programs anywhere other than television, I will occasionally refer to non-fiction films as television programs. Nor will I be making a distinction between 16mm or 35mm film, SP betacam, and/or various video or other digital formats. All formats are referred to as films, programs and/or items.

The noble and the savage

I focus on the significance of the term 'the noble savage' to highlight the paradoxical meaning that oscillates between the *noble* pole and the *savage* pole. It is an ambiguous and variable term used to define perceptions of the 'other' so I will therefore not be referring to it in terms of its scientific meaning. I will argue that it is precisely because of its fluidity and ambiguity that I suspect the notion of the *noble* and *savage* has endured for several centuries, long before and after Europeans set foot on Australia's eastern shores. I examine the term in its parts because I want to understand why Europeans were able to revere or wish to preserve the *noble* while despising and hoping to destroy the *savage*. I am also fascinated with irrational European observations that confined the world's population to such simplistic binary terms of good and evil, north and south, black and white, real and unreal, and in many ways continue to do so. To do this I have divided themes that were characteristic of 18th and 19th century images and literature illustrating the *noble savage*, sometimes used to represent Australian Aborigines, into five themes: 1) 'patrons of nature's gifts'; 2) 'infantile creatures of innocence'; 3) 'black naked brutes'; 4) 'torn between two cultures' and 5) 'doomed for extinction'.

Although many have thought Jean Jacques Rousseau coined the term, Cranston argues that authors and explorers referred to the *noble savage* (or the characteristics of the *noble savage*) as early as the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. Proponents of the idea in one form or another included Christopher Columbus, Michel de Montaigne, Desiderius Erasmus, and Sir Walter Raleigh, who was particularly fascinated by the way *savages* obtained their food.¹¹ Seventeenth century poet John Dryden referred to the *noble savage* when he wrote, 'I am as free as nature first made man, Ere the base laws of servitude began, when wild in woods the noble savage ran.'¹² By the 18th century the French meaning of the word *savage* conveyed an uncorrupted innocence. Rousseau's statement, quoted above, demonstrates that the *noble savage* was a concept in which Europeans romantically viewed other cultures in ideal terms and envied them. Maurice Cranston says the concept of *noble savage* gained popularity at a time when Europeans felt they had lost the ability to make use of nature's gifts, and were instead trapped in the tangled world of letters, magistrates, politics and commerce.¹³

Interestingly, the motivations of 18th and 19th century scientists and artists, who ventured into new worlds looking for solutions to their own society's over-commerciali-

11. This parallels nature and wildlife studies/programs about Aboriginal hunters and gatherers where there is a white presenter/protagonist who studies the diets and cooking skills of Aborigines. See discussion below.

12. J Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada, Part One*, 1670, cited in Jones 1985.

13. Cranston 1991. See also Schaer, Claeys and Tower Sargent (eds) 2000. Both books stress in great detail many complex reasons for European desires for utopia and for the noble savage in European societies throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

sation and corruption, are not that unrelated to some of the rationales used by contemporary documentary film-makers about other cultures. Although there were other motivating reasons for 18th and 19th century scientists and artists to study other cultures and colonies, the impulse to find a solution for one's societal problems by exploring other people's culture is not uncommon. For example, documentary filmmaker Gary Kildea boldly suggests that white film-makers could afford to sail through exoticism by making films about Aborigines because in most cases they did not have to carry the political and social burden of responsibility that Aboriginal film and television makers seem to do.¹⁴ I am also interested in the notion that white film-makers are as interested in making films about other cultures because they are frustrated with 'their' own society. In my interview with cutting-edge film-maker Alec Morgan, I wondered why white film-makers would want to make a film about Aborigines. His reply was that in part he made *Lousy Little Sixpence* because he wanted to 'make sense of a white superficial world that greatly valued materialism, Gallipoli and jingoisms, but when it came to Aborigines they were yet to be treated as human beings deserving of justice and recognition'.¹⁵ But is it fair to say that Aboriginal film and television makers are exempt from having the same interests in exoticisms? Probably not, since Aboriginal film and television makers are just as capable of being attracted to the same cultural iconographies and symbolisms and can find them just as fascinating when filming Aboriginal communities other than their own, especially when aiming to address white audiences.¹⁶

Just as 18th century Europeans thought Utopia was located in a greater southern hemisphere, an inversion of the Eurasian landmass, balancing and contrasting the corruptible and tangled world of the north,¹⁷ contemporary portrayals see Australia's outback as the real heart of Australia. When Europeans first encountered Aboriginal people on the Australian continent, they saw them through a double vision¹⁸ under the guise of objectivity. They saw Aboriginal people in the same way they saw the two hemispheres, that is, through a framework supporting a simplistic dichotomy of opposing poles. The world for them at that time required that one was either civilised or uncivilised. No matter how enlightened they imagined themselves to be, Europeans could not shake off their double lenses on the world, maintaining their racist supremacist attitudes over those they sketched, wrote about, and recorded. By exalting those they had met, they perhaps thought themselves acting in a most *noble* manner themselves.

With no such excuses as their 18th century predecessors, 21st century Australians still resort to binary terms when discussing Aboriginal people, for example Aboriginal people living in settled Australia, opposed to Aboriginal people who are traditional owners living on their land. This perception is touched upon by Toby Miller, who discusses

14. Discussions arising at the Cross-cultural Round Table, convened by David and Judith MacDougall, Braidwood, NSW, February 2000.

15. F Peters-Little, interview with Alec Morgan, Bondi Beach, November 2001.

16. For example, the film *Malangi* is a documentary I researched for Aboriginal director Michael Riley, about 'a day in the life' of Aboriginal artist David Malangi, who starts the day hunting and gathering with his extended family. On the shoot, Riley discussed how he was particularly fascinated with the traditional lifestyle but was somewhat pleased that his own life was not as hard going in Sydney where he lived and worked.

17. Gibson 1984: 2-3.

18. Thomas and Losche (eds) 1999.

how the world ceases to find Australia interesting when Australia became modern.¹⁹ The trend to see Aborigines in the north, supposedly possessing a traditional culture that is worthy of saving, but urbanised black culture is not as authentic, and unworthy of research was encouraged by North American scholar Eric Michaels. According to anthropologist Melinda Hinkson, he inspired a small industry of scholars to write about Aboriginal television making in remote Australia.²⁰ This peculiar outback fixation has not escaped everyone's attention. Megan McCullough, an enthusiastic anthropology student at New York University wrote:

It is possible to see how [Marcia] Langton's dismissal of mainstream television in Australia was perhaps hasty. The Aboriginal programs unit at the ABC demonstrates that Aboriginal mainstream television can effectively and interestingly juggle identity politics with the nuts and bolts of production, reception and distribution without compromising the complexity of the Aboriginal political positions and cultural positionalities ... [Langton] appears to judge independent cinema and remote Aboriginal media associations more valuable, more worthy of both the title and state funding.²¹

The implications of dividing mainstream Aboriginal television-makers from remote Aboriginal television-makers has even affected Aboriginal film-makers themselves. This is demonstrated in the events leading up to the newly formed National Indigenous Media Association of Australia, (NIMAA) who in 1991 initially sought to ban Aborigines working in the ABC and SBS from membership with the national organisation because Aborigines working for mainstream television were thought to not be producing 'real' Aboriginal television.²²

Patrons of nature's gifts

From what I have seen of the Natives of New Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched People upon Earth; but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans, being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous, but with the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them ... The Earth and the Sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life. They covet not Magnificent Houses; Household stuff; they live in a Warm and fine Climate, and enjoy every Wholesome Air ... in short they seemed to set no Value upon anything of their own nor any one Article we could offer them. This in my opinion Argues, that they think themselves provided with all the necessarys of Life, and they have no Superfluities.

Captain James Cook 1770²³

Perhaps the most common image of the *noble savage* emerges in many nature and wild-life documentaries. This is where audiences are able to go on 'white man walkabouts'. Reminiscent of the early observations of Captain James Cook, who clearly admires

^{19.} Miller 1994: 1.

^{20.} Hinkson 2002.

^{21.} McCullough 1995: 15.

^{22.} F Peters-Little, interview with former secretary of NIMAA, Greg Eatock, Sydney, 2001.

^{23.} J Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery*, cited in Reynolds 1987: 96.

Aborigines living in harmony with nature, many nature and wildlife documentary programs uphold the notion that 'real' Aborigines have a natural affinity to land, in other words, live like native flora and fauna, with very little need for anything that may exist in the modern world. Programs that do this are *Walkabout*; the first documentary series on television featuring Aborigines, produced by Charles and Elsa Chauvel in 1958 and aired for 13 weeks on the ABC, and Vincent Serventy's *Nature Walkabout* which ran for 26 weeks on the Nine network, in the same year. The *Nature Walkabout* series followed Vincent Serventy and his young family travelling across the continent.²⁴ Continuing in the same format of families on their personal expeditions in the Australian outback the *Leyland Brothers World* series went into production as early as 1961 for the Seven Network, producing over 40 episodes for the network throughout the 1970s.²⁵ A regular feature of Seven's *World Around Us* series during the late 1970s was *Malcolm Douglas' Adventure* series on the Seven Network, which featured Aborigines who would almost invariably be one of Douglas's friends or guides.

Voiceless Aborigines, like other flora and fauna, are used in many nature and wildlife documentaries as backdrops. Their part becomes apparent when an Aboriginal 'friend' passes on knowledge to white protagonists supposedly teaching them how to survive harmoniously with the land. The white protagonist in nature and wildlife documentaries, as my mother said 'always looked somewhat unnatural in bare feet, pretending to be at one with nature, until they are able to reunite with an invisible camera-crew and 4WD and a chartered flight back to some swanky Sydney editing room'. Commencing in 1976 another 'friend' of the Aborigines was Harry Butler, who was a Tasmanian naturalist and conservation expert who became famous for his fanatical interests in plants and animals. *Harry Butler in the Wild* was a popular 26-episode series produced by the ABC and repeated several times during the mid-1970s. Both Butler and crocodile farmer and film-maker Douglas ditched the earlier family expedition format and made personality-driven protagonists a popular style.

Appearing on television in the 1980s, the ABC reclaimed their stake on nature and wildlife programs with the highly popular series *Bush Tucker Man*, filling the gap that the successful *Harry Butler in the Wild* series had left behind. The *Bush Tucker Man*, sharing Sir Walter Raleigh's fascination for the diets and eating habits of the native peoples, aired 26 episodes on the ABC and was repeated several times. Les Hiddens, who was the *Bush Tucker Man*, was most noted for wearing army fatigues and a strangely modified Aussie slouch hat. He was an environmentalist like Butler, but had a more robust personality and was a connoisseur of edible native plants and animals.

The Aboriginal 'friend' filmic theme of 'white-man storytelling', was recently cleverly parodied by actor/comedian Glen Robbins. Appearing as Russell Coight, the presenter of an eight-part one-hour 'mockumentary' series airing on Channel Ten, *Coight* is a fictional character created by Robbins who travels and meets with black and white people living in the outback. Often describing the people he meets as his great 'mates' or Aboriginal 'friends', Robbins allows us to see Coight's somewhat ostentatious imaginings of his so-called popularity amongst the locals. This becomes clear

²⁴ F Peters-Little interviews with Catherine Serventy, one of the children on the Serventy series, November 2001.

²⁵ F Peters-Little, conversation with Seven Network's archivist.

when Coight introduces the camera to his 'mates' or 'friends' who are never quite as awestruck about him as he is of them. When Robbins edits the story together we see the same close-up 'handshake' between a 'black' hand and a 'white' hand. The shot is then repeated showing the same close-up black/white handshake even though the wide-shot reveals Coight to be shaking hands with white men. Whether Robbins intends to comment on relationships between Aborigines and non-Aboriginal presenters, Robbins is sending up one of Australia's most repetitive images between blacks and whites. In fact, the close-up of the black/white handshake is prevalent in many films, including a film by Aboriginal filmmaker, Richard Franklin, *Harry's War* (1991), where Harry, an Aboriginal soldier shakes hands with his white army friend.²⁶

Infantile creatures of innocence

In all questions of morality and in all matters connected with the emotional nature the blacks were mere children.

CS Wake²⁷

Darwinians believed adult European people passed through the stages of human evolution while growing up. They considered that Aborigines were still at the childhood stage. References to Aborigines as childish are too numerous to mention. The notion that Aborigines are childlike underpins the foundation stone for most Aboriginal policy, past and present. Barrister Noel Pearson continues to argue that the resultant paternalism and welfare chain Aborigines to their own social and cultural demise.²⁸ While represented as voiceless in nature and wildlife documentaries, the notion that Aboriginal people are childlike and incapable of taking control or speaking for themselves was challenged by film-makers in the 1960s who opposed the use of white narration or white presenters. A 60 minute documentary called *A Changing Race* made by documentary filmmaker Robert Feeney, aired on the ABC in 1964, a year before the freedom rides.²⁹ It was presented by Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little. It was an attempt to illustrate an Aboriginal voice presenting Aboriginal opinions to non-Aboriginal Australia. Besides this one-off, white narration over black images dominated until the 1980s when documentary film-makers came to struggle with the problematic issues of the 'voice of god' style of film making. Commenting on his own filmmaking style, Ian Dunlop says 'it's a constant struggle to use narration and subtitles over the translations of one language to another and with the tidying-up of Aboriginal Kriol'. As a result, Dunlop admits that many of his films have no sound at all.³⁰ Nevertheless, today Dunlop is the exception and since the late 1980s it has become conventional for documentary film-

^{26.} *Harry's War* is a 27 minute short drama Franklin wrote on the life of a young Aboriginal soldier who leaves Condah Mission to fight for his country in the jungles of Papua New Guinea. The film is based on the experiences of his uncle Harry Saunders who fought and died in the beaches of Gona in 1942.

^{27.} CS Wake, *The mental characteristics of primitive man, as exemplified by the Australian Aborigines*, 1872, cited in Reynolds 1987: 118.

^{28.} Pearson 2000.

^{29.} Borchers 2001.

^{30.} Ian Dunlop, Round Table discussion at the Cross-Cultural Film-makers Conference, Braidwood, 2000.

makers who make Aboriginal documentaries to use presenters like Jimmy Little in the *A Chancing Race* documentary, or Aboriginal narrators.³¹

Perhaps the most familiar portrayal of Aboriginal people involves the problem of alcoholism in the community. Overall, documentary film-makers tend not to treat the issue of alcoholism amongst white men in the same way that they treat male Aboriginal alcoholics. Film-makers are more likely to sympathise with an Aboriginal male alcoholic than they are able to express sympathy for a white male alcoholic. Well-known documentary films that do this are Margaret Lattimore's *Genocide* (1990) and Denis O'Rourke's *Couldn't Be Fairer* (1983), as well as many others. In these films, we view the problem of violence against women in the Aboriginal community and highlight the self-mutilation, self-destruction of society, culture and tradition, from domestic violence to deaths in custody. However, what is interesting in most accounts is the Aboriginal men accused of perpetrating violence against Aboriginal women are also seen to be victims of colonisation. So that in one sense audiences focus more upon the oppression and despair of Aboriginal men who become alcoholics, and understand less about what they do, or about Aboriginal women, who have long been the victims of colonisation, alcoholism and domestic abuse dished out by the men.

Another example of treating Aborigines as 'creatures of innocence' is found in many of the films highlighting the issue of Aboriginal stolen generations, such as Darlene Johnson's exceptional film *Stolen Generations* (2000), the Alec Morgan film, *Lousy Little Sixpence* (1983) and to a degree, David MacDougall's *Link-Up Diary* (1987). The impact of the Morgan film was powerful insomuch as it was the first time Australians took the slightest notice of the history of removal of thousands of Aboriginal children, forcibly or otherwise from their natural families. The innovative Johnson film was very timely, and made an important statement at a crucial time in Australian political history. Johnson's film aired on the ABC on 26 May 2000, the month following the federal Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, Senator Herron's public challenge on television of the notion of stolen 'generations'; needless to say the media ran amok. As a follow-up, Channel Nine's *Sunday* program³² conducted interviews with two of the women from Melville Island used in *Movietone* footage featured in the Johnson documentary. Asked if one of the women felt she had been stolen, her reply was that she had grown up grateful to have been raised by white parents, and did not feel stolen in any way shape or form. In an extract from the interview, Dalley interviews Marj Harris who tells a disturbing story of her life, and how she was grateful to have been fostered out to a white family.

DALLEY: And when you were born, how did your own mother feel about you?

HARRIS: Well she had another 'half-caste' child, who is my sister Molly, and she was badly treated by her family and tribes or clans.

DALLEY: Your mother was? For having a coloured child?

31. For example, Sean Kennedy, director of *Jimmy Little's Gentle Journey* 2003, who insisted on using Aboriginal actor Aaron Pederson for narration.

32. *Sunday Program*, Helen Dalley interview, with Lorraine Deutsher and Marj Harris, Channel Nine, April 9 2000.

- HARRIS: Yes, for having a coloured child. So she thought that next lot that come along she wasn't going to keep them, as simple as that. So a brother was born and she done away with him at birth.
- DALLEY: Your mother did away with her son at birth?
- HARRIS: Yeah, it was always mother only.
- DALLEY: How did she do that?
- HARRIS: Oh, she hit him on the side there. This was what my grandma told me. Then of course when I came along, we had same father, Irishman, and when I came along and mum had same thing in mind, to do away with me too.
- DALLEY: Did she try?
- HARRIS: Yeah she tried, hitting me there, that's it, missed the main part there and hit me there.
- DALLEY: How come she didn't succeed?
- HARRIS: My grandmother grabbed me, she was beautiful, she grabbed me, according to what she told me, she grabbed me and held me against her breast and said 'no don't kill this one, I want this one, I want her for me'.
- DALLEY: So did this go on a lot, this treatment of coloured children?
- HARRIS: Oh yes, a lot of mothers done away with their children, and reason was their own clan didn't accept them for having a white child, as they called us.

In the case of the *Link-Up Diary* film, historian Peter Read stated in a presentation at a film discussion night at *Screensound Australia* in 1999, at the time they had been filming in 1987, there were many cases where he attempted to reunite people, but some were not as enthused about reconnecting with their Aboriginal heritage as we may think. He stated that he felt that the concept that all Aboriginal children who had been fostered out were eager to reconnect with their heritage became more popular following the unveiling of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's 1997 *The Bringing Them Home Report*. It is left open to debate as to whether there needed to be more attention given to the topic. I believe documentary film-makers may want to pay more attention to this part of Australia's tragic history in order to bring a fuller story to the fore. At the risk of sounding like an apologist for the right, I think this is preferable to having people think that all Aboriginal children were stolen from their families solely on the basis of racist policies: in many cases, Aboriginal children were taken away for other reasons and these other reasons may need further explanation, if not only for historians or politicians, but for the stolen children themselves.

The other side of Aboriginal innocence is white guilt, however there is a long history of whites reacting against guilt, which could well mean that for some Aboriginal people that the more they become empowered, the more whites may well strike back. We see this, for example, in the attempted undermining of the impact of the stolen generations in the media-hype surrounding the *Bringing Them Home* report. On ABC TV's *7.30 Report*, 3 April 2000, reporter Tim Lester reported that Senator Herron stated that there was no such thing as 'a stolen generation', simply because Herron hypothesised that 'there simply were not enough children taken to warrant that word "generation"'.

Historically, there has been a long history of whites feeling badly done by blacks, and so justifying their retaliations, no matter how brutal or furtive. This is seen in the quicksilver change of attitude by early 19th century colonial authorities, from 'romanticising blacks to eradicating them'.³³ Woolmington argues Aborigines were initially perceived as *noble* until such time that Aborigines began resisting the land grabs by new white settlers in their efforts to graze and cultivate land. By 1850 they were perceived as rural pests, and treated as *savages*.

The curious white response of 'playing victim to their victims' is not new, but was perhaps most publicly recorded and strengthened after the television screening of the then One Nation Party leader Pauline Hanson in her maiden speech to parliament on 10 September 1996, where she stated to the nation that in 1955:

Hasluck's vision was of a single society in which racial emphases were rejected and social issues addressed. [And] ... I totally agree with him, and so would the majority of Australians. But remember, when he gave his speech he was talking about the privileges that white Australians were seen to be enjoying over Aborigines. Today, 41 years later, I talk about the exact opposite — the privileges Aborigines enjoy over other Australians.

So it appears that Aboriginal people who present an moral upper hand, even in the media, can not always expect sympathy or acknowledgement from white audiences, but may expect to meet with indignation and revenge, particularly when seen to receive support from whites who are more educated, wealthy or open-minded than the audience. Having this in mind, I wonder if film-makers addressing the inequities and injustices experienced by Aborigines, might think more carefully about anticipating such reactions from those more prone to indifference to Aboriginal concerns than the film-makers themselves are. For there surely must be one thing more disconcerting than Aborigines who take the high moral ground, and that would have to be other whites who take the higher moral ground on the behalf of Aborigines against other whites.

Black naked brutes

They are ungrateful, deceitful, wily and treacherous. They are indolent in the extreme, squalid and filthy in their surroundings, as well as disgustingly unpure amongst themselves.

W Wilshire³⁴

The idea of Aborigines as close to nature has its nasty *savage* side. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Aborigines were seen as practically non-human. The observations of artists and scientists were fraught with European double visions and value judgments, prejudices and discriminations, equating Aborigines as sub-human and animalistic. The examples of statements about Aborigines as possessing ape-like characteristics are abundant. During the 19th century Melanesian, Polynesian, Indian and Caribbean groups although stigmatised with ape-like comparisons, it was thought the blacker the skin colour the more animalistic: Melanesian and Aborigines were less civi-

³³. Woolmington 1988.

³⁴. W Wilshire, cited in Reynolds 1987: 109.

lised than brown-skinned people like the Polynesians or Caribbean groups, who were considered more attractive, intelligent, sociable and so on. Darwinian scholars and 19th century anatomical scientists extended their studies to the Australian Aborigines, branding Aboriginal society as not having sovereignty and devoid of governance, law and civilization. While Wilshire's statement was made in the 19th century, such views about Aboriginal people as filthy, indolent and ungrateful were found to exist and fit in with the basic assumptions of white Australians in the 1950s by researcher Malcolm Calley. He found that many white Australians thought Aborigines to be dirty and foul smelling with no concept of hygiene, riddled with diseases and sexually promiscuous. Calley's research also revealed whites believed Aborigines drank more alcohol than they did, and handled it badly. They also believed Aborigines were lazy, unpunctual, thriftless and unreliable characteristics compounded by an incessant gambling addiction, all of which proved them mentally inferior to whites.³⁵ Yet, what is so interesting in Calley's report is that he conducted his research before television was broadcast in Australia, especially on the north coast of New South Wales, proving that such assumptions were already developed.

More recently, we can see how the question of Aborigines living in squalor and filth appears in the now infamous *Sixty Minutes* episode in which Pauline Hanson asks Tracy Curro to 'please explain' the meaning of xenophobia.³⁶ In this episode, Hanson visits the Aboriginal community on Palm Island, stating how very hard she found it to sympathise or want to do anything for Aborigines if they do not seem to care about the garbage and sanitary problem on the island. It is clear in the episode that Hanson is unable to differentiate between poverty and keeping tidy. Media scholar Steve Mickler argues that comments made by Hanson and others, suggest that Aborigines have to 'earn their rights and entitlements as a sovereign people — that they have to prove their moral fitness to enjoy rights that for other peoples, are accepted as being inherent'.³⁷

The supposition that underlines Aborigines as having an innate desire for filth, indolence and being incapable of taking care of anything material is unquestionably embedded deep within the colonial consciousness. When conveying their values through colonial discourse, an issue such as the need for land is so often inadequately communicated by film and television makers and those they interview. From the anti-land rights advertisement campaigns and the stereotypes of Aborigines as unproductive lazy brutes, very few Australians are able to understand what the land rights debate is. They instead imagine land rights in the 1970s as something that gives permission to groups of unemployed, lazy, or apartheid-driven activists seeking to literally sit in the dirt and 'dream' of a culture that is lost.³⁸ Thirty years later, the stereotype is still present, and so I wonder how film-makers should address the issue today, especially when there are parliamentarians who blatantly remain unconvinced of Aborigines

³⁵. Calley 1957: 190–193.

³⁶. Pauline Hanson appeared on *Sixty Minutes* and responded to the question 'Are you xenophobic?' with 'Please explain?'. The move was calculated to make Pauline Hanson look stupid and uneducated. It worked — she did. It also made interviewer Tracy Curro look like a member of the intellectual elite. It is argued that Pauline picked up many votes that night. See <http://bovination.com/cbs/xenophobia.jsp>

³⁷. Mickler 1997.

³⁸. Peters-Little 2001: 12.

rights to the land. This is indicated in a statement given by *One Nation* member David Oldfield who stated in the New South Parliament as recently as 4 December 2003:

I acknowledge that the Aboriginal people, as a people in the past, are an anthropological oddity and are no doubt significant and worthy of study. Perhaps the House should be reminded that prior to white settlement Aboriginal people, through their various practices, ignorant as they were, managed to wipe out approximately 500 species of flora and fauna, that is, make it extinct ... And had white settlement not come along, what would the Aboriginal people be doing with the land today? They would be doing the same as they had always done: hunt, fish and set it on fire. Aboriginal people need us to help them make it into the twenty-first century.³⁹

The question of who has the ability to successfully articulate the relationship that Aborigines have to land is complex and vague. With notions that the land is our 'mother', a concept whose origins are debatable,⁴⁰ is it little wonder why 'catch phrases' such as 'the land is my mother' or sacred sites being equated to churches, are concepts that remain misunderstood or frowned upon. I once screened a film to a group of students in which one Aboriginal character compares the destruction of an Aboriginal sacred site to the destruction of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney. The feedback from one white student was that, while he admitted that he was a supporter of Aboriginal rights he felt the analogy was insufficient because he knew that he, like many others, would delight in the destruction of St Mary's Cathedral, and such a comparison had failed to help him understand the Aboriginal sacred connection to land. I left that afternoon thinking how important it was to be able to communicate 'sacredness' more effectively in films, rather than hooking onto catch phrases or rhetoric that may have worked a decade or more ago.

A powerful film that I thought tackled the issue of land and dispossession successfully at the time was *Munda Nyringu*, co-produced by Jan Roberts and Robert Bropho, a Nyoongah man from Western Australia in 1983. It was a documentary about the Western Mining Corporation and the local Aboriginal people around Kalgoorlie. Images of traditional owners between shots of sub-standard housing conditions and the goldmines themselves, inter-cut with detailed graphics demonstrating the statistics of mining finances against the dispossessed Aborigines in the film. Although a personal favourite of mine, this film may prove unconvincing today, or even worse, be accused of political correctness, a term that has become completely ambiguous in the last decade. In Darlene Johnson's film *Gulpilil*, where Johnson carefully avoids this problem, we witness a combination of Gulpilil's frustrations with having no land rights while living under harsh conditions. We understand, through the film, that though it is a choice he has made to live on his mother's and his father's country, it is fraught with hardships. Gulpilil's viewpoints are clearly understood even though he continues to reject the usual white aspirations. He is proud of his 'full-blood' blackfella birthright, whilst angry with the denial of land rights, even though he has 'made it' as a successful international movie star.

³⁹. New South Wales State Parliament Legislative Council on December 4 2003, during the debate on the establishment of the Natural Resource Commission and the Catchment Management Authorities (from Hansard).

⁴⁰. Gill 1987.

It is little wonder that so many film and television makers try to make Aborigines 'worthy' characters, nevertheless, I try to avoid these statements, and question if other film-makers, especially other Aboriginal film-makers, are just feeding into a white superiority mindset. In my own experience of editing, I recall interviewing Aboriginal actor Pauline McLeod, who stated that Aboriginal storytelling is equally relevant for children and for adult audiences. The part of her interview I left on the cutting room floor has her saying 'if white people really knew Aboriginal people they would learn to love us and see us as human beings'. My director, who was Torres Strait Islander, thought the statement was very effective and represented how McLeod felt and that it would appeal to white audiences. I on the other hand left the statement out because I thought it was an ineffectual example of blackfella's begging for white approval of their worthiness, which is something I hoped we had moved beyond, yet it is a relatively common thing to hear Aboriginal people saying. For example, an episode of *Art Review* was concluded by Bob Maza, a famous Aboriginal actor saying 'Aboriginal people just wanted to be equal with whites'.⁴¹ Fed up with hearing this sort of statement on air I eventually wrote to *Art Review* asking the producer 'which white person did she think Maza was hoping to be equal to?' My letter went on to say that I thought it was particularly patronising of the producer to use such a clichéd statement as this to end the segment, particularly since there were probably stronger statements that could have been used. The producer was Aboriginal, and someone I had worked with in the past. However, it is somewhat unfair to continually blame producers for some of the things Aborigines people say in front of the camera, especially when the Aboriginal talent/subject, is imagining his/her audience, and is trying to reach that audience.

Nakedness was another indication of Aboriginal people as the 'sub-human' creatures of the *noble savage* kind. It was an important feature for artists and writers to record. John Hawkesworth wrote in 1773 'All inhabitants that we saw were stark naked, they did not appear to be numerous nor to live in societies, but like the other animals were scattered along the coast and in the woods'.⁴² Nakedness of black and brown bodies seemingly closed off from sexual voyeurism. Nakedness is tolerable if discussed in a cultural context but somewhat unscrupulous if discussed openly in a sexual context, since observers ought never be openly attracted to black bodies and risk admissions of their own desires. For example, when photographer Kolodny removed the tops of Aboriginal women's dresses to reveal their breasts, Kolodny justified it was simply to accentuate their racial differences.⁴³ Likewise Leni Riefenstahl, who strongly argued her films had not been the visual-architect of Nazi aesthetics, also denied her erotic voyeurism of black nakedness when she portrayed Nubian men of Africa.⁴⁴

From the early 18th century the issue of skin colour has shifted between the *noble* and *savage* poles. Where black-skinned Melanesian was considered more *savage* than brown-skinned Polynesian, in addition to the civil rights movement and the rise of the

41. Bob Maza, in an interview with Susan Coombs, producer for *Art Review* program, ABC TV, 1993.

42. J Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of his present majesty for making discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere*, London, 1773, cited in Gibson 1984: 34.

43. Peterson 1985: 176.

44. Adam 1995: 20.

Black Panther movement of the 1960s, which espoused slogans of 'black is beautiful', black skin has become *nobler*, particularly in Australia, even though blackness is not as visible in Australia as it is in the United States or United Kingdom. White or fair-skinned Aborigines throughout Australian history have suffered the difficulty of issues relating to their level of authenticity, or fears of being 'stolen' away from their natural families, or live with the stigma that they are the children of a white parent who disowned them or the product of sexual abuse. Fair skinned blacks are the *savage* bastards of the Aboriginal community who are most likely to be associated with treachery and inauthenticity. Such is the case for Tasmanian Aborigines accused of not being Aboriginal enough, because they have blonde hair and blue eyes.⁴⁵ While it was the 'full-blood' Aborigine who was regarded as treacherous on the frontiers of settlement, the 'mixed-race' Aborigines later took on this role, the more it was thought that the 'full-blood' blacks were becoming extinct. At the turn of the 19th century, colonists began romanticising the black-skinned Aborigines as the pure and authentic *noble* bushman, and 'hybrids' carried the bad in both white and black races.⁴⁶ Aborigines as the main group in Australian society with black skin, have a history of being divided into caste systems of blackness and brownness.

Where the camera's lens confines people with black skin to a traditional cultural or environmental context, rarely do we see them in kitchens, or in public spaces like coffee shops and supermarkets, going to work in their offices or in the ordinariness of the day. Aboriginal people with fairer coloured skin or brown skin on the other hand are not restricted to these same environments, but it is unusual to see brown-skinned people in a non-political or cultural context. Black people or brown people supposedly do not occupy the same public sphere as white people. This is why I made my film *Oceans Apart* (1991). In this film, I place Aboriginal women in the public sphere, in railway stations, in classrooms, sipping tea in the dining room. The film was a response to a comment I heard from someone who said that where she lived in Bondi she never saw an Aboriginal person. I imagined that her oversight was because she had been unused to recognising what an Aboriginal person looked like outside a stereotypical visual context.

People with black skins are often not from an English speaking background. Those with brown or fairer skins often are. Black skin people are seen with narration or subtitles. Brown or fairer skins are sometimes seen as subtitled, but they are seen to have a slightly better command of the English language. Non-Aboriginal people are less likely to hear or distinguish an Aboriginal accent. They are more able to listen to an American accent than an Aboriginal accent. Aboriginal people are able to tell where one comes from even if they are speaking Aboriginal English.⁴⁷ In any case, it is still difficult for non-Aborigines to listen or appreciate the authority of an Aboriginal voice; in much the same way female broadcasters try to give authority to their voices by

45. Mansell 2002: 2.

46. Keen 1988: 197.

47. There are different accents on different vowels or the drawl that a speaker has. For example, in the film *Blackfellas* by James Ricketson, whites may pronounce 'blackfellas' with the 'e' as one uses it in 'egg'. Other whites may say 'blackfellows', whereas the Aboriginal actors in the film have a different emphasis on the 'e' and say 'blackfullas', pronouncing the 'u' as one would use it in 'cup'.

sounding more like men. As someone who has worked in radio, and with music, I have always found the tone of the male Aboriginal voice generally softer than white men's voices that boom on the television screen and radio, and therefore less demanding.

Triumphing over the stereotype of Aborigine as black naked brutes is perhaps a long way off. Nevertheless I hope that what can be achieved in the long term is that stories about Aborigines can be made personally, honestly and confidently in spite of the ignorant blathering from folks like Oldfield, Hanson and many others in the public domain. We need to continue to tell our stories while being mindful of not trying to waste our energies presenting ourselves as perfect human beings worthy of white acceptance.

Torn between two cultures

Another enduring theme in *noble savage* literature is the idea of the tortured *savage* torn between two cultures. Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) all depicted 'modern men' (white men) struggling to learn humility and tolerance for his fellow but outcast (*savage*) 'brother'. The tortured *savage* is an anti-hero but befriends white men who ultimately betray or try to save or convert him, the *savage* always driven to extreme measures usually ending in his/her demise. This classic dramatic format from 18th century literature continues to be used in many films about Aborigines, who are always 'torn' between two cultures and loyalties. In William Thomas Moncrieff's 1831 operatic three act drama tragedy *Oh Van Dieman's Land!* an Aboriginal woman, Kangaree, is torn between choosing the love of a white man over the love of a black man. A century and a half later, Aboriginal characters in feature films like Bruce Beresford's *Fringe dwellers* (1986), Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955), Fred Schepesi's *Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1978), James Rickertson's *Blackfellas* and Nicholas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1971) are all films that highlight Aboriginal characters who are torn between cultures.

The notion of Aborigines being 'torn' between cultures acts as the explanation for the demise of Aboriginal characters, rather than a situation where the whites themselves take an active role in the Aborigines' 'inevitable doom'. Rather than accept responsibility, it is easier to blame blacks for being lost between two worlds. Furthermore, this is problematic for blacks only: it is irrelevant to whites. Whites theoretically do not move between two worlds, but are seen to be capable of accommodating and integrating their pasts and futures, good and evil, positives and negatives without dying or losing their values, identity and lives. Whites think themselves capable of living within a multicultural society while maintaining their whiteness. It is only non-whites who supposedly do not know how to do this. Only Aborigines are supposedly traumatised and diminished by integration, interaction and assimilation. If they do accommodate and integrate different cultures successfully, then they are not authentically Aboriginal. They become polluted or contaminated. Aboriginality when polluted dies, and so does the Aboriginal character or signifier in these plays and films. One example of non-fiction films focusing on the 'two worlds' theme is Curtis Levy's *Sons of Namatjira* (1975).

Doomed to extinction

While Desiderius Erasmus wrote of the 'happiness of the simpleton and blockhead for they are devoid of knowledge of their own death' as early as the 16th century,⁴⁸ Australian writers in the 19th century thought Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction. As Henry Reynolds points out, writers of that time used an abundance of metaphors to describe Aboriginal people as variously fading away, fading out, decaying, slipping from life's platform, melting away like the snow from the mountains at the approach of spring, perishing as does the autumnal grass before a bush fire. Reflective of Keith Windschuttle's extravagant claims that more Aborigines were killed by 'natural causes' than warfare, Herman Merivale argued in 1839 that the declining Aboriginal population was not due to warfare, spirits, new epidemics or the destruction of game. There were 'deeper and more mysterious causes at work; the mere contact of Europeans is fatal to him in some unknown manner'.⁴⁹ For it is remarkable that people like Windschuttle and Merivale should find it more uplifting if Aborigines are killed by disease or prostitution than musket fire, is surely absurd if not offensive. Herman Merivale's view that the disappearance of blacks (or black skin) is mysteriously echoed in the 1993 documentary *Black Man's House*. Steven Thomas' film focuses on a group of contemporary Tasmanian Aborigines searching for their ancestors' graves so that they could be finally put to rest in a culturally appropriate manner, at the Wybalenna cemetery. When this occasion takes place, it is perhaps the most uplifting and high-spirited moment of the film. For the rest of the film Tasmanian Aborigines are presented as morbid people whose skin-colour is not the same as that of their ancestors. The fiery and political savvy of well-known fair-skinned Tasmanian Aborigines like Jimmy Everett (who is in the film) is notably missing. This is a film where Thomas also uses the fair skin of the people in the film to his advantage, making a connection to white audiences. The music described as a funeral dirge is continuous, and stories of the Aborigines are juxtaposed against a repetitious graphic of Benjamin Dutterau's 19th century painting of the 'Conciliator' of George Augustus Robinson shaking hands with the natives at Wybalena in 1840. Each time the graphic appears the camera zooms further and further into the clasping black/white handshake. The black/white handshake, that I mentioned earlier, has become a very powerful symbol in the Reconciliation movement, but nonetheless, represents unwritten negotiations between black and white men or 'mates' only. *Black Man's Houses* took out the award for best documentary at the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals. Also nominated for best documentary at the Australian Film Institute Awards in 1997 was Matthew Kelly's *Last of the Nomads* (1997) told in the classic style of Daisy Bates's *Passing of the Aborigines*.⁵⁰ This film follows five white men led by an Aboriginal 'friend' into the then uncharted western Gibson Desert to locate two elderly members of the Mandildjara tribe, Warri and Yatungka, who of course eventually die after coming into contact with white society.

Reflective of their anthropological obsessions with preserving the culture from extinction and doom, a wave of attention focussing on Aboriginal research in the northern and central Australia has dominated. This has made my own research for

48. cited in Reynolds 1987.

49. Reynolds 1987: 122.

50. Bates 1938.

Aboriginal film and television making in the southern and eastern regions more difficult. Apart from Tracy Moffatt, there is very little written on the other 40 or so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that have been making television programs in the southern and eastern states, particularly after Eric Michaels' research became widely recognised in film and academic circles. This is perhaps why I have found the work by Faye Ginsburg the most innovative, especially in her article 'Stations identification' where she points out that Aboriginal people at the ABC were producing more Aboriginal documentaries per year than any other production house but had virtually no recognition outside Australia, despite the quality of their work. In this Ginsburg asks us to 'bear consideration in terms of form, substance and reception as a precedent-setting model for indigenous people as their concerns in the televisual imaginary of the nation state and beyond'.⁵¹

Film-making that is obsessed with maintaining and recording traditional culture dominates the number of films made about Aboriginal people. Finding material on southern and eastern Aboriginal film-making is much more difficult than locating films or research material on Aborigines living in central or northern Australia. For example, the audiovisual archives in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) are one of the world's most recognised collectors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander film and video with just over 1623 items, but these mostly focus on the remote regions of Australia or films that have been produced by scholars. So for anyone conducting research on Aboriginal television produced by and about Aborigines living in urban communities, AIATSIS would not be the best option, although it ought to be since it is a very costly process to purchase archives from broadcasters.⁵² However, AIATSIS is not an isolated case. The archives at *Film Australia*, which is primarily a production house, stores over 178 films currently catalogued as 'Indigenous films' (which include 44 films on Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands). Yet 82 of the 134 films feature central and northern Australia, and the remaining 52 films are divided into biographies or other films that are non-specific to location and/or feature urban Aboriginal life.

Of the 1819 items catalogued in Mura at AIATSIS, there are only 10 that were produced by the Aboriginal producers at the ABC. Although the ABC archives holds over more than 19,500 items on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and SBS holds over 2000 items, AIATSIS only holds one documentary program that has been produced by the Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) and three programs from the *Blood Brothers* series that screened on SBS TV. Therefore, the majority of the ABC programs are produced by white film-makers and journalists such as news and current affair programs such as *Four Corners* and *Chequerboard* that have been produced by white film-makers and journalists. Nevertheless, AIATSIS holds 26 copies of the ATSIC funded *Aboriginal Australia* program, produced by Aboriginal producers Trevor Ellis and Karla Vista at the National Recording Studio in Canberra. Screensound Australia on the other hand boasts an Indigenous catalogue of 12,000 items, although more than two thirds of these are stories about Aborigines living in remote regions. They hold ten series of

51. Ginsburg 1993: 92.

52. AIATSIS has an agreement with ABC archives via an access program to transfer or distribute copies of ABC programs for previews and/or possession.

ICAM (Indigenous Cultural Magazine programs) from 1996 to 2001, produced by the Indigenous Programs Unit at SBS, and made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander film-makers. *Screensound* is currently revising their own access programs and sensitive moral and legal copyright issues with Aboriginal people from the community.

Other series produced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teams in the APUs at the ABC and SBS were *Blackout 1-7*, *First in Line*, *ICAM*, *Kam Yarn*, *Messagestick*, *Storytellers of the Pacific*, *Living Black* and *Songlines*. *Blackout* ran for seven years, producing over 60 episodes. *First in Line* produced over 22 programs for SBS. The *ICAM* series on SBS ran from 1996-2002. *Kam Yarn* ran two seasons from 1994-5, other mini-series like *Songlines* ran nine episodes, and the *Storytellers of the Pacific* in 1995 was a four one-hour international documentary series. In addition to this, the *Many Nations One People* series in 2001 ran eight episodes, and SBS commenced its first season of the dynamic *Living Black* program in April 2003. *Messagestick*, which began in 1999, continues to produce and air between 12 and 33 programs per year and operate an online service called by the same name that has regular visitors to their website totalling 40,000 people, many of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in remote and urban centers.

Given that the Indigenous units at the ABC and SBS use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander producers and directors, one can see that there are literally hundreds of films and videos being produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working in film and television in the southern and eastern states. And what is more interesting is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander film-makers in the southern and eastern states are less concerned about making films that are about preserving and recording a 'dying' culture, but are about social, historical and political injustices. It is as if the dominant stories about Aborigines in the north are *nobler* stories, about a race that is doomed to extinction, while stories about Aborigines in the southeast are stories about Aborigines who are *savage* and belligerent.

In terms of reading material, the vast majority of the 94 articles catalogued by AIATSIS under the heading 'Aboriginal television' focus mainly on Aboriginal television in central Australia, even though the majority of programs are produced by urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander film-makers working for mainstream television.⁵³ Of the total number of articles listed in the Murdoch Reading Room bibliography on Aboriginal television,⁵⁴ the overwhelming majority of articles emphasise a focus on community television in remote northern and central Australia. Clearly, resources on Aboriginal or television making in the southern and eastern states are limited, even though the number of films and film-makers in urban centres in constant production is

53. I refer to works by Eric Michaels, Tony Dowmunt, Mary Venner, Christina Spurgeon, Phillip Batty, Tom O'Regan and Helen Molnar. Those who do not specifically write about remote television usually write about individual Aboriginal film-makers, who are usually the same people such as Tracy Moffatt, Michael Riley, Ivan Sen or Rachel Perkins, and to a lesser degree Darlene Johnson, Ann Pratten, Marcia Langton, Karen Jennings, Albert Moran, Catherine Summerhayes and Anne Kaplan. Those who specifically write about urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander television are Faye Ginsburg, Alan McKee, John Hartley, Rachel Perkins, Jackie Urla, Megan McCullough and Lester Bostock, most of whom are Aboriginal film-makers or North American academics.

54. <http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/oztv/bibtv.htm>

to some extent higher than the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making films in the remote areas. So one wonders what scholars are writing about and more precisely what they are not writing about and why this should be the case.

Conclusion

When I began this research, I set out to review some of the most popular misconceptions and preconceptions of Aboriginal film and television making. I was concerned about the *noble* focus on the 'real' Aborigines in northern and central Australia. I was concerned that there were too many *noble* expectations on Aboriginal film and television makers to prove that they could make different or better films about Aborigines than white film-makers. Unrealistic expectations were being placed on them to prove that Aboriginal people supposedly possess 'natural' ability to not only make films, but that they could communicate to white audiences a more accurate, political and unbiased, homogeneous view of Aborigines. I was concerned about the demands for Aborigines to prove these 'natural' abilities to audiences, broadcasters, political commentators, academics, social and cultural theorists and art critics in their 'natural' propensity to be able to represent their entire culture, community, history and culture in any given film or program. There seemed to be an unstated expectation that the moment Aborigines take control of their image they will be doing *nobler* things with it. However, I am yet to be convinced.

I am also concerned about the opinion that television today is better than television in the past, or that it is going to get better. One only needs to look back at the politically motivated magazine programs in the 1960s and 1970s that covered issues from land rights to anti-uranium mining to Aboriginal citizenship and compare them to the weekly magazine television programs about Aborigines on television today. Programs such as the ABC's *Countrywide*, *Monday Conference*, *This Day Tonight*, *A Big Country*, *Weekend Magazine*, *Four Corners* and *Chequerboard* tried to prick the comfortable Australian consciousness at the time. Journalism at that time did not sustain the view of Australia as the lucky country, but found poverty, loneliness, neurosis, corruption, mental and physical suffering and other social problems just below the surface of everyday life,⁵⁵ and subsequently covered many pro-Aboriginal programs, focusing on Aboriginal land rights, protest movements and Aboriginal civil liberties. To say that television is getting better and that the political messages from the Aboriginal community are more frequent is somewhat erroneous. There are far less collaborative works, which were relatively fashionable in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Perhaps a honeymoon period for independent Aboriginal documentary filmmaking emerged from the Sydney Film-makers Co-op, whereby many celebrated documentary film-makers entered into successful and memorable collaborations with Aboriginal people, producing perhaps the most outstanding films in Aboriginal film-making history: films like *My Survival as an Aborigine*, *Lousy Little Sixpence*, *Munda Nyuringu*, *Couldn't Be Fairer*, *Ningla A Na*, *Wrong Side of the Road*, *On Sacred Ground*, *State of Shock* and *Dirt Cheap*. These are films that are perhaps more politically confronting than say David Batty's *Bush Mechanics* series (2001) or Imparja Television's *Nganampa Anwernekenhe* series (2000).

⁵⁵ A Moran 1989.

Whether one makes an Aboriginal story, person or issue *noble* or *savage* in its representation, it is in one way or another a pendulum swing from one opposite pole to another, neglecting all shades and perspectives in the course of Aboriginal self-representation. It denies opportunity for further honest and rigorous debate between others and us, and new ways of imagining and exploring ourselves. But instead of new ways of seeing ourselves and debating new issues, what has emerged after 45 years of television and three decades of self-determination has been an increasing interest in formalising and legalising the way film and television makers ought to make films about Aborigines. The recent surge of legal protocols and guidelines that require film-makers to demonstrate their 'cultural respect' or to learn how to sufficiently read 'Aboriginal body language' will,⁵⁶ I suspect, invite further restrictions not only for white film-makers, but Aboriginal film-makers themselves in the future.⁵⁷

I am mostly concerned that the outcome of too many rigorous ethical protocols and cultural guidelines which are meant to protect Aboriginal 'moral fitness and standards' run the risk of manipulating film-makers to produce sanitised versions of Aboriginal culture, thus distorting the very culture they purport to protect.⁵⁸ We have swapped the *savage* for the *noble* in a way that is neither true nor useful. What we are perhaps witnessing is a *savage* backlash to years of *noblising* Aborigines as untouchable subjects, undeserving of justice or open debate. I am most worried about what the future may bring in Aboriginal film and television making, and all its possibilities. This includes the prospect that film-makers may have less room to create and say new things, and they may become discouraged from asking the hard questions that need answering simply because we still want Aborigines to be *noble savages*, and we lack the courage to challenge each other and ourselves.

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⁵⁶. Bostock 1997.

⁵⁷. Peters-Little 2002: 2.

⁵⁸. For example, in Bostock's 1997 guidelines it states that Aborigines from New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania are Kooris, and Aborigines from Queensland are Murrus. These are white boundaries, and there are Aboriginal tribes in NSW who are also traditionally Murrus.

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Exhibiting Aboriginal industry: a story behind a 're-discovered' bark drawing from Victoria

Elizabeth Willis

An etching on bark, made before September 1854 by an un-named member of the 'Loddon and Murray tribes' in Victoria, was recently 're-discovered' in England in a back storage area of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.¹ This drawing once formed part of the first systematic display of Aboriginal material held in Victoria and was later displayed in Paris at the Exposition Universelle of 1855. Only three bark drawings executed by Indigenous Australians in south-eastern Australia during the 19th century are now known to survive. Another drawing, from the same time and with a similar provenance, is held in the British Museum,² while the third, drawn perhaps 15 years later by an Aboriginal person from near Lake Tyrrell in the Mallee district of Victoria, is in the collection of Museum Victoria.³

In this paper, I describe the transfer of the Kew bark drawing from the artist to a European collector, trace its journey from the Loddon to the Economic Botany Collection at Kew Gardens, and comment on the presentation of Australian Indigenous culture at exhibitions in London in 1851 and in Bendigo, Melbourne and Paris in 1854 and 1855. I also make some preliminary comments about the work itself. In tracing the drawing's 'cultural biography', I argue that it, and other Indigenous material displayed in 1854 and 1855, was collected and exhibited to demonstrate the 'industry' or work of Indigenous people. This aim was largely absent from exhibitions of Indigenous material later in the 19th century.

The bark drawing at Kew, executed on a piece of curved bark that is now split in two places, is a representational work that appears to show a group of men dancing in a corroboree. The existence of a figurative, naturalistic Indigenous art in south-east Australia, particularly along the Murray River and its southern tributaries, is well-attested by contemporary European observers. During March and April 1843 Chief Protector Robinson saw bark drawings — 'rude drawings of humans & drays', figures of men and emus dancing, and a drawing of the spearing of a white man — on the inside of

1. Centre for Economic Botany, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, (Kew EBC 55386) (64 x 35cm).

2. British Museum, No. Oc.1827 (66 x 31cm).

3. Museum Victoria, Department of Indigenous Cultures, X1520 (86 x 56cm).

bark huts at camps on the Murray and Loddon Rivers.⁴ Gerard Krefft, collecting natural history specimens for the new National Museum of Victoria in 1857, saw Aboriginal drawings – ‘a few tracings on sheets of blackened bark, probably done during a rainy day’ – on the Murray.⁵ Squatter Phillip Chauncy reported:

On the Murray River, where they used to cover their huts with bark, the young men often amused themselves with carving, or drawing with charcoal, on the inside of the bark, various objects and scenes in illustration of any events they desired to record.⁶

Some of these drawings were made with charcoal on a smoothed surface. Squatter EM Curr recalled the activities of the Bangerang tribe on the Murray and Goulburn Rivers: ‘occasionally ... the men drew pictures of corroborees or hunting scenes, with charcoal, on the sheets of bark of which their mia-mias were composed’.⁷ A more patronising tone was taken by settler GT Lloyd, who described how Victorian Aboriginal men ‘sometimes attempt to delineate with a piece of charcoal, horses, carts and other things’.⁸

Other drawings were etched into a blackened surface. R Brough Smyth described how the drawing from Lake Tyrrell was made:

the bark was smoked on the inside by placing it over a fire of twigs and leaves, until the surface was blackened but not charred ... the artist drew the figures with the nail of his thumb ... or a piece of bone.⁹

The two other surviving bark drawings from Victoria, in the Kew and British Museum collections, are also etched into soot-blackened bark. It is possible that these drawings were originally located on the inside surfaces of bark huts where smoke-blackening occurred naturally. However, I suggest in this paper that the bark pieces may have been deliberately prepared by the artists, who created two works that they knew were to be part of an exhibition.

The Museum Victoria bark drawing was given to Robert Brough Smyth by Theo J Sumner, who received it from William Stanbridge, a pioneer squatter at Lake Tyrrell who had collected it and brought it to Melbourne before 1874.¹⁰ The other two Victorian bark drawings now in London were sent to Paris in 1855 by John Hunter Kerr, a squatter who took up land on the Loddon River in 1849.

JH Kerr and the Loddon people

John Hunter Kerr emigrated from Scotland at the age of 18 in 1839, and first took up land near Heidelberg, on the outskirts of Melbourne. The 1840s depression that ruined many of Port Phillip’s gentlemen squatters left him in financial difficulties. He moved from his station and settled on a farm on the Yarra flats, later returning to Scotland for two years. On his return to the colony in 1849 he purchased a property on the Loddon, which he renamed Fernyhurst. This was a station of 89,000 acres which he and his part-

4. Clark 1988: 67,71,73, cited in Cooper 1994: 105.

5. Krefft 1862–5: 374, cited in Groger-Wurm 1973: 1.

6. Chauncy, in Smyth 1878 vol 2: 258, cited in Sayers 1994: 142.

7. Curr 1883 [1965]: 132.

8. Lloyd 1862: 465, cited in Groger-Wurm 1973: 1.

9. Smyth 1878 vol I: 286–287, cited in Massola 1958: 125.

10. Sculthorpe 1990: 54.

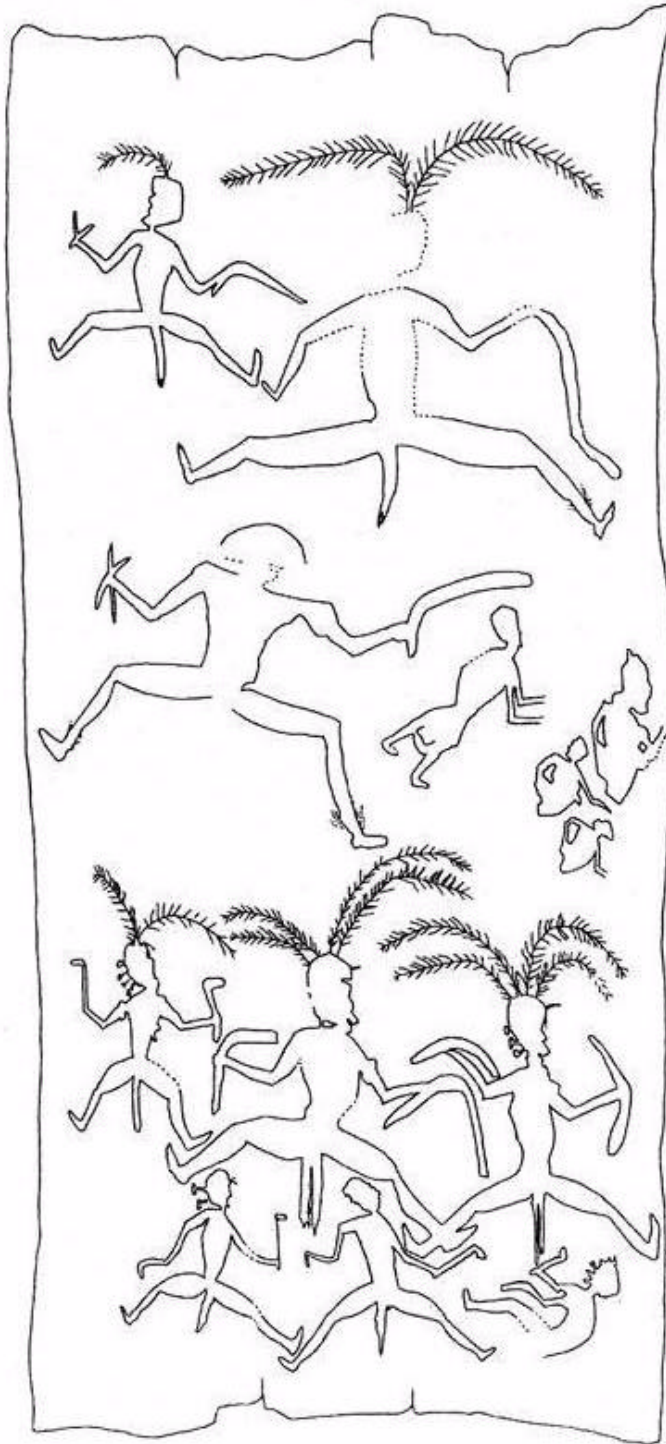


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the bark etching in the collection of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Drawing by Lindsay Kerr, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

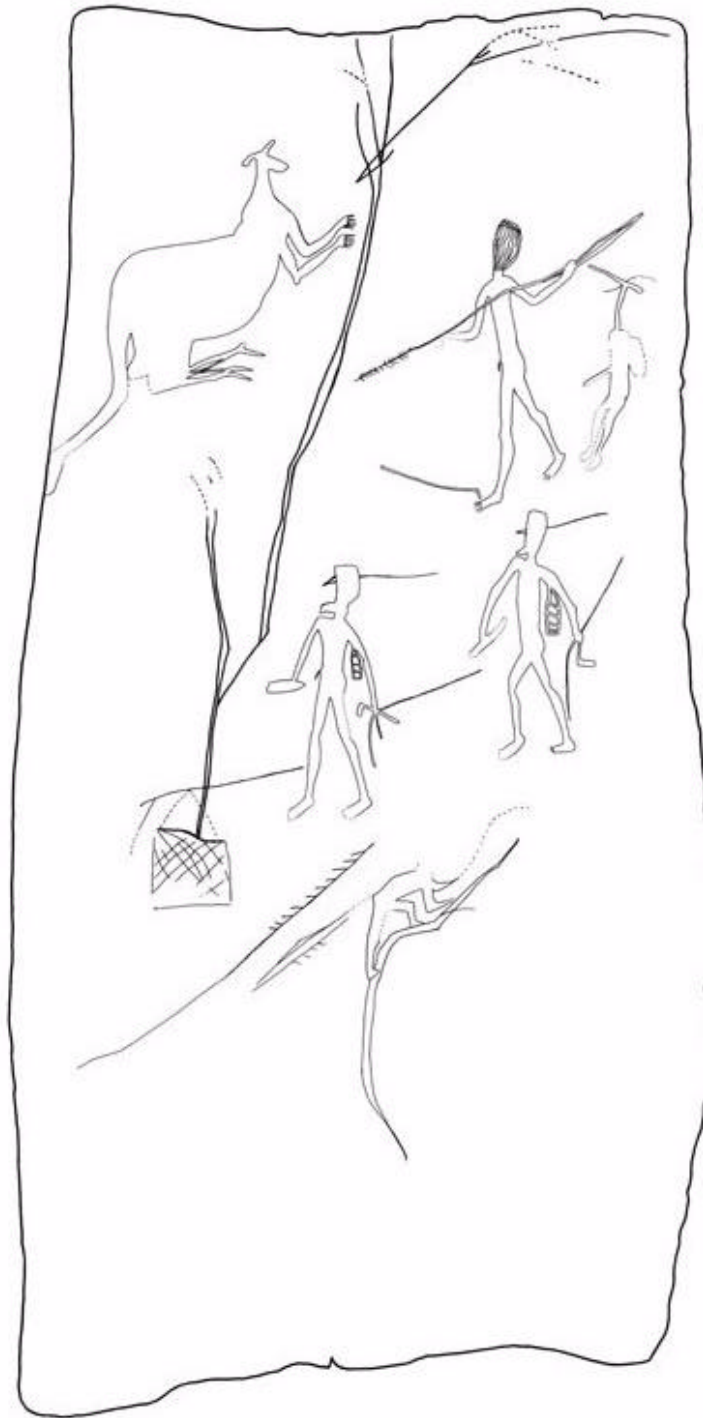


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the bark etching in the collection of the British Museum. Drawing by Lindsay Kerr, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

ner stocked with sheep and cattle. He sold meat to the diggers on the Korong goldfields and was obviously a person of some importance in the local community as he was appointed a magistrate in 1854. However, he was an unsuccessful squatter. 'Bad seasons and adverse circumstances', including the 'dissipation' of his partner, were reasons given for Kerr's failure after his death. He was forced to sell Fernyhurst in 1855 but stayed on the property, possibly as manager, until 1861.¹¹

Kerr wrote anonymously a volume of reminiscences that was published in Edinburgh in 1872.¹² The impression given in the autobiography is of a man with considerable enthusiasm for living and a great curiosity about his new environment. He was interested in his 'Aboriginal neighbours', both in Heidelberg and at the Loddon, and claimed to have been 'always on very friendly terms' with them. He described accompanying them on hunting expeditions for kangaroo, possum, and wild turkey, and wrote of the patient perseverance and trustworthiness of the Indigenous people he knew. While he shared the contemporary belief that 'the doom of their race was fixed, and that, in obedience to the mysterious decree of Providence, they were passing away to give place to a superior race', he was interested to record the transition from what he called 'the savage *pur et simple*' to a people 'undergoing a great change of habits and character since their intercourse with white men'.¹³ A few years before Kerr arrived at Fernyhurst, the Murray and Loddon tribes had already been recorded as having declined in population by 10–12 percent.¹⁴

John Kerr's station house was close to an Aboriginal camp and he writes about visits to and from the camp, for example describing his attendance at the burial of a chief and reporting conversations with his 'quiet inoffensive neighbours' about their marriage customs, their experience of Aboriginal missions, and the visits to Melbourne of some tribal leaders.¹⁵ Kerr was one of the first to photograph Aboriginal people. As he described it, 'when their first shyness was overcome they were never weary of sitting in any attitude, and laughed with childish glee at the results'.¹⁶ Soon after his arrival at the station Kerr persuaded the local people to stage a corroboree during the day for him, giving them 'a considerable present' to do so. He was told that women could not see a corroboree in daylight, so, to add verisimilitude, he arranged for three young men, wrapped in possum skin cloaks, to pose as the audience. The resulting photographs are perhaps the earliest ever taken of a corroboree.¹⁷

Kerr's other photographs include images of Aboriginal men in possum skin cloaks with traditional weapons, and a 'young half-caste boy on opossum rug' with his toys: bull rushes, a small shield and playing sticks.¹⁸ Kerr knew some of the women and children of the camp as well. A few years after settling at Fernyhurst, he drew a portrait of

11. Hancock 1996: vii–xv.

12. Kerr 1872. Contemporaries suggested that his wife also contributed to the book.

13. Kerr 1872 [1996]: 11–13, 39.

14. Hull 1846: 20.

15. Kerr 1872 [1996]: 141–151.

16. Kerr 1872 [1996]: 150. Photography was then in its infancy in Victoria. Kerr used the British calotype process, where prints from paper negatives were made on salted paper (Hancock 1996: xi).

17. Kerr 1872 [1996]: 17; State Library of Victoria H82.277/10.

18. State Library of Victoria, H82.277/7-9; Royal Historical Society of Victoria, P402-A.

'Queen Jerrybung' or 'Jellibung', an elderly matriarch of the tribe, and a lithograph was later made of his drawing.¹⁹ A photograph taken in 1849 of his station hut and yard includes a servant who appears to be an Aboriginal woman, dressed in European clothing including a dress, bonnet and large apron.²⁰ Kerr did not pose his neighbours in traditional dress against a 'timeless' background of the Australian bush or, generally, against the backdrop of their own homes. Instead, he posed them against the walls of a building made of dressed stringybark, which was possibly his own first home or the separate building provided as accommodation for his employees. In this way he was portraying the Indigenous people 'coming in', moving into the station complex and not remaining on the edge. His photography also hinted at the changes in Aboriginal culture wrought by the coming of Europeans. One of his most striking photographs shows a young man in a possum skin cloak who stands proudly against the backdrop of a white sheet pinned to the stringybark wall; he holds a European flintlock musket and aims it with authority away from the photographer into the distance.²¹ It appears from his autobiography and from the evidence of his photographs that Kerr was well-known and accepted by the Indigenous people who lived close to his station house, and that he was in a position to hear and observe much about their daily life.

Kerr and the Exhibitions of 1854 and 1855

In 1854, Kerr was about to be appointed a local magistrate and was thinking of joining the Melbourne Club. It was not yet apparent that he had been living beyond his means and that he was soon to face bankruptcy. In July that year, Kerr responded with enthusiasm when he learnt that a committee of public men in Bendigo was calling for 'specimens of the industry and resources of the colony of Victoria' to be collected and forwarded for display. They wanted material that would be displayed first in a new exhibition building in Bendigo, then in an exhibition in Melbourne, and that would then be forwarded to Paris for the 1855 Exposition Universelle.

The Bendigo Exhibition (also known as the Sandhurst Exhibition), 'the first Exhibition of Industry held in Australia', was held only three years after the enormously successful *Exhibition of Industry of the Nations* at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851. Victoria had not been separately represented at the London exhibition and the colonists wanted to ensure that they were properly represented at the Paris exhibition, so that they could make a significant contribution to the international stage.²² The Victorian Government appointed Exhibition Commissioners who encouraged regional committees, planned a central exhibition in Melbourne, and organised the display of a wide variety of material in a Victorian Court in Paris.

Kerr's autobiography is silent on his involvement in these exhibitions and we can only surmise why he became involved. He had exhibited before. In January 1851 he won a gold medal for 'the best colonial thoroughbred' in an exhibition organised by the Victorian Industrial Society.²³ He was quick to respond to the Bendigo Exhibition

19. Kerr, J 1992: 424; a copy of the lithograph is in the Dixon Library DL Pd 55. It is reproduced in Drought 1926: facing p.1.

20. State Library of Victoria, H82.277/12.

21. State Library of Victoria, H82.277/11.

22. Panton n.d. *Autobiography*: 115. See also Westgarth 1857: 98.

23. *Argus*, 3 February 1851: 2.

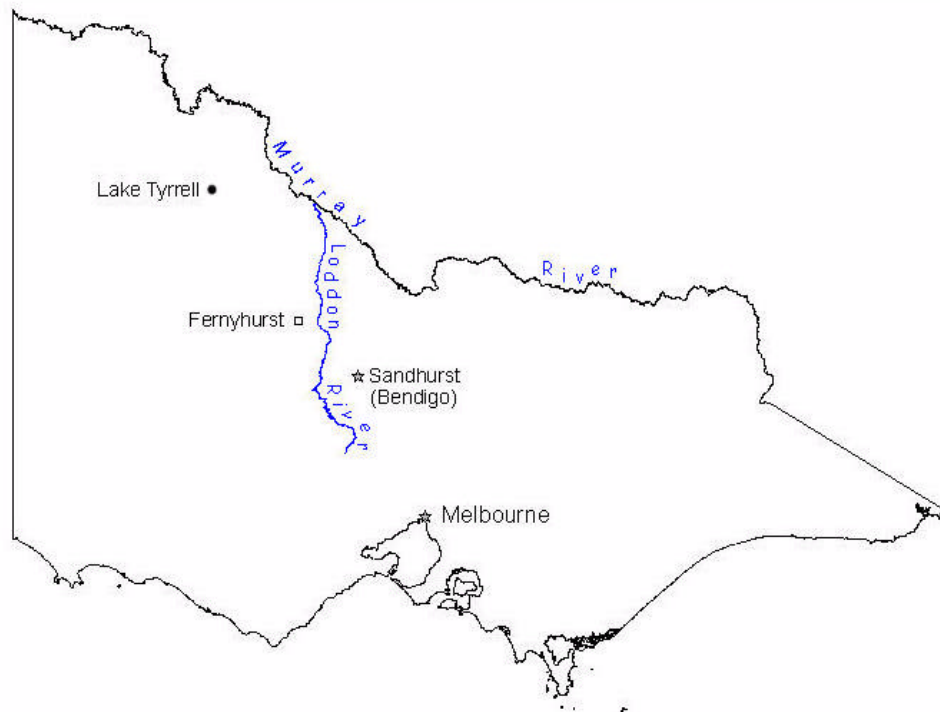


Figure 3: Map of Victoria showing locations referred to in the paper. Courtesy Peter Lilywhite, Museum Victoria

Committee's request, gathering and forwarding to Bendigo a wide range of material for display.

The collection of Indigenous material culture that John Kerr submitted under his name for the Sandhurst Exhibition was impressive in its variety and extent. As well as Aboriginal tools — shields, waddies, boomerangs, 'native tomahawks', spears and spear throwers — it included 'opossum skins worked by Aborigines', an emu skin, the 'skin of an opossum on bark', some 'native boys' play sticks', examples of women's work, particularly 'native grass wrought by lubras' and 'a kangaroo rat bag'. In addition, he displayed three items of ceremonial significance: 'emu feathers used in corrobberys [sic]', 'kangaroo rat skins, used in corrobberys', and a large curved piece of bark in the shape of an emu decorated with white ochre lines, which he later told collector RE Johns that he had seen used in corroborees.²⁴ To round off the collection, he exhibited at least two 'native drawings on bark'. One of these showed a kangaroo and other animals being hunted, while the other — the work now at Kew — depicted Aboriginal dancers wearing emu feather headdresses. Kerr also contributed a collection of raw materials to the Bendigo Exhibition, displaying 'specimens of iron ore, gum-vines, pine-gum, lime, salt, gypsum and smelted iron ore' and 'woollen gloves and socks' made on his station from 'rough wool'.²⁵

²⁴ Cooper 1994: 96–97. This piece is now in the British Museum, item Oc.+1281.

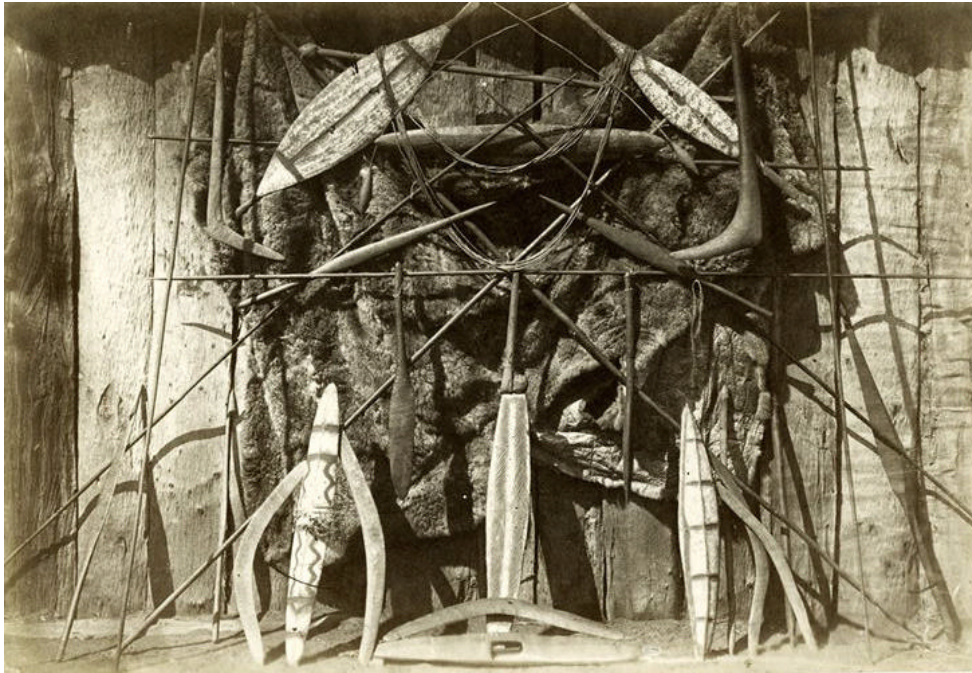


Figure 4: Display of items collected from members of 'the Loddon and Murray tribes', photographed by John Hunter Kerr c.1854. Courtesy La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Kerr's collection of Aboriginal material has received little attention from historians, probably because so few pieces from it are known to have survived. Yet he was the first to present a systematic display of Aboriginal material to a wide public in Victoria.²⁶ His collection is also notable because it included material from women and children, as well as men. He may have photographed some of the collection at Fernyhurst before he took it to Bendigo. A lithograph of a photograph showing boomerangs, spear shields, parrying shields, two types of spears, spear-throwers, weet-weet or play sticks, clubs, a possum skin rug and fibre rope, displayed against the wall of a bark shed, was published as the frontispiece of his book in 1872.²⁷

When the Sandhurst Exhibition opened in September 1854, the press reports described Kerr's exhibit as 'an excellent collection of weapons and various articles used by the aborigines'.²⁸ The collection included at least one example of a work-in-progress: a

^{25.} *Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition 1854*: 35–36. See also *Argus*, 18 September 1854: 5.

^{26.} A small collection of Indigenous artefacts, donated by squatters and William Thomas of the Aboriginal Protectorate, was on display at the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute from c.1846, but these were not collected systematically. The newly formed National Museum of Victoria did not collect Indigenous material culture, although it did display 'Aboriginal skulls' at the 1854 Melbourne Exhibition (Cannon 1991: 318; *Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition 1854*: 23).

^{27.} Kerr 1872 [1996]: 153. An albumen silver print of this is in the State Library of Victoria, H30158/29.

possum skin pinned out on bark to show how the skins were prepared before being made into cloaks. Kerr's exhibit of Indigenous industry received a silver medal at this Exhibition: the citation was for a display of 'native weapons'.²⁹ When the collection was moved to Melbourne in October 1854 and displayed in the new Exhibition Building on the corner of William and Latrobe Streets, it was placed on the mezzanine near the picture gallery, and described as 'a most interesting and elaborate collection of aboriginal implements and articles of clothing'.³⁰ Yet the bronze medal that Kerr won in Melbourne is inscribed 'Native weapons and natural history'.³¹ Despite the evidence in front of them for an Indigenous material culture that was much wider and more complex than merely instruments of war and tools for the hunt, the judges appear to have interpreted the collection through eyes which noticed and recognised only the weapons.

Kerr's collections, along with samples of Victorian gold, wool and timber, and specimens of the mammals, birds, and plants of the region, were shipped to London and thence to Paris in the care of Special Commissioner Edward Bell, who was to set up the Victorian Court as part of the British Court in the new exhibition buildings along the Champs-Élysées. Bell was charged with the care of 20 packages from Victoria, including a valuable collection of Victorian gold nuggets. He had a horrible trip on the *Argo*: the voyage took over two months, the impressive display case that had been provided to house the Victorian gold was too large to fit in the hold and obstructed promenaders on the deck, and he seemed to quarrel with most people on board.³² When he arrived in Paris, he discovered that no formal application had been made by the Victorian authorities for space in the Exhibition. He succeeded in obtaining a very prominent position for the case of gold, but the other material, including the Aboriginal exhibits, was placed out of the mainstream in a hot, glass-roofed temporary annexe. In his report to the Chief Secretary in June 1855, Bell feared that not many people would see the Victorian exhibits.³³

The presentation of Indigenous material at the Paris Exhibition

How did European Australians choose to present Indigenous material at this, the first great international exhibition to display material from mainland Australia to a European audience?

In the 1850s, the 'Exhibition of Industry' at an international exhibition implied much more than simply the display of the products of the industrial revolution. Certainly, the mechanical marvels and inventions of the machine age had evoked the greatest wonder at the London Exhibition of 1851. But the international exhibitions aimed also to show the fruits of the 'industry', 'industriousness', or 'work', of the peoples of the world. In the words of Asa Briggs: 'The values behind the exhibitions were international too. Work was hailed, mankind was treated as one, and the future of mankind was explored'.³⁴ The products and crafts of the indigenous peoples of the

28. *Argus*, 18 September 1854: 5.

29. *Argus*, 18 September 1854: 5.

30. *Argus*, 18 October 1854: 5.

31. Museum Victoria, Numismatics collection, NU 34980.

32. Bell 1855.

33. *Argus*, 15 December 1855: 6.

34. Briggs 2002: 13.

colonised world — the objects that would be dismissed as ‘curios’ or ‘curiosities’ by later generations — then formed part of the large displays presented by colonial powers and were not separated off into disconnected displays arranged by ethnicity. It was colonialism, rather than race or ethnicity, that was being displayed.³⁵ Indigenous items were on display in the 1850s essentially as examples of ‘native industry’ and adaptability, and as indicators of the workmanship and common humanity of people from all parts of the world.

As the European settlers in Victoria gathered items for the Melbourne and Paris Exhibitions, they were influenced by several strands of thought. Their overwhelming sentiment was one of pride: pride in the progress which had established towns and farms and cultural institutions in a ‘wilderness’ only a few short years after British settlement. There was optimism, as well, about the potential of the new land to provide raw materials that were yet to be fully exploited. They wanted to promote their new land by displaying a wide range of ‘industry’, and they wanted to include examples of Aboriginal industry, of the work of Aboriginal people. Although many Europeans expressed a belief that Indigenous people were being supplanted and suppressed as ‘an inferior race’, many of those who collected material for Paris had first-hand knowledge of the ingenuity and adaptability of their Aboriginal neighbours, and the variety and innovation of their material culture. An exhibition was a place where these strands came together. At the time of the Melbourne Exhibition in 1854, George Rusden, scholar and Exhibition Commissioner, gave a lecture at the Melbourne Mechanics Institute. He suggested that the exhibition was ‘an undertaking ... for the good of work and learning’ and quoted from Francis Bacon when he likened the Exhibition to a place which would be ‘dedicated to the study of the works and creatures of God’.³⁶

The theme of the industry and adaptability of Indigenous people was apparent also in the certificate designed by Ludwig Becker for the prizewinning exhibitors at the 1854 Melbourne Exhibition. Becker depicted the usual suspects — gold digger, shepherd, farmer and ‘wild’ Aboriginal man with boomerang and spear — but he also showed an Aboriginal bullock driver, his work for the day completed, resting in the street of a town; he was described in approval as ‘attired in Guernsey, trousers and high-lows, and exhibiting the effects of his contact with the civilisation of the white man’.³⁷

There was a further reason for displaying works of Aboriginal industry in the Melbourne and Paris Exhibitions: Victorians wanted to prove to the world that, in Victoria at least, the Indigenous people were both still working in traditional ways and adopting new ways. In London in 1851, the Tasmanian Court had included some examples of the ‘works of industry’ of Indigenous Tasmanians, but the Australian colonists’ contribution to the Crystal Palace exhibition had been criticised by a London journalist. In a weekly paper put out during the exhibition, he listed the exhibits that showed Aboriginal industry, and marvelled at their ingenuity. He then deplored the fate of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, and suggested that Indigenous people were probably no longer to be found in southern Australia. In October 1851 he wrote:

^{35.} Benedict 1983: 41.

^{36.} Rusden 1857: 7.

^{37.} *Argus*, 7 May 1855: 6; Museum Victoria, Department of Australian Society and Technology, 01.728.



Figure 5: Ludwig Becker designed this prize certificate for the 1854 Melbourne Exhibition of Produce and Works of Industry. Indigenous people are included in the design.
Collection: Museum Victoria

There is a melancholy tribute paid in the Van Diemen's Land Department to its now extinct Aborigines. In our forty years possession of that settlement we [ie the British race] have utterly destroyed them ... Yet these poor people had tastes and industry too. ... They obtained a brilliant shell necklace by soaking and rubbing off the cuticle, and gaining various tints by hot decoctions of herbs. They procured paint by iron ore, and reducing it to powder by grind-stones. They converted sea-shells and sea-weeds into convenient water vessels; they wove baskets, and they constructed boats with safe catamarans. All these things are exhibited. Surely, then, the men whom their greedy supplanters admit to have done this ... ought not to have been hunted down ... and shut up in an island too small for even the few remaining. The New South Wales contributions offer no sign of the Aborigine's works, and probably the country contains no longer any trace of the people.³⁸

This criticism was known in Victoria. Captain RE Pasley was one of the Commissioners of the Melbourne Exhibition and owned a copy of the publication where it had appeared. He and his fellow Commissioners may have been influenced by its content when they came to plan the 1854 Exhibition.³⁹

The 'Special Instructions' for intending exhibitors distributed by the Exhibition Commissioners in July 1854 listed the kinds of items of natural history, metals, timber, grain and manufactured articles that would be acceptable for display for Paris. They also urged contributors to collect examples of Indigenous industry, particularly Aboriginal weapons and implements, shell necklaces, 'native food', and opossum rugs.⁴⁰ If a range of 'native industry' was presented, it would prove that not all Australian colonies had destroyed their Indigenous inhabitants, and it would also show that many Aboriginal people were still undertaking traditional activities, while others were adapting to European ways. (The Victorian Exhibition Commissioners also wanted to demonstrate how British settlers had improved on Indigenous practices, so they suggested that exhibitors could collect 'opossum rugs as prepared by the Aborigines, and also as manufactured in a superior manner'.)⁴¹

In response to these instructions Kerr submitted a complex and nuanced collection of Aboriginal objects that was designed to show the industry of Aboriginal people. Kerr's collection of material from the Loddon people, with its mix of domestic, ceremonial, women's and children's objects, as well as hunting tools and weapons, presented evidence of a variety of activities and work from a community where children played, women collected food and wove grasses into attractive containers, and men decorated their homes and participated in complicated ceremonies. It is apparent that the collection was put together deliberately, probably with the active involvement of his Indigenous neighbours, and that an attempt was made to include material made and used by a range of different people – women and children as well as men. I suggest also that the two representational bark drawings that were collected and exhibited by

38. *The Crystal Palace and its contents*, Issue 3, 18 October 1851: 44.

39. Pasley, Colonial Engineer, owned and exhibited in 1854 'a complete set of the medals and books connected with the Great Exhibition of 1851', *Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition* 1854: 33. He had the opportunity to read this criticism from London before contributing to the Special Instructions for the 1854 exhibitors.

40. *Special Instructions for the guidance of local committees and intending exhibitors* 1854: 24.

41. *Special Instructions for the guidance of local committees and intending exhibitors* 1854: 24.

Kerr may have been deliberately commissioned or chosen as examples of Aboriginal industry and because they illustrated how some of the other items collected from the Loddon people were used.

The Loddon and Murray collection gathered by Kerr formed the bulk of the Indigenous cultural material on display in the Victorian Court in Paris. It was supplemented by a small display from the Government Museum, showing a further aspect of Aboriginal industry: 'tomahawks, in various stages of manufacture, from Phonolite' from the Mount William district.⁴² Some Victorian exhibitors showed objects that demonstrated contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans. Ludwig Becker exhibited a 'pencil drawing by an Aborigine' and 'two portraits of Aborigines'.⁴³ Another Victorian exhibitor, T Jones, contributed a 'bullock hide halter made by Aborigines on the Murray', that showed the adaptation of old techniques to a new material and purpose.⁴⁴ Kerr was not alone among the exhibitors in being interested in the 'works of the industry' of Indigenous people, in the material evidence of their innovation, productiveness and adaptability.

The theme of 'Aboriginal industry' was also evident within the NSW Court at the Paris Exhibition. It is not clear whether the NSW Commissioners followed the Victorian Commissioners in suggesting that works of Indigenous manufacture could be submitted for exhibition in Paris, but several exhibitors did submit such works. There was no equivalent to Kerr's carefully gathered and comprehensive collection, but the NSW Court included Indigenous items contributed by several different exhibitors, including 'native dillies', 'Aboriginal baskets', a boomerang and 'womera', 'several native spears and waddies', and an 'opossum rug'. There were also some examples of the adaptability of Aboriginal people in the face of contact with Europeans. Mrs Minniss exhibited 'Aboriginal knitting needles from the Tumut River' and J Hocking from Vacluse presented 'gloves and cuffs of Aboriginal manufacture from opossum fur'.⁴⁵ Many of these objects were assembled in face-to-face interactions between the exhibitors and the Indigenous people who traded or gave their items for exhibition. They were displayed as examples of Indigenous industry and included examples where traditional skills and/or materials had been adapted for a new purpose.

The exhibition of Indigenous material in Paris in the Victorian and NSW Courts contrasts with exhibitions of Aboriginal material prepared later in the century, which were generally dominated by Aboriginal weaponry. In her analysis of European representations of 'Aboriginality' in later 19th century Victoria, Lesley McCall suggested that 'the fascination of 19th century Europeans with the primitive and savage created ... an image of Aboriginality in which the portrayal of a state of primitiveness was fundamental.'⁴⁶ Particular artefacts, especially hunting and fighting implements, were thought to illustrate this principle best, and these predominated in most 19th century exhibitions, photographs of Aboriginal people, and museum displays.⁴⁷ Aboriginal weapons were presented as examples of primitive technology and often exhibited so as

⁴². *Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition 1854*: 8.

⁴³. *Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition 1854*: 29.

⁴⁴. *Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition 1854*: 35.

⁴⁵. *Catalogue of the Natural and Industrial Products of New South Wales 1855*: 9–14, 81.

⁴⁶. McCall 1988: 109.

⁴⁷. McCall 1988: 109–110.

to provide a dramatic contrast with objects showing the progress and increased complexity of European technology. One example of this was RE Johns' collection of Victorian ethnographic material, displayed at the Paris International Exhibition in 1878. Tom Griffiths describes how the collection was separated out from the other Victorian exhibits, and placed at 'the beginning of a series showing "the history of labour", proclaiming to the world the primitive nature of Australia's relic savages'.⁴⁸ Other scholars have also identified an emphasis by 19th century collectors on weapons and hunting tools. Philip Jones has suggested that museum and exhibition collections of the 19th century, with their 'bias toward weaponry', 'supported the dominant and erroneous view of Aborigines as people with little leisure, preoccupied with internecine warfare rather than with ceremonial or artistic life'.⁴⁹ Ilaria Vanni suggested that displays of weapons at international exhibitions placed Aboriginal people 'outside time', 'frozen', as people living in a nomadic society of hunters.⁵⁰ Such displays also presented Aboriginal weapons as 'trophies', and hinted at the subjugation of the Indigenous people.⁵¹ The collections exhibited by Kerr and other colonists in 1855 were clearly more comprehensive and more nuanced than these later collections.

In Paris, Kerr's collection was entered with other collections of Indigenous and non-Indigenous material from Victoria in Section 25, 'Articles of clothing, objects of fashion and fancy', under a special section, 'Diverse collections'. It was described as 'native weapons and ornaments used in war and corroborees by the aborigines'.⁵² The Indigenous material was not separated out from the Victorian Court; it was included with the other works of 'industry' produced by the European settlers of the colony.

Kerr's collection was not awarded either a medal or a certificate in Paris and it appears to have been largely un-noticed. A Gold Medal went to the NSW commissioner, W MacArthur, for the NSW display of raw materials, wines, wool, wheat, and Aboriginal artefacts. The judges were impressed by the wide range of workmanship and industry in the display, suggesting that it showed both 'l'industrie primitive des naturels' and 'l'industrie déjà très-développée des colons'.⁵³ Edward Bell made only one early report back to the Victorian Commissioners,⁵⁴ so the Victorian exhibitors, including Kerr, waited in vain for a comprehensive account of how their material had been viewed in Paris.

At the close of the Paris Exhibition, exhibitors could choose to have their collections sold in Paris, or forwarded at their own cost to a specified destination in Britain.⁵⁵ It is not clear what Kerr intended to have done with his collection, as the schedule listing the Victorian material shipped to Paris, which gave indications about the exhibitors' expectations for ultimate disposal, has unfortunately not survived.⁵⁶ There was a small market for the sale of Aboriginal material within Britain. Natural history collectors like

48. Griffiths 1996: 49–50.

49. Jones 1988: 155.

50. Vanni 1999: 7.

51. Vanni 1999: 8.

52. Paris Universal Exhibition 1855: 132.

53. Exposition Universelle de 1855, 1856: 1220.

54. Report dated 14 June 1855, published in *Argus*, 15 December 1855: 6.

55. *Special Instructions for the guidance of local committees and intending exhibitors* 1854: 11.

56. Referred to in Paris Exhibition Commission *Letterbook*, 30 January 1855.

John Cotton sent Aboriginal artefacts as well as bird skins and other specimens from Victoria for sale by an agent in England,⁵⁷ and Kerr may have hoped to take advantage of this trade, or he might have hoped to sell the material directly to a collecting institution in London. The British Exhibition Commissioners made it their habit to purchase significant items from international exhibitions for the great national museums.⁵⁸ Sir William Hooker, the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, visited Paris during the Exhibition in 1855 and reported to the Board of Trade on the 'remarkable objects' he saw.⁵⁹ Presumably, Hooker's report formed the basis for his recommendations of possible acquisitions for the British collections, including the newly-developing Economic Botany collections at Kew. The records at Kew identify Kerr as the source of the bark drawing, so even if it was sold to the Botanic Gardens by an agent the connection with Kerr was retained.

In 1861, the Economic Botany collections at Kew contained the two bark drawings and the ceremonial piece in the shape of an emu that had been exhibited by Kerr. They were presumably kept as examples of an unusual use of a natural resource by an indigenous people. The drawing with the corroboree was on display in that year, when it was described as 'bark of a Eucalyptus, on which rude drawings have been made by the aborigines of Australia'.⁶⁰ Later in the century, one bark drawing and the ceremonial piece were recognised as having ethnographic value, and were transferred to the British Museum of Mankind in 1866 and 1880. As already noted, the second bark drawing slipped out of sight and has only recently been re-discovered and its significance recognised.

The three works continue to be held by the London collecting institutions and it is probably unlikely that they will be repatriated in the near future. They are among many other items of Indigenous manufacture from Australia, collected before 1860 and sold or donated to the British national collections. Few of them are as well-provenanced as these three items.

Description of the work at the Royal Botanic Gardens

I have suggested above that Kerr may have chosen to collect, or the Aboriginal people to make, the two bark drawings because they illustrated how some of the other objects on display were used. The drawing now in the British Museum shows boomerangs, spear-throwers, spears, shields and clubs in use by hunters. The drawing now in the Royal Botanic Gardens depicts how the 'emu feathers used in corrobberys' — also part of Kerr's collection — were worn. A quick stylistic examination suggests that the two bark etchings that Kerr collected were by different artists. Kerr seems to have been among those 19th century European artists who took an interest in the art of the Aboriginal people.⁶¹ He thought of himself as an artist — his drawing of 'Queen Jellibung' was made into a lithograph — so it was perhaps natural for him to seek out artists

57. Mackaness 1978 vol 2: 33, 6 March 1846.

58. Hoffenberg 2001: 40.

59. Hooker 1855.

60. Servaes and Prendergast 2002: 7.

61. Sayers 1994: 83.

among the Aboriginal people he knew and to collect or commission their work as part of the wider collection, and as an example of another type of 'industry'.

The etching in Kew is on a curved piece of bark. It shows 13 figures, arranged roughly in four groupings. Most are recognisably human and eight of them are clearly male. Many of the figures appear to be dancing in a corroboree formation. Five of the figures wear headdresses made from emu feathers. Two men wear four shafts of emu feathers, two wear two shafts and one figure only one shaft. At least three of the males are wearing two to four other hair ornaments. Nine of the figures are carrying objects: boomerangs, waddies or tomahawks, and other items that are now unclear and have not been identified. Some of the smaller figures are partly limbless, and least resemble humans. Two figures are stretched out as if on the ground. One of these may be depicted as if climbing a tree after a possum. Three figures may represent a group of people sitting on the ground and observed from behind — or perhaps a woman and two children using digging sticks.⁶²

The drawing is arranged in a linear style in four distinct levels: two dancers at the top, one dancer or hunter with four reclining or seated figures on the second level, three decorated dancers on the third layer, with three smaller images — two dancers and one indistinct reclining figure — at the bottom. This linear format is also followed by the other bark drawing from the Loddon now in the British Museum, where there appear to be three rows of figures; and in the bark drawing in Museum Victoria where human and animal figures are arranged roughly in five levels. Some of the sitting and reclining figures in the Kew bark drawing are very similar to those in the Museum Victoria bark drawing from Lake Tyrrell. The Kew drawing seems to be the only one of the three where the artist has begun to delineate facial features for some of the figures.

In the bark drawing in Kew the dancers appear to be naked, with their genitalia clearly depicted and exaggerated in size. There does not appear to be any suggestion of a fibre girdle. This is surprising given EM Curr's report of the Bangerang people in corroboree that 'in all cases the performers wore a belt around the loins from which depended, both before and behind, a thick bunch of opossum skin throngs which hung halfway down to the knees'.⁶³ The drawing is one of the few illustrations showing emu feather headdresses, as distinct from cockatoo feathers, in a corroboree in Victoria. Curr described how 'the hair of the head ... was confined either by a netted fillet or a narrow band of twisted opossum skin ... a plume of emu or cockatoo feathers being frequently inserted in it'.⁶⁴ In 1895 Albert AC le Souef, the son of a Victorian Protector of Aborigines and later a member of the Aborigines Protection Board, wrote about a Goulburn River corroboree that he had seen in 1841. He described the dancers, 'painted with streaks of white pipeclay', who wore 'on their heads red or white bands, in which were stuck feathers of the white or black cockatoo, or bunches of the tail feathers of the emu'.⁶⁵ The drawing shows the dancers with their feet very wide apart. It is not a detailed representation of all aspects of the corroborees seen by Europeans: the dancers

62. Servaes and Prendergast 2002: 7–9. Additional comments by the author, who had a brief opportunity to see the work in London in 2002.

63. Curr 1883 [1965]: 135.

64. Curr 1883 [1965]: 134.

65. Sculthorpe 1990: 176.

are not decorated, and there is no head-band supporting the emu feather headdresses. The tufts of green leaves that Curr describes 'borne tightly around each ankle', and the 'rolls of fur around the thick part of the dancers' arms', are not shown.⁶⁶ There were no examples of these objects among the collection that Kerr sent to Paris.

There are obvious parallels between the bark drawing and the work of Tommy McRae who lived on the Murray around Wahgunyah and was drawing with ink on paper for a European audience from the 1860s. McRae also grouped his figures in several levels and drew scenes of corroborees and hunting expeditions. McRae's corroboree formations are much tighter and more disciplined than in the bark drawing, but the dancers are depicted in a similar stance, heads turned to one side and hands holding instruments or tools.⁶⁷ One of McRae's drawings of a 'war dance' seems to show emu feather headdresses.⁶⁸ Similarly, south-eastern Aboriginal artists William Barak and 'Mickey of Ulladulla' both grouped the figures that they drew on paper in a linear arrangement. Both artists depicted dancers in corroboree with feet wide apart and legs strongly braced.⁶⁹

Carol Cooper has suggested that figurative drawings were the visual language used by Indigenous people for communication with outsiders and the uninitiated.⁷⁰ This type of drawing was therefore eminently suitable for a work that was to travel far from its point of origin to Melbourne and then to Europe. The Kew drawing awaits full interpretation and detailed comparison with related works, a project that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In 2004, Museum Victoria turns 150. This year also marks the sesquicentenary of the display in Melbourne of Kerr's collection from the Loddon and Murray people. The Museum has negotiated with the Royal Botanic Gardens and the British Museum to borrow the two bark etchings, so that these significant and scarcely known works can be seen again in Australia. They will be on display at the Melbourne Museum from March to June 2004.

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^{66.} Curr 1883 [1965]: 135.

^{67.} Cooper and Urry 1981: 81–88. See also Sayers 1994: 27–49.

^{68.} Tommy McRae: 'Lachlan Blacks war dancing', State Library of Victoria H14224, reproduced in Sayers 1994: 126.

^{69.} William Barak: 'Ceremony', National Gallery of Victoria 1215B/5, reproduced in Sayers 1994: 120; 'Mickey of Ulladulla': 'Corroboree', National Gallery of Australia, 91.870, reproduced in Sayers 1994: 130.

^{70.} Eagle 1999: 242.

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‘To infuse an universal terror’: a reappraisal of the Coniston killings¹

Bill Wilson and Justin O’Brien

Australian history has of late entered a new phase of self-reflection, fuelled in part by Keith Windschuttle’s questioning the number of Aboriginal deaths as the result of frontier conflict.² This revisionist view of frontier conflict has led to a re-examination of many events previously accepted as ‘truths’. One of these events, the Coniston killings of 1928 near Alice Springs, has almost universally been accepted as a massacre. Even Keith Windschuttle acknowledges that ‘Coniston deserves the label “massacre”’.³ This year marks the 75th since the tragic events at and around Coniston Station. In September 2003 a plaque was unveiled near Coniston, in honour of those who lost their lives during what is locally referred to as the ‘killing times’.

As this paper demonstrates, the complete story of Coniston remains, however, arcane and the death toll is probably far greater than that given in the commonly accepted account. We present new information derived from actual perpetrators that the total Aboriginal death toll was at least twice the official figure. Coniston was the subject of official reports, three court hearings, a Board of Enquiry, domestic and international press reports, a book, a thesis and journal articles. Despite this prominence and wealth of documentation, much remains imprecise and ambiguous in our historical understanding of the events leading to, during, and after the killings. To date the story has been oversimplified and many inconsistencies have remained unexplored. It is over 40 years since the last detailed academic examination was made of Coniston, when Hartwig⁴ prepared an Honours thesis on the subject. Peter and Jay Read’s *Long time, olden time*⁵ remains the pre-eminent published Aboriginal account of the Coniston Massacre, using as it does material from eye-witnesses to the events. However, much of the historical investigation over the past 20 years has been centred upon Cribbin’s book, *The killing times*.⁶ While the relative prominence of Coniston is owed to this work, the

1. ‘To infuse an universal terror’ [sic] — according to Tench, Governor Arthur Phillip thus described to him the purpose of Australia’s first official punitive expedition in December 1790 (Tench 1789: 168).

2. Windschuttle 2000a: 9.

3. Windschuttle 2000a: 9.

4. Hartwig 1960.

5. Read and Read 1991.

6. Cribbin 1984.

book has virtually no footnotes and the sources are therefore not verifiable; yet Windschuttle — who considers that the 'role of the footnote is to make historians publicly accountable'⁷ — among others, considers the work an authority.⁸ Cribbin's story, however, contains errors of fact, is replete with incidents unmentioned in other sources, and misconstrues the sequence and nature of events (when compared with official testimony and records). It is the narrative interpretation of a journalist who did not apply even the most rudimentary archival research skills of the academic historian. Many of the inconsistencies in Cribbin's account have been inherited by subsequent writers, notably Bruce Elder⁹ and the supposedly circumspect Keith Windschuttle.¹⁰ They also make their own mistakes. For example, Elder's incorrect placement of Brooks Soak some 20km south of Coniston Station (it was west) has survived seven reprints and one revised edition of *Blood on the Wattle*.¹¹ Windschuttle incorrectly places Coniston Station itself on the Lander River (it was on the Warburton).¹²

This work sets out the events as they are now understood, while acknowledging that many inconsistencies have yet to be explored and that a definitive account of the atrocities at Coniston remains to be written. In particular, we expand upon the public knowledge of a leading figure in the events, Mounted Constable William George Murray, and draw on the unpublished diaries of TGH Strehlow.

Before the killings

In 1928, Central Australia was one of the last frontiers in the European conquest of Australia; Coniston was its western outpost. The Coniston lease, situated on the Warburton River some 250km north-west of Alice Springs, was granted to Randall Stafford of Adelaide in 1917 and the station stocked four years later.¹³ The Tanami desert lay to the west of Coniston, the Lander River country to the north. European contact with the region's traditional owners, the Warlpiri, had been minimal, with pastoral stations and the Tanami goldfield the only permanent European presence.¹⁴

Three significant issues which are significant during the lead up to the Coniston killings are often disputed in interpretations of the events: conflict over land use, the effects of drought, and the events which led to the demise of Frederick Brooks.

In the non-Indigenous community, from police and pastoralists to politicians, there was a consensus that the competing interests of traditional Aboriginal owners of land and pastoralists could not mutually prosper. The *South Australian Register* summed it by stating 'the blacks have taken charge and it will be an impossibility to develop the country until there is more police protection'.¹⁵ Police Sergeant Charles

7. Windschuttle 2002: 132.

8. Much of the material for Cribbin's work was sourced from oral histories collected by Peter Read in 1976 and 1977 for the later publication Read and Read 1991. Journalistic flavour and some embellishment were added.

9. Elder 1988.

10. Windschuttle 2000a.

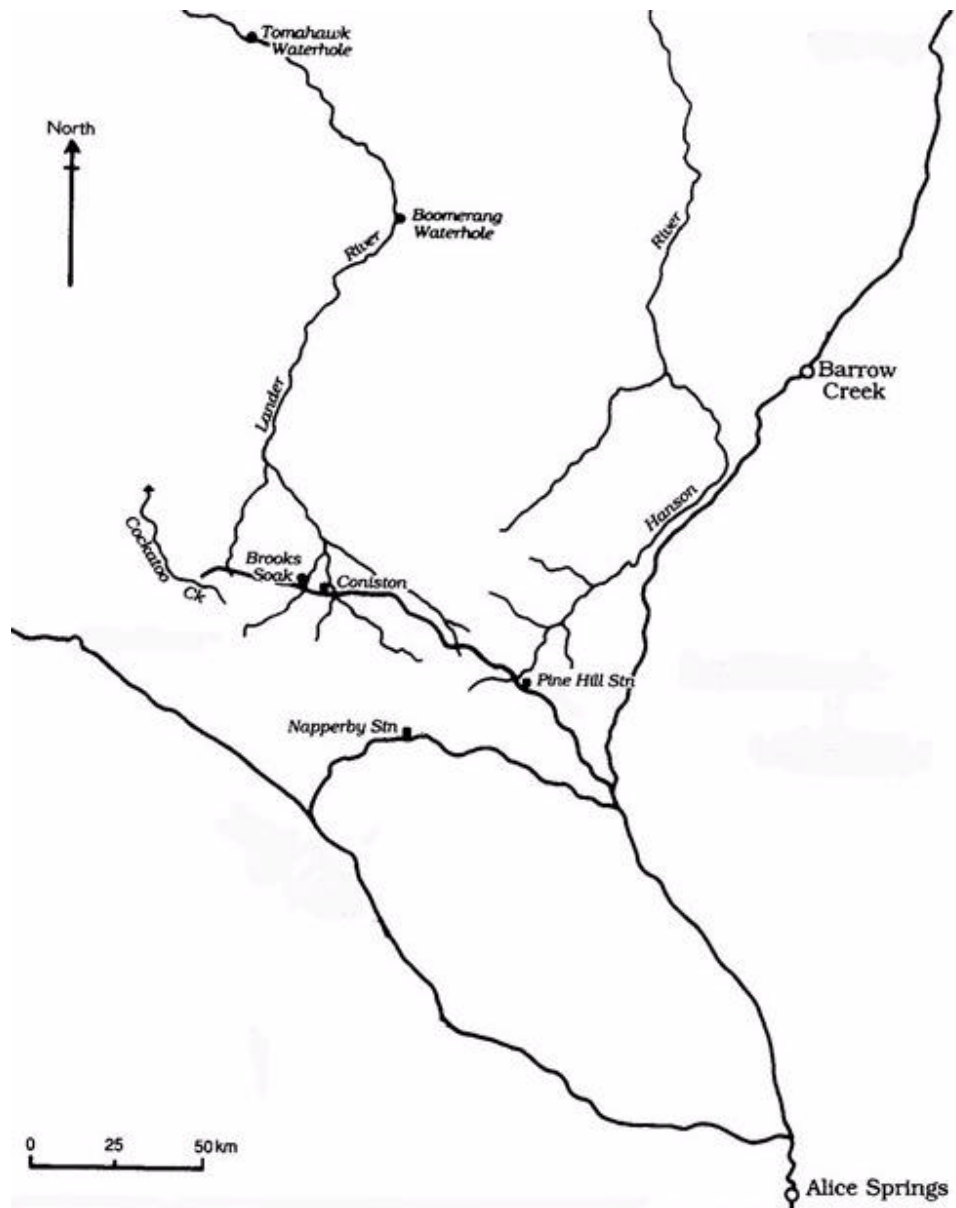
11. Elder 1988: 177.

12. Windschuttle 2000a: 19.

13. Hartwig 1960: 3–4.

14. Meggitt 1962: 16–24.

15. *Register*, 8 September 1928.



Location map based on a diagram in Elder 1988, p 178.

Herbert Noblet of Alice Springs expressed a similar (albeit bleaker) sentiment in correspondence to Central Australian Government Resident and Police Commissioner JC Cawood after the Coniston killings:

My experience in nineteen years of out back life is that the settlers are very fair to the natives but stock and natives do not and will not thrive together and it can be seen at a glance by the restlessness and tucked-up look of the cattle when they are together. If this country is to be settled with a healthy white population, we must give the pioneers every protection both for themselves and their stock otherwise the country must be left to the natives who have not the slightest idea of development in any shape or form.¹⁶

Whether or not the belief that the carnage of Coniston was inevitable actually played a hand in its manifestation remains a matter of historical conjecture. It may not, however, be entirely irrelevant that just weeks before the killings Cawood ominously remarked to a missionary at Hermannsburg that it was time the blacks were taught a lesson.¹⁷ The increased cattle killings and threats to several white men in the area may have been the catalyst for Cawood's views.¹⁸

From 1924, Central Australia suffered a four-year-long drought, the worst recorded.¹⁹ The consequent starvation of Aboriginal people was noted in reports by Cawood²⁰ and two pastoralists in the area.²¹ The drought exacerbated Aboriginal reliance on traditionally dependable water resources — the permanent soaks of Central Australia's river systems — bringing Warlpiri and other Aboriginal people into a closer proximity to the more settled districts. Soon after the events at Coniston were made public the Commonwealth Government,²² however, sought to establish that drought was either non-existent or negligible in its impact — certainly in no way responsible for Aboriginal violence.²³ This denial is critical, as the subsequent Board of Enquiry also refuted the claims of a drought being the basis of the violence.

The death of Frederick Brooks

Nowhere is the oversimplification of the 'Coniston story' more evident than in accounts of the death of the dingo trapper Frederick Brooks, who was murdered on the morning of 7 August 1928. Brooks was a lifelong friend of Randall Stafford; the two originally met in the country around Lake Eyre.²⁴ In July, Brooks, aged 61,²⁵ asked Stafford (for

16. Noblet to Cawood, 8 December 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

17. Rev. FW Albrecht in correspondence to Hartwig, in Hartwig 1960: 13.

18. Read and Read 1991: 33.

19. For example, in 1928 just 3.29 inches of rain fell at Barrow Creek, the lowest reading since records began in 1899 (Wilson 1996: 97–98).

20. Report of the Government Resident for Central Australia for the period 1 March 1927 to 30 June 1927: 5. In his 1928 Government Resident Report Cawood noted 'continual drought conditions'.

21. Strehlow 1959.

22. Central Australia was then a separate territory under the direct jurisdiction of the Commonwealth.

23. Department of Home & Territories, 'Central Australia — Shooting of Aboriginals', 23 November 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

24. Strehlow 1959: 312–319.

25. Death certificate by Coroner HB Walkington, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

whom he had worked in the past) if he could try his hand dingo scalping on Coniston. Stafford warned Brooks that he and the Aboriginal woman he lived with (Alice) had received threats from 'myall'²⁶ Aboriginal people and that it would be unsafe to go out any further than a soak some 22km west of the station. On 2 August, Brooks left for the soak, taking with him rations, two camels, and two Aboriginal assistants, Skipper and Dodger, to help him in his work.²⁷ On the morning of 7 August, Skipper and Dodger found Brooks' corpse half-buried in a dug-out rabbit burrow and his camp ransacked.

It is commonly accepted that Brooks was murdered by Aboriginal people, but the reason remains a matter of speculation. Most Aboriginal accounts point to Brooks being involved in a sexual relationship with one or two Warlpiri women and that this was either inappropriate or 'an arrangement' not honoured by Brooks.²⁸ European accounts at the time invariably stated Brooks was killed 'so as to get possession of his flour and tobacco'²⁹ or because he encountered a warring party of 'myalls' making for Coniston, intent on removing the white man from Aboriginal land. Contemporary European accounts were concerned with portraying the murder as an unjustified 'outrage'; Aboriginal accounts treat the killing as a form of justified retribution or tribal justice. Warlpiri men Blind Alec Jupurrula and Jack Japaljarri told Read and Read (1991) that Brooks had asked a local Aboriginal man, Japanangka (also known as Bullfrog), for his wife Marungarli, to do his washing for him and that he would give Japanangka food and tobacco in exchange. Japanangka expected Marungarli to return but when she did not, and Brooks did not supply any food or tobacco, he attacked him at dawn. According to this account Brooks had said:

Let that woman go washing clothes for me, and [I'll] let her go after washing clothes. I'll give you tucker.' And so old man let her go, that old lady. That Freddie took him away, washing clothes, but he [Brooks] never comin' back. He never comin' back with the tucker. He keepem there ...³⁰

For his part, Randall Stafford had yet another view of the motive:

Whatever those myalls might have had against the rest of us, old Fred was entirely innocent. And they murdered him at one of my soaks, on my own land. Even Alice agreed that that party had really come to murder her and me. Only Fred was unlucky enough to cross their tracks. So they killed him instead, because it was easier.³¹

Considerable doubt also surrounds the finding of Brooks' body and how his death was reported. Until 1984 it was commonly accepted that the first person (apart from the murderers and Skipper and Dodger) to see Brooks' corpse was the prospector Bruce Chapman. This was based on a note to Stafford (then at Ti-Tree Well) supposedly writ-

26. 'Myall' is a now derogatory term denoting a traditional living Aboriginal person. Its origin, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is *mayal*, which the Dharuk-speakers of NSW used to denote a 'person of another tribe'.

27. Strehlow 1959: 312-319.

28. Wilson 1996: 84.

29. Deposition by Murray to Special Magistrate Allchurch, 7 September 1928, NAA A431 1950 Part 1.

30. Read and Read 1991: 35-37. See also, Tim Japangardi Langdon, 'Coniston Story', in *Yurrkuru-Kurlu*, Yuendumu School, 1978: 18-20, in Headon 1991: 98.

31. Strehlow 1959: 312-319.

ten by Chapman and a statement by Stafford which had been taken down by Robert Purvis at Ti-Tree Well³² and telephoned through to Alice Springs police on 11 August.³³ According to this version of events put forward by Hartwig,³⁴ Skipper and Dodger arrived at Brooks' camp on the morning of 7 August to find him dead and a group of Aboriginal people rummaging through his gear. After being threatened by this group and told to 'tellem him [Brooks] been fall down self' the two rode their camels to Coniston and as there was no white person at the station, Chapman, camped 32km down the Lander, was sent for. Chapman went to Coniston and then to the soak, where he discovered and reburied Brooks' body and returned to the station from where he wrote the note to Stafford.³⁵

However, in Read and Read³⁶ and Cribbin³⁷ and subsequent works sourced from Cribbin and interviews with Alex Wilson, it was Wilson who first found Brooks' body while travelling to Coniston.³⁸ Wilson, a part-Aboriginal man, was headed for Coniston with news of the illness of the legendary bushman Joe Brown. Cribbin's version of events, which drew heavily on Wilson's recollections, differs from the official (Board of Enquiry) account in many respects.³⁹ Another account by Dick Kimber has it that the Aboriginal bush worker Paddy Tucker found the body a day prior to Wilson's arrival at the soak, later warning all Aboriginal people he met to clear the area as trouble was afoot.⁴⁰ An eye-witness account in *Long time, olden time* also has Aboriginal people being warned that the shooting had occurred, but in this instance unnamed Aboriginal men 'run across the country' telling of a shooting at Brooks' Soak saying it was 'an accident'.⁴¹

Significant uncertainty surrounds the movements of Bruce Chapman, especially in light of his undated note to Stafford with the first news of the murder. In that note (presumably written on or after 7 August) Chapman stated he was at Coniston and that Alex Wilson had arrived 'yesterday' from The Granites goldfield where Joe Brown was in a 'very bad' way and that he and Wilson were going out to help him.⁴² In later years Wilson claimed he returned to Joe Brown just in time to see him die, but made no mention of Chapman.⁴³ Wilson was, however, at Coniston by the time Murray arrived on 12 August but Chapman was not mentioned in any documentation, until the Administra-

32. 'Statement from Randle [sic] Stafford taken down by Robert Purvis at Tea Tree Well', undated typed copy, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

33. Alice Springs Police Day Journal 23/6/27 to 31/10/29, NTAS, NTRS F255, entry 11 August 1928.

34. Hartwig 1960.

35. Murray to Commissioner of Police, 2 September 1928, NAA A431 1950 Part 1.

36. Read and Read 1991.

37. Cribbin 1984.

38. Read and Read 1991: 38.

39. For example, Cribbin states Stafford first heard the news of the murder on his return to Coniston. There is no mention whatsoever of any note from Chapman or message from Ti-Tree Well. In Cribbin, Chapman simply arrived at Coniston, evidently of his own accord.

40. Interview with Dick Kimber, 25 March 2002 and Carment, Maynard and Powell 1992: 215.

41. Read and Read 1991: 38.

42. Letter received by Randle Stafford from Bruce Chapman, undated typed copy, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

43. Kimber 1986: 104.

tor, Cawood, informed Canberra of Chapman's death on 12 November 1928.⁴⁴ To compound the confusion, it appears that Wilson told Cribbin that he was travelling to Coniston with news of Brown's death, not his illness.⁴⁵

The movements of Mounted Constable Murray, who was at this time away from his usual location at Barrow Creek, remain similarly uncertain. The Barrow Creek Police Day Journal records that from August 7 to October 21 Murray was 'absent from station on duty in Alice Springs district'.⁴⁶ Exactly why Murray left the Barrow Creek district for Alice Springs is unclear. In Cribbin's work it is said that Murray had taken two sheep stealers to be detained at Alice Springs.⁴⁷ Such events are not recorded in the Alice Springs Police Station Day Journal. What is clear, according to the Day Journal, is that on 11 August it was 'Reported over phone from Tee Tree (sic) by Mr Stafford that Mr Brooks prospector had been killed by natives out west from Stafford's Station'.⁴⁸ By a twist of fate Cawood had that very morning dispatched Murray and 'native' (later 'Tracker') Paddy from Alice Springs to investigate persistent complaints of cattle killing at Coniston and Pine Hill stations. Murray was fortuitously met on the road and informed of Brooks' murder.⁴⁹ He then returned to Ryan's Well where Cawood instructed him by telephone to proceed to the murder scene and arrest the culprits and also to bring in the ailing Joe Brown. Cawood later wrote that he instructed Murray to ascertain Brown's condition and if serious take him to Ryan's Well where he (Cawood) and a nurse would pick Brown up and take him to Alice Springs.⁵⁰

Murray, however, made absolutely no mention of Brown in any of his reports or evidence and his single reference to Chapman is that he was the first European to receive news of the murder, and that he saw and reburied the body and reported the matter to police.⁵¹ There is no record of Murray ever interviewing, or even meeting, Chapman. On 22 November, Cawood informed the Department of Home and Territories that 'Chapman unfortunately died in the Alice Springs Hostel of Cerebro Meningitis three days after his arrival here'.⁵² The answers as to whether Chapman was indeed the first to see Brooks' body, how Stafford and the police were informed of the murder, the exact movements of Alex Wilson, and the circumstances surrounding Joe Brown's fate all went to the grave with Chapman.

44. Cawood to Secretary Home & Territories Department, 22 November 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

45. 'Appears' because Cribbin does not source this information, although it is very likely that Wilson was the source.

46. Barrow Creek Police Day Journal 27/2/26 to 31/8/32, Northern Territory Archives, F258, entry 21 October 1928.

47. Cribbin 1984: 36.

48. Alice Springs Police Day Journal 23/6/27 to 31/10/29, Northern Territory Archives, F255, entry 11 August 1928. Hartwig has a telegram not telephone call inform police of the murder.

49. Hartwig 1960: 20–22 suggests it was Stafford who met Murray on the road.

50. Cawood to Secretary Home & Territories Department, 30 August 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

51. Murray to Commissioner of Police, 2 September 1928, NAA A431 1950 Part 1.

52. Cawood to Secretary Home & Territories Department, 22 November 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1. Cawood did not give the date of Chapman's arrival, thus his date of death is unclear.

On 13 August, just two days after police heard of the murder, all the particulars contained in Stafford's statement from Ti-Tree Well were in the Adelaide newspapers. The next day the *Sydney Herald* ran the story under the headline 'Killed By Blacks: In Central Australia: Body in Rabbit Burrow'. This article was the first the Secretary of the Department of Home and Territories in Canberra, JA Carrodus, had heard of the killing.⁵³ One can only presume that either those at Ti-Tree Well or the Alice Springs Police informed the press.

Mounted Constable William George Murray

It is necessary at this point to pause and examine the character of Mounted Constable William George Murray. Very little has so far been brought into the public arena regarding the character and attributes of Murray and yet one cannot fully understand the events at Coniston without having an insight into this complex character.

Murray was a military man, a Light Horse veteran of World War I who had also served over seven years in the Victorian Mounted Rifles militia prior to 1914. Murray, like most Northern and Central Australian Territory police officers at that time, received no formal police training on enlistment into the Police Force; he was expected to learn on the job. It seems likely, therefore, that when confronted in Warlpiri country Murray went into 'military mode', simply falling back on his war experience and acting as if he was in a war, a state with which he had much experience.

Murray enlisted in the 4th Light Horse in 1914, just 16 days after the Empire had declared war on Germany.⁵⁴ Murray proceeded to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force with B Squadron of the 4th Light Horse on 20 May 1915 and landed at Gallipoli on 24 May.⁵⁵ He subsequently served on the Western Front, was wounded, and took part in the successful attack on Messines Ridge on 7 June 1917, which commenced when 19 landmine blasts began to shatter the German line, merging to a single explosion which was felt in London.⁵⁶ B Squadron went into this action mounted and rode, sometimes at a gallop, over ground that British bombardment had left with a shell crater every nine square yards. In 1918 Murray was granted 1914 Special Leave and returned to Australia. He was discharged on 23 March 1919.⁵⁷

On 4 April 1919, Murray applied for a position as Police Stock Inspector in the Northern Territory. The Territory Administrator granted him the position, with an annual wage of £240.⁵⁸ On 10 July, aged 35 years, he was sworn in at Rankine River, pledging that he would 'cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and preserved'.⁵⁹ Murray was later posted to various stations, including Rankine River, Lake Nash, and Arltunga, taking charge of Barrow Creek in 1926. By this time he had already earned a reputation among Territorians as a tough and effective constable.⁶⁰

53. *Sydney Herald*, 14 August 1928.

54. Australian War Memorial, WWI Personnel Dossier WG Murray 308.

55. Smith 1993: 23.

56. Coulthard-Clark 2002: 129.

57. Australian War Memorial, WWI Personnel Dossier WG Murray 308.

58. Northern Territory Administrator to WG Murray, 6 May 1919, in NTAS, NTRS F596 Staff files, 'P', 1924-1959, William George Murray.

59. NTAS, NTRS F596 Staff files, 'P', 1924-1959, William George Murray.

60. Carment, Maynard, and Powell 1992: 219 and McLaren 1982.

Murray was not universally liked. Randall Stafford for example, meeting with Strehlow at Coniston in September 1932, made what Strehlow described as 'a few pungent remarks on Murray's personal character':

As for that chap Murray's yarns about his heroic single-handed encounters with the Lander blacks, no one up here's going to swallow any of the silly bragging yarns he brought up before the Board ... Those silly Wild West yarns may take in the city mugs down South, but I know Murray far too well for that. He may be a killer, but he'd never rush into any real danger all on his own: the man's far too cunning for that.⁶¹

Strehlow's own view at that time was that Murray seemed a 'placid, almost easy-going and kindly man'.⁶²

Like all figures on the Australian frontier, George (as he was known) Murray was not a 'cardboard cut-out', rather he was very much a whole human being. While his actions at Coniston were brutal, he must be understood in context and 'the system' which permitted him to police in remote areas without adequate training be implicated in his actions.

The Coniston killings

Murray arrived at Coniston on 12 August and ordered that any Aboriginal people coming into the station be arrested and questioned. On 15 August two Aboriginal men, Padygar and Woolingar, arrived at the Aboriginal camp near the homestead on their own business. During their arrest by Murray's 'trackers', Paddy and Major, they attempted to escape. On hearing the scuffle, Murray rushed to the scene and was attacked by Woolingar, whom he shot above the eye. Padygar and Woolingar were later chained to a tree overnight.⁶³ According to his police report, Murray ascertained at Coniston the names of 20 Aboriginal people implicated in Brooks' murder and promptly formed a party to locate the killers. None of the legislative requirements to swear members of this party in as special constables were complied with, so the non-police members were nothing more than vigilantes. This was not, of course, the first time that vigilantes had been so engaged in the Northern Territory. For example, in 1884 vigilantes commanded by a lone police officer also undertook a massacre of Aboriginal people following the murder of several miners near the Daly River.⁶⁴

On 16 August, Murray departed Coniston with Alex (also variously spelt Alick or Alec) Wilson, Stafford, the prospector John Saxby, itinerant worker Billy Briscoe, 'trackers' Paddy and Major,⁶⁵ Dodger, and the two prisoners who had 'volunteered' to show Murray the whereabouts of an Aboriginal camp near the murder scene. Later that day the group came across a party of some 23 Aboriginal people and at Murray's order

^{61.} Strehlow 1959: 312–319.

^{62.} Strehlow 1959: 387.

^{63.} Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

^{64.} Wilson 1996: 28–31.

^{65.} It appears neither Paddy nor Major were officially police trackers. The Alice Springs Police Day Journal entry of 11 August stated Murray left Alice Springs with 'native Paddy', in later references he is referred to as a 'Tracker'. Major, an uncle to Dodger, was already at Coniston and even less a 'Tracker' than Paddy. Hartwig, however, states Murray left Alice Springs on 10 August with both Paddy and Major.

formed an extended line — in the tradition of the Light Horse — with Murray in the centre.⁶⁶ According to Murray's reports and evidence to the Board of Enquiry, Murray ordered the Aboriginal party to disarm and when they failed to do so a fight ensued, during which shots were fired. After the melee it was discovered that four Warlpiri were killed outright, including one woman, and another woman was wounded and died within an hour, bringing the total number killed to five.⁶⁷ 'Tracker' Major conveniently identified the dead as Brooks' killers.⁶⁸

During the evening after this encounter three young Aboriginal boys (including one known as 'Lala') were captured; two were released the following day. Contrary to Cribbin (and Elder) these boys did not mutilate their feet so that they could not direct Murray to Aboriginal camps. This story comes from a self-mutilation that actually took place during the Morton expedition after a completely different group of Aboriginal boys had been captured.⁶⁹

An Aboriginal account of this first encounter may provide a clue as to why Stafford soon left the party:

there were Aborigines scattered in all directions at one stage, he [Stafford] pursued the person, calling on them to stop and when they didn't and it was like a young man or person at least running away, he fired and the person fell down either shot through the heart, through the back or mortally wounded instantly and Stafford rode up and I think the person who had been shot had fallen and rolled over and it was a young woman. He was actually appalled that he'd shot a woman and he stopped and withdrew from the patrol and would have nothing else to do with it anymore.⁷⁰

According to Murray the party returned to Coniston on 18 August and departed on the morning of 19 August, leaving behind Stafford, the two prisoners, and Lala.⁷¹ Stafford, however, stated he left the party after the first encounter, returning to Coniston via White Stone — at least two days later than Murray had him leaving.⁷² In any case, on 19 August on the Lander north of Coniston the remaining party met six Aboriginal people, who ignored warnings to disarm and threw boomerangs. Murray claimed that, after dismounting, he 'received several blows from boomerangs and yamsticks and was compelled to use my revolver'.⁷³ Three were killed and three wounded; all the wounded later died, leaving six dead. Murray declared that the three wounded were identified as murderers of Brooks, without stating by whom they had been identified.⁷⁴

66. The dates of the encounters are from McLaren 1982, whose account offers the clearest chronology.

67. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

68. Stafford evidence to Board of Enquiry, 13 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

69. *Sunday Sun and Guardian*, 5 February 1933, confirmed by Murray in an interview with Hartwig in 1960, see Hartwig 1960: 28–29.

70. Interview with Dick Kimber by Justin O'Brien, 25 March 2002.

71. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2. Cribbin, however, has Stafford leave the party alone.

72. Stafford evidence to Board of Enquiry, 13 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

73. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

74. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

On 22 August, west of Coniston, another two Warlpiri were killed, this time attempting to escape from Murray and 'Tracker' Paddy. Their killing was clearly not in self-defence, as Paddy revealed to the Board of Enquiry that he shot and killed a boy running away from him, having chased him over two hills.⁷⁵ Another three Walpiri men were killed (one dying of wounds) 60km west of the third encounter, once again after Murray had dismounted.⁷⁶ This was probably the encounter at Mission Creek which eye-witness Jimmy Jungarrayi suggests was the westernmost point of Murray's expedition.⁷⁷

It was during the encounter of 22 August that Murray arrested Akirkra, whom he alleged was implicated in the murder.⁷⁸ During this time William Briscoe heard 'the reports of one or two shots' in the hills near the Western Australia border. He did not know who fired the shots and he never discussed the matter with anyone else.⁷⁹ On 30 August the party returned to Coniston and on the following day Woolingar died of the head wound given him by Murray on 12 August.⁸⁰ This brought the official total number of Aboriginal people killed thus far to seventeen.

On 1 September Murray and Paddy returned to Alice Springs with the young Aboriginal witness Lala and prisoners Padygar and Akirkra, who had been charged with Brooks' murder. On 2 September Murray prepared a report on the Brooks expedition, detailing how the 17 had been killed. On the following day, Cawood telegraphed Canberra noting that police had returned with two prisoners and that 'others concerned in outrage died from wounds in fight with police and civilians while resisting capture'.⁸¹ In reply to the department's question as to how many were killed, Cawood gave the number of 17 and (somewhat misleadingly) stated the 'settler near scene *last murder asking protection*'⁸² (emphasis added).

Another incident occurred while Murray was in Alice Springs, leading him back to the Coniston area and further conflict with the Walpiri. On 28 August, the co-owner of Broadmeadows Station, William John ('Nugget') Morton, had been attacked by a group of 15 Warlpiri.⁸³ A Warlpiri oral history suggests that Morton was attacked because of his abuse of Aboriginal women. Jimmy Jungarrayi told Read and Read (1991): 'Well, that, all the people bin talkin', "What we killem that man, because that man come up and robbem with the woman all the time?"'.⁸⁴

75. Paddy evidence to Board of Enquiry, 31 December 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2
Hartwig places this encounter on 23 August.

76. Hartwig places this encounter on 27 August.

77. Read and Read, 1991: 40.

78. Murray deposition to SM Allchurch, 7 September 1928, NAA, A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

79. Briscoe evidence to Board of Enquiry, 13 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2
[Attachment].

80. The date of the party's return to Coniston and the death of Woolingar vary in accounts. What is clear from the Alice Springs Day Journal is that Murray returned from patrol during the evening of 1 September.

81. Telegram, Cawood to Secretary Home & Territories Department, 3 September 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

82. Telegram, Cawood to Secretary Home & Territories Department, 4 September 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

83. Letter dictated by W Morton to BS Sandford at Tea Tree Well, 30 August 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

In notifying police of the event, Morton claimed three Aboriginal men approached him asking for tobacco and meat and that when he passed meat to one he was thrown to the ground and soon found 15 men attacking him. He stated he fought his way to his revolver, receiving 'several heavy blows to the head', and 'after firing several shots I noticed the blacks raced away'.⁸⁵ The Aboriginal version of events is that several Aboriginal people attacked Morton with sticks and boomerangs and tried to kill him, however Morton, resisting fiercely, was able to fire his revolver and kill two of his attackers.⁸⁶

In his initial statement Morton neglected to mention that he had killed any of his assailants with his revolver.⁸⁷ He made his way, after joining his companion Sandford, to Ti-Tree Well where he dictated a letter to the police, being unable to write himself due to injury. On 7 September Alice Springs police received written word that Morton had been attacked.⁸⁸ Murray was despatched to investigate.

Strehlow's diaries corroborate the Aboriginal oral accounts of Morton's cruelty to Aboriginal people, especially young women. In 1937, as a Department of Aboriginal Affairs Patrol Officer, Strehlow and Sergeant Koop of Alice Springs conducted an investigation into Morton's suspected breaches of Aboriginal protectionist legislation. In detailing the allegations against Morton, Strehlow provided a useful insight into his character:

'Nugget' Morton was keeping a Western Australian lubra there for his stockwork: she had tried to run away ... but Morton had got her back (and the other two) each time and inflicted a severe hiding as a deterrent against further attempts to run away. [He] also employed one or two other little native girls, 9 or 10 years of age, whom he had raped.⁸⁹

Arriving at Broadmeadows on 24 September, Murray formed another party comprising himself, Morton, Alex Wilson and 'a small Aboriginal boy'.⁹⁰ The party soon captured three young Aboriginal boys who, after some persuasion from Murray,⁹¹ eventually led them to an Aboriginal camp at Tomahawk Waterhole on the Lander. Here four were killed, three dying from wounds. Morton identified the four dead as some of his attackers.⁹²

The following day at Circle Well, north-east of Tomahawk Waterhole, another two Warlpiri were killed — one shot, the other killed by Murray with a tomahawk. Sev-

84. Read and Read 1991: 42.

85. Letter dictated by W Morton to BS Sandford at Tea Tree Well, 30 August 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

86. Read and Read 1991: 42.

87. Cribbin states Morton killed two Aboriginal men during the attack upon him, without citing any source but this was probably Read and Read 1991.

88. Alice Springs Police Day Journal 23/6/27 to 31/10/29, NT Archives, F255, entry 7 September 1928.

89. Strehlow, Diary begun April 1st 1937, SRC, Alice Springs, entry 28 April 1928. Strehlow also recorded that Skipper and Dodger were working for Morton at his Tin Field mine.

90. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

91. *Sunday Sun and Guardian*, 5 February 1933. These are the three boys who mutilated their feet, contrary to Cribbin and Elder's accounts.

92. Deposition by Morton to Board of Enquiry, 19 January 1929, NAA A431 1950 Part 2.

eral days later on the lower Hanson River the party came upon a group of some 40 Aboriginal people; Murray again dismounted and a fight ensued, this time eight were killed.⁹³

Aboriginal accounts differ in the names of the places where attacks occurred but they do confirm attacks on camps where people were sleeping and the rounding up of whole camps 'just like cattle'.⁹⁴ In many cases towards the end of the police action the people who were attacked and killed had not even heard of the troubles at Coniston and Broadmeadows but were instead going about their usual business, in one case taking part in a ceremony at Wajinpulungk.⁹⁵ Oral history also suggests the Aboriginal men at Wajinpulungk were tied to trees and later shot.⁹⁶ It may well be that the official police reports of the incident were falsified.

Murray returned to Alice Springs on 18 October⁹⁷ and on 19 October wrote a one page report on the Morton patrol, neglecting to give the number of Warlpiri killed. He later told the Board of Enquiry his report was somewhat less than ideal because, 'I did it in a very great hurry as I had to go out about some other matters'.⁹⁸ These 'other matters' included the trial of Padygar and Akirkra, for which Murray travelled to Darwin along with his prisoners and sole witness Lala. They were acquitted after two trials due to inconsistencies in Lala's evidence and the inadmissibility of the defendants' earlier confessions of guilt at Alice Springs; the first trial was aborted due to its jury being discharged.⁹⁹ The trial was successful, however, in attracting the attention of the missionary community to the killing of at least 17 Warlpiri.

A Commonwealth Board of Enquiry

The Department of Home and Territories in Canberra had requested that Cawood provide his comments on the police reports, details of the coronial inquest into Brooks' death, and statements from the civilians on Murray's patrols.¹⁰⁰ In a letter of 9 November Cawood was chastised for his non-action and told:

This Department is at a loss to understand the sudden change in the attitude of the aboriginals of Central Australia towards white men. Unusual circumstances appear to be attached to the cases of the attacks on Brookes, Morton and Tilmouth, in that they have all been reported by Constable Murray, and have occurred recently and within a comparatively short time, while nothing of a similar nature had previously been reported for some years.¹⁰¹

⁹³. Murray and Morton evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

⁹⁴. Read and Read 1991: 45.

⁹⁵. Read and Read 1991: 49.

⁹⁶. Read and Read 1991: 50.

⁹⁷. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

⁹⁸. Murray evidence to Board of Enquiry, 16 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

⁹⁹. *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 13 November 1928.

¹⁰⁰. See, for example, Telegram, Secretary, Department of Home & Territories to Cawood, 20 August 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1 and Secretary, Department of Home & Territories to Cawood, 28 September 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

¹⁰¹. Secretary, Department of Home & Territories to Cawood, 9 November 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

On 27 November 1928, following much adverse press coverage and sustained lobbying from missionary and other humanitarian societies, the recently-retired Bruce-Page Government decided to appoint a Board of Enquiry into the killings in all three cases.¹⁰²

The independence and integrity of the Board of Enquiry, officially appointed by the Governor General on 13 December, was compromised from the outset. The Board comprised Queensland Police Magistrate AH O'Kelly (chairman), South Australian Police Inspector PA Giles (who had served in the north of South Australia) and Cawood (Murray's superior), who rightly should have been a witness. The Reverend Morley of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, already angered that his Association's request for missionary representation on the Board had been denied, led the public outcry against the composition of the Board. By way of concession, the Government decided the Alice Springs lay missionary Ernest Kramer could be present throughout the enquiry and cross-examine witnesses;¹⁰³ it also extended the same privilege to Mounted Constable Murray.

The Board of Enquiry terms of reference were to inquire into whether the shootings in the Brooks and Morton cases were justified and whether any provocation had been given by the settlers to account for the 'depredations' by the Warlpiri.¹⁰⁴ The Board spent 18 days hearing evidence from 30 witnesses and one day in preparing its findings.¹⁰⁵ Significantly, the list of witnesses did not include either 'Tracker' Major or Alex Wilson.

It appears that Murray was so concerned that Stafford would incriminate him to the Board that he perverted the course of justice: he later told a fellow police officer that he was anxious to tell Stafford what to say when giving evidence to the Board, 'so he arranged with the senior official driving the magistrate to pretend to get his vehicle stuck in the sandy creek approaching the station. Apparently unaware of this the constable [Murray] drove on to the station and contacted Stafford'.¹⁰⁶

The findings of the Board, made public on 30 January 1929, were that in all cases the shootings were justified as self-defence and that settlers or police had given no provocation. The blame lay squarely with the 'Walmulla'¹⁰⁷ tribe which was allegedly advancing into the Coniston country 'to wipe out the settlers'. There was not a 'scintilla of evidence' that the police party was a punitive expedition. In addition, the Board offered their own explanations for the Aboriginal people's action, including, 'unattached Missionaries wandering from place to place, having no previous knowledge of the blacks and their customs and preaching the doctrine of the equality of man'. In its

¹⁰² Telegram, Prime Minister Bruce to Queensland Premier William McCormack, 27 November 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

¹⁰³ Cawood had earlier suggested to the Department that if missionaries were to be represented on the Board the position should go to Kramer, based on his experience in Central Australia. Telegram, Cawood to Department of Home & Territories, 29 November 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

¹⁰⁴ Board of Enquiry Ordinance, 13 December 1928, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson 1996: 94.

¹⁰⁶ Oral history Gordon Birt, NTAS, NTRS 226, TS 13, P 4.

¹⁰⁷ 'Walmulla' and 'Warramulla' are corruptions of the Warlpiri word Walmalla, denoting the western subgroup of the Warlpiri community.

conclusion, the Board also stated that there was no evidence of any starvation of Aboriginal people in Central Australia.¹⁰⁸ In doing so the Board ignored the ample evidence, including Cawood's own Annual Reports, of a widespread and severe drought and the consequent starvation of Warlpiri people.

The work of the Board was by no means exhaustive. There were further killings reported later that were not included. For example, Warlpiri people, Alex Wilson and John Saxby each reported that Murray and party visited other sites not mentioned in Murray's reports or evidence to the Board, including Tippinba (Patirlirri), 24km west of Broadmeadows, where at least six more Warlpiri were killed.¹⁰⁹

Obvious discrepancies between Murray's evidence to the Board, his official report of 2 September, and his evidence to Special Magistrate Ernest Allchurch on 7 September (which at least the chairman O'Kelly had read) were not considered by the Board. Murray stated in his police report that 'From enquiries I ascertained the names of twenty adult male aboriginals whom it is alleged were implicated in the murder [of Brooks]'.¹¹⁰ It never occurred to the Board to ask why Murray had not written down the names of the 20 natives implicated in the murder of Brooks, which is strange given the level of detail in other information Murray provided. Nowhere did Murray state how he received these 20 names, nor was he asked how by the Board. It is also noteworthy that in evidence at the Darwin trial, Lala said 'about ten altogether' participated in the murder.¹¹¹

Murray stated to an Alice Springs Police Court that, having ascertained at Coniston the names of 20 natives camped at the soak, he 'then proceeded to the locality and arrested Prisoner Padygar'.¹¹² Yet in his police report five days earlier he had stated that Padygar was arrested at the native camp at Coniston following the melee in which Woolingar was shot – on 15 August, a day prior to his departure.¹¹³ Murray returned to his first version of this arrest in his evidence to the Board in January 1929.

Another glaring inadequacy not considered by the Board was that there was no clear evidence presented to verify that those killed by the party during the first expedition had indeed participated in Brooks' killing. According to Murray, those killed in the first encounter 'were recognised by the native boy Dodger ... as being the natives who were camped in the vicinity of Brooks' camp'.¹¹⁴ Dodger was not called to give evidence to the Board. Earlier, in correspondence to Canberra explaining how Padygar

¹⁰⁸. Finding of Board of Enquiry, 18 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2. The reference to unattached missionaries was to the lay missionary Annie Lock, who was then camped at Harding Soak.

¹⁰⁹. Read and Read 1991: 44.

¹¹⁰. Murray to Commissioner of Police, 2 September 1928, NAA A431 1950 Part 1. Murray repeated this claim in his deposition to Special Magistrate Allchurch.

¹¹¹. *Northern Territory Times*, 9 November 1928. Cribbin (1984) states that Padygar provided these 20 names to Murray, although no source is provided.

¹¹². Murray deposition to SM Allchurch, 7 September 1928, NAA, A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

¹¹³. Murray to Commissioner of Police, 2 September 1928, NAA A431 1950 Part 1.

¹¹⁴. WG Murray deposition to Coroner V.G. Carrington, 19 January 1929, NAA, A431 1950/2768 Part 2. According to Stafford's evidence to the Board, however, the killers were identified by Major.

and Akirkra had been acquitted and why Skipper and Dodger had not given evidence, Cawood noted that:

they were very young – even younger than the eye-witness [Lala]. They did not witness the murder nor did they see the body of Brooks which had been buried before they got back to the scene of the murder with the camels.¹¹⁵

It is somewhat incongruous, therefore, that the Board evidently accepted that Dodger had correctly identified some of the killers after the first encounter. Randall Stafford stated to the Board that Skipper 'was present when Brooks was killed', that he was 'a brother to Major', and that he had 'told Major about the gin holding Brooks' hands'.¹¹⁶

After the first encounter the guilt of those killed was, according to Murray, determined by Warlpiri people who had survived the shootings. None of these Warlpiri gave any evidence to the Board, nor were they asked to. To compound confusion the Board found that 'the pursued natives ... had been identified by Tracker Major as being implicated in the murder of Brooks',¹¹⁷ even though Major was not present at the scene of the murder and his evidence was not presented before either the Darwin trial or the Board itself.

The story was similar in the Morton case, with the only evidence linking those killed to Morton's attack being the testimony of the pastoralist himself. The evidence of Murray and Morton was that, of the 15 people who allegedly attacked Morton, 14 were located and killed in the three encounters. Appropriately, in each of the three acknowledged encounters – which were recounted as wild skirmishes – only the guilty were killed. This absurdly convenient coincidence either went unnoticed or was simply whitewashed by the Board.

The Department of Home and Territories had decided that those killed during both the Brooks and Morton patrols had indeed been the guilty parties four months before the Board's findings were released. A memorandum dated 18 September 1928 stated that, 'Definite evidence of the implication of the aborigines in the murder of Frederick Brooks was established *before* action for their arrest was taken by the police'¹¹⁸ (emphasis added). This statement, contradicted by later evidence, was made despite the fact that Murray made no particular reference as to how he knew who was implicated in the murder in either his deposition to Allchurch or his report to Cawood.

The Board also overlooked the dubious credibility of the claim that Paddy and Major were police trackers and the fact that no one in either of Murray's parties had been sworn in as a Special Constable and they were thus not protected by statute in any arrest or lawful killing. It was noted in a confidential report by Chairman O'Kelly that had regular police and not settlers been used in the patrols, 'it was more than probable that there would not have been the killing of blacks, at least not the same extent'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Cawood to Secretary Department of Home and Territories, 22 November 1928, NAA, A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

¹¹⁶ Stafford evidence to Board of Enquiry, 13 January 1929, NAA, A431 1950/2768 Part 2 Skipper and Major were mostly likely classificatory brothers.

¹¹⁷ Finding of Board of Enquiry, 18 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

¹¹⁸ Department of Home and Territories memorandum, 'Murder of F. Brooks by aboriginals, Central Australia', 18 September 1928, NAA, A431 1950/2768 Part 1.

The killings at Coniston appear to have been more widespread and greater in number than the Board of Enquiry ever established. Aboriginal bushman Walter Smith told Alice Springs historian Dick Kimber that he believed over 200 people had been killed.¹²⁰ The lay missionary Annie Lock (whom the Board partly blamed for unsettling Aboriginal people by preaching the doctrine of the equality of man)¹²¹ stated her belief, in a letter a year after the killings, that some 70 Aboriginal people had been killed:

The natives tell me that they simply shot them down like dogs and that they got the little children and hit them on the back of the neck and killed them and in front of the eyes of those they left they knocked the dogs in the head and threw them in the fire ... This is the natives verdict and we have to be careful and prove it, but, I questioned them in different ways and when they least expected it, even to boy and girls and they all say the same thing and instead of 34 it was over 70.¹²²

Unfortunately, Lock never named her informants so it has not been possible to corroborate these statements. It is noteworthy that not only missionaries and Aboriginal people have made claims of a significantly higher Aboriginal death toll. Randall Stafford also believed that the number killed was at least twice the 'official' figure of 31. Strehlow met Stafford at Coniston in September 1932. His meticulous diary records a conversation with Stafford during which he offered an intriguing insight into the killings four years earlier:

Lots of blacks were shot for it. Mind you, I don't approve of all that the police party did afterwards. I only know of most of their doings by hearsay, of course, for I would not go out far with the police myself, though I did lead them to the place where Fred was killed. But I can tell you this: most of the things they did were hushed up afterwards at the official enquiry. I had enough of it when I saw Murray coming back to the party after shooting several blacks at the first encounter. But Murray, Nugget Morton, Police-tracker Paddy, and the rest went on with lots of rifles and loads of bullets; and I was told that they shot down myalls up and down the Lander River for many miles. At the enquiry they owned up, I believe, to shooting thirty-one blacks in all, and this figure included two gins as well. But some of the men who went out with Murray told me that the true figure was at least twice as high ... but to shoot down whole camps of blacks without leaving any live witnesses behind is not my idea of justice.¹²³

Conclusion

This paper, while placing on the record the currently understood accurate version of events, has established that many of the details remain to be unearthed regarding Coniston. This is despite, it should be noted, Coniston's status as arguably the best-documented and one of the bloodiest of all frontier conflicts in Australian history. At a minimum, the role of the 'dark horses' Cawood and the members of the Board of Enquiry, the Board chairman's 'confidential report' on the killings,¹²⁴ and the truth or

¹¹⁹. This portion of the confidential report, the only available, is quoted in Home and Territories Department Memorandum No. 28/10740 of 27 April 1929 by JA Carrodus, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

¹²⁰. Kimber 1986: 109.

¹²¹. Finding of Board of Enquiry, 18 January 1929, NAA A431 1950/2768 Part 2.

¹²². Markus 1990: 163.

¹²³. Strehlow 1959: 312-319.

otherwise of the existence of a warring party of Aboriginal people remain largely unknown. There are also the inconsistencies that pervade the accounts of Coniston. These must, if possible, be resolved so that a consistent and accurate account is on the public record.

The corruption of due process by the Board makes a mockery of claims by writers such as Keith Windschuttle that Australia's settlement was fairly guided by the British rule of law. Windschuttle regards Coniston as a 'genuine' massacre; but it is more than that. The Board of Enquiry corrupted the judicial system and favoured Murray and the other whites involved. Coniston gives the lie that the British rule of law, even where it applied, offered security and justice to Aboriginal people. Windschuttle has professed a curious faith that an ostensible rule of law ensured Australia's colonies and their frontiers were 'governed by both morality and laws that forbade the killing of the innocent', that Europeans could not kill 'blacks with impunity'.¹²⁵ The response to Coniston presents a clear case where this very rule of law — nothing short of a Commonwealth Board of Enquiry established by the Prime Minister and appointed by the Governor General — was used to whitewash what Windschuttle has himself described as 'mass murder'.¹²⁶

Coniston's legacy is, then, twofold. Its fallout served as 'break point' in north Australian race relations; it emptied the Warlpiri homeland, leading to the 'end of the hunter-gather life' for many people of the region,¹²⁷ and it made the official 'punitive expedition' an unacceptable anachronism in the Northern Territory.

Oddly enough, Coniston lives on today in the shape of the two-dollar coin. On the obverse is depicted 'One Pound Jimmy' or Gwoya Jungarai, a Warlpiri man who also featured on two Australian stamps in the 1950s. He is 'said to be a survivor of the 1928 Brooke's Soak affair'.¹²⁸

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Hiding the bodies: the myth of the humane colonisation of Aboriginal Australia

John Harris

How many Aboriginal people died as a result of European colonisation of Australia? In this decade of historic milestones both imaginary and real – the new millennium, the series of bicentenaries of white settlement in various parts of Australia and the centenary of Federation – it is a curious fact that one of the most heated Australian debates surrounds the question of the extent of Aboriginal deaths, particularly violent deaths, in colonial Australia. It is being alleged that Australian historians of Aboriginal affairs consciously distort history for political or ideological purposes or, if they don't, that they have been 'duped' by those who do. Yet the question that must be asked is whether these critics are themselves doing exactly that – distorting history for ideological purposes with the intention of influencing the direction of historical scholarship and, ultimately, policy-making on Aboriginal issues.

This debate was intensified with the publication in *Quadrant* of a series of three articles by Keith Windschuttle entitled 'The myths of frontier massacre in Aboriginal history'¹ a major revisionist attack on almost every contemporary Australian historian who writes about Aboriginal history. His major claim is that 19th century missionaries and modern Australian historians have greatly exaggerated the number of Aboriginal people killed during the white settlement of Australia. Windschuttle's purpose in exposing what he considers fraudulent claims about Aboriginal deaths goes something like this:

- current policies of Aboriginal self-determination are not working since they are based on the false notion that separate development is best for Aboriginal communities;
- early missionaries lied about the extent of Aboriginal deaths to promote their own ambitions for the control of protected Aboriginal mission stations;
- these false views influenced subsequent government protectionist policies, keeping Aboriginal people isolated from mainstream Australia and preventing their assimilation right up to today;
- historians continue to fabricate massacre stories to underpin a system of Aboriginal policy-making based on the rights of supposedly mistreated people

¹ Windschuttle 2000a, 2000b, 2000c.

to autonomy when in fact they would prefer to be assimilated into the wider Australian society;

- policies therefore need to be changed and we must begin by demolishing the 'massacre myths' which have misled us for the past two centuries.

No one denies, least of all myself, the immense social crisis in many Aboriginal communities, and that in them the original inhabitants of this continent continue to die at a horrifying rate, often by their own hands.² Urgent action is needed to stem the human disasters, which, arguably, may have as much claim to be labelled 'genocide' as anything done in the past. Getting history right will not provide an immediate means of preventing family violence or stemming substance abuse but this does not render history irrelevant. Getting history wrong will, in the long term, mean that lasting solutions will be sought in the wrong places. While the only effective strategies must come from Aboriginal people themselves, a final solution cannot exist outside a recognition of the true nature of the past treatment of Aboriginal people. This historic truth cannot be found by consciously rewriting history to whitewash the reality of dispossession – including in many places violent dispossession – and by denying the scale of the tragedy which befell the original inhabitants of this continent as a result of colonisation by a European power.

A number of unwarranted claims and illogical connections in Windschuttle's own writings weaken his allegations of a long-standing conspiracy to manipulate Aboriginal affairs by deception. This single paper, however, cannot begin to deal adequately with all the questions raised in the *Quadrant* articles and with the comprehensive responses on this and related issues by Robert Manne,³ Bob Gould,⁴ Roger Sandall,⁵ Peter Howson,⁶ Deborah Cassrels,⁷ Robert Murray,⁸ and the many newspaper columnists who further discussed them, let alone treat the insightful analyses of the real crisis which exists in many Aboriginal communities by Noel Pearson,⁹ Peter Sutton,¹⁰ and others. I will therefore deal only with the main subject of Windschuttle's 'Myths' series: the facts surrounding the death and depopulation of Aboriginal Australia from whatever cause. In attempting to place this issue in its proper historical context, let me say that my overall view is similar to that being expressed today by many thoughtful people on all sides of Australian politics: that we must first understand and acknowledge the past and then we must try to move on, dealing where necessary with immediate problems through immediate strategies. This is very different indeed from denying the past and then trying to move on. As George Orwell said in 1984, those who control the past also control the future.

2. Trudgen 2000: 59.

3. Manne 2001a, 2001b, 2001c. Manne's recent (2003) comprehensive and important collection of responses deals almost exclusively with Windschuttle's volume on Tasmania (2002). The collection was not available prior to this paper's submission to *Aboriginal History*. This paper deals only with Windschuttle's *Quadrant* papers.

4. Gould 2001.

5. Sandall 2001.

6. Howson 2001.

7. Cassrels 2001.

8. Murray 2001.

9. Pearson 2001.

10. Sutton 2000; see also Trudgen 2000.

The deaths of Aboriginal people

The awful but surely undeniable fact of Aboriginal history, the one fact which transcends all other facts and all other estimates, reconstructions, analyses, guesses, misrepresentations, truths, half-truths and lies, is the fact of the immense and appalling reduction in the Aboriginal population during the first 150 years of European settlement. This must be the starting point of any morally responsible discussion of the past treatment of Aboriginal people and therefore must precede any discussion of death by violence.

Estimates of Australia's Aboriginal population in 1788 range from 300,000 to well over one million. The lower estimate, proposed by the English anthropologist Arthur Radcliffe-Brown, used to be generally accepted¹¹ but many now regard it as far too low. Based on census statistics and reports gathered several decades after European settlements, it failed to take into account the rapid decline in Aboriginal numbers within the first 10 years of the arrival of European settlers anywhere in Australia. The works of Australian statistical economist, Noel Butlin, point to a much higher original population.¹² Butlin estimates a population of 250,000 for Victoria and NSW alone, noting that his model could suggest 'significantly higher figures'.¹³ He also estimates a population decline in south-eastern Australia from 250,000 in 1788 to 10,000 or 15,000 in 1850.¹⁴ By the 1920s, census figures indicate that only about 58,000 'full-blood' Aboriginal people survived in Australia. Butlin's figures therefore suggest a 96% decline in the Aboriginal population. Not everyone agrees with Butlin's calculations, and it must be emphasised that this paper does not rest upon the acceptance of Butlin's figures. The lower (Radcliffe-Brown) population estimate still demands that we deal with a decline from 300,000 to 58,000, indicating that European settlement of Australia removed well over 80% of the original inhabitants. While there are arguments about whether or not this reduction constitutes 'genocide', such an impact on the Indigenous inhabitants resembles the fate of many oppressed ethnic groups elsewhere in the world whose mistreatment or annihilation we deplore.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, few could deny the evidence of their own eyes that the Aboriginal population seemed to be rapidly declining. A constantly reappearing explanation was that their disappearance was inevitable. There was no shortage of euphemisms to label the apparent demise of the Aboriginal race. They were 'fading away', 'decaying', 'slipping away', 'melting away', and so on.¹⁵ In the first century of colonisation and beyond, it was a convenient and widespread assumption that their extinction was irreversible. Appeal could be made to biology — 'We cannot fail to recognise in their extinction a decided widening of the chasm by which mankind is now cut off from its animal progenitors';¹⁶ to history — 'This is the history of all new countries ... The Australian blacks are moving rapidly on into the eternal darkness';¹⁷ and even to God — 'It seems, indeed, to be a general appointment of Divine Providence that

11. Eg Elkin 1938: 25; Rowley 1972: 385.

12. Butlin 1983; 1993.

13. Butlin 1983: 146.

14. Butlin 1983: 147.

15. There is detailed discussion of this in Reynolds 1987: 122.

16. McAllister 1878: 157.

17. Meston 1889: 1213.

the miserable Aborigines of New Holland should be utterly swept away by the flood-tide of European civilisation'.¹⁸ This view that 'backward', 'stone-age' Aboriginal people were incapable of surviving is still encountered in the speeches of conservative politicians like Marshal Perron and Ross Lightfoot. Ex-Prime Minister Gorton publicly but erroneously claimed that Aboriginal people had not even invented tools and 'would not know what another tribe was doing'.¹⁹ The same views are often expressed by some of the critics of Aboriginal land rights such as Hugh Morgan when executive director of Western Mining: 'Aboriginal culture was so much less powerful than the culture of the Europeans that there was never any possibility of its survival'.²⁰

Yet during the whole of the white settlement of Australia there were always those who questioned the inevitability of the death of Aboriginal people and the motives of those people who most stridently asserted their imminent extinction. Many of these were Christian missionaries but many were not. According to the perceptive visitor, Count Strzelecki, in 1845, these statements were 'an inquest of one race on the corpse of another', which usually ended in the verdict 'dead by visitation of God'.²¹ Another who forthrightly challenged the inevitability of Aboriginal deaths was Edward Wilson, editor of the Melbourne *Argus*:

There is too great a readiness in recognising, as 'the hand of Providence', that which is directly traceable to our own notorious neglect and wickedness. ... We have nearly swept them off the face of the earth. We have shot them down like dogs. In the guise of friendship we have issued corrosive sublimate in their damper and consigned whole tribes to the agonies of an excruciating death.²²

Inevitability, to Bishop Matthew Gibney in 1893, was simply a convenient euphemism for genocide:

The Aboriginal races are doomed to disappear before the advances of the white man' ... 'Doomed to disappear!' ... Over how many bloody outrages, over what an amount of greed on the part of some, weakness on the part of government and apathy on the part of the public does this convenient euphemism throw a thin but decent disguise?²³

There were multiple and complex causes of the deaths and population decline of Aboriginal people. Yet from the earliest days, those who were distressed by the suffering of Aboriginal people were in close agreement about its causes. Catholic Archbishop John Bede Polding described the main reasons when giving evidence before Governor Gipps' Enquiry in 1845:

The aggressive mode of taking possession of their country, which necessarily involves a great loss to the natives.

The horrible extent to which sensual indulgence is carried by the whites, in the abuse of females in an early period of life — mere children — who are thus made incapable of becoming mothers of healthy offspring.

The introduction of diseases for which they have no proper remedy.²⁴

18. Bull 1884: 72.

19. *Canberra Times* 13 Nov 1997.

20. *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 June 1993.

21. Strzelecki 1845: 344; see also Stokes 1846: 2.

22. *Argus* 17 March 1856.

23. *West Australian Record* 5 October 1893.

Here are listed the three major causes of Aboriginal depopulation: massacre, sexual abuse, and disease. In a powerful substantiation of Polding's list, missionaries from different Christian churches and widespread locations, observing first-hand the decline of the Aboriginal population, independently came up with similar lists: 'The musket's deadly aim ... fatal diseases ... licentious Europeans' (Wesleyan missionary Benjamin Hurst, Geelong);²⁵ 'The private revenge of injured Europeans ... ill-treatment of the black women ... measles, whooping cough and influenza' (Congregational missionary Lancelot Threlkeld, Lake Macquarie).²⁶ These deaths led in turn to secondary causes of death, including despair and alcoholism, but violence, sexual abuse, and disease were behind them all. This is the immense tragedy that the High Court in the Mabo judgement went so far as to call 'the legacy of unutterable shame', the consequence of the white settlement of Australia which must be named in any attempt to treat Aboriginal people with justice today.

Of all the ways in which colonisation led to the deaths of Aboriginal people, violent death at the hands of Europeans was always the most obvious and the most dramatic. It has now also become the most publicised and the most controversial. This is an unfortunate and unbalanced development which has the potential to distract us from the deeper issues. The tragically huge depopulation of Aboriginal Australia, by whatever means, is far more important an issue than arguments about how the victims actually died. More Aboriginal people died of venereal diseases, hunger, and smallpox than by violence. But the debate about the extent of violent death has lately assumed considerable significance and become a kind of battle for how history is interpreted.

Death by violence

A common view among writers on Aboriginal history today is that about 2,000 non-Aboriginal people, mostly Europeans, were killed by Aboriginal people and that about 10 times this number – 20,000 Aboriginal people – were killed by Europeans.²⁷ In his Quadrant articles Windschuttle disputes the figure of 20,000 Aboriginal deaths, claiming that the total is much smaller, that of these, most were killed in small numbers, rarely on such a scale as to constitute a massacre. Windschuttle's major argument in his 'Myths' series is that accounts of massacres have been fabricated or exaggerated, initially by neurotic or self-interested 19th-century Christian missionaries and much later by 20th-century leftist historians²⁸ who deny the legitimacy of British settlement of Australia.

Windschuttle attempts to demonstrate his claims by examining the four alleged massacres of Aboriginal people which journalist Phillip Knightley chose to treat, in *Australia: biography of a nation*, the killings at Pinjarra (WA, 1834), Waterloo Creek

^{24.} Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, *NSW Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings* 1845: 10–11.

^{25.} Hurst, cited in Young 1858: 188–190.

^{26.} Threlkeld 1837.

^{27.} The best-known estimate is that of Reynolds (1982:122) although Broome (1988) and Murray (1996) come to similar conclusions using differing approaches. Many later authors such as Blainey (1993) and Day (1996) no doubt accepted Reynolds' figures as reasonable, although it should be noted that Reynolds stated clearly from the outset that some would regard his estimates as too low and some as too high.

^{28.} Windschuttle 2000a: 9, 17.

(NSW, 1837), Forrest River (WA, 1926) and Coniston Station (NT, 1928).²⁹ Dismissing the first three of these as fabrications, Windschuttle then proceeds to deny the generally accepted but conservative estimate of 20,000 deaths. In doing so he not only seeks to devalue the work of people like Henry Reynolds, Noel Loos, and Richard Broome, whom he considers 'politically motivated' left-wing historians, but also the opinion of much more conservative writers like Robert Murray.³⁰ He ignores right-wing historian Geoffrey Blainey's acceptance that there were 20,000 killings of Aboriginal people on the colonial frontier.³¹

Windschuttle demands what most historians would regard as impossibly rigid and unrealistically restrictive methods of determining historical truth. I am indebted to Bob Gould for his insightful description of Windschuttle's technique as 'forensic'.³² A reading of his three papers shows that he regards historical research as one would a criminal investigation. Historians, he says, should only accept claims of violent deaths where there is 'direct evidence'. His minimum requirements include eyewitness reports, subsequent body counts, independent corroboration by other witnesses, and confessions by the guilty.³³

To restrict historical investigation to the exacting requirements of the criminal court is unrealistic. For a start, after one generation no witnesses are available. All serious historical enquiry must from time to time determine the truth about the past by gathering and evaluating the widest possible range of information and then weigh the 'balance of probabilities'.³⁴ To apply Windschuttle's rigid criteria would limit historical enquiry to those events for which there are contemporary written records. Even more importantly, the 'forensic' approach, applied after the event, is restricted to what is actually stated in the written records. To Windschuttle, undocumented deaths are not deaths. This is a most serious flaw in Windschuttle's methodology because restricting the truth to what has been written must by definition be biased in favour of the victors, the richer and more powerful.

Aboriginal people did not keep written records of the dead and wounded. Unwittingly perhaps, Windschuttle makes this point very dramatically by listing the numbers of European dead in several of the most publicised killings of European people.³⁵ I agree with Windschuttle that these non-Aboriginal victims should indeed be listed. Almost all can be individually named. European deaths on the frontier are powerful evidence that many parts of Australia were forcibly invaded and that Aboriginal people resisted the invasion of their lands. But we know few of the names of the Aboriginal dead, even in the more notorious events which by scope or fame somehow merit the title of massacre, let alone the unrecorded names of those who were killed singly or in small numbers or unofficially. There are some records in Aboriginal oral histories but Windschuttle rejects such information. In the years when Aboriginal evidence was

29. Knightley 1999.

30. Murray 1996.

31. Blainey 1993.

32. Gould 2001: 8.

33. Windschuttle 2000a: 12.

34. Gould 2000: 5.

35. Windschuttle 2000b: 21.

inadmissible in court, their accounts of events were seldom heard and are absent from the written record. The tenacity of devout Catholic John Plunkett, the NSW Attorney General, brought the Myall Creek killers to justice in 1838, although not their northern pastoralist employers who armed and encouraged them. But he could not bring charges against other alleged killers because the only witnesses were Aboriginal people, 'heathens' who could not swear an oath on a Bible.³⁶

I do not rate violent death as more unjust or more tragic than slower death from the inhumane treatment of dispossessed and despairing human beings. Windschuttle's papers oblige us to single out violent death, thus giving this one aspect of Aboriginal death an undue prominence — but this is clearly Windschuttle's intention. From my own research, I consider that the figure of 20,000 Aboriginal people violently killed is a cautious estimate and that the probable figure is closer to 30,000. Indeed a figure of 20,000 deaths was initially proposed for Queensland alone and used by Butlin in his estimate of 400 violent deaths per annum in Queensland over a 50 year period.³⁷ While it is my view that there is no ultimate significance in the question of whether the figure was 16,000 or 30,000, being only one part of a far bigger picture of dispossession, neglect, and death, it must be acknowledged that violent deaths are psychologically different from other deaths. It is deceptively easy for the reality of violent death to be masked by the magnitude of death from disease and neglect. Violent deaths are directly done to people by other people and the effect on the psyche of the survivors differs significantly from the effect of slower death. While I find squabbling about the number who died by violence distasteful, I will nevertheless comment on the three killing events which Windschuttle denies or downplays in order to illustrate that historical truth — that is, what really occurred in these events — may not necessarily be as he portrays it.

Pinjarra, WA, 1834

In Western Australia in October 1834, a mixed force of soldiers of the 21st Regiment, police, and civilian settlers, led by the Governor, Captain James Stirling, surrounded the Murray River people near Perth and shot many of them. Windschuttle accepts the lowest estimate that between 10 and 20 Aboriginal people were killed, which he regards as 'lawful and morally justifiable' because he claims that the sole intent of the expedition was to find a murder suspect and also that they only shot in self-defence.³⁸ While Windschuttle, 170 years later, may judge the actions of this mixed gang of soldiers, police, and settlers as moral and just, not everyone in Perth did, not even in 1834. It was, according to one settler, Joseph Hardey, 'a shocking slaughter'.³⁹ Would Windschuttle regard such an expedition as 'lawful and morally justifiable' today if an armed force killed 10 or 20 Australians while searching for a murder suspect and, if not, at what point in Australian history did it suddenly cease to be acceptable behaviour?

The motives for the expedition, however, were much less straightforward. Prior to October 1834, a number of Europeans and many more Aboriginal people had been killed in and around Perth and one Aboriginal man executed. Frustrated that the Mur-

³⁶. See full discussion in Rowley 1972: 127–8.

³⁷. Butlin 1983: 111.

³⁸. Windschuttle 2000a: 18–19.

³⁹. Burton 1929: 26.

ray River people were hindering southern pastoral expansion, Stirling had been looking for an opportunity for a show of force for some time. He found his excuse when Private Hugh Nesbitt was killed on the southern property of Thomas Peel ('Peel Town'), allegedly by Aboriginal people who had escaped from custody following their theft of flour from Shenton's Flour Mill. It is misleading of Windschuttle to allege that a search for Nesbitt's killer was the sole or even major purpose of Stirling's expedition. In his official report to the Colonial Office in London, Stirling made no secret of the fact that he had set out to punish the whole tribe and that his overriding intention was to instil fear of the white settlers into them and thus break their resistance.⁴⁰ Long before the modern historians whom Windschuttle dismisses, Paul Hasluck in *Black Australians* (1942) judged that there was no purpose for the battle 'except punishment', noting the Governor's own words that the only way to deal with Aboriginal people was to 'reduce their tribe to weakness' by inflicting 'such acts of decisive severity as will appal them as people'.⁴¹ The *Perth Gazette* recorded Stirling's stern warning to the survivors that if there were any more trouble 'four times the present number of men would proceed amongst them and destroy every man woman and child'.⁴² Just how many Aboriginal people were killed at Pinjarra may never be known, but the reported figure of 'between 15 and 20' refers only to men and only to those killed in the initial confrontation at the river, during which superintendent of Police, Captain Ellis, was fatally wounded. The Murray River people were pursued for at least another hour during which women and children were also killed. Later reports describe mass graves as well as single graves.⁴³ A few days later, Thomas Peel, who had taken part in the battle, was given title to a large tract of Murray River lands. He sold 100,000 acres for a huge profit in December of the same year.⁴⁴

Waterloo Creek, NSW, 1837

Another alleged massacre which Windschuttle disputes was at Waterloo Creek. A massacre is generally understood as a slaughter of a large number of innocent people, but the question of whether a given event constitutes a massacre is mostly an argument about words, about what is a large number, and about whether the killings happened at the same time and place. The killings at Waterloo Creek are a prime case: they were not a single event but an extended campaign designed to break the will of the Kamilaroi people in north-western NSW early in 1838. When Lt-Col Kenneth Snodgrass was appointed Acting Governor of NSW, he immediately despatched Major James Nunn and his mounted police to the Namoi and Gwyder rivers to curb the spearing of sheep and cattle and to investigate the deaths of several stockmen. Snodgrass, a northern landowner himself, told Nunn, 'you are to act according to your own judgement and use your utmost exertion to suppress these outrages'.⁴⁵ As Windschuttle admits, the whole truth may never be known about what became labelled 'Major Nunn's Cam-

40. Stirling to Stanley, Secretary of State for Colonies, 1/11/1834, CO. 18.14. Australian Joint Copying Project: 299-300. See also Lord Glenelg to Stirling, loc cit. and John S Roe, Registered Field Book, 3, 1834-1838, Department of Land Management, Perth.

41. Hasluck 1942: 48-49.

42. *Perth Gazette* 1/11/1834.

43. eg *Perth Gazette* 22/11/1834.

44. Fletcher 1984: 1-5.

45. Rowley 1972: 232. Windschuttle himself uses this quote (2000: 14).

paign'. The most serious confrontation took place near Waterloo Creek (or Snodgrass Lagoon). Afterwards, rumours and gossip were rife. Returned troopers bragged about their exploits. Northern squatters, rejoicing in the decimation of the Aboriginal people, boasted of the numbers killed.

Concerned by what he heard, London Missionary Society missionary Lancelot Threlkeld reported that 'two or three hundred' Aboriginal people were killed by Major Nunn's party.⁴⁶ Threlkeld later admitted he did not know the precise number and that his figures could have been based on claims which may have been exaggerated. Windschuttle tries to make much of this but his handling of this later admission by Threlkeld is as misleading a case of selective quotation as any he accuses other historians of making. Threlkeld was not in fact retracting his claim about a large number of dead, as Windschuttle implies, but acknowledging that he could not put an exact figure on the dead, which is a different thing altogether. Threlkeld had many contacts in the Namoi/Gwyder region, including his own son, and he stressed that the numbers of dead were still great. Threlkeld's exact words were:

Nunn ... should have abstained from the vain boasting which may have exaggerated the numbers slain but when the tribe was driven into a swamp, surrounded and fired at until destroyed and where it is said the stench is intolerable from the carcasses of the slain, the number must be considerable and but known to those engaged in the slaughter.⁴⁷

Windschuttle rejects all this on the grounds that Threlkeld had a vested interest in proving the need for missions to protect Aboriginal people. This is a strange claim given that Threlkeld knew that reporting massacre details would only alienate the very people whom Windschuttle claims he was trying to impress, and would damage any vested interest he might have had. Missionaries were often the only people in pastoral districts to hear the Aboriginal version of events or to care about Aboriginal people's fate. Outspoken missionaries such as Threlkeld, Giustiniani, and the Gribbles saw it as their duty to 'bear witness', irrespective of the consequences to themselves.⁴⁸ I do not know of any 19th-century missionary who ever gained favour with colonial authorities by reporting the mistreatment of Aboriginal people. On the other hand, people with obviously vested interests in the success of Major Nunn's campaign were those who wanted to end Aboriginal opposition to pastoral expansion, including the land-owning Acting Governor, Snodgrass, who exploited the brief interregnum between Governors Bourke and Gipps to crush Aboriginal resistance to squatters taking over the Kamilaroi lands.

There was an official enquiry into Major Nunn's campaign, particularly the engagement at Waterloo Creek to which Threlkeld referred. Nunn's deputy, Lt George Cobban, who led that attack, said that 'four or five' were killed but his Sergeant, John Lee, said that 'forty or fifty' were killed.⁴⁹

Windschuttle's 'forensic' approach to the incomplete records of Major Nunn's campaign is firstly to reject anything said by Threlkeld because he was not an eyewitness, and to malign his character and motives. It is strange to encounter such criticism

⁴⁶. Threlkeld 1838, reproduced in Gunson 1974 (I): 144–150.

⁴⁷. Threlkeld to W.W Burton, 8 Feb 1839, reproduced in Gunson 1974 (II): 275.

⁴⁸. See, for example, introduction to Gribble J, 1886.

⁴⁹. A full account is Millis 1992. Windschuttle accepts that Nunn's and Lee's figures differ.

of someone for reporting rumours of killings of Aboriginal people. Surely anyone, missionary or otherwise, who heard such information should have reported it to the appropriate authorities.

All we are left with, according to Windschuttle's methodology, are the confessions of the perpetrators. His approach here is elitist, judging Lee to be mistaken about 'forty or fifty' being killed because he was the junior officer. Cobban's estimate of 'four or five' must be correct, according to Windschuttle, because he was the responsible senior officer.⁵⁰ Windschuttle believes that the police (or, more frequently, mixed troops of police and civilians) who engaged in these operations acted with care and integrity because they were British, holding 'civilised values' and respecting 'the principles of law on which the Colony of NSW had been founded'.⁵¹ He portrays them carrying out textbook raids on Aboriginal camps: surrounding the camp, interrogating their captives through Aboriginal interpreters, inspecting the camp for incriminating evidence, and taking suspects into custody. Windschuttle makes a naive claim that, because the Waterloo Creek killings took place in desirable grazing lands, had there been a sizeable massacre the northern squatters who immediately took over the land would have reported any bodies they found!⁵² These were the same northern pastoralists whose interests Snodgrass and Nunn were protecting and who a few months later defended and supported the men tried for the Myall Creek killings. Indeed, a question which must be asked about events at Myall Creek is why settlers in the north-west of NSW thought they could kill Aboriginal people with impunity. In this era, some settlers thought that all that was needed to remove troublesome Aboriginal people was to seek official approval to shoot them.⁵³ As statements by the accused in the Myall Creek case clearly showed, others thought they could simply kill them anyway without fear of the law. Could the Myall Creek killings have had anything to do with the official precedent set by Major Nunn and his party? The only person with the courage to publicise these northern NSW deaths was Lancelot Threlkeld.

Someone who also knew much about the various killings in NSW was Catholic Archbishop John Bede Polding, who frequently spoke out against the wanton slaying of Aboriginal people. He described the manner in which settlers took possession of the country in his evidence before the Legislative Council's 1845 Select Committee as 'occupation by force, accompanied by murders, ill-treatment, ravishment of their women ...'⁵⁴ Windschuttle dismisses such evidence of clergy and missionaries, lumping them together as a group with vested interests and ulterior motives in fabricating and exaggerating massacres. Anyone who has read my writings on Christian missions would know that I do not consider clergy incapable of racist attitudes or improper motives and that I do not always condone their actions.⁵⁵ But I find unacceptable Windschuttle's position that missionaries all over Australia of all denominations should be cast in the same mould as unreliable witnesses when in fact they are often our best and only

50. Windschuttle 2000a: 17.

51. Windschuttle 2000a: 13-14.

52. Windschuttle 2000a: 17.

53. See for example documents relating to William Morris in Organ 1990: 164-171.

54. Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, *NSW LCVF* 1845: 8-9.

55. eg Harris 1994; 1998.

witnesses. Many missionaries were uniquely placed to know what was happening: they often lived in the vicinity, knew those involved including the Aboriginal people, and in many cases understood Aboriginal languages. A point missed by Windschuttle is that Polding was in a position to know a great deal about what went on in the pastoral frontier but, unlike Threlkeld, he was constrained from divulging details due to the sanctity of the confessional. Polding's itinerant priests heard confessions everywhere they travelled, particularly from Irish convicts employed by the squatters. Polding himself heard the confessions of several of the men convicted of the Myall Creek killings. It was widely believed in the colony that, had any of the convicted men turned King's evidence, many leading figures in the colony would have been implicated.

Windschuttle, following Knightley, makes a great leap from the 1830s to the 1920s as if all that had happened between was irrelevant. Not even in the case of the killings at Coniston Station in 1928, which Windschuttle acknowledges were a massacre, does he ask why Constable George Murray and his associates still believed they could get away with such actions. Windschuttle compliments missionary Athol McGregor for his part in making the Coniston massacre known and does not suggest he had a vested interest in inventing massacre stories to convince the authorities of the necessity for mission stations. Windschuttle correctly notes that Murray would have had difficulty communicating with the Warlbiri people in 1928⁵⁶ (although he considers that Major Nunn would have easily found Aboriginal interpreters from among the Kamilaroi people at Waterloo Creek in 1838).⁵⁷ He also accepts the accuracy of modern-day Aboriginal oral history of the killings at Coniston Station because different Aboriginal people told the same story over a 12-year interval between 1971 and 1983. This, of course, relies on the first person interviewed in 1971 having reported accurately. Does this not suggest that Aboriginal oral history may sometimes be more reliable than Windschuttle elsewhere allows?

I have also found reliable the remarkable and largely untapped knowledge of amateur local historians, who were often very well placed to know a great deal about unrecorded events and community memories. Windschuttle, however, dismisses the possibility that a knowledgeable local like the 'former operator of the local picture show' could provide valid information.⁵⁸ He appears not to have valued the rich source of information in the many published local histories, in which massacres are frequently reported as common knowledge and not requiring proof. These important writings often confirm the origins of colourful local placenames like Butchers Creek, Slaughterhouse Swamp, Mt Arsenic, Bony Point, and Skull Creek.

Forrest River

Windschuttle gives much space to the alleged killings at Forrest River, predictably accepting the revisionist opinions of journalist Rod Moran in *Massacre Myth*⁵⁹ rather than historian Neville Green's *Forrest River Massacres*.⁶⁰ He claims, therefore, that there were no killings at Forrest River. For one who places so much credence on what is for-

56. Windschuttle 2000a: 19.

57. Windschuttle 2000a: 16.

58. Windschuttle 2000a: 15.

59. Moran 1999.

60. Green 1998.

mally recorded in courts, Windschuttle has surprisingly little hesitation in rejecting the findings of the Royal Commission into the alleged killings as well as modern-day Aboriginal oral history massacre accounts.

An important aspect of Windschuttle's approach to the events at Forrest River is the way in which he deals with missionary Ernest Gribble, the main source of the allegations of massacre. Windschuttle denies Gribble's reliability partly because, as a missionary, he had supposedly a vested interest in exaggerating atrocities committed against Aboriginal people but mostly because, according to Windschuttle, Gribble was a mentally disturbed, 'sexually tormented' man.⁶¹ Windschuttle maligns the characters of Ernest Gribble and of his father John and his brother Bert.⁶² He dismisses John Gribble's vehement denunciations of the slave-like, bonded labour system in the north-west of Western Australia at the turn of the 20th century as the falsifications of a man obsessed with keeping Aboriginal people completely segregated from white society and preventing their assimilation. Windschuttle ignores the fact that after Federation the new Commonwealth Government forced Western Australia to hold an enquiry into labour conditions for Aboriginal people in the north-west, and that the subsequent Roth Royal Commission (1904)⁶³ vindicated John Gribble's accusations.⁶⁴

Trying to make something of the alleged sexual misdemeanours of Ernest's younger brother, Bert, is a cheap trick.⁶⁵ It has no bearing on Ernest's personal reliability as a witness. He, too, disapproved of his brother's actions in Queensland but this has nothing at all to do with whether a massacre occurred on the other side of the continent. Windschuttle writes as if he is revealing deep Gribble family secrets but he is not. We already know there are both black and white Gribble descendants and all those I have met are proud of their ancestry.

When it comes to Ernest himself, Windschuttle throws aside the strict 'forensic' standards he demands of others in dealing with evidence, reporting gossip and innuendo, no matter how insubstantial. He uncritically accepts claims made by Christine Halse,⁶⁶ disputed by descendants of Ernest Gribble, including statements attributed to them.⁶⁷ Halse's evidence for an alleged liaison with an Aboriginal girl at Yarrabah is based upon the recollections of an 84-year-old Aboriginal woman in 1984 of a conversation she recalled overhearing in 1908 between two other girls. I am not saying Ernest Gribble never had a sexual relationship with an Aboriginal woman and nor does his family today. I am saying that the standards Windschuttle demands of us in assessing, say, Lancelot Threlkeld's massacre allegations are far stricter than the standards he applies to himself in his evaluation of Ernest Gribble's character. Indeed, Windschuttle sets aside all pretence of objectivity when he writes of missionaries 'succumbing to the power of Eros during the steamy tropical nights'.⁶⁸

61. Windschuttle 2000c: 16-17.

62. Windschuttle 2000c: 12-17.

63. Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives, *Western Australian Parliamentary Papers*, 1905 1(5).

64. Harris 1994: 426-427.

65. Windschuttle 2000c: 16.

66. Halse 1992.

67. Private correspondence in possession of the author.

68. Windschuttle 2000c: 16.

Ernest Gribble was a complex man and not without his problems. But Windschuttle's negative picture of him belies the warmth with which his descendants are still welcomed at Yarrabah. It also belies the fact that he continued until his death to be widely respected by many Aboriginal people and, in particular, by leading Aboriginal political activists who regularly sought his advice. One of them, William Cooper, wrote in 1938 that, if everyone in Australia had the same respect Gribble had for Aboriginal people, 'there would be no suffering for this race of people'.⁶⁹

Having asserted my views about the large number of killings of Aboriginal people and that many of these went unrecorded, I feel obliged at least to provide examples of the kind of information that has led me to these conclusions. My most detailed investigations have been in the Northern Territory, where I lived for many years in several different places, but I have carried out research in all States and have read sufficiently widely to have a reasonable grasp of literature dealing with the rest of Australia. Settlers' memoirs constitutes one hugely important genre that Winschuttle disregards.

There is evidence that in different times and places a conspiracy of silence surrounded the killing of Aboriginal people. If such conspiracies are effective then their existence is difficult to prove, but many settlers who maintained silence as younger people often became more garrulous in old age when recording their personal reminiscences or narrating the tales of their forbears. From the 1950s, there were older 'pioneers' or descendants of pioneering families, like Mary Durack, who were prepared to speak plainly in their historical writings.⁷⁰ In the Northern Territory, where the 'killing years' are much more recent than elsewhere, members of several long-time and highly respected Territory families like Bill Linklater and Lynda Tapp have written honestly about the early cattle men and women:

The white robbed the native of his tribal territories, denuded his hunting grounds, confiscated the water supplies and made native life generally impossible. The black retaliated by the only means known to him. But the spear and the nulla nulla could not match rifle and revolver, and the white man's chains were strong. There is no doubt that during the cattle migration and the gold rush to the Kimberleys, the whites shot down the blacks like crows all along the route.⁷¹

A Queensland example of this important genre is the writings of Sir Hudson Fysh, founder of Qantas. His book *Taming the north* is a biography of the notorious early Queensland settler Alexander Kennedy. Fysh was no tolerant, left-wing, pro-Aboriginal historian trying to invent or exaggerate atrocities. His distaste for Aboriginal people and their culture is obvious, yet he had no hesitation in reporting eight verbal descriptions of massacres involving Kennedy, the Native Police, and their senior officer, FC Urquart, who later became Queensland's Commissioner of Police. Fysh's book was endorsed by Kennedy and Urquart themselves and by Flynn of the Inland!⁷² This book alone destroys Windschuttle's model of the careful, mild, lawful, and humane manner in which police expeditions and other officially-sanctioned actions against Aboriginal

^{69.} Gribble 1932: 112. See also comments on Palm Island in Cooper to Minister for the Interior, 19 Feb 1938, reproduced in Markus 1988: 82–85.

^{70.} eg Durack 1981.

^{71.} Linklater and Tapp 1968: 74.

^{72.} Fysh 1935.

people were generally carried out in the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁷³ It also challenges his high-sounding claims about British civilisation and honour.⁷⁴ In fact, contemporary critics of the abuse of Aboriginal people often called settler attitudes 'un-British'. As Governor Davey said of Tasmania, 'I could not have believed that British subjects would have so ignominiously stained the honour of their country'.⁷⁵

I am primarily a linguist and first started to take serious note of massacres while doing linguistic research in the Roper River region of the Northern Territory. While living at Bamyili (Barunga) in the 1960s, I first noticed the 'missing' languages of the Roper River Valley – Warndarang, Ngandi and Ngalakan. This puzzled me until I listened to the reminiscences of old Aboriginal stockmen, including Hickey Hood who had lived as a child on Elsey Station, the place immortalised in Jeannie Gunn's *We of the Never Never*.⁷⁶ In these reminiscences I learned of a different side to Elsey Station. During the era of the notorious Eastern and African Cold Storage Company, hunting gangs rode out regularly from Elsey to shoot Aboriginal people along the valley of the Roper River. I met survivors like Barnabas Roberts who, as a small boy, had seen his father shot. I met George Conway, an elderly white man, who had led one of the gangs, who told me he had shot 'dozens of Aborigines' in 1905 and 1906. I was doing linguistic research and was not especially interested in recording oral history at that time and I now deeply regret not having taken detailed notes from these people or taped their words. Fortunately, I was not the only person to meet George Conway. The geographer FH Bauer met him in 1957, noting his candid admission that Aboriginal people along the Roper had been 'systematically hunted'.⁷⁷ Hunting gangs rode out of Elsey Station following the north bank of the Roper River. Each foray took them through Ngalakan country and then into Warndarang country or north into Ngandi country. So it was that these were the tribes whose numbers were most tragically reduced. When I carried out linguistic research in the 1970s, there were no remaining speakers of Warndarang and only five living speakers of Ngandi. The language groups further away from the valley had fared better. There were 30 or 40 speakers remaining of neighbouring languages whose speakers lived slightly more distantly like Mara or Mangarayi. Of the next languages whose speakers were more distant again, such as Nunggubuyu or Rembarrnga, three or four hundred speakers remained.⁷⁸

Languages decline for various reasons but sudden and catastrophic loss of languages as seen throughout Australia is typically related to aggression. Tasmanian is the most obvious but there are many others which diminished or disappeared very suddenly – Kwaimbal (NSW), Kurnai (Vic) and Yeeman (Queensland) to name a few. Some took a little longer to go, languages like Wakay (NT), whose speakers fought an extended and tragic guerrilla warfare with the intruding Europeans. Although they won many of the battles, eventually, by slow attrition, they lost the war and their languages died with them.

73. Windschuttle 2000a: 16.

74. Windschuttle 2000a: 13–17.

75. Davey, cited in Bonwick 1870: 59.

76. Gunn 1908.

77. Bauer 1964: 157.

78. Harris 1986: 225–233.

The killings by hunting gangs in the Roper River valley were never reported because of a conspiracy of silence in the Northern Territory. When the first Church Missionary Society mission was established on the Roper River in 1908, the survivors gathered there for safety. Rex Joynt, one of the founding missionaries, wrote that the 'the natives have been shot down like game and hundreds killed in a spirit of revenge'.⁷⁹ 'They just regarded us Aboriginal people as animals', Dinah Garadji told me when recounting her memories of the dangerous years before the coming of the mission. This particular conspiracy of silence — and there were many — can be precisely dated to 1884. In this year, four white miners were killed at the Daly River Copper Mine. During the next year or so, several police expeditions and official settler posses were sent out 'in pursuit of the Daly River murderers'.⁸⁰ The extent of the indiscriminate and arbitrary reprisals was made known through the courage of ex-policeman James Smith and ex-Protector of Aborigines Robert Morice, who wrote, 'It is difficult to say how many natives have been killed for the Daly River outrage but from all I have heard from different sources, I should say not less than 150, a great part of these women and children'.⁸¹ One of the police officers, Corporal George Montagu, wrote a report which admitted too much, estimating that his party alone had killed 20 or 30 men:

What the other parties have done I do not know but I believe the natives have received such a lesson this time as will exercise a salutary effect over the survivors in the time to come. One result of this expedition has been to convince me of the superiority of the Martini-Henry rifle, both for accuracy of aim and quickness of action.⁸²

Northern Territory newspapers exulted: 'Corporal Montagu and his party are entitled to the hearty thanks of the whole community';⁸³ 'As to the shooting of blacks we uphold it defiantly'.⁸⁴ Forced to be seen to act, the Minister for the NT set up an enquiry chaired by a member of one of the punitive parties. They determined behind closed doors that Corporal Montagu was mistaken about having killed anybody, that the natives had been treated with leniency and had escaped, and that there was 'no evidence to prove that any natives were killed'.⁸⁵ This whitewashing of Montagu's actions by a sham enquiry, contributed to an open license to kill in the NT from 1885 until 1908. The *NT Times* openly promoted silence on the subject of killing Aborigines in 1886:

If a hundred of the offending tribe had bitten the dust for each one of the poor fellows who were so brutally attacked, we at least would consider that no more than simple justice had been done ... We trust that when occasion again arises, there will be no necessity to argue about the tally of killed or wounded. Private parties will be sent out and the natives will probably disperse. Beyond that statement, the southern press will have little to fill its sensational columns with.⁸⁶

^{79.} Joynt 1918: 7.

^{80.} For detailed discussion, see Harris 1986: 217–229.

^{81.} *South Australian Register* 4 June 1885.

^{82.} *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* (HA), 170/1885: 3.

^{83.} *Northern Territory Times* 26 Dec 1885.

^{84.} *North Australian* 8 Jan 1886.

^{85.} *South Australian Register* 18 Jan 1886.

^{86.} *Northern Territory Times* 20 Feb 1886.

In 1885, NT Police Inspector Paul Foelsche went so far as to define the word 'disperse' as 'shooting them'.⁸⁷ Writing his memoirs, Mounted Constable Willshire did not bother with euphemisms:

We came upon a large mob of natives camped amongst rocks of enormous magnitude ... It's no use mincing matters — the Martini-Henry carbines at this critical moment were talking English ...⁸⁸

Whilst tracking some natives who had been killing cattle ... we came upon them camped in a gorge. When we had finished with the male portion we brought the black gins and their offspring out ...⁸⁹

Willshire declared that most policemen who accompanied him on such an attack 'would need a clean pair of pants'.⁹⁰

The more I learn of incidents such as these and the more I learn of how frequent and widespread they were, the more convinced I am that these Aboriginal deaths by violence have been underestimated. What, for example, of the 50 years of officially-sanctioned killings by the Queensland Native Police and at other times by the other 'foreign' Native Police units? In Alice Springs recently, simply because I mentioned I was writing this paper, I learned from local Aboriginal people of yet another massacre at Epenarra and some more about the missing people of Whistleduck Creek, who had disappeared between the decision to open a mission there and the arrival of the missionaries. Food or drink laced with poison was provided to Aboriginal people in Alice Springs as recently as 1980. The whole subject of poisoning is one that Windschuttle ignores. It was a widespread practice but no longer provable by Windschuttle's forensic demands. Some monuments remain, as in Australia's Mt Arsenics and Poison Water Hole near Narrandera, but most poisonings have not even left behind such mute testimony as a revealing colonial place-name.

The exact number of Aboriginal deaths in this frontier battle will never be known. Yet tragic as they were, these 20 or 30,000 Aboriginal deaths by violence are a small number compared to those to whom the colonial settlement of Australia brought a slower and more ignominious death. It is to these we now turn.

Death from sexual abuse

The least discussed, most hidden, and most sinister cause of death and depopulation was sexual abuse of women and children. At times deaths of Aboriginal females from venereal diseases and sexually-related violence outnumbered all other causes of Aboriginal death. The official census figures from the mid-19th century are appalling in their stark and horrifying objectivity. For example, the return from Lake Macquarie District in 1837 was '28 men, 2 women, 2 boys, no girls'.⁹¹

There have always been those who blamed Aboriginal women for their own deaths. Some Aboriginal women willingly gave themselves to white men or engaged in prostitution but while these women may have been accessories in their own deaths it

⁸⁷. South Australian Archives 790/1885/174.

⁸⁸. Willshire 1896: 40–41.

⁸⁹. Willshire 1896: 43.

⁹⁰. Willshire 1896: 90.

⁹¹. Threlkeld 1837.

does not justify the abuse of the weak by the strong. But, in any case, they represent only a small proportion of those Aboriginal women and girls who were taken advantage of by what Lancelet Threlkeld called 'force, fraud or bribery'.⁹²

The abuse of Aboriginal women was rife across the whole continent. Whalers, sealers, and other seafarers abducted coastal women who were never seen again. Constable TC Thorpe of the Northern Territory Police wrote in 1898 that Aboriginal women on the cattle stations 'were run down by station blackguards on horseback and taken to the stations for licentious purposes and there kept more like slaves than anything else'.⁹³ Renowned north Australian author, Xavier Herbert, said that 'they had to be there; without available women men would refuse to work on remote stations'.⁹⁴ Another NT author, Ernestine Hill, could write as recently as 1938 that black women were available, white men had the right of the conqueror and, in any case, black women were devoid of morality.⁹⁵ Willshire believed that God meant Aboriginal women to be used by white men 'as he had placed them wherever the pioneers go'.⁹⁶ Well known bushman-author Bill Harney wrote in 1958 that 'the pioneer makes the country by using the gifts within it to his needs'.⁹⁷ Indeed, the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women was so widely accepted that a distinctive vocabulary developed: 'gin hunts', 'black velvet', 'gin sprees', and so on.

Fatal venereal diseases were unknown or very rare in Aboriginal Australia prior to European settlement.⁹⁸ Largely untreatable before modern antibiotics, the multiple, dehumanising symptoms of gonorrhoea, syphilis and granuloma include pain, disfigurement, sterility, blindness, insanity and death. The literature clearly demonstrates that white settlers and Aboriginal people both knew them to be European diseases. In 1873, a year after the founding of Darwin, William Wildey described the Larakia people in glowing terms: they were 'most happy' and 'contented.' The young girls were 'very pretty, symmetrically formed and walked majestically'.⁹⁹ Only nine years later, William Sowden described the same people as 'dirt-encrusted, nearly all syphilitic'.¹⁰⁰ Annie Baxter of Yambuck Station in south-western Victoria kept detailed diaries: 'the camp across the river', which she happily described in 1844, became the 'Camp Des Invalides' by 1847.¹⁰¹ Whole pastoral leases were abandoned because everybody died, black and white both. In this same period, two-thirds of the Aboriginal people of the Port Phillip district died of venereal diseases, including almost all of the young women.¹⁰²

More hidden and therefore more difficult to assess was death by sexually related violence. Niel Black, a young stockman in western Victorian in the 1840s, wrote that it

⁹². Threlkeld 1837.

⁹³. Thorpe to Govt. Resident, NT, 5 March 1898, GRS 790/1898, SASA.

⁹⁴. Herbert cited in McGrath 1984: 234.

⁹⁵. Hill 1938: 231.

⁹⁶. Willshire 1896: 18.

⁹⁷. Harney 1958: 50.

⁹⁸. For a fuller discussion, see Harris 1994: 241-5.

⁹⁹. Wildey 1876: 118-119.

¹⁰⁰. Sowden 1882: 145.

¹⁰¹. Dawbin, Annie Maria [Baxter], *Diaries*, MSQ 181, Dixson Library, Sydney. (See also Critchett 1984).

¹⁰². Reece 1974: 54.

was common for men 'to sleep all night with a lubra and if she poxes him or in any way offends him, perhaps shoot her before twelve next day'.¹⁰³ In 1824 in Tasmania, several men were sentenced for crimes towards Aboriginal women chillingly listed simply as 'indescribable brutality'.¹⁰⁴ Threlkeld referred to these violent deaths as 'the slaughter of the black women'.¹⁰⁵

Worst of all was the sexual abuse of young girls. In ignoring the fact of missionary anger at what today would be called paedophilia, Windschuttle and many other critics of Christian missions seriously misjudge the motivation for establishing isolated mission stations, particularly in the 19th century. Many missionaries, appalled at the sexual exploitation of children, could think of no immediate solution other than setting up some kind of controlled environment to protect children from what they commonly called 'the unbridled passion of unprincipled white men'. Daniel Matthews regularly entered the timber-cutters' camps on the Murray to remove young Aboriginal girls.¹⁰⁶ His wife Janet cared for 11-year-old girls who were pregnant to white men. William and Mary Watson nursed children as young as eight who were dying of VD and reported stockmen having '3 or 4 such children'.¹⁰⁷ Angelina Noble, the wife of James Noble, the first Aboriginal man ordained to the Christian ministry, had herself escaped from a stockman who kept her as a 'drover's boy' – a captive girl with hair cut short and dressed in boy's clothes.¹⁰⁸

Not only did many of these children die, those who survived were almost invariably rendered infertile, a hugely significant factor in Aboriginal depopulation. Polding spoke of the sexual abuse of 'mere children who are thus made incapable of becoming mothers'.¹⁰⁹ Hurst wrote that 'fatal disease, introduced by licentious Europeans' interfered with 'the natural source of supply and increase'.¹¹⁰ Magistrates of the Dungog District, responding to an 1845 survey, recorded that 'the diminution in births was most remarkable', attributing the decline to 'sexual intercourse with the whites at a very tender age'.¹¹¹ In the Port Phillip District, only one Aboriginal child was born and survived between 1839 and 1845, while the group of Aboriginal people itself was reduced from 207 to 152. By 1859 that number had fallen to 56.¹¹²

Death from European diseases

Large numbers of Aboriginal people succumbed to contagious European diseases to which they had not yet developed immunity.¹¹³ With his flair for colourful language, Threlkeld wrote in 1837 that measles, whooping cough, and influenza had 'stretched the black victims in hundreds on the earth'.¹¹⁴ The serious question which must be

¹⁰³. Niel Black, cited in Kiddle 1961: 121.

¹⁰⁴. Plomley 1966: 38.

¹⁰⁵. Threlkeld 1837.

¹⁰⁶. Harris 1994: 219–228, for detailed accounts see Cato 1976.

¹⁰⁷. Watson Diary, 5 Mar 1833, 18 Aug 1833 etc. Australian Joint Copying Project, M233.

¹⁰⁸. Higgins 1981: 3–4.

¹⁰⁹. Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines 1845: 10–11.

¹¹⁰. Hurst, recorded in Young 1858: 188–190.

¹¹¹. Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines 1845: 55.

¹¹². Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines 1845: 27.

¹¹³. Recent research such as Briscoe 2003; Campbell 2002 and Dowling 1997 are shedding light on this neglected topic.

asked is this: as the years passed, what proportion of these deaths were unavoidable and what proportion were due to what can only be called calculated neglect?

In the earliest years of British colonisation, it was beyond the power of the white colonists to stem the epidemics or cure the sick. In the third year of the settlement of Sydney, all but two of the Kadigal Aboriginal people of the local Sydney region died of a disease which settlers presumed to be smallpox.¹¹⁵ They tried their best to save lives, mystified that no white people caught the disease. Recent research has shown that the epidemic may not have been smallpox but chicken pox, which the settlers failed to recognise as fatal.¹¹⁶ Later epidemics (after the second and third fleets) were indeed smallpox and were responsible for widespread death. In Western Australia in the 1840s, children at John Smithies' Wesleyan Mission died from tuberculosis contracted from the milk of the school's herd of cows.¹¹⁷

Contagious diseases like measles, smallpox, and influenza spread outwards from areas of white settlement, moving gradually through the Aboriginal tribal groups. Early European explorers encountered the drastic effects at remote distances from European population centres. At Wellington, NSW, in the 1830s, missionaries William and Ann Watson found their small medical knowledge stretched to the limit. Desperately trying to heal the sick and comfort the dying, they were unable to cope with the numbers. They built a small hut as an 'infirmary' but it was always full. Then they filled their own cramped two-roomed home with sick Aboriginal people. They were a familiar sight around the district with their horse-drawn cart, picking up people too ill to help themselves.¹¹⁸

Such deaths, wrote Threlkeld, were 'beyond the power of mortal men'.¹¹⁹ It was undoubtedly true in the first decades of contact that the spread of unfamiliar diseases was so rapid, the Aboriginal resistance to these strange diseases so low, and the death-rate from them so high, that there was little anyone could have done about it. But was that always to be so? Can we simply blame foreign pathogens for two centuries of continued deaths from preventable or curable diseases?

As the 19th century ended and the 20th century began, the continued illness and death of Aboriginal people in the more settled parts of Australia had more to do with their unhealthy living conditions than the lethal effects of foreign diseases. This became extreme when Aboriginal people were forced to congregate in overcrowded and unsanitary shanty towns.¹²⁰ Unwelcome in their own lands and forcibly excluded from their own food and water sources, Aboriginal people congregated on the outskirts of country towns. People suffered malnutrition and overcrowding in makeshift shelters of hessian, cardboard, bark, and rusted iron. How many died in these and other circumstances will never be known. In 1902, the Queensland Registrar General informed the Chief Protector of Aborigines that Aboriginal deaths were not to be recorded.¹²¹

114. Threlkeld 1937.

115. Gov Phillip to Lord Sydney, 13 Feb 1790, *Historical Records NSW* I(ii): 308.

116. Wright 1987.

117. Smithies' Letters, 26 Oct 1844, MN 172, Batty Library, Perth; McNair and Rumley 1981: 96.

118. Watson Diary, 12 Feb 1834, Australian Joint Copying Project, M233.

119. Threlkeld 1837.

120. An excellent recent study of this situation is Briscoe 2003.

Even after Federation, when state governments set up official Aboriginal reserves, conditions were rarely any better. Xavier Herbert managed Darwin's Kahlin Compound in the 1920s and '30s. In 1980, giving evidence before the Finniss River Land Claim, Herbert described the living conditions when he took over as 'hideous'. Worst of all was the plight of women suffering from leprosy and other incurable and contagious diseases, who were kept in an old building chained by the legs to their iron beds.¹²² In 1936, Daisy Bates described Western Australia's infamous 'Lock Hospitals', the islands where Aboriginal people suffering contagious diseases were incarcerated:

There is not in all my sad sojourn amongst the last sad people of the primitive Australian race, a memory of half so tragic or harrowing, or a name that conjures up such a deplorable picture of misery and horror unalleviated as these two grim and barren islands off the West Australian coast that for a period, mercifully brief, were the tombs of the living dead.¹²³

Amidst a general acceptance of the high level of Aboriginal deaths, a few brave voices spoke out, asking why Australia should continue to accept that Aborigines died in large numbers 'like rotten sheep' as Bishop Frodsham expressed it in 1906.¹²⁴

The causes of Aboriginal deaths were highly complex but mostly preventable. Shooting was preventable. Poisoning was preventable. Venereal diseases and malnutrition were certainly reducible. The total is far too great to be explained away by distracting and trivial arguments about a few apparent inconsistencies in some historians' handling of what is already an inadequate record, highly skewed towards justifying and excusing those whose action or inaction allowed the tragedy to continue unabated.

The rewriting of history

History tends to be written from the perspective of the powerful rather than the weak. Nowhere has this been better demonstrated than in the records of the struggle for the control of much of Australia between the original inhabitants and the colonisers. In this one-sided conflict, we know the names of almost every one of the 2,000 Europeans killed by Aboriginal people. I have not discovered more than a handful of the names of the 20,000 or more Aboriginal people killed by settlers. We know the name of every convict who died at Sydney Cove. We know at the most the names of only three or four of the dozens of Kadigal people who died in the Sydney epidemic in 1791. Once the Indigenous inhabitants had been vanquished and dispossessed they became irrelevant to the accepted, triumphalist story of the colonisation and development of Australia. They were simply written out of history. Australians my age learned almost nothing of them in school in the 1940s and 1950s.

In assessing the current debate we must bear in mind that Australian history has already been rewritten. Windschuttle and his associates write as if they are engaged in a moral campaign to correct the lies and misinformation of scheming Christian mission-

¹²¹. Roth 1902: 17.

¹²². Xavier Herbert, proceedings before His Honour Mr Justice Toohey, Aboriginal Land Commissioner, re Finniss River Land Claim, 25 Aug 1980: 542.

¹²³. Bates 1936: 96.

¹²⁴. Report on the Australian Church Congress 1906: 121.

aries and modern ideologically-driven historians who invent and exaggerate a tragic Aboriginal past for their own political ends. What those modern historians he criticises have been trying to do is to write back into history the story of Aboriginal Australians hidden for so long from our eyes.

Closer to the 19th and early 20th centuries, writers well knew what had been done to Aboriginal people and many consciously revised history to exclude the story. Anthropologists Spencer and Gillen thought that 'it is well to draw the veil over the past history of the relationship between the blackfellow and the whiteman'.¹²⁵ This phrase 'to draw the veil' or 'curtain' was very common in histories and settlers' reminiscences such as Thorne, Eden, and Hamilton.¹²⁶ As early as 1846, Stokes regretted that the facts of Australia's colonisation 'must reach the eyes of posterity'.¹²⁷ Knight refused to elaborate on the terrible Kilcoy poisoning lest it 'harm the honour of the white race'.¹²⁸ Crawford thought it best that much of what the Northern Territory police and cattlemen did was 'wisely left unexplained'.¹²⁹ Ferrara worried that details of frontier violence in the northwest could affect 'Western Australia's reputation abroad'.¹³⁰

In 1960, the eminent Australian medical scientist Sir John Cleland could still regret that 'atrocities committed by unscrupulous white people on our natives are raked up and recounted'.¹³¹ He was responding to the fact that a new generation of historians like Shaw, Crawford, Greenwood, Pyke, Clark, and Ward were acknowledging the better-documented past atrocities such as the Myall Creek and Coniston Station massacres. What Cleland and so many other non-Aboriginal commentators fail to understand is that it is only white Australians who 'rake up' past atrocities because it is only white Australians who have forgotten them. Ever since these atrocities occurred they have become part of Aboriginal people's experience and self-understanding: they never forgot or revised history, they never 'drew a curtain' over these events — they preserved them. They daily walk past the cairns where the bones of their dead lie, or, when out in the bush, they know the locations of massacre sites.

Recent historians like Rowley, Markus, Loos, Ryan, and Reynolds have been trying to redress the imbalance with their research into Aboriginal and European contact history. It is, of course, this latter group that Windschuttle and his associates accuse of bias and fabrication and of perpetuating a long line of historical inaccuracies going right back to missionaries in the 1830s. These early Christian missionaries did not distort or hide history — they were *part* of that history, although they did not know it at the time; they reported what they saw and what they heard; they publicised what they knew had happened and what they suspected had happened. We should honour them far more than their contemporary opponents, such as the editors of the Northern Territory newspapers who urged police and settlers to kill and not to bother reporting the dead. Of course a few

^{125.} Spencer and Gillen 1912 vol I: 189.

^{126.} eg Thorne 1867: 340; Eden 1872: 117; Hamilton 1912.

^{127.} Stokes 1846 II: 462.

^{128.} Knight 1895: 104.

^{129.} Crawford's comments appended to Willshire, 1896: 101.

^{130.} Letter of Peter Ferrara to *Western Australian*, reproduced in Reilly 1903: 346.

^{131.} Cleland 1960: 29.

missionaries may have been misled or mistaken but many of them were well placed to know what was happening. It defies logic and sense to claim that many of them confided lies and exaggerations to their letters and private journals. There was a time, closer to those tragic years, when older Aboriginal people understood and acknowledged what the missionaries had done: 'If the missionaries hadn't come, my tribe would have been all shot down',¹³² 'This mission saved people from getting killed ... The mission was put up just to save the people',¹³³ 'Only for the missionaries there wouldn't be so many Aborigines walking around today. They're the ones that saved the day for us. Our people were finished before the mission men came'.¹³⁴

As for recent historians of Aboriginal history, none claim infallibility. Over many years of writing I know I have made some errors. I am grateful to people who help me by pointing them out so that I can amend them. That is how the writing of history works. But this is not at issue here. The question before us is not whether modern Australian historians have got every little detail right but whether they have been correct about the main direction and thrust of Aboriginal and European contact history. There is an immense amount of evidence that they are right. After years of reading countless newspapers, missionary journals, settlers' reminiscences, and local histories, and after conversations with hundreds of elderly Aboriginal people, I was overwhelmed by the evidence of massacre, death, dispossession, and despair. There is no need to fabricate or exaggerate, the record is tragic enough on its own.

Acknowledgements

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¹³² Barnabas Roberts (NT) recorded in Sandefur 1979: 13.

¹³³ Walter Greenwood (Queensland), cited in Freier 1999.

¹³⁴ Phillip Pepper (Victoria) 1980: 15.

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‘The police appear to be a useless lot up there’: law and order in the East Kimberley 1884–1905

Chris Owen

This blunt assessment of the performance of the Western Australian police in the Kimberley district was expressed by Ord River pastoral station owner William H Osmand in May 1895.¹ Their perceived inefficiency in protecting his cattle from attack by local Aboriginal groups prompted him to write to his parliamentary representative Francis Connor, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for the East Kimberley. Connor in turn forwarded this letter to Attorney General Septimus Burt, suggesting the necessity for ‘some stringent measures to be taken’.² Why did Osmand consider the police so very ‘useless’?

This paper explores aspects of policing during the development of the East Kimberley pastoral industry between 1884 and 1905 and suggests important changes to our current understanding of the nature of Kimberley police. The tendency, first articulated by Andrew Gill in 1977 and later by Cathie Clement and Neville Green, has been to depict police as autonomous agents of the emerging colonial state, and any killings of Aboriginal people which occurred were seen as being independent of the colonial administration.³ Evidence is presented here showing that police practices in the East Kimberley were not initially locally authorised or self-directed acts. Police were directed by their administrator, the Commissioner of Police, who was himself acting under the informal advice and influence of those with vested interests.

This paper outlines the response of the numerous and militant East Kimberley Aboriginal groups to the new arrivals. What is revealed is that, along with the better-documented history of police in repressing Aboriginal resistance in the West Kimberley during the mid-1890s, similar, less publicised, events were occurring in the East Kimberley.⁴ This paper addresses the complex tensions particular to the period in question: police actions took place within a local culture and often against a background of a poor

1. Letter from W H Osmand to F Connor, 4 May 1895, State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA) Colonial Secretary’s Office (CSO) Acc 527, File 1868/1895. All records property of SROWA unless stated.

2. Letter from W H Osmand to F Connor, 4 May 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 1868/1895.

3. Gill 1977; Clement 1989a; Green 1995.

4. See Pederson 1995; McGregor 1993.

relationship with the East Kimberley pastoralists. The Commissioner of Police who was stationed in Perth, required police to act within the law, yet ordered 'dispersals', repressive acts involving killings. The remoteness of the Kimberley district meant there very little in the way of an effective authority supervising police actions. Concurrently, the WA government promoted economic development, sought independence from British control and wished to be seen to be treating the Aboriginal population justly. Pastoralists and settlers preceded the arrival of police in the East Kimberley, and at times took the law into their own hands. Police who sought to uphold the rule of law were working within a frontier culture hostile to laws which many colonists perceived worked against their interests.

The archival records utilised for the majority of this paper are a combination of official records produced by the Western Australian Police Department, and government correspondence primarily from the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO). The police records include individual reports from officers in the district in the form of 'bush patrol' reports which were sent to the Commissioner of Police and records of day-to-day activities from the East Kimberley police stations. Complimenting these official records are the often frank memoirs of settlers and recently discovered uncatalogued police files which are housed at the WA Police Service.

The pastoral background

In the 1880s the Western Australian government promoted pastoral expansion in the Kimberley district and most leases in the East Kimberley were taken up by pastoralists from the eastern colonies. By contrast, leases in the West Kimberley were operated primarily by Perth-based interests. The East Kimberley district extended from the port town of Wyndham at the north of WA, south along the corridor of the fertile Ord River valley and its many tributaries, to around Halls Creek. The East Kimberley joined the West Kimberley district around the Durack Ranges and its eastern boundary was in and around what was then the South Australian border.

Cattle were introduced into the East Kimberley by Nathaniel 'Nat' Buchanan, who, in 1884, overlanded 4000 cattle from Queensland for JA Panton and WH Osmand and formed Ord River Station.⁵ In late 1884, Michael Durack and Tom Kilfoyle formed Lissadell Station and Patrick Durack formed Argyle Station, each with 2000 cattle. Two years later Tom Hayes and JJ Durack established Rosewood Station and Francis Connor with Denis Doherty established Newry Station in SA. The company Connor and Doherty, storekeepers and packers, was established in 1893 and facilitated trade by acting as a shipping agent in the Kimberley.⁶

The development of these pastoral companies was slow as the environment was harsh and infrastructure almost non-existent. When the 1886 Halls Creek gold rush ended in 1889, only a small local market remained and prices for stock were depressed.⁷ Droughts across the Kimberley from 1890 to 1892 further stalled pastoral expansion.⁸ In any case, East Kimberley pastoralists found it difficult if not impossible

5. Bolton 1953: 30.

6. Bolton 1953: 75.

7. For a general report on the East Kimberley, see CSO, Acc 527 File 1757/1890.

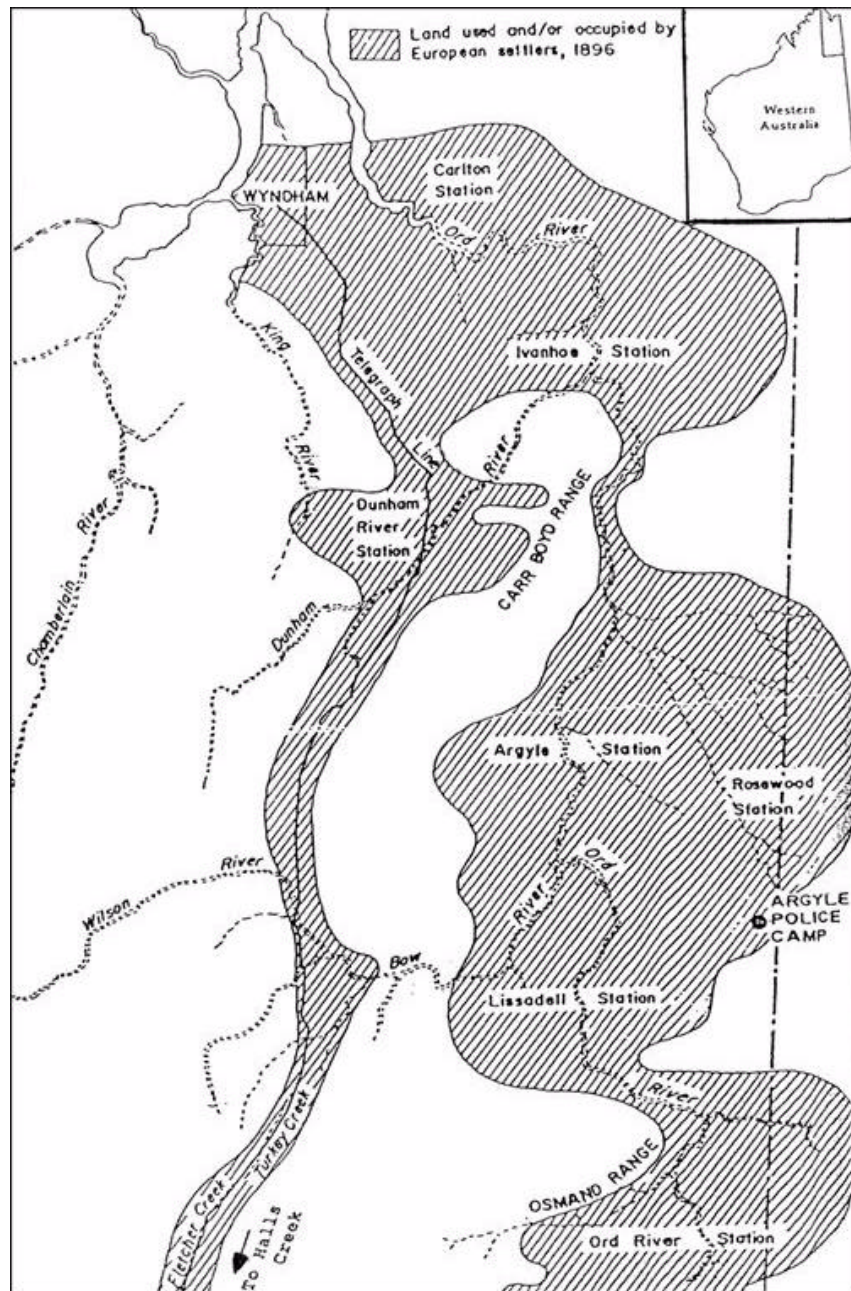


Figure 1: The East Kimberley District 1896. Cathie Clement and RWAHS.

to dispose of their stock because cattle had to be driven overland to the port at Derby, 300 miles away.⁹

Several factors contributed to a resurgence in prospects. The boom of the Kalgoorlie goldfields in 1893 brought enormous population increases to WA from the eastern colonies, and with them a market for beef.¹⁰ The improvement of Wyndham port, first used in April 1894 for live cattle export, made exporting more economical and pastoral expansion more attractive.¹¹ Post-drought conditions made beef production a viable concern.

Most of the pastoral expansion occurred along the lower Ord and Dunham Rivers and a number of smaller stations were established in more remote country on the Bow, Panton and Margaret Rivers. Carlton Station (stocked by Hart Bros) built up stock between 1893 and 1898 and the Durack brothers stocked numerous other leases on the Dunham River. They, along with WH Osmand consolidated their holdings on the Ord River.¹² Jack Kelly, an ex-stockman from the Ord River Station formed Texas Downs in late 1897.¹³

In 1897 Connor and Doherty amalgamated with the Durack Bros to form Connor, Doherty and Durack, the major pastoral company and beef producer in the East Kimberley district. Their pastoral empire covered 'roughly ten thousand square miles'.¹⁴ This, along with the company of Alexander Forrest and Isadore Emanuel in the West Kimberley, became the beef producing empire of WA.¹⁵

Geographically, the enormous East Kimberley pastoral leases from Wyndham along the Ord River valley formed a pattern of boundaries over long-established Aboriginal land and language groups: the lands of the Miriuwung, Doolboong, Gajirrawoong, Kija, right down to the Jaru.¹⁶ Stockman Jack Banggaiyerri Sullivan talks of the time when 'they [pastoralists] got a bit of ground, quietened the blackfellers, tamed them down and worked them'¹⁷ and those who 'would not come in' — meaning settle down on stations — the pastoralists 'put a bullet in them'.¹⁸ These people, who continued to live a traditional life and did not, or would not, work or 'sit down' and camp on the stations, were called 'bush blacks' by the colonists.

Pastoral expansion produced an enormous increase in cattle numbers. On Ord River Station for example, cattle numbers increased from 4000 in 1885 to an estimated 30,000 in 1896.¹⁹ Cattle invaded new country and Aboriginal people took advantage of

8. For report of drought and Aboriginal depredations, see Trooper Brophy's 'Report on the Kimberley Goldfields District', 14 Nov 1892, Acc 430, File 2293/1892.

9. Macdonald Holmes 1963: 170; also see Bolton 1953: 76. Connor and Doherty had first used Derby as a port shipping cattle for the Duracks; Denis Doherty was the Fremantle link and Francis Connor was in Wyndham.

10. Bolton 1953: 69.

11. Durack 1983: 4. Mary Durack attributes this to Francis Connor's influence.

12. Macdonald Holmes 1963: 171.

13. 'Doug Moore's Memoirs' nd, MS, Battye Library, Acc 3829A, MN 1237: 1.

14. Durack 1959: 363.

15. Bolton 1953: 70.

16. Shaw 1981: 35.

17. Shaw 1983: 65.

18. Shaw 1983: 65.

19. Bolton 1953: 77.

the lumbering cattle as a food source. As one police officer explained, they were ‘simply living on beef’.²⁰

The Kimberley Police Force

The responsibility for protection of pastoralists and property fell on the government, which used the colonial police force for this purpose. One sergeant, two constables and two native assistants – young Aboriginal men assigned to police, who tracked offenders – were introduced into the West Kimberley at Derby in 1883.²¹ In the East Kimberley, police were stationed at Wyndham and the mining locale of Elvire Creek (later moving to Halls Creek) in 1886. ‘Midway’ camps or outstations (essentially two men, their native assistants, horses and a tent) were positioned at Fletchers Creek in 1890 and Denham (Dunham) River in 1891. Their function was to protect the telegraph line from Wyndham to Halls Creek from damage by Aboriginal people who used the porcelain insulators as material for spearheads.

Police were expected to prosecute those who interfered with property or stock in what became known as ‘depredations’. The pastoral districts were policed by ‘bush patrols’. Following complaints from pastoralists, police travelled often for hundreds of miles over several weeks to arrest offenders, who were then chained by the neck and marched back to either Halls Creek or Wyndham gaol. Part of the official police role was to protect Aboriginal people from exploitative colonisation. This conflicting role as both prosecutor and protector created a great deal of social tension between the various interest groups in the Kimberley. Police were often beholden to the pastoralists, who they depended on for support for rations and shelter, so policing them was fraught with difficulty.²² Pastoralists certainly had an expectation that the police were there to serve their interests. This, coupled with the fact that the pastoralists often considered police their subordinates, created strained social relationships.

The Kimberley police force, like all the colonial police forces in Australia except Tasmania, was administered from the capital of the colony, in this case Perth. Financial constraints of the early WA colony meant that very few police were recruited relative to the size of country. Complaints from locals regarding police effectiveness were sent to Perth and replies relayed back through slow and laborious communication channels: by ship, then horse and cart and the telegraph wire if it was functional. Kimberley police received instructions from this centralised, bureaucratic organisation some 1200 miles away. But there were also demands imposed by the inordinately harsh conditions of an isolated, environmentally hostile and often violent district.

The difficulty police faced was that they were required to not only enforce British law but also compel both Europeans and Aboriginal people to act within the constraints of the law. Aboriginal people were British subjects, and, in theory, entitled to the same protections as any subject of the Crown. Kimberley police, always a civil never a military force, had to be seen to be acting within the law. Violent acts against Aboriginal people by police were often sanctioned under the rubric of ‘giving them a lesson’.

20. ‘Report from Overend Drewry to Commissioner of Police’, 14 Dec 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

21. ‘Letter from Superintendent of Police MS Smith to LC Troy.’ 31 Oct 1882. AN 5/6, Acc 129.

22. Clement 1989a: 88.

Those undertaking this violent work, which aimed to pacify and control Aboriginal people, were seasoned police called 'bushmen'.

The Aboriginal responses

Europeans had been speared and killed in the East Kimberley at periodic intervals since the first arrivals. Fred Marriot in June 1886 at Halls Creek,²³ John Durack in November 1886 east of Ord River Station,²⁴ Trooper Buckley and EB Lockett at the 25 Mile Cattle Camp near Halls Creek in September 1888,²⁵ and George Barnett was speared while travelling between Fletcher Creek and Halls Creek in July 1888.²⁶ Written records reveal palpable fear on the part of the isolated settlers in all areas of the East Kimberley, especially in the early 1890s with further pastoral expansion encroaching on Aboriginal land.

In mid-1891 at Denham River Camp, PC Guilfoyle pleaded for more men and reported being terrorised nightly to the point where he reported that 'the camp is not safe at present time'.²⁷ The Fletcher Creek Police Station was burnt down in 1893 and the police horses were speared.²⁸ Mr Booty, manager of Ord River Station, reported to police in October 1893 that the 'Osmand blacks' had got so daring that it is 'not safe to send the stockman on that part of the run unless the party is a large one'.²⁹ Sergeant Thomas Wheatley wrote of the 'King River natives' south of Wyndham as 'without doubt in my opinion the fiercest and most daring natives I have met since I have been in the Kimberley district'.³⁰ One resident of the district later wrote of a state of conflict existing, with houses fortified against attack: 'stone building walls 2'6" thick, no windows, verandah, only doors. Built for safety when blacks bad'.³¹ He also told of how 'the majority of stockmen carried revolvers on their belts, but when boundary riding and doing slow work where blacks were bad, always carried their 32 rifles under the saddle'.³²

Responses in the WA Parliament

Subsequent changes in the composition of the WA legislature following the granting of responsible government in 1890 brought more oppressive regulations to bear on the Aboriginal population. John Forrest's government was hostile to the Aboriginal Protection Board. This body remained under British control as the British government was not convinced that the Aboriginal populations were being treated in a humane manner and was wary that the WA government was unduly influenced by pressure groups.³³ For-

23. 'Report by Sergt Troy regarding death of Fred Marriot', Derby Police Station. 3 July 1886, AN 5, Acc 738/3.

24. Wyndham Police Station, 11 Jan 1887, Acc 430 File 298/1887.

25. Goldfields Police Camp, 2 Sept 1888. Acc 430 File 1585/1888.

26. Wyndham Occurrence Book, 21 Aug 1888, AN 5, Acc 741/1.

27. Denham Police Station, 11 July 1891, AN 5, Acc 739.

28. 'Wingbing' was charged with this offence. Fletcher Creek Occurrence Book, 17 June 1893, AN 5, Acc 740.

29. 'Journal of a trip by Sergt Brophy and party in pursuit of natives who are killing cattle on the Ord, Osmand and other rivers', 1 Oct 1893 - 24 Nov 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

30. 'Journal of Sergeant Wheatley on Patrol from Wyndham Station', 14 Oct 1895, Acc 430, File 2951/1895.

31. Doug Moore's Memoirs: 2.

32. Doug Moore's Memoirs: 16.

33. Marchant 1981: 20.

rest's government was sensitive to interference in the treatment of Aboriginal people in WA and resented outside criticisms.³⁴

The criminal offence of cattle spearing was created in 1892.³⁵ In the same year an amendment to the *Aboriginal Offenders Act* saw whipping, which had been abolished in 1883, reintroduced as punishment.³⁶ Although under a clause in pastoral leases Aboriginal people could hunt by 'burning the land', in reality the practices interfered with the newly arrived stock. This clause was extinguished by 1897.³⁷ Gaol terms were increased and pastoralists, as Justices of the Peace, could prosecute Aboriginal people caught eating beef. Those charged with cattle killing were dealt with summarily either by a magistrate or a Justice of the Peace. In 1893 an amendment removed the restriction on JPs from adjudicating on their own cases.³⁸

The WA parliament was dominated by those with agricultural and pastoral interests and was sympathetic to the problems of the settlers. One such member was the inaugural MLA for the East Kimberley, Francis Connor. His interest was as an active partner in the Connor and Doherty company and as a representative of the pastoral industry. He declared in October 1893:

No doubt there will be a lot of sentiment spoken about putting these blacks off their own country, and no doubt exception will be taken to the idea of dispersing them. But I hold that it is simply a question of whether the natives are to have this country or the whites?³⁹

Connor's speech, seconded by Alexander Forrest, was in reaction to the rising dissent in his constituency over conditions in the Kimberley and the latest spearing of a police officer, John Collins, in July 1893. Connor and Forrest advocated the establishment of a 'native police force', and hence a more aggressive police role to control attacks on settlers and stock. Alexander Forrest's concerns were the 'hill tribes' who killed stock and threatened West Kimberley settlement. He asked whether 'the life of one European is not worth a thousand natives, as far as settlement of this country is concerned'.⁴⁰ The motion was withdrawn after pressure from Premier John Forrest, who did not wish to sanction the 'indiscriminate slaughter of blackfellows'.⁴¹ The actions of police on bush patrol revealed the variance between government rhetoric and the reality which existed 1200 miles away on the East Kimberley frontier.

³⁴. Marchant 1981: 15–30. Allegations were aired in 1886 by Reverend JB Gribble about cruelty and abuse by settlers in the earlier settled Gascoyne districts: see Gribble 1905.

³⁵. Marchant 1981: 9.

³⁶. *Aboriginal Offender Act Amendment 1883, Statutes of Western Australia*. No. 18 1892. Point 3: 'The number of strokes not exceeding twenty five, or in the case of a male offender under the age of sixteen not exceeding twelve.' Point 4: 'No whipping shall be inflicted except in the presence of a Justice of the Peace, Protector of Aborigines or officer of the police not under the rank of Sergeant.'

³⁷. Marchant 1981: 9.

³⁸. Gaol penalties ranged from three years for a first offence to five years for any subsequent offence. *Aboriginal Offender Act Amendment 1893*. 56 Vic, No.15.

³⁹. Speech by F Connor, 4 Oct 1893, WAPD 5: 1050.

⁴⁰. Speech by A Forrest, 4 Oct 1893, WAPD 5: 1052.

⁴¹. Speech by Hon Sir J Forrest, 5 Oct 1893, WAPD 5: 1065.

The spearing of Trooper Collins

The patrol on which Trooper John Collins was speared took place along the Behn River near Rosewood Station. According to newspaper reports of this affray, 23 Aboriginal people were shot.⁴² After Collins' death a large police party consisting of 'bushmen' went out with the purpose of 'arresting or dispersing natives who had killed PC Collins and who are continually killing cattle on the Ord, Osmand and other rivers'.⁴³ The punitive party was ostensibly one which would 'teach them a lesson' and consisted of Sergeant Brophy, PC Rhatigan, PC McCarthy, PC Lucanus, and Native Assistants Rocket, Willie, Mickey, and Dickey. The police certainly had a clear understanding of their role: they travelled 678 miles over two months and shot 30 Aboriginal people in this time.⁴⁴ Sergeant Brophy noted, 'In all my experience with natives I have never known them to make such plucky and determined fight as those blacks'.⁴⁵ He went on to state that:

The natives we had to deal with are no doubt the worst in Western Australia and had the party not been a good strong one all with a good knowledge of the bush and natives the result of the expedition may not have ended up so successful the punishment given to these natives will I am certain have a good effect as to arrest them in the high ranges is simply impossible for they show 'fight' on the approach of any white man.⁴⁶

Sub Inspector Drewry, in charge of the Kimberley district, justified the deaths to Commissioner Phillips by stating, 'it is almost impossible for the police to arrest these natives so long as the natives are unwounded and have their spears they will stand off the police or anyone else every time'.⁴⁷

The importance of these 'strong' bush police parties must be viewed in the context of the development of Kimberley policing. The WA government, while not openly endorsing oppressive practices towards Aboriginal people, tolerated certain activities if they perceived them to be necessary in maintaining control in the Kimberley.

Unlike other colonial frontiers, control of the Aboriginal population on the Kimberley frontier was undertaken by a civil police force which had strict rules and regulations regarding firearms. Several attempts were made to establish a native police force following the Queensland model: in early 1887, citizens of Wyndham, including Francis Connor, petitioned the Governor of WA, Sir Frederick Napier Broome, to establish a body capable of dealing with Aboriginal people in the region.⁴⁸ The Government Resident of Wyndham endorsed this idea because of the 'brave and warlike behaviour'

⁴². *The Western Australian Record*, 5 Oct 1893: 7.

⁴³. Report by Sergt Brophy to Commissioner of Police, 30 Nov 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

⁴⁴. 'Journal of a trip by Sergt Brophy and party in pursuit of natives who are killing cattle on the Ord, Osmand and other rivers', 1 Oct 1893 – 24 Nov 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

⁴⁵. 'Journal of a trip by Sergt Brophy and party in pursuit of natives who are killing cattle on the Ord, Osmand and other rivers', 25 Oct 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

⁴⁶. 'Report by Sergt Brophy to Commissioner of Police', 30 Nov 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

⁴⁷. 'Report from Overend Drewry to Commissioner of Police', 14 Dec 1893, CSO, Acc 527, File 90/1894.

⁴⁸. 'Letter from Buchanan, A Lucanus, HF Keep, CJ Hepperton, Smallpage Bro & Co, F Connor, PJ Durack, AGD Beresford, Wyndham to His Excellency, Sir Frederick Napier Broome, Governor of Western Australia, Perth', 11 Jan 1887, CSO, Acc 527, File 677/1887.

of the East Kimberley Aboriginal people and because he found ‘that Europeans are not the slightest use in this country’.⁴⁹ This idea was dismissed as Commissioner MS Smith did not wish to use a ‘Queensland style’ policing method.

In April 1887, after the death of MS Smith, George Braithwaite Phillips took over as Police Commissioner. Phillips, who had never been a policeman nor been to the Kimberley, was socially well-connected in the Perth colonial elite. He was a member of the Weld Club – an exclusive club of legislators, business people and a close friend of Alexander Forrest.⁵⁰ In early 1888, the Colonial Secretary, Malcolm Fraser, ordered a reduction in the police force to reduce expenditure.⁵¹ Phillips requested more police, however financial limitations precluded this.⁵² He did however change the rules and regulations regarding the use of firearms by the police, an issue first discussed in October 1888. These rules were questioned by FN Broome, then by Attorney General A Warton, particularly Phillips’ original pronouncement ‘that a person committing a felony’ may ‘be lawfully killed providing he cannot be otherwise apprehended’.⁵³ Broome asked if ‘the word “kill” [is] not used with undue prominence and emphasis’.⁵⁴ The wording of this regulation was changed, to ‘be lawfully “fired upon” providing he cannot be otherwise apprehended’.⁵⁵ Under official police rules, firearms were to be used if no other means of preventing the escape of the person pursued was available. In reality the line for bush police between legal use and indiscriminate shooting was often indistinguishable. In any case, the most valuable police in the Kimberley – the ‘bushmen’ who were experienced with firearms, horses, and ‘bush work’ – were lauded for their skills.

Who were the bushmen?

Most police recruits were ‘unskilled workers’, ‘labourers’, or from police forces in other parts of Australia. Some came from a military background, some joined and left several times depending on their fortunes elsewhere. Joining the police force was a last resort for many men, but it had the prospect of progressive promotion, regular pay, and a way out of poverty. Accordingly, the standard of applicants was often not high, to such an extent that they could often be more of an encumbrance to other officers than any assistance.⁵⁶ Police were often reluctant to serve in the northern districts due to the harsh conditions: police in the midway camps lived in tents and subsisted on a diet of salted meat, tea and damper, with some dying from illnesses such as typhoid, malaria, and scurvy. Their horses, too, would frequently be ‘knocked up’ or get the ‘mad staggers’ from being ridden for long periods in harsh conditions. A special allowance had to be created to entice men to serve in the north.⁵⁷ Under Section 7 of the 1892 *Police Act*,

49. ‘Letter to Colonial Secretary Perth from Government Resident Wyndham’, 4 Jan 1887, CSO, Acc 527, File 677/1887.

50. Bentley 1993: 140.

51. See *Police Gazette*, 25 Jan 1888, CO 6/840 Phillips Volume 4 1888: 15.

52. Bentley 1993: 141.

53. Draft rules for the use of firearms, G Phillips point 3, CSO, Acc 527, File 2833/1889.

54. Correspondence from FN Broome to Commissioner of Police, 3 Oct 1888, CSO, Acc 527, File 2833/1888.

55. Draft rules for the use of firearms, G Phillips point 3, CSO, Acc 527, File 2833/1889.

56. Wyndham Letterbook, PC Troy’s description of PC Archdeacon, nd (circa April 1890), AN 5, Acc 741/11.

57. *Western Australian Government Gazette* 17 Oct 1888.

the Commissioner could promote police simply for serving in the Kimberley district. He also had the power to hire non-commissioned officers at his discretion.⁵⁸

For all the 'good bushmen' there were equally police considered 'useless', as they were ill-suited to the environment and the work required of them. Social pressures influenced the actions of police, especially around the centre of Wyndham where police drinking was a problem and personal relationships were not harmonious. The extent of this was evident when, in May 1890, Sergeant Richard Troy reported to Commissioner Phillips that PCs Tuke and Archdeacon were drinking so much that they 'are not to be trusted as they cannot resist drink whenever its obtainable if they are out of sight of an officer'.⁵⁹ At the same station, PC Pollard had reported PC Tuke to Sergeant Troy for swearing at him, drunkenness, and neglect of duty. In June 1890, PC Pollard shot Sergeant Troy in the back while raiding an Aboriginal camp 135 miles from Wyndham; Troy died three days later.⁶⁰ PC Tuke pleaded with the Commissioner of Police to transfer him south as he feared the climate was permanently injuring his health.⁶¹ PC Archdeacon left after becoming dangerously ill with fever and dysentery. Sergeant Houlihan had reported PC Gee for being so drunk on duty that he was falling off his horse.⁶² A new officer, Constable Oakes, arrived in Wyndham but the assessment by a superior officer was less than flattering: 'no horseman, no knowledge of horses, unacquainted with firearms, no experience of bush life and has not the least inclination to do anything about it ... he is simply useless at cleaning saddles even'. Oakes also feigned illness to avoid bush patrol.⁶³

Such was the number of police leaving the district that the Commissioner ruled that if an officer was stationed more than two miles from Perth he had to give three months notice rather than one month.⁶⁴ Relationships between local communities and their police were to be kept as distant as possible through the constant transfer of staff. However, as there was such difficulty getting appropriate staff, this principle was ignored, leaving relationships to develop which were often improper. The outcome of these events was that 'bush police' evolved as both a police force which was efficient in the district and as individual characters. These police not only tolerated but embraced living in harsh conditions with an increasingly hostile Aboriginal response to their presence. In the mid-1890s these men and their native assistants were sought out by police authorities and sent to the East Kimberley because they had considerable experience with the 'native question'. Mick Rhatigan, Michael Brophy, Thomas Wheatley, Arthur Freeman and August Lucanus were such men. Rhatigan and Brophy, for example, stayed in the East Kimberley for over 15 and 16 years respectively.⁶⁵ PC Rhatigan in particular had a reputation as a 'good bushman'. Turkey Creek stockman Doug Moore

58. *The Police Act 1892*, 55th Vic, No. 27. Section 7.

59. Wyndham Letterbook, 10 May 1890, AN 5, Acc 741/11.

60. Wyndham Occurrence Book, 11 Jun 1890, AN 5, Acc 741/2.

61. Tuke resigned when the Commissioner ignored his request. Wyndham Letterbook, 4 Nov 1891, AN 5, Acc 741/11.

62. Wyndham Letterbook, 5 Mar 1891, AN 5, Acc 741/11.

63. Wyndham Letterbook, 22 Feb 1891, AN 5, Acc 741/11.

64. *Police Gazette*, 23 March 1892, CO 6/966(12) 1892: 47.

65. Battye 1912: 528.

referred to him as ‘one of the best shots in the country and he missed very few blacks if after them, especially on the Osmond River where they were pretty well cleaned up’.⁶⁶

In the West Kimberley, bush police such as Arthur Buckland, Reginald Nash Spong, and Richard Henry Pilmer were employed to deal with the ongoing conflict, specifically the ‘native outlaw, Pigeon’ or Jandamarra.⁶⁷ In late 1894, Commissioner Phillips decentralised administrative control of the Kimberley district. Police in the West Kimberley came under Overend Drewry’s command.⁶⁸ The Governor of Western Australia, under advice from GB Phillips, appointed Frederick John Orme to be Sub Inspector of Police in the East Kimberley.⁶⁹

Claims and counterclaims on the new pastoral frontiers

Phillips instructed Orme, who was stationed in Wyndham, to establish the extent of stock depredations in the Argyle area and surrounds. This was in response to a letter from Nathaniel Buchanan, the new manager of WH Osmand’s Ord River Station: on 19 February 1895 he had written an agitated letter declaring that ‘Blacks have been very troublesome and were killing in all directions ... they seem to be getting more daring every day’. Buchanan demanded police protection, stating that the nearest police were either 210 miles north in Wyndham or 130 miles south in Halls Creek, and claiming that he had lost 7000 cattle to depredations since his station was first stocked.⁷⁰

Orme’s response to Phillips in March 1895 expressed incredulity at Buchanan’s allegations. He reported that Buchanan was exaggerating losses and, since he had been managing the station only since November 1894, had little idea of how many cattle were on his run. Orme went on to express concern that the ‘strain of Mr Buchanan’s letter means the extermination of the Aborigines, which I am not in favour of, as I am sure they can be made quiet if the station owners will only work with the police’.⁷¹ A month later Orme wrote again, this time putting far more emphasis on the reasons for Buchanan’s accusations. He stated ‘with confidence’ that the claims made by Buchanan were false.⁷² He said the ‘natives on Ord River Station were not troublesome’ and that mismanagement and incompetence of the new owner, Mr Osmand, were to blame. This man, Orme said, had hired stockmen of whom he said: ‘it is a fact that not one of them yet know on what part of the run the majority of cattle are on’. He added that they were scared of the ‘Ord River natives’, had only four men to look after 20,000 cattle over 150 square miles, and ‘the stockmen cannot go out without being lost and it is always neces-

⁶⁶. ‘Doug Moore’s Memoirs’ nd: 2. Mick Rhatigan is implicated in a massacre at Mistake Creek (near Turkey Creek) in 1915. See Clement 1989b: 16–17.

⁶⁷. See Pederson 1995 for an account of the Pigeon story in the West Kimberley.

⁶⁸. Drewry was replaced by Sub Inspector Craven Harry Ord in August 1895.

⁶⁹. *Police Gazette*, 5 Dec 1894, CO 6/1092 Phillips 49 (CSO 1987/1894) 1894: 221.

⁷⁰. ‘Letter to Minister for Lands from Nathaniel Buchanan’, Ord River Station, Wyndham, February 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁷¹. ‘Letter from O/C Sub Inspector Orme to Commissioner of Police’, 3 March 1895, Halls Creek Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁷². ‘Correspondence from Sub Inspector Fred Orme to Commissioner of Police’, 6 April 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

sary to send a blackboy with them'. Orme concluded, 'I think that Buchanan wrote the letter in order to save himself, as they have no idea how the mustering will turn out'.⁷³

Much of what Orme wrote can be substantiated by author Mary Durack. She states that after Osmand had bought out his partner, JA Panton, in 1894, he had directed 'a succession of discouraged managers' from Melbourne via 'enigmatic telegrams and autocratic letters'. Osmand was using the business as an investment and had planned to sell when he had built up enough stock. He 'clearly had no interest in improving the property' or responding to requests from workers for improved amenities.⁷⁴ Osmand's letters to the government certainly stated his position quite clearly:

The losses in cattle speared by the blacks is about £28,000 and now after eleven years of this sort of thing a daily brutal killing of cows calving and heavy in calf still goes on. I think the government must admit that this is not the sort of treatment English settlers expect (after having risked their capital) from the government of a British Colony.⁷⁵

Osmand went on to express an urgent need for protection, as his station workers could not protect themselves. He stated that:

The premier was interviewed some time about November last by Mssrs Durack who was then in Perth, and Mr. Frank Connor MLA Parliamentary Representative for West Kimberley representing complaints then made by Kimberley settlers of the wholesale cattle slaughtering that was going on at that time. Promises were made that the police should put a stop to it and there it ended. Things are now worse than ever.⁷⁶

It appears that such letters and telegrams were effective, as a telegram was sent to Osmand in Victoria from the Office of the Premier advising him that police would 'visit the stations regularly'.⁷⁷

Demands also came from pastoral stations further north, particularly those owned by the Durack family. However, as with Osmand's Ord River Station, Orme disputed these allegations on similar grounds. He stated that Mantinea Station was leased by PJ Durack, who was actually managing Lissadell Station (which was over 100 miles away), and so the cattle had no overseer. 'No wonder they are disturbed,' he said, 'yet the police have to bear the abuse and the complaints which are made. They will not look after their own cattle, and yet expect the police to stop the cattle killing'. And, at Lissadell Station, the manager complained of stock losses but Orme was forthright in stating to Phillips that 'Lissadell report natives very troublesome but I am not prepared to believe this. This station is continually making reports of cattle killing, but they are too frightened to go out and see for themselves'.⁷⁸ This was substantiated when Sergeant Wheatley visited Lissadell Station in May 1895 and was informed by a stockman

73. 'Correspondence from Sub Inspector Fred Orme to Commissioner of Police', 6 April 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

74. Durack 1983: 46.

75. 'Letter from WH Osmand. Stawell. Vic to Minister of Lands', 15 April 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

76. 'Letter from WH Osmand. Stawell. Vic to Minister of Lands', 15 April 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

77. 'Telegram from Office of the Premier and Under Secretary to Osmund [sic] Stawell, Vic', 23 July 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

that 'no one had been around the run or amongst the cattle for over eight months and they know of no cattle being killed'.⁷⁹

Orme reported to the Commissioner of Police that stations in the East Kimberley would 'kill beasts at regular intervals for the natives, all Durack stations being exceptions'. He said the Duracks 'wanted to know who would pay for this'. Orme went on to state that 'All stations, bar Duracks, wish me to bring in the natives in to the homestead when, with the help of the police, they will civilise them'.⁸⁰ Sergeant Wheatley had, however, observed P Durack killing stock for the 'bush blacks' on 9 May 1895.⁸¹ Disputed and often exaggerated claims abounded at this time and personal animosity often dominated reporting of events. There was however, an expectation from some Duracks that the police would be their personal boundary patrol. Sergeant Wheatley told P Durack at Ivanhoe Station that 'he must not expect police to be stockmen for him'.⁸²

The relationship between police and pastoralists was documented by George Marsden, the travelling Inspector of the unpopular Kimberley body, the Aboriginal Protection Board.⁸³ In 1896 he reported of Michael and Ambrose Durack that:

Mr Durack was the first settler in the Kimberley and he says at first he was never troubled by the natives at all as they seemed to fear the 'white man', but as soon as the police came to Kimberley and blacks got into trouble and were arrested and then escaped or returned after their time then the trouble with the cattle began. Mr Durack spoke very warmly as to the utter ruin and eventual disaster which will arise from the blacks escaping apparently whenever they like from Wyndham gaol. As most of these natives who have escaped belong to the Denham, Lizardell [sic] and Argyle countries, all of which join one another, they have returned with utter contempt for the 'white man', except that when he is around and awake. They prowl around at night now ... a thing which in former years has never happened, and if they find the camp asleep they throw spears into it. This shows pretty plainly that they are becoming bolder and this can only arise from the fact that they know the white men at Wyndham cannot hold them ... Mr Durack spoke rather significantly as to his present treatment of bush natives. He says: – 'In former years I used to treat them kindly, I killed bullocks and fed them: they returned my kindness by driving my bullocks over the ranges, and scattering them on the runs and now I have turned "dog" on them now'.⁸⁴

⁷⁸. 'Correspondence from Sub Inspector Fred Orme to Commissioner of Police', 6 April 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁷⁹. 'Journal of report of Sergeant Wheatley and PC Rhatigan. 22 April 1895 – 4 June 1895', 9 May 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, 823/1895.

⁸⁰. 'Correspondence from Sub Inspector Fred Orme to Commissioner of Police' 6 April 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁸¹. 'Journal of report of Sergeant Wheatley and PC Rhatigan. East Kimberley district 22 April 1895 – 4 June 1895', 9 May 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁸². 'Journal of report of Sergeant Wheatley and PC Rhatigan. 22 April 1895 – 4 June 1895', 27 April 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁸³. See G Marsden's 'General Report of the Kimberley District', 12 Mar 1897. Marsden wrote, 'The Aboriginal Protection Board is not popular amongst the settlers in the Kimberley.' AN 1/1, Acc 495, Item 12.

⁸⁴. Aboriginal Protection Board Correspondence, 'Report for the Secretary of the Aboriginal Protection Board of Western Australia from Mr. George Marsden', 3 Sept 1896, Emphasis in original. AN 1/1, Acc 495, Item 49.

The animosity between police and pastoralists was based on the belief that the other party had created the situation. Pastoralists, police stated, were undermanned and too afraid to patrol their runs and look after their stock because Aboriginal resistance was so fierce. Police, pastoralists claimed, were incompetent, too far away, or too slow to arrest any 'ringleaders', and were to blame for the entire state of affairs.⁸⁵ MP Durack claimed 'Ye're all useless anyway without the blacks to help you with the dirty work'.⁸⁶ WH Osmand asserted that an unnamed Durack had told him that escapes from Wyndham gaol were 'understood and arranged' by the police so they could re-arrest the same offenders and thus be seen to be acting. He suggested that a new Commissioner was in order: 'a more active and smarter man of more modern ideas is required for the position'.⁸⁷

Pastoralists wanted decisive and effective police action. They wanted Aboriginal people off the land, claiming their presence startled the cattle, making them unmanageable and prone to losing condition. By engaging police, pastoralists envisaged that they could legally be rid of the Aboriginal people whose country they had colonised and who were showing resistance to their presence. They saw this as their right as they paid their taxes to the government for the land and for their protection; by exaggerating stock losses and creating a sense of urgency they would bring more police to the district. Furthermore, blaming Aboriginal people for all losses would defuse issues relating to mismanagement (with owners often based in the eastern colonies) and the loss of cattle by drought, wild dogs, disease, and cattle theft or 'duffing'.⁸⁸ One stockman asserted that 'in fact no less than 6 stations were made around the Ord River by shaking Ord River cattle'. This included Texas Downs Station stocked by 'a confirmed cattle thief' Jack Kelly.⁸⁹

The bush patrol from Wyndham

The police patrol, responding to the pastoralists' allegations, left Wyndham on 22 April 1895.⁹⁰ Sergeant Thomas Wheatley, PC Mick Rhatigan and native assistant Dicky visited Hart Bros' Carlton Station, where 'Mr Hart kindly lent me his native boy Pompy and a horse saddle' and Ivanhoe Stud Station where they registered stock numbers but reported no problems. On 4 May they arrived at Argyle Downs Station, where P Durack reported 'no natives had killed cattle of late'. On 5 May, however, they went to Prospect Creek where, Sergeant Wheatley stated, they 'saw cattle running and natives chasing them'. PC Rhatigan fired on them, 'killing four men'.⁹¹ Orme reported to Phil-

⁸⁵. Mary Durack refers to the antagonism in Durack 1959: 354.

⁸⁶. Durack 1983: 326.

⁸⁷. 'Cattle Killing in the East Kimberley', Letter from WH Osmand to F Connor, 4 May 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 1868/1895.

⁸⁸. Fencing on these enormous pastoral leases, for obvious reasons, was out of the question. In any case, pastoralists practised the 'open range' method of grazing peculiar to Queensland whereby cattle roamed freely.

⁸⁹. 'Doug Moore's Memoirs': 1. 'Shaking' means stealing.

⁹⁰. 'Journal of report of Sergeant Wheatley and PC Rhatigan 22 April - 4 June 1895', 22 April, 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

⁹¹. 'Journal of report of Sergeant Wheatley and PC Rhatigan 22 April - 4 June 1895', 5 May 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

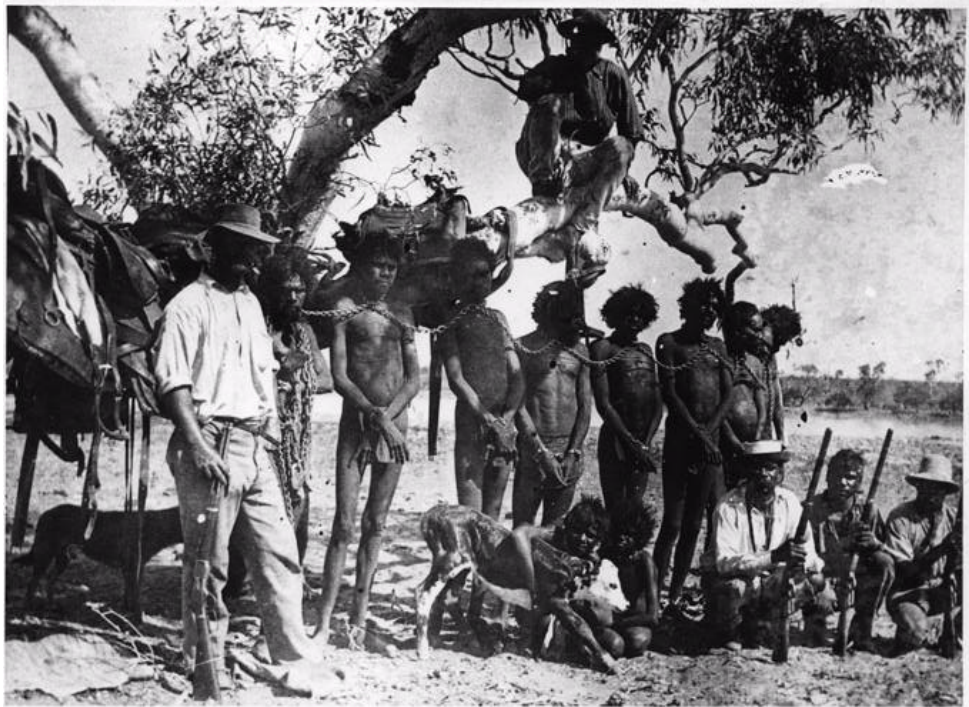


Figure 2: 'Police, Native Assistants and Prisoners' ca1890. Batty Library 7816B.

lips that the shooting on 5 May 'gave some natives whom they found in the act a lesson that they will remember'.⁹²

In other districts, allegations of cattle killing continued. Denis Doherty sent a letter from Fremantle to the Commissioner quoting Francis Connor:

Wyndham 16th November 1895

Blacks are worse now than ever they were known to be. Michael (M P) can tell you what he saw at Newry reports this morning a wholesale slaughter of imported stock and horses at stud station we see by papers reports to Commissioner are at variance let commissioner know this. Mr. M P Durack will be here tomorrow he anxious have a chat with you. Kindly let me know when it would be convenient for you to see him. I have taken the duty of writing to you as F. Connor is in the Eastern Colonies.⁹³

In response to this correspondence, GB Phillips wrote to Connor and Doherty outlining police procedure in the Argyle pastoral region:

⁹². 'Report by Sub Inspector Fred Orme on Sergeant Wheatley's April May Trip', 14 June 1895, CSO, Acc 527, 823/1895.

⁹³. Personal Correspondence, 'Letter to Commissioner of Police GB Phillips from D Doherty', 18 Nov 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895; M Durack had left the Ivanhoe station on board the boat 'Pagliaferro' to report to GB Phillips. See Telegram from Orme to Commissioner of Police, 16 Nov 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

Acknowledge Mr Doherty letter and say that I shall be glad to see Mr. Durack at any time that he can make it convenient to call, if he will kindly let me know the day and hour ... I may state that the police left Wyndham on the 6th instant to patrol the various stations and that they have been instructed to remain out until they have thoroughly dispersed the natives.⁹⁴

Personal visits by MP Durack and Connor and Doherty's correspondence put pressure on the Commissioner of Police, who then wired Orme stating his reports were 'contradictory and misleading' and that he was 'at one time saying no cattle were being killed' and at other times saying that 'natives were very bad'. And ultimately, that the 'settlers deny correctness of police reports and state natives are continually killing cattle'. Commissioner Phillips ordered Sergeant Wheatley and his party 'to remain on stations and disperse all natives. Establish regular communication with him [Orme] and keep me informed of what is being done'.⁹⁵ Police became actively engaged in the protection of cattle on specific pastoral stations at the expense of local Aboriginal communities.

The 'dispersal' in action

Police regulations required a written record of daily events in the form of Occurrence Books for stations, Letterbooks for correspondence to Perth and Journals for bush patrols. The Occurrence Book for Wyndham Station states that in November 1895 a police party had been ordered to undertake a bush patrol and for several days previous to the patrol PC Mick Rhatigan had been busy shoeing a large number of horses for the long trip.⁹⁶ The unusually large police party consisted of Rhatigan, Sergeant Wheatley, four Native Assistants — Mickey, Willy, Joe, and Bubby — and 13 horses.⁹⁷ Sergeant Wheatley's private notebook, the only surviving record of this event, describes how the police party left Wyndham on 6 November 1895, arrived at Ivanhoe Stud Station on 9 November, and, after tracking until 11 November, found the group deemed responsible for cattle killing. Sergeant Wheatley describes the scene:

Left camp at 6.30am and followed the tracks and came upon the natives in a large lagoon, the assistants told them to come out of the water and reeds, two of them came which we arrested the rest of them tried to escape but in doing so we fired on them killing twenty men the women and children making good their escape. The two we arrested shewed us where they killed the cattle and told us they had killed plenty the following are the names of the two we arrested Ginnare, Cunbiliger.⁹⁸

This shooting is the single largest incident recorded by police in the Kimberley district. For the next two weeks the police party travelled along the Ord River and around Ivanhoe Stud Station looking for Aboriginal people. On 22 November the police found the Aboriginal camp where there were 25 women and 30 children, and twelve

94. Telegram GB Phillips to Connor and Doherty, 'Cattle killing on Stud station East Kimberley', Marked 2967/1895 and 2945/1895, 18 Nov 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

95. 'Telegram from Commissioner of Police G B Phillips to Sub Inspector Fred Orme', 19 Nov 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

96. Wyndham Occurrence Book, 2-6 Nov 1895, AN 5, Acc 741/3.

97. Wyndham Occurrence Book, 6 Nov 1895, AN 5, Acc 741/3.

98. 'Private diary of Sergeant Thomas Wheatley during police patrols from Wyndham from 6 Nov to 23 Dec 1895', 11 Nov 1895, Battye Library, Acc 1266A Manuscript.

men whom they arrested.⁹⁹ The police party, with their prisoners chained by the neck, then went to Lissadell, where they picked up rations and supplies from the homestead, and Michael Durack reported that had seen 'the remains of 18 head of cattle killed by natives'. They proceeded to Rosewood Station where Tom Kilfoyle said that 'the natives had not interfered with his cattle since last wet season', and then to Connor and Doherty's Newry Station, where the manager said 'the natives had killed cattle two months ago on the Keep River'. They then returned to Ivanhoe Stud Station, where Wheatley observed that 'natives had not interfered with the stock since we dispersed them on our way up'.¹⁰⁰ Wheatley and party stopped for a day on 16 December, as three of the prisoners could not keep walking due to exhaustion. According to the records of the Wyndham Police Station Occurrence Book, the patrol returned over six weeks later on 23 December with 14 prisoners 'on the chain' and two witnesses.¹⁰¹ Since the prisoners' arrest they had walked, chained together and chained to trees at night, over 260 miles (400km).¹⁰² In Wyndham court, on 23 December, before F Pearse and JW Durack JP, 13 prisoners were charged with 'being in the unlawful possession of beef' and sentenced to two years with hard labour and 15 lashes of the cat-o'-nine tails. One Aboriginal boy was remanded for eight days, pending the arrival of M Durack to charge him.¹⁰³ After this police activity, a telegram from Orme directly to the Commissioner of Police revealed a little more than the usual police reports:

Returned today met police party about eighty miles from here they have had most successful trip tribe recently killing at Durack Bros Ivanhoe Stud Station thoroughly dispersed not one escaping. Durack Bros reports no killing on Argyle Downs station Sergt Wheatley met Halls Creek police party at Lissadell station where both parties dispersed several tribes.¹⁰⁴

By 7 February 1896, Sub Inspector Orme declared to the Commissioner: 'Re: Native depredations on stations settlers throughout district express great pleasure at actions of police latterly and also express opinion that there is little doubt but that cattle killing will cease for a while'.¹⁰⁵

The consolidation of police forces and the opening of Argyle Police Camp

Under Phillips' instructions, a new camp at Argyle Downs was established as a more cost-effective way to police the new pastoral districts. Police, rather than travelling

⁹⁹. The prisoners' names were Didgebrinng, Giniring, Cullingagin, Wallabaring, Bulanine, Gorge, Coolwaring, Gangauire, Caarabang, Gillbangie. Wheatley Manuscript. 22 Nov 1895.

¹⁰⁰. 'Private diary of Sergeant Thomas Wheatley during police patrols from Wyndham from 6 Nov to 23 Dec 1895', 18 Dec 1895, Battye Library, Acc 1266A, Manuscript.

¹⁰¹. Wyndham Occurrence books records 14 prisoners, Wheatley records 12 but only gives the names of 10.

¹⁰². 'Private diary of Sergeant Thomas Wheatley during police patrols from Wyndham from 6 Nov to 23 Dec 1895', Battye Library, Acc 1266A, Manuscript.

¹⁰³. Wyndham Occurrence Book, 23 Dec 1895, AN 5, Acc 741/3.

¹⁰⁴. 'Telegram from Sub Inspector Orme to Commissioner of Police GB Phillips', Wyndham Station, 15 Dec 1895, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895. See also Telegram dated 27 Dec 1895 Const. Inglis and party 'dispersed several tribes on Lissadell and Ord River Stations', CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895. There is no surviving record of these Halls Creek police patrols in the State Archives.

¹⁰⁵. 'Telegram from Sub Inspector Orme to Commissioner of Police GB Phillips', 7 Feb 1896, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895. See Figure 3.

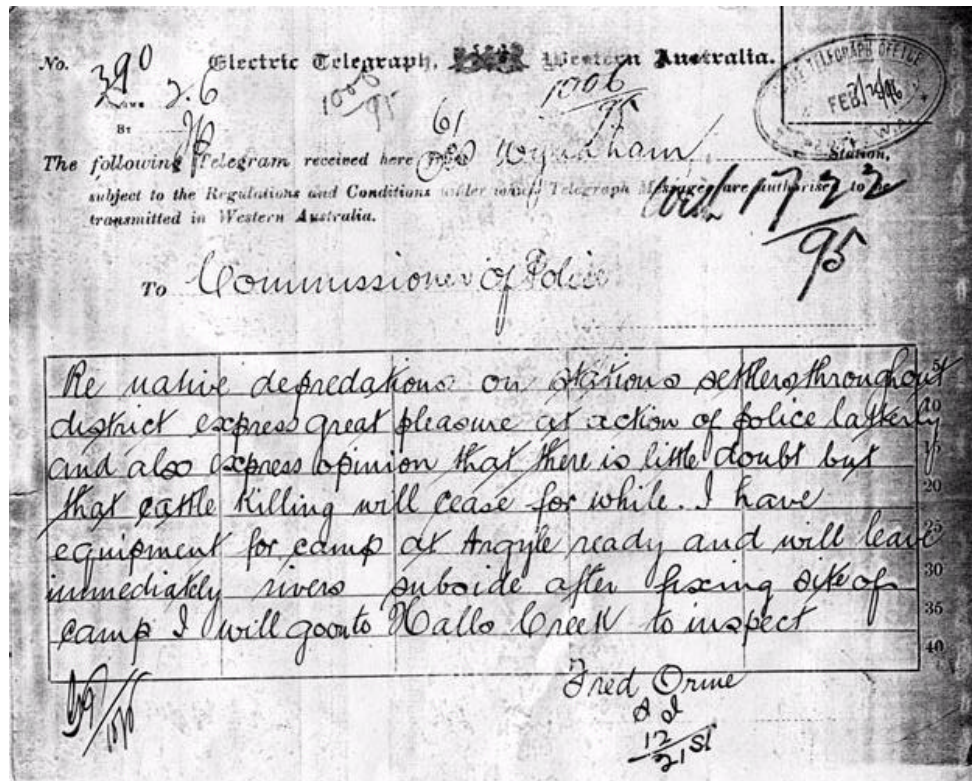


Figure 3: Sub Inspector Orme's Telegram to Commissioner Phillips. 7 Feb 1896. State Records Office of Western Australia.

from Wyndham or Halls Creek (often extremely difficult in the wet season), would be more central to the areas requiring police attention. The Argyle camp was actually situated at Wild Dog Springs (hence the general name), a spot situated on the mail route from Wyndham down to the Goldfields and Halls Creek.¹⁰⁶ The main role of the new camp was to patrol Lissadell, Argyle, Ivanhoe Stud, Carlton, Mantinea, and Ord River Stations.¹⁰⁷ Complementing this force were the Constables from Fletcher Creek and Denham River camps, who had been withdrawn in December 1895 when it was thought the telegraph line no longer needed protection, due to 'extensive killing and imprisonment'.¹⁰⁸

Officially established on 23 April 1896, 'Wild Dog' originally consisted of three seasoned bush constables, four native assistants and 16 horses, under command of Fred Orme.¹⁰⁹ The available records from this camp are testimony to the actions of bush police engaged in a process of pacification through ambush, arrest, and shootings. Any

¹⁰⁶. The camp was 38 miles from Argyle Station, 56 miles from Ord River Station, 28 miles from Rosewood and 50 miles from Newry — it was placed in order to be most central to all stations in the district.

¹⁰⁷. 'Correspondence from Sub Inspector Fred Orme to Commissioner of Police', 6 April 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

¹⁰⁸. Clement 1989a: 86.

deaths were justified in the police records under the guise of ‘resisting arrest’ or ‘escaping’.¹¹⁰ Police use of firearms was unchecked, there was no attempt to arrest ‘ringleaders’, and numerous Aboriginal people were shot not only for ‘being in possession of beef’ – a criminal offence – but, as the following examples of police actions show, simply because they were there.

In September 1896, PC Rhatigan was working directly from Argyle camp with native assistants Pluto and Peter, getting beef supplies from Rosewood Station.¹¹¹ On their way they tracked a mob of Aboriginal people who had allegedly killed and eaten a horse and had killed cattle. On 22 September, the party surrounded the Aboriginal camp at sunrise and, according to Rhatigan’s report, the Native Assistant called out to them to:

leave their spears and not run away. I succeeded in arresting four natives who stopped. There were a large number who made there [sic] escape there were several men shot in trying to make their escape. There was 50 rounds of Winchester ammunition expended. We found about three cwt of beef in this camp.¹¹²

The party then returned to Rosewood Station to pick up rations as they were out of beef. On the next patrol, on 27 October 1896, PC Arthur Freeman came across the path of a ‘large mob’ but, since he was on his own, decided to go to Argyle Station and get four native assistants – Pluto, Corriway, Paddy, and Wallily – and PC Rhatigan to assist him.¹¹³ By 29 October they had tracked the party to 10 miles from Argyle police camp, according to Pluto. They found the group, waited until sunrise, and, as PC Freeman wrote:

as day broke and natives began to awake ordered them to sit down and not to try and run away. Some complied and others ran for their spears several of which were thrown, ordered boys [the native assistants] to fire on those attempting to escape. Several were shot and more escaped. Arrested 14 men and two women. I should estimate there were at least 40 or fifty women in this camp not counting children – expended 40 rounds of Winchester ammunition.¹¹⁴

During this time police activity around Argyle involved collecting and transferring prisoners. PC Rhatigan took 22 from Argyle to Wyndham gaol on 5 October 1896.¹¹⁵ On December 25 1896, PC Freeman was on patrol again on the Ord River and Lissadell runs.¹¹⁶ After leaving Argyle camp he tracked a party of Aboriginal people until:

¹⁰⁹. ‘Telegram from Commissioner of Police GB Phillips to Sub Inspector Orme’, 2Dec 1895, Wyndham Station, CSO, Acc 527, File 823/1895.

¹¹⁰. See for example ‘PC Freeman’s Journal whilst on Patrol on Ord River and Lissadell Runs’, Acc 430, File 1344/1897.

¹¹¹. ‘Copy of PC Rhatigan’s Journal for Sept 1896’, 15 Sept 1896, Argyle Camp, Acc 430, File 3689/1896.

¹¹². ‘Copy of PC Rhatigan’s Journal for Sept 1896’, 22 Sept 1896, Argyle Camp, Acc 430, File 3689/1896.

¹¹³. ‘Copy of PC Freeman’s Journal from Wyndham to Argyle Police camp’, 24 Oct 1896, Acc 430, File 3688/1896.

¹¹⁴. ‘Copy of PC Freeman’s Journal from Wyndham to Argyle Police camp’, 29 Nov 1896, Acc 430, File 3688/1896.

¹¹⁵. ‘Copy of PC Rhatigan’s Journal whilst travelling from Argyle camp to Wyndham from the 5 Oct to the 22 Oct 1896’, 5 Oct 1896, Acc 430, File 3690/1896.

¹¹⁶. ‘PC Freeman’s Journal whilst on Patrol on Ord River and Lissadell Runs’, 25 Dec 1896, Acc 430, File 1344/1897.

about 11am saw eight or ten natives in advance of us about a mile off on the crest of a small hill, waited until natives had descended on the other side of the hill out of sight then made a dash to surround them, about midway saw a mob of Lubras we had not previously seen and who upon seeing us started running after the natives and shouting out to warn them. On reaching the top the hill could see natives about a quarter of a mile off running at full speed in the direction of the Ord River as they would not stop fired after them and the boys went in pursuit ... 20 rounds ammunition used.¹¹⁷

PC Freeman's party engaged this group once more on 6 January 1897, when:

one old man deliberately threw a spear at the boy [native assistant] who was then not 30 yards distant from them, boy dodged the spear and as the native was shipping another into his woomera native assistant Carriwing who was covering his mate shot him dead, upon this all the natives broke and taking what shelter they could find in the creek and long grass commenced throwing spears and stones a general fight ensued in which all the boys behaved very well.¹¹⁸

Freeman wrote that this party 'was the largest mob I had seen in the E. Kimberley. I should think there were at least 50 males in the camp'. He surmised that it was a meeting place for tribal groups from the north of SA and a mob from the Ord River. Freeman then 'visited the scene of the fight and found nine dead bodies, it is impossible to say how many may have been hit in the skirmish. Sixty rounds of ammunition expended'.¹¹⁹

In late January 1897 PC Rhatigan was patrolling the Lissadell, Argyle, and Ord River Runs and noted his surprise: 'as I never travelled over such a lot of country and saw the natives so scarce. All the cattle I saw were very quite [sic]'.¹²⁰ PC Rhatigan continued the bush patrol and travelled further down the Ord River following some Aboriginal tracks to Spring Creek. They put out their own fire so they 'would not be speared during the night' and waited until sunrise before raiding the camp.

I recognised 9 escapees in this camp but was unable to arrest any of them I was very nearly getting speared as they [sic] natives that were apprehended previously fought something terrible. I succeeded in arresting three natives and to my knollage [sic] none of them were in before. In this camp I gathered together 96 women.¹²¹

Later he gathered together those who could not escape and explained to them why he was taking them away: 'I told them they should not tuch [sic] cattle and the white men would not interfere with them'.¹²² A report by Orme to the Commissioner of Police on 27 March 1897 reports that PC Rhatigan arrested a total of seven people but expended

¹¹⁷. 'PC Freeman's Journal whilst on Patrol on Ord River and Lissadell Runs', 26 Dec 1896, Acc 430, File 1344/1897.

¹¹⁸. 'PC Freeman's Journal whilst on Patrol on Ord River and Lissadell Runs', 6 Jan 1897, Acc 430, File 1344/1897.

¹¹⁹. 'PC Freeman's Journal whilst on Patrol on Ord River and Lissadell Runs', 6 Jan 1897, Acc 430, File 1344/1897.

¹²⁰. 'PC Rhatigan's Journal whilst on patrol on Lissadell, Argyle and Ord River Runs', 15 Jan 1897, Argyle Police Camp, Acc 430, File 1345/1897.

¹²¹. 'PC Rhatigan's Journal whilst on patrol on Lissadell, Argyle and Ord River Runs', 16 Jan 1897, Argyle Police Camp, Acc 430, File 1345/1897.

¹²². 'PC Rhatigan's Journal whilst on patrol on Lissadell, Argyle and Ord River Runs', 16 Jan 1897, Argyle Police Camp, Acc 430, File 1345/1897.

60 rounds of ammunition in doing so.¹²³ The Osmond River was heavily patrolled by police parties, with PC Freeman recording that by January 1898 there was ‘only a comparatively small mob of blacks now living in the vicinity of Osmond’.¹²⁴ With pastoralist consent and indeed assistance, police were actively clearing pastoral runs of Aboriginal people by arrest and killing. The number of Aboriginal people shot is not possible to calculate from the written record, however the loss of cattle resulted in imprisonment at the rate of 10 or 12 men per animal.¹²⁵ Mary Durack reflected on Argyle police practices by writing, ‘The methods used would seem to have been effective, as the estimated number of cattle speared fell abruptly in the following year, to considerably less than half’.¹²⁶

The frontier culture of the East Kimberley: ‘blackballing’

Aboriginal oral history accounts, European historical accounts and biographical accounts confirm the fact that large numbers of Aboriginal people were killed by Europeans in the East Kimberley district during this period.¹²⁷ Punitive expeditions or revenge killings followed the spearing of settlers. After the deaths of Fred Marriot and John Durack, both in 1886, and George Barnett in 1888, police parties, including settlers signed up as ‘special constables’, combined to punish those deemed responsible. These expeditions caused the deaths of numerous Aboriginal people.¹²⁸

This can be understood in terms of notions of ‘bush justice’. Police were not introduced in the more remote areas until some years after the first European settlement. This had a profound effect on the attitudes of the colonists, who had found ways and means to justify violent acts against Aboriginal people.¹²⁹ Remoteness from authority, isolation, and fear influenced behaviour, and violence became an accepted way of achieving control over Aboriginal people. Gordon Buchanan, son of ‘Nat’ Buchanan, wrote of frontier justice after a killing: ‘They held their own inquest. In those days there were no police within three hundred miles. Every man was his own policeman: and the letter of the law was often ignored in favour of summary justice’.¹³⁰

A ‘conspiracy of silence’ characterised frontier relations, meaning no man would incriminate another for activities involving violence against Aboriginal people, and they certainly would not record the event. Another pioneer put the Kimberley ‘bushman’s code of honour’ regarding punitive expeditions in these terms: ‘Either stand in with the mob and keep your mouth shut or refuse to stand in and also keep your mouth shut. In either case you will be respected and no more will be required of you in the

¹²³. Report by Fred Orme on ‘Journal of PC Rhatigan patrolling Argyle, Lissadell and Ord River Stations. 17.1.1897 to 22.2.1897’, 27 March 1897; Forwarded to Police Department Chief Office 12 April 1897, Acc 430, File 1345/1897.

¹²⁴. ‘Copy of PC Freeman’s Journal on patrol searching for natives who killed cattle 10 Jan 1898 to 12 Feb 1898’, 16 Jan, 1898. Argyle Police Camp Acc 430, File 1930/1898.

¹²⁵. Clement 1989a: 93.

¹²⁶. Durack 1983: 48.

¹²⁷. See Clement 1989b. For Aboriginal oral history accounts of shootings see Ross 1989; Shaw 1981, 1983, 1992.

¹²⁸. See Owen and Choo 2003: 128–156; Durack 1959: 285–286; Green 1995: 58–59.

¹²⁹. See Buchanan 1997: 59; Clement and Bridge 1991: 104; Durack 1959: 286.

¹³⁰. Buchanan 1997: 59.

matter'.¹³¹ One police officer referred to a 'sort of Freemasonry' which existed among the colonists. He reported that 'it was impossible to get written statements from them', and that 'they might as well leave the district at once if they gave a white man away'.¹³²

Some police, however, sought to follow police regulations and prosecute settlers engaged in the killings of Aboriginal people who 'interfered with cattle'. In November 1897, PC Ritchie investigated reports that Jerry Durack incited his Aboriginal stockman Nipper to shoot two men named Jacky and Monday; Jacky was killed.¹³³ Nipper told PC Ritchie that 'Jerry came up give me revolver told me go shootem on hill I go shoot Jacky first Monday ran away'.¹³⁴ Charges were laid but dismissed after another officer reported to Commissioner Phillips that Durack was not implicated.¹³⁵ In December 1897, PC Ritchie received information from a prisoner that Charles Lincan, Mick Cassidy, 'Jack', and one of Jerry Durack's stockmen called Pompey shot three women and one man and burnt their bodies at a spot on McPhee's Creek 30 miles south of Denham Station. After the prisoner showed PC Ritchie the site he wrote: 'The camp was quite visable [sic]. Saw the place where the bodies were burnt. Saw one skull and lower jaw in the sand and ashes and some smaller bones much burnt'.¹³⁶ There is no evidence that this case was pursued.

One case that was pursued suggests that prosecuting Europeans was a perilous affair. In late October 1901, PC James Campbell Thomson from Argyle Police Camp was investigating allegations of the murder of two Aboriginal men on Texas Downs Station and the burning of their bodies. In the course of his investigations Thomson visited the site where the bodies were burnt and found the remains of both were visible.¹³⁷ He gathered five independent Aboriginal witnesses who could corroborate the fact that Texas Downs stockman Thomas McLaughlin shot and killed two Aboriginal men and burnt their bodies at a spot 30 miles east of Turkey Creek Telegraph Station.¹³⁸ Thomson's record of attempting to arrest McLaughlin under warrant reveals a great deal about the culture of the Kimberley frontier:

When I got within about twenty feet of the house I saw McLaughlin sitting down on the verandah. I got off the horse in doing so I asked native witness Charly if that was the man individual McLaughlin that shot the natives and he said yes. I walked towards McLaughlin and he said good day but only got within 15 foot of him when he said what's your game Thomson I said I arrest you under the Kings name with that he jumped up and took a Mauser Rifle from behind his back and covered me he then said take me now I said it was not safe he said that twenty bastards would not take him and that I was trumping up a charge against them he said you have not

¹³¹. D Swan in Clement and Bridge 1991: 104.

¹³². 'Witness Statement from Corporal W. Goodridge (No. 112.) regarding allegations he made in Roth Commission report', 24 May 1905, Wyndham, East Kimberley, Acc 430. File 540/1905.

¹³³. Aborigines Department Correspondence, AN 1/2, Acc 255, File 118/1898.

¹³⁴. Aborigines Department Correspondence, 'Statement by Osborne Ritchie', AN 1/2, Acc 255, File 118/1898.

¹³⁵. See Green 1995: 67-68.

¹³⁶. 'Journal of PC Ritchie' 14 Dec 1897, Wyndham Station, Acc 430, File 298/1898.

¹³⁷. 'Journal of PC Thomson while investigating shooting and burning of Natives', 29 Oct 1901, East Kimberley District, Argyle Police Station, AN 5, Acc 241/9; Clement 1989a: 93-94.

¹³⁸. 'Journal of PC Thomson while investigating shooting and burning of Natives', 31 Oct 1901, East Kimberley District, Argyle Police Station, AN 5, Acc 241/9.

told me what charge you have against me I said for shooting two natives he said I thought so then he said that I better get onto the plain if I meant business with him I said it was not safe as he had the drop on me he then laughed he said he would let me off this time but if he saw me again I can say good bye he then said get off the station and leave me that nigger, I will fix him up I said no he was my prisoner then he said get off and look out with that I went to my horse and told native witness Charley to walk in front of me my rifle was in the off side of the saddle he said that he was watching me I led my horse away to where I left natives it was getting dark. Mr. Durack stopped behind as McLaughlin sang out get off your horse. Durack came after me to get his horse I asked him what was McLaughlin up to he said you'd better be careful as he means to do you in.¹³⁹

Thomson could not leave his witnesses in this area, as he was fearful that 'some of the other white men might shoot them' so he returned to Argyle Camp with them.¹⁴⁰ McLaughlin left for South Australia and the charges were never brought to court. After this episode Thompson was shunned and 'blackballed' by the settler community and was told by PB Durack that it 'served him right'.¹⁴¹ Durack asserted 'that it was an understood thing that the Commissioner had not to take notice of such cases'.¹⁴²

This claim that Commissioner of Police George Phillips, undertook a 'gentlemen's agreement' that Europeans would not be investigated or prosecuted for murdering Aboriginal people is substantiated by another officer. PC Hill met on patrol PB Durack, who informed him that PC Thomson 'had done a dirty trick for trying to hang his fellow man for shooting savages at the Texas Downs station', saying that 'the late Commissioner did not want it done'.¹⁴³ PC Hill had earlier recorded:

Mr P Durack informs me that people seem to have a down on Const. Thomson now for doing what he has putting away McLaughlin shooting blacks. Mr Durack also remarked that he thought Constable Ritchie bad enough in trying to hang his uncle [J Durack]. He said that any of the police who put away a man for doing in the blacks always got the chuck out of the police.¹⁴⁴

In 1905 Thomson was required to give evidence to Dr Walter Roth in his *Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives*, an investigation into allegations of cruelty and

¹³⁹. 'Journal of PC Thomson while investigating shooting and burning of Natives', 5 Nov 1901, Argyle Police Station, AN 5, Acc 241/9. East Kimberley District.

¹⁴⁰. 'Journal of PC Thomson while investigating shooting and burning of Natives', 5 Nov 1901, Argyle Police Station, AN 5, Acc 241/9. East Kimberley District.

¹⁴¹. 'Journal of PC Thomson whilst on shooting case of two Aborigines named Friday and Jimmy from 15 Nov – 23 Dec 1901', 16 Dec 1901, Uncatalogued police file, Argyle Police Station Letterbook, WA Police Service (WAPS). Later Thompson recorded in his journal that a manager named Mr Booty refused to sell rations to him and his police assistants because of this investigation. 'Journal of PC Thomson and na Barney, Bow and Joe from 12 Jan 1902 to 10 Feb 1902', 30 Jan 1902. Un-catalogued police file, Argyle Police Station, WAPS.

¹⁴². 'Journal of PC Thomson whilst on Shooting case of Two Aborigines named Friday and Jimmy from 15 Nov 1901 to 23 Dec 1901', 16 Dec 1901, Uncatalogued police file, Argyle Police Station, WAPS.

¹⁴³. 'Journal of PC Hill from 4 Dec 1901 to the 21 Dec 1901 whilst distributing statistics', 16 Dec 1901, Uncatalogued police file, Argyle Police Station Letterbook, WAPS. GB Phillips died on 26 March 1898 and was replaced by Fred Hare in May 1900.

¹⁴⁴. 'Journal of PC Hill and Police Assistant Barney from 23 Nov 1901 to 6 Dec 1901', 27 Nov 1901, Uncatalogued police file, Argyle Police Station, WAPS.

abuse in the north of the state. The report was damning of the behaviour of police and the use of armed Native Assistants to do police work.¹⁴⁵ Thomson explained how he was disliked by settlers who 'tried to make things very unpleasant for me'. He stood for the rule of law: 'The settlers could not have a free hand with the bush natives when I was about'. He went on to write:

I also may state that a week before I received a telegram two stockmen came up from Wyndham and said they heard that I was transferred to Perth and that F. Connor or S. Copley¹⁴⁶ got me shifted. I was very unpopular with all the Duracks and Copley's manager named Atkinson, and Kelly that's the reason I did not apply for a transfer from East Kimberley when I had done three years, as I did not like them to think that influence got me transfer.¹⁴⁷

These allegations suggest that police seeking to uphold the rule of law could be moved or dismissed for acting against the interests of the pastoral industry. Perhaps most revealing was the suggestion that pastoralists and stockmen would not be investigated for the killing of Aboriginal people. Certainly, within this culture there was very little incentive for police to enforce the law regarding killings.

In the period 1884 to 1905 we have seen evidence of the interrelationship between police, pastoralists, the WA government and Aboriginal people. The government was directly petitioned by colonists regarding the actions of Aboriginal people on East Kimberley pastoral stations. Consequently, under colonial instruction, the police, as a civil force, became active agents of forceful colonisation. The killing of Aboriginal people by police was given the sanction of the legal system and legitimised as 'policing'. Aboriginal welfare was not a consideration, making a mockery of claims of protection under the law.

As Cathie Clement noted, many pastoral stations in the East Kimberley from 1896 owed their survival largely to the actions of police.¹⁴⁸ These actions involved some of the most widespread 'dispersals' of Aboriginal people in Western Australian history with little public comment from police authorities. The 1897 Police Annual Report, tabled in parliament, made reference to the continued hostility towards settlers by 'West Kimberley Natives' and Pigeon, but made no mention of the East Kimberley other than reporting that 'in other districts the natives have been fairly quiet'.¹⁴⁹ In the 1898 report however, it states that the East Kimberley 'police have been fully occupied in looking after the natives',¹⁵⁰ and by 1899, 'The natives generally have been kept well under control during the year'.¹⁵¹

The distinction between police as agents of law and order and as agents of conquest was irreconcilable, not least because of the apparent acceptance of illegal practices at the senior level of policing. Violence towards Aboriginal people of the East Kimberley was not just a local matter of Aboriginal people being caught between set-

¹⁴⁵. Report of the Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives (Roth Report) 1905.

¹⁴⁶. Sam Copley, part of Copley Bros, bought the Ord River Station from Osmand's estate in 1902. Durack 1983: 114.

¹⁴⁷. 'Report of Constable Thomson Reg No. 586', 13 Feb 1905, Acc 430, File 540/1905.

¹⁴⁸. Clement 1989a: 92.

¹⁴⁹. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Year ending 30 June 1897. WAPPVP. Paper 19: 4.

¹⁵⁰. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Year ending 30 June 1898. WAPPVP Paper 17: 7.

¹⁵¹. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Year ending 30 June 1899. WAPPVP. Paper 31: 7.

tlers and police. In this regard, the evidence subverts assumptions that frontier violence contravened the wishes of administrators in Perth. Killings ('dispersal' and its synonyms) were not only countenanced but appear to have been implicitly sanctioned by the Commissioner of Police, in deference to vested commercial interests.

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A preference for forgetting: some reflections on publishing *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: an Australian history of place*

Mark McKenna

This paper briefly canvasses some of the more casual and everyday (although no less revealing) responses to my recent book, Looking for Blackfellas' Point, a history of south-eastern NSW which is narrated against the backdrop of the politics of Australian history. In light of the Windschuttle saga, I explain how my book was received, critique Windschuttle's concept of history, and offer some thoughts on the way in which we, as historians, might respond. I also argue that the culture of forgetting is deeply embedded in Australian society. To introduce the theme of forgetting, I begin, by way of comparison, recalling a personal experience in Germany.

In October 2002 I visited Berlin. Twenty years ago, between late 1982 and early 1984, I lived in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), otherwise known as East Germany. The Communist regime that ruled the country was, relative to other East European states, economically successful and politically efficient. It infiltrated the daily life of every citizen to a degree unthinkable for most Australians.

Throughout the 1980s, every member of the family I had lived with was under surveillance by the Stasi — East Germany's secret police. Today, although the Stasi files are open and accessible, my close friend in Berlin still refuses to read her file for fear she might discover that her best friends were her informers. This history she can live without. She prefers not to know.

Berlin overflows with memorials — some intended some unintended. The building in which I lived twenty years ago, now renovated, appears little different today from any of the modern apartment buildings in Berlin. Fresh paint and geraniums in every window box. Windows and doors where there were once none. The ubiquitous café and bakery on the street below. The visual memory of the East has been quickly erased.

But next door, rimmed by barbed wire and a 2-metre high steel fence, stands the two-storey building that once housed a preschool and kindergarten. It is as I remember it: the most inappropriate structure imaginable for a preschool but nonetheless consistent with the stereotypical images of the GDR — imposing dark Gothic grey. Because the original owner of the building is still to be found, or perhaps because legal proceedings are still under way, the building remains unrenovated and unoccupied. Gazing

through the barbed wire I had the feeling I was looking directly at the wreckage of the GDR. In a manner typical of Berlin, the built environment suggests a constant struggle between remembering and forgetting.

During my visit I walked along a section of the Berlin Wall that is now retained as a memorial. A plaque on the wall bore the following inscription:

In remembrance of the division of the city
August 13 1961 – November 9 1989
And in memory of the victims of Communist tyranny¹

Certainly there were many victims of the regime, prisoners of conscience, those who died trying to escape, those who suffered recrimination in their workplace or home life because of their political views. Now that the communist regimes of Eastern Europe have crumbled, liberal democracy can remember their history as one in which oppressive regimes ruled an innocent people in waiting for their deliverance to capitalist liberal democracy. As if the people of East Germany had always been capitalists at heart – victims of Communist tyranny. But the East Germans I had known did not see themselves in this light. They believed Communism had failed the socialist ideal.

Just as the past injustices of fascism became one of the primary legitimising forces of communist East Germany (*niemals wieder fascismus*), now the memory of the injustice of communist dictatorship becomes, together with the denunciation of fascism, the legitimising force of a liberal-democratic and reunited Germany. Different politics demand different memories.

The three main themes of this brief German travelogue – the overwhelming desire of human beings in certain circumstances to prefer not to know, to forget and 'move on', the constant struggle in public culture between coexisting narratives of acknowledgement and denial, and the intensely political nature of public remembering – all surface in settler Australia.

In Germany, remembering the past has often entailed revolutionary shifts in the language of history and politics. Superficially at least, in the language of the public culture, the past is constantly being severed from the present, constantly being rewritten and remembered anew. It is precisely revolutionary shifts such as these that Paul Connerton has described in *How societies remember* as creating the material basis for the myth of a historic beginning.²

For Europeans in Australia, 1788 constituted a historic beginning of sorts. From the moment of first contact, a narrative was required that interpreted the invader's presence and legitimacy in relation to an Aboriginal presence. An explanation was required. The

1. The inscription can be seen on the sections of the Wall that remain at Bernauer Strasse and reads:

Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer
In Erinnerung an die Teilung der Stadt
vom 13. August 1961 – 9 November 1989
und zum Gedenken
an die Opfer kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft
Errichtet durch die
Bundesrepublik Deutschland und das Land Berlin

2. Connerton 1989.

future narratives of contact history, diverse as they were, were embedded in the seed of the original narratives of discovery, exploration and settlement – narratives of settler purpose that generally assumed the inferiority and expendability of Aboriginal people and their culture. Of course few settler historical narratives fail to be infiltrated in some way by Aboriginal narratives. Many relied on the retelling of stories originally told by Aboriginal people or at least claimed to rely on the evidence of Aboriginal people. Alternatively they juxtaposed their own presence, however momentarily, against that of a transient and uncivilised indigenous presence. In this sense there was never, and can never be, a settler narrative that is entirely *non-Aboriginal*.

In *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, I have tried to show how narratives of acknowledgement have continued to coexist with narratives of denial, forgetting, and evasion in settler culture. Although traditional settler narratives were not seriously undermined by historians until the 1960s, the notion that the so-called Great Australian Silence has been shattered once and for all in the last three decades of the twentieth century needs considerable qualification.³

Australia is a nation without a historic founding myth such as the French Revolution or the American War of Independence, a fact which probably makes it less able to accept histories that are critical of myths of national progress and achievement. It is a nation that has, to date, resisted the formulation of a contemporary founding myth, a myth of historic beginning based on the acknowledgement and recognition of the history of the frontier, dispossession and Indigenous rights.

Both in the theatre of federal politics and in the area of NSW that I have studied closely, the far south coast, the struggle to assert critical narratives of Australia's past continues. A preference for forgetting on both a local and national scale remains. This is something that has become even clearer to me since *Looking for Blackfellas' Point* was published in September 2002. It was evident both in the intellectual and political climate that prevailed at the time, and the way in which this climate influenced the reaction to the book, particularly in media interviews and on-the-ground in local communities.

It is interesting to reflect on what happens when a book dealing with frontier violence and the culture of forgetting in Australia is published in the context of the so-called 'History Wars' and the nationwide publicity attracted by Keith Windschuttle's *The fabrication of Aboriginal history*.

Which camp are you in?

When journalists interview me about *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, I am usually confronted with a standard leading question: 'Mark, do you see your book belonging to the black armband camp or the white blindfold camp?' I now have a standard reply. It is in neither camp, and the more that the media continue to accept uncritically this absurd binary division, itself a creation of the current crop of conservative pundits that have dominated Australian public debate in the last decade, the more impoverished our sense of history will become.

³ McKenna 2002: 202–7.

Listening to much of the so-called 'history wars' debate I am often frustrated and annoyed. There are many examples of historians writing subtle and sensitive accounts of frontier history that displayed empathy for every historical figure — whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. But these books never seem to be discussed in the media. Instead, much of our public culture prefers tabloid dualities — massacres or humanitarian concern — shame or pride — guilt or denial. This is one reason that I wanted to write history in a way that did not test the past against the language of contemporary politics and in a manner that did not seek to condemn with moral outrage. It is also why I set out to write a history that might be read as a conversation of hope.

A conversation of hope

What do I mean by 'hope'? I mean a history that seeks to understand the importance of the frontier in Australian consciousness, not by focusing purely on violence nor on the denial of violence. But instead by writing a history of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in which religion, the environment, the economy and all aspects of social and cultural history have a place. In other words to connect the frontier to the crucial question of explaining who we are and who we have become as a nation and as a people.

Since the publication of *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, I have had several people on the south coast and in the ACT make remarks along the following lines. 'Mark, have you heard of the new book on Aboriginal history by Wind someone or other, a lot of these stories about how bad our history was aren't true you know. We didn't kill all the Aborigines. You should read the book.'

I should 'read the book' and I have, but equally I'm sure that they haven't read the book. I repeat this anecdote because it raises the question of the levels at which the cultural impact of Keith Windschuttle's *The fabrication of Aboriginal history* is felt most profoundly — at an everyday conversational level.

As Tom Griffiths has written, in small communities 'oral sources are often regarded as the pre-eminent means of access to the local past'.⁴ The intimate and personal delivery of oral history gives it a more authentic and truthful ring. The teller is strangely free of the need for verification, yet somehow, as the custodian of folklore, even more authoritative as a result. Today this is true of narratives which seek to acknowledge frontier violence as well as those which seek to deny or marginalise it.

At the same time, any attempt to detach oral history from other forms of history is problematic. Especially in the period between 1960 and 2000, settler and Indigenous oral history frequently inform 'documentary' history. In turn, historical research ultimately becomes part of settler and Indigenous social memory, just as the stories in my book, for some, will soon become part of the fabric of social memory. But on the south coast of NSW, the world view and political beliefs of different social groups are reinforced more by oral history than scholarly history. 'Alternatives' and 'greenies' commonly repeat tales of colonial violence or massacres. (Some, for example, having heard about my book rather than having read it, have told me that my book has only confirmed what they 'knew all along'.) In a similar fashion, farmers and long-standing

⁴ Griffiths 2003: 141.

residents repeat laconic tales of the pioneer past that validate their own right to belong. Many people do neither, happy to live without history, reflecting on the past as little as possible, preferring not to know, a fact that reminds us that the need to acknowledge history is one historians are often too keen to ascribe to others.

In a manner consistent with the force of oral history in local communities on the south coast and elsewhere in Australia, the impact of Windschuttle's polemic is most in evidence in what is said, heard, and written about the book in the media, on the street and in private conversation. It is not Windschuttle's schoolmasterly checking of historians' footnotes, his assertion of the narrative framework of the rule of law, or even his exposure of mistakes by other scholars which makes his book significant in the discourse of our public culture. Instead it is the allegation that Aboriginal history has been fabricated — that three decades of historical scholarship can be characterised in the grab language of the media — like a trailer for *Sixty Minutes*. To quote Windschuttle, Aboriginal history is all 'smoke and mirrors', an 'exercise in white vanity', 'mythologies designed to create an edifice of black victimhood and white guilt'. And to paraphrase Windschuttle, genocide is a lie, frontier warfare is a lie, Aboriginal societies were primitive, we did the best we could in difficult circumstances. We owe them nothing. We were and are an honourable and decent people. We should be proud of our achievements.⁵

Empathy with the predicament of Aboriginal people in colonial Australia is not feasible for Windschuttle. He writes from and for the white side of the frontier. As he tellingly remarked in a recent interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* — 'you can't really be serious about feeling sympathy for someone who died 200 years ago'. On another occasion, participating in a discussion on ABC Radio National's *Late Night Live* in late 2003, Windschuttle quipped that 'you would have to be mad' to want to write three volumes of Aboriginal history.⁶ Such subject matter is not worthy of a scholar of his stature.

Windschuttle is a denialist, not so much because of his meagre count of the Aboriginal dead, but because he denies Aboriginal people their humanity, denies them ownership of land, denies them political objectives, denies them 'collective interest of any kind', and denies them the ability to feel compassion for others. Moreover, he denies history, as a discipline, the possibility of understanding the frontier except as a juridical presentation of evidence.

These are the condensed historical narratives of denial promulgated by Windschuttle that seep into our communities with barely disguised political intent, creating a polarised and adversarial climate and giving succour and reassurance to those who believe that the dispossession of Aboriginal Australia is a 'history' that can be explained away. Inevitably the weaker elements are overpowered.

⁵ Windschuttle 2002: 1–10, 398–406, 412–16. Also see my review of this book in the *Age*, 25 January 2003 Saturday Extra: 9.

⁶ Cadzow 2003: 24. *Late Night Live*, Radio National Discussion broadcast September 3 & 4 from the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne shortly after the launch of Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark's *History Wars*, 2003.

Having set out to explain the origins of the culture of forgetting in Australia in *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, I have watched with interest as the practice of forgetting, so deeply embedded in Australian society, has been re-enacted with Windschuttle's encouragement.

Australian historians in the early twenty-first century are presented with a political confrontation the resolution of which is imperative — Why can our present not be separated conveniently from our past? — Why should we continually remember the critical narratives of Australian settlement? When responding, perhaps we should do so not simply by emphasising (or denying) frontier violence, but by explaining how the dispossession of Aboriginal people, both historically and in the present day, lies at the heart of Australian consciousness and identity, and is connected to *every* aspect of our past.

History has the potential to be literary in the best sense of the word — open to all aspects of human experience, especially the personal experience of the writer. Open not only to the document, that which is tangible, but to what is intimated, to the silences and absences as well. This openness creates a history rich with possibility. It is precisely this view of history that those such as Windschuttle are eager to ridicule and dismiss. Let me give two examples.

History?

I recently had the privilege of visiting Davidson's whaling station on the southern side of Twofold Bay in NSW, a 'historic site' close to the Eden woodchip mill and a naval munitions depot, now managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and currently under review. There will soon be a new 'Conservation Management and Cultural Tourism Plan' for the site.

Imagine a small timber cottage, a cleared setting close to the water, old fruit trees and garden flowers overlooking a large inlet, where the Towamba River, the same river that flows through my land, finally reaches the sea. A short walk from the cottage, through columns of towering coastal grey box, some hundreds of years old, you reach a high point from which you look across the south side of the bay. The view is dream-like, mythical. You are elevated partly because beneath your feet is a vast midden. The shells crush easily, splintering with every step you take. Only a few beaches away to the east, but fortunately out of view, the mechanical drone of the chip mill and the long arm of the new naval wharf promise to obliterate history — Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

The whaling station site was an Aboriginal special place and Aboriginal heritage long before it became part of the settlers' heritage. Looking through a wide-angle lens, the whaling industry barely registers in the history of human habitation in the area. To appreciate this, you only have to stand on the midden, looking out to the mouth of the Towamba River. Aboriginal historical association with this place runs deep. It touches the ground lightly yet it weighs heavily. Comparatively, the history of the whaling station is slight. But it touches the ground much more obviously, and so to us it is more accessible as history.

Absence

The fragility of our sense of belonging in Australia is borne out by the strangeness and difficulty settlers faced in grafting the European faith in Christianity on colonial soil.

Without the architectural scaffold of faith — the cathedrals and churches that we now find in the cities of Australia — settlers struggled to believe, struggled to find their God in a country where civilisation had yet to gain a foothold. I was reminded of this recently.

One day last September I was at home alone. Looking out towards the front gate, a distance of 70 metres or so, I saw three women in Sunday best walking along the drive towards the house. Outside, the wind tore at everything that dared to stand. The sky filled with leaves and dust. The bush swayed violently. As the women came closer, I could see that one of them was carrying a Bible. They were Jehovah's Witnesses. I opened the door and greeted them. They immediately spoke some comforting words on the current 'war against terror'. All had been predicted. All would end well. All would be forgiven for those who embraced the word of the Lord. One woman began to read aloud from the book. Raising her voice slightly she spoke the words piously — 'And the meek shall inherit the earth'. Behind her the wind bayed. The tops of the gums bent over as if in pain. Her words fell away, stories from another place and time, nostalgic almost, falling now on fallow ground.

I felt then that I understood why many settlers longed for the permanence of the church and its ministers. I also understood why many Bishops in the colony had refused to consecrate wooden churches — because the bush would devour them. Only within walls of stone was faith safe and belief still possible. Without these protective edifices the bush seemed to strip every social ritual and meaning bare — exposing them as little more than social constructs. How much more threatening then is the settler's confrontation with Aboriginal people — a people who were connected intimately with the land, for whom the land was not an enemy but the source of life — the essence of every aspect of their culture?

Responding

I have argued in the conclusion to *Looking for Blackfellas' Point* that the history we remember creates the framework within which our politics takes place. One of the most fundamental tasks for historians is to continue to confront the ever-present need (on both a local and national level) for a history of pieties and comfortable reassurance. But this confrontation involves much more than merely repeating the sorry tale of dispossession. It also involves explaining how and why this selfsame tale can be sensed and interpreted in so many aspects of our social and cultural experience.

To do so is to take our audience beyond the documentary record. Beyond the letter of history, as if it were an article of law to be tested in the courts or placed on media trial, and beyond statistics and tidy calculations. We might then communicate a vision of history that is open to oral sources, to fable and myth and to human emotion and human psychology.

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Australian history – lifting haze or descending fog?

John Maynard

Despite the deep horrors of the Aboriginal experience during the past 216 years, we continue to draw strength and inspiration from the tenacity and courage that our people displayed to survive. Across recent decades we have witnessed the fervour, patriotism and nationalistic flag-waving and bell ringing that coincided with the 1988 Bicentennial, with Reconciliation, the Olympic Games and the Federation celebrations. Any appraisal of the 100 years since Federation involves an examination of the construction of Australian history. History, it is said, is not just about what happened or when it happened, but more importantly why it happened and how it happened. In recognition of that fact, knowledge of history and its importance was for at least three quarters of the 20th century a forbidden zone for Aboriginal Australians. We were not only denied the how and the why but also the what and the when. We were written out of the historical page and efficiently erased from the social landscape.

Regardless of this negative, since the 1970s Australian historians both black and white have attempted to drag this country to a historical moral reality and accountability. From an Aboriginal viewpoint this is not something new, but more of a tradition which we need to regain. My grandfather Frederick Maynard, a pioneer Aboriginal activist, was up on a soapbox at the Domain in Sydney in the mid 1920s speaking out on the rights of Aboriginal people. He took that message to the streets of Newcastle, Kempsey, Lismore, Grafton and many other centres throughout NSW. A decade later he was followed by the likes of Bill Ferguson, Jack Patten, Pearl Gibbs and William Cooper. They took the Aboriginal protest back to the streets with the 1938 Day of Mourning protest. In 1965, inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States led by Dr Martin Luther King, Charlie Perkins instigated the 'Freedom Rides' throughout NSW.

Historically, the Aboriginal political voice was silenced and in the contemporary setting it continues to be. This point is exemplified in the largely white 'History Wars' debate, where the protagonists from within and without the academy lock horns in a media designated arena, which fans the results into flames of its own purpose. The biased coverage by the media reveals either a finely orchestrated campaign aimed directly at undermining revisionist history or has played into the hands of skilled media operators like Keith Windschuttle, Paddy McGuinness, Christopher Pearson and Piers Ackerman.

In a highly perceptive and modern analysis of the Australian historical landscape Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, a committed campaigner for the Aboriginal fight for justice in the 1920s, was scathing in her appraisal of the invaders. It is somewhat depressing that some of our contemporary analysts do not possess the same compassion for the horror of the Australian Aboriginal historical experience now. Many today still fail to consider the ramifications of years of persecution and neglect of Aboriginal people and issues by governments. McKenzie Hatton could well be seen to be answering the arguments of our present right wing intelligentsia and our current Prime Minister, who erroneously conclude that the actions of the past hold no relevance to present day Australians. 'The position of the remnant of the original owners of this land and at present resident in New South Wales is a blot on State and Church alike,' she wrote.

The fact that certain [A]borigines are camped under petrol tins and without certain knowledge of where their next meal is to come from is a reflection on our boastful civilization.

We may claim that we are not responsible for the actions of the original British invaders who violated their homes, shot, poisoned, burned and mutilated the natives; but we cannot claim immunity from the conditions existing at the present time, and what should not be tolerated for one moment longer than it will take to rectify matters.¹

The clarity and wisdom of Hatton's words stand in stark contrast with the Windschuttle thesis that 'there was no genocide ... there was no frontier warfare'.²

Archival observations are important in defending the character of some of our famous humanitarians like Threlkeld, Gribble and GA Robinson from recent ill-founded assaults. Basing his argument around the assassination of the character and motivation of many of these humanitarians, Keith Windschuttle has denounced them as radical weavers of historical fiction and fantasy. He asserts that these individuals were far from genuine, compassionate witnesses, 'simple humanitarians shocked by violence they came across, most were players in a bigger game to define and implement colonial policy on Aborigines'.³ In his scramble to denigrate revisionist history as an invention of politically motivated fabricators, Windschuttle has revealed the lack of time he has spent in Australian archives. He has failed to observe or recognise that right across Australia from the earliest point of settlement until the 1930s many individuals who did display a conscience wrote out against what was happening in this country.

I do not have the time or space here to recognise all of the letters or articles penned, writing out against atrocities committed against the Aboriginal population that I have uncovered. However, it is worth quoting some of these observations. An article published in the *Newcastle Chronicle* in 1869 stated:

We have not only taken possession of the lands of the [A]boriginal tribes of this colony, and driven them from their territories, but we have also kept up unrelenting hostility towards them, as if they were not worthy of being classed with

1. *Daylight* 30 October 1926.

2. *The Australian* 1 September 2003; Windschuttle 2002b: 398-399. See also Windschuttle 2000a, 2002b.

3. Windschuttle 2000d: 6.

human beings, but simply regarded as inferior to some of the lower animals of creation.⁴

Another writer in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1904 had no doubts about what was and had gone on, pointing to the hopelessness of the Aboriginal situation:

Governments ... winked at offences with the exception of a few cases too flagrant to condone. Laws which are really no laws, honoured more in the breach than the observance are ones that Australians have become accustomed to as far as the [A]borigines are concerned ... the 'white man's burden' is necessary accompaniment to conquest and occupation, the framers of the Federal Constitution were guilty of sinful neglect towards the [A]borigines when they left the question as it always has been — each state to have the right to wallop its niggers.⁵

With a sarcastic and biting sting another commentator summed up the situation:

It has been said that we acquired this country not by an act of war, but by peaceful occupation. Yes, without so much as 'by your leave' we introduced ourselves as supermen and overlords; we took possession of the [A]borigines, destroyed their game and drove them from their scant water supplies. As a people they have suffered much injustice at our hands, and they have been powerless to prevent the insults and injuries that we have done to them, for our 'peaceful occupation' has meant many terrible and treacherous deeds and it now seems will finalise in the extinction of a race of the most single hearted and peaceful people on the earth today ... We who have steeped our souls in every known sin, as judged by our laws that we have made.⁶

These were not isolated commentaries or the work of deranged politically motivated individuals, but rather the sentiments of many observers over decades. They were not well known historical figures like Threlkeld, Gribble or Robinson who are unjustly accused by Windschuttle of pushing their own agendas⁷ — in contrast they were ordinary, everyday Australian citizens.

Despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary Windschuttle's analysis concludes that:

Ever since they were formed in 1788, the British colonies in Australia were civilised societies, governed by both morality and laws that forbade the killing of the innocent. The notion that the frontier was a place where white men could kill blacks with impunity ignores the powerful cultural and legal prohibitions on such actions. For a start, most colonists were Christians to whom such actions were abhorrent. But even those whose consciences would not have been troubled knew it was against the law to murder human beings, Aborigines included, and the penalty was death.⁸

Windschuttle is quick to denounce missionaries like Threlkeld and Gribble as biased and lacking in trust yet his own argument hinges on the presumption of binding Christian values.

4. *The Newcastle Chronicle* 13 November 1869.

5. *The Sydney Morning Herald* 15 November 1904.

6. *Daylight* 25 May 1922.

7. Windschuttle 2000d: 6.

8. Windschuttle 2000c: 23.

Another way in which Windschuttle's arguments have twisted the facts is in his statements regarding Aboriginal activism. He asserts that Aboriginal political activism and the push for self determination began in the 1960s and was instigated and led by 'white left-wing agitators'. Windschuttle concludes, in reference to Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait that:

Neither indigenous culture ever developed, on its own, the notion of either the state or the nation, let alone the ideas of autonomy, sovereignty or self-determination. These concepts derive from the European political tradition. They were first applied to indigenous politics by white radicals in the 1960s and were taken up by the then new Aboriginal political elite, most of whom learnt them not at the feet of tribal elders but at university.⁹

But, contrary to this, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) had first instigated the call for 'self-determination' as applied to Aboriginal communities and people as far back as 1925.¹⁰ This all-Aboriginal organisation gained front-page media coverage in the Sydney newspapers of the time, which announced the formation of the Association under the headline 'On Aborigines' Aspirations — First Australians to Help Themselves - Self Determination'.¹¹ Another article stated 'Aborigines in Congress — Self Determination Is Their Aim — To Help A People'.¹² The message was clear and blunt: the new Aboriginal political movement was 'fighting for the preservation of rights for [A]borigines for self determination'.¹³ This evidence quite clearly reveals that the push for Aboriginal self-determination including social, economic and political justice was not instigated and led by white left-wing radicals during the 1960s, but was an Aboriginal initiative and preceded this period by at least four decades.

At the end of the First World War many oppressed groups including blacks and Indigenous peoples around the world gained in confidence and found a political voice. The war 'altered the course of world history in ways that strongly affected black protesters in the United States and Africa'.¹⁴ Many of these groups were fuelled with a surge of national and cultural pride and their political agenda was driven under 'the banner of "self-determination"'.¹⁵ This upsurge in international protest and demand was reflected in Australia with the rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association who gained inspiration from and would mirror many of the demands of these international black groups.¹⁶ Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association was the biggest single outside influence on the platform and directive of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association.¹⁷ Garvey's movement is today recognised as the biggest black movement ever mobilised in the United States and its influence was far reaching.¹⁸ Garvey and his platform 'struck a response chord in the

9. Windschuttle 2000a:14.

10. *The Daily Guardian* 7 May 1925, 24 April 1925.

11. *The Daily Guardian* 24 April 1925.

12. *The Daily Guardian* 7 May 1925.

13. *The Daily Guardian* 7 May 1925.

14. Fredrickson 1995: 137.

15. Fredrickson 1995: 137.

16. Maynard 2003: 91-105.

17. Maynard 2003: 91-105.

18. Garvey 1970: 201.

hearts and minds of black people from an astonishing variety of social and cultural backgrounds throughout the world'.¹⁹ Sadly by the mid 1930s and in the space of only one decade 'Garveyism had disappeared as an effective organised force',²⁰ and the AAPA in Australia followed the Garvey movement into near total erasure from memory. In Australia, as in the United States,²¹ the authorities were very much a part of the erasing process. Despite holding four conferences and mobilising widespread support the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association were simply 'hounded' out of existence by the authorities.²²

Highlighting the present and continued fight of Aboriginal people to control and govern their own affairs and directives, Fred Maynard in a petition to New South Wales Labor premier Jack Lang in 1927 called for the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board to be scrapped completely and replaced by a 'board of management comprised of capable educated [A]boriginals under a chairman to be appointed by the government'.²³ Their stance was firmly cemented in the fight for Aboriginal rights to their land and through that economic viability. Maynard demanded of the government: 'Restore to us that share of our country of which we should never have been deprived'.²⁴ He later declared the 'Australian people are the original owners of the land and have a prior right over all other people in this respect'.²⁵ Maynard and the AAPA challenged and embarrassed the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board on several occasions. In response, the Board informed New South Wales Premier TR Bavin that Fred Maynard's 'voluble manner and illogical views are more likely to disturb the Australian [A]borigines than achieve for them improvement of conditions'.²⁶

Recently Pat Dodson declared:

We as Aboriginal people have got to stop looking at governments to keep giving us dough because that's how they co-opt us, that's how they divide us and that's how they corrupt us ... We have got to stop being co-opted into the system because the more we do that the more we participate in our own demise.²⁷

It is telling that several decades before, the Aboriginal political leaders of the 1920s foresaw and were confronted with the very same insidious forces pitted against them. The AAPA platform was grounded in the collective good of Aboriginal people not the betterment of individuals. The AAPA were well aware of the dangers of enforced welfare dependency and warned that ration handouts and being treated as children by the government held dire consequences:

the AAPA was out to teach the people self respect, and that could only be brought about when they took on the responsibility of their own support and development.²⁸

19. Fredrickson 1995: 152.

20. Sommer 1998: 5.

21. Sommer 1998: 5.

22. Horner 1994: 27, quoting a conversation between Bill Ferguson and Charlie Leon.

23. AAPA petition to Premier, 10/6/1927, Premiers Department Correspondence Files, A27/915; *The Newcastle Morning Herald* 2 July 1927; *The Northern Star* 6 July 1927.

24. AAPA petition to Premier, 10/6/1927, Premiers Department Correspondence Files, A27/915.

25. F Maynard 1927, Premiers Department Correspondence Files, A27/915.

26. Premiers Department Correspondence Files, A27/915.

27. *The Weekend Australian* 6-7 April 2002.

In the contemporary scene, Aboriginal commentator Bill Jonas in his capacity as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner stressed:

Citizenship rights alone are not enough. As a tool of social change they are inadequate and, indeed, entrench the inequality that already exists ... We need to go further with rights. We need to adopt a rights approach that does have the capacity to transform social, economic and political relations in Australia. We need to adopt social policies aimed at achieving equality, rather than assuming it; and we need to give full recognition to indigenous people's inherent rights, in particular native title.²⁹

The echoes of the past reverberate in this quote. AAPA President Fred Maynard, in his inaugural address before 250 Aboriginal people assembled at a conference in Sydney in 1925, said:

We aim at the spiritual, political, industrial and social. We want to work out our own destiny. Our people have not had the courage to stand together in the past, but now we are united, and are determined to work for the preservation for all of those interests which are near and dear to us.³⁰

Recognition of the same call for political, social and economic/industrial reform several decades apart clearly outlines how little progress has been genuinely achieved in that time. Evidence reveals that Aboriginal voices for decades have stated the obvious needs from an Aboriginal perspective but if the past several decades are any indicator that voice will fall on deaf ears. Charlie Perkins in a speech on Australia Day 1984 illuminated the Aboriginal situation of fear and a sense of entrapment: 'We cringe like dogs at the prospect of the 'White backlash'. We pray eternally that the White authority structure will not turn on us and impede what little progress we have made'.³¹

It is crucial that the past efforts of the AAPA and early 20th century Aboriginal political patriots are revealed and recognised. From an Indigenous perspective, revealing the missing jigsaw pieces of our history – for our communities and future generations – remains the crucial motivation. The revelation of our histories can play a central role in exposing the hypocrisy and lack of historical credibility of those opposing their telling. If this country is to attain maturity it must first of all deal with its past, and through that process provide a platform where both black and white can walk together to a shared future of hope, prosperity and equality. Sadly the whole thing has degenerated into a exercise of political and intellectual point-scoring with little thought or compassion for the Aboriginal suffering in the past, or for the scars of that horrific impact that remain deeply embedded in the Aboriginal psyche.

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31. Read 2002: 279.

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Unwitting soldiers: the working life of Matron Hiscocks at the Cootamundra Girls Home

Anna Cole

Preface

Some months ago, I sat watching the television news in London as four young Australian surfers from Perth, the place I grew up, described their experiences of surviving, and helping others survive, the 12 October 2002 bombing of a nightclub in Bali. They reminded me, with a jolt of tender recognition, of my younger brother. Wide laconic accents, faces taut from emotion held in check, inarticulate but palpable love and friendship. I watched, and I thought how much their age and the ordinary things they were saying about their extraordinary acts of bravery resonated with young men from other eras and other wars — these young men on the television, unwitting soldiers in a war that has no boundaries. I continued to watch, with growing discomfort, as the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, came on the television after them and said the bombing ought not to change Australians from the ‘happy, freedom-loving people’ they are. While I relished, with the nostalgia of an Australian overseas, this depiction of my country-people, I was reminded of the stultifying hypocrisy that currently pervades much of Australian political life. Howard presented a naïve national picture of a cheerful band of battlers, a picture that, ironically, continues to exclude the first Australian people who battled against enormous odds to maintain families, communities, and spirit under the pressures of colonialism and systematic government policies to disperse and assimilate.

I, like everyone, was shocked and hurt for my fellow Australians and for the 40 Balinese and the Japanese and Turkish tourists who died in the attack. But equally, I was galvanised to argue that while bombs and the lives they destroy have an undeniable urgency, the furor around them can blind us to the many, less sensationalist ways that lives have been, and continue to be, irrevocably changed and in some cases destroyed. This article, in part, urges us to remember that while fresh grieving began in Australia after the bomb in Bali, and a barrage of new wounds have since been opened in the world, old wounds and deep grieving for other matters still remain to be addressed compassionately and responsibly within Australia. Perhaps in some ways it is easier to be rightly shocked and angry at overseas events than it is to continue to engage with the nuances and complexities of much longer-standing, unresolved and deeply painful domestic issues.

Introduction

That is how I preface my discussion of an aspect of the work of the Aborigines Welfare Board in NSW from 1939–1969. My focus here is the Cootamundra Girls Home, officially called the Cootamundra Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, which was set up by the Aborigines Protection Board in 1911 in the Cootamundra town's old hospital, 380km south-west of Sydney. It was established as a training institution for Aboriginal girls too young to be 'apprenticed' in domestic service. In 1915, as a result of an amendment to the Aborigines Protection Act, the Protection Board – precursor to the Aborigines Welfare Board – was granted the power of acting *in loco parentis* over all children defined as Aboriginal in NSW. In 1918 the Board was granted further powers to remove all children under 18 years from its reserves. The Home, which ran from 1911 to the late 1960s, acted as a place to hold and train young Aboriginal girls before they turned 14 and could be sent as domestic servants to middle-class homes across the state. Hundreds of girls passed through the Cootamundra Home, and it is remembered by many in the *Bringing them home* report published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.¹

I reconstruct here something of the working life of the longest serving matron at the Home, Ella Hiscocks, based on recordings she made with historian Peter Read in 1980,² on the evidence she gave before a Parliamentary Inquiry in 1966, and on interview material and correspondence with ex-'inmates' (as the Board called the Aboriginal girls and boys) of the home.³ Hiscocks, as a functionary of the Board, played her own part in a long-standing and systematic government attempt to break down and assimilate Aboriginal children into white society, a strategy in a wider battle against Aboriginal culture and identity. Yet her own ambivalent and often unhappy memories of her work with the Aborigines Welfare Board are in tension with the historical part she played in implementing a violently racist policy. As her conflicted memories reveal, she was herself something of an unwitting participant of this other war without boundaries that took place on Australian soil and is, to this day, yet to be fully recognised by the government which inherited its legacy. In some part, reconstructing the working life of people such as Ella Hiscocks may assist our understanding of the ideology and circumstances under which ordinary people come to work for, and rationalise, extraordinarily brutal ends.

Working for the Board

*The welfare caused us so much loss and pain. When can we start our grieving? How long are we going to have to grieve? And sometimes I think about how they don't want to spend any money to put things right – but how much did they spend taking the kids away? How much did it cost them? How many of them got jobs and supported their families by taking ours away?*⁴

1. Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families 1997.

2. Thanks to Peter Read for telling me of this interview, conducted in 1980 with Ella Hiscocks. Lodged at Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Listening Room, Canberra [hereafter Read 1980].

3. Some of the interviewees requested anonymity which is reflected in this article.

Ella Hiscocks recalled that, on visiting the Cootamundra Home for Aboriginal Girls in the early 1940s, 'I could have known it by the smell of it'.⁵ She had been to the Girls Home, in the old hospital on the edge of town, once before, escorting a young Aboriginal girl there, and had not been impressed. But when offered the position in 1945 of Matron at the Home for three months by the Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board, Mr Lipscombe, she took the position reluctantly.⁶ She was at the time under threat of a transfer 'way outback' by the Department of Education for which she worked, and was recently widowed and without recourse to her husband's income or to her former role as the wife of a station manager. A little over 20 years later Hiscocks retired, a story in the *Cootamundra Herald* noting that she had become the Home's longest-serving matron.⁷

In the decades that followed World War II, white women such as Hiscocks were increasingly employed as Matrons at the Aborigines Welfare Board's children's institutions around the state of NSW and on Aboriginal stations, as 'lady' welfare officers, as teachers and nurses, and, later, as witnesses and government representatives at a Parliamentary Inquiry in the late 1960s which contributed to the abolition of the Board. Assumptions about white women's 'special responsibility' for socialising Aboriginal women and children, for educating about cleanliness and hygiene, and for 'regulating' their sexuality, interacted closely with post-war racial policy and contributed to women's central and largely forgotten role in the administrative and symbolic world of the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board. As in other colonial contexts, the figure of the white woman in NSW was mobilised in both a real and a symbolic way by the administration to facilitate both so-called racial distinctions and their own efforts to modernise bureaucratic control.⁸

Other than the stories of missionary women, for the most part the story of women's work in the colonial administration has been 'shunted to the sidings of history', to borrow a phrase from Anne McClintock.⁹ The working histories of women employed by the Welfare Board show something of the pressures on these women as they negotiated questions of 'race', 'gender' and 'class' in their daily work. Under the bureaucracy of the Aborigines Welfare Board, the management and control of Aboriginal girls and women, specifically the control and surveillance of their domestic arrangements, was an integral part of the 'new standardised practices' of administration that they sought to enact.¹⁰ The increasing standardisation of women's employment by the Board was endorsed by the administration at a time when a cheap but expanded staff was needed to enact the increased attempts at surveillance stipulated in the Public Service Board report of 1939 that had led to the reformation of the old Aborigines Protection Board. Thus assumptions about the role that white women could play in 'training' for assimilation by monitoring the domestic sphere of Aborigi-

4. Link-up & Wilson 1997: 12.

5. Read 1980.

6. Aboriginal Welfare Board Minutes (AWBM), 25/4/1945: 4/8544.

7. *Cootamundra Herald*, 22 March 1967: 1.

8. For comparative international material see eg Mager 1999; McClintock 1995; Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992; Callaway 1987; Knapman 1986; Ware 1992; Stoler 1995.

9. McClintock 1995: 258.

10. Goodall 1995: 75-101; Bartlett 1999: 10-37.

nal lives interacted with an administrative stress on increased surveillance at a time of budgetary cut-backs.

These working women did not, so far as I know, leave collections of letters or journals for historians, as many of their financially independent, middle-class reformist contemporaries did. Instead their days were filled with attempts to 'fight dirt', order domestic environments, 'train' and educate Aboriginal women and children, and in some instances openly criticise the Board's authority. These women's historical traces reveal the different ways ideas about the mission of white femininity intersected with racial administration and the government's efforts to order the domestic worlds of Aboriginal families and communities.¹¹

Matron-in-charge

The job of Matron-in-charge at the Board's Cootamundra Girls Home was one of the significant roles played by a non-Aboriginal women working for the administration. At the end of her career Ella Hiscocks was awarded a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in recognition of her 'work among Aboriginal children'.¹² Ex-inmates of the Cootamundra Girls' Home remember her work among Aboriginal children a little differently.¹³ Many have mixed memories of Hiscocks, who acted partly as a 'surrogate mother' to hundreds of Aboriginal girls removed from their parents. During her time as Matron of the Cootamundra Home, Ella Hiscocks developed a substitute mother/daughter relationship with one Aboriginal ward in particular, a girl who had been removed from her family and placed in the home when only a few months old.¹⁴ A significant memory retained by the Aboriginal girl, now a grown woman, is that from about the age of three, before she went to bed each night, the Matron would sit with her and make her pull her nose, 'stroke my nose down the side saying it would make it straight'.¹⁵

This intimate example is a clue to the ways the rationale that led to the establishment of Homes such as Cootamundra infused the daily actions and interactions of the Board's employees. Individuals working for the administration may have believed themselves to be 'humane' in their relationships to Aboriginal wards, yet in their day to day work, and in their attitudes towards Aboriginality, they contributed to a daily undermining of the self-perception and identity of the children and young adults in their care. More overtly, memories of Hiscocks' humanity and devotion to the girls at the Home are matched with accounts of emotional abuse and the unremitting repression and deprivation experienced under her strict rule.¹⁶ One woman told how, as an adult, she had finally 'forgiven Matron' who had 'held her spirit captive all her adult life'.¹⁷ She recalls visiting her in a nursing home in Cootamundra in 1998, where Ella

11. This article is drawn from a longer chapter in Cole 2000 that draws on the recorded memories of Ella Hiscocks, Aboriginal Welfare Board Station Reports and Returns from around NSW, and the critical correspondence of two school teachers at the Kinchela Home for Aboriginal boys. For further work in this field see Cole, Haskins, Paisley (under review).

12. *Cootamundra Herald* 1967: 1.

13. Name withheld, interview by author 1998: tape 2; Jopson, *Sydney Morning Herald* Features, May 19 1998: 13; Hankins 1982; Link-up & Wilson 1997.

14. *Cootamundra Herald*, 22 March 1967: 1.

15. Hankins 1982: 4.5.5.

16. Hankins 1982: 4.4.1–4.4.8.

Hiscocks, in a state of advanced senile dementia, resided. 'She lies there now looking very undignified' recalled the ex-ward of the state with some relief.¹⁸

Ella Hiscocks was born in Pilliga, north-west NSW, in 1901, and began her career at the age of 21 as the teacher in charge of the segregated school at the Pilliga Aboriginal Reserve. She lived alone in town and rode out on a bicycle to the Aboriginal reserve each day. Her work at Pilliga as a young, unmarried woman gave her a lasting impression of conditions experienced on the Aborigines Protection Board reserves during the 1920s. Her memories of the people she met and worked with at that time recall the impoverishment and ill-health experienced by many people resident on Board reserves and stations. She remembered that many of the Aboriginal people at the reserve were 'half-starved'. These first-hand impressions of conditions on Aboriginal reserves contributed in future years to her ambivalent relationship with the administration during the course of her career with the Board.

From the Pilliga reserve school, Hiscocks was again put in charge of an Aboriginal school, near Lismore, NSW. She married soon after and her husband, a farmer's son with little prior involvement with Aboriginal people and no formal training in book-keeping, or indeed anything, became manager of an Aboriginal station south of Quirindi, NSW.¹⁹ The employment of men like Hiscocks' husband reflected the idea held by the Aborigines Protection and Welfare Boards that all white people apparently possessed racialised skills for living which they could pass on to Aboriginal people. At the same time as her husband became manager, Ella Hiscocks became the Matron of the Aboriginal station, a position open to her exclusively because of her status as wife of the manager. From Quirindi, the Board moved the husband and wife team to Cumeragunja where they stayed for three years. After the premature death of her husband Hiscocks was forced to return to work as a teacher at the Aboriginal school in Lismore. Over the next few years she taught at Aboriginal segregated schools in Lismore, Tuncester, Yass, and Coraki.²⁰ It was in 1945 that Alfred Lipscombe, Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board, asked Hiscocks to fill in at the Cootamundra Girls' Home for an initial three months.²¹

Working for the Board

In an interview recorded by Peter Read after her retirement, Ella Hiscocks stressed her disagreements and frustrations with the Sydney-based Aborigines Welfare Board and the miserable economic conditions she worked under in the 1940s through to the 1960s.²² The long hours she worked, her heavy workload, the isolated geographic location of the Home, and the slow bureaucratic procedures associated with the centralised Welfare Board were the focus of her recollections in the early 1980s of her working life.²³ At Cootamundra, Hiscocks was responsible for an average of 40 girls at any one time, ranging in age from as young as a few months to 16 years old.²⁴ The Home itself,

17. Name withheld, interview by author 1998: 2.

18. Name withheld, interview by author 1998: 2.

19. Aborigines Welfare Board Station Reports and Returns, (AWB SR & R) 1947: 4/10747.4; Read 1980.

20. State School Records SR 10/6626, 110/7912, 10/8262.2, 10/5528.

21. Read 1980; AWBM 16 February 1945: 4/8544.

22. Read 1980.

23. Read 1980.

in the old town hospital, engendered well-remembered feelings of isolation.²⁵ The schoolroom where Hiscocks taught each day had been the isolation ward of the hospital and she remembered with dismay: 'it was terrible ... it was a terrible job to try and work it on your own'.²⁶ Aboriginal women incarcerated in the institution as young girls also recall the associations there between the isolation of the old hospital, sickness and death.²⁷ One of the most feared punishments was being locked alone in what was believed to have been the hospital morgue.²⁸ Several women recall being traumatised as girls by long hours spent locked in that section of the building as punishment by Hiscocks and other staff members.²⁹

As well as the many tasks required in the day to day running of the institution, Hiscocks remembered her broader role in the maintenance of each girl's 'moral welfare' which, she said, required vigilance and a ceaseless work roster.³⁰ She remembered herself as alone in her special responsibilities, stressing that while all the other staff would only work their set hours she was on call 'night and day'.³¹ In her descriptions of the exhausting and ceaseless nature of her work, Hiscocks presents herself as a victim of the Board's limited budget and their insistence on time-consuming bureaucratic processes. She remembered in particular the way the bureaucratic processes of the Board interacted with the mainstream, 'white' welfare administration to frustrate her efforts to improve life for the Aboriginal girls at the Home. The supply of both food and clothing at the Girls' Home came from mainstream state welfare agencies.³² Food was ordered each week from a central government store, and Hiscocks had to submit exact quotes each week for each individual.³³ Having to order each item and wait for delivery from a central government store over-complicated the process of buying food, a process which could, if Matron Hiscocks had been entrusted by the Board with her own account, have been bought more simply in the nearby town of Cootamundra. Clothing for the Home was supplied by the Prisons Department. As well as being of poor quality it was often inappropriate for the young girls living at the Cootamundra institution. Shoes, for example, were frequently too big, and Hiscocks recalls that on more than one occasion they 'didn't match up'.³⁴ Hiscocks remembers being hamstrung by a central bureaucracy even in organising sport and recreation for the girls:

24. AWB SR&R, Cootamundra: 4/10745.2, see also Link-Up & Wilson 1997; Hankins 1982.

25. Read 1980.

26. Read 1980.

27. Name withheld, interview with author tape 2 1998: 2; Jopson *SMH* Features, May 19 1998: 13; Hankins 1982; Link-up & Wilson 1997.

28. A small building, away from the main building was believed by some girls held at the institution to be the hospital's old morgue. Betty Ellis, interview with author, 12 May 2003; see also Hankins 1982: 4.4.5

29. Names withheld, interview with author 1997, 1998. Betty Ellis, interview with author, 12 May 2003.

30. Read 1980.

31. Read 1980.

32. AWB SR&R, Cootamundra, Monthly Returns 1947-1948: 4/10745.2

33. AWB SR&R, Cootamundra, Monthly Returns, 1947-1948: 4/10745.2.

34. Read 1980.

I'll tell you something else that made me mad ... the children liked sport and I had to send down to the Board for permission to take them anywhere ... They'd take a long time to get back ... sometimes the children would miss out because of it.³⁵

Working in isolation from the Sydney-based Board, Hiscocks formed other allegiances outside it. The Matron recalled turning to authority figures in the local community when seeking to improve the clothing ration. She remembers prevailing, unsuccessfully, on the local town Doctor to get him to add his weight to her complaints to the Board about the poor quality of clothing issued to the girls at the Home.³⁶ Hiscocks also received support from local branches of professional and religious women's clubs during her employment at the Home. In the article published in the *Cootamundra Herald* on the day of her retirement, Hiscocks praised the Cootamundra section of the Business and Professional Women's Association, the Country Women's Association and the Church of England's Women's Guild.³⁷ Of these organisations Hiscocks said, 'I only had to mention something I wanted, and one or more organisation would respond'.³⁸ Hiscocks' support from local women's organisations indicates the awareness and endorsement of the work of the Cootamundra Girls' Home among non-Aboriginal women in the rural community, a complicated historical fact that is often not remembered now.

Clean and moral

Keep your bodies and minds clean, for by doing so you will help to form a wholesome personality. Assume the dignity and carriage, which are your heritage and your right.

Mrs Irene 'Inspector' English,
Aborigines Welfare Board, 1955.³⁹

Amidst Matron Hiscocks' complaints about the poverty of the administration and her ceaseless workload, two common themes emerge from her memories highlighting the interaction of racial and gendered discourse. Unsurprisingly, Hiscocks' memories of the Home revolve around two key and inter-related tropes: 'cleanliness' and 'morality'. Frequent references to the morality of 'cleanliness' and the possibility of Aboriginal girls 'going bad' or 'getting into trouble with the opposite sex' form a central refrain in Matron Hiscocks' memories.⁴⁰ From her first impressions – that she would have 'known it by the smell of it' – Hiscocks ordered her memories of her work at the Home through the prism of cleanliness. During her time there she conducted a concerted campaign to get the Aboriginal girls from the Home accepted at the local 'white' state school. She recalled lobbying the Principal of the local High School, the local Parents and Citizens group and the Department of Education's school inspector until she was successful in convincing the school to take the fifth and sixth form girls, and eventually girls of all ages in 1950.⁴¹ One of her most persistent and persuasive arguments for why

35. Read 1980.

36. Read 1980; see AWB Minutes 1949, item 4, Matron's request, 4/8545.

37. Anon, *Cootamundra Herald*, 22 March 1967: 1.

38. Anon, *Cootamundra Herald*, 22 March 1967: 1.

39. English 1955: 2.

40. Read 1980; Hiscocks at NSW Joint Parliamentary Inquiry upon Aborigines Welfare 1967: 508–523.

the school should take the girls from her Home, said Hiscocks, was that 'her girls' were as 'clean as local white girls'. She recalled that she finally got the girls accepted at the school after she had asked the school inspector: 'why the students can't attend the local school? They're *cleaner* than a lot of the white girls'⁴² (emphasis added).

In framing her argument to the school inspector in these terms, Hiscocks was engaging in what anthropologist Mary Douglas describes as a 'dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status' in which ideas about cleanliness, dirt and pollution are crucial.⁴³ Wherever ideas of dirt are prominent, argues Douglas, their analysis discloses a play upon 'profound themes': reflection on dirt involves, amongst other things, reflection on the relation of 'order to disorder ... and form to formlessness'.⁴⁴ In Douglas' well-known summation, dirt is 'matter out of place'.⁴⁵ Such a formulation implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order:

Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.⁴⁶

As an agent of the state, working at the 'boundary line' between black and white children, Matron Hiscocks reflected a wider cultural system of classification. Her constant fight against dust and dirt represented for Hiscocks an ideological struggle that is inseparable, in her account, from her real struggle against the deprivation and endless work she was required to do in the Home. The Matron strove hard to participate in the constant cleaning and constant re-ordering of the identities of the wards of the state, who had been entrusted to her surveillance and supervision. In chasing dirt, in constantly seeking to tidy, the Matron was not simply governed by an anxiety to purify, but was attempting to positively re-order her environment — and the girl's identity — and seeking to make both conform to an idealised notion of white female domesticity, an ideal promoted by the government and its agencies as the key to the 'successful assimilation' of Aboriginal people.

The Matron's memories and associations with cleanliness and dirt are revealing of the system or order of beliefs that structured the processes at the core of the assimilationist policies and practices enacted haphazardly, but with brutal force, by the Aborigines Welfare Board.⁴⁷ The Matron's exhausting and futile efforts to keep the young Aboriginal girls at Cootamundra clean and free from dirt coincided with a bureaucratic system that identified black as dirty and in need of expunging and assimilating into a 'clean' white culture and identity. The Matron's particular and individualised role in the production and demarcation of boundaries between white and black, clean and dirty, thus coincided both with a broader assimilationist project and with restrictive and limiting ideas about white femininity.

⁴¹. Read 1980; AWBM, 13 April 1948: 4/8545; AWBM, 25 April 1949: 4/8545. In later years the school began taking girls of all ages from the institution.

⁴². Read 1980.

⁴³. Douglas 2002: 3.

⁴⁴. Douglas 2002: 44.

⁴⁵. Douglas 2002: 3.

⁴⁶. Douglas 2002: 35.

⁴⁷. See Goodall 1995: 75–101, also Bartlett 1999: 10–37. For a particularly powerful and disturbing account of the impact of such policy see Edwards 1982: 4–8.

Cleaning was women's work and in the context of the racialised discourse about the 'deprivation' and 'filth' of Aboriginality, Matron Hiscocks' work was never done. Anything that increased the level of 'dirt' also increased the workload of the Matron, whose job it was to 'clean' the Aboriginal girls to make them acceptable to white society. She remembered angrily that the Board supplied the Home with an old covered truck, 'like they used in the war' to get the girls to school each morning.⁴⁸ Every morning on the way to school the dust thrown up on the children in the back of the open truck threatened Matron's tireless efforts to keep the children clean. When Peter Read interviewed her in 1980 he suggested to her that the girls must have been cold on the back of the open truck in winter. Matron Hiscocks was angry at this line of questioning and cut short his comment, saying, 'you know what the dust is like. By the time they got down to school their navy blue tunics would be grey'.⁴⁹ Questioning her about the girl's experience of the cold seemed to disturb Matron Hiscocks' reminiscences of her own hard work and of her victimisation at the hands of the inefficient Aborigines Welfare Board. Her response to Read's question by alluding to the dust shows something of the way that, in Douglas' words, 'uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained'.⁵⁰ The 'pattern' in this instance was Hiscocks' belief that the 'polluting' factors which interrupted the Board's — and her own — best efforts to uplift the girls was the random element of dust or dirt. Yet, at the same time as Matron was working ceaselessly to 'civilise' and whiten the girls in her care, stroking their Aboriginal noses to turn them straight, working endlessly to ensure their cleanliness, these same girls were driven into town on the open back of the truck, like cattle, like 'blacks'.

Direct criticism of Board's members or its policy was not a part of the Matron's discourse. The focus of her complaints about the administration was directed at a generalised sense of 'over-work', or random dust. Hiscocks fondly remembered some of the men working for the Board during the 22 years she worked as Matron of the Cootamundra Home. Inspector Donaldson, loathed and feared among Aboriginal people throughout NSW for his tactics of child abduction,⁵¹ was, in her estimation, 'a fine old gentleman ... [who] did very good work amongst them'. (Hiscocks' husband had applied for the job of Inspector held by Donaldson, but had died before he could begin).⁵² Hiscocks' loyalty and evident fondness of the men working for the Board sits in an ambivalent relationship to the anger and frustration evident in her memories of the ceaseless workload, the slowness of the central bureaucracy to support her basic needs such as food and clothing, her lack of financial autonomy, and her persistent sense of isolation from the administration.

Throwing her to the dogs

As with her constant battle against 'dirt', the pressures of Hiscocks' work frustrated her efforts to maintain strict supervision over the 'moral welfare' and sexual experiences of her young charges. As the only employee at the Home who could drive, one of her

48. Read 1980.

49. Read 1980.

50. Douglas 2002: 40.

51. Horner 1994: 7, 18 and Hankins 1982: 2.1.13.

52. Hankins 1982: 2.1.13.

duties was to travel out to country stations to meet prospective employers of young domestic service 'apprentices' when they reached the age of fifteen.⁵³ Due to work pressures at the Home, she remembered that she had to abandon the practice of interviewing prospective employers before taking the young 'apprentice' to work for them: 'In the end I'd take the girl out with me and if everything was in order I'd leave her there'.⁵⁴ She remembered only one occasion where she decided against leaving the young woman. Asked if she ever got the feeling the young apprentices were over-worked or abused in some way she replied flatly, 'No'. Ex-apprentices sent out to work as domestic servants recall that often the Matron was the only contact they had with someone outside the household they worked in whom they could tell of the physical and often sexual abuse they experienced in these positions.⁵⁵ As with her battle against 'dirt', the pressures of Hiscocks' work within an inefficient bureaucracy frustrated the Matron in her efforts to maintain strict supervision over the sexual experiences and 'moral welfare' of her charges.

While Hiscocks' workload militated against her enforcing the high 'moral standards' she was expected to oversee, she expressed a clear interest in the role she sought to play in 'reforming the girls' and ironically saw the removal of young Aboriginal girls from sexual threat as one of the main reasons they were taken from their Aboriginal communities.⁵⁶ She recalled in detail the time she was instructed to accompany a young woman to a remote Aboriginal station, where she was to be left in punishment for repeatedly running away from domestic service positions. Hiscocks remembered her own and the young woman's distress: the apprentice 'cried all night' and the Matron recalled that she 'cried too'.⁵⁷ By morning, Hiscocks, in a rare moment of open disobedience, decided against the Board's instructions, and refused to leave the young woman at the Aboriginal station. In explaining her actions she said: 'I couldn't have left her ... I would have felt like I was throwing her to the dogs. She was just of that age and all the boys would have been after her'.⁵⁸

Ex-apprentices have since told how being returned to an Aboriginal station, although disorienting and frightening after years away, could provide a much needed source of community after the isolation and exploitation of domestic service.⁵⁹ In this instance, Hiscocks sent the young woman to work as a domestic servant for a friend of hers in the country. Matron's perception of a predatory Aboriginal male sexuality on Aboriginal stations perhaps shows us something of her merged identity with the young Aboriginal children and women in her charge. It also, of course, represented a typical racist depiction of Aboriginal men. Yet Hiscocks' fears about Aboriginal stations and reserves, expressed in sexual terms, are contradicted by her own experience of working on these stations before she was married:

53. Read 1980.

54. Read 1980.

55. Name withheld, telephone interview with author 2002; Hankins 1982; Link-up & Wilson, 1997; Tucker 1983.

56. Read 1980.

57. Read 1980.

58. Read 1980.

59. Haskins 1998.

Very seldom ... you'd come across a girl who'd get in trouble on the settlement and have an infant or anything like that you know. The law amongst them was very strict on that count.⁶⁰

Hiscocks appeared to have had no understanding of the gendered dimension of the Government's child removal policy or of the long-term cultural and social purpose furthered by the Board in removing girls from their communities. After 21 years at the Cootamundra Girls Home she stated confusingly: 'I think it is very much better for the children to be left with their parents and as far as I know that has always been the board's policy to make the parents stand up and live up to it and do what they should do, and leave the child'.⁶¹ While official statements of assimilation policy stated in Board minutes and reports overtly stressed the importance of training Aboriginal women to 'merge' with whites, Hiscocks, contradicting her expressed fears about Aboriginal male sexuality, remarked: 'The pity is few of them marry the dark men. You know the full bloods are very upstanding. I know only one girl who married a dark man, he was a Kinchela boy'.⁶²

Hiscocks relied heavily on nostalgic recollections of the 'progress' made by 'her' girls and on ambivalent but largely negative attitudes towards Aboriginal mothering to justify the separation of Aboriginal girls from their mothers. For example, she could express confusion and grudging acknowledgement of the importance of their Aboriginal mothers to 'her' girls:

One girl, she became a trained nurse ... her mother came, she was a terrible woman, but she came to the Home and that girl saw her coming up the path and ran towards her and threw her arms around her and made such a fuss of her ... she's still a mother you see ... but that girl, afterwards she worked with the Flying Doctors as a nurse for a long while.⁶³

In this recollection the strong, loving emotions felt by the daughter for the 'terrible woman' were not as important as her success and individual progress as a nurse with the Flying Doctors. In another instance, reflecting on the role of the Board in removing children from Aboriginal stations, Hiscocks remarked: 'the parents were never asked. The police would come and take the girls ... it was a terrible thing to have done'.⁶⁴ The confusion between her own experience working in Aboriginal communities and the pervasive ideology which emphasised Aboriginal women's worthlessness as mothers, the dangers of 'moral degradation', and predatory nature of Aboriginal male sexuality form a contradictory mix in the Matron's memories. Describing her time as a teacher on Aboriginal reserves, she remarked:

[T]hat's one thing with a[n Aboriginal] settlement, you never saw any of them being thrashed. The only unkindness was there was no food and that wasn't their fault. There was no food ... a lot of malnutrition. You were restricted you couldn't give the people rations except the old people unless they were working on the settlement; there was no money around anywhere those days.⁶⁵

60. Read 1980.

61. Hiscocks 1966: 511.

62. Read 1980.

63. Read 1980.

64. Read 1980.

65. Read 1980.

Her lived experience of Aboriginal communities was mixed but continually contradicted by a system of belief in which Aboriginality was an inferior identity and whiteness the goal and desire. Asked again about the causes of malnutrition amongst the Aboriginal people she worked with, Hiscocks replied it was because 'they only thought of today'. So despite her own experiences of life on Aboriginal reserves, which she contrasted favourably with institutional life, she concluded ambivalently in the late 1960s:

I do not think that any institution can equal the natural home life. But these children are not getting a natural home life. Because dark people naturally live unto the day they do not look after tomorrow even, and very often they would be hungry and they would not get a natural life in that respect. I think they are very much better off in an institution than they would be in some of their home lives.⁶⁶

These contradictory statements are evocative of a consciousness caught between a rationalisation for the role she played in the separation of children from their families and a different understanding of Aboriginal communities gained from her years in the field. She was part of a system which believed Aboriginality itself was an aberrant condition to be replaced with an 'assimilated' identity suitable for white society, yet at times her own emotional connection to the 'girls' in her care, and her previous experience as a single woman working on Aboriginal reserves, conflicted with her official role. Hiscocks' ambivalent memories of her time at the Home and the contemporary testimony recorded during a late 1960s government Committee reflect and enact the particular shifting intersections between 'race', 'class' and 'gender'.⁶⁷

Ending up in bother

Towards the end of her long career at the Cootamundra Girls Home, Hiscocks came before a Parliamentary inquiry 'upon Aborigines Welfare' that toured NSW in 1966.⁶⁸ The theme of young Aboriginal women's sexuality was persistent in both the questions and answers exchanged between Hiscocks and the parliamentary representatives. Their exchange is evidence of the way that, as recent post-colonial writing has argued, sexual control is fundamental to the way racial policies are secured and colonial projects carried out. The committee sought an efficient, 'modern', and mechanistic way of dealing with what appeared to them to be a self-evident 'problem': the sexuality of single Aboriginal women. As one committee member explained the problem:

These girls are going to Sydney, finding a job and ending up in bother ... Where is this thing to be tackled? What machinery have we set up to give these girls guidance?

They asked Hiscocks to comment on what happened to the girls when they left the Cootamundra Home. Hiscocks answered that 'all the girls' ended up pregnant within a short time after leaving the Home: 'The same thing happens to the whole lot of them, they go to Sydney and in no time they are in trouble, as I told you, and the baby arrives.' When questioned if the fathers are 'white boys', Hiscocks replied: 'mostly the

⁶⁶. Read 1980.

⁶⁷. There is a rich literature on the ambivalence of memory and oral testimony. See eg Thomson et al 1994: 33–43; Stuart 1994: 55–63. A useful Australian collection is Donaldson et al 1992.

⁶⁸. The Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines Welfare, Parts 1 & 11 1967, Hiscocks' testimony.

whites, a terrible lot of the sailors I think. They meet every boat that comes in pretty well'. In Hiscocks' explanation it was the lecherousness of men that created the circumstances under which the young women got pregnant: 'you only have to get on a train, and a few men will get in the train and they will never let up on them if you are not with them ... they are only prey for the men there'.⁶⁹ In the ensuing questions and answers, members of the Parliamentary inquiry concluded that the number of girls 'getting into bother' was 'tied up with poor intellectual ability and low reasoning ability' and that 'we have found a pattern that the coloured people are not immoral but amoral'.⁷⁰ Dismissing her own earlier opinion that white men were culpable for much of the 'bother' the girls got themselves in, Hiscocks reverted to a culturally-essentialist explanation of the young women's high pregnancy rates concluding that 'amongst aborigines themselves there is no courtship ... I do not think it worries them at all'.⁷¹

Stark contrasts between Hiscocks' recorded testimony before the government Committee in 1966 and her later interview with Read underline both the ambiguities and subjectivity of memory and reflect her conflicted and marginal position within the administration. In 1966, in front of a parliamentary Committee that would eventually recommend the end of the Aborigines Welfare Board, Hiscocks is quizzed about whether there is any 'conflict or over-control' from the Board.⁷² In light of her repeated complaints about bureaucratic control and inefficiency – a theme in her later interview – her unequivocal answer is surprising:

No. I have never had any worry in any shape or form all the time I have been with the board. I have always pulled with them and they have pulled with me. I have never asked for anything I could not get.

This statement reflects Matron's loyalty to the Board and also her deep dependency on it for her income and, after 21 years of service with them, for her sense of identity and meaning. Only much later, from the vantage point of 20 years and retired from the Board, could Hiscocks recall her deep frustration with the administration. The influence of the interviewer himself, as in every oral history interview, must be taken into account here, and the changed political context in which his questions were posed must equally be relevant. But Hiscocks' ambiguous memories also reflect her position in the administration, her long experience with Aboriginal people, and her limited sympathy with them, as a teacher and a single woman, as a station matron and a married woman and later as a widow. As the longest-serving Matron at Cootamundra Home her experiences were in constant conflict with her role as a functionary of the Board and this is reflected in her later interview.

Matron Hiscocks is a contradictory and complex character and her conflicting testimony is revealing, I think, of the impossibility of seeking to act humanely while supporting the systematic denial of Aboriginal culture and identity that is inherent in the policy of assimilation. Hiscocks embodied some of the most abiding contradictions in the 'colonial' administration's economy of white female labour. That is, she was protected by racial privilege but not by economic security. She was 'inferior' in the gender

⁶⁹. The Joint Committee 1967, Hiscocks' testimony: 512–13.

⁷⁰. The Joint Committee 1967, Hiscocks' testimony: 512.

⁷¹. The Joint Committee 1967, Hiscocks' testimony: 512.

⁷². The Joint Committee 1967, Hiscocks' testimony: 511.

and class hierarchy of mainstream white culture but seen as 'superior' in the racial hierarchy. She lodged among 'black girls', on their way to a life of under-paid and often unpaid domestic service⁷³, but she was not one of them. The isolation experienced by the Matron, the slowness with which central office responded to her requests, and the indignities of being made to constantly rely on outside state agencies make her in many ways an abject figure. Marginal, in terms of power to control her working life and conditions, but necessary to the colonial state, Hiscocks is a representative of the boundaries and limits of women's roles in the domestication of colonisation.⁷⁴ As a final, ironic and complex addendum, the Aboriginal 'daughter' she adopted at the Home as a baby, and towards whom she had shown some of her most human affection, became as an adult one of the first courageous Aboriginal spokespeople to expose and damn the systematic policy of Aboriginal child removal and the use of institutions such as Cootamundra in the state-sanctioned destruction of Aboriginal families and wider communities.

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⁷³. The wages paid to apprenticed Aboriginal domestics were set by the Board, with the majority of the weekly wage paid into a trust account and only a small amount of 'pocket money' given to the apprentice. The set wage was small relative to standard wages for domestic servants. Most girls considered the pocket money they received too small to buy anything decent. Many girls never received any pocket money from their employers. Evidence suggests that large numbers of Aboriginal apprentices, whose wages were paid into Protection and Welfare Board trust accounts never received those wages upon the completion of their apprenticeships. See Walden 1995: 1–7; Tucker 1983: 116; Horner 1983: 7–17; Shea 1983.

⁷⁴. On similarities with the role of the white governess in South African colonies, see McClintock 1995: 258–300.

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‘We do not want one who is too old’: Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland

Shirleene Robinson

In 1997, the *Bringing them home* report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission explored the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families in the 19th and 20th centuries.¹ It highlighted the particular interest that European officials had in Aboriginal children, as opposed to Aboriginal adults, and the way that many of these removed children were sent out from missions to perform labour for Europeans. This article further explores the way that Europeans made use of Aboriginal child workers in the 19th and 20th centuries by focusing on the field of domestic service.

Introduction

Domestic service was the principal field of employment for Aboriginal females in Queensland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This type of labour was physically laborious, emotionally exhausting, and low-paying. Historians have explored the working lives of Aboriginal domestic servants in some detail and have revealed that these workers were oppressed by the dual categories of race and gender.² A substantial number of Aboriginal workers employed in this field were children. Previous researchers have not considered the impact that this demanding service had on these physically and emotionally immature workers. This article attempts to redress the balance by investigating the way that youth impacted on the experiences of Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland.³

Aboriginal children were employed as domestic servants across Australia in this period. This article will focus on Queensland due to both constraints of space and the

1. National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) 1997.

2. The situation in Queensland has been explored in the following: Huggins 1987–1988; Huggins 1995 and Evans and Scott 1996. For other Australian regions see McGrath 1978; Reynolds 1990: 165–190; Hodson 1993; Sabbioni 1993; Walden 1995; and Haskins 2001. The more general position of Aboriginal children in Queensland is explored in Kidd 1997.

3. For a broader consideration of the way that the physical and emotional immaturity of Aboriginal children influenced their working experiences and related legal aspects, see Robinson 2002. Hetherington 2002 has also explored the experiences of Aboriginal child workers in WA in the 19th century.

different nuances of policy in individual states. Up to one-third of Aboriginal domestic workers in Queensland were aged less than 18 years and thus can be classified as children. Almost all of these young people were over-worked, underpaid, not given any education, and not provided with the basic necessities of life. Many of these workers suffered long-term psychological damage after their European employers denied them access to their families and traditional cultures. Furthermore, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of these young workers was commonplace. Despite the obvious power imbalance between adult European employers and Aboriginal child workers, young Aboriginal domestic servants used a variety of creative mechanisms to resist European domination. This article considers these strategies of resistance and their ultimate success or failure. Finally, it concludes that Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants in Queensland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were amongst the most vulnerable workers in the state's history.

Although it is not the intention of this article to compare the experiences of Aboriginal and European child workers in colonial Queensland, it is important to recognise that Aboriginal child workers were subject to greater oppression than their European counterparts because of their dual categorisation as both Aboriginal people and children.⁴ Both Aboriginal and European child workers occupied a vulnerable position in Queensland society due to their youth: in any relationship between children and adults, the adult controls the power-balance. Aboriginal children, however, were further subjugated because they were members of a dispossessed Indigenous community. The distress of working European children is not to be underplayed, but it is crucial to acknowledge that there were more official mechanisms in place to deal with their abuse.

Definitions and demographic observations

The demographic composition of the Aboriginal domestic service workforce in 19th and 20th century Queensland reflects broader societal understandings of the work of men and women in the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Domestic service was an occupation highly segregated by gender, with the great bulk of these workers being female.⁵ The composition of the Aboriginal workforce reflects this gender divide. In 1920, when the Queensland government undertook a survey of Aboriginal workers employed in the field of domestic service in the state, they found that almost all of these workers were female.⁶

It is evident that a significant proportion of these workers were also young and could be classified as children. At this point, it is necessary to explain the definition of childhood that is used in this study. Defining the age when childhood ends and adulthood begins is difficult because, as the historian Phillippe Aries has pointed out, childhood is a modern historical construction.⁷ Throughout this study, Aboriginal people under the age of 18 have been classified as children. This definition has been adopted for several reasons. In the first instance, international bodies such as the

⁴ The situation of Aboriginal and European child workers in Queensland is compared in Robinson 2002.

⁵ Matthews 1984: 65.

⁶ 'Returns of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Females in Employment in 1920' [date and in-letter no. not provided], A/58912, Queensland State Archives.

⁷ Aries 1962.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization define a child as a person under the age of 16. When referring to child labour and children performing dangerous work, however, these organisations argue that this labour is damaging to people under the age of 18. Accordingly, they classify all workers under the age of 18 as children.⁸ Secondly, recent overviews of government policies towards Indigenous people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have also tended to demarcate people under the age of 18 as children for the purposes of their studies.⁹ This article follows their approach.

While domestic service was a demanding occupation, it is evident that a large number of Aboriginal children were employed in this capacity. According to the 1920 survey of Aboriginal domestic servants in Queensland, which was undertaken by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, John Bleakley, more than a third of the 524 female Aboriginal domestic servants in service in the state in that year were under the age of 18.¹⁰ While statistics for the period 1842 to 1945 reveal that at least 448 Aboriginal children under the age of 18 were recorded as being employed as domestic servants, this figure is almost certainly a dramatic underestimation of the number of Aboriginal domestic servants employed in this period, as European employers were under no compulsion to register their Aboriginal employees until 1897. The Aboriginal children whose details were recorded in the late 19th and 20th centuries are likely to represent only a fraction of the overall Aboriginal child workforce.

The data available that relates to Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants in Queensland between 1842 and 1945 indicates that their average age tended to be younger in the period before the passage of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* than in the period afterwards and until the conclusion of World War II. In the period from 1842 to 1896, the majority of Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants were aged from ten to 12 years. Europeans were certainly prepared to use young Aboriginal children as domestic servants in this period, with the youngest child listed as employed in this period being only three years of age. In the period after the passage of the 1897 Act, up until World War II, the majority of Aboriginal children employed in this capacity were aged between 12 and 14 years. While the mean age in this period tended to be older than it had been in the earlier period, there are two recorded cases of two-year-old Aboriginal girls being employed as domestic servants in this period. To the contemporary observer, the employment of these physically and emotionally immature toddlers appears bewildering and impractical. No specific information was provided on the labour tasks these children may have performed, but, based on other evidence, it is probable that they performed simple tasks such as tidying and sorting clothes. It was most likely that these children were being 'trained early' to perform heavier labour when they grew slightly older.

Australian historians, in general, have used the term 'domestic service' to describe 'the provision of household labour by paid employees rather than dependents'.¹¹ The

8. For example, Falkus et al 1997.

9. For example, Read 1982: 2 and Fabian and Loh 1980: 18.

10. 'Returns of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Females in Employment in 1920' [date and in-letter no. not provided], A/58912, Queensland State Archives.

11. Kingston in Davidson et al (eds) 1998: 192.

occupation was common among Australia's female population from the start of European settlement up until the middle of the 20th century, when improved technology and wider career options for women made domestic service virtually redundant as a paid profession.¹² The type of household labour that European domestic servants were expected to perform in Queensland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was wide-ranging and difficult. Ronald Lawson, in his study of Brisbane society in the 1890s, has explained that European domestic servants were required to wash, iron, cook, set the table, wash the dishes, care for children, make repairs, garden, and chop wood.¹³ Overwhelming evidence indicates that most domestic servants found the occupation unpleasant.

Domestic service was a demanding profession for any woman in 19th and 20th century Queensland. It was especially arduous for the majority of Aboriginal women, however, because the tasks they were expected to perform far exceeded in range those required from European domestic servants.¹⁴ As Jackie Huggins has pointed out, as far as Aboriginal workers were concerned, the term 'domestic service' was 'employed to describe any type of labour which was not related to stockwork or tasks outside the boundary of the main camp'.¹⁵ European employers expected Aboriginal domestic servants to cook, clean, and act as 'nurse-girls' to their children, just like European domestic servants, but also placed other demands upon them, including those of a sexual nature.¹⁶ Evans and Scott conclude that Aboriginal domestic servants were 'worse paid, more tightly disciplined and less well-regarded than their white counterparts'.¹⁷

European employers did not moderate the severity of labour tasks that Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants were expected to perform, including cooking, cleaning, washing, and minding their employers' children, in spite of their own youth. These tasks were physically demanding and potentially damaging to the children's physical development. There are cases of Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants being required to separate milk,¹⁸ dig post holes,¹⁹ chop the firewood, and fetch the water from the river.²⁰ One Aboriginal child, ostensibly employed as a domestic servant, was charged with keeping goats warm at night by sleeping with them.²¹

Most Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants were grossly overworked.²² The recollections of Aboriginal women who were employed as domestic

12. Kingston in Davidson et al (eds) 1998: 192. See also Kingston 1975: 55 and Matthews 1984: 71.

13. Lawson 1973: 135.

14. Huggins 1995: 189. McGrath 1978 also makes this point in her study of Aboriginal women workers in the Northern Territory.

15. Huggins 1987-1988: 12.

16. See, for example, Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 27 June 1901, in-letter 15120 of 1901, 'Aboriginals West of the Warrego', COL/143, Queensland State Archives; and R Reside, Constable, Boulia Sub-District, to the Home Secretary, 10 December 1898, in-letter 7341 of 1898, COL/143, Queensland State Archives. Also explored in detail in Evans 1982: 6-21.

17. Evans and Scott 1996: 140. Jennifer Sabbioni makes a similar point regarding the experiences of Aboriginal domestic servants in Western Australia in Sabbioni 1993: 7-29.

18. Kennedy 1985: 22.

19. Rosser 1985: 53.

20. Vogan 1890: 227.

21. King 1996: 199.

22. This generally holds true for Aboriginal adults as well. See Blake 1987: 53.

servants in their childhood illustrate the great quantity of work these children were expected to undertake. These tasks were so onerous and demanding that Rita Huggins, who was employed in her youth as a domestic servant, has asked whether this employment was 'servitude or slavery?'²³ Huggins remembers being expected to work from dawn until the late evening: cleaning, washing, ironing, preparing food, and caring for her employer's children.²⁴ Marnie Kennedy, who also worked as a domestic servant as a young girl, had a similar experience. She recalls the breakfast bell waking her at 4:00am, after which she had to spend the day setting and waiting on the table, cleaning the large dining room and lounge, doing the washing and ironing for up to eight people and then working in the dairy.²⁵ Eve Mumewa Fesl has described how her mother, who was employed as a child, had to scrub floors and wash clothes for a family of five.²⁶ Ruth Hegarty, who worked as young domestic servant, began work at 5:30am, before the family she worked for had risen, and did not retire for the evening until they had all gone to bed.²⁷ A typical day would see her starting a fire in the wood stove in the morning, preparing breakfast, emptying chamber-pots, preparing morning tea, afternoon tea and dinner, and washing up and setting the stove in preparation for the following day.²⁸ She said, 'I had never before in my short life worked that hard.'²⁹ Wayne King's mother was ostensibly employed as a domestic servant but had to help on the farm as well. She recalls, 'Boy, was that hard work!'³⁰

The childcare aspect of domestic service was particularly stressful for Aboriginal children, who were often not much older than the European children they were caring for. Rita Huggins remembers that her employer's children were often cheeky to her, yet she was not permitted to discipline them in any way.³¹ Despite the stressful nature of childcare work, government officials argued that young Aboriginal girls were particularly suited to this responsibility. In 1908, the Chief Protector of Aboriginals wrote that Aboriginal girls under the age of 12 'cannot be of much use to people' unless 'to amuse and take care of children'.³² Employers also believed that Aboriginal children were particularly adept at performing childcare work. There are numerous examples of settlers writing to government officials asking specifically for young Aboriginal children to perform this type of labour. In 1908, one potential employer wrote to the Superintendent of Barambah Aboriginal settlement, asking for a young Aboriginal nursemaid. He emphasised that 'we do not want one who is too old as she may not take to the children'.³³ His request must have been unsuccessful because he wrote to the Chief Protector of Aborigi-

23. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 33-47.

24. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 37.

25. Kennedy 1985: 22.

26. Fesl 1993: 111.

27. Hegarty 1999: 104-105.

28. Hegarty 1999: 104-105.

29. Hegarty 1999: 104-105.

30. King 1996: 201.

31. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 37.

32. Chief Protector of Aboriginals to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 20 August 1908, in-letter 09830 of 1908, HOM/J38, Queensland State Archives.

33. A. B. Osbourne to the Superintendent, Barambah settlement, 21 October 1914, in-letter 03024 of 1914, A/69461, Queensland State Archives.

nals again a few months later wanting 'any little girl about twelve or fourteen years of age ... to mind the baby and make herself useful around the house'.³⁴

Injuries

Poorly kept records make it impossible to detail the number of injuries that Aboriginal children working as domestic servants sustained through the course of their employment. Hospital records available for the late 19th and 20th centuries do indicate that a number of Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants were admitted needing medical attention.³⁵ Unfortunately, these records only specify the occupation and age of the child and not the cause of their stay in hospital. Nellie, aged seven and described as a domestic servant from the Batavia River region, was admitted for two weeks in 1891.³⁶ Topsy, aged ten from Cooktown, was described as a domestic and was admitted to the hospital for two months from November 1892 to January 1893.³⁷ Kitty, aged ten, was described as a nursemaid and only stayed in the hospital for one day in 1893.³⁸ Another child, also called Topsy, was described as a general servant and was hospitalised for three days in 1899.³⁹ There are two recorded instances of Aboriginal children who had worked as domestic servants dying in hospital. One of these children, Annie, was aged 16 and had worked as a domestic servant in Cooktown. She died in 1892 after spending 11 days in the Cooktown Hospital. The other child, Rosie, a girl aged about 12, had worked as a domestic servant for a member of the police force. She died in 1896 after a month in hospital.⁴⁰ Neither of these children had the causes of their death recorded.

'We cannot procure sufficient girls to meet the demands': the popularity of Aboriginal child domestic servants

The demand for young Aboriginal domestic servants was high throughout the period from 1842 to 1945. Indeed, after the passage of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897*, which forced the majority of Queensland's Aboriginal population onto missions and reserves, government officials viewed domestic service as the only suitable occupation for young Aboriginal women.⁴¹ Consequently, these institutions focused on training Aboriginal girls to perform this type of employment and served as labour depots where Europeans could procure young Aboriginal workers.⁴² The demand

34. A. B. Osbourne to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 21 October 1914, in-letter 03024 of 1914, A/69461, Queensland State Archives.

35. For example, Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/23-32 [dates not provided], Queensland State Archives.

36. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/17, 30 September 1890-24 July 1891, Queensland State Archives.

37. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/19, 27 July 1892-8 August 1893, Queensland State Archives.

38. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/19, 27 July 1892-8 August 1893, Queensland State Archives.

39. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/23-32 [dates not provided], Queensland State Archives.

40. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/20, 9 August 1893-26 December 1894, Queensland State Archives.

41. Evans and Scott 1996.

42. Robinson 2003: 172-236.

for young Aboriginal domestic servants was so great throughout this era, however, that missions and reserves could never entirely satisfy the requests for these workers.

While no official statistics were collated for most of this period, there is much evidence that European employers were eager to engage these young servants. An example of how early in the occupation of a region this employment was accepted without question can be found in an 1852 *Moreton Bay Courier* article. Published only one decade after the commencement of free settlement in the Moreton Bay District, the article mentions that an Aboriginal girl at Maryborough, aged about eight or nine years, who had been employed as a house-maid and nurse-girl, had witnessed a murder.⁴³ It is noteworthy that the employment of this young Aboriginal child in this capacity was not considered sufficiently unusual to warrant further comment.

As the British pushed into the northern reaches of the state, they started employing increasing numbers of Aboriginal children as domestic servants. When the English writer Anthony Trollope toured Queensland in the 1870s, he observed that numerous settlers were using young Aboriginal girls as domestic servants.⁴⁴ By the 1880s, such employment had become commonplace. By the 1890s, when the Queensland government finally turned its attentions towards the employment of Aboriginal people in the colony, official records reveal that settlers had become highly dependent on the labour provided by these young domestic servants.⁴⁵

Europeans continued to use large numbers of young Aboriginal domestic servants as the 20th century began. The state government aided this demand by purchasing a house in West End, a suburb of Brisbane, to act as a receiving depot for Aboriginal domestic servants from all over Queensland.⁴⁶ Officials such as Archibald Meston were happy to send Aboriginal girls as young as five years of age to this home to be trained as domestic servants.⁴⁷ In 1906, Richard Howard, the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, commented on the high demand for Aboriginal domestic servants, explaining that it was 'so much in excess of the supply, that although the settlements at Barambah and Deebling Creek Mission have been drawn upon to their utmost extent, places could be

43. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 22 May 1852: 2.

44. Trollope 1873: 72.

45. Government records provide the details of many Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants in the 1890s. See for example: H Willett to the Colonial Secretary, 22 April 1890, in-letter 3375 of 1890, COL/A613, Queensland State Archives; James Dempsey to the Home Secretary, 2 October 1902, in-letter 18761 of 1902, A/58927, Queensland State Archives; and Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Lands Department, 5 March 1902, in-letter 2956 of 1903, 'Dr Roth's Progress Report, February 1903', A/44681, Queensland State Archives.

46. Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 22 October 1902, in-letter 16189 of 1902, COL/144, Queensland State Archives. The Aboriginal Girls Home at West End was opened in 1899 and was finally closed in 1905, following an incident where the Protectress of Aboriginals, Mrs Frew, was believed to have misappropriated funds belonging to Aboriginal workers. The Home had an unpleasant reputation while it was in operation. In 1901, Archibald Meston informed the Under Secretary, Home Office, that 'the Home, under the present Matron, is regarded as a jail and she herself as a very unsympathetic jailer.' See Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 25 February 1901, in-letter 03291 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

47. See for example, Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

found for quite double the number'.⁴⁸ In 1911, Bleakley, Howard's replacement as Chief Protector of Aboriginals, made a similar observation, informing one settler that 'the matter of obtaining Aboriginal girls for domestic service from this department is always uncertain, as the applications for them are so numerous we cannot procure sufficient girls to meet the demands'.⁴⁹

During World War I, Queenslanders continued to make heavy use of young Aboriginal domestic servants.⁵⁰ Evans and Scott have ably demonstrated that the demand for these servants continued unabated throughout the period between World Wars I and II.⁵¹ In 1924, W Porteous Semple, the superintendent of Barambah reserve, acknowledged the demand for Aboriginal domestic servants by commenting that he had no trouble finding employment situations for these workers, as 'for domestic labour there is always a good demand'.⁵²

This good demand for young Aboriginal domestic servants can be explained by the fact that these servants eased the responsibilities and workload of European settlers in Queensland during the period considered. Dawn May has explained that European employers benefited from using Aboriginal domestic workers in 19th century Queensland because they were versatile, produced a high quality of workmanship, and provided European women with invaluable assistance.⁵³ Correspondence from employers confirms that Aboriginal children provided them with valuable assistance in the domestic sphere. In 1917, one employer wrote to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, informing him that the 13-year-old Aboriginal girl she had engaged as a domestic servant 'was such a help to me looking after the children' and that her little child loved the Aboriginal girl.⁵⁴

'Something like slavery'? The costs of Aboriginal child labour

While Europeans benefited enormously from the use of Aboriginal children as domestic servants, the performance of this labour took an equally enormous toll on the lives of these young servants. In fact, when the experiences of these young workers are considered as a whole, parallels can be drawn between their working situations and slavery.⁵⁵ This is a highly complex issue, as there is much conjecture over the precise conditions that constitute slavery. The sociologist Orlando Patterson has convincingly argued that

48. 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1906', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1907 2: 1264.

49. Chief Protector of Aboriginals to JA Chauvel, *Summerlands*, Harrisville, 14 February 1911, in-letter 350 of 1911, A/58665, Queensland State Archives.

50. See for example, 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the year 1917', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1918 1: 1673. and 'Aboriginals Department - Information Contained in Report for the Year Ended 31 December 1918', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1919-1920 2: 535.

51. Evans and Scott 1996: 140-157.

52. W Porteous Semple, Barambah Settlement, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 1 September 1924, in-letter 2677 of 1924, HOM/J539, Queensland State Archives.

53. May 1983: 84.

54. Mary McKinley to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 23 January 1917, in-letter 00341 of 1917, A/69776, Queensland State Archives.

55. For extensive discussion on the theoretical foundations of classifying Aboriginal workers as slaves, see Evans 1999: 169-170 and Robinson 2002.

it is not adequate to define slavery as the legal ownership of human beings.⁵⁶ He maintains that this definition is too simplistic, as it does not take into account the complexity of slavery as a historical condition of substantial power imbalances.⁵⁷ If Patterson's definition is adopted, Aboriginal child domestic servants, dominated by their European employers and usually unable to control their own working lives, occupied a position recognisable as slavery.⁵⁸

Aboriginal child workers in the field of domestic service were placed in a slave-type situation not only because of their age and gender, but also because they had little protection against abuse. In theory, European settlers who employed Aboriginal children were required to hold a permit issued by the required Protector of Aboriginals or Chief Protector of Aboriginals to do so, which was renewable each year.⁵⁹ In practice, however, many employers of Aboriginal child domestic servants were either not issued with permits by local Protectors of Aboriginals, or they were granted permits to employ Aboriginal children as domestic servants indefinitely. This meant that employers in Queensland were able to exercise unchallenged control over their Aboriginal child domestic servants throughout this period. In 1904, Roth commented that one employer at Cooktown had been allowed to employ two Aboriginal children, one boy about four years old and one girl about seven years old, as domestic servants without permits being issued.⁶⁰ Protectors of Aboriginals often trapped Aboriginal children in unhappy employment situations with no means of leaving by issuing employment permits which were meant to stand *ad infinitum*. In 1881, Emily, a ten-year-old girl, was ordered by government officials to remain in service with a European family 'indefinitely'.⁶¹ In another case, in 1905, a Protector of Aboriginals issued an indefinite permit for the employment of a girl who was aged ten, but who did 'not look more than seven or eight'.⁶² This meant that the employer did not have to renew his permit annually and consequently that the child's situation was in no way monitored.

The issue of wages

There is little evidence to suggest that child labourers received remuneration for their work. Many young Aboriginal domestic servants were either paid poorly or were not paid at all. This was the case for Aboriginal women as well as Aboriginal children.⁶³ As late as 1901, Archibald Meston noted that almost all Aboriginal domestic servants in the state were not being paid for their labour.⁶⁴ Until an Amendment Act to the *Aboriginals*

56. Patterson 1982: 21.

57. Patterson 1982: 1.

58. Robinson 2003: 7–16.

59. 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1904', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1905 1: 750.

60. Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Public Lands, 23 January 1904, in-letter 02068 of 1904, A/58750, Queensland State Archives.

61. [in-letter no. and date not provided], 1881, Police Station Noosa, Watchhouse Charge Book, 18 March 1878–26 December 1934, QS 519/1, Queensland State Archives.

62. Protector of Aboriginals, Bowen, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 10 August 1905, in-letter 1696 of 1905, A/58729, Queensland State Archives.

63. Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975: 143.

64. Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 27 June 1901, in-letter 15120 of 1901, 'Aboriginals West of the Warrego', COL/143, Queensland State Archives.

Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 was drafted in 1901, the Queensland government could not legally compel European employers to pay wages to Aboriginal child workers.⁶⁵ In effect, this meant that for the first 60 years after free settlement in the Moreton Bay District these young workers had no legal guarantee that they would receive wages.

Even after the passage of the 1901 Amending Act and the provision of a suggested scale of wages for Aboriginal children by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Walter Roth, in 1904,⁶⁶ the enormous control that European adults had over Aboriginal children meant that in many cases these employers were able to avoid paying them wages. In one example, which came to Roth's attention in 1902, an Aboriginal girl had worked for a European employer at Normanton as a domestic servant for ten years, since the age of three, without receiving any wages.⁶⁷ That same year, the Southern Protector of Aboriginals, Archibald Meston, drew the attention of the Under Secretary to another case where a 14-year-old Aboriginal girl had worked for two years as a domestic servant without receiving wages.⁶⁸ Cases such as these continued throughout the first half of the 20th century. In 1917, Bleakley, who was then the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, became aware of another case where an Aboriginal girl, aged about 18, had lived with a European family all her life, had performed 'a good deal of work in the house' and had looked after her employers' children, yet had never received any wages.⁶⁹ In another case, which came to official attention in 1937, a 15-year-old Aboriginal girl received only 16 months worth of wages, yet had worked as a domestic servant for the previous nine years.⁷⁰

In some instances, European employers were able to avoid paying wages to young Aboriginal domestic servants with the approval of the Queensland government. In 1898, Archibald Meston, who was then the Southern Protector of Aboriginals, allowed one European employer to use a five-and-a-half year old Aboriginal girl as a domestic servant without paying wages.⁷¹ Again, in 1904, government officials sanctioned the decision of one employer to avoid paying his young Aboriginal domestic servant any wages until she turned 11-and-a-half because she would supposedly 'not be of much use' until then.⁷²

65. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1900', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 1901 4: 1337.

66. Walter Roth to the Home Secretary, 23 May 1904, in-letter 16262 of 1904, A/58927, Queensland State Archives.

67. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1902', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1903 2: 461.

68. Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, 11 January 1902, in-letter 00532 of 1902, COL/144, Queensland State Archives.

69. Protector of Aboriginals, Cloncurry, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 4 April 1917, in-letter 12610 of 1917, POL/J15, Queensland State Archives.

70. EK Thompson to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 15 March 1927, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

71. Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16907 of 1901, COL.145, Queensland State Archives.

72. Acting Chief Protector of Aboriginals to the Home Secretary, 4 November 1904, in-letter 34418 of 1904, 'Acting Chief Protector of Aboriginals: Progress Report. October 1904', A/44681, Queensland State Archives.

Even when Aboriginal children did receive wages, they were not proportionate to the amount of work they were required to undertake. Queensland government officials suggested that Aboriginal children should receive lower wages than other workers, right from the first attempts to set optional scales of wages. In 1902, Protector Galbraith suggested that Aboriginal girls under the age of 12 who were employed by Europeans should receive only two shillings and six pence per week. Galbraith suggested a higher rate of pay, five shillings per week, for Aboriginal domestic servants over the age of 12.⁷³ This was still less than adult European domestic servants were able to command: in Queensland, the average adult European domestic servant was receiving ten shillings per week as early as 1893.⁷⁴

Queensland's various Chief Protectors of Aboriginals did not adhere to a particular rate of pay for young Aboriginal domestic servants and were often prepared to accept low wages for these children. In 1908, six years after Galbraith had suggested that Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants should receive two shillings and six pence per week, Aboriginal children were being legally employed as domestic servants in the state for as little as one shilling and three pence per week.⁷⁵ Even when Aboriginal girls were receiving the suggested two shillings and six pence per week, officials admitted that European domestic servants would receive wages at least four times as high for the same work.⁷⁶

Educational issues

Most Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants did not receive any education. This directly contravened the *Education Act* of 1875, which was meant to cover Aboriginal as well as European children.⁷⁷ In 1905, Walter Roth commented on this, remarking that, legally, employers were the guardians of Aboriginal children and were obliged to send them to school.⁷⁸ In practice, however, this very rarely occurred because the government supervision over these children was 'imperfect'.⁷⁹ Evidence indicates that Roth was right to suspect that employers were not sending their young domestic servants to school or teaching them to read or write.⁸⁰ Indeed, out of all of the records that were kept by government officials, only two cases were found where European employers sent their young Aboriginal domestic servants to school.⁸¹ Official correspondence shows that one of these children, a ten-year-old girl, did very well aca-

73. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1901', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1902 1: 1138.

74. Thorpe 1996: 177.

75. Mrs R Joseph, Sandgate, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 24 August 1908 [in-letter no. not provided], A/69461, Queensland State Archives.

76. Frances Meston to the Under Secretary and Home Secretary, 15 January 1900, in-letter 00679 of 1900, A/58929, Queensland State Archives.

77. Crown Solicitor to the Home Secretary, 17 February 1903, in-letter 20373 of 1903, A/58927, Queensland State Archives.

78. Although this article does not have the space to fully consider the issue of 'guardianship', it is a highly important topic. See Haebich 2000.

79. Haebich 2000.

80. See, for example, 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1904': 758.

81. Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

demically at Normanton state school.⁸² The other child however, was removed from her domestic service position and school at the age of nine, after three-and-a-half years of service, when her employer became ill. She was then taken to the Aboriginal girls home at West End in Brisbane to await a further position.⁸³

‘Scraps for dinner’: food and other necessities

Young Aboriginal girls employed as domestic servants frequently did not even receive life’s basic essentials in their places of work.⁸⁴ Fesl describes how her mother was told that ‘fruit is good for little girls, therefore when you are hungry, you can climb up and eat some mangoes from the tree’,⁸⁵ and this was the only food that the child received. Wayne King’s mother remembers that she was only permitted to eat the scraps from the breakfast table. She questions why she was considered ‘good enough’ to perform hard labour but not ‘good enough’ to be fed properly?⁸⁶ Agnes Williams, who began working as a domestic servant at 13 years of age, told Jackie Huggins that she had ‘food rations and bread and dripping’ occasionally during the day and ‘scraps’ for dinner.⁸⁷

There are also many cases of Aboriginal girls who were employed as domestic servants not receiving adequate clothing. Fesl’s mother was made to wear old clothes that she stitched together from her European employer’s cast-offs.⁸⁸ In 1902, Archibald Meston commented on this endemic flaw in the system when he described how one 14-year-old Aboriginal domestic servant had not received any wages for two years of labour and had ‘not even clothing fit to be seen in the streets’.⁸⁹

‘You were always the Aboriginal servant’: emotional abuse and exclusion

Loneliness often accompanied material deprivation.⁹⁰ Employers caused young Aboriginal servants to feel emotionally isolated by treating them as inferiors and by preventing them from having contact with other Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture.⁹¹ When Agnes Williams’ mother died, her male employer prevented her from attending the funeral, telling her that ‘he didn’t see any reason’ for her to go home.⁹² While Aboriginal children were frequently prevented from having contact with their own families, they were rarely accepted by European families. Roth realised very early on that Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants were never

^{82.} Mrs Colless to Archibald Meston, 29 October 1903, in-letter 1454 of 1903, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

^{83.} Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

^{84.} Huggins mentions that this was also the case for adult Aboriginal domestic servants in Huggins 1987–1988: 9.

^{85.} Fesl 1993: 111.

^{86.} King 1996: 201.

^{87.} Huggins 1991: 1.

^{88.} Fesl 1993: 111.

^{89.} Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 11 January 1902, in-letter 00532 of 1902, COL/144, Queensland State Archives.

^{90.} Sally Hodson has made a similar point about the experiences of young Aboriginal domestic servants in Western Australia. See Hodson 1993: 77.

^{91.} These issues were also explored in the 1997 *Bringing them home* inquiry.

^{92.} Huggins 1991: 1.

accepted as equals by their European employers. In 1901, he wrote that these Aboriginal child workers were:

brought up in a false position as 'one of the family' [until] the time arrives sooner or later when the true-blooded or half-caste girl realises that she is a pariah amongst those very people with whom, probably ever since she can remember, she has associated with more or less as an equal. Is it matter for wonder that such should finally end badly?⁹³

While loneliness and isolation were common themes mentioned in correspondence relating to these workers, Queensland's longest serving Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Bleakley, still expressed surprise in 1915 when one young Aboriginal domestic servant left her position and walked a long distance because she felt so isolated.⁹⁴

Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants also experienced great loneliness because their employers would not let them associate with other Aboriginal people. The great degree of misery that these children would have experienced as a result of their isolation from their family and traditional associations is almost unimaginable. In 1901, Archibald Meston observed that it was a common practice in the western districts of Queensland to prevent Aboriginal domestic servants from socialising with other Aboriginal people: he reported that many Aboriginal domestic servants were being 'locked-up at night to keep them from their own people'.⁹⁵ In 1904, Protector Galbraith informed Roth that many stations in the Normanton area did not let their Aboriginal domestic servants, most of whom had started work at the age of seven, associate with other Aboriginal people.⁹⁶ Again, many Europeans did not accept that Aboriginal children had the same bonds of kinship and emotional requirements that European children did. Even in those rare cases when employers recognised the emotional requirements of their Aboriginal child workers, it seems they were usually more concerned with their own agendas than easing the loneliness of these young workers.

Employers greatly exacerbated the depressing situation of young Aboriginal domestic servants by treating them as inferiors.⁹⁷ The supposed lowliness of these young workers was constantly reiterated. Even the act of taking meals constantly reinforced the distinction between young Aboriginal domestic servants and their employers. Rita Huggins remembers that 'at the end of the day we'd have to eat in separate rooms out of sight of the family'.⁹⁸ Wayne King's mother has also described how inescapable the division between young Aboriginal domestic servants and their European employers was in daily working life. She recalls:

93. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1900', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 1901 4: 1337.

94. Protector of Aboriginals, Charleville, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 9 September 1915, in-letter 02765 of 1915, A/58666, Queensland State Archives.

95. Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 27 June 1901, in-letter 151201 of 1901, 'Aboriginals West of the Warrego', COL/143, Queensland State Archives.

96. Protector Galbraith, Normanton, to Walter Roth, Northern Protector of Aboriginals, 30 January 1904, in-letter 226 of 1904, A/44680, Queensland State Archives.

97. Huggins 1987-1988: 8-9.

98. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 38.

You were always the Aboriginal servant. I wasn't allowed to walk through the house to get to my room at the back of the house; I always had to use the back entrance. My meals had to be taken separately on a table on the back verandah.⁹⁹

Ruth Hegarty describes a similar experience, remembering that 'I was never allowed to forget where I came from or how untrained I was, both domestically and educationally'.¹⁰⁰ Agnes Williams recalls that she 'was a servant and was treated like shit'.¹⁰¹

'I did not know what the thrashing was for': the issue of physical abuse

While many Aboriginal children were overworked, underpaid, lonely, and not given an education, a similarly high proportion of these workers were also physically abused by their European employers. Their youth and size meant that they were vulnerable to such abuse and were powerless to prevent it. Harold Meston described one case of physical abuse in 1900; this case was somewhat unusual because the abused child was able to give an account of her treatment. The incident had come to official attention due to the actions of a Mrs EA Salisbury, who had been staying at a Toowoomba boarding house when she observed the 'cruel way' that a European employer, Mrs Boyce, treated her ten-year-old Aboriginal domestic servant, Gerribah. Mrs Salisbury wrote to government officials, informing them that she knew that Mrs Boyce had, 'on one occasion, given [Gerribah] twenty-eighty lashes with a dog whip and 'used to kick her around''.¹⁰²

Mrs Salisbury's complaint led to Harold Meston investigating the case further. Meston interviewed several other European witnesses and Gerribah herself. Gerribah told him that she had been with Mrs Boyce for a long time and used to do housework for her and mind her two young children. She was not paid for this labour. Furthermore, Gerribah described:

Mrs. Boyce used to thrash me with a riding whip, and hit me in the face. Sometimes I was thrashed because I forgot to do something Mrs. Boyce told me to do and sometimes I did not know what the thrashing was for.¹⁰³

Further evidence revealed that Mrs Boyce's husband had also kicked the child. Meston told his superiors that when he had asked Gerribah if she was willing to leave her situation with Mrs Boyce, she 'promptly answered with a very emphatic "yes!"'.¹⁰⁴ Gerribah herself, as a powerless young child, had been unable to leave her abusive situation.

Many similar cases of physical abuse were recorded. In 1907, the *Winton Herald* newspaper reported another disturbing case where a seven-year-old Aboriginal child, Alice, had been repeatedly abused physically and emotionally by her employer, Mrs Walsh.¹⁰⁵ The case had come to public attention because Mrs Walsh's neighbour, Timothy Scanlon, had heard the child being beaten for one-and-a-half hours and had

⁹⁹. King 1996: 201.

¹⁰⁰. Hegarty 1999: 113.

¹⁰¹. Huggins 1991: 1.

¹⁰². Mrs EA Salisbury to Archibald Meston, 7 March 1900, in-letter 03622 of 1900, COL/140, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰³. H. Meston to the Under Secretary and the Colonial Secretary, 9 March 1900, in-letter 03622 of 1900, COL/140, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰⁴. H. Meston to the Under Secretary and Colonial Secretary, 9 March 1900, in-letter 03622 of 1900, COL/140, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰⁵. *Winton Herald*, 8 April 1907: 3.

later seen the child standing outside in the sun with no shade and her hands tied behind her back. He had considered the treatment to be cruel and informed the *Winton Herald* of the case; he also stated that he knew the girl had been abused in a similar manner several times previously.

This case received considerable publicity and this led to the local police charging Mrs Walsh with assault. During the court case, further details of the appalling treatment the young girl had experienced were revealed. As a domestic servant, Alice had been expected to 'wash-up the crockery, brush down the stove, take the ashes out, sweep the kitchen and brush the floor' without receiving any wages. The child suffered emotional abuse, with Mrs Walsh telling her that her mother was 'alive; she was down in hell'. Mrs Walsh had physically abused the child in numerous ways and a doctor told the court that the child was covered with at least 30 elongated scars. Testimony from witnesses revealed that Mrs Walsh had beaten Alice with a cane, had placed the child's hand on a hot stove which 'burned her right hand which was very sore', tied her hands behind her back when she was 'bold', and made her stand in the hot sun without any shade with her sore hands still tied behind her back. Alice appeared before the court with 'scars, bruises, cuts and sores', 'all over her face, hands and body'. After her court appearance, Alice was sent to the Winton Hospital, where she remained for more than a week. As a result of the court case, Mrs Walsh was fined the maximum available amount of 20 pounds. Alice was charged as a neglected child and was sent to an industrial school.¹⁰⁶

'Not adequately protected'? The prevalence of sexual abuse

Many Aboriginal children who worked as domestic servants suffered from sexual abuse, as well as physical and emotional abuse; this would have caused immense psychological trauma. The prevalence of sexual abuse has been noted by the historians Henry Reynolds and Anna Haebich who have explained that this was a real risk for Aboriginal girls employed in Queensland's past.¹⁰⁷ During the first half of the 20th century, government officials became conscious of this fact, yet no adequate measures were taken to protect the girls. In 1922, the Reverend J McCormack, from Murgon settlement, wrote to the Home Secretary complaining about this official apathy, asserting that 'the black girl is not adequately protected when she leaves the settlement and goes out to work amongst white children'.¹⁰⁸

There are countless cases of Aboriginal girls being sexually abused while in service. Aside from the obvious psychological damage this would have caused, these children were often also infected with sexually transmitted diseases by their employers. Roth's 1900 report mentioned several cases of young Aboriginal domestic servants 'who had been tampered with' and were subsequently suffering from venereal disease.¹⁰⁹ Aboriginal girls on missions were justifiably frightened of being sent out as domestic servants because they were aware that sexual abuse was rampant. Wayne King's mother remembers that this was a real concern: she described the experience of

¹⁰⁶. *Winton Herald*, 8 April 1907: 3.

¹⁰⁷. Reynolds 1990: 179 and Haebich 2000: 301.

¹⁰⁸. RW Shand, Murgon, to J. McCormack, Home Secretary, 29 May 1922, in-letter 04646 of 1922, HOM/J431, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰⁹. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aborigines for 1900', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 1901 4(2): 1336.

one girl who had been sent out to help a local clergyman while his wife was in hospital. The clergyman raped the girl three times on the way to his farm. The girl knew that her complaints would not be believed by government officials and as a result only told other residents of the mission, including King's mother, of the abuse she had experienced.¹¹⁰ Agnes Williams told Jackie Huggins that every male employer she had ever worked for had sexually propositioned her and that European females did not believe her complaints about this behaviour.¹¹¹

Large numbers of Aboriginal children also became pregnant after this abuse. However there are no recorded instances of employers taking responsibility for these pregnant girls. Instead, young, pregnant Aboriginal girls were abandoned by their employers.¹¹² For example, one child began employment as a domestic servant at the age of ten. Four years later, her female employer informed Roth that the child was pregnant and that she no longer wanted her, asking instead for the child to be removed to a mission.¹¹³

High-ranking officials also knew that Aboriginal girls out in service were vulnerable to sexual abuse. In 1924, Governor Leslie Wilson commented that a large number of Aboriginal domestic servants were falling pregnant while in service. Wilson informed the Deputy Premier that 95% of the young girls who were sent out to domestic service from Queensland's Aboriginal missions and reserves were returning to these institutions pregnant.¹¹⁴ The Deputy Premier, however, took no notice of Wilson's letter.

Resistance

While the Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants in Queensland between 1842 and 1945 unquestionably occupied a powerless position, it is important to note that they did not just passively accept mistreatment by their European employers. Although their age and physical vulnerability significantly impeded their ability to resist their slave-like situation, it is important to recognise that these children still tried to resist the dominance of their European employers. This was more the case for older Aboriginal children than younger children. Younger children were probably not physically or emotionally developed enough to formulate strategies of resistance or to challenge the authority of their European employers.

Aboriginal child domestic servants generally used passive rather than violent strategies against their European employers. Their age and social position would almost certainly have prevented them from engaging in more violent means of resistance. It appears that the majority of Aboriginal children who resisted their employment as domestic servants opted to run away from their situations; this action was also probably related to the children's desire to reunite with their families. There is also evidence

¹¹⁰. King 1996: 199.

¹¹¹. Huggins 1991: 2.

¹¹². For example, Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Public Lands Department, 5 March 1903, in-letter 2956 of 1903, 'Dr Roth's Progress Report. February 1903', A/44681, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹³. Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Public Lands Department, 3 September 1901, in-letter 1461 of 1901, 'Dr Roth's Progress Report. August 1901', A/44679, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹⁴. Governor Leslie Wilson to the Deputy Premier, 6 June 1934, in-letter 5048 of 1934, A/3699, Queensland State Archives.

that Aboriginal domestic servants showed their resistance through mechanisms that included stealing, 'playing up', and destroying their employers' property.

In the 1870s, as he travelled through Queensland, Anthony Trollope noted the frequency with which Aboriginal child domestic servants ran away from employment. He observed that these children were running away almost as soon as they were physically able to do so.¹¹⁵ Trollope commented that the success rate of this strategy of resistance was not high. To illustrate this point, he described the situation of one particular 14-year-old girl, who had 'made repeated attempts at escape' but was recovered by Aboriginal trackers and taken back to her European employer.¹¹⁶ He used the terminology of 'slave' to illustrate the powerless situation of the child.

Most employers did not benignly accept their young Aboriginal domestic servants running away, but rather, went to considerable lengths to recapture them. They frequently enlisted the local police to help find these children. In one such case, in 1901, three Aboriginal children were taken from Nocundra in western Queensland to the Aboriginal Girls Home at West End to be trained as domestic servants. One of these children, Ruby, ran away from the Home and got as far as Chinchilla before the police captured her and took her back to the Home at West End.¹¹⁷ There are some cases where Aboriginal children who ran away from domestic service positions were given the opportunity to discuss what had prompted their actions. Invariably, they mentioned that their actions were prompted by their desire to leave exploitative and abusive employment situations.¹¹⁸

There are cases of Aboriginal children resisting domestic service positions where they were unhappy by stealing from their employers. For example, in 1902, Roth reported a situation where Lena, a 'little' Aboriginal child employed as a domestic servant at Normanton, was removed to Mapoon Aboriginal mission after she stole 15 shillings from her employer and gave it to local Aboriginal people.¹¹⁹ This strategy of resistance by stealing appears to have been quite successful because it resulted in the removal of its young practitioners from abusive situations.¹²⁰ It is important to be aware, however, that employers almost certainly directed violence towards Aboriginal children who engaged in this practice.

Aboriginal children often 'played up' to express their unhappiness with their employment as domestic servants. This mechanism of resistance could be quite successful as it resulted in many Aboriginal children being removed from their employment situations and sent to missions. In 1901 alone, Roth was able to describe several such cases. In one situation, an Aboriginal girl, Maria, aged about 13, 'knew a great deal of housework', but due to the fact that she was 'slipping out at night' and was 'playing up'

¹¹⁵ Trollope 1873: 72.

¹¹⁶ Trollope 1873: 73.

¹¹⁷ Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 14 February 1901, in-letter 02644 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹⁸ Denis Keane, Police Station, Bowen, Kennedy District, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 28 April 1907, in-letter no. 859 of 1907, A/58751, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹⁹ 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1902': 462.

¹²⁰ For example, 8 July 1916 [in-letter no. not provided], Police Station, Atherton, Watchhouse Charge Books, QS629/1/1 (1), Queensland State Archives.

in other ways, her employer no longer wanted her. She was sent to Yarrabah Aboriginal mission.¹²¹ Similar to stealing, this resistance mechanism could be quite successful; however, it is again almost certain that European employers directed violence towards Aboriginal children who resisted their dominance in this way.

Aboriginal children also resisted exploitative and abusive domestic situations by destroying property belonging to their European employers. In one case, which occurred in the Brisbane suburb of Oxley in 1903, Mulla, an Aboriginal girl who was then aged about 14, set fire to her employer's curtains. At the time that this incident occurred, Mrs Sturmpels, Mulla's employer, did not suspect her. Later, however, Mulla told police officers that she had set fire to the curtains and that she had done it on account of the appalling treatment she had received from Mrs Sturmpels, who used to beat her with a stick. Gus Forrest, the Sub-Inspector of Police for South Brisbane, later told the Home Secretary that since the case had come before the Court and Mulla had been removed from her employer, she had 'behaved very well' and did 'her work in a very satisfactory manner', and that 'with kind treatment would make a very good servant'.¹²²

Conclusion

Young Aboriginal domestic servants showed a great deal of courage and initiative in formulating and implementing strategies of resistance. Ultimately, however, their employers firmly controlled the power-base in the relationship. Those children who were fortunate enough to be removed from their exploitative and abusive employment situations were almost always removed through the actions of other Europeans. The powerless situation of those Aboriginal children who worked as domestic servants in 19th and 20th century Queensland meant that they had much in common with slaves.¹²³

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¹²¹. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aborigines for 1901': 1138.

¹²². Gus Forrest, Sub-Inspector of Police, South Brisbane, 3 July 1903 in-letter 12665 of 1903, A/58929, Queensland State Archives.

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Absorbing the ‘Aboriginal problem’: controlling interracial marriage in Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

Katherine Ellinghaus

[A]ssimilation is our word. Many Aboriginals take it as meaning they are to be bred out. They wish to be a distinctive people ... The desire of the Aboriginals to be a distinctive people is something we should respect.¹

What did the word ‘assimilation’ really mean in the mouths of white Australian politicians when they referred to Aboriginal people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? This paper, part of a larger project which compares interracial marriages of white women and Indigenous men in Australia and the United States, begins from the assumption that umbrella terms such as ‘assimilation’ can mean different things in different times and places. Comparative historians are urged not to assume that ‘because they bear the same label, ideas, institutions, or groups ... perform the same function everywhere’.² As this paper will show, such insights prove valuable when seeking to understand the particular policies aimed at Indigenous people in a unique settler society such as Australia.

In Australia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whites envisioned the ‘assimilation’ of Indigenous people in two very different ways. Some believed in the possibilities of teaching Indigenous people to live and support themselves as white people (‘cultural assimilation’), others focused on the loss of Indigenous physical characteristics through interracial relationships (‘biological absorption’). In most instances, however, the politicians, public servants and anthropologists involved in solving the ‘Aboriginal problem’ were cryptic when they referred to the future of Aboriginal peoples. A full explanation was never given about whether they envisioned assimilation being hastened by the births of mixed-descent children who did not physically appear to be Indigenous, or whether they simply wanted to teach Indigenous people to live in the manner of white people.

This paper has stemmed from a comparative investigation into the rudimentary attempts to promote cultural assimilation in Australia and the United States through

1. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates 1, 1967: 286.

2. Grew 1985: 98.

the education systems set up for Aboriginal and Native American people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the United States, legislation such as the Dawes Act (1887) attempted to turn Native Americans into self-supporting farmers by allotting them each a portion of their reservations and rewarding those that took up the offer with citizenship. Significant government funds were spent on setting up a comprehensive system of education with on and off-reservation schools dedicated to teaching Native American children how to live like whites. The rhetoric of improvement, citizenship, and education which shaped the Dawes Act (which, it should not be forgotten, caused immeasurable suffering and loss of land to Native Americans) was completely absent from Australian legislation. The legislation passed by each Australian state and colony rarely if ever mentioned cultural assimilation, or put in place policies aimed at educating Aboriginal people; the substandard Aboriginal education system has been well-documented by several scholars.³ In addition there is evidence that, as Barry Morris has discovered in rural NSW, Aboriginal families who attempted to farm and become self-sufficient (as the Dawes Act encouraged Native Americans to do) were often discouraged and undermined in various ways.⁴ Nor did the legislation ever allocate land for Aboriginal people's own use. There were no treaties equivalent to those signed between Native Americans and white Americans in the United States; instead the doctrine of *terra nullius* (which presumed that the land was empty) left Aboriginal people little legal status under the law, and certainly much less of a basis from which to claim sovereignty than the Native Americans' admittedly limited position as 'domestic, dependent nations.'

As Henry Reynolds has shown, from the earliest years of settlement white Australians debated whether Aboriginal people should be amalgamated with or segregated from mainstream settler society. Unfortunately, as he points out, white Australians simply 'couldn't deliver on the promise' of amalgamation.⁵ It was not that white Australians were uninterested in cultural assimilation of Aboriginal people; on the contrary, the need to 'civilise' Aboriginal people was a common refrain in the speeches and articles of those interested in the 'Aboriginal problem.' However, these sentiments were rarely translated into efforts to help them in this respect. What Reynolds has called a 'promise' of assimilation was made to Aboriginal people: that by acculturating they would improve their status, live more comfortably, and be treated with greater respect. This promise was not kept.

If cultural assimilation was not the focus in this country, then what was? In this paper, I undertake a state-by-state analysis of exactly how the incorporation of Aboriginal people into mainstream Australian society was imagined by those who created the many pieces of legislation aimed at Indigenous people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although they were known as 'protection' Acts, the actual protection of Indigenous rights, bodies, and land was far from the outcome of these laws. Historians have, for the most part, studied the separate sets of legislation passed by individual states and territo-

3. See Trudinger 1973; Fletcher 1989; Brooke and Kohen 1991; McGrath 1995: 24–5; Milnes 1985; Austin 2000.

4. See Morris 1989 and Goodall 1996 for accounts of Aboriginal families living in NSW in the early 20th century.

5. Reynolds 2000: 233, 284.

ries.⁶ In this nation-wide investigation of this legislation, I demonstrate that although white Australians often spoke about their obligation to 'civilise' the Indigenous peoples they had displaced, they demonstrated little faith in the possibilities of cultural assimilation. Instead, Australian policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries swiftly began to emphasise biological absorption of the mixed-descent population, and only rarely contained measures designed to encourage the three aspects of cultural assimilation: Christianisation, education, and the ownership of private property. In this paper I argue that, although approaches varied, in all but one Australian state or territory there are clear indications of absorptionist policies and practices. The clearest and best documented examples, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, are discussed first.⁷ The slightly different, but nevertheless clearly absorptionist, methods used in the southern states of Victoria, NSW and South Australia are then examined. Queensland, the exception, is discussed last. These variations between the states cannot be explained simply by the size of their white or Indigenous populations, as might be expected. Instead, the important factor appears to be the presence of Asians, Pacific Islanders, and other non-white, non-Indigenous peoples who lived, albeit in relatively small numbers, in some Australian states, particularly in the north and west.

In the United States, scholars are beginning to document the importance of broad national ideologies about race, or the entire racial 'landscape', to white ideas and obsessions about seemingly unrelated events and issues: female suffrage and the assimilation of Native Americans are just some examples.⁸ In Australia, too, the different racial groups which existed and the attitudes towards them can be seen to have a considerable influence in shaping Aboriginal policy. Unlike the almost open-door policy on immigration which resulted in a large, multi-ethnic population in the United States, white Australia's immigration policy attempted to keep their largely British population racially homogeneous. Early concerns about the numbers of Asian immigrants (characterised as the 'yellow peril') in the late 19th century consolidated as Australia became a federated nation in 1901. The first government in power after Federation, led by Edmund Barton, placed great emphasis on restricting the immigration of non-white groups. Indeed, as eminent Australian historian Manning Clark has argued, 'White Australia' was 'the first principle by which the Commonwealth was to be administered and guided'.⁹ In its first year, the Commonwealth of Australia put in place the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* which consolidated the various measures the colonies had already put in place into a system of restrictions based on a hierarchy of desirable (European, especially British) and undesirable (Asians, Indians, Pacific Islanders) immigrants. The goal of a 'White Australia' was openly stated.¹⁰ What was rarely or never mentioned in the debates surrounding this policy was the fact that Australia as a nation was not completely 'white' to begin with — instead significant populations of Aborigi-

6. While there have been many histories of the impact of the legislation on the Aboriginal people of the states, one of the few efforts to approach the subject from a national perspective is Chesterman and Galligan 1997. See Austin 1992, 1993; Christie 1979; Haebich 1988; Kidd 1997; Read 1988; Reid 1990.

7. See Anderson 2002: 216–43; McGregor 2002; Jacobs 1986; Austin 1990, 1993.

8. Newman 1999; Hoxie 1995; see also Bederman 1995.

9. Clark 1981: 200.

10. For more information on these policies see Markus 1994: 110–54.

nal people lived in the north and the west, including growing numbers of people of mixed descent. The ideology of biological absorption helped to reconcile the existence of these populations with the objective of a 'White Australia'.¹¹

Absorption

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Australian policy-makers planned the disappearance of the Aboriginal people, but not through their adoption of white ways of earning a living and their incorporation into the nation's economy. Rather, it was to be a two stage process: firstly, the 'doomed race' theory posited that people of full descent would soon 'die out',¹² and secondly, it was believed that Aboriginal physical characteristics, and it was hoped, Aboriginality itself, would disappear altogether through biological absorption. The latter theory relied on the dubious scientific idea that Aboriginal genes would not create any 'throw-backs,' or children who physically resembled stereotypes of 'the Aboriginal', after a few generations of 'inter-breeding'.¹³ Ideas about who was or was not 'fit' to 'breed' were closely related to the rhetoric of eugenics which had been filtering into Australia since the 1890s and which gained in popularity during the inter-war years.¹⁴ Emphasis on biological absorption was more conspicuous in some states than in others, but, in combination with the idea that Aboriginal people of full descent would 'die out,' it dominated the strategies which white Australians devised to rid themselves of their 'Aboriginal problem'.

In the Northern Territory and Western Australia, clauses in protection legislation which allowed one of the many forms of control over Aboriginal people's lives — control over whom they could marry — were the basis of the system of biological absorption in these places. Interracial relationships were both a source of anxiety about racial purity and a means through which the demise of the Aboriginal population could be imagined. In the south-eastern states (South Australia, NSW and Victoria; Tasmanian Aboriginal people were supposedly 'extinct') slightly different methods were adopted, but these were still on the whole driven by the underlying aim of biologically

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11. For a fascinating discussion of the ways in which absorption can be understood as part of a unique Australian concept of 'nation', see McGregor 2002.
 12. Tasmania, the smallest state, had an important role to play in keeping what Russell McGregor has labelled the 'doomed race theory' alive, having in a sense 'proved' it by allowing the rest of the world to believe that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people had become 'extinct' with the death on 8 May 1876 of the 'last' full-descent person (a woman called Truganini). See McGregor 1997.
 13. For example, it was argued in the South Australian state parliament that: 'Many well known ethnologists have advocated the assimilation of our Australian natives into the white race. Some people hold up their hands in horror at the thought of the black race mingling with the white, but ethnologists and archaeologists have agreed that it is a logical solution of this vexed problem. The Australian aboriginal is different from the negroid races of other countries, as he does not throw back.' *South Australian Parliamentary Debates* 1938: 845 (hereafter *SAPD*).
For a discussion of the scientific justifications for Western Australian attempts at biological absorption see Jacobs 1986.
 14. Tony Austin has analysed the Northern Territory's policies under Chief Protector Cecil Cook as an 'eugenicist solution' (Austin 1990, 2000). Stephen Garton and Russell McGregor, however, have pointed out several reasons why absorption was not strictly eugenic thinking and stress the importance of not labelling it as such (Garton 2000; McGregor 2002: 297-9).

assimilating the Indigenous population. Only the state of Queensland did not accede to this policy. As the following description of Western Australia and the Northern Territory will show, a crucial factor in each state or territory's particular solution to the 'Aboriginal problem' was the size of its non-white, non-Indigenous population. For the most part these were Pacific Islander and Asian men who had immigrated to Australia in search of work or had been brought there by force as slave labour. The presence of these populations can be seen to be closely connected to the existence of legislation restricting whom Aboriginal people could marry.

Western Australia and the Northern Territory

As the 20th century began, politicians' anxiety in Western Australia intensified about the prevalence of interracial sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women. In 1904 Walter Roth, the Protector of the Indigenous peoples of Northern Queensland since 1899, worked for a Royal Commission which inquired into the condition of Western Australian Aboriginal people.¹⁵ Much to white settlers' discomfort the evidence taken by Roth included graphic stories of the sexual habits of Western Australian white men, not just itinerant workers and shepherds, but also station owners and police. "'Kombo"-ism [casual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women],' said Roth bluntly in his report which was presented to Parliament in 1905, 'is rife'.¹⁶

The Western Australian *Aborigines Act 1905* was based partly on an earlier Act passed by Queensland in 1897 and was partly a response to Roth's report. It attempted to regulate casual liaisons between white men and Aboriginal women by a variety of measures. These included the creation of reserves which anyone other than an Aboriginal person was forbidden to enter without good reason; provisions designed to force white fathers to support their children financially; and the transfer of guardianship of mixed-descent children to the Protectors. The latter consequently acquired the power to remove the children from their mothers and send them to live in government institutions. The Act also made the Chief Protector's approval a requirement for all marriages of Aboriginal women to non-Aboriginal men. Like Anna Haebich, most historians have seen this last measure as one of a group of 'sweeping powers allowing for the rigid control of Aborigines', and as yet another way of reducing the births of children fathered by white men with Aboriginal women.¹⁷ However, while certainly related to the

15. Legislation aimed at Aboriginal people was first passed in Western Australia in 1886. The 1886 *Aborigines Protection Act*, however, ignored the issue of interracial sex and concentrated instead on regulating the employment of Aboriginal people. Accurate measurements of the size of the Aboriginal population living in Western Australia during this period do not exist. In 1891 and 1901 the state government counted only those 'full-bloods' living in settled areas, and included 'half-castes' as part of the white population. They counted 6,245 and 6,212 respectively, while the white population hovered around 200,000. Fraser 1906: 110; *Statistical Register of Western Australia* 1903: 5.

16. 'Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives', *Western Australian Minutes and Votes and Proceedings of Parliament* 1(5), 1905: 25.

17. Haebich 1988: 85. Christine Choo's recent book is an exception, in which she argued that: '[b]y the turn of the century, Aboriginal women in Western Australia (and other parts of Australia, especially the tropical north) were seen as an even greater threat when they chose to have sexual relationships with non-European, particularly Asian, men' than when they had relationships with white men. Choo 2001: 4.

growing mixed-descent population, the section of the Act which dealt with marriage was not specifically directed at the problem of casual liaisons between white men and Aboriginal women. Rather, its inclusion reveals much about the significant role that the presence of other ethnic groups played in the minds of legislators who aimed to control the Aboriginal population.

As a result of its rich mineral resources and pearling industry, Western Australia had a small but significant Asian and Pacific Islander population. They were mostly men employed in these lucrative industries. The 1901 census recorded that out of a total population of 184,124 there were 3,615 people who were born in one of the 'Asiatic' countries.¹⁸ It was this group which came to dominate the discourse about interracial relationships.¹⁹ No doubt the fact that this population was almost completely comprised of adult males contributed to legislators' anxieties. In evidence given before the Roth Royal Commission, both those answering questions and those posing them frequently mentioned this group of men when discussing problems of interracial sex and the production of mixed-descent children. Despite their comparatively small numbers, this group was singled out with extraordinary frequency in the minutes of evidence. For example, when asked which people he would object to as employers of natives, a police sergeant from Carnarvon gave the example of a 'Malay' man, 'who has a native woman with him – practically living with him ... I object to this, not because of his nationality, but because he is a very dirty and disreputable man'.²⁰ A sergeant from Broome answered similarly. To the question 'Do you know of any blacks working without contract where you would object to the employers?' he answered 'Yes. Cases where the employers are Asiatics, for instance. I would like to have the power to object.'²¹ A similar bias was evident in those asking the questions. Witnesses were asked if they knew of any 'Europeans or Asiatics carrying native women around the country', or if they knew of 'any cases of defilement of young native girls by Europeans or Asiatics'. A direct link was made between the issue of interracial marriage and this group of men. Henry Charles Prinsep, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, was asked whether he had the 'power to prevent a female aboriginal from being married to a person other than an Aboriginal'. When he replied in the negative, the question which followed revealed exactly which 'person other than Aboriginal' the questioner had in mind: 'Are Asiatics being legally married to aboriginal females?' A similar coupling of concerns about marriages of Aboriginal women and Asian or Pacific Islander men appears in the parliamentary debates on the 1905 Act the following year. James Isdell, prospector, station manager, and member for Pilbara, spoke at length in support of the clause controlling interracial marriages, arguing that Asian men mistreated their Aboriginal wives and that there was 'great evil in connection with this inter-marriage with aliens, and it is disgraceful'.²²

18. Vanden Driesen 1986: 158; Fraser 1906: 297.

19. For more information about the Asian population of Western Australia, and European anxieties about them, see Choo 1994, 1995, 1999, 2001.

20. Evidence of Thomas Houlahan, 'Minutes of Evidence Given at the 1905 Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives', in *Papers Respecting the Treatment of Aboriginal Natives in Western Australia*: 330-1.

21. Evidence of John Byrne, 'Minutes of Evidence': 616.

Similarly, in parliamentary debates Asian and Pacific Islander men served as convenient scapegoats when sensitive topics were being discussed. In 1905 Frederick Piesse, the member of the Legislative Assembly for Katanning, blamed the 'unfortunateness of natives' on their 'connection with the darker races from the Islands of the East'.²³ In 1929 when Edward Angelo quite rightly blamed the decimation of the Aboriginal population of Western Australia on diseases introduced by Europeans, a colleague interjected 'What about the diseases introduced by Asiatics?'²⁴ Surprisingly, given the very considerable number of children born of white and Aboriginal parents, it was the growing, but still small, population of children of Aboriginal and Asian or Pacific Islander parents which obsessed parliamentarians and motivated the legal controls on interracial marriage. For example, James Isdell concluded a diatribe against marriages between Aboriginal women and Asian men in 1905 with a simple warning: 'We are talking about a White Australia, and we are cultivating a piebald one.'²⁵ Isdell was not worried so much about the shades of 'black' and 'white' in his colour-schemed view of the future of Western Australia; it was the possibility of other hues introduced by Asian and Pacific Islander men that raised his ire.

In the Northern Territory (which was administered first by South Australia, and, after 1911, by the Commonwealth government), white people had similar concerns about interracial sexual relationships. In the very first Chief Protector's report for 1910, William Stretton expressed his belief that the 'aboriginal is, undoubtedly, capable of great improvement, but this can only be effected by separating them from their intercourse with Asiatic races. ... Among these people a most undesirable race is rapidly increasing'.²⁶ A clause controlling interracial marriage remained unchanged from its original appearance in the South Australian *Northern Territory Aboriginals Act 1910*, the first and only piece of legislation South Australia passed concerning Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.²⁷ The clause simply forbade the celebration of the marriage of a 'female aboriginal with any person other than an aboriginal ... without the permission, in writing, of a Protector'.

22. Evidence of John Byrne, Robert Anderson and Henry Charles Prinsep, 'Minutes of Evidence': 647, 960, 174-5; *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter WAPD), 28, 1905: 427.

23. WAPD, 28, 1905: 324.

24. WAPD, 83, 1929: 2105.

25. WAPD, 28, 1905: 427.

26. 'Report of the Government Resident for the Year 1910', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers* 3(66), 1911: 42 (hereafter CPP).

27. The *Northern Territory Aboriginals Act, 1910* defined who was to be classed as Aboriginal, set up a department to control and 'promote the welfare' of Northern Territory Aboriginal people, prevented white people from moving Aboriginal people around the country and from entering reserves, gave the Chief Protector the power to say where Aboriginal people could live and who they could work for, made it an offence to sell a gun to an Aboriginal person, restricted Aboriginal women from marrying non-Aboriginal men, and set up a system to make the white fathers of mixed-descent children contribute to their maintenance. A 1911 Ordinance, passed by the Commonwealth government, added to, rather than replaced, the 1910 Act. It gave the Chief Protector greater powers over Aboriginal people's lives and changed the system of licensing white employers to use Aboriginal labour. *Aboriginals Ordinance, 1911* (Commonwealth).

In 1913, anthropologist and temporary Chief Protector W Baldwin Spencer demonstrated clear bias against interracial sexual relationships between Aboriginal women and Asian men (as opposed to white men) in the Northern Territory, claiming that sexual contact with Chinese people caused 'rapid degeneration of the native'.²⁸ Spencer was specifically worried about mixed Aboriginal, Asian, and Pacific Islander children. He recommended that the legislation 'be amended to include a more clear definition of a half-caste than it now does. ... It must be remembered that they are also a very mixed group. In practically all cases, the mother is a full-blooded aboriginal, the father may be a white man, a Chinese, a Japanese, a Malay or a Filipino'.²⁹

While much of the legislation passed by Western Australia and the Northern Territory contained clauses which attempted to regulate non-marital interracial sex between white men and Aboriginal women, the clauses specifically targeting marriage were aimed mostly at Asian and Pacific Islander men. It was not envisioned, in any case, that many white men would stoop to make their relationships with Aboriginal women public and long-term, but a vague feeling that these relationships and their offspring were integral to the demise of Aboriginal identity was also at work. Marriages between Aboriginal women and 'alien' men could only complicate this process. This vague feeling, however, was soon given more explicit expression in the policies of two particular chief administrators.

In the late 1920s and 1930s both the Northern Territory and Western Australia were under the direction of strong-willed Chief Protectors who attempted to use the anti-interracial marriage clauses in the legislation to promote biological absorption. In Western Australia Augustus O Neville and in the Northern Territory Cecil E Cook endeavoured to set up a process by which the mixed-descent population would gradually be 'absorbed' into the white population through interracial sexual intercourse. These men were perhaps the most influential advocates of the elimination of Aboriginal physical characteristics during this period of Australian history.

In a book published in 1947, Neville outlined his views on the future of the Aboriginal population, policies which he had tried to implement during his administration:

It would seem proper that like should mate with like — full-blood with full-blood, half-blood with half-blood or lighter — but because so many are near-white we must expect, and have experienced already, legal unions between us and them. It is to the benefit of our own race that the full-blood should not any longer be encouraged to mate with other than full-blood; on the contrary, he should be rigidly excluded from any association likely to lead to any other union.³⁰

Neville was instrumental in the decision to include a clause in the Western Australian *Aborigines Act Amendment Act 1936* which dictated that no marriage of *any* Aboriginal person could be celebrated without the permission of the Chief Protector. Previously the restrictions had related only to the marriage of Aboriginal women to non-Aboriginal

²⁸. Spencer 1913: 43.

²⁹. Spencer 1913: 46.

³⁰. Neville 1947: 56. For an examination of Neville's policies of biological absorption see Jacobs 1986. For a fictional treatment of the effect of Neville's policies on Western Australian Aboriginal people see Scott 1999, and for a case study of how they impacted on the lives of one interracial couple, see Rajkowski 1995.

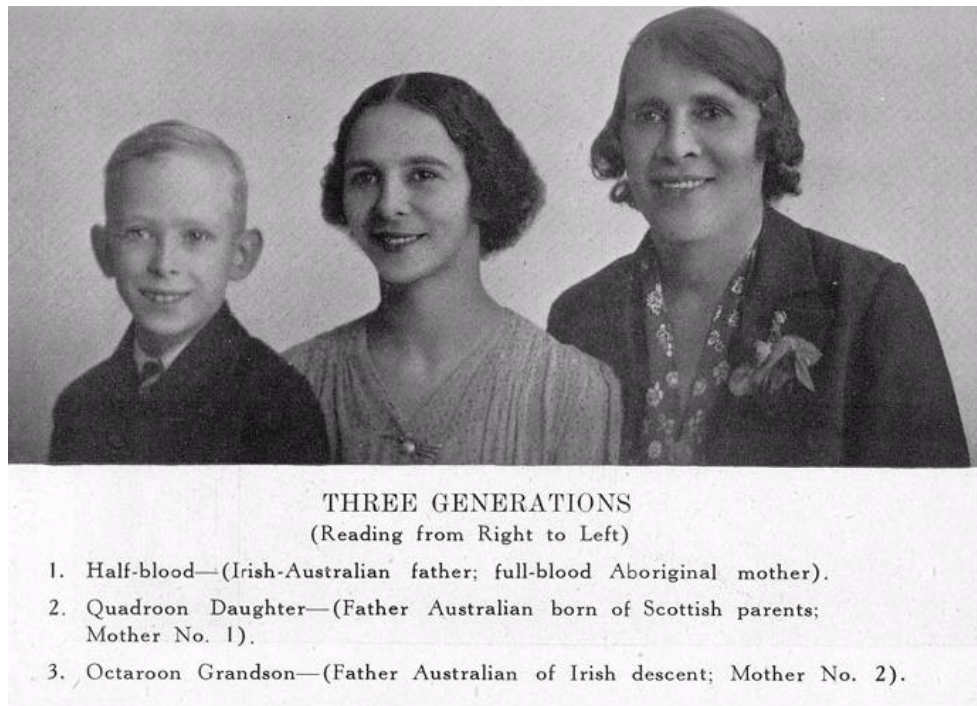


Figure 1: In his 1947 book about Australian race relations, AO Neville provided visual support for his biological absorptionist theories. From Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority*, facing p72.

men. Biological absorption depended on those of mixed Aboriginal and white descent having children with those who had fewer Aboriginal ancestors than themselves. Control of marriages was necessary to implement this theory, as was the separation of those of mixed descent from those of full descent. As Craig argued in 1936, '[t]he colour must not be allowed to drift back to black. If we can only segregate the half-castes from the full-bloods we shall go a long way towards breeding the dark blood out of these people'.³¹ Far from an earlier moral concern to prevent 'miscegenation' between white men and Aboriginal women, by 1936, according to the government, 'the best thing that [could] happen to a half-caste [was] to marry a white'.³²

Dr Cecil E Cook, who held dual posts of Chief Protector and Chief Medical Officer of the Northern Territory from 1927 until 1939, was another outspoken advocate of biological absorption. Perhaps to a greater extent than any other high status official on record, Cook subscribed to the philosophy that the Aboriginal people could be absorbed into the white population through interracial marriage. Cook was open about his belief that people of mixed descent should marry each other or white partners, but not Aboriginal people of full descent, and used the powers granted to him by the *Aboriginal Ordinance 1911* to attempt to ensure that this would occur. Like his colleague in

³¹. WAPD 98, 1936: 823.

³². WAPD 98, 1936: 987.

Western Australia, Cook was also adamant in his belief that this solution to the 'Aboriginal problem' was being hampered by the births of children with Asian or Pacific Islander fathers. In 1930, immediately after he wrote of the permission he had given to the marriage of seven 'female half-castes with persons other than aboriginals', he recorded that '[a]ction was taken to discourage any association which was calculated to result in or encourage marriage between coloured persons other than half-castes and female aboriginals'.³³ Tony Austin argues that, especially in the early years of his office, Cook was careful not to make overly strong statements of his views in his official writing because of his many vociferous critics. In private correspondence, however, he was wont to argue openly, for example, that:

In the Territory ... the preponderance of coloured races, the prominence of coloured alien blood and the scarcity of white females to mate with the white male population, creates a position of incalculable future menace to the purity of race in tropical Australia ... If [women of mixed descent are] permitted to mate with alien blood, the future of this country may very well be doomed to disaster.³⁴

It is hardly surprising that the Northern Territory, where the unique population included large proportions of Asian and Pacific Islander people, produced a Chief Protector with views as strong as Cecil Cook. In 1911, the census recorded that only 1,729 white Australians, most of whom were men, lived in the territory. A total of 1,633 Chinese people lived there, along with unrecorded numbers of Japanese, Pacific Islander, Maori, and various other peoples. The Aboriginal population was estimated at between 20,000 and 50,000.³⁵

Legislation concerning Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, with their considerable non-white populations, reflected a multi- rather than a bi-racial society. While government rhetoric often indicated an implicit acceptance of interracial sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women, it remained adamant in its condemnation of relationships between men of other ethnic backgrounds and Aboriginal women. Legislators fought a losing battle to create a society which would eventually be 'bred' white. When the 1937 Aboriginal Welfare Conference, at which all the state administrators had gathered, recommended that the destiny of Aboriginal people of mixed descent was their 'ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth', it was Neville who claimed that 'Western Australia ha[d] gone further in the development of such a long-range policy' than any other state with its policy of controlling marriages, and emphasised the inevitability of the process. 'How can we keep them apart from the community?' he asked, 'Our own population is not increasing at such a rapid rate as to lead us to expect that there will be a great many more white people in the area fifteen years hence than there are at present'.³⁶

Cook also supported the idea of absorption as the only alternative to the horrifying possibility that 'in fifty years, or a little later, the white population of the Northern

³³. 'Report on the Administration of North Australia for the year ended the 30th June, 1930', *CPP*, 4(216), 1929-1931: 6. The effect of these policies on one particular couple can be seen in Camfoo 2000.

³⁴. Cook to Morley, 28 April 1931, as quoted in Austin 1993: 133-4. See also Austin 2000.

³⁵. Powell 1996: 126.

³⁶. Commonwealth of Australia 1937: 10-11.

Territory will be absorbed into the black.³⁷ To these men, responsible for the control of significant Aboriginal populations and familiar with the results of casual interracial sex on the frontier, biological absorption through the birth of more and more mixed-descent children seemed the obvious solution. It was an answer, however, which had some drawbacks. One of these was the 'pollution' of Indigenous blood with Pacific Islander and Asian 'blood'. Hence the effort to prevent these unions through the restriction of whom Aboriginal people could marry.

Victoria, NSW and South Australia

In the south-eastern states, biological absorption was promoted using slightly different methods. Rather than controlling the parenting of mixed-descent children, politicians tried to engineer the 'disappearance' of their Indigenous populations by physically dividing Aboriginal people from one another, removing families and individuals from the reserves, and removing children from their families. These solutions to the 'Aboriginal problem' were certainly a response to the characteristics of white settlement in these areas. Not only did white settlement happen earlier than in the northern and western states, it grew faster. In Victoria, NSW, and South Australia, the period during which white settlers and Aboriginal groups physically and violently clashed was short and devastating for the Aboriginal populations. By the time Victoria, for example, began legislating to control its Indigenous population in the 1860s, the Aboriginal population officially numbered only 1,869.³⁸ Furthermore, unlike those in the north and the west, the southern and eastern states did not have significant non-white, non-Aboriginal populations.³⁹ Consequently these states displayed fewer anxieties about controlling or preventing interracial sexual relationships, and, unlike the northern and western states, did not enact legislation which imposed official control on interracial marriages.

In NSW, Victoria, and South Australia the humanitarian idea that white people owed Aboriginal people something for the theft of their land quickly dissipated and was replaced by resentment of Aboriginal people's supposed 'cost' to the state. It was this problem which obsessed white administrators. Two solutions were found for the financial aspect of the 'Aboriginal problem', both of which were applied in varying degrees in all the Australian states at different times. The first method attempted to divide Indigenous populations along racial lines into 'mixed-descent' and 'full-descent' groups, and to remove financial support from the former (the latter were expected to succumb to the 'doomed race theory'). The second method divided the Indigenous community in a different way: by singling out children, again mostly according to racial classification. The models for this policy were the Acts passed by NSW in the

37. Commonwealth of Australia 1937: 14.

38. Christie 1979: 175.

39. There had been a large influx of non-European, predominantly Chinese, immigrants to Victoria during the goldrush decades (1850s–80s), but by 1891 the Chinese population had fallen from 25,424 in 1857 to 7,349 in 1901, making up less than 0.8% of the total population. Cronin 1982: 136, 140. NSW did have a significant Chinese population during the mid-19th century due to the gold rushes, when there were around 17,000 Chinese in the state. In 1881 white anxieties about this group resulted in the *Chinese Influx Act* which restricted their immigration, all but solving the 'problem' by the time the colony began to concentrate on assimilating its Indigenous population.

early 20th century. Although very different from the methods of biological absorption championed by Cook and Neville, these policies too, with their emphasis on merging those of lighter-skin with the white community, are clear applications of an absorptionist philosophy.

In Victoria in the 1870s and early 1880s, what historian Michael Christie has called 'a fully-fledged absorptionist policy' was developed and duly enshrined in law by the *Aborigines Protection Act 1886*. This Act, Christie has argued, 'virtually ensured that "Aborigines" ... would eventually die out'.⁴⁰ In various debates in the Victorian parliament and in evidence taken by an 1877 *Royal Commission on the Aborigines*, white people repeatedly expressed their opinion that Aboriginal people of full descent were destined to succumb to the 'inevitable fate of an inferior race to disappear before a superior', as CM Officer, the member for Toorak, put it.⁴¹ By contrast, those of mixed descent were increasing in numbers, and the solution proposed for these people was to deprive them of the government support to which they had previously been entitled by removing them from the reserves and stopping their rations. In other words, as one of the authors of the policy explained, these people should be 'treated as Europeans, and separate[d from] the pure blacks'.⁴² On the surface this form of 'absorption' appeared to imply little more than an assimilation into the white economies. Mixed-descent people were denied their Aboriginal identity, and the government support that went with it, and sent out into mainstream society to sink or swim. However, the racial categorization on which the policy was based — those of mixed descent, who already had some white ancestry, were targeted — indicates its similarity to the methods of biological absorption attempted in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Not only would these people live and work alongside white people, but their partially white ancestry rendered them possible contributors to a process of absorption, should they marry each other or white people. They were prevented by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines from marrying those of 'full-descent' to encourage this process.⁴³

Although the 1886 Act failed, for a variety of reasons, to force Aboriginal people of mixed descent to support themselves financially, the cruel and pragmatic nature of Victorian policy became, as has been recognised by John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, an important 'precursor' to practices in the other states.⁴⁴ Thus it was clear that the NSW Board for the Protection of Aborigines was, from its inception, aware of and in complete agreement with the ideas circulating in Victoria.

From 1898 the NSW Board had sent out circulars to missionaries and station managers asking them to ensure that no able-bodied Aboriginal people were receiving government assistance.⁴⁵ Removing people from the stations, however, could not be achieved with encouraging circulars, and the Board's report for 1908 lobbied for the

40. Christie 1979: 201.

41. 'Royal Commission on the Aborigines', *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 3, 1877–8: 111 (hereafter *VPP*).

42. 'Royal Commission on the Aborigines' 1877–8: 52.

43. For more information about the regulation of interracial marriages during this period see Ellinghaus 2001.

44. Chesterman and Galligan 1997: 20.

45. 'Aborigines (Report of Board for 1898)', *Journal of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*, 61(1), 1899: 3.

introduction of legislation giving the Board power 'more especially with respect to the children, who, under existing conditions, must sooner or later become a burden on the State'.⁴⁶ The NSW government's legislative attempts to control the lives of Aboriginal people in the early part of the 20th century, while similar to those made in Victoria, are also unique in their blatant and single-minded focus on absorbing the Aboriginal population by means of removing children from their parents. Although all Australian states participated in the removal of children from their parents, the NSW government placed the earliest and greatest emphasis on this method of destroying Aboriginal identity. Pale-skinned children were targeted for removal in the hope that they would 'pass' for white, and boys and girls were sent to different regions of the state to keep them apart.⁴⁷ Bain Attwood has shown that this time was one in which the lives of NSW Aboriginal people steadily worsened: 'Hundreds, even thousands, of Aboriginal men and women were prohibited from remaining on or entering into reserves', while the amount of land reserved for Aboriginal people was halved between 1910 and 1928. It has been 'estimated that approximately 2000 Aboriginal children were separated from their families by the Board' between 1909 and 1938.⁴⁸ By 1937, NSW felt that it came second only to Victoria in having found a solution to the 'Aboriginal problem'. BS Harkness, a member of the Board, told the 1937 Aboriginal welfare conference that '[o]ur problem is not so difficult as that of other States, excepting Victoria', and added his support to the prevailing view that people of mixed descent should be 'merged' with the white population.⁴⁹

South Australia put in place policies of dispersal and removal similar to those applied in NSW and Victoria. Interestingly, South Australia originally considered restricting the marriages of Aboriginal women when it was still in control of the area which became the Northern Territory. Indeed, South Australia's period of governing this area (1863–1911) provides a revealing case study of the differences in policy between the south-eastern and north-western regions of Australia. Perhaps calmed by the same forces that delayed the development of Aboriginal policy in NSW and Victoria, it was not until 1911, just after the legislation for the transfer of control of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth had been passed, that the South Australian government enacted legislation for the 'Aboriginal and Half-Caste Inhabitants of the State of South Australia'.⁵⁰ The clauses omitted from this legislation, compared with those included in the Northern Territory legislation, are revealing. South Australian parliamentarians obviously believed their constituents to be better employers than those in the Northern Territory, and the possibility of violence by Aboriginal people in

46. 'Aborigines (Report of the Board for the Protection of, for year 1908)', *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers* 2, 1909: 4.

47. See Morris 1989: 110. The 1909 Act defined an 'Aborigine' as any 'full-blooded aboriginal native of Australia, and any person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood who applies for or is in receipt of rations or aid from the board or is residing on a reserve'. The measures it put in place to remove 'able-bodied' Aboriginal people from the reserves were even more drastic than Victoria's policies, which at least gave some years of warning before people of mixed descent had to vacate the reserves. The Act also gave the Board the power to dictate where Aboriginal people could camp, and made it illegal, as in the other states, to supply Aboriginal people with alcohol.

48. Attwood et al 1994: 8.

49. Commonwealth of Australia 1937: 14.

possession of firearms was seen as less substantial. More significantly, and no doubt due to the smaller populations of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the southern state, there was seen to be no need to monitor the marriages of Aboriginal people.⁵¹

A Royal Commission to investigate the Aboriginal population of South Australia was appointed just after the 1911 Act was passed. In 1913, it produced a Progress Report which suggested policies similar to those operating in Victoria and NSW in the previous decades: people of mixed descent were not to be supported by the government, and the merging of the populations was to be accomplished by the removal of children from their parents. As in Victoria and NSW, it was thought that there should not 'be an obligation on the general taxpayer to support the people of [another] race as loafers'.⁵² By 1923, the South Australian government felt it necessary to enact legislation which concentrated on the removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children, its main provision allowing the Chief Protector to place any Aboriginal children in an institution until they turned 18.⁵³ South Australia's firm commitment to biological absorption was reaffirmed at the 1937 conference, at which a federal Aboriginal policy was discussed for the first time. The South Australian representative, Professor JB Cleland, expressed concerns about a growing mixed-descent population in his state which was not the result of an 'additional influx of white blood, but following on inter-marriage with themselves'. He asked for Commonwealth funding for a study about the 'best method for the gradual absorption of the half-caste' and suggested that a scheme be implemented 'by which the two sexes can have opportunities of meeting and so marrying'.⁵⁴

The removal of children became common practice in all Australian states as the century progressed. Peter Read has described the impact of the policies in this way:

[I]t used to be said that by the end of the First World War, there wasn't a single British family that had not been touched, by injury or death, by the fighting in Europe. It is probably fair to say that except for the remotest regions of the nation, there was not a single Aboriginal family which had not been touched by the policy of removal. Everybody had lost someone.⁵⁵

50. Like its rejected predecessor, the *Aborigines Act, 1911* (South Australia) was very similar to the 1897 Queensland legislation. It created the Aborigines Department and a Chief Protector, who became the legal guardian of all children under 21 years. It made it an offence to remove any Aboriginal person, female 'half-caste', or child from a district; attempted to keep non-Aboriginal people out of reserves, made provisions for treating contagious diseases, and attempted to regulate employment through inspections rather than a permit system. It gave the department the power to remove any Aboriginal person from a reserve or force them to stay on one, to move Aboriginal camps away from towns, to allot blocks not exceeding 160 acres to Aboriginal people. Provisions were also included which forced fathers of mixed-descent children to contribute to their maintenance.

51. See 'Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines Bill', *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* 2(77a), 1899, (hereafter *SAPP*); Austin 1992: 168–9; *SAPP* 1899: 38 and 1911–12: 231. The legislation, however, as Peggy Brock has argued, continued to focus on controlling Aboriginal women's sexuality. See Brock 1995.

52. 'Progress Report of the Royal Commission on The Aborigines', *SAPP* 2(26), 1913: 12.

53. *Aborigines (Training of Children) Act, 1923* (SA).

54. Commonwealth of Australia 1937, 10. In 1938 and 1939, a study of Aboriginal people of mixed descent was conducted under the auspices of the University of Adelaide and Harvard University. See Tindale 1940.

55. Read 1998: 9. See also Haebich and Delroy 1999; Haebich 2000.

White Australians are only just beginning to learn of the extent of Aboriginal peoples' suffering as a result of these policies. In 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission released a report which investigated the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their parents. One of its many conclusions was that the removal of children was an act of genocide according to the Convention on Genocide ratified by Australia in 1949. 'The essence of genocide is acting with the *intention* to destroy the group,' the report argued, '[a] major intention of forcibly removing Indigenous children was to 'absorb,' 'merge' or 'assimilate' them, so Aborigines as a distinct group would disappear'.⁵⁶

The exception: Queensland

That racial policies, particularly those which restrict interracial marriage, cannot be explained without examining the entire racial landscape in which they were adopted (in other words, all the racial groups which lived in that particular area) is borne out by the huge body of anti-interracial marriage legislation passed in the United States: from 1661, when the Maryland General Assembly passed the first colonial anti-miscegenation statute, and operational until 1967, when the US Supreme Court declared such laws unconstitutional.⁵⁷ Created to keep the white race 'pure,' these laws varied greatly in terms of the restrictions and punishments put in place and the groups targeted (although the majority of these laws focused on African Americans). They make the Australian legislation, which restricted but did not forbid interracial marriages in three of the seven colonies/states, look mild by comparison. They also served a very different purpose: to prevent interracial marriages rather than to encourage certain types of them, as occurred in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. In Queensland, however, although a clause restricting interracial marriage almost identical to that enacted in Western Australia and the Northern Territory was included in its protection legislation, initial anxieties about racial mixing resembled those in the United States more than those in neighbouring Australian states. As in many American states, the object of the law was to prevent interracial marriages altogether, rather than to encourage certain types that would lead to biological absorption.

Queensland was the first state to pass a law which enabled the Chief Protector to control the marriages of Aboriginal people. The 1901 Act, which amended the Queensland government's first attempt at protection legislation (the 1897 *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*), contained a clause which made the marriage of Aboriginal women to any person other than an Aboriginal man conditional on written permission from a Protector.⁵⁸ In debating the clause, however, legislators displayed subtly different anxieties about interracial relationships between Aboriginal women and Asian and Pacific Islander men than those prevalent in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.⁵⁹ Although men of non-white ethnicities (mostly Pacific Islander and Asian), who lived in Queensland in significant numbers, were still regarded in some quarters as undesirable sexual partners for Aboriginal and mixed-descent women, the good qualities of Pacific Islander husbands were a familiar refrain in the Protector's reports over the next few years.⁶⁰ Between 1899 and 1913 the reports of the

⁵⁶. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997: 27. See Curthoys and Docker 2001.

⁵⁷. See Lay 1993.

Chief Protectors displayed an implicit acceptance of marriages between Aboriginal or mixed-descent women and Pacific Islander, Asian, or European men. The concern of Walter Roth and Richard B Howard, the Chief Protectors for this period, was the prevention of immorality and cruelty, not the long-term consequences of the sexual mixing of the different groups. In his report for 1899, which attempted to estimate the number of mixed-descent children in the north, Roth's preoccupation was not with their growing numbers, but with alleged infanticide and the 'future welfare, care, and happiness of the children themselves'.⁶¹ In the next year's report he called interracial marriages 'a great moral wrong' not because of anxieties about 'miscegenation' but because they might take place 'without previous careful inquiry being made as to whether [Aboriginal women] are not already married in the tribal sense of the term'.⁶² Again, in his report for 1901, he complained that:

the general morality of some of the settlers etc., in these same districts is at so low an ebb that the presence of such (especially half-caste) [female] children acts as a sort of premium on 'kombo'-ism. For as long as the Asiatic or low-class European realises that no Governmental action is taken with regard to his half-caste children, he will continue cohabiting with his aboriginal paramour.⁶³

So while anxieties certainly existed about a growing 'hybrid population', Roth did not use the law restricting marriages to try to prevent Aboriginal-Pacific Islander marriages altogether.⁶⁴ After describing nine such 'marriages, etc.' between Aboriginal women and Chinese or Pacific Islander men in which the women worked as prostitutes, Roth revealed that his personal agenda was always to 'exert my influence in the direction of trying to put a stop to these mixed marriages, but cases repeatedly occur where they may be considered both expedient and justifiable'. When deciding whether to allow a marriage, Roth gave great weight to the 'general character and repute of both individuals, the number of years during which there has been cohabitation, and, where children have been born, the manner in which they have been reared, cared for, and schooled'.⁶⁵ He had given permission for 40 such marriages that year. In each case he listed the district, ancestry of both husband and wife, and occupation of the husband. In some cases Roth even saw marriage as the least of a number of evils. In his report for 1905, he wrote:

58. The 1897 Act was used as the model for legislation passed in Western Australia (1905), in South Australia (1910), and the Northern Territory (1911). It defined 'Aborigines' and 'half-castes' (placing many of the second category into the first, and therefore subjecting them to the Act), attempted to segregate the races by creating reserves, appointed Protectors, and made the employment of Aboriginal people dependent on a permit issued by a Protector. It also made it an offence to harbour Aboriginal people or female 'half-castes' (a hint here of anxieties about sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women), or to remove Aboriginal people from one district to another or out of the state, or to supply an Aboriginal people with alcohol or opium. It also tightened controls of the employment of Aboriginal people on pearling and bêche de mer vessels, forbade Aboriginal women or half-castes or children from being employed on ships, made it an offence for anyone (except a Superintendent or Protector) to frequent a place where Aboriginal people or female 'half-castes' were camped, made fathers of mixed-descent children liable for support of their child, and placed the burden of proof of age onto men accused of having carnal knowledge of underage Aboriginal girls.

59. For a discussion of anxieties surrounding relationships of Aboriginal women and Asian men in the far north, see Ganter 1998, 1999.

It is a practical impossibility to prosecute all the men — Europeans, Asiatics, and Islanders — living with aboriginal females, under the harbouring clauses of the Act, and hence my action has been to encourage marriage where the parties persist in cohabiting, rather than lay my department open to the reproach of sanctioning concubinage and prostitution.⁶⁶

The appointment of John W Bleakley to the office of Chief Protector in 1913–14 heralded a new era which put Queensland even further out of line with the rest of Australia. In his first report for the year 1913, Bleakley wrote of his belief that mixed-descent women should marry only Aboriginal or mixed-descent men.⁶⁷ It appears that Bleakley did his best to discourage interracial relationships. In 1916, he mentioned that a 'policy of encouraging legal marriage to [Aboriginal women's] own country men is proving successful, as in twenty-eight cases the husbands chosen were aboriginal or half-castes'.⁶⁸ By 1928, his policy had become 'to check as far as possible the breeding of half-castes, by firmly discouraging miscegenation, and, in conformity with this, every effort is made to encourage marriage of those now with us to people of their own race'.⁶⁹ By 1931, Bleakley was even attributing the success of this policy to the desires of the Aboriginal women themselves: 'It is noteworthy,' he wrote in his report for 1931, 'that in very few instances any desire has been shown to marry outside of their own race; in fact, in the institutions, they seem to show a preference for the full-blood'.⁷⁰ Finally, in 1932 he noted the change in departmental policy towards marriages with white men:

The efforts of this Department in the past have been directed to the checking of this evil, by sternly preventing miscegenation, as far as the limited machinery made possible. The marriage of whites and aboriginals, unfortunately not discour-

60. For example the Home Secretary argued that: '[t]he reason why the legislation is asked for is that an Asiatic, who is known to have been convicted of offences against the Act — for supplying blacks with opium, for instance — upon a prosecution being attempted against him for a breach of the Act with regard to harbouring a gin and her family, perhaps portion of that family being his own children, does this: He goes through a form of marriage with that gin, and defies the law. There are many such instances. He is a nomad, and that marriage bond is no more to him than a snap of the finger. If he wants to sever it he packs up his traps and goes elsewhere. But he is able, by going through that form of marriage, to defy the protector, and say, "You cannot remove this woman from my premises; she is my wife".' *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* 1901: 223.

61. 'Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1899', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 5, 1900: 10 (hereafter *QVP*).

62. 'Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1900', *QVP* 4(2), 1901: 9.

63. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1901', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter *QPP*) 1, 1902: 7.

64. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1901': 8.

65. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1901': 9.

66. 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1905', *QPP*, 1906: 15.

67. 'I lean strongly to the view that it is less cruel to these unfortunates to keep them among the race to which they belong, half by blood and almost wholly by nature, than to expect them to take a place with their white sisters, where uncongenial conditions and company condemn them very often to what can only be an unhappy lonely existence.' (Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the year 1913', *QPP* 3 (1914), 11).

Bleakley published his opinions about assimilation at length in Bleakley 1961.

68. 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the year 1916', *QPP* 3 (1917), 8.

aged in the earlier years, has been absolutely prohibited, and every encouragement given to these women to marry amongst their own race.⁷¹

Far from encouraging the idea of absorbing Aboriginal identity altogether, Bleakley went out of his way to rid Queensland of its mixed-descent population by absorbing it into the Indigenous population rather than the white.⁷² In this, he made Queensland the exception to every other Australian state and territory.

Although Bleakley's policies certainly showed the same anxieties about the problem of a growing mixed-descent population, he was not in agreement with the Chief Protectors of Western Australia and the Northern Territory, Neville and Cook, who by this time were advocating the absorption of Aboriginal physical characteristics into those of the white population. The reasons for Bleakley's unconformity can perhaps be found in his 1936 and 1937 reports, as he grappled with his unpopular ideas about the future of Australia's multiracial society. He wrote in 1936:

Considerable interest in the case of the half-caste has been awakened by suggestions from different quarters, resulting in a side controversy, that the solution of the problem of their future lay in their absorption into the white race by marriage of young women to white men.⁷³

Interestingly, his reason for objecting to this idea was also regarded as one of the biggest 'problems' faced by supporters of the absorption policy — the 'impurity' of mixed-descent 'blood':

Unfortunately, such a proposal, although suitable in some special cases of quadroon and lighter types with definite European characteristics, overlooks the many complexities of this difficult problem. Not every half-caste is the product of European breeding — quite a large proportion are of alien blood more akin to the

69. 'Aboriginal Department — Information contained in the report for the year ended 31st December, 1928', *QPP* 1, 1929: 5.

70. 'Aboriginal Department — Information contained in the report for the year ended 31st December, 1931', *QPP* 1, 1932: 8.

71. 'Aboriginal Department — Information contained in the report for the year ended 31st December, 1932', *QPP* 1, 1933: 9. Historian Noel Loos suggests that Queensland authorities had another motivation for discouraging white men from marrying their Aboriginal partners: the threat to the status quo that such state and church-sanctioned unions represented. Loos 1982: 36.

72. Although the only official criteria for accepting or rejecting applications for interracial marriages expressed in the Protector's reports remained those given by Roth in 1901 (character, length of cohabitation, children etc), the differing policies of the three Protectors during the period between 1884 and 1939 are reflected in numbers and kinds of marriages approved by them. Until 1916, under the Protectorships of Roth and Howard, in the first few years of Bleakley's office, the majority of marriages approved were to Pacific Islanders. From 1917, the majority of approved marriages were between Aboriginal men and women, or 'half-castes' (presumably descended from European and Aboriginal parentage). By 1928, only marriages between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men or men of mixed descent were approved. In the following decade growing numbers of such marriages took place (reaching a peak of 113 in 1936), while there were at most one or two cases of interracial marriage between Aboriginal women and other ethnic groups.

73. 'Aboriginal Department — Information contained in the report for the year ended 31st December, 1936', *QPP* 2, 1937: 10.

aboriginal race itself, such as Pacific Island, African, Malay, and others of Asiatic origin.⁷⁴

The following year Bleakley reiterated this objection when commenting on the 1937 Aboriginal Welfare Conference's support of the policy of 'absorption'. According to Bleakley,

Queensland's cross-breed problem was probably more complex than that of any other State, owing to the greater percentage of Pacific Island and Asiatic crosses, and the views of most of the authorities on the subject in this state disputed the wisdom of measures to encourage the absorption of these breeds.⁷⁵

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of unease about Aboriginal and Asiatic relationships voiced in Queensland, it appears that the phenomenon had reached greater prominence in that state. At the conference itself Bleakley recommended that people of mixed descent should be absorbed, not by the white population, but by the 'native community'.⁷⁶

There does not appear to be one simple explanation for Queensland's aberrant use of its ability to control Indigenous marriages. Although it is arguable that the difference in Queensland's policy can be attributed to the opinions of Bleakley personally, his belief that Queensland's 'crossbreed problem' was more 'complex' than any other state suggests that the white population of Queensland was also perhaps not so confident of being able to absorb such a large Indigenous community. It has been estimated that the area that later became the state of Queensland was home to 100,000 Aboriginal people at the time of initial white settlement. Although that figure had fallen to 26,670 by 1901, it was still the largest recorded Aboriginal population of any state in Australia.⁷⁷ Queensland also had a significant Chinese population and a sizeable Pacific Islander minority population created by the sugar industry.⁷⁸ Just as in the United States, non-white populations of significant size caused the idea of biological absorption to be vetoed in the minds of Queensland administrators.

According to the discussions surrounding the legislation, Queensland adopted the 1901 interracial marriage clause to prevent Aboriginal women who were already married according to their own traditions from marrying a different man under the laws of the state, and to prevent men from using marriage to escape prosecution for 'harbouring' Aboriginal women. Bleakley then used it to prevent interracial marriages between Aboriginal and mixed-descent women and non-Aboriginal men, thus imped-

74. 'Aboriginal Department Report, 1936', 10. Bleakley's own solutions ranged from a separate 'half-caste' colony to, according to Rosalind Kidd, privately considering the sterilisation of Aboriginal women (Kidd 1997: 137).

75. 'Aboriginal Department — Information contained in the report for the year ended 31st December, 1937', *QPP* 2, 1938: 11–12.

76. Commonwealth of Australia 1937: 8.

77. Chesterman and Galligan 1997: 31. The Northern Territory's Aboriginal population was merely *estimated* to be between 20,000 and 50,000 — Queensland's figure was based on more reliable statistics.

78. In 1906 a government report estimated that over 5,000 Melanesian men were resident in Queensland. Approximately 20,000 Chinese people arrived in Queensland in the last decades of the 19th century, many attracted by the gold rushes of the period, although many returned home again after a short stay (Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1988: 218, 332).

ing rather than encouraging biological absorption. This model was then taken over by other states and manipulated to fit their own anxieties about interracial 'miscegenation,' anxieties that only appeared in Queensland much later. So the laws prohibiting marriage of Aboriginal women to non-Aboriginal men actually grew from quite different concerns in the various states. Although, as many historians have noted, the Queensland legislation was the basis of that of Western Australia, South Australia, and the Northern Territory, in practice legislators and administrators interpreted clauses with similar wording to suit their own ends.

Perhaps another explanation can be found in the argument of several Australian historians, most recently Nikki Henningham, that relationships between white settlers and Aboriginal people in Queensland, particularly in the north, was in many ways unlike that in other regions in Australia.⁷⁹ Henningham argues that, as well as the anxieties created by the isolation and small size of the white population, labour shortages in the early years of settlement had produced a unique situation in which Aboriginal people were indispensable, unpaid 'family members' on many outback Queensland stations.⁸⁰ Although, as Henningham points out, this situation was one of the reasons why many Queensland white men resented the 1897 Act for interfering in what they saw as their personal lives, its blurred racial boundaries might also have been behind the reluctance of Queensland administrators and politicians to consider biological absorption as a solution to their 'Aboriginal problem'. As late as the 1960s — in the United States a period of increasing racial tolerance — Bleakley was still arguing that, because of the inferior natures of white people willing to engage in interracial sexual relationships and:

the present half-civilised state of the aborigines, the process of absorption would be through the least desirable channels on both sides. There is much to be eliminated from, or changed in, the aboriginal ideology before the race can mate on a level with that of a higher culture without incurring grave social dangers.⁸¹

Despite the genocidal implications of biological absorption, as these comments imply it can also be seen to entail a kind of equality: the equality of two groups of people who felt compatible enough to allow for intimate acquaintances to be formed. Such issues demonstrate the complexities of comparative history. This kind of equality was a rare occurrence in the United States' 'Jim Crow' South, infamous for its intolerance of interracial marriages. In Queensland, too, it was unthinkable.

Conclusion

Leaving aside Queensland, a broad comparison of Australian state policies with reveals some subtle national differences. White Australians relied on interracial sexual relationships to bring about assimilation through a generation-by-generation loss of Aboriginal physical identity. In Western Australia and the Northern Territory, where large non-white, non-Indigenous populations existed (such as Pacific Islander or Asian peoples), controls were put in place to prevent the production of children with mixed Asian or Pacific Islander descent, who did not fit into the absorption project. In the south-eastern

^{79.} Henningham 2000. See also, among many others, Evans et al 1988, Loos 1982 and Kidd 1997.

^{80.} Henningham 2000: 257–8.

^{81.} Bleakley 1961: 314.

states of Victoria, NSW, and South Australia, smaller populations of Aboriginal people allowed white people to be quite content to let biological absorption occur 'naturally', helping it along with methods such as dispersal and the removal from Aboriginal homes of children of mixed descent, but not feeling the need to control marriage through legislation. Only policy makers in Queensland were squeamish about the absorptionist project and tried to prevent racial mixing and to ensure the 'purity' of the white race.

Patrick Wolfe's comparative work on interracial sexuality and its place in the colonial project is useful here. In Australia, Wolfe has argued, a small Indigenous population in conjunction with various scientific works proposing the suitability of Aboriginal 'blood' for absorption, led to same belief as in the United States, that 'the category 'White' [could] stand admixture' of Indigenous identity without its purity being compromised. On the other hand, 'Aboriginality', like 'Indianness', could not; it immediately became 'half-caste', 'quadroon', or 'octoroon' by the addition of white 'blood'.⁸² The intensity of the effort to absorb Aboriginal people biologically is not only thrown into relief when the inadequate efforts to culturally assimilate them are compared with the more concerted efforts in the United States. In addition, the Australian emphasis on absorption can be partially explained by comparing Australian racial landscape with that of the United States. Wolfe proposes that the absence of an Australian equivalent of the African American population meant that white Australian anxieties were diffused over a number of groups. In Australia, Wolfe has argued, the lack of a significant 'third race' meant that 'miscegenation discourse focused from the outset on Indigenous people' and emphasised their segregation from the smaller numbers of Asian and Pacific Islander people who might 'pollute' the process of their absorption.⁸³

In this investigation of the legal controls of interracial marriage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I hope I have demonstrated that historical analysis which crosses national boundaries can give us valuable perspectives on the past. Here in Australia, where the cruel treatment of Indigenous people has frequently been rationalized as the product of 'good intentions at the time', white Australians would do well to realise that dealings with the original owners of the land might have been different: other possibilities were explored elsewhere, and the situation in which we find ourselves in the year 2003 was not in all ways the inevitable outcome of the past.

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⁸². Wolfe 1994: 116. For a discussion of the level of acceptance of Indian-white absorption see Smits 1991.

⁸³. Wolfe 2001: 872.

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Undermining the social foundations: the impact of colonisation on the traditional family structure of the Goulburn tribes

Margaret Taylor, David Schmitt and Parimal Roy

The family¹ provided the essential foundations and structural framework for traditional² Aboriginal society. The nuclear family provided the foundations that were reinforced by the collective alliances and land-holdings of the extended family. Kinship, and hence family, 'was the real basis of tribal organisation'.³ 'The elementary or nuclear family'⁴ was 'the basic unit of everyday social living'⁵ and consisted 'of a man and his wife or wives, and their children, own or adopted'.⁶ Clark, drawing on Curr's study of the Goulburn River Protectorate Station between 1840 and 1853, suggests the salience of this concept to the present study when he states that in traditional Aboriginal society in the region '[t]he rule of patrilocality ... [decreed] ... that a married woman

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1. We acknowledge the complexities of the traditional Aboriginal social structure and the consequent difficulties associated with the use of the concept 'family', and in particular 'nuclear family' with all its specific Eurocentric connotations. Birdsall (1987: 130-131) addresses some of the specific difficulties associated with their application. In spite of the anthropological looseness of these concepts, Berndt and Berndt (1977), Berndt, Berndt and Stanton (1993) and Tilbrook (1986) use them, and we consider that thinking in terms of nuclear and extended families helps to distinguish between real, traditional, and fundamental familial divisions. More importantly, for this study, we feel that they offer a useful vantage point for assessing particular social impacts of European colonisation. We argue that using kinship groups or descent groups and their various divisions instead of family and its two broad divisions would lead us into an area that is extremely confused in our primary sources, and would mean exploring a level of kinship complexity that Lawlor (1991: 242), drawing on Claude Levi-Strauss, claimed 'would demand the most complex nonlinear formulas and equations — and even they might not suffice!' We do not wish to do this, nor would our sources enable it. Finally, we feel that the 'scientific' classifications tend to dehumanise the Aboriginal people and we therefore prefer terminology that emphasises the human dimension of the tragedy.
 2. In this paper, we use the term 'traditional' as a synonym for pre-contact. We do not use it to suggest, or claim, a complete disjunction between the past and the present. Aspects of the traditional continue to this day (see, for example, James Weiner 2002 regarding the persistence of *habitus*).
 3. Abbie 1969: 193.
 4. Berndt and Berndt 1977: 88.
 5. Berndt and Berndt 1977: 43.
 6. Thompson 1983: 11.

resides with her husband'.⁷ In this context, the 'conjugal unit' or 'marital unit'⁸ was the nuclear family of pre-colonial Aboriginal society and provided the basis for survival. The extended family – tribes, moieties and clans⁹ – provided the fundamental kinship and hence social structure of traditional Aboriginal society. Aspects of this structure did survive colonisation and Barwick has claimed that 'to be Aboriginal is to be born to, to belong to, to be loyal to family'.¹⁰ Similarly, Daylight and Johnstone suggested post-contact continuities when, in the 1980s, they stated that 'Aboriginal values, beliefs, identity and language are developed and nurtured within the family'.¹¹

Society and family were – and remain – indivisible within the kinship system: neither function adequately without the other. In the pre-contact period, neighbouring extended families were connected through marriage. Any assault, whether direct or indirect, on the nuclear and extended family and on the institution of marriage threatened the viability of that traditional society. In her study of south-west Australia, Tilbrook notes that at its best the traditional family unit was quite a fragile and vulnerable institution because it consisted of 'a host of individuals with different but overlapping, and potentially conflicting, alliances based on membership of different marriage categories'.¹² This was also to prove true in the Goulburn region, where European colonisation inadvertently exploited these tensions, with catastrophic consequences for the Aboriginal people. Colonisation impacted on the social foundations of traditional society by creating and aggravating generational and gender tensions. The resultant bitter conflict around these divisions eroded the cooperation and trust essential to the viability of the nuclear and extended family. As a consequence, as colonisation proceeded Aboriginal families in contact with European people became increasingly dysfunctional through the premature death of many women and through the economic and social marginalisation of those who remained. Competition from European males for the remaining women compounded this process and frustrated family formation. The killing of infants of Aboriginal-European parentage further exacerbated the chaotic spiral of inter-gender conflict and familial disintegration.

This paper focuses exclusively on the nature and impact of changes in family structure among the communities of the Goulburn tribes of Victoria during the early period of colonisation. It does not provide a definitive history of the traditional Aboriginal family from initial contact to the present. We argue that the severe disruption of the nuclear and extended family was a common tragedy among the Goulburn tribes and played a significant part in the weakening of their traditional society. In general terms, the nature of the European challenge to Aboriginal society in the mid-19th century was consistent wherever it occurred and as a consequence tended to unfold in broadly similar ways; Edward Curr, a 19th-century observer of the frontier conflict, suggested that the process was broadly similar wherever it occurred.¹³ Therefore, where we consider it appropriate, this paper draws on material from the examination of other regions, or

7. Clark 1999: 36.

8. Berndt, Berndt and Stanton 1993: 32–40.

9. Abbie 1969: 188–197.

10. Barwick 1976: 154.

11. Daylight and Johnstone 1986: 45.

12. Tilbrook 1986: 108.

13. Reynolds 1982: 61.

from generalised studies, to enhance or clarify the understanding of this human tragedy in the Goulburn region. In the Goulburn region, the European settlers, administrators, and visitors in the region recorded this sorry chapter. The views they presented are Eurocentric and therefore distorted. These sources also fail to account adequately for the destruction wrought by the preceding invisible invasion – smallpox – on traditional culture. Therefore the views they present may, at best, represent a distorted picture of an already distorted traditional culture. This paper relies heavily on an analysis of what these problematic sources say and imply about family disruption. Despite the real limitations of this approach it does provide indirect access to an important, if not key, aspect of the disruption of traditional Aboriginal society.

The Goulburn tribes

The designation 'the Goulburn tribes' was a European label based on geography that was indiscriminately applied in the mid-19th century to the peoples who frequented the Goulburn River (or Central) Station of the North Eastern Protectorate in the district of Port Phillip. Only a relatively small number of the Aboriginal people of the region regularly attended the station and these were mainly drawn from the tribes of the Bangerang (or Yorta Yorta) nation, the various clans of the Ngooraialum speaking peoples, and the northern communities of the Tauounurong people.¹⁴ In 1843, a non-government report signed by LaTrobe noted that while 400 Aboriginal people frequented the station there were some 1000 living in 'accessible' tribes, and a further 3000 living 'beyond these limits to the north'.¹⁵ The Assistant Protectorate for the Goulburn District was nominally responsible for the welfare of all Indigenous people residing east of the Campaspe and Coliban Rivers, north of the foothills of the Great Dividing Range, and south of the Murray River. In times of fear and hardship, the Goulburn River Station was visited by the people who traditionally held land between the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers¹⁶ and, in similar circumstances, the Goulburn tribes frequented the Loddon River Station.¹⁷ The label 'the Goulburn tribes' is therefore a very imprecise designation that embraces a wide range of family and tribal groupings.

The initial assault on the traditional family

The disruption of the nuclear and extended families of the Goulburn tribes began long before the Europeans commenced their occupation of the region in the mid-1830s. Smallpox, introduced into Australia after permanent British settlement in NSW, swept through the vulnerable Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia.¹⁸ The pre-contact Goulburn

¹⁴. We have adopted throughout this paper the practice of using the spellings of tribal and clan designations as they commonly appeared in the primary sources examined for the paper. These spellings are, in a number of cases, still used by parts of the local community today. For more recent variants, see Clark 1999: 7, 22–25.

¹⁵. Report of the Port Phillip District Committee of the Societies for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1843: 2.

¹⁶. Clark 1999: 82, 93, 100, 106, 145, 160.

¹⁷. Clark 1999: 91.

¹⁸. We are aware of the debates concerning the source of these epidemics and whether they were actually smallpox. On the basis of the various arguments and evidence we tend to accept many of the central propositions espoused by Butlin (1983) where he concludes that the epidemics were smallpox and that they originated from the settled areas of Australia.

tribes had no natural immunity to smallpox and evidence indicates they were devastated by two epidemics, the first in approximately 1800 and the second in 1830.¹⁹

It is impossible to know the number of separate Aboriginal communities that were affected by this invisible European invasion or how many lives were lost because of it. Early European observations and records of anecdotal evidence indicate epidemics were responsible for a considerable depopulation of the region.²⁰ The people who died from smallpox did so in great numbers and suffered a horrific death. Other exotic diseases also preceded colonisation and Butlin believes the presence of these diseases would have inhibited the ability of the Aboriginal people to respond adequately to smallpox.²¹

In the traditional context, sorcery was seen as the agent responsible for disease. As a consequence, smallpox engendered in the survivors a level of fear and distrust of others, especially strangers. This distrust, during the early phase of colonisation, disrupted tribal affiliations and prompted an unprecedented bout of revenge killings.²² Previously friendly tribes found themselves constantly at war with each other. Dredge claimed that by 1839 the clans on the middle reaches of the Goulburn River, although from the same linguistic groups, had become implacable enemies and could barely communicate with each other.²³ This intertribal conflict compounded the consequences flowing from the disruption of betrothal, marriage, and kinship lines caused by the many premature deaths from smallpox. The 1830 epidemic came at a time when traditional society was just recovering from the impact of the earlier epidemic and continued the disruption of an already weakened and vulnerable society. Sturt's descriptions of the impact of the disease in the region in the mid-1830s provided first hand evidence of the significant, and in some locations, almost total destruction of human life. While camped near the Goulburn River some two miles from its junction with the Murray River, Sturt noted that '[i]t is evident that a terrible mortality had swept them [the Bangerang peoples] in numbers away' and he deduced from the numbers and the condition of the graves that it was an 'unusual fatality'.²⁴ 'From whatever cause, death had been busy with them'.²⁵ Colonisation was therefore the third blow in 30 years to fall on this freshly disrupted and severely compromised society. It was the blow that the traditional nuclear and extended family, and hence traditional Aboriginal society, could not survive without significant adaptations.

Throughout the 1840s discrete Aboriginal communities responded individually to the impact of settlement. Each faced the accompanying challenges alone. Whole family groups moved from the Goulburn region to the Murray and beyond to avoid the impact of European settlement.²⁶ These people often combined to form larger communities that maintained their discrete tribal identities. Despite the survival of these tribal affiliations into the present, the new communities were not immune to the impact of

19. Butlin 1983.

20. Curr 1886: 216–217; see also Sturt 1899: 142.

21. Butlin 1983: 11–12.

22. Parker 1854: 17–18; see also Curr 1886: 85, 103.

23. Dredge 1845: 19; see also Curr 1965: 104.

24. Hibbins 1978: 23–24.

25. Sturt 1899: 142.

26. CJ LaTrobe 1841, also Campbell to Robinson, GA Robinson Papers.

colonisation.²⁷ Marriage and kinship lines were disrupted right across the region because of the specific impact of colonisation. Key impacts included the disruption of the nutritional and economic bases of traditional society.

Undermining the nutritional and economic base of the traditional family

The traditional Aboriginal family was essentially a self-sustaining food production unit. Tilbrook notes of south-western Australia that 'nuclear-based families hunted and foraged on land in which individual members held access and usage rights'.²⁸ This was a pattern that was common to the rest of the continent. The structure of the family and its relationship to its land ensured survival. Locality and family were and remain the 'essential bonds'²⁹ of Aboriginal society.³⁰ Tilbrook claims that 'traditionally marriage was both the instrumentality of inheritance and the means of groups of kin gaining access to land owned by other like groups'.³¹ Anything that undermined traditional marriage patterns and competed with a nuclear or extended family or separated it from its land directly challenged the rationale for family formation and the survival of its members.

The first permanent European settlers arrived in the Goulburn river region during a devastating drought. Traditional food, water, and medicinal resources were already severely depleted. As settler numbers increased the tribes found it increasingly difficult to compete with them and their grazing stock for these same scarce resources.³² Many Aboriginal people suffered malnutrition and faced starvation. In 1839, Dredge wrote of the people at the Goulburn River Station that:

to satisfy their hunger I have known them to eat the putrid flesh of a sheep which have been drowned for a fortnight, the stench of which was so offensive as almost to taint the atmosphere.³³

As a consequence, some of the Goulburn communities fought desperately to retain their land and its precious resources.

The 'Faithful Massacre' was the first recorded armed collision between the region's Indigenous people and the Europeans. This was fought near present-day Benalla on the Broken River on 11 April 1838. Seven Europeans and an unknown number of Aboriginal people were killed.³⁴ William Pitt Faithful later ascribed the attack to a lack of kangaroos in the area, which he believed to be related to a general distressed state among the Aboriginal people.³⁵ Other Aboriginal people opted to trespass on neighbouring lands rather than fight the Europeans. This choice entailed breaking traditional law and was punishable by death. It also fostered inter-tribal and inter-family conflict and killings.³⁶

^{27.} LeSouef 1895.

^{28.} Tilbrook 1986: 103.

^{29.} Barwick 1976: 154.

^{30.} The Yorta Yorta native title claim also indicates the significant importance and continuation of locality to these people at the heart of this paper; see Morgan 2002.

^{31.} Tilbrook 1986: 107.

^{32.} Curr 1886: 240.

^{33.} Dredge letterbook, Letter dated 31 July 1840. LT Ms. 11625 Box 16/6.

^{34.} Cannon and MacFarlane 1982: 312-316.

^{35.} Cannon and MacFarlane 1991: 233.

^{36.} Dredge 1845: 9; see also Curr 1886: 80; 'Report on the condition of the Aboriginal natives of the Murrumbidgee District', Historical Records of Australia (HRA) 1(XXV): 12-13.

By the mid-1840s the traditional food resources of the Aboriginal communities whose land was now within the settled regions of the Port Phillip District were so depleted that McCombie claimed in 1845 that it was common for the Aboriginal people to boil and eat gum leaves for food.³⁷ Apart from generating Aboriginal-European conflict and killings, the catastrophic loss of resources that followed European settlement also divided the generations and disrupted the traditional roles of men and women. This division and disruption was accompanied by uncharacteristic levels of intra-family violence that threatened the survival of the traditional structures supporting the extended and nuclear family.

Generational divisions

Generational divisions arose from the preferential employment of young Indigenous adults in the European colonial system and the removal of Indigenous children by private citizens and the colonial administrators. The emerging inter-generational tensions were further exacerbated by a growing dependence on introduced food and addictive substances: tobacco, sugar, tea and, later, alcohol. All of these were introduced into the tribal camps in the settled areas of the region during the 1830s and 1840s.³⁸ Broome highlights the general impact of these imports when he states that 'alcohol had disastrous effects on tribal and family life ... [leading] ... to ill-health and death.'³⁹ In general, '[t]he lure of food was only outmatched by a desire for stimulants'.⁴⁰ The use of intoxicants was not alien to traditional Aboriginal people but access and use had been limited by regulation, scarcity, and the need to secure food.⁴¹ Broome claims that out of curiosity and the promise of easy food 'many Aboriginals came in to obtain European tucker well before the traditional foods in the area were exhausted'.⁴² This opened the way for the creation of inter-generational divisions.

In the Goulburn River region the Aboriginal people attracted to the squatting runs received addictive substances as part-payment for their labour. Whole communities chose to modify their nomadic lifestyle in order to have access to addictive stimulants. This increased their dependence on the easily acquired but nutritionally poor European food. In 1841, Curr noted a constant craving for tobacco among the neighbouring Bangarang people, who stayed close to him as their only supplier. He believed this craving to be responsible for the initial breakdown of their traditional society.⁴³ This ensnared them in a cycle of dependence, creating a captive reserve labour force for the squatters.⁴⁴ The squatters preferred to utilise the young men from this reserve labour force.

The preferential employment of young Aboriginal men by the squatters exposed them to the influences of the European culture and increased the distance between them and their communities and traditional culture. This generated and exacerbated

³⁷. McCombie 1845: 265.

³⁸. Dredge letterbook, letter dated 17 February 1840; see also Curr 1965: 107; Dredge diary; Hinkins 1884: 50.

³⁹. Broome 1982: 55.

⁴⁰. Broome 1982: 52.

⁴¹. Broome 1982: 55.

⁴². Broome 1982: 52.

⁴³. Curr 1866: 107-110.

⁴⁴. Cooper and Blame 1981: 24.

existing generational divisions within the tribes.⁴⁵ The young men quickly adapted to living and working within the European economic community and it was noted that, as the 1840s progressed, many exhibited considerable fear of their tribal elders and preferred to live on the squatters' runs.⁴⁶ Broome suggests the young 'were less steeped in their own culture, and thus had less to lose and possibly more to gain from the European presence'.⁴⁷ The tribal elders, on the other hand, vigorously resisted the alienation of their land and rightly feared the influence exerted by the Europeans over the younger generations.⁴⁸ Broome claims that 'there is some evidence that young men used the upheavals created by white contact in various ways to gain women and power traditionally monopolised by the old men'.⁴⁹ These actions struck at traditional marriage practices and at the extended family. In January 1842 LaTrobe informed the Colonial Secretary of this generational conflict in the Goulbourn region and claimed that these young people were in danger and needed protection from their tribal communities.⁵⁰

Generational and gender divisions were also promoted when Europeans, both private citizens and colonial administrators, removed Aboriginal children from their communities, alienating them from their families and tribes.⁵¹ In 1840, Captain George Grey noted the particular pressures on Aboriginal children, more specifically the girls, who were taught the European ways only to be returned to the bush at puberty and forced to marry men raised in the traditional manner.⁵² Education in traditional Aboriginal society was a life-long experience and the education of these girls was incomplete. This led to misunderstandings between the men and women as well as between the generations. These misunderstandings struck directly at the foundations of the nuclear and extended family, a situation that was compounded by a number of factors that divided Aboriginal men and women.

Gender divisions

Gender cooperation was fundamental to the survival of the traditional Aboriginal nuclear family. Male and female roles were defined within the context of the family and were based on a division of labour that defined a state of relative equality. The impact of the continued and accelerating destruction of traditional resources fell heaviest upon the roles and power of the women. Hallam, in a study of the Aboriginal women of the Perth region noted that:

⁴⁵. The squatters employed the young men for stock work, sheep washing and shepherding, for stripping bark for use as building materials, and for the clearing and ploughing of small areas of land.

⁴⁶. 'Report on the condition of the Aboriginal Natives of the Murrumbidgee District', January 1 1847, HRA I(XXV): 560.

⁴⁷. Broome 1982: 63.

⁴⁸. 'Report on the condition of the Aboriginal Natives of the Murrumbidgee District', January 1 1847, HRA I(XXV): 560.

⁴⁹. Broome 1982: 63.

⁵⁰. LaTrobe Correspondence with GA Robinson, 1842-1848, LT Ms. 58431 Box 650/17.

⁵¹. Hinkins, for example, took an Aboriginal child to live in his home as companionship for his daughter (Hinkins 1884: 17).

⁵². George Grey, Report dated 8 October, 1840, HRA I(XXI): 35.

European fences, sheep crops and guns ... deprived Aboriginal women of access to their land to which they held rights and the carbohydrate staples they used to harvest there. The women were still expected to be the providers, but within a decade the Europeans had become the resource from which they had to harvest.⁵³

In the Goulburn region this process changed the relationship between men and women in eight ways. First, the importance of the women's secret-sacred ceremonies waned. Women lost their inheritance of song and dance as their resources of plants, herbs and small animals were destroyed and the associated ceremonies of increase ceased to be relevant to the community.⁵⁴ Ellis and Barwick also noted this outcome when writing of the song knowledge of the Antikirinja women of South Australia. They stated that 'with the availability of ready-ground flour, there may no longer be the same need to perform ceremonies for the increase of certain grass-seed species'.⁵⁵ The loss of their ceremonial role saw women increasingly marginalised as agents of traditional culture.

Second, women were important providers for themselves, their husbands, and their children.⁵⁶ Their own economic independence and capacity to fulfil their designated role as key provider for the nuclear family depended on access to a wide range of resources, which were destroyed by the grazing practices of the settlers. The women of the Goulburn tribes, for example, relied on access to reeds from which they constructed intricate baskets and nets for their personal use. These woven items were essential tools in the tasks of procuring and transporting the family's food. The reed beds essential for their production were soon destroyed by the indiscriminate firing of the squatters.⁵⁷ This severely compromised the women's capacity to trade and service their personal needs, further marginalising them within the new economic and social structures. It also undermined the traditional independence of women,⁵⁸ making them increasingly dependent on Aboriginal and European males. This emerging dependence was increased by the imposition of a patriarchal social order under the Protectorate system.

Third, the imposition of European values through the allocation of food and clothing under the Protectorate system further eroded women's power. Traditionally the women were economically self-sufficient and were the primary providers for their young children. Hallam claims that in the Aboriginal society in the Perth region:

Aboriginal women ... provided their families with the basic carbohydrate staples which comprised the bulk of their diet, and the small protein supplements ... which together gave their families adequate nutrition.⁵⁹

Under the Protectorate system in Victoria, the issue of rations was tied to work performed, and work was only offered to the men. It was erroneously assumed, based on the European cultural model, that men would accept responsibility for their wives and children. The allocated rations were barely sufficient for a single man, were of limited nutritional value, and did not replicate the varied and highly nutritious traditional

53. Hallam 1991: 52.

54. Taylor 1999: 139-140.

55. Ellis et al 1989: 37.

56. Berndt and Berndt 1977: 120.

57. Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 72-76; see also Mitchell 1965: 305; Curr 1886: 78.

58. Berndt and Berndt 1977: 148.

59. Hallam 1991: 39.

diet of Aboriginal people.⁶⁰ The Aboriginal people were expected to supplement the rations with traditional food. This was unrealistic because the tribes were encouraged to stay close to the Protector and the traditional resources in the immediate vicinity were rapidly over-utilised and destroyed. As a consequence, the women and children starved.⁶¹ Assistant Protector Dredge was so distressed by the plight of the women in the Goulburn region that he created work specifically for them to supply them with food and so ease their hunger.⁶² While this provided immediate assistance, in the long term it served to increase the dependence of the women on the Protectorate system and on Europeans generally.

Fourth, the allocation of clothing under the Protectorate system further compromised the traditional role of women. One set of clothing and one blanket was allocated to each man, and one gown to each woman.⁶³ In traditional society, possum skin rugs were manufactured by the men who then passed them on to the women and children.⁶⁴ The lifestyle changes encouraged by the Protectorate system led to a rapid decrease in the numbers of available possums in the vicinity of the station and a corresponding decrease in the supply of rugs. Many rugs that were made were kept by the men for their own use or for barter with the Europeans.⁶⁵ In this context, the plight of the women and children was compounded by the nature of the traditional nuclear family. An Aboriginal man was allowed more than one wife and may have several dependent children. The allocation of one blanket per family was totally inadequate and the women were forced to wear European-style gowns that increased their susceptibility to illness. Neither the blankets nor gowns provided the warmth or protection afforded by traditional skin rugs. The voluminous skirts did not dry easily once wet and the women could remain trapped in damp clothing for lengthy periods of time. Traditionally, the women often swam while hunting and gathering food, which was impeded by European clothing.⁶⁶ While most removed the gowns when away from the Protectorate station, their health was still compromised because they lacked their traditional rugs to compensate. This also struck at their capacity to fulfil their independent cultural role. At certain times of the year, the women established their own camps in order to carry out secret-sacred business.⁶⁷ This became more difficult when they were forced to depend on their husbands' camps for warmth.

Fifth, the exclusion of Aboriginal women from legitimate work in the European economic system⁶⁸ further diminished their power. By the 1840s, their survival depended on gaining access to this system. The only avenue open to them was the provision of a service or product required by the European men. During the period of initial contact it was common for the tribes to offer the sexual favours of the women to

60. Dredge letterbook, Letter 3, dated 31 July 1840; see also Dredge diary, entry dated 2 June 1840.

61. Dredge diary, Latrobe Library MS 5244, Box 16/4.

62. Dredge diary, entry dated 4 June 1840.

63. Thomas to Robinson, correspondence dated 21 September 1840, GA Robinson Papers.

64. Curr 1883: 326–327.

65. Dredge diary, entry dated 18 October, 1839.

66. Pitts 1914: 17.

67. See Matthews 1905: 114–119 for a discussion of the role of the women's camp in the initiation ceremonies of the young men of the Goulburn tribes.

68. Dredge diary, entry dated June 4 1840.

the settlers. This 'was a traditional way of creating friendliness, obligations and thus repayments between kin, or established good relations between groups in potential conflict'.⁶⁹ The practice had ceased in the Goulburn region by the 1840s, and women were rarely offered freely.⁷⁰ Broome states that 'the one great need that bachelor Europeans had on a frontier devoid of white women was the sexual and domestic service of Aboriginal women'.⁷¹ Sometimes, when a tribe was in desperate straits in the Goulburn region, the whole community acknowledged this trade and the men acted as brokers between the women and the Europeans.⁷² By the 1840s, however, many of the women in the Goulburn region were acting independently of their fathers and husbands and the younger women had found that trading in sexual favours provided their only access to the colonial economy.⁷³ This angered the men and the ensuing conflict forced many women to leave their traditional communities. Numbers of women moved to camps on the squatters' runs where they became further alienated from their families and communities.

The number of Aboriginal women who, either by circumstances or force, cohabited with European men in the 1840s is unknown; however, in November 1850, one settler expressed the opinion that it would be difficult to find a single Aboriginal woman living in the communities within a 50 mile radius of Melbourne or Geelong who had not at some time co-habited with a European man.⁷⁴ These women were vulnerable to abuse from both Aboriginal and European men. They were also victims of introduced venereal diseases which spread throughout the Aboriginal communities as both groups of men used the women caught in the middle.⁷⁵ It was alleged that in the 1840s two-thirds of the Port Phillip Aboriginal people were infected by venereal diseases.⁷⁶ All of these factors had dire consequences for the formation and survival of the nuclear and extended family.

Sixth, cash wages paid by the squatters to the Aboriginal men further shifted the balance of power in the communities away from an equal partnership between men and women to male dominance. It is not known when the local Aboriginal men began using English coins as a medium of exchange, however it is known that English coins were occasionally used by the male elders of the Goulburn tribes when purchasing flour in the latter months of 1839.⁷⁷ English coins were reported to be in circulation freely among the Goulburn tribes by the late 1840s, when Curr observed their use in an exchange in a Bangerang community. In this instance coins were offered by one man to purchase the wife of another so she could be punished for suspected sorcery practised against the son of the first.⁷⁸ The woman was subsequently put to death.⁷⁹ Tilbrook

^{69.} Broome 1982: 53.

^{70.} Broome 1982: 53.

^{71.} Broome 1982: 55.

^{72.} Dredge diary, entries for 1839.

^{73.} Dredge 1845: 29.

^{74.} Clarke 1967, appendix.

^{75.} See Critchett 1984: 18 for details of the impact of venereal disease on the women.

^{76.} Broome 1982: 58.

^{77.} Dredge diary, entry dated 6 December 1839.

^{78.} Curr 1883: 410–417.

^{79.} Curr 1883: 410–417.

claims that European observers in south-western Australia depicted women as 'the objects of retribution in chains of retaliatory actions'.⁸⁰ The Bangerang example supports this and highlights the growing importance of money and the significant devaluation of women, family, and marriage in the face of colonisation.

Seventh, infanticide, traditionally a method of population control primarily used when the survival of the community was at risk, increased in the wake of colonisation. Traditionally, the decision was made by the father of the infant, and under these circumstances the mother usually had young children and was unable to care for the new baby.⁸¹ Curr believed that traditionally, approximately half of all Bangerang infants were put to death at birth. He further observed that after the arrival of the settlers this number increased to include all children of Aboriginal-European parentage.⁸² Blainey argues that in traditional society it was a widespread practise to kill babies 'believed to have been fathered illegitimately'.⁸³ The increase in infanticide noted by Curr could therefore have been provoked by the illegitimate status of the newborn of mixed parentage as well as the severe resource constraints, both of which followed in the wake of European occupation. In the 1850s, Thomas noted that among several communities, including the Goulburn tribes, 'few infants are born among them, and if born are seldom seen after the first month'.⁸⁴ Many of these children were of Aboriginal-European parentage, typically with an Aboriginal mother. Until the mid-1840s Aboriginal men refused to allow these children to live.⁸⁵ As a consequence, women who wished to keep their children were forced to protect them at all times.⁸⁶ For many the only option was to leave their community and live in camps close to the squatters' huts. This further undermined the traditional family and family formation and increased inter-gender conflict by setting men and women in direct opposition.

Eighth, the distress and frustration experienced by the disintegrating tribal communities led to an increase in the amount and severity of violence directed against women by some of the men.⁸⁷ Sexual frustration and conflict over infanticide were probably key factors in this violence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this inter-gender violence was neither traditional nor accepted behaviour. Dredge noted the outrage with which the women met the violence, and the shame exhibited by the men after it occurred.⁸⁸ Parker believed that the very hard life experience by the women of the Goulburn and Loddon tribes during the 1840s and 1850s, and the violence to which they were subjected, contributed to a much shorter lifespan than that of Aboriginal

^{80.} Tilbrook 1986: 99.

^{81.} LeSouef (1895: 12) recalled watching Tatambo's wife killing her second daughter at the Goulburn River Station. The reason he gave was that she could not cope with two dependent infants. Her first daughter, Jinny, was three years old. See also Blainey 1988: 98.

^{82.} Curr 1965 1883: 116.

^{83.} Blainey 1988: 98.

^{84.} Thomas Report dated 30 June 1853. (William Thomas was Assistant Protector at Westernport and later Protector of Aborigines in then Port Phillip District after the closure of the Protectorate System.)

^{85.} Thomas Report dated 30 June 1853.

^{86.} Gipps to Stanley, HRA I(XXI): 745. These babies were at risk in isolated communities until the end of the century. See Clements 1947: 2.

^{87.} Curr 1886, vol. I: 61,100.

^{88.} Dredge diary, entries dated 20 December 1839, 3 February 1840, 3 March 1840.

men.⁸⁹ All these factors struck directly at the survival of the family, a situation that was exacerbated by the disruption of family formation.

Disruption of family formation

The alienation of the young men and women from the tribal communities damaged the complex traditional marriage system which dictated that each person could only take a spouse from within a carefully delineated group within the tribal society. Tilbrook notes:

Traditionally, marriage was both the instrumentality of inheritance and the means of groups of kin gaining access to land owned by other groups. Strictly enforced rules for marriage cut across territorial divisions and place people into various categories but not with all categories.⁹⁰

The high mortality rate meant that large numbers of spouses promised in childhood were no longer available for marriage. An 1852 estimate of the Indigenous population for the Murray District (the boundaries of which were much the same as those of the former North Eastern Protectorate) suggested that there was a ratio of one woman to every three to four men and one child to every two women or six to eight men.⁹¹ This imbalance was exacerbated by the large numbers of young women who were forced to live on squatting runs away from their communities in an attempt to regain their economic and social independence or to escape the excessive violence, directed at them or their children, within the family unit.⁹² McCombie observed in the 1840s that the relationships between the men and women were very fraught, with much fighting between men over spouses.⁹³ Many men were left without access to wives, and by the 1850s those women who remained within their communities had become a valuable commodity and found their freedom severely constrained.

The responses of men of marriageable age differed according to their circumstances. Some chose to ignore tribal law and steal women from other communities.⁹⁴ Many murders occurred as a result of these raids and associated revenge attacks and were commonplace until 1855. In 1855 Thomas reported that murder within the tribes was no longer necessarily over women as it had been 'in former years'.⁹⁵ Others, attempting to live within the constraints of their traditional law, formed homosexual liaisons when appropriate spouses were unavailable. Robinson, in response to Dr Baylie's report on homosexuality at the Goulburn River Station, stated his belief that these were isolated instances and that the practise was not usual among Aboriginal men but has resulted, in his opinion, from exposure to the behaviour of some Europeans.⁹⁶

^{89.} Parker 1854 : 8.

^{90.} Tilbrook 1986 : 107.

^{91.} 'Commissioner for Crown Lands Murray District Report', Victorian Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings, 1853–1854(III): 86.

^{92.} Cannon (1990: 82, 184) notes two incidences of Aboriginal men killing women because they co-habited with European men.

^{93.} McCombie 1845: 254.

^{94.} McCombie 1845: 254.

^{95.} Thomas Report 1855, Item 2.

^{96.} Robinson to Latrobe, PROV, VPRS 10, Item 49/816.

Beveridge observed that the only Aboriginal men along the Murray who maintained the stability afforded by the family were those who lived with their wives well away from the larger tribal communities.⁹⁷ Ironically, this represented the triumph of the nuclear over the extended family and the complete reversal of the traditional situation in which the extended family complemented and ensured the survival of the nuclear family. For others, the lack of appropriate spouses left Aboriginal men without a traditional family. This completed their total alienation from their traditional land and society and they wandered in large groups throughout the region.⁹⁸ These groups were the most obvious outcome of the disruption of the nuclear and extended family, the significant distortion of the gender ratio in the Aboriginal population, and the erosion of traditional marriage practices. Colonisation was largely responsible for a society of families being replaced by a rootless, predominantly male, remnant with little hope of re-establishment in its original form. In the face of the significant loss of the family many resorted to alcohol. Alcohol addiction and abuse became common among the Goulburn communities during the late 1840s and many deaths occurred because of drunken behaviour.⁹⁹ But despite this sorry outcome a nucleus of people did survive to ensure a continuous presence in their traditional locality.

Conclusion

The nuclear and extended families of the Goulburn tribes in the years between the arrival of smallpox and the coming of the Europeans were tense institutions riven by cross-cutting loyalties and the potential for inter-generational and gender conflict. The massive depopulation caused by the invisible invasions of introduced smallpox generated inter-tribal conflict, disrupted traditional marriage practices and interfered with nuclear family formation. The visible invasion of colonisation followed hard on the heels of the invisible invasions of disease and opened up the generation and gender divisions. Colonisation alienated Aboriginal people from their land and resources, challenging the very foundations of the traditional nuclear and extended family, while conflict between the generally adaptive young and their resistant elders directly challenged its viability. The viability of the nuclear family was challenged by European competition for Aboriginal women and by the increasing alienation of women from men through a restructuring of traditional gender roles, violence, the impact of venereal disease, conflict over infanticide, and the significant decrease in the fertility and number of Aboriginal women. With the nuclear and extended family in tatters, little of substance remained to ensure the survival of traditional society. The erosion of the family unit and the accompanying disruption of the marriage system contributed enormously to the restlessness, melancholy, and depression experienced by Aboriginal people and observed so frequently during the 1840s that Europeans came to believe these to be characteristic of the Indigenous peoples generally.¹⁰⁰ The fact that some via-

^{97.} Beveridge 1889: 12.

^{98.} Henry Bingham Commissioner for Crown Lands, Murrumbidgee District, to Colonial Secretary Thomson 1845, 'Report on the Murrumbidgee District', dated 26 December, 1845, HRA I(XXV): 11; see also Robinson Papers, correspondence dated 12 April 1840; also Robinson Report, PROV VPRS 10, Item 47/1185.

^{99.} Thomas Report 1855.

^{100.} McCombie 1845: 257-258.

ble remnants of families and kinship networks did survive to ensure continuity to the present day bears testimony to their intrinsic attachment to their land and the adaptability of the people who remained.

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Of a 'contested ground' and an 'indelible stain': a difficult reconciliation between Australia and its Aboriginal history during the 1990s and 2000s

Lorenzo Veracini

This article proposes an interpretative narrative of the evolution of Aboriginal history as a scholarly enterprise during the 1990s and in more recent years.¹ The 1990s were characterised by attempts to synthesise the interpretative traditions resulting from previous decades of scholarly activity. In more recent years, the debate has shifted dramatically, dealing specifically with the genocidal nature of white Australia's policy towards Aboriginal peoples. The most important passages in this process are associated with the 1992 Mabo decision by the Australian High Court and the publication of the *Bringing them home* report of 1997.²

During the 1990s, the relationship between particular political shifts and related historical writings in Australia was comprehensively transformed and became much more direct. The writing and interpretation of history have commonly been a site for direct political contestation, but in the 1990s political agendas became an informing feature of historiographical debates more than in previous decades.³ One outstanding example of this tendency is John Howard's successful domination of the political scene – an ascendancy based also on an explicit and unambiguous effort to 'reconquer' history for the Liberal camp.⁴ In this context, an array of conservative opinions has challenged academic discourse. Nonetheless, both academic commentators and Aboriginal people successfully linked the 'unsurrendered' character of native title and, later, of Aboriginal sovereignty to both the resistential and the collaborative practices of

1. My review is selective. The works chosen for inclusion are intended as 'snapshots' of the ongoing historiographical debate. For other works outlining the evolution of Aboriginal history as a scholarly enterprise, see Mulvaney 1964: 1–56; Coltheart 1984; Reynolds 1984 and Curthoys 1998. See also reviews by Attwood 1995 and McGrath 1995: 359–397.

2. National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) 1997.

3. For example, see Watson 2002. Don Watson, Paul Keating's speechwriter, whose book *Recollections of a bleeding heart* won the Age Book of the Year prize in 2002, pays constant attention to the production and reproduction of historical discourse.

4. See Brawley 1996.

Aboriginal communities. Parallel to this consolidation, public agendas and discourses about 'Aboriginality' developed in a way that necessarily referred to ongoing debates about the experience of Aboriginal peoples.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, an important shift in the drive behind historical writing has been a series of public debates following the activities and conclusions of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's *Bringing them home* report. In this context, many historical contributions published in more recent years have either insisted on the genocidal nature of Australia's political record or attempted to dismiss such a claim. This notion was certainly not new — art historian Bernard Smith had already detected a genocidal trauma in Australia's psyche as early as 1980 and Henry Reynolds has convincingly demonstrated that the denunciation of these practices was at the centre of Australia's humanitarian tradition since the 19th century.⁵ However, during the early 2000s this debate has acquired an unprecedented significance and become a paradigmatic feature of Australia's historiographical landscape.

This article emphasises how quickly both historiographies and political questions move and the strong relations between them (although the lengthy gestation time of most history books means there is often some disjunction between the two). Although it concentrates on the more recent period, my reading of the evolution of the historiography of the Aboriginal experience entails four successive waves. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the first wave of historical writing established a dialectical opposition between Aboriginal absence and Aboriginal presence. This concluded with an unequivocal argument for both Aboriginal destruction and survival, a solution that dialectically synthesised the initial dichotomy.⁶ Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, a second phase proposed the existence of a struggle between Aboriginal passivity and Aboriginal challenge. This dialectical tension was then superseded through the full establishment of Aboriginal political resistance as a recognised interpretative paradigm.⁷ Thus, the third phase in the late 1980s and early 1990s represented the tension between Aboriginal strategies of confrontation and collaboration with invaders. It was concluded by the reaffirmation of both, and of Aboriginal agency as an interpretative category. It was, again, a synthesis of two opposing conceptions.⁸

The fourth, still unfinished, wave of historiographical transformation commenced during the 1990s. Once Aboriginal autonomy had been fully recognised as an interpretative notion, dialectical oppositions can be seen to have shifted once again to be replaced by the tension between unsundered sovereignty and unilateral extinguishment of native rights to land. The explicit appraisal of an Australian pattern of 'genocide', including consideration of whether this is an appropriate term to apply in Australian history, currently informs history debates. It entails a synthesis of both continuity of sovereignty and the processes of dispossession, allowing for the assessment of genocidal practices together with irreparable losses of autonomy by Aboriginal communities. For example, the 2001 issue of *Aboriginal History* was entitled "'Genocide"? Australian Aboriginal history in international perspective'.⁹ It presented a collective statement that had been

5. Smith 1980; Reynolds 1998.

6. See Rowley 1972; Reynolds 1972.

7. See Blainey 1975; Reynolds 1982.

8. See Reynolds 1990; McGrath 1995.

decades in the making and authoritatively recapitulated recent historiographical reflection on Australia's genocidal trauma. Keith Windschuttle's 'denialism' has not ultimately challenged this wave of historiographical transformation.¹⁰

In summary, during the last two decades historians have followed a complicated intellectual itinerary and wrestled with questions of Aboriginal agency, white responsibility, destruction, and survival. A survey of the historiographical debates ultimately challenges Windschuttle's (and Geoffrey Blainey's) picture of an 'Aboriginal industry' that supposedly emphasises genocide, fabricates mass killings, and accentuates separate cultures.¹¹ The series of changes in historiographical focus cannot be seriously constructed as a conspiracy of intellectuals. Windschuttle's representation of Aboriginal historians and historical scholarship emerges as oversimplifying and inaccurate.

The first part of this article outlines the evolution of Aboriginal history during the 1990s; the second part outlines some of the debates that followed the publication of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's *Bringing them home* report.

The 'Age of Mabo'

The High Court decisions of 1992 and 1996 on the Mabo and Wik cases had a tremendous impact on the received interpretation of Australia's race relations, and the historiographical consequences of these deliberations informed the debates of the 1990s.¹² Bain Attwood has perceptively described the connection between Mabo and the historical debate that followed:

Mabo and the new Australian history ends the historical silence about the Aboriginal pre-colonial and colonial past upon which the conservative invention of Australia and Australianness was founded, and since their Australia was realised through and rests upon that conventional historical narrative, the end of this history constitutes for them the end of Australia.¹³

The Mabo decision legally acknowledged Indigenous occupation and the possible recognition of property rights for a substantial number of Aboriginal communities. The Keating government legislated in the spirit of the High Court's views on Aboriginal rights. While native title was accepted and ownership transferred in some regions, 'Aboriginal Reconciliation' fully entered the government agenda after the then Prime Minister's 'Redfern Park Speech' in 1992.¹⁴ After Mabo, discussion of invasion, settlement and dispossession became a part of current affairs.

In a response to the need to investigate native title under the terms that emerged from the Mabo decision, one of the main subjects of historical inquiry during the 1990s became the detection of unbroken connections between Aboriginal communities and their landholdings. This approach emphasised local history projects and localism as the focus for the research; not many overviews of Aboriginal history and sovereignty were

9. Curthoys & Docker 2001. For a discussion about this volume of *Aboriginal History*, see Veracini 2002.

10. See Australian Council of Professional Historians Associations Inc 2003; Manne 2003.

11. See Gare et al 2003; Blainey 2003.

12. See for example Rowse 1993; Brennan 1998.

13. Attwood 1996: 116.

14. Reproduced in Grattan 2000: 60–64.

proposed during this phase.¹⁵ Consequently, whether Aboriginal resistance had been of a 'collaborative' kind or of a more 'challenging' type – or a combination of both – became less significant than in previous decades. For example, the acknowledgment of native title and the process of Aboriginal Reconciliation promoted a type of research less interested in open resistance: Aboriginal communities could claim native title through the historical recovery of their participation in pastoral enterprises, and the need for reconciliation encouraged a rhetorical emphasis on negotiation rather than conflict, casualties, and violence.

For example, Attwood and Arnold's *Power, knowledge and the Aborigines* focussed on ideological processes rather than violence as a way to interpret the historical experience of Aboriginal people.¹⁶ The authors, explicitly referring to Edward Said's work, were producing a critique of the conceptual and ideological apparatuses of knowledge-constructing notions such as the 'Aborigines' and 'Aboriginality'. They interpreted 'Aboriginalism' as the Australian substitute for 'Orientalism':

Aboriginalism, furthermore, disempowers Aborigines because they are made into an object of knowledge over which European Australians, as the dispensers of truth about their needs and requirements, gain control. Aboriginalism can, moreover, be seen to have produced the reality it has imagined by influencing government policies and practices which have, in turn, determined Aborigines' terms of existence – racialising the Aboriginal social body and so making Aborigines of the indigenous population. Hence it would be a mistake to see Aboriginalism as merely epiphenomenal and therefore unimportant; rather it is a hegemonic system of theory and practice which has permeated colonial structures of power.¹⁷

Brutality aside, two centuries of humanitarian intervention on the 'Aboriginal question' were now being postulated as problematic. In the process, nearly three recent decades of rewriting of Aboriginal history were also being challenged. Attwood and Arnold's problematisation of Aboriginality, exposing the nature of 'Aboriginalism' and identifying its strategies, constituted a redefining critique of the academic strategies employed until then to deal with Aboriginal issues.

An example of this transition towards an analysis of cultural resistance is represented by Peggy Brock's *Outback ghettos*.¹⁸ The disarticulation of Aboriginal society which followed invasion, Brock argues, was not complete, and her book explores the previously unacknowledged extent to which Aboriginal 'agency' had successfully prevented assimilationist policies from succeeding. Institutionalising and protectionist practices had not broken a powerful mix of passive resistance and concealed challenge. Of course, Aboriginal people 'had to redefine themselves if they were to survive', but this 'understanding was not imposed on them; they chose it over other options. Those who chose not to redefine themselves may well have been those who did not ultimately survive'.¹⁹

15. One exception was McGrath 1995. It should be noted that this volume was one historiographical outcome of another commission of inquiry, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, RCIADC 1991.

16. Attwood and Arnold 1992.

17. Attwood and Arnold 1992: ii–iii; see also Said 1978.

18. Brock 1993.

19. Brock 1993: 156.

Laying a stress on Aboriginal agency, adaptation, adjustment, flexibility and resilience, Brock's suggestion is to 'see Aborigines making themselves rather than being made'.²⁰ White Australia had steadily attempted to extinguish separate Aboriginal identities and autonomies, yet, despite its power, it had rarely succeeded, and institutionalisation had frequently worked in the direction of intensifying local identities, allowing Aboriginal resistance to sometimes use and subvert a repressive regime.²¹ Moreover, Brock argues that institutions had provided Aboriginal resistance with the opportunity to establish and consolidate new and stronger community ties despite continued pressure. The new historiographical phase of the early 1990s was shifting the focus of attention from episodes of violent Aboriginal challenge (or collaboration) to the analysis of a successful *praxis* of resistance. It should be noted that the institutionalisation of Aboriginal people had been a central aspect of many reflections on Aboriginal issues since the publication of CD Rowley's trilogy in the early 1970s.²² Now, however, rather than a vehicle for the destruction of Aboriginal society, Brock proposes that institutionalisation was a vehicle for Aboriginal resistance and survival, and the traditional interpretation redirected.

Dawn May's *Aboriginal labour and the cattle industry*, published in 1994, also made a dramatic contribution to the ongoing reassessment of Aboriginal resistance under European control.²³ The book concentrates on the north Queensland pastoral frontier, but the narrative implicates the rest of the pastoral north as well. While highlighting the continuous dependence of pastoral stations on Aboriginal labour, May shows how many Indigenous groups had been able and willing to adjust to a new economy. Whereas Aboriginal labour had often guaranteed the very viability of the pastoral station,

Aboriginal people were not abandoning their own mode of production. They were in fact trying to accommodate the European system into their own. They quickly realized that in exchange for labour in cattle stations, they could legitimately live on their own land and practice many aspects of their old life in a modified form.²⁴

May shows pastoral and Aboriginal worlds as compatible and coexisting, in many ways mutually supporting each other. After an earlier phase of violent confrontation, they had frequently found a *modus vivendi* that was suitable to both worlds. Aboriginal labour was available in a context of dire labour shortage, offering skills — both new and traditional — appropriate for the 'open range' system of pastoralism, and was, most importantly, cheap. At the same time, the provision of goods and rations and a continued residence on customary land meant that a traditional lifestyle and customary obligations to land could be retained. Moreover, this 'articulation of the Aboriginal and capitalist systems' offered two other elements that made accommodation possible: it generally left sacred sites intact and, because of its seasonal nature, allowed Aboriginal landholders performance of culturally necessary obligations.²⁵ However, May notes

20. Brock 1993: 156.

21. See also Kidd 1997.

22. See Rowley 1972a, 1972b, 1972c. For an analysis of the theme of institutionalisation and Rowley's role in informing academic and political practice, see Rowse 1993: 27–54.

23. May 1994.

24. May 1994: 57.

25. See May 1994: 85–94.

that while such an accommodation gave Aboriginal communities more than relatively secure residence and some access to European goods, the unwritten terms of this accommodation often entailed an almost complete control over the affairs of the black community.

According to May's narrative, this accommodation was increasingly challenged after the 1890s, decades after the first pastoral stations had been established in north Queensland and Aboriginal people had been 'let in'. This happened only when growing competition for jobs, increasing use of fencing, enhanced missionary activities and, most significantly, reinforced state intervention created the conditions for a widespread reduction of the Aboriginal contribution to the cattle economy. In sum, *Aboriginal labour and the cattle industry* is a case study which highlights Aboriginal agency while providing a model for the interpretation of the pastoral invasion of Australia. May's work also has a more practical implication: as the ultimate dispossession of Aboriginal communities had happened at a much later stage than previously acknowledged, the notion that many Aboriginal communities could claim their native title – a title that had not been relinquished during the pastoral age – was now being supported by an established pattern of historical inquiry.

Important interpretative shifts were also being proposed at the level of general surveys. For its comprehensiveness and for the authority of its contributors, as well as for addressing the issue of invasion in an innovative way, *Contested ground* represented a landmark in the historiography of Aboriginal people.²⁶ Although this book was criticised as a 'missed opportunity' for failing to provide a fully inter-state comparative historical understanding, the book's aim of presenting readily accessible state histories to a larger public was met, and for the first time.²⁷ While recognising that the multiplicity of factors involved in Aboriginal histories created a 'myriad of regional variations', Ann McGrath, the editor of the book, defended its inclusive approach: 'invasion' and 'settlement', issues involving a fundamental premise of the nation's establishment, could no longer be avoided.²⁸ Her interpretative proposal was to override the opposition between the two and to include both understandings in the picture of frontier Australia:

after all, why is it always posited as invasion *or* settlement? Why not invasion *and* settlement? Or settlement *and* invasion? In trying desperately to achieve 'political correctness' there is a danger that some aspects might be exaggerated at the expense of others.²⁹

This book was in many ways also summarising the body of research that had been carried out during the previous decades and suggesting a synthesis of its main interpretative strands of resistance and collaboration:

it was the very nature of colonialism that coloniser and colonised came together. In many such meetings, murder, rape, pillage, deceit occurred, but there was also co-operation, affection, generosity, loyalty, even love. As well as a history of con-

^{26.} McGrath 1995.

^{27.} Review by Markus 1998: 233.

^{28.} McGrath 1995: xxvi.

^{29.} McGrath 1995: xxviii.

flict and domination, there was also a history of negotiation, compromise and exchange.³⁰

An effort towards the incorporation of conflicting images was repeatedly proposed as the way out of an historiographical impasse. Similarly, the collection of essays *In the age of Mabo* also stresses the notion that the Aboriginal past was, and could not be other than, 'contested ground'. The essays interpret the consolidation of what Bain Attwood defined as 'the new Australian history' as a process stemming from the re-emergence of Aboriginal people in the written Australian historical landscape after a century and a half of almost complete exclusion.³¹ In the process, while historians had contributed remarkably to the redescription of an Australian identity, Aboriginal history was reshaping the whole of Australian historiography:

'The Aborigine' or Aboriginality has become central to the defining of Australian nationhood and identity to an unprecedented degree. Aboriginality has probably always been an element in the construction of Australian identity, but whereas its role was previously premised upon it being construed as a lack (*vis-a-vis* Australia's 'whiteness', modernity, progress, etc), its significance now derives from it being imagined in positive terms, indeed upon it being idealised.³²

In the 'age of Mabo' Aboriginal history and 'invasion' finally came to be the issues around which a further renegotiation of Australia's identity and relation to its past were to be elaborated, Attwood argues.³³ Such redefinition is ongoing, despite popular mythologies and despite the gap between general public perception and academic discourse — a gap, however, which is steadily and dangerously growing. Aware of this gap, Attwood expresses concerns about simply reversing a historiographical tradition:

There are also flaws evident in the construction of a new Australian identity from the materials of the past. First, there is the risk in populist (rather than academic) histories that we merely replace one unsatisfactory past in which we uncritically celebrate the founders of Australia, with another in which we merely 'exorcise their disturbing legacy'.³⁴

In a dialectical way similar to McGrath's conflation of 'settlement' and 'invasion', Attwood proposes a partial abandonment of the interpretative trends which had emerged since the 1970s. He proposes instead to insist on 'compromise' rather than 'exploitation' as the most appropriate model for understanding Aboriginal-white relations and on accommodation rather than disarticulation.

In a similar way, placing equal emphasis on both, a synthesis of the dialectic dyad represented by 'compromise' and 'resistance' is also the proposed interpretative pattern of Heather Goodall's *Invasion to embassy*.³⁵ In the first part of her narrative, Goodall describes a complex system of accommodation, a compact which had suited both pastoralists' needs and those of Aboriginal landholders for a long period. The latter had

30. McGrath 1995: xxviii.

31. Attwood 1996: xv.

32. Attwood 1996: xxiii.

33. See also Day 2001. In Day's overview, the themes of conquest, dispossession and race relations outweigh any other concern, and Aboriginal history becomes a paradigm for the whole interpretation of Australian history.

34. Attwood 1996: xxxvii.

35. Goodall 1996.

maintained traditional rights on their landholdings by accepting a system of 'double occupation' while, after the cessation of overt hostilities, most 'squatters stopped trying to exclude Aboriginal owners from their country, and Aboriginal communities reoccupied their lands as they took up work on their invaders' pastoral runs'.³⁶ Only later did the 'double occupation' eventually and progressively enter into crisis, as the development of towns, 'free selection', and economic downturns altered the need for black labour in pastoral runs. Attempts at renegotiation, either by the state directly or by European employers, missionary leaders, or town communities, had to face a surprisingly consistent, organised and resilient local resistance. According to Goodall, the double occupation had therefore been followed by a stage of enforced and strongly contested 'second dispossession', a phase which took place at different times in different areas and according to local needs and balances of power. In more remote regions, the terms of the double occupation were finally denounced only in the late 1960s.³⁷ Most importantly, Goodall's narrative challenges ameliorative narratives of Aboriginal history. She convincingly shows that 20th century white Australia was as much inclined to Aboriginal dispossession as its 19th century predecessor, while also confirming that land rights had a strong tradition of acknowledgment by Europeans – a tradition that was not established *ex novo* after Mabo.

Aboriginal autonomy was also the main subject of Tim Rowse's *White flour, white power* which introduced to the historiographical landscape of Australia what could be termed the 'rationing frontier'.³⁸ Rationing had historically been – at least until the transition from rations to cash in the 1960s and early 1970s – the most recurrent interaction between Aboriginal groups and pastoralists, missionaries, administrators and bureaucrats. Rowse notes how the implicit and explicit relationship between ration-provider and ration-user had consistently eluded historical and anthropological inquiry. His argument, identifying rationing as 'a pervasive institution of Central Australian colonialism', consists of an evaluation of rationing as a 'culturally undemanding' factor, one that could be accepted and practised by Indigenous recipients since it permitted them to 'preserve their own understanding of why they were rationed for'.³⁹ Contextualising the history of rationing in the wider history of assimilationist ideologies, Rowse assesses their ultimate failure against the resistance/persistence of Aboriginal understandings.

Rowse uses this comprehension of the inner workings of the donor-recipient relationship to explain the historical development of Aboriginal-white relations and the 'moral geography' of Alice Springs – a geography characterised primarily by its divisions along the town-bush boundary. The 'ideologies of donation' that informed rationing in its different phases had seen rationing as a first step towards assimilation, towards an overarching movement in the direction of the entitlements of a 'Central Australian citizenship' (the capacity to own a suburban house inside the civilised side of the boundary).⁴⁰ However, this strategy had been disempowered by Aboriginal understandings: since they perceived it as being 'no more than the passage of goods

36. Goodall 1996: 58.

37. See Goodall 1996: 104–114, 125–148.

38. Rowse 1998.

39. Rowse 1998: 4–5.

40. Rowse 1998: 2.

[and] requiring only the most minimal degree of intersubjective accord ... it was difficult for assimilationists to build a tutelary practice upon that relationship'.⁴¹ Rationing emerged then as another 'site' for Aboriginal resistance and survival, a site in which tribal agendas of preservation of autonomy and control of the black community could be reconciled with the need to seek an accommodation with the colonising presence. Moreover, the relationship characterising most of the interface between Aboriginal people and settlers did not allow the construction of a body of knowledge about the colonised, and the 'scientific party, the pastoral lease, the mission enclave, the police station, the welfare settlement' had been no exception in this context.⁴² By depriving the coloniser of effective means to gather knowledge, Aboriginal communities had effectively protected their autonomy.

These works are all united by the tendency towards uncovering Aboriginal resistance and resilience where it had not been sought before: after the period of open hostilities had ceased, and well after the moment in which open armed conflict had typically been concluded by an unwritten agreement between local Aboriginal people and pastoralists. These interpretations do not divide between an Aboriginal dispossession located in an irretrievable past and contemporary Aboriginal politics, or between 'colonial' and 'federal' histories. Anticipating a historiographical phase that was to come later, these works conflate the 19th and the 20th centuries and insinuate the notion that the search for a genocidal history may have to be carried out in a less linearly historicised discursive past.

Inga Clendinnen's *True stories* is also dedicated to this form of reassessment of the relationship between white and Aboriginal Australia.⁴³ Clendinnen's proposal is to abandon the term 'frontier' in order to interpret the complexities of that interface. She argues that the history of Aboriginal resistance cannot be positioned in either side of the rapidly moving line of settlement, and this should certainly cease to represent an interpretative divide between Aboriginal presence and Aboriginal destruction. Clendinnen proposes to situate Aboriginal resistance more accurately, while recognising that the intelligibility of Aboriginal actions is an interpretative problem still waiting to be approached satisfactorily. How to interpret a type of resistance that covers its tracks to the ultimate limit of intelligibility? Her answer is in Indigenous agency, which she refers to as 'sensibly flexible politics' or a 'strategy of incorporation'.⁴⁴ She demonstrates that a simplifying historiography cannot be applied to the history of Australia, especially to the history of its race relations. At the same time, Clendinnen's lectures represent a manifesto for historical research, a proposal for a further demise of the sterile opposition between 'black armband' history and settler style recitations. It is, again, a synthesis of two conflicting narrations:

Why concoct a single, simple, and therefore necessarily false tale and call it Australia's history? Why not a cornucopia of true stories, which would tell us what really happened? Why deny the courage of those early settlers? Why deny their cruelty when sheep were taken or a shepherd speared? Why deny the horror

41. Rowse 1998: 5.

42. Rowse 1998: 5.

43. Clendinnen 1999.

44. Clendinnen 1999: 49.

when they took their guns and hunted down black men, women and children, helplessly running to nowhere? ... I would recommend a crabwise approach, eyes swivelling sideways, backwards, forwards, with equal intensity, because while the past is past, it is not dead.⁴⁵

And, I would suggest further, in the case of Australian race relations, often the past does not even seem to be past.

Bringing home the *Bringing them home* report

The Mabo judgment was a turning point both in Australian historical debates and in public perceptions of the Aboriginal experience. As we have seen, the High Court in a sense gave a qualified juridical recognition to an already successful historiographical transformation which had made violent dispossession a central theme of Australian historical narratives. This acknowledgment brought an Australian revisionist historiography out of academia and into public policy, and, in turn, into collision with a consistent section of public opinion. Although this revisionist view has had to be defended in the public sphere, even those who oppose the theme of frontier violence do not challenge the principle that there was no Indigenous consent to the assertion of British sovereignty.⁴⁶ There remained, however, an unavoidable debate about the price that Aboriginal people have paid in being colonised, and the moral necessity of reparations. In this debate, the turning point was the *Bringing them home* report, which coalesced the voice of an Indigenous constituency of suffering – not so much the dispossessed, but the psychologically and morally shattered.⁴⁷

Aside from the financial burden associated with the prospect of compensation, acknowledging Aboriginal victimhood at this level, or, more than that, recognising white Australia as the victimiser of the Aboriginal 'other', has proven most frightening for a significant section of the public. A longing for a 'positive' narrative of Australian history is an established feature of an Australian consciousness, as illustrated for example by Ann Curthoys' appraisal of conservative historical discourse.⁴⁸ Considering this trait may help elucidate why it has been so difficult for Australian public opinion to accept a 'genocidal' assumption of recent historical scholarship and for the Howard administration to acknowledge the necessity of an apology. Indeed, redescribing one's intellectual state of mind from victimised to victimiser would necessitate a degree of courage and imagination that would be difficult to muster in today's Australian political and societal scene. The reason why a revisionist narrative of Australia's past is shared by only a minority of people outside academia may lie in the persistent power of a settler ideology. Overt support for meaningful native title and for Aboriginal sovereignty, for a Truth Commission on the stolen generations, or for the trial of Australian assimilationist policies, are instances that, in the context of a settler society and culture, cannot be legitimised or accepted as part of everyday knowledge. Accordingly, advocates of such notions, challenging what is admissible into the public realm, are assessed as ideologically or mentally ill. Recent attacks against the proponents of a genocidal dis-

⁴⁵. Clendinnen 1999: 101–103.

⁴⁶. See the autobiographical Reynolds 1999; Windschuttle 2000, 2002.

⁴⁷. See National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their Families (Australia) 1997; Bird 1998.

⁴⁸. Curthoys 1999: 1–19.

course as applied to Australian history in which interest in genocides is attributed to their Jewish background fit this intellectual framework.⁴⁹

In *An indelible stain?*, Henry Reynolds deals with the highly contentious topic of an Australian genocide while concentrating on a series of specific test cases, including the smallpox epidemic of 1789, the uprooting of Aboriginal Tasmanians, the 'dispersions' on the pastoral frontiers, and the assimilation paradigm. The work constitutes, in fact, a comprehensive if episodic overview of Aboriginal history.⁵⁰ Reynolds, however, developed a framework of analysis that departs from more traditional approaches to genocide studies and fully allows for the extreme localism of the Australian frontiers. Because of the specific characteristics of Aboriginal social systems – which typically comprised a small group linked to a particular country – Reynolds considers the resolve of settlers to destroy these small nations, whose land they had appropriated, to constitute what in genocidal proceedings is identified as deliberate intent. Reynolds thus elucidates a peculiar paradox of Australia's genocides, a feature frequently exploited by Australia's denialists: the smaller the group to be considered, the greater the likelihood that genocide did actually take place, and that most members of local groups were killed by settlers and by Aboriginal troopers.⁵¹ The more localised the struggle, the higher the probability that there was an intention to wipe local peoples out, and the lower the chances to properly document this. On Australian frontiers, genocide becomes more generalised yet less momentous; the numbers of each incident would have been quite small, and some of the perpetrators may sometimes have had little conscious idea of the genocidal nature of their actions. In the last analysis, Reynolds shows a process of Indigenous erasure and a deliberate intent – the two necessary prerequisites for a genocide to be recognised as such.

Reynolds's assessment of the 20th century history of the Aboriginal experience requires a different approach to the nature of cultural genocide as defined by Raphael Lemkin, the initiator of modern genocide studies.⁵² Whereas 'assimilation' is no longer an explicit part of Australia's political life, the intent to finally absorb the Indigenous people into 'the nation' and extinguish their separate autonomy remains strong. In this sense, Reynolds' analysis ultimately deals with the lack of a postcolonial passage, a passage his scholarship has been consistently advocating for decades. A local variation of genocide, therefore, not only stains Australia's past but also its present. Until Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as distinct peoples through a systematic acceptance of customary law and self-government supported by regional agreements and a constitutional definition of Indigenous rights, to use Reynolds' concluding words, 'the long-heralded, often-anticipated disappearance of the Aborigines [as distinct peoples] may yet come to pass'.⁵³

Anna Haebich's *Broken circles* constitutes the first comprehensive account of the Aboriginal experience *vis a vis* the policy of forced child removal.⁵⁴ This history,

49. See Tatz 2001: 30; Ryan 2001.

50. Reynolds 2001.

51. See especially Windschuttle 2000, 2002; Evans & Thorpe 2001; Attwood & Foster 2003.

52. See Lemkin 1944; Curthoys and Docker 2001.

53. Reynolds 2001: 179.

54. Haebich 2000.

covering all Australian colonies, states, and territories, is all-inclusive, evaluating the earliest seizures of Aboriginal children as well as later policies of systematic removal and incarceration. *Broken circles*, however, is also a history of the resistance and achievements of Aboriginal attempts to defend their communities and family life. The strategic choice of covering the history of 19th century abductions and producing a comprehensive survey of state intrusion into Aboriginal family life highlights continuity (as Goodall's *Invasion to embassy* also does) and collapses 'colonial' and 'contemporary' histories. It also contributes to the timely repositioning of a debate that, by its nature, is better located in an historical dimension rather than a judicial arena. Indeed, *Broken circles* immediately became an essential tool of reference for people addressing these issues. It countered what amounted to a coordinated effort to dismiss the notion that a policy of widespread removal of Aboriginal children had ever occurred, or that the removal of children could be ascribed to a genocidal practice.

From the beginning of her work, Haebich interprets Aboriginal family life as the centre of an Aboriginal ideology. Despite recurring denials, its deliberate and regular disruption could not entail a purposeful attempt to erase an Aboriginal identity:

Overlapping circles of extended family lie at the heart of the lives of most Aboriginal Australians. Networks of family relationships determine day-to-day activities and shape the course of destinies. From an early age Aboriginal Australians learn who belongs to whom, where they come from and how they should behave across a wide variety of kin. These are highly valued and integral components of Aboriginal cultural knowledge.⁵⁵

By the same token, Haebich's detailed analysis of Aboriginal family life highlights outstanding persistence and resilience rather than fragility. This is ironic, since it was often a perceived collapse of family bonds that allegedly triggered a 'humanitarian' policy of forced removal. In this sense, *Broken circles* constitutes yet another example in the historiographical investigation of Aboriginal resistance and persistence. Ultimately, in Haebich's work, family life and Aboriginal struggles against governmental intrusion become a paradigm for the interpretation of the wider processes of Aboriginal contestation against white hegemony.

During 2001, most of the historiographical debate on the stolen generations and an Australian genocide coalesced around Robert Manne's essay, 'In denial: the stolen generations and the right', which argues convincingly that there had been a campaign to undermine the genocidal paradigm espoused in the *Bringing them home* report.⁵⁶ The report's recommendation for an apology and for a process of compensation had prompted a series of judicial disputes which have seen a number of court cases testing whether the Federal Government should be held liable for the suffering of Indigenous children under the policies of removal. The courts have so far refused to recognise Federal Government liability.

'In denial' is structured in two main parts. The first presents an outline of the dynamics of the debate, exemplified by the outburst of recrimination that followed Aboriginal spokesperson Lowitja O'Donoghue's admission in February 2001 that her

^{55.} Haebich 2000: 13.

^{56.} Manne 2001a. *Quarterly Essay's* format consists of monographic essays; a reprint of 'In denial' was successively published in 2002 promoting it as a 'national bestseller'.

white father may have handed her and her siblings to missionary authorities. The second, and major, part of Manne's essay documents a coordinated promotion of denial. The campaign, co-ordinated by Padraic McGuinness' editorship of *Quadrant* and covertly encouraged by the Federal Government, revolved around the notion that Indigenous children were 'rescued' rather than 'stolen'. Manne's debunking of such a campaign tends to move away from the judicial debate and back into historical understanding, ultimately reproposing the notion that only a frank acknowledgment of a genocidal history will initiate a process of healing (and that such an outcome is indeed preferable to a continuation of a national trauma).

The subsequent issue of the *Quarterly Essay* was the site of an interesting correspondence, where a number of critical responses by notable scholars contributed to a discussion on the issues raised by Manne's essay.⁵⁷ These critiques especially insisted on several elements: one was a reductionist argument, epitomised by the suspicion that the numbers of children removed is more likely to be around 25,000 than 100,000 (as the *Bringing them home* report had originally implied); another recurring theme in these responses was an emphasis on the repeated loss of recent court cases concerning the stolen generations by Aboriginal claimants, and the finding by the judicial system that the Commonwealth Government was not responsible for the suffering of the applicants.

On the other hand, influenced by her recent Holocaust studies, Clendinnen's response reiterated a refusal to utilise a genocidal terminology and represented a historiographical challenge to Manne's denunciation of denialism.⁵⁸ Clendinnen's interpretation of the practice of child removal did not recognise its genocidal character and distinguished between 'genocide' and 'brutality'. However, the controversy between Manne and Clendinnen was one of characterisation and contexts: whereas Manne thought that an intention to 'breed out the colour' (and extinguish a specific group's autonomy) also qualified for the description of genocide, Clendinnen interpreted this term in a narrower sense and as a synonym for the Shoah. Nouns, however, often acquire a different value in different intellectual circumstances, and in North America, for example, the term 'holocaust', let alone 'genocide', enjoys a wide currency in colonial studies.⁵⁹

Despite their terminological divergence, Clendinnen's discussion of the tension between intention and outcome, and the idea that good people can do terrible things, may be ultimately supportive of Manne's conception of denial. He concludes that 'almost no-one was able to see through the kind of racism which could make it seem that tearing Aboriginal children from their mothers and communities was a natural, even noble act'.⁶⁰ Manne is optimistic in his use of the past tense. And yet this may be somewhat premature: the campaigns of denial concerning frontier casualties and the stolen generations, and their reception, show how many advocates of an Australian settler consciousness are not yet ready to see through that same racism.⁶¹

57. See correspondence of Brunton, Clendinnen, Duffy, Moran 2001: 88–114; Manne 2001b: 115–130; Schaffer 2001.

58. In their denunciation of *Quadrant's* denialist campaign, Evans and Thorpe have also expressed their unease in using 'genocide' as a word capable of conveying the reality of Australian Aboriginal history, and opted for 'indigenocide' instead (Evans and Thorpe 2001: 33–39).

59. See, for example, Stannard 1993; Davis 2002.

60. Manne 2001a: 93.

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Notes and documents

Elspeth Anne Young 1940–2002 **Board member of Aboriginal History 1987–2002**

The world has lost an extraordinary woman with the death of Elspeth Young in Britain on 10 August 2002. Her determination despite being in such poor health to get to Britain to say goodbye to her Scottish family and friends characterised her nature. Strong and determined in everything she did, she wore with pride the label 'wee toughie'. She was born during the Battle of Britain and her sister recounts 'it became a family joke that Elspeth, the little fighter, came into the world at that time'.

The strength of mind and body that got her back one last time to Britain characterised everything she did in life. As her colleagues Ritchie Howitt and Gerry Ward (p 85) note, 'When talking about her diagnosis, Elspeth reflected on her life very positively, saying she had fitted so much in, and seen so many places she'd never imagined she

would see, that she should really be about one hundred and fifty!' A lot of this travel was to complete challenging fieldwork as an undergraduate in the Scottish Highlands, as a PhD student in Highlands New Guinea and over the last two decades working with Indigenous people in central and northern Australia, Botswana and Canada.

Elspeth studied geography at Edinburgh University — where her grandfather, father and sister had studied before her. She completed a Masters (Honours) thesis based on research with the remote sheep farming communities of Glen Elg in the west of Scotland. After a stint of school teaching, first in Scotland and then in Trinidad, she took up a research assistant position in geography at the University of



Papua New Guinea in 1971. This was the beginning of a long association with Papua New Guinea. After completing her PhD thesis on *Simbu and New Ireland Migration* she commenced her long and productive work on Indigenous issues in Australia. She played a key role as a Research Fellow in Dr Fred Fisk's landmark project on the 'Aboriginal component in the Australian economy'. In 1981 Elspeth published an influential volume, *Tribal communities in rural areas*. In 1982 she joined the Darwin based Northern Australian Research Unit. Her years in Darwin were extraordinarily productive both for her own publications and the amazing support she gave to so many researchers working in northern Australia.

In 1985 Elspeth took up a position in Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy of the University of New South Wales. In 1994 she moved to the Environmental Management and Development program of the National Centre for Development Studies at the Australian National University. During her last seventeen years based in Canberra she excelled as both a teacher and a researcher. I had the very great good fortune of starting my career as an academic geographer in Canberra during this period. While I was never in the same department as Elspeth she was my greatest source of support. She was the most wonderful mentor — unfailingly positive and supportive. I had always known I was not alone in having had her as a key mentor but I have been stunned since her death to find out how many other people regard her in the same light.

For me, and for so many others, she was always there when needed to provide a supporting word or comments on a draft, or to be a referee for a promotion or grant application. Her sharp mind and refreshing willingness to say what she meant made her intellectually incisive and challenging to be near. As one colleague at the celebration of her life held at the Australian National University's Grand Hall last year put it, 'You challenged me in ways and demanded more thinking than anyone I ever met. You cared and gave beyond your ken, you will be missed.'

Far from slowing down in her sixties, Elspeth was full of plans to spend more time in the field and had reduced her administrative load at the university to make such work possible. It was with enormous sadness that I found myself flying off to the Northern Territory the day after she died to work on a project we had developed together. There was however no way I could have stayed in Canberra grieving, for I knew how disappointed she would have been in me if I had not gone ahead with the work we had put so much planning into.

Elspeth lived her life simply, with integrity, enjoyment and humour. She had an extraordinarily wide range of friends in many different circles in Australia and overseas. In Canberra, for example, she was active not only as an academic but also as a community planning activist, a bushwalker and as a singer. On the national and international stages she had equally broad networks — playing a key role with the Australian Antarctic Division, the International Geographic Union and numerous informal networks of scholars and Indigenous people working on Indigenous issues. I had the rare pleasure of attending my first two international conferences with Elspeth and on both occasions was amazed by the breadth of her international friendships and networks.

Elspeth was an inspirational teacher who made a real difference to the lives of so many of her students. Emotional tributes from students from around the world were a highlight of the celebration of her life. As well as this worldwide cohort of former stu-

dents Elspeth leaves behind many other important legacies. These include her contribution to the successful Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Claims to Ti Tree and Mount Allen and her ground breaking research on Indigenous land management issues in Australia: for example, she was the earliest researcher to champion the 'caring for country' concept (see Young 1987). She carried out landmark comparative work on Indigenous land management issues around the world. This work lives on both through the pages of her remarkable 1995 volume *Third World in the first: development and Indigenous peoples* and the ongoing global networks of Indigenous people and academics that she played such a key role in fostering. She provided support for a whole generation of Australian researchers working on Indigenous issues and for Geographers more generally. Howitt and Ward (2003) provide a moving and detailed summary of her contribution to Australian geography. She has contributed a direct and ongoing legacy in an extraordinarily generous bequest of over \$700,000 to support Indigenous students studying at the Australian National University.

Elspeth taught so many of us the power of socially committed research. Her research was never done in an ivory tower – it was always aimed at improving the lives of those she was working with. Elspeth's research focused on capacity building and empowerment of people and communities. It is therefore fitting that so many people feel so empowered from having known her. As one friend put it, 'Elspeth was a person who always gave more to those things in which she was involved than she took. We will all miss her.'

Richard Baker
Geography, School of Resources,
Environment and Society, ANU

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‘Leave it to me’: an appreciation of Peter John Grimshaw 1932–2003

One man made it possible for *Aboriginal History* to become a reality and that man was Peter John Grimshaw. Bob Reece and I, as self-appointed editors, had spoken and written to most Australian scholars with an interest in Aboriginal history at the time and we received many letters of support and encouragement. We had also formed a committee, the forerunner of the Editorial Board, which first met on 4 September 1975. But how would we be funded? Having been a founding member of *The Journal of Pacific History* I knew that it was necessary to have enough money to pay the first printer's bill after which the journal would become self-supporting through subscriptions. In the case of *Pacific History* we started with a consultation fee that had been paid to Professor JW Davidson for constitutional advice. While I hoped that the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University would provide an umbrella for *Aboriginal History* I was less sanguine about receiving financial support. I went to see Peter who was then Business Manager for the Joint Schools (Pacific Studies and Social Sciences). To my delight and surprise Peter was enthusiastic about the idea. He seemed to know where he could find the funds. ‘Leave it to me’, he said in his characteristic way. In no time he had won Professor Wang Gungwu, Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies, to his way of thinking and some days later we were summoned to the Director's Office. An account was opened with \$2000 and we were told we would be supported as an academic committee but the journal was not to be recognised as an official organ of the School. Professor Wang had been involved with a cultural minority journal in Singapore which had been taken over by political activists and, despite our assurances of objectivity, he was closing the door on any formal link. We also received a small grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies as it then was.

Some time later, after discussing the matter with Bob Reece and Diane Barwick, who had agreed to be one of the editors, I invited Peter to be our treasurer. Peter not only accepted the role of treasurer but also arranged secretarial support which continued until 1992. He was the principal architect of our constitution when we became incorporated and he performed the dual roles of treasurer and public officer until his death on 2nd March 2003. As a member of the Board Peter's commitment to education and concern for research opportunities for Australian Indigenous scholars was expressed in his administration of the Stanner Fellowship funding and the bequests for the Sally White – Diane Barwick Awards. For 26 years he regularly attended Board meetings giving sound financial advice and sage counsel. He will be sorely missed.

Peter Grimshaw had a strong feeling for Indigenous causes. His father Colonel JS Grimshaw, MC, was Commissioner of the Royal Papua and New Guinea Constabulary from 1947 to 1954. and Peter spent part of his early life in Papua New Guinea. His great aunt was the prolific Pacific writer Beatrice Grimshaw.

Peter was born in Adelaide on 3 January 1932. Educated at Unley High School he later studied for an Arts degree from the University of Queensland and obtained a Master's degree in Education (Administration) from the University of New England. While at the Australian National University he continued his historical studies and just before his

death he had completed a manuscript on the history of the Papua New Guinea constabulary.

Through his principal sporting interests, boxing and rugby, Peter had a common bond with many Aboriginal men who excelled in both sports. Peter himself was South Pacific Amateur Heavyweight Boxing Champion in 1953-54 and he was a Rugby League representative player in 1952-54. From 1949 to 1957 Peter served in the Department of Civil Aviation in Papua New Guinea. He also joined the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles in which he was commissioned. His links with the Australian Army led him to take a special interest in the largely undervalued role of Aboriginal servicemen and together with John Mulvaney he was co-editor of a volume of *Aboriginal History* (Vol 16, 1992) devoted to the subject.

After six years with the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority Peter joined the staff of the Australian National University as Business Manager in 1964 and held that post in different capacities until his retirement in 1997. A founder of the University Credit Union he was active on a number of staff and business committees in the ACT, serving on the University Council in 1976-80. He played a major role in providing excellent working and accommodation facilities for researchers in Port Moresby and Suva and was prominent in setting up the North Australian Research Unit in Darwin. On one of his many inspection visits to the New Guinea Research Unit at Port Moresby he walked up to the lakeside laboratory on Mt Wilhelm (11,500 ft) surprising the resident scientists. He was the recipient of both Australian and Papua New Guinea honours.

As Business Manager Peter earned a reputation for efficient management and solving problems of the moment. One knew that there was a solution when he said 'Leave it to me'. In his funeral address, Professor Gerard Ward, former Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies, gave a typical instance.

I recall, for example, a late evening phone call from University Security. They had taken a frantic phone call from the transit lounge at Singapore airport. Two young Russian scholars, en route to visit the School, were stranded there. Their institution had put them on the plane from Moscow, but without onward bookings and tickets for the Singapore-Sydney leg! And they had no visas for Singapore. They could stay in the terminal for 24 hours but would then be expelled back to Moscow — and their embassy in Singapore was not interested! My solution was a phone call to Peter! By 9 a.m. next morning he had obtained bookings and arranged for tickets to be issued to them in the transit lounge. They duly continued their journey, greatly relieved, and somewhat astounded at what an academic administrator could do from a quarter of the world away.

This was the Peter we had the privilege of knowing on the Board of Aboriginal History. His budgeting was impeccable and no problem was too difficult. With his passing, his family have lost a valued member and *Aboriginal History* and the University an advocate, friend and lynch pin.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Professors Gerard Ward, Hank Nelson and Isabel McBryde who contributed to this obituary.

Niel Gunson
Division of Pacific and Asian History, ANU

‘Tribal loyalties’: reconnecting with the land

A tribute to Mrs Alice Kelly, 1919–2003

On Friday, July 11th, a ritual of great cultural significance was being enacted in the Melbourne Town Hall. Bobby Rose, arguably the greatest exponent of Aussie Rules was being farewelled by some 400 dedicated supporters of the game. A champion in the black and white guernsey of the Collingwood Magpies, his passing enlisted the presence of both local and regional followers of that tribe. And in the best tribal tradition, the stage, complete with every past and present member of Magpie warriors, raised the Town Hall rafters with the rousing chorus of the tribal war cry ‘Good old Collingwood forever’. Rarely outside a grand final have the good (and not so good) citizens of Melbourne witnessed such a passionate expression of tribal solidarity.

On the day before Bobby Rose brought Swanston St to a standstill, another crowd of 400 people had gathered to another funeral. But unlike the Collingwood publicity, this passed without media attention. But like Bobby Rose, the deceased embodied great, even greater tribal traditions.

The funeral was of Mrs Alice Kelly, a great Elder of the Mathi Mathi people who was ritually united with the red soil of the Mathi Mathi lands at Balranald, just a short drive north of the Murray. In her long life (84 years) Alice Kelly had seen the harsh times, the good and many not-so-good times of an Aboriginal person growing up in a community that, in early days at least, was alien and often outrightly hostile to her traditions. From the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, where she saw her father cut his own bark canoe, she was married at 15 years to a young man, Alf Kelly, and became a dedicated wife in Alf’s droving days. That fertile liaison nourished a family of 11 children, the foundation of ‘the Kelly clan’ now numbering no less than 177 direct descendants.

Throughout droughts, family struggles and hard times, Alice Kelly sought and found constant support and companionship with her Aboriginal traditions. She remembered language, observed traditional laws and above all, developed a passionate love of the land to which her people were intimately attached.

In 1969, events took a strange turn, a turn that was to change the lives of both Alice Kelly and myself. In March of that year I brought a group of archaeologists, geologists and soil scientists to inspect a deposit of burnt bones I had located on the shores of then un-named dry lake in western NSW. It was a site of clear archaeological significance. When the late Rhys Jones removed a large carbonate block, out dropped a piece of burnt human mandible. We were dealing with Australia’s then oldest known human burial and the world’s oldest example of human cremation.

Within the next 12 months, we named that place, Lake Mungo. Meanwhile, back in Canberra Dr Alan Thorne at the Australian National University had reconstructed the remains demonstrating the death and cremation burial of a young woman on the shore of the then brim-full lake. Known now as ‘Mungo Lady’ we have ascertained the age of her death and burial 40,000 years ago.

The realisation that people of such antiquity had been living and dying in this now arid landscape startled many Australians, offering new ways of viewing past

changes in both the land and its ancient occupants. But none were more enchanted than the Aboriginal Elders of that region, and foremost amongst them, Mrs Alice Kelly.

Mrs Kelly immediately identified with her ancestral spirits of Lake Mungo. Specifically, she saw a direct and continuous lineage with that young woman who had lived and been nourished by that land, by the very lands that had supported Alice and Alf Kelly with all their people.

The family of Aboriginal continuity knew no fracture. Mungo Lady was brought to life in the heart and mind of Alice Kelly. But science had defiled her by removal of her remains from her ancestral homelands. Alice began a long battle with science to redress these wrongs, to return Mungo Lady's remains to her homeland and to teach science and scientists of the ritual links between body, spirit and land, links that science so often ignores or even denies. As one of many who have been irrevocably touched by Alice Kelly's tireless endeavours, her legacy invites us to share her philosophy with fellow Australians.

It was the strength and integrity of Alice Kelly's Aboriginal traditions that have now brought Indigenous Elders and scientists in the Lake Mungo region to new levels of collaborative interaction. Gone are the embattled stand-offs of a few years ago when Aboriginal people fought for ownership of their own cultural history, protection of sites and especially protection of graves and human remains. It has been a long journey on a sometimes bumpy road. But even more importantly for some of us, that journey has involved another, extending the boundaries of science far beyond those that constrained us in 1969 when Mungo Lady first reappeared after 40,000 years of silence. This involves the connecting links between people, both living and dead, and the wonders of the lands, lands within which we, like our Indigenous cousins, were born and with which we interact throughout our lives. Those connecting links, hard to encapsulate, where language fails us, reside somewhere in the concept of spirituality, of belonging or in some mysterious way, related to our very being. We of the western world have lost something precious.

We too were once tribal, and not just in the Collingwood sense. Who of us can imagine where our ancestors roamed 10,000, let alone 40,000 years ago? For us, in a technological age, dominated by a consumer culture where nature is to be exploited more than nurtured, the challenge of crossing the boundary to explore those links where spirit enjoins land and people in strange harmony remains a largely alien venture. Like those who have experienced the healing powers of Alice Kelly's synthesis of people, land and spirit, the challenge for us all is to venture into those dangerous waters, to preserve and celebrate the natural wonders of this land, to rediscover our own tribal roots. Indeed, it is that tradition exemplified by both Bobby Rose and Alice Kelly and other great inspirational elders that will help lead us into a new enlightened age of understanding people and environment. It is a journey in which the memory of both Alice Kelly and Mungo Lady invites every Australian to explore.

Jim Bowler, Professorial Fellow,
School of Earth Sciences,
University of Melbourne

Book Reviews

Invisible invaders, smallpox and other diseases in Aboriginal Australia 1780–1880 by Judy Campbell, 266pp, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2002, \$49.95

Judy Campbell's *Invisible invaders* is a polished gem of historical research. It is one of those books which are fine to the feel, and its design, from cover to print-size to selection of illustrations, is excellent. The writing style is clear, the evidence well presented, the Glossary useful, and the Notes, Bibliography and Index comprehensive. Any historians or other researchers interested in the history of smallpox and other diseases in Aboriginal Australia will surely use this study as a cornerstone reference from now on.

The subtitle of the book, 'smallpox and other diseases in Aboriginal Australia 1780–1880', clearly indicates the major focus. However, the first two chapters present a very useful commentary on ancient Aboriginal diseases, as well as ancient diseases elsewhere in the world, and the impact of 'virgin soil outbreaks' of smallpox on Native Americans. The fine thread of comparison with the North American records is a useful reminder of the similar nature of the impact of virgin epidemics of smallpox, but the contrast, as the author also points out, provides a cautionary tale about jumping to incorrect conclusions as, in particular, the influential American scholars Butlin and Diamond did.

Judy Campbell presents the Australian evidence in such a way as to nicely acknowledge historical sources and allow other theories to be examined, yet leads readers on lucid paths of greater understandings. Her key examinations, those of the various smallpox epidemics from 1789 to the 1860s, are as comprehensive as the records allow, and compelling in their deductions and summaries.

Although the evidence for presumed accidental introduction of smallpox by Macassans has long been noted, for a considerable time it was lost beneath speculation about British introduction, as either accidental (eg Stirling 1911) or, more sensationally, as a deliberate act of 'original aggression' (eg Butlin 1983). In Chapter Three, 'Myths', the author effectively waddies these ideas on the head, along with speculation that the disease was chicken-pox or a 'native pock'.

Having discounted these myths, the source of smallpox is then comprehensively considered in Chapter Four, 'The Indonesian Archipelago 1780–1880'. In fact, much earlier reports of its presence in Asia are presented before it is proven to be south-east Asia in origin in the crucial period. A wide range of historical sources allows Campbell to indicate, from both circumstantial and reported evidence, that the Macassans from Sulawesi and elsewhere were responsible for introducing this 'most dreadful scourge' to the Aborigines, and a map (p 67) indicates the places of origin and directions of spread to northern Australia. This chapter sets the background for an exhaustive, yet

nonetheless constantly interesting Chapter Five, 'Hidden History'. Here she examines the contrary hypotheses, then indicates how, as had long been hinted at, the 'chains of connection' — the Aboriginal gift exchange, travelling ceremonial and other travelling routes — were the logical routes by which the Macassan-introduced 'virgin soil' smallpox epidemic arrived in Sydney in 1789. (This is briefly, but usefully, expanded upon later where appropriate (pp 166, 182–3)). Once again a useful map is provided, as wherever appropriate throughout the book. The author is scrupulous in indicating when the evidence is either reasonable speculation or direct historical observation.

Her presentation here, and throughout, illustrates the advantage of using a chronological approach, when even scanty records are available, to indicate specific and likely places of origin, directions and speed of the spread of the disease, and the terrible but varying impacts on Aboriginal populations at locality after locality, region after region. And in 'The aftermath' (pp 102–4) she briefly considers the tragic impact of other introduced diseases, notably tuberculosis. A point of considerable interest, mentioned but not developed, is that the imbalance of males to females among the survivors in favour of males, as well as the massive loss of life, 'may have delayed a return to customary life and demographic recovery' (p 98).

Chapter Six, 'The Frontiers of Eastern Australia 1824–1830' is an excellent chapter, using both Aboriginal oral history and the observations of early British and German colonists to indicate how smallpox spread beyond the coasts in eastern Australia. The evidence of a devastation on the Darling and then Murray Rivers and its further spread in coastal South Australia and much further north is unequivocal. (The reviewer, having been shown an Aboriginal skull excavated during laying of a water-pipe by a friend on the eastern shore of Lake Albert on the Lower Murray in the mid-1960s, prevailed on the friend to hand the skull to the then appropriate authorities. This was followed by an examination of the area in which the skull had been found. At this time two distinctive concentrations of partially exposed skeletons, one of twenty-one individuals and the other of eleven individuals, were recorded. Their location was indicated in an old historical reference as being one at which many Aborigines had died as a result of smallpox. No record of the research has ever been published, and the historical reference is not indicated here to protect the grave sites.)

The ensuing chapters Seven to Nine, respectively titled 'The Colony of New South Wales 1828–32', 'Eastern Australia 1860–1867' (including the Northern Territory) and 'Western Australia 1860–1870', are equally erudite. They conclusively prove — despite the understandable limitations of the evidence in most desert areas, and despite some groups surviving unscathed for various reasons (see eg p 150) — that smallpox epidemics had a terrible impact Australia-wide: smallpox caused the deaths of half or more of the groups in the virgin epidemic stages; numbers of Aboriginal survivors in New South Wales and what eventually became Victoria indicated that the populations had 'never recovered' their pre-impact numbers (see eg pp 148, 154). The author also suggests that, as in North America, the losses were so great that at times effective resistance to the invading Europeans was either not directly possible or was often limited because of the depleted numbers due to disease (pp 161, 189, 213).

An important point of the research is that, while the specific place of origin is not known for certain in New South Wales, the author uses the available records to clearly indicate that the spread was from the interior to the coast, rather than the reverse as has

generally been assumed; that it almost certainly spread north to south from well inland of Moreton Bay; and that, even at the time, postulations about the origins included 'in the islands of the Malay Archipelago' (p 148). Furthermore, while the Aboriginal attempts at evasion and treatment are mentioned in earlier chapters, here the references are more frequent, and mythologically derived explanations, as well as perceptions of the malignant power of other Aborigines, are mentioned as Aboriginal explanations for its occurrence.

Although it is not the focus of her study, Campbell also mentions the concerns that colonial officials, and frontier colonists in New South Wales, had for the Aborigines who were suffering from smallpox and other diseases in an 1866 to 1867 outbreak in western South Australia (pp 184–7), and similarly in Western Australia (pp 193, 212). Such concerns, including encouragement of Aborigines to seek vaccination in addition to their own treatments, and to rest appropriately and recover, as well as the nursing care by colonists, could in themselves well provide an interesting article. Certainly there was a degree of self-interest, in that such treatment would also benefit the few unvaccinated colonists, preventing them from catching smallpox from the Aborigines, but the evidence is also clear that among the invading Europeans there were many who had a compassionate humanitarian concern for the well-being of the original inhabitants. She also counters Jared Diamond's assertions of frontier violence in Australia being the main cause of Aboriginal deaths. It is certain that, terrible as every deliberate massacre was, smallpox and tuberculosis (unavoidable in the European population of the era, and accidentally spread to, and then by, Aborigines) caused vastly more deaths than did bullets or poison (pp 161–2).

At this stage I do question one perception by the author, and that is the implication that some groups of Aborigines, particularly those at points along the Murray and the Darling, universally blamed Europeans for the introduction of smallpox, and therefore were belligerent (pp 161–2). Time does not allow development of the alternative or counter evidence, but from my own (unpublished) research I believe that it is clear that distinctive Aboriginal group boundaries, misunderstandings between the explorers' groups and Aborigines (neither knowing the other's language nor other key protocols and practices) and fear of the invading strangers on the Lower Murray – and probably elsewhere along both rivers – created tensions independent of any Aboriginal perceptions about smallpox.

Although it is worthy of a more detailed commentary, Chapter Nine, 'Western Australia 1860–1870', follows the author's previous meticulous considerations of the evidence in examining four different subregions. While measles and tuberculosis are also precisely referred to, it is smallpox which continues as the focus of her attention. After proving that it again can reasonably be attributed to the visits of Macassans, and that some of the spread was from inland rather than the coast, the developing tragedies are followed by reference to the chronology of observations. It is an impressive chapter, in that almost all other major studies have given the greatest, and often sole, attention to eastern Australia.

Before considering the concluding chapter, I mention a few minor errors. On p 21 'European' should read 'Europeans'; on p 105 the date of 1989 in line two should be 1789. In all instances from p 179 onwards, including the Index, 'Tietkins' should be 'Tietkens'; and on p 182 the distance of 'several hundred kilometres in two days' is a misreading of the evidence. However, these are all very minor errors in an illuminating study.

Chapter Ten, 'The Diseases that Killed', is a tour de force summarising chapter. The comparisons and contrasts with North America are incisively commented upon; and if anyone can use a scalpel gently while still respecting their endeavours, then the author has done so on the three main commentators Curr, Butlin and Diamond. In so doing she firmly restates that which she has conclusively proved: that the origins of the smallpox epidemics in the century 1780-1880 lay with the Macassan visitors from Sulawesi. She reiterates that the 'chains of connection' which linked Aborigines continent-wide became 'chains of infection', so that smallpox in particular, but also measles, tuberculosis – the 'worst disease transmitted to Aborigines by Europeans' in the same century (p 228) – and venereal diseases, spread as virgin epidemic catastrophes. Although other points are succinctly made, a final fitting quotation reads: 'Between 1780 and 1870 smallpox itself was the major single cause of Aboriginal deaths. The consequences of Aboriginal smallpox are an integral part of modern Australian history' (p 227).

In conclusion, this is as fine a book of historical research as it has been my sad pleasure to read. Judy Campbell has impressively distilled and summarised the evidence about diseases in Aboriginal Australia to 1880. She deserves whatever history awards exist for excellence.

RG Kimber
Alice Springs

Aboriginal suicide is different: a portrait of life and self-destruction by Colin Tatz, 249pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 2001, \$33.00

Professor Colin Tatz has published a book that is mainly (but not exclusively) based on his field study in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and New Zealand. The study had been funded over a 3-year period by the Criminology Research Council, with the findings presented in July 1999. In this book, Tatz attempts to provide some explanation of Aboriginal suicide and how it differs from non-Aboriginal suicide. Understandably Tatz 'found no excitement or intellectual exhilaration' in carrying out his field study and reporting the findings; in fact he only experienced 'distress' (p ix). Tatz refers to Maori suicide in New Zealand where he claims that it 'is as much of a problem in New Zealand as is Aboriginal suicide in Australia' (p x). Contrary to Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie Tatz states his belief that alienation can 'be a spur to achievement' (pxi). To bolster this argument Tatz points to the amazing resilience and courage shown by many Aboriginal communities, particularly among Aboriginal women. He also suggests that an Australia-wide study along similar lines to his research is no longer necessary. This is because Ernest Hunter and others also released a report in 1999 on Aboriginal suicide in North Queensland, and any further research along the same lines would not substantially alter the 'broad conclusions reported in these two studies' (p xii).

Tatz begins his discussion on Aboriginal suicide with the social and political contexts of Aboriginal suicide. Aboriginal suicide is different because Aboriginal people mostly live 'non-Aboriginal' lives that cannot be separated from their particular social and personal histories. There can be no disputing the fact that five or more generations

of inter-racial violence has had deep and profound effects on Aboriginal people in Australia. Tatz uses a quote from Emmanuel Marx to help explain the origins of what he calls the 'new violence'. That is, where a person is so totally dependent on 'officials' and therefore unable to 'stage a public appeal', he may be compelled to assault family members and even commit suicide so that he can 'share his burden' or 'regain the support' of his family members (p 23). Tatz explains that suicide as a social phenomenon was rare in the Aboriginal population until the 1980s, the increase in the Aboriginal suicide rate being attributable largely to 'internal breakdown' in Aboriginal communities as a result of governments abolishing the missions and reserves now called communities. Tatz rejects the quantitative 'safety in numbers' approach that many social scientists use when attempting to explain Aboriginal suicide (p 43).

Tatz goes on to suggest that the use of scientific methods to quantify Aboriginal suicide is a futile exercise, given the many causal factors and the vastly different circumstances of Aboriginal people compared to non-Aboriginal people. Tatz suggests that in order to explain and understand Aboriginal suicide one must use a discipline that looks at the wider context of this social phenomenon. Using quantitative methodologies presents all sorts of difficulties in defining Aboriginal suicide. He points to the fact that most Australian States and Territories do not have an Aboriginal identifier, since 'neither police reporting of non-natural causes of death', nor coronial determinations of an individual's death, record whether the deceased is Aboriginal or not (p 63). This tells us that there is still a long way to go before the quantification of Aboriginal suicide can be even remotely measured. Tatz takes a quote from Alvarez (1974) where he suggests that the study of suicide has yielded more and more publications, papers, essays etc. However, 'Suicidology' has not made much of an impact on suicide rates in the western world. Tatz estimates Aboriginal suicide to be at least 'double' maybe even 'quadruple the rate of non-Aboriginal suicide' (p 79). Tatz presents quantitative data from New South Wales, the one State that in recent times has begun to record Aboriginality in death records. He concludes that Aboriginal youth suicide rates in 1997 were over '48 per 100,000' in the state of New South Wales ... double the non-Aboriginal rate of suicide' (p 86).

Tatz also looks at risk factors associated with Aboriginal suicide where consideration is given to ideas presented by Hassan and Baume, who suggest that people who are unmarried, from non-English speaking, ethnic or rural backgrounds, are more at risk of suicide (pp 125-7). Tatz suggests that 'formal marriage', unemployment and low job status are not highly important in Aboriginal societies. They are, according to Tatz, normative aspects of Aboriginal life and therefore they are not 'major stressors' (p 127). Tatz also suggests that the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) has provided a boost for the morale of Aboriginal people where being a CDEP worker carries with it a 'higher status'. This seems to contradict somewhat his earlier implication that unemployment is not a significant risk factor for Aboriginal suicide (p 131). This is further contradicted when Tatz points to the occurrence of Aboriginal people 'having titles attached to their jobs, receiving pay rather than dole packets', as resulting in something like a 'miracle of morale boosting' for Aboriginal CDEP participants (p 130). He suggests that CDEP should be expanded with no ceiling on the numbers of participants. Therefore, it seems that being actively engaged in some sort of employment, even if it is regarded as menial work, may in fact be a significant factor in preventing Aboriginal suicide.

Tatz draws the reader's attention to comparative studies in the field of suicidology and, while asserting that international comparative research is useful in other contexts, he is less convinced of 'the value of comparison in suicidology' (p 162). Tatz rejects the mental health approach as being too individualistic and points to the 'large body of evidence in the literature' that the explanation of Aboriginal suicide is more likely to be found in 'social and political contexts' (p 162). Throughout his book Tatz is trying to liberate research on Aboriginal suicide from the 'isolation wards of science' or 'conventional suicidology', which he claims is a western diagnostic model based on 'medical/psychological' ideas (pp 41, 181). The bio-medical approach to suicidology, according to Tatz, will not provide much insight into Aboriginal suicide and 'suicidology needs to be liberated from this domination by statistical method' (p 189). One would agree with Tatz's assertion that, in order to understand how Aboriginal suicide has come to be understood through the work of suicidologists, a discussion of the wider academic debate relating to Aboriginal suicide needs to be examined as well. That is, a multi-disciplinary approach must be taken in order to avoid narrow prescriptive approaches such as that of 'biological determinism' (p 191).

Tatz suggests that a separate field of study in Aboriginal suicidology needs to be established and the portrait of Aboriginal youth suicide, along with that of young Maoris and Canadian/American Indians, is not only different 'but is radically different' from non-Aboriginal young people. Given the large scale of this field study and the vast experience that Tatz has in the field of Indigenous studies, this book is essential reading for those who are interested in the field of Aboriginal suicidology.

Nigel Bennett
Research, AIATSIS, Canberra

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Ancestral power: the dreaming, consciousness and Aboriginal Australians by Lynne Hume, 210pp, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2002, \$39.95

A book dealing with the more esoteric, or subjective, side of Aboriginal religious experience is timely and possibly overdue. Elkin's *Aboriginal men of high degree* was first published in 1945. In the foreword to the 1976 edition (reprinted in the 1977 and 1994 editions), Jeremy Beckett comments that, 'despite the expansion of Aboriginal studies, it remains the only substantial work on what might be called the Aboriginal occult'.¹

And yet another twenty-five years have passed and his comment still holds true. That is why Hume's work is in many ways groundbreaking.

The scope of *Ancestral power* goes beyond that of Elkin. He was interested in the very specific personality of the 'clever men', their making and their powers. Although covering much of the same ground, Hume's work is more ambitious. She wants to analyse the Dreaming and try to understand it through the role it plays in the personal experiences of Aboriginal Australians who, she argues, can interact with it as a living reality during altered states of consciousness (ASC). Hume's approach to ASC is underpinned by the assumption that experience, the content of consciousness, is determined by cultural variables. At the same time she seeks to highlight that ASC have common essential elements across cultures.

There is another noteworthy difference between Hume and Elkin. Elkin worked extensively among Aboriginal people across the continent. Hume, on the other hand, comes to Aboriginal anthropology as an outsider and uses the texts of others as her 'field notes'. The outside perspective can of course be an advantage, and there is no reason why somebody coming from a background of religious studies should not be able to provide valuable insights into Aboriginal religion.

Hume draws on and seeks to relate three bodies of material:

1. extensive and widely ranging material on Aboriginal religious practices and worldviews;
2. information from other religious practices, mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, with which to contrast the Aboriginal material;
3. theories and case studies from the field of consciousness research with which to provide explanatory models for some of the reported experiences.

The Aboriginal material is drawn from across the continent, but particularly detailed examples come from Arnhem Land, the Kimberleys, the Western Desert and the south-east of South Australia. Much of the material Hume uses is from more specialised and possibly obscure publications or even so far unpublished sources. One of the contributions of her book is in bringing such material together and making it available to a wider audience.

Hume suggests that in Aboriginal society, as in other Indigenous societies, all phases of consciousness, such as 'dream', 'trance' or 'waking' experiences, are considered meaningful. Such societies are said to operate on a 'fully *polyphasic* consciousness', and Hume largely accepts this at face value, explaining the advantage of that position:

Western culture in general fails to prepare individuals for an easy, fearless exploration of alternate phases of consciousness ... Most ethnographers, for example, are not equipped with the experiential and conceptual material requisite for sophisticated research into the religious practices of other cultures. The tendency is for researchers in the field to explain another culture's stated experiences of alternate states of consciousness in terms of the Western medical model, which accords with a materialist worldview (p 5).

Hume attempts to understand Indigenous Australian concepts on their own terms by finding parallels in other cultures and, more importantly, by offering models that can

1. Elkin 1977, 1994: xvii.

explain the experiences without denying the reality of their essential elements. Providing explanations for some of the more esoteric aspects of Aboriginal (and generally human) experience that are both culturally appropriate yet scientifically palatable is of more than merely philosophical or theoretical value. The issue of people's spiritual attachment to land is of ongoing relevance in native title claims and heritage matters, yet in many regards the anthropological models to explain the 'spiritual' interrelationship of land, humans and other animals are, arguably, deficient, as Tonkinson has noted:

A different kind of tension, but potentially very important in the land claims process is that between Aboriginal conceptions of reality and Western legal precepts. For example Mardu people with whom I have worked in the Western Desert described how, during dreams, they would sometimes travel in dream-spirit form to their homelands. In this way they were able to maintain what they would regard as a physical presence in their country no matter where they were actually living. Significantly, these dream-spirit journeys enabled them to continue their vital role in fulfilling the religious imperative of 'looking after country'. The Mardu would be in no doubt that this cultural element satisfies legal requirements for evidence of 'continued occupation' of traditional territory. However, in a court of law or a Tribunal hearing, operating according to Western legal precepts, such 'presence' would surely be regarded as at best metaphysical, hence of dubious validity in that it cannot be subject to proof or disproof.²

Hume spends much of the book concentrating on two areas of experience. The first of these, which I found one of the most important sections of this book, relates to the discussion of 'Power' in chapter 4.

The notion that rituals and music may function as conduits for 'power' both generative and dangerous, from the Ancestral to the human sphere, leads Hume to take a closer look at the concept of 'power'. This starts with a brief historical and philosophical overview of the key concept 'energy' and an introduction of the notion of psychic energy. It is argued that psychic energy, although usually not visible, can be perceived in others and the environment. Hume shows that the notion of such energy is present cross-culturally and across Australia. Her examples are: *chi (qi)* from China; *n/um* of the Kalahari Bushmen; *kundalini* of the Hindu; *dumo* of Tibet; *libido* of psychotherapy; *mana* of Polynesia; *kunta kunta* of Cape York; *marr* of Arnhem Land; *guruwari* of the Walbiri; and later in the chapter, *miwi* from the Ngarrindjeri and *kurunpa* from the Pitjantjatjara.

Hume alludes to a suggestion by Donald Thomson that such energy might underlie all ritual and ceremonial life in Arnhem Land and her own approach seems to support this view more widely. She sets out how people interact with this energy in sacred rituals, for example by pressing their bodies against sacred objects, touching paintings or engaging with particular sites, and emphasises the notion of reciprocity that underlies these interactions. This point can be extremely relevant to some of the current arguments surrounding Aboriginal people's attachment to land.

Hume's second key point regards a category of experiences which occur during sleep and which her examples show to be recognised across Aboriginal Australia. Both men and women, 'clever' or not, are held to be able to fly about in their spirit body, visit distant country, meet deceased relatives or even Dreaming Ancestors and obtain infor-

² Tonkinson 1997: 7.

mation for songs and ceremonies. Hume touches on this again and again and seeks to substantiate it as a form of interaction with the Dreaming. She shows the pivotal role of the Dreaming in society and points out the many layers of information carried in mythology. Then she looks at the concept linguistically, at its origins from Spencer and Gillen's translation of *altjiranga ngambakala* and the interesting relationship between Indigenous words for the Dreaming and the nocturnal dream. Hume finds that in some languages, as in Arrernte, the words for these two 'events' are indeed related. In other languages there is no such linguistic connection, yet the Dreaming is still related to dreams. Based on Stanner, Hume says:

For [the Murinbata] the Dreaming (*demnginoi*) was, and still is. People of mystical ability who draw special powers from the existent Dreaming, 'do so not by thought (*bemkanin*) which is like a dream in the head, but by dream (*nin*) itself ... It lets them cross all the divisions of time space and category'. This comment demonstrates that although a dream is not the same as the Dreaming, it is nevertheless a way to access Dreaming reality, which is exactly what Stanner speculated (pp 31–2).

This is central to Hume's argument: through altered states of consciousness, of which 'dreaming' is one, people can, quite literally, contact other dimensions, that is the Dreaming. In fact, what people are actually describing, Hume suggests, is not 'dreams' but so called 'out-of-body experiences' or 'astral journeys'. There is a brief reference to a pioneering researcher of this experience, Robert Crookall, and some examples to show that the experience is recognised cross-culturally. This is an important element in Hume's reasoning and she is clearly conscious that this sort of subject matter may receive a hostile reception among fellow academics. Consequently, it is a shame that the argument is somewhat scattered across the book. It could have benefited from being treated more concisely and from a more careful analysis of the experience by drawing on the more recent body of literature regarding it.

Other important topics covered throughout the book are the religious, esoteric and consciousness altering roles of ceremony, music, song and art. Benign and malign magical practices as well as the making and powers of 'clever people' are also covered in some detail.

While the general approach and the variety of sources, including some remarkable and detailed case studies,³ should make this a very valuable work, it is somewhat undermined by a number of shortcomings. Firstly there are editorial issues. The presentation of the material is at times disjointed; arguments and examples are repeated across different chapters and even within chapters, especially in the latter part of the book. The spelling of Indigenous words is inconsistent and their translations not always convincing. The particular example that struck me is the translation, I assume adopted from Catherine Ellis, of the Pitjantjatjara phrase '*inma pulka inkanyi*' as 'singing in a strongly accented style'. While this might be an ethnomusicologist's interpretation of the song style, the words simply mean 'singing a big {ie important} song'. Secondly, and more substantially, there are a few passages which, to my mind, detract from the important overall points that are being made by fudging some of the complex issues that arise in consciousness research. One example is the following sentence:

³ For example, the story of Paddy Compass Namadbara (pp 115–19), which was originally recorded by Ian White.

The flow of psychic energy in the body may be interpreted in some cultures as a 'dreambody', soul, subtle body, or energy body, which may have the capacity to metamorphose or vanish at will and travel to other worlds (p 58).

This has really no bearing on the presentation of the Aboriginal material and confuses the very two issues which Hume otherwise treats quite distinctly: the actions of energies (power) felt in the physical body, and those of a 'dreambody' engaging in journeys while the physical body sleeps. Accuracy on these topics is particularly crucial, as many readers will be new to and critical of the sort of concepts espoused.

Towards the end of the book, Hume states:

Certainly, there is still much research to be done in this area, and it is hoped that other researchers may pursue some of the ideas that have been offered, even if only as a result of indignation at what is suggested (p 164).

I am by no means indignant at her suggestions, which are themselves an important contribution to current academic discourse. For that very reason their presentation is at times a little disappointing. In spite of that, *Ancestral power* provides a convenient starting point for others wishing to delve into this fascinating subject matter.

K McCaul, Adelaide

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People of the rivermouth: the Joborr texts of Frank Gurrmanamana, book and CD-ROM by Frank Gurrmanamana, Les Hiatt and Kim McKenzie with Betty Ngurrabangurraba, Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones, 198pp, National Museum of Australia and Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 2002, \$135.00

This is a remarkable publication about which it is difficult to do justice in a short review. *People of the rivermouth* is an almost encyclopedic work with a single Aboriginal community as its subject. It deals with the Anbarra people of the Blyth River in northern Arnhem Land and results from a long period of collaboration between the Anbarra and leading scholars, most notably the prominent Australian anthropologist Les Hiatt. The book and its accompanying CD-ROM are based on twenty fascinating texts. These were the outcome of communications between Hiatt and Frank Gurrmanamana in 1960 that explained some of the principal features of Anbarra society. The texts are published in Frank's language, Gidjingarli, and English. The CD-ROM provides them in oral form and includes much information about their wider cultural, environmental and historical contexts.

'Here is a land', Kim McKenzie writes in the Introduction, 'with stories that flow back and forth between the present and a past beyond any records, much as its river moves with each tide' (p xii). Each text is a dialogue between imagined people, most of

whom are related to one another. The word these people use for correct behaviour is *Joborr*. The texts, all translated by Hiatt, are divided into sections that describe key events in a life time: growing up, the formalities of marriage, love's variations and vicissitudes, men's business and the formalities of death. Within each set of events, various key issues are described and explained. Each section includes lists of the individuals involved, 'cast' diagrams, synopses and explanatory notes.

To take just one example, part of the section on love deals with sharing a wife. There are five cast members, a man, his wife, his sister, his sister's daughter and his sister's daughter's son. A married woman has a relationship with her husband's grandnephew that has her husband's approval. He returns from a journey and the following conversation occurs.

Ngaya [husband] to Mengga [wife]:
 Who did you sleep with?
 Mengga to Ngaya:
 Just as you told me – only your grand-nephew.
 Ngaya to Mengga:
 Fine, all is well (p 91).

The explanatory note observes that the text 'exemplifies the warm and mutually supportive relationship that normally exists between a male and his maternal great-uncle' (p 90). In general, McKenzie comments, the texts are not prescriptive and are concerned with how the narrator 'saw social structures operating in day-to-day Anbarra lives' (p xiii).

People of the rivermouth is an outstanding contribution to scholarship. The National Museum of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies must be congratulated on its publication in both book and multimedia format. It provides the most revealing examination of a single Aboriginal community that I have encountered. The texts and CD-ROM took me into a world that is not far from my own in Darwin but in some respects radically different. They provide illumination and understanding. While the focus is on one man and his community, the texts also deal with cultural situations that exist in all human societies. The book is most attractively produced, with a striking cover, sturdy binding and very attractive page designs. The CD-ROM is also well designed and produced. It would be a shame if the high recommended retail price prevents the publication from reaching the wide readership it deserves.

David Carment
 Northern Territory University
 Darwin

Rak Badjalarr: Wangga songs for North Peron Island by Bobby Lane, Belyuen Community, Northwest Australia, CD (19 tracks), and short book (39 pp) by Allan Marett, Linda Barwick and Lysbeth Ford, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 2001

Wangga music of the Daly region is distinctive and engaging. The opening phrases with the didjeridu seem to go right into your bones and make you want to jump up and

dance. This collection is extremely listenable, and the accompanying book is an excellent exposition of *wangga*.

The late Bobby Lane (1941–1993) was a great song man. From his home in Belyuen Community on the Cox Peninsula across the harbour from Darwin, he brought into being songs about the Cox homeland and about his ancestral sites on Peron Island to the south near the mouth of the Daly River. Allan Marett and Linda Barwick are ethnomusicologists, and Marett has worked with people at Belyuen for many years. Bobby Lane was one of his teachers, and is remembered at home as one of the great Wadjiginy songmen. Lysbeth Ford is a linguist who has worked extensively with several of the languages spoken within the Belyuen community. These scholars have long collaborated with each other and with Aboriginal people in this north-west region. Their collective work has developed many insights into the relationships between song and spirit, life and death, music, memory and cultural survival.

The process by which songs are brought into being involves dreams and interactions with song-giving spirits. According to the authors, Bobby Lane ‘likened the experience’ of learning songs ‘to watching Frank Sinatra or Bing Crosby sing on film’ (p 4). The songs concern real incidents and real people, and a number of the incidents remembered in the song took place at Belyuen itself (see Marett 2000 for a rich analysis). ‘Rak Badjalarr’ refers to Bobby Lane’s father’s country at North Peron Island, and the song was brought into being with a vision of ‘Audrey Lippo eating oysters near some rocks at Mandorah’ where the wharf now is (p 11).

Wangga is dance music. It is not secret, and these days is performed for ‘secular’ events such as school graduations, but the authors note that even in such contexts the ‘songs retain their spiritual power’ (p 2). The power of songs is also sustained through their work in holding and communicating shared memories, shared relationships between past and present, and between people, places, Dreamings, and ancestral power. These are complex issues, related in thoroughly accessible fashion in the book.

A larger portion of the book analyses the actual songs — their rhythmic patterns, the structure of various measured and unmeasured songs, and the interweaving of instruments and song texts. There are transcriptions and translations of all the song texts, and there are several different performances of one song. A few songs recorded in the past are included on the CD, thereby enhancing the historic depth of the musical experience.

One of the most interesting aspects of the textual and musical exposition is that many of the explanations for the songs are in Bobby Lane’s own words. Thus, for example, the fourth track concerns a site that is a deep hole in the ocean bed between South Peron Island and the mouth of the Daly River. Bobby Lane said: ‘*Bandawarra-ngalgin* this means far away, out in the middle of the water, the tide is coming in *kadjemene kabarambarra*; *ngalefiyitj* means you sit there clapping hands; *kakkungbende ngappuring Badjalarr* this means I’m going to a place called Peron Island’. The middle verse or song text is translated: ‘stand up and dance, women, for us both’ (pp 14–15).

Wangga is a song tradition that is vibrantly alive and travelling. Songs are traded, learned and sung all through the region from Cox south through the Daly Reserve and on south into the Victoria River valley, as well west into the Kimberley. The tradition is a contemporary form of Indigenous memory, connectivity across ontological domains,

identity, and social commentary. At home in Belyuen, younger people are continuing to perform Bobby Lane's songs, and to add to the repertoire of knowledge and experience. The final track is another version of the title track *Rak Badjalarr*. It is sung by Colin Warrambu Ferguson accompanied by Nicky Djarug on didjeridu and was recorded by Marett in 1997, four years after Lane's death. The authors report: 'On the occasion of this performance, Bobby Lane's ghost appeared, manifesting itself as blue-green lights and a cool breeze ... The performance concludes with a ritual call ... for the country and for Bobby's spirit' (p 36).

This CD is a tribute to Bobby Lane's life and creativity, bringing us both the history and future of his oeuvre along with his own spectacular performances. It will be valued locally and across the region; at the same time it generously takes this engaging work out into other homes and communities around the world. The songs and texts are reproduced with the permission of the Lane family, and royalties are returned to the family.

Deborah Rose, CRES, ANU

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The town grew up dancing: the life and art of Wenten Rubuntja by Wenten Rubuntja and Jenny Green with contributions from Tim Rowse, 196pp, Jukurrpa Books, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2002, hardback \$59.95

Once upon a time history was the stories of great men. During the past two centuries however, western historians moved towards the idea that history is made by people in the plural. An equivalent issue for biography has been where to position the subject. Will it be in the role of an individual acting upon the world? Or of someone less individual, who is acted upon by life and in turn acts from a sense of the potential of their time? There is no doubt about where the hero of this history stands. Wenten Rubuntja (born 1920s) is the diplomatic representative of *his people*. He identifies his people not narrowly but in many contexts. Thus his life story, rather than being merely the adventures of a western-style hero, is a layering of many stories of the people, events and places that have come into and spread out from his life. As the title of the book indicates, it is at one level the biography of Alice Springs (Mparntwe), a town that 'grew up dancing'. At another, it is a story of some decades of policy making on questions of land rights. It is, as well, a history of cultural brokerage. Wenten, his people, the local 'city', and the whitefellas in Canberra are seen to have influenced each other's lives. More than that: the extraordinary success of this biography-cum-autobiography is in showing the processes *within* as well as between people, by which history has been made.

Wenten is an all-rounder who fashions the tools for acting upon life, over the years broaching his circumstances on many fronts. Since his teens he's been an outback man presenting a Hollywood style of dress — he is especially known for his hats. Another guise is the mission Christian. He has been brickmaker, drover, timber-cutter, butcher, cook, administrator, responsible family member, alcoholic — now reformed, man of Abo-

iginal law, committee and board member, artist, storyteller, historian, word-spinner, and that's not all the roles he has played.

Especially interesting is the synthesis he makes of the many parts of his life. Jenny Green and Tim Rowse who thread the life story together have given first place to Wenten's voice. We read him three ways, speaking Arrernte, speaking a mixture of Arrernte and Aboriginal Australian, and using the language of Australia. One form of expression follows the other, making an interleaved text to marry with the intercultural content of the book. It has the effect of bringing the reader into position as one type of listener, then another; of revealing Wenten in action as an interlocutor; and of showing that a topic of conversation may be geared to one language rather than another. That voice, with its rich play of imagery and language, is what makes the book memorable.

Not only is Wenten Rubuntja a man of several languages and many more dialogues, his use of language reveals a mental pattern of connection in which ideas shift between different frameworks of reference. I believe that people of all cultures use metaphors, yet metaphor does not function equally in all societies. Europeans experience this compression more expressly in poetry. For Wenten, it may be the crux of how meaning is established. Here are some examples from the book (quoting the English translation):

- He was working in the kitchen at Amoonguna in the early years of the land rights movement and a verbal image for the sheer hard work that would be entailed arose from that kitchen — land rights was like a lot of people needing to be fed. 'Everybody used to come up and cry, "You got to cook lot of dinner now, boss, you got to cook a lot of dinner now". "Oh, look at the crowd there. Trucks coming in, Land rights now, land rights now."'
- Wenten describes his major effort of recent decades as 'work for country', and explains the significant work of Jesus in the light of a like commitment to two countries — this world and heaven — for which Jesus has dual forms of responsibility according to an Arrernte style of inheritance through mother and father.
- Wenten's is not the only voice that finds correspondences — direct and ironic — between historical characters, symbolic actions and dual belief systems. Ruby, his older sister (now deceased), tells how white people coming to Arrernte country scorned the Aboriginal people's values:

They used to shoot at their stone axes ... They tried to get the early days people into clothes ... showed them how to cook food as well — 'This is how to turn it over in the coals', the whitefellas said ... [As to which European first] came in this direction and opened up the way. We just used to say 'Captain Cook' — I don't know what his name really was.

In these examples, one way of thinking is overlaid on another, when to the speaker both could seem equally appropriate. The reader does not have to go far to find a basis for some of Wenten's connections. One recurrent idea is of people mixing together equally. He approves the notion on principle, as many of us do. But behind Wenten's endorsement is a history of being separated out: not being allowed to go into town after dark because of being Aboriginal; having to move house out of town because of being Aboriginal; not allowed to buy alcohol because of being a ward of the state; disallowed the vote because of ditto. Those institutional stratagems of separation may be in the past, yet habits of separation are still strong in Australia and are manifest in Wenten's speech. One such habit is enshrined in the terms Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. For

many Australians the division makes no genealogical sense: families that have been here for over a century very likely have an Aboriginal input even if they don't know it and the same is true of many people who are designated Aboriginal. Culturally, it is another matter. The difference is now understood in terms of a richer local culture that is Arrerntne (or other Aboriginal group), and the wider community (including the Arrernte) that is straining towards locality and at the same time is heavily involved in globality. Wenten's several voices have echoes in all of us.

For an art historian perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the book is the positioning of Wenten's paintings. Jenny Green discusses art insightfully under the heading 'Living Under Two Laws', yet in the main the reproductions and their extended captions are detached from the text, present in the same way as Wenten's voice, with the minimum of intervention by the book's other authors. Provided the reader keeps alternative spellings in mind, the index is a useful way of moving between an image and related parts of the text, maps and other images.

Wenten utilises the western style of Albert Namatjira (his father's cousin) and the dot style of Papunya — the history of which goes way back into the region's past. They are modes to which he has a right through family and country; likewise they are forms of communication equivalent to the region's multilingual habit of speech. However, looking at the reproductions before and as I read the book, I thought I had an insight into something Wenten's paintings express that is quite distinct from his verbal expression. Compared with Wenten's practice as a wordsmith, his paintings are more hieratic, the imagery is less inflected with irony, the message is ideal rather than negotiable, and quite often the impact is blazingly clear and beautiful. The form that fixes a subject for Wenten is markedly symmetrical. In acrylic there will typically be a central motif determining the orientation of other motifs arrayed in compass order. Correspondingly, in watercolour there will often be two trees, a pair of hills or steep rocks flanking a centre. The key is mirror repetition; and the visual effect of mirroring is magic realism or hypnotic affirmation. I found the ideal twinship of Wenten's preferred pictorial form reminiscent of the utopian duality that has been his political dream. Jenny Green sees it stemming from 'the kinship system' of 'two intersecting moieties (resulting in four distinct kin categories)'.

The style of magic realism is faintly reminiscent of Ginger Riley (who also acknowledges a debt to Namatjira) and owes something to Walt Disney, especially some images describing a central pool of water and a yellow road snaking to hills on the horizon. A few watercolours using the dot technique could indicate a more deliberate dialogism between Western Desert and western styles. In terms of subjects there appears to be a consistency of sorts in how each style is used. Namatjira's style is employed for scenes that have more or less western, and biographical reference, and is more often than not used for Namatjira's subjects (yet there is not a huge overlap between the artists' subjects). The so-called Papunya style is used when ceremonial significance is uppermost. I note also that the components of paintings — waterhole, hill, rock, waterhole, tracks, cross-cousins, sisters — may be the same regardless of whether the presentation is map-like or perspectival. If some acrylics describe a heraldry of Dreamings, the majority of the watercolours are a pilgrim's progress blocked by boulders, cliff, water, hill, sinuous tree. Whereas Namatjira's typical orientation is horizontal, with the viewer outside and, as it were, to one side, Wenten differs in orient-

ing the viewer inward via a path into the landscape. In those several ways the artist suggestively parallels the mythic forms of his two cultures.

Wenten says 'When I stopped racing I became an artist'. The cowboy and artist may have connected for him because they were jobs that had a high style:

I was a proper cowboy ... My horse had a star-patterned breastplate — just like old Gene Autry's and old Buck Jones's. I was a good jockey [at the Hermannsburg horse races] ... and I used to have a rifle in the front pouch like a cowboy. And boots just like that — with [high heels] and spurs. I made all the women at Hermannsburg fancy me.

Similarly, he came to painting through emulating 'the old man' Albert Namatjira, who was a household name around Australia in the 1940s and 1950s. 'I wanted to learn' so (during one of the periodic lay-off times when stockmen were not needed):

I come back and see the old man doing the job long Todd River, then I been get a painting board, then me been start then. And me been forget about stock work — I been sit down with the painting now, till I get to now. For reconciliation and all the organizations, Land Council, Congress, Legal Aid and all that one.

With emulating Namatjira came the responsibility to be a leader within his family and local community, and an ambassador nationally and internationally.

Wenten's part in the past few decades' story of reversible destiny has been as a negotiator with a delayed (poetic) style of address; who has known how to seize the moment, and to present all parties with a winning position. His people, as he reminds us, include all Australians of recent times, thus at the broadest level his diplomacy reflects the collective wisdom and purposeful direction of thought of Australians at large. As he says, the process has to be correct all the way through, 'You had to get the right country, get the right Dreamtime story — don't get somebody else's. Because you've got *kwertengerle*.' *Kwertengerle* is a serious responsibility for mother's and mother's brother's land and Dreamings, though they are not directly one's own. The same offsider responsibility characterises the role of the Senate in the business of government.

When Parliament reads and they got to take-em to go through the senate. That's all the *kwertengerle* ... Senate mob can't just make their own law before it goes through the *arlperrepwentye* mob, see — then they got to go back again. Whitefella law has always been like that as well. Politician is *arlperrepwentye*; *kwertengerle* is the senate.

The success of the book, amounting to a breakthrough in the art of biography, owes much to the wise and imaginative curatorship of Jenny Green and Tim Rowse. What has been in the past dryly explained by experts as an 'Aboriginal' style of amalgamating disparate beliefs and stories comes alive in Wenten Rubuntja's effective use of metaphor in speech and the utopian idealism of his paintings. As Wenten remarked on reading the text, 'This book is really good — people have got to read it'.

Mary Eagle
Centre for Cross-Cultural
Research, ANU

A cosmos in stone: interpreting religion and society through rock art by J. David Lewis-Williams, Altamira Press, Rowman and Littlefield, Walnut Creek, California, 2002 \$US29.95

David Lewis-Williams's work on San rock art and ethnography is well known among rock art researchers and is widely recognised as innovative and highly insightful. His extension of a shamanic interpretation to the Palaeolithic cave art of south-western Europe,¹ however, has been less enthusiastically received – indeed it has been the subject of sometimes quite acrimonious criticism. An explicit reply to such critique was published in 2001.² In the present volume Lewis-Williams invites the reader to retrace with him the intellectual journey of some thirty years of research, through philosophical developments in anthropology and archaeology, that has led him to the interpretation of concepts encoded in San and Palaeolithic art. The format chosen for this is to reprint a selection of eleven papers, each prefaced with an introduction and rounded off with a 'Retrospect', except for three published within the last decade which, in his own words 'are too recent to warrant retrospection' (p 190).

An introductory chapter presents a historical outline of developments in rock art research that led to the heady days of the 'New Archaeology' (processualism), the structural functionalism of British anthropology and, in France, the structuralism of Levi Strauss – an era of intellectual optimism in the power of the 'scientific manipulation of objective data', and within which the then young Lewis-Williams began his career.

Chapters 2–7 develop his South African research in which initial recording and analysis of the art left him dissatisfied with the statistical distributional approach then advocated. Inspired by the ethos of 'participatory anthropology' as propounded by Malinowski and others, he turned to the 'Bleek' archives of interviews with /Xam informants, the only verbatim records of /Xam myths and practices. Comparing this material with recent anthropological work with other San groups confirmed the broadly homogeneous nature of San cultures, particularly of the centrality of shamanism in articulating San culture. The particular insight that Lewis-Williams brought to bear in his work, however, is his emphasis on the importance of understanding the metaphors of language that are necessarily culturally informed. Reference to research on altered states of consciousness then enabled him to identify the metaphors that evoke visions, sensations and other features experienced in trance in what otherwise seemed incomprehensible statements by Bleek's informants. A return to the art led him to the identification of features that evoke shamanistic experience.

The conclusion to chapter 6 that 'Eventually, we may be able to use these insights to formulate general principles of shamanistic rock art' foreshadows his rationale for expanding this work into other regions, particularly as he affirms the universality of shamanism (defined as institutionalised altered states of consciousness) among all hunter-gatherer societies (pp 175, 197). If this were so, the practice would likely have great antiquity and, in some form, would likely have been practised by the hunter-gatherers of Palaeolithic south-western Europe.

1. Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998.

2. Clottes and Lewis-Williams 2001.

The universality of shamanism among hunter-gatherer societies, however, is not universally accepted! Shamanism has not been unambiguously recorded in Australian Aboriginal culture and is not a feature of Aboriginal religion and ritual. Lewis-Williams's references to Australia are somewhat peripheral, relying on Eliade (1972) for ethnography and an idiosyncratic paper by Sales (1992) on the Burrup 'climbing men' panel for rock art.

In view of the prevalence of shamanism among Arctic hunter-gatherer societies an antecedent in the European Palaeolithic does remain a thesis worthy of consideration. At this period in the late 1980s–1990s the influence of postmodernism in archaeological thinking led to a pessimism about the possibility of ever truly accessing past realities. Lewis-Williams reacted strongly against the negativity and high degree of relativism espoused particularly by writers such as Christopher Tilley or even the limitations of textual approaches to material culture of Ian Hodder and others. He follows Alison Wylie who insisted that the negativity of relativism can be overcome by recourse to the intertwining of distinct and independent sources of evidence.

Thus a crucial theoretical basis for asserting confidence in his San research lies in the convergence of three independent strands of evidence: the art, the ethnography, neurological data on altered states of consciousness. For the Palaeolithic the art is the only strand of evidence available. Ethnography is of course not available, and contrary to Lewis-Williams, one must argue that despite the universality of neurological phenomena, there is no *a priori* reason to presume that Palaeolithic peoples harnessed such experiences into cultural practices. Following his own theoretical precepts, evidence for such practices needs to be demonstrated from within the features of the art, *and* shown to be more probable than alternative explanations for these. Lewis-Williams achieves the first criterion with a close examination of both general and specific features of the art, and presents a compelling argument for the identification of visionary experiences depicted in settings that may both elicit and enhance such experiences. Possible alternative explanations are not entertained — though one must admit a coherent alternative system is not easy to advance.

In the closing chapters Lewis-Williams moves beyond the identification of rock art imagery to search for the specifics of cultural praxis within which the painting and viewing of these images served to mediate or subvert sociality. Many of the concepts developed in this section will be familiar from a quite different cultural context in the anthropology of Aboriginal art.

This book's relevance to an Australian readership lies, apart from its obvious intellectual interest, in its discussion of theory and method. Methodologically his research has led Lewis-Williams to argue strongly for the importance of the particular in rock art, and to emphasise the centrality of agency in cultural praxis — including the making and consumption of rock art — in interpretation of its social role. He admits that patterns obtained from numerical distributional studies have value in defining the broad parameters within which such more focused analysis can be located, but decries what he considers the explanatory futility of limiting research to statements about semiotic systems that mediated group interactions.

He proposed shamanism as a clue to the interpretation of Palaeolithic art. Few in Australia, I believe, would adduce shamanism to explore the meanings of Aboriginal

rock art, and in recent times there has been a healthy reluctance to extend even current beliefs and practices far back in time. For the remote past, we are still left with only one strand of evidence.

Andrée Rosenfeld
Rathdowney, Queensland

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Broken Song: TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal possession by Barry Hill, 818pp, Random House Australia, 2002, \$59.95 [Vintage paperback \$39.95]

In June 1908, Theodor Georg Heinrich Strehlow was born at Hermannsburg Mission at the interface of three cultures: the German culture of his Lutheran missionary parents Carl and Frieda, the Arrernte culture of the people whom these parents had come to convert, and the British culture of the wider Australian society in which he lived. Throughout his life and career as anthropologist and linguist among the Arrernte, Strehlow's inter-cultural placement was the cornerstone for his accomplishments, but at the same time the troubled interaction of the three cultures would cause him much mental and emotional turmoil.

Hill's narrative begins with the Lutheran Mission at Killalpaninna, where Carl Strehlow was first stationed before moving on to Hermannsburg where Theodor was born, the youngest of six children. His siblings were taken back to Germany for their schooling when he was only three years old and he essentially grew up as an only child. Following Carl's dramatic death, mythically captured in Strehlow's *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, fourteen-year-old TGH Strehlow was sent to a Lutheran boarding school in Adelaide. As we follow him from school to university, Hill impresses upon us Strehlow's cultural malaise as he is seeking a place in the English society of Adelaide, largely it seems by way of sports and the English girls he met at society balls. Following completion of his degree in English Literature and Linguistics, Strehlow secured a grant to return to Central Australia for the study of Arrernte oral literature. His life's work is set in motion, as are the principal themes that, at times with a certain monotony, accompany the reader throughout Hill's book. On the one hand there is Strehlow's sense of not fitting in, of being a 'stranger in the land that bore me' as he put it on his 1933 return to the Centre, a feeling that appears to be the flipside of his tangible superiority com-

plex. On the other hand there is Hill, ever critical of every word Strehlow wrote in diaries or elsewhere, and unforgiving in his analysis of the man himself.

Part III of the book, 'Patrolling', is structured around Strehlow's experience as Patrol Officer in Central Australia in the late 1930s. It casts a wide net introducing many of the principal players in Aboriginal affairs, and portraying attitudes, political pressures and living conditions for both black and white in the Centre during that period. In the midst of all this was Strehlow, stationed at Jay Creek with his young wife Bertha. He was charged with keeping an eye on 4 600 Aboriginal people, the majority of whom were classified as 'nomads', in an area the size of England. He would appear to have acquitted himself well, even in the unforgiving task of overseeing the quality of the relationships between white station managers and their Aboriginal employees. He was especially unpopular among the pastoral establishment for policing the interactions of white workers and Aboriginal women. In 1940 he found himself accused in parliament of being a Nazi, a fifth columnist preparing the Centre's 'blackfellows' to rally to Hitler's aid. This was too ludicrous an accusation to cause his dismissal, but it raised tensions, tensions that were not helped by Strehlow's own style, which persistently challenged the insidious grain of racism in Northern Territory Aboriginal affairs and within his own department. The ongoing friction with his superiors finally erupted and he was forced to quit his job and join the army. Officially it was to be only a temporary absence from his post, but at the end of the war he returned to Adelaide University, this time as a member of staff. In that position he continued his research among the Arrernte and neighbouring people for the rest of his life.

The book's focus then turns to 'translation' and in particular Strehlow's ability to translate Arrernte to English. Following a more general chapter on translation, Hill looks at Strehlow's official work for *Songs of Central Australia* (Arrernte to English), his nocturnal work on refining his father's Bible translation (English to Arrernte), and finally his well documented role as translator in the Stuart case. He tries to split Strehlow, and to some extent the world around him, into two personas. Caliban, drawn from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, is the persona of the primal, magico-religious domain of the indigene. This is Strehlow the *ingkata*, totemite and keeper of secrets. The other is Luther, based on the historical founder of Strehlow's inherited faith. This is the serious Germanic Strehlow who spends his nights on bible translation and judges both Arandic culture and that of the Anglophone Australians from the German-Christian vantage point.

The accuracy of this metaphorical divide is questionable, and it seems to lead to a certain pigeonholing of perhaps more complex issues. More importantly though, the value of this section is compromised by the fact that Hill does not speak Arrernte. That is not to say, as Strehlow may have done, that Hill should be fluent in Arrernte to comment on the worth of his work, but in light of some of the analysis undertaken it is frustrating that the author made no attempt to compensate for a lack of language by consulting people who do speak it, or drawing on an Arrernte-English dictionary such as that of John Henderson and Veronica Dobson. Hill forcefully makes the point that Strehlow was no poet, or at best only a second rate poet. He seems to be suggesting that Strehlow would have done better not to impose his own poetic shortcomings onto the Arrernte verses he was trying to place into the pantheon of world poetry. But in the end this remains Hill's own considered opinion about what he labels Strehlow's genetically-German English. Perhaps Hill is right, but for all the reader knows, Arrernte speakers

may think Strehlow's translations are 'spot on', in which case Hill's theoretical arguments on the art of translation would become inconsequential.

The remainder of the book documents Strehlow's increasing entanglement with the objects of his collection (*tjurunga*) and the subject of his studies (the Arrernte people and their language). For much of his life Strehlow seemed to view himself as the only white person who could properly understand Arrernte society and value their sacred objects, ceremonies and songs, knowledge of which he acquired throughout his life. In his final years, Strehlow became possessed by his possessions, thinking of himself as 'the last Aranda man' misplaced in a world where white power brokers and Europeanised Arrernte have all ceased to value the sacred traditions which only he still knew.

From Strehlow's perspective, the only other person who understood is his second wife, for whom he unceremoniously left Bertha and their three children, all of whom he subsequently ignored. With the exception of this new 'love', his life seems to have become a stream of dysfunctional relationships: he engaged in continuous pitched battles with the newly established Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, maintained a lifelong grudge against those academics in England who did not recognise his genius, complained generally and quite unreasonably about lack of funding and recognition from the world around, and even fell out with a number of Lutheran colleagues and friends, although it is among his faith that he finds recognition and support until the end. The anthropologist Ronald Berndt figures as a loyal friend until the 'atom bomb' (Strehlow's words) of the so-called *Stern* case, where images secret and sacred to the Arrernte were sold by Strehlow and published in popular magazines first in Germany and subsequently, against Strehlow's explicit instructions, in Australia. Then even Berndt took a step back.

This is a very critical portrait of Strehlow, and although his ethnographic and linguistic contributions are occasionally given their due, Hill's primary focus seems to be on Strehlow's failures in life. We read how he failed as husband and father, as writer, as translator, as 'friend of the Arrernte', and so on until his very life itself becomes the *Broken Song* of Hill's title. Even before Strehlow's dramatic death, one feels confronted with a man whose life has gone terribly amiss and who, perhaps as a result, has spent his last few years in what looks like a mental and emotional hell.

This is not a light story. Hill's delivery is fairly heavy and editorial oversights of grammar, typography and dates (including Strehlow's birthday) may trip the reader up. The real burden overshadowing the book of course lies in Strehlow's increasingly troubled mind. It is from that mind as revealed in Strehlow's extensive diaries that this book largely derives. Hill enjoyed 'exclusive access' to these diaries and perhaps that is the reason why he does not draw more on anecdotal information from colleagues, family and friends. That may have been a way to lighten the picture and also to complete it, by widening the lens and capturing aspects of Strehlow perhaps not revealed in his own self-images.

That is not to say that Hill's approach is narrow. In fact he tackles his subject from many angles and there are times when Strehlow can disappear from view entirely as Hill takes the reader through extensive background discussions. An historical perspective runs through the book, looking at Strehlow's place in the wider realm of Australian Aboriginal affairs and, according to the primary influences at various stages of

Strehlow's life, examining the roles played by missions, patrol officers, government departments, academic researchers and so on. There is the literary perspective which questions the merit of Strehlow's poetry and prose and the linguistic perspective which queries the strength of his translations. The psychological perspective, mostly Freudian but never fully developed, analyses the workings of Strehlow's mind, his self-obsession, immaturities, self-pity, fear and loathing. The anthropological perspective seeks to show how Strehlow's puritan descriptions of Arrernte society fail to take account of its evolutionary capacity and its ability to sustain itself in spite of dramatic changes to the 'pristine' social structures which he documented. In view of such a multiplicity of arguments, lines of inquiry and literary genres, it is perhaps not surprising that not all the avenues followed are equally compelling, nor equally suited for every reader.

Yet, in spite of the apparent breadth, the image of Strehlow can be depressingly two-dimensional. It is here that the views of others may have helped. What, for example, do Arrernte people think? The book makes many judgements, about the ways in which Strehlow has failed the Arrernte, to whom, as far as he was concerned, he had dedicated his life. But what actually are the Arandic discourses, past and present, about their self-declared *ingkata*? One comes away feeling that somehow Strehlow's claim, that he was chosen as the one to be given information and objects, was of his own creation, a vital component of his personal mythology, and that the actual intent of his informants was different. We learn that at the height of the controversy that overshadowed the end of Strehlow's life, some Arrernte men accused him of theft and cultural appropriation. But what about those old men who impressed upon him the idea that they were not teaching their young men their secrets any more? Maybe these were political statements, not to be taken as literally as Strehlow seems to have done, but surely they were not just feeding his egotistic fantasies. What about those Arrernte people who now look gratefully upon Strehlow's collection as a cultural treasure trove that might have been lost without his obsession? Such multiple discourses, inherent in the world of Aboriginal affairs, may have had some role in Strehlow's psychological undoing, but that dimension is not really explored here. Nor are more mundane topics such as Strehlow's thirty odd years at Adelaide University (which remain fairly nebulous in the book), or his personal relationships as friend or colleague.

Broken song was launched at the 2002 Strehlow Conference in Alice Springs. The conference highlighted the complexities of TGH Strehlow and his chosen field. Hill's principal focus is Strehlow's production of *Songs of Central Australia*. There will be others more qualified to assess his critique of that particular issue, but generally it seems to me that there is still ample scope for further commentaries on the complex life and workings of TGH Strehlow.

K McCaul, Adelaide

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Nhanda villages of the Victoria District, Western Australia by Rupert Gerritsen, 31pp, Intellectual Property Publications, Canberra, [GPO Box A145, Canberra, ACT 2602], 2002

This short booklet is the latest by Rupert Gerritsen in a series of publications examining historical Aboriginal culture in the coastal region north and south of Geraldton, WA, an area once known as the Victoria District. 'Nhanda' refers to both the Aboriginal people along the coastline and their language.¹ The analysis and discussion of collections of huts in the region is based primarily on the 1839 accounts of George Grey, and constructed around his application of the term 'village' to describe one of the region's large multi-hut sites.² Gerritsen's analysis of the texts leads to the development of a settlement typology as support for his central argument: that Aboriginal groups were practicing agriculture and living sedentary lives on a multi-season basis.

The 'Background' section of the booklet introduces the region and its history, and briefly summarises the historical events that led to Grey's encounter with the 'villages'. Why the author chose to focus on the 'village' instead of including 'town' is not clear, as both terms appear in one of Grey's texts. Gerritsen reviews a number of later historical observations of single- and multi-hut sites. Several of the latter could be interpreted as 'villages' although they were not described by that term historically.

Gerritsen reviews evidence of extensive yam grounds, paths and wells in the proximity of the hut sites and generally throughout the region. In this booklet, which draws upon his previous publications, he makes a case for agricultural practice among Victoria District Aboriginal groups: '... the paths, the wells, the huts and the villages – all bespeak an agricultural society exhibiting a high degree of sedentism' (p4) and in conclusion states that 'the *Nhanda* people of the Victoria District were engaged in agriculture' (p 21). Such a controversial interpretation is in need of significantly more analysis and modelling than is presented. Gerritsen does not adequately review the contribution of pioneering research by Hallam³ that first considered the association between yams, alluvial sites and 'villages', and proposed that south-west Aboriginal groups were living semi-sedentary lives in pre-European times. While Hallam considered these to be indigenous developments, Gerritsen suggested that they were the result of a yam introduced by Dutch sailors in 1629.

The booklet's 'Site identification' section relates the author's field investigations that aimed to identify 'village' and village-like sites recorded by Grey. The colour photographs of places visited are very useful for readers not familiar with the area. The reasons that these sites might match Grey's accounts are discussed. The first is on the narrow floodplain of the lower Hutt River, a site that Gerritsen subsequently registered with the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Perth. He noted from an inspection of surface features that the site is on 'a flat elevated terrace that does not appear to be a natural formation, being raised from 2-3m above the river's flood level' (p 6). Gerritsen's justification for the assertion of non-naturalness is not stated, but it seems more

1. Blevins 2001.

2. Clifton 1852 also used the term when he briefly noted a 'village of plastered huts' at a site on top of a hill on the Bowes River.

3. See Hallam 1986, 1989.

probable that this structure is an old alluvial terrace.⁴ There follow several calculations that attempt to quantify aspects of settlement at this site. This includes measuring the dimensions of this terrace (p 7) and calculating the rate of cultural deposition, based on the assumption that it resulted from land use change stimulated by Dutch sailors post-1629 (p 18). These quantifications, and their comparison to results from archaeological sites in the Middle-East and meso-America, should be set aside pending sub-surface investigation.

Gerritsen's description of his field searches for Grey's village-like sites on the lower Hutt, Bowes and Greenough rivers⁵ illustrates some of the difficulties and opportunities that arise from ground-truthing historical accounts. Gerritsen 'tentatively' concludes that the Victoria District huts, together with accounts of paths and wells, are indicative of multi-season sedentism (p 18). The emphasis on multi-seasonality is presented as an element of his Aboriginal agriculture hypothesis. While clay-covered huts and wells may represent intensive labour investment for immediate and long-term use, it is possible that yam grounds and well-trodden paths represent less intensive effort over longer periods. The analysis is conducted within a framework of European seasons, whereas evidence from the south-west suggests that six seasons were more typical in the lives of Aboriginal people.⁶

A second element of the hypothesis involves a spatially-configured schema for settlement patterns. Such a schema is not supported by the level of available detail about the locations of many hut sites, and the concentration of known sites in the near-coastal areas of regions belonging to local Aboriginal groups. In the schema, for example, both 'homesteads' and 'lodges' are defined as being 'at least 1km from any other structure' (p 20). The limited landscape view-shed of Grey and other European travellers along their routes makes it uncertain whether they could *see* more than 1km in all directions at hut sites. Having limited the analysis throughout to the accounts of Grey and one or two others, Gerritsen subsequently reveals other relevant historical evidence (p 20-21). This material could usefully have been included much earlier.

On a positive note, Gerritsen has made a significant discovery in finding a second account of Grey's walk from the Murchison River to Perth in 1839. This text is extremely valuable, as it states itself to be a verbatim account from Grey's now lost daily field notes. Analysis of the differences between this account⁷ and the published version⁸ would have been valuable as a foundation for this current research. In particular, why did Grey not mention the Hutt River 'village' sites in both accounts? Similarly, Gerritsen identifies an omission of hut observations from one version of Stokes' 1841 travels near Geraldton (p 23) without exploring its significance. The booklet would have benefited from a table of all historical quotations referenced, and a

4. 'Terraces form as a result of slow downward movement of the river bed ... leaving old flood-plains stranded above typical flood plains' Pen 1999: 75.

5. For the Greenough river [called the Irwin by Grey], Gerritsen's interpretation of Grey's route is at odds with prior studies that locate the route entirely on the Back Flats.

6. See Gentilli 1995; Meagher 1974.

7. Grey 1841a.

8. Grey 1841b.

topographic map showing the specific and approximate locations of the described sites and events.

Analyses of the mid-west coastal region's historical materials have a vital role to play at smaller and larger scales in understanding important questions posed by traditional owners, archaeologists, anthropologists, palaeoecologists and environmental historians. While at times this booklet presents cautious analysis of the historical record, the conclusions drawn are frequently beyond the limitations of the available data and at odds with what is understood about Aboriginal resource use in pre-European times. Nonetheless it will serve to stimulate interest in the history of the region and its Aboriginal people.

Michael O'Connor,
Perth

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Aboriginal Sydney: a guide to important places of the past and present by Melinda Hinkson, with photography by Alana Harris, 174pp, Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra 2001, \$33.00

The Sydney region has a rich Aboriginal history and fortunately many places survive where this heritage can be seen. This guide book is a must for any visitor to or resident of Sydney who wishes to visit places that provide information about the life and culture of Aboriginal inhabitants of the Sydney region from the pre-colonial past to the present.

The book is well structured so that the fifty places to visit are grouped into several areas: The Central Business district; Around the harbour (Balls Head and Berry Island reserves and Sydney Harbour National Park); North of Sydney (Ku-ring-gai Chase and Garigal National Parks); Inner South (Redfern, Camperdown Cemetery, Bondi Golf Course); South of Sydney (Botany Bay National Park and La Perouse); West of Sydney (Parramatta, Blacktown and Cranebrook), and South-west of Sydney (Liverpool area and Bents Basin State Recreation Area). These sections are preceded by a short introduction 'Seeing the past in the present' which provides a brief historical overview and cultural context to the sites. The final section of the book provides a list of useful organisations from which additional information can be obtained, as well as references to the sources used in the book and further reading.

The places to visit include pre-colonial archaeological sites such as rock engravings at West Head, Grotto Point and Bondi, and shell middens at Balmoral Beach and Kurnell; early colonial sites such as the Blacktown Native Institution site; museums and art galleries with exhibitions about Aboriginal life and culture, eg the Australian Museum and Museum of Sydney in the CBD, and Muru Mittigar Culture Centre at Cranebrook; the *Cadi Jam Ora First Encounters* garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens where plants of the Sydney region which provided food and useful products are growing; as well as contemporary institutions such as NAISDA Dance College and Bangarra Dance Theatre, and buildings such as Yarra Bay, La Perouse, and The Empress Hotel, Redfern. As such it presents places which were of importance to Aboriginal people in the distant past and are important to them today.

Presentation is excellent with easy to read text and plentiful colour photographs. For each of the places to visit there is initially a brief description of what is present, the location according to UBD and Gregory's map books, how to get there, the facilities available and what time is needed for the visit. Thereafter follows a longer description giving the history and importance of the site and what is to be seen. Integrated with descriptions of the sites is information about key events and people connected with them.

There are, however, a couple of places where I query descriptions. At Grotto Point (p 46) the engraved figures are said to have been 'regrooved' to improve their visibility. Use of the term 're-grooved', for the process that was undertaken, is misleading as it implies that the grooves forming the outline of the figures have been deepened by *cutting* into the sandstone. What happened is that the sandstone surface within the grooves was cleaned of lichen and dirt by a technique that uses water and low or non-abrasive nylon brushes. This process lightens and thus highlights the grooves against the surrounding darker sandstone surface. At Captain Cook's Landing Place, Kurnell (p 101), the radiocarbon dated midden is behind the beach between The Watering Place

and The Landing Place (Megaw 1969: Plate 4), rather than beneath Alpha Farm House. The oldest radiocarbon date, 1330 ± 100 (ANU-721), and a stratigraphically higher date of 360 ± 110 (ANU-722), in conjunction with historical observations show the area was used as a campsite over the past 1300 years (Megaw 1974 p 36). At Parramatta Park (p 137), it is unlikely that middens of freshwater mussel shells occur in this area although several stone artefact scatters have been found in proximity to Parramatta River and Domain Creek.

These particular questions, however, do not detract from the overall worth of the book and I reiterate that it is a recommended purchase for visitors to and residents of Sydney.

Val Attenbrow
Australian Museum, Sydney

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George Barrington's voyage to Botany Bay: retelling a convict's travel narrative of the 1790s edited by Suzanne Rickard, 181pp, Leicester University Press, Leicester and New York, 2002, paperback £18.99

This is a curious publication. Beginning with a fine introduction by Suzanne Rickard and ending with many pages of detailed annotation, it offers in between the text of a book first published in 1793–1794. The original work pretended to be an autobiographical account of the experiences of the famous London pickpocket George Barrington, who was transported by the Second Fleet. The original text was partly fiction and partly a mishmash of passages taken from other works. None of it, in fact, was written by Barrington.

The purpose of the original fraud was to cash in on Barrington's celebrity and the current demand for books about the Antipodes. This new publication is equally misleading, at least in its title. It is not 'George Barrington's voyage'. It is not 'a convict's travel narrative'. It is the work of a literary hack who may never have left London. Rickard's introduction makes this clear enough, and yet buyers of the book might well complain of something like false advertising. A back-cover remark on 'the dubious publishing ethics' of the 1790s is delicious in the circumstances.

This little piece of modern fast practice tends to confuse the scholarship of Rickard's introduction. Barrington was a very interesting man, who played many parts in life and was ascribed many more. He was a wonderful symptom of the late eighteenth-century fascination with personal identity and the remaking of self. But in real life he had nothing to do with the text which Rickard is here introducing. The man and the text are linked

only by the motivation of the creators of the original book, so that really this motivation – the marketing of Barrington's name – ought to be the main point of inquiry.

The introduction might have better used to deflect the lie on the front cover. Instead Rickard confuses the issue a little by various references to 'Barrington's publishers', 'Barrington's account' and so on. One section is headed 'The convict's eye'. On the other hand she includes a vivid story of Barrington's criminal career and of the vicissitudes of his public image as well as an exhaustive account of the books about New South Wales to which his name was added (listed in the bibliography).

Especially interesting is her suggestion that because of Barrington's celebrity these books were for many years fundamental to the popular image of Australia in Europe. This seems, in fact, to be the main significance of the present text. There is still work to be done, then, in relating this text to early nineteenth-century perceptions, and especially its references to Indigenous people. In describing Aboriginal customs and depicting Aboriginal personality it conveyed to a popular readership the Enlightenment attitudes of Arthur Phillip, Watkin Tench and others. At the same time there are plenty of anecdotes of the savage and exotic. The balance may be awkward, but if this text above all others shaped early English ideas about race in Australia it is certainly worth coming to grips with.

Alan Atkinson
University of New England
Armidale

Forty years on: Ken Hale and Australian languages edited by Jane Simpson, David Nash, Mary Laughren, Peter Austin and Barry Alpher, 528pp, Pacific Linguistics, Canberra, 2001, \$55.00

Ken Hale is undoubtedly one of the major figures in Australian linguistics. He first arrived from the US in 1959 and carried out major studies of the Arrernte and Warlpiri languages of Central Australia and Lardil from the Gulf of Carpentaria. His involvement in Australian linguistics has continued unabated with a series of published works on a variety of languages and issues right until the present.

In the late 1950s, Australian linguistics was still a long way from coming of age. Capell's 1956 *A new approach to Australian linguistics* – now long superseded – was the only substantial reference source that was available, and the first university department of linguistics was not to be established until the mid-1960s. However, Ken Hale's period of involvement has seen Australian linguistics develop a strong tradition of descriptive, theoretical and historical rigour. Ken Hale was also influential in seeing linguistics made relevant to the changing needs of speakers of Australian languages themselves, especially with his involvement in the establishment of the School of Australian Linguistics (pp 161–78).

Ken Hale's extremely successful academic career is well covered in the excellent bibliographical summary of his contributions in this volume (pp 1–18); the entertaining and informative biographical information provided (pp xii–xiv and 19–43); and a variety of reminiscences (pp 113–22, 231–8 and 427–30).

What is particularly significant about Ken Hale's activities in Australian linguistics is not only their depth but also their breadth. In addition to making some very significant contributions to the literature of general linguistic theory, Ken Hale's publications cover a wide range of areas relating to Australian languages. He has published extensively on Australian phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon, historical linguistics and sociolinguistics (including the very serious question of language endangerment, which particularly affects all Australian languages). It would be entirely fair to say that no other scholar has offered such a broad range of publications on Australian languages since Ken Hale's arrival on the Australian scene more than forty years ago. For an example of a truly modern Australianist linguist, one could not do better than point to Ken Hale.

Ken Hale probably doesn't remember this himself, but at a linguistics conference in 1974, the first I attended, a number of us junior scholars were struck by some seemingly simplistic generalisations that were offered at one stage by one presenter. I leaned over and commented quietly about this to Ken Hale, who offered words of academic encouragement. Those of us who considered ourselves at the time to be academic nobodies took strength from this and resolved to express ideas which we would probably not otherwise have felt sufficiently bold to put in print. In addition to being something of an academic giant himself, Ken Hale had an admirable ability to foster growth in those who consider themselves to be academically less experienced. Academic stature and personal humility seldom come together so easily within a single individual, and Australian linguistics is so much the richer for Ken Hale's contributions.

Obviously, however, it is not primarily my responsibility as a reviewer to offer words of praise for Ken Hale, as this is a task which the editors and contributors in this *Festschrift* have already admirably achieved with their volume. The range of authors and topics represented in this *Festschrift* is testament to the huge influence that Ken Hale has had on Australian linguistics over the years, through his academic stature and his personal encouragement. It is to the editors' credit that almost every established figure in the field of Australian Aboriginal linguistics is represented, as well as a number of more recent arrivals on the scene.

The editors and contributors of the *Festschrift* have clearly set out to reflect the broad range of interests of Ken Hale. Of course, this makes it difficult to review. Singling out any author for particular praise would be unfair given the very high level of contributions in this volume overall. The volume contains discussions relating to Arrernte, Warlpiri and Lardil, as we might expect, written by those who followed in Ken Hale's footsteps, such as Gavan Breen (pp 45–70), Harold Koch (pp 71–88), Mary Laughren (pp 151–60, 199–226) and Tim Shopen (pp 187–98). There are also contributions relating to other languages that Ken Hale worked on less intensively, and some relating to languages that he had not worked on, but where the work was inspired by his earlier contributions. Significantly, the editors have included a contribution by Ephraim Bani (pp 477–80), who is one of the earliest speakers of an Indigenous Australian language to be trained at the School of Australian Linguistics.

On the technical side, this is an attractive volume, peppered with fascinating photographs from the early years of Ken Hale's work in Australia. It is clearly and consistently laid out. The editors faced a huge task in putting together a collection of

three dozen separate contributions into a single volume. Perhaps inevitably, there are some problems, and the volume comes supplied with a modest collection of addenda and errata. However, few (if any) of these would have been likely to cause serious problems had they not been pointed out.

The editors of this volume can be proud of having produced a volume that is more than just an acknowledgment of the debt that they — and all of us — owe to Ken Hale. The contributions relate to all of the areas in which Ken Hale himself has published over the years, while at the same time providing us with some fascinating social history relating to the development of Australian linguistics over the last forty years.

Terry Crowley
University of Waikato
Hamilton, New Zealand

The Black Lords of summer by Ashley Mallett, 221pp, University of Queensland Press, 2002, \$30.00

At the outset the idea of Ashley Mallett as a past Australian Test cricketer writing on the 1868 Aboriginal Cricket tour of England holds obvious appeal. There is the potential for a fresh voice and one certainly steeped in the world of cricket. Much has already been written on the tour though and Mallett acknowledges particularly John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt's efforts in this regard. While fitting, this tribute raises the question of what Mallett hopes to achieve by writing on an event so well covered in the past. He states himself that he 'fell into' writing the book through his contemporary involvements with Indigenous cricketers and that it seeks to give greater depth to the culture clash between the 1868 tourists and their manager Charles Lawrence. He also aims to detail where they came from and the injustices they had suffered. It must be said that he has been only partly successful.

Mallett is strongest when writing on the actual cricket played, both on the tour and in Australia, though the account of all forty-seven tour matches does begin to pall. He raises some important points at times in this regard, noting that Lawrence sought to improve the skills of the Aboriginal players but also to make money out of them. His presentation of an English cricket culture where gambling was rife and influenced the development of the game is both insightful and refreshing. Often though such themes are raised and not fully developed, as in the case where Mallett contrasts the interest in the Aboriginal players in England with the way they were treated at home, but does not go on to explore this contrast. In order to do this successfully, despite his stated intentions, he would have had to develop a greater knowledge than he displays in his work of how life was for these cricketers at home. His reference to Johnny Mullagh saying he would never marry a black woman, and a white one would not have him, provides an avenue for exploring culture clashes in the tourists' lives. As Mullagh's father King Watertight indicated — when asked if he had killed any 'whitefellas', replying he had only killed three 'poor buggers' but 'no gentlemen' — appreciation of social distinction was clearly developed in the family before their introduction to cricket. A lack of in-

depth research and a dependence on secondary sources limits the approach here and more generally throughout the book.

Confusion is displayed in relation to language and tribal groups. Madi Madi and Wutjupaluk are presented as tribes in the region of origin for the cricketers, erroneously in the first case and contestably in the second, while Djabwurrung and Jardwajali are listed accurately as languages. The relevance of Djabwurrung is limited though: while most of the tourists were clearly Jardwadjali speakers and others possibly Wergaia or Buandik speakers, no link exists between any of them and Djabwurrung country. There is also an insertion of a conversation William Stanner had with an Aboriginal man from 'the western districts' about his Dreaming Place. This 'quote' from Stanner comes via two other sources and did not originally refer to the area at all. A recycled reference to Johnny Redcap's 'wife' Caroline (really his sister) compounds the mistakes of others. New South Wales origins for two of the cricketers, Charlie Dumas and Twopenny, are more definitely presented by Mallett than in earlier works but again without supporting evidence.

Given Mallett's lack of background in Aboriginal studies and reliance on secondary sources and thus dependence on the work of others, a case could still be made for the work as an important means of bringing specialist research to a wider audience. Even at this level, the work is marred by what seems to me to be an awkward prose style, inserting ethnographic and other contextual material into the narrative of the tour apparently in a random manner. The final chapters, dealing with post-tour Aboriginal cricket, by contrast, are free flowing and vigorous in style, perhaps indicating the potential that lay with the project. Certainly a greater editorial input from University of Queensland Press may have enabled more of that potential to be realised.

Edward Ryan
History, La Trobe University
Melbourne

Goodbye Bussamarai: the Mandandanji Land War, Southern Queensland 1842-1852 by Patrick Collins, 305pp, University of Queensland Press, 2002, \$34.00

Travelling west from Dalby to Charleville along the Warrego Highway, it is tempting to conclude that not much happens in this part of Australia. There are a few towns on the route, an occasional farmhouse or homestead, and cattle or sheep grazing in paddocks. For the most part, the history of this landscape has been one of little change and tranquillity. But the present tranquillity disguises a brutal and bloody past.

This is the land of the Mandandanji, and Patrick Collins provides a detailed account of the first decade of interaction and conflict between the Mandandanji and European explorers and pastoralists. In the tradition of Roger Milliss's *Waterloo Creek*, Collins draws extensively on a range of primary and secondary sources to chart the complex relations on the frontier.

The first decade on the Maranoa was a war but, like all wars, the script was not simple. It was characterised by complexity, confusion and contradictions. Collins's account reveals that the Mandandanji waged a concerted resistance to the invasion by

European pastoralists. Collins argues that this resistance was led substantially by Bussamarai, who stands in the tradition of other resistance leaders such as Pemulwuy. Collins reveals that Bussamarai's relations with the invaders were complex. He was not always organising attacks on cattle and sheep but at times engaged with Europeans and attempted a form of rapprochement. The most remarkable example of this was a large-scale corroboree (described by Gideon Lang as an 'opera') organised by Bussamarai and performed in front of Maranoa settlers at Surat. The 'opera' involved scenes of conflict between Indigenous peoples and squatters, ending in the squatters being driven away. The intent was to demonstrate that the Mandandanji and neighbouring groups had the capacity to defeat the trespassers on their land.

But ultimately they did not. Despite some early successes in driving pastoralists away, the Mandandanji and other groups on the Maranoa were unable to contend with the superior firepower and mobility of the Native Police and pastoralists. The rifle and horse were a formidable combination. As elsewhere on the frontier, the Native Police played a significant role in intimidating and subduing Indigenous groups.

Goodbye Bussamarai raises again the question of the extent of violence on the frontier. These debates tend to focus on how many killings occurred. Collins indicates that the number of Europeans killed on the Maranoa can be accurately assessed, but it is much more difficult to assess the losses of the Mandandanji. Collins suggests at least 150 and 'double that number is not fanciful' as against nine Europeans. Even by the most conservative estimates, the Mandandanji suffered fearful losses.

Despite emphasising the ongoing violence on the frontier, Collins also highlights that not all relationships were characterised by hostility. Some pastoralists attempted to befriend and establish relationships with local groups. Perhaps the most interesting personality was Paddy McEnroe who worked as a stockman on Mount Abundance. When the station was abandoned in 1849 following the deaths of several stockmen and loss of stock, Paddy McEnroe however did not feel threatened. He had obviously established harmonious relationships with the Mandandanji and continued to live in the area for a number of years.

Goodbye Bussamarai is an important contribution to the growing corpus of regional studies on frontier relations. It does not attempt to compare events on the Maranoa with other regions, but *Goodbye Bussamarai* does raise numerous questions about frontier relations. These questions include:

- environmental conditions — to what extent did environmental conditions play a part in frontier conflicts — was resistance more effective in areas of dense forests and scrubs compared with open woodlands and grasslands? The Mandandanji, it appears, had few areas where they could genuinely escape except for some brigalow scrubs (p 59).
- disease — to what extent did introduced diseases contribute to Indigenous mortality? Collins refers on several occasions to illness among the Native Police (p 165). Could it not be assumed that 'fever and ague' also affected the Indigenous population as well as other diseases?
- rapprochement — Paddy McEnroe was unusual but by no means an exception on the frontier. How was it that some individuals were able to establish and maintain good relations with Indigenous groups?

Goodbye Bussmarai is not flawless. It is not without the occasional error and misinterpretation. Some conclusions are debatable. For example, the link between Paddy McEnroe of Mount Abundance and a Paddy McEnroe who was one of the 1798 Irish rebels transported between 1800 and 1802 is tenuous.

While one may quibble with some of the details and conclusions Collins reaches, what is indisputable is that the pastoral invasion of the Maranoa devastated but did not destroy the Mandandanji.

Tom Blake
Ashgrove, Queensland

'Under a bilari tree I born': the story of Alica Bilari Smith by Alice Bilari Smith, with Anna Vitenbergs and Loreen Brehaut, 233pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle 2002, \$24.95

This is a pleasantly readable story of the life of an Aboriginal woman born on a Pilbara station and growing up through a time of great change. The main charm of this story is that it is told in Alice's own words. Anyone familiar with Aboriginal English, and especially that used by older Aboriginal people in Western Australia, will find Alice's voice very familiar; in fact, I could often 'hear' her voice in my head. Clearly the story is based on tape-recordings of Alice telling her story which was then written down pretty much verbatim by the co-authors, resulting in it being couched almost entirely in Aboriginal English, the first such work I have seen. The only exception to this use of Aboriginal English (apart from plates of certificates and the correspondence from Alice's Native Welfare Department files) is the eight sidebars which provide further information about people and places mentioned in the text.

Of course, this introduces a problem: carefully transcribed speech introduces many ambiguities due to the lack of features such as stress, pause and intonation. While there are traditions for writing the various standard Englishes that reduce this problem (but which do not entirely eliminate it) they would require modification of Alice's words. The co-authors have, I think, chosen correctly in not making these changes and instead sticking with Alice's own words, although this leads to some passages requiring re-reading to be understood.

The book follows Alice's life, from growing up on Rocklea Station to retirement in Roebourne, where she lives now. In its 233 pages it skips rapidly across years of her life, focusing on those anecdotes that Alice remembers most vividly. The book contains a number of black and white photos of Alice, members of her family and other relatives, and also of places on some of the many stations in the Pilbara on which she worked. It finishes with 13 pages of excerpts from Alice's Native Welfare Department files which illustrate official attitudes of the time towards 'half-caste' children and, in particular, the lack of hope they show for the future of a young girl who marries 'in the tribal way'. It reinforces how wrong they were in this view of Alice's likely future; she was to be a great mother not only to her own children but to many others, as well as a true pillar of strength for her people.

One criticism I have is that words from the various Aboriginal languages of the region are given in a variety of orthographies, sometimes the standard orthography for the language in question, sometimes in what appears to be an ad hoc spelling. The authors should at least have discussed the issue of orthography in the preface. There are several other errors relating to the spelling of language names. The map on pages 12–13 shows ‘Thaianyji’ for the language near Onslow; this should be ‘Thalanyji’ (this error is repeated on p 144). As well, the map shows a language to the north of Port Hedland with the name ‘ngaria’; this should be spelled ‘Ngarla’, however it should probably not be shown on the map. The reason for this is that although there is mention in the book of a ‘tribe’ called ‘ngaria’ (p 24), this refers to another language in Western Australia which is also known to its speakers as Ngarla, and which is spoken to the south-east of Paraburdoo (near the Collier Range National Park). This language, which is also known as Ngarlawangka (a name some of the speakers settled on to avoid confusion with the other Ngarla in the north) is unfortunately not shown on the map.

To sum up, while not telling a story of earth-shattering importance this book gives us a view into the life of Alice Bilari Smith and the events and people that have mattered to her, and it does this in an evocative and powerfully Aboriginal voice.

Doug Marmion
Department of Linguistics,
RSPAS, ANU, Canberra

Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world, Claire Smith & Graeme K Ward (eds), 230pp, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2000, \$35.00.

This book presents a selection of nine papers first given at the ‘Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world’ symposium held in Darwin, July 1997. The book captures some of the spirit of the meeting with its photographs of the participants: Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, craftspeople, media, performers, anthropologists, historians, archaeologists from around the world. The book is only one of the ways in which the symposium has been made available to a wider audience. It was also broadcast live on radio, was the subject of a documentary film and a CD is to be produced.

The collection of papers provides a student text for comparisons between social anthropology, ethno-archaeology and history on the subject of imperialism and Indigenous peoples.

The book takes as its subject of discussion the way in which globalisation affects Indigenous peoples in mostly neo-liberal states. It looks at, on the one hand, the effects of power relations on Indigenous peoples by neo-liberal states and, on the other hand, strategies adopted by Indigenous peoples to retain their cultures, profit from them and find ways of effectively controlling the future encroachment of other dominant states. The tension between connectedness across difference and how to keep local identities distinctive in a globalised system which is inherently place-less runs throughout the book.

In Chapter 1, Smith, Burke and Ward set out how and why the work was produced. Their purpose is clear in introducing the subject of threats to the autonomy, control over land and knowledge of small populations by larger more dominant ones.

Next in the process of the chaos of imperialism they want to portray a sense of hope where the dominant cultures learn from colonised ones. 'Globalisation constitutes an unprecedented threat to the autonomy of Indigenous cultures as well as an unprecedented opportunity for Indigenous empowerment' (p 21). The title of the book indicates the stress by the authors on the ways in which the aspects of a globalised world economy – particularly increased communication and access to markets – that make it 'interconnected' may be of benefit to Indigenous peoples.

In this review I discuss briefly the origins of globalisation and, setting this book's propositions regarding globalisation in context, criticise the themes of the book and its ways of approaching Indigenous peoples and globalisation.

Globalisation is a sanitised name given to world domination by large capitalist monopolies with national and international connections (branches and corporate arrangements) related to world capitalist expansion and military and cultural dominance.¹ Although this book deals with global processes and imperialism, how the authors understand these terms is not clearly defined.

Roman, Italian, Ottoman, Portuguese, Spanish and British Empires enacted colonial programs by acquiring other lands, other peoples across the globe. Colonialism, up to the fifteenth century, was powered by insatiable wants for exotic goods such as food, spices, furniture, fabrics and jewellery, but ended in pillage of lands, labour and rape of cultures and peoples. This process continued by both destroying Indigenous societies and reshaping mercantilism into segmented imperialism that emerged into what we now know as globalisation. Globalisation, therefore, is a form of imperialism where war, conquest and capital combine to produce an hierarchy of dominant states who monopolise industries and resources, the most desirable areas of the world and, finally, create an educated population through dominance of strategic ideologies, to manage both fixed and mobile capital.²

Robert Layton, a British anthropologist, attempts to show in his chapter 'From clan symbol to ethnic emblem: Indigenous creativity' that small groups essentially have self-determining mechanisms to which clans (or ethnic groupings) can resort creatively as protection against imperialism. I would consider that Layton's proposition is rather dubious in the light of historical experience. His use of comparative chimpanzee and hunter-gatherer data introduces an inappropriate metaphor and a misleadingly simplified approach to self-determination of the sort which has a long history for subjugated peoples.

American anthropologists Larry and Karen Zimmerman and Leonard Bruguier in their paper 'Cyber smoke signals: new technologies and Native American ethnicity', show how technological determinism can metaphorically be turned on its head to act in favour of 'Native American ethnicity'. I find this proposition is as doubtful as Layton's claims. Both these contributors are in danger of suggesting that Indigenous peoples are equally as blameworthy as the invaders for their own pauperisation and dispossession.

Julie Gough, a Tasmanian Indigenous artist, discusses how 'history, representation, globalisation and Indigenous culture' have been depicted through musicological

1. See Marx 1982: 286–287; Lenin 1976: 634–731 and Blainey 2000: 34–44 for examples.

2. Etherington 1984: 176–262.

and other representations. Gough argues for an alternative way of representing Tasmanians to that of the neo-liberal state's dominance, by 'representing historical stories and cultural meanings of objects'. Gough claims to do so by retelling documented events from an alternative perspective. While this is a laudable notion, it could be argued that her work is more of a reactive criticism of non-Indigenous Australian artists which draws on similar patterns of abstraction as the non-Indigenous histories of which she is rightly critical.

The Olympic games are the starting point for Meekinson's critique of the neo-liberal state and Indigenous politics in 'Indigenous presence at the Olympic games'. Meekinson suggests that over the last century Aboriginal imagery has been appropriated consistently as a 'marker of Australian identity' yet Aboriginal people 'remain shadowy figures in the national consciousness'. Like Layton, Meekinson concludes that despite the appropriation of Indigenous culture by the Republican and Olympic movements there remained an underlying strength whereby 'Indigenous voices were able to come to the fore'. Meekinson maintains that the several media do 'educate, inform, express diversity, provide role models, employs and displays a physical presence [of] a right to being somewhere'. But meagre Indigenous voices are bought into Meekinson's case, for example Rhoda Roberts and Cathy Freeman, who are media personalities with well-known, possibly stereotyped, bureaucratic voices.

Morphy uses a phenomenological perspective on art as well as a sociological one. One of the aims of a phenomenological approach is to provide descriptions of the world as it is experienced. Misused, it could be seen to present anthropology and anthropologists with the prospect of getting inside the skins of Indigenous peoples, 'being Aborigines', and also, from the centre of empire, speaking for and owning Indigenous peoples. This, I consider, is at the base of Howard Morphy's chapter on 'Elite arts for cultural elites: adding value to Indigenous arts'. Morphy continues the book's theme of challenges to perceptions of oppression by the neo-liberal state, and presents a model whereby agents of art and cultural preservation can be protectors of Indigenous people's consciousness against exploiters. This is an old model grounded in 19th and 20th century British and Australian anthropology and protectionist policies.

In this chapter Morphy rightly critiques students of Indigenous art for not developing an understanding that Aborigines are involved in the global art market where their work is 'a value creating process' that 'involves both the creation of new kinds of values in objects and the increase of their value in terms of exchange' (p129). While 'the process of value transformation is often summarised as moving from ethnographic object to art object ... and in terms of certain radical critiques is seen to result in the alienation of art' from the artists and their society, Morphy disagrees (p129). He says this view is an oversimplification of the processes involved which denies agency to the Aboriginal people and fails to take account of areas of compatibility between art in Aboriginal society and art in western society (p 130). By this argument, looking at the experience of producing market commodities, or, what makes the artist work and continue to do so for the market, is the best way of understanding the legitimacy of the commodity and the producer, and the agency of Indigenous environments. Morphy is, I think, timid about announcing to the reader that anthropologists are unwillingly drawn into both the local and international markets either as part of an intelligentsia, promoter of the process or as honest broker.

The most shocking thing about the kind of approach that Morphy is advocating is that anthropologists are claiming for themselves the kind of disciplinary process so vehemently attacked by Edward Said in his *Orientalist* critique.³ Said shows how British and other European scholars turned themselves into 'Egyptian Arabs' as a means of finding out how they carried on their lives, that is, how they produced an Egyptian and Muslim consciousness. Colonialism produced these kinds of actions at the intersection of the Orient and the Occident. Here in Australia, and I suspect in other countries, anthropologists can be seen to be profiteering from the knowledge gained. This process results in anthropologists who set themselves up as knowing more about Aborigines than Aborigines know about themselves. Anthropologists act as agents without visible costs to themselves. Their rewards come from representing what they call Aboriginal Australia.

Morphy, as a defender of Indigenous art, claims that phenomenology enables him to make statements about Australian Indigenous peoples. He says, '[c]entral to the functioning of Aboriginal art are two factors: 1 art is an important component of a system of restricted religious knowledge; 2 art is integral to the political life of Aboriginal societies, and is typically the property of corporate clan groups' (p 132). These two claims, based on his writings and those of Ian Keen, are 'Claytons claims', that is, they are claims you make when you have no claim to make. First, these claims do not apply to more than 1% of the country. Second, Aboriginal politics, whether in bush camps in urban society where the majority of Aborigines live, has nothing to do with 'art', painted, spoken or performed. Third, art in the 21st century is related to material or economic life controlled by markets, exchanged for money to buy goods and services, be they works performed for traditional ceremonies, CDEP government programs and ATSIC elections. Fourth, many of the artists do their work not for collectives, family or otherwise, but for personal gain, and this is a general case across Australia.

According to Morphy's interpretation of the effects of imperialism on Aborigines, 'Art is not an arena into which Aboriginal people have been unwillingly dragged; rather [and this is where Morphy speaks on behalf of all Aborigines] it is an arena that Aboriginal people who have been unwillingly colonised have turned to as a means of asserting their rights and autonomy in the transformed postcolonial context' (p142). To me, this is a weak and inaccurate assessment of the longer political struggle and could be seen as special pleading to make his own position more plausible.

Consider the history of artefact collection: antiquarians were involved in collecting and pillaging Indigenous material culture from first contact. Baldwin Spencer and Paddy Cahill of Oenpelli were the first white men to engage in the collection of 'bark paintings' in the Northern Territory. At the time, these products were something only Aborigines used and then left to decay. Their transformation to art was part of a process of incorporation into European interests and ideology. These works were bought for cash from Aborigines and sent south in numbers.⁴ From as early as about 1911, Cahill collaborated with Spencer. The Aborigines who sold their works discussed them with nobody except perhaps Cahill, who had little knowledge about the goods he collected

³ Said 1978.

⁴ Griffiths 1996.

from ceremonial sites. Moreover, Cahill could not have had discussions with anyone other than Spencer. It was certainly the case in Darwin, as the white population in that town loathed Aborigines and all they stood for.⁵

Another way of understanding the processes of colonial incorporation is to see it as Aborigines in effect being dragged into painting in the early part of the 20th century, later continued by government policies designed and implemented by anthropologists, missionaries and protectors. After 1967, Nugget Coombs, William Stanner and Barrie Dexter (who created the Council for Aboriginal Affairs 1968–1972) created a bureaucracy to sell whatever Aborigines could produce, saving white society from paying for Aboriginal reparation and their welfare.⁶

Meanwhile Christian missionaries promoted the sale of artefacts in a number of different ways and places. First, trade in Aboriginal artefacts, tree carvings and weapons in southern and western areas of New South Wales was encouraged as an industry for purchase by European pastoralists and travellers in the 1830s–1840s. Thereafter this activity continued on reserves. Second, Lutheran Missionaries promoted Dieri craft as works of art for profit in South Australia. Third, the Queensland government as early as the 1920s brought tourists by the boatload to Palm Island to buy or collect Aboriginal artefacts by the tonne. Fourth, the New South Wales governments from 1907 encouraged the sale of artefacts, a practice continued today at the La Perouse Aboriginal settlement on Botany Bay.⁷ Fifth, the 1880s saw artefacts from the Riverina and South Coast Aborigines engaged in prolific trade in weapons, for trade and material gain.

Morphy does not draw on this broader, more complex history. Like Layton, he makes assumptions about Indigenous cultural strength as an imperialist façade to protect the interests of anthropologists while the discipline continues its plunder of Indigenous peoples' intellectual property. I am arguing that Morphy's interpretations of the relation of Indigenous people to the art market is too partial, ignoring its underlying relationship to the expansion of European ideology, with anthropologists acting as key agents of imperialism, and remaining so.⁸ Nor are we given any idea about the contradictions of wealth and poverty within communities where popular painters originate, nor how and where the profits from these production activities end up.

Outside Australia, Penny Dransart, in her chapter 'Cultural tourism in an interconnected world: tensions and aspirations in Latin America', takes the tensions in Latin America as her example of Indigenous people coping with globalisation. There are tensions in the market place, where buyers come face to face with sellers. In her example Dransart shows how Andean women produce non-traditional textiles for a global market with traditional techniques. Like other writers in this book, Dransart uses examples of craft production to provide evidence for a form of liberation from capitalist alienation. Exploitation, not being immediately evident, is assumed not to operate.

⁵ See letter by Cahill in Mulvaney's 'Paddy Cahill of Oenpelli', in Press, 2002: 28.

⁶ The first government body to promote art interests was the Aboriginal Arts Board that came directly from the Council for the Arts, a body created by HC Coombs for the Federal Government.

⁷ Hinkson and Harris 2001: 106–123.

⁸ See eg Caulfield 1972: 182–212.

The final paper, by Loring and Ashanti, 'Past and future pathways: Innu cultural heritage in the twentieth century' provides a valuable comparative study with circumstances in Indigenous Australia. The Innu confront multinational mining developments, hydro-electric schemes and military threats to their land, plus governmental policy interventions which contributed to social disruption and despair. The paper documents the use of national publicity to increase awareness of these impacts, and focuses on the strengthening of identity which may grow from a community archaeology exploration of 'trails' — presumably ways of walking from one area of living to another — that 'lead back to the past and are anchored in the present' (p 168). They compare differing perspectives on the past that obtain in the region (northeastern-most Canada) derived from the different sources of ethnohistory, archaeology and Indigenous stories and philosophy.

However, the idea that by gaining some kind of ethical agreement from archaeologists or from art dealers for working with Indigenous people is the same as somehow empowering them is, I argue, a theoretical illusion, and a weak solution. Far more powerful authorities in mining, government and military often lack ethical and operating criteria understandable by those whose territories they invade. Australian experience shows that those who make war and peace, control economic activities, collect Aboriginal intellectual property and act as agents of Aborigines, have never really worked in the true interests of Aborigines. For this reason, return of lands, provision of economies, return of material plunder and negation of Aboriginal viewpoints have worked against and not for Indigenous peoples. Land rights and native title legislation serve as the classic anthropological 'Catch 22' whereby their ideologies serve as 'Indigenous straw persons', and it is they who have defined who is an Indigenous person and it is given to social scientists, government, lawyers and the courts to decide what Indigenous people's entitlements ought to be.

Smith and Ward chose a very difficult topic on which to base a discussion of world developments and Indigenous peoples. The text works well in its own terms, but I consider that there is a lack of consideration of the historiography of imperialism and its modern form of global forces impacting on Indigenous peoples. Tricky new assumptions, mostly put forward by anthropologists and ethno-archaeologists, have failed to come to grips with imperialism.

In stressing 'interconnectedness' over dislocation — one of the main features of globalisation — the book's arguments develop a rhetoric of empowerment within the structure of globalisation. This glosses over the realities of continuing poverty, conflict and inequity for Indigenous people, especially in the fields of human rights, jobs not welfare, education and health. These are the areas which need to be kept in focus as the areas in which empowerment is real, not an illusory mystification.

Gordon Briscoe,
Centre for Indigenous History,
RSSS, ANU

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Contributors

Anna Cole is a Research Co-ordinator at Goldsmiths College, University of London, working on cross-cultural exchange in Oceania. She has worked as Project Historian for the 'Shared Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories of pastoralism' project with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service's Cultural Heritage Division. She is currently co-editing two volumes, *Uncommon ground: 'white' women in Aboriginal history* with Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisley, and *Bodies, art and exchange in the Pacific and Europe* with Bronwen Douglas and Nicholas Thomas.

Katherine Ellinghaus is a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of History at the University of Melbourne, where she also teaches 20th century United States history.

Martin Gibbs is a lecturer in historical and maritime archaeology at James Cook University. His current research interests include the nature of Indigenous contact with maritime industries and shipwreck survivors in Australia and Torres Strait.

John Harris is the Translation Consultant in the Bible Society, particularly in their program of translation into Indigenous Australian languages. He is particularly interested in Aboriginal mission history, in which field he has published widely.

John Maynard is an Australian Research Council post-doctoral fellow with Umuliko Centre for Indigenous Higher Education Research at the University of Newcastle. His traditional roots lie with the Worimi people of Port Stephens. He was the recipient of the *Aboriginal History* Stanner Fellowship for 1996 and the New South Wales Premiers Indigenous History Fellowship for 2003–2004.

Mark McKenna an Australian Research Council Fellow in the History Department, School of Social Sciences, ANU. He is the author of *The Captive Republic: a history of republicanism in Australia 1788–1996*, and the prize-winning *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: a history of Australian place*, 2002.

Justin O'Brien is employed by the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation at Jabiru in the Northern Territory. His interests are frontier history and the history of Indigenous development in the Northern Territory.

Chris Owen is a post-graduate student at the University of Western Australia researching the history of police in the Kimberley District of Western Australia, 1883–1905. He is currently employed as a historian at the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council.

Francis Peters-Little is a Research Fellow in the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, a musician and documentary filmmaker. Her areas of research are Aboriginal arts and media, Aboriginal recent political history and identity and Indigenous higher education. She is commencing work on the ARC project 'Unsettling histories: Australian Indigenous modes of historical practice'.

Shirleene Robinson is a Lecturer in History at the University of Queensland. Her research interests include Aboriginal labour, the treatment of Aboriginal children and child removal.

Parimal Roy is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences, Monash University Gippsland Campus. His major areas of research include race and ethnic relations, family and social networks, interethnic marriage, social change, urban sociology and community studies. Among his recent publications are the books *Family diversity in India: patterns, practices and ethos*, 2003 and *The Indian family: change and persistence*, 2001.

David Schmitt is a Lecturer in History/Politics at the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences, Monash University Gippsland Campus. He has research interests in community history, Australian military history and contemporary global politics including ethnic and indigenous relations and is currently undertaking research in these areas.

Margaret Taylor was a post-graduate research student at the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences, Monash University Gippsland Campus. She has a particular interest in the Aboriginal community in the Goulburn Valley and is currently working on a monograph based on her previous research on the Aboriginal community in the Goulburn Valley.

Lorenzo Veracini teaches history and politics at the University of the South Pacific, Suva. His research interests include the politics of history and the historiography of settler nations.

James Warden is a curator at the National Museum of Australia. Formerly he was the historian for the Central Land Council, Alice Springs.

Elizabeth Willis is a Senior Curator in the Australian Society and Technology Department at the Museum Victoria. Her current research focuses on aspects of Victorian state history in 1854. She is curating a display of three 19th century Indigenous Victorian bark etchings, to be held at the Melbourne Museum from March to June 2004.

Bill Wilson is a lecturer in history and politics at the Charles Darwin University. His interests are the history of policing in the Northern Territory and frontier history.

Information for authors

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Footnote style

1. Rowley 1971: 107. See also Barwick 1981.
2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
3. Fison and Howitt 1880: 96-108.
4. *Evening Mail*, 12 March 1869.
5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

Footnote numbers are placed after punctuation marks in the text.

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