

Aboriginal History

Volume 29 2005

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Aboriginal History is a refereed journal that presents articles and information in Australian ethnohistory and contact and 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Subjects include recorded oral traditions and biographies, narratives in local languages with translations, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, archival and bibliographic articles, and book reviews.

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

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

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Cover: Coloured Progressive Association farewell to Jack Johnson, Sydney 1907. Maynard family photograph, courtesy Cheryl Oakenfall.

Aboriginal History

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Foreword

This 29th edition of the journal contains four papers that consider the politics of Aboriginal identity in new ways. John Maynard explores little known 'international black connections' between Aboriginal activists of the early 20th century and the African-American activists of the Universal Negro Improvement Society, led by Marcus Garvey. Mitchell Rolls confronts the implications of multiple potential locations for identity that arise with 'mixed descent', and draws comparisons between the US and Australia. Rani Kerin examines the relationship between a young Aboriginal boy and Charles and Phyllis Duguid in South Australia in the 1940s, showing the gap between theories of assimilation and the complexities of practicing it in person, and the sad outcome of these confusions. Sarah Holcombe looks at the establishment of an Aboriginal mining company in Western Australia in the 1940s, and how these early management and financial structures relate to contemporary Indigenous organisations' practices.

In the other papers, Darrell Lewis draws together previously unpublished sources which describe the lives of Aboriginal people of the Victoria River area of the Northern Territory in the mid-1800s, and their reactions to early exploring expeditions — 'a kind of "foundational document"' for the people of the area. Geoff Gray works at the other end of the ethnographic process, looking at those who looked at others so prodigiously — anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt — in terms of the social and academic context in which their careers were built and maintained.

Thanks are due to Peter Read who carried out the editorial work on the earlier stages of this edition of the journal.

2005 has been a fruitful year for *Aboriginal History*, with two important and handsomely-produced monographs published. The first of these was Mike Smith's *Peopling the Cleland Hills: Aboriginal history in western Central Australia 1850-1980*. Historian Tom Griffiths wrote in his introduction to the book:

This is an unusual and compelling history of an Australian frontier. In it, the archaeologist turns historian. Mike Smith sifts documents and memories in order to describe the last century and a half of culture contact in the region where older sediments have previously been his study. He uses Puritjarra rockshelter as a place from which to view the modern social exchange and disruption generated across Kukatja country by the European colonial invasion. This is not just a fine, original history, but also a challenging model of archaeological practice.

In *The Australian* newspaper's reviews of the best books of 2005 the book was recommended as 'original' and 'full of insight and redemptive force' by Nicolas Rothwell, novelist and senior writer for *The Australian*. He wrote:

Meticulous in its reconstruction of lost time and near-vanished memories, restrained and sober in its tone and voice, this book sets a benchmark for writing that seeks to capture the clash of civilisations in central Australia (3 December 2005).

The other Aboriginal History monograph published in 2005 was *Many exchanges: archaeology, history, community and the work of Isabel McBryde*. This is a celebration and exploration of the work of Professor Isabel McBryde. Her longterm contributions to the understanding of Indigenous culture and heritage in Australia (see Peter Read's discussion of these in 'Notes and Documents', this volume) are explored in the collection's inter-disciplinary studies by leaders in the fields of archaeology, history, heritage management, linguistics and anthropology. The collection will be welcomed by all who have an interest in the history and the future of these overlapping studies. The collection demonstrates the many connections — inter-disciplinary, inter-cultural and inter-generational — that flow into the creation of lively and informed Indigenous histories. Professor McBryde is one of the founding members of the journal *Aboriginal History*.

2006 will see the thirtieth edition of *Aboriginal History*, first published in 1977. A special themed edition of the journal is being prepared to mark these three decades of pioneering publication, the changes that have occurred, and current directions in a discipline that barely existed 30 years ago. There was some opposition at that time to the establishment of a journal that marked out 'Aboriginal history' as a distinct sub-discipline on the grounds of possible marginalisation, or because of a perceived lack of documentary sources, or the requirement for such histories to be the domain of Indigenous historians only (see Isabel McBryde's chapter in *Terrible hard biscuits: a reader in Aboriginal history*, Allen and Unwin, 1996). The resounding strength and depth of the work published in the journal since then makes it clear that the sub-discipline is not only valid and viable but a central location for challenging ways of thinking about practices of history, and its role in the constitution of personal and national identities in colonial and potentially de-colonised contexts. The journal has been an important agent in the construction of the multi-vocal, diversely-sourced and inter-disciplinary forms which have come to characterise the sub-discipline. Sales of *Aboriginal History* publications are flourishing, a testament to the expanding interest and involvement in the dynamism and challenge of understanding, writing, singing, painting or filming Aboriginal history.

Ingereth Macfarlane
Managing Editor

‘In the interests of our people’: the influence of Garveyism on the rise of Australian Aboriginal political activism

John Maynard

‘It is difficult to predict when new pasts will erupt through the surface of established understandings and change the landscape of the future’.¹

In August 1924 a letter sent from an Aboriginal man, Tom Lacey, in Sydney to Amy Jacques Garvey – associate editor of *The Negro World* – reveals new insights on the rise of early Aboriginal political activism. Amy Jacques Garvey was the wife of Marcus Garvey, at the time probably simultaneously the most revered and despised black man on the planet. Garvey was the leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which remains the biggest black movement ever established in the United States.² The letter from Lacey was published in Garvey’s *Negro World* under the banner ‘Australia sends Greeting to the Fourth International conference’.³ This article explores the significance and genesis of these international black connections with early Aboriginal political leaders on the Sydney waterfront.

The large-scale revocation of independent Aboriginal reserve lands in NSW between 1910 and 1925 and the brutality of taking Aboriginal children from their families⁴ were the galvanising issues that ignited Aboriginal political revolt and led to the rise of the first united organised Aboriginal political group, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA).⁵ The Aboriginal reserve land was turned over to white farmers, returned soldiers (World War I veterans) and urban expansion.⁶ The Aboriginal occupants, after decades of blood, sweat and tears, were turned onto the street with little more than the shirts on their backs. It was against this backdrop of oppression that the AAPA arose to inspire their people.

1. Davis 2001: 95.

2. Dawson 2001: 2; Levine 1993: 122; Martin 1983: 100.

3. *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

4. ‘The Stolen Generations’ - a State government policy of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families. See Commonwealth Government, Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission 1997; Read 1999; Haebich 2000.

5. Goodall 1996: 151.

6. Goodall 1996: 151.

Black maritime workers: the seeds of political mobilisation

During the opening decades of the twentieth century at the Sydney docks, contact between Aboriginal men employed as wharf labourers and international black seamen led to communication and inspiration. Through this contact, an appreciation of an international black struggle developed among Aboriginal people. They realised they were not alone, and that others around the globe were now speaking out against oppression, racism, and prejudice directed against black people.

The first indication of serious international black influence upon later Aboriginal political mobilisation is the formation in Sydney around 1903 of an organisation called the 'Coloured Progressive Association'. (The name itself may have had some bearing some 21 years later on the naming of the 'Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association'.) The CPA and its links to Aboriginal people were undoubtedly a result of working connections on the Sydney waterfront, at the time a major and busy international port. The Coloured Progressive Association's membership largely comprised African Americans and West Indians although there is evidence that Aboriginal people were also involved.⁷ The great majority of the international black men could not have been Australian nationals, but would have been foreign transitional seamen. As race theory took hold in the mid-nineteenth century, the multiracial and revolutionary unity which had previously existed between mariners of all ethnic backgrounds disintegrated.⁸ The early decades of the twentieth century were a period in Australia with high levels of overt racism. The implementation of the 'White Australia' policy with its significant long-term ramifications was a famous product of the era.⁹ 'Australia first put a tax on coloured people, increased the tax, afterwards limited the number, and finally prohibited their entry'.¹⁰ International black commentators were scathing:

There is Australia, a great empty continent containing five million people where it could easily support one hundred million. It is being held for white settlers who do not come, while coloured people are being kept out. Let Australia open its doors to its natural coloured settlers.¹¹

Conditions for international black seamen were harsh in Australian ports at the time. One Jamaican seaman displayed his disgust by refusing to turn out for the customs inspection. He was forced to appear in court and replied to the magistrate:

'We went to Newcastle, had to pass customs; went to Wallaroo, had to pass customs; came to Port Adelaide had to pass customs. Once I was undressed, and they made me come up. There are 12 of us coloured men on the ship, and we want to know why we should be singled out. The ship is chartered, and we came to work the ship, not to live here. We do not see why we should have to pass the customs every time we come into port.'

7. Maynard 2003a: 95.

8. Linebaugh & Rediker 2000.

9. 'White Australia'. All government parties campaigned on a White Australia policy at the first general elections in 1901 and the new restrictive legislation was among the first enacted by the national parliament. It was not until 1967 that a more positive practice of allowing a flow of coloured immigrants into Australia was adopted (Murphy 1982: 282).

10. *Daylight*, 29 November 1924: 809.

11. *The Crisis* 23(3) January 1922.

Defendant was ordered to forfeit two days' pay, and to pay £2 1/- costs. As he left the court he bowed to the magistrate and said, 'Good Morning Sir'.¹²

In 1904 a deck crew of 20 'Lascars' had left a ship docked in Melbourne and camped on shore, refusing point blank to return to the vessel. They complained to authorities of ill-treatment while working on an Australian-owned vessel *Argus*, and said that they had been assaulted by the captain:

Under the Aliens Act the captain of the *Argus* is liable to a penalty of £100 a man should any of them remain ashore.

The 20 Lascar deck hands who struck work on the steamer *Argus* at Williamstown yesterday, walked to Melbourne during the night and this morning they interviewed the shipping master. They explained that their wages ranged from 10 to 35 rupees per month, but that none of it could be handled until they returned to the port from which they shipped.

Captain Currie, of Currie and Co., owners of the *Argus*, and captain Sutherland, master of the steamer, were present at the interview.

Eight of the men complained that they had been struck by the captain. They all declined to go on board unless there was a fresh captain. They would sooner go to gaol. After some angry passages, captain Currie said he would take out warrants and have the men imprisoned till the time of sailing. When they got back to Rangoon they would be discharged. The charges against the captain were denied by the captain and the first mate.¹³

The following day the men appeared before the city court and received no support to their pleas of abuse. The captain was exonerated, and the crewmen, brave enough to stand up in the face of abuse, were penalised:

The 21[sic] Lascar seamen who went on strike from the steamer *Argus* on Sunday, owing as they alleged to ill-treatment by the captain were before the city court today. Captain Sutherland said he had not touched any of the men, and he had heard no complaints.

The Bench, after hearing further evidence ordered 18 of the men back to the steamer, whilst the others, who were said to have caused the trouble were remanded for a week.¹⁴

Twenty years later, conditions for international black seamen remained harsh in Australian ports. A crew of West African seamen went on strike whilst their ship was in dock at Newcastle. It was noted in the press that the captain of the vessel would 'have to support them on board or pay a penalty of £100 a man if they remain off the ship more than 24 hours'.¹⁵ Although some white groups opposed the restrictive policies that targeted black visitors,¹⁶ similar severe experiences for black seamen existed in other ports around the globe during the early decades of the twentieth century. Many

¹². *Daylight*, 31 August 1925: 920.

¹³. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 February 1904: 5.

¹⁴. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1904: 10.

¹⁵. *The Northern Daily Leader*, 5 September 1925.

¹⁶. The Seamen's Union, for instance, had passed a 'resolution in favour of black labour on ships' in Australian waters (*Daylight* 31 July 1923: 618).

black seamen were forced to live in extreme poverty in English ports like London, Liverpool, Cardiff and Hull:

Dumped from tramp steamers or attracted by the prospect of casual work ... black seamen found it hard to get another ship, harder still to find work ashore. Most white seamen rejected them as shipmates; white dockers, too refused to work alongside them. Having spent the small sums they had been paid off with, having pawned any spare clothes and other belongings, destitute seamen tramped from port to port, desperate for work. Their quest was endless and almost hopeless. Help from compatriots and parish hand-outs kept them from starving.¹⁷

The formation of the Coloured Progressive Association in Sydney was undoubtedly a result of similar experiences. Black men and women with maritime connections congregated together for support in the face of mutual hardship and isolation.

Jack Johnson and the Coloured Progressive Association

The Coloured Progressive Association itself may never have been noticed by the media – and might simply have faded into oblivion – except for the arrival in Australia in 1907 of one extremely high profile individual. Heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson was one of the most charismatic and talented sporting identities the world has known (fig 1). Certainly the coming of Johnson to Australia gave Aboriginal people an identifiable black icon of great celebrity to cheer, and something to aspire to. Johnson had for years been denied the opportunity of fighting for the Heavyweight Championship of the World. He had two fights during his first Australian visit, knocking out both West Indian Peter Felix and Australian Bill Lang.

An advertisement in the *Referee* on Wednesday 13 March 1907 drew attention to Johnson's imminent return to the United States and that an organising body called the Coloured Progressive Association of New South Wales, described as a 'solid influential Sydney body', was holding a farewell function in his honour.¹⁸ Some of the organisation's office bearers were named: 'Mr. W. Grant is grand president, Mr. H. Gilbert treasurer, and Mr. G. Phillips secretary'.¹⁹

The program arranged is a capital one for such an occasion. Some of the leading Tivoli and National Amphitheatre artists, including Miss Casey Walmer, Chas Pope, Harry Ingram and others will assist. Jack himself is billed for a display of ball punching, which should prove a treat in itself. First class music is promised, and dancing and singing will run from 8 till 12.²⁰

The farewell to Johnson, at Leigh House in Sydney, evidently well-attended and an undoubted success, was given sarcastic racist coverage by the *Truth*:

The gorgeous mirrors of the dance-room reflected the gyrations of the coloured cult of the city ... white men (a very few) ambled around with full black, half and quarter caste beauties ... Three white ladies toed the 'shazzy' in amazing shoulder cut evening dresses. One of these charmers had on a blazing red costume, and she made a paralysing start in a waltz.²¹

17. Fryer 1984: 294-295.

18. *The Referee*, 13 March 1907.

19. *The Referee*, 13 March 1907.

20. *The Referee*, 13 March 1907.



Fig 1 Dapper Jack Johnson wearing his beige tweed suit, 1908.
NAA A1861, 848 'Boxer Jack Johnson of Galveston, Texas'.

Jack Johnson was depicted as looking magnificent when he arrived in a light square-cut tweed suit. He moved at ease amongst the crowd throughout the evening but did not take to the dance floor himself. Later in the night Johnson left in a hansom cab. He returned shortly after 11 o'clock. 'Coyly clinging to his ebon wing was Cassie Walmer of the Tiv. The pair accompanied by a select small party did a duck upstairs'.²² Highlights of the dancing during the night present further evidence of the maritime background of those present: 'a quadrille was in progress shortly after 11 o'clock, and some sable dancers were displaying bell bottomed trousers with great effect'.²³

Despite its glaringly offensive tone, the article presents historical evidence of the Coloured Progressive Association at the time. The president, an elderly 'coloured' gentleman and a former steamtug captain, W Grant, indicated to the reporter that the organisation had a membership of '40 or 50 and had been in existence about four years'.²⁴

He also let it be distinctly understood that the Black Progressives didn't like the Commonwealth restrictive legislation. They want an open black door, which coons can enter at their own sweet will.²⁵

The journalist completely dismissed the thought that Aboriginal people could have been a part of the evening. Educated and elegantly attired Aboriginal men and women were out of the realm of his imagination.

Comfortably disposed about the lounges were ladies white and coloured. Some of the latter were full-blown negresses, and there was a mixture of half-castes, quadroons and octoroons. On each side of the ballroom were seated black wallflowers, interspersed with a few whites. The coloured gentlemen and ladies were almost entirely of the American type. The Coloured Progress Association does not evidently include the La Perouse shade.²⁶

But a photograph of the event (which clearly identifies Jack Johnson and West Indian boxer Peter Felix) shows that the future AAPA President Fred Maynard was also present at Johnson's farewell in Sydney (see fig 2).

No further mention or account of the Coloured Progressive Association has to date been found. Hopefully further research may uncover what became of this organization, its membership and explore further links to the later Aboriginal political movement. Jack Johnson had displayed interest, knowledge and appreciation of traditional Aboriginal life during his visit. 'I spend most of my spare time in the art galleries and the museum', he stated.

My principle hobby is archaeology. When I visit your museum and see the numerous specimens of prehistoric man's art, your boomerangs of many varieties, your stone axes from various States and the many examples of Paleolithic and Neolithic man's skill — simply I envy you. America had its rude implements but they did

21. *The Truth*, 17 March 1907.

22. *The Truth*, 17 March 1907.

23. *The Truth*, 17 March 1907.

24. *The Truth*, 17 March 1907.

25. *The Truth*, 17 March 1907.

26. *The Truth*, 17 March 1907.

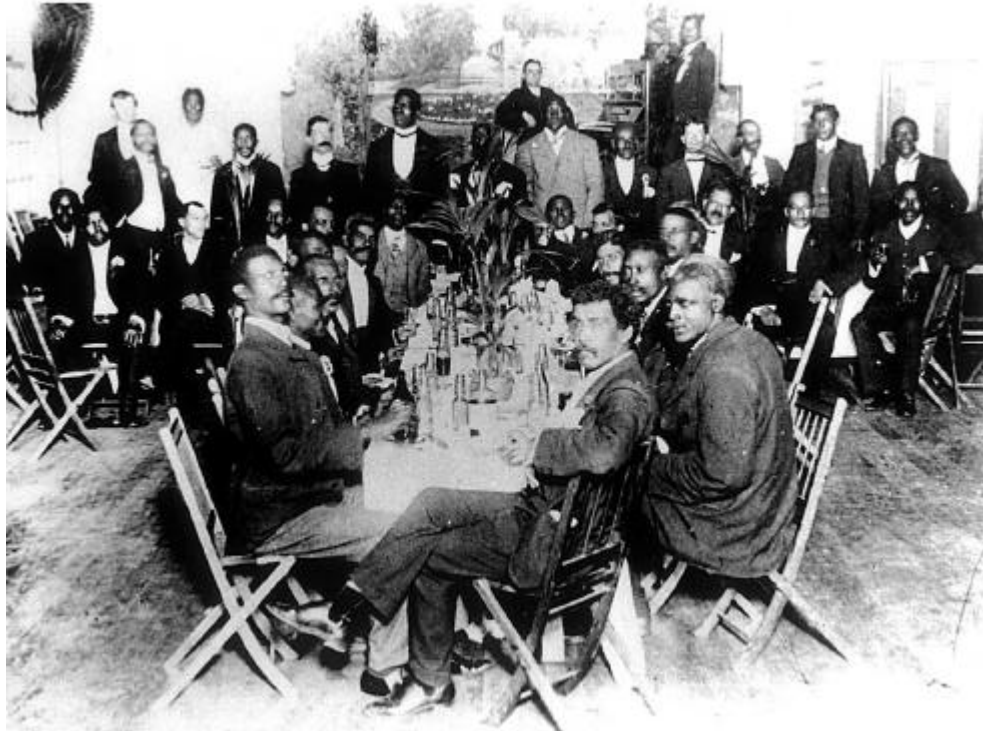


Fig 2 Coloured Progressive Association farewell to Jack Johnson Sydney 1907. Johnson is standing at the back in the pale suit, to his right the other tall man is West Indian boxer Peter Felix. My grandfather, Fred Maynard, is the third from the right and to Johnson's left. Maynard family photograph, courtesy Cheryl Oakenfall.

not show anything like the same foresight. The Australian natives must have been geniuses to invent such weapons.²⁷

Late in 1908 Johnson returned to Australia to fight for and win the Heavyweight Championship of the World. It is worth noting that Johnson was given the privilege of official exemption to enter the country to take part in the fight.²⁸ He met the Canadian world champion Tommy Burns in Sydney. Burns was offered the incredible sum of £6,000 to defend his title against Johnson in Sydney. Johnson was to receive £1,000 for the fight; under the circumstances of being denied the opportunity for so long he would probably have climbed into the ring for nothing.²⁹

The fight attracted international media interest in an Australian-held sporting event that would be unparalleled until the staging of the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. The fight was held at the specially constructed open-air Sydney Stadium. It was a sell-out. Twenty thousand people jammed into the stadium, with a further 40,000

²⁷. Wells 1998: 178.

²⁸. 'Relative to the issue of Certificate of Exemption in favour of Jack Johnson', NAA Memo No 5934/08, D596.

²⁹. Corris 1980: 93.

locked outside. Johnson completely destroyed Burns in the ring. All the years of racial prejudice, persecution and denied opportunity spurred him on. During the fight Johnson continually taunted Burns, telling him he punched like a woman, and that Mrs Burns would not recognise him when he got home. 'At one point, Johnson exposed his right side and told Burns to hit him with all his might. The champion complied and Johnson didn't even wince'.³⁰ Burns was knocked down three times in the first two rounds and the pattern of the fight had been established. However, Johnson had no intention of ending it early. He was like a cat playing with a mouse. The beating Burns took was so complete that the police eventually jumped into the ring and stopped the punishment.

The news of this great – black – victory spread around the globe and rapidly through Aboriginal and Pacific Island communities where it was received with 'great delight'.³¹ A Solomon Islander who was present at the Burns-Johnson fight as a young boy later described it as 'the greatest day of my life'.³² Years later Johnson himself recounted that during the break between rounds, his eyes surveyed the crowd, and he drew strength from a black man whom he saw in the audience:

As my gaze wandered out into the surrounding territory, I saw a colored man sitting on a fence watching the fight with open mouth and bulging eyes. My glance returned to him again and again. He was one of the very few colored people present, and he became a sort of landmark for me.³³

Fears of the consequences of such identification of black Australians with Johnson's victory underlay attempts to suppress the news of Johnson's win in such places as the Solomon Islands, 'where it was felt the "natives" might take an inappropriate message from it'.³⁴ A writer in the *Bulletin* screamed, 'Johnson's behavior in the ring was objectionable, so much so that if it had happened in America, someone would have shot him dead to the cheers of the crowd and given the film as defense evidence and got a verdict of "justifiable homicide"'.³⁵ Randolph Bedford, writing for the Melbourne *Herald*, did not hold back his scorn for Johnson. 'Already the insolent black's victory causes skin troubles in Woolloomooloo,' he moaned. 'An hour after, I heard a lascar laying down the law of Queensberry to two whites, and they listened humbly. It is a bad day for Australia'.³⁶ Bedford's article incited a race debate that raged on the letters page of the Melbourne *Herald*. One writer, signed as 'Uncle Tom', commented dryly:

Reverse the conditions, which prevailed at Sydney and place a white boxer in a ring in a southern State in America, with a huge crowd of hostile blacks, it would be pardonable if he replied to their taunts as Johnson did on Saturday. If Jack Johnson's critics are not satisfied with him I might remind them that there are millions of highly cultured colored gentlemen in America and other parts of the world who possess as high an order of intelligence, and certainly more humanity than Mr. Randolph Bedford.³⁷

^{30.} Fleischer nd: 18.

^{31.} Corris 1980: 94.

^{32.} Corris 1980: 94.

^{33.} Wells 1998: 245.

^{34.} Corris 1980: 94.

^{35.} Corris 1980: 94.

^{36.} Wells 1998: 197.

Johnson returned to the United States where he knocked out Stanley Ketchel, and then the 'Great White Hope', Jim Jeffries. After the Johnson-Jeffries fight, race riots erupted in the United States. Whites reacted angrily when Jack Johnson seemed to first toy with Jeffries and then knocked him out in the fifteenth round. The violence of the race riots made world headlines.³⁸ Both the black and white population had looked forward to the match against the much vaunted Jeffries:

Johnson's notoriety while in Australia and the high degree of racial hostility associated with his fights here and in the USA meant that many people were eagerly following the fight in 1910.³⁹

A squatter on the north coast of NSW, Cunningham Henderson, later recorded his memories of the Johnson-Jeffries fight. Henderson's recollections offer a valuable insight of the differing black and white sentiments surrounding this major sporting event. Henderson recalled that he was helping his friend, Tom Yabsley, to muster cattle:

It was the day of the Johnson-Jeffries fight in America. Because of Johnson's colour the black boys took a keen interest in the fight and were discussing it. Just then a blasting shot went off in a stone quarry a few miles away, which we heard plainly. Yabsley turned quickly to Alfie and said — 'Did you hear that?' 'Yes Boss What that feller?' 'That was Jeffries hitting Johnson!' Alfie quickly cupped his hand, held it to his ear, and striking a listening attitude, said — 'No Boss, I never heard the people shout!' (meaning there was no applause) The laugh was against the boss.⁴⁰

The recall of this incident by Henderson and the sarcastic 'banter between the whites and blacks about it, all suggest that its significance ran deeply for them all'.⁴¹

The significance and impact that Jack Johnson made on the international black population around the globe cannot be underestimated, as boxing writer Jeff Wells revealed:

The fists of Jack Johnson had rattled the white world — even from the farthest outposts of the British Empire came angry reports about bumptious natives. White America now trembled for its women. White manhood had shrivelled. While a black mistress — especially in the south — was considered a passable fashion accessory for a white man it was unthinkable that white women might begin submitting to the charms of black men. Johnson had long flaunted his affairs with white women at a time when a black man could be lynched for even the slightest sexual suggestion to one. In fact, during Johnson's reign as champion 354 black men were lynched — 89 for alleged offences against white women.⁴²

Marcus Garvey, who himself would figure prominently as a rallying and inspirational figure for Aboriginal Australians, once declared 'a strong man is strong

^{37.} Wells 1998: 197.

^{38.} See, for example, 'Race Riots in America, 19 deaths, many hurt and 5,000 arrested' *The Daily Express* (London), 6 July 1910 (headline).

^{39.} Recollections of Mr C. A. Henderson, 1864-1950, Mitchell Library MSS 1863, 7-734, quoted in Goodall 1998: 70-71.

^{40.} Recollections of Mr C. A. Henderson quoted in Goodall 1998: 70-71.

^{41.} Recollections of Mr C. A. Henderson quoted in Goodall 1998: 70-71.

^{42.} Wells 1998: 228-9.

everywhere'⁴³ and Jack Johnson was such a man. He was, Garvey said, 'strong everywhere he went. He had beaten his white opponent in Australia, he had beaten them in the United States and he could beat them wherever they presented themselves. He was strong, and it did not matter where you took him, he was still strong'.⁴⁴

The aftermath of World War I: the rise of black political consciousness

There is little doubt that Aboriginal wharf labourers continued their association with international black seamen prior to, during and after World War I. During the 1903-1935 period, 335 African, African American and West Indian people entered and left Australian ports.⁴⁵ In a six-year period from 1912 to 1917, 106 of these international black visitors entered and left Sydney.⁴⁶ The acceleration of contact between Aboriginal wharf laborers in Sydney and visiting black seamen during this period of world turmoil could well have set the foundation for the launch of Aboriginal political agitation in 1924.

The end of World War I was a catalyst for great change. The Western imperial powers had been weakened and their position of expansionist superiority seriously eroded. The 'inevitability of peaceful progress under the auspices of liberal capitalism'⁴⁷ had been severely shaken. The war 'altered the course of world history in ways that strongly affected black protestors in the United States and Africa'.⁴⁸ One black speaker at a New York UNIA meeting in 1922 passionately declared:

You are asked to go and fight the Germans who had done you no wrong. You were told to give the Germans hell, while they were giving you hell over here, and while you were giving the Germans hell, they were giving your mothers, sisters and sons hell in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama and then the Negro asked 'which is better, to make the world safe for democracy, or to make his home safe for his wife and children'. That is what he asked then and what he is asking now.⁴⁹

Around the world many oppressed groups including Indigenous peoples gained in confidence and found a political voice. Many of these groups were inspired and fuelled by a surge of national and cultural pride, and their political agenda was driven under 'the banner of "self-determination"'.⁵⁰

This upsurge in international protest and demand was reflected in Australia with the rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, which drew inspiration from and mirrored many of the demands of these international black groups. A significant factor of the period, worldwide, was the move from rural environments to the cities by many black people seeking better working opportunities.⁵¹ This would be reflected in the nucleus of the 1920s Aboriginal movement — men like Fred Maynard,

^{43.} Martin 1983: 86.

^{44.} Martin 1983: 86.

^{45.} Register of departure of coloured persons from the Commonwealth, NAA A38.

^{46.} Register of departure of coloured persons from the Commonwealth, NAA A38.

^{47.} Fredrickson 1995: 137.

^{48.} Fredrickson 1995: 137.

^{49.} Federal Surveillance of Afro Americans, Index film A563.

^{50.} Fredrickson 1995: 137.

^{51.} Fredrickson 1995: 138. See also Clarke 2003: 41-52; Plater 1993: 64; Fisk 1985: 9; Johnstone 1970: 32-33.

Tom Lacey, Dick Johnson and Sid Ridgeway — who were all working and living in Sydney and not confined on incapacitating reserves. The international black political surge reflected a strong push for equal, political, economic and social rights. But significantly for the rise of Aboriginal political protest, 'focussing on them to the exclusion of cultural issues could not satisfy the need of a people who had been humiliated by white supremacy for sources of group pride and a positive sense of identity'.⁵²

Through their contacts with African American seamen on the docks and waterfront of Sydney it is likely that the Aboriginal leaders of the 1920s including Fred Maynard had acquired knowledge of the works of Frederick Douglass, Booker T Washington, WEB Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, amongst others. Therefore international black movements and ideologies would form the core of the political directives and rhetoric of the 1920s Aboriginal leadership. A number of sources illustrate that these international black writers, and many more, were both available and sought after in Australia. A letter sent to Carter G Woodson, editor of the *Journal of Negro History* (and regarded by many as the 'Father of Negro History'⁵³) demonstrates that point. The letter hints at a maritime connection: A Goldsmith, who described himself as a 'Negro Exile' sent his correspondence to Woodson from Port Melbourne in 1920. Goldsmith informed Woodson that the 'Negro papers I read out here [are] *The Crisis*, the *Brownies Book*, "*Crusader*", "*Journal of Negro History*", "*The Negro World*", the "*Emancipator*".⁵⁴ Seeking Woodson's intellectual appraisal Goldsmith wrote: 'what do you think of them'. He enclosed 9/-6d to Woodson for his subscription for the journal *Negro History*.⁵⁵ AAPA treasurer Tom Lacey's letter to Amy Jaques Garvey in 1924 substantiates the Australian interest in international black literature and newspapers. Lacey hinted at their propaganda potential: 'I would be very grateful to you if you could advise me how to get some of your American papers, *The Negro World* and other papers, so that I could distribute them among our people as it might help to enlighten them a bit'.⁵⁶

It is important to consider not just the impact of newspapers like the *Negro World* but the attempts by white authorities to stamp out their circulation. 'The *Negro World* penetrated every area where black folk lived and had regular readers as far away as Australia' says historian Tony Martin:

It was cited by colonial powers as a factor in uprisings and unrest in such diverse places as Dahomey, British Honduras, Kenya, Trinidad and Cuba. These powers therefore had no illusions concerning the appeal of its message of racial self-reliance and its anticolonialist tone to oppressed black people. During its entire existence, therefore, the paper was engaged in a running battle with the British, French, United States and other governments, all of which assiduously sought to engineer its demise, or, failing that, to restrict or prevent its circulation.⁵⁷

The rapid rise of Marcus Garvey had begun soon after his arrival in the United States from Jamaica in 1916. In less than a year, he had established the Universal Negro

⁵². Fredrickson 1995: 143.

⁵³. Low & Clift 1988: 868.

⁵⁴. Carter G Woodson Files, Reel 1 series 2 correspondence 1912-1950.

⁵⁵. Carter G Woodson Files, Reel 1 series 2 correspondence 1912-1950.

⁵⁶. *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

⁵⁷. Martin 1976: 93.

Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York.⁵⁸ Greater racial consciousness in the aftermath of World War I was instrumental in attracting thousands of African American supporters, especially in Harlem.⁵⁹

In January 1918, he [Garvey] launched the *Negro World*, a newspaper that Claude McKay, another Jamaican dubbed 'the best edited coloured weekly in New York'. In 1919 an attack on his life led to further publicity for Garvey as a persecuted martyr.⁶⁰

Garvey's organisation experienced phenomenal growth and spread rapidly across the globe. The UNIA would stir 'the entire world of Negroes to a consciousness of race pride, which never existed before'. The organisation attempted to break 'down the barriers of racial nationality among Negroes and caused American, African, West Indian, Canadian, Australian [Aborigines] and South and Central American Negroes to realise they have a common interest'.⁶¹ Garvey insisted the UNIA did not exclude anyone:

'For once we will agree with the American white man, that one drop of Negro blood makes a man a Negro.' In the UNIA '100 per cent Negroes and even 1 per cent Negroes will stand together as one mighty whole'.⁶²

Garvey and his platform 'struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of black people from an astonishing variety of social and cultural backgrounds throughout the world'.⁶³ Adding further weight to the wharf connection is the fact that Garvey was able to achieve a worldwide network of information by sending out agents to spread his message, and many 'of those who did this work for him were seamen'.⁶⁴

The Australian branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association

At the height of its power in the mid-1920s, the UNIA had successfully established chapters in 41 countries, including a branch in Australia:

The Sydney, Australia UNIA branch was undoubtedly the furthest from Harlem. It illustrated how, in those days before even the widespread use of radio, Garvey and the UNIA were nevertheless able to draw communities from practically all over the world together into a single organization with a single aim.⁶⁵

In August 1920, the UNIA held the first of a number of highly successful international conventions. Over 25,000 members gathered at Madison Square Garden in New York to hear Garvey speak. Members from UNIA branches across the globe 'attended from places as far apart as Australia, Africa and North America'.⁶⁶ Who were the Australian delegates present at that convention?

The Negro World reveals some information on the background and activities of the Sydney UNIA branch. A letter sent by the Sydney secretary Robert Usher and published in 1923 indicates the excitement and enthusiasm of the Australian group at a

58. Garvey 1970: 201.

59. Garvey 1970: 201.

60. Garvey 1970: 201.

61. Hill 1987: 327.

62. Levine 1993: 132.

63. Fredrickson 1995: 152.

64. Martin 1983: 86.

65. Martin 1983: 99.

66. Martin 1976: 42.

time that the impact of Garvey and his organisation was 'resounding throughout the length and breadth of this small continent'.⁶⁷ Despite some difficulties the branch was now up and running and money was being spent in ensuring its growth. Usher revealed that many Aboriginal people in Australia were suffering low self-esteem and confidence 'but there are some of us who are doing our best to not only keep ourselves out of the mire, but to pull our brothers out as well'. The Sydney branch was adamant that they intended to push information of Garveyism to break ignorance within Aboriginal communities and provide inspiration: 'we are doing our best to bring them in line'.⁶⁸ Usher was aware of Garvey's proposed world tour and expressed the hope he might include an Australian visit because 'we would like him to visit the Sydney Division'.⁶⁹ A United States Federal surveillance report reveals that in 1923 Garvey had taken steps to undertake a world tour which included a month in Australia. The 'various branches of the UNIA are being requested to immediately arrange for Garvey's appearance before the branches'.⁷⁰

The letter from future AAPA treasurer Tom Lacey to Amy Jaques Garvey in 1924 reveals greater detail of the makeup and operation of the Sydney branch:

Dear Madam; I do hope you will excuse me for taking the liberty of writing to you, but I am doing so *in the interests of our people*.⁷¹

Lacey's letter pledged the future support of 10,000 Aboriginal people in NSW and 60,000 Aboriginal people nationally to Garvey and his movement.⁷² He stressed to Garvey, 'we have a great deal of work in front of us to do. What I mean by that is the native aboriginals of this state, New South Wales'.⁷³ National expansion clearly lay at the forefront of the agenda. 'We have not had the time to organize the other four states yet, but I think there are about fifty or sixty thousand; that is as far as we can reach at the present time'.⁷⁴ Lacey points out that he himself had been a member of the Sydney UNIA branch since 1920 and had recently been elected as the organiser of the Sydney chapter:

I myself take a great interest in the work. Nearly all my time is taken up with it. I started in 1920, that is four years ago, and they made me organizer this year, 1924. I hope before long you will be able to send us a delegate down here to Australia, as it would mean a great help to us.⁷⁵

Despite his optimistic tone, this letter clearly revealed that the Aboriginal political fight would be hampered by the tight control exerted over many Aboriginal people confined on reserves by both missionaries and government Protection Boards:

We have a bit of trouble to see some of our people, as the missionaries have got the most of them, and we have great difficulty in reaching them. The authorities

^{67.} *The Negro World*, 5 May 1923.

^{68.} *The Negro World*, 5 May 1923.

^{69.} *The Negro World*, 5 May 1923.

^{70.} Federal Surveillance of Afro Americans, Index film A563.

^{71.} *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924 (my emphasis).

^{72.} *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

^{73.} *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

^{74.} *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

^{75.} *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

won't allow us to see them unless we can give them [the Aboriginal Board] a clear explanation of what we want them for.⁷⁶

Lacey recognised the negative long-term effect of confinement on missions and reserves for the Aboriginal population. The authorities 'have got their minds so much doped that they think they can never become a people'. Lacey and others recognised Garvey as a great leader and a source of hope:

[Garvey] has done wonderful work since he started, and we will still continue to pray for him, that he may have great success in his great work.⁷⁷

Lacey revealed that his sister was also involved with the Sydney UNIA branch and offered some evidence that Aboriginal people had taken up the initiative to inform the international black community of their plight in Australia:

My sister Mrs Hassen, is treasurer of this branch. She is also going to write to you, and send some Australian papers.⁷⁸

Only months after this correspondence, news of the establishment of the AAPA was announced in Sydney and significantly there is no further recognition of a Sydney UNIA branch from this time on. The Aboriginal leaders had likely realised that an organisation of their own would be of much greater advantage. Nevertheless they saw parallels between the ideology of Garvey's movement and their own experiences. They cleverly unpacked Garvey's ideals and remodelled it to their own experience in Australia. They built their platform around Garvey's call for pride in culture, solid economic base, and strong association to land of birth.

Media coverage: the black/white difference of opinion

The Negro World during the 1920s provided a well informed coverage of the Aboriginal situation in Australia to its international black readership. Numerous articles appeared, for example, highlighting the movement to establish a 'Model Aboriginal Black State' in northern Australia,⁷⁹ commentary on the restrictive 'White Australia' policy,⁸⁰ and the use of violence directed against the Aboriginal population. Headline banners delivered vivid imagery of the Australian Aboriginal experience: 'Race Horrors in Australia Unspeakably Vile'⁸¹ and 'Killing off the Black Australians'.⁸² The latter article explained to its uninformed readers that a great number of Aboriginal people were caged on government reserves 'and were being rapidly aided by so-called civilised man to join the extinct types'.⁸³ This was compared with the Native American experience:

It is hardly believable that the white rulers of Australia, who have taken the country by force from the blacks, as they took the North American continent from the Red Men, have dealt with the black natives in a spirit of exterminating them root and branch, and with no regard whatsoever for the humanities.⁸⁴

76. *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

77. *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

78. *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

79. *The Negro World*, 17 October 1925.

80. *The Negro World*, 29 April 1922.

81. *The Negro World*, 27 September 1924.

82. *The Negro World*, 26 September 1925.

83. *The Negro World*, 26 September 1925.

A report in the *Negro World* summarising the influence and impact of Garveyism around the globe in 1924, was titled 'Blacks of Australia enslaved and brutalised':

Everywhere the black man is beginning to do his own thinking, to demand more participation in his own government, more economic justice, and better living conditions. The Universal Negro Improvement Association during the past five years has blazed the trail for him, and he is following the trail. We do not think he will turn back. He has nothing to lose and everything to gain by pushing forward, whatever the obstacles he may encounter.⁸⁵

In contrast, there was widespread media condemnation of Garvey and his movement in the Australian press during these years. Many of the articles were both racist and alarmist in their content:

Little is known in Europe of the movement of revolt and protest, which the New York International Congress of the negro-peoples of the world represents, but it is not to be ignored. It is a part of the menace to the domination of the white races, and it is vitally connected with the ever increasing power of Japan and the movement among the Moslems. The New York Congress began with a procession of negroes, many of them in elaborate uniforms, and among the banners was one depicting a black Virgin Mary leaning over a black child. This banner was a crude summary of the movement. The white man's domination is no longer accepted as inevitable, his predominance is frankly challenged.⁸⁶

One writer in the *Bellinger and Nambucca Times* in 1925 exemplifies the levels of racist hysteria present at the time. The writer warned that the white race was in decline and decay 'not in culture or intellect, but numerically; the black race is growing swiftly, relentlessly, ruthlessly for all the rest of us, but for the whites especially. In 100 years from now the blacks may be supreme'.⁸⁷ The correspondent went on to remind the readers that in the United States and Canada:

the problem of the negro is always at their doors. They know all about Marcus Garvey. Memory is short, and it is perhaps worth while to recall who Mr Garvey is, and for what he stands ... there was a tendency to underestimate the real strength of the menace represented by the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League.⁸⁸

He pointed out that the UNIA had established factories and an all-black steamship line. The article was an attempt to inflame the passion of the ignorant. In some quarters Garvey was credited as being some sort of new 'Moses'. The writer intimated that although Garvey and his organisation were forced into collapse through the actions of the authorities, this was in all likelihood only a temporary setback. The writer revealed his own insecurity by pointing out the precarious situation and threat to the white populace of the planet:

The hard fact remains, however, that in a relatively short campaign the League had from a nucleus of some fifteen stalwarts to a membership of somewhere in the

^{84.} *The Negro World*, 26 September 1925.

^{85.} *The Negro World*, 20 September 1924.

^{86.} *The Daylight*, 30 October 1924: 797.

^{87.} *The Bellinger and Nambucca Times*, 27 February 1925.

^{88.} *The Bellinger and Nambucca Times*, 27 February 1925.

neighbourhood of 2,000,000 organised in hundreds of branches; that it won a good deal of plausible sympathy; that many short sighted Americans even saw in the negro prophet's dream of a "Back to Africa" campaign a possible solution of the immediate problems in their own continent; and that there are some 400,000,000 negroes in the world population already with a power of prolific expansion shown by no other race.⁸⁹

Another report in Adelaide's *Advertiser* confirms the fears and ignorance portrayed to the wider community of Marcus Garvey and his organisation. Garvey was described as a man who:

looks to the time when the yellow and white races will be locked in a great race war, the negroes will march over their weakened and prostrate bodies and enter into their own. The bloodiest of all wars is yet to come when Europe will match its strength against Asia and that will be the negroes opportunity to draw the sword for Africa.⁹⁰

One can only guess at the alarm that would have been raised if it had been more widely known that a UNIA branch had operated in Sydney during the early 1920s. But there was no mention of this group in the Australian newspapers or government correspondence of the time.

Coinciding with the rise of black and Indigenous political voices during the time was the mobilisation of a growing number of international white philanthropic humanitarian and Christian reformists. Largely these people and groups operated under misguided assumptions that their perceived place of privilege allowed them to make decisions on behalf of disadvantaged groups. The significance of these white humanitarians and those imbued with religious zeal cannot be played down or devalued. However, the need for recognition of international black influences upon Aboriginal political activity is clearly evidenced by the present day Australian historical misconception that the AAPA was either driven by, or at least included, white Christian or nationalistic members.⁹¹

The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association

The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) burst into Australian public awareness in 1925 with front-page media coverage of their first conference staged in Sydney.⁹² During the next four years they fought a bitter campaign against the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. The AAPA held four conferences and established 11 branches with an active membership of over 500.⁹³ When one considers that the entire Aboriginal population in New South Wales at the time was recorded as numbering less than 7000, with the great majority on restricted Aboriginal reserves with denied mobility, this was an incredible achievement.⁹⁴ The AAPA platform centred on Aboriginal rights to their own land, citizenship, stopping the government practice of removing

^{89.} *The Bellinger and Nambucca Times*, 27 February 1925.

^{90.} *The Advertiser*, 18 April 1925.

^{91.} McGregor 1997: 115; Attwood & Marcus 1999: 59; Goodall 1996: 152. See also Attwood 2003.

^{92.} *The Daily Guardian*, 7 May 1925.

^{93.} Maynard 2005: 18. This is a remarkable number, considering that the government census of the entire Aboriginal population of New South Wales was under 7,000.

Aboriginal children from their parents, and defending a distinct Aboriginal cultural identity.⁹⁵

There has been academic misinterpretation and confusion in attempts to decipher the meaning of the AAPA logo, motto and the rhetoric of the Aboriginal leaders.⁹⁶ The most prominent theories are that these arose out of Christian influence or white nationalism. Some have questioned these assumptions. Attwood and Marcus concluded that:

The AAPA's symbol had a motto 'One God, One Aim, One Destiny', but Maynard was influenced less by Christianity — although he had been raised in the church — than by his experiences as a young man as a drover and stockman throughout Australia and later as a wharfie and an active member of the Waterside Workers Union, by those of his family who had lost land when it was leased to white farmers.⁹⁷

Heather Goodall pointed out that Christian and white nationalist objectives were not reflected in the Association's agenda:

The emblem was an image of an Aboriginal man circled by the words 'Australia for Australians'. The AAPA frequently used the word 'Australian' rather than 'Aborigine'. The emblem was a thinly veiled reference to an indigenous people's assertion of nationhood.⁹⁸

Although there have been questions raised, disputing preconceived assumptions relating to the AAPA motto and logo, no one has been able to unravel completely the mystery of its origin or its meaning. The fact is that the logo, motto and much of the political rhetoric of the AAPA were incorporated from the doctrine of Marcus Garvey and his group, the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

The clarion call of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association was 'One God! One Aim! One Destiny!'⁹⁹ — the same as that of the later AAPA. In his poem 'Africa for the Africans', Garvey cried:

Europe Cries to Europeans, Ho!
Asiatics claim Asia, so
Australia for Australians
And Africa for Africans.¹⁰⁰

'Australia for Australians' was the battle cry featured on the AAPA logo. This was surely no coincidence. Garvey again included Australia in a long poem which sets out the world-wide impact of 'The tragedy of white injustice'.¹⁰¹ Garvey had originally titled this poem 'The white man's game, his Vanity Fair'. In it, Garvey ingeniously

^{94.} *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 February 1925. (The following year, Board figures published in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 10 February 1926 saw the Aboriginal population rise to 7,072 in contradiction of the theory at the time of a rapidly 'dying race').

^{95.} Maynard 2002: 33–36. See also Goodall 1988a: 186, 1988b: 6, 1990: 5; Creamer 1990: 151; Morris 1989: 171.

^{96.} McGregor 1997: 115. See also Attwood & Marcus 1999: 59.

^{97.} Attwood & Marcus 1999: 58.

^{98.} Goodall 1996: 152.

^{99.} Levine 1993: 112.

^{100.} http://africawithin.com/garvey/garvey_poetry.htm accessed 25/07/05.

^{101.} http://africawithin.com/garvey/garvey_poetry.htm accessed 25/07/05.

incorporated, and saw parallels with, the suffering experienced at the infamous market place Vanity Fair, richly described in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*:

Garvey employed the name of the town in his 1927 poem to encapsulate its theme of white oppression and decadence. Just as Bunyan's work is a kind of sacred picaresque in which evil is pitted against good, so Garvey's poem is a chronicle of the atrocities committed against native peoples by white colonizers.¹⁰²

Garvey dissected and reworked Bunyan's plot to reflect the international experience of millions of Africans, Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians in the face of savage European colonial conquest.¹⁰³ In their four years in the public spotlight, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association made continued demands through the media. There were frequent statements by Fred Maynard that the AAPA encouraged Aboriginal self-respect through spiritual, political, industrial and social ideals. Marcus Garvey had written in his manifesto 'We are organised for the absolute purpose of bettering our condition, industrially, commercially, socially, religiously and politically.'¹⁰⁴

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association had led a call for a symbolic and spiritual return to Africa and highlighted the importance of promoting a strong cultural identity. The call for a return to Africa meant nothing in Australia to the Aboriginal people, but the call for recognising cultural significance and the importance of their own homeland, struck a chord with the Aboriginal leaders. Fred Maynard's continued use of the term 'Australian people' instead of the more commonly used, 'Aboriginal' is thought-provoking. Some may well declare the name 'Australian' is just taking up another European tag. But Maynard may well have been insisting on Aboriginal association with the land and continent. The AAPA platform was all about defending traditional Aboriginal land tenure and cultural identity. Fred Maynard later declared: 'The Australian people are the original owners of the land and have a prior right over all other people in this respect'.¹⁰⁵

Maynard and Lacey had closely studied and analysed the writing of Marcus Garvey. They had then shaped and remodelled this material to their own immediate needs. The Aboriginal leaders of the AAPA were eloquent, articulate statesmen far ahead of their time. They were very aware of international events and were able to utilise that knowledge to their advantage. AAPA Treasurer Tom Lacey was described as:

not only a fluent speaker but a veritable Lincoln of phraseology. He is possibly the best-informed man in the State regarding the movement for the emancipation of the slaves in America and Cuba, and he is bringing all his native intelligence to bear on the subject.¹⁰⁶

Lacey had set himself the task of informing his people of their denied place in white society. Despite that, his message was overwhelmingly positive regarding their

^{102.} Hill 1987: xxxii.

^{103.} Hill 1987: xxxii.

^{104.} Garvey 1970: 55.

^{105.} Maynard, F 1927, NSW Premiers Department Correspondence Files A27/915.

^{106.} *The Voice of the North*, 10 October 1927.

prospects. If empowered they were capable of achieving and overcoming all manner of obstacles:

From end to end of N.S.W. the name of Lacey is known and admired. He is a keen debater and will be hailed as a modern Moses. The slogan 'No more slavery in N.S.W.' will reverberate throughout the length and breadth of the continent, and will not only have the effect of breaking the chains off the aboriginals in the prison gangs of West Australia, but will straighten out every grievance which the native people are enduring under the respective Australian Governments in general but those of New South Wales particularly.¹⁰⁷

In another appraisal, Tom Lacey was described 'as an impressive speaker [who] claims that the Aboriginals of Australia can attain to the same position as the coloured people of the United States, who have their own colleges and universities. He resents the actions of our parliamentarians whose laws place the Aboriginals in the category of children or imbeciles.'¹⁰⁸

Fred Maynard was described as an 'orator of outstanding ability, and in the not far distant future will loom large in the politics of this country for the reason that the aboriginal question is becoming a very important one'.¹⁰⁹ Self-educated on a wide variety of topics, and a voracious reader who continued to educate himself,¹¹⁰ Maynard's awareness of international — particularly black — issues and events is clearly articulated in his correspondence attacking the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. 'What a horrible conception of so-called legislation, re any civilized laws, I say deliberately stinks of the Belgian Congo', he wrote of the Board's repressive legislation.¹¹¹ His earlier association with the Coloured Progressive Association, and his other links to African American men and women linked to the Universal Negro Improvement Association led the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board to attempt to discredit and defame Maynard's Aboriginal background and character. In correspondence from the Board to Premier Jack Lang, the inference made was quite explicit: he could not possibly be Aboriginal and his representations 'should not be allowed to unduly occupy the Premier's time. Mr Maynard is a full blooded black (either American or South African) whose voluble manner and illogical views are more likely to disturb the Australian Aborigines than achieve for them improvement of conditions.'¹¹²

Knowledge of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association, despite success and widespread recognition, was rapidly lost. The material presented here provides evidence that the early Aboriginal political agenda was very much influenced by Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association had formulated its political platform based on decades of experience and

^{107.} *The Voice of the North*, 10 October 1927.

^{108.} *The Voice of the North*, 11 January 1926.

^{109.} *The Voice of the North*, 11 January 1926.

^{110.} Maynard-Kondek 1988: 175.

^{111.} Maynard, F 1927, Letter to Aboriginal girl, NSW Premiers Department Correspondence Files A27/915.

^{112.} NSW Premiers Department Correspondence Files 9/11/1927, A27/915.

knowledge of international black issues. The belief that 'whites knew best' and were 'pulling the strings' of early Aboriginal political activity continues to contaminate present-day analyses. For example, Attwood says 'the influence of white activists, especially on the political discourses that shaped debate about rights for Aborigines, was much greater than any other influence'.¹¹³ This is not meant to demean or deny the role played by white supporters in early Aboriginal political mobilisation (who did play a prominent part) but is intended to present a more balanced understanding.

The discourse that influenced the AAPA in the 1920s was black internationalism. The Aboriginal activists of the period were well informed, independent and far-sighted with their political goals. Despite the evidence and documentation to support the significant impact the AAPA made, it was erased from the Australian historical landscape in a very short space of time. As a result, Aboriginal Australians in later decades were severed from this inspirational knowledge of their history. Sadly, this process has denied Aboriginal and African American activists their deserved place of prominence in Australian historiographical memory.

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¹¹³. Attwood 2003: xiii.

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‘Invaders of a peaceful country’: Aborigines and explorers on the lower Victoria River, Northern Territory

Darrell Lewis

Introduction

The Victoria River lies in the northwest of the Northern Territory, within the tropical monsoon belt. Rising in the sand plains of the desert fringe, it winds its way through increasingly well-watered savanna grassland and range country to the tidal reaches where there are mountain ranges up to 300 metres high. Mesas and cliff-lined, flat-topped ranges of broken sandstone and limestone border much of the Victoria River catchment or cut haphazardly across the valley floor through a mosaic of basalt and limestone plains. Ecologically, it is a rich and diverse region with vast Mitchell grass plains, dry ‘desert’ areas, scrublands, wetlands, and occasional patches of rainforest. Springs, billabongs and waterholes generally are common.

For the Aborigines it was a land of plenty, with plant foods, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals in abundance. At European contact the region was the home of at least eleven separate Aboriginal language groups¹ with a total population of between 5500 and 16,500 people.² By comparison with other parts of Australia where radiocarbon dates have been obtained in archaeological excavations, the region has probably been occupied for at least 40,000 years. In contrast, European knowledge of the region spans less than 200 years.

For much of its European history the region was a backwater of the Territory, and very little ethnographic research was carried out there. There are a number of possible reasons for this. One is that the district was remote and difficult to access. Another is that the climate is harsh, with high temperatures and humidity for at least two-thirds of the year;³ and yet another is that there were no functioning Aborigines reserves, mission stations or towns to act as bases from which anthropologists could carry out

1. See northwest sheet of tribal boundaries map in Tindale 1974; map Lewis 1990: 9.

2. Birdsell (1953) suggested that a language-identified group tended to a mean of 500 persons. Based on his figures, the total population of the 11 language-identified groups in the Victoria River district would be 5500. Butlin (1983: 175) suggested that Birdsell’s estimate should be increased by a factor of more than three. On this basis the Aboriginal population of the Victoria River district would be about 16,500.

3. Lee 1969: 220–45.

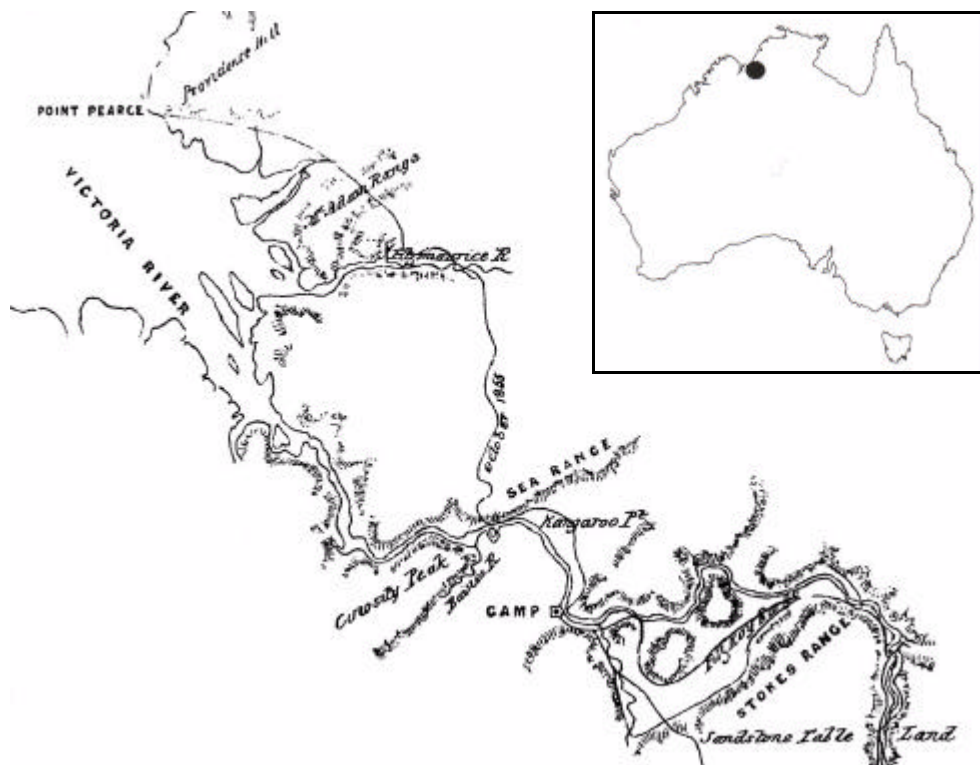


Figure 1: Location of the lower Victoria River, NT. Part of Gregory's original map of 1856 showing the depot camp and other placenames on the lower Victoria River. NBAC Map F246 Goldsbrough Mort Collection 2/859/378: Victoria River and Northern Territory Leases, Exploration by AC Gregory and party, Nov 1855-Jun 1856, nd. Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, Canberra.

research. As a result there are comparatively few records documenting local Aboriginal life in the early days of European settlement. However, some fascinating information about the Aborigines exists in the records of two exploring expeditions, and little of this information has ever been brought to the attention of researchers and others interested in the traditional life and history of Victoria River Aborigines. Presenting this information is the focus of this paper.

Two official exploring expeditions visited the lower Victoria River country in the nineteenth century – the Wickham-Stokes expedition of 1839 and Gregory's expedition of 1855–56. With respect to Aborigines, Stokes' accounts are brief but informative. Gregory's published accounts have even less to say about Aborigines, but a number of unpublished diaries and letters written by members of Gregory's expedition contain quite detailed information on both the environment and the Aboriginal inhabitants. These unpublished records provide basic descriptions of the appearance, dress and weapons of the Aborigines, and document the development of largely peaceful relations between the explorers and local people. Viewed through the lens of ethnographic studies carried out in recent times, the observations of the explorers also provide

insights into traditional Aboriginal life at the point of contact, and beyond the material realm. Combined with the published reports, they provide a kind of 'foundational document' for Aboriginal life in the Victoria River district — a baseline from which to measure the changes wrought by European settlement.

There are similar 'baselines' in other parts of Australia — far too many to summarise here. However, it is clear that relations at each place developed in their own way, according to the 'rules of engagement' on each side, the determination or otherwise of the Europeans to maintain peaceful relations, the character of the individuals involved and no doubt other factors, and a few examples will suffice to illustrate this point. At Escape Cliffs settlement, established east of Darwin in 1864, there were numerous instances of serious conflict during the two years that the settlement lasted.⁴ However, in spite of some instances of conflict, at the new settlement established three years later at Darwin Harbour only 45 kilometres from Escape Cliffs, relations remained relatively peaceful. In this case it appears that both the Europeans and Aborigines had learnt from previous experience at Escape Cliffs and were more inclined to negotiate a peaceful relationship.⁵ At Sydney Cove relations alternated between peaceful encounter and hostility before general conflict broke out,⁶ but at Albany in southern Western Australia relatively peaceful relations developed between the Aborigines and the military men who established the initial outpost, and continued as the settlement grew.⁷

While the historical record indicates that conflict was almost inevitable wherever settlers came and took over the land, if the available records are to be believed there were rare exceptions. Robert Christison, the pioneer of Lammermoor station in western Queensland, is said to have established friendly relations with local Aborigines,⁸ and there is no record of any conflict with local people on Flora Valley station, East Kimberley, stocked by the Gordon Brothers in 1887. These brothers are said to have been determined to avoid the violence that had erupted at Wave Hill, stocked four years earlier,⁹ and their intentions may have been realised. Some years after they settled there Aborigines 'accidentally' speared a Flora Valley beast on a neighbouring station, and they came to the brothers and apologised, saying that they thought it belonged to the neighbour.¹⁰ On the lower Victoria River contact between the explorers and the Aborigines was mostly peaceful, but whether this state of affairs would have continued if the Europeans had remained in the area for a longer period is impossible to know.

The Wickham-Stokes expedition: October–November 1839

Official European knowledge of the Victoria River region began in October 1839 when the expedition led by Captain John Wickham arrived there in HMS *Beagle*. Wickham's expedition explored both the Fitzmaurice River and the Victoria River by boat to the head of the tidal reaches, but Wickham himself became ill before his explorations were complete so he handed responsibility to Lieutenant John Lort Stokes, and it was Stokes

4. Wells 2003: 46–59.

5. Wells 2003: 39, 59–71, 102.

6. Clendinnen 2003.

7. Ferguson 1987.

8. Bennett 1927: 68.

9. Buchanan 1997: 134, 149.

10. Buchanan 1997: 149.

who led much of the exploration and who later wrote the only published account of the expedition.¹¹ The Wickham-Stokes expedition was only on the Victoria for a month and did not establish a land-based depot, so there was little time or opportunity for the Aborigines to become sufficiently familiar with the whites to make sustained contact. As a result, the Europeans learnt very little about local Aboriginal society, but their notes enable us to make several observations.

First, as it passed along the tidal reaches of the Victoria (between the river mouth and 10–15 kilometres above Timber Creek), expedition members saw fires they attributed to Aborigines and found two rafts near Rugged Ridge,¹² but they saw no Aborigines at all.¹³ Their apparent absence has at least two possible explanations. One is that as the white men moved up the river, news of their appearance may have been relayed to Aborigines further upstream. If this was so, the Aborigines may have hidden themselves and watched the strangers pass; while the explorers saw no Aborigines, the Aborigines almost certainly saw them.¹⁴

The other explanation concerns seasonal conditions. The expedition was on the river in October, at the end of the long winter dry season. In this region the arrival of the first storms of the wet season is highly variable. They can begin in September and be regular and frequent, but more often they begin in October or November and are infrequent. In any case, it takes a considerable time for the parched ground to become soaked and for runoff to occur, and until there has been sufficient rain to make the river flow the water in the tidal reach is too salty to drink. There are now very few freshwater billabongs or springs along the tidal section of the river and at the end of the dry season most of these are dry.¹⁵ If this was the case before the impact of cattle, most of the Aborigines who might otherwise have lived along the riverbanks were likely to be concentrated at water sources well out on the surrounding plains, in nearby ranges, or along the river above the tidal zone. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that when Stokes led a foot party above the tidal reaches he quickly found evidence for an Aboriginal population so large that he began to worry about the possibility of attack.

From the head of the tidal reach Stokes' party walked upstream for six days, to a point close to the location of the present-day Coolibah homestead. Along the way they discovered an abandoned village of 13 paperbark huts,¹⁶ old campfires with the remains of turtles, mussels and crocodiles, and burnt-off areas. Then they began to see the Aborigines themselves. First they saw two children who fled into 'tall reeds', and shortly afterwards they saw 'three women carrying bundles of bark at their backs ... They were quite naked, with the exception of a slight covering of bark around their waists.' When the women saw them they called out and were answered by what

11. Stokes 1969 vol 2.

12. Rugged Ridge is located on the west bank of the Victoria River at co-ordinates 890 090 on the Victoria River 1:100,000 map, sheet 4867.

13. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 40–63.

14. Similar reactions to the appearance of Europeans were documented throughout Australia. See Mulvaney 1989: chapter 1; Reynolds 1981: chapter 1.

15. These observations are my own, based on 35 years experience of the area.

16. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 69.

sounded like a large party nearby, which caused the explorers to hurriedly move on.¹⁷ Later that day they saw a party of natives cross the Victoria and head downstream.¹⁸

There can be little doubt that on this section of the river, at least, the Aborigines quickly discovered the white intruders and kept them under observation, and eventually some decided to make contact. When Stokes' party was resting on the riverbank in the vicinity of 8 Mile Yard on present-day Coolibah station, they heard 'the shrill voices of an evidently large body of natives'.¹⁹ The explorers prepared themselves for attack, but instead they experienced a peaceful encounter:

Two natives, accompanied by a large cream-coloured dog that howled mournfully, came down suddenly, shouting "Ho! ho!" upon the opposite bank, as though more clearly to reconnoitre our position. They were fine looking men, with bushy hair and spare limbs, quite naked, and apparently unarmed — a usual indication among the aborigines of Australia that their intentions are peaceful. They amused themselves for a time by making all sorts of gestures, shouting still "ho! ho!" to those of their body in concealment ... I was of course very glad that no appeal to force was necessary ... against those to whom we appeared in the character of invaders of a peaceful country.²⁰

This was the closest contact with Victoria River Aborigines experienced by anyone on the Wickham-Stokes expedition. After unsuccessfully trying to communicate the Aborigines eventually withdrew, leaving Stokes to remark that

the condition and appearance of the two who made themselves visible, indicated their residence in a country fitted to supply abundantly all natural wants ... I could not help comparing the bold, fearless manner in which they came towards us — their fine manly bearing, head erect, no crouching or quailing of eye — with the miserable objects I had seen at Sydney. I now beheld man in his wild state; and reader, rest assured there is nothing can equal such a sight. Before me stood two of the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia who had never, until then, encountered the hitherto blighting look of an European.²¹

When the explorers finally returned to their boats they learned that some expedition men hunting on a hillside had seen a large party of Aborigines 'crawling along the ground with evident caution'²² towards a watering party. Stokes assumed that the Aborigines were 'intending if possible to surprise them', but it is at least as likely to be an example of the Aborigines keeping out of sight and cautiously sneaking up to satisfy their curiosity about the strange white men.

Even though his explorations did not extend beyond the lower Victoria River, Stokes painted a glowing picture of the region and his report was an encouragement to further exploration. Before leaving the Victoria he expressed the desire that, 'ere the sand of my life-glass has run out ... smoke may rise from Christian hearths where now alone the prowling heathen lights his fire'.²³ Stokes died on 11 June 1885,²⁴ just two

17. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 72.

18. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 74.

19. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 78.

20. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 79.

21. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 80.

22. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 89.

23. Stokes 1969 vol 2: 46.

years after the first (at least nominally) Christian hearths appeared on the Victoria. The irony is that today there may well be more Aboriginal Christians in the district than there are European Christians, and over the years many of the local whites could easily have qualified as 'prowling heathens'.

The Gregory expedition: October 1855 to July 1856

For sixteen years after Stokes left, the Aborigines were left in peace. Then in 1855 an expedition led by Augustus Gregory was sent to explore the upper Victoria River and to determine whether it might in fact be a 'highway' into the interior of Australia, perhaps even to the fabled inland sea.²⁵ Due to an accident on board the ship carrying the expedition horses, and because a landing place could not be found as far up the Victoria River as Blunder Bay, the horses had to be landed near Port Keats. From there a small party led by Gregory travelled overland, through the broken country of the Fitzmaurice River valley and across to the Victoria River,²⁶ while the other expedition members continued on to the Victoria in the expedition ship *Tom Tough*, with the intention of setting up a base camp from which inland expedition could take place.²⁷

A depot camp was soon established at a point about 10 kilometres below Timber Creek and from there Gregory made a number of forays into the interior, far beyond the point reached by Stokes, eventually travelling right up to the watershed and beyond, down the inland-flowing Sturt Creek to where it ends in a huge salt lake.²⁸ When Gregory eventually returned to the main base camp the expedition broke up, and Gregory started off with a group on horseback to travel 3200 kilometres across northern Australia and down to Moreton Bay (Brisbane).²⁹ The remaining expeditioners boarded the *Tom Tough* and left to obtain provisions at Kopang and then to sail to the Albert River in the Gulf of Carpentaria for a rendezvous with the overland party.³⁰

Expedition records

Within a few years of the end of Gregory's expedition a number of expedition members published papers relevant to their own expertise and experience, but the only detailed published accounts of the expedition are the reports by Gregory.³¹ These provide relatively short day-by-day descriptions of events and through reading these alone it would be easy to imagine that the expedition had minimal contact with Aborigines. However, the men in charge of the depot camp while Gregory was away kept an official camp journal, and some kept personal diaries and wrote letters to friends and family in England, some of which have been preserved in archives.³² They document a number of significant encounters between the explorers and the Aborigines, and reveal a poignant 'what might have been' in view of later race relations in the region. In combination with Gregory's journal and the published papers, they provide an insight

24. Hordern 1990.

25. Cumpston 1972: 110; Wickham, 'Description of the River Victoria on the N.W. coast of New Holland', p 41. Mitchell Library A308 (microfilm copy at CY 2627, frames 91-117).

26. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 102-7.

27. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 102.

28. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 138.

29. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 152-4.

30. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 154.

31. Gregory 1857, 1858, 1884 [1981].

into many aspects of Aboriginal society at the time – people's physical appearance, their material culture, social relations and land use – and their varied reactions to the Europeans. They also suggest a greater awareness of Europeans than might otherwise have been expected.

Gregory's personal experience of Victoria River Aborigines was similar to that of members of the Wickham-Stokes expedition. His journal records that during his inland forays he often saw signs of Aborigines and occasionally heard them calling, but he had only a few fleeting glimpses of the people themselves.³³ Understandably, his journal is primarily concerned with what he experienced himself, and although the depot was permanently manned for nine months, Gregory himself spent only half that time there. As a result, his journal provides scant detail about the experiences of the men who stayed there while he was away. For example, on his return from his second excursion inland Gregory recorded that during his absence, 'The natives have been frequently at the camp in small parties, and on these occasions were very quiet in their demeanour'. He was also told that Aborigines met by small detached parties of men away from the base camp had made 'hostile demonstrations', and on one occasion had to be fired on, with one man being slightly wounded.³⁴ Gregory's brief and dry journal entries gloss over these events; far more occurred between the Aborigines and the men stationed at the depot camp than either Gregory's journal or later books about his expedition would suggest. Furthermore, not all encounters away from the base camp were hostile.

Discovering each other

When the expedition ship *Tom Tough* moved up the Victoria River, no Aborigines were seen along the 140 kilometres of tidal reach. Like the Wickham-Stokes expedition before them, Gregory's men moved up the river in October. Once again, the Aborigines are likely to have been elsewhere and any who remained probably hid themselves. One distant bushfire was seen, and in a remarkable coincidence with the experience of Wickham and Stokes, near Rugged Ridge Gregory's men discovered 'floats' made from a very light mangrove wood.³⁵ A sketch of these floats made by Thomas Baines shows several bound together, and stakes protruding from the trunks, probably placed there to hold spears and other belongings in place.³⁶

Initial contacts were either cautious and low key, or unfriendly. The first 'cheek by jowl' encounter occurred on 16 November when Gregory was leading a party on a short

³². JR Elsey National Library of Australia Ms 25; JS Wilson and JR Elsey, *Journal kept at the main camp, ... 1856*, entry for January 5 1856, Mitchell Library ZC 411-1; JS Wilson, *Journal...*, entry for January 31 1856, Mitchell Library ZC 411-2; letter from JR Elsey to his 'beloved parents', nd, written over an extended period at Victoria River Depot, NLA Ms 25/5; letter from JR Elsey to 'Dear John' 1856, NLA Ms 25/4.

³³. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 126, 132, 134, 140-1, 147, 149-50.

³⁴. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 150-1.

³⁵. JS Wilson (1858: 152) mentions the use of 'rafts'. A sketch of these 'rafts' by Thomas Baines is dated 27 September 1855. (A copy of this drawing is held at the NLA in the Thomas Baines collection.) This indicates that they were discovered during a reconnaissance to Blunder Bay in search of a landing place for the horses, which were still on board the expedition's second ship, the *Monarch*, near Point Pearce (Gregory 1884 [1981]: 102).

³⁶. Thomas Baines collection, NLA.

reconnaissance to the freshwater reaches of the river. At Palm Island, eight kilometres above the mouth of Timber Creek,

A native approached the bank of the river and came to us, and a parley commenced which was rather unintelligible, and when he found that he could not make himself understood by words, resorted to the language of signs, and expressed his contempt of us in an unmistakable manner.³⁷

During the following week or so, Aborigines twice visited a party cutting trees at Timber Creek. While these visits were described as 'neither decidedly friendly or hostile', the Aborigines pilfered some items 'imprudently left lying near one of the logs' and later 'set fire to the grass about 200 yards from the camp, and then retired'.³⁸ In December two men looking for strayed horses about 25 kilometres to the west thought themselves threatened by a large group of Aborigines; they scattered them by charging them on horseback.³⁹

Gregory set out on his second and major excursion inland on 2 January 1856. Two days later two crewmen from the *Tom Tough* were hunting across the river from the depot when four Aborigines appeared. One of the hunters was already on his way back across the river with a kangaroo he had shot, so Captain Gourlay went over to pick up the other crewman, and Wilson recorded in the camp journal that:

During the time he was ashore the Capt'n had a parley with the Natives and observed that they spoke a few words of English. One asked for tobacco and seemed to understand its use perfectly when a small piece was given him — he said tomorrow in a manner that the Captain understood to mean, that they would come tomorrow. Mosquitos being exceedingly troublesome to him he would strike the place where they stung him with his hand and say, no good, no good.⁴⁰

In spite of the friendly nature of this meeting, Wilson was afraid of problems arising if similar incidents occurred, so he gave orders that no hunting was to be done on the opposite side of the river as long as Aborigines were in the area.⁴¹ The same Aborigines appeared at the same place the next day but were ignored. They came again the next day, and the next, and were ignored each time.⁴² In the meantime work was begun on digging a defensive ditch around the depot camp to give it a degree of protection against possible attack, and to serve as a boundary line inside which Aborigines were not to be allowed.⁴³

Wilson was perplexed at the apparent use by the Aborigine of the English words 'no good', 'tomorrow', and 'tobac' and his apparent knowledge of the use of tobacco, and he speculated that when the British settlement at Port Essington existed (1838–49)⁴⁴ Aborigines living in the area might have learnt 'a considerable number of English

37. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 112.

38. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 112–13.

39. Gregory 1884 [1981]: 118. The men were Thomas Baines and R Bowman. Baines later recreated this encounter in an oil painting, a copy of which is reproduced in Braddon 1986: 37.

40. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 3 January 1856.

41. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 5 January 1856.

42. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 5 January 1856.

43. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 7 January 1856.

44. Spillett 1972.

words' and transmitted them to the neighbouring tribes. He noted that the man who appeared to use English words was older than his companions, and might have learnt the words he used (and gained a knowledge of tobacco) when he was living with Aborigines much further to the north.⁴⁵

Wilson's speculations that English words and knowledge of tobacco may have been passed from tribe to tribe from the old Port Essington settlement were quite possibly correct. In fact, there is no reason to deny the possibility and good reason to assume it was the case. It is now well-known that Aborigines throughout Australia were connected to each other via trade and information networks.⁴⁶ Explorers elsewhere in Australia were often surprised to meet Aborigines far beyond the frontier who possessed European goods and even some words of English such as 'white fellow' and 'majkat' (or similar variations) for musket.⁴⁷ George Windsor Earl, the official linguist and draughtsman at Port Essington,⁴⁸ noted that information passed rapidly from tribe to tribe, so that 'an event of any importance is known over a large extent of country in the course of a very few months'. He also noted with surprise that Aborigines visiting from further inland spoke of 'white people who dwelt in the country to the south, and who built houses of stone', and he assumed that this must refer to houses in the infant settlement of Adelaide, over 3000 kilometres away.⁴⁹

Similarly, when explorer Ludwig Leichhardt first entered the plains of the South Alligator River in November 1845, he met Aborigines who repeatedly said the words 'perikot' and 'nokot'. Because of their accent, at the time Leichhardt did not recognise what the Aborigines were saying, but later he realised the words were 'very good' and 'no good'.⁵⁰ This was about 200 kilometres from Port Essington, and apparently these words were used so often by the whites there, and with such emphasis, that they made a impact on the Aborigines who heard them and were passed along from tribe to tribe to this place. It is of interest to note that among the Larrakia Aborigines in the Darwin area, 'perikot' is the term they now use for 'white man'.⁵¹

Months after the first encounter with the supposedly English-speaking Aborigine, expedition surgeon and zoologist Joseph Elsey had an opportunity to converse with him (see below) and as a result he rejected the claim that any local Aborigines knew words of English, although he admitted that several words sounded like 'tobac' and 'no good'.⁵² Given that Leichhardt had not recognized the words 'very good' and 'no good' after more than four years experience of listening to Aboriginal English, it is quite possible that the Victoria River Aborigines were attempting to speak English and that Elsey was not experienced enough to understand what he was hearing. In addition, the facts remain, first, that upon (apparently) asking for 'tobac' and being given a piece, the Aboriginal man 'seemed to understand its use perfectly' — the implication being that

45. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 4 January 1856.

46. Peterson 1976: 50–94; Reynolds 1981: 1–24.

47. Reynolds 1981: 1–24.

48. Reece 1990: 87–9.

49. George Windsor Earl, cited in Reynolds 1981: 10.

50. Leichhardt 1847: 495; see Harris 1985: 148–69.

51. Personal communication, Deborah Rose, January 2005, who worked on the Cox Peninsula land claim in which Larrakia people were claimants.

52. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 2 March 1856.

he began chewing it — and second, that he apparently said ‘tomorrow’ and did indeed come back the next day.

Apart from the discovery of some footprints near the depot camp on 18 January,⁵³ the Aborigines seem to disappear from the depot area for six weeks, but down river below the Angalarri Creek junction there were remarkable encounters on 31 January, 1 February and 3 February. On 31 January Wilson, Captain Gourlay and some sailors set off by boat from the depot camp to look for a suitable place to careen the *Tom Tough* so that repairs could be carried out. Darkness had fallen as they neared the Sea (now Yambarran) Range when they noticed some Aboriginal campfires. Some of Wilson’s men ‘cooeed’ but got no answer, so Wilson ordered a gun to be fired. Upon hearing the gunshot one might have expected the Aborigines to flee, but instead they began calling to the Europeans and one came towards them with a firestick. This suggests that they had become familiar with the sound and use of firearms, probably while watching the Europeans from hiding. The two groups kept calling to one another as the boat passed, but no contact was made and shortly afterwards the Europeans camped for the night.⁵⁴

The next day saw the most extraordinary encounter of the entire expedition. A few minutes after Wilson and his men resumed their journey downstream they were again hailed by Aborigines. Wilson directed his men to keep going and the Aborigines followed them by running along the riverbank. Eventually his party pulled up on the opposite bank for breakfast, and the Aborigines who had followed them gathered to watch.⁵⁵

As the explorers landed they shot at a flock of cockatoos feeding on wild melons growing there and ‘as they rose and were flying overhead one of the men fired up amongst them’. A cockatoo fell from the sky and Aborigines watching from across the river, ‘simultaneously gave a yell of mixed admiration and astonishment’.⁵⁶ Some of Wilson’s men went into the nearby bush to try and shoot more game but they soon hurried back, saying they had been hailed by what seemed to be another large group of Aborigines. A conversation ensued between the Aborigines on both sides of the river, and as a result,

Nine of those on the off side marched into the water until out of their depth, then swam to a sandbank in the middle across which they marched in the same regular order and again swam toward the bank carrying their spears above water in the left hand. As they approached the bank (about 200 yards below where our boat was moored), an elderly native swam out to meet them bearing in his hand a green bough. The green bough, the well known emblem of peace.⁵⁷

In Aboriginal society, generally, old men and old women are the leaders in ritual events.⁵⁸ The fact that the group crossing the river was met by an old man carrying a green bough clearly indicates that the Aborigines on each side of the river were from different social groups and coming together for peaceful purposes, most probably a rit-

⁵³. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 18 January 1856.

⁵⁴. Wilson 1856, entry for 31 January 1856.

⁵⁵. Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

⁵⁶. Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

⁵⁷. Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

⁵⁸. Palmer 1994: 943–5.

ual gathering. Of course, Wilson had no way of knowing this. He and his men feared an attack so they loaded their muskets and then 'stood on the high bank and expressed in high terms their admiration of the novel scene ... The place added materially to the effect. The broad river, the repulsive red cliffs of Sea Range, the picturesque Dome⁵⁹ in the back ground.'⁶⁰

The two groups of Aborigines came together some distance away and then came, unarmed, towards the Europeans. All of them were young men except for one 'rather elderly man' with 'an abundant beard'⁶¹ who came on about 30 yards in advance of the others. Still fearing an attack, Wilson's party made signs for them to stop. The elderly man in the lead apparently understood these signs and ordered his countrymen to keep back. He then 'trampled down the long grass round where he stood to show that he had no concealed weapon', and pointed to a running sore on his back. Wilson's men were still fearful and wanted to drive the Aborigines away, but Wilson ordered them to hold their fire, making the rather droll remark that the Aborigines 'came rather to have their wounds healed than to have others added'. He and his men then went up to the injured man.

The expedition surgeon was not with Wilson's party and they had no medicines, so after some discussion they improvised a treatment. First, one of the men prepared a quid of tobacco. Then, believing he needed to convince the Aborigines that powerful magic was involved, he

Muttered a lot of gibberish performed a number of gymnastic movements, which ended (muttering all the time) by taking off his hat looking at the sun, first over his right shoulder then over his left and dashing his hat with violence to the ground proceeded to apply the solaceing [sic] weed.⁶²

The quid of tobacco was then bound in place with a strip torn from the man's shirt. The puzzle is, what made the injured man think that these strange intruders could help with his wound? Although nothing can be said with certainty, it may be that along with English words and knowledge of tobacco, word had come that the Europeans at Port Essington were good at healing wounds and curing sickness.

While this 'treatment' was in progress the crewmen had approached the other Aborigines and 'an amicable understanding established'. Wilson thought that the friendliness of the Aborigines was probably due to the 'peaceful and distant disposition' the expedition members had maintained since they had arrived, and because the Aborigines 'had evidence of, and felt our superiority'.⁶³

According to Wilson, the Aborigines indicated that they knew of the expedition's depot camp and seemed anxious to make a visit. He also believed that they invited him to a corroboree at their camp that night (and he was almost certainly correct), but he

^{59.} The 'Dome' is a conical hill on the east bank of the Victoria River at the very end of the Yambarran Range' (Millik Monmir 1:100,000 map, sheet 4967, co-ordinates 284 981).

^{60.} Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

^{61.} The scene described here occurred on 1 February but the reference to the elderly man having an abundant beard is in the entry for the following day (Wilson 1856, entry for 2 February 1856).

^{62.} Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

^{63.} Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

declined. He and his men then finished their breakfast, gave the Aborigines a few small gifts, and continued on downstream. The Aborigines followed them along the bank for a distance but were eventually left behind. Then, as Wilson's party was passing the Dome, a large group of women, children and old men watched them from the hillside and called out to them, but once again the Europeans continued on.⁶⁴ In the Victoria River district today many rituals are fully or partly gender-specific and it is likely that these people were keeping out of sight of a male-only ritual about to take place.⁶⁵

On their return upstream two days later Wilson and his men camped near where they had met the large group, and they had another peaceful encounter. This time there were only six men, four that they had seen before and two others who were very young and who 'stood aloof.' Wilson noted that the four older men 'seem to have their teeth ground down to an even Surface' and that

They may be considered to be about the Middle Stature, but are so very slender that they appear taller when at a little distance. They have generally very thin beards, yet they seem to value and admire that gift of Nature. One (who seemed the most intelijent) [sic] had enough on his chin to allow of its being drawn together and tied had the tip of a Kangaroo's tail added to it to increase its length ... They practice the rite of Circumcision but whether it be with them a religious rite remains to be learned. They wear no clothing with the exception of a belt made of bark and bound round the body with about a dozen plies of chord [sic].⁶⁶

Unlike the older men, the two young men who 'stood aloof' had their two front teeth knocked out and Wilson was 'given to understand by the others that they belonged to another tribe up the River'.⁶⁷ Later on at the depot other Aborigines were seen with their front teeth missing (see below) so it is unlikely the two young men in this group were missing their teeth through accident or fighting. Tooth avulsion as part of initiation rituals was once a widespread practice in Australia.⁶⁸ In the Victoria River district today there are several different rituals through which boys are made into young men. These are Pantimi, Wanga, and Yalaju,⁶⁹ but none of them involve tooth avulsion. However, the fact that some men seen by expedition members had all their teeth and others had the two upper front teeth missing suggests that tooth avulsion was practiced in the past by some and that, like today, there were variations in initiation rites. It is highly likely that the young men with their teeth knocked out were undergoing 'young men's' initiation – the initiation of boys into the first stage of manhood. In the Victoria River district this is a prolonged process during which the neophytes are largely removed from society, placed under the strict control of initiated men, and taken on trips into the territory of neighbouring groups.⁷⁰ Young men undergoing this stage of initiation are quite constrained in their social interactions and can appear

^{64.} Wilson 1856, entry for 1 February 1856.

^{65.} Rose 1992: 28.

^{66.} Wilson 1856, entry for 3 February 1856.

^{67.} Wilson 1856, entry for 3 February 1856.

^{68.} Horton 1994: 1086; the practice was reported at Port Essington in 1843 (H Melville, cited in Mulvaney 1989: 70).

^{69.} Rose 1992: 55.

^{70.} Rose 1992: 145–9; MJ Meggitt (1974: 36, 46, 233, 285) reports a similar 'grand tour' of initiates in Walbiri country, immediately south of the Victoria River.

'aloof' when spoken to by strangers or by inappropriate people. Whether the ceremony about to take place was a 'young man's initiation' or a ritual focusing on an older age-group is unclear. In historical times in Walbiri country, immediately south of the Victoria River district, neophytes were allowed to view the rituals involving older men.⁷¹

Wilson's description of the Aborigines does not mention body scarring, but this feature is remarked upon later by Elsey.⁷² In the Victoria River district and elsewhere in historical times, scarring of the chest and arms of men signified that they had gone through the major initiation rites (known as Gadjari or 'Big Sunday' in the Top End of the Northern Territory) and achieved full manhood. It is likely that the scarring noted by Elsey also signified the attainment of full manhood by Aboriginal men. The practice continued well into historical times, and although these ceremonies are still held in the Victoria River region, body scarring appears to have ceased within the last few decades.

To return to the meeting between Wilson's party and the six Aborigines, the men in this group were fascinated with the physical appearance of the Europeans and in a manner strangely reminiscent of late 19th and early 20th century anthropological studies of Aborigines,⁷³ they examined them 'with extreme minuteness'. They noted that not all of the whites had hair of the same colour and were astonished at their 'superior muscular proportions which they observed with admiration'. One man opened Wilson's shirt and examined his chest 'with the minuteness that a Military Doctor might be supposed to do that of a young recruit'. Possibly he was looking for chest scars as evidence that he was dealing with a fully initiated man. Then he compared each part of Wilson's arm with the same parts of his own. He noted that Wilson's hand was not as large as his own and called to one of his friends to come and look at the difference. While the second man was holding Wilson's hand in his own, Wilson grasped it as hard as he could, causing the man to wince and sing out. According to Wilson all the Aborigines laughed and the butt of his joke 'seemed both pleased and astonished while he rubbed his hand and described his sensations to his brethren'.⁷⁴

The men with Wilson then began to barter with the Aborigines and exchanged a blanket and a red woollen shirt for two spears. They were keen to obtain a stone tomahawk but Wilson noticed that the Aborigines seemed to value these very highly, and in a perceptive and considerate insight he admonished his men to only trade something which would be of equal service to the Aborigines. The Aborigines had two stone hatchets, 'one ... made from a fragment of trap, the other of Syenite'. Wilson was intrigued by the axe of syenite⁷⁵ because he had examined the 'drift of the Victoria' but never seen this type of stone, and he remarked that he 'could obtain no information from the natives relative to the locality in which it had been obtained. My impression was that it originally belonged to some tribe up the Adelaide and had passed from them through the intermediate tribes.'⁷⁶ In a general sense Wilson's surmise was proba-

71. Meggitt 1974: 234.

72. Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 2 March 1856.

73. For example, see Stirling 1966; Campbell and Lewis 1926; Fenner 1936: 46–54.

74. Wilson 1856, entry for 2 February 1856.

75. According to the *Macquarie Dictionary* (Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1981: 1770), syenite is 'a granular igneous rock consisting typically of felspar (orthoclase) and hornblende.'

bly on target. It is, of course, well known that artefacts and other items were and are traded from tribe to tribe,⁷⁷ but whether this particular hatchet came from the Adelaide River area cannot be determined. Eventually the Europeans and Aborigines parted 'in the most amicable manner' and the Aborigines followed the boat for some distance before dropping out of sight.⁷⁸

The next encounter occurred at the depot camp over a month later. On 2 March Elsey was in a gully above the camp when he was alarmed to see three Aborigines approaching. He rushed back to camp to wait for them at the embankment, and described how

they came forward boldly, and the eldest of them walked directly up to me & jumping the ditch, stood by my side. I immediately intimated that he must recross the ditch whereon he jumped back laid down his spears & woomera & jumped back again, but it was not till I pushed him over that he seemed to understand that neither he nor his weapons were to cross the ditch. They were very cheerful & communicative, but had no Knowledge of English, though several words sounded very much like "tobac" "no good" &c.⁷⁹

According to Elsey these Aborigines

were all in very fair condition had the two upper front teeth knocked out & wore a tassel in front fastened round the loins. The two youngest had the hair fastened with a white band, that of the eldest was loose in front, close shaven behind. They had a centre tuft of their beard twisted up with the tip of a kangaroo tail, or matted together with gum. They were also freely but irregularly marked with long scars across the breast & over the shoulder joint ... They each carried long spears, a woomera, & two of them a bundle of sticks for making fire by friction, rubbing one into a hole in another; also a roll of dry tea tree bark for tinder.⁸⁰

After a time Elsey went to his hut to get the Aborigines some old clothes and when he returned he found the oldest of them back inside the ditch again. Elsey got him outside the ditch once more, and somehow made it clear that he must stay out. He then 'gave him an old merino waistcoat, the second an old pair of drawers & the third a finely made handsome youth, an old silk handkerchief to tie round his head'. After about an hour they left and 'promised to renew their visit'.⁸¹

While Elsey was dealing with these Aborigines, Wilson and his party were in a boat on their way back to the depot. On the morning of 2 March his men were trying to shoot some cockatoos in the trees a short distance below the mouth of Timber Creek when they came upon a large group of Aborigines. Some had climbed high into trees to watch their approach while others were on a high rocky bank that jutted out into the river.⁸² They called out and invited the whites to land, 'but not liking appearances about them' Wilson directed the boat to move further towards midstream. As they

^{76.} Wilson 1856, entry for 2 February 1856.

^{77.} Mulvaney 1976: 72-94.

^{78.} Wilson 1856, entry for 3 February 1856.

^{79.} Wilson 1856, entry for 3 February 1856.

^{80.} Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 2 March 1856.

^{81.} Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 2 March 1856.

^{82.} Wilson 1856, entry for 3 March 1856.

passed the Aborigines the boatmen noticed three of them standing hidden in the shade of a bush with their spears fixed in their woomeras. At the command of an old man, one of the three men ran as close as he could and prepared to throw his spear at them. A shot was fired in his direction and his arm dropped 'as though it had been shot down.' In fright he ran back to his friends and then a gun loaded with shot and ball was fired at the Aborigines. The whites saw the ball hit the rocks and miss the Aborigines, but some of the shot may have hit them 'as several of them jumped as though they had been struck unexpectedly, and they all scampered off across the rocks yelling like so many frightened imps'. Wilson did not believe that any of the Aborigines had been seriously injured, but he thought it would be 'a sufficient warning to them' not to try and throw spears at the white men again.⁸³

Clearly this spear-throwing incident was not an all-out attack because if real aggression had been involved most of the men present would have thrown their spears and other weapons. Instead, it appears to have been an example of Aboriginal 'testing' of a new situation or group, as described by anthropologist Deborah Rose.⁸⁴ Throwing a few spears enabled the Aborigines to discover in what manner and how well the white men were able to defend themselves, and consequently, whether they should be friendly or aggressive. It is fortunate for the explorers that none of the Aborigines was seriously injured or killed, or subsequent events may have been quite different.

In a note at the end of this journal entry Wilson described how, soon after his return, Elsey made a trip upstream to Reach Hopeless (about 12 kilometres above Timber Creek). As he began his return, he found himself cut off when Aborigines appeared on both banks.⁸⁵ Luckily they proved friendly. Some were the men that Elsey had seen at the depot camp a few days earlier and several others were in the group that Wilson's men had fired upon the previous day.⁸⁶ According to Wilson, these men

seemed anxious to explain [to Elsey] some affair which he supposed to be their meeting with us, and one of them a young fellow showed him two small fresh scars on his arm from bird shot wounds, [and] he patted the gun in a conciliatory manner. Since then he has been met with several times and has been to the camp, but always with expressions of good feeling.⁸⁷

From this time it is clear that relations between the Europeans and the Aborigines improved rapidly. On 28 March Elsey recorded that 'In the afternoon the natives again appeared on the opposite side of the river & were soon recognised as our acquaintances up the river by their calling out "bit of sugar" &c'.⁸⁸ The Aborigines appeared across the river again on the following two days, and on both occasions Elsey and others went over to them. On the first occasion Elsey wrote that the Aborigines 'were without arms, very friendly & merry & one of them at last understood my endeavours to catch some

⁸³. Wilson 1856, entry for 3 March 1856.

⁸⁴. Rose 1992: 145–9, 165–85.

⁸⁵. Wilson 1856, note at the end of the entry that begins 3 March 1856; Elsey's encounter with these Aborigines occurred on 11 March.

⁸⁶. Wilson 1856.

⁸⁷. Wilson 1856.

⁸⁸. Wilson and Elsey, entry for March 28 1856. Note: It is not explicitly stated that this and the entries for the following two days were written by Elsey rather than Wilson, but Wilson appears to have had a much less trusting attitude towards Aborigines than did Elsey.

of their words & gave us a number by which we were enabled to ask for a stone tomahawk, which they promised to bring the next day'.⁸⁹

The Aborigines returned the next day, bringing with them two stone tomahawks, and Elsey added to his word list, recording twenty words of the local language, 'most of them signifying parts of the body'.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, these word lists are not to be found in any of the surviving records from the expedition.

While the Aborigines were in the area across the river they fired the grass which burnt well, and this prompted Elsey to remark that, 'since Thursday 27th March there has been a brown fog all round the horizon ... This and other fires on both were probably the cause of this dry fog which rendered the air very close & hot'.⁹¹ During the next six weeks, at least, fires or smoke was seen in all directions;⁹² clearly the wet season had ended and the burning of country typical of Aboriginal land management across much of Australia had begun.⁹³

Aborigines came to the depot camp again on 13 April and Elsey later wrote in the Camp Journal that

At dinner time two of our black friends, Deana & Dearbigen made their appearance, and begged some clothes for their gins. I gave one a cotton waistcoat, the other a pair of drawers. They gave me a few additional words of their vocabulary, and were greatly astonished at the sketches in Stokes' works, especially of their own drawings⁹⁴, to most of which they gave names.⁹⁵

Additional details of this meeting were given by Elsey in a letter he wrote to 'Dear John' that same day. Curiously, the names he gave for the two Aborigines are different, but there can be no doubt that they are the same men:

I was roused from my solitary dinner of preserved beef & rice ... by the cry "Doctor, there are natives coming to the camp," so I was obliged to jump up, take down my rifle, and gird on my revolver and march out to meet them. They proved to be two old friends, Drand & Deartijero, with whom I had become very intimate during a voyage up the river. When I had satisfied their modest desires, frightened them with a looking glass, astounded them with a telescope, and presented one with an old merino waistcoat & the other with a pair of cotton drawers cut off at the knee, both being singularly suitable garments for bush wear.⁹⁶

Through both the journal entry and the letter, Deana and Dearbigen (or Drand and Deartijero) become the first Aborigines in the Victoria River district to appear as individuals in the historical record, and this highlights the familiarity that was develop-

^{89.} Wilson and Elsey, entry for 29 March 1856.

^{90.} Wilson and Elsey, entry for 30 March 1856.

^{91.} Wilson and Elsey, entry for 30 March 1856.

^{92.} Wilson and Elsey, entries for 20 and 22 April, and 6 and 9 May.

^{93.} Horton 1994: 365-6.

^{94.} On page 170 of volume two of Stokes (1969) there are illustrations of Aboriginal rock engravings from Depuch Island, Western Australia. Presumably these are the pictures shown to the Aborigines.

^{95.} Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 13 April 1856.

^{96.} Letter from J Elsey to 'Dear John', 13 April 1856, NLA Ms 25/4.

ing between the explorers at the depot camp and some of the local people. The two Aborigines came to the camp again the next day, and Elsey

had a long chat with them, & obtained a number of words & was surprised to find that they understood the use of the boomerang which they call Karlee. They do not appear to use it themselves, but described with great exactness its course & the peculiar sound it makes in its passage. A still more interesting fact to me was that they recognised at once a drawing of the Australian Porcupine Anteater, or Echidna, & pointing to some ants which were attacking a brown snake we had given them, intimated that they constituted its food.⁹⁷

Apparently Elsey was surprised at their knowledge of boomerangs because he never saw one in their possession. The absence of boomerangs directly parallels the situation today; Aborigines on the lower Victoria River do not make boomerangs, but obtain them via trade from the south. Those they now receive are fighting boomerangs rather than the returning type, and are used primarily as clap-sticks during ceremonies.

There was another visit by Aborigines to the depot on 27 April, but no details were given.⁹⁸ On the morning of 10 April Wilson was on board the *Tom Tough* where it was careened near the Dome, when 'The tribe of natives whom we had seen on a previous occasion down this way, having seen the vessel they came to pay us a visit, and crossed the River for that purpose. They were quite peaceable and sat on the bank watching our movements with Astonishment.'⁹⁹ In the afternoon the Aborigines noticed some smoke ascending near Curiosity Peak and moved off in that direction, indicating that they would return later. They 'recrossed the river at the foot of the Dome, each taking a piece of dry wood (of a particularly light Kind of Mangrove) under the arm to buoy them up'.¹⁰⁰

It was probably this river crossing that Wilson elaborated upon in a paper he published in 1858. In it he described how the Aborigines crossed using 'floats ... composed of one, two or three stems, according to their size, of a peculiar kind of mangrove tree, that is, when dead or dry, very light and buoyant'. He went on to describe how a single native would get astride such a float, but if a larger group crossed, as he once saw a 'tribe' including women and children do, they would hang onto the float while swimming alongside.¹⁰¹ The fact that Stokes saw rafts and that Wilson saw Aboriginal men, women and children readily cross the river indicates that there was friendly communication and movement between the people on both sides of the stream.

Wilson returned to the depot camp on 14 May and he recorded that on the way he and the men with him, 'dined in the boat at Sandy Island under the scrutinising gaze of a tribe of Natives'. A week or so later Wilson, Elsey and the expedition botanist, Ferdinand Mueller, made another boat trip down river,¹⁰² and on their return they stopped for breakfast at 'Stony Spit' (below Sandy Island). There they were joined by an Aborigine who had previously provided both Elsey and Mueller with words lists,¹⁰³ and he

^{97.} Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 14 April 1856.

^{98.} Wilson and Elsey 1856, entry for 27 April 1856.

^{99.} Wilson 1856, entry for 10 April 1856.

^{100.} Wilson 1856, entry for 10 April 1856.

^{101.} Wilson 1858: 152.

^{102.} Wilson 1856, entry for 21 May 1856.



Figure 2: Thomas Baines with Aborigines near the mouth of the Victoria River, NT. 1857. Painting, oil on canvas, 45 x 65.5cm by Thomas Baines. Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK129. National Library of Australia PIC T314 nla.pic an2273869. Shown are Thomas Baines with Aborigines near the depot camp. In the background can be seen the *Tom Tough*, one of the depot buildings, the mound enclosing the camp and a boab tree.

later went with them in the boat back to the depot. In a paper Wilson published after returning to England, he expanded on this meeting:

We were joined by the old native Deeanna with whom we had already formed a little intimacy. Having given him some bread and tea, he enquired by signs what bread was? In answer I took some seed from a tuft of grass growing by where were sat, and placing it between two stones, rubbed it and showed him the flour; immediately he saw me adopt this operation he expressed satisfaction as though he understood perfectly.¹⁰⁴

The camp journal kept by Wilson and Elsey was discontinued shortly after Gregory's return on 9 May 1856, and for about a month the only record of daily life at the depot is Gregory's journal. During this time Gregory made few mentions of Aborigines. In one instance he noted that a few days after he arrived back, 'a small party of natives came to the camp in the morning and bartered a few trifles, and then retired'.¹⁰⁵ It was probably on this occasion that Thomas Baines made the series of wonderful sketches of Aborigines at the depot camp that are in the Baines collection.¹⁰⁶

^{103.} Wilson 1856, entry for 28 May 1856.

^{104.} Wilson 1858: 137–53.

^{105.} Gregory 1981: 151.

One of the last encounters nearly ended badly. On 4 June 1856 in the vicinity of Curiosity Peak, four crewmen from the *Tom Tough* went on shore to barter with a group of about twenty Aborigines. One of the Aborigines stole a tomahawk from the boat and the Europeans quickly held another captive to secure its return. This led yet another of the Aborigines to try, unsuccessfully, to wrestle a gun from one of the crewmen, whereon all the Aborigines decamped. The tomahawk was found later¹⁰⁷ and based on the descriptions of the event by those involved, the incident was later recorded in a sketch by Thomas Baines.¹⁰⁸ Victoria River Aborigines are only mentioned once more in any document from the expedition. When the depot camp was abandoned and the *Tom Tough* was moving downstream towards the open sea, some Aborigines at Holdfast Reach called out and one ran for some time along the riverbank.¹⁰⁹ However, the ship soon outpaced them, and the Aborigines on the Victoria were once more left in peace.

After the expedition ended, James Wilson summarised his view of relations between the Aborigines and the explorers on the lower Victoria: 'except on one occasion, our intercourse with them was always amicable, and ... there is no impression left on the minds of the native population unfavourable to their English visitors'.¹¹⁰ Of course, there were actually a number of mildly unfriendly encounters, but overall this appears to be a fair summation. Sadly, relations between Europeans and Victoria River Aborigines were not to be so friendly and mutually fascinating again for a long time to come.

Summary

The records of Stokes, Gregory, Thomas Baines, and more particularly of the men permanently stationed at the depot camp, provide an interesting insight into Aboriginal life as it was before being disrupted by the arrival of settlers and cattle. Briefly, we see people who, when confronted with white people for the first time, prudently conceal themselves and observe the strangers from hiding. Remains at their camps show that they were eating turtle, crocodile and mussels. Initially they are probably as fearful of the whites as the whites are of them, but they are also curious. They sneak up for a closer look and in one case they 'test' the strangers with spears. Eventually familiarity brings confidence, and friendly contact is established. Then we see a healthy and confident people. They are naked except for a waist belt of bark or cord, the men bearing body scars, and often with their beard tied in a narrow goatee style and extended with an animal tail. The men carry spears and spearthrowers, stone hatchets and firesticks, and have dingoes as companions.

A seasonal pattern of land use is revealed, with people retreating to major freshwater sources late in the dry season and then spreading out across the land and burning the country at the end of the wet season. We see a large ceremonial gathering during the wet season, a ceremony that we can surmise is an initiation ritual. Patterns of behav-

^{106.} For examples, see Braddon 1986: 68–9; see also the dust jacket and page 83 of Cumpston 1972. The Baines collection is held by the Royal Geographical Society in London.

^{107.} Gregory 1981: 152–53.

^{108.} See Braddon 1986: 77.

^{109.} T Baines, *Journal of the Detachment of the North Australian Expedition left by Mr Gregory at the Main Camp Victoria River 1856*, entry for July 19 1856. Mitchell Library, C408.

^{110.} Wilson 1858: 137–53.

iour connected with this ritual — the carrying of a green branch during the ritual approach of one group to another, the control of ritual and by implication the control of knowledge by old people, the separation of women and children from the men for at least part of the ceremony, and the separation of neophytes from 'normal' society, their control and guidance by older men, and their travel into neighbouring areas as part of their education into manhood — are still practiced in the Victoria River region today.

The scarring of the chests and arms of the men indicates the existence of a high stage of initiation, almost certainly the same as or akin to the 'Big Sunday' ceremony carried out in the region today. Finally, we see evidence for the existence of Aboriginal trade and information networks, including the possibility that information about the language, behaviour and skills of white men who until 1849 were stationed at Port Essington, some 600 kilometres to the northeast, was known to Victoria River Aborigines before Gregory's expedition arrived in the district in 1855.

By the time the expedition left the Victoria River, relations between the men at the depot camp and the Aborigines had reached a remarkable state of friendliness. The explorers were indeed 'invaders of a peaceful country', but unfortunately for both sides this experience was not to be repeated for a long time to come. In the 27 years that passed before the arrival of the first settlers, at least 12 private expeditions visited or passed through the region.¹¹¹ Until 1878 these expeditions reported no hostile incidents, but then something changed. We can speculate that the same information networks that may have brought information about the whites at Port Essington had, by 1878, brought information about the whites along the Overland Telegraph Line and beyond. If so, Victoria River Aborigines may have heard about violent clashes which left many Aborigines dead, and perhaps news that these white men brought large herds of cattle with them and had taken over large areas.¹¹²

Some Victoria River Aborigines may even have had first hand experience of whites along the line before the first settlers arrived in the Victoria River country. Early settlers' accounts and ethnographic studies reveal that Aborigines in the district travelled long distances outside their own territory for purposes of trade, marriage and ceremony. For example, the early ethnologist RH Mathews learned from the settlers of Aborigines on the upper Victoria River who travelled eastward to Newcastle Waters, then north to Katherine and came back by way of Delamere and Gregory Creek.¹¹³ At ceremonial gatherings near the telegraph line they would have met Aborigines who had travelled similar distances from different directions, and this situation was repeated from ceremonial gathering to ceremonial gathering, creating 'chains of connection' across most of the continent. These connections enabled people to receive goods and information from regions far beyond their maximum range of travel.¹¹⁴ As well as receiving news from Aborigines who may have been in more sustained contact with white people, in the decade before white settlers arrived in the Victoria River district, any Aborigines who made one of these long trips would have seen white people with their own eyes; some may have had negative experiences at their hands.

¹¹¹. Lewis 2004 chapter 2: 47–84.

¹¹². Lewis 2004 chapters 3 and 4.

¹¹³. Mathews 1901: 69–89.

¹¹⁴. Mulvaney 1976: 72–94.

Whether some of the Victoria River Aborigines had seen white people along the telegraph line and perhaps experienced rough treatment from them, or whether they had only heard about them, from 1878 they began to resist the intrusions of the land-seekers and prospectors, and when the first settlers arrived in 1883 they were met with spears.¹¹⁵ Twenty years of open hostility ensued, with at least 15 whites and a considerably greater number of Aborigines being killed or wounded. The settlers became invaders of a violent country, and the peaceful encounters between the Aborigines and Gregory's men on the lower Victoria were forgotten.

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Sydney James Cook/Duguid and the importance of 'being Aboriginal'

Rani Kerin

In 1944, Charles and Phyllis Duguid, well-known campaigners for Aboriginal rights, agreed to adopt a six-year-old 'full-blood' Aboriginal boy named Sydney James Cook. Cook lived as a full and ostensibly equal member of the Duguid family in their Adelaide home for the next six years. He was shown the same love and affection as the Duguids' own children and, although his adoption was never formalised, he assumed the Duguid name. Sydney Duguid was a 'lad': occasionally willful and often disruptive, a prankster who loved the limelight, a young boy desirous of attention. According to Charles, 'Sydney [was] little different, if at all, from a stirring white boy of his own years'.¹ He attended school and took 'the usual place in the community of a boy his age – just that – no more, no less': that is, until 1950 when Charles and Phyllis Duguid sent Cook, aged twelve, to live with Aborigines at Roper River Mission in the Northern Territory.² It is difficult to imagine a step more at odds with contemporary understandings of assimilation. Assimilation moved Aborigines into white society – it did not move them back. And yet the Duguids were strong supporters of assimilation, if by assimilation is meant a policy that would bring Aboriginal people 'into equal enjoyment of Australian life'.³ In sending Cook to Roper River, the Duguids believed they were aiding his assimilation by giving him a chance to assimilate Aboriginal culture as well: they believed that Cook needed to learn how to 'be Aboriginal' in order to live in white society. Beginning with a brief biographical and scene-setting sketch that underlines the circumstances surrounding Cook's placement in the Duguid home, this article explains Cook's relocation to Aboriginal society in terms of Charles and Phyllis Duguid's unconventional approach to Aboriginal assimilation.

'Small black child of God'

On or around 30 October 1937, an Aboriginal woman gave birth to a male child near a township called Cook on the west coast of South Australia. What happened next remains something of a mystery. According to the Reverend Tom Jones, organising missionary of the Bush Church Aid Society of Australia (BCA), the child was 'rescued ...

¹ C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, State Records Office of South Australia (hereafter SRSA), GRG 52/1/1948/86.

² Duguid 1946b: 16.

³ Duguid 1963: Preface.

from death from starvation when only a few hours old'.⁴ Abandoned by his mother, 'the tiny black mite was picked up on the Nullarbor Plain' by a BCA worker and taken to the BCA hospital at Cook.⁵ The child was named for the Society's Bishop, Sydney James Kirkby, and the township of Cook; Sydney James Cook.⁶ Charles Duguid's account of Cook's separation from his parents was quite different. According to him, Cook was 'actually found ... in a sack on the kitchen floor of the Cook hospital and his navel cord had not been tied'.⁷ In 1946, in an article entitled 'Aboriginal children I have met', Duguid described the circumstances of Cook's abandonment thus:

Eight years ago a tribe of Aborigines was forcibly chased from the neighbourhood of a town on the Transcontinental line ... During the upset a terror-stricken mother gave birth to a baby boy. Some hours later a sack was left in the kitchen of the local Mission hospital. A weak cry came from the sack, and inside was found a newly-born Aboriginal child — cold and nearly lifeless; and the mother's life must have been endangered too.⁸

That Cook was found 'in a sugar bag on the floor of a Bush Aid Hospital', Charles and Phyllis Duguid repeated in statements to the Northern Territory Welfare Branch in 1960, Phyllis adding 'perhaps his mother died [in] childbirth' as the reason for Cook's abandonment.⁹ The journalist Douglas Lockwood told a slightly different story. After meeting Cook in the Northern Territory in 1965, Lockwood wrote that Cook's mother 'bundled him in a sugar bag and gave him away'.¹⁰ Cook's own version, as told to the adventurer and writer Frank O'Neill in the early 1960s, was different again:

I was born into tribal life near Cook in South Australia ... I was only a few months old when my mother left me in the sand. She saw a group of white people and ran. She must have been frightened.¹¹

According to Cook, one of the white people who frightened his mother was the Reverend Eric Constable, a Church of England Minister and BCA worker, who took him to the BCA hospital at Cook where he lived for the next four years.¹²

Was the BCA worker who 'rescued' Cook also responsible for chasing his mother away? Was Cook found in the sand or on the kitchen floor? Was he a few hours old, a few days old or a few months old? Did Cook's mother survive childbirth? Was there a sugar bag? Although ultimately unresolvable, the different answers to these questions suggest something of each respondent's agenda. Having 'rescued' Cook from certain death when only a few hours old, the BCA saw itself — and represented its workers — as the heroes of the piece. Cook, in contrast, blamed the BCA for his abandonment. In claiming that he was a few months old at the time, Cook created a narrative in which

4. Jones to Penhall, 24 May 1944, SRSA GRG 52/1/1943/80.

5. *Real Australian*, 14 November 1941.

6. *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

7. C Duguid to Hasluck, 21 October 1953, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), Series A452/1, Item 1957/2566.

8. Duguid 1946a: 33.

9. C Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960; P Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

10. *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

11. 'A native with a college accent', undated newspaper clipping, Duguid Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter Duguid Papers: 1), Series 3, Folder 3.

12. 'A native with a college accent', Duguid Papers: 1.

his mother both survived childbirth and loved him; it was not her intention to leave him behind. Charles and Phyllis Duguid portrayed Cook and his mother as victims of frontier violence. Although, like Cook, they blamed white society for his abandonment, the Duguids also sought to make it clear that the 'separation of [Cook] from his own folk was not [their] responsibility'.¹³ Out for the most sensational story possible, Lockwood (and several other journalists who covered Cook's story in the mid 1960s) portrayed Cook as a 'foundling waif' who triumphed in the face of the greatest adversity – abandonment by his mother at birth.¹⁴ The sugar bag, whether it existed or not, can be seen as a symbol of white society's corruption of Aboriginal culture. Emptied of its original sickness-inducing contents and returned with a baby 'in a pitiful condition', the sugar bag was (and is) a metaphor for Aboriginal dispossession.¹⁵

The 'true' story of Cook's abandonment will probably never be known. What is known is that Cook spent the first four years of his life in the BCA's care at hospitals at Cook and Penong. Regular articles in the *Real Australian*, official organ of the BCA, kept members informed of Cook's progress. With smiling face, neatly combed hair and starched white clothes, Cook's image regularly adorned the front page of the Society's newsletter. Captions like 'Our Baby' left readers in no doubt as to the BCA's proprietorial feelings: Cook was their 'small black child of God' and members were asked to 'Pray earnestly for him as he climbs life's ladder'.¹⁶ Under the BCA's care, Cook was lavished with attention and affection. As he grew older, however, it became increasingly difficult to care for him at the hospital. In 1941 it was suggested that Cook be adopted by an Aboriginal family, but, believing that 'God had given him to [them] for some special purpose', the BCA favoured a white family instead. After 'due consideration and prayer', the Reverend Eric Constable (who, it will be recalled, was the man Cook blamed for his abandonment) and his wife offered to provide a home for Cook 'until he was old enough to go to school'. Cook lived with the Constables in Adelaide for two years before being transferred to Colebrook, an institution for Aboriginal children run by the United Aborigines Mission (UAM), in 1944. Anxious for the BCA to maintain its 'connection with the child', Jones arranged for Cook to remain at Colebrook at the BCA's expense, but such an arrangement was not his to make.¹⁷ As an Aboriginal ward, all decisions regarding Cook's future resided with the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board (APB).

A year earlier, in June 1943, the APB had approved Cook's admission to King's College – a prestigious Adelaide school – noting at the time that it 'was intended to fit the boy ... for a professional career or any other for which he may show aptitude'.¹⁸ Jones, in requesting that Cook be allowed to stay at Colebrook, advised the APB that

13. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

14. In 1965, Cook was appointed the first 'full-blood' Aboriginal union organiser for the North Australian Workers Union. See *News* (Northern Territory), 11 January 1965, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 January 1965; *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

15. A recent entry in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, 'Hand, Christian and Her Son', painted by the artist Adam Hill, depicts the hand of God passing a bag of sugar to an Aboriginal child. See *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award* (Exhibition Catalogue) 2004: 68-69.

16. *Real Australian*, 1 March 1940, 24 February 1941, 1 July 1941, 14 November 1941, 4 March 1942.

17. Jones to Penhall, 1 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

'the Kings school experiment [had] not worked out': 'Kings College was tried ... with the best of intentions. Unfortunately, it was not successful'.¹⁹ The secretary of the APB, WR Penhall, thought otherwise. Having received a 'distinctly favourable' report from the headmaster at King's College, AM Oats, Penhall was at a loss to understand Jones' impression of failure.²⁰ Cook's school report for term one 1944, his second term at King's, showed grades of C or better for each of his classes and was accompanied by the following words of encouragement from Oats:

I and my staff consider that there has been a very great improvement in Sydney this year — an improvement in attitude and general behaviour. We are therefore anxious that his undoubted ability be given a chance to develop in sympathetic surroundings.²¹

Penhall was keen for Cook to continue his education at King's College. In practical terms, this meant that rather than Colebrook another white family would have to be found. Penhall already had a family in mind — the Duguids.

'Because of his need'

Charles and Phyllis Duguids' practical sympathy for the 'plight of the Aborigines' was well known. A medical doctor and elder in the Presbyterian Church, Charles Duguid regularly visited remote parts of South and Central Australia to investigate the health and welfare of Aborigines, and was the author of numerous articles, radio broadcasts and public lectures that aimed to raise the status of the Aborigines by bringing 'the white population of Australia to recognise their worth'.²² In 1937 he was instrumental in the establishment of Ernabella Mission, widely regarded as one of the least oppressive and most culturally sensitive missions ever established in Australia, and in 1940 he was appointed an official Protector of Aborigines and member of the South Australian APB. His wife, Phyllis Duguid, was also an important campaigner. Through organisations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women, Phyllis worked mainly, although not exclusively, to improve the status of Aboriginal women and girls.²³

From their holiday house on Kangaroo Island, Phyllis Duguid wrote to Penhall regarding the 'difficult question of Sydney's future' in May 1944. She had, she explained, 'given the whole matter a great deal of thought' and had decided that if it was 'in the interests of Sydney's development and future happiness to continue as he [was] at King's College' then her family's home would be open to him. Phyllis made it clear, however, that neither she nor Charles could regard themselves as 'foster parents for other people'. 'We could only do our best for the child if we had complete responsibility for his future', she advised. By complete responsibility, Phyllis meant complete adoption, an action which would require Cook's exemption from the Aborigines Act.²⁴

18. Minutes of the Meeting of the Aborigines Protection Board, 30 June 1943, Papers of Dr Charles Duguid, State Library of South Australia, Mortlock Collection, Series 2.

19. Jones to Penhall, 1 May 1944; Jones to Penhall, 24 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

20. Penhall to Jones, 29 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

21. Kings College report on Sydney Cook, Term 1 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

22. C Duguid to Hasluck, August 1951, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

23. For a detailed study of the Duguids' activism see Kerin 2004.

Penhall readily agreed to Phyllis' conditions. On 17 May 1944, the APB unanimously resolved 'That Dr Charles and Mrs Duguid be authorised to legally adopt and have charge of Sydney James Cook'.²⁵

As a member of the APB, Charles Duguid was ideally situated to negotiate the matter of Cook's placement, yet his sole contribution seems to have been a post-script in the bottom corner of Phyllis' letter to Penhall in which he stated, 'I am entirely with Mrs Duguid in what she has written'.²⁶ The weight of evidence suggests otherwise. Despite being legally authorised to adopt Cook, the Duguids never did; Cook remained a ward whom the Duguids fostered for the APB. The reasons for this apparent change of heart are unclear, but particularly since Phyllis seemed so keen to adopt, and given Charles' uncharacteristic taciturnity, one has to wonder whether he was the reluctant party.

If Charles Duguid's later accounts are to be believed, it would seem that he had serious reservations about Cook's place in his home, and in white society more generally, from the outset. By outside observers Cook was viewed as a kind of experiment – a chance for Charles and Phyllis to prove their longstanding argument that Aborigines of full-descent were capable of 'advancing' to the same level of civilisation enjoyed by white Australians. In 1949, Pastor Samuels, secretary of the UAM, criticised the Duguids for using Cook in this way, an accusation Charles vehemently denied: 'At no time was the question of experiment in our minds'.²⁷ According to Charles, 'it was only after the deepest consideration and prayer that [they] agreed to take [Cook] in and then only because of his need'.²⁸ Over the years, Charles repeatedly named Cook's need, and Cook's need alone, as the factor that had decided the matter of his place in their home. For example: 'Sydney was taken into our home ... because of his *need*'; 'Until we took him in at the age of six for his *need* he had been moved around from pillar to post without training or guidance for the future'.²⁹ Cook's need aside, Charles Duguid's need to make this point is in itself significant. By emphasising Cook's need for stability and for the 'affection and discipline of family life', Duguid implied that Cook's need for a home was greater than his desire to provide it.³⁰

What about Phyllis? Did she share her husband's reservations? Penhall believed that Cook needed 'a definite home' and the 'individual care of a good mother'. In assuring Jones that Cook would be 'happy' and well cared for with the Duguids, Penhall explained that Cook was 'very much attached to Mrs Duguid'.³¹ Mrs Duguid, it seems, was similarly attached to Cook. She was also attached to the idea of Cook. Cook was not the first Aboriginal child to stay with the Duguids. A year earlier, in 1943, Charles and Phyllis had opened their home – and their hearts – to Nganyintja, a thirteen-year-old girl from Ernabella Mission. Although Nganyintja spent barely three weeks with

24. P Duguid to Penhall, 15 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

25. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

26. P Duguid to Penhall, 15 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

27. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

28. C Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

29. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; C Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820 (emphasis added).

30. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949],], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

31. Penhall to Jones, 29 May 1944 SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

the Duguids before returning to Ernabella, it was time enough for strong feelings to develop. With Charles at work and the Duguids' children, Andrew aged twelve and Rosemary aged nine, at school, Nganyintja's days were spent with Phyllis, helping around the house, playing in the garden and teaching Phyllis her language. According to Charles, a special 'understanding between the child and my wife' developed which revealed that Nganyintja's 'love for [Phyllis] ... was very manifest'.³² Phyllis' love for Nganyintja was equally apparent, yet her actions were at all times tempered by the knowledge that she was Nganyintja's 'temporary mother' only.³³ In Cook, Phyllis saw a way to make this most unique and rewarding of experiences more permanent.

With the burden attendant upon receiving an Aboriginal child into their home lightened by Phyllis' enthusiasm — she was, after all, the primary care-giver — this alone was not the cause of Charles' reservations. Instead, what worried him was Cook's anomalous status as an Aboriginal child of full-descent in white society.

'Full-blood tribal Aborigines are happier with their own people'

Like most campaigners and observers of Aborigines, Charles Duguid divided Aborigines into (artificial) groups for the purpose of better understanding them, as well as representing them and their needs. He distinguished between Aborigines on the basis of location and degree of interaction with white society, not blood — although biology played a role — and he measured them against an ideal of pre-contact Aboriginal life. According to Duguid, there were three main groups or 'types' of Aborigines: '(a) Those as yet hardly touched by us; (b) Those around cattle stations and mining camps; (c) Those in our own civilisation'.³⁴ When speaking or writing about Aborigines, Duguid insisted upon the importance of differentiating between these 'aspects of Aboriginal life', shortened for ease of explanation to 'full-blood tribal, detribalised [and] half-caste'.³⁵ The Aborigines in the first group were the people Duguid most admired for they most resembled his imagined ideal of Aboriginal life in Australia prior to the arrival of white civilisation. They were 'natural natives — people of amazing initiative and ability and fineness of character'.³⁶ The Aborigines in the second group were 'the relics of the tribe'. Having lost the land on which their 'tribal' life revolved, Duguid viewed 'detribalised' Aborigines as people without culture — dispossessed, degraded and deprived of reason to live. Phyllis Duguid viewed Aborigines of mixed-descent in much the same way. Indeed, she believed that 'mixed-bloods' often fared worse than 'detribalised' Aborigines, for while they had 'lost the moral standards and strict of their Aboriginal forefathers they [had] never been properly trained and educated in the best traditions of their white ancestors'.³⁷ Charles Duguid disagreed. In his view, 'half-castes' were so far removed from 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines, both culturally and physically, as to be virtually indistinct from white people.³⁸

³². C and P Duguid 1943: 8.

³³. C and P Duguid 1943: 9-11.

³⁴. Duguid 1940b: 88.

³⁵. Duguid 1945: 46.

³⁶. Duguid 1940b: 88.

³⁷. P Duguid, 'The Atlantic Charter for all Australians', typescript of radio broadcast, 30 October 1944, Phyllis Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide.

In keeping with his location-based typology, Duguid included under the heading 'half-caste' Aborigines of full-descent who lived in white society: 'With the half-caste we can consider the full-blood in our civilisation', he explained.³⁹ Duguid's inclusion of a few 'full-bloods' in the same category as 'half-castes' did not necessarily mean that he believed such Aborigines belonged in white society. Quite the contrary: it merely reflected (an unfortunate) reality. It meant that such Aborigines were living in white society and so deserved access to the same benefits of civilisation as white Australians. Duguid's greater goal was to prevent Aborigines of full-descent from 'drifting' towards white society. He insisted that those who congregated around railway lines and small townships 'should be led back to their own country ... for their own sakes'.⁴⁰ This was not a matter of intelligence, for Duguid was adamant that 'the intelligence of the full-blood Aborigines [was] in no sense inferior to that of the half-castes'.⁴¹ Rather, it was a matter of place. Only in their own place—meaning in their own culture and environment—were Aborigines of full-descent capable of real advancement: the kind of advancement witnessed daily at Ernabella Mission where the Aborigines were 'encouraged to remain tribal'.⁴²

Ernabella Mission represented the full expression of Duguid's views on the advancement of 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines. Founded in an era of revised missionary thinking, Ernabella operated on principles of respect for Aboriginal culture; the white staff were required to learn Pitjantjatjara and 'make every attempt to see the natives' standpoint on the problems that [were] befalling him'.⁴³ Situated on the border of the Central Aborigines Reserve — between the Aborigines and the encroaching white man — Ernabella aimed 'to ensure that the inevitable interchange between the two cultures [was] as slow and gradual as possible'.⁴⁴ Its main function was 'to hold the native to his own country and to keep men, whose motive [was] personal gain, away from him'. Advancement occurred through the white missionaries 'daily contacts with the natives'.⁴⁵ 'No attempt [was] made to wean the native from his own way of living'. Instead, and in keeping with contemporary anthropological advice, Ernabella sought to give 'the old men of the tribes [time to] work into their system what of ours they [understood] and [wished] to adopt'.⁴⁶ Likewise with the children, Ernabella aimed to train them 'in such a way that they [would] retain their natural prowess and powers'.⁴⁷

38. In Charles Duguid's view, most Aborigines of mixed-descent 'differ[ed] from white people only in tint of skin', C Duguid, 'Voices from overseas', transcript of radio broadcast, May 1954, Charles Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide, since deposited with the National Library of Australia.

39. Duguid 1940b: 89.

40. Duguid 1940b: 88; C Duguid, typescript article for *Venture*, February 1940, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 4.

41. Duguid 1946c: 40.

42. See for example, Duguid 1939: 7; Duguid 1940a: 47. In these and other articles, Charles Duguid argued that the Aborigines of Australia were 'a people ... full of intelligence', and this was especially evident when the 'native [was] judged in his own field of knowledge'; meaning in his or her own culture and environment. See also Duguid 1943b: 8.

43. Duguid 1940b: 88. For a discussion of revised missionary thinking see McGregor 2001.

44. Duguid 1941: 9.

45. Duguid 1940b: 88.

46. Duguid 1941: 9.

47. Duguid 1943b: 14.

Treated in this way, with respect and understanding, Duguid was certain that the Aborigines at Ernabella would become 'men and women conscious of ability of meet the whites when they must'. He was equally certain that the alternative, rushing or forcing our ways upon them, would only produce 'very inferior and degraded editions of white people'.⁴⁸

Where did this leave Sydney James Cook, a displaced child of 'full-blood tribal' parents? By Duguid's definition, Cook was the same as a 'half-caste'; that is, hardly Aboriginal at all. However, belonging in the same category as the 'half-caste' did not mean that Cook belonged in white society. It just meant that he was domiciled there. Duguid's contrasting relationship with another Aboriginal boy, an eleven-year-old 'full-blood' named Tjaruru, further illuminates the nature of his reservations regarding Cook. Duguid met Tjaruru while travelling through the Haast Bluff region west of Alice Springs in 1936. In his travel diary Duguid described how Tjaruru captured his attention through mimicry and held it through his 'thirst for knowledge'.⁴⁹ When Tjaruru's family moved away from Duguid's camp, Tjaruru stayed behind. 'He can't bear to miss anything', Duguid exclaimed: 'How is he going to find his people? He knows his father's footsteps and he will follow them.' According to Duguid, Tjaruru showed 'leadership and ability ... in his every action': he was 'mentally alert', 'lithe of limb [and] exuberant with life'.⁵⁰ It was with deep despair that Duguid imagined what would happen to this 'amazing boy' if and/or when his country was taken over by white men and cattle:

This is his country ... [He] will be brought into a sullen submission, or as is more likely, poor Tjaruru will rebel — he is too great to be an underdog — and he will be sent to gaol. The whole thing is utterly damnable.⁵¹

Duguid was so fearful for Tjaruru's future that he wrote in his travel diary, 'I wish I could have the oversight of this boy for the next five years'.⁵² Duguid's desire to provide Tjaruru with better future prospects notwithstanding, he would never have removed Tjaruru from his people or his country, for despite the dangers of an encroaching white civilisation, Duguid firmly believed that 'full-blood tribal Aborigines [were] happier with their own people and should never be taken from them'.⁵³

Just like a white boy?

In contrast to the expansive files kept by the Northern Territory administration following Cook's relocation to Roper River Mission in May 1950, few records of Cook's time with the Duguids remain. Of those that Charles Duguid chose to keep, their type as well as their content are revealing of his frustrated efforts to understand his young charge, and to help Cook cope with the prejudices of white society: psychological reports, school reports and correspondence pertaining to Cook's expulsion from King's College in 1948. Added to this, two short entries in two published works — 'Aboriginal

⁴⁸. Duguid 1943b: 10.

⁴⁹. Duguid 1946a: 31.

⁵⁰. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3; C Duguid 1946a: 31.

⁵¹. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3.

⁵². Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3.

⁵³. Duguid 1946a: 33.

Children I Have Met' and *Ernabella Revisited* – comprise the full-extent of Charles Duguid's personal and public records regarding Cook's life in Adelaide. Although further insights can be gleaned from the records of the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board, the fact that Duguid, an activist who built his reputation on 'knowing' Aborigines, chose not to make Cook, or his relationship with Cook, a topic for wider public consumption requires explanation.⁵⁴

The general public were definitely interested in Cook's story.⁵⁵ In October 1946, in the midst of the rocket range controversy, Charles Duguid presented himself at the Adelaide office of *Smith's Weekly*, a large bundle of maps under his arm. He wanted the magazine to publicise his protest against the rocket range, and they did, but *Smith's* editors were also interested in Duguid himself – a man who had 'spent a small private fortune in pushing the black man's cause', had helped to establish Ernabella Mission and had even 'adopted a full-blood boy'. Anticipating their reader's interest, *Smith's* explained:

The lad is now nine years old, goes to King's College (Adelaide) and is equal of his fellow students. He has been reared with [the] white man's pride of his own race and is unashamed of his colour.⁵⁶

The question of Cook's racial pride and/or colour consciousness will be examined below. Such comments aside, it is clear that Duguid's association with Cook enhanced his public reputation as an activist. In 1951, less than a year after Cook's relocation to Roper River, *People* magazine devoted four pages to Duguid's work on behalf of Aborigines, beginning with an exaggerated account of his efforts to help Aboriginal children:

[Duguid's] first step was to take several Aboriginal children – tribal full-bloods – into his home. Most of them stayed weeks and months at a time. One, a boy of six, stayed for many years. They came timid, suspicious creatures wondering what to expect in the white man's house. But their fears were soon allayed. They became part of the home. They ate at the family table with the Duguids' own children, had their own rooms, were sent to school.⁵⁷

This 'experiment astonished Adelaide', according to *People*, 'but it proved Duguid's point. Given equal opportunities, the Aboriginal children were well-mannered, intelligent and in every way the equal of white children'.⁵⁸ And it was not just Adelaide society that found Duguid's so called 'experiment' so astonishing. In 1954, Duguid's 'daily experiment' – his willingness 'to go the limit and bring the Aborigine into [his] home' – saw him praised in the Church of Scotland's newsletter *Life and Work*.⁵⁹ Ten

⁵⁴. Charles Duguid repeatedly claimed to 'know' Aborigines, both individually and collectively. See for example Duguid 1947: 2.

⁵⁵. Mary Bennett (nee Baird), a former craft teacher at Ernabella Mission, grew up in the house next-door to the Duguids. According to her, 'Sydney ... was talked about all over the town and many predicted "it would never work" but it DID because of the attitude, love and understanding of problems which Dr Duguid showed'. Mary Bennett, 'My memories of Dr Duguid', typescript, June 1972, Nancy Barnes Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide (original emphasis).

⁵⁶. *Smith's Weekly*, 12 October 1946.

⁵⁷. *People*, 14 February 1951.

⁵⁸. *People*, 14 February 1951.

years later, in 1964, the *Newcastle Morning Herald* described Duguid's determination to prove the Aborigines' equal intelligence by bringing 'full-blooded children into his home' as a 'magnificently successful ... experiment':

The full-bloods grew up with Dr Duguid's own two children, knowing them as brother and sister, living a normal suburban life, attending school and college. They became responsible adults, took responsible positions in life. Dr and Mrs Duguid were very proud of them.⁶⁰

Apart from Nganyintja who spent less than three weeks with the Duguids, the only other Aboriginal child of full-descent the Duguids brought into their home was Cook.

As mentioned previously, Charles Duguid was adamant that Cook was not an experiment. Clearly, the general public thought otherwise. So did the Adelaide anthropologist and medical scientist, JB Cleland. In 1964, Cleland wrote to Charles and Phyllis Duguid requesting 'a full record of Sydney Cook's ... behaviour as a child'.⁶¹ Since Cook's 'nurture was strictly European till late childhood', Cleland wanted to know 'whether he behaved exactly as a white child would or differed significantly or slightly in any way'.⁶² Demonstrating the pervasiveness of racially or biologically deterministic ideas, what Cleland really wanted to know was whether Cook had 'inherit[ed] any trait not likely to be shown by a white child'.⁶³ The Duguids ignored Cleland's request. Perhaps inspired by Cleland's interest, however, Phyllis penned a long poem – sixty lines of lament – entitled 'To an Aboriginal boy'.⁶⁴ It was not what Cleland had in mind. Rather, it was (and is) an expression of deep regret over white society's failure to understand, let alone appreciate, Aboriginal people and their culture. As the final few lines attest, it was also a message of hope and a call for forgiveness:

Ignore the judgement and forget the lie.
They said your race was doomed – its heritage
Feeble and useless in the march of time.
And, if you can, forgive the bitter wrong
Your fathers suffered at our fathers' hands.
Share with our sons your ancient disciplines
And what remains to you of native lore,
While they redeem the past and share with you
The endless riches of our common land.⁶⁵

Cleland's questions point to the kinds of indignities that Cook probably suffered as child in Adelaide. The Duguids' daughter, Rosemary Douglas, has recalled that life

^{59.} *Life and Work* (the Record of the Church of Scotland), September 1954.

^{60.} *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 30 June 1962.

^{61.} Cleland to C Duguid, 7 January 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

^{62.} Cleland to C Duguid, 7 January 1964; Cleland to C Duguid, 11 February 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

^{63.} Cleland to C Duguid, 11 February 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

^{64.} Phyllis Duguid applied for the copyright of her poem 'To an Aboriginal Boy' in March 1966. This was granted in June 1966. In her application Phyllis stated that the poem was written in January 1964. See P Duguid, 'To an Aboriginal boy', NAA: A1336/1, 67922.

^{65.} P Duguid, 'To an Aboriginal boy', NAA: A1336/1, 67922. A copy of Phyllis' poem can also be found in Barnes 2000: 70-71.

was hard for Cook in Adelaide: there were very few 'full-bloods' in the city, she explained, as so Cook 'stood out'.⁶⁶ It did not matter that he had only ever known the company of white people – his skin colour and physical appearance marked him as Aboriginal, and therefore out of place in white society. Even those aware of Cook's circumstances found it difficult to look beyond his colour. In 1945, the Duguids engaged a psychologist, Lois Allen, to test Cook's intelligence, not because they doubted his abilities, but in the hope of proving him the equal of his peers. Using the Binet Intelligence Test, Allen found that Cook, aged 8, had an IQ of 102, but his 'abilities [were] by no means equal':

He is below average in his ability to deal with abstract relationships, and his understanding of social and moral obligations is of the 6-7 year old level. On the other hand, his ingenuity and ability to deal with practical situations is above average; and he was able to pass two tests of this kind at the 12 year old level.⁶⁷

Demonstrating the extent of her own colour prejudice, Allen concluded that it was 'probably a trial to [Cook] to adjust to complicated civilised standards' because he did 'not understand their necessity'. Later she explained that Cook found school work 'boring' because it was 'against his natural bent'.⁶⁸ The fact that 'civilised standards' (meaning the standards of white society) were all that Cook had ever known was apparently irrelevant in the face of his 'natural bent' (meaning his Aboriginal inheritance).

Most people's reactions to Cook, as well as their expectations of him, were determined by his skin colour. In 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', Charles Duguid sought to minimise the visibility of Cook's difference by highlighting the numerous ways in which Cook was the same as a white boy his age, a tactic which had the opposite effect of reinforcing the dual nature of Cook's difference. First broadcast as an address to Adelaide schools in 1946, the article featured three 'full-blood' Aboriginal children, Tjaruru, Nganyintja and Cook – two 'tribal' Aborigines and one from the 'white world'. Unlike Tjaruru and Nganyintja, Cook was not named in the article. Nor was the nature of his relationship to Duguid specified. Instead, Cook was referred to as 'the third child', 'the baby from the sack', 'that child' and 'he'; an abandoned Aboriginal infant who 'had to be kept in white society' and was 'now living in an Adelaide home'.⁶⁹ A photograph of Cook in a tailored suit – white shirt and tie, double-breasted jacket and short pants with knee-high white socks completing the ensemble – accompanied the article. Instructively, if somewhat unimaginatively captioned 'Full-blood, Aged 7, Adelaide', it showed the very model of an assimilated Aborigine. But there was a catch. To his readers, should they ever meet this boy, or others like him, Duguid implored:

⁶⁶. Personal communication with Rosemary Douglas (nee Duguid), 24 August 1999.

⁶⁷. Confidential Report on Sydney Duguid, Aged 8 years, 0 months, by LW Allen, 9 November 1945, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

⁶⁸. Psychological Report on Sydney Duguid, Aged 10 years, 4 months, by LW Allen, February 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

⁶⁹. Duguid 1946a: 33-34.

Don't draw attention to his brown skin, don't laugh at him, but just as important don't spoil him. Don't single him out with lollies and toys. Treat him exactly as you would your own white friend or brother.⁷⁰

By withholding Cook's name and asking others to ignore his colour, Duguid showed how tenuous Cook's hold on sameness really was. Unlike white children, Cook was black. Unlike Tjaruru and Nganyintja, Cook had no special skills or 'tribal' qualities for Duguid to admire. Having been raised in white society, the best that Cook could be, it seems, was the same as a white boy his age. Thus, Duguid reported that Cook could 'swim and dive, play games with vigour ... [and] throw a ball much further than any of his school mates'. He was 'a wizard on a scooter, [could] ride a bicycle with abandon' and he had even 'joined the Cubs', an important rite-of-passage for white boys his age.⁷¹ However, since there was nothing especially significant about a young boy joining the Cubs or riding a bicycle, what made Cook's achievements noteworthy was that he was a 'full-blood' Aboriginal. This simple truth lay at the heart of Duguid's unease about Cook.

In May 1946, the entire Duguid family holidayed at Ernabella Mission. On their return to Adelaide, the question 'How did Sydney react to the natives' was asked so often that Duguid took the opportunity of answering it in *Ernabella revisited*, a booklet issued by the Presbyterian Board of Missions. According to Duguid, the trip had a profound effect on Cook's behaviour. He returned to Adelaide 'less aggressive than he was and much more helpful in the home'. Duguid attributed this change to Cook's new-found awareness that he was 'not ... the only brown boy' in the world; 'he knows there are hundreds more at Ernabella, on the stations ... and at Alice Springs'.⁷² The trip also had a profound effect on Duguid's understanding of Cook. In *Ernabella Revisited*, Duguid related an incident that occurred while he and Cook were visiting the sheep camps with one of the mission's workers, Walter MacDougall:

At one of the sheep camps two Aboriginal women were in charge — a woman at least in the late forties, and a younger woman in perhaps the early twenties. The older woman asked Mr MacDougall in her own language who Sydney's father and mother were and where they were. 'He hasn't any father or mother,' Mr MacDougall replied in Pitjantjatjara. 'Dr and Mrs Duguid look after him.' 'No father or mother!' cried the old woman and she burst into tears. The younger woman almost reproved her. Pointing to Sydney, running happily with the native children she said in her language, 'Look, he's alright, Dr and Mrs are father and mother to him. They look after him.' It may only have been the mother heart that brought the tears but I think the older woman was probably conscious of the fact that *Sydney was missing much knowledge and learning that no white parents could give him*.⁷³

Thus reminded of what Cook was missing, Duguid found it increasingly difficult to convince himself, let alone others, that Cook could survive in white society, and be happy there.

⁷⁰. Duguid 1946a: 34.

⁷¹. Duguid 1946a: 34

⁷². Duguid 1946b: 15-16.

⁷³. Duguid 1946b: 16 (emphasis added).

Returning Sydney James Cook

In May 1948, on the first day back from term break, the new headmaster at King's College, CC Shinkfield, asked Duguid to 'make other arrangements' for Cook's education. According to Shinkfield, the school risked losing four students on Cook's account. None 'of the parents concerned were ... against [Cook's] colour', Shinkfield told Duguid, but they were all 'against the boy himself for his influence [was] by no means wholesome'.⁷⁴ Of particular concern was the 'undesirableness' of Cook's 'conduct in the lavatories'. 'The lad will interfere with smaller boys, and will not let them alone, to the extent that, in one instance, one small boy is having nightmares over [him]', Shinkfield explained. The school had 'done its best' for Cook and was not to blame for this 'disappointing' result: 'The boy in himself [was] the obstacle'.⁷⁵ Duguid was outraged. According to him, Cook admitted his involvement in the lavatory incident – an unfortunate affair, but one that occurred 'frequently in boys schools' – and he named the other boys involved, including the ring-leader, but 'they [were] white' and Cook was not: only Cook was expelled. There was no doubt in Duguid's mind that 'colour [was] at the bottom of all this trouble'.⁷⁶ More than colour, however, it was the meanings that Shinkfield and the parents involved attached to Cook's colour in light of his actions that was the problem. Colour plus sexuality – or instinct at its most untameable – invoked irrational fears of unrestrained sexual licentiousness, and since Cook was 'nearly two years older' than most of his classmates, Shinkfield feared that his 'inherently unwholesome' influence 'bid fair to widen'.⁷⁷

The Northern Territory administration proffered a similar explanation. Nearly a decade later, a draft dossier of Cook's life prepared by the Director of Welfare, HC Giese, cited such instances of negative behaviour on Cook's part as evidence of his 'reverting to Aboriginal tendencies'.⁷⁸ Although, as far as Duguid was concerned, Cook's indiscretion was typical of boys his age, not typical of Aboriginality, it was clear that Cook could not remain at King's College.⁷⁹ It will be recalled that Cook's 'distinctly favourable' association with King's College had been one of Charles and Phyllis Duguid's main considerations in accepting Cook into their home. With this association broken, the APB felt that Cook's 'best interests' would be served 'if he were transferred to the St Francis Home for Native Boys at Semaphore'.⁸⁰ This suggestion was not acted on and Cook remained with the Duguids. Towards the end of 1948, however, the situation became unmanageable, and Duguid requested that 'permanent' alternative arrangements be made. Cook had 'had every chance that could be given him, but he [was] becoming more difficult every month' and was 'upsetting the home through defiance'. 'For his own good', Duguid suggested that Cook 'ought, if at all possible, to be with older boys of his own colour who [could] control him'.

74. Shinkfield to C Duguid, 24 May 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

75. Shinkfield to C Duguid, 1 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

76. C Duguid to Shinkfield, 11 June 1948; C Duguid, notes on 'Objections to Sydney', [June 1948]; P Duguid, notes on conversation with Cook, [June 1948], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

77. Shinkfield to C Duguid, 1 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

78. 'History and Background of Sydney James Cook', draft report, 29 May 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

79. C Duguid to Shinkfield, 2 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

80. Penhall to C Duguid, 2 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

Duguid was aware that Harry Green, the superintendent at Ooldea Mission, was believed to have located Cook's parents and, if this were true, Duguid reasoned that Cook 'should be allowed to return to them'.⁸¹ Penhall, representing the APB, 'agree[d] entirely that [Cook] should be returned to live amongst his own people'. However, rather than 'thrust [the] boy back into the primitive conditions existing at Ooldea', Penhall felt that Cook would do better under AJ Pearce's control at the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) at Finniss Springs.⁸² Unfortunately Pearce was reluctant to be lumbered with such a difficult child. He had heard that Cook was 'inclined to be dishonest', and since there was no dormitory at Finniss Springs, Pearce was unwilling to take Cook into his own home.⁸³ Undeterred and determined to avoid 'thrusting the boy back into the primitive life' at Ooldea, Penhall approached Noel Wiley of the UAM at Oodnadatta.⁸⁴ Unlike Finniss Springs, Oodnadatta had a dormitory and access to a school, and although word of Cook's poor behaviour had spread, Wiley agreed to the move.⁸⁵ The secretary of the UAM, Pastor Samuels, strongly objected: 'If Dr D wants to get rid of Sydney, let him send him to Ernabella', he declared.⁸⁶ Another approach by Penhall, again with emphasis on the undesirability of returning Cook to 'a primitive life' at Ooldea, elicited the desired result. Samuels agreed to the move provided that Cook was subject to the same conditions as applied to other children at Oodnadatta: there was to be no special treatment, no interference by Duguid, and Cook was to 'remain in the institution unless removed by the APB'.⁸⁷ No-one in Duguid's family was 'willing to part with [Cook] on the understanding that he [would] not be allowed to return'.⁸⁸ Against Penhall's advice, and much to Penhall's chagrin, Duguid withdrew his request to have Cook relocated.

Penhall doubted whether Cook 'would ever be successful or happy living in a white community'. In his view, the longer Cook remained 'away from his true environment', the harder the inevitable transition would be.⁸⁹ In an era commonly associated with the first stirrings of change towards a national policy of assimilation, Penhall's determination to see Cook 'absorbed in his true environment amongst the native people' seems oddly discordant, especially in light of Penhall's own views on assimilation.⁹⁰ In February 1948, at a Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities, Penhall affirmed that the object of Aboriginal policy was 'to facilitate and hasten the assimilation of [the Aborigines] into the general life of the community'.⁹¹ Yet, less than ten months later, Penhall was advocating Cook's immediate return to Aboriginal society, albeit one more advanced (less primitive) than Ooldea.

⁸¹. C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸². Penhall to C Duguid, 17 November 1948; Penhall to Pearce, 21 October 1948; Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸³. Pearce to Penhall, 1 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸⁴. Penhall to Wiley, 25 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸⁵. Wiley to Penhall, 6 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸⁶. Memo, 8 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸⁷. Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948; Penhall to C Duguid, 21 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸⁸. C Duguid to Penhall, 29 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁸⁹. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 November 1948; Penhall to Pearce, 21 October 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

⁹⁰. Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

What did this say about assimilation? If Cook, an Aboriginal child who was raised in white society by white people could not be happy there — if he did ‘not fit into the environment of our white civilisation’ as Penhall claimed — what hope did other Aborigines have?⁹² Rather than question the efficacy of assimilation, Penhall blamed Cook’s inability to live in white society on ‘the handicap resulting from his early years’ with the BCA; a condition entirely unique to Cook, and not, therefore, the failure of assimilation.⁹³

Duguid held a different view. While he agreed that the BCA’s ‘utter spoiling’ had left Cook damaged in terms of assimilation by depriving him of the ‘normal disciplines that a child learns in its earliest years’, Duguid characterised Cook’s greater ‘tragedy’ as ‘what happened at his birth’.⁹⁴ ‘In judging [Cook]’ — and by implication assimilation — ‘we must remember that he has never known his real parents and never mingled with his own race’, Duguid explained.⁹⁵ This meant that Cook had been denied the opportunity to develop certain qualities that Duguid regarded as essential to his survival in white society. These were ‘self-control’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘self-respect’ — the very qualities that Duguid admired in ‘tribal’ Aborigines such as Nganyintja.

Following Nganyintja’s three-week stay in Adelaide, Duguid claimed that ‘[n]o more adaptable, no more lovable or co-operative child [had] ever been in [his] home’.⁹⁶ Of all Nganyintja’s qualities, it was her ‘naturalness’ that Duguid most admired for Nganyintja ‘met people naturally’ and by her ‘naturalness’ showed ‘what possibilities [lay] in ... native children’. Duguid attributed Nganyintja’s ability to be her ‘natural self’ around whites to her having ‘no sense of racial inferiority’, which he attributed in turn to the respect paid Aboriginal culture at Ernabella Mission.⁹⁷ ‘Naturalness’ was a compliment Duguid reserved for describing Aborigines’ reaction to others. In *Ernabella revisited*, he noted that Cook ‘took his place naturally among the boys and girls’ at the mission ‘and they received him as naturally. They taught him to play their games, to throw the boy’s spear, to ride horses, and to make damper’.⁹⁸ But Cook’s ‘naturalness’ was contingent, a quality of his response to Aboriginal company only, for unlike Nganyintja who slept ‘naked ... between the fires at night’, Cook ‘was a member of the white community’ at Ernabella and so ‘had meals with us and of course slept with us’.⁹⁹ Outside Aboriginal society Cook had no recourse to ‘naturalness’, no reservoir of self-respect or system of self-honour to draw upon, other than that which whites had given him.

91. ‘Notes of Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities’, held at Parliament House, Canberra, February 1948, NAA: A52/3, 572/994. See also Rowley 1972: 389-91.

92. Penhall to Wiley, 25 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

93. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

94. C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86; P Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

95. C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

96. C Duguid 1946a: 32-33.

97. C Duguid 1946a: 32-33, 1943a: 15.

98. C Duguid 1946b: 16.

99. C Duguid 1946b: 16, 1943a: 15.

To live contentedly in white society, Duguid believed that Cook needed to feel as proud of his own race and be as unashamed of his colour as *Smith's Weekly* had, presumably on Duguid's advice, described Cook in the article mentioned above. That advice reflected Duguid's ambition for Cook; an ambition that he came to see as unrealisable so long as Cook remained in white society. Cook's problem was not Aboriginality, in Duguid's view, but the lack of Aboriginality. It was not race, but the lack of pride in his race. It was not colour, but the lack of a dignifying context for his colour. And these were kinds of things 'that no white parents could give him'.

In May 1950, two years after his expulsion from King's College and five months before his 13th birthday, Charles and Phyllis Duguid sent Cook to live with Aborigines. Having effectively burnt their bridges among the small community of appropriate missions in South Australia (Ernabella, being a mission for 'tribal' Aborigines, was not considered appropriate) the Duguids sent Cook to the Church of England Mission at Roper River in the Northern Territory.¹⁰⁰ The intervening years had seen Cook enrolled in a school that was 'particularly gifted in the handling of difficult boys', according to Phyllis, 'but he continued to play truant and please himself, eventually becoming quite out of school control'. At Roper River it was planned that Cook would 'live with [an Aboriginal] family, continue with correspondence lessons, and above all learn something of cattle work under sympathetic direction'.¹⁰¹ Sending Cook from the relative luxury of a comfortable suburban home to an Aboriginal camp was not an easy decision to make. As late as October 1949, Cook's psychologist reported that 'he did not want to leave home' and that 'he seemed rather agitated at the suggestion', but the Duguids were convinced that Cook needed 'the companionship of his own people ... [in] his adolescent years'.¹⁰²

It was Charles and Phyllis Duguids' particular understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginality — or what it meant to 'be Aboriginal' — that drove them to seek racial companionship for Cook. Other white foster parents might have acted differently, and, according to the Northern Territory administration, the Duguids could hardly have acted less appropriately. Cook's relocation to Roper River was viewed by the Welfare Branch as both backward (in terms of assimilation) and cruel.¹⁰³ However, whether it was a retrograde step depends entirely on how assimilation is understood. As far as the Duguids were concerned, Cook's advancement in white society had stalled. To become an Aboriginal man conscious of his own self-worth, they believed that Cook needed to go through the rigours of tribal initiation and hopefully acquire a meaningful and dignifying context for his colour. Unlike Penhall, who anticipated Cook's remaining in Aboriginal society, the Duguids saw the move as temporary. 'After a few years' with his own people, they believed that Cook would re-enter white society and 'become a very useful and happy citizen'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰. Penhall to C Duguid, 14 April 1950, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1950/3.

¹⁰¹. P Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

¹⁰². Piddington to P Duguid, 2 October 1949, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86. Charles and Phyllis held strong views on the crucial role that adolescence played in the lives of 'tribal' Aborigines. See Duguid 1943a: 5; P Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines', typescript [1940s], Phyllis Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide.

¹⁰³. Ryan to Giese, 23 March 1957; Archer to Hasluck, 5 June 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

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^{104.} C Duguid to Penhall, 17 November 1948; See also C Duguid to Hasluck, 21 October 1953. Cook lived in the Northern Territory for the rest of his life. After leaving Roper River, he worked for several years at Nutwood Downs Station before marrying Ruth Camfoo in 1960. In 1962, Cook completed a Patrol Assistant's training course while living and working at Beswick Creek Station. In 1964 he played the role of the witch-doctor in Cecil Holmes' film *I, the Aboriginal*, and in the same year was elected vice-president of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. In January 1965, Cook was appointed the 'first full-blood union organiser' with the North Australian Workers Union (NAWU). In July that year, Cook lost his NAWU position to Dexter Daniels, a childhood friend from Roper River. Cook died in 1983, aged 47. Anecdotal evidence suggests that his death was alcohol related. For a detailed study of Cook's life in the Northern Territory, see Kerin 2004: Chapter 5.

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The changing politics of miscegenation

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In an opinion piece in Hobart's *Saturday Mercury* Henry Reynolds, the noted historian of Aboriginal-settler Australian relations, raised the contentious issue of identity in respect to Tasmanian Aboriginal people of mixed heritage.¹ In reclaiming and asserting a defiant Aboriginality, many Tasmanian Aborigines (and mainlanders too) obfuscate and/or ignore the fact that they are of mixed descent. Their identity, both cultural and personal, is subsumed into a proclaimed Aboriginality. Reynold's proposal that such people (in Tasmania anyway) might better be described as Creole drew the expected voices of dissent. For many of those proclaiming Aboriginality, Aboriginality constitutes both the sum and total of who they are and any scrutiny of this assumed identity invariably raises hackles. And there is good reason for this. Descendants of miscegenation, often conceived through violence, were for long the subjects of ostracism, concern and administrative contumely. At various points they were described as inheriting the worst characteristics of both races, as being irretrievably trapped in the chasm betwixt two cultures, as having no culture at all, and always as a problem. In some jurisdictions this led to ever finer and sillier gradations between such descendants so as to more securely locate them within the colonial order, thereby effecting greater administrative control. Descendants of mixed heritage were not granted the liberty to exist in their own complex right. They were instead conceived of as a group to whom things needed to be done in order to provide them with culture and an identity, or alternatively, to rid Australia of their presence. Sterilisation was one of many proposals put forward to effect the latter² and assimilation became enacted policy. Little wonder then that many of Australia's indigenous people baulk at the notion of a hybrid identity. While such an identity would have the capacity to 'evad[e] the replication of ... binary categories' and allow for the 'develop[ment of] new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth',³ it is more widely regarded as a further and calculated denial of the authenticity of one's history, subjectivity and culture.⁴

Whilst many remain empathetic to and understand the need of those of mixed descent to 're-present themselves as coherent people with a sustainable historicized subjectivity',⁵ the elision of one (or more) cultural and biological heritages in

1. Cited in Pos 2002: 37-8.

2. See Kidd 1997: 137-8.

3. Ashcroft et al. 1995: 183.

4. See Anderson 1997.

proclamations of identity is a phenomenon deserving of analysis, not uncritical nor tacit endorsement offered under the presumption of salutary support. Furthermore, when considered within the context of today's orthodox rhetoric describing black/white relations, the politically efficacious and sometimes faddish elision of heritages raises some unsettling possibilities.

The assimilation era and its authorising policies have understandably become the subject of scrutiny and criticism. The Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities held in Canberra in April 1937 determined

That this Conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.⁶

AO Neville, Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs, was an influential delegate. In asking 'Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there ever were any aborigines in Australia,' Neville confirmed that the conference took the notion of absorption literally. In the vernacular of that era, the plan for Aboriginal people of mixed descent was to 'fuck 'em up white'.⁷ In dealing with the legacy of this era, however, in striving to negate the sense of having an identity deemed unsavoury or incomplete, are some of the repugnant ideologies underpinning the notion of absorption remanifesting? Whether consciously or otherwise, has the intended eugenicist project simply been reversed through the taking of non-Aborigines as consorts to 'fuck 'em up black?'

If the notion of absorption of black into white is the subject of scrutiny, as it should be, so too should be the adopted practice of extirpating non-Indigenous heritage. From the 2001 census we know that 69 per cent of couples with an Aboriginal partner are intermixed.⁸ In capital cities this rises to 87 per cent.⁹ The aforementioned 1937 conference would have expected such a high rate of intermarriage to be responsible for a marked and escalating reduction in the number of Aboriginal people, but the contrary is happening. Rather than identifying as white, or non-Indigenous, or something other than Aboriginal that embraces mixed descent, the descendants of mixed marriages between black and white tend to identify as Aborigines. According to Bob Birrell and John Hirst, this 'is an important source of the rapid growth in the self-identified Aboriginal population in Australia'.¹⁰ The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research Unit goes further, suggesting that this could well be the only source of growth. This is because indigenous women's fertility is now at or below replacement level. Besides any

5. Anderson 1997: 12.

6. Commonwealth of Australia 1937 (unpaginated).

7. Manne 2001: 17.

8. The increase in intermixed Aboriginal-settler Australian couples can be gauged from the following census data: 1986 46 per cent; 1991 51 per cent; 1996 64 per cent (Birrell 2000: 62-3).

9. Birrell and Hirst 2002.

10. Birrell and Hirst 2002; see also Birrell 2000: 62, 63-5.

increase in identification and the growth already contained within the relatively young age structure, 'only the contribution made by Indigenous births to non-Indigenous women ... will now sustain Indigenous population growth'.¹¹ Whilst we can presume that today most if not all intermixed child-producing unions are entered into voluntarily, or at least without state coercion, the identity imposed upon or assumed by the children and their descendants is not so innocent. There are various investments in and sensitivities surrounding this issue, not the least being the perceived threat or otherwise to the integrity of Aboriginal cultural survival. Greg Gardiner and Eleanor Bourke allude to these exigencies in an article critical of how the Australian Bureau of Statistics explain Indigenous population growth, particularly in relation to identity. Gardiner and Bourke posit that – rather than intermarriage being a threat to Indigenous peoples because of reported fears of cultural dilution – settler Australian identity 'could well be ... standing in line for "dilution"'.¹² Manifestly a vast legislative and policy complex, and an array of political, historical, educative, communal, cultural, social and psychological exigencies function to coerce particular identities, even ones apparently voluntarily assumed. For example, the only way that an Aboriginal heritage is formally and popularly recognised is through the assumption of Aboriginality. Despite these pressures, children do not always assume the racial, ethnic and/or cultural identity expected of them by others, including parents and/or communities. Children can identify at variance to their ostensible phenotype, and siblings can assume (or are allocated or otherwise have imposed upon them) different identities.¹³ Nevertheless, pressures to adopt particular identities remain. A young student who wished to acknowledge both sides of her biological and cultural heritage and who was desirous of an inclusive identity, uncertain as to what to say when challenged in the politically-charged environment of the university Aboriginal Studies centre in which I work, mumbled she 'was descended from Aborigines.' An Aboriginal staff member – herself a person of mixed descent – pounced with the reprimand 'I hate it when people say that'.¹⁴

Direct comparisons with North America on the issue of the identity of people of mixed descent is difficult. One might surmise that any such comparison should be with Native Americans. However, Native Americans have not faced the same legal (and social) barriers to miscegenation as African Americans, and the exogamy rate has always been comparatively high. The 1990 census revealed that 59 per cent of Native American marriages were intermixed¹⁵ and a national survey conducted in 1993 reported a rate of 70 per cent.¹⁶ These figures need qualifying. Rachel Moran argues that '[e]arly intermixing of white and Native American populations has blurred personal racial identifications, so that people readily shift their identities in response to

11. Kinfu and Taylor 2002: iv.

12. Gardiner and Bourke 2000: 46. Whilst not speaking of miscegenation nor of the identity assumed by those of mixed descent, but rather of the cultural, social and philosophical influence of Aboriginal history and the Aboriginal presence on settler Australians, the Australian poet Les Murray has mused on the figurative inevitability of becoming an Aborigine: 'Gradually you become them. Every invader, every settler gradually becomes the people who are conquered' (Murray 1992: 32).

13. Root 2001: 152.

14. 15 August 2001.

15. Moran 2001: 108.

16. Brown and Douglass 1996: 325.

changing policy'.¹⁷ Furthermore, children born of Native American-white couples where there are high rates of intermarriage (such as in areas where the Native American population is dispersed and/or urbanised) are often classified as white by the parents. Those with remote Native American ancestry 'treat their Indian identity as optional'.¹⁸ This is not the case in Australia. Irrespective of population characteristics, intermixed Aboriginal-settler Australian couples are likely to categorise their children as Aboriginal, and raise their children in the expectation that they will assume an Aboriginal identity. Such racialisation is much more a feature of how African American-white couples rather than Native American-white couples categorise their children.¹⁹ Reginald Daniel notes how 'African ancestry ... is passed on in perpetuity as a means of socially designating *all* future offspring as black, and thus it precludes any notion of choice in self-identification'.²⁰ Such racialised essentialism has attracted broad support. Indeed, until very recently a wide cross-section of professionals in North America argued that the sound mental health of children of mixed black-white descent was dependent upon them successfully assuming an African American identity.²¹ It should be noted that the research upon which this argument is based is characterised by its paucity, not depth, is frequently contradictory, and/or is specific research from which generalist application should not have been extrapolated. Nevertheless, despite the number of African American-white intermixed marriages nearly doubling from 1981 to 1991 (121,000 to 213,000 couples), and increasing again in 1998 to 330,000 couples, compared to Aboriginal people the rate of miscegenation is very low. Of the total number of marriages in North America in 1998, 0.6 per cent comprised African American-white marriages. Out of all marriages involving an African American spouse in 1990 only six per cent were interracial marriages.²² Thus in terms of identity politics, whilst there are close parallels between children of African American-white descent, and Aboriginal-settler Australian descent, there is a wide disparity in rates of miscegenation.

Another feature distinguishing between how Native Americans and Aboriginal people identify is their response to 'blood quantum'. Whereas many Aboriginal people (and Australian government agencies and service providers) subscribe to the 'one drop' rule as being sufficient biological quantum for an individual to assume an Aboriginal identity — subject to also satisfying other criteria²³ — in order to be classified Native

17. Moran 2001: 108.

18. Moran 2001: 109.

19. Moran 2001: 105.

20. Daniel 1996: 130, his emphasis.

21. Daniel 1996: 127. A similar notion appears to have currency in Australia in respect to mixed descent children assuming an Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, adopted through policy and/or legislation in one form or another in every Australian State and Territory, have as their basis this assumption. See Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997: 439–79, 581–90; Law Reform Commission 1997.

22. See Root 2001: 179–88; Kennedy 2003: 126–7.

23. There is no unitary definition of who is an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander. Nevertheless, access to many targeted federal and State services and programs depends upon Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders satisfying a threshold test. This test stipulates that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is someone who: 1) is of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; and 2) identifies as an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and 3) is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives or has lived. See Gardiner-Garden 2003: 1.

American by the Bureau of Indian Affairs individuals must be of at least one-fourth Native American 'blood quantum.' In addition some tribes set their own membership criteria and various 'blood quanta' are used as entry benchmarks.²⁴ Nevertheless, apropos to Gardiner's and Bourke's comment about settler Australian identity 'standing in line for "dilution,"'²⁵ the US Bureau of the Census predicts that by 2050 'the representative face of America will no longer be white'.²⁶

Notwithstanding the Indigenous desire to reclaim a sense of authenticity formerly denied, there is an obvious political efficacy in Aboriginal communal coercion and individual advocacy (both grass root and elite) to sway people of mixed descent to forego their non-Indigenous heritage and proclaim loudly their Aboriginality. Aboriginality, not recognition of mixed heritage, determines access to targeted services, and is a requisite underlying the ability to make successful land rights and native title claims, amongst other things. Acknowledgement and acceptance of Aboriginality, particularly in southern Australia including Tasmania, has been vital. A consequence however is that political (and other) expediencies have a way of hardening cultural and social arteries, thereby restricting innovative flow and stifling dynamism, change and growth. Furthermore, the ostensible oppositional radicalism of denying non-Indigenous heritage in assertions of Aboriginality all too often segues into a racialisation that allows little more than a recitation of traditional contrivances,²⁷ or emotive appeals to a heart-felt true inner black self.²⁸ The orthodox understanding that culture is learned also comes under challenge. Culture, like phenotype, is treated as if it too is innate. Under the one-drop rule Indigenous (and/or black) descent is held to imbue one with, or allow one access to, a range of inherent values and qualities.²⁹ Pertinent to this paper, however, is the question of why in Australia there is so little analytical interest in the elision of all but a singular cultural and biological heritage?³⁰

The rhetorical and semantic context in which this extirpation takes place is also of consequence. The manner of the British acquisition of Australia is under dispute. Was it by discovery, occupation, conquest and/or cession?³¹ Whatever, the complex, enduring and tangled processes of colonisation are now glibly glossed as invasion, and the colonisers as invaders. Martial diction and a plethora of descriptors of and metaphors for

24. Ramirez 1996: 56.

25. Gardiner and Bourke 2000: 46.

26. Cited in Root 1996a: xiv.

27. See Memmi 1965: 98-100.

28. See Hall 1990: 226-7, and *passim*.

29. For discussion on how this understanding affects judicial decisions in the United States in transracial adoptions, see Kennedy 2003: 444-5, 467-8, and *passim*. See also Lowenthal 1998: 222.

30. There's anecdotal evidence that in Broome people of mixed heritage are more inclined to acknowledge and celebrate all their ancestral lines, or at least those other than any white forebears. One can speculate that this is in part motivated by the appeal of the exotic. A Japanese pearler, Afghan cameleer, Chinese cook, gardener or laundryman, Filipina deckhand and so on, all take one into new and exotic locales, cultures, peoples, and away from the supposed blandness and badness of the white 'invaders.' Again, anecdotally, a growing number of young Aborigines are expressing a desire to embrace and name their complex heritage.

31. Reynolds 1996: 86-107.

war describe both past and present encounters and relations between black and white. Certainly many Aboriginal people argue that Australia was invaded, invasion continues and that *ipso facto*, an ongoing war is being fought. Before a 1983 Senate Committee central Australian Aborigines argued that 'Aboriginal people have never surrendered to the European invasion and assert that sovereignty over all of Australia lies with them'.³² Not only is the alleged war over territory. 'It's a cultural war' Professor Marcia Langton declared in a millennial conference address.³³

If we accept that there is an unfinished and ongoing war — and ostensibly we do, for credible critiques of this view of affairs are few — what then of sexual relations between black and white that result in offspring whose duty is to proclaim one identity, heritage and cultural influence at the expense of the other? Certainly in North America some saw the demanded elision of white heritage as part of their soldierly duty. Speaking of her 'mixedness' and the recent movement towards recognition of 'multiracial' identities, the journalist and novelist Danzy Senna recalls she and her siblings being pressed into service by their black father as 'his soldiers in the battle for negritude'.³⁴ In the introduction of her *Miscegenation blues: voices of mixed race women*, the editor Carol Camper, who whilst of mixed descent identifies as black, writes that '[t]he invasion of women's bodies is always a device of war'.³⁵ Under this dated and gloomy assessment of sexual intimacy, intermixed children born of white women are racial and cultural myrmidons. More prosaically a former Aboriginal colleague once worked for a large, well-funded, well-staffed State-based Aboriginal office that oversees and administers a raft of programs and projects. Its staff, affiliates and supporters believe they are the only local Aborigines, and as a corollary, believe they should have the authority to sanction and disavow the claims of others to Aboriginality. My colleague confided his unease at the unceasing office refrain of 'fucking whites', an epithet always hurled in anger. Somewhat ironically, it was also taken literally. Everyone in the office, without exception, was of mixed descent, and all, again without exception, had non-Indigenous, white partners.³⁶

There is much literature considering the issue of rape in war, and how forced impregnation is not only an instrument of terror but — through purposefully hindering the reproductive continuation of a people by distorting their ethnic composition — an instrument of ethnocide. This occurrence has been given legal definition by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.³⁷ The vexed and complex issue of the rights and identity of any resulting children is one also taken up in this literature.³⁸ Whilst there is a great deal of literature (and policy and legislation past and present) dealing with bi- and multiracial children, there is little material (analytical or otherwise) discussing the issue of *consensual* sexual relationships betwixt opposing parties in a war zone and the ramifications of this in terms of the identity of any resulting offspring. The significance of this is that, as in Australia there is a supposed ongoing territorial and

32. Cited in Reynolds 1996: 106–7.

33. Langton 2000.

34. Senna 1998: 16–17.

35. Camper 1994: xx.

36. 21 January 2002.

37. Carpenter 2000a: 2, 2000b; see also Appadurai 1998; Card 1996, 1997.

38. See for example Carpenter 2000a,b.

cultural war, amongst other things Australia itself is a war zone. Consequentially, if this is war then *consensually* procreating intermixed couples can hardly be described as naive. Whether they are conscious of the fact or not, and presumably many are not, they are in fact part of the armoury, an offensive weapon wielded against whiteness.³⁹ Although now coming under challenge by those seeking to embrace a bi- or multiracial identity, sentiments similar to this sustain African American interest in retaining the 'one drop' rule in respect to identity. Whilst the rule of hypodescent⁴⁰ was first implemented in an explicit attempt to preserve white privilege and white racial and cultural purity, many African Americans now view the one-drop rule 'as a necessary, if originally oppressive, means not only of maintaining a distinct but equal African American racial and cultural plurality, but more important, of mobilising blacks in the continuing struggle against white privilege'.⁴¹ Further witness to this is the opprobrium apportioned to prominent individuals of black descent who publicly express a bi- or multiracial identity. When Tiger Woods rejected the categories Black and African American and proclaimed himself to be Cablinasian (from Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian) he was accused of shirking his real identity — that of an African American.⁴² The charge is laid that the assumption of a blended identity strategically evades 'the societal stigma attached to blackness'.⁴³

And what of consent itself in respect of intermixed procreating couples? A moral unease has haunted many colonisers and settler Australians from the commencement of European occupation. Even the instruction to live 'in amity and kindness' with Aborigines issued to Governor Phillip contains a tacit moral concern over the presence of Aboriginal people. Those who gave voice to their concerns include both sensitive and hardy pragmatic folk; the uneducated and the highly educated.⁴⁴ Even the most passionate and articulate defenders of Aboriginal dispossession confessed disquiet. 'What means this whispering in the bottom of our hearts,' introspected Richard Windeyer, an otherwise forthright barrister whom Reynolds describes as 'one of the ablest apologists for European colonisation'.⁴⁵ The matter of the legitimacy of non-Indigenous occupation of Australia, Aboriginal dispossession and the manner in which these occurrences were achieved are issues of public concern and dispute. Bearing witness to this is the broad interest in and ongoing public debate over the issues raised by Keith Windschut-

39. I'm not drawing a comparison in this paper between inter-racial sexual relations on the frontier which occurred 'largely within a context of unfreedom, exploitation and terror' (Evans 1982: 9 and following) and the imposition of a singular identity upon children now born of mixed marriages. This paper is concerned with specific aspects of the latter.

40. The formal term for the 'one-drop of blood' rule, whereby a person with any trace at all of African ancestry is deemed to be black.

41. Daniel 1996: 132, 122–3.

42. Kennedy 2003: 143–4; Moran 2001: 159. See Root (1996a: ix–xi) and Daniel (1996: 127) for a glossary of terms used to describe people of mixed descent. See Senna (1998: 23–7) for a caustic glossary derived from 'Variations on a theme of a Mulatto'. Senna treats any embracing of hybrid identities — such as Woods' self-identification as Cablinasian — with derision (see Senna 1998: 12–27). An editorialist was similarly dismissive, describing Woods' motives as deriving from 'an almost Star Trekian brand of humanism', before chiding him (unfairly) for self-interestedly side-stepping 'the race debate' (cited in Moran 2001: 159).

43. Daniel 1996: 129; see also Lowenthal 1998: 210; Reddy 1994: 68.

44. See Reynolds 1987.

45. Reynolds 1987: 162.

tle's recent publication. Windschuttle alleges that the accepted version of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal history in Tasmania attesting to widespread and deliberate killings of Aboriginal people and a state of war between black and white, is a fabrication unsupported by evidence.⁴⁶

Many claims are made as to the effect that colonisation and its legacy has had on the psyche of settler Australians. Bernard Smith argued in the 1980 Boyer lecture series that Australians are beset by unresolved guilt.⁴⁷ That settler Australians are alienated from ourselves, the landscape we inhabit and suffer a spiritual void are common assertions: so common in fact that many accept such assertions as a given, and it is a mindset that has permeated both popular and esoteric culture. As Andrew Lattas discusses, '[s]elf-alienation is a theme that haunts Australians. It is made to haunt them. It is something they haunt themselves with ... Situated in an alien landscape, white settler Australians are made to internalise a sense of not being at home with themselves'.⁴⁸ Nor at home in the land we inhabit. So acutely has the historian of Aboriginal Tasmanians Lyndall Ryan⁴⁹ internalised this constructed notion of illegitimacy and alienation she desires to have her ashes scattered at sea, for in her words, 'it is neutral territory over which no human may lay claim. And therefore I have the right to have a relationship with it because I'm not treading on anyone's toes.'⁵⁰ Judith Wright, one of Australia's foremost poets and environmentalists, also expressed ambivalence towards Australia: 'Those two strands — the love of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion — have become part of me. It is a haunted country.'⁵¹ The historian Bain Attwood alludes to this discomfiture too in his book *Rights for Aborigines*. Attwood suggests that in order to understand the motivation of non-Aboriginal activists for Aboriginal rights throughout all of post-contact history, psychological factors must be considered. He concludes, furthermore, that unless "'rights for Aborigines" in all their forms' are recognised, the moral legitimacy of the Australian nation will be forever denied, and none of us will ever 'be truly at home in this world'.'⁵² Germaine Greer argues in her recent essay that guilt pervades the settler Australian conscience.⁵³ Following the release of the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families⁵⁴ and the subsequent publicity, a sense of disquiet for some has escalated into something resembling self-hatred. The Sorry Books⁵⁵ are littered with comments such as 'I often feel ashamed to be white.' Says another, 'I am deeply ashamed of my skin colour as a white Australian.' And another, 'I'm disgusted at what my ancestors have done ... I do not feel that I am a part of this arrogant (sic) ignorant dominate (sic) culture.' Someone else,

46. Windschuttle 2002. For responses to Windschuttle's thesis see Manne 2003 and Macintyre and Clark 2003.

47. Smith 1980.

48. Lattas 1990: 54–5.

49. See Ryan 1996 [1981].

50. Cited in Read 2000: 197.

51. Wright 1991: 30.

52. Attwood 2003: xiii, 349 and following.

53. Greer 2003.

54. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997.

'I am sometimes ashamed to be white', and on and on such exculpatory narcissism goes.

Aboriginal people are pivotal to these themes of unease, guilt, alienation, illegitimacy, self-hatred and angst.⁵⁶ Whilst many Aborigines are ever ready to exploit the unease felt by settler Australians and indeed extract political efficacy from it, more often settler Australians haunt themselves with this unease. However, irrespective of intention and where agency lies, the Aboriginal presence in Australia appears to be responsible for spawning a range of mild psychopathologies. In other words, it could be argued that settler Australian responses to the Aboriginal presence are functioning to imprison us within certain psychological and behavioural forms, such as the various manifestations of self-beratement and guilt.⁵⁷ Given this, could it be that Aborigines — being a set of disruptive and unsettling elements generating a particular set of responses (guilt, alienation, illegitimacy, and so on) — unconsciously are functioning as the psychological captors of settler Australians. If so, then settler Australians, as captives of long duration, might be expected to begin over-identifying with their psychological captors, thus experiencing a subtle manifestation of Stockholm syndrome.

There is no universally agreed aetiology of Stockholm syndrome,⁵⁸ nor even agreement as to what it actually is. The name dates from an incident in Stockholm in August 1973 when an armed robber held four bank employees hostage for six days. Despite periodic threats to harm the hostages, even to kill them unless certain demands were met, some began to identify with their captor and criticise those attempting to rescue them. Their response was rationalised as a defence mechanism — employed either consciously or unconsciously — through which captives seek to ameliorate their stress and avoid harm.

With the naming and describing of Stockholm syndrome came the ability to test its relevance across varied and wider fields. As an indication of the sort of hypotheses advanced, some find in the syndrome an explanation for the relationship between battered wives and their abusers. Dee Graham, associate professor of psychology, University of Cincinnati, uses the term 'societal Stockholm syndrome' in her suggestion that all women are held in a state of captivity and fear by a (potentially) universally vio-

55. The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families recommended the holding of an annual 'Sorry Day' for the purposes of commemorating 'the history of forcible removals and its effects' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997: 652 s7a). The organization Australians for Native Title proposed the addition of 'Sorry Books' that would allow settler Australians to express their regret and personal apologies over the forced removal of indigenous children. These books have become an integral part of Sorry Day activities throughout Australia. The comments cited are from one of the books made available for further expressions of regret each 'Sorry Day' at the University of Tasmania. Reading through many other 'Sorry Books' demonstrates that the comments are not atypical.

56. It's important here to understand that I am not according settler Australians the status of victim, nor Aboriginal people the status of aggressors. Rather, I am seeking to further understand the responses of settler Australians to their increased awareness, comprehension and acknowledgment of black-white relations in Australia, historically and currently.

57. Gooder and Jacobs 2000: 229-47.

58. See Graham 1994: 24-9.

lent patriarchy. Graham argues that through extrapolating Stockholm syndrome from the specific (an incident) to the general (society), male-female relations and women's psychology can be best understood.⁵⁹

I'm not implying agreement nor disagreement with Graham's thesis *vis-a-vis* male-female relations here. It is her application of Stockholm syndrome to the broader sociocultural sphere that is of significance, as is her recognition that violence – a necessary catalyst in the development of the syndrome – need only be psychological. The relevance is that whilst there is no doubt that Aboriginal people in general are more the subjects of white violence and oppression than whites are of Aboriginal violence, it is also manifestly apparent in the aforementioned discussion that unresolved issues between black and white within Australia are troubling the settler Australian conscience. This unresolved conflict, in part ideological and in part political, is of an enduring nature, and over the last two or three decades an increasing number of Australians have come to understand Aboriginal grievances, to feel they are legitimate, and on some level to identify with them. As noted, a consequence of this is a questioning of one's sense of self, belonging, and legitimacy. If these forms of identification are arising from the expressed feelings of guilt, alienation, and so forth, and if Stockholm syndrome does have cadence beyond the specific to the extent that it resonates at a sociocultural level, then perhaps it does offer insight into black-white relations in Australia. Following the line of this explanation, could this offer one reason why so many non-Indigenous partners within intermixed procreating relationships appear comfortable having their offspring elide one heritage and identity – their non-Indigenous heritage – for the sake of another – that of Aboriginal heritage? Could this be one reason why in Australia there is so little analysis of this elision? Could this be one explanation (amongst many) for the high rate of intermixed procreating couples?

There are many ways of being Australian, and Aboriginality, like any other identity, is open to myriad possibilities. But an Aboriginality that forecloses against recognition of mixed descent and the genetic and cultural influences of all forebears is in some instances disingenuous. Furthermore, to allow a person of mixed descent to exist in their own complex right, as we are asked to do, requires recognition and acceptance of all lines of descent. The policy of assimilation sought to 'breed out the black strain' and, through cultural coercion, to eliminate Aboriginal cultural and biological heritage. It could be argued that the elision of white heritage in current identity politics – on an individual level at least – is hand-in-hand with the same (repugnant) ideology. Here too, particularly in the ideological shadows of the unguarded comment, one witnesses the unfolding of yet another eugenicist project. One that is, however, now under challenge. Randall Kennedy notes how in the United States many thousands of people of mixed ancestry 'have begun to insist upon public recognition of the full complexity of their lives',⁶⁰ and are eschewing monoracial and/or monocultural identities. So successful have these demands been that the US Bureau of the Census now allows individuals to indicate multiracialism on the census.⁶¹ Even this is not

^{59.} Graham 1994.

^{60.} Kennedy 2003: 144.

^{61.} Moran 2001: 154–78. Moran provides an interesting analysis of the significance of this change, including a critique of how the data will be re-aggregated, and some of the consequences.

going far enough for some. Says one biracial woman, 'People are already talking about giving us a heritage, ... making us a census box. I want to see the day when there are no boxes'.⁶² Professor Maria Root, of Filipino, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, German and Irish heritage, has written 'A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People'.⁶³ Included amongst the twelve rights is the right 'not to keep the races separate within me.' Root explains that she does not 'want to fit into a system that does not accommodate [her] reality'.⁶⁴ For various reasons, some will always assert and privilege a unitary identity and heritage, and (as discussed) acceptance of this is and has been crucial for many in the restoration of dignity, respect, and the realisation of certain rights. But Reynolds' call for the recognition of a Creole identity, or some such, is overdue, and its pertinence is not confined to Tasmania, but is Australia-wide. Both black and white need to confront this.

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‘You are ... my anthropological children’: AP Elkin, Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, 1940–1956

Geoffrey Gray

Anthropology in the past was so very different, in terms of both numbers and regional spread, to what it is today, and the opportunities for concentration on a few specific persons, rather than the diffusion among many, were correspondingly greater.¹

Summary

Ronald and Catherine Berndt were Australian anthropology’s most well-known and prolific practitioners in the period after AP Elkin — a period from about 1950 until their respective deaths in 1990 and 1994. The two met in Elkin’s rooms in April 1940 and married the following year. Their intellectual and personal debt to Elkin was enormous, which they recognised. But it was also a burden, one which they attempted to shake off for the rest of their professional lives. This paper, by focusing on Ronald and Catherine Berndt, examines the role of patronage in the academy as a way of elucidating the formation and shaping of the discipline of anthropology in Australian universities in the period 1940 to 1956, the year when Ronald Berndt obtained a position as senior lecturer in anthropology in the University of Western Australia. During this period Elkin, Professor of Anthropology, managed to obtain research funding for the Berndts, occasional employment in the Sydney Department of Anthropology as well as sending them to the London School of Economics to do their PhDs, and finally obtaining a position for Ronald as lecturer in the University of Sydney. Catherine had been promoted by HD Skinner at Otago (New Zealand) and it was he who encouraged her to attend Sydney. Due to University regulations she was unable to obtain a tenured position. Professional anthropology in Australia had such a small base that a patron like Elkin was critical to success. The Berndts were not the brightest and best of Elkin’s students — a fact acknowledged by Elkin — yet they went on to accept his mantle as the authorities on all matters to do with Aboriginal Australia and Aboriginal Studies. Academic brilliance does not necessarily secure a position and/or success in the academy, a fact Elkin had observed earlier: ‘anthropological field work in Australia does not demand brilliance in examinations’.

1. Berndt and Berndt 1965: 1.

Introduction

In their obituary for Adolphus Peter (AP) Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney between 1934 and 1956, Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt declared that the debt 'we ourselves owe him, personally' was immeasurable. 'It was', they had declared earlier, 'a debt beyond our repayment'. They informed the reader that it was in Elkin's study that they first met in 1940. 'Over the years, his support for us both never wavered — even though at times, inevitably, we saw things differently from the way he did. He wrote to us on 18 May 1978 [near the end of his life], "you are, if I may say so, my anthropological children — of whom I am proud". It was ... reciprocated ... since we looked upon him as our close classificatory father'.²

Elkin was not Ronald's only patron but Ronald (RMB) was not indebted to the others in the way he was to Elkin.³ CP Mountford and Norman Tindale of the Museum of South Australia, Harvey Johnston and JB Cleland, both members of the University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research, also encouraged him to pursue a career in ethnology. Ronald did acknowledge a special debt to Johnston and Cleland. On hearing of Johnston's death he told Cleland that 'I personally owe a great debt to him, for during my early years in Adelaide he constantly encouraged me to pursue anthropology, and it was indeed his recommendation as well as your own, which introduced me to Professor Elkin and thus enabled me to receive [my] initial training'.⁴

Johnston and Cleland may have pointed RMB towards Sydney but it is unlikely that Ronald and Catherine would have been able to develop their careers in social anthropology without the personal patronage of Elkin. The circumstances of Elkin's patronage of a couple, the Berndts, were most likely unique internationally and were certainly unique in Australia. As the British anthropologist Lucy Mair recalled, when she was at the London School of Economics in the 1920s and 1930s 'in those days ... it was all personal patronage'.⁵ Raymond Firth in a more subtle way told me that he was 'sympathetic to [Ralph Piddington] both in his Australian work and later, in his job applications in Aberdeen etc'.⁶ He arranged Piddington's appointment to the Chair of Anthropology at Auckland University in 1950. However, Catherine and Ronald were marital as well as anthropological partners and it was the qualities of a husband and wife team that were attractive to Elkin: he had often lamented the lack of anthropological knowledge about women and the Berndts offered an opportunity of studying both men and women concurrently.⁷ It was the career of Ronald which Elkin assisted and promoted. Although he was supportive of Catherine he was also constrained by the

2. Berndt and Berndt 1979: 8; Berndt and Berndt 1964: xi. In the 1985 edition of the book they state 'our debt to him remains', 1985: xviii.

3. I refer to Ronald Berndt sometimes as Ronald and at other times as RMB; Catherine Berndt as Catherine or CHB.

4. RM Berndt to JB Cleland, 26 September 1951, Cleland Papers, Mortlock Library, University of Adelaide.

5. Lucy Mair, in 'Interview of Lucy Mair' by Jean La Fontaine, 1983. <http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/ancestors/mair.html>, accessed 3/1/06.

6. Firth to author, 20 February 1993 (personal possession of author).

7. Such husband-and-wife teams were not uncommon in British anthropology of the period — Monica and Godfrey Wilson, Scarlett and Bill Epstein, Shirley and Edwin Ardener, Rosemary and Raymond Firth, for example.

mores of the time: unless they were unmarried, women in academia were often seen as having a career that was supportive of their husband.

We know academic patronage exists but we do not know the extent and dimensions and the multiple agenda being played out. This paper discusses how personal patronage and disciplinary territoriality worked in making the career of Ronald Berndt and to a lesser extent of Catherine Berndt. I argue that through a combination of good luck, hard work, determination, opportunity and, importantly, the patronage of Elkin, Ronald Berndt was able to develop and consolidate a career as a professional anthropologist. Elkin maintained both intellectual and financial control by directing where anthropological research could be undertaken as well as by promoting those whom he favoured.⁸ CD Rowley has referred to Elkin's 'benign paternalism' whereas DJ Mulvaney describes it as evidence of Elkin's intellectual narrowness and 'cultural imperialism'. In fact Mulvaney goes further: he argues that Elkin acted against his anthropological opponents, for example Donald F Thomson.⁹ Patronage therefore was not a neutral process in the hands of Elkin. In this case the patron wants to either mould the person in their image or ensure the continuation of their way of doing things. The patron protects and promotes their client at every available opportunity as well as regulating the flow of resources between him/herself and the client which assists in the maintenance of various institutions and beliefs. By carefully tracing the characters, exploring their rationales and relationships, an examination of such patronage enables a more nuanced reading of the forces that helped shape the formation of Australian anthropology in the immediate post-war period.

Positions for anthropologists were scarce at the time. The growth of the Department of Anthropology in the University of Sydney was slow. Until H Ian Hogbin was appointed permanent lecturer in 1936, the professor was assisted by a combination of short-term lecturers including Camilla Wedgwood, Raymond Firth and WEH Stanner, and researchers sponsored by the Australian National Research Council (ANRC) who were at the department writing up their fieldwork.¹⁰ Mona T Ravenscroft, who lectured in 1938, was also appointed tutor in the department. No further appointments, except for the linguist Arthur Capell's appointment as a lecturer in 1944, were made until 1948 when he and Hogbin were appointed Readers.

The establishment of the Australian Army's School of Civil Affairs, later the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA), the Australian National University (ANU) in 1946, and a department of anthropology at Auckland University (New Zealand) in 1950 all created positions for anthropologists. The appointments for the ANU and Auckland were within the domain of Raymond Firth. ASOPA, although independent of the University of Sydney and outside the gift of Elkin, was nonetheless dependent on graduates from that university — KE Read, Marie Reay and Ruth Fink.¹¹

8. A referee of this paper surprisingly suggested that this was the natural order of things in the academy: 'all academics are juniors, depend on their teachers/supervisors to help them grow, including gaining grants and jobs and eventually move away and succeed to positions where they have students and the process begins again ... this is how academic life works'.

9. Mulvaney 1990; 1988: 211.

10. Notes and News 1932: 226.

11. For further discussion see Gray 2000, 2001a: 1–29.

Elkin, nevertheless, was particularly well positioned to provide financial support through his position as chairman of the Anthropology Committee of the ANRC, as well professor in the only teaching department of anthropology in an Australian university. In effect, from 1933 onwards he controlled the limited funds available for anthropological research in Australia. In the period from 1926 (the date of the founding of the chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney) to 1938, the Rockefeller Foundation provided the bulk of the funding for anthropological research. These funds were administered through the ANRC and awarded on the recommendation of the Committee for Anthropological Research chaired by the professor.¹² When these funds were exhausted, no funding was available other than funds from the University and the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board, and a small amount put aside by Elkin which covered the ongoing expenses for publication of the journal *Oceania*, and funded the research of Phyllis Kaberry in Abelam (New Guinea) and the linguistic work of Arthur Capell. Both were clients of Elkin's largesse and Capell was promoted within the department by Elkin. Kaberry left for Yale in 1941 never to return to Australia.¹³ In 1940 Elkin received £3000 from the Carnegie Corporation which he placed at the disposal of the ANRC, but in reality he recommended the research workers and the research program. The Carnegie money was used on the Berndts' research, as well as by Marie Reay, Arthur Capell, and the Sydney based sociologists Jean Craig, Caroline Kelly, Mona Ravenscroft, Vera Hole and Florence Harding.¹⁴ Research projects were fitted in with the general schema of anthropological research first articulated by AR Radcliffe-Brown and adopted by Elkin. The plan was to fill in all the gaps of ethnographic knowledge and each researcher was sent to such places where ethnographic knowledge was either limited or nonexistent.

I

Catherine Helen Webb had graduated Bachelor of Arts from Victoria University (Wellington, New Zealand) and completed a Certificate of Proficiency in Anthropology at Otago University. The style of anthropology taught at the University of Sydney was unavailable in New Zealand. Ronald Murray Berndt, on the other hand, had no academic qualifications but came highly recommended by JB Cleland and T Harvey Johnston as we know.¹⁵ He was employed as an honorary ethnologist in the South Australian Museum. Both he and Catherine enrolled for a Diploma in Anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1940. This required coursework and a short thesis.

Once they had completed their coursework Elkin was eager to get them into the field. The fact that the Berndts had not completed the requirements for the diploma were of little importance; Elkin had observed earlier that 'anthropological field work in Australia does not demand brilliance in examinations'¹⁶ and this was so in the case of the Berndts.¹⁷ He had consulted Cleland as to a suitable site in South Australia for them.¹⁸ He arranged for Catherine to obtain an ANRC grant for six months' fieldwork

12. Peterson 1990.

13. See Gray 2002: 23–50.

14. Gray 2001a.

15. RMB to Cleland, 26 September 1951, Cleland Papers, Mortlock Library, University of Adelaide.

16. Elkin to Vice-Chancellor University of Sydney, 16 November 1937, EP 249/659.

in Ooldea. Ronald, although not eligible as he had no academic qualifications, applied for a grant.¹⁹ Elkin informed the ANRC Executive Committee that Ronald was familiar with 'Ooldea and the opportunities for work there' and that he 'has ... shown himself to be possessed of the necessary qualities which are required in the field worker and as a result of his study and training with me this year he should be a very good [field] worker'.²⁰

The Berndts needed official permission to go to Ooldea and this was provided by Ronald's old patron JB Cleland, who was also Chairman of the South Australia Aborigines' Protection Board (APB). The APB provided a permit to Catherine's husband although she was the recipient of the research funds — as his wife, she did not need a permit. (Ronald had been at Ooldea in July–August 1939 as part of an expedition by the Museum of South Australia and the University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research.)²¹ He pointed out in his application to the ANRC that he had undertaken previous fieldwork, besides Ooldea, 'in Adelaide and at Murray Bridge on the Lower River Murray between November 1939 and February 1940, and intermittent periods with informants of the Jaralde tribe; Data collected from a Ngadjuri informant ('middle' South Australia), 1939-40; Work carried out at intermittent periods with T. Vogelsang who is intimately familiar with the Dieri tribe (Lake Eyre Region). Inquiry into the Dieri language and the collection of native texts had been the result'.²²

After Ooldea, Ronald and Catherine Berndt continued to work on two distinct but related projects; firstly, in the Lower Murray, among people who did not live a traditional life but where a few of the eldest remembered their traditional past ('memory cultures'). This was a continuation of work started by Ronald in the late 1930s. Catherine notes that this trip 'constituted RMB's first anthropological field experience with living people, and that at a time when he had no anthropological training'.²³ Secondly, Ronald and Catherine were engaged in a study of acculturation in urban and rural South Australia, which was linked to Ronald's work on the Lower Murray.²⁴

In the early months of 1942, the Berndts wrote up their Ooldea fieldwork, which was submitted for the Diploma in Anthropology, although it was Ronald's initial intention to submit a thesis on his Lower Murray research.²⁵ They were eager to have it completed because Ronald was increasingly anxious he would have to leave the research to undertake some war work.²⁶ The Berndts, especially Ronald, also sought to

17. The coursework results were as follows: Miss C Webb — Essays A; A. Exam: 71%. Result P[ass]. Mr R Berndt — Essays B+; B+. Exam 36%. Result F[ail]. Post Paper 56%. Result P[ass]. Elkin to Registrar, 21 May 1941, University of Sydney Archives (Student Records), 13/4/4.

18. Elkin to Secretary (ANRC), 14 July 1940, Elkin Papers (hereafter EP) 156/4/1/14, University of Sydney Archives.

19. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 2 May 1941, EP 156/4/1/14.

20. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 16 July 1940, EP 156/4/1/14; RMB to ANRC, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78. Also RM Berndt 1982: 49–50.

21. RM Berndt 1939; also RM Berndt 1989: 59–62.

22. RMB to ANRC, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78.

23. Catherine Berndt 1993: 3.

24. Berndt and Berndt 1951 was a result of this research.

25. RMB to Elkin, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78. They spent the first months of 1942 with Catherine's family in Dunedin (New Zealand), returning to Sydney in March.

26. RMB to Elkin, 11 January 1942, RMB to Elkin, 28 January 1942, EP 246/613.

obtain 'some post in a semi-military capacity ... dealing with the natives directly or indirectly', in Papua and New Guinea or the Native Affairs Branch in the Northern Territory. At the instigation of Elkin, Ronald Berndt wrote to the Prime Minister offering his (and Catherine's) services. Elkin had also written to the Prime Minister outlining a position of Liaison Officers who would supervise depots where Aboriginal people could be assessed for their suitability for war work.²⁷ In May 1943 they were each awarded a Diploma in Anthropology for their Ooldea research which they had presented as a joint thesis — *A preliminary report of field work in the Ooldea region, western South Australia*.²⁸ Elkin considered it the 'best complete monograph' of an Aboriginal tribe and told Raymond Firth: 'Personally I think they have real understanding of Aboriginal life, and are the best field workers in Australia to date'.²⁹

Soon after their return to Adelaide, Ronald presented a paper (jointly written with Catherine) to the Anthropological Society of South Australia on their Ooldea work, culture contact and native policy. It was received with some hostility by the audience — mostly members of the Museum, the Board for Anthropology Research, missionaries and government officials, and interested members of the public. Catherine told Elkin they had not anticipated 'that any controversy could possibly arise from the paper among people who had the interests of the natives at heart ... who [nevertheless] feel that the paper was a veiled personal attack on their knowledge of aborigines and a certain amount of unexpected emotion seems to have developed'.³⁰ In their presentation the Berndts expressed concern that there was indiscriminate and unsympathetic moving of Aboriginal people 'from the northern coast to further inland and towards Adelaide. Half castes are taken away from their homes, while missionized full-bloods and those who have been in long contact with the white man, are told to go bush'.³¹ The Berndts also opposed the proposed move of 'natives from the Ooldea Reserve' to a 'suitable property in the north-western pastoral country'. Their conclusion was 'supported by the knowledge that the natives themselves emphatically did not desire this move. It seems to us only fair that in the question that is bound to have such an important bearing on their whole future, their point of view should in justice be taken into account. It seemed to us that the movement of these natives to such an area will serve to hasten the process of disintegration, considerably more even than would be the result of contact along the [Transnational Railway] Line'.³²

They continued their research around the Lower Murray and other parts of rural and urban South Australia which they considered as an 'excellent opportunity for stud-

27. RMB to Elkin, 4 January 1942; RMB to Elkin, 11 January 1942; RMB to Elkin, 28 January 1942; RMB to Elkin, 16 February 1942, EP 246/613. Elkin to Curtin, 2 April 1942, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) MP508/1, 240/701/217.

28. Berndt and Berndt 1942–43.

29. Elkin to Firth, 13 November 1948, EP 178/4/2/178; RMB to Elkin, 15 February 1945, EP 246/613.

30. CHB to Elkin, 24 June 1942, EP 246/613.

31. RMB to Elkin, 17 April 1942, EP 246/613.

32. RMB to University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research, 4 November 1942, EP 246/613. Copies were sent to Cleland, Johnston, Elkin, Erskine and Penhall; see also RMB to Elkin, 2 November 1942, EP 246/613. RMB did not address the Society again until 1989; CHB never did after their joint address.

ying culture contact in an advanced form'.³³ They were interested in 'matters concerning Culture Contact and points of Native Policy – also their [Aborigines'] attitude toward the war'.³⁴ The Adelaide research was unfunded (although supported by Elkin)³⁵ and demonstrated their enthusiasm and determination to work as anthropologists. They had no formal position with the University of Sydney or with the Museum. Living in Adelaide was cheap, yet living at RMB's father's house was not easy. They told Elkin that 'the circumstances under which we work are not always pleasant'. He explained that because of his mother's death the previous year, under the 'Adelaide billeting system' two rooms were vacant in 'our house'. It was a choice of taking a number of soldiers or sub-letting the rooms. RMB's father chose the latter. The couple living at the house had two children and as a consequence 'most of our work has to be done at night'. Added to this was concern over obtaining his military exemption.³⁶

In the following year Elkin succeeded in obtaining funding for the Berndts' Adelaide research (which included two months at Menindee in south-west New South Wales funded by the New South Wales Aborigines' Welfare Board).³⁷ He explained to JA Gibson, honorary secretary of the ANRC, that the Berndts had

at their *own expense* ... spent several months of 1942 on the Lower Murray doing very careful research amongst the remaining Aborigines – checking and adding to work done there 20 years and more ago of Radcliffe-Brown. They have months of writing up of material before them, and should do this before tackling any other job. I know they cannot afford to do this on their own funds, and *I recommend* that the ANRC make a grant to their writing up material at the rate of £6 per week, as from February 1, 1943, for six months or until such time, if earlier, they enter the Commonwealth Service.³⁸

Elkin's hope that this would be completed before they began any new work was not fulfilled. Although they worked at this material and prepared a draft it was not until 1993 that it was finally published as *The world that was*.³⁹ (By this time Ronald was dead.) In August 1943 Elkin presented a further application on their behalf for a grant for 12 months' fieldwork in South Australia 'especially in (1) the Adelaide, (2) the Quorn-Maree, (3) Lower Murray and possibly (4) Koonibba-Port Augusta districts, for (a) research on acculturation of aborigines and (b) recording of tribal knowledge provided by remaining members of former tribes in these districts.' Both projects were 'important scientifically, and the former also practically'. Moreover, Elkin declared, 'these two workers have specialized in this type of work and [are] particularly efficient in it'. The Executive recommended that payment start from 1 September 1943.⁴⁰ (Elkin had the grant start 'as from 1st August, following on after the termination of the grant

³³. RMB to Elkin, 11 August 1942; Elkin to RMB, 4 September 1942, RMB to Elkin, 4 October 1942; RMB to Elkin, 4 October 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁴. RMB to Elkin, 17 April 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁵. Elkin to RMB, 4 September 1942, RMB to Elkin, 4 October 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁶. RMB to Elkin, 10 May 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁷. Berndt and Berndt 1943.

³⁸. Elkin's emphasis. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 16 February 1943, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA) Australian National Research Council papers MS 482, folder 840.

³⁹. Berndt and Berndt with Stanton 1993.

⁴⁰. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 19 August 1943, NLA MS 482, 840.

for the first part of this year'.⁴¹ It was only in the months from December 1943 to February 1944 that they were not recipients of ANRC funding. A commonwealth position for the Berndts — 'to take charge of a Feeding Station for Aborigines at the Granites, Northn (sic) Territory' — optimistically hoped for by Elkin and the Berndts did not eventuate.⁴²

II

The Berndts' South Australian research was unexpectedly hindered in late 1943 by the refusal of the South Australian APB to grant them permission to enter the Port Augusta, Point Pearce, Point McLeay and Swan Reach Aboriginal Reserves. RMB had written to the APB requesting permission for him and Catherine to conduct research at these reserves. He stated that the work was for Elkin and funded by the ANRC.⁴³ Elkin made strong representations on their behalf; he told the Board that the Berndts were 'proficient and skilled', 'earnest and sincere' and 'got on very well with the Aborigines'.⁴⁴ He stressed that comparative work such as the Berndts were doing on the 'scientific study of acculturation and assimilation is an essential basis for [future Native] administration'.⁴⁵ JB Cleland, chairman of the APB, however, advised Elkin that 'there are likely to be difficulties ... in granting permission for the Berndt's [sic] to enter the reserves'.⁴⁶ He did not specify what these difficulties might be. At the end of 1943, the APB deferred, yet again, consideration of the Berndts' application, 'as many of the natives are not accessible, being engaged in work related to the prosecution of the war, and also on the grounds that the applicants have a disturbing influence on the tranquillity of the natives on the Reserves'.⁴⁷ Ronald provided further information on the purpose and significance of their research, their methods and aims, but was again refused a permit.⁴⁸ He wrote again to the Board and requested the reasons for the application's non-approval. The chairman noted that the APB was not required to give reasons for its decisions.⁴⁹ The Berndts nonetheless were 'astonished' that they continued to meet with such opposition 'before our investigation had been carried out'. They assumed there was some 'apprehension that our work would reveal certain conditions and activities which the authorities wish to remain unrecorded'.⁵⁰ The Berndts underestimated the depth of opposition to their work, and to them personally, despite the indication of this in the hostility shown to their paper at the Anthropological Society of South Australia in June 1942. But what was the cause of the hostility and how deep was it?

The Berndts were unaware that the United Aborigines' Mission superintendent at Ooldea had made a complaint to the APB while they were at Ooldea. After initially wel-

41. Isabel Houison to RMB and CHB, 13 September 1943, NLA MS 482, 840.

42. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 16 February 1943, NLA MS 482, 840.

43. RMB to Penhall, 15 November, 1943, State Archives of South Australia (hereafter SASA), GRG 52/1/1940/97; RMB to Elkin, 8 November 1943, EP 246/613.

44. Elkin to Chief Secretary (Aborigines' Protection Board), 10 November 1943, Cleland Papers, South Australian Museum (hereafter SAM).

45. Elkin to Cleland, 13 December 1943, EP 157/4/1/23.

46. Cleland to Elkin, 30 November 1943, SAM Cleland Papers.

47. APB Minutes, November 1943, SASA GRG 52/16.

48. APB Minutes, 19 January 1944, SASA GRG 52/16.

49. APB Minutes, 2 December 1943, SASA GRG 52/16.

50. RMB to Elkin, 12 November 1943; RMB to Elkin, 16 November 1943, EP 246/613.

coming Ronald and Catherine Berndt,⁵¹ the superintendent of the Mission, Harrie E Green, wrote to the Aborigines' Protection Board that he did not want them at Ooldea as they were 'having a very unsettling effect upon the Natives'. Green reported that Aboriginal people 'deeply resent[ed] [Berndts'] persistent questionings into matters which concern their tribal life and Secret Customs. Also taking photos of them with no covering at all, representing them to be wild bush Natives in Central Australia and they do not get around like that here at Ooldea'.⁵² (As a result of Green's representations, the Berndts' permit was terminated as of 22 November 1941, the date they left Ooldea.)

Soon after Green made his initial complaint to the APB he was contacted by the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau (a precursor of the Australian Security Intelligence Office) seeking information on Berndt: 'Dr Charles Duguid has requested that you may favour me with some information, in strict confidence, regarding Ronald Murray Berndt, an alleged anthropologist, who has a Permit to stay on the Native Compound at Ooldea ... It has been reported that Berndt is upsetting the Natives: — that he is suspected of anti-British feelings ... Any information you may be pleased to supply will be greatly appreciated'.⁵³ This only served to reinforce Green's views on Ronald. In mid-1943 Ronald informed Green that he and Catherine planned to return to Ooldea as part of the South Australian survey and 'stay for two years or more'. Green was dismayed and he advised AB Erskine, secretary of the United Aborigines' Mission, that Ronald Berndt 'does not like the mission work at heart, I am sure, and I have no sympathy with his idea of the Germans being justified in invading Poland and in trying to exterminate that nation and what they did to the Jews there. Whatever he says or writes or does he is pro-German and I don't trust him. You can communicate this to Mr Penhall [secretary of the APB] or anyone you please whom it may concern'.⁵⁴

Erskine, aware of the CIB interest, however, kept to the point that Berndt was a disruptive presence; he informed the APB that

as a Mission we are opposed to this man [RMB] spending time on one of our Stations. He is not in sympathy with our work, and his presence so upsets the natives that our work is not only more difficult but is definitely hindered. If we could see that he was doing any good for the native we would tolerate his presence, but, as far as we can see, there is absolutely nothing done to lift the native on to a higher platform. We trust that, if this man sends in a request, asking permission to go on this, or any other reserve, on which we are working, that the Board will refuse to grant it ... [Their work] is of no practical value to the Aborigines.⁵⁵

51. Harrie Green to Cleland, 17 July 1941, SAM Cleland Papers. RMB to Cleland, 19 July 1941, SAM Cleland Papers; Catherine Berndt 1994: 154.

52. HE Green to Aborigines' Protection Board, 20 September 1941 SASA GRG 52/1/1941/25.

53. R Williams, Inspector CIB, to HE Green, 3 October 1941, NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

54. Green's comments reported by AB Erskine (Secretary, United Aborigines' Mission) to Aborigines' Protection Board, 28 July 1943, copy in NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248. As scurrilous as Green's comment seems, anti-Semitism among Germans and people of German descent in South Australia is well documented. With regard to Ronald Berndt, it is highly likely that he uttered anti-Semitic statements. Green had his own agenda and most likely exaggerated the strength of RMB's views. Colin Tatz, who spoke with RMB about anti-Semitism, assures me that RMB was deeply disturbed by his (Berndt's) father's anti-Semitism and how it lingered with him (RMB) (pers comm Colin Tatz, 25 May 2004, Canberra).

Green's complaint about the disruptive effect of the Berndts on Aboriginal people at Ooldea, supported by Erskine, was used by the APB to restrict the Berndts' movement and entry to government and mission stations in South Australia.⁵⁶

The Berndts, naively as we now know, were sure Green was 'not the instigator of the opposition to their entering reserves'. They felt it had to be other, more influential people, who opposed them and their research. They told Elkin that they had received a short but cordial note from Green which confirmed their 'conviction that the opposition is not the result of his instigation'. They held this view some months later, perhaps not knowing Green's role until much later, if at all. They were confident, however, that Cleland, Penhall and Erskine 'may be at least partly responsible'. CP Mountford, who had befriended Ronald when he joined the Museum, also reported to the CIB on his conversations with Ronald.⁵⁷

Cleland informed the Berndts that the Board decided they should be 'doing direct war work' as anthropology and sociology were 'no value whatsoever to any one in war time, although perhaps of some use in time of peace'. Cleland added that if the Berndts continued their 'present work' they would be 'barred from any employment either in any Government concern or any Body even partially controlled from public funds: and he advised that if we had regard for own welfare we would consider his remarks carefully and look for other occupations'. He nonetheless conceded that if the Berndts found work in 'regard to acculturation' in another area such as the Northern Territory or New Guinea 'but particularly not in South Australia' he would be satisfied.⁵⁸ Another contributing factor was opposition to the Sydney Department by members of the Board for Anthropological Research and the Museum of South Australia who were, Ronald told Elkin, 'bitterly antagonistic to the ... "Sydney School of Anthropologists"'.⁵⁹ Elkin was bemused: 'I thought that would not exist in your case, seeing you are a South Australian, but apparently you have been contaminated by residence in Sydney'.⁶⁰ This antagonism was primarily over funding and a different research agenda, in what was considered by the Adelaide people as Sydney's intellectual imperialism. Towards the end of his life Ronald made the observation, forgetting the intensity of the rivalry in the 1930s and 1940s, that it was about 'the issue of amateur versus professional'.⁶¹ Cleland and the Board had a limited understanding of the Sydney anthropological enterprise which made it harder for them to appreciate the value of social anthropological research.

A further irritation to most of the members of the Universities Board, besides Ronald's German ancestry, was his military exemption.⁶² Cleland raised the possibility

55. AB Erskine (Secretary, United Aborigines' Mission) to Aborigines' Protection Board, 28 July 1943, NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

56. See various in NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

57. RMB to Elkin, 18 January 1944; RMB to Elkin, 8 October 1944, EP 246/613.

58. RMB to Elkin, 8 November 1943; RMB to Elkin, 12 November 1943, EP 246/613.

59. RMB to Elkin, 6 December 1943, EP 246/613.

60. Elkin to RMB, 10 December 1943, EP 246/613.

61. RMB 1989: 59; also Jones 1987: 71-92; Mulvaney 1988: 207-12.

62. Many Germans and Australians of German descent had been interned. In the circumstances RMB was fortunate that no further action other than surveillance was taken. See, for example, Bevege 1993.

with Ronald that anthropological research was simply a device for avoiding military service or war-related work. Cleland reported his conversations with Ronald Berndt to the Commonwealth Investigation Branch and provided no support for the Berndts in APB meetings. On one occasion, Ronald's remarks about the war and his bragging about avoiding military training so upset Cleland's wife and daughters that they left the room.⁶³

In his letter of support for the Berndts, Elkin addressed the matter of Ronald's military exemption and the importance of their research. He informed Cleland that – despite his views about the inappropriateness of the Berndts research – the ANRC was satisfied, as was Scientific Manpower,

that in doing the present work [Menindee and the larger survey of South Australia], they are contributing towards a solution of a very important present and post-war reconstruction problem. I am sure you can understand why their work should be done in South Australia, as well as in New South Wales and Queensland and, of course, the obvious persons to do it in South Australia are the Berndts. They have already done work there and Mr Berndt is a native. I would like to emphasize the fact too that this work should be done under the special conditions which arise during wartime, for this will affect their [Berndts] future. ... The problem with the more or less civilized aborigines is a very difficult one sociologically and psychologically, and the more detailed and deep analysis of all aspects of the problem, the more hope we have of finding a solution. ... [A]s Mr Berndt had worked to some extent under your guidance and with your blessing, I thought he should continue the research in South Australia.⁶⁴

Cleland was not persuaded. It should have been obvious by then that the Board was opposed to the Berndts' anthropological research and unhappy about Ronald's military exemption, and that this antagonism and deprecation flowed across to the decisions of the APB.

Despite strong opposition from the APB and its refusal to issue permits, the Berndts – almost as an act of defiance – visited Aboriginal people on the boundaries of the mission stations. Catherine, who looked after the bookwork and other administrative matters to do with their ANRC grants, developed a chatty and (for present-day readers) a revealing and informative correspondence, with Isabel Houison, assistant secretary of the ANRC. They had an extensive and wide ranging correspondence which covered everyday events and gossip as well as anthropological reflections and general political comments. Catherine told Houison that they had a 'very profitable visit to Yorke Peninsula'; she observed that

it is very conservative area and in some of the towns color (sic) prejudice is extremely noticeable. In Port Victoria, for instance, near Point Pearce Mission Station, there are special regulations which are rigidly enforced. For instance, the natives are not permitted in that town after 6pm, under threat of prosecution – although the town receives much profit from their custom during the day. The feeling against them is strong too.⁶⁵

⁶³. AC Palmer, Inquiry Officer, to The Inspector (CIB), 10 July 1941, NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

⁶⁴. Elkin to Cleland, 10 November 1943, EP 157/4/1/23.

⁶⁵. CHB to Isabel Houison, 16 January 1944, NLA MS 482, 840.

From the coast they set out for Ernabella Mission and spent some time at Macumba and Oodnadatta, 'where some ceremonies were being held; it was very cold camping out in the open but it was well worth while'. The founder of the mission, Charles Duguid, was angered and reported their unauthorised presence to the APB. They had also accompanied EWP Chinnery, the Commonwealth Advisor on Native Affairs and Director of the Northern Territory Branch of Native Affairs, to Balaklava, 'where there is a war-time settlement of half-castes from the Northern Territory'. They found the people 'very pleasant' and they hoped 'to return there for brief period'.⁶⁶ Until this visit the Berndts had not met people from the North, and this is reflected in their description: 'they are a mixture of aboriginal with various asiatic strains, such as Chinese, Japanese, Philippino and Malayan, and do not look at all like aborigines'.⁶⁷ Despite the tenacity and determination of Catherine and Ronald, it became clear to them and Elkin that continued opposition by the Board and key figures such as Cleland, CP Mountford and Duguid meant that there was little hope for continued research in South Australia. In addition, despite their (and Elkin's) representations, the Commonwealth and the Army were not interested in employing them. Elkin began casting around for other possibilities.

III

At the end of May 1944, following discussions with Chinnery and AS Bingle, General Manager of the Australian Investment Agency ('Vesteys'), Elkin arranged a position for the Berndts. He was confident it would provide 'great opportunities for research, and also should help in a very practical way. It is, in short, to be Aboriginal Welfare Officer and Liaison Officer on the Vestey's Stations in the North'.⁶⁸ The Berndts were 'very pleased to accept the position ... and extremely grateful for your kindness in arranging it. We are looking forward to the opportunities for practical research and applied anthropology which this will provide'.⁶⁹

The Berndts conducted a survey 'to investigate labour and allied problems connected with natives, on stations under the control of Northern Agency Ltd [Vesteys], Alice Springs; [they] were to look into such aspects as the declining birth-rate and labour shortage on these stations, and where possible to suggest measures for their alleviation. In this capacity they were to act as welfare officers, in the study of native social and living conditions, and to serve as liaison between the officials of the firm and the Department of Native Affairs'.⁷⁰ This survey was a difficult and often traumatic time for them. They found themselves in conflict with the General Manager of Vesteys over his reluctance to act on their recommendations to improve the working conditions and treatment of Aboriginal station workers and their dependants, as well as his demand that the Berndts recruit Aboriginal labour.⁷¹ They stayed employed by Vesteys from August 1944 to April 1946. During this time they were also increasingly concerned by what this work for Vesteys might mean for their career as anthropologists. They told

⁶⁶. CHB to Isabel Houison, 16 January 1944, NLA MS 482, 840. JRB Love (Superintendent of Ernabella) to Duguid, July 1944; Penhall to Love, 3 August 1944, SASA GRG 52/1, 1944/24.

⁶⁷. CH Berndt to Isabel Houison, 17 November 1943, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁶⁸. Elkin to RMB, 30 May 1944, EP 246/613.

⁶⁹. RMB to Elkin, 9 June 1944, EP 246/613.

⁷⁰. Berndt and Berndt 1945.

Chinnery, for example, that they were unhappy to think their 'association with this firm can prejudice our status as anthropologists, and so severely limit the natural course of our work'.⁷² Later they described their position as 'anthropologists to Vestey's' as 'far-cical ... In other words we are definitely prostituting our work for no adequate reason'.⁷³ In June 1946 they completed their report.⁷⁴

The survey and its writing up was a complex and contested event involving Elkin, Chinnery, officers of the Northern Territory Native Affairs Branch, particularly the deputy director VC Carrington and Bill Harney, Bingle and the station managers of Vestey's stations, the Northern Territory Administrator, CLA Abbott, the Commonwealth government, the State governments of South Australia and Western Australia, the Army, and both Army and Commonwealth intelligence agencies. The politics and views were manifold and conflicting. The Berndts were most likely unaware at the time — they give no indication to the contrary — of these machinations. We can, however, be reasonably certain that Elkin and Chinnery in particular were seeking to implement a 'new deal' through extensive government intervention, pursuing the aims of the Commonwealth government as set out by John McEwen, Minister for the Interior, in February 1939. Both men had been critical in the formulation of this policy.⁷⁵ They were motivated by humanitarian ideals premised on ideas of welfare and social justice which would bring about an alteration in the relationship between the state and Aboriginal people, as well as ameliorating and rehabilitating Aborigines from their tragic despondency. At the time, these goals seemed to be within the grasp of humane Europeans.⁷⁶

Elkin, while recognising the value of the report, did not think it should be published in the form presented in 1946. He wanted the Berndts to write a book on Aboriginal labour using the information they had obtained during their research on Vestey's stations and Army compounds. He thought this would be a more useful result of their research. The Berndts were caught in this complex web and failed, most likely due to their wish to see the Vestey's work behind them, to produce a report which could assist Elkin and Chinnery in their pursuit of better working conditions and treatment for Aboriginal pastoral workers. It is little wonder, in the light of the circumstances now known, that it took until 1987 for a version of the report — *End of an era* — to be published.

^{71.} This research personally affected the Berndts for a long time after they left the employ of Vestey's. An example of how difficult it was personally is provided in C Berndt 1994: 155–6. Their commentary on some of these relationships is provided in Berndt and Berndt 1987: x–xx; 14–54; 252–84. See also C Berndt 1950: 9; 16–17. The relationship between Elkin, the Berndts and Bingle is discussed in Gray 2001b.

^{72.} RMB to Chinnery, 5 August 1945, Chinnery Papers (hereafter CP), NLA MS766.

^{73.} RMB to Chinnery, 21 August 1945, CP, NLA MS766.

^{74.} Berndt and Berndt 1946. It is difficult to ascertain how many copies of this ms were made; it does appear, however, that a copy was not presented to Vestey's. See Gray 2001b: 38.

^{75.} McEwen 1939; also Gray 2004: 21–33.

^{76.} See Gray 2005: 37–54; Rowse 1988: 57–73.

IV

With the war ending, Elkin focused on the general plan for anthropological research, initiated and developed by AR Radcliffe-Brown in 1926. Once the Berndts' work for Vestey's was completed, Elkin encouraged them to make an application to the ANRC to 'carry out social anthropological work' in the northern part of the Northern Territory, particularly Yirrkala. Lloyd Warner and Donald Thomson had worked in Arnhem Land before the war. Elkin, supporting the application, declared to the committee of which he was chairman, 'that this would be a valuable place for research to be carried out by these two most experienced and thorough workers.' Elkin arranged for a salary and expenses to be paid to the Berndts from the end of May 1946, when their work for Vestey's officially ended. The projected research, typical of the sort conducted in the 1940s, was 'concerned mainly with such important aspects of acculturation as the taking of a census, the collection of genealogies and case histories, the study of population and tribal distribution, education and occupational training, native labour, diet and nutrition'. The Berndts noted that it would be 'most unwise to neglect the indigenous and traditional culture, such as the sacred and non-sacred corroborees (ie of both men and women), and the collection of phonetic texts and other linguistic data'.⁷⁷ Co-operation was 'expected from all ... mission bodies and personnel; travelling expenses would be reduced to the minimum by the use of mission [and Northern Territory administration] luggers'.⁷⁸ Research could not occur without the support of either.

The research proposed may have fitted into the general research plan but it also had another purpose. There is little doubt that this project was developed as a way of thwarting the photographer and amateur ethnologist Charles P Mountford's proposed expedition to Arnhem Land. Mountford had arranged to undertake a major expedition to Arnhem Land in 1947 funded by the American National Geographic Society, the Commonwealth government with backing from the Navy and Air Force, and the American Smithsonian Institute. When Elkin heard of Mountford's proposed expedition to Arnhem Land, he wrote to the National Geographic Society: 'I should like to suggest that ... your expedition ... should include a trained social anthropologist. Mr Mountford, who is a good photographer, especially of still subjects, and who has done valuable work in the recording and copying of native art, is not a trained anthropologist, much to his own regret'.⁷⁹ Mountford was an amateur. In case there was any doubt, Elkin presented himself as the authority on Aboriginal culture and people.

Mountford, aware of Elkin's opposition, was concerned that the Berndts research would seriously undermine his relationship with the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian. Mountford, the Berndts told Elkin with an air of innocence, 'seemed to think that both you and the Research Council were deliberately "sending" us to that area to thwart his expedition'.⁸⁰ Catherine described to Isabel Houston Mountford's attempt to dissuade them from going to Arnhem Land:

77. Elkin, Report of the Anthropology Committee, July 1945–July 1946; Elkin, Report of Anthropology Committee, 7 August 1947, EP 161/4/1/81. RMB and CHB to ANRC (Anthropology Committee), 11 May 1946, NLA MS 482, 840.

78. Berndt and Berndt to ANRC, 11 May 1946, NLA MS 482, 840.

79. Elkin to National Geographic Society, 1945, quoted in Wise 1985: 204.

80. RMB to Elkin, 1 July 1946, EP 246/612.

First of all he tried hard to persuade us to give up the idea of going to Arnhem Land, saying that it would make him look rather silly if the news got into the papers. Then he promised us lots of concessions, including occasional trips on his lugger, or his launch, or his small motor-boat (he's expecting to have all three), if we would leave certain areas to his party, and not publish any data from them. He was especially anxious that I [Catherine] should 'lay off' women's ceremonial life at either Oenpelli or Millingimbi, and in return his party would do the same for me! I told him that I had lots of material already regarding that, and he was most upset — apparently they are going to make a big thing of it ... [H]e intended to have a scientist from Washington coming out to study the effects of the war on the natives: and he wasn't at all pleased to hear that (apart from actual army personnel) we hold most of the data relating to the now-abandoned army compounds, which included natives from Arnhem Land (Oenpelli, Millingimbi etc) ... I am afraid that he thinks it is all a plot on the part of Professor Elkin and the Research Council, to forestall his much-publicized expedition! ... [H]e was anxious that we shouldn't tell Professor Elkin even that he called, but of course we are doing so.⁸¹

It 'amused' them to think that Mountford, with a budget of nearly £10,000, 'expects competition from us, with our small grant'. Mountford paid the Berndts further visits until, finally, he seemed 'quite resigned to the idea' of their going to Arnhem Land.⁸² Elkin, not content with the Berndts working in Arnhem Land, arranged for an expedition of his own, which included Bill Harney, the cartoonist Eric Joliffe and a photographer from *Pix*, as well as two Methodist missionaries, to make a quick visit through Arnhem Land in August-September 1946.⁸³ While Elkin considered Mountford's expedition as 'just something else to delay the Aborigines finding their balance after the war'⁸⁴ he did not see his work or that of the Berndts in the same way. Their work was serious and in the interests of advancing scientific knowledge about Aboriginal life.

Elkin continued to undermine and deprecate Mountford and promote the Berndts. Clem Christensen, editor and founder of the journal *Meanjin*, was approached by Elkin to accept a piece by the Berndts on art in Arnhem Land. Elkin pointed out to him that the Berndts had obtained 'Aboriginal carvings in the round' from north-east Arnhem Land in 1947 — 'completely unknown previously — not even seen by Mr Mountford in his 1948 (American Expedition). Also bark paintings: those done for ceremonies (not for sale). Mountford, of course, got plenty of bark paintings — natives will make a trade of it. But the ones collected by the Berndts are mythologically correct and done with local ochres (Mountford took ochres up with him).'⁸⁵ Christensen, however, wanted them to write about some other region. After some discussion the Berndts decided to write on the 'Central Western area of the Northern Territory, a region where

81. CHB to Houison, 30 June 1946; CHB to Isabel Houison, 30 July 1946, NLA MS 482, 857a.

82. RMB to Chinnery, 11 July 1946, CP, NLA MS766.

83. CHB to Chinnery, 16 September 1946, CP, NLA MS766.

84. Elkin to Harney, 12 January 1948, EP 30/8/1/8/3.

85. Elkin to Christensen, 22 May 1950, *Meanjin Papers*, University of Melbourne. In 1957 the Berndts organised 'Australian Aboriginal Art: Arnhem Land paintings on bark and carved human figures' at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Caruana (2000: 455) noted that this exhibition was highly significant: 'it was the first to situate identified and named artists within regionally-based styles'.

no other social anthropological work has been done ... we shall deal with some crayon drawings made by the Aborigines with the minimum of contact; these show some very interesting features, [and] represent a selection of several hundreds we have in our possession'.⁸⁶ They wanted, they told him, to 'give the anthropologist's attitude toward Aboriginal art, and incidentally explain something of our reasons for writing *Art in Arnhem Land*'.⁸⁷

Supporting Elkin against Mountford was not the only reason the Berndts objected to Mountford's expeditions. They, like Elkin, saw him as an amateur who had the potential, by virtue of his lack of scientific method and training, to disrupt their work. Catherine observed, somewhat sarcastically, that Mountford 'knows just enough really to prevent him from realising his ignorance'; in contrast, they were 'as thorough with our own work as we can [be]: and the more we learn, the more we realise how many years it would take to understand native life really well in all its aspects. There are so many details that can't be discovered by casual expeditions such as his, obliged always to use an interpreter and never becoming intimate with the people.'⁸⁸ Being there first also meant the field was 'uncontaminated'. Catherine commented that she was pleased they had been in Arnhem Land first (that is, before Mountford), 'because it will be a hundred times more difficult to do thorough work on that coast after all that rabble [Mountford's expedition] has been through; they will really do a lot of harm, and shouldn't be allowed to go'.⁸⁹ This echoed Elkin's assessment of the situation.⁹⁰

V

Mountford, of course, failed to dissuade the Berndts. They arrived in Darwin in mid-August 1946, where they briefly met Elkin,⁹¹ and quickly moved on to Yirrkala. The only handicap with Yirrkala was that very few 'people speak much English. Still, we'd find that at most places where there were any number of bush people, and we should not have too much difficulty [with the language]'. They usually liked to set up camp but when they arrived the construction of a Borden hut had started. It had a cement floor and 'may even have electric light later on, so we don't object to combining field work with a certain amount of comfort — particularly in wet weather. It will be quite a change after our camp on the Daly.' The building was to be used as a dispensary.⁹²

Yirrkala was a dramatic contrast to Vestey's stations and the position of Aboriginal people. At Yirrkala people were assertive, confident and independent; not always to the Berndts' liking. The Air Force had used Melville Bay as a base during the war and this had had a 'considerable effect on the natives: they have, for instance, quite sophisticated tastes in the matter of food'. The Berndts judged that Mission control had been

⁸⁶. RMB to Christensen, 21 July 1950, Meanjin Papers, University of Melbourne. See also Stanton 2000: 222–3.

⁸⁷. RMB & CHB to Christensen, 31 July 1950, Meanjin Papers, University of Melbourne.

⁸⁸. CHB to Houison, 23 April 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁸⁹. CHB to Houison, 2 January 1948, NLA MS 482, 857a. CHB to Chinnery, 7 February 1948, CP, NLA MS766.

⁹⁰. Elkin to Harney, 12 January 1948, EP 30/8/1/8/3.

⁹¹. CHB to Isabel Houison, 20 August 1946, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁹². CHB to Chinnery, 16 September 1946, CP, NLA MS766. They spent December 1945 to March 1946 at the Daly River when they were employed by Vestey's. It had been a severe wet season.

'very lax; and the standard of work has not been sufficiently high'.⁹³ They described the Yirrkala 'natives [as] a very grasping people, with a great idea of their own importance'.⁹⁴ ... greedy and lazy, and so badly disciplined: they are by far the worst we have met'⁹⁵ ... [and] are very tiring to work with, continually demanding ... preferring to lie in the shade rather than work'.⁹⁶ It was also the most expensive place for fieldwork they'd encountered: 'the demand for tobacco and food grows at times almost overwhelming. ... We had expected a rather easier time of it ... we are actually having more difficulty with informant's food here than in the desert [Vesteys]'.⁹⁷ The situation with informants, they anticipated, would get worse as the Northern Territory Administration planned to start an 'industrial training scheme' and the Berndts felt they would not be able to compete in the matter of handing out rations.⁹⁸

At this time we get a glimpse of the Berndts' domestic relationship in the field. Ronald spoke with informants while Catherine, who also undertook her own fieldwork, attended to the correspondence, housekeeping and other domestic matters; she explained to Isabel Houison that 'Ron is so anxious to spend every minute in working (trying to do as many of the song-series as possible) that I'm doing his letters as well'.⁹⁹ They were excited by the song-series discovery and explained to Chinnery that

[T]here is no doubt that the songs ... reveal some aspects of aboriginal life which would otherwise take a long time to obtain. At Bathurst Island ... we concentrated on songs: and by working at full pressure every day we obtained quite a good sample — we'd like to spend about a year there doing nothing else. ... Actually the Yirrkalla (sic) people have the most picturesque songs we've met so far ... There are long song-series there, all very interesting. For example, there are hundreds of songs ... dealing with early pre-Macassan and Macassan contact, and the trepang camps that were established along the coast ... Another series of songs deals with the Island of the Dead away to the east, from which the spirits send the Morning Star each day to remind the natives that it's time to wake up, so that they go hunting to find food to keep themselves alive (not that they bother much about that these days, after the Air Force invasion).¹⁰⁰

93. CHB to Houison, 31 October 1946, NLA MS 482, 857a.

94. CHB to Chinnery, 24 March 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

95. CHB to Houison, 6 July 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

96. CHB to Houison, 26 May 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

97. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 21 January 1947, CP, NLA MS766. When Bill Harney left Yirrkala he gave his food supplies to the Berndts. The Berndts lived sparsely: 'we had only ordered plain bulk stores ourselves — flour, rice etc, since we had been promised garden produce: and in the last five months that has been negligible. So imagine our feelings at receiving a large piece of bacon, tinned fruits and Frankfurts, an entire bag of good flour — and some potatoes and onions (the first we've had for months)! That should help us to fatten up before we leave here, and you can guess how grateful we are' (CHB to Chinnery, 24 March 1947, CP, NLA MS766).

98. CHB to Houison, 31 October 1946; CHB to Houison, 23 April 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a. Harney told Elkin that 'the Berndts are here plodding on surrounded by fires and dust, but not missing a beat. Great people these the right type for this work'. Harney to Elkin, nd (EP 30/8/1/8/3).

99. CHB to Houison, 23 April 1947; CHB to Houison, 7 January 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

100. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

In March, they visited Groote Eylandt, together with the newly appointed director of Native Affairs, FJ Moy: 'We had a very interesting and pleasant trip, being able to see both the Mission there (CMS) and the old Air Force base: [Catherine] spent [her] time at the Mission going through some records and journals relating to the days when it was half-caste settlement, and Ron was able to do quite a lot of kinship, genealogies etc.'¹⁰¹ Chinnery had resigned at the end of 1946, and the Berndts found his replacement, Moy, less interested in their anthropological research.¹⁰² This most likely reflected a significant difference between the two men: Chinnery saw himself as an anthropologist administrator whereas Moy was an administrator with some anthropological training. The Berndts told Chinnery that they were, for example, unable to 'discuss songs' and their significance with Moy, although he politely humoured them by pretending to take an interest. This disappointed them after Chinnery's interest in their work.¹⁰³

Their Yirrkala fieldwork had been 'trying' and Catherine went so far as to 'rejoice' that they were 'away from Yirrkala at last, and very thankful for it'.¹⁰⁴ In Darwin there was plenty to do: 'many of the natives and half-castes expect us to spend a certain amount of time with them.' They went to Oenpelli for twelve days and spent a few days at Port Keats, twelve days at Bathurst Island, and hoped to be back in Darwin plenty of time to meet up with Elkin, who was making another quick visit to the Northern Territory. From there they planned a trip to Goulbourn Island to finish off some genealogies and songs. They were in no hurry to return to Sydney.¹⁰⁵

VI

In Sydney, on their return in August 1947, Elkin arranged for the Berndts to lecture for the final term 'helping with cadets and so on'. They recognised that, despite the support they received from Elkin, opportunities to develop a career in Australia were limited. Ronald's lack of academic qualifications was also a hindrance. They hoped for work in the USA although Elkin discouraged them 'with talk of all the difficulties to be met with even before setting out, and it does seem that with the present inflation we would spend most of our time starving in a slum instead of working. Maybe the position will be a little easier soon'.¹⁰⁶ While they waited, Elkin obtained a Commonwealth Research Grant so they could write up their Arnhem Land material, and he arranged for the ANRC to reimburse their extra expenses as a result of their prolonged research trip in eastern Arnhem Land.¹⁰⁷ Their academic writing was also beginning to interest local and international publishers. They were enthusiastic about receiving a reply to a manu-

¹⁰¹. CHB to Houison, 26 May 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

¹⁰². RMB had expressed an interest in applying for the position (he sent an application to Elkin) but Elkin considered Berndt was not of the right temperament for the job. Elkin to Chinnery, 16 April 1946, EP 20/1/5/61. Chinnery to Elkin, 14 May 1946, EP 174/4/2/173.

¹⁰³. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

¹⁰⁴. CHB to Houison, 6 July 1947, NLA MS 482, 856a.

¹⁰⁵. In fact they took 'a lease of seven acres at West Point (next door to Bill Harney, and sharing the same billabong and sea frontage), only six miles from Delissaville — so one day we'll take our notebooks and rusticate there', RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766. CHB to Houison, 29 July 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a. See also Elkin to Moy, 6 August 1947, NAA CRS F1, 52/570.

¹⁰⁶. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

¹⁰⁷. CHB to Houison, 2 January 1948, NLA MS 482, 857a.

script dealing with acculturation in South Australia, which they had sent to Chicago University Press.¹⁰⁸

The Berndts spent 1948 and part of 1949 at the University of Sydney teaching and writing up their research. Elkin then arranged for them to travel north again, and they spent the latter part of 1949 and early 1950 at Oenpelli in western Arnhem Land; they had long wanted to work at Oenpelli, attempting a visit while they were working for Vestey's. During 1950, Ronald was employed as a temporary lecturer and Catherine as an assistant. The previous year, 1949, Ronald had been awarded a BA (Research) while Catherine received her MA which was published as *Women's Changing Ceremonies* (1950). Ronald was awarded his MA in 1951. On obtaining formal qualifications it was necessary, if they wanted to advance their careers, especially overseas, to undertake study for a Doctor of Philosophy.

Elkin encouraged the Berndts to widen their anthropological interests and proposed that they work in the Highlands of New Guinea. Elkin was motivated in part by the interest shown by Frederick Nadel, foundation Professor of Anthropology at the Australian National University (ANU) in New Guinea and partly by his own desire to mark out an anthropological territory in the New Guinea Highlands.¹⁰⁹ The ANU, like the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) and the Australian Army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, represented a threat to Elkin's hegemony over matters anthropological. It was understood that there was an agreement, albeit informal, that the ANU would not impinge on Aboriginal Australia.¹¹⁰ The Highlands, an area of international interest, was, so Elkin believed, divided between Sydney and the ANU. Elkin told Nadel he 'had gained the impression that you were concentrating on the region from Goroka to Mt Hagen, in a quite intensive coverage. I was therefore, directing my own workers, and any person for whom I had responsibility, either to the eastern end, or the western end of the Highlands.'¹¹¹ Elkin, for example, had sent Kenneth E (Mick) Read to Kainantu (Upper Markham Valley) at the end of the war.¹¹²

In 1951 Catherine was awarded an Ohio State Fellowship from the International Federation of University Women and Ronald obtained research funds from the Department of Anthropology in the University of Sydney. Ronald and Catherine did two periods of fieldwork — 1951 and 1952–3 — in an area south of Kainantu in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea,¹¹³ an area where there was minimal European contact. In choosing such an area this was not because they desired the 'pristine primitive' but rather, because Ronald's 'expectation was that it should be possible to explore the processes of externally sponsored change almost from their beginnings; to discover the relative strengths and weaknesses of some of their institutions as contrasted with others; and, hopefully, to make some suggestions that might direct those changes, in order to modify the trauma of radical disruption ... [because] many of the people were experiencing substantial alien impact for the first time, it should be possible to influence the

¹⁰⁸. This was published as Berndt and Berndt 1951.

¹⁰⁹. Elkin to Hercus, 1 February 1950, EP 156/4/1/14.

¹¹⁰. Firth 1974: 16.

¹¹¹. Elkin to Nadel, 11 June 1954, EP 41/4/2/414. See also Wilson and Young 1996.

¹¹². Pers comm, KE Read, May 1993.

¹¹³. See RM Berndt 1992; CH Berndt 1992; Reay 1992.

course of change through local awareness of the problems and through administrative goodwill.¹¹⁴ Catherine, on the other hand, was more modest in her aims as she wanted to 'learn more about women's "world views"'.¹¹⁵ These themes were evident in their Australian Aboriginal work. Unlike other researchers in the Highlands they had considerable experience in the field, and their interests were developed through their previous work.

When the American anthropologist James B Watson indicated he was interested in working in the eastern Highlands, the Berndts commented to Elkin: 'we hope ... he will not choose our eastern Highlands! May we be so bold as to define our area as south from Kainantu, as far as the Papuan border; east to across the Lamari to Azana; west to Mt Michael. This is not selfishness — but we should very much like to have a further period there later, after writing up and going through our material here'.¹¹⁶ They argued that it would 'from both our points of view, as well as from an anthropological one, ... be a pity for [Watson] to work directly in Kainantu — especially since our material is yet unpublished. ... We would not recommend that he go to Kainantu ... anymore than we ourselves would go to Goroka, where [KE] Read has been working ... please don't think we desire to monopolise the Kainantu district — that is furthest from our minds'.¹¹⁷ They did not return to the Highlands and Watson worked at Kainantu.¹¹⁸ The Berndts' work in New Guinea formed the basis for their doctoral studies.

When casting around for a suitable university in which to undertake these doctoral studies they considered several universities in the United States, the ANU and the London School of Economics (LSE). It was Elkin who encouraged them to attend LSE, not only to obtain their doctorates but also to gain experience and develop an international network: the 'main thing [at LSE] is to make contacts and get everything you can out of the seminars'.¹¹⁹ This they did. They were pleased that they did not go to the ANU: 'England has been (and is) an experience which we needed, and from our point of view we are glad to be having this period'.¹²⁰ They maintained a regular correspondence with Elkin, informing him about who they met, their conversations and observations.

VII

In 1952, under the auspices of the Carnegie Corporation, Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn made a survey of the social sciences in Australia in which they recommended that Western Australia should be the site of a new anthropology department. While the Berndts were in England, the University of Western Australia had obtained funding from the Carnegie Corporation to establish a senior lectureship in anthropology. The position would be based in the Department of Psychology, headed by Ken F Walker, foundation professor of Psychology. Walker had completed a Diploma in Anthropol-

¹¹⁴. RM Berndt 1992: 77.

¹¹⁵. CH Berndt 1992: 99.

¹¹⁶. RMB to Elkin, 19 October 1953, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹¹⁷. RMB to Elkin, 28 October 1953, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹¹⁸. Watson 1992: 167–98.

¹¹⁹. Elkin to RMB and CHB, 3 August 1954; also RMB to Elkin, 2 May 1954, EP 41/4/2/375. Cf Berndt 1992: 68–72.

¹²⁰. RMB to Elkin, 21 August 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

ogy at the University of Sydney under Elkin. In early 1954, he asked Elkin for information about the structure of the anthropology courses at the University of Sydney — 'I have been thinking of modelling the courses on the general Sydney plan, requiring Psychology I as a prerequisite for a second and third year unit.'¹²¹ Elkin considered the creation of the position in Perth as an opportunity to influence the appointment of the person chosen, as well as affecting the structure and content of the courses offered, and enabling the continuance of research and teaching about Aboriginal Australia along the lines he deemed desirable.¹²² He was adamant that the person appointed be Australian in outlook and show an interest in Aboriginal problems and that a future Department of Anthropology 'play a very important part in both University and State' affairs.¹²³ So Elkin was particularly pleased with Walker's emphasis on 'the need for research problems relating to Aborigines'.¹²⁴

Elkin continued to work hard to ensure the Berndts' future. At the 1954 ANZAAS Conference in Canberra, he took the opportunity to further discuss with Walker the University of Western Australia's plans for the establishment of a senior lectureship in anthropology. He told the Berndts that he had no doubt whatever that at the end of five years, 'or soon after, it will become a separate Department and a Chair'. And there was no doubt that, should Ronald apply, he would get the position and that 'Perth would wait' for him to complete his PhD. There was a position waiting for Ronald at Sydney as well, Elkin could assure Ronald. At the University of Sydney, Ronald and Catherine would be close to their chosen fields — Australia and Papua New Guinea; Perth offered other newer possibilities such as Timor. Nonetheless, it was, he told Ronald, his choice.¹²⁵

Despite his confidence about the Perth position Elkin nonetheless had to consider other potential candidates, particularly British candidates. Raymond Firth, Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, had been responsible for Nadel and Stanner's appointments to the ANU, as well as Ralph Piddington's to the foundation Chair in Auckland. Elkin was keen to limit Firth's influence in this appointment. He wrote to Walker: 'I understand that Professor Firth considers that the applicant ought to be rather an expert on studying our own society and somewhat of a psychologist. However, I think that should be secondary — you want somebody who really knows his social anthropology, and who will take especial interest in spreading and advancing knowledge about the Aborigines and all the problems related to them.' The emphasis had to be on Aborigines. It was 'quite likely that some quite bright folk from England will apply, but unless they really give assurances that they would attack the problems which are so important in Western Australia, I would regard it rather unsatisfactory to appoint any of them'.¹²⁶ He further advanced the cause of Ronald by ranking, both for Walker and the Registrar of the University of Western Australia, the three candidates that he proposed: Ronald Berndt, Mervyn Meggitt and KE Read, in that order. Read

¹²¹. Walker to Elkin, 22 April 1954, EP 41/4/2/433.

¹²². Notes and News, *Oceania* 1954: 126.

¹²³. Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁴. Elkin to Walker, 26 October 1954, EP 41/4/2/433.

¹²⁵. Elkin to RMB, 2 September 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁶. Elkin to Walker, 26 October 1954, EP 41/4/2/433.

was, he said, inexperienced in the Aboriginal field and Meggitt, who had still to complete his MA, wanted to undertake comparative studies in New Guinea. There was no one with Ronald's 'qualifications or experience in the Australian field who could better fill the position in the sub-Department of Anthropology in Perth, or in a later separate Department'.¹²⁷ This was a *de facto* job application on behalf of RMB! It is unknown whether Firth had someone in mind for the position, or who he encouraged to apply.

While Elkin was shoring up RMB's position in the University of Western Australia, the University of Sydney Senate confirmed Ronald's appointment as lecturer in the Department. Subsequently, Elkin advised Ronald to withdraw his application for the Perth position, at the same time informing the Registrar of the University of Western Australia on behalf of Ronald: 'Your offer is a very kind and considerate one, which Mr Berndt appreciates very much, and so do I'. Elkin noted it was still possible that by the end of the year, 'one or other of the candidates ... would be able accept the position' if it was still available.¹²⁸ During the latter part of 1955 the Berndts travelled through the United States, visiting anthropology and sociology departments.¹²⁹ In the interim Walker appointed Ruth Fink, a student of Elkin's, as 'someone with training in psychology and anthropology to make a survey of the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal population in Western Australia in the white community'.¹³⁰ Having decided on Sydney, the Berndts were pleased to be returning to Sydney and to the Department: 'our friends and interests there, but there are, as you mention better opportunities for Catherine's research. Also, if you remain in Sydney after your retirement, we shall be able to keep in closer touch with you.'¹³¹

Aware that Elkin would retire at the end of 1956 Ronald was reasonably confident of being awarded the chair. Ronald knew it would be competitive and had previously observed that 'Hogbin, I am sure will try ... and Stanner too'.¹³² Stanner had informed Elkin that he 'shall be a contender for the Sydney chair when you feel that the time has come for you to retire'.¹³³ RMB told Elkin '[i]t would be an honour of inestimable value to hold your chair — I can only say that when the time comes I shall apply as you have suggested. Apart from anything else, Sydney is the natural centre of my interests and my research — for both Aboriginal Australia and the Pacific. It is with this intention too that I wish to be "strong" academically (both in degrees and theoretically — and with practical experience in organisational matters). I hope it will not be necessary to apply until we return.'¹³⁴

The Berndts' relationship with Hogbin, when in London, had been courteous but aloof; he was closely associated with Firth, with whom (they informed Elkin) he

¹²⁷ Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁸ RMB to Elkin, 20 December 1954; Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁹ Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 31–3.

¹³⁰ Elkin to RMB, 7 December 1954, EP 41/4/2/375; Latukefu 2001: 53–68.

¹³¹ Elkin to RMB, 7 December 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³² RMB to Elkin, 21 August 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³³ Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP 197/4/2/573. The Berndts shared Elkin's opinion of Stanner and his work, and noted in agreement that it 'is, however, unfortunate that he is so lax as far as writing goes' (EP 41/4/2/375, RMB to Elkin, 15 March 1954).

¹³⁴ RMB to Elkin, 21 August 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

seemed to spend most of his time and was, the Berndts claimed, under Firth's influence.¹³⁵ He was also nearly 15 years their senior and an established and reputable scholar on Melanesia. His relationship with Firth dated almost from the beginning of Hogbin's first anthropological research in 1927. Moreover, his relationship with Elkin was strained and it was hardly likely that he would embrace two of Elkin's proteges. In 1948 Elkin attempted to block Hogbin's appointment as Reader while supporting that of the linguist and (fellow Anglican) priest, Arthur Capell. He failed but only partly. Both were appointed to readerships. Elkin assured the Berndts that Hogbin's relationship with Firth was based 'on friendship. I don't think [Firth] has a very high opinion of Hogbin's ability, certainly not theoretically. He will help him get medals and such like, but I don't think he would have him on his staff.'¹³⁶ (He might well have been referring to himself and his own view of Hogbin!)

VIII

Positions and alliances were being formed in the context of the impending retirement of Elkin. It was possible that on his retirement, the replacement would be neither an Australian nor an Aboriginalist. Of the Australian candidates, only Stanner and Berndt had the requisite qualifications and experience. This caused Elkin some concern but he was certain he could surmount these difficulties when the time came. Les Hiatt, at that time a student at Sydney, recalled that 'what may have passed as modern theory in the dying days of Elkin's regime was no longer regarded as the state of the art north of the Equator'.¹³⁷ There was certainly a sense that change was in the air.

In an attempt to thwart the possibility of a non-Australianist being awarded the position, Elkin set out the criteria for the new 'occupant of the Chair', someone 'especially interested in, and also well experienced in, the anthropology of the Australian Aborigines and the people of New Guinea and Melanesia'.¹³⁸ If it was accepted, then the position was tailor-made for Ronald Berndt. Hogbin applied, but withdrew after Elkin threatened to disclose aspects of his personal life. Elkin did not think Stanner was up to the task as well as frequently expressing disappointment in his anthropological performance.¹³⁹ Hogbin, however, ensured that Elkin's preferred candidate, Ronald Berndt, did not succeed: he supported John A Barnes and received support from many in the university who wanted a professor with solid academic standing internationally, and a change from Elkin and his acolytes.¹⁴⁰

Barnes' appointment was considered a victory for Hogbin and anthropological modernity.¹⁴¹ As a consequence, it was evident that Ronald Berndt had no future in a department in which Hogbin could exercise his influence. It would be an intolerable situation. Furthermore, Ronald Berndt was not favourably disposed to Barnes. The Australian anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry explained to her friend Mary Durack that

¹³⁵. RMB to Elkin, 29 May 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³⁶. Elkin to RMB and CHB, 26 February 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³⁷. Hiatt and Beckett 2001: 17.

¹³⁸. Elkin to Registrar (University of Sydney), 12 April 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³⁹. Marie Reay to author, February 1991. There is also considerable correspondence in the Elkin Papers to support Reay's view. Pers comm Kenneth Smith, February 1991.

¹⁴⁰. Wise 1985: 220; Hiatt 2001: 109-14; Barnes 2001: 139-46.

¹⁴¹. Wise 1985: 219-20; cf Barnes 2001: 142.

'the Berndts are not friends of the Barnes and, between you and me, Berndt said he would not work under Barnes. No reflection on J Barnes — merely that Barnes is the same age and Berndt is jealous.'¹⁴² The University of Western Australia had delayed making an appointment.¹⁴³ This, serendipitously, was to Berndt's advantage. Ronald was still considered a candidate for the University of Western Australia position, and, when it became available, he accepted: Elkin assured him he 'could do nothing else'.¹⁴⁴

In mid-1956 Ronald wrote to Elkin from Perth. He hoped Elkin found Barnes 'agreeable: he is really quite a pleasant chap'. He recognised that the Sydney department as made by Elkin was under threat from Hogbin and hoped Barnes was 'not drawn too much towards Hogbin. But having yourself within observational distance of the Department should mean a great deal. It's a pity Stanner is not there, in spite of his strange ways!'¹⁴⁵ Six weeks later he commented on the appointments at the University of Sydney and the Australian National University. He was correct about Meggitt's appointment to a lectureship at Sydney but the appointment of Edmund Leach to the ANU Chair was a rumour. He considered Leach's appointment would 'undoubtedly mean a narrowing of Anthropology in Australia. All I can say is thank goodness we got out of Sydney and are establishing Anthropology here in a way which will counteract the kind of emphasis it is likely to have now in Sydney and Canberra'.¹⁴⁶

In fact, JA Barnes was appointed to the ANU in 1958 and a New Zealander, William Geddes, succeeded Barnes in Sydney. But Ronald was correct about the state of Aboriginal anthropology. Elkin had expressed concern about the state of Aboriginal anthropology towards the end of 1955, writing that 'neither at this Department nor at Mosman [ASOPA] will there be any member of staff personally conversant with the aboriginal problems of Northern Australia. All that can be said for Sydney is that there will be here a couple of staff who have had experience amongst mixed-bloods'.¹⁴⁷

IX

The paucity of positions — both teaching and research — meant that a career in anthropology in Australia was dependent upon the goodwill and patronage of the Professor of Anthropology in the University of Sydney. Without such patronage, funding for research and developing a career was virtually impossible. When the Berndts embarked on their anthropological careers there were few anthropologists of an earlier generation interested in the Australian field, and those who were, such as Ralph Pidington, CWM Hart, Stanner and Kaberry, had by force of circumstance established careers overseas. (Only Stanner returned to an academic position in Australia). As a consequence there were few candidates eligible for the position at the University of Western Australia. The Berndts were favoured also by both the exigencies of war and RMB's exemption from service: this created a space which enabled them to conduct

¹⁴² Kaberry to Durack, 25 April 1956, Durack Papers, Berndt Museum, University of Western Australia. Also RMB to Elkin, 24 July 1956, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴³ Registrar (UWA) to Elkin, 17 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁴ Elkin to RMB, 12 December 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁵ RMB to Elkin, 6 June 1956, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁶ RMB to Elkin, 24 July 1956, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁷ Elkin to Giese, 11 November 1955, EP 189/4/42/455.

intensive research at Ooldea, Adelaide and Central western Northern Territory when they could otherwise have been engaged in war work.

The Berndts were the second generation of Sydney anthropologists. Besides them, the other students promoted by Elkin for careers in anthropology were KE Read and Marie Reay. Read attended the LSE where he was awarded his PhD; he then lectured at the ANU and ASOPA before taking a position in the University of Washington, Seattle, USA; Marie Reay also taught briefly at the ASOPA and then at the ANU where she was awarded her PhD. She remained at the ANU until her retirement in 1993.

Wise, in her biography of Elkin, described Ronald as being 'tailor-made for Elkin'; he 'had a natural air of deference, an attitude of extreme politeness, a deep interest in Aborigines and an extraordinary capacity for slogging doggedly at a task'.¹⁴⁸ From an early stage in his relationship with Elkin, Ronald Berndt frequently sought his mentor's approval and support in regard to decisions about his academic future. Ronald's deference and an implicit acknowledgment that he was dependent on the good will of Elkin made it difficult for him to act independently. He was dependent on Elkin for his and Catherine's future and, like a father, Elkin could be impatient and irritated by his 'child's' diffidence. Elkin was, as Wise put it, their 'paterfamilias'.¹⁴⁹

When Elkin described them, in May 1978, as 'if I may say so, my anthropological children — of whom I am proud' he was saying that they were the inheritors of *his* anthropology and in this they had made him proud that they continued in his tradition. The Berndts read the statement, thinking he was talking about them as his 'classificatory' children, thus making Elkin their 'close classificatory father'.¹⁵⁰ He may have been a father to them as well and he was proud that they had continued to walk in his footsteps and had succeeded in finding their place. In the short biographical introduction to *Going it Alone? Essays in Honour of Ronald and Catherine Berndt*, Robert Tonkinson and Michael Howard tell how Elkin 'disclosed [to the Berndts] that he had always considered them to be his "spiritual children"'.¹⁵¹ This makes reference to Elkin the spiritual father, both in a Christian and Aboriginal sense, as well as the mythic father — as the Berndts wrote: 'like the mythic beings of his beloved Aboriginal Australia, his spirit will surely live eternally, as an inspiration to generations of anthropologists to come'.¹⁵²

This did not mean that their relationship was without tension, as is evidenced by the trouble over Vestey's and the supposed suppression of the Berndts' report by Elkin and the Australian government. The Berndts needed, in a sense, to free themselves from Elkin but continued to acknowledge their indebtedness if not gratitude: they therefore needed to create a separate space in which they could work and develop. In this they were lucky that Elkin retired in the year they moved to Western Australia,

¹⁴⁸. Wise 1985: 166. RMB is remembered more often for his aggressive arrogance, always determined to prevail in whatever he felt strongly about (pers comm, Robert Tonkinson, 24 May 2004). Others variously describe him as rude, tactless, gauche, boorish, humourless and absurd. Catherine is largely the put-upon partner in these narratives.

¹⁴⁹. Wise 1985: 219–20.

¹⁵⁰. Berndt and Berndt 1979: 8.

¹⁵¹. Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 36.

¹⁵². Berndt and Berndt 1979: 8.

although this did not diminish their social and intellectual relationship.¹⁵³ It is significant that with Elkin's death the Berndts were able, finally, to publish a version of their 1946 Vestey's report. They had produced a revised version which Elkin rejected in the year before his death.¹⁵⁴

Catherine's career after Ronald's appointment to UWA appeared to be an adjunct to his. Catherine, who was variously described by Elkin as a 'very brilliant anthropological field worker' and a 'brilliant linguist',¹⁵⁵ was sidelined by the university's attitude to the employment of married women as Ronald's career developed. Throughout Ronald's tenure at the University, Catherine was employed in either a part-time or honorary capacity. They were aware of this restriction on Catherine's career before Ronald took up the position; I suspect they hoped it would change in time, which it did in the late 1960s but at 'some cost to the generation of women who fought to secure these changes'.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, she and Ronald continued to do fieldwork together and publish their results either singly or together. She, like Ronald, was committed to the anthropological enterprise. Ronald had told Elkin in March 1941 that his intention to study anthropology was 'to better fit myself for a life time of work in ethnological fields'.¹⁵⁷ He never wavered from this ambition which he achieved with the help of Catherine.

The Berndts established, developed and maintained Aboriginal anthropology at the University of Western Australia. There is little doubt that Elkin anticipated that Ronald, with the assistance of Catherine, would keep true to an Aboriginal anthropology sympathetic to his style and interests. Tonkinson and Howard suggest that this was so. Berndt sought, like Elkin in the 1940s, to combine anthropology and sociology, an 'interest which stemmed from ... Elkin's efforts in the same direction', and reinforced by their American experience.¹⁵⁸ They were not successful at the time. Nevertheless, Elkin, no doubt, was pleased and proud of their success in developing and promoting Aboriginal anthropology in Western Australia. They were indeed his 'anthropological children'.

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¹⁵³ Wise 1985: 227.

¹⁵⁴ VS Greaves (General Manager, University of Western Australia Press) to Elkin, 16 November 1977; Elkin to Greaves, 23 November 1977; AP Elkin to RMB and CHB, 10 January 1978, EP 76/1/12/272.

¹⁵⁵ Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁵⁶ deGaris 1988: 103, 105, 245; also Crawford and Tonkinson 1988, and Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 32-3.

¹⁵⁷ RMB to Elkin, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78.

¹⁵⁸ Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 35-6. Such a combination occurred at the ANU under Nadel and was continued by JA Barnes.

sion to quote from the papers of her father, EWP Chinnery; the librarians at Mortlock Library, University of Adelaide; and Tom Gara for directing me to material in the State Archives of South Australia. Bob Tonkinson, Nic Peterson, Jeremy Beckett, Bruce Rigsby, Fiona Paisley, Diane Bell, Deane Fergie, Patrick Sullivan and Christine Winter read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper.

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Indigenous organisations and mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: lessons from a historical perspective

Sarah Holcombe

Summary

This paper traces the development of the first private company set up by Aboriginal people in Western Australia. This company, Northern Development and Mining (Nodom), was formed in the late 1940s to enable Aboriginal members of the company to develop an economic base from mining and pastoralism in the Pilbara region in north-western Australia. The methods by which this company operated and the impetus behind its formation, which stemmed from a pastoral strike and associated social movement, are instructive today. Nevertheless, this paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of this early movement and the associated companies of Pindan and Nomad. Rather, it aims to draw out and interrogate structural elements of these early organisations that can shed light on management issues of contemporary Indigenous organisations set up to harness economic and social development from major mines in the Pilbara region. As such, anthropological field research was undertaken to inform this contemporary project. Hence, the selective historical mapping within this paper focuses on the structure of leadership and the associated issues surrounding access to benefits within these early organisations. Questions are raised that will assist in the analyses and formulation of effective governance structures in this same region today. Researching the history of settlement and early development is an essential prologue to contextualising current Indigenous responses to mining and associated development.

Introduction

Over the last ten years in the Pilbara there has been a flowering of Indigenous organisations. Many of these have developed in response to land-use agreements, both commercial and under the Native Title Act, with mining companies for large-scale mining projects — principally iron ore. The wider research question for this project is to what extent the mining industry can contribute to the regional economy and wider social sustainability through its engagement with Indigenous stakeholders. As an anthropologist my research focus in this project involves the examination of the organisational structures set up by Indigenous groups to manage and disburse the potential benefits that flow from these land-use agreements. Access to publicly available written

materials about these specific organisations is limited, and there is original material in this paper for which there are no published evidentiary sources. Hence, the anthropological research component of this paper is meshed with historical data.¹

This paper investigates the common themes that emerge from these inter-cultural organisations from the 1940s to today, such as comparable issues of organisational structure, representation and leadership. Reflecting on the past is a fundamental method for considering the present situation. Thus, this analysis of the early organisations set up to harness commercial enterprise offers an instructive comparison with the contemporary situation.

There are two major aspects to this paper. First, it briefly sketches a history of the sociopolitical conditions of Indigenous people in this region, as these conditions led to the pastoral strike in the 1940s and the development of the first Indigenous company in Western Australia. This historical sketch indicates ways of tackling the research questions that are raised about the intersections of the state, the development bodies and Indigenous 'groups' and organisations. Second, this paper looks at lessons that can be learnt from early Indigenous organisations, the Nodom, Pindan and Nomad Companies, that were formed in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s respectively for mining and pastoral ventures. Wilson and Rowley use the term 'movement' to describe the impetus behind these organisations.² The terms 'Pindan social movement' and the 'Pilbara Aboriginal social movement' are often conflated. According to Wilson, behind these organisations was a 'reformist, highly organised, non-Millenarian, co-ordinated and, if consideration of the predominant value emphasis is added, egalitarian' agenda.³ However, the momentum of this principally ideological agenda slowed considerably for many of the early Indigenous founders. The 'split' in the early company, due to an internal leadership challenge causing two factions to emerge, and the subsequent reformation highlight some of the central issues.⁴

Strong trends emerge and permeate through to the present, particularly the issue of 'cash in hand' payments, indicative of tensions between individualism and collectivism. Perhaps surprisingly, there is a strong resonance in the ideologies behind these early companies, between the socialist ideology of the 1950s co-operatives and the contemporary liberal reformative ideology post-native title. In this context of 'development' through mining, both ideologies seek the economic experience to be an absolute, encompassing social and political process with a view to long-term benefit. The contemporary terminology for this ideology is expressed in terms of 'community benefit packages', where immediate expenditure and entrepreneurial activity, perceived as individualistic, short term and financially risky, have been actively discouraged under contemporary trust structures, such as that set up under the Yandi

1. This paper stems from background research undertaken for the Australian Research Council linkage project 'Indigenous community organisations and miners: Partnering sustainable regional development?' The industry partners for this project are Rio Tinto and the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA).

2. Wilson 1961, 1980; Rowley 1970.

3. Wilson 1961: 388.

4. Read and Coppin 1999: 123.

Land Use Agreement. However, this trend appears to be lessening because of Indigenous pressure.

This paper navigates between the competing accounts and perspectives on this early movement and resultant companies. Because this movement was so radical for the time, it has received significant attention from scholars in anthropology and history, and biographers of key Indigenous leaders involved, while an autobiography and a novel were also written.⁵ These not only provide a wide spectrum of perspectives, but often make it difficult to objectively assess the efficacy of these early companies in delivering to Indigenous people the economic and social freedom which they had sought. For instance, for Don McLeod, the non-Aboriginal man who facilitated the formation of these companies, a central vision driving these organisations was social justice through a strong socialist ideology. Hence, the companies operated as co-operatives. Some significant policy reforms that developed during this period in Western Australia are a direct result of the activism of these organisations, such as an increase in cash wages for Aboriginal pastoral workers.⁶ Ironically, the cost of pursuing many of these wider social justice issues left Aboriginal people who were directly involved worse off. Many of the court cases were paid for through their earnings. Workers did not receive cash wages, as the profits from the company flowed back into developing and maintaining the company infra-structure and fighting these larger battles. A significant number of Aboriginal company members did not find this financial arrangement equitable and raised questions about control of the 'cheque book' and the structure of the company that allowed this external ideology to dominate.⁷

Analysing this leadership structure and the interaction between McLeod and the Indigenous company members allows us to consider such issues as how his personal relationship with people influenced and drove their commitment and loyalty to the 'cause', the tensions between individual autonomy and the collectivity, and the diversity of expectations among the Aboriginal company members. Analysis of such issues is revealing of the types of governance structures for commercial enterprise that were instituted in this region in the past, and the types of men who became leaders. Likewise, analysing this early inter-cultural engagement can inform current research on Indigenous self-management in the same region. For instance, Wilson's ethnographic material from this early period suggests that economic success was achieved largely within an Aboriginal cultural framework.⁸ This conclusion, however, appears to be premised on an ideal perception of Indigenous communality and egalitarianism, which resonated with some members of the company more than with others. Hence, the divisions or 'split' within the group.⁹

Regional historical overview

Unlike many other remote regions in Australia, there has been very little mission presence in the Pilbara. Pastoralists were active in opposing missions in the region on the

5. Wilson 1961, 1980; Rowley 1970; Attwood 2003; Palmer and McKenna 1978; Read and Coppin 1999; McLeod 1984; Stuart 1959.

6. Rowley 1970: 261.

7. Palmer and McKenna 1978: 108.

8. Wilson 1961, 1980.

9. Read and Coppin 1999: 119–40.

grounds that they would stymie land access, along with access to Aboriginal workers.¹⁰ As a result there were no reserves set aside for Aboriginal people during the 1940s to 1960s, as there were in the desert regions of Western Australia such as Jigalong and Wiluna. The discouragement of missions in this region indicated the responsiveness of the early Department of Native Affairs to the pastoralists as the major regional economic stakeholders. The State government actively promoted settler development in this resource-rich region, to the detriment of any independent advocacy for Aboriginal people in the Pilbara. There was no representative body, or mediating organisation, between Aboriginal people and developmental interests related to exploitation of the land. Relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people initially occurred through the pastoral industry, and according to Edmunds are now viewed by Aboriginal people nostalgically as 'when people lived in harmony'.¹¹ While this view does not accord with the realities of the harsh indenture¹² system that led to the strike action of the 1940s, it contrasts with the subsequent negative relations with the mining industry from the 1960s and which are now beginning to be addressed.¹³

Aboriginal people in the Pilbara are not strangers to mining.¹⁴ Gold was discovered at Nullagine (about 240 kilometres north-east of the Hamersley mines) in 1878, and alluvial tin four years later. By 1906 about 300 Aboriginal people were panning in these tin fields, and developing a small-scale subsistence economy by selling bags of alluvial tin and gold to the local storekeeper for flour, tea and sugar.¹⁵ In other cases the local policeman would buy the product at a lower price, at the threat of 'hunt[ing Aboriginal people] away from the gold country', and on-sell it.¹⁶ This early period of the Aboriginal alluvial mining economy was also the basis of the novel *Yandy* by Donald Stuart.¹⁷ It focused on this early Indigenous engagement with mining, the hardships faced on the tin fields, and the impetus for the pastoral strike.¹⁸ The author, Donald Stuart, was a 'special category officer' for the Department of Native Affairs and his account competes somewhat with McLeod's, as discussed below.¹⁹

These Indigenous miners introduced a technical innovation in the use of a traditional winnowing dish and container known as the *yandy*. This flattened dish enabled Aboriginal people to compete effectively with European miners on the tin fields. The fact that this type of mining was labour-intensive also meant many Aboriginal people

10. McLeod 1984: 68; Wilson 1980: 157.

11. Edmunds 1989: 21.

12. This indenture system was a contract between the employer and employee. In theory the employer could be fined for non-compliance with minimal conditions relating to food, clothing and health of employees. Aborigines were in turn obliged to remain with that employer (Wilson 1980: 153). This system has also been described as 'slavery', as freedom of movement was not possible and wages were either extremely low or not paid (McLeod 1984:60).

13. Edmunds (1989) discusses the early negative relations with the mining industry.

14. Likewise, the blue asbestos mining industry began at Wittenoom, in the Hamersley Ranges in 1940, where a significant number of local Indigenous people worked (PAIWP, cited in Day 2004). There is, however, very little published material about Indigenous involvement at Wittenoom.

15. Wilson 1980: 152; Stuart 1959: 38.

16. Stuart 1959: 38.

17. Stuart 1959.

without formal training could be successful at it. Those most skilled in using the *yandy* were Aboriginal women, perhaps — it could be inferred — because of the implement's similarity to the winnowing dishes predominantly used by them.²⁰ Women were employed equally, and in fact were so central to the mining operations of the Pindan Company that a child-care camp, known as 'kids camp', allowed them to work full time.²¹ In this period before citizenship rights all able-bodied Aboriginal people worked in pastoralism or alluvial mining.²² Until 1967 Aboriginal people in the Pilbara still held 30 mining tenements in the northwest and 28 in the Eastern Goldfields.²³ Later, however, the mineral leases were increasingly taken up by large mining companies and Aboriginal people became less able to compete.

The development of Pilbara towns and subsequent impact on the Indigenous population

The development of the Pilbara mining towns is, according to Edmunds, 'perhaps the most visible demonstration of the extent to which control over social as well as economic development was ceded by the State government to the mining companies in the interests of rapid and large-scale resource exploitation'.²⁴

The first town established in the region was Roebourne. It was founded in 1866, two years after the first white pastoralists arrived in the region.²⁵ Today most of the population of this town of approximately 950 is Aboriginal.²⁶ Until the 1960s, however, it was predominantly a non-Indigenous town operating as the administrative centre of the region, and until then authorities imposed strict controls on Aboriginal movements both to and from the town. With the decline of pastoralism in the 1960s and 1970s,²⁷ Aboriginal people began moving into Roebourne and the surrounding area. During this same period, major mining companies took up tenements in the area, largely as a result of the lifting of the earlier trade embargo on iron ore in 1950s. (The trade embargo

18. The information I have about Donald Stuart is limited to Wilson's comments. He indicates that Stuart was employed by the Department of Native Affairs to 'combat "white influences" in Pindan. He remained very antagonistic to McLeod' (1961: 105). Nevertheless *Yandy*, although written in the 1950s, is a surprisingly revealing account of Indigenous political-economic life during that period. Stuart has a number of narrative voices that take us through the period that led up to the pastoral strike and through to the strike action. A perspective of one of the tin fields, Moolyella, narrated from the point of view of Aboriginal leader Dooley Bin Bin is as follows:

It always depressed him, the Moolyella tin field. A grave of his people. Here came the cast-off old men and women, the lame and the blind, the feeble and ailing, turned adrift by the station owners to live or die as best they might. Here to Moolyella, to gouge alluvial tin, working old ground with yandies, winning enough of the small heavy black pebbles every day to buy the meagre rations for the morrow, here to Moolyella to rot and die came Dooley's people in their old age. Their relative, close 'lations, helped them, but Poverty was the lot of all blackfellas, and hunger was always grinning its most wilddog grin at Moolyella (1961: 46).

19. Wilson 1961: 104.

20. Wilson 1980: 153. As the novel *Yandy* suggests, before the establishment of the Aboriginal mining companies, women were strongly compelled to mine for different reasons, as the alternative was prostitution. 'It is better to yandy all day, half hungry, than to eat the tin of beef that is the fee of lying on the ground under a whitefella while he slakes his thirst at your throat and grinds his loins heavily, hurtfully, at your cold dry body' (Stuart 1959: 36).

21. Wilson 1961: 141.

had been placed on the export of iron ore for steel making, when it constituted potential infrastructural support for World War II.) Construction of large open cut mines commenced, together with company towns to house the influx of employees.²⁸ The first major mine, Mt Tom Price, was opened in 1966 after the closed company town and port of Dampier were built for its workers in 1965.²⁹ In 1968 the open town of Karratha was built and another mining company, Cliffs Robe River, constructed its own port and company town of Wickham. These new towns are respectively 38 kilometres and 12 kilometres from Roebourne. By the early 1970s there were nine closed company towns in the Pilbara: Pannawonica, Dampier, Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Newman, South Hedland, Goldsworthy, Shay Gap and Wickham.

These towns crystallised the economic and social marginalisation of the Aboriginal population. Roebourne became an Aboriginal town as its resources, including non-Aboriginal service workers, were moved to neighbouring Karratha and Wickham. Karratha became the new regional administrative centre. One Shire Councillor suggested that the key reason for not simply expanding the existing town of Roebourne was that the new 'residents were worried that they would have to live with a large Aboriginal population'.³⁰ In 1989, 80 per cent of the regional Aboriginal population of the Shire lived in Roebourne.³¹ Although today these new towns are becoming 'normalised', 'a euphemism for the regularization of municipal and community services' in the transfer of control from the mining sector, the Aboriginal population would appear to have little incentive to leave Roebourne, where Indigenous resources have been centralised. However, in the Central Pilbara, in the area of Tom Price and the Karajini National Park, a homelands movement has developed with the setting up of the Wakathuni, Billeri, Youngaleena and Wirrilimarra communities.

The history of blue asbestos mining and the establishment of the nearby town of Wittenoom in the Hamersley Ranges offers an interesting comparison to the establishment of the iron ore industry discussed above. Lang Hancock began mining asbestos

22. During the early stages of Noddom the local economy of Aboriginal people was particularly hybrid (as per Altman 2001), as reliance on the customary economy in the form of hunting was also important for subsistence. This amalgam of the customary economy with income from the mining economy continued throughout the life of the companies (Wilson 1961). This Indigenous skill in harvesting local food might have played an active role in maintaining the companies during the periods of poor mining profits.

23. Edmunds 1989: 48.

24. Edmunds 1989: 49.

25. Shire of Roebourne history web site <http://www.roebourne.wa.gov.au/historyshire.htm> Accessed 3/1/06

26. See <http://www.roebourne.wa.gov.au/historyshire.htm>.

27. Unlike alluvial mining, pastoralism had been an activity largely dominated by men. However, it had enabled Aboriginal families to continue to live on their country.

28. Edmunds 1989: 28.

29. Company towns were known as 'closed' as all the infrastructure and services were provided by mining interests for their employees and support services. As local and state government agencies did not service them, non-mining interests were not catered for. Thus, conversely, an 'open' town such as Karratha was developed by local and state government to service the broader region.

30. Edmunds 1989: 11.

31. Edmunds 1989: 13.

fibres in 1936 in Wittenoom Gorge on Mulga Downs station and by 1947 a town was built nearby to service the mine.³² The mine functioned until 1966 with Aboriginal labour alongside migrant labour. Aboriginal station workers 'from Mulga Downs would come and go to the mine', many of whom were of the Banyjima language group working on their own country. They likewise lived in the Wittenoom township and continued to do so after the mine closed in 1966.³³ While there was work for Aboriginal men and women in the mine, this is likely to be because most non-Aboriginals refused to do it.³⁴ The conditions in the mine and the mill were described as 'appalling'.³⁵ As is now widely known, Wittenoom became 'the greatest industrial disaster in Australia' with cases of mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer still being diagnosed.³⁶ No records of Aboriginal employment at Wittenoom were ever kept, and special screening and monitoring programs were not available to Pilbara Aboriginal people until 1994.³⁷

Edmunds' research in Roebourne on the political economy of race relations up to the late 1980s provides a useful baseline for considering the wider context in which contemporary land-use agreements, such as Yandi, are negotiated. It reminds us how recently the mining industry and companies such as Rio Tinto have been actively engaged with Aboriginal people:

As one Hamersley Iron employee at Tom Price explained [in relation to setting up their operations in 1966], Hamersley had no problems with Aboriginal people because there were no Aboriginal organisations that had to be dealt with.³⁸

The exclusion of Aboriginal labour was inherent in the planning of these new mines. The then Department of Native Affairs concluded that there were no employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, despite the fact that the iron ore industry, particularly in that early stage, was heavily reliant on non-skilled labour and despite Aboriginal people's early experience with mining.³⁹ Between 1961 and 1981 the regional population increased by 1400 per cent because of this introduced workforce.

It seems that a key factor in the Indigenous political economy of this region was the absence of intermediaries in the form of missions,⁴⁰ a focused Department of Native Affairs,⁴¹ or the introduction of statutory advocacy bodies for Indigenous land rights (as occurred in 1976 in the Northern Territory). Thus, Aboriginal people have had to act as their own advocates in pursuing their civil rights. Indeed, as Wilson noted, the gen-

³² Safetyline Institute–Worksafe Western Australia 1998.

³³ Day 2004: 1.

³⁴ Some of the workers sent to Wittenoom were part of the Commonwealth government policy to place new migrants for a period of two years in any work situation (Asbestos Diseases Advisory Society of Australia Inc, ADAS).

³⁵ ADAS.

³⁶ ADAS; Safetyline Institute.

³⁷ PAIWP 1995: 9 in Day 2004: 2.

³⁸ Edmunds 1989: 47. Hamersley Iron was a business unit of the Rio Tinto Group.

³⁹ Edmunds 1989: 48.

⁴⁰ Wilson observed that the only time the Western Australia government encouraged a mission in the Pilbara (in this case in the form of financial assistance), was when the Roman Catholic church set up an Aboriginal pastoral station and established a school at White Springs. This was a specific attempt to stop the Pilbara Aboriginal Social movement in the late 1940s. Wilson notes that although this mission operated for a while, it held little attraction for the strikers (1980: 164).

eral desire for independence and autonomy was reinforced by early negative experience with the Department of Native Affairs.⁴² The Pilbara protest and subsequent Aboriginal companies challenged the authority and legal controls of the state over Aboriginal lives and, as Clancy McKenna stated, assisted them 'to play the white man at his own game'.⁴³ In relation to the development of large scale mining it has been observed that 'if [Aboriginal people] happened to be sitting down in a mission on the site of the [mineral] finds, their cases would [have been] pressed'.⁴⁴ As it was, Aboriginal people had to press the case for economic and social rights themselves. This was done initially in relation to the pastoral industry in the 1940s, followed by the development of Indigenous-owned commercial mining companies in the 1950s and pastoral companies in the 1960s.

One of the ramifications of this history of struggle for political and economic autonomy has been the fraught introduction of native title representative bodies under the *Native Title Act 1993*. The relationships that some Aboriginal people, both individually and as members of family groups, have fostered over the years with development interests in the region are stronger than their relationships with the new organisations designated to represent them (such as native title representative bodies or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission regional council). Because of this, and the diversity of Indigenous socio-histories, attempts to foster a regional approach to the Indigenous polity in the Pilbara region have a fraught recent history.

These different political environments of Native welfare in the 1940s and post-native title in the early 2000s have implications for Indigenous organisational solidarity. Comparing the politically oppositional environment within which these early companies emerged and the negotiated reconciliation environment of today, provides the opportunity to consider the possibilities of governance structures within the wider sociopolitical economy.

Early Aboriginal political activism and organisations in the region

From 1946 to 1949 Aboriginal people employed in the pastoral industry across the eastern Pilbara staged a series of strikes.⁴⁵ The return to station work occurred only when demands for pay and better conditions were met. Some never returned but instead took up new economic opportunities. Because Aboriginal labour on these stations was indentured (in a legally binding contract, see footnote 1), strikers were arrested and

41. This state negation of responsibility dates back to the granting of statehood in 1890 when the transfer of authority of the local Aboriginal population from the British Colonial office to the state occurred. Immediately after this transfer there was a move to favour settlers' interests. Aboriginal permission to hunt over leasehold pastoral properties was repealed. The Aborigines Protection Board with its travelling inspectors visiting outlying regions was disbanded. Instead local police and magistrates were requested to add 'protection of Aborigines' to their usual duties, leading to greater local control by settler interests. The change was also evident in the funding for the administration and welfare of Aborigines. Whereas the colonial office had required that 1% of the gross revenue of the colony should be allocated in this direction, the new government cancelled the ruling (Wilson 1980: 154).

42. Wilson 1961: 186.

43. Palmer and McKenna 1978: 109.

44. Rowley 1970: 168-9.

45. Rowley 1970: 253-5; Wilson 1980.

sentenced to jail terms, especially the strike leaders, who included Dooley BinBin, Peter Coppin, Clancy McKenna and Ernie Mitchell. It was also a punishable offence to 'entice' Aboriginal labour from stations and a number of Aboriginal people were arrested and jailed on this basis, including Clancy McKenna and Dooley BinBin.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that this walk-off, or strike, happened 20 years before the Gurindji walk-off from Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory in 1966, which is now considerably more famous. However, unlike the Northern Territory, in the eastern Pilbara, 'there were widespread rumours that stations were likely to close down because of poor seasons and decreasing profits. The future of the station culture appeared insecure. The situation was highly conducive to the spread of a movement which offered an alternative'.⁴⁷ To co-ordinate this strike action a social movement developed that effectively introduced industrial bargaining techniques to a group that had been economically and socially disenfranchised, with only their labour with which to bargain.

The (recently deceased) Don McLeod was the non-Aboriginal facilitator for this movement. In his work as a prospector and miner, and to some degree in the pastoral industry, he had seen that Aboriginal people were grossly exploited by the settlers. While working at one of the stations he discussed his views with the Aboriginal man Kitchener – an indentured station worker – who turned out to be a senior ritual leader for the area. Kitchener told other Aboriginal people of this white Australian who spoke strongly of Aboriginal rights. McLeod was invited to a large ritual gathering where, according to McLeod, 23 language groups were represented.⁴⁸ The strike was planned at this 1942 bush meeting, and took four years to gain shape and momentum. However, this 'movement' involved more than striking for better conditions from the pastoral industry; a mining company was also formed to co-ordinate what many Aboriginal people in the Pilbara were already doing. This company, Northern Development and Mining (Nodom), was the first Aboriginal-owned company in Western Australia.⁴⁹ It grew rapidly from 1949, and between 1951 and 1953 there were 700 members of this company.⁵⁰ However, as Wilson indicates:

This increase in size brought problems of co-ordination, and of inculcating the rules and practices which had been developed. Some found abiding by group decisions irksome. Also, the more casual kin-oriented groupings were having to be modified somewhat to meet the demands of the wider organisation. Previously, each small group worked largely as an independent economic unit.⁵¹

The following sections of this paper examine these increasingly complex management methods, to highlight the leadership structures and the role that McLeod played in the organisation.

^{46.} Read and Coppin 1999: 69; Wilson 1961: 58, 68.

^{47.} Wilson 1961: 385.

^{48.} McLeod 1984: 40.

^{49.} Read and Coppin 1999: 113.

^{50.} According to Wilson, in late 1949 McLeod was asked by the senior law men to join the activities of the group. McLeod's active involvement had also previously been forbidden because of the regulation forbidding association between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. McLeod had been jailed under this law many times. He then provided his vehicle for the use of the group and began wolfram mining (Wilson 1980: 164).

^{51.} Wilson 1980: 164.

The company purchased Yandeyarra station (the country of a number of the key Indigenous leaders) and three other stations with profits from mining, and established a home for Aboriginal hospital outpatients at Marble Bar. As well as working Yandeyarra as a pastoral enterprise, the company built a hospital clinic and a school there.⁵² It centralised all income and worked on an 'all found' co-operative basis; providing for greater expenditure on capital and development work such as road building and purchasing equipment.⁵³ This pooling of earnings for the 'common good' accorded with McLeod's ideology of communism. It was also one of the major factors focused on by the Council for Aboriginal Rights based in Melbourne, who were active supporters of McLeod's involvement in the company.⁵⁴ For this same reason, however, many prominent Indigenous members of the company left, and the company split in 1959.

By late 1953 the company had lost £30,000 and was forced into liquidation by the state. The company membership dwindled to just over 300.⁵⁵ This was due to prolonged litigation over mining claims, problems with contaminated ore and continuing disputes with the State Department of Native Affairs. McLeod robustly argued that this failure was 'due to the legal and administrative contrivances instituted by the State in order to break the spirit of the organised blackfellows'.⁵⁶ The Department of Native Affairs sought to take control by setting up the 'Pilbara Natives Society' and selling off some of the company's assets, such as Yandeyarra station.⁵⁷ Wilson states that 'many returned to the stations, where higher wages were now available, or [again] set up small independent [alluvial mining] groups around Marble Bar, Nullagine, or out from Port Hedland'.⁵⁸ The Pilbara Natives Society lasted less than two years, and within that time McLeod was asked by some of the previous members to assist in setting up another company.

The Pindan Company was formed in 1955 and by 1959 employed 300 Aboriginal people, approximately one-third of the Aboriginal people in the area of its operation.⁵⁹ There were six work camps, an administrative camp and two others, mining for eight different minerals including tin, copper, wolfram, gold and manganese.⁶⁰ They also

52. Although the school was built, their application to the Education Department for a teacher was rejected on the grounds that it would entice Aboriginal workers from other stations to move to Yandeyarra if they were keen to have their children educated, and because such a move would be seen as de facto acceptance of McLeod (Wilson 1980: 164–5).

53. Wilson 1980: 164.

54. According to Attwood (2003: 136), the 'Council for Aboriginal Rights owed its founding to connections between the Communist leadership of the North Australian workers union ... and communist party members in Melbourne ... in 1951 ... The original committee included two Clergymen and the basis of its support broadened during the 1950s but the key players were socialists, who always held the main positions'.

55. Rowley 1970: 255. By 1954 mineral sales were held up over prolonged litigation involving a joint mining venture with an Adelaide company. The group was supplying labour for the operation in return for monthly payments. When these fell in arrears, the Aboriginal labour ceased as well.

56. McLeod 1984: 109.

57. Wilson 1980: 165.

58. Wilson 1980: 165.

59. Wilson 1961: 136. During this period there were also approximately equal numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this area, although non-Aboriginal people were concentrated near the towns and Aboriginal on the stations and mining areas.

had a joint management arrangement with Sims, a metal purchasing company. Again, in line with McLeod's communitarian ideals, wage payments were minimal or, according to some such as Coppin, non-existent. This was apparently so that more equipment could be bought for the company. However, as had happened previously, and according to McLeod, with the encouragement of the Department of Native Affairs, a split formed, with those who sought higher wages opposing McLeod.⁶¹ The tension between the Department of Native Affairs and McLeod is a persistent theme in all of the written sources. However, the issue of wages as a cause of dissatisfaction was not necessarily related to the tensions with the Department. For instance, Clancy McKenna held the position that 'you've got to give people what they earn, and make the lazy ones get on — otherwise you just got a few workers and the rest are bludgers'.⁶² This split could also have been partly due to a lack of flexibility on McLeod's part, in his overriding commitment to the co-operative.

In the mid-1960s McLeod and his followers, principally desert people, formed the Nomads Company in the Roebourne area. This dichotomy between the desert and riverline/coastal Aboriginal groups was one of the major sources of conflict within the company and is an issue in the region today. Although the desert people outnumbered the riverline/coastal people by 2:1 in company membership, all the powerful positions were held by the riverline/coastal people. One reason for this was that riverline/coastal people had a history of greater contact with Europeans and as a result had a greater command of English and business skills, while the desert people were stronger in terms of their knowledge of Indigenous law.⁶³ In this context these differences could also be considered in terms of the riverline/coastal people tending toward individualism and autonomy, and desert people tending toward collectivity (see below).

By 1967 the Nomads Company was supplying some of the labour for the new mining developments at Port Hedland and maintaining itself through mining. The earlier Pindan movement continued to provide a voice for Aboriginal people in the Pilbara: its Aboriginal Director, Peter Coppin, gave evidence to the Select Committee on Voting Rights in 1961.⁶⁴ However, he was not an active member of the company at that time, as he and Ernie Mitchell had set up their own company, the Mugarinya Pastoral Company. They had eventually re-acquired Yandeyarra and part of White Springs station through negotiations with the state government. It is now held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust.⁶⁵ By the 1980s the Nomads Group, formed after the Pindan split, was based at Strelley pastoral station (to the south-east of Port Hedland), while the remaining members of Pindan group, also known as the Mugarinya group, had Yandeyarra station as their base.

^{60.} Rowley 1970: 257.

^{61.} McLeod 1984: 101–8.

^{62.} Palmer and McKenna 1978: 108.

^{63.} Wilson 1961: 205–7.

^{64.} Rowley 1970: 169.

^{65.} Wilson 1980: 166; see also McLeod 1984: 109.

What lessons can be drawn from the energy and structure of these early companies?

McLeod himself claimed that the major impetus for the success of the Pilbara Aboriginal movements and affiliated companies was that it was *their* enterprise, not his.⁶⁶ This is McLeod's perspective and this issue of ownership is a complex one. In fact, the company was referred to as 'McLeod's Pindan group', as he toured the east coast of Australia under the auspices of the Council for Aboriginal Rights to publicise 'what it called 'positive angles of how to improve the situation [of Aborigines], and realistic schemes of alternative ways of life''.⁶⁷ McLeod's vision for the company found resonance with this Council who, according to Attwood, saw co-operatives as an alternative to capitalist modes of production and believed they could provide a new economic basis, at least for tribal people.⁶⁸

McLeod's facilitation demonstrates the crucial role of the outsider in developing schemes that bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests. The political vision and energy of McLeod was essential in enabling Aboriginal people to have a voice during this early period. Although it is possible that a strike would still have occurred, it probably would have remained localised in its immediate impact. McLeod assisted the strike leaders to co-ordinate the strike action across many pastoral leases, as well as assisting in raising funds to do so. It was this early radicalism, when McLeod became a champion of Indigenous rights, that harnessed the loyalty of the key Aboriginal founders of the company. However, three of these four founding members of the company left it in the late 1950s because of McLeod's tight control over it and because, as Coppin argued, 'he wouldn't listen to nobody'.⁶⁹

McLeod's expertise lay with the mining enterprise, rather than pastoralism, and he was more of an idealist than a businessman. The later split in the company appeared to stem from the fact that the Aboriginal members were not significantly involved in the company's financial planning, and that McLeod channelled significant amounts of company profits into expensive legal battles.⁷⁰ According to Coppin 'he also wanted to send money overseas to poor people' in his embrace of charitable causes.⁷¹ McLeod was regarded by the Indigenous company members as the 'book-keeper' and he held the purse strings tightly. The use of this term is indicative, however, because although bookkeepers were important on stations, they were also peripheral to daily and social activity.⁷² A significant tension developed between those wanting cash for their labour and those who were content with communal reward and with consolidating the company empire by purchasing more equipment. There is no doubt that in terms of

66. McLeod 1984: 99.

67. Attwood 2003: 143–6.

68. Attwood 2003: 146.

69. Read and Coppin 1999: 133.

70. One of these court cases involved challenging the Act of Native Affairs in the High Court. The contention was that it was an Act of slavery and so contravened the anti-slavery Act passed by the English parliament in 1833. According to McLeod the High Court 'admitted that Blackfellows were slaves under the Act. However, it ruled that Western Australia being a sovereign state, had the right to enslave any one it wanted to, providing it passed the necessary legislation' (1984: 60).

71. Peter Coppin, pers comm 2003.

influencing broader Indigenous policy issues this 'movement' was successful. However, it wasn't successful in immediately elevating people's standard of living, as Peter Coppin noted: 'I was with him for twenty years, and everything broken, no new anything. At least when we were on the stations we always had new boots. That's [partly] why we went against him'.⁷³ There were also long periods when there was very little to eat. Wilson refers to 1955 as the 'starvation period' when the workers lived on kangaroo meat and water.⁷⁴

The success of McLeod's earlier organisational strategies was based on long-term association with the organisation members, a build-up of trust and some understanding of Indigenous political structure. This, in turn, fed into Aboriginal commitment to the organisation. As noted, he didn't plan the early meetings, he was invited to them and was later invited to take an advisory role as company director. However, according to the biographies of McKenna and Coppin and discussions with Coppin and Allen, McLeod's role became far more than advisory.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, this early movement, which led to the strike action and the formulation of the mining companies, had its own impetus: it was not formed solely in reaction to development, but created development opportunities. According to McLeod, the mining venture was at the forefront in the region in developing mineral deposits.⁷⁶ Yet, these companies weren't formed for solely economic purposes, although economic independence was a major driver. Both the Nodom and the Pindan Companies were also sociopolitical movements with a broad and wide-ranging agenda that included not only employment, but also education, health care, housing and dispute resolution methods to deal with civil and domestic conflicts. As Wilson observed, 'life in the Group required more of a person's total participation than the 'station system''.⁷⁷ Wilson, whose ethnographic research occurred during the rise of the Pindan Company of the late 1950s, rather than the earlier Nodom, found that Pindan was both a sociocultural unit and a 'political community'.⁷⁸

There is no doubt that for a period of time Pindan functioned effectively and this is the focus of Wilson's thesis.⁷⁹ It would be equally interesting, however, to have focused on the reasons for the demise of Pindan. Nevertheless, there is value in teasing out elements of the apparently successful structure as it existed for several years, and consider why it worked for some people and not for others. Why was it that Pindan could not be sustained as a 'socio-cultural unit'?

⁷². Wilson 1961. Wilson states that 'on pastoral properties, 'book keepers' kept accounts and did general secretarial work. Although important in the administration of the stations, socially they were peripheral to many of the activities'. He indicates that the Pindan members 'saw a similarity between McLeod's place in the company, and that of the station book keeper' (1961: 147, footnote).

⁷³. Coppin, pers comm 2003.

⁷⁴. Read and Coppin 1999: 117.

⁷⁵. Palmer and McKenna 1978; Read and Coppin 1999.

⁷⁶. McLeod 1984: 101-4.

⁷⁷. Wilson 1961: 114.

⁷⁸. Wilson 1961: 118, 120; Wilson refers here to Weber 1946: 338.

⁷⁹. Wilson 1961.

Dispersed governance

*'Better to be poor altogether, not jealous. Not good to be boss.'*⁸⁰

Legally the Pindan Company was owned by six Indigenous shareholders, plus McLeod and Elsey Lee.⁸¹ It was stated explicitly that no other Europeans could become legal members of the company. Officially the shares were held in trust for the general body of members, approximately 100 people, including the various camp bosses and committee members. As Wilson indicates, 'the expectation was that these members could control the actions of the shareholders, and if necessary withdraw them by majority status'.⁸² However, this apparent simplicity belied the elaborate structure of formal leadership which was, according to Wilson, 'conceived as a broad based pyramid with those most influential occupying the peak and with other leaders diffused throughout the base yet remaining responsible to those above them'. Three of the six Aboriginal shareholders regarded as the three most senior men were known as directors: Ernie Mitchell, Peter Coppin and Coombie. According to Wilson all three were of the river-line 'group', were ceremonial site holders and law leaders.⁸³ Parallels can be made with this type of Indigenous leader today. To gain legitimacy and some degree of authority it is not enough to have business acumen and a solid command of English, it is also essential to have credibility in the arena of Indigenous law.

There were 25 gang and camp bosses and at least nine technicians, who included mechanics and rock-drillers. There were in total 72 'committee' members (apart from the shareholders) and 26 'ordinary members'.⁸⁴ The committee member positions were equally divided between men and women. Although there were no Aboriginal women shareholders (or directors), interestingly, of the 14 women Wilson has listed in a table of individuals in the Pindan Company hierarchy, 12 are committee members; a higher proportion than the men, despite the overall roughly equal numbers of men and women who were committee members.⁸⁵ Wilson has only listed those individuals regarded as 'important' in each of these roles, suggesting that women used the sphere of the committee to address issues of concern to them, while men occupied almost all of the other roles — including those of 'ordinary members'. He further indicates that wives of bosses were expected to be on the committee, providing they could fulfil their roles.⁸⁶

The mineral holdings of the first company, Nodom, operating between the late 1940s and early 1950s were based around 14 work camps.⁸⁷ Under the new Pindan

^{80.} Peter Coppin, pers comm 2003.

^{81.} I am unsure of this non-Aboriginal woman's association with Pindan. However, it may be assumed that she was personally associated with McLeod.

^{82.} Wilson 1961: 145.

^{83.} Wilson 1961: 146.

^{84.} Wilson 1961: 146.

^{85.} Wilson 1961: 146. Wilson's table showing the Pindan Company hierarchy indicates that he has only listed 'important company members mentioned in the text', but there appears to be some inconsistency in the numbers of 'committee members' versus 'ordinary members' (1961: 146).

^{86.} Wilson 1961: 148.

^{87.} Wilson 1961: 89.

Company these were reduced to 12 camps, six of which were camps engaged in prospecting or mining.⁸⁸ These camps also tended to be residential areas. The structure of re-formed Pindan was not significantly different from the original Nodom Company. The work gangs were relocated to keep up with the changing market, and the economic scope of activities widened to include fishing for pearl shell, shooting goats and kangaroos for hide, and collecting buffel grass seed for sale.⁸⁹ These work camps operated as independent business units in terms of immediate localised decision making. Camp bosses were also work bosses in the smaller mining camps. The camp bosses held authority over each dispersed residential area and their approval had to be given before any official meeting could be held. As Wilson indicates 'except in emergency, Directors and shareholders could not issue orders contrary to those given by a camp boss on matters of settlement administration'.⁹⁰ Thus, a pattern of dispersed governance and consolidated residence emerged.

The work camps were linked to the central community of Two Mile, just outside Port Hedland, which acted as the administrative centre. This early form of governance could be regarded as 'connected localism' or 'relational autonomy'.⁹¹ However, it is not strictly a 'jurisdictional devolution' model in the sense that Smith writes of it, as the major decision-making power was centralised with the six directors, most of whom lived in Two Mile. Although much of the daily governance was dispersed, authority had not devolved on all levels: the work camps were answerable to the central administration. Nevertheless, the concept of regionally dispersed and layered community governance operated as a means to mesh local authority with collective scope.⁹²

The two senior Aboriginal directors, along with the chief technicians, lived at Two Mile. This was the acknowledged centre of the Pindan community, according to Wilson, and provided relative stability for the group even though many of the mining camps were impermanent. These camps were established within a well-known area defined in contemporary economic and social terms, rather than in classical cultural and sociolinguistic terms. Although there were 13 'tribes' or language groups represented in the membership of Pindan, the language of Nyangumarta, a coastal/riverline language, was generally adopted.⁹³

One of the most striking aspects of the governance structure of Pindan was the lack of distinction between the operations of the commercial enterprise and of civil society, as this society consisted of company members. This structure fed into all aspects of Pindan member lives. If members were not happy with this all-encompassing way of life, they left or were asked to leave. Wilson recorded 14 such cases during his field research period.⁹⁴ Teddy Allen was one of those who was asked to leave. He indicated that he was 'sacked' by McLeod in 1950 because he didn't pool all his earnings, when he

88. Wilson 1961: 136.

89. Wilson 1961: 103.

90. Wilson 1961: 147.

91. Smith 2002: 25.

92. See Smith 2002; Westbury and Sanders 2000.

93. Wilson 1961: 379.

94. Wilson 1961: 202.

independently bought some clothes and other items with several others after selling buffel grass.⁹⁵ Entrepreneurialism was not encouraged.

Contemporary organisations

Contemporary organisations, such as the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation and the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation, established under land-use agreements, cannot operate in a similar holistic manner to these earlier organisations, although the agreements under which they are formed are comparably broad and encompassing. The Gumala Aboriginal Corporation was established under the Yandi agreement with Rio Tinto over three Hamersley Iron mines and associated infrastructure in 1997,⁹⁶ while the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation was established over the neighbouring BHP Billiton Area C mine and elements of its infrastructure in 2001. The Gumala Aboriginal Corporation has its head office in Tom Price with a sub-office in South Hedland, while the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation has its head office in South Hedland, with two sub-offices in South Hedland and one in Roebourne.

Both Aboriginal corporations could theoretically have identical overlapping membership, as they are both based on the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili native title claimant group of approximately 450 people. That the membership of both corporations is not consistent arises from a complex of individual political choice of affiliation with one or both corporations. This strategy is also associated with the differences in the structure of both corporations. Where the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation has a centralised authority, with a non-elected Indigenous head who is also the head of the enterprise arm and the Trust, the authority structure of the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation is more dispersed. The GAC corporation holds annual elections for the chairman, the three different committees overseeing it, the enterprise arm and the Trust. The chairman is non-Indigenous. Both corporations have different establishment histories, tend to be associated with or dominated by different families within the three language groups (of Innawonga, Banyjma and Niapaili) and offer different benefits to the Indigenous stakeholders. In this sense they compete for allegiance.

The demographic pattern of Indigenous people today differs considerably from the time of the early companies, when those involved with the companies lived, by necessity, near the operations. Today Indigenous members of the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili and Gumala Aboriginal Corporations live scattered across the Pilbara and beyond, far removed from the mine hinterlands. Within townships, families are scattered throughout the multiracial towns, and over the last 15 years a number of families have settled on outstations or homelands. Even when people are living in the same town, such as Tom Price or Paraburdoo, there is no 'community'⁹⁷ of shared interests — in fact, there is considerable diversity of interests. Most new corporation members do

⁹⁵. Teddy Allen, pers comm 2003.

⁹⁶. The infrastructure for the Yandicoogina project, for instance, is worth approximately \$700 million (Eggleston 2002: 3), while the land-use agreement as a package over 20 years is valued at \$60 million (Aboriginal Independent Newspaper 1998) or US \$40 million (Eggleston 2001: 10).

⁹⁷. There is a considerable literature on the concept of 'community' and the value of it as a reference point for social structure. For two recent perspectives on the use of this term in the Australian Indigenous context see Holcombe 2004 and Sullivan 1996.

not work in the mining industry in any capacity and, though many are in receipt of welfare entitlements, there is great diversity in Indigenous economic interests. Whereas the several dispersed business units were also residential units for these early companies, there is no contemporary comparable work place 'community'. Nevertheless, the structural framework of these modern land-use agreements, from which the Gumala Aboriginal and the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporations arose, remains broad as they attempt to capture, or perhaps create, an overarching paradigm that is as inclusive as the framework of the earlier companies.

The land-use agreements under consideration in this research project are complex and multifaceted. Rio Tinto views its agreements in the Pilbara,⁹⁸ such as the Yandi agreement, as 'long term investments' through the introduction of 'a wide range of programs', which include 'taking responsibility for a wide range of social and cultural issues in the region'.⁹⁹ A fundamental aspect of such an 'agreement benefit package' is that they are developed as social as well as economic investments 'under community trust structures, education, training and employment commitments, Indigenous business development, cultural heritage protection, environmental co-management and cross-cultural education, amongst other things'.¹⁰⁰ In fact, as these agreements attempt to reach into all aspects of Indigenous lives they could be interpreted as the attempted co-option of Indigenous parties to them, powerfully reminiscent of the earlier Pindan movement. Like the Nodom and Pindan trust structures, certain aspects of these modern trusts are dominated by external decision-making. Indigenous parties to the Yandi Agreement, from which the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation arose, have indicated that they have little control over how the money in the trust is distributed. Rather, as McLeod was 'boss for the cheque book', so the non-Indigenous Trustees of Gumala, based in Perth, are understood to operate. Since its inception in 1997, there has been a Gumala Trust rule that only 'community' enterprises will be funded (not individual businesses) and that cash payments are not offered to members.¹⁰¹ Thus, like the earlier companies, under the contemporary trust structure of Gumala, entrepreneurs tend not to be encouraged. Nevertheless, the structure of the Gumala Trust (known as the General Foundation) was the subject of review in late 2003 and the issues of cash payments and the types of businesses that could be funded were amongst the concerns of the review, according to Gumala members spoken with.

Modern multi-articulated Indigenous lifestyles equate to both dispersed residence *and* dispersed governance, the implications of which can only be touched on in this paper. With the expansion of business opportunities flowing from trans-national mining companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton operating locally, smaller groups of self-identified families and language groups are seizing the increased options in mak-

98. Another major neighbouring land-use agreement, which also covers three mines, is the Eastern Guruma Indigenous Land Use Agreement signed in 2002.

99. Van de Bund 1996: 1.

100. Harvey and Fry 2003.

101. The exception to this was the Foundation for the Elderly and Infirm which operated for the first four years of the agreement. This foundation or trust allowed those aged and infirm people a relatively small payment each year. After this fund expired, the demand for this payment to continue was such that the remaining General Foundation — under Gumala Investments — continues to provide the payment.

ing agreements exclusive to those within the 'group'. The structure of this modern group is driven politically by the native title claim process; the process itself is divisive due to the administrative need to draw exclusive boundaries around claimant groups spatially and genealogically. The group then effectively becomes the negotiator for agreements with mining companies. Thus, there is no unitary Indigenous interest as may emerge through a representative body. Indigenous interests are dispersed over many agreements as the one family or language group may be party to several agreements, each of which varies in terms of its success in delivering benefits than other agreements. While on the one hand this enables dispersed and layered leadership from within families and language groups, it is also competitive and not necessarily in the interests of the Indigenous parties to the agreements. Ideally, a regional approach to standardising agreement-making could overcome factionalism that arises from this dispersed approach. Such an approach is being developed by the Pilbara Native Title Service, through the establishment of a negotiation protocol with Rio Tinto and the Fortescue Metals Group. A central negotiating committee, consisting of representatives of twelve native title groups, has been set up to meet with Rio Tinto to establish consistent regional principles.¹⁰²

Management of conflict

'In conflict situations the source of authority becomes more explicit'.¹⁰³

One of the central organising principles that structured Nodum and the later Pindan companies was the management of conflict. Conflict 'permeated almost every aspect of group life' and thus meetings to deal with conflict regularly occurred. 'Directors learnt of the problems of ordinary workers and they in turn received reports of the [various camp] leaders' actions and future policies. Meetings were used to co-ordinate the work force and institute new mining units ... and [meetings were used for] settling conflicts'.¹⁰⁴ The impression from Wilson's material is that these meetings kept the operations open and transparent, but it is also clear that they were vital for maintaining order. As indicated earlier, casual kin-oriented groupings had to become more permanent and less contingent to meet the demands of the wider organisation, placing pressure on group members to maintain cohesion.

In light of Wilson's material in particular, a key theme to emerge over the many years of operation of these Indigenous companies has been the tension between autonomy or self interest and group or collective interest, and between equality and hierarchy. The encompassing framework of these companies is instructive of the processes that were implemented to impart information and to resolve disputes. The regularity of meetings was crucial in this regard as they kept a tight reign over the 'group' to maintain solidarity. If that was threatened, then the party involved was asked to leave.

¹⁰². Yamatji Marlpa Barna Baba Maaja Aboriginal Corporation annual report 2004: 50 and Ritter 2004.

¹⁰³. Wilson 1961: 117.

¹⁰⁴. Wilson 1961: 151.

The committee system, as dispersed throughout all the mining camps and at the central camp, was the major forum for dispute management. The essential criteria for being a committee member was being 'able to "speak up at meetings", putting a view-point clearly and forcefully'.¹⁰⁵ As indicated above, women tended to dominate this forum. They also held their own meetings every two days to decide on cooking duties and to air disputes between themselves. Unless these disputes were serious they did not reach a general meeting.¹⁰⁶

The authority of the Pindan Company — principally held by committee members — also entered the realm of family disputes when they contravened camp rules or where the stability of the camp was at risk through domestic dispute. This included divorce meetings in order to annul a marriage in a formal yet amicable manner.¹⁰⁷ In fact, Wilson notes that even as negotiations were breaking down at the company level when Pindan was splitting, 'the group techniques for dealing with kin and domestic matters affecting the community remained and were regarded as legitimate'.¹⁰⁸ It appeared that there was virtually no realm of camp life that was not under the purview of the company. For instance, a company director officiated at the weddings of company members, as well as at their divorces.¹⁰⁹ Wilson also compares the structure of conflict resolution in law meetings with the secular meetings of Pindan. However, as he indicates, there are more reference to precedents and rulings in law decisions by senior ceremonial leaders.¹¹⁰ Judgments for secular decisions were, nevertheless, strong as 'persistent failure to abide by Pindan rulings resulted in warnings which, if not heeded were followed by expulsion'.¹¹¹ This monopoly over the punitive regulation of behaviour resonates with the structure of a 'total institution' in terms of it being all encompassing and reformative. I am not asserting here that the Pindan Company was in any way like a prison;¹¹² it was, of course, voluntary. However, the issues of maintaining social order and control were central to the daily operations of the camps as they consisted of company members.

One of the most common issues to emerge among contemporary organisations is the tension between 'too many meetings' and not enough of them. The old adage of 'if there is an information vacuum, then gossip and innuendo will soon fill it' is important to consider here. Thus, the regularity of meetings to maintain the effective running of these early companies was crucial in spreading knowledge, as well as in giving people the opportunity to voice their concerns. It seems apparent that a major element of the purpose of the structure of these early companies was this venting of conflict and asser-

¹⁰⁵. Wilson 1961: 148.

¹⁰⁶. Wilson 1961: 152.

¹⁰⁷. According to Wilson 'marriage ceremonies in Pindan followed a modified Western pattern. The couple intending to marry 'put up' their request at a meeting where the kin clusters of the two persons discussed the matter. Unless there were irregularities such as 'crooked' [kinship] sections, or one of the applicants was already married, the acceptance was officially automatic' (1961: 173).

¹⁰⁸. Wilson 1961: 286.

¹⁰⁹. Wilson 1961: 173.

¹¹⁰. Wilson 1961: 191.

¹¹¹. Wilson 1961: 191.

¹¹². See Foucault 1977; Ignatieff 1983.

tion of control. The need to maintain cohesion in the contemporary organisations of the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation and the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation is no different. However, with membership scattered so widely, additional means are also necessary. Newsletters are produced by both organisations updating members on projects and programs funded. In the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation's case, their regional radio station – the Gumala community radio station – operating through the corporation office in Tom Price, acts to inform members (and the region generally) about the activities of the corporation.

Structures of authority and leadership

Wilson indicates that many of the leaders prominent in the camps and work gangs of the original company in 1952 remained influential figures in the re-constituted Pindan Company of 1959.¹¹³ Thus, there was considerable continuity of leadership over the life of the organisation. But, importantly, these leaders left when Pindan failed to offer them the responsibility and decision-making powers that they felt were necessary. They broke away, taking most of the original company membership and developed organisations that catered to their ambitions.¹¹⁴ For example, Peter Coppin and Ernie Mitchell split from Pindan to start Yandeyarra station through the Mugarinya Company,¹¹⁵ while Clancy McKenna had left earlier over the payment of wages.

Nevertheless, highly structured lines of authority operated over the span of Nodom and Pindan. Authority appeared to be diffused throughout the company by the institution of the 'committee', which not only automatically encompassed the formal leaders, such as the six shareholders, but also included forceful persons effective in administrative matters with no official leadership position. 'Spokespersons emerged at times of crisis within the Group when factions developed [and equally they] could be withdrawn if the group sponsoring [them] agreed that [they] were not adequately stating their case'.¹¹⁶ The fact that the almost half of the committee members were women, and they were the most 'important' on the committee, suggests that women played a greater role than has been formally acknowledged.

Wilson notes that the person had to fit the role.¹¹⁷ The six Aboriginal shareholders 'were recruited in a manner which combined features of appointment and election ... [It] bore some similarity to the technique used by [Aboriginal people] to introduce new Law men. Eligible persons were nominated by leading members and the candidate's suitability was discussed'. This formal and transparent election process offers parallels with IM Young's critique of democratic process in Iroquois federalism:

Leaders were chosen on merit, although they usually came from designated families; they were expected to respond to public opinion, and in extreme cases could be impeached if they abused their power; issues and policy proposals could come from anywhere in the federation; decision-making relied on deliberation both within and among member nations and included mechanisms of review.¹¹⁸

^{113.} Wilson 1961: 90.

^{114.} Read and Coppin 1999: 119.

^{115.} Palmer and McKenna 1978: 119.

^{116.} Wilson 1961: 148.

^{117.} Wilson 1961: 146.

^{118.} Young 2000: 241.

Although its scale is different, Young's brief summation of Indigenous North American democracy allows us to consider Pindan as a comparable form of decision-making.

The limitations on power within this structure were an issue for Pindan. Wilson indicates that 'it was recognised that leaders in one sphere tended to have power in another, even though they might have no actual [formal legal] authority'.¹¹⁹ 'Ritual leaders' who had experience on pastoral stations were powerful within these new organisations. However, as Wilson states,

Those from influential kin clusters had a greater chance of getting leadership positions. As the riverline people 'owned' the land and their middle aged and elderly men as a group were more acculturated in Western ways than the equivalent Desert men, they had become predominant in the top leadership positions in the Company.¹²⁰

As noted above, those in leadership positions were also the ones to leave. The range of leadership roles was based on the ability of the individual to act as a public spokesperson and to be 'reasonable'.¹²¹ Peter Coppin also used this term 'reasonable' and indicated that it 'required listening carefully to a lot of information from people in groups and then coming to what was essentially a compromise decision'.¹²² Thus, leadership was not based solely on traditional criteria, such as a ceremony leader or country owner, but importantly also on leadership skills and technical knowledge.¹²³

Wilson's ethnography of this early movement also traces the rise of the 'young men' into positions of power. Many of these had worked as independent contractors for mines or pastoral companies before joining the company. A significant number of them were so-called 'part Aboriginals',¹²⁴ including Mitchell, Coppin and McKenna. These people were adept at operating in the European business world, but were also committed to their Indigenous business world of ritual. Wilson indicates, however, that a recurring problem in the issue of leadership was that 'there were insufficient high status positions in the company for those who desired them, especially for the young men, more acculturated in Western ways'.¹²⁵ This was the case even with the possibility of

^{119.} Wilson 1961: 204.

^{120.} Wilson 1961: 204. Wilson indicates that Pindan was made up of 13 different 'tribal' groups and migrants from others. They were not equally represented. The most numerous Njangomada [Nyangumarta] with 156 people, outnumbered the next largest 'tribal' grouping, the Njamals [Nyamal] with 42 people, by about 4:1. More broadly, these 13 groups were classified by the people themselves into 'riverline' and 'desert'. Taken as a whole the desert people of the Pindan outnumbered the riverline by 2:1 (Wilson 1961: 154). However, as discussed, the riverline people held the majority of the leadership positions.

^{121.} Wilson 1961: 188.

^{122.} Read and Coppin 1999: 116.

^{123.} Wilson discusses the shortage of technicians as an element in the early failure of Nodom. The company relied on a few people who were sufficiently expert in supervising the mining operations. When one of them happened to fall ill at a crucial time — when a shipment was due — the commercial vulnerability of the company was exposed. The issue of the level of education and technical capacity of the company members is acknowledged as crucial to the company's success, as was the training of apprentices. Wilson mentions that there were four apprentice mechanics in Pindan (1961: 150).

^{124.} The term 'mixed descent' was used to refer to Clancy McKenna in his biography (1978), while Rowley (1970) tends to use the term 'part-Aboriginal'.

several positions at the top. And, as discussed, the reality was that McLeod was 'the boss', with the final say on the financial direction of the company.

Direct parallels can be seen today in the fission and fusion of Indigenous organisations, while the leadership of key people continues. For instance, in the early negotiation and development of the Indigenous organisations set up to manage major land-use agreements over the last 10 years, the same individuals tend to hold the powerful roles. The first chairperson of the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation, set up under the Yandi Agreement, played a major role in developing it and clearly learnt a lot from the process, describing the negotiation of this agreement as a 'learning curve'. He then went on to found the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation which effectively competes with the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation in some key areas, although as indicated there is a significant overlapping of membership. The point is that this fission of organisations and leadership is dynamic, as opportunities are sought out.

There are direct parallels with the ideologies behind the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation and the earlier Nodom and Pindan Companies, with their collective refusal to offer cash payments to members. It is arguable that, like the earlier companies under the directive influence of Don McLeod, it was also the primarily external influences of Rio Tinto that directed the trust structure of the Gumala Foundation in not allowing cash payments to members. Interestingly, the more recent Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation was established with different rules that include the possibility of limited cash payments to individual members. This is an important difference between the two Indigenous organisations and is often commented on by their respective overlapping beneficiaries.

It is also worth noting that this schema of collectivity, referred to now as 'community', appears to have its strongest advocates externally. Recall the 1950s Council for Aboriginal Rights perspective on Pindan as a co-operative. Is there a perception that the collective approach to money is the best way for Aboriginal people to deal with the wider economy? This approach is not necessarily shared by Indigenous people themselves. As recalled by Wilson for the early companies, 'although the ideal remuneration scheme for the Group was a collective one, since its inception there had been spasmodic attempts to introduce "cash in hand" payments'.¹²⁶ Like the earlier leaders Ernie Mitchell and Peter Coppin, the original chairman of the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation also listened to the broader opinion and was strategic in forming another corporation with the ability to offer its members some immediate returns.

The company as an inter-cultural phenomenon

Wilson conceptualises those who act as spokespersons for the company as 'bridge-men',¹²⁷ linking the company with 'outside authority and interpret[ing] events for members of all systems'. He indicates that kinship and law systems were integrated with the company. It is important to note that the men with authority were Law men, as well as technical experts. They had to be both, to operate effectively and legitimately in this 'inter-cultural' arena.¹²⁸

^{125.} Wilson 1961: 199.

^{126.} Wilson 1961: 203.

^{127.} Wilson 1961: 123.

The importance of continuing the Law during the operation of the early companies was stressed by the Aboriginal company members.¹²⁹ As McKenna stated to McLeod when he chose to leave Nodom, 'we Marangu just about forgotten our business. You told us once we got to leave all that law behind us, if we ever going to make anything. Well, I reckon that was a wrong thing'.¹³⁰ However, on the other hand Coppin indicated that 'throughout the strike and even after ... "the Split", the elders continued to do the Law'.¹³¹ This may have been without the encouragement of McLeod, however.

The fact that McLeod controlled the finances was also a major issue. In this key area there were strong perceptions that McLeod was not being accountable, and that the maintenance and expansion of the company infrastructure was not transparent. As Peter Coppin noted, 'people were signing cheques, but for what?'¹³²

Attwood notes that the Council for Aboriginal Rights saw Pindan as a 'half-way house to full assimilation'.¹³³ He argues that it was perceived 'as a means rather than an end in itself ... instead of an example of an ongoing state of cultural difference and of a minority group claiming rights as a group'. It seems to me that neither perception is reasonable, as both radically underestimate the extent to which Pindan and the associated movements meant different things to different participants. The diversity of expectations by its Aboriginal members of what it could deliver to them was significant. This diversity was informed by language, culture and history. For many, the companies were vehicles to gain equality, so they could operate like other citizens. Clancy McKenna, for instance, left Pindan as he 'felt that the strike was now behind him. He had won for himself at least, the right to work, and keep a job like a white man. Now he wanted to be a success, to be a boss, and to earn money like other white men did'.¹³⁴ Those who stayed with McLeod and formed the Nomad Company were operating less individualistically and were content to be part of a group by following the leadership of McLeod. These were principally the desert Aboriginal people. Today, this corralling of so-called 'Indigenous interests', where people have to operate in the interests of the group – through the vehicle of the elusive 'community' – is a strong pattern in the development discourse.¹³⁵

When the company split, it is noteworthy that it followed the cultural and regional divide of riverline/coastal and desert. As Wilson indicated, 'kin affiliations affected loyalties, the coastal 'riverline' people tending more to support Mitchell and Coppin, the desert people to be in sympathy with McLeod'.¹³⁶ However, overarching kin affiliations were the different histories and expectations that Aboriginal people

^{128.} See Holcombe 2005; Martin 2003; Merlan 1998. Inter-cultural theory has an extensive literature within post-colonial studies internationally, in particular, the work of Bhabha and his concept of the 'third space' (1995) and Brathwaite (1971) on creolisation in Jamaica.

^{129.} Palmer and McKenna 1978.

^{130.} Palmer and McKenna 1978: 109.

^{131.} Read and Coppin 1998: 142.

^{132.} Peter Coppin pers comm 2003.

^{133.} Attwood 2003: 147.

^{134.} Palmer and McKenna 1978: 105.

^{135.} See in particular Nussbaum 2001 and Escobar 1995.

^{136.} Wilson 1980: 165.

brought with them from these regions. As indicated earlier, the fact that Aboriginal leaders were from the coastal/riverline groups indicates that they brought with them qualities gained from their work as contractors, based on a history of interaction with settler enterprise. This raises the question of whether or how the companies were culturally based, as they clearly did not comprise a coherent or homogenous Indigenous 'group' derived from pre-contact group structure, however relational and contingent this group may have been. Several of the key leaders, such as Peter Coppin and Clancy McKenna were not driven by the mining enterprise but — like many of the other coastal/riverline people — 'preferred instead the stock and horse work that [they] had grown up with and become so adept at'.¹³⁷ There was a tendency in the 'split' for the coastal/riverline people to have shared a history in pastoralism, while desert people were more closely affiliated with mining as the more dominant economic opportunity in the desert region.

The composition of the contemporary organisations offers an interesting contrast to these earlier ones as the latter were defined in pragmatic economic and socio-historical terms. As mentioned previously, the membership of the contemporary Aboriginal corporations such as Gumala and the Innawonga Banyjma Niapaili Corporation established under land-use agreements is politically defined in cultural terms under the *Native Title Act 1993*. Each negotiating body comprises a native title claimant group, thus defining Indigenous 'groups' in terms of shared language and land. This apparently convenient collectivity belies the negotiation that takes place within and between families, where this group is as contingent as siblings deciding to 'follow' their mother or their father for membership to different groups. The contemporary membership of these new organisations may be just as contingent as it was during the earlier period, when the issue of cultural groupings was on a much more regional scale and quite dependent upon individuals simply wanting to be involved.

Conclusion

The application of a historical framework to this contemporary research project is vital. In this Pilbara case study, there is a precedent for significant Indigenous engagement in commercial development through the mining industry (unlike in the Northern Territory, for instance). This early engagement was vigorous and lasted for over 20 years, allowing for change and development. Although this project is dealing with some new issues in terms of Indigenous *partnering* with large development companies, some of the key issues remain unchanged. The language of engagement may have changed from the Indigenous companies of the 1950s and 1960s to the post-native title present, but central aspects of the ideology underlying the engagement in these two periods are shared. The language has shifted from discussion of 'co-operatives' to 'communities', from 'egalitarian non-capitalist reform through a new economic basis',¹³⁸ to 'long term investments under community trust structures'.¹³⁹ The ideology behind both is all-encompassing, seeking the complete immersion of the Indigenous polity to the regional mining agenda.

^{137.} Read and Coppin 1998: 134.

^{138.} Attwood 2003: 146; Wilson 1961.

^{139.} Harvey and Fry 2003.

This paper's preliminary comparative historical analysis has identified patterns that have emerged in the Indigenous engagement with enterprise in the Pilbara region. These patterns could be considered as principles of engagement in this inter-cultural context. Such principles include the role of the outsider, which in the case of Don McLeod was crucial in facilitating the establishment of these early companies. This is not to suggest that outsiders are always 'crucial' to developing Indigenous entrepreneurial enterprise, although external influences may often be necessary to initially facilitate change. Nevertheless, the extent to which this external agent stays engaged in the enterprise may depend on whether their role, which is likely to be in the area of financial management, is charged with 'listening' to and engaging with their constituency, or, in the contemporary case, the agreement beneficiaries.

There are tensions between the issue of maintaining the collectivity and the desire of individuals for autonomy. This manifests most clearly in the desire for cash in hand, rather than pooling for collective or 'community' benefit. Another aspect of this is the issue of transparency. When one receives cash, there is an immediate return and in this exchange, an understanding of where, or at least how, the money has been distributed. A lack of visible monies can be alleviated by keeping people informed and including them in the 'bookkeeping' process, rather than allowing it to be left to, or dominated by, the external agent. There is an interesting resonance here with the issue of cash wages in the early companies and cash payments by contemporary mining companies, which were not perceived as a sound long-term investment.

Another emerging trend is that leaders who want a long-term career have to 'listen' to their constituency and appear 'reasonable', which may also be a way of referencing majority perspective on an issue. If one takes as an example the cash in hand issue, this concession to the majority may appear problematic to external audiences. Nevertheless, it would appear that successful Indigenous leadership has to recognise and acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous interests and attempt to balance this against majority interests, while also being aware of, or referencing, external interests and expectations. This results in a complex set of tensions.¹⁴⁰

The continuity of leadership and the types of men who become leaders has emerged as another pattern. In this inter-cultural context, leaders must not only be adept in the realm of commercial business, but have to be respected and have credibility in the religious context of local Indigenous Law. They cannot have expertise solely in this area — they must have both abilities. The degree of expertise or knowledge in this area of law is, however, the most critical, and is debated amongst their constituents. The two realms of expertise sit in tension throughout the period of leadership. Furthermore, if the ambitions of these leaders cannot be met, then new opportunities will be created or seized in this cycle of the fission and fusion.

The tensions between the larger ideological issues, such as social justice for all Aboriginal people in Western Australia,¹⁴¹ and the on-ground issues of achieving a decent standard of living for those who worked for the early companies,¹⁴² were

^{140.} See also Dodson 2003 and Kilgour 2003.

^{141.} McLeod 1984.

^{142.} Read and Coppin 1999.

significant during the early movement. A key theme to emerge is that tangible positive change in terms of addressing immediate needs has to be evident to maintain loyalties, and this is equally true for contemporary organisations.

In this contemporary context not only is the wealth (noting that the Yandi agreement is worth \$60 million) and thus the planning for its expenditure more significant, but mining companies also seek outcomes from their community program inputs, as the new era of corporate social responsibility embraces concepts such as 'sustainability'.¹⁴³ The Rio Tinto Aboriginal Training and Liaison program in 2000 evaluated the 'tradeoffs between culture and independence' as a threat in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.¹⁴⁴ This perspective could be considered in light of the legalistic and restrictive framework under which the *Native Title Act 1993* is implemented, which (to over-simplify) emphasises the need to demonstrate adherence to tradition, and the practice of customary law and the continuity of attachments to land. It is arguable that this has encouraged a renaissance of tradition. At the same time this contradicts the policy agenda of 'mainstreaming', which emphasises engagement with the formal economy as exemplified by land-use agreements. Yet, land-use agreements sit uncomfortably in this recognition space. This is because agreements, such as Yandi, are structured around a communally-based benefits package with an emphasis on trust structures and a discouragement of entrepreneurial activity. They seek to mesh with the renaissance of tradition through the development of a neo-traditional communitarian economy.

Acknowledgements

This paper derives from a paper given in the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research seminar series, a pre-fieldwork paper for the Australian Research Council project 'Indigenous community organisations and miners: partnering sustainable regional development?'. The focus of this project is the implementation of land-use agreements and the effectiveness of benefit flows to the Indigenous recipients. I have undertaken three periods of field research (over two months) in this Pilbara region since the seminar paper was presented, and have considerably re-cast the original paper in the light of this experience. The first field-site of this multi-site project is the Rio Tinto Hamersley Iron and Robe River mines in this region. I would like to thank Jon Altman, David Martin, David Trigger, Julie Finlayson, Robert Levitus, Bruce Harvey and Elizabeth Bradshaw for their comments on this paper. I would like to thank Peter Coppin and Teddy Allen for their patience in recollecting their early experiences with the mining co-operatives during a visit to their respective homelands. And finally, an important thanks to the many Indigenous parties to the contemporary agreements who I and other colleagues interviewed in Tom Price, Wakathuni, Billeri, Youngaleena, Port Hedland, Wickham, Roebourne and Karratha. They remain anonymous for the purposes of confidentiality.

¹⁴³. See Eggleston 2002; Horwood 2002.

¹⁴⁴. Dames and Moore 2000.

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Notes and documents

The Sally White – Diane Barwick Award

The Sally White – Diane Barwick Award is presented annually by the Board of *Aboriginal History* to a female Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tertiary student who is about to start or is already studying for an Honours or post-graduate degree. The Award can be used for any appropriate research-related purpose.

2004 Award

Wendy Hermeston was awarded the 2004 Sally White – Diane Barwick Award. She is currently Aboriginal Health Research Fellow at the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health in Lismore, NSW. She has a BA(Psych) and has recently submitted her Masters of Applied Epidemiology at the Australian National University. She writes:

In my former position as an Aboriginal counsellor supporting Aboriginal people impacted by Stolen Generations related issues, I witnessed daily the profound impact of forcible removal on clients, across multiple generations. Through this experience I saw a need for methodologically sound, Aboriginal authored evidence regarding the effects of both past removals, and of current policies and practices relating to contemporary removal of Aboriginal children. This was the motivation for my application to the Masters of Applied Epidemiology, Indigenous Health through the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University.

My major project was called 'Doing it right: a pilot study exploring culturally, ethically and methodologically appropriate means of investigating the history and impact of forcible removal in families of Aboriginal inmates at a rural prison'. This pilot project was the first step in developing appropriate methods for conducting future research in this area. Whilst carrying out this research I applied for and was granted the Aboriginal History White-Barwick award, for which I was very grateful. I also entered the *Medical Journal of Australia's* Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Competition. My essay 'Telling you our story: how apology and action relate to health and social problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' was one of three runner-up essays selected for publication.¹

Currently I am employed as an Aboriginal health research academic at the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health in Lismore, NSW and I am a member of the Indigenous Staff Network of the Australian Rural Health Educa-

¹ MJA 2005 183 (9): 479-481, see http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/183_09_071105/her10025_fm.html (accessed 31/01/06).

tion Network. I look forward to carrying on this research, having added to the body of knowledge in this area and learned a great deal from the Masters of Applied Epidemiology pilot study.

2005 Award

The award for 2005 was made to **Jessica Shipp** to assist her in the completion of her Masters in Applied Epidemiology at the ANU. She writes:

I was born and raised in Dubbo. I graduated with a Bachelor in Applied Science (Environmental Health) in 2003 from the NSW Aboriginal Environmental Health Officer Training Program. Whilst involved in the program I was given extensive experience in delivering 'Housing for Health' projects in remote and urban Indigenous communities. The 'Housing for Health' methodology focuses on what environmental changes will achieve the maximum health gain, particularly for children aged 0-5 years. It was in this role that I became interested in data collection and Aboriginal health statistics.

I am currently completing my Masters in Applied Epidemiology through the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University. My major project focuses on food safety and food-borne illness and attitudes and behaviours in an urban Indigenous community.

Applications invited

Future candidates for the Sally White - Diane Barwick Award are invited to apply in writing at any time, for selection in April of the following year. Please apply to:

Aboriginal History Inc.
PO Box 3827
Canberra ACT 2601

Contact the Secretary, Robert Paton 0419 736459, for further details.

Many exchanges, many ripples – the work of Professor Isabel McBryde

Peter Read

This is the text of the speech given at the launch of Many exchanges: archaeology, history, community and the work of Isabel McBryde, edited by Ingereth Macfarlane with Mary-Jane Mountain and Robert Paton, 2005, Aboriginal History Inc Monograph No 11. The launch was held at the Australian National University on 17 November 2005.

Picture the young Isabel McBryde at Melbourne University, in the late 1950s. She describes herself then as a 'very solemn classicist', finishing her Masters of Arts degree on the political opposition to the Flavian Principate in the first century AD in ancient Rome. Luckily her lecturer, John O'Brian, incorporates a lot of archaeology into his lectures. Enter John Mulvaney, freshly arrived from Cambridge, extolling the virtues of archaeology in Australia. Isabel goes to Cambridge and does a crash course in archaeology; two years rolled into one. She returns to Australia convinced of the value of Australian archaeology, and that the important archaeology to do in Australia is prehistoric. There's some opposition. People say to her, 'But there's nothing for you here. You should be in Egypt or Athens.' But Isabel has already glimpsed what is to become the dominant element in her extraordinarily productive life: the chance to document exciting hunter-gatherer archaeology of world significance: fifty or sixty thousand years of diverse, important cultures.

So let's think of Isabel now as the centre of the pond. Exchanging, yes, but also making ripples which will wash to the ends of the earth. Those far away ripples I'll come to later. Let's for the moment think locally.

We're in Armidale now in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Ted Egan comes through town to talk about the north of Australia. Russell Ward invites Jeremy Beckett to talk about western New South Wales. Isabel begins to document and to survey the sites of the local area, for there is then no serious archaeology carried out in New England, and not an enormous amount of interest in things Aboriginal. Isabel begins not just to map out sites of likely significance, but to ponder the connections between ceremonial sites, rock art sites, stone circles, inscribed trees, stone resources (see chapter 2 in the book, by Jack Golson). People are beginning to feel her influence. The ripples are spreading. But one of her great regrets is the prevailing view at this time that everything was all finished, that contemporary Aborigines knew nothing. The unity between Aboriginal place and Aboriginal people in New England finally happens, but not until the 1990s. We can flash forward to Isabel sitting in the AIATSIS library reading for the first time the records of the linguist Gerhard Laves who worked with the Old People of New England in the late 1920s. She recalls

I just sat there, almost in tears, because there was the ethnography in his stories and accounts of senior people who gave him information on their own terms. There were the stories of the ancestral beings and the meanings of those sites. I



Isabel McBryde signs a copy of 'Many exchanges: archaeology, history, community and the work of Isabel McBryde' for contributing author Helen Brayshaw at the launch, Australian National University, November 2005 (Photo: Ursula Frederick)

wasn't aware when I started [in the 1960s] of the interest and knowledge of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

So these were major ripples emerging from Isabel's work in New England: that Aboriginal sites held, and still hold, many meanings. That information could, and should, be returned to communities as part of what Cheryl Brown, Northern Section, Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW), has called 'the repatriation of knowledge'. That Aboriginal people not only can be, but have to be an essential part of any archaeological work. (See papers in section 1 of the book, 'Exchanges of ideas'.)

Let's follow another ripple as it washes ever further from that young Masters student. We're in Woiworung country, in Victoria. We're at the greenstone axe quarries at Mt William. Isabel is tracing their distribution in south-eastern Australia. She's working with Alan Watchman on the petrological analysis of the material, to match the artefacts back to the quarries that they came from. Note the convergence of different kinds of expertise, the characteristic inter-disciplinarity of this archaeology. Note the conjunction of hard science and the humanities. How should the somewhat uneven distribution of these artefacts in south-eastern Australia be explained? You can include many different kinds of human values in your hypothesis: symbolic, technological, economic, personal and community values. You can work with a historian. Is there an ethnographic record of conflict between groups? Is there a break in distribution patterns? Can anything be inferred from the artefacts going in certain directions, being used in ceremonies in certain areas, but not in others? This archaeological ripple is beginning to splash about in all the social and hard sciences as it seeks a shared under-

standing of the human past. (See papers in section 2 of the book, 'Exchanges within regions, across disciplines' and in section 3, 'Exchanges in stone'.)

Now, in the mid-1970s, the ripples are washing across to Canberra. Working with committees such as the Sites Committees of National Parks and Wildlife, working with Sharon Sullivan and other heritage managers as they begin to ask 'Where are all the blackfellers'? These are the very early days of having Aboriginal people trained and employed as Sites Officers and Rangers (see chapter 11 in the book, by Sharon Sullivan). And why stop there? The Australian Heritage Commission also is ripe for reform. In her calm persuasive way Isabel is persuading the Commission that they need Aboriginal staff, and even — dare she suggest it? — an Aboriginal Commissioner. Enter Bill Jonas. Isabel recalls

It just took a bit of time. I put up proposals and pointed out the great advantage of that input and how the whole register of the National Estate would benefit, because there would be a different range of sites that would be nominated and there was an opportunity for local knowledge.

So Bill Jonas became the first Aboriginal Commissioner and again in Isabel's words, 'did a fantastic job in setting up procedures for consultation and liaison, and the appointment of an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Dave Johnston.'

And now the ripples that Isabel is making are splashing around the world. We're among the standing stones at La Petite Pierre, France, 1992. Armed with the passionate conviction of the social value of archaeological sites, Isabel is talking to the World Heritage Council of those very special sites one finds, among other places, in Australia and the Pacific, exemplars of an immensely long tradition of non-literate societies. The sites are not just a single splendid example of human activity, but are parts of a system. They are cultural landscapes and their associative heritage values, linking material remains in the landscape with the beliefs and activities of a human society which once occupied it. They're an important cultural expression, which need to be incorporated into the intellectual and physical treasures of the world. Her arguments were accepted. And as a consequence, the following year Mt Tongariro, New Zealand, was the first cultural landscape listed for its associative values, and in 1994, Uluru-Kata Tjuta, already on the World Heritage List for its natural values, was renominated for its spiritual values as an associated landscape (see chapters 1 and 7 in the book, by John Mulvaney and Marilyn Truscott respectively).

Can we go further than this? Surely there are no bigger ripples in Isabel's life than profoundly altering the way that the principal world heritage body understands sites of significance?

Yes there are. The ripples are washing right round the world and they're all around us in this room. What's given Isabel the most satisfaction, she says, is her interaction with students. So many of them are here tonight. She says of her role as a teacher, 'The students I've had. I mean, they've all gone on and done such innovative, important things in the discipline that have also been very important in Australian society. The other thing that gives me satisfaction is the role that I was able to play in establishing, say, the Special Entry scheme at the ANU, encouraging the Archaeology department and others to welcome Aboriginal students. I'm proud of the Aboriginal students.

They've done such wonderful things.' So many of them are now archaeologists themselves. (See chapter 3 in the book by Mary-Jane Mountain.)

And carried within her many students, are the values which she has imparted. Let's think about what they are: a sense of ethical obligation to the discipline *and* to those for whom one is working. The importance of preserving the material record. The obligation to the present members of the custodial culture. The recognition that they may place their own complex values on sites which may in certain circumstances take precedence over the scientific/historical values of outsiders. To accept that the interests of archaeology and the present day cultural custodians may even collide. The belief that resolution of such collisions occurs through one's willingness to talk and to listen and to seek the middle ground. And to know that if, somehow, a middle ground can't be found, then to hold the belief that resolution may in the future be found.

I'll finish with an enormous thankyou to Ingereth Macfarlane for putting together this book, which has been for her, and for all of us associated with it, a labour of love. In launching this book I, and the Board of Aboriginal History, salute Isabel in two ways: I salute Professor McBryde who brought associative and cultural values of landscape to the very highest levels of heritage assessment in the world. And simultaneously I salute Auntie Isabel, one of our most distinguished Elders, who gave us the reassurance that now, more than ever, we need the values of the humanities within the social sciences.

The extinction of rigour: a comment on 'The extinction of the Australian Pygmies' by Keith Windschuttle and Tim Gillin

Michael Westaway and Peter Hiscock

In a 2002 article in *Quadrant* by Keith Windschuttle and Tim Gillin,¹ it was argued that a founding population of people of Oceanic Negrito origin were wiped out by subsequent population migrations into ancient Australia. The article borrows heavily from the trihybrid model proposed by Dr Joseph Birdsell and initially developed in the 1930s. Birdsell argued that this population was largely replaced in Australia by two subsequent prehistoric migrations except in the Cairns rainforest region and Tasmania. Birdsell referred to the hypothesised founding Negrito people as the Barrineans. Windschuttle and Gillin allege that Aboriginal activists (who started their campaign against Birdsell's thesis in the 1960s) were opposed to the theory as it ran counter to their political aspirations. Although no link is identified by Windschuttle and Gillin between the actions of Aboriginal activists and the archaeological community, the authors imply that archaeologists have opted to support the flawed 'one people' model for the prehistoric population of ancient Australia through an unscholarly concurrence between the designated experts and the political interests of Aboriginal people. In reality archaeologists have abandoned Birdsell's 70-year-old model because it is no longer sustained by the abundant archaeological evidence. In this paper we sketch some of the abundant evidence that is responsible for the abandonment of this outdated model of Australia's past and provide an overview of the two prevailing models for the peopling of this continent.

Extinction of the 'pygmy model'

Before Windschuttle and Gillin's suggestion that there was a major pygmy extinction event in Australia is even plausible, it is necessary to accept that a separate pygmy group derived from Oceanic Negritos once existed here. In fact there is no evidence from the archaeological and biological record for the existence of such a pygmy population in Australia.

One of the primary criteria for obtaining pygmy status in the modern world is short stature. Windschuttle and Gillin do not define what they mean by a pygmy and, in the absence of a specific definition, the classical anthropological definition proposed by E Schmidt in 1905, must apply by default. Schmidt defined pygmies as populations for whom *average* male stature is 150cm or less and *average* female stature 140cm or less.² Windschuttle and Gillin would indeed seem to be aware of this definition as they go to the trouble of claiming that most of the adult males around Kuranda and Cairns measured by Birdsell stood between 140 and 150 centimetres tall. This is a poor reading

1. Windschuttle and Gillin 2002.

2. Cavalli-Sforza 1986: 17.

of the biological data collected by Birdsell. The average stature reported by Birdsell³ for males is in fact 155cm in Cairns and 159cm at Kuranda. Stature for females is not reported.⁴ These people were rather short, but in the absence of an extended justification they are too tall to be classified as pygmies.

The case for pygmies in Tasmania is even less sustainable. People from Tasmania seem not to have been short at all. Information on stature from Tasmania is not anthropometric and is dependent upon ethnohistorical accounts, none of which suggest that Aboriginal people living in Tasmania were of small stature. It would seem that the only scrap of evidence that has been used to suggest that the Tasmanian Aboriginals were derived from Oceanic Negritos is their wavy hair. The research of Dr Colin Pardoe has demonstrated that, despite 10,000 years of geographic isolation from the mainland, the similarities between Tasmanian skeletal biology and the mainland Aboriginal population in Victoria outweigh the differences. It would seem that there has been very little divergence between the two groups.⁵ Tasmanian Aborigines clearly share ancestors with their relatives across Bass Strait and are not derived from a separate migration.

Windschuttle and Gillin follow Birdsell in claiming that evidence from the archaeological record supports the existence of a founding Negrito population. They argue that the gracile skeletal remains from Lake Mungo in the Willandra Lakes were most likely those of the smaller, more slender Negritos. However, biological anthropologists, including Birdsell, have failed to identify any diagnostically Negrito characteristics in the human fossil record from Lake Mungo or, indeed, any other part of Australia. It certainly does not appear that these individuals were small in stature, which is the only means of identifying a pygmy population in human palaeontology. Although there is still debate on the actual antiquity of the Lake Mungo 3 (LM 3) individual (the dates range between 40,000 and 60,000 years before present), and indeed its sex, it is certainly one of the oldest known human skeletons in the country. The right ulna has a maximum length of 297mm which lies at the uppermost limit recorded for recent Australian Aboriginal males,⁶ larger than the average male stature recorded by Birdsell (1993) across most of Aboriginal Australia. Indeed the stature reconstructions for *all* Pleistocene fossil humans⁷ appear to be beyond the mean height for pygmies.⁸ There is no evidence to suggest that any of the Pleistocene fossil humans have any affinities with those groups that have been referred to as Oceanic Negritos. On the contrary, the fossil human record demonstrates that Australia's first people were tall.

Stone tool industries have also been employed in the Windschuttle and Gillin article to support a founding Negrito hypothesis. For example, the Kartan stone artefacts were first described by Professor Norman Tindale, who employed them to construct a cultural chronology of Aboriginal tool types. Tindale argued that the Kartan artefacts were the earliest in the sequence and most likely represented the tool kit of the 'Barrineans'. It is now clear that this interpretation is entirely incorrect. Firstly, these purported

3. Birdsell 1993: 309.

4. Birdsell 1967, 1993.

5. Pardoe 1991.

6. Brown 2000.

7. eg Brown 2000.

8. Brown 2000.

Kartan 'tool types' may not be tools at all, but simply manufacturing debris which is not diagnostic of chronology or maker. Secondly, such objects are now dated to the last 10,000 years and do not represent the debris of an early settlement of Australia. Thirdly, these kinds of stone artefacts are not found in chronological association with skeletal remains, so it is difficult to ascribe them to one of the trihybrid skeletal 'types'.

A similarly outdated reading of the archaeological evidence is present in Windschuttle and Gillin's statement that the dingo was introduced 6000 years ago and was accompanied by a whole new technology of stone tools. Although this was a view held by archaeologists 20–30 years ago it has been overturned by much recent research. Firstly, the dingo was probably introduced only 4000–4500 years ago, with claims for greater antiquity failing to take disturbance and poor dating into account. Secondly, we know that no new technology was introduced from outside Australia at that time. The stone implements that Windschuttle and Gillin refer to were present from before 7000–8000 years ago, and probably developed from pre-existing technology. During the last 10,000 years there were radical changes in ancient technology as Aboriginal groups adjusted to climatic and social change.⁹ These changes are not indicative of new groups entering the continent.

Windschuttle and Gillin are also dismissive of the use of craniology to establish the genetic affiliation of different population groups, despite the fact that craniology incorporating multivariate analyses is used across different regions of the world to map human variation. It has proved to be a powerful tool in forensics and repatriation to establish the origin of crania of unknown provenance and population group. The basic assumption in craniological studies attempting to estimate the degree of genetic relatedness between populations is that those populations that display the most similarities are the most closely related.¹⁰ The initial study of Queensland crania by Larnach and Macintosh,¹¹ who observed the frequency of anatomical traits of either metrical or non-metric definition, formally demonstrated that the 12 Cairns rainforest crania available to their study could not be coherently distinguished from other Queensland crania. The crania certainly did not indicate that there was any 'Oceanic Negrito' component in their cranial form.¹² Subsequent craniological research in Queensland incorporating metric data has been consistent with the results of Macintosh and Larnach.¹³ There are subtle differences between different geographical regions in Queensland, the most distinct being amongst the Aboriginal people of the Keppel Islands who were semi-isolated by 14 km of sea and underwent slight microevolutionary change.¹⁴ Slight variation in skeletal form is expected in indigenous populations spread over large areas of distance and geography.

Current models for the origins of the Aboriginal Australians

Questions about the biological origins of Aboriginal Australians have been at the forefront of archaeological debate in this country since the establishment of archaeology as

⁹ Hiscock 1994.

¹⁰ White 2000: 430.

¹¹ Larnach and Macintosh 1969.

¹² Macintosh and Larnach 1973.

¹³ van Holst Pellekaan 1991; Pardoe and Donlon 1991.

¹⁴ Larnach and Macintosh 1972; Pardoe and Donlon 1991.

a professional discipline in Australia in the 1960s. Evidence on the origins of the first Australians relies heavily upon data taken from bones, including teeth. Other forms of archaeological evidence have placed the human fossil and osteological record into a broader context providing an understanding of the timing of expansion into different Australian environment types. Knowledge acquired from skeletal remains and the material record indicates that Aboriginal people have adapted, both biologically and culturally, to all Australian environment types ranging from deserts to tropical landscapes, geographically isolated islands and sub-temperate highlands. Indeed it would seem that even the marginal environments were occupied during those periods of increased aridity that characterised the Pleistocene.

Amongst specialists there are different opinions regarding the biological origins of Aboriginal Australians. This diversity of models springs from the complexity of the evidence that is available. In an attempt to address this difficult question, biological anthropologists not only acquire information by applying evolutionary theory to the fossil record, but have in the past obtained relevant data from recent and living populations in the form of molecular (blood types, DNA) and morphological evidence (craniometrics, physical characteristics – stature, skin colour, hair form etc).

As explained in the general Australian prehistory works referred to by Windchuttle and Gillin, ever since the archaeological communities general abandonment of Birdsell's trihybrid model debate has focused on two explanatory models. In addition to the 'one people' model criticised by those writers, other experts favour Alan Thorne's dihybrid model which proposes separate Pleistocene colonising events of Australia with ultimate roots in Southeast Asia and China.¹⁵

Thorne developed his views at a time when there was widespread acceptance of the 'multiregional continuity theory' on the origins of anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*, a model that traces today's regional indigenous populations to their supposed, respective *Homo erectus* forebears. Thorne's dihybrid model can be seen as an adaptation of multiregional continuity because, in addition to relating Australian Aborigines' ultimate origins to South-East Asian *Homo erectus*, the usual view at the time, he proposed a separate colonising thrust into Australia of a less robust population with its roots tracing back to North-East Asian *Homo erectus*. The last two decades, however, have seen the rise of the 'Out of Africa' theory which proposes a single origin of *Homo sapiens* within the last 150,000 years in Africa. Proponents of this view largely but not universally hold that after leaving Africa, anatomically modern humans gradually replaced more primitive species of humans (ie *Homo erectus* in Asia and *Homo neanderthalensis* in Europe) and also colonised previously unpopulated continents such as Australia and America. The biological variation that is seen in Aboriginal populations across the country, they argue, has been the result of adaptation to different environments over tens of millennia (a very long period of time).

Variations on both general theories exist and archaeologists continue to work on the problem from a vast array of perspectives. As Australia is often considered one of the strongest cases for supporting multiregional continuity,¹⁶ the human fossil record

¹⁵ Thorne 1980.

¹⁶ Antón and Weinstein 1999; Bulbeck 2001.

in this country has been the subject of intense scrutiny and debate by the international community on both sides of the argument.

The trihybrid model developed by Birdsell had its origins in the once commonly held view that there had been 'pure races' who had migrated across the globe including to Australia, and that the variation in today's populations is due to admixture.¹⁷ Birdsell claimed that the first 'race' to inhabit Australia was of Oceanic Negrito stock,¹⁸ the descendents of whom could be seen in Tasmania and the rainforest areas at Kuranda and Cairns at the time of European contact. This model does not correspond with any of the information from the human fossil record. As we have explained there are no fossil skeletons of pygmies and the earliest skeletons yet found were tall people.

Biological anthropologists and archaeologists seek to explain Australia's population prehistory through the use of material evidence. As further archaeological data has been collected over the years, a clearer understanding of Australia's population prehistory continues to emerge. No new evidence has emerged to support a trihybrid model. On the contrary, all of the current evidence indicates that the trihybrid model is wrong. One of the important characteristics of scientific archaeology, as practiced in Australia in recent decades, has been the willingness to abandon models that have been refuted by archaeological evidence. The rejection of Birdsell's trihybrid model is not an indication of political influence in the discipline of archaeology, but a reflection of the practice of science.

Science is increasingly developing a clearer understanding of environmental influences on human biology which assist in explaining the numerous causes and effects environment has on human variation. The research of Dr Julian O'Dea, for example, has suggested that the rainforest environment's low ultraviolet light levels in the Cairns area limit the skin's production of vitamin D which is important for skeletal growth and maintenance, leading to the evolution of small body size to expand the surface area of the skin, relative to body mass, available to absorb ultraviolet radiation.¹⁹ O'Dea's claim for reduced ultraviolet radiation is consistent with Birdsell's documentation of lighter skin among the people from Cairns compared to those from adjoining areas. This is an example of the variation in physical features that has arisen amongst Aboriginal groups as they have adapted to different environment types. It is necessary to reiterate that differences in Aboriginal biology do not necessarily reflect different ancestry.

Conclusion

Windschuttle and Gillin have engaged in a fanciful and ultimately superficial discussion of Australia's past. Instead of developing a solid understanding of the evidence and analytical techniques that archaeologists and biological anthropologists have employed to describe the history of human occupation in Australia they have concentrated on interpretations that are decades out of date and have resorted to the bizarre conspiracy theory that 'the fact that the Australian pygmies have been so thoroughly

¹⁷. See Professor Colin Groves's discussion on this in 'Ockham's Razor', 28 April 2002, ABC <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/ockham/stories/s541202.htm>, accessed January 2006.

¹⁸. Thomas Huxley (1870) was amongst the first to visualise a 'race' of Negritos in Tasmanians.

¹⁹. O'Dea 1993.

expunged from public memory suggests an indecent concurrence between scholarly and political interests'.²⁰ The reason that pygmies are not discussed in models of human colonisation of Australia is that a separate group of pygmies never existed here. This is not a political statement but a scientific one, based on the absence of any biological data available for a pygmy population living in Australia, the skeletal evidence for population continuity throughout Australian prehistory and the archaeological evidence for cultural adjustment to climatic change rather than cultural replacements. It is essential in science that testable hypotheses stand the rigour of peer review. The trihybrid model does not correspond with the available data and therefore has been replaced by those models that convincingly address and accurately incorporate the archaeological and biological data.

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²⁰ Windschuttle and Gillin 2002: 18.

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Book reviews

Frontier justice: a history of the Gulf Country to 1900 by Tony Roberts, xviii + 316pp, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2005, \$32.95

I first encountered Tony Roberts, now a retired Commonwealth public servant, some years ago when he contacted me regarding his interest in Charley Havey, a colourful figure who served as the local magistrate in the small isolated town of Borroloola in the Northern Territory's Gulf region between the early twentieth century and the 1930s. Roberts was enthusiastic about researching Havey's life, writing an excellent article for the *Northern Territory dictionary of biography*, of which I was general editor. Since then we have been in intermittent contact. He obviously knew the Gulf area well through his travels there and spoke to me about the further work he hoped to complete on its past. I, and others, encouraged him although his strong commitment to the task was already evident. The outcome, *Frontier Justice*, is an outstanding contribution to history. As Henry Reynolds comments on the back cover, the book is also particularly timely given current historical debates in Australia.

The story it tells is of 'the most colourful and lawless part of Australia's last frontier' (p xiii) from the period of initial contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans to the beginning of the twentieth century. Roberts defines the 'Gulf Country' as extending from the Barkly Tableland to the Roper River and from the Stuart Highway to the Queensland border and beyond. The establishment of the pastoral industry there from the mid-1860s led to widespread Aboriginal resistance and massive white retaliation. Using a range of official archival sources as well as other white and Aboriginal evidence, Roberts carefully documents over 50 incidents involving multiple killings of Aboriginal people, many of which were the result of punitive expeditions. It is impossible, he notes, to estimate how many other cases are unrecorded. By 1900, 35 years of 'dispossession, massacres, abductions and untreated diseases ... had taken their toll' (p 260). In spite of the obvious implications of such findings for Australia's 'History Wars', Roberts pays no direct attention to these. Instead he rather curtly comments in his final sentence that for descendants of the Aboriginal groups living in the Gulf Country, 'the violence of the pastoral frontier is not an academic matter' (p 262).

Ross Fitzgerald's review of the book, while acknowledging the depth of the research, questions *Frontier Justice's* length and argues that it 'would have benefited from considerable pruning' (*Bulletin*, 8 March 2005, p 62). It is, however, the richness of the detail that makes what Roberts says so interesting and significant. While the record of what occurred in the Gulf Country is, unfortunately, by no means unique in Australia, I can think of no other study of the Australian frontier that is so thorough and systematic in its portrayal of inter-racial violence. *Frontier justice* has other virtues. It is

well written with a strong and clear narrative that avoids unnecessary theorising. Roberts condemns what he sees as unfettered violence and examines its tragic consequences yet this is no simplistic exercise in 'black armband' history. The book includes vivid and readable accounts of individual explorers, overlanders, policemen and pastoralists that enhance understanding of their characters and motives. Excellent use is made here of diaries, letters and eyewitness statements. At least some of the white people, such as the expert bushman and cattleman Charley Scrutton, are dealt with sympathetically. Roberts's first-hand knowledge of the country about which he writes is always evident. There are maps, photographs and illustrations, including disturbing detail on the front cover from the Aboriginal artist Oscar's late 1890s illustration, 'Murderer hobbled to tree. Troopers despatching'.

Roberts is now well advanced with the sequel to *Frontier justice* that takes the story to 1950. I look forward to its appearance.

David Carment
Charles Darwin University

Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land, revised edition, by Donald Thomson, compiled and introduced by Nicolas Peterson, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria 2003, 245pp, many photographs, \$34.00

The first edition of this book, published in 1983, was warmly received as a personal narrative of anthropologist Donald Thomson. In it he recounted his reasons for persuading the Commonwealth government to commission him to undertake research in north-eastern Arnhem Land in the mid-1930s, what he learned there, and his return to organise and lead a reconnaissance unit of Aboriginal men during the opening years of World War II. The second edition should be even more warmly received.

As compiler, Nicolas Peterson's chief aims were 'to provide a visual ethnography of Aboriginal life in eastern Arnhem Land as it was between 1935 and 1943 and to go some way towards suggesting the vision Thomson had of the Anthropological Bulletin he outlined to the government but never wrote' (p xv). Peterson is handsomely successful in the first aim. The photographs are superb. Thomson was an excellent photographer and worked under difficult field conditions (which he describes). Of some 120 photographs all but two are Thomson's and more than 80 are additional to those in the first edition. Sixteen new drawings were intended to illustrate a volume, *The Aborigines of Australia*, that he planned but never completed (p 236). The photographs and drawings are well placed in relation to the text. The quality of photographic reproduction in the second edition is excellent and far superior to that of the first edition. One could only wish that the standard of copy editing, including that of captions, were of the same standard (one photograph of eight people names nine individuals [p67]).

Peterson generally succeeds in his second aim through the generous addition of photographs and drawings, but also in large part through incorporating material from Thomson's publications as well as his reports to government. Thomson's outline of the proposed Anthropological Bulletin (pp 13-14) suggests that the result would have been

much like other ethnographies that had been written at that time (even though Thomson said that the outline was preliminary). Through incorporating Thomson's published work in anthropological journals and in newspapers, unpublished reports, diaries, and letters, Peterson has woven a first-person narrative of Thomson's experiences in eastern Arnhem Land and his involvement in issues related to the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land. Although it was surely demanding, the result has no distracting seams. The greatest significance of the text, however, is that it is a detailed and perceptive contemporary history: it is description of events in which Thomson was both observer and actor, events that included the effects of external forces on north-eastern Arnhem Land Aborigines during the 1930s and 1940s. It is the journal of a passionate participant and advocate.

Peterson begins the book with a biographical sketch. Thomson's interest in natural history was manifest in his childhood. His single-mindedness and determination were characteristics that were apparent throughout his university career as was his attraction to scientific expeditions to remote places. It was only after he became a staff member of the University of Melbourne in 1932 and completed his doctorate of science in 1934 that he changed from predominantly natural science to social science (p 5), and that followed two periods of fieldwork in Cape York Peninsula in the 1920s.

In 1933, during fieldwork on Cape York Peninsula, Thomson learned that Aborigines at Caledon Bay had killed five Japanese and three white men and that a punitive expedition was likely to be formed, events that moved him to offer to intervene. Peterson describes Thomson's campaign to conduct the Arnhem Land expeditions of 1935–36 and 1936–37 and to improve the administration of Aboriginal affairs, his subsequent sojourn in Cambridge, his return to Australia and the formation of the Aboriginal guerrilla unit during World War II, his later fieldwork in the central desert, his involvement as a member of the Aborigines Welfare Board of Victoria, and — toward the end of his life — his narrowed reputation as an ecological anthropologist. Peterson remarks on the unfortunate discrepancy between Thomson's publications in ecology and his overwhelming interest in mythology and ceremonial life revealed in the fact that almost all of the 1500 foolscap pages of field notes deal with the latter topics; his interests were those of the linguistic anthropology that developed later, making Thomson ahead of his time.

But the focus of the book is on Thomson's experiences in Arnhem Land between 1935 and 1943, and his reasons for going there underlie those experiences. Peterson says of Thomson's first approach to the University for support to undertake the first expedition, in addition to his apprehension of the consequences for the Aborigines of Caledon Bay if a punitive expedition were to go ahead, 'his motivation was surely reinforced by his feeling for the bush, by his love of exploration and by a somewhat romantic view of himself living with the unknown people of eastern Arnhem Land' (p 8). The account that Peterson has put together amply demonstrates all those facets.

Chapter 2 begins the first person narrative and is a short 'Prelude' to Thomson's first expedition to Arnhem Land. Here Thomson, on Cape York Peninsula at the time (1933), describes his reaction to learning of the possible authorisation of a punitive expedition and his first approach to the Chancellor of the University of Melbourne with a proposal to offer his services to the Commonwealth government to 'go alone into the troubled area to make friends with the Aboriginal people and to report the true facts'

(p26). It was more than a year later, after much negotiation, that he was given a commission to go to eastern Arnhem Land. Thomson refers to the trial of Dhakiyarr and his disappearance, and to the imprisonment in Darwin of three of Wonggu's sons for the murder of the Japanese at Caledon Bay. He was subsequently able to return these sons to Wonggu, widely known as the leader of the feared 'Balamomo tribe'. Thomson remarks that following the High Court's quashing of Dhakiyarr's sentence and order for his repatriation, 'Significantly, no high-level official enquiry was ever made as to his fate. But the Aborigines are unanimous about this. "Poiliceman shoot'im", was their verdict. And nothing escapes them, least of all the fate of a lone Aboriginal five hundred miles from home, who has killed a policeman' (p 31).

Chapter 3 is based chiefly on Thomson's extensive 1948-49 article in *The Geographic Journal*, which in turn is based on the Interim General Report of Preliminary Expedition to Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia 1935-1936. A map on p 34 shows Thomson's travels during this expedition as well as those of 1936-37. This chapter tells of Thomson's recruiting a crew and sailing the *St. Nicholas* from Cairns to Groote Eylandt and his first forays into eastern Arnhem Land. There were delays and during one of them he went to Darwin where he visited Wonggu's three sons, in Fanny Bay gaol, who gave him a message stick for their father (p 37).

The traverses Thomson undertook during this first expedition were arduous — partly because of his inexperience in the area — and his health suffered terribly; nevertheless, in June 1935, trying to follow the coast, he walked from the north bank of the Roper River north to Bennett Bay, and in July he walked from the mouth of the Koolatong River upriver to Matarawatj, 'one of the renowned, almost legendary camping places of the fighting men of Blue Mud Bay. This was probably the very same camp from which they had come to attack Flinders' men at Morgan Island more than 130 years before. This was the camp of the Aborigines I had come to meet' (p 58). Although Wonggu was not there, but at Trial Bay, Thomson stayed for several days. He then travelled from the Koolatong River north, walking overland from Blue Mud Bay to Trial Bay, where he found Wonggu: 'Here at last I met Wonggu. Although he must have been over fifty, he appeared still to be in the prime of life — a tall, powerful man with intelligent face, deep set eyes and a heavy beard, trimmed almost in Van Dyck style' (p 76). After a few days they had become friends, and Thomson explained to Wonggu why the government had sent him to his country: 'I told him that he would be held responsible for the peace of his group, and that this time he himself, and not his sons, would undoubtedly be blamed by the Government for any further trouble that might occur ... later he brought me a message-stick, and explained that the marks inscribed upon it represented himself sitting down quietly and maintaining peace among the people' (p 80). Thomson had achieved his first objective.

Peterson drew on material from Thomson's published account in the *Geographical Journal* and the unpublished report to form Chapter 4, which he titled simply 'Travels in Arnhem Land'. After visiting Wonggu at Trial Bay, Thomson began a planned walk from Caledon Bay to Arnhem Bay but, stricken with a debilitating fever, he was forced to abandon it. Instead he sailed to Port Bradshaw, guided by Mawalan, and with a group of people, some of whom were from Melville Bay, walked toward Arnhem Bay, finally reaching it after five days. He was quite ill with dysentery during this time, so he sailed to Milingimbi to restore his health. He remained at Milingimbi for two months

and 'With the aid of some excellent interpreters [he] was able to make a survey of the people in the area and obtain much general information on their culture and ceremonial life' as well as adding to the 'cinematographic record that [he] had commenced at Blue Mud Bay' (p 93). In October 1935 he left Milingimbi and began what he called the longest and most important patrol of that expedition: he crossed eastern Arnhem Land on foot from the Crocodile Islands (where Milingimbi is located) to Blue Mud Bay and then on to Matarawatj in the Walker Hills from where he organised a trip to the famous flint quarry at Ngilipidji (pp 93–106). On this expedition he also spent a short time at Groote Eylandt (pp 110–12). He returned to Melbourne in January 1936.

Chapter 5 is based on the 1935–36 unpublished report and is essentially a demographic summary of the area he had visited, the total population of which he estimated at 1475 (p 116). Thomson is not very sanguine about the continuing existence of Aborigines in the Arnhem Land Reserve under the multiple impacts of white expansion in the area including exploitation of their labour, unjust treatment by police and courts, and unenlightened policies. He set out 'the basis for an enlightened policy' that began with 'Absolute segregation within the Arnhem Land Reserve to preserve the social structure *in toto*' of the people living there, and he concluded with a recommendation for a 'settled, uniform policy for the treatment of the whole of the Aboriginal population of Australia' and the 'Immediate establishment of a Department of Native Affairs staffed by men [sic] selected solely for their special qualifications and sympathies for dealing with Aborigines' and the ability to administer the policy. Other recommendations were acceptance of the nomadic way of life of the people in Arnhem Land (thus missionaries would travel with them rather than gather them into villages or compounds), the formation of patrols to travel throughout Arnhem Land to protect the people from interference and exploitation, the deployment of a suitable medical officer to work in the area, and the abolition of the use of police constables as 'Protectors' of Aborigines (pp 118–19).

Thomson's *Report on expedition to Arnhem Land 1936–37* to government is the basis of the material in Chapter 6, augmented with material from Thomson's personal papers and published ethnographic accounts (p 233). Thomson saw his 1935–36 work as unfinished, and was successful in obtaining support to continue it. His re-entry plan included getting the government to release Wonggu's three sons from gaol in Darwin: 'I felt that the liberation of these men would be a very appropriate gesture following the excellent reception that I received at the hands of Wonggu and the people of Caledon and Blue Mud Bays. It would be appreciated by them not only as a reward for good behaviour, but as a gesture of goodwill and confidence on the part of the Government' (p 123). Thomson was successful, and in August 1936 returned Wonggu's three sons to him at Yirrkala, where Wonggu was visiting at the time. While Thomson had been in Canberra, several killings relating to a blood feud had occurred, and he sought out the principal actors, recorded their versions of the feud, and warned them of the 'gravity of their offence and cautioned them not to repeat it' (p 133). In December, Thomson arrived at his wet-season base camp at Gaarttji, on the edge of the Arafura Swamp, and from there he travelled to observe a Gunabibi ceremony in progress near the Blyth River. In the middle of January 1937 he returned to Milinbimbi, where he remained until the end of May. During this period he recorded information on social organisation, mythology, and language, and made a study of fishing methods, including

different forms of fish traps, descriptions of which were subsequently published in an anthropological journal (p 144). Thomson also observed the wet-season magpie goose-hunting in the Arafura Swamp (pp 148–60) and subsequently published an account of those two- or three-day expeditions into the swamp by means of specialised canoes, the collection of goose eggs and capture of the geese. In May he moved from Milingimbi to the Derby Creek area in order to observe and record women's food gathering and preparation (pp 164–71). A chart illustrating the seasonal cycle is included in this chapter (pp 172–3). The chapter concludes with a summary of Thomson's policy recommendations to Government and his rationale for them (pp 181–93).

The final chapter of the book is drawn from Thomson's *Report: the Organization of the Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit 1941–1943*. Following Australia's entry into World War II, Thomson was commissioned as Flight Lieutenant in the RAAF, but he persuaded government to support the establishment of a special reconnaissance force with both a coastwatching role and a guerilla warfare role should the Japanese invade north Australia. Because of his knowledge of the people of the area and their recent history, Thomson was able to form a company of 50 Aboriginal men, some from the Arnhem Bay region and some from the Caledon and Blue Mud Bays region, who had been actively engaged in feud during 1936. He had the assistance of three regular army men in training them. The unit was reorganised in 1943. The outpost at Caledon Bay was closed, and the unit's activities (essentially a manned ship on armed patrol) were thenceforth only coastal patrol (p 227). Thomson's report describing the unit's activities during the 19 months that it existed is the stuff of good military history.

Whether Peterson should be listed as editor as well as compiler and author of a biographical sketch is a question that might be asked. Peterson notes in the Preface to the second edition that 'A large number of alterations have been made to the previously published text' (p xv) although he introduces the Preface by declaring that 'The principal change made for this edition is the inclusion of over eighty additional photographs and sixteen new drawings' (p xv). Peterson decided to cast the narrative in the first person and in the mode of an explorer's journal. This decision was hard: Thomson's 'style of writing was highly personal, even in government reports, and his passionate commitment to the Aboriginal people kept him constantly in the limelight as advocate, defender and critic' (p xi), and Peterson was able 'to create a narrative akin, in some respects, to the journals of the early explorers rather than an academic account' (p xi). Reading the material from the 1935–36 and 1936–37 reports of his expeditions to Arnhem Land it is easy, if not inescapable, to envision the writer as an explorer on an expedition into uncharted territory (he had much earlier wanted to join Antarctic expeditions). It was perhaps in this mood that Thomson gave names to geographic features to honour people important to him (eg the Peter John River after his sons [p 91] and a 'fine timbered plateau' MacFarland Plateau 'in honour of Sir John MacFarland, then Chancellor of the University of Melbourne' [pp 87–8]).

In all these circumstances, it might be asked whether it might not have been more appropriate, and not unfair to Thomson, to retain his own phrasing and terminology – which naturally were of his time – rather than alter them to be consistent with 1983 expressions of sympathetic attitudes toward Aborigines and convictions about fairness and justice. Peterson says, 'The most difficult problem facing me as editor [*sic*] has been

deciding on the extent to which I should alter certain phrasing to protect Thomson from anachronistic criticism. The original writing was done in the late 1930s and early 1940s when Aboriginal people were commonly called 'natives' or 'boys'. He used these terms, as well as 'Aborigines'/'Aboriginals', throughout his writings. Today [1983] they have a jarring and unpleasant connotation, which would not accurately reflect the relatively progressive [why relatively?] nature of many of Thomson's views [and] at times his expression and attitudes were more overtly paternalistic than is acceptable today...' (p xii). Peterson goes on to say, 'there can be no doubt that Thomson was in the forefront of champions of Aboriginal rights, including land rights, recognition of customary law, and the need to respect Aboriginal people as fully responsible Australian citizens with their own views and rights' (p xii). Thomson's reports and his publications clearly justify that assessment. Peterson acknowledged the 'risk of de-Thomsonising the account' in changing 'terms such as "natives" and "boys" to "Aborigines", etcetera' (pp xii-xiii). (The inclusion of 'etcetera' raises questions that arouse speculation about the full extent of the process of 'de-Thomsonising'). Peterson has supplied notes on his sources for the biographic sketch (Chapter 1) (pp 230-2), a list of the principal sources for each chapter and a description of the material he has added (pp 233-4), and short lists of further historical and anthropological sources (pp 234-5). This detailed information is very useful and provides readers with the ability to pursue particular passages and indeed to determine for themselves the extent and the effect of Peterson's 'de-Thomsonising'.

Sources of the illustrations in the book are also provided. Sources of the photographs and notes on the equipment Thomson used, as well as references to specific publications on Thomson's photography are given (pp 236-7). Lists of maps, drawings, and photographs with brief descriptions of subjects, and the pages on which they occur make them easy to locate, especially useful in the case of photographs, which are an expanded and important new component of the second edition (pp 237-40). Note should also be made of Peterson's expanded captions: he has added substantial descriptions based on his own research in north-eastern Arnhem Land and, particularly with reference to naming individuals in photographs, the result of consulting Yolngu. And, Peterson notes, identification of particular people as individual actors in Thomson's work, while not unique, is also not typical of the prevailing practice of anthropologists then, although Warner (1937; rev. edn 1958) had also named the individuals with whom he interacted in his Milngimbi-based study.

Written as a first-person narrative of discovery, the book is highly readable. It might even be regarded as a kind of 'reflexive' ethnography. Significant publications by other anthropologists working with Aboriginal people in Australia that include themselves as actors in the way that Thomson does are rare, not just the narrative that Peterson has compiled, but Thomson's articles in professional journals such as *Man* (which Peterson has drawn on), and even his most theoretically oriented publication, the book *Economic structure and the ceremonial exchange cycle in Arnhem Land* (1949). Thomson's reports to government involve explicit accounts of his interactions with Yolngu and their environment. Among Australianists, Lloyd Warner is a partial exception: Appendix IX (1958 pp 566-89) of *A Black civilization* is ostensibly a biography of Mahkarolla, Warner's friend and companion as well as his chief informant, but the two concluding sections are accounts of events that involved Warner as well as Mahkarolla. For Thomson, the thread that links it all together is his passionate plea that the Aborigi-

nal people of eastern Arnhem Land be allowed to continue to live their lives as an independent people.

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Blackfellas Whitefellas and the hidden injuries of race by Gillian Cowlshaw, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden, MA USA, 2004, 272pp, bibliographical references and index, \$49.95

Not for a long time have I read such a beautifully written book in which the complexities of race relations in Australia are analysed with so much subtlety and candour by a respected academic. *Blackfellas Whitefellas* takes as its starting point the race riots ('the Riot') in the town of Bourke on the night of 5 December 1997 which occurred not long before Cowlshaw began her fieldwork in that town. It is a timely publication in light of events on Palm Island in December 2004 when the Aboriginal community reacted angrily to the death-in-custody of one of their young men, Cameron Domadgee, resulting in a coronial inquiry into Domadgee's death. Similar events have occurred in other parts of Australia, for example in Redfern in 2003.

Gillian Cowlshaw's *Blackfellas Whitefellas* is not just another thesis on race relations. It is a finely drawn, in-depth analysis. Four different perspectives of the Riot are presented in the Prologue, and revisited in Cowlshaw's developing thesis in the following chapters. Each chapter brings the reader through an examination of a different set of mechanisms of social control and reactions to these by Bourke residents, their embodiment in the lives and perspectives of individuals in the town. Her analysis of race relations in Australia challenges the conventional interpretations of racial confrontation in which the interests of blacks and whites are seen to be polarised. Here the eruption of the Riot is taken as symptomatic of the currents of underlying feeling between blacks and whites and within their communities in Bourke, the aetiology of which can be found in the initial colonising period. It is a fitting metaphor. The Riot and the responses of the people of Bourke to this event are a means to show us something about 'our racialized selves in Australia and indeed in the world today' (p xiv). It is not simply a black and white issue. Cowlshaw succeeds in unfolding the layers of meaning and many shades of grey by going under the surface and listening to what the people of Bourke have had to say and do about their lives and relationships.

Cowlshaw's argument proceeds with a careful examination of racial and racialised identities by exploring concepts of victimhood, stigma and the 'cultures of complaint' as manifested in the Murri (Aboriginal) and Gubba (non-Aboriginal) communities in Bourke (Chapter 2, Stigma and Complaint) She argues that it is the racial

stereotypes we hold about the other and the racial identification we embody in our own lives that shape our social life. Cowlshaw discusses the embodiment of these concepts in the lives of real people and situations. A town like Bourke has particular characteristics which influence the operation of stigma and stereotype, for example, the notoriety of the town as a site of racial conflict due in part to the intense media and research interest in the town and its people; the internal conflict of residents who could act out of both positive and negative stereotypes about themselves and others; the structural hierarchy in the town; the visibility of individuals and families and their histories in the intimacy of parochial conditions; the tangibility of Aboriginal people's experience of stigma. Deeply held and strong racist attitudes are often not displayed in public but are shared only with those who are thought to have similar values. Their public face is often silence and exclusion; the reaction to this exclusion is the projection of fear, anger and mistrust. Reading and analysing the discourse of complaint is complicated by the varying personal value positions influenced by family and personal experiences.

In Chapter 3 (Injury and Agency), Cowlshaw explores the question of agency and where its energy or motivation comes from. Her starting definition of agency is 'the ability to exert some power, beginning with enunciating one's own interest and identity as distinct from those of others'; the energising spark for agency is 'derived from injury' and applies equally to Gubbas and Murrís (p 60). The Riot itself and the legal processes associated with the Riot were seized by Murrís as opportunities to 'talk back', argue against or stand up to perceived stigmas and injustices. This talking back occurs literally by use of 'colourful' language and verbal breaches of protocol, or in embodied acts of defiance, for example provocative acts like smashing shop windows, which draw on the image of 'out-of-control violent blacks and demonstrating what violent blacks can do' (p 75). Black agency occurs in the face of the exertion of white power and as an antidote to a feeling of helplessness.

Cowlshaw's connection with Murrís and her understanding of their particular and collective situations is amply demonstrated throughout the book but especially in Chapter 4 (Performance) in which she draws a picture of the lives and identity of Murrís as 'performed' in Bourke, before the gaze of Gubbas or apart from it. Identified here are forms of Aboriginal narrative which include humour and ironic mocking, as well as public expressions of violent, transgressive and often chaotic behaviour, with their ability to shock the audience. Gubba responses to displays of apparently chaotic behaviour are an assertion of order and normality, with perhaps a tinge of envy of the freedom that the marginal status of Murrís appears to give them. One of the most significant markers of the marginality of Murrís in Bourke is poverty and its resultant dramas in their everyday lives.

The expression of Aboriginal cultural and social identity anywhere in Australia will necessarily entail its performance in a group which exists within the context of the colonisers of this country. Identity is maintained through everyday acts of individuals whose words and deeds reinforce the distance between Gubbas and Murrís and the boundaries between the two social and cultural settings (Chapter 5). Such a situation creates difficulties for those who marry across the cultural boundaries, or who work alongside each other as 'mates' in a rural setting, where individuals are pressurised, teased, cajoled or insulted into maintaining racial rather than personal or family loyalties. Cowlshaw aptly identifies the power of language, within both the Aboriginal and

non-Aboriginal settings, in the use of secret terms that name social stigma and its associations in ways which indicate that social stigma is barely contained below the surface or psychologically strengthens the Aboriginal person in the face of the oppression.

At the heart of this book lies the chapter on violence, Chapter 6, which is about 'the deployment and disavowal of violence, and its shifting place in colonial, postcolonial, and anti-colonial narratives of race in Australia' (p 140). In this chapter Cowlshaw deals with real violence – physical and verbal force and hurt to others, and 'immoderate vehemence' which includes rough or excessive actions or words that are not intended to inflict hurt, but inadvertently do. Here Cowlshaw pays particular attention to the reality of institutionalised violence and its impacts which include acting out and acts of self destruction. Her discussion also turns to Murri ways of acting and being that to Gubbas appear flamboyant or excessive, disturbing the sensibilities of Gubbas. Thus the incompatibility of the two cultural groups becomes visible at their boundaries. Past and contemporary frontier violence and the persistence of their influence must be acknowledged.

Through the lens of citizenship, Cowlshaw discusses Aboriginal people's rights and responsibilities in a civil society, and society's responses to them. Murris struggle for survival and justice within bureaucratic systems that are alienating in their complexity. She argues that as the rights of Aboriginal people and their special needs as citizens are excessively scrutinised in the public sphere, and as their visual arts, dance, song and social systems are increasingly appropriated or eroded by non-Aboriginal society, this level of surveillance and erosion of identity leads Aboriginal people to rage against the system (Chapter 7)

Chapter 8 (Our History) deals with the question of the embodiment of the memory of oppression and its impacts on individuals, the family and community. Whose narratives? How should they be told? By whom? What is declared and what remains hidden? What happens to people as they sift through the memories, re-living or denying, inflaming emotions or dulling them. The recollection and narration of memories could be another oppressive mechanism, one in which anthropologists, historians, lawyers, doctors and academics are actively involved. By rioting, the Murris of Bourke may also have been reacting to the burden of Gubba patronage and guilt and the projection of Gubba shame.

In the final chapter (Chapter 9: Trials and Transformations) the apparatuses of the court – the physical environment, language, dress, processes – are taken as a metaphor of the predominantly non-Aboriginal social and cultural system, another battlefield and an extension of the Riot. Cowlshaw is clearly of the opinion that while a significant amount of goodwill exists in Australia among non-Aboriginal people towards Aboriginal people, there remains a 'narcissistic desire, often muted and pressed into unconsciousness, to improve the Indigenous population', (p 244) and that non-Aboriginal Australians are largely baffled by the rejection by Aboriginal people of their good intentions. The Riot, and the eruption of other similar actions across Australia are the means through which Aboriginal people express their outrage and agency, challenging the hegemony of their colonisers in flagrant actions that draw attention to themselves and their communities in the face of apathy, blindness and sometimes ill-will of the wider community.

Cowlshaw's presentation of her arguments is even-handed and sophisticated. Her arguments are built on careful fieldwork among people of Bourke with whom she has developed strong relationships over many years, and on a very comprehensive array of sources which indicate the depth of her scholarship. The language of *Blackfellas Whitefellas* is refreshingly direct. I particularly appreciated the way in which Cowlshaw has used the endnotes to clarify and comment on particular points or items in her narrative in a way that is not intrusive or stilted.

Blackfellas Whitefellas is a very significant analysis of race relations in colonised countries and theorising at its best. Cowlshaw's contribution will have a lasting impact on discourses on race relations and the mechanisms of agency.

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Paddy Cahill of Oenpelli by John Mulvaney, Aboriginal Studies Press 2004, 215pp, \$39.95

Anyone interested in Australian history generally and contact history in the Northern Territory will appreciate this book. It is John Mulvaney's sixth publication relating to the work of Baldwin Spencer, following a research association of over 30 years.

The primary focus is Paddy Cahill's time at Oenpelli (1909–22) and his collaboration with Spencer. Details are also given of Cahill's other activities and achievements including pioneering tropical agriculture, serving as a Protector of Aborigines, and humanitarian work in Aboriginal health. He was a pioneer in the Buffalo industry, carried out mineral prospecting, was involved in pearling, and produced butter in the dairy at Oenpelli. He was close to the Administrator JA Gilruth, and was involved in the Ewing Royal Commission.

In 1883 Cahill arrived in the Territory from Queensland, having joined a cattle drive from Richmond, Queensland to the Victoria River District and the Ord River. He lived in Palmerston from 1891 (renamed Darwin in 1911), and was manager of Delamere station from 1903–07. Mulvaney presents a pioneer seeking to do his best in difficult circumstances. Paddy Cahill's faults are acknowledged, but without judgement Mulvaney comments:

Cahill was not faultless, but his later humanitarian efforts to introduce some dignity into the crisis of Aboriginal social and territorial dislocation, combined with the onslaught of introduced diseases, was exceptional (p 74).

His role in Aboriginal contact history merits greater understanding when set within the grim racial attitudes of his times (p 78).

An example of Cahill's humanitarianism is seen in his protest in 1901 on behalf of fringe dwellers (pp 29–31) for which he was severely criticised by other citizens. Mulvaney refers to an observation of Elsie Masson, a visitor to Oenpelli, who said:

his wonderful sympathy with their customs and their beliefs ... he speaks to them in their own language and calls them by their native names. In return they give him their confidence and no ceremony is too sacred to be enacted before him (p30).

Valuable features of the book include 25 letters from Cahill to Spencer from 1912 to 1921, a six-part article published by Cahill outlining a trip from the East Alligator River to the Coburg Peninsular in 1898–99, and another article giving details of a trip from the Adelaide River to Point Farewell (near the mouth of the South Alligator River) in 1901. Eleven of eighteen historical photos relate to Oenpelli. A short appendix gives four letters from Joe Cooper and Solomon (a Larrakia elder) to Baldwin Spencer.

Cahill's correspondence indicates the extent of the work Cahill did for Spencer. It is a sad reflection of the times that Spencer received praise and awards for work that could not have been done without Cahill's unique contribution.

While living and working at Oenpelli from 1967 to 1979 I had opportunity to meet the descendants of families that Cahill had worked with, and to hear some of the Kunwinjku (Gunwinjgu) oral traditions concerning their contact history. There are two issues that I will refer to based on this experience. The issues are the relationship between Kakadu/Gagudju and Kunwinjku (Gunwinjgu), and the attempt to poison the Cahill family.

Mulvaney (p 53) refers to Spencer's observation that 'Spencer called the local clan owners Kakadu (Gagudju). ... The Gunwinjgu "do not mix in camp" with the Gagudju and related groups, though they are present at one another's ceremonies'.

I have vivid memories of hearing an elderly Aboriginal woman, one of the last survivors of the Erre group (whose country was to the south of and close to Oenpelli) speak about Oenpelli and the Gagudju to the Woodward Land Rights Commission in 1973. She asserted that Oenpelli was not Gagudju country and that Paddy Cahill had brought the Gagudju people to Oenpelli. Her resentment about this was obvious. She clearly disputed Spencer's claim (1914: 14) regarding the existence of a Kakadu nation.

Mulvaney refers to the attempt to poison Cahill and his family (pp 62–4) and the involvement of two Aborigines Romula and Nipper. Cahill's letter 17 (pp 119–21) refers to Nipper's involvement and 'the first attempt was made to poison us' (p 120). The poisoning is referred to in the NT Administrator's report (NT 1918: 13–14), but no mention is made of multiple poisonings:

Mr Cahill ... informs me that in spite of the defection of Romula in attempting to poison him and his family, he would gladly have the Aboriginal back at once, ... He is satisfied the aberration manifested was solely due to the bad influence of the other native 'Nipper' and as Romula had been his close companion during twenty-five years.

I arrived at Oenpelli not long after Nipper's death. He was well respected and was recognised as the 'traditional owner' of Oenpelli and the surrounding country. One of his sons is the present senior traditional owner. There is no knowledge of the poisoning among this generation of Nipper's descendants. Romula was possibly with Cahill at Delamere station as there is a hill in that region known as 'Romula's knob' (personal communication Dr Patrick McConvell).

John Mulvaney is to be commended for this publication.

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Seeking racial justice – an insider's memoir of the movement for Aboriginal Advancement, 1938–1978 by Jack Horner, 226pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, \$34.95 and *Black and White together – FCAATSI: the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders 1958–1973* by Sue Taffe, 288pp, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, \$24.95.

Jack Horner is a well-known and well-loved Canberra identity. His new book, *Seeking racial justice*, explains why. From the late 1950s, Jack and Jean Horner were integrally involved in the struggle for justice for Aborigines. They joined the Aboriginal-Australia Fellowship in 1957 and soon became affiliated with Australia's first national lobby group on behalf of Aborigines, the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement, later called the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). Readers will appreciate Horner's humility. They will admire his tenacity. They might also relate to his professed naivete: when Jack attended his first Aboriginal-Australia Fellowship meeting in Sydney, he 'simply went to find out if discrimination against Aboriginal people existed in Australia' (p 21). His learning curve was steep and some mistakes were inevitably made.

Through Horner's book we gain privileged insight into an individual's struggle to understand competing racial ideas and policies, especially with regard to assimilation. Horner 'believed in assimilation' (p 41) and he saw 'the benefits of assimilation' (p 47), but he eventually had to change his 'thinking on assimilation' (p 68). Sadly this kind of honesty regarding assimilation is rare. Rarer still is Horner's further acknowledgment that changing his views on assimilation 'was not as easy as it might seem almost half a century later' (p 68). Assimilation is a key concept in Horner's book, as are integration and self-determination. These terms, and the phases in Aboriginal administration they loosely represent, help Horner to structure his book. *Seeking racial justice* has three parts: Segregation and Assimilation, 1938–61; Assimilation and Integration, 1959–67; Integration and Self-determination, 1968–78. Although Horner's analysis of these terms is limited, he provides future researches with a wealth of material simply by revealing the extent of his own confusion. Horner reminds us that the meanings of these, and other such terms, cannot be taken for granted.

The back cover describes *Seeking racial justice* as 'part history, part memoir', as if these narrative styles are mutually exclusive: they are not. Horner's message is most powerfully received when the historical narrative is interrupted by his presence – when readers are reminded in Jack's gentle style that he was actually there. I found Horner's explicit questioning of the role of white people in Aboriginal politics espe-

cially compelling. His personal reflections, explanations and anecdotes greatly enhance this extremely important, and beautifully written, book.

Sue Taffe's *Black and White together* is also beautifully written. It tells the story of FCAATSI: from its formation in 1958 to its demise in the early 1970s. Along the way we learn about several generations of activists, black and white, and about their campaigns and shifting priorities. The 1967 referendum for constitutional reform features prominently, as do FCAATSI's other, less well-known, campaigns for equal wages, work and welfare. Taffe's book covers similar ground to Horner's, but they are not in competition with each other. Rather, they complement each other and should be read together. A highlight is Taffe's balanced appraisal of Jack Horner's role in FCAATSI (pp 299–302) following the Easter 1970 split. Here, as elsewhere, the virtue of reading the books of Taffe and Horner together is self-evident, for as well as filling each other's gaps, they effectively, if unintentionally, emulate the fraught history they represent by simultaneously providing different perspectives on similar stories, people and events.

Much is made of the fact that *Black and White together* began life as an 'oral history'. Less publicised is the fact that its most recent previous incarnation was as a PhD thesis. Many publishing houses are reluctant to read, let alone publish PhD theses, and I commend the University of Queensland Press for publishing this excellent book. Granted, the end result is much revised, but all the attention to detail, careful analysis and meticulous research that characterised the original thesis remains.

As the title of her book suggests, Taffe's principle focus is on black and white Australians working together for Aboriginal advancement. Her skilfully crafted narrative is punctuated by mini-biographies as each new character is introduced resulting in a rich and colourful political history. Along with Horner's *Seeking racial justice*, Taffe's *Black and White together* is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of black and white activism in Australia. Both books have informative appendices, detailed references and excellent indexes.

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Where the ancestors walked: Australia as an Aboriginal landscape by Philip Clarke, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2003, xii + 282pp, \$29.95

Aimed at a general audience rather than an academic one, this is a book of very wide scope, covering topics including the original settlement of Australia about 50,000 years ago, aspects of precolonial economy and society, and changes in Aboriginal cultures following British colonisation. Clarke attempts to give the whole a unifying theme of 'cultural landscape', although the theme is not well developed.

The book is divided into four parts. Chapters in Part I cover the first settlement of Australia, the 'religious landscape', and institutions including kinship and land-owning groups. Chapters in Part II concern hunting and gathering, material culture and art. Part III is about variation across Australia, primarily in environments, foods and calendars. Part IV covers 'cultural change', from contacts with the Macassans on the north coast to the effects of British colonisation.

Together with the absence of an effective unifying theme, the result of the broad scope is that the book is rather a mixed bag. Given that it begins with the first populations of Australia, a brief overview of prehistory is an obvious omission. The approach to topics that are included tends to be on the conservative side. For example there is no discussion of the debate about the 'out of Africa hypothesis'; Clarke jumps from *Homo erectus* in South-East Asia straight to humans entering Greater Australia.

The treatment of the totemic ancestral doctrines is good, especially on the importance of the 'skyworld' and the networks of geographical connections they constitute. However, reliance on the concept of 'dreaming' results in an overly homogeneous picture, and Clarke neglects the 'magical' aspects of ancestral doctrines and ritual. There is almost nothing about sorcery and magic — a major omission given the centrality of these doctrines and their connections with ancestral doctrines.

The chapter on social life gives a general account of kinship, 'clans' and language identities. It says very little about rituals, but has a useful discussion of prohibitions of various kinds. In spite of caveats, Clarke relies on the concept of 'tribe' where language-identity would have been a good substitute. He states erroneously that patrifilial clans were ubiquitous except for the Western Desert. Considering all the rethinking that has gone on in the last few decades, it is a pity that Clarke reproduces the tribe-clan-band model.

As one might expect from a museum-based anthropologist, the strongest chapters are on material culture and resources. The central chapters describe in some detail, resources, equipment and techniques, and their broad regional variants. This information is complemented by material on Aboriginal concepts of seasons in various regions.

Part IV continues the material culture theme in looking at artefacts introduced from the Torres Strait Islands, Papua and the Macassans. The chapters on the effects of European colonisation are, to my mind, rather superficial. They include such matters as explorers' reliance on Aboriginal knowledge, the imposition of Christianity, and Aboriginal versions of history such as stories about Captain Cook. There is rather little here on political and economic relations between colonisers and Aborigines.

As a broad overview of Aboriginal culture and society the book may be suitable for higher grades in schools, and for general tertiary courses in Aboriginal studies. Some sections of the book, particularly those on material culture, resources and techniques may be of value in more specialist courses.

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Woven histories dancing lives: Torres Strait Islander identity, culture and history edited by Richard Davis, 276pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, \$39.95.

Richard Davis' compilation is a unique reflection on the lives and histories of Torres Strait Islanders. These essays are an extended dialogue that began with the 1998 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies seminar series 'The Torres Strait 100 years on'. The 21 essays provide a useful and comprehensive insight into the complex and rich cultural diversity of the peoples of the Torres Strait. Importantly, this volume allows Islanders' voices to respond to Western academia, and places cultural and academic significance on Islanders' lives.

Part 1 (of 4) presents introductory essays by Jeremy Beckett, David Lawrence and Helen Reeves Lawrence. The essays represent Torres Strait as both a bridge and barrier between two continents. Islanders are understood as people of the sea, with strong kinship ties overarching the Torres Strait, where values, culture, law and socioeconomic structures continue to be maintained. The late Ephraim Bani expresses his concern for the need to restore Islander cultural self-esteem.

In Part 2, 'Identity, Performance and *Kastom*', Davis interprets the assimilation of Islander social identity as a fusion of past imagery and symbolism to locate the self in the present. Helen Reeves Lawrence and Julie Lahn describe how the process of indigenisation and recontextualisation of missionary-brought forms of Christianity has led to the formation of the Church of Torres Strait, and an ongoing movement toward self-management. An Islander woman, McRose Elu, highlights these spiritual adaptations as a 'pragmatic, symbolic and imposed choice'. The totem is explained by Bani as a symbolic focal point for group identification and social solidarity.

Maintaining this theme of identity, Jude Philp carefully examines ideas of 'cultural tourism' and ownership between the subject and the photographer in AC Haddon's 1888 photographs. Anna Sinusal notes that the formation of Torres Strait Islander Creole created the linguistic foundation for a pan-Islander political identity; and Maureen Fury argues that valuable research must actively engage with Islanders in their political-geographic space.

In Part 3, 'Space, Region and Politics', Martin Nakata and Sandra Kehoe-Fortuna thoroughly investigate the process in which the colonial administration positioned Islanders in a racist discourse that continues to shape their future. David Lawrence illustrates the narratives that are mutually understood through historical-cultural relationships between Papuans and Islanders, and Bill Arthur makes clear the complexities in a borderland rife with economic and resource inequalities due to modern legislative and political boundaries. This theme of power is developed by Jenny Martin Davis' discussion of community and school-staff relationships on Salibi Island. The processes of male and female initiation ceremonies are illustrated by Bani.

In Part 4, 'Time and Resources', members of the Murray Islands Archaeological Project advance the first firm archaeological evidence of approximately 3000 years of horticultural subsistence and human occupation in the Murray Islands. Additionally, Colin Scott, teamed with Monica McLennan, notes the key role Indigenous knowledge and institutions play in conservation, resource use and management of the land and marine space. Finally, Bani highlights Islander cultural knowledge of the dugong and

its hunting-processes associated with understanding the tides, currents, and the position of sea grass.

This is a readable and useful text that combines insightful scholarship with clear narratives. It has a broad scope over the Torres Strait region, and advances the proposition that, over time, changes to *ailan custom* (island custom) will require ongoing interpretations from multiple viewpoints.

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The artificial horizon: imagining the Blue Mountains by Martin Thomas, 313pp, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003, \$49.95

As someone who grew up in the Blue Mountains and is still resident there, I felt some unease about the prospect of an academic historian dissecting the familiar, magical places of the region. I've always thought that those places you call home have a special aura, beyond academic analysis, even though the latest trend for historians researching 'place' makes home one of today's premier intellectual grounds for investigation.

However, my trepidation was unfounded. I greatly enjoyed reading most of this book. Martin Thomas treats the human experience in the Blue Mountains in an elegant, although sometimes academically heady way. He charts the experiences of different groups and individuals as a visual journey through the labyrinths of the hills in an attempt to place them in the Blue Mountain landscape. To do this he draws on art history, philosophy, geography, folklore, oral history and more traditional historical discourse. These are well illustrated with a wide range of images. The final product is a series of five thematic 'passages' consisting of groups of essays loosely tuned to each subject. At times I found the treatment of the themes to be a little lofty with the ubiquitous (and to me often unnecessary) references to scholars like Descartes, Engels and Wittgenstein making the text difficult to read in parts.

One major thread through the book is the role of Indigenous people in the history of the Mountains. An analysis of paintings by Thomas Mitchell and Eugene von Guérard provides the setting for a lively and intriguing analysis of the place of Aboriginal people in the narrative of Mountains history. As part of this analysis Thomas brings to light interesting detail about the Aborigines who occupied 'The Gully' near Katoomba township until they were moved on by developers in the 1950s. This is certainly an important part of Blue Mountains history, and it was enjoyable to read, but in some senses it was also disappointing. I found Thomas' analysis of life at The Gully to be not particularly original or inspired, and given the pivotal importance of events at this place, more might be expected. It is partly my own experiences that lead me to this conclusion. I grew up with the children of many of the Aboriginal people he refers to and for most of us what happened at The Gully, as described by Thomas, is common knowledge, as it is amongst many Mountain residents. Life and the incidents at The Gully are in fact so widely known and acknowledged that the local Rotary Club detailed them in

The Katoomba-Leura Story (Armitage 1998). Factually, and in analytical terms, Thomas's own work adds little to popular accounts. Similarly, one can question the worth of Thomas' attempt to debunk local identity Mel Ward's mythological story of the Three Sisters. As Armitage (1998: 118–19) points out, few local people seriously believed Mel Ward's colourful account of three Aboriginal sisters turning to stone to be a real Aboriginal myth. What would have been more interesting is to know what made these legends so popular as a representation of the Mountains to the outside world. The history of a place like the Blue Mountains is after all a constant balance between perceptions of self (locals) and others (visitors).

This brings me to the other main criticism I have of this book. Thomas lacks any significant level of introspection, which I find surprising for a cultural historian of place (although he may deny that he is one). Thomas, I consider, fails to analyse how he is reshaping the history of the very place he is examining. He recognises how the shape of the social landscape changes as groups and individuals add layers of meaning, but he appears oblivious to how he is doing the same thing. I am suspicious of any seemingly innocent attempt to reshape, without deep introspection, the history of any place or people. This leads me to ask, for example, whether one can place Aborigines into the landscape in a more meaningful way than the early painters and their contemporaries, without bringing to bear a very deep critique of one's own world view? In this sense I still feel the unease I mentioned at the beginning of this review. It is unsettling to see an analysis like this one that strains to see the far 'horizons' and yet misses being able to see itself.

Nevertheless, Thomas gives a brilliant and insightful view of early European movements into the Mountains. It was a great relief not to see the story of Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth conquering the mountains and opening up the western plains. Thomas sees European relations with the land from an uncommon perspective. Using his own analogy, it is almost as though he is able to take the light from the labyrinths and dissect it into its component parts, showing views of the Mountains not seen before. The accounts of Strzelecki's and Caley's journeys into the 'Devils Wilderness' were particularly illuminating. These are parts of the Mountains where I have walked and I now see the area through new eyes.

The passages of the book which deal with suicide, and the life of the archaeologist Gordon Childe are beautifully crafted. Again, it was a relief to see Thomas weave a picture of a slightly darker aspect of the Mountains which has received little attention. You get the distinct impression when reading these sections that Thomas is able to clearly see something of the 'aura' of the Mountains that has attracted people there for all sorts of reasons. His discourse on suicide and on Childe's death near Govetts Leap is a wonderful journey through the dark, shady labyrinths of the Mountain landscape and the minds of some of those who felt compelled to travel to these Mountains on their final journey. It is an intriguing sketch of a part of the area's cultural history also touched on by novelists like Delia Falconer (1997) who hint that the deep valleys say something profound about the spirit people who visit them.

Any misgivings I have about this book are outweighed by the impact it has had on how I, and others, will now see the Mountains. It is not an easy task for any author to take on a project like this, where they have to articulate a feeling for the hills that changes, like the light in the deep valley gorges, the longer they stay in the Mountains.

Thomas is to be commended for being able to catch glimpses of that light in the labyrinths and bring them to the reader.

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Rob Paton
Blackheath

A bend in the Yarra: a history of the Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School 1841–1851 by Ian Clark and Toby Heydon, 100pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, \$24.95

Among a handful of sites of Aboriginal importance in the post-contact past of Melbourne, an area at the confluence of the Yarra River and Merri Creek is of the first rank. Over a period of more than ten years beginning in 1841, this site was the scene of a range of encounters between Europeans and Indigenous people from local clans. In the case of the former group many of the actors were officials, who represented government in some capacity. The use of this area for official purposes and the consequent presence of government agents has led to both its importance being recognised and to a more extant historical record of the interactions that took place there. Thus, there are not only a number of reasons for the importance of the site, but a good body of documentation to substantiate this importance. Both of these features are spelt out at some length in this report, compiled by historical geographers Clark and Heydon. What the authors have done is to provide a detailed compilation of the historical basis for assessing the significance of this site.

This report is the result of a detailed historical study into the site, commissioned by Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. It is not surprising then, nor entirely out of place, to find it contains detail that is no more than background or contextual in nature. For example, the greater part of chapter 4 is devoted to providing historical detail about the Aboriginal Protectorate of 1939–1849, the three phases of a Native Police Corps (although the first two had no connection with the Merri Creek site), and a number of other sites around the Melbourne district frequented by Aboriginal people in the early post-contact period. This is all context for the specific detail about the study area that is to follow in the next two chapters.

After brief private use for pasturing cattle, in 1841 the area was reserved for government use. William Thomas, the Assistant Protector for the Western Port District had been visiting the site from late in that year and from June 1842 it was selected as temporary quarters for the Native Police troopers under the command of HEP Dana. In the following couple of years Thomas was unable to prevent local clanspeople living at the site also and eventually set up quarters there himself. Of major significance was the establishment of a school for Aboriginal children at the site, which operated from 1845 to 1851.

Of course, the area had an importance to the Indigenous clans prior to the arrival of Europeans. The authors point to the historical evidence for this, although perhaps they exaggerate their achievement in claiming, in the conclusion (p76), that their report has revealed the details of traditional ownership of the site, as these were well documented many years ago.

A few small corrections could be made. It is by no means certain, for example, that 'the signing of Batman's treaty occurred on Merri Creek' (p27); details of the site called *Worrowen* (near present-day Brighton) are quoted at length but the reference does not appear in the Select bibliography at the end of the report. However, these are minor quibbles and do not detract significantly from the overall value of the report.

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Alive and kicking: Areyonga teenage Pitjantjatjara by Annie Langlois, 267pp, Pacific Linguistics 561, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 2004, \$69.30

Langlois documents the recorded speech of Pitjantjatjara teenagers in Areyonga, a southern Northern Territory community. About 200 (mostly young) people lived there at the time of her research in the mid-1990s. Pitjantjatjara is the community's preferred language of interaction. However, traditional cultural transmission is increasingly sporadic, and 'there is a very noticeable western influence on teenage speech and the way of life of Areyonga teenagers' (p11). The book gives an adequate account of Langlois' fieldwork, the setting and methodology, it contains a large number of speech examples, and includes interesting theoretical discussions on language endangerment. It appears to be a thorough documentation of linguistic and cultural change.

Chapter 1 provides background information on the Areyonga community, their language situation, and Langlois' methodology. Chapter 2 describes differences in the sound patterns of teenagers and senior Pitjantjatjara speakers, mainly concerning English loanwords. Word-level grammatical simplification is dealt with in chapter 3, followed by two chapters on sentence-level changes. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the lexicon and case studies of lexical fields, in which extensive reliance on English borrowings seems increasingly evident in children's speech. Chapter 8 briefly describes the secret 'short-way' language used by teenage girls, and chapter 9 summarises the documented changes.

Although this is not a long-term study — the author avoids drawing on historical data — a number of important generational differences are documented. Langlois demonstrates an extensive shift towards English, affecting sounds, sound patterns, grammar and semantics. Her conclusions regarding language survival prospects are not, however, supported by the data presented. Her view is that teenage Areyonga Pitjantjatjara is in a 'healthy' state more or less because the changes happening within it can happen in 'healthy' languages. This is untenable. Changes in threatened languages are typically extensive, happen fast, and features are lost without being replaced by alternative devices in the language (Schmidt 1985: 213–214). Moreover, grammatical

and other changes do not act independently in any one level but tend to influence each other (see Lee 1987: 322).

One of Langlois' concluding remarks is that 'Areyonga teenage Pitjantjatjara, circa 1990, is in a healthy state' (p181) and her final sentence says 'for now, Areyonga teenage Pitjantjatjara is alive and kicking' (p182). It is unclear how ten-year-old data can support the latter statement. In contrast with Langlois' conclusions, it would appear that Areyonga teenage Pitjantjatjara is in fact undergoing rapid, accelerating, extensive linguistic shift, which in terms of language maintenance and loss is always a cause for concern.

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Muslims in Australia: immigration, race relations and cultural history by Nahid Kabir, 360pp, Kegan Paul, London, 2004

Hobsbawm, in his study *Nations and nationalism since 1780* (1990: 67) tells us that 'the links between religion and national consciousness can be very close'. He goes on to point out that world religions like Islam and Christianity were, paradoxically, 'therefore designed to fudge ethnic, linguistic, political and other differences'. Australia is ideologically a 'multi-corporate state', a place where religious communities have coexisted, with limitations, since 1788.

Muslims in Australia claims to be a study of 'the settlement of Muslims in Australia as a religious group' (p328). It should be remembered that Islam is a religion and Muslims are the peoples who adopt that faith. As a workable category for a history, these two are readily confused. On the surface it is easy to use Islam as a religious term but it lacks currency as a sociological term due to the diversity of elements that it includes. This book tries to combine a study of minority immigrant groups and their similarities to the Muslim minority community, with a perspective on their relationships with the European-Australian majority. In doing so, Kabir has chosen a vast subject which confronts, on the way, many barriers of mixed genres and non-availability of sources.

The topic certainly deserves attention as little has been written about these histories. 'Afghan' is the stereotype for Middle Eastern peoples in histories such as McKnight's book on camels (1969). However, Kabir's research shows that they came from northern Africa, the Levant, Afghanistan, Persian countries and from Middle Eastern countries only recently formed.

Kabir begins her narrative with a short, interesting collection of data on early Muslim convicts and free arrivals. She then jumps from 1813 to the 1860s, when a boat load of camels and Afghans cameleers disembarked at Port Augusta in South Australia

en route to providing camel transport from about the 1860s until the late 1920s, when rail transport gradually superseded cameleers and their camels. Kabir then provides a short piece on Australian immigration policies, which takes us up to the 1996 census.

Understandings of these historical movements are bound up in the schism of the occident and the orient, and the defining qualities of Orientalism: 'Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of the deepest and most recurring images of the 'Other' (Said 1978:1). Australia is included in this history. The subject is not just about fear, religion, race or culture and the prejudices therein, but it is also about the burden of 'who's history are we dealing with'?

Islam, the author acknowledges, has a past dating back 1,700 years emerging out of Arabia. She does not look at Islam's role as a conquering movement, although it was Islam's expansion from Arabia that enabled its proselytising of the Maccassans, who brought Islam to Australia prior to the arrival of Christianity (Mulvaney 1975: 41-44). Her account does not include the interactions of Muslim people and Aboriginal people.

Kabir presents us with a theory that the social and cultural phenomena surrounding the migration of people who are Islamic is largely determined by stereotypic Anglo prejudices. But I think that this is an over-simplification. For while prejudices have affected every group who came to Australia for whatever economic, political or cultural reasons, the author's attempts to characterise prejudices by white society against Afghans as relating to 'race' alone is misguided. They also need to be seen in an economic light. When the Afghans came to British Australia they came for a profit, the companies they worked for provided the capital but the camel transport was controlled by small privateers who relied not on Islam and its infrastructure but on verbal and customary contract systems to survive. Discrimination pervades every aspect of capitalism: its dehumanising aspects and its profit-driven capacities cannot tolerate difference either then or now.

For this review, in the journal *Aboriginal History*, I think it is appropriate to focus on the topic of the interactions of Muslim people and Aboriginal people. There are many Aborigines whose progenitors were Muslims. Their histories have not been extensively researched. This important topic is not studied in this book, and no use has been made of either the archives in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies or state and federal primary source materials.

From the 1860s Muslim peoples came in some numbers, prompted by a demand for camel transport, which they monopolised. They also employed others; some of the people they employed were whites, the majority were Aborigines. They provided the transport for the building of the Overland Telegraph Line and the numerous railway lines across Australia, for the transportation of wheat, wool and fruit along the rivers of New South Wales and Victoria, and minerals for domestic consumption and for export, until the rail links superseded their skills. In many country towns now you will see streets named after Muslim camel traders and such names as Mecca St, in Bungendore NSW, aptly placed on the eastern side of the town.

The cameleers present two dilemmas: firstly, they came without their religious leaders, and secondly, they came without their wives. The building of the Overland Telegraph Line and the railway through central Australia provided the circumstances for

cameleers and Aboriginal women to develop short and long term relationships. The transport depots where the Afghans rested overnight contained fringe camps where Aboriginal people lived. Many of the Afghans took Aboriginal women from these camps, and from these relationships came large numbers of children of mixed racial descent.

Between the time of the national census of 1901 and the first Commonwealth census of 1911 the number of persons of mixed descent ('half-castes') recorded in central Australia increased from 187 (in a total of 23,048) to 244 (in a total of 21,756). Partly because no racial category was used to distinguish them in the historical records, little is known of the actual Aboriginal-Muslim numbers and whether they became Muslims. The significant thing about these figures is that they represent a great increase in the number of children present in the transport and cattle camps. The increase in the population of children created a social revolution whereby the customs and manners of traditional group's civil society could not cope. The changed circumstances of the population of mostly females and children lacked leadership, lacking also an economy, authority structures and capital surplus (see Rowley 1972 and Briscoe 1991). Without a 'civil society', these children could rely only on the social and economic support of camp women. The Aboriginal women and their children either remained in the camps or moved from the main routes and lost contact with their Muslim relatives, to be swept up into Christianity, or no religion at all. Some Muslim fathers did take Aboriginal women into their harems (see Briscoe 1991: 127-9). On the whole, however, they were abandoned to their own devices or to those of the new Commonwealth Administrator (see Rowley 1972 *Outcasts in white Australia*). From 1911, well into the 1970s, children and adults of full and mixed descent were removed from cattle camps, depots, fringe camps and the bush camps. They were taken to government 'Native Institutions' and to church institutions for the purposes of socialisation, tuition and control.

While the topic of *Muslims in Australia* at first excites the imagination, it emerges that tackling 'immigration, race relations and cultural history' is too complex for this work. Given the limited source material available and used, the book's scope is problematic. 'Value free history' is a myth, but my impression is that the book is aimed at Muslim readers more than general history readers and students. The book is made hard to follow by the lack of a clear introduction to the content and an index.

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Whitening race: essays in social and cultural criticism edited by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 303pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, \$34.95

It is disappointing when a nascent field of study (in an Australian context anyway), emerges seeming already tired and dated. This is not a problem with Whiteness Studies *per se*, but with its application here. In too many of the 17 contributions in this volume a politics and ideology forecloses against the formulation of the sort of revelatory enquiry that Whiteness Studies potentially offers. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings there are some thoughtful and interesting chapters here. Several gently suggest caution, and the constraining path that Whiteness Studies could follow; a caution unheeded by some of its authors, however.

Jane Haggis (pp48–58), one of the scholars at the forefront of Whiteness Studies in Australia, admits to some ‘unease about naming and focusing on “Whiteness”’ (p49), principally out of fear of strengthening ‘white race privilege’ (p51) and of reifying essentialism. In dealing with these concerns Haggis provides a coherent and useful précis of key critiques of essentialism, including that of Ien Ang’s (pp52–4). She then, however, through a dubious contrivance, accepts a rigid, fixed difference between Aborigines and settler-Australians whilst at the same time rejecting that the asserted incommensurability represents an essentialist turn. This argument shows faithful devotion to a cause more than frank and fearless scholarship.

Gillian Cowlshaw’s contribution (pp59–74) is typically reasoned and astute, and in some respects counters the arguments of others featured in this text. Cowlshaw notes how culture has supplanted race in ostensibly progressive scholarship whilst still invoking the same markers of difference such as heritability and primitivity (pp59–60). This argument is not new and Cowlshaw has made it previously, but unfortunately it warrants repeating. Culture continues to be mobilised in race’s stead, as if word substitution alone absolves the nefariousness associated with notions of race rather than transferring the same problems to another similarly problematical category. Cowlshaw argues that the employment ‘of race as the basis of social identification [is not] necessarily negative or regressive’ (p60, her emphasis), and that our attempts to negate the significance of race have deflected analysis and helped us deny how ‘racial identities are powerful and positively significant’ (p60). Cowlshaw writes of the growing ‘conventional *discursive respect* towards Indigenous people and heritage’ (p63, her emphasis), which, like more public ‘[g]estures of appeasement or guilt often stand in for tough-minded work’ (p64). She also warns of the dangers of creating through Whiteness Studies an ‘unarguable indigenous authority’ (p72), an authority further bolstered by ‘obsequiousness towards black voices’ (p258). Cowlshaw calls for intellectual engagement, not avoidance (or indeed obsequiousness) (pp66–7, 72), and for recognition of entangled histories and the complexities of inter-subjectivity. It is precisely this sort of engagement that enables Cowlshaw to read empathically and with discernment rural Aboriginal support for Pauline Hanson (p65). Cowlshaw’s chapter is not merely the strongest in a text of mostly moderate scholarship; its strength would and should be recognised beyond this volume’s probable reach.

Bob Pease’s chapter too is interesting (pp119–30). His aim is to ‘discuss some of the dilemmas, tensions and contradictions in the process of challenging white male privilege’ (p119), and in doing so he provides a thorough and very useful review of

contemporary scholarship in this field. The critique of diversity programs is timely (p125), and Pease's consideration of the insights that critical Whiteness Studies may glean from debates within pro-feminist movements is both sensible and practical. Pease modestly concludes that he raises more questions and dilemmas than he provides answers to (p129), but it is these very questions and dilemmas that need raising, not ignoring, and the very problems that Whiteness Studies need to engage with. Few within this volume, however, appear willing to do so.

Maureen Perkins (pp164–75) provides a nuanced account of the act of 'passing', and links this in interesting ways to those in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English society who attempted to mask their social origins, only to have their obfuscation betrayed by their spontaneous real selves. Perkins details how stolen (and lost) children were a product of the dislocation that accompanied rapid industrialisation in Europe, and how the development of British government policy over several generations led to increasing intervention in children's lives. The stolen generations of Aboriginal children must be considered in this context, Perkins argues. However, attempts to mitigate blame by suggestions that the government policy of assimilation was well meaning are belied by the fact that there was a 'common belief ... that the hidden corruption of colour would always eventually be revealed' (p174).

Sue Shore (pp89–103) critiques the role that liberal humanism plays in skewing adult education towards a white norm. She shows how many radical educators are similarly entrapped by the discursive practices of whiteness. Susan Young (pp104–18), in an argument not without significant problems of its own, details how far behind theories underpinning the vocation of social work lag in terms of dealing with whatever Other. Kate Foord (p133–47) reads Rod Jones' novel *Billy Sunday* on one level as a recuperated inscription of Turner's frontier thesis in Australian nation building. In doing so she achieves the very difficult feat of rendering Lacanian psychoanalytical interpretative theories accessible, although the argument does not always flow easily. Furthermore, Lacanian psychoanalysis enables readings of *Billy Sunday* at considerable variance to those of Foord's, but these possibilities are ignored. Belinda McKay (pp148–63) focuses on the often overlooked early white women writers in Queensland and demonstrates their complicity in colonialism and dispossession. Her analysis is strongest and most interesting when discussing the issue of assimilation in women's fiction in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century.

Moreton-Robinson, an indulgent editor in this instance, is the text's reference point and most contributors pay their intellectual respects. I have the sense that several of the authors are writing solely for each other (and perhaps their students), and that Whiteness Studies in Australia is more of a club than a genuine area of enquiry. The liberal acknowledgements to each other (both in this text and in laudatory reviews) emphasise this introspection. This field has the potential to offer new insights into fraught and contested terrains but for the most part the contributors to this text eschew that opportunity, hectoring their readers and opting for persuasion through convictive belligerence. How does this contribute to a supposedly academic text? It charts little new ground. Whiteness Studies needs to embrace a broader intellectual church, to be more generous and meticulous in its scholarship, and outward looking if it wants to expand its sphere of influence beyond vested interests and fellow travellers. The chap-

ters which are most constructive, including those listed above, are drowned in the overall clamour.

One minor point, directed to the publishers. This book as an artefact has its limitations, as the print is almost in danger of toppling off the page. Given that the book's readers will be mainly students in selected undergraduate courses, more generous margins are needed.

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The French explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772–1839 by Colin Dyer, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2005, \$32.95

A French cross-cultural compendium

Nineteenth century meetings between French scientific explorers and Aborigines are a well documented but little used resource in cross-cultural Australian histories. There is a tendency to discard the French presence along the Australian coast in the early nineteenth century focusing instead on the British interactions with Aborigines. *The French explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772–1839* by Colin Dyer is the latest addition to a slowly growing literature which draws attention to the French meetings with Aborigines during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Other recent writings in this area include *Encountering Terra Australis: the Australian voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Mathew Flinders* (2004) by Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-Sooby.

The French explorers chronicles 10 French expeditions to Australia over six decades. Starting in 1772 with the journey of Marion Dufresne, Dyer then takes us to the expedition of La Perouse in 1788, Bruny d'Entrecasteaux in 1792, Baudin in 1801, de Freycinet in 1818, Duperry in 1824, de Bouganville in 1825, d'Urville in 1826, Laplace in 1831 and d'Urville again in 1839. Dyer gives us a summary of the 10 expeditions, their aims and official instructions, and divides the material up thematically. Of the four sections – 'descriptions of Aboriginal Australians'; 'relations between the Aborigines and the French'; 'relations between the Aborigines themselves' and 'relations between the Aborigines and the British' – most weight is given to the first two.

Dyer states from the first that his aim is to 'enable readers to make as close an acquaintance as possible directly with the French explorers and the Aboriginal Australians during their encounters'. Because of this, Dyer's voice is absent from the text. Dyer is also scant with historical context (crucial when dealing with the French in the late eighteenth century) and includes little analysis. What Dyer does give us is 'essentially the evidence ... to enable readers, if they so wish, to draw their own conclusions, to form their own arguments'.

Dyer's first chapter looks at the French writings on the physical descriptions of the Aborigines – their weight, height, size of teeth and the colour of their skin. Due to Enlightenment thinking, the French observations were highly anthropological and special emphasis was given to 'men in nature' and the physicality of the 'sauvage'. The

French were also interested in Aboriginal nutrition, their dwellings, use of fire and material culture.

Dyer then goes on to explore relations between the Aborigines and the French, through French eyes. He looks at social relations – how the Aborigines received the French and (briefly) how their first meetings were acted out. The French perception of Aboriginal character and language is an intriguing section of *The French explorers* as we are shown how French perceptions of Aborigines changed over half a century, from a romantic Rousseau-inspired spirit, to the disappointment that Arago and d'Urville experienced in the 'miserable' Aborigines of the 1820s.

Dyer makes an attempt at an Indigenous perspective in the next section entitled 'the Aboriginal Australians as anthropologists'. He comments on the Aboriginal curiosity at the colour of the French men's skin, their clothes, material culture and their sex. In doing so, Dyer could have used this opportunity to make the point that the 'anthropological' Aborigines were actually curious in very similar ways to the French men. He spends no time in analysing what these French visits might have meant to the Aborigines.

The next section of *The French explorers* looks at the relationships the Aborigines had between themselves. The book finishes with a short chapter on relations between the British and the Aborigines, all through the eyes of the French.

The small bibliography – made up almost entirely of French sources – leads Dyer to make an already cloudy picture of cross-cultural meetings even cloudier. This brief bibliography may also be the reason why he sometimes draws brash generalisations: 'Unlike the British, the French were not interested in conquering ... so relations between the explorers and the Aborigines were predominantly respectful and harmonious. They really got on very nicely – even romantically on occasion.'

With the absence of Dyer's voice, and no textual exegesis, the reader is left feeling that *The French explorers* reinforces eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes towards Aborigines. In the absence of a deeper reading of these iconic journals it is easy to fall into the trap of accepting what was written at face value, or worse, judging their actions from the present – a dangerous temptation for a historian to fall into. The same can be said about the lack of Indigenous understanding: 'When the French first landed in New Holland the Indigenous inhabitants must have wondered who on Earth these creatures were.' No effort is made by Dyer to consult the records that actually document some of the Indigenous interpretations of the meaning of the presence of these white male visitors. Dyer writes that 'we can only guess at interpreting their interpretations', but the reality is that it is just as hard to get inside the heads of nineteenth century Frenchmen as it is to get inside those of nineteenth century Aborigines. It is hard, but this does not mean that we should not try.

Due to the absence of a deeper relationship with his texts, Dyer misses out on the complexity of these cross-cultural meetings – often, if not always, fraught with the unpredictable possibility of slipping into conflict.

The French explorers is not a fine-grained history book on French meetings with Aborigines and Dyer does not pretend that it is meant to be. Although the intricate details and complexities of cross-cultural meetings are quickly flown over, the book certainly has its merits. It is a valuable compendium of French descriptions and

impressions of Aborigines and a useful chronicle of ten extraordinary expeditions. Importantly, it includes previously uncited material, some of which Dyer has translated himself. This arduous task is of immense value for fellow historians and interested readers, and the effort that has gone into it is evident in his 'Note on Vocabulary'. The illustrations that have been chosen are also admirable. Francois Peron's detailed sketches, Nicolas Petit's Tasmanian pictures and Jacques Arago's illustrations of Aboriginal traditional life are beautifully reprinted.

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Whispers of this Wik woman by Fiona Doyle, University of Queensland Press, 152pp, 2004, \$24.95.

In *Whispers of this Wik woman*, Fiona Doyle has added to the rich stream of family history flowing from Aboriginal writers. In the process she has shown how the broader historical process of European colonisation has impacted upon Aboriginal lives and personal relationships. The story focuses on Wik activist, Jean George Awumpun, Fiona Doyle's maternal grandmother, whose adult life was spent in the Weipa-Napranum area. She is the last fluent speaker of the Alngith language and a living treasure-house of the local language and culture. She was an eloquent spokesperson in the struggle for Wik native title and was a signatory on 16 June 1998 to the Alngith Native Title agreement, and on 14 March 2001 to the Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement between the Peoples of Western Cape York Peninsula, the Federal Government and the mining company, Comalco. This sounds like a march of triumph in which justice is rewarded, but Doyle has courageously revealed the other personal, tragic dimension of Awumpun's life.

Fiona Doyle makes it clear that this book is her interpretation of her family's history especially as it relates to their identification with the Weipa area; an interpretation that is still not accepted by most of her countrymen and women. According to Awumpun, her father, Dick Kelinda, had visited Aurukun from his clan country around the old Weipa Mission and been persuaded or coerced to stay there, presumably to assist the missionaries at Aurukun which was established in 1904, six years after Mapoon's establishment. It was not until 1942 that Jean George Awumpun and Roy George returned to Weipa as newlyweds.

The Aboriginal people at Weipa concluded Awumpun was from Aurukun. There was also no acceptance that Dick Kelinda's father, Yepenji, was Alngith. The story that Fiona Doyle narrates is overshadowed by this assertion and rejection of the identity of Awumpun and her descendants. This reaches a compelling but bitter climax when she is accepted as Alngith to be a signatory because her grandfather's name, Yepenji, was recorded as Alngith in the white man's records. This has not convinced her nay-sayers at Weipa. This book is a glowing, unashamedly partisan defence of her grandmother's identification and a passionate tribute to her life.

Until 1966, when the Presbyterian Board of Mission handed over control of Weipa Mission to the Queensland Government, the family history takes place within the con-

text of a mission, but one in which the missionaries seem to be only bit players in the lives of the Aborigines, although they assume more and more control. The Aboriginal people continue to live the only lives they know with one another even though the framework of their lives changes from one generation to the next. Dormitory life is created to remove the children from the parents. One generation lived the language and culture. The next learnt about it when they associated with their traditional parents outside the dormitories. The next were at a further remove. Yet, as Doyle shows, Aboriginal people like Dick Kelinda and Awumpun, with complete faith in their Aboriginal religion and values, who had never experienced dormitory life, could accept sincerely the Christian faith and become its advocates among their own people. Fiona Doyle makes it clear, without any qualification or embarrassment, that Awumpun's Christian faith is still very important to her: 'She finds peace in her Saviour' (p129). She also finds a sustaining strength in being Alngith.

Although the focus of this book is on Jean George Awumpun, other fascinating cameos emerge: Dick Kelinda, Awumpun's grandfather who became a displaced person because of missionary influence at Aurukun. He was used as a bridge between the missionaries and the local Aborigines whose way of life the missionaries were determined to change. Also Fiona Doyle herself, who is a successfully established choreographer, dancer, educator and author. She moved to Sydney when she was 16 to study dance at the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association and became comfortable with city life. She graduated from James Cook University's Remote Teacher Education Program (RATEP) with a Bachelor of Education in 2002 and has recently moved to Brisbane with her husband and three children. She has traced her Austrian father who appears with her in a photograph taken at Jessica Point in 1996.

Fiona Doyle is a woman of two very different worlds. It has been important for her to explore and establish her grandmother's identity for, in doing so, she was also exploring and establishing her own. Her traditional past is important to her personally and in the expression of her creativity.

Often, in Doyle's account, I was intrigued about what was *not* said or further explored. This may have been because she thought there was insufficient evidence or because she did not wish to pursue the matter further. For example, with regard to the relationship between Dick Kelinda and the missionaries, why did he accept the authority of the missionaries in the early days of the mission when he could have simply returned to his home country? 'He also had a heart for the Lord Jesus and His word' (p10).

The disturbed nature of family life is acknowledged but with a respectful sensitivity and restraint. No explanation is suggested as to why the children of a number of women are being brought up by others. Doyle observes that traditional culture is not currently being lived at Weipa by her parent's generation or hers, and that it is mainly the women who are trying to keep it alive. 'Where are the men, the Weipa men?' she gently laments (p99). She also observes the redefinition of identity that is occurring: 'members of family groups are being "clumped" together under "one tribe headings"' (p5).

Doyle devotes four pages of this book to telling one of Awumpun's stories, first in pidgin and then in standard English. Four men magically speared a woman who

turned into a bird and flew: 'The people saw her fly. My mother was there with old lady Laura' (p22). The men are captured by Dick Kelinda and brought back to Aurukun where Superintendent Mackenzie had them whipped. Two were exiled from the mission. The supernatural and the natural, the marvellous and the mundane exist side by side. Doyle's comment is: 'Nana once told me about a bizarre happening that occurred as the result of a crime that took place. This story has stayed with me because of its strangeness' (p19). Doyle's lightness of touch gives the material the respect it deserves.

There is much else in *Whispers of this Wik woman* that is touched on in passing: missionary control through government legislation, dormitory life, the involvement in World War II, the use of Aboriginal men and women as cheap labour, the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women when they were sent out to work, the perception of the old people that mission times were in some ways golden days, the impact of alcohol on community life, and the new life that Aboriginal people are cutting out for themselves. But the focus of this book is Fiona Doyle's determination to establish Jean George Awumpun's identity and to celebrate the triumph of her life despite the negative response of many of those whom she has lived with all of her adult life. Here there are broad parallels with Koiki Mabo's struggle to achieve Native Title, despite the lack of support from some of the Meriam people, their questioning of his lineage and denying his ownership of all of the land he claimed to have inherited.

In 2003, Fiona Doyle's book received the David Unaipon Award for the best entry by a Black Australian Writer. The University of Queensland Press have done well to sponsor this award and to turn it into such a fine publication. I hope it continues to attract writers of the calibre of Fiona Doyle.

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Contributors

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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. Please do not use *ibid.* or similar abbreviations, but repeat the short citation.

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