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**Genocide in Tasmania and Rohan Wilson's *The Roving Party***

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# 1 Introduction

Tasmania has often been cited as one of the few clear examples of genocide in the world's history. Since 1803, the year in which the British settled on the island, it had been a prison for the criminals of the worst kind. The island was run as a police state, so a lot of documentation exists from that period, much more than from the mainland Australia, which point to what was going on in Tasmania in the nineteenth century. Repeating the pattern from the mainland, the frontier violence committed by the British was even worse this time. It brought to the near-annihilation of Aboriginal Tasmanians by the second half of the nineteenth century. The allegedly last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian, a woman named Trugannini, died in 1876. Because of the existence of the records that point to gradual disintegration of Aboriginal Tasmanian tribes, Tasmania has often been cited as a clear case of genocide. However, there have been many issues in characterizing it as such, and they are examined in this thesis.

Rohan Wilson explores some of these issues in his novel *The Roving Party*. He takes a moment from Tasmania's violent colonial history, and puts it under scrutiny. Having the plot set at the height of Black War, 1829, Wilson uses historical figures and historical situations and recreates them anew, to show all the nuances of living in Tasmania in that period. Once placed into a broader perspective, these events point to some of the issues in defining violence in Tasmania as genocidal.

The present thesis is a case study of genocide in Tasmania. Its aim is to elucidate how the frontier violence in Tasmania committed by the British Empire came to be characterized as genocidal, what are the complexities of such definition, and if the word "genocide" really can be applied to Tasmanian experience. The thesis further provides an analysis of Rohan Wilson's *The*

*Roving Party*, the novel that deals with a particularly violent moment taken from Tasmania's colonial history, to show from the events described in the novel that what was going on could in fact be characterized as the ongoing process of genocide.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the issue of the notion of genocide. It explains how genocide came to be a crime under law, and it points to all the issues regarding the legal definition. It pays special attention to the issues in defining colonial genocide, and offers an alternative definition.

The following two chapters deal with the processes of colonial expansion in Australia and Tasmania. They explain how the British colonial settlements came to be, and how from the initial encounters between the settlers and the natives that were somewhat amicable, because of completely different ideologies and lifestyles, and because of the Empire's pressure to seize increasingly more land, the events unfolded into frontier violence, which led to genocide(s) of the native population.

The next chapter deals with historiography on the violence of Tasmania, dating back from the early years after the violence, until the recent years of the twenty-first century. The overview is important because it provides an image of how the frontier violence in Tasmania was perceived in different periods of Australian, but also of world's history, especially after genocide had become a crime under law. It offers a debate on reasons for and against defining Tasmania as a site of genocide.

The following chapter provides an analysis of Rohan Wilson's *The Roving Party*, examining events from the novel through Lemkin's "revised outline for genocide cases". It shows that

majority of the elements necessary to conclude that genocide did take place are present in the text, therefore, the events described in the novel can, in fact, be seen as genocide in process.

## 2 Genocide, Colonial Genocide, Indigenocide

Genocide, crime against a targeted group of people leading to their annihilation. Not because of something that they have done, but because of who they are, because of their identity, be it religious, national, ethnic, racial, or any other. Even though the word is rather new (it was coined in the middle of the twentieth century), the concept it describes has been present in the human history since antiquity.

Examples of cases of genocide can be traced back to early history. Roman siege and eventual destruction of Carthage, crimes committed against Christians again by the Romans; crimes committed by Christians against “unbelievers” during the Crusades (Jones, 2006, 5). The acts of mass violence can be traced all around the globe. In the thirteenth century, out of religious and cultural beliefs, but also looking for power and glory, Genghis Khan and his Mongol horsemen set out to destroy everything on their way from East Asia to the gates of Western Europe (6). The year 1492 brought the discovery of America for the Europeans, yet for its native population it signalled the beginning of extinction. More recent examples come from the early modern era. Famous is the case of the Vendée uprising: Vendée is a region in France whose citizens, four years after the French Revolution, in 1793, rebelled against the replacement of their priests by pro-revolutionary designates. This resulted in a civil war which turned into genocide against the Vendéans (7). Another example is Zulu genocide, committed during the reign of Shaka Zulu, 1810 – 1828, who wanted to expand his kingdom and destroyed tribes on the larger territory of the present-day South Africa. The Zulus even used the term *izwekufa*, *izwe* (nation, people), *ukufa* (death, dying), which is identical to the term genocide both in meaning and etymology (8).

Even though these violent acts have been a recurring feature of human history, it was not until the twentieth century that they have been given a name. The term “genocide” was coined in 1944 by a young Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin. Growing up in a Jewish family in Poland, Lemkin developed interest for learning foreign languages and cultures that produced them. Reading about cultures, he was struck by the sufferings inflicted by one people on another, and compared those to the present-day situation in Poland. Indignant that the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide had largely escaped prosecution, Lemkin, then a young state prosecutor, began to work on an international law proposal on this sort of crime. In 1933, his proposed international laws on “barbarity” and “vandalism” were presented to the Fifth International Conference for the Unification of Penal Law in Madrid (Lemkin being absent because of travel visa problems) (Goldsmith 238). The Madrid delegates refused to adopt these laws. As the World War II broke out, Lemkin escaped to Sweden in 1940, and then to the USA in 1941, where he continued lobbying the US government to take action on this matter. Due to Lemkin’s efforts the United Nations General Assembly began discussions on genocide as a crime under international law. In 1944 Lemkin wrote a book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, in which he dedicated an entire chapter (the famous chapter nine) to the notion of genocide, and used this term for the first time. He further elaborated this term in the book *Introduction to the Study of Genocide*, which remained unpublished because of his untimely death. In it, Lemkin articulated his understanding of genocide and resistance to it:

Genocide is a gradual process and may begin with political disenfranchisement, economic displacement, cultural undermining and control, the destruction of leadership, the breakup of families, and the prevention of propagation. Each of these methods is a more or less effective means of destroying a group. Actual physical destruction is the last and most effective phase of genocide. The victim group may respond in various ways. It may lose its group identity through conversion or other ways of assimilation. Its members may attempt temporary loss of group identity by hiding or through disguise. There may be more or less systematic emigration. The group may prefer stoic submission and martyrdom or struggle for its rights, in other words, reinforce its group cohesion during the crisis.

Finally, the group may disintegrate because its members yield to personal disintegration expressed by panic and disorganized flight (qtd. in Jones, 2013, 234)

In 1946 The General Assembly Resolution 96(I) declared genocide a crime under international law, and two years later General Assembly Resolution 260(III)A unanimously adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide (Goldsmith 239). It entered into law in 1951.

The articles I and II of the Convention state the following:

*Article I.*

The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

*Article II.*

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (qtd. in Jones, 2006, 13)

Even though the UN Convention meant a great step forward in dealing with the crime of genocide because it legalized the term, and thus created a legal obligation for action in cases of genocide, it also brought many difficulties in defining whether a certain crime falls under the category of genocide or not. Thus, the Convention became open to rival interpretations.

For example, the exclusion of the political, social and gender groups were strongly resented. The omission of cultural genocide, as well. Lemkin wanted to insert cultural genocide into convention; he lobbied strongly for it, because culture was central to his idea of genocide. For



Lemkin, culture “integrated society and enabled the fulfilment of individual basic needs.” (Moses, 2008, 12) If the culture of a group was undermined, Lemkin thought, the group would disintegrate and its members would either assimilate into another group, or succumb to physical destruction (12). The issue of cultural genocide has been particularly important in the study of colonialism because it often involved projects of (forced) indigenous assimilation. Also, as indigenous societies see their identity primarily through their culture, and not their race, the destruction of their culture then should also fall under the category of genocide. Yet, Lemkin reluctantly allowed for cultural genocide to be omitted from the Convention (13).

Another issue with the UN Convention on Genocide has been the question of intent. The above-cited Article II of the Convention states: “genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a ... group, as such.” The type of intent required is not stated, and the fact that there is no clear definition has resulted in much debate and put the effectiveness of the Convention into question (Goldsmith 240). “The type of intent regularly associated with genocide is the Romano-Germanic civil law term, *dolus specialis*” or the specific intent (241). It implies a direct connection between the act and its outcome; for example, execution in cold blood of a member of a designated group (Jones, 2006, 38). Some scholars, as will later be demonstrated in the analysis, argue that a charge of genocide should not be considered, if *dolus specialis* cannot be proven. Within the same legal system, but one level below *dolus specialis* is *dolus eventualis*. It means that the perpetrator knows their actions may lead to the destruction of a group, yet they continue to make these acts. (Goldsmith 241) Another lower level is general intent, when the perpetrator intends to commit the killing, but not necessarily to destroy the group. Both *dolus eventualis* and general intent, Goldsmith argues, are too low for the level at which the crime of genocide is held (242).

The main problem with specific intent is in obtaining actual proof that the perpetrator's intention was to destroy the group. Intent refers to a person's state of mind, and as such, unless explicitly stated (like in the case of Hitler's proclamation of intent to exterminate the Jews), is very difficult to prove (242). Yet, how can one know what is in perpetrator's mind? In the absence of a formal confession, intent then should be inferred (Jones, 2006, 38). Goldsmith argues that a knowledge-based approach should be used. "Knowledge means awareness that a circumstance exists or a consequence will occur in the ordinary course of events" (242).

"In the case of genocide, where the collective actions of many individuals is considered, one would have to show that there is a high possibility that a collection of prohibited acts aimed at a particular group would bring about its destruction. Therefore, committing a prohibited act with the knowledge that it would further genocidal plan should be sufficient to prove intent." (242)

The problem with "intent" is especially evident in the cases of colonial genocides that always led to mass murders, forced removals and assimilations, and rapidly declining numbers of indigenous populations. In such cases it is next to impossible to find incriminating documents. Yet, on the trace of the knowledge-based approach, Evans argues that in the absence of incriminating documentation, intention might be inferred in the act of continuing with colonization even though the outcomes may easily be predicted in advance, and arguably "regretted" after, only to be repeated later in the same pattern in new settings (2008, 138). For Evans, settler colonialism was "pursued by choice, premeditation and acquisitive will" (141).

That Lemkin thought more or less the same is evident from *History of Genocide*, another book of his that remained unfinished and unpublished. He studied a large number of cases, from antiquity to modern times, and the book was supposed to contain forty-one chapters, the thirty-eighth of which deals with "Tasmanians", and the last one, though never written, bears the title

“Natives of Australia” (Curthoys, 2006, 166). Lemkin had no illusions about the nature of European colonialism; this can be seen from the fact that he also included the chapters on Indigenous peoples of South and North America, and the Herero of the German South West Africa. Lemkin wanted to review all those cases of violence in light of his newly coined term. When writing on colonial cases, he never spoke of a plan, but he tried to identify the “intent” of the colonists. Lemkin argued that “occupations and settlements conducted on terms that neither recognized indigenous rights nor engaged in subsequent negotiations were bound to issue in genocide because resistance and its brutal suppression was inevitable” (Moses, 2008, 18). In fact, he thought that colonial settlements and genocide are inseparable, which can be seen from what he wrote about genocide in *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*:

“Genocide has two phases, one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group: the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor’s own nationals.” (Qtd in Moses, 2008, 9)

Another issue from the Convention related to colonial genocide is the issue of the agent, the perpetrator. If there was no direct order from the state, and the acts of violence against indigenous populations were committed by settlers on their own volition, sometimes despite direct state orders not to do so, who was to be blamed for the acts committed? The Article IV of the UN Convention on Genocide mentions “constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals” among possible agent. (qtd. in Jones, 2006, 21) Since it has never been stipulated in the UN convention that genocide is solely a crime of state, individual settlers could be guilty of genocidal acts, as well.

With these specific issues related to colonial genocide in mind, the question that poses itself is should colonial genocide be a subcategory distinct from genocide? Australian historian Raymond

Evans thinks that it should. He argues that there is too big a gap between the UN convention genocide definition and analysis of the disastrous process of indigenous dispossession by settler colonialism (2008, 134). Since the official definition was providing too little and demanding too much, Evans and his colleague, Bill Thorpe, also an eminent Australian historian, decided to “do a Lemkin” themselves and coined the term *Indigenocide*, to explain specific conditions under which such case of genocide was performed:

First ...indigenocide usually occurs when an invading group intentionally invades and colonizes another group or groups who are the “first peoples” of that region, or who have proof of such origins.... Secondly, the invaders must conquer the Indigenes and maintain their advantages over them as long as is necessary or possible. Thirdly, as conquerors, the invaders must kill sufficient numbers of Indigenes, or render their ways of sustaining meaningful life so difficult that they come close to extinction and may disappear altogether.... Fourthly, and this reinforces the actively *genocidal* aspects, the Invaders must classify the Indigenes as “the lowest form of humanity,” rather like Eichmann classified Jews as a “garbage nation,” who deserve to be exterminated. Fifthly, indigenocide, notably with Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians, involves destroying, or attempting to destroy, Indigenous religious systems and imposing binaries between the material and spiritual realms. Above all, indigenocide implies in theory and practice that Indigenous people are *less valued* than the land they inhabit and which the invaders desire (141).

This definition does not place the emphasis on expressing the intent, but that intent can be inferred from the very behaviour of the conqueror who usurps the land, holds it and depopulates it, intentionally disregarding the consequences upon the native inhabitants. The term, Evans argues, “communicates an interdependent, three-way onslaught upon lives, land and culture” (141). Such definition is definitely worthy of consideration. So are many others, offered by eminent genocide scholars such as Leo Kuper, Helen Fein, Mark Levene, and others, with the purpose of improving of what remained unclear in the Convention. However, since Lemkin’s definition is the only international-legal definition of genocide, it will be used primarily throughout the text analysed in the thesis.

### **3 Australian Colonial Experience**

#### **3.1 The Myth of *Terra Nullius* and the Colony's Beginnings**

Eighteenth-century England was a place marked by significant changes, caused primarily by Industrial revolution. For the first time in history the machine had replaced human labour, the result of which was massive unemployment. Under the stresses of industrialization the towns were developing rapidly, there was a fast rise in population, so fast that by the 1770 the population of London doubled (Hughes, Location No. 814). The labor market was saturated with young people. With unemployment came a rise in poverty, and with poverty a swelling wave of criminal activities. English prisons, such as Tyburn and Newgate, were overcrowded. At first, the Government organised public executions, hoping it would “reform” those who saw them, but no such thing happened. For a period they managed to dispose of a number of convicts, sending them to America. But after 1775 the American colonies rebelled, and one of the results of the revolution was that the British could no longer send the convicts there. As soon as this happened, English prisons were overcrowded again. Another solution for transport had to be found. What they chose in the end was Australia, “a useless continent at the rim of the world, whose eastern coast had been mapped by Captain Cook in 1770” (Location No. 1216). This was a place from which the convicts would never return.

In 1768, James Cook set out on his first Pacific voyage, the task of which was to go to Tahiti, and, once there, to observe the transit of Venus across the Sun's face (Location No. 1395). Once completed, Cook could then continue with his explorations. On August 25, 1768, the *Endeavour* set sail from Plymouth. Having finished with their task on Tahiti, another task began, the one of looking for the Southern Continent. After months of meandering, on April 19 a new coast

appeared. It was the site of today's state of Victoria. On April 22, the crew saw some Australians on the beach, and one week later, the first contact was made. Cook observed them for a period of time, and noted that these were the people with no sense of material possessions, they were ill-armed, backward; they would give no trouble (Location No. 1483). Cook saw these men in terms of the British mindset of the period: they had no cultivated land, so they only had rights to what they caught and gathered. This uncultivated land was then declared as *terra nullius*, a land belonging to no one, and, therefore available for settlement (Moses, 2004, 13). So, a couple of months later, moving up north, on August 21, 1770, Cook and some of his crew "landed on a nubbin of rock now called Possession Island, hoisted a Union Jack and formally claimed the whole coast south of where they stood... as "New South Wales" in the name of George III" (Hughes, Location No.1510).

Eighteen years had passed before another British ship appeared on those shores. In 1787 the First Fleet carrying convicts set out on the voyage to Australia, with Governor Arthur Phillip in command. They arrived in Australia in January 1788, after long 252 days. On January 26 1788, Governor Phillip officially founded a penal colony in Port Jackson.

Phillip's task for the future years was to build a society where convicts, once they served their sentence would want to stay and turn into settlers. Majority of convicts were not prisoners, but "government men"; they were supposed to build this society, work on the road and house construction, or as assigned men for a master; and in that way serve their sentence. Having served the sentence, they could get either an absolute pardon (the rarest one), which included the right of returning to England; a conditional pardon, with which they acquired citizenship within the colony but no right of return to England. The third one was the ticket-of-leave, which meant

they no longer had to work for government or a master, but could spend the rest of their sentence working for themselves (Location No. 7729).

As they settled on the Australian soil, another issue had to be confronted – its native inhabitants. Governor Phillip was given strict directions to treat indigenous population “with amity and kindness”, and for a very brief period it was so. After initial caution, the Aborigines were accepting Phillips’ presents and showing interest in the white settlers (Location No. 2272). They reciprocated in offering their women to the settlers as it was customary in their intertribal traditions.

What kind of people were the indigenes? Contrary to the widespread belief of Aboriginal homogeneity, there were many indigenous tribal communities in Australia (Hughes mentions a figure of around 500) (Location No. 464). They had no notion of private property; however, they were intensely territorial because of the connection to the land they inhabited. It was their hunting ground, but they also felt a strong spiritual connection to it for it was the land of their ancestors, so the tribes “owned constellations of sacred sites rather than neat parcels of land” (Reynolds, 2006, Location No. 1125). As they were hunters, they constantly moved about their territory in search of food and fresh water, so they had no domestic culture, but lived on a subsistence level (Hughes, Location No. 570). The natives carried their culture with them as they walked, their “dreaming”. To take away their territory meant not just land dispossession, it meant depriving them of their history, which led to spiritual death; it meant the destruction of their past and their future (Location No. 655).

Aboriginal tribal society was an egalitarian one. Elders were bearers of the group’s myth and lore, but there was no hierarchy (Location No. 576). There was no sense of private possession,

and children were taught from very young age to share everything. One of the “things” they shared was their women. Women were often exchanged between tribes, and offered to visitors as a sign of hospitality. Since it was a kind of society in which everything was shared, the natives naturally assumed that whatever white people had was theirs to take or use. But soon they discovered it was not so.

As the colony progressed and increasingly expanded, the natives found themselves being forced to leave their territories, they were left without their food and water supplies. On the other hand, the whites grew ever more impatient with the natives stealing their scarce food supplies, their cattle, and possessions; however, they were under instructions not to harm them, so there was little they could do to prevent this. The tensions were high.

In his book *The Other Side of the Frontier* Henry Reynolds argues that the situation “in the field” was not polarised, that the indigenous population was much more open to communication and cohabitation with the whites than superficial historians would have people believe (Location No. 1853). He enumerates various accounts of exchange between the two peoples, be it that of objects, of food, or other things. Reynolds speaks of the Europeans’ influence on the Aboriginal cuisine, culture (painting, music, dance), and of Aboriginal assistance in Europeans’ way through the hostile environment. Yet, too great a difference between the two cultures was bound to end in violence, with the Europeans trying to impose their culture in their ruthless pursuit of the “free land”, and the natives trying to resist the invasion of the white settlers and fighting for their survival. Numerous are accounts of such instances of frontier violence all over Australia’s newly founded colonies.



### 3.2 Frontier Violence in Colonial Australia

It was not long before tensions between the settlers and the natives escalated in violence. At times it was overtly physical, resulting in many episodes of killings and massacres. At other times violence was less overt; it included destruction of health, standards of living, language, faith and cultural identity (Kociumbas 77).

The first example of violence committed by the settlers comes from the colony's very beginning. In 1789, the British settlement at Sydney, NSW, was in a difficult situation. Crops failed, the food supplies were scarce since the settlers quickly exhausted local resources of fish and game. Both the natives and the settlers were hungry and the tensions were high between them. Since there was no policy of extermination; moreover, the natives were to be treated with respect and as subjects to the Crown, the problem was solved, Kociumbas argues, with the outbreak of a deadly disease, variola (80).

“Resembling smallpox, this fatal pestilence caused the deaths of an unknown number of Aboriginal men, women, and children not only in the immediate vicinity of the settlement, but far inland where it travelled via indigenous gift-exchange networks and social relationships. Making food-gathering impossible and eroding faith in traditional medicine and cosmology, the illness also destroyed morale among survivors, the more so since it visibly attacked none of the white settlers” (80).

The causes of the 1789 epidemic have been the subject of a continuing debate among Australian historians, whether it had been unleashed deliberately or not. Though it was not listed among the medical supplies that accompanied the ships from England, it is known that variola was brought with the fleet (81). Both the medical fraternity and the officer class knew of its deadly effects on indigenous population. The whole issue of variola has been covered in mystery until the present day because there is no written evidence of its use, or any kind of medical records pointing to the

treatment of the sick at the time of the outbreak. Moreover, what is very significant, gaps can be found in the journals of Surgeon White for that particular period, as well as the absence of diaries of Randolph Clark, the man who wrote in detail about the colony's everyday activities (81). The smallpox epidemic of 1789, Kociumbas argues, tells a lot about genocide and its denial. Though it was not denied, it was represented as a tragic sideline. The epidemic also paved the way for the stereotypes on the weaknesses of the Aboriginal race and their consequent "fading away" (82).

Another example of violence committed by the settlers on the natives happened several decades later. It was one of the most famous instances of frontier violence in Australian history, and it occurred in 1838, at a place called Myall Creek, on the property of one Henry Dangar. The attack was meant as a revenge for stock-theft and "cattle-rushing" or stampeding. Even though the workers on the station had no idea who the culprits were, they found an encampment of Aborigines some forty miles from the site and decided to attack them (Hughes, Location No. 7015). On 10 June 1838 a dozen armed stockmen rounded up twenty-eight unarmed Aboriginal men, women and children, drove them to a killing-ground nearby, and brutally murdered them. However, among them was a white witness who turned informer against the other eleven (Location No. 7021). Although in their first trial all of them were acquitted, in a second trial seven of them were found guilty, and hanged; four went free. This case was politically explosive and it was Governor George Gipps himself who expedited the prosecution and execution of whites (Moses, 2004, 7). Had it not been for him, the case would never have come to court at all. It was one of the very rare occasions that a capital offence was enforced for the murder of Aborigines. Although the Myall Creek massacre did cause public outrage, it did nothing "to stop the majority of those who believed the Australian version of Manifest destiny" – a belief that white people were not only meant to, but were chosen by God to inhabit new territories and bring

civilization, no matter the cost (Hughes, Location No. 7026). What it did do; however, it made the settlers more careful about the way they performed their punitive expeditions and massacres, as the following example will show.

Just a few years after Myall Creek, in 1843, an incident took place at Warrigal Creek, in the Gippsland district of the British-Australian colony of Port Phillip (now Victoria). There, local pastoralists carried out a massacre of Aborigines belonging to the local *Kurnai* people. It was a very young district for the first settlers have arrived in 1840. What was very problematic was the fact that law and order existed only in name, for it was not until late 1843 that the first Crown Lands Commissioner had arrived (Bartrop 199). The major problem was the cattle-based pastoralism of the settlers, who simply took over pieces of Aboriginal land and set their cattle to grazing. The *Kurnai* tried to resist them, spearing both cattle and the settlers, trying to get them to leave. One of the local settlers, Angus McMillan, having lost his nephew to Aborigines' attack, decided to retaliate and organized a posse to track down and kill those responsible (200). Before setting out McMillan warned twenty of his gathered men that the "mission had to be carried out in utmost secrecy" and made them swear a blood oath never to tell the truth of what they were about to commit (201). They did not want to end up prosecuted like the perpetrators of the Myall Creek massacre. Yet, accounts of the crime do exist, and their fragments put together provide a story of what happened: They went after the blacks, and found them around a large waterhole, which then the settlers surrounded. They shot at them as long as their ammunition lasted. More than a hundred of natives were killed (201). The killing did not stop at Warrigal Creek; in the following years Gippsland became one large killing field, committed by private individuals in a private capacity (202). They were marked by silence and denial, a legacy that

would become deeply rooted in Australian culture well until the second half of the twentieth century.

From 1820s on, pervasive settlement also occurred in one of the largest Australian colonies – Queensland. Queensland frontiers covered a vast extent of territory; 1.73 million square kilometres, almost one quarter of the Australian total (Evans, 2004, 162). With the beginning of pastoralist settlements around 1840 the frontier spread rapidly. Since the Queensland government was the most open to implementing policies that the settlers desired, Queensland’s history had arguably become a colony having “the most troublesome frontier story of all the Australian colonies” (160). By 1862, it is argued, Central Queensland became the centre of Australian “pioneer warfare” (155). Both sides suffered great losses. Reacting to dispossession of their territory, the natives killed some forty settlers, both men and women. The settlers, supported by Native Police, retaliated fiercely. “Untold hundreds” of Aborigines were killed, perhaps some five hundred in total: the *Jiman*, *Wadja*, *Kairi*, and *Darumbal* people were reduced to remnant groups (156). The violence lasted for decades. By 1890s the Queensland settler society had grown to 400,000 people, and the indigenous population had shrunk to 25,000 – a demographic slump of some ninety percent (164). The Queensland frontier was, Evans argues, one of the most violent places on Earth (167). Despite all the slaughter and the general brutality against natives, no Queenslander was prosecuted for a crime against Aboriginal person until 1883, when a Townsville man was sentenced for the rape of an Aboriginal child (168).

Not so far away, in the southwest Queensland, another indigenous tribe, *Karuwali*, suffered similar fate. Until 1868 the *Karuwali* lived untouched by the settler invasion. However, in that year the settler pastoralists arrived and gradually seized more than seventeen-thousand square miles of Aboriginal land (Lukin Watson 175). Herds and flocks increased, and the land lost

much of its fauna and vegetation, making it difficult for Aboriginal people to provide food for themselves. Another problem was the predominantly male settler society. The shortage of sexual partners was resolved with assault, abduction, and rape of black women and children (179). Reports made by policemen show that these incidents were not one-off events, but recurring behaviour. Even though the natives were British subjects under British law, neither police officers nor anyone else decided to take any action against the perpetrators (179). Pastoralists even used black women as sexual offer to recruit labor. The result of sexual abuse, aside from mental harm, was the spread of venereal diseases. Mental harm also came from forcing Christianity unto the indigenous population. This also included preventing the “barbarous” practice initiations (182). Forbidding initiation ceremonies meant preventing the social reproduction of Aboriginal life. In indigenous communities knowledge, also referred to as the “Law”, was passed on through a succession of initiation grades. “Prevention of initiation ceremonies”, Lukin Watson argues, “threatened the authority structures of tribal life, the development of future leaders, and the transfer of important social knowledge on which Aboriginal life depended” (183). In addition to these indirect assaults on the *Karuwali* tribe, overt violence also took place. Several massacres were recorded, such as the one at Coonchere Sandhill on Diamantina River, where more than one hundred men, women, and children perished; or another one at Kalidgiworra Waterhole. The combination of land dispossession, starvation, abductions, assaults, sexual disease, and massacres eventually brought to the disintegration of the *Karuwali* tribe. *Karuwali* experiences during white settlement were not unique; the destruction of other Aboriginal societies proceeded in similar ways wherever land was suitable for grazing sheep and cattle (189).

The above described instances of frontier violence show that there existed a pattern in the process of colonisation on Australian mainland: land dispossession, massacres, rapes, abductions, and spreading of diseases. To say that these things were done intentionally would perhaps be incorrect, for the settlers did what they could to make a life for themselves in this hostile environment, supported by the government (or better to say, the lack of it). Two so profoundly different traditions, the one of private property versus egalitarianism, simply could not coexist. Even though the natives often proved themselves as courageous defenders, and demonstrated skillful resistance, the European colonisation proved to be fatal for many indigenous tribes.

In the history of Australian settlement; however, there was a place of particular violence that left “an indelible stain” on the British Empire, being cited often by many historians and genocide scholars as a site of clear case of genocide: it was Tasmania.

## **4 Tasmania**

### **4.1 The Colony's Early Years**

The first name of Tasmanian island was Van Diemen's Land, and it was only in 1856, after all the violence discussed in this chapter had finished, that it was officially renamed Tasmania. Yet, since Tasmania, and not Van Diemen's Land, is most often used in discussions of violence that occurred on the island, especially when the issue of genocide is mentioned, the name Tasmania will be used throughout the text.

In the history of Australian colonisation Tasmania holds a special place as a site of particular violence. It was considered by many a Hell on Earth. Whereas majority of New South Wales convicts were not hard-core criminals, but people who found themselves in difficult life situations, and ended up there working as "government men", or "assigned men", the convicts sent to Tasmania were the worst kind, repeated offenders. With years the island became a dump "for hundreds of Sydney convicts who were too turbulent, lazy or brutish to be useful in New South Wales" (Hughes, Location No. 9231). Penal settlements Macquarie Harbor, and later Port Arthur, became synonyms for cruelty.

Having heard that French ships were sailing along the Tasmanian coast, the British hurried and founded the first settlement on Tasmania on 12 September 1803, at Risdon Cove. After the first year, the colony was divided in two parts: the southern capital was moved to Hobart, and the northern colony was administered from Launceston (Clements, 2014, 19). The early years were extremely difficult. Food was scarce, so the settlers had to depend on indigenous foods. Kangaroo meat became the staple food, and the more the colonists hunted them, the more their

number plummeted. This forced the hunters to move further into the interior, spreading onto the natives' territory. The violence, once again, was inevitable.

Aboriginal Tasmanians were remarkably resilient people. Like mainland Aborigines, they were not a homogenous group, but were divided into tribes that had their own language and rituals. A tribe usually consisted of thirty to eighty individuals, who shared a common dialect and migratory pattern (25). Occasionally, they would meet to trade, socialise, perform ceremonies, or arrange marriages. They, too, were territorial, having sacred sites that were central to their identity (25). Passing from one tribe's territory to another's had to be negotiated to avoid conflict.

Gender relations were strongly patriarchal, and women were treated badly. Domestic violence was normal. During migration periods women had to carry everything, because men hunted. Women also collected shellfish and plant materials, and prepared food, built huts and took care of children (27). Like on mainland Australia, women were offered as a sign of hospitality to newcomers. In the early years of white settlement some fringe-dwelling tribes even prostituted their women to the colonists either to gain favour with them, or to procure dogs and introduced foods (38).

Native Tasmanians led rich spiritual lives. They were animists, "who perceived the agency of spirit-beings in all the workings of nature" (28). They, too, had mythologies, through which they made sense of the world around them, although the details of their spiritual lives are not known. Tasmanian creation myths were very similar to the Dreaming myths of mainland Australia, having both "evolved from an earlier common belief system" (28). In their belief, all humans possessed spirits. The north-east chief, Mannalargenna, for example, spoke constantly of a



powerful guiding spirit (30). Mannalargenna was a revered shaman, but it was believed that all native Tasmanians had a personal totem spirit (30).

Death was very important in Tasmanian culture. Tasmanians performed funerary and mourning rituals. Human remains were thought to be especially powerful, and the natives often carried them as charms (31). They also performed ceremonies to call upon a lurking spirit for some divine information. Tasmanians often performed ceremonies and rituals for a variety of purposes: storytelling, entertainment, or healing. Ceremonies of all sorts were central to Tasmanian cultural life. So, once the colonists arrived, and started gradually to occupy more and more of the natives' land, these became more and more difficult to perform. In addition to that, the food became more difficult to procure as now the newcomers also hunted game for survival. Repeating the pattern from the mainland, it did not take long for the violence to ensue.

The first recorded incident of violence occurred a couple of months after the establishment of the first settlement. It took place at Risdon Cove on 3 May 1804. Around noon, a group of over one hundred natives, including men, women, and children, came out of the bush. Their intentions were not clear. One of the witnesses, a former convict Edward White, years later told a Committee for Aboriginal Affairs that they were just hunting kangaroos, they carried clubs, but no spears; they were not a war party (Hughes, Location No. 10337). Yet, he informed the soldiers, who then loaded their weapons, marched on the tribespeople, and shot them. The Aboriginal death toll is uncertain, but according to the sources it was not a large-scale massacre (Clements, 2014, 35). However, it must have remained firmly in the memories of local tribes, because after that incident, the south eastern-tribes kept their distance for a period of time.

The next wave of violence occurred during 1806 and 1807, the drought period. Over a period of nine months, several whites were killed or wounded by the southern tribes. The attacks were primarily a response to specific infractions, such as killing game on their territory (36). The colonists were particularly cruel: sometimes they would kill the natives for sport; other times, it was rumoured, the colonists would shoot them to feed their dogs (Hughes, Location No. 10 349).

Another reason for violence between the two groups was the natives' women. As mentioned earlier, at the beginning some tribesmen offered their women to the colonists either to establish alliance with white men, or to procure dogs and newly-introduced foods (Clements, 2014, 38). However, just like on the mainland, when the colonists did not reciprocate, it would make the natives angry and seek revenge. As more and more settlers arrived, usually alone, the number of rapes and abductions of natives' women, who were derogatorily called *gins*, grew exponentially. Women were usually taken in campfire ambushes, and after being raped they were either released or killed (38). Naturally, the native men sought revenge.

The pattern of violence between the two cultures was fully established by 1815. It went on against the proclamations by lieutenant governor that the natives were under the full protection of English law. All three of governors, Collins, Davey and Sorell, issued them (Hughes, Location No. 10 355). No piece of paper could go against the reality of the invasion: the settlers were increasingly grabbing the natives' land, food supply, and women. The natives' response was by no means passive; every time they were attacked in one way or another, they would wait for their chance, and then retaliate. So, in a couple of years, what started off as a war of random encounter eventually turned into a war of extermination.

## 4.2 The Black War 1824 – 1831

With every year more colonists arrived, and the settlements and the stock-pastures spread. By the late 1820s there was a roaring boom in sheep-farming and wool exports. Naturally, as the colony progressed, it was taking more and more of the natives' land, and the sheep were destroying the natives' food base by displacing kangaroos and other game (Location No. 10381). The natives fought back. From 1825 to 1828 the number of the attacks on white settlements more than doubled each year (Clements, 2014, 42). The natives learned not to attack *en masse*, but instead they harassed the fringes of the settlement, the stock-huts and shepherds' cottages (Hughes, Location No. 10394). The problem of "suppressing the blacks" had to be resolved. There were three options: removing the natives; conciliation and amicable existence; or exterminating the blacks. The third option became increasingly popular with every passing month (Clements, 2014, 44).

The government's primary martial response was to send pursuit parties and roving parties. Their impact was negligible; for every success, they experienced a dozen of failures (45). There were two reasons for such an outcome. First, pursuit parties consisted mostly of soldiers and convicts, neither of whom had a choice in participating, so it is safe to assume they had little incentive to perform the task. Second, when natives knew they were being pursued, they could easily escape from the enemy, for they knew the terrain well, and how and where to move (45). Roving parties were full-time patrols. There were two types: military, consisting of soldiers and convict field police, and civilian, consisting almost entirely of assigned convicts, who served on the promise of reduced sentences (46). The leaders of civilian roving parties were "trustworthy individuals" such as Jorgen Jorgensen, Gilbert Robertson and John Batman, who received grants

of land in exchange for their services. These roving parties were sometimes successful, but usually only when accompanied by a cooperative native guide (46).

Yet, nothing could stop the natives from fighting back. The violence perpetrated against the settlers was a resistance movement; they used force to defend themselves against an invading enemy. As the years progressed, they gave up on targeted revenge, which became increasingly unmanageable because of the growing number of the colonists (65). Spreading of the white settlements made the natives feel unsafe to move over much of their territory, up to the point when “it became too dangerous to hunt, and they were forced to adopt a war economy based on plunder” (67).

Native violence enraged many settlers to the boiling point, and they were furious with the government’s failure to protect them. By the late 1820s the natives’ brutal attacks, combined with their ability to disappear without a trace, produced an image of them as “magical, even demonic” (105). The settlers’ pressure on Governor Arthur to do something was immense. So in April 1828, the Demarcation Order was proclaimed, by which the natives were prevented from entering the eastern and central settled districts, thus confining them to the Western area, which consisted of swamps and vast mountains, and was practically devoid of game (Lemkin 174). It brought no results. The order was then superseded in November 1828 by the declaration of Martial Law, which basically removed all common law restrictions on killing natives, and might have given the colonists the confidence to do so openly, were it not for Governor Arthur’s strict emphasis that the use of arms was the last resort and that every bloodshed would be checked (Clements, 2014, 54). This was then followed by the Order offering money for the capture of the natives. These were the most important government promulgations, but in total there were dozens of them.

The settlers were continually hunting down the natives, scouring countryside for weeks at a time, hoping they would capture or destroy them. However, hunting natives was far more difficult than hunting game. The settlers would usually find them by night, having seen the smoke produced by the campfire; they would surround the sleeping tribe, and most often would kill them (73). Killing the natives as they slept was beneath British honour, but they had to be stopped, and this was the most effective way.

The Tasmanian Aborigines proved to be extraordinary resilient warriors. They were the peoples who celebrated martial prowess (80). Many are the stories of the bravery of some of their tribal chiefs: Woorady, Tongerlongerter, Mannalargenna and Timmy. The natives learned to stalk the colonists and attack them at their most vulnerable (84). Their attacks were always performed during the day. Even though they could have acquired the settlers' weapons, the natives continued to use their own: stones, spears and waddies. They simply recognised that, for fighting a guerrilla war, on the terrain on which they lived, their weapons was more appropriate than the settlers' (83). The terrain was also a big part of the success of the natives' resistance. Unlike on mainland Australia, where, even though hostile to newcomers, most of the country was flat, the island of Tasmania was a nightmare for the settlers: it was a rugged and harsh terrain, covered with mountains and swamps, and had horrible weather conditions. The settlers simply did not know how and where to move. The natives, on the other hand, had lived there for thousands of years, and knew every metre of the land. However, in the end, all this proved not to be enough.

In September Governor Arthur finally capitulated to the public pressure and organised a mass-mobilisation of all able-bodied men to defend the colony (126). The Proclamation of October 1, 1830 sealed the fate of the natives. A new Martial Law directed that the natives "be

hunted down by concerted action and driven forth from all their places of refuge on the island” (Lemkin 175). Arthur established the so-called “Black Line”, which comprised some 2200 men, out of whom 550 soldiers, 440 free men, 800 assigned convicts and 400 ticket-of-leave convicts. The line was divided into three divisions, and together they formed a front which was over 300 kilometres long (Clements, 2014, 126). The plan was to sweep the island from north to south “with the view of converging on the Oyster Bay and Big River tribes, and driving them into *cul de sac* of Tasman’s Peninsula” (Lemkin 175).

It started off on 7 October 1830, and ended some seven weeks later, on 26 November 1830. The Line was a complete failure. Aside from the capture of two native men, nothing else was achieved by the operation (Clements, 2014, 144). The reasons for the Line’s failure were many. First, most of the men in the Line, like soldiers, assigned convicts, or ticket-of-leave convicts were not there by choice, so their enthusiasm was low. Second, the weather conditions were awful; by November, the men were frozen from the wind and rain (136). They did not have adequate clothes, or enough food rations. But, the ruggedness of the terrain was the greatest problem; nothing was a greater obstacle than the landscape itself. In such environment a fight against the enemy, to which this terrain was home, felt like “a battle with a shadow” (144).

However, although the settlers could not have even imagined it, the Black War would soon come to its end. In 1831, the natives made less than one-third of the attacks than the previous year (155). This had little to do with the Black Line; it was simply that years of warfare with the settlers had drastically reduced the natives’ strength. They lost many of their peoples not just in the killings, but in other ways, as well. As they were often ambushed, the natives had to run away quickly. What this meant was leaving the wounded, the weak and the old behind. In the height of warfare some tribes even resorted to infanticide, so that the crying of their children,

*picanninis*, would not give away their location. So, on the New Year's Eve 1831 a group of once powerful Mairremmener people, of whom just sixteen men, nine women and one child remained, surrendered themselves (168).

### **4.3 The Conciliation and the Final Demise**

A man called George Augustus Robinson played a significant role in the natives' surrender. Known as the "Conciliator", his task was to travel across the island in a series of "friendly missions" and to persuade the native population to leave their territories and move to safety.

Robinson showed interest in the natives from the moment he had arrived in Tasmania. His vision was to assimilate these people into the white society by showing kindness and understanding, once he had come to understand their language and their ways (Hughes, Location No. 10516). When he heard in 1828 that Governor Arthur was looking for someone who might be able to conciliate the natives and the settlers, he immediately applied himself for the task. When the first natives were captured, it was decided they would be transported to a nearby island, Bruny Island. There, Robinson immediately turned attention to their "material and spiritual improvement" (Clements, 2014, 163). However, the natives died quicker than he could convert them. In six-month time some two-thirds of the Bruny Islanders died from respiratory disease.

Meanwhile, as the war continued on Tasmania, Robinson suggested to go unarmed into the wilderness and to convince the native tribes to surrender peacefully. With the help of native women who had accompanied him, he was very successful, and finished his work in 1833, having brought in 159 natives in the period of four years (Lemkin 176). When he negotiated with the natives, he promised them their customs were to be respected, they would have whatever

they wanted – tea, sugar, flour, blankets, and other things, that he would bring their women back. Robinson assured them once the violence was over they could return to their country (Clements, 2014, 178). It never happened.

So, in 1834, the last Aboriginal Tasmanians followed Robinson to a camp set up on Flinders Island in Bass Strait. For the next fifteen years it became their home, and for the majority of them their grave (Lemkin 176). Robinson planned to Europeanize them. The natives were given clothes, new names, and elementary schooling. However, they longed to return to their country. This lifestyle caused high mortality rate among them; they died of diseases and deracination. (177). In 1839 Robinson left Flinders Island and returned to mainland Australia. The survivors were returned to the mainland in 1847; forty-four natives were removed to Oyster Cove on the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, near Hobart. The conditions there were no better than those on Flinders Island; many natives got sick and died, and “the rest lost heart and fell into a state of apathy” (177). The last male Aborigine, William Lanne, died in 1869. Truganina<sup>1</sup>, the last aboriginal woman died in 1876.

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<sup>1</sup> There are various versions of her name: Hughes uses Trucanini, Lemkin Truganina, Clements uses both Truganini and Trugernanna



#### **4.4 The North-West Frontier and the Sea Frontier**

Though the Black War took place mostly in the interior and the eastern part of the island, the two frontiers are also important to mention, especially the sea frontier, which produced the first generation of mixed-descent Tasmanians who have, in recent decades, “established themselves as a powerful cultural and political presence in the state” (Clements, 2014, 191).

The north-west scene of Black War was similar to the eastern one, but with some differences. Timing was one of them. Violence in the east began in 1804 and was over by 1832; in the north-west it began only in 1827 and lasted until 1842 (180). The type of colonists was different, as well. They were exclusively servants of Van Diemen’s Land Company, an enterprise that was given a monopoly on the region. Its chief agent was Edward Curr (180).

One more time sex was the reason for the conflict. The colonists abducted women, wanting to have sex with them; the natives resented it and speared one of the men; and then the colonists killed a native (181). So, once more, a cycle of violence had begun. North-west Tasmania was a place of a particularly sordid strain of white violence, where men saw the killings of the natives as acts of honour. The natives were killed, poisoned, abducted, and raped. Particularly famous was the case of the so-called Cape Grim massacre, where a group of natives was trapped on the beach and suffered high mortality (183). Curr ignored his magisterial duty, and declined to investigate the matter. Later, in a letter to the company’s directors he admitted, echoing the Australian version of Manifest Destiny that “my whole and sole object was to kill them, and this because my full conviction was and is that the laws of nature and of God and of this country all conspired to render this my duty” (qtd in Clements, 183).

Sixteen acts of violence against the natives were recorded in the north-west, most of them involving only one or two victims. Yet, by 1834, when Robinson collected what he believed were the last people; the north-west Tasmanians had been wiped out (188). Still, they resurfaced briefly some years later in 1839 and 1842, attacking company men and property; however, after their final attack in February 1842, they disappeared forever (189). The company's men clearly dominated the conflict, and the only force of law was Edward Curr, the man who himself wanted to see the natives extirpated.

The sea frontier was a place of encounter between the European sealers of the Bass Strait and the Aborigines of northern and eastern Tasmania. The sealers were predominantly run-away convicts, brutalised and sex-deprived men. They kidnapped Aboriginal women and enslaved them. In addition to being sexually exploited, women had to perform many tasks, such as making clothes, diving for shellfish, preparing food, and other things. Men also prostituted them and took sadistic pleasure in torturing them. The practice of abduction and enslavement became regular by the 1820s (193). What eased the circumstances for the sealers was the fact they took the women to the islands, so they did not have to fear retaliatory attacks.

These enslaved women, known as "Tyereelore" among the natives, lived their lives in suffering and misery. As Robinson promised the natives during negotiations he would return their women to them, he really did secure the release of some two dozen of these women between November 1830 and May 1831 (202). However, several Tyereelore women stayed with the sealers after the rest moved to Flinders Island, and "within a generation they and their ageing masters had established a functioning community that still exists today (199).

## **5 Remembering Tasmania: History of Debates on the Frontier Violence**

The history of writings on the issue of occupying Tasmanian territory and what it meant for the Aboriginal Tasmanians started in 1835 and lasts until the present moment. Even though the frontier violence in Tasmania has long and frequently been cited internationally as having witnessed a clear-cut case of genocide, such a characterisation is rarely adopted within Australia (Curthoys, 2008, 229).

Lyndall Ryan divided the historical overview of the debate on Tasmanian violence into three historical periods: 1835-1870; 1875-1939; and 1948-2008 (39). In the first period, drawn mostly from oral testimony of the settlers, the belief in widespread massacre dominated the debate. In the second period, based on archival sources and the doctrine of self-exterminating Aborigine, the belief in massacre denial took hold. The third period was marked by a fierce contest for control of the debate based on different interpretations of the sources: one side has argued for massacre denial, while the other side has claimed that there had been many instances of massacre and the violence was widespread (39).

### **5.1 Nineteenth-Century Writings**

The first writers on the issue of Tasmania's violence argued that settlers and their government were guilty of Aboriginal Tasmanians' near-annihilation. Henry Melville, a radical journalist and editor of the local *Colonial Times* newspaper set the parameters of the debate (40). He criticized white settlers in general, and Tasmanian government decision makers in particular for their treatment of Aboriginal Tasmanians (Madley, 78). In 1836 Melville gave his account of the Black War in *The History of Van Diemen's Land, From the Year 1824 to 1835*, in which he claimed that Aboriginal Tasmanians "had been treated worse than were any of the American

tribes by the Spanish” (qtd. in Madley 79). John West, a congregational minister and journalist, arrived in Tasmania four years after the war and soon realised that it had been a defining moment in Tasmania’s history (Ryan 41). He published *The History of Tasmania* in 1852. West had no doubts that what happened during the Black War had been a massacre (41). West’s seminal work on Tasmania was followed by James Bonwick’s *The Last of Tasmanians*, published in 1870. In the book Bonwick mentioned sixteen instances of massacre, with a loss of at least 300 Aboriginal lives. “If any reader was in doubt that massacre was widely used to dispose of hundreds of Aborigines in the Black War”, Ryan writes, “then Bonwick’s account appeared to offer more than enough evidence to dispel it” (42).

By the time Bonwick’s book was published, the memory of events of the war was beginning to fade and some colonists were worried about the colony’s reputation on the international scale. So they needed to make their past “more palatable” (42).

James Erskine Calder, the colony’s former surveyor general, wanted to restore the colony’s tarnished reputation. Calder searched for the official sources of the war, and found what he called “nineteen awful volumes” of papers in the vaults under the Colonial Secretary’s Office in Hobart (qtd. in Ryan 43). The papers gave a different story of the Black War for, instead of reports of massacres, he found numerous accounts of “fictitious fights”, which “were found to be utterly false on investigation” (qtd. in Ryan 43). This led him to conclude that the natives were responsible for their own demise and, from that moment on, massacre denial took hold (43). Reynolds notes that this “cult of forgetfulness” emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, during a period of growing Australian nationalism and campaigning for Australian federation, and continued for decades (Reynolds, 1999, 92).

## 5.2 Historiography after the UN Convention on Genocide

However, things changed in the light of the aftermath of the World War II. A new term, genocide, was introduced, and it largely displaced the earlier terms of extirpation, extinction and extermination (Curthoys, 2008, 231). What was important for modern historians was that Lemkin's aims were not only to establish a new crime, and mechanisms for its prevention, but also "to reinterpret the course of human history in light of his new concept" (231). Lemkin developed a framework for looking at a range of historical cases, a "Revised Outline for Genocide Cases", in which he thought important to look at the following aspects: background, conditions leading to genocide, methods and techniques of genocide, the genocidists, propaganda, responses of victim group, responses of outside groups, and aftermath (Curthoys, 2006, 164). In the chapter on Tasmania, Lemkin applied this analytical methodology.

Following his "Outline", Lemkin concluded that genocide in Tasmania did occur. The condition leading to genocide was that of a colonial expansion. As for methods and techniques of genocide, they were executed on a physical, biological and cultural level. Massacres (such as Risdon Cove Massacre in 1804) and forceful deportations occurred. Families were separated, women and children stolen by settlers, sealers, convicts and bushrangers; men were brutalized. When on Flinders Island, the natives were taught how to read, write and many of them were Christianized. These crimes were rationalized as imposing culture/civilization on savages and protecting whites from the natives' attacks. All this resulted in depopulation, moral deterioration and finally the supposed extermination of the full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanians. In answering the question of who is guilty of the genocide Lemkin states that both the government and the individuals are to blame:

The blame for this destruction of a race lies on the cruelty and lack of understanding of human beings, on the cruelty of the selfish, grasping settlers and convicts who attacked and aroused the spirit of revenge of the originally peaceable natives, and on the lack of understanding of the men who in the end strove to protect them and make them conform to the standard of an alien civilization, and killed them with misguided kindness. (Lemkin 179)

The very same year the UN Convention on Genocide came to life, 1948, a seminal work on violence in Tasmania appeared: *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* by a Tasmanian-born journalist Clive Turnbull. The book was written in the shadow of Turnbull's experiences as a war correspondent in Europe and Asia, and was the first text to draw an analogue between the Nazis' attempts to exterminate the Jews and British attempts to exterminate the Tasmanian Aborigines (Ryan 44). "*Black War* signalled a challenge to the comfortable extinction discourse that had prevailed since the 1870s" (Curthoys, 2008, 238). Turnbull was convinced that massacre played a key role in the extermination of the Aborigines, and he placed the blame squarely with the British authorities who made the decision to colonize the island, first as a prison, and later as a place of profit (238).

As the word "genocide" had come to replace words such as "extinction", "extirpation" and "extermination", there had been a change in reviewing the cases of violence:

"Where *extermination*, *extirpation*, and *extinction* placed the Tasmanian events in a long ago past, out there away from the present, *genocide* connected them to an ongoing present, to legal and political as well as historical considerations. To call something "genocide" rather than "extermination" was somehow seen as far more serious for modern Australians; the questions of intent and responsibility were so much closer to home" (241).

The application of the term "genocide" to Tasmania operated quite differently in international scholarship and Australian historiography. Genocide scholarship had really got under way in the 1970s, and grew dramatically in the 1980s. Tasmania was, possibly, readily accepted as a clear

case of genocide for two reasons: the fact that everyone “knew” that Tasmania was a case of colonial extinction, therefore, it had to be a case of genocide; and second, the central role played by the government in controlling relations with Aboriginal people in Tasmania seemed to exemplify the emphasis on the role of the state in much genocide theory and scholarship (241).

Local historiography went in a different direction. There was not a great deal of historical research into the Tasmanian events for two decades after the publication of Turnball’s book. Despite the fact that the 1950s and 1960s were a period of rapid growth in the writing of Australian history, there was no particular interest in the history of frontier violence.

This lack of interest either in the frontier violence, or in the Aboriginal society in general, was what W.E.H. Stanner, a famous anthropologist and sociologist called the “great Australian silence”. In 1968 Stanner was invited by ABC to present his work in a series of talks, the so-called Boyer Lectures. Speaking on the subject of Aboriginal Australians, Stanner said that they still occupied a marginal position within Australian society, and this could be seen in particular in the writings on Australia. He enumerated several books on Australian history and civilization, noting how almost all of them displayed either marginal interest, or no interest at all in the native society. Such a pattern could not be accidental, Stanner claimed, it was “a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape” (25). He called for acknowledging of Aboriginal history, and making it part of Australian history.

### 5.3 New Revisionists

This happened soon. A number of historians in the 1970s and the 1980s began to look at Tasmanian history more closely. The most comprehensive study was written by Lyndall Ryan, whose book *Aboriginal Tasmanians* was published in 1981. Ryan's account generally supported Turnbull's story of violence and disregard for human life; however, she rejected the notion of extinction. She wrote about the effects of the loss of the native women to the sealers as double-edged: on the one hand, this loss was an important reason for population decline of the natives in certain areas; on the other it "saved Aboriginal Tasmanian society from extinction" (qtd in Curthoys, 2008, 242).

"She emphasized that modern indigenous Tasmanians are descended from these unions, and traced the history of their descendants in considerable detail. Recognizing the permeability of racial boundaries in a way the traditional extinction thesis did not, Ryan regarded the descendants as they regard themselves, as indications of the survival, against all odds, of the indigenous peoples of Tasmania" (242)

The same year, 1981, Henry Reynolds published his famous book *The Other Side of Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*. In it, reconstructing from the archives, but also from the oral stories told to him by the natives, he offered their view of the process of colonisation. He tried to show that things were not polarized, that there existed communication, cooperation, trade and general mutual interest between two sides; however, because of very different, almost opposite lifestyles and ideologies, the two societies were bound to end in conflict.

A historian and art critic Robert Hughes argued genocide took place in Tasmania. In his book *The Fatal Shore* (1986) he declared that Tasmanian Aborigines were "shot like kangaroos and



poisoned like dogs” (Location No. 3146). As for what happened to them, Hughes thought it was “the only true genocide in English colonial history” (Location No. 3149).

Since then, there have been many books, theses and articles published on the issue of Tasmania’s frontier violence by scholars such as Lloyd Robson, Brian Plomley, Cassandra Pybus, Tony Barta, Raymond Evans, Bill Thorpe Ian McFarlane, James Boyce, and others.

In the late 1990s political developments again had an impact on Australian historical scholarship. The Human Rights Commission’s *Bringing Them Home* report of 1997, dealing with the history and effects of Aboriginal child removal brought the question of genocide under public eye once more, renewing the interest in the subject among Australian historians such as A. Dirk Moses, Tony Barta and Henry Reynolds.

## **5.4 History Wars**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Tasmania’s history became the epicentre for the controversy known as the “History Wars”. In 2002 Keith Windschuttle self-published *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen’s Land, 1803-1847*, the first of a projected series of volumes in which he proposes to re-examine the early history of relations between the White settlers and the indigenous populations of Australia (Ianziti 2). Rather than examining early Australian history, Windschuttle has been more concerned with recent Australian historiography. His book, Ianziti notes, derives its power from being an act of accusation, an accusation that a number of leading academic historians, including Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds, have falsified the picture of race relations in early Australia (2).

Windschuttle's thesis is that historians like Reynolds and Ryan have "fabricated" a version of the early White settlement in Tasmania. As a proof, he offers a "critical reading" of the primary sources cited by historians in question, pointing out they have quoted wrong numbers mentioned in historical records in order to suit their theses.<sup>2</sup> The findings Windschuttle offers are "sensational", leading him to believe he has "uncovered enough evidence to warrant a charge of malpractice against the historians examined" (3). This is the first step towards a recovery of Australia's true past, the one in which not only was there no genocide in Tasmania, but "the so-called "Black War" was a minor crime wave by two Europeanized black bushrangers, followed by an outbreak of robbery, assault and murder by tribal Aborigines" (Windschuttle 26). Windschuttle acknowledges that full-blooded Tasmanian Aborigines did die out, but he posits that they caused their own demise by trading their women and being susceptible to European diseases. In the end, Windschuttle reveals the goal of his work, which is "a defence of the integrity of both the nation itself and the civilization from which it derives" (29).

Commenting on Windschuttle's work, Ianziti notes that Windschuttle's tactic has been to exert maximum leverage from the errors he has uncovered (7). According to Ianziti, he appears to believe that, in order to know what really happened, one just needs to consult the record. Yet, the task of the historian is to interpret the historical documents into the patterns of meaning; therefore, "the same set of documents is subject to multiple interpretations" (7). This is something that Windschuttle does not seem to be aware of.

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<sup>2</sup> As for the numbers, Reynolds mentions that it was his guessed number of 20 000 of killed Aborigines in the whole of Australia that caused the great controversy (Location No. 176). As for the number of Aboriginal Tasmanians, both him and Clements claim that at the beginning of the settlement there were around 4000 natives, this number being halved by 1830, and then dropped drastically in the next 10 years. Lyndall Ryan offers a number of 6000 of Aboriginal Tasmanians in 1804, only to be reduced to 250 by 1830 (The Black Line, 5). Hughes proposes a number of 300 000 natives in the whole of Australia in 1788 (Location No. 453), and 3000-4000 Aboriginal Tasmanians in 1803 (Location No. 3139). A. Dirk Moses proposes, and Adam Jones echoes the number of 750 000 Aboriginal Australians in 1788, which was reduced to mere 31 000 by 1911 (Genocide and Settler Society, 18).

In 2001 Reynolds published *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History*, in which he was very reluctant to characterise genocide in Tasmania as such. He explains that there is not enough evidence that genocide occurred: a very successful resistance was offered by the natives, resulting in guerrilla warfare, and no *dolus specialis* was pronounced on the part of the Governor Arthur. Moreover, “a key British intention [...] was always to treat the Aborigines with amity and kindness” (qtd. in Docker 77).

The problem of intent has remained the main issue in defining whether genocide in Tasmania occurred or not. Many scholars find that definition troublesome, to say the least. Tony Barta, for example, agrees that intentions are important; however, they “matter most because of all the ways they are disguised” (112). Intentions were disguised, Barta asserts, by the perpetrators of atrocities to make sure they were not to be held responsible, but also to escape responsibility by those who should have called perpetrators to account (112).

John Docker takes Reynolds’ 2001 text and shows it can be turned against itself (77). He notes that:

Reynolds’ own discussion of the British presence in post-1804 Tasmania indicates many intentions in addition to a single benevolent one of amity and kindness, indeed a profusion of intentions: to claim sovereignty and assume that they were the rulers; to possess a land they knew indigenous inhabitants considered was their own; to settler colonise and keep on settler colonising when the destructive consequences for the indigenous inhabitants were becoming increasingly plain; to use force and terror if met with resistance, which they knew would occur from previous colonising over the centuries; to remove and deport an unwanted and now a minority population, knowing, as experienced imperial colonisers, how susceptible the indigenous people would be to fatal sickness on contact with Europeans, as would occur on Flinders Island during the 1830s and 1840s. (77)

Therefore, Docker wonders: “In this plethora of intentions, why should we take an intention of amity and kindness as primary?” (77).

In 2014 Nicholas Clements published *The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania*. The author focused on the experiences of daily life of both sides during the Black War, dividing his chapter in White/Black. Clements followed his PhD mentor Henry Reynolds' thesis that it cannot be said with certainty that genocide was committed by the British in Tasmania. For Clements, "those who participated in the violence did so largely out of revenge and self-preservation", and they "lacked any ideological impetus to exterminate the natives" (57). Therefore, Clements found it inappropriate to apply the term "genocide" to the colonists. Reynolds wrote a foreword to Clements' book in which he concluded that "Clements has written a book that, while reflecting upon the History Wars, has transcended their angry contention and has, consequently, brought them to an end" (x).

The acclaimed Aboriginal critic Greg Lehman shares no such belief. What he sees as the most obvious obstacle in Clements' book is that there are no first-person accounts by Aborigines of events described in each of the "Black" sections (261). Therefore, both "Black" and "White" are to be read through the lens of a non-Aboriginal commentator. Another problem is that this Black/White dichotomy, Lehman notes, runs the risk of missing more nuanced influences on events and attitudes in the colony (261). Lehman concludes that Clements' book certainly constitutes a significant chapter in Australia's ongoing "History Wars"; however, his "even-handedness" is compromised by an absence of an unmediated Aboriginal voice, and as such is unlikely to mark an end to the "History Wars" (262).

## **6 Rohan Wilson's *The Roving Party***

In 2011 Rohan Wilson published his first book, *The Roving Party*, which explores the period of the Black War with historical detail. Wilson sets the plot of his novel during the height of the Black War, 1829, the year after the proclamation of a harsher Martial Law, the one which permitted the settlers to hunt the natives and offered financial rewards for their capturing. Wilson describes the atrocities committed by the settlers, but also a fierce and bloody resistance offered by the natives.

The characters, most of which are based on real historical figures, offer an insight to what it must have been like for both sides, the settlers and the natives, to go through the experience of the Black War. On the one hand, Wilson depicts the harsh realities of Tasmanian life for the “newcomers”, settlers, such as John Batman, and convicts, many of which did not even want to be there, now faced with violent natives, and with hostile and alien environment. On the other, he shows the natives caught in the process of their disintegration, fighting back with all their power, symbolically embodied in the character of Mannalargenna; the power which lies mostly in the connection to the land they had inhabited for thousands of years. In between these two worlds stands the character of Black Bill, a product of both worlds, but belonging to neither. Bill’s story is also the story of the ongoing process of forced disintegration through assimilation which fails in the end.

The acts of violence committed by John Batman and his roving party upon the natives described in the novel reflect a broader picture of the strategies used that eventually led to near-annihilation of the Aboriginal Tasmanians. The natives’ resistance has been portrayed as fierce, appearing almost supernatural at times; however, not sufficient to succeed in fighting back.

In his MA dissertation “The Roving Party & Extinction Discourse in the Literature of Tasmania” Wilson uses the “anti-colonial” approach to reflect upon the events of Tasmania’s past and present-day status of Aboriginal Tasmanians (Wilson, 2009, 3). Considering the issue of genocide, he argues that Tasmania is often wrongly cited as the location for the only fully documented case of racial annihilation (1). As a race, Aboriginal Tasmanians were thought to have been destroyed, or otherwise vanished. However, Wilson argues, Aboriginality is no longer being defined as a racial category, but rather as identity that has its basis in community (2). As such, it would be incorrect to say they are extinct. The extinction discourse “while first and foremost a derivative of colonial racism, is also an ideology that helps to maintain the status quo of Aboriginal marginalisation” (9). As for the issue of genocide, Wilson concludes that it “may have occurred”, depending on the definition of genocide one uses; however, to acknowledge that genocide may have occurred in Tasmania does not mean to accept “the false or deluded ideologies that construct Aboriginal Tasmanians as a race whose authenticity was bound inextricably to their racial homogeneity” (16).

*The Roving Party* is a historical novel that re-creates in detail events from the Black War. The three protagonists, John Batman, Mannalargenna, and Black Bill, are based on real historical figures. In Australia’s history, John Batman is remembered as one of the pioneers and founders of Melbourne, and a person “widely considered to have been sympathetic towards Aboriginal people” (Clements, 2011). Wilson shows the side of Batman not many Australians were taught in school. In the 1820s Tasmania he had established himself as an enterprising farmer, and, having captured the infamous bushranger Matthew Brady, had gained considerable renown for his bushcraft (Clements, 2011). It should not be surprising then, that he seized on the “Aboriginal problem” as a way to get more land and inflate his reputation (Clements, 2011). In 1829 Batman

petitioned Governor Arthur for the convicts and resources to form a “roving party” to go in pursuit of the Aborigines, conveying “the benevolent intentions of the Government”. In return he wanted 2000 acres of land after the first year, and a reward for every live Aborigine brought in.

Tasmanian peoples were warrior peoples who celebrated martial prowess, and the north-east chief Mannalargenna was known all across Tasmanian island as the greatest warrior. G.A. Robinson observed that Mannalargenna “was universally admitted by all the native tribes who knew him as being the most able and successful warrior of all the aborigines” (qtd in Clements, 2014, 80). He possessed “astonishing skill in battle” and “undaunted courage”. Robinson received “accounts from himself and others of his exploits in war, in which all the natives agree” (80). Mannalargenna was also a revered shaman; he spoke constantly of a powerful guiding spirit. Often he was gripped by violent convulsions, which were taken to be possession experiences, resulting in some profound insight (30).

As for the character of Black Bill, few reliable pieces of information can be found on the historical figure; however, Clements mentions the name “Black Bill” in his book, *The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania*, in the chapter on the natives who collaborated with the whites. He states that not all Tasmanians were at war with the invaders; that a few of them chose to collaborate with the invaders, and to become trackers and guides for the roving parties. Some of the notable guides included “Black Bill”, “Mungo”, “Cowerterminna” and Kickertopoller, or “Black Tom” (170).

The novel begins with Manalargena coming with his men to Black Bill's hut, asking him to fight on the natives' side. They do not belong to the same tribe; Manalargena and his men are Plindermairhemener men, and Black Bill is a Pannihier man. However, during wartime the personal quarries of the tribes are put aside. All the men had their hair ochred "into long ringlets as precise as woven rope" for "they were freshly painted for war" (Wilson, 2014, 2). Manalargena offers him ochre, and Bill dabs it on his head, only to wash it off soon after. Bill's pregnant wife Katherine appears on the door and, upon seeing her, Manalargena states: "A boy. My demon tell me" (5). Manalargena is persistent, but Bill has already promised his allegiance to John Batman, the prominent settler who was forming a roving party to go in pursuit of Aborigines. Bill may be Aboriginal Tasmanian, but he is "as good as white" (3). Manalargena tells Bill the story of two brothers in order to remind him who his people are, but Bill refuses to acknowledge the story.

Bill joins Batman's roving party that is formed of nine men: himself, John Batman, Batman's manservant William Gould, the Dharug natives Crook and Pigeon arrived from Parramatta in NSW, and four prisoners: a 15-year old Thomas Toosey, Jimmy Gumm, James Clarke – Horsehead and Howell Baxter. Batman informs them that he has been given contract by the Governor and he intends to collect on it (15). For some men, like Batman, this is an opportunity to acquire more land; for others, like the convicts, this is a way of getting their tickets-of-leave.

Batman needs the natives in their roving party because he knows the terrain is extremely hostile and without "their bushcraft the party had no hope of success" (10). He explains to his men their primary target is Manalargena: "There is among them a chief. A warrior. Some say witch. He is called Manalargena. If we don't kill this man we all need a floggin [...] You must bring him down before all others" (17).



In the morning on the day of their departure, Black Bill observes the Ben Lomond region:

“Likely to their eyes the whole of Kingston farm was a swath of order hacked out of chaos, a stamp of authority hammered into Van Diemen’s Land.

But when Bill surveyed that grant he saw the ancient constructions of the Plindermairhemener, the precisely burned plains carved over generations to advantage the hunter, the lands called up anew with every footfall” (26).

Wilson gives a vivid image of the hardships of life experienced by the members of the roving party in this inhospitable land, a “stretch of forest, entirely hostile to folk of any nation, native or not” (35). On its journey, the party experiences various difficulties: poor weather/climate, scarcity of rations provided by the government, lack of suitable clothes (no shoes).

After a period of time, they finally manage to trace a tribe united of two, and the massacre ensues. Even though the orders from the Government were to capture the natives and bring them in, for the Aboriginal peoples were subjects under the Crown’s law, events on the frontier often included different scenario, the one of mass killing. Before attacking the natives, Batman advises: “If you want them tickets of leave from the Governor, you’d best save some live head. Makes for good show bringin em in” (67).

After the massacre is committed, Black Bill checks out the territory, and finds a heavily wounded man, a member of the Plindermairhemeners, he recognizes him from the scars on his body:

“Above the wound he was ornamented in several places with scarring. Most of them were in the shape of halfmoons but along his shoulder he was scarred in neat rows and it was these scars that spoke of his clansmanship. Bill read those scars and saw that face and he understood: here was Taralta the lawman” (81).

They capture him, as well as one young woman with a child, but Taralta is too wounded to be taken to the town. So now the question of who will kill him arises, for the killing of a native is punishable by law. However, knowing from experience that such a thing never occurred, Black Bill states: “You cant murder a black, he said, any more than you can murder a cat” (99). So he takes the task upon himself and kills Taralta. Soon after, a fight between Manalargena and Black Bill takes place, during which Manalargena calls him “plague dog” and speculates “on the nature of white sickness Bill had so plainly contracted” (108). Bill remains beaten, lying on the floor, and he has a dream in which his unborn son visits him. His son tells him he found him in this foreign country, and then Bill “raised the boy high to his shoulders where he gripped the ochred ropes of hair on his father’s head” (72).

Upon their return to Kingston, the party passes through Batman’s land and they see sheep bones, “evidence of the slaughter committed upon Batman’s flocks some years back by those same folk” (113). They return to Batman’s farm, the one he ran as feed for the government stores. Black Bill is reunited with his pregnant wife Katherine, who works for Eliza, John Batman’s wife. Eliza washes the native woman, scrubbing the grease and dirt off her, and puts her in one of her dresses. When she tells Katherine to ask the girl’s name, she rudely replies: “Whites got no need of our name ... You call us anythin” (119).

After the captured woman had been delivered to Campbell Town and her child was left at Batman’s farm, the party takes off, though some reluctantly, for another roving mission, this time in an even rougher part of the country. As they leave, Eliza watches them from the window: “It was country riddled with the bruised souls of a decade’s war and although she could not see them she knew they were there, walking their trails, voices intermingled in song, bearing spears meant for her and her children” (138).

The party heads towards east, Batman observes the pastures and wonders if the blacks had given up on them. Black Bill responds: “They can no more give it up than you can give up yer hand and feet” (145). As they pass the territory, signs of the clans are present everywhere. They encounter houses with wooden buckets of water everywhere around them, the proof that the natives were there, trying to burn them. At one point Black Bill leads the party through the hills: “The only map he possessed was the roll of the land, the bend of the river and the arc of the sun. This was familiar country to him” (169).

One evening, during a particularly bad weather, the company find themselves protection within a burned swamp gum. They decide to spend the night inside it to protect themselves from the rain, but Black Bill remains outside. Not even when Batman comes outside for him does he change his mind. “Bisected circles and halfmoons and spirals. The signs of life. No other tree was burned. Just one amid the many” (171). Bill recognizes this site for what it is, a cremation site, and stays away. His native side reveals itself once more, for in the culture of Aboriginal Tasmanians death was an important rite of passage. Most tribes cremated their dead, and the funerary sites were considered a place of great danger (Clements, 2014, 30-31).

Another night, in an almost surreal manner, the shadow spreads over the moonlight, and the party gets attacked by the natives’ dogs. One of the assignees, Jimmy Gumm, proposes the eclipse might have provoked the rabid dogs, but Black Bill refutes this idea stating they were sent. A revelation which sends Batman into thinking: “What’s this headman doin’? Is he runnin from us? Or huntin us?” (182).

After a period of wandering through the ever more hostile environment, the party comes across a cleverwoman: “Beneath the mantle the skin of her torso was writ with chartings of

power by means of glass or tektites or perhaps knives” (195). The woman starts an oratory directed at Black Bill, she speaks of white men, and how their first notion was to possess, and now Bill brought their notions into her country. Soon after the party encounters once more the Plindermairhemener tribe and this time manages to capture and take away their women. As they deliver them into town, the crowd spontaneously gathers and thanks them; however, Batman responds there is no need for thanking for they will be paid. After a couple more days of unsuccessful roving they return to Kingston.

Black Bill returns home and soon after his wife falls into labour, but she gives birth to a malformed child that dies after only a couple of breaths of his short life. In the death of his son, Black Bill recognises this as Manalargena’s revenge. Bill cremates the child in accordance with Panniher ritual he barely remembers: “As the body was consumed Bill tried to sing those old dirges he’d once known but they were gone from his memory” (234). The next day among the ashes Bill picks up the little skull and a thigh bone, cleans them and brings them to Katherine so she can wear them, for human remains were thought to be especially powerful by the native people, and were often carried as charms (Clements, 2014, 31). Finally, Bill and Katherine set out to find Manalargena and kill him.

As they head towards east, they carry nothing with them and live off the land alone. At one point Bill saves a young native girl that has been imprisoned and raped by two bushrangers. When they finally find the Plindermairhemener, they are located on the coast, many tribes united, or what has left of them:

“Above the salt marsh the moon rose as white as parchment. The men of the Plindermairhemener, some Leetermairremener folk and some from even further south were gathered around the hearth fires by clan, a group convened from the remains of bands bitterly reduced by raids and wars and disease and every kind of misfortune the frontier could visit upon a people” (264).

Black Bill confronts Manalargena, who tells the child is justice, and goes on: “You murder us. You come in the night. You hide. You shoot. With pimdimmeyou you come. And you bring sorrow. So I call your child and he listen. My demon call. He hear our music that child. This is justice, he said” (271-2). Katherine tries to shoot Manalargena, but Bill tells her to leave him, for he understands all too well that what Manalargena said is the truth.

Through the character of Black Bill, Wilson discusses the so-called “gray area”, the one that Clements omitted by dividing his chapters into white/black sections. Black Bill inhabits both worlds, but belongs to neither. He is a Vandemonian, a native. However, he was brought up as a white man, given a name by a white man and is fighting the cause of the white man. In the novel, there are many moments in which his Aboriginality surfaces, the reading of the territory, the perception of the land, living off the land, the rituals, even though almost forgotten, of his native tribe. Although he has been living long time as a white man, all these traits are still within him. So when he has to choose sides, it is very difficult for him to do so, even if he does not show it. And after the final encounter with Manalargena, he understands that what happened to his child is justice, and he is to blame for it.

Black Bill’s story can be seen as the one of assimilation in progress. And assimilation in this case can be seen as a part of the greater picture: the one of genocide in progress. If Lemkin’s methodology were to be applied to Wilson’s novel, almost all elements from his “Outline” could be found present in the text. The historical background that appears from time to time, such as Batman’s land burned by the natives, or mentioning of the land tormented by the decade’s war. Condition leading to genocide is clearly the one of colonial expansion: Batman will be given

additional land if his “roving” is successful. All kinds of methods and techniques of genocide are present in the text: massacre and mutilation of the Plindermairhemener men (physical), taking away of their women and their children - even Black Bill can be presumed to be a stolen child (biological), killing of the lawman Taralta can be seen as a destruction of cultural symbol, for he was the last man of the tribe who knew the law. The genocidists show their intent in their roving, for example when Batman tells men before the massacre to spare a couple of Aborigines so they have something to bring to town. It goes to show that killing was the norm, rather than the exception. As for propaganda, the natives were represented as savages that threatened the settlers’ communities and needed to be dealt with. Responses of the victim group are demonstrated through very strong resistance offered by the natives and embodied in the character of Manalargena, and through assimilation, like in the case of Black Bill. What lacks is the response of outside group and the aftermath, but as the novel is set in 1829, the genocide is still the ongoing process; however, the aftermath, at least for some of the characters, such as Manalargena, is already known to the reader.

## 7 Conclusion

The nineteenth-century Tasmania was probably the worst place on the face of the Earth. It was an island turned prison for the worst kind of criminals. The land was inhospitable, food was scarce. Very few people went to live there on their own volition. Those who did live there endured hardships so they could survive. As the settlement grew, the patterns of behaviour from the mainland Australia were repeated. The settlers took the natives' land, food, and women.

Dispossession of the land for the Aboriginal Tasmanians meant not only the loss of place to live, or hunt; it meant a loss of their history, and of their future. Aboriginal Tasmanians, just like Aboriginal peoples of the mainland Australia shared deep spiritual connection to the land they inhabited. It was a place where they performed their rites of passage, corroborees, or held intertribal meetings. They knew every piece of their terrain.

So, when they found themselves in a situation where they were continually forced off their territory, naturally, they started to fight back. The native Tasmanians proved themselves as great warriors, they quickly learned how to fight against the settlers, and deployed guerrilla style of attacks. One of the main reasons for the natives' success in fighting back was the terrain. Tasmania's landscape was very different from that of mainland Australia; it had harsh climate, and was covered with rugged mountains, swamps, and rainforests. For people who lived there for thousands of years it presented no problem; moreover, it was their vantage point. But for the colonists, it was a nightmare, and during wartime, in addition to fighting against the natives, they often had to fight against the landscape itself.

Nevertheless, no matter how much great resistance was offered on the part of the natives, the years of fighting reduced their numbers in great deal, and eventually, they were forced to give up

on fighting. As they were relocated, first to Bruny Island, then Flinders Island, and in the end the Oyster Cove, most of them fell into apathy and died. The death of the last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian was officially recorded in 1876.

For a long time there had been talk of the extinction of the whole of Tasmanian Aboriginal race. First accounts were more sympathetic to their condition and destiny, stating that the native inhabitants had fallen victims in the war of extermination. However, as the colony progressed, the settlers wanted to get rid of their shameful past, so the accounts took a different turn, and the destiny of the native Tasmanians was described as the extinction of a weaker race in the face of progress. The following decades the country simply fell into silence on the subject.

Interest in the subject was renewed after World War II, and the drafting of the UN Convention on Genocide. Viewed in the light of the new term, the events unfolded in Tasmania became more serious. The case of Tasmania had suddenly become a ground for the fierce debate between international scholars, who mostly saw Tasmania as a clear site of genocide, and local historiography, which was reluctant to define it as such.

The arguments of those who were reluctant to define Tasmania as a site of genocide were that there was no *dolus specialis* pronounced on the part of the government; moreover, the settlers were always instructed to treat the natives “with amity and kindness”. Another reason was that high mortality rate was present among the settlers from the natives’ attack, and the settlers were only trying to protect themselves and their property. Genocides were usually afflicted on vulnerable minorities, and the Tasmanian settlers fought against capable and terrifying enemy.

Those who saw Tasmania as a site of genocide, said that even though no *dolus specialis* was proclaimed, the intent of the British Empire was more than clear: to claim sovereignty over the



land, to possess the land at no matter what cost, to use force and terror if met with resistance, which they knew would occur from previous experiences of colonisation over the centuries. For the pattern of colonial genocide was always the same: settling the new territory, imposing/“bringing” culture to uncivilized/inferior peoples, and once they rebelled, removing them from the territory, either through ethnic cleansing, or through mass killings.

Events unfolded in the nineteenth-century Tasmania may not fit in their entirety under the legal category of genocide provided by the UN Convention, but that does not mean there was no genocide. Even Raphael Lemkin saw Tasmania as a site of genocide. When he applied his framework to Tasmania, all the elements of genocide were present. It is not the task of a historian to judge, but to look into the documents written in the period, and try to construe out of them things that were omitted. With colonisation the Aboriginal Tasmanians lost the foundations of life – food, land, health, and reproductive capacity. From the beginning, but especially from the 1820s on, it was clear to everyone that if colonization continued the indigenous population would soon, under these circumstances, decline in great numbers, or even disappear. To continue with colonization under these circumstances meant to participate knowingly in the process of genocide.

*The Roving Party* puts on the spot one of the toughest years in the life of the colony. Through the characters based on historical figures, Wilson shows in an authentic way the experiences of all the parties involved in the war: the settlers, represented through the character of John Batman, a well-respected member of the society and landowner, who engages in the pursuit of the natives because of the promise of more free land; but also through the characters of the convicts, showing the other side of colonization, that of forced arrival and hard life of majority of the colonists. Representing the other side is the character of Manalargena, as the symbol of

Aboriginal resistance. In the novel he is depicted as a witch, almost supernatural. Manalargena's cunning way of fight makes him a terrifying opponent. In between the two worlds stands the character of Black Bill. A native gone white, Bill is the story of assimilation that failed. Even though he works for a white man, talks in his language, and fights against his own kind, everything he does, he does as he was taught by his own kind, and the way he sees the world is through the eye of a native. Bill's assimilation eventually fails as he comes to realise, having lost his newborn son, that he fought on the wrong side. Bill's assimilation can be seen as a part of the bigger picture. Put together with other events described in the novel, such as hunting and killing tribes, taking away the native children, viewing the natives as the savages that need to be dealt with, treating them like animals, it can be seen the ongoing process of genocide.

Genocide in Tasmania was not the case of state planning, or mass killing. It was based, like so many other instances of colonial genocide, on land seizure, and disregard for human life of its native inhabitants. It was a colonization that failed to protect the Aboriginal Tasmanians from settler attacks, and from the effects of the loss of the foundations of life.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to elucidate how the process of the colonisation of Tasmania in the nineteenth century led to a gradual disintegration of its native inhabitants, the Aboriginal Tasmanians, and ended up with an alleged extinction of an entire race. The paper describes conditions on the Tasmanian frontier, and moments of fierce violence that eventually led to such an outcome, and places it in the context of the violence committed by the settlers in the whole of Australia, showing that there existed a pattern. What is elaborated further is how the violence in Tasmania came to be represented in historiography, from the discourses that saw Tasmania as the site of the extinction of a weaker race to the notion of Tasmania as a site of genocide committed by the British Empire. Fierce debates, especially in the last 40 years, point to the issues in defining Tasmania as a site of genocide, and whether such a definition can be applied in this case. It explains why Tasmania can be seen as a site of genocide, even though it does not conform entirely to the definition of genocide provided by the UN Convention on Genocide. The paper further provides an analysis of Rohan Wilson's *The Roving Party*, novel that deals with a particularly violent moment from Tasmania's history. The analysis of the novel shows how the events described in the novel can be seen as a part of a bigger process – of the ongoing process of genocide.

## **Key Words**

genocide, settler colonialism, frontier violence, Raphael Lemkin, issue of intent, Tasmania, Black War, Aboriginal Tasmanians