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**Camels, Ships and Trains: Translation Across the 'Indian
Archipelago,' 1860 - 1930**

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Abstract

In this thesis I pose the questions: What if historians of the Australian region began to read materials that are not in English? What places become visible beyond the territorial definitions of British settler colony and 'White Australia'? What past geographies could we reconstruct through historical prose? From the 1860s there emerged a circuit of camels, ships and trains connecting Australian deserts to the Indian Ocean world and British Indian ports. Aboriginal traders and travellers moving along railway lines, British Indian seafarers jumping ship at Australian ports, Muslim merchants and peddlers working camel tracks across deserts, left in their trail a rich archive of materials in their own languages. Whilst transnational history has emerged as a burgeoning area of writing in Australia, scholars have rarely engaged with materials beyond the English record. In this thesis I show that non-English language sources offer immense possibilities to take historical writing in Australia beyond the conceptual spaces of colony and nation. Examining South Asian and Aboriginal language records, in each chapter of this thesis I grapple with the pragmatic and conceptual challenges presented by working with a range of languages. Following the lead of postcolonial theorists I use and extend 'translation' as a productive metaphor for the methodologies necessary to discipline non-English language materials into historical scholarship in English.

Examining a Bengali book of poetry, a Kuyani place-name, an Urdu memoir, Arabunna, Dhirarri and Dieri stories, an Arabic root word and Wangkangurru song-poetry within the same analytic framework presents significant challenges. Yet a

circuitry of camels, ships and trains brought speakers of these languages into close, regular contact, intricately threading together Aboriginal lives, families and livelihoods with those of Indian Ocean travellers. Using a place-oriented framework to bring South Asian and Aboriginal language materials together, I map the multifaceted interconnections between the geographies of modernity inhabited by speakers of various tongues. With a twin analytical focus on language and place, in this thesis I treat 'translation' not only as a process of change between languages, but as a schema of physical mobility between places. Exploring multiple meanings of the word 'translation,' in this thesis I propose a palette of tentative solutions to the challenges of working with South Asian and Aboriginal language sources in the Australian context. Drawing upon the insights generated by scholars of Aboriginal history and postcolonial theory, this thesis extends the productive challenges they pose to the field of transnational history in Australia and offers significant contributions to Indian Ocean studies.

Statement of Originality

I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed:*Samia Khatun*.....

Date:21 August 2012.....



আম্মা

Dedicated to my mother Eshrat Hossain *nee* Mirza

27 December 1951 – 12 June 2011

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I dedicate this thesis to my Amma, storyteller extraordinaire. Questions about language and place became urgent to me because she was dying. She is on every page.

Samia Khatun, 30 March 2012

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Introduction

At the edge of the Australian desert, on the buckling shelves of an old mosque in Broken Hill, there remains a wealth of things once precious to Indian Ocean travellers. Local lore has it that this tiny mosque on the outskirts of the mining town was built in the late 1880s. Its interior walls feature tendrils woven into arabesque in relief and today it is a quiet, peaceful place of retreat from the gritty dust storms and brilliant sunlight of these desert parts. Broken Hill was founded on the country of Wiljali people when British prospectors discovered silver in the 1880s and the town grew with the fortunes of the nascent mining company Broken Hill Propriety Limited (BHP). As the firm funnelled an increasing volume of lead, iron ore and silver bullion from Wiljali geography to industrialising centres and markets around the world, the town became a busy, cosmopolitan node of commerce in the geography of the British Empire. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century hundreds of Muslims from various parts of the world had gathered in Broken Hill.¹ They built two mosques; only one remains in its original location.²

In July 2009, while gale force winds raged outside, I explored the treasures housed on those shelves. Amongst letters, notebooks, a peacock feather fan, a pair of

¹ Gunny Khan, "To The Editor: The Camel Nuisance," *The Barrier Miner*, 23 May 1904, 2.

² The second smaller mosque from 'Western Ghantown' in Broken Hill has been moved to the yard adjacent to the North Broken Hill mosque, Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 175.

embroidered children's shoes, a wooden stringed instrument and two bottles of acrid scent from Delhi, lay a large book that bore the English label 'The Holy Koran.' Turning the first few brittle pages I soon realised that it was not a Koran. Sitting in the mosque I found myself reading 500 pages of Bengali performative poetry; a compendium of eight lengthy translations from Persian mystic poetry to Bengali verse, printed in Calcutta in 1893. I hadn't read Bengali since roughly the age of eight. As I struggled to decipher unfamiliar Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Arabic words, woven into a tapestry of 19th century Bengali grammar, a range of unknown places became visible. Not only did the book reveal a past when Hindu and Islamic cosmologies were interwoven in a pattern that was most unusual, its presence in Broken Hill suggested a network of mobility connecting Bengal to the Australian colonies.

As my Bengali reading improved over time, the urban geography of Chitpur Road, the main artery of the cheap Bengali print industry in late 19th century Calcutta came into focus. I glimpsed poets, publishers and press workers engaged in the process of yoking words to the book-commodity, mapping both Bengali and Islam to the economic geography of the book market. Venturing even deeper into the book, beyond the din of the book-production industry, I stepped into the imaginative world of the poetry itself. According to the poet, Allah wrote the world into existence with a flourish of his divine pen. As He wrote and wrote, seven lands took shape under seven skies, oceans rose and rivers began to flow. Within a mesmerising cocoon of arabesque, in those first pages I glimpsed a cosmopolitan geography inhabited by

jinns, angels, Islamic prophets and ordinary people, 'some black, some fair, some as fair as the moon.'³ Try as I might I caught no glimpses of any women.

Reading the book that remains in Broken Hill reveals a number of geographies. Its weathered pages tell the story of Islam expanding outwards from Mecca not only into Bengali folk idiom but also the interior reaches of the Australian colonies. It reveals the ideal – or imagined – egalitarian community of Islamic brotherhood overlaid onto a material, cosmopolitan geography produced by the growth of capitalist industry in Broken Hill. Its presence in Broken Hill tells a story that cannot be contained solely within national frameworks of Indian, Bangladeshi nor Australian histories.

There has been no shortage of writers critiquing national frameworks of analysis in recent historical scholarship. As historian Sven Beckert has pointed out, the fields of world, global, transnational and international history are all critiques of the inadequacy of the nation as an analytical category.⁴ Nevertheless, as Tony Ballantyne observed in 2005 'the nation state remains a key, probably *the* key, unit for historical analysis and narrative.'⁵ A number of historians in Australia have attempted to challenge the grip of the nation on the historical imagination by employing transnational frameworks of investigation.⁶ This body of scholarship rarely engages

³ Translation by Samia Khatun, Kazi Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia* (Kolkata: Hanifia Press, 1301 BS/1894 AD), 4: Line 2 - 3.

⁴ C. A. Bayly et al., "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *The American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006): 1446.

⁵ Tony Ballantyne, "Putting the Nation in its' Place?: World History and C. A. Bayly's *The Birth of The Modern World*," in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2005), 23.

⁶ Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2005); Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus, *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity* (Melbourne: RMIT Press, 2006); Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008); Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700 - Present* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the*

with materials that are not in the English language.⁷ As Benedict Anderson has argued, it was the daily printed presses, the novels and serials that gave popular rise to the literate subjectivity, notions of simultaneous time and horizontal fraternity that underpinned the historical phenomenon of 'national consciousness.'⁸ From the 1880s, the urban writers in the Australian colonies who filled page after page with myths of the empty interior, effacing Aboriginal presence and producing what W. H. Stanner described as the 'Great Australian silence,'⁹ did so in English. It was through English documentation that settler institutions produced the categories of 'prohibited immigrant,' 'aliens,' 'natives,' 'half-castes,' and 'asiatics.'¹⁰ As historian Penny van Toorn has shown, English mediated Aboriginal people's negotiation of the settler bureaucracies that surveilled their lives through a 'paper panopticon' and English played an important role in the emergence of pan-Aboriginal nationalism in Australia.¹¹ This does not however mean that people didn't tell stories, write poetry,

Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Katherine Ellinghaus, *Taking Assimilation to Heart: Marriages of White Women and Indigenous Men in the United States and Australia, 1887-1937* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005); Warwick Anderson, "State of Hygiene: Race "Improvement" and Biomedical Citizenship in Australia and the Colonial Philippines," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁷ While Patrick Wolfe's essay examines sources in languages other than English, in Curthoys and Lake's collection it is one of the few contributions to the volume that the editors highlight does not touch on Australia at all. Curthoys and Lake, *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, 5; See Patrick Wolfe, "Islam, Europe and Indian Nationalism: Towards a Postcolonial Transnationalism," in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2005).

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended ed. (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 37 - 46.

⁹ 'The Dreaming (1953)' in W. E. H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009), 57 - 72.

¹⁰ Margaret Allen, "'Innocents Abroad" and "Prohibited Immigrants": Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910" in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective Canberra*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005); Margaret Allen, "Betraying the White Nation: The Case of Lillie Khan " (Paper Presented at the Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity, Melbourne University, 2006); Margaret Allen, "'A fine Type of Hindoo' Meets 'the Australian Type': British Indians in Australia and Diverse Masculinities," in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008).

¹¹ Penny Van Toorn, "Writing the Entrapped Nations of Indigenous Australia into Being," in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700 - Present*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny

read books, sing songs, write letters, name places and form relationships in and across other tongues. These are obvious points. Yet they remain systematically disregarded by contemporary historians of Australia. Most histories of Australia in transnational context have remained as Anglo-centric as their national, colonial and imperial antecedents.

Characteristic of the blind spot with regards to language, in a recent collection on 'vernacular modernity in Australia' neither the editors nor the contributors explicitly mention the powerful role of *English* in mediating experiences of settler modernity.¹² In a volume organised around the 'central issue of the vernacular' and produced with the aim of 'contributing to a more outward looking, internationalising phase of Australian studies,'¹³ this glaring omission by the editors draws attention to a larger tendency of scholars in Australian Studies to conflate 'language' with 'English.' In not acknowledging the specificity of the relationship between English and the historical production of the imperial, colonial and national geographies, these writers reproduce the Anglo-centrism of the pasts that they study, missing the immense possibilities that non-English language sources have to offer to their project to take historical writing 'beyond the conceptual and territorial spaces of the nation.'¹⁴ As historian Antoinette Burton has pointed out, 'the relative linguistic provincialism

Russell and Angela Woollacott (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹² Most noticeably, Bill Casey's contribution to the volume, while dealing with settler appropriations of Aboriginal language songs, does not interrogate the role of language in shaping settler reception of Aboriginal songs as 'primitive' in Bill Casey, "Modernity Denied: The Case of Harold Blair's 1956 EP, *Australian Aboriginal Songs*," in *Impact of the Modern: Vernacular Modernities in Australia 1870s - 1960s*, eds. Robert Dixon and Veronica Kelly (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008).

¹³ Robert Dixon and Veronica Kelly, eds., *Impact of the Modern: Vernacular Modernities in Australia 1870s - 1960s* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008), xv, xiii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

of most practising historians, imperial or not, is a huge impediment to getting at any place “outside” an ineffably Anglo-centric worldliness.’¹⁵

In this thesis I pose the questions: What would happen if historians of the Australian region began to read non-English language sources? What places become visible? What past geographies could we reconstruct through historical prose? What reading and writing techniques would be necessary? Beginning with the Bengali book at Broken Hill, each chapter of this thesis investigates sources in languages other than English that enjoyed circulation beyond the margins of settler society. Grappling with the challenges of ‘reading’ these materials I illuminate past geographies that existed alongside, intersected with and extended beyond the territorial definitions of British colony and settler nation. Working with records in South-Asian languages and Australian Aboriginal languages, I argue that, like passports, these documents offer entry to foreign countries: past places which generated the stories, songs, printed-books, memoirs, contracts and place names that I start from. In investigating non-English language sources and the places in which they were embedded, in this thesis I draw upon insights of postcolonial theory, Aboriginal history and Indian Ocean studies and extend the productive challenges they pose to the growing field of transnational history in Australia. In the remainder of this introduction I will outline the geographical frameworks and analytical approaches I use throughout the thesis, ending with some of the challenges of ‘reading’ non-English language sources.

¹⁵ Antoinette Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing and Teaching British Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 291.

1. Language and Place

Scholars of the Australian region have paid closest attention to languages other than English in the field of Aboriginal history.¹⁶ From the early 19th century European missionaries have engaged with Aboriginal languages and from the 1960s a linguistics movement emerged resourced by Australian universities and the federal government.¹⁷ Since its inception in 1977, the interdisciplinary journal of Aboriginal History has published a number of Aboriginal language stories as the fruit of collaborations between linguists and Aboriginal people.¹⁸

¹⁶ From within the discipline of history a number of writers have examined the anthropologists and missionaries who undertook research on Aboriginal languages. For example see Martin Thomas, *Culture in Translation: The Anthropological Legacy of R. H. Mathews*, ed. Ingereth Macfarlane, Aboriginal History Monograph 15 (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2007); Martin Thomas, "Word Territory: Recording Aboriginal language with R. H. Mathews," *History Australia* 5, 2 (2008); James Wafer and Hilary Carey, "Waiting for Biraban: Lancelot Threlkeld and the 'Chibcha Phenomenon' in Australian Missionary Linguistics," *Language and History*, 54, 2 (2011); Hilary Carey, "Death, God and Linguistics: Conversations with Missionaries on the Australian Frontier, 1824-1845," *Australian Historical Studies* 40 (2009). Environmental historians have also examined Aboriginal language words in Eric Rolls, "A Song of Water [Aboriginal people's knowledge of the various methods of obtaining water was often contained in songs.]," *Island*, 102 (2005); Eric Rolls, "A Chant of Lost Water," *Australian Humanities Review*, 39 - 40 (2006); Michael Cathcart, "Uluru," in *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002). Anthropologist and historian Phillip Jones has undertaken a number of collaborative projects with linguists using Aboriginal language sources. For example see Philip Jones, Peter Sutton and Kaye Clarke, *Art and Land: Aboriginal Sculptures of the Lake Eyre Region* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum in association with Wakefield Press, 1986). For historian Minoru Hokari, learning Gurindji, a language spoken in the northern cattle country of the Northern Territory today, was part of his doctoral research into Gurindji historical practise. Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011).

¹⁷ A history of the Australian linguistics movement and the state of research on Aboriginal languages can be found in William B. McGregor, *Encountering Aboriginal Languages: Studies in the History of Australian Linguistics* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 2008); John Henderson and David Nash, eds., *Language in Native Title* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2002); For a history of writing in Aboriginal languages see Mary-Anne Gale, *Dhanum Djourra'wuy Dhawu: A History of Writing in Aboriginal Languages* (Underdale, S. Aust.: Aboriginal Research Institute, University of South Australia, 1997); For early missionary linguists see Carey, "Death, God and Linguistics: Conversations with Missionaries on the Australian Frontier, 1824-1845."

¹⁸ In this thesis, I draw particularly heavily from the work of Luise Hercus and a list of her publications to 1990 can be found in Elizabeth Kat, "Publications by Luise A. Hercus," in *Language and History: Essays in Honour of Luise A. Hercus*, ed. Peter Austin (Canberra: Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1990); For an example of a collaboration between historians and linguists see Peter Austin, Luise Hercus and Philip Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988); For a recent summary of musicological approaches to Aboriginal language materials see Myfany Turfin and Tonya Stebbins, "The Language of Song: Some Recent Approaches in Description and Analysis," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 30, 1 (2010).

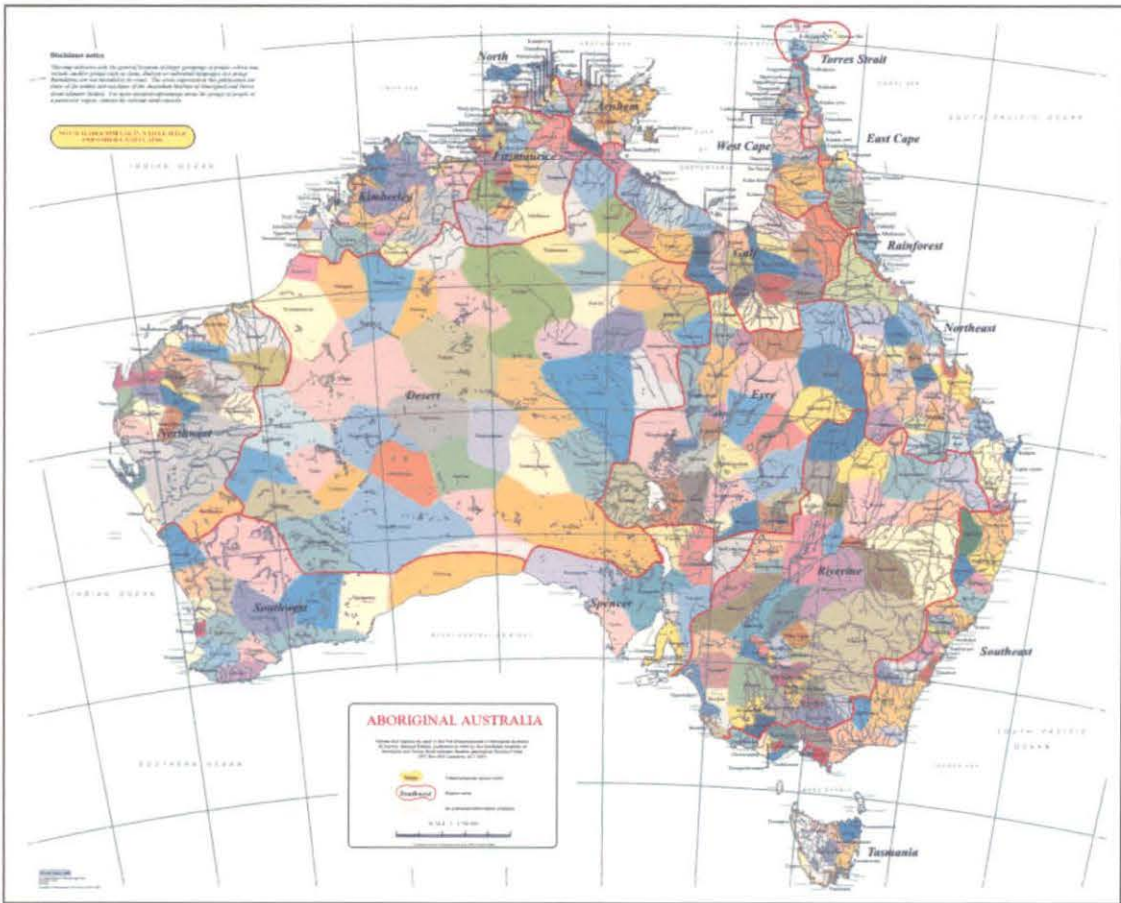
Questions about place, particularly the relationship between particular languages and territory, have always been an important feature of scholarly engagement with Aboriginal languages. Using the representational techniques inherited from British cartography, the earliest mappings of Aboriginal languages to territories emerged from the discipline of anthropology.¹⁹ The map of Aboriginal linguistic territories that remains in circulation today is known as ‘Horton’s Map,’ first published in 1996 and compiled by a team of cartographers led by David Horton (see Figure 1). While Horton’s map works as a powerful visual representation of the continuing diversity of Aboriginal people, historian Penny Van Toorn has suggested that it obscures the lines of connection between speakers of different languages, the geographies of mobility between different territories. As she has pointed out ‘in some cases, a borderline *is* a shared track.’²⁰ Similarly, the research of Worimi scholar Dale Kerwin, drawing together archaeological, linguistic and anthropological data with contemporary Aboriginal oral accounts, has described the shared tracks, common-ways and trade routes as the ‘arteries’ of an Aboriginal economic landscape.²¹ Throughout this thesis, I use and adapt Horton’s map as an aid to convey the relative locations of Aboriginal language communities that I write about, whilst developing Van Toorn and Kerwin’s conceptual focus on lines of connection between places.

¹⁹ Anthropologist Norman Tindale was one of the first scholars to attempt to map the entire linguistic landscape of Aboriginal Australia and Penny Van Toorn offers an overview of this history of mapping in Van Toorn, “Writing the Entrapped Nations of Indigenous Australia into Being,” 43 - 46.

²⁰ Her emphasis Van Toorn, “Writing the Entrapped Nations of Indigenous Australia into Being,” 45.

²¹ Dale Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: The Colonisation of the Australian Economic Landscape* (Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 102.

Figure 1



Horton's Map of Australian Aboriginal languages

Horton, David. "Aboriginal Australia Map." Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2005.

In addition to drawing on linguistic research into Aboriginal languages, this thesis is informed by the place-oriented approaches developed by other writers in Aboriginal history. Since the 1960s Aboriginal history has developed in collaboration with and sometimes in tension with Aboriginal social justice movements. With land often at the heart of this contested field, the Aboriginal English term 'country' is a dense place word that a number of writers have grappled with.²² In response to scholarly attempts to define 'country,' anti-nuclear activist and Arabunna man Kevin Buzzacott wrote in 1998 'anthropologists and all that mob – they're trying to tell us who we are, and what we are and what we think. I'm saying "No you can't tell us that."... we know the country.'²³ In engagement with Aboriginal articulations of and political struggles for 'country,' a body of place-oriented writing has emerged as one of the methodological innovations of Aboriginal history.²⁴ 'Place-oriented research,' as Deborah Bird Rose has articulated it, is a call 'for writing that seeks to do justice,

²² For linguistic analyses see David P. Wilkins, "The Concept of Place Amongst the Arrernte," in *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia*, eds. Luise Hercus, Flavia Hodges and Jane Helen Simpson (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2002); One of the most influential articles in anthropological writing about Aboriginal geographies is T. G. H. Strehlow, "Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia: a Functional Study," in *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: Modern Studies in the Social Anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*, ed. Ronald M. Berndt (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970); For historians grappling with 'country' see Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002); Deborah Bird Rose, "Taking Notice," *Worldviews; Environment, Culture, Religion (Special Edition: Ecological Worldviews, Australian Perspectives)*, 3 (1999): 7; See the collection Deborah Bird Rose and Anne Clarke, eds., *Tracking Knowledge in North Australian Landscapes: Studies in Indigenous and Settler Ecological Knowledge Systems* (Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, 1997); Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996); Grace Koch and Myfany Turpin, "The Language of Central Australian Aboriginal Songs," in *Morphology and Language History: In Honour of Harold Koch*, eds. Harold James Koch, et al., *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* (Perth: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2008), 168.

²³ Kevin Buzzacott, *Lake Eyre is Calling* (Murray Bridge SA: Nyiri Publications, 1998), 7.

²⁴ Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009); Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback*; Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*; Ingereth Macfarlane, "A Water History of the Western Simpson Desert, South Australia," in *23⁰S: Archaeology and Environmental History of Southern Deserts*, eds. M. A. Smith and P. Hesse (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2005); Ingereth MacFarlane, "Entangled places: Interactive Histories in the Western Simpson Desert, Central Australia" (Australian National University, 2010).

ethically and methodologically, to the richness of time, human endeavour, and the multiplicities of living things whose tracks cross a given place.²⁵

Working across the fields of spatial history, environmental history and Aboriginal history a number of writers have developed techniques to interrogate language and place together, developing analytical vocabularies to express the never simple relationship between these two categories.²⁶ Linguists working with Australian Aboriginal languages have shown that ‘cultural perceptions of place ... are clearly reflected in language, from the level of morphology to the level of discourse.’²⁷ Drawing upon the insights of these different fields of scholarship interrogating language and place I set my sights on a transnational geography.

2. The Indian Archipelago

In 1845, Sir Thomas Mitchell set out on an overland expedition from Sydney to chart a route to the Indian Ocean. Mitchell was the Surveyor General of the British colony of New South Wales and he wrote ‘that part of the Indian Ocean nearest to Sydney, has appeared of more importance to the colonists, since steam navigation became

²⁵ Deborah Bird Rose, "Writing Place," in *Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (Clayton: Monash University ePress, 2009), 123.

²⁶ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987); Michael Walsh, "The Land Still Speaks? Language and Landscape in Aboriginal Australia," in *Tracking Knowledge in North Australian Landscapes: Studies in Indigenous and Settler Ecological Knowledge Systems*, eds. Deborah Bird Rose and Anne Clarke (Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, 1997); Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 7 – 15; Rose, "Taking Notice"; Bonyhady and Griffiths, *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia*; George Seddon, "Words and Weeds: Some Notes on Language and Landscape," in *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape*, ed. George Seddon (Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape: 1997); Rolls, "A Song of Water [Aboriginal people's knowledge of the various methods of obtaining water was often contained in songs]"; Heather Goodall, "Digging Deeper: Ground Tanks and the Elusive 'Indian Archipelago,'" in *Beyond the Black Stump: Rethinking Rural Histories in Australia*, ed. Alan Mayne (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2008).

²⁷ David P. Wilkins, "The Concept of Place Amongst the Arrernte," in *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia*, eds. Luise Hercus, Flavia Hodges and Jane Helen Simpson (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2002), 39; Also see Austin on the complex relationships in Diyari, an Aboriginal language in the Lake Eyre region, between ‘place’ and ‘time’ that are encoded into language in Peter Austin, "Temporal Reference, Tense and Aspect in Australian Aboriginal Languages," in *Jikan to Kotoba: Time and Language*, ed. Yasuhiko Nagano, *Senri Ethnological Studies* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1998), 12.

regular between England and the Indian Archipelago.’²⁸ At the time the ‘Indian Archipelago’ described the chain of over 12 000 islands under Dutch imperial control.²⁹ As Kerwin has shown, every section of Mitchell’s march towards the Indian Ocean proceeded with the aid of Aboriginal guides interpreting local languages and following directions along well-worn paths heading north.³⁰ Appropriating the Aboriginal trading routes that Kerwin describes as ‘arteries of an Aboriginal economic landscape,’ Mitchell proceeded towards the densely peopled, wooded northern gulf that he named ‘Australindia’ (see Figure 2). Addressing ‘the industrious and enterprising colonists of the South,’ Mitchell pointed out in his journal that from this coast ‘at no great distance lay India and China, and still nearer, the rich islands of the Indian Archipelago.’³¹ While Mitchell’s expedition never actually reached the shores he imagined as ‘Australindia,’ upon his return to Sydney he nevertheless remapped the ‘Indian Archipelago’ as a region framed by and *including* British India and the Australian colonies (see Figure 3). Mapping the Australian mainland as the largest in a series of islands embedded in a chain stretching southeast from the Bay of Bengal,³² this was a strategic statement about the role of the Australian colonies in British imperial penetration into Dutch controlled territory. Not only did the journal of Mitchell’s expedition act as a map for future British occupation of Aboriginal lands, it was also a spatial blueprint for British designs upon Asia.

²⁸ Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia, in Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848): Conclusion

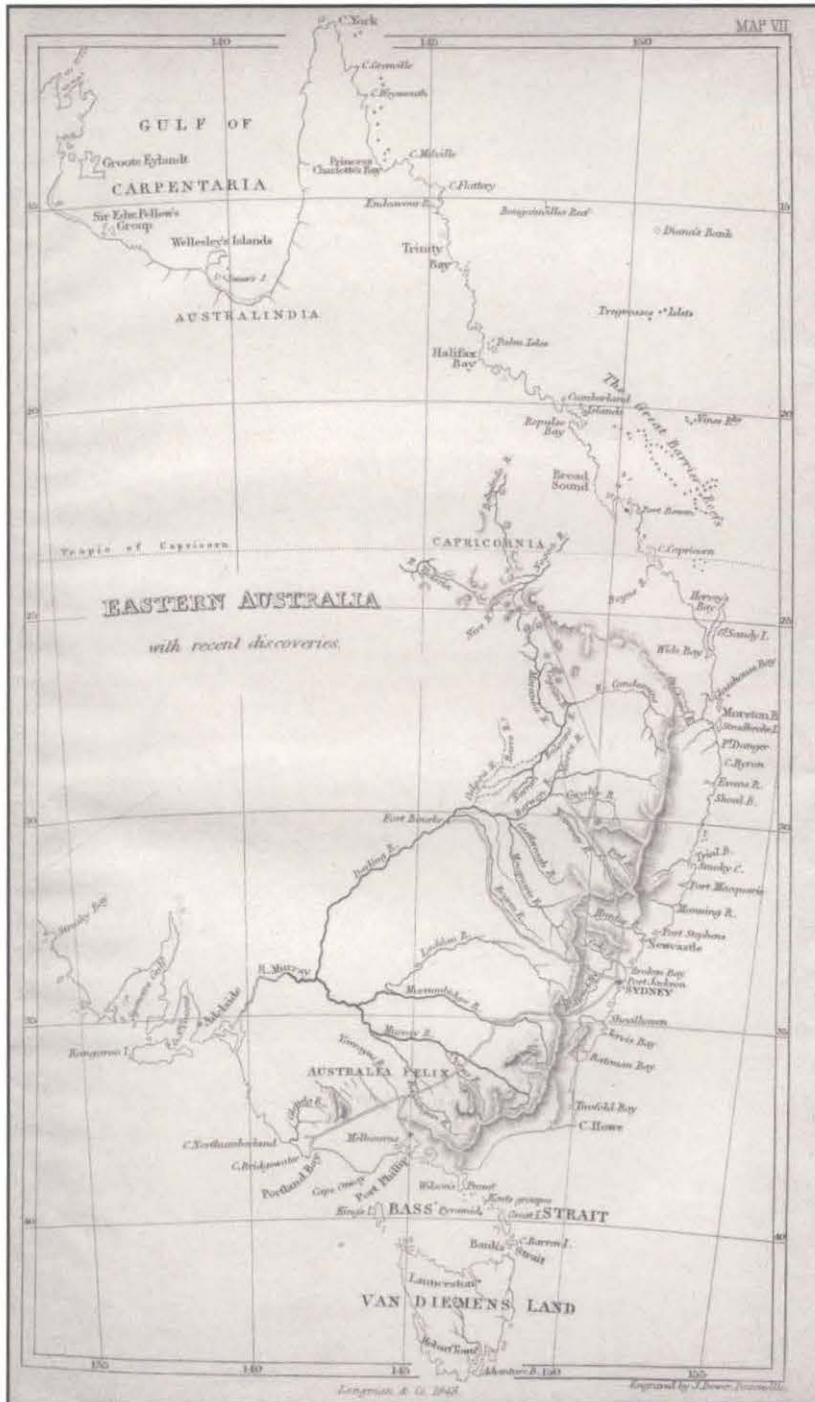
²⁹ F. Boucher, *The Indian Archipelago: A Concise Account of the Principal Islands and Places of the Indian Archipelago; With Suggestions for Promoting Commerce and Colonization Therein; and for the Development of the Vast Resources and the Civilization of the Inhabitants of that Extensive and Magnificent Region* (London: Jones and Causton, 1857), 5; Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995): 465.

³⁰ Dale Kerwin, "Aboriginal Dreaming Tracks or Trading Paths: The Common Ways" (Griffith University, 2006), 225 - 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

³² Heather Goodall, "Landscapes of Meaning: Views From Within the Indian Archipelago," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, 1 (2008): i.

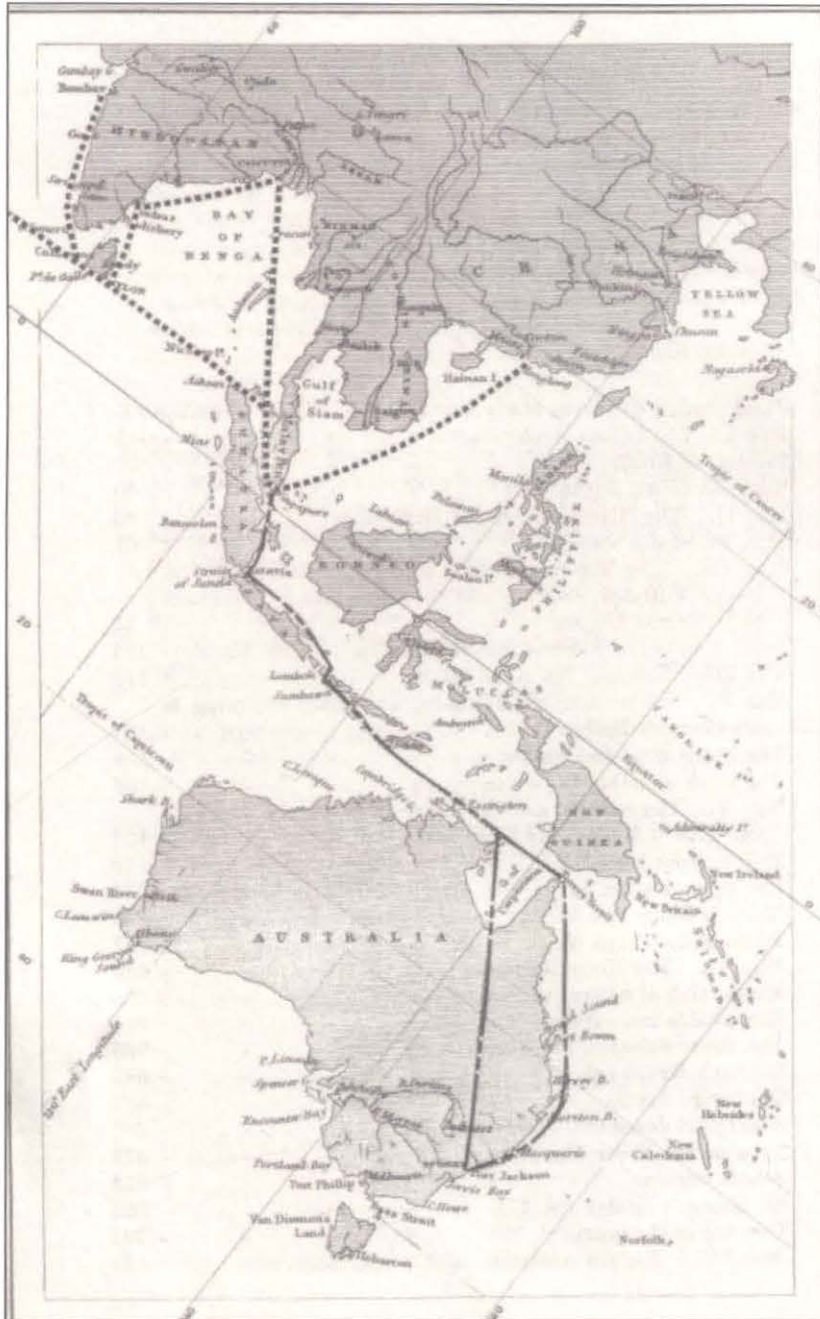
Figure 2



Thomas Mitchell's Map featuring 'Australindia'

'Map VII: Eastern Australia, with recent discoveries' appears in APPENDIX to Mitchell, Thomas Livingstone. Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia, in Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848.

Figure 3



Thomas Mitchell's Map of the 'Indian Archipelago'

'Map 1: The Indian Archipelago' appears in APPENDIX to Mitchell, Thomas Livingstone. *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia, in Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria*. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848.

Recently a number of writers have used Mitchell's 'Indian Archipelago' as a powerful visual tool to re-imagine the place of Australia in the Indian Ocean region and illuminate historical connections across this geography. Investigating how plant and animal species spread across the 'Indian Archipelago,' historians Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull have illuminated successive waves of non-European mobility across this terrain both before and after British arrival to these parts.³³ Devleena Ghosh and Lindi Todd in collaboration with Heather Goodall have shown that at Australian ports people frequently 'jumped ship and skirted empire,' revealing the 'Indian Archipelago' as a lived geography beyond the always-encroaching bureaucratic apparatuses of empire.³⁴ Whilst Goodall's investigation of the transfer of water-technologies from British India to colonial New South Wales has suggested that British imperial officers often mediated the movement of ideas across the 'Indian Archipelago,' in the field of maritime labour history she has shown anti-imperial solidarities between different union movements converged upon taking control of the movement of commodities.³⁵

Scholars writing from Australia have used the framework of the 'Indian Archipelago' to enter into conversation with a burgeoning field of Indian Ocean studies which has emphasised the mobility of non-Europeans. Their methodologies have built on the 'history from below' approaches pioneered in British Marxist historiography from the 1960s and drawn upon insights of 'subaltern studies' and 'Aboriginal history' developed within Indian and Australian historiography

³³ Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull, "Acacia Exchanges: Wattles, Thorn Trees and The Study of Plant Movements," *Geoforum* 39, 3 (2008); Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull, "The Indian Ocean and the Making of Outback Australia: An Ecocultural Odyssey," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social and Political Perspectives*, eds. Shanty Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

³⁴ Heather Goodall, Devleena Ghosh and Lindi Todd, "Jumping Ship – Skirting Empire: Indians, Aborigines and Australians across the Indian Ocean," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, 1 (2008): 69.

³⁵ Heather Goodall, "Port Politics: Indian Seamen, Australian Unions and Indonesian Independence," *Labour History* 94 (2008): 49.

respectively from the 1980s. Emphasising the use of sources beyond the settler colonial archive, these scholars have proposed that ecological archives, oral records and particularly Aboriginal oral records are dense repositories of information about non-British mobility across the ‘Indian Archipelago.’ These scholars have urged others to consider the view from within the ‘Indian Archipelago’ and in this thesis I explore non-English language sources as another archive that can render visible both lived and imagined geographies of mobility across this slice of the Indian Ocean world.

3. Camels, Ships and Trains

In 1857, the coast Mitchell called ‘Australindia’ was appended to the newly created British Colony of Queensland and neither his naming nor mapping of the ‘Indian Archipelago’ took hold in the imagination of British settlers. Nevertheless, between 1860 and 1930 the activities of ‘enterprising colonists of the south’ saw the emergence of an interlocking transportation infrastructure of camels, ships and trains that gave rise to Mitchell’s ‘Indian Archipelago’ as a lived geography. In this thesis, it is the arteries of this transportation network that thread together sources in a number of different languages and from disparate archives. Here I outline a brief history of the development of these lines of communication connecting British India to the Australian region, not via the northern coast as Mitchell envisioned but rather the southern ports of the Australian colonies.

In 1862, Sir Thomas Elder, a wealthy landowner from Adelaide purchased a shipment of camels from Bahadur Morad Khan, a wealthy Muslim merchant who

supplied these beasts to British Governments throughout the empire.³⁶ From the port of Karachi Elder's agent Samuel Stuckey set sail for Port Augusta in South Australia 'having on board 31 Afghans, 3 passengers, 124 camels, 31 donkeys, one quagga, black and grey partridges, 2 deer, 80 sheep, 1 cow and two bullocks.'³⁷ The '31 Afghans' Stuckey mentioned in his diary were workers from British India and Afghanistan. They were contracted at Karachi for three years of service in the Australian colonies as camel drivers. As camel yards were established throughout the Australian interior, camel tracks converged upon the same scarce sources of water central to Aboriginal economies, cosmologies and day-to-day life. Aboriginal workers were often employed in the camel industry and at places of frequent convergence many Muslim camel-workers formed intimacies with Aboriginal women throughout the Australian interior. Many Aboriginal families today remain intricately connected with the descendants of cameleers.³⁸ In the early days of the camel industry British settlers expressed the hope that 'Europeans will be found able to manage the camels, so that the Indian drivers will not be actually necessary.'³⁹ However this did not eventuate and the livelihoods of extended families and at times entire villages in British India and Afghanistan remained bound to Australian deserts. The familial networks that continue to shape these deserts today were thoroughly entrenched by the 1930s when the rise of motor transportation destroyed the camel industry.

³⁶ Bahadur Morad Khan was based in Karachi and owned substantial land on the British Indian border with Afghanistan. He supplied the British Governments of India with camels and in 1860 supplied the colonial Government of Victoria with camels for the Burke and Wills Expedition. B. M. Khan is mentioned in Extract from Diary of Samuel J. Stuckey, 1862 - 1866, Local History File Anderson 37, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection; "Importation of Camels," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 March 1862, 5; Mohamed Hasan Musakhan, ed. *The Mosques, Camel-Men and Islam: Islam in Australia, 1863 - 1932* (Adelaide: Mahomet Allum, 1932), 2; John Martineau, *Life and Correspondence of the Right Hon. Sir Bartle Frere, Bart., G.C.B., F.R.S., etc.* (London: John Murray, 1895), 191.

³⁷ Extract from Diary of Samuel J. Stuckey, Port Augusta Public Library.

³⁸ See Peta Stephenson, "Keeping it in the Family: Partnerships Between Indigenous and Muslim Communities in Australia" *Aboriginal History* 33 (2009); P. Rajkowski, *'Linden Girl': A Story of Outlawed Lives* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1995).

³⁹ "The Brindisi Route," *South Australian Register*, 1 December 1866, 2.

From the 1870s, while the growth of camel transportation networks was bringing the deepest reaches of the Australian desert interior into the terrain of capital, a steam-shipping revolution was strengthening the grip of European empires in the Indian Ocean. The construction of the Suez Canal in 1869, the completion of a global telegraph network in 1871 and the rise of steam-shipping transformed the economic landscape of the Indian Ocean by changing the way that money and commodities moved across this terrain. While non-European traders continued to operate in the Indian Ocean throughout the age of European domination, historian Rajat Kanta Ray has suggested that this imperial communications and transportation revolution finally turned the tide against the non-European merchant in favour of European firms.⁴⁰

On the northern coasts of the Australian mainland, the annual arrival of sailing boats with monsoon winds long predates the age of British imperial penetration into these waters.⁴¹ The rise of steam shipping saw the increasing arrival of Chinese and Japanese capital and labour in addition to the older traffic of sailing boats. From the 1880s the imposition of heavy customs duties upon Asian seafaring craft by the British colonial government coupled with aggressive policies of containment of Aboriginal people ultimately severed longstanding affective, cultural and trading ties that bound these coasts into the Indian Ocean. As historians have observed, this moment of apparent increasing global interconnectedness heralded the beginning of a long period of enforced isolation for Aboriginal seafarers with deep histories of

⁴⁰ Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," 478.

⁴¹ Historian Regina Ganter provides an overview of the historiographical debate on the length of Northern Aboriginal connections to Asian economies in 'Trepang: Australia's Asian Connection' in Regina Ganter, Julia Martínez and Gary Mura Lee, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia* (Crawley, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 4 - 28.

oceanic mobility.⁴² From the twentieth century these northern waters emerged as 'the most militarised and fiercely guarded region' in a federated 'White Australia.'⁴³

Substantial discoveries of gold in the Australian interior between 1860 and 1930, significantly increased the volume and frequency of shipping traffic from the southern ports and the place of Australian settler geographies in British imperial strategy in the Indian Ocean. Regular steam-shipping infrastructure connecting southern Australian ports to British India emerged around government contracts for the transportation of mails and gold bullion.⁴⁴ Economic historian Andrew Pope has shown that Australian gold was often transported directly to the treasuries of British Indian Governments, financing the export of Indian products to the centres of industrialising Europe during peacetime and ensuring the continuation of British Indian war supplies to Britain during World War I. The emergence of this new axis of imperial mobility from the 1860s not only buttressed the rise of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) as one of the most powerful shipping firms but also underpinned the monetary infrastructure of the British Empire in the Indian Ocean world.⁴⁵ As a number of historians have shown, British shipping companies such as P & O relied heavily upon the labour of *lascars*, the maritime counterpart of the British Indian 'coolie.'⁴⁶ Thus, while British colonial policies were severing Aboriginal ties stretching seawards from the northern coast of the Australian

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴³ Ruth Balint, *Troubled Waters: Borders, Boundaries and Possession in the Timor Sea* (Crow's Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 3.

⁴⁴ Andrew Pope, "The P&O and the Asian Specie Network, 1850 - 1920," *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1996); Andrew Pope, "Australian Gold and the Finance of India's Exports During World War I: A Case Study of Imperial Control and Coordination," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 33 (1996); Andrew Pope, "Precious Metals Flow in the Indian Ocean in the Colonial Period: Australian Gold to India, 1866 - 1914," in *Evolution of the World Economy, Precious Metals and India*, eds. John McGuire, Patrick Bertola and Peter Reeves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ Pope, "The P&O and the Asian Specie Network, 1850 - 1920," 151.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Hyslop, "Steamship Empire: Asian, African and British Sailors in the Merchant Marine, c.1880 - 1945," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44, 1 (2009).

mainland, the development of British shipping was extending the mobility of *lascars* to the southern ports of the same landmass.

In the mid-1870s the colonial government of South Australia began plans to connect the southern coasts of the Australian mainland to its northern shores with a railway line. Visiting the Australian colonies in 1875, the English writer Anthony Trollope commented that 'I cannot believe in the expenditure of ten million pounds on a railway which is to run through a desert and go nowhere.'⁴⁷ Trollope's remark belittling colonial aspirations and effacing Aboriginal presence in one fell swoop apparently cut deep. Three years later, turning the first sod at of the 'Great Northern Line,' the Governor of the South Australia replied directly to Trollope's slight. He insisted that the proposed railway line 'did not go through a desert and it went everywhere. If it only went to Port Darwin...it went to Java, India, Siam and China and also shortened communications with Europe and America.'⁴⁸ Also happily effacing Aboriginal presence, the Governor envisaged that a railway would simultaneously draw settlers economically closer to Asia *and* culturally closer to Europe and America; the gathered crowd responded with a standing ovation.⁴⁹

Following the course of the transcontinental railway through the northern deserts of South Australia, in this thesis I pause at a number of the railway sidings threaded together by the south-north line. Arriving at the camel transportation hub of Beltana on the territories of Kuyani people in 1881, the railway continued towards Lake Eyre, the vast, low salt plain that drains the surface water of a large portion of the Australian desert interior. Reaching the town of Marree the railway line curved

⁴⁷ Citing Anthony Trollope in Ian R. Stevenson, *The Line that Led to Nowhere* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1979), 23.

⁴⁸ Quoting Port Augusta Dispatch in *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

westwards along the artesian springs that thread a path through the heartland of Arabunna deserts and then northwards through country peopled by speakers of Arreptic languages (see Figure 4). Along both the north-south and east-west transcontinental lines, the railway towns established in the interior became camel transportation hubs as well as convergence points for many Aboriginal people.⁵⁰ The community of cameleers from various parts of British India and Afghanistan came to be known in settler idiom as 'Afghans.' Each of these railway towns included a section known as a 'ghantown' and at times British settlers described the railheads where they were frequently outnumbered as 'little Asia.'⁵¹ In 1898, when the transcontinental east-west railway line was opened from the gold fields of Coolgardie to Kalgoorlie, the wealthy camel merchant Hasan Musa Khan, the nephew of Bahadur Morad Khan from Karachi, presented the Governor of Western Australia with a white camel.⁵² Camel and railway networks interlocked at railheads and the movement of Indian Ocean travellers through Australian deserts became closely entangled with the transcontinental lines. So much so that in 1929 when the north-south railway that had begun as the Great Northern Line reached the town of Alice Springs, settlers rejoiced in the arrival of the 'Afghan Express' and the 'Royal Afghan' - soon shortened to 'the Ghan.'⁵³ Between 1860 and 1930, a growing network of camels, ships and trains

⁵⁰ A number of feminist writers have discussed Aboriginal women's presence along the transcontinental railways. See Fiona Paisely, "'For a brighter day': Constance Ternent Cooke," in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*, eds. Fiona Paisely, Anna Cole and Victoria Haskins (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005); Fiona Paisely, *Loving Protection?: Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919 - 1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Fiona Paisely, "No Back Streets in the Bush: 1920s and 1930s Pro-Aboriginal White Women's Activism and the Trans-Australia Railway," *Australian Feminist Studies* 12, 25 (1997); Alison Holland, "Whatever Her Race, a Woman is Not a Chattel," in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*, eds. Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisely (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Basil Fuller, *The Ghan: The Story of the Alice Springs Railway* (Chatswood, N.S.W.: New Holland, 2008), 16.

⁵² Phillip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland. 1860s - 1930s* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2007), 138.

⁵³ Fuller, *The Ghan: The Story of the Alice Springs Railway*, 11.

Figure 4



Map of Aboriginal Language Areas Discussed in this Thesis

Adapted from Horton's 'Aboriginal Australia Map' and Mitchell's mapping of the 'Indian Archipelago,' reproduced in Figure 1 and Figure 3 respectively.

realised Mitchell's 'Indian Archipelago' as an expanding geography of capital – and not only British capital by any means.

This transportation network connecting British India and the Australian region was just one of the geographies that arose from the colonisation of Aboriginal common ways and trading routes. As scholars have shown, travellers from China, Japan and Indonesia, in addition to various parts of Europe and North America, converged upon industries in the Australian colonies.⁵⁴ While a range of imagined and lived places flourished contemporaneously as Aboriginal land was brought into the terrain of capital, the resources of a powerful cluster of British institutions – particularly the state – backed the production of settler geographies. As Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake have shown, 'White man's countries' were geographical productions that deployed the 'state-based instruments of surveillance, the census, the passport and the literacy test'⁵⁵ to manage the global mobility of others.

Governments first deployed language tests as explicit tools of racial exclusion from the Australian colonies in the late nineteenth century. In 1898, already restrictive immigration laws governing settler ports were strengthened by the introduction of an 'education test.' This apparatus gave customs officers the ability to test people seeking entry at Australian ports in any European language, enlisting language as one of a myriad of strategies of racial exclusion employed by the state.⁵⁶ Upon federation in 1901, a modified 'Dictation Test' became one part of a much bigger strategy to build the national geography of 'White Australia.' A number of writers have

⁵⁴ For a collection of articles about travellers and traders to Australia see Don Grant and Graham Seal eds., *Australia in the World: Perceptions and Possibilities*, (Perth: Black Swan Press, 1992); Henry Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Regina Ganter, "The View From the North," in *Australia's History: Themes and Debates*, eds. Penny Russell and Martyn Lyons (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, 4.

⁵⁶ Fletch Heinemann, "Australian Gold Rush Sparks Customs Chaos," *Manifest* 3, 2 (2000): 22 - 24.

investigated the cultural productions and communications systems that produced 'White Australia.'⁵⁷ In addition, a number of historians examining instruments of governmentality have charted the production of 'whiteness' in the Australian region through medical and pedagogic strategies of rule during the period examined in this thesis.⁵⁸

4. Sources Used in this Thesis

The strategies of settler rule that have received substantial attention from Australian scholars were only ever partially successful.⁵⁹ Appropriating Anderson's concept of the nation as an 'imagined community,' in this thesis I treat 'White Australia' as an

⁵⁷ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981); Alan Atkinson, "'He Filled Us Full of Laughter': Contact and Community in Australian Experience," in *Cultural History in Australia*, eds. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003); Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to Tell the Time* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993); Melissa Bellanta, "Fabulating the Australian Desert," *Philament*, 3 (2004); Deana Heath, "Literary Censorship, Imperialism and the White Australia Policy," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891*, eds. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001); Ken Inglis, "Accas and Ockers: Australias New Dictionaries," *Meanjin* 1 (1977). For an analysis of settler attitudes to the 'rise of Asia' see David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*; Alison Bashford, "'Is White Australia Possible?' Race, Colonialism and Tropical Medicine," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, 2 (2000); Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Katherine Ellinghaus, "Absorbing the 'Aboriginal Problem': Controlling Interracial Marriage in Australia in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries," *Aboriginal History* 27 (2003); Ellinghaus, *Taking Assimilation to Heart: Marriages of White Women and Indigenous Men in the United States and Australia, 1887-1937*; Boucher, Carey and Ellinghaus, *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity*; Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*. Anderson, "State of Hygiene: Race 'Improvement' and Biomedical Citizenship in Australia and the Colonial Philippines"; Nicole Moore, "Treasonous Sex: Birth Control Obscenity Censorship and White Australia," *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, 48 (2005).

⁵⁹ As historian Eric Germaine has shown, the position of British Indians negotiating increasingly exclusionary settler bureaucracies was complicated by the fact that these people were supposedly British subjects. Eric Germaine, "Southern Hemisphere Diasporic Communities in the Building of an International Muslim Public Opinion at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, 1 (2007): 26; Germaine has also shown that 'Mahomet Allum Khan of Adelaide' was an entrepreneur financing some publications of a global Islamic network in Eric Germaine and Nathalie Clayer, eds., *Islam in Interwar Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 114; Annette Potts has shown that British Indians in the Australian Colonies appealed to their position as 'British Subjects' in their negotiations with settler institutions in Annette Potts, "'I am a British Subject and I Can Go Wherever the British Flag Flies': Indians on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales During the Federation years," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 83, 2 (1997).

‘imagined geography,’⁶⁰ albeit an influential one backed by powerful settler institutions. Aboriginal, British Indian and Afghani people moving through an interlocking network of camels, ships and trains left a trail of archives that are not in English that offer insight into the alternative geographies they inhabited. In this thesis I examine personal papers, letters, books and memoirs left behind by Indian Ocean travellers. Today, their descendants hold some of these records as precious family relics and others remain in mosques and local history collections. During the era of camels, ships and trains numerous songs and stories were composed by Aboriginal people and passed from mothers to daughters, sisters and nieces, from fathers to sons. Many of these remain in circulation in the oral records of Aboriginal communities today. From the 1960s, as part of a nascent movement to record Aboriginal languages, linguists generated an archive of stories and songs that I draw upon in this thesis. While I use linguistic materials to piece together changing Aboriginal geographies in deserts transformed by the arrival of white settlers and Indian Ocean travellers, these sources also offer detailed, close observations about itinerant Muslims, revealing the politics of encounter between people from very different parts of the ‘Indian Archipelago.’

While foregrounding non-English language materials that circulated beyond settler society, I also draw heavily upon standard archival sources of historical enquiry in English. Settler government, press and legal institutions have generated the most voluminous paper archives about people on the move from British India and

⁶⁰ Historian Lorenzo Veracini uses this phrase in Lorenzo Veracini, "The Imagined Geographies of Settler Colonialism," in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, eds. Tracy Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Afghanistan – a region that I describe as ‘South Asia’ in this thesis.⁶¹ I approach English printed archives as sites where various lived geographies intersected with settler institutions and read them against the grain to piece together insights into the structural underpinnings of the ‘Indian Archipelago.’⁶² Some of the wealthiest Muslim merchants have also left business records in state and national archives. In addition, corporate archives of mining, shipping and pastoral companies contain a wealth of information about the day-to-day place politics of race relations. The settler printed press record is a particularly rich archive on the complex geographies that Aboriginal place-names were embedded in.

The materials examined in this thesis were produced within different storytelling conventions and some of them were generated in specific institutional contexts. These are records that were deciphered by their producers using reading techniques that are at times opaque to people who encounter them today. As Robert Darnton, one of the foremost writers in cultural history and the history of the book, has pointed out: ‘reading remains a mystery...if we could really comprehend it...we could begin to penetrate the deeper mystery of how people orient themselves in a world of symbols spun around them by their culture.’⁶³ Deciphering Aboriginal and South Asian language materials demands careful and new reading techniques as well as creative writing practices to reconstruct, describe and illuminate the pasts in which

⁶¹ In response to a discussion on H-ASIA regarding whether Afghanistan is part of ‘South Asia’ see Guha, Sumit <sguha@history.rutgers.edu>. ‘Is Afghanistan part of S Asia? Academic Boundaries and Geographical Regions’ in H-ASIA. <http://www.h-net.org/~asia/>, 26 August 2009.

⁶² Writer Haneefa Deen recently likened these archives to ‘Aladdin’s cave.’ Troves of often digitised information where knowing the right word sees ‘the entrance...swing open to reveal its treasures and secrets.’ Hanifa Deen, *Ali Abdul v. the King: Muslim Stories from the Dark Days of White Australia* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2011), x.

⁶³ ‘Readers respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity’ in Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 215 - 16.

these materials were embedded.⁶⁴ In this thesis, the combination of reading and writing techniques I use may be best described as a method of translation across the 'Indian Archipelago.'

6. Theorists of Translation

As historian Lydia Liu has written, 'the problem of translation has become increasingly central to critical reflections on modernity.'⁶⁵ The methodologies I use in this thesis draw upon a growing scholarship on translation and are informed by multiple meanings of the word 'translation.'⁶⁶ Firstly, in common everyday usage in Australian English, translation is understood as a process of change from one language into another. Colloquial dialects that historically emerged through encounters between speakers of different tongues have recently emerged from post-colonial scholarship as a highly charged in-between medium that can be read as an archive, offering startlingly intimate details about how people saw, lived and inhabited the places where these languages emerged.⁶⁷ Lydia Liu in her analysis of Chinese modernity has suggested that linguistic features participated in the same frontier economy that goods and capital moved in and has called for closer historical attention to the emergence of universal means of communication at contact zones.⁶⁸ In the Australian context some of these themes with specific reference to encounter between languages have been explored in the field of linguistics and, under the

⁶⁴ Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ Lydia He Liu, *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

⁶⁶ For example see the collection Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood eds., *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ Amitav Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecasts: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail," in *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*, eds. Pamela Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr and Michael Pearson (Pretoria: Unisa Press & Penguin India, 2010), 21.

⁶⁸ Lydia He Liu, "The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign," in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia He Liu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 14.

interdisciplinary umbrella of 'borderlands,' a broader group of scholars have investigated the theme of translation at sites of encounter.⁶⁹

In a second sense, working with sources in various languages to produce historical prose in English requires acts of translation at a number of levels. Along this vein, a number of scholars have developed 'translation' as a useful metaphor for the practise of writing history. Treating historical prose as a language with its own strict rules, Dipesh Chakrabarty has drawn attention to the grammar of an apparently natural 'homogenous, secular, calendrical time' that underpins historical storytelling.⁷⁰ Chakrabarty has suggested that the process of disciplining 'enchanted life-worlds,' populated by supernatural creatures that behave according to various other concepts of time, onto the disenchanting, linear timeline of academic prose where only humans have agency, is an act of translation to history.⁷¹ This process of 'translation' as Chakrabarty defines it is one that scholars of Aboriginal history have grappled with in the Australian context.⁷²

⁶⁹ Jeff Siegel, ed. *Processes of Language Contact: Studies from Australia and the South Pacific* (Quebec: Champs Linguistiques, 2000); In the eJournal *Borderlands* see Regina Ganter, "Turning Aboriginal - Historical Bents" *Borderlands eJournal* 7, 2 (2008); Anthony Burke, "New Languages: Power, Feeling, Communication (Editorial)," *Borderlands eJournal* (2003); Michael Pickering, "Lost in Translation," *Borderlands eJournal* 7, 2 (2008); Shino Konishi, Leah Lui-Chivizhe and Lisa Slater, "Indigenous Bodies (Editorial)," *Borderlands eJournal* 7, 2 (2008).

⁷⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 74.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 72 - 96.

⁷² William Stanner coined the neologism 'Everywhen' in an attempt to convey Aboriginal people's concepts of space-time underpinning what scholars call 'the Dreaming' in Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, 57. There is a lengthy and controversial discussion of Yolngu concepts of time and space in Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being* (Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In a review on histories of Aboriginal labour Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore have drawn attention to the spectrum of responses that scholars in the field of Aboriginal history have developed in grappling with the problems of time. They write that while historians such as Henry Reynolds have insisted upon using linear time chronologies, Curthoys and Moore suggest that Deborah Bird Rose is at the opposite end of the spectrum, using the narratives as told by Aboriginal people as the intellectual organising principle of her analysis. Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore, "Working for the White People: An Historiographic Essay on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour," *Aboriginal Workers: Special Issue of Labour History* 69 (1995): 13 - 14. Most recently, historian Minoru Hokari in his research and writing on Gurindji people has explored the tensions and intersections between the chronological periodisation of academic history and place-

In addition to drawing upon these approaches, in this thesis I use the word ‘translation’ in a third more material sense. ‘Translation’ can mean movement between places. In the language of high-school physics ‘translation’ describes the ‘side-ways’ movement of physical objects – motion without rotation around the centre.⁷³ This meaning of ‘translation’ draws attention to one of the key thematic concerns underpinning this thesis: mobility. This usage of ‘translation’ seems an apt descriptor for mobility through a transportation network that connected the interior of the Australian colonies to British India laterally, giving rise to a grid of mobility between British settler and franchise colonies, without recourse via metropolitan London.⁷⁴ While in some chapters I investigate in close detail the politics of non-European mobility through a transportation network, in other chapters I use mobility through places today as an explicit methodology of research to decipher certain sources. In my analysis I approach the task of ‘reading’ South Asian and Aboriginal language materials in the Australian region by combining these three meanings of ‘translation’ and their recent theoretical articulations.

7. Australian Engagement with Indian Ocean Studies

The materials examined in this thesis offer valuable contributions to the emerging field of Indian Ocean studies. Since Fernand Braudel’s study of the Mediterranean as a ‘liquid continent,’ a number of inter-regional water bodies have generated

oriented grammar of Gurindji historical practise in Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback*.

⁷³ The OED offers the following definition of translation in the language of physics ‘Transference of a body, or form of energy, from one point of space to another. Motion or movement of translation: onward movement without (or considered apart from) rotation; sometimes as distinguished from a reciprocating movement as in a wave or vibration.’

⁷⁴ For analyses of the different structures that underpinned British rule in settler colonies and franchise colonies see Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labor and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” *The American Historical Review* 106, 3 (2001); Tracy Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

corresponding bodies of historical scholarship. Scholars have approached the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Caribbean and Saharan Sea amongst others as the organising geographies that illuminate histories of oceanic connection, rather than separation. Currently, the Indian Ocean is one such 'Mediterranean' receiving growing attention from writers as a 'theoretical terrain, a geographical space and a historical network of human connectiveness.'⁷⁵ As Isabel Hofmeyr and others have pointed out, scholarly interest in this body of water has burgeoned alongside the economic rise of Asia and the emergence of the Indian Ocean as the cradle of a Post-America world order.⁷⁶

As historian Regina Ganter has pointed out, the northern coasts of the Australian mainland that meet the Indian Ocean 'exist somewhere at the faded margins of the Australian historical consciousness.'⁷⁷ Equally, in the emerging field of Indian Ocean studies, the south-eastern quarter of this 'liquid continent' remains hazy.⁷⁸ However, from the 1970s scholars in the field of Aboriginal history have

⁷⁵ Gupta in the 'Prologue' to Pamela Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr and Michael Pearson, eds., *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*, Indian Ocean Series: Africa in the Indian Ocean: Cultural and Literary Perspectives (Unisa Press & Penguin India, 2010), 4; For example: Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke, eds., *Cultures of Trade: Indian Ocean Exchanges* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860 - 1925*, eds. David Parkin and Ruth Barnes, Indian Ocean Series (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Engseong Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2006); Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Kai Kresse and Edward Simpson, eds., *Struggling With History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Shanty Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal, eds., *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social and Political Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010); Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865 - 1915* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁷⁶ Isabel Hofmeyr, "Africa as a Fault Line in the Indian Ocean," in *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean*, eds. Pamela Gupta, Isabel Hofmeyr and Michael Pearson (Pretoria: Unisa Press & Penguin India, 2010), 99. More broadly, from the field of geography Philip Steinberg has examined 'Territorial Political Economy and the Construction of Ocean-Space' in Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8 - 38.

⁷⁷ Regina Ganter, "'Australia Seemed Closer the Tokyo': Japanese Labourers in Australia, 1870s to 1940s," in *Australia in the World: Perceptions and Possibilities*, eds. Don Grant and Graham Seal (Perth: Black Swan Press, 1992), 330.

⁷⁸ Goodall, "Landscapes of Meaning: Views from Within the Indian Archipelago," ii. While a number of the leading, early practitioners of Indian Ocean studies were maritime historians based in Australia, when these scholars mention Australia, it is often to point out its exception from the Indian Ocean

charted how Aboriginal trading, familial and cultural ties stretched across the Indian Ocean world.⁷⁹ The influence of Islam predates British arrival to the south-eastern rim of the Indian Ocean and as linguists have pointed out 'rupiah' today remains the word for 'money' in Yolngu-Matha languages on the northern shores of the Australian mainland.⁸⁰ Aboriginal networks of mobility and Aboriginal language sources remain an underused archive, which have important contributions to make to this area of study. The exclusion of Australian Aboriginal materials from Indian Ocean studies is neatly demonstrated by historian Shailendra Bhandari's recent account of the spread of *rupiya* – the silver currency and word – coined in Bengal in 17th century AD.⁸¹ She traces the economic and linguistic reach of 'Rupiya' to African, Arabian and Indonesian shores but stops short of the Australian coast, remaining silent on the Indian Ocean histories of Australian Aboriginal people. It is a silence that highlights the need for a greater level of engagement between Indian Ocean studies and scholars working on the Australian region.

As I have indicated, it is not the northern coast of the Australian mainland that I examine in this thesis. Rather, I focus my attention on the southern ports that mediated connection to the Indian Ocean world between 1860 and 1930. Shifting my

world or recount the emergence of an 'island nation' of white settlers. For example see John McGuire, Patrick Bertola and Peter Reeves, eds., *Evolution of the World Economy, Precious Metals and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3; Frank Broeze, *Island Nation: A History of Australians and the Sea* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998).

⁷⁹ C. C. Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege': Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1976); Ganter, Martínez and Lee, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*; Ganter, "The View From the North"; Regina Ganter, "Muslim Australians: the Deep Histories of Contact," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, B4 (2008).

⁸⁰ Michael Walsh, "Languages and their Status in Aboriginal Australia," in *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, eds. Colin Yallop and Michael Walsh (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993), 6; Alan, Zorc and Walker, R. David, "Austronesian Loanwords in Yolngu-Matha of Northeast Arnhem Land," *Aboriginal History* 5 (1981): 156. On the influence of Islam on Aboriginal people on the Northern coast of Australia see Peta Stephenson, *Islam Dreaming: Indigenous Muslims in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010), 297.

⁸¹ Shailendra Bhandare, "Money on the Move: The Rupee and the Indian Ocean Region," in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, eds. Himnashu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

attention to the continuation of non-European mobility facilitated by an emerging network of camels, ships and trains during this period rather than the production of White Australia as an 'island nation,' I offer contributions to the field of Indian Ocean studies. Building on the recently developed framework of the 'Indian Archipelago' I bring a number of different areas of Australian history into fruitful dialogue with developments in Indian Ocean studies. By placing the history of Muslims and British Indians in Australia within the context of the Indian Ocean world, I explore alternatives to the current scholarly focus on how settlers and their institutions represented and policed these travellers.⁸² A number of historians have recently examined the triangulated development of race-relations in Australia and investigated the relationships between Aboriginal people and Asians.⁸³ In this thesis, I argue that these interactions offer significant contributions to Indian Ocean studies. Through close attention to the voluminous archives generated by itinerant Muslims working the Indian Ocean and Australian deserts, I piece together the structural underpinnings of gendered mobility across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Particularly, my use of Aboriginal language archives offers unique insight into the gendered encounters of Indian Ocean travellers in Australian deserts.

⁸² See for example Allen, "'Innocents Abroad' and 'Prohibited Immigrants': Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910"; Allen, "Betraying the White Nation: The Case of Lillie Khan "; Allen, "'A fine type of Hindoo' meets 'the Australian type': British Indians in Australia and diverse masculinities."

⁸³ Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang, eds., *Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Chinese Encounters in Australia, 1901-2001* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, 2003); Ganter, Martínez and Lee, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*; Peta Stephenson, *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007); Stephenson, *Islam Dreaming: Indigenous Muslims in Australia*; Minoru Hokari, "Anti-Minorities History: Perspectives on Aboriginal-Asian Relations," in *Whitewash: From Federation to Reconciliation*, eds. Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang (Canberra: Australian National University, 2003); Minoru Hokari, "Globalising Aboriginal Reconciliation: Indigenous Australians and Asian (Japanese) Migrants," *Cultural Studies Review* 9, 2 (2003); Julia Martínez, "Plural Australia: Aboriginal and Asian Labour in Tropical White Australia, Darwin, 1911-1940" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Wollongong 1999).

8. Structure of Thesis

Bringing a printed Bengali book of poetry, a Kuyani place-name, the Urdu memoirs of a seafarer, Arabunna, Dhirarri and Dieri stories, Wangkangurru song-poetry and an Arabic root word that sprouted variants in Australian deserts onto the same analytic framework presents significant challenges. Yet a circuitry of camels, ships and trains brought speakers of these languages into close, regular contact, intricately threading together Aboriginal lives, families and livelihoods with those of Indian Ocean travellers. Accordingly, I have used these lines of mobility to draw the thesis together as a coherent whole. Placing these materials in the same geographical framework of the 'Indian Archipelago' while not collapsing Aboriginal and South Asian experience demands close reading of places of convergence from different perspectives.⁸⁴ As historian Judith Binney has pointed out in the New Zealand context, we cannot translate others' histories into our own – we can merely juxtapose them.⁸⁵ In this thesis, the chapter structure I have employed does some of this work of juxtaposition to illuminate the multifaceted thematic and lived interconnections, between geographies of modernity inhabited by speakers of South Asian and Aboriginal languages.

In the **first chapter** I use a number of techniques to 'read' the Bengali book-commodity that remains today at Broken Hill. Reading a range of archives I

⁸⁴ This is a technique that has been developed in the field of Aboriginal history by a number of writers. For example see Jacki Huggins, Rita Huggins and Jane M. Jacobs, "Kooramindanjie: Place and the Postcolonial," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995); Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: the Meaning of Lost Places* (Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Oakleigh, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002); Heather Goodall, "'The River Runs Backwards'," in *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002); Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003).

⁸⁵ Judith Binney, "Maori Oral Narratives, Pakeha Written Texts: Two Forms of Telling History," *New Zealand Journal of History* 21, 1 (1987): 30 - 32.

investigate how this book travelled to Broken Hill and piece together a history of Muslim mobility through the material circuitry of the 'Indian Archipelago.' Reading the poetry itself I illuminate a history of reading, writing and storytelling that existed beyond settler geographies in the era of camels, ships and trains.

In the **second chapter** using the Urdu memoirs of a *lascar* from Lahore, I closely examine oceanic mobility in the era of British steam-shipping. From c.1875 Khawaja Muhammad Bux began working as a fire stoker on British ships and by the 1890s had established himself as an import/export merchant in the city of Perth in Western Australia. A wealthy man by the end of his days, Bux sat with a scribe after he retired to the city of Lahore, orating his tales of the sea for generations to come. It is an extraordinary document that remains unpublished and offers rare insight into how one seafarer both navigated and narrated an ocean transformed by steam shipping. Embarking from the port of Bombay, I examine seven voyages that Bux undertook over his lifetime. Treating the 'Indian Archipelago' as a slice of a broader Indian Ocean world, I draw attention to the multiplicity of forces that shaped Bux's mobility across this geography.

From the ocean, I turn my attention to a tract of desert in the arid north of the British Colony of South Australia in the **third chapter**. The first camel breeding depot in the Australian colonies was established at the sheep run of Beltana, in territory peopled by Kuyani speakers. For Indian Ocean travellers Beltana became a gateway into a livelihood working Australian deserts. For Aboriginal people, the arrival of camels to Beltana from Kandahar to Kuyani territory in the 1860s, followed by the construction of the overland telegraph and transcontinental railway, grafted a colonial communications and transportation hub onto an existing cosmopolitan centre of Aboriginal trade. With close attention to Kuyani and Wangkangurru place-names,

stories and song-poetry at Beltana, I examine how Aboriginal traders, workers and travellers negotiated a growing network of camels, ships and trains.

Having ‘mapped’ mobility across the ‘Indian Archipelago’ in some detail, in the remaining chapters I examine the politics of encounter at some of the places where ‘the Ghan’ railway line intersected with camel tracks. Along the course of this line, government engineers built railway water tanks, dams and bores that came to be reliable permanent sources of water where people from different parts regularly converged. In the **fourth chapter**, I examine an Arabunna story about an encounter between two young Aboriginal sisters and two Muslim camel workers at the railway water tank at Alberrie Creek railway siding. Using linguist Luise Hercus’ English translation of this encounter as an entry point, I investigate the conventions that mediated gendered encounters between Muslim travellers and Aboriginal people on the move.

The story of what happened at the railway tank at Alberrie Creek remains alive in the oral records of Arabunna people today. In the **fifth chapter**, I travel to Alberrie Creek to investigate how Aboriginal storytellers continue to make meaning of this particular tale. In October 2010, travelling for seven days through Arabunna country with Reg Dodd, the Chairman of the Arabunna People’s Committee, I received my first lessons in the grammar of Arabunna storytelling. I illustrate how a particular type of literacy in reading and narrating place powerfully shaped young Aboriginal women’s encounters with and memories of cameleers.

In the **sixth chapter** I examine Muslim marriage conventions that underpinned gendered encounters throughout arid pockets of the largest island of Mitchell’s ‘Indian Archipelago.’ At the busy railhead of Marree along ‘the Ghan’ there erupted a

violent marriage dispute in 1904. Arriving on the evening train to Marree, Sher Khan from Kabul shot Moosha Balooch five times to avenge the breach of a marriage agreement. It was an event that generated a lot of talk, gossip and innuendo in a number of languages spoken at Marree and continues to circulate in the oral records of people living at the town today. In this chapter, examining the shooting and its aftermath, I piece together the particular species of Muslim marriage conventions that took root along the camel tracks through Australian deserts.

After shooting the wealthier camel-merchant at Marree, the wronged Sher Khan disappeared into the desert on foot. A Lower Southern Arrernte man, known to settler police officers as Charley, tracked this cameleer over the next days and accounts of Khan's escape through the desert came to be told time and time again in Aboriginal languages spoken around Marree. In the **seventh and final chapter** I place Charley's court testimony of tracking Khan alongside Dhirari and Wangkangurru accounts of this chase recorded by linguists from the 1960s. Examining how this story of pursuit travelled across time, I illuminate the powerful role that lived geographies played in structuring the place Muslim cameleers found in Aboriginal people's memories and imagined geographies.

Over the sixty-year period of camels, ships and trains examined in this thesis, both settler nationalism and the Australian nation-state as a political-economic unit emerged as powerful forces in the region. South Asian and Aboriginal people, both accorded a marginal place in settler geographies, had little use for Anglo concepts like 'White Australia' or the 'empty interior.' In this thesis I explore the material circuits that some of these people moved along and the alternative stories they told along the way: the lived geographies and imagined geographies that existed in the Australian region beyond the settler territorial categories of colony and nation. Working with a

range of languages presents a number of pragmatic and conceptual challenges.

Exploring multiple meanings of the word 'translation,' I propose a palette of tentative solutions for how to 'read' South Asian and Aboriginal language records. As

Anderson proposed, the printed book-object was a mass-produced industrial commodity that played a privileged role in shaping modern consciousness and spatial imaginations.⁸⁶ Accordingly, I begin by reading the book of poetry at Broken Hill.

⁸⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 34.

Chapter One

Bengali poetry in the Australian desert

The poem begins by evoking a divine pen wielded by an invisible hand.¹ In 1861, Bengali poet Munshi Rezaulla wrote that at the very beginning of time itself Allah wrote onto a tablet the destinies of all beings.² According to Rezaulla, as He wrote and wrote, trees grew into forests and the wind blew across oceans and deserts realising the design of divine words. A fist full of dust fleetingly became an earthen statue and then took the living, breathing shape of Adam.³ The pages of verse that follow tell the stories of the Islamic prophets from Adam to Muhammad sent to steer the children of Adam through an earthly geography to an eternal afterlife. It is a familiar story with some South Asian inflections. During the era of camels, ships and trains, a printed book of 500 pages of Bengali poetry beginning with Rezaulla's account of creation found its way to Broken Hill, an inland mining town 500 miles from the nearest seaport. In the 1960s on the Gregorian calendar, a group of local historians found the book of poetry lying in the yard of the disused mosque in Broken

¹ Kazi Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia* (Kolkata: Hanifia Press, 1301 BS/1894 AD), 3: Line 8.

² *Ibid.*, 5: Line 7 - 10. All translations from Bengali to English are by Samia Khatun unless otherwise stated. I am indebted to the various people who have helped me with translations from Bengali including Eshrat Hossain, Afrin Sumaya, Shubham Roy Choudhury, Dr Sanjida Khatun and Dr. Devleena Ghosh. Reference works I have consulted in the process of interpreting this text are Shaik Ghulam Maqsd Hilali, *Perso-Arabic Elements in Bengali*, 3 ed. (Rajshahi: Hilali Foundation, 2005). Atindra Mojumder, "Arabic, Persian and Turkish words in Bengali Literature" (University of Melbourne, 1981); Sailendra Biswas, *Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2000).

³ Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia*, 3: Line 21 - 22.

Hill.⁴ The final few pages were missing, the book was badly weathered by desert extremes and in the words of historian Christine Stevens, 'its sacred pages [were] blowing in the red dust.'⁵ Unable to decipher the words, the local history enthusiasts carefully dusted the book free of sand. Labelling it in English as 'the Holy Koran,' they placed it inside the mosque they were restoring as a tourist attraction. Since then, the book at Broken Hill has been mentioned a number of times in Australian histories of Islam and has repeatedly been mislabelled as a Quran.⁶

In fact, the book bears the title *Kachachol Ambia* and its contents belong to a style of Bengali performative verse known as *puthi* poetry. The title *Kachachol Ambia* was first published in 1861.⁷ In the following decades it was reprinted many times in a neighbourhood of Calcutta that came to be known as *Battala*. Literally meaning 'under the banyan tree,' *Battala* became synonymous with an urban geography of cheap Bengali print production from the 1860s on the Gregorian calendar. The copy of *Kachachol Ambia* that remains at Broken Hill is an 1894 reprint.⁸ The first page bears the seal of publisher Kazi Sofiuddin (see Figure 5). Descended from a family of Islamic judges – or *Kazis* - Sofiuddin was one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world of *Battala* publishing. A number of scholars of book history have written

⁴ 'The Broken Hill Mosque,' Information Pamphlet by Ralph Wallace, Item 3, Mosque Records, Broken Hill Historical Society.

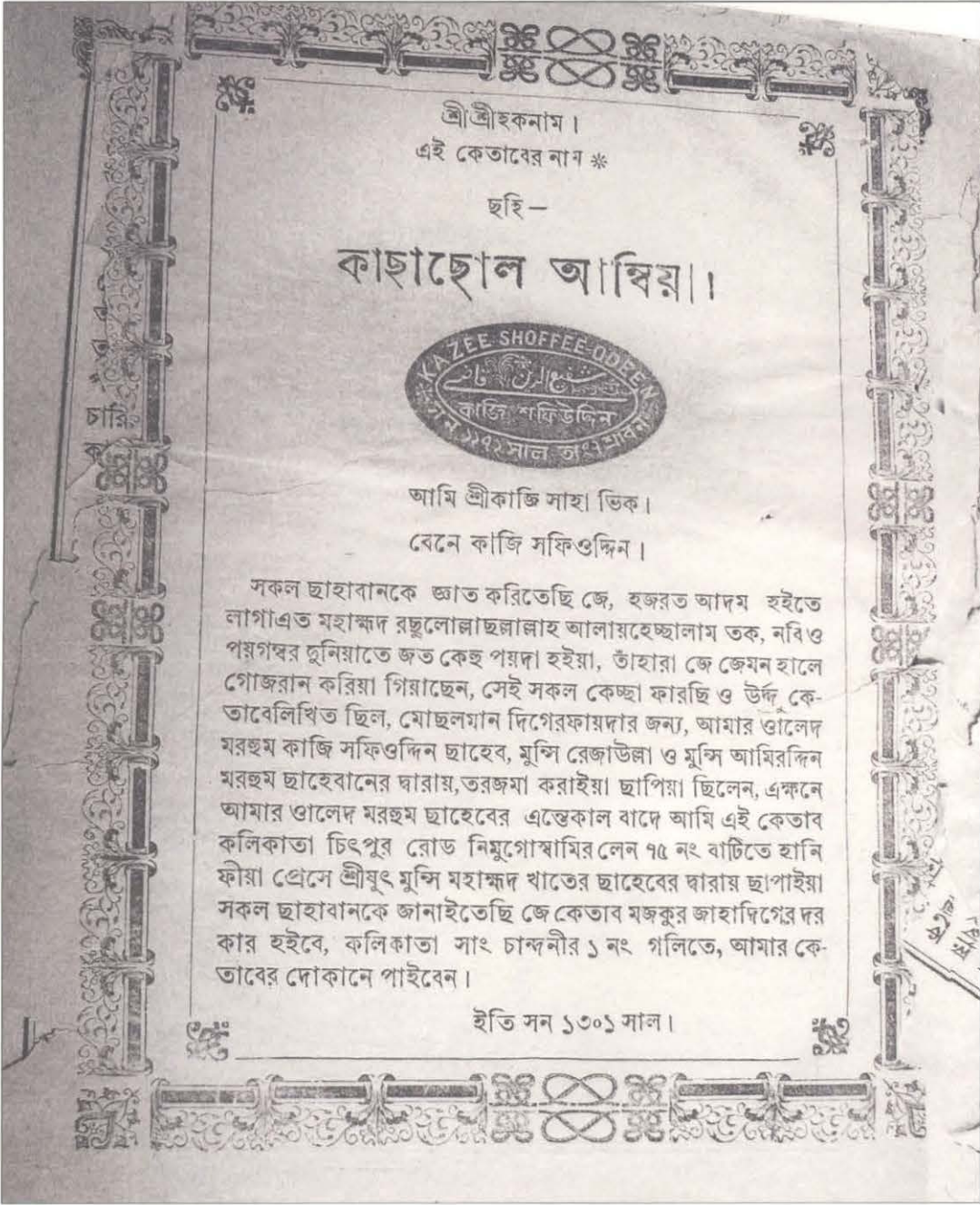
⁵ Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 100a.

⁶ 'The Broken Hill Mosque,' Information Pamphlet by Ralph Wallace, Item 3, Mosque Records, Broken Hill Historical Society; In 1965, A. F. Tylee described the book as 'a translation into the national language of East Pakistan of the Holy Koran' in Mosque Records Broken Hill Historical Society, *The Mosque of the Camel-Men*, by A. F. Tylee (1965); Christine Stevens' book includes a picture of *Kachachol Ambia* and labels it a Quran in Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, 84b, 100a; In a Bangladeshi magazine, Australian historian Nahid Kabir from The University of Western Australia likewise referred to the book in Broken Hill as 'translated copy of the Holy Quran' in Nahid Kabir, "A History of Muslims in Australia," *Star Weekend Magazine*, September 7 2007.

⁷ Bengali linguist Sukumar Sen dates the first publication of Rezaulla's poetry to 1861 in Sukumar Sen, *Battalar Chappa O Chobi*, 2nd ed. (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2008 (1984)), 50.

⁸ The publication date appears as 1301 on the Bengali San (BS) calendar in Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia*, 1. For more information about the BS calendar see Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 332 - 3.

Figure 5



Seal of Kazi Sofiuddin

Appears at the beginning of the publisher's statement in Sofiuddin, Kazi. *Kachachol Ambia*. Kolkata: Hanifia Press, 1301 BS/1894 AD, 1.

about him.⁹ Tracing Sofiuddin's career, historian Gautam Bhadra has recently shown that *Battala* was a place where publishers engaged Brahmin pundits and Muslim noblemen to translate Vaishnav, Hindu, Persian romances in addition to Islamic classics into Bengali while relying upon the labour of the singing minstrel wandering the countryside, the working class Muslim bookbinders and the Hindu business castes to print, bind and distribute the books to the masses.¹⁰ *Battala* was a cosmopolitan workshop of 'print-capitalism' where words from classic texts were yoked to book-commodities and the riches thereby generated were distributed most unevenly through the class hierarchies of the printing industry.¹¹ Sofiuddin emerges from South Asian historiography as a key operator in the *Battala* business of translation and the title *Kachachol Ambia* was one of his most ambitious and successful undertakings.

Having travelled the oceans and deserts of the 'Indian Archipelago,' the particular copy of *Kachachol Ambia* that remains at Broken Hill invites closer analysis with careful attention to both language and place. In this chapter, by

⁹ In order of publication date: Reverend James Long, "Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language, in 1857, to Which is Added, a List of the Native Presses, With the Books Printed at Each, Their Price and Character, With a Notice of the Past Condition and Future Prospects of the Vernacular Press of Bengal, and the Statistics of the Bombay and Madras Vernacular Presses," *Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government* (Calcutta: John Gray, General Printing Department, 1859), 3 APPENDIX A; Rajendra Lal Mitra, "On the Origin of the Hindvi Language and Its Relation to the Urdu Dialect," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 33, 5 (1864): 518; Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui, "Musalman O Bangasahitya," *Sahitya Parishat Patrika Hoy Sangkha* (1900): 96; Sukumar Sen, *Islami Bangla Sahitya* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1358 BS/1952 AD), 100, 09, 13; Sen, *Battalar Chappa O Chobi*, 45, 50, 63; Mofakkkhar Hussain Khan, *The Bengali Book: History of Printing and Bookmaking, 1667 - 1866*, vol. I (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999), 378; Mofakkkhar Hussain Khan, *The Bengali Book: History of Printing and Bookmaking, 1667 - 1866*, vol. II (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2001), 578, 318 - 19, 21, 24, 27; Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 272; Gautam Bhadra, "Rashbhab Manoharini," *Robbar (Supplement to Newspaper Sambaad Protidin)*, 12 December 2010; Samia Khatun, "Morubhumite Bangla Kabbo," *Robbar (Supplement to Newspaper Sambaad Protidin)* 2011; Gautam Bhadra, *Nyera Battalae Jae Kaubar?* (Kolkata: Chatim Books, 2011), 139, 223 - 26, 30, 54, 77, 78.

¹⁰ Bhadra, "Rashbhab Manoharini," 12.

¹¹ Sen quotes an article from '*Basantak*' magazine that appeared c.1873 describing the conditions and pay for which compositors worked in the *Battala* presses in Sen, *Battalar Chappa O Chobi*, 59. Anderson articulates 'print-capitalism' as the 'explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print)' in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and Extended ed. (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 42 - 43.

'reading' this book-commodity at Broken Hill using a number of techniques, I sketch the movement of Muslim travellers along the arteries of the 'Indian Archipelago' and explore histories of reading and writing beyond the margins of settler geographies in the Australian region. I first examine some aspects of translation from Persian poetry to Bengali verse and then investigate the translation of the book from *Battala* to Broken Hill. The bulk of this chapter is structured around the questions raised by the copy of *Kachachol Ambia* at Broken Hill. How did this book travel from *Battala* to Broken Hill? With whom did it arrive? I start by reading beyond the erroneous label that this book has borne ever since its entrance into Australian historiography and turn my attention to the poetry itself.

1. Translation Between Languages

The copy of *Kachachol Ambia* in Broken Hill is a translation from Persian poetry to Bengali popular verse. '*Qisas-al-Anbiya*,' meaning 'Stories of the Prophets' in Persian and Arabic, is an important title in histories of the Islamic book and has been in circulation since the very first century of Islam.¹² With his eye on the nascent book-market in c.1860, Kazi Sofiuddin approached his friend Rezaulla to translate the title *Qisas-al-Anbiya* for a popular Bengali audience, appealing that 'ordinary people cannot read Persian.'¹³ In tackling the task of translation for the *Battala* industry, Rezaulla joined a much longer line of Muslim writers described by scholars as 'mystic' poets, who believed that writing, reading, listening, indeed any sort of

¹² Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qisas al-Anbiya* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 1; See also John Renard, ed. *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 138; I am indebted to Professor Gabor Korvin for sending me one recent publication in English under this title: Ibn Kathîr, *Stories of the Prophets (Qasas-ul-Ambia)*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003).

¹³ Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia*, 6: Lines 14 - 15.

relationship with words, could induce a meditative state of intimacy with Allah.¹⁴ The tools of writing - pens, paper and ink - were articles that Islamic mystics playfully animated not only in the art form of calligraphy but in the subject matter of their lengthy reflections on the process of writing.¹⁵ Rezaulla had never written poetry before. In translating the stories of the Prophets, his couplets had to stay true to divine design while appealing to the sensibilities, language and imagery of popular Bengal. Daunted by the enormity of the task, he agonised 'how will I create poetry of this form?'¹⁶

Following conventions recognisable throughout a larger body of mystic poetry and drawing upon the motifs of many writers before him, Rezaulla wrote a lengthy account of his path to poetry at the beginning of *Kachachol Ambia*.¹⁷ In rhyming couplets he informs his readers of a decision to leave behind the temptations of an increasingly materialist world and turn to poetry. Overwhelmed by the task of translation he resolved that whatever he set out to find Allah would reveal. Invoking the imagery of a fisherman who firmly knots his loincloth to his waist in anticipation of the toil ahead, Rezaulla wrote 'I leapt into the sea.'¹⁸ As orientalist scholar Annemarie Schimmel has shown, both Arabic and Persian poets were particularly fond of comparing themselves to the pen. In their autobiographical accounts, mystic writers frequently leapt into illusory oceans in search of poetry, their bodies

¹⁴ Annemarie Schimmel is a leading orientalist scholar of Islamic 'mysticism.' For her discussion of the category 'mystic' see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 4 - 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 415 - 16; Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 116 - 17; Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 227 - 44; Marcia Hermansen, "Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia," *The Muslim World* 87, 3 - 4 (1997).

¹⁶ Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia*, 6: Line 19.

¹⁷ Rezaulla's autobiographical writing can be identified as belonging to the 'Tazkira' tradition discussed in Hermansen, "Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia."

¹⁸ Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia*, 6: Lines 19 - 21.

metaphors for a divine pen guided by an invisible hand and immersed in an ocean of ink.¹⁹ For example a sixteenth century mystic calligrapher commenced his verse pleading with his pen ‘Come, O pen of composition and write letters/ In the name of the Writer of the Well-Preserved Tablet and the Pen!’²⁰ Mirza Ghalib (1797 – 1869 AD), the most renowned poet of Muslim India and writing during Rezaulla’s lifetime, likewise deployed a range of pen imagery.²¹ Drawing upon a number of metaphors used by these poets, having taken a leap of faith, Rezaulla likened translation to the painstaking task of trawling an ocean bed for pearls and stringing together a garland of revealed gems. He wrote ‘this necklace I call *Kachachol Ambia*.’²² In Rezaulla’s account, like the measured movement of prayer beads, threading together Bengali words into couplets across the page, translating *Qisas-al-Anbiya* into *Kachachol Ambia*, was a meditative process requiring total immersion, indeed abandonment to divine design.

Whilst drawing upon an archive of Islamic mystic metaphors and imagery, Rezaulla penned his words and measured his couplets into the rhythmic conventions of another tradition of poetry. Performative *puthi* poetry long predates the age of printed text in Bengal.²³ Used for centuries as the medium of popular poetic expression about local cults, gods and folk heroes and myths, it is a form steeped in the polytheistic practises of folk culture in Bengal. While in verse Rezaulla’s gives an account of writing *Kachachol Ambia*, the observations of one British government official offers a glimpse of how people read *puthi* poetry. In 1879 AD, C.W. Bolton

¹⁹ Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*, 116 - 17.

²⁰ ‘*Risala*’ cited and translated by Annemarie Schimmel in *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 415.

²² Sofiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia*, 6: Line 22. Schimmel writes about pearl and sea metaphors in Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*, 117.

²³ See David L. Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Maṅgal-Kābya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (Chronicle Books, 2008), 4; Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 - 1760* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 265.

reported that in Calcutta ‘frequently... an observant passer-by sees a large know of natives collected around a Tailor or native grocer’s shop to hear a man (the most prominent person for the time being) reading a Tale in the Musalmani-Bengali.’²⁴ Watching from the margins of such gatherings, Bolton wrote ‘the reader is looked upon as a prodigy of learning; the only gift perhaps which he has being a ready knowledge of the alphabet and words and fluency of reading, which is always rapid, sonorous, and musical, and must be accompanied with rapid motions of the head and body, without which he could not go on.’²⁵ As historian Rafiuddin Ahmed has suggested, not just readers and audiences, but sometimes also writers of *puthi* poetry were from the poorer sections of Bengali society.²⁶

In contrast to Bolton’s surveillance of the urban gatherings around *puthi* readers, the memoirs of Kazi Motahar Hossain offer a more intimate account of *puthi* readings in rural Bengal at the turn of the twentieth century. Hossain’s father was an Islamic judge in the region of Kushtia, today on the border of India and Bangladesh. In his memoirs Hossain recounted that during the final few hours before sunset his father would sit on the verandah of the familial home to read *puthi* poetry and ‘many people from surrounding areas would travel considerable distances to come and listen to the stories.’²⁷ Confirming Bolton’s observations about the local fame of *puthi* readers, Hossain’s account sketches the verandah as place where *puthi* reading drew people together from a range of class backgrounds. Hossain wrote that his father

²⁴ Tapti Roy quoting from letter, ‘C. W. Bolton, undersecretary, Government of Bengal, to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Department, 29 April 1879,’ in Tapti Roy, “Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature,” in *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 47 - 48.

²⁵ Tapti Roy quoting from letter, ‘C. W. Bolton, Undersecretary, Government of Bengal, to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Department, 29 April 1879,’ in *Ibid.*

²⁶ Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871 - 1906: A Quest for Identity*, 2 ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), xx.

²⁷ Kazi Motahar Hossain, *Sritikatha* (Dhaka: Nabajuga Prokashani, 2004), 15.

'memorised many parts of *puthis*' offering some insight into how this style of poetry shaped technologies of memory and the popular transmission of Islamic sacred history. Hossain recalled that his father 'at times, would spontaneously recite historical events of importance stretching from Adam to Prophet Muhammad without even looking at the *puthi*.'²⁸ From listening to recitations, Hossain too learnt the same verses and it is likely that villagers leaving that verandah took home couplets from Islamic sacred history set to the rhyme and meter of *puthi* poetry.

Curiously, almost from the moment of its translation to Bengali in c.1861, *Kachachol Ambia* has been identified repeatedly as a site of hybridity, an at times troubling in-between-ness. Rajendralal Mitra (1822 – 1891), one of the earliest orientalist of South Asian origin and a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, undertook a close analysis of the language of Rezaulla's poetry in 1864 (see Figure 6).²⁹ Mitra noted that while 'the language of Young Bengal... is a patchwork of English nouns and Bengali verbs,'³⁰ *Kachachol Ambia* contained a high ratio of Arabic, Persian and Urdu words in a patchwork of Bengali verbs. Tabulating Rezaulla's verse and describing the languages of Islam as 'foreign,' Mitra counted '17 foreign for every 24 Bengali words.'³¹ While Hossain's account suggests that *puthi* poetry was a most effective vehicle for the transmission of Islamic sacred history and imagery, Mitra's analysis suggests that the printed *Kachachol Ambia* was a medium through which words from the languages of Islam entered into popular usage.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For a discussion of Mitra within the context of the 'Bengal Renaissance' see Susobhan Sarkar, *On the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1985), 43.

³⁰ Babu Rajendralala Mitra, "The Origin of the Hindvi Language," *Journal of the Asiatic Society* XXXIII, V (1864): 515.

³¹ Ibid.: 518.

Figure 6

The language of the translator, Reza-ullah, will be illustrated by the following extract, in which we have 17 foreign for every 24 Bengali words.

B 1 F 1 B 2 B 3 F 2 F 3 F 4 B 4 B 5
স্তন হো মোমিন ভাই করিয়া খেয়াল। আখেরে সাফং জার হইবে
F 5 F 6 F 7 F 8 F 9 F 10 F 11 B 6 B 7
নেহাগ ॥ মহান্নর যোস্ত। নবি আলায় হেআলাম। পরগন্বরী হৈল তাঁর
B 8 F 12 F 13 F 14 B 9 B 10 B 11 B 12 F 15 B 13
উপরে ভাষাম ॥ নবুওত করিয়াতে সেই মোতি ভারী। লেখিতে ছেফত তাঁর
B 14 B 15 B 16 B 17 F 16 B 18 B 19 B 20 B 21 B 22
আমি কিবা পারি। আপনা নুরেতে জারে আপে নিরঞ্নে। প্রথমে করিয়া
F 17 B 23 B 24
পয়দা রাখিল গোপনে ॥

Mitra's Analysis of Rezaulla's language

Babu Rajendralal Mitra, "The Origin of the Hindvi Language and Its Relation to the Urdu Dialect," *Journal of the Asiatic Society* XXXIII, no. V (1864), 518.

By the close of the nineteenth century, *Kachachol Ambia* had been reprinted a number of times and Muslim opinion on *puthi* poetry was increasingly polarised across Bengal. In 1900 the urban publisher Abdul Gafur Siddiqui evoked Sofiuddin to assert the contribution of Islamic thought to the cultural history of Bengal. Siddiqui argued that just as cheap *Battala* translations of Hindu classics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* shaped Bengali storytelling, so too *Battala* translations of Islamic classics shaped the evolution of the language and popular Bengali literature.³² Conversely, the semi-autobiographical fiction of contemporary writer Syed Mustafa Siraj has suggested that the hybrid *puthi* style of poetry in *Kachachol Ambia* came under attack from Islamic reform movements sweeping through the northern parts of British India towards the close of the nineteenth century.³³ In Siraj's Bengali novel *Aleek Manush* published in 1994, upon the arrival of Islamic reformers to north Bengal, an elderly villager hastily discards a *puthi* he is reading on the verandah: a copy of *Kachachol Ambia*.³⁴

In the process of translation from Persian to Bengali at *Battala*, some writing techniques of Islamic mystic poetry came to be grafted to the reading techniques of popular Bengali verse. As Bhadra has outlined, yoked to the book-commodity in the pungent workshops of *Battala*, a number of hybrid forms of storytelling entered into rapid economic circulation across the geography of the Bengali book-market.³⁵ As linguist Sukumar Sen has shown, the riverine system of Bengal formed the arteries of this market, delivering freshly printed books to the furthest reaches of the countryside within months. The copy of *Kachachol Ambia* in the Australian interior, however,

³² Siddiqui, "Musalman O Bangasahitya," 96 - 99.

³³ See Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870 - 1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁴ Syed Mustafa Siraj, *Mythical Man (Bengali Title: Aleek Manush)* (Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi, 2005), 25 - 26.

³⁵ Bhadra, *Nyera Battalae Jae Kaubar?*, 111.

tells the story of its circulation through another circuit of mobility. The slice of the Indian Ocean world stretching from Calcutta to Broken Hill was not a geography brought into existence specifically by the economic circulation of Bengali book-commodities. Rather, the circulation of commodities in general gave rise to the circuitry of camels, ships and trains across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Next I investigate the translation of one particular copy of *Kachachol Ambia* from *Battala* to Broken Hill.

2. Translation Between Places

The discovery of a lode of silver at Broken Hill in the 1880s saw this town emerge as a dense node in an interlocking transportation network. As increasingly large shipments of metal ore were funnelled to market, over 500 miles of railway was laid connecting Broken Hill to the nearest seaport. During the first 50 years of its growth, however, it was not trains but camels that supplied provisions for the booming mining town. The completion of the train line to Port Pirie in 1888 consolidated Broken Hill as a transportation hub supporting a large industry of cameleers carting goods throughout arid desert pockets of the 'Indian Archipelago.'³⁶ In 1890, Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd. (BHP) entered into shipping contracts for the transportation of silver bullion with P & O and OSN.³⁷ Calcutta was an industrial centre and recruiting ports for both these companies, two of the biggest shipping firms working the Indian Ocean.³⁸ Indeed, corporate histories the largest mining conglomerate in the world

³⁶ James Fiddaman's self-published manuscript gives a broad survey of the camel industry in Broken Hill. 'Camels and Cameleers' by J. W. Fiddaman, 1968, Item 10, Mosque Records, Broken Hill Historical Society.

³⁷ 'Agreement between BHP and Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Co. and Orient Steam Navigation Co. Ltd, for Shipment of Bullion, 16 July 1889' reproduced in Denis M. Riley and Dale E. Crisp, *The Iron Ships: A Maritime History of BHP, 1885 - 1992* (Melbourne: BHP Transport, 1992), 12.

³⁸ G. Balachandran, "Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta, 1880 - 1935," *International Journal of Maritime History* IX, 1 (1997).

today – BHP-Billiton – reveal that by the 1890s there was ample transportation infrastructure connecting Broken Hill and Calcutta, dense centres of industrial activity on the British imperial map. How, when and with whom did this copy of *Kachachol Ambia* travel from *Battala* to Broken Hill in the opposite direction to colonial exports? Tracing the career of Khan Zada, a camel worker based around Broken Hill, I will show how a copy of *Kachachol Ambia* might have arrived to the mosque with an Indian Ocean traveller who was not of Bengali origin.

Cameleers

Khan Zada arrived in the Australian colonies in the late 19th century and married an Aboriginal woman by the name of Eileen Mary Josephine in 1926. He made his home in Broken Hill whilst working in the camel industry, which saw him travel throughout the Australian inland.³⁹ The mosque where the *Kachachol Ambia* remains today was built by Muslim workers and merchants, many of whom were in the camel business. The majority of these men, like Zada, were from the north western provinces of British India and Afghanistan, where there were thriving camel industries. Described as a 'stout, talkative and jovial soul,'⁴⁰ Zada is a prominent figure in settler accounts of the Broken Hill 'Afghans.'⁴¹ However this body of scholarship makes no reference to Zada's life as a seaman, a story that falls outside the land-based narratives of nation building that structure the majority of histories of the Muslim cameleers.

³⁹ Family Papers relating to the descendants of Zada Khan, Personal Collection of Donna Cook, Port Augusta.

⁴⁰ 'Camels and Cameleers' by J. W. Fiddaman, 1968, Item 10, Mosque Records, Broken Hill Historical Society.

⁴¹ Khan Zada is mentioned in Page 2 of Ibid; Jeff Carter, 'Nomads in No Man's Land,' magazine clipping of column 'Jeff Cater's Wild Country,' from *People*, p.51, no date, Item 2, Mosque Records, Broken Hill Historical Society; Pamela Rajkowski, *In the Tracks of the Camelmen: Outback Australia's Most Exotic Pioneers* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987), 103, 09, 20, 68; Phillip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland. 1860s - 1930s* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2007), 178; Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, 306, 126; Roberta J. Drewery, *Treks, Camps, & Camels: Afghan Cameleers Their Contribution to Australia* (Broken Hill: Published by Author, 2008), 34, 89.

Khan Zada was born in the city of Karachi.⁴² Before he was a cameleer he worked as a *lascar*, the maritime counterpart of the Indian coolie labourer.⁴³ While Australian historiography remains silent on the global career of Zada, some stories from his seafaring days have survived in the private memories of his children. In 1985, Zada's son Larl Zada recounted that after 'jumping ship as a youth' at an Australian port, Zada took up employment in land based transport industries.⁴⁴ Reflecting upon his own service in WWII on a troop ship as a fireman Larl Zada recalled 'My old dad had been a seaman before me, and I quite took to it.'⁴⁵ The eldest member of Zada's descendants alive today is Aysha Zada in the town of Port Augusta. At the age of 100, she recalled that her forefathers did not talk much about their seafaring days.⁴⁶ Contracted to British steamships under the system of 'Asiatic Articles,' strict regimes controlled the mobility of *lascars* docked at ports outside British India. Ship desertion could lead to grievous consequences for *lascars* who were caught,⁴⁷ and today the possibility that many cameleers arrived to Australia by 'jumping ship' remains a source of shame for some of their descendants. As Amitav Ghosh has pointed out, *lascars*' own tactics to avoid public scrutiny form just one of the 'many curtains of silence we seek to pierce when we enquire into their lives.'⁴⁸

As with many cameleers, the exact date of Zada's arrival to the Australian colonies is unknown. However an image of camels being unloaded from the

⁴² Correspondence between Zada and relatives in Karachi reveals that he was born in Karachi. Papers of Donna Cook, Port Augusta.

⁴³ By the age of the steam shipping technology in the late 19th century, *lascar* referred to the 'coloured seamen' who worked in the engine rooms and below deck in British owned steamships Heather Goodall, Devleena Ghosh and Lindi Todd, "Jumping Ship – Skirting Empire: Indians, Aborigines and Australians across the Indian Ocean," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, 1 (2008): 52 - 53.

⁴⁴ June Fergusson, "The Galloping Ghan takes a rest," *Stock Journal* 1985. Newspaper clipping in family papers of Lal Zada, Port Augusta.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Personal communication with Aysha Zada, Saturday 1st August 2009, Port Augusta.

⁴⁷ Ravi Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900 – 1960," *International Review of Social History* 51, Supplement (2006).

⁴⁸ Amitav Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecasts: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2008): 58.

steamship *SS Bengal* powerfully shapes the stories of arrival told by Zada's descendants today (see Figure 7).⁴⁹ The image, of which there are various versions, depicts a camel being lowered from the steamship *Bengal* to the dock at Port Augusta where the railway line meets the sea.⁵⁰ The *SS Bengal* was one of a number of ships chartered at times to transport camels from Karachi and Kabul and regularly travelled between Calcutta and the Australian ports from as early as 1872 and well into the 20th century.⁵¹ Arriving on a ship such as this, it is possible that Zada spent time in Calcutta exploring the dockside neighbourhoods where Bengali *puthis* were printed, perhaps spending eight anna on a souvenir such as the *Kachachol Ambia*.⁵²

Whilst not shedding any light on the precise moment of Zada's arrival to the Australian colonies, a close look at a photograph of camels being unloaded from *S.S. Bengal* reveals a vast wealth of information about the milieu of the British steam-ship. This ship was crewed at least partially by *lascars*.⁵³ Two barefooted men with dark complexion and uncovered heads are captured in mid action in this photograph, one running to the stern and the other descending with a bucket onto the railway tracks that extended to the dock. Meanwhile, men in turbans wait on the docks, ready to receive the camel suspended in mid air, while European men on board the vessel

⁴⁹ Personal communication with Trudy Stewart, Friday 4th September 2009. There is a country western song written by the descendants of the 'Afghans' which mentions this photograph in CAAMA, *The Last Camel Train [sound recording]* (Alice Springs: CAAMA, 2002).

⁵⁰ Unloading Camels at Port Augusta (Photograph), 1893, Local History File TR25, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection.

⁵¹ Peter Taylor, *An End to Silence: The Building of the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Darwin* (Sydney: Methuen Australia, 1980), 46.

⁵² Soffiuddin, *Kachachol Ambia (Qasas-ul-Ambia)*, Page 2: Line 27.

⁵³ Unloading Camels at Port Augusta (Photograph), 1893, Local History File TR25, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection.

Figure 7



Unloading camels from *SS Bengal* at Port Augusta

Unloading Camels at Port Augusta (Photograph), 1893, Local History File TR25, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection

applaud the feat being performed by the *lascar* deckhands. A rare snapshot of the racially differentiated hierarchy of the steamship, this photo also depicts a meeting point for shipping, camel and railway industries, three distinct transport networks that forged conduits of movement across oceans and over deserts. It highlights that the late 19th century steamship was a place where the lives of the turbaned cameleers from the north-western parts of British India and Afghanistan intersected with those barefoot maritime labourers who peopled the Indian Ocean, many of whom were Bengali.

It is certainly conceivable that the *puthi* arrived in Broken Hill amidst goods loaded atop a camel with a cameleer like Zada. Shifting scholarly focus away from the nation building narratives and onto the seafaring chapters of the lives of cameleers places the Bengali *puthi* in the North Broken Hill mosque within a circuit of transport networks that joined various nodes of industrial activity across the ‘Indian Archipelago.’ Leaving Zada on his way inland to make his name in the Broken Hill camel industry, I want to now return to the space of the steamship to explore the possibility that the *Kachachol Ambia* arrived to Broken Hill with a Bengali speaker.

Bengali Lascars

Long before the rise of the British Empire labouring people of Bengal have crewed vessels across the Indian Ocean.⁵⁴ Examining archival records of Australian port cities around the turn of the 20th century confirms that during the age of the British Empire the largest island of the ‘Indian Archipelago’ became a destination for some of this global workforce. That a Bengali *lascar* even appeared in an amorous role in Henrietta Drake-Brockman’s sexually charged sailing fantasy set off the Western

⁵⁴ The Census Commissioner of Bengal in 1881 wrote: ‘the Mahomedan youth of eastern Bengal Delta still furnish the Bay of Bengal with boatmen and sailors, as they did when the Mughals had a dockyard and a naval arsenal in Dacca.’ Quoted in Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871 - 1906: A Quest for Identity*, 3.

Australian coast in the 1920s, suggests that some citizens of 'White Australia' were aware of the uncomfortable, even titillating proximity of these seafaring men.⁵⁵

The P & O was one of the largest shipping companies to routinely employ 'Calcutta crews' on ships docking at Australian ports.⁵⁶ As historian Andrew Pope has shown, from the 1870s, the P & O steam-shipping network bound Australian ports and British Indian ports increasingly closer together in a bid to capture the lucrative imperial trade in gold specie.⁵⁷ Whilst the Post and Telegraph Act (1901) outlawed the employment of *lascars* on ships carrying Australian mail, many P & O vessels trading in other goods continued to be worked by 'Calcutta crews' well into the 20th century. A fatal stabbing on-board a steamer docked at Port Adelaide reveals that Bengali *lascars* also reached Australian ports whilst working vessels owned by smaller companies than P & O. In December 1907, the steam ship *SS Kish* owned by the Clyde Shipping Co. of Glasgow,⁵⁸ docked at Port Adelaide. On an oppressively hot Adelaide day the trouble started when harsh words were exchanged between *lascar* crewmen confined to the cramped quarters of the docked vessel. A scuffle erupted and a violent stabbing led to the death of Bengali coal trimmer Arzad Ullah on the 3rd December 1907. Abdullah, a twenty five year old man from Calcutta, who had joined the crew of *Kish* at Singapore as a fireman, was charged with murder on the 4th of December 1907. Committed for trial in the Supreme Court of South

⁵⁵ Henrietta Drake-Brockman, "Sydney or the Bush (Unpublished Manuscript)," (Canberra: National Library of Australia, c.1920).

⁵⁶ M. Watkins-Thomas, "Our Asian Crews," *About Ourselves: (P & O Staff Journal)*, September (1955).

⁵⁷ Andrew Pope, "Precious Metals Flow in the Indian Ocean in the Colonial Period: Australian Gold to India, 1866 - 1914," in *Evolution of the World Economy, Precious Metals and India*, eds. John McGuire, Patrick Bertola and Peter Reeves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Andrew Pope, "The P&O and the Asian Specie Network, 1850 - 1920," *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1996).

⁵⁸ "The Kish," *The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842 - 1954)*, Thursday 12 September 1907, 8.

Australia, Abdullah stepped onto the shores of 'White Australia' with a bundle of his meagre possessions.⁵⁹

Settler press coverage suggests that this Bengali fireman was framed and took the fall for someone else. Indeed, Mr Paris Nesbit, Abdullah's defence lawyer, 'made a powerful appeal to the jury on behalf of the accused, his address occupying an hour and a half.'⁶⁰ Close examination of the archival documents that this case generated confirms that some *lascars* were literate. For example *lascar* fireman 'Mir Bose' wrote his address and signed his name in Bengali at the bottom of his witness statement to the Supreme Court, which was penned in English by the court clerk.⁶¹ Was the *Kachachol Ambia* that remains in Broken Hill today performed at sea by a literate *lascar* like Mir Bose? Was *puthi* poetry part of a larger oceanic archive of popular literatures enjoyed by *lascars* as they worked paths across the Indian Ocean connecting ports?

American seaman and writer Herman Melville wrote in an autobiographical account of the British merchant service that '[White] Officers lived astern in the cabin where every Sunday they read the church of England's prayers, while the heathen at the other end of the ship were left to their false gods and idols. And thus, with Christianity on the quarter-deck and paganism on the fo'c'sle, the *Irrawaddy* ploughed the sea.'⁶² Did literate Bengali *lascars* perform *puthi* poetry on Sundays according to time-work schedule of European Officers at sea? Reflecting upon decades of service on-board P & O liners, another British ship officer wrote in 1955

⁵⁹ The King Against Abdulla, February 1908 no. 13, Archives of the Supreme Court of South Australia (SCSA).

⁶⁰ Newspaper Report, Item 3, State Records of South Australia GRG 5/46 Criminal Offence Report (homicides), Willfull Murder, Box 1, File no. 2430 of 1907.

⁶¹ Deposition of Witness by Mer Bakhs in King vs. Abdulla, 13/1908, SCSA.

⁶² Ghosh quoting Redburn: His First Voyage, Being the Sailor Boy Confessions And Reminiscences Of the Son-Of-A-Gentleman In The Merchant Service, Anchor Books, New York, 1957, p 165 in Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecasts: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail," 57.

that 'from time to time, when several Asian manned ships are in port together[,] ... a crowd of Moslems will foregather in a mess room or [deck] to make that weird, though rather intriguing, cacophony of sound, Eastern music. They will sit cross-legged on the deck and chant their songs to a musical accompaniment.'⁶³ Music appears an integral part of the paths *lascars*' worked across seas and in 1916 the Melbourne *Argus* reported that when the P & O liner *Malaya* crewed by British Indians sank in 1916, 'the lascars stuck to their places, and as the liner went down some of the gallant natives could be heard singing as they went to their death.'⁶⁴

The *SS Kish* departed on the 5th of December for 'Dunkirk, Hull and Continental ports via Shea' with a cargo of sheepskins, wool and wheat for the Elder, Smith and Co. Pastoral Company.⁶⁵ It left behind a distraught Abdullah in Adelaide Gaol. One settler newspaper revealed that during his imprisonment for two months whilst waiting for his trial, Abdullah 'was crying every day because he had no relatives to visit him.'⁶⁶ The jury, taking a 'merciful view of the case,' found him guilty of manslaughter and Abdullah was 'sentenced to 10 years imprisonment with hard labour.'⁶⁷ What we cannot confirm nor disprove is whether the bundle of belongings that Abdullah took to the Yatala Labour Prison included a Bengali *puthi*.

Whilst Abdullah was left behind in Adelaide against his will, a voluminous body of archival records and the occasional *lascar* testimony confirms that despite the increasingly strict regimes of control imposed upon *lascars* at ports outside British India, many of these workers jumped ship upon reaching Australian ports. In his

⁶³ Watkins-Thomas, "Our Asian Crews."

⁶⁴ "Loss of Maloja. Saved, 301; Missing, 155. Splendid Conduct of Lascars," *Argus*, Wednesday 1 March 1916, 9.

⁶⁵ "Sailed - December 5," *The Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1889 - 1931)*, Friday 6 December 1907, 6.

⁶⁶ Newspaper Report 'A Murder Charge. Abdullah on his Trial. The Prisoner's Evidence', Item 3, SRSA GRG 5/46/1/1907/2430.

⁶⁷ Newspaper Report 'Port Stabbing Case. Abdullah Sentenced. Ten Years for Manslaughter', Item 3, Ibid.

memoirs, Khawaja Muhammad Bux, a *lascar* from Lahore detailed how he successfully and routinely jumped ship and helped his countrymen to evade customs police officers at a number of Australian ports. Bux was already living in Perth in the 1890s when friends arrived at the port of Fremantle in the colony of Western Australia. Bux boarded a train from Perth to Fremantle with some other Indians and he had in the breast pocket of his coat two spare return railway tickets back to Perth. Bux wrote in his memoirs: 'A group of nine or ten persons reached the port from Perth along with me. We had got return railway tickets from Perth. We handed over two return railway tickets to Chiragh ud Din and Ghulam Hussain and got them disembarked...Police were told that these persons had the return railway tickets from Perth.'⁶⁸

Like Khan Zada from Karachi and the men from Bombay that Khawaja Muhammad Bux helped, many *lascars* from Calcutta too jumped ship at Australian ports. At the close of the 19th century, there is ample evidence of the presence of Bengali speakers of a range of class backgrounds in Australian ports. Some of these men would not have been able to afford the third class fare to Australia and would have worked their passage.⁶⁹ For example, a Bengali man called 'Dervaish,' usually a title for someone treading a mystic path, was making and selling jars of pickle in Melbourne in the early 1880s.⁷⁰ Across the continent at Port Hedland in the British Colony of Western Australia, Sheik Abdulla Aziz from Calcutta was a cook in 1890.⁷¹

In Fremantle in the 1890s it was two Bengali cloth sellers, who refused Khawaja

⁶⁸ Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Gábor Korvin and Syed Haider Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," (Rawalpindi: Personal Collection of Gábor Korvin, 2006), 127.

⁶⁹ In the early 1880s, Khawaja Mohammed Bux wrote that a third class fare from Bombay to the Australian Colonies was 150 Rupees in *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 72, 79.

⁷¹ Anne Atkinson and Vivienne Loois, *Asian Immigrants to Western Australia, 1829 - 1901*, ed. Rica Erickson, 10 vols., vol. 5, *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians* (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia, 1988), 436.

Muhammad Bux accommodation on the cold winter evening that he disembarked from his ship.⁷² Between July 1904 and June 1905, thirteen Bengali merchants dealing in cloth had the means to contribute towards the building of the Perth mosque and the number fell to eight the following year.⁷³ Back across to the eastern edges of the largest island of Mitchell's 'Indian Archipelago,' Seepoo Mullah, born in Calcutta, departed from the port of Townsville in 1905. He had in his possession a 'Certificate of Domicile' that allowed him re-entry into the recently federated 'White Australia,'⁷⁴ demonstrating that even after federation some Bengali workers kept travelling across the 'Indian Archipelago,' albeit with increasing difficulty.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, tightening port restrictions and increasing nationalist agitation against Asian hawkers and shop owners had significant consequences for Bengali *lascars* who had built land-based livelihoods. Bux wrote that after the issue of hawkers licenses to Asians ceased in the colony of Western Australia in 1893 'all the Chinese and Indians got extremely worried...The Bengalis also became jobless.'⁷⁵ This legislation however made an exception for hawkers selling 'fish, fruit and vegetables in towns'⁷⁶ thereby pushing these itinerant workers inland in their search for a livelihood. Bux writes that 'these hawkers got dispersed to other areas.'⁷⁷ Many Bengalis, who had been *lascars* once upon a time found their way to the arid interior of Australia as cameleers, one industry where

⁷² Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 79.

⁷³ Mohamed Hasan Musakhan, ed. *The Mosques, Camel-Men and Islam: Islam in Australia, 1863 - 1932* (Adelaide: Mahomet Allum, 1932), 10, 19 - 20.

⁷⁴ Certificate of Domicile: Seepoo Mullah, Control symbol 1905/163, Series J2482, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁵ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 99.

⁷⁶ 'Chief Office of the Police Department Perth to Commissioner of Police Adelaide, 14th December 1909' in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/2 Correspondence files ('PCO' files) - Police Commissioner's Office, "Issue of Hawkers Licenses; Boats Trading on R.Murray, is License Needed for Retail Sales," Box 99, File no. 403 of 1906.

⁷⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 99.

South Asians continued to find employment long after the enactment of 'White Australia.' One wealthy camel owner from Afghanistan, Ossman, complained about such Bengali men on his team. Transporting goods to the Western Australian goldfields in the 1920s, Ossman described his Bengali workers as 'not good camel men.... Him - hawker from Calcutta. One man drive'm cab in Calcutta, the others - fools. White men think because him got black skin him camel man. Him never seen camel hardly in India.'⁷⁸

Chasing the copy of *Kachachol Ambia* that remains in Broken Hill today reveals a surprisingly large archive of Muslim mobility: people who jumped ship and skirted empire and nation across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Local history records suggests that the camel transportation network seems the most likely means that the copy of *Kachachol Ambia* travelled to the Australian interior. However, it is possible that the *puthi* arrived to Broken Hill navigating the Murray-Darling river basin from the eastern port cities of Melbourne and Sydney. Pursuing this alternate route, I now turn my attention to another network of Muslim mobility in the south-eastern corner of the Australian landmass that bound this island into the 'Indian Archipelago.'

Hawkers and Rivers

The mosque where the *puthi* remains today is located at the intersection of a number of different networks of mobility that were shaped by the ecology of the region. The vein of metal ore that the township of Broken Hill was founded upon is located at the boundary of the Murray-Darling basin and the Lake Eyre basin, two separate riverine systems that gave rise to distinct but interconnected networks of mobility. As

⁷⁸ First Published as "Outback Trails - An Oldtimer's Memories" and other articles in the "Folly Pot" Column, *The Western Mail*, 1938 - 1942,' quoted in Jane Simpson, "Camels as Pidgin-Carriers: Afghan Cameleers as a Vector for the Spread of Features of Australian Aboriginal Pidgins and Creoles," in *Processes of Language Contact: Studies from Australia and the South Pacific*, ed. Jeff Siegel (Fides: Champs Linguistiques, 2000), 207.

hostilities towards the 'Chinese, the Japanese, the Kanaka, the Lascar, the Hindoo, the Afghan'⁷⁹ reached a peak, some Bengali men found work as cameleers as I have already shown. Others sought out a livelihood in the interior as hawkers. In the south-eastern quarter of the Australian landmass, historians have shown that British Indians flocked to the Murray-Darling.⁸⁰ A riverine system that spanned across the colonies of South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, it was a complex conduit of trade that dominated the inland topography of eastern Australia (see Figure 8).⁸¹ Whilst historians writing about Broken Hill as a node in routes of Muslim mobility have foregrounded camel transportation networks, the importance of the Darling River to the development of this town is also well documented in local histories and memories.⁸²

Printed accounts of hawkers on foot throughout this region swell in settler presses coinciding with the flooding of inland waterways and resultant mishaps.⁸³ For example, in 1891, near Wangaratta in the British Colony of Victoria, a hawker travelling from Tarrawingee with two companions, drowned in a tributary of the Murray River. The *Argus* (Melbourne) reported that 'in order to shorten the distance

⁷⁹ Newspaper Clipping, 'The Afghan Menace, and Incidentally the Alien Curse,' appeared in *Barrier Daily Truth*, 20 March 1903 in 'Afghans' (Notes and Research Materials Collected by Roberta Drewery and Brian Tonkin), Outback Archives, Broken Hill Public Library.

⁸⁰ Annette Potts, "'I am a British Subject, and I Can Go Wherever the British Flag Flies': Indians on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales During the Federation Years," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 83, 2 (1997): 105.

⁸¹ Whilst the Murray-Darling is a constantly changing geography of connected rivers, the map reproduced in Figure 8 was compiled in 2010 and offers some guide to the geographical reach of this complex system.

⁸² 'Riverboats' in R. H. B. Kearns, *Broken Hill: A Pictorial History* (Hawthorn: Australia Investigator Press, 1982), 179 - 84.

⁸³ For example "Drowning at Kotupna. Three Lives Lost," *The Argus*, Tuesday 24 October 1893, 5; "New South Wales (By telegraph from our correspondent): Fight among Indian Hawkiers," *The Brisbane Courier*, Tuesday 13 December 1898, 5; "Australian State Telegrams (From Melbourne Papers)," *The Mercury*, Monday 15 July 1901, 4; "The Country: Holder," *The Advertiser*, Monday 15 February 1904, 9; "Inland River Navigation," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1905, 15; "An Indian Drowned in the Murray," *The Advertiser*, Thursday 13 December 1906, 11; "River Murray Drowning Fatality," *The Advertiser*, Tuesday 18 December 1906, 8; "The Murray Drowning Case," *The Advertiser*, Friday 14 December 1906, 11; "Indian Hawkiers Death," *The Argus*, Friday 20 October 1911.

Figure 8



Murray-Darling Basin

Image reproduced in Beale, Bob. "Scientists offer qualified support for Murray-Darling Basin Plan." Online News (2010), <http://www.science.unsw.edu.au/news/scientists-offer-qualified-support-for-murray-darling-basin-plan/>.

by two or three miles'⁸⁴ the Indian hawkers headed for Yellow Creek 'which was flowing rapidly, and is about 15ft deep at the point they reached. One of them, who was familiar with the road, offered to guide his companions, and, leaving his bundle on the bank, led the way. He had got some distance across when he suddenly disappeared, and he was not seen again.'⁸⁵ As environmental historians have noted, the behaviour of inland waterways of the largest island of the 'Indian Archipelago' has mystified many foreign arrivals to these parts.⁸⁶ Unlike 'rivers' in various other parts of the world, Australian inland waterways for long stretches of time remain dry beds of sand dotted with trees, which would have appeared to unsuspecting hawkers as inviting paths to be travelled with ease. However these often dry conduits are subject to very sudden, rapid flooding. Hawkiers unable to read the behaviour of water frequently drowned trying to pursue the shortest possible route between towns.

British Indian hawkers with a cartload of goods were a common sight along the Murray-Darling and its tributaries and hawking became quite a profitable business for those who exercised caution along its beds and shores.⁸⁷ Aboriginal writer Ruby Langford Ginibi has reminisced about the Richmond River: 'we used to row across here to buy lollies from an old Indian woman called Mrs Singh who had a caravan with wheels that was pulled along by a draughthorse.'⁸⁸ In 1898 in the town of Narrandera on the Murrumbidgee River in the colony of New South Wales, 'a

⁸⁴ "An Indian Hawker Drowned," *The Argus*, Friday 10 July 1891, 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ For an historical account of the ecology of the Murray-Darling and Lake Eyre basin rivers, respectively, see Heather Goodall, "'The River Runs Backwards'," in *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 30 – 51; James Terence Puckridge, "Heritage Significance of the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers: Address to Lake Eyre Basin Pastoralists at Muloorina," (Muloorina: Friends of the Lake Eyre Basin, 1993).

⁸⁷ Mentions of an 'Indian hawker named Boota, a well-known man' in "An Indian Hawker Killed," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday 11 June 1903, 8.

⁸⁸ Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Real Deadly*, (North Ryde, N.S.W.: Angus & Robertson, 1992).

company of Indian hawkers, numbering nearly thirty'⁸⁹ gathered at their camp to 'do honour to two of their number who were about to return to India with savings amounting to £200 each.'⁹⁰ This group of travelling traders had gathered before embarking once more for circulation across the 'Indian Archipelago.' While the majority of such gatherings never made it into settler presses, on this occasion a raucous fight over the amassed fortune ensued and 'three of the hawkers were badly injured.'⁹¹ The presence of alcohol perhaps makes it unlikely that this was a crowd of Muslims with a Bengali speaker or two amongst their midst. Nevertheless, this riverside account at Narrandera offers a glimpse into the kinds of gatherings where a text like the *Kachachol Ambia* might have found occasion to be performed enroute to Broken Hill.

The most well-known Muslim trader along the Murray-Darling was Boota Mohammad Allam, an Urdu speaker from Punjab. Asian import/export businesses mushroomed in the port cities of Sydney and Melbourne in the final decades of the 19th century and well into the 20th century and Allam supplied an extensive inland distribution network along the Murray-Darling worked by hawkers.⁹² 'M. Allam, General Merchants and Importers' was a firm based in Redfern in the port of Sydney.⁹³ Calculations, money orders, ledgers and receipts peppered with Mandarin and Urdu signatures reveal that (in partnership with Chinese businessman George Dan) Allam supplied imported wares from British India and China; supplying both settlers and British Indians, shop owners and hawkers, in the riverside towns of Gulargambone, Walgett, Brewarrina, Warren, Dubbo, Coonabarabran, Mungatah and

⁸⁹ "New South Wales (By telegraph from our correspondent): Fight among Indian Hawkers."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Boota Mohamed Allam papers, ca. 1902-1915, Manuscripts collection of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 2813

⁹³ This title is from Allam's stationery in Ibid.

Burren Junction. Importing cloths, silks and spices amongst other goods, this entrepreneur also exported Australian horses to British Indian ports. Known as a moneylender to his countrymen in the Murray-Darling region, Allam came to be known to many as 'Cashmeia' – or 'money man.'⁹⁴ Whilst the small time hawkers along the Murray-Darling travelled across the Indian Ocean when they wanted to deliver their earnings to their kith and kin, larger operators like Allam used the far more speedy and efficient system of postal money orders to remit their profits to British India.⁹⁵

Whilst Allam's papers offer insight into the wider business networks that hawker operations bound these rivers into, local historical records reveal that there were smaller Bengali peddlers present around Bourke, Menindee and Wilcannia, the closest inland river ports to Broken Hill. Abdul Hammet known to children in the area as 'Hamra the lolly man'⁹⁶ was born in Calcutta and sold ice cream from his handcart in Broken Hill.⁹⁷ Mahomet Anamac who lived at Bourke frequented Broken Hill regularly and is remembered by locals as a 'Bengali circus performer.'⁹⁸ In addition, a number of hawkers around Broken Hill can be identified as from British India as opposed to Afghanistan, but cannot be conclusively proved nor disproved as Bengali.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ 'Telegram requesting a loan of £25 dated 12 January 1904' and 'Receipt issued by Noor Deen of Gulargambone to 'Cashmeia' dated 4 October 1903' in Ibid.

⁹⁵ 'Receipt of Money Order sent from Redfern Post Office to Post Office at Chomak, Punjab,' in Ibid.

⁹⁶ Personal communication with Lil Khan, Saturday 22nd August 2009, Adelaide.

⁹⁷ 'Family history of Abduel Hammet' in 'Afghans' (Notes and research materials collected by Roberta Drewery and Brian Tonkin), Outback Archives, Broken Hill Public Library.

⁹⁸ Abdulla Fazulla's recollections in Drewery, *Treks, Camps, & Camels: Afghan Cameleers Their Contribution to Australia*, 91.

⁹⁹ For example Mohammed Raffick who was the muezzin of the Broken Hill mosque and correspondence with Professor Gabor Korvin confirms that Raffick was 'British Indian.' Raffick is mentioned in Gábor Korvin, "Afghan and South-Asian pioneers of Australia (1830 - 1930): A biographical Study (Part 2)," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 51, 2 (2003): 53., Drewery, *Treks, Camps, & Camels: Afghan Cameleers Their Contribution to Australia*, 90. Raffick is also

By 1905, the main arteries of the Murray-Darling ecology that British Indian traders were navigating had given rise to a traffic of 'gaudy hawker's boats'¹⁰⁰ conveying wares to 'spots where you would never think it possible that a boat could reach.'¹⁰¹ In 1906 it came to the attention of the South Australian police that hawkers were conducting 'trade up and down the river Murray.'¹⁰² After investigations the Police Commissioner in South Australia confirmed that 'a number of Aliens, principally Assyrians and Indians, hold Hawkers Licenses and travel the back country.'¹⁰³ In New South Wales, the authorities were much more aware of the presence of these 'floating stores.'¹⁰⁴ The NSW superintendent of Police informed his South Australian counterparts in correspondence that 'All hawking boats trading on the Murray River (and other rivers) are licensed under the New South Wales Hawker's Act of 1901.'¹⁰⁵

While settler surveillance of sea-ports and river traffic generated a paper archive about the mobility of South Asians across the 'Indian Archipelago,' Aboriginal oral archives contain some of the most detailed insight into the cultures of performance that these people brought to the Murray-Darling region. In Dhirrari, an Aboriginal language spoken in the northern deserts of South Australia, Ben Murray recounted meeting two brothers who were snake charmers at 'waygiri midani' in

mentioned in the newspaper reports "Broken Hill," *The Adelaide Advertiser*, Thursday 12 February 1914, 10., "Auction," *The Adelaide Advertiser* Tuesday 20 January 1914.

¹⁰⁰ "Inland River Navigation," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 11 March 1905, 15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/403.

¹⁰³ Letter from Sub-Inspector of Detectives (Adelaide) to the Commissioner of Police (South Australia), 20 July 1910, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Letter from the Commissioner of Audit (South Australian Police) to the Chief Secretary (South Australian Police), 26th of February 1907, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ NSW Police Superintendent to the SA Police Commissioner, 23 December 1909, *Ibid.*

1922.¹⁰⁶ Linguist Peter Austin has translated this to a spot 'near the River Murray' which meanders through South Australia, eventually meeting the ocean at the wetlands of Coorong. Murray recalled how the elder brother would coil a snake into his turban and offer to swap his headgear with the hats adorned by passers by. Murray recalled 'when he put the snake's head in his mouth he was bitten.'¹⁰⁷ After this performer died from his wounds, his younger brother began taming snakes and continued performing in these parts. When recalling this encounter Ben Murray described the techniques used by these entertainers to 'quieten the snake'¹⁰⁸ revealing something of the keen detail with different people at the margins of 'White Australia' at times watched each other.

In Calcutta, hawkers operating outwards from the *Battala* presses and along the arteries of inland rivers comprised a crucial distribution network that made books like the *Kachachol Ambia* popular and profitable.¹⁰⁹ Reverend James Long, one imperial observer of the nascent industry in Bengali book production in 1857 wrote that book peddlers could regularly be 'seen going through the native part of Calcutta and the adjacent towns with a pyramid of books on their head.'¹¹⁰ As Long observed, book hawking was a seasonal occupation picked up by agricultural labourers for whom there were no crops to harvest, no seeds to sow, during certain months on the Bengali agrarian calendar. What if one such book hawker, with an unsold copy of *Kachachol Ambia* in his possession boarded a steam ship at the port of Calcutta?

¹⁰⁶ Peter Austin and Ben Murray, "Afghan Story (Dhirari Story)," in *This is What Happened: Historical Narratives*, eds. Peter Sutton and L. A. Hercus (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), 131.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰⁹ Sen, *Battalar Chappa O Chobi*, 52.

¹¹⁰ Long, "Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language, in 1857, to Which is Added, a List of the Native Presses, with the Books Printed at Each, Their Price and Character, With a Notice of the Past Condition and Future Prospects of the Vernacular Press of Bengal, and the Statistics of the Bombay and Madras Vernacular Presses," XIV.

Upon arrival to Australian ports, it is certainly plausible that a copy of *Kachachol Ambia* slipped through the bureaucratic fissures governing the Murray-Darling system, perhaps in cart wheeled by a small-time hawker along sandy beds, or even amidst the wares of a 'floating shop.'

Conclusion

Some time and many nautical miles after Munshi Rezaulla's giant leap into a metaphorical ocean to become a poet, one copy of *Kachachol Ambia* found its way to the interior of the largest island in the 'Indian Archipelago.' I will never know precisely how, when and with whom this copy of *Kachachol Ambia* travelled from *Battala* to Broken Hill. Nevertheless pursuing the answers reveals the 'Indian Archipelago' to be an interconnected network of overlapping circuits of mobility. Gathering together the trajectories the book might have travelled sketches the routes of mobility that converged at the Broken Hill mosque at prayer times, Eid festivities, marriages, deaths and other memorable events in peoples lives and on the Islamic calendar. There was a geography that was contemporaneous to and intersected with both settler and Aboriginal geographies and in subsequent chapters I will explore some of the surprising translations that arose at these places of encounter.

As Muslim travellers made their way through working shipping lines and camel tracks, charting river systems and inscrutable waterways, they formed long-distance trade networks, entered into partnerships with Chinese businessmen, came to be known locally along peddling routes and entered into the oral records of Aboriginal people. Travelling through this circuitry, they left a surprisingly large trail of materials in various tongues; an archive of past reading, writing and storytelling practices stretching across the 'Indian Archipelago.' In subsequent chapters of this

thesis I will return to some of the sources unearthed in the pursuit of the book in this chapter. Reading the poetry that remains at Broken Hill is one of the few access points we have to how people might have made sense of their navigation through the circuits I have sketched. Indeed, as Schimmel has written, ‘the metaphors of Islamic mysticism and philosophy are not merely poetic ornaments but are indicative of a peculiar way of thinking.’¹¹¹ The fact that there were books of poetry travelling these circuits of mobility as well as camels, South Asians and iron ore, forcefully draws our attention to the fact that what circulated across the ‘Indian Archipelago’ were not just things, but ways of thinking, seeing the world and imagining the past and future. And the fact that this poetry itself became a hotly contested translation renders it a book-commodity most meaningfully interpreted as perpetually caught in the process of translation between a number of categories.

Casting the net in search for a copy of the *Kachachol Ambia* moving across the ‘Indian Archipelago,’ illuminates rural verandahs in Bengal, shop fronts in urban Calcutta, crew quarters in steam ships travelling the Indian Ocean and Australian river-beds as some of the places where the *puthi* was far more likely to be performed rather than inside the mosque at Broken Hill. Just as a copy of *Kachachol Ambia* was discarded on a verandah in an era of Islamic reformism in Siraj’s fiction, so too a copy of this book might have been discarded in the yard of the mosque at Broken Hill. There are however no precise details about how and where *puthi* reading happened in the Australian region, no glimpses into how the stories of *Kachachol Ambia* might have changed as they travelled.

Examining the translation of mystic poetry between languages and places reveals that both processes were inextricably tied to the fortunes of commodities.

¹¹¹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 144.

While the book commodity produced in *Battala* stitched together Persian mystic writing techniques with Bengali reading cultures, a larger geography of the circulation of commodities in general threaded together urban Calcutta and Australian deserts, setting a hybrid storytelling forms in circulation across a slice of the Indian Ocean world. 'Reading' the poetry using a number of different techniques reveals the 'Indian Archipelago' as a space that accrued an archive of reading techniques and writing styles as vast as the people who travelled through it. In addition to offering insight into the frames through which people viewed a world of camels, ships and trains from the margins of settler geography, this archive is also something of a treasure trove of writing techniques for historians interested in writing places beyond the settler geographies of colony and nation. In contrast to land-based national narratives, the salty, connective tissue of the Indian Ocean was at the heart of the 'Indian Archipelago.' Accordingly, next, I turn to this sea of stories.

Chapter Two

Seven Voyages of Khawaja Muhammad Bux

Sindbad the Sailor is the most infamous teller of Indian Ocean tales. Departing seven times from the port of Basra, he returned seven times, each time with a heavier purse and an incredible tale. Surrounded by perfumed gardens and warbling birds at his opulent house in the city of Baghdad, in his old age Sindbad the Sailor told his rags-to-riches story over seven consecutive days to Sindbad the Porter, his poorer countryman of the same name. The prosperous merchant of the sea began his tale with ‘Porter my story is astonishing... how much toil and trouble I have endured at the beginning!’¹ Historians have shown that since the code governing monsoon winds was deciphered in 7th century BC, increasing numbers of merchants like the mythological Sindbad departed from the port cities on the rim of the Indian Ocean and returned richer men.² From 7th century AD, the rapid spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula, propelled across the Indian Ocean by trade winds, further consolidated the movements of princes and peddlers as increasing numbers of

¹ Muhsin Mahdi and Husain Haddawy, *Sindbad And Other Stories from the Arabian Nights* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995), 15.

² Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 12; Claude Markovits, Jaques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750 - 1950* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003); Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992); Lakshmi Subramanian, "Merchants in Transit: Risk-sharing Strategies in the Indian Ocean Region," in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, eds. Himnashu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lakshmi Subramanian, "Commerce, Circulation, and Consumption: Indian Ocean Communities in Historical Perspective," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*, eds. Shanty Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

believers undertook pilgrimage to Mecca each year. As monsoon winds carried seafarers home across the Indian Ocean, there emerged not only innumerable oral tales about faraway lands, but also fabled storytellers such as Sindbad the Sailor. Scholars have interpreted the tales of Sindbad, contained within the framing narrative of a dialogue between a richer and poorer traveller, as a repository of memories, nostalgia, dreams and facts, myth and history, accrued over centuries of Indian Ocean navigation.³

During the period examined in this thesis, an imperial communications and transportation revolution was transforming the terrain of Muslim mobility across the Indian Ocean and a network of camels, ships and trains threaded together the Australian region and British Indian ports. As some of the seafarers examined in the previous chapter returned from Australian ports, sometimes laden with riches, they recounted their journeys drawing upon popular storytelling conventions about seafaring. Scholars in Indian Ocean studies have often lamented that few records have survived that offer insight into how *lascars* navigated and narrated oceanic mobility

³ The Sindbad the Sailor tales were first translated into French by Antoine Galland in 1704 as part of a larger collection of folk tales now known as the 'Arabian Nights' or 'One Thousand and One Nights.' For an outline of the history of early translations into European languages see Robert Mack, ed. *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), ix – xxiv; For scholarly engagement with this corpus of stories by historians, geographers and literary theorists see 'Part I: Introductory Essays' in Roger Allen, "Sindbad the Sailor and the Early Arabic Novel," in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, eds. Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1 - 63; Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, eds., *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia (Volume 1)* (Oxford: ABC Clío); Ulrich Marzolph, "Sindbād," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. P. Bearman, et al. (Brill: Brill Online, 1997); Thomas Suárez, *Early mapping of Southeast Asia* (Berkeley: Periplus Editions, 1999); Muhsin Al-Musawi, *The Islamic Context of the Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ferial J. Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996); Felicity Nussbaum and Saree Makdisi, eds., *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sadhana Naithani, "The Teacher and the Taught: Structures and Meaning in the Arabian Nights and the Panchatantra," *Marvels & Tales* 18, 2 (2004); Orhan Pamuk, "To Read or Not to Read: The Thousand and One Nights," in *Other Colours: Essays and a Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007); Gerard Randall Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arabic Texts Containing Material on South-East Asia* (Leiden & London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1979); Thomas Suárez, "Early Southeast Asian Geographic Thought," (1999), <http://hq.abaa.org/books/antiquarian/news_fly.html?code=45>, viewed 30 March 2011; Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Wāq al-wāq: Fabulous, Fabular, Indian Ocean (?) Island(s) ...," *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures* 10, 2 (2000).

within the racialised, gendered spaces of the British steam-ship (see Figure 9).⁴

Reflecting on Anglo-Australian writing about the Indian Ocean, Michael Pearson, one of the founding scholars of Indian Ocean studies has written ‘we lack memoirs by say a local fisher, or an African stoker on a nineteenth century steam ship; they would have very different tales to tell as compared with leisured Western accounts.’⁵ Over the course of my research in pursuit of the Bengali book, I came across one such rare travelogue: The 200 page Urdu memoirs of Khawaja Muhammad Bux, *lascar* turned merchant.

Khawaja Mohammad Bux was a living in a shop in Bombay and working as a perfume hawker when he heard his first tales about the sea. Located in the dockside neighbourhood of Bhindi Bazaar, in an alleyway known as ‘phool gali,’ this shop was a gathering place for sailors and ship workers who told tales of distant places, some real, others no doubt fantastical.⁶ Many years later Bux recalled that ‘hearing all this talk a desire kindled in me and I started yearning to reach one of those countries.’⁷ In around 1875, eighteen-year-old Bux joined the crew of a British steam-ship as a fire stoker and embarked for the port of Basra. In 1925, after a lifetime of oceanic circulation, he retired to Lahore as a prosperous merchant. By the end of his days Bux was the owner of a number of properties in Lahore and in the city of Perth in Western

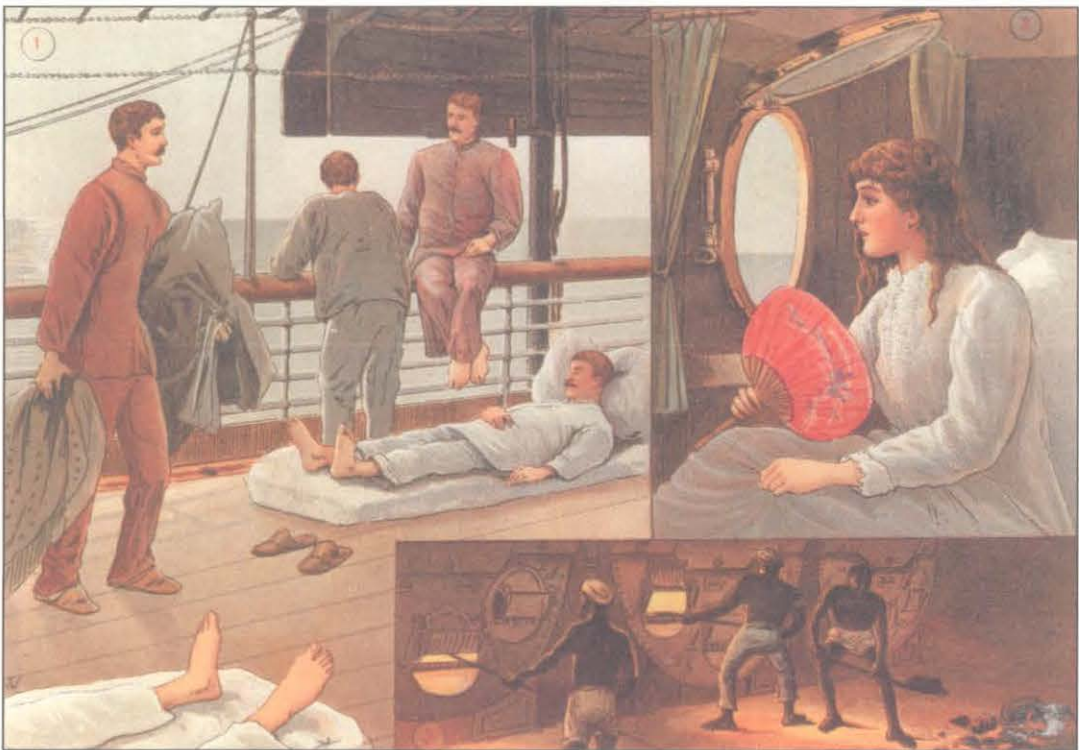
⁴ Janet J. Ewald, "Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1914," *The American Historical Review* 105, 1 (2000): 69. For one collection of seafarers accounts see Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers* (London: THAP Books, 1987).

⁵ Michael Pearson, "Studying the Indian Ocean World: Problems and Opportunities," in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, eds. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

⁶ Green produces an image of cafes and gathering place for Muslim travellers in South Bombay, c.1890, in Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

⁷ Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Gábor Korvin and Syed Haider Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," (Rawalpindi: Personal Collection of Gábor Korvin, 2006), 17.

Figure 9



Onboard Nineteenth Century British Steam-ships

'In The Red Sea - A Hot Night,' c.1891,' in LLOYD, William Whitelock. *P & O Pencilings*. London: The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, 1987, 72.

Australia. His substantial holdings included import/export shops, residential houses, the 'Australia mosque' that he built opposite Lahore railway station, hotel businesses and other assets spanning the 'Indian Archipelago.'⁸ As increasing numbers of Bux's younger kin set out in his footsteps, this family of growing fortunes came to be known as the 'Australia-walabs' of Lahore.⁹ In his final days this merchant threw his energies into consolidating his wealth and knowledge for future generations. Sitting with a scribe by his side Bux orated the details of his oceanic voyages to distant places (see Figure 9).¹⁰

The resulting memoirs are the rare distillation of an archive of oral stories that Bux must have told and retold over his life. Like the stories of Sindbad the Sailor, Bux's memoirs are organised as a sequence of voyages, departing many times from the port of Bombay and a few times from Calcutta, returning each time with an incredible tale. Like the fortunes of Sindbad, the overarching narrative of Bux's travelogue is a rags-to-riches tale of increase and abundance. Sometimes addressing his audience as 'dear readers,' at other times appealing directly to 'my dear sons,' Bux titled the collection of voyages '*Savanih-e-umri*,' the 'Events of My Life.'¹¹ Over a decade after Bux was buried at the 'Australia mosque,' his eldest son engaged a calligrapher to rewrite the memoirs in *nasta'liq* script, an elegant art form and a medium of moral instruction with a genealogy stretching to the royal courts of the

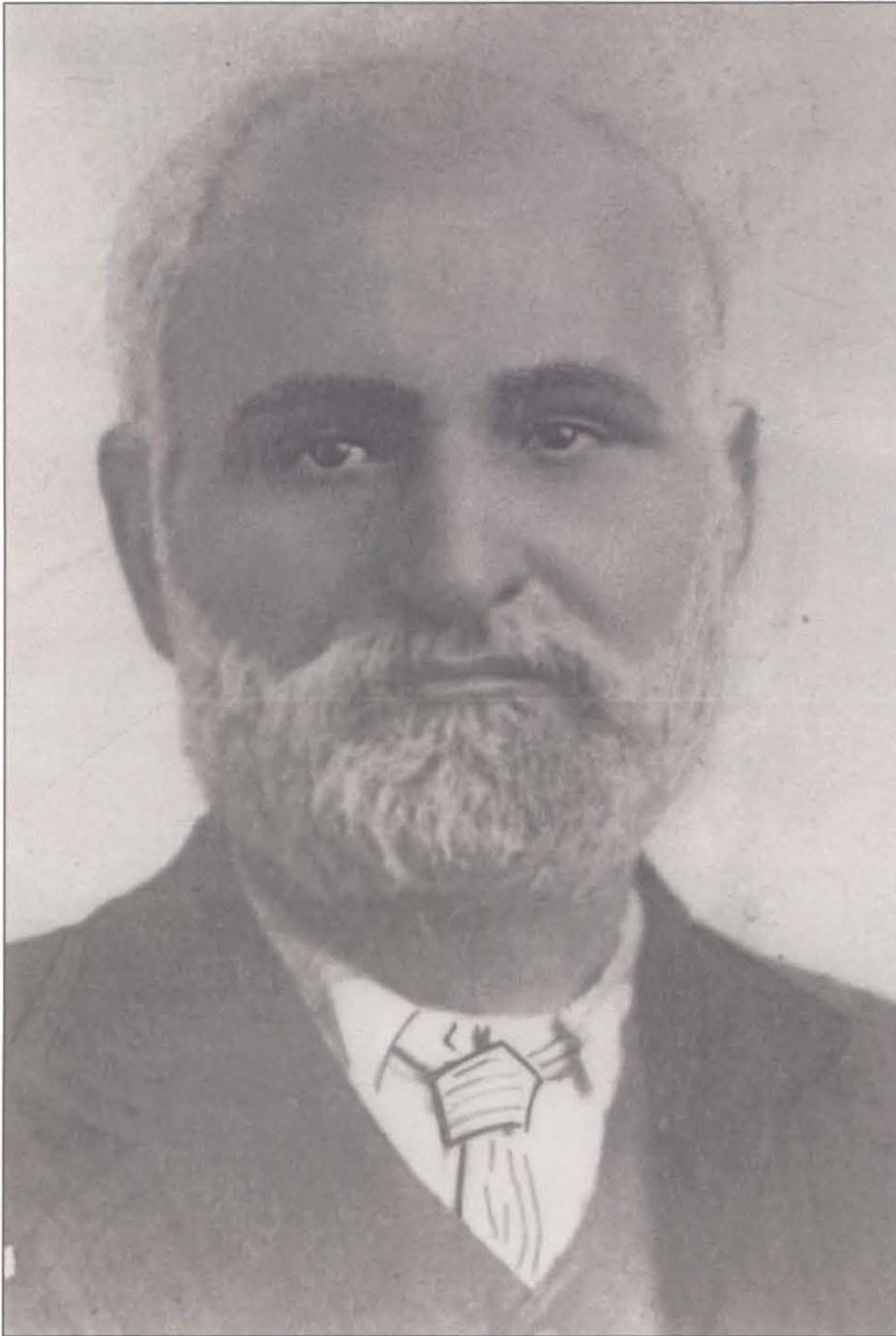
⁸ In Perth, Bux owned property in Barrack Street, Pier Street, James Street and Mackie Street opposite the Occidental Hotel. He also owned many houses, including property in the Mackie Street building that were rented out to various people. In Lahore Bux was the owner of a large group of buildings that included the 'Australia Chemist,' a herbal medicine shop called the 'Australia Dawakhana,' and the 'Australian Welding Co.' amongst other businesses. Gábor Korvin, "Adventures of a Kashmiri Merchant in Australia - An Unknown Urdu Travelogue," *Journal of the Pakistani Historical Society* 52, 1 (2004): 24.

⁹ Goodman, "'Australian' Colony In an Indian Bazaar."

¹⁰ Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Gábor Korvin and Syed Haider Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," (Rawalpindi: Personal Collection of Gábor Korvin, 2006), iv.

¹¹ Korvin, "Adventures of a Kashmiri Merchant in Australia - An Unknown Urdu Travelogue."

Figure 10



Portrait of Muhammad Bux, c.1922

Photograph reproduced in Khawaja Muhammad Bux, "MEMOIRS of Khawaja Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (translated by Gábor Korvin and Syed Haider Hassan), Rawalpindi: Personal Collection of Gábor Korvin, 2006), iv.

Persianate world.¹² It is a long, structured conversation between a wealthy man at the end of his life and younger ones of the same name whose travels lay ahead. Quoting Saadi-Shirazi, the 16th century Persian poet from Bagdad, Bux urged his sons, and their sons in turn, 'if you stay home all your life, you will remain immature as a man. Go out and see the world.'¹³

Today this document remains in Perth and is treasured as a family relic by the 'Australia-walas.' Gabor Korvin and Syed Haider Hassan, scholars based in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan respectively, completed an English translation in 2006.¹⁴ It remains unpublished and has not yet received sustained attention from scholars.¹⁵ Using Korvin and Hassan's recent translation, in this chapter I select and outline seven of the numerous voyages that Bux narrated to his scribe in Lahore. In search of a writing device that maintains the narrative structure of Bux's memoirs, I have adopted a framework similar to the Sindbad the Sailor tales to organise my analysis of Bux's lifetime of 'circular migration.'¹⁶ The central theoretical concern of this chapter is the interrogation of mobility.¹⁷ Accordingly, in narrating each voyage, I examine a different set of forces that shaped Indian Ocean mobility in the age of steam-shiping.

¹² The text was converted to into *nasta'liq* in c.1944 by M. Ameer Bux at Lahore. 'Preface by Mr. Khalid Bux' in Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," iii; Nabil F. Safwat, *The Art of the Pen: Calligraphy of the 14th to 20th Centuries*, ed. Julian Raby, vol. V, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (New York: Nour Foundation in Association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992), 9.

¹³ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 152.

¹⁴ I am greatly indebted to Professor Gabor Korvin for providing me with a copy of this recent translation.

¹⁵ The current scholarship on Bux includes Korvin, "Adventures of a Kashmiri Merchant in Australia - An Unknown Urdu Travelogue"; Yasmeen, "Muslim Australian Contributions: Bux Family as a Case Study"; Gabor Korvin, "Adventures of an "Afghan" Hawker in Australia - An Unknown Urdu Travelogue (Lecture)," in *13th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research* (Melbourne2001); Goodman, "'Australian" Colony In an Indian Bazaar"; Devleena Ghosh, "Under the Radar of Empire: Unregulated Travel in the Indian Ocean." *Journal of Social History* 45, 2 (2011): 497-514.

¹⁶ Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17 - 18.

¹⁷ Ho has recently explored the possibilities of 'mobility as an interpretive key' in Engseung Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*, The California world history library (Berkeley, CA ; London: University of California Press, 2006), 29.

One of the key recruiting centres for *lascar* labour, Bombay was a busy crossroads for British steam shipping routes and Bux worked his passage to a number of Indian Ocean ports and beyond.¹⁸ The first two voyages follow Bux's travels as a young *lascar* from Bombay to the West Indian Ocean and then along the chain of British free trade ports stretching to Singapore, offering an account of how he navigated the forces of industrialisation set in motion by the rise of steam shipping. The subsequent two voyages outline Bux's pilgrimage to Mecca and then his maritime service to the British government in Aden. In the final three voyages I follow Bux's turn towards to the south-eastern quarter of the Indian Ocean world and outline his travel to Australian ports, examining translation across the 'Indian Archipelago' in the context of wider Indian Ocean mobility.

Bux's memoirs are bookended by detailed descriptions of his family home in Lahore and accordingly this is where I too begin and end. Surveying his bundle of growing assets in Lahore known as the 'Australia Holdings,' Khawaja Mohammad Bux began his tale by recounting that his own genealogy could be traced back to the scribal classes serving royal imperial officers. After the British East India Company deposed Sikh Rule in Punjab in 1839, Bux's grandfather tried his hand at the business of camel trading and eventually settled on silk weaving. The textiles industry was the trade that Bux inherited when he was born in 1857. His birth mother died when he was only three years old, and his memoirs contain scant details of her. Her absence however looms large early in his memoirs and it was in the embrace of his father's mother that Bux sought refuge from unkind stepmothers during an unhappy childhood. This loving grandmother features in Bux's earliest memories as a

¹⁸ On the social milieu from which *lascars* were recruited see G. Balachandran, "Recruitment and Control of Indian Seamen: Calcutta, 1880 - 1935," *International Journal of Maritime History* IX, 1 (1997).

peacemaker who smoothed over the absences, ruptures, violence and jealousies that erupted within the family structure. It was under the guidance of this woman that Bux's marriage was arranged to his cousin when he was 16 years old, to heal a breach between her two bickering sons. The familial home nevertheless remained troubled and Bux recounted to his scribe in c.1925 that in response to 'the ever-increasing harsh treatment of my second stepmother... I made up my mind to migrate to another country. It was possible that I could get a better means of earning there.'¹⁹ Leaving his young wife in the domestic quarters of a large extended family home, Bux's tale of travel begins when he turned his back on an unhappy home in Lahore and found himself in the bustling port of Bombay.

1. Bombay to Basra: British Capital and *Lascar* Labour

The shop in Bhindi Bazaar, where Bux found a place to sleep and work as a scent hawker was his gateway to the Indian Ocean. Owned by Punjabi villager Karam Din many Punjabi migrants to the city in addition to seafarers and travellers gathered at the premises.²⁰ Hearing about 'conditions in Europe,'²¹ Bux started seeking employment on a steam ship and Bux's contacts in Bhindi Bazaar soon introduced him to the Punjabi '*serang*,' Shadi Khan Pathan. This man was the leader of the British Indian crew on-board a steam-ship departing for the Persian Gulf. Bux recalled that 'in lieu of his services for getting me this appointment,'²² the *serang*

¹⁹ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 9.

²⁰ Bux's memoirs provide further biographical information on the owner of this shop: 'Mr. Karam Din was a barber of Village Choker Khurd near Lalamusa, a town in Punjab. He become very prosperous and got quite a few mansions built up in his village, he is probably now dead.' in Ibid., 17.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

²² Ibid.

pocketed the month's wages in advance that Bux received after signing his contract. After four days the ship sailed for Basra.

In contracting as Indian labour in service to European capital Bux joined the ranks of the *lascar*. Throughout the 19th century there was considerable debate about precisely who the *lascar* was.²³ On British ships two distinct sets of labour laws governed the hire of '*lascars*' and 'Europeans' for service and the distinction had significant economic consequences for shipping companies. Engaged under the 'Asiatic Articles' the main features that set *lascars* apart from European seamen were significantly lower wages and tighter restrictions on mobility.²⁴ 'It was a tough job,' recalled Bux. Engaged as a 'fireman' he had to shovel coal into the furnace engine that vaporised water into steam. It was a very different technology to the sailing craft that had plied the waters between Bombay and Basra for centuries. As historians have shown the rise of steam shipping from the 1870s reduced non-European sailing craft to insignificance in the north-western quarter of the Indian Ocean.²⁵ Bux at this time joined the increasing numbers of seafarers without prior genealogies of oceanic

²³ Gopalan Balachandran, "Circulation Through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1890 - 1945," in *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750 - 1950*, eds. Claude Markovits, Jaques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 101; Tony Ballantyne, "Te Anu's Story: A Fragmentary History of Difference and Racialisation in Southern New Zealand," in *Rethinking the Racial Moment: Essays on the Colonial Encounter* eds. Alison Holland and Barbara Brooks (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 55.

²⁴ By the mid nineteenth century, *lascars* were remunerated at a rate between one third and one-fifth the wages of European seamen and sea and land legislation interlocked to produce a regime of circulation that ensured that *lascars* returned to their port of departure in British India in Ewald, "Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1914," 76; For the interlocking regimes of land and sea legislation that sought to contain *lascars* see Ravi Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900 - 1960," *International Review of Social History* 51, Supplement (2006).

²⁵ Ray notes that this was not true for all parts of the Indian Ocean and Arab merchants operating between Hadamawt and the Dutch East Indies flourished even after the advent of steam shipping in Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995): 476.

mobility who were embarking on nautical career at the bottom of the racially stratified space of the steam ship: the engine room.²⁶

On the third day the ship encountered stormy seas. It was Bux's first experience with fierce monsoonal winds and the storm was so severe that it was barely possible to remain upright. He recalled 'the officer of the ship ordered all the firemen to tie a rope to their bodies and keep shoving coal to the engine furnace.' Whilst 'the heat in front of the furnace was unbearable' Bux recounted that 'if one left his place to go to the upper deck, the captain would beat him and send him down.' Upon entering turbulent waters, Bux and the other two inexperienced ship hands on-board were initiated into the hierarchy of social relations that kept the machine in motion. All three abandoned hope of surviving. Discussing it amongst themselves, they 'decided that it would be better to commit suicide by jumping overboard rather than to sink along with the ship.' The three *lascars* gathered on the pitch dark deck and 'Imam ud Did, a resident of Sialkot, jumped into the sea straightaway.'²⁷ Bux too was about to jump, but 'just on the last second a white guard got hold of my collar and pulled me back. He also caught hold of my companion.'²⁸ Jumping to his grave would have seen Bux committing breach of contract!²⁹ The two remaining new recruits, guilty of attempting the criminal offense of 'desertion' under British maritime law, were presented to the captain and 'a report was made in English.'³⁰

²⁶ Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900 – 1960," 111 - 13.

²⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See Ahuja for an analysis of rules against desertion in maritime labour law in Ahuja, "Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900 – 1960," 119.

³⁰ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 20.

They were locked up and overnight ‘by the grace of Allah, the adverse winds subsided before dawn, and the sea became calm like a plate.’³¹

The punishment meted out to Bux and his companion was confinement in a cell ‘when not on duty’³² as well as reduced rations of rice, dried fish and beans. For a couple of young sailors suffering from seasickness, who had never even seen a ship prior to this ordeal, the experience was a harrowing one and they attempted repeatedly to desert the vessel. Under the ‘Asiatic Articles’ regime first negotiated between the British Government and the British East India Company in the early 1800s, the *serang* Shadi Khan Pathan was responsible for the discipline and control of the new *lascar* ship hands he had recruited in Bombay. It is likely that their repeated attempts to ‘jump ship’ played a part in the souring of this *serang*’s working relationship with the captain. Upon docking at Basra, a city under the rule of the Ottoman caliphate, ‘Shadi Khan Pathan approached a court in Basra’ to protest against the authority of the captain. Appealing to the ‘rule of the Turkish Caliph’ Bux recalled that the *serang* ‘petitioned the court that two of his compatriots were locked up in the ship and were not allowed to disembark, although they were innocent.’³³ While maritime and immigration law interlocked at ports to ensure the circular mobility of *lascars* back to their port of origin, as historians have shown it was also at ports that Muslim leaders often played on existing tensions between different imperial regimes for their own purposes.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Seema Alavi, "'Fugitive Mullahs and Outlawed Fanatics': Indian Muslims in Nineteenth Century Trans-Asiatic Imperial Rivalries," *Modern Asian Studies* (2011): 2; Gopalan Balachandran, "Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886-1945," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, 2 (2008): 45.

In a show of Ottoman prowess that Bux relished in his retelling, ‘a guard of four Turkish sepoys’³⁵ returned with Shadi Khan Pathan to the steam ship docked at Basra ‘to investigate the report.’³⁶ Observing the approach of the party accompanied by the *serang*, the Captain ‘positioned himself on the landing gear of the ship to intercept them.’³⁷ The Turkish soldiers announced that they had court orders to investigate the ship and the captain explained ‘that these men were employed on the ship and were confined to lock up, to foil their attempt to desert.’³⁸ Prevailing upon the Turkish soldiers to turn back, the captain diffused a potential showdown between the rules of land and sea.

As soon as the officers of the Ottoman-Sultan Caliphate disembarked ‘Shadi Khan, the Sarang, was handcuffed and arrested.’³⁹ Bux recounted that ‘The ship stayed there for three days and Shadi Khan the poor wretch, remained in the lock up, just like us.’⁴⁰ Departing from Basra, the ship stopped at Bu-Shehr on the Persian Gulf. Bux noted that ‘cotton and rosewater containers were loaded on the ship at that port’⁴¹ and business resumed on the homeward journey to Bombay. Upon completion of his first circulation of the Indian Ocean as a *lascar*, Bux and his fellow deserter were not awarded any salaries nor experience certificates. Nevertheless, Bux recalled that the captain let them off easy ‘since we were both raw hands.’⁴² It was the *serang* who had directly challenged the authority of the captain enshrined in British maritime labour law, who received the harshest punishment. Shadi Khan Pathan was discharged with no payment and the *serang*’s ‘previous certificates were confiscated and through

³⁵ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 21.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 22.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

a publication, he was blacklisted for any further employment.⁴³ These steps ensured that this *serang* would never again work onboard a British steam ship.

Upon return to Bombay, traders crowded in to meet the incoming ship as they always did. The containers of rosewater and bales of cotton were unloaded and the European shipmaster discharged the *lascar* crew and the disgraced *serang*. Two months had passed since their departure and while Bux had earned nothing he had been initiated into the strict rules governing the oceanic circulation of *lascars*. British maritime labour laws and the social machinery that kept the ship in motion across the Indian Ocean laid a powerful template of circular mobility that shaped Bux's subsequent voyages. There is no way to be sure whether the events he described happened. Even if his account drew upon a rich repository of seafaring lore rather than his personal experience, however, it is a tale that illuminates the various forces that assaulted the inexperienced *lascar* venturing out to sea. With empty pockets and ill tidings for the kith and kin of the young man who had jumped to his untimely death, Bux made his way through the familiar streets of the city to Bhindi Bazaar. With his own extraordinary tales about life at sea between Bombay and Basra, he returned to the den of stories in Phool Gali, Bhindi Bazaar.

2. Bombay to Shanghai

Growing weary of spending his days in Karam Din's shop and nights sleeping on the streets of Bhindi Bazaar, Bux soon sought another appointment at sea. He recalled 'at last I got a job on a ship, through an officer of a ship for rupees fifteen per month. The ship was due to sail for China.'⁴⁴ Bux was paid one-month's salary in advance before departure. Before embarking for Shanghai, Bux invested some of this in merchant

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 23.

capital. He recounted '[I] purchased onion baskets worth eight rupees as merchandise. It cost me five annas per basket.'⁴⁵ According to his memoirs a number of others likewise bought onions and Bux boarded with the vessel with 25 baskets of onions. As historian Janet Ewald has suggested African and South-Asian maritime workers were often also traders and 'exercising customary rights to cargo space, they peddled goods from one port to another.'⁴⁶ Bux likewise embarked on his second Indian Ocean voyage as a labourer who was also the owner of capital in the form of onions. The first port of docking was Penang, at the northern end of the Strait of Malaka. Here Bux observed that the 'the ship officials sold off their onion baskets at the rate of two and a quarter dollars per basket,'⁴⁷ referring to British silver trade dollar that was in circulation in these ports. Observing that 'a dollar was equivalent to rupees two and four anna,'⁴⁸ Bux did not part with his onions at Penang for this price.

The next port was Singapore, a major commercial centre where a number of leading non-European merchant groups congregated. Economic historians have used the umbrella term 'bazaar economy' to describe merchant trade both before and after the processes of industrialised production transformed the Indian Ocean.⁴⁹ Rajat Kanta Ray has argued that contrary to imperial historical accounts of the decline of the 'bazaar economy,' the era of European empires across the Indian Ocean heralded the systematic rise of Asian capital, rather than its decline. At the British port of

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ewald, "Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750-1914," 72.

⁴⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Rajat Kanta Ray, "The Bazaar: Indigenous Sector," in *Business Communities of India: A Historical Perspective*, ed. Dwijendra Tripathi, *IIMA Monograph in Business History* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1984); Rajat Kanta Ray, "The Bazaar: Changing Structural Characteristics of the Indigenous Section of the Indian Economy Before and After the Great Depression," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 3, 25 (1988); Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914."

Singapore, a dense crossroads for a number of traders operating in the bazaar economy, Bux observed many of his fellow *lascars* taking their onions to market, but he held on to his merchandise.

At the next port of Hong Kong Bux transformed his onions into money; the key being it was more money than he started with. He recounted 'I sold off my onion baskets at the rate of three dollars each. Therefore, the basket purchased for five annas only[,] brought me six rupees and twelve annas. I got Rs. 162/- from this sale whereas my cost price was Rs. 8/ only.'⁵⁰ Stepping onto the streets of Hong Kong with baskets of onions for sale and realising a profit of 154 Rs, Bux completed his first transaction in the 'bazaar economy.'

After leaving Hong Kong, the vessel docked at Shanghai for fifteen days. Bux observed that 'the ship officials started procuring merchandise for taking to Bombay'⁵¹ as the date of departure approached. Some of his senior officials with an understanding of South-Asian markets purchased mats and quilts from the Shanghai bazaars. Bux recounted that he invested in the proceeds of his onion sale in silk handkerchiefs and shawls 'since I had acquired judgment about silk in my early age.'⁵² The process that Marx described as 'metamorphoses' from money to goods to money and so on, Bux narrated in his memoirs as a chain of exchanges transforming labour into money into onions into money into silk goods at Bombay, Hong Kong and Shanghai respectively.⁵³

⁵⁰ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Classics (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 198 - 210.

With his purchase of silk products, Bux described a schema for the economic circulation of goods that was quite distinct from – but never entirely separate to – the process of spatial circulation. He outlined to his scribe the discovery that he could make his money grow by transporting eight rupees as onions rather than eight rupees of silver coinage hidden amongst his belongings on board the ship. The transactions that actually took place may not have involved the quantities that he named. However in narrating this second voyage, citing specific amounts of money and quantities of goods, Bux began to describe in some detail the behaviour of merchant capital whilst in oceanic motion. It is likely that these were teachings that he wished to impart on his ‘dear sons.’

As business historians have shown, the communications and transportation revolution from the 1870s transformed both the movement of money and ships across the Indian Ocean. In addition to the advent of steam-shipping, the global telegraph network completed in 1872 radically changed the terrain of economic transactions between Indian Ocean ports. European traders using telegraphic transfers began to mobilise money more effectively over vast distances in comparison to Asian merchants reliant on slower methods for circulating information.⁵⁴ In Ray’s account of the 1870s the altered technological conditions of international trade finally and decisively turned the balance against long established Asian merchant networks in favour of the European firm.⁵⁵ Venturing out into Indian Ocean ‘bazaar economy’ at precisely this moment, Bux’s narrative sketched the details and workings of the tier of

⁵⁴ The characteristic ‘bazaar economy’ instrument to mobilise money was the *hundi*, a negotiable paper instrument written usually in a South Asian language and issued by ‘native bankers’ and ‘shroffs,’ that was used to move money across great distances. Indian Ocean ports had money shops where *hundis* could be cashed and these were the instruments used to finance the activities of Asian merchants. For accounts of the *hundi* see Subramanian, "Commerce, Circulation, and Consumption: Indian Ocean Communities in Historical Perspective"; Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800 - 1914," 259.

⁵⁵ Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," 478.

peddling and merchant operations in which *lascars* began to participate, all the while contracted to British capital.

On the return voyage, Bux detailed the abundance and trade in all goods imaginable and he observed 'most of the Chinese in these port markets knew the Indian language,' facilitating easy trade. In his account of Singapore on the homeward journey, Bux was full of praise for this city of skyscrapers where the 'streets were well laid out'⁵⁶ and 'the sanitation arrangements were excellent.'⁵⁷ He recounted to his scribe, 'people from every country and all corners of the world were to be found there. For the traders this city is a centre of commerce. Transactions of millions of rupees take place daily.'⁵⁸ However, Bux's memoirs contain a cautionary tale that in such a city too much money on one's person was somewhat dangerous. For 'one could see every kind of trader here.'⁵⁹

'By chance' Bux narrated, 'I visited the quarter of the prostitutes one night.' 'There we found beautiful and well made up European prostitutes, sitting there on the chairs, at the end of the bazaar.'⁶⁰ Bux observed their pimps 'actively going up and down the bazaar' in search of buyers. 'These prostitutes had fixed the rate of their "merchandise" at five rupees each.'⁶¹ Sometimes these men accepted a lower price from a non-European but Bux claimed that they would 'then demand the balance inside the house.'⁶² Nearby there were also 'the residences of Japanese prostitutes. In addition there were Malayan and Indian prostitutes.'⁶³ In his account of the global

⁵⁶ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 28.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

traffic in women in the late 1870s, Bux recounted ‘the scenes we witnessed that night were unforgettable.’⁶⁴ Observing these streets between dusk and 2am Bux recalled that ‘On the arrival of a European in the vehicles, the way they were pulled in different directions by the wooing prostitutes was in itself a spectacle worth enjoying. Similarly, the non-Europeans arriving in carriages faced the same ordeal.’⁶⁵ After describing brothel scenes in titillating detail Bux’s narrative ‘Readers! At that time, I was at the peak of my youth and had enough money to spend. However, it was the blessing and grace of the Almighty, which kept me safe at such lewd places.’⁶⁶ Throughout his travelogue Bux warned his readers against frequenting places where they would ‘spend their earnings uselessly.’⁶⁷ What emerges from Bux’s memoirs is that ultimately the purchase of sex at ports was not only ‘sinful and harmful’⁶⁸ but a waste of moneys better invested in silks and onions.

Bux’s long account of his second voyage suggested that the fraternal relationships developed at Bhindi Bazaar, onboard the ship and at mosques in the port cities he visited could aid in this setting of capital into economic motion. These very same fraternal relationships could however sometimes lead him down alleyways and into the underbelly of port cities. Bux’s narrative promised readers that by judiciously keeping money in economic motion and firmly in one’s possession one could unlock the Indian Ocean as a string of ports flowing abundantly with riches. Indeed reaching

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Warren has detailed the edifice of prostitution in Singapore during Bux’s time in James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870-1940* (Singapore; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); For an account of the role of the traffic in women in the region stretching from Singapore to South-East Asia in shaping the Anglo/Dutch frontier see Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865 - 1915* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 231 – 36; On traffic in humans in the Indian Ocean also see Gwyn Campbell, "Slavery and the Trans-Indian Ocean World Slave Trade: A Historical Outline," in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, eds. Himnashu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 - 18, 28, 54 - 55.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

the port of Colombo after imparting some of these lessons Bux recounted that the ‘coconut is produced there in abundance. Tea of many kinds is also grown... Cardamom and cinnamon are produced in such an abundance that the residents used cinnamon wood as fuel.’⁶⁹ It was a land strewn with jewels and riches and ‘every kind of precious stone is also found there.’⁷⁰

When the ship eventually returned to Bombay, ‘the traders crowded in immediately’⁷¹ and so continued innumerable processes of metamorphoses. On top of the remainder of his wages, Bux also received ‘an excellent certificate of performance.’⁷² It was his ticket to future service to European capital as well as merchant activity in the ‘bazaar economy.’ In addition to these earnings Bux sold the ‘silk handkerchiefs on double the profit.’⁷³ Oceanic circulation of the *lascar*’s person was by no means the same as economic circulation of the same *lascar*’s capital. In Bux’s narration of his second voyage, harnessing each to the service of the other emerges as the key to prosperity. With his purse full of riches and a tale about how to best navigate waters that were being transformed by steam shipping, this *lascar* turned merchant once more made his way to Bhindi Bazaar through the streets of Bombay. Perhaps like the fabled Sindbad the Sailor, Khawaja Muhammad Bux told this tale of onions, silks, coconuts and cinnamon to the poorer countrymen who gathered by his feet at Bhindi Bazaar.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

3. Bombay to Mecca

On his return from Shanghai, Bux met an invalid at Bhindi Bazaar who in more able times had served as a clerk in the offices of a British government bureaucrat. Fojdar Khan was a dying man from North Punjab who proposed to Bux 'we should go for Hajj, so that all of our journeys may be blessed.'⁷⁴ Coinciding with the imperial communications and transportation revolution of the 1870s, increasing numbers of pilgrims embarked on voyages across the Indian Ocean according to a schema of circulation enshrined in the fifth pillar of Islam.⁷⁵ Bombay was a crossroads for shipping routes heading in a number of directions and Muslims making their way to hajj from Africa, Central Asia and Iran alike were funnelled through what historian Nile Green has described as Bombay's 'religious marketplace.'⁷⁶ Many pilgrims who had already undertaken their hajj obligations operated out of Bombay as spiritual travel agents and Bux's enquiries at the offices of Hajji Qasim Ji revealed that for a journey from Bombay to Jeddah 'the normal fare for two persons was rupees sixty.'⁷⁷ The fare Hajji Qasim Ji demanded was beyond Bux's reach and he narrated how he haggled down the price to one third: 'We pleaded that we were destitute and hence

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, 205; Barbara Metcalf, "The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the Hajj," in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, eds. Dale F Eickelman and James P Piscatori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 90; Green has examined the emergence of Bombay as a layover for hajjis from Iran in the nineteenth century in Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915*, 126 – 37; On hajjis from East India see C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning of the Moslems of the East-Indian-Archipelago* (Translated by J.H. Monahan) (Leiden: Brill, 1970); On hajj prior to the nineteenth century see M. N. Pearson, *Pious Passengers: The Hajj in Earlier Times* (London: Hurst and Company, 1994); Michael N. Pearson, *Pilgrimage to Mecca: The Indian Experience, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996).

⁷⁶ Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915*, 131.

⁷⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 31.

deserved to obtain tickets on concessional rate. So we had to pay only Rs.20/-for the two tickets.’⁷⁸

The rising number of poorer pilgrims embarking on hajj from British India in the final quarter of the 19th century is well documented.⁷⁹ Bux referred to the moneyed merchants undertaking hajj as ‘Saiths’ and his account repeatedly drew attention to the relations and distinctions between richer and poorer hajjis. Indeed, starting with negotiations about the fare to Jeddah, over the course of Bux’s long, detailed account of hajj, every stage of the journey is propelled by negotiations between rich and poor. Boarding the vessel with Fojdar Khan during hajj season, Bux recalled that the vessel was ‘fully packed with Hajjis.’⁸⁰ Travelling towards the north-western rim of the India Ocean through seas notoriously known for their monsoonal tempers, within a day of departure the hajjis encountered a storm. Bux recalled ‘the rich on board got a lot of free food cooked and distributed to all the passengers to calm the nature.’⁸¹ However, it did not help with the seasickness that ensued and ‘almost all the passengers were vomiting... none was left to serve the food.’⁸² Bux however was no stranger to the fury of the seas and finally, the ‘saiths’ deputed Bux and Khan to serve the meals. Bux recalled ‘both of us had virtually to spoon-feed the Hajjis. They simply were out of their senses.’⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ As Metcalf has written, a number of accounts of the hajj undertaken by British Indians in the final quarter of the 19th century took up the cause of the poor Indian pilgrim who was ‘vulnerable, abused, and cheated,’ citing Mirza Irfan Ali Beg in 1895 – 6 in Metcalf, “The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the *Hajj*,” 90; In 1927 a Hajj Enquiry undertaken by the British Government noted that the ‘average Indian Pilgrim’ came ‘from the poorer classes,’ quoted in Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, 205.

⁸⁰ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, “Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu),” 31.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

As the storm raged, as a collective body of labour continued to work the machinery below deck, Bux's narrative described the emergence of another many-headed body of hajjis above deck. The imagined global *ummah* of Islamic brotherhood took corporeal form on the ship to Jeddah and throughout Bux's narrative to Mecca remained marked by perpetual suspicion, envy, longing, aspiration, patronage and interdependence across class lines. Bux recounted 'we reached Aden while the feeding of the Hajjis was still in progress.'⁸⁴ Describing the 'port of Tawai' on the coast of Yemen at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Bux narrated 'this is the place where a huge stone statue of the ancient tyrant King "Shaddad" had been erected.'⁸⁵ the landmark that announced the pilgrims' arrival to the sacred geography of Islam.⁸⁶

Between Aden and Jeddah, Bux recounted 'we observed a mountain-like structure rising ahead of us. At this point, all the Hajjis put on the 'Ihram.'⁸⁷ Dressing in the white robes that Muhammad and his followers had donned on their march to Mecca in the 7th century AD, the pilgrims on the ship prepared to insert themselves into a path of mobility and a corresponding narrative of circulation stretching back to the sacred history of Islam. Disembarking at Jeddah, the travellers headed inland over densely storied deserts and Bux recalled 'Since I could not afford to hire camels, we started on foot. We reached Makkah after 3 days.'⁸⁸ Bux described that upon arrival at Mecca 'the rich are approached by the agents who take them to the houses of the

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ The story of 'Shaddad' can be found not only in Islamic texts, but also the infamous collection of folk tales now known as the 'Arabian Nights.' See W. Montgomery Watt, "Iram," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam (Online Edition)*, eds. P. Bearman, et al. (Brill Online, 2012); Also see entry for 'Âd' in Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, eds., *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia (Volume 1)* (Oxford: ABC Clio), 468 - 69.

⁸⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 32.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 33.

Sheikhs and accommodate them there.’ While he lamented that ‘no one looks after the poor,’⁸⁹ his narrative of hajj actually suggests otherwise. ‘Along with all other poor Hajjis’ Bux and Khan ‘accompanied a trader by the name of Muhammad Hussain to the Indian-Serail.’⁹⁰ The following day ‘the said Muhammad Hussain assigned one of his men to guide us’ who led them to the ‘House of Allah through the gate of Ibraheem.’

The individual distinctions between rich and poor disappear from brief portions of Bux’s hajj pilgrimage at the significant places where the collective *ummah* congregated. Bux described to his readers that ‘the entrance to the House of Allah is at a height of seven feet... The ‘muezzins’ go to the top of each of the seven minarets’⁹¹ from where they ‘start reciting the call for prayers simultaneously in a loud voice.’⁹² At the centre was the black stone enclosed by Kaaba and the Arabic noun ‘*Tawaf*,’ translating to ‘encircling’ in English, describes the custom where hajjis walk around the Kaaba seven times counter clockwise.⁹³ Recalling the sight of innumerable pilgrims undertaking *Tawaf*, Bux narrated ‘it is said that the circumambulating of Kaaba is taking place without any break in ages. You find people going around it at all times.’⁹⁴ Led by their guide, Bux and Khan too encircled the Kaaba seven times in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad and his many white-robed followers from various corners of the ever-expanding geography of Islam, reciting ‘*Allah Huma Lubbaik Lubbaik*.’⁹⁵ An Arabic phrase that literally translates to

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 36 - 37.

⁹² Ibid., 37.

⁹³ F Buhl, "Ṭawāf," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam (Online Edition)*, eds. P. Bearman, et al. (Brill Online, 1999).

⁹⁴ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 36.

⁹⁵ Korvin and Hassan’s translation in Ibid., 34.

‘O Allah! I am present at your command here,’ it is uttered within the profoundly collective context of encircling Kaaba during *Tawaf*.⁹⁶

After completing his hajj obligations Bux spent a lengthy amount of time working as a hawker and peddler in Medina. Eventually, he once more ended up at the port of Jeddah, penniless. From this port on the Red Sea ‘it was rumoured that a ship, full of the destitute, was likely to leave for Bombay soon.’⁹⁷ True to the rumours ‘the rich traders... accepted all the destitute on board’⁹⁸ and free food was served on the vessel ‘due to the kind courtesy of the Saiths.’⁹⁹ His narrative of the return voyage to Bombay completed an account of Indian Ocean circulation that relied upon the poorer pilgrim making repeated appeals to rich merchants and invoking the universal brotherhood of Islam to secure their support.

Upon return to Bombay, Bux ‘went straight to the barbershop of Karam Din in Bhindi Bazaar.’¹⁰⁰ In his memoirs Bux concluded the account of his hajj at Bombay with ‘I did feel the urge to go back to my hometown but the lack of money kept me back.’¹⁰¹ He may not have returned with riches, but he arrived in Bhindi Bazaar with a detailed account of pilgrimage across storied seas and deserts. At the centre of his narrative was the seemingly timeless circulation of the Kaaba at the centre of Islamic geography; a schema of circulation across the Indian Ocean brought within the reach of poorer pilgrims by appeal for membership to the *ummah*.

⁹⁶ Metcalf discusses the Arabic word ‘*labaik*’ or ‘I am here’ in Metcalf, “The pilgrimage remembered: South Asian accounts of the *hajj*,” 93.

⁹⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, “Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu),” 47.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

4. Bombay to Somaliland: In Service to the British Government

Khawaja Mohammad Bux first encountered the idea of Australia in the Arabian Sea. After returning from hajj, Bux contracted to a steam-ship owned by the British Government of Bombay as a *lascar* and departed for Aden. Upon his return to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Bux's ship remained stationed at Aden for a period of fourteen months running Government errands. It proved a fortuitous voyage for Bux. The *serang* of the vessel had fallen ill and Bux was appointed to the supervisory role of *serang* in charge of over one hundred and fifty ship hands. Ever attentive to monetary details, Bux recounted in his memoirs that his rise through the hierarchy of maritime labour was accompanied by a jump in his salary from 18 rupees to 50 rupees per month.

Furthermore he began to enjoy closer intimacy with men inhabiting the upper echelons of the ship. Bux was informed that 'an officer from England had arrived who was to be taken around the smaller atolls for sightseeing.'¹⁰² After a voyage of two days from Aden the ship reached a strip of coastal Africa that featured in the geography of the British Empire as 'British Somaliland.' Bux received 'orders to take ten ship hands along for this sightseeing'¹⁰³ overseeing a party of *lascars* Bux 'disembarked along with the visiting dignitary.'¹⁰⁴

*The British Government official whom Bux accompanied was an explorer in search of gold and other precious minerals. He features in Bux's memoirs as 'Sahib Bahadur,' a title Korvin and Hassan have translated as 'respected gentleman.'*¹⁰⁵ Over

¹⁰² Ibid., 50.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Korvin's translation, Ibid., 51. It could be suggested that there is some ambiguity in Bux's memoirs about whether this Government employee was of European origin or Indian origin. Writing in 1888, Rudyard Kipling used the title 'Sahib Bahadur' in his sketch of 'The Englishman.' However 'Sahib

two days, this imperial officer climbed the hills and mountains on a small island off the Somali coast. Bux recalled that 'the VIP got up to the top of the mountain and surveyed for some time through binoculars. He used to pick up some rocks and pass them to us. We kept storing these rocks in a sack for him.'¹⁰⁶ Over the course of the expedition, at the peaks of a tiny island between the Arabian peninsula and the African coast, Bux recalled that 'the sahib bahadur told me he had been to Australia.' From the 1850s, substantial discoveries of gold had catapulted the settler colonies of Australia into discursive circulation in the Indian Ocean and Shahib Bahadur informed Bux 'she is a very fine country and exports gold to other countries.'¹⁰⁷

Bux undertook his service to the British government c.1880 and, while he was carrying sacks of rock samples for Sahib Bahadur, the search for gold by British explorers – both governments and private - was under way at various edges of the Indian Ocean world. While Kanta has shown that the imperial and communications revolution of the 1870s entrenched European dominance over non-European merchant trade across the Indian Ocean in new ways, it also heralded a period of decline for the British Empire. Economic historians of the British Empire have described the period 1873 – 1893 as the 'long depression.'¹⁰⁸ With the declaration of The International Gold Standard in 1871 it was a period when the British Imperial Government was struggling to maintain the position of the City of London as the largest financial

Bahadur' likewise was a title appended to the names of elite Indians, many of whom enjoyed Government employment. Given that Bux describes this Government Official as 'from England,' I have assumed that 'Sahib Bahadur' did not feature as a figure of racial ambiguity in Bux's memory. Kipling's use of 'Sahib Bahadur' cited in Mary Condé, "Constructing the Englishman in Rudyard Kipling's 'Letters of Marque,'" *The Yearbook of English Studies (Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing)* 34 (2004): 237; 'Sahib Bahadur' appears as an appendage to the name 'Nawab Baqi Mohammad Khan' cited in Barbara Metcalf, "Islam and Power in Colonial India: The Making and Unmaking of a Muslim Princess," *The American Historical Review* 116, 1 (2011): 6: footnote 12.

¹⁰⁶ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 50.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁸ John McGuire, "India, Britain, Precious Metals and the World Economy: The Role of the State Between 1873 and 1893," in *Evolution of the World Economy, Precious Metals and India*, eds. John McGuire, Patrick Bertola and Peter Reeves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 180.

market in the world while a number of major competing European imperial currencies moved onto gold. As historian Andrew Pope has shown, within this larger context the gold-rich Australian colonies emerged as crucial to the overall imperial strategies of the British Empire in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰⁹

Returning to Bombay from his period of service to the British Government, Bux decided that 'I did not need any further travelling.'¹¹⁰ Regardless of the excellent certificate-of-service with which he was discharged, Bux recounted 'I had firmly made up my mind to go back home and join my ancestral trade.'¹¹¹ Even promotion to the rank of a *serang* did not change that the 'quality of rations provided for consumption was inferior. The quality of rice was so poor that even the animals would not eat it. Pulse tasted bitter.'¹¹² The British imperial tale of 'Australia,' encountered somewhere between Aden and the coast of British Somaliland, seemed destined to disappear from his horizon. Disembarking at Bombay with his purse full of riches, Khawaja Mohammad Bux turned his back on the fraternal milieu of Bhindi Bazaar made his way back to Lahore, determined to try his hand at silk weaving.

5. Bombay Back to Bombay

Bux lasted only three months in the land-based textiles industry underpinning the livelihood of his family. He reasoned with his father that 'if I stuck to this profession

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Pope, "The P&O and the Asian Specie Network, 1850 - 1920," *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1996); Andrew Pope, "Precious Metals Flow in the Indian Ocean in the Colonial Period: Australian Gold to India, 1866 - 1914," in *Evolution of the World Economy, Precious Metals and India*, eds. John McGuire, Patrick Bertola and Peter Reeves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁰ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 51.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

for the rest of my life, I might gain nothing but my daily bread.’¹¹³ With dreams of economic ascension and with the financial help of his family, Bux cobbled together the train fare from Lahore to Bombay and ‘set off for Australia...’¹¹⁴ In doing so Bux firmly fixed his sights on the slice of the Indian Ocean world stretching from Indian to Australian ports that Sir Thomas Mitchell had mapped as the ‘Indian Archipelago.’

Upon reaching Bombay Bux discovered that ‘rupees one hundred and fifty were the charges per head, for the third class fare to Australia.’¹¹⁵ The larger shipping companies such as the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co. (P & O) did not even offer third class fares on many ships heading to the Australian colonies and transported mostly Government employees.¹¹⁶ That corporate histories of the P & O refer to this lowest class of fare as ‘émigré fares,’ highlights that passenger tariffs targeted a working class European market. The fare that Bux was quoted was equivalent to at least three months of his earnings as a *serang* and up to ten months of the wages of a *lascar*. While Bux had begun to enjoy upward mobility through the labour hierarchy of the steamship, contracted under the ‘Asiatic Articles’ he nevertheless continued to be remunerated in rupees at rates significantly lower than European seafarers: a discrepancy exacerbated by the dramatic fall of the value of the silver rupee with respect to the international gold standard to which pounds sterling had been pinned. Passenger fares remained out of Bux’s reach and he decided that contracting for service on a return voyage to the Australian colonies was his only means of reaching this quarter of the Indian Ocean. Bux narrated to his scribe his

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ According to a P & O report on the service that delivered mail to Australian ports ‘Two thirds of the Company’s Indian passengers are Government officials’ in ‘The Report of the 1904 Committee on the Eastern Mail Service’ quoted in Stephen Rabson and Kevin O’Donoghue, *P & O: A Fleet History* (Kendall: The World Ship Society and The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, 1988), 79.

intentions to jump ship, recalling that 'I planned to leave it on reaching any port there.'¹¹⁷ From the very first moment that Bux set his sights on the 'Indian Archipelago,' he recognised that travel across this geography was about using imperial shipping infrastructure whilst dodging the rules imposed by British maritime and land law that interlocked at ports and threatened to frustrate his plans of economic mobility.

However, he recalled 'I tried my best but failed to get a job on any such ship.'¹¹⁸ Despite his excellent certificates of service and record of prior service for the British Government, joining a ship headed for the Australian colonies as a *lascar* proved more difficult than Bux had anticipated. In vain he joined a vessel heading to European ports via the Suez Canal. He secured employment 'on a steam-ship named 'Lambaria' owned by the P & O Co.'¹¹⁹ It proved a memorable journey. Afloat the Red Sea at the onset of the South West monsoon, the 'Lambaria' collided with another ship whilst Bux was asleep in his bunk.¹²⁰ The incident entered the annals of shipping news and we can confirm that the P & O ship 'Lombardy' left from Bombay on the 18th of May 1883 and collided with the steamer *Huntingtower* on the 1st of June 1883 upon approaching the Suez Canal.¹²¹ In addition to passengers and other goods,

¹¹⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 52.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ 'June, July and August were the months that the S. W. Monsoon blew from Aden to the Red Sea' in William Henry Rosser and James Fredrick Imray, *Indian Ocean Directory. The Seaman's Guide to the Navigation of the Indian Ocean and the China Sea; Including a Description of the Winds, Storms, Tides, Currents, &c.; Sailing Directions; A Full Account of All the Islands; With Notes on Making Passages During Different Seasons* (London: James Imray and Son, Chart Publishers and Nautical Booksellers, 1867), 384.

¹²¹ Rabson and O'Donoghue, *P & O: A Fleet History*, 9; "Miscellaneous," *The Argus*, Tuesday 31 July 1883, 11; "India and the East," *The South Australian Advertiser*, Monday 9 July 1883, 6.

the *Lombardy* was carrying London bound 'Australian mails which left Melbourne on May 8.'¹²²

Undoubtedly, this was an historical moment of increasing P & O traffic between the port of Bombay and the Australian colonies. In particular, the government-subsidised traffic in gold-specie and mails did much to thread together the ports of British India and Australia. Until Australian nationalist legislation in 1901 banned the use of *lascar* labour on steam-ships carrying Australian mails, P & O services to the Australian colonies depended heavily on *lascar* labour. However, despite the existence of a growing transportation and communication infrastructure across the 'Indian Archipelago,' Australian ports remained out of reach for Bux in 1883. Why could he contract to a vessel carrying mail *away* from but not *towards* the ports of the Australian colonies?

Part of the answer has to do with the role of language in carving out the terrains of possible oceanic mobility for *lascars*. That the increasing global mobility of European 'capital' was not historically matched by the free mobility of *lascar* 'labour' is the Marxist critique underpinning Ravi Ahuja's account of the containment of *lascars*. Particularly after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, the 1870s and 1880s saw the growth of British steam-shipping fleets and increasing numbers of shipping firms operating in the Indian Ocean. Whilst the aggregate number of Indian *lascars* set into spatial circulation by these firms increased during this period, Indian Ocean historiography reveals that language and region of belonging powerfully shaped which communities of *lascars* worked which waters. Ahuja has shown that

¹²² "Miscellaneous."

language or region was even a schema used by shipping firms to differentiate between the wages of *lascars* from different parts of British India.¹²³

As we have already seen the *serang* on each steam-ship was responsible for recruiting *lascars*. Often employing workers from their own villages or town, the command of the *serang* often relied upon this language he shared with his charges. Recent research into British Indian maritime labour suggests that Bengali *lascars* from Sylhet crewed the engine rooms between Calcutta and European ports, whilst Punjabi *lascars* worked the services to the Far East as well as British ports. *Lascars* from Colombo crewed P & O services to Sydney by the close of the 19th century and *lascars* from villages surrounding Bombay continued to crew P & O services to the city of Melbourne well into the 20th century.¹²⁴ Particular language communities and the fortunes of rural villages in British India came to be mapped to routes of shipping companies employing *lascar* labour. For Bux, translation across the ‘Indian Archipelago’ was not just about dodging British captains and port authorities: it was about navigating the criss-crossing mosaic of linguistic and regional communities that decisively influenced who crewed this slice of the Indian Ocean.

In addition to his proficiency in a language he repeatedly called ‘the Indian language,’¹²⁵ it is likely Bux also had some fluency in Punjabi and he had basic command of English. Contracting with a ship departing for the Australian Colonies demanded first making contact with a seafarer, preferably a *serang*, headed for

¹²³ Ahuja writes that ‘Calcutta lascars received lower wages, and even the food rations their agreements entitled them to were smaller and less expensive’ in Ahuja, “Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900 – 1960,” 130.

¹²⁴ Annette Potts, “‘I am a British Subject and I Can Go Wherever the British Flag Flies’: Indians on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales During the Federation Years,” *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 83, 2 (1997): 102; “Mahomed Bhikha: Lascars for the P. and O.,” *Argus*, Monday 15 May 1933, 8.

¹²⁵ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, “Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu),” 26, 96.

service to the Australian colonies. His Punjabi networks in Bhindi Bazaar, which extended outwards from haunts like the shop owned by Karam Din, did not see him encounter an Indian seafarer already charting the waters of the 'Indian Archipelago.' The research of historian Gopalan Balachandran highlights that role that shipping companies may have played to bring this about. Balachandran writes that after 1887 the P & O 'decided not to engage Punjabi seamen on ships sailing to Australia.'¹²⁶ These policies may have been unofficially in place around 1883 as Bux began to 'go to the port daily, to work there, and would return in the evening.'¹²⁷ Earning a pitiful seven annas a day, Bux narrated to his scribe 'I kept on thinking I have wasted all my time and there is still no prospect of going to Australia.'¹²⁸ Not all of Bux's tales of circular mobility beginning and ending at Bombay were ones of increase.

6. Bombay to Port Williamstown: Translation Across the 'Indian Archipelago'

After many intervening voyages departing from Bombay and fruitless attempts to contract with a ship headed to the fabled gold-rich 'southland,' Bux finally jumped ship at the 'bustling and magnificent metropolis'¹²⁹ of Singapore. Bux had heard that Singapore 'being nearest to Australia, was a port of departure for many Australia-bound ships.'¹³⁰ The architecture of the global Islamic brotherhood eased the passing of Bux's nights in Singapore and he recalled 'I started living in a city Mosque...' Sleeping at the mosque, during the days he would check the Steamship Co. Office and

¹²⁶ Balachandran, "Circulation through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1890 - 1945," 111: Footnote 49; On the process of Sikh Punjabi 'identity formation' in the processes of migration and imperialism see Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹²⁷ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 66.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 68.

eventually a steam-ship bound for Australia arrived. Bux narrated ‘my efforts to enrol on it failed because it was totally manned by people from Malaya and I did not know a single word of Malayan-language.’¹³¹ With no money on his person to purchase a ticket and without proficiency in the *lingua franca* that would allow him to join the ranks of *lascars*, Bux stowed away. He described that he ‘hid between the emergency boats that were meant for the passengers.’¹³²

Twenty-four hours passed after the ship departed Singapore and Bux eventually ‘was forced to come out due to thirst and hunger.’¹³³ On being presented to the European authorities the Captain ordered the Malay and Chinese crew to search Bux’s body. Bux memoirs reveal ‘they did not find any money on my person. Then the Captain told me I would have to work, which I accepted with readiness.’¹³⁴ Joining the Malay and Chinese crew, Bux drew closer and closer to this ‘fine country’ where he had once heard ‘they extracted gold.’¹³⁵ The first coast that appeared on Bux’s horizon was that of northern Australia.

Seven days and seven nights after departing from the port of Singapore, Bux’s ‘ship reached port ‘Ralq.’’ Remembering this voyage from Lahore in c.1925, Bux recounted to his scribe, ‘This place has pearls in abundance. There we saw thousands of big launches, with Japanese and Malay crews. Their job is to take out the pearls.’ Though Bux related a lengthy account of the machinery used for pearl diving and the processes of harvesting oysters from the bed of the ocean, what he could not recall with precision was the name of this port. It is likely that he was talking about a town like Port Walcott. It stands out as a very hazy place in Bux’s somewhat extraordinary

¹³¹ Ibid., 69.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 52.

memory. Port Walcott was a pearling centre and frequently visited by steam-ships from Singapore, a financial centre of the 'bazaar economy.' In English written records this town has variously been named as 'Tien Tsin' after a Chinese barque, then 'Port Walcott,' 'North District,' 'the landing' and 'Cossack.'¹³⁶ As historian Regina Ganter has shown, upon the onset of an imperial and communications revolution colonial customs policing and policies of containment targeting Aboriginal people sought to sever the trade links of non-Europeans to this Indian Ocean rim from the 1880s.¹³⁷

'At last!' Bux narrated to his scribe, 'after leaving port Ralq the ship reached Melbourne.' It was at 'Port Williamstown,' at the mouth of the Yarra River, that Bux first disembarked onto the Australian Colonies around 1885.¹³⁸ It was the southernmost port on the Australian mainland and Bux immediately began to search in vain for South-Asians. With no money and without a rail-ticket he was stopped by an inspector after boarding a train to Melbourne. Bux recounted 'I told him that presently I had no money, but if he could take me to some Indians, I would be able to obtain money from them and pay the fare.'¹³⁹ Eventually, accompanied by a Police officer, Bux arrived at a dwelling of British Indians and knocked on the shop door at 11pm. In his memoirs Bux recalled that 'a Bangla speaking fellow by the name of

¹³⁶ Jock McLaren, "WA's Kimberley [Part 2]: 'Civilisation' comes to Walcott Inlet," *Wilderness News* 8, 9 (1987); Balint writes '[After 1866] ...Pearling towns soon sprang up at Nikol Bay, Shark Bay and Cossack along the remote north-west coastline' in Ruth Balint, *Troubled Waters: Borders, Boundaries and Possession in the Timor Sea* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 21; C. Roberts, "Customs in Western Australia: A Survey - From 1853 to the Present," *Australian Customs History Journal* 1 (1989): 67.

¹³⁷ Regina Ganter, Julia Martínez and Gary Mura Lee, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia* (Crawley, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 28.

¹³⁸ This is the approximate date given in the 'Life Summary of Mohammad Bux' written by his grandson, Khalid Bux in Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," iv.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Dervaish came out. I narrated the whole of my story to him and told him that I have reached Australia at last!’¹⁴⁰

A number of Punjabi and other British Indian men lived at the premises that Dervaish rented in Melbourne. Two Punjabis explained to Bux the next morning that ‘Bengali Dervaish makes pickle and supplies to them the filled bottles to sell in the market. Bengali Dervaish lets them have 5-shillings per pound as commission.’¹⁴¹ Bux was offered the same job and on his first day as a pickle hawker in the streets of Melbourne, he recounted that he sold 10 shillings worth of pickles. Paying only one shilling for meals on his first day Bux saved one-and-a-half shillings from the cut of the sales that the pickle maker gave him. He pointed out to his readers ‘please remember that a shilling is worth fourteen annas,’ revealing that his calculations of earnings was in rupees. Given that a typical salary as an experienced *lascar* was 18 rupees per month, Bux was utterly delighted at his savings of ‘one and a quarter’ rupee on his very first day hawking jars of pickle in Melbourne. He recalled ‘it showed me how good Australia was and that one could make a lot of money in that country.’¹⁴²

Whilst it was partly the discrepancy between the value of the rupee and the pound that had prevented Bux from joining the ranks of passenger traffic from Bombay to Melbourne, it was this very same increasing discrepancy that rendered ‘One and a half shillings’ a lucrative daily earnings. Bux’s delight at one and a half shillings a day in the early 1880s has to be understood in the context of its translation to rupees. Indeed, accounts of Bux’s many subsequent voyages to the Australian colonies consistently move back and forth between calculations in rupees and pounds

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

whilst in circulation between Australian and British Indian ports. On his first voyage to the British colony of Victoria, Bux began to decipher how to make the fluctuations in value between pounds and rupees, work for him. Discovering the logic underpinning what scholars have sometimes called 'remittance economies,'¹⁴³ Bux began planning for the future. 'I thought of calling over my close relatives to Australia, because there were ample opportunities to make a lot of money here.'¹⁴⁴

It is significant that having arrived to the place where he had once heard that abundant gold was extracted and exported, the gold-commodity disappears from Bux's memoirs entirely in relation to his accounts of Australia. Bux had spent many voyages charting waters awash with bazaar transactions in silver currencies and, beginning with the profits he made on those jars of pickle, he commenced a long prosperous trading career, starting as a hawker and then eventually becoming an import/export merchant. It was in translations between the pounds in circulation in the Australian colonies and rupees in circulation in the Indian Ocean world that Bux located the future of his family's livelihood. While a landmass abundant in gold was a myth about *land*, the geography of Bux's economic ascension remained the Indian Ocean.

Three months after having first arrived to the Australian Colonies in c.1885, Bux prepared for his departure. Having disembarked at Port Williamstown with no money on him, he boarded another ship from the same port with a purse full of riches, £50 to be precise.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps even more valuable than his pickle profits were a number of contacts in Melbourne, an important addition to Bux's growing global

¹⁴³ Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," 519.

¹⁴⁴ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 73.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

network of useful contacts. Through this network in Melbourne, centred upon British Indians' shops, Bux heard of a consignment of horses departing from Port Williamstown for the city of Madras. He recounted 'a worker was to get ten pounds up to Madras'¹⁴⁶ and he worked his passage back to British India. From this point in Bux's memoirs, the end point of his accounts of circular mobility shifts from the shop in Bhindi Bazaar in Bombay to the familial home in Lahore. Like a dutiful son, upon his return home to Lahore, Bux narrated 'I gave all the money I have brought with me to my father and my stepmother.'¹⁴⁷ In bringing to an end his first account of the remittance of money across the 'Indian Archipelago' Bux concluded with 'I did not consider at all that she was my stepmother.'¹⁴⁸

7. Calcutta to Fremantle: In Seclusion Across the 'Indian Archipelago'

Bux's birth mother died before he was old enough to form living memories of her. His recollections of early life and childhood feature two unkind stepmothers who made the family home an unhappy one for Bux. Recounting his earliest memories Bux narrated 'my grandmother kept me with her and she brought me up... I always thought she was my real mother. She loved me more than my real mother.'¹⁴⁹ This loving grandmother arranged Bux's marriage at the age of sixteen and, as we saw at the outset of this chapter, leaving her in Lahore Bux undertook voyage after Indian Ocean voyage in search of a livelihood beyond the silk industry. After he commenced translation across the 'Indian Archipelago,' the point of departure and return for each of his accounts of circular migration shifted to the domestic sphere in Lahore. In the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

seventh and final voyage that I outline in this chapter, I turn my attention to this domestic world of the 'Australia-walas' that bookends Bux's own narratives.

After his return from Melbourne in the mid 1880s, Bux pursued many business interests in the Australian region and the 'Indian Archipelago' emerged as the geography underpinning the prosperity of the family. In the port of Fremantle and the nearby city of Perth in the colony of Western Australia, Bux ultimately established himself as an import/export merchant. Beginning with his wife's brother, Ghulam Nabi, Bux's memoirs detail how he facilitated the passage of 28 people from his extended family network to Western Australia. The arrival of his father in Bux's account of 'chain migration' allowed not only the companionship that he sought in a city where 'no other Indian, Pathan or Sikh was seen,'¹⁵⁰ but also a reliable partner in business. While Bux hawked goods on the streets of Perth, his father kept the shop open and 'increase[d] the sales day by day.' Bux's father came to be known throughout Perth as a curiosity and sold more goods than people who knew English. Bux recounted 'It became known to all people in Perth that an Indian shopkeeper had set up shop in William Street who hands out two wooden-pointers of 6-ft and 8-ft length to every customer entering his shop. He also provides a price tag of each item... the shopkeeper is a gentleman and a nice person. Hearing such unusual thing[s] from each other, every woman paid a visit to the shop and bought something without any need.'¹⁵¹ Around this time, in his mid 30s in the early 1890s and at the prime of his life Bux began to long for married life in the Australian colonies.

As historian Margaret Allen has shown, intimacies between white women and British Indian hawkers and shopkeepers were common and sometimes controversial in the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 88.

late nineteenth century.¹⁵² On the topic of ‘those women who are white’ Bux wrote that in the Australian colonies ‘the best among the very best, beautiful among the most beautiful and the young are found just for food and clothing.’¹⁵³ Having established himself as affluent trader in the colony of Western Australia, Bux observed in his memoirs that rich persons could ‘get women free of cost.’¹⁵⁴ Commenting on intimate relations he observed between his countrymen and white women Bux narrated that ‘when those Indians lose their wealth, the women left them too.’¹⁵⁵ Weighing up the possibility of forming relations with a white woman, whose affections he feared were tied to his fortunes, he decided instead to move part of his existing family to Western Australia. Accordingly, when Bux embarked for his next voyage across the ‘Indian Archipelago’ in c. 1893, his wife and seven-year-old daughter boarded the vessel with him at the port of Calcutta.

An increasingly important economic provider for a large family network of ‘Australia-walabs,’ Bux also convinced three sons of his father’s sister to accompany him. He offered to ‘pay their entire traveling expenses for the journey for both ends.’ The terms of the engagement were ‘they will keep whatever they earned, but incase they earned less than rupees 50/- in a month, I shall make up the balance.’¹⁵⁶ Boarding the steam ship with his merchandise and family, Bux purchased freight and tickets for

¹⁵² Margaret Allen, “‘A Fine Type of Hindoo’ Meets ‘The Australian type’: British Indians in Australia and Diverse Masculinities,” in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008); Margaret Allen, “Betraying the White Nation: The Case of Lillie Khan” (paper presented at the Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity, Melbourne University, 2006); Margaret Allen, “‘Innocents Abroad’ and ‘Prohibited Immigrants’: Australians in India and Indians in Australia 1890-1910” in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective Canberra*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005); Margaret Allen, “‘White Already to Harvest’: South Australian Women Missionaries in India,” *Feminist Review* 65 (2000).

¹⁵³ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, “Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu),” 92.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 91 - 92.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

himself and the five others accompanying him. His days of labouring across the Indian Ocean were behind him.

At Singapore Bux rented a house from a trader and business partner by the name of Munshi Muhammad Ibrahim Mamon. Bux's account of this voyage reveals that the women in his family observed '*purdah*.' A Persian root literally translating to the English nouns 'curtain,' 'membrane' or 'veil,' *purdah* in nineteenth century British India was a complicated regime of gendered seclusion practised by veiling and the spatial separation of Muslim women's living quarters.¹⁵⁷ Bux doesn't detail how *purdah* was maintained whilst onboard the ship between Calcutta and Singapore. It is likely his wife and daughter were confined to their cabin in the upper echelons of the steamship. Unlike Bux's own confinement during his maiden voyage across the Indian Ocean, Bux's wife was not kept under lock and key under the authority of the captain. Rather she was confined in seclusion by *purdah* purportedly under the authority of Allah. The family spent eight days in Singapore and Bux detailed that 'through Munshi Muhammad Ibrahim Mamon I procured goods consisting of silk and other items for sale in Australia.'¹⁵⁸

Departing Singapore, after three weeks on the high seas, the vessel docked at Fremantle laden with Bux's merchandise of silks, male cousins, his wife and their youngest daughter. The sun, however, was still high in the afternoon sky. Bux recounted 'I thought that if we leave for the city straight away, it will be a strange thing for the locals to see a lady with a veil, because they do not know anything about

¹⁵⁷ For Muslim women's critiques of 'seclusion' at turn of the century South Asia see Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, "Sultana's Dream," in *Galpa: Short Stories by Women from Bangladesh*, eds. Firdous Azim and Niaz Zaman (London: Stanza, 1905); Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, *Sultana's Dream and Selections from The Secluded Ones (A Feminist Press Sourcebook)* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1988).

¹⁵⁸ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 94.

the veil and they have no such concept.¹⁵⁹ Unlike the port of Singapore, there were no established networks of Muslim merchants familiar with the institution of *purdah* to smooth their entry into Fremantle. It was a new urban space that had to be worked not only into geography of Asian merchant capital but also the expanding geography of Islam. Bux and his cousins consulted with each other and devised a stratagem to invent '*purdah*' anew in this new place.¹⁶⁰ The four men decided to spend the afternoon in search of a property for rent and move Bux's wife and daughter from the ship when the city was cloaked by dusk. Bux tells his readers 'it was done as planned, and no one came to know that an Indian had brought his family here.'¹⁶¹ While maintaining seclusion, this strategy also ensured that the party avoided any unwelcome attention from colonial officials. The silk and other items were duly taxed in Fremantle and Bux set up shop once his goods were released from the Customs House (see Figure 11).

Bux's newly arrived cousins soon began hawking goods from the shop in the streets of Fremantle and the upstairs storey of the rented premises became the quarters inhabited by Bux's wife and daughter in seclusion. Bux does not give his wife's name in his memoirs. She is first referred to as the 'daughter of Fazal Din,' then the wife of Muhammad Bux and later the 'mother of Muhammad Rashid.' Nor can we glean from Bux's travelogue any insight into what those days in Fremantle were like for this woman and her daughter. What Bux's memoirs do reveal is that he was one of the very few Muslim Indian patriarchs at the close of the 19th century who believed in female education and his daughter continued to receive lessons in Urdu during her

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ As geographer Doreen Massey writes, 'the question was in what ways the terms of male dominance would be reformulated within these changed conditions' in Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 192.

¹⁶¹ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 94.

time in Fremantle. Indeed, at the end of his days, Bux used his amassed wealth to build not only the 'Australia Mosque' in Lahore but also a middle school for the education of Muslim girls.

Bux's narrative of the separation of the women's quarters from the shop and place of business transactions renders visible the architecture of gendered mobility across the 'Indian Archipelago' in the early 1890s. At Singapore, rupees were transformed into the silk that Bux purchased from Mamon, while Bux's wife and daughter remained cloistered in the rented house. While *lascars* sold their labour in the lower echelons of the vessel to propel the steam engine across the Ocean, Bux's merchandise increased in value and Bux's wife and daughter remained confined in the passenger quarters of the ship. Upon arrival in Fremantle, the imported wares were taxed by the colonial government, a portion of Bux's capital entering into the revenue books of the British Empire. Cloaked by dusk, Bux's wife and daughter avoided the attention of these same authorities regulating the arrival of Asian women to the Australian colonies. In the shop Bux rented as well as in the streets and alleys of Fremantle, Bux's cousins sold imported goods. Wares were transformed into shillings and pounds, delivering profits into the hands of Bux and his male kin. All whilst Bux's wife and daughter remained secluded from view in the upper quarters of the shop. The process of metamorphoses that strung together the 'Indian Archipelago,' the transactions marking the nodes of the economic circulation that underpinned the livelihood of the 'Australia-walas,' all took place beyond the walls of female seclusion.

From Bux's memoirs, *purdah* in Fremantle is best understood as the reinvented articulation of the many forces that curtailed and shaped women's mobility

Figure 11

Business	
<p>M O H A M E D B U X, DRAPER AND CLOTHIER, Barrack- street, Perth SPRING AND SUMMER GOODS. A very choice assortment of various articles, and many Indian Novelties. Iron Safes 24, 26, 28, 30 inches. Indian Margo Chutrees. Pres- served Ginger and Pineapple, best quality and very cheap. Table Covers, Mantles, Borders, Cushions, Plate Gold Work, Fine Silk Cushes, Choice Silk Dress Materials, Tassar, Cream, White, and Black Silk Pieces. A large assort- ment of Handkerchiefs, Gents' Clothing and Under Linen, Choice Silk, Linen, and Flannel Shirts, Indian Earthenware and Water Jugs, Fancy Goods and Perfumery, well dressed Tiger Skins just arrived from India, and other articles too numerous to describe. The cheapest and best goods can be had from Mohamed Bux.</p>	<p>T</p> <p>HU HO HU T Sai</p> <p>7 7 7 7 7 7 7</p> <p>G A 1 7</p> <p>NC 1 1 1 1</p> <p>F</p>
<p>I N C R E A S I N G D E M A N D for HAMILTON AND PORT PHILLIP RABBITS AND TINNED MEATS. W. J. KIFFIN THOMAS, Agent.</p>	
Educational.	
<p>F R E M A N T L E S C H O O L. Head Master: HENRY BRIGGS. (Queen's Scholar St. Mark's College, Certificated in Science and Art) (Classics: J. H. BROWN, B.A., Trin. Coll., Dublin. Good home for boarders in Schoolhouse; strict supervision in studies and sports. Fees for day boys from £2; for boarders from £13 per quarter. Apply for Prospectus to C. W. RANDLER, House Master.</p>	<p>NC 1 1 1 1</p> <p>F</p>

Advertisement of Wares Sold by Muhammad Bux

"Advertisement," *The West Australian* (Perth, WA: 1879 - 1954), 3 October 1895, 1.

across the 'Indian Archipelago.' As Gayle Rubin has pointed out in her classic study of the political economy of gender, 'capitalism rewired notions of male and female which predate it by centuries.'¹⁶² As industrialised British capitalism rewired the Indian Ocean terrain of merchant capital, the 'Indian Archipelago' emerged as a new geography that was 'heir to long tradition[s] in which women do not inherit, in which women do not lead, and in which women do not talk to god.'¹⁶³ As these traditions were invented anew at places such as mosques and shops from which women were excluded, Bux persistently depicted the range of feminine spaces he encountered as dangerous. As I have already mentioned, over the course of his many voyages he warned readers against the lure of women in the streets and shops of Bombay, Singapore, Suez City and Fremantle alike. However, it is in accounts of his own domestic sphere of Muslim women cloistered in the institution of *purdah* that Bux delivered his most extensive critiques of women's spaces.

Whilst the domestic sphere bookends a number of his voyages, at the very end of his memoirs he delves into a lengthy series of cantankerous observations about the domestic sphere. Bux orated that he detested the 'ritual of *bhaji*,' the giving of fried vegetables between households and within family networks.¹⁶⁴ He disapproved of the 'gathering of women for wailing'¹⁶⁵ on the occasion of death, arguing that 'an assembly of women often results in feuds'¹⁶⁶ According to Bux, Punjabi women when they assembled could have the most unfavourable influence on each other. He dictated in length to his scribe on the evils of 'smoking hubble-bubble' amongst

¹⁶² Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic of Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 30.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 143.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

respectable Punjabi Muslim women which in 1920s Lahore 'ha[d] become a sort of fashionable behaviour.'¹⁶⁷ On the issue of money in the domestic sphere he opined 'women have a system of collective savings called "committee" in most of the houses. That is harmful!'¹⁶⁸ Bux observed that 'women start contributing to these "committees" without taking permission from their husbands'¹⁶⁹ and he urged that wives should manage household money so that 'it will be available for the husband as and when required.'¹⁷⁰ He opined that 'the vile rituals of marriage should be eliminated.'¹⁷¹ Bux particularly objected that 'money is spent on preparing golden dresses'¹⁷² for the bride. According to Bux these gold-brocaded dresses rotted in boxes after the marriage ceremony, disused. It dismayed Bux that, 'As a last resort nothing can be done except that the golden thread is separated and be sold off. It fetches a price not in rupees but paisas.'¹⁷³ Bux suggested that 'a thousands times better alternative is that the couple is presented equal amount of cash.'¹⁷⁴ On the topic of women's gold ornaments he bitterly observed 'If the same amount were invested in trade you would get it back with profit.'¹⁷⁵ Bux's memoirs reveal his distaste for domestic spaces into which riches realised at port markets were sometimes funnelled, leaving the schemas of circulation that he saw as worthwhile. These were the secluded spaces of intimate contact to which men returned by night after their days of active participation in the processes of circulation in shops, mosques, streets, markets and oceans.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

Bux's critiques of the domestic sphere sketch the outlines of a vibrant world of female seclusion in Lahore. It is likely that his account is a lifetime's worth of critiques accrued in response to the domestic world he observed in Lahore from 1870s to the 1920s. Seclusion in the upstairs quarters of a shop in Fremantle in the early 1890s, separated from a world of sisters, aunts, cousins, mothers and grandmothers by an ocean, must have been a very different experience for Bux's wife and daughter. Two months after Bux set up this shop, a policeman arrived one morning with a court order. This officer of settler law told Bux that 'people living around have reported that an Indian has opened a shop in their locality. He has brought their family with him and keeps them confined in the upper storey of that shop. They also had reported that this Indian man tortured his family and they keep hearing sounds of wailing from his house all the time.'¹⁷⁶ It was the beginning of a long series of complaints against Bux by white settlers.

It is possible to date the incident to c.1894 and it is the earliest recorded case of the complex institution of *purdah* in the Australian colonies and equally complicated settler responses to this practice.¹⁷⁷ *Purdah* proved a difficult concept to translate in court. Bux narrated 'I did not know the exact equivalent of "*purdah*" in English and also I failed to explain it properly. It was quite a fun in the court ... Sometimes the magistrate looked at me angrily and sometimes would laugh on his own.'¹⁷⁸ The decision was deferred. Next time Bux appeared in court, a British employee of the Fremantle Telegram Office was asked to translate for him. According

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 95.

¹⁷⁷ I am approximating the date of the court case on the basis of "Shipping News," *The West Australian (Perth, WA : 1879 - 1954)*, January 14 1895, 4; Korvin, "Adventures of a Kashmiri Merchant in Australia - An Unknown Urdu Travelogue," 31 - 32.

¹⁷⁸ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 96.

to Bux, this man 'knew the Indian language well, as well as the traditions.'¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Bux's memoirs suggest that a number of British settlers in the Australian region were fluent in South Asian languages and in 1894 Bux even advertised a job opening for a 'good Englishman, one who speaks Indian language preferred.'¹⁸⁰ To Bux's relief, with the aid of the telegraph office employee, the 'the magistrate got convinced that he had no jurisdiction in religious matters.'¹⁸¹ He recounted that 'Finally the magistrate instructed me to take my wife out for a little walk during the dark.'¹⁸² This ruling reveals that there emerged pockets of the 'Indian Archipelago' where British law had no jurisdiction.

After hawking was outlawed in Western Australia in 1893, successive waves of Bux's relatives departed for home.¹⁸³ On 13 January 1895 from the port of Albany in Western Australia, Bux departed with his wife and daughter for British India.¹⁸⁴ Over the next few years Bux continued to circulate in the 'Indian Archipelago' and Bux's wife gave birth to two sons and buried the elder in Lahore. Bux once again began to yearn for married life in Western Australia and he recounted to his scribe 'I told my wife, the mother of Mohammad Rashid, my intention of taking her to Australia this year.'¹⁸⁵ His wife however had other plans. Bux recounted with irritation 'She flatly refused to go with me without thinking over the matter properly. She told me that she had no need to go to Australia and if I was adamant to take along

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ "Advertising," *The Daily News (Perth, WA : 1882 - 1954)*, July 20 1894, 3.

¹⁸¹ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 96.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Regina Ganter, "Muslim Australians: The Deep Histories of Contact," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, 4 (2008): 487.

¹⁸⁴ "Shipping News."

¹⁸⁵ Bux, Korvin and Hassan, "Memoirs of Khawajah Muhammad Bux, Australian Businessman (Translated from Urdu)," 125.

one, I should marry someone else and take her along.’¹⁸⁶ Enlisting the sympathies of his relatives, Bux tried his best to sway her decision. He reported that ‘a lot of counselling was done but it failed to move her.’¹⁸⁷

Perhaps Bux’s wife liked frying vegetables! Perhaps she enjoyed giving and receiving *bhaji* and other gifts that circulated between households observing seclusion. Perhaps, she enjoyed the large gatherings of bickering, gold-clad women at wedding ceremonies. When her son died at the age of three years and four months in Lahore perhaps she had wailed with the women in her extended family.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps when settlers heard her wailing in the upstairs quarters of the shop in Fremantle, she had been grieving someone’s death. The ‘Indian Archipelago’ was a field of gendered mobility where the refusal to embark on an oceanic journey and an appeal to polygamy were the attempts of this particular woman to eke out a space for herself in an increasingly global world of her male relatives. Over the course of her life, her husband, most of her brothers and all of her sons and sometimes even her daughters were engaged in circular migration, emerging as the ‘Australia-walabs’ of Lahore. Her refusal to embark on subsequent voyages, unlike the sum of Bux’s many voyages, did not carve out a slice of the Indian Ocean for a lifetime of oceanic circulation. Instead she insisted that the geography of domestic seclusion in Lahore would continue to mark the boundaries of her mobility. In doing so she fashioned a pocket of the ‘Indian Archipelago’ distinct from but never entirely separate to that of Bux.

Long after Khawaja Muhammad Bux first penned his memoirs in c.1925, it was a repository of stories that remained in circulation through generations of his family. For historians today it provides a close description for how a *lascar* mastered

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 100.

the rise in British steam shipping networks to establish a sea-based livelihood for an entire extended family of 'Australia-walabs.' In circulation through Bux's family, it laid a blueprint for merchant mobility, for generations of circulation, across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Indeed, the graves of the Australia-walabs make visible the way that the design of the memoirs was realised as the Australia-walabs cluster of assets spanning the 'Indian Archipelago' grew and grew. Bux's father, who entered the camel business in Western Australia, was buried at a mosque in Kalgoorlie, while Bux came to be buried at the Australia mosque in Lahore. Bux's son was buried in after a lifetime of Oceanic circulation was buried in Perth and the his son in turn was buried at Lahore. In 1944, Bux's son established the Australasia bank in Lahore and it was around this time that a calligrapher translated the memoirs into *nasta'liq* script, a marker of past stories of Muslim wealth. Perhaps, it was also then that the tie was pencilled onto the portrait of Bux that accompanies the memoirs today.

Housed in a two hundred page dialogue between a richer aging merchant and a younger men of the same name, Bux's accounts of his voyages depict a sea criss-crossed by overlapping networks that shaped mobility. Once in a life-time circulation of Kaaba, the constant circulation of *lascars* and *serangs* through port markets were gendered circuits of mobility overlaid with the linguistic networks and class divisions that undergirded British steam shipping. Nevertheless, in Bux's experience it was a geography of riches and in his memoirs he names twenty eight Australia-walabs whose migration Bux facilitated to the Australian colonies. Many of these men made their livelihoods in transport industries in the desert. Indeed Bux's father emerged as an important camel merchant in the Australian goldfields. Next, following the trajectory of some of the first Muslim cameleers to Australian deserts, I turn my attention to Beltana.



Chapter Three

Desert Crossings

Two Dingoes were in hot pursuit of an Emu along the inland watercourse today known as Cooper Creek. Anyone who has seen an emu running at full speed through the northern deserts of South Australia knows that it is an event of some drama that creates a lasting impression. This particular Emu was a giant bird of mythic proportions and its escape created deep, lasting contours of mobility through the desert. Each time it changed direction to throw those Dingoes off scent, each place the thirsty Emu stopped for a drink, each close escape from the jaws of its predators, all created giant claw-marks and features perceptible only to those who know how to read them. As these creatures ran and ran and ran from Queensland into South Australia and southwards still, the Emu produced tracks stringing together sources of water that travellers would decipher and follow for generations to come. As they ran and ran and ran, the salt-crustured umber deserts changed into the mountainous country today known as the Flinders Ranges. It was amidst peaks peopled by speakers of Kuyani that the two vicious Dingoes eventually caught and ripped open the Emu. The glistening blood of the Emu poured forth into the earth, staining the clay pans of the surrounding country and solidifying in the bowels of a cave near Parachilna Creek.¹

¹ This story was told by Aboriginal people to many English writers and aspects of it have appeared in print a number of times since 1879. In reconstructing this story for the purposes of this chapter, I have drawn upon the accounts in English listed here: 'Dr. Patrick Shanahan to Professor Edward Stirling, dated 26. 12. 04' reproduced in Philip Jones, "That Special Property," in *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2007), 343 – 47; Another account of the story by Dr. Shanahan was printed in "General News: South Australian Aboriginal Legends," *The Advertiser*, February 4 1910, 6; George A. Horne and G. Aiston, *Savage Life in Central Australia*

The colour of this substance has no easy English translation: archaeologist Isabel McBryde has described it as ‘a brilliant, shimmering, deep violet-hued red.’² It is powdery in texture and according to historian Phillip Jones its silvery sheen ‘becomes apparent only when rubbed across the skin.’³ From the mid 1850s, British settlers arriving to these parts began to describe this congealed blood as ‘red ochre.’⁴

In 1881, Pintha-Mirri set out on an epic journey from the northernmost deserts in the British Colony of South Australia for red ochre.⁵ From Wangkangurru deserts, he joined a group Aboriginal traders travelling southwards on ochre business to the stony ranges of Kuyani country, leaving behind family in what is today known as the Simpson Desert. Following the tracks of the Emu, more and more people from different places gathered as they deciphered and tracked the escape of the giant flightless bird from the jaws of those two Dingoes. The deserts they travelled were created and crisscrossed by the tracks of giant ancestral Emus, Lizards, Humans, Dingoes, Cods, Opossums, Frogs, Cats and other beings that scholars in Aboriginal history refer to as creatures from the ‘Dreaming.’⁶ In Aboriginal English these tracks

(London: Macmillan, 1924), 130; T. A. Masey, the English representative of the South Australian Corporation of Copper Mines gave an account of the Emu story in T. A. Masey, "The Red-Ochre Caves of the Blacks," *South Australian Register*, June 10 1882, 6; J. D. Woods et al., *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg & Son, 1879), 280 – 82; A.W. Howitt, *Native Tribes of South-east Australia* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), 711 – 13; A.P. Elkin, "Cult-Totemism and Mythology in Northern South Australia," *Oceania* 5 (1934): 184 – 89; Most recently, in conversation with Aboriginal storytellers, historian Dale Kerwin has published an account of the Emu and two Dingoes story in Dale Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: The Colonisation of The Australian Economic Landscape* (Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 113.

² Isabel McBryde, "Travellers in Storied Landscapes: A Case Study in Exchanges and Heritage," *Aboriginal History* 24 (2000): 161.

³ Jones, "That Special Property," 339.

⁴ The earliest press reference to ‘Red Ochre’ in these ranges occurs in "Water in the North," *South Australian Register*, November 7 1856, 2.

⁵ Hercus mentions Pintha-Mirri in Luise Hercus, "Leaving the Simpson Desert," *Aboriginal History* 9 (1985): 32: Footnote 12.

⁶ W. E. H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009), 57; A number of anthropologists have written about Dreaming creatures in the Simpson Desert, one of the most influential articles being T. G. H. Strehlow, "Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia: A Functional Study," in *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: Modern Studies in the Social Anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*, ed. Ronald M. Berndt (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970); Deborah Bird Rose,

are often called 'histories'; for the purposes of this thesis I will refer to them as 'Dreaming tracks.' The Emu Dreaming track that these men were travelling in 1881 was one important conduit in a bigger blueprint of Aboriginal mobility connecting distant places. Historian Dale Kerwin has described it as one artery of the Aboriginal 'economic landscape.'⁷

The physical scales of Dreaming tracks are comparable to routes such as the silk-road and the frankincense route and journeys along these overland tracks were significant life events for Aboriginal people.⁸ Children grew up anticipating these journeys, listening to stories about far-off districts that returned with travellers. When old enough to embark in pursuit of Dreaming creatures themselves, young people sometimes feared the dangers that lay on the road to ochre. Upon safe return they too told and retold their stories of travel to the wide-eyed children who they had left behind in the ranks of the uninitiated.⁹ From the mid 1850s British settlers began taking up mining and pastoral leases atop many sections of the Dreaming track laid by the Emu. In 1881 when Pintha-Mirri was travelling for red ochre through the sheep run of Beltana, closely tracking the escape of the Dreaming Emu through Kuyani

Reports From a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004), 36; For an examination of 'Dreamtime' as a universal category invented by settlers see Patrick Wolfe, "On Being Woken Up: The Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler," *Culture Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, 2 (1991).

⁷ Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: The Colonisation of The Australian Economic Landscape*. There is a substantial body of archaeological literature about the importance of Dreaming tracks to Aboriginal economies. See John Mulvaney, "The Chain of Connection: The Material Evidence," in *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, ed. Nicolas Peterson (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976); John Mulvaney, "... These Aboriginal Lines of Travel," *Historic Environment* 16, 2 (2002); Isabel McBryde, "Goods From Another Country: Exchange Networks and the People of the Lake Eyre Basin," in *Australians to 1788*, eds. D. J. Mulvaney and J. P. White (Sydney: Weldon, Syme and Fairfax, 1987); Isabel McBryde, "The Cultural Landscapes of Aboriginal Long Distance Exchange Systems: Can They be Confined Within Our Heritage Registers?," *Historic Environment* 13, 3 (1997); Isabel McBryde, "The Landscape is a Series of Stories: Grindstones, Quarries and Exchange in Aboriginal Australia: A Lake Eyre Case Study," in *Siliceous Rocks and Culture (6th International Flint Symposium 1991)*, eds. A. Ramos-Millan and A. Bustillo, *Monografica Arte Y Arqueologica* (Madrid: University of Granada, 1997).

⁸ Sandy Blair et al., "Making Tracks: Key Issues About the Heritage of Australian Routes and Journeys," *Historic Environment* 16, 2 (2002).

⁹ Woods et al., *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, 281.

territory, he encountered a giant, black mechanical beast cutting across the country spewing spectacular volumes of smoke.

It was a steam powered locomotive constructed in Manchester by the firm 'Beyer, Peacock & Co.'¹⁰ and it was hauling carriages along a railway track to the new Beltana railway siding.¹¹ After the Governor of South Australia turned the first sod of the Great Northern line in 1878 railway construction proceeded through the arid heart of the colony over the next decades, connecting the precious few sources of water. Following the overland telegraph line, the transcontinental railway followed a route that Jones has described as 'a thread of European communication which bisected hundreds of intangible but meaningful lines of Aboriginal song-poetry and ancestral paths.'¹² On 2 July 1881, the first 'Beyer Peacock' locomotive on this south-north railway track, cutting across the Emu Dreaming track, arrived at Beltana railway siding at 6.50pm.

The sight of the new beast at Beltana made such an impression on Pintha-Mirri that in language usually used to sing about Dreaming creatures he created a Wangkangurru song about the train.¹³ In 1986, linguist Luise Hercus published an English translation of this song in the journal Aboriginal History:

¹⁰ Details of 'Beyer Peacock' locomotive in "The Great Northern Railway," *South Australian Register*, May 20 1882, 1; Leon Oberg, *Locomotives of Australia: 1854 to 2007* (NSW: Rosenberg, 2007), 45, 124 – 26; Marshall, *Locomotives of the S.A.R.* (Walkerville, S.A.1972); J. N. Westwood, *Locomotive Designers in the Age of Steam* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1977), 47 - 50.

¹¹ 'Messrs. Barry, Brooks and Fraser' in "Public Works. Port Augusta and Government Gums Railway," *South Australian Register*, Wednesday 6 July 1881, 1, Supplement.

¹² F. J. Gillen, *F. J. Gillen's First Diary 1875* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1995), 4 - 5.

¹³ Hercus in collaboration with musicologist Grace Koch has categorised this song as one of a handful of Aboriginal language songs that disrupt their categories of 'traditional' and 'rubbish' song. They write 'in these compositions everything except the date of the subject matter is traditional' in Luise Hercus and Grace Koch, "A Native Died Sudden at Lake Allallina," *Aboriginal History* 20 (1996): 148.

Wangkangurru Song

VERSE 1:

Railway *yarilu' waya'*
Beltana *yarilu' waya'*
Yarilu' waya' Beltana yarilu'
Warrithu-ru thupu nhatji-rma:

VERSE 2:

Kali'ngkrima kayiya'
Kali'ngkrima na' kali'ngkrima yayai'
Wandura warritha
*Wandurali 'ya'*¹⁴

Hercus' translation

The railway tralaa tralaa
Beltana tralaa tralaa
tralaa, tralaa, Beltana tralaa
He could see the smoke from
afar:

Smoke rising
Smoke rising'
Smoke rising from afar.

It was a song describing a site of intersection between a railway track and a Dreaming track. Many years later, performing this railway song to Hercus, Pintha-Mirri's son Mick McLean recalled 'as I was growing up, I wanted to see a train. I wanted to see the smoke going up in a continuous column, oh how I wanted to see the fire of a train! I wanted to see the smoke of that fire!'¹⁵

At Beltana, the railway line and the Dreaming track created by the Emu were two of the many threads of mobility that intersected, transformed each other, and then continued beyond the bounds of the property. The Flinders Ranges were a cosmopolitan place of convergence for Aboriginal travellers from distant parts long before British explorer John Edward Eyre first described the 'peculiarly grand and sublime' peaks in English in 1840.¹⁶ A plot of land surveyed as a sheep run in the Flinders Ranges in 1856 eventually became known as 'Beltana' and the first camel-breeding depot in the Australian colonies was established there in 1867. The continuous departure of British explorers from Beltana into the Australian interior on camels, the construction of the overland telegraph line in 1871 and the arrival of the

¹⁴ Hercus, "Leaving the Simpson Desert," 32.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 'Entry for 21 August 1840, Chapter VI' in Edward John Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia, and Overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound, in the Years 1840-1: Sent by the Colonists of South Australia, With the Sanction and Support of the Government: Including an Account of the Manners and Customs of the Aborigines and the State of Their Relations With Europeans* (Electronic text of the original published: London : T. and W. Boone, 1845) (Sydney: University of Sydney Library Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service, 2002).

railway in 1881, in turn consolidated Beltana as a colonial communications hub.

Aboriginal trade in ochre likewise persisted throughout the era of camels, ships and trains and Beltana consequently emerged as an arid pocket of the 'Indian Archipelago' where Dreaming tracks intersected with colonial schemas of mobility with particular density.

Building on the insights of feminist geographer Doreen Massey, recently Tony Ballantyne has suggested that it is useful to think of past places as 'knot-like conjunctures where the ceaseless small-scale mobilities of life in the location interlocked into the more extensive networks that enabled the regular movement of people, things and words in and out of the location.'¹⁷ In the period examined in this thesis, an extensive transportation infrastructure colonised both local tracks of Aboriginal mobility as well as the larger scale Dreaming tracks that connected distant places, families, languages and stories. In her research with Irrwanyere people in the western Simpson Desert, historian Ingereth MacFarlane has developed the metaphor of 'entanglement' to explore how Charlotte Waters telegraph station on the Overland Telegraph line became a node entangled in multiple networks through a range of interactions. MacFarlane suggests that 'every place in still-colonial Australia contains [an] expansive capacity for retelling the interactional histories that made them.'¹⁸ Viewing Beltana through the place-oriented frameworks developed by these scholars, in this chapter I investigate the interactions and entanglements between circuits of Aboriginal mobility and schemas of colonial mobility in the era of camels, ships and trains.

¹⁷ Tony Ballantyne, "On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth Century New Zealand," *Journal of New Zealand History* 45, 1 (2011): 61.

¹⁸ Ingereth MacFarlane, "Entangled Places: Interactive Histories in the Western Simpson Desert, Central Australia" (Australian National University, 2010), 370.

I examine four crossings between the tracks of mobility that crisscrossed Beltana. Examining a Kuyani place name, I begin by piecing together how Kuyani speakers mapped and narrated local tracks, ‘the ceaseless small-scale mobilities of life,’ through the patch of desert that settlers surveyed as the pastoral property of Beltana. Secondly, I examine the arrival of foreign beasts to an ecological artery through Kuyani country and the subsequent global circulation of Kuyani words. In the third section I turn to the long distance Aboriginal networks that local Kuyani tracks at Beltana were embedded in. I explore how Aboriginal people trading in ochre negotiated the increasing circulation of commodities along the Dreaming track created by the Emu and two Dingoes. In the final section I return to the arrival of the steam powered ‘Beyer Peacock’ across the Emu Dreaming track. Contrasting Wangkangurru memories of this crossing with the recollections of settlers, I show how differing geographies powerfully shaped accounts of the ‘same’ train.

With no literacy in any Australian Aboriginal languages, ‘reading’ Kuyani and Wangkangurru language words, place names, stories and songs presents significant challenges of translation. Largely due to pragmatic limitations, I have used only materials that are available in English translation for the purposes of this chapter. I use Kuyani words that appeared in settler presses and history books, Wangkangurru stories that Aboriginal people told that were penned by English writers, songs that were recorded by linguists who then published English translations in academic journals. Encountering these Aboriginal language materials through the medium of English print introduces an ever-present layer of complexity. Piecing together Aboriginal geographies of mobility from Aboriginal language records demands examination of both the narrative and structural contexts in which they came to be articulated in English and translated to print. The most considerable conceptual

difficulties arise in trying to grasp the understandings of place within which Aboriginal people were telling stories, naming places and singing songs. Turning my attention from oceans to deserts, from South Asian languages to Wangkangurru and Kuyani records, in this chapter I draw upon the innovations of scholars in the fields of linguistics, spatial history and Aboriginal history to grapple with the challenges of translation across the ‘Indian Archipelago.’

1. Mapping a Kuyani Place Name

After Pintha-Mirri witnessed the arrival of the train at Beltana, he returned home to the northern deserts with ochre and a number of new songs: of creatures the traders had seen and places they had been. As Kerwin has written the congealed blood of Dreaming creatures was often a vehicle with which other material property and intellectual property moved along the artery of the Dreaming story.¹⁹ As Pintha-Mirri sang his Wangkangurru train song again and again, the English noun ‘railway’ and place-name ‘Beltana’ were appended to Wangkangurru vocabulary and the train-beast found a place in the imaginations of listening children who were yet to encounter ‘whitefellows.’ Whilst ‘railway’ was clearly an appropriation of an English word, the place name ‘Beltana’ was an English translation of the Kuyani place name ‘*Palthanha*.’ Throughout the period examined in this thesis *Palthanha* remained a Kuyani place quite distinct from Beltana. In this section I draw upon the research and methodologies of linguists to identify the physical location of *Palthanha* and piece together the outlines of the Kuyani story that mapped the place.

¹⁹ Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: The Colonisation of The Australian Economic Landscape*, 102.

Since Paul Carter's study in 1987, a number of Australian historians have examined place names as a dense site to explore relationships between language and place.²⁰ In the field of Aboriginal history, linguists have shown that Aboriginal place names such as *Palthanha* were often held tightly in sequence in stories that can be thought of as networks.²¹ Using examples from Warumungu, a language spoken today around Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, linguists Jane Simpson and Luise Hercus have illustrated how Aboriginal place names are often associated with the travel of Dreaming creatures: 'Warumungu ancestral women go to the place *Wittin* and leave a coolamon. That is visible now as a waterhole. *Wittin* means 'coolamon' in Warumungu. They go east to another place, *Manaji*, where they dig bush potatoes. *Manaji* means 'bush potato' in Warumungu.'²² In these examples the place names *Wittin* and *Manaji* reference not only the story of how the places were created but belong in a sequence that unfolds in a particular order, offering some insight into where the places featured in Aboriginal routes of mobility. As Hercus and Simpson suggest, situating Aboriginal place names in the context of the networks they were held in can offer insight into 'a way of looking at the land.'²³

²⁰ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987); Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002).

²¹ In 1986 linguist Dorothy Tunbridge delivered a lecture about place names in the Flinders Ranges that marked a watershed in the linguistic study of Aboriginal place names. Dorothy Tunbridge, "Aboriginal Place Names [Edited address delivered to the Second National Nomenclature Conference, now the Committee for Geographic Names in Australia, 21 August 1986]," *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1987). Since Tunbridge's address, there has emerged a substantial body of place name research. See L. A. Hercus, Flavia Hodges and Jane Helen Simpson, *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2002); For a discussion of the politics of Aboriginal place name restorations in the last three decades see Tony Birch, "A Land So Inviting and Still Without Inhabitants: Erasing Koori Culture from (Post-)Colonial Landscapes," in *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South-Africa and Australia*, eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²² L. A. Hercus and Jane Helen Simpson, "Indigenous Placenames: An Introduction," in *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia*, eds. L. A. Hercus, Flavia Hodges and Jane Helen Simpson (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2002), 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

The literal Kuyani meaning of ‘*Palthanha*’ can be approximated in English as ‘cloak-place.’ Linguists collaborating with speakers of Kuyani and other neighbouring Aboriginal languages have suggested that ‘*paltha*’ is a noun that translates to English clothes, cloak, clothing, blanket and cloth – a range of items that Aboriginal people fashioned from animal skins.²⁴ ‘-*Nha*’ is a case ending that marks proper names, and hence many place names, in Aboriginal languages spoken in the Flinders Ranges and the deserts to its north.²⁵ Whilst linguistic data reveals the literal meaning of the name *Palthanha*, this field of research has yet to shed any light on the precise place it referred to or the broader circuitry of Aboriginal mobility the place name was held in.²⁶ The vast archive of Dreaming stories that have entered the printed record and remain in circulation amongst Aboriginal people of the Flinders Ranges today likewise do not offer any insight into *Palthanha*.²⁷

²⁴ Today Adnyamathanha is the language geographically closest to Kuyani that continues to be spoken and taught in the Flinders Ranges. Conducting language elicitation work with Adnyamathanha people in the 1960s, linguist Bernhard Schebeck suggested that the place name ‘*valdhanha*’ was the origin of ‘Beltana.’ However, the property that came to be known as ‘Beltana’ from the 1860s was at the time inhabited by people who spoke Kuyani and Hercus has suggested that ‘*valdhanha*’ is the contemporary Adnyamathanha pronunciation of Kuyani ‘*palthanha*.’ The Adnyamathanha noun ‘*valdha*’ continues to refer to ‘clothes/blanket, cloak/clothing, blanket, cloth,’ Personal Communication with Luise Hercus and Jane Simpson, 7 April 2010. Also see J. C. McEntee and Pearl McKenzie, *Adna-mat-na English Dictionary*, Rev. May 1992. eds. (Adelaide: J. McEntee, 1992), 63.

²⁵ Dorothy Turnbridge, "Aboriginal Place Names [Edited address delivered to the Second National Nomenclature Conference, now the Committee for Geographic Names in Australia, 21 August 1986]," *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1987): 2.

²⁶ There is no story for ‘*Valdhanha*’ or ‘*Palthanha*’ in Dorothy Turnbridge and Nepabunna Aboriginal School, *Flinders Ranges dreaming* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1988).

²⁷ Linguist Schebeck uses ‘Beltana’ as an example of a place name that is not analysable in Bernhard Schebeck, "Some Remarks on Placenames in the Flinders," in *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia*, eds. L. A. Hercus, Flavia Hodges and Jane Helen Simpson (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2002), 146. In addition, there are no published stories about the etymology of Beltana in Turnbridge’s substantial linguistic research into place names in the Flinders Ranges: Turnbridge, "Aboriginal Place Names [Edited address delivered to the Second National Nomenclature Conference, now the Committee for Geographic Names in Australia, 21 August 1986]"; Dorothy Turnbridge and Nepabunna Aboriginal School, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1988); Dorothy Turnbridge, *The Story of the Flinders Ranges Mammals* (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1991); "Flinders Ranges Mammals: From the Dreamtime to the Present," *Habitat: The Magazine of the Australian Conservation Foundation* 20, 3 (1992). Margaret Sharpe and Dorothy Turnbridge, "Traditions of Extinct Animals, Changing Sea-Levels and Volcanoes Among Australian Aboriginals: Evidence from Linguistic and Ethnographic Research," in *Archaeology*

However, because Beltana became a significant transportation hub underpinning settler exploration and industries in the arid Australian interior, debates and claims surrounding the etymology of the name 'Beltana' have arisen many times in English printed records. As linguists have insisted, when reconstructing the meaning of an Aboriginal language word, the existence of many differing etymologies penned by English writers aids rather than obscures attempts to reconstruct the range of meanings and usages that a word had.²⁸ Linguist Dorothy Tunbridge has pointed out that when settlers asked Aboriginal people the meaning of place names, the multiplicity of meanings of the English verb 'mean' shaped both how Aboriginal people responded and what English writers penned.²⁹ In pursuit of where *Palthanha* was - both physically and with reference to Kuyani geography - I turn to an examination of the emergence of 'Beltana' in the English printed record and the settler etymologies for 'Beltana' that cite Aboriginal people as their source of information

Some writers have assumed that the first use of 'Beltana' in English was by pastoralist John Haines on Waste Lands Lease no. 379: a contract Haines entered into in 1856 with the governor of the British Province of South Australia to run sheep on country inhabited by Kuyani people.³⁰ In fact that document allots only a number

and Language I: Theoretical and Methodological Orientations, eds. Roger Blench and Matthew Spriggs (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

²⁸ Jane Simpson, "Making Sense of the Words in Old Wordlists," in *Paper and Talk: A Manual for Reconstituting Materials in Australian Indigenous Languages from Historical Sources*, ed. Nick Thieberger (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1995).

²⁹ Tunbridge, "Aboriginal Place Names [Edited Address Delivered to the Second National Nomenclature Conference, Now the Committee for Geographic Names in Australia, 21 August 1986]," 3.

³⁰ Christine Margaret Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited* (Adelaide: Privately Printed for the The Beltana Pastoral Company Limited, 1965), 19; Geoffrey Manning, *Manning's Place Names of South Australia from Aaron Creek to Zion Hill* (Modbury, S. Aust.: Gould Books, 2006): 63.

to a surveyed plot of land, not a name.³¹ Nevertheless, lease no. 379 was the foundational English document that introduced a very new schema of seeing, valuing, measuring, living and labouring on a patch of Kuyani country, setting the spatial framework within which settlers began to eventually use the name Beltana to refer to a sheep run. The earliest appearance of 'Beltana' in the English printed press occurs in 1863, the year that lease no. 379 was appended to the holdings of the firm 'Elder, Smith and Co.'³² The earliest etymology of Beltana was recorded in the late 1880s when the managing director of the Beltana sheep run, Nathaniel Phillipson, reported that Kuyani speakers had informed him that 'BELT meant running and ANA water.'³³

Whilst Phillipson's translation of 'Beltana = Running Water' is not supported by linguistic research, it is an etymology that has proved enduring in the settler printed record and reveals a lot.³⁴ When squatters surveyed northern deserts for the suitability of grazing sheep and cattle, it was 'running water' they went in search of. The sources of water they located, often with the aid of Aboriginal guides, were privileged places for which they sought out the local name. Colonial policy encouraged lessees and surveyors to insert 'native names... in the public maps'³⁵ and a

³¹ State Records of South Australia GRS 3570/1, Surrendered Pastoral Lease of Waste Lands of the Crown, "Her Majesty Queen Victoria and Sir Richard Graves MacDonnell to John Haines," Box 12, File no. 379 of 1855.

³² The earliest newspaper reference to 'Beltana' I can locate occurs in "Plunder by the Blacks," *Empire*, Wednesday 13 May 1863, 2. In 1863, Robert Barr Smith signed lease no. 379 appending this sheep run to the holdings of 'Elder, Smith & Co.' in State Records of South Australia GRS 3570/1, Surrendered Pastoral Lease of Waste Lands of the Crown, "Her Majesty Queen Victoria and Sir Dominickdaly to Robert Barr Smith," Box 12, File no. 379 of 1863. The first lease document to feature the word 'Beltanna' with a slightly different spelling was Lease no. 1710 (which replaced Lease no. 379), signed by Sir Thomas Elder in 1867 and coinciding with the creation of 'Beltana Pastoral Company.' State Records of South Australia GRS 3570/1, Surrendered Pastoral Lease of Waste Lands of the Crown, "Her Majesty Queen Victoria and His Excellency Francis Gilbert Hamley to Thomas Elder," Box 12, File no. 1710 of 1867.

³³ Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 19.

³⁴ This is an etymology that continues to be reproduced in some scholarly literature, for example in Bianca Di Fazio and Amy L. Roberts, "Stone Artefacts from the Beltana Region, South Australia," *Australian Archaeology*, 52 (2001): 47.

³⁵ Citing a notice in the Government Gazette inserted by Governor Gawler in October 1839' in Rodney Cockburn, *What's in a Name? Nomenclature of South Australia: Authoritative Derivations of Some 4000 Historically Significant Placenames* (Adelaide: Gellingham Printers, 1984), 276.

lot of Aboriginal place names penned by settlers referred to specific water places in the local Aboriginal language.³⁶ In deserts defined by the scarcity of water, Aboriginal place naming practices and settler appropriations of such names, not to mention human survival and livelihoods, converged upon the contours threading together reliable, permanent sources of water. Phillipson's etymology was correct in an ecological sense and points to the circuit that was at the very heart of the colonisation of this patch of Kuyani country: Warioota Creek (see Figure 12).

As historian Christine MacGregor has written 'the name 'Beltana' seems closely linked with Warrioota Creek'³⁷ and letters printed in the Adelaide newspaper The Register reveal that Kuyani storytellers often educated English speakers in Aboriginal lore along this waterway. Docie Pondi, her son Billy Pondi and his wife Rosie were Kuyani storytellers who spent their lives in the Beltana area and around Warioota Creek.³⁸ One correspondent wrote in 1914 that when visiting pastoral stations in the Flinders Ranges 'I always used to get Rosie ... to teach me some native names.'³⁹ In 1930, another writer, using the pseudonym 'Kangarilla' recalled that Warioota Creek was a place where she 'played with the blacks' when she was only a tiny girl.'⁴⁰ 'Kangarilla's letter mentions that 'the old blackfellow Billy Pondi... was a constant visitor to our home.' Kuyani men, women and children became integral to the pastoral economy in these parts and Kangarilla recalled 'Old Rosie did the washing for my mother many a time...' These letters reveal that in addition to the station manager and white pastoral workers, visitors, young settler 'girls, and

³⁶ For examples see Ibid., Alfred N. Day, *Names of South Australian Railway Stations with Their Meanings and Derivations* (Adelaide: R. E. E. Rogers, 1915).

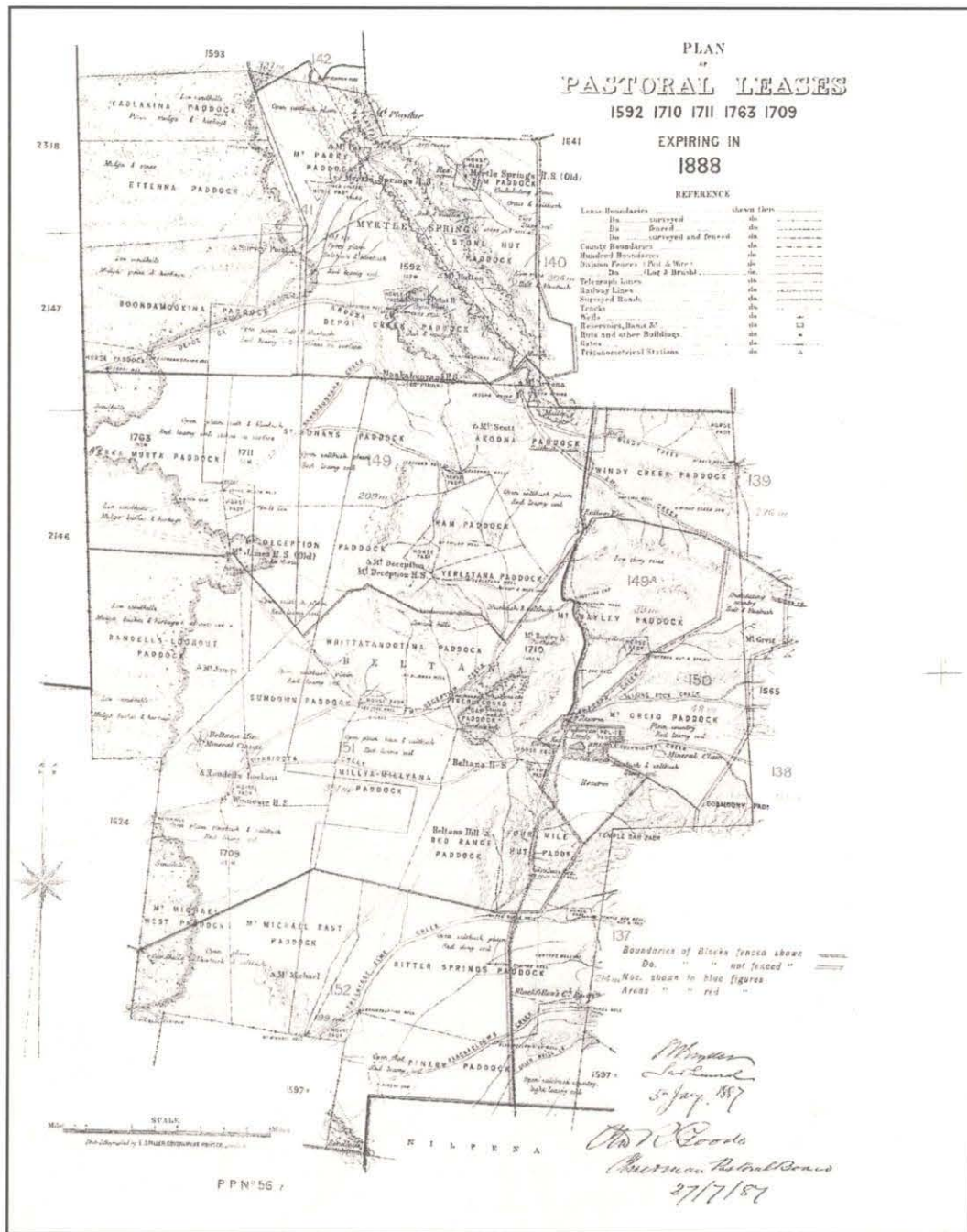
³⁷ Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 19.

³⁸ Rufus, "Out among the People: Billy Pondi's Challenge," *The Register News-Pictorial*, November 29 1929, 6.

³⁹ "Mr. and Mrs. Wagtail at Home," *The Register (Adelaide, SA : 1901 - 1929)*, 14 December 1914, 4.

⁴⁰ Rufus, "Played With the Blacks. Out Among the People.," *The Register News-Pictorial*, September 24 1930, 6.

Figure 12



Map of Beltana Pastoral Property, 1887

State Records of South Australia SAPP 56 South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 'Second Annual Report of Pastoral Board,' 1887.

presumably boys too, were in close contact with Kuyani people in both settler homes and in Aboriginal domestic places along the creek. 'Kangarilla' recalled that 'their camp was about a quarter of a mile from my father's home. The blacks were very friendly with us and we were always among them.'⁴¹

One extraordinary letter printed in The Register in 1924 sheds new light on the Kuyani geography of *Palthanha*, revealing that Kuyani storytellers not only educated people about names but sometimes taught settler children how to see these places within their Aboriginal networks. The correspondent recounted a 'legend' associated with the name 'Beltana' from the 'Coollannie tribe.' He – or was it she? - wrote 'I was born at Beltana Station in the still-standing cottage on the bank of the Warioota Creek, in the year 1884. Thus I played around the dear old station, and for many years after I was able to walk I knew all the old-time blacks, and from them I gathered the following story.' Using the pseudonym 'Coollannie' the writer employed a nostalgic tone very similar to 'Kangarilla' and may have been the same person. 'Coollannie' began the account of a Kuyani 'legend' with a close description of the geography of Beltana pastoral station. He or she wrote, 'Beltana Station stands on the south side - of the Warioota Creek, on a high hill that slopes down to the creek.' Recounting that 'the Warioota and Sliding Rock Creeks junction straight in front of the station,' the letter follows the grain of these watercourses adding that 'just below the junction there arises a steep bluff, which seems to spring straight out of the creek's bed.' Both Sliding Rock and Warioota 'creeks' were stony watercourses better described on most days as dry paths threading together permanent waterholes both fresh and brackish. After the sudden and dramatic thunderstorms that assault the Flinders Ranges, both creeks rise to rush in a westerly direction down the peaks. 'Coollannie' wrote that at

⁴¹ Ibid.

the junction of these two watercourses 'in high floodtime the water divides, and a large portion of it swirls around this bluff.'

Three years before 'Coollannie' was born, the 'Great Northern line' was constructed to the east of the Beltana station homestead and cut across the course of Warioota Creek and then Sliding Rock Creek as it proceeded northwards. Beltana railway siding was built between the Warioota Bridge and the Sliding Rock Bridge. 'Coollannie' described that flowing westwards 'the waters of the Warioota Creek have a straight run for about a mile before passing under the railway bridge and continue so till the junction of the two creeks.' In contrast the waters 'of Sliding Rock Creek curve almost continuously after they pass the railway bridge, about a mile north of the Beltana railway station yard.' Observing that 'the meeting of the waters causes a commotion,' this keen observer of the drama of flood-time at the junction of these waterways wrote 'the swift straight current of the Warioota forces most of the waters of the Sliding Rock Creek to the north of the bluff, and they rejoin at the old Afghan camp, about half a mile below the station.'

'Coollannie' penned this detailed description of flood-time Warioota Creek in response to a debate that was under way in settler presses. Following the publication of the second edition of H. C. Cockburn's Nomenclature of South Australia in 1924, a disagreement arose among settlers regarding the etymology of 'Beltana.' The Register requested 'if any correspondent can throw further light upon the elusive derivation of Beltana let him come forth.'⁴²

'Coollannie's response to The Register, after describing the motion of Warioota Creek, proposed that 'the word "Ana" means water in the blacks' language

⁴² "Miscellaneous. From Squatter," *The Register*, Saturday 2 August 1924, 15.

and Belta means crossing. Thus we have Beltaana, which was naturally abbreviated to Beltana.' The claim that 'Beltana = Crossing-water' was not literally correct.

However 'Coollannie' was not the only settler in conversation with Kuyani people who claimed that 'Beltana' made some reference to a physical place where the action of 'crossing' could be observed. As this debate was raging in the presses, an elderly Kuyani speaker informed W. C. Reid, the General Manager of Beltana in the 1920s, that the name meant 'crossing of the waters.'⁴³ When the etymologies proposed by Phillipson, Reid and 'Coollannie' citing speakers of Kuyani are all read together as suggested by linguists, *Palthanha* emerges as the Kuyani place name for the physical location where the two creeks junctioned below the Beltana station homestead.

What 'Coollannie' wrote next suggests there was a Dreaming story that mapped the Kuyani geography of *Palthanha*. The letter continued that 'the Coollannie tribe had a legend that the Warioota and Sliding Rock Creeks quarrelled when they met.' It is very likely that when Billy, Rosie and other Kuyani storytellers recounted this 'legend,' it was Dreaming creatures travelling along these watercourses who 'quarrelled when they met,' or had some sort of altercation upon encounter. As Aboriginal Dreaming stories from the Flinders Ranges and beyond reveal, the range of dramatic events that took place upon encounters between Dreaming creatures is extremely vast and not at all predictable. Dingoes ripped an Emu open to create an ochre pit. One Lizard with only two husbands had a jealous fight with another Lizard with ten husbands.⁴⁴ A Kangaroo coming across a woman slumbering under a tree tucked her into his pouch and bounded away.⁴⁵ These encounters did however all leave their mark upon places. 'Coollannie's account of the legend of *Palthanha*

⁴³ Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 19.

⁴⁴ 'The Lizards Murrandyarli and Murnga' in Turnbridge and Nepabunna Aboriginal School, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*, 60.

⁴⁵ 'The Old Woman and Her Lost Children' in *Ibid.*, 76.

continues that at on encounter 'the Warioota lay down while the Sliding Rock waters passed over them, and then, after going around the bluff, the waters became friends again, and the[y] followed the creeks' natural course.' As Michael Organ's bibliography of Dreaming stories indicates, almost from the moment that English writers encountered Aboriginal people from the late 18th century, they began to pen their partial understanding of the motion of Dreaming creatures.⁴⁶ Read within the context of this literature, 'Coollannie's account is recognisable as one settler memory of a Kuyani Dreaming story, heard during a childhood spent on Warioota Creek, albeit with some gaps.

In telling this story, were Kuyani storytellers describing the *creation* of Warioota and Sliding Rock Creeks by the travels of the Dreaming creatures that are absent from 'Coollannie's account? Was that 'steep bluff, which seems to spring straight out of the creek's bed' at the junction created by their encounter? What if any imaginative relationship did the place *Palthanha* have with clothes, blankets or cloaks? 'Coollannie's letter does not stipulate exactly what relationship this 'legend' had to either the creation of the junction nor the literal meaning of the noun '*Paltha*.' Nevertheless as a child this keen listener of Kuyani stories picked up that the story corresponded to and mapped the peculiar behaviour of water currents at the junction at flood time. 'Coollannie' wrote 'The strange part of this is that in high floods most of the Warioota's waters pass to the north of this bluff, while the Sliding Rock's waters pass to the south.' Whilst '*Paltha-nha*' did not literally translate to 'crossing-water,' on the occasion of high floods at *Palthanha* there was literally a crossing of waters as the force of Sliding Rock and Warioota reached equilibrium of sorts and the flow of each creek crossed the other. This letter 'from Coollannie' suggests that each

⁴⁶ Michael Organ, "Australian Aboriginal Dreaming Stories: A Chronological Bibliography of Published Works 1789 - 1991," *Aboriginal History* 18, 2 (1994).

such meeting of the ‘waters,’ and each even rarer ‘crossing’ at high floods, was a visually and aurally spectacular ecological event that punctuated the rhythms of station life at Beltana sheep run.

Whilst ‘Coollannie’s’ letter contains some obvious gaps where Dreaming creatures usually feature in Aboriginal lore, the fact that this writer replaced these gaps with flood-time ‘waters’ suggests that Kuyani storytellers told the tale *as if* mapping the behaviour of the water. ‘Coollannie’s’ translation of the story not only suggests that it held an extraordinary amount of detail about sensorial encounter with the place *Palthanha* at the time of high floods, but also offers a entry point into understanding Kuyani schemas for yoking together language, memory and place.

Perhaps for Kuyani people the meeting of the Dreaming creatures was realised each time waters rushed down the ranges to cross at *Palthanha*. Perhaps at each such crossing the story was, retold, remembered and reinvigorated. When a Kuyani storyteller told ‘Coollannie’ the tale as a child, did they remember their mother, father, uncle or grandmother who once told them the story? Perhaps the motion of the particular Dreaming creatures that rushed down the creeks connected this place meaningfully to other places. ‘Coollannie’s’ claim that ‘for many years after I was able to walk I knew all the old-time blacks,’ suggests that there came a certain age after which spending time amongst Aboriginal people, listening to Kuyani lore was not what was expected of white children. It also indicates that the story sent to The Register was penned about three decades after she or he first heard it. How did ‘Coollannie’ remember the story? Each time the creeks flooded and the memorable event of ‘crossing’ took place, did ‘Coollannie’ too recall, renew and reinvigorate the legend of *Palthanha*, long after this child grew distant from Kuyani storytellers?

This translation of a Kuyani story was the longest of many theories printed in The Register in 1924 proposing etymologies for Beltana.⁴⁷ Cockburn incorporated some of these other proposed etymologies in future editions of Nomenclature. The letter from 'Coollannie,' possibly written by a woman, structured around an ecological event and extensively citing a childhood encounter with Kuyani people, was entirely omitted. To the 'the student of nomenclature' Cockburn offered the too-cautious advice 'when in doubt, leave it out.'⁴⁸ In 1929 there were 4 generations of the Pondi family living on Warioota Creek and this story of *Palthanha* undoubtedly remained in oral circulation in Kuyani records in the era of camels, ships and trains. However, even though Kuyani people translated the story into English, particularly in their relationships with white children, and even though it entered briefly into the settler printed record, the Kuyani meaning of *Palthanha* fell out of circulation in the medium of English print.

In contrast, the settler appropriation of 'Beltana' enjoyed increasing circulation in English print as it emerged as a leading brand associated with a number of colonial industries. Settler translation of the Kuyani place name *Palthanha* to the property name Beltana were inextricable from the transformations to place unleashed by the processes of colonisation. Next I examine some material implications of the symbolic translation of Kuyani '*Palthanha*' to English 'Beltana.'

⁴⁷ The others were: "Miscellaneous. From Squatter"; "Beltana. From A. T. Saunders," *The Register*, Tuesday 5 August 1924, 11; "Beltana. From R. C. Malvern.," *The Register*, Wednesday 6 August 1924, 14; "Beltana. From 'Au Luchorpin'," *The Register*, Monday 11 August 1924, 7; Daisy Bates, "Beltana. From Daisy M. Bates"; *The Register*, Tuesday 26 August 1924, 7.

⁴⁸ Cockburn, *What's in a Name? Nomenclature of South Australia: Authoritative Derivations of Some 4000 Historically Significant Placenames*, xvi.

2. Warioota Creek and Translation to Brand 'Beltana'

If *Palthanha* was the junction of Sliding Rock Creek and Warioota Creek, what were the networks that Beltana was embedded in? In this section I show that the name Beltana, in addition to being the name of the larger property mapped by lease no. 379, also came to be refer to a number of additional places that were inserted onto the course of Warioota Creek. As we have seen, Kuyani lore suggests that a Dreaming creature rushed down the course of Warioota on the occasion of floods. Soon after lease no. 379 was surveyed, the process of translation to Beltana commenced as creature after foreign creature arrived to this Dreaming track.

The first flock of sheep arrived to Warioota Creek in 1856, accompanied by two white men on horses.⁴⁹ The station homestead was built on the hill overlooking the junction *Palthanha*. In 1863, 'Elder, Smith and Co.,' one of the most significant firms in the development of settler capitalism in the Australian colonies, acquired lease no. 379 in addition to the 17 709 head of sheep and pastoral infrastructure on this property.⁵⁰ By this time the financial headquarters of the sheep business was known as 'Beltana homestead' and the brand 'Beltana' began to appear in English printed press in reports of 'London Wool Sales.'⁵¹ Beltana became a reputable, known brand of colonial wool and in 1867 the formation of the 'Beltana Pastoral Company,' attached the name to an umbrella firm that brought together all the sheep and cattle properties in the arid north in which 'Elder, Smith and Co.' had an interest.⁵² From a number of properties bale after bale of wool imprinted with 'Beltana' was funnelled to Port Augusta, across the Indian Ocean, to the markets of London and then to the

⁴⁹ At the age of 80 Hugh Semple recalled driving the first flock of sheep to Beltana with John Haimes in "Hearty at Eighty. An Early Pioneer's Story," *The Advertiser*, 30 December 1911, 23.

⁵⁰ Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 21.

⁵¹ "London Wool Sales," *South Australian Register*, 9 October 1863, 4.

⁵² Macgregor's corporate history lists these as Beltana, Mt. Lyndhurst, Mulgaria, Murnpeowie and Cordillo Downs in Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 12.

industrial centres of the British Empire. The arrival of sheep to Warioota Creek was accompanied by the insertion of a number of new places along this waterway: sheep watering places, ram paddocks, the Beltana homestead, horse paddocks amongst others.⁵³ This constellation of privately owned infrastructure connected the ecology of Warioota Creek to a new global trade network stretching to London. Yoking the word 'Beltana' to the fortunes of the wool-commodity, the thriving business in sheep set the brand into motion through an economic circuit that both connected metropole and colony and produced these spatial categories.

The labour of Kuyani people eventually came to be incorporated into the business of sheep. Whilst in rhetoric the colonial Government of South Australia developed a rations system as 'compensation' for the theft of Aboriginal land and destruction of prior livelihoods, in practice enterprising squatters used government-supplied tobacco, blankets and flour as substitutes for wages for labour performed by Aboriginal people in the pastoral economy.⁵⁴ Beltana station was one such point of distribution for rations by the 1860s. Undoubtedly labour relations between station managers and Aboriginal people were much more exploitative than the relations between capital and settler labour. However the incorporation of Warioota Creek into a larger geography of capital was not accompanied by the forcible removal of people from their land as it was elsewhere in the Australian colonies.⁵⁵ Aboriginal labour eventually formed the backbone of the pastoral economy throughout the northern

⁵³ 'Plan of Pastoral Lease 1710' in State Records of South Australia SAPP 56 South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 'Second Annual Report of Pastoral Board,' 1887.

⁵⁴ Peggy Brock, "Pastoral Stations and Reserves in South and Central Australia 1850s - 1950s (Editors Ann McGrath, Kay Saunders, Jackie Huggins)," *Aboriginal Workers: Special Issue of Labour History* 69 (1995); Robert Foster, "Rations, Coexistence, and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Labour in the South Australian Pastoral Industry, 1860-1911," *Aboriginal History* 24 (2000): 1 - 26.

⁵⁵ Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore, "Working for the White People: An Historiographic Essay on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour," *Aboriginal Workers: Special Issue of Labour History* 69 (1995).

deserts of South Australia as well as the Northern Territory and Kuyani families like the Pondis remained on their country.

With sheep at the centre of the business, tracking dingoes and other predators along Warioota Creek became a crucial part of the labour performed at Beltana by Kuyani people. Billy Pondi, his son Leslie, king Harry Bailes and a man named Percy were some of the Kuyani people in the area who came to be infamous around Beltana for their tracking skills from the 1880s until 1930s.⁵⁶ In addition to tracking sheep killers many squatters and their urban visitors enjoyed chasing game along Warioota creek; a watercourse with extraordinary 'bird life... droves of wild turkey and parrots in millions.'⁵⁷ In the 1920s The Register published a number of accounts of chasing creatures along the Warioota accompanied by Aboriginal trackers. They read like something of a mixture between British hunting tales and Kuyani tracking tales.⁵⁸ In 1929 Billy, who was by this time a grandfather of many, even extended an invitation to white hunters to Warioota Creek. He challenged those who claimed superiority to Aboriginal trackers to 'come along and track a wild dog with us over the stones.'⁵⁹ The ability to track creatures, Dreaming and otherwise, along this Warioota Creek remained absolutely central not only to Kuyani cosmology and mapping, but also livelihoods within the pastoral economy. It is within this context of interdependence between settlers and Aboriginal people that the Kuyani story of *Palthanha* remained in circulation in Kuyani records and sometimes shaped the imaginations of settler children.

⁵⁶ "Death of an Aboriginal King," *The Register*, 31 December 1910, 13; Rufus, "Out Among the People: Black and White Trackers," *The Register News-Pictorial*, 10 January 1930, 6.

⁵⁷ Rufus, "Out among the People," *The Register News-Pictorial*, 25 April 1930, 6.

⁵⁸ "Memorable Chase," *The Register*, 15 April 1908, 5; Rufus, "A Dingo Hunt. Percy the Black Tracker. On Beltana Station," *The Register*, 14 June 1928, 9.

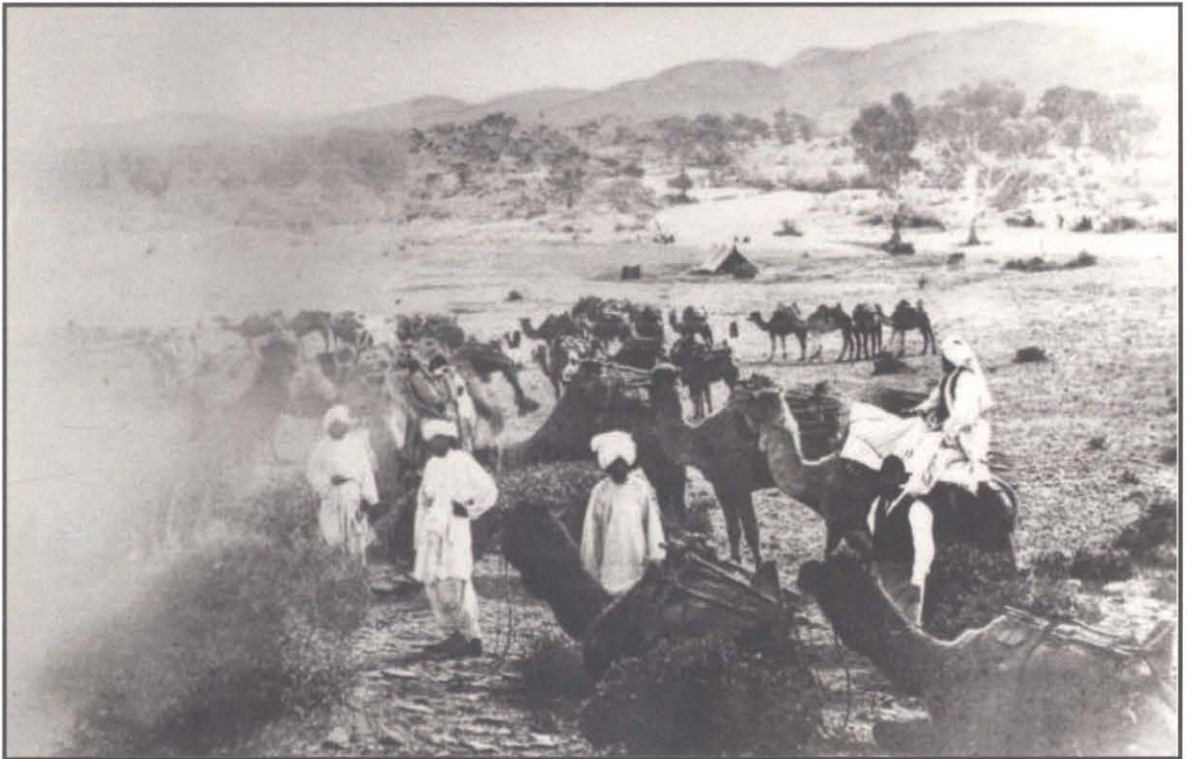
⁵⁹ Rufus, "Out Among the People: Billy Pondi's Challenge."

Just over a decade after the arrival of sheep a shipment of foreign creatures from Kandahar arrived in considerable numbers to Warioota Creek, inserting yet another cluster of places onto the circuitry of *Palthanha*. Following a business transaction between K. B. Morad Khan in Karachi and Sir Thomas Elder in Adelaide, 124 camels accompanied by 31 Muslim workers, set sail across the ‘Indian Archipelago’ and arrived to the Flinders Ranges in 1866. Camels were first pastured in the hills of Umbertana and in 1867 relocated to Beltana sheep run. A camel yard was constructed on Warioota Creek (see Figure 13). In addition to appropriating existing waterholes, a number of wells and bores were sunk along the watercourse specifically for use by camels and the Muslim workers who tended them.⁶⁰ The camel-breeding station on Warioota Creek was the first in the Australian colonies and as settler presses monitored this enterprise with interest, the brand ‘Beltana’ came to be yoked to another species.

The arrival of camels to a Kuyani Dreaming track bound its ecology into a remittance economy spanning the ‘Indian Archipelago’ supporting families and, at times, entire villages in British India. While both Kuyani people at Beltana sheep run and the Muslim cameleers who arrived from British Indian ports can be described as people colonised by the British Empire, there were significantly different structures underpinning their engagement with settler capital and governments.

⁶⁰ These new water places acquired the names ‘Afghan well’ and ‘Afghan bore.’ State Library of South Australia: BRG 133/3 Beltana Pastoral Company Limited Records, Wells 1928 - 1933.

Figure 13



Camel Yard on Warioota Creek

State Library of South Australia: B61979, Afghan camel drivers, BELTANA:
Afghan camel drivers photographed at Beltana, possibly during a time when they
went on strike, 25 January 1870.

Firstly, in contrast to Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry, camel-workers recruited at the ports of British India signed contracts outlining the terms of their exploitation. Secondly, unlike Aboriginal stock workers, from the outset cameleers were paid in a combination of cash and rations of ghee, dhal, flour and salt.⁶¹ Thirdly, remuneration for camel-carting work did not double as the meagre 'compensation' paid by the colonial government for the alienation of land. Finally, cameleers at Warioota Creek at times owned the camels they worked allowing a certain level of autonomy from settlers. The wealthier of the cameleers occupied what Indian Ocean scholars have described as a tier of 'intermediary capitalists.' They were classed as 'aliens' according to British colonial law and unable to own land. Hence, from the 1880s, Sir Thomas Elder facilitated the acquisition of land by businessmen such as Faiz and Tagh Mahomet.⁶² The camel industry that was established first on Warioota Creek and thereafter spread to many other waterways in the Australian interior gave rise to complex partnerships between settlers and Muslim businessmen. In contrast, Kuyani people in the pastoral industry never owned sheep or land under British law.

The insertion of the camel yard on the circuitry of *Palthanha*, in addition to setting 'Beltana' wool in motion through a new network of mobility, gave rise to a series of smaller camel carrying firms owned by Muslim traders. Symbols

⁶¹ 'Contract Written in Dari, and its English Translation, Executed on 26 March 1860 at Karachi Between Dost Mahomed, Belooch, Esa Khan and the Victorian Exploring Expedition Committee' reproduced in Phillip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland. 1860s - 1930s* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2007), 37. One Adelaide press reported in 1866 'we learn from Northern letters received by this mail that the camel-drivers are giving considerable trouble. They demand ghee or butter in addition to their usual rations, and are disposed to be awkward unless it is given them' in "The Brindisi Route," *South Australian Register*, Saturday 1 December 1866, 2.

⁶² Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Elder Smith & Co. LTD, 8/68, Correspondence, Documents, Memoranda and Some Accounts and Insurance Papers Relating to Faiz and Tagh Mohamet of Hergott and Later of Perth, Merchants, Camel Proprietors and Carriers, Including Some Personal Papers of Faiz Mohamet, 1888 - 1905.

representing these subsidiary businesses were branded onto the bodies of camels and (see Figure 14) Beltana became a leading brand associated not just with certain commodities, but with the transportation infrastructure that moved colonial commodities in general. In 1869, the shipping firm Orient Steam Navigation & Co., in which Elder had shares, built the barque *S. Beltana* specifically for the colonial wool trade to London (see Figure 15).⁶³ By the 1870s the name *Palthanha*, embedded in an artery of Kuyani mobility was set into global circulation along the arteries of a global geography of capital along with a range of commodities that 'Elder, Smith & Co.' had an interest in. In translation from Kuyani *Palthanha*, 'Beltana' became a word owned by a firm.

In 1880 railway engineers and workers arrived to Warioota Creek to make preparations for the arrival of yet another creature. At the place where the railway line cut across the wide, story corridor of Warioota, a railway bridge of 7 spans of 40 feet each, or roughly 80 meters in total, was erected in an attempt to ensure that the train timetable was not disrupted by flood-time waters.⁶⁴ In an attempt to harness the motion of Dreaming creatures for the purposes of railway transportation the colonial Public Works Department sunk a reservoir into the bed of Warioota with the capacity to capture 5 078 000 gallons of flood time waters at a cost of £7200 (see Figure 16). The last 10 miles of railway to Beltana proceeded through particularly difficult

⁶³ Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 70. In 1912, a ship owned by the P & O also came to be named S.S. Beltana in Stephen Rabson and Kevin O'Donoghue, *P & O: A Fleet History* (Kendall: The World Ship Society and The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, 1988), 162.

⁶⁴ Engineers frequently underestimated the power of these seemingly dry conduits and only 2 and a half months after the opening of the railway to Beltana, settler presses reported that between Parachilna and Beltana 'a rush of water came down from the hills, and carried away the earth and ballast in numerous places' in "Quorn," *South Australian Register*, 16 September 1881, 6.

Figure 14



Branding Camels at Farina, c.1914

Photographed by Ivor Jenkins and reproduced in Jones, Phillip, and Anna Kenny.
Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland. 1860s- 1930s. Adelaide: South
Australian Museum, 2007, 70.

Figure 15



***S Beltana* at Port Adelaide, 1869**

State Library of South Australia: PRG 1373/19/3, The Wooden Ship 'Beltana', 773 Tons, on Slip at Port Adelaide, 1869.

country and 5 locomotives and 88 wagons imported from Manchester were engaged to cart the necessary ballast, coal and water required to lay the track.⁶⁵ In the winter of 1881 construction on Warioota bridge, Beltana reservoir and Beltana railway siding was complete and a cluster of places resourced and owned by the colonial government were inserted onto the circuitry of *Palthanha*, profoundly transforming the ecology of Warioota Creek.

In anticipation of the opening of Beltana railway siding, local settlers formed a committee, lobbied the government into providing the first service for free, invited influential guests to catch this ride to Beltana and decorated the new station with 'all the flags available to best advantage.'⁶⁶ The settler ceremony that greeted the arrival of the first 'Beyer Peacock' on 2 July at 6.50pm was a carefully staged event that must have looked quite bizarre to everyone else watching. Immediately after arrival of the first passenger service, the visiting dignitaries were deposited at the siding and 'the train was run back a short distance.' Mrs Blood, the 'wife of one of the oldest and most respected residents' was asked to conduct the ceremony. When she was in position, arrival was dramatised again and Mrs Blood smashed a bottle of champagne upon the moving locomotive as it passed through the arch of Beltana railway siding. The chairman of the organising committee then called for three cheers 'for the Queen, his Excellency, and the Parliament.'⁶⁷ The formalities appending the new railway station to the geography of the British Empire came to a close as the crowd of settlers presumably recited in unison: Hip hip hooray hip hip hooray hip hip hooray.

⁶⁵ "The Great Northern Railway."

⁶⁶ "The Great Northern Railway. Opening of the Line to Beltana," *South Australian Register*, 8 July 1881, 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Figure 16



Railway Reservoir on Warioota Creek

State Library of South Australia: B54698/7, Beltana Reservoir, Photographed by Charles Walter Woods, 1905.

The colonial translation of the Kuyani place name '*Palthanha*' to the brand name 'Beltana' inserted multiple new places onto the ecological circuits that defined *Palthanha*. As creature after foreign creature arrived to the sheep run known as Beltana, Warioota Creek remained the artery of mobility that continued to connect the place *Palthanha* to the various places named Beltana. Each new creature that arrived embedded inside the logic of the commodity bound the track of the Dreaming creature *en route* to *Palthanha* into a new set of distinct but interrelated networks. By the time steam-trains cut across Warioota Creek, Kuyani '*Palthanha*' which had previously been uttered in speech, story and possibly song, found expression in English print as 'Beltana' in reports of wool sales, shipping news, telegraph communication, accounts of the camel industry, settler maps, urban presses, train timetables and eventually in the pages of settler history books.

3. The Circulation of Commodities and the Trade in Ochre

Warioota Creek featured prominently not only in local Kuyani livelihoods and colonial industries, but on long distance routes of Aboriginal mobility. The arrival of creatures embedded in the logic of commodity production to a complex of Dreaming tracks transformed the terrain through which Aboriginal people continued to trade in ochre. Aboriginal traders negotiated stock routes, camel tracks and railway lines cutting across Dreaming tracks in very different ways. As we saw at the outset of this chapter, the tracks laid by the Emu as it escaped the clutches of the two vicious Dingoes mapped a conduit of mobility between Wangkangurru deserts to Kuyani country and Beltana sheep run. Focusing on this particular route of Aboriginal

mobility linking distant places, in this section I will outline some of the ways that the circulation of commodities interacted with the circulation of ochre.

The ochre pits at Parachilna in the Flinders Ranges were a particularly dense place of convergence for long distance Aboriginal traders. In addition to the Emu, a number of other Dreaming creatures travelled to these hills along unrelated storylines only to die and have their blood solidify at Parachilna.⁶⁸ Arabunna people, from the west of Lake Eyre, followed tracks created by two Dingoes chasing a ferocious Gecko to the ochre caves of the Flinders Ranges.⁶⁹ From the southern coasts, people following Dreaming tracks brought various stone technologies to Kuyani country to trade for ochre, while from the British colony of New South Wales travellers traced the course of Callabonna and Yandama Creeks to the ochre pits of the Flinders Ranges.⁷⁰ Exchange networks from Kuyani territory spread as far north as the Indian Ocean, leaving behind traces of melo shells, baler shells and other coastal items of exchange in the archaeological record around Beltana.⁷¹ As people travelled these routes generation after generation, various types of affective relationships including marriage interwove distant places along corridors of mobility and Dreaming tracks became ancestral lines in multiple ways.

After the arrival of sheep to Warioota Creek, as settler presses reported on the success of the Beltana wool-commodity in London markets, simultaneously they

⁶⁸ Jones gives an account of other Dreaming tracks that also converged on Parachilna in 'Jones, "That Special Property," 349 - 53.

⁶⁹ Luise Hercus, "Singing and Talking about Red Ochre (Unpublished Manuscript)," (Canberra: Australian National University, 2009), 3; This story is also quoted by Horne and Aiston in Horne and Aiston, *Savage Life in Central Australia*, 128.

⁷⁰ McBryde, "Travellers in Storied Landscapes: A Case Study in Exchanges and Heritage," 160.

⁷¹ McBryde writes that the archeological record reveals that a diverse range of pearl shell items enjoyed Australia-wide circulation and can be traced to the coast of the Kimberly region with the Indian Ocean in North-West Australia in Isabel McBryde, "'The Landscape is a Series of Stories': Grindstones, Quarries and Exchange in Aboriginal Australia: A Lake Eyre Case Study," 589, 603; Isabel McBryde, "Goods From Another Country: Exchange Networks and the People of the Lake Eyre Basin," 260; Isabel McBryde, "Travellers in Storied Landscapes: A Case Study in Exchanges and Heritage," 24.

began reporting on Aboriginal trade structured around the congealed blood of Dreaming creatures.⁷² On 18 April 1863, a correspondent from Beltana wrote to an Adelaide press that 'a mob consisting of between twenty and thirty came down from the neighbourhood of Blanchewater, about ten days ago, for the purpose of obtaining a sort of red ochre.'⁷³ The letter continued that 'a few miles from Beltana a dray was plundered by the sable gentry, who carried off about a bag and a half of flour, and a bag of sugar as well as a quantity of clothing.'⁷⁴ Unlike Kuyani people whose labour was incorporated into the pastoral economy in exchange of rations, travellers from distant places did not have relationships of interdependence with the station manager and middle management at Beltana; instead they followed Dreaming beings through foreign country observing conventions of their own.

A number of settler accounts offer glimpses into the negotiations that Aboriginal travellers entered into with locals. In 1856 one commentator on 'red ochre' described that upon arrival of Aboriginal traders to the Flinders Ranges 'a treaty was entered into' between the visitors and the local Aboriginal people. The writer observed that 'one of the most singular features of the friendly treaty was, that the visitors were bound not to pursue game in the country they visited, although they were permitted to kill any that they could take without deviating from the line of march.'⁷⁵ As Aboriginal trade continued through pastoral properties, following negotiations over rations, sheep and cattle according to conventions illegible to settlers, squatters began to lobby the colonial government demanding increased police

⁷² "Plunder by the Blacks"; "London Wool Sales."

⁷³ "Plunder by the Blacks."

⁷⁴ "Topics of the Day," *The South Australian Advertiser*, 30 April 1863, 2.

⁷⁵ "Water in the North."

numbers to protect livestock.⁷⁶ In June 1863, Julius Jeffreys, the leaseholder of the northern property Strangways Springs, wrote to the Police Commissioner on behalf of an influential group of squatters. He warned that ‘unless immediate steps are taken by the government some frightful calamity will take place.’⁷⁷

Whilst oral lore articulated the conventions of mobility through foreign places for the Aboriginal trade in ochre, British written law stipulated what constituted legal encounters between squatters and Aboriginal people, particularly at sources of water. Lease no. 379 outlined that Aboriginal people retained ‘full and free right of ingress egress and regress’ to ‘springs and surface waters’ and ‘to take and use for food birds and animals *feræ naturæ* in such a manner as they would have been entitled to do’ within the bounds of the property.⁷⁸ However as historian Robert Foster has shown this letter of the law meant little in practice and squatters were never prosecuted for breaching the ‘rights’ accorded to Aboriginal people by British law.⁷⁹ In addition, while lease no. 379 outlined ‘that the Lessee shall not in any manner change alter divert or obstruct the use of ... roads paths or ways’ this contract between squatters and the settler government did not acknowledge the existence of Aboriginal commonways or Dreaming tracks.⁸⁰

In November 1863, after undertaking business with ochre at Parachilna, a group of traders travelling along the Emu and two Dingoes storyline converged upon

⁷⁶ "Plunder by the Blacks"; "Intercolonial Affairs - South Australia," *The Argus*, 16 December 1863, 6; "Topics of the Day"; "The Brindisi Route."

⁷⁷ Julius Jeffreys, a pastoralist on the Strangways Springs run, cited in Jones, "That Special Property," 363.

⁷⁸ GRS 3570/1/Box 12/1863/379

⁷⁹ Foster, "Rations, Coexistence, and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Labour in the South Australian Pastoral Industry, 1860-1911"; Foster, "Coexistence and Colonisation on Pastoral Leaseholds in South Australia, 1851 - 99," in *Despotic Dominion: Property Rights in British Settler Societies*, eds. John McLaren, A.R. Buck and Nancy E. Wright (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ GRS 3570/1/Box 12/1863/379.

the rapidly changing ecology of Warioota Creek.⁸¹ They were at one of the permanent waterholes of Warioota when a white shepherd arrived with a flock of 1300 sheep. The Aboriginal men stopped the creatures from getting to the water. They killed 3 sheep with boomerangs and drove some further down the creek away from the water 'saying that [the] water was theirs'⁸² according to the police report. The Aboriginal traders made demands for tobacco, the knives carried and coats worn by white workers in addition to 'sheepey,' eventually following the shepherds to the station kitchen. Here Captain McKay, one-time sovereign of a shipping firm and the manager of Beltana sheep run at the time, caught hold of one Aboriginal man and horsewhipped him as a warning to the others.⁸³ Next, on 27 November 1863 a gang of settlers with hunting-whips and revolvers confronted the group of Aboriginal men with boomerangs and waddies at Warioota Creek. A witness later testified in court 'Captain McKay got off his horse to fire at the natives, as they were all about the creek.'⁸⁴

Corporal Wauhope from Angipena police station arrived to Warioota Creek on 1st December and, observing the corpses, the officer of British law predicted that the 'affray at Beltana will be a check to their visits for a time to the sheep districts...'⁸⁵ One wounded man with ochre in his bag crawled some distance along Warioota Creek for 5 days, dying only shortly before the arrival of the surgeon to the site of

⁸¹ Police reporting identified some of the traders as being from the Strezlecki track, which was the Emu and two Dingoes route according to Kuyani man Harry Bailes' account of the story in 1904. See Jones, "That Special Property," 344 - 47. In addition Hercus has pointed out that there was more than one Emu and two Dingoes storyline, Hercus, "Singing and Talking about Red Ochre (Unpublished Manuscript)," 4.

⁸² Corporal Wauhop cited in Jones, "That Special Property," 363, Robert. Foster, "Feasts of the Full-moon: The Distribution of Rations to Aborigines in South Australia: 1836-1861," *Aboriginal History* 13 (1989).

⁸³ Letter written by a correspondent 'from Wenowie' forwarded to the *South Australian Register* and reprinted in "Intercolonial Affairs - South Australia," *The Argus*, 16 December 1863, 6.

⁸⁴ Testimony of 'Alexander McGinniss' in "Inquest on Natives Shot in the Far North," *South Australian Register*, 26 January 1864, 6.

⁸⁵ Jones, "That Special Property," 363.

violence.⁸⁶ The settler presses reported only the deaths of the 3 Aboriginal people whose corpses remained at Warioota Creek. The many more people who were wounded and died beyond the creek did not make it into the official reports or the trial. After conversation with Kuyani people a few years later another settler recorded that 'eleven blacks were killed on the spot, and it is said forty or fifty others died of their wounds before they reached their own territory.'⁸⁷ It was one of a number of violent encounters in the Flinders Ranges and the discrepancies between settler and Aboriginal records remain unresolved.⁸⁸

The jury of 8 white settlers returned the verdict of 'justifiable homicide' unanimously ruling that the killers at Warioota Creek were 'quite justified in firing and shooting at the natives.'⁸⁹ McKay reported the event to Sir. Thomas Elder in a letter that ended with the warning 'You had best, therefore, warn the Government to order up a sufficient force to protect the settlers if not, they will be shot down like dogs, as the settlers must do so in defence of their lives and property. My hand is injured by the trigger guard of my gun, I am therefore not able to write myself.'⁹⁰ The trade in ochre continued and the following year Corporal Wauhope requested further resources from the state arguing 'breech loading rifles are the only weapons that would intimidate such a determined lot of natives.'⁹¹ In 1864 in response to rising

⁸⁶ Testimony of Dr. Cotter printed in "Inquest on Natives Shot in the Far North."

⁸⁷ Masey, "The Red-Ochre Caves of the Blacks."

⁸⁸ Jones, "That Special Property," 363; Robert Foster, Rick Hosking and Amanda Nettlebeck, *Fatal Collisions: The South Australian Frontier and the Violence of Memory* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2001), 94 – 114; Peggy Brock, *Yura and Udney: A History of the Adnyamathanha of the North Flinders Ranges* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press in association with the Aboriginal Heritage Branch, Dept. of Environment and Planning, South Australia, 1985), 28 - 32.

⁸⁹ "Inquest on Natives Shot in the Far North."

⁹⁰ "Intercolonial Affairs - South Australia."

⁹¹ Citing Corporal Wauhope in Jones, "That Special Property," 364.

settler hysteria the colonial government supplied police in the Flinders Ranges with a consignment of rifles.⁹²

Over the next decades police power and resources increased throughout the northern deserts of South Australia often with disastrous results for people travelling the tracks of Dreaming creatures. In the 1880s a large group of travellers on the track of the Emu were massacred at Koonchera sand hill in the north-eastern corner of the colony of South Australia. Visiting the site with Hercus in 1971, Wangkangurru man Mick McLean recounted that a group of families had gathered for a ceremony. He described that the leaders of the group 'brought together the people, country by country, wherever the (ancestral) emu stayed they went and brought them back here (to Koonchera) the Yandruwanta, the Yawarawarga, the Namani.' The group on their way to ochre country were about to start singing and dancing when police officers from Andrewilla arrived looking to avenge the spearing of one bullock. Mick McLean reflected that what happened next was 'all because of a bullock, just a small one, a mere calf, at Koonchera.' Most people did not even have the chance try and escape. 'They killed all the women, the blind old men and the young initiates' Mick McLean said. Three people escaped and it is their testimony that has remained alive in Aboriginal records. In 1950, travel writer George Farwell estimated that at least 200 people were killed.⁹³ According to Aboriginal oral records upwards of 500 people were massacred.⁹⁴ No investigations were ever conducted and there is an eerie silence about this massacre in settler presses.

⁹² As Jones has outlined it was a controversial move amongst settlers even at the time in *Ibid*.

⁹³ George Farwell, "Land of Mirage," 160.

⁹⁴ Hercus, "Singing and Talking about Red Ochre (Unpublished Manuscript)"; Mick McLean Irinjili and Luise Hercus, "The End of the Mindiri People," in *This is What Happened: Historical Narratives*, eds. Peter Sutton and L. A. Hercus (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971/1986), 189: Line 14.

These two sets of killings along the Emu Dreaming track at Warioota Creek and Koonchera waterhole reveal that when settlers encountered Aboriginal traders, not only were they armed with guns but also deployed a powerful cluster of institutions to uphold the rule of property: the resources of the state, settler presses and the judicial system. Some historians have suggested that the arrival of sheep and cattle and the distribution of government tobacco, blankets and flour actually increased the frequency of Aboriginal people's journeys along Dreaming tracks.⁹⁵ However the rule of property that arrived with these commodities had disastrous results for people carrying on with the business of ochre, at times devastating important arteries of the Aboriginal economic geography.

In contrast, the emergence of camel tracks and the government construction of a railway line crossing parts of the Dreaming track laid by the Emu had quite different implications for the movement of ochre. Camels drank deeply from waterholes before setting off for long treks and it is very likely that Aboriginal people and Muslim cameleers had altercations at water-places throughout arid pockets of the 'Indian Archipelago.' However, as Engsens Ho has pointed out, the activities of non-European merchants and itinerant workers operating across the Indian Ocean arena differed significantly from their European counterparts in that their 'enterprises overseas were not backed by an equally mobile, armed state.'⁹⁶ Instead the Muslim fraternity brought to Warioota Creek and other Aboriginal networks, a different set of resilient institutions that underpinned their schemas of circular migration across the 'Indian Archipelago.' In subsequent chapters I will return to the marriage

⁹⁵ Foster, "Feasts of the Full-moon: The Distribution of Rations to Aborigines in South Australia: 1836-1861"; Jones, "That Special Property."

⁹⁶ Engsens Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2006), xxi.

conventions, inheritance laws and familial structures that powerfully shaped cameleers' encounters with Aboriginal people at water places, violent and otherwise.

As a latticework of camel tracks developed outwards from the breeding depot at Warioota Creek, many Aboriginal people found employment in the camel industry. The tracks laid by camels frequently appropriated the very same water places strung together by the tracks laid by Dreaming creatures and the significance of the camel industry for geographies of Aboriginal trade and family has not yet received the close attention it deserves from historians.⁹⁷ Many Muslim camel owners, both wealthy landed merchants and smaller operators, employed Aboriginal people to work these beasts. One Arabunna woman's recollections from the 1910s and 1920s that Aboriginal camel workers 'used to go off working and come back and get lots of money,'⁹⁸ draws attention to the camel industry as one of the earliest to remunerate Aboriginal people with money rather than rations. Along the particular tract of desert traversed by the Emu and two Dingoes, Sallay Mahomet of Beltana held the government contract for the delivery of mail at the turn of the century and employed eastern Arrernte man Tom Buzzacott.⁹⁹ Settler press accounts also confirm that Aboriginal camel-workers were travelling the corridor traversed by the Emu alongside Muslim cameleers.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Jones, "That Special Property," 407; Footnote 101; W. E. Harney, "Roads and Trade," *Walkabout* (1950): 42; Dale Kerwin draws attention to the use of camels in the trade of 'pituri' in Dale Kerwin, "Aboriginal Dreaming Tracks or Trading Paths: The Common Ways" (Griffith University, 2006), 35.

⁹⁸ 'Reflections on a Television Program' in Luise A. Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," *Aboriginal History* 5, 1 (1981): 48: Line 4.

⁹⁹ Sallay Mahomet was the camel driver on a number of expeditions undertaken by Ernest Giles and is mentioned many times in Ernest Giles, *Australia Twice Traversed: The Romance of Exploration, Being a Narrative Compiled from the Journals of Five Exploring Expeditions into and through Central South Australia, and Western Australia, from 1872 to 1876*, 2 vols., vol. II (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889); Details of Tom Buzzacott's association with Mahomet are recounted in Commissioner Elliott Johnston, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Malcolm Buzzacott* (Canberra: Australian Govt. Pub. Service, 1990).

¹⁰⁰ "A Far Northern Tragedy. Charge of Murdering an Aboriginal. A Half-Caste Committed for Trial," *The Advertiser*, 27 August 1912, 12.

The presence of Aboriginal workers such as Buzzacott in the camel industry facilitated the continual traffic of ochre from the Flinders Ranges to the northern deserts. Ben Murray recounted in Dieri to linguist Peter Austin that he often received parcels of ochre along the mail-route. Between 1908 and 1914, Ben was living at the Killalpanina Aboriginal mission to the east of Lake Eyre and worked with camels. Many other Aboriginal people from further afield visited Killalpanina fortnightly for rations, remaining on the peripheries of the colonial economy as part of 'a firm decision not to 'come in.''¹⁰¹ Ben detailed the mechanics of delivering ochre by camel to these people whilst avoiding detection by European missionaries.¹⁰² Cutting the corner of a bag of flour Murray concealed the shimmering ochre in this vessel recounting 'I put it on the saddle of the camel, so it could be taken ahead.'¹⁰³ While camel tracks appropriated Dreaming tracks to set commodities in circulation, Aboriginal workers re-appropriated this transport network to continue the circulation of ochre, sometimes even disguised as commodities.

Likewise, the construction of the railway line to Beltana in 1881 and northwards from the Flinders Ranges was accompanied by transformations in the geography of ochre trade. As state resources were funnelled into the construction of railway infrastructure, Aboriginal workers began to operate the coaling stages along the length of the Great Northern line in exchange for food and tobacco. Station managers and railway workers engaged Aboriginal people to cart baskets of coal from railway yards to the locomotive and load the engine by means of a hand-operated

¹⁰¹ Peter Austin, Luise Hercus and Philip Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 141.

¹⁰² 'Unloading at the Mission' in *Ibid.*: 141 - 45.

¹⁰³ 'Unloading at the Mission' in *Ibid.*: 144: Line 6.

hoist.¹⁰⁴ Long before Aboriginal workers left an imprint on the balance books of the Railways Department, they formed working relationships with white railway staff. It is likely that these relationships played an important part in the emergence of the trade of ochre along the railway line.¹⁰⁵ In 1904 a group from the northern deserts embarked in pursuit of the Emu and some of the youngest amongst the travellers shared an account of their journey with Hercus as aged men in 1976. Jimmy Russell, Wangkatyaka man, recalled that on the way back from the ochre caves 'they go to the Commodore (railway) cottages,'¹⁰⁶ which housed railway workers 13 miles south of Parachilna.¹⁰⁷ From there the travellers 'go by train. The guard gives them a free ride.'¹⁰⁸ Jimmy recounted that the traders on the Emu track in 1904 'walked to that hill and they came back on the train!'¹⁰⁹ As Ben Murray informed Phillip Jones, station managers from the Flinders Ranges heading northwards often allowed ochre parties in their ceremonial gear 'to travel in an empty truck concealed under a tarpaulin.'¹¹⁰

From the 1880s and 1890s, particularly within the context of violent targeting of Aboriginal groups of traders along Dreaming tracks, the new train line emerged as a schema of mobility along which people were less vulnerable to the terror of armed settlers. The routes that ochre travelled transformed over time in negotiation with the changing terrain of mobility and so too did Dreaming tracks. When the head

¹⁰⁴ Basil Fuller, *The Ghan: The Story of the Alice Springs Railway* (Chatswood, N.S.W.: New Holland, 2008), 139 - 40.

¹⁰⁵ Along the east-west trans-Australian railway line there are a number of photographs that confirm that Aboriginal people were working and living along this line in the period 1914-1950 and it is likely that the same was true on the north-south line.

¹⁰⁶ Hercus, "Singing and Talking about Red Ochre (Unpublished Manuscript)," 11.

¹⁰⁷ A short biography of Jimmy Russell appears in L. A. Hercus and Australian National University. Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. Dept. of Linguistics., *A Grammar of the Arabana-Wangkangurru Language Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*, Pacific Linguistics. Series C (Canberra: Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1994), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Hercus, "Singing and Talking about Red Ochre (Unpublished Manuscript)," 11.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁰ Jones, "That Special Property," 370.

stockman at Cowarie station, Takaweejee, told the Wangkangurru story of the escape of the Emu in the 1920s, it began with two creatures jumping out of the earth: ‘...Emu jump up. Dog him live in hole. Chase'em emu. Emu run. Dog run.’ Stringing together some of the places of Aboriginal convergence in the 1920s the creatures ‘Pass’im Killalpaninna. Pass’im Dulkaninna. Pass’im Apawandinna. All time Emu run. Dog run.’¹¹¹ Running and running and running the giant creatures reached the railway track. Takaweejee continued ‘Pass’im Farina. Pass’im Beltana,’ mapping the path of the Emu’s escape along a stretch of railway track. He continued ‘Emu him run up big hills. Dog him catch'em emu. Kill'em. Blood him jump out. Ochre grow. Lot good ochre.’¹¹² This account of the Emu storyline reveals that by 1924 the railway track was incorporated into oral Wangkangurru lore mapping an important artery of the Aboriginal economic landscape. In Takaweejee’s narrative, as the Emu ran and ran, a colonial common-way coincided with an Aboriginal common-way.

As hundredweights of ore, bags of wheat and bales of wool moved through Australian deserts and were shipped to southern ports and across oceans, Aboriginal storytellers translated the arteries of the geography of capital into Dreaming tracks. As we have seen, the arrival of settler capitalism to Aboriginal Dreaming tracks appropriated Aboriginal words and water-places. In turn, on their encounter with the circuitry of colonial capital Aboriginal traders appropriated these networks and reinserted names and places like ‘Beltana’ into Dreaming tracks and trading routes, ensuring that the Emu continued to run and run and run up the peaks where the two Dingoes finally caught the giant bird.

¹¹¹ Kerwin identifies ‘Crooked Foot Peter’ as ‘Takaweejee,’ Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: The Colonisation of The Australian Economic Landscape*, 104.

¹¹² Horne and Aiston, *Savage Life in Central Australia*, 128 - 30.

4. Remembering the Arrival of the Train

In 1881, as the first 'Beyer Peacock' approached Beltana railway siding garlanded with British flags, cutting across innumerable Dreaming tracks laid by Emus and other creatures, various people positioned differently with respect to the British Empire were watching. We have seen how Aboriginal language words and stories came to be entangled with colonial circuitry. In this section, contrasting English and Wangkangurru arrival narratives about the coming of the train to Beltana, I show how different imagined geographies disciplined memories of the 'same' event.

On the evening on 8 July 1881, as settlers at Beltana gathered at the railway siding in anticipation of the arrival of the train, another crowd was gathering on a nearby hill. Mrs Lewis was the schoolteacher at Beltana at the time and at the age of 71 in 1925 she recalled that 'a wonderful spectacle was witnessed by the white people when the train first steamed into Beltana.' She told a journalist from The Mail that 'in those days blackfellows came from Central Australia, almost at Parachilna, for red ochre. It was not uncommon to see 200 natives on the trade route, at a time, and the tribes from far off were sometimes hostile.' One such group of traders from distant places had converged on Kuyani country over the winter months of 1881 when the railway line was completed. As the first 'Beyer Peacock' approached, Mrs Lewis recalled that 'the blacks climbed to a hill top and crouched down with fear at the sight of the great black engine (or "black moora").'¹¹³

'Moora' was Mrs Lewis' appropriation of the Kuyani word 'mura,' a noun that translates to both the complex being that was the Dreaming creature and the

¹¹³ "Pioneer of the North. Hardships of Early Days," *The Mail*, 13 June 1925.

tracks they laid.¹¹⁴ As the motion of Dreaming creatures threaded together distant places, unsurprisingly the word ‘*mura*,’ or sometimes ‘*muramura*’ is shared across distant Aboriginal languages. As we have already seen, some of Mrs Lewis’ pupils in the 1880s and 1890s were conversant in Kuyani lore and it is certainly possible that this schoolteacher likewise acquired some knowledge of *mura* in direct conversation with Kuyani storytellers. Even if Mrs Lewis picked up the word via other settlers, her recollections reveal that ‘moora’ enjoyed circulation in local English at Beltana.¹¹⁵ Translating the ‘great black engine’ into ‘black moora’, Mrs Lewis used whatever she grasped of this complex Kuyani concept to imagine and convey how Aboriginal people on that hill might have understood the arrival of the train to Beltana. Her use of the ‘moora’ confirms that tracks laid by Dreaming creatures not only shaped, confronted, washed away and challenged settler enterprise but also enabled some settlers to see places differently, however briefly.

Mrs Lewis memories were published in the Adelaide newspaper The Mail in 1925 and reading the article closely reveals how the imagined geography of ‘White

¹¹⁴ The word *mura*, or sometimes *muramura*, for Dreaming creatures is spread in usage across many Aboriginal language territories. Writing in 1937 and with reference of red ochre, Fry used *mura* in H. K. Fry, "Dieri Legends, Part I," *Oceania* 48, 2 (1937): 198; In the Flinders Ranges Tunbridge discusses Adnyamathanha ‘*muda*’ in Tunbridge and Nepabunna Aboriginal School, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*, xxviii; In Diyari and Thirrari, Austin translates ‘*muramura*’ as ‘mythical being, culture hero’ in Peter Austin, *A Grammar of Diyari, South Australia*, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 259; Hercus and Becket have examined the circulation of *mura* through the ‘Corner Country’ from Queensland into South Australia in Luise Hercus and Jeremy Beckett, *The Two Rainbow Serpents Travelling: Mura Track Narratives from the Corner Country*, Aboriginal History Monographs, 18 (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2010).

¹¹⁵ For example, Samuel Gason the hotelier at Beltana was known for his knowledge of Aboriginal languages - particularly Dieri - and published on Dreaming beings and ochre expeditions Woods et al., *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, 253 – 307. When E. Curr collected Aboriginal word lists from settlers around Beltana in the 1880s, Gason provided a wordlist for the people he called ‘the Unyamootha tibe’ and Mr. J. W. Kingsmill of Beltana supplied Curr with a wordlist for the ‘Kooyiannie tribe.’ Edward M. (Edward Micklethwaite) Curr, *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia, and the Routes by Which it Spread Itself Over That Continent*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Melbourne: John Farnes, Govt. Printer 1887), 120 – 23. N. E. Phillipson, the manager of Beltana was likewise knowledgeable on languages other than English spoken around Beltana. On Phillipson see Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 22; "Phillipson, Nathaniel Edmund (1844–1898) (Obituary)," *Australasian Pastoralists' Review* (1898).

Australia' disciplined settler memories into very particular narratives. The report bestowed upon Mrs Lewis the title of 'Pioneer of the North' and it is useful to interpret the article as co-authored by the unnamed press reporter and this former resident of Beltana. The reporter catalogued Mrs Lewis' memories of the 'coming of the railway' as one of a number of 'milestones in the march to progress' at Beltana alongside 'the first arrival of camels from Afghanistan; the opening up of much unoccupied land, and many gold rushes and copper booms.'¹¹⁶ The article unfolds explicitly following the narrative template of 'the march to progress' and re/produces the myths and contradictions that belied nationalist aspirations to 'White Australia.'

The reporter had Mrs Lewis within the space of sentences recounting the 'opening up of much *unoccupied* land' and then reminiscing about the 'hundreds of blacks, who lived about Beltana' in addition to the regular convergence of '200 natives' from distant places upon the Flinders Ranges for trade.¹¹⁷ As cultural historians have shown from the 1880s many urban artists and writers began fabricating the myth of an interior void of Aboriginal people.¹¹⁸ It was an aesthetic that lay the foundations necessary to imagine 'White Australia' as an achievable future reality. Mrs Lewis' memories of lived experience at Beltana did not comply with this myth of the empty interior.¹¹⁹ What is striking is the way the article in The Mail recruited the train as the instrument that smoothed out discrepancies between past realities and future aspirations, realising settler fantasies about the erasure of Aboriginal people. The Mail reported that the hundreds of Aboriginal people around

¹¹⁶ "Pioneer of Far North. Hardships of Early Days."

¹¹⁷ My emphasis *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ See Bellanta on the invention of the Australian interior as a 'Landscape of Fabulous Modernity' in Melissa Bellanta, "Mobilising Fictions or, Romancing the Australian Desert, 1890-1908," *History Australia* 1, 1 (2003); Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Gender, Race, and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction 1875-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁹ Melissa Bellanta, "Fabulating the Australian Desert," *Philament*, 3 (2004).

Beltana 'died out quickly after the train came.'¹²⁰ Such an account is at significant odds with the way that Aboriginal people actually used railway infrastructure, as we have already seen.

Regardless of whether it was the unnamed reporter, or Mrs Lewis, or perhaps both who announced the end of the 'Cooannie tribe' in 1925, it was not true. While it is important not to downplay the destruction, disease, chaos, upheaval and violence that the experience of colonisation unleashed upon Aboriginal people, Kuyani people by no means 'died out.'¹²¹ Not even all printed press accounts effaced Kuyani presence from the area. Indeed in 1929, The Register News Pictorial published a photograph of four generations of Kuyani people, from Docie Pondi who had witnessed the arrival of the 'first whites' to her great grand children; a striking statement of Kuyani resilience! In addition Macgregor's corporate history of Beltana written in 1965 notes that Aboriginal people's presence 'has continued over the years until the present when they occupy the abandoned homes in the township.'¹²²

Aboriginal people both predated and outlasted white settlement at Beltana. Read within this longer history, this particular article in The Mail appears as a moment in the urban production of the Anglo myth of an empty interior.¹²³

¹²⁰ "Pioneer of Far North. Hardships of Early Days."

¹²¹ Brock has written about the emergence of the 'Adnyamathanha' group, meaning 'rock-mob,' from the various distinct language groups who peopled the Flinders Ranges in Brock and South Australia in Peggy Bock, *Yura and Udney: A History of the Adnyamathanha of the North Flinders Ranges*, 13 - 17. More recently, Kuyani people and the broader Adnyamathanha group have appeared in the news in their negotiations with mining company BHP-Billiton. For an examination of some of these dynamics of engagement today see Marsh, Jillian. "A Critical Analysis of Decision-making Protocols used in Approving a Commercial Mining License for the Beverley Uranium Mine in Adnyamathanha Country: Toward Effective Indigenous Participation in Caring for Cultural Resources" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2010).

¹²² Macgregor, *A History of the Beltana Pastoral Company Limited*, 29; Also see "Cultures Combine in Outback Opera," *The Koori Mail: The Fortnightly National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Newspaper*, 27 August 1997, 20.

¹²³ Within the field of Aboriginal History, it was anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner who described this phenomenon as the 'cult of forgetfulness.' See Bain Attwood, "The Past as Future: Aborigines, Australia and the (Dis)course of History (Extract)," *Australian Humanities Review*, 1 (1996).

Many scholars have shown that the steam-train and railway track was a machine ensemble that was an important actor in the processes of industrialisation that gave popular rise to the very concept of 'modern progress.' Additionally, a number of scholars have shown that popular observance of standardised time arrived with trains and train timetables.¹²⁴ Most recently, American historian Richard White has insisted that railways, their construction, the politics of mobility and the movement of trains along them produced a particular type of space. White writes: 'workers altered an existing landscape by driving a railroad through it. The track created an axis. Looking down the track, engineers could measure a linear space and the length of journeys looking outward from the tracks, surveyors could find the series of square sections that made up the railroads land grant.'¹²⁵

The article disciplined Mrs Lewis' memories of the *past* arrival of the train into service for the *future* of 'White Australia' according to narratives of 'progress' that were *present* in 1924. As theorist of Victorian aesthetics Lynda Nead has written, British modernity 'can be imagined as pleated or crumpled time, drawing together past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations and the product of a multiplicity of historical eras.'¹²⁶ The Mail's account of the arrival of the train to Beltana articulates a settler variant of the British modernity that Nead describes. Furthermore from this English printed newspaper report, the settler 'march to

¹²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Classics (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1990); Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, 1934); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, New ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986); E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38, 1 (1967). Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to Tell the Time* (Melbourne; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Most recently in the field of American history see Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

¹²⁵ White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, 118.

¹²⁶ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8.

progress' emerges as a complex philosophy of mobility intricately linked to the imagined destination of 'White Australia.' In contrast, Wangkangurru recollections of the arrival of the mechanical beast to Beltana railway station were underpinned by a different philosophy of mobility embedded within another geography; an alternate schema for threading together past, present and future.

As we saw at the outset of this chapter, whilst travelling along the Emu track, Pintha-Mirri was so moved by the sight of arrival of the locomotive bellowing smoke at Beltana, that he composed a Wangkangurru song about the encounter. Pintha-Mirri's railway song was amongst a number of new songs that returned home to Wangkangurru deserts with the ochre traders; songs of creatures they had seen, events that had happened, places they had been. As Wangkangurru children heard these songs again and again, anticipating the day they too would see these faraway places along the tracks of the Emu, Pintha-Mirri's journey itself became the stuff of legends. Many years later, Pintha-Mirri's son Mick McLean performed the Wangkangurru railway song for linguist Luise Hercus. Born c.1888, Mick, sometimes known as Irinjili, was an extremely knowledgeable man who spoke a number of Aboriginal languages.¹²⁷ In 1970 Mick's rendition of his fathers' song came to be recorded onto audiocassette within the context of a nascent linguistics movement to preserve Aboriginal languages.

In the lead up to performing the train song Mick recounted that *Palkuru* was a Wangkangurru place in the Simpson Desert where he camped with his family as a boy 'time and time again.'¹²⁸ Mick said in English 'My father had seen whitefellows, but

¹²⁷ Luise Hercus, "McLean, Mick (Irinjili) (1888 - 1976)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); L. A. Hercus, "Mick McLean Irinjili [Obituary]," *Newsletter/Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies*, 7 (1977).

¹²⁸ Hercus, "Leaving the Simpson Desert," 29: Line 9.

my mother and I hadn't. I was a boy then leave me along *Palkuru*. He came up for that red ochre over there at Parachilna.¹²⁹ Switching to Wangkangurru Mick reiterated that his father with a group of men 'went off to Parachilna leaving me behind as a small boy. We went on staying in our camp [at *Palkuru*].'¹³⁰ Returning to English he recalled that 'The end of that railway was along Beltana in that time *waru yarndi*' - or 'long, long ago.'¹³¹ Remembering that his father 'made song out of that, my old man, Wangkangurru song,'¹³² Mick began singing '*Railway yarilu' waya' Beltana yarilu' waya' ...*'¹³³

From Mick's set up of the performance there emerges some ambiguity about exactly when Pintha-Mirri's encounter with the steam train took place. In the published translation of this song to English in *Aboriginal History*, in a footnote, Hercus draws attention to the 'chronological problem'¹³⁴ with this set up. The railway line arrived at the town of Beltana in 1881 and continued northwards to reach the towns of Farina and Marree in 1882 and 1884 respectively.¹³⁵ These were all events on the settler calendar that took place before Mick was born c.1888. Mick's lead up to the song however, both what he says in English and then reiterates in Wangkangurru, suggests that he was a young boy when his father saw the train. How could Mick be born after 1888 and be at *Palkuru* when his father first saw that train at the end of the railway line at Beltana in 1881? According to the rules of historical chronology this is impossible.

¹²⁹ Ibid.: 31: Line 16.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.: 31: Line 17.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.: 32: Line 16, footnote 12.

¹³⁵ The first train arrived on Saturday 2 July 1881 in "The Great Northern Railway. Opening of the Line to Beltana."

Hercus' 'chronological problem' in pointing out that historical chronology and linear time did not organise Irinjili's memory, draws attention to the schema of mobility that did. Hercus suggests in the same footnote that Pintha-Mirri must have been to Parachilna for red ochre multiple times, both before and after Irinjili was born. Given that upon returning from these epic journeys, Aboriginal men told and retold their travel stories time and time again and Hercus concludes that 'It seems likely that he telescoped into one the two or more visits to Parachilna that he heard about as a child.'¹³⁶ Whilst Hercus suggests that it was Mick who 'telescoped' the various instances of travelling along the Dreaming track into one, it could also have been Pintha-Mirri who distilled various memories onto the one narrative track. Hercus' solution to the 'chronological problem' suggests that the Dreaming track was not only the schema of mobility that Pintha-Mirri was travelling when he saw the train, but that it was also the narrative contour in the earth into which either father or son, or perhaps both, disciplined their memory of first encounter with the train. If the settler 'march to progress' was the narrative that Mrs Lewis' memories of the arrival of the train were disciplined into in the English printed record, the Dreaming track created by the escape of the Emu was the index that Wangkangurru memory of the arrival of the train came to be disciplined to in the process of inter-generational transmission.

As sheep and cattle, camels and trains created lines of travel through Kuyani territory, the circuitry of Aboriginal trade, story and mobility drew these newer tracks into their paths, sometimes reshaping and reinventing old tracks anew. When the Warioota Creek and the Sliding Rock Creek met and 'quarrelled' at *Palthanha* there was a logic that saw them 'become friends' and travel together for a while before separating again. Likewise when the tracks of the railway crossed those of the Emu, it

¹³⁶ Hercus, "Leaving the Simpson Desert," 32: Line 16, footnote 12.

was a happy meeting of different schemas of mobility through the desert. Other encounters as we have seen were just violent. The range of encounters at desert crossings however are surprising, as people translated others tracks into their own in unpredictable ways. The strikingly different renditions of the arrival of the railway in settler archives and Aboriginal oral archives reveal that the powerful role that imagined geographies played in disciplining people's accounts of the past, *en route* to radically different futures. For settlers, memories of events at Beltana become embedded in chronological narratives of the march of progress and the genesis of 'White Australia.' For Aboriginal people, the events were organised not according to march of progress but rather the winding track of the Emu's escape from those two Dingoes.

Chapter Four

Waiting for the Train at Alberrie Creek

Late one afternoon, two sisters waited for their train at Alberrie Creek railway siding. The weekly train was due at 5.46pm and the two girls were headed back to Marree after visiting family.¹ They watched for the first signs of steam where the afternoon sun dipped towards the railway tracks.² Alberrie Creek was roughly 30 miles to the north west of Marree and the girls were sitting by the '*dangki waga bara-bara-na*,'³ which linguist Luise Hercus translated to 'long black tank.'⁴ The railway fettler's cottage was just nearby but that afternoon 'nobody was there.'⁵ The shadows cast by clumps of grass and shrubs were growing darker and longer when two men on camels rode past on their way to the nearby dam. Known most commonly as '*udh*' or '*ush*' in some of the South Asian languages spoken by the Muslim cameleers, the camel became '*gamulu*' in the tale of encounter that those two young women later told.⁶ The

¹ Arrival time of train from Oodnadatta at 'Davenport/Alberrie Creek' in years spanning 1891 - 1899 in State Records of South Australia, GRS/2844 Public Timetables, 1888 - 1911, Consignment 00001, Unit 6.

² Ibid.

³ Note on the use of linguistic data: unless otherwise stated, when spelling words from Aboriginal languages I have reproduced the exact spelling used in texts published by linguists. 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Luise A. Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," *Aboriginal History* 5, 1 (1981): 44: Line 2, 46: Line 2.

⁴ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Ibid.: 44: Line 2.

⁵ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Ibid.: 46: Line 1.

⁶ Some South Asian languages where '*Udh*' or '*Ush*' refers to 'camel' include Bengali, Urdu, Pashtu and Hindi. John T Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1884), 88; H. G. Raverty, *A Dictionary of the Puk'hto, Pus'hto, or Language of the Afghans: With Remarks on the Originality of the Language, and its Affinity to Other Oriental Tongues*, 2 ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), 65; Mahendra Caturvedi, *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary* (Delhi:

camels were in need of water before a long night's trek towards Oodnadatta and the position of the sun might have also signalled to the cameleers that it was nearly time for *Maghreb* prayers. We cannot be certain whether the sun had already set nor how faithfully those two particular men observed prayers. However, upon sighting the women by the water tank they brought their beasts to a sudden halt. To the dismay of the waiting sisters, 'the train was running late.'⁷

Hercus published this story of encounter between travellers from different parts of the 'Indian Archipelago' in the journal *Aboriginal History* in 1981. The railway tank that features in the story was constructed in 1891 and by the early 1900's both sisters had children of their own.⁸ From these details it is possible to date the encounter roughly to the 1890s. Decades later, an Arabunna woman, Mona Merrick, recounted the story of what happened that day to linguist Luise Hercus in Arabunna. Within linguistic scholarship the language Mona Merrick spoke is known as 'Arabana.'⁹ Aboriginal people who grew up hearing these tales, and who continue to speak the language, today use the spelling 'Arabunna.' The distinction between the two hints at the ever-present fissure, at times the vast chasm, which separates scholarly knowledge about Aboriginal languages, stories and experiences from

National Publishing House, 1970), 98; Sailendra Biswas, *Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2000), 143.

⁷ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 46: Line 2.

⁸ 'Page 12' in State Records of South Australia GRG 42/120/0/1 South Australian Railways, List of Wells, Bores, Dams, &c., Prepared for The Royal Commission (to June 30th, 1902). Mona Merrick identified these girls as the mothers of Jimmy and Leslie Russell and Hercus' research indicates that Jimmy Russell was born in c.1900 and Leslie Russell in c.1906. L. A. Hercus, *A Grammar of the Arabana-Wangkangurru Language Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*, Pacific linguistics. Series C (Canberra: Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1994), 3.

⁹ 'Arabana' is used in Hercus, *A Grammar of the Arabana-Wangkangurru Language Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*. It is also the spelling used by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) which holds the oral collection of stories recorded by Hercus and many other linguists.

Aboriginal people's articulations about their lives.¹⁰ I start from the premise that Hercus's acts of recording, transcribing, producing morpheme-by-morpheme glosses and ultimately a translation to English transformed Mona Merrick's oral 'Arabunna' story of what happened at the railway siding to an 'Arabana' text. In this chapter, drawing on linguistic methodologies, I read Hercus' 'Arabana' text to examine the way that words moved along transportation networks. In her examination of Chinese modernities, translation theorist Lydia Liu has proposed that the exchange of linguistic features participated in the same frontier economy that goods and capital moved in.¹¹ Reading a site of encounter between Muslim men and young Aboriginal women, I examine these processes in the context of the 'Indian Archipelago.' I outline the story as Mona Merrick recounted it to Luise Hercus and then turn my attention to the movement and exchange of words along camel tracks and the emergence of a unique variety of English at places of South Asian-Aboriginal encounter. First, however, I provide the historical context in which the story circulated between Arabunna women before it was published as linguistic text accompanied by an English translation.

The account of what happened to those girls at Alberrie Creek was told and retold for decades before it entered the printed record. The two sisters' own mother tongue was Arabunna, one of a number of Aboriginal languages spoken in the deserts surrounding Lake Eyre.¹² Kuyani, Arabunna and Wangkangurru were some of the Lake Eyre languages that had a presence at Marree, where the girls were traveling that

¹⁰ 'Holding Our Tongues – Language Revival' in

<http://australianlanguages.wordpress.com/2010/09/25/holding-our-tongues-language-revival/>

¹¹ Lydia He Liu, "The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign," in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia He Liu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 21.

¹² Mona Merrick described the two girls in the story as Arabunna women. 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 46: Line 1.

evening. Aboriginal multilingualism was common prior to European invasion and towards the close of the nineteenth century people around Lake Eyre remained fluent in a number of lakes languages as well as acquiring English. In the words of linguist Jane Simpson 'it was common practise throughout Aboriginal Australia to speak the language in the 'country' belonging to the 'country.''¹³ Upon reaching Marree, it is likely the sisters' story was repeated in various languages. As I will explore further in the next chapter it is an encounter that remains in the oral records of older speakers of Arabunna around Alberrie Creek today. Hercus captured one such telling within the context of the intense language acquisition work on Lake Eyre languages that she carried out from 1965 to the 1980s.¹⁴ I have therefore approached the published 'Arabana' text as one that congeals a number of Aboriginal women's experiences of encounters with cameleers, rather than simply recording a singular historical event.

Mona Merrick heard the story about the sisters at Alberrie Creek from her mother Barralda, an Arabunna woman. Mona mostly grew up at Finnis Springs Pastoral Station, the title to which was held by her white father, Francis Dunbar Warren. Barralda and F. D. Warren had many children and Mona, born c.1912, was their eldest. The railway tank where the cameleers encountered the sisters, was an often-visited water place during Mona Merrick's childhood. She recounted elsewhere 'we used to get water in a drum ...from the tank at Alberrie Creek siding'¹⁵ and right along the railway line Aboriginal people could often be seen carrying home tins of water on their heads from the railway tanks.¹⁶ At the time Mona recounted the story

¹³ Jane Simpson, "Early Language Contact Varieties in South Australia," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 16, 2 (1996): 171.

¹⁴ Hercus, *A Grammar of the Arabana-Wangkangurru Language Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*, 1.

¹⁵ Quoting Mona Merrick in Luise Hercus, Peter Sutton and Kinhill Stearns, "The Assessment of Aboriginal Cultural Significance of Mound Springs in South Australia," in *Mound Springs Heritage Survey* (Adelaide: South Australian Department of Environment and Planning, 1985), 15.

¹⁶ Interview of Archie Kite by Pamela Rajkowski, Saturday 22 August 1981. Pamela Rajkowski's Notes (Unpublished).

of encounter at Alberrie Creek railway siding to Hercus, she was part-owner of the title to Finnis Springs Station. She spent most of her childhood at Finnis Springs during the 'protectionist era' of government policy towards Aboriginal people. Colonial administrators from the 1920s categorised Aboriginal children of mixed parentage as 'half-caste' and government bureaucrats and white missionaries pursued policies of child removal right across a federated 'White Australia.'

Some children from Finnis Springs were sent away from their families to mission homes, losing their language.¹⁷ However, with the support of Francis Dunbar Warren, many Aboriginal children were able to remain with their mothers and families at Finnis Springs through the height of the protectionist era. Barralda's descendants remember Warren warmly as a white pastoralist who became incorporated into a large Aboriginal family.¹⁸ Against the broader historical context of the removal of many children from Aboriginal mothers, within the boundaries of Finnis Springs, Barralda was able to pass on many Arabunna stories and language to her children. The very survival of this Arabunna story of encounter at Alberrie Creek is part of a larger story of Arabunna resilience and negotiations of various institutions that wrought havoc on Aboriginal families.

¹⁷ Reg Dodd and Jen Gibson, "Learning Times: An Experience of Arabana Life and Mission Education," *Aboriginal History* 13 (1989): 85. In the region around Finnis Springs the United Aborigines Mission established a 'half-caste' home at the railhead of Oodnadatta in 1924 and this institution relocated to Quorn much further south along the railway line in 1927. See V. E. Turner, *Pearls From the Deep: The Story of Colebrook Home for Aboriginal Children, Quorn, South Australia*, 2nd ed. (Adelaide: United Aborigines' Mission, 1936). More broadly, for the history of the removal of Aboriginal children see Ronald Wilson, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997); Barbara Cummings, *Take This Child...: From Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Children's Home* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990); Tony Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home So Clearly: The Commonwealth and 'Half-caste' Youth in the Northern Territory* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Barralda's grandchildren Reg Dodd and Trevor Buzzacott remember Francis Dunbar Warren in Dodd and Gibson, "Learning Times: An Experience of Arabana Life and Mission Education," 85 - 92., Trevor Buzzacott, "Arabunna Wuthlu," in *Giving an Account of Ourselves: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Philosophy, Knowledge and View* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2009).

Abigana was the term that Mona Merrick used for the cameleers who arrived at the tank that day on their way to the adjacent dam. ‘*Wadjbala madimadi*,’ ‘*gadabu ηara-ηara*’ or ‘*ngarrapi ngarrapi*’ were some of the other terms that Aboriginal peoples of the area also used to refer to Muslim camel handlers.¹⁹ While *Abigana* was appropriated from the settler term ‘Afghans,’ the other phrases were descriptive. Translating to ‘white fellows with hair-string’ and ‘head tied up’ these phrases drew attention to the turbans these men sometimes wore, a feature that set them apart from European arrivals.²⁰ To aid in railway construction throughout the 1880s, South Australian Railways transported to the Lake Eyre region two shipments of camels and handlers from the Bikaner district of Rajasthan, because of perceived climatic similarities between these desert parts of the ‘Indian Archipelago.’²¹ In addition, from the 1890s a number of Muslim landowners established camel breeding depots at Marree in partnership with firms like the Beltana Pastoral Company.²²

Moving along this network and coming across the two Arabunna girls at the railway *dangki* at Alberrie Creek, the cameleers ‘asked – they asked straight away! – ‘Undo your clothes and show us your breasts – we want to see your breasts!’²³ By the close of the century one of the lessons that Aboriginal people around Lake Eyre had learnt from half a century of contact with settlers was that not donning European clothing could lead to harsh punishments. Accordingly the two sisters were wearing

¹⁹ *Wadjbala madimadi* (Arabana) translates to ‘white fellows with hair string,’ *gadabu ηara-ηara* (Arabana) to ‘head tied up’ in Hercus, “Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia,” 39.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Basil Fuller, *The Ghan: The Story of the Alice Springs Railway* (Chatswood, N.S.W.: New Holland, 2008), 148.

²² For example in 1893, Tagh and Faiz (Jemadar) Mahomet bought land under the name of Sir Thomas Elder, establishing a camel depot for the Beltana Pastoral Company. Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Elder Smith & Co. LTD, 8/68, Correspondence, Documents, Memoranda and Some Accounts and Insurance Papers Relating to Faiz and Tagh Mohamet of Hergott and Later of Perth, Merchants, Camel Proprietors and Carriers, Including Some Personal Papers of Faiz Mohamet, 1888 - 1905.

²³ ‘The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek’ in Hercus, “Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia,” 46: Line 3.

dresses that the cameleers now demanded that they remove. With no sign of their belated train, 'the two of them showed their breasts.'²⁴ In desperation the girls wondered 'When is this train coming – these whitefellows are making us show our breasts!'²⁵

The removal of a settler uniform of propriety exposed most vulnerably that the girls had 'brownish-red bodies, not absolutely black, and they were both very plump.'²⁶ Hercus has suggested that in accordance with their own cultural understanding of light skin and corpulence as a symbol of women's status 'the two Afghans liked what they saw.'²⁷ Both Mona and Barralda were light skinned and their lives were shaped by the ever-present possibility that Aboriginal children from Finnis Springs would be removed to 'half-caste' homes either by government administrators, police officers or missionaries.²⁸ It is well documented that settler scrutiny of Aboriginal children's bodies and categorisation according to the racial taxonomies of settler bureaucracies often produced disastrous consequences for Aboriginal families. Hercus' 'Arabana' text suggests that cameleers brought institutions of their own which generated an interest in light-skinned Aboriginal children and Barralda warned her daughters that the Muslim cameleers were a peculiar variant of '*wajdbala*' – whitefellows – who had a taste not only for fair skin, but also for '*marni*'- fat.

²⁴ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in *Ibid.*: 46: Line 4.

²⁵ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in *Ibid.*: 46: Line 6.

²⁶ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in *Ibid.*: 46: Line 5.

²⁷ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in *Ibid.*

²⁸ On the forced removal of Aboriginal children see Wilson, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*; Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000); Peter Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1982); Gordon Briscoe, *Racial Folly: A Twentieth-Century Aboriginal Family* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 58.

Mona Merrick recounted to Hercus that the frightened girls were wondering ‘When is this train coming,’²⁹ when the men demanded ‘Lift up your clothes so we can see your thighs – show’ m leg!’³⁰ In response, the sisters ‘showed and showed their thighs, oh how they went on showing and showing!’³¹ The sisters were frightened not just of impending sexual violence but of something still more alien, for the men did not touch them. ‘They are not even putting their hands anywhere near – they are just looking!’³² Unnerved by the greedy gaze of the *Abigana* they wondered why the cameleers made them bare their light, plump flesh but did not even touch them. It became evident to the girls that it was ‘*palku*,’ their flesh, their meat, that the cameleers hungered after. They concluded ‘those two want to eat both of us, you and me!’³³

The two men who held the scared young women in their gaze brought to the encounter at Alberrie Creek customs of clothing, codes of propriety and standards of beauty that Aboriginal people found bewildering at times. It is uncertain when in the long sequence of the retellings of this story the account of the cameleers’ gaze became a story featuring the threat of cannibalism. Each retelling no doubt emphasised different aspects of the encounter and it might have been a watchful Barraalda who translated this incident into a cautionary tale for her young, well-fed, light skinned brood. Perhaps she wanted to instil fear in her daughters of the dangers beyond Finnis Springs, beyond the *dangki*, without specifying the details of what might have happened. This wasn’t the only story that Barraalda told about the threat of

²⁹ ‘The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek’ in Hercus, “Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia,” 46: Line 6.

³⁰ ‘The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek’ in *Ibid.*: 46: Line 7.

³¹ ‘The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek’ in *Ibid.*: 47: Line 8.

³² ‘The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek’ in *Ibid.*: 47: Line 10.

³³ ‘The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek’ in *Ibid.*: 47: Line 12.

Abigana cannibalism and perhaps Arabunna women really did believe that the cameleers would eat them.³⁴

Whilst there is a vast body of writing about cannibalism myths in the Australian region, the bulk of this scholarship is organised around settler claims of Aboriginal cannibalism.³⁵ Within the historiography of Asian-Aboriginal relations in Australia, Ganter has drawn attention to the myth of Aboriginal cannibalism as the most well known anecdote of interactions between Chinese people and Aboriginal people in the tropical north. In Ganter's account Aboriginal preference for Chinese flesh was a myth encouraged and deployed by British settlers, a 'powerful distorting prism'³⁶ through which Asians viewed, feared and kept their distance from Aboriginal people.³⁷

What sets the Arabunna story told by the sisters and retold by Arabunna women at Alberrie Creek for generations apart from the myths documented by other scholars is that it is an Aboriginal myth of cannibalism that arose at an asymmetrical encounter. In the next chapter, I will pursue in greater detail both the emergence and circulation of this cannibalism myth and the meaning it had for the women amongst whom it gained currency. In the remainder of this chapter however, closely reading

³⁴ For example see 'Getting a Lift from Macumba' in *Ibid.*: 42 - 44.

³⁵ For example see Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 106 - 26; Lynette Russell, "Mere Trifles and Faint Representations: The Representations of Savage Life Offered by Eliza Fraser," in *Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck*, eds. Ian J. McNiven, Lynette Russell and Kay Schaffer (New York: Leicester University Press, 1998), 56 - 57; Larissa Behrendt, "The Eliza Fraser Captivity Narrative: A Tale of Frontier, Femininity and the Legitimization of Colonial Law," *Saskatchewan Law Review* 63 (2000); Katherine Biber, "Cannibals and Colonialism," *Sydney Law Review* 27 (2005); Michael Pickering, "Cannibalism Amongst Aborigines? A Critical Review of the Literary Evidence" (Unpublished Litt. B. Thesis, Australian National University, 1985).

³⁶ Regina Ganter, Julia Martínez and Gary Mura Lee, *Mixed relations : Asian-Aboriginal contact in North Australia* (Crawley, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 163 - 65.

³⁷ Historian Minoru Hokari cites Japanese historian Taira Ogawa's reference to Japanese fears of being eaten by Aboriginal people in the pearling industry in Minoru Hokari, "Globalising Aboriginal Reconciliation: Indigenous Australians and Asian (Japanese) Migrants," *Cultural Studies Review* 9, 2 (2003): 91.

Hercus' Arabana text, I turn my attention to the language which mediated the encounter at the railway siding and the exchange of words and linguistic features along the transportation networks at whose intersection this encounter took place.

Language Along the Camel Track

Close scrutiny of the language of communication at this encounter at the railway *dangki* highlights of the emergence of a mutually intelligible medium between various people across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Mona conveyed most of the cameleers' speech to Hercus in Arabunna, with the important exception of a snippet embedded within the directive issued by the cameleers to: '*njilba ηari-maṇḍa, dara nani-na! show'm leg!*'³⁸ This fragment of English in Merrick's tale draws attention to the language that arose as a medium of communication between cameleers and Aboriginal people. As I have already suggested it is likely that the two sisters at Alberrie Creek spoke a number of Lake Eyre languages and the cameleers likewise would have been fluent in one or more South Asian languages. Yet the only medium that was mutually intelligible at this meeting was English.

However, it was a variety of English that was a little different to the English spoken by settlers. The '[e]m' suffix that Mona added to the verb 'show' is a common feature of the contact variety of English spoken by many Aboriginal people around Lake Eyre during the life of this story. '*Show'm*' is an example of the addition of an ergative case ending to a transitive verb according to a grammatical rule in Arabunna and a number of other Australian Aboriginal languages.³⁹ Linguists have shown that

³⁸ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 46: Line 7.

³⁹ On 'Pidgin English and Aboriginal English' see Barry J. Blake, *Australian Aboriginal Languages: A General Introduction*, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1991), 67 - 73. For more detailed treatment of the 'em' suffix in Aboriginal pidgin English as ergative case marking on transitive verbs see Harold Koch, "The Role of Australian Aboriginal Languages in the Formation of

when British settlers spoke to non-English speakers their speech tended to be 'Foreigner Talk,' a simplified version of English that had its own conventions.⁴⁰ A particular variety of 'pidgin' arose as Aboriginal people took words and phrases in settler 'Foreigner Talk' and modified them according to the morphological and sometimes syntactic rules of their own languages, speaking back to settlers in a language that linguists have called 'Aboriginal Pidgin English' (AP). Despite the incredible diversity in the grammars of Australian Aboriginal languages, through close analysis of examples of AP that arose in geographically distant places, linguists have shown that the conventions of this contact language - quite distinct from settler English - were puzzlingly consistent in structure and vocabulary throughout Aboriginal Australia. The addition of the '[e]m' suffix by Aboriginal speakers to certain verbs in AP, is one prominent manifestation of this consistency.⁴¹

However, '*Show'm leg!*' appears in Hercus' Arabana text inside an order issued by the cameleers suggesting that Mona was conveying a directive issued by the men in her use of this snippet of English. Ultimately, it remains ambiguous from this extract whether '*show'm leg!*' was what the cameleers really said that day. It could very easily be how the speech of cameleers was remembered or mimicked by any one of the women who retold the story. '*Show'm leg!*' could be the Arabunna sisters' memory of the cameleers' speech, an example of how Barralda spoke English or Mona Merrick mimicking the English speech of Muslim cameleers. There is not enough data to confirm conclusively whether this was a feature of the English speech of the cameleers that evening at Alberrie Creek, or of one of the Aboriginal women

Australian Pidgin Grammar: Transitive Verbs and Adjectives," in *Processes of Language Contact: Studies from Australia and the South Pacific*, ed. Jeff Siegel (Fides: Champs Linguistiques, 2000), Section 2.1 - 2.2: 17 - 21.

⁴⁰ Simpson, "Early Language Contact Varieties in South Australia," 169.

⁴¹ Koch, "The Role of Australian Aboriginal Languages in the Formation of Australian Pidgin Grammar: Transitive Verbs and Adjectives," 17 - 18.

who retold the story, or the memory of the language of frontier days, refracted through many retellings of the story.

This is an ambiguity present in many Aboriginal people's recollections about words exchanged with cameleers in the Lake Eyre region. Another Aboriginal man, Ben Murray, recounted a story in Wangkangurru to Hercus about the time he encountered an aged, dying 'Abigana' at Murnpeowie sheep station in the mid 1930s. Ben offered to kill a sheep for the starving man to eat and the old cameleer replied 'Me eat'm if you cut'm throat you say same as me Bisamala wala akuba.'⁴² Ben Murray saved that old man from starvation that day by closely following his instructions for how to 'cut'm throat' whilst mimicking the Arabic phrase dictated by the ailing cameleer. Whilst the '[e]m' suffix appears in many such examples of cameleers speech, significantly the oral stories recounted by Aboriginal people featuring the speech of British settlers often do not feature characteristics of AP.⁴³ Were *Abigana* mimicking AP when they demanded 'show'm leg!' or did they themselves mainly use a variety of AP to communicate with English-speakers? These ambiguities surrounding the '[e]m' suffix are systematic throughout the volume of data that is available on words exchanged at meeting points between Aboriginal people and cameleers.⁴⁴

Linguist Jane Simpson has theorised precisely this ambiguity. She argues that the verbal suffix '[e]m' along with a number of other features peculiar to the AP spoken by Aboriginal people, made its way into the variety of contact dialect of

⁴² 'The Aged Afghan' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 59: Line 12.

⁴³ Jane Simpson, "Camels as Pidgin-Carriers: Afghan Cameleers as a Vector for the Spread of Features of Australian Aboriginal Pidgins and Creoles," in *Processes of Language Contact: Studies from Australia and the South Pacific*, ed. Jeff Siegel (Fides: Champs Linguistiques, 2000), 225 - 26.

⁴⁴ See the data collected and reproduced by Simpson in 'Appendix: Examples' in *Ibid.*, 221 - 44.

English spoken by some - but not all – of the cameleers.⁴⁵ Whilst the addition of an '[e]m' suffix is not a feature of 'Indian English' spoken at the turn of the 19th century, Simpson's data on the speech of Muslim cameleers in the Australian colonies reveals that many of these itinerant workers employed the '[e]m' suffix so characteristic of AP. In pursuit of an explanation for the puzzling consistency of the conventions of AP throughout Aboriginal languages in addition to the presence of features of AP in cameleers' speech, Simpson embarks on an analysis of the means of diffusion of this dialect of English. She convincingly proposes that camels were vectors that spread English and the conventions of AP throughout the deepest reaches of the arid Australian mainland. She points out that cameleers 'worked in areas inhabited by the last Aborigines to suffer European invasion. The wide-ranging travel of many Afghans meant they had the opportunity to pass on their conventions of using language over a large area.'⁴⁶ Simpson notes that cameleers 'relations with Aborigines cemented this opportunity'⁴⁷ and proposes the presence of the '[e]m' suffix in the speech of some Muslim men as a corollary of the camel as means of circulation of AP.

In addition to sexual encounters along the camel tracks such as the one related in Merrick's story, as we saw in the previous chapter, numerous Aboriginal people also laboured in close proximity to Muslim men within the camel transport industry.⁴⁸ According to white missionaries 'there were two distinct types'⁴⁹ of Aboriginal people in need of Christian intervention at the northernmost railhead of Oodnadatta.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ 'Reflections on a Television Program' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 47 - 48. There is also a tribute to 'Aboriginal cameleers of days gone by' in track #1 in CAAMA, *The Last Camel Train [sound recording]* (Alice Springs: CAAMA, 2002).

⁴⁹ Turner, *Pearls from the Deep: The Story of Colebrook Home for Aboriginal Children*, Quorn, South Australia, 8.

‘The first were the camel boys employed by Afghan teamsters. These (*sic*) were used to the ways of civilisation, were well provided for, understood English, and readily responded to the Gospel message. The second type were... the nomadic blacks.’⁵⁰ Aboriginal women also laboured within the camel industry and occasional settler press reporting offers sensationalist glimpses into this complex world of Muslim men and Aboriginal people in motion along camel transportation routes.⁵¹ As Mona Merrick recollected elsewhere lots of Aboriginal people ‘used to work (with camels) and then go back to Oodnadatta: the Afghans just paid them money (but stayed in Marree)!’⁵² Placed within this broader context, the cameleers’ command to ‘*show ’m leg!*’ appears as a fragment of a universal medium of communication that not only mediated labour and intimate relations formed between cameleers and Aboriginal people, but actually emerged as these relationships unfolded along camel tracks.

The language of commodities offers one set of metaphors to describe the movement of language itself. The production and circulation of contact English can be likened to the commodities that cameleers, Muslim and otherwise, disseminated throughout the most arid reaches of the ‘Indian Archipelago.’ As Lydia Liu has pointed out, ‘the linguistic and the economic – as well as their theoretical articulations – have long evoked each other and inhabited each other.’⁵³ In Liu’s analysis, the circulation of money - the universal commodity that every other commodity is

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Rangan and Kull have reprinted a postcard featuring Aboriginal women camel handlers titled ‘Native Women Camel Driving. South Aust’ in Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull, “The Indian Ocean and the Making of Outback Australia: An Ecocultural Odyssey,” (unpublished): 62. For one extraordinary example of settler journalism about relationships along camel routes see “Far Northern Tragedy. Charge of Murdering an Aboriginal. A Half-Caste Committed for Trial,” *The Advertiser*, 27 August 1912, 12.

⁵² ‘Reflections on a Television Program’ translated into English in Hercus, “Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia,” 48: Line 5.

⁵³ Liu, “The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign,” 21.

expressed in terms of - is a powerful metaphor for the currency of the universal language at the colonial frontier.⁵⁴

Research in the field of ecological history offers another illuminating metaphor that can be used to describe the emergence and circulation of contact English. Following similar lines of enquiry to Simpson's work on AP, historians Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull have described camels as vectors in their study of the spread of *Acacia Farenesia* to the interior of Australia.⁵⁵ *Acacia Farenesia* or the 'mimosa bush' is a species of Wattle that is native to Central America and the Caribbean. Within botanical studies this plant is an enigma because its arrival to the continent predates that of Captain Cook. Rangan and Kull have proposed that it was disseminated throughout the interior via camel faeces during the era of camel transportation. Their analysis of the *Acacia Farenesia* charts two separate non-British waves of movement over the continent in the field of ecology, locating the Australian outback within the flow of species not only across the 'Indian Archipelago,' but also oceanic geographies chronologically prior to British arrival.⁵⁶ In their analysis, the camel-vector emerges as a means of 'looking beyond the historical barrier of 1788, of seeing the Outback as connected by old and new movements across lands and oceans.'⁵⁷ Drawing upon the insights of Rangan and Kull, English, rather like seeds embedded in camel faeces, can be thought of as a substance secreted along the lines of camel communication. Using the language of ecology, contact English can be thought of as a species that flourished in fortuitous local conditions, growing with

⁵⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁵ Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull, "Acacia Exchanges: Wattles, Thorn Trees, and the Study of Plant Movements," *Geoforum* 39, 3 (2008): 1266; Haripriya Rangan and Christian Kull, "The Indian Ocean and the Making of Outback Australia: An Ecocultural Odyssey," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*, eds. Shanty Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁶ Rangan and Kull, "The Indian Ocean and the Making of Outback Australia: An Ecocultural Odyssey," 67.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

particular density at the precious sources of water upon which different living beings converged.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, water places were privileged sites where processes of exchange between languages occurred and this can likewise be observed in the story Mona Merrick told Luise Hercus. The '*dangki*' where Mona said the sisters waited was an appropriation of the settler term 'tank' that rendered it consistent with the rules of Arabunna morphology. The term 'Tank' however is itself a water-word that entered the English vocabulary upon British imperial contact with the water technologies of South Asia. In her research into ground water tanks in North Western New South Wales Heather Goodall has traced the etymology of the word to a double derivation. She writes that its source is either the Sanskrit or the north-western Gujrati '*tankih*.'⁵⁸ In 15th century India '*tankih*' described an excavation in the ground designed to catch rainwater. In 1616 the British Viceroy of India wrote on his travels through Gujarat 'besides their Rivers,..they have many Ponds, which they call Tanques,..fill'd with water when that abundance of Rain fals.'⁵⁹ Goodall's research focuses on the first half of the nineteenth century in northern New South Wales when cavities, very similar in design to South Asian '*tankih*,' were dug for rainwater harvesting and came to be known by settlers and Aboriginal people as 'tanks.' In pursuing the flow of water technologies across the 'Indian Archipelago,' Goodall concludes that while there were a number of South Asians present in the early days of the British colony of New South Wales, it is most likely that British settlers with past experience in British India mediated this intercolonial transfer of knowledge.

⁵⁸ Heather Goodall, "Digging Deeper: Ground Tanks and the Elusive "Indian Archipelago," in *Beyond the Black Stump: Rethinking Rural Histories in Australia*, ed. Alan Mayne (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2008), 130.

⁵⁹ Entry for 'tank' in OED.

By the time of the construction of the railway tank at Alberrie Creek in 1891, bore water tanks had superseded ground water tanks in the interior of the Australian colonies, leaving barely any memory in the settler imaginations of the South Asian origin of the word 'tank.'⁶⁰ The word *Dangki* of course did not enter into circulation in Arabunna through camel networks but rather by way of the railway network along which these water features were erected as it proceeded northwards. Considering the route that the word '*tankih*' travelled from South Asian languages to '*dangki*' in spoken 'Arabunna' via the English appropriation 'tank' reveals that Government railway infrastructure was part of the circuitous route along which words flowed between places and languages across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Both the presence of '*dangki*' and the 'em' suffix in Mona Merrick's tale reveal that as different groups of people moved across the 'Indian Archipelago,' English changed as new speakers began using the medium and old speakers encountered other languages.

In Australian historiography, the emergence of English as a language mediating communication *between* speakers of other tongues is taken to be so inevitable and obvious that it is rarely theorised.⁶¹ Examining the language of encounter along the camel tracks reveals the surprising circuits that English travelled through deserts independently to settlers. It is worth noting that, whilst the cameleers and their descendants eventually adopted the settler English term 'Afghans' to refer to

⁶⁰ The discovery of the Great Artesian Basin at Bourke in Northern NSW in 1878 revealed a source of water that was inexhaustible in settler imagination. See Goodall, "Digging Deeper: Ground Tanks and the Elusive "Indian Archipelago," 153. Extensive use of this water source by the nuclear industry has resulted today in a wealth of literature about the environmental impacts of bore water. See Gavin Mudd, "The Sustainability of Mound Springs in South Australia: Implications for Olympic Dam," in *Commission on Mineral and Thermal Waters Meeting (Paper Presented at the Int'l Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH) Ballarat, Australia 1998)*; See Kevin Buzzacott, *Lake Eyre is Calling* (Murray Bridge SA: Nyiri Publications, 1998).

⁶¹ For an account of English mediating 'black solidarity' between Aboriginal people see Penny Van Toorn, "Writing the Entrapped Nations of Indigenous Australia into Being," in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700 - Present*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 47.

themselves they did not adopt the Arabunna terms '*wadjbala madimadi*,' '*gadabu njara-njara*' or '*ngarrapi ngarrapi*' for self-identification. What were the processes that saw this diverse group of workers, merchants and their descendants start to use the settler term 'Afghans' to refer to themselves? In addition, as we have seen *Gamulu* was the Arabunna appropriation of the settler term 'camel' for the beasts that these Muslim men worked but themselves frequently called *Udh* amongst other things. Why didn't *Udh* gain currency within Aboriginal languages?

As Liu writes 'one interesting consequence of recent world history is that we can afford *not* to marvel at the miracle of universal communicability.'⁶² Reading Hercus' 'Arabana' text using linguistic methodologies renders visible that the emergence and spread of English was an historical and spatial event. Particularly along camel tracks, English came to be appended to the palette of many languages that Aboriginal people already spoke. For many Muslim workers travelling the 'Indian Archipelago,' English came to be a language they picked up in conversation with Aboriginal people along the camel tracks. Can we extrapolate to say that English became an Aboriginal language? Or perhaps we should say that English became an Indian Ocean language?

That both ecological and economic metaphors can be evoked to describe the complex event of English, draws attention to the fact that linguistic mobility was contemporaneous to and coextensive with other powerful transformative processes that the camels were bound up in. When the men stopped at the railway *dangki* the camels were ecological vectors that needed watering. It is likely there were seeds of all sort ruminating in their innards (just as they were loaded with commodities and supplies of various kinds scheduled for delivery at Oodnadatta) while those

⁶² Liu, "The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign," 14.

cameleers looked and looked at the girls' bared breasts and demanded '*show'm leg!*' At this particular encounter at Alberrie Creek railway siding, the miracle of universal communicability allowed the two cameleers to harass Arabunna girls in some of the same ways they might have pestered vulnerable South Asian girls they encountered whilst working the deserts of British India and Afghanistan. More to the point, such moments are episodes in a history of English circulation not necessarily mediated by settlers.

As the sisters were showing and showing their plump legs at Alberrie Creek, they would have heard the approach of the train long before they saw it, as the cameleers just kept looking and looking.⁶³ 'At last the train arrived!' and Mona recounted to Hercus in Arabunna that 'the two girls got on it to return to Marree.'⁶⁴ As it pulled away from Alberrie Creek the *dangki* disappeared from sight and perhaps the chug of the train eventually drowned out the frightened thumping in their chests. Examining the sisters' excruciating wait for the belated train at Alberrie Creek railway tank using linguistic methodologies reveals some of the ways that the medium of English travelled through the 'Indian Archipelago' along transportation networks, changing as new speakers appropriated it.

Mona Merrick concluded the story with 'The two Afghans didn't want that train (to come) – they only wanted a girlfriend.'⁶⁵ This final line captures her ultimate ambivalence towards the Muslim cameleers after having spent a lifetime in close proximity with many of these men and their families. It is an expression of ambivalence that is similar to that voiced by people around Marree who identify


⁶³ 'A Special Correspondent' wrote that the sound of the train could be heard 6 miles on approach to Davenport Springs (Alberrie Creek) in "North and by North. The Water Problem. Natives and the Desert Sounds," *The Register*, 5 April 1907, 7.

⁶⁴ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 47: Line 13.

⁶⁵ 'The Train was Late at Alberrie Creek' in *Ibid.*

themselves as 'Afghans,' when they talk about their relations with Aboriginal people. For example, in 1990 historian Gordon Briscoe interviewed Miriam Dadleh, the descendent of a cameleer Dadleh Balooch from Baluchistan. When Briscoe raised questions about relationships between the 'Afghans' and the 'Aborigines' she responded 'Oh well ah they were not bad... See because a lot of the Afghan was married to Aboriginal woman you know.'⁶⁶ Just as there was significant ambiguity in the demarcation between the contact English spoken by Aboriginal people and cameleers, a medium that circulated and developed inside the relations these people built with each other across various asymmetries, today this ambiguity exists in where 'Afghan' families end and 'Aboriginal' families begin. These intricate relations between Indian Ocean travellers and Aboriginal families produced uneasy relations of trust and mistrust, desire and fear. In this context, a motif of cannibalism emerged. In the following chapter, I follow another course of translation that sheds some light on why those Aboriginal girls were convinced that the cameleers proposed to eat them as they waited and waited for the train.

⁶⁶ 'Miriam Dadleh Interviewed by Gordon Briscoe' cited in Simpson, "Camels as Pidgin-Carriers: Afghan Cameleers as a Vector for the Spread of Features of Australian Aboriginal Pidgins and Creoles," 203.



Chapter Five

Travelling with Reg Dodd

'See, this is your classroom!' Reg Dodd announced. We were at the crest of a sand hill that rose above Arabunna country, to the northwest of Alberrie Creek. The sun was not far from setting. The desert stretching out below was in bloom in every direction. Lake Eyre was full and locals were saying that the surrounding country was greener than it had been since 1975. Some months earlier, I had travelled to Marree in winter for the annual Camel Cup and Reg had invited me to return again in spring. A heavy season of monsoons beginning in December 2009 in north Queensland and the Northern Territory had brought to life the sandy beds that lead inland to Lake Eyre. Fed by unusually high levels of local rainfall along the way, record levels of water had gathered by September 2010 when I returned. After seven days of travel we reached the top of the sand hill (see Figure 17).

It was a learning place that was very different to the tertiary education environment from which I had been interpreting Arabunna language sources. Analysing Luise Hercus' 'Arabana' text published in *Aboriginal History*, in the last chapter I drew upon linguistic tools to 'read' an Aboriginal language story. On level six of the Fisher library at the University of Sydney, shelved between the call numbers 499.15 and 499.1586 2 are a good number of books by linguists about Australian Aboriginal languages. That was the place I started my research. I followed

Figure 17



Sandhill Overlooking Arabunna Desert

Photo courtesy of Richard Wilson, Sunset on 1st October 2010.

key authors writing about Aboriginal languages along the camel tracks and railway lines I was following into a virtual world of journal articles and larger debates under way about language, place and circulation. It was a new area of study for me. I audited a semester long course in Syntax in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney in order to make sense of the language data collected by linguists. As I completed exercises in morphology, tense, mood and case amongst other linguistic universals, eventually I began to grasp how to read the grammar of Hercus' 'Arabana' text and also learnt about the broader discipline of linguistics as a science of language description. While it was a fruitful course of research, it did not answer the question that puzzled me the most. Why did the Arabunna girls waiting for their train at Alberrie Creek railway siding deduce that the two cameleers were going to *eat* them?

As I outlined in the last chapter, removing more and more of their clothing, the terrified young women at the lonely railway siding concluded '*nurga-nda dani-ligu waya-nda*: we know they want to eat us!' Reading the 'Arabana' text complete with an English translation, it is this twist in Mona Merrick's oral Arabunna story that remains incomprehensible. It is possible to imagine, albeit imperfectly, the way those men might have stared at those bared light skinned girls. It must have been a powerful gaze alien and unintelligible to those two sisters. Their terror and confusion is understandable. But why, at this site of sexualised encounter, would the girls deduce that the men would eat them? It is – to say the least - unlikely that Muslim cameleers had ever eaten Aboriginal women. There are strict taboos on eating human flesh in Islam and it was not a widespread practise in British India nor Afghanistan. There are no references in English textual records about cameleers eating Aboriginal people, nor is it likely that stories circulated of them doing so. This was not a myth that was

directly fanned by settlers amidst rising ‘anti-Asiatic’ sentiments in the 1890s. Why, then did young women draw this coherent conclusion when they were commanded to bare their flesh? And what circumstances saw older Arabunna storytellers propagate this parable for decades after the encounter?

Today, at the age of 71, Reg Dodd is one of the older living members of Mona Merrick’s family who can recall hearing this and other Arabunna tales of *Abigana* cannibalism. Living at the old railhead of Marree, Reg is the chairman of the Arabunna People’s Committee. A prominent Aboriginal spokesperson in the area, he plays a crucial role in the Arabunna language revitalisation programs under way at Marree Aboriginal School today.¹ Mining and tourism are the two industries near Marree and Alberrie Creek. Reg operates an Aboriginal owned business that takes outsiders through Arabunna country. Through this business Reg constantly travels to significant places as part of a larger strategy of Aboriginal land management.² His trips provide the infrastructure for an important meeting ground from where the Arabunna community builds political alliances and support networks with outsiders and wider social movements. My seven co-travellers were a group of legal practitioners working in Aboriginal land rights.³ By day we travelled Arabunna country and each night the discussion veered towards the politics of land and country,

¹ Reg Dodd recently featured in a series of newspaper articles about sailing on Lake Eyre. Rebecca Puddy, "Yachties and Aborigines in Rough Water over Lake Sailing Rights," *The Australian*, April 23 2011. In addition Reg has contributed to a number of historical and environmental pieces of research including: Leah Gibbs, "Yachties and Valuing Water: Variability and the Lake Eyre Basin, Central Australia," *Australian Geographer* 37, 1 (2006); Leah Gibbs, "Just Add Water: Colonisation, Water Governance and the Australian Inland," *Environment and Planning* 41 (2009); G. M. Mudd, "Mound Springs of the Great Artesian Basin in South Australia: A Case Study from Olympic Dam," *Environmental Geology* 39, 5 (2000); Gavin Mudd, "The Sustainability of Mound Springs in South Australia: Implications for Olympic Dam," in *Commission on Mineral and Thermal Waters Meeting* (Paper Presented at the Int'l Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH) Ballarat, Australia 1998).

² Reg Dodd and Tom Jenkin, "Aboriginal Tourism and Land Management in the Lake Eyre Basin: Arabunna Aboriginal Tours" (Paper Presented at the Lake Eyre Basin – Today and Tomorrow: Place, People, Possibilities, A Conference Organised Under the Lake Eyre Basin Inter-Governmental Agreement, 2006)

³ Catherine Marshall, "Shining a Lamp on Complex Indigenous Legal Issues," *The Australian*, 19 November 2011.

settler law vs. Aboriginal lore, colonisation and history. Having arrived in the footsteps of the itinerant Muslim workers I was chasing, I was simultaneously something of an interloper, participant and contributor to a longer conversation at the heart of ongoing Aboriginal experiences of colonisation: the alienation of land.

In this chapter I return to the myth of cannibalism that features in Mona Merrick's story about the encounter at Alberrie Creek. Reg has what he calls a 'slowly, slowly' approach to travelling through country that he knows intimately. Travelling with him 'slowly, slowly' some of the Aboriginal language materials and stories I was grappling to 'read' began to fall into place. In particular, by the time we left the sand hill at Anna Creek pastoral station, the Arabunna story of *Abigana* cannibalism seemed entirely logical. There I began to literally *see* why the sisters thought the cameleers were going to eat them. In this chapter, I give an account of how travelling through Arabunna deserts with Reg Dodd was a powerful method of translation across the 'Indian Archipelago.'

Getting to Alberrie Creek

Getting to that point had not been a straightforward process. I first met Mona Merrick's nephew Reg Dodd when I was chasing the Bengali book that remains at Broken Hill. From July 2009 I began contacting the descendants of the Muslim men who used to live in Broken Hill and quickly found that the old camel centres throughout Australia continue to be tightly interconnected through family networks. Lal Zada, who lives in Port Augusta today, is the great grandson of Khan Zada, whose movements I traced in the first chapter from Karachi to Australian deserts. Many of Lal's family live in Port Augusta, and they invited me to join them on a road trip to Marree for the Camel Cup; an annual occasion when the descendants of the Muslim

cameleers reunite. The transcontinental railway no longer runs through tiny Marree. The newer railway connecting Adelaide to Darwin continues to be known as 'The Ghan' and today is operated by AustralAsia Railway Corporation. The disused original route is known locally as the 'old Ghan.' Thus in July 2010, I travelled the first leg of the journey to Alberrie Creek with the Zada family.

The frenzied activities of the camel cup include 3 days of camel racing, a dance on the second night and the reunion of the 'Afghans' culminating with a third curry night. Somewhere amidst the festivities Lal introduced me to Reg Dodd; they are roughly the same age and from the 1950s worked in the railways together for many years in Marree. I had my first chance to talk to Reg the morning that I was leaving Marree. Dousing a few wooden blocks in petrol Reg set them alight for some warmth in the bitter cold morning and pulled up a couple of chairs outside the Arabunna Peoples Community Centre. At that stage of my research, I had come across a few Arabunna stories recorded, translated and published by linguists. I attempted to articulate to him why I wanted to talk to him and what my project was about.⁴ It was a daunting task for any doctoral student; and at that stage my project was not very clearly formed. My thesis was about language and place. Could I perhaps talk to him about Arabunna?

He answered immediately with a question. 'What you have to ask yourself,' he said, was 'why have you come here?' I was the latest in a long line of people who had different interests in Arabunna and Reg challenged me with a series of hard questions. 'Why do you want to know about my language? Why should I tell you about my language?' The hardest was 'Unless you want to be an expert in my language, why

⁴ Deborah Bird Rose, "Writing Place," in *Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (Clayton: Monash University ePress, 2009), 117.

would you want to write a thesis on it?' For this last, I did not have a satisfactory answer. The question exposes the inescapable dynamic at the heart of all 'research' encounters with Aboriginal people. I was writing a thesis in order to get accreditation. In the era of Native Title, when writers are accredited as 'experts' on Aboriginal people and in particular their languages or country, scholarly testimony and written material in courts of law can at times have disastrous and unexpected results for Aboriginal people. The question of expertise on language and place, and the connection between the two, is a particularly sensitive one. Yet I still wanted to talk to Reg about Arabunna: language and place. How could I write a thesis about non-English language sources in Australia and ignore Aboriginal languages? None of my answers satisfied him. Going around and around in circles, we returned again and again to his question 'But why have you come here?'

Eventually, I answered Reg in the most direct way that I could. I told him about finding the Bengali book in Broken Hill. It was a particularly interesting book I told him because it was not written to be read silently but rather it was written to be performed. I wanted to know whether any of the older descendants of Indian Ocean travellers at the Camel Cup reunion might remember what their grandfathers and great grandfathers were singing at towns like Broken Hill, Marree, Beltana and Bourke. The chase for the book took me to Marree and the camel cup. That was why I had come.

'Well?' he demanded. 'Did you find out anything? What did they say? Do they remember?' I told him that many people at the reunion had described, some had even performed what they could remember of the sliding scales that are so characteristic of South Asian music. I was happily telling him about a number of leads on how the Bengali book got to Broken Hill when he steered the conversation in an

alarming direction off the safe path of historical research. ‘Can you sing?’ he asked. ‘Sing something from that book.’ Horrified, I desperately started wondering where Lal Zada was. Surely it was time to hit the road. Eventually he softened his approach and cajoled me with ‘just a couple of lines.’ I protested ‘it’s in 19th century Bengali! I am only just working out how to read it; I have no idea how I would sing it.’ He responded by offering to get his guitar. It turned out Reg was a country music singer.

In the end, seeing no escape, I did sing. It wasn’t nineteenth century *puthi* poetry. But Reg appeared unconcerned about such details as long as it was in Bengali. Something had changed. Sitting back on the chair he started reminiscing about the old camel men who grew old during Reg’s childhood. ‘There are so many stories about them’, he told me. ‘We grew up with them and they were always around and working with us.’ He began to rattle off names that had become faces for me during the Camel Cup festivities: ‘Moosha, Dadleh, Bejah...’

Somewhere over the course of my first difficult conversation with Reg, the dynamic of the encounter shifted. While relationships between Indian Ocean travellers and Aboriginal people were riven through with various asymmetries, it was nevertheless a long relationship of co-existence. It seemed that a life-time of co-existence and negotiation between Aboriginal people and Muslim workers, merchants and their families throughout these deserts shaped how Reg ultimately understood why I had come to Marree. That is when the conversation really started. By the time Lal Zada drove past to pick me up for the long drive south to Port Augusta, Reg and I had covered a lot of topics: language movements and mother-tongues, mining politics, uranium, BHP-Billiton, country music, contested national borders, East and West Bengal, Bangladesh and Arabunna. We were only beginning and it was time to leave. ‘You should come back!’ Reg said. He invited me back in spring on a camping trip

through Arabunna country. Curiously, the Bengali book was my entry point to a conversation with Reg about Arabunna.

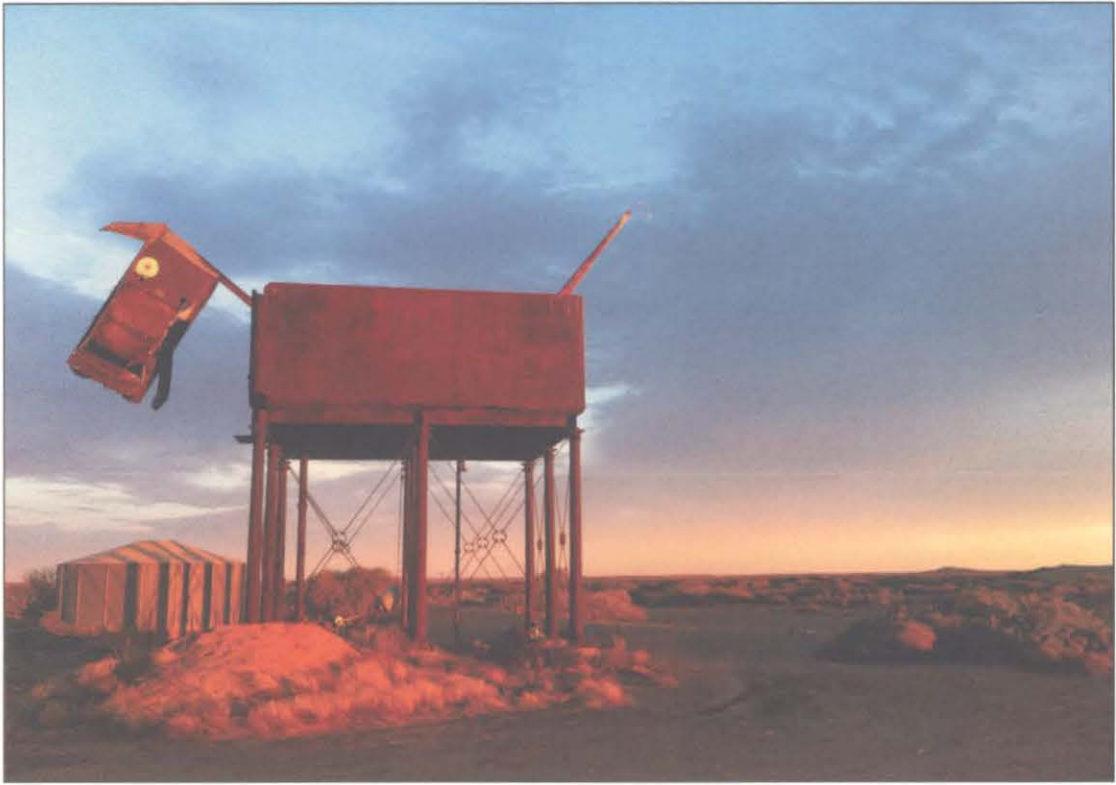
From Alberrie Creek up the Oodnadatta Track

A few months later, at the end of September 2010, I travelled to Alberrie Creek via Marree. The camping trip with Reg began and ended at the railway tank that remains standing. Since the 'old Ghan' stopped running in 1981, the tank has acquired some curious appendages (see Figure 18).⁵ Alberrie Creek today is something of a meeting place for environmental activists, anti-nuclear movements and Aboriginal movements. The rusted body of a Chrysler and a thin metal rod have transformed the tank into a giant dog that wags its 'head' when desert winds pick up. Standing by this water feature where the two Arabunna sisters waited for their train once upon a time, it is possible to see the faint outline of the route via which 'the Ghan' would have arrived from Oodnadatta. The rails are long gone and the sleepers provide excellent firewood for campfires.

Long after the girls made their escape on the train in the 1890s, their story of encounter with the cameleers circulated at the places that Aboriginal people gathered. The Warren-Hogarth family was an influential family of pastoralists who held pastoral leases over the heartland of Arabunna country to the west of Lake Eyre. Anna Creek was the largest of these titles. There, Barralda, Reg's grandmother, built an extremely important political and intimate relationship with pastoralist, Francis Dunbar Warren. By 1918, when Warren took up the lease to Finnis Springs encompassing Alberrie Creek, he had a number of children with Barralda. As

⁵ Graham St John, "Off Road Show: Techno, Protest and Feral Theatre," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 19, 1 (2005): 14; Esther Lindstrom, "Sculptures in the Outback," in *Stateline* (Australia: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

Figure 18



Railway Tank at Alberrie Creek

Photographed by Samia Khatun, Sunset on 5th December 2011.

Barralda's extended Aboriginal family shifted to Finnis Springs, it became a convergence point for many Aboriginal people usurped from their land and negotiating livelihoods in pastoral and camel industries. Reg was born at Finnis in 1940 and during his childhood it became something of a 'labour bureau for surrounding pastoralists.'⁶ When F. D. Warren – whom Reg calls 'old grandfather' - passed away in 1954, his Aboriginal children and grandchildren inherited the pastoral title to Finnis and many of Barralda's descendants continue to live on this property. It is the unusual story of a white pastoralist who came to be worked into a large Aboriginal family.

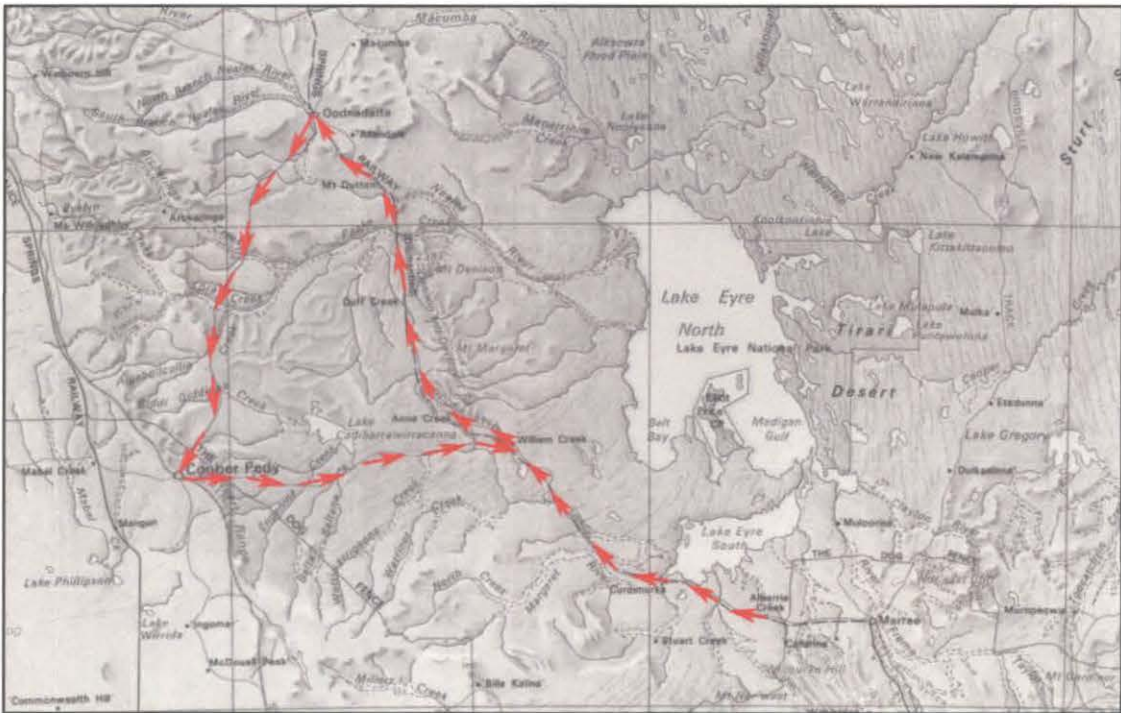
Over the course of the trip we travelled north from the property of Finnis Springs and up the Oodnadatta track (see Figure 18). This unsealed road is where the camel track once lay. It meanders alongside the abandoned railway line and is entangled with many Aboriginal storylines. After arriving at the now defunct railhead at Oodnadatta we doubled back heading southwest towards the town of Coober Pedy. For the last leg of the journey we cut eastwards across the vast territory encompassed by Anna Creek. Once a pastoral property, today BHP-Billiton holds a mining lease over the land and members of the Arabunna community hold the Native Title.⁷

Sleeping the first night by the railway tank, we departed on the Oodnadatta track early next morning. The first few days travelling along the Oodnadatta track were about 'meeting' Reg's family in a sense through his stories about the places that they once lived. I caught glimpses of the various Arabunna women who I had read about through the places we travelled. When Reg's told a story about Barralda at the

⁶ "Home For Aborigines," *The Advertiser*, 10 September 1943, 2.

⁷ Kerry Staight, *Creek Dries Up* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008); Jill Bowen, *Kidman: The Forgotten King* (London ; Sydney: Fourth Estate, 2007).

Figure 19



Arrows Indicate Direction and Route of Trip With Reg Dodd

Adapted from Trevor Griffin and Murray McCaskill, eds., *Atlas of South Australia* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986), 110 - 11.

place that Barralda gave birth to Amy, Reg's mother, I began to grasp something of the intimate, lived significance of the places we were travelling through. As a student history I am used to 'meeting' past historical actors through the medium of text. 'Meeting' Reg's family in the places they inhabited – and still inhabit – was an experience I symptomatically found very hard to commit to paper. Nevertheless, I did write down everything I could remember every morning and in the rest of this chapter I will draw upon my diary entries. While I wasn't engaged in oral history, the words Reg used did profoundly and importantly shift the way I saw the desert. Thus, here I have quoted his words as I wrote them in my travel diary.⁸

'See, the woman who told Luise that story about the cameleers, that woman and my mother, they were sisters' Reg said one morning. We were at a creek near Oogelima springs. Reg had nursed a fire to life and I was making myself porridge. He found a windbreak between some shrubs and called me over with 'so what's happening with your thesis?' When I brought up the story I had read about Alberrie Creek, Reg cried '*nyari marnda dara*, show'm leg!' in recognition. Clearing a patch of ground in front of him he said 'Oh yeah, they said to em 'show'm leg!' Planting two sticks in the ground next to each other he illustrated 'see, when the old women told these stories they would be talking so fast. And at the same time! Just talking and talking. O! they would just sit there and tell the story so fast.' He said that as kids they would always be listening. Without even knowing that they were listening to stories, they would pick stories up Reg said. That is how the Arabunna tale of what happened at Alberrie Creek travelled between mothers and kids, daughters, sisters and aunts at Finnis Springs.

⁸ I am indebted to Reg Dodd for his permission to quote him. Reg Dodd to Samia Khatun, Letter Dated 8 December 2011.

Following the contours of the tale of encounter at Alberrie Creek that I had read in print, Reg's telling of the story took an unexpected turn. 'They used to take em girls and trade'm see' he said. Drawing the camel transportation centres in the sand in relation to the stick-sisters at Alberrie he explained 'cos you had mob in New South Wales, in Queensland, in Western Australia.' Tracing a line he illustrated how 'them old men they got a couple of them at Oodna. Three there, three girls. And take'm down to Marree... And then they were goin up Birdsville.' Marree was a busy transportation hub and the Birdsville track heading northeast was the camel route to Queensland. 'But up the track a bit,' Reg continued, 'the girls took off at night time. Went up the top end of the Lake and back around through Oodna. See, they got away! They had a lot of skills them old women.' He repeated a few times 'Old women told us this is what happened.' I asked whether this is why Arabunna women warned their kids to stay away from Muslim cameleers and he confirmed 'the old people would tell em don't go near them, they eat you or kill you or take you away.'⁹

Today, many people in Reg's family are descendants of the cameleers. During the period of interlocking camel and railway tracks, complicated relations developed between these people who were somewhere on the margins of an emerging 'White Australia.' The interface between Aboriginal people and the descendants of 'Afghans' today remains as complex and multifaceted as the many affective ties that slowly interwove some families and created acrimony between others. Many Aboriginal children remained unacknowledged by their Muslim fathers whilst some Aboriginal wives and their children became absorbed into the families at the 'ghantowns' of the

⁹ For writers in Aboriginal history who have explored the complexity of Aboriginal women's agency at sites of sexualised encounter and exchange see Lynette Russell, "A New Holland Half-Caste: Sealer and Whaler Tommy Chaseland," *History Australia* 5, 1 (2008); Ann McGrath, "'Black Velvet': Aboriginal Women and their Relations with White men in the Northern Territory, 1910-1940," in *So Much Hard Work: Women and Prostitution in Australian History*, ed. Kay Daniels (Sydney: Fontana Collins, 1984).

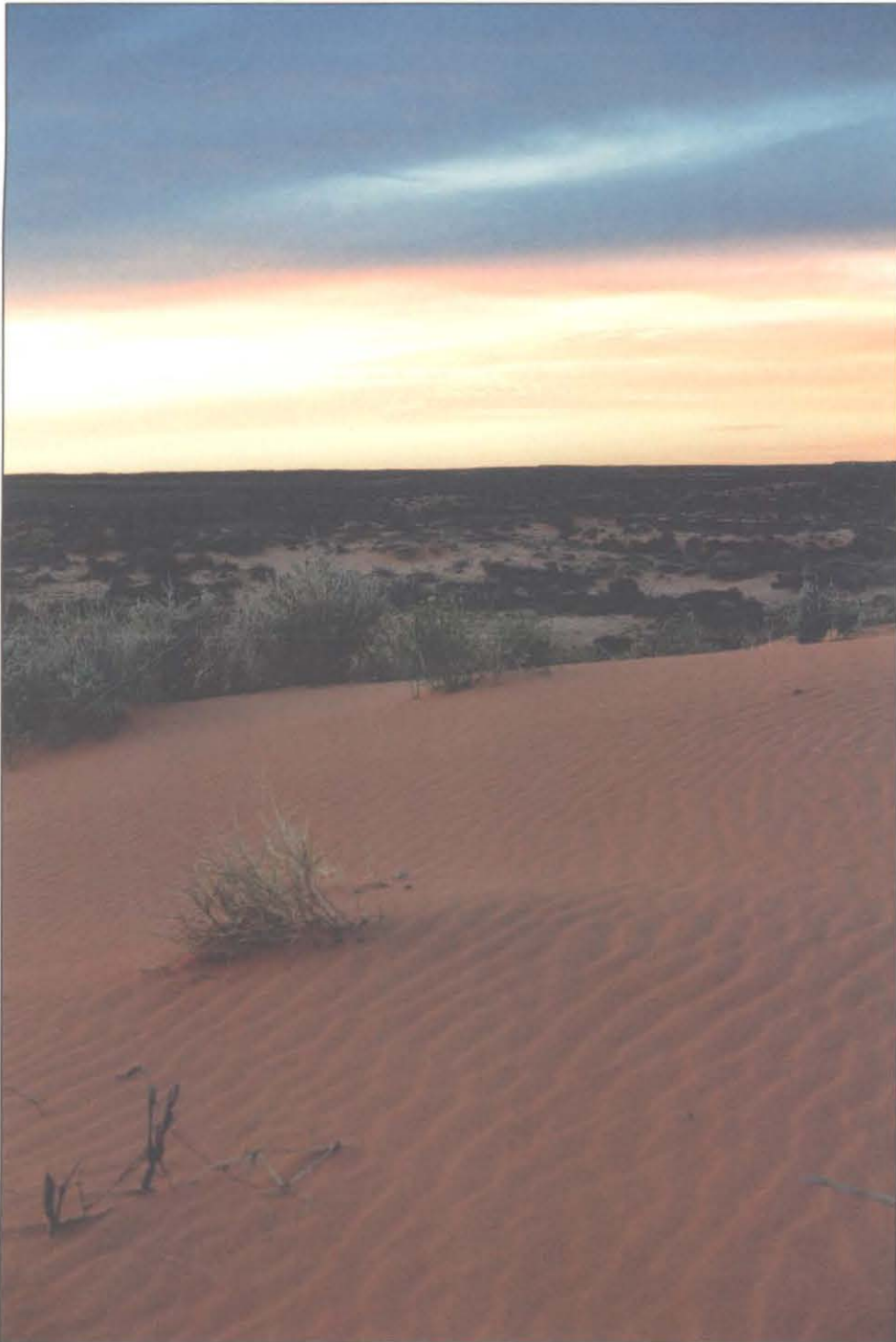
cameleers. Having worked alongside each other in the various industries that have shaped this pocket of the 'Indian Archipelago,' when they talk about each other today, their attitudes are mediated through experiences of marriages that worked, ones that didn't, fathers who disappointed, mothers they never knew, brothers and sisters who wouldn't acknowledge them on the streets of small towns. Reg reflected 'Yeah some of them used to take em girls and sell em. But you know there were plenty others who looked after em.' The story at Oogelima ended with Reg again rattling of a stream of Muslim names familiar around those parts: 'there was Moosha, Dadleh, Zada...' and so on.

Reg's account of the encounter at Alberrie Creek revealed that during Barralda's day, throughout Mona and Amy's lives and their daughters' lives in turn, on encounter with cameleers they could suddenly end up in unfamiliar places. Cameleers travelling along the Oodnadatta track to Queensland or to the deserts of Western Australia, could take Arabunna girls to silent places where deserts were storied in languages they didn't know. Older women in Reg's family circulated these tales of *Abigana* cannibalism as scare tactics: cautionary tales that warned children to stay away from this other variety of white fellow. When those cameleers demanded the girls bare their plump legs at Alberrie Creek, it is possible that drawing upon their archive of Arabunna stories they heard about cameleers they concluded that they were going to be eaten. Reg's account revealed the context in which a myth of *Abigana* cannibalism was circulated between women of different ages. The question remained: how did such a myth begin? And why in that particular form? Why was being eaten the apt metaphor for the threat of sexual violence, the possibility of being taken away, traded or trafficked, or just absorbed into an unfamiliar family?

Heading eastwards from Oogelima Creek after a late breakfast, we made our way back towards the ‘old Ghan’ railway line, veering off the path to chase every animal track and every storyline that caught Reg’s eye. The day that began at Oogelima stretched out across the vast breadth of Anna Creek pastoral station – larger than the size of Belgium locals will tell you - and ended at the foot of a series of crimson sand hills (see Figure 20). Here, wandering the dunes, watching, listening and following creatures in a particular way, Reg imparted the very first lesson in being able to read places in the way that he does (Figure 21). ‘See here,’ he would point to a thread in the sand. With ‘see where he is going?’ Reg would be away in pursuit of the creature’s tracks. Looking at its tracks Reg could recreate every minute detail and dramatic twist that happened along the way. Picking up the track of a particular three-toed, two footed creature I tried to follow Reg’s example. It was an animal I was unfamiliar with, but whose prints my untrained eyes could easily follow (see Figure 22). In looking carefully in on one particular thread and moving along it, the intense drama that storied every inch of the sand hill unravelled before my eyes.

Creatures on the move across the dunes have dramatic lives. Meandering through places they weave together plant life and water-places, where they sometimes encounter other creatures. They lay eggs, shed their entire skin, bury themselves into the earth to slumber at sundown. Sometimes they drop dead, only to become a convergence point for other creatures to feed on, who then in turn leave droppings, lay eggs and so on. My three-toed creature was having an uneventful day and left only droppings along the way. Nevertheless, as its tracks continuously crossed others with no consequence, it became clear that I had little idea who came first in these intersecting stories. Asking what time the track was laid was a somewhat meaningless

Figure 20



Sand Hill on Anna Creek Station

Photo Courtesy of Richard Wilson, Sunset on 1st October 2010.

Figure 21



Reg Dodd and Samia Khatun

Photo Courtesy of Richard Wilson, 1st October 2010.

question (see Figure 23). It is where creatures suddenly and unexpectedly meet that drama erupts, sometimes proceeding along the axis of pursuit and escape. Soaring above the dunes for some time, predatory birds leave prints of precise brutality. Escaping from the clutches of these hungry others, earth-bound tracks become shallow and long as creatures speed across the sand. There came a moment when I could actually see that the series of sand hills were entirely criss-crossed with tracks of innumerable beings on the move (See Figure 24 and 25). The layer of sand that was visible to me was a tactile medium that recorded with exceptional detail the many-dimensional mobility of living beings through it.

Reading the sand hill as an archive of mobility, Reg would often break out into Arabunna, as he threaded a path naming creatures and describing their actions. My ears did not have the sensitivity to commit their names to memory. I tried but my clumsy tongue could not wrap itself around the Arabunna words that rolled so easily off his. Their paths of travel disappeared into the earth, slipping from my gaze far quicker than I would have liked. Just as it takes years to learn to read and even longer to write stories in Bengali, it must have taken Reg years to learn how to decipher tracks on the earth and tell Arabunna stories. In addition, it was a lifetime of living in and close to Arabunna country that maintained his literacy. I continued to crawl over that hill mesmerised and in pursuit of tracks until Reg stopped at the crest of one dune just on sunset. Something had happened! So we embarked on perhaps the most important chapter of the lesson.

It was a lizard travelling down the hill (see Figure 26). The even weight and spacing of its tracks reveal that the creature was moving at a leisurely pace, unaware that it was being carefully watched and sized up by a soaring predator. Fixing the lizard in its gaze, abruptly the predator swooped in upon its prey, creating claw prints

Figure 22



Tracks of 'My' Two-legged Three-Toed Creature

Photo Courtesy of Richard Wilson, Sand Hill at Anna Creek Station, 1st October 2010.

Figure 23



Tracks of Two Creatures Crossing

Photo courtesy of Richard Wilson, Sand Hill at Anna Creek Station, 1st October 2010.

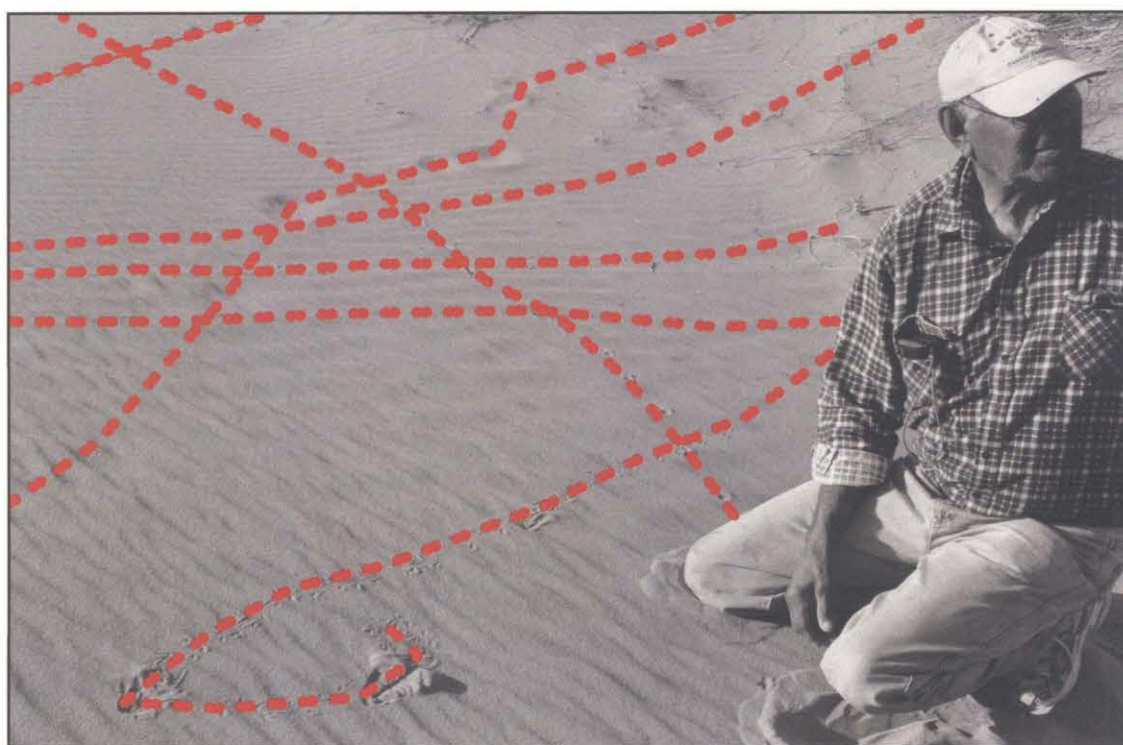
Figure 24



Reg Dodd telling the Stories of the Tracks

Photo courtesy of Richard Wilson, Sand Hill at Anna Creek Station, 1st October 2010.

Figure 25



Sand Hill Criss-Crossed with Tracks

Track Marks Highlighted by Samia Khatun on Photo taken by Richard Wilson, Sand Hill at Anna Creek Station, 1st October 2010.

in the earth that reveal that it was an eagle. Escaping from the claws and beak of the enormous bird, the lizard sped westward. 'See, how he got away here' Reg translated the shallow and elongated tracks. The hungry bird bore down once more, with more force and deliberate precision, creating a deep narrow furrow in the sand. The disturbed sand around the furrow reveals the site of brutal struggle where the lizard tore away from the eagles' beak scampering injured in a south-easterly direction. The third attack the bird made upon the lizard was its last. Here the captive lizard thrashed about in the clutches of the eagles' crushing claws, creating a shallow and wide circle around the site. Perhaps it was here that the eagle dismembered the lizard. That there are neither bones nor any remains suggests that part of the lizard carcass became airborne with the eagle and any remains found their way back to the earth when its hunger was satisfied. There, it is likely that what remained of that lizard became a feeding place for smaller creatures still. Until, what was once a lizard became matter indistinguishable from the sand hill.

This event of high drama that Reg rendered legible on the sand lies beyond the domain of current academic historical practise. In conventional academic histories of this sand hill could the lizard and the eagle feature as central actors? Yet, it was this asymmetrical encounter between two creatures that gave me invaluable insight into some of the principles of Arabunna storytelling. Beginning with the predatory gaze of the eagle, the drama in these narratives that criss-crossed the dune was in the pursuit and escape, actions that created features in the sand. Like so many other narratives imprinted on the sand hill, the tracks of the lizard ended with dismemberment, consumption and disappearance from the face of Arabunna geography. Eating! Being eaten, the apprehension of being eaten, the pursuit of tracks in order to eat, were ever-present possibilities shaping how creatures moved across the sand dunes.

Figure 26



Tracks of Lizard and Eagle

Photo courtesy of Richard Wilson, Sand Hill at Anna Creek Station, 1st October 2010.

Indeed, pursuit by predators in order to be eaten was almost what defined a set of tracks as a good Arabunna story. Was this sand hill something like Arabunna geography in microcosm? What if Arabunna country in its entirety was one such sand hill writ large? Wouldn't boulders, hills and valleys be marks left by creatures of giant proportions? Wouldn't the water after sudden thunderstorms travel along the tracks left by enormous travelling creatures? Wouldn't smaller creatures travel to the places where larger creatures lay dead with their blood congealed?

After having only spent a small amount of time with Reg, having just caught glimpses of his family, I cannot of course hope to grasp Arabunna philosophies. What is clear is that learning to decipher tracks in minutiae and tell stories of this form was crucial to the day-to-day livelihoods, sustenance and survival of Arabunna people throughout the era of the camel industry and beyond. Although Aboriginal people came to be the principal workforce in the pastoral industry in these parts from the 1860s, the meagre rations that the colonial and later state government offered as compensation for the alienation of land was never enough to sustain families.¹⁰ As Reg recalled about growing up at Finnis Springs in the 1940s and 1950s 'As a kid I remember [as rations]...we got a bit of flour and jam and sugar and tea that's all. Apart from that you lived off the land.'¹¹ Was it at classrooms like these that Aboriginal children were taught how to eat off the land? Indeed, it is likely that the two Arabunna sisters at Alberrie Creek, Barralda and then her children Mona and Amy and then the children of Reg's generation, learnt how to read and tell Arabunna stories, whilst in pursuit of creatures across classrooms.

¹⁰ On the system of rations for Aboriginal people see Robert Foster, "Feasts of the Full-moon: The Distribution of Rations to Aborigines in South Australia: 1836-1861," *Aboriginal History* 13 (1989); Robert Foster, "Rations, Coexistence, and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Labour in the South Australian Pastoral Industry, 1860-1911," *Aboriginal History* 24, 1 - 26 (2000).

¹¹ Reg Dodd and Jen Gibson, "Learning Times: An Experience of Arabana Life and Mission Education," *Aboriginal History* 13 (1989): 86.

After the lesson on that sand-hill, I began *see* why the Arabunna sisters thought the two cameleers were going to eat them. The story of encounter at Alberrie Creek railway siding follows the contours of many of the narratives that Reg described on the hill. At the water tank, the story begins with an encounter. In response to the unnerving, greedy gaze of the cameleers, their sizing up of the girls' bared flesh, the sisters' deduced '*Nurga-nda dani-ligu waya-nda*: we know they want to eat us!' It is a logical progression in the grammar that underpins Arabunna stories of encounter. To the relief of the two girls, 'finally the train came!' and they escaped leaving in their path the railway track. After it was too dark to track anymore that evening, Reg said 'see, if there is a dust storm tonight, it will be like turning a whole new page. And all the stories will start again.' It was the end of my first lesson in how to 'read' Arabunna, stories and places.

Travelling with Reg, shed new light on how Arabunna sisters might have learnt to read deserts and tell stories. It was a trip that made it at least imaginable why those two same Arabunna sisters might have 'written' the cameleers into a story featuring a fear of being eaten at a place of encounter. The journey ended at Alberrie Creek and the diary I kept, imperfect a medium as it was to record what was going on in another quite different medium, proved to be a key part of making sense of a number of the Aboriginal language sources that I use in this thesis. Reg's claim that cameleers were trading girls is consistent with the accounts of a number of historians of the camel industry in Australia.¹² Next I turn to a close examination of the negotiations along the camel tracks.

¹² Rajkowski, *In the Tracks of the Camelmen: Outback Australia's Most Exotic Pioneers*, 175 - 76. Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, 224.



Chapter Six

Muslim Marriage Disputes

The railway clock read 8.10pm on the 24th of June 1904 when Sher Khan stepped off the train onto the platform at Marree, an important railhead for the pastoral industry and camel transportation network in the South Australian desert. The train track separated settlers' homes and businesses from the Muslim quarters of known as the 'ghantown.' Although it was a bright moonlit night, the four or five Muslim cameleers standing by the station might not have recognised Sher Khan. He had unwound his turban and was dressed in a brown tweed suit and a European felt hat. Moosha Balooch, after collecting newly arrived mail from the post office, was heading back across the railway line to 'ghantown.' Known locally as Moosha, he was an influential camel owner from Baluchistan, an arid region that today spans across the borders of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. After leaving the station through the turnstile Moosha turned to see Sher Khan following him. Extending his hand Moosha was about to greet Khan. 'I was going to shake hands,'¹ Moosha testified in Port Augusta Circuit Court later. However before he could utter his salaams Khan pulled out a gun from the folds of his suit and pulled the trigger; not just once but five times. 'He shot one in the chest'² recounted Moosha who narrowly escaped death that

¹ 'Deposition of Witness' by Moosa Baloochi, Camel Owner (Afghan) in Case File: 'The King Against Sher Khan, Circuit Court of Port Augusta', July 1904 no. 5, Archived Files of the Supreme Court of South Australia, Criminal Jurisdiction.

² 'Deposition of Witness' by Moosha Balooch, Camel Owner (Afghan) in Ibid.

night, 'Two grazed me on the face one on each side and one hit me in the right arm.' The smell of gunpowder hung thick in the air and the gunshots were reverberating through the town and beyond when Sher Khan slipped away into the inky shadows cast by the moon.

Thirty five year old Sher Khan was born in Kabul and in 1904 was working at Murnpeowie,³ the largest station operated by the Beltana Pastoral Company (see Figure 27). Khan had arrived to the Australian colonies in 1900 from the port of Singapore.⁴ Archival records suggest that, like the infamous peddler '*Kabuliwallah*' from Rabindranath Tagore's fiction, who wandered the streets of Calcutta at the close of the nineteenth century, there were vast numbers of itinerant merchants and workers from the city of Kabul travelling the 'Indian Archipelago' during the age of camels, ships and trains.⁵ After his arrival to the colony of South Australia, *Kabuliwallah* Khan was engaged as a junior camel driver by the Beltana Pastoral Company. Somewhere along the camel-tracks running through the Australian deserts he met another older man from Afghanistan, Surwah Khan.⁶ Many a conversation must have passed between the two, of home and abroad, of war in Afghanistan, camels and the carting business, the nostalgic past and the uncertain future. Amidst all the talk Sher Khan learnt that the elder Khan had a young daughter.

³ M. C. Ireland suggests that he lived at Murnpeowie in 'Deposition of Witness' by George Ireland Mounted Constable in Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ '*Kabuliwallah*' was first published in Bengali in 1892 and has been translated into English by a number of authors. Rabindranath Tagore, "Kabuliwallah," in *Galpa Guchcha* (Dhaka: Nouroj Sahitya Sangsad, 1990); Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories [Translated by William Radice]* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994); Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore, Selected Short Stories. [Trans. Mohammad A. Quayum]* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2011).

⁶ Jones and Kenny following Rajkowski write that Surwah Khan was from Baluchistan in Phillip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland. 1860s - 1930s* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2007), 190. However in a letter to the Police Commissioner of South Australia, Surwah Khan identifies that he is 'Afghan' and not 'Balochi.' State Records of South Australia GRG 5/2 Correspondence files ('PCO' files) - Police Commissioner's Office, Letter from Surwah Khan to Police Commissioner, Box 99, File no. 202 of 1906.

Figure 27



Prison Photograph of Sher Khan

State Records of South Australia GRG54/41 Register of prisoners - Yatala Labour
Prison, Unit 4, vol. 3, File no. 3952.

On the winter night when Sher Khan pulled the trigger, hearing gunshots, passing British Indian hawker, Dur Mohamed, dropped his basket of fish and ran to the railway station where he 'saw the revolver shining in Sher Khan's hand.'⁷ After the chaos and confusion died down at Marree that night, Dur Mohamed once more picked up his basket and headed towards 'ghantown' bearing not only fish for sale but also a riveting tale. Accounts of the shooting spread in every direction and several languages through transport and communication networks and along waterways and other corridors of mobility, leaving a rich trail of stories.⁸ From the west of the railway tracks, the police officer sent a telegram to his superior in Adelaide detailing that at 'about 8.45... an Afghan, was shot at the back of a railway station by a man who immediately disappeared...there is very little hope of the patient's recovery.'⁹ To the east of the railway an assorted community of Muslim cameleers, Aboriginal women, white women and their children discussed the matter. An Aboriginal man from Charlotte Waters was engaged to track Khan and in the next chapter I will return to how the story circulated on the banks of Frome Creek, the waterway where Aboriginal people camped even further east to 'ghantown.' As cameleers, both Muslim and Aboriginal, made their way outwards from Marree, the story travelled with them to the makeshift mosques throughout the interior and eventually to the port cities.¹⁰

⁷ 'Deposition of Witness' by Dur Mahomed, Hawker (Indian) in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSSA.

⁸ Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 225 - 27. English language records which mention the shooting incident at Marree include: Diary of John Gilbert Partridge, 1915 - 1922, Local History File B137, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection; King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSSA; In addition there was significant press coverage of the incident for example in "All Because of an Afghan Maiden," *The Advertiser*, 29 September 1904, 4.

⁹ The Adelaide Register, "An Afghan Shot. Injuries Very Serious. Assailant at Large.," *Adelaide Register*, 25 May 1904, 5.

¹⁰ Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, 2, 15.

According to the settler press coverage of the incident and the subsequent trial, it was 'all because of an Afghan maiden.'¹¹ The Adelaide Advertiser reported that at the centre of the debacle was a fifteen-year-old girl by the name of Adelaide Neckimore, daughter of Afghani Surwah Khan and Ellen Khan of Irish origin (see Figure 28).¹² A decade after the shooting, Sher Khan's defence lawyer Mr Hardy recounted the tale to John Gilbert Partridge, the mayor of the town of Port Augusta who was in Marree on business.¹³ In his diary Partridge wrote an account of the 'tragedy-romance story of the Afghan community of Maree (*sic*)'¹⁴ that reveals how settlers made meaning of the incident as they repeated the story to each other. Hardy informed Partridge that 'Young Sheer Khan, a junior camel-train man, was courting the charming daughter of an elderly and very mercenary couple. The parents made a pretty substantial charge for their daughters, Sheer Khan being stung for 150 which he did not possess, so he paid a deposit of 100, and set off north to earn the balance of 50 purchase money. Before he left, the betrothal feast was celebrated, and at this feast an old gravy-eyed 'Ghan named Moosha cast envious eyes on the bride-elect. After the feast, with Sheer Khan out of the way, he bought her for 200 from the treacherous parents, taking delivery of his goods while poor Sheer Khan was battling with his camels in Queensland. But it was not long before Sheer Khan learned what had happened.'¹⁵

¹¹ "All Because of an Afghan Maiden."

¹² The birth records of Adelaide Khan (*nee* Neackmore) identify her mother 'Ellen Khan (*nee* O'Brien)' as 'English.' However, her maiden name suggests she was of Irish heritage in SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/202.

¹³ Partridge identifies in 'Chapter 8: Business Life' that it was Mr. Hardy who told him the story and newspaper reports of the court case reveal that Mr. Hardy was Sher Khan's defense lawyer. Page 184 in Diary of John Gilbert Partridge, 1915 - 1922, Local History File B137, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection; The Adelaide Advertiser, "The Hergott Shooting Case," *The Advertiser*, 24 June 1904, 8.

¹⁴ Diary of John Gilbert Partridge, 1915 - 1922, Local History File B137, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Figure 28



Adelaide Moosha with Her Children at Marree, c.1910

Photo reproduced in Stevens, Christine. *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 225.

Supplementing Partridge's account with other settler accounts and with police archival records, historian Christine Stevens has interpreted the shooting as a 'brideprice' dispute.¹⁶ According to Stevens, a price was paid by Muslim grooms for the daughters of other Muslim cameleers and sometimes even English parents. Drawing upon Aboriginal language accounts of this incident linguist Luise Hercus was the first to use the term 'bride-price' in 1981 and she writes 'The Afghans had come without women of their own' and to marry 'the young daughters of other Afghans...they often had to pay large sums of money.'¹⁷ Hercus suggests that in comparison to settler women, 'part Afghan girls were even scarcer and expensive.'¹⁸ The shooting that took place at Marree railhead is just one of a rich set of oral and documentary sources about Muslim marriage payments that historians have collated. Using the framework of 'bride-price,' writers in Australia have concluded that 'Afghans brought and sold their wives'¹⁹ as part of a cash economy within the context of a shortage of Muslim women in Australian deserts. Disappointingly, historians of the cameleers in Australia writing from within Muslim communities have remained entirely silent on the matter of exchanges that were taking place at the time of cameleer nuptials.²⁰

¹⁶ Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, 224.

¹⁷ Luise A. Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," *Aboriginal History* 5, 1 (1981): 39 - 40, 49. Also see Peter Austin, Luise Hercus and Philip Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Ngyu-Thangknyiwarna)," *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 145 - 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 40.

¹⁹ Pamela Rajkowski, *In the Tracks of the Camelmen: Outback Australia's Most Exotic Pioneers* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987), 175.

²⁰ There is no mention of *mahar* in the earliest history of Muslims in Australia written from within the Muslim merchant community. Mohamed Hasan Musakhan, ed. *The Mosques, Camel-Men and Islam: Islam in Australia, 1863 - 1932* (Adelaide: Mahomet Allum, 1932). There is also a marked absence of marriage payments in more recent writing. For example in Gábor Korvin, "Afghan and South-Asian Pioneers of Australia (1830 - 1930): A Biographical Study (Part 1)," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 51, 1 (2003); Gábor Korvin, "Afghan and South-Asian Pioneers of Australia (1830 - 1930): A Biographical Study (Part 2)," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 51, 2 (2003); Gábor Korvin, "Paternal Influence on mtDNA?: A Case from Western Australian History," *ISAA Review* 2, 5 (2003). Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, (London: Kegan Paul, 2004); Nahid Afrose Kabir, "The Economic Plight of Afghans in Australia, 1880

In this chapter I piece together the dynamics of marriage negotiations along camel tracks in some desert pockets of the 'Indian Archipelago.' Drawing upon methodologies from the field of political economy and feminist historiography, I move away from the existing framework of 'brideprice' and its reliance on classic liberal economic narratives of exchange, shortage of demand and inflation of prices.²¹ Not only does the 'bride-price' narrative that scholars have posed erase the complexity of these arrangements, it obscures the role that the marriages and intimacies formed by Muslim cameleers with women played in mediating relations between men working across the 'Indian Archipelago.' As Gayle Rubin argued in her essay on the traffic in women 'if it is a woman being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it.'²² Accordingly, in this chapter I examine the fraternal relations that Muslim marriage disputes were embedded in. I begin by suggesting 'mahar' rather than 'bride-price' as a more fruitful analytical framework within which to understand the payments negotiated at Muslim marriages.

A contract signed at the town of Bourke in New South Wales suggests that cameleers understood nuptial exchanges and negotiations within the framework of mahar agreements. On 4 June 1917, a fourteen-year-old girl born to English parents signed a contract stating 'I Myrtle Mary Dee of Bourke did marry and take Morbine

- 2000," *Islamic Studies* 44, 2 (2005); Nahid Afrose Kabir, "Muslims in Western Australia, 1870-1970," *Early Days* 12, 5 (2005); Bilal Cleland, "The History of Islam in Australia," (No Date), <http://islam.iinet.net.au/channel/islam_australia.html> viewed 28th May 2009; Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey among Australian Muslims* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995). Hanifa Deen, *Ali Abdul v. the King: Muslim Stories from the Dark Days of White Australia* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2011).

²¹ J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

²² Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic of Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex," in *The Second Wave: A reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 37.

Perooz to be my lawful husband with the consent of my guardian my mother.²³

Thirty-five-year old Morbine Perooz, born in Peshawar agreed to ‘...pay to the said Myrtle Mary Dee on demand at any time now and hereafter the sum of ten pounds as “Mahar” or marriage consideration according to the Mohamedan law and religion...’²⁴

In this chapter I re-examine the Muslim marriage convention that has been called ‘bride-price’ by Australian scholars. I pay particularly close attention to the shooting at Marree railway station in 1904, using *mahar* both as an interpretive key and framework upon which to hang my analysis of Muslim marriage payments across the ‘Indian Archipelago.’

The word ‘*mahar*’ is a tri-literal Arabic root and the earliest written references to it can be found in the pages of Arabic poetry that predates Islam.²⁵ While the agreement signed by Perooz and Dee in Bourke locates this convention within ‘Mohamedan law and religion,’²⁶ *mahar* does not actually appear in the Quran. The payment outlined in the Quran from the husband to the wife at the time of the marriage is variously referred to as *ajr* (reward), *farīḍa* (legal obligation) and *ṣaduqa* (nuptial gift).²⁷ Scholars of Islam have suggested that the Quran deliberately moved away from the term *mahar*, which was a payment to the father of the bride. They suggest that careful avoidance of the term *mahar* in Islamic marriage law was an innovation in Arabic society in the founding century of Islam that gave wives sole

²³ Typescript of Marriage Document titled 'Morbine Perooz - Myrtle Mary Perooz (nee Dee)' in Alan Barton Collection, Bourke Public Library.

²⁴ Typescript of Marriage Document titled 'Morbine Perooz - Myrtle Mary Perooz (nee Dee)' in Ibid.

²⁵ Personal Communication with Dr Richard Barz, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific; O. Spies, "Mahr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (Brill Online 2012); Harald. Motzki, "Bridewealth," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur' ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Washington DC: Georgetown University (Brill Online), 2012).

²⁶ Typescript of Marriage Document titled 'Morbine Perooz - Myrtle Mary Perooz (nee Dee)' in Alan Barton Collection, Bourke Public Library.

²⁷ Motzki, "Bridewealth."

legal rights to a marriage payment.²⁸ However, *mahar*, both the word and the convention of negotiation at marriage, persisted and has spread from the Arabian Peninsula along trade routes, accompanying the spread of Islam across the world. Sometimes taking the form of a sum of money offered by the groom, *mahar* remains a part of Muslim marriage negotiations in various parts of the world today.

Mahar, the word and the marriage payment convention, circulated in Australian deserts as the camel industry emerged as a crucial adjunct to the development of settler capitalism. Just as frontier English spoken by Aboriginal people and South Asian cameleers and ecological species such as *Acacia Farenesia* were disseminated by the ‘camel-vector,’ in this chapter I treat *mahar* as another species that took root along the camel tracks in translation across the ‘Indian Archipelago.’ A wealth of feminist writing about South Asia has emphasised the importance of close, fine-grained studies of marriage payments. Accordingly, in this chapter I closely read the marriage dispute at Marree railway siding to piece together some of the broader characteristics of *mahar* in Australian deserts.²⁹ A close examination of *mahar* exchanges which turned sour or whose meanings have subsequently been obscured in settlers’ translations illuminates the role that *mahar* agreements played in economic and social relationships on which these capitalists relied. It also sheds light on a particular species of *mahar* that cameleers reinvented in translation across the ‘Indian Archipelago’ as their contact with non-Muslim

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ ‘Bridewealth’ and ‘Brideprice’ practices are staple objects of analysis in anthropological and feminist literature. For reviews of this literature with reference to South Asia see Srimati Basu, ed. *Dowry and Inheritance* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2006), i – iiv; For one account of the workings of *mahar* in Mughal India see Zinat Kausar, “System of Maher (Dower) and its Importance in Muslim Marriages During the Mughal Age (1526 - 1707),” *Journal of Historical Research (Ranchi, India)* 27, 2 (1989); Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For studies of South Asian Muslim domestic worlds in the context of Britain see Pnina Werbner, *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2002); Alison Shaw, *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 2000).

communities created sometimes-fatal ambiguities and novel uses of an old convention.

Police records, settler press coverage and court records created in the aftermath of the shooting reveal that Adelaide's father Surwah Khan negotiated two *mahar* agreements, first with Sher Khan and then with Moosha Balooch. The *Adelaide Advertiser*, citing Sher Khan's defence lawyers, reported that he 'was married according to Afghan rites to a girl in Adelaide. He had paid money to educate the girl, and they were betrothed.'³⁰ The prospective groom also paid monies to 'keep the girl's parents and family for some time.'³¹ Khan's counsel estimated that in total 'he paid about £200.' Given that Khan was working as a 'junior camel-train man,'³² this was quite an extraordinary sum of money at a time when labouring settler men of a new 'White Australia' earned less than £2 a week. It is likely that this money paid to Surwah Khan constituted a large portion of Sher Khan's earnings from the Beltana Pastoral Company, paid over a period of time since his arrival to the British Colony of South Australia in 1900. The press coverage however, perhaps echoing the framework of the 'eloquent appeal for clemency' made by Khan's lawyers, loses the way this transaction was no doubt extended over a longer stretch of space and time: the miles travelled, tonnage carted and extended talk that extracted this amount from the young *Kabuliwallah*. Instead the settler presses foregrounded the sensational magnitude of the amount. In collapsing these transactions into value in pounds, settler accounts erase the relationships of obligation, friendship, affect and negotiation between groom-to-be and his future father-in-law that the convention of *mahar* was embedded

³⁰ The *Adelaide Advertiser*, "Hergott Shooting Case. Sher Khan Found Guilty. Sentence Deferred," *The Advertiser*, 20 July 1904, 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Diary of John Gilbert Partridge, 1915 - 1922, Local History File B137, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection.

in. Existing Australian historiography on Muslim marriages has replicated this abstraction and has very little to say about the meaning of *mahar* for the people who negotiated these amounts.

Particularly after money began changing hands around 1902, Sher Khan must have kept a keen eye out for glimpses of Adelaide each time he passed through Marree, perhaps with additional instalments for Surwah Khan each time. Adelaide was Surwah Khan's only daughter and he must have guarded her movements very closely indeed. Within the context of this gendered ebb and flow of cameleer labour through Marree railhead, jealousies and violence erupted at times. Mobility underpinned the livelihood of the cameleers. The routes that colonial commodities travelled underpinned the geography of relations they formed with the women and girls whose lives became intimately and economically entangled with theirs.

Archival records suggest that while husbands, fathers and grooms-to-be were on the camel-track, illicit intimacies sometimes developed 'ghantowns.'³³ The railway shooting at Marree that evening can be understood as one of the outbursts of jealousy, violence and scandal that broke out according to the rhythms of the arrival and departure of trains to meet camel strings.³⁴ Interconnected to railway and shipping networks, theirs was a world where gossip and rumours travelled furiously fast and could have deadly consequences. Hawker Rahim Bukhush's testimony in Port

³³ Some other incidents of cameleer 'jealousies' are recorded in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/2 Correspondence files ('PCO' files) - Police Commissioner's Office, Complaint by Adam Khan of Hergott Springs against M. C. EcEwen for Alleged Ill-Treatment of Afghans, Box 103, File no. 258 of 1911; State Records NSW: Police Department, Broken Hill Gaol: NRS 2057; Gaol Photographic Description Books, 1904 - 1929; [3/6018] Microfilm reel no. 5095.

³⁴ In 1907, Said Mahomet murdered Haaji Khan apparently for having relations with his white wife. A few years later, Mounted Constable McEwan wrote to Police Inspector Clode that '[Adam Khan] all the time try to make the Afghan jealous. He tell him other man speak to Afghan's wife when he away with the camels. He make the Afghan Hadji Khan jealous of Said Mahomet. Then Hadji shoot Said, and he be hanged.' State Records of South Australia GRG 5/46 Criminal Offence Report (homicides), Murder, Box 2, File no. 2744 of 1909; And SRSA GRG 5/2/103/1911/258.

Augusta Circuit Court included snippets of a conversation with Sher Khan and reveals the role that gossip played in the shooting at Marree. Bukhush and Khan were on a train in Adelaide to Morphettville Racecourse. Just past Goodwood Station, Khan lamented that 'All my friends give me the shame calling me all sorts of names ...through this girl.'³⁵ Khan asked for advice on what to do and Bukhush replied 'well I can't do anything about this as they are your country people and you know them better than I do.'³⁶ Bukhush was Punjabi and his advice to his *Kabuliwallah* gambling partner was informed by the recognition that it was not his place to meddle in Afghani matters. Fluent in spoken English, with written literacy in Urdu and spoken proficiency in other Indo-Aryan languages,³⁷ Bukhush was a man with some power and influence amongst the Muslim fraternity in Australia. In this matter however, he conceded 'Well I don't know I can't say anything.'³⁸

Sher Khan agreed that Bukhush had best keep out of the matter, but lamented that '...they won't stop it for me.'³⁹ Khan concluded 'Moosha will have to shoot me or I will shoot Moosha.'⁴⁰ Bukhush relayed to Port Augusta Circuit Court that he warned Khan that 'one of you will get hung then.'⁴¹ Sher Khan was not to be deterred by his sage counsel. Weighing up the prospect of continued taunts from his countrymen against the possibility that he could be sentenced to 'six months or twelve months' in

³⁵ 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSA.

³⁶ 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in Ibid.

³⁷ Bukhush signed his witness deposition in Urdu and in 1907 was called upon as a court interpreter for Bengali lascar Abdulla in the stabbing case on the *S.S. Kish*. 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in Ibid. State Records of South Australia GRG 5/46 Criminal Offence Report (homicides), Willfull Murder, Box 1, File no. 2430 of 1907.

³⁸ 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSA

³⁹ 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in Ibid.

⁴⁰ 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in Ibid.

⁴¹ 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in Ibid.

prison Khan resolved 'I can manage that.'⁴² The act of pulling the trigger repeatedly on the man who robbed him of the pleasure of consummating one of the largest economic transactions he had made in his life might have been far less calculated in reality. Bukhush may have fabricated this account. Perhaps he was pushing his own agenda in accordance with his own alliances in the cameleer community. Regardless of its veracity, Bukhush's testimony gestures towards the role that gossip and talk could play in this milieu of itinerant workers and merchants.⁴³ Talk starting at the site of the *mahar* negotiated between Surwah Khan and Moosha Baloochi spread outwards through the Muslim community, circulating most dangerously amongst Sher Khan's countrymen. The conversation that passed between Sher Khan and Rahim Bukhush on that train, likewise travelled fast and far; news that Sher Khan was coming to get him had already reached Moosha's ears by the time the two men met at the railway turnstile.⁴⁴ The sting of economic loss no doubt mingled with the passions of Khan's wronged heart as he made the decision to board the train to Marree with his revolver. However, Bukhush's testimony suggests that it was the humiliation he was subjected to by the gossip and taunts of his 'countrymen' that ultimately prompted him pull the trigger. It was a calculated attempt at murder embedded within a complex of fraternal relationships at a meeting point of camels and trains.

A few months prior to the shooting, while Sher Khan was on the road carting for the Beltana Pastoral Company during long, summer days across the desert, Surwah Khan had negotiated the second marriage agreement with Moosha Balooch in

⁴² 'Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide' in *Ibid*.

⁴³ For the role of gossip in settler society in the Australian region see Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies: Sydney & Cape Town, 1820 - 1850* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction: Colonial Gentility and Femininity* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ 'Deposition of Witness' by Moosha Baloochi, Camel Owner (Afghan) in *King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904*, SCSA.

Marree. By 1904 Moosha owned hundreds of camels and extensive property both in Baluchistan and South Australia. If Sher Khan had not returned to Marree with his revolver, Adelaide's marriage to Moosha might have proved an opportune lifelong alliance for Surwah Khan: a familial and economic relationship that would secure his prosperity in the tumultuous decades to come. As it turned out, in 1906 the dissatisfied father of the bride wrote a letter of complaint to the Police Commissioner of South Australia detailing that 'when Mussa engaged with my girl... He promised me two hundred pound as a present.'⁴⁵ He claimed that Moosha had not paid his dues. A close reading of the evidence that historians have gathered about 'bride-price' reveals an important and significant ambiguity about whether monies were ever actually paid or just 'promised.' In 1917, when Morbine Perooz agreed to the more modest *mahar* amount of £10, he entered into an obligation to 'pay to the said Myrtle Mary Dee *on demand* at any time now and hereafter.'⁴⁶ Whether Myrtle Mary actually ever demanded this money, whether Perooz subsequently made the payment and if so whether it was Myrtle Mary or her parents who pocketed the money, are details that remain elusive.

These ambiguities surrounding the realisation of *mahar* 'promises' into tangible forms are to some extent inherent in the rules of marriage articulated in Islamic texts. For example the Quran instructs Muslim men to 'give women their bridal gift upon marriage, though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience.'⁴⁷ Historian Zinat Kausar's analysis of *mahar* in Mughal India illuminates its role as a lifelong obligation. She writes that 'like an on

⁴⁵ Letter from Surwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/202.

⁴⁶ My emphasis, Alan Barton Collection, Bourke Public Library.

⁴⁷ (4: 4) *The Qur'an [A new Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem]*, Oxford World Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50; For discussion of Q (4:4) see 'Women and the Qu'ran' in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Encyclopaedia of the Qur' ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur' ān* (Georgetown University: Brill Online, 2010).

demand obligation it remained due at all times, the wife's right ...not being extinguished by lapse of time.'⁴⁸ Reinterpreting the cash transactions proposed in Australian historiography by considering the possibility that *mahar* amounts may not actually ever have changed hands substantially changes the meaning of the amounts. Historian Pamela Rajkowski has written that Sa'yid Sideek Balooch of Marree arranged the marriage for his daughter Aleema to 'old Guzzie Balooch' for £250.⁴⁹ Did this money actually ever change hands between the groom and the ageing father of the bride? Was it a cash transaction that Sa'yid Sideek Balooch entered into with Guzzie Balooch via the *mahar* or was it a longer relationship of familial obligation and perhaps financial dependence? In Rajkowski's account, 'old Mudgeed' agreed on a *mahar* of £350 to marry Sa'yid Sideek Balooch's youngest daughter Rozanna when her father was ageing and not well enough to make a substantial income for himself.⁵⁰ Did the Muslim fraternity understand this payment as a mark of respect for the bride and his lifelong commitment to her? Or perhaps more importantly was it understood as a sign of respect and recognition of the status of her ageing father? Did the Aboriginal, English and mixed-descent wives of 'Ghantown' and their daughters understand the meaning of these payments differently to the Muslim cameleers?

The contested, multiple meanings of each of these agreements, some accompanied by material exchanges and some not, emerged in gendered gossip, speculation and talk along the camel track and by the mixed populations who inhabited 'ghantowns.' The various meanings these payments took on to onlookers from different parts of the Marree township were worked out in talk and gossip. After the agreement of £200 was reached between Surwah Khan and Moosha Balooch, we

⁴⁸ Kausar, "System of Maher (Dower) and its Importance in Muslim Marriages During the Mughal Age (1526 - 1707)," 65.

⁴⁹ Rajkowski, *In the Tracks of the Camelmen: Outback Australia's Most Exotic Pioneers*, 175 - 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

know that Sher Khan's countrymen taunted him with various names as they speculated on and propagated the sensitive details of *mahar* talks around Adelaide's marriage. This gossip, and the violence to which it occasionally lead, were grafted onto the inherent ambiguities of Muslim marriage payments, exacerbated by the translation of this convention to a part of the 'Indian Archipelago' where the *mahar* was being invented anew and thus up for grabs.

As Indian Ocean travellers translated *mahar* into an Australian context, so too settlers produced their own translations of how Muslim marriages functioned. The abundance of settler and Aboriginal recollections that 'Afghans bought and sold their wives'⁵¹ reveals that the sums negotiated according to the convention of *mahar* enjoyed astonishing currency and circulation in settler gossip and talk. These accounts of the commerce in women by cameleers tapped into a number of settler anxieties sweeping the Anglo-American world in the first few decades of the 20th century. Against the rise of a new settler discourse on childhood, in particular white Australian girlhood, the young ages of the women that cameleers married received severe criticism.⁵² In 1909, an Australian man was onboard the steamship *Oratana* on his way back to Naghpur Railway in Bengal where he was stationed, when he encountered a young white girl, Leontene Adell Hocking. From India he wrote home to a Melbourne newspaper claiming that Leontene's step-father Noab Khan had abducted her with plans to procure money for her.⁵³ In 1913, police in South Australia

⁵¹ Pamela Rajkowski quoting George Farwell from *Land of Mirage* in *ibid.*, 23.

⁵² For discourses on Australian girlhood see the collection Melissa Bellanta, ed. *The Girl in Australian History (Special Issue of Journal of Australian Studies)*, 34, 4 (2010); For a study of Australian girlhood in the 1950s see Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993).

⁵³ He wrote 'When she grows to be a woman she will be brought in contact with natives of high caste and with plenty of money. The rest is understood...' in newspaper article 'A Mysterious Affair. White Girl Abducted by an Afghan,' in *Sunday Times* (Melbourne) 20 September 1909, Newspaper Clipping in National Archives of Australia: Department of External Affairs, AI Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1 Jan 1890 - 31 Dec 1969, 1911/8557 Case of alleged abduction of a White

conducted a lengthy investigation into the purported 'white slave traffic' of white women by 'Afghans' amongst others.⁵⁴ The *Adelaide Advertiser* at times published sensational articles warning white women not to enter into intimacies with Muslim cameleers and traders. 'Such marriages are contracted by husbands merely as a business transaction' warned a telegram published in the *Advertiser*. 'Women are induced to marry and accompany them back across the north-western frontier of India, where they are promptly sold to the highest bidder.'⁵⁵ Meanwhile, feminist movements connecting bourgeois white women across the British Empire were campaigning for an end to child marriage and polygamy in both India and Australia.⁵⁶ It was within this context that the talk surrounding *mahar* negotiations seeped out of 'ghantowns' and entered into wider circulation in frontier colonial Australia.

The brief glimpse of the Muslim men's gossip that taunted Sher Khan suggests that the details of *mahar* negotiations were highly sensitive information circulating amongst cameleers. The wider context of settler hysteria about the purchase and sale of women by Muslim cameleers and traders must have ensured that *mahar* came to be guarded carefully by the inhabitants of 'ghantown,' and perhaps even became a site of

Child, by Noab Khan, 1909 - 1925. This case has been examined in greater detail in Margaret Allen, "Betraying the White Nation: The Case of Lillie Khan," (Paper Presented at the Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity, Melbourne University, 2006); Margaret Allen, "'A Fine Type of Hindoo' Meets 'the Australian type': British Indians in Australia and Diverse Masculinities," in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008).

⁵⁴ State Records of South Australia GRG 5/2 Correspondence files ('PCO' files) - Police Commissioner's Office, "The White Slave Traffic," Box 106, File no. 395 of 1913.

⁵⁵ "Lying Afghans. Horrible Fate of Women Who Marry Them. Sold in Slavery. Some Startling Revelations," *The Advertiser*, 20 March 1913, 10.

⁵⁶ For feminists campaigning against polygamy in early 20th century Australia context see Alison Holland, "Whatever her race, a woman is not a chattel," in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*, eds. Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisely (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005). More broadly on the relationships between British feminists and Indian women see Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865 - 1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); On 'White Slavery' discourse in settler society in Australia and New Zealand see Jeannette Delamoir, "'It Pulsates With Dramatic Power': White Slavery, Popular Culture and Modernity in Australia in 1913," *JAS, Australia's Public Intellectual Forum* 82 (2004); Bronwyn Dalley, "'Fresh Attractions': White Slavery and Feminism in New Zealand, 1885 - 1918," *Women's History Review* 9, 3 (2000).

shame for wives and daughters who did not understand the convention but were nevertheless part of the negotiations. One white woman married to a cameleer responded to the 'White Slavery' allegations under the pseudonym 'Dusky.' The *Advertiser* warned white women considering marrying an 'Asiatic' that "When her attractions wane she becomes a household slave." 'Dusky' responded with 'Um! What else is the average working man's wife out here long before her attractions wane? She not infrequently lives for someone else at the washtub.'⁵⁷

While settler recollections and scholarly accounts have presented 'bride-price' at 'ghantowns' as confirmation that Muslim cameleers accorded women lower status in society, ironically it was the sites along the camel-track where *mahar* arrangements were *not* negotiated where women were left most economically vulnerable as a result of their intimacies with Muslim cameleers. These merchants and workers certainly did not enter into *mahar* negotiations at all sites of sexual intimacy. There is voluminous evidence that cameleers between destinations at times engaged in chance intimate encounters with women outside the conventions of marriage and *mahar*. At Alberrie Creek, when those cameleers held the two frightened Arabunna girls in their gaze, it seems likely that it was not their intent to engage with them within the convention of *mahar*. However as we saw in the last chapter Arabunna people told these stories in order to warn girls about men who would buy and sell them. Did the story of cameleers eating girls in fact circulate because Aboriginal girls and women came to be embroiled in *mahar* negotiations? What is clear, as also suggested by the marriage dispute data collated by historians is that *mahar* appears to have been

⁵⁷ Dusky [Pseudonym], "Letter to the Editor: Afghans and White Wives," *The Advertiser*, 25 March 1913, 12. The reference to the 'washtub' makes it likely that this letter was written by 'Bibi Zatoum,' also known as 'Winifred Stegar,' a white woman married to cameleer Karum Bux from Punjab. For more details on Stegar see Hilarie Lindsay, *The Washerwoman's Dream: The Extraordinary Life of Winifred Steger* (Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

negotiated only at privileged nodes along the camel tracks: the 'ghantowns' which were hubs of Muslim fraternity.

There is evidence to suggest that many Muslim men in the Australian colonies on the other hand did abide by the conventions of *mahar* when they entered into relationships with Aboriginal women.⁵⁸ Rosie, an Aboriginal woman living in Oodnadatta, married a Muslim cameleer while the industry was thriving. In the 1930s, missionary historian V. E. Turner wrote that 'after twelve years he told her that he was going back to his own country, and that as she had been a good wife to him he would pay her for her faithfulness. He handed her a cheque, telling her not to cash it for three days.'⁵⁹ This account was part of Turner's argument that missionary institutions were needed to provide for 'deserted' Aboriginal women and children. What Turner interpreted as a payment for fidelity may be better understood as the completion of a *mahar* obligation. The cheque bounced, leaving Rosie destitute. Nevertheless, the manner in which her departing husband paid lip service to his financial obligation confirms that some Muslim men entered relationships with Aboriginal women within the framework of *mahar* obligations.

While the transnational circulation of these workers and merchants at times left women like Rosie destitute, many first wives left in British India and Afghanistan were similarly left without their marriage dues by the 'circular migration' of Muslim men across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Cameleer Abdul Kader Mucher owned

⁵⁸ Pamela Rajkowski recalled that when Jack Ackbar married Aboriginal woman Lally, he approached her family to commence marriage negotiations. (Personal Comm.) For details on Jack and Lally Ackbar see P. Rajkowski, *'Linden Girl': A Story of Outlawed Lives* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1995).

⁵⁹ V. E. Turner, *Pearls from the Deep: The Story of Colebrook Home for Aboriginal Children*, Quorn, South Australia, 2nd ed. (Adelaide: United Aborigines' Mission, 1936), 7.

‘approximately 30 head of camels and saddles’⁶⁰ and died on 4 October 1924 in Oodnadatta. Noorbibi, his wife in Karachi, engaged a legal team to track down Mucher’s estate in South Australia.⁶¹ She learnt that Kader’s possessions were valued at £220 and a few days prior to his death he made a will naming his partner in the carrying business, Hadji Akhtar Mahomet, as the ‘sole beneficiary’ of his estate.⁶² The Police Commissioner of South Australia informed Noorbibi that ‘Hadji Akhtar Mahomet is at present on the road with loading for Newcastle Waters and is not expected back in Oodnadatta for two or three months.’⁶³ It is tempting to speculate on whether it was Mucher or his business partner Mahomet who cheated Noorbibi of her dues – more likely to be inheritance dues than a *mahar* amount. However, it is far more illuminating to focus on the relations between these men - the foundational unit of the Muslim fraternity – in order to understand the recurring failure of marriage conventions to benefit wives, both in Australian deserts and British India.

Thus I will now return to Surwah Khan’s letter of complaint to the South Australian Police Commissioner detailing one such fraternal relationship gone wrong, in search of insight into the role that *mahar* played in the relations that arose around the camel industry. Khan’s incensed letter reveals that the ‘promised’ *mahar* of £200 was accompanied by a guarantee of ongoing employment not as a labouring cameleer but as a manager of Moosha’s extensive property and camels. Khan wrote that ‘the first time [Moosha] engaged with my girl he promised to give me two pounds a week

⁶⁰ Letter from Mounted Constable Virgo to Inspector Giles, 9th July 1925 in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/2 Correspondence files ('PCO' files) - Police Commissioner's Office, "Hiranand & Santdas - Kader Mucher - Whereabouts of", Box 145, File no. 1148 of 1925.

⁶¹ Letter from Hiranand and Santadas (Karachi) to Superintendent of Police (South Australia), 4 June 1925, in *Ibid.*

⁶² Letter from Commissioner of Police (Adelaide) to Messrs. Hiranand and Santadas (Karachi), 22 July 1925, in *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

to manage everything for him.’⁶⁴ It was an arrangement that could have provided Surwah Khan with a weekly income better than most men doing camel-carting work and even most labouring settler men of the day. The year that Surwah Khan and Moosha Baloochi negotiated this marriage agreement, the new Commonwealth Government established the Conciliation and Arbitration Court to resolve disagreements between workers and employers. It was another three years before the Harvester Judgement (1907) determined in this new court made it Australian law that the ‘basic family wage’ of £2 per week was to be paid to white male workers across all industries.⁶⁵ In 1904, using his daughter as a bargaining tool at the time of *mahar* ‘talk,’ Surwah Khan negotiated a similar wage with the wealthy Moosha Baloochi for a petty managerial position. During the first decades of the 20th century, state apparatus emerged to arbitrate between class interests of citizens of ‘White Australia.’ Muslim merchants and workers living in the same towns as settlers, but better understood within the geography of the ‘Indian Archipelago,’ relied instead on conventions of negotiation between families such as *mahar*.

That marriage could be one means of securing not only employment but also a favourable change in status is of course not peculiar to Muslim cameleers, nor to the Australian colonial frontier. The broader agreement that Surwah Khan claimed he negotiated with Moosha Baloochi reveals that amounts of money were just one of a number of obligations entered into by prospective grooms. Labour, assets such as shops and camels, and even debt could be part of *mahar* negotiations. Particularly in the 1930s as the camel industry was swiftly replaced by motor transport, some Muslim men used the convention of *mahar* to cushion themselves and their families

⁶⁴ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/202.

⁶⁵ Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia: Volume 4, 1901-1942*, 5 vols. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 103 - 4.

from the devastating effects of the economic depression. By the 1930s, Gool Mohammed from Kabul, one of the witnesses of the *mahar* contract between Morbine Perooz and Mary Myrtle Dee, was no longer in the camel-carrying business. He was a contractor in fencing and well-sinking and leased Mulgaria sheep station to the west of Farina in 1935.⁶⁶ Journalist Ernestine Hill described him as 'a wise man and leader of the Afghans.'⁶⁷ Hill wrote that 'the eldest daughter is betrothed to a handsome young Afghan half-caste who will work for the father for two years to win her, as Jacob worked for Rachel.'⁶⁸ At a time when the circulation of commodities and hence money was at a crisis point, and the Muslim fraternity particularly vulnerable, *Mahar* agreements such as these held more at stake than ever before as they were often the only mechanisms standing between self and penury.

In the Broken Hill 'ghantown' Shamrose Khan and Zaidulla Fazulla were cameleers who developed a complex multilayered relationship over many days and miles traversed together. Side by side they had worked the deserts and the oceans across the 'Indian Archipelago' since the 1890s and prayed next to each other in many a mosque as part of a mobile Muslim brotherhood. In 1933 however Zaidulla Fazulla was in serious financial trouble. He wrote to his nephews in Karachi that 'things are very bad in this country, no work and no money.'⁶⁹ Unable to secure any carting work, he could not pay for the camels Shamrose had sold him on credit and fell into debt. Shortly afterwards he penned his letter to Karachi, Zaidulla agreed on the marriage between his fifteen year old daughter Miriam Khan and his creditor

⁶⁶ Jones and Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland. 1860s - 1930s*, 174.

⁶⁷ Ernestine Hill quoted in Rob Olston, *Farina: From Gibbers to Ghost Town* (Ballarat: Bundinyabba Publications, 2007), 53 - 55.

⁶⁸ Ernestine Hill quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Letter from Zaidulla Fazulla (Broken Hill) to Nephews Feroze Din and Sarwar Din (Karachi), 1 May 1933 in Shamrose Family Papers, Broken Hill.

Shamrose Khan.⁷⁰ The groom most kindly cancelled the debt as part of the *mahar* negotiations. As Sugata Bose has written, South Asian intermediary capitalists travelling the Indian Ocean world were 'utterly indispensable to the working of global colonial capitalism and yet acutely vulnerable to its periodic downturn.'⁷¹ Miriam Khan's transformation to Miriam Zaidulla can be understood as one outcome of this vulnerability. This agreement between Shamrose Khan and Zaidulla Fazulla reveals the multilayered relationships that cameleers formed with each other. Rarely engaging with settler institutions such as banks - private or government - they were each other's debtors and creditors, family, employers, employees along the camel-track. *Mahar* agreements signalled yet another chapter in the affective and economic relationships between these men.⁷²

Back in Marree, two years after Moosha's marriage to Adelaide, these complex relations had significantly soured between father and son-in-law, employee and employer, patriarchs of their respective extended families that spanned the 'Indian Archipelago.' Khan claimed that Moosha's brother '...put my wages for two years in a book. He steal book from me and then trick me out.'⁷³ Surwah Khan alleged that not only did the Balooch family refuse to hand over the agreed *mahar* and withhold his wages, but also that '[Moosha's] brother afterwards broke my house and took my wife away to India. And made a separation between my wife and me. My

⁷⁰ Personal Communication with Janet and Bobby (Aminullah) Khan in Broken Hill and Lil Khan in Adelaide, June 2009.

⁷¹ Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 78.

⁷² On the financial institutions of Indian Ocean merchants see Rajat Kanta Ray, "The Bazaar: Indigenous Sector," in *Business Communities of India: A Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1984); Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800 - 1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995); Lakshmi Subramanian, "Merchants in Transit: Risk-Sharing Strategies in the Indian Ocean Region," in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, eds. Himnashu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lakshmi Subramanian, "Commerce, Circulation and Consumption: Indian Ocean Communities in Historical Perspective," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*, eds. Shanty Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

⁷³ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/202.

three boys were left behind.’⁷⁴ Whether or not Ellen Khan really did abscond to India with Moosha’s ‘brother,’ it is clear that this was a bitter feud between two families, which unfolded over a number of years. Both Surwah Khan and Moosha, with varying degrees of success appealed to settler laws in search of retribution.⁷⁵ Khan complained to the Police Commissioner in Adelaide that ‘I have been to the police up here but they are all friends of Moosa and they will not take action against him... I think everybody take the rich mans part and not the poor man.’⁷⁶

Feminist historian Srimati Basu has written that ‘status asymmetry’ between families was at the very heart of the logic of marriage conventions such as *mahar*.⁷⁷ By 1906, Moosha Balooch owned 300 camels and Surwah Khan by his own account was a ‘poor man’ who had been robbed his dues. The hierarchy in wealth between the estate of Adelaide’s father and husband saw the *mahar* amount that had been negotiated and consequently breached become a conduit for continuing extortionate demands between the men party to the original negotiation. Surwah Khan wrote to the Police Commissioner ‘I want to pull him for two thousand pounds for damages.’⁷⁸

From the beginning of the marriage negotiations with Sher Khan around 1902 till his attempt to extort money from Moosha Balooch in 1906, we can observe Surwah Khan exploiting every ambiguity inherent in Muslim marriage conventions and ambiguities created at the intersection of different marriage conventions. He interpreted *mahar* as an obligation the groom owed to the father of the bride, rather than the bride. He demanded from Moosha that the promised ‘present’ be realised in

⁷⁴ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in Ibid.

⁷⁵ On 19 September 1904, between 1am & 2am someone shot at Surwah Khan’s house while he was asleep. Detailed in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/46 Criminal Offence Report (homicides), Shooting with Intent to Murder, Box 1, File no. 2045 of 1904.

⁷⁶ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/202.

⁷⁷ Basu, ed. *Dowry and Inheritance*, xiv.

⁷⁸ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in SRSA GRG 5/2/99/1906/202.

cash form. In framing his demands to the police Surwah Khan tried to mobilise ambiguities between what he called 'Afghan law' and 'English law.' His correspondence to the police appealed to 'Afghan law' in requesting help to extract the promised £200. Khan wrote 'According to English law you want no money but Afghan law you do.'⁷⁹ Simultaneously he appealed to 'English law' in urging the police to 'take some action against [Moosha] for interfering with her under the age of consent.'⁸⁰ When settler police refused to prosecute Moosha, Surwah Khan appealed 'you must look out for rich as well as poor in these days according to Afghan law.'⁸¹ Over the course of a long drawn out family feud that continued for decades, bickering Indian Ocean travellers used fissures created at places of encounter to negotiate fraternity along the camel tracks.

As Engseng Ho has written, Indian Ocean travellers wandered seas and deserts in quite a different manner to their European counterparts. Ho points out that one of the crucial differences was that 'their enterprises overseas were not backed by an equally mobile, armed state.'⁸² In this chapter, piecing together some mechanics of Muslim marriage conventions I have sketched an alternative institution that shaped South Asian travellers' engagements with their countrymen and local women. Consistent with Khawaja Mohammad Bux's inability to translate the concept of *purdah* in a settler court of law in chapter 2, conventions shaping gender relations emerge as a sites across the 'Indian Archipelago' where people observing the same events produced radically divergent meanings. Thus the methodologies of feminist

⁷⁹ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in Ibid.

⁸⁰ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in Ibid.

⁸¹ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in Ibid.

⁸² Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2006), xxi.

political economy are powerful, indispensable tools in the project of describing and theorising translation across the 'Indian Archipelago.'

When Sher Khan approached Moosha Baloochi at the railway siding on 24 June 1904, he had his hand outstretched. Moosha already knew that Khan was coming and tried to shake Khan's hand in a gesture of fraternal solidarity. The jibes and taunts of his countrymen had followed the *Kabuliwallah* along the camel track, however, and as he pulled the trigger he yelled at Moosha 'I'll kill you, I can't leave you alive.'

⁸³ While settler presses declared that 'it was all because of an Afghan maiden,' I have instead interpreted Khan's act of violence as embedded in a complex world of fraternal gossip, taunts, jibes and affective and economic interdependencies between men that seeped out of 'ghantown' and into circulation through the networks that converged on the railhead. In the next chapter I turn my attention to Aboriginal language accounts of the shooting.

⁸³ 'Deposition of Witness' by Moosha Balooch, Camel Owner (Afghan) in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSA.



Chapter Seven

In Pursuit of Sher Khan

After firing five shots at Marree railway siding, Sher Khan vanished into the inky shadows cast by the moon, leaving Moosha Balooch in a pool of blood. Only a few weeks earlier, sitting on a train from Adelaide to Morphettville racecourse, Khan had plotted his revenge on Moosha. Weighing up the possible consequences of settler law with a friend Khan reasoned ‘they will have a job to find me though’¹ and made the firm decision to shoot. True to Khan’s prediction, Constable Ireland, the police officer at Marree, ‘could get no trace of him that night.’² Disguised in his European felt hat and coat he slunk past ‘ghantown’ to the east of the railway line. The moon illuminated a path of escape and Khan attempted to obscure his footprints as he proceeded. Ireland testified in Port Augusta Circuit Court later that ‘at day light next morning as soon as it was light enough to track I took Charley the tracker to the back of the Railway station.’³ By the railway turnstile there were visible marks in the earth of the struggle after which Sher Khan disappeared from settler view. From the turnstile, soon picking up a ‘persons track running away in an easterly direction,’⁴ Charley began his pursuit of Khan across the desert.

¹ Rahim Bukhush citing Sher Khan in ‘Deposition of Witness by Rahim Bukhush, Hawker of Adelaide’ in Case File: ‘The King Against Sher Khan, Circuit Court of Port Augusta’, July 1904 no. 5, Archived Files of the Supreme Court of South Australia, Criminal Jurisdiction.

² ‘Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland’ in Ibid.

³ ‘Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland’ in Ibid.

⁴ ‘Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland’ in Ibid.

At the time of the shooting Ben Murray was about eleven years old and living with his brothers, sisters and mother at Frome Creek.⁵ 'The Frome' as it was locally known, was on the outskirts of Marree, to the east of 'ghantown.' It was a convergence place for many Aboriginal people from around Lake Eyre working in a number of industries or travelling through Marree. Over six decades after Khan fled from the railhead in 1904, Murray recounted the incident to linguists in Wangkangurru and Dhirarri confirming that accounts of the Muslim marriage dispute enjoyed circulation in Aboriginal languages at the Frome just as it spread through 'ghantown' gossip to the east and settler talk to the west of the railway line.

All three communities clustered around the railhead were in agreement that £200 was the amount of the transaction between Moosha Balooch and Surwah Khan. The father of Adelaide bitterly complained that Moosa had 'promised' him £200 as a 'present' and J. G Partridge wrote in his diary that 'Moosha ...bought her for 200 from the treacherous parents.'⁶ In Dhirarri, Ben Murray likewise recounted that 'Moosha he gave £200. Old man Sarrawa said 'you have her now.'⁷ In his Wangkangurru account Ben expressed in English that 'Moosa, been buy'm for £200...'⁸ Indeed, these numeral amounts are the only consistent threads running through the various language accounts of the incident that were repeated for decades. However, as we saw in the last chapter such amounts are most meaningfully

⁵ For biographical details about Ben Murray, see Peter Austin, Luise Hercus and Philip Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 128.

⁶ Letter from Suwah Khan to the Commissioner of Police, 8/4/06, in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/2 Correspondence files ('PCO' files) - Police Commissioner's Office, Letter from Surwah Khan to Police Commissioner, Box 99, File no. 202 of 1906; 'Pages 184 - 185' in Diary of John Gilbert Partridge, 1915 - 1922, Local History File B137, Port Augusta Public Library Local History Collection.

⁷ Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 154: Lines 3 - 4.

⁸ Luise A. Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," *Aboriginal History* 5, 1 (1981): 51: Line 5.

interpreted by careful examination of the conventions that they were embedded in. *Mahar* was not the framework through which settlers understood the shooting. Nor was *mahar* the convention through which Aboriginal people made meaning of the violence at the railway station. Rather in Murray's stories, the disputed '£200' came to be embedded inside another complex convention: an Aboriginal tracking narrative.

In addition to Ben Murray's recollections, published by linguists Hercus and Austin and historian Phillip Jones, my research has uncovered a witness statement made at Port Augusta Circuit Court by Charley, the Lower Southern Arrernte man whom police engaged to track Khan. It is an account that has not been examined by scholars. In his Wangkangurru account, Ben Murray identified the tracker as 'Jackie Nyalbili,' a Wangkangurru man from the Simpson Desert.⁹ In his Dhirarri account of Khan's escape, Murray left the identity of the tracker unspecified. In an even later English retelling of the incident to Jones, Murray identified the tracker as Mick McLean.¹⁰ The settler press coverage of the shooting and the subsequent court proceedings offer no additional information about the man who tracked Sher Khan, making occasional references to him as 'black tracker.'¹¹ Charley's testimony, penned by the court transcriber on 22 June 1904, reveals that he stated 'I belong to Charlotte

⁹ *Ibid.*: 50: Line 9.

¹⁰ Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 145: Footnote 53.

¹¹ The police reports of the incident refer to the tracker simply as 'tracker' in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/46 Criminal Offence Report (Homicides), Shooting with Intent to Commit Murder, Box 1, Item 1364 of 1904; These settler press reports of the incident do not mention the tracker: "An Afghan Shot. Injuries Very Serious. Assailant at Large," *Adelaide Register*, 25 May 1904, 5; "Hergott Shooting Case," *Adelaide Register*, 23 June 1904, 4; "The Hergott Shooting Case," *The Advertiser*, 24 June 1904, 8; "Hergott Shooting Case. Latest Particulars," *The Advertiser*, 27 May 1904, 6; "Hergott Shooting Case. Sher Khan Found Guilty. Sentence Deferred," *The Advertiser*, 20 July 1904, 5; "Was it Marriage or Betrothal?," 26 February 1904, 4 – 5; In a subsequent shooting incident that targeted Surwah Khan, the press reported that Constable Ireland investigated the matter with 'Black Tracker Leo.' Taking place five months after the shooting of Moosha Balooch, 'Leo' may of course have been another Aboriginal man working as a tracker in "All Because of an Afghan Maiden," *The Advertiser*, 29 September 1904, 4.

Waters tribe.’¹² This is a claim that neither Jacki Nyalbili nor Mick McLean would have ever made.¹³

Printed records from around the turn of the century reveal that ‘Charley’ or ‘Charlie’ was a very common English name both assigned to and adopted by many Aboriginal workers in the region stretching from Marree to Charlotte Waters. However reading the ‘paper panopticon’¹⁴ of settler bureaucracy does not reveal any additional biographical or genealogical data about a man named Charley from the Charlotte Waters area.¹⁵ Charley’s detailed court statement nevertheless offers extraordinary insight into how this Lower Southern Arremnte man produced a tracking narrative in a settler court of law and, read alongside Murray’s accounts, makes it possible to examine how Aboriginal accounts of the chase changed over time.

Starting with the same Muslim marriage dispute examined in the previous chapter, here I turn my attention to Aboriginal people’s tracking narratives in pursuit of Sher Khan in the aftermath of the shooting at Marree railway siding. Consistent with developments in the field of Aboriginal history, the ‘track’ has emerged from a

¹² ‘Deposition of Witness by Charley of Hergott, tracker’ in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSA.

¹³ Personal comm., Luise Hercus, 9 March 2010.

¹⁴ Penny Van Toorn, “Writing the Entrapped Nations of Indigenous Australia into Being,” in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700 - Present*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 49.

¹⁵ In the 1880s, Charlie Karnapittie was a police tracker from the Birdsville area. In 1901, Wood duck Charlie, working at Wood duck Station was the Wangkangurru man who guided geologist J. W. Gregory for part of his journey through what he called the ‘dead heart of Australia.’ In 1921, there was a Charley living and working at Todmorden Cattle Station near Oodnadatta. While a medical expedition described this Charley as belonging to ‘Arremnte tribe,’ people speaking Arrentic languages span a vast part of the central Australian desert. Combing the genealogies of Lower Arremnte people living at Charlotte Waters from data compiled in the 1996 Finke Land Claim, reveals no traces of anyone called Charley. Mick McLean Irinjili and Luise Hercus, “The End of the Mindjili People,” in *This is What Happened: Historical Narratives*, eds. Peter Sutton and L. A. Hercus (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971/1986), 187: Line 8; J. W. Gregory, *The Dead Heart of Australia: A Journey Around Lake Eyre in the Summer of 1901 - 1902, with Some Account of the Lake Eyre Basin and the Flowing Wells of Central Australia* (London: John Murray, 1909), 139; Wood-duck Charlie is also mentioned in L. A. Hercus, “Murkarra, a Landscape Nearly Forgotten: The Arabana Country of the Noxious Insects, North and Northwest of Lake Eyre,” in *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and Re-Naming the Australian Landscape* (Canberra: 2009), 261.

number of chapters of this thesis as a complex schema of mobility that shaped Aboriginal people's lives, livelihoods, mobility and cosmologies throughout the deserts I have been writing about.¹⁶ As camel tracks and railway lines emerged as arteries for the movement of commodities always in negotiation with the circuits of Aboriginal trade and mobility often articulated by Dreaming tracks, the police tracker emerged as an ambivalent figure who translated Aboriginal spatial knowledge for the purposes of settler law. Anthropologist and Aboriginal rights activist, Marcia Langton has pointed out that the tracker figure remains an elusive and even a disturbing figure, more readily dealt with in film than history.¹⁷ In this chapter, I pursue not the tracker but the track. First I examine Charley's production of a police tracking narrative in Port Augusta Circuit Court in 1904. Then I turn my attention to how the story changed over time by examining Ben Murray's account of pursuing Sher Khan in 1975. Following traces of a lost track through memory and archives, I draw to a close the project of translation across the 'Indian Archipelago.'

Tracking Sher Khan in 1904

Charley was from a locality that was quite some distance from Marree. Belonging to the 'Charlotte Waters tribe,' he was from a family living on the Finke River to the

¹⁶ For example see Hokari's discussion of the 'right way' in Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 118 - 35. Luise Hercus and Jeremy Beckett, *The Two Rainbow Serpents Travelling: Mura Track Narratives from the Corner Country*, Aboriginal history monographs, 18 (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2010); Deborah Bird Rose and Anne Clarke, eds., *Tracking Knowledge in North Australian Landscapes: Studies in Indigenous and Settler Ecological Knowledge Systems* (Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, 1997).

¹⁷ Langton has examined Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil's performance in the films *The Tracker*, *Rabbit Proof Fence* and *One Night the Moon* in Marcia Langton, "Out From the Shadows: The Development of the Aboriginal Tracker Figure in Australian Film," *Meanjin*, 65, 1 (2006): 55 - 64. The Aboriginal tracker is an enigmatic figure in Australian cultural history that a number of writers have examined. See for example see Fiona Probyn, "An Ethics of Following and the No Road Film: Trackers, Followers and Fanatics," *Australian Humanities Review*, 37 (2005); Kate Warren, "Repositioning The Tracker: Approaches to representation [online]," *Screen Education (St. Kilda, Vic.)* 63 (2011); Philip Jones, "A Tracker Comes Home: Dick Kubadji, a Tracker and Guide for Famous Australian Explorers of the Nineteenth Century," *Adelaide Review* 91 (1991); William B. McGregor, "Structural Analysis of the Police-Tracker Story Genre in Gooniyandi," *Oceania* 58, 4 (1988). Eric Rolls, "A Chant of Lost Water," *Australian Humanities Review*, 39 - 40 (2006).

north of Arabunna territory. Built in 1871, Charlotte Waters was the name of a repeater station on the overland telegraph line just north of the border of South Australia and the Northern Territory. A number of writers have examined the lines of connection that continued to connect Aboriginal people from Charlotte Waters to distant parts of the Australian region after the arrival of the Overland Telegraph.¹⁸ Charley's court statement contains a number of features of contact variety English spoken by Aboriginal people and discussed in chapter 4. This suggests that while English was not Charley's first language, he was one of the many people who acquired it through participation in pastoral or transport industries. Like many other Aboriginal people who gathered at Marree it is likely that he was engaged in camel-work, dingo-hunting or stock work when the shooting happened at the railway siding.

From sunrise till sundown on 25th May 1904, Charley deciphered and followed Sher Khan across 30 miles of desert, narrating parts of the escape to Ireland in English. He recounted in Port Augusta Circuit Court on 22 June 1904 'I pick'em up tracks back of railway station I follow them. I follow boot track little way then I see no boots on. Then em go without boots through a fence long camel paddock. Right round longa railway line. He put'em boot on there.'¹⁹ Khan's strategy for evading the gaze of settler law was to periodically remove his shoes and taking a circuitous route of escape. Charley narrated 'I follow up track long railway fence[.] There I see'em takem off boots again. Him go longa line I follow him longa line and him put on boots again. I follow him right along Farina.'²⁰ At the railway line where Sher Khan replaced his boots, Constable Ireland turned back towards Marree Police Station to

¹⁸ John Mulvaney, "'... These Aboriginal Lines of Travel,'" *Historic Environment* 16, 2 (2002): 6., Ingereth MacFarlane, "Entangled Places: Interactive Histories in the Western Simpson Desert, Central Australia" (Australian National University, 2010).

¹⁹ 'Deposition of Witness' by Charley, Aboriginal Police tracker in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSSA.

²⁰ 'Deposition of Witness' by Charley, Aboriginal Police tracker in Ibid.

avail himself to speedier means of communication. On reaching Marree he fetched his horse and sent a 'wire' to Farina Police Station requesting the assistance of additional police officers. Charley continued alone on foot after Ireland's departure. In Khan's tracks Charley soon reached a government dam at Farina that he was familiar with. He testified 'I know the dam at Farina. I go dam follow track along there tracks turn up other side dam Farina side... It was just about sundown. I follow track till dark.'²¹

In his escape through the desert, Sher Khan threaded together fences, boundaries of camel paddocks, the railway tracks and a dam, finally veering 'this way to township Farina.'²² In disguise the previous night, perhaps Khan was seeking to steer clear of the camel tracks that he knew so well. Over the day of pursuit, reading every move the cameleer made on his escape, literally walking Khan's footsteps, Charley's tracking narrative in court a month later went back and forth between the drama of Khan's escape and the drama of deciphering his tracks. Sequences like 'I follow up track long railway fence[.] There I see'em takem off boots again. Him go longa line I follow him longa line and him put on boots again'²³ wove the act of reading place with that of moving through place. Charley's court statement reveals that tracking embodied a schema of translation, not only from the marks left on the earth to story, but also between places.

Charley's court statement offers some glimpses of the larger circuitry of place knowledge that he was drawing upon when he tracked Khan. When Sher Khan's counsel, Mr Hardy, cross-examined Charley, more precise details of Charley's

²¹ 'Deposition of Witness' by Charley, Aboriginal Police tracker in Ibid.

²² 'Deposition of Witness' by Charley, Aboriginal Police tracker in Ibid.

²³ 'Deposition of Witness' by Charley, Aboriginal Police tracker in Ibid.

familiarity to the track of pursuit emerged. On first being questioned by Mr Hardy, Charley revealed 'I belong to Charlotte Waters tribe... I never tracked before for the police.'²⁴ On being prompted further, Charley returned to the dam at Farina that he had claimed he 'knew.' The questions Hardy posed are unclear but Charley answered 'at Farina plenty stones. Little people go longa Farina dam for water. Plenty travels longa dam. Plenty stones on railway line.'²⁵ Perhaps Hardy had enquired into how Charley knew the country around Farina even though it was quite some distance from Charlotte Waters. Regardless of the line of questioning, Charley's response reveals that he knew Farina dam as a source of water for Aboriginal people *en route* to an abundant source of 'stones' at Farina.

As writers in Aboriginal history have shown, stone, both as raw material and stone implements, supported a vast, interlocking Aboriginal trading network stretching from the Indian Ocean coast of the Kimberley and Carpentaria to the temperate southern coasts of the Australian mainland.²⁶ Limestone, sandstone and quartz were sought after media from which people fashioned various types of material technologies and everyday items. As archaeologist Isabel McBryde has shown, stone quarries were densely storied nodes in Aboriginal geographies.²⁷ His response that

²⁴ 'Deposition of Witness by Charley of Hergott, tracker' in *Ibid.*

²⁵ 'Deposition of Witness by Charley of Hergott, tracker' in *Ibid.*

²⁶ Isabel McBryde, "Goods From Another Country: Exchange Networks and the People of the Lake Eyre Basin," in *Australians to 1788*, eds. D. J. Mulvaney and J. P. White (Sydney: Weldon, Syme and Fairfax, 1987); Isabel McBryde, "Travellers in Storied Landscapes: A Case Study in Exchanges and Heritage," *Aboriginal History* 24 (2000); Tim Turpin, "The Social and Economic Significance of the Movement of Stone Edge Ground Hatchets in Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 7, 12 (1983); John Mulvaney, "The Chain of Connection: The Material Evidence," in *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, ed. Nicolas Peterson (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976); Mulvaney, "... These Aboriginal Lines of Travel"; Most recently the research of Dale Kerwin has drawn together a number of archaeological, ethnographic and Aboriginal oral sources on the trade in stone implements in Dale Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: The Colonisation of The Australian Economic Landscape* (Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

²⁷ Isabel McBryde, "'The Landscape is a Series of Stories': Grindstones, Quarries and Exchange in Aboriginal Australia: A Lake Eyre Case Study," in *Siliceous Rocks and Culture (6th International Flint Symposium 1991)*, eds. A. Ramos-Millan and A. Bustillo, *Monografica Arte Y Arquelogica* (Madrid: University of Granada, 1997), 594.

'plenty travels longa dam. Plenty stones on railway line' reveal that the tract of desert that Khan escaped through was familiar to Charley – whether it was through story, or through prior travel – because it was on a trade route. Charley's mention of stones reveals one spatial grid that this tracker used to orient himself in tracking Khan from Marree to Farina: Aboriginal stone trading networks.

As we saw in chapter 3, in travelling along long distance trade routes, Aboriginal people often tracked the motion of Dreaming creatures. We also saw that as a network of camels, ships and trains set Australian deserts awash with commodities, Aboriginal people also began tracking dingos, stray sheep, amongst other creatures, whilst Dreaming creatures began moving along railway tracks and their congealed blood was sometimes set in motion through camel networks.

Called to the witness box at Port August Circuit Court, Charley was asked to mobilise the embodied archive of Aboriginal spatial knowledge in support of Constable Ireland's prosecution of Khan and, more broadly, the operation of the settler legal system. However, in order to do this, he first had to render the chase into a form legible to the various people in attendance at court. In narrating the pursuit in English Charley had to convey tracking without drawing on the spatial resources available in Arrerntic languages or any other Aboriginal languages in which he had fluency. From linguistic research spatial relations emerge as a key site for losses and transformations in meaning in translation from spoken Arrerntic tales to English oral and written text.²⁸ In the 1980s linguist David Wilkins, in his research on Arrernte 'grammars of space' carried out work with Mparntwe people in Alice Springs, speakers of Eastern and Central Arrernte. Wilkins points that people telling travel

²⁸ David P. Wilkins, "The Concept of Place Amongst the Arrernte," in *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous Origin in Australia*, eds. L. A. Hercus, Flavia Hodges and Jane Helen Simpson (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2002).

stories in Arrerntic languages heavily use the cardinal points ‘*ayerrere, ikngerre, antekerre, alturle,*’ comparable to English north, east, south and west.²⁹ While Arrerntic cardinal points do have comparable English translations, in Wilkins’ account they are part of a larger set of Arrerntic spatial resources, many of which do not have easy English equivalents.

Unable to place his story using the spatial resources available to him in Aboriginal languages, Charley’s English narrative in court relied heavily on the English prepositions ‘this,’ ‘there,’ ‘long’ and recurrently ‘longa’ to locate places and describe motion. As linguists have suggested, Aboriginal people’s appropriations of English prepositions are one of the most distinct features of contact varieties of English and conflate various subtleties and dimensions of spatial information that can be expressed in Aboriginal languages.³⁰ Storytelling was rarely a matter of using words alone and phrases like ‘follow track *long there*’ and ‘tracks go *this way* to township Farina’³¹ suggest that Charley used a range of hand gestures and body language to communicate the orientation of his and Khan’s movement towards Farina. Thus, as the court transcriber penned Charley’s account, a vast wealth of spatial information was lost in translation to the flat plane of the written word.

There are no easy answers to the relationship between the linguistic expression of space and the material circuitry of stones that oriented Charley’s movement through place. Reading Charley’s testimony next to Constable Ireland’s highlights that the different linguistic ‘grammars of space’ that tracker and police drew from were part of larger infrastructures of spatial knowledge. In Ireland’s testimony the

²⁹ David Wilkins, "Towards an Arrernte Grammar of Space," in *Grammars of Space: Explorations in Cognitive Diversity*, eds. Stephen C. Levinson and David Wilkins (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 54.

³⁰ Wilkin’s writes ‘English prepositions look like portmanteau morphemes which conflate different types of spatial information’ in *Ibid.*, 61.

³¹ My emphasis.

incident begins on 24 May 1904 'when the train arrived, at about ten minutes past eight in the evening.'³² As part of his deposition Ireland submitted a printed map (see Figure 29). On a town plan from 1896 that divided the land into rectangular plots with assigned numbers, railway reserves and street names, Ireland marked the spot where the chase began with X. He testified that at 'about five or six yards outside the turnstile at the back of the Station I saw some marks approximately where marked on the plan. The marks indicated a struggle I set the tracker to work tracking from there.'³³ He testified that the distance they followed the tracks was '300 yards' and 'after some distance the tracks took half a circle in a southerly direction through Faiz Mahomet's camel paddock back onto the railway line.'³⁴ Leaving Charley in pursuit of Khan's tracks, Ireland made his way back to Marree to send a wire to the police at Farina and re-joined Charley with his horse. When he overtook Charley, 'he had proceeded about 3 ½ miles along the line from the point at which I left him.'³⁵ Meeting the constable from Farina, the two officers of settler law 'rode on ahead of the tracker and went to Farina.'³⁶ Ireland testified, 'This was at a few minutes to six o'clock.'³⁷

In pursuing Khan together and in their subsequent account of the chase apparently in the same language – English – tracker and police drew upon very different resources to orient themselves in and move through space, and to narrate this motion in a settler court of law. To communicate across and move through place Ireland drew upon the state infrastructure made available to officers of settler law: the telegraph system, horses and other officers. Reading the railway clocks at either end

³² 'Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland' in King vs. Sher Khan, 5/1904, SCSA.

³³ 'Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland' in Ibid.

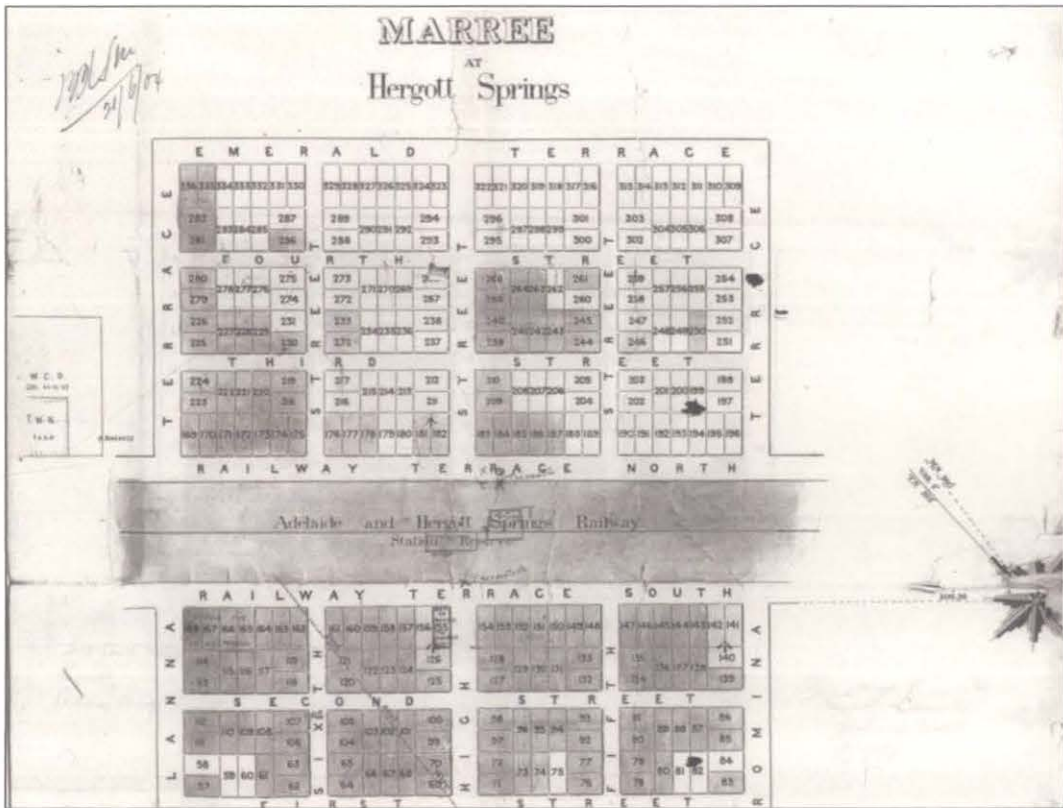
³⁴ 'Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland' in Ibid.

³⁵ 'Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland' in Ibid.

³⁶ 'Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland' in Ibid.

³⁷ 'Deposition of Witness by Mounted Constable Ireland' in Ibid.

Figure 29



Map of Marree Submitted in Court

Case File: 'The King Against Sher Khan, Circuit Court of Port Augusta', July 1904 no. 5, Archived Files of the Supreme Court of South Australia, Criminal Jurisdiction.

of the chase, he recorded events by filling out detailed police reports each night and entering a log into the police journal. His statement in court was part of a larger process of the paper archiving of times and places of events and the names of the people involved. To narrate the chase in court he produced a map, itself produced by a town planner resourced by the state a few years earlier. In addition to a palette of English spatial terms that Charley didn't use, such as 'southerly,' 'half-circle,' 'miles,' employing numbers to express time and distance, Ireland also drew upon an entire infrastructure of communication, transportation and mapping to embark on and subsequently describe the chase. From Ireland's account, Charley's ability to read tracks appears as an essential resource that he simply appended to a grid of settler knowledge.

Yet this interpretation overlooks the degree to which Charley gained advantage from his ability to add communication in English to his own palette of resources. Just how much he gained is difficult to ascertain. The details of how much Ireland paid Charley to translate Khan's escape into a form legible to settlers are not elaborated anywhere. It might have been rations, tobacco, cash, flour, blankets, or a combination of the commodities that settler institutions used in their negotiations with Aboriginal people. Marree police journals reveal that by 1921, a permanent tracker was engaged for a salary of rations and housing in a shed adjacent to the police station.³⁸ Through contracts such as the one between Ireland and Charley, Aboriginal knowledge was engaged in service to settler institutions in exchange for commodities. Such schemas of translation brought Aboriginal knowledge into relations of

³⁸ 'Correspondence Regarding Request for [Aboriginal] Police Trackers Salary Increase, c. 1917 - 1921' in State Records of South Australia GRG 5/307/2 Marree (formerly Hergott Springs) Police Station Records, Letter Book (Apr 21 1917 - May 21 1923).

equivalence with European commodities: essentially, Charley's ability to speak English served to commodify his ability to read the land.

Understanding Ireland and Charley's accounts of pursuit as an unequal partnership between coloniser and colonised tells only part of the tale. As we saw in the last chapter, precisely *whose* law Ireland set out to administer that day in pursuit of Sher Khan is questionable. The critically wounded Moosha Balooch, who was moved from the railway yard to the station, was a powerful figure in Marree. Responsible for the camels owned by the South Australian government, Moosha enjoyed greater protection from police than many of other Muslim men in the camel business. Less wealthy camel workers complained bitterly about the protection that white police afforded Moosha. Would Ireland have drawn upon a wide range of resources, including Charley's help, if Khan had shot a less influential cameleer?

Tracking Sher Khan in 1975

Many decades after Charley and Ireland set out in pursuit of Sher Khan, Ben Murray narrated the chase in Wangkangurru to linguist Luise Hercus in the late 1960s and in Dhirarri to linguist Peter Austin in 1975.³⁹ Reading these two accounts using the English translations published by the linguists reveals that both the route of Khan's escape and the details of what happened at each place along the route were features of the tracking story that changed over time. In this section, while drawing on the Wangkangurru telling, I will focus mainly on the Dhirarri story, which is the lengthier and more detailed account.

³⁹ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Pariku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 145.

Ben Murray was born in 1893 and, like many other Aboriginal people along 'the Ghan' line, acquired and maintained fluency in a number of Aboriginal languages in the era of camels, ships and trains. From the late 1960s, Murray collaborated with a number of historians and linguists. He was the sole remaining resident at Farina when Peter Austin, a student of linguistics, arrived to interview Murray as part of a longer research relationship. On 28 November 1975 Austin was camped by the creek bed at Farina with his tape recorder running and Murray began his tale with 'Old man Sarrawa he gave a girl to Shirkhan. Then he gave him money £150.'⁴⁰

In the intervening years between Charley's testimony in court and Murray's telling at the creek bed in Farina, the details of the marriage dispute and discussion of *mahar* amounts had circulated throughout the various communities around the railway town of Marree. Placed with the context of the Arabunna stories examined in previous chapters, Murray's tales about the shooting at Marree appear as another form in which accounts of Indian Ocean travellers buying and selling girls circulated in Aboriginal languages.

Murray knew little of the machinations of Muslim *mahar* precisely because it was a convention that his family were excluded from. Ben Murray's mother was Karla Warru, an Arabunna-Dhirarri woman who acquired the name Anne Murray in the 1890s.⁴¹ His father was Bejah Dervish, a cameleer from Baluchistan who is well known in Australian historiography (see Figures 30 and 31).⁴² Bejah, as he was locally known around Marree, attained the rank of sergeant fighting for the British

⁴⁰ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 154: Line 1

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 117.

⁴² Valmai A. Hankel, "Bejah, Dervish (1862? - 1957)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 7 (1979). Also see entry in Phillip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland, 1860s - 1930s* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 2007). For a survey of historical writing on Bejah Dervish see Jones and Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland, 1860s - 1930s*, 172. For film footage of Bejah Dervish see John Heyer, "The Back of Beyond (Film)," in *Shell Company of Australia and Outback on Screen* (Australia: Shell Film Unit Australia, 1954).

Indian army. He arrived to the colony of Western Australia in 1891 from the port of Karachi (see Figure 3). Bejah was a skilled cameleer who accompanied a number of European explorers through Australian deserts. He did well for himself working within British imperial and colonial institutions. Indeed, Bejah's name can be found strewn not only through British explorers' journals but also across the Australian desert as a source of place names, such as 'Bejah Hill' in Western Australia. In 1909, Bejah married a white widow Amelia Jane Shaw and had one son with her in Marree. He features prominently in settler accounts of 'Afghans' and emerged as an influential figure in the 'ghantown' fraternity centred upon the mosque. An outcome of Bejah's extramarital intimacies with Karla Warru, Ben Murray was never publicly acknowledged. However, Bejah admitted his paternity in private conversation with his alienated son and at times assisted Murray.

The relationship between Ben Murray and Bejah Dervish, one of the various strands that threaded together the itinerant communities that converged upon Frome Creek and 'ghantown' respectively, was a difficult one at times. Murray did not learn the camel business from Bejah, but rather from Akbar Khan, another cameleer who worked in the Lake Eyre area.⁴³ Relations between Murray and his half-brother Abdul Jubbar known locally as 'Jack Bejah,' were particularly tense.⁴⁴ Murray explained to historian Phillip Jones that 'I didn't go by his name because he wasn't interested in looking after us. Mother had to carry on herself.'⁴⁵ Instead the Murray family took their name from their mother's employer, Mrs Murray, a white widow who operated a

⁴³ For an account of relations between Akbar Khan and Ben Murray see 'Text I: Black Bastards' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 137, 56 - 58.

⁴⁴ 'Comments on the Customs of the Afghans' in Luise A. Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," *Aboriginal History* 5, 1 (1981): 61.

⁴⁵ 'Ben Murray to Phillip Jones, 3.11.83' in *Ibid.*: 128.

Figure 30



Bejah Dervish, 1896

Photo reproduced in Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), 1989, 241.

Figure 31



Studio Portrait of Ben Murray, c.1913

Photo taken by German Missionary Hermann Vogelsgang and reproduced in Peter Austin, Luise Hercus, and Philip Jones. "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)." *Aboriginal History* 12, (1988), 115 - 88.

boardinghouse in Marree. Adopting a name in recognition of the ongoing relationship of interdependence that the family formed with Mrs. Murray, Anne Murray never received any of the affective or economic dues of *mahar* from Bejah. Her son likewise inherited few benefits from his father. Never inducted into the Muslim fraternity, Murray knew nothing of *mahar*, only that himself and his mother were denied certain securities.

The gendered movement of Indian Ocean travellers through a circuitry of camels, ships and trains transformed Aboriginal families throughout the deserts wherever these men made their livelihoods. Children like Ben Murray, in addition to the women that cameleers formed intimacies with, drew upon their own resources to negotiate with and make meaning of the familial institutions Muslim travellers brought with them. Reading Murray's accounts using the translations into English by linguists, his description of the marriage dispute at first appears consistent with settler accounts of the transactions that came before. After telling how Surwah Khan 'gave a girl to Shir Khan' in exchange for 'money £150,'⁴⁶ Murray narrated that Moosha in a subsequent transaction gave the father of the prospective bride '£200.' In the Wangkangurru account, likewise, Murray specified that '£150' passed between father of the bride and Sher Khan and in English he narrated that the problem arose when Khan received news via the camel communication network that 'Moosha been buy'm for £200.'⁴⁷

The English translations of these various stories can create an air of simple fixity about the sums offered by the prospective grooms to the greedy Muslim father. Closer examination of the original forms of these stories reveals that however

⁴⁶ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 154: Line 1.

⁴⁷ 'Sher Khan' in Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," 49: Line 3.

consistent the numbers, there was nothing fixed about the currency those numbers were attached to. When they entered into circulation in Aboriginal oral records, they were no longer attached to English concepts of pounds, shillings and pence, but encased in another substance entirely. The words that Ben Murray juxtaposed to numerals to convey that 'money' was being transacted during Muslim marriage negotiations were not just adaptations of the English words 'pounds' or 'money.' In Wangkangurru, Murray said it was '*150 gadna-kardi*.'⁴⁸ In Dhirarri he expressed the amount as '*marda 150*.'⁴⁹ Linguistic data confirms that these terms emerged as commonly used money-words around Lake Eyre. Both *marda* and *gadna* translate literally into English 'stone.' The '-*kaardi*' suffix that appears in '*150 gadna-kardi*' transforms the Wangkangurru word for stone, *gadna*, into a term for 'pebble,' *gadna-kaardi*.⁵⁰

This is not a simple matter of semantics. When Murray spoke of *150 gadna-kardi*, he attached the bride-price story to yet another world of exchange and circulation. The numerical amounts that Murray expressed in his accounts were new concepts adopted by Wangkangurru and Dhirarri speakers.⁵¹ Along with many other Australian Aboriginal languages, these two Lake Eyre languages did not have a boundless numerating system prior to the era of camels, ships and trains.⁵² The concept of infinitely large numbers was directly appended to the vocabularies of

⁴⁸ 'Sher Khan' in *Ibid.*: 49: Line 1, 51: Line 1.

⁴⁹ 'Jealous Afghans' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 145: Line 2, 54: Line 2.

⁵⁰ For a linguistic discussion of the '-*kaardi*' suffix in Arabana-Wangkangurru and its comparable equivalents in other Lake Eyre languages see Peter Austin, Luise Hercus and R. Ellis, "'Fruit of the Eyes': Semantic Diffusion in the Lakes Languages of South Australia," *Papers in Australian Linguistics* 10 (1976).

⁵¹ For an account of the extension of Aboriginal languages see Simpson's study of Warumungu: Jane Simpson, "How Warumungu People Express New Concepts," *Language in Central Australia*, 4 (1985).

⁵² For enumerating systems in Thirrarri and Wangkangurru, see Peter Austin, *A Grammar of Diyari, South Australia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 56 - 58; L. A. Hercus, *A Grammar of the Arabana-Wangkangurru Language Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*, Pacific Linguistics. Series C (Canberra: Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1994), 103 - 05.

speakers of Aboriginal languages around Lake Eyre through their negotiations over labour performed, tonnage carted, heads of sheep, rations and wages paid, and later reinforced through missionary education. Money in particular, a peculiar substance that could be accrued without limit, introduced the necessity for boundless counting, using Arabic numerals, to many Aboriginal languages.

To make this concept legible, Wangkangurru and Dhirarri people attached it to a familiar network of exchange: the trade in stone. As Charley's narrative of tracking revealed, Khan in escaping across the desert along the railway line had unknowingly crossed an older long-distance trade network. Archaeologist John Mulvaney has pointed out that stone goods stand out from the material record as an exchange medium for other rarer items in Aboriginal economies. Facilitated by the widespread currency of stone materials, Mulvaney has argued, it was possible for Aboriginal traders 'who had brought pituri from the Mulligan River and ochre from Parachilna to own a Cloncurry axe, a Boulia boomerang and wear shell from the Carpentaria and Kimberly.'⁵³ Within this context of the material circulation of stone goods, stone-words entered into linguistic circulation as money-words in all of the Aboriginal languages I have been working with in this thesis.⁵⁴ Indeed, linguistic data reveals that stone-words emerged as money-words in many Australian Aboriginal languages.⁵⁵ As Murray attached the numerical amounts that featured in the *mahar* negotiations to the

⁵³ Mulvaney, "The Chain of Connection: The Material Evidence," 80.

⁵⁴ Personal Comm. with Luise Hercus, 27 April 2010; Barry J. Blake, *Australian Aboriginal languages: A General Introduction*, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1991), 32.

⁵⁵ Ngarigu people who lived in the South-Eastern seashore of New South Wales on the Victorian border extended *gurubung*. Warlpiri people to the North and West of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory continue to express money using *purlu* and *pirli*, meaning 'rock' and 'hill' respectively. *Larrilarri*, the term for gravel in Warumungu spoken in the Northern Territory, conveys small change and speakers of Wik-Ngatha'na on the coast of Cape York in Queensland jutting out into the Gulf of Carpentaria use *kula*, derived from 'stone.' Jane Simpson has compiled a table of money words in Simpson, "How Warumungu People Express New Concepts," Section 1.4; Michael Walsh, "Languages and Their Status in Aboriginal Australia," in *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, eds. Colin Yallop and Michael Walsh (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993), 6. Austin, *A Grammar of Diyari, South Australia*, 9; Blake, *Australian Aboriginal languages: A General Introduction*, 32.

currency of an Aboriginal trade network, he also mapped the story to a geography very different to the one inhabited by the Muslim fraternity in these parts. In addition to embedding the *mahar* dispute in a tracking narrative, Murray relocated the very path that Sher Khan escaped to a geography that was more relevant to him.

After shooting Moosha Balooch at the railway station, Murray narrated, 'Shirkhan then went that way to the creek.'⁵⁶ A dry sandy corridor of grass, dwarf eucalypti and desert shrubs for most of the year, the Frome describes a water way from the northern peaks of the Flinders Ranges to the low salt plains of Lake Eyre.⁵⁷ During a season of heavy rains, water travels northwards along the Frome, through many pastoral and cattle stations, past the town of Farina, past the eastern edges of Marree town ship and towards Lake Eyre. It is likely that Murray as a young boy first heard the story of the Muslim marriage dispute at the Frome in the aftermath of the chase and in both his Wangkangurru and Dhirarri accounts, Khan headed straight for Frome creek in his attempt to escape settler law.

Insisting that Khan 'didn't go on the road that goes to Mundowdna/ He only went straight that way to the creek'⁵⁸ in both of Murray's accounts the pursuit proceeds along the contour of the creek. As I have already mentioned, Charley did not feature in Murray's accounts. Rather Murray described the nameless tracker using the Dhirarri noun '*Karna*,' literally meaning 'man' and more meaningfully translating to 'Aboriginal man' in a desert awash with settler and South Asian men. He narrated that Khan 'put his boot on again and took them off again / thats how he went along,'⁵⁹ in

⁵⁶ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 155: Line 21.

⁵⁷ Lois Litchfield, *Marree and the Tracks Beyond in Black and White: Commemorating the Centenary of Marree* (Marree: L. Litchfield, 1983), 89.

⁵⁸ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)." 155: Lines 22 – 23.

⁵⁹ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 155: Lines 27 - 28.

an attempt to obscure his path of escape. It was a technique that nevertheless left a tell-tale history that the tracker could read and Murray related that tracker and police 'followed [Khan] like that, (sometimes) barefoot, (sometimes) with shoes on, along the creek.'⁶⁰ Emphasising again that Khan 'didn't leave the creek,'⁶¹ Murray's narrative then steered the chase towards a place that he knew in great detail. Travelling along a circuitry of inland waterways, Khan 'went to the Paradise (Creek) where the two hills Dam is.'⁶²

'Paradise Creek' did not feature in Charley or Ireland's account of Khan's escape route. However, from the portion of Murray's stories that have been published, Paradise Creek emerges as a place that came to be densely storied over the course of his working life and a place of return in his storytelling to linguists. Running through Witchelina pastoral station, Paradise creek was a corridor upon which Murray's responsibilities converged whilst engaged as a stock worker and dingo-hunter at various times. He had tracked many creatures along Paradise creek and in the 1930s while Murray was tracking stray rams he rescued a mother and her son from drowning at Paradise Crossing.⁶³ Engaged at Witchelina station again in the 1950s to carry out work with sheep, it remained a creek that Murray kept returning to in his labouring life.⁶⁴ The linguistic archive reveals that not only did Murray tell stories *about* Paradise Creek, it was a place that he took Austin to in May 1974 to tell stories *at*, interweaving the creek into the developing research relationship between

⁶⁰ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 31.

⁶¹ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 35.

⁶² 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 36.

⁶³ Ben Murray and Peter Austin, "Paradise Crossing (Dhirari Story)," in *This is What Happened: Historical Narratives*, eds. Peter Sutton and L. A. Hercus (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986).

⁶⁴ 'Then I came to Witchelina in 1950. Then I worked there, always working looking after sheep' Ben Murray in 'Text J: In the South' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 167: Lines 24 - 25.

storyteller and linguist.⁶⁵ It was a corridor along which Murray attained exceptional literacy over his lifetime and in his account of Sher Khan's escape, the cameleer 'followed the Paradise Creek in bare feet.'⁶⁶

Next, Khan 'put his boots on again,'⁶⁷ and continued along the creek leaving behind the particular stretch that Murray knew so well. Remaining on the waterway 'He came to Two Hills Dam. He took his boots off again.'⁶⁸ Murray told Austin that 'then he came barefoot here to the creek where you are camped now.'⁶⁹ The appearance of the camping place where the storytelling was unfolding in November 1975 inside the narrative reveals that not only the teller of the story, but also the listener and the place of storytelling were active agents in shaping the route of Khan's escape. Given that both Constable Ireland and tracker Charley testified that they followed Khan's tracks along the railway line, it is likely that this is the path that Khan physically travelled on the night of 24 May 1904. The insertion of Austin's camping place in 1975 into the route of escape charted by Murray suggests that at some point during repeated acts of storytelling along the Frome and repetitions of the story in Aboriginal languages at various creek side camps, Khan veered off the railway and onto the creek system that was so central to Aboriginal lives and livelihoods.

The vast inland river system that drains to Lake Eyre is rarely thought of as a system of circulation because it is devoid of surface water for most of the time. However, the creek banks were the places where people lived, tracked, laboured, camped and passed on stories. For this reason it emerges as a circuit of circulation as

⁶⁵ Murray and Austin, "Paradise Crossing (Dhirari Story)," 293.

⁶⁶ "Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Austin, Hercus and Jones, "Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna)," 155: Line 38.

⁶⁷ "Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Ibid.: 155: Line 39.

⁶⁸ "Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Ibid.: 155: Lines 40 - 41.

⁶⁹ "Text H: Jealous Afghans' in Ibid.: 155: Line 42.

significant as Dreaming tracks and Aboriginal trade routes. Indeed, Aboriginal trade routes and Dreaming tracks often coincide with rivers.⁷⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that over time the geography of circulation – of this as no doubt of many other stories – should become the river.

From the spot by the creek where Murray and Austin were engaged in the work of telling and recording, ‘again [Khan] put his boots on.’⁷¹ With the tracker and police close on his heels, the chase continued as Khan proceeded ‘to the Railway Station where [a railway engineer] was filling a water tank to start the engine.’⁷² As we saw in previous chapters, the railway tank was a frequent place of encounter and Murray switched into English to recount the conversations that took place. Addressing the engineer as ‘boss,’ Khan said ‘Boss me lose’em camel, big mob of camel.’⁷³ As the cameleer and railway man were talking, the concealed policeman and tracker were listening from the banks of the dam. The tracker confirmed for the policeman that Khan was the creature they had pursued across the desert with ‘Hey boss! him here alright!’⁷⁴ Having caught up with the fleeing cameleer, the tracker approached Khan while the policeman remained concealed. Addressing the Aboriginal tracker as ‘boy,’ Khan said ‘Good day boy! Me lose’em camel.’⁷⁵ The tracker replied ‘Oh, I see boss. I help you.’⁷⁶ Concealing his own complicity with the police, the tracker offered to decipher the tracks of the fictitious lost camels, offering himself as an accomplice in Khan’s attempt to conceal his true identity, expressed by

⁷⁰ For example see Hercus and Beckett, *The Two Rainbow Serpents Travelling: Mura Track Narratives from the Corner Country*.

⁷¹ ‘Text H: Jealous Afghans’ in Austin, Hercus and Jones, “Ben Murray (Parlku-Nguyu-Thangknyiwarna),” 155: Line 43.

⁷² ‘Text H: Jealous Afghans’ in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 44.

⁷³ ‘Text H: Jealous Afghans’ in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 45.

⁷⁴ ‘Text H: Jealous Afghans’ in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 51.

⁷⁵ ‘Text H: Jealous Afghans’ in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 55.

⁷⁶ ‘Text H: Jealous Afghans’ in *Ibid.*: 155: Line 56.

tracks he made on the desert. 'I'll help you to search,'⁷⁷ the tracker was reassuring the cameleer when the policeman came out of hiding to arrest Khan.

The conversation at the railway tank does not occur in Charley's nor Ireland's statement. Details of this exchange may have been embellishments that the tracking story accrued in tellings and retellings by Murray and other Aboriginal storytellers at the Frome, other creek beds, on the camel track, or as Aboriginal people waited by the Farina railway tank for 'the Ghan' running late. The way the nouns 'boss' and 'boy' shifted in use over these conversations reveals not only the tripartite racial hierarchies that arose along camel tracks and railway lines, but also that Murray expressed the distinctions in terms of class relations. While, the tracker figure in the interaction at the railway tank emerges as the 'boy' in relation to both police and cameleer who he calls 'boss,' he relishes the ambiguities of precisely who it is he is working for. In Ben Murray's accounts he remains elusive, changing names across different tellings, concealing his true identity at the railway tank while always remaining the figure who can reveal the tracks of others. But the track itself was far more important. Ben Murray's Wangkangurru and Dhirarri accounts of the story suggest that long after precise details about the name and home of the tracker faded from Aboriginal people's retellings of the story, the tracks that Charley laid continued to act as a template within which accounts of *mahar* circulated in Aboriginal lore. Over the course of tellings and retellings, the inland creek system became route of Khan's escape in Murray's tale. At the age of 84, Murray retold the marriage dispute incident that had taken place some 70 years ago as a tracking story along the watercourse that threaded together so many places of significance to him, binding the listener and the place of storytelling into the narrative itself.

⁷⁷ 'Text H: Jealous Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 156: Line 58.

When I was travelling through Arabunna deserts with Reg Dodd, we visited a stone quarry along the Oodnadatta track. Like Wangkangurru, the word for stone in Arabunna is *gadna*. Stone words are dense with many meanings in the Aboriginal languages I have been working with. When Dreaming creatures meet their end, they often die to become hills. These hills Reg told me, are also called *gadna*. In Wangkangurru and Arabunna, as in Dhirarri, the same stone-word refers to stone as an item of Aboriginal exchange, to money, and to Dreaming creatures petrified. Master translator that he is, Reg watched me grappling unsuccessfully with the idea that all these things could be described with the same word. At last he said, 'See, it is just another way of valuing things.' Tracing the multiple mappings and meanings of the escape and pursuit of Khan by the tracker through its many translations, I have been reminded of the impossibility of assigning definitive meaning to any of it. At moments it is possible to glimpse the connections between words, concepts, routes and creatures, but the broader picture remains beyond my grasp. It is a process at the heart of translation across the 'Indian Archipelago.'



Conclusion

'My father was Bejah,'¹ Ben Murray recounted in Wangkangurru, long after Bejah Dervish, buried at Marree had departed for an Islamic hereafter into which his son had little hope of admittance. Bejah had done little for the welfare, spiritual or material, of his son: 'they never looked after us when we were young, we had nothing.'² Himself ageing at Farina, Murray recalled that when men of his father's generation began to grow old, they buried their money. 'They dug a hole',³ he recalled, and placing their riches in powdered milk tins, or coffee tins, 'they put it in the hole in the dead of night.'⁴ Murray told how in Marree and Farina, likewise, 'they buried it there under the toilets, clothes lines and under fence-posts.'⁵ The suspicious old men, whose livelihoods in the camel industry had disappeared in the 1930s, would say 'Can't keep'm in my house, everybody looking.'⁶ In the dead of the night they crept out to deposit their remaining riches in hidden pockets of the earth. Mona Merrick, too, recalled in Arabunna that the Indian Ocean travellers would bury money. 'My mother and my brothers and sisters, we were always looking for it, but we never found any.'⁷ Murray recounted 'Gold too, can't find'm now.'⁸ In Farina and Marree, Broken Hill, Beltana, along the camel tracks of

¹ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in Luise A. Hercus, "Afghan Stories from the Northeast of South Australia," *Aboriginal History* 5, 1 (1981): 62: Line 1.

² 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*

³ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 62: Line 4.

⁴ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 62: Line 1.

⁵ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*

⁶ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*

⁷ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 62: Line 4.

⁸ 'Comments on the customs of the Afghans' in *Ibid.*: 62: Line 1.

the Northern Territory, throughout West Australian goldfields, somewhere near where the mosques used to be, lost riches lie buried in the desert.

Where were the coins? What was their story? Reading settler records in English alone you might never know that the coins existed, let alone how to find your way to them, let alone what story lay behind them for the dying men. Reading memoirs, books, names and stories in Aboriginal languages and South Asian languages has revealed places beyond settler geographies, places that people inhabited and storied while camels, ships and trains threaded together a new world from old. Just as the plane of the daily newspaper created the concept of simultaneous existence, so too the sand hill archived all that happened. As travellers with their poetry and stories mapped a course through their earthly lives across the 'Indian Archipelago,' various imagined geographies converged onto the same physical places. As people crossed over thresholds into others' worlds, translation is the most appropriate way to describe how they made sense of foreign places.

Veering off the usual paths of historical enquiry in Australia and into non-English archives merely alerts us to the presence of the coins and other riches. In this thesis, I have explored some of the ways that historians – metaphorically at least – might trace a path to the lost coins. The 'Indian Archipelago' was a place crossed through with overlapping, innumerable networks. Understanding how commodities moved through this complex grid, how gender circumscribed mobility, how Aboriginal people read and tell mobility, are all indispensable tools in the historian's task of translation.

Beginning at the mosque in Broken Hill, I began grappling with a range of languages, some familiar, others entirely unknown. Over the process of 'reading' and 'writing,' translation emerged as an apt description for many of the processes in which people, creatures, commodities and stories were perpetually caught as camels, ships and trains

threaded the Australian region into the Indian Ocean. I have shown that the Indian Ocean world was criss-crossed with various tangible and intangible grids that powerfully shaped motion across the 'Indian Archipelago.' Australian deserts likewise were made by the interconnected circuitry of rivers and creeks, Dreaming creatures and trade routes and at water places various surprise encounters unfolded.

The complex interweavings of place and mobility, storying and translation whose paths I have followed in this thesis resist any attempt to tie them into a neat conclusion. Khan's marriage drama and escape across the desert followed the settlers' iron railway and crossed Aboriginal tracks of trade and story. Beltana and Pelthana inhabited a shared geography, but the meanings attached to those names are almost irreconcilable. The mistranslations that arose at sexualised encounters were three way affairs that cannot be understood without reference to each other. All whilst a divine pen guided by an invisible hand wrote the world into existence. Pursuing narratives in multiple languages inevitably produces a work that speaks more of incommensurability than of synthesis.

Yet there were intersections. Along the paths of camels, ships and trains, worlds came together and diverged, and the process transformed both experience and meaning for everyone involved. Blundering translations produced incomprehension, mistrust and sometimes violence. Only by revisiting this history with attention to the varied languages that followed those paths and created their own patterns of discursive circulation can we begin to comprehend, however dimly, the complexities, misunderstandings, and new understandings of a dialogue that was held in many tongues. We may never find the coins buried in the desert, but we can pay more attention to the stories that tell us why they might be there. As Reg reminded me, it's about different ways of valuing things.

মরুভূমিতে বাংলা কাব্য



অস্ট্রেলিয়ার
এক
ইতিহাসের
বইতেও
লেখা আছে,
এই
মসজিদে
একটা
কোরান রাখা
আছে।
আসলে
কোরান নয়,
পাঁচশো
পাতার
বাংলা কাব্য।
১৩০১
বাংলা সালে
ছাপা
বটতলার
বই।

ব্রিটিশ আমলে, উনিশ শতকের মাঝের দশকগুলোতে, কলকাতার বটতলায় বাংলা ভাষায় যখন ছাপাখানা চালু হচ্ছে, ততদিনে অস্ট্রেলিয়ার ব্রোকেন হিল-এ রুপো আবিষ্কারের ফলে আদিবাসী উইলিয়ামকালি-দের দেশ ও ভাষা ধ্বংস হতে শুরু করেছে। 'ব্রোকেন হিল প্রোগ্রাইটি কোং' ('বিএইচপি') খনির কারবারের সঙ্গে-সঙ্গে আধুনিক শহর গড়ে উঠল। এখন বিএইচপি-র ব্যবসা মিলিয়ন ডলারের অংক ছাড়িয়ে গিয়েছে, আর উইলিয়ামকালি-দের ভাষা তো পুরোপুরি উধাও। উনিশ শতকে প্রচুর ভারতীয় ও আফগানি লোক চলে গিয়েছিলেন ব্রোকেন হিলে। শহরের উত্তর সীমানায় পুরনো একটা ছোট মসজিদ রয়ে গিয়েছে, ১৮৮৭ সালে বানানো। ব্রিটিশ আমলে বহু মানুষ এখানে নামাজ পড়তেন। ২০০৯-এর জুলাই মাসে সেই মসজিদ দেখতে গিয়ে, একটা ভাঙা তাক-এ বিভিন্ন জিনিসের মধ্যে চোখে পড়ে গেল এক বই। ধুলোভরা পাতা উল্টে দেখি, বাংলায় লেখা। কে যেন ইংরেজিতে প্রথম পাতার লিখে রেখেছে, 'দ্য হোলি কোরান'। অস্ট্রেলিয়ার এক ইতিহাসের বইতেও লেখা আছে যে, এই মসজিদে একটা কোরান রাখা আছে। কিন্তু পড়ে দেখি, বইটা আসলে কোরান নয়, পাঁচশো পাতার বাংলা কাব্য। ১৩০১ বাংলা সালে ছাপা বটতলার বই।

অস্ট্রেলিয়ার গভীর মরুভূমির শুরু ব্রোকেন হিল শহর থেকে। বহু বছরের মরুভূমির তাপে পাতাগুলো ভাঙা-ভাঙা। বটতলার প্রকাশক কাজী সফিউদ্দিনের কেতাব, 'কাজাখল আদ্বিয়া'। কলকাতার চিংপুর রোডে ছাপা। আরবি কিসাস-উল আদ্বিয়া হাদিসের অংশ থেকে অনুবাদ করা হয়েছে বাংলায়। নবি হজরত আদমের গল্প 'স'এরি' করেছেন কবি মুনিশি রেজাউল্লা। শুরু : 'এক মুষ্টি খাক দিয়া, মাটির মুরত কিয়া, পয়দা কৈল আদম ফুরতে'। 'সায়েরের বালাম ও কেতাব তরজমা করিবার বয়ান' পড়ে জানা গেল, রেজাউল্লা লেখক হয়ে উঠেনেন স্বী করে। উনি লিখছেন : 'ভাবি মোনে আল্লা বিনে নাহি মদদগার। জে বা জাহা টোড়ে তারে দেয় পরদার। সেই তরসাতে আমি ওম্মেদ রাখিয়া। শুমুদুরে সিনু ঝাপ কোমর বান্দিয়া।'

অস্ট্রেলিয়ার অভিলেখাগারে পুরনো নবি খুঁজতে-খুঁজতে দেখি, ১৮৮০ সালে এক পাঞ্জাবি ব্যবসাদারের উর্দু স্মৃতিকথায় পাওয়া যাচ্ছে দেরভায়স নামে এক বাঙালি মানুষের কথা। তিনি মেলবোর্নে টক-আচার বেচতেন। তারপর পেলাম ১৮৯০ সালে পশ্চিম অস্ট্রেলিয়ার পোর্ট হেডল্যান্ড শহরে কলকাতার এক বায়ুর্চি বৌজ, মাছ ভাজতেন। ফ্রিম্যান্টল শহরে তো বহু বাঙালি কাপড়ের ব্যবসা করে দর্জিপাড়াই খুলে বসেছিলেন। ১৯০৭ সালের দক্ষিণ অস্ট্রেলিয়ার পুলিশের কাগজপত্র থেকে বেরল, বাঙালি খাল্বাসি আরজানজালা কিল-ঘুবি মেয়ে কলকাতার আবদুল্লাকে

জাহাজেই মেয়ে ফেলেছিল। যিনি পুলিশের কাছে তার নামে নালিশ করেছিলেন, বাংলায় সেই করেছেন, 'মির বস'। ১৯৩০-এর দশকে পাই, এক কলকাতার রিকশাওয়ালা উট নিয়ে ব্যবসা শুরু করেছিলেন পিলবারা মরুভূমিতে। বটতলার বই নিশ্চয় এমন কারও হাত ধরেই পৌঁছেছে ব্রোকেন হিল-এ। এই সব মানুষের মধ্যে অনেকেই ফিরে এসেছিলেন ভারতবর্ষে। কেউ ঘুরতে-ঘুরতে নোঙর ফেলেছিলেন মহাসাগরেরই অন্য দাঁশে। অনেকে অস্ট্রেলিয়ায় রয়ে গিয়েছিলেন আদিবাসী মহিলা বিয়ে করে।

শৌভ্র করতে-করতে গেলাম 'মারি' মফসসলে। এটা রেল স্টেশন ছিল এককালে। ভারতের মুসলমানদের বৃহত্তম উটের ব্যবসা ছিল এখানেই। অস্ট্রেলিয়ার জাতপাত তখনকার ভূগোলে বেশ স্পষ্ট বোঝা যায়। মারি-র রেলপথের পশ্চিম দিকে বাস করত ব্রিটিশরা। পূর্বদিকে চারশোর বেশি মুসলমান মানুষ একত্র হয়ে দু'টো মসজিদ বানিয়ে নিয়েছিলেন। মুসলমান পাড়ার চৌহদ্দিতে এসে জড়ো হয়েছিলেন বহু আদিবাসী, তাঁদের নিজের-নিজের দেশ হারানোর পর। মারি-তে পেলাম আদিবাসী 'আরাবানা' ভাষায় প্রচুর মুখে মুখে ছড়ানো গল্প, মুসলমানদের নিয়ে। পরিচয় হল আদিবাসী নেতা রেজা উড-এর সঙ্গে। অনেক বয়স হয়েছে, তবুও ইনি আরাবানা ভাষার স্বীকৃতির জন্য যুক্ত চালিয়ে যাচ্ছেন। ব্রোকেন হিল-এর মসজিদে বটতলার বইয়ের কথা শুনে তিনি তো অবাক। বহু মুসলমান তখন আদিবাসী মানুষদের সঙ্গে অঙ্গাঙ্গি মিশে গিয়েছিলেন। কেউ বা আবার আরাবানা মেয়ে চুরি করে এক জায়গা থেকে অন্য জায়গায় পালিয়ে যেতেন উটে চড়ে। রেজা বললেন, সেখো, তোমায় গবেষণার শেষে এইখানেই আবার আসতে হবে, কারণ তুমি দেখবে পুঁথিটা আসলে এই আরাবানা-দের হাত থেকেই গিয়েছে ওই মসজিদে।

এখন কলকাতায় এসেছি বটতলা ও কাজী সফিউদ্দিনের হালহিস্তি জানতে-বুঝতে। অস্ট্রেলিয়া থেকে এই পশ্চিমবঙ্গ অবধি যার সন্ধানে এলাম, ঘুরলাম, তার টিক টিকানা পাব কি না জানি না, কিন্তু এই জার্নি-তে এত মানুষের সঙ্গে চেনাজানা হল, মাতৃভাষার বানে চড়ে এমন অশ্চর্য যাত্রা হল, সেটাই বিরাট প্রাপ্তি।

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