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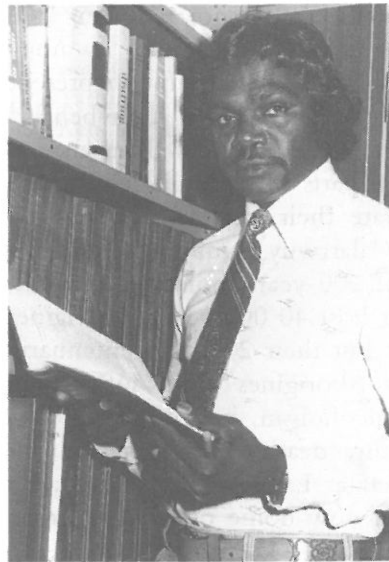
10

Contested ground: what is 'Aboriginal history'?

WHEN the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke launched the *Penguin Bicentennial History of Australia* on the grassy banks of Sydney Harbour in January 1988, a delegation of Aboriginal protesters ensured that it made quite a splash. An Aboriginal man hurled the book into the waters below and the television cameras rolled. The soggy copy was retrieved by a participant in the book launch and duly autographed. The Aboriginal spokespersons complained that this officially endorsed book did not tell their side of the story. Indeed, anticipating possible criticism, its non-Aboriginal author had stated that he did not attempt to present 'Aboriginal history' because he could not write on their behalf.[1]

On Australia Day, 26 January 1988, Aborigines from around the country, including the remotest parts of Australia, converged on Sydney's Hyde Park to celebrate their physical and cultural survival. Speakers Gary Foley and Galarrwuy Yunupingu ridiculed the relatively puny achievement of 200 years, pointing out that, having occupied the country for at least 40 000 years, Aborigines could be celebrating not their first but their 200th Bicentennary. It was an optimistic message, for Aborigines today suffer high rates of poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, imprisonment, disease, infant mortality, and premature death. That same January evening Aboriginal people gathered at La Perouse, named after the French expedition of 1788 and now home of a major urban Aboriginal community, to share sacred 'Dreaming stories', to

Aboriginal Protest on Australia Day, 1988. This protest was centred around Sydney Harbour, near where a re-enactment of the arrival of the First Fleet was to arrive and where Aborigines staged their own version of the landing. JOHN FAIRFAX PHOTO LIBRARY



Galarrwuy Yunupingu, Chairman of the Northern Land Council. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

dance, sing and make music shaped by generations of people who lived in distant Australian landscapes.

These events highlight not only the vexed question of the place of Aborigines in Australian history generally but also the problem of modes of transmission and authorial voice. Questions of power relations, of colonialism, nationalism and the political functions of such historiography are also central to the debate. Indeed, the very term 'Aboriginal history' is problematic. Amongst academic historians, and now the general public, it has come to signify historical writing where the predominant subject matter concerns Aboriginal people. Aborigines, however, argue that the only true 'Aboriginal history' must be written by Aborigines. Some non-Aboriginal historians concur, defining themselves as historians of Aboriginal–white relations, claiming they have never attempted to write 'Aboriginal history'.[2] Others have decided to write only of textual representations—of the way non-Aborigines perceived or constructed the notion of Aborigines—and without actually writing about them as people.

The term also implies further questions: who are 'Aborigines?' A general category for indigenous people, 'Aborigine' was applied by Europeans to describe the indigenous people of Australia. The term 'Aborigine' is a historical construct, a product of time and of changing consciousness.[3] Prior to the arrival of Europeans, there was no unified indigenous consciousness nor use for a general term. Australian indigenous people now apply the term 'Aborigines' themselves, though, as shown in earlier chapters, those of the south-east prefer 'Kooris' or 'Murris', designations for their own people, as an Australia-wide category of identification. In pre-contact societies and in more traditional societies today, black Australians identify according to clan or band associations, sometimes dubbed 'tribal'. Regional diversity is indicated by the more than 500 languages spoken throughout the continent in 1788, and clan affiliation was flexible according to marriage, changing population and ecology.

Nonetheless, the term 'Aboriginal history' prevails in its wider usage as denoting history about Aborigines and by Aborigines—in print, art, voice and song. Its ambit is shifting and open to debate. In my opinion, the term usefully identifies a genre of writing,

although it is a pluralistic one, without clear boundaries or prescribed authors. But then I am writing as a white female historian, trained in the academy in the liberal humanistic traditions of thought and knowledge. This chapter reflects this by the pre-eminence given to traditional academic 'historiography' over popular and Aboriginal traditions. I first look at the texts, the 'history books', which have been written almost exclusively by non-Aboriginal, mostly male, authors. Then I turn to Aboriginal history-making, and finally explore historiographical and political issues and debates about the discourse.

No consideration of the term 'Aboriginal history' could be complete without also questioning the meaning of the term 'history'. In the western cultural context, it is used for both academic and popular forms of historical representation, particularly written. As Lenore Coltheart argued, 'the moment of Aboriginal history' differs from the European version, for

> history is our familiar blend of the European ideas of time and knowledge and a 'natural' product of our system of thought. History is our second nature, the context of experience for our praxis, as for our contemplation; the source of explanation for us as political agents in public and in private.[4]

Men have made themselves the stars of the drama. Although subject to increasing challenge, 'history' encapsulated a linear notion of time, and the concept of unvarnished truth, or 'the triumph of logos over mythos'. 'Aboriginal history', originating in an oral tradition, thus forces us to reflect upon the cultural specificity of 'history' as understood by westerners.

But before focussing further on such problematic issues, a survey of the place of Aborigines in the earlier historiography will be provided. In the journals kept by the British men who arrived on the 'First Fleet' in 1788, (published in the 1780s and 90s) their meetings with Aborigines were described in fascinating ethnographic detail. Whilst these works were travellers' narratives rather than professional histories, they displayed a strong interest in the unique and exotic nature of the indigenous people of Australia, an interest shared by their reading public. Their physical appearance, rituals, adornments, economy, gender behaviour,

morality, and interactions with the white men, were discussed alongside philosophical questions regarding the contemporary notion of the 'noble savage'. The journals of Lieutenant David Collins and Surgeon Watkin Tench were especially readable, and provided an important source for future writers, including historians.[5]

While Australian historiography in a formal sense was still in its infancy by the early nineteenth century, these efforts did not ignore Aborigines. J. Bonwick's *First Twenty Years in Australia* told the story of individual Aborigines such as Bennelong, who proved capable of 'civilisation'; 'failed' attempts at 'uplift' were also described. Bonwick wrote:

> The settlement of Australia was formed without any consideration of the claims of the natives, or scarcely a recognition of their existence. *They were too weak to present opposition, and too degraded to excite sympathy.* [my italics] The assumption of absolute jurisdiction over the new territory followed the occupation, just as if it had no previous inhabitants.[6]

G.W. Rusden's *History of Australia*, published 1883, discussed Aboriginal–white relations as part of its introductory chapter 'Natural Phenomena and the Australian tribes'. Rusden acknowledged the violence and rapid population decline, especially focussing on Tasmania. An apparent trend towards extinction in Tasmania confirmed the emergent ideology of Social Darwinism, proving the 'inevitable' consequences of colonisations. Rusden's was one of the last general histories to address frontier brutality and the moral issues of dispossession of the indigenous people. He tackled the issue of national guilt, arguing that 'by nearly half a century of contempt for justice', public opinion has been so debauched 'that Aboriginal rights were denied'. Rusden held the whole community responsible for the slaughter which continued in frontier regions as he wrote. More commonly, however, Australians were told they should not trouble themselves about the 'disappearance' of Aborigines. H. G. Turner's *History of the Colony of Victoria* concluded that its treatment of Aborigines should result in 'no serious stain' on the colony's reputation.[7] The earlier histories therefore used Aborigines to underline the

strangeness or otherness of the new land and as a 'backdrop' for the coming of 'civilisation'. The hostility of indigenous peoples was emphasised to show the difficulties of conquest; frontier conflict was thus inescapably part of life as were ethical questions concerning land ownership.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Aborigines were being increasingly expunged from published histories, and historians turned their attention to explaining away the 'convict stain' of white Australia's foundations. The trend was typified by Arthur Jose's bestselling *History of Australia from the earliest times to the present day* (1899), which opened with an image of Australia as waiting to be 'discovered' and 'colonised', then followed by a chapter entitled 'Filling in the Map', as though the land was a series of blank spaces waiting to be pencilled in by Europeans. In referring to Captain Cook's journey to Australia, Jose blames the 'blackfellows' for being unco-operative with the 'friendly' expedition. While Jose's section on New Zealand is a story of indigenous and coloniser clashing in warfare, his reference to Aborigines is to dismiss them as 'so small and scattered that their claims were rarely considered'.[8] Indeed, S.H. Robert's influential *History of Australian Land Settlement* (1924) started with British, not Aboriginal occupation. Reference to their presence, while minimal, sweeps them further into irrelevancy: 'Their grievances . . . were usually the result of their own ungovernable dispositions and their failure to see any sense in the white man's laws of property.' A. de Brune's *Fifty Years of Progress in Australia 1878–1929* (1929) proceeds as though the continent was empty. Overlooking the bloodshed of conquest on Australian soil, the story's climax comes with the Great War of 1914–18, from whose 'blood-stained battle-fields' a new nation supposedly emerged. Such studies of Australian history thus presented European men as actors—discovering, exploring, settling, fighting.

With the Federation of the Australian colonies as a nation in 1901, historians had a new agenda. Not surprisingly, they wanted to reflect contemporary goals and aspirations and bolster positive self-images. Twentieth century historians, including the labour 'radicals', were inevitably engaged in nation building and the construction of the unifying mythologies necessary to buttress it.

National immigration policies such as the 'White Australia Policy', designed to keep out Asian migrants, also served an ideological function in reinforcing the concept of an all-white nation. Despite its unusual acknowledgement of 'the Invasion of Australia', W.K. Hancock's *Australia* (1930) denied the Aboriginal presence by repeatedly referring to 'empty' and 'uninhabited' lands and 'virgin plains'. Whilst his assessment of the inevitability of Aboriginal destruction is tempered by criticism of those British who did their 'wrecker's work with the unnecessary brutality of stupid children', he simultaneously blamed humanitarians for being unable to agree on policy for the 'black man's preservation'. While rather naive to assume that any one policy was a cure for the havoc wrought by colonialism, Hancock more convincingly argued that Australians were unwilling to commit the necessary 'hard thought and hard cash. Australian democracy is genuinely benevolent but is preoccupied with its own affairs. From time to time it remembers the primitive people whom it has dispossessed, and sheds over their predestined passing an economical tear.'[9]

Until the 1970s, most general histories of Australia forgot to shed even the token tear. Despite its comprehensive mission, Gordon Greenwood's influential *Australia: A Social and Political History* (1955) only mentioned Aborigines in passing. Manning Clark's *Short History of Australia* (1964) stressed the offerings of British civilisation, and after chapter one Aborigines faded from the story. Building on an evolving mythology, Douglas Pike's *Australia: the Quiet Continent* (1966) depicted Australia as 'a lonely land', 'the remote continent', and contended that nothing dramatic or bloody ever occurred on Australian soil. A.G.L. Shaw's *The Story of Australia* (1967) spoke in negatives; Aborigines could offer 'no serious resistance' due to their 'primitive culture'; they 'knew nothing of agriculture', had 'no permanent settlements', had 'no domestic animal but the dog'. Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia* (1970)[10] represented a critical turning point, for although he did not provide a detailed discussion on Aborigines on the grounds that too little had been written about them, he recognised racism as central to Australian history.

In 1968, it was the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner who, in the prestigious Boyer Lectures, challenged 'The Great Australian

Silence'—on the story of Aborigines. His survey of historical writing revealed a terrible neglect of the topic, leading him to argue that:

> inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.[11]

Australian history as a separate study evolved alongside burgeoning nationalism, unashamedly written as the story of colonialism victorious, with varying degrees of deference to the British Imperial founders. The easiest way to tell such a tale without sounding callous was to forget the vanquished altogether, and certainly not to allow the uncomfortable possibility that the nation was founded upon dubious sovereignty. Equally influential was the author's subjectivity; as white male authors, they undoubtedly imagined a similar audience. Aboriginal people's meagre educational opportunities ensured that few would read these texts, let alone write them. Deaf to the few public voices of Aboriginal protest, the historians wrote within the comfortable western mind-sets of the dominant society.

The disciplinary boundaries of history and anthropology were also to blame. With the rise of anthropology in Australia during the early twentieth century, an artificial demarcation arose between those who studied the 'primitive' blacks, and those who studied the 'progressive' white past. The domination of the British structural-functionalist school of anthropology in Australia led to an emphasis on reconstructing past cultures, with its static cultural model deflecting attention altogether from processes of change. In the quest for 'traditional' society, fieldwork and analysis ignored both past and present economic and social environments. Although exhibiting some humanitarian concern, anthropologists such as A.P. Elkin attempted to nurture cosy research relationships with government policy makers and the pastoralists upon whose land many Aborigines resided. To these men, such charged issues as colonialism and indigenous exploitation were anathema.[12]

When female ethnographers such as Olive Pink[13] tried to combine scholarship with strong activism, her work was judged a threat to the status quo and the power-brokers refused its publication. The female protectors that Pink proposed to prevent Aboriginal women from sexual exploitation, threatened the attractiveness of outback employment for white males. Thus the anthropological establishment reinforced the notion that Aborigines, whilst having a static 'past' to uncover and preserve, did not have a history.

The establishment in Canberra of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1963–64 as a research centre did little to alter this, for its purpose was not to study change but essentially to retrieve what might otherwise be 'lost'. Anthropologists, linguists, and experts in material culture dominated the establishment; only 'prehistory', or history prior to white contact had its own special advisory committee and a mere sprinkling of historians were members of the Institute. When historians' interest in 'Aboriginal history' strengthened, they were viewed as untrained and unsuitable for research on Aborigines. Although there is now a History Committee, Fellowships at the Institute have rarely been held by historians, and in past years, historical researchers have sometimes met difficulty in gaining support due to lack of anthropological training.[14] Aboriginal writers in various fields complain that they, too, have trouble being taken seriously.

Specialist historical analysis of Aboriginal–white relations first appeared in the 1970s, in the tracks of important Aboriginal rights campaigns in the late 1960s, including the Gurindji's strike for equal wages and land rights. Effective lobbying by Aboriginal spokespeople like Oodgeroo Noonuccal (previously Kath Walker) in the lead-up to the 1967 Referendum further raised the consciousness of white Australians. They were also influenced by developments in the United States and decolonisation movements in Africa. Influenced by Althusser, Marcuse and the New Left, academics questioned progress models and committed themselves to activist scholarship. Recognition of the absence of Aborigines in Australian historiography thus led to a wealth of enthusiastic research.

In 1970, the political scientist C.D. Rowley published a pathbreaking historical trilogy, entitled *The Destruction of Aboriginal*

Society, *Outcasts in White Australia* and *The Remote Aborigines*. Rowley humanely appraised state administration of Aboriginal affairs, especially via government policies and the law. He keenly understood the political ramifications of breaking the silence:

> No adequate assessment of the Aboriginal predicament can be made so long as the historical dimension is lacking; it is the absence of information . . . which has made it easy for intelligent persons in each successive generation to accept the stereotype of Aborigines as an incompetent group.[15]

Frank Stevens, author and barrister, analysed the history of racism in Australia and issues of wage equality, especially in the northern pastoral industry. Peter Biskup's *Not Slaves Not Citizens* (1973) was another excellent study of state policy regarding Aborigines. Raymond Evans' work on Queensland Aborigines in *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination* (1975) applied sociological models to an analysis of racist ideology and practice.[16]

The belief of such authors, however, in the universality of humanistic and Marxist paradigms, left their cultural bias as author unchallenged, and led them to portray Aboriginal people as passive victims. Rowley and Biskup's near exclusive reliance on official sources meant that Aboriginal people's perspectives were ignored.

In *The Black Resistance* (1977)[17] Maoist authors Robinson and York similarly took no account of the different world-view of Aboriginal peoples, despite their efforts to present Aborigines as fighters rather than victims. They modelled Aborigines as a guerilla-style resistance, even turning a woman into a man to suit their cliched warrior paradigm. Nonetheless, a book which portrayed Aborigines as actors rather than helpless victims made a timely impact.

Some important work was published in the prestigious mainstream journal, *Australian Historical Studies*, now brought together in a volume edited by S. Janson and S. Macintyre entitled *Through White Eyes* (1990)[18] This selection shows that the first relevant articles—Mulvaney's excellent descriptions of changing attitudes towards Aborigines from 1606–1929—did not appear until 1958. A long pause followed until 1973, the year after the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was erected outside Canberra's Parliament House,

then several important articles appeared in the 1980s. None were by Aboriginal authors.

Most importantly, however, a specialist journal *Aboriginal History* has been devoted to the subject since 1978. The product of the tireless efforts of its first editor, the late Dr Diane Barwick, from its outset the journal was characterised by a pluralistic definition of 'Aboriginal history' and the encouragement of contributions from Aboriginal authors and co-authors. A survey of editions reveal only a small proportion of Aboriginal-authored articles but a more substantial number collaborated with Aborigines who shared their life stories or perspectives. The journal also fostered an interdisciplinary approach, with contributions from anthropologists, linguists, archaeologists, prehistorians, cave art experts, musicologists, geographers, educationalists, archivists, and librarians.

Enriched by the insights offered by several disciplines, Henry Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981)[19] was an extremely important monograph, for it attempted to portray the story of the frontier from Aboriginal vantage points, to get into the minds of Aboriginal people, and to acknowledge 'difference'. Aboriginal reactions to sighting the first white men, and their responses to frontier violence, were driven by their cultural imperatives, including Aboriginal belief and law. This book was indeed an attempt to present the perspective from 'the other side', the one which historians had thought could not be told due to inadequate evidence. While Aborigines had little control over the manufacture of historical records, Reynolds scoured the documents to find snatches of their voices recorded in newspapers, parliamentary papers, police and court records. Collecting then threading together evidence from throughout Australia, he created a patchwork picture of wider patterns of colonialism. Critics pointed out the need for closer regional studies, while others had doubts about Reynolds' resistance model and frontier paradigm. Reynolds' frontier implied rather firm boundaries, with Aborigines placed on 'the other side' as noble, and any who co-operated with the colonisers presented as collaborators. Reynolds made great progress in challenging the western mind-set, yet perhaps he gave some the impression that a white man could fully articulate

Aboriginal perspectives. He stated that he was not a dispassionate scholar but instead motivated by a desire to change an ignorant, racist society. The following year Richard Broome's compassionately written *Aboriginal Australians* appeared. It provided an excellent general synthesis of existing historical work and made sensitive use of Aboriginal perspectives.

Lyndall Ryan's *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*[20] was a detailed study located mainly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century materials. She sensitively took into account the feelings of the Aboriginal communities with whom she worked and intelligently portrayed the experiences of female Aborigines. My *'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in the Cattle Industry* (1987)[21] departed from preceding interpretations, being described as using a dynamic cultural model and containing a more complex notion of power relations.[22] Here Aborigines were shown to inhabit *both* sides of the frontier. They agreed to work for the white men and women and indeed Aborigines excelled at stockwork, a highly prestigious activity, and domestic tasks, including caring for and virtually bringing up the manager's children. Working for the coloniser did not mean that they were traitors to their own people; they did not suddenly think 'white' but rather incorporated the cattle world into their own cultural frameworks; it was 'no shame job' and they worked for rather different reasons than Europeans might envisage. Unfamiliar with cash, they wanted a regular supply of food for their kin, and to continue to live upon, have access to and 'look after' their traditional lands. *Born in the Cattle* also made gender a central category of historical analysis[23], focussing upon the division of labour and the sexual relationships between coloniser and colonised. The inter-dependence created by such intimate relationships was shown to be central to frontier dynamics, further breaking down any stereotype of a fixed frontier boundary. Given the predominance of white–black unions in frontier regions, it was indeed problematic to ascertain who was on which side of the frontier during sexual intercourse!

Born in the Cattle was substantially shaped by the collection and incorporation of oral history interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cattle-station workers. This enabled the piecing together of richer detail on the everyday labour routine of

Aborigines, and a greater understanding of Aboriginal cultural explanations for their work experience. In many ways, the research process enabled Aborigines to teach their history themselves. Their perspectives played an important role in shaping the questions asked of other evidence. Blurring occurred, however, between the voices articulated; was the author acting as a vehicle for the perspectives of Aboriginal interviewees, or was it her own voice as historian the reader heard? Those engaged in oral history collection often find it difficult to contradict their informants' accounts due to the nature of the relationships formed, and expectations of trust which arise. Tim Rowse argued that I had not paid enough attention to the influence of nostalgia in the accounts of older surviving station workers.[24] Attwood was especially suspicious of the value of oral history.[25] Rowse and later Attwood argued that my involvement in land rights work led to an effort to stress continuing traditional land associations. Also controversial was my contention that cattle station Aborigines were 'never truly colonised'[26], an assertion which demanded more careful definition of terminology and theory.

Marie Fels' study of the Port Phillip Native Police *Good Men and True* (1988) applied cultural history models and close ethnographically-informed textual readings. She tended to attribute a great deal of autonomy to the Native Police, pointing out how they mediated between cultures. The next significant study was Bain Attwood's *The Making of the Aborigines* (1989).[27] Drawing upon his research into Aboriginal missions in Victoria, he argued that Aborigines were more 'made' than making, more 'determined' than determining. Attwood argued that nineteenth century Aborigines were being 'constructed' as people by a dominant culture. Jan Kociumbas also dissents from the 'agency' model, arguing that, 'Like other oppressed people, they had no power to determine the choices available to them.'[28] Her work is heavily structured according to Marxist paradigms which tend to encapsulate all oppressed groups as victims.[29] Ann Curthoys has also argued for balance in this regard.[30] Like Reynolds, McGrath and Fels, Attwood was influenced by insights from a variety of disciplines, and drew upon intensive doctoral research, though with more overt reference to his historiographical influ-

ences. Distinguishing himself from other scholars on the grounds of being an 'outsider', a New Zealander rather than Australian born, and not being politically active, he claimed a greater monopoly on 'objectivity'.

Recently Reynolds also published some influential works on the question of land tenure and frontier violence, especially *The Law of the Land* (1989), and *Frontier* (1987), which questioned the *terra nullius* doctrine.[31] Drawing upon a wealth of recent scholarship, Reynolds' more recent *With the White People* (1990) is a study of Aborigines in a wide range of employment relationships with the colonisers. It allows for a more flexible frontier paradigm and slightly more recognition of the importance of gender relations.

General histories have not yet managed to integrate the story of Aborigines into their analysis. Those published in the 1970s and 1980s made only token mention of Aborigines, including the widely-used *New History of Australia* edited by F.K. Crowley. *A People's History of Australia since 1788*, edited by J. Lee and V. Burgmann, employed Left-wing and labour historian's perspectives, and included a number of articles on Aboriginal issues. The largest team project, the *Australians* series, invited Aboriginal discussion and participation, hoping to provide a history for everyone and about everyone. Authors of several volumes included Aboriginal content but Aboriginal people were reluctant contributors.[32] Its 1938 'slice' volume included the much-praised article on Aboriginal activism 'Day of Mourning' by Langton and Horner and a collection of Aboriginal oral histories.[33] The *Oxford History of Australia* devoted a special volume to pre-1788 history, which has not yet appeared, and authors of other volumes attempted to interweave 'Aboriginal history' into the texts but it is only a key theme in the 1770–1860 volume by Jan Kociumbas.[34] In the 'view from the window' of the general histories, Aborigines are only just starting to be seen, though the collaborative feminist history, *Creating a Nation*, represents a departure.[35]

ABORIGINES MAKING HISTORY

For many Aboriginal people, the only 'Aboriginal history' they recognise is that compiled by their own people. There are as yet

no general histories of Australia written by Aborigines, and very few publications which claim to be all-encompassing regional histories.[36] Biographies and autobiographies are the most common form of Aboriginal historical writing. They contain a hitherto untold story, which readers are happy to absorb without the mediation of further historical interpretation. But within this medium, there are many possibilities. Biographies of 'outstanding Aborigines' first appeared in the 1970s and 80s: the story of well-known civil rights activists such as Kath Walker, *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared* and Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me,* artist Dick Roughsey, and of 'ordinary people' such as Jimmie Barker (told by Janet Mathews), Marnie Kennedy, Ella Simon, Elsie Roughsey, Phillip Pepper, Ida West, Alice Nannup, G. Ward, and Ruby Langford.[37]

Sally Morgan's best-selling *My Place* (1988), while not a 'work of history' in the academic sense, was a compelling autobiographical narrative, a journey of discovery and a detective story whose main theme was family history. It included large slabs of oral history told in the words of Morgan's older and more traditional Aboriginal relations. This work received many accolades and won virtually every available literary prize. Since then, the market for Aboriginal autobiography has expanded, and new books are regularly coming out which narrate the story of Aboriginal women, men and families. Some of these have been compiled with the assistance of non-Aboriginal editors, in the style of *Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*.[38] For academic historians, these works also present new historical data—a wide range of examples from which common threads and diversity of historical experiences emerge. The Aboriginal critic Mudrooroo criticised Morgan for borrowing European narrative styles[39], presumably because this perpetuated cultural hegemony.

But Aboriginal publications have distinctive qualities; kinship and loss of family are especially prominent. Tucker's *If Everyone Cared* fits this category, and more recently Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*. Edwards and Read's *The Lost Children* contains stories of thirteen New South Wales people and their struggles to find their Aboriginal parents or kin. *Take This Child* also contains stories of child-removal in the Northern Territory.

More culturally-traditional northern Aborigines such as Ngabidj and Paddy Roe have recorded life stories via white intermediaries, and these also tend to emphasise stories of people's relationships to land and landscape. Cohen and Sommerville's *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*, the story of generations around the New England district of New South Wales, is another example of the land-based narrative, with a biographical format.[40]

It is worth pondering why Aborigines choose the biographical form for expressing their stories. Partly it may reflect a reluctance to speak about what has not been personally witnessed or what lies outside one's own clan area. Biography might have been chosen for its ability to touch a nerve, to get a message across. Dominance of the biographical medium can also be explained by the relatively few Aboriginal graduates. While limited educational opportunities have meant that most Aboriginal people had little choice, other Aborigines reject university training as a bastion of colonialism, determined to achieve their ends without being subject to such western hegemonic institutions.

Aboriginal students are more likely to choose law, anthropology, or medicine. Some recent graduates, including those with interdisciplinary backgrounds such as Marcia Langton, Gordon Briscoe, Noel Pearson and Jackie Huggins have continued their historical writing. But such talents often find they are called upon to fulfil senior executive positions in policy making, or decide to spend their energies working with their own communities rather than becoming career-path academics.[41] Universities thus suffer a 'brain-drain' of Aborigines with historical expertise.

Aborigines make history mainly outside the academies. Unlike the disciplines of anthropology or linguistics, history is considered a non-exclusive discipline, because its language or theory is not specialist, and because wider social perceptions of history stress its accessibility to the general public. (For example, newspaper articles constantly refer to 'history in the making', 'historic moments'; people enjoy historical television series and films.) History can be shared by storytelling, songs and art, so does not require high literacy or educational standards, and can be taught to people of varying ages.

Aboriginal student Anita Heiss receives her honours degree in history at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, 1992. UNSW PUBLICATIONS

This probably explains why, of all the conferences held by Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), 'Aborigines Making History' (1988) was one of the best attended by Aboriginal participants. They came from diverse backgrounds: educators at pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, genealogists, family historians, bureaucrats, and activists. Many were in some way involved in the practice of history; a group of Collingwood women had set up an Aboriginal History Group and had already published historical pamphlets. Others practised history by researching, writing or teaching, and saw such knowledge as intrinsic to their identity as Aborigines. They viewed history as something which belonged to them all, in which they could participate through sharing their personal experiences or acquired knowledge, through researching family history, by recording the reminiscences of older people. Some participants had studied at university level, often in general Aboriginal studies courses, or education, linguistics, literary criticism or anthropology. Most participants had picked up their historical skills through community involvement or actually practising history. Had they not been Aboriginal, they might be

dubbed 'amateur historians' but given the special value and purpose of history by Aborigines, this label is not only elitist but quite inappropriate.

Many writers, including numerous older women, were most interested in writing the specific histories of their families and clans, emphasising genealogy rather than social history. While these less ambitious histories do not generally discuss the wider impact of power relations, they certainly raise consciousness, strengthening a sense of distinctive identity, boosting self-esteem and preserving cultural knowledge for their descendants. Many family histories have been published, especially by the government-backed Aboriginal Studies Press, alternative presses and increasingly by commercial publishers.

The historical novel is another form chosen by black authors. Monica Clare related the exploitation of a young Aboriginal girl in *Karobran*. Colin Johnson's *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the End of the World*, based his story of frontier brutality in Tasmania, and Eric Willmot's *Pemulwuy* dramatised the story of an Aboriginal warrior who led battles against the British in their early New South Wales settlements.[42] Philip McLaren's *Sweet Water, Sweet Land* told of brutal massacres and cultural exchanges.

Where historical circumstances have led to greater dislocation from their land and traditional culture, Aborigines are more likely to see 'Aboriginal history' as a means of retrieving that lost past, of piecing together an often romanticised 'lost culture'. The personal and political are fused. History is used as a means of explaining the personal pain suffered by their parents or near kin and for their current underdog status. Like the white history which excluded them, 'Aboriginal history' can serve pan-Aboriginal, nationalistic ends, for it enhances the anti-colonial struggles for recognition as an indigenous nation and for land rights generally. This might be termed 'oppression history' but Aboriginal stories such as that of the drover Amy Laurie and matriarch Ida West's *Pride Against Prejudice* often stress survival themes.[43]

'Aboriginal history' is thus used as a means of political consciousness-raising, affirming a shared sense of oppression, and a way of resolving identity problems caused by state interventions which broke up families and communities. Aboriginal ancestry

need no longer be denied; the deepest hurts of bureaucratic cruelties can be aired. Children can learn why their parents refused to talk about certain issues; to open the locked doors is both saddening and empowering. As movingly rendered in books such as Morgan's *My Place* and C. Edwards and P. Read's *The Lost Children*[44], to discover the truth of the past, the pain of the past can heal. Improving self-knowledge and self-esteem can mean greater individual and community well-being.

The preceding discussion of history by Aboriginal people has been chiefly concerned with an end-product which is written down or published. Aboriginal people are a very diverse group, and approach their history from varying vantage points and in differing cultural styles. As Aborigines were a pre-literate people prior to the British arrival, they had no place for the 'written history' or even the recorded events which westerners usually assume to be 'real history'. The thousands of Aboriginal people in more remote regions still maintain a qualitatively different relationship with their own history. With more continuous relationships with land, language and culture, they see 'Aboriginal history' as a living tradition, of which written or published versions are a recent development. Nonetheless, Aboriginal elders are deeply concerned about their younger generation's loss of interest in traditional law, and consider the continuing life of 'the Dreaming' and education about land and history as essential to their survival as a people.

Another way of looking at 'Aboriginal history' is thus as something quite ancient, a complex and diverse tradition which has ensued for at least 50 000 years. This is the history which has been transmitted through the generations, not just 'orally' through spoken stories but through dance, music and song. Song cycles linked country, stories and people throughout the land. The Aboriginal philosophical and religious tradition or 'Dreaming' included creation stories relating animals, plants and humans together within the same landscape. Aborigines in northern and central Australia now swap Dreaming stories on cassette tapes or at large gatherings to which they travel by car, 4-wheel drive vehicles and bus. Dreaming stories are also told via traditional paintings and engravings on stone, patterns on sand, 'story sticks',

Northern Territory Land Commissioner Kearney with Pharlap Dixon during Murranji Land Claim Hearing, 1983. Aboriginal men and women have shared many traditional stories as part of the land claims process in the Northern Territory. R. BLOWES

and modern forms of painting on bark, canvas and paper. Traditional children's stories have also been translated into English and illustrated by Aboriginal artists. Some communities have also embraced film, video and multi-media CD-Rom. 'Traditional' forms of Aboriginal history are far from static, reflecting and explaining ever-changing contemporary circumstances.

Northern Aborigines such as the Mudbura and Gurindji tell stories of the coming of the first white men to their regions, sagas of exploration, settlement and Aboriginal negotiation with the newcomers. They explain how the arrival of white men dramatically altered their prior relations with their land, sustenance and women. Such contact sagas are referred to by Aborigines as 'history stories', or merely '*before*'. Some can be verified as accurate accounts, enhanced by unique Aboriginal understandings of events. Others, such as the Captain Cook myths, have attained a more mythologised form, where the white intruders become symbols of

chaos and law-breaking. Other sagas formulate distinctive Aboriginal paradigms of colonialism—explanations for their current place in the world.[45] Although quite distinctive, they have partly evolved out of a dialogue with white Australian historiography, often conveyed via the classroom. For example, school children are told that 'Captain Cook' was the first white man to come to Australia. It is therefore extrapolated that whenever a first white intruder appears in the landscape, he will be called 'Captain Cook'.[46] Names become symbolic, characters archetypal. 'Dreaming stories' about sites in the landscape have also merged with some Christian traditions, such as the story of Noah's Ark.[47] Narrative style and the principles behind them deserve much further analysis but to do even a little justice to these forms of history requires much further study. That historians in Australian universities have not engaged in an analysis of traditional Aboriginal historical practice is a serious omission.[48] Such explorations could provide stimulating challenges to the discipline.

POLITICS OF BLACK AND WHITE

Several Aboriginal spokespeople have contended there must be no further appropriation of their history. Only Aborigines should write 'Aboriginal history'. All others should stay out. White historians have based their careers, got Doctorates, made money out of books by ripping off Aborigines of their life stories, of their evidence, of their history. Only Aborigines should gain. Only Aborigines know the 'correct' interpretation of their past. Only Aborigines can understand Aboriginal minds, and Aboriginal reactions.[49]

White historians sometimes reacted defensively to such attacks, partly because it threatened them with redundant specialisations. Others have been troubled because they hoped to prevent the damaging effects of black exclusion from Australian national history; to them 'Aboriginal history' is part of the story of humanity. They value the potential power of the white historians' voices: the impact of Geoffrey Blainey's *Triumph of the Nomads*[50] in heightening public awareness of Aboriginal cultural achievements, Rowley's exposure of their dispossession and oppression

and Reynolds' calculation of the death rates on the frontier, the creative responses of Aborigines and the dubious justice of *terra nullius*. Historians should perhaps be more self-conscious of the culturally-specific nature of their liberal missionary zeal[51]. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that many talented historians, including highly-motivated students, shy away from the field because they fear offending Aborigines or being accused of not minding their own business.

The great diversity in Aboriginal culture and historical experience and their relatively few historians could mean that blacks-only 'Aboriginal history' might reflect the experience of a regional or political minority. This could be exacerbated by the dominant myth of 'the authentic Aboriginal voice', for like 'the feminist view', one Aboriginal author is often taken by outsiders to be representative of all, leaving no room for divergent political positions. While a generalist account of Aboriginal history by an Aboriginal author will undoubtedly be published before too long, Aboriginal scholars like Michael Williams and Noel Pearson are committed to following traditional protocol and avoid setting themselves up to represent knowledges to which they cannot claim.[52]

There are still many areas of potential conflict between Aborigines and non-Aboriginal researchers. One of these is access to records, for on the grounds of privacy, Aborigines are demanding full control over who inspects archival records concerning their people. This is an understandable position as it follows decades of the State exerting control over their private lives. Many things have also been insensitively published by anthropologists and other academics, including photographs or names of the recently deceased or sacred materials. Aborigines have every right to mistrust white promises. Yet to 'lock up' this information from non-family members threatens to keep the lid on an already censored past. It threatens to deny access to vital knowledge relevant to understanding colonial power relations.

Of more concern to 'traditional' communities is the propriety of knowledge-sharing according to the principles of Aboriginal law. The European concept of knowledge as universally accessible, fundamental in institutions such as universities and libraries,

did not apply in pre-contact Aboriginal society. Information about Dreaming stories, land and ceremony were available according to gender, kinship classification, land ownership, and age. Important cultural information was for those worthy, ready or appropriate to receive it. In a special sense, knowledge was power but it must not get into the wrong hands. Knowledge bore importantly on custodianship of land, power over production and reproduction. To share secret knowledge could empower the receivers but endanger its articulators.

Like all peoples, Aborigines thus have many different histories. Some are more militant in interpretation than others. Some are extremely conciliatory, leading white radicals to say their political consciousness has not yet developed. Some Aborigines want to co-operate with non-Aboriginal researchers; some don't. Some people have very clear political agendas, others see education and culture as something separate from politics. Some believe that only elders can tell history stories; others believe anyone who knows them can do so. Revisionism and critique is also emerging in the ranks of Aboriginal writers, for example the work of Jackie Huggins, Mudrooroo, Paul Behrendt and Michael McDaniel.

Aboriginal spokespeople want their children to be taught about their own past in the school system. Some demand that it only be written about and spoken by Aborigines. This poses a serious dilemma for non-Aboriginal teachers who believe they must incorporate the story of Aborigines. Collaborative teaching approaches with increasing Aboriginal control are becoming more common, especially at tertiary level. Koori-controlled courses at Monash, New South Wales and Macquarie Universities have used texts written by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors, and called in a variety of Aboriginal speakers. White historians are increasingly inviting Aboriginal guest lecturers to contribute to any relevant courses. White historians willing to teach or co-ordinate courses on Koori history have often interpreted their role as that of caretaker, awaiting a suitable Aboriginal applicant at a later date. This has often worked well, though students have sometimes had to suffer a constantly changing front-person. Aboriginal lecturers, although highly valued and sought after, have been offered little job security and had to work in locations distant from their

home community. They have then confronted difficulties in fulfilling the multiple demands of students, of their local communities, and of the academic community. The Aboriginal Resource Centre of the University of New South Wales, directed by Paul Behrendt, presents an excellent model. Achieving some continuity, it independently runs its own courses, makes input into campus-wide subjects and runs a busy centre which makes knowledge of Aboriginal matters highly accessible.

Positive discrimination towards Aborigines has enabled many outstanding individuals to supply invaluable perspectives within universities but it also raises difficulties for others. Should Aboriginal historians be admitted to postgraduate degrees or promoted to lectureships within the history discipline without receiving any basic formal training? Is it justifiable because it offers the opportunity to sink or swim, or does it put them at a disadvantage, setting some people up to suffer from feelings of inadequacy or inevitably fail? Is the role-model function of such appointments more important than their historical skills? Or do Aboriginal people offer a *qualitatively different* history and sophisticated and unique skills which cannot be judged by the same standards?

While many Aboriginal scholars prefer the disciplinary autonomy of 'Aboriginal Studies' rather than having to conform to the parameters of a single discipline, Aboriginal voices are increasingly finding places to be heard within 'mainstream' historical accounts. For example, Aboriginal author Jackie Huggins has participated in *A People's History of Australia*, *Through White Eyes* and *Gender Relations in Australia*.[53] More importantly, Aboriginal groups are assuming greater control over the dissemination of knowledge about them. Tranby College circulates a list of books approved by black educators. Aboriginal education or other special officers have been appointed to the Australian Museum, the Powerhouse Museum, the National Museum of Victoria, and Aboriginal communities have set up their own cultural museums or 'keeping places' in Adelaide and various rural locations.

In attempting a new sensitivity, non-Aboriginal historians face the danger of overcompensating, being so over-concerned about offending Aborigines that they refuse to disagree with any person of Aboriginal descent. As Marcia Langton has pointed out, to not

engage in debate with Aboriginal scholars is both condescending[54] and cowardly. Yet some white scholars are justifiably fearful of presenting ideas which might not conform with the political campaigns of the most high-profile Aboriginal spokespersons; indeed they fear informal 'blacklisting', receiving scathing reviews, being branded racists or banned from the black-approved books lists. With Aboriginal representatives now increasingly consulted by University appointment panels, career opportunities can be tangibly damaged. Sometimes such advice rightly penalises insensitivity towards Aboriginal issues but it can also reflect misunderstandings or misinterpretations which can stem from different orientations to knowledge and different educational levels. Applying a set of rules to such appointments is problematic. Fear of going against current political adages may inhibit exchange of ideas, and sometimes those who do not fear offending others have some very useful ideas. No one has a monopoly on 'truth', and often the only way to advance knowledge is to suggest interpretations beyond the currently perceived 'truths' or wisdoms. So while acknowledging the need for historians to be politically sensitive, this should not mean censorship.

While history is inevitably political and historians of Aboriginal history have been forced to face this from the outset, it is no easy task to recognise one's own place as part of an ongoing colonial process. White historians are inevitably part of the group oppressing Aborigines. To be challenged on this can be an educational experience, enhancing awareness of one's own society, the process of history and history-making.

Many white historians have worked alongside Aboriginal people on projects of vital current concern to their communities. Indeed, historians in the 'Aboriginal history' field have a high participation rate in public or applied history. Often they have been employed by Aboriginal bodies or government organisations with Aboriginal staff, been expected to work with cultural sensitivity and to deliver the required product. This represents a shift in power relations, for Aboriginal organisations are in the role of employer and historian as service provider. At the same time, the historians' expertise is respected and they are awarded some authority and independence.

Heather Goodall acted as Historical Advisor during the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Testing at Maralinga in Central Australia and has worked for numerous Aboriginal organisations, including Tranby Aboriginal Co-operative College, the Western Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales and the Pitjantjatjara Council in Western Australia. Henry Reynolds has advised various Land Councils, including the Cape York Land Council, and has taken an active role in land rights reform. Peggy Brock worked on an Aboriginal Sites Register for the Aboriginal Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment and Planning in South Australia.[55] The editor of *Aboriginal History* since 1990, Peter Read, began researching 'Aboriginal history' as part of his teaching job with Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. He collected oral histories there and later in Cowra, New South Wales, and published a book on the Wiradjuri people. In between, he worked for Link-up, an Aboriginal organisation set up to trace parents or children separated mainly by state policies, which until the 1960s, had advocated separating children from their families to 'train' them as cheap domestic labour and in the benefits of 'white civilisation'. In 1990 Read was called upon to give evidence in the Californian murder trial of the Australian Aborigine, James Savage, who was taken from his young mother at birth, adopted and later deserted by white missionary parents. From 1979, the author advised and acted as expert witness for the Northern Land Council for several Aboriginal land claims. Lenore Coltheart, Ray Evans and Kay Saunders also advised Aboriginal Land Councils. Rae Frances and Bruce Scates collaborated with the La Grange Aboriginal community to erect a monument in Fremantle which would take issue with a nearby explorers' memorial; it would commemorate 'All Aboriginal people who died during the invasion of their country'.[56] Historians of Aboriginal history became the first to play a major advisory role for an Australian Royal Commission when from 1990–91 they contributed research papers and advised the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Its National History Project, co-ordinated by the author, engaged consultant historians Peter Read, Richard Broome, Peggy Brock, Errol West, Henry Reynolds, Heather Goodall and Dawn May. In

1994, historian Tom Stannage (who earlier worked on the Seaman Inquiry in Western Australia) and Bob Reece conducted research relating to the *Native Title Act, 1993*.

Historians' involvement in Aboriginal politics has led to their being branded 'bleeding hearts', liberals or missionaries but experience with 'real life' has led to a growing sensitivity and awareness of cultural complexities: it has allowed historians to hear what Aborigines actually want rather than what others assume they want. Although some historians, such as Marie Fels and Bain Attwood, have eschewed involvement in Aboriginal politics, the practice of history has already involved them. Attwood, for example, tutored in an Aboriginal studies course at Monash University run by Aboriginal linguist Eve Fesl, and Aboriginal critics have responded sharply to his ideas.[57] Whether white historians work alongside Aborigines or not, in taking part in any historical dialogue on this topic, they are inevitably caught in the web of ongoing power relations, cultural clashes and conflicting nationalisms.

Such entanglement can mean positive attempts to shift the balance of power between whites and blacks, as has also taken place within the academies, in teaching. Despite its career problems, Aboriginal history as practised within the traditional history discipline has a special vitality and originality. The reasons for this are linked with the way it has borrowed insights from other disciplines, especially ethnography, linguistics and archaeology. It also leads the way in venturing towards 'cultural history', the successor of social history. Such recognition implies that Aboriginal history has not been marginalised as an obscure specialisation but is recognised as leading the discipline in new directions. The quality of recent works has been recognised by the award of numerous prizes, including human rights, literary and historians' awards.[58]

Historiographical questions become especially pertinent in an atmosphere of political engagement. These include whether a separate, an alternative field of study is warranted and whether it is methodologically possible to write 'Aboriginal history' in segregation. In my view it is impossible to analyse post-contact history in an isolated manner, for it is essentially relational. Just as feminist historians are recognising the need to understand

masculinity and wider social power structures, historians interested in 'Aboriginal history' must explore the interface between the cultures, between coloniser and colonised. But the question of position, and of perspective, allows for many different vantage points. Some, like Evans and Saunders, have categorised it as part of the history of 'race relations'.[59] Many would quibble with using the term 'race' at all; others have referred to 'culture contact'. In the Australian context, the historical importance of Aboriginal–white relations requires that 'Aboriginal history' be integrated into the story of mainstream Australian history. A shift of paradigm is required, an incorporation of 'Aboriginal history' into an Australian history which is truly one of colonialism: one which analyses the economic, social and cultural conflict between indigenous peoples, the colonised, and the colonisers, as central to national settlement, development and nationalism.

DISCOURSE AND DIALOGUE

'Aboriginal history' is constantly under challenge. One dilemma is whether white authors cease to *collect* Aboriginal life stories. Aborigines have argued that this violates their privacy. Others point out that the story is inevitably 'channelled' via the white interviewer, with cultural bias shaping the questioning and responses. A second dilemma is whether white authors should cease to *analyse* 'Aboriginal history', on the grounds that this is a continuing appropriation of Aboriginal intellectual property. Perhaps they should only write about what whites *did* to Aborigines, not how they responded.

White authors have put their names to books where they have edited Aboriginal stories. Should they be authors or ghostwriters or co-authors? What is and should be their status? Are they facilitators or creators? Aboriginal oral histories have often been mediated through white authors, and this has become a subject of much literary criticism. In the late 1970s, early 1980s, Bruce Shaw collected and edited the stories of Ngabidj, Banggaiyerri and various other men of the Kimberley region in Western Australia. Ngabidj's story, *My Country of the Pelican Dreaming* is an invaluable source, allowing insights into the traditional world

of an elder in the context of a volatile and changing frontier region. Ngabidj, who died before the book was published, told his story in English, which Shaw transcribed and rephrased into more 'readable' English for the imagined 'general reader'. Mainstream literary critics claimed the Aboriginal-colloquial style of Shaw and Ngabidj's narrative was too obscure for the general reader, whilst Aboriginal critic Mudrooroo accused Shaw of too much interference with the text, attacking such writing as 'captured discourse, captured lives'. Mudrooroo argued that an Aboriginal audience was left out of Shaw's category 'general reader', though this is somewhat dubious given the range of English spoken amongst Aboriginal groups throughout the country. *Reading the Country* used a contrasting strategy, presenting the words of Paddy Roe like poetry; the pauses are signified by new lines not punctuation, and little obvious editorial intervention. Mudrooroo argued, however, that the words are still trapped and subordinate to the artworks of Krim Benterrak and the philosophical discussions by Muecke, who studied in Paris and cites the ideas of G. Deleuze and F. Guattari on nomadology and the influence of French theorists such as Foucault, Barthes and Derrida.[60] Muecke's presentation of Roe's words (in Aboriginal English, a type of creole) are an attempt to avoid intervening with his words, yet his control over the form of the book, with instructions on how to read it, introductions and conclusions, inevitably privilege the voice of the white, highly educated male author, who unlike Paddy Roe, spoke cultured English as his first language.

The collection of oral history by white or black historians necessitates an intensely personal confrontation with the past, or more accurately, the individuals' different pasts. The power relations between interviewer and interviewee are constantly under examination. Aboriginal interviewers are now collecting valuable oral histories, which effectively places more control in Aboriginal hands but issues of power relations are still relevant.[61] The Aboriginal author, Bill Rosser, interviewed ex-drovers and pastoral workers in his *Dreamtime Nightmares*.[62] His angle of questioning showed marked differences of perspective to his Aboriginal interviewees, at least one of whom classed him as a

'white man'. His behaviour and skin colour had led to this perception, underlining the varying definitions of 'Aboriginality'.

Power relations are even more problematic when the interviewer is non-Aboriginal and part of the colonising class. Heather Goodall argued that the best way to prevent the exploitative mining of Aboriginal evidence by historians, was for interviewer and interviewee to collaborate in the historical analysis, with the historian sharing, maybe training the interviewee in her special skills. Though commendable, Goodall's position might only be applicable where there is shared ground regarding cultural outlook, education and age. It does not resolve the problem of whose voice will be used for the final presentation. Further, her argument could imply that the trained historian holds the more 'sophisticated' interpretation, one which tends to deny cultural difference and assume the same interpretation should be reached.

Anthropologist Diane Bell whipped up great controversy when she co-published with an Aboriginal collaborator Topsy Napurrula Nelson in *Women's Studies International Forum*. The topic itself was highly sensitive, about rape within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal women, including Marcia Langton and Jackie Huggins, were outraged by the article, and various detractors spoke on *The Coming Out Show* on ABC National Radio, on 18 May 1990. The debate hotted up further when the editor of *WSIF* refused to publish a protest letter by twelve Aboriginal women. In her critique of the affair, Jan Larbalestier argued that despite Bell's assertions of cross-cultural collaboration, Bell as the privileged white academic was the one who located Nelson's voice in the text. Her voice was the authoritative white voice, the active voice, which she also placed in opposition to other 'hostile' Aboriginal women who she accused of not speaking out. By setting up the 'traditional' credentials of Nelson and positioning her as the 'authentic Aboriginal' voice, she thus invited the anger of black women. In emphasising women's shared oppression, Bell paid inadequate attention to difference, the need to consider the power relations of such collaboration, the forum for and mode of expressing its results and especially the need for Aboriginal women to formulate a distinctive voice.[63] Bell responded by arguing that her Aboriginal critics, like her collaborator, had

powerful voices, and feared that Larbalestier's assertions would only mean a reversion to silence.[64]

To what extent will white authors really collaborate on an equal footing with Aboriginal historians? Nervousness on the part of some white authors about 'Aboriginal' topics could draw them to acquire Aboriginal co-authors. The practice might become merely a method of enhancing the white author's political credentials. The power relations implicit in such interactions, and the nature of the collaboration, must be more clearly articulated. Different types of contributions may be made without assuming either party is more important than the other but the readers are entitled to know to whose voice they are listening. It is important that collaborations do not cease but also that they be real, so that the dangers of tokenism do not arise.

Other scholars have attempted to create a safe haven by avoiding any discussion of Aboriginal experiences of history. Instead, they focus purely on critical studies of European representations of Aborigines, sometimes assuming that this topic relieves them of any obligation to include or co-operate with Aboriginal authors. Some indigenous people criticise such highly theorised studies as attempts to 'rise above' their concerns and render their writings 'inferior'. Typifying such studies is *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, edited by John Arnold and Bain Attwood.[65] Although many of its authors earnestly discuss the importance of indigenous voices and the politics of co-operation, there is no editorial reference to Aboriginal authors being invited to contribute to its analysis.[66] *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines* only admits Aboriginal representations in the cover art, thus perpetuating the type of primitivist trope it set out to critique. That is, Aboriginal people belong to the world of the visual, of colour and sensation rather than that of the intellect, words and theory. Despite good intentions, a retreat to studying 'our representations of them' can exaggerate the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', thus leading to a form of intellectual apartheid.

In debates about form, content must not be forgotten. There are still many important themes which demand further exploration. The evolution and meaning of Aboriginal identity is attracting increasing attention from scholars such as Beckett and

Attwood, and the results will be interesting. The gender dimension of colonialism has been largely ignored, and much more needs to be done on the ways in which Aboriginal men and women and relations between them were portrayed by white authors at different historical junctures. Trans-cultural relationships between the sexes also require further research: the relationships between white females and black, the relationships between white men and black, and the relationships between the genders of different societies. Where sexual unions occurred, what happened to the children and what sort of family cultures emerged?[67] As stated in the introduction, comparative studies are important, not only between different colonies and states but between regions, between mission and cattle station people, reserve residents and labourers living outside state controls (and often outside archival records). Furthermore, with the approaching centennial of Federation, we need to explore Aborigines' exclusion and conditional inclusion into the nation. We cannot understand the history of the Australian nation until we understand this.

'Aboriginal history' can be heard or read in many different ways—as a form of further colonialistic appropriation and exploitation, or as a means of decolonisation, of constructing Aboriginal nationalism, as a history for human rights, as a way of gaining control over the past and present, as a way of holding onto the land. Some might still see it as 'objective', politically disinterested[68] scholarship. Yet it can be a means of gaining a balance, with cultural exchange and a sharing of power as intrinsic to the making of history. In many ways, therefore, the process is as important as the product. The history of Aborigines in Australia is an interactive one, and it is also part of the story of the wider cosmos. Colonialism could not be confined to either an 'Aboriginal world' or a 'white world', for cultural change means cosmological vantage points were ever changing. A multiplicity of perspectives is therefore required.

As we have seen, 'Aboriginal history' challenges the very parameters of history as a discipline; it highlights its cultural embeddedness, and it throws up many questions regarding the nature and universality of knowledge: the importance of the

interpreter and participant's perspectives, its ownership, manufacture and dissemination. The controversial nature of 'Aboriginal history' for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners has led to a special liveliness—a healthy introspection balanced by outward application of their expertise to the public sphere, which have necessitated interactions with contemporary Aboriginal communities.

Like the term 'Aborigine', 'Aboriginal history' is a site of conflict; it can be a site of exploitation, of privilege, hegemony, a meeting point, a site of separation, of coming together, of continuous tradition, of cultural resurgence. Like all historiography, it may be dated, burdened by outmoded paradigms and culturally bound. Equally it can be a site of cultural exchange and learning, on the edge of evolving, of understanding, of speaking, dancing or dramatising, something beyond itself. Colonialism, as typified by conflict over land, bodies and minds, created 'Aboriginal history' as pluralistically understood today. Traditionally a history rooted in the soil, 'Aboriginal history', like the very land of Australia, has become, and will continue to be, contested ground. The contest shapes the differing perceptions of what history is, of what the historical questions are. But this contest can involve collaborations which attempt to challenge wider power relations. The common ground of 'Aboriginal history' must remain a speaking place, one of co-existence and dialogue between all kinds of Australians. Hopefully the great Australian silence will not again shade the island continent, or its island state. On the land's edges, I hope there will still be places where history books fly like fish into the water below. Beyond will be further sites where histories, glittering and horrifying, will be salvaged. Released from their drowned muteness, they will ask questions of the dead and the living.

NOTES

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interest are P. Spearritt's 'Celebration of a nation: The Triumph of Spectacle' and C. Bulbeck's, 'Aborigines, memorials and the history of the frontier'.

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9 W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, Ernest Benn, London, 1930.

10 G. Greenwood (ed.), *Australia. A Social and Political History*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1955; Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, Heinemann, London, 1964, pp.34–35, 65; D. Pike, *Australia. The Quiet Continent*, Cambridge, London, 1966; A.G.L. Shaw, *The Story of Australia*, Faber, London, 1967, pp.17, 21; H. McQueen, *A New Britannia*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1970.

11 W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming: Black and White Australians—An Anthropologist's View*, Boyer Lectures, ABC, Crows Nest, 1968, p.25.

12 See R.M. and C.H. Berndt, *End of an Era*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1987. It is evident from this analysis that loyalty to Elkin stopped the Berndt's public expose of the fatal consequences of exploitation of Aboriginal workers by the Vesteys company.

13 C. Chéater in *Olive Pink Bulletin*, 1990.

14 See Annual Report of Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1965, its newsletters and journals.

15 C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, ANU, Canberra, 1970, p.69.

16 F. Stevens, *Racism: the Australian Experience*, ANZ, Sydney, 1971–2; F. Stevens, *Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry*, ANU, Canberra, 1974; F. Stevens, *Black Australia*, Sydney, 1981; P. Biskup, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1973; R. Evans, K. Cronin, K. Saunders, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, ANZ, Sydney, 1975 [republished 1988].

17 F. Robinson and B. York, *The Black Resistance*, Widescope, Melbourne, 1977.

18 S. Janson and S. Macintyre (eds), *Through White Eyes*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990.

19 H. Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, James Cook, Townsville, 1981 [reprinted Penguin 1982]. Some of the critique below contains ideas from Ann Curthoys.

20 L. Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, UQP, St Lucia, 1981.

21 A. McGrath, *'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987. The amount of space given to the editor's own work is disproportionate, but it was requested to provide readers with an idea of my historiographical approach, which happened to highlight several relevant debates.

22 T. Rowse, 'Tolerance, Fortitude and Patience: Frontier Pasts to Live With?', *Meanjin*, vol.47, no.1, 1988; T. Rowse 'Paternalism's Changing Reputation', *Mankind*, vol.18, no.2; Bain Attwood, 'Understandings of the Aboriginal Past: History or Myth', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol.34, no.2, 1988; Bain Attwood, 'Aborigines and Academic Historians: Some Recent Encounters', *Australian Historical Studies*, 24, April 1990.

23 Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, p.138.

24 Rowse, 'Tolerance, Fortitude and Patience'.

25 See Rowse, 'Tolerance, Fortitude and Patience'.

26 See Rowse, 'Paternalism's Changing Reputation'. See also R. Frances, B. Scates, A. McGrath, 'Broken silences? Labour history and Aboriginal workers', in T. Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, UNSW Press, Kensington, 1994. D. S. Trigger, *Whitefella Comin'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, also used Aboriginal oral history perspectives as evidence.

27 M. Fels, *Good Men and True: the Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837–1853*, MUP, Melbourne, 1988; Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*.

28 J. Kociumbas, *The Oxford History of Australia: Possessions,* vol.2, Oxford, Melbourne, pp.101–102.

29 See review by M. Anderson in *Labour History*, 66, May 1994.

30 A. Curthoys, 'Agents or Victims', paper delivered to AHA Conference 1988.

31 H. Reynolds, *The Law of the Land*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1987; *Frontier*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987; *With the White People*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1990.

32 'The Working Party of Aboriginal Historians for the Bicentennial History, 1788–1988', 'Preparing Black History', *Identity*, 4, 5, Oct. 1981.

33 See S. Janson and S. Macintyre (eds), *Making the Bicentenary,* MUP, Melbourne, 1988; M. Langton and J. Horner, 'Day of Mourning', in B. Gammage and P. Spearritt (eds), *Australians, 1938,* Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1987.

34 J. Kociumbas, *Possessions*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992. Kociumbas has stridently objected to the emphasis on agency in recent texts, implying on one occasion that such authors are apologists for colonialism. See pp.101–102.

35 P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath, M. Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, 1994.

36 J. Miller, *Koori: A Will to Win*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1985.

37 K. Walker, *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, Angus and Robertson, 1972; M. Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1983; C. Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1975; E. Simon, *Through My Eyes*, Collins Dove, Melbourne, 1987; J. Matthews, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977; M. Kennedy, *Born a Half-caste*, AIAS, Canberra, 1985; R. Langford, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1988; P. Pepper, *You are what you make yourself to be*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1980; L. E.Roughsey, *An Aboriginal Mother tells of the Old and the New*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, 1984; I. West, *Pride Against Prejudice*, AIAS, Canberra, 1984; G. Ward, *Wandering Girl*, Magabala Books, Broome, 1987; A. Nannup, *When the Pelican Laughed*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1992. For an overview of Aboriginal literature, see A. Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1989.

38 Matthews.

39 Mudrooroo, *Writing from the Fringe*, Hyland House, South Yarra, 1990.

40 Tucker, Langford; B. Cummings, *Take this Child: From Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Children's Home*, ASP, Canberra, 1990; P. Cohen and M. Sommerville, *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990.

41 Marcia Langton, currently at the Cape York Land Council, has held numerous influential positions: Director of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies; Central Land Council; the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; the Queensland Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs; and the Anthropology Department, Macquarie University. Gordon Briscoe completed a postgraduate degree on the Royal Commission into Nuclear Testing at Maralinga and is currently working for the Commonwealth Government. Noel Pearson completed a BA Honours in history at the University of Sydney, studied law and is Director of the Cape York Land Council, which has been protesting against a proposed space station being built there. Jackie Huggins studied history and women's studies at the University of Queensland; she wrote *Auntie Rita*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, and her publications include 'Response' in S. Janson and S. Macintyre (eds), *Through White Eyes*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, and (with Thom Blake) 'Protection or Persecution? Gender Relations in the era of Racial Segregation' and (with Heather Goodall) 'Aboriginal Women are everywhere: Contemporary Struggles' in K.Saunders and R.Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, Marrickville, 1992.

42 M. Clare, *Karobran*, Alternative, Chippendale, 1978; Mudrooroo Nyoongah, (previously Colin Johnson) *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the End of the World*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1983; E. Willmot, *Pemulwuy, the Rainbow Warrior*, Weldons, McMahons Pt, 1987.

43 See A. Laurie and A. McGrath, 'I Once was a drover myself' in D. Barwick, B. Meehan and I. White (eds), *Fighters and Singers*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985; I. West, *Pride Against Prejudice*, 1984. D. Headon analyses the survival theme in 'Beyond the Years of the Locust: Aboriginal Writing in the 1980s, part 2', *Meridian*, vol.7, no.2, Oct. 1988.

44 C. Edwards and P. Read (eds), *The Lost Children*.

45 For fuller discussion of these themes, see introduction, chapter 1

and afterword of A. McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987.

46 D. Bird Rose, 'The Saga of Captain Cook: Morality and European law, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 1984, pp.34–35; H. and F. Morphy, 'The "Myths" of Ngalakan History: Ideology and Images of the Past in Northern Australia', *Man*, 19, 1985, pp.459–78.

47 E. Kolig, 'Dialectics of Aboriginal Life-space' in M. Howard (ed.), *Whitefeller Business*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1978.

48 One book heading in that direction is by anthropologist D. Bird Rose. Her *Hidden Histories*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1991, presents and interprets oral accounts from the Victoria River region. A more recent large-scale work is Stuart Rintoul's *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1994.

49 This is a summary of the proceedings of a special seminar on Aborigines and History at the Australian Historians Association Conference, 1984. One of the key speakers was Phyllis Daylight, then heading an enquiry into Aboriginal Women. See also J. Huggins and K. Saunders, 'Defying the Ethnographic Ventriloquists', *Lilith*, no.8, 1993.

50 G. Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1975.

51 L. Coltheart, p.180.

52 Michael Williams' Doctoral research concerns his home community, and Noel Pearson was reluctant to write a general history of Aborigines in Queensland for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody partly due to this factor.

53 See J. Lee and V. Burgmann, the three-volume *People's History of Australia*, McPhee/Gribble, Ringwood, 1988; K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia*, specifically co-authored articles by J. Huggins.

54 Marcia Langton during RCIADIC discussions, May 1990.

55 P. Brock, *Women, Rites and Sites*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

56 R. Frances and B. Scates, 'Honouring the Aboriginal Dead', *Arena*, 86, 1989. See also C. Bulbeck, 'Aborigines, memorials and the history of the frontier', in S. Janson and S. Macintyre (eds), *Making the Bicentenary*.

57 Attwood, pp.142–43. See B. Attwood 'Portrait of an Aboriginal as an artist', *Australian Historical Studies*, 99, Oct. 1992 and 100, April 1993; T. Birch 'Half Caste' and J. Huggins 'Always was Always will be', *Australian Historical Studies*, 100, April 1993.

58 Henry Reynolds' *Law of the Land* won a peace prize in 1988, and Reynold's *Frontier* and McGrath's *Born in the Cattle* were nominated for A. A. Phillips Prize for Australian Studies in the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards for 1988 and 1990. *Born in the Cattle* won the Hancock Award for Young Historians, 1988 and *The Making of the Aborigines* was co-winner of this Award for 1990. Co-winners of the John Barrett Prize in Australian Studies, 1992–93 were Heather Goodall, ' "The Whole Truth and Nothing But": Some Interactions of Western Law, Aboriginal History and Community Memory', in B. Attwood and J. Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, LaTrobe University, Bundoora, 1992, and A. McGrath, 'Beneath the Skin', in R. Howe (ed.), *Women and the State*, LaTrobe University, Bundoora, 1993. Out of the wide interdisciplinary field known as 'Australian studies' it is interesting to observe that both related to Aboriginal history.

59 See K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, 1992, pp.vii–xiv.

60 Mudrooroo, *Writing from the Fringe*; K. Benterrak, S. Muecke, P. Roe, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1984.

61 The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies has trained numerous women in oral history techniques, as have various government projects. Others have gained expertise through experience.

62 B. Rosser, *Dreamtime Nightmares*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1985.

63 D. Bell, 'Speaking about rape is everyone's business', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 12, 4, pp.403–16; J. Larbalestier, 'The Politics of Representation: Australian Aboriginal Women and Feminism', in *Anthropological Forum*, vol.6, no.2, 1990, pp.143–57.

64 D. Bell, 'A Reply from Diane Bell', *Anthropological Forum*, vol.6, no.2, 1990, pp.158–65.

65 J. Arnold and G. Attwood (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 1992.

66 B. Attwood, 'Introduction' to ibid, pp i–xvi.

67 The author has received a substantial grant from the Australian Research Council for a project, Gender and Colonialism, to explore state attitudes and Aboriginal responses to black/white sexual and family relations and childrearing.

68 For further discussion of this theme, see A. McGrath, ' "Stories for Country": Oral History and Aboriginal Land Claims', *Journal of the Oral History Association of Australia*, 1988.