

## Reviews

*A Frontier Conversation*, produced by Wonderland Productions for the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, Australian National University, 2006, 54 minutes, directed by Claire Haywood, distributed by Ronin Films at [www.roninfilms.com.au](http://www.roninfilms.com.au)

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This film depicts a journey in which I participated. Organised by Ann McGrath from the Australian National University, a group of historians from ANU, Charles Darwin University, and several US universities visited a number of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in August 2004. The aim of the group was to start up conversations between Indigenous historians, story-tellers, and heritage workers and non-Indigenous historians about the meaning and purpose of history. My main role in the trip was to assist Ann with the interviewing to camera, especially of the members of the tour, catching them at odd moments, seeking their immediate reflections on the conversations they had had with various Indigenous people. The presence of the camera affected the trip very considerably, in forcing us all to formulate and record our ideas as we went.

The visit was an experience in itself. I went as a university-based historian with a long interest in Indigenous peoples' rights and in Indigenous history. It was invigorating and inspiring talking with people whose understanding of history is very different from that of professionally trained historians, but who probably see it as even more important than we do. I learnt an enormous amount about the role of memory and history in the lives of people in the present, and the way it can shape and alter community identity, pride, and cohesion. These are issues that in fact affect all Australians, but the way it works for Indigenous people is often very different and distinctive.

The finished film, I think, works on several levels. As producer and narrator, historian Ann McGrath is to be congratulated on dreaming up the whole exercise, and for taking chances, asking intriguing questions, and being open to some unexpected answers.

At one level, *A Frontier Conversation* is a very simple and watchable film about a group of historians from Australia and the United States visiting and chatting with Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. It is a road movie, with all the attractions of a road movie — beautiful scenery, diverse and interesting people, and the growth in awareness and understanding by the travelling historians. In the film, you see us meet, among others, language students at Batchelor College, park rangers at the Nitmiluk National Park at Katherine, representatives from the innovative and successful Indigenous commercial and community venture, the Jawoyn Association, and local oral

historians at Kakadu. Like the historians on the trip, we as audience look, listen, and learn. It looks wonderful, professionally shot as it is by Paul McGrath, in stunningly beautiful country. Though many of the historians are very reluctant film stars indeed, there are some natural performers as well, such as Gordon Briscoe and I think Ann McGrath herself.

As the film progresses, however, we realise that its concerns are not so simple after all. They are nothing less than the complex problem of the very different uses to which history is put in different cultural settings, and its varied meanings and consequences as a result. *A Frontier Conversation* asks some difficult questions such as: how valuable can histories written by outsiders to any community be? What are the responsibilities of the historian, Indigenous or not, to the people whose stories he or she attempts to tell?

At another level again, and perhaps unexpectedly, we find in this engaging film that what began as a search for dialogue about history, and perhaps the exchange of histories between Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians, becomes something else. I see this film as above all a challenging study of the role of historical practice in cultural maintenance and renewal. Again and again we learn that for Indigenous people their main interest in history is as an aspect of a larger project of cultural maintenance, retaining and sometimes regaining knowledge that was once common in the community and is in danger of being lost. Frequently we see people who were not really yet old enough to be considered elders, people in their 30s and 40s, struggling to retain and convey cultural knowledge that they felt was in danger of dying with the elders of their community. For them, any means of retaining or regaining this knowledge was welcome, and that especially included oral history, the recording of memories about the people, places, and events of the past. Many were very ambivalent about the role non-Indigenous historians could play in this process, but it seemed to me the door was nearly always open to further dialogue on this very issue. In the film, these issues arise again and again. In other words, it is not so much history as such but rather the interplay between the present and the past that becomes the story.

*A Frontier Conversation* should be of great benefit, especially in teaching and community group contexts. It should be able to provoke many discussions and further conversations. It will also, I think, become in time a record of *its* time, a particular stage in the ever-changing story of Indigenous survival and revival, and Indigenous-non-Indigenous interactions.

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A response to *A Frontier Conversation* by Margaret Jacobs  
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This intriguing and soft-spoken documentary brings together scholars of Indigenous history from both North America and Australia to meet with Indigenous communities and their locally-based historians in the Northern Territory. In these encounters, it becomes clear that scholarly, academic approaches to history often clash with the ways that Indigenous communities and their historians tell their histories. This is not news to

most readers of *Aboriginal History*, however, the film goes beyond this observation. It aims to show the possibilities for dialogue and fruitful exchange, as well as productive debate, when historians trained in different traditions of knowledge production meet and discuss their common passions for history. Rather than making grand claims about cultural breakthroughs, the film is quieter and more subtle, suggesting that this is only the beginning of a long conversation that must continue over many years.

I want to discuss just two of the issues that the film raises: first, the stakes involved for Indigenous people versus academic historians in interpreting and conveying the history of colonialism, and second, the possibility of telling history in myriad ways. As many of the participants point out in the film, many Indigenous people use history to connect themselves to their land, and both land and history are crucial to creating their identities. For historians who work within their own Indigenous communities, the film suggests, the survival, healing, and recovery of their own people is their primary agenda.

In contrast, what is it that drives non-native academic historians in interpreting Indigenous history? The film intimates several possibilities. Choctaw historian Clara Sue Kidwell notes that university-trained academic historians tend to be more interested in facts and causal relations than in questions of identity. Several other commentators in the film point out that academic historians write books that may only be read by a few hundred people, many of them other historians. And why do we write these books? Is it an 'indulgence', as Yale historian Jay Gitlin suggests, a 'first world practice', even a product and vestige of western colonial culture? Do we do it simply to advance our careers, as historian David Carment implies, or do we have higher goals to raise awareness among other non-native people in our nations?

While polite and circumspect, Indigenous-community historians in the film seem to view academic historians as, at best, irrelevant to their work. At worst, they see university-trained scholars as cultural appropriators who have extracted knowledge from Indigenous peoples for their own purposes. This perception may be deeply unsettling to many of us academic historians who imagine ourselves as exposers of atrocities, dispellers of myths, and seekers of justice; in short, as champions of Indigenous people. It is of course troubling to find out that we are viewed by many Indigenous historians much as a kind of latter-day Friends of the Indian, a group of white American reformers in the 19th century, who we now recognise as well-meaning, but ultimately paternalistic do-gooders who often did more harm than good because they did not consult with Indigenous people or see them as equal partners in the enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

Such a chasm may exist between Indigenous-community historians and academics because of different conceptualisations of the use of knowledge. Within the academy, we are trained to value academic freedom, the ability to research and write about any subject that compels us and to make knowledge universally available. Indigenous communities tend to emphasise intellectual responsibility more than freedom and to believe that only certain groups of people should have access to certain types of knowledge. The documentary also suggests that Indigenous historians resent the near-

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<sup>1</sup> For more about Friends of the Indian, see my book, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879-1934*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1999: 10-12, 24-55.

monopoly that non-native historians have had in telling Indigenous history, or at least telling it to a non-native audience. We academic historians have indeed been the arbiters of what constitutes 'real' history — namely books and articles heavy on analysis with scrupulously documented footnotes — and a 'real' historian, a scholar trained within a university PhD program. Without accusation or blame, the film gently prompts its viewers, especially academics, to examine our assumptions about knowledge and to realise our responsibilities to Indigenous communities.

Overall, the film suggests that we academic historians need to do more self-reflective soul-searching. Why do we do what we do? Why do we do it in the way that we do? What are the stakes for us? Is this merely an intellectual exercise? Why are we seen by many Indigenous historians outside the academy as thieves of knowledge? As colonial conspirators? And after self-reflection, then what should we do? The film promotes conversation, exchange, dialogue, respect, and reconciliation as the historical practices we must embrace to overcome the distrust and suspicion that Indigenous historians often feel toward non-native academic historians.

This film also focuses on other ways of interpreting the past and conveying its meaning than through the written word alone, and this is the second issue I want to address. Historian Ann McGrath, the film's narrator and executive producer, suggests that Indigenous communities tell their histories through diverse media: performance — including song, dance, and re-enactment — the preservation of Indigenous languages, travel to and tourism within native lands, rock and bark painting and other visual art, and film. Moreover, the film extols the value of learning Indigenous histories through Indigenous means. We gain a fuller understanding of Aboriginal history, for example, when we hear Northern Territory administrator Ted Egan welcome the film's group in Darwin with a haunting and powerful performance of an Aboriginal song. Apart from the song's content itself, the history that led to Ted Egan's performance of the song suggests something of the complex historical encounters and interactions that have taken place on the frontiers between Aboriginal communities and incoming settlers. Through learning Indigenous languages, historians can also gain a very different sense of colonial history. We can see the power of this in the work of Hawaiian scholar Noenoe Silva, who, after learning the Hawaiian language, was able to access Hawaiian language newspapers of the late 19th century and to recover native Hawaiian opposition to annexation by the United States.<sup>2</sup> Travel to Indigenous lands and historic sites may also enrich our understanding of the past. I have experienced this myself on a tour of Fort Robinson in northwest Nebraska. While a Northern Cheyenne elder recounted his people's history there, we stood in the barracks which once confined his ancestors and looked out to the hills where they fled in the dead of winter. We could imagine the Northern Cheyennes breaking out of their prison and heading for their ancestral lands hundreds of miles away in Montana, and we could hear the shots of the US cavalry as they killed 64 Northern Cheyenne people on their bid for freedom.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, University of North Carolina Press, Durham, 2004.

3. For more on this episode in Northern Cheyenne history, see Joe Starita, *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge: A Lakota Odyssey*, Putnam, New York, 1995.

These means of telling history engage the full range of human sensory experience; they rely upon the body itself to convey and understand history. I think in particular of the clowns who perform during ceremonies of the Pueblo Indian communities of New Mexico, who use their bodies to interpret the complicated history of their encounters with Spanish priests or with Anglo tourists.<sup>4</sup> Such methods of history telling also require us to learn history through our bodies, as I experienced at Fort Robinson.

These are not, however, Indigenous versus white academic ways of doing history, and we should avoid settling into such simplistic dichotomies. After all, these forms of performative, bodily, sensory histories are equally compelling to many non-Indigenous Americans and Australians. In the United States, witness the popularity of Civil War battle re-enactments, or the recent re-creation of the Lewis and Clark journey. Participants are gripped by the fumes of gunsmoke and the aroma of a campfire, the sting of mosquitoes, the chill in the air or the heat of a uniform in deep summer in a way that they might not be by the articles and books that academic historians publish. This was even apparent at the Western History Association conference in St Louis, Missouri where part of *A Frontier Conversation* was screened. One session enabled conference participants to travel by bus from the conference hotel to the remains of Cahokia, the site of a densely populated and complex Indigenous Mississippian civilisation from the 1100s to the 1600s, renowned for building enormous mounds that loom over the Mississippi River nearby. As we historians lumbered off our buses on a beautiful sun-filled autumn day, we were herded into a small, windowless auditorium with concrete benches, where four academic talks about Cahokia were scheduled. As scholars delivered their presentations about ancient Cahokia, we squirmed and fidgeted in our seats. After two presentations, one bold historian asked for a break for air and restrooms, at which point virtually the entire group of western historians stampeded out the door. I fled out into the sunshine and the wind to climb out-of-breath to the top of Monk's Mound, to experience the view and the full sense of the place unmediated by academic dissection. And I was not alone.

These other ways of conveying history, however, also require interpretation. Historians — whether academically or community trained — are still important cultural mediators or, in the evocative term used by Azar Nafisi (author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*), 'guardians of memory'.<sup>5</sup> The phrase suggests the powerful connection between history and memory, a connection that academic historians cannot ignore, and a topic that has become a major interest to historians.<sup>6</sup> Nafisi's phrase also suggests that memory — and history — can be assaulted and corrupted. As Czech writer Milan Kundera has asserted: 'The first step in liquidating a people ... is to erase its memory. Destroy ...

4. I have written about Pueblo dancing in *Engendered Encounters*, 1999: 106–48.

5. Azar Nafisi made this arresting comment at a presentation on September 20, 2006 at the University of Nebraska. See also her book *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, Random House, New York, 2003.

6. There is a vast literature on history and memory. Two books that I have found particularly accessible and fascinating in this regard are Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan: Storytelling in a Family's Past*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1998 and Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*, Norton, New York, 1996.

its culture, its history.<sup>7</sup> This brings us back around to the first issue I discussed. The need for 'guardians of memory' conveys the stakes involved for everyone. The keeper or guardian of memory is an important and powerful social figure, but also one who may wish to keep others from obtaining their own direct relationship to history and memory. This documentary suggests that historical memory need not only be guarded nor conveyed through the work and traditional medium of academic historians, but that Indigenous community historians have a vital role to play, not only in keeping history alive in their own communities but in teaching a fuller and deeper history to the rest of us.

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<sup>7</sup>. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, translated by Michael Henry Heim, Penguin Books, New York, 1981: 159.

## Book Reviews

*First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and their Futures* by Jeffrey Sissons, 174 pp, Reaktion Books, London, 2005, £12.95.

As I write this review, the Commonwealth Government's 2007 intervention in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities is in its third month. This intervention, according to the official pronouncements, is motivated by a humanitarian desire to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families. Its advocates suggest that any attempt to paint it as a continuation of colonial policies is misguided scaremongering by those who want to maintain the status quo, irrespective of the suffering of women and children. Such arguments are emotive and close off the opportunity for any meaningful engagement with the complex social morass that is the historic relationship between Indigenous peoples and their colonisers. It is this fraught relationship that is the subject of Sissons' tightly argued book. And it does not require much reading to realise how easy it is for the contemporary Northern Territory intervention to look like so many other intervening acts from our colonial past. Sisson's book allows us to place the present intervention in a broader historical context.

Woven through the book is the theme that the process of colonisation involved the full assumption of sovereignty by the colonial state; not only over the land of indigenous people, but over the people themselves including their children and their very identity. A number of examples provided by Sissons bear an uncomfortable resemblance to some of the current emphases of the Northern Territory intervention.

For example, Sissons discusses the role of the 1865 New Zealand Native Land Court which, while ostensibly ensuring a certain protection of Maori land ownership, individualised land ownership. This, Sissons argues, enabled government and private businesses to by-pass kin-group leaders and deal directly with individual owners to acquire land. Traditionally communal land was in this way gradually broken up until it became uneconomic for any community members to hold on to their individual parcels. This, it seems, is very much a fear of those who are wary of the private leasehold arrangements which the Commonwealth is now enforcing in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.

Another striking parallel with the past is the current intervention's focus on children. Few would dispute a government's responsibility to protect children who are suffering neglect and abuse. But any government intervention in the life of Aboriginal children must surely benefit from being conducted with an awareness of the history of such interventions. Sissons' fourth chapter, 'Indigenous Children', succinctly outlines the concerted efforts made to break down Indigenous socialisation by removing chil-

dren from the control of their families. The justification for such separation was always that it was 'in the best interest of the children', e.g. to remove them from the negative influences of tribal life or to provide them with the education they would need to function in the new society of which they were now a part. Yet in practice, the action was essentially violent and the impact one of profound personal and social trauma, as is now well documented. According to Sissons, the actual motive behind the removal of children was more sinister. He argues that governments 'were claiming ownership over indigenous children in order to claim ownership over indigenous land. The alienation of land required the alienation of children.' Native Title legislation in Australia lends some support to this view. To be able to claim rights in land Aboriginal peoples are required to demonstrate themselves as functioning societies, regardless of the past 200 years of social intervention they have been subject to. The past removal of children makes contemporary claims that much harder.

The spectre of endemic child abuse will always provide solid grounds for government intervention. More fundamentally it questions the future ability of indigenous communities to reproduce themselves in a healthy or sustainable way. Yet it is still important to remember that it is not that long ago that abuse was condoned and facilitated by the government that is now supposedly seeking to protect children. Mistrust and cynicism are understandable in that context, but could perhaps be assuaged if the past was acknowledged rather than brushed aside.

His short, well written chapters look at the meaning of 'indigenism', the way in which governments have tried to define the authentic indigenous, what it means to be indigenous in urban environments, indigenous citizenship and the recovery of an indigenous identity in the 21st century. His real interest in outlining the history of colonial relationships is to consider how a re-configuration or reappropriation of indigenous identities might look. He draws parallels between material objects and people's sense of identity. Just as objects and remains were removed from communities, displayed in colonial museums and claimed by the colonisers as 'theirs', so were indigenous identities. Individuals were classified according to nebulous blood measurements, entered onto Indian registers or 'exempted' from their own Aboriginal identity on terms defined solely by the colonists. And just as objects and remains are being reclaimed and returned to communities, so indigenous identities are being reclaimed. This reclamation, in Sissons' view, is a dynamic process. It is a project actively engaged in by many indigenous peoples. Significantly it is not a return to the past. People are not seeking to be 'tribal' once more. Rather it is a quest for a future in which indigenous people can be both strong in their own culture and citizens of a globalised world.

Sissons is no idealist and is frank about the challenges of such a quest. Any repossession of culture and identity is invariably only partial and circumscribed by the conditions of the nation state in which it occurs. It usually takes the shape of traditional culture based businesses and indigenous corporations. In fact any nation/indigenous relationship is likely to be very much defined by structures that stem solely from the colonist's culture: Aboriginal corporations in Australia are essential to accessing any government funding, for example. The attempt to reclaim children through indigenous schools is also limited, as no school can fill the gap left by the breakdown of a coherent indigenous society when it comes to socialising children.



Sissons is also dubious about the pursuit of 'self-determination' at least if it is understood to include territorial independence. Such a claim is unacceptable to all nation states. Most indigenous peoples today, however, do not have such an aspiration. For them, self-determination is about cultural and political autonomy. That aspiration can, and in some cases is, accommodated by nation states. But Sissons raises the sensitive question of whether self-determination from a position of financial dependence, the position of most indigenous peoples, is really self-determination at all.

Another tension explored in this book is that between urban indigenous people and communities who continue to live on their traditional land – and then of course there are those people whose traditional lands are now urban centres. This diversity in the living conditions of indigenous peoples today causes difficulties for policy makers, be they indigenous or non-indigenous, but also among indigenous communities. People in urban centres have greater access to education and the ability to navigate the world of the colonisers while those on traditional land have traditional authority, sometimes financial benefits from royalties or other land based income, and frequently more readily granted external endorsement as 'real' indigenous people. For Sissons this divide, where it exists, needs to be bridged to contest the divisive politics of authenticity.

Drawing on the work of native American writer Deloria, Sissons briefly proposes a model of a three-way relationship between tribally indigenous, ethnically indigenous and non-indigenous citizens of post-colonial states. In the end there are no answers here. There is, however, a whole lot of context which could usefully inform answers to specific policy problems, such as the Northern Territory intervention. While I found this book highly informative and relevant to current events, Sissons obviously did not have the Northern Territory intervention in mind when he published this book in 2005. This book also provides the reader with a good understanding of the complex dynamics that continue to define the relationship between indigenous peoples and the post-colonial states of which they are now a part.

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*The non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern Australia: comparative studies of the continent's most linguistically complex region* edited by Nicholas Evans, x+513 pp, Pacific Linguistics in association with the Centre for Research on Language Change, Australian National University, Canberra, 2003, \$99.

This volume is an especially significant contribution to the comparative study of Australian languages and thus ultimately to theories of Australian prehistory that may be based on such study. As Evans notes in his introduction, it is the first book-length historical study of the non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern and north-western Australia, an area containing 'perhaps 90% of Australia's linguo-genetic diversity' (p. 3). While Evans himself does not discuss the more general implications of this diversity – it is a book for linguists rather than historians – generally it has been taken as evidence for

the relative antiquity of linguistic settlement in this area, in contrast to a later spread of the less diverse Pama-Nyungan languages across the remainder of Australia.<sup>1</sup>

The main detractor from such a view has been RMW Dixon, who maintains that the widely held and traditional model of language development simply does not apply in Australia.<sup>2</sup> His own model would require quite a contrary interpretation of the diversity of non-Pama-Nyungan languages, namely that population movements have been too numerous and extensive to allow many of the languages to reach a 40–60 per cent ‘equilibrium level’ of shared vocabulary. Considering our lack of direct knowledge of actual prehistorical developments, Dixon’s theory can only be critiqued in terms of its logical basis.<sup>3</sup> In this regard it may be noted that one motivation for Dixon’s approach was his ‘lack of success in applying the established methodology of historical linguistics to the Australian linguistic situation’.<sup>4</sup> As time passes, however, the ‘established methodology’ has been applied to Australian languages with increasing success,<sup>5</sup> the present volume being an especially important example of this precisely because of the diversity of the languages involved.

The volume makes its greatest contribution to the study of the Gunwinyguan family and related languages. These are dealt with in half of the 16 papers in the volume, including five authored or co-authored by Mark Harvey. Particularly important is Harvey’s ‘initial reconstruction of Proto Gunwinyguan phonology’, since this establishes a solid basis for the comparison of such other aspects of the languages as their grammars. This extremely careful and exhaustive paper could serve as a model for phonological reconstruction; with due caveats about possibilities of borrowing and discussion of the steps taken to minimise the problem, Harvey was able to identify 1315 sets of cognate words (not including the verb forms treated in the paper discussed next) that could support the reconstruction of forms in the protolanguage.

A second key contribution to Gunwinyguan is a reconstruction of ‘Proto Gunwinyguan verb suffixes’ by Alpher, Evans and Harvey (pp. 305–352). Following the best comparative approach, they do not merely posit reconstructions of isolated suffixes, but instead they present partial reconstructions of nearly 20 verb paradigms, whose shared idiosyncrasies provide especially compelling comparative evidence. These two key papers are supplemented by a number of others relating to Gunwinyguan. Particularly impressive is Rebecca Green’s paper on ‘Proto-Maningrida within Proto-Arnhem’, whose reconstructive work on 24 verb paradigms provides for the first time solid evidence of the relationships among the Maningrida area languages, as well as their more distant relationship to Gunwinyguan. The other papers include one by Evans and Merlan on ‘Dalabon verb conjunctions’, one by Merlan on ‘The genetic position of Mangarrayi’, and three others by Harvey on Western Gunwinyguan and on verb systems and object enclitics in Eastern Daly languages.

Aside from Gunwinyguan and related languages the volume includes two other papers that are especially noteworthy. One is Stokes and McGregor’s ‘Classification

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1. For an excellent introduction to the considerations involved see Evans and Jones 1997.

2. Dixon 2002: xvii–xx, 20–44.

3. In addition to pp 5–7 of the work under review see Black 1997 and Koch 2004: 48–57.

4. Dixon 2002: xvii.

5. For another recent example see Bowern and Koch 2004.

and subclassification of the Nyulnyulan languages' of northern Western Australia. While this language grouping has never really been in doubt, the paper provides a very neat phonological reconstruction based on 405 cognate sets that solidly confirms the grouping and provides some evidence on its internal divisions and the problems of its external relationships.

Even more noteworthy is the published version of Ian Green's ground-breaking work on 'The genetic status of Murrinh-patha'. While earlier studies had not been able to group Murrinh-patha with any other language, Green found striking similarities in the verbal 'auxiliary' paradigms of Murrinh-patha and Ngan'gityemeri that enabled him to reconstruct partial paradigms for 18 auxiliaries in a shared ancestral language he called 'Proto Southern Daly', although only six of these paradigms are sampled in the present paper. Green characterises the genetic relationship as close (pp. 128, 155) and yet ultimately allows that the paucity of other grammatical and lexical similarities leave open questions about the actual extent of divergence (p. 155).

One question that needs further work is the extent to which the similarities between Murrinh-patha and Ngan'gityemeri actually represent shared innovations rather than shared inheritances, but resolution of this question depends on higher level comparative reconstruction involving such groups as Gunwinyguan. This made me realise that the work on Gunwinyguan had focused on suffixes for tense, aspect and mood (TAM), leaving it largely incomparable with Green's work on pronominal prefix paradigms. In a final paper in this volume, Harvey deals more broadly with pronouns and especially pronominal prefixes in a wide range non-Pama-Nyungan languages, but this work is programmatic, suggesting that a considerable amount of difficult work remains to be done.

There are four other papers in the volume. Reid contributed a second one relating to Ngan'gityemeri (here spelled with double *rr* while Green spells it with single *r*) to document interesting changes in verbal structure within the last 60 years. A paper by McConvell on 'Headword migrations' provides evidence from the Jarragan languages that pronominal marking can move diachronically from verbs to noun phrases in a way contrary to a proposal by Nichols. There are also two papers providing comparative data, if not historical reconstruction, for the closely related Wanyi and Garrwa languages, namely one by Breen and, somewhat oddly perhaps, an 'update' to Breen's data by Belfrage – one may wonder why they didn't get together to provide unified coverage.

The volume is attractively laid out and excellently proofed: since I did not notice a single typo in the English, I can hope that there may also be none in the considerable data from Australian languages. I did encounter a statement or two I could quibble about, but I can no longer locate them, and in general the comparative work is of the highest quality. While non-linguists may find the volume difficult to follow, they may well want to be aware of its potential impact on our understanding of the prehistory of Australia.

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*Piercing the Ground: Balgo women's image making and relationship to country* by Christine Watson, 400 pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2003, \$39.95.

There is so much to admire about *Piercing the Ground*. As a work of anthropology, it is exemplary: its analyses of the influences on, and purposes of, Balgo women's art are based firmly on the years of Watson's experience with Balgo artists as both a curator and administrator, including a period of nine months when she lived in the community proper. The book is replete with a comprehensive listing of innumerable figures and symbols, as well as an extensive glossary and the translation of an important songline. Also included are 31 colour plates showing, in brilliant detail, important examples of the women's work. Outside the realms of anthropology and the social sciences, however, *Piercing the Ground* is perhaps even more valuable. At heart it is a celebration of the power of Balgo art, of its capacity to draw the artist into synchronicity with her surrounding landscape, of the way this art can also communicate across cultures and – most importantly – of its ability to assert the strength of Balgo women.

Due to the confluence of a diverse range of language groups in Balgo, *Piercing the Ground* describes one of the most dynamic artistic communities in the country. Watson outlines two primary concerns that underlie her examination of it: firstly, to come to an understanding of how Balgo women conceive and then produce their images; secondly, to look at how their artistic practice in turn embodies their religious beliefs and ceremonial practices. In commencing this examination, however, Watson is careful to deconstruct a dichotomy that has plagued much analysis of Aboriginal art in the past. It is a separation of the 'traditional' or 'pure' art over that which is seen to be contaminated by prolonged contact with Western culture. Embedded in this dichotomy is a privileging of men's sacred culture over that of women's, an opposition that simply does not exist in Balgo. Watson points out that critics who have neglected these other parts of a living Law, and have concentrated on the 'traditional' voice, have ignored the fertility, flexibility and contemporaneity of the art, as well as its roots in non-ceremonial activities such as sand drawing. In this light it is paradoxical that Balgo art came to acquire so much of its vitality precisely *because* of the interplay between 'tradition' and

non-Aboriginal influence (pp. 148–9). Part of the aim of *Piercing the Ground* is to return to a more holistic perspective of Aboriginal artistic practice.

One of the key factors leading to the book's success is the position of the writer within it. In the tradition of watershed anthropological publications like Deborah Bird Rose's *Dingo Makes Us Human*, Watson eschews the classical, Archimedean vantage point on some imaginary mountain above Balgo. Instead, well-versed in the phenomenology of place espoused by philosophers like Edward Casey, she is entirely conscious of her bodily presence on the *ground*; the reader, too, feels something of the meandering, uncertain nature of her explorations around the community as she contends with the multiple, often conflicting senses it provokes. The first chapter begins with a brief history of Balgo before going on to carefully describe the [then] current layout of the community, including where Watson lived in it. This is a crucial act of grounding, in which the writer asserts her real, lived connection to the place, and the reader in turn realises that what follows is very much an experience of *Christine Watson's relationship to Balgo women's image making*. As the paintings are being painted she is there, beside the artist, watching the work progress. It is in this way that we get a taste for the way in which the women's art is as much a physical activity – taking place in the sand, in ceremony, on canvas – as it is a cerebral, contemplative one.

Indeed, at times I had the sense that the book was almost as much of a learning experience for her as it was for me; this is epitomised, perhaps, in the remarkable sixth chapter, 'Touching the Ancestors', in which Watson recounts her journey with six Balgo women along the Nakarra Nakarra Dreaming Track. It is a complex story that began with a two-month long translation and recording of the song cycle, followed by a six-day sojourn during which the women inducted Watson into a form of understanding of the Dreaming and of their creative practices. 'As we travelled and performed ceremonies at various sites,' she writes, 'we forged a relationship between the Dreaming track and its living guardians which reflects their contemporary concerns. This not only emphasised the fluid, continually re-forming nature of space and place ... but also ... the women's concern with their role in initiation ceremonies' (pp. 204–5). By combining a contested, multi-authored transcription of the songline with beautifully wrought descriptions of the women's dancing and *kuruwarri* sand drawings, the chapter creates an unforgettable sense of the way in which the women used a vast array of media to channel power from the Dreaming into their bodies, and from their bodies into the earth, and back again. They danced through country, unifying world and body in a flexible, breathing form.

*Piercing the Ground* achieves a startling synthesis in the final chapter, 'Becoming the Dreaming'. It is here that Watson hones in on the essence of the power of Aboriginal desert art, and considers its capacity to communicate across cultures. The power, she says, is in the art's ability to express 'the possibility of human intimacy with landscapes, an intimacy fed by starkly different relationships with place' (p. 291). In contrast to Western representational systems of art, where individual-centred vision tends to silence other ways of knowing a scene, in Balgo art vision is dispersed across the landscape according to the plane of the ground. Maintained in a state of openness to the environment, the entire human body permeates into the terrain. Consequently, a full repertoire of haptic, sonic and visual techniques is required to contribute to the evoca-

tion of this experience. Indeed, for the Walpiri and Kutjungka people at least, features of the land are also names and songs, all of which charge the land with its power.

Here, then, the 'genius and piquancy of Aboriginal desert systems' rests 'in their ability to convey a sense of bodily transformation through ... [a] sacred geography which is of the earth as well as the heavens, and contains fleshly human beings as part of their sacredness' (p. 296). Balgo women's paintings communicate cross-culturally by speaking from a basis in the *human body*. We are all, in different ways, familiar with it. While the icons the women use are culturally specific, 'the use of these forms of the body are symbols which we in the west know at deep, visceral levels of ourselves' (pp. 295–6). It is testament to Watson's talent – as a critic of Aboriginal art and as a writer – that her book, like the women's paintings of which she writes, is an astonishing example of how phenomenological thinking has the capacity to bring country to life in a variety of forms, in countless locales.

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*Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* by Jane Lydon, xxvi + 303pp, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, and London, 2005, US\$23.95 (pbk).

Jane Lydon of the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies at Monash University in Melbourne has produced a well written and ably structured book that not only stimulates the intellect but also delights the eye. Her research has been meticulous in its breadth, and it is the comprehensive presentation of the photographic archive which makes the book so valuable and so attractive. The narrative is set in the context of cross-cultural representation studies, which have largely replaced gender studies as the prevailing corrective to traditional historiography. Lydon is particularly fortunate in that the Indigenous reserve that she selected for her analysis is the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, already the subject of a major pioneer study by the anthropologist and historian Diane Barwick, whose *Rebellion at Coranderrk* was published posthumously in 1998. She is also fortunate in the richness of the photographic record of Coranderrk over a period of some 60 years of the place and its people.

While her choice of location was a good one, a comparative analysis of the records (or the absence thereof) from other stations established in colonial Victoria would have strengthened her argument and allowed her to test whether the theoretical framework she chose was a valuable model for interpretation or a constraining one.

Lydon's preface reads more like an introduction, for it not only states the author's aims but also gives the background of Victoria's Aboriginal missions and reserves. The 32-page Introduction, entitled 'Colonialism, photography, mimesis', is a self-contained essay that raises theoretical issues, particularly the ways in which other writers on representation have interpreted photography in the colonial era. It may well have been written last as it places the study in a wider context and is written in a self-confident prose interlarded with concepts drawn from ongoing debate such as 'Cartesian perspectivalism' and 'flawed colonial mimesis'.

The historical substance of the work is contained in five chapters that deal with the photographs commissioned by the colonial government and later by the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines. The first chapter looks at the brilliant photography of Charles Walter (1831–1907) in the first period at Coranderrk. The second chapter continues the interpretation of Walter's work and that of other photographers in relation to the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866. Chapter three introduces the work of Frederick Kruger (1831–1888), especially his slightly more controversial photographic albums. Chapter four deals with the troubles in the 1880s until the closure of the station in 1924, and chapter five deals with the revival of the Aboriginal community at Healesville, particularly from the 1970s. As Lydon lived for a time in the Coranderrk community with all the tensions of the period, chapter five is enriched by her own experiences and insights.

The thrust of Lydon's analysis is that, despite the colonial exploitation she discerns in the photographs, the Aboriginal families of Coranderrk were often in control of their representation and that from the 1970s they were using the photographs in a positive way to illustrate their own family history. While Lydon is even handed in the treatment of her subject, Coranderrk was not necessarily the best case study to give her the results she was expecting from her theoretical approach. On the positive side there is plenty of evidence to show that the residents developed 'a remarkable sophistication in understanding how they were portrayed, and they became adept at manipulating such representations in their own cause, despite their lack of power in larger society' (p. xx). On the other hand the photographs do not always confirm the degree of 'colonial exploitation' that the argument demands or that might have been discerned on other reserves and missions.

Eye contact is usually vital to representation studies, but just as often misleading. Just how subjective is the observer? We are told (p. xiv) that, in an early daguerreotype by Douglas T. Kilburn (1811–1871), the three women 'seemingly shut their eyes against the intrusive camera's gaze'. In fact two women are looking open-eyed at the camera and the third's eyes are slightly narrowed as she is looking down at the camera. I have a daguerreotype in my own family collection of an Aboriginal woman of the Geelong district where the eye contact is also direct. Eye contact is first raised as a cultural factor on p. 25, but we should remember that eye contact is with the camera and not the photographer. Also, the meanings associated with eye contact vary in different cultures and circumstances. I am assured that some Aboriginal people avoid direct eye contact in discussions because to 'maintain eye contact' would mean that you disagreed with the speaker and were challenging his or her views.

Walter's portrait of Garrak-coonum or Timothy holding a book and looking out with averted gaze (plate 43) is also reproduced on the cover to complement Lydon's book title. She comments:

Like each one of the portraits in this series, the man's personality seems tangible and vivid. Although he does not engage directly with us, his gaze cannot be dismissed: to my mind, it conveys something profoundly touching.

In staring at Garrak-coonum, we reproduce Walter's gaze: the white photographer imprinting this Aboriginal man on to his plate, mechanically reproducing his likeness in permanent form. Why were Walter and his patrons so interested? Did their fascination lie with the successful appropriation of European ways – clothes,

industry, religion, goods and accomplishments (symbolised by the book) – that is, in the Aboriginal mimicry of whites? Evidence for the missionaries' pride in such transformations suggests that this was so. But perhaps beneath the rhetoric of improvement lies something more fundamental .... In Walter's interest in the Aboriginal people of Victoria expressed through a visual language we see the circulation of mimesis and alterity as white fascination with Aboriginal mimicry is itself expressed mimetically when subject reaches out to embrace object. (p. 118).

Lydon then skilfully links 'Timothy's vision' with a large drawing by him portraying Aboriginal life and signed 'Timothy Coranderrk' accompanied by a small identifying image of himself complete with book (plate 45).

Lydon and those of her school of thought may be correct or partially correct in their analysis but I find something slightly distasteful, even patronising in the argument from mimesis. In regard to cricket, 'the Aboriginal mimicry of a white man's game' (p. 126) it is an outside observer's views that support the interpretation, not the views of an insider. Mimicry suggests a mere copy of the original whereas Aboriginal men adopted cricket as one of their own games from the beginnings of white settlement. Although many Aboriginal people only paid lip-service to Christianity, others made it part of their own Aboriginality, something well demonstrated in parts of Australia today. Isabel McBryde points out that the Aboriginal people of the south-east have always been adept at turning derisive laughter and ridicule, even abuse, back against their detractors and instances the way JJ Healey writes about Bungaree's brilliant turning of the tables on the naval elite in Sydney. The 'remarkable sophistication' discerned by Lydon did not take time to evolve from the colonial situation but was there from the beginning.

Another area where the analysis tends to be overstated is in the interpretation of *carte de visite* (c.de.v.) photographs, collages and albums. We are told that Kruger's c.de.v. Aboriginal portraits could be given 'even more derisive meanings' in the context of c.de.v. albums. The section is labelled 'Hawaiian royalty, freaks, etc' (p. 164). The Hawaiian royalty is supposed to show 'aspirations to Europeanness', but two of the four portraits are in traditional clothing and King Kalakaua, like other monarchs of the day, had been wearing western clothing for most of his life. Fijian royalty, not represented here, preferred to be photographed in dishabille. That Siamese twins and dwarfs were in the same collection has little significance. The photos were invariably grouped according to their subject following the family photos. C.de.v.s. were collected like postage stamps, funeral cards or postcards and fulfilled the role of the picture magazines (*Pix, Hello* etc) of the 20th century. My own family c.de.v. collection also contains a section of nonconformist clerics and a few oddities, one being a cartoon of an English woman of fashion and an Ashanti woman (Ashanti v England 1874) with the telling caption 'Not so very different after all'.

While there is a case for the exploitative use of both Kruger's more scientific photography and his studies of 'civilised natives' (see plates 57 and 62) these photographs can also be accepted for what they are – beautiful images of a proud people that would contrast markedly with images of wretchedness in other parts of Australia. Walter's impressive panel, 'Portraits of Aboriginal Natives Settled at Coranderrk', exhibited in 1866 (pp. 78–81) certainly had a scientific interest but it is sympathetic and there is considerable eye contact. A similar collage of c.de.v. portraits of convicts at Port Arthur



that I passed on to the National Library has a different effect and could easily have been used to illustrate the lowest rungs of humanity.

At a time when most Australians are particularly conscious of inter-racial violence in our past, the injustices of 'the stolen generation' and the emphasis on reconciliation, it is not always easy for researchers to accept that there were places and periods when there was mutual good will and a considerable degree of empathy. Lydon's study was undertaken to supplement and correct the work of historians and in this case the historian by implication is Diane Barwick. Although she commends Barwick's work and praises her and Luise Hercus for giving their research back to the Coranderrk community (p. 237) she gently implies that Barwick tended 'to view nineteenth-century representations, particularly visual imagery with a credulous eye', a tendency that was 'characteristic of a historiography that has relied primarily on documentary sources and that relegates past visual regimes to a subsidiary role' (pp. 219–20). At page 207 she had already questioned Barwick's 'assessment of the cordial relations that she suggests prevailed between white station staff and Aboriginal women, arguing that managers' wives and daughters treated them as "friends and equals"'. Sylvia Kleinert has taken the argument further. In her article 'Aboriginality in the city: re-reading Koorie photography' (*Aboriginal History*, vol 30, 2006), which does not even cite Barwick's book, she seems to believe that because Barwick's descriptions 'are in marked contrast to the picture of gender relations elsewhere on the frontier' (*AH*, p. 80) they must be wrong and implies that the 'emerging feminist ideologies' when Barwick was researching 'led her to exaggerate the level of Indigenous transformation'. Diane Barwick was much more perceptive than this interpretation allows. She, like other innovative scholars of Aboriginal women's history such as Diane Bell, Fay Gale, Isabel McBryde, Betty Meehan, Luise Hercus, Sally White and Elspeth Young, had a remarkable empathy with Aboriginal women and she knew that there were white women who shared her approach in earlier times.

It is a pity that Lydon did not engage seriously with Barwick's ideas, especially her insights into John Green's role in encouraging the community at Coranderrk to take control of its own development. As Isabel McBryde recently wrote to me:

To me what comes out of the Walter photographs is the essence of the community at that time – making a new life, developing self-determination in the new colonial setting while still retaining their cultural identity (not being 'civilised' / 'colonised' unwillingly). There is 'agency' there that Green fostered, and leaders such as Barak continued to assert. Green in Diane's interpretation was more than 'a kindly soul'. He was not 'soothing the dying pillow' but indicating ways to co-existence and self-determination.

There is much fascinating material in *Eye Contact* including the story of 'Eliza's daughter' who crocheted a collar and sent it to Queen Victoria who acknowledged it; the story of Barak; and the story of John Green and his family who endeared themselves to the Coranderrk community. The grim story of the effect of assimilation policy has its own interest. As Lydon made it clear that Coranderrk was to be her focus, it is hardly fair to criticise her for not looking more fully at the photographic record in other missions and reserves, yet as the comments above suggest, Coranderrk was in some ways atypical.

One of the areas which I think could have been explored a little more fully is the role of graphic art both as a medium in its own right and in relation to photography. Certainly Lydon discusses 'editing' the photographic record, particularly in relation to 'untidy' miamias photographed in Walter's panoramic view of Coranderrk (pp. 54–55) but not visible in the wood engraving of the settlement (p. 46) published in the *Illustrated Australian News* for 25 August 1865. The mission house was not visible either and the view selected was the more appropriate one for a small frame. The *Illustrated London News* carried attractive drawings of Aboriginal life in Victoria in the 1850s and 1860s and it would have been useful to compare these studies, particularly as the residents decorated their walls with illustrations from that publication. More, too, could have been written about the background and development of photography in the period and the influence of the Pictorialist movement.

Despite any reservations expressed above, *Eye Contact* is an important and seminal book. In general it has been well-produced. There are virtually no typographical blemishes though one solecism, common to parish newsletters, is repeated, the use of Reverend without a given name or at least a designation. The 88 illustrations enhance the production and make us warmly receptive of the residents of Coranderrk. I wish to thank Isabel McBryde for discussing the book with me and for her suggestions and amendments which have been silently incorporated into this review.

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*Campfires at the Cross: an account of the Bunting Dale Aboriginal Mission at Birregurra, near Colac, Victoria 1839–1851* by Heather Le Griffon, 321 pp, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2006, \$39.95.

Scholars interested in the history of the Western District, early relations between Aborigines and Europeans on the frontier of pastoral settlement, and the development of the Methodist Church in Australia will be pleased to see that *Campfires at the Cross* covers all of these topics in considerable depth. Prompted by the lack of an accessible, reliable account of the Bunting Dale Aboriginal Mission, Le Griffon focuses on the story behind its establishment, operation and eventual dissolution in 1851. Her historical narrative is structured so as to ensure that the vividly recounted events are understood within the context of the period. The author brings to life the past's present and the (occasionally overwhelming) account of the mission and the lives it touched in a way that is never divorced from the social, political and religious forces responsible for transforming colonial Australia.

Established in 1839 with the intention of 'relieving the plight of Aboriginal Australians in the Port Phillip District', the mission and its clergy had moderate success in communicating Christian values, promoting education and literacy, as well as alleviating the suffering associated with dispossession and the total disruption of Aboriginal society. Francis Tuckfield, a young Cornish clergyman, was sent from England by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society with the task of finding a suitable site for the institution while his colleagues went to Sydney to lobby the Governor for a land grant

and financial assistance. Following a difficult journey into the Otway Forest and shorter tours north and west of Geelong, by May 1839 Tuckfield 'favoured a site about forty miles to the west of the little settlement of Geelong' on the upper reaches of the Barwon River. The selection of a site was a pivotal decision that would greatly influence the future success of the Methodist mission, but Le Griffon's brief account of this process provides readers with few details concerning the specific criteria weighed by the young Reverend or the other locations that had been considered. Young and inexperienced, Tuckfield made this choice without any input from local Aborigines or William Buckley, who had departed for Van Diemen's Land in late 1837.<sup>1</sup> The location of the mission at the nexus of three tribal territories would make Bunting Dale a magnet for conflict and prove to be one of the primary factors leading to its closure just 12 years later.

One cannot write a history of early Victoria without addressing the issue of frontier violence. Le Griffon should be commended for the manner in which she approaches this sensitive topic, asserting from the outset that '[s]hame and blame is not the game'. What follows is a moving account of the ways in which the Wesleyan missionaries worked to promote the well-being of Aborigines. Readers are treated to nuanced readings of key developments at Bunting Dale, with Le Griffon making extensive use of diary entries to illustrate Tuckfield's deepening affinity for the Gulidjan people, their culture and language. Quite remarkably, within months of their arrival in the Western District the missionaries recognised the grave threat that faced the region's Aborigines and consequently shifted the focus of their efforts from religious instruction to the establishment of a safe haven where terrified Aborigines would feel protected. The two clergymen at Bunting Dale also endeavoured to bring government attention to incidents of frontier violence and eagerly pointed to ways in which the Protectorate system could be improved. They were genuinely alarmed when they observed the 'unexplained preponderance of firearms' amongst a European population that had been 'badly frightened' since the mysterious disappearance of Joseph Gellibrand and George Hesse in the district in February 1837. All too often, reports of stolen sheep were followed by news of killed or missing Aborigines.

Land, resource use and access were major sources of conflict in the Western District, yet the situation of the mission 'close to the territories of four distinct Aboriginal clans, and simultaneously upon the portions of land previously held under licence by five squatters' also made Bunting Dale a flashpoint for conflict. The Wesleyans' willingness to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding Aboriginal deaths was a source of ire for some district squatters, and this sometimes translated into the public attacks that appeared in the colonial press. At the mission, the enforced proximity of rival Aboriginal groups produced scenes of disagreement that also occasionally led to acts of violence and murder. Marriage rights and the taking of wives was a common source of dispute, and tensions could rapidly spiral toward the uttering of threats and open aggression. News of these conflicts further undermined the good work of the missionaries and increased institutional resistance toward the continuation of funding for their

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<sup>1</sup> This is an important point of clarification. Previous accounts had indicated that Tuckfield consulted with William Buckley in the process of site selection, most notably: CA McCallum, 'Tuckfield, Francis (1808–1865)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 2, Melbourne University Press, 1967, pp. 540–541.

project. Disease, violence and starvation caused Aboriginal population numbers to plummet, and in turn this made politicians and religious bureaucrats question the relevance of any attempts at missionary activity in the Western District. What was the point of continuing when fewer Aborigines were living at the mission and no conversions to Christianity had been made? In January 1843, the vicious murder of an Aboriginal woman at Bunting Dale led to a new approach in the missionary effort and the decision to exclude all but the Gulidjan people from the mission. Though this tactic succeeded in putting an end to the string of murders that had occurred at Bunting Dale, it also cut the number of Aborigines at the mission and made it increasingly difficult for politicians and Methodist leaders to justify expenditures on the operation.

In 1848, a dwindling Aboriginal population, a total lack of Christian converts and pressure for re-opening of land led Reverend Boyce, then Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions in Australia, to announce the closure of the mission precisely at the time when it had become financially self-sufficient. Tuckfield and his family moved to Geelong, and once the neighbours had concluded their prolonged squabble over land that was *owed* to them, no one 'felt any obligation to compensate the indigenous people for the loss of their land'. Once more, the Aborigines were dispossessed.

In February 1851 the 'Black Thursday' bushfires swept through western Victoria, burning down the remaining buildings at Bunting Dale. Not a single trace of the Mission remained, and one may wonder whether, without dedicated local historians like Le Griffon, these stories might be lost as well. This book highlights the great efforts made by the Methodist Church in Australia to aid the Aborigines of western Victoria during a period of traumatic displacement and total cultural disruption. The experiences of Reverend Tuckfield provide us with a remarkable window into the world of missionaries, religious bureaucracies, and the mind of a compassionate witness thrust into the turmoil of the pastoral frontier. Le Griffon's *Campfires at the Cross* is an important contribution to the history of the Western District, giving scholars a useful launching point for further work on the impact of missionary activity on Aboriginal belief systems and the ethics of a civilising mission directed from the imperial core.

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*Rob Riley: An Aboriginal Leader's Quest for Justice* by Quentin Beresford, xiv + 374 pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006, \$39.95.

This biography is shadowed from its first page by Rob Riley's suicide in 1996 and, to that extent, is framed by one of the most potent symbols of the alienation of Indigenous Australians, and particularly by the self-destruction of a figure who sought, across a full compass of political engagement, to redress that condition. It is a study, then, shaped by themes of loss – even despite Riley's many achievements – and by Quentin Beresford's overarching interest in 'telling the story of how modern Australia failed to make a lasting settlement with its Indigenous people'. Riley is seen as representing 'a unique generation of activists', whose commitment was energised by coming to consciousness of their own direct experience, and characterised by a personal dedication perhaps unlikely to be replicated. Beresford argues that Riley's work in the late 1970s as chair of the National Aboriginal Conference 'came close to delivering national Aboriginal land rights on terms articulated by Aboriginal people' – an outcome not matched by the more institutionalised and 'insider' forms of politics which marked Riley's later career. And he maintains that Riley must be understood as 'a victim of Australian racism in all its interwoven and barely acknowledged historical and contemporary manifestations'. Such themes make this a challenging, engrossing book, both in characterising recent history and in setting the terms for current debates.

Beresford has some concerns that, as a biography, this study might be overwhelmed by the complexity of issues with which Riley worked, and the diverse contexts of his life – from Sister Kate's Children's Home outside Perth to the Canberra offices of the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gerry Hand, for whom Riley was an adviser in 1987. While there is clearly a certain fatal momentum to this account, Riley is no simple martyr. His personality emerges as an active agent in itself, an integral dimension of his changing modes of political engagement.

With 'a curious and contradictory mix of impatient idealism and underlying vulnerability', Riley achieved an impressive conceptual synthesis in his understanding of 'racial power', the intersection of law and history, and the gains of making Indigenous issues matters for international scrutiny. Yet he was quick to seize opportunities for open political confrontation, and to be attracted into the more cloistered and competitive 'political fray' of parliament and bureaucracy. If the Noonkanbah blockade in 1980 prompted Riley to grasp land rights as a battle for *all* Aboriginal people, it remained the case that he best understood urban-based politics. In a post-Mabo environment the kinds of alliances that had once flourished for him, both personally and professionally, with Peter Yu (for example) of the Kimberley Land Council, fractured into divisions between Riley's advocacy of essentially legal processes through the Aboriginal Legal Service and Yu's search for consultative models.

With critical subtlety and compassion, Beresford conveys the often contradictory elements of Riley's living – through each element of his political engagement. If Riley had a certain emblematic status – the 'key Noongar' as a public advocate in the early 1980s, then a 'black politician in a white political structure' – Beresford looks past these labels to contextualise that engagement. The personal dimensions of Riley's public life are sketched with respect, again if perhaps overly shadowed by an imminent sense of psychological fragmentation. Riley's practices of 'distancing' his political persona from

his private and emotional life and of insisting on placing Indigenous politics in a bold, sustained agenda of dispossession, rather than a softer regime of reconciliation and identity politics, is almost ironically underscored by his disclosure in 1993 of a long-repressed childhood rape. In such acute moments, Beresford shows that modes of engagement are often in themselves creatures of complex social contexts.

Beresford also deftly explains the political chronology of Indigenous politics over an 'epic' period of change, conveying a sharp sense of unintended consequences (of the Seaman Land Rights Inquiry in Western Australia, for example), the interdependency of issues, the costs of pragmatism and the shifting of alliances. His uncompromising interpretation of the failure of land rights politics in the 1980s, and with it a comprehensive agenda reflecting genuine Indigenous aspirations, will provoke valuable debate – although this view itself perhaps sits uneasily with Beresford's own emphasis on the contingencies shaping phases of activism.

But perhaps the most enduring theme of this book, always running within the text, is the persistence of racism in Australia, whether the power of figures such as Howard Sattler, with whom Riley jostled on talk-back radio, the disclosure through opinion polling of entrenched prejudice in 'middle Australia', or the basic denial of legitimacy to Indigenous aspirations (Beresford quotes Gerry Hand, reflecting on parliamentary debates on the proposal for a Treaty: 'we just couldn't bloody believe the depth of hostility'). Riley insisted that some kind of concerted action had to be taken, at the highest and sustained levels, to address a kind of gut instinct to such racism, over and above calls for 'reconciliation'. Clearly, this remains a daunting but undeniable need.

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*Black Glass: Western Australian Courts of Native Affairs 1936–54* by Kate Auty, 366 pp, Freemantle Arts Centre, Freemantle, 2005, \$24.95.

In a conservative political climate where Aboriginal people are portrayed as receiving an unfair advantage in the criminal justice system, Kate Auty's book is a resounding reminder of Aboriginal people's historical disadvantage. This book, which draws on extensive research of the 'legal archive', challenges the myth promoted by the Commonwealth government that Aboriginal offenders are given lenient sentences. This conception resulted in the passage of the *Crimes Amendment (Bail and Sentencing) Bill* (Cth) 2006 that removes cultural considerations from the sentencing of offenders. Prime Minister John Howard (Southern Cross Radio, 19 May 2006), explained that the courts were applying a 'misguided notion of Aboriginal law or customary law, rather than Anglo-Australian law'.

Kate Auty's timely publication overviews the Courts of Native Affairs that the Western Australian government established in the 1930s. She is concerned with highlighting the distinctly punitive nature of this separate court system. The object of these courts, articulated by the Chief Protector of Aborigines at the time, A O Neville, was to

expedite criminal justice processes for Aboriginal people. Consequently, these summary courts dealt with murder and manslaughter cases without providing Aboriginal defendants a right to a fair trial. Hearings were devoid of impartial representation and rights to a jury trial, a hearing by a judge and an appeal. Once found guilty, the Magistrate and Commissioner of Native Affairs could order types of punishments, such as 'floggings', which were not available in sentencing non-Aboriginal offenders.

Several chapters of *Black Glass* deal with the customary law defences and justifications that accused Aboriginal persons presented to the court. Auty reveals how the Native Courts – far from accommodating these customs – either disregarded them or relied on them to increase the accused's culpability. This represents a 'double discrimination'. On the one hand, Aboriginal people were excluded from the rule of law by being denied formal rights to procedural fairness; on the other, Aboriginal people were discriminated against by the criminalisation of their customs.

The purpose of the book is to demonstrate that *silences* pervade the legal archive. Auty claims that the views of Aboriginal persons in the courts are silenced. These silences are both literal (through Aboriginal people not speaking in court) and constructed (through police and prosecution submissions and court judgments overlooking Aboriginal evidence, such as customary justifications provided by the defendant). As a legal practitioner (a lawyer and a magistrate) rather than a historian, Auty is stunned to discover that omissions pervade the legal documents.

From these silences, Auty deduces that accused Aboriginal persons resisted and subverted the court system. In piecing together further legal documents, Auty claims that Aboriginal resistance is offered 'through lying, keeping secrets, frustrating investigators with 'false' versions of events, providing a representative villain or defendant, and even that most overt of resistant acts – escaping'. Chapter 4 sketches the reliance on cultural justifications and silence by Aboriginal people to elude the courts and police interrogators. Auty refers to a constructed 'magic-narrative' by accused Aboriginal persons as an example of them 'controlling and manipulating multiple dialogues'. Such methods, Auty argues, were the 'weapons of the weak'.

Many of Auty's inferences, such as Aboriginal people conspiring to conceal evidence, are problematic and perhaps the book's weakest link. Suggesting that Aboriginal persons perverted the course of justice is a strong claim, which is inferred from predominant silences and the official archive. Without a watertight basis, this argument reinforces the criminal label attached to Aboriginal people. It also overlooks the view – which is discernable from Auty's research – that Aboriginal silence was a result of alienation from the court system.

*Black Glass* makes a plausible point that these deceptive and manipulative methods were the only tactics available to the Aboriginal person in the unjust 'native' court system. Auty's construction of Aboriginal deception attempts to signify Aboriginal empowerment. However, Auty's argument that Aboriginal people constructed false customary excuses to gain the upperhand in the court system is offset by her evidence that Aboriginal people were still convicted, sentenced and incarcerated. Moreover, her focus on false customary justifications is consistent with narrow contemporary government understandings of customary excuses.

Without providing a historical background, Auty is unable to explain the court bias and Aboriginal exclusion from the court process. She does not unpack the impetus for the Courts of Native Affairs and the judicial or investigatory biases, and how they reflected the government's broader Aboriginal policy. After all, summary justice for Aboriginal offences was not unique to Western Australia – nor did it begin or end with the Courts of Native Affairs. Originally, summary justice was dispensed on the frontier more crudely, without charges laid or trials conducted, but through the barrel of a gun.<sup>1</sup> Across northern Australia, including in the Kimberley region, in the 1930s, pastoralists and squatters administered justice personally on the grounds that it was the most efficient means of teaching Aboriginal people a lesson.<sup>2</sup> However, 'efficiency' was only a euphemism for expedient colonisation of land and suppression of Aboriginal resistance. In this broader context, are Aboriginal silences before the courts weapons of the weak or products of an unjust colonial punitive system? The legal archive that Auty reads does not answer this question, but perhaps history does.

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*Unfinished Constitutional Business? Rethinking Indigenous Self-determination* edited by Barbara A Hocking, xxiii + 293 pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2005, \$39.95.

This book left me feeling somewhat ambivalent. It is not the kind of book I would normally read cover-to-cover. Once I started, however, I appreciated the interesting insights into Indigenous-state relations over a geographically and culturally diverse area. At the same time a number of the papers seem to be preaching to the converted and do not really make clear arguments to support the authors' opinions. Most contributions deal with former English colonies: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the Solomon Islands. There is also a more general exploration of attitudes towards Indigenous people in the Commonwealth. Inserted into this mix are papers examining self-determination aspirations in Hawaii, the Saami Parliaments in Scandinavia, and the issue of intellectual property rights and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Whall provides a big-picture introduction in dealing with Indigenous representation on the international stage. She explores the role of Commonwealth nations at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and traces the Commonwealth's historic attitudes towards Indigenous people. The many acronyms pervading this discussion make it a bit hard to follow at times. Whall notes how the 1996 change in the Australian government substantially altered the role this country plays on the international stage. Since that time, Australia has shifted from a position at the forefront of the self-determination debate to becoming categorically opposed to the very concept. The varied

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1. See Cilento, R 1959, *Triumph in the Tropics: an historical sketch of Queensland* (with Clem Lack), Smith & Paterson, Brisbane, p.185.

2. See Buchanan, G 1933, *Packhorse and Waterhole: with the first overlanders to the Kimberleys*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p.117.



positions of Canada, New Zealand, Malaysia, India and other Commonwealth states are also touched on.

Bradley and Seton use the concept of deep colonisation when discussing the claims process under the Northern Territory Lands Right Act. They acknowledge that Aboriginal people have gained rights through that legislation, but they argue that the legislation is nonetheless fundamentally unjust, subject to governmental interference and manoeuvring and ultimately disadvantageous to those who have already suffered most, i.e. the 'Stolen Generation'. Essentially, the structures set up to facilitate recognition of Aboriginal rights are themselves part of the colonising process that undermines those very rights.

Cunneen also refers to deep colonising, this time in the context of policing. Indigenous populations are subject to statistically significant higher incarceration rates than non-Indigenous populations. Cunneen argues that indigenous people are criminalised as a community. In Australia it is readily apparent how this has occurred historically from the moment of settlement when Aboriginal people were jailed (or shot) for spearing cattle and other domestic animals. Such criminalisation perpetuates marginalisation and needs to be overcome by appropriate, community-based justice programs. This, Cunneen argues, would be a step towards self-determination.

Moreton-Robinson examines the intersection of race and gender and how it impacts on the role Indigenous women can play in a patriarchal white society. She explores the systemic racism inherent in the Australian Racial Discrimination Act, and highlights the leadership role Indigenous women can play in transforming cultural and social institutions 'so that our ways of knowing will be taught and respected' in spite of the 'erasure and denial of Indigenous cultural knowledge by white people'.

Morrissey explores the role played by public actions and statements of politicians such as John Howard and Pauline Hanson, but also Aboriginal politicians such as Geoff Clarke, in setting the public mood with regard to Aboriginal issues. Mansell asks if self-government is possible for the Norfolk Islands, why is it not available to Aboriginal communities? He suggests that most Australians would neither understand nor accept that Aboriginal people may not want to be part of Australia and sets out a proposal by which all crown lands are returned to Aboriginal people who will then be in a position to become economically independent.

The next three chapters focus on New Zealand. The absence of a glossary for the many Maori words used in these papers made parts of them a little hard to follow. Erueti offers an interesting account of Maori traditional dispute resolution and explores the possibilities and limitations of those traditions applying in the Maori land court. Magallanes contrasts the New Zealand system of Maori parliamentary representation with First Nation tribal delegates in Maine, USA. While the Maori delegates represent their community as well as having a role in mainstream politics, the First Nation delegates play the role of ambassadors of their people to the mainstream political system. Buick-Constable provides another angle on Indigenous-State relations in New Zealand by focusing on the Treaty of Waitangi and the various 'settlement legislations' that followed.

The following two chapters consider the Pacific Islands. Cooper provides a fascinating historical account of the colonisation of Hawaii and the various mechanisms of

dispossession used against the Kanaka Maoli or native Hawaiians. Colonisation here started briefly with the British but was taken up more seriously by the United States. Care examines the recent history of conflict in the Solomon Islands (up to the year 2000) and sources it in the clash between the artificial nation state and traditional tribal structures.

Russel looks at the original commitment of the Canadian government to Indigenous self-determination and says that in that respect no 'settler state has gone further either in principle or in practice'. He suggests, however, that this commitment is based on fear of conflict and economic disturbance rather than genuine respect for Indigenous peoples. Russel goes through the various historic policies and practices on Canada's Indigenous people before looking at the significance of the Quebec secession attempts on engagement with First Nations and the more recent shifting of public opinion on Indigenous issues.

Waters explores the concepts of indigeneity, self-determination and sovereignty. While I found this paper quite hard to follow, it seems to focus on the difference of world views between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and the impact colonisation continues to have on Indigenous communities and individuals. Magwaro argues that having internal dispute resolution in the hands of Indigenous people without interference by State institutions is an essential element of self-determination. She touches on the tension that arises when customary laws are seen to infringe human rights standards, while at the same time western laws infringe Indigenous rights.

Vogel's paper sets out some of the international politics surrounding the Convention of Biological Diversity before setting out a model by which Indigenous people could gain rights and economic recognition for their specific knowledge of biological diversity.

Finally Hocking, the editor of the volume, provides an overview of the differing political organisation and participation of Saami in Scandinavia. She considers legal issues that have arisen over the years as well as international issues that arise from Saami being spread over four nations (including Russia), three of which are part of the European Union. In her concluding remarks Hocking comments on the Australian situation. She argues that 'it is time to make a legal closure of the 1788 change of sovereignty and, through a series of treaties, formally establish the complete legal constitutional title to the territory of Australia' (p. 279).

This statement, which appears on the first page, captures the tenor of a number of contributions: 'Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of this right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.' While I am deeply supportive of these notions, I did not find much in this book that really advanced that cause. That the fundamental question of how self-determination for Indigenous people in a modern nation state might look was not substantially addressed is, for me, a key shortcoming. Colonisation has been going on for more than 100 years in all of the countries discussed. Regardless of social marginalisation, Indigenous people are deeply enmeshed within the economy (even if it is the welfare economy) and social structure of the dominant societies. Arguing for self-determination and sovereignty in that context requires more detailed analysis than most of the authors in this volume provide. This is also highlighted by the

fact that none of the contributors really engages with the substantial body of 'anti-self-determination' commentary that currently dominates Australian public policy discourse (e.g. Johns 2001).

In the end, while I found a number of the historical overviews (especially Erueti, Cooper and Hocking) useful and a number of the insights gained by taking the Indigenous point of view (especially Moreton-Robinson and Mansell) thought-provoking, other papers are much less compelling. The standard of writing and editing is not as high as it might be. More significantly, what is really lacking is a substantial and compelling argument that brings alive a vision of how self-determination might actually look in the globalised society of the 21st century. Without such a vision it is unlikely to come onto the radar of those who might engage in constitutional business.

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*Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous peoples and the colonial culture of archaeology* by Ian McNiven and Lynette Russel, 328 pp, Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham, Maryland, 2005, US \$58.95.

The essential argument of this book is that 'Indigenous people take issue with the way archaeologists research Indigenous heritage and pasts' because of the colonial foundations of Indigenous archaeology 'founded upon and underwritten by a series of deep-seated colonialist and negative representational tropes of Indigenous peoples, developed as part of European philosophies of imperialism over the last 2500 years'. This quotation gives a flavour of the language of the book, as well as summarising its theme.

A lot of the assertions that follow are familiar and have been worked over by a range of authors from different disciplines during the last quarter-century. However, this is a detailed, well researched and clearly argued exposé that, more or less, chronologically lays out the colonial foundations of archaeology in Australia and the various distortions and objectifications it often produced. The argument is strongly put that archaeology has been a willing and helpful handmaiden of colonialism and of the justification of colonial conquest. The book relies on evidence from the US and Australia with an emphasis on the latter. It takes us through a range of 'isms' which show different aspects of this central assertion. For example:

- Progressivism: archaeologists demonstrate the gradual process of the human species and in so doing place Aboriginal people on a lower step than 'modern man'.
- Antiquarianism: Aboriginal people as living fossils.

- Migration and diffusionism: the moral and intellectual decline of migrated peoples cast off from the centre of civilisation, and the explanation of their achievements, innovation and change by the arrival of another group from that centre to influence and improve the indigenous inhabitants.

These 'isms', chronologically discussed, culminate in subjection – the dehumanisation of the past and of Indigenous people through the West's scientific approach, the development of the 'new archaeology' and the well established colonial tendency to legislate (at least in south-eastern Australia) to define Aboriginal sites as relics and archaeological sites rather than as living cultural heritage.

So the tenor of the book is clear. It is well written, well researched and cogently argued and it convincingly implicates archaeology in the colonial project. It uses some interesting and apt examples and case studies to illustrate research, theorising and paradigms that demonstrate appropriation, and show how such paradigms have penetrated the popular imagination, and in some cases come round in their turn to influence academic speculation.

I found the book enjoyable and stimulating. It is a thoughtful summation of the sins of our archaeological ancestors. But I do have a quibble with its ending. The final development (prior to the present) is described as 'shared history', which led me initially to anticipate a shift from the negativity of the 'isms' to the more hopeful interaction between the Aborigines and archaeologists, which I had seen so clearly over the last 25 years, but my hopes were dashed when I came to the sub-heading for the second half of the chapter, 'New Appropriation'. In the view of the writers in this last chapter (and in fact in conflict with some of their earlier cited evidence), all attempts by archaeologists to shrug off the colonial mantle so far, including community archaeology, have failed to varying degrees.

The authors refer to the most advanced and least colonial form of archaeology – immediately preceding their own work – as 'stakeholder's' archaeology, but even this is flawed because Aborigines are merely one group of stakeholders among others: to be included but not given the ownership and determination rights over their culture to which they are clearly entitled. This summation is, in my view, unduly pessimistic. There are still many problems with Aboriginal/ archaeological relations. Legislation that effectively mandates Aboriginal control of Aboriginal sites is still lacking in many jurisdictions. But there are also many examples of progress. For instance, from the late 1970s no archaeologist has conducted an excavation in New South Wales without the consent of and on the terms of the appropriate (or at least apparently appropriate) Aboriginal group. The long and well-documented history of archaeological work at the Willandra Lakes over the last 30 years is a clear illustration of the changes this policy has wrought. The last 30 years of the 20th century have seen deep and lasting change in Australian archaeology, which the authors fail to acknowledge. In my view it can't really be said, as the authors assert, that during this period archaeology has continually evolved in order to continue its processes of subjugation.

Effectively the authors claim that before the present, and their own work, no meaningful decolonisation of archaeological practice had been achieved. But in historical terms this is to deny the very processes of change which surely contributed in part to their own enlightened attitude and their undoubted advances in this area.

Like many an archaeologist of the past, they see themselves, or at the least their position, as being at the apex of the development of the decolonisation of archaeology in Australia and as representing the perfection of this idea.

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*God, guns and government on the Central Australian frontier* by Peter Vallee, 336 pp, Restoration Books, Canberra, 2006, \$39.95.

When first I saw Peter Vallee's title I was reminded of Jared Diamond's *Guns, germs and steel* (1997), and have since been told by two friends who have read the book that they also instantly thought of the latter title. Whereas the Diamond book is sub-titled 'A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years', *God, guns and government* is a microcosm of the same story, with 1891 being the crucial year.

Peter Vallee has delved with forensic research skills into the period 1877-1891 in central Australia. His particular focus is on Hermannsburg Mission, Boggy Waters police camp and Tempe Downs station to the west and south-west of Alice Springs. Alice Springs and the western cattle stations provide some characters of occasional significance, as do the distant South Australian government, legal, mission and police administrators. While those in Adelaide and Port Augusta are mostly hidden as in a distant mirage, very occasionally they become key players, too. Importantly, in giving attention to a man called Ereminta, and placing Mounted Constable William Willshire and his role in the then very remote central Australian contexts of people and country, Peter Vallee does central Australian history a genuine service.

One opens the book to find the question, *Who killed Ereminta?* as the only words on a stand-alone page. It is an effective comment; one might well say the alternative title for the book. The first brief chapter describes the shooting of two Aboriginal men called Ereminta and Donkey by the Native Constables of a police patrol led by Mounted Constable Willshire. It presents a well-constructed frontier tragedy that introduces both major and minor characters, and concludes with several questions that lead us into the main discussions of the book. It is followed by a photograph – not of Ereminta, as you might expect – with the author's caption: 'Can this man provide a model for his appearance?' The answer is that we do not know. Thereafter, a good selection of photographs of some of the key Aboriginal characters are featured.

'Faith to faith 1877-1885', the first of five main sections of the book, commences with 'Prophets to the Desert', which excellently details the purposes, work and frustrations of the Lutheran missionaries who established Hermannsburg Mission on the Finke River in 1877. By using select quotations from their correspondence and other records, and his own reflections about muscular Lutheran Christianity – in contrast to the Western Aranda beliefs and perceptions, particularly in relation to marriage, treatment of women and education, for example – Peter Vallee establishes the inevitable tensions of an early contact situation. The Lutherans' sheer hard work and devoutness did not change the fact that 'the Western Aranda were their neighbours, not their prisoners' (p. 35). That they stood on the high moral ground while they observed that

'[almost] every white man' on the surrounding pastoral properties had 'his black concubine' (p. 44) set up tensions of another kind. The problems they faced were, in fact, virtually identical to those that the Lutherans had faced a decade earlier at Kilalpaninna Mission. Schmiechen (1971) considered many of the same elements in his research into both missions, but Vallee teases out those aspects that lead one deeper into the story he has to tell. He indicates that the missionaries created fracture lines in Western Aranda society, despite their good intentions and despite some positive progress in their endeavours.

Section two, 'Government on the Line 1836-1890', is again an excellent presentation. As the author states, whatever the ideals of government, the men – initially they were all men – on the pastoral frontier took a 'risky punt' by investing there (p. 67), and, no matter how superior they perceived themselves to be, they were trespassing into Indigenous lands. Spearing of stock instantly became a major problem. They faced additional problems associated with climate, distance from markets, costs of transport of supplies and a lack of womenfolk of their own background. Police, including the key figure Mounted Constable Willshire, are introduced. Chapter 6 'Law or war? scaling justice for the frontier' establishes the nature of idealised distant government as opposed to the realities. Vallee comments that 'Until the arrival of police, settlers and Aborigines alike have no choice but to make their own justice' (p. 80), and '[i]n such circumstances what rules is not law or government or politics. In their place must stand the character and moral standards of individuals' (p. 81). He then discusses degrees of 'dispersal' of Aborigines, (the 'third degree' being 'firing to kill' [p. 87]) and the lobbying by pastoralists for a police force. The principal concern of the South Australian government's responsible minister 'was not justice, but economic development, and Willshire's job depended on satisfying the pastoralists' (p. 92). That he was shown how to do so in no uncertain terms by Mounted Constable Wurmbrand's murderous exploits is touched upon (eg pp. 95-96), but Wurmbrand's mentor role is not developed as fully as it could have been. On the other hand, details of select atrocities, attacks and punitive patrols distant from the focal area, and the breakdown of government control because of distance and the weaknesses of key officials are extremely well considered.

Vallee portrays many aspects of central Australian society and touches upon many events in the third part of the book, but the most fascinating section for me was the author's development of the proposal that Constable Willshire, now based at Boggy Water police camp south of Hermannsburg, fell desperately in love with a young Aboriginal woman. It is clear by strong implication from Willshire's publications that he salivated at the sight of nubile young women and he is open in his accounts about travel with women-only or women-dominated groups, but, as Vallee states, when one of his lovers became pregnant, he quickly off-loaded her to a man who was living well to the east of Alice Springs (p. 181). Vallee makes a very good case for Willshire's refusal to give details of his patrols of mid-1889 because he was not on patrol at all, but visiting Adelaide with a female Aboriginal teenager, 'probably Nabarong, the cause of his feud with Ereminta' (plate facing p. 198). Furthermore, Vallee provides proof that Willshire visited a well-known jeweller's shop 'where all of Adelaide's engaged couples went to find tokens of their love' (p. 179). Having many times considered the same evidence, I remain as puzzled as Vallee about some of the bizarre aspects of Willshire's publications, and think that the implication that Willshire and the young woman

became engaged is fanciful. A love token of some kind is a reasonable proposition, however, in the context of Willshire's 'inordinate love of Notoriety' as fellow police officer Mounted Constable South expressed it (p. 279). One possibility is that he purchased a silver 'dog's collar' which he riveted about her neck, as another man is said to have done in Willshire's book *A thrilling tale of real life in the wilds of Australia* (1897: 28).

After some purple prose – 'the toxic wind began to reap its fatal harvest among those remaining at the mission' (p. 191) – the rest of this section gives an excellent account of the missionaries' increasingly harsh treatment (including chaining and whipping) of Aborigines as they attempt to retain Christian control. It documents Willshire's ruthless patrols, and how Willshire established himself, along with his Native Constables, at Boggy Waters police camp.

Section Four begins with a discussion of what was transpiring in Adelaide's mission and government circles and how this contributed to the continuing frontier violence. Wurmbrand's involvement in the murder of chained Aborigines north of Hermannsburg is a trigger for much of what follows. The author closely examines the formal South Australian government inquiry and illustrates the degree to which incriminating details were covered up to save a senior policeman's hide. He also details the accusations by the Hermannsburg missionaries against police and pastoralists and the counter claims. Further 'covering up', particularly by deliberately not calling Aboriginal witnesses as Willshire had threatened to do (p. 230), is mentioned, and in the end it is certain that everyone was protecting his own hide to some extent. Vallee is a bit tough, though, when he states that '[o]ne cornerstone of Aranda Lutheranism was Erwin Wurmbrand's revolver' (p. 239). His revolver was hardly an intended 'cornerstone', and certainly the missionaries did not expect it to be used for cold-blooded murder! More importantly, though, Willshire emerges as an incorrectly maligned officer *on the basis of available evidence*. It is this effective clearance of his name against the majority of the allegations that seems to have suggested to him that he now had a totally free hand. Significantly, having called the inquiry's bluff by threatening to call Aboriginal witnesses who might have implicated many white men in the Centre in some misdeed, he appears to have concluded that he was above and beyond the laws of the land.

The fifth major section, 'The trials of William Willshire', is wonderfully examined. Vallee provides a step-by-step analysis of the evidence that Willshire was guilty of murder. Details of the Port Augusta courtroom are given in such a way that one could easily imagine a film being made of the setting and the trial. In many ways it was a truly sensational trial, for Willshire was the first policemen brought down from the Centre in chains to face a murder charge. The author has done the trial, and all the questions surrounding it, justice, even if, as he also suggests, justice was not done: some witnesses were deliberately not called and obvious questions were not asked, with senior South Australian government officials very much ducking for cover. That Willshire was freed to loud acclaim does not mean that he was not guilty. Even so, the conflicting evidence given by Aboriginal witnesses (some of whom had clearly been influenced by Willshire), and the fact that the Native Constables had done the shooting of the two Aboriginal men, might suggest that even today a jury would have some difficulties in coming to a decision. Willshire might well have been found to be implicated rather than

directly guilty, although cutting a wounded man's throat, then burning the bodies before unconcernedly sitting down to breakfast remains difficult to explain away.

Much as it is clear that Willshire wished to return to Boggy Waters (or a new camp further south), but was blocked by his superior officers from doing so, it is overly romantic to say that he was 'forced to leave behind on the Finke perhaps the only women who had ever loved him as he needed to be loved, with uncritical admiration' (p. 299). I believe that the woman or women who supposedly loved him were creations of his romanticised self-perception, and they were quite prepared to return to their Aboriginal husbands rather than stay with him – which is why the husbands were murdered. In his later writings Willshire indicates none too subtly, in an account of young women dancing about him while he was seated, that he 'always had a keen sense for natural beauty, and an admiration for the weird and wild mysteries of unknown regions' (1896: 30). Although he denies that he accepted 'overtures' from one of the young women on this occasion, there are no hints in his accounts of nubile young Aboriginal women that he was missing his Tempe Downs woman, or women. But to be as fair as possible to him, although Vallee denies the possibility of a 'close marriage', without stating why he believes this, Willshire appears to have settled down happily enough into marriage with yet another young woman (p. 304 and plate following p. 308).

Intriguingly, Willshire defended himself in a later publication by questioning why Frank Gillen, the Justice of the Peace, was so assiduous in chasing up evidence and in having him arrested. He wrote 'I never meddled with long-haired Rose at Charlotte Waters' – where Gillen lived for the 12 years to 1890 – 'and have to this day failed to comprehend why he displayed such venom, and thus comported himself' (p. 298). Willshire appears to have believed that central Australians, other than those associated with missions, would support him no matter what he did (and many did raise funds for his defence), and he missed the point that Gillen was doing his duty as a Justice of the Peace by gathering evidence about a murder, not a meddling with the 'long-haired Rose'. Presumably Gillen had had cause to remonstrate with Willshire about some incident involving Rose a year or two before the trial, but Willshire's reference seems to be a frontiersman's bitter 'last laugh' at Gillen, again demonstrating his 'inordinate love of Notoriety' (p. 279).

At the conclusion of the trial, Willshire's defenders said that he was found innocent, and that was all that mattered. However, does it end there? In 'Who killed Ereminta? a retrial', Vallee revisits the trial with the benefit of modern hindsight. He suggests that Judge Bunday had limitations, that 'the prosecution ran dead' and that there was a 'permanent conspiracy of the public servants'. However true or not these perceptions are, the author realises that he needs to examine Willshire more closely. He considers Mounted Constable South's comment about Willshire's 'insanity' and decides, instead, that his 'eccentricity' '[flowered] into acts of evil' on the frontier. Vallee also considers that Willshire's superiors 'should share responsibilities for the deaths of Ereminta and Donkey', which means, as he states, that the South Australian government and the electorate were responsible. He further examines the 'complicity' of the Native Constables and the missionaries 'with police violence'. All of this is well enough argued, but I found it less satisfying than the rest of the book in that it essentially ignores all of the positive actions by the Aboriginal witnesses, Mounted Constable



South, Frank Gillen, the Hermannsburg missionaries in much of what they did, and those others who had integrity.

The 'Epilogue' more interestingly reflects on the Aranda and the Lutherans, and, as with the rest of the book, is worth the reading.

The author has made a deliberate choice not to pursue some aspects of Willshire's 'notoriety', and to focus solely on his central Australian service. In the process he has, among many other aspects, examined the possibility that Willshire genuinely fell in love with a young Aboriginal woman. Although I believe that it would have been useful to have considered his career more widely, the advantage of the close focus is that it allows the author to bring Ereminta and several other Aboriginal characters more sharply into vision than in previous studies. It also means that the allegations against Willshire which resulted in his trial, and the trial itself, are given due prominence.

I read the book with interest and pleasure. The selection of photographs, particularly those of people, is excellent. That of Chambers Pillar is rather oddly chosen to illustrate the country beyond the pillar rather than the inscribed name of Willshire. I found the maps adequate, the 'Select list of persons' useful (pp. 323–325) if too limited on Wurmbrand, and the Notes, Bibliography and Index generally very good, with only a few minor spelling, printing and indexing errors. The writing is accessible English, easily readable by anyone with an interest in the subject, and benefits from occasional modern colloquial phrases or personal comments by the author. It does require constant close attention to keep 'on track' because of the fine detail presented. Problems are few. The author can be relied upon for his excellent research, and excellent choice of quotations from letters and transcripts of evidence, but one must be alert for occasional assertions or postulations. Curiously, the bibliography, while otherwise comprehensive, omits Schmiechen's thesis and Stapleton's hagiography. These are but minor quibbles in a book of sustained excellence.

All in all, I consider it the most finely detailed study yet published of a significant era in central Australia's history. I highly commend it for study in university courses in Australian history, and to general adult readers with a detailed interest in central Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory history.

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