

# ABORIGINAL HISTORY

Volume forty-two 2018



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Volume forty-two 2018



Australian  
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P R E S S



Published by ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc.  
The Australian National University  
Acton ACT 2601, Australia  
Email: [anupress@anu.edu.au](mailto:anupress@anu.edu.au)  
This title is also available online at [press.anu.edu.au](http://press.anu.edu.au)

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Since 1977 the peer-reviewed annual journal *Aboriginal History* has pioneered interdisciplinary historical studies of Australian Aboriginal peoples' and Torres Strait Islander's interactions with non-Indigenous peoples, principally in Australia but also transnationally. It promotes publication of Indigenous oral traditions, biographies, narratives in local languages, archival and bibliographic guides, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, critiques of current events, and research and reviews in the cognate fields of anthropology, archaeology, sociology, linguistics, demography, law, geography and cultural, political and economic history. For more information, please visit [aboriginalhistory.org.au](http://aboriginalhistory.org.au).

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

Cover design and layout by ANU Press

This edition © 2018 ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc.

ISSN 0314-8769 (print)  
ISSN 1837-9389 (electronic edition)

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# Preface

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Ingereth Macfarlane

Welcome to the 42nd volume of *Aboriginal History* journal. The seven articles this year highlight the wealth of sources that feed into historical research of Indigenous Australia. Their arguments are based on material that ranges from comments on online internet forums to media photographs, from missionaries' correspondence to local and self-published newspapers, from institutional records to personal diaries and interviews, and from town maps to archaeological surveys and museum collections.

The role of performance in the events organised by the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) in 1957–67 in Sydney shows up the contest between state assimilationist goals and Indigenous participants' insistence on distinction, continuity and survival (Bollen and Brewster). The then radical agenda – in a protectionist policy regime – of the advocacy group, the Aborigines' Protection League in South Australia in the 1920s–30s, is examined in a detailed study of the group's campaigns and campaigners (Foster). A picture of colonial reception of Aboriginal performance and the public assertion of local Aboriginal cultural priorities in 1893 Darwin is developed in the historical contextualisation of a collection of Aboriginal artefacts found in the Marischal Museum, Aberdeen (Sculthorpe). A nuanced analysis of the relationship between the Catholic Benedictine Mission at New Norcia and the Western Australian Native Welfare Department draws on the correspondence between the Abbot of New Norcia and A.O. Neville (Taylor). A large body of reader responses to a recent online article on the deep history of Aboriginal Australia provides a way to map the strengths and weaknesses in the general Australian public's apprehension of that long history (Griffiths and Russell). A spatial history argues against the concept of 'fringe camps' and for a pattern of demonstrable continuities between precolonial, colonial and recent Aboriginal people's favoured camp places and the locations of urban contemporary park spaces in Brisbane and townships in south-eastern Queensland (Kerkhove). In the format of an interview, the themes concerning the writing of

Aboriginal history and contemporary political debates that are developed in Tim Rowse's recent book *Indigenous and Other Australians since 1901* (2017) are explored (Johnson and Rowse).

## Vale Luise Hercus

We honour the creative life and exceptional scholarly contribution of Luise Hercus, who passed away in April 2018. She was a foundation member of the Editorial Board of *Aboriginal History* journal, and its book review editor from 1993 to 2017. Still working days before she died aged 92, she was dedicated and skilled in recording Aboriginal language accounts, especially for south-eastern Australia and the Lake Eyre region, and putting these in historical context. Her work has made these available to Aboriginal communities and to all those who want the land alive with its stories of the Ancestors and of the people. She is sorely missed by all, and especially by Aboriginal History Inc.

## Change to the referencing system in *Aboriginal History* volume 43, 2019

In the early years of publication, the editors of *Aboriginal History* journal spent much time developing an in-house system of referencing that worked for the full interdisciplinary range of papers that it was the editors' goal to publish. That system achieved its purpose for four decades, but in the age of electronic publication and standardisation, simplification is possible and desirable. In volume 43, 2019, Aboriginal History Inc. will change the referencing for both journal articles and monographs to a more standard Chicago referencing format, with a few modifications. For detailed information and examples of the format for new submissions, please read the updated 'Information for authors' on our website at [aboriginalhistory.org.au](http://aboriginalhistory.org.au).

Many thanks to the stalwart Editorial Board, to Geoff Hunt, and to Emily Hazlewood and ANU Press for their invaluable, skilled support, assistance and patience in bringing this volume into its final form.

## Contributors

**Jonathan Bollen** is Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of New South Wales. His research interests include the repertoire of Australian plays in theatre production and the history of entertainers touring the region in the 1950s and 1960s. He is the co-author of *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s* (2008) and *A Global Doll's House: Ibsen and Distant Visions* (2016). He also has experience in the digital humanities, developing collaborative methodologies for theatre research and analytical techniques for visualising artistic networks.

**Anne Brewster** is Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales. Her books include *Giving This Country a Memory: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices of Australia* (2015), *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism* (1996) and *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography* (1995). She co-edited, with Angeline O'Neill and Rosemary van den Berg, an anthology of Australian Indigenous writing, *Those Who Remain Will Always Remember* (2000). Her research has been supported by the Australian Research Council DP140100553.

**Robert Foster** is Associate Professor in the History Department at the University of Adelaide. His most recent publications include the co-authored books, *Fragile Settlement: Aboriginal Peoples, Law, and Resistance in South-West Australia and Prairie Canada* (2016), *Out of the Silence: The History and Memory of South Australia's Frontier Wars* (2012) and *A History of South Australia* (2018).

**Billy Griffiths** is a historian and Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, and an Associate Investigator with the ARC Centre of Excellence for Australian Biodiversity and Heritage (CABAH). His latest book is *Deep Time Dreaming: Uncovering Ancient Australia* (2018).

**Miranda Johnson** is a senior lecturer in history at the University of Sydney. Her work examines indigenous and settler histories in comparative contexts, with a core focus on the Pacific. Her first book, *The Land Is Our History: Indigeneity, Law, and the Settler State* (2016), examined the emergence of indigenous legal activism and juridical responses to it in the late twentieth century in three settler states, Australia, Canada and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

**Ray Kerkhove** is a Visiting Fellow at Griffith University. He works on reconstructing Indigenous material culture and historical landscapes. He co-founded ICP (Interactive Community Planning) Aust Inc., which won the Queensland Governor's Gold Award for services to local heritage. He has written several works, most recently *Aboriginal Campsites of Greater Brisbane* (2015), which reconstructs the locations and histories of post-contact Aboriginal camps in and near Brisbane.

**Harold Koch** is a linguist attached to the School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics, College of Arts and Social Sciences, The Australian National University. His primary research interests have been Australian languages and historical linguistics. He had co-edited (with Claire Bovern) *Australian Languages: Classification and the Comparative Method* (2004); (with Luise Hercus) *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and Re-naming the Australian Landscape* (2009); (with Rachel Nordlinger) *The Languages and Linguistics of Australia: A Comprehensive Guide* (2014); and (with Peter K. Austin and Jane Simpson) *Language, Land and Song: Studies in Honour of Luise Hercus* (2018).

**Tim Rowse** is a former Professorial Fellow in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts and is Emeritus Professor in the Institute for Culture and Society and an Editorial Fellow of the National Centre for Biography, at The Australian National University. He continues to work on Australian colonial history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Lynette Russell** is Professor of Indigenous Studies (History) at the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, Monash University. Her work is deeply interdisciplinary and collaborative, and her research outputs are focused on showing the dynamism of Aboriginal responses to colonialism, their agency and subjectivity. She is Deputy Director of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Australian Biodiversity and Heritage (CABAH).

**Gaye Sculthorpe** has been Head of the Oceania Section in the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum since 2013. Prior to this, she worked for nine years as a Member of the National Native Title Tribunal in Australia. As a staff member of Museums Victoria for many years, she helped develop the opening exhibitions for Bunjilaka, the Aboriginal Centre at Melbourne Museum in 2000. Her current work in the United Kingdom includes research on British collections for two ARC Linkage Projects: 'The Relational Museum and its

Objects' and 'Collecting the West: How Collections Create Western Australia'. Gaye curated the exhibition 'Indigenous Australia: Enduring civilisation' at the British Museum in 2015.

**Peter Sutton** is an author, anthropologist and linguist who has lived and worked with Australian Aboriginal people since 1969. He is a specialist in Aboriginal land claims, languages and art. He has written or edited 16 books, the most recent being *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus* (2009) and *Iridescence: The Play of Colours* (2015, with Michael Snow).

**Elicia Taylor** is a PhD candidate in History in the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Newcastle. She is the author of an article on Aboriginal child removal (*Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 2015).



## Luise Hercus AM, FAHA 1926–2018

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Harold Koch with contributions from members of the Editorial Board of Aboriginal History Inc.<sup>1</sup>



Luise Hercus at the launch of *Language, Land and Song: Studies in Honour of Luise Hercus* in 2016.

Source: Grace Koch.

Luise Anna Schwarzschild was born 16 January 1926 in Munich, Germany, to her artist father, Alfred, and pianist mother, Theodora (née Luttner). The family's secure, middle-class existence was disrupted by the rise of Nazism, given her father's Jewish background and the political dissent of her mother's family. In 1938, the family fled to England, where Luise learned English and pursued her education. In 1943, she gained a scholarship to St Anne's College, University of Oxford, where she was awarded first-class honours in Romance languages, specialising in medieval French, then held a lectureship in Romance languages for seven years. She extended her studies to Sanskrit and Middle Indo-Aryan Prakrit dialects.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this tribute was originally published by Harold Koch: 'Luise Hercus AM, FAHA 1926–2018', *Emeritus: The Australian National University Emeritus Faculty e-magazine* 9(4): 7–8, 192.55.98.146/\_resources/ef/news/Emeritus%20Vol%2009%20No%2004%20-%20May%202018.pdf (accessed 18 December 2018).

In 1955, she married the Australian physicist Graham Hercus and moved to Melbourne, where their son Iain was born in 1957. From 1955 to 1969, Luise taught Sanskrit unofficially at the University of Melbourne and Monash University. From the early 1960s, on her own initiative, she sought out Aboriginal people in Victoria who retained knowledge of their languages and documented these as far as possible. After extensive travels in Victoria and adjacent areas of New South Wales, on a minimal budget, she produced her results in *The Languages of Victoria: A Late Survey* (1969, revised 1986), contradicting the widely held view that the Aboriginal languages of the south-east had not survived.

Luise's linguistic documentation continued, extending to Paakantyi on the Darling River in New South Wales; Nukunu, Wirangu, Adnyamathanha, Kuyani, and Arabana-Wangkangurru in South Australia; and a small number of languages of south-western Queensland and the Northern Territory. From 1965 to 1969, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies appointed her as a part-time research fellow attached to the Department of Anthropology, University of Adelaide, where T.G.H. Strehlow pursued Australian linguistics.

In 1969, she was appointed Senior Lecturer in what later became the Faculty of Asian Studies at The Australian National University, to teach Sanskrit. She commuted weekly from Melbourne, where Graham was employed, to be Deputy Warden in Burton Hall during the week. In 1973, she was promoted to Reader, a position she held until her retirement in 1991.

In 1974, after the premature death of her husband, she moved to the Canberra region, purchasing a farm near Gundaroo, where she could indulge her well-known love of animals, in particular wombats and large dogs.

Luise received a PhD from The Australian National University in 1976 for published work submitted as a thesis titled *Studies in Middle Indo-Iranian and Aboriginal Languages*.

On her retirement, from 1992 until 2018, she was attached as a Visiting Fellow in The Australian National University Linguistics Department.

Luise's involvement with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) endured for most of its history, from the early 1960s – as a member of the institute and its Linguistics Advisory Committee, recipient of research grants, and especially as the depositor of one of the largest collections of audio recordings, over 1,000 hours covering 56 language varieties.

Luise's research into Aboriginal languages and histories continued throughout the period of her employment in Asian Studies. She produced grammars and dictionaries for a number of languages. Her main research focus, however, came to be the languages and traditions of the Lake Eyre Basin. She devoted the bulk



of her time until the end of her life to producing monograph-length accounts of Wangkangurru traditions – historical stories, song series, Ancestral stories, placename information – communicated to her by the remarkable knowledge-holder Mick Maclean Irinyili. This work established an exceptional body of documentation and translation of stories of places in the region, based on numerous fieldtrips and many interdisciplinary scholarly collaborations.

She was generous in providing information from her vast store of knowledge to members of Aboriginal communities, researchers and consultants in ecology, archaeology, Indigenous heritage, native title, land rights and land management, education, and government policy. Her documentation of languages continues to be used in language revitalisation programs by Aboriginal communities, many of whose members Luise maintained long-term contacts with and counted among her dear friends.

Luise was a founding member of the interdisciplinary editorial board of *Aboriginal History* journal from its inception in 1977, providing linguistic expertise. She edited three volumes of the journal (1985, 1991 and 1999). In the first of these, she states her position on the role of language studies: ‘a mere translation is not enough: the text with the gloss is, after all, the closest we can get to what people said and thought’.<sup>2</sup> Luise also published nine articles in the journal, one in volume 1, 1977, called ‘Tales of Dadu-Dagaḷi Rib-bone Billy’, a characteristically presented story framed by an Aboriginal historian and recounted direct in Aboriginal language, an ‘eye witness account’ as Luise called them,<sup>3</sup> translated to make them accessible for all. Such stories were otherwise only published in specialised linguistics journals. Aboriginal History Inc. has compiled an electronic republication of the nine articles Luise published in *Aboriginal History*, with an introduction by linguist Peter Sutton. These, together with an eight-page bibliography of Luise’s published works prepared by Harold Koch, will be available on our website at [aboriginalhistory.org.au](http://aboriginalhistory.org.au), and Peter Sutton’s review is published in this volume 42.

Luise was also the *Aboriginal History* book review editor from 1993 to 2017. She had a knack for choosing reviewers with expertise who would deliver their review, and was remarkably persistent in extracting them, keeping a permanent ‘black list’ of those who failed to produce. She co-edited a series of books published by Aboriginal History Inc., including studies of Indigenous placenames,<sup>4</sup> regional Ancestral stories<sup>5</sup> and an important collection of South Australian Aboriginal biographies.<sup>6</sup>

2 Dutton and Hercus 1985: 3.

3 Dutton and Hercus 1985: 3.

4 Clark et al. 2014; Koch and Hercus 2009. Also Hercus et al. 2002.

5 Beckett and Hercus 2009.

6 Simpson and Hercus 1998.

Luise's research in the Aboriginal studies field made a huge and continuing impact on the recognition and preservation of Indigenous historical knowledge. Her work has been recognised with many honours: election to the Australian Academy of the Humanities (1978); membership in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1995, 'for service to education and linguistics, particularly through the preservation of Aboriginal languages and culture'; award of a Centenary of Federation Medal (2003); compilation of her articles on Indo-Aryan languages (1991) and of volumes of essays by colleagues in Aboriginal studies, in 1990 and in 2016.<sup>7</sup>

Luise passed away 15 April 2018 after a brief illness. She is survived by her son Iain and daughter-in-law Anne-Mari, a sister Dora in New Zealand, and eight nieces and nephews. She is sorely missed as an outstanding member of the *Aboriginal History* board, inspirational colleague, role model and friend.

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7 Austin, Koch and Simpson 2016, 2018.

# Luise Hercus and *Aboriginal History*

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Peter Sutton

## Introduction

Between 1977 and 1999, Luise Hercus published nine papers in the journal *Aboriginal History*.<sup>1</sup> Seven of these were centred on narrative and song texts recorded in or about the Lake Eyre region, presented in the Aboriginal languages of Luise's teachers, and carefully glossed and translated into English prose. The other two *Aboriginal History* papers were salvage studies dealing with languages of far south-western New South Wales, using old records.

## The oral histories

Luise's method in the seven *Aboriginal History* text-based papers led to the Aboriginal people with whom she had worked giving their histories from within their own world and in their own voices. Luise provided plentiful historical and biographical context, but the centrepieces were always the narratives themselves, and the central characters were the narrators and those they spoke about.

Although Luise was trained in linguistic studies at Oxford, hers was an approach far more at home in the Boasian textual tradition than in that of British philology. Far from merely scouring the outback for grammars of unwritten languages, Luise's interests extended to every aspect of the people's lives and historical experiences, including both the unutterably tragic and the comic. Like her language teachers of the bush, Luise largely let the facts speak for themselves. Her own role needed no

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<sup>1</sup> Hercus 1977, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1985, 1989; Hercus and Koch 1996, 1999; Austin et al. 1988. All papers were republished by ANU E Press in 2011, and DOI numbers are derived with the 2011 date.

moral meta-commentary in order to bolster its authority. It may not be surprising that it was Luise who came up with the unadorned title for our book: *This is What Happened*.<sup>2</sup>

## Aboriginal history from the other side

In 1981, Henry Reynolds published his ground-breaking book *The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia* (1981). The next year it was republished with a new subtitle: *Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (1982). While this book indeed focused on the experiences of Indigenous people during conquest and colonisation, it did so primarily through the use of documents and publications written by Europeans. The voices of Aboriginal people themselves were largely silent.

This was a pity, given that the journal *Aboriginal History* had been in print since 1977 and in a paper in the very first issue – a paper listed by Reynolds but not discussed – Luise Hercus had published texts in local languages concerning the frontier period and the life and times of the ‘koonki’ (witch doctor) known as Rib-Bone Billy or Ngadu-dhagalhi.<sup>3</sup> What is more, she had said there: ‘This is Aboriginal history viewed from “the other side” by the koonki’s own distant relatives, speakers of Wangganguru’.<sup>4</sup>

The first of these stories gave details of a massacre of Aboriginal people by ‘white-fellows’, probably in the Clifton Hills area of north-east South Australia and probably in the 1890s.<sup>5</sup> Like most such Aboriginal tales of frontier terrorism that were told by people who lived at about the same time or not long after, the narrative is focused on the people, and on the events and their locations, but makes no moral or political comment and reveals little of the emotions of the storyteller. The only point at which the narrator, Ben Murray, makes such a remark of feeling, is towards the end when he says:

*Guldjirigarinha birda – ga warduguba njurdu ngamarlaburrunha*.<sup>6</sup>  
They shot them all, even the pitiful little babies.<sup>7</sup>

2 Hercus and Sutton 1986.

3 Reynolds 1982: 244. I have changed Luise’s original spelling that used diacritics (Dadu-ḍagalī) to the practical orthography shown here.

4 Hercus 1977: 55.

5 Hercus 1977: 56.

6 I have omitted here the morpheme-by-morpheme glosses of the original text.

7 Hercus 1977: 60, 62. *Ngamarla* means ‘pity’.

In her second *Aboriginal History* paper, ‘How we danced the Mudlungga’, Luise presented texts in which Mick McLean and Ben Murray gave quite detailed memoirs of participation in the Mudlungga ceremony in 1901 and 1902.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the usual view from the other side of the frontier – the European side – these histories are not couched in terms of unnamed ‘blacks’ having unspecified ‘corroborees’, but are presented in terms of identified participants, site by site details of the cross-country progress of the ceremonial postulants and their families, and even remembered song verses specific to the Mudlungga are interpolated here and there. Luise’s detailed annotations in this paper added considerably to our understanding of frontier-period travelling ceremonies of this kind.<sup>9</sup>

## Afghan cameleers and Syrian traders

In recent decades there has been a burgeoning literature on the so-called Afghan cameleers of the Australian outback in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and on their relationships with non-Afghans, including Aboriginal people and Syrian traders.<sup>10</sup> In terms of the latter relationships as a scholarly interest, Luise was, I think, there first.

Her third *Aboriginal History* paper, ‘Afghan stories from the north-east of South Australia’, contained narratives by Mona Merrick and her brother Arthur Warren in Arabana, and by Ben Murray and Johnny Reece in Wangganguru.<sup>11</sup> Typically, the tales are sprinkled with specific placenames and identified Aboriginal individuals, but, as well, the ‘Afghans’ (and Syrians) are in many cases identified by personal name: Mūsā, Salim Khan, Sher Khan, Azim Khan, Abdul Qadir, Wasīm Khan, Sayyid Ali, Bejah Dervish, Azim Amīr, Mansūr. These are invaluable records of frontier characters, many of whom would otherwise have left little trace in documentary history.<sup>12</sup>

Luise, as a co-author with Peter Austin and Philip Jones, returned to the Afghan theme in ‘Ben Murray (Parlku-nguyu-thangkayiwarna)’.<sup>13</sup> At 73 pages, this was the giant among her *Aboriginal History* papers, and more than half of those pages consisted of narratives by Ben Murray with glosses and translations. He would have made a good fourth (and first) author in the byline.

8 Hercus 1980.

9 Mulvaney (1976) surveyed the literature including the multiple sources on the spread of the Molonga (Mudlungga) ceremony 1893–1918.

10 See, for example, Cigler 1986; Stevens 1989; Rajkowski 2005; Jones and Kenny 2007.

11 Hercus 1981.

12 Basic biographical details of most of the men in the above list may be found in Jones and Kenny 2007: 167–91.

13 Austin et al. 1988.

## A distinctive structure

The narrative texts are dealt with by Luise on a pattern: the original text is transcribed, then glossed morpheme-by-morpheme, and then the free translation appears next. This means that the reader can be assured that Luise actually understands the grammar and semantics of the languages of her teachers. Alongside all this is usually a phoneme chart giving the orthography for the texts, and a list of grammatical abbreviations used in the glosses. And at the end, there is always a list of references to Luise's sources.<sup>14</sup>

Several of the *Aboriginal History* papers, like most of her Australianist books and many of her other papers, begin with photographs of Aboriginal people, usually the narrators in the case of a paper based on texts, or speakers of the language in the case of the grammars. In these cases, the mentor precedes the student.

In many of her papers and books, Luise also supplies brief biographies of these people, and provides the historical contexts of their lives or the times they speak about.

A recurring graphic is the regional map, and another is a map of language countries, accompanied, often, by a more detailed map of particular locations referred to in the text, and one or more photographs of sites visited by Luise and her guides.

## Collaborative work

These maps reflect Luise's passion for recording not just stories and songs about places, but their actual locations. Without the off-road vehicle, this work would have been severely curtailed.<sup>15</sup> Luise was guided and mentored in this cultural landscape mapping by her language teachers, who were very many in number but foremost among whom was Mick McLean Irinyili (c. 1888–1977). Irinyili and his family had left the Simpson Desert for good in 1899, but his memories were rich, and with the aid of Dennis Bartell, who was able to locate the wells visited by explorer David Lindsay in 1886, Luise was able to tie those memories to precise points in a daunting landscape.<sup>16</sup>

Non-Aboriginal colleagues and friends also worked in the bush with Luise. They provided help with mapping site locations, with tape recording, cooking and transport. Her husband Grahame was a key person on the earlier bush trips, and also took photographs. Over quite a few years, Luise had the benefit of the

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14 Perhaps the most intriguing of these is the last reference for the last of the *Aboriginal History* papers. It reads: 'Strehlow, 1947. *NBmissing [sic]: if not supplied, delete reference and quotation sourced from him?*' And indeed that must have happened, as this ghostly allusion to T.G.H. Strehlow has no echo in the text.

15 Sutton 2016.

16 Hercus 1985.

repeated company of Vlad Potezny, whose navigational and mapping skills were superb. She also worked and/or travelled in these remote locations with Iain Hercus, Cath Ellis, Sally White, Rhonda Buckley, Lynda Penny, Bob Ellis, Peter Austin, Isabel McBryde, Colin and Pam MacDonald, Richard Barz and family, Peter Clark, Dennis Bartell, Philip Jones, Stephen Morey, Des Coulthard, myself, and others.

Luise also collaborated with other scholars and published with them repeatedly, perhaps her most frequent collaborator in her later decades being Grace Koch, who was able to bring her great musicological skills to coincide with Luise's linguistic transcriptions of songs.<sup>17</sup> Luise had earlier worked in the field with musicologist Catherine Ellis and others in 1965, 1966 and 1967,<sup>18</sup> and a limited release report on women's music of the eastern Western Desert resulted, co-authored by members of the field teams.<sup>19</sup>

Many scholars in the humanities and social sciences publish alone, unlike those in the hard sciences. Luise's approach to scholarship was as a member of a collegial community where sharing, rather than hoarding or solo display, was a driving principle.

The book of oral history texts and their translations that Luise and I put together in the early 1980s contained 33 stories from all over Australia, and was structured exactly along the line of Luise's own *Aboriginal History* papers and others she published elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> One difference from Luise's *Aboriginal History* papers was that, in the book, the narrators' names appeared in the credits, and were placed ahead of those of the translators and annotators. This was a refinement in the art of recognition.

## The linguistic papers

In 'The Marawara language of Yelta', Luise used the case of the Marawara language to build a commentary on the methodological problem of interpreting old linguistic records of varying quality and often small quantity. 'But we are tempted to ask for too much from some of these sources, particularly the word-lists ...'.<sup>21</sup> Yet, in this case, by using the only major work on Marawara<sup>22</sup> and her much greater knowledge of neighbouring dialects of the same language (called by her Paakantji or Baagandji), Luise was able to make reliable sense of the nineteenth-century sources. The 1939 source was, as she remarked elsewhere, 'a fine work by Tindale' (who was

17 See Hercus and Koch 1996, 1999.

18 Ellis and Barwick 1989: 23–24.

19 Buckley et al. 1967, 1968.

20 Hercus and Sutton 1986.

21 Hercus 1984: 56.

22 Tindale 1939.

a museum ethnologist), and she considered that ‘Tindale’s hearing of what to him was an unknown language was brilliant’.<sup>23</sup> Appreciative collegial recognition was one of Luise’s scholarly hallmarks. She praised Tindale’s ear for language when few if any other professional linguists had seen fit to do so. Just before she died, Luise proposed that she and I edit, annotate and publish (under his name) Norman Tindale’s manuscript grammar of Wanyiwalku that he wrote when working with George Dutton.<sup>24</sup> Having worked together with Luise on so many projects over the decades since at least 1981, this would have been a highly enjoyable process, but it was not to be.

In the second of the linguistic papers Luise published in *Aboriginal History* (1989), she again found time to praise the work of Norman Tindale:

The only comparative word-lists that are truly satisfactory are those which are based on a depth study of both languages involved. There are rare exceptions even when there is no depth study. These exceptions are made with the help of two speakers in the same environment, preferably knowing each other’s language ... A fine example of such a list is Tindale’s manuscript of a comparative vocabulary of Marawara, the southernmost Paakantji dialect, and Yuyu (Ngintait) from the Murray below Ned’s Corner. Tindale made the list with both speakers present, Frank Fletcher for Marawara and Bob McKinley for Yuyu ...<sup>25</sup>

Luise’s paper is a masterly unravelling of difficult sources in a part of Australia where primary ethnolinguistic records were sparse and fragmentary. Her task here was in many ways the reuniting of pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The paper’s main emphasis was on more accurately locating geographically the linguistic countries of the region and sorting out the naming of groups. As she did so often, here Luise included archaeological considerations, and contributed to our picture of the patterns of distribution of riverine and non-riverine inhabitants of the Murray system at the time of conquest.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

After a scholar is no longer with us, their works remain a living presence alongside our memories of the one who created them. When their work was a joint production, meshing narrator with translator and commentator, the narrators also live on in the present through their tales of the past.

23 Hercus 1982: 3.

24 See N.B. Tindale 1938 – c. 1980, Notes on Wainjiwalku grammar, Adelaide, South Australian Museum Archives AA 338/8/21.

25 Hercus 1989: 52.

26 Hercus 1989: 60–61.



Particularly through her decades-long personal relationships with the families of her Aboriginal teachers, and also partly through frequent repatriation of her records during her involvement in family history projects, language revitalisation, heritage protection and native title research, Luise herself became part of Aboriginal history across a vast area of south-eastern Australia. That history has long been one of intertwined lives, and therefore of the sharing of those we have lost.

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# Articles



# NADOC and the National Aborigines Day in Sydney, 1957–67

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Jonathan Bollen and Anne Brewster

This article presents an account of the events organised in Sydney by the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) in its first decade, 1957–67. While committees operated in other states, the NADOC in New South Wales was the most prominent in those years.<sup>1</sup> The significance of NADOC, or NAIDOC as it is has been known since the 1970s, is evident in the organisation's survival. It has developed into Australia's largest annual celebration of the 'history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.<sup>2</sup> Yet there exists to date only a brief historical account of its development.<sup>3</sup>

NADOC was one of a number of organisations active in mid-twentieth-century Australia, involving Aboriginal and white Australians. As a church-based organisation with a close relationship to government, NADOC emerged alongside the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (AAF), founded by Faith Bandler and Pearl Gibbs in 1956, and the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA), founded in 1958.<sup>4</sup> Like the Indigenous members of the FCAA, many of the Indigenous participants in the NADOC events, we argue, understood themselves as 'bearers of collective rights'.<sup>5</sup> They expressed these rights in discourse addressed to white Australians. They also drew on an artistic repertoire of poetry, music, storytelling and performance. In his history of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), founded in the 1920s, John Maynard emphasises the skills of Aboriginal activists in oratory

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1 J. Rogalsky to Spalding, 7 August 1962, SLNSW, MLMSS 4057.

2 National NAIDOC Secretariat 2017.

3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 2003.

4 Bandler and Fox 1983; Taffe 2005.

5 Rowse 2005: 18.

and rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> Similar skills were deployed by Indigenous participants in the NADOC events. Maynard also records that AAPA conferences featured ‘musical entertainments’ given by Aboriginal performers, and members proposed an ‘old time native display’ for presentation to touring royalty.<sup>7</sup> We argue, in this article, that the events organised by NADOC provided an important platform for Indigenous participation and cultural production in the public sphere.

In researching NADOC’s first decade of events in Sydney, we examine the interplay of two contesting imperatives: (1) the advocacy of assimilation as a policy that ‘expected’ all Aboriginal people to ‘attain the same manner of living as other Australians’, and promoted the ‘acceptance’ of Aboriginal people ‘by the whole Australian community’;<sup>8</sup> and (2) the involvement of Indigenous participants, their negotiation of the policy of assimilation, and their insistence on Aboriginal difference, continuity and survival. NADOC aligned with the federal policy of assimilation in distributing government-produced publications that sought to improve non-Indigenous Australian attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Anna Haebich analyses these publications as propaganda, part of the government’s exercise in public relations to promote the policy of assimilation.<sup>9</sup> Alongside government publications, committee documents and media reports, we draw on photographs of participants performing at NADOC’s Sydney events.<sup>10</sup> These we analyse for indications of cultural repertoire, affective relations and audience significance aspects that are not always evident in written documents from government and church sources.<sup>11</sup> Our analysis of the Aboriginal speakers, singers and writers who participated in NADOC’s first decade suggests that they claimed Indigenous agency: they wrested control over discourse and repertoire in performance, they deployed Indigenous aesthetics and shared Indigenous knowledge. Their participation challenged the prevailing characterisation of Aboriginal people as submissive subjects of white governance and passive consumers of European practices and products.

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6 Maynard 2007.

7 Maynard 2007: 74, 90–92.

8 Department of Territories 1961b. Various actors, both individual and institutional, evoked, deployed and critiqued the government’s cultural definition of assimilation throughout the first decade of NADOC (see Attwood 2003: 193–211). The meaning of the term was not stable; Rani Kerin borrows from Charles Rowley to characterise assimilation as ‘nebulous’ and ‘vaguely defined’, varying in its meaning from ‘general equality’ to biological absorption (Kerin 2005: 85.1).

9 Haebich 2008: 137–58.

10 Many of the photographs were taken for *Dawn*, a magazine for Aboriginal people published by the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board, 1952–69; these photographs are now part of the Government Printing Office series at the State Library of NSW. We also draw on images from Fairfax taken for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

11 Taylor 2003.

## The emergence of National Aborigines Day

In its first decade in New South Wales, NADOC was predominantly made up of non-Indigenous members; however, Indigenous people such as Charles Perkins attended some meetings and others such as Jimmy Little played a major role in organising events.<sup>12</sup> In this article, we focus on the Indigenous activists and entertainers who participated in NADOC events, including Jim Hamilton, Joyce Mercy, Margaret Morris, Frank Roberts and Jack Simms who gave speeches; and Lorna Beulah, Harold Blair, Nancy Ellis, Col Hardy, Eva Mumbler and Candy Williams who sang. Their presence and participation enabled Indigenous people to pursue their own political and cultural agendas through the events organised by NADOC. Their involvement suggests that they shared the conviction, of earlier generations of Indigenous activists, that collaboration with non-Aboriginal people was vital in influencing public opinion.<sup>13</sup> High-profile activist and poet Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), who participated in National Aborigines Day in Sydney in 1965, wrote about the ‘organisational role’ that white Australians could play ‘in assisting the Black Australian to reach his own type of achievement with his own set of values’.<sup>14</sup>

The events of National Aborigines Day can be identified as part of the history of Indigenous activism. National Aborigines Day has a direct link with the Melbourne-based Australian Aborigines’ League, founded by William Cooper in 1932, and the Aborigines Progressive Association, an all-Aboriginal organisation founded in New South Wales by Jack Patten and William Ferguson in 1937. Cooper and Ferguson initiated the Aboriginal Day of Mourning, first held in Sydney on 26 January 1938, building on Cooper’s work with the league, which included presenting an Aboriginal choir in concert for Melbourne’s anniversary celebrations in 1937.<sup>15</sup> By 1940, Cooper had engaged the National Missionary Council of Australia to dedicate the Sunday prior to Australia Day to observing the Day of Mourning in church services. This is recognised as one of the originating impulses for National Aborigines Day.<sup>16</sup>

12 SLNSW, MLMSS 4265.

13 Taffe 2005: 22.

14 However, Walker was very specific about the nature of ‘coalitions’ between Black and white Australians and the anti-racist self-education that was necessary for whites to undertake in order to form ‘effective alliances with Black Australians’; Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), ‘Coalition of Black and White Australians’, 1969, UQFL84, Box 30. (Authors have followed Kath Walker’s style with capitalisation of Black in this article.)

15 Attwood 2003: 69–74.

16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 2003.

In the records of NADOC's first decade, the Sunday of observance for Aborigines is recounted as a joint undertaking of the Australian Board of Missions and the Church Missionary Society.<sup>17</sup> These were organisations of the Anglican Church, active since the mid-1800s in missionary endeavours engaging the Indigenous people of Australia. Under the auspice of the National Missionary Council of Australia (NMCA), they promoted Aboriginal Sunday from 25 January 1952, with the hope that 'the Church may influence and inspire [non-Indigenous] people everywhere to a new attitude to these kindly people, the original inhabitants of our land'.<sup>18</sup> By 1956, the NMCA was seeking to broaden the reach beyond observance in church. As chairman at the inaugural meeting of NADOC, Rev. V.W. Coombes outlined the plans for 'a National Aborigines Day which was not confined to the Sunday – which reached only a section of the community – but which could bring in the newspapers, broadcasting and governmental activities'; the aim was to 'bring about a change of heart on the part of the [white] people and develop a new form of public opinion' with the 'obligation ... not only to work on reconditioning the Aborigine, but on reconditioning the white man to receive the Aborigine'.<sup>19</sup>

In their visions of futurity and endeavours to effect social change during this period, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were often at cross-purposes. The 'reconditioning [of] the white man' was an objective strongly supported by Aboriginal people, but for them this reconditioning was not just for the purpose of 'receiv[ing] the Aborigine' into the mainstream but for 'the white man' to get his own house in order:<sup>20</sup> to address the ongoing brutalising effects of colonisation on white people themselves and the culture of cruelty and aggression that was the legacy of colonisation. Kath Walker (Oodgeroo), who participated in many political fora and cultural events of the period and was prominent in a wide range of mainstream news and entertainment media, insisted that Aboriginal economic advancement was dependent not only upon the transformation of Aboriginal people and culture but on that of white people and culture. She wrote:

Let the white man reconstruct his own race and let the black man reconstruct his race. When all races have achieved that aim, then and only then can black and white come together as friends and neighbours.<sup>21</sup>

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17 NADOC records at the State Library of NSW are included in collections from Rev. A.W. Grant (MLMSS 4265), the Australian Board of Missions (MLMSS 4503) and the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (MLMSS 4057).

18 Appeal to the Clergy of Australia: Aboriginal Sunday, 25 January 1952, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503.

19 Minutes, Inaugural Meeting of the Aborigines Day Observance Committee, Sydney, 27 July 1956, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503; Rev. V.W. Coombes represented the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions.

20 Minutes, Inaugural Meeting of the Aborigines Day Observance Committee, Sydney, 27 July 1956, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503.

21 Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), 'Black Australians', speech delivered to the Journalists Club, 16 August 1969, UQFL84, Box 30, p. 4.



If the non-Indigenous participants in the planning of National Aborigines Day were targeting white audiences with the aim of facilitating assimilation, many Aboriginal commentators at this time envisaged that future interracial relations would be based on a radical change or reconfiguration of whiteness on a scale that was not acknowledged in non-Indigenous formulations of assimilation. Whiteness required, in Walker's words, wholesale 'reconstruction'.

The decade between the first NADOC events of 1957 and the 1967 referendum saw a concerted effort on the parts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to court the media. Publicising National Aborigines Day was a priority for NADOC. While Aboriginal Sunday had been largely a religious observance, a 'day of penitence', 'prayer and intercession' and 'consecration to the task', National Aborigines Day became an exercise in public relations.<sup>22</sup> From the outset, NADOC sought to change public opinion through a nationally coordinated program engaging media organisations, commercial enterprise and service organisations. In each state, they sought newspaper coverage and radio programming; in Sydney, they sought publicity on ABC television, then in its first year of broadcasting. They approached major department stores to display exhibitions of Aboriginal art and mission handicrafts for sale, and they cooperated with Rotary, Apex and the Country Women's Association to access distribution channels beyond churches and schools.<sup>23</sup>

In its first decade, NADOC was committed to promulgating assimilation. It framed the purpose of National Aborigines Day in alignment with federal government policy. This purpose included 'an acknowledged acceptance of assimilation within the Australian community as the objective, and towards this end the earliest possible complete acceptance of Aborigines by the white community at all stages and standards of their living'.<sup>24</sup> The federal government provided materials to promote National Aborigines Day. From 1957, the Department of Territories produced booklets annually, largely written from an anthropological point of view, which sought to educate non-Indigenous audiences about Australian Indigenous peoples. Paul Hasluck, Federal Minister for Territories, funded the printing of 80,000 copies of *Our Aborigines* (1957) for distribution by NADOC in 1957.<sup>25</sup> The government funded similar print runs each year. According to Russell McGregor, these booklets were 'the federal government's first foray into propaganda intended to sway mass opinion towards a more favourable view of Aboriginal people and greater involvement in Aboriginal affairs'.<sup>26</sup>

The first National Aborigines Day organised by NADOC was held on Friday 12 July 1957, with church services on the following Sunday. The committee's report on activities lists ABC television and radio coverage, including members of

22 Appeal to the Clergy of Australia: Aboriginal Sunday, 25 January 1952, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503.

23 Minutes, NADOC, Sydney, 29 August 1956–23 July 1957, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503.

24 Minutes, NADOC, Sydney, 8 March 1957, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503.

25 NAA, A452, 1957/2671.

26 McGregor 2011: 89.

the committee, the Singleton Aborigine Choir and an Aboriginal concert in Bega, as well as the Children's Session on radio 2CH, the station owned by the NSW Council of Churches. There were window displays at the Anthony Hordern & Sons department store and the County Council Electricity Department in Sydney, and at the British and Foreign Bible Society Centre in Canberra. In Brisbane, the Lord Mayor opened a display at City Hall and Hasluck attended a dinner; in Adelaide, a concert by Aboriginal artists was given in the Masonic Hall; and in Melbourne, Hasluck was guest speaker on Sunday at the Wesley Methodist Church. Overall, Hasluck was impressed by the media coverage achieved nationally, commenting to Rev. Coombes that the 'Committee had accomplished in two days something the Government had not been able to accomplish over many years'.<sup>27</sup>

The report on NADOC's second National Aborigines Day, held on Friday 11 July 1958, records 'a much wider and [more] powerful observance than that of 1957'.<sup>28</sup> A similar range of activities was generated in the state capitals – public meetings and church services, window displays in department stores, coverage in the press, radio broadcasts and, in Sydney and Melbourne, television broadcasts. Seventy thousand pouches containing 12 photographs, probably those reproduced in the booklet *Assimilation of Our Aborigines* (1958), were distributed through schools, universities, service organisations and trade unions, along with 10,000 posters for display. A short film from the Department of Territories, titled *End of the Walkabout*, was nationally distributed in multiple copies for public exhibition and broadcast on ABC television in Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>29</sup> Further films were distributed for National Aborigines Day in subsequent years.

For the third National Aborigines Day, held on 10 July 1959, the NSW committee staged a demonstration in Martin Place, the civic heart of Sydney, site of the General Post Office and the Cenotaph memorial. The term 'demonstration' requires clarification, since the event was not a protest march with banners, chants and slogans. Rather, it was a civic ceremony, with dignitaries in attendance and an orderly program of speeches, presentations and addresses, interspersed with musical performances and physical displays. Many speakers were non-Indigenous, but Indigenous speakers and performers played an important role in the proceedings. The non-Indigenous dignitaries included Governor of New South Wales Lieutenant General Sir Eric Woodward and Paul Hasluck. The event attracted an audience of more than 2,000 people. The Indigenous speaker was Jack Simms of La Perouse, vice president of the AAF, who 'appealed for full citizenship rights for aborigines' in his address.<sup>30</sup> Aboriginal children from the La Perouse Public School performed a 'folk

27 Minutes, NADOC, Sydney, 23 July 1957, SLNSW MLMSS 4503.

28 Report of National Aborigines Day and Aborigines Sunday, 11–13 July 1958, SLNSW, MLMSS 4503.

29 NFSA 21836; 'TV and radio', *Sun-Herald*, 13 July 1958: 94; 'Sunday television', *The Age*, 11 July 1958: Radio/TV Supplement 8.

30 The AAF 'ensured that black people would speak' at the NADOC demonstrations; in addition to Simms, these speakers included Herbert Groves, Charles Leon, Joyce Mercy, Jack Hassen and Clive Williams (Horner 1983: 171).

dance' that would appear to be of British or European origin, given the costuming and choreography captured by a photographer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.<sup>31</sup> In this regard, the 1959 demonstration succeeded in attracting press coverage and public interest.

From 1960 to 1965, National Aborigines Day in Sydney was observed annually as a demonstration in Martin Place. The dignitaries on these occasions included white men of government, church, academia and the media, and representatives of the organising committee (Figure 1).<sup>32</sup> Their civic status lent significance to the occasions, attracting public notice in the press and attention from white Australians. The programs suggest that the participation of Aboriginal people was framed by items that asserted the priority of non-Aboriginal Australians and the state. At the 1960 demonstration, the address by Pastor Frank Roberts, musical items from Jimmy Little and Candy Williams, and performances by the children of La Perouse Public School were prefaced by the playing of the national anthem ('God Save the Queen') and an opening speech from the Lord Mayor, who also provided 'concluding remarks' before the police band played 'Advance Australia Fair'.<sup>33</sup> Yet there are also some indications that the demonstrations did not run strictly according to the programs. There were aspects of improvisation, and some details, such as the topic of speeches and the selection of songs, that were not specified in advance.

In focusing on the participation of Aboriginal people in National Aborigines Day, we emphasise the agency they exercised in choosing to participate, in selecting their repertoire and contributing their voices, talents and energies to the events. In the remainder of this article, we investigate how various Aboriginal people, who participated in National Aborigines Day in Sydney between 1957 and 1967, used the arts to express Aboriginal cultural and political imperatives. Our analysis identifies two ways in which Aboriginal people participated: as activists addressing the audience in speech and as singers and musicians providing entertainment. Some of these people like Charles Perkins and Jimmy Little were profiled as 'successful Aborigines' in *One People*, one of the government-produced booklets, distributed by NADOC in 1961.<sup>34</sup> But their participation in National Aborigines Day entailed an exercise of agency – writing speeches, selecting repertoire, delivering performance, engaging an audience – which extends beyond their portrayal as models of assimilation in a government publication. We conclude by considering the significance of NADOC's first decade of achievement in the public sphere.

31 'Folk dancing to mark Aborigines' Day', *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter *SMH*), 11 July 1959: 1; 'Native rights appeal', *SMH*, 11 July 1959: 4.

32 In addition to Woodward and Hasluck, regular dignitaries included Harry Jensen, Lord Mayor of Sydney; C.A. Kelly, NSW Chief Secretary; Rev. A.W. Grant, NADOC chairman; Professor William Geddes, University of Sydney; Martin Royal, ABC announcer; and representatives of the Rural Bank.

33 'Aborigines remembered: Ceremony in Sydney', *Dawn*, July 1960: 1.

34 Department of Territories 1961a: 26–32.



Figure 1: Sir Eric Woodward, the Governor of New South Wales, accompanied by Joyce Mercy, meeting students at the National Aborigines Day demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney, 9 July 1965.

Source: R.L. Stewart, Fairfax, FXB246664.

## Indigenous self-representation: Activists addressing audiences in speech

Aboriginal activists used the occasions created by NADOC in Sydney to articulate their own political goals and social agendas. From 1959, NADOC provided a platform for Aboriginal figures of national prominence to deliver powerful speeches that described the mistreatment of Aboriginal people, in particular those living in rural and remote regions, about whom many white Australians living in the capital cities would have had little knowledge. Joyce Clague (née Mercy), who spoke at the National Aborigines Day in Sydney in 1964, describes white audiences at this time being 'shocked [at] the conditions we had grown up with'.<sup>35</sup> The speeches addressed the politics of citizenship and racial discrimination, setting Australia's mistreatment of Aboriginal people within the international context of the United Nations and

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35 Joyce Clague, as quoted in Pauline Clague's personal communication with Anne Brewster and Jonathan Bollen, 3 November 2017. In addition to her participation in NADOC events, Joyce Mercy (as she was then known) was associated with the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship and involved in establishing the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in 1964; see Taffe 2014.

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When Jack Simms ‘appealed for full citizenship rights for aborigines’ in addressing ‘more than 2,000 people’ at the 1959 National Aborigines Day in Martin Place, he explained:

I don’t mean citizens’ rights to go into the pub and drink beer. We want to be given citizenship, and we shall keep on fighting for it. We want to be decent citizens like anyone else. I think we are the only people in Australia who have not got citizens’ rights.<sup>36</sup>

Simms drew attention to racial segregation, with ‘special roped-off seats in country theatres’ where ‘aborigines had to sit’, and told reporters that ‘segregation in NSW is “just as bad as in the United States”’.<sup>37</sup> At the Martin Place demonstration in 1960, Pastor Frank Roberts, the activist-evangelist who had participated in the 1938 Day of Mourning, proclaimed that ‘[r]acialism was brutal and should never become implanted in the Australian way of life or thought’. In addressing the ‘crowd of nearly 3,000’, Roberts appealed to the ‘spiritual and moral qualities’ of white Australians ‘to bring about assimilation’: ‘All of us want to see in our lifetime the elimination of racial torment and racial bigotry’ and ‘the eradication of racialism, which is felt in many parts of the world today’.<sup>38</sup>

While speakers such as Jack Simms and Frank Roberts drew direct comparisons between Australia and the United States, Australian governments distinguished the policy of assimilation from apartheid in South Africa and segregation in the US. This distinction is expressed in *Dawn*’s report on National Aborigines Day in 1960:

With the policy of assimilation adopted by Commonwealth and State Governments strongly supported by all churches and by individuals who will not tolerate the possibility of apartheid in this country, the aborigines are called upon to adjust themselves to a new way of life in our democracy.<sup>39</sup>

From this perspective, the interpellation of assimilation (‘called upon to adjust themselves’) was justified by extending the promise of national belonging: ‘Because they are people of skill and inherent vision we Australians have confidence in their ability to take the responsibilities of full citizenship’.<sup>40</sup> Yet when invited to address the experience of assimilation, Aboriginal speakers took the opportunity to articulate their own vision of national belonging, one that affirmed their autonomy, heritage and difference.

36 ‘Native rights appeal’, *SMH*, 11 July 1959: 4; Jack Simms, from the Aboriginal community at La Perouse, was federal vice-president of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship.

37 ‘Animals! Aborigines’ plight’, *Daily Mirror*, 10 July 1959: 1.

38 ‘Racialism “brutal”: Aboriginal asks for toleration’, *Dawn*, July 1960: 1.

39 ‘Aborigines remembered: Ceremony in Sydney’, *Dawn*, July 1960: 1; see also, ‘Advances in treatment of Aborigines’, *SMH*, 14 July 1958: 2.

40 *Dawn*, July 1960: 1.

Aboriginal speakers also used the occasions presented by National Aborigines Day to convene an Aboriginal audience. We see evidence of this in a speech delivered by Margaret Morris at National Aborigines Day in 1961.<sup>41</sup> She was invited to speak ‘on behalf of the aboriginal women of New South Wales’;<sup>42</sup> her ‘stirring address’ was later printed in *Dawn* under the headline, ‘We are a proud people’.<sup>43</sup> Although Morris endorses assimilation, she does so cautiously and somewhat reluctantly, attesting to the complexity and ‘nebulous’ quality of the term.<sup>44</sup> She specifically stipulates that she supports the role of assimilation in bringing about the *economic* incorporation of Aboriginal people into the mainstream. She talks about making the decision to move her family into ‘the white community’ for the sake of her children’s upward mobility. However, she resists the agenda of some proponents of assimilation to facilitate the cultural and biological absorption of Aboriginal people. She insists that her family’s incorporation into the mainstream should not imply that her children must give up their Aboriginality. Her speech has a dual purpose: while addressing her white audience in order to demand economic parity, she also takes the opportunity to address and galvanise Aboriginal people. Morris affirms Aboriginal difference, declaring that Aboriginal people are a ‘proud people’, and exhorts them to wear their Aboriginal heritage ‘like a badge’. In the last two paragraphs of her speech, she slips into the second-person, addressing her Aboriginal audience directly, saying, ‘you, the Australian aborigines, are the only true Australians’. Here is an instance of Aboriginal activists taking advantage of National Aborigines Day to reach out to Indigenous audiences, to affirm Indigenous networks and solidarity. In doing so, they demonstrated their autonomy in ways that contested, subverted and exceeded the non-Indigenous organisers’ vision of National Aborigines Day, which prioritised Aboriginal people’s cultural assimilation into the mainstream and non-Indigenous Australians’ ‘acceptance’ of them.

Despite the prospects of interracial address at the demonstrations in Martin Place, the political agendas of Aboriginal activists speaking at National Aborigines Day were not accurately represented in the press. In 1961, a reporter for the *Daily Mirror* transformed Margaret Morris’s claim that ‘We believe we should be entitled to “a place in the sun”; a position of equality – no more’ into ‘We ask for assimilation so we may live as human beings should – no more’.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the *Sydney Morning Herald* misquoted Joyce Mercy’s speech for National Aborigines Day in 1964 (Figure 2). The reporter transformed Mercy’s call for ‘special efforts to ensure that Aborigines have equal opportunities in the future’ into ‘a special effort towards

41 ‘Mrs Margaret Morris, President of the Burnt Bridge–Greenhill Country Women’s Association, addresses the National Aborigines’ Day ceremony in Martin Place, Sydney’, *Dawn*, July 1961: 2.

42 ‘To-day I feel very honoured’, anon. typescript, undated, SLNSW, MLMSS 4265.

43 Margaret Morris, ‘We are a proud people! A stirring address’, *Dawn*, October 1961: 1–2.

44 See, for example, the discussion of assimilation in Kerin 2005.

45 ‘Must break color’, *Daily Mirror*, 14 July 1961: 9.



a better deal for aborigines in the future’, even though the phrase ‘better deal’ does not appear in Mercy’s published speech.<sup>46</sup> The political language of advocacy and demand – the calls made by Morris and Mercy for equality and equal opportunity – are transformed into ameliorative statements about a ‘better deal’ and the putative benevolence of assimilation.



Figure 2: Joyce Mercy speaking at the National Aborigines Day demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney, 10 July 1964.

Source: State Library of New South Wales, Government Printing Office 2–34571.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Aboriginal makes plea for “better deal” at Sydney ceremony’, *SMH*, 11 July 1964: 4; ‘Colourful ceremony in Martin Place’, *Dawn*, July 1964: 1–3.

By 1965, the opportunity that National Aborigines Day provided to Indigenous activists and performers to address non-Indigenous Australians in political discourse, to challenge the government policy of assimilation and to drive the agenda for administrative reform, becomes more evident in press reports. This can be illustrated through the involvement of Charles Perkins in National Aborigines Day events. In the early 1960s, Perkins was a professional soccer player and student at the University of Sydney. He participated in National Aborigines Day in 1962, joining the singers Jimmy Little, Col Hardy and Candy Williams for photographs at the exhibition of Aboriginal art held at the Wales Gallery in Sydney (Figure 3).<sup>47</sup> In 1964, Perkins took an official role, welcoming the guests and the public to the demonstration in Martin Place, and escorting the Lieutenant Governor of New South Wales, Sir Kenneth Street, on an inspection of a guard of honour composed of school boys from Nowra and their hosts from Collaroy Plateau.<sup>48</sup> At National Aborigines Day in 1965, having drawn high-profile attention to racism in regional New South Wales on the Freedom Ride with university students, Perkins was the leading Indigenous male speaker at the demonstration in Martin Place.<sup>49</sup> In his address, Perkins responded to the speeches given by two white politicians: A.D. Bridges, the NSW Minister for Child Welfare, who announced that the recently elected Liberal Government would 'appoint a select committee to inquire into all aspects of Aborigines' conditions'; and Mrs Edna Roper, the Labor Member of the NSW Legislative Council, newly in opposition.<sup>50</sup> *Dawn* records that, in welcoming the government inquiry, Perkins said that 'Aborigines must be consulted about their present position and about the future' and that 'there should be more Aborigines on the Aborigines Welfare Board'.<sup>51</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald* reports that Perkins 'told the gathering in Martin Place that assimilation of Aborigines would be achieved much sooner if more Aborigines were given a voice in their future' and quotes him saying, 'Aborigines are not advancing with the nation's growth' and '[t]he aboriginal person must be consulted about his future and present situation'.<sup>52</sup>

The other Aboriginal people speaking at National Aborigines Day in 1965 were Joyce Mercy who gave the welcome, Jim Hamilton from the One People of Australia League (OPAL) in Queensland, and Kath Walker (Oodgeroo) who was invited to speak 'on behalf of Aboriginal women'.<sup>53</sup> As part of her address, Walker read from *We Are Going*, her first collection of poems (Figure 4).<sup>54</sup> While neither *Dawn*

47 *Dawn*, August 1962: 1. The Wales Gallery was in the Old Herald Building, on the corner of Pitt and Bridge Streets.

48 *Dawn*, July 1964: 1–2.

49 Perkins 1965.

50 'NADOC ceremony speaker tells of select committee', *Dawn*, July 1965: 1.

51 *Dawn*, July 1965: 2.

52 *SMH*, 10 July 1965: 6.

53 'Programme. National Aborigines Day Demonstration. Martin Place, Sydney, 9 July 1965', SLNSW, MLMSS 4057; ABC, TARA 350848.

54 Walker 1964.



nor the *Sydney Morning Herald* report the title of the poem that Walker read, the *Herald* quotes Walker as saying, ‘Australia is our country – let us shape its future together, not apart’, and records that she ‘recited one of her poems, calling for equality, fellowship, and independence for aborigines’.<sup>55</sup> The poem that Walker read is the ‘Aboriginal Charter of Rights’, which includes the lines, ‘Make us equals, not dependents’, ‘We want freedom, not frustration’, ‘Independence, not compliance’, ‘Give us fellowship, not favours’.<sup>56</sup> In reading the ‘Charter’ from the dais, Walker reached beyond her allocated brief. Tasked by NADOC to deliver a ‘short address’ ‘on behalf of Aboriginal women’, Walker took advantage of the occasion to advocate for political change and policy reform in the international language of human rights and self-determination.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 3: Jimmy Little (left) with Col Hardy, Charles Perkins and Candy Williams at the art exhibition for National Aborigines Day, Sydney, 13 July 1962.

Source: State Library of New South Wales, Government Printing Office 2–20003.

55 ‘A lunch-hour crowd of several hundred watched the ceremony to mark National Aborigines’ Day held in Martin Place yesterday’, *SMH*, 10 July 1965: 6.

56 ‘Aboriginal Charter of Rights’, Walker 1964: 9–10; the catalogue record for ABC, TARA 350848, includes the short description, ‘Walker reads Charter’.

57 ‘Programme. National Aborigines Day Demonstration. Martin Place, Sydney, 9 July 1956’, SLNSW, MLMSS 4057.



Figure 4: Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) reading from her book of poetry, *We Are Going*, at the National Aborigines Day demonstration, Martin Place, Sydney, 9 July 1965.

Source: R.L. Stewart, Fairfax, FXJ363191.

The political rhetoric of Walker's poetry was reinforced on that occasion in music performed by a white Australian folk singer. *Dawn* reports that Gary Shearston sang a song by Dougie Young of Wilcannia, probably 'The Land Where the Crow Flies Backwards', and his own setting of one of Walker's poems, almost certainly 'We Are Going'.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Shearston only borrows the title of Walker's poem, adding 'to Freedom' to transform its meaning for a call-and-response protest song, which he modelled on 'We Shall Overcome', the anthem of the American civil rights movement. Shearston based the melody on a chant taught to him by Roy Dadaynga, a Yirrkala man who stayed on in Sydney after touring with the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1963.<sup>59</sup> We now turn to the singers and musicians who performed at National Aborigines Day events in Sydney.

## Indigenous self-representation: Singers and musicians providing entertainment

From the outset, NADOC called on Aboriginal singers and musicians to provide entertainment for National Aborigines Day in Sydney. At the demonstrations in Martin Place, musical items were interposed between the speeches, filling out the program and building a sense of occasion. Singers like Harold Blair, Jimmy Little, Lorna Beulah and others demonstrated musical talents across a broad repertoire including opera, lieder, gospel, country, pop, Indigenous songs and syncretic forms. They popularised Aboriginal people as celebrity-citizens, modelling class mobility and apparently successful assimilation within modern Australia. An observation from Jack Horner, the Secretary of the AAF, describes this dynamic as a movement beyond the paradigm of tradition. He observed the crowd in Martin Place in 1961 being 'taken by surprise at the "popular" style of singing', as if they had been 'vaguely expecting Aboriginal music of some sort'. He recognised the surprise as having 'taught the people in Martin Place that you should expect modern values from NSW Aborigines'.<sup>60</sup> The surprise Horner observes can be seen as an index of white attitudes being 'reconstructed' (as Kath Walker put it), a process brokered by the self-representation of Aboriginal modernity.

Nancy Ellis sang at a public meeting for National Aborigines Day in 1958. The title of the meeting was 'End Australia's Apartheid'. Ellis had moved from Western Australia to study at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1953.<sup>61</sup> This suggests a classical repertoire of operatic arias and lieder, although it is not recorded what she sang at the meeting. The committee also approached Harold Blair, who by that time had established a public profile through radio, recording and concert tours.<sup>62</sup>

58 *Dawn*, July 1965: 2; Walker 2014: 93; NFSA 283503.

59 Andrews 1966; 'Festival of Aboriginal arts', *Daily Mirror*, 9 July 1965: 18; Casey 2011.

60 J. Horner to J. Rogalsky, 15 July 1961; J. Horner to L. H. Cocks, 15 July 1961; SLNSW, MLMSS 4057.

61 Fairfax, FXT310206.

62 Harrison 1975; *Harold* 1994.

Blair would perform at the National Aborigines Day demonstration in 1963, but he was unable to accept the initial invitation to perform in 1958 due to a theatrical engagement in Melbourne.<sup>63</sup> In the discourse of assimilation, Ellis and Blair provided models of ‘successful Aborigines’, which is how Blair was profiled in *One People*, the NADOC booklet for 1961.<sup>64</sup> They were admired for their success in arts and education, and for the way their singing from the classical repertoire appealed to a cultivated audience of white Australians. However, it is important to recognise that Ellis and Blair were also involved in activism. Ellis was active in the AAF, the organisation founded by Faith Bandler and Pearl Gibbs to ‘promote better understanding between aborigines [*sic*] and European Australians’.<sup>65</sup> Blair was a member of the Aborigines’ Welfare Board (1957–59) and became involved in the Aborigines Advancement League and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI).<sup>66</sup>

The involvement of Ellis and Blair in Aboriginal activism points towards another repertoire of songs. ‘Negro spirituals’, popularised in Australia through the minstrel tradition, acquired a political significance in postwar Australia, in part through the recordings of Paul Robeson, which circulated prior to his tour in 1960.<sup>67</sup> Robeson’s career as an African-American singer and political activist in the trade union and civil rights movements in the US was widely reported in Australia. In linking artistic achievement with the politics of civil rights, the figure of Robeson and his repertoire of music informed media reportage on Harold Blair. Newspaper reporters hailed Blair as the ‘Australian Paul Robeson’, in particular, when he sang ‘operatic arias’ for conference delegates at the Australian Council of Trade Unions in 1947.<sup>68</sup> Blair had attended the Grace Church in Harlem, earning some money singing gospel songs in the choir,<sup>69</sup> and a report from the 1966 Easter conference of the FCAATSI records that he sang Negro spirituals, probably from the repertoire popularised by Robeson.<sup>70</sup> Blair’s recordings adhere to the repertoire of opera (Puccini, Mozart) and lieder (Schubert, Schumann), although in 1956 he made a record of *Australian Aboriginal Songs*. Some of these were collected by Dr Harold Lethbridge in the 1920s, having been written by Boss Davey from the Maranoa district in Queensland, and one was composed by Reverend Ronald Trudinger at the Ernabella mission in the South Australia, drawing on Pitjantjatjara chants.<sup>71</sup> Blair recorded the songs

63 Harrison 1975: 196; Blair performed in Noel Coward’s *Nude with Violin* at the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne, from 21 June 1958. AusStage, ‘Nude with Violin’, Event 129601, [www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/event/129601](http://www.ausstage.edu.au/pages/event/129601) (accessed 23 August 2017).

64 Department of Territories 1961a: 27.

65 *SMH*, 11 July 1956: 12; quoted in Horner 2004: 20.

66 Duncan 1993.

67 Curthoys 2010. The concert presented in Melbourne by the Australian Aborigines’ League in 1937 also included ‘African American spirituals’ (Attwood 2003: 73).

68 ‘Native sings to unionists’, *News* (Adelaide), 5 September 1947: 5; ‘Aboriginal tenor “spellbinds” ACTU’, *Daily News* (Perth), 5 September 1947: 10.

69 *Harold* 1994.

70 Andrews 1966.

71 Casey 2008.

in Melbourne, singing in an African-American gospel style, accompanied by a jazz quartet; however, non-Indigenous critics struggled to hear the modernity of Blair's music, insisting on its 'authentic native rhythms and primitive harmonies' instead.<sup>72</sup>

Blair sang at the First National Aborigines Day Revue with an all-Aboriginal cast, at the Anzac Auditorium, Sydney, on 10–11 July 1963. He performed songs from the opera or lieder repertoire, designated 'solos (classical)' in the printed program, and songs from another repertoire simply designated 'solos'.<sup>73</sup> At the demonstration in Martin Place on 12 July, he delivered a spoken address and sang, although no indication of repertoire is given. While songs from the classical repertoire demonstrated Aboriginal achievement for the audience of white Australians, songs from the gospel repertoire were associated with the advocacy of civil rights. For National Aborigines Day in 1963, it is likely that, in addition to classical items, Blair also sang from his repertoire of Aboriginal, spiritual and gospel songs. Blair kept the Aboriginal songs in his repertoire for 15 years or more, from his concert at the New York Town Hall in 1951 to performances during the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956 and an appearance on Melbourne television in 1966.<sup>74</sup>

In the 1960s, the musical repertoire for National Aborigines Day in Sydney was most substantially shaped by Jimmy Little. Little was from Cummeragunja, near Echuca, Victoria, a significant community in the struggle for Aboriginal rights.<sup>75</sup> Little was initially a 'hillbilly singer', singing songs recorded by Nashville stars, before broadening his repertoire to include "'evergreen" Irish songs' like 'Danny Boy' and 'country-gospel' like his biggest hit 'Royal Telephone'.<sup>76</sup> By his own account, Little was a versatile singer: he could also croon the theme songs from Hollywood movies, emulate the smooth soul of Sam Cook, and mix rockabilly hits with 'Aussie bush ballads'.<sup>77</sup> His breakthrough record in 1959, *Ballads with a Beat*, includes the Paul Robeson standard 'Ol' Man River' and a similar song of toil, 'That Lucky Old Sun', popularised by Louis Armstrong and Sam Cooke. Little also performed his own material, including 'Give the Coloured Lad a Chance', a protest song written by his father and recorded in 1958.

Little was the most prominent performer at National Aborigines Day in Sydney, singing at the Martin Place demonstrations in 1960, 1962–64 and in the Sydney Town Hall in 1967 (Figure 5). He was also a catalyst for other Indigenous artists to participate. In 1961, his father, Jimmy Little Senior, a seasoned entertainer himself, performed a 'gum-leaf duet' when his son could not attend.<sup>78</sup> Other

72 Bill Patey, 'On the record', *The Argus*, 20 October 1956: 19, quoted in Casey 2008: 54.

73 SLNSW, MLMSS 4265.

74 Casey 2008: 59; 'Jimmy Hannan huffs and puffs', *The Age*, 19 May 1966: TV Radio Guide 1.

75 *Jimmy Little's Gentle Journey* 2003; Walker 2014: 21.

76 Walker 2014: 22.

77 Walker 2014: 32.

78 'Mr A. McLeod and Mr. Jimmy Little senior, accompanied by Miss Margaret Williams, all of Nowra, play a gum-leaf duet during the National Aborigines' Day ceremonies in Martin Place, Sydney', *Dawn*, July 1961: 3.



Indigenous artists who performed at National Aborigines Day include Candy Williams (1960, 1963), Margaret Williams (1961, 1963), Col Hardy (1961–64), Lorna Beulah (1962–65), Eva Mumbler (1962), Fred Little (1963), Doug Peters (1963) and Heather Pitt (1964). Candy Williams, originally from Cowra, had been pivotal to the development of an Aboriginal music scene in Redfern, which included Jimmy Little and, later, Colin Hardy.<sup>79</sup> Williams and Hardy toured with Little and his brother Fred in ‘Australia’s First All Coloured Show’ in 1962. A similar line-up of artists performed at the First National Aborigines Day Revue, which Little produced and compered for National Aborigines Day in 1963 (Figure 6).<sup>80</sup> For NADOC, this was ‘the first Concert run entirely by Aboriginal people’ and Little handled all the arrangements. For the Aboriginal entertainers, it was an opportunity for celebrity promotion. They designed the ‘special souvenir programme’ to include ‘space for autographs’ rather than advertisements.<sup>81</sup>



Figure 5: Jimmy Little signing autographs at the National Aborigines Day demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney, 13 July 1962.

Source: State Library of New South Wales, Government Printing Office 2–20007.

<sup>79</sup> Walker 2014: 84–85.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes, NSW NADOC meetings, 13 March 1963, 10 April 1963, SLNSW MLMSS 4265.

<sup>81</sup> D. Graham to J. Horner, 8 May 1963, SLNSW, MLMSS 4057.



Figure 6: Jimmy Little and (probably) Candy Williams preparing for a concert for National Aborigines Day, at the Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, 14 July 1963.

Source: SMH Picture by Ton Linsen, Fairfax, FXB247341.

NADOC also adopted mechanisms to ‘discover’ Aboriginal talents beyond Sydney. These mechanisms indicate how NADOC conceived itself as an exercise in public relations with the capacity to create celebrities by bringing individuals to public notice. Colin Hardy, from Walgett, was a finalist in the first talent quest in 1961, judged by John Antill, the composer of *Corroboree*, the concert suite and ballet; the winner was Charles Edwards of Purfleet, near Taree, although the press did not follow his story beyond the event.<sup>82</sup> The second talent quest for National Aborigines Day in 1962 produced two winners: Lorna Beulah and Eva Mumbler. Lorna Beulah, a Wiradjuri woman from Forbes, suited the narrative of discovery. Jack Horner of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship acknowledged NADOC’s achievement in these terms: ‘You have made a really good find in Lorna Beulah, and I hope that in the years to come you will find more rich talent of this quality’.<sup>83</sup> *Dawn* described Beulah as ‘The Girl with the Golden Voice ... who stopped the Martin Place crowds in their tracks’ with her ‘mezzo-soprano voice of amazing range and beauty’.<sup>84</sup> Beulah had studied at the Conservatorium of Music, Parramatta, in 1948, and presented a ‘Celebrity Recital’ at the Town Hall in Forbes in 1952. After marrying, she lived in Toongabbie in western Sydney, and later moved with her husband to Alice Springs.<sup>85</sup> At Martin Place for National Aborigines Day in 1962, by then a mother of two, she sang from the classical and operatic repertoire: ‘Songs My Mother Taught Me’ by Antonín Dvořák, Mimi’s song from *La Bohème* by Puccini and ‘My Hero’ from *The Chocolate Soldier* by Oscar Strauss (Figure 7). Like Nancy Ellis, she was hailed as an Australian Marian Anderson.<sup>86</sup> She won a scholarship to the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, sang on television in Bobby Limb’s *Sound of Music* and toured nationally in *Porgy and Bess*.

By contrast, Eva Mumbler sang ‘Old Rugged Hills of Home’ (Figure 8), one of four songs composed by Grace O’Clerkin, which Mumbler had recorded as the duo Olive and Eva in 1955. Olive McGuinness and Eva Bell (later Mumbler) were associates of Candy Williams and performers in Redfern. According to Clinton Walker, the songs they recorded – ‘Old Rugged Hills’ with ‘Rhythm of the Corroboree’ and ‘When My Homeland is Calling’ with ‘Maranoa Moon’ – ‘became Aboriginal standards, sung by everybody from Harold Blair to Jimmy Little’.<sup>87</sup> On winning the NADOC talent quest, however, Mumbler was not feted with a scholarship and forward bookings like Beulah. As a resident of Sydney, Mumbler’s proximity may have worked against the narrative of ‘discovery’. Her choice of repertoire, with its appeal to Aboriginal country and tradition, may have played a part.

82 ‘National Aborigines’ Day ceremony in Sydney’, *Dawn*, July 1961: 4; see also ‘Purfleet’, *Dawn*, September 1958: 10.

83 J. Horner to J. Rogalsky, 14 August 1962, SLNSW, MLMSS 4057.

84 ‘Nightingale sang in Martin Place’, *Dawn*, August 1962: 3.

85 ‘Personality – Lorna Beulah (Mrs Tom Oliphant)’, *Irabina* 1(7): 4, NLA MS 3677.

86 ‘Exhibition of Aboriginal art at new civic centre’, *Biz*, 25 July 1962: 3.

87 Walker 2014: 84.





Figure 7: Lorna Beulah singing at the National Aborigines Day demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney, 13 July 1962.

Source: State Library of New South Wales, Government Printing Office 2-19997.



Figure 8: Eva Mumbler singing at the National Aborigines Day demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney, 13 July 1962.

Source: State Library of New South Wales, Government Printing Office 2–19991.

The participation of Aboriginal singers and musicians in the NADOC events produced a range of effects. On the one hand, it promoted the idea of ‘successful Aborigines’ as evidence of the government’s success in pursuing the policy of assimilation. On the other hand, it presented Aboriginal people as celebrity-citizens producing commodities of cultural value to the postcolonial Australian nation.

The classical repertoire performed by Harold Blair and Lorna Beulah provided one measure of success. However, the breadth of repertoire, including gospel, spirituals, popular song and country music incorporating Aboriginal forms, indicates the agency that Indigenous singers and musicians exercised in forging musical performances for National Aborigines Day. It also points to their impact on non-Indigenous audiences of the period. The white audiences' 'surprise' at the 'popular' style and 'modern values' of Aboriginal singers and musicians, which Jack Horner noted at National Aborigines Day in 1961, suggests that Aboriginal performers were engaging non-Indigenous audiences in unexpected ways, highlighting their limited understandings of contemporaneous Aboriginal life. Entertainers at National Aborigines Day in 1962 – including talent quest winners Lorna Beulah and Eva Mumbler, Joe Timbery's didjeridoo band and popular vocalists Jimmy Little and Col Hardy – 'captured the attention of more than 3,000 people who at one stage jammed Martin Place stopping all lunch-time traffic'.<sup>88</sup> By exceeding the narrative of assimilation that described them being passively 'accepted' into the mainstream, they became active in transforming interracial relations and sociality.

## Conclusion: Indigenous participation and the public sphere

The first decade of National Aborigines Day is framed by the 'grassroots' political activism that led to the formation of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement in 1958 and the citizenship referendum in 1967. This period encompasses a significant transition in interracial relations as the government-led policy of Indigenous assimilation to white Australia gave way to the increasing visibility of Aboriginal people and their movement into the public sphere. As we have argued, Indigenous activists, writers, singers and musicians played a vital role in this transition, through their participation in National Aborigines Day events, their success and self-promotion as celebrity citizens, and their deployment of activist discourse and Indigenous repertoire.

The focus of National Aborigines Day shifted in Sydney in 1966. The NSW NADOC was flagging in its organisational capacity and the demonstration planned for Martin Place did not go ahead.<sup>89</sup> A concert was held in Hyde Park instead. It was organised by the newly established Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and attracted a smaller crowd of 300 people. The theme was 'Education is the Key' and the Chief Secretary announced funding to 'ensure that all Aboriginal children have the opportunity to study at the secondary school level'.<sup>90</sup> For National Aborigines

88 'Crowds stood still in heart of Sydney', *Dawn*, August 1962: 1, 4.

89 Minutes, NADOC, 18 March 1966, 2 September 1966, NLA MS 3677.

90 "Education the key" – Slogan for National Aborigines Day', *Dawn*, August 1966: 3.

Day in 1967, a conference was held in the Sydney Town Hall, at which the Chief Secretary, the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, as well as 'prominent Aboriginal citizens', addressed an assembled audience of 2,500 secondary school pupils, university students and police cadets.<sup>91</sup> Di Graham of the AAF, who joined NADOC at the time, describes the shift away from putting Aborigines 'up on show for just one day of the year' towards a new 'format', which intended to have an 'educational influence on both black and white Australians'.<sup>92</sup>

Two images illustrate this change in NADOC's first decade of promoting Aboriginal people and their repertoire in the public sphere. In 1959, Aboriginal schoolchildren from La Perouse performed folk dances from a British or European tradition, demonstrating their accomplishment for white dignitaries on the dais. In hindsight, it is an irredeemably assimilationist image.<sup>93</sup> Folk dancing was repeated in 1960 but abandoned after that. By the mid-1960s, the educational perspective on interracial relations focuses on encounters between young people and the repertoire becomes a blend of the popular and Indigenous. An image from National Aborigines Day in 1966 illustrates this shift. It shows Dorothy Saunders, 17, of Greenacre, receiving 'instruction on the didgeridoo' from Michel Baluka, 19, of Milingimbi Island, off the coast of Arnhem Land.<sup>94</sup> The following year, Australian students were assembled in their thousands to hear 'Aboriginal men, women and a school pupil' speak of 'their experiences and their views' and to enjoy well-known entertainers like Jimmy Little perform their latest hits.<sup>95</sup>

By the end of NADOC's first decade, the policy of assimilation was in question. Some Aboriginal people were looking beyond the putatively egalitarian nation-state to other sites of affiliation. Their increasingly transnational identifications mark a departure from NADOC's earlier conception of Aboriginal people as having 'no other community' and 'no other destiny' than that of assimilated Australian citizens.<sup>96</sup> In 1968, National Aborigines Day established connections with other first nations peoples. At a NADOC meeting on 6 December 1967, Charles Perkins moved a motion proposing that the 1968 National Aborigines Day feature a 'panel of experts' including 'a Red Indian, an Eskimo and a Maori' who would be invited to Australia to 'confer with leading Aborigines'.<sup>97</sup> After the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal participation in directing NADOC was acknowledged as a necessity by some non-Indigenous people. In providing funds for National Aborigines

91 'Australian conscience on Aborigines disturbed – Minister', *SMH*, 15 July 1967: 8.

92 Graham 1983: 156.

93 'Joyce Tilbury (left) and Sandra Stewart, pupils of La Perouse Public School, joined hands to lead a folk dance in Martin Place, where their school joined in celebrations to mark National Aborigines' Day', *SMH*, 11 July 1959: 1.

94 'Instruction on the didgeridoo: Before and after', *Dawn*, August 1966: 4.

95 Graham 1983: 156.

96 Rev. V.W. Coombes, *Ministers' Bulletin* 42, May 1959, NAA, A452, 1959/135.

97 Minutes, NADOC, 6 December 1967, SLNSW, MLMSS 4265.

Day's activities in 1969, the Director of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs described the 'revitalised' objectives of National Aborigines Day as 'Aboriginal morale and community awareness'.<sup>98</sup> In 1969, NADOC redrew the original 1956 constitution to include a clause providing for 'substantial Aboriginal participation in the direction of National and State committees'.<sup>99</sup>

As Steve Mickler observes, the 1960s witnessed the loss of government control over information about Aboriginal people in the public sphere.<sup>100</sup> In its first decade, NADOC provided a platform for Aboriginal people to assert survival, broadcast their voices and perform their repertoire. Their presence in the public sphere had a dramatic impact on white subjectivity. The surprise that Jack Horner noted in 1961 was echoed by Ben Davie, a journalist covering National Aborigines Day in 1967. Davie described interviewing an Aboriginal man, Charles French, who made him realise that 'we would never have met, never talked, had this not been National Aborigines Week'.<sup>101</sup> It was this profound systemic racialised disaggregation and the failure to acknowledge Aboriginal futurity that Indigenous participants and performers, in the first decade of National Aborigines Day, were challenging. As Kath Walker put it in the iconic poem she performed in 1965:

We want hope, not racialism,  
 Brotherhood, not ostracism,  
 Black advance, not white ascendance:  
 Make us equals, not dependents.<sup>102</sup>

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# What we were told: Responses to 65,000 years of Aboriginal history

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Billy Griffiths and Lynette Russell

## Introduction

In July 2017, a new date was published from archaeological excavations in western Arnhem Land that pushed the opening chapters of Australian history back to 65,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> It is the latest development in a time revolution that has gripped the nation over the past half century.<sup>2</sup> Stimulated by this new research, the authors of this article, together with geochronologist Bert Roberts, held a forum in Wollongong to explore the ways in which the Australian public have made sense of the deep Aboriginal history of Australia. A distillation of this discussion was published in *The Conversation* in November 2017 with the title, ‘When Did Australia’s Human History Begin?’<sup>3</sup>

The short, 1,500-word essay – written by a historian, an Indigenous studies scholar and a geochronologist – was explicitly interdisciplinary, as, we argued, all attempts to write history on the scale of tens of millennia must be. We sought to move beyond a view of ancient Australia as a traditional and timeless foundation story to explore the ways in which scientists and humanists are engaging with the deep past as a transformative human history. We also stressed the immense variety of societies that have called this continent home, and the particularities of their cultural and ecological histories. We argued that the past 65,000 years cannot be divorced from the turbulent events of the last two centuries, and, equally, that the past 230 years of Australian history should be understood in the context of tens of millennia of human experience on this continent.

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1 Clarkson et al. 2017.

2 Griffiths 2018.

3 Griffiths et al. 2017.

The essay was shared widely by the ABC, *Australian Geographic* and a number of science news outlets; within a few days it had reached over 50,000 readers and attracted over 1,000 comments on various platforms. It has since been republished as a podcast. Many of the comments dredged up an ugly racist undercurrent in Australian society. Despite an initial desire not to engage – to heed the online mantra ‘Don’t read the comments!’ – we quickly realised that, taken together, these responses delivered a rare insight into public thinking about Aboriginal history and deep time. *The Conversation* and other online forums provide an opportunity to ‘take the pulse’ of the public and examine their often deeply held beliefs. Despite the range of views expressed, we were quickly able to identify several recurring themes amidst the hundreds of comments. In this article, we attempt to explore and trace the origins of some of these dominant and enduring myths about Indigenous Australia.

The title of this article is inspired by Henry Reynolds’s memoir, *Why Weren’t We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth about Our History*. Reynolds’s title was an exasperated cry about the silences in Australia surrounding the histories of invasion and dispossession. It was both a personal plea, as he reflected on the ‘great gaps’ in his own Tasmanian education, as well as a passionate appeal to the conscience of all Australians, as Australians.<sup>4</sup> As he wrote in the opening passage:

Why were we never told? Why didn’t we know? I have been asked these questions by many people, over many years, in all parts of Australia – after political meetings, after public forums, lectures, book readings, interviews. It hasn’t mattered where I spoke, what size the audience, what the occasion or actual topic dealt with. Why didn’t we know? Why were we never told?<sup>5</sup>

In 2010, historian Mitchell Rolls wondered whether the questions Reynolds posed were ‘more obfuscatory than revelatory’, suggesting that his overwhelming desire to ‘face up to our history’ had obscured an earlier generation of history-making. Rolls aligned this argument with a broader critique of anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner’s words about ‘silence’ in settler–Aboriginal relations.<sup>6</sup> Reflecting on the scale of public interest in ‘Aboriginal themes’ in the mid-twentieth century, as expressed in a raft of novels, children’s books and anthropological texts, the activism of Aboriginal leaders such as William Cooper, and popular culture magazines like *Walkabout* (1934–72), Rolls joined Tom Griffiths in suggesting that Stanner’s ‘silence’ might better be described as ‘white noise’: in Griffiths’s words, ‘an obscuring and overlaying din of history-making’.<sup>7</sup> The often unconscious or half-conscious nature of denial certainly

4 Atkinson 2009: 351–68; Attwood and Griffiths 2009: 4–9.

5 Reynolds 1999: 1.

6 Rolls 2010: 11, 16. For a reflection on the presentist uses of Stanner’s ideas, see Hinkson 2010.

7 Griffiths 1996: 4–5.

changes the tenor of Reynolds's plea. In response to 'Why weren't we told?', Bain Attwood and Stephen Foster pose the more confronting questions: 'Why didn't we ask?', 'Why didn't we listen?' and 'Why weren't we able to hear?'<sup>8</sup>

This article pushes these important questions further. Instead of exploring absences in national understanding or drawing attention to the structures that hid earlier generations of scholarship, we examine some of the ideas that came to fill the 'great gaps' in knowledge that Reynolds described and that have endured despite the past four decades of research in Aboriginal history. Rather than probing 'The Great Australian Silence', we are interested in the public apprehension of Aboriginal Australia that Stanner described in 1968 as 'our folklore about the Aborigines': that which 'mixes truth, half-truth and untruth into hard little concretions of faith that defy dissolution by better knowledge'.<sup>9</sup> The 'we' in our title is Reynolds's 'we': it speaks to and for a national audience.<sup>10</sup>

The readers who engaged with our online essay asserted their views with striking certainty. The comments privileged sources the authors claimed to have encountered or 'discovered'. They were a chorus of voices repeating what they were familiar with, what they had been told. Drawing on this rich dataset, we seek to begin to unpack this 'folklore', to explore the origins of specific ideas and to ask why certain themes have proven so resilient. Rather than asking 'why weren't we told', this article digs down into 'what we *were* told'.

## The presence of the deep past: Tracking social narratives

The inspiration for our analysis comes in part from Liz Conor's recent book *Skin Deep: Settler Impressions of Aboriginal Women*, in which Conor eloquently illustrates, dissects and debunks a series of recurring tropes and leitmotifs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (particularly women). She traces persistent stories of infanticide and cannibalism over the course of a century and more, interrogating 'the unrigorous standards of past knowledge production' and reflecting on the rigidity of these ideas in the face of contrary evidence.<sup>11</sup> In showing how such myths linger and why, she reminds us of the ongoing need to challenge entrenched ideas and reflect on their origins. In a similar vein, Ian McNiven and Lynette Russell's book *Appropriated Pasts* identifies various tenuous but constant colonialist and racialised themes in the intellectual history of Aboriginal archaeology.<sup>12</sup>

8 Attwood and Foster 2003: 3, as quoted in Rolls 2010: 19.

9 Stanner 1968: 30.

10 Attwood and Griffiths 2009: 40–45.

11 Conor 2016: 238.

12 McNiven and Russell 2005.

There is a rich literature on the range of social narratives various ‘publics’ have constructed about the past. In the 1990s, American historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen collected quantitative and qualitative data from 1,400 Americans to find out what people knew about the past, what was important to them. The survey, published in *The Presence of the Past*, was a significant shift in social research, as it moved the focus away from studies of historical illiteracy towards what they termed ‘popular history making’.<sup>13</sup> In Australia, Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, and Anna Clark have conducted similar large-scale interview projects that seek to understand how Australians relate to their past.<sup>14</sup> This is complemented by the more quantitative efforts of scholars like Murray Goot and Tim Rowse, who studied public attitudes towards Indigenous history in *Divided Nation?*,<sup>15</sup> and Frank Bongiorno and Darren Pennay’s 2018 analysis of data from the Social Research Centre, which asked just over 3,000 Australians to reflect on significant historical events in their lifetimes.<sup>16</sup>

A growing number of studies use social media as a ‘mine’ for data – to help understand audiences, for example, or to track the emergent issues and controversies of a discipline.<sup>17</sup> Of the ‘big data’ approaches, Chiara Bonacchi and colleagues’ recent work sets the standard for popular understandings of heritage. Their ‘systematic study of public perceptions’, based on 1.4 million posts, comments and replies, examined the ways in which ideas and materials from the ancient world were mobilised in contemporary debates surrounding Brexit.<sup>18</sup> Other studies approach user comments at a more intimate level, exploring these forums as sites of remembrance and even analysing how comments shape readers’ perceptions of an article.<sup>19</sup> Anna Clark employs such a qualitative approach in her book *Private Lives, Public History*, a sustained reflection on the historical engagement of so-called ‘ordinary’ Australian citizens.<sup>20</sup> Drawing upon a carefully curated ‘oral historiography’ from 100 Australians from across the country, as well as anonymous comments on internet blogs and ‘letters to the editor’, Clark explores how Australians *make sense* of their past as a site of connection, contestation and commemoration. In this article, we use the same approach to draw on the more than 1,000 ‘responses’ to our online essay to examine how Australians make sense of Aboriginal history and deep time. The simplicity of our online essay – its broad question and overview structure – has allowed us to use the comments as a gauge of wider public engagement.

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13 Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998.

14 Ashton and Hamilton 2010; Clark 2016.

15 Goot and Rowse 2007.

16 Bongiorno and Pennay 2018.

17 Marwick 2013; Newman 2017.

18 Bonacchi, Altaweel and Krzyzanska 2018.

19 Yadlin-Segal 2017; Jahng 2018.

20 Clark 2016.

The responses we analyse were published in the comments section of *The Conversation* and on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. *The Conversation* has an audience of over 5 million monthly users, 85 per cent of whom have an undergraduate degree or higher. Many articles inspire vigorous debate with over 20 per cent of the readers commenting on at least one article.<sup>21</sup> Although some of the responses to our paper were later moderated and removed, we as the authors were able to see all comments. The republication of the online essay – in particular its appearance on the ABC website under the headline ‘A Story of Rupture and Resilience’ – exposed our words to a much wider audience, stimulating a range of responses that we tracked online using Twitter and Facebook. For our analysis, the names of the commenters have been removed, and, in light of the considerable repetition, we have chosen the most representative comments. Some of the authors identified themselves as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Where the commenter did not offer an identifier, we have assumed that they were non-Indigenous. We have also slightly edited comments to remove repeated words and to correct spelling mistakes. Nothing has been altered that might change the commenters’ intended meaning.

We have synthesised the comments into five main themes:

1. The ‘other’ first Australians: ‘Pygmy people were here first’
2. Wilderness and fire: ‘Whitefella Dreamings of a terra nullius’
3. The march of progress: ‘Not moved beyond a bark lean-to’
4. A harmonious existence: ‘A society that had no need to change’
5. A hunger for history: ‘Tell me some stories of ice age Australia!’

We deliberately avoided using the contentious term ‘prehistory’ in our online essay, as it carries unhelpful baggage and creates a divide between history and prehistory that both privileges documents and precludes writing a synthetic integrated history. As scholars and teachers, we strive to work in an anti-colonial, anti-racist manner to create a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Australia’s past and cross-cultural relations. Married to this has been our ongoing commitment to true interdisciplinarity, working across HASS and STEM fields.<sup>22</sup> But our broad interpretation of History was not always greeted with enthusiasm by readers. As one commenter responded:

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21 *The Conversation*, ‘Our audience’, [theconversation.com/au/audience](http://theconversation.com/au/audience) (accessed 9 April 2018).

22 Over the past decade much has been made of the differences and connections between the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM) as discrete research areas. Significant work is now taking place to bring these two areas together through collaboration and a better understanding of what can be achieved in the cross-disciplinary space. Anti-racist work that has been important includes Kowal 2015 and Land 2015.

History begins when people started to write things down. Before that it's prehistory. Surely [the authors] are aware of that universal usage. Are they just incorrect? Or postmodern? Or do they feel there is some kind of stigma attached to the term prehistory?

Another commenter appreciated what we were trying to achieve by blurring these lines:

I think the article inherently raises the contemporary understanding of a break between history and prehistory which is a reasonable undertaking. Categories of knowledge aren't static; understanding changes. The belief that history, dependent on the written record, surpasses the study of 'prehistory' because the latter is so much more obviously subject to interpretative inquiry, obscures the interpretive nature of history itself.

If Australians are to engage with the deep past as a transformative human history, they need to overcome certain myths about Aboriginal history and people's lives in ancient Australia. In the following sections, we interrogate the origins of five recurring themes and reflect on why certain ideas persist in the face of contrary evidence.

## The 'other' first Australians: 'Pygmy people were here first'

A significant number of the responses to our essay referred to 'rumours of an earlier race [that was] displaced by the Aboriginals'. Some commenters referred to this race as the 'Australian Pygmy Tribe'; others argued that Aboriginal Tasmanians were the first people to arrive in Australia and that they had been killed off on the mainland and driven to the far south of the continent. It is relatively easy to trace the origins of these nuggets of misinformation back to nineteenth-century thinkers.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as one of the responses noted, it 'is interesting to see how much comment reflects controversies of the last two hundred years'.

Contemplating the origins of Indigenous Australians has a long history. In 1870, English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley speculated that there was a close relationship with the people of South Asia, as they share the 'chief characteristics' of the 'so-called hill-tribes who inhabit the interior of the Dekhan, in Hindostan'.<sup>24</sup> These ideas profoundly influenced the American physical anthropologist Joseph Birdsell, who developed a model of migration in the 1930s that became known as the 'trihybrid' theory.<sup>25</sup> Birdsell suggested that there were three distinct waves of

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23 For more detailed analysis see McNiven and Russell 2005; Prentis 1995.

24 Huxley 1870: 406.

25 Birdsell 1967; McNiven and Russell 2005: 90–91; Prentis 1995: 79–91.

migration into Australia, with an early group of ‘Oceanic negritos’ coming from Southeast Asia, followed by the arrival of people from Japan, and a later group from India. Based primarily on appearances – or ‘variations’ – Birdsell argued that modern Aboriginal peoples were an amalgam of these three waves. He attributed the origins of the Tasmanians, in particular, to the first and second waves of migration. There is no skeletal or material evidence to support the ‘trihybrid’ model and, since the discoveries of ancient *Homo sapiens* burials at Lake Mungo in 1968, physical anthropologists have found a wealth of evidence that contradicts it.<sup>26</sup>

In 1999, however, the ‘trihybrid’ model was revived by geneticists Alan Redd and Mark Stoneking in an article in *The American Journal of Human Genetics*.<sup>27</sup> Redd and Stoneking paired evidence of a maternal genetic connection between Australia and India with apparent changes in the archaeological record about 4,000 years ago to suggest a recent wave of migration from India to Australia, much as Birdsell had proposed. More recent genetic studies have discredited Redd and Stoneking’s hypothesis.<sup>28</sup> Although there was trade with the outside world in the past few millennia,<sup>29</sup> which brought, importantly, the dingo to Australian shores, there are no signs of the kinds of sweeping gene flow from India to Australia that Redd and Stoneking describe. The evidence currently suggests that Australia was peopled once, and only once, by a single group of *Homo sapiens* who voyaged to this continent at least 65,000 years ago.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Birdsell’s hypothesis continues to have traction, and Redd and Stoneking’s article was one of the few pieces of academic research that was invoked in the responses to our essay, with one commenter writing a detailed post about the ‘Dravidian DNA in the modern Aboriginal genome’.

The other main cause for the resuscitation of the ‘trihybrid’ model was a 2002 article in *Quadrant* by Keith Windschuttle and Tim Gillin titled ‘The Extinction of the Australian Pygmies’. The authors revisited the Birdsell hypothesis and mounted an attack on the scholars who had thoroughly debunked it. They argued that ‘Aboriginal activists and their white supporters’ had suppressed information about ‘the Australian pygmies’ because it posed an inconvenient truth to their political movement.<sup>31</sup> ‘In reality,’ Michael Westaway and Peter Hiscock responded in 2005, ‘archaeologists have abandoned Birdsell’s 70-year-old model because it is no longer sustained by the abundant archaeological evidence.’<sup>32</sup>

26 See, for example, Pardoe et al. 1991; Westaway and Hiscock 2005.

27 Redd and Stoneking 1999: 808–28.

28 Bergström et al. 2016: 809–813; Nagle et al. 2017: 43041.

29 Paterson 2011.

30 Clarkson et al. 2017: 306–10; Griffiths 2018: 279–80.

31 Windschuttle and Gillin 2002: 7.

32 Westaway and Hiscock 2005: 142.

So why do ideas of an earlier race – or a later usurping race – continue to persist in the popular arena? As McNiven and Russell have argued, the stubborn resilience of the trihybrid model, particularly its most recent iterations, appears to be tied to colonialism and anxiety around native title.<sup>33</sup> In short, in arguing for multiple waves of migration by different ‘racial groups’, which then usurped the previous groups, these theories reduce the magnitude of the dispossession wrought by Europeans. We all become ‘invaders’; there are no ‘first peoples’, only second- and third-wave Australians.

Shoshanna Grounds and Anne Ross reached similar conclusions in their analysis of how the ‘trihybrid’ model was mobilised in the 1997 One Nation Party booklet, *Pauline Hanson: The Truth*.<sup>34</sup> A more recent example can be found in Senator David Leyonhjelm’s attempts to stave off constitutional recognition in 2015. When asked about recognising the ‘first Australians’ in a constitutional preamble, Leyonhjelm sought to create doubt over whether Indigenous Australians really had been ‘first’. ‘There may have been people in Australia prior to the Aborigines,’ he said. ‘If there is any doubt at all, why would you put history in the Constitution?’<sup>35</sup> The trihybrid origin debates were similarly invoked by commenters on our online essay to delegitimise contemporary Aboriginal peoples’ claims. The conspiratorial tone of Windschuttle and Gillin’s article also featured in the discussions about ancient Australia.<sup>36</sup> As one person commented on our article:

When Mr and Mrs Mungo were discovered, another skeleton was also located, and, yet, kept quiet!! Why?? ... these discoveries have been located at Mungo but due to Political Correctness have been ‘hushed up’ ... [if the] Truth would come out ... we all could grow with this knowledge.

The belief in conspiracies, particularly ‘science-based’ conspiracies, appears to be a consequence of limited scientific literacy often coupled with a sense of social dislocation. Access to communities of like-minded people has grown with the internet, and in particular social media, creating hubs of mutually reinforced misinformation.<sup>37</sup>

Australia’s deep antiquity and the colonisation of the continent by Aboriginal peoples remain poorly understood, as does the evolving and uncertain nature of scientific knowledge. The inherent racism of the colonial project, and the assumed

33 McNiven and Russell 2005: 90–99, 124.

34 Grounds and Ross 2010.

35 Louise Yaxley, ‘Senator David Leyonhjelm questions if Aboriginals were first occupants of Australia; says it would be “bizarre” to put into constitution’, ABC News, [www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-25/david-leyonhjelm-raises-doubts-over-aboriginal-occupants/6572704](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-25/david-leyonhjelm-raises-doubts-over-aboriginal-occupants/6572704) (accessed 12 March 2018).

36 Jordan and Bosco 2018.

37 Bessi et al. 2015.



superiority of Western culture was writ large across many of the essays' comments. As a tool for understanding the state of race relations and the possibilities for some form of reconciliation, many of the responses suggest that we have a long way to go.

## Wilderness and fire: 'Whitefella Dreamings of a *terra nullius*'

Our online essay did not refer to Aboriginal burning practices – it did not even include the words 'wilderness' or 'fire'. Yet these terms appeared in over 100 responses to our essay. Surprisingly, considering the racist undertones of other comments, very few commenters questioned that Aboriginal people had used fire to manage and manipulate their landscape; this was largely accepted as a basic fact of Aboriginal history. Instead, the respondents were interested in exploring how the insights of 'fire-stick farming' might be useful in contemporary initiatives to protect and manage the Australian environment. They were asking how, not if, Aboriginal fire had shaped the environment. Did fire have a part to play in the extinction of the megafauna? Is the absence of traditional burning regimes the cause of recent 'widespread, high intensity wildfires'?

Although Aboriginal mastery of fire was clear to many settlers and explorers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that ecologists, geographers and archaeologists realised the role it had played in creating and maintaining certain vegetation patterns.<sup>38</sup> In 1968, drawing upon the emerging evidence of Aboriginal antiquity, as well as the insights of contemporary burning regimes, archaeologist Rhys Jones and palaeontologist Duncan Merrilees independently suggested that Aboriginal burning had played a profound role in shaping Australia's flora and fauna over millennia.<sup>39</sup> The spark of insight captured by Jones's phrase 'fire-stick farming' has been stoked and tended by many scholars over the intervening decades, including Sylvia Hallam's pioneering regional study in south-western Australia, *Fire and Hearth*, Stephen Pyne's 'fire history of Australia', *Burning Bush*, and Bill Gammage's recent continental history, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*.<sup>40</sup> The responses to our essay suggested that this rich history of scholarship has succeeded in entering the public sphere. Almost all of the comments accepted that Aboriginal burning regimes had transformed the Australian environment to some degree. Aboriginal history is inextricably tied to fire history in the minds of these respondents, even where fire is not mentioned in the story under discussion.

38 Griffiths 2018.

39 Jones 1968; Merrilees 1968.

40 Jones 1969; Hallam 1975; Pyne 1991; Gammage 2011.

Many commenters used our essay to challenge the philosophies and policies of contemporary conservation bodies. They criticised the popular usage of phrases such as ‘wilderness’ and ‘pristine forests’ for implying that parts of the Australian landscape had been unoccupied or uncultivated. As one respondent exclaimed: ‘National Parks are whitefella Dreamings of a *terra nullius*’. Several comments reflected on the tensions within the environmentalist movement that accompanied the recognition of Aboriginal land management strategies. As one commenter argued:

the idea that simply reserving areas we think are natural, and leaving them un-managed, will result in bio-diverse climax ecosystems is naive at best, and could even be viewed as racist in terms of its ignorance of 65,000 years of Aboriginal land management.

But others were more cautious in their remarks, highlighting, for example, the alliance between the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Country Needs People campaign as evidence of a recent ‘rapprochement between conservationists and Aboriginal peoples’.<sup>41</sup> Many comments addressed attempts to reintroduce Aboriginal burning practices across Australia, with some wondering if these contemporary regimes were ‘doing more harm than good’.<sup>42</sup> After an ardent discussion about contemporary bushfire policy, one commenter reflected on the gradual ‘evolution’ they were observing in the debate: ‘even environmentalists’ were beginning to see the Australian landscape as a ‘created’ environment. We could track a similar ‘evolution’ in public understanding in the comments on our essay.

While the majority of commenters accepted the concept of ‘fire-stick farming’, they largely referred to it as singular practice with uniform effects. There was little appreciation of the variety of ways in which burning has shaped the landscape and there was no discussion about how burning regimes have changed over millennia. This is perhaps a reflection of the limitations of the most cited source in the comments, Bill Gammage’s *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, which both telescopes the long history of Aboriginal burning into the year 1788 and homogenises the practices of hundreds of different Aboriginal nations into a single, universal system. The implications of Aboriginal burning were dramatic, but also varied and complex.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the influence of Gammage’s work is undeniable, and the relative nuance in this debate is a tribute to his public outreach. A recurring refrain in the responses was: ‘Have you read Bill Gammage?’

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41 For more on the idea of ‘green-black’ alliances, see Vincent and Neale 2016.

42 Lehman 2001: 308–19; Young and Ross 1994: 184–97; Bird et al. 2005: 443–64; Neale 2018.

43 There are many critiques of Gammage’s thesis. See, for example, Karskens 2018; Hiscock 2014.

## The march of progress: ‘Not moved beyond a bark lean-to’

Another theme that emerges in the comments is the very particular idea of ‘progress’: a linear understanding of ‘intellectual advancement and modernisation’ that can be measured by Western concepts such as agriculture, architecture and industry. As one commenter reflected: ‘The older the Aboriginal race is discovered to be the more cogently poignant it becomes that their civilization has not moved beyond a bark lean-to.’ The comments almost unanimously placed value judgements on different types of subsistence strategies and social organisation, with one respondent lamenting that it would be ‘rather sad if the peoples of the world were still hunter gatherers’.

Many commenters railed against this dismissal of Aboriginal culture as ‘stagnating’ at the ‘bark lean-to’, with dozens of people referencing and repeating arguments from Bruce Pascoe’s recent book *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?*. Pascoe, an Aboriginal writer, scholar and storyteller, has made a passionate case for Indigenous societies to be viewed through the lens of ‘agriculture’. In his attempt to contest the negative racial attitudes that remain prevalent in Australian society, and to restore ‘Aboriginal pride in the past’, he has sought to ‘re-classify’ the first Australians as farmers and horticulturalists. He draws together the immense ethnographic evidence of Aboriginal land management, burning, tilling, irrigating, harvesting, baking and construction to argue ‘that Aboriginals did build houses, did cultivate and irrigate crops, did sew clothes and were not hapless wanderers across the soil, mere hunter-gatherers’.<sup>44</sup>

But Pascoe, like the commenters who invoke his research, is equally captivated by the enduring myth of progress – articulated as the move from foragers to farmers – and *Dark Emu* explicitly privileges the language of ‘agriculture’ above all else. Such an assumption demands interrogation. What is ‘mere’ about a hunter-gatherer way of life? What does the language of ‘progress’ do to our understanding of change and dynamism? Is it necessary to turn to Eurocentric language and ideas to acknowledge the richness and complexity of Indigenous economies? Is it meaningful to define ‘agriculture’ as a stable category that transcends space and time?

In Australian archaeology many of these questions have been teased out in the debates over ‘intensification’: a theoretical mechanism employed and expanded by Harry Lourandos to explain the variety of social and economic changes in Australia over recent millennia.<sup>45</sup> When Lourandos began working on Aboriginal sites in

<sup>44</sup> Pascoe 2014: 156.

<sup>45</sup> Lourandos 1983. British archaeologist Barbara Bender originally outlined the concept of ‘intensification’ in her 1978 article, ‘Gatherer-hunter to farmer: A social perspective’.

western Victoria, he found his assumptions about Aboriginal society challenged by the presence of vast eel traps and holding ponds in the landscape and ethnohistoric descriptions of large-scale gatherings to process foods at sites with clusters of huts made of wood, stone and clay. As he marvelled in 1987, ‘The people of southwestern Victoria and their neighbours were more numerous, more sedentary and far more ingenious than we ever imagined’.<sup>46</sup> But Lourandos was hesitant to use the label ‘agriculturalist’ to explain the phenomena he was observing. Indeed, by drawing on the language of ‘intensification’, he hoped to move beyond labels, which create arbitrary boundaries, to explore the ‘grey areas’ in between. In his own work, he acknowledged that the term ‘hunter-gatherer’ was a colonial artefact, but he also worked with it and sought to enlarge our understanding of the societies it represents. He titled his book-length history of Aboriginal Australia *Continent of Hunter-Gatherers*.<sup>47</sup> ‘The main question was no longer “Why or why not agriculture?”’ he argued in 1981, ‘but “Why change?”’<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps the reason such Western parallels continue, and why Pascoe’s arguments have such traction, is because of the sheer scale of the ‘gaps’ in public knowledge about Aboriginal societies prior to the arrival of Europeans. When there is such historical illiteracy, there is little room for nuance. We see an example of this in the debates in the comments over Indigenous architecture. When commenters argued that Aboriginal societies ‘lived in stone houses, thatched houses up north, or spinifex domes’, their responses were greeted with outright denial. As one person erroneously asserted: ‘Letters from the first settlers make no mention of these “stone houses”’. Even the people who stepped in to defend the complexity of Indigenous societies conformed to the old metrics of progress. As one commenter wrote, ‘Many First Nations’ Peoples were as smart as or were smarter than the average white person.’

We are wary of using Western terms to argue for the significance of Indigenous heritage for it risks repeating antiquated colonial assumptions about evolutionary hierarchies, whereby every society is on a ladder climbing towards the ultimate destination of agriculture and industry. It is important to remember that there is no inherent value to a farming or a foraging way of life. Communities have shifted between these categories and moved back and forth as suited their needs. Neither signifies greater sophistication and both are amorphous categories better understood on a spectrum of economic activity. The boundaries between them are blurred. Indeed, there is growing body of literature that emphasises the losses as well as the gains in the transition to agriculture.<sup>49</sup>

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46 Lourandos 1987: 307.

47 Lourandos 2010: 75–77; Lourandos 1997.

48 Lourandos 1981: 536.

49 For a recent popular distillation see, for example, Harari 2014: 87–180.

## A harmonious existence: 'A society that had no need to change'

In our online essay, one of the authors (Russell) published the results of a small-scale survey of 35 Indigenous friends and colleagues of varying ages, genders and backgrounds who were asked for their thoughts on Australia's deep history. Many of the responses were statements of cultural affirmation ('we have always been here'), while others viewed the long Aboriginal history on this continent through the lens of continuity, taking pride in being members of 'the oldest living population in the world' and 'the world's oldest continuing culture'. Terms like 'the oldest living culture' have long been regarded by Russell as deeply problematic.<sup>50</sup> Embedded within these concepts is the sense of Aboriginal culture as both unchanging and stagnant. The notion of the 'oldest living culture' also conveys an unchecked nostalgia, indeed romantic ideal, for a harmonious society with no outside pressure to change. As an expression of identity, it remains a powerful statement. But when others uncritically repeat such statements as historical fact, they risk suggesting that Aboriginal culture has been frozen in time. It is easy to hear echoes of the language of past cultural evolutionists, who believed, in Robert Pulleine's infamous words, that Aboriginal people were 'an unchanging people, living in an unchanging environment'.<sup>51</sup>

The deep antiquity of Australia posed a challenge for some of the Aboriginal respondents to our essay, as they fundamentally rejected the notion of putting a date to their ancestors' presence on this continent; rather, they asserted, they have been here forever. We accept such an ontology. It is a way of seeing and interacting with the past that need not be contested. There is another way of looking at it, which a number of the respondents to Russell's survey advocated: that 65,000 years is forever. Others suggested that on arriving here some 65,000 years ago, their ancestors became Aboriginal, and therefore Aboriginal people have always been here.

Many non-Indigenous commenters felt uneasy about such expressions of cultural identity. As one person wrote:

Describing something as 'always being here' is giving ownership and power to the person who says it – but unjustifiably, as it's a verbal history. I came here when I was 7 but I have 'always been here' for as long as I remember.

Here we see a lack of understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and a dismissal of the historicity of oral traditions and oral history. In contrast, dates emerging from archaeological sites were privileged as sources of historical evidence; indeed, they were celebrated with the mentality that 'older is better'. As one Aboriginal commenter wrote:

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<sup>50</sup> Russell 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Pulleine 1928: 310.

Will we eventually see a figure of 100,000 years? Perhaps ... And that is a good thing, for whatever the precise findings of science, the fact remains that the Indigenous people of Australia are Aborigines i.e. native to this land, and their life and culture is a deeply embedded part of the land, having evolved over an incredibly long period of time.

Other comments suggested that the date 65,000 years is simply a matter of ‘science ... catching up with Aboriginal historical fact’. Arguably, the deep anxiety that the term ‘always been here’ generates will remain, as Ian McNiven has observed, as long as Australia remains unreconciled and sovereignty issues unacknowledged.<sup>52</sup>

The subset of the comments we have classified as ‘A harmonious existence’ also argued for an Australian exceptionalism. They contended that Australia is ‘unique’ in that Aboriginal peoples had ‘evolved to live in relative harmony with each other and their environment’. One commenter suggested that ‘No other group of humanity has existed in relative harmony with each other and their land for as long’. Another invoked archaeologist Josephine Flood’s work to describe Aboriginal peoples as being the ‘aristocrats of the stone age’: a people who were ‘perfectly adapted’ to their environment, ‘without the threat of war and invasion’ and who had ‘achieved a society that had no need to change until Europeans arrived’. The ‘noble savage’ of the eighteenth century is not far from these musings.<sup>53</sup> The notion of living in harmony and balance with each other and the land also resonates with the ‘new age’ movement found in popular texts such as Robert Lawlor’s academically decried *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*.<sup>54</sup>

There is a fine line separating such visions of harmony and the statements about a continuous culture. Taken together, they suggest a failure to understand that over the course of 65,000 or more years the cultures (plural) did change. As Russell has observed, at first contact there were hundreds of different cultural groups and over 200 language groups, and it was the attempts to erase this diversity of Indigenous cultures that has led to depictions of an ‘essentialised, spatially homogenous Aboriginal culture’.<sup>55</sup> This spatial homogeneity is all too easily read as chronological stasis. As well as cultural transformations, these societies endured great environmental and climatic changes. While people have lived in Australia, volcanoes have erupted, dunefields have formed, glaciers have melted and sea levels have risen about 125 metres, transforming Lake Carpentaria into a gulf and the Bassian Plain into a strait. It is naive to suggest that Aboriginal cultures would remain stagnant across tens of millennia. When we examine the public’s perception on this topic, it becomes clear that there remain significant gaps in understanding

52 McNiven 2011: 41.

53 McGregor 1997.

54 Lawlor 1991. Although this book sits firmly in what we would call the ‘new age’ genre, remarkably, it has been cited by over 260 academic writers.

55 Russell 2001: 3.

and a steadfast desire to see an idealised past, expressed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous commenters. This response, however, was not universal. As one Aboriginal respondent wrote:

We've watched Tasmania become an island ... The sea levels [rose and a] great flood [took] much of our old areas of living ... And created new ones ... The evidence is everywhere ... We have cultural ways of keeping track of many of this planet's fluctuating systems.

Here we see an Aboriginal man taking pride in the transformative history of his people – a story of rupture and resilience.

## A hunger for history: 'Tell me some stories of ice age Australia!'

In 2009, Henry Reynolds looked back over his career and suggested that Australian society had entered 'a new era' in regards to Indigenous affairs:

The numerous reports about the attitudes of secondary school students and their lack of interest, if not disdain, for Aboriginal history points in the same direction. In books, articles and speeches I was mainly addressing an audience who felt, with both reason and concern, that they had not been told the true story of Australian history. It would seem that many young people would rather choose not to know. The inescapable conclusion is that my histories have themselves become part of history, addressing concerns that are now losing both relevance and resonance. In moments of pessimism, I wonder if my work was for one season only and perhaps the weather has changed?<sup>56</sup>

While it may seem that we emerge from analysing these comments with a similar sense of pessimism, our experience has been different to Reynolds's. Although there is much misinformation and ignorance about Aboriginal history and deep time, there is also an undeniable hunger for history. Far from 'choosing not to know', many readers were eager to know *more*. Indeed, several comments ended by explicitly asking for more information: 'Can you point me to a published survey?'

The five sources most readily invoked were (in order of highest to lowest): Wikipedia, Bruce Pascoe, Bill Gammage, Henry Reynolds and Josephine Flood. Putting Wikipedia to one side, these authors are similar in that their major works are book-length, continental studies addressed to a wider *Australian* audience. Their commitment to public outreach is clear in their prose, with the books either acting as an 'explainer' (Flood) or prosecuting an argument about *national* understanding (Pascoe, Gammage, Reynolds). There were several comments that referred to the

56 Reynolds 2009: 383.

profound role that Reynolds in particular had played in opening their eyes to Aboriginal history. As one commenter wrote: 'It was only after Reynolds published his work that I realized that the innocent playgrounds of my youth in the bush in fact had been killing fields for Aboriginal people'. Many lamented how much has been lost through the ravages of dispossession and expressed frustration at the challenges of interpreting the deep past:

The true history of our continent will remain forever unknown to us, prior to European settlement we have only fragments of knowledge hinting at what might have been. It is almost like trying to read a book where you are only allowed to look at every twentieth page.

Here we see awareness that there will always be gaps in knowledge about Indigenous Australia, and that writing history at the scale of millennia is full of uncertainty. But this was accompanied by a desire to fill those gaps. As one commenter exclaimed: 'tell me some stories of ice age Australia!' Other commenters craved new ways of accessing the deep past. As one exchange in the comments put it:

The story needs a good director from Netflix perhaps.  
Dude, that would be the ultimate, a doco series on Netflix.

The gradual awakening about Aboriginal history, in large parts fostered in the pages of this journal, is still underway.<sup>57</sup> Many Australians are still coming to terms with the violence of dispossession. The question on their lips remains, 'Why weren't we told?' But the emerging understanding of the deep past is inspiring different questions and opening another avenue for Australians to engage with Aboriginal history: an excitement about the technoscience that allows us to see events, trends and people in ancient Australia. Jeffrey Toobin has described public enthusiasm about forensic techniques in America as the 'CSI effect'; there is a similar sense of wonderment at the 'cool science' that enables history-making at the scale of tens of millennia.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the comments, alongside the strains of racism, there is clear admiration for the ingenuity of the societies that have inhabited this continent over tens of millennia and the ways in which they made – and continue to make – this land their own. Many of the comment writers felt a sense of national pride by engaging with this history, especially when comparing it with the more recent history of the so-called 'Old World' of Europe. One non-Indigenous commenter expressed a longing to have a personal link with this history: 'I am envious of the ancient connection First Nations people have to this land'. The 'young' nation, a footnote to empire, has become a continent with an ancient heritage.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Attwood 2012.

58 Toobin 2007: 31; Kohlenberger 2015: 69.

59 Attwood 1996; Byrne 1998; Griffiths 2018.



In 2009, Reynolds reflected that ‘the weather had changed’ and that his longstanding concerns about Aboriginal history were ‘losing both relevance and resonance’ in the wake of ‘the seemingly contradictory, co-eval developments of the Prime Ministerial apology and the continuing intervention in the Northern Territory’. Perhaps now, in post-Uluru Statement Australia, the weather is changing again.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The comments we analysed in this article were captured, rather than collected or curated. They provide a limited but revealing insight into public thinking about Aboriginal history and deep time. The clear discomfort many commenters expressed can be related, we argue, to perceptions of legitimacy and the gulf of understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This supports Ian McNiven’s conclusion:

as long as Australian society struggles to comprehend and acknowledge Aboriginal Native Title rights, archaeology will continue to be manipulated by those seeking to undermine Aboriginal authenticity and legitimacy of connections to land and heritage.<sup>61</sup>

The enduring challenge, it seems, is how to disseminate knowledge about this continent’s deep history and dispel public misconceptions about ancient Australia. In 1999, Richard Mackay and Grace Karskens argued for the importance of ‘storytelling’ in communicating archaeological finds.<sup>62</sup> Archaeologist Stephen Nichols also highlights the role of television and the school education system in shaping social narratives about the past. Together with Jonathan Prangnell and Michael Haslam, Nichols urges his peers in archaeology to adopt an ‘expanded vision of a socially active and politically engaged public archaeology’.<sup>63</sup> One example of this is the highly successful, award-winning ABC series *First Footprints* (2013), which visualised and described in documentary form the archaeology of Indigenous Australia.<sup>64</sup> Many archaeologists and Indigenous communities collaborated in the four-part series, which married dramatic narratives with photo-realist digital animation to bring the deep past to life. It is as close as scholars have come to the ‘Netflix series on ancient Australia’ called for in the comments. However, even in a diversified and increasingly digital media landscape, our study suggests that books continue to play a powerful role in shaping public debate. We are far from alone

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60 For commentary on this shift, see, for example, McKenna 2018.

61 McNiven 2011: 41.

62 Mackay and Karskens 1999: 110.

63 Nichols et al. 2005: 79; Nichols 2006.

64 Dean 2013.

in observing 'the staying power of the old-fashioned codex'. As Robert Darnton's work on the history of communication demonstrates, new media generally do not displace the old, but rather 'enlarge and enrich the information landscape'.<sup>65</sup>

As we noted in our original article, telling the epic story of Australia's past cannot be managed by one discipline alone. To expand the public's understanding, historians and archaeologists need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that, crucially, involves Indigenous voices. Only then can the deep history of this continent be told with the nuance, subtlety and magnitude it deserves, and perhaps it might shift some of the more entrenched and erroneous views about the past.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Ian J. McNiven, Ingereth Macfarlane and two anonymous referees for their comments, as well as Bert Roberts, our co-author on the original essay.

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65 Darnton 2009: xiv.

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# A corroboree for the Countess of Kintore: Enlivening histories through objects

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Gaye Sculthorpe

This paper discusses a corroboree performed in Darwin in 1893 to illustrate the potential of British ethnographic collections for researching overlooked historical events. The performance was brought to light after a collection of Aboriginal artefacts used in it was noted and examined by the author in the collections of Marischal Museum, Aberdeen, in 2016. The description of the performance and associated objects extends understanding of the nature of cross-cultural engagements in late nineteenth-century Darwin and raises museological questions about methodologies for engaging Aboriginal people in the research and interpretation of historic objects.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2015, I have been regularly visiting regional museums in Great Britain and Ireland to identify significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander items in their collections and to assist local curators document these. Such collections remain relatively unknown despite surveys undertaken and the number of researchers who have examined these collections over many decades.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, Philip Jones estimated that there were perhaps 30–40,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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1 Readers are warned that this paper contains quotes from nineteenth-century newspaper accounts that include offensive terms used to refer to Aboriginal people in that era. A previous version of this paper was delivered as the 2017 Anthony Forge Memorial Lecture at The Australian National University. I would like to thank Ingereth Macfarlane as editor of the journal and the anonymous referees for their comments. Thanks also to Philip Jones of the South Australian Museum in accessing the diary of Edward Stirling; Louise Wilkie and Neil Curtis for assistance during my visit to view the collection at Marischal Museum; and Kirsty Kernohan for discussions regarding the Kintore archives.

2 Researchers who have published on Aboriginal and Torres Strait material in UK collections include Plomley 1961, 1964; McBryde 1978; Moore 1984; Morphy and Edwards 1988; Megaw 1993, 1994; Philp 2015. Surveys include Gathercole and Clarke 1979; Cooper 1989; and Jones 2001. The Gathercole and Clarke survey is available online, [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000473/047346EB.pdf](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000473/047346EB.pdf) (accessed 27 July 2018).

objects in European museums.<sup>3</sup> With data provided to me by individual museums, collection data available online and by examining past surveys, I have estimated that there are over 30,000 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander objects in British and Irish collections.<sup>4</sup> These collections are particularly important since they include many object types that are not well-represented in Australian collections or that were collected at a time before some Australian states had their own museums.

Historical approaches to researching Aboriginal collections in museums have great value. For example, in Britain the Pitt Rivers Museum, using the concept of 'the relational museum', analysed objects acquired between 1884 and 1945:

to provide insights into the colonial relations of administrators, missionaries, travellers and anthropologists, the changing situations of local people responding to and participating in these colonial forces, shifting intellectual fashions in the metropolitan centre lying behind collections and a mass of biographies of people of all types whose lives were entangled with objects and collections.<sup>5</sup>

The project demonstrated the potential for museum collections as 'sources of complex histories and as a means of activating relationships in the present'.<sup>6</sup> Jones, in *Ochre and Rust*, drew on museum objects to develop narratives about meanings of objects on the colonial frontier. More recently, Rebe Taylor has examined the life and work of Ernest Westlake through a study of his collections and archives at the Pitt Rivers Museum.<sup>7</sup> Recent re-examination of an early Aboriginal shield from New South Wales in the British Museum highlights how even one object can be used to animate past histories and to act as a potent force in engaging with Indigenous Australians and others today.<sup>8</sup>

My first visit to a regional collection in the United Kingdom was in 2015 to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. To my great surprise, I located there Aboriginal artefacts used by the Aboriginal cricketers in cultural performances during the 1868 Aboriginal cricket tour of England. The tour manager, William Hayman, had donated these to the museum at the end of the tour, which was the year the museum opened.<sup>9</sup> In mid-2018, some of these were displayed at the MCC Museum at Lords Cricket Ground to commemorate the 150th anniversary of this historic event.

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3 Jones 2001: 5.

4 Of this total, approximately 13,000 are stone tools collected by Ernest Westlake in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

5 Gosden et al. 2007; also Pitt Rivers Museum, 'The Relational Museum', [www.prm.ox.ac.uk/RelationalMuseum.html](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/RelationalMuseum.html) (accessed 21 July 2017).

6 Pitt Rivers Museum, 'The Relational Museum'.

7 Jones 2007; Taylor 2017.

8 Nugent and Sculthorpe 2018; Thomas 2018.

9 Sculthorpe 2016.

The regional museum research has involved to date over 25 museums. It seeks to extend the concept of 'the relational museum' to explore a diversity of connections between objects in multiple institutions (local, national and international), and how new relationships can be developed by these institutions with originating communities for whom these objects may be known, or as yet unknown, but nevertheless important today.<sup>10</sup>

This paper is a first step in activating relationships in relation to a significant collection of objects noted during a research visit to Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, in 2016. These objects and associated archival material, unpublished and overlooked until now, draw attention to a corroboree performed in Darwin in April 1893 for the Countess of Kintore.

There is increasing interest in such nineteenth-century Aboriginal cultural performances. In his study of tourist corroborees in South Australia until 1911, Michael Parsons highlighted the grand scale of some of those events (up to 20,000 spectators) and suggested genres of performance (peace, command, gala) that could be blended to suit any required audience.<sup>11</sup> Fred Cahir and Ian D. Clark have demonstrated how Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria in the mid-nineteenth century displayed increasing business acumen when participating in such events.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Janice Newton has argued in relation to two Victorian corroborees that these particular events were examples of creative responses to the great changes happening to the lives of Aboriginal people during that period.<sup>13</sup> While corroborees were sometimes performed on the lands of the Aboriginal participants, in other cases, such as with Meston's 'Wild Australia Show', Aborigines were involved in cultural performances that toured widely in the 1890s and early 1900s. McKay and Memmott have argued that by presenting Aborigines as 'the other', Meston helped legitimise legislative reforms aimed at controlling the lives of Aboriginal people in Queensland.<sup>14</sup> Although arranged performances of public 'corroborees' in Darwin – such as for the Earl of Kintore in 1891 – have been noted previously, the discovery and consideration of objects and associated archival material from the 1893 corroboree for the Countess of Kintore extends our understanding of such events.

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10 ARC Linkage Grant LP150100423 titled 'The Relational Museum and its Objects' led by Professor Howard Morphy and Dr Maria Nugent of The Australian National University. The research partners are the British Museum, the National Museum of Australia and Wagga Wagga City Council.

11 Parsons 1997.

12 Cahir and Clark 2010.

13 Newton 2017.

14 McKay and Memmott 2016: 200.

## Vice-regal corroborees in Darwin

In the early 1890s, a series of vice-regal visitors to Port Darwin (then Palmerston) gave rise to more frequent demands by European officials for Aboriginal cultural performances to entertain these transient audiences. As historian Samantha Wells has noted, these were not the first Aboriginal performances for a European audience in Darwin,<sup>15</sup> but the 1890s was a period of particular intensity, influenced by Port Darwin then being a frequent stopover on shipping routes to Asia. Contemporary descriptions and surviving objects provide insights into the organisation of the performances, the complex nature of the material culture produced and exchanged for them and insights into their values and meanings to those involved. No Aboriginal oral or written accounts of these events exist, but Aboriginal actions and values can be inferred from the European descriptions of the events, observations of the objects used and collected, and by inference from observations of other ceremonial gatherings in northern Australia in that period.

Memorialised by several photographs taken of the event by photographer and police Inspector Paul Foelsche, a vice-regal corroboree was arranged in 1891 for the 9th Earl of Kintore, Algernon Keith-Falconer, then governor of South Australia. At the request of the British Colonial Office, Kintore made a tour of inspection of what was then part of South Australia, including a transcontinental trip from Darwin to Adelaide with Edward Stirling, honorary director of the South Australian Museum. They were accompanied by three Aboriginal men, Willie, Jem and Louis.<sup>16</sup>

Kintore's visit to the Top End included a three-day boat trip up the Alligator River and travelling with the Government Resident Mr John Knight and Foelsche to inspect the goldfields near Pine Creek.<sup>17</sup> The Resident played a key role in the social life of Darwin and was host for important visitors. Knight had emigrated from England to Melbourne in 1852 after seeing the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, and had organised the exhibits from Victoria for the 1862 International Exhibition in London.<sup>18</sup> In 1888–89, he was the Northern Territory commissioner for the Intercolonial Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne.<sup>19</sup> He had developed a reputation for flair in organising such displays. Foelsche had been working in the region since 1869 and, as Povinelli has described, held a complex position as both

15 Wells 2003: 165–74.

16 The names are taken from the online catalogue of a photograph of the expedition in SAM Archives, ref. AA 309/5/1/30. One of these men was also present at the 1893 corroboree (see below), but their life stories await investigation.

17 *Adelaide Observer*, 4 July 1891.

18 Rosenzweig 1996: 25; see also letter from J G Knight to Emilie Knight in Wilson et al. 1994: 25.

19 Wilson et al. 1994: 14.

a dispenser of justice and a 'key interpreter for the European settlers of the status of local Aboriginal groups' traditional outlook'.<sup>20</sup> He described and evaluated their customs, collected their objects and took hundreds of photographs.<sup>21</sup>

To welcome Kintore, Knight organised a special procession of the Chinese community, a banquet with the Chinese merchants and a ball.<sup>22</sup> On 2 April, he also hosted a 'grand Aboriginal corroboree' on the Esplanade involving 'Larrakia' and 'Woolnah' people in 'opposing factions' who were decorated with 'ochre and other fantastic ornaments of fur or feather'.<sup>23</sup> A local paper reported of this event:

For the corroboree the darkies had their camp pitched opposite the Residence, and here they cut their antics for an hour or more to the interest and delight of the Governor and a great many other visitors who had seen nothing like it before. It was a very fair specimen of aboriginal entertainment, and its success quite justified Mr. Knight in placing it amongst the good things of the gubernatorial season.<sup>24</sup>

The event was such a success that Mr Knight organised another shortly after for the officers and crew of the visiting ships HMS *Penguin* and HMS *Tauranga* in front of a crowd of between 300 and 400 people. The *Northern Territory Times & Gazette* commented:

True to arrangement, the Government Resident tendered his complementary corroboree in honour of the two warships. It was arranged in tip top style, with all that regard for detail which characterises the entertaining efforts of Mr. Knight on all occasions. As a performance the corroboree was similar in most respects to the one given for the Governor's edification, but here were a few additions, mechanical and otherwise, which considerably enhanced the interest in the spectacle, and as the natives had much more time to make their arrangements, rehearse their parts, prepare costumes and so on, the effect was much nicer than on the previous occasion. The use of ship's blue lights gave the show an additional charm, and with all things combined the affair was quite a treat to the large number of visitors who had never seen anything of the kind before.<sup>25</sup>

The account commented that a corroboree in town was very different to the unique dances performed by 'unadulterated myall blacks' in their 'virgin home':

In the midst of a town the weirdness of the spectacle is rubbed off, and the performers look upon the thing as a rare fine joke ... One thing at least is remarkable in connection with all these native shows is the wonderful time and tune kept by both the 'band' and the dancers ... the darkies are simply perfect in their regard for the pause ... and

20 Povinelli 1993: 77.

21 See Jones 2005 for further information on Foelsche's photography.

22 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 10 April 1891; *Adelaide Advertiser*, 24 April 1891; *South Australian Register*, 9 May 1891.

23 *South Australian Register*, 25 April 1891.

24 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 10 April 1891.

25 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 31 July 1891.

the feet of the nimble dancers stop and go with the regularity of clockwork ... not the least interesting feature of the corroboree was the grotesque way in which many of the leading characters were painted up and fancifully decked out'.<sup>26</sup>

After their return to Adelaide, Edward Stirling sent Kintore 77 objects from a larger collection of objects acquired at various locations on their transcontinental trip. The rest of the objects were lodged at the South Australian Museum, where they remain. They include a 5-metre-long ceremonial pole and 10 of the 'curious and fantastic plaited helmets' collected by Stirling that were worn at the 1891 corroboree.<sup>27</sup>

Mr Knight died suddenly in office in early 1892 and Inspector Foelsche appears to have been responsible for entertaining important visitors until the new Resident arrived. In March 1892, Lord Onslow, the ex-governor of New Zealand, visited Darwin, as part of a group on a regular cruise organised by Thomas Cook & Co. on the SS *Airlie*. Foelsche received a telegram from Cooktown requesting that he treat the Onslows to a corroboree when they arrived.<sup>28</sup> The *Northern Territory Times & Gazette* noted:

it was rather singular that some of the darkies engaged should have had cunning enough to borrow the picturesque head dresses used at a former spree, but afterwards sold to white residents, from whom they borrowed them. If the owners of these adornments continue good natured the fantastic hats will become in time quite stage properties.<sup>29</sup>

In March 1893 the new Resident, Mr Justice Charles Dashwood, hosted the visit of Lord and Lady Jersey (the ex-governor of New South Wales and his wife) and another 'grand aborigine corroboree' was organised in their honour.<sup>30</sup> The local paper reported that 'all the town and its wife [presumably the women of Darwin] turned out. The visitors watched the proceedings with evident enjoyment for half-an-hour or better, and will doubtless take away a few specimens of the decorative faculties of North Australian natives'.<sup>31</sup> Mr Dashwood told Lady Jersey:

this was one of the few places where such an entertainment was possible. In parts of Australia farther south the aboriginals have become too civilised, and in the wilder places they were too wild and would not perform before white men.

26 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 31 July 1891.

27 A brief list of these 77 items sent to Kintore prepared by museum preparator Amandus Zeitz dated 28 October 1894 is available in the South Australian Museum and Marischal Museum, Aberdeen. The online catalogue of Marischal Museum provides brief details of all their Australian objects, but further research is required to confirm provenance of the various Kintore collections. An exhibition, 'A Journey of Great Interest', was prepared by Philip Jones in 1991, to mark the centenary of this transcontinental expedition. See object label text sent from Jones to author.

28 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 18 March 1892.

29 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 18 March 1892.

30 *Express & Telegraph*, 15 March 1893; *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 17 March 1893.

31 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 17 March 1893.

Lady Jersey noted:

The whole thing was well worth seeing. The men were almost naked, and had with their own blood stuck wool in patterns on their black bodies. They had tall hats or mitres of bamboo on their heads, and carried long spears. The Corroboree began after dark, and the men shouted, danced, and carried on a mimic war to the glare of blazing bonfires. A sort of music of rhythmic noise accompanied the performance caused by weird figures painted with stripes of white paint who were striking their thighs with their hands. They looked so uncanny that I could not at first make out what they were, but was told they were the women or 'gins'. The scene might have come out of the infernal regions or of a Witches' Walpurgis Night.<sup>32</sup>

The next day, Lord Jersey wanted to give the performers 'presents' but was 'begged not to give them money, as they would spend it in drink, but he was allowed to purchase tobacco and tea and distribute packets of tea'.<sup>33</sup> Lady Jersey found it hard to believe that the 'tidily dressed' and 'peaceable men and women' were the 'demoniac warriors who had thrilled us night before'.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, by April 1893, when the Countess of Kintore arrived in Darwin, the gubernatorial corroboree was becoming a regularly staged event.

## The 1893 corroboree

Sydney Charlotte Keith-Falconer (née Montagu) (1853–1932), Countess of Kintore, was the wife of the then governor of South Australia and one of the great world travellers of her era. She arrived in Adelaide in 1889, and although her husband remained as governor till 1895, she returned to live in the United Kingdom in 1893. Returning by ship via the Endeavour River and the Torres Strait, she arrived in Port Darwin on 24 April 1893 for a brief stopover. The Russian survey ship the *Razboinik* was also in port, collecting hydrographical data and natural history specimens at Exmouth in Western Australia, and were undertaking a demographic survey of the Darwin population.

The Countess, her daughters Lady Ethel and Lady Hilda, Inspector Foelsche, as well as Commander Ukhtomsky from the Russian ship dined that night at the Residency. Commander Ukhtomsky felt he received 'exceptional courtesy' from the Resident Mr Dashwood, who had shown him all the places of interest and then had 'honored me by lunch and ball and, finally, arranged a military dance of the wilds – "karabora" for which the local savages had been summoned in the yard of the Governor's house'.<sup>35</sup> The *Advertiser* described this event as a 'monster corroboree' organised especially for

32 Child-Villiers 1922: 325–26.

33 Child-Villiers 1922: 326.

34 Child-Villiers 1922: 326.

35 Windle et al. 2016: 186–87.

Lady Kintore,<sup>36</sup> and the *Northern Territory Times & Gazette* commented this was 'a now recognised species of entertainment for visiting bigbugdom'. The audience included 'pretty well the whole European population of the township, together with the inevitable medley of Chinese, Malays, Japanese, Hindoos, and the other descriptions of humanity common to a free and enlightened community'.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the performers, over 700 people attended. Outside the Residency gate, the Countess observed:

a party of blacks painting themselves for tonight's Corroboree – they were camped in front of a sumptuous wurley made of green boughs & leaves & were all intently sticking tufts of wool over backs & chests. They gash themselves quite deeply & with the blood stick the wool onto the spot till they too look as if they were dressed in tightly fitting jackets ... In the garden was another tribe – the lubras painting up their faces with white mixture to a positively gruesome state of hideousness & the men busy with blood & wool ... I should say they are very low down in the scale of humanity with their matted black hair, dirt & general wretchedness.<sup>38</sup>

There were three Aboriginal groups: 'The Larrakeahs (or Port Darwin tribe), the Woolnas (from Adelaide River) & the Alligators'. The audience formed a circle and the corroboree began:

The lubras are seated together in a group near the fire. They keep up a monotonous kind of droning beating time with their hands & which they bring down with a sort of hollow sound into their laps. ... From the wurley on our left advance a company of warriors their backs covered with wool (as described) & on their heads the most extraordinary conical hats, made of grass, wool & feathers. With stealthy steps they steal out towards the fire & then advance on the pole – beating time with their feet so perfectly that no metronome could do it better. The noise made by their feet is most astonishing – they might be a regiment of artillery – one of their numbers swarms up the pole – all in strict time, while the others go through their dance at the bottom ... Then the Larrakeahs retire & the Alligators advance – stamping all together the muscles of their thin legs quite tense but never a mistake in time, till they in turn retire with a wild whoop. Variations on the original thence take place – all to the same weird music?, & all with apparently the same motif – defiance of their enemies ... Once they are wound up they would go on all night Mr Foelsche says.<sup>39</sup>

The corroboree ended about 10.30 pm. Inspector Foelsche remarked to the Countess: 'I was sorry there was a moon ... as it is weirder when there is nothing but the firelight'. She replied: 'Possibly it is but for my part I enjoyed it hugely as it was'.

36 *Adelaide Advertiser*, 25 April 1893.

37 *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, 29 April 1893.

38 Sydney Keith-Falconer (Countess of Kintore), Journal, 24 April 1893, University of Aberdeen Library, MS3064/3/9/1(6).

39 Keith-Falconer, Journal, 24 April 1893. The question mark is in the original text.



Some present recalled memories of past events. One of the Aboriginal men asked Inspector Foelsche to point out Lady Hilda and Lady Ethel, as daughters of the Earl for whom they remembered performing the corroboree two years before. Down on the jetty before their boat departed the next morning, the vice-regal party saw 'a few of our town entertainers of last night smoking and lazily diving for pennies', including an Aboriginal youth from the interior who had crossed the continent with Kintore in 1891. He 'had a bright face & was dressed like a European', and had brought a small boy from Charlotte Waters with him who was working locally as a servant.<sup>40</sup> At 11 am, 18 hours after their arrival, they set sail for home via Hong Kong, Japan and Canada.

Sydney Keith-Falconer acquired many objects from the corroboree, which she displayed in a small museum in her house at Keith Hall, near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire. In 1922, she donated these and other objects to Marischal Museum at the University of Aberdeen.<sup>41</sup> They include a 3.6-metre-high painted ceremonial pole, decorative ornaments of feathers and wool, 14 tall conical headdresses and corroboree caps.<sup>42</sup> The collection also includes a bushman's stool as well as an umbrella stand painted with scenes of the corroboree.

The construction and materials used in the ceremonial objects are revealing. The ceremonial pole is finely carved and painted with designs in red, white, black and yellow ochres along its length and decorated with feathers. The headdresses are made of many materials, both European and locally available. The foundations are made from a type of cane, wicker or grass, and they are decorated with many materials including feathers, wool, European cloth, various gums and seeds. Some have pom-poms attached, which must have come from European homes. The colouring used in decoration includes the use of Reckitts Blue and red dye. The production of these objects clearly reflect the innovative use of available materials and the closeness of Aboriginal people to the domestic lives of Europeans in Darwin in 1893, either as domestic workers or close neighbours. A great deal of time and care would have been needed for their production.

40 Although Sydney Keith-Falconer records in her journal that she had 'Kodaked' the performers, no image of it has yet been located. Her scrapbook contains one poor-quality image of the Aboriginal youths on the jetty. Keith-Falconer, Scrapbook, University of Aberdeen Library MS3064/2/8/3.

41 Further donations from the family were given by after the death of the 10th Earl, in 1935, and again in 1936 through his secretary.

42 The author noted 12 of the 14 headdresses in the collection at Aberdeen in 2016. The ceremonial pole is registered as ABDUA:57077.

## Values and meanings

The Countess clearly enjoyed the corroboree, but what it meant for the performers is hard to assess as newspaper and diary accounts present only European perceptions of it and there are no Aboriginal accounts. In 1912, W. Baldwin Spencer lamented that the Larrakia were ‘much too decadent to retain more than vestiges of old customs’ and that ‘it was unfortunate that no account of their ceremonies had been written’.<sup>43</sup> Such views, as Povenelli notes, long persisted in relation to Larrakia ritual, rather than, as often with other groups, change being seen as dynamic and contributing to continuity of cultural traditions.<sup>44</sup>

The 1891 corroboree performed for the Earl of Kintore was mentioned only in the briefest terms by Edward Stirling. He noted it took place in front of the Residency between 8 pm and 9 pm:

Members of the two tribes of the vicinity the Larikiah & the Woolnah took part – each contingent dressed or rather undressed for the occasion & appropriately ornamented for the occasion. It was undoubted [*sic*] well done for semi-civilized blacks and their strange antics and manoeuvre which would require a separate description were carried out with great spirit.<sup>45</sup>

Stirling, who collected objects from the 1891 event, recognised in his 1894 report of the Horn expedition that even ‘ordinary’ corroborees required adherence to proper decorations, songs and music for what were still very elaborate performances.<sup>46</sup>

In 1882, Foelsche noted of Aboriginal ceremonies in northern Australia that ‘corrobories’ were performed on many occasions such as a death, start of hostilities, when returning from visits to neighbouring groups or ‘when they feel inclined to be jolly’.<sup>47</sup> Different decorations were applied to the body for different ceremonies with specific colours for those in honour of the dead and ‘on all other occasions any colour they fancy, which sometimes takes hours to put on, and covers the whole body, when they very much resemble in appearance the clowns in circuses’.<sup>48</sup> Parkhouse, a local government official in Darwin, noted in the 1890s that Aboriginal people came and went according to various seasonal factors, with corroborees performed for many different reasons including marriage and initiation.<sup>49</sup>

43 Foelsche 1882: 6; Spencer 1914: 152.

44 Povenelli 1993: 78 .

45 Edward Stirling, Diary, 2 April 1891, South Australian Museum Archives. Philip Jones has commented that as Kintore’s expedition left at 2–3 am next morning, no fuller description seems to have been made.

46 Stirling 1896: 71.

47 Foelsche 1882: 5.

48 Foelsche 1882: 5.

49 Parkhouse 1895: 6–7.

Wells has researched extensively the relationship of Larrakia to their lands. She notes that, since the early 1870s, Larrakia people had participated in public ceremonies and spear-throwing demonstrations associated with European events. These included the erection of the first telegraph pole in Darwin in 1872 and Boxing Day 'sports' festivities in 1873.<sup>50</sup> With increasing numbers of tourists visiting regularly by ship from the 1890s, public corroborees became more common and continued into the early twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> She notes also how Larrakia had to negotiate radical changes to their landscape, resources and traditional economy due to the influx of Europeans living on their land together with increasing numbers of Aboriginal visitors coming into Darwin for short- and long-term visits.<sup>52</sup> She suggests there was both a degree of alliance between Larrakia people and their colonisers against visiting traditional Aboriginal enemies, as well as increased potential for social and ceremonial activity by Larrakia and neighbouring groups.<sup>53</sup> This appears similar to processes that Newton has described for south-eastern Australia, where nineteenth-century corroborees were sometimes stimulated by increased mobility and more frequent gatherings caused by dislocation: when beliefs were being challenged and a new foreign social order was imposed, ritual was used as a creative response to change.<sup>54</sup>

Mary Rose Casey has commented that long before and after European colonisation, groups in a region gathered regularly to exchange objects, stories, ritual items and other objects, and argues that the terms of public performances in the late nineteenth century were constantly being negotiated.<sup>55</sup>

While the corroborees reported for early 1890s Darwin were prompted by vice-regal and other visits and involved some organisation by local European residents such as Foelsche or the Government Resident, it would be simplistic to categorise the corroboree for the Countess in Michael Parson's terms, as either a 'tourist corroboree' or a 'command performance' in her honour. The accounts of the detailed preparations, the sequence of each group's participation and the skilful choreography observed, suggest it was done in accord with local Aboriginal traditions, with each group involved having particular roles and responsibilities. It was performed by Larrakia on their land and involved neighbouring groups with whom there were longstanding complex and constantly negotiated relationships.

50 Wells 2003: 165–66.

51 These included visits by the *SS Australian* in 1899, *SS Chingtu* in 1891, *SS Guthrie* 1894, *SS Eastern* in 1900; see Wells 2003: 168–69.

52 Wells 2003: 145–46.

53 Wells 2003: 146.

54 Newton 2017: 130.

55 Casey 2011: 11.

Descriptions noted above of other corroborees in 1890s Darwin suggest the performers likely received some form of payment, probably in the form of goods rather than money. Although being a means of participation in the changing local economy, the elaborateness of the preparations suggest they held inherent value for the performers for their own cultural political and reasons, and were occasions of enjoyment for the participants (inferred from the European observation of a 'rare fine joke'). The ceremonial objects used ('stage properties') were objects of dynamic exchanges between the performers and local Europeans. After being made by Aboriginal people, they sold them to local residents, borrowed them for reuse and then possibly sometimes sold them again to visiting Europeans. The accounts indicate that with more notice of a forthcoming performance, more complex and decorative objects were produced, and it seems that keeping these to hand in European homes was a way to preserve them for future use as required.

## 'What has been lost is safe'

Anthropologist Howard Morphy has commented that ethnographic collections contain two locals: 'the local of the museum and the displaced local of the source community where objects originate. In recent years those two locals have come together and often found that they need to repair a spatiotemporal disjunction'.<sup>56</sup> From the point of view of the 'displaced local' of Aberdeen, in the time since these objects were donated to Marischal Museum in 1922, they have not been well understood, and known primarily as associated with a high-status local collector who was part of the vice-regal colonial networks in the late nineteenth century. The Countess was one of many vice-regal people, although notable as a rare woman, bringing back objects acquired from Indigenous peoples to the United Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> Until this research was undertaken, curators at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide understood the objects in Aberdeen were some of the objects used at the 1891 corroboree for the Earl and given to him by Edward Stirling rather than being from a separate event organised for the Countess.

These materials comprise a rare set of nineteenth-century regalia used in a public corroboree by Aboriginal people, and perhaps the only one arranged in honour of a woman. The collection adds to the small body of surviving works used in public performances by Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century, which also includes the objects from the 1868 Aboriginal cricket team in the Royal Albert Memorial

<sup>56</sup> Morphy 2015: 367.

<sup>57</sup> She also collected objects directly from Māori during her Antipodean travels, which are also housed in Marischal Museum. Other vice-regal collectors include the governor of New Zealand, William Hillier (Lord Onslow), who in 1892 took to the United Kingdom a complete Māori meeting house, *Hinemibi*, which still stands today at Clandon Park in Surrey. Objects collected by Jane, Lady Franklin, Sir Thomas Brisbane, Sir Napier Broome, Sir Hugh Nelson and other state governors are distributed in various collections in the United Kingdom.

Museum in Exeter, and artefacts used by Aboriginal people in Archibald Meston's 'Wild Australia Show' in the 1890s, now housed in the Australian Museum in Sydney.

The objects from the 1891 and 1893 corroborees form an important part of the heritage of Larrakia and neighbouring groups. Many objects used in non-public ceremonies were often left to decay naturally after performances, but the objects from the 1893 corroboree were made, used, stored, reused and then collected by an interested outside observer and have been kept since in private hands and in a public museum.

There is still much work to be done to identify and document the provenance and history of these and other Australian objects in Aberdeen.<sup>58</sup> For example, a comparative analysis of the form, construction and materials of the objects from the 1891 corroboree in Adelaide and the ones from the 1893 corroboree in Aberdeen could provide insights into any differences of style in these objects and performances.

The question of what these objects mean for Larrakia and neighbouring peoples today also remains to be explored. The study of such historical objects in museums raises practical and ethical issues about relationships between researchers, museums that hold such items and the communities from which they originate. Where collections and peoples are at a great distance from each other, this may not always be a straightforward or quick process to undertake. The first step is raising awareness of the existence of the objects. The value of rich collaborative exchanges between museum collections and Indigenous communities is now widely recognised, as the work of artists such as Judy Watson, Abe Muriata, Maree Clarke, Jonathan Jones and Julie Gough attests, as well as being of value to community members with individual research interests.<sup>59</sup> How to foster such relationships internationally is part of the research project to which this study contributes. There is much potential for further investigations by the Indigenous Research Fellows involved in the study working with regional collections in Britain.

At this point, we do not know if Larrakia people sold the ceremonial corroboree objects to Lady Kintore, if they were a gift to her from the Resident Mr Knight or perhaps Inspector Foelsche, or precisely how they left their original lands. One of the

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58 At the University of Aberdeen, Kirsty Kernohan commenced a PhD in 2017 investigating the broader collecting activities of the Countess.

59 For illustration of works inspired by objects in museum collections by Judy Watson, Julie Gough, Jonathan Jones, Abe Muriata and Maree Clarke, see Gough 2018; Sculthorpe et al. 2015; Thorner 2018; and Watson 2009.

clan mottos of the Earls of Kintore is: ‘*Quae amisassa salva*’ (‘what has been lost is safe’), referring to the crown jewels of Scotland.<sup>60</sup> At a memorial service in 1932, Rev. Grant said:

We might think of Lady Kintore ... as the wife of a former Governor of South Australia, who enhanced the prestige of that onerous position, and endeared herself to the colony by her charm, or we might remember her in the role of a traveller, intrepidly braving by the Amazon, or in Indo-China, hardships that might well-appal even a man half her age.<sup>61</sup>

Although Sydney Keith-Falconer spent less than a day in Darwin, through the preservation of the ceremonial regalia from the corroboree put on in her honour, we might now also recognise her as playing a role in documenting the lives of Aboriginal people in multicultural Darwin in the late nineteenth century, leaving a material legacy now ready to be enlivened by Aboriginal people with new relationships and perspectives in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>60</sup> These were, reputedly, preserved from falling into the hands of Cromwell by the mother of the first Earl. *The Mail*, 24 March 1928.

<sup>61</sup> *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 27 September 1932.

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# Contested destinies: Aboriginal advocacy in South Australia's interwar years

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Robert Foster

## Introduction

In the interwar years, as protection policies took hold across Australia, Aboriginal political organisations and advocacy groups emerged to protest and demand rights and freedoms. Among the better known of the Indigenous-led organisations were Fred Maynard's Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) in New South Wales, and William Cooper's Australian Aborigines' League in Victoria. These were regional organisations fighting mostly local issues such as the injustices of life 'under the Act', or for better access to land and resources. However, they also engaged national issues, as exemplified by William Cooper's Petition to the King, which was circulated throughout the country and called for reserved seats for Aboriginal people in federal parliament.<sup>1</sup> More influential, however, were the white-run advocacy groups. The Association for the Protection of Native Races, established in 1911, had a national perspective and, among other things, sought greater federal control of Aboriginal affairs.<sup>2</sup> The National Missionary Council, established in the mid-1920s, was a platform for many of the mainstream churches.<sup>3</sup> More locally were groups such as the Australian Aborigines Ameliorative Association in Western Australia and the Victorian Aboriginal Group in Melbourne. As Attwood has observed, these were highly paternalistic organisations, who saw themselves working 'for' Aboriginal people 'rather than through them'.<sup>4</sup> This was certainly true of South Australia's long-

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1 Attwood 2003: Chapters 2 and 3.

2 Markus 1990: 158–62.

3 Raftery 2006: 166.

4 Attwood 2003: 90–91; Markus 1990: 158–59.

established Aborigines' Friends' Association (AFA), which Attwood has described as one of Australia's 'most politically conservative' missionary organisations. South Australia also gave rise to one of the most radical of the nation's advocacy groups, the Aborigines' Protection League. Established in 1925, its central issue was a petition campaign for the establishment of Aboriginal states – imagined essentially as Home Lands governed by Aboriginal people themselves.

A number of scholars have examined the 'Model State' campaign: Michael Roe drew scholarly attention to it with a brief article in 1986 in which he focused primarily on the nature of the Petition itself;<sup>5</sup> in 1999, Kevin Blackburn wrote a detailed analysis of it from a political history perspective;<sup>6</sup> Ben Silverstein has explored it through the prism of Lord Lugard's model of Indirect Rule; while others have looked at it in the context of Commonwealth Aboriginal policy.<sup>7</sup> My intention in this paper is not to revisit the Model Aboriginal State campaign, *per se*, but to examine the Aborigines' Protection League's broader political agenda. The league's campaign for autonomous Aboriginal States was part of a more general advocacy of land rights and self-determination – a radical, even utopian, agenda in an era dominated by paternalistic protection policies. In South Australia, the most vocal advocate of the latter policy was the AFA, which was not only well-resourced, but had a direct influence on the shaping of protection policy through its dominance on the state's Advisory Council for Aborigines.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this paper is to examine the Protection League's challenge to the association's stranglehold on public debate about Aboriginal policy and administration, from its formation in the mid-1920s, through to its dissolution in the late 1930s, when the 'New Deal' saw the policy of protection give way to assimilation.

## Aborigines' Friends' Association and state 'protection' policy

South Australia *Aborigines Protection Act 1911* was passed well over a decade after most states had put comparable legislation in place.<sup>9</sup> The Chief Protector at the time the Act was passed was William Garnett South, a former Mounted Constable who had served on the frontiers of Central Australia in the 1890s. As I have argued elsewhere, South's principal concern was the growth of the state's 'half-caste' population; he wanted to remove Aboriginal people of mixed descent from Aboriginal camps, disperse the mixed-descent population of missions into

5 Roe 1986: 40–44.

6 Blackburn 1999: 157–80.

7 Silverstein 2011: 90–105; Markus 1990: 168–72.

8 Markus 1990: 158.

9 *An Act to make provision for the better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal and Half-Caste Inhabitants of South Australia*, No. 1048 of 1911.

the general community, and replace the existing network of privately run missions with state-run 'Industrial Institutions'.<sup>10</sup> He believed that they 'must inevitably be merged into the general population' and that 'nothing should be left undone that will help to convert these people into useful members of the community instead of allowing them to grow up dependents'.<sup>11</sup>

A royal commission into the operation and management of the state's missions was established in 1913, and it recommended that the state's four missions be taken over by the government and administered by the Aborigines Department. In the end, only the two southern missions were taken over: Point Pearce on Yorke Peninsula in 1915, and Point McLeay in 1916. Point McLeay was one of the state's oldest missions, established in 1859 on the shores of Lake Alexandrina by an interdenominational Christian group calling itself the Aborigines' Friends' Association (AFA).<sup>12</sup> By the close of the nineteenth century, with a growing population and insufficient land, the association was finding it increasingly difficult to make the mission financially viable and supported the government intervention.<sup>13</sup>

The government takeover of the mission at Point McLeay in 1916 could conceivably have sounded the death knell of the association, but it rebounded with surprising energy. The man most responsible for this resurgence was John Henry Sexton, a Baptist Minister who became 'Missionary Secretary' of the association in 1912.<sup>14</sup> Graham Jenkins, in his history of the association to 1915, describes Sexton as someone who had a 'penchant for organising things – particularly other people', and claims that he 'gained virtual control of the AFA' when he became general secretary in 1913.<sup>15</sup> Sexton was socially and politically well-connected. In 1886, he married the daughter of Thomas Playford, state premier, federalist and senator in the first federal parliament.<sup>16</sup> Under Sexton's influence, the association ambitiously broadened its ambit of activities and the reach of its influence.<sup>17</sup>

In the first instance, the association continued to fund a full-time missionary at Point McLeay. The government takeover of the Point Pearce mission, on Yorke Peninsula, opened up another opportunity; with no comparable body maintaining an involvement in the community, the AFA took an interest in the spiritual welfare of the residents. Their activities included providing nurses at both government stations, as well as contributing to the provision of medical facilities.<sup>18</sup> In the

10 Foster 2000: 15.

11 Report of the Protector of Aborigines for the year ending June 20, 1912, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers (SAPP)*: 7.

12 Jenkins 1976: 3–20.

13 Jenkins 1976: 333–60.

14 Jenkins 1976: 328.

15 Jenkins 1976: 328–29.

16 Edgar 1988.

17 Jenkins 1976: 328–29.

18 See Aborigines' Friends' Association (AFA), *Annual Reports*, for the late 1920s and early 1930s.

mid-1920s, it expanded its reach into Central Australia. In the 1920s, the association became interested in E.E. Kramer's 'Camel Caravan'. Kramer was a self-appointed missionary, who for some years had been evangelising in Central Australia.<sup>19</sup> The association was impressed by his work and began funding his activities.<sup>20</sup> As this assistance demonstrates, the association also served as a general funding body, albeit at a modest level, supporting a variety of missionary and philanthropic causes.<sup>21</sup> By 1926, the association had also become an active participant at the annual National Missionary conference, with Sexton attending regularly and contributing to the development of policy.<sup>22</sup>

Significantly, the association also acquired a direct influence on the formulation of government policy. When South Australia passed its Aborigines Protection Act in 1911, it left executive authority to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, in contrast to other states, which established Protection Boards. The 1913 royal commission recommended the establishment of a Board, and the association lobbied the government to act on the recommendation.<sup>23</sup> The Minister of Public Works, in whose department the Protector's Office was situated, agreed and in January 1918 an 'Advisory Council for the Aborigines' was formally established.<sup>24</sup> The minister was well-disposed toward the AFA and he allowed the seven-member committee to be drawn entirely from the association's general committee. This included the association's president, Thomas Fleming, and their secretary, Henry Sexton, who was elected Chairman of the Advisory Council. Even the parliamentary representative on the council, MLC John Lewis, was a member of the AFA. All members served in an honorary capacity, but the government paid all expenses connected with their work.<sup>25</sup> Although membership changed over time, the council was dominated by AFA members until the 1930s. However, while the council had unparalleled influence, it had surprisingly little power, its formal role was to 'make recommendations' to the minister, with executive authority under the Act remaining with the Chief Protector. Sexton later recalled that the council was at its most effective in its early years – a time, one would suggest, when the council and the Chief Protector were singing from the same hymn sheet of 'protection'.<sup>26</sup> The essence of 'protection' policy is captured in the two words most commonly found in the longer title of the relevant Acts: 'protection' and 'control'. In these Acts, the government secured

19 Markus 2000.

20 See AFA, *Annual Reports*, for the 1920s for details of Kramer's work and his association with the AFA.

21 In 1936, for instance, it gave out £185 to 28 different missionary causes, see AFA, *Annual Report*, 1936, p. 18.

22 AFA, *Annual Report*, 1926: 3–5.

23 South Australia, Royal Commission 1913: vii–viii; AFA, Minutes, 17 February and 26 October 1917, SRG 139/2–6.

24 Regulations under the Aborigines Act, 1911, *South Australian Government Gazette (SAGG)*, 24 January 1918: 141.

25 Appointments to the first Council, *SAGG*, 31 January 1918: 182.

26 J.H. Sexton, *The Advisory Council of Aborigines: The Origin of the Board*: 7, in AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/400.

to itself coercive controls over the lives of Aboriginal people, and especially the children over whom it became de facto parent. It heightened the level of segregation on government and mission-run settlements, where it endeavoured to implement programs of education and training designed to prepare the children for life off the missions and in the broader community.<sup>27</sup> This was a policy pursued by the Protector of Aborigines, advocated by the AFA and, for a time, mediated by the Advisory Council of Aborigines.

In pursuit of his policy to push people off the 'mission' and into the general community, the Chief Protector adopted two strategies. First, regulations were introduced to make life on the government stations increasingly unattractive, with penal provisions for a range of petty offences.<sup>28</sup> Second, he developed a Bill that would give him authority to take children who had reached school-leaving age and place them under the authority of the state Children's Department, where they would be given 'practical training' until they reached their majority.<sup>29</sup> The Training of Children Act became law in 1923, and although South died shortly before the Act became law, his successor, Francis Garnett, previously superintendent at Point Pearce, supported the policy. The AFA also supported it; indeed, through their influence on the council, they may have helped develop it. For a number of years before the Act was passed, the association had been advocating the establishment of 'Children's Homes' on the government stations – effectively dormitories – where the children would be 'trained' and taught 'discipline'.<sup>30</sup> The new Protector supported the proposal, believing it would better prepare the children for their transition to the authority of the state Children's Department.<sup>31</sup> The Aborigines Department went to great lengths to prepare for this change, including drawing up lists of children they regarded as suitable for removal.

The implementation of the Act proved a disaster for the government. In March 1924, the state Children's Council ordered the removal of a baby from her mother, a resident at the Point McLeay station. The Children's Department officer contrived to take the baby from her mother in what proved to be a fraught and very public scene as she disembarked from her train at the Adelaide Railway Station.<sup>32</sup> The removal became headline news. Aboriginal people, who had already indicated their opposition to the Act, protested against the removal, and the action was roundly condemned in the press. The mother was interviewed; she pointed out that her brothers had patriotically served in the war, and asked, 'is there to be one law for the white

27 Edgar 1988.

28 Foster 2000: 21.

29 Raynes 2009: 5–7.

30 The Annual Reports of the AFA from 1918 through until the mid-1920s regularly called for their establishment.

31 Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the year ended 30 June 1920, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, 1920: 103.

32 Raynes 2009: 7.

people, and another for the black?<sup>33</sup> C.E. Taplin, son of Point McLeay's founding missionary and, at this time, President of the AFA, wrote to Protector Garnett describing the removal as an 'outrage'.<sup>34</sup> Sexton, Secretary of the AFA and Chairman of the Advisory Council, wrote that he thought the 'hasty attempt to put the new Act into force' would 'recoil' on the department and sought an explanation from the Protector. The Protector agreed that the removal was 'tactless and unfortunate', and not what the Act was primarily designed to facilitate. The child was returned to its mother.<sup>35</sup> As the Protector noted in his annual report, the Act was suspended because of 'native sentiment being opposed to it'.<sup>36</sup> The elaborate plan entailed in the Training of Children Act to 'transition' Aboriginal children from the government stations via the state Children's Department into the broader community, and which both Garnett and Sexton supported, was rendered a 'dead letter'.<sup>37</sup> The underlying policy of 'protection', however, remained in place, and continued to be advocated by the AFA. A collateral effect of the episode was the damage it did to the relationship between the Protector and the Advisory Council. As Sexton himself conceded, over time the council was marginalised, with the minister seeking advice directly from the Protector and increasingly ignoring the council.<sup>38</sup>

## The Aborigines' Protection League and the Model State campaign

In early 1924, just as the controversy over the Training of Children Act was unfolding, Col. J.C. Genders, a businessman, was appointed to the General Committee of the AFA. Genders was 66 years of age at the time, manager of an Adelaide accountancy firm, a Freemason, member of the Australian Natives' Association, and head of the Justices' Association.<sup>39</sup> We get some insight into his interests and preoccupations through a small monthly newspaper called *Daylight*, which he began publishing in 1919. Self-described as a 'journal for thinking and progressive farmers', it carried stories about grain prices and agricultural policy, but also served as a vehicle for his own causes. It reveals Genders as a Christian socialist and an internationalist; he was, for instance, interested in the League of Nations and an advocate of Esperanto. Why he suddenly decided to become involved in Aboriginal advocacy is unclear as up to

33 Foster 2000: 23–24.

34 C.E. Taplin to F. Garnett, 21 April 1924, AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/400.

35 Garnett to Sexton, 2 and 7 May 1924, AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/400.

36 Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the year ended 30 June, 1924, *SAPP*: 138.

37 Garnett to Sexton, 2 May 1924, AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/400.

38 J.H. Sexton, *The Advisory Council of Aborigines: The Origin of the Board*: 7–9, AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/400.

39 Blackburn 1999: 168. See also Burgess 1907: 556–7. The Australian Natives' Association was founded in Melbourne in the 1870s, with branches being subsequently established in all other Australian colonies. Its membership was restricted to men born in Australia, and it promoted 'nationalist' causes, most famously, Australian federation. The Justices' Association was founded in South Australia in 1898 to support the work of Justices of the Peace.



the time he joined the association, *Daylight* published almost nothing on Aboriginal matters. Once a member, Genders regularly attended association meetings and, in the aftermath of the removal controversy, accompanied Taplin on a visit to Point McLeay.<sup>40</sup>

His first contribution to AFA business came in a late February meeting in 1925. Genders asked that the committee convene a round-table conference to discuss the following resolution that he wanted to present to the upcoming annual general meeting:

That a petition be presented to Federal Parliament praying for the creation of a separate state in Northern Australia to be called the Australian Black State, The Australian Zion State, or some more appropriate name, citizenship in which to be restricted to Australian Natives ...<sup>41</sup>

The minutes politely record that discussion of the matter was deferred to a later date. The annual general meeting went ahead a week later, at which Sexton spoke at length about the 'Problem of the Half-Caste' and tried to breathe life back into the plans to establish 'Children's Homes' and revive the Training Scheme.<sup>42</sup> Genders resigned from the association a week before the AGM and immediately began to promote his scheme for a 'Model Aboriginal State'. He outlined his proposal in letters to the press and published a lengthy explanation of the scheme in his newspaper *Daylight*. The time had come, he wrote, to save 'the fast dying Australian Aboriginal Races', and 'redeem' the country's mistakes by creating 'a separate State in Northern Australia called the Australian Black State'. Citizenship would be restricted to Aboriginal people; a 'Native Tribunal', initially assisted by a government resident, would govern the state, but there was to be no interference 'with the Laws and Customs of the Natives'.<sup>43</sup> Having floated his plan, Genders set about organising his 'Round Table Conference' for 13 March 1925.<sup>44</sup> Prominent attendees were Dr Herbert Basedow and Capt. S.A. White, the former was an anthropologist and the latter a naturalist, and both prominent members of Adelaide's scientific community. Only a few years previously, they had been pivotal to the successful campaign for the establishment of the North-West Reserve, which they hoped would protect the Aboriginal tribes of the region from forced cultural change.

Over the course of 1925, a series of meetings were held to further develop the proposal. In July, a subcommittee was appointed to draft a 'manifesto and petition'. Aside from Genders, it included Basedow and White, Rev. J.C. Jennison, who had also been a key supporter of the North-West Reserve campaign, and C.E.

40 AFA, Minutes, 11 April 1924, SRG 139/2-6.

41 AFA, Minutes, 29 January 1925, SRG 139/2-6.

42 *Advertiser*, 18 February 1925: 10.

43 *Daylight*, 28 February 1925: 846.

44 *Register*, 14 March 1925: 11.

Taplin, who, only a month before, had been President of the AFA.<sup>45</sup> By March of the following year the final version of the Petition and Manifesto had been published. The key element remained a call to establish a 'Native State' to ultimately be managed by a native tribunal, with the exception of 'authorized missionaries, teachers and agricultural instructors', no one was permitted to enter the State without the authority of the tribunal, but Aboriginal people were permitted to come and go as they pleased. A new element was added, that they have representation in federal parliament, along New Zealand lines. The Manifesto elaborated the details of the plan explaining that this was to be a 'Model Aboriginal State' and, if it was successful, others 'would surely follow' and that 'the growth of a sense of nationhood would be a great incentive'. In this conception, the Aboriginal state was imagined as developing toward an equivalent status to the existing states of the Commonwealth, eventually enjoying its own constitution, with its citizens governing themselves in their own country. The precise location of the first state was not defined, but was imagined that it would be an existing tribal territory somewhere in Arnhem Land. As the campaign progressed, its supporters endeavoured to clarify the details. Given that these 'States' were imagined as essentially coterminous with the territories of 'uncontaminated' tribes, it was proposed that Government Residents would be appointed, and federal resources be provided, to assist in the inevitable growth of the states toward the conditions of modern life. Furthermore, they thought that educated Aboriginal people, like David Unaipon or David Noble, could be engaged to 'assist' in their founding. In consideration of Aboriginal people who had already been dispossessed of their land, it was suggested that they be granted land in southern Australia to develop their own states.<sup>46</sup> As utopian as this must have sounded at the time, there were two core principles that set the league's agenda apart from that of other advocacy groups, and especially the AFA: the demand that Aboriginal people be given their land, and that they be allowed to manage their own affairs.

In 1926, the proponents of the plan formed themselves into the Aborigines' Protection League and held their first general meeting in the Adelaide Town Hall in late November that year. Their constitution stated that their aims were to promote the petition and eventually present it to federal parliament, work toward the establishment of the proposed 'state, or states', promote the 'wise and just treatment' of Aboriginal people, and 'prevent discrimination against them'. Herbert Basedow was elected president and J.C. Genders was made honorary secretary. The vice-presidents included four women, W.T. Cooke, J.A. McKay, A.K. Goode and A.I. Tomkinson, representatives of the Women's Non-Party Association; the natural scientists T.P. Bellchambers and S.A. White; C.E. Taplin, who appears to have ceased his association with the AFA; and the Ngarrindjeri polymath, David Unaipon.<sup>47</sup>

45 *Register*, 1 August 1925: 11.

46 *Daylight*, 31 March 1926: 16.

47 *Advertiser*, 27 November 1926: 11.

Over the course of the following year, members of the association promoted the scheme and gathered signatures for their petition. They distributed their manifesto and petition in Adelaide and interstate, and collected signatures at stalls set up in city arcades.<sup>48</sup> Supporters were interviewed on radio and in the press.<sup>49</sup> They gave public talks to interested local groups such as the Justices' Association, the Theosophical Society and the Women's Non-Party Association.<sup>50</sup> In June 1927, the Conference of Women's Associations passed a resolution in favour of the proposal and, in early 1928, their vice-president, Constance Cooke, spoke in favour of the plan in an address to the 'Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society' in London.<sup>51</sup> While regularly cited in the press as a supporter of the Model State proposal, Unaipon was never a prominent spokesperson. He was most active in the league's early years; in August 1927, for instance, he presented a talk in support of the league in a series of broadcasts by radio station 5CL.<sup>52</sup>

## Critics of the Model State proposal

As the proposal became a subject of discussion in the press, Sexton, on behalf of the AFA, publicly and privately campaigned against it. A few days after Genders's 'Round Table Conference', Sexton wrote to the federal Minister for Home and Territories informing him of the 'fantastic scheme', and describing Genders as an 'unpractical dreamer' who had presented the scheme to them and, when he made no headway, resigned, 'for which we are devoutly thankful'.<sup>53</sup> The committee of the AFA met at the end of March and drafted a formal response: they 'unanimously agreed' that the scheme 'was fantastic and impractical', that Aboriginal people would 'resent being lifted out of their own present environments' to be 'sent to a strange territory', and that the different tribes would not get along 'bringing about tribal quarrels and bloodshed'. What they preferred was the present system of 'setting aside reserves', which would be 'centres of real education and practical training'.<sup>54</sup> The Adelaide *Advertiser* endorsed the association's views, saying that the league's use of terms like 'State' and 'citizenship' were 'absurdly grandiose'.<sup>55</sup>

Genders took the lead in defending the proposal against its critics. Sexton's original criticism that the plan proposed to effectively 'herd' Aboriginal people onto an isolated reserve constituted the most frequently voiced condemnation of the scheme. In April 1927, the Western Australian Chief Protector, A.O. Neville,

48 *Register*, 22 February 1927: 8.

49 *News*, 15 August 1927: 10.

50 *Advertiser*, 14 March 1927: 18; *Register*, 21 April 1927: 3; *Daylight*, 30 June 1927: 195–210.

51 *Daylight*, 31 March 1928: 306.

52 *News*, 15 August 1927: 10.

53 Sexton to Secretary, Home and Territories Dept., 16 March 1925, AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/65.

54 AFA, Minutes, 31 March 1925, SRG 139/2–6.

55 *Advertiser*, 2 April 1925: 8.

criticised it on these grounds, leading Genders to come out in the press and deny that this was what they proposed.<sup>56</sup> He was particularly aggrieved when the claim appeared again in the *Australian Board of Missions Review*. He responded in the May 1927 edition of *Daylight*, criticising Sexton, who by this time was the association's representative on the National Missionary Council, for deliberately encouraging this misrepresentation.<sup>57</sup> In November, Genders went so far as to have his solicitor write to Archdeacon Bussell, then president of the association, charging that their claims were defamatory, and asking them to be withdrawn.<sup>58</sup> As the campaign was reaching its head, the federal Minister for Home and Territories sought advice on the matter from the Chief Protector of the Northern Territory. Cecil Cook wrote that if the proposal sought to 'collect natives of assorted tribes together', then it was 'futile' and 'undesirable', but he noted that it did not propose this. He applauded the idealism of the proposal and thought that if applied to 'unspoilt natives', it might have some hope for success, but he would want to see a much more considered plan outlined.<sup>59</sup>

As Blackburn has noted, Aboriginal views of the Model State proposal were initially mixed, with significant opposition to it when it was presented, as the AFA characterised it, as a plan to remove Aboriginal people from their districts.<sup>60</sup> For instance, an Aboriginal deputation to the Premier of Western Australia in 1928, believing the plan would entail forced removals, expressed opposition to the idea. William Harris said that if 'a native State is provided nearly as many soldiers and police as there are Aborigines will be required to keep them there'.<sup>61</sup> The allegiance of one of the league's most prominent Aboriginal supporters, David Uniapon, also shifted over time. Although a member of the league's inaugural general committee, Uniapon supported a motion opposing the idea at the annual general meeting of the AFA in 1928.<sup>62</sup> While accepting that people's views change, it is nonetheless a fact that he had close links with Rev. John Sexton, who often quoted his views, and was to some extent reliant on the association for financial and moral support.<sup>63</sup>

The petition, signed by 7,113 people, was eventually tabled in federal parliament on 20 October 1927, but its introduction was overshadowed by a broader debate about Aboriginal welfare. A recent massacre in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, concerns about the treatment of mixed descent children in the Northern

56 *News*, 12 April 1927: 2.

57 *Daylight*, 24 May 1927: 186.

58 Various letters between Genders's solicitor N.A. Webb and the AFA between November 1927 and January 1928, AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/65.

59 C. Cook to Minister for Home and Territories, 3 September 1927, 'Model Aboriginal State', NAA A1, 1932/4262.

60 Blackburn 1999: 174–75.

61 *West Australian*, 10 March 1927: 18.

62 AFA, Minutes, 28 February 1928, SRG 139/2–6.

63 Markus 1990: 179–84.

Territory, and questions about the role of missions led the government to discuss establishing a nationwide royal commission. As the debate unfolded over the last quarter of the year, the South Australian member for Hindmarsh, Norman Makin, pushed for the scheme to be considered. The responsible minister, already primed by Sexton, peremptorily dismissed it, referring to the opposition of the state's Advisory Council, and unnamed missionary associations.<sup>64</sup> As debate on the proposed inquiry progressed, and it became clear that a smaller-scale inquiry into the treatment of 'Aboriginal and half-caste' people in the Northern Territory would go ahead, another South Australian member, Parsons, got an agreement that the Model State proposal would at least be included in its terms of reference.<sup>65</sup>

## The evolution of the campaign

Frustrated by the federal government's failure to seriously consider their petition, the league took their appeals closer to home and organised a conference with members of state parliament on 31 May 1928. Only a handful of members attended the meeting, but it gave the league an opportunity to present their case in detail. Genders outlined their proposal and argued that there were essentially two policy alternatives before the public: that of the missionaries who sought large grants of money to 'pursue their old plans of "control" ... [through] "compulsory segregation"', or that of the league which supported the right of Aboriginal people 'to manage their own affairs in their own communities along their own lines'. That afternoon they also presented their scheme to South Australian Senator A.J. McLachlan. After hearing them out, the senator assured them that their petition would not be overlooked, but, much to Genders's chagrin, repeated the criticism that Aboriginal people would object to being herded into a place away from their own districts. In June they approached the government again, this time with a smaller-scale, but more specific, proposal. They requested the minister to set aside an area of land on Eyre Peninsula 'in perpetuity as a native territory for the detribalised full-bloods and half-castes of the State to be governed under a Constitution by themselves'. The minister responded by saying that they did not possess land suitable for those purposes, but also that the 'Council of Aborigines' thought the plan impracticable. Genders later castigated the minister for being unable to correctly name his own department's Aborigines 'Advisory Council', scoffing at the idea that it was a 'Council of Aborigines' when it was made up mostly of AFA representatives who had their own agenda to push.<sup>66</sup>

64 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 13 and 20 October 1927.

65 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 2 November 1927.

66 The details of these meeting were reported at length in the 30 June 1928 issue of *Daylight*.

Part of that agenda included expanding their missionary activity in Central Australia. An approach had already been made to the Advisory Council in 1925 to establish a mission on or near the North-West Reserve, but it had been rejected on the advice of the Chief Protector.<sup>67</sup> In 1928, a celebrity missionary, Huston Edgar, famed for his mission to Tibet, was in Australia on a speaking tour. Sexton invited him to join E.E. Kramer's Camel Caravan to report on the condition of Aboriginal people in the North-West Reserve.<sup>68</sup> On the party's return, accounts of the expedition were reported prominently in the press and the association published Edgar's report and ensured that it was widely distributed. Edgar condemned the 'leave him alone' policy, and described the 'uncontaminated tribes' of the region as 'crude, cruel and disgusting'. How, he asked, were they to be saved? It was the responsibility of the government, in conjunction with the missionary, to introduce them to 'British culture and Christianity', to 'instruct, control' and 'protect' them.<sup>69</sup> Genders, on hearing reports about Kramer and Edgar's expedition, wrote that he looked forward to the time when the Reserve would be governed entirely by Aboriginal people themselves, and he hoped that the AFA might fund a university or a college in the new state.<sup>70</sup>

In March 1928, J.W. Bleakley, the Queensland Chief Protector, was appointed to conduct the federal inquiry into the management of Aboriginal people in Central and Northern Australia, and his report was released in February 1929. It was a detailed report that made recommendations on a wide range of issues such as the establishment of reserves, the treatment of 'half-castes', labour conditions and missions. It briefly dealt with the Native State, rejecting it as 'fantastic and impracticable'.<sup>71</sup> To assess public opinion, C.L.A. Abbott, the Minister for Home and Territories, organised a conference of 'interested parties' in Melbourne to discuss the report. Held on 12 April 1929, it included delegates from all over Australia. South Australia's delegates included Henry Sexton, representing the AFA, and J.C. Genders, representing the Aborigines' Protection League (APL).<sup>72</sup> Both organisations prepared submissions in advance. The AFA put forward a recommendation that the three Central Reserves be merged and put under federal control. They wanted a 'government settlement for the civilizing of the natives' be established where, under the supervision of a superintendent and assistants, Aboriginal people might be taught stock work. Finally, consistent with policy articulated at the National Missionary Conference, they insisted that missionaries should be appointed to

67 Advisory Council of Aborigines, Minutes, Vol. 1, 1918–1927, 1 September 1925, GRG 52/12/1.

68 'Exploration of Reserves in Central and Western Australia, Mr. J. H. Edgar and Mr. Kramer', AFA, Correspondence files, SRG 139/1/124/1928.

69 J. Huston Edgar, *Exploration of the Great Reserves: Set apart for the Aborigines of South and Central Australia*. The report was published in the *Register* in September 1928 and in the AFA, *Annual Report*, 1928: 21–36.

70 *Daylight*, 30 June 1928: 344.

71 Bleakley 1929: 30.

72 *Advertiser*, 15 April 1929: 15.

‘assist in civilizing the natives’, teach them to ‘respect law and order’ and ‘give up cruel customs and practices’.<sup>73</sup> His plan was for the Great Reserve to be transformed into a super-sized government station.

The APL also put a proposal to the conference, a further elaboration of their Model State proposal. Genders put forward the following motion:

That to the nomadic tribes who still have their tribal governments intact, land, taking the aboriginal boundaries, be allotted in perpetuity, and that they be allowed to govern it as far as they are able with the assistance of teachers and others, and that no white person should be allowed into the territory without a permit.<sup>74</sup>

Constance Cooke seconded the motion, but no one else supported it. Minister Abbott, wanting to move the discussion on to other matters, commented ‘I think you are a little ahead of your time, Mr Genders’.<sup>75</sup> In a later presentation to the APL about the proceedings of the conference, Genders criticised the vested interest of station owners, missionaries for hanging on to ‘old-fashioned ideas’ and the Australian Board of Missions for supporting ‘compulsory segregation’, and concluded that it was time for Aboriginal people to be allowed to solve the ‘aboriginal problem’ in their own way.<sup>76</sup>

One of the few actions to come out of the conference was the recommendation that the three Central Reserves be combined and placed under federal control. Sexton was triumphant, reporting back to the association’s members that their proposal had received the ‘unanimous’ support of the conference.<sup>77</sup> In coming months, correspondence on the issue was exchanged between the three governments, and it was decided that a meeting to discuss the takeover would be held in Adelaide. However, with the impact of the Great Depression deepening, it was mutually agreed to indefinitely defer the matter.<sup>78</sup> Genders admitted leaving the conference ‘disheartened’.<sup>79</sup> While he never gave up on the idea of the Model State, the league increasingly directed its energies to other matters.

73 ‘Reserves in Central Australia’, reproduced in AFA, *Annual Report*, 1929.

74 Conference of Representatives of Missions, Societies, and Associations interested in the Welfare of Aborigines to consider the Report and Recommendations submitted to the Commonwealth Government by J. W. Bleakley Esq., Report of Debates, Commonwealth of Australia, 12 April 1929: 11.

75 Conference of Representatives: 12.

76 Genders 1929, Report to the State Executive: 1–5.

77 AFA, *Annual Report*, 1929: 10.

78 Premier of SA to Premier of WA, 6 October 1930, Commissioner of Public Works, Correspondence files, GRG 23/1/1917/643.

79 Genders 1929, Report to the State Executive: 10.



## The league's advocacy of land rights and self-determination

Although the Model Aboriginal State was the league's marquee issue, it involved itself in a range of other matters concerning Aboriginal rights and welfare, and almost invariably took a contrary position to the AFA. There were a number of key ideas and principles that emerge from the league's public statements. The first of these was a baseline position that Australia had failed to honour its historical obligations, and needed to make amends. In support of these claims, members would point to the state's founding proclamation that promised to protect Aboriginal rights and welfare, and Governor Gawler's ostensible defence of Aboriginal rights to land in the early years of settlement.<sup>80</sup> As the Model State proposal itself demonstrates, land was identified as the crucial issue. In the published response to the Bleakley report, Genders made his most impassioned call for Aboriginal rights to land. He declared that whites had overrun their hunting grounds and reduced them to 'landless proletarians', and that Aboriginal people wanted 'some of the land back that has been stolen' from them. A leading plank of the league's proposal, he wrote, was that 'legal ownership of sufficient suitable land be transferred from the Crown to the Aborigines without power of alienation'. This, he pointed out, was not contained in Bleakley's recommendations, nor did it have a place in the 'missionary propaganda' of groups like the AFA.<sup>81</sup>

Following on from this recognition of dispossession was a claim that 'existing policy' was a failure and that something new needed to be tried. Pushed to be more precise about what the 'existing policy' actually was, Genders usually referred to the segregation of Aboriginal people on mission-run reserves or government stations. He criticised the 'well-intentioned', but 'mistaken approach of government and missionaries who instituted a system of control, control, control ...'.<sup>82</sup> He condemned the National Missionary Council's policy of 'compulsory segregation' as 'unrighteous' and 'probably illegal',<sup>83</sup> and asserted that the 'dominance over and repression of the aboriginals in the past has not given them the right inspiration for their progress'.<sup>84</sup> On a number of occasions, he personalised the attack by citing as a failure the AFA's 70 years of management at the Point McLeay mission.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, he criticised their influence on the Advisory Council. Writing in January 1928, he pointed out that all members of the Advisory Council, with one exception, were also members of the AFA. He could not think of a 'single' thing

80 See, for instance, *Daylight*, 28 February 1925, 31 March 1926; *Observer*, 28 August 1926; *Advertiser*, 22 October 1930; Genders 1937.

81 All quotes from Genders 1929, Statement by the Aborigines' Protection League: 2.

82 *Daylight*, 30 June 1928: 340.

83 *Daylight*, 31 December 1927: 271.

84 *Daylight*, 31 March 1928: 306.

85 *Daylight*, 31 October 1927: 246.



that the council had done to give ‘justice to our natives’, but it nonetheless chose to interfere ‘in a lot of matters which should not concern it’, citing the ‘iniquitous Act (now suspended) allowing native children to be taken from their parents’.<sup>86</sup> As well as opposing the practice of child removal, it was a plank of the league’s policy that they oppose all forms of discrimination.<sup>87</sup>

When Genders argued that they should be allowed to ‘work out their destinies in their own self-governing communities’, he was unequivocally advocating self-determination, albeit in the language of the day.<sup>88</sup> Genders looked to other models to give legitimacy to his proposal. Writing in 1927, he suggested that their proposed Model State might ‘produce another Liberia’, or African-American colony like Dearfield in Colorado.<sup>89</sup> Lady Symon, wife of the eminent constitutional lawyer and, like her husband, a supporter of the league, described their aims as ‘Home Rule for Australian Aborigines’.<sup>90</sup> By 1930, Genders was invoking Jan Smuts’s South African policy of ‘separate development’ as a possible model.<sup>91</sup> Writing in 1937, at about the time he resigned from the league because of growing ill-health, he cited the African policy of ‘indirect rule’ as the ideal approach for the way it ‘involves the co-operation of the African in his own development’. He went on to observe, when ‘we have learnt not to discriminate between the colour of the skin’ and when through ““Indirect rule” the Australian Aborigines has achieved national pride with his own Government, Chiefs, etc., has his own universities ... then it will be time to talk about assimilation’.<sup>92</sup>

The broad principle of self-determination underscored the nature of the league’s advocacy politics and set it sharply against the position of the AFA. From the very outset, the league advocated that representatives of their proposed states should have seats in federal parliament. When Cooper’s petition calling for reserved seats in federal parliament was circulating in the mid-to-late 1930s, the league was supportive, but Sexton was unimpressed. He believed that the ‘petition’ would ‘stain the good reputation of Australia’, and dismissed the signatories as ‘mainly people of mixed blood and not content like the old aborigines to accept their fate in the old uncomplaining spirit’.<sup>93</sup> In 1929, the league passed a resolution that Aboriginal people be ‘represented on all Boards, Councils, Commissions, etc. relating to their affairs’.<sup>94</sup> This was a position they reiterated in 1936 when there were discussions about replacing the Advisory Council with a newly proposed board. Sexton spoke

86 *Daylight*, 31 January 1928: 283.

87 *Advertiser*, 27 November 1926: 11.

88 *Daylight*, 31 March 1928: 306.

89 *Register*, 8 June 1927: 7.

90 *Daylight*, 31 August 1928: 366.

91 *News*, 13 March 1930: 11.

92 Genders 1937: 3; Silverstein 2011: 97.

93 Quoted in the *Advertiser*, 27 October 1937: 25.

94 *Advertiser*, 19 January 1929: 13.

out against this idea, saying that members of the board should be people ‘really interested in the welfare of the Aborigines’, people with ‘education, experience and a knowledge of racial problems’. These were skills, he said, that ‘would preclude Aborigines having a seat on the Board’.<sup>95</sup>

The league, as was noted earlier, appointed David Unaipon to the inaugural committee, and sought to encourage Aboriginal support of their activities. In 1928, ‘Narrunga Johnny’ and John Bews, from the Point Pearce government station, and George Rankine, formerly of Point McLeay, all expressed support for the league’s activities.<sup>96</sup> In February, Genders put the proposal to a Constitution Commission, which was in Adelaide to take evidence on the question of federal control of Aboriginal matters, and George Rankine gave evidence in support. He approved of the proposal that a ‘large area of land somewhere in Arnhem Country’ be set aside for ‘the primitive natives now residing there’. He also supported the newer idea of a ‘Territory for all educated Aborigines living in the lower part of South Australia’:

Such aborigines be given the power to govern and direct the management of the Territory. The absolute failure of the Mission Stations now in existence is to my mind the reason why the Constitution drawn up by the Aborigines’ Protection League is an ideal one ...<sup>97</sup>

Narrunga Johnny wrote that the ‘model state proposed for aborigines is an exceptionally kind and thoughtful proposition’.<sup>98</sup> In expressing their support for the Model State proposal, these men also used the opportunity to protest more generally against their treatment. Bews, a First World War veteran, complained that the policy of ‘protection’ did not protect them but treated them like children. Narrunga Johnny argued much the same thing, writing that the ‘aboriginal laws ... degrade rather than uplift us’, and that the Act should be abolished. Rankine described the mission stations as a ‘farce’ and called upon Aboriginal people to be given the power to govern and direct their own affairs.<sup>99</sup> They wanted land and the freedom to ‘work out their own career’ or, as Rankine put it, the chance to live ‘in their own community’. Genders reproduced their correspondence in *Daylight*, and applauded their forthright views.<sup>100</sup>

By September 1926, the New South Wales-based AAPA had begun corresponding with the league. E. McKenzie Hatton, the secretary of the AAPA, pointed out that all ‘officers of the Association, were Aboriginal’, and that it was ‘the people’s own movement and things are done from the viewpoint of the Aboriginal which is a vital

95 Genders and Sexton quoted in the *News*, 14 July 1936: 5.

96 *Advertiser*, 17 January 1928: 14 and 24 January 1928: 15; *Register*, 28 January 1928: 14.

97 George Rankine’s evidence to the Constitution Commission, quoted in *Daylight*, 29 February 1928: 292.

98 *Advertiser*, 17 January 1928: 14.

99 Evidence to the Constitution Committee, reproduced in *Daylight*, 29 February 1928: 292.

100 *Daylight*, 29 February 1928: 294.

starting point when beginning to help them'.<sup>101</sup> In March 1928, Genders published more correspondence from the association, which endorsed their proposal and expressed solidarity: 'the time has come for the aboriginal to make a definite stand for citizen's rights and have a voice in the welfare of our own country'.<sup>102</sup> Shortly afterwards, probably inspired by contact with this interstate organisation, and with initial assistance from the league, the Australian Aboriginal Association was formed.<sup>103</sup> Advertisements in *Daylight* called upon Aboriginal people interested in joining to contact D. Roper who was listed as 'Secretary Pro. Tem'.<sup>104</sup> Roper, who had previously been a superintendent at Point Pearce, was at this time financial secretary of the APL. By June, a Point Pearce Branch of the Australian Aboriginal Association had been formed with P. Williams as president and Mark Wilson taking over from Roper as secretary. The deputation that put the 'Eyre Peninsula Model State' proposal to the South Australian Parliament in June 1928 included Wilson, Williams and Rankine as representatives of the Australian Aborigines' Association.<sup>105</sup>

While Aboriginal people had long been active in campaigning for their rights, the Australian Aboriginal Association appears to have been the first formal Indigenous political organisation established in South Australia.<sup>106</sup> Relatively little seems to have been recorded about its activities, but it was still active in the 1930s as the Australian Aborigines Union, under the presidency of Robert Wanganeen. In 1933, it declared that the two central objectives of the association were to organise so that they may have 'a voice in the all-important question of the better treatment of aborigines' and to get parliament to formulate a scheme whereby 'civilized and educated natives could become a valuable asset to the land that rightfully belongs to them'.<sup>107</sup> Two years later, Wanganeen and 97 other Point Pearce residents petitioned the government, complaining that the 'white race' was 'occupying our lands' and treating them as 'paupers and outcasts'. They called upon the government to 'allow a person of their blood' to represent their interests on any proposed government board.<sup>108</sup> As Raftery notes, while Wanganeen was assured that the matter would receive the government's attention, the view of Protector M.T. McLean was that an Aboriginal person should not be included on the proposed board.<sup>109</sup>

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101 *Daylight*, 30 September 1926: 89.

102 *Daylight*, 31 March 1928: 305.

103 Maynard 2008: 81–86, 125–28.

104 *Daylight*, 30 April 1928.

105 *Daylight*, 30 June 1928: 340.

106 Raftery 2006: 171–73.

107 *Chronicle*, 21 December 1933: 2; Raftery 2006: 171–72.

108 Cited in Raftery 2006: 171–72.

109 Raftery 2006: 172.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a number of episodes of violence in Central and Northern Australia gave advocacy groups like the Aborigines' Protection League and the AFA great cause for concern.<sup>110</sup> The AFA, while condemning the killings at Coniston in Central Australia, nonetheless hedged its criticism by pointing to the 'lawlessness' of the Aborigines,<sup>111</sup> and asking for 'sympathy to be extended to the hard-working outback settler who lose their stock by the natives spearing them'.<sup>112</sup> When international criticism of the treatment of Aboriginal people began to be reported in the press, Sexton's first response was to defend the country's reputation and ask why there was no reference to the 'fine service' that organisations like his were doing.<sup>113</sup> The APL, on the other hand, suggested that Australia's treatment of Aboriginal people be taken before the British Privy Council. It was also proposed that they hold a Moot Court to 'bring our white civilisation before the bar of justice'.<sup>114</sup> Basedow was quoted in the press as saying that the hearing would consider the confiscation of tribal lands, the uncounted destruction of lives, laws and customs, the defilement of woman and the enslavement of men, and the country's failure to assist in Aboriginal people's transition from nomadic to settled life.<sup>115</sup> Genders wrote to the AFA asking if they would participate, but they declined on the grounds that they saw no practical purpose in the event.<sup>116</sup> Although Genders had the interest of the Justices' Association, there is no evidence that the Moot Court was ever held.

An incident that occurred in 1928 serves to highlight the extent to which the agendas of both organisations reflected fundamentally different attitudes toward Aboriginal people and culture. When reports circulated in 1928 that sacred Churingas had been stolen from Aboriginal people in Central Australia, Basedow expressed outrage, writing that Aboriginal people were not 'heathen', and the theft of such a 'sacred relic' was 'little remote from sacrilegious vandalism'.<sup>117</sup> Sexton and the AFA were more sanguine about it, reporting that the stones were not sacred, had probably been sold to the tourists and no further action was necessary.<sup>118</sup> Members of the APL were influenced by contemporary anthropological theory, they praised traditional Aboriginal laws and customs as the 'moral' glue that held their communities together, and they sought to protect Aboriginal people still living traditionally from forced cultural change. For Sexton, Aboriginal people were not moral, they were fallen, and it was his Christian duty to rescue them. He endorsed the views of missionary Edgar, that Aboriginal people were 'crude, cruel and disgusting', and that they be

110 Biskup 1973: 84–86; Powell 1996: 156–58.

111 AFA, *Annual Report*, 1929.

112 AFA, *Annual Report*, 1928.

113 AFA, Minutes, 16 November 1932, SRG 139/2; see also *Mail*, 17 December 1932.

114 *Advertiser*, 22 October 1930: 8; *News*, 13 March 1930: 17.

115 *Advertiser*, 22 October 1930: 8.

116 AFA, Minutes, 27 March 1930, SRG 139/2–6.

117 *Daylight*, 31 May 1928: 330.

118 AFA, *Annual Report*, 1927: 9.

taught 'British culture and Christianity'. Where the APL saw European influence as the cause of Aboriginal people 'dying out', Sexton argued that they carried 'within themselves the seeds' of their own 'decay'.

In the first decade of its existence, while Basedow was president, the APL had largely been guided by Genders and the Model State campaign. However, when Basedow passed away and was replaced by Charles Duguid, their focus shifted to the 'Great Central Reserve' and the idea of a 'Medical Mission'. Duguid was elected president of the league in June 1935, having been elected the first lay Moderator of the Presbyterian Church just a few months before.<sup>119</sup> Duguid had no background in Aboriginal policy, was not a missionary, but his views were informed by anthropology. Like fellow league members White, Basedow and Jennison, he was concerned at the impact that spreading settlement was having on the residents of the North-West Reserve. In 1937, with the support of the Protector of Aborigines and the Advisory Council, Charles Duguid was given authority to establish a 'Christian Anthropological Mission' on the eastern border of the North-West Reserve.<sup>120</sup> The new head of the Advisory Council at this time was J.B. Cleland, Chairman of the University of Adelaide's Board for Anthropological Research. Cleland had earlier advocated the establishment of a 'buffer zone' to be managed by a 'neutral body', and Duguid's 'Medical Mission' appears to have satisfied that criteria.<sup>121</sup> This was not the sort of missionary presence that Edgar and Sexton had advocated in 1928, but something new. However, it was broadly in accord with the principles of the league in not advocating forced cultural change, promoting respect for traditional Aboriginal culture and assistance in their transition to settled life. Independent of these developments, the anthropologist Donald Thompson was suggesting something similar for the Northern Territory. In a report on Aboriginal policy, presented to the federal government, in December 1937, he suggested that mission stations be located at the boundary of reserves, serving essentially as 'buffers'.<sup>122</sup> Duguid applauded the idea as being consistent with the approach he was taking, while Sexton again dissented, arguing that missions should be at the heart of reserves so that Aboriginal people could be educated and weaned off their superstitions.<sup>123</sup>

In 1938, Genders, now 80 years of age, stepped down as secretary of the league citing ill-health. The year before, he produced a document summarising his philosophy, at the heart of which was still a proposal for Aboriginal states. The league he founded had moved on from Genders's *idée fixe*, but the broad, underlying principles were still there, although less ambitious in scope and expressed in more temperate language. In a discussion of the league's principles during a 1940 committee meeting, they

119 Duguid 1982: 107–8.

120 Edwards 2012: 12–14.

121 Gray 2007: 55–56.

122 Thompson 1937: 7.

123 *Advertiser*, 31 December 1937: 18.

agreed that the league would be ‘non-political, non-sectarian’, that its ‘main duty’ would be to ‘see that suitable land is set aside for the aborigines’, and that the ‘League recognises the aborigine’s right to retain his native culture’.<sup>124</sup> The APL continued to speak out on matters concerning Aboriginal welfare, most notably in 1939 and 1940 when the prospect of mining again threatened the integrity of the Great Central Reserve. Its energies, however, were diminishing. In 1939, the new secretary noted that the original members were dropping away and nothing was being done to attract younger people. The league folded in 1946, with many of its members giving their support to the newly established Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia.<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

In the early 1920s, the AFA was the sole Aboriginal advocacy organisation in South Australia. Fundamentally a missionary group, it dominated public discussion about Aboriginal welfare, and helped shape the protection policy of the era through its dominance on the Advisory Council for Aborigines. The APL, while it had supporters drawn from religious organisations, was more secular in its outlook. The ‘Model Aboriginal State’ proposal was, as Silverstein has commented, ‘too much to have hoped for it’, and ‘not a plan that the settler colonial state was likely to implement’. However, in its relatively short life, the league promoted principles that challenged the established policy of ‘protection’, by advocating land rights and self-determination. The mantra of the APL was that Aboriginal people should have the right to ‘determine their own destinies in their own communities’. By the time of the Initial Conference of State and Federal Authorities in Canberra in 1937, protection policy had essentially run its course, but the idea of self-determination was still ‘fantastic and impracticable’. In announcing 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’, the conference was moving towards the new era of assimilation.<sup>126</sup> In 1939, Minister for the Interior Jack McEwen announced his ‘New Deal for Aborigines’, which promised the gradual ‘uplift’ of Aboriginal people and a path to ‘citizenship’, transitioning Aboriginal people from their ‘nomadic tribal state’ to life in ‘a civilized community’. This was a process, as McGregor observes, in which Aboriginal people had ‘little involvement and less influence’, and ‘arguably ... intensified administrative intrusions into Aboriginal lives’.<sup>127</sup> The ‘protection era’ was over, but self-determination was still ‘a little ahead of its time’.

124 Aborigines Protection’ League, Minutes, February 1940, SRG 250/1.

125 Kerin 2017: 118–21.

126 *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities*, 1937: 3.

127 McGregor 2011: 34.

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# Benevolent Benedictines? Vulnerable missions and Aboriginal policy in the time of A.O. Neville

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Elicia Taylor

[Eliza] must understand distinctly that when she reaches Perth she is under my control, and must do as she is told.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently Eliza was brought to me by Policewoman Dugdale, and she [Eliza] claimed that she was the daughter of a half-caste by a white father, and was not therefore subject to the provisions of the Aborigines Act in regard to her movements and our desire to send her back to the Mission.<sup>2</sup>

In August 1932, a young woman's escape from a Perth boarding house raised considerable anxiety within the Western Australian Aborigines Department. As a resident of the Benedictine mission known as New Norcia, Eliza had been staying at a Perth boarding house while receiving medical treatment. However, upon learning that her treatment was to be terminated and that she would be returning to New Norcia, Eliza rebelled. Not only did she refuse to submit to mission authorities, Eliza also challenged the Aborigines Department's authority to control her welfare.

At first glance, this incident suggests a level of collusion between state and church in managing the Indigenous population in Western Australia at the time. However, a closer examination of interactions between the Aborigines Department and New Norcia authorities reveals a much more complicated relationship. From his earliest days as Superior of New Norcia, Abbot Anselm Catalan challenged what he believed to be an anti-Catholic bias within the Aborigines Department. The Abbot's

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1 Neville to Catalan, 21 May 1931, Archives of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia (hereafter ABCNN) 05120.

2 Bray to Catalan, 25 August 1932, ABCNN 05120.

suspicions certainly fuelled significant state–mission tension. Examining his interactions with the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the social and political conditions affecting missions, and the consequences for missionaries’ treatment of Indigenous populations.

This article unpacks points of conflict and compliance between Catalan and Neville as played out in individual cases where Aboriginal people negotiated with these authorities. The Benedictine missionaries’ sense of vulnerability is an overriding consideration within this study as we learn of their battles to maintain a Catholic presence amongst the local Indigenous population, while at the same time dealing with the state’s increasingly severe restrictions on Aboriginal lives and mission operations. Within this context, Catalan’s behaviour treads an unsteady path between resistance and accommodation in his relationship with the Aborigines Department.

This study is based upon the rich archival records of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia. Correspondence between Abbot Catalan and the Aborigines Department held within this archive provides important insights into the nature of the relationship, and its consequences for local Aboriginal communities. Christine Choo and Katharine Massam have also utilised the New Norcia archives in their important works addressing missionary relationships with the Aboriginal community, although such works have not focused in detail on this specific state–mission relationship.<sup>3</sup> The insights gained from studying New Norcia’s relationship with the Aborigines Department contribute to our understanding of the complexities and nuances within the Aboriginal experience, and highlight the need to avoid oversimplifying the depiction of missions as either complicit and compliant or resistant and ‘rebellious’ towards the Aboriginal policies pursued by the state. These dichotomies are not particularly helpful in evaluating the tangled nature of some state–mission relationships.

Within this study we find surprising acts of resistance by Benedictine priests towards state interference, as well as rare and tantalising glimpses of Aboriginal reactions to such behaviour. However, as is so often the case when trying to uncover Indigenous experiences from the archives, their perspectives are mostly absent or obscured, requiring careful reading and interpretation of documents against the grain. Wherever possible, examples of Aboriginal voice that I encountered within the records have been brought into the foreground of this article. In the course of my research, and realising the sensitive and personal nature of the records I would be examining, I contacted the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation, an organisation founded in the 1990s to build and empower Aboriginal family support structures and foster community connections.<sup>4</sup> Some members of this organisation are

3 Choo 2001; Massam 2015.

4 New Norcia Benedictine Community, ‘Support from the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation’, [www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/special-events/2014-salvado-bicentenary-year/nnac](http://www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/special-events/2014-salvado-bicentenary-year/nnac) (accessed 30 August 2017).

descendants of former residents of New Norcia. Having received the organisation's consent for this research project, I hope that I have done justice to the information that can be gleaned from the archival record. As a condition of accessing the New Norcia archives, I agreed to change the names of all Aboriginal people referred to in this article.

## 'Civilising' missionaries

Existing scholarship on missionaries' 'civilising' endeavours has contributed enormously to our understanding of the variety and complexity of issues arising from missionary involvement in colonisation. Within the Australian context, historians have tempered their references to the benevolence of missionary activities by recognising that many of the individuals assigned to missionary work were either physically or mentally unsuited for the challenging conditions they encountered, and that mission organisations often struggled to secure adequate support from the state.<sup>5</sup> By magnifying specific state–missionary relationships, historians have developed a deeper understanding of how state policies were sometimes influenced by including missionaries in the 'civilising' process. For example, despite significant tensions identified by both Choo and Noel Loos in their studies of mission organisations in Western Australia and Queensland, these historians point to a symbiotic relationship in which missions were dependent upon state support for their existence, and state bureaucrats were reliant on mission compliance with policies related to Aboriginal child removal, institutionalisation and assimilation.<sup>6</sup>

In her recent biography of Mount Margaret Mission teacher and activist Mary Bennett, Alison Holland explains how missions could also find their supportive state relationship rapidly deteriorating due to outspoken missionaries who resisted government policy. Holland specifically refers to the Mount Margaret missionaries' increasingly acrimonious relationship with A.O. Neville, and their distinct sense of vulnerability as they opposed restrictive government policies while also struggling to maintain state support for their operations.<sup>7</sup> While Holland accounts for a gradually deteriorating state–mission relationship, the constantly precarious status assumed by missionaries within colonial regimes also warrants consideration. In his theoretical examination of competing models of colonialism in nineteenth-century South Africa, John Comaroff explains that British missionaries were regarded as both a 'dominated faction of the dominant class', and 'friends and protectors of the natives', effectively setting them at odds with the agenda of the dominant colonial ruling classes.<sup>8</sup> Comaroff's conception of the missionaries' conflicted relationship

5 Harris 1994: 758–59.

6 Choo 1997: 14; Loos 1991: 73, 84.

7 Holland 2015: 196–206.

8 Comaroff 1997: 166.

to colonial governing bodies complements Holland's suggestion of missionary vulnerability, with both ideas providing useful frameworks for considering the relationship between Benedictine missionaries and the state. In the discussion that follows, we can see that the vulnerability of the mission significantly impacted upon its capacity or will to resist state pressure.

## A complicated relationship

At the heart of this study are the complex interactions between Western Australian Chief Protector of Aborigines Auber Octavius (A.O.) Neville and New Norcia's Superior, Abbot Catalan, both of whom shared varying levels of responsibility for New Norcia's Aboriginal community. Neville had been appointed to the role of Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1915 without any prior experience of issues affecting Indigenous communities. According to his biographer Pat Jacobs, Neville was an extremely capable administrator within the Department of Immigration and Tourism to the extent that his skills were highly sought after by the Aborigines Department. While he eventually agreed to the transfer, Neville had been hesitant to leave his position in Immigration and Tourism to take on the much lower status and budget attached to the Aborigines Department.<sup>9</sup>

Abbot Anselm Catalan had also been reluctant to accept his position as Superior of New Norcia. He had been educated at the Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat in Catalonia, Spain, and ordained in 1902.<sup>10</sup> After spending eight years at St Bede's College, Manila, and as procurator of the Benedictine missions in the Philippines, Catalan was appointed as an Abbot Visitor to New Norcia in 1914 upon the death of Abbot Torres, to oversee the election of Torres's successor. Catalan had intended to return and spend the rest of his life at Montserrat, but, to his consternation, he was formally elected Superior of New Norcia in 1916 where he remained for the next 35 years.<sup>11</sup> Catalan continued his predecessor's focus on monastic and liturgical life while also revitalising the mission by stabilising and modernising its property and equipment.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs 1990: 53–54.

<sup>10</sup> Mulcahy 1993. The year in which Catalan was ordained is contested with Mulcahy suggesting 1902, while Hutchison asserts 1901. See Hutchison 1995: 85.

<sup>11</sup> While the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* lists Catalan's commencement at New Norcia as 1915 (Mulcahy 1993), he was not officially elected as Superior until 1916; New Norcia Benedictine Community, 'The Story of New Norcia: The Monastic Town 1901–1950', [www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/heritage/history](http://www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/heritage/history) (accessed 1 August 2018); Hutchison 1995: 85.

<sup>12</sup> Hutchison 1995: 86

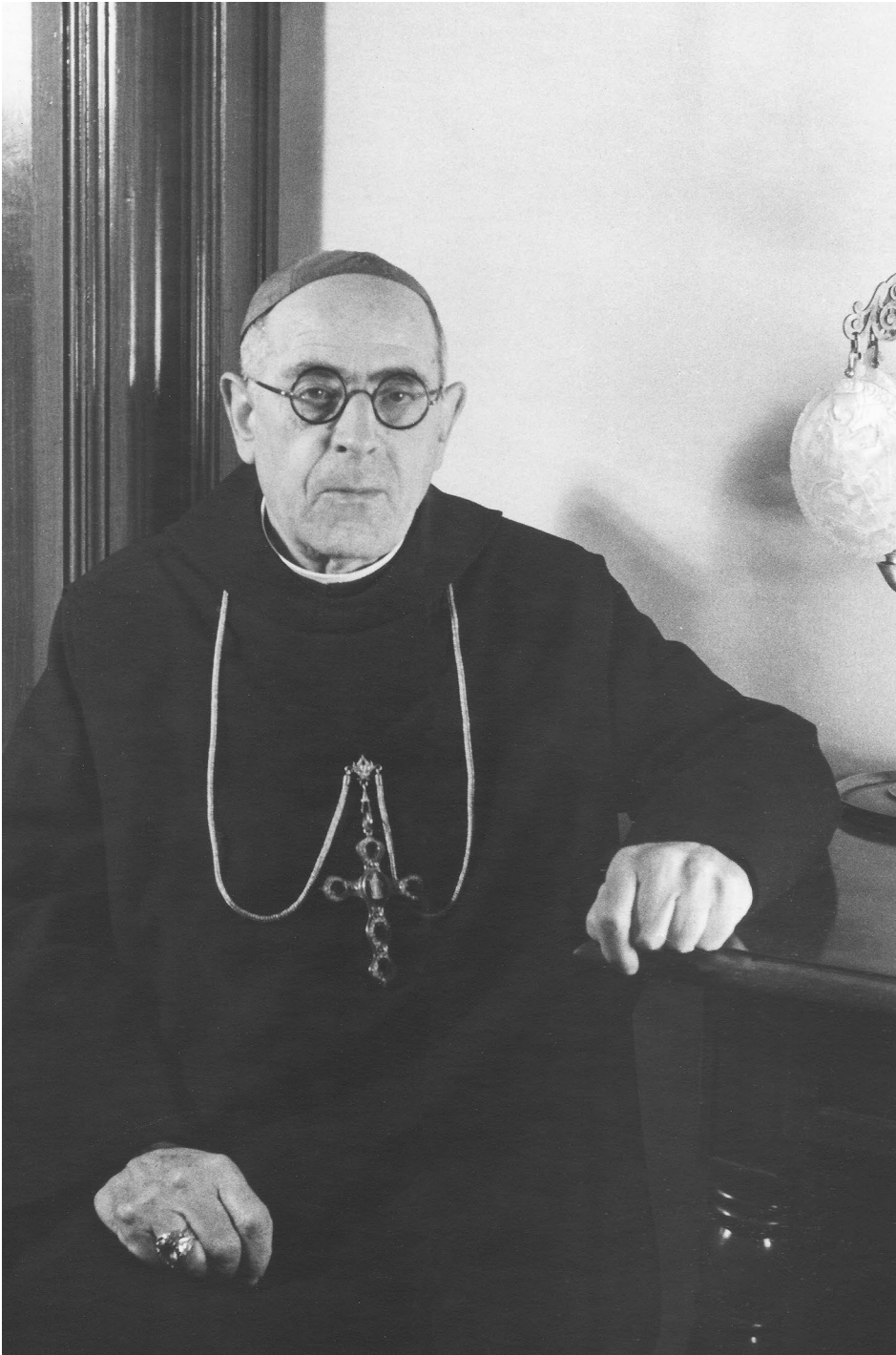


Figure 1: Abbot Catalan.

Source: Courtesy Archives of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia 72591P.

Despite their hesitant beginnings, Neville and Catalan both devoted significant years of their lives to the state's Indigenous communities. As Chief Protector, Neville's approach to managing the Indigenous populations was heavily influenced by social and political pressures. Particularly significant were the economic and ideological imperatives that influenced Neville's preference to accommodate the state's Aboriginal populations in government-run settlements rather than on missions.<sup>13</sup> He also pursued increasingly tight controls over Aboriginal people's movements and behaviour. While the Chief Protector's disdain for missions caused understandable concern for New Norcia authorities, Neville's later promotion of policies to eliminate the mixed-descent population attracted a more ambiguous response from the mission. For his part, Abbot Catalan's oversight of New Norcia's Indigenous residents was similarly impacted by ideology – in this case deriving from religious ideals. However, the Abbot's prioritisation of sectarian adherence was at times detrimental to the Aboriginal community, and a source of frustration for Neville.

In examining the correspondence between Neville and Catalan, three major areas of friction become evident. In the first instance, as a Roman Catholic institution, New Norcia's influence within a Protestant-dominated environment created sectarian tensions that were problematic for the staunchly Anglican Neville. Second, Catalan's ability to care for the mission's Aboriginal residents was consistently hampered by his conflicted role as both an advocate for his residents and a virtual agent of the state. Finally, Neville's increasingly severe policies concerning 'tribal' and mixed-descent marriages presented dilemmas for many mission communities. Yet, as we shall see, Catalan's response to Neville's demands was predominantly guided by his commitment to sectarian integrity, rather than opposition to the 'race-based' restrictions pursued by Neville. These areas of tension are first examined separately to make sense of the complex social and political forces influencing Neville and Catalan. Considering these factors in combination, we see that this particular state–mission relationship experienced significant tensions as a result of Neville's anti-mission outlook and Catalan's defiant response. The Benedictine missionaries' vulnerability on religious grounds necessitated their compliance with Neville's directives regarding Aboriginal care, and this conflicted position heavily affected their ability to protect the Aboriginal community from severe state-imposed restrictions on their lives.

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13 Haebich 1988: 157.



## A Benedictine mission

New Norcia is a small monastic town located 132 kilometres north-east of Perth. In 1846, the town was originally established as a mission by Spanish missionary Dom Rosendo Salvado. As Bernard Rooney and John Harris have described, Salvado recognised the importance of balancing Aboriginal traditions with the missionaries' Christianising aspirations. Like some of the early Lutheran missionaries, Salvado acknowledged the value in maintaining traditional Indigenous languages, and he encouraged Aboriginal people to hunt or spend time in the bush if they appeared to become unmotivated.<sup>14</sup> As a mission community, New Norcia was perhaps most unusual in its aim to operate for the benefit of Aboriginal people without necessarily being dependent upon their labour. Unlike other institutions, New Norcia shared labour between a large number of monks and other white employees, effectively enhancing the cooperative working relationships between missionaries and Aboriginal families.<sup>15</sup> Salvado also valued the sanctity of Aboriginal family life, and insisted on Aboriginal children remaining with their families in their own homes at night.<sup>16</sup> These factors proved successful in fostering the Aboriginal community's willingness to entrust the care of their children to the mission as early as 1847.<sup>17</sup>

The Benedictine missionaries' initial accommodation of Indigenous culture was to lessen over time due to a combination of state regulations and mission changes instigated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The passing of Western Australia's *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* ushered in significant changes and required New Norcia to admit Aboriginal and mixed-descent children from a broader geographical area, effectively decreasing the local, family-focused character of the mission.<sup>18</sup> In 1900, Salvado's death prompted the appointment of Dom Fulgentius Torres, who decreased New Norcia's missionary focus in his quest to transform it into a European-style monastery, a decision that created resentment amongst the mission's Aboriginal population and was criticised in the press.<sup>19</sup> In 1906, Torres also commenced the establishment of a Benedictine outpost at Drysdale River in the northern Kimberley region, an endeavour requiring additional oversight and financial support from New Norcia.<sup>20</sup>

14 Harris 1994: 316; Rooney 2006: 310.

15 Harris 1994: 296–97; Rooney 2006: 311.

16 Harris 1994: 296.

17 Rooney 2006: 311.

18 Harris 1994: 302–3.

19 Rooney 2006: 315; Haebich 1988: 17.

20 Durack 1969: 212, 215; Hutchison 1995: 85.

The passing of the Western Australian *Aborigines Act 1905* contributed to a new social and political atmosphere that ultimately reshaped New Norcia's relationship with the state. This legislation effectively laid the cornerstone of legal parameters that were designed to segregate Aboriginal populations from the wider community. In particular, the 1905 Act appointed the Chief Protector of Aborigines as the legal guardian of all Aboriginal and 'half-caste'<sup>21</sup> children under 16 years of age, legally sanctioning the removal of children from their families and their placement in institutional care.<sup>22</sup> In 1906, New Norcia's Abbot Torres was granted Protector status by then Chief Protector Henry Prinsep in recognition of the important role the mission was to play in supporting government policy.<sup>23</sup> However, it was under Neville's administration that the full powers of the Aborigines Department were to significantly impact upon mission authorities – including New Norcia and the Drysdale River Mission.

**'But should we the oldest and faithful Aborigines Institution in W.A., be singled out for slaughter because we are Catholics th[e]n it is time for us to rebel'<sup>24</sup>**

From his earliest experience of the Western Australian mission, Catalan was aware of New Norcia's vulnerability both as a mission and a religious organisation, and it would seem that his fears were well-founded. Upon his appointment as Chief Protector, Neville was guided by Minister Underwood's anti-mission stance, and a desire to increase the professionalism of the Aborigines Department while also reducing departmental expenditure.<sup>25</sup> Neville's preference to accommodate the state's Aboriginal populations in government-run settlements signalled a significant threat to mission communities. The major impetus of Neville's preferred Native Settlement Scheme was to segregate Aborigines from the wider community with as little financial outlay as possible.<sup>26</sup> Neville predicted that the settlements would be phased out after two or three generations as the older people died off and the younger Aboriginal people joined the wider community. However, the interim arrangement was for all Aboriginal people to submit to the direct control of the

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21 Terms such as 'full-blood' and 'half-caste', which were once commonly used to differentiate on the basis of parentage, are considered offensive and are no longer used in either a common or official sense. Such terminology does not reflect the values of the author or this journal, and is therefore presented between single quotation marks to denote its contentious status.

22 Haebich and Delroy 1999: 20–21.

23 Prinsep to Torres, 20 June 1906, ABCNN 05118.

24 Catalan to Colonial Secretary Drew, 17 August 1915, ABCNN 05118.

25 Haebich 1988: 157.

26 Haebich 1988: 157.

Aborigines Department and accept settlements as the focal point of their lives.<sup>27</sup> While rumours of poor living conditions, lack of freedom and violent treatment saw many Aboriginal people refusing to move to settlements, vulnerable families, especially those reliant upon rations, submitted to the department's plans.<sup>28</sup>

The settlement scheme enabled Neville to reduce mission subsidies, which were halved between 1915 and 1920.<sup>29</sup> While only those children referred to missions by the Aborigines Department were to be subsidised, Neville's belief that funds should support practical and vocational skills for Aboriginal children, rather than the Christianity prioritised at missions, made such referrals uncommon. Most missions closed during this period, with New Norcia the only mission to survive, albeit with cuts to its funding.<sup>30</sup> In responding to New Norcia's funding cuts, Catalan appealed to Colonial Secretary Drew, also a Catholic, declaring, 'should we the oldest and faithful Aborigines Institution in W. A. be singled out for slaughter because we are Catholics than [*sic*] it is time for us to rebel'.<sup>31</sup> The Abbot clearly interpreted Neville's cuts to the mission's subsidies as resulting from an anti-Catholic bias, rather than as reflecting his more general anti-mission position.

This is not to say that Neville rejected all forms of spiritual guidance for his Aboriginal charges. Within the vicinity of New Norcia, the Moore River Native Settlement employed Church of England missionary workers to provide Christian guidance to the settlement community. As Neville later explained, his preference was to 'ensure that in the future our missionaries and mission workers are British in origin and sentiment or at least possess the same outlook as ourselves [public servants]'.<sup>32</sup> With respect to the Moore River Settlement, this preference for British missionaries ignored New Norcia's long history of involvement with the local Aboriginal population.<sup>33</sup> However, Neville evidently allowed New Norcia priests to visit the Moore River Settlement on occasion, for the benefit of Catholic residents, a situation that Catalan and New Norcia priests exploited as a way of increasing Catholic influence among the settlement's residents. In fact, the priests' determined, and at times defiant, actions at the Moore River Settlement were to ignite significant tensions between Catalan and Neville during the 1920s.<sup>34</sup>

27 Haebich 1988: 157–58.

28 Haebich 1988: 171–72.

29 Haebich 1988: 166.

30 Haebich 1988: 166–68.

31 Catalan to Drew, 17 August 1915.

32 Neville 1947: 103–4, 120.

33 Harris 1994: 284–87; Haebich 1988: 168.

34 Catalan to Neville, 10 February 1928, ABCNN 01430.



Figure 2: Mr A.O. Neville, Commissioner of Native Affairs.

Source: Courtesy State Library of Western Australia, 5000B.

## 'I do not want to turn, but the Father is trying to make me do so against my wish'<sup>35</sup>

On several occasions, New Norcia priests attempted to baptise children who, according to Neville, had previously been baptised by Church of England ministers, or whose parents did not identify as Roman Catholic.<sup>36</sup> Tense communications between Neville and Catalan continued throughout the 1930s as the Abbot referred to a distinct anti-Catholic bias in the actions of authorities, and accused Neville of contravening the Aboriginal people's 'right to religious freedom'.<sup>37</sup> Catalan's reference to Aboriginal people's freedom in this regard is somewhat ironic given the lack of consideration for their wishes shown by either Neville or the missionaries. While critiquing the priests' heavy-handed approach to Aboriginal families, Neville's own failure to seek and clarify the preferences of Aboriginal parents in these matters effectively denied these families any autonomy regarding their religious adherence.<sup>38</sup> New Norcia priests similarly disregarded Aboriginal families' interests when justifying that their strenuous efforts to baptise the children of mixed-faith marriages were legitimate and indeed necessary in their struggle to maintain the Catholic Church's relevance amongst the local Indigenous people. The absence of Aboriginal voices within the correspondence considerably hampers our ability to interpret their response to these incidents. Understandably, Aboriginal families might have felt bemused or even outraged regarding the priests' actions. It is also possible that some may have welcomed the priests' intervention to properly acknowledge their Catholic adherence, or offer correction to baptisms possibly enforced by settlement authorities.

During the 1930s, New Norcia priests' attitudes towards Aboriginal couples at the Moore River Settlement reinforced tensions between Neville and Catalan. Secular staff employed at the Moore River Settlement alerted the Aborigines Department to a number of incidents in which the visiting New Norcia priests appeared to be interfering in the lives of married couples. Moore River staff members were disturbed that the priests were trying to induce non-Catholic partners to convert to Catholicism.<sup>39</sup> While the priests maintained that they were attempting to redress the increasing number of mixed-faith marriages at the settlement, the Aborigines Department was particularly concerned by the New Norcia priests' defiance when reproached by settlement staff, and requested Catalan's cooperation in reprimanding the offending clergy.<sup>40</sup> Catalan's response, however, was neither apologetic nor

35 Williams to Neville, 11 February 1935, ABCNN 05120.

36 Neville to Catalan, 27 February 1928, ABCNN 05118; Catalan to Neville, 15 October 1934, ABCNN 01436; Neville to Catalan, 13 March 1937, ABCNN 05120.

37 Catalan to Neville, 15 October 1934.

38 Neville to Catalan, 13 March 1937.

39 Bray to Catalan, 21 July 1934, ABCNN 05119; Neville to Catalan, 25 February 1935, ABCNN 05120.

40 Bray to Catalan, 21 July 1934.

regretful, and demonstrated considerable resistance to departmental authority. On one occasion, stating that the couple in question had not ‘accomplished the conditions required for their matrimony’s validity’, Catalan endorsed his priest’s actions as a legitimate attempt to validate a marriage that was not recognised by the Catholic Church.<sup>41</sup>

While we rarely hear Aboriginal voices within these state–mission communications, on one occasion Neville included an Aboriginal man’s written statement to support his own criticism of the priests’ actions. In objecting to attempts by a New Norcia priest to force his religious conversion, Alfred Williams asserted ‘he [the priest] ought to be satisfied as my wife is an R.C. and all my children too’.<sup>42</sup> However, Catalan maintained that it was the Moore River Settlement authorities who were acting unfairly, by not giving due consideration to Catholic requirements in the event of a mixed-faith marriage.<sup>43</sup> While Williams’s protest failed to attract Catalan’s sympathy or remorse, Neville’s unusual inclusion of the statement provides a valuable source of Aboriginal perspective on the priest’s actions. Aside from the obvious resentment in his statement, ‘I do not want to turn [to Catholicism] but the Father is trying to make me do so against my wish’,<sup>44</sup> Williams’s letter expresses his own nonchalance regarding his family’s inconsistent religious adherence, a point that no doubt concerned Catalan.

Catalan’s resistant stance during these incidents reflected his own considerable anxiety regarding the impact of mixed-faith marriages on Catholic identity within the Aboriginal community. Such marriages had become a sensitive issue for Catholic priests since the *Ne Temere* papal decree had come into effect in 1908.<sup>45</sup> This decree stipulated that marriages either between Catholics or between a Catholic and a non-Catholic person were not valid before God and church, unless they were contracted in the presence of a Catholic pastor.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, this decree had attracted opposition from Protestant organisations due to its defiance of state power that recognised the validity of the civil and Protestant components of mixed-faith marriages.<sup>47</sup> Catalan was also concerned about certain assurances that needed to be obtained prior to the marriage ceremony, such as the promise required by the non-Catholic party to raise his or her children in the Catholic faith.<sup>48</sup> As with the episodes relating to baptism, Catalan’s adherence to Catholicism largely outweighed his concern for the Aboriginal people’s own wishes. In responding to Neville’s claims

41 Catalan to Bray, 30 July 1934, ABCNN 01436.

42 Williams to Neville, 11 February 1935, ABCNN 05120.

43 Catalan to Neville, 4 March 1935, ABCNN 01436.

44 Williams to Neville, 11 February 1935.

45 Mol 1970: 293.

46 Mol 1970: 293; O’Farrell 1969: 240–41.

47 O’Farrell 1969: 242.

48 Catalan to Neville, 4 March 1935; Mol 1970: 293.



regarding Alfred Williams's objections to Catholic conversion, Catalan dismissed the concerns, arguing that they were 'founded merely on the word of a native with no witnesses'.<sup>49</sup>

During the late 1930s, Catalan's defiant pursuit of greater Catholic influence at the Moore River Settlement drove his request to build a dedicated Catholic hall for the settlement's residents and Catholic priests. Surprisingly, Neville agreed to the proposal in February 1939. Although Chief Secretary Kitson had rejected the plan in February 1938, the Chief Protector, in his final year in office, made a small concession by granting conditional endorsement for the building.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Neville was influenced (or exhausted) by Catalan's determined lobbying. Neville presumably weighed his concession against the opportunity to attract and maintain New Norcia's compliance on issues of greater significance to him, such as the oversight of the mission's Aboriginal residents and the prevention of marriages between mixed-descent and 'full' Aboriginal people.

## 'I shall be glad to know how it was that the seriousness of her condition was not discovered earlier'<sup>51</sup>

The relationship between Neville and New Norcia substantially complicated the mission's level of care for Aboriginal residents. Catalan's conflicted intermediary role was evident in his attempts to meet their needs despite the financial and regulatory constraints imposed by Neville. During earlier interactions, this situation was evidenced by the Abbot's obvious difficulty in seeking urgent health care for his residents while adhering to Neville's pedantic administrative demands. Neville's tighter administration of mission subsidies brought increased scrutiny to New Norcia's operations and finances, and raised considerable concerns for Catalan regarding the mission's financial viability.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps sensing the mission's vulnerability under Neville's reforms, Catalan was initially compliant with departmental processes regarding the care of New Norcia's Aboriginal residents.

On one such occasion during 1918, Catalan visited Neville's city office seeking permission for 19-year-old Mary Graham to go to a sanatorium for more specialised care, as she was gravely ill.<sup>53</sup> Neville's insistence on a doctor's certificate, and Catalan's difficulty in obtaining one, delayed the young woman's treatment for some two months. Tragically, Mary passed away just four days before Catalan finally

49 Catalan to Neville, 4 March 1935.

50 Kitson to Catalan, 22 February 1938, ABCNN 051119; Neville to Catalan, 17 February 1939, ABCNN 051119.

51 Neville to Catalan, 9 August 1918, ABCNN 05120.

52 Biskup 1973: 155; Haebich 1988: 167.

53 Catalan to Neville, 14 August 1918, ABCNN 01420.

received Neville's permission to place her in the sanatorium.<sup>54</sup> Considering Catalan's attempts to balance Neville's requirements with Mary's critical need for care, the Abbot was understandably perplexed by Neville's inquiry, 'I shall be glad to know how it was that the seriousness of her condition was not discovered earlier'.<sup>55</sup> Mary's death emphasised the considerable discrepancy between Neville's pursuit of greater administrative efficiency and the lived experiences of those individuals whom these so-called 'efficiencies' had attempted to assist. While Neville remained rigid in his demands for Catalan to follow proper protocols, Catalan's early compliance had altered by 1937, as shown when he acted on the rapidly declining health of a young girl named Milly.<sup>56</sup> Catalan's decision to admit Milly to the children's hospital without notifying the Aborigines Department was criticised and, following the girl's eventual death from her illness, the Abbot was reprimanded for defying proper procedure, and ordered to reimburse the department for her funeral expenses.<sup>57</sup>

Correspondence relating to the health of New Norcia's residents also reveals the extent to which they attracted departmental surveillance when receiving medical treatment away from the mission. Neville was particularly concerned that New Norcia's residents could potentially evade departmental oversight when receiving medical attention in Perth, and therefore sought increased cooperation from Catalan in monitoring their movements and behaviour. As with other Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, eye problems such as trachoma were endemic at New Norcia, and those residents afflicted with the condition were occasionally sent to Perth for treatment.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the young woman referred to at the beginning of this article, Eliza George, had been sent to Perth in 1930 to receive such treatment. Like other young Aboriginal women, she was accommodated in a government-designated boarding house.<sup>59</sup> Eliza first attracted Neville's displeasure when she unexpectedly returned to New Norcia without requesting the Chief Protector's permission. Neville was particularly annoyed at the mission's communication failure, and the unnecessary accommodation expenses incurred by his department.<sup>60</sup>

Catalan's difficult intermediary role was evident in his response to Neville, in which he attempted to negotiate an agreeable situation for both Eliza and the Chief Protector. Catalan explained that Eliza had returned to New Norcia of her own accord, and that he had tried to convince her to continue her treatment in Perth until the hospital authorities formally dismissed her. He also acknowledged that the

54 Catalan to Neville, 14 August 1918.

55 Neville to Catalan, 9 August 1918, ABCNN 05120.

56 Neville to Catalan, 15 March 1927, ABCNN 05120; Neville to Catalan, 15 April 1932, ABCNN 05120.

57 Bray to Catalan, 19 January 1937, ABCNN 05119; Catalan to Bray, 24 January 1937, ABCNN 01438.

58 Briscoe 2003: 179–80; Neville to Catalan, 13 May 1931, ABCNN 05120; Catalan to Neville, 2 July 1932, ABCNN 01433; Catalan to Neville, 1 August 1937, ABCNN 01438; Catalan to Bray, 27 September 1940, ABCNN 01442.

59 Bray to Catalan, 26 July 1932, ABCNN 05120; Kinnane 2003: 203.

60 Neville to Catalan, 13 May 1931.



arrangement had strained departmental finances, and suggested that Eliza remain at the mission in between her three-monthly appointments in Perth.<sup>61</sup> Curiously, however, Neville disregarded Catalan's suggestion, and directed that Eliza should return to Perth, adding 'she must understand distinctly that when she reaches Perth she is under my control, and must do as she is told'.<sup>62</sup> Neville's concern for Eliza might well have concluded at that point but for Catalan's further request, in July 1932, to allow another woman, Josephine Wallace, to go to Perth for treatment for a similar eye complaint.<sup>63</sup> Catalan's letter reminded Neville that Eliza, having returned to Perth in 1931, was still receiving treatment and that her stay had now been ongoing for the past two-and-a-half years. In his response to Catalan, Neville noted that Eliza's treatment had come at considerable cost to the department, and recognising that Josephine now required similar care, decided not to approve departmental support for Josephine's treatment. Neville explained that New Norcia authorities were now liable for Josephine's treatment costs because she had lived at the mission nearly all of her 40 years.<sup>64</sup>

Clearly angered by Neville's response, Catalan requested the intervention of Chief Secretary Charles Baxter.<sup>65</sup> While Baxter eventually endorsed some limited departmental support for Josephine's treatment, the Aborigines Department terminated Eliza's treatment in Perth.<sup>66</sup> However, this was not the end of the story for Eliza who, upon learning of her imminent return to New Norcia, escaped from the Perth boarding house. When apprehended by a police officer, Eliza claimed that she was the daughter of a 'half-caste' by a white father, and therefore was not subject to the provisions of the Aborigines Act.<sup>67</sup> Deputy Chief Protector Bray, who was in charge during a period of Neville's absence, asserted that Eliza was being influenced by others who had offered to help her take legal action to clarify her position if the department attempted to send her back to New Norcia.<sup>68</sup> Bray was anxious about the delicate legal situation affecting both the department and New Norcia, and the possible repercussions if it was discovered that significant funds had been spent on the care of a person deemed non-Aboriginal.<sup>69</sup>

Despite Neville's best efforts to control his Aboriginal charges, this episode accentuated his need to gain the support and compliance of mission authorities. What might initially be regarded as a routine matter involving a young woman's health care offers valuable insights into this complex state-mission relationship

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61 Catalan to Neville, 18 May 1931, ABCNN 01432.

62 Neville to Catalan, 21 May 1931, ABCNN 05120.

63 Catalan to Neville, 2 July 1932.

64 Neville to Catalan, 13 July 1932, ABCNN 05120.

65 Catalan to Baxter, 25 July 1932, ABCNN 01433.

66 Baxter to Catalan, 4 August 1932, ABCNN 05119; Bray to Catalan, 26 July 1932, ABCNN 05120.

67 Bray to Catalan, 25 August 1932, ABCNN 05120.

68 Bray to Catalan, 25 August 1932.

69 Bray to Catalan, 25 August 1932.

and the flow-on effects for Aboriginal residents. Catalan evidently performed a complicated role as both an advocate for his residents, and in his duty to assist the Aborigines Department. In attempting to help resolve the department's dilemma, Catalan supplied the available details of Eliza's parentage – which, incidentally, gave no indication as to her 'racial' make-up. He also explained that the young woman would always be welcomed at New Norcia.<sup>70</sup> While Eliza did eventually visit the mission again, she did not remain there for long. Catalan's final correspondence to Bray on the matter revealed his disappointment at having lost contact with Eliza, and his obligation to inform the department of her departure.<sup>71</sup>

Eliza's actions during this incident are particularly intriguing. Not only did she demonstrate considerable assertiveness in questioning the legality of the department's control over her life, she also rejected the idea of submitting once again to mission authorities. Furthermore, Eliza's reference to her 'racial' make-up and her confidence in challenging departmental regulations are indicative of the Indigenous community's awareness of Neville's increasingly restrictive 'race-based' controls and their implications. In the early 1930s, Eliza was able to escape the clutches of the Aborigines Department, and indeed the mission, at a time when her particular 'racial' make-up positioned her outside Neville's sphere of control. However, the Chief Protector's need for greater authority in solving the growing 'half-caste problem' was to become a major concern for Aboriginal families and New Norcia as the 1930s progressed.

## 'I suppose you have heard about Mr Neville the Protector. He is taking every girl that is fair from their mothers'<sup>72</sup>

Throughout his term, Neville was confronted by the deficiencies of the Western Australian *Aborigines Act 1905* that had been formulated on the false assumption of the Aboriginal population's inevitable extinction.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the rapidly increasing 'half-caste' population had raised significant challenges for Neville in his attempts to accommodate prevailing societal attitudes within his policy decisions. Essentially, these mixed-descent people were considered too black to join white society yet too white to be left within Aboriginal communities. Neville called for the policy to shift from its earlier focus on segregating Aborigines from the potential contamination posed by white society. Instead, he advocated a policy in which Aborigines of mixed

70 Catalan to Bray, 27 August 1932, ABCNN 01433.

71 Catalan to Bray, 10 September 1932, ABCNN 01433.

72 Gregory to Catalan, 16 March 1937, ABCNN 05120.

73 Tomlinson 2008: Abstract.

descent would be absorbed into the white population.<sup>74</sup> Whilst broader support for such measures was slow to gain momentum, in 1933 the parliament voted for a royal commission to investigate the condition and treatment of Aborigines.<sup>75</sup> Perth Magistrate Henry Doyle Moseley undertook the royal commission in 1934, and his report was tabled in parliament in 1935.<sup>76</sup> Importantly, the report acknowledged the need for amendments to existing legislation as Neville had long been arguing.

The *Native Administration Act 1905–1936* (WA) combined recommendations from both Moseley and Neville. The legislation instituted changes that provided Neville with guardianship of all legitimate and illegitimate Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ children up to 21 years of age, regardless of whether or not the child had a living parent or relative.<sup>77</sup> The Act also included a broader definition of ‘native’ to encompass a wide range of Aboriginal people of part descent who had not been subject to the 1905 Act.<sup>78</sup> The extension of Neville’s legal powers allowed him to separate mixed-descent children from all Aboriginal influences, and facilitated their assimilation into white society. As Holland explains, Neville was particularly concerned about the impact of missions on his plans for assimilation. Not only did missionaries encourage marriages, regardless of descent, they endeavoured to create ‘segregated, self-perpetuating Aboriginal communities’.<sup>79</sup> Neville instead maintained that confining people of mixed descent to settlements enabled closer departmental oversight of their marriages while also providing opportunities for them to work and interact amongst the general community.<sup>80</sup> Neville’s determination to accommodate mixed-descent children in government settlements rather than on missions was to significantly impact upon New Norcia’s ability to assist parents seeking protection for their mixed-descent children.

In March 1937, local Aboriginal man Jonathon Gregory recognised the consequences of Neville’s increased authority and made a desperate request for Catalan to admit his ‘fair-skinned’ daughter, Hannah, to New Norcia. Gregory elaborated, ‘I suppose you have heard about Mr Neville the Protector. He is taking every girl that is fair from their mothers’.<sup>81</sup> This was not the first time Catalan was approached to help Aboriginal families fearing the removal of their children. Responding to a similar

74 Tomlinson 2008: Abstract.

75 Haebich 1988: 327–28.

76 Haebich 1988: 328, 337; Western Australia, Royal Commission 1935.

77 *Native Administration Act 1905–1936* (WA), ‘To Remove and Protect: Western Australia: Legislation / Key Provisions’, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (AIATSIS), [aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/remove-and-protect/western-australia](http://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/remove-and-protect/western-australia) (accessed 1 September 2017).

78 Haebich 1988: 349; *Native Administration Act 1905–1936* (WA), ‘To Remove and Protect’, AIATSIS, [aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/digitised\\_collections/remove/52794.pdf](http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/digitised_collections/remove/52794.pdf) (accessed 1 September 2017).

79 Holland 2015: 202.

80 Holland 2015: 202–3.

81 Gregory to Catalan, 16 March 1937.

request in 1933, the Abbot had been unable to accommodate more children at that time due to financial constraints imposed by the Aborigines Department. His regretful reply stated:

I wish I could do something for the half caste May Brown as well as for other natives, who are asking me to do something for them, especially now when it seems they are afraid to be removed to Moore Settlement.<sup>82</sup>

Aboriginal families were becoming increasingly fearful of having their children removed to the known appalling conditions of the Moore River Settlement where residents suffered from inadequate food, accommodation and health care, and received cruel treatment from settlement authorities.<sup>83</sup>

By 1937, Catalan was able to accommodate Gregory's daughter, and Hannah was admitted to New Norcia on 26 March.<sup>84</sup> However, the arrangement was to be short-lived. Only one month later, Catalan was advised that Neville had decided to remove Hannah from New Norcia as she was 'a quadroon, and her only hope [was] to remove her altogether from the Toodyay District and association with natives'.<sup>85</sup> Catalan's subsequent communication to Gregory revealed his regret and helplessness at the hands of the department, and particularly his concern regarding the girl's ability to maintain her faith unless placed in a Catholic home or school.<sup>86</sup> Despite Catalan's assurances to Neville of Hannah's preference to remain at New Norcia, he regretfully acknowledged Neville's authority under the Act, and conceded that mission authorities would be in no position to stop him should he remain convinced of the need to remove her from New Norcia.<sup>87</sup>

When directly confronted by the impacts of Neville's decisions on New Norcia's Aboriginal community, it appears Catalan's sympathy was with mission residents. He seems to have genuinely cared for the mission's Aboriginal residents and sought as much assistance for them as possible. Essentially, his efforts were considerably hampered by the financial and administrative restrictions enforced by the Aborigines Department, as well as Neville's legal authority. While he may have been able to resist departmental interference regarding the missionaries' religious influence, Catalan's attempts to advocate on behalf of mission residents were largely ineffective.

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82 Catalan to Smith, 16 February 1933, ABCNN 01434.

83 Haebich 1988: 207, 310–11, 334–35.

84 Catalan to Neville, 24 April 1937, ABCNN 01438.

85 Bray to Catalan, 20 April 1937, ABCNN 05120.

86 Catalan to Gregory, 23 April 1937, ABCNN 01438.

87 Catalan to Neville, 24 April 1937.

‘But we have no half-caste girls for them at Drysdale, and as they are excellent boys I want to get them the wives they want’<sup>88</sup>

Examining the Benedictine missionaries’ approach to mixed-descent and Aboriginal marriage is particularly revealing of their priorities with respect to Aboriginal welfare. Interactions between Neville and Catalan regarding mixed-descent relationships were especially complicated due to the missionaries’ reliance on marriage as a civilising force, and the Indigenous population’s varying levels of Aboriginal descent, particularly at New Norcia’s outpost Drysdale River Mission. Neville’s earlier years in the Department of Immigration and Tourism, and particularly his exposure to the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth), had established his strong commitment to ‘white Australia’ ideals. Neville demonstrated this commitment through his strict adherence to the marriage regulations outlined under the *Aborigines Act 1905* stipulating that the Chief Protector’s permission was required for any marriage between an Aboriginal woman and a non-Aboriginal man.<sup>89</sup> The early twentieth-century requirement to control mixed-descent relationships reflected the new nation’s fears regarding miscegenation, and particularly the threat posed by the ‘coloured half-caste’ population.<sup>90</sup>

The diverse character of the Aboriginal communities under Neville’s control produced further complications for the Chief Protector. During his 1916 tour of the Kimberley, Neville opined that the strength and vitality of the Kimberley tribespeople needed protection from white contamination.<sup>91</sup> He particularly regarded the encroachment of missions within these areas as a significant threat to the cultural and ‘racial’ integrity of the ‘full-blood’ tribes.<sup>92</sup> Not only did Neville’s viewpoint challenge the very existence of missions amongst Aboriginal communities, it also threatened mission-arranged marriages as one of the key strategies adopted by missionaries in Christianising and civilising the Aboriginal populations. As Felicity Jenz explains, missionaries emphasised the marriage of Indigenous mission residents as a way of reinforcing gendered European and Christian codes of behaviour, with the hope that married couples would then remain with the mission and become useful role models for local Aboriginal people yet to be converted.<sup>93</sup>

88 Catalan to Colonial Secretary Colebatch, 22 December 1917, ABCNN 01418.

89 *Aborigines Act 1905* (WA), s. 42.

90 Ellinghaus 2003: 186–88.

91 Jacobs 1990: 71.

92 Neville 1947: 63–66.

93 Jenz 2010: 39–41.

In 1917, Abbot Catalan's request to arrange marriages between residents of the Drysdale River and Beagle Bay missions received Neville's strong opposition and created significant state–mission tensions. On this occasion, Catalan had attempted to transfer four mixed-descent girls from the Beagle Bay Mission as potential wives for four young men at the Drysdale River Mission (also of mixed descent) due to an absence of eligible mixed-descent women in that vicinity.<sup>94</sup> Neville justified his opposition to the plan by alluding to the possible dangers arising from moving the young mixed-descent women to a predominantly 'full-blood' community.<sup>95</sup> When reflecting upon the event after his retirement, Neville explained his repugnance to the appearance of a 'mass marriage' in this instance, which he regarded as a deviation from Christian principle.<sup>96</sup>

Abbot Catalan, however, saw no conflict with Christian principle. In what had become a typical course of action during this early period of Neville's term, Catalan requested ministerial intervention for his proposal. He insisted to Colonial Secretary Colebatch:

These boys are most of them, of marriageable age and would be better in every respect, married ... But we have no half-caste girls for them at Drysdale, and as they are excellent boys I want to get them the wives they want.<sup>97</sup>

Catalan assured Colebatch that the girls would not be forced into marriage and would be returned to Beagle Bay if they preferred not to stay at the Drysdale River Mission.<sup>98</sup> He also explained that during his previous visit to Beagle Bay many of the girls had been agreeable to his idea.<sup>99</sup> Eventually, the Colonial Secretary formulated a compromise allowing the young men from Drysdale River to relocate to the Beagle Bay Mission for the purpose of marriage, an outcome that Catalan gratefully accepted.<sup>100</sup>

While this incident was ultimately resolved, the arguments presented by both Catalan and Neville reveal their contrasting attitudes towards Aboriginal men, and the potential for miscegenation. Catalan's emphasis on the benefits of marriage for the mixed-descent men ran counter to the official preoccupation with the Aboriginal female's role in reproduction that predominated during the twentieth century. More predictably, Neville's insensitivity to the plight of the men at Drysdale River reflected the typical bureaucratic attitude that denied the role of Aboriginal (including mixed-descent) men as husbands and fathers, such an acknowledgement

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94 Neville 1947: 66; The four 'half-caste' boys had been sent to the Drysdale River Mission in 1909 during Chief Protector Isdell's drive to remove 'half-caste' children in the Fitzroy Crossing area. See Choo 1997: 25.

95 Catalan to Colebatch, 30 September 1918, ABCNN 01420.

96 Neville 1947: 66.

97 Catalan to Colonial Secretary Colebatch, 22 December 1917.

98 Catalan to Colebatch, 22 December 1917.

99 Catalan to Colebatch, 22 December 1917.

100 Catalan to Colebatch, 5 August 1918, ABCNN 01420; Catalan to Colebatch, 30 September 1918.

being counterproductive to the aims of Aboriginal policy that assigned the paternal role to the state.<sup>101</sup> A further complication for Neville was the idea that these couples, and their offspring, would remain on the mission, in close proximity to a ‘full-blood’ community. That outcome was incompatible with official plans to separate the ‘half-caste’ and ‘full-blood’ populations, and assimilate ‘half-castes’ to ensure their transformation into useful members of the broader community.<sup>102</sup>

**‘Offered flour, tobacco, and thin brushes for the paint, you know, but they had to stay with us, the missionaries. And afterwards they had to be free to marry the one they wanted’<sup>103</sup>**

Involvement in Aboriginal marriages by either the state or missions also raised the question of how best to deal with existing ‘tribal’ marriage practices. Anthropologists categorise traditional Aboriginal marriage systems as ‘gerentocratically polygynous’, meaning that older Aboriginal men were entitled to more than one, and sometimes several wives, while young men had no wives at all.<sup>104</sup> While Neville was uncomfortable with the polygamous nature of these marriages, he acknowledged the often violent consequences arising either from Aboriginal transgressions, or state or missionary interference. Placing heavy emphasis on his role as ‘protector’, Neville was adamant that any Christian marriages contracted between Aboriginal couples should first consider and respect ‘tribal’ law.<sup>105</sup> As Choo explains, Drysdale River missionaries shared Neville’s concerns with ‘tribal’ marriages, and were also, outwardly at least, committed to avoiding interference in marriages wherever the Aboriginal people were not Christian. However, the missionaries played an active role in the marriages of Aboriginal people who identified as Christian, paying particular attention to the requirement for the men to choose only one wife.<sup>106</sup>

The Drysdale River missionaries’ outward acceptance of ‘tribal’ considerations contradicted their beliefs that such customs contributed to dangerously low populations amongst the Aboriginal community.<sup>107</sup> According to former Drysdale River missionary Father Seraphim Sanz, who was interviewed by Choo in the 1990s, the missionaries at Drysdale River were deeply concerned about the practice of ‘promising’ young girls to old men, which produced an age disparity that disastrously

101 Haskins 2003: 110–11.

102 Haebich 1988: 150–51, 157–58.

103 Sanz, 9 April 1992: tape 1, as quoted in Choo 2001: 205.

104 Choo 2001: 192.

105 Tomlinson 2008: 247–48.

106 Choo 2001: 202.

107 Choo 2001: 203–4.

affected their prospects for successful reproduction.<sup>108</sup> Their solution involved convincing Aboriginal families to hand over their children for the missionaries to rear, thereby preserving the Aboriginal population in the area and developing a viable Catholic community.<sup>109</sup> First envisaged as a long-term solution during the early 1930s, missionaries began to keep the children when they visited the mission with their parents. As Father Sanz later explained:

Offered flour, tobacco, and thin brushes for the paint, you know, but they [the children] had to stay with us, the missionaries. And afterwards they had to be free to marry the one they wanted.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout Neville's term, the Drysdale River missionaries' scheme escaped the scrutiny of the Aborigines Department, probably due to the mission's remote location and the fact that the children had not yet reached marriageable age. However, violations of 'tribal' considerations in marriages performed in the early 1940s resulted in several Aboriginal deaths, attracting the ire of Neville's successor, Francis Bray.<sup>111</sup> Bray subsequently arranged an investigation into the Drysdale River missionaries' breach of the *Native Administration Act 1905–1936* (WA), the results of which influenced the tightening of administrative and reporting procedures regarding marriage regulations.<sup>112</sup>

## Halting the 'half-caste' population

Aside from Neville's ongoing commitment to protect the 'full-blood' Aboriginal population, he was particularly concerned about the increasing mixed-descent population. Neville had continually questioned the effectiveness of existing legislation in preventing white men's exploitation of Aboriginal and 'half-caste' women and the consequent mixed-descent offspring.<sup>113</sup> From the late 1920s, he began to explore more extreme solutions to halt the 'half-caste' population based on eugenic theories that had gained prominence within the scientific community. Neville adopted these theories and advocated a policy of 'biological absorption' involving 'breeding out the colour' by encouraging 'half-castes' to marry and reproduce with lighter rather than darker-skinned people.<sup>114</sup> However, for 'full-blood' populations, Neville's policy of 'biological absorption' required their ongoing separation from mixed-descent populations.<sup>115</sup>

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108 Choo 2001: 203.

109 Sanz, 29 November 1993, as quoted in Choo 2001: 203, 239.

110 Sanz, 9 April 1992: tape 1, as quoted in Choo 2001: 205.

111 Choo 2001: 186–88, 216; Bray to Catalan, 1 May 1943; Bray to Catalan, 27 May 1943, ABCNN 051119.

112 Choo 2001: 229–30.

113 Jacobs 1990: 185–86.

114 Zogbaum 2003: 132; Haebich 2000: 279; Haebich 1988: 351; Jacobs 1990: 193–94.

115 Neville 1947: 56.



Neville's complicated attitudes towards mixed-descent marriages had a significant impact on missions where residents were free to select their own marital partner regardless of 'race'.<sup>116</sup> Assessing the Benedictine missionaries' reactions to Neville's marriage controls is assisted by comparative studies of other mission communities in Western Australia, such as the Mount Margaret missionaries who were vocal opponents of Neville's state-imposed marriage requirements. Holland has written extensively on Mount Margaret teacher and activist Mary Bennett, whose outspoken challenge to Neville's attitudes on 'tribal' marriage practices and 'racial' absorption contributed to the mission's rapidly declining relationship with Neville.<sup>117</sup> While the Moseley royal commission and changes to the Aborigines Act were indicative of the harder line Neville was pursuing with respect to mixed-descent intercourse and marriage, the final breakdown of Neville's relationship with the Mount Margaret Mission came from Neville's attack on missions at the Aboriginal Welfare Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities in April 1937. During this conference, Neville openly criticised the attitudes of missions and their incompatibility with his plans.<sup>118</sup> The following year, Neville introduced 150 additional regulations associated with the Native Administration Act, including the requirement for missions to obtain a licence from Neville's department. These measures intended to remove any sense of autonomy previously enjoyed by mission communities.<sup>119</sup>

In comparison with the bitter arguments played out between Neville and the Mount Margaret Mission over mixed-descent marriage, interactions between Neville and authorities at the Benedictine missions were remarkably amicable. Communications predominantly focused on obtaining appropriate permissions and notification of marriages performed at the mission.<sup>120</sup> In some instances, Neville requested marriage details to ascertain the 'racial' make-up of his Aboriginal charges, and Catalan's response was typically obliging and efficient.<sup>121</sup> In stark contrast to impassioned arguments that characterised the Mount Margaret Mission–Neville relationship, New Norcia's interactions with Neville regarding Aboriginal marriage had become highly bureaucratic. Aside from the clandestine attempts described by Sanz to disrupt 'tribal' marriages at the Drysdale River Mission, the Benedictine missionaries did not typically resist state requirements with respect to mixed-descent marriage.

116 Haebich 1988: 245, 261–62; Biskup 1973: 215–16; Choo 2001: 226–27; Zogbaum 2003: 122, 125, 126, 131.

117 Holland 2001: 292–301.

118 Haebich 1988: 349–50; Jacobs 1990: 260; *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities*, 1937: 11, National Library of Australia, nla.gov.au/nla.us-vn118931 (accessed 28 August 2015).

119 Holland 2015: 206.

120 Copping to Catalan, 31 July 1923, ABCNN 05120; Catalan to Copping, 26 August 1923, ABCNN 01425; Catalan to Neville, 7 March 1928, ABCNN 01430; Bray to Alcade, 24 July 1934, ABCNN 05120; Catalan to Neville, 20 February 1935, ABCNN 01436; Neville to Catalan, 28 February 1935, ABCNN 05120; Neville, Circular 101, 16 July 1930, State Records Office of Western Australia (hereafter SROWA) Cons 993, 1930/0234; Catalan to Neville, 22 July 1930, SROWA Cons 993, 1930/0234.

121 Neville to Catalan, 3 November 1934, ABCNN 05120; Catalan to Neville, 7 November 1934, ABCNN 01436.

During Neville's term, New Norcia and Drysdale River priests performed 123 marriages, equating to approximately five marriages per year.<sup>122</sup> This relatively small number of marriages belies the range and complexity of issues confronting the Benedictine missionaries with respect to marriage. New Norcia priests regarded compliance with correct religious procedure as paramount, and were unwilling to compromise even when their intransigence created significant tensions in their relationship with Neville and the Aborigines Department. Like the Mount Margaret Mission, the Benedictine missionaries acknowledged the negative impacts of 'tribal' marriages upon local Aboriginal populations, yet such concerns did not warrant their open defiance of state requirements. Instead, they attempted to redress the situation quietly, until the significant consequences of their decisions emerged after Neville's term. Finally, Catalan's cooperation with official requirements regarding mixed-descent marriage indicates a level of apathy regarding Neville's planned absorption of the Aboriginal population. That New Norcia's population was largely of mixed descent, effectively lessening the potential for unions that would challenge Neville's directive, might partially account for this attitude.<sup>123</sup> However, Catalan's greater need for state acceptance of the mission's religious purpose, and especially to support his concerns regarding inter-faith marriage, outweighed his desire to make waves with the authorities on this particular issue of mixed marriage.

## Conclusion

The complicated relationship between A.O. Neville and Abbot Catalan provides an illuminating snapshot of the challenges faced by mission organisations due to state interference. Most important, however, are the impacts of this complicated relationship upon the local Indigenous people, and the occasional Aboriginal voices emerging from the documents provide small, yet valuable, hints of their reactions to state and mission interference in their lives. At times, Benedictine missionaries were benevolent in their treatment of Aboriginal residents. However, other incidents demonstrated their almost callous disregard for the Aboriginal community's opinions and, most importantly, their future happiness and well-being. Underpinning each of the three themes is the Benedictine missionaries' sense of vulnerability during Neville's era. While Catalan may have over-exaggerated Neville's anti-mission stance as a specifically anti-Catholic position, the perceived threat to his missions' religious purpose heavily influenced the Abbot's relationship with Neville. Catalan was concerned by the direct impacts of Neville's interference in the lives of Aboriginal people, particularly when such interference diminished his own capacity to provide health care and protection to mission residents. To a significant extent, however, he was powerless to resist Neville's demands. Yet unlike other mission communities,

<sup>122</sup> Marriage Register, Marriages Performed between 1915 and May 1940, ABCNN.

<sup>123</sup> Catalan, Evidence from the Moseley Royal Commission, SROWA Cons 2922, Item 1: 19.

Catalan did not appear concerned about the broader implications of Neville's decisions regarding the future of Western Australia's Aboriginal people, such as those associated with the policy of 'biological absorption'. Indeed, rather than the open opposition that had characterised Catalan's reaction to Neville's accommodation of mixed-faith marriages, the Abbot was visibly compliant with Neville's restrictions on mixed-descent marriages. In this respect, the heavily negotiated nature of the state–mission relationship becomes clearer as the Abbot carefully weighed Neville's demonstrated intransigence on issues of Aboriginal oversight and 'racial' mixing with his own responsibility to protect the mission's religious purpose. In such uncertain times, Catalan's struggle with Neville over the Benedictine missions' religious integrity was perhaps the only battle he could conceivably win.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support I received from the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation, especially the generosity and kindness shown by former director Margaret Drayton.

Abbot John of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia kindly granted me permission to access the archives, and archivist Peter Hocking provided valuable and patient assistance.

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# *Indigenous and other Australians since 1901: A conversation between Professor Tim Rowse and Dr Miranda Johnson*

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Miranda Johnson and Tim Rowse

Tim Rowse's book, *Indigenous and Other Australians Since 1901* (2017), raises timely questions about the writing of Aboriginal history, as well as offering insights into contemporary political debates. In this conversation, conducted via email, we examine some of the book's arguments, the evidence drawn on to make them and why these interventions are necessary today. In the introduction to the book, Rowse draws attention to W.E.H. Stanner's hope for telling the 'the story ... of the unacknowledged relations between two racial groups within a single field of life'.<sup>1</sup> He shows why this was and continues to be so difficult in terms of identity, territorial control and jurisdictional practice. In Australia, indigeneity does not mean one thing, and its meaning has changed and become increasingly plural over time; for much of the twentieth century there were really two Australias – north and south – that were represented and governed differently; and two sovereignties – one kin-based, the other state-based – that have posed considerable challenges to each other, right up to the present. This argument serves as the jumping-off point for the conversation.

**MJ: Why these two groups, 'Indigenous' and 'Other Australians'? Who do you imagine, in the context of this book, comprises these two groups?**

TR: The binary Indigenous/non-Indigenous (or 'other Australians') has been around as a framework for official statistics since 1969, and it has become the basis of an important notion of 'social justice' (Closing the Gap). The binary has become

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1 Quoted in Rowse 2017: 4.

central to Australians' national imaginary, partly through the state's and civil society organisations' promotion of 'reconciliation' since 1991. Recall that in the Preamble to the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*, we find the affirmations that:

- (a) Australia was occupied by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who had settled for thousands of years, before British settlement at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788; and
- (b) many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders suffered dispossession and dispersal from their traditional lands by the British Crown; and
- (c) to date, there has been no formal process of reconciliation *between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians* [my emphasis].

So the binary has currency as part of our civic vocabulary.

'Indigenous' comprises 'Aboriginal people' and 'Torres Strait Islanders'. 'Other Australians' is, of course, a very heterogeneous category. In my book, I have not considered distinctions among 'other Australians' that are undoubtedly important: of class, of sex, of ethnic identity, of Australian-born and overseas-born, of Anglophone and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB). A lot could be said about the different ways that these various categories of non-Indigenous Australian have been oriented towards their settler status. I have not gone into these differences at all in the book, though I am giving them some attention in my work on the Australian Cultural Fields project.<sup>2</sup> However, I have devoted a lot of attention to three axes of difference among Indigenous Australians: region, sex and class. I have tried to give a textured account of 'Indigenous Australia' by highlighting the historical emergence of these distinctions among them.

**MJ: And why the period, 'since 1901'? Is the twentieth-century story, post-Federation, quite distinct from that of the nineteenth?**

TR: Before 1901, six colonies acted independently of each other, though not in ignorance of each other. The settler colonial state substantially changed its internal dynamics in 1901, in that six colonies formed a national level of government. The story of the state's dealings with Indigenous Australians is from that moment partly a story of intergovernmental relationships. My earlier work on 'assimilation' had taught me that they were important. The act of federation, driven powerfully by 'white Australia' nationalism, also raised the question of the non-white populations of 'north' Australia. How was the 'south' (where the visions of federation flourished) to incorporate this 'multicultural' north (a question studied by Henry Reynolds, Regina Ganter, Gary Lee, Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers)?

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Cultural Fields: National and Transnational Dynamics, [www.westernsydney.edu.au/ACF](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ACF) (accessed 14 August 2018).



The year 1901 also saw the inception of the Australian constitution, which contained the phrase ‘aboriginal native’; that term now had to be operationally defined – a much tougher challenge than anyone then imagined, I think I have shown. I chose Alfred Deakin as the representative historical agent who made Federation significant in ‘Indigenous affairs’, because he did three things that defined the cultural and geopolitical outlook of the federation project. In 1902, he defined ‘aboriginal native’ for constitutional law. In 1905, he published (anonymously) a concise prospectus of the extension of the rule of law over the entire continent, acknowledging the relative weakness of the state in the north. In 1910, speaking on the Commonwealth’s takeover of the Northern Territory, he again projected nationhood in continental terms, implying that it was a task for the future, now to commence.

I did consider starting the book in 1911, when the national government first assumed direct administrative and legislative responsibility for some Aboriginal people (those in the Northern Territory). But that would still have left me with the problem of what to say about the new national government’s stance towards the mastery of the continent in the period 1901–10, so well expressed by Deakin.

**MJ: As you demonstrate time and again in the book, the projection of nationhood northwards, the idea that the continent can and should be mastered, is never completed. Notably, Indigenous and state sovereignties, based in different forms and practices of authority, continually challenge each other. What do you think accounts for that incompleteness or, to put it another way, why did Deakin’s dream fail to become reality?**

TR: There is an easily available explanation for the incompleteness of Deakin’s project: the relative inhospitality to settler colonisation of the climate and soils of much of the continent. When people migrate to Australia, they tend, in overwhelming proportions, to settle in the temperate zones and in the capital cities in particular, and that is still so. So if numerical preponderance over the indigenous people is a major determinant of the success of settler colonisation – its ‘mastery’ of a territory – then the settler colonisation of the Australian continent has been and continues to be a spatially uneven project. Incompleteness is evident in the fact that Australian governments still subsidise the colonisation of the north through tax concessions and other forms of public sector support, such as those effected by the Grants Commission.

What Deakin expected was that Aboriginal people would be outnumbered by colonising immigrants and that they would disappear into the settler population, and it seemed to him (in the first decade of Federation) that they were well on their way to doing so in Victoria and New South Wales. He also hoped and (I suppose) expected that administration and the rule of law would permeate every corner of the continent. This has come about. The 1966 Census demonstrated administrative mastery, in that the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, with the help

of missions, could for the first time exhaustively enumerate the entire Indigenous population. (In recent years, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has acknowledged that remote area enumeration is more difficult than it seemed in 1966, and it uses special methods.)<sup>3</sup>

In jurisdiction, ‘mastery’ is a bit more complicated, as there is a lingering question of whether and how to take Aboriginal customary law into account in programs of ‘justice investment’, in the application of the criminal law and in formulating native title’s ‘bundle of rights’. I agree that the challenge of ‘Indigenous difference’ remains, though it is in the context of a huge asymmetry: Australian law can extinguish native title, but the reverse does not apply. The word ‘mastered’ is interesting. When the settler colonial state declared certain regions to be ‘inviolable reserves’, and when such reserves (despite never being totally ‘inviolable’) remained sites of enduring Indigenous enclaves and then became part of the Indigenous Land and Sea Estate, were such regions and their inhabitants ‘mastered’ or not? Such reserves and their successor legal regimes (the Indigenous Estate) were within the Crown’s sovereign territory, as the militarisation of the remote regions in the Second World War and in the Cold War demonstrated, but the inhabitants have lived, and in thousands of cases continue to live, a distinct variation of ‘the Australian way of life’.

So the continent has not been normatively integrated: pluralities remain. The argument for seeing that state of affairs as a lack of mastery or as incomplete mastery rests on a conception of the modern state as normatively ambitious – that is, as aspiring to ensure that high degree of cultural homogeneity that Ernest Gellner argued is characteristic of the **modern** nation-state.<sup>4</sup> The ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy – with its appeal to norms of well-being established on the basis of comparison with non-Indigenous Australians – is a program of normative integration, of the ‘mastery’ of peoples and places most remote from the capital cities.

**MJ: That process of ‘normative integration’ is depicted by other scholars as a process of ongoing settler colonialism. You have critiqued some theories of settler colonialism elsewhere. One of the points I’ve taken away from your critiques is your concern that there is a value judgement in the use of settler colonial theory that induces a kind of moral hesitation in historians. In your article on this topic in *Australian Historical Studies*, you advocated an ‘impersonal analysis’ that avoids taking what you call the position of a ‘transcendant morality’.<sup>5</sup> I wonder if you would elaborate here on how you have cultivated this kind of approach in your work. I’m assuming that you are not arguing precisely for the ‘noble dream’ of objectivity but, rather, for the practising of a particular kind of historian’s ethic; and one, moreover, that**

3 See Rowse 2012: Chapter 1.

4 Gellner 1996: 98–145.

5 Rowse 2014: 297–310.

**actually plays (or should play?) an important role in public discussion about Indigenous rights, settler state responsibilities, and so on, today? In other words, I guess it's a position that is neither that of activist or ivory-tower dweller?**

TR: I am rather opposed to 'normative integration' if it is experienced more as pressure than as opportunity by the Indigenous Australians who are supposed to benefit from it. All opportunities create some pressures of course, and some of the choices facing Indigenous Australians are difficult to make because their consequences are difficult to foresee or because they are just intrinsically difficult. For example, it is good that there are opportunities for young people to commit to more years of formal education, but it is possible that this takes young people away from family and country, and also that it creates clashes of values and understandings between generations. Such dilemmas are unavoidable, but those in authority (including Indigenous authorities) should maximise the scope for choice – at the level of the individual and above – about whether and how to commit to the various futures on offer. That's my underlying value position, and it's hardly unique to me.

This leads me to the other part of your question: I have learned not to assume, in writing history, any conception of 'the Indigenous interest'. I assume that all humans have an interest in living as long as possible in dignified and happy ways, but among Indigenous Australians there is such a variety of starting points and visions and capacities that it is risky to generalise about what does or does not advance their interests. Nor do I find it possible to adopt a general view of the rights and responsibilities of non-Indigenous Australians and their governments. A responsible settler colony is always limited to ameliorative action, since the deed of colonisation is irreversible. Many ameliorative actions in the past now look morally ugly, but before pronouncing such a judgement, the historian should try to think him or herself into the shoes of those who did those things – that is, become aware of their knowledge, values, assumptions and instruments of authority. Empathy with narrated action is necessary to good description. The historian's investigative and imaginative effort should result in a sound, evidence-based description of the actions, of the conjunctures in which they took place and of the consequences – intended and unintended. Moral judgement, applying the values of the historian, is then possible. Whether the historian proceeds to make the moral judgement explicit will be determined by the kind of relationship that the historian imagines he or she has with readers. I tend to imagine a readership that is diverse in its values and politics, and intelligent, and I rarely tell readers whether I think the actions I have described are consistent with my values. I could give anyone a list of things in Australia's past that I find deplorable, should they be interested. My list would overlap with many others'.

Finally, it could be said that the one value that the historian must not fail to honour is intellectual honesty: rendering the past as truthfully as the available evidence allows. The Uluru Declaration (May 2017) invited truthful historical scholarship as

a basis for a more civil and just Australia. However, political identities are based as much on forgetting as on remembering, and so one still has to make a judgement about which truths to emphasise. With Emma Waterton, I have recently explored this issue, asking how the Native Mounted Police could figure in a revised Australian military heritage.<sup>6</sup>

**MJ: In allowing for the space for engagement between reader and your text, you do run a risk of being misconstrued. I realise this is true to a degree for any writer or historian, but the risk is perhaps higher in a field such as this, because the field of Aboriginal history in Australia has been the subject of such acrimonious, polemicised and highly moralised public debate. Intellectual honesty, making up one's own mind, can open one up to the charge of being some kind of traitor, paradoxically even more so perhaps when refusing the role of history warrior. I was reflecting on this in reading your simply stated but surprisingly startling question that frames Chapter 4 of *Indigenous and Other Australians Since 1901*, 'did protection protect?'. As you point out in the opening of this chapter, this policy 'experimentation' had no clear method for assessing its success or failure. Moreover, the administrative processes measuring Aboriginal survival lacked, as you put it, an 'unquestionable database'. This administrative failure allowed for the perpetuation of 'dying race' stories, far beyond their demographic truthfulness (if a broad definition of 'Aboriginal' is used, you argue that demographic recovery was probably underway by the 1920s). Your answer to the simply stated question is, therefore, complex and demanding. I was wondering whether it asks (at least some) readers to rethink their assumptions at quite a deep level, thereby potentially risking their own moral positions and even identities. These present-day assumptions might be themselves artefacts of the absence of a countervailing story to demographic collapse. Is this something you thought about when writing the chapter?**

TR: I think that you are right to say that people's political identities are at stake when they engage with narratives of Australia's colonial history. I recognise this because of the feelings that I have experienced in finding at least one of Keith Windschuttle's arguments persuasive: his critical review of Peter Read's account of New South Wales data on the 'Stolen Generations'. Windschuttle focused on whether the removals were permanent; the age at separation; the sex composition of those separated; their first destination; how many of the separated were 'orphan' or 'neglected' or without a male breadwinner in their household; whether we can infer an official intention that those removed would lose their Aboriginal identity; and the numbers removed.<sup>7</sup> As Peter is a friend and Keith only a distant acquaintance (and as political identities are held in place partly by our ties of friendship) and as

<sup>6</sup> Rowse and Waterton 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Windschuttle 2009: 75–127.

the Stolen Generations story has become exemplary of our opportunity to apologise for the heavy-handed and insensitive management of Indigenous Australians, I felt some discomfort in acknowledging Keith's review of the New South Wales archival evidence as compelling.<sup>8</sup> I would like to see Peter's critical response to that part of Keith's book, as we would all learn from that debate. I recognise the pull of political identity also in the wariness of many of my colleagues about giving the Native Mounted Police the attention that I think they require in the narrative of colonisation: the Native Mounted Police has the potential to shatter the narrative binary (in which Indigenous Australians are 'resistant' to non-Indigenous 'invasion') on which 'progressive' colonists like me draw. Political identities and friendships were also at stake in the debate about the Northern Territory 'Emergency Response' (the 'Intervention') – to which I have had a very ambivalent response. So yes, I am acutely aware of the emotional consequences and moral resonance of agreeing or disagreeing with this or that truth claim. This introspective debate about how to position myself has bothered me (but also strengthened me, I think) since Noel Pearson began to voice his critique of 'passive welfare' in 2000. Fortunately, some of the people with whom I discuss these things are friends of long standing, and this has given me confidence that the social fabric of my life is unlikely to be destroyed by a single disagreement. As well, in my academic world, I have many friends and acquaintances who reward me, with continuing respect and affection, for being frank in my uncertainties and unorthodoxies. We should not underestimate the importance of the emotional infrastructure of free inquiry.

Let me comment on the specific instance that you have raised: what you see as the 'complex and demanding' answer to the question 'Did protection protect?'. My position here is a very orthodox 'public policy' perspective. If public policy states an objective (as it should, in a rational world) then we are led to two questions: Do we have an instrument for measuring to what extent the objective was attained? And (if the answer is 'yes'): Was it attained? It is surprising that in the historiography of 'protection' there has been so little attention to one of the basic material impacts of 'protection': population recovery. In even conceiving this question, I owe a lot to Len Smith, the demographer and ANU colleague who I have worked with a little.<sup>9</sup> Part of my answer also draws on his work, as my citations show – but also on the work of missions and those who have bothered to study their data. I hope that the chapter to which you refer will inspire some counterfactual history: could there have been a less regimented, patronising and racist set of instruments for arresting the decline of the Indigenous population? If there were such methods within reach, why did Australians not use them? Finally, I am dismayed by the online response by one reader of Philip Jones's review of my book in *Australian Book*

8 Rowse 2012: Chapter 5.

9 Smith 1980; Rowse and Smith 2010: 90–106; Smith et al. 2008: 533–55.

*Review*.<sup>10</sup> Commenting on his report that I had synthesised studies of protection's positive population impact, she wrote: 'Isn't this just another way of saying "at least European invaders didn't massacre them all"?' – implying that 'massacres' were the default manifestation of colonial authority! She then speculated that: 'Rowse's work sounds very much like an apologist interpretation of colonial policies, at least from this review of it'. I just hope she takes the trouble to read my book, so that she can make an informed judgement of the degree to which I am 'an apologist of colonial policies'. I certainly want to reserve to historians the possibility of judging some 'colonial policies' to have been better than others.

**MJ: Your hope that this chapter will inspire some counterfactual history concerning the policy of protection (and other policies too, perhaps, including assimilation and even self-determination?) is striking to me. You know, no doubt, of the debate in New Zealand in the 1990s among historians about the Waitangi Tribunal's approach to and use of history. W.H. Oliver's essay 'The Future Behind Us: The Waitangi Tribunal's Retrospective Utopia' expressed considerable reservations about the construction of an alternative past in which previous governments were held to account for what they should have done, according to standards of the present, implying, Oliver thought, that governments *could* have behaved differently. He was concerned about the 'instrumental presentism' of the tribunal's history writing.<sup>11</sup> What do you think of this argument? Is it equally a concern in the Australian context? Or does the absence of an institution like the Waitangi Tribunal here actually free up historians to produce more counterfactual or speculative histories about what colonial policy could have done?**

TR: I don't know enough to comment on the scholarship generated by the Waitangi Tribunal's work, but I do agree strongly with the argument that the contingent capacities and instruments of colonial authorities are objects for historical inquiry. This would be so even if we did not use historical description as the basis for making moral judgements about past actions. Given that historians and readers DO consider the past through a morally evaluative lens, it is even more important that we try to understand, historically, the options that faced colonial authority at any specifiable moment in time. So the question: 'what could they have done?' is important, and answering it will give rise to counterfactual histories. I learned a lot by attempting the counterfactual: 'What if the Bruce-Page government had created a Model Aboriginal State?'<sup>12</sup> I learned that the historian answering that question has to consider material features of colonial rule – such as transport, the size and composition of the public service, the availability of food stocks in remote regions, and so on. In *Indigenous and Other Australians since 1901*, I have tried to historicise

10 Jones 2018: 18–19. The reader's response can be found in the online edition of this issue.

11 Oliver 2001: 9–29.

12 Rowse 2006: 89–114.

the capacities for colonial authority in my account of the changing relationships among colonial authorities (the civil state, the military state, the missions, the pastoralists) in the long, slow incorporation of the 'north' by the 'south'. Less prominent is the theme of Indigenous capacity – but it is there when I try to tell the stories of changing Aboriginal kinship and of severely limited formal education for Aboriginal children (producing a crippling literacy deficit).<sup>13</sup>

I'd like to address another aspect of your question: the relationship between counterfactuals and contemporary political/moral identities. Counterfactuals are often implicit. The biggest counterfactual of all, in critical histories of Australia's colonisation, is the question: 'How would Indigenous Australians have lived (and now be living) if Europeans had not colonised them?' When people make adverse moral judgement on the European colonisation of the Australian continent, they imply an answer to this question: Indigenous Australians then and now would have been much better off had they not been colonised. This answer is habitually presumed rather than set out as a plausible counterfactual story, and this presumption is possible because it is foundational to a progressive political identity that is generally anti-colonial. That is my political commitment too, but I would nonetheless like to see the counterfactual explored explicitly, rather than simply presumed. In contrast there are those (Geoffrey Blainey in his Boyer lectures is an example) who argue that while we must acknowledge and regret the immediate destructive impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australians, we should then take a long-term view in which it is possible to say that colonisation turned the Australian continent into a productive asset of benefit to the entire world and of benefit, in particular, to all who now live in Australia and share in its prosperity.<sup>14</sup> The counterfactual in that argument is that the resources of the un-colonised continent would have remained under-used by a relatively small Aboriginal population. Again it is easy to see how that (usually implicit) counterfactual is foundational to a contemporary political identity: the perspective of John Howard's speeches in the 1990s in which he acknowledged harm done to Indigenous Australians while concluding that colonisation's moral balance-sheet was positive. It is not easy to make explicit these opposed counterfactuals, but they are there whenever our historical narratives take on an evaluative (morally, politically) meaning in public debate about the past and future of the nation.

Finally, let me answer the counterfactual that you have posed me: would debate about the colonial past in Australia be less 'free' were there a body similar to the Waitangi Tribunal in Australia? I find it hard to answer, as I have too little experience of the 'unfreedom' of historical controversies in New Zealand. One would think that

13 The reader interested in the topics kinship/sovereignty and education/literacy should consult the very detailed index in Rowse 2017: 495–504, under 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'/'education/schooling' and 'kinship/governance'.

14 Blainey 2001.

the most severe limitation on discussion in both Australia and New Zealand would be the difficulty of focusing the historical imagination on the Indigenous people on both sides of the Tasman who allied themselves with the Crown.<sup>15</sup> However, on this matter, perhaps debate in New Zealand has been more free. My impression is that it has been easier to write freely about the multiple political affiliations of the Māori martial tradition than about the Aboriginal police tradition. I found Kynan Gentry's work on the Māori martial heritage interesting, just as I have been fascinated by the patriotism espoused by Apirana Ngata.<sup>16</sup> Someone should write comparatively about Māori, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'patriotisms'. The Anglican Church and its missionary ancillaries will turn out to be a big part of that analysis, I conjecture.

**MJ: That sounds like a great topic! What are some of the new directions in Indigenous and colonial history writing in Australia that you are most interested and excited about at the moment? What else do you think is not being examined that should be? You open up a number of new lines of inquiry in the latter part of the book; for instance, about the formation of an Indigenous middle class. Do you think these areas need to be further researched? And if so, how?**

TR: Among the lines of inquiry that I think are very promising are those focused on individual lives of Indigenous Australians, including the recently initiated project led by Shino Konishi and other recent work that traces Indigenous 'mobilities' at the level of the individual.<sup>17</sup> This work will reinforce our understanding of the variety of Indigenous adaptations and also the opportunism (in a non-pejorative sense) of any process of adaptation to what became an overwhelming alien presence. A limitation of taking the individual as the unit of analysis is that it may not convey collective responses at the level of the family, clan or 'tribe'. Such entities are poorly documented, but they are important as what they do is a big part of what we refer to as Indigenous 'sovereignty'.

This leads me to another theme of recent scholarship: the persistence of adapted and limited but real Indigenous jurisdiction under colonial conditions. This persistence is often more inferred than observed – that is, inferred from the attention paid to the limitations of colonial authority, as highlighted by scholars such as Heather Douglas, Mark Finnane, Anne Hunter and Lisa Ford. The *de facto* (from the colonists' point

15 Contributions by Michael Belgrave, Miranda Johnson and Amanda Nettelbeck in Carter and Nugent (2016) discuss how, in some colonies, indigenous regard for the British monarch went so far as to align colonised peoples *militarily* with British authority against other colonised peoples. As other contributors to this book show, the 'monarchism' of the colonised did not necessarily lead to such commitments of force. For speculation that Native Mounted Police in the Australian colonies may have been motivated in part by a sense of service to the Crown, see Rowse 2018: 1–23.

16 Gentry 2015.

17 See for example Carey and Lydon 2014; Shellam et al. 2016; and Standfield 2018. For information about the ANU-based project led by Shino Konishi see: [history.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/ncb/research/indigenous-dictionary-australian-biography](http://history.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/ncb/research/indigenous-dictionary-australian-biography) (accessed 18 December 2018).



of view) persistence of Indigenous jurisdiction is a good theme for historical research, even if it is not easy to document the performances of Indigenous jurisdiction. Of course, in focusing on Indigenous jurisdiction, we will have to be careful not to idealise it: its norms and sanctions included phenomena alien to contemporary sensibilities.

Knowledge of colonial history can build analytically on existing scholarship by becoming more comparative. Some comparisons to make are of Australian colonies/states and of regions within colonies/states, and here I'd remark in passing that we need to be on our guard about the continuing influence of the work of Patrick Wolfe whose knowledge of the case of 'Australia' (and his 'elimination/erasure' thesis) is based on what Patrick knew of Victoria. We now have sufficient scholarship on each colony/state to enable more secondary, comparative analysis within the case of 'Australia'. We are already starting to see systematic inter-colony comparison emerging from Griffith University's quantitative study of prosecutions.<sup>18</sup> Comparisons within the CANZUS (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America) are still too few, and I admire Alison Holland for teaching Australian colonial history in this comparative way at Macquarie.<sup>19</sup> Your own work exemplifies the benefits of this comparison, Miranda.<sup>20</sup> I plan to do a bit more of this myself – focusing on how 'reserves' were used.

It is important that in all these studies we do not equate 'colonial authority' with what the state did. One corollary of historicising state power is to throw attention towards such non-state colonial authorities as missions and employers. In the historiography of missions, Regina Ganter is leading the way with her Griffith University website and with her concise and penetrating *The Contest for Aboriginal Souls: European Missionary Agendas in Australia* (2018).<sup>21</sup> Her work also reminds us that the ability to read non-English sources is necessary in much of the work on missions, and so that topic is unlikely to be crowded with Australia-based scholars, who are (myself included) lamentably monolingual.

The characteristic weakness of academic history is the relative absence of attention to the recent past. The recent past may be more difficult to document (though its oral history opportunities are greater) and it is more likely to be confronting of some political identities (that feel assured in their judgements of time-distant humanitarianism) because it is the past of our own lifespan. However, a strong grasp of the recent past is important as it informs current political debate. The period since 1973 includes experiments in Indigenous empowerment that have yet to be

18 'The Prosecution Project', prosecutionproject.griffith.edu.au (accessed 14 August 2018).

19 Holland 2018: 151–72.

20 Johnson 2016.

21 'German Missionaries in Australia', missionaries.griffith.edu.au (accessed 14 August 2018).

studied historically.<sup>22</sup> I'd like to see PhD projects on the history of the Aboriginal Arts Board (1973 – now), the Aboriginal Development Commission (1980–89) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) (1990–2004). Much of the government records are now available, and many of the principal actors are still alive and (I hope) open to interview. In each of these agencies there were Indigenous intellectuals who had to conceive of themselves in historical terms – that is, as mediators of the opportunities of modernity to peoples empowered by the public affirmation of their traditions. That has to be a fascinating theme for research in the next 10 to 20 years.

Finally, I don't think we know nearly enough about the Indigenous experience of formal education and of print culture. The instructive comparison here is New Zealand where the early Māori–missionary interaction created a legacy of Māori literacy. Indigenous Australians are struggling to overcome a literacy gap. How did that gap come about? What efforts have been made and thwarted, by both sides, to equip Indigenous Australians with such basic instruments of self-determination?

**MJ: The field of Indigenous history here and elsewhere has been remarkably interdisciplinary. Is this something that you think can be further exploited?**

TR: There are two ways that historians can be interdisciplinary – one more difficult than the other. The relatively easy and not uncommon way is what we do when we write about the history of knowledge – its production and consumption. To do that, we have to increase our understanding of the knowledge traditions that we are writing about – for example, to write on the history of nursing and nurses may require some immersion in medical sciences, or to write a biography of a clergyman could well benefit from immersion in the theological questions that animated that person's life. No 'discipline' or intellectual tradition is foreign to historians, if they are willing to put in the work on such sources.

The other way that history can be interdisciplinary is when it makes the knowledge-objects of other disciplines objects of its own inquiry. Insofar as these knowledge-objects are constituted by concepts and methods that are specific to disciplines other than history – for example, demography, economics, anthropology, political science, linguistics, jurisprudence, philosophy, criminology – then the historian may find him or herself using the concepts and methods of those disciplines. Much of the most important work on Indigenous history has not been interdisciplinary in this second sense – at least, not in Australia. Indigenous history in Australia is still mostly revisionist national history (and I include my own work here). We have gone a long way in revising the account of the nation – taking seriously that it is a settler colonial society – by using sources and methods of analysis that were used in the orthodox account that we have revised. We have achieved much

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22 A notable exception is Norman 2015.

simply by asking new questions, but this did not require us to be interdisciplinary. The really important work of Henry Reynolds, Ann Curthoys, Andrew Markus, Ann McGrath, Bain Attwood, Heather Goodall, Richard Broome, Lyndall Ryan, Peter Biskup, Bob Reece, Anna Haebich and many others that I could mention has not been ‘interdisciplinary’, and in saying that I intend no criticism at all. The discipline that is most obviously relevant to Indigenous history is anthropology and yet few historians cite its concepts or use its methods. This is quite surprising since many Australian historians would say (and wear this as a badge of political honour) that they are committed to the idea that Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded. Yet they rarely cite the ethnographic research that gives substance to the idea ‘Indigenous sovereignty’ – that is, research that describes (and sometimes historicises) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander modes of governance, including their customs of assigning people to land and regulating relationships between the sexes and between the generations. There is a rich literature on these topics, but few historians have tried to incorporate it into their accounts of the Indigenous responses to colonisation. Their training enables them to feel more comfortable historicising the colonists than the colonised. Indeed, some writing in the ‘settler colonial studies’ mould seems to make a virtue of not historicising the Indigenous – a self-inflicted travesty of the ‘politics of representation’.

The scholars in Indigenous history who have been ‘interdisciplinary’ in my second sense have mostly been anthropologists who have sought to historicise the findings of their ethnographies. Here I have in mind Diane Austin-Broos, Ian Keen, Howard and Frances Morphy, Peter Sutton, Jeremy Beckett, Francesca Merlan, Barry Morris, Gillian Cowlshaw, Nicolas Peterson, David Trigger, David Martin – to name only a few of the older guard, because there is a more recent generation whose opportunity to work both historically and ethnographically has come because of the evidentiary demands of native title work (Sally Babidge, Katie Glaskin, Eve Vincent – again to name only a few). There has also been historical investigation in the work of certain linguists (Patrick McConvell, Luise Hercus, and here I am even more hesitant to name exemplary names). I realise that I have answered your question with respect to Australia, and that your question might be answered differently by someone with a wider knowledge of ‘Indigenous history’.

**MJ: And, finally, what’s next for you, Tim?**

TR: I am currently working on four fronts. I want to write a paper about how ‘reserves’ were seen as a mechanism of ‘protection’ by nineteenth-century colonists. This will complement two other papers I have written on the nineteenth century: on the Native Mounted Police and on how pastoralists learned to practise some of the functions prescribed for ‘protectors’ (in press).<sup>23</sup> Second, I am collaborating

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23 See Rowse and Waterton 2018; Rowse 2018.

with colleagues at Western Sydney University to write about the ways that the 'Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary' has become significant in the production and consumption of Australian culture. With Fred Myers and Laurie Bamblett, I am editing a collection on that theme. Third, I want to propose that it is now possible for historians to conceive the 'self-determination' era as a period in Australia's colonial history about which we can make generalisations, as we do already when we characterise the aims and mechanisms of the 'protection' and 'assimilation' eras. With Laura Rademaker, I am soon to host a workshop posing the question: 'How shall we write the history of Indigenous self-determination in Australia?' Laura Rademaker and I will edit a collection of papers from that workshop. Fourth, I'd like to continue to read Indigenous autobiographies and to annotate them in a systematic way to encourage others' use of them. I am falling behind in this project, but I look forward to the time when it is a work priority for me to read each autobiography as it appears and put the annotation online. On top of all that, I aspire to keep up with ethnographic writing about Indigenous Australia and to read in 'Global History' in the period since 1500. And I like to grab the occasional opportunity to teach. I don't plan to write any more single-authored books.

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# Aboriginal camps as urban foundations? Evidence from southern Queensland

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Ray Kerkhove

## Musgrave Park: Aboriginal Brisbane's political heartland

In 1982, Musgrave Park in South Brisbane took centre stage in Queensland's 'State of Emergency' protests. Bob Weatherall, President of FAIRA (Foundation for Aboriginal and Islanders Research Action), together with Neville Bonner – Australia's first Aboriginal Senator – proclaimed it 'Aboriginal land'.

Musgrave Park could hardly be more central to the issue of land rights. It lies in inner Brisbane – just across the river from the government agencies that were at the time trying to quash Aboriginal appeals for landownership, yet within the state's cultural hub, the South Bank Precinct. It was a very contentious green space.

Written and oral sources concur that the park had been an Aboriginal networking venue since the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> OPAL (One People of Australia League) House – Queensland's first Aboriginal-focused organisation – was established close to the park in 1961 specifically to service the large number of Aboriginal people already using it. Soon after, many key Brisbane Aboriginal services sprang up around the park's peripheries. By 1971, the Black Panther party emerged with a dramatic march into central Brisbane.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Musgrave Park served as Queensland's 'tent

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1 Aird 2001; Romano 2008.

2 Lothian 2007: 21.

embassy' and tent city for a series of protests (1988, 2012 and 2014).<sup>3</sup> It attracts 20,000 people to its annual NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Week, Australia's largest-attended NAIDOC venue.<sup>4</sup>

This history makes Musgrave Park the unofficial political capital of Aboriginal Brisbane. While that legacy affected Weatherall's and Bonner's choice of this site for their 1982 proclamation, many Brisbane Aboriginal people already viewed Musgrave Park as their 'campsite' and 'home'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1985, Bob Weatherall asked me to evaluate the oral tradition that the park has always been an important meeting and camping place against the testimony of written history.<sup>6</sup> The research highlighted written records from the 1890s onwards, recalling a set of subcamps on the ridges of what is now the Brisbane High School end of Musgrave Park, continuing for 400 metres towards today's Dorchester Street and Somerville House (see Figure 1). Early residents Chas Melton and William Clark document 'hundreds' of Aboriginal people living on the ridges here during the 1840s and 1850s,<sup>7</sup> walking daily into South Brisbane town to sell, trade, work or beg.<sup>8</sup> They recall 'bark and bough *gunyahs* under the trees at the foot of Highgate Hill, and on the slanting sides of Cumbooquepa (Somerville House)'.<sup>9</sup>

The report found that Musgrave Park had been a public reserve since the commencement of European settlement. Brisbane surveyors habitually allotted areas for water or recreational use in their mapping during the 1840s. Surveyor Henry Wade's 1844 map shows he left the area we now call Musgrave Park unassigned, presumably on account of its waterholes or Aboriginal occupants, as early accounts recall South Brisbane (then just a few houses) relied on a waterhole and swamp within this area.<sup>10</sup> Aboriginal people were recorded camping around the ridges of this and the adjacent waterholes of Woolloongabba. In fact, the water was regularly carted from these waterholes to the emerging town by local Aboriginal children.<sup>11</sup> By 1850, the area was officially called 'South Brisbane Reserve for Public Recreation and Extension'.<sup>12</sup>

3 'Musgrave Park, South Brisbane: Conservation Management Study' 2001: 9; *The Conversation*, 17 May 2012; *Stringer*, 19 October 2014.

4 See Romano 2008: 45.

5 Romano 2008: 48.

6 Kerkove 1985.

7 *Brisbane Courier*, 10 July 1915.

8 'The Passing of a Pioneer Explorer', *Brisbane Courier*, 15 March 1912: 12; Melton 1915 [1924].

9 *Brisbane Courier*, 10 July 1915.

10 *Brisbane Courier*, 15 March 1912: 12; *Queenslander*, 7 August 1909.

11 Kidd 2000: 14.

12 QSA AIA Series c. 1850.



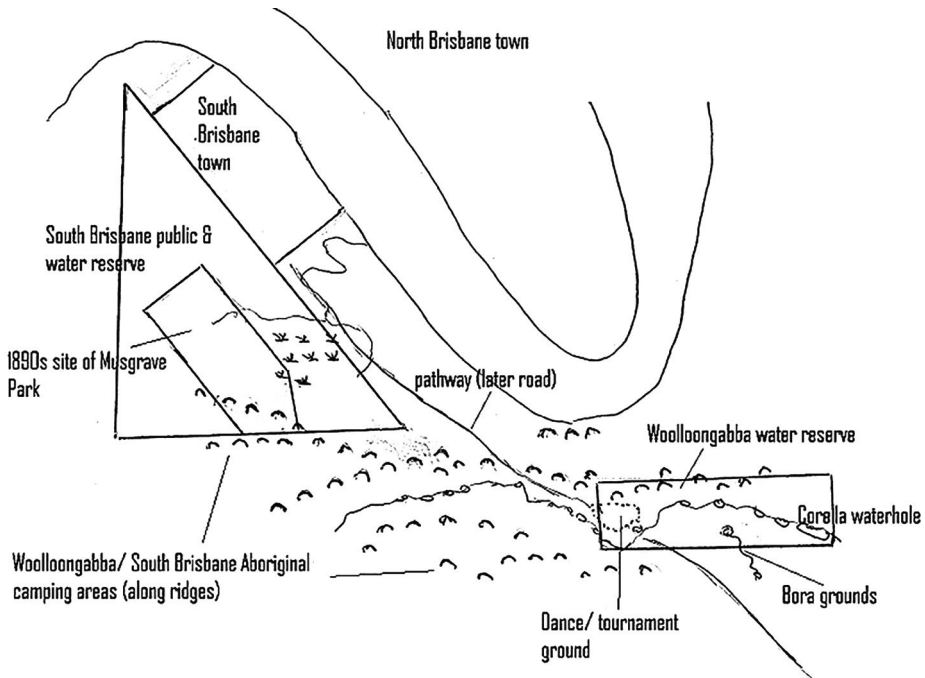


Figure 1: The relationship between the evolving South Brisbane/Musgrave Park and Woolloongabba Water/Recreation Reserves and Aboriginal camps.

Source: Author.

Between the 1880s and 1930s, South Brisbane Reserve shrank as housing encroached and the water supply was used up. The remaining core was renamed Musgrave Park in 1884 in honour the visit of Lord Musgrave.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Musgrave Park was effectively a ‘relic’ of an Aboriginal camp and waterhole.

It was a relic that has refused to go away. In 1900, Aboriginal men were still collecting bunya nuts at Mater Hill near the park.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps because the park lay halfway between the home of the Queensland Aboriginal Protector (Archibald Meston) and the West End Aboriginal Girl’s Home, Aboriginal men continued to ‘loiter’ here. A few decades later, this ‘loitering’ had turned the park into Brisbane’s main venue for Aboriginal people to meet and socialise.

<sup>13</sup> Kerkhove 1985.

<sup>14</sup> *Sunday Mail*, 16 June 1935.

## Musgrave Park as a pre-settlement campsite

Musgrave Park's Aboriginal use long pre-dates the 1940s. Does this equate to the area 'always' being a meeting and camping ground? Until the 1850s, it retained its swamp, woodland and rainforest resources. Aboriginal people supplied thatching to South Brisbane from the reeds of this swamp. Traditionally, this was *Kurilpa* ('place of bush rats'), a rainforest and wetlands pocket covering today's West End and South Brisbane. It was favoured for Aboriginal hunting drives on bush rats, scrub turkeys and other foods.<sup>15</sup>

Within Kurilpa, Michael Strong's archaeological survey concluded that Musgrave Park offered the best site for a base camp:

the mosaic of vegetation patterns ... would have provided a rich variety of food, both vegetable and animal, and many other resources such as medicines and bark for construction of housing. The environmental context would have ... provided for the larger gatherings ... It is possible that ... a camp site existed in the Musgrave Park area, as it offered a ridge sitting above significant wetlands and a creek ... The area also offered a range of nature resources that would have provided most, if not all, requirements of daily life.<sup>16</sup>

Strong also noted a pathway threaded from Musgrave Park to a known river crossing (Kurilpa Point) – again suggesting that it was the location of a camp.<sup>17</sup> Stone axes and scrapers have been found within and very close to the current park.<sup>18</sup> This again implies the camp pre-dates settlement.

Between 1827 and 1830, there was no European settlement on this side of the river, yet Aboriginal people are recorded conducting disastrous and continuous raids on the area's maize crops. We know they did this from a camp close by, as Commander Logan sent soldiers to storm the camp to dissuade further raids.<sup>19</sup>

## Rethinking the nature of Aboriginal campsites

A hundred years ago, acknowledging the persistence of a camp beside Brisbane City was not deemed important. Aboriginal people, being classed 'closer to apes than angels',<sup>20</sup> were assumed to be 'just passing through' like migratory birds. As Buchan

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15 *Brisbane Courier*, 22 March 1930; *Queenslander*, 16 September 1916.

16 Strong and Archaeo 2003: 32, 34.

17 Strong and Archaeo 2003: 32, 34.

18 Kidd 2000: 6.

19 *Australian*, 25 July 1827; Petrie 1904: 209.

20 Cowlishaw 1988: 63.

noted, Australia's European founders clung to Enlightenment views that hunter-gatherers had 'an absence of architectural culture ... no thought for the morrow'.<sup>21</sup> This helped justify colonial claims over Indigenous lands.<sup>22</sup>

However, since the 1970s, Aboriginal living areas have been reconsidered through archaeological work on 'permanent villages' in western Victoria.<sup>23</sup> Julia Coleman and Jay Hall identified Aboriginal 'villages' in south-eastern Queensland and north-eastern New South Wales.<sup>24</sup>

It was already known that base camps occupied well-defined, fairly permanent areas.<sup>25</sup> Hall, Lilly and Ulm showed that larger camping grounds had archaeological signatures<sup>26</sup> with well-planned layout and placement,<sup>27</sup> and nearby 'amenities' such as ceremonial grounds, burial grounds, a public space and a refuse tip.<sup>28</sup> This matched the observations of early explorers of the area – for example, Leichhardt in his travels between NSW and Wide Bay (Queensland):

over their territory ... they have regular 'camps' like the villages and inns of the whites found in other countries. They know the localities (of these) extraordinarily exactly. ... These 'camps' are only little distant from one another and they journey only a short stretch during a day.<sup>29</sup>

Colin Munro – an early Fernvale pioneer – describes a typical southern Queensland camp as having 50 huts of five to six persons each.<sup>30</sup> This gives a total of 250–300 persons per camp. Another early south-eastern Queensland settler, Thomas Petrie, states: 'the Turrubul (Brisbane) tribe certainly did not all congregate together in one spot but camped in lots of about 200 each, and they visit each other'.<sup>31</sup> These populations included non-locals. Early settler Thomas Petrie grew up speaking the local languages. He describes Brisbane's traditional camps hosting visitors from many other areas – the Logan, Stradbroke Island, Bribie Island, Ipswich and Wide Bay.<sup>32</sup> Regular sub-camps were allotted to the visitors. Lengthy gatherings were held, for hunts, ceremonies and tournaments, and for marriages.<sup>33</sup>

21 Buchan 2001: 144.

22 Moretti 2012: 99, 117; Buchan 2001: 146–47.

23 Lourandos 1977.

24 Coleman 1982; Hall 1982.

25 Coutts 1966; Lilley 1984: 26.

26 Hall and Lilly 1987; Ulm et al. 1995: 24.

27 Rapoport 1972: 37; Hall and Lilley 1987; Ulm et al. 1995: 24.

28 Walters 1985; Rowland and Connolly 2002.

29 Leichhardt 14 July 1843 in Darragh and Fensham 2013: 254.

30 Munro 1862: 142.

31 'Ethnology – The Old Brisbane Blacks. Letter to the Editor', *Brisbane Courier*, 28 September 1901: 624.

32 Petrie 1904: 161.

33 Petrie 1904: 161.

## Negative images of historic Aboriginal camps

If camps sometimes held large numbers of residents, they must have been highly visible in the colonial landscape, and would have been initially larger than European settlements. Where they continued into recent times, they may be assumed to have had an impact on the design of the towns that enveloped them.

Paul Memmott has shown that Aboriginal camps were a ubiquitous feature of Australian towns.<sup>34</sup> This means that every Australian town had an Indigenous spatial component. Such *residential* presence is rarely mentioned in colonial histories, largely because it was sidelined or not 'noticed'.<sup>35</sup> Nineteenth-century paintings show Aboriginal people on 'the edges and fringes of urban settlement', even when their urban presence is clearly recorded.<sup>36</sup>

This bias also pervades perceptions of Indigenous urban heritage. Suburban and town museum displays concentrate on 'Dreaming stories' or other intangibles.<sup>37</sup> Studies of Aboriginal societies overwhelmingly emphasise remote rather than urban communities.<sup>38</sup> If Aboriginal heritage is honoured within urban settings at all, it is through plants, animals or artefacts from before settlement, as though Indigenous society of the last two centuries is irrelevant.<sup>39</sup>

Ironically, the efforts of Charles Rowley, Henry Reynolds and other historians in highlighting the brutality of colonisation created a narrative wherein Aboriginal camps were assumed to vanish with the tide of invasion. In this scenario, Aboriginal society was so disrupted by the invaders that traditional life patterns immediately dissolved and traditional living spaces were replaced by 'fringe camps'. Fringe camps were not viewed as traditional living spaces,<sup>40</sup> but rather as something the white community created from detribalised 'refugees', who gravitated to the towns and were assigned 'leftover' lands.<sup>41</sup> In other words, 'fringe camps' are viewed as subsidiary, artificial living areas. Rod Fisher painted Brisbane 'fringe' camps as 'underdeveloped'.<sup>42</sup> Ross Johnston viewed them as undergoing 'increasing degradation'.<sup>43</sup> Other historians described camp residents as 'slaves' providing cheap sex and labour,<sup>44</sup> and the inhabitants spiralling into crime, addiction and suicide.<sup>45</sup>

34 Memmott 1996; Greenop and Memmott 2006: 167.

35 Byrne 2003: 73, 82.

36 Russell 2015: 28.

37 Goodall 1999: 167, 169.

38 Anderson and Jacobs 1977: 12f.

39 Hinkson 2002: 62, 69.

40 Morgan 2006.

41 Reynolds 1978; Coleman 1979; Hunter 1991; Reynolds 1990.

42 Fisher 1992.

43 Johnston 1988: 56–57.

44 Coleman 1979: 38; Evans 1984; Reynolds 2013: 118.

45 Evans et al. 1975; Evans 1999; Fisher 1992: 73.

## Inaccuracies in the ‘fringe camp’ image

It cannot be denied that substance abuse, mass removals or massacres occurred at historic camps, as did exclusion from certain metropolitan areas.<sup>46</sup> Land acquisition and associated loss of natural resources degraded and confined Aboriginal living areas. This affected how Aboriginal people valued their camping grounds. For example, Francesca Merlan’s research near Katherine, Northern Territory, found Aboriginal residents believed ‘rainbols’ (spirits) had been ‘thrown away’ by construction work<sup>47</sup> – inducing them to hold their living areas in similar disrespect.<sup>48</sup> However, change was not always or entirely negative. The influx of Western goods and ideas provided a volatile space for growth and innovation.<sup>49</sup> Hinkson and Smith argue that the resultant ‘hybridity’ did not create a people ‘caught between two worlds’ but rather a more contemporary manifestation of Aboriginal culture.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, long-term Aboriginal values continue in urban communities of Brisbane, and the layout of modern ‘town camps’ manifest traditional Indigenous forms, updated with new technologies.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, as Paul Irish and Michael Ingrey have found in east Sydney, camps and Aboriginal housing continue to occupy the same precolonial spaces:

Even today, these camps are often thought of as fringe camps, as if Aboriginal people had no choice over location and were left trapped and dependent on the outer edge of European settlements. The continued occupation of rich resource areas and the likely maintenance of cultural obligations to country show that this was not the case.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, there is increasing archaeological evidence that ‘fringe’ camps in many cases perpetuated camps that existed before settlement. Archaeologist Peter Kabaila found that the Yass region’s Aboriginal reserve was established during the nineteenth century ‘because it was near an existing camp by the river’.<sup>53</sup> There are further examples of this from the mid-north coast of New South Wales,<sup>54</sup> Brisbane Airport<sup>55</sup> and south Kimberley.<sup>56</sup> Patricia Bourke located many historic camps ‘on top of older pre-contact sites’ within Darwin.<sup>57</sup>

46 Robinson 2002; Greenop and Memmott 2006: 259.

47 Merlan 1998: 51–53.

48 Merlan 2006: 179f.

49 Merlan 2005: 169.

50 Hinkson and Smith 2005: 161–62.

51 Greenop 2008; Memmott 2002: 66f; Memmott 2007: 110, 232, 258f.

52 Irish and Ingrey 2013: 84–85. See also Irish 2017; ‘A History of Aboriginal Sydney’, [www.historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au](http://www.historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au).

53 Kabaila 2012: 16.

54 Smith and Beck 2003: 66f.

55 Hall and Lilley 1987.

56 Smith 2001: 23.

57 Bourke 2005: 54.

Early government reports support this evidence of continuous occupation. The *Annual Report on the State of Aborigines in New South Wales* (1852) observed Aboriginal groups quitting traditional campsites during frontier violence, only to move back when peace was restored, with residents becoming workers on New South Wales homesteads.<sup>58</sup> This pattern was replicated on the Darling Downs in Queensland.<sup>59</sup>

## Historic camps as vibrant colonial communities

Despite being physically different from European towns, Aboriginal ‘town camps’ were places of enculturation, socialisation and identity, as European villages were.<sup>60</sup> *Yumba* – a Queensland word for fringe camp – means ‘home’.<sup>61</sup> In other words, these places were not ‘leftover lands’ but cherished sites. Herb Wharton’s account of Cunnamulla *yumba* describes a warm, supportive community, rich in sociocultural life.<sup>62</sup> In the 1980s, the Mitchell Aboriginal community collected elders’ memories of Mitchell *yumba*. Their account shows their *yumba* played a key role in maintaining local sites, bush tucker, kinship and crafts.<sup>63</sup>

The occupants of ‘town camps’ were also the lifeblood of rural industries.<sup>64</sup> Their contribution to the pastoral industry has been explored,<sup>65</sup> but they were also essential to fishing, oystering, timber-getting and domestic services. Mitchell *yumba* provided many of the town’s farm and stockhands, domestic servants, fencers, ring-barkers, hunters of ‘vermin’, fishers and bullock-drivers.<sup>66</sup>

As sole traders or working for white bosses, camp residents were major suppliers of ‘bush produce’: fish, crabs, oysters, honey, baskets, native fruits and nuts, pelts, ornamental flowers and plants, bark and even fur cloaks.<sup>67</sup> In 1847, the potential of Moreton Bay prawns was discovered from Aboriginal fishers:

During the last week, the natives have procured immense quantities of this delicious crustaceous fish ... They are much larger than the same kind of fish caught on the southern coasts ... and would no doubt turn out a profitable export ... Several of the Inhabitants have potted, salted and pickled them, in large quantities, for the purpose of forwarding them to Sydney.<sup>68</sup>

58 NSW Archives, ‘Annual reports on state of the Aborigines’, 22 September 1852.

59 Feehly 1997.

60 Henry 1999.

61 Godwin and L’Oste-Brown 2002: 198.

62 Wharton 1999: 3–5.

63 Mitchell Aboriginal Community 1985: 24f.

64 Memmott 1996; Greenop and Memmott 2006.

65 Reece 1974; Reynolds 1974; Loos 1982: 28; Pope 1988.

66 Mitchell Aboriginal Community 1985: 17, 32–33.

67 Kerkhove 2013.

68 *Moreton Bay Courier*, 16 October 1847: 3.

Knowledge of geography, geology, food and biota was also contributed.<sup>69</sup> In 1877, timber-getter and businessman William Pettigrew made a presentation to the Queensland Philosophical Society in Brisbane outlining the useful qualities of native Queensland timbers. His presentation was based – as he admitted – almost entirely on information provided by the Aboriginal people he knew, his timber crew being initially all Indigenous people.<sup>70</sup>

## The influence of Aboriginal camps on urban history

All of this evidence points to Aboriginal ‘fringe camps’ as more central to the story of the growth of colonial towns than is commonly accepted. Susanne Jones argued that a largely undocumented ‘deep history’ of Indigenous–European interaction probably underlies the development of most Australian urban settlements.<sup>71</sup> Aside from historical and economic influences, did Aboriginal base camps influence the siting, components and design of Australian towns and suburbs? In south-east Queensland, the former campsites I was taken to by Aboriginal families were mostly located in current public reserves or parks, well within central business districts. This raises the question: which came first, park or camp?

Many site locations for south-east Queensland’s historic camps are recorded in Colliver and Woolston’s ‘Aboriginals in the Brisbane Area’ (1978) and John Steele’s monumental *Aboriginal Pathways* (1983). Early Brisbane maps do not detail Aboriginal camp locations, but Local Studies units within Brisbane suburban libraries hold local reminiscences that help to place them. Old maps, early memoirs, newspaper reports and the insights of local history groups and archaeologists further expand the results. From this basis, I was able to locate some 100 historic Aboriginal camps within the Greater Brisbane area alone.<sup>72</sup> Very few of these could have been ‘single occasion’ (or ‘dinner’) camps, as they are referenced over many decades, in different sources, yet always on the same location. Aboriginal informants advised me that at least six Brisbane camps were still functioning into the 1950s.<sup>73</sup> In most cases, a park or some other reserve with a supply of water was the location. In the following discussion, examples from southern Queensland are considered in more detail.

69 Reynolds 1990.

70 *Queenslander*, 1 December 1877.

71 Jones 2009: 34, 41. See also McKenna 2002.

72 Kerkove 2015, funded by a Brisbane City Community Heritage grant.

73 Aird 2001; Yuggarapul Elder Des Sandy, pers. comm., Sandgate, April 2013.

## Redcliffe

Queensland's first European settlement was Redcliffe, 40 kilometres north of present-day Brisbane. In 1799, explorer Matthew Flinders made landfall below Redcliffe's Woody Point and proceeded 400 metres to what is now Clontarf. Here he encountered a vacant Aboriginal camp.<sup>74</sup> Redcliffe was established as a penal colony in 1824, abandoned in 1825. Much later, in 1875, Clontarf was where Redcliffe's first urban settlement developed. Significantly, early residents found a vibrant Aboriginal camp at the same location that Flinders had recorded a camp.<sup>75</sup> They describe its importance in the annual Aboriginal mullet run – groups coming from afar to fish and engage in dugong and turtle hunts and corroborees.<sup>76</sup> Even in 1913, this was the regular camp for Sam Boama – the last Aboriginal man recorded living a 'traditional' life in Redcliffe.<sup>77</sup> There are 12 references to this camp, spanning more than a century: in 1799, 1823, 1842, 1843, 1859, 1875, 1885, 1887, 1888, 1890, 1900 and 1913.<sup>78</sup>

Why Redcliffe's European settlement emerged next to an Aboriginal camp is revealed in early maps (Figure 2). They show that this area – known as 'Bell's Paddock' – contained a set of freshwater reserves, created by lagoons and swamps. It was 'much bigger in those days ... It extended from Victoria Avenue to Thompson Crescent, taking in Donald and McLennan Streets'.<sup>79</sup> This area embraced all those that early colonists described as Aboriginal camps.<sup>80</sup> Today, the area is a cluster of parks: Bell's Paddock, Bicentennial, Apex, Filmer, Woody Point and Crockatt.

Did the Aboriginal camps appear on account of the parks? Obviously not: Flinders's 1799 description and the other early pre-1875 references show that the camps long pre-date the parks. A much-used well near the Woody Point Park was purportedly of Aboriginal origin. There was another such well just north of the Clontarf Water Reserve.<sup>81</sup> Thus the area's first wells also seem to have been Aboriginal.

74 Flinders in Steele 1972: 31–32.

75 'Blacks at Redcliffe', *Courier Mail*, 17 August 1935: 19; 'Redcliffe in the Early Eighties – Many Memories of the First Settlers', *Sunday Mail*, 9 March 1930: 21.

76 *Courier Mail*, 6 August 1935; Fairhill 1989: 13.

77 Box 1985: 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 5 December 1924.

78 Kerkhove 2015: 25–26; *Courier Mail*, 17 August 1935: 19.

79 Box 1985: 2.

80 Box 1985: 2; Gee 2009: 6; *Courier Mail*, 17 August 1935: 19.

81 At the bayside end of Albert Street, Margate. Richens 1978: 30.



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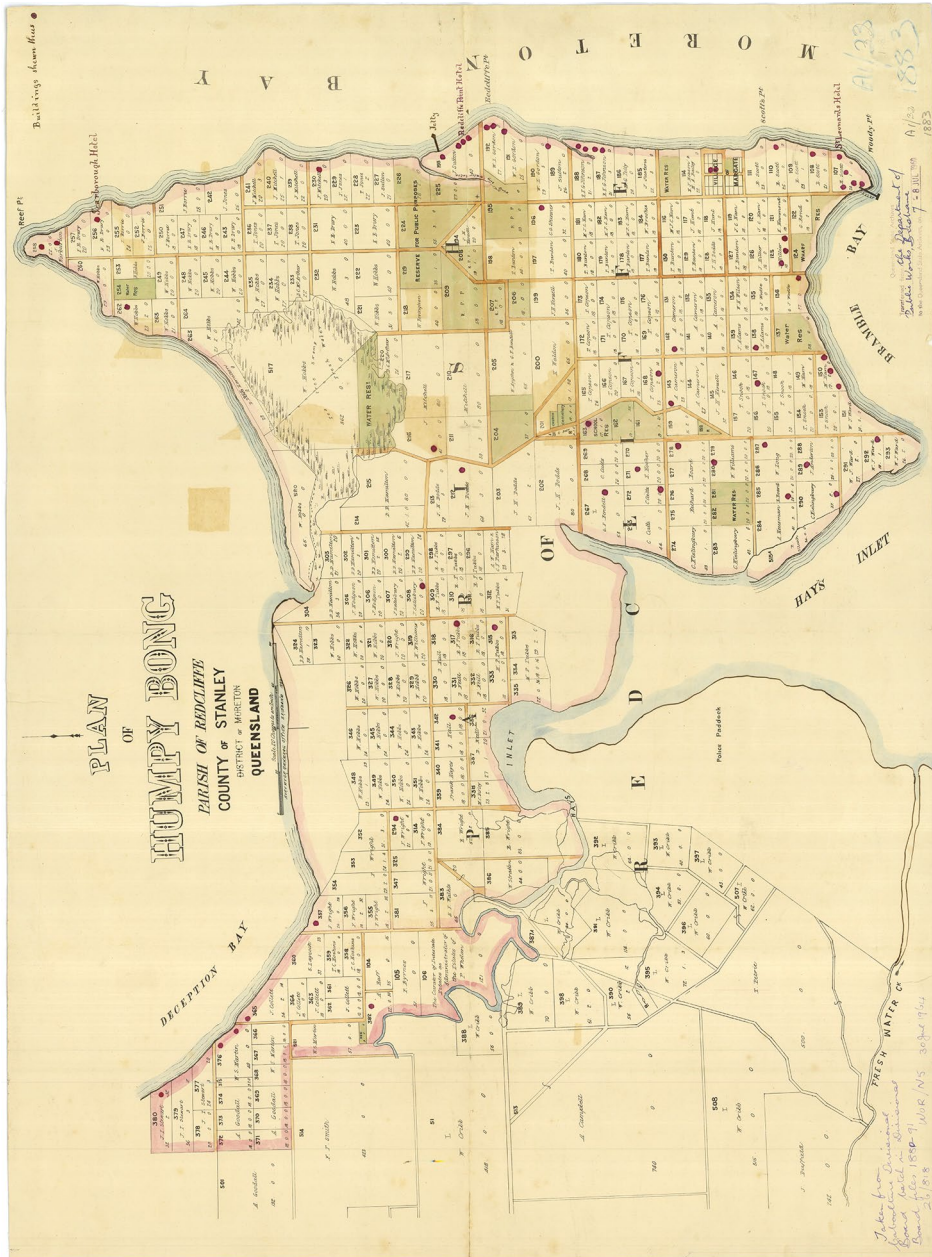


Figure 2: Redcliffe peninsula, showing water reserves (dark areas) associated with Aboriginal encampments.

Source: Queensland State Archives A1/32 1883.

Further north lay the second colonial water reserve. In 1843, missionaries described an Aboriginal camp on this spot, decades before the reserve was declared.<sup>82</sup> Today it is a park: Humpybong, at the heart of Redcliffe.<sup>83</sup> Redcliffe's two other colonial water reserves were beside the only other recorded Aboriginal camping grounds of Redcliffe peninsula: on the very northern tip (Scarborough), and at the swampy 'neck' of Rothwell.<sup>84</sup>

The 'main business' of early Redcliffe seems to have grown from the camps' 'main business'. As mentioned, this area was the focus of the mullet run. The camps were renowned for quality oysters and mud crabs. Aboriginal hearths for processing and roasting shellfish were once common around Clontarf.<sup>85</sup> European Redcliffe similarly won renown as a fishing, oystering, crabbing and boating resort. This could be a coincidence determined by the environment, except that early residents such as Parry-Okeden inform us that the Aboriginal residents were Redcliffe's first boating pilots and first sellers of fish and oysters.<sup>86</sup> The European town developed in the 1880s–1920s, which suggests its *raison d'être* was fed by intercultural exchange.

## Breakfast Creek

In 1823 and 1824, explorers John Oxley and Alan Cunningham sought the best site for a Moreton Bay colony, the future Brisbane. They favoured 'Breakfast Creek', today's suburbs of Newstead, Ascot and Hamilton. Oxley promoted Breakfast Creek because here 'they [the Aborigines] are very numerous'.<sup>87</sup> Oxley viewed their villages as indicative of rich land. Cunningham was similarly delighted to find fresh water in the form of 'ten native wells' in the vicinity. Thus the location of Brisbane was chosen, as Oxley said, because it was 'not a half mile' from a cluster of Aboriginal camps.<sup>88</sup>

Numerous were the beaten paths of the wild aborigine. His several fireplaces showed me that this point of the river was numerously inhabited.<sup>89</sup>

These camps did not 'collapse' once settlement began. Rather, over the following decades we have continuous reports about them in local newspapers.

82 Nique and Rode 1843 in Gee c. 2010: 2.

83 Pat Gee, Redcliffe Local Studies, Redcliffe Shire Library, pers. comm., 12 June 2014.

84 'Interview with John Genn 3 October 2006', Gee c. 2010: 1; *Queenslander*, 7 December 1878: 311; Michael Strong, pers. comm., Sandstone Point, July 2014.

85 Richens 1978: 3; Gee c. 2010: 3; *Sunday Mail*, 4 June 1939, 6.

86 *Sunday Mail*, 9 March 1930: 21.

87 Oxley 16 September 1823 and 2 December 1823 in Steele 1972: 127.

88 Oxley 16 September 1824 in Steele 1972: 125.

89 Oxley 16 September 1824 in Steele 1972: 125.

Ray Evans researched a violent police raid that took place here in 1861, in which the camps were burnt to the ground.<sup>90</sup> He presumed this marked their end. However, this was not the first or last raid. The camps were destroyed by settlers and police at least seven times,<sup>91</sup> but were continually rebuilt.<sup>92</sup> At least one camp was still active into the 1890s, and a few Aboriginal residents lived close by in hostels as late as 1910–14.<sup>93</sup> Families who claim descent from Brisbane and surrounding areas had ancestors living in these hostels.<sup>94</sup>

As the raids suggest, Breakfast Creek was a significant thorn in the side of colonists. For decades, there were reports of hostilities: raids on gardens, robberies, harassment, and counter-attacks by police and farmers.<sup>95</sup> Alex Bond, a Kabi man, recalls his mother Penny Bond describing the area as a ‘battle front’. Police regularly chased Aboriginal people across the creek each sundown.<sup>96</sup> Tit for tat, camp residents treated settlers who ventured onto their side of the creek as fair game. Aboriginal defiance was the main reason for an 1850 petition from Breakfast Creek colonists demanding police protection. The area remained largely unsettled 32 years after Brisbane was established:

Between Breakfast Creek and Eagle Farm ... there still remains some dense patches [of scrub] ... it is at present the rendezvous of the Aboriginal tribes ... At these times they become a dangerous pest to the small farmers dwelling in that neighbourhood.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, these camps were vital to Brisbane’s supply of fish:

Until very recently the inhabitants of Brisbane depended mostly for a supply of fish upon the aborigines of this locality [Breakfast Creek], very much, no doubt, to the profit, in a pecuniary sense, of these sable sons of the soil.<sup>98</sup>

Operating traditional fishing weirs and nets at the camps, the Aboriginal residents had sufficient surplus to trade and sell in town.<sup>99</sup> Chas Melton witnessed ‘a couple of hundred fish’ procured ‘in a few minutes’ at Breakfast Creek.<sup>100</sup> He states that the catches were sold door-to-door to Brisbane’s ‘housewives’.<sup>101</sup> Today, the parks of Newstead, Crosby, Hamilton, Bartley’s Hill and Oriel, and the Albion and Eagle Farm Raceways occupy the former camps.

90 Evans 1987: 311.

91 On July 1852, August 1859, December 1861, January 1862, October 1865, February 1867, November 1873.

92 Kerkhove 2015: 89–92.

93 Kerkhove 2015: 93.

94 Maroochy Barambah and Madonna Thomson, pers. comm., Brisbane, August 2016.

95 Kerkhove 2015: 89–92.

96 Bond and Kerkhove 2009; ‘Brisbane’s Historic Homes’, *Queenslander*, 11 February 1932: 35.

97 Dawson 2009: 14.

98 *Moreton Bay Courier*, 17 August 1861.

99 *Brisbane Courier*, 29 March 1929.

100 Melton 1919: 347.

101 Melton 1915 [1924]: 58–59 (No. 83).

## Victoria Park (York's Hollow)

Another unacknowledged thorn in Brisbane's side lay above the city centre, around Victoria Park (Kelvin Grove and Spring Hill). This was 'York's Hollow' – windy, woody ridges that at times saw 700 to 1,000 Aboriginal residents in the 1840s and 1850s,<sup>102</sup> making it similar in size to early Brisbane.<sup>103</sup> Today, this remains the largest expanse of open space near Brisbane City: a park, a golf course, a tertiary institute and exhibition grounds. One of the original boundary roads lay south of the Aboriginal camps. Again, this was an area designated as a water reserve that became parkland. The area's many waterholes and springs were the main water supply for the northside of early Brisbane during the 1840s to 1860s.<sup>104</sup>

Denis Cryle and Rod Fisher presumed York's Hollow emerged as a 'fringe camp' during the 1840s and disappeared by 1860.<sup>105</sup> However, my own finds of stone artefacts and oyster shell suggest it was occupied by the time of first settlement, if not before. A year before any European settlement (September 1824), Oxley reported being kept awake by the tumultuous noise of Aboriginals 'a mile above' his camp at Milton.<sup>106</sup> A 'mile above' Oxley's camp would be roughly at today's Petrie Terrace. This was the location of 'Green Hills' camp, close to the former tournament grounds at Roma Street that the camps used.<sup>107</sup> This might explain the noise.

Even if this was not the camp Oxley heard, we know York's Hollow existed by the convict period (1820s–1830s) as botanists visited it,<sup>108</sup> and Tom Petrie, one of the earliest settlers, mentions its use.<sup>109</sup> Neither did it disappear in 1860: a decade later, Archibald Meston visited 60 Aboriginals here.<sup>110</sup> In the 1890s, the location was a main centre for blanket giving.<sup>111</sup> Still later, between the 1930s and 1950s, many Aboriginal families including the Fords and Rallahs lived in York's Hollow 'shanty town'.<sup>112</sup>

York's Hollow deaths, corroborees and tournaments were reported in Brisbane newspapers as part of the daily fare. White administrators were embroiled in disputes with the camps' occupants – to the extent of attacks (one by the 11th Regiment) and public executions.<sup>113</sup>

102 *Brisbane Courier*, 9 January 1933.

103 Brisbane had only 1,600 residents in 1849.

104 Greenwood and Laverly 1959: 81.

105 Cryle 1992: 32; Fisher 1992: 73f.

106 Steele 1972: 147.

107 Petrie 1904: 55.

108 Steele 1975: 219–20.

109 Petrie 1904: 160–61.

110 'Lost Tribes of Moreton Bay', *Brisbane Courier*, 19 June 1923: 8.

111 *Brisbane Courier*, 19 June 1923: 8; Blake 1987: 50.

112 Aird 2001: 29, 32–33.

113 *Moreton Bay Courier*, 3 February 1847: 2; Cryle 1990: 69–70; Connors 2015: 193.





Figure 3: York's Hollow (thick outline) marked as 'Reserve for the Supply of Water and for Public Recreation' in 1855.

Source: Queensland State Archives.

The massive camp provided early Brisbane's gardeners, wood-choppers and domestic cleaners, and supplied brushwood (essential for domestic cooking and warmth), honey and ornamental plants and ferns.<sup>114</sup> The latter seem to have influenced the development of Brisbane's distinctive 'bush houses' (decorative garden huts or veranda sections for displaying assorted fernery and orchids). Lord's 1930s history

114 *Brisbane Courier*, 3 June 1922.

of Brisbane gardening tells us the tradition developed during the nineteenth century, being 'supplied with the most beautiful of their orchids, staghorns, ferns, etc. by the blacks' from scrubs behind York's Hollow camp.<sup>115</sup>

Later use of Victoria Park indicates further Aboriginal influence. Being the venue for spectacular intertribal sports and tournaments, York's Hollow drew European spectators.<sup>116</sup> Its Aboriginal tournaments were recalled as 'stirring enough to arouse the admiration of the toughest larrikin'.<sup>117</sup> Thus it is more than coincidental that Victoria Park's open woodlands became the venue for European sports and rifle-shooting. Eventually, the area hosted sports contests and shows – notably Queensland's annual Exhibition ('Ekka') – since 1876. From the 1910s to 1950s, the most popular aspect of this event were the Aboriginal boxing matches, and the 'Aboriginal Hall' where Aboriginal missions and reserves showcased their produce and crafts.<sup>118</sup>

## Nundah

Queensland's first free (non-convict) settlement was a Moravian mission at 'German Station', Nundah (1838). It owes its existence and location to Aboriginal camps: the missionaries wanted to be close to potential converts, so they chose the crossroads of major pathways in the middle of several camps.<sup>119</sup> Aboriginal elders granted them the spot called *Tumbal* ('hoop pine') – a forested knoll.<sup>120</sup> When it became obvious that Aboriginal people were not becoming converts, government and mission funding dried up. This forced the German missionaries to focus on farming in order to survive. The mission sputtered to a gradual end, but it nevertheless initiated Queensland's first school, first dairy and first vegetable farms, all of which were for – and partly the work of – scores of Aboriginal people who attended the failing mission.

Despite the gradual demise of the mission, the camps persisted for many decades. During the 1910s, the site of the camps became what are still Nundah's main parks: Bishop, Mercer, Shaw and Kalinga. A huge inter-group corroboree was held at today's Mercer Park as late as 1903.<sup>121</sup> Even in the 1940s to 1950s, Kalinga Park was home to a shanty town that included Aboriginal families.<sup>122</sup>

115 McCallum 2004: 4.

116 *Brisbane Courier*, 3 June 1922.

117 *Sunday Mail*, 21 October 1928.

118 Scott and Laurie 2008: 44, 162–64, 226.

119 Cleary 2002; *Australian*, 13 December 1838.

120 *Queenslander*, 13 December 1902.

121 Nunn et al. 1998: 6.

122 *Sunday Mail*, 1 August 1954.

**4 NUNDAH**

- Toombul
- Woolloowin
- Clayfield
- Kalinga

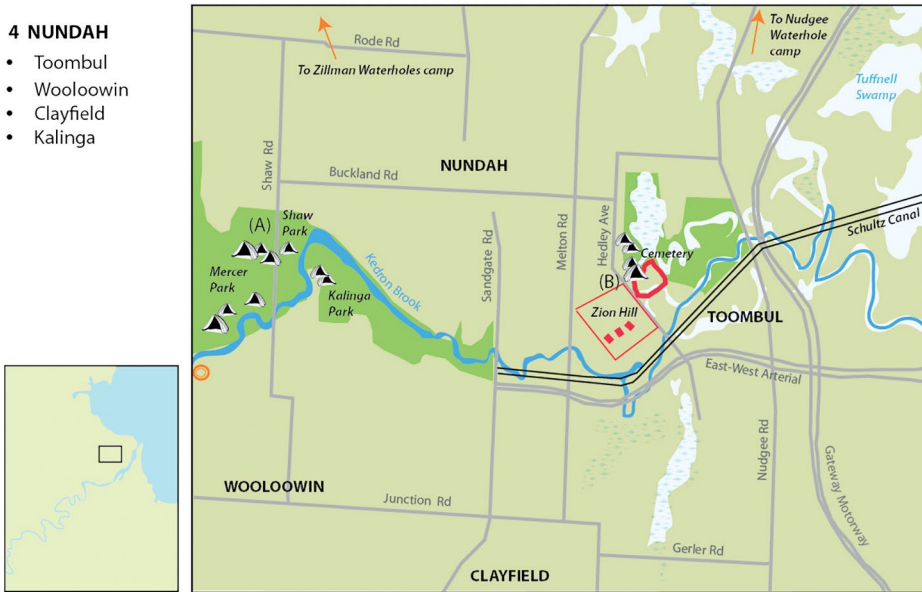


Figure 4: Nundah showing the correlation between location of Aboriginal camps (triangular hut shapes), parks (green shaded areas surrounding Kedron Brook and cemetery) and the German mission of Zion Hill (red areas).

Source: Author and Turnstone Archaeology.

## Wynnum

Wynnum’s Indigenous roots were never denied. The area was first remembered as a large ‘black’s camp’.<sup>123</sup> Early residents stated they knew their Bayside hamlet was named by Aboriginal people after pandanus (*win-nam*) – a food source.<sup>124</sup> Tom Petrie, an early visitor, described Wynnum as the Aboriginal camp for launching expeditions to hunt turtle, dugong and flying fox on the neighbouring islands.<sup>125</sup> There were advertisements for Aboriginal boating and fishing excursions – including the traditional turtle and dugong hunts.<sup>126</sup>

123 Mr Port in Wynnum Library 1995: 3.

124 Gough in Wynnum Library 1995.

125 Petrie 1904: 89; see also ‘Various Fishing Methods’, *Queenslander*, 9 August 1902: 291.

126 *Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil*, 17 May 1888.

European settlement first appeared at North Wynnum (around the mouth of Wynnum Creek) as a fishing-related adjunct to the Aboriginal camp.<sup>127</sup> By 1908, Wynnum was a thriving town and the old camp was transformed into public parks (Elanora Park and Greene's Park).<sup>128</sup> However, locals persisted in referring to this area as 'Blacks Camp' in the 1920s–1940s.<sup>129</sup>

## Nambour

Nambour today is the administrative centre for the Sunshine Coast Regional Council. The accepted history is that the town was 'founded' or settled in 1870 when Matthew Carroll Senior set up a hut on the town's Petrie Creek. The town was purportedly named after a farm.<sup>130</sup> However, eight years earlier (1862), a map of this area already shows 'Nambour' marked where the town is now. The map was produced by William Pettigrew, an early timber-getter. According to Pettigrew's diary, 'Nambour' constituted the grassy flats by Petrie Creek, which he coveted for running cattle, but could not use as too many Aboriginal people were there, frightening the herd.<sup>131</sup> Also in 1862, pioneer Tom Petrie visited this area (hence 'Petrie's Creek'). He similarly mentions a camp on the creek – a great corroboree centre where even groups from the distant interior stayed.<sup>132</sup> Thus, Nambour camp certainly preceded Nambour town.

In fact, the camp seems to have been the reason for establishing a town. Petrie visited solely to recruit a team for timber work. Some 40 individuals (including their wives and children) elected to join him. For the next decade, these were the main timber-workers around the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay.<sup>133</sup> Mathew Carroll only moved into the Sunshine Coast under a contract to cut timber.<sup>134</sup> He shifted from the beach to Petrie's Creek to assist Pettigrew's and Petrie's timber work. By 1865, Pettigrew had arranged for logs to be dragged to what is now Nambour Showgrounds at the Petrie Creek camp.<sup>135</sup> This was where Mathew Carroll chose to settle. Mathew Carroll Junior describes the camp:

127 'Early Wynnum and Manly', Wynnum Manly Historical Society, n.d. (c. 2015), [www.wmhs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Early\\_Wynnum\\_Manly.pdf](http://www.wmhs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Early_Wynnum_Manly.pdf) (accessed 14 October 2018). See also Parke 2012: 18.

128 Wynnum North State Primary School Centenary Committee 1982: 13.

129 Port in Wynnum Library 1995: 3.

130 'Nambour's Beginnings – A Reminiscence, Part I', *St Joseph's Magazine*, 8 February 1934: 2.

131 Taiton 1976: 103.

132 'Tom Petrie's Reminiscences', *Queenslander*, 24 May 1902: 1132; Petrie 1904: 23.

133 Kerkhove 2014: 56–57, 61.

134 Kerr 1998.

135 Pettigrew 1862–1865.



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The show ring [site] was a favourite camping ground [for the blacks] and there they used to stay for weeks at a time ... Often have I seen hundreds of *mia-mias* erected on the showgrounds, perhaps most frequently at bunya time, every three years.<sup>136</sup>

Carroll explains that as his family were the only white residents, his playmates as a child were Aboriginal children who – like him – became involved with the timber industry:

We were often much aided by the aborigines, our playmates of earlier days, who knew where the rich timber patches were in the scrubs and led us to them. Some of the blacks themselves made first-class bullock-drivers and fine timber-cutters.<sup>137</sup>

The Nambour Showgrounds is still within Nambour’s central business district.

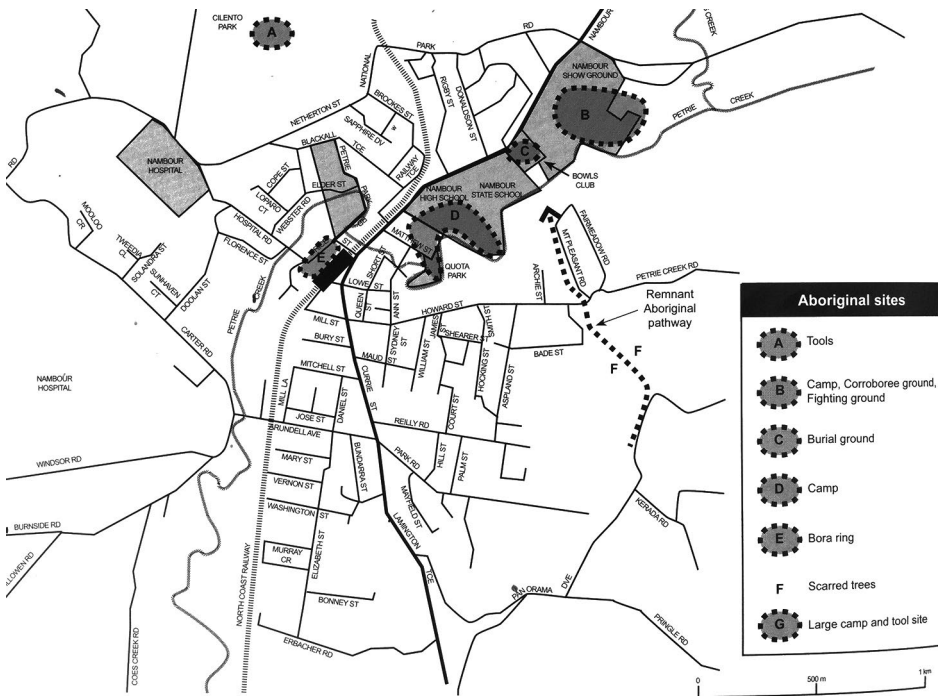


Figure 5: Relationship between traditional Aboriginal camps and sites of Nambour and the current town plan.

Source: Author, 2009.

136 *St Joseph's Magazine*, 8 February 1934: 2.

137 *St Joseph's Magazine*, 8 February 1934: 1–2.

## Bli Bli

Officially, the history of Bli Bli on the Sunshine Coast begins in the 1910s. Prior to this (1880s), the area had just a single homestead.<sup>138</sup> However, opposite that homestead and the heart of today's Bli Bli town lies Muller Park. Early residents recall this as:

once a large aboriginal settlement, acres of which are still covered with the shells of oysters and other fish which must have comprised a good part of the diet of those ancient inhabitants ... Old settlers tell of a large encampment of blacks at this locality.<sup>139</sup>

The account goes on to describe the many axes, grindstones and tools for processing shellfish that farmers would plough up there. Bli Bli camp persisted until 1917.<sup>140</sup> There are Aboriginal people, such as the Jones family, whose ancestors are recorded living at that camp and who still live there. Ironically, today white residents dispute this heritage, ridiculing Aboriginal people's attempts to fight inappropriate development of Muller Park.<sup>141</sup>

## Maroochydore

Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast is said to have emerged in 1912 at Cottontree (Maroochy Heads), developing from 1890s holiday camps run by the Salvation Army.<sup>142</sup> That 'point of origin' is even now a caravan park. These holiday camps founded the region's beach tourism.<sup>143</sup> What is missing from this narrative is the fact that the church camps were only established because the Salvation Army was greatly alarmed at the moral laxity of the Europeans, Pacific Islanders and Aboriginals already camping here.<sup>144</sup> Since the 1870s, timber was rafted from Coolum Creek, Nambour and Bli Bli to Cottontree by Pettigrew's Indigenous team. They camped at Chambers Island and Picnic Point in Maroochydore.<sup>145</sup> Maroochydore's first boat and fishing tours also seem to have been run by local Aboriginal families, such as the Balls.<sup>146</sup> In fact, Cottontree was already an ancient residential area.

138 *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 22 July 1927.

139 *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 22 July 1927.

140 *The Telegraph*, 23 May 1917.

141 'Aboriginal elder calls for calm in rowing club dispute', *Sunshine Coast Daily*, 27 May 2015, [www.sunshinecoastdaily.com.au/news/aboriginal-elder-calls-for-cordial-result-in-rowin/2652050/](http://www.sunshinecoastdaily.com.au/news/aboriginal-elder-calls-for-cordial-result-in-rowin/2652050/) (accessed 16 October 2018).

142 Gittins 1994.

143 Gregory 1991: 81.

144 Gittins 1994: 15.

145 Cubby 1976: 5.

146 *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 4 September 1903: 5.

In 1844 – before any white presence – the explorer Bracewell described an Aboriginal camp of over 80 persons at Maroochy Heads.<sup>147</sup> Ian McNiven’s excavations found that, from 500 years ago until colonial times, Maroochy Heads was a favoured site for exploiting estuarine shellfish (oyster, cockle, whelk) and processing *bungwall* (a swamp tuber).<sup>148</sup>

Thus it would be more correct to say that Maroochydhore began as a shellfish-harvesting camp. Shellfishing was woman’s work (they would travel through the area’s mangrove islands in small canoes to gather oysters). Their presence made Maroochydhore attractive to the mostly male Aboriginal, Islander and European workers who camped here. As this resulted in Aboriginal, Aboriginal–Islander and Aboriginal–European liaisons, one of the Salvation Army’s first acts at Cottontree was conducting beachside marriages.<sup>149</sup>

## Ipswich

Queen’s Park is the centrepiece of Ipswich City, surrounded by heritage architecture and sporting a public zoo. What is less known is that the site is a revered Aboriginal camp, *bora* (ceremonial) site and tournament area.<sup>150</sup> Ipswich City Council formally acknowledges this in its Land Management Plan.<sup>151</sup>

In 2011, an archaeological survey revealed many Aboriginal stone artefacts at Queen’s Park, indicating intensive Aboriginal occupancy before settlement. Limestone Ridge (a dominant feature of the park) was found to be a set of chalcedony quarries. Long before European presence, these stimulated trade, ceremony and tournaments between surrounding clans, explaining why a major camping ground developed on this site.<sup>152</sup> Also before settlement, the explorer Cunningham spotted a shipworm (*Teredo* species) ‘farm’ being operated near what is now Queen’s Park.<sup>153</sup> Such ‘farms’ (artificial piles of logs regularly harvested for *Teredo*) were constructed near the junction of creeks and rivers (such as the Queen’s Park site), marking popular locations for major base camps.<sup>154</sup>

European history of Ipswich began with a convict lime-burning outpost at what is now 2 Thorn Street. This is next to Limestone Hill (Queen’s Park), which means the city’s colonial birthplace sits beside the ancient camp.

147 Steele 1983: 178.

148 McNiven 1989: 45–48.

149 Gittins 1994: 15f.

150 Turnstone and Jagera Daran 2011: 39–40.

151 Ross Planning 2010: 10.

152 Turnstone and Jagera Daren 2011: 61–62.

153 Cunningham 1827 in Turnstone and Jagera Daran 2011: 30.

154 *Queenslander*, 9 August 1902: 291. Petrie here identifies teredo farms at creek–river junctions at Mooloolaba, Petrie and other sites known to have had large encampments.

Accounts throughout the nineteenth century give us ample proof that the Queen's Park area remained a large and thriving Aboriginal settlement: 'their camp being in a portion of the park near Limestone Hill'.<sup>155</sup> Frequent, large inter-group tournaments occurred at 'Limestone Hill',<sup>156</sup> indicating the site retained its traditional use. It was only in the 1880s–1890s that Aboriginal residents of Queen's Park were fully evicted. The evictors were aware that the site was the main living area of the Aboriginal population:

other than the camp in Queens Park, they did not have a home to go to. It would seem that their presence in Queens Park not only evoked a sense of compassion but also some consternation and perhaps embarrassment.<sup>157</sup>

The evicted population became the core of Deebing Creek Mission, 8 kilometres south.<sup>158</sup> Thus the city's spatial origins were obscured by a forced removal.



Figure 6: View from Limestone Ridge in Queen's Park, Ipswich, showing continued Aboriginal presence in the 1860s (William Francis Emery, *View of Ipswich from Limestone Hill*, 1861/62, oil on canvas, Gift of Mr Les Thomas, 1986).

Source: Ipswich Art Gallery Collection.

155 *The Week*, 6 May 1892.

156 *Queenslander*, 28 June 1919.

157 Habermann 2003: 5.

158 Habermann 2003: 3–6; Thorpe 2002: 101.

## Barcaldine

In 1846, explorer Thomas Mitchell placed a dot on his map at a spot he called ‘Lagoon Creek’. Above this, he scribbled ‘native camp’. Below, he added ‘tribe of natives’.<sup>159</sup> He was 600 kilometres from any white settlement. Seventeen years later, ‘Lagoon Creek Railway Station’ was built exactly where Mitchell placed his ‘native camp’ dot. Twenty years after that, Barcaldine town was founded – again, at Lagoon Creek.

Today, Lagoon Creek is mostly known as the historic location of the Shearers’ Strike camps (1891). What is less known is Lagoon Creek’s status as the Aboriginal camp in colonial times, and that it is where Aboriginal people of the area tend to live still.<sup>160</sup> An abundance of flaked artefacts clearly demonstrates the antiquity of the site at Lagoon Creek.<sup>161</sup> They help to show that Barcaldine is Lagoon Creek Aboriginal camp, enduring from prehistory to the present.

## Conclusion

When Patricia Bourke surveyed post-contact camping grounds in Darwin, she discovered she was probably the first person to do so:

[My survey] highlighted the almost complete lack of [archaeological] knowledge related to distribution or frequency of more recent ‘contact period’ sites ... archaeological work historically has focused on sites of Holocene or earlier age ... [resulting in] a dearth of archaeological research focused on more recent sites in urban areas.<sup>162</sup>

This situation is widespread and highlights the incomplete state of knowledge of historic Aboriginal camps.

It has been presumed that Aboriginal camps were too transient, too disrupted, too fragile or too disconnected to influence urban development. This has led to situations such as the 2014 Musgrave Park tent embassy eviction, wherein it was debated whether Aboriginal people were reclaiming their own place or illegally squatting. By contrast, more than 80 years ago, Queenslanders accepted that settlers had usurped Aboriginal sites:

159 Hock 1990: 13.

160 Kerkhove 2008: 6.

161 Egloff et al. 1991: 65–66.

162 Bourke 2005: 54–55.

the bold adventurer, having marked with an axe on the four corner trees the boundary of his selection of 100 square miles falls the first trees for his horse yard and splits the first slabs for his home, with rifle holes in the walls to keep off the blacks that for years will dispute with him possession of the waterhole which is his headquarters.<sup>163</sup>

This paper argues that although the history of dispersal is undeniable, many Aboriginal camps endured on their traditional locations, maintaining vibrant communities well into the modern era, and impacting the physical configuration of our suburbs and towns.

Long before European discovery, Australia had a populated cultural landscape. It seems logical that patterns of Indigenous occupancy helped define features of urban Australia.<sup>164</sup>

Many urban roads follow Aboriginal pathways.<sup>165</sup> Many suburban placenames equate with ancient living areas.<sup>166</sup> In southern Queensland, water reserves and green spaces were often relics of camping grounds, and central business districts often grew from colonial interactions with important Aboriginal base camps.

Who then were the 'fringe dwellers'? The first homesteads and hamlets often occupied the fringes of Aboriginal water sources and the fringes of Aboriginal base camps. Thus European settlements might be classed as 'fringe camps'. Kerry Jones, a representative of one of the Kabi Kabi families on the Sunshine Coast, said to me that his people had been vital to 'kick-starting' towns and industries 'but no one believes us'.<sup>167</sup> Whether recognised or not, Australia's urban geography has undeniable Aboriginal foundations.

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163 *Courier Mail*, 3 March 1934.

164 Head 2000.

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# Book Reviews





## *The Good Country: The Djadja Wurrung, the Settlers and the Protectors*

by Bain Attwood

xiv + 225 pp., illustrated, Monash University Publishing, 2017,  
ISBN: 9781925523065 (pbk), \$29.95

Review by Victoria Haskins  
University of Newcastle

Bain Attwood's latest book marks something of a return to his very earliest foundational work on local Indigenous histories in colonial Victoria. Widely known for his broader discussions on generalist Indigenous topics including land and civil rights movements, the Stolen Generations 'narrative', frontier conflict, and Aboriginal historiography and questions of power, in this work Attwood has turned his focus on one particular region and set of historical actors: the Djadja Wurrung people of the Kulin in central Victoria, the settlers who laid claim to their country, and the colonial officials who acted as mediators, the 'Protectors'. *The Good Country* is in many ways a return, also, to a more traditional narrative form of colonial history than we have become accustomed to reading in past years, and in this respect reflects Attwood's ongoing wrestle with the question of postmodernism and narrative theory in Indigenous history.

Structurally, the book moves through a series of six roughly chronologically organised chapters tracing the Djadja Wurrung's experiences of invasion and dispossession. The history opens with the originating encounter between Europeans and Aborigines in the Port Phillip district in the mid-1830s. Painfully little is known empirically of this initial interaction at a local level, beyond fragmentary traditions recorded by the likes of Protector Edward Parker, but Attwood does what he can to offer a Djadja Wurrung perspective here. The two maps in this chapter, representing present-day understandings of the traditional Djadja Wurrung domain, help locate the reader in this history. In the following chapter, on the conflict that rapidly follows the appearance of European colonists, a third map provides the details of the many, many pastoral runs that were established on Djadja Wurrung territory (I would have

liked to have seen some kind of dating on their appearance, but in their proliferation perhaps that is not possible: Attwood's directions to the reader for his sources for follow-up will be useful for researchers). This chapter, which talks of the 'killing times', provides a descriptive chronicle of violent conflicts and massacres in Djadja Wurrung country in a brief but intense period from 1838 to 1842.

Chapter 3 then moves into the period immediately following this onslaught, and discusses the nature of a frontier characterised by 'relatively harmonious relations', as Attwood puts it, between colonists and the local people. This situation he ascribes to three factors: the Djadja Wurrung's decision to form an alliance with pastoralists; the presence of Edward Parker's Protectorate; and the shocking impact of introduced disease. In the following chapter, Attwood works through the new colonial policy of Protectorates that emerged from the late 1830s, moving the focus increasingly closer to the establishment of Parker's station protectorate at Larnebarrumul in 1841. Chapter 5, 'Refuge', gives us a history of the Protectorate through the 1840s until its abolition in 1849. The sixth and final chapter, 'Decline', traverses the experience of the Djadja Wurrung through the gold rushes of the 1850s to the closing of the now dilapidated Larnebarrumul station in 1864 and the removal of the Djadja Wurrung to Coranderrk station, where Attwood is able to trace the activities of a number of individuals who would play a role in the events of this station in coming years. Here, though, the narrative comes to an end, with an epilogue chapter providing an update on the contemporary (2013) agreement between the Victorian Government and the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, recognising the Djadja Wurrung as the traditional owners of part of the land in central Victoria, and settling four native title claims.

In a practical sense, *The Good Country* is an orthodox, even old-fashioned, local Aboriginal history of colonial dispossession. As explained in his acknowledgements, the genesis of the book was in research undertaken for the then Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Association by Attwood with two other historians (Nicholas Clark and Marie Fels) in the 1990s, the results of which were published in a slim volume by Attwood in 1999,<sup>1</sup> and its roots as such are clearly visible. However, not only has the historical evidence been deepened and the original account extensively rewritten, but Attwood frames his revised history in larger ways that give it more of the historiographic weight we have come to expect from this historian.

In the first place (and this will be of interest to readers of this journal), Attwood presents the study as a case study for the larger project of Indigenous history for which the journal *Aboriginal History* is the flagship. He delineates the dimensions or preoccupations of this project thus: expanding the time frame of Aboriginal history back beyond 1788; emphasising and centralising Indigenous people in this

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1 Attwood 1999.

history, which had tended to be heavily Eurocentric; presenting or representing Aboriginal perspectives on this history; a commitment to scholarly objectivity, to recover a range of historical experiences and avoid passing judgement; an expansion of conceptual frameworks beyond history proper, to reveal the role of Aboriginal culture in shaping post-contact society; and, finally, and for Attwood's study 'most importantly', a determination to focus on local specificities and variations of the Indigenous experience rather than subsuming such differences within a generic national historiography. Within this framing, Attwood challenges existing historians who have written on the subject of colonial settler–Indigenous relations in recent times with the critique that the archival research is less fulsome than it could or should be, and that 'a great deal of this work is [therefore] overly programmatic in nature, adds little if anything to historical understanding, and renders the past a much less complex and messier place than it really was' (p. xiii). This does strike me as a little unfairly dismissive of a field shaped by theoretical positionings and concerns that Attwood himself has played a key role in promulgating. Putting this aside, however, in *The Good Country*, Attwood has indeed provided a lucid and succinct account of a local colonial history, based upon rigorous archival methodology, a study that shows quite clearly the 'messiness' and complexity of Indigenous–settler relations in the colonial period. Perhaps most appealing for me in this work is the way that Attwood has implicitly rendered locality, place and country indivisible and inextricable from Indigenous history: the title is apt, for this is really a study of a history of country *and* people, a 'good country' indeed.

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## *Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee: We're Telling All of You*

by Donny Woolagoodja and Janet Oobagooma, compiled  
and written in collaboration with the Dambeemangaddee  
people and Valda Blundell, Kim Doochan, Daniel Vachon,  
Malcolm Allbrook, Mary Anne Jebb and Joh Bornman

416 pp., illustrated, Fremantle Press, 2017,  
ISBN: 9780646967646 (pbk), \$44.99

Review by Cindy Solonec  
University of Western Australia

*Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee: We're Telling All of You* is essentially Dambeemangaddee people's deep history. In their closing words, oral historians Donny Woolagoodja and Janet Oobagooma reiterate the catalyst for having their history and culture documented:

Since aalmara (white people) came here they thought that they owned our country but we know from old people that this is our country and cultural place. We know from old people how to live in our country. Other people should respect that like we respect other Traditional Owners and their country (Donny Woolagoodja, p. 403).

Janet Oomagooma tells us:

we old people are getting tired and we just want to make sure our younger generation knows the right ways for our country and feels strong to keep the culture and country healthy like it has been from the day it was created (p. 404).

As respected senior holders of Dambeemangaddee knowledge and wisdom, both are well-qualified contributors to this book.

As a Nigena (Nyikina) woman from the West Kimberley, I am familiar with people's names and places, and I was aware of the important work by Ngarinyin cultural and spiritual educator David Mowaljarlai in *Yorro Yorro: Everything Standing Up Alive*; and by Kwini man Ambrose Mungala Chalarimeri in *The Man from the Sunrise Side*.

I was delighted, then, to be in a position to learn about more of the belief systems from the north-west Kimberley, this time from the perspectives of Woddordda (Worora or Worrorra), and I have not been disappointed.

*Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee* is a thoughtfully constructed book that is comprehensive, detailed and user-friendly, thus accessible to a wide audience. Its 25 chapters are organised into six parts. The first two revisit long-established stories about Lalai (creation) and *dambeema* (land and sea) and encounters with Europeans. Notably, the Wandjina etchings and paintings are affirmed. Parts three to six, convey the essence of *dambeena*, its people and the deep events of Lalai.

The name ‘Dambeemangaddee people’ emerged in 2011 following a determination of their native title claim that is made up of Woddordda, Yawjabai, Oomeday and Oonggarddangoowai peoples. Oral historians, cited verbatim throughout the book, are presented in italicised Arial font, while sitting alongside them are academic descriptions presented in peach-coloured boxes. In collaboration with the traditional owners, Valda Blundell, Kim Doohan, Daniel Vachon, Malcolm Allbrook, Mary Anne Jebb and Joh Bornman explain place and space and shifts in culture. Janet Oobagooma with Leah Umbagi, meantime, point out that the pronunciation of Woddordda words are being lost under orthographical spellings, so they devised their own system for this work that will allow their youth to more easily recognise and pronounce Woddordda words correctly (p. 18). Beautifully depicted throughout the book are impressive colour and black-and-white images of people, landscapes, rock engravings and traditional seafaring life. Provided, too, are useful maps of the region, though a map with the many Dambeemangaddee placenames would have been helpful.

The researchers emphasise that, despite being forced to move away from their country, Dambeemangaddee’s history has continued to be powerfully expressed. Forced onto missions and stations, their knowledge of country survives in their oral traditions. Even among the mixed-languages at Mowanjum, close to Derby, where they live away from country, histories of saltwater and maritime identities are embedded in poems, paintings, songs and stories. This book complements the research already done in the region by missionaries like Rev. J.R.B. Love and Howard Coate and the anthropologist A.P. Elkin. Their work, however, has often been inaccessible to Dambeemangaddee and other non-academic peoples.

*Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee*, then, brings to life the events that shaped the lives of the old people who looked after country. Dambeemangaddee people’s rich archive of oral traditions is a reminder that Lalai did not begin when white people arrived. I was pleased to learn that Lalai is the Dambeemangaddee name for creation. Like Tjukurpa in Central Australia, Lalai is not called ‘The Dreaming’, the title bestowed on Australia’s first peoples’ belief systems by Westerners. The very word ‘dream’ implies something that can be easily dismissed. Lalai is linked to beliefs

about Woongudd (conception), the life force that is the entire Wandjina-Woongudd worldviews. Lalai stories include Indonesian fishermen, before *aalmara*, and details about conflicts with their neighbours over land. Stories provide useful connections for families like the beautifully related Woongudd story of conception in Chapter 2; and, in Chapter 12, the profoundly worded (and highlight of the book for me) Duloogu – the realm of the dead.

As handed down by the traditional owners, Dambeemangaddee history and their worldview reaches far beyond written historical accounts. It goes deep into the country itself and the events that shaped land formations together with the longstanding relationships between people, animals, the land and the sea. The 200-year Western documentation is but a pinprick in the long history of the Dambeemangaddee lands and culture. In this book, they tell all of us, it is crucial that their areas are cared for by the traditional owners. Too much has already been disregarded since the intrusion by Westerners into Aboriginal societies. Too many accounts of the region's history and culture are from Western perspectives, and too many writers have not named the Dambeemangaddee elders and people. They tell all of us that their ancestors led rich and complex lives, and that they were not all affected in the same way by past events.

Dambeemangaddee's continued connections to country, connections that have never been lost, are now affirmed in this book that brings them to life along with the events that shaped the lives of the old people who looked after country. Dambeemangaddee seem satisfied with this collaborative work, which will prove to be an essential and timely resource not only for countrimin (local Aboriginal peoples), but for scholars and researchers alike.

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## *From the Edge: Australia's Lost Histories*

by Mark McKenna

xx + 251 pp., Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Publishing, 2016,  
ISBN: 9780522862591 (pbk), \$34.99

## *'Moment of Truth: History and Australia's Future'*

by Mark McKenna

86 pp., *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 69, 2018,  
ISBN: 9781760640507, \$22.99

Review by Maria Nugent  
The Australian National University

National reconciliation remains a work in progress. Under the federal Turnbull Government, it faltered and stalled. Turnbull's cavalier and graceless rejection of the Uluru Statement from the Heart has been widely condemned. Mark McKenna's *Quarterly Essay*, 'Moment of Truth: History and Australia's Future', ruminates on the implications of the Prime Minister's ham-fisted response, and charts a way to get the process back on track. In particular, he pursues the statement's call for a national process of historical truth-telling.

This is an issue close to McKenna's own heart. With his award-winning *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place* in 2002, he made the case that Australian citizenship must be built on knowledge of the violent dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and recognition of their status as Indigenous Australians with particular claims on the state. A decade and a half later, he returns to these issues and arguments in two new publications. In the *Quarterly Essay*, he describes an incident during the 40th commemorations of *Aboriginal History* journal, which were held at ANU in October 2017, when Frances Peters-Little asked the majority-white audience 'why you whitefellas are interested in blackfella history'. McKenna was the next speaker up, having graciously stepped into the breach at the 11th hour when Henry Reynolds could not join the meeting.

He recounts in his *Quarterly Essay* that he responded to the question by saying that he ‘found it impossible to live in this country as an informed citizen without understanding Aboriginal history and culture’. But he felt unsatisfied with that response, and went away from the day knowing that there was more to think about in order to approximate an adequate answer. In some ways, the long-form essay he penned over the summer constitutes a fuller response to Peters-Little’s question, but it also builds on the journeys he had been taking once more into place, politics and history.

*From the Edge: Australia’s Lost History* is accessible, narrative history tinged with travelogue. In this work, McKenna presents four long chapters, each of which focuses on a different region in Australia. Spanning the south-east, north-west, north and north-east of the continent, McKenna excavates and presents what he calls ‘lost histories’. Through these places and their deep and buried pasts, he proposes a series of alternative foundational histories that speak to articulations of national identity different from the white settler-colonial one that continues to dominate public discourse and commemoration. These alternative foundational stories are all anchored deeply in the ancient and enduring histories of Indigenous people; and they draw attention to a multiplicity of relations and interactions that developed between Indigenous people and others. Teasing out the complexities and ambiguities, as much as ambivalences, of cross-cultural interactions to provide richer accounts of Australia’s past, McKenna is working in the same vein – and on some of the same places, people and events – as a number of emerging, younger historians. As a book pitched at a general readership, it is not heavy with citation, but the inspiration of this new scholarship is quietly evident.

The *Quarterly Essay* is, true to the demands of the genre, more polemical, but with a touch of poetry. Although it begins bleakly with the impasse that has emerged in the wake of the Uluru Statement, it is on the whole a hopeful essay. McKenna draws strength and optimism from the depth and quality of Indigenous leadership; the checks and balances of parliamentary democracy; and the power of historical truth and symbolic gestures to heal broken polities and build reconciled communities. McKenna argues strongly that a reconciled national community is within reach, and that it is in the hands of the federal parliament and its leaders to achieve it. As with *From the Edge*, McKenna anchors much of his analysis in place. The ones he mobilises for his arguments in this essay are not on the edge but in the centre: Uluru and Canberra. McKenna begins by describing what he considers is a hole in the heart of the parliamentary triangle – the notable absence of a monument to Indigenous Australia – and ends with a proposal to fill the empty space with a museum devoted to Indigenous culture and history and a national monument that acknowledges the violence of colonial dispossession.

The essay also visits Botany Bay, and its fraught history as a national foundational site. He tells a story of a street sign he stumbled across at Kurnell (the site of Captain Cook's landing in 1770), which declared the unprepossessing suburb the 'birthplace of modern Australia'. By means of a forensic study of the weather-beaten sign (aided, he notes, by an army of volunteer researchers at a local library), McKenna reveals a series of subtle emendations to the slogan that responded to the shifting politics of national foundations. Woven into this part of the essay is a brief discussion of what McKenna describes as 'the stolen bark shield' that Dharawal people 'had used to defend themselves against Cook's musket fire'. The shield does not receive the same degree of scrutiny as the street sign; its status, provenance and the claims made about it are presented in the text as though uncontested. Only readers of footnotes will know that knowledge about the shield is in flux; that assumptions about its association with Cook challenged. Also mentioned and celebrated is the 'discovery' of another shield, also apparently associated with Cook, in a museum in Berlin. Despite what the headlines said, the claim of discovery, like most claims of discovery, have been overstated, and the Cook connection contested. So, there is an unfortunate unevenness in where McKenna's critical gaze rests. Nevertheless, the broader arguments about identity politics, foundational myths and national futures, which he makes through Kurnell, does remind us of what is at issue in current debates about commemorating Cook. Perhaps more importantly, it does a service in preparing us for what to expect in the public culture and discourse in the next couple of years as the 250th anniversary of Cook and the *Endeavour* in 2020 looms.

McKenna is a powerful advocate for the reconciliation agenda, and for the place of historical truth-telling as essential to the process. However, reading these two publications together made me wonder whether he is not overly hopeful about what history, symbolism and politics can achieve, or, alternatively, whether he underplays the depth of historical denial and silence upon which Australian social life has been built and continues to be built. Undoing *that* edifice might well prove to be far more challenging than building a monument that properly recognises Indigenous people, their history, culture and life in the heart of the nation.

## Reference

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# *'Me Write Myself': The Free Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land at Wybalenna, 1832–47*

by Leonie Stevens

xliv + 356 pp., Monash University Publishing, 2017,  
ISBN: 9781925495638 (pbk), \$29.95

Review by Gaye Sculthorpe  
The British Museum

I read this book with great interest as many of my ancestors make an appearance in it: Fanny Cochrane Smith, who was born at Wybalenna in 1834; her mother, Tangantura (Sarah); Eugene (Nicermenic), husband of Tanganutara; and Fanny's siblings Mary Ann and Adam. What new light would it shed on their lives and that of their compatriots?

This is not the first history to examine the lives of Tasmanian Aborigines whilst exiled at Wybalenna: pioneering scholars of Tasmanian Aboriginal history Reynolds (2005) and Ryan (2012) as well as Van Toorn (2006) have discussed many of these issues before. This is, however, the first book to attempt to provide a comprehensive history of Aboriginal life during the period of the Wybalenna settlement.

After an introduction to Tasmania and its history to 1830 ('40,000 Years to Exile'), Stevens focuses on texts written by Aborigines on Flinders Island to analyse the concerns, daily life and political strategies of the Aborigines living there. The author's analysis is based on a conscious reversion of sources, using 'a hierarchy of credibility' that places texts by Aboriginal people at the top of the pyramid, texts that record Aboriginal voices second and European sources third. The 'VDL texts' (mainly newspapers written by Aborigines at Wybalenna) are principally authored by teenagers Walter George Arthur and Thomas Brune in the *Flinders Island Chronicle*; other records examined are sermons, delivered by men at prayer meetings, personal testimonies and records of the results of school examinations. The author's aim is 'with gaining a sense of the *lives people led* during their exile at Wybalenna, in their own words' (p. xxiii). This is its greatest strength. With the exception of Mary Ann Arthur, whose activism is emphasised, the written sources privilege the male voices

of the key authors; yet Stevens uses these sources to illuminate the ongoing activism and agency of others – notably the Aboriginal sealing women and the testimonies that highlight the horrible mistreatment of several children by various settlement officials.

The author argues that instead of being a place of isolation, Wybalenna was well-connected into a wider colonial network of information and concerns. Indeed, as Auty and Russell (2016) and others have discussed, a group of Tasmanian Aborigines spent several years in the Port Phillip district with Protector George Augustus Robinson, where two men were executed after being convicted of murder. The Aboriginal residents on Flinders Island were thus attuned to events in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, Launceston and New Zealand, as well as London, where a petition was directed in 1846.

While deliberately emphasising the written or recorded words of the Aboriginal residents, less attention is given to some important cultural events and practices, such as the funeral ceremony for the esteemed leader Manalakina (Mannarlargenna). The author references in a footnote the visit of naturalist John Gould to Flinders Island in 1839, but his expedition with a large group of Aborigines on a natural history–collecting expedition across Flinders Island is not discussed. Gould relied on the eyesight and skills of the young boy Timemenedic (Adophus) in finding eggs, and this reliance of Aboriginal expertise was a formative experience for his future collecting on mainland Australia. Such time away from the settlement at Wybalenna was important for the continuation of Aboriginal customary traditions during their time in exile. The rich pictorial record of Aboriginal portraits by John Skinner Prout who visited there in 1845 is also not drawn into discussion.

The available archival sources tend to draw attention to the problems of administration of the settlement, and the book places less emphasis on the issue of sexual violence directed against women and children, which included Fanny Cochrane. Of the lives of other Europeans living on or visiting Flinders Island, such as the sealers and military men and their relationships with Aboriginal people, we learn less. Although the author clearly outlines her reasons for using the European names given to the Aboriginal residents, without a table for reference of the European and Aboriginal names, it is at times difficult to follow the trajectory of the individual lives discussed.

This book has its origins in a PhD thesis at La Trobe University. It is meticulously referenced and indexed and the footnotes also correct some small errors in prior texts. Only a few errors were spotted – for example, the reference to ‘Edmunds’ not ‘Edmonds’. The publication would have been enhanced by the addition of some images such as a sample of the handwriting of the authors, copy of some text from the *Chronicle* or images of Aborigines at Flinders Island such as by Prout, of which one decorates the cover.

I read most of this book at one sitting. Combining the strengths of an accomplished writer of fiction with detailed historical research, the author provides a compelling narrative of the events in which the Aborigines in exile at Flinders Island played an active part. From a detailed study of extensive archives sources emerges much new detail on individual lives and events. The author's introduction anticipates there will be a mantra: 'We do not need yet another European history of VDL people'. The 'Black War' in Van Diemen's Land continues to fascinate many scholars such as recent histories by Brodie (2017) and Clements (2014). In moving beyond the Black War, this book contributes significantly to our understanding of the motivations and daily concerns of Tasmanian Aborigines whilst exiled at Wybalenna and, most importantly, their perceptions of their rights and place in the world.

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## *Found in Translation: Many Meanings on a North Australian Mission*

by Laura Rademaker

xix + 231 pp., illustrated, University of Hawai'i Press, 2018,  
ISBN: 9780824872656 (hbk), US\$68.00

Review by Helen Gardner  
Deakin University

Since 1788, missionaries have been at once evangelists, wardens, translators, friends and enemies of Aboriginal people. They have been both agents for and foes of the colonial state. Yet, as with colonialism, missions have changed through time, adapted to new ideologies, responded to theological changes and negotiated with changing Aboriginal communities. To tackle these histories, particularly from inside the colonial state, requires great maturity. Scholars must have a deep sense of the specificity of Aboriginal culture and language and relationship to place, as well as a good grasp of the particular theology and politics of the chosen denomination. Those who enter these labyrinthine archives must be alert to the disciplines relevant to such a study: linguistics, anthropology and theology as well as the historical sub-disciplines of Australian and mission history. Then there is the complex subjectivity of writing Christian histories from the pugnacious secularism of contemporary Australia. Nearly all historians of mission in Australia live day by day with the legacies of colonialism and Christianity. Rademaker tackles this head-on in her finely crafted introduction where she describes her upbringing as an Evangelical Anglican in the Sydney diocese.

The opening chapter identifies a major new voice in mission history. Rademaker's mature and very well researched analysis of the history of mission in nineteenth-century colonial Australia is both insightful and comprehensive. She is right to position this history within the broader context of missions to the Pacific Islands as Sydney became the hub for these networks. In churches and manses in these streets,

missionaries debated the questions of translation, the problems of interpretation and the successes and failures of their endeavours. Rademaker has brought this history to life with a sure and confident touch rare in such a young scholar.

The book is focused on the Church Missionary Society Angurugu mission on Groote Eylandt that began in 1944. Over six chapters, Rademaker examines the issues of translation and language through both the archives and participant memories of the messy encounters of mission life. While combining interviews with archival analysis is not especially unusual, Rademaker has used her research to explore the very sounds and experience of this past; to examine the transformative effect of translation, hymn singing and letter writing on the mission. The result is a history that hovers between speaker and listener; that calls to mind the resistance of the interlocutor as well as the confusion of the speaker. These chapters bring to life the inward emotions and outward practice of mission and are identified in their titles: 'Ears to hear: The sounds of speech'; 'The letter kills: Writing in English'; 'Speaking to the heart: The language of faith'; 'Singing in tongues: Translation through song'.

At first, communication on this mission was meant to be in English. This was settler-colonial Australia at the height of assimilation. Aboriginal languages were suppressed or denied while the polyglotism of Aboriginal people was exploited to reshape them as English speakers. Missionaries did not make any attempt, at first, to learn Anindilyakwa, and Rademaker uncovered an unexpected outcome: the people gladly hid their language and therefore maintained the secrets, the power and the hierarchies of knowledge implicit in its use. Through language, people could undermine missionary aims, offer resistance and hold secret conversations within earshot of their uncomprehending mission masters. And English was compromised. Missionaries were compelled to recognise the krio of northern Australia – the *plower* (flour) and *juka* (sugar) in use at the shop. The languages of this mission were in flux and contingent.

This changed in the 1960s as fresh ideas challenged the assimilation theories of earlier decades and allowed new space for Aboriginal languages. Missionaries were now urged to learn Anindilyakwa and to speak to the people directly 'to the heart'. They met resistance from the community, for the status quo had served them well. And the timing was complex: fluency in English was especially important to Indigenous people for negotiating with mining companies seeking access to resources. The missionary linguist Stokes had long dreamed of completing the work of Bible translation and the use of Anindilyakwa by all mission residents. Now free to undertake her work, she tried her best to interest both European and Aboriginal people in the task, but struggled beyond the key figures of Gula Lalara and Murabuda.

Rademaker illuminates the cultural differences on the origins of language by exploring the myths relevant to both Christians and the Anindilyakwa people. Her story is bookended with the Old Testament story of Babel, the time when the peoples of the world spoke one language and sought to build a tower to heaven. God thwarted this dangerous ambition by scattering his people across the earth and making them incomprehensible to each other. Thus was born the clamour and confusion of languages. Translation into the vernacular was a bedrock of Protestant faith. Success was proof of God's presence in all humanity. But the language of the Anindilyakwa-speaking people was not just a medium to convey the divinity of Christianity, it had been carried to them by their ancestral Creative Being Yandarrnga and his sons and was of deep ontological significance. These were communities created and re-created by their speech, their texts and their songs. In this sense, the missionaries were right, it was a 'heart language'.

This book explores the deep paradox at the heart of Christian mission; translating the universalism of the Christian God while acknowledging the cultural relativism of distinct languages. Nineteenth-century missionaries were often sensitive to this, but it was forgotten for much of the twentieth century under the power relations of settler colonialism and the hegemony of English. Rademaker brings her wide reading and deep knowledge to produce a significant contribution to Aboriginal history and the analysis of mission. This is an important book and a true cross-cultural study.



# *The Contest for Aboriginal Souls: European Missionary Agendas in Australia*

by Regina Ganter

xxxii + 248 pp., ANU Press, 2018,  
ISBN: 9781760462048 (pbk), \$50.00

Review by Tim Rowse  
The Australian National University

In the colonisation of Australia, non-state authorities did much of the colonising, and among the most important agents of colonial authority were missionaries. Regina Ganter has condensed years of archival research on the history of missions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – across an impressive number of archives in Australia and Europe – into a deceptively short book that sits alongside her voluminous website hosted by Griffith University.<sup>1</sup> The book is complementary to the website, but stands well on its own.

To describe the entry of missions into Aboriginal domains, Ganter reaches for an organic metaphor: ‘grafting on to local societies’ (p. 107). In choosing a word that refers to a sympathetic relationship between two organisms, she concedes something to the view that missionaries had of themselves. As she writes:

missionaries thought of themselves as guardians against the worst excesses of colonisation, rather than as colonisers themselves, and [they] were often amazed when Indigenous people treated them as just one of the ‘bosses’ (p. 208).

As she points out, some grafts did not ‘take’. The average duration of a mission in Australia up until 1915 was only 14 years. This was also the average lifespan of the 35 missions that were staffed by German speakers over the full course of colonial Australian history. There were many missions of short duration. All missions have

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1 ‘German Missionaries in Australia’, [missionaries.griffith.edu.au](http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au) (accessed 18 December 2018).

been fragile, difficult projects, and Regina concludes that ‘eventually, the missionaries had to either adapt to local expectations, interpretations and rituals to involve locals, or quit’ (p. 146).

So the puzzle at the centre of her work is the puzzle of two cultures’ sustainable coexistence in a settler-colonial society. Ganter illuminates this by pointing to the ways that missions were materially useful and spiritually intelligible to many Indigenous Australians. Her evidence about this ‘middle ground’ is so extensive and so convincing that a reader might ponder the book’s title: ‘The Contest for Aboriginal Souls’. The word ‘contest’ refers more to the territorial rivalries among the Christian denominations – covered in her first three chapters – than to any zero-sum tussle between Christian and Indigenous spirituality. While Ganter persistently returns to the question of how missions could be sites of sustained coexistence and even of community, she also sees the gaps in the mission social fabric. For example, she points to abiding differences in missionary and Aboriginal ideas about corporal punishment, and she never loses sight of the instrumentalism of Aboriginal people for whom the food quest had long been every individual’s pressing concern. She notes that one Aboriginal response to a sermon was the shouted question: when are we getting something to eat?

The possibility that souls can be sites of a contest may point to a contest within Ganter herself between the soul of the secular historian and the Catholic girl from rural Germany who makes a brief appearance on page 176. Having revealed the biographical basis of her empathy with German Catholicism, Ganter discusses the limitations of secular histories that have emphasised that ‘missions served the interests of colonising states’ (p. 212). Ganter has two responses to that emphasis.

One points to ways that the colonial state could be quite overbearing in its dealings with mission-Indigenous communities. For example, state protection policies made certain missions into receiving depots for children removed from their natural families, whether or not the missionaries wanted to perform this function. Ganter writes that such missions ‘were in a pincer of expectations’ (p. xix). Another example of state and mission at odds is that some missions in the north encouraged intermarriage between Asian Catholics and Aboriginal Catholics, but officials in Western Australia opposed the formation of Asian-Aboriginal families. A third example of tensions between the state and missions is that state land policies did not give mission communities security of tenure, and governments until the 1970s were deaf to missionaries’ land rights advocacy.

Ganter’s other response to the intellectual and political overconfidence of secular humanist history is that she insists that we make the imaginative effort to empathise with missionary spirituality and with Indigenous points of view. What she says about

Indigenous points of view has to be gleaned partly from non-Aboriginal writings, but that attempt has to be made. Ganter explains in her concluding chapter that mission history should:

[take] into honest account the intentions, processes and outcomes at play. The question of intentions has been the prerogative of histories written from within the churches that are bent on giving due credit for effort. A focus on the process tends to be the domain of Indigenous memories of mission life that are inclined to emphasise pain. The outcomes, finally, are more in the viewfinder of academic treatments that leverage critical analysis in the framework of empire and colonialism. This book has attempted to span these perspectives, not working deductively from a theory or model, but inductively sorting through a massive amount of detailed record (p. 211).

Industrious, multilingual Regina Ganter has shown that it is possible to deal with the intentions, processes and outcomes of missions to Indigenous Australians. The book is outstanding not only because it covers so much time and space, and not only because it uses sources that few historians can or will use. On top of all this, Ganter has written the best kind of history – that is, a history that makes you think about the limitations of your own standpoint as an historian. German Catholic tradition is being subtly channelled in this book, as Ganter challenges academic history's secular humanist self-assurance.





## *Indigenous Archives: The Making and Unmaking of Aboriginal Art*

edited by Darren Jorgensen and Ian Mclean

xv + 469 pp., illustrated, University of Western Australia Press, 2017,  
ISBN: 9781742589220 (pbk), \$39.95

Review by Gretchen Stolte  
The Australian National University

An archive is a Western concept – a construction of state institutions to maintain public documents and official records for both posterity and historical significance. Archives are not neutral and are rarely complete and as such are typically fragmented and partial. An Indigenous archive, however it may be defined, sits within these frameworks. How they are positioned, how they are used, and how they are constructed, is the focus of this new volume of essays edited by Darren Jorgensen and Ian McLean. In *Indigenous Archives: The Making and Unmaking of Aboriginal Art*, contributors describe how the concept of an Indigenous archive fits into, challenges, redefines or completely ignores the paradigm of the Western archive. This volume is a timely contribution, critically engaging the reader with Indigenous archives across Australia with beautifully written case studies and stories showing the innovation and diversity of its subject matter. It is not a perfect volume though, and its unfortunate flaws detract from what could otherwise be a stellar publication.

The structure of the 18 essays is separated out into four parts: ‘Limits to Archives’, ‘Histories from Archives’, ‘Indigenising Archives’ and ‘Decolonising Archives’. Framing these four parts for the reader and providing a critical context is left to the volume’s short preface, which is forced to give a superficial treatment. The preface lays out for example ‘the importance of the archivist’ as ‘the interpreter and organiser of The Archive’ (p. xi). Reading these statements in the context of a volume on *Indigenous* archives is awkward. Lacking self-reflexivity on *who* the archivist is and how the identity of the archivist might be a critical factor in the *interpretation* and organisation of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a serious oversight. Emphasising the importance of the archivist does not do the

authors contributing to this volume justice as none of them claim that kind of authority. The introduction, instead of giving these kinds of issues some real weight and time, waxes rhapsodic around Derrida's concept of the archon, which, for the purposes of this volume, borders on the bizarre.

The introduction aside, there are several stand-out chapters that illustrate how Indigenous archives hold a unique position within the Aboriginal art industry and the lives of Aboriginal artists. Emilia Galatis's chapter on Ngaanyatjarra history paintings provides a sensitively written account, bringing in the theory of cultural trauma into discussions about archives. John Kean's article on Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula is backed by 138 footnotes, which makes Kean's contribution a source in and of itself. Philippa Jahn brings in the rock art record as a form of environmental archive, and Brook Andrew and Katarina Matiasek's chapter is commendable for its innovation in writing of an archival travelogue. Jane Lydon's chapter is a well-examined case study of how Aboriginal engagement can transform photographic archives.

There are three articles that are exemplars for incorporating Aboriginal voices, Aboriginal authorship and for demonstrating ways in which an Indigenous archive challenges Western concepts. John Dallwitz, Janet Inyika, Susan Lowish and Linda Rive produced a brilliant chapter on the Aṛa Irititja project, a database of historical and artistic documentation driven by Aṇangu wishes for a 'regularly updated, high quality interactive multi-media' interface that includes Indigenous languages (p. 250). Genevieve Grieves and Odette Kelada provide the only examples of the connections 'between activism, art and archives' by exploring the works of Vernon Ah Kee and Yhonnie Scarce (p. 324). Finally, Robert Lazarus Lane's article investigates the agency of Yolngu artist Wukun Wanambi and how the archive at the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka centre in Yirrkala plays a role in cultural ceremony. As Lane writes, 'any choreography that appears to originate fully from the dancer, and not from the archive, is not ceremonial because it's outside the archival process' (p. 228). These three chapters turn the Western archive concept on its head and reform it in ways that are specifically Aboriginal.

Despite these many successful aspects of *Indigenous Archives*, there are some issues that could have been approached more critically, making this volume more accountable to the promise in its title. Of the 22 contributing authors, only four identify as Aboriginal Australians. Considering the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers engaging with archives, libraries, museum collections and art centres across the country, having only four First Nation authors in the volume is a low number. Curiously, several authors cite and reference Julie Gough's archival research but Gough herself is not a contributing author, which seems like a lost opportunity.

One final point I would like to make is a personal issue I have with edited works considering Australian 'Indigenous art' or archives. The term is misleading in this case as the book does not include one single case study or author from the Torres Strait. Often in discussions about Indigenous issues in Australia, Torres Strait Islanders struggle for visibility. In a volume about Indigenous archives, this oversight seems particularly devastating as Islanders have been active engagers with their archives in museums, libraries and galleries for decades (see anything written by Anita Herle, for example). Australian academics need to start remembering the country's other First Nation peoples in the development of their publications.

The bottom line is that this volume is a wonderful contribution to our understanding of Aboriginal archives in Australia and the many ways in which it is being transformed and utilised by communities, academics and artists. It is recommended for its diverse case studies but cautioned against for its missing pieces (maybe rectified in volume two?).



# *'Against Native Title': Conflict and Creativity in Outback Australia*

by Eve Vincent

ix + 243 pp., illustrated, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2017,  
ISBN: 9781925302080 (pbk), \$34.95

Review by Diane Bell  
The Australian National University

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow  
— T.S. Eliot

In *'Against Native Title'*, Eve Vincent takes the reader to Ceduna, South Australia, where she explores the conflicts between the idea that the 'traditional owners' of the country can and will be identified and recognised under the *Native Title Act 1993*, and the reality of angry intra-Aboriginal contestings of historical and contemporary identities amongst Kokatha, Wirangu and Mirning. We meet 'Aunty Sue', Sue Coleman Haseldine, confidently Kokatha, dedicated to caring for her country, for whom the 'motion' and the 'act' fuse. Aunty Sue's repudiation of native title is not contrarian but a creative celebration. Her 'Rockhole Recovery' regime is testament to her connection to country. Her knowledge of its stories give form and meaning to her action. This is *her* 'title' to act.

Eve Vincent is well aware she has ventured into shadow lands as she maps the ruptures in the national narrative of progressive enfranchisement of the first Australians. She turns her unflinching gaze onto the contradictions, tensions and dilemmas that simmer and explode in this outback service town poised on the edge of the Nullabor Plains where 25 per cent of the 3,500 population identify as 'Indigenous' (p. 1). From her introduction to Aunty Sue in 2006 through a Melbourne-based anti-nuclear waste dumping campaign friend, to her 2007–08 fieldwork as a

PhD student in anthropology, through the granting of native title to the Far West Coast peoples of 80,000 square kilometres, and her reflective Epilogue that takes us to 2016, Eve offers fine-grained ethnographic insights of daily frustrations and anxieties alongside the existential and political quagmire of post-Mabo Australia. A native title claim, decades in the making, disenfranchises and disrupts. Native title claims reinstate ‘colonial relations between the nation-state and Aboriginal people’ (p. 119).

Privileging Aboriginal perceptions and experiences, Eve interrogates the demands of native title to document unique enduring, unchanging identities where fluidity, transformation and accommodation prevail. ‘It would be really good if someone could do something about Tindale,’ says a disdainful Aunty Sue (p. 109) of ethnologist Norman Tindale, whose genealogies have become the gold standard of connection. In ‘Engaging with the historical record’, the notion that ‘the earlier the record, the more highly valued’ is scrutinised. How to track change? The ethnographic present freezes the capacity of Aboriginal people to manage change – be it climate change, demographic change, any change before the definitive baseline accounts of the first literate observers.

Questions abound: How to navigate the potential conflicts of interests, loyalties and personal politics in Ceduna, where whitefellas’ and Aboriginal people’s lives intertwine but racial hierarchies persist? How to plumb the relationship between greenies and ‘Aunty Sue Mob’? Eve’s nuanced analysis of the cooptions, misreadings and motives in ‘Making assertions’ is exemplary (p. 145ff.). How does the ‘deep past’ inform contemporary notions of Aboriginality? Eve juxtaposes the land beyond the ‘dog fence’, country of bounty and apprehension, the outback, the ‘out of town’, the ‘away from town’, where dingoes howl, with the town patrolled by dog squads reclaiming control of public space in the shadow of a manufactured threat from the wild.

Why did Aunty Sue Mob turn their back on native title? In 1992, the High Court had ruled by a majority of six to one that the Meriam people were ‘entitled as against the whole world to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of (most of) the lands of the Murray Islands’. The court held that the common law of Australia recognised a form of native title. On 1 January 1994, the *Native Title Act 1993*, legislation that ‘recognises and protects native title ... provides that native title cannot be extinguished contrary to the Act, commenced operation’. Yet, as Aunty Sue Mob explain, their experience of the native title claim process is an attack on their self-understanding (p. 133). They know who they are.

In ‘Tending to rockholes’, Eve paints a vivid picture of the trips with urban-based greenies that entail about a week of 4WD travel to a series of rockhole sites strewn across the Yumbarra Conservation Park, Yellabinna Regional Reserve and the more distant Yellabinna Wilderness Area:

One rockhole is a dramatic formation that rises steeply out of the scrub that can be climbed up and wandered over. Its blotchy brownish, orangey, greenish surface resembles the pockmarked skin of a wizened reptile with folds and wrinkles ... Auntie Sue is thrilled by this tendency of the rockhole to conceal and reveal itself, as if it conspires to sometimes hide and at other times pop out, teasing and beckoning those who approach it (pp. 135–36).

Accounts of preparing for a rockhole visit will resonate with anyone who has undertaken fieldwork in 'outback' Australia: the consultations, negotiations, addressing the needs of the elderly, infants, provisioning and equipment maintenance (p. 142). The visceral reality of cleaning out and restoring rockholes, of 'plunging hands into thick foul smelling gloppy sludge at the bottom of rock holes to dig out sticks, whole bones and feathers' (p. 149), for Auntie Sue Mob, this is assertion of connection. Eve is at her best when writing of the country and rockhole trips. The tone, energy and uncluttered style contrasts with a text that is too often burdened by citations of worthy scholars whose wisdom disrupts rather than enriches the narrative.

There is much more to be said of *'Against Native Title'*. It rewards a close reading and deserves to reach a wide audience. The Epilogue invites new questions as the intensity of the conflict ebbs, a Mirning-Wiangu-Kokatha identity emerges and Auntie Sue accepts an invitation to join the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) representing the native title holders (p. 195). I look forward to the next chapter.





## *Australia: The Vatican Museum's Indigenous Collection*

edited by Katherine Aigner

400 pp., Aboriginal Studies Press & Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2018,  
ISBN: 9788882714116 (pbk), \$40.00

Review by Louise Hamby  
The Australian National University

Katherine Aigner's passion not only for Indigenous material culture, but also the complex relationships of missionaries and priests from the Catholic church in Australia with these objects makes this publication an important one. *Australia: The Vatican Museum's Indigenous Collection* is a book with many authors and far-ranging topics, but has a very specific focus: the not so well-known collection of Australian objects held by the Vatican Museum. Due to the Vatican's Ethnology Museum being closed for the past 40 years, and many of the valuable texts needing to be translated from German, Italian and Spanish, Australians have not had much information about this collection until now. Aigner states:

This catalogue is a continuation of that collaboration, to reconnect the material culture which had been sent to the Vatican Museum over 100 years ago with the relevant source communities who remain the cultural custodians today (p. 24).

It was through liaising with missionary orders, families and artists in communities in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and elsewhere, along with archival research and working with other writers, both academics and mostly Indigenous local people, that these connections have been made.

The jewels of the Vatican's Indigenous Collection and of this book are the objects, their history and the contextualising chapters. The objects come from the collections of New Norcia, north of Perth, founded in 1847; the Drysdale River Mission, in the Kimberley area of Western Australia, founded in 1908; and from the Bathurst Island Mission in the Northern Territory, founded in 1911. They are lavishly illustrated, tempting one to just look at the pictures. Overall, the Vatican's Australian collection

contains approximately 300 objects, of which 128 are photographed for this book, though a full listing of the whole collection would have been useful. Included in the illustrations are many archival materials and photographs of land and people, which enrich the understanding of the objects. The catalogue section of the book also includes short stories about the objects, some speculative as to their origins or potential makers. The design of the book features many extracts and vignettes of material, though it was not always clear who authored these. Taken on their own they are complete in themselves, like the detailed pieces discussing glass points, pearl shell and coolamons in the section by Kim Akerman. For some sections, this type of material could have been incorporated within the text of the chapter to make the discussion flow.

The first two sections of the book, 'Indigenous Australian Collection' and 'Material Culture', along with the catalogue of objects make this an impressive book. Aigner's desire to cover all of Australia, and to foreground Indigenous cosmology through the essays, was ambitious. She invited authors 'to write about different aspects of this rich Australian culture to educate the European and Australian audiences' (p. 28). The section 'Cultural Heritage' presents more general background material to set the scene. The 'Custodian' section would have been improved by more stories from the actual areas of the collection, although others offer insights into Aboriginal culture. In particular, Bentley James's article about Laurie Baymarrwanga shows the importance of language. Excellent, well-written chapters include that by Tony Swain on Aboriginal cosmology and 'The Yued Clan: Identity and Cultural Renewal' by Father Bernard Rooney. They provide history and background for the collection. Some of the chapters in the book are general in nature and do not add a great deal to the focused story of the Catholic missions, of collecting and of interactions with Aboriginal people concerned with the objects in the Vatican Collection. However, they are valuable in themselves and would work well in a more general volume about Aboriginal cosmology.

The Vatican Collection is significant due to the rarity of some objects and their early date of collection. Many are from a time (in the 1840s) when few significant collections of Australian material culture were being made: in the top end of Northern Territory, it was not until Baldwin Spencer's 1912 collection from Gunbalanya and Hubert Wilkins's 1924 collection from Milingimbi that Arnhem Land collections began to be amassed. Some of these earlier objects are intriguing, such as a group of 13 two-sided depictions on slate ('Wanjina Song Cycle') and a small Wanjina painting on bark. The process of painting on both sides of a surface is seen in other early collections that have come from Methodist missions. For example, Olive Lambert's collection from Milingimbi has paintings completed on both sides of small planks, and Lloyd Warner's has folded, shaped bark painted on

both sides. The lack of detailed information about these objects makes it helpful to look at the objects in other museum collections that share, as Philip Jones points out, 'typological and visual' (p. 138) associations.

When constructing a biography of an object, the value of considering the place of collection, where an object may have been used and where it was used is demonstrated in Philip Jones's analysis of catalogue item #22, a stack of three red ochre forms. By looking at Father Salvado's memoirs from his time at New Norcia from 1850 to 1851, Jones has potentially ascertained the specific type of ochre and how it may have been exchanged and valued by Aboriginal people.

The stack of three lumps of ochre point the way to an in-depth look at the objects documented in the Vatican Collection catalogue. An analysis of the objects, coupled with an Indigenous perspective and archival knowledge, lead to greater understanding of the Australian collection held in the Vatican.



# *Entangled Territorialities: Negotiating Indigenous Lands in Australia and Canada*

edited by Françoise Dussart and Sylvie Poirier

xiii + 269 pp., University of Toronto Press, 2017,  
ISBN: 9781487521592 (pbk), CA\$29.95

Review by Kim McCaul  
Flinders University

This volume consists of 10 regionally specific contributions that explore entanglements between indigenous and non-indigenous communities from the Northern Territory in Australia (Morphy, Fache, Kubota, Vaarzon-Morel, Peterson) and from Alberta, Quebec and British Columbia in Canada (Feit, Scott, Westman, Thom, Poirier).

‘Entanglement’ provides a powerful trope to explore the interface between colonial and colonised cultures in all its complexity and messiness. The idea of ‘entanglement’ clearly transcends essentialism and also goes well beyond syncretism, inviting an understanding of the many levels at which indigenous and non-indigenous cultures articulate with each other, and above all how disparate ontologies coexist in practical terms, even in the face of continuous and relentless pressure by the dominant culture to impose its reality upon all within its domain. The editors explain that they use the concept of entanglement because:

it makes it possible to grasp the complexity of situations such as ‘relative autonomy’, ‘hybridity’, the ‘inter-cultural’, or ‘resistance’, without privileging any of them ... The concept of entanglement is opposed to ideas such as separate objects or discrete operators, and, as illustrated in each of the chapters in this volume, it is best suited to analyze ‘what is going on’, since it draws attention to imaginative possibilities and unexpected consequences of colonization, neo-colonization, and commodification. (p. 11)

While the concept of entanglement is naturally addressed in each of the contributions, there is significant variation in the foci of analysis, which include the entangled relationships indigenous people have with other land users, with the

state and its policies, with the modifications occurring in the natural environment and with anthropologists and the research process about themselves. These different domains in turn give rise to different emphases on what it is that is 'entangled'; there are entanglements in terms of practical coexistence (e.g. Poirier, Feit, Scott), communication (Peterson), environmental and resource management (e.g. Fache, Morphy, Vaarzon-Morel) or a shared understanding of the very nature of consciousness (e.g. Thom).

But underpinning all of these is an ontological entanglement in which the indigenous parties are at a significant disadvantage, in that they need to struggle to maintain their world view while understanding and engaging with that of the dominant culture, which has little pressure to adapt. As such, an important theme found throughout the contributions is how indigenous people engage with non-indigenous concepts, frameworks and initiatives by re-framing them in accordance with their own ontology. At one level, this occurs spontaneously such as with the alternative perception of the natural environment, so that, for example, what the government considers a wilderness to which it can allocate rights to non-indigenous parties at will is actually home and an organic extension of their own personhood for the Eeyouch. Morphy provides a practical example of how the Indigenous Protected Areas policy of the Commonwealth government was met with enthusiastic uptake by Aboriginal communities, because they conceived of them as avenues for their own 'Indigenous life projects' – that is, to re-establish autonomy and purpose in their lives. The much more limited bureaucratic conception of the initiative was thus coopted to meet indigenous needs and values with an immediate potential for tension between the indigenous and non-indigenous actors.

At other times, this engagement is deliberate and based on the now multi-generational initiatives of the indigenous parties to maintain not only a geographic but also an ontological space within the dominant society. Such deliberate and strategic actions are shown, for example, by Scott and Feit, who both discuss aspects of the life-experience of Canada's Eeyouch and highlight the practical adaptations and challenges to the Eeyouch relational ontology in their engagement with the state (Feit) and sports hunters (Scott).

It is tempting to interpret the notion of entanglement as a process impacting all entangled parties in some way. And there are examples of the dominant culture being influenced and altered by its encounter with the indigenous. For example, Morphy describes how the phrase 'Caring for Country' was adopted into official policy-speak, thereby acknowledging Aboriginal conceptions of country while at the same time claiming that responsibility on behalf of the whole Australian population. But even this shows a power imbalance in which the dominant culture is largely free to adopt concepts and adapt them to its needs, while the indigenous population has much less freedom to do so.

In fact, in describing the interwoven relationships of indigenous and non-indigenous life worlds, the essays inevitably document the substantial cultural changes experienced by the latter. And while it is important to point out instances where the non-indigenous is indeed altered due to its contact with the indigenous, it would be disingenuous to deny that, for all the determination and resilience mustered by indigenous peoples to maintain their culture, the entanglement is very much theirs; they need to negotiate the influences of an imposed non-indigenous presence in almost every aspect of their lives and even in the remotest parts of their traditional domains. For indigenous people to maintain their life world and take practical steps to protect it from continuous encroachment by the state and the general non-indigenous population requires continuous hard work, a sense that emerges from virtually all contributions in this volume.

As a reader unfamiliar with the Canadian context, I would have appreciated some maps to help me locate the discussions more easily, and I expect Canadian readers may feel the same way about the Australian essays. It also struck me that the case studies all addressed communities that were more remote and still strongly situated in their traditional cultural contexts, despite all the external pressures on them. I believe it would be valuable to explore the concept of entanglement in urban and rural contexts, where the indigenous communities are even more closely enmeshed with non-indigenous life worlds. As it stands, I consider that the essays in this volume provide a valuable contribution to the growing literature on ontological relations between indigenous and non-indigenous, colonised and colonisers. They provide a contemporary and practical focus on the continuous struggles of identity and survival of indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia, and it can only be hoped that policymakers and front-line staff in government and non-government bodies who engage with indigenous groups draw on the insights arising from this publication.





## *Indigenous and Other Australians since 1901*

by Tim Rowse

viii + 504 pp., NewSouth Publishing, 2017,  
ISBN: 9781742235578 (pbk), \$45.00

Review by Ben Silverstein  
The Australian National University

At a time when Indigenous political movements in Australia insist that settler authorities reckon with powerful claims for treaty, recognition of sovereignty and Indigenous political representation, one is inevitably drawn to consider possibilities for political change. How can decolonisation be more than metaphor in a settler-colonial situation? What are the horizons of justice? These questions are central to Tim Rowse's *Indigenous and Other Australians since 1901*, which, in surveying and reflecting on the past 118 years of Australian settler-colonial policy thinking and practice, historicises the narrowing confines within which emancipation might be imagined or actualised.

This book presents an overview of a long and complex period, moving through continuities and transformations in characteristically ordered, lucid and readable style. Across 450 pages of text, Rowse takes us through many of the key political actors and institutions, including missionaries, anthropologists and politicians, as well as presenting often unconventional and provocative arguments on protection, assimilation, self-determination, race and Indigenous land rights. Many of these will prompt further research.

*Indigenous and Other Australians* deftly synthesises over a century of policy, threading together a set of ordering arguments that underlie the national narrative. First, the category 'Aboriginal' emerges as a dynamic product of engagement between colonial authority and its Indigenous objects. Second, the story of Australia's national period is presented as, in part, that of the South normalising or colonising the North, a space of troublingly persistent difference. And third, it narrates the post-frontier collision of qualitatively different political orders by examining settler interventions that have sought to confront and reduce the difference of Indigenous government.

In responding to a proposed new historical framework, one approach open to the reviewer is to ask where this might take us. I want to address this question by examining more closely the treatment of protection policy as the argument presented is, in some ways, the fulcrum for the entire story.

Writing against those ‘liberal’ historians who have been offended by the coercions of protection and have tended to criticise it as a ‘moral failure’ (pp. 151–52), Rowse instead asks whether protection policy did, in fact, protect Aboriginal people. And he answers this question through statistical reasoning; if protectionist institutions across the country were the sites of population growth, then, he argues, they protected. Drawing on Gordon Briscoe’s research, Rowse argues that coercive institutionalisation ‘probably secured basic nutrition, improved the detection and treatment of infectious diseases and helped to mitigate infective sexual contacts that had reduced the fertility of women’ (p. 150).

Rowse shows how, within the social world of protection, growing Indigenous populations were unevenly stratified: people experienced confinement in institutions of protection in different ways, and the ‘benefits’ of assimilation accrued to specific kinds of Indigenous people. Chief among these ‘benefits’ was the training and skill-development provided to those Indigenous people with non-Indigenous ancestry, classified by the state as ‘half-caste’. It was these people who were trained in literacy and numeracy, provided with a broader education and thrust into managerial roles. And when national policy turned to self-determination – understood in this book as a governmental mode that subsumed political aspirations – it was these people who were positioned and equipped to take advantage, to run the new institutions of Indigenous business and self-government. Protection and assimilation, in other words, were self-determination’s enabling conditions, and it was those most assimilated who were most able to take advantage of self-determination.

In its denouement, this is an analysis that helps us draw out the ways formal self-determination policies can be historicised in relation to protection, articulated as a new mode of integration rather than its repudiation. It further helps us to understand some of the ways racial formations have been reproduced despite a formal abandonment of racist language, and the limited potential of such government policies to emancipate Aboriginal peoples.

But it is also troublingly restrictive in its focus. Protection policies certainly may have protected people from some of the violence and predations of the settler-colonial world, albeit while subjecting them to a differently violent regime. But, one is prompted to ask, can we feasibly segment one aspect of that world from another, or might it be more effective rather to think of protection alongside the practices of land occupation, labour exploitation and violence that were driving Aboriginal people into institutions? Was protection, that is, just one element of an interdependent settler-colonial complex?

The narrowed story told is one of an increasingly confined world; the main story of the book is, ultimately, that of the erasure of Indigenous sovereignties. These sovereignties are described and theorised in some detail in the Introduction, as the products of kinship-based political orders that produce what the anthropologist Ian Keen terms ‘reproductive power’ through practices of polygyny (p. 12). But the concept does little productive work through the rest of the book, recurring only as evidence of Indigenous deficit, as producing subjects who do not keep regular daily work hours, for instance, or whose familial relationships chafe against modern corporate accountability. The book instead traces the apparently inexorable spread of settler sovereignty, first as the expansion of settler law across the continent, and then as the spread of ‘modern’ subjectivities from south to north. Indigenous sovereignty here, by contrast, is represented in retreat, as recalcitrant or maladjusted.

It may have been interesting to trace the ways the text could have been transformed by an account of persistent and transformative Indigenous articulations of sovereignty. Or, indeed, how broadening the frame – so as not to be bounded by centring the nation as the engine of history – could have told a story of Indigeneities that are not necessarily confined, or defined, within the nation.

I couldn’t help but wonder how Rowse’s framework would deal with the breadth, the insistence on reinvention and continuity, and the enactment of Indigenous sovereignties in the recent Uluru Statement from the Heart. Somewhat characteristically, rather than taking a position on the best way forward, Rowse ends *Indigenous and Other Australians* by wondering about the consequences of a failed future referendum on constitutional recognition. More questions, more research. This is a book that makes a series of arguments that will provoke further scholarship, a significant achievement in a crowded field.



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*Aboriginal History* encourages the submission of papers that reflect the values that have been central to the journal since its establishment in 1977. These emphasise Indigenous voices, experience and sources. They may involve combinations of oral, written and non-textual forms of history-telling. They may make accessible multi-vocal and interdisciplinary approaches to historical research, providing insight into the ethical practices followed in such research. *Aboriginal History* journal fosters such approaches to historical work, but work based in other approaches to researching Indigenous histories will be considered.

Articles of up to 7,000 words in length (including footnotes and references) are preferred, but submissions of a maximum of 10,000 words (including footnotes and references) will be considered. Book reviews must be 1,000 words or less, and review articles up to 2,500 words in length.

Please submit a Microsoft Word version of your paper to [aboriginalhistoryinc@gmail.com](mailto:aboriginalhistoryinc@gmail.com), addressed to the Editor, together with a short abstract and author biography in a separate Word document.

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Tables and boxes should be numbered consecutively and should be referred to in the text in brackets by number (Table 1).

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All works referred are to be included in a reference list at the end of the article, arranged in alphabetical order by author's last name and include full publication details as given on the title page of the work. Arrange works by the same author in chronological order. Web citations should include full address and date accessed.

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