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**Forces of destruction, acts
of creation : aboriginality,
identity and native title, on
the far west coast of South
Australia**



**Forces of Destruction, Acts of Creation:
Aboriginality, Identity and Native Title, on the Far West
Coast of South Australia**

Thesis submitted by Eve Mary Vincent BA (Hons) Melb

February 2013

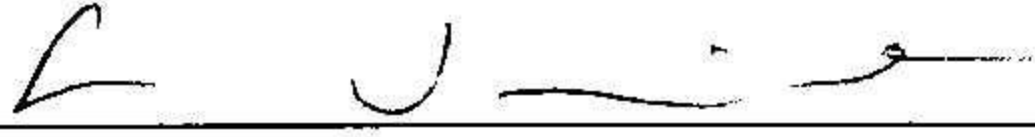
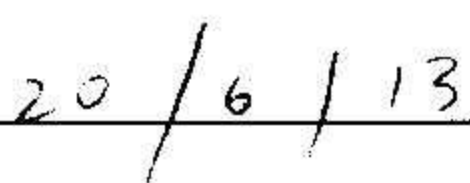
Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Anthropology, The University of Sydney.

DECLARATION:

This is to certify that this thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated, that due acknowledgement is made in the text to all other materials used, and that this thesis is less than 100,000 words in length.

Ethics clearance for this research was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), University of Sydney (Protocol No. 12694).

Signature Date

Abstract

Central to this ethnography is a biannual event called 'Rockhole Recovery,' which takes place in Far West South Australia. Rockhole Recovery comprises numerous days of Four Wheel Drive (4WD) travel and involves visiting a series of rockholes — permanent water sources that occur in granite outcrops scattered amongst semi-arid mallee scrub. Members of a highly politicised Aboriginal grouping from Ceduna, whom I call Aunty Joan Mob, jointly undertake rockhole trips with interested non-Aboriginal 'greenies'.

This thesis provides an interpretation of Rockhole Recovery as an inspired and generative form of political action. Rockhole Recovery generates meanings, relationships, affects and symbols. It is to the documentation, elaboration and celebration of these that I attend in this thesis. The historical and social context that gives rise to this particular form of politics is explored throughout the thesis.

I understand Rockhole Recovery to constitute expressive acts on the part of Aunty Joan Mob. Rockhole Recovery represents a creative/political response to the manifold, contradictory and intensely stressful ways in which Aboriginal people are called on to be, and the ways in which they experience being Aboriginal, in the contemporary moment. I argue that Aboriginality is both a thoroughly unstable and relational identity category.

Specifically, Aunty Joan Mob are responding to the demands, pressures — and invitations — of the native title process, which they have experienced as profoundly destabilising. In Ceduna, the native title process has served to contradict, 'correct,' supersede and alter the self-understanding and terms of self-identification of Aunty Joan Mob members. Aunty Joan Mob seek to assert, return to themselves and consolidate an understanding of their own lives, histories and identity on their own terms.

Rockhole Recovery is best understood as a creative/political response to the ontological impasse experienced as a result of Aunty Joan Mob's encounter with the native title process. I describe this as a 'struggle for self-definition'. This undertaking involves making assertions and acting both with and against others — most significantly with greenies, and against other Aboriginal people. Forces of destruction and acts of creation shape the world described in this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I cannot thank by name those I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to: the family of 'Aunty Joan'. As inadequate as the word 'thanks' seems to the task, I thank 'Aunty Joan Mob' for all the trips out the back, the good feeds, story-telling sessions, kids' birthday party invites... in short, for sharing a whole world with me and my gang. I thank, especially, 'Aunty Vera,' 'Aunty Joan' and 'Uncle Gary' for looking after me, and always looking out for me.

I thank Jane Lydon, Virginia Watson and Tess Lea for their encouragement over the years. I'm grateful to Jane, Shane Reside, Tanya Serisier, Breony Carbines, Belinda Burbidge and Anna Clark for reading whole chapter drafts and providing thoughtful feedback. Many wonderful friends have been supportive and interested listeners, my thanks go especially to Ali Russell, Sascha Fuller and Clare Land. My stellar proofreading team did a fantastic job, thanks so much Tanya, Sascha, Richard Bailey, Marni Cordell, Camilla Pandolfini, Cate Massola and Holly Creenaunc. Esther Singer, Sam Sowerwine and John Cleary all made the trip out to Ceduna in 2008 — these visits from old friends meant much more to me than what they could have realised.

Two friends deserve special mention. Tanya Serisier has been, at once, a gentle friend and an inspirational scholar: I don't know how I would have survived the tough stuff without her. Breony Carbines, a much-admired friend, has been a trusted interlocutor for many, many years: **none** of this is imaginable without her.

I was the grateful recipient of the 2009 Daphne Elliot Bursary, awarded by the Australian Federation of University Women – South Australia Inc. Trust Fund, for fieldwork expenses. While working on this thesis I was supported by a University Postgraduate Award Scholarship, and then a Carlyle Greenwell Bequest Finishing Scholarship. I thank Linda Connor for being an accessible and supportive head of department. Other fieldwork funding came from the Carlyle Greenwell Bequest and the Postgraduate Research Support Scheme. I engaged Shane McGrath and Inge Olmheim to transcribe my interviews, and Ella Wood to assist me in the preparation of a final document. In all cases the assistance rendered was purely technical.

My writing this thesis was only made possible with the loving support of my parents, Jane and David Vincent, and my aunt, Judith Vincent. I thank the three of them for their unstinting generosity. ‘JJ’ and ‘Davey’ are energetic, hands-on grandparents, whose help has been invaluable. Judy’s reputation in our household is legendary and deserved. I thank her for becoming such a big part of my children’s lives, and for always being a huge part of mine. I also thank Jim and Jenni Reside for their ongoing support, which I sincerely appreciate.

Yasmine Musharbash, my associate supervisor, applied herself to every draft I produced with uncompromising vigour. Her involvement made this a much better thesis.

Some years ago Gillian Cowlshaw encouraged me to believe I could dive into anthropology at the deep end, and surface ... somewhere. I hope to think she was right. Gillian deserves my most heartfelt thanks for challenging, inspiring and cheering me on at every turn, and for insisting I combine compassion, honesty and critical thinking. She was simply the most wonderful supervisor.

My son Ned’s whole life has been framed by this project. I commenced fieldwork soon after he was born, and submitted this thesis the same week he started school. Wild dogs loom large in his imagination and he loves to pour over photos of his time as a bush baby. I’m so proud of the school kid that bush baby has become. Billy Rose, my little sweetheart, has had less fun, and I’ve demanded greater forbearance. I thank them both for putting up with a preoccupied mum.

Shane Reside has long consoled himself with the thought of the acknowledgement he would get at the end of all this. Well, here it is babe. I thank Shane for moving 1800 Ks to a tiny outback town he’d never visited before. Shane is up for the adventure that is life. We’re in it together and with all my heart I thank him for all I’ve learnt from him; for being a beautiful dad; for often laughing out loud, in recognition, while reading chapter drafts; for sustaining an interest in my work; and for constantly asking critically engaged and difficult-to-answer questions about it all. I thank him also for all the extra time he found out of nowhere to allow me to write.

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Maps

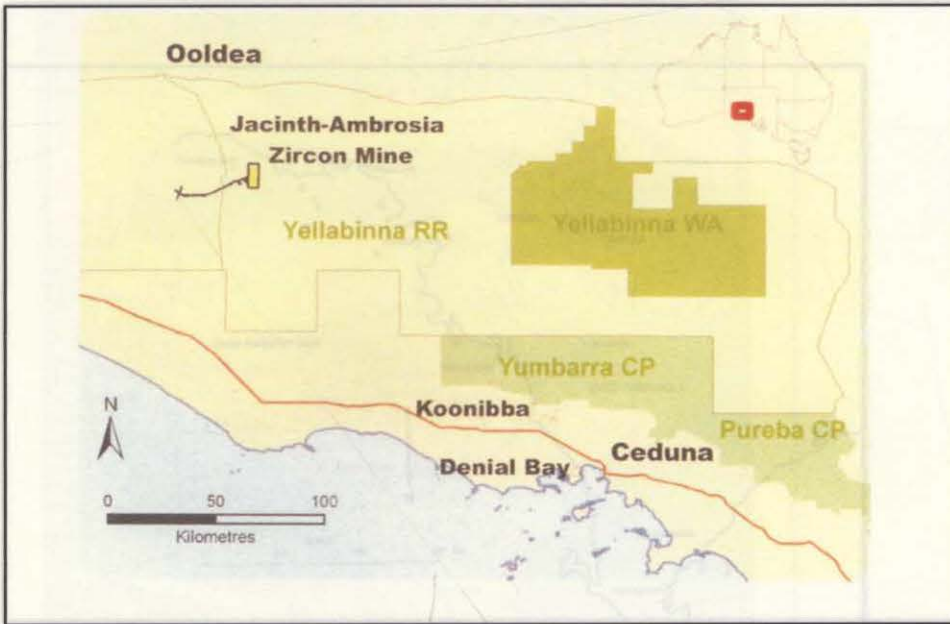


Figure 1: Map showing Ceduna, Koonibba, Denial Bay, Yumbarra and Pureba Conservation Parks, Yellabinna Regional Reserve, Yellabinna Wilderness Area and the Jacinth-Ambrosia mine site.

Map by Adam Wood, created for bush foods book project (see chapter seven).

Figure 2: Map showing the location of the Jacinth-Ambrosia Zircon Mine.

Map taken from Brock, Peggy, 1995. *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation and Survival*. Cambridge, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 64.

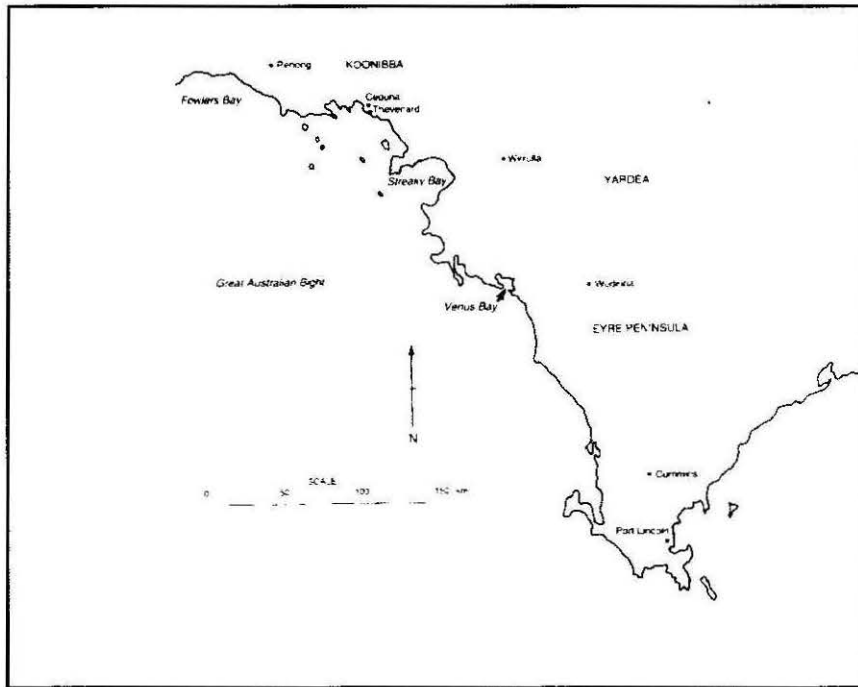


Figure 2: Map showing localities surrounding Koonibba Lutheran Mission

Map taken from Brock, Peggy. 1993. *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation and Survival*. Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 64.

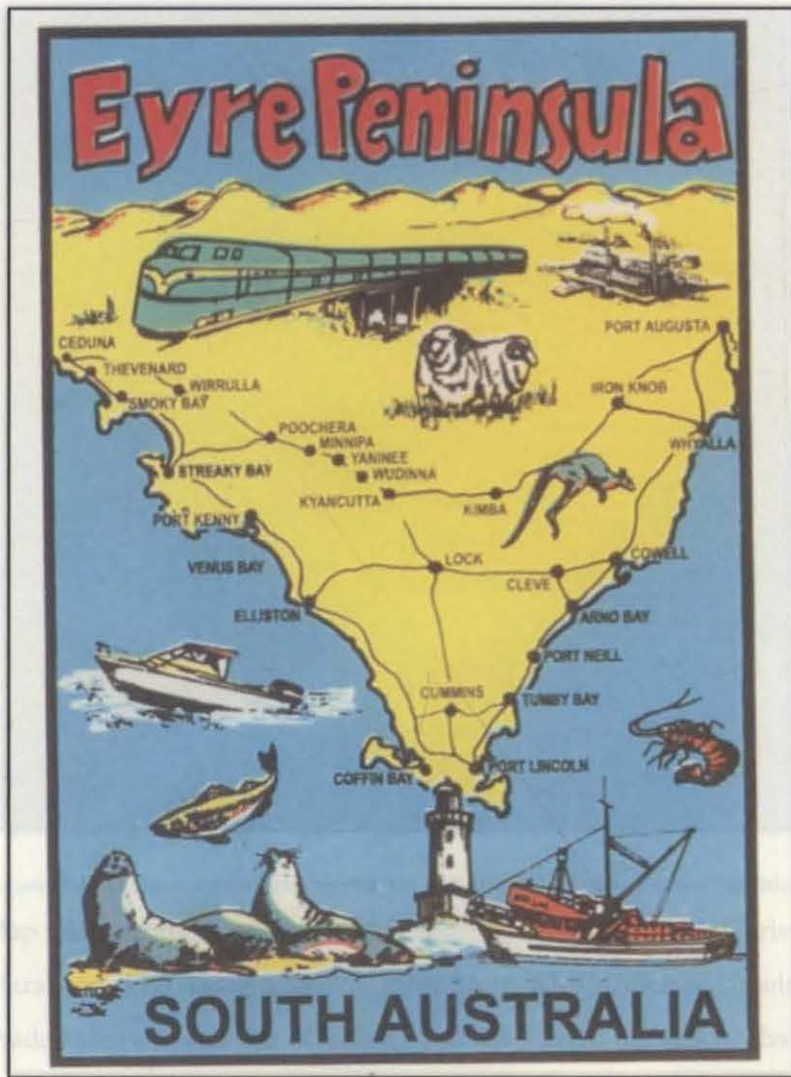


Figure 3: Map from tourist postcard

Postcard purchased from Ceduna op-shop, for 20 cents.

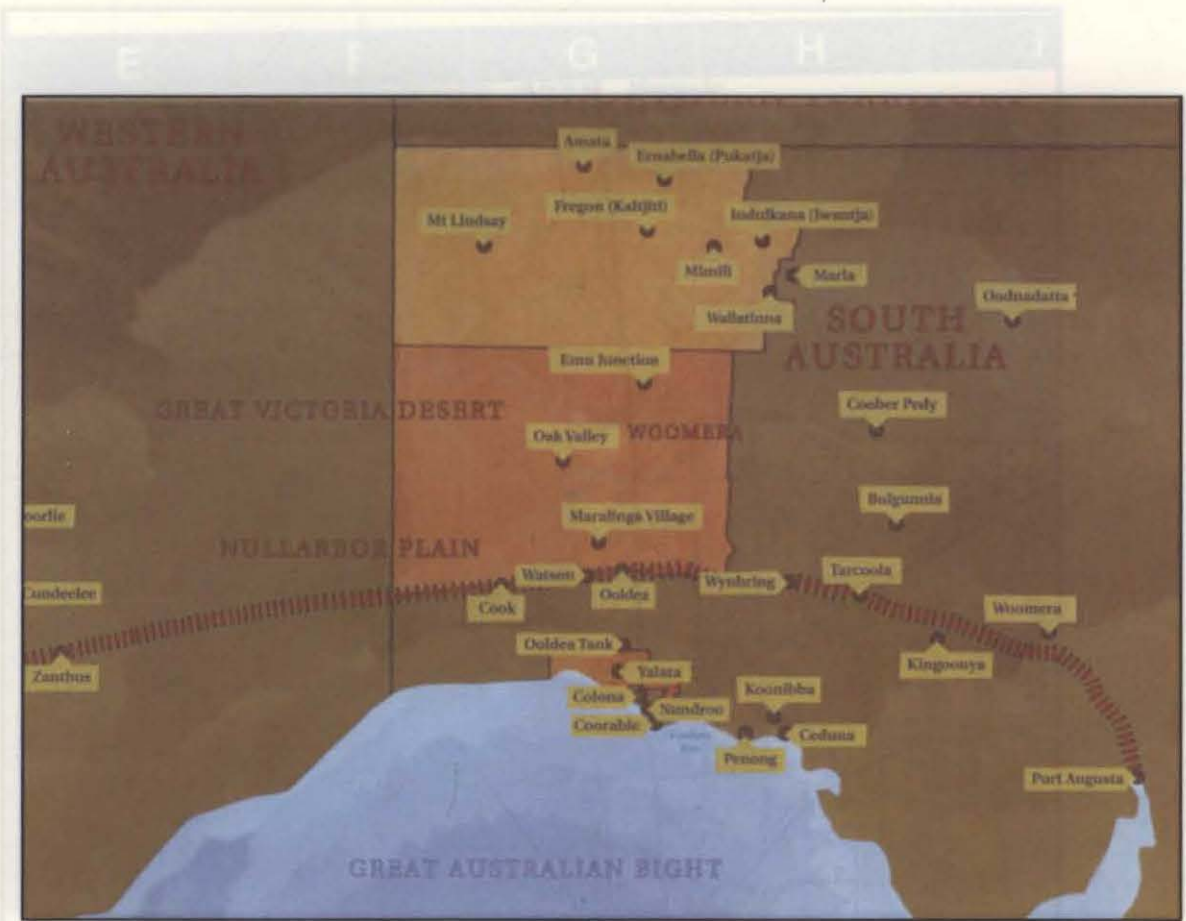


Figure 4: Map showing Ceduna, in relation to Yalata, Ooldea and other localities

Map taken from Yalata and Oak Valley Communities, with Christobel Mattingley. 2012. Maralinga. The Anangu Story. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 68. The orange shaded area denotes the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands; the yellow shaded areas, the Anangu Pitjanjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

Figure 5: Map of Ceduna township

Maps available from the tourist centre. I used this map throughout the early period of my fieldwork.



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Maps available from the tourist centre. I used this map throughout the early period of my fieldwork.

is that rockhole trips represent a creative response, on the part of Aunt Joan Mob, to the manifold, contradictory and intensely stressful ways in which Aboriginal people are called on to be, and the ways in which they experience being Aboriginal, in the contemporary moment. I argue for an understanding of Aboriginality as both a thoroughly unstable, and relational, social category. Furthermore, I argue that it is

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis.

Chapter one. 'Out the back' and into the field: thesis introduction

Introduction

Central to this ethnography is a biannual event called 'Rockhole Recovery,' which takes place every March and September in Far West South Australia. Rockhole Recovery, or simply 'rockhole trips,' comprises six, sometimes seven, days of Four Wheel Drive (4WD) travel and involves visiting a series of rockholes — permanent water sources that occur in granite outcrops scattered amongst semi-arid mallee scrub. Members of a highly politicised Aboriginal grouping from Ceduna, whom I call 'Aunty Joan Mob,' jointly undertake rockhole trips with interested non-Aboriginal visitors.¹ Aunty Joan Mob have affectionately tagged their guests 'greenies': these greenies are best described as grassroots environmental activists and are based, mostly, in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Rockhole Recovery participants visit either three or four named rockholes over the course of each trip; the route varies slightly each time according to which rockholes Aunty Joan Mob deem it a priority to visit. Participants empty rockholes of gunk, debris, rotting animal remains and dirty water, leaving them empty for the next rain to replenish these ancient water sources.

I interpret Rockhole Recovery as an inspired and generative form of political action. Rockhole trips generate meanings, relationships, affects and symbols. It is to the documentation, elaboration and, indeed, celebration of these that I attend in this thesis. I understand rockhole trips to constitute expressive acts on the part of Aunty Joan Mob and seek here to understand both what it is that their enactment expresses, and the social and political conditions that underwrite this undertaking. The major insight of this thesis is that rockhole trips represent a creative response, on the part of Aunty Joan Mob, to the manifold, contradictory and intensely stressful ways in which Aboriginal people are called on to be, and the ways in which they experience being Aboriginal, in the contemporary moment. I argue for an understanding of Aboriginality as both a thoroughly unstable, and relational, social category. Furthermore, I argue that it is

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis.

experienced as such by Aboriginal people, who embody the overburdened category of Aboriginality, and frequently find themselves suspended in a densely interwoven web of contradictions. To even speak of Aboriginality is to enter a 'labyrinth full of obscure passages, ambiguous signs and trapdoors' (Dodson 2003:28). This thesis is concerned with a group of particular Aboriginal people's efforts to cut a path through this labyrinth. I take up the question of Aboriginality throughout the thesis, but for now I note a specific aspect of this formulation. That is, Aunty Joan Mob are responding to the demands, pressures — and invitations — of the native title process, which they have experienced as profoundly destabilising. Aunty Joan Mob seek to assert, return to themselves and consolidate an understanding of their own lives, histories and identity on their own terms. In Ceduna, over the past decade, the native title process has unfolded in such a way as to serve to contradict, 'correct,' supersede and alter the self-understanding, and terms of self-identification, of Aunty Joan Mob members. In the midst of an atmosphere of internecine intra-Aboriginal conflict, Aunty Joan Mob have publically 'turned their backs' on native title. The interplay between destructiveness and creativity is a recurring theme of the thesis. In short, I understand Rockhole Recovery as a creative response to the ontological impasse experienced as a result of Aunty Joan Mob's protracted encounter with the native title process and the destruction left in its wake. I describe this as a 'struggle for self-definition'.

Michel de Certeau postulated that if Foucault (1991a; 1991b) was right, and the productive, disciplinary apparatus was everywhere becoming 'more extensive':

it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them ... what "ways of operating" form the counterpart ... of the mute processes that organize the establishment of the socioeconomic order.
(de Certeau 1984:xiv)

My thesis is clearly influenced by the legacy of resistance studies (for classic works see Genovese 1974; Scott 1989). I take heed however of Sherry Ortner's criticisms (1995:179) of the genre, especially of the lack of attention paid to 'ongoing politics *among* subalterns'. The fierceness, bitterness and rawness of the political contests between Aboriginal groupings in Ceduna is a central concern of the thesis: I enjoy no 'romance' with the concept of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990). Like de Certeau (1984:96), I follow

the ‘multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures’ and spatial practices ‘that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised’. De Certeau (1984:28) offers me a theory of a kind of makeshift creativity, which beautifully captures the way Aunty Joan Mob avidly collect detritus and discards, literally ‘making use of [their world’s] scraps’ to fashion their own world.

For de Certeau (1984:xi), ‘the question at hand’ concerned ‘modes of operation or schemata of action, and not directly the subjects (or persons) who are their authors or vehicles’. In my case, the question at hand concerns directly, *both* what de Certeau called an ‘assemblage’ of everyday practices, ‘tactics’ and schemas of action *and* the subjects/persons who are their authors. As to the attention to the everyday, I draw inspiration from anthropologist Kathleen Stewart. In writing about contemporary American society Stewart (2007:1) has said that ‘the terms neo-liberalism, advanced capitalism, and globalization [and their putative characteristics] do not in themselves begin to describe the situation we find ourselves in’. Stewart (2007:1) does not deny the reality of the forces and systems that these terms ‘try to name,’ but resists the urge to see them as ‘dead effects imposed on an innocent world’. Instead, Stewart (2007:1) is intent on evoking ‘the ordinary,’ which she understands as ‘a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges’. Ordinary (miniscule and quotidian) ‘forms of living’ (Stewart 2007:5) are comprised of moments conterminously banal and significant; beliefs and practices that are at once incoherent, contradictory and axiomatic; and the intimate, painful and lived effects of ideologically and discursively determined possibilities. It is ordinary forms of living that I bring to light in this thesis, rather than the workings of the native title system itself. I found, following Stewart (1996:1), that the possibilities for everyday, local social action and narration are in excess of the limits hegemonic systems prescribe, even in spaces “‘occupied”, exploited and minoritized’. Like Stewart I foreground the ‘authors’ of these ordinary actions — Aunty Joan Mob’s insights, experiences, desires, fears and frustrations are at the heart of this thesis.

This introductory chapter has three substantial parts. Firstly, I introduce the phenomenon of Rockhole Recovery more fully, explaining that rockhole trips constitute Aunty Joan Mob’s determined expression of opposition to mining in their country, writ large. I summarise the status of mineral exploration and the impact of Australia’s current mining boom in this region to date. I then briefly introduce the town of Ceduna, and

locate the whereabouts of rockhole trips. And I introduce the charismatic, perspicacious figure of Aunty Joan, explaining that rockhole trips are essentially her vision.

Secondly, I locate my own work within the field of Australian Aboriginal studies, and the minor tradition of anthropological work undertaken in rural Australian towns. In this section I outline my theoretical as well as regional orientations. I argue throughout this thesis that what it means to be Aboriginal only makes sense *in relation* to what it means to be non-Aboriginal and in relation to Aboriginal people's experience of non-Aboriginal institutional forms and cultural norms. Moreover I argue that this relation, or rather these sets of relations, are borne from the colonial condition and cannot be understood outside of the complex power relations between coloniser and colonised, in which they remain enmeshed. This thesis involves extensive ethnographic exposition of this point. In doing so I depart from the longstanding anthropological interest in cultural continuity, stressing instead the ways in which Aboriginal people's experiences are characterised by *radical discontinuities*, as the meanings and significance attributed to Aboriginality by external forces are constantly shifting. Thus my thesis is about a small group of contemporary Aboriginal subjects, possessed of both political consciousness and critical acumen, as they strive to retain a coherent sense of themselves.

Finally, I turn to methodological concerns, outlining the origins, evolution and enacting of my own study. I discuss my subjective experience of fieldwork, focusing specifically on the emotions of fieldwork (Behar 1996; Cerwonka and Malkki 2007; Davies and Spencer 2010) as well as commenting briefly on the methodological and theoretical implications of taking a baby into the field (see Cassell 1987).

***'They have their claws in.'* The relationship of mining to Rockhole Recovery**

Rockhole trip routes traverse South Australia's Yellabinna Regional Reserve and the Yumbarra and Pureba Conservation Parks. These parks are open to the public for camping and 4WDing, and are managed from Ceduna by local 'Parks and Wildlife' employees, under the auspices of the state government's Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. All three parks are also under intensive mineral exploration, their geological sub-stratum being especially rich in heavy mineral sands

deposits.² On my first rockhole trip, undertaken in March 2008, I collected a flyer that stated:

Every March and September [Aunty Joan Mob] and [the greenies] collaborate on a 4WD journey monitoring and cleaning significant soaks and water holes within the Yellabinna Regional Reserve and Yumbarra and Pureba Conservation Parks, which are under siege from SA's mining boom.

The flyer includes a quote from prominent Aunty Joan Mob figures:

WE HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING FOR PROTECTION OF THIS REGION FOR MANY YEARS. SHORT TERM PROFITS FROM MINING WILL NEVER OUTWEIGH THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES OF THIS LAND, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO OUR PEOPLE. OUR MESSAGE TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND ANY MINING COMPANIES IS 'MUNDOO YUMADOO ILIGA' WHICH MEANS 'LEAVE THE LAND AS IT IS'.

The flyer is now a creased and torn piece of A4-sized paper, folded in quarters and smudged with sweat. It forms part of my collection of treasured, scrappy ephemera, the value of which lies far beyond its mnemonic function. I treat these as cultural 'artefacts' (Lea 2008:226), belonging to a world in which passionate and stark sentiments are cobbled together, reproduced ad hoc and disseminated quickly and cheaply. The flyer is jammed with text of varying shapes and sizes, small, too-dark black and white photocopied photos and features the following map (see Figure 6).

²Two geological provinces meet in this region: the Gawler Craton, which underlies the greater part of South Australia and the Eucla Basin, which extends from the western Eyre Peninsular into Western Australia. The Gawler Craton is prospective for uranium, gold and copper deposits, among other minerals, and the Eucla Basin is prospective for heavy mineral sands, among other minerals. BHP-Billiton's enormous Olympic Dam uranium and copper mine, located near Roxby Downs, is part of the Gawler Craton. The heavy mineral sands mine, Jacinth-Ambrosia, which is located 200 kilometres northwest of Ceduna, is in the Eucla Basin. See the South Australian government's PACE (Plan for Accelerating Exploration) website for further details, http://paceinvestors.pir.sa.gov.au/geology/eucla_basin and http://paceinvestors.pir.sa.gov.au/geology/gawler_craton [Last accessed January 27, 2013].

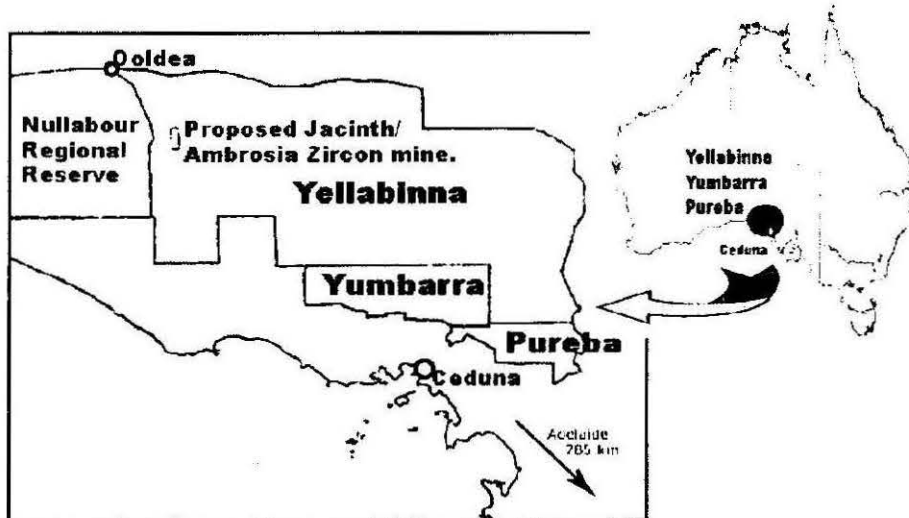


Figure 6: Map of region, from flyer

And yet the question of mining, which seemed crucial at the outset of my research project, and is still critical to Aunty Joan Mob, emerged as a minor theme of my thesis in the end. The question that assumed primacy is that of what it means to be Aboriginal — as it is experienced in relation to Ceduna whitefellas; in relation to other Aboriginal people; in relation to the demands and desires of state institutions; and in relation to greenies. I'm certainly not saying, 'I think rockhole trips are actually about something other than what Aunty Joan Mob say they are about.' And I'm not looking to discover and reveal *the* singular meaning and ultimate significance of rockhole trips. Rather, rockhole trips provide a rich vein for interpretation because of their multiple and contradictory expressive effects. I see my task as teasing out the sets of questions Rockhole Recovery opens up, *and* constitutes some form of response to. I offer interpretations that are very much my own and am acutely aware of the fact that Aunty Joan Mob members and greenies may well disagree with aspects of my argument.

Aunty Joan first made contact with greenies in 2005 when she travelled to Coober Pedy, in northern South Australia, for a three-day-long gathering of Aboriginal anti-nuclear activists and greenies. *Kulini Kulini* (Are you listening?) was a camp organised as part of the *Irati Wanti* (The poison, leave it) campaign against a proposed nuclear waste dump in northern South Australia (Brown and Brown 2005:75). The Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, a council of Senior Aboriginal women living in Coober Pedy, initiated *Irati Wanti* in 1998, and fostered close working relationships with urban-based environmental organisations

and campaigners over the course of their successful seven-year-long campaign.³ At *Kulini Kulini*, Aunty Joan says, 'I got up and asked for help.' She formed a close bond with an anti-nuclear activist who responded to her request; inter-personal relationships with Aboriginal identities are desired and exalted by anti-mining activists, no doubt this activist recognised that Aunty Joan's request for help also represented an appealing offer of friendship. Aunty Joan quickly encountered other 'greenies' from within this same social-political-cultural milieu. I too belong to this world, a point I will elaborate later. In March 2006, Aunty Joan, in collaboration with this greenie, organised the first rockhole trip.

'Going out to clean rockholes was something we have always done,' Aunty Joan once reminded me: rockhole trips are conceptualised as inflecting a traditional cultural practice with urgent political meanings. Aunty Joan explained that she envisaged that rockhole trips would enable 'a lot more people to see the sites, to see what we do, to understand us, to listen'. Her hope, in this regard, has certainly been realised. She perceives, 'We're getting a lot more respect out there for the Aboriginal way of life.' What Aunty Joan sees as 'the Aboriginal way of life' — visiting, tending to and maintaining the ecological health of rockholes — faces a potential and visible threat in the form of mineral exploration in the region.

Rockhole Recovery participants travel in a slow, snaking 4WD convoy along soft, sandy roads, the conditions of which have greatly improved because of the access mining companies' exploration parties now enjoy to this remote area, an irony Aunty Joan Mob appreciate. 'We used to call this killer track!' Aunty Joan Mob members frequently comment when travelling one particular route, before jokingly offering thanks to 'the miners' for widening roads and clearing overhanging trees for them. But Aunty Joan Mob reinscribe these routes for their own purposes, in order to maintain a relationship with country that they wish to see protected from future development. Aunty Joan Mob

³ From 2000 to 2005 I was part of a small activist collective named the 'Melbourne Kungkas': our mission was to support the Coober Pedy-based women's council. I did not attend *Kulini Kulini* because of other commitments. The Irati Wanti campaign came to a triumphant conclusion in July 2005 when then prime minister John Howard announced that the proposed South Australian site had been abandoned (see Brown and Brown 2005:111; Vincent 2007:156-157). In 2006, the federal government announced a new plan to build a nuclear waste dump in the Northern Territory. Currently, the preferred site is on Muckaty Station, 120 kilometres north of Tennant Creek. According to the Australian Conservation Foundation's website, the Traditional Owners of Muckaty Station maintain that both the Northern Land Council and the federal government 'failed to accurately identify, consult with and receive their consent and are seeking to reverse the decision'. See <http://www.acfonline.org.au/be-informed/northern-australia-nuclear/muckaty-radioactive-dump> [Last accessed October 1, 2012].

hold an absolute position as to the future of their country — they do not want to see any mining proceed in this particular swathe of bush, under any conditions. ‘Too good for miners,’ Aunty Joan once fired back, her eyes flashing, after I made effusive comments about a particularly beautiful spot we visited on a warm spring day. Aunty Joan summarised her absolute opposition, stating,

There are rockholes all over the place: special, sacred sites all over the place. You can’t negotiate. The land is the land, and I’ve been saying all along, ‘The land is not negotiable.’

The three contiguous conservation parks/regional reserves where rockhole trips are undertaken are overlaid with a confusing patchwork of mineral exploration leases. In 1999, the South Australian Liberal state government controversially ‘reproclaimed’ Yumberra Conservation Park from a single-use conservation park into a multi-use park, in order to allow exploration and mining to take place within the park (Ogle, et al. 2002:5).⁴ Western Australia-based Iluka Resources now mines and processes the mineral sand Zircon at the Jacinth-Ambrosia mine site on the far western edge of the Yellabinna Regional Reserve, and is one of the largest tenement holders in the region. Under the Native Title Act’s ‘right to negotiate’ statutes, the Far West Native Title Group has signed an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) with Iluka, which covers the Jacinth-Ambrosia mine.⁵ Aunty Joan calls these ‘Illegal Land Use Agreements’. Jacinth-Ambrosia

⁴ The story of how this ‘reproclamation’ came about has many twists and turns. Aunty Joan explained to me, ‘I think what really started it was when they found a thing called the anomaly, that glowed red from the satellite pictures.’ Ogle et al (2002:5) have explained that ‘aerial geological surveys in the 1990s revealed a large anomaly under the surface of the Park of a type which have been found to be highly mineralised elsewhere in the Gawlor Craton’. The mining industry lobbied to have Yumberra ‘opened up’ while conservation groups campaigned to ‘maintain its strictly protected status’ (ibid.). The state Liberal government’s 1999 re-proclamation was opposed by Labor in opposition. However when Labor came to power in South Australia in 2002 it proved reluctant to reinstate Yumberra’s status as a singly proclaimed conservation park, despite nothing having come of the anomaly (see The Wilderness Society’s press release ‘Where is the government going on Yumberra?’, <http://wilderness.org.au/campaigns/outback-asustralia/yumb60009> [Last accessed January 13, 2012]. Instead, Labor premier Mike Rann proclaimed a 500,000 hectare portion of the Yellabinna Regional Reserve a wilderness area, banning mining and exploration in the northern corner of this reserve (Dorbzinski 2004:21). Regional reserves were, in themselves, new categories of reserves designated in 1987, which explicitly provided for mineral exploration and mining to take place in areas simultaneously recognised to have conservation value (Cohen 1992:208). At the time of writing a further change is underway, which would see all conservation parks that have mineral exploration and mining interests active in them have their status revised as ‘nature parks’.

⁵ ‘Signing of sand mining agreement,’ *Aboriginal Way* (publication of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Native Title Unit, South Australia), January 2008, p. 3.

became operational in early 2010, about a year after I concluded 12 months of fieldwork in Ceduna.⁶

Throughout 2008, while I was undertaking fieldwork, Iluka had a single, peripatetic exploration rig operating across its tenements, shifting it constantly, and sometimes declaring certain areas as 'non-prospective' in public meetings, company newsletters and via frequent communiqués in the local weekly paper, the *West Coast Sentinel*. I attended one such public meeting in the back room of the pub in July 2008. In response to my question, an Iluka representative confirmed the company was looking for uranium deposits as well as heavy mineral sands. Aunty Joan Mob members did not attend these kinds of meetings, setting great store instead in rumours and their own observations. While I was undertaking fieldwork, mining companies increasingly had a presence in everyday life: brand-new 4WDs with bonnets bearing fluorescent flags on taut, skinny poles were a common sight; men in neat blue shirts filled the seats on the twice-daily small plane service between Ceduna and Adelaide; giant trucks lumbered along the Highway One Adelaide-Perth route that skirts the edge of town; and Iluka was a major sponsor of community events.⁷ Aunty Joan followed these developments closely and commented to me in 2008, 'They [the mining companies] already have their claws in.'

To summarise, Aunty Joan Mob are holding out against a vision of their future increasingly held up as the saviour of remote and regional Aboriginal lifeworlds (Langton 2012). They extend an invitation to urban-dwelling greenies to participate in Rockhole Recovery as guests in their country, in order to establish and maintain a political support base that they anticipate drawing upon in the future. While I was living in Ceduna the

⁶ See Iluka Resource's webpage devoted to the Jacinth-Ambrosia project for more details, www.iluka.com/?pa=ja [Last accessed January 13, 2012]. I have visited Ceduna on six occasions since returning to the east coast in March 2009, and have crossed paths with a number of friends, black and white, who now form part of Iluka's 'Fly In, Fly Out' (I'F'O) workforce at Jacinth-Ambrosia. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the effects of Jacinth-Ambrosia: new research would be required to do this.

⁷ Many of Ceduna's inhabitants treat the prospect of becoming a mining town as exciting; others welcome the opportunity for economic development but remain ambivalent about what becoming a mining town might mean for the social life of the town as a whole. A critical perspective on the social effects of the mining boom can be found in Butler (2009), Carrington et al (2012) and (Cleary 2012). Jon Altman (2009) summarises common issues arising out of agreements negotiated between Aboriginal groups and mining companies. These include, but are not limited to, Aboriginal people having broader aspirations for agreements to fund and enable 'life projects,' while mining companies maintain a more narrow focus on employment opportunities at the mine site; the problem of environmental damage; the retracting neoliberal state withdrawing ordinary services from remote areas and Aboriginal people relying on agreements to secure provision of these services by mining companies; agreements fuelling intra-Aboriginal conflict (Altman 2009:38-39).

prospect of mining largely remained an omnipresent yet undifferentiated threat from the perspective of Aunty Joan Mob. For the many Aboriginal and white residents of Ceduna who hope that mining will secure the region's economic future, it remained an alluring promise. In any case, the issue of mining and its potential effects emerged as less urgent than other social dramas *already* unfolding over the course of my fieldwork.

'Out the back': locating the town of Ceduna and Rockhole Recovery

Ceduna is a dusty outback town perched atop a ragged coastline. Located 800 kilometres west of Adelaide, on the northwest extremity of the Eyre Peninsular, it is the last major 'service town' before the flat, tree-less Nullabor Plain and the South Australia/Western Australia border. According to the 2010 national census, the Local Government Area of Ceduna (which includes the town as well as outlying farmlands and small localities) had a total population of just under 3,500. A quarter of this population identify as Indigenous.⁸ The Indigenous population itself is comprised, roughly speaking, of two fairly distinct sets of peoples, although the distinction serves only to introduce the scene and will soon be exposed as fragile and artificial.

The first group comprises Aboriginal people whose history centres on the Koonibba Lutheran mission and who identify themselves as Kokatha, Wirangu and/or Mirning. Aunty Joan Mob are Kokatha people and often refer to themselves as Nungas — a term used to mean Aboriginal people in South Australia in the same way 'Koori' is used in southeast Australian states. Aunty Joan Mob contest the legitimacy of Wirangu-identifying-Nungas, arguing that this identity-category is a recent invention, spawned by the native title process. I examine this conflict at length in chapter five. The second Aboriginal group I refer to is comprised of Pitjanjatjara-speaking people, whose history centres on Ooldea, and who spend considerable amounts of time in Ceduna but normally reside at either the remote community of Yalata, 200 kilometres west of Ceduna, or at Oak Valley in the Great Victoria Desert. These Aboriginal people identify not as Nungas

⁸ Census data is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website, http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/LGA41010 [Last accessed November 1, 2012].

but as Anangu: their social and kin relations stretch north into the Anangu Pitjanjatjara Yunkunytjatjara (APY) Lands and into the Northern Territory (see Appendix). I stress that the boundaries of these categories are not fixed, both because the first 'group' is internally riven, and also because many marriages have taken place between these two 'groups' over generations.

Rockhole Recovery itself takes place 'out bush' or 'out the back,' within a vast stretch of mallee scrubland. Out the back designates a realm of meaning-generating action that lies northwest of a stretch of the lengthy 'Dog Fence' that starts in western Queensland, turns south towards western New South Wales, tracks west across northern South Australia and then drops down to the coast, finishing at a point just west of Fowlers Bay (Holden 1991:7).⁹ Individual run-holders in South Australia first erected fences in order to protect stock from dingoes in the late 1880s (Holden 1991:24) and in 1946 the South Australian Dog Fence Act provided 'for an unbroken line of dog-proof fencing across the northern parts of the state' (Holden 1991:33). Between 1985 and 1987, a 120 kilometre section of the Dog Fence netting north of Ceduna was replaced with 91 kilometres of metre-high, seven-wire electric fence (Holden 1991:159).

Aunty Joan and her husband, a whitefella and retired wheat farmer, Uncle Gary, worked as contractors on the Dog Fence over this time, camping out bush for short stretches of time, sometimes tugging their caravan behind a two wheel drive Holden ute. Uncle Gary reminisced:

We used to go there on school holidays ... I had all the family out here, the young boys, our lads, putting in dog fence posts, and we used to get a dollar a post, they used to earn good pocket money over the Christmas holidays.

A pamphlet devoted to promoting the 'Parks of the Far West' describes the rockholes that dot the wild scrub north of the Dog Fence:

⁹ Philip Holden (1991) travelled the 5,309-kilometre length of this dingo-proof fence in 1989. In his travelogue he explains that the fence is referred to as the 'Barrier Fence' in Queensland, the 'Border Fence' in NSW and the 'Dog Fence' in South Australia (Holden 1991:7).

Within this parallel dune system are small islands where granite outcrops (inselbergs) trap water after rain. These are extremely important to local wildlife and have significant Aboriginal cultural associations.¹⁰

The 'parallel dune system' entails a series of undulating sand dunes that run east-west. On the March/April 2012 rockhole trip, I marked down each time we rose to the crest of one of these rises and went bumping and crashing down the other side (see Figure 7).

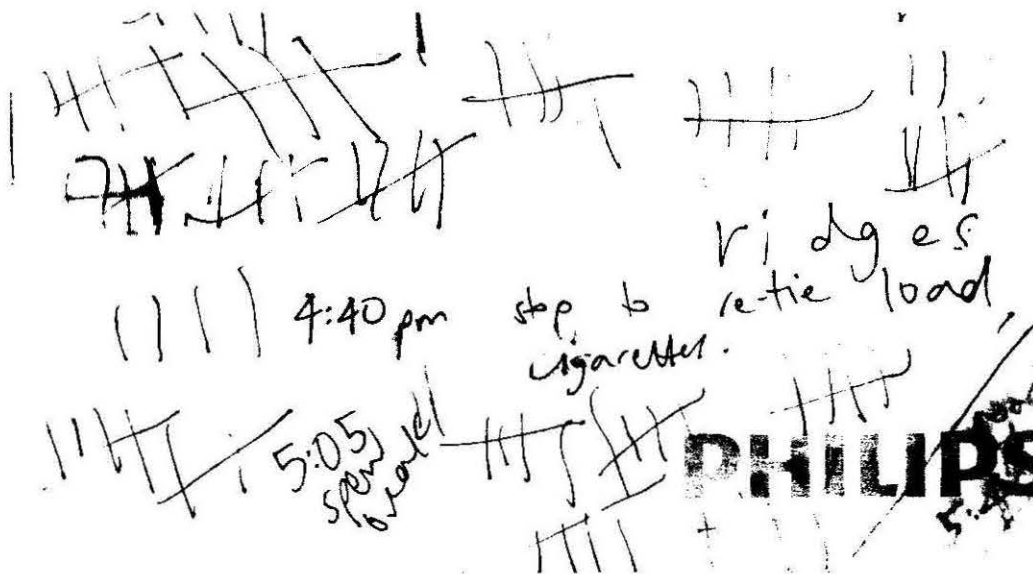


Figure 7: Marking down each ascent/descent.

I marked down 99 dunes but this is a rough approximation — the shape of the country, as well as its significance, is subject to interpretation. Some dunes are steep ridges of deep, soft sand: a 4WD driver can take several attempts at getting to the top, before slowly churning their way over them in low gear. Others are low bumps and dips that follow each other in quick succession, so that it is not always clear where one begins and ends.¹¹

¹⁰ This pamphlet was downloaded from the website of the Department of Environment and Heritage, government of South Australia at www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/ [Last accessed January 13, 2012].

¹¹ I recorded each sand dune/east-west ridge by making a mark each time we went up and over one. The marks are made on the instruction manual for our car stereo, which I found after a mad scramble through the glove box for something to write on. It was difficult to make even the strokes because the trip was so bumpy. I evidently spilled water or perhaps lemonade on my record, or perhaps one of my children did: I can't remember. I was also jotting down the times and reasons for us stopping on the way. I have noted that we stopped at 4:30pm to re-tie the load on the trailer, as it had bounced loose. We stopped at 4:40 for a cigarette break. We stopped at 5:05 for someone to spew. And we stopped again at 5:45 to again re-tie the load on the trailer.

The rockholes are all interlinked mythical sites (Anderson 1999). While I know a little of the creation stories associated with some of the rockholes, I do not intend to disclose anything along these lines. This is partly because my own knowledge is partial, fragmented and limited. More pertinent is the fact that the possessing of, disclosing and circulating of this kind of cultural knowledge represents an extremely fraught undertaking. The reasons for this are bound up in the intense conflicts generated by the local native title claim process. Aunty Joan Mob are caught in a double bind: rockhole trips are one means by which they legitimate their own cultural authority, emphasising their familiarity with and attachment to these sites to a local audience, as well as to visiting greenies, who are in turn regarded as emissaries of the imagined nation. At the same time, they fear the consequences if the stories, meanings and even names associated with particular sites, which they wish to demonstrate that they know, circulate too freely. The fear is that other Aboriginal people will claim to 'know' things they don't *really* know, or at least did not know until they learnt them from the Aboriginal people who 'really' hold this understanding. Once things are set down, Aunty Joan Mob perceive, it's there for 'anyone to read': people might read it and claim 'they've known it all their lives'. 'Knowledge' is thus treated as something that needs to be held over time, and something that directly links contemporary people with their antecedents, whose lifeworlds were fundamentally structured by the mythical/metaphysical dimensions of country. It's the experience of these kinds of tensions — over the rightful proprietors of cultural knowledge, over the meanings and significance that country holds today — as well as the broader conditions that give these conflicts shape, that I subject to analysis later in this thesis. For this reason I also refrain from naming/specifying the particular rockholes visited over the course of Rockhole Recovery.

Historian Simon Ryan (1996:101) comments on the 'peculiar authority that maps possess,' noting that there 'can be few representational objects that are so often confused with the things they are meant to represent'. That is, a map as a representation of reality assumes that this reality is available to it 'in an unmediated way' (Ryan 1996:102). With this in mind, I considered carefully which maps of Ceduna to include as an aide to understanding this thesis. Ongoing and highly racialised contests about the nature of reality characterise the town's social life, which I discuss in chapter four. The localities and features marked on a tourist map are not the localities and features given prominence in the lives and histories of Ceduna Nungas. I have only ever found one map on which the rockholes themselves are named and marked, but most maps of this area

do not even bear the inscriptions of the roads travelled over the course of rockhole trips. On that most detailed map I have seen, Aunty Joan noticed that the rockholes names are in fact confused. She speculated that perhaps men had shown an outsider one of the women's sites and then, in order to mask their indiscretion, supplied the name of another, less potent site, a rockhole that lies to the west. For reasons largely of sensitivity, but also impracticability, I do not supply the map showing the location of the rockholes. And it's in order to diffuse the authority of *the* map, that I include numerous maps of the same area, showing how different sources map this same place in different ways, in order to best represent the way this part of the world is inhabited by different groups of people ie. Anangu, Nungas, tourists, or whitefellas.

There are a few locations I do name in this thesis. Googs Lake, which lies approximately 70 kilometres northeast of Ceduna, is a vast, white salt-lake 15 kilometres in length, which crunches and crackles underfoot. We generally camped at Googs on a sandy slope overlooking the lakebed, amidst Slender Cypress-Pines and Australian Sandalwood. The burning of fallen Sandalwood branches sent sweet-smelling smoke wafting up the side of the hill. The other place I name is a claypan, Paint Lakes, located west of Googs.

The rockholes all vary in their character and size. One is a dramatic formation that rises steeply out of the scrub and can be climbed up, clambered across and wandered over. Its blotchy brownish, orangey, greenish surface seemed to me to resemble the pockmarked skin of a wizened reptile, with folds and wrinkles. Deep green pools are found on its hide. This largest outcrop can be glimpsed from afar — on my first rockhole trip Aunty Joan drew my attention to a sliver of rock on the shimmering horizon, coming in and out of view as the convoy of 4WDs made its way up the track towards it. Aunty Joan was thrilled by this tendency of the rockhole to conceal and reveal itself, as if it was conspiring to sometimes hide and at other times to pop out, teasing and beckoning those who approached it. From atop this rockhole, a sweeping 360 degree view of the dark green mallee scrub spreads out below; from high above, the dramatic rises and steep descents appears as gentle undulations. From up here it was as if the country were an unruffled surface of the sea and stretched, undifferentiated and wavy green, in every direction to the horizon. This, I soon realised, was because I did not know what I was looking at (see Ryan 1996:119-120 for a discussion of the way explorers' descriptions of the land as sea served to homogenise the landscape). Aunty Joan Mob members orient

themselves to features that are not necessarily visible, but the direction in which they lie and their approximate location is always known and noted.

Another rockhole does not rise from the landscape, seeming instead to form a depression that has settled into the sand. Its hard, orange circular rockface spreads out, and is slightly sunken. Another is a rise marked with imprints and shallow pools scooped out of its surface. This last rockhole appeared to me in drastically different lights. The first time I saw it, I huddled in patchy shade with my cranky ten-week old baby, in filthy, searing heat. The rock looked like a hard, grey tablet ringed with tough, stubbled grasses. Black water, thick sludge and the remains of a partially decomposed emu and wild dog were being bucketed out of its deep well, and a putrid stench hung in the thick, hot air. But once in winter we visited it as rain fell lightly, revealing its grooves and crevices, and casting the whole lichen-covered rockface in soft, green hues. Small bright green and turquoise-coloured birds, with wet, shiny backs, flitted through the trees and flew low across the rockhole. A naturally occurring soak by its edge was choked with thick onion weed. And another time, after days of summer storms and heavy rain, the sky silver and sun pouring through dense clouds, the earth seemed rich, red and muddy and the rockhole teemed with warm water. My baby, by then almost one, crawled straight into the smaller pools and took a bath. I took the photo in Figure 8 on this muggy afternoon.

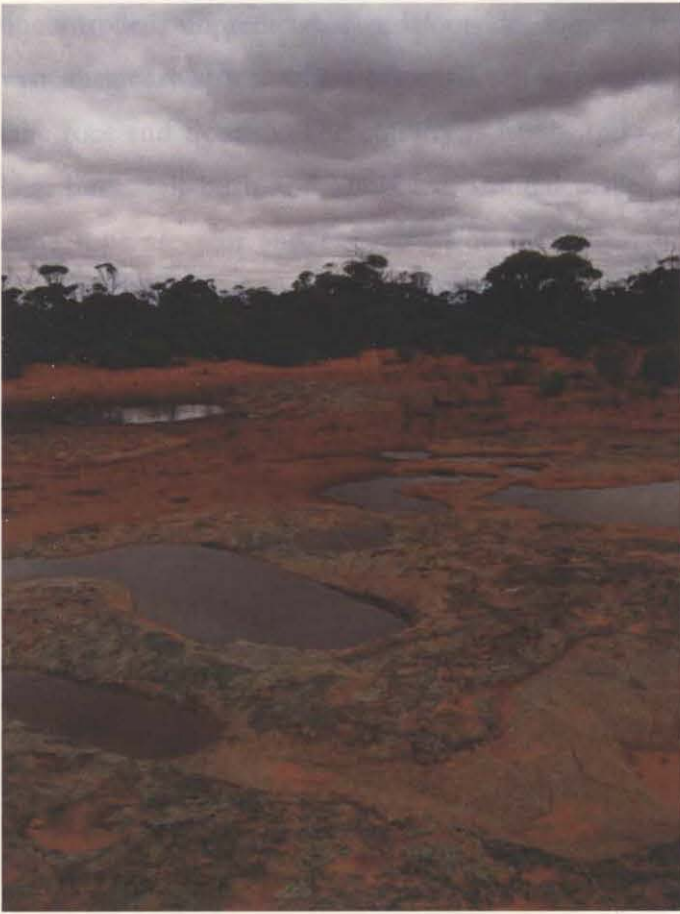


Figure 8: Out the back, after rain.

The dog fence marks a boundary between domesticated space, devoted largely to wheat cropping — settled, subdued, colonised space — and a vast stretch of semi-arid mallee woodland, a domain beyond the agricultural district.¹² ‘Out the back’ in the local vernacular, indexes a zone that is wild but is not what conservationists mean by ‘wilderness,’ a notion which Marcia Langton (1996:20) has long criticised for being devoid of any reference to Indigenous people, and being integral to discourses which erase the Indigenous presence. The term ‘wild’ has been subject to similar critiques (Neale 2011), however I use it to indicate both a space and state of being that is

¹²In talking about ‘space’ in this way I take as axiomatic the insights of Henri Lefebvre (1991), Michel de Certeau (1984) and others in interpreting space as constructed, shaped and made by human activity and power relations, rather than as natural. Lefebvre pioneered an understanding of space as socially produced, rather than as the pre-existing backdrop to social action, arguing that spaces are produced by and productive of social relations. Furthermore, says Lefebvre (1991:17-18), spaces obscure the conditions of their own production: illusions about space as passive, natural, intelligible and substantial support the understanding of space as existing prior to the subject’s engagement with space. For a recent collection dealing specifically with the ways spaces are made and unmade by settler-colonialist practices and imaginaries see (Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds 2010).

uncontrolled, unpredictable and ‘outside domestication’.¹³ ‘Out the back’ represents a vast imaginary space, where liberated self-imaginings, on the part of Aunty Joan Mob, take root and flourish. The country is harsh, spiky, dry and hard: spear grass, spinifex, blue bush, salt bush and knobbed, stunted mallee trees cling tight to the dunes. The dune tops are soft and car tyres sink into them but the ground near the rockholes themselves is compacted. And yet, this parched, semi-arid landscape is conceived of as an abundant domain. Aunty Joan has fashioned a statement that encapsulates that a whole world lies out the back:

This is the last inland area where I can teach our children — this is our school. The land houses our bush medicine — our pharmacy. Hunting for our meat, gathering our food — our grocery stores, our garden. Our spiritual beliefs are within and throughout the land — this is our church.

I argue that this world provides a window on to a way of being, which is now quite other to those Aboriginal people, like Aunty Joan Mob, whose lives are caught up, as a matter of course, in the globalised modern-capitalist matrix. As David Mosse (2006:936) sums up, *all* anthropological fields have become to some extent ‘unbounded’ and are now entangled in ‘webs of regional and transnational connections and communities’. Aboriginal people on the Far West Coast have long been integrated into the rural economy of the region, now the mineral resources of their country are in demand in a global economy driven by Chinese demand.¹⁴ And yet, out the back lies proximate to these Aboriginal lives and is treasured for lying within grasp. I perceive that heading out the back involves entering a psychic space beyond, and recalling a temporality before white society. Access to this is partly what gives the experience of being in the bush its profundity and power.

Aunty Joan

As is already apparent, the woman I call Aunty Joan is the central character in this thesis. I hope it is also evident that Aunty Joan has the gift of the gab. Her warmth and humour,

¹³ The term is Ghassan Hage’s, and was elaborated at a seminar held in the University of Sydney’s Gender and Cultural Studies Department on September 21, 2012.

¹⁴ Zircon is mostly used for ceramic ware and tiles; China is Iluka’s biggest market.

as well as her ability to craft a narrative and to generate profound insights out of ordinary occurrences, made a lasting impression on me, as well as on many greenies and those around her. W. E. H. Stanner (2009 [1959]:48-49) described Durmugam as a Nangiomeri man with a strong 'sentiment for Aboriginal ways,' who 'wanted to live a blackfellow's life' and 'venerated his culture'. All of this also struck me about Aunty Joan, although what it means to live an Aboriginal life in her own times and social/political context is of course vastly different from the context Stanner described. Also like Durmugam, Aunty Joan has 'a "hot belly" for [her] rights' (Stanner 2009 [1959]:49).

One of the narratives that Aunty Joan has most masterfully shaped is the story of her own life. Born on the Koonibba Lutheran Mission, located about 45 kilometres west of Ceduna, in 1951, Aunty Joan frequently says that she has 'always been a rebel'. Her siblings remember her as a 'tomboy' growing up. Aunty Joan told me:

I used to go with all the men, which was pretty much unheard of. There'd be one little girl who'd travel everywhere with the men coz all the other girls had to learn basket weaving and stuff, but I learned on the land, our culture. So I was really lucky in that respect.

Aunty Joan travelled out bush in a two-wheel sulky, drawn by a horse. 'Our people have been walking that country for years so having a horse and sulky was a little bonus,' she says. She was the particular favourite of one of her mother's younger brothers: he spoilt her 'something rotten' and gave in to her demands to go everywhere with the men. With her uncles and grandfathers, Aunty Joan went bush for days at a time, 'They took me right out the back there.' Aunty Joan now thinks that she was taken bush for a reason:

Old grandfathers used to look after me, take me places — I think they took me there just [because] I had memory, coz I can remember things. That's why I'm fighting now. I think they already knew that 'this one here is an outlaw'. Coz I was always called outlaw. 'Outlaw one will get a back up later on in life.'

Aunty Joan's traces her willingness to fight 'government,' on the issue of mining, to her childhood experiences. Her grandfathers entrusted cultural knowledge to her about particular rockhole sites, believing she would be inclined to get her 'back up' and be willing to 'stick up for the land'. Moreover, she explained to oral historian Sue Anderson and archeologist Kerryn Walsh in 1996 that her dogged 'hatred for government' stems

from the fact that she harbours 'a fair bit of hatred for the system that took the brother away'.¹⁵ This is a reference to her experience of 'Welfare' and the splitting up of her family after the end of the mission in 1963. I will go into more depth about this in chapter three.

Aunty Joan has a brown, sun-beaten face creased with a deep smile lines, and spindly stars that radiate from the edges of her eyes. We looked up once to see a bunch of crows chase an eagle through the sky. The eagle ducked and weaved, and the crows came at it from every side, pecking and harassing it. 'Go Crows!' she called out, in her husky smokers' voice. She barracks for the Adelaide Crows football team and refers to herself sometimes as 'an old crow cackling'. She has a strong singing voice that is both rough and sweet, and adapts country and western lyrics so that they become irreverent ballads about local Ceduna characters. She taught me a lullaby that I have sung often to my own babies: I see the moon and the moon sees me / Smiling through the leaves of the old gum tree / I hope that moon that shines on me / Shines on the one that I love.

'The wind is my hairdresser,' Aunty Joan says stepping out into her dusty yard and letting the hot, north wind rush through her tangled thick black hair. Joan Didion (2008:217) described the malevolent Santa Ana, a hot wind that came 'whining' on down from the northeast, 'blowing up sandstorms,' and 'drying the hills and the nerves'. In Ceduna, menacing winds frequently lifted topsoil off the wheat farms, cloaking the whole, swirling sky in an orange haze. The task of the hairdresser is generally to subdue and shape hair, human hands and tools bringing this naturally occurring stuff under their control. Aunty Joan styles herself in conscious opposition to this, subverting the human will/natural forces hierarchy. She is drawn to images of wildness and rebelliousness, and in this moment cheerfully submits to the wind, representing as it does the unpredictable and powerful forces of the natural world, with their thrilling capacity to overpower human designs and desires.

Aunty Joan pinches her cigarettes between her thumb and first finger. If smoking is 'a wordless but eloquent form of expression' (Klein 1993:182), Aunty Joan's smoking style is edgy. This is the grip of the fighter: the knuckles are bared (Klein 1993:176). She wears

¹⁵ I have been granted access to a selection of very valuable recordings done by Anderson and Walsh as part of the National Estates Grants Programme-funded 'Oral History of the Koonibba Mission Project'. The interviews were conducted in 1996 and 1997, and have been lodged in the J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection, Mortlock Library of South Australia. The recordings are stored at OH 365. I can give no further details than this without compromising the anonymity of my research participants.

tracksuit pants and floppy tee-shirts: including two favourites, given to her as presents from greenies. One says, 'Black by popular demand.' The other features an historic image of armed Native American Indians and says, 'Homeland Security. Fighting Terrorism Since 1492.' The first I interpret as making fun of greenies, in a cheeky, gentle way. Greenies are drawn to and compelled to valorise Aunty Joan because of her racialised identity; irony lies in the fact that on the basis of this very identity Aunty Joan is also the subject of local racism, and has been subjected to violent state interventions. The second tee-shirt connects Aunty Joan with a diffuse global aesthetic and political subculture of militant, confident anti-colonial sentiments, and wicked sense of humour.

Aunty Joan appeared to me in the way Koori man Frank Doolan appeared to Gillian Cowlishaw (2009) and Senior Yarralin identity Hobbles Danayarri to Deborah Rose (1991; 1992; 2001). I also draw on anthropologist Alan Feldman's interpretation (1991:241-247) of the role of deceased Republican paramilitary Bobby Sands to explore the significance of her persona.

I use both the substance of Aunty Joan's own life experiences — as well as the penetrating insights, aphorisms, little gems and grimly funny tales she applied herself to continually producing about those experiences — to illuminate the particular dilemmas and struggles of a distinctly Aboriginal predicament. Similarly, for Cowlishaw (2009:29), the person of Doolan epitomised 'a particular critique of Australian society ... as well as a conviction that another Aboriginal story needs to be told'. Rose (in 1992) has captioned Danayarri's portrait, 'master storyteller and political analyst; Hobbles produced compelling narratives that commented on the moral content of the colonial encounter (see especially 1991; 2001). For Feldman (1991:242), it was Sands who 'generated the orienting myths and anchoring symbols' of the H-Block prison situation and the Hunger Strike, having fully comprehended that the British state had shifted the ideological battleground on to Republican prisoners' bodies, before the IRA had done so.

Aunty Joan has also grasped something fundamental about 'the Aboriginal condition,' beyond her own experience as an Aboriginal person. Out bush one day she mulled over the fact that 'government' named the railway line that runs from Adelaide to Darwin, 'the Ghan'. This is in recognition of the history of Afghan cameleers in Australian desert regions (Stevens 1989:320). And yet, said Aunty Joan, the government 'was locking up all those Afghans in Baxter'. (Australia's immigration detention centres house numerous Hazara asylum seekers from Afghanistan (Sparrow 2005).) This was a pithy critique of

the multicultural state which gestures — in this case retrospectively — to honour and incorporate the experiences of a people previously subject to racial prejudice and violence (Stevens 1989:139-166), yet also retains the power to manage the national space, excluding the alien other in the present (Hage 1998). Aunty Joan continued. ‘Hang on, why am I surprised by that?’ She paused for effect. ‘That’s what they do to us.’

Aunty Joan is married, as I mentioned, to a retired white wheat farmer named Uncle Gary. Uncle Gary left school at the age of 14 and started his working life ‘lumping’ (loading) wheat bags on to boats down on the wharves at Thevenard, the port town adjoining Ceduna. It was there he met Aunty Joan in the mid-1960s, when he was about 20:

I thought, ‘Geez she’s a beautiful girl,’ and we sort of went together for a couple of years and then I married her, then we had six kids, and we’re still together.

He joked, ‘Never had one fight — we’ve had lots of them.’ Uncle Gary remembered that in the late 1960s, when they married:

There wasn’t very many people who married dark girls, at work people used to look down on the dark people and I could never work out why, but it was just the way it was... [M]y parents were a little angry to start with, but then they fell in love with my wife just the same as I did, and they loved her.

Certainly there might have been racist talk, concedes Uncle Gary, about his marriage to Aunty Joan and about their ‘brown-skinned babies,’ but of those who talked, he told me, ‘I don’t give two shits about them!’ His spirited defiance suggests that judgments were commonplace and that psychic energy was required to overcome them. Another white man of the same generation, who also married an Aboriginal woman in the late 1960s, boasted that he had settled the same matter, among racist whites, with his fists.

Aunty Joan and Uncle Gary’s farm was a central location throughout my time in Ceduna, I refer to it simply as ‘the farm’. The farmhouse has thick crumbling sandstone walls, which keeps it cool in the scorching summers. Aunty Joan and Uncle Gary are usually to be found sitting around their kitchen table, its laminex surface cluttered with condiments, foodstuffs and stacks of paper: Aunty Joan’s ‘piling cabinet’. The kitchen walls overflow with family photos, and the cupboards with collections of jars. There is always some kind

of activity underway: fish soak in the sink, before being gutted, bargain-price nectarines are cored and stewed before being frozen, the crossword is being filled out.

At other times, Aunty Joan made thought-provoking comment on what it meant to be human. One early winter evening, a handful of Aunty Joan Mob members were sitting around the kitchen table at the farm, talking as it fell dark outside. Della, a Maori woman who had 'shacked up' with one of Aunty Joan's nephews, mentioned that a white man with whom she had been working at a sobering-up facility attached to the hospital had quit his job. 'Couldn't hack it,' she said. 'Couldn't hack the drunks,' one of Aunty Joan's sisters supplied. Aunty Joan nodded before concluding, 'He couldn't see himself in them.' This last remark grabbed me, as it seemed so casually to affirm, or at least to hint at, the promise that Ghassan Hage (2012) argues is evinced by the critical anthropological tradition. That is, encounters with alterity invite us to think about the 'otherness that is within us' (Hage 2012:300).

I have been questioned after presentations drawing on the material in this thesis as to whether I am fudging the issue of other people's involvement in a 'one-woman-show'. Aunty Joan Mob comprises about ten core adult members in Ceduna, with about 15 children attached to them. This is a conservative estimate, as many other family members come and go, and many more maintain an interest in the social dramas I describe as well as visit from Adelaide to take part in rockhole trips. There are a number of reasons why Aunty Joan Mob members who were a big part of my time out in Ceduna do not appear as individual figures in this thesis. The more-or-less cohesive small group I describe as 'Aunty Joan Mob' has become fractured since my leaving Ceduna: I've since set aside material and removed direct references to certain identities. One person who continues to be very involved in all that I describe made it clear from the outset that they refused to bear the anthropological gaze, a wish I of course respected. Another character remains central: Aunty Joan's sister Aunty Vera showed me great kindness over my time in Ceduna, and continues to do so. Her insights are everywhere in this thesis, but especially in chapter three, which deals with the Koonibba mission experience.

I use the descriptor 'Aunty Joan Mob' to indicate the way in which Aunty Joan's charisma and vision draws her family members to her. 'Mob' is frequently used as a suffix throughout Aboriginal Australia to designate a relation to place (eg Keen 1999:104; Tonkinson 1974), or to describe the relationship between people on the basis of a shared experience/ characteristics (eg Redmond 2007:80). 'Aunty Joan Mob' members more or

less correspond to members of an incorporated body, but I am reluctant to use a name generated to satisfy institutional requirements. I deploy vernacular forms and styles throughout the thesis. In this case, 'Aunty Joan Mob' better evokes the fluid, informal and grassroots style of Rockhole Recovery. Case in point: in a discussion about whether or not the rockhole trips' itineraries should become more structured one Aunty Joan Mob member shook her head, stating, 'Nah, we're go-with-the-flow mob.'

Regional and theoretical orientations

The discussion so far, with talk about bush trips out the back, belies the fact that my fieldwork was undertaken in small rural town. Ceduna lies on the edges of what the social scientist Charles Rowley (1972:v) designated as 'settled' Australia. My work then follows in what Gillian Cowlshaw and Lorraine Gibson (2012:10) identify as a 'minor ethnographic tradition' whose major contributors include Marie Reay (1945), Jeremy (Beckett 2005), Diane Barwick (1964; 1994), Barry Morris (1989), Gaynor Macdonald (1994; 1997) and of course Cowlshaw herself (1998; 2004). Aboriginal people in remote northern settings have remained the enduring object of anthropological fascination, and elicit a broader public interest. The notion that 'settled is lesser' (Gibson 2008:295) remains implied, and I am forced to write against the assumption that the lives of the Aboriginal people I know are less interesting or, even, less Aboriginal, because they are 'less different,' culturally as well as in physical appearance.

The southeastern tradition's 'minor' status, Cowlshaw and Gibson argue, designates not just that the bulk of Australian anthropological research has been undertaken in remote northern settings, but also identifies an intellectual legacy of a sustained interest in themes which have, until recently, remained marginal to the discipline as a whole. Namely, in this work:

the boundaries between Aboriginal and white society, sometimes porous, sometimes impenetrable and sometimes violent have been an insistent focus of ethnographic attention. (Cowlshaw and Gibson 2012:4)

Aboriginal people's critical awareness of and constant negotiation of these boundaries is especially evident in more recent work dealing with southeastern conditions (Babidge 2010; Everett 2009; Fverett 2011; Gibson 2008; Gibson 2010; Kwok 2012; Lambert-

Pennington 2007). The boundaries between Aboriginal and white society claim my ethnographic attention throughout this thesis. I treat Aboriginal and white identities as co-constituted. Instead of seeing discrete cultures meeting, interacting, overlapping or enmeshing, I examine 'culturally differentiating activity' (Weiner 2006:17).

There are two points to make about the notion of 'settled' Australia. Firstly, while Rowley (1972:v), in 1967, might have designated the sparsely populated north as 'colonial,' today it is clear that bounded Aboriginal and white worlds do not exist even in remote Aboriginal Australia; remote Aboriginal lifeworlds are also permeated and produced by the presence of actual others as well as the logic, knowledge systems of, economic ties to and cultures of the Australian nation-state. Journalist Nicolas Rothwell brings this into view more concretely, writing:

All through the remote indigenous world there are outside helpers, the enabling army, delivering services, building capacity, looking on through engaged, compassionate, postcolonial eyes. With their art, and their troubles, their spirituality and their mesmerising difference, Aboriginal people in the bush have become ever more necessary to the mainstream. (Rothwell 2008:17).

Secondly, this image of there existing, in the north, a less settled, less colonised and more profoundly and thoroughly Aboriginal world and way of being, is sustained in part by Aboriginal people's imaginings of and investment in these categories (Gibson 2008). I deal with examples of this phenomenon throughout the thesis.

The contributors to Ian Keen's (1994) groundbreaking collection on work in 'settled' Australia took issue with earlier scholars' emphasis on 'acculturation' and the 'disintegration' (Reay 1945:309) of the normative content of localised and distinct Aboriginal cultural forms. Instead, the contributors to *Being Black* stressed continuity, documenting the perpetuation of distinctive cultural traditions, sets of meanings and social relations and also, more broadly, the reproduction of Aboriginal identities, all in massively hostile conditions. Peggy Brock's (1989) edited collection demonstrated the retention and renovation of land-based cultural knowledge in South Australia, specifically that held by Aboriginal women. On the subject of conceptualising continuity, Diane Austin-Broos (2009:12) has noted that the model of continuity deployed in the classical genre of Aboriginal ethnography assumes that 'continuity is found in an enduring

culture,' that is, it is propelled forward. Instead, Austin-Broos proposes that continuity be conceived of something that is worked at backwards, foregrounding the role of human practice and imagination. On the one hand, drawing on Austin-Broos (2009:12), it is plain to see that Aunty Joan Mob's imaginative and practical labours as well as their spatial practices, are all geared towards a very conscious 'reproduction and transformation' of their own cultural traditions. But ultimately, I am convinced that to foreground continuity as a theme of this thesis would only serve to obscure one of the most insistent points that I think Aunty Joan, in particular, was always trying to make: Aboriginal people's experience of being Aboriginal has been radically discontinuous.

Aboriginality is an unstable category, constantly being defined and refined by external actors and forces, and about which competing and contradictory discourses circulate in the same place and at the same moment. Many scholars have sketched the history of constructions of Aboriginality (see amongst others Anderson 2003; Beckett 1988b; Dodson 2003). However, it is important to grasp that particular individuals' own lives have spanned traceable historical shifts, compelling them to enact an ongoing dialogue with discourses about the significance of the particular qualities of their own lived and embodied existence, as well as shifting evaluations of the worth of their cultural heritage.

More precisely, Aboriginality has undergone broad shifts since the turn of the twentieth century to the present: as something to be eradicated, then uplifted in the assimilation era, as a means of augmenting governmentality in the self-determination/recognition era, and is now desired, in the native title era, as uncontaminated, authentic cultural difference. Aunty Joan was born into a world in which she was categorised as 'half-caste' and has vivid memories of hiding from 'Welfare' so that she could remain living with her Aboriginal grandparents, mother and siblings. She was discouraged from speaking Kokatha, the language in which her grandparents were conversant. Lutheran missionaries hoped she would receive a Western education. Yet she came of age in a period of rapid transformation. The policy of assimilation was being dismantled, and in the 1960s the progressive South Australian Labor premier Don Dunstan began the legislative reforms that would usher in the self-determination era. Now a great grandmother, Aunty Joan has participated in state-funded Kokatha language documentation programs, and is engaged to teach black and white school children how to make wurlies (traditional dwelling structures, made out of branches).

Aboriginal people must struggle to maintain a viable and coherent sense of their own identities in a world that reflects back dense distortions. Significantly, Aunty Joan resisted both the Lutherans' attempt to educate her, because it involved leaving behind her home and family, and the state's attempts to incorporate her into the governance structures of the recognition era, preferring instead to live on the economic margins throughout this period. While she now enjoys limited validation of her long-standing and avid interest in Aboriginal cultural practices, she refuses the substantial rewards offered by engagement with the native title regime, rejecting the opportunity to deal as a claimant with mining companies, and scorning the turn to the written record to authenticate contemporary identity-formations.

I am not suggesting that identity categories can ever be stable: what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man have shifted enormously over the same timeframe I survey broadly here. However, throughout this thesis I argue that Aboriginality is an especially over-burdened category of experience. Furthermore, these revisions have involved violent transformations.

Another strand of Aboriginal anthropology also picks up the theme of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal boundaries and relationships, making use of Francesca Merlan's notion of the 'inter-cultural' to explore contemporary conditions (see Hinkson and Smith 2005; Ottosson 2010; Ottosson 2012). As indicated, I wish to get away from a notion that suggests two 'cultures' (and only two) are *already* in existence. Instead I argue that Aboriginality and non-Aboriginality are mutually constituted, and only come to make sense in relation to each other. Merlan has offered an explanation of thinking that underpinned her now popular but strangely under-discussed notion of the 'intercultural':

The world is nobody's solely; imaginatively and in other ways, the co-presence of people with different ideas and forms of action is kept in mind. Subjectivity is always fundamentally under construction, and always fundamentally relational. (Merlan 2005:169)

I agree that of course Aboriginality, like all forms of subjectivity, is, as I am arguing, 'relational'. As Merlan says, this does not always involve the co-presence of non-Aboriginal people, but an imagined white gaze often makes itself powerfully present. Merlan (2005:169) also says that she 'did not wish to begin with a notion of what Aboriginal culture "is", a finished product'. In the situation I am familiar with 'culture' is

this 'finished' thing, it is *always* an over-determined concept. The 'having' or 'not having much' of 'Aboriginal culture' is an insistent theme of local discourse, and sketching the whole social field as 'intercultural' does little to explain how the notion of 'culture' circulates or becomes an operative and divisive concept. There are then two concepts of culture at work in this thesis. As an analyst, I retain a sense of culture as the *everyday* ways that groups of people 'give expressive form to their social and material life-experience' (Clarke, et al. 2000:10). But for Aunty Joan Mob members culture is most often a reified object that some people have retained, while others have 'lost'.

If Aboriginality is relational, it is important to clarify the nature of the black/white relation, which I earlier indicated remained enmeshed in the colonial condition and involves complex power relations. For Frantz Fanon (1967:109), the experience of colonised blackness was to be 'sealed in crushing objecthood'. 'The white man has woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories,' wrote Fanon (1967:111). 'I am overdetermined from without' (Fanon 1967:116). This resonates with the way Aboriginal people in Ceduna talk about both Aboriginal culture (see Correy 2006) and Aboriginality, in objectifying and overdetermined terms, as if Aboriginality was something in excess of or outside their own lived experience of being an Aboriginal person. One Nunga told me with pride that her father was an 'Aboriginal artist'. Another mentioned that his daughter lived in Coober Pedy where she was 'an Aboriginal cop'. 'Rabbit Proof Fence!' one of Aunty Joan's family members chimed in as Aunty Joan told the story of how she had run away from school in Adelaide.

This thesis illustrates how a hazardous course between being-as-subject and being-as-object is being navigated in one particular place. Aunty Joan Mob members must chart a different course to that of Fanon, as they are objectified in the neocolonial rather than colonial present: they are desired, recognised, called upon and valorised as well as being pointed at, marked, spurned and reviled. I use the term 'neocolonial' advisedly, meaning it to indicate the ways in which the native title era moves to redress the injustices of the colonial era but through this *very same process* re-inscribes colonial relations between the nation-state and Aboriginal people. In chapter five I expand on the way the native title claims process has been experienced by Aunty Joan Mob as overriding their reality and as allowing and disallowing certain Aboriginal identities, determined on the state's terms.

This tension between being-as-subject and being-as-object can be seen in another way, using 'yarning' or storytelling as a generative metaphor. The town of Ceduna is thick with

stories. There is an insistent urge to narrate: wit, self-deprecation and poignancy combine in order to make a point about social reality. Tasmanian Aboriginal historian Greg Lehman (2003) describes the imperative to tell a story 'true'. In Aboriginal English, says Lehman, the question of 'truth' refers to an insightful apprehension of reality, rather than a factual account:

For us, the 'truth' is made up of countless contradictory, ironic and provocative elements, woven together into an allegorical, sometimes fictive documentation of what it is to live our lives. (Lehman 2003:175)

Basil Sansom (1980:79-175) details the process by which, in the fringe camps of Darwin, campers settled on a consensus interpretation ('the word') about camp events, or 'happenings'. This kind of narrating, of the self and social body, the telling of 'what it is to live our lives,' is frequently in tension with the multiplicity of ways in which Aboriginal people are called on to speak as representatives of Aboriginality, and called on to embody authentic Aboriginality. The struggle for self-definition I outline arises out of the tensions produced when self-understandings meet the state's and outsiders' formulations.

Slipping out of focus: the origins of this study

I first visited Ceduna in November 2006. A close friend from Melbourne, Rhiannon, whose social-cultural-political milieu I shared, was staying in a cute aqua caravan, circa 1970, out at the farm.¹⁶ I well remember meeting Aunty Joan for the first time and her giving me a firm squeeze across the shoulders, 'Welcome to our country.' As a white Australian 'born of the conquerors' (Wright 1991), I have long been afflicted with a variety of postcolonial anxiety about having inherited the legacy of dispossession. It felt wonderful to be welcomed.

I slept on a rusted spring bed-frame and thin foam mattress on the verandah at the farm. Aunty Joan spent a week acting as our guide: we picnicked out bush; waded into the warm water at low tide to claw razor fish out of the mudflats; and spent the weekend camping in the dunes behind a wild, thrashing beach with around 20 members of Aunty Joan's extended family. Aunty Joan's generosity was touching, but the trip offered much more. Aunty Joan unsettled latent assumptions about the nature of Aboriginal

¹⁶ Rhiannon was also a member of the Melbourne Kungkas group from 2000 to 2005.

circumstances, constructed in public discourse by both the political right and left in terms of lack. I was used to caring about abject lives lived under the shadow of state domination and affected by the harrowing effect of societal and institutional racism; about bodies that bore the stresses of radical inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across a range of statistical indices; and, also, of recognising a triumphal narrative — Aboriginal people had ‘survived’ all this. These structural conditions are real, and certainly have some bearing on Aunty Joan’s life. But her mode of being in the world, her restless energy, her passion for her own life story and her intense interest in the particular bit of Australia where she lived, were far more arresting than tales of suffering and subjection. Even more appealingly, greenies were invited to play a part in all of this, and could secure a role in this world. Rhiannon moved to Ceduna on a permanent basis in March 2007, her arrival timed to take part in Rockhole Recovery. I arrived in Ceduna to begin 12 months of fieldwork in March 2008, my arrival also timed to take part in Rockhole Recovery. Both Rhi and to a much lesser degree myself have since assisted in organising and promoting future rockhole trips, and more generally in raising the profile of the issue of mining in the region.

I entered the field then as a ‘hybrid’ (Lea 2008:viii) inhabiting and often struggling to manage a dual identity as a greenie/researcher. But these dual aspects of myself, which I sometimes sketched, roughly, as a former/future self, were contained within the one body. Anthropologists and greenies were both known entities to Aunty Joan Mob, but anthropologists had come to be associated with the process of collating a native title claim, while I looked, talked, acted and dressed like a scruffy greenie from the city, who hung around with Nungas. Other people in Ceduna, both Aboriginal and white (many of whom had already encountered Rhiannon) recognised and categorised me accordingly. As I paid for my diesel at the service station the cashier, whom I had never met, gave me the five per cent local’s discount and commented rather enigmatically, ‘I hear you’re out here to protect the land. Well, they say you shouldn’t fight a losing battle, but if you don’t speak up you won’t be heard.’

To further complicate things, I was a greenie/researcher intent, initially, on researching greenies. ‘[O]nce one attempts to put consumption together with production, to fit colony to metropolis, there is a tendency for one or the other — the “hub” or the “outer rim” — to slip out of focus,’ observed Sidney Mintz (1985:xvii) in the introduction to his study of the modern appetite for sugar. Mintz shifted his focus from work among the

descendants of slaves and indentured labourers, to the consumers of the initially exotic and now commonplace products of the Caribbean, bringing the social habits of Western, modern, large-scale societies into view and stressing the interrelatedness of production and consumption, colony and metropolis, emergent tastes and desires and exploited labour power.

Using Mintz's metaphor, I at first sought to adjust the analytical lens so as to bring greenies/progressive white actors into sharp focus, while letting the Aboriginal figures that have been *the* subject-object of over a century of Australian anthropology move about in the background. My reasons for designing an auto-ethnographic, self-reflexive inquiry were less to do with intellectual innovation than ideological tenets held dear. These convictions were, in turn, to form part of the terrain under study. I was reluctant to subject Aboriginal people to the anthropological gaze most forcefully criticised and rejected by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). Initially my research simply asked: Why are certain non-Indigenous people drawn to become involved in Aboriginal political struggles such as these? My puzzlement was sincere and personal: after a decade of being personally involved in Indigenous 'solidarity' campaigns with an environmental focus I turned a critical eye on *the desire to be involved*, determined to 'analyse the conceptual basis of [my] own progressivism' (Lea, et al. 2006:2).¹⁷

My early research interests were difficult to explain to both Aunty Joan Mob and greenies. 'I'm wondering what kind of fieldnotes you write up,' mused one greenie, herself an academic researcher, out bush one morning over the course of a rockhole trip. She imitated me writing, 'Last night, we all ate *malu wipu* [kangaroo tails] for dinner.' We continued talking and I understood her to be saying, 'How could I bear to fix my gaze on greenies, when I was all the while surrounded by such a paradigmatic object of fascination: a group of Aboriginal people vitally involved in re-energising their own cultural traditions and maintaining a relationship with their country?' I was torn between wanting to challenge this outdated assumption about who or what was 'interesting' and thus worthy of critical attention, and admitting that I was coming to agree with her.

¹⁷ The political context surrounding the imperative to critically examine progressive social and cultural worlds is important to note. Nicolas Rothwell (2008) summarises a paradigm shift that has unfolded since the 2000 publication of Noel Pearson's (2009) 'Our Right to Take Responsibility'. Influential Aboriginal political and intellectual figures, most notably Pearson and Langton, have broken with the Left and forged new political alliances with major corporations, neo-conservative think tanks, mining companies and conservative politicians. The ascendant discourses are of welfare reform, individual responsibility, the work ethic, home ownership and economic development.

In July I had a conversation with Aunty Joan in which I reiterated that my task was to work out why 'people like me' went along on rockhole trips. And? 'Oh, well, I'm still thinking about it, I'm not sure yet.' Aunty Joan was encouraging, 'You'll figure it out dear.' She quickly changed the subject and took me down to her fruit trees to load me up with plastic bags full of thick-skinned lemons. But in early December I was again at the farm, talking about my research. By this stage I knew that greenies came and went: I had filled my field diary with material nominally tangential to my thesis, coming slowly to the unavoidable realisation that it was greenies that were tangential to this social world. I still wanted to make sense of Rockhole Recovery but knew that it only made sense if I foregrounded the experiences of Aunty Joan Mob. I explained all this around the kitchen table. Aunty Joan said, 'Well when they leave, we're still here.'

And so, in this thesis, Aunty Joan Mob members are central and greenies peripheral. But still I constantly adjust the focus: sometimes zooming in on particular individuals; sometimes panning out to survey more general scenes; sometimes focusing on Aunty Joan Mob; sometimes more broadly on local Nungas; sometimes Ceduna whitefellas; and in chapter six returning my attention to greenies. Like Mintz, I am seeking to put all this together to show that these social identities are co-constructed and mutually interdependent.

Much has been written about the power inequalities between the researcher and the researched, the interpreter and the interpreted (see amongst others Asad 1979; Kumoll 2010; Smith 1999; Watson 2002). The late Eric Michaels insisted that reflexivity was demanded of ethnographers working in Aboriginal settings, where there is no avoiding the question:

What right have you to appropriate our lives and inscribe our histories, to advance your own, and your culture's, objectives without even considering if this may be at the expense of ours? (Michaels 1994 [1987]:127)

Anthropology's preoccupation with representation has long since waned, more than two decades after the publication of the influential *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). However, tortured exploration of the politics of representation, speaking positions and power relations remains a feature of the grassroots leftist/greenie social worlds from which this thesis emerges. I take questions to do with representation seriously, but have grave misgivings about something that cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed (2004:para 11)

usefully glosses as ‘the politics of declaration’. In writing about critical Whiteness studies, Ahmed (2004:para 12) argues, ‘declaring whiteness, or even “admitting” to one’s own racism, when that declaration is assumed to be “evidence” of an anti-racist commitment, does not do what it says’. Ahmed concludes that declarations of whiteness are ‘non-performative’. Her argument has broader application: white, middle-class activists often feel compelled to make some kind of declaration or ‘acknowledgment’ — of their relatively powerful social position, usually listing the axis along which they enjoy this ‘privilege’ such as their race, class background, gender and sexuality (see Crawford 2012:15). This awkward convention, of invoking one’s ‘positionality’ (Spivak 1988:271) continues to compel writers and scholars (but rarely anthropologists) to declare themselves to occupy a position of ‘privilege,’ demonstrating their awareness of the power they enjoy in the world, relative to the power of those they are writing about. I am reluctant to employ exactly this convention for three reasons.

Firstly, the move seems facile if, as Ahmed suggests, the author simply gets her anxieties out of the way, declaring herself ambivalent or uncomfortable about the task of describing and interpreting other people’s lives and then proceeding to describe and interpret them anyway. I return to unsettling moments throughout the thesis to indicate that the anxieties bound up in this undertaking were everywhere present and inhibiting, they cannot be contained within a neat declaration nor ever fully resolved. ‘There is no avoiding,’ writes John von Sturmer (1995:110), ‘the heartland of one’s subjectivity’. Doubt and anxiety were the primary emotions and responses that dogged me in the field, in the ‘frenzied’ way von Sturmer described. I interpret these, following Hage (2010) as ‘political emotions,’ shaped by the moral contours of the greenie lifeworld, itself mirroring — and often intensifying, producing distortions — versions of the guilt, shame, and redemptive urges that sometimes grip the nation.

Secondly, and quite obviously, I’m not convinced that researching and writing about ‘the Other’ is an utterly reprehensible undertaking. Nancy Scheper-Hughes comments (1992:28), ‘Not to look, not to touch, not to record, can be the hostile act, the act of indifference and of turning away’. To declare it arrogant to enter into and analyse the lifeworlds of the oppressed is also an easy way out, and no less an abrogation of the responsibilities of the powerful than this attempt of mine, to render in detail the lived complexities of vitally important Indigenous experiences. In the process I also advance a critical examination of my own position and attachments.

Finally, I am conscious of Aunty Joan Mob members having their own view of what I do. However much Aunty Joan Mob generously and willingly shared their lives with me and answered my many questions, I knew they felt sorry for me because I have spent so many years of my life in the city, working away at what they see as the rather pointless task of writing a PhD thesis. Uncle Gary often said, of an anthropologist they had taken out bush and who had gotten lost, 'She was a doctor of something but she had no brains.' And Aunty Joan liked to say, 'The bush is my university.' Hage (2010:134) noted feelings of humiliation while he was conducting fieldwork in Lebanese villages amongst men who classified, and feminised, him as a 'talker'. What I constantly noted about my own emotional experience of fieldwork is that feelings of humiliation and belittlement afforded me relief, seeming to act as a valve through which to release my anxieties and guilt about the power I enjoyed in the world. In the moment I felt myself humiliated, I was relieved of feeling like I was in possession of authority. I lack the expertise to develop a psychoanalytic interpretation of these feelings but they complicate Hage's observation (2010:133) that anthropologists are generally willing to discuss, and indeed make a virtue out of, their efforts 'to avoid projecting colonial relations of power into the fieldwork situation,' but are generally unwilling to discuss the process of being 'inferiorised' by their informants. In my case the two processes can only be understood via their imbrication.

The one-footed crow of Denial Bay: fieldwork in a small country town

Like many other researchers in suburban or small town settings, I lived independently of Aunty Joan Mob members (see Babidge 2010:8). My partner and I rented a little two-bedroom house that had been trucked east from the site of the Ooldea railway siding on the transcontinental railway route. We lived in Denial Bay, a tiny settlement of approximately 200 houses, further west around Murat Bay from Thevenard and Ceduna. Rhiannon lived just around the corner from the house we rented from March 2008 until April 2009. Unlike most fieldworkers I had a constant interlocutor from my world and I relied on Rhi for social, emotional and intellectual sustenance.

Small town life was characterised by intimacies, overlaps, informalities and exchange. In Denial Bay, a one-footed crow, amongst so many other birds, lifted up in to the air when the galahs and crows rose in a circling mass from the bent trees and blue saltbush that

ringed the settlement. The scrub was criss-crossed with tracks and strewn with rubbish from farms — water tanks with split sides, car carcasses and other debris. The lone one-footed crow often flew over my house, or I would see it in the street, sitting on a fence, power-line or branch. Anonymity did not seem a possible condition even for birds to sustain. Coincidences were here rendered impossible and belonged only to an alienated, atomised world in which a connection between apparently disconnected people and events is strange or aberrant. Talking with locally knowledgeable people such as Uncle Gary revealed a raft of connections between any of the persons I enquired about, as well as between them and the person to whom I enquired. The things that might be known about someone spoke to the historical and social conditions of life in a place where ‘race matters’ (Cowlshaw and Morris 1997). It might be known about someone that they had ‘Aboriginal blood’ even though they identified, understood themselves as, and were understood as ‘white’. And further, it might be known that this person knows this fact about themselves but lives out a denial of this knowledge, even though ‘everyone knows’ that they know that they know. And, it might be known that someone was ‘two-faced,’ nice enough when you bumped into them ‘down the street,’ but a ‘racist cunt’ behind Nungas’ backs.

I derived great enjoyment from the informal, spontaneous, intensely social and personalised nature of everyday interactions — driving into Ceduna to get the mail, going supermarket shopping, checking out the op-shops: all were likely to involve personalised interactions and afforded acts of recognition. One example out of many will suffice to illustrate the informality of small town arrangements and the ways the borders of personal, family, work and social lives and identities bleed into each other: I called up about some cheap pea straw advertised in the classifieds of the *Sentinel*, which I wanted for my garden. Esme, who was selling the straw, asked me a few questions about myself and then, satisfied that she’d made a connection, said she’d drop it to me at work. I was working a few casual lunchtime shifts a week at the Aboriginal-controlled childcare centre Minya Bunhii. I was offered this job because the assistant director was my partner’s football coach’s wife, and bumped into us having lunch one day down the street, while the shortage of casual relief workers happened to be on her mind. When I arrived for my next shift the assistant director said, ‘Oh Eve, there’s some hay out the front for you.’ I hadn’t failed to notice it: four bales were piled up in a messy tower on the nature strip right outside the childcare centre’s front door. In order to pay for my

straw I slipped an envelope into a four-year old child's bag, whose mother passed it to Esme.

The methodological implications of taking a baby into the field

When I arrived to start my fieldwork in 2008 I brought my ten-week-old baby Ned with me. The condition of motherhood was both the basis of many of my most positive field relations, as well as one that drew my attention to the class- and culturally-specific experience of motherhood, and my own practices in general. Being a neophyte mother helped me forge many of my own relationships in Ccduna as I found I always had something to talk about with other mums — sore tits, dramatic labour stories, teething, sleeping: bodies and practicalities. I was by no means feigning interest in conversations along these lines, enduring them in order to bridge the gulfs that existed between our class backgrounds, political orientations, and (sub)cultural experiences and norms. I found myself immersed in a community of 'breeders,' as one Nunga friend put it cheerfully, with whom I could share my most immediate concerns.

Many of the contributors to Joan Cassell's edited collection *Children in the Field* emphasise that greater social 'acceptance' was facilitated by their being in the field with children (see also Diane Bell (1984:26)). And yet there are stark limits to the constitution of motherhood as a shared condition (Maher 1997:222). The most apparent difference — constantly commented upon, sometimes with discretion but often not — was my age as a first time mum. Many people did not make much of an effort to hide from me their mild horror at my having had my first child at the age of 30! Aunty Joan and her sisters, for instance, knew that this was what 'Hollywood stars' did but it was seen as sort of grotesque, unnatural and physically dangerous. I was, however, a new mum living far away from my family. My fieldwork invariably suffered in patches: I was often up at pre-dawn and sat in my Denial Bay home exhausted as the sun levered open a crack between the sea and sky, squeezing its way through, pale light trickling on to the water's surface and pink fluffy clouds nestling in the low scrub line. Being sleep-deprived may well have affected the quality of my field-notes, which I attended to sporadically rather than daily. But the setbacks and occasional comments about my age were more than made up for by the love, attention and support (not to mention advice!) that surrounded my first year as a mum and my baby's first year of life.

In his first months on the Far West Coast, Ned loved nothing more than to watch 'bush telly' while we were camping — the fire. Later on, he liked to bathe in the rockholes. He cut his first teeth on wombat gristle. He was, we all agreed, a 'little bush baby'. Uncle Gary frequently reminisced about sleeping out bush with his babies in the swag. He relished the fact that we were prepared to do the same with our first born, even when it involved waking to find fresh wild dog tracks around the perimeter of our tent, evidence of Aunty Joan's insistent warnings that dogs would come into camp because they could smell a lactating mother.



Figure 9: Ned watching 'the bush telly'.

Structure of the thesis

The two chapters following this one provide a historical background to the study. Having introduced the contemporary identities and politics of the scene, some historical background is needed to aid the reader's understanding of Aunty Joan Mob's resistance to their incorporation into state discourses. Chapter two deals covers the nineteenth century, while chapter three turns to the twentieth century and West Coast Nungas'

experience of life on the Koonibba Lutheran Mission. The historical material firmly establishes the instabilities that characterise the Aboriginal experience over time. Over the course of these chapters the category of Aboriginality is ever shifting. In chapter two I foreground contemporary Aboriginal subjects' responses to traces and accounts of the past, as they persist and circulate in the present. In chapter three I also foreground Aboriginal subjects' responses, this time to the historical circumstances they face, and the definitional regimes imposed by outsiders such as missionaries and the state. A new collective identity slowly takes shape, comes into being and finds its voice over the course of these chapters, that of 'mission mob'. At the close of chapter three, the gates of the Koonibba Lutheran mission are torn down, and the government steps in to take over the community. Mission residents experienced this as a chaotic end to a whole world. A general exodus from Koonibba, into Ceduna and other towns, ensued in the mid-1960s. I follow the historical tide, moving my attention to town, as a key site of social action.

In chapters four and five, I stress the relational nature of Aboriginality in the present. In chapter four, set entirely in town, and frequently 'down the street,' I examine the way Aboriginal difference is defined and experienced, against whitefellas, and against other, 'disreputable' ways of being Aboriginal. Everyday contests over peopled town spaces form the empirical basis of the chapter. I conclude chapter four with a discussion of recent efforts to mould the social practices of black bodies to white norms, examining the Ceduna council's controversial deployment of a private security firm, or 'dog squad,' to enforce local bylaws prohibiting loitering, littering, drinking and camping in public places. In chapter four then I am concerned primarily with the constitution and dissolution of racialised categories, and the way these indeterminate categories are stabilised in ways that serve to underwrite an intact racial hierarchy. I talk of Nungas, Anangu and whitefellas here, refining the opening discussion of 'what it means to be Aboriginal'.

In chapter five, the identity categories become further refined still, as intra-Aboriginal conflicts demand my focussed attention. I analyse here Auntie Joan Mob's experience of the native title regime's re-writing of local Aboriginal identities, explaining how and why an internecine local conflict has unfolded over the course of the native title era. As I expound on the 'everyday effects of native title,' the basis of the bitter conflict between Wirangu and Kokatha-identifying Nungas becomes clear. At this point in the thesis then, I will have tracked shifts, which are far from linear or singular, from 'natives,' to

'Koonibba mob,' to Aborigines to Nungas/Anangu, to Kokatha-, Wirangu-, Mirning-, and Pitjanjatjara-identifying people.

Chapter five is crucial in laying the groundwork for chapter six, in which I argue that Rockhole Recovery is best understood as a creative response to an ontological impasse, experienced as a result of native title. Thus in chapter six my emphasis shifts from forces of destruction to acts of creation. Rockhole Recovery is a tactical undertaking, which advances what I call Aunty Joan Mob's 'struggle for self-definition'. Here I outline explicitly my understanding of this struggle, which amounts to Aunty Joan Mob's creative and political efforts to stabilise their self-understanding. This undertaking involves making assertions and acting against, and with, others. The role of greenies, as vital interlocutors, comes into view in chapter six.

To recapitulate, chapter six and seven elaborate Aunty Joan Mob's particular response to their particular predicament, the contours of which are mapped in chapters two through to five. I bring rockhole trips into sharp focus in chapter six, picking out vivid details: the chapter deals specifically, and ethnographically, with Rockhole Recovery. This chapter brings home the fact that Rockhole Recovery only makes sense when it is understood as a response to the destabilising effects of native title. Chapter seven takes a further step again, arguing against attributing Aunty Joan Mob's avid interest in revitalising their own cultural traditions to the internalisation of the demands of the state. Responses to the state are only ever part of what is going on, and I wish to show that something beyond this is also taking place. Chapter seven considers the power and profundity associated with 'being in the bush,' showing that entering into this space provides a means of coming to terms with contemporary conditions. 'Out the back,' contemporary Aboriginal subjects come into contact with another way of being, and reach towards the sense of freedom it offers them.

Marcia Langton's recent Boyer Lectures tackle issues of immediate concern to this thesis. Langton seems to me to disavow an Aboriginal way of being that Aunty Joan Mob remain determined to express their faithfulness to. This thesis then concludes with the occasion of Marcia Langton's 2009 compelling address in the Ceduna Memorial Hall. The occasion left a troubled Aunty Joan in its wake, insisting that Langton's vision of the Aboriginal future could never become her own.

Chapter two. The past in the present: historical background to the ethnography

Preface: A brief tour of the Ceduna Museum

Upon entering the Ceduna Museum, the visitor sees an old barber's chair with a yellowing, brown-studded leather seat back and ribbed silver footrests. A caption is attached, 'PROGRESS IS GREAT THE CHAIR REPLACED THE KEROSENE CASE IN THE BARBERS SHOP.' A wall lined with grainy black and white images features photos of: a camel team in front of the Globe Hotel, Fowlers Bay in the late 1800s; bagged wheat being loaded on the train to be railed to Thevenard jetty in 1960; the cutting of hay with horses at Coorabie in the 1920s; a mouse plague in the wheat stacks at Denial Bay in 1917; the Waratah Gypsum Plaster Factory at Thevenard in 1959; assorted football teams; a new year's day picnic at Laura Bay in 1910 — the women sitting stiffly for the portrait in long, white dresses amidst the low-lying scrub.

In the next room a cabinet contains: football club medals; a watch and chain; a death penny given to the family of a man killed in World War One; sea opals; World War Two souvenirs; a pocket watch; a photo of a bark hut at Laura Bay; a German hymn book. Another cabinet contains: petrified wood; some chipped-off pieces of the Berlin Wall; a seahorse; 'unusual small tools' (according to the caption); some fossils; a handful of bird eggs; a collection of what I recognise as Aboriginal stone implements. A wooden school desk is crammed with Empire-Corona, Imperial 200, Remington Portable and Royal typewriters, some of them labelled with the names of their donor. Another is cluttered with rusted lamb bells and kerosene lamps. A blue galvanised iron baby's bath is captioned, 'Made by FA Blumson in 1947. Used by his daughters Valerie, Shirley and Reva and son Kelvin.'

Floorboards creak underfoot as the visitor moves from room to room, then outside and into a series of sheds. These display, among other things, wheat farming machinery and a cavernous whale's skeleton, which once washed ashore.

Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history' famously had his face turned to the past. 'Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage

upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet,' wrote Benjamin (2007:257). Inside the Ceduna Museum, the angel of history sees perhaps not a single catastrophe but certainly the past as a single moment. The relics and wreckage of this time — before now — accumulate. The barber chair's insouciant caption certainly references progress, and the museum also emphasises a point of origin, giving prominence to a copy of an 1896 petition to the Surveyor General's office requesting that the 'Government grant the surveying of a Township, and erection of a Telegraph office' at a landing place on Murat Bay (see Faull 1988:162-163). Twenty-six farmers, a grazier, a blacksmith and a master mariner signed the petition, which eventually led to the surveying of the Ceduna township in 1900 (Faull 1988:164). But the urge to narrate progress within the museum or, indeed, the urge to establish any kind of linear narrative, has been sublimated to the urge to accumulate and acquire. The effect is a local museum that does not narrate, but instead piles material wreckage upon which little order or sequencing has been imposed (see also Healy 1997:77-78). The collecting criteria for these objects appears to be that a thing either be old, or resemble something old, and thus be designated the subject of history. In one of the sheds a Strongbow Draught bottle with green frosted glass and a faded label, circa 2000 (at a guess) takes its place in a row of opaque, chunky medicine bottles dating from the early twentieth century (again I guess).

I loved the chaotic and irreverent aspects of the museum and went there a number of times to marvel at both the jumble of objects and the many photos on display, bringing first a visiting friend and later my parents with me. Each time we were the only people wandering through its maze of small rooms, while a lone volunteer sat at the front desk. On one of these occasions the chatty volunteer told us she was originally from a northern European country and had settled in Ceduna. She commented that Ceduna locals 'never visit the museum' before supplying that she herself had never thought to visit the local museum belonging to the European town where she was from.

Introduction

This chapter provides a historical background to my ethnography. Having located Ceduna in space I now locate it in time. This chapter, however, is about more than that. It is both about the past, and the way people relate to the past. In establishing a historical background I did not want to narrate the past as 'a chain of events,' something agreed

upon or stable. Benjamin (2007:263) calls for historians to 'stop telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary'. Taking heed of this call, I resisted the urge to write as if 'the past has been settled even more effectively than the country' (Carter 1987:xx). My approach instead draws inspiration from cultural theorist Chris Healy's (1997) work, which sketches the myriad ways in which Australia's colonial past is made meaningful in the present.

In criticising historicism, Benjamin perceived that the causal connections between events are ascribed from the perspective of the present. Certain events and experiences are only designated as historical in nature, retrospectively. Cultural historian Greg Dening (1996:41) points out that 'all that has happened' — the entire, inchoate accumulation of everything — produces moments that are 'almost indescribable'. Instead, as soon as the present moment becomes a past experience, it 'is transformed into symbols that are exchanged' (Dening 1996:36). The past takes the form, for example, of 'reminiscence, gossip, anecdote, rumour, parable, report, tradition, myth' (Dening 1996:37). All these forms are social, or as Dening (1996:36) prefers, 'public'. 'For an expression to have shared meaning, it must be possessed of some system which can be recognised' (ibid.).

This chapter brings to light multiple forms of public expression, possessed of systems of shared meaning, about the past. These forms are mostly small-scale and vernacular, but also overlap with larger-scale registers of meaning, as local understandings are refigured by national debates about the colonial past (see also Cowlishaw 2006). Believing with Dening (1996:50) that 'history cannot be divorced from the circumstances of its telling,' I interweave information about Ceduna's past, drawn entirely from secondary sources, with ethnographic material about contemporary people, both Aboriginal and white, making sense of that past, as they find a way to dwell in the particular and unstable 'landscapes of memory' they inhabit (Healy 1997:2).

On an empirical level, this chapter deals with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century on the Far West Coast. This was a momentous period in which 'South Australia,' 'Ceduna,' and 'Aborigines' came in to being. One of the key sources used in the writing of this chapter, *Survival In Our Own Land: 'Aboriginal' Experiences in 'South Australia' since 1836* (Mattingley and Hampton 2008), insists on this point. By using apostrophes throughout the volume, the editors mark terms and concepts that were imposed on people and lands with the advent of colonisation. This includes, at all times, 'Aboriginal' and 'South Australia'. In tracking how these things came into being I do not attribute any

fixity, inevitability, causality or finality to the meaning of these terms. Indeed, my intention is to reveal them as contingent and unstable, and as always haunted by other possibilities.

Much of the historical detail I relate here was first mentioned to me, however obliquely, in conversations, interviews and anecdotes over the course of my fieldwork. The past is subject to as many contestations about its substance, significance and meaning, as are present events. This chapter focuses on both Aboriginal and white people's engagement with, and interpretation of, past events, and the affective dimensions of this engagement. I am interested in people's investment in knowing various things about the local past, and the contradictory desires, attachments and injuries that condense in those things known about the past. I hope here to highlight the dialogical relationship between historical happenings and everyday life, shifting constantly between the past and present. I show, on one level, how the past created contemporary places and contemporary persons. On another, I use my ethnographic material to show that people are engaged in ongoing processes of self-creation in the present, drawing on aspects of, and specific understandings of the past as part of this process.

I proceed, pause and backtrack, mirroring the museum's abandonment of continuous time. There are four moments or sites, in particular, in which the past forces itself into view in the present, and where the significance of the Aboriginal past is variously and often passionately constituted. I linger and zoom in on these points. First there's the museum, to which I return at the close of this chapter. I treat *Survival* as both a valuable source of information about the past, and an object of anthropological import in the present. Compiled as part of South Australian sesquicentenary celebrations in 1986, *Survival* is a powerful volume that narrates the history of South Australia from an Aboriginal viewpoint. I discuss the ways in which *Survival* belongs to the time of its own creation and original publication — the late 1980s, as well as the ways the rendering, reproducing and reading of an account of the Aboriginal past can be experienced as intimate and heartfelt. I then move to a discussion of the various ways the Elliston massacre, which is believed to have taken place in the first half of the nineteenth century, has been remembered and denied, with attention to the ways different versions foreclose or lend weight to contemporary Aboriginal self-imaginings. And I begin with a small local event, a collaborative effort of greenies and Aunty Joan Mob, commemorating the invasion of the Australian continent.

'That was the day they invaded Australia.' The candlelight walk, January 26

In 2008 greenics and Aunty Joan Mob organised a candlelight walk on the evening of January 26, a date designated by the Australian state and widely celebrated as 'Australia Day,' but commemorated by many Aboriginal people and their sympathisers as 'Survival Day' or 'Invasion Day'. The walk was not an isolated event: individual greenics involved in Rockhole Recovery have links with the South Australian branch of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) through progressive social and political networks.¹⁸ ANTaR SA members organise monthly 'Candlelight Walks for Peace and Justice,' which in their present incarnation call for a Treaty and Bill of Rights. Ngarrindjeri activists from southeast South Australia initiated these walks in 2000 and extra efforts are made to draw together crowds of people to walk each year in Adelaide on January 26.

Aunty Joan remembers the 2008 Ceduna candlelight walk as a 30-person strong, exciting event. On the evening of January 26, 2009 I headed down to the Ceduna foreshore for the second walk of this kind. In the car park I found Aunty Joan and her cousin, Aunty Cecilia, on their mobile phones trying to rouse more relatives. After a brutally hot public holiday all who were called upon complained that they were tired and, one said, sun-struck after spending the day on the Denial Bay jetty 'crabbing' — dangling pots on long ropes down into the water and leaving them on the seafloor, for blue swimmer crabs to become ensnared in. Someone else said they were 'too knackered to come'. 'We're knackered too,' commented an unimpressed Aunty Joan after she got off the phone.

Those of us who had gathered in the twilight decided to walk regardless of our small number. Aunty Cecilia gave a short earnest speech, 'We are walking for peace. Once you have peace, you can have justice.' Aunty Joan amended this as we walked along the foreshore, 'Once you have peace, you have justice, and then you have FREEDOM,' she boomed out, more riotous than righteous. The sun had sunk beyond the water to our left, and we walked a short length of the foreshore in the dark. Wind kept blowing out

¹⁸ ANTaR formed in 1997. Originally called DON'T (Defenders of Native Title), it arose in opposition to then prime minister John Howard's 'Ten Point Plan' amendments to the Native Title Act, and now consists of state branches that campaign on various issues to do with reconciliation and recognition. For more historical background see www.antarvictoria.org.au/pages/antar-vic-history.php [Last accessed January 25, 2013]. ANTaR has a largely non-Aboriginal, middle class membership.

the flickering candles in our silver lanterns, which were homemade out of scrubbed-clean canned tomato tins, with bent wire handles. ‘The forces of nature are too great for us!’ sung out Aunty Joan, reenergising an event that was proving anticlimactic.

Our party of walkers comprised eight adults (four members of Aunty Joan Mob, three greenies including me, and one local hippie), six Nunga kids and my one-year-old baby, Ned. When we reached the jetty we bumped into some young Nunga women walking around in the cool night with their toddlers. I didn’t know them but they were family and were happily incorporated into the photo taken for, and featured in, the next *Sentinel* (January 29 2009: 4).

In the days leading up to the walk we had circulated a small flyer in Ceduna advertising the event. Rhiannon and I agonised over the wording of this flyer. We wanted to intervene in a hegemonic narrative about the nation’s beginnings but feared alienating a local audience whom we assumed would be hostile to our message. In the end, in close consultation with members of Aunty Joan Mob, we settled on, ‘Australia Day means different things to different people.’

At the walk Rhi told me that she had handed the flyer around at a casual backyard barbeque earlier that day, drawing defensive and non-comprehending responses from Nungas and whitefellas alike. She recounted that a young Nunga woman, known to us both, commented upon reading the flyer, ‘But we’re all Australian. I mean we’ve got a lot to celebrate.’ We laughed at our failed efforts, but also admitted our unease. The flyer called on *all* Ceduna residents to ‘come together’ to walk. However, I want to expand on our Nunga friend’s rejection of its invitation to recognise herself as a ‘different’ kind of person, for whom we imagined Australia Day would necessarily hold a ‘different’ meaning.

Our flyer drew on an implicit, general belief, shared by Rhiannon, many Australian progressives and me, in the importance of ‘acknowledging’ the history of violent dispossession that attended the British claiming of the continent. Our flyer, reflecting this belief, oriented its Aboriginal readers to 1788, inviting them to recognise themselves immediately and *primarily* as the invaded, and positing Australia Day as a celebration belonging to the invaders. Many Aboriginal people *do* see the history of violent dispossession as being intrinsic to their subordinate position in the contemporary social structure, and contemporary white/blackfellas relations are sometimes made sense of in

terms of relations between invader and invaded. But Aboriginal people may also refuse this formulation, or at least its explanatory power, foregrounding instead other aspects of their identity and collective past.

Jeremy Beckett's (1988a:1) edited collection analyses 'the past as the principal currency of exchange' in contemporary constructions of Aboriginal identity. The contributors deal largely, but not exclusively, with the relationship between contemporary Aboriginal subjects and the pre-contact Aboriginal past, utilising 'authenticity' as an analytical category. The case I describe has more to do with politicised uses of the colonial past than the construction (and self-construction) of the authentic Aboriginal cultural subject — a distinction, I am aware, that cannot be easily maintained when many of the political gains Aboriginal people have won, such as land rights, depend on Aboriginal people demonstrating that they remain such authentic cultural subjects (Jacobs 1988; Merlan 1998). The distinction serves a purpose for now. I suggest that the relationship between Aboriginal political subjects and the colonial (rather than pre-contact) past is better grasped by turning, not to Beckett et al (1988b), but to political theorist Wendy Brown's (1995:52-76) compelling critique of identity politics. In Brown's terms (1995:74) our flyer figures Aboriginality as a politicised identity marked by 'a past of injury'. Brown's key insights (ibid.) are about the ways in which these politicised identities are condemned to assert their political claim 'only by entrenching, restating, dramatising, and inscribing [their] pain in politics'. This pain cannot ever be overcome, without risking giving up the political claim that rests on it. The impossibility of transcending this hurt offers insight into why some Aboriginal people are less interested in drawing on a collective 'past of injury' than in orienting themselves to a more recent past of assertion, achievement and recognition. Many Aboriginal people in Ceduna see themselves as un-problematically included in the category of 'Australian' in the present, enjoying universal citizenship rights that older generations of Aboriginal people fought hard to secure (Chesterman 2005). In terms of their historical consciousness, they are oriented less to 1788 and more to the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, however vaguely these are alluded to. They convey respect for the efforts of recent generations but are also, in some cases, patriotic and nationalistic.¹⁹ Aboriginal people may well desire to assert themselves, then, rather

¹⁹ In January 2010 Aunty Vera treated herself and me to tickets to the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. At the women's singles final, after I mumbled my way unhappily through the national anthem, we disagreed about the function of nationalism. I was disturbed by the proliferation of flags and frenzied chanting at the Open, but Aunty Vera maintained that to 'celebrate being Australian' didn't involve denigrating or 'being against' others. Interestingly, it was Jessica Mauboy, a young Indigenous

than as marginal and injured, as doubly possessed of citizenship status, expressing that they are both 'proud to be Aboriginal' and 'proud to be Australian'. Moreover, the binary relation between the invader and the invaded fails to speak to a historical and contemporary experience of intimacy between black and white (see chapter four).

My impression then, on January 26, 2009, was that our pamphlet had failed firstly to unsettle local complacency about the origins of Australian society in dispossession. We had also reproduced a version of history that was intended to foreground the Aboriginal experience, but instead failed to resonate with some local Nungas. A week later, however, a Nunga friend of mine named Keesha, a stylish and self-possessed young woman, initiated the following exchange by talking first to my baby, 'Hey Neddy, I seen you in the paper.' I understood that she was referring to the short *Sentinel* article about the walk. Then, turning to me, she asked, 'What was that for?' I started to reply, but she continued, cutting me off:

Yeah coz I was in Adelaide and I was getting out of the taxi with my cousin — she has real fair skin — and she goes 'Happy Invasion Day!' (laughs). And I go, 'What you say that for?' and she told me that was the day they invaded Australia. Oh my gosh, I never knew that.

In response I said, quoting from our flyer, 'Well that's it, Australia Day means different things to different people.' Keesha nodded affirmatively, 'It does.' Keesha seemed emboldened by the reshaping of the national narrative in such a way that it centred on the experiences of Aboriginal people, and vested them with moral authority. In some cases then, Brown's critique is penetrating: Aboriginal people do not wish to be condemned only to restate, dramatise and reiterate a past marked by injury, intuiting that they will find themselves trapped in endless rehearsal and repetition of their pain. But in Keesha's case, far from being overly familiar, the event confirmed very recent and

woman and former Australian Idol runner-up, who sang the anthem. 'She's a Nunga!' Aunty Vera told me, a fact invoked to bolster her position that Australian national pride and assertions of Aboriginal identity should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. Questions to do with nationalism and national identity were often questions on which greenies and Aunty Joan Mob diverged in their opinions. In a campfire sing-a-long on one Rockhole Recovery, we were running out of known lyrics when an Aunty Joan Mob member suggested we sing the national anthem. 'But we don't know the words,' she said laughing. The greenie sitting beside me grumbled, 'and we wouldn't sing it even if we knew them'. I was taken aback when on a smaller trip out bush with Aunty Joan mob members the five Nungas present — all of them of Aunty Joan's generation — agreed that Australia should *not* become a republic. They seemed to desire to see the Australian state held in a position of subordination to the British Crown, so that there existed an authority above the Australian government to which they could, in theory, appeal about the nation state's perpetuation of injustices.

startling revelations about the past — indeed about the fact of there even *being* such as thing as a historical narrative that told of an Aboriginal past that was the legitimate possession of Aboriginal people. This revelation in turn produced revelations about contemporary social forms and relations.

Keesha noted that her cousin was fair-skinned, a detail associated, in this instance, with sassiness and confidence. More significant is the fact that they were in Adelaide together, which has a history of Aboriginal political action, and where an oppositional and historically-informed kind of political consciousness is more readily available to Nungas. For Keesha, her cousin's bold and empowering assertions were affirmed on her return to Ceduna by the news of our local event.

Points of origin: interpreting the founding of the state of South Australia

While January 26 marks the establishment of the British penal colony of New South Wales in 1788, the European invasion of South Australia in 1836 occurred a half century later, and under quite different circumstances. A private, commercial company established the colony and distributed land on a systematic basis to free citizens (Brock 1995:208).²⁰ In Britain much debate preceded the convict-free South Australian experiment. Promoted and designed by ambitious capitalists and social reformers such as Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the colony also came into being at a time when humanitarians dominated the British Government's Colonial Office. Previously active in anti-slavery campaigns, they expressed concerns about Indigenous people's rights in land and insisted that Indigenous people be regarded as British subjects (Foster et al 2001).

The influence of these contradictory social forces can be seen in two pieces of legislation, both of which are variously cited in the present as 'foundational'. The first of these is the Waste Lands Act (1834), which authorised the establishment of a free colony known as the Province of South Australia and set out the plan for 'systematic colonisation' by claiming land described as 'waste and unoccupied' (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:3). *Survival* cited and emphasised the injustice of the Waste Lands Act, rebutting the notion

²⁰ This experiment in 'systematic colonisation' was short-lived. Historian Stuart Macintyre (1999:80) explains, 'While the principal settlement, Adelaide, and its surrounds were carefully laid out by William Light, the surveyor general, the arrangement soon succumbed to land speculation and South Australia reverted to the status of an ordinary Crown colony in 1842.'

that the lands now known as ‘South Australia’ were either unoccupied or unused. ‘The earth was untilled. The land was not disfigured by man-made constructions,’ wrote Mattingley and Hampton (*ibid.*). ‘But it was indeed not ‘waste’. In fact its resources were known and carefully husbanded’ (*ibid.*). The editors, like other historians of the era, contested the long-held colonial fiction of *terra nullius*, a land belonging to no-one, which was, of course, the legal notion overturned by the High Court in the 1992 Mabo decision.

Besides the Waste Lands Act, another ‘founding document’ accorded prominence in the present is an 1836 Letters Patent, which defined the exact boundaries of the Province of South Australia. A stipulation stated that nothing in the Letters Patent:

shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal Natives of the said Province to the actual occupation or enjoyment in their own Persons or in the Persons of their Descendants of any Lands therein now actually occupied or enjoyed by such Natives.²¹

Historian Henry Reynolds (2003:127-152) usefully explains the relationship between these two documents, and the schism between the South Australian Commission (the company promoting the venture) and the Colonial Office. The Commission effectively drafted the Waste Lands Act, and had it rushed through parliament in haste, a process roundly criticised in humanitarian circles (Reynolds 2003:127-129). However, before the Commission could dispatch the first boatload of colonists to the colony, the Colonial Office was required to issue a Letters Patent. The clause cited above was intended to enshrine Indigenous property rights (Reynolds 2003:136). The Letters Patent, according to Reynolds (2003:137), ‘created a sense of crisis among the would-be colonists already frustrated by long-delayed departure’. Reynolds argues (2003:40) that the Commission, from the outset, ‘aimed to outwit the zealous reformers in the Colonial Office’. The Waste Lands Act was never amended, as the Colonial Office desired it to be, and in terms of the Letters Patent, the Commissioners were in a position to interpret what constituted ‘occupancy’. The Commissioners worded their own promises carefully. Reynolds concludes (2003:141), ‘The leading figures knew all along that they would

²¹ The document is reproduced in full on the ANTaR SA website at <http://antarsa.auspics.org.au/category/news/2010/09/read-the-letters-patent-of-19-february-1836> [Last accessed July 12, 2012].

claim, on arrival in South Australia, that Aboriginal property rights, even the right to occupation and enjoyment, did not exist.’

In the present, South Australian Aboriginal activists and ANTaR SA have seized on the 1836 Letters Patent, devoting considerable energy to raising public awareness of its existence and its expansive provisions. The candlelight walks, for example, were originally conceived of as part of a Letters Patent ‘campaign’ (a loose appellation). Activists highlight the recognition of Aboriginal rights in land that existed in 1836, insisting that this ‘foundational’ document should be ‘honoured’. The editors of *Survival* saw the Waste Lands Act as shorthand for the colonial past: the origins of South Australian society lying, unambiguously, in arrogance, insult and injury. The provisions of the Letters Patent were rightly seen by the editors as being ‘in conflict’ with the commissioners’ commercial venture, and were quickly overshadowed, resulting only in the creation of a number of small reserves (Matingley and Hampton 2008:79). For activists who today formulate Aboriginal claims in reference to the Letters Patent, the colonial past is recast from a site of injury to a site of potential redemption and justice. New possibilities for future trajectories are opened up by this use of past documents, and the reinterpretation they offer.

Present day historians note that the fact that Aboriginal people were to be regarded as British subjects marks the influence of the humanitarian Colonial Office (Foster et al 2001:2). The first governor of South Australia, Captain Hindmarsh, made much of the fact that the ‘Natives’ were to be ‘considered as much under the safeguard of the laws as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British subjects’ (Foster et al 2001:3). The fact that Aboriginal people were considered British subjects, however, ‘did not alter the realities of settler violence and Aboriginal resistance to invasion’ (Foster et al 2001:2-3). By contrast, *Survival* (Matingley and Hampton 2008:3) looked to the moment when Aboriginal people’s ‘sovereign status was changed’ in 1836, fixing the point where they were proclaimed British subjects as the moment ‘the tragedy began’. For the editors of *Survival*, this moment *itself* did violence to the integrity of the variety of forms of Indigenous personhood that existed in ‘South Australia’ at the time of invasion, rather than potentially mitigating the violence of invasion. The academic narrative has failed to grasp the way in which Aboriginal political subjectivities are fashioned in relation to historical material: there is no dignity to be found in being technically regarded as a British subject, entitled to protection under the invaders’ law. *Survival*’s second

section (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:28) opens with a full-page photograph of two naked Aboriginal men, laced to each other by a heavy neck-chain. With bitter irony the photograph is captioned, 'British subjects.' It is time to consider *Survival* in more depth.

Survival. 'Treasured in many homes'

Survival in Our Own Land is a hefty, large-format book, with a facsimile of the black, gold and red flag stretched across the length and width of its bold cover. In the foreword to the original edition the chairperson of the Aboriginal Executive Committee, which commissioned the volume, acknowledges that controversy surrounded the committee's involvement in South Australia's official sesquicentenary events and projects (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:ix). The all-Aboriginal Committee, Chairperson Vi Deuschle notes, was criticised by 'dissenters' for taking part in a series of state-sponsored undertakings that marked 150 years since the establishment of a permanent British settlement at Pattawilya, or Holdfast Bay, the site of present day Glenelg, in 1836. However, explains Deuschle, the committee sought an opportunity for Aboriginal people to 'express their views in their own way' and to tell the story of Aboriginal-European contact in South Australia 'in their own words' (ibid.). To this end the committee commissioned non-Aboriginal writer Christobel Mattingley to be the editor and researcher, with committee member Ken Hampton as co-editor, of an extensive account of the history of Aboriginal South Australia since 1836.

The outcome is a volume written from the Aboriginal perspective, 'Nunga' being deployed throughout the book as a category that unifies Aboriginal people across time, and across the state now named 'South Australia'. The narrative speaks of 'our people,' 'our culture,' 'our grandfathers'. The invaders, across time, are 'Goonyas'. Yet the involvement of a non-indigenous figure, Mattingley, was central to *Survival's* production, and a short note speaks directly to the question of having a non-Aboriginal writer assume an Aboriginal voice. Writing about 'Our Christobel Mattingley,' Ken Hampton says:

Christobel Mattingly was chosen and appointed by the Jubilee 150 'Aboriginal' Executive Committee as the editor/researcher for *Survival*... because of her empathy with our people and her experience as a researcher and writer. We're pretty proud of her determination and doggedness against the odds in putting this book together. ... Her ability to gain peoples'

confidence, to make them confident enough to expose of themselves what hasn't previously been said, is terrific. She has been able to see through our eyes the effects of Goonya authoritarianism upon us as a people. She has become one of us. (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:xiii)

Philip Batty (2005:218-219) has discussed the ways Aboriginal people working within Aboriginal organisations can 'lease' their Aboriginality to non-Aboriginal organisational workers and, in doing so, authorise them to act. In the passage above, Mattingley is first claimed as 'ours,' implying she has outsider status, but that she is respected and held close. Then, through her demonstrated identification with Nunga experiences, she is authorised to speak, becoming, temporarily Aboriginal and 'one of us' — or at least *more* Nunga than Goonya, if not wholly Nunga. For her part, Mattingley (2008:xiii) thanks Ken Hampton for making '*Survival*... so truly and distinctively "Aboriginal".' Complex machinations are at work here. The dichotomous relationship that structures *Survival* is undone before being quickly re-established, in order to allow the book to exist.

Mattingley and Hampton wove together archival material, poetry, oral histories recorded as part of assembling *Survival*, and existing historical scholarship into a series of thematic chapters. The book, says Hampton (1988:xi), contains 'feelings' as well as 'facts'. Hampton (ibid.) elaborates, stating that the work 'is an expression of 'Aboriginal' feeling about the loss of birthright'. A highly charged, passionate account of Aboriginal dispossession follows. Forceful language dramatises the world-shattering effects of colonisation:

Goonyas came to the country with axe, plough, flock and fencing wire. They invaded it with roads and railways. ... They replaced its animals with sheep, cattle, camels, goats horses donkeys, rabbits and cats, and took the water for themselves and their beasts. Together they destroyed the trees and the life-giving plants. They suppressed the traditional owners of the land with firearms, chains, whips and arsenic. They forced their penis into the womb of our traditional society. (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:4)

In the preface to the fifth edition Mattingley states,

Nungas have taken *Survival in Our Own Land* to their hearts. It is treasured in many homes. When it first appeared people sat up all night reading it, or slept with it under their pillow. (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:iii)

Mattingley (ibid.) describes Nunga readers' intimate relationship with this telling of their own history, 'For many Nungas it was cathartic. For any months after it was launched in 1988 people rang to share their stories with me.' *Survival* was certainly closely engaged with in my experience. A copy sat on Auntie Vera's shelf and when I commented upon it she became extremely animated, incensed about an incorrect caption on an early photograph of a Koonibba mission football team. I did not take this expression of discontent to signal alienation with the work, however. On the contrary, Auntie Vera assumed ownership over the volume, accepting that it told a story that belonged to her and seeing herself as in conversation with its creators, rather than granting them the status of authoritative authors.

When Rhiannon saw the copy I had borrowed from the Ceduna library lying around my Denial Bay home she told me resolutely, 'I LOVE that book.' 'Goonyas,' notes Mattingley (ibid.), 'were moved to tears by the stories and haunting photos.'

Survival reproduces colonial documents in full as well as a substantial body of powerful photographs. One taken in 'about 1930' in the Tomkinson Ranges, in the far north-west of South Australia, features two lean, naked Aboriginal men helping push a loaded utility truck out of a bog. Prospector Michael Terry, whose photograph — and truck — this is, captioned the image as follows, 'An hour before this photograph was taken these ... blacks had never seen a "wheelbarrow" as they dubbed the expedition truck' (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:8).

The photograph also bears a kind of counter-caption, generated as part of the process of collating *Survival*. Alex Minutjukur comments that this is a photograph of 'nikiti tjutangkuya untuni' or 'naked people pushing' (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:8). In this case Minutjukur's caption does not contradict, refute or expound on the original (as happened elsewhere in *Survival*). Nor does it comment on the moral content of the photograph, as the captioning of the chained 'British subjects' does. The process of selecting, publishing and explaining each archival photograph is, however, established as dialogical: the significance of each image in the present is brought into view. In many cases this takes the form of naming, where possible, Aboriginal subjects whose individual identities were not recorded in the process of photographing and storing these images.²²

²² The relationship between colonialism and the medium of photography is a field unto itself. Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson's edited collection (2003) was a seminal examination of the 'excesses' of meaning that lie 'waiting to resurface' (Pinney 2003:6) in images originally made under oppressive conditions. For an in-depth work see historian Jané Lydon's monograph *Eye Contact* (2005). Through a

The photos were an especially valued aspect of *Survival* according to Mattingley who relays (2008:iii), ‘I have heard of some, desperate to obtain a photo of long lost family, who have torn a page or cut the photo out of a borrowed book.’ For the editors of *Survival*, images from the colonial archive were redeemed in the present, as they were repurposed by the descendants of those who were photographed (see also Macdonald 2003:227). In the case of this particular photo, the Tomkinson Ranges men, who look quizzically towards the camera, and whose matted hair marks them as initiated men, remain anonymous figures in the annals of history, and Minutjukur’s relationship to them is not explained.

This image is emblematic of an encounter that the editors constantly return to in telling the story of Aboriginal South Australia: the fact that many Aboriginal people in the north of the state were *nikiti* and only vaguely cognisant of the existence of vehicles in ‘about 1930’. *Survival* in fact exhibited a tendency of vital interest to this thesis. Throughout the volume the editors stress the vastly differing experiences of Nungas in the south-eastern, more densely settled area of the state since 1836, and Aboriginal people in the remote northwest, some of whom did not encounter white people until nearly a full century later.

Survival posits the latter group as extremely ‘fortunate’ to have enjoyed traditional life, largely undisturbed, for this longer period. *Survival* reads largely as an account of loss, with the north represented as a reservoir of culture, strength, and renewal. Indeed Minutjukur’s caption reminds the reader about the existence of contemporary Aboriginal worlds in which Indigenous languages still predominate, even if the word *nikiti* is probably a Kriol version of ‘naked’. In contrasting loss with undisturbed continuity, *Survival* mutes more complex tensions arising from these radically different experiences of contact being contained within the same state borders and subject to the same legislation. More significantly still, the editors reproduce a narrative that holds that contact with white people, ways and worlds should be regarded as tainting the Aboriginal experience and corrupting Aboriginal identities — rather than sketching multiple ways of being Aboriginal emerge as the result of divergent historical experiences. This is the dynamic that Beckett et al (1988b) were writing against: the construction of pure, traditional ways of being Aboriginal against a *lesser* way of being Aboriginal. It is

close reading of a large body of images of residents at the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in Victoria, Lydon demonstrates that photography, with its often-noted capacity to objectify and distance, was not simply a tool of colonial domination, surveillance and scientific categorisation but that the photographic record reveals ambivalences, intimacies and a process of exchange between observer and observed.

important to remember that the publication of *Survival* itself belongs to a particular historical moment: in the year of Australia's stupefying celebration of the Bicentenary, colonial violence and the destruction of a whole way of being was forcefully inserted into public discourse, disrupting the confident narrative of nation-building.

Early contact history: the South Australian frontier and the Elliston massacre

Port Lincoln or 'Lincoln' is a town with which many Ceduna Nungas have close family links. A massacre that is believed to have occurred in the early contact history of the West Coast at Elliston, a town midway along the coastline between Lincoln and Ceduna, continues to be talked about in the present. It is to this site of memory I now turn.

Regardless of the provisions of the 1836 Letters Patent, historian Peggy Brock (1995:208-209) shows that Aboriginal societies in South Australia, as elsewhere, were impacted in specific ways by the alienation of land for specific capitalist developments. On the West Coast a remarkably short pastoral period, which began in the 1860s, ended in the late 1880s when smaller blocks of land were taken up for agriculture (Faull 1988:55-57). In the early 1840s European pastoralists established a toehold on the lower Eyre Peninsula at Port Lincoln, an area in which whalers had already established a presence (Brock 1995:215). By 1842 this isolated pastoral settlement was 'in a state of siege' due to Aboriginal attacks on settlers and stock (Foster et al 2001:4), and the settlers almost abandoned it (Brock 1995:215). Historian Robert Foster's (1989; 2000) detailed work on rations distribution in South Australia shows how, in some instances, 'rations became a tool for controlling frontier conflict' (1989:65). Port Lincoln was a case in point, rations eventually providing the means for 'securing' the settlement (Foster 1989:69-70).²³

Foster et al's *Fatal Collisions* (2001) details the process by which past events are mythologised and circulated. The authors (Foster et al 2001:44) note the circulation 'on the West Coast and beyond' of 'shadowy incomplete fragments of a local legend about Indigenous people driven to their deaths over a cliff near Elliston as payback for the murder of two or three settlers'. The authors deal with various versions of this event as it is rendered, from 1880 to the present, in newspaper accounts, in a novel, and in

²³ Foster (1989:69-70) tells us that monthly ration distribution at Port Lincoln was first introduced in 1847 but after a series of murders in 1850 and a long drought, resulting in widespread Aboriginal starvation, ration distribution was 'stepped up' with additional distribution points at Venus Harbour and Salt Creek.

Aboriginal oral history and local debate. Intent on also establishing the verifiable facts about the case, they conclude that the 'legend' of the Elliston Massacre aggregates details of a series of different events from 1848 and 1849. Most versions begin with the 1848 murder of hutkeeper John Hamp, whose body was found some distance from his hut, Hamp having set out from his hut to cut timber unarmed (Foster et al 2001:46-47). In May 1849 five Aboriginal people died after eating arsenic-poisoned flour stolen from a hut. This event is thought to have precipitated the payback murders of Captain Beevor and Anne Easton (Foster et al 2001:47). Three weeks later, a group of armed whites pursued their Aboriginal attackers down the Waterloo Bay cliffs. According to the available documentary evidence, this resulted in two, or three, Aboriginal men's deaths while five others were arrested in possession of stolen goods. Four of those apprehended were charged with various offences and subsequently escorted to Adelaide. Two of these men were tried and convicted of Beevor's murder in Adelaide and sentenced to death (Foster et al 2001:49). They were escorted back to the district and hung from a gum tree outside Beevor's hut (*ibid.*). Three other men were tried for Easton's murder but were acquitted for lack of evidence.

Port Lincoln-based Mirning-Kokatha woman Iris Burgoyne's memoir (2000) appeared the year before Foster et al's scholarly work. Based on her memories, musings and local oral histories, Burgoyne's book contains an account of the Elliston massacre that is far from 'vague or shadowy'; in fact it re-works, in vivid detail, some of what I've outlined above. Burgoyne (2000:114) says that 'a camp of about two hundred Aboriginal people lived on the outskirts of Elliston'. Two men went out hunting from this camp and the next day a farmer wrongly accused the two of stealing some missing sheep. A judge came up from Adelaide and sentenced the two to hang. The two men's trial, according to Burgoyne (2000:115), was held at night in a big shed in Elliston. 'The Aboriginal people stood outside in the dark, peeped through the window and watched the two men as they pleaded with the judge' (*ibid.*). Burgoyne's account has Aboriginal people bearing witness to the workings of a cruel new order, while they remained 'in the dark,' simultaneously excluded and outside of its grasp.

According to this version, on the night following the trial in the shed the two wrongly convicted men were hung in the centre of town. 'Those innocent fellows hung there all the next day, while the Aboriginal people mourned them' (*ibid.*). The next night,

Aboriginal people removed the bodies. After burying their countrymen, Aboriginal people:

Snuck around to the boarding house where the judge slept and coaxed him outside with a whoobu-whoobie, a device that made different sounds like an engine, a dog growling or a horse neighing. When the judge emerged they grabbed him, knocked him unconscious and hung him in the very same place. (ibid.)

Swift retaliation followed, as the townsfolk took ‘the law into their own hands’:

The police rounded up farmers with about ten horses and rode out to the camp. They herded all the Aboriginal men, women and children like animals and forced them off the cliffs at Elliston. People tried to escape, but they were cut down by whips, sticks and guns. (ibid.)

The massacre’s three survivors recounted these scenes of violent excess as they spread their story up and down the coast. These events are said to have taken place in 1839, with ‘another massacre’ occurring in the same area ten years later (Burgoyne 2000:118). ‘No Aboriginal person has lived in Elliston ever since,’ says Burgoyne (ibid.).

Ceduna Nungas’ perceptions support this last point insofar as they regard the towns along the Eyre peninsular coastline, between Ceduna and Port Lincoln, as hostile territory. Aunty Joan, commenting on the ways in which Ceduna’s council was trying clean up the disorderly Aboriginal public presence in town (see chapter four), threatened ominously to ‘call up Streaky Bay and tell them the Nungas are coming’. This comment attests to her perception that Streaky Bay, only 100km from Ceduna, was whitefella-only territory. Whitefella perceptions seemed to also confirm this. One of my friends criticised ‘Squeaky Bay’ (as he called it) for being racist, and white-only, while others talked about going there for a ‘special treat’ — to eat gourmet food but also, the unspoken assumption was, that it was a treat to temporarily escape the presence of Aboriginal people.

Aunty Vera told Anderson and Walsh that the story of the Elliston massacre was told to her with ‘such force’ that she initially assumed her grandmother, who narrated it, was present at the time of ‘that massacre,’ only changing her mind about this later when she worked out when she was born. The detail contained in Burgoyne’s account serves to

underline Aunty Vera's observation that 'the old history was handed down very, very strongly'.

W.E.H. Stanner's (2009 [1968]:182-193) 'great Australian silence' prevailed in the national histories of the twentieth century, systematically denying the presence of Aboriginal people in Australian history. Yet in local contexts, lurid, gothic and explicit accounts of frontier violence flourished — most notably in the period after the realities of frontier life faded from immediate memory and became mythologised. Foster et al (2001) document a crucial shift: at the local level, the frontier was portrayed in the late nineteenth century, and into the twentieth century, as a site of Aboriginal depravity and outrage, and European courage and resourcefulness. Settler violence had a crucial function within these representations; this was the stuff pioneer stock were made of as they subdued a savage landscape and expunged a savage presence. Numerous versions of the Elliston massacre are grotesque: the hutkeeper Hamp is decapitated; in some his sawn-off head is found in a camp oven (Foster et al 2001:44-68). Representations of these kinds of 'treacherous' acts signified the Aboriginal 'power to wreak disorder and destruction,' the fear of which 'legitimated much of the redemptive violence produced on the colonial frontier' (Morris 1989:84).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Aboriginal people were rapidly gaining political and social status, this situation — again, at the local level — had shifted. This is evidenced in the response to a proposal by the civil rights body Federal Council Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) to mark the site of the Elliston Massacre. FCAATSI planned to build a memorial at a place where, it claimed '250 Aboriginal people were presumed to have been driven to their deaths in 1846' (Foster et al 2001:69). This plan was met with concerted local opposition and went unrealised. In this time, local opponents were intent on sanitising and denying the violence of the past (Foster et al 2001:70). Settler violence no longer had a redemptive function nor served to enhance the reputation of settlers as pioneers. Instead it rendered both their individual legacies and the colonisation process morally questionable.

Burgoyne's memoir was published by Aboriginal press Magabela Books. Her publication belongs to a new era of narrative production as the 1980s and 90s saw a wave of Aboriginal autobiographies gain prominence in Australia, many of them by women (eg Ginibi 1988; Morgan 1987; Mum Shirl and Sykes 1987). Burgoyne's own story was recorded and set down with the help of Tania Perre who describes herself, endearingly,

as ‘a skinny whitefella’ student of Aboriginal Studies at Spencer TAFE in Port Lincoln. In her foreword, Perre states that their book ‘breaks the secrecy surrounding the massacres of Aboriginal people at Elliston in 1839 and 1849’ (Burgoyne 2000:xvii). This dynamic in public discourse, which holds that the secret of frontier violence is brought to light by Aboriginal people and their sympathisers, and is denied and covered up by those that wish to defend the nation’s honour, culminated in the so-called history wars (see Macintyre and Clark 2003 for a summary). Yet Perre’s formulation acts, unwittingly, to obscure its own historicity, implying that this was the first moment in time in which an account of this violent event had circulated publicly. This is symptomatic of a broader trend, in which earlier modes of remembering are forgotten. David Roberts (2003:150–157) and Katrina Schlunke (2005) also explore the circulation of local oral histories of massacres in which Aboriginal people were allegedly driven to their deaths over cliffs in the central west and New England areas of New South Wales respectively, revealing that rather than ‘repression,’ modes of talking about these kinds of events proliferate in local settings.²⁴ Foster et al, Roberts and Schlunke are convincing in arguing that histories and accounts of massacres such as the Elliston massacre serve different ends in different historical moments, underlining again that ‘history cannot be divorced from the circumstances of its telling’ (Denning 1996:50).

What then should I make of a popular contemporary account of the Elliston incident, which ‘is still discussed in Ceduna today’ (Foster et al 2001:71)? The story that circulates in Ceduna adds one further detail: ‘that not all people died, the majority hiding at the base of the cliffs until the vigilantes left’ (ibid.). This detail is present in Auntie Vera’s version. She said that her great grandfather ‘pulled his kids underneath the cave and they could hear the wailing and screaming’.

Rick Hosking (2008:175) returns to the story of the Elliston massacre in a later work that asks ‘why do people need to remember a massacre, especially one that never happened?’ He does not really attempt to answer his own question, instead reading the physical site of the Elliston cliff tops as suggestive of multiplicities and layers — of violence, denial, remembering and forgetting. My own interpretation as to what is at stake in the

²⁴ This is reminiscent of Foucault’s famous hypothesis about the Victorian age’s relationship to sexuality. Where silence, absence and repression are popularly attributed to it from the perspective of the present, instead Foucault (2008:18) finds a ‘proliferation of discourses concerned with sex’. Foucault’s larger task was to trace the way the ‘truth of sex’ concerned forms of power *productive* of sexuality and human relations, rather than repressive of them.

remembering of the Elliston massacre is that the 'further detail' is of crucial significance. While I know many people related to Iris Burgoyne, the only version I have heard of the Elliston massacre in Ceduna also recounts that while some people were driven to their deaths, *most* Aboriginal people survived, hiding in caves at the cliffs' base. This is a version that does not allow for a wholesale loss of Aboriginal people or cultural knowledge in a single moment. Instead it has Aboriginal people bear witness to the brutality of the frontier, but to ultimately survive to both reproduce Aboriginal society over time, and to reproduce and circulate testimonies about settler violence. This reiterates the theme of witnessing found in Burgoyne's book, where Aboriginal people gather together in the dark and 'peek' in to the shed, but for the most part evade the invaders' grasp. Aboriginal people survive not out of luck but due to their skills and cunning, hiding in the caves and successfully eluding the finality of the fate that settlers would have them meet.

Leaving behind Lincoln, at the foot of the Eyre Peninsular, and Elliston, along its coastline, I move now to a series of isolated settlements strung along Murat Bay and perched atop the Great Australian Bight.

Aboriginal-European contact on the West Coast

A permanent European presence was established on the West Coast by 1860, when the squatter W. R. Swan founded the pastoral station 'Yalata,' west of Fowlers Bay (Faull 1988:37). A rations depot was subsequently established at Fowlers Bay in 1862 (Brock 1993:64). The Ceduna Museum holds a photo of the Yalata homestead as well as the cracked leadlight glass window from above its door; a handwritten note is sticky-taped to the window, 'This run ran over 120,000 sheep at its peak.' This was in the late 1880s (Faull 1988:49). Faull (1988:44) describes the 'Yalata Run' as 'a vast sheep empire,' reproducing the hegemonic language of the colony in grandly claiming that between 1868, by which time it was fully established, and 1888, 'it *was* the Far West'.

The late Clem Eckermann (2010:11), a former pastor at the Koonibba Lutheran Mission, points out in his historical memoir that the early era of establishing the pastoral economy was labour intensive: Aboriginal people were engaged as builders, well-sinkers, fencers, shepherds and outstation keepers. Eckermann (2010:12) wrote that 'no strife' arose over

access to watering grounds; in fact, interestingly, wells tapped into the underground basin ‘made considerable new sources of supply available to the Nungas’.

Eckermann (2010:13-14) mentions the spearing of the explorer, Darke, at Waddikke Rocks as a rare example of a violent encounter on the West Coast. In the process he omits references to several violent clashes recorded at the time and easily available to the most casual reader: in 1858 an Aboriginal person speared a member of an early well-sinking party who was working for Swan and soon after one of Swan’s shepherds was killed (Faull 1988:313). Faull (1988:314) describes that an ‘elaborate and macabre execution,’ was subsequently carried out at the site of the shepherd’s murder. Faull (ibid.) also notes examples of near sadistic cruelty on the part of early pastoralists who exploited Aboriginal labour, before concurring overall with Eckermann: the relationship between pastoralists and Nungas on the West Coast was ‘mostly trouble-free’.

The desire to render the history of dispossession uneventful and consensual is consistent with other white locals’ attempts to trivialise Aboriginal resistance as passive and ineffectual. E. E. Lutz’s memoir of his years on the West Coast, between 1893 and 1961, provides one such example. Lutz says, of the Aboriginal people that gradually ‘came in from the bush, loaded with spears, boomerangs, waddies etc’:

They looked rather savage and made one feel a little jittery. ... Although always well armed, it was surprising how soon their courage vanished! When for the first time, two natives saw a man on a bike riding towards them, they headed for the scrub, thinking “muldarby” (devil) was chasing them! (n.d.:33)

Lutz presumes to know what Aboriginal people thought, infantilising them and portraying them as representing no real threat to the European taking up of the country. He uses the phrase ‘time marches on’ as a refrain throughout his memoirs, casting dispossession as an inevitable *effect* of history, rather than a fact of history — an historical process, involving the deliberate actions of human actors.

By the 1880s kangaroo hunters had set up camps on and around the Nullabor Plain with the aim to eradicate kangaroos, considered vermin (Eckermann 2009:11). Brock says that both pastoralists and kangaroo hunters employed Aboriginal people, ‘utilising their hunting and tracking skills and knowledge of the country’ (1993:65, see also Faull 1988:52). However, there is evidence that Aboriginal women were frequently abused in the hunters’ camps (Brock 1993:65; Burgoyne 2000:20). Kangaroo skins were sent to

Adelaide to be auctioned, and eventually shipped to America where they were used to line railway carriages, for bookbindings and in gloves (Faull 1988:52). In 1894, when the kangaroo hunters left the area because of a lack of water and game, they reported that Aboriginal people were starving as the result of increased pressure on their food sources (Brock 1996:65).

As mentioned, the pastoral leases granted from 1860 expired in 1888 (ibid.). There was 'strong demand' for new agricultural land (Faull 1988:55). Subdivision of larger pastoral properties started, numerous smaller agricultural units with either Right to Purchase leases or Perpetual Leases becoming available (Brock 1993:65).

Agriculture, mostly wheat cropping, used the land much more intensively than pastoralism 'and represented a formidable attack on Aboriginal ritual and economic activities' (Brock ibid.). By the turn of the century the food supply situation was critical (ibid.) and the period was marked by more frequent violent encounters between Aboriginal people killing sheep for food, and shepherds, the new farmers and their families (Faull 1988:317-318).

Aboriginal people feature frequently in the reminiscences of old settlers collected in a local oral history publication (Dayman 1989). There are two notable things about the part Aboriginal people are cast in these 'pioneer tales'. First, Aboriginal people are always in subservient roles, either calling on settlers to ask for tea, sugar and clothing, or aiding white settlers becoming established on the land by doing odd, menial jobs. Secondly, while these contemporary tales are careful to recall and set down the names of any families or identities who had a presence on the West Coast in the nineteenth century, they never name Aboriginal individuals, just 'natives'. It is striking that many of the white surnames celebrated in this collection are now surnames strongly associated with Aboriginal families in Ceduna, a complex phenomenon I revisit in chapter four.

Named places: the contemporary landscape takes shape

Even those things that appear most solid and taken-for-granted in the present — the names of places, and the relationships between places — are contingent rather than historically preordained. The quiet backwater of Denial Bay, for instance, was once the area's main town. According to a sign near the Bay's jetty, the township takes its name

from the fact that in 1902 Mathew Flinders landed at this spot hoping to find fresh water. His wish was denied. Nungas take some satisfaction from the inscription of a whitefella's thwarted hope in a landscape dominated by street names that honour white 'pioneers,' or which mangle local Indigenous words. William McKenzie was one of the newcomers allotted a run under the new land distribution system in 1889, taking up holdings situated about three kilometres west of present day Denial Bay (Faull 1988:86). The ruins of his homestead are pictured in Figure 10.



Figure 10: The remains of 'Mac's' home.

It seems to me that the cairn erected to direct attention to the existence of these crumbling remains on a lonely back road represents, in part, an attempt to inscribe an anxious 'I was here' in the landscape (Birch 2005:186). The inscription firms up the European hold on an inhospitable and sparsely populated region, and guards against doubts about the legitimacy of the colonial project. Throughout the 1890s, McKenzie established a small village on his run, which boasted a blacksmith's shop, post office, saddlery, slaughter yards, several cottages and a large home with a dining room catering for 50 people (Faull 1988:86). The Museum features a 1953 sketch of 'Mac' at his homestead; McKenzie died in 1906, so presumably the drawing is based on a

photograph. McKenzie is featured with a thick beard and braces; he stands, hands in pockets, by a solitary tree. 'NOTE PET CROW!!' jokes the caption: a bird roosts on his shoulder.

'Mac's town' was the social centre of the district but its functions eventually shifted to Denial Bay, a settlement which was only officially surveyed in 1901, but which had grown up around a landing place widely used since 1889. On the east side of Murat Bay wheat farmers started using a separate landing place near which the town of Ceduna was surveyed in 1900. Faull says that while the Governor's choice of name for the new town was Ceduna, for many years it continued to be called 'Murat Bay'; indeed the post office did not change its name to until 1921 (Faull 1988:166). A jetty was built in Ceduna in 1903, and by about 1915 it had become the key town in the region (Faull 1988:175). The town's dominance was assured by the building, in 1920, of a deep-sea port at Thevenard, then a separate town adjacent to Ceduna but now effectively a suburb of Ceduna. Thevenard came to be associated with a Greek fishing community (Faull 1988:390).

Faull (1988:283) describes the long period between 1888 up until the drought of 1928-1930, which coincided with the depression, as the 'hopeful years'. After this period the population on the West Coast began to retract. Faull documents the rise and demise of many other localities in the area: sites of social life — wool shed dances, congregations and small schools — that now stand deserted. The West Coast is dotted with these 'landscapes of abandonment' (Birch 1999:61).²⁵ One of the contributors to the local history collection laments the decline of Mudamuckla, saying:

The wheat sheds, sale yards, passenger train, the store and all the sports facilities are gone. Recently the hall which had been the focal point for so many people for fifty seven years was demolished because of storm damage and white ants. ... I know we must accept progress but I am sad to see the small centres lose their identities. (Dayman 1989)

This reading of 'progress' in a narrative that speaks only of decline is telling. The determination to narrate progress most often takes the form of a valuing of the quality of 'perseverance'. Megan Poore (2001) conducted anthropological fieldwork in Ceduna in

²⁵ Sites of desertion — spooky stretches of road; ghost towns; the places left behind in the wake of destruction or abandonment — have interested a number of Australian historians and authors (Ballantyne 2001; Gibson 2002; Read 1996). The fascination these sites exert is understood as being bound up with contemporary disquiet surrounding the violent legacy of dispossession.

1996-7, focussing on white modes of belonging to Ceduna. Poore (2001:71-73) documented the attachment of 'old locals' to stories of their families' 'pioneer' pasts. These stories often revolved around physical endurance, a quality demanded by the toughness of the environment. Images of pioneers 'doing battle with the heat, the sandflies, the poor soil, the isolation (even mallee roots!) are invariably evoked', wrote Poore (2001:70). And, while their descendants are admired, Poore perceives that the achievements of past pioneers are linked to an admiration of their own qualities of endurance, as farmers who have persevered in marginal country that lies beyond South Australia's 'Goyder Line of Rainfall,' which was surveyed in 1865 and continues today to mark a boundary between arable land suitable for agriculture and semi-arid country (Meinig 2005).

Back to the museum

What happened in the past is left behind in what Denning (1996:42) called 'sign-bearing relics'. This includes, but is not limited to, material remains. 'Their meanings are reconstituted in their present' (Denning 1996:43). How then am I to understand the meaning of the Ceduna Museum's collection of remnants, as their meanings are reconstituted in the present?

After the craziness of the first two rooms described above, the museum visitor encounters more coherent displays, dedicated loosely to themes. One room has a domestic focus and features a collection of long dresses, curtains, chamber pots, a pram for twins, baby nightgowns, a washing basin and jug. A small room is dedicated to the nurses and staff of the Bush Church Aid Society, while another catalogues local shark attacks. In the lounge-room, local histories are stacked higgledy-piggledy on the shelves for the museum visitor to browse. These comprise mainly typed copies of extensive genealogies, compiled for white family reunions, but also include copies of two Lutheran publications celebrating 'mission work among the Australian Aborigines' at Koonibba. One room is devoted to a display about the Maralinga nuclear testing program. This room includes photos and maps of the Maralinga township, a tribute to Len Beadell, who surveyed the testing site (Beadell 1967; see also Vincent 2010) and a letter from the South Australian Health Commission, which is blue-tacked to the wall and reassures visitors that none of the material on display has unsafe radiation levels. The display does not

mention the long-term dislocation of southern Pitjanjatjara people from their traditional country, which was contaminated by nuclear tests.

Historian Tom Griffiths (1996:221) has said that, 'local history is indiscriminate about everything except place and loyalty'. Griffiths (1996:220-221) considers the proliferation of Australian local museums since the 1960s, sites of history that jumble objects of significance and in which, 'place and affiliation become pre-eminent'. Griffiths (1996:221) quotes Paul Carter's explanation of the juxtapositions and non-sequiturs that abound in local museums, 'In local histories the place ... is a means of unifying heterogeneous material, or lending it, rhetorically at least, a unique identity.' In the Ceduna Museum, the explanation centring on place holds true to some extent but does not explain items such as the pieces of the Berlin Wall, brought back to Ceduna by a local who presumably visited Germany in 1989.

It is the captions or tags — literally the 'signs' borne by these material relics — that point to the museum's significance. Where Griffiths accords pre-eminence to 'place and affiliation' and Carter stresses place, within the Ceduna Museum affiliation is paramount. Little effort has gone in to identifying or dating the 'what' of the museum, but care has been taken to note down the 'who': the name of the person who donated each object is frequently on display. Photo captions include question marks and approximations, the photographer is noted, but also, wherever possible, the donor. The baby bath's caption is 'Made by FA Blumson in 1947. Used by his daughters Valerie, Shirley and Reva and son Kelvin.' And the barber's chair original label 'PROGRESS IS GREAT THE CHAIR REPLACED THE KEROSENE CASE IN THE BARBERS SHOP' has the addition, 'DONATED BY CJ NICHOLLS'.

Thus I contend that the material in the Ceduna Museum is unified through a process of constructing a community of 'locals,' whose names mean something *to each other* and who have deep roots in the past. Paradoxically, the audience of locals to which the collection speaks are precisely those people, because of the security of their belonging to Ceduna, who would 'never think' to visit the museum, as the volunteer perceived. While I hope I have conveyed that I found much to enjoy in the Museum, eventually unease and dissatisfaction took over. The Aboriginal past has a limited presence within the museum. In a back shed, a collection of slender, hand-crafted spears hangs on nails and is labelled with a tiny typed note that reads, simply, 'Very, very old.' The community of named

'locals' to whom the museum belongs even if they never visit it — those people represented as having deep roots in the past — is made up of Ceduna whitefellas.





Figure 11: Scenes from inside the Ceduna Museum

Conclusion

The significance and substance of past events are contingent on, and always subject to interpretation from the perspective of present actors. In this chapter I have probed the instability of the past by dwelling on the ways in which it is constantly being reworked in the present. The relationship between the past and present is, I am insisting, dialogical and dynamic.

The instability of the past is enmeshed with the instability of the meaning of Aboriginality. Not only is the meaning of Aboriginality specific to distinct historical periods, with key shifts discernable over time, but Aboriginal people in the present are engaged in acts of self-creation that involve drawing, in various and often contradictory ways, on available understandings of the past. The way the past is represented in public discourse is shaped by the political and social conditions of the specific time in which a particular version of past events circulates. These conditions determine which versions are more or less 'available' to contemporary actors. There are layers upon layers here. In this chapter I have produced readings of the readings various social actors have themselves produced about pasts that in many cases have an immediate and intimate relation to, and bearing on, their own lives.

I have dealt primarily with the period in which the category of 'Aboriginal' came into being, in the places now named 'Ceduna' and 'South Australia'. In the next chapter I turn my attention from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. At Koonibba, what it meant to be Aboriginal was subjected to even more insistent, rigid, thorough and violent revisions and interventions, which drew divergent responses.

Chapter three. The Koonibba mission experience: transformation and regeneration

Introduction

Koonibba, says Aunty Vera, was — is — home. She told me, ‘I was born at Koonibba, I was baptised at Koonibba, I was confirmed at Koonibba. And I suppose I’ll be buried there.’ In the 1997 interview with Anderson and Walsh, Aunty Vera expounded on the centrality of Koonibba to her identity. ‘It is my birthplace. My afterbirth was buried there, so it’s very significant. It’s our home.’

In this chapter I argue that throughout most of the twentieth century West Coast Nungas organised and expressed their collective identity around the shared experience of life on the Koonibba Lutheran Mission. The native title era has generated new tensions and possibilities around local Aboriginal self-identifications: a major concern of this thesis is to analyse the re-emergence of ‘tribal’ identities as the *primary* referent for Aboriginal self-understandings. Indisputably, these ‘tribal’ identities — Kokatha, Mirning, Wirangu and Pitjanjatjara — are ascendant in Ceduna, as they are across Australia. However, an understanding of the Koonibba experience remains vital, so as to grasp the basis of an identity-formation that has been largely, but not fully, eclipsed. This chapter is principally an account of the kinds of lives Aboriginal people lived out on Koonibba Mission between its founding in 1898 and the departure of the Lutherans in 1963, when the state government took over the management of Koonibba.

Koonibba, I argue, was on the one hand the site of a profound transformation. Lutheran missionaries sought to transform the very personhood of Aboriginal people: they were to become domesticated, working, sedentary, individuated subjects, possessed of Christian moral values (see Attwood 1989). Transformations along these lines certainly occurred, but this process was not straightforward, nor was it unidirectional, as Aboriginal people engaged in a process of re-making themselves, according to their own priorities. I draw extensively on Peggy Brock’s (1993:63-120) excellent account of the Koonibba Mission in this chapter, and endorse her reluctance to emphasise missionaries’ all-encompassing capacity to re-make people. Instead, as Brock wrote (1993:156), ‘I suggest that we should

see Aborigines making themselves rather than being made.’ This chapter also relies heavily on the memoir of former Koonibba pastor, Clem Eckermann (2010), which was published posthumously.

As much as Koonibba was the site of transformation, it was also the site of the regeneration of a collective identity. ‘It’s *our* home,’ said Aunty Vera notably, rather than ‘my home’. At Koonibba, under conditions not of their own making, West Coast Nungas consolidated their number and remade themselves into a distinct collectivity, ‘mission mob’. The fact that Aboriginal people came to settle permanently at Koonibba signalled the end of a way of being for mobile hunter-gatherers. And yet this chapter explains why and how it is that Koonibba is remembered as somewhere where knowledge of ‘the old ways,’ and of language, was kept alive. The relationship of the mission to Aboriginal cultural practices is by no means obvious (see also Tonkinson 1974).²⁶ The missionaries discouraged (but did not ban) the speaking of Indigenous languages, yet this only saw a heightened importance attached to efforts to teach language ‘behind the missionaries’ backs’. The missionaries endeavoured to dismantle pre-contact, land-based understandings and ritual practices, yet today Nungas in Ceduna equate growing up on the mission with an opportunity to learn something of their culture. Specifically, some kinds of ceremonial gatherings continued at the mission, in secret, into the 1950s. And Koonibba Nungas continued to maintain a relationship with country contiguous to the mission as they went hunting in order to supplement their meagre ration supply. Memories of mission childhoods are memories of time spent out bush. ‘We had the run of the mission,’ says Aunty Joan. She also told me, ‘We were free.’

In this chapter I show, firstly, how these uneven transformative processes unfolded. After setting out the circumstances of the mission’s establishment, I turn to three axes along which transformation can be sketched. The first is spiritual, and looks at various

²⁶ Robert Tonkinson (1974) argues that the ‘Jigalong mob’ remained ‘tradition-oriented,’ but describes a situation quite different from the one I do. At Jigalong, during the 1960s, Christianity had made few inroads. Ceremonial and religious life flourished at Jigalong, despite the missionaries’ presence (Tonkinson 1974:69). Tonkinson (1974:135) pointed out the irony of the fact that ‘the mission, unwittingly and indirectly, has facilitated the retention of the Law and its focal manifestation, the religious life. By allowing large numbers of tradition-oriented Aborigines to congregate on a permanent basis at Jigalong, where they were fed, the mission has enabled them to pool their religious knowledge and has given them ample spare time to devote to religious discussion and activity.’ Male initiation ceremonies involving sub-incision and circumcision continued in secret at Jigalong throughout the 1960s, and the missionaries dared not venture into the camp in which Aboriginal adults lived. At Koonibba, daily life had been transformed by the 1920s, by which time Christianity had certainly taken hold. It is Aboriginal people’s *memories* of the mission, I am arguing, that are oriented to the persistence and presence of the old ways on the mission.

interpretations of the experience of conversion. Along the second axis I examine the controversial history of the Koonibba Children's Home, where Aboriginal children were trained to work for white Lutheran families in South Australia and Victoria. I explain the home's relationship to broader assimilation policies in operation at the time, and to the spectre of state-mandated removal of children. In the realm of religion, and in terms of the disciplinary regime instilled at the home, the Lutherans' attempts to shape Aboriginal beings, bodies and lives achieved near hegemonic status. However, the missionaries' hold on determining the meaning and substance of the Koonibba experience loosens as the chapter progresses. The third axis is that of domestic space: here I discuss the transition, both symbolic and actual, from camp life to living in houses on the mission. I reject the dichotomous organisation of camp/cottages as two entirely 'separate settlements of the station landscape' (Brock 1993:82), highlighting instead the way mission people shifted *between* the experience of being in camps and living in houses.

Finally I elaborate the way mission experiences have become central to the constitution of Aboriginal identities in the present moment. In describing the everyday lives of Koonibba Nungas I hope, throughout the chapter, to draw out the presence of and significance attributed to 'the old ways' and the speaking of language on the mission. This discussion elucidates why Aunty Joan remembers Koonibba in the following terms:

There was no money-money, it was very poor in the ways of money. But as far as the family and the culture and the living off the land went... We were rich, we were really rich.

Around the campfire and around the kitchen table at the farm, stories about growing up at Koonibba were frequently told. On rockhole trips, greenies evidently enjoyed listening to these vivid recollections of an evening. I collected a wealth of material about Koonibba from these story-telling sessions and in my interviews. I stress that Aboriginal people in Ceduna do not hold a uniform perspective about the process and legacy of the missionary experience. Some Ceduna Nungas perceive that the missionaries 'made us hate ourselves'. Others see it that the mission's objective was to physically contain Aboriginal people, and that Aboriginal people were patronised and also starved. To others, like Aunty Vera, Koonibba was, and remains, home. Many West Coast Nungas continue to express a durable bond with Koonibba. Many Aboriginal people also hold certain Lutheran missionaries and other mission staff, such as teachers, dear in their hearts and maintain ongoing relationships with them. Further, affection for individuals is

expressed, sometimes, by those people who express bitterness about the mission experience overall. In all cases, the mission experience remains a kind of touchstone for contemporary Aboriginal subjects, some seeing the mission as having given them their moral bearings and access to a high quality formal education, as well as a sense of belonging that ties them to other Aboriginal people in Ceduna. Yet others are oriented to mourning the profound cosmological, ontological and philosophical Otherness that missionaries' efforts at reform irrevocably refigured over the course of the twentieth century, as well as to its retrieval.

In terms of historical time, this chapter takes up where the last chapter left off — at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the mission was becoming established. I retain from the last chapter a focus on the ways in which the past is made meaningful in the present. I emphasise here not only that the past created contemporary Aboriginal people, but also that Aboriginal people draw on the past, in the present, in order to affirm contemporary self-imaginings.

Clearing the scrub: early days on Koonibba

In August 1897 Pastor Kempe, formerly of the central Australian Hermannsburg Mission (see Austin-Broos 2009:28) visited the West Coast for the purpose of identifying a suitable site for a Lutheran mission. William McKenzie took Kempe to the Hundred of Catt, an area of thick mallee scrubland, in the pouring rain, leading him to the camp of Micky Free and Sarah-Rose Button (Eckermann 2010:30). These were the grandparents of Iris Burgoyne, whose memoir featured so centrally in the previous chapter. Burgoyne says that her grandmother made tea for Kempe and McKenzie in the billy, 'sweetening it with sugar used from a tree called *womma*' (2000:21). Then, Free led Kemp and McKenzie through dense woodlands:

The timber became thicker and thicker, until it was almost impenetrable. They had to leave their vehicle in the middle of the scrub, and continue on foot. The whole block was criss-crossed from every direction and inspected by [their] keen and knowledgeable eyes. In places there was low, in places, high scrub; in places small open plains. Everywhere, they startled and set into flight the great variety of animal and bird life. Abundantly convinced that the land was suitable for agriculture, and accompanied by their

admirable and competent guide, they arrived, completely exhausted, back at the vehicle. (Eckermann 2010:30-31)²⁷

The Lutheran Church secured a lease in the Hundred of Catt with a right of purchase in two years. Eckermann (2010:33) says that the name 'Koonibba' is possibly based on a poor transliteration of the term '*Kuru Hibla*' or 'iris of the eye', which may have been the name given to the Koonibba rockhole, a permanent water source on which the mission depended. Aunty Vera, however, said to me slowly, 'Koonibba. See — *goona...*?' *Goona*, or shit, was a word I knew well. According to Aunty Vera, Koonibba meant 'pile of shit'. Aunty Joan told me the same thing, adding, 'The Nungas had the last laugh over the missionaries on that one.'

Micky Free features as a compelling figure in all the accounts of the Koonibba Mission I have read (Brock 1993:97-99; Burgoyne 2000; Eckermann 2010:231-234). Free, also known as Willis Michael Lawrie, was the son of Michael Lawrie, a London-born Irishman who worked as a boundary rider, and Tjabiltja Catlin Mingo, a Mirning woman (Burgoyne 2000:14). I was told by one of Free's many descendents that Michael Lawrie, 'the Irish fella,' jumped ship down at Eucla, atop of the Great Australian Bight. Michael Lawrie and Tjabiltja were married, describes Burgoyne (*ibid.*), in a traditional firestick ceremony. Free's long and varied working life involved, among other things: periods as a leaseholder of a block of land in the Hundred of Catt; as a kangaroo hunter; and as a guide for an exploration party in the Warburton Ranges (Brock 1993:97-98). Free taught himself to read English while patrolling the dog fence. Aunty Joan and Aunty Vera's mother, interviewed by Anderson and Walsh, says she remembers him, in later life, living alone in a tin hut on Koonibba. In 1947, at the age of 79, Free spent his last morning cutting wood in the scrub, before collapsing as he climbed out of his buggy on his return home (Eckermann 2010:234).

While he did not settle there permanently until 1906, Micky Free was instrumental in gathering people at Koonibba to begin the task of scrub clearing, necessary for the establishment of a farm. Between 1898 and 1901 Koonibba was without a pastor. It was effectively a farm, overseen by a white, Lutheran-appointed manager who welcomed Aboriginal people as workers, or simply to camp undisturbed on the church's lease. Koonibba mission took over the function of distributing government rations to the old,

²⁷ This passage is indented in Eckermann's work, but no reference for the original is given.

sick and to children from McKenzie (Brock 1993:66) and also distributed rations in return for work. In the early years of the mission it was the ready food supply that attracted Nungas to Koonibba. Even after the first missionary's arrival, says Brock, 'Many resented the work required from the able-bodied, preferring to go to Denial Bay or Penong where they could camp without labour demands and still obtain food' (Brock 1993:80). Instilling a work ethic was an early and major objective of the missionaries and they wrestled constantly with the need to provide food, so as to hold Nungas to Koonibba, and an ideological reluctance to issue rations except as a reward for work (Brock 1993:79-80).

Scrub cutters worked with axes and bare hands. Horses were used to drag the felled trees and the cleared areas were burned (Burgoyne 2000:24). Free had previously acted as a foreman on Aboriginal teams already employed as scrub cutters around the district (Eckermann 2010:28); indeed Aboriginal workers continued to command better wages scrub cutting off the mission than on it in years to come (Eckermann 2010:145), showing the vital role of Aboriginal labour in various rural economies across Australia (see Beckett 2005). The task of 'snagging' was particularly arduous and disliked on Koonibba: this involved 'cutting back to ground level the stumps and shoots on the cleared ground' (Brock 1993:123).

A memorial to the early Koonibba scrub cutters is on display in the Koonibba Community Council office today. It is based on an early photo of the scrub clearing underway: a silver plaque depicts the same scene in relief. The text praises the hard labour involved in pulling out the tough mallee trees, with their knobbled roots, in order for the workers to build 'a place to call home'. When I interviewed Aunty Joan Mob member Jamie he proudly explained that he was descended from one of the early scrub cutters. But when I went to Koonibba with a visiting Melbourne friend she raised an eyebrow on reading the dedication, commenting drily, 'Presumably they already had homes.' My friend did not recognise, and indeed could not be expected to know, that Nungas are proud to see something of their own past in the contemporary landscape. Her viewpoint reflects more widely shared progressive assumptions, in that Aboriginal people are rarely credited desires and aspirations for modernity or new experiences. Ceduna Nungas, however, perceive both that their ancestors' world and homes were destroyed *and* that their ancestors helped create and shape a new world (which was certainly not of their own design). In hegemonic local discourse, white 'pioneers' are

alone venerated as establishing the early towns and economies of the region, in a distant period characterised by hard labour and deprivation (see Dayman 1989). The scrub cutting plaque recognises Aboriginal creative efforts against this local backdrop of denial.

Koonibba offered, in Brock's terms (1993:71), a 'refuge' to Aboriginal people increasingly displaced by new land use and on the brink of starvation, providing, especially, a 'safe haven' for their children. Thus in Koonibba, local Aboriginal people intuited and seized the potential for establishing a stable base from which to camp as a large group (something becoming increasingly difficult in the district); to reenergise ceremonial life; and collect a regular food supply. Furthermore, at Koonibba, the seeds for an emergent collective identity were sown.

Brock paints a picture of the early Koonibba population, which fluctuated greatly:

The Lutherans were told that there were 500-600 Aboriginal people on the West Coast in 1898. The West Coast supported very large gatherings — it was not unusual for 200-300 people to meet together for ceremonies. In the first years of the mission, groups of between 150-200 would gather, prior to moving on to ceremonial grounds. (Brock 1993:63)

After the bulk of people moved on for ceremonies, only a handful remained at Koonibba, 'the old and sick and a few people of mixed descent who did not want to participate' (Brock 1993:66). This situation was to gradually change after the arrival of Koonibba's first pastor.

Spiritual struggles: the first axis of transformation

In December 1901, the German-born and American-educated Pastor Wiebusch arrived at Koonibba (Brock 1993:68). Wiebusch set about learning the names of everyone present, conducting roll calls every evening at six o'clock. Wiebusch, says Brock, ran the mission on 'extremely strict principles' rewarding, over the course of his tenure, hard work, obedience and spiritual 'progress' (ibid.). The mission day began at 7:45 am when a flag was raised to indicate feed time and then school, and closed with evening sessions in the camp, where Wiebusch would play hymns on his violin (ibid.). 'Nungas,' says Eckermann (2010:51), 'were amazed at the sounds that he could extract from this "block of wood".' Wiebusch, as at other missions, was evidently intent on establishing

disciplined routines of the kind Foucault described. Aboriginal people's 'docile bodies' were to be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (1991b:136) into working bodies: this was the relation of docility-utility, according to Foucault (1991:137). This aim was not easily realised; hymn singing would precipitate the singing of traditional songs and ceremonies, which on occasions continued for several days, leaving people too exhausted to do any farm work (Brock 1993:68-69).

I can only reach at Wiebusch through the various published accounts that exist of this early period at Koonibba, and here I examine the vastly different ways that the Wiebusch years are depicted in the work of Eckermann, Brock and Burgoyne. These divergent depictions point to conflicting interpretations of spiritual transformation: for Eckermann conversion amounts to liberation; Brock resists generalising, representing conversion as something profoundly experienced by particular individuals; for Burgoyne conversion is best viewed as a coercive process akin to 'brainwashing'.

Eckermann devotes almost half of his account of the Koonibba mission to the Wiebusch years (1901-1916), shaping a linear narrative of progress. He interprets Nungas coming out of 'darkness' and into God's light: church attendance grows, baptismal class numbers gradually swell, ceremony numbers dwindle. Eckermann also narrates a story of material progress: buildings are erected and then, as they crumble, are gradually replaced by larger, more solid and sophisticated structures. There are 'challenges': a perpetual water shortage; a severe drought in 1914-16; local anti-German sentiment during the same period which found expression among mission Nungas;²⁸ and the financial problems which were to dog the mission throughout its history. All of these are conceived as 'set-backs', slowing but never diverting the 'stream of Time' (Fabian 2002:17) that carries goal- and future-oriented people such as Europeans along (Eckermann 2010:20), and into which Aboriginal people had been swept.

For Eckermann, Wiebusch is the main character in the Koonibba story, as it was he who encountered Aboriginal people still in thrall to the 'dark' side of 'native life,' and whose momentous task it was to transform Aboriginal people's spirituality. Eckermann

²⁸ Eckermann (2009:125) says that Koonibba Nungas were 'induced' to sign a petition, in Wiebusch's temporary absence, by local 'patriots' who were hostile to the Lutherans in their midst. Historian Cameron Raynes (2009:58) takes this same petition to be indicative of early signs of 'unrest' at Koonibba. While the authors of *Survival* (Mattingley and Hampton 2008 [1988]:204) note that 'anti-German feeling was strong enough' to warrant a petition, they stress instead the petitioners' demand for a stake in their land: 'we want the benefit (sic) of this ground, as there is no satisfaction to the natives'.

describes the ‘real-life situation of the Nungas’ in the early twentieth century — by this he means not their social conditions, but the emplaced cultural practices that confronted Wiebusch and his wife. Eckermann (2010:42) relays that Wiebusch soon heard of a case of infanticide in the Fowlers Bay area and witnessed the ‘touch-penis greeting rite’. Pastor Wiebusch’s diary also records being confronted by the sight of ‘whole animal eating because it included the entrails of animals, without cleaning out their contents’ (Eckermann 2010:43). In an appendix about Ooldea, Eckermann (2010:205-230) returns to the theme of ‘repellent’ Aboriginal cultural practices as he elaborates Daisy Bates’ discredited accounts of cannibalism (see White 1993:56).

To what end did Eckermann commit himself to a graphic evocation of this particular version of the Aboriginal past? I surmise, following Povinelli (2002), that Eckermann sought here to expose a form of liberal bad faith. Eckermann was seeking to redeem the reputation of mission work, in a contemporary climate that he perceives as hostile to the history of missionaries’ hubris, and which will judge harshly Wiebusch and others’ attempts to destroy/displace Indigenous worldviews. Eckermann (2010:42) positioned himself on the defensive noting, ‘I know that to concede that such infanticides actually happened is to invite condemnation as one guilty of racial prejudice.’ He challenged his readers to accept these ‘real-life’ Nungas, conjuring up images of radical otherness intended to test the limits of liberal tolerance, and weaken the moral case against the missionaries. The use of the phrase ‘real-life’ in describing Nungas’ ‘situation’ is telling. Eckermann implied that sympathetic readers might think they know something of the Aboriginal past and of Aboriginal cultural practices, but in fact they hold only to phantasms. It is in the ‘censoring of repugnant customs,’ says Povinelli (2002:54), that the ‘nation forgets its own intolerance,’ an insight, which Eckermann seems to have grasped, as he tries to revive those suppressed feelings of repulsion and intolerance, in order to encourage in his readers an affective identification with Wiebusch.

Wiebusch and his wife, says Eckermann (2010:44), cared lovingly for Koonibba Nungas however much their moral sensibilities were offended by their cultural practices. The same is true of Eckermann himself: he may have regarded those West Coast Nungas encountered by Wiebusch as living in a state of ‘material and spiritual poverty’ (Eckermann 2010:18), but he was at great pains to dignify the Koonibba identities with

whom he worked during the 1940s and 1960s.²⁹ Eckermann imagined traditional beliefs to centre on malevolent spirits, leading him to conclude that 'the Gospel answered a deep-felt need to be set free from fear' (Eckermann 2010:103). Aboriginal people then, in this version of events, readily embraced the opportunity for liberation, as soon as it was presented to them.

Brock, by way of contrast, took the spiritual struggles of Wiebusch's first converts seriously (see also Austin-Broos 2009:77-101). Her work preceded Robert Kenny's monograph (2007), devoted to the sensitive exploration of Wotjobaluk man Nathanael Pepper's experience of conversion, but it seems to me Brock shares Kenny's willingness to countenance that nineteenth century Aboriginal people's inner lives were rich, complex and varied. Kenny (2007:196-107) offers a close reading of the way Indigenous conceptions of the sacred were found to have some resonance in Christianity, considering, for example, the import of blood in Indigenous and Christian rituals. Essentially he sees Pepper's conversion as reflecting the spiritual quest and experiences of a particular individual, whose spiritual life was not predetermined by his cultural identity. Brock shows Wiebusch's converts engaged in torturous struggles, both within themselves, with other family and community members who disapproved of their decision, and with Wiebusch, whose style was autocratic. Conversion was not undertaken lightly, on either side. The process involved extended periods of instruction and many of the early converts went through periods of doubt, often interrupting their studies to pursue other experiences, before resuming the process. Brock provides biographical sketches of the early converts, many of whom were deeply interested in religion, and wrestled with religious questions over the course of their lives, in conversation both with Wiebusch and each other.

Brock (1993:71) emphasised that Koonibba Nungas existed in a rich cultural milieu, 'The majority of people were not seeking out an alternative set of beliefs.' She elaborated, 'Their religious life was vigorous and had not as yet become seriously undermined by European colonialism' (ibid.), despite the immense pressures and difficulties confronting them. Indeed from Wiebusch, Eckermann relates a constant movement between Koonibba mission and north to Tarcoola and the Gawler ranges for initiation

²⁹ Eckermann served at Koonibba as a teacher and assistant pastor from 1941-1942, then as a pastor and superintendent from 1946-1953 and from 1960 until the mission's end (Eckermann 2010:6).

ceremonies.³⁰ While the population had ‘stabilised’ by the time of Wiebush’s departure in 1916 (Brock 1993:89) and Eckermann (2010:44) said the last ‘walkabout’ took place in 1924, movement for ceremonies evidently continued for some time after this. Thus, explains Brock (1993:71) most early converts were drawn from a specific pool of Aboriginal people, they were people of ‘mixed descent who had contact with Europeans, uninitiated minors, and non-local Aboriginal men who had ended up in the area’.

Where Eckermann represented Nungas coming to God and being liberated *from fear*, Iris Burgoyne saw Nungas forced to Christianise *out of fear*. Burgoyne also shaped a linear narrative: Aboriginal people gradually lost their culture as they became more and more acculturated to European ways. Her grandfather, Micky Free, was ‘eventually brainwashed’ (Burgoyne 2000:25). Eckermann praised Free for the strict moral code he adhered to but according to Burgoyne (ibid.), ‘He frightened his daughters into going to Church.’ Where Eckermann said God offered freedom, Burgoyne said (2000:41), of life on the mission, ‘[W]e were robbed of our freedom.’ Brock (1993:98) also commented on the fact that Free was well known for ‘rounding up the children to make sure they went to school and church,’ while Aunty Vera told Anderson and Walsh that she remembers Micky Free cracking a stockwhip — only in the air, never touching the children — and then being marched into church after she’d been playing in the quarry:

And he would sit right up the back by the door and as soon as he saw a head move — and he’d sit right on the aisle — he would creep down the aisle ...
So you never moved in church. You sat there with your muddy feet and muddy face and hands and mud dripping off your clothes if you’d been

³⁰ Brock (1993:67) shows that Nungas quickly grasped that letters ‘were a powerful means of communication’. Letters were frequently dictated to, and read out by, European intermediaries. These letters enabled contact over long distances and provided a means for Aboriginal groups to inform other groups of their whereabouts and intended movements. European technologies were used for Aboriginal ends, points out Brock (ibid.). Examples of this kind abound in the literature dealing with the post-frontier period. Barry Morris (1989) focussed at length on the way the Dhan-Ghadi, in northern NSW, appropriated European materials and fashioned them to pre-existing practices. Wire, and later the shelves of a fridge, were used on a campfire with which to grill fish (Morris 1989:84). At Jigalong, wrote Tonkinson (1974:113), many European material items were accepted ‘for different purposes from those originally intended’. He described men unravelling knitted garments so as to obtain the wool for use as body decorations and also drill bits being prized as carving tools (ibid.). Stephen Muecke (2004:67), in commenting on the use of historical time, proposes, ‘instead of saying blackfellas “leant to adapt” (like Darwinian creatures) to whitefella concepts of time, why not say they captured them for their own purposes?’ Importantly, Morris (1989:84-85) shows that the reappropriation of European tools simultaneously provides ‘testimony to the predominance of a new social and material environment,’ which belonged to a new cultural order. This new order came, in Morris’ terms, to ‘encapsulate’ the Dhan-Ghadi, as it did West Coast Nungas.

playing in the dirt and you never moved. And you sang when you had to sing.

On the question of faith, Burgoyne could not reconcile the Lutherans' teachings with her own life experiences, and other Aboriginal lives, marked as they have been by loss and suffering. She wrote:

[God] did so many things to me until I eventually lost my faith. He was the man I really believed in, and then He took my family away from me and left me with nothing. He could have reasoned and left some siblings until we reached old age together. But He whipped them away like flies. (Burgoyne 2000:106-107)

An antagonistic relationship with God however, is still, a relationship with God, and this passage affirms His existence. Burgoyne, however, explained that she is nourished by Mirning spirituality, giving us a sense of the way in which many of the Aboriginal people whom I know, whose childhood was spent on the mission, regard themselves as Lutherans but are also vitally engaged in exploring their Aboriginal cultural and spiritual traditions. This has not involved, as far as I can tell, much 'Aboriginalisation of Christianity' (Brady and Palmer 1988) but I own this is not something I paid much attention to. My sense is however, that being Lutheran and believing in God, and being Aboriginal and believing in aspects of an Indigenous cosmology, poses few problems for Aboriginal people, who are as well equipped to live comfortably with their own internal contradictions as others.

The process of converting Koonibba Nungas did not reach a neat endpoint. In 1934 Pastor Mueller reported that the last of the 'camp natives' had been baptised. However, 'new catechumens continued to come into Koonibba territory from the hinterland to the north and west, asking for instruction for baptism' according to Eckermann (2010:168). These were Kokatha people, who mostly lived at Ooldea but also 'came to and went from Koonibba at will' (Eckermann 2010:169). The Koonibba population then continued to fluctuate, to some extent, throughout its entire history.

Koonibba Children's Home: the second axis of transformation

At the Koonibba Children's Home, a residential institution, generations of boys were trained up to work as farm labourers and girls as domestics. Here I discuss the circumstances surrounding the home's founding and its complex legacy.

Brock has shown that the last decades of the late nineteenth century, a period of economic downturn, were characterised by government disinterest in Aboriginal affairs. A widespread belief that Aboriginal people were fated for extinction underwrote this period (McGregor 1997) and in a desire to cut spending the state limited its role to amelioration of only the most desperate circumstances via basic rations distribution. Into the vacuum left by 'government's withdrawal' came philanthropic and church groups (Brock 1993:12-14). However, just as Koonibba was becoming established, the South Australian government began 'again taking an active role in Aboriginal affairs' (Brock 1993:6), partly motivated by the public's realisation that the population of Aboriginal people of mixed descent was rapidly increasing rather than decreasing.

The South Australian Aborigines Act (1911) was modelled on Queensland's 1897 protectionist act. The editors of *Survival* (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:55) noted that the Act represented a 'belated attempt to protect Nunga people' from the destructive effects of contact, including alcohol and sexual abuse. The resulting legislation was restrictive and repressive. The 1911 Act was amended twice, in 1934 and 1939, but remained the basis for administering Aboriginal lives in South Australia until 1962 (Gale 1964:111). Mattingley and Hampton summarised (2008:45), 'Our people bitterly resented it and its effects, which are still felt today.'

At Koonibba the repressive facet of 'protection' found its clearest expression in the Koonibba Children's Home, the most controversial aspect of the Koonibba experience. The home opened in 1914, entered a period of decline in about 1955 and closed its doors in 1963 (Eckermann 2010:108-109). In building it the church incurred a huge debt, which was to 'haunt the mission board for many years' (Brock 1993:83), and have profound ramifications: later, Aboriginal labour was effectively exchanged for donations to the mission as children, especially girls, were sent out to work for Lutheran families in South Australia and Victoria. The home housed children whose parents continued to move either around the district, for itinerant work, or through their country, because they

continued to live tradition-oriented lives. Either way, most home children's parents did not reside permanently on Koonibba.³¹

Under the 1911 Act the Chief Protector of Aborigines became the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children under 21 (HREOC 1997:638). Koonibba staff were extremely concerned about provisions in the Act relating to 'half-caste' children. The Protector had the power to take charge of all 'half-caste' children found 'wandering or camping' with Aboriginal people and put them under the control of the State Children's Department (Brock 1993:16). In 1912 the Protector warned the Koonibba missionaries directly that 'neglected' children of mixed descent were to be removed from their parents and that 'if these children were to remain at Koonibba the accommodation would need to be upgraded' (Brock 1993:82-83).³² Eckermann (2010:105-106) relates that the mission decided, 'with the full approval of the concerned parents ... that a children's home should be built at Koonibba'. The home was to ensure children stayed in contact with their families: children were only ever placed in the home voluntarily and parents could 'visit daily ... so that family bonding would be maintained' (Eckermann 2010:106). The home was conceived then out of genuine concern, in order to circumvent aspects of the 1911 Act. Yet it evolved into an institution with aims entirely congruent with nation-wide policies of Aboriginal child removal, severely curtailing children's contact with their kin and setting them on a course to assimilation into white society.

Survival carries a largely positive account of life in the home. Audrey Kinnear (nee Cobby) recounted, 'There were fifty of us in the Home. We were one big happy family and my memories of life in the Home is mostly of happy times' (in Mattingley and Hampton 2008:206). While discipline was instilled, Kinnear's memories of the home environment are mostly warm, 'Amongst the Home kids there was a strong sense of togetherness. We were a big family sharing our happy and sad times and problems' (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:208). The discipline, hard work and routines endured, reflected Kinnear, 'stood me in good stead in later life' and she offers sincere thanks to

³¹ Children's dormitories were a common feature of missions around Australia, serving different functions in different places and often accommodating children whose parents lived permanently on the same mission. There also seems to have been great variation, in terms of the regularity of, and restrictions surrounding, children's contact with their kin (Blake 2001:67-84; Choo 2001:142-169; Tonkinson 1974:122-124)

³² Historian Anna Haebich (2000:199) shows that in South Australia the Protector continued, for some time after the passage of the 1911 Act, to remove Aboriginal children using the provisions of the State Children's Act 1895. This Act included a definition of a 'neglected child' as a child found 'sleeping in the open air, without home or settled abode' (HREOC:636-637).

the Lutheran families who ‘opened their hearts’ to her, and ‘support me through my passage through life’ (ibid.). Kinnear’s mother was a Yunkunytatjara woman, removed to Yalata because of the Maralinga testing program. It was with sadness that she ‘vaguely remembers’ the mothers of home children coming to Koonibba and camping in the bush near the church’ (ibid.). Kinnear continued, evoking with tenderness the following scene:

Us kids used to sneak to the camp and they gave us rabbits and guldas [sleepy lizards] cooked in coals — they were delicious and we shared with the other kids. Our mothers stayed a few days then disappeared. (ibid.)³³

Once a child was voluntarily installed in the home they were not allowed to leave. Historian Cameron Rayne (2009) has stressed that home residents were referred to in bureaucratic and mission correspondence as ‘inmates’ and that single young women were effectively trapped in the home, working there under a rule known misleadingly as ‘the 21 rule’. As Raynes explained (2009:63), this rule ‘stipulated that young Aboriginal women should not be allowed out of the home until the age of 21 [as they were under the guardianship of the Chief Protector], unless to marry’. However, Raynes’ research (2009:63-64) has brought to light cases of women being held in the home for much longer than this; there they continued to be a source of free labour, assisting with cooking, cleaning, sewing, washing, ironing and mending.

Mission women also worked in the home, including Iris Burgoyne’s mother and Aunty Joan and Aunty Vera’s mother, now deceased. The latter told Anderson and Walsh she was never paid for any of the work she did in the home. Aunty Joan related to the same interviewers that her mother developed close bonds with three boys in the home, brought down from Yalata and Ooldea ‘because they weren’t full blood Aboriginals’. ‘One of them boys to this day calls her “mum”,’ said Aunty Joan.

Eckermann (2010:157-158) detailed how the church board’s debt was eventually cleared during the Debt Liquidation Campaign of the 1930s, with help from Lutheran congregations in South Australia and Victoria. In return for those people’s generosity, the home provided domestics and farmhands to these areas for years to come: girls and

³³ Kinnear tells her story more fully elsewhere (Pring 1990:47-66). Again she speaks fondly of the home, but details extremely fraught, complicated and painful relations with her biological family and mother, with whom she was reunited later in life.

boys were trained up in the home and then 'sent out'. Raynes quoted extensively from a 1936 letter from Koonibba's Pastor Traeger to the Aborigines Department:

[Traeger] wrote: 'As we have an over supply of big girls in our Home, I would ask you to sanction that [names of three girls] be sent to Tarrington [in Victoria]'. [Traeger] claimed that the girls had consented to go, and made it clear that the 'supply of big girls' was linked to the mission's financial obligations, with their removal being part of an arrangement with their backers: 'I am particularly anxious to fill this request as the Tarrington people are among the chief financial supporters of our mission. Care has been taken to choose three of our best girls.' (Raynes 2009:58-59)

There is no doubt that the regime was hyper-exploitative, but warm and loving human relationships still flowered — both within the home, and also between home children and Lutheran families.

On the subject of those young women sent out as domestics, Aunty Vera commented, 'But I'm not sure that you'd consider them part of the stolen generation, because they did come back?' This, in a nutshell, points to the conflicting interpretations the children's home experience has spawned. Extensive Australian scholarship demonstrates that from about the 1930s, state-based assimilation policies had as their object the dissolution of Aboriginal identities via the 'absorption' of people with Aboriginal descent into white Australian society (Haebich 2000; Read 1999). The violence that accompanied this process — physical, sexual and institutional as well as psychical and spiritual — has been the subject of emotional and ideological (Manne 2001) Australian public debates since the late 1990s. The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families concluded that, between 1910 and 1970, 'not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects of forcible removal' (HREOC 1997:37). These public revelations culminated in then prime minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations.

For his part, Eckermann seemed stunned by the fact that he was called to appear before the aforementioned inquiry in Adelaide, stressing that the rationale of the home was never to *permanently* sever home children's ties to their family. The 'inmates' of the children's home were, after all, placed there 'voluntarily,' in stark contrast to the stories of removal by means of coercion, deception, compulsion and sheer force that the inquiry

brought to light. But the families who entrusted their children to the care of the Koonibba Children's Home did so with a full awareness that if they did not do so their children might well be taken away, and all contact with them lost. The home cannot be represented as separate from the policy of forcible removal, and innocent as to its effects, as it relied on the spectre of removal for its own *raison d'être*. Furthermore, it is clear that once placed in the home, Aboriginal children found themselves committed to an institution with a disciplinary function; missionaries acquired enormous discretionary powers over every aspect of the children's lives;³⁴ and the children's labour, especially the girls', was exploited.

Raynes has obsessively pursued his argument that the Aborigines Department in South Australia, with William Penhall as its administrative head, acted in excess of its powers between 1939-1953. For Raynes the Koonibba Children's Home provides the exemplary case of Penhall's repressive practice. Koonibba, Raynes surmised (2009:57), was 'far enough from civilisation to allow its staff to treat Aboriginal people as if they were without any rights at all'. Raynes highlighted a number of cases in which Penhall colluded with the missionaries, particularly Pastor Traeger, to deny Aboriginal parents custody of their children. Raynes' archival research is invaluable, but his focus strikes me as misguided: in South Australia the power to remove children was far more narrowly circumscribed than in other states; Penhall is singled out for engineering a system under which the Aborigines Protection Board, 'lacking legal power to remove Aboriginal children, simply removed children as the opportunity arose' (Raynes 2009:x). Surely the fact that in South Australia the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their kin involved extra-legal actions on the part of the state — while these actions were more or less legal across the rest of Australia. — is one of the least disturbing aspects of the history of the stolen generations.

Some Aboriginal people I know are firmly of the view that at Koonibba the Lutherans helped them *evade* welfare rather than facilitated their removal. This would seem to support Eckermann's view that the home was very deliberately devised as a way to

³⁴ For example, children were usually allowed to spend the Christmas holidays with their parents but Raynes (2009:70) showed that the release of home inmates over this period did not always occur. Indeed in 1946 Eckermann tried to keep children at the home over this time. Raynes' research showed that Eckermann faced a genuine dilemma: he was concerned about the education of these children, fearing they would fail to return after the holidays. Moved by Aboriginal distress, he eventually reneged.

ensure Aboriginal children maintained contact with their families, where the government sought to dissolve that contact.

These questions are pressing ones for Aunty Joan and her sisters, and further biographical detail is needed to explain why. Aunty Vera is Aunty Joan's eldest sister, and the first child of a Kokatha woman from the mission and a white local. Anderson and Walsh questioned Aunty Vera's mother directly about her relationship with this whitefella but she was reluctant to talk about her love affair with a man she met while working on a neighbouring farm milking cows. When she first fell pregnant, Aunty Vera's mother ran away, fearing her own parents' reaction. She returned before Aunty Vera was born, the first of six children to this father.

Aunty Vera and Aunty Joan's white father was involved, to a limited extent, in their family life. He regularly brought his children clothes and food on the mission and he delivered Christmas presents. Aunty Vera vaguely remembers going out to the farm to stay with him and travelling with him, 'from time to time,' into Ceduna. Aunty Joan told Anderson and Walsh:

Before my father died, he used to come out to the mission all the time with the back of his ute full of fruit and vegies and stuff — just loaded up with food — and he would pull up there and I would be like a big queen on the back of the ute, throwing the kids apples and oranges and stuff.

Aunty Vera, however, says their father did not like the fact that all food on the mission was shared out amongst kin, worrying that his children were missing out. He sometimes stood by his truck while his children ate in front of him, an image that speaks both to his affection and his distance from Aboriginal mores.

In Ceduna, Aunty Vera told me, 'People actually knew who we were, they knew who our father was.' She continued, 'We weren't openly discriminated against but I believe we were talked about around the kitchen tables.' Their father had another, older white family, on a nearby farm. This family acknowledged the relationship with Aunty Vera's family. Aunty Vera refers to her father's other, white children as 'brothers' and 'sisters' and Aunty Joan remembers their father's white wife showing them great kindness after the mission closed and the family experienced severe hardship. Aunty Joan said:

Yeah, yeah that was pretty openly acknowledged, even by his wife, dear old soul. And when we ... left the mission ... his wife was wonderful, she just treated us — I don't know where she got the patience to teach me anything, but she treated us like we were her own kids, and that was a big thing for that woman to do coz she was ridiculed in the white society ... but she just stood up strong and accepted us.

While white society talked about them, Aunty Vera and Aunty Joan's mother was 'a bit of an outcast' on the mission, shunned, especially by Aboriginal men, for having 'all these kids and no husband'. And mission children too sometimes teased Aunty Vera and her siblings for being 'half-caste'. Today, Aunty Joan likes to ham up that they were neither black nor white in colour, but 'the creeeeam in between'. But her sisters remember being made painfully aware of their stigmatised difference. I met up with Aunty Vera for lunch one day in Ceduna and told her I'd been in the library, watching footage of the 1952 Koonibba Jubilee. I had looked for her in the children's running races but didn't see her. 'I'm the *minya* [small] white one,' she said with some bitterness, challenging me to acknowledge that she should have been easily identified in the footage as fairer than the rest. The footage is blurry, sped up and washed out, and I honestly couldn't pick her.

Aunty Joan told me that Lutherans consistently warned the whole community about impending visits from 'Welfare,' enabling children who were not living in the home to head out bush. Aunty Vera also remembers escaping Welfare by heading out bush, but says this was done in defiance of *both* government officials and the missionaries:

Welfare was a big terrifying feature of mission life for us, for us kids. We used to run away from them, but Mama and Papa [her maternal grandparents] and them adults knew where we were ... and when it was dusk we'd wander home to the [mallee] shoots between the community and the footy oval and sit there and Mum would bring some food down for us to eat, some tea, cause during the day we caught our own galahs and found our own eggs in the birds' nests.

Then, 'we'd wait until all the lights went out at the missionaries' houses, and then we'd go home and go to bed'. Again our conversation turned to the question of the 'stolen generations' narrative, as it had come to circulate publicly. In this exchange Aunty Vera identified more precisely that certain experiences remain invalidated by that narrative,

such as the omnipresent *threat* of removal, which was a defining and frightening feature of her own childhood:

If we happened to be caught at school when they [the Welfare] came — you can imagine we never wore shoes there, but we had shoes that we had to force our feet into, and that was ... very painful wearing those shoes, because the missionaries might say ‘you gotta wear shoes’ and take us away if we don’t. That was a big threat. A lot has been spoken about the stolen generation, but very little if anything has been spoken about the emotional suffering of the people who weren’t actually stolen but who were under threat of being taken away. That was very traumatic.

‘The life of the wurley.’ The symbolic distinction between camps and cottages

For Brock, a focus on the transformative processes by which the missionaries attempted to re-make Aboriginal subjects entailed greater attention to spatial rather than temporal dimensions of the mission experience (see also Lydon 2009). In Brock’s sketch the landscape of the mission, in its early years, was divided into ‘two poles,’ the mission settlement and the camp on its fringes. ‘As the mission became established, the camp remained physically and ideologically separate,’ says Brock (1993:67). What the missionaries imagined as a transition from one mode of being to another was initially symbolised by the move from wurlies and humpies in the camps to stone cottages, which were preferentially allocated both to the converted and to the most indispensable workers. Eckermann (2010:107) deploys the same symbolic distinction when he comments that the children’s home gave children the opportunity to know more than ‘the lifestyle of the wurley’.

Iris Burgoyne heard the version about the Elliston Massacre(s) related in the previous chapter in camps on the fringes of the Koonibba Mission in the 1940s. She explains that ‘many of the old people’ from Talewan, Ooldea and the Bight area resided in camps on the outskirts of the mission. ‘Camp people,’ she says, ‘lived in the bush, eating lizards, emu eggs, wombats and kangaroos’ (Burgoyne 2000:39). As a young girl she often visited the camps for something to do. ‘We could not afford a television or radio,’ she relates, so instead the children ‘flopped down on blankets and talked’ with the old people. It was here, she concludes, that she learnt about ‘Mirning culture, rules and Law’ (ibid.).

Camp life, I am postulating, was not just an important aspect of the early years on the mission, but a long-term feature of Koonibba life. Aboriginal people continued to visit Koonibba for periods of time — from Ooldea and further north — up until the 1950s, and camp on the fringes of the mission settlement. Aunty Joan told Anderson and Walsh:

Other people used to come ... we would have to go to corroborees and that was the whole community had to go, kids and all. ... And they'd be there for a week or so ... next morning you'd get up and the camp was gone, just like that.

While the spaces of camp and settlement were certainly distinct and 'ideologically separate' *from the point of view of the missionaries*, camp Nungas were a part of the lives of those living and growing up in stone cottages. Burgoyne tells of a childhood spent moving *between* these spaces, regularly visiting and spending time with her kin. Camp people also occasionally visited their kin now housed in cottages, if they needed to check on or look after someone. However, she says, 'they [camp residents] much preferred to drink their cup of tea outside, rather than go inside the house' (Burgoyne 2000:39). Furthermore, those Aboriginal people living in houses did not necessarily use their domestic space in the way it was designed to be used. Aunty Vera and Aunty Joan's mother grew up in a two-room home on the mission: one room held a woodstove and kitchen, the other room slept her parents and the twelve children. She told Anderson that damper was sometimes cooked in the ashes in a fire outside of the house, and that, as there was very little crockery, people simply ate with their fingers. Many people opted to sleep outside, under the stars, on hot summer nights. Such re-fashioning of domestic space occurred, and continues to occur, across Australia (eg Musharbash 2008:151-152).

Those people who lived in houses on Koonibba routinely went to Denial Bay to camp for the summer.³⁵ Here they built wurlies and slept on seaweed mattresses. Aunty Joan Mob have strong memories of *these* camps. While Aunty Vera remembers Clydesdales pulling a dray down to the camp spot, Aunty Joan remembers arriving 'on the back of the mission truck'. She says, 'The missionaries would drop us off there and we'd stay

³⁵ Today too, the Koonibba mini-bus often brings people down to the Denial Bay beach on hot summer days. With music blaring from the car stereo, Koonibba community members cook up food in the picnic area, swim and wade in the shallows, and sometimes dance in the car park adjoining the jetty.

there for a couple of weeks of the holidays.’ At Denial Bay, the community simply camped in the scrub, as Aunty Joan described to Anderson and Walsh:

We just went and got the seafood you know, what we could get — fish, crabs, razorfish — whenever the tide was out, there was always heaps to eat there. I remember Granny having this great big black pot — she was always making noodles in it to feed everybody — it was huge. But then there was a lot of people too.

I am arguing that it was possible to experience a form of camp life, even if one was normally living with one’s family in a house. Aunty Joan told Anderson and Wash that she grew up in a three-room ‘big house, big solid stone thing,’ on the mission, which also had a ‘sleep-out’. Their grandparents had the sleep-out, a large family occupied each of the other two rooms, and a single uncle slept by the fireplace in the kitchen. Yet Aunty Joan Mob’s memories of the Denial Bay camps are treasured in the way Burgoyne treasures her time visiting camps on the mission. This was a space in which a version of the ‘old ways’ was taught and lived. Memories of summers at Denial Bay centre around the gathering and sharing of food: collective, kin-based bonds and food-collecting skills are emphasised.

Further still, to this sketch of camp(s) and settlement, I would add a third space: the fringe camps many Koonibba people resided in on the outskirts of towns in the district, including Ceduna, Wudinna and Port Lincoln. These camps formed part of Koonibba Nungas’ ‘beats’ in Jeremy Beckett’s terms (1994:131). Fay Gale noted in the early 1960s, ‘Only one third of the so-called “Koonibba people” still live on the mission; the others are scattered across Eyre Peninsula’ (1964:101). Indeed, as much as the Lutherans encouraged and rewarded a commitment to Koonibba, conditions on Koonibba necessitated movement off the mission for economic reasons.

A summary of the financial circumstances of the mission provides a crucial aide to understanding its history. Up until 1921 Koonibba was a fully functioning cattle and wheat farm, with full employment of Aboriginal men its policy, and self-sufficiency its goal. Aboriginal people undertook farm work under the supervision of a white overseer or, when they were not available, ‘the more reliable Aboriginal workers (mostly of mixed descent) acted as supervisors’ (Brock 1993:79). While working men left during World War One to take advantage of a European labour shortage throughout the district, after

the war's end they were back on the mission (Brock 1993:89). By this time the period of full employment — whereby labour was demanded in return for a combination of wages, rations and clothing — had, argues Brock, succeeded in its objective. It had ensured a potential pool of converts who had reason to remain on the mission, and enabled close supervision of the newly converted. This period resulted in a generation of Koonibba women who were trained housekeepers, and men who were 'capable teamsters, shearers, wheat lumpers, stevedores, stone masons, carpenters and blacksmiths' (Brock 1993:90). In 1921 the church board, heavily in debt after the building of the children's home, decided to abandon full employment, as it could not afford so many wages on a 12,000 acre property with poor soil, and to switch from cattle to sheep (ibid.). While the last decision created more work in the short term as fences were sheep-proofed, and the policy change took some years to implement, increasingly Koonibba men had to seek work off the mission, mostly in the region's towns but also on farms and pastoral stations. By the mid-1930s the church had given up on farming altogether, leasing the mission's land to local white share-farmers, who employed just one or two Aboriginal men at any given time.

Aunty Vera's maternal grandfather, or Papa, had been trained on Koonibba, and was an accomplished stonemason who worked both on the mission, and around the district. Aunty Vera remembers, as a little girl, jumping up and down on the piles of sand Papa was using for his mortar at the site of a house that still stands in the centre of Ceduna today — and getting into trouble for her efforts. Aunty Vera recounted to me that she once told the then mayor of Ceduna this, but he denied it, asserting that *his* father had built the house that still stands. Aunty Vera told me, 'I swear to almighty God that Papa built that house and not [the former mayor's] father! But see because we're black people nobody is going to take notice of us.' As well as a stonemason, he was, I've been told a 'gun shearer,' much sought around the district for his speed and skill. He travelled the district with his brother, also a shearer, on a pushbike.

The 1921 change in policy at Koonibba coincided with opportunities for greater mobility on the West Coast, via cars and a new railway line, and the advent of telephone communications with the outside world (Brock 1993:91-91). Aunty Vera and Aunty Joan's mother told Anderson that mission Nungas often purchased second-hand cars from nearby farmers. Brock says:

Cars became a common sight on the West Coast. The mission bought its first car in 1925 By this time some Aboriginal people had already acquired their own cars with wages they had earned, not only farms but on the railways and at the new deep sea port at Cape Thevenard. Cars gave them increased mobility and independence at a time when they might have to travel long distances in search of work. (Brock 1993:92)

Koonibba men, sometimes alone and sometimes with their families, went to live for periods in improvised fringe camps on designated reserves on the outskirts of towns such as Ceduna, Wudinna, and Port Lincoln. In Ceduna, men obtained seasonal and erratic work loading wheat and gypsum at the Thevenard deep sea port (Brock 1993: 104-105), and then, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, building Thevenard's wheat silos. During the 1940s, families moved to Wuddina either to work with the railways or on the building of the Tod River Pipeline (Brock 1993:108), and families moved to Port Lincoln in the 1940s, initially to work at the freezing plant and on the wharves (Brock 1993:110-111).

Iris Burgoyne describes life in Ceduna at this time:

The government set aside land for Aborigines to settle but provided no housing or sanitation. All we had was a water tap. We made humpies and wurlies and relieved ourselves in the bush. We did the best we could. We washed ourselves with hot water in old tins and buckets. (Burgoyne 2000:56)

Descriptions of the rudimentary nature of fringe camps on the outskirts of rural towns at this time are also found in the early anthropological writings about south-eastern Aboriginal Australia (eg Reay 1945). Brock describes the general atmosphere in Ceduna as 'hostile' to the Aboriginal presence. Against this hostility, assistance and acts of kindness made a lasting impression. Burgoyne says:

[K]ind non-Aboriginal women that our mothers worked for gave us blankets, towels, pillows and tins of food. Their husbands would deliver old pieces of canvas to our camp, which made our shelter along with sticks and boughs. (Burgoyne 2000:57-58)

Burgoyne describes hunting for food or walking the five kilometres into town for supplies. 'Kind people offered us lifts back to our camps,' says Burgoyne (2000:58),

providing a list of names of these 'fine gentlemen'. Men from the camp worked loading boats at Thevenard, 'My heart flickers with gratitude for the dear old Greek shop owners in Thevenard. They allowed Mirning people credit for food until our mothers paid the bills' (ibid.).

Aboriginal children were effectively barred from white schools in the district. Similar stories are recorded elsewhere (Cowlshaw 2004:126). In the 1940s, the Ceduna primary school refused to accept Aboriginal children, arguing that a school was provided for them at Koonibba. The 45 kilometres was, of course, an impossible distance to travel daily at the time (Brock 1993:105). The policy, as elsewhere, was inconsistent over time, and the justifications for prohibiting/discouraging Aboriginal enrolments ever shifting. Burgoyne remembered:

We moved back and forth from Koonibba to Ceduna. I went to school there for three months before my parents pulled me out. The board didn't like Aboriginal students because they thought we were diseased. (2000:56)

To conclude: the camps on Koonibba were home, especially in the early years, to those who refused the Lutherans' message. Fringe camps of 'Koonibba people' across the Eyre Peninsular also existed as spaces beyond or outside of the Lutherans' reach. Eckermann imagines them as the locus of sex, gambling and drinking, interpreting a return to Koonibba after a period in a fringe camp as a return to the mission's elevated moral universe.

As Koonibba families spread out to towns and rural localities, the missionaries were also forced to become mobile: Koonibba missionaries began travelling 'up the road' (along the West Coast) and 'down the line' (down the southern Eyre Peninsular) holding services for its 'dispersed congregation' in woolsheds and churches dotted along the way (Eckermann 2009:177-180).

Koonibba mob: the determined maintenance of relations with country

Aboriginal people draw on the mission experience today in ways that tell us much about the constitution of Aboriginality in the present moment. Certain Ceduna Nungas assert that to experience the world of the mission was to experience, and be immersed in, a world belonging to Aboriginal people, despite this world being so fundamentally

organised by white outsiders in ways that both reflected and imposed their structures of thought.

Memories of the 'old people' and the 'old ways,' the determined maintenance of certain cultural practices as well as secret ceremonies, and the speaking of Kokatha are all stressed today. Memories of material deprivation, which centre on hunger, are recounted less with bitterness than pride in the fact that Aboriginal people continued to travel regularly, on foot and in horse-drawn sulkies, out the back of the mission, to hunt and provide for their less able kin. Mission mob maintained a relationship with their country via these frequent expeditions, visiting and drinking from the rockholes around which Rockhole Recovery itineraries are organised. More complex still is the experience of Aunty Joan and her siblings. As 'half-caste' children growing up on the mission in the 1940s and 50s, they were made to feel painfully aware of their difference from most of the other mission children, who had two Aboriginal parents even if these parents were themselves of mixed descent.

Aunty Joan and Aunty Vera remember hiding out bush to escape the reach of Welfare. While Aunty Vera talked about eating both galahs and eggs found in birds' nests, Aunty Joan remembered old people catching food, 'even wild cat,' while she was hiding out bush for days with the mission's fairer-skinned children. She told Anderson and Walsh:

I remember those tracks through the night and it was real dark and it was all half-caste kids, the older ones carrying the little ones and with the Grandparents — one up the front, one at the back and a couple down each side, keep us in line — and we'd go to Koonibba siding to my uncle's place and he'd feed us there and — wouldn't stay any longer than it took time to eat — and then we'd be off back through the scrub again. And the old people had to catch us food, even wild cat. But we would be out for three days sometimes.

The bush, in these memories, is a hospitable place that is credited with protecting, sheltering, feeding and nourishing fair-skinned mission kids, in the process ensuring that they maintained their ability to locate themselves within the local Aboriginal world. Thus, those whose Aboriginality was regarded as most malleable by the state in the past were afforded an opportunity to experience something that is prized as central to Aboriginality in the present: comfortable, familiar and dependent relations with country.

Memories of the presence of the old way were a central theme stressed by all of my interviewees. The Lutheran missionaries, 'of course,' tried to discourage ceremonies on Koonibba, says Aunty Vera, 'but Koonibba is a big traditional area'. She says:

I can remember going down halfway between Koonibba and what we called three-mile gate, that's the entrance to the community now and *inma*, corroborees. Mama threw a blanket over our heads and every time we'd peep she'd whack us on the back of the head — well not whack but tap us on the back of the head, cover us over. So we pushed a hole in the blanket, so we could see. And I'd be looking and [my sister] would say 'my turn now, my turn now'. So, yeah, we saw what those corroborees are about.

Witnessing is not the same thing as embodied participation in ritual life, but such an association is prized, as high-stakes contests about legitimacy and cultural differentiation have escalated in the native title era. Aunty Vera's memories of this scene segued into boiling anger at being called a 'johnny come lately' by other Aboriginal people. She told me, 'A lot of people now say that we don't know anything about tradition. Sadly those people never ever attended a traditional ceremony.' For Aunty Vera, growing up on Koonibba was equated with a certain level of exposure to, and access to traditional cultural knowledge: experiences that are highly valued in the contemporary context. In my interviews the substance of these experiences was not stressed so much as the significance of having grown up in a setting where 'the old ways' remained an ongoing part of one's life. Nungas who grew up on the mission also remember protocols regarding strangers entering the country, Aboriginal visitors waiting to talk to the appropriate people before they stepped onto the mission.

Aunty Joan also offered instances of the eruption of 'old tribal' ways in to everyday life in her interview with Anderson and Walsh, identifying these as making a strong impression:

There used to be fights out there. Like my Uncles would be fighting with some people and then next thing, you know the Grandmothers would be in it and they were real like tribal fights, they were.

This once involved her Grandmother 'belting another lady with a crowbar'. Aunty Joan clarified, 'they weren't very often and it was only mainly between two families.' She also told Anderson and Walsh:

I can remember when one Uncle died and his whole family, his wife and his kids, had to go from house to house wailing, you know, really tribal, wailing and then everyone had to join them as they went — his family came to our house and then our family had to join them and go on to the next house and everybody finished up together somehow. All wailing and all. That was one that stuck in my mind, it was so loud.

Aunty Vera talked to me at length about learning Kokatha while growing up on the mission. The Lutherans ‘would have preferred us to speak pure English’, she says. However, she mused, ‘I think the beauty of growing up the way we grew up is the ability that we develop to jump from one culture immediately into another without taking a breath.’ Cultural, in this case, linguistic fluidity, rather than domination or assimilation characterised her account of life on Koonibba:

See, if I had somebody here that I had to speak to in language it would be nothing to just leave you sitting there and let you listen. It’s not the rudeness of the thing: it’s how we spoke at Koonibba when I was growing up.

Aunty Vera’s grandmother, however, spoke another form of Kokatha, which gives us some sense of the fact that the language spoken at the mission was not static, ‘I used to say, “Mama whatta you talkin? Whatta you sayin? Tell me!”’ Her grandmother would reply, ‘I’m talking deep Kokatha.’ Deep Kokatha, Aunty Vera told me was ‘the old Kokatha,’ spoken by people who didn’t speak English at all. Aunty Vera then said, ‘Her deep Kokatha could also have been Pitjanjatjara ... Mama was multilingual, speaking Mirning, Kokatha, Pitjanjatjara, whatever, whatever.’ Kokatha wasn’t spoken in front of white people on the mission. But, it was said, ‘as soon as the non-Aboriginal people would turn around and walk away — back to language!’ Aunty Joan emphasises that while her mother’s generation faced great pressure and scrutiny, while they ‘stood up front’, her grandparents concentrated on teaching the kids instead, ‘behind the missionaries’ backs’.

By far the strongest theme of my interviews was food and the constant struggle to get enough to eat on Koonibba, the mission having long ago abandoned any efforts at food production. From the Anderson and Walsh transcripts I learnt that the government ration comprised flour, tea, sugar, potatoes and onions. And quince, says Aunty Joan:

Quince was always *the* fruit. It was part of the rations. And we'd do odd jobs for the older people and they'd give us their quince. But I can't stand it now (laughs). That's probably why.

Rations were supplemented with kangaroo and possum meat and wild fruits: *burrub*, the wild peach or quandong, which is native, and *wulga*, the prickly wild tomato, an introduced species. Women went for rabbits using crowbars, while men sometimes hunted rabbits with spears and waddies. Nearby farmers sometimes came to the mission to sell eggs and fat, but the milk procured from the mission's cows went to the home and to white mission staff. Water was carted from an underground tank at the blacksmith's shop; the well at Koonibba rockhole was too far to walk to for drinking water, but was a popular swimming spot for the children in summer. A small shop sold tobacco, biscuits, jam and lollies. Aunty Vera recalled:

[The shop] sold fruit and vegetables that were brought in. The farm [which was being share-farmed], as far as I can remember, didn't actually produce fruit and vegetables for the community. Sheep and wheat farming was the go there, but once a week they used to kill so many sheep and then sell it in the morning at the meathouse, but us all kids would line up around the slaughter yard to get the offings, because *nurrundjerrie* — sheep's stomach — that's good meat.

Aunty Vera remembers eating rabbits and also galahs. The white gaze sometimes made its presence powerfully felt in these exchanges. Aunty Vera continued, anticipating recoil from the idea of eating galahs, 'Some people would screw their nose up at it, but it's poultry. They eat quail, so they shouldn't screw their nose up at that.'

Both the memories of hunting while hungry, and of eating bush foods while hiding from Welfare are stressed as openings onto a way of being Aboriginal that the missionaries were intent on foreclosing. Aunty Joan talks very positively about 'learning how to survive by our own wits'. The mission kids routinely spent their days catching *gulda* (sleepy lizard) and playing in the scrub. She told Anderson and Walsh, 'And when we would wander off for a full day, just kids, we'd come back full, we weren't hungry.' *Guldas* would be cooked on little fires built out in the scrub, or brought home. Aunty Joan reflects that sometimes she would accompany the men from the mission for days,

ostensibly to hunt kangaroos, but, as she told Anderson, 'it was something else'. These treks involved visiting rockholes out the back, and sourcing ochre for ceremonies.

It is this not quite defined, but ever-present 'something else' that has come to be identified as the significant feature of this time spent out bush. Koonibba people, it is remembered, remained a people who found opportunities to move about their country and hunt on it. They also had opportunity to visit its mythical sites, maintaining ongoing relationships with the rockholes. The missionaries could not stop mission residents from hunting, as they were unable to feed them adequately. And so, Nungas worked against the forces that were trying to sever them from another way of life and their spirituality remained as much oriented to a relationship with country as the weekly devotion suppers and Sunday church services.

Ripping down the gates: the end of the mission

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Lutheran missionaries sent Koonibba students who showed academic potential to Adelaide to complete their education at Concordia College. Aunty Vera, for instance, was already boarding at Concordia when the government took over the mission in 1963.

By this time, the mission's housing stock was in a state of disrepair. Aunty Joan remembers one house collapsing completely, as a group of adults sat playing cards in the kitchen, and also a huge hole in the roof of her childhood home. Gale (1964:108) comments that stone houses on Aboriginal reserves and stations across South Australia at the time were 'damp, badly fretted, or in danger of collapsing'. There was intense overcrowding. According to Eckermann (2010:189-190), the church envisaged the Department of Aboriginal Affairs taking over the mission to 'provide housing, employment, vocational training, and the like in a way that the Church could not hope to match financially'. In the early 1960s, the church was experimenting with what Eckermann describes as 'self-determination and self-governance' structures. The community met on a Monday night to 'discuss issues affecting the common good, and make decisions'. While a superintendent implemented these decisions, Eckermann laid all credit at the feet of Koonibba residents:

They carried out cottage repainting and repairs, repainted the hall and school, built stone tank-stands for the new cottages, surveyed and graded a street system for the village, built a community laundromat, re-roofed underground tanks, put down new tennis courts. ... The Department of Aboriginal Affairs at long last came to light with modest grants [of two thousand pounds a year] for housing, and it was a source of pride that from foundation to ridge cap these cottages were built by Aboriginal labour under Aboriginal foremen. (Eckermann 2010:187)

South Australia's policy of assimilation by means of relocating Aboriginal families from reserves and mission stations into the general community, was in its death throes (Gale 1964). This, however, was what the Department planned for Koonibba:

The Department made a takeover offer that clearly announced the aim of dispersing the people, and eventually wiping the Koonibba community off the map. It set a timetable of two years for the dispersal, with or without the consent of the people affected. (Eckermann 2010:190)

Complicated negotiations involving proposals and counter-offers followed, with the Koonibba mission staff and community continuing to outline their vision for a self-governing community. However, in May 1962, Koonibba residents were shocked to hear the church had accepted the Department's offer. Koonibba's pastor and teaching staff immediately resigned in protest, and a petition against the terms of the takeover quickly raised 80 signatures (Eckermann 2010:201-202). The church and Department were unmoved, and from July 1963 'the government came in' as Aunty Joan says.

After the mission's close, many Koonibba Nungas began moving into Ceduna. Aunty Joan's family also left Koonibba soon after this but went instead to Port Lincoln where Aunty Joan's mother's sister was living. While a general exodus from Koonibba ensued, the state's planned 'dispersal' never eventuated. After a while, people started 'dribbling back home'. Aunty Joan said. 'I mean it is home, and you're always dribbling back to home again.' The mission's end coincided with the nascent self-determination policy era, the former mission becoming a reserve, and eventually the Koonibba Aboriginal Community. Aunty Joan told Anderson and Walsh:

They took down the big front gates at the mission, because it had 'Koonibba Lutheran Mission' and they took, just ripped them off. They didn't want them anymore. Which I thought was sacrilege, because they were really pretty.

Aunty Joan's mother was, in the years following the mission's end, forced to relinquish her children, who were split up: some joined Aunty Vera to board at Concordia and others were sent to live with various family members. Aunty Joan remembers it that 'the government' convinced her mother to give up her youngest, newborn baby for adoption, telling her that only this way she would be able to keep her other children in her care. The whole family lost contact with this baby for thirty years. As to the promise regarding the rest of her children, 'That was just a big, big con-artist job, big con job, because they got us afterwards.' Aunty Joan says:

So you wonder why I don't trust governments. And people have asked me whether I was part of the stolen generation? I don't know whether that's classed as stolen or not, but I always say no, because they couldn't steal me, I kept running away. I kept running away back to the mission, so I don't see that as being stolen I just see it as a bit of fight between me and the government, and in the finish I won that fight. When I turned 14 they left me alone.

It was, remembers Aunty Joan, back to the mission she ran. Koonibba remained home, and those who remained welcomed her. At Koonibba, her old aunties would tell her, 'We want you to stay with us, but we're scared, we're scared the policeman will come, Welfare will come.' Aunty Joan would then have to leave again.

Conclusion

Frances Peters-Little (1999:4) criticises white historians for failing to recognise the significance and relevance of missions and reserves to contemporary Aboriginal people's identities. Writing about her own elders, she asserts that 'missions and reserves have become as vital to their identity as sacred sites and ceremonies of significance' (ibid.). This chapter attempts firstly to redress this failure on the part of white scholars, stressing the significance of Koonibba to contemporary Aboriginal identities on the West Coast.

Others have done so before me. Jane Jacobs states (1983:360-361), 'The West Coast Kokatha identity is linked essentially to their Koonibba experience.' And Brock notes (1993:7), 'People who came from Koonibba are likely to claim it as an identifying label, rather than use pre-existing language groups such as Kokatha or Wirangu as communal identities.' This situation, however, has changed.

Thus this chapter maps out the basis of an identity concept that has since been superseded by 'tribal' identifications. An understanding of the Koonibba experience is crucial, in order to understand the significance of the new self-understandings that have (re)emerged, taken root and been nurtured relatively recently, and under specific political and social conditions. These broad shifts underline the instability of Aboriginal identity formations over time, and the suddenness and profundity of these shifts give rise to complex contests over the substance and value of various ways of being Aboriginal and expressing an Aboriginal identity. Moreover, these shifts bring to light the constant interplay of outsiders' desires and agendas, such as the missionaries' and the state's, in terms of moulding and coercing Aboriginal people's ways of being, as well as Aboriginal people's ambivalent and active responses to manage these attempts. What we might see as forces of destruction and of creation are locked in a kind of contest here, as they compete for supremacy.

On a more empirical level, this chapter provides some insight into the kinds of lives Koonibba people lived at the mission between 1898 and 1963, a period over which Aboriginal subjectivities were thoroughly and deliberately refigured and transformed. I have stressed the way memories of Koonibba provide a rich source of memories of the 'old people' and the 'old ways,' of being nourished by bush foods and of maintaining a relationship with country. In this way, 'Koonibba mob' have been shown to work against the forces geared towards their reconstruction. These experiences have become central to the constitution of valorised Aboriginal identities in the present, as the meaning and import of Aboriginality is again revised by the state.

Chapter four. Nungas, whitefellas and Anangu: the constitution and dissolution of racialised difference

Introduction

In June 2010 I sat with a group of Aunty Joan Mob members fishing off the rocks nearby Ceduna. Our conversation turned to a very recent, horrible event. A local whitefella was driving home along a dark road leading out of town, along which an Anangu woman walked to Town Camp, which provides temporary accommodation to Pitjanjatjara-speaking visitors from the remote communities of Yalata and Oak Valley. The whitefella ran into the woman and she was killed. He stayed with his car and was arrested. Some members of Aunty Joan Mob spoke quietly and with familiarity about the woman who was 'finished now,' expressing sorrow for her family. Aunty Joan's niece Jo Jo and Jo Jo's brother (who are of course Nunga), joined Jo Jo's white partner in ruminating on the fact that this young whitefella was their friend and a 'good person'. They were shocked and saddened to think that his life too had been 'ruined,' expecting him to be imprisoned. Aunty Joan praised him for staying with his car, telling me 'Anangu will go wild' and speculating that he could easily have been beaten severely had the woman's family members come across the scene. The deceased woman was reportedly drunk at the time of the accident. The Nunga teenage girls present, at that point inclined to be obnoxious, criticised Anangu harshly for being 'always drunk,' suggesting they 'deserved what they got'. Finally, Jo Jo became extremely agitated, arguing that the exclusively white members of the District Council of Ceduna ('the council') refused to adequately light the route to Town Camp, leaving Anangu to walk a dangerous road.

In Ceduna an intact racial hierarchy, which institutionalises white hegemony and normalises Aboriginal subordination, remains a persistent fact of life. This chapter examines the complexities underwriting that hierarchy by way of analysing the constitution of three sets of relationships structured by difference. I deal firstly, and most comprehensively, with the relationship between local whitefellas and Nungas. Then I turn to the relationship between Nungas and Anangu. Finally, I explain the relationship between what I see as a local 'white elite' and Anangu. I argue that the first relationship is

characterised by a central contradiction, between racial intimacy, on the one hand, and social distance and 'separateness' on the other. The second relationship involves the construction of a kind of other Other. Anangu are sometimes revered and feared for holding the powers associated with the maintenance of certain cultural practices, and are objectified in statements such as 'Anangu will go wild'. Yet many Aboriginal people of my acquaintance condemn Anangu practices, expressing frustration that tensions between 'disorderly' groups of Anangu and whitefellas impact on Nunga-whitefella relations. In the last case, I consider the tensions that animate Anangu relationships with the local white elite, documenting recent efforts to mould the social practices of black bodies to white norm, and highlighting the role of disgust in local debates. Specifically I examine the council's controversial deployment of a private security firm — the K9 Unit ('the dog unit' or 'the dogs') — to enforce local bylaws prohibiting loitering, littering, drinking and camping in public places. In all cases, complex instabilities and also interdependencies are at play.

I am not proposing that these identity-categories are neatly separable; there is much overlap and interrelatedness between their members. In setting them out in the title of this chapter and in attaching one or the other to certain individuals — marking the unitary subject positions of those I featured in my opening vignette for example — I risk shoring up the very categories I wish to show are constantly being worked out, contested and pointed to as deficient in one moment, and affirmed as meaningful in the next. It is the instability, permeability and dissolution of these categories, as well as ongoing efforts directed toward their maintenance and reconstitution that I hope to bring to light in this chapter, by sketching ethnographic scenes where indeterminate identities are being worked out, elaborated and/or contested, or where articulations of the racialised hierarchy can be seen to be being made.

The organisation of these sets of relations can be seen to work towards the maintenance of a racialised social order. The term 'order' grants no aura of stability to white hegemony and Aboriginal marginalisation in Ceduna: this hierarchy appears and disappears, asserting itself and then concealing or suppressing itself and its effects. Its authority waxes as it is worked towards, defended vigorously, guiltily enjoyed and bolstered by a range of individuals and institutions, and wanes as it is challenged, worked against, mocked and flouted by others.

One of the central claims of this thesis is that Aboriginality is a fundamentally unstable and relational category of experience. In the previous two chapters I have taken a historical approach to the demonstration of this claim. This chapter engages in everyday ethnographic exposition of this point. 'The public image, and the term *Aborigine*, are products of the white world, not of those being named,' argues Gillian Cowlishaw (2004:83). This chapter, following Cowlishaw (2004:85), examines Aboriginal people's negotiation of the white world's impositions and invitations, and how these collide and sometimes intersect with a wealth of 'self-images' produced and circulated within the Aboriginal domain. What it means to be Aboriginal in Ceduna can involve defining oneself most vigorously against other kinds of ways of being Aboriginal: Cowlishaw's categories (2004:190-191) of 'respectable and disreputable Aboriginality' have much purchase here. In the case I describe, these categories are generally mapped, in public discourse, onto Nungas and Anangu. In this chapter, the term 'Aboriginality' becomes of more limited use, and I speak mostly of Nungas and Anangu, as well as whitefellas. What it means to be Nunga, what it means to be a whitefella, and what it means to be Anangu assume greater significance than the more general exploration of 'what it means to be Aboriginal'.

I begin by providing some brief descriptions of peopled town spaces, sketching both the physical reality of Ceduna's streets as well as the *habitus* of those who walk, drive ('cruise'), sit, yell, hang out, chit-chat, laugh, gossip, piss and drink in them.

'Down the street': peopled town spaces

Over the course of my fieldwork, Ceduna's social life was concentrated on four main street corners facing a gravel roundabout, itself revolving around a signpost bristling with destinations and distances — in one direction lies Perth (2000 Kms), in another Adelaide (800 Kms). On one corner sat the only supermarket, diagonally opposite stands the barn-like, drive-through bottle shop, which adjoins the Foreshore Hotel ('the pub').³⁶ Two banks occupy the remaining corners. The intersection I am referring to is the point where Poynton and McKenzie streets cross (see Figure 5). Each of these four corners offered a vantage point from which to track people's movements in and out of the

³⁶ The supermarket has since moved, and the centre of social life with it.

supermarket, as they made their way down to the bottle-shop or pub, and general human activity as it thinned out and congealed again along a two block stretch of Poynton Street, past the bakery's outdoor tables, toward two bustling, dirt-cheap op-shops and a second bottle shop. On one of the bank's corners a sharp metal rim runs atop a curved, decorative tiled wall. Structurally subtle, the rim is unambiguous in its object, making it impossible to sit down and spend time comfortably on this highly visible corner. Instead Anangu were often found sitting on the opposite corner with legs folded, crossed at the knees and their backs leaning against the warm supermarket wall: they faced the main street but were hidden from the view of tourists arriving in town.

Writing in the early 1970s, Aboriginal activist and intellectual Kevin Gilbert said of small country towns:

If you don't believe [that Australia is a racist place] go look in any country town at blacks walking along the street. Note the sidelong, averted gaze, the exaggerated attempts at dignity, the overdone, affected bravado (Gilbert 2002:35)

Some thirty years later, I found the Ceduna street scene markedly different from the kind Gilbert evoked. White people's relationships to the main street are primarily instrumental: it is a place to do things and socialising with known others is incidental, but to be expected. For Nungas and Anangu, the potential to socialise with known others 'down the street' is reason enough to spend time there. On busy days in town, Ceduna's streets were vitally alive. Nungas and Anangu leant on elbows along open car doors, talking to the passengers inside. Names, greetings, insults, cheeky jokes and whole messages were flung across the street. Children were 'growled' at; verbal fights broke out. Kids jumped up and down in parked cars, and clambered between their seats and the footpath. Women, and occasionally men, pushed kids in small fold-up strollers, while others sported generic versions of the popular light-weight, aluminum three-wheel stroller models now ubiquitous in Australia. Anangu pushed children along in rattling, worn and heavy four-wheel relics. The little heads of unrestrained children could sometimes be spied bobbing up and down behind windscreens as low-slung cars with loud V8 and V6 engines made their way slowly along the main drag.

Aboriginal people assert with their relaxed bodies — slowly loading shopping into car boots as traffic cautiously edged past — the conducting of lengthy interactions —

hugging visiting family, catching up on news in the medium strip, double parking for the purpose of involved conversations — and public laughter — that the streets of Ceduna belonged to them. The ‘homeliness ... apparent in the way people inhabit the streets’ (Cowlshaw 2004:88) amounts to an explicit claiming of everyday spaces, which challenges whitefella assertions of their greater legitimacy and entitlement to shape, claim and possess these same spaces, and sets the scene for contest.

‘I think we’re related to them.’ Nunga-whitefella relations

Ceduna Nungas and whitefellas share histories, surnames, families, homes, workplaces and the same public places: black and white lives are fundamentally intertwined. Aunty Joan says, ‘We know there’s no getting rid of white people now. Which is good. We are all mixed up anyway.’ Her comment captures a crucial contradiction, central to this condition of racial intimacy. White people remain an identifiable and separate social group, external to the Nunga social body (in that there is no getting rid of ‘them’). And yet, ‘we are all mixed up,’ partly because many Aboriginal people are themselves descendants of white people. Whiteness cannot be easily disentangled, and is acknowledged as being constitutive of the Nunga social and physical body. The binary organisation of black/white identities is constantly being pointed to as nonsensical and deficient. Nungas are well aware that white people take refuge in the binary’s falsity, in order to deny that Aboriginality is constitutive of many white physical bodies and to enjoy feelings of superiority derived from being not-Aboriginal. And yet, as in the situation Cowlshaw described (2004:60), ‘the racial dichotomy retains its power’ and is simultaneously affirmed as meaningful. Aboriginal people especially embrace an identity that is increasingly seen to have unique, essential and precious attributes, that is Aboriginal people ‘have culture,’ however much argument centres on which particular Aboriginal people have more or less of it. As for white people, they are bereft of culture. Nungas’ loyalty to their Aboriginal identities, however, goes far beyond this. Many Nungas I know will sometimes refer to themselves as ‘partly white’ but *never* as ‘partly Aboriginal’.

Aunty Joan’s point about being ‘all mixed up’ was brought home to me early on in my fieldwork. With my partner I visited a large, comfortable home belonging to a working class white family: here the sea breeze wafted in to shift the hot, thick air around. We had

posted a note on the supermarket's noticeboard stating that we wished to buy a fridge: this family called the following day to say they had one they were willing to sell. While I drank cordial in the kitchen with a couple aged, I think, in their 40s, I was told that Ceduna was a great place to live, 'apart from the Abos'. Meanwhile, Shane inspected the fridge in the shed with the couple's teenage son. Shane chatted to the teenager about us knowing Auntie Joan Mob and he commented, 'Oh yeah. I think we're related to them or something.' The lines between racist whites/Aboriginal people were by no means as clear-cut as what I anticipated when I moved to a country town imagined by outsiders in similar terms to that of Bourke in Western New South Wales: a 'depressing nastiness' is attributed to these 'outback deserts of racism and poverty' (Cowlshaw 2004:2). Like Cowlshaw, I found black and white people living in a single social domain, a town routinely subjected to outsiders' contempt, but which was locally 'a source of pride' (Cowlshaw 2004:5).

White women and men routinely 'hook up' and/or marry across the racial boundary. In doing so they might find themselves living, socialising, relaxing, speaking and relating to others in a new way. It remains then an accepted fact that 'being Nunga' means something different to 'being white,' although the extent, meaning and evaluation of these differences are subject to constant disputation as well as fun-making. The content of these categories is far from fixed or agreed-upon. White people might be perceived by both white and black observers to be living like Nungas and Nungas might be observed, this time mostly by other disapproving Nungas, to be living like whitefellas. These categories are rendered unstable in terms of their internal constitution. It was said, 'She's got Nunga in her,' meaning 'even if she doesn't admit it'. And they are constantly subjected to external scrutiny, interpretations, commentary and adjustments.

So what is it, exactly, that remains firmly in place? There exists in Ceduna a shared assumption about what constitutes white and black *styles of life*. The distinctions between them are based, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) so convincingly catalogues, on the minutia of everyday social and aesthetic practices: habitual 'techniques of the body,' modes of speech, stylistic preferences, as well as attitudinal orientations and the personal relationships that are stressed, emphasised or denied. It is perceived movement between Nunga/whitefella styles of life that is fraught, a source of intense local interest, and something that can fuel violent conflict.

In Bourdieu's French study, people are impelled to make consumption choices and to style themselves in ways associated with those who occupy more powerful social positions, accruing different forms of capital and value in order to advance their own social standing and differentiate themselves from those people who occupy a subordinate social position. However, in Ceduna intense ambivalence surrounds the decision to adopt or to emulate a style of life that has greater social standing but attracts criticism for involving a form of disloyalty to one's Aboriginality. That is, Nungas who went 'whitefella way' might be perceived to distance themselves from their families as they enjoy access to greater respectability and status. I became aware that one Nunga woman I know was deeply troubled by a fear that she might be seen in this light. She managed a large Aboriginal employment agency in town. One day I absentmindedly picked up a photograph from her desk and she rushed to tell me that if she'd known the photo was about to be taken she would have moved closer to her family. The photo was many years old, and the woman stood just one or two steps to the side of a handful of members of her extended family. The small physical distance captured by the photographer, purely by chance, and the social distance it symbolised, continued to cause her evident anguish, as it seemed to represent her standing apart from her family.

'He thinks he's white,' might be said about someone who wanted to finish Year 12 and had ambitions to go to university. The comment above suggests an example of group cohesion 'premised on the impossibility of transcending ... subordination' so that the 'achievement of individual success endangers this cohesion' (Paradies 2006:359). To transcend one's subordination might well pose a challenge to a sense of ongoing belonging to the Nunga lifeworld, however I witnessed more closely the ways opportunities for individual success, conditional on the basis of being Aboriginal, posed a different kind of a challenge to one's sense of self. That is, I was closer to Nungas about whom the comment above was made, rather than Nungas making such comments.

Ceduna Nungas are conscious that other possible ways of being Aboriginal are affirmed by both state and non-state institutions and are available to them. A father enthused to me that his Nunga daughter was going to university, explaining to me that there existed 'loop holes' for Aboriginal students. His daughter rejected one offer, taking up another instead, because at an open day she sensed the first university wanted to enrol Aboriginal students as a cynical exercise to boost its own reputation as an inclusive institution. She

was not prepared to lend weight to its superficial ambitions. Jo Jo had worked in numerous Aboriginal organisations in Ceduna but told me that of all her jobs:

I liked working at the pub [the best] cause there was a lot of different people there, and being Aboriginal, I got the job from merit, not, you know, because they need an Aboriginal person. That felt really good.

In this case, I perceived that Jo Jo did not wish to be reduced to being primarily a representative of Aboriginality, but valued being an individual with specific skills and capacities, and for being valued by others as such. She wanted to be an Aboriginal *employee*, not an *Aboriginal* employee.

I knew a number of Nungas who had married/partnered-up with whitefellas. I became aware of a minor genre of ambivalent comments, which made their way into discrete, sometimes bitter conversations. The discretion involved either not wanting to be disloyal to whitefella partners, husbands or wives or may have involved wanting to avoid further conflict with them. Muted utterances revealed a struggle to reconcile being Nunga and the kin-based obligations this entailed, with commitments to their white partners and their own 'mixed up' nuclear family. I sometimes saw Nungas express frustration that their culturally-specific priorities, commitments or obligations to kin could be perceived as mysterious, fictitious, annoying or optional. Tensions might centre, for example, on a Nunga man's desire to go out bush on an all-night long hunting trip with his brothers and cousins. Or, in extreme cases, they might fester for years and come to test the relationship as people felt torn between Nunga and whitefella families and ways, and pressure to choose between the two.

While the styling of the body is a crucial marker of Nunga-ness or whiteness, the fact that a racialised identity cannot be read directly off the body produces its own sometimes light-hearted, often deeply painful, set of discourses. Paradies argues (2006:359-360) that skin colour and physical features remain of enormous significance to the validation and negotiation of an Aboriginal identity. While the contemporary significance of skin colour is a topic touched upon in Australian analyses, it is so sensitive so as to be rarely elaborated, with Cowlshaw's oeuvre (see especially 1998) a notable exception.³⁷ I found

³⁷ Paradies discussion is insightful. Victorian historian Bruce Pascoe (2007) has reflected on the ways that suspicion attends to his identification with his Aboriginality. Pascoe perceives that 'pale Kooris' are either regarded as opportunistic or as treacherous, and that white Australians perceive his determination to emphasise his Aboriginal antecedents over his Cornish ones as a kind of 'betrayal'. Wendy Holland

that skin colour was often referenced among Nungas. Often this took the form of jokes, teasing and ironic asides about being 'pasty' and needing to work on one's 'tan'. Only white people were actually described as being physically 'white' in colour. 'There's a white boy in the kitchen! White boy! White boy!' sang out Della, as my naked toddler streaked out of the bedroom one visit. The meaning attached to different skin colours has of course varied according to broader social/political processes (see Cowlishaw 1999:270-271). As I have shown, on the mission in the assimilation era, pale-skinned children were vulnerable to state removal. The context today is radically different and being too fair can be seen and experienced as a vulnerability of quite a different kind, as it attenuates an Aboriginal person's claim to embody authenticity. Some Aunty Joan Mob members worried that a broader, non-local audience would regard their anti-mining position, based on concerns for their country, as illegitimate because they did not fulfill the desired image of the traditional Aboriginal elder. 'Don't judge us on the colour of our skin, look at what's in our hearts and minds,' pleaded one spokesperson. The spectre of the Hindmarsh Island bridge controversy was sometimes invoked when these worries were raised (see Simons 2003; Weiner 1999). Aunty Joan Mob members well knew that claims to Aboriginal cultural knowledge could be met with derision, ridicule and fierce resistance, from other Aboriginal people as well as white interests.

Jo-Jo was herself fair-skinned and a thoughtful, sparing commentator. She thought that 'being really dark' in Ceduna, as Anangu people are, involved facing overt prejudice, being insulted in the streets, and 'being served last in the shops'. She said, 'I guess I get a lot more benefits being with the white skin, being Aboriginal with the white skin ... [it's easier] than being really dark, definitely.' But she also talked of her own experiences at the local high school, where she had 'arguments with the girls ... the Aboriginal girls who think, "Ah you think you're too good for us".' Pale-skinned Nungas faced heightened pressure to consistently demonstrate their identification with their Aboriginality. Jo Jo explained:

I used to just talk to everybody, I didn't hang in their little group, so they just started picking on me for that sort of reason, and then I just said, 'Well, I am

(1996:97) also provides a personal account of 'living in a white body and identifying as a murri'. In a fascinating historical article Maurcen Perkins (2004) examines English and Australian examples to do with the mythology of pale-skin people of mixed descent 'passing'; many of these involve processes of 'unmasking' where the essential, irrepressible features of otherness (such as being able to dance) expose someone's whiteness as 'false'.

partly white.’ And then I just totally started hanging with my other friends, and they just accepted it.

While Jo Jo was indeed ‘partly white’ her identity as a Nunga was ultimately unassailable as she was closely associated with her extended family.

The maintenance of separate physical and symbolic realms

So far I have stressed that intimate social relations were everywhere apparent, even while intimacy presented very real difficulties and tensions, and the very categories of Aboriginal/whitefella are heterogeneous in their constitution and often overlap. And yet overwhelming evidence of Ceduna’s race relations being structured by the maintenance of homogenous separate physical, discursive and symbolic realms was also everywhere apparent. The persistent fact of an intact racial hierarchy found dramatic expression in the realm of civic participation. I attended a series of ‘public’ events over my time in the field, including a motivational speaker and an International Women’s Day breakfast at the pub; an Australia Day breakfast, an open mike session and regular schnitzel nights at the Sailing Club; and two public information nights, one in the pub and one held at a football club, regarding the status of the mining company Iluka’s exploration ventures. Attendees of all these events were virtually exclusively white. While some were light-hearted, cheesy events others were much more serious gatherings in which both the history and future of the *whole town* was discussed and imagined. Many white people have no qualms about discussing the town as if it were a white-person’s town alone, in which Aboriginality, if mentioned, was a problem that needed addressing. Others however puzzled over the question of Aboriginal participation in the civic realm.

Well-meaning whitefellas frequently mistook social spaces indexed as white, as neutral. Their puzzlement was genuine, and reflected a desire for things to function differently. At a story-time session for babies at the school library one morning, a newcomer asked the librarian if Aboriginal children ever came to story-time? The four white mums present were all keen to engage in a conversation about the separation between black and white, and that efforts to ‘encourage’ Aboriginal attendance had been repeatedly tried and had failed. Our relaxed, inconclusive conversation was itself conditional on the ‘white-on-white’ composition of our group (Frankenberg 1993:23). All remained at a loss as to how to explain why things still seemed to be so ‘separate,’ exhibiting concern, and

providing examples of events where black and white distance had been bridged. 'That was great to see,' they agreed about a children's event on the foreshore where Nunga and whitefella kids all played together.

Social distance allows misperceptions and myths to flower. 'The problem with this town,' said a bloke at a garage sale, 'is that Aborigines get free cars.' Ten years ago, he recalled, 'everyone' struggled to get ahead and were driving 'bombs'. 'Ten years ago' is an abstract signification of a not-too-distant past. Needless to say Aboriginal people do not get given free cars; I am ill-qualified to judge, but it seems that many Ceduna Nungas today are still driving clapped-out 'bombs'. These misperceptions are specific to the recognition era, where certain Nungas have joined the professional classes and accrued some material goods, if not wealth. (Aunty Joan Mob members also criticise Nungas who drive 'flash' 4WDs, supposing that these were acquired through mining exploration royalties.) Class-based resentments intersect in complex ways with casual expressions of racism, which remain locally acceptable and abrasive to outsiders: in this case a working class whitefella bitterly criticised Nungas for transgressing their marginal social position. The dense circulation of misperceptions prompted one Nunga organisational worker to tell me wryly, 'People think I get paid to go to funerals. If that were true, I'd be a rich man.'

I attended two public marches, which seemed to starkly demonstrate the existence and functioning of these two separate physical and symbolic realms. On Anzac Day 2008 I arrived into town early, finding the main street utterly deserted and the closed supermarket displaying a sign stating, 'Out of Respect for the Fallen, Foodlands will open at 1pm today.' A crowd soon gathered and a small parade down the main street featured ex-servicemen, nurses, the SES and police, walking or travelling in vintage cars. Ceduna's Mayor stood on a little box on the nature strip. Elevated slightly, he watched over the procession with his hand pressed to his heart. A few marchers saluted him, which he acknowledged with a little nod.³⁸ The crowd of approximately 200 exclusively white Ceduna residents assembled on the pavement, taking photos with digital cameras and waving to the marchers before following the route of the march to arrive at a park. After the Australian flag was raised, songs were sung softly; the crowd mumbling their

³⁸ The hand on the heart, the salute and the nod: these all formed part of a whitefella-owned gestural repertoire well understood by Nungas in town. In the Memorial Hall with two Nunga women one day, one of them swore underneath the solemn boards, which hung high above her, listing the deaths of local men in World War One and World War Two. Her friend clicked and pointed upwards with a mischievous grin, 'Bit o respect.'

way through a tuneless rendition of the national anthem and a hymn. It had begun to drizzle. During proceedings, three Anangu called out to each other in Pitjanjatjara from the other side of the park, gesticulating and laughing before falling quiet as they moved closer to the event and gauged its mood. Their voices rung out clearly, but the tableaux in the park stood frozen, determined to ignore them, even after they drifted over and stood on the fringes of the event. Afterwards, as the event started to break up I heard the three Anangu approach the police, enquiring about the event. One officer asked, 'Everything *palya* [okay]?' 'Yeah, *palya*.' Another seemed annoyed by their presence, cutting their questions off coldly.

Anzac Day, historian Mark McKenna argues, enjoyed a revival under former prime minister John Howard's reign, becoming 'an article of national faith and communion, a sacred parable we dare not question' (2008:337). Certainly, the speeches in the Ceduna park tended toward an enthusiastic, if idiosyncratic, affirmation of the national narrative, rather than an opportunity for sober reflection on the realities or meaning of war. However, the event I attended is better understood as an expression of *local* faith and communion rather than an opportunity for national patriotism. The association between a local experience and Anzac Day was powerfully evoked and imagined. It was imagined as an experience that belonged, in the past and in the present, to the white citizenry. Bowed heads blocked out, not just the voices ringing out from the edge of the park, but the existence of a plaque at Koonibba — 40 local Aboriginal men from the mission fought in World War Two.

In July I again headed into town in a hurry, not wanting to miss the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Of Celebration (NAIDOC) day parade. Again I found the main street eerily deserted. I met up with Rhiannon and soon bumped into an Aunty Joan Mob member who asked us if we were going in the parade? 'No just watching,' we replied in surprise. We soon realised that no one else was watching the parade. A couple of hundred Aboriginal people took part in the procession; the Mayor did not attend the NAIDOC day march. My boss from the childcare centre presided over its end, standing with a video camera and looking regal with a huge silky black, gold and red Aboriginal flag tied around her neck and hanging down her back like a shimmering cape. Rhi and I decided to join in, bringing up the rear, walking excitedly amongst friends. The marchers walked quickly, proudly and energetically. Balloons and streamers were tied around strollers and wrists. Three elderly white women ducked out of the op shop to stand on

the footpath and eagerly watch and wave, perhaps amplifying their enthusiasm to compensate for whitefellas' overall disinterest in the event.

In front of me, a spunky young Nunga woman with bleached blonde hair and big hoop earrings filmed behind a camera, asking a friend, 'Sooooo, what's it like to be black?!' 'Oh I look really good in black,' her mate replied touching her jet-black leather jacket. They screamed with laughter.

What was the meaning of this march without spectators? Where I perceived the lack of recognition, affirmation and local interest as humiliating, many Nungas revelled in their temporary take-over: on this morning, whitefellas seemed to have been run out of town. At the march's conclusion Rhi and I did not feel unwelcome, but definitely irrelevant: kids, aunties and young mothers of our acquaintance all said hello to us briefly before resuming conversations or going in search of family to sit with. We left to have lunch in town, and noticed that white shoppers had slowly started returning to the main street.

Physical separation did not, of course, presuppose an autonomous, self-enclosed realm. The spunky young Nunga behind the camera played to an imagined white gaze. In this case, the white other in mind was a curious but benign observer, objectifying and scrutinising Aboriginality in asking, 'What it's like to be black?' Indeed, I recognised myself as being behind a kind of camera, viewing all these scenes through an analytical lens: I noted with discomfort that the question — my question — was mocked and evaded, while blackness was simultaneously affirmed.

Attitudes and intimate relations

Interviews afforded me a chance to hear both Nunga and whitefellas reflect on local race-relations. My whitefella interviewees tended to take a more optimistic view about the unavoidably intimate conditions of town life than did my Nunga ones. Liza, a teacher at the school and long-term local, didn't socialise with any Aboriginal people. Yet she was sincere in believing:

We're a community where two different groups, or more than two, live together, and we're learning to live together ... people in Adelaide ... may not be racist, but they're not living next door, or teaching, or working with people.

Liza's view was that Aboriginal people and whitefellas held to distinct sets of 'values'. She saw herself as wedded to ideas because she was 'brought up with them,' taking pains to express that she didn't regard her mode of living as intrinsically superior. She cited approaches to time as an example of these differences, reproducing the popular assumption that the black/white dichotomy corresponded to a punctual/late dichotomy:

It's probably how we should be! I mean who cares really ... if something comes up surely it's better to be with your kid, then, you know, making sure you're at work at 9 o'clock, but I'm still of that whole 'I gotta be at work at 9 o'clock!'

For Liza, opportunities to 'mix' with Aboriginal people had narrowed in what I am calling the recognition era. By this she meant that Aboriginal-specific services such as the childcare centre where I worked, and the Far West Coast Aboriginal Sport Complex, which fields all-Aboriginal footy and netball teams (both named 'Mission') had in effect resulted in less opportunities for shared experiences. Her first child had attended the only childcare centre in town, then called a crèche, growing up with Nunga kids 'right from the start'. When Liza's second child was born in the early 1980s, Aboriginal families had moved their children to the newly opened Aboriginal crèche (now childcare centre). While gesturing supportively, if vaguely, to the benefits of Aboriginal-controlled endeavours, Liza expressed that an opportunity had been lost to herself. This is something that troubled Nungas also. Aunty Joan makes a point of involving white kids in the cultural activities and trips out bush she facilitates for the school, believing the local social body to have become more fractured along racial lines since the late 1960s.

Liza then had little social contact with Aboriginal people, but expressed anti-racist views. Other interviewees talked about the ways in which Ceduna locals might *experience* racial intimacy but continue to *express* racist attitudes. Bobby was an opinionated greenie who spent six months in Ceduna after he left Melbourne 'to get out of the city' and before he decided where to go next. He threw himself energetically into Ceduna life and concluded that it exposed a hypocrisy that inhered in the inner city, left-liberal, anti-racist milieu he was most familiar with. 'What does it mean to be not-racist if you don't spend any time

around Aboriginal people?’ he asked rhetorically, echoing Liza’s comments about ‘people in Adelaide’.³⁹ Bobby continued:

People share lives here [in Ceduna] in this really full on way. Like it’s a racist town in the sense that Aboriginal people — Anangu people — are so obviously Anangu and obviously don’t live the same lives that white people do ... But it’s not that white people here are more racist than white people elsewhere. And to the contrary, you have all these amazing white people that have heaps of Aboriginal relationships in their lives ... they’re these inspiring, unassuming, working-class white people who the middle class Left and the liberal middle class consider to be ... reactionary, conservative bogans... There’s definitely those here, but those same people that would have those same classist opinions about working class people would have very little contact with Aboriginal people and would feel very high and mighty about their progressive ideas about Aboriginality.

I asked Bobby for an example:

Like Sharkie, married into a black family. He’s just a classic, 100 per cent, lumpen prole dude, white dude. Telling me about the first time he bought some big TV and had to catch the bus to Retrovision in [a nearby town] and then didn’t have enough money to get a ticket home so he had to carry this telly, and it was far and he was really stoned. The police thought he stole it and he got arrested ... there’s a hundred Sharkies in this town.

Bobby was especially struck by the way local Aboriginal words had been incorporated into everyday lexicon. He told me that his football coach would say:

‘Okay everyone, line up. We’re not going to be doing long kicks, we’re just doing little *minya* [small] ones.’ And no one questioned what the word *minya* meant, or noticed it. ... You’d hear a sixteen-year-old farmer boy who on the surface could be considered to be a reactionary racist or whatever but then would also be going, ‘Oh you should have seen Scotty, he was so fucking

³⁹ While Bobby and Liza represent ‘the city’ as the natural home to superficial, anti-racist sentiment and the small rural town of Ceduna as a place where people *actually* lived with difference, this construction is obviously a convenient one. Historian and social researcher Mark Peel (2003:145-155) shows how the most disadvantaged suburbs of Australian cities are places where multicultural social relations, including Aboriginal-white relations, are a part of everyday lives.

gubby-ta [silly drunk], like blind.’

Bobby identified that an absence of anxiety about using racist language was characteristic of local life, and contrasted sharply with the progressive scene he remained a part of. Since moving to Ceduna he was determined to resist condemning those white people that used racist language as, simply, ‘racists,’ an individuating term that seemed wholly inadequate to capture the way local race relations were organised:

At the football club, all the white boys will be making jokes about blackfellas and Abos constantly — mostly about Anangu ... If you picked up on their language, like, ‘Ah, fucking, that dude, that black cunt stole my weed’, or, ‘All them fucking blackfellas, I know what your family’s like, you’re all fucking down the pub putting your money in the pokies every night.’ Some of these comments are racist for sure: I’m not trying to defend them. But, inescapably, people share lives ... the relationships are all really real. People make racist comments *as well* as being really open to Aboriginal people.

Aunty Vera’s reflections on the current state of race relations also probed this contradiction, but with a different emphasis from Bobby, which is significant. Aunty Vera said:

It’s funny, when I was growing up, the people in Ceduna were super racist against the Greeks in Thevenard, then the Aboriginal people started moving in to town [from Koonibba], so that racism then began to be directed towards the Aboriginal people. And now it is still directed at Aboriginal people... [M]arriages have gone on now in Ceduna between Ceduna-Koonibba-Thevenard, Greeks and Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals and non-Greeks, and kids got mixed blood, it’s like this melting pot, you know ... and people are still bloody racist.

I’ve talked to this girl now... her father-in-law is so racist, but his son married his daughter-in-law anyway, who was of Greek origin, and now, I don’t know, ... how does he come across to [her] kids [who are his grandchildren]? Because he’s still racist against her culture, against, maybe not her, but against, what is that word? Race, against her race, but his son has actually married this person, and the children are half and half for God’s sake, so does he accept his grandchildren and is still racist against this

person's race?

For Bobby the encouraging, even inspiring thing is that people can hold racist assumptions *and yet* share their lives in meaningful ways with racial others. For Aunty Vera, the depressing, demeaning thing is that people share their lives in meaningful ways with racial others *and yet* hold fast to racist assumptions.

I interviewed a young white woman named Carly who also emphasised the instabilities and contradictions that characterised Nunga-whitefella relations. 'Things could go either way,' she noted, meaning that closer involvement with racial others could dissolve racism, or in some cases harden people's attitudes. She was referring to a recent unsettling event, which had reverberated around the community of whitefellas working in the Indigenous social services sector. A popular, lovely white couple had had their house broken into and the thieves had been and gone while they were sleeping. They now felt scared at home. More complex feelings surfaced too: after years of them both working with Nungas they quickly established the identity of the young thieves, in the wake of what they experienced as a betrayal, their compassion ran dry. The thieves had not bothered to distinguish between this couple as 'on side' whitefellas rather than racist whitefellas. This in turn exposed the fragility of this distinction, as the couple in question found themselves shifting towards the affective dispositions — fear, indignation, condemnation — which characterised the local whites they had spent years defining themselves against.

Carly also talked about an impermanent relationship she had with an Aboriginal boy as a teenager, a relationship that she saw as bound up in a desire to break restrictive, respectable norms, and rebel against the social order.

There was a stage where ... my white friends dated Aboriginal boys, a few of us dated some Aboriginal boys and that caused a bit of conflict with the Aboriginal girls ... you know, one of my friends got slammed up against stuff and got called all sorts of racist names, but I didn't specifically have any trouble, but I would just be like 'Oooo, here they come,' and they were big girls too, they were [the] same age as us, but they were big. But they talk to me now, 'Hey [Carly], how you going' ... and I'm like, 'I'm good.' And they've got lots of kids ... the guy I used to date has now got five or six kids with a local girl.

So did any of those high school relationships last? I asked.

No, not long term, the longest one was probably the one I had with a guy and I think that was like a year. ... They were probably a bit rebellious those boys, and we probably were too. ... I don't know, I could now imagine other people looking on, having negative thoughts about it, you know, 'This girl from this good family and this Abo boy...' that kind of stuff, I hear those comments about other people, so I'm sure people [said] them.

Carly was about 14 at the time she was describing. She also had a close Aboriginal girlfriend with whom she now has minimal contact. These relationships receded, in part, because Carly's Aboriginal peers 'all dropped out of school and we lost contact'. While there exists a mutual acknowledgement of a shared past ('they talk to me now') these black and white lives diverged because of a persistent social fact: the low retention rate of Aboriginal high school students.

Nuisance style: Anangu-Nunga relations

I cruised slowly along the main street in a mini-bus one late winter mid-morning, with a few Nunga acquaintances. Our driver was a tough-minded, passionate Nunga bureaucrat: on seeing her aunty standing on a street corner with a cluster of other Aboriginal people she exclaimed, 'Don't tell me Aunty [Lorna] is hangin out nuisance style!' Her observation was greeted with a burst of hilarity. In the wake of our laughter an uneasy silence settled, borne perhaps of everyone's awareness of the speakers' relatively powerful social position as opposed to that of her aunty's. Others present in the bus that morning knew that the same might be said about them sometimes. Our driver had already ribbed another bus passenger — 'What you went down town crusty way?!' — after she admitted she had been to the shops before showering.

'Nuisance style' designates a set of practices regarded as troublesome, or in Cowlishaw's terms 'disreputable' (2004:191) and that a person might be described as belonging, in that moment, to 'nuisance mob'. I saw this as a comment on the complex question of intra-Aboriginal class difference. Some Nungas evince a strong desire to 'distance themselves from repellant images' (ibid.), criticising people's disinterest in their appearance, swearing, daytime public drinking, or in Aunty Lorna's case her simply hanging about on

a corner, perhaps waiting for the bottle shop to open, while others moved through town more purposefully. The question is complex because other Nungas differentiated themselves with more subtlety, without condemning styles of life that were kin- rather than work-oriented and which made much sense to Nungas, even if they organised their own lives differently, and which they defended against white criticisms. Class-based differences exist and find expression *between* Aboriginal persons, a question much neglected in the literature on contemporary Aboriginal scenes, but recently dramatised in the 2012 ABC series *Redfern Now*.⁴⁰ Fissures of this kind have now been decades in the making: there are members of Ceduna's Nunga professional and administrative workforce who were educated in Adelaide in the 1960s, against the odds and generally with the support of the Lutheran Church. Sometimes involved in the early-1970s Aboriginal political movement in Adelaide, on returning to Ceduna they found themselves well placed to seize newly emerging opportunities in Aboriginal-controlled organisations. In Ceduna, work in this sector often involves Nungas managing and working in organisations that have a high proportion of Anangu clients, although this is not always the case. I am also not suggesting that within these roles Nunga professional and administrative workers amass great wealth, but certainly aspirations for, or the reality of, home-ownership, relative security and stability, and ambitions/expectations for their children's education have become the norm. Within certain Nunga families, two generations have now experienced office-based working lives of this kind. In short, one of the bases of intra-Aboriginal differentiation in Ceduna is between what Frank Doolan sometimes calls 'professional blackfellas' (in Cowlshaw 2009:27) and other kinds of blackfellas in Ceduna. In many cases, the movement between 'nuisance' and what I have heard referred to as 'goody-goody' styles of life is fraught and fluid. Some Nungas move in and out of work of this kind with remarkable rapidity. Tiring of work and routine, they might take up again with family members whose lives are dedicated to fishing, crabbing, spending time together and drinking. Then, tiring of having no money of their own, they might move back into employment. I was amazed that they were still employable after having held so many different, short-term positions.⁴¹ There remains a proximity

⁴⁰ See <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/redfernow/> [Last accessed January 26, 2013].

⁴¹ I am just as amazed by this also being the case amongst white friends — disillusioned and highly educated radicals originally from Melbourne, who have since decided to become 'helping professionals' (Lea 2008:12) and work in government or Aboriginal organisations, mainly in the Northern Territory. Some of these people also move in and out of work with remarkable rapidity and are seemingly still employable after having held a series of different, short-term positions, presumably because these difficult

between peoples and kin-based connections are seldom denied: our mini-bus driver pulled over and wound down her window to talk for a while with Aunty Lorna standing on the corner.

Many of my Nunga interviewees pointed to nuisance style behaviour — public, visible forms of alterity — as a trigger or focus of white racist fears and responses. It was generally assumed that Anangu were synonymous with ‘nuisance mob,’ but Nungas who lived in town also sometimes distance themselves from those Nungas who lived at Koonibba. I do not wish to oversimplify the extent to which Nungas also identify and repudiate nuisance mob practices, seemingly in line with white objections. Some focused firmly on the white moral judgments engendered by the highly visible presence of Anangu campers and drinkers in town, seeing white reactions as the problem.

I interviewed one high profile Nunga community member who had originally trained as a nurse. She condemned public drinking, positioning herself both as an authoritative ‘Aboriginal voice’ on this issue *and* distancing herself from the Aboriginal people she described:

It’s unfortunate that a lot of focus has been placed on Aboriginal alcohol consumption, and the behaviour of those people who consume copious amounts of alcohol — now I’m getting into my English dictionary here, or my nursing phraseology — and their behaviour is not acceptable. ... It’s the few whose behaviours are unacceptable, and it’s the few that are focused on.

Jamie’s emphasis lay elsewhere. Instead of the self-destructiveness the former nurse perceived, Jamie fixed his attention on the psychic destruction wrought by white reactions, and shared by all Aboriginal people. Jamie described his experience of school as being ‘basically racist, you’ve got mainly black against white’. Our discussion progressed and I asked him what he thought the bigger, community-wide ‘problem’ between black and white was all about. He replied without pause, ‘You’ve got Yalata people coming down and leaving their rubbish, you’ve got the council, and you’ve got the dog unit chasing people around.’ That Yalata people ‘leave their rubbish behind’ is a shorthand reference, frequently used by both black and white, to flag the disruptive effect of a specific form of Aboriginal alterity that was seen, literally, to create a kind

jobs lead to disillusionment and ‘burn-out’ in the ways Lea (2008) and Emma Kowal (2006) have described.

chaos that the council was obsessed with containing. Zohl D* Ishtar (2005:66) has showed that the Senior women of Wirrimanu (formerly Balgo) use rubbish both consciously and unconsciously to demarcate areas as their own, and discourage white interference, the Wirrimanu women manipulating a whitefella aversion, bordering on neurosis, to 'mess' or rubbish (see also Lea, et al. 2012:155).

From Jamie's perspective, *all* Aboriginal people feel stigmatised, targeted and offended by white censure and judgment of Anangu campers and public drinkers. Jamie said, 'They [Anangu] might be just walking down the street, dogs pull up... It really hurts.' Anangu are 'they' in this statement, Jamie does not say 'we'. But that Anangu are subjected to scrutiny, even where they are simply 'walking down the street' — that is when they are just being themselves — is experienced by Jamie as hurtful. Many Nungas, such as the teenage girls in my opening scene, define themselves *against* Anangu, differentiating their own style of life as being distinct from that of Anangu visitors to Ceduna, and adopting uncompromising stances to underline the distinction. Jamie was related through his father to 'Pitjanjatjara mob,' however I do not attribute the reason for his hurt solely to this genealogical connection with some Anangu. To use Aunty Joan's terms, Jamie could see more than a little of his Aboriginal self in these Aboriginal others.

Many Nungas revered and also feared Anangu, perceiving they 'were somehow closer to the spiritual essence of Aboriginal identity than they' (Schwab 1994:93). Anangu still conduct 'business' (ceremonies), a term often spoken in a hushed tone, and always said gravely and with respect. 'Clever' Anangu were still feared for holding the power to 'sing' an enemy and make them sick. Teenage girls warned me to be careful not to let any of the clever men steal my hair, as then they might compel me to fall in love with them.

In many cases fear and respect for Anangu powers coexisted with condemnation of public drinking. (Indeed, below I establish that in some cases Nungas perceived that Anangu disorder and violence enhanced the sense of their power.) I was also told about one Nunga woman who had seemed to switch from one position to the other. This woman allegedly denied and avoided all contact with her Anangu relations in the past. It was said that she enthusiastically embraced these same relatives recently, making much of her connection to a form of Aboriginality which had had its significance revised in the native title era, as Aboriginal people are required to demonstrate their traditional connection with the land, and authentic cultural difference is prized. This example lends weight to the argument of the whole thesis: that radical discontinuities characterise the

Aboriginal experience, and that apparently progressive steps can have unanticipated and ambiguous effects.

Anangu-whitefella relations: moulding black bodies to white social norms

In July 2009, I visited Ceduna and learned that the Mayor had launched an offensive against spitting, editorialising in the *Sentinel* that visitors to Ceduna were affronted by the sight of people spitting out the front of the supermarket. Anangu men were the unambiguous target of his invective: although they were not named, no-one else could possibly be meant. The example makes explicit the racist understandings underpinning a number of attempts, on the part of the council and with the support of the white elite, to condemn, contain and alter the social practices of black bodies regarded as primitive. It also highlights the central role of disgust in local discourses about race.

Nobert Elias used spitting as an example of the way the Western self-image of 'civilized' behaviour was realised by the internalisation of restraint. Elias traced the transformation of this particular bodily practice from the middle ages to the present, showing how the inclination to spit and the social rules governing the expulsion of saliva gradually evolved so that spitting is now associated with revulsion and shame, and the urge to spit is so repressed it manifests in dreams and is acted on only by children. 'Frequent spitting is even today one of the experiences that many Europeans find particularly unpleasant when travelling in the East or in Africa,' notes Elias (1994:128). And Ceduna, the Mayor would no doubt add. Gestures, movements and habits that have now 'grown strange to us,' points out Elias (1994:45), were once commonplace and accepted, representing the 'embodiments of a different mental and emotional structure'. Old men hocking phlegm unsurprisingly gives rise to feelings of disgust in white cultural subjects *conditioned to repudiate the habit* but spitting has no inherent attributes: in specific conditions we learn to be disgusted by it. In this case the black body is represented as the embodiment of an inferior, primitive excess of difference regarded as offensive. In other cases the primitivism that Anangu are represented as embodying is designated, not just as repulsive, but also as devious and a fundamental threat to the moral order.

The scrutiny and judgment of 'strange' bodily practices extends to more prosaic and entirely 'inoffensive' differences. I learned this at a footy match between the Ceduna Blues, a whitefella-dominated team and Thevenard, whose ranks throughout 2008 were

filled with Yalata players.⁴² At a late-winter football match, a group of Blues supporters sitting behind me kept up an extended, circular conversation about the Yalata players' bare feet. 'Isn't it illegal?' one pondered out loud. 'I'm pretty sure it's illegal,' he mused. 'It must hurt,' he decided. Every time a bare black foot made contact with the ball, members of this group exclaimed, 'Oooh... Ahhh...', wincing and laughing. Many other spectators — Nunga and whitefella — expressed admiration for the barefoot footy players, although I sensed that this appreciation in part involved marvelling at the exotic. To these Blues supporters, however, the bare feet were an affront, an irritating reminder of a way of being, designated beyond the bounds of acceptable difference. The Blues supporters assumed that it was their role to define and determine where these boundaries lay, or should lie, and to comment on their transgression. They fantasised about the law, which by definition renders the categories of acceptable/unacceptable absolute, and the consequences for their transgression severe.

The most extreme example of the local white elite's overtly hostile relationship with Anangu bodies came with the introduction, in March 2008, of regular foot patrols by two men and two dogs — a Rottweiler and a German Shepherd. The men were principals of a Port Lincoln-based security firm (West Coast Sentinel, April 3:1). The team, as I've flagged, is known as 'the K9 Unit' or colloquially as 'the dog unit' or 'the dogs'. Authorised as council officers, the K9 Unit were engaged to enforce local bylaws that prohibit loitering, littering, public drinking and camping in public places, but especially on the foreshore. While their introduction was precipitated by a crisis, and was intended to be short-term, the emergency quickly became the rule (Agamben 1998).⁴³ The dogs have become an ongoing feature of Ceduna life.

⁴² The Thevenard coach was a whitefella highly regarded by Aboriginal people in Ceduna. A mini-bus full of Yalata men travelled to and from Ceduna, a distance of 200 kilometres each way, twice a week throughout the football season.

⁴³ The 2007-2008 summer holiday period witnessed an influx of visitors from Yalata into Ceduna. An incident that occurred at a New Year's Eve party was, from the perspective of the local white elite, the proverbial last straw, after weeks of mounting tensions in high temperatures. At 3am on New Year's Day 2008 two police officers were called to a 'disturbance' in Thevenard. A group of 30 to 40 revellers abused and assaulted the officers, before one Aboriginal man helped the police back into their car. The officers were treated for minor injuries at the Ceduna hospital and 'returned to their duties' (West Coast Sentinel, January 10:1). The Mayor was quick to condemn the visitors with characteristic passion. He wrote, 'the standard of behaviour shown by some visitors to our town and some residents has been absolutely disgusting and unacceptable. We have seen tidy streets turned into pigsties by idiots upturning rubbish bins, bottles broken on footpaths, drunken parties disturbing innocent neighbours, vandalism of property and generally disgraceful actions from a small minority of people who do not deserve to be a part of our community... Your behaviour is not acceptable in a civilized community and will not be tolerated' (West Coast Sentinel, January 10:2). The council called for an injection of funds into local policing efforts and

Local by-laws are of course universal in their application and the Council expended enormous energy in trying to fashion a kind of ‘public secret’ so the dogs would be a matter of ‘what is generally known but cannot be stated’ (Taussig 1999:267). The attempt failed, as prominent public identities, local letter writers both in favour and against the patrols, and even sometimes the Mayor stated more-or-less explicitly that the K9 unit had been engaged to police, manage, contain, disrupt and ultimately expunge the presence of *specifically Anangu* public drinkers.

Throughout this period the Mayor constantly reiterated, ‘most of our Indigenous community are decent people’. The possessive construction of ‘our’ Indigenous community is telling, implying as it does that the Indigenous residents of Ceduna belong in some sense to the town’s white leaders, who cast themselves as empowered to bestow their approval of, or to censure, Aboriginal behaviour.

The introduction of the K9 unit represented a muscular attempt to reassert white authority over Ceduna’s ‘public’ spaces, and it quickly attracted criticism and interest from the national media, prominent Nunga spokespeople in town and other black and white locals. I will deal with the substance of these criticisms in turn.

Barry Morris explains that in the wake of the 1960s civil-rights movement and more particularly the early 1970s radical, urban-based land rights movement:

Metropolitan centres took up the role of the guardians of the rights of Aborigines and, often, the failure of rural communities to embrace this new diversity saw them characterised as redneck and racist. ... [These same rural communities] also became the subjects of the moral scrutiny of the metropolitan press. (Morris 2005:62)

The deployment of the K9 Unit attracted critical attention from the daily Adelaide tabloid newspaper, *The Advertiser* and the ABC’s national radio program AM.⁴⁴ Despite,

also announced a decision to further restrict people’s access to the foreshore public toilets (West Coast Sentinel, January 10:4) The state government quickly seconded a team of Starforce officers to Ceduna the following weekend (West Coast Sentinel, January 17:1,5) but the Council also decided to pursue what it saw as a more long-term solution. In their first four days on the job, the K9 unit issued fines totaling \$2000 for bylaws offences (West Coast Sentinel, April 3:1). The Mayor reiterated his tough stance, ‘If the court dismisses the fine — as sometimes happens — then we will send the bill to the attorney general’ (West Coast Sentinel, April 3:4)

⁴⁴ See Tory Shepherd, ‘Dog squad makes town a “police state”,’ *The Advertiser*, May 9, 2008, www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,23668149-421,00.html [Last accessed July 2, 2009] and Nance Haxton,

or perhaps because of the fact that this dynamic, as Morris notes, is well established, the Mayor was enraged by the *Advertiser* condemnation, calling it 'hysterical rubbish' and pledging never to speak to any *Advertiser* journalist ever again (West Coast Sentinel, May 15:2). In fact, it was this media attention from afar which galvanised Council resolve: 'United by what they consider unfair treatment in the *Advertiser* [councillors] voted unanimously to recommend the dog patrols continue' (West Coast Sentinel, May 15:1).

In this same article a white resident who lived on the street facing the foreshore was quoted as saying, 'they come out at night when the rest of us are going to bed and they disappear in the morning when the rest of us are getting up to go to work' (West Coast Sentinel, May 15:4). This image captures the sense of there existing a fundamental, irreconcilable problem of radical difference between those Anangu people irresponsibly drinking on the foreshore, and white property owners going about their legitimate daily duties. 'They' seem to have lives that neatly reverse normal and acceptable rhythms. The K9 unit offered a radical solution to this, in that they were charged with shifting this highly visible form of life from public view. This is not *necessarily* as sinister as it sounds. The men working for the security firm reiterated that they saw their role as an extension of existing social services in Ceduna, in that they often drove Anangu to town camp or called ambulances, taxis or the sobering up unit to a person's assistance — a technique Lea et al call (2012:157) 'dispersal to zones of rehabilitation'.

However, the K9 unit is patently not a social 'service' and much local discussion recognised that the council had effectively outsourced and privatised police work. Allegations and evidence of the dogs representing the savage face of local race relations soon emerged. In the *Advertiser* article Aboriginal spokesperson Mitch Dunnnett reported that people were 'being intimidated and bitten' by the two dogs. He continued, 'You see pictures of South Africa when the white people used to use dogs on the blacks up there. That's happening in Ceduna'.⁴⁵ In the next *Sentinel*, the Mayor denied the claim that a dog had bitten anyone, stating instead that a drunk man had run at one of the dogs, and the dog 'responded by grabbing the man by the arm and restraining him' (West Coast Sentinel, May 15:3). The dog was 'extraordinarily gentle,' claimed the Mayor (ibid.). Dunnnett pointed out that practice of sitting on the ground was in itself a totally

'Mixed reaction to dog patrols in Ceduna' (Transcript), broadcast July 3, 2008, www.abc.net.au/am/content/2008/s2292994.htm [Last accessed July 2, 2009].

⁴⁵ Tory Shepherd, 'Dog squad makes town a "police state",' *The Advertiser*, May 9, 2008, www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,23668149-421,00.html [Last accessed July 2, 2009].

unthreatening and distinctly Aboriginal bodily practice, as is the kicking of a football with bare feet. He stated:

Aboriginal people have been sitting down in groups for thousands of years. It's our way of communicating, talking about issues. ... Then, all of a sudden, the K9 unit pulls up.⁴⁶

Aunty Joan once saw the men from the K9 Unit kick the soles of the feet of a woman sleeping on the grass, in order to rouse her. I once saw the dogs locked in their cage, in the back of the vehicle, which was parked on the main street. They jumped crazily, crashing against the bars barking. An Anangu woman pointed them out, shouting, 'Look out, him been kill you!' Late one night I witnessed the dog unit questioning a Nunga man who had fallen down as he attempted to run away from them. The young man was cornered, scrambling part-of the way up so that he crouched on his haunches, with his back flattened against a wall, but pinned there by the men standing over him and the German Shepherd straining on its leash, with one of the officers using his considerable strength to pull the dog away from the man's face. Beads of sweat shone on his naked brown torso, and his chest heaved. Suddenly he broke away, sprinting off into the night. The officer lashed out at the gathered crowd, and told us we had 'no fucking idea' what was going on, and to 'stay out of it'. Observing the first scene, Aunty Joan felt utterly powerless to intervene, instead bearing witness to this sleeping woman's degradation. I felt similarly about the last scene.

Both Nungas and whitefellas have expressed relief that things had 'calmed down' in Ceduna since the K9 unit patrols had begun. I don't mean to be dismissive of how stressful encounters with drunk, out of control people might potentially be. Violence, it was said, had virtually disappeared off the streets. I frequently gave lifts to Anangu cadging rides to town camp and between Ceduna and Denial Bay, and my interactions with the drinkers in town were always light-hearted. But I certainly gave wide berth to the one public argument I witnessed, between a staggering man wielding scrap metal and an unequally unsteady woman.

Lea et al (2012) argue that the 'moving on' of Aboriginal people from Darwin and Alice Springs' commercial zones represents an expulsion of non-consuming, non-neo-liberal

⁴⁶ Tory Shepherd, 'Dog squad makes town a "police state"', *The Advertiser*, May 9, 2008, www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,23668149-421,00.html [Last accessed July 2, 2009].

subjects from spaces of capital accumulation. While this holds true of the situation in Ceduna, in terms of the pressing fear that tourists will recoil from these scenes, what is most notable about local discourse is the central role of sensory responses, such as disgust and complaints about noise. Most of the discussion about Anangu campers and public drinkers fixated on the rubbish strewn along the foreshore and the disgust that items such as discarded nappies engendered. Broken glass posed a danger to public safety, the complaints stressed, and many letter writers talked about the Anangu groups' rowdiness, foul language and them disrupting the sleep of those residents whose houses face the foreshore.

I conclude by reminding myself that I am as bound up in processes of differentiation as any of those people whose positions I analyse, forming my own political identity by way of contradistinction to the Mayor's position, and that of his supporters. My interpretation of this debate was challenged one night, not by the white elite's moral agenda, but by a Nunga friend, Max. At a BBQ at my house, myself, Shane and some other whitefella friends who were also new to Ceduna and who were involved with Nungas through work in the social service sector made light of local white paranoia. 'I got here and I'd heard about these "gangs",' said one friend, 'it's a couple of Nunga boys that are into hip-hop!' Finally, Max burst out from the other side of the fire, 'I don't know about that!' He emphasised that Ceduna *was* a violent place, about which we knew nothing. Here, he echoed the K9 Unit officer who told the gathered crowd we had 'no fucking idea' what was going on, although Max was not an aggressive person and he made his point softly, but stubbornly. Ceduna, he continued, was liable to explode as it had on New Year's Eve in 2008. He boasted that Ceduna was 'more violent than Wadeye'. Our seemingly sympathetic discourses diminished the power — as omnipresent, latent and real to Nungas as it was to 'paranoid' whitefellas — of Aboriginal action to unsettle white people's sense of safety, entitlement and belonging.

What is missing from the shocked reporting of outsiders is an understanding that this way of policing Aboriginal bodies should not be taken to represent an aberration, specific to this isolated island of racial intolerance and backward practices and reminiscent of apartheid South Africa. Adding another layer of policing to Ceduna's streets is co-extensive with a broader shift underway across 'advanced societies,' seeming to confirm Loic Wacquant's (2001) argument that neo-liberal states rely on police and penal

institutions to contain the disorders produced by neo-liberalism.⁴⁷ This is a tentative thesis: fieldwork among those groups of people actually affected by these innovations would be needed to develop a more nuanced view.

Conclusion: signs and the local semiotics of race

In tracking the complexities that underwrite the racial hierarchy, the meaning of racialised categories, and the contest over defining and shaping town life I became very interested in reading signs. Literally, perusing the supermarket's notice-board was a popular activity: here we posted our plea for a fridge; other signs advertised upcoming garage sales, featured cars and dirt-bikes for sale, and told of lost parrots and a wombat rescue service. Colourful posters featuring Microsoft Word clip art publicised upcoming events — motor-cross, music at the Sailing Club, outreach activities facilitated by Aboriginal organisations. These signs are part of a broader, complex sign-system, which, following Roland Barthes (1984), I came to read as a locally-specific semiotics of race.

The pub displays a sign outlining its strict dress code. The tourist centre displays one stating that it is against the rules to have bare feet in the centre, which incorporates the only public toilet on the main street. These two signs speak of, or to, certain styles of life and effectively bar Anangu access from 'public' facilities. 'Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflection,' says Barthes (1984:129). The myth in Ceduna is that of racial equality: the formal, institutional separation/segregation of black and white is, after all, a thing of the past, which everyone has rejected. However, this genre of signs ensure that certain 'public' settings remain whitefella-dominated, and thrusts Anangu into a different kind of public view, as they are forced to do in public what they are then derided for doing in public: piss, defecate etc. It is through everyday practices, the like of which I have examined in this chapter, that the racialised hierarchy is normalised.

Furthermore, it is through everyday practices that the indeterminate categories I have set out in this chapter are reinvested with meaning, and consolidated. Yet other kinds of signs are in extensive circulation in Ceduna. Both Nungas and Anangu wear tee-shirts,

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011) analysis of neo-liberal modes of governance may well prove more productive for analysing Australian conditions. Povinelli sketches less the carceral state, than a state that has abandoned and left to die those citizens who wish to persist as 'otherwise'.

stiff embroidered caps, billowing silky jackets and carry bags emblazoned with the positive, patronising behaviour-oriented messages that flood the Aboriginal world. Both Nunga organisational workers, whose job it is to 'deliver the programs' geared toward behaviour change, and those whose behaviour is targeted, mix and matched these messages eclectically. The visual excess produced by the sight of these circulating signs, bodies bearing a plethora of messages, seemed to me to confuse and neutralise each of their specific messages, which targeted drinking, family violence, and other irresponsible behaviours. The messages represent targeted interventions/exhortations aimed at reforming Aboriginal individuals, yet the wearing of these signs instead signalled belonging to a shared Aboriginal world, defined against whiteness.

And still more signs explicitly expressed Nunga and Anangu pride, in ways that were robust, joy-filled and defiant, and challenged the social structure. **YALATA WARRIORS** announced the custom-made stickers on the windscreen of a commodore I often saw driving around town. The 'sign-bearing, sign-wearing body is also a producer of signs' (Bourdieu 1984:192). At the gym one night a glistening brown muscle showed off an eye-catching, full-colour tattoo of the Aboriginal flag. Underneath the flag, lettering announced: '*Coz I'm free...*'

Chapter five. 'We know who we are.' The everyday effects of native title

Introduction

This chapter analyses Aunty Joan Mob's everyday experiences of native title, which largely occur at some distance from the legal process undertaken by claimants. In Ceduna, as elsewhere, processes associated with the preparation of a native title claim have disturbed Aboriginal people's self-understandings, occasioned profound interpersonal conflict and dramatically altered everyday social realities. Since the advent of the native title era many Ceduna Nungas have drawn on historical records to revive an identity as 'Wirangu,' an appellation which I have reason to believe had largely fallen into disuse by the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁸ The native title process has stimulated the resurgence of 'tribal' identities rooted in historical knowledge, a common occurrence across Australia. The people Aunty Joan Mob call the 'native title mob,' are viewed as drawing on these same historical sources in ways that have served to contradict, 'correct' and supersede Aunty Joan Mob's previously held terms of self-identification. Aunty Joan Mob see themselves as Nungas who also 'always knew' themselves to be Kokatha people, living out their lives on Kokatha country and speaking the Kokatha language. 'Native title,' it has been explained to me, 'attacks a person's identity and the very essence of who they are.' While the last chapter talked of the constitution of racialised identity categories, in this chapter I analyse the shifting constitution of Kokatha, Wirangu, Mirning and Pitjanjatjara identities.

Aunty Joan Mob's experience of native title has culminated in their outright rejection of the whole concept of native title. I stress that my analysis was initially forged out of Aunty Joan Mob's cogent critique of native title, and was then enhanced by a wider understanding of its effects on other people and in other places. From this, I develop a broader analysis of the neocolonial logic of the concept of native title.

⁴⁸ I will turn to Aunty Joan Mob's view of the Wirangu revival later in this chapter, for now I note that it is by no means uniform and largely at variance with my own.

This chapter lays the groundwork for the following chapter, in which I argue that Rockhole Recovery can be understood as a creative response to an ontological impasse, experienced as a result of native title. Rockhole Recovery is a tactical undertaking, which advances Aunty Joan Mob's 'struggle for self-definition'. This undertaking involves making assertions and acting with, and against, others. Furthermore, it entails articulating a vision of an extant way of living that expresses and celebrates certain specific values and rejects others.

In this chapter I set out the changed conditions and possibilities for Aboriginal self-understandings that emerged in Ceduna in the native title era, and which resulted in Aunty Joan Mob experiencing this ontological impasse. I believe that this impasse is best understood as a political crisis. I explain how this crisis came about, and how it has come to structure everyday life and Aboriginal social relations in Ceduna. This remains the case for Aunty Joan Mob members, even as their energies are devoted to creating a space to inhabit beyond or outside of native title.

I examine then what happens when some Aboriginal people explore and/or embrace new possibilities while others, like Aunty Joan Mob, resist the imposition of new definitional criteria and all that it entails. In short, I examine the effect the native title process has had on Aunty Joan Mob members' very sense of self, and on everyday social relations. In doing so I consider the fact that anthropologists are deeply implicated in processes that involve acting as experts on, and authoritatively defining the category of Aboriginality, in ways that sometimes jar painfully with the ways that Aboriginal people understand and define themselves. This discomfiting reality needs urgently to be reckoned with.

Historical background to native title in Ceduna

In this section I outline the history of native title as it specifically relates to Ceduna. This necessitates briefly surveying South Australian land rights legislation and also the history of a local initiative called 'homelands'. Both land rights legislation and homelands produced complex intra-Aboriginal tensions, which have intensified since the advent of the native title era in the mid-1990s.

South Australia was the first state to introduce land rights legislation with the passage of the Aboriginal Lands Trust Act in 1966 (Edwards 2008:79). Under this Act, the state government is able to transfer Crown Lands to the Trust, which is made up of people of Aboriginal descent, 'appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of Aboriginal Councils and Communities living on land owned by the Trust' (Peterson 1981:115). Initially it transferred unoccupied Aboriginal reserves that were the vestiges of the early colonial period. The Trust now holds freehold title to a number of Aboriginal Communities located on former Aboriginal reserves, leasing these to the relevant Aboriginal Council for 99 years (Bradshaw and Collett 1991:4). In 1975, 890 hectares of land was leased back to the Koonibba Community Council on a 99-year lease.⁴⁹

South Australia also has two specific Land Rights Acts, which in both cases granted inalienable freehold title over enormous stretches of desert: the Pitjanjatjara Land Rights Act (1981) and the Maralinga Tjaruta Land Rights Act (1984).⁵⁰ The passage of these acts sowed the seeds for new intra-Aboriginal tensions. Jane Jacobs (1983; 1988) persuasively argues that the Pitjanjatjara Land Rights Act, and the high profile campaign leading up to it, put pressure on other South Australian Aboriginal groups to cast their own land rights aspirations in the terms modelled by the Pitjanjatjara. Jacobs closely analyses the way Kokatha land rights aspirations were articulated in the 1980s. 'The process has involved Aboriginal groups deliberately selecting aspects of their cultural inheritance which they know have become acceptable to external agents as proof of their unique and special interest in land (Jacobs 1988:35-36).

I was exposed to expressions of tension along these lines. One Nunga in Ceduna complained to me that the Maralinga Tjaruta 'get recognition from the government ... the rest of us, we're invisible ... yet we're the people who were imposed upon [by the southern Pitjanjatjara/Maralinga Tjaruta people's movement south]. One man joked, 'If the Pitjanjatjara head any further south, they'll claim Antarctica.'

In Charters Towers, Sally Babidge (2004:205) was repeatedly told, 'We was all together, all one mob, before this land claim business.' This, Babidge argues (*ibid.*), is 'not just an

⁴⁹ As recorded in the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements database (ATNS), see <http://www.atns.net.au/agreement.asp?EntityID=1627> [Last accessed August 12, 2012].

⁵⁰ The Pitjanjatjara Land Rights Act handed back over 100,000 square kilometers and the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands Right Act over 75,000 square kilometers (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:82,87). Philip Toynce and Daniel Vachon (1984) provide a wonderfully vivid account of the campaign leading up to first act.

expression of nostalgia'. Instead, this reflection produced an assessment about the effects of native title, which is seen to deliberately fracture broader-based Aboriginal collectivities. Native title, says Babidge (ibid.) was seen as 'just another piece of legislation to make us Murrumbidgee fight amongst ourselves'. In Ceduna, the linguist Paul Monaghan notes (2012:49), 'it is common to hear laments such as, "before this native title everyone was just a Nyannga" [Nunga]'. This is true of my experience too and as Babidge suggests there is an element of nostalgia at work. I have, however, heard alternate accounts of the breakup of the Nunga identity into 'traditional' identities. Many of my interviewees say that this process has its origins in the local 'homelands movement' of the early- to mid-1990s, and was then intensified by people's involvement in the first wave of native title claims emanating from Ceduna throughout the late-1990s, a period during which 'tribal' identities were codified as research for native title claims was prepared by anthropologists.

The establishment of homelands in the early 1990s involved the purchase of local properties through the ATSIC Land Acquisition Fund.⁵¹ The local ATSIC office oversaw and engineered the purchase of local properties for incorporated bodies formed by the descendants of various sets of ancestors — usually, but not always, figures prominent around the turn of the nineteenth century.

The eponymous Yarilena homeland, to use one example, is home to the descendants of Yari and Lena Miller, who moved from Koonibba to Ceduna in 1942, where Yari Miller carted night dirt for the council (Brock 1993:105). The couple faced intense scrutiny, hostility and complaint from white residents but lived in town until the mid-1950s before moving to a reserve on the outskirts of Ceduna (Brock 1993:105-107). This former reserve is now the site of the homeland belonging to the couple's descendants (Wilson 2003:48). Homelands vary greatly in size, in terms of population and the amount of land owned: some host a settlement, services and even small businesses (see Monaghan 2012), and some run operational farms. Others are periodically occupied parcels of land, without much infrastructure.

⁵¹ ATSIC stands for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, which was established in 1989 and combined the administrative roles of the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and the representative and advocacy roles of previous bodies. John Howard's Coalition government abolished ATSIC in 2005 (Bradfield 2006:87-88).

I know of nine such homelands in the vicinity of Ceduna but have been unable to find any publicly available documentation relating to their establishment, justification and constitution. From an interview with a former ATSIC employee I gleaned that ATSIC intended them to provide an economic base for their residents, as well as representing a concerted attempt to break up the sociality of 'the Bronx,' the notorious housing trust area of Ceduna that lies inland of the gypsum train-line, beyond the reach of the sea breeze. Many housing trust houses were physically moved on the backs of trucks out to homelands, leaving the Bronx today dotted with overgrown vacant blocks.

Jo Jo, born in Ceduna in the early 1980s, was quite certain that the advent of homelands ushered in a period of unprecedented conflict:

Back when I was little, everyone basically lived in the housing trust area and just all got along great, didn't matter what family [or what] last name you were or anything, we just all lived together. Then they put homelands together, and put them all in their own little family groups and then it just started all this bickering.

She pointed out that many of these arguments centered, not just on inequitable resource allocation to the various family groupings as homelands were gradually established, but on people's decisions about what family group to orient themselves towards, in cases where they could claim a biological relationship with more than one antecedent. For Jo Jo, homeland groups remain the basis of social tensions. She was convinced that Nunga kids, who saw themselves as part of exclusive family-based groups, had banded together to target her young son at primary school. She told me, 'Kids are more closer to their own little cousins now coz they all sort of live together in little groups.' When I asked Jo Jo her views on the Wirangu/Kokatha distinction, which emerged in the native title era, she again foregrounded the distinctions that existed *within* the 'tribal' categories, based on 'little family groups':

Things didn't seem so tense back then, it seemed like all the family was sort of together, and now it's all kind of broken into different little groups within Kokatha, it's like all these different little family groups now, instead of just the one big group, and, yeah, everyone seems to be arguing, wherever you are [about] what sort of group you're in ... we're all bit of each other anyway now, we're all, you know, half this, half that. ... Because it's caused so much

friction it doesn't really bother me, I'll tell anyone that I'm Kokatha but, you know, that's what I am, but it doesn't really faze me.

Then, in the 1992 Mabo decision, the High Court found that native title still exists in Australia, overturning the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, or 'territory inhabited by a people who did not have a recognised social or political organisation' (Bartlett 1993:ix).⁵² In progressive quarters Mabo was celebrated, and is still commemorated, as a moral triumph, while farmers and the mining industry mounted vicious campaigns, hysterically proclaiming threats to suburban backyards (eg Morgan 1992).⁵³ The federal Labor government moved quickly to develop a legal framework for the realisation of native title.⁵⁴ Aboriginal leaders such as Marcia Langton, Noel Pearson and Mick Dodson negotiated the terms of the Native Title Act, while opposing interests sought to influence the legislation's drafting.⁵⁵ The 1993 Native Title Act was always a disappointment to those who hoped for legislation that would 'substantiate Mabo's promise' (Rowse

⁵² The High Court affirmed that prior to 1788, Indigenous peoples across Australia held title, in common, to their land under their own laws and customs (Bartlett 1993:x). Their native title was not extinguished by the mere assertion of sovereignty by the British Crown. However, the Crown had the right to extinguish it without compensation, and had in fact done so over much of the continent (Bartlett 1993:xx-xxii).

⁵³ Others still argue that the Mabo decision did little to rupture the status quo. Patrick Wolfe (1999) advances a comprehensive critique along these lines. For Wolfe the logic of native title is coextensive with the 'logic of elimination' that underpins settler-colonial societies. The Mabo decision and the Native Title Act constitutes an 'acknowledgment' of the 'binary relation of invasion' (Wolfe 1999:206), the relationship between the invaders and the invaded, which Wolfe takes as the structuring determinant of Australian race relations. Yet simultaneously, the act also 'sought to restrict the beneficiaries of this acknowledgment' (ibid.). This restriction was realised by 'limiting the category of native title beneficiaries to those who could meet certain criteria for *minvadedness*' (ibid.). This, according to Wolfe (1999:206-207), 'entailed a ratification — even a redoubling — of the history of oppression, since it provided that *the more you have lost, the less you stand to gain*'. I find Wolfe's account disappointingly reductive in its use of a totalising schema. Wolfe reinvests in the categories of non-Indigenous/Indigenous as an oppositional binary, foreclosing any possibility of an understanding of how these categories are co-created and *always have been*. Similarly, Katherine Biber (2004) provides a stimulating reading of native title in psychoanalytic terms. For Biber (2004:2), the Aboriginal Other's claim to native title is an obstacle to the Australian national fantasy of being at home in Australia. Native title law becomes the agent of fantasy-fulfillment. This is not achieved merely by erasing the obstacle, but because it is in *pursuing* the fantasy that 'we' (the national subject that Biber addresses) experience pleasure. Biber (2004:17) says, 'We experience additional pleasure when we realize that our pursuit is perpetual, as we will never fulfill our fantasy' (because Aboriginal claims on the nation-space are continually being made). Biber's conclusion (ibid.) is disturbing as she herself seems quick to declare Aboriginal dispossession as something already, and totally, realised, 'Our enjoyment derives from our continued pursuit of a fantasy we have already achieved.'

⁵⁴ Virginia Watson (2001:73-75) usefully summarises the divergent responses of the major political parties: then prime minister Paul Keating cast the Native Title Act as an 'historical turning point' and unique opportunity for reconciliation; then opposition leader John Howard, vigorous in his opposition to the act, argued that native title 'conferred "special rights" on Indigenous people which non-Indigenous Australians were unable to claim'.

⁵⁵ The passage of the Act and the political machinations surrounding it is the subject of the *4 Corners* program 'Judgement Day,' which was screened to commemorate 20 years since the Mabo decision. See <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/05/03/3494661.htm> [Last accessed January 26, 2013].

1993:249) mainly because it affirmed previously alienated land, that is, titles already conferred by the Crown.⁵⁶ Alienated land could not be claimed unless it had been conferred after the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act. The High Court's 1996 *Wik* decision, however, held that native title could coexist with pastoral leases (see Bachelard 1997:39-70). The possibilities for native title claims became reduced after the Howard government passed a series of amendments in 1998. And from the outset, Aboriginal activists such as Michael Mansell (1992) and Gary Foley (1997) advanced trenchant criticisms of native title, noting that it constituted the most inferior form of property title available under common law, comparing it with the inalienable freehold title available under the 1976 Northern Territory Land Rights Act.⁵⁷

Despite the earlier developments I have described, native title has emerged as a more radically disturbing force, partly for the reasons Povinelli (2002) has described. For Povinelli (2002:32-33) native title places an 'impossible demand' on Indigenous subjects, who are compelled to identify with a 'lost, indeterminable object,' that is forms of social organisation and traditional laws and customs that predate colonisation, and which must be sufficiently intact and still observed by native title claimants today in order to demonstrate continuity of connection.⁵⁸

The National Native Title Tribunal is the main tool for implementing native title. This body's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, providing claimants with assistance in the preparation of application; applying the 'registration test' to native title claimant applications, which determines whether or not the claim will proceed; and mediating

⁵⁶ Galarrwuy Yunupingu (1997:14) describes this 'key compromise' on the part of the Aboriginal negotiators as 'an historic gift to the Australian people and a profound statement of our commitment to reconciliation'.

⁵⁷ Grassroots land rights movements had, since the 1970s, also led to land rights legislation in other states such as New South Wales (see Norman 2009) and Queensland, and to a raft of specific land acts in all states, except Western Australia, which provided for the handing back of certain portions of land, but without provision for a mechanism to claim other lands. See Nicolas Peterson (1981) for a nation-wide summary.

⁵⁸ While many other anthropologists are critical of the limits of the Native Title Act and express sympathy for claimants' efforts to adhere to the criteria, they limit their focus to the workings of the Act. Povinelli's (2002) work represents a broader engagement with liberal multiculturalism as a contemporary ideological formation. The expressed desire of the state to make reparations and do 'good' conceals the limits of this desire, argues Povinelli. In the realm of native title, the conditions attached to the state's recognition come into view. For Povinelli, the liberal multicultural state both embraces 'authentic' cultural difference, which is seen to enrich and enhance the nation, but designates other forms of difference ('radical alterity') as repugnant and beyond the limits of recognition.

between parties to applications.⁵⁹ These enormously bureaucratic processes unfold over the course of years, which can stretch into decades. In Ceduna, the first native title claims for the region were lodged in 1995. At the time of writing, the amalgamated Far West Coast claim, into which all active claims in the region have now been absorbed, has still not been resolved.

The political crisis produced by native title

Over the course of this chapter I interpret Aunty Joan Mob members as experiencing, and responding to, a crisis about the nature of their own identities. This crisis has led to their rejection of the concept of native title on a number of grounds. I do not see this crisis as an existential crisis, whereby Aunty Joan Mob find themselves experiencing doubts about who or what it is they 'really' are — although this is an accusation levelled at them by other Aboriginal groupings they are in conflict with (Monaghan 2012:54) and a barbed charge they direct at those same others in turn. 'Our background is well known to us,' insists Aunty Vera. As Aunty Joan Mob members told me many times, 'We know who we are.'

I refer here to a *political crisis*, generated by an urgent imperative to respond to conditions that have proved profoundly destabilising, and by a felt desire to express and affirm their own identity as Kokatha people.

'Native title throughout the years has been a really shocking experience,' says Aunty Joan. 'First we had to choose one tribe, and we know that most of us come from two [Kokatha and Mirning].' Then, 'We were demanded to prove to the government our continual existence to the land for the past 200 years.' She continued, 'All these demands came on to us through the native title system and the government bullying to try and get the land from us.' Aunty Joan went on:

There is no native title and I don't care what they say. They asked us to prove our connection to the land for the last two hundred years and when I asked [a native title lawyer] to prove the government's connection to the land for the [past] two hundred years he nearly choked. He said, 'You can't do that.' I said, 'Why not? You're doing it to us.' You know, the unfairness of

⁵⁹ See the Tribunal's website, <http://www.nntt.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx> [Last accessed August 12, 2012].

the whole thing. And finally it got the better of us that they were not listening, they didn't care. ... Once we realised what native title was up to, we backed out of there. We told them then that we were not a part of their native title claim anymore, but they refused to take our names off their list and they keep ignoring it.

Aunty Joan points out that this is not the first time 'government' has 'dictated who they said I was'. Aunty Joan's generation keenly remember being categorised as 'half-caste'. As I have established, they spent their childhoods under the threat of being removed from Koonibba because of the state's definitional regime, which underpinned child removal and assimilation policies. Aunty Joan often retold an anecdote about first arriving at boarding school in Adelaide. When she told the school principal she was Aboriginal, he said 'I'll put you down as European.' 'You will not!' came her response. She continues to refuse to accept that her own identity be determined, distorted or set down by others.

Recognition emerges as a central analytical category within the native title literature (see especially Mantziaris and Martin 2000). As the philosopher Charles Taylor (in Taylor and Gutmann 1992:32) points out, the demand for recognition that characterises contemporary political struggles confirms the fundamentally dialogical nature of human life. That is, being recognised depends on being apprehended: it is based on a relationship. If subordinated/subaltern subjects are to be recognised by a gesture of the nation-state, then the crucial question pertains to the nature of the relationship. The question is this, 'On whose terms?' The answer, of course, is 'the state's'. While this is starkly apparent in relation to native title, it is not a new phenomenon, as I have demonstrated.

Native title claimant groups must constitute themselves and make themselves 'legible' by defining themselves in terms set out by the native title legislative framework (Dauth 2011:23). From Aunty Joan Mob's perspective, in Ceduna this process served only to *produce* gross distortions that then acquired a forceful reality as a newly emerged group of people named the Wirangu were 'recognised,' and their existence concretised, a move that carried a curious effect. Aunty Joan Mob see the Wirangu as a *creation* of the native title era. Yet in local discourse, the native title process is credited with *apprehending* the latent presence of Wirangu people and the Wirangu language on the West Coast, affording it due recognition and, in doing so, obscuring the conditions that underwrote its recent re-emergence. As this highly charged and very complex situation has evolved,

Aunty Joan Mob's self-understanding and terms of self-definition initially emerged as a major casualty of the whole process. However their determined response to the situation has seen an enhanced awareness and import attached to their specific identity as Kokatha people, with an ongoing relationship to country they understand as their own. Where other native title groups 'struggle for recognition' through the native title claims process (Macdonald 2002), Aunty Joan Mob struggle for self-definition *against* the native title claims process.

In an illuminating discussion, Simon Correy et al (2011) theorise the destabilising effects of involvement with the native title claims process. Correy et al report being:

struck by the powerful social effects of identifying, describing and maintaining these [intra-Aboriginal] differences and by the rapidity with which particular differences become ossified and transformed into enduring social distinctions. We have observed the alacrity with which the various claimant groups with which we have worked ... have reinscribed distinctions, generated by the native title process, between persons and the groups, locating these distinctions within a highly charged moral order. (Correy et al 2011:42)

In the case I describe, the Wirangu/Kokatha distinction, and the form it takes in the present, was certainly generated 'by the native title process'. The distinction and energies directed toward the maintenance and elaboration of this distinction have seen it transformed, over the course of a decade, into an 'enduring social distinction'. And, as I will elaborate shortly, the Wirangu are morally ascendant in Ceduna, because they fulfill criteria specified under the Act.

Correy et al (2011:42-43) use the Freudian notion of 'the narcissism of minor difference' to account for the ways in which a group identity may be constituted by focusing on minor differences with significant social others with which there is an overwhelming sense of similarity and a concomitant need to differentiate and delimit oneself clearly. The pressure to produce and then sustain clearly defined claimant groups creates an environment 'in which small differences between people and groups become suffused with very powerful emotions' (Correy et al 2011:44). It is worth noting the irony of the fact that after the state succeeded in seeking out and generating 'iconic differences' between Ceduna's Indigenous groups, and after these groups were sufficiently differentiated into 'clearly bounded units' (Correy et al 2011:50), then these distinct

groups joined together in an amalgamated native title claim, which remains to be resolved. Aunty Joan Mob, however, are not a part of the amalgamated claim, and it is probably safe to say that their faith in native title will never be restored.

Aunty Joan Mob have, in effect, been told they are mistaken about the nature of their own existence. I have come to see that this experience amounts to a visitation of profound symbolic violence, about which the native title literature has very little to say. More precisely, I see this as an instance of ontological violence: Aunty Joan Mob have been told they are not who they understand themselves to be. Precisely how has this situation come about?

'What about Tindale?' The contestation of the historical record

In 2003 Peter Sutton noted that the native title era has given rise to several cases:

where physical and cultural occupation of lands whose former occupants had shifted elsewhere, and/or became locally depleted, have turned into controversial bases for legal claims by members of the historically incoming groups. (Sutton 2003:5)

At the time of writing, Sutton referenced a Kokatha claim from Ceduna as an example of this more widely spread phenomena. However, he went on, 'the persistence of records plays a powerful role in preventing the ready extinguishment of consciousness of how things were before' (Sutton 2003:6). As I have established, since the advent of the native title era many Ceduna Nungas have drawn on historical records to revive an identity as 'Wirangu,' and remind Kokatha people 'of how things were before'. Wirangu people understand themselves as a coastal people, whose country stretches inland as far north as Ooldea and Tarcoola (Monaghan 2012:48). How then has this reemergence of the Wirangu come about?

Linguist Paul Monaghan has conducted research on the Far West Coast over the last decade, working closely with a number of senior community members, mostly women, on Wirangu language and cultural revitalisation projects. The reconstructed Wirangu language, says Monaghan (2012:49-50), 'is based on the colonial records of missionaries, police officers, anthropologists, linguists and the memories of a small group of senior women'. A key text used in this process is a wordlist Daisy Bates recorded, in writing, at

Yuria rockhole, about 100 kilometers west of Ceduna (Monaghan 2010:240). At Yuria, Bates recorded Minjia, or Lucy Washington, the grandmother of the two elderly sisters who are the last remaining fluent speakers of Wirangu (see Ramp 2006). I visited Yuria with Aunty Joan Mob on the September 2008 rockhole trip, and the occasion brought home to me its contested significance to both Wirangu and Kokatha-identifying peoples.⁶⁰

I wish to set aside the *content* of these historical records for now. I am arguing that this *process*, by which the accounts of early observers such as missionaries, anthropologists and Daisy Bates are privileged as authoritative sources on the subject of contemporary identities has embittered the people I know. Accepting that these sources can legitimise contemporary identity formations undermines the authority and explanatory power of local sources, such as the understandings that ‘the old people passed on’ and the things that people say they ‘always knew’. Babidge (2004:200) notes that anthropologists who act as experts for native title claimants are sometimes alert to this dynamic; a land council anthropologist told her, ‘it seems wrong to be standing out the front of a meeting telling [Aboriginal] people about their history’. My point is that some Aboriginal people are, themselves, highly attuned to the neocolonial implications of such a dynamic and express cynicism about the fact that their own self-understandings are accorded secondary status by native title related processes, while those things that can be verified through archival research are accorded primacy.

This double move, on the part of native title law, is underappreciated in the native title literature. The problem reliance on the early sources poses for anthropologists has certainly been considered (Palmer 2010). But what kind of problems does the use of early sources pose for contemporary, politicised Aboriginal subjects? The very moment native title ‘recognises,’ it simultaneously undermines, recognising ultimately that a greater

⁶⁰ In 1938, Bates (1966:177) wrote mournfully of Yuria Gabbi (water), saying ‘the *walja*—eagle-hawk—have now entire possession of Yuria Gabbi, for its owners and their relations have long since gone to the “spirit of Yuria Gabbi.” Near the granite [outcrop] is an old dead tree, shaped like a rough cross, and upon its branches a *walja* is always to be seen sitting in the early morning. ... The rabbit has come to Yuria, and dug burrows close by the water, and three of these burrows are near the dead sandalwood so *walja* waxes fat and lazy. And only the cutting flints are there to tell of the old-time residents or those who passed.’ Bates, who believed Aboriginal people would not survive the onslaught of modernity, could not have imagined the ways in which sites such as Yuria have today been repossessed as rightfully belonging, and of spiritual importance, to contemporary Aboriginal peoples.

authority, veracity and truth-effect inheres in the colonial record than in contemporary Aboriginal people's self-understandings.

When I first mentioned to Aunty Joan that I would like to use my 'research skills' to contribute to some kind of grassroots project entirely separate from my thesis, she asked me uncertainly, 'What about Tindale? It would be really good if someone could do something about Tindale.' Ethnologist Norman Tindale's 1974 map of tribal boundaries was resented, not just for getting it 'wrong' (as Aunty Joan Mob perceived it), but for the aura of authority it had seemed to acquire over the past 15 to 20 years. The lines on Tindale's maps had acquired a troubling fixity, effectively cutting Kokatha people off from what they understood as their country, and leaving them stranded on the map just north of places they knew and cared about. I was at loss as to what to 'do' about Tindale and instead collaborated on a book documenting Aunty Joan Mob's bushfood knowledge (see chapter seven).

Tindale was the ethnologist and curator of anthropology at the South Australian Museum from 1928 to 1965 (Gara 1995:135). With American physical anthropologist J. B. Birdsell, and at the request of the South Australian government, Tindale undertook 'what has been called the greatest systematic genealogical survey conducted on any indigenous population anywhere in the world' (Wilson 2003:13). This genealogical information, collected between 1938 and the 1960s, together with photos, have been used for purposes radically counter-posed to the purpose for which they were collected. Tindale and Birdsell's survey, underwritten by government interest in the 'half-caste problem':

was hailed at the time as a major population genetics study on the effects of miscegenation ... Now, over 50 years later, this information is being used in a very different and innovative way to assist people trace their family trees and establish their Aboriginal identity. (Wilson 2003:13-14)⁶¹

Neva Wilson, then an employee by the South Australian Museum's Family History Project, recounts travelling to the West Coast in 1992 and 1993 to inform people about the existence of the Tindale material, and seek permission for the publication of selected genealogies:

⁶¹ Ian Keen (1999) describes a similar scenario, in East Gippsland, Victoria.

The people were very responsive to the many questions I asked and were very excited and thrilled by the recordings of their family trees and photographs that were done so many years ago by Tindale and Birdsell; it gave them a sense of continuity. (Wilson 2003:17)

The situation however is more complex than this narrative of reclamation makes out.⁶² Tindale's findings have been taken to undermine, rather than fill out, some Aboriginal people's understanding of their Aboriginal identity. Furthermore, Tindale's *map* is a different matter entirely from the genealogies, and has been widely critiqued for the firm boundaries it created, and the essentially monolingual model of social organisation it deployed (Dauth 2011:31; Monaghan 2012:52)⁶³

Robert Paine (1996:61), writing about the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en land claim case in Canada, points out that the Canadian state demanded, in this case, 'that a claim to Aboriginality be demonstrated historically, from before contact. That is to say, before there were written records'. And yet, Paine notes (*ibid.*), 'the State —as part of its own social construction— insists that historical truth is best found *in* the written'. Herein lies my own dilemma: I find myself always tempted by a turn to the written, in order to test these many claims and counter-claims, believing, as part of my own social-constructedness, that the historical truth is best found in the written. But to do so would be to *enact what it is I seek to critique*: the native title legal regime's demand that the substance of people's contemporary identities be brought in line with written and recorded sources. The question must, instead, be reframed, so as to be an inquiry into the effects of the native title process rather than an inquiry that accepts, implicitly, the logic of native title.

And yet it is not possible to tell the story of the reemergence of the Wirangu without providing some historical background in this chapter. The historical material is by no means conclusive, and I use it here to help explain how this situation *came about*. I have not availed myself of archival material, initiating this process would, I believe, amount to an expression of faith in the authority of these accounts.

⁶² More recently, in 2012, the State Library of Queensland mounted a poignant exhibition called 'Transforming Tindale,' which included large-scale sketches by artist Vernon Ah Kee, based on photographs of his family members. See the Library's website, <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/calendar/general/exhibitions/transforming-tindale> [Last accessed December 21, 2012].

⁶³ In Ceduna, tribal names, territory and language are understood to always directly correspond, and neatly overlap, with each other.

The treachery, as Aunty Joan Mob portray it, of those who have more recently begun to identify as Wirangu, was always illustrated to me by way of the following example. In 1974, Ceduna Nungas established an organisation known as the Far West Aboriginal Progress Association or FWAPA (Faull 1988:336). The organisation channelled state and federal government funds, made available throughout the recognition era, for the provision of Aboriginal housing, health and employment services. FWAPA also organised social events, such as dances, a festival and a choir, for the Aboriginal community who, after the government takeover of Koonibba Mission in 1963, were increasingly living 'in town'. FWAPA's newsletter was called *Kukatja Wangka*. Kukatja here is a version of Kokatha; the newsletter, I was told, meant 'the Kokatha talking'.

Several people who are prominent Wirangu-identifying identities in Ceduna today were heavily associated with FWAPA and, it is alleged, at that point of time *never* asserted a distinct identity or raised any objection to the whole-of-community's aspirations being represented under the banner of *Kukatja Wangka*. This fact is consistently wielded to underline the claim that the reassertion of a distinct identity as Wirangu is both recent and opportunistic.

Here Jane Jacobs' work again provides a crucial insight. In the early 1980s, Jacobs worked with Kokatha people living in Port Augusta. Discussing the way the Port Augusta Kokatha community related to the other major population centre of Kokatha people, in Ceduna, Jacobs notes (1983:359-360), 'The West Coast people also identify themselves as Kokatha.' I have been unsuccessful in my attempts to locate copies of *Kukatja Wangka*. But Jacobs quotes from the FWAPA newsletter to support the point above. Jacobs (1983:360) calls the following a 'public statement of identity'. I reproduce the original reference and citation, as they appear in Jacobs' thesis, in full:

World renown[ed] linguist Professor John Platt, who has done many years research into the languages of this general area, agrees that while there were several groups of population which traditionally lived in the area (for example the coastal Wirungu [sic] group), the group from whom most of our members are descendants are the Kuktja [Kokatha] group who mainly occupied the lower fringes of the Western Desert (Ooldea and Westward) and who were subsequently dispersed into other areas (Koonibba, Yalata). (*Kukatja Wangka*, Official Newsletter of the Far West Aboriginal Progress Association, vol. 1, no. 2, Feb 1981.) (ibid.)

Aboriginal people in Ceduna might say, on the one hand, that they were previously ‘all Nungas,’ before the advent of the native title era. However the quote above suggests that by the early 1980s there also existed a more specific consciousness that Koonibba was the site, primarily but not exclusively, of a Kokatha regeneration. Indeed, this is something that people consistently represented to me as something they knew while growing up on Koonibba — something they were taught by ‘the old people’. In the newsletter Platt, an expert and outsider, is invoked to lend weight to these identity claims.

I have never had any member of Aunty Joan Mob counter the authoritative opinion of one scholar or observer by providing an alternative expert citation from another. My firm view is that it is the significance and centrality of Aboriginal *self-accounts* that Aunty Joan Mob insist upon. They regard it as unproblematic that Nungas on the Far West Coast in the 1980s were largely, but not exclusively, descended from Kokatha antecedents (the newsletter says *most* of our members). This was a social fact but did not grant Kokathanness any special quality as against the qualities of Nungas who were descended from non-Kokatha peoples. As Monaghan summarises (2012:49), ‘There is some evidence to suggest Gugada [(Kokatha)] was the dominant tribal term operating in the wider Ceduna region in the 1950s, the time in which the older generation was growing up.’ This was the generation that went on to assume organisational roles in the nascent recognition era, and who were involved in the publication of *Kukutja Wangka*.

Some historical accounts suggest Kokatha descendents greatly outnumbered Wirangu descendents well before the 1950s. Brock, citing the diary of Koonibba’s first pastor, Wiebusch, says that by the late nineteenth century the Wirangu and Kokatha were holding joint ceremonies on ‘the west coast, in the Gawler Ranges, and to the north’ (1993:63). Brock continues, ‘This suggests that the Wirangu under pressure had adapted their cultural and ceremonial life to that of the Kokatha’ (ibid.). While this observation renders the Kokatha ascendant, Wiebusch, says Brock (1993:63-64), ‘ascertained that there were three or four languages spoken by visitors to the mission, but he identified Wirangu as the primary one and attempted to learn it’. However, Brock (1993:64) follows this detail with the following one: ‘By the 1920s Kokatha had become the predominant Aboriginal language; the missionary at that time considered Wirangu almost extinct.’ It seems Brock understands that Pastor Hoff, who arrived in 1920 and left in 1930, spoke Kokatha. However, Eckermann said that:

Pastor Hoff had abilities that made him a good missionary. This period [the 1920s] was probably the best in Koonibba's history in regard to the use of the Wirangu [sic] language. Both Pastor Hoff and his assistant, Pastor Juers, spoke the language fluently (Eckermann 2010:147)

Nearly half a century later, in 1966 and 1967, John Platt recorded Gugada (Kokatha) speakers on the West Coast. Platt also made some recordings of Wirangu speakers, noting, 'The dialect is now almost extinct in that very few speakers remain and these are mostly so scattered that they have little opportunity for communication in Wirangu' (Platt 1970:63). In 1970, at La Perouse, Aboriginal activists and their supporters gathered to mark the obliteration of Aboriginal language groups and people as part of the destruction wrought by colonisation. 'Wirangu' was mourned as one of those languages thought to be utterly lost (Capell 1971:103).

For the sake of argument, I take up Eckermann's perspective on Hoff's effective use of Wirangu at Koonibba in the 1920s, as against Brock's. And I know that Aunty Joan's generation grew up on Koonibba in the 1950s, and say they had 'never heard of Wirangu,' confirming Monaghan's point that Kokatha was 'the dominant tribal term operating in the wider Ceduna region in the 1950s'.

What happened between the 1920s and 1950s? Brock identifies the major population shifts occurring in northwestern South Australia in the first half of the twentieth century:

[T]here was a movement south to Ooldea and the transcontinental railway line from 1917 to the 1940s; Ngaanyatjara speakers in the late 1920s moved from the Warburton Ranges and the Gibson Desert in Western Australia to Laverton, Mount Margaret, Kalgoorlie and Wiluna; by 1921 Antikirnya were moving east from Granite Downs to the Oodnadatta area, and Yunkunytjatjara from the Everards were also moving east; and into the area they previously occupied came the Pitjantjatjara from the Mann and Tonkinson Ranges. (Brock 1995:217)

In terms of the specific, empirical detail, it is the first phase of population movement that concerns me: this detail explicates the general point that 'during the twentieth century people from the north, who used Ooldea as a staging post, moved south' (Brock 1993:64). This in turn impacted the Kokatha, who previously predominated at Ooldea, but who were 'displaced by Antikarinya and later Pitjanjatjara' (ibid.). And so Koonibba,

rather than Ooldea, became the central locality at which the West Coast Kokatha congregated.

I have included Brock's full passage here, however, as it brings to light the fact that 'non-Aboriginal intrusion had indirect as well as direct impacts on Aboriginal people' (Brock 1995:217). One of the major impacts of colonisation was to alter the territorial associations of various 'tribal' groups. Aboriginal people in the northwest of South Australia were moving even *before* many of them had encountered white people, sometimes because of the effects of white settlement experienced elsewhere, as pastoralists usurped hunting grounds, forcing Aboriginal people to share smaller areas with neighbouring groups. Aboriginal people moved for reasons of ceremony and because of droughts, but also out of areas where food was becoming scarcer because of pastoralism, and for reasons of curiosity, towards European population centres and novel attractions, such as the Trans-Australian railway line.

And so I too want to stress that there is evidence to suggest that *at the time of first contact*, the coastal groups were *already* under pressure from Kokatha groups moving out of the western desert. For his part, Tindale surmised:

At the time of first white settlement [of South Australia] in 1836, the coastal tribes of the Eyre Peninsular were on the defensive against people moving south from the Lake Eyre region and southeast from the Western Desert, the most insistent being the Pangkala and the Kokata [Kokatha]. (Tindale 1974:135)

Tindale suggests that this pressure was to do with the relative abundance of food on the coast, compared to the semi-arid inland. Significantly Tindale (1974:136-137) speculates that, 'Wirangu is an old language and its users may have moved west earlier from the Flinders ranges.'

Patrick Wolfe (1999:207) formulates that 'to fall within native-title criteria, it is necessary to fall outside history'. This misrepresents the situation somewhat. As Arjun Appadurai has suggested 'natives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow *incarcerated*, or confined in those places' (1988:37 emphasis in original; see also Malkki 1992). Furthermore, the example of the Kokatha/Wirangu suggests instead that Aboriginal people are also held incarcerated within, or held captive to, a particular moment in time. That moment — the moment of

first contact — is firmly located *within* colonial history, rather than outside history. This moment in time is arrested, notwithstanding the fact that this moment is one moment amongst a bigger moment in flux. Tindale's speculation about the Wirangu, then, becomes highly suggestive. Aboriginal groups are recognised as the traditional owners of an area they were present in at a particular point in time.

Aunty Joan Mob rail against 'the unfairness of the whole thing'; they rightly perceive that native title recognises and valorises the authority of the colonising order rather than that of the other. This frozen moment in time is the moment the other is apprehended by the coloniser. That is, the native title process seeks to substantiate Aboriginal people's claim to know something of the substance of who it is they are, by demanding that their own self-accounts are confirmed by, and are consistent with, outsiders' accounts of that frozen moment.

Wirangu-identifying people do not, to my knowledge, dispute the fact that the Kokatha tribal identity and language had achieved dominance by the mid-twentieth century. In fact, it has been suggested that the reemerging Wirangu have suffered under a lifetime of being dominated and isolated by the usurping Kokatha. A documentary about the last two remaining fluent speakers of Wirangu dramatises this claim in its promotional material. The film's synopsis states: 'No one speaks to them in Wirrangul [sic] anymore. Everyone speaks the dominant language of Pitjanjatjara and Gokatha [sic]. To speak the language, they can only talk to one and other [sic]' (Ramp 2006).

But what of Kokatha-identifying people? In effect those Nungas who, like Aunty Joan Mob, self-identify as Kokatha and who have grown up and lived lives on or around Koonibba mission/community, and/or in Ceduna have, in the native title era, been cast as part of an 'historically incoming group,' to use Sutton's (2003:5) seemingly innocuous phrase, as descendents of 'Western Desert migrants,' as Monaghan (2012:49) would have it, or to put it more bluntly, as interlopers. Through their experience of the native title process, Kokatha people are rendered, by this new designation, as living in country that they do not rightfully belong to, or at least do not belong to 'traditional way,' as it is said in Ceduna. The basis of their relationship, and therefore the substance of this relationship, to the country in which they were born and brought up, country that they have intimate knowledge of, and a strong attachment to, and in which they have lived out their whole lives, are thus undermined. This has of course happened in other places, but contestation of the process and its effects are seldom heard in the public domain.

Aunty Joan Mob members exhibit a range of responses to the phenomena of 'the Wirangu'. Some members maintain that the Wirangu identity and language has no basis in any kind of historic or contemporary reality whatsoever. They dismiss the sources from which Wirangu identity and language have been reconstructed, and see them as lacking all credibility and truth-value. Others are more accepting of the legitimacy of the Wirangu as a distinct group, and presumably accept the veracity of these sources. But they do not accept that Wirangu descendants should be seen as the rightful 'traditional owners' over the coastal region, the site of Ceduna and Koonibba mission. This is seen as an opportunistic, greedy and unfair repositioning on the part of some local Aboriginal people, who have sneakily outmaneuvered other local Aboriginal people with whom they share a history. Many assert that the Wirangu language has been 'reconstructed' by plundering from Kokatha: Aunty Joan Mob members allege that Wirangu people are 'stealing' from Kokatha in order to bolster their own claims to distinctiveness, credibility and an intact language, faced with evidence that Kokatha enjoys greater strength today than Wirangu. Others suggest that the Wirangu were always a minor entity, dwarfed, numerically, culturally and linguistically, in pre-contact times by the Kokatha, a fierce 'tribe' of meat-eating warriors. ('Guga' means meat, from here: Gugada/Kokatha.) It is seen as a cruel irony that the Wirangu today could assume superior moral/social status.

When I asked Jamie what he made of the Wirangu, he seemed vague, but saw the Wirangu identity as a recent phenomenon. 'All I know is the Wirangu ... they only just come in not very long ago. There's Wirangu and there's Mirning and all that stuff, just because of the native title.' Native title had encouraged distinctions that then got in the way of established social relationships. Jamie continued:

Ages ago we can just walk up there to [a homeland associated with Wirangu people] and just sit down and have a drink, fire going, talk about the old days. Now you go out there and you start a big fight if you even say 'native title'.

I knew however that Jamie was still welcomed at this particular homeland, even while most members of Aunty Joan Mob regarded it as a kind of enemy territory and refused to go there. His generally vague answers to my questions reflected an attitude of disengagement with native title, which in turn meant that it was possible to maintain relationships outside of the native title conflict:

[W]hen I go there I just go and see my uncles down there, I don't worry about anyone else. And we just sit down, have music going, fire going. Just sit down, talk about old days, you know. They talk about hunting tomorrow or the next day, and nothing about native title. Nothing.

At one stage Jamie did attend a native title meeting but quickly walked away from the process after this experience. He told me he sat 'on the Kokatha side' (he is related to Aunty Joan through his maternal grandmother, and was 'grown up' by a senior Kokatha-identifying community member). He was shocked to realise, 'The Wirangu didn't even want to talk to me.' Furthermore, someone from Yalata approached him to remind him of his genealogical links to the Pitjanjatjara: 'They said, "Oooh, you should be on this side."' He told me, 'Well I'm not going to spilt myself into two pieces, and go sit there on my [paternal] grandma's side as well!'

In short, while some Aunty Joan members fall silent and stiff at even the mention of the word 'Wirangu,' becoming near paralysed with anger, others accept it has a reality, while still others cock an eyebrow and quickly snort, 'so-called'.

The everyday effects of native title

Aunty Joan slid a butter knife along the inner edge of an A4-sized envelope addressed to her, pulling out a copy of 'Aboriginal Way,' the publication of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement's Native Title Unit. This edition advertised a 'fancy' dinner in Adelaide celebrating 15 years of native title: ticket prices included dinner and entertainment. 'Well if they want entertainment, I'll give them entertainment for free!' promised Aunty Joan, in a darkly humorous and daring mood, tossing the newsletter to one side.

Another task of this chapter is to show how this native title disputation has become a part of everyday lives. I hope to convey something of the emotional tenor of local life, rent as it is with expressions of fury, bitterness, cynicism, suspicion and betrayal. These affective dimensions of native title are of course inextricable from all I have outlined above: Aunty Joan Mob's experience of native title as an alien thing, imposed on them by the state, and something that has *resulted in their dispossession*, as they are told that they are apparently not the rightful owners of country they have always regarded as their own.

In seeking to understand the everyday effects of native title I follow Benjamin Smith and Frances Morphy's (2007a) lead, treating native title as a social phenomenon, which has become a part of everyday life and local social relations — in short, as something that has 'social effects'.⁶⁴ Native title has come to have a presence in daily life and social interactions in Ceduna. In my experience, native title is not just a 'thing' but also an 'it,' talked about as if it has a persona and is a type of social actor. Aunty Joan told me 'our group pulled out of native title, although native title still insists that we're part of their process'. And, she began another statement ominously by declaring, 'Now I don't care who the government think they are, or who native title think they are ...'

The contributors to Smith and Morphy's collection, however, largely retained as their focus the legal processes entailed by claimants' involvement in specific native title claims, while also showing how these issues have 'spilled over into everyday talk' (Glaskin 2007:68). In a similar vein, Babidge (2010:165-192) also deals with native title as an everyday experience, providing a detailed ethnographic account of the structure and atmosphere of the many meetings involved in the preparation of native title claims. I argue here for work that goes further than seeing that native title 'spills over'. Few contemporary ethnographers of Aboriginal scenes have provided accounts of the way things-to-do-with-native title saturate everyday life, and the ways in which native title has a presence in settings and scenarios quite *outside* of processes entailed by native title claims. Native title reshapes social relations, in turning reshaping the quotidian, reaching into kitchens and conversations and affecting aspects of life *seemingly unrelated* to the vicissitudes of the drawn-out claim process.

In Ceduna, 'native title' might be given as an explanation for avoiding eye contact with someone in the supermarket aisle, or leaving an event abruptly after recognising that a 4WD belonging to 'Wirangu mob' is slowing down, indicating and pulling in to the same event. Native title is cited as the reason behind dirty fist-fights out the back of the pub, and other threats — explicit, rumoured and imputed — of violence. 'Native title' is the reason a Nunga friend, around at my house for a game of cards, jokingly threatened over

⁶⁴ There is a vast body of literature dedicated to native title, much of it written by native title anthropologists for the purpose of assisting other native title anthropologists with their practice (eg Fingleton and Finlayson 1995; Sutton 2003). Because I write about the local effects of a long-lasting claim, and approach the question from the perspective of a group who have long since withdrawn from the claims process, much of this literature is of limited use. The contributors to Smith and Morphy's collection provide by far the most relevant literature for my purposes.

the course of the evening to redraw the boundaries of our map of 'Aboriginal Australia,' which was blue-tacked to the kitchen wall, so as to extend Kokatha territory all the way to the coast.⁶⁵

'Aboriginal people are split,' says Aunty Joan of the impact of the native title process. 'It's sister against sister on these issues.' At another time, she elaborated:

The conflict of, between native title, the people that want native title, that want mining, and the people that don't — well, they're not even talking to each other. ... It's really sad. Once upon a time I could walk down the street and say, 'Hey brother!' And now I don't say anything, he doesn't say anything. And the same with the sisters, you know, 'Hey sister!' None of that's there anymore; it's gone.

She quickly clarified, 'It's still there, but as far as native title mob, people that want native title, they've lost it. The ones that are on the outside still got it.' The conflict was certainly represented to me as all-encompassing in interviews and conversations, but I found that social practices were more fluid, and relationships more contingent on specific circumstances, that what these absolute summaries imply. Aboriginal people on either side of the 'split' did sometimes still associate, young kids were at school together and teenagers went to the same parties. There were however some implacable enemies, who crossed the street rather than pass each other by.

As should now be clear, local Aboriginal identities have been reformulated in the native title era. The consequences of this are omnipresent in everyday life: those people now recognised as Wirangu traditional owners have gained local prestige, are vested with a kind of moral authority and receive an ongoing level of recognition as traditional owners of the coast, and the land on which Ceduna is situated. The status of Kokatha, as a category of existence, has been adjusted and, overall, diminished since the mid-1990s. People who do not identify as Wirangu and instead retain identities as Kokatha, for example, have not necessarily *lost* prestige as individuals, but they resent the rise of locally prominent Wirangu figures, perceiving that their recognition and valorisation occurs at their own expense. This statement speaks to the experience and resentment of Aunty Joan Mob, but is not limited to them.

⁶⁵ This map is a copy of the Aboriginal Australia wall map, created by David Horton (2000) and based on Tindale's map.

More concretely, the Wirangu have attracted federal government funding through the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program for the purpose of documenting and reviving their language, which is regarded as ‘critically endangered’ (Monaghan 2012:50-55). Senior Wirangu figures have also been contracted to run ‘cultural awareness’ training (Monaghan 2012:48) for Iluka Resources, the company mining Zircon at Jacinth-Ambrosia. The Wirangu are acknowledged as ‘traditional owners’ by well-meaning local entities such as conservation groups (see Letch 2010:11-15) as well as local bureaucracies and institutions that program ‘Welcome to Country’ ritual acts as part of their public events (see Everett 2009; Kowal 2010b). The conflict I describe is well known and event organisers are usually cognisant of its rough outline, carefully acknowledging the presence of Wirangu, Kokatha and Pitjanjatjara people in Ceduna today. But the association of the coast, and the site of Ceduna with the Wirangu, however understated, is noticed and resented by the people I know.

‘Native title’ then seems both everywhere and nowhere in my fieldnotes and transcripts. It took me some time to appreciate the import of local divisions engendered by native title processes, and still longer to grasp their relevance to Rockhole Recovery. And when I did at last begin to ask questions to this effect I was not supplied with answers made sensible via narrative. The ‘force of feelings’ (Rosaldo 1993) consistently diverted any attempts of mine to hear narrative-based accounts of what has happened ‘since native title came in’. Bourdieu argues (2009:105-106) that the seemingly innocent question of ‘What comes next?’ is designed to elicit an ordered sequence of events; the question however, ‘imposes an attitude to temporality opposite of the attitude involved practically in the ordinary use of temporal terms’. Bourdieu (2009:109) criticised researchers for this technique which, among others, represents an attempt to ‘force coherence’ on to incoherent social phenomena, experience and forms.

My own attempts to ‘force coherence’ onto the phenomena of native title failed miserably. Conversations out bush and round the kitchen table all seemed to veer and break-off, punctuated out bush by kids nagging, babies crying, and cups of tea being made, and at the farm by the phone ringing, cars pulling up, and people heading out for to the verandah for *buyu* (a cigarette). One evening I tried to recall and list the things that a frenetic conversation out at the farm that afternoon had zig-zagged between. Uncle Gary had sat at one end of the kitchen table, Rhiannon and myself around the table, and Aunty Joan moved restlessly between dinner preparations, the sink, the stove and the

phone in the hallway. We talked of: a \$700 phone bill recently received by a family member, and the unsympathetic response from the phone company when they pleaded they had kids to feed, and couldn't pay the bill ('tough shit' said the phone company); plans to contact the *Sentinel* with an expose about this phone company's unfeeling and unjust operations; preparations for an upcoming birthday and the ordering of cakes; passionate advice offered to me about giving Ned a wombat bone to cut his teeth on (a niece who cut her teeth on wombat bone 'has the best teeth in the family'); an overview of the names certain family members had been given at birth but don't use, going by nicknames or middle names instead; and ideas for fundraising for an upcoming Rockhole Recovery, the ostensible topic of our 'meeting'. At one point Uncle Gary's phone rang, and he answered it with a bright, 'Hello son,' while the phone in the hallway rang repeatedly and Aunty Joan went in and out to pick it up and give a hoarse, quick, 'Hullo!' Rhi and I sat bemused while Uncle Gary and Aunty Joan nattered away on the phones, either side of where we sat silently. All of this was shot through with a series of jagged, cut-up comments about someone who was known to be Kokatha, but was 'sitting with the Wirangu,' so that we seemed to spend hours talking about this person, whom I had never met, but without them ever being the central topic of conversation. About this same person it was sometimes said, 'We know whose womb [they] came out of,' meaning that this person's own efforts to reposition themselves as Wirangu would never convince Aunty Joan Mob members that this person was not Kokatha, as they had previously understood themselves to be. On another occasion I was driving Aunty Vera somewhere when she burst out, 'Liar, liar, liar, liar!' at the mention of someone's name. 'I'd like to rip the curly hair from [their] head!' she said. And while I felt I could never get a handle on native title, or sustain a focussed conversation about it, one morning Shane went to the farm to help fix something and later complained in frustration that instead of attending to the task at hand everyone 'sat around the kitchen table talking about native title for hours'.

For Aunty Vera and many others the question of native title was inextricable from the question of mining. The reemergence of land-based 'tribal' identities coincided with the period the state government opened up this region's conservation parks for mineral exploration (in the late 1990s). Mining companies seeking exploration rights in the region were keen to quickly identify and enter into negotiations with the relevant native title claimant group. While Aunty Joan Mob felt that their family group was compelled to foreground one aspect of their identity over another (Kokatha over Mirning), for other

Nungas, they allege, this represented an opportunity. Those ‘who didn’t know what their tribal group was,’ I was told, ended up ‘picking one’. And, it was said, ‘You pick the one, probably, pick the one that’s got the dollars, or the one that’s got the big mouths.’

Over the course of an interview with Aunty Joan I thought I was perhaps, at last, going to establish something chronological about the native title claim process, along the lines of ‘what comes next’. Aunty Joan told me, ‘Everything we’ve talked about [in terms of their genealogical and cultural knowledge] is now used against us ... so we’ve clammed up. It’s all there, to help native title to get through court.’ Seizing on this, I said eagerly, ‘When is it [the claim] going to court?’ Aunty Joan replied:

I don’t know, I guess it’ll have to, but I mean this one alone is a big pot bubbling over, you know, it’s gonna bubble over, it’s a witches court. I can’t see how six claimant groups can get native title over the same land, and then ... we’re probably classed as the seventh, outside of native title, saying, ‘You can do what you want, this is not your land, you can go to the government, you can fight ... you can negotiate with the miners and the government, but you’re not touching this land and that’s it. It’s not the government’s land.’ And there’s no way in the world they can claim it ...

Aunty Joan was referring here to her perception that the distinct groups whose claims have been absorbed into the amalgamated claim are claiming the same land, against each other (which is not the case). Native title is seen to have unleashed a kind of monster as it bubbles over: these are images of toxicity and excess. Most significantly for my purposes, Aunty Joan perceives that she has created a new identity out of this process: Aunty Joan Mob become a kind of ‘seventh tribe,’ a group of Kokatha who are disillusioned with native title, and whose disillusionment is so foundational to their identity in the present, it constitutes them as a distinct social group. It is by no means the case that all people who identify as Kokatha have broken with the native title process, and this is part of the problem from Aunty Joan Mob’s point of view: because close relations of theirs are active participants in the amalgamated claim, genealogical material relating to their antecedents forms part of the claim material. Aunty Joan Mob feel ensnared within the process as they have tried to ‘pull out’ but native title is keeping them ‘there’.

Finally I abandoned this line of questioning, aimed at gathering an account which made use of ‘continuous time’ (Bourdieu 2009:105). Instead I amassed discontinuous fragments: muttered utterances, caustic close-lipped pronouncements, gestures that seemed to condense fury into infinitesimal actions, such as the sudden flick of a cigarette into the dust. Conversations came to abrupt ends with dramatic, finalising condemnations: ‘big shots’; ‘liars’; ‘sell outs’; ‘that little bitch’; ‘fucking cunts’. These seemed like dead-ends but their accumulation also represented openings onto other kinds of narratives and experiences about native title. Following Kathleen Stewart I have tried in thesis to ‘make a space for these stories’ (1996:9) which exist in the gaps that open up between things said and not-said.

Ways of being Aboriginal in the native title era

Monaghan (2012:50) records the following passage, citing it as evidence of how certain ‘performances’ of Aboriginality are disparaged ‘at the community level’. The speaker identifies as Wirangu, and here she lambasts a person I assume to be a member of Aunty Joan Mob:

She’s one of these Aboriginal out of the woodwork ... she uses these jaw breaking words you know when she wants to and then all of a sudden she’ll switch and try to speak Gugada [Kokatha] but it’s Wirangu ... and it’s not really Wirangu it’s a mixture of English and Wirangu, enni [inni]? And she’ll rattle off those things you know to show the Whitefellas she can talk Nyanngya [Nunga] way. And she’ll use the jawbreakers to show the Blackfellas she can use these big words. Jawbreakers are words that people wouldn’t have heard so they wouldn’t understand it ... wherever she goes she’s trouble. (Monaghan 2012:51)

Initially the most striking thing about this passage is its familiarity: any number of Kokatha-identifying persons of my acquaintance could very easily have said all of this about the Wirangu-identifying speaker quoted here. The passage, I contend, tells us less about the person purportedly being described, and much more about the unstable social and political conditions that have redefined the meaning of Aboriginality over time. I will work through the accusations/insults in turn. The first comment, about ‘the Aboriginal out of the woodwork,’ is later expounded on by Monaghan (2012:54), as he talks about

accusations of ‘textbook Nyanggas [Nungas] and ‘whitefellas turned black’. Like Monaghan, Yuriko (Yamanouchi 2012) and Gillian Cowlishaw (1998:110), I have been exposed to plenty of talk about ‘johnny-come-latelies’. Aunty Joan Mob certainly describe some of the people most enthusiastically involved in the Wirangu revival in these terms. Secondly, the accusation is made that these performances of cultural difference are directed towards whitefellas in order to impress them, and bolster the speaker’s own claims to possess cultural knowledge. These observations are frequently made about the Wirangu, who increasingly enjoy a privileged form of bureaucratic recognition at local events. Thirdly, the sketch is of troublesome, powerful figures, people who deploy ‘jaw breakers’ — a phrase that infers an Aboriginal person well versed in bureaucratic and/or educated modes of speech, who has enjoyed some measure of success on whitefella terms, but now wishes to recast themselves as ‘culture people’ in an era where cultural distinctiveness is feted and rewarded. This is also an all too familiar claim. The point is not, of course, to go tit-for-tat with these claims, but to shift the analysis so that the ever-shifting social, historical and political conditions, and the demands and desires of state institutions that underwrite these tensions, come more clearly into view.

My argument is that these claims and counter-claims for authenticity and authority bring to light the sheer density of the ways of being Aboriginal which have been validated, legitimised, made possible, elevated *and* circumscribed in contemporary Australia, and the ways these have shifted even over the course of people’s own lifetimes. They point to the radical instability of the category of Aboriginality.

Monaghan (2012:54), for instance makes much of the fact that ‘the main opposing Gugada faction’ (Aunty Joan Mob) can be seen as Aboriginal people ‘who had earlier achieved respect in town through their achievements in the white education system’. He attributes the bitterness of this ‘faction’ to the fact that ‘their stocks have diminished’ (ibid.) and the power balance between Wirangu and Kokatha has shifted, in the native title era, in favour of the former. Again, I have also had it represented to me that the Wirangu ascendancy was fuelled, in part, by the fact that key players more quickly and effectively grasped the opportunity the native title claims process presented, partly because they had connections to Ceduna Nungas working in the Aboriginal affairs bureaucracy in Adelaide. Aunty Joan says she first heard of native title when a relative warned her that ‘people are saying that some other mob are gonna come and steal our

land'. Aunty Joan Mob members explained that the 'educated ones' had an advantage over the 'poor ones' when, in the late 1990s, Aboriginal people in Ceduna were trying to understand both what native title was all about, and what the processes involved.

Again, the point is not to ascertain which of these claims are truer than others, but to realise the profundity of this historical shift, and its unpredictable effects. In the post-assimilation era, Aboriginal people with formal education qualifications were enticed, invited, or enthusiastically took up work in the numerous Aboriginal corporations and organisations spawned by the self-determination governance structures of the recognition era, in Ceduna and also in Adelaide. But in the native title era it is land-based identities, the retention of 'traditional cultural' knowledge, and more localised life stories that are accorded value and prestige. Intent on identifying some original and therefore *truer* form of Aboriginal existence, the current definitional regime undermines other Aboriginal cultural forms that have been created through the colonisation process. Thus the idea that 'settled is lesser' (Gibson 2008:295), long evidenced in Australian anthropology, is frequently reproduced by Aboriginal people who locate themselves accordingly.

Conclusion: Aboriginal pain and public discourse

In opening a collection dealing with intra-Aboriginal conflict in the land rights and early native title era Francesca Merlan writes (1997:1), 'Some people took the view that conflict was far too sensitive and heartfelt for the issues concerned to be a matter of public discussion.' What then of this chapter, which has attempted to convey something of the emotional intensity of a long-lasting local conflict? My sense that this material was 'inadmissible' (Feldman 1994) into Australian public discourse was confirmed in numerous conversations with Australian fieldworkers: many researchers immediately recognised the dilemma I described, relayed stories of similarly bitter, complex and all-consuming dynamics and recounted their own efforts to handle sensitive material of this kind, including advising me as to how to exclude, or at least severely circumscribe, public discussion or publication of it. While I faced my own fears involved in describing the pain and bitterness bound up in the conflict Aunty Joan Mob are embroiled in, I found myself confronting an apparent paradox: Aboriginal people *routinely* enter public discourse as a 'traumatic identity form' (Berlant 2000:33) and as aggrieved parties. Either

they are victims of racism and of history, or pathologised figures, suffering, in part, because of the perpetuation of Indigenous cultural practices that are deemed inimical to modernity and wellbeing.⁶⁶ In some ways emotional pain, troubled circumstances and victim status can be regarded as a *precondition* to the Aboriginal presence in public discourse. However, I maintain that few accounts of these kinds of native title conflicts, and even fewer that attempt to capture the lived experiences of such conflicts, circulate in Australia (but see Claudie 2007; Everett 2011; Foley 2007; Lydon and Burns 2010:52; Smith and Morphy 2007a). It is vitally important that these experiences are attended to ethnographically and analysed; this chapter represents one such attempt to do so.

I assume that the first reason for the neglect of these issues is that these painful experiences are the direct consequence of legislation that was hailed as righting an historical wrong. Native title forms part of the recognition increasingly extended to Indigenous Australians from the late 1960s onwards. It is difficult for people of goodwill to accept that the outcome of these 'gains' has involved an experience of profound loss for some Aboriginal people. Secondly, attending to this conflict involves hearing Aboriginal people expressing their cynicism and anger at/about other Aboriginal people. While I take state processes as the object of my critique, and Aunty Joan Mob certainly rail against native title as an institution, ultimately Aunty Joan Mob take as their most bitter enemies not the state, native title, nor mining companies but other Aboriginal people, many of whom are intimately known and related to them.⁶⁷ They allege they are the victims of the wrongdoing of other Aboriginal people, and represent these Aboriginal people as deceitful, greedy, as imposters and thieves.

Thus in extended discussion of these heartfelt issues, I have wrestled at length with the doubts Merlan flags, and continue to do so (see also Macdonald:65). I have made difficult decisions as to the material to include and exclude here. I am plagued by fears

⁶⁶ I refer here to the debate generated by Peter Sutton's (2009) *The Politics of Suffering*. The role of cultural practices in this debate is analysed in Altman and Hinkson (2007).

⁶⁷ In a fascinating footnote, Correy et al (2011:59) speculate about the high turnover of staff employed by native title representative bodies as follows: 'It is just at the time when they are most at home with their own conscience that they become constituted as oppressors. Their generosity and goodwill is repaid with revolt and hate and not the tribute of recognition that the well-meaning liberal advocate is fully occupied in thinking they deserve. In going some way to humanising the colonising regime they have highlighted the unacceptability of the situation. ...Native title is still part of the limitations of a colonial regime and, in upholding the regime by democratising it, the regime is rendered even more unpalatable.'

that I will expose Aunty Joan Mob to more emotional pain. And while I worry about others I own that I also worry about myself: I'm near certain that in the process of writing about all this I'll become the object of some people's anger.

There is, I believe, no ignoring this conflict: it is a defining feature of Ceduna social life. Indeed, as I have argued here, it has become a fundamentally constitutive conflict about who people are, or who they are not, and as such *is part of what gives life its substance*, a claim which I elaborate in the following chapter. Fighting with others sharpens the contours of the self. Amongst my amassed field note fragments are plenty of snippets about the ways a speaker's eyes might flash and their nostrils flare, as in anger they became animated, energised and excited. While this is a story, certainly, of forces that have wreaked havoc, and of destruction — of relationships, and the 'unity' of the Aboriginal social body, supposedly enjoyed in times past — throughout this thesis I show Aunty Joan Mob to be creating something new out of all of this.

While laying all this bare may be criticised as inappropriate, to ignore it would equally represent an act of bad faith. John Morton reflects on his involvement in several disputes emanating from land claims in Central Australia:

I would say that one of the things which characterises my experience of Aboriginal disputes is that they can appear (to 'us') to have a certain 'raw' quality: they seem 'uncivilised' – definitely not bourgeois. (Morton 1997:86-87)

Morton (1997:87), following John von Sturmer's lead, sees this 'as both a lack and a possession'. While the Arrernte may fail to adhere to notions of good behaviour, Morton perceives that 'there is also a kind of directness involved which is often muted under so-called 'civilised' conditions', continuing:

While such behaviour might be registered [by the whitefellas in attendance] simply through a general sense of embarrassment, there may also be feeling among those representing the case that the Aboriginal cause is almost certainly harmed by any such exhibition of 'poor form'. (ibid.)

Morton (1997:90) wonders if anthropologists are in effect 'in the business of "refining" Aboriginality'. To gloss the nature of this conflict would make me a party, I think, to a process of 'refining Aboriginality'. Of this I want no part. Instead, I have endeavoured in

this chapter to capture the 'raw quality' of this particular dispute and to bring to life Aunty Joan Mob's everyday experience of native title.

Chapter six. Rockhole Recovery: advancing Aunty Joan Mob's struggle for self-definition

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that Aunty Joan Mob have experienced native title as an attack on their self-understanding, and that the local native title claims process has entailed the destruction of intimate social relationships. In this chapter I turn to Aunty Joan Mob's rejoinder to these destabilising and distressing conditions. In response to their disillusionment with native title, I see Aunty Joan Mob engaging in something I call a 'struggle for self-definition'. In this chapter I explain and elaborate my interpretation of Rockhole Recovery as a tactical undertaking that advances this struggle. My emphasis thus shifts from forces of destruction to acts of creation.

Aunty Joan Mob are involved, daily, in a creative/political struggle. Their struggle for self-definition rests on the refusal of imposed definitions and a rearticulation of, and reinvestment in, Aunty Joan Mob members' self-understanding, as Kokatha people living out their lives on Kokatha country. The terms and basis of Aunty Joan Mob's self-understanding has not just remained intact in the face of the pressures exerted on it, but has been bolstered and its import amplified. Aunty Joan Mob reject the *authority* of outsiders, experts, whitefellas, historians, linguists, anthropologists and, ultimately, the nation-state, over the definition of who they are and where they fit into the local population. They express and affirm their own understanding of who it is they are, what bit of country they rightfully belong to and what bit of country rightfully belongs to them. I interpret Aunty Joan Mob as struggling to return to themselves an understanding of their own histories, lives and identities *on their own terms*. It is this I call the struggle for self-definition.

Monaghan (2007:115) refers to Aunty Joan Mob as 'Wirangu detractors'. This chapter shows that this limited formulation obscures the fact that while the Wirangu/Kokatha conflict has involved acts and expressions of negation, it has also involved acts of creation. This bitter dispute has spawned as many assertions as it has detractions — it is

as much about proud defenses of and reinvestments in Kokatha-ness as denigrating claims to Wirangu-ness.⁶⁸

Allen Feldman's insight that symbol and action are neither opposed to each other, nor complement each other, undergirds this chapter. To symbolise is to 'act politically' states Feldman (1991:165). Feldman's argument (*ibid.*) relied on undoing the distinction between 'expressive activity in contrast to effective practice'. In the H-Blocks, 'symbolization of the condition being protested transformed that very condition' (*ibid.*). The generation of symbols is key to Rockhole Recovery, but these should not be understood simply as a means to a 'real' political end. Rockhole trips transform the condition of passivity and disempowerment that Aunty Joan Mob find themselves in, and takes them into a new space, and new condition.

I argue in this chapter that rockhole trips express, dramatise and symbolise several, interlaced assertions. Firstly, Aunty Joan Mob undertake trips on country to signal their rejection of the passive, even submissive, role of 'claimant'. Aunty Joan Mob defiantly assume that they are entitled to enjoy and express their relationship to country, refusing to wait to be authorised to do so. Secondly, Rockhole Recovery involves Aunty Joan Mob conveying their relationship with country via sweaty, smelly physical activity. This sensory corporeality stresses a contrast between the process of outlining people-country relationships to satisfy the state's requirements, in words, and the process of expressing and living this relationship, with bodies. Furthermore, the tasks undertaken over the course of Rockhole Recovery are highly symbolic. Rockhole trip participants clean out permanent water sources, maintaining sites that they point to as neglected by other Aboriginal people that assert a privileged ('traditional') relationship with these sites. More pointedly still, trip participants' efforts are also directed at rehabilitating one particular outcrop that has become covered with sand over the years. In digging out this specific site, Aunty Joan Mob hope to symbolise a more general condition, which underlines their opposition to mining. The country that sustained and was sustained by 'the old ways' is still there — it lies submerged rather than lost. Aunty Joan Mob members repeatedly told me that the local native title claimant group has determined that mineral exploration teams observe a 200 metre 'buffer' around rockhole sites. This work, which changes the

⁶⁸ This difference of emphasis may, in part, result from us encountering this conflict at different moments in time (Monaghan from the first years of the millennium and me from 2006 onwards). When I met Aunty Joan Mob their energies had shifted away from direct confrontations with their putative enemies and into Rockhole Recovery.

very size and shape of the rock-face each time it is done, is intended to unsettle any sense of certainty that the edges of this buffer zone can be reliably ascertained. The first part of the chapter is devoted to ethnographic exposition of the three interlinked assertions set out above. A key task of this chapter is to also detail the process of organising and executing rockhole trips.

The second part of the chapter outlines that the struggle for self-definition is necessarily dialogical. Greenies emerge in this chapter as vital interlocutors, and in the second half of this chapter I submit greenies to the anthropological gaze, as I originally set out to do at the outset of this study. I argue that greenies have a crucial role to play in all of this not just because of the practical labour they contribute to the physical/symbolic tasks at hand, but because they provide a receptive audience for Aunty Joan Mob's performances, taking up, reproducing and circulating their assertions. This process is far from straightforward. I have argued throughout the thesis that Aboriginality is relational; in this chapter greenies' imaginings of the idolised, authentic way of being Aboriginal comes into contact, in complicated ways, with actual Aboriginal people. On one level it is clear that Aunty Joan Mob members sometimes engage in a highly performative process of 'self-essentialising', in Simon Correy's (2006:344) terms. Correy (2006:338) refers to the way in which Aboriginal people made 'themselves the object of their own thought,' as part of the lands claim process. I refer to the way Aunty Joan Mob members find ways to explicitly stress that they are uncontaminated Aboriginal subjects who have a deep and natural affinity for their traditional country. These performances are enacted, in part, for the benefit of greenies and the process is largely satisfying to both parties as it involves being recognised on terms that are gratifying to Aunty Joan Mob — as possessing integrity, as being knowledgeable, as being the rightful owners of the country through which we travelled over the course of Rockhole Recovery, and as having culture. Greenies in turn feel that they are privileged to have had the opportunity to spend time with authentic Aboriginal subjects. But the course is beset with hazards. Aunty Joan Mob are seeking to define themselves on their own terms, yet find that greenies unwittingly overwrite the script, constantly defining Aboriginal people in their own terms. There is no problem as long as these frames align, but they do not always do so. Most greenies are the guests of warm and generous hosts who are upfront about what they ask for and offer: they seek a political support base in their fight against mining interests, and they offer friendship. But greenies sometimes appropriate aspects of Aboriginality in ways that encroach on the space Aunty Joan Mob have forged for themselves to exist in. The

picture is more complex still: many greenies come and go without realising that it is any way contentious to understand this tract of country as simply, indisputably, Kokatha country. But others can be unsettled to learn that via their philosophical opposition to the development of an intact ecosystem, and through enjoying the friendship of Aunty Joan Mob members they have been enjoined to one side of a bitter intra-Aboriginal struggle. I conclude by reintroducing Bobby (from chapter four), who reflected on this realisation at length.

The first assertion: refusal to 'claim'

Rockhole Recovery expresses a critique of the state-claimant power relations that underpin the native title process. 'Native title,' perceives Aunty Joan, 'means admitting the government own the land'. Aunty Joan continues, 'And I hate that.' Aunty Joan says she refuses to 'go under government's thumb'. Whatever its status in law, the land 'belongs to us and it's still part of us.' 'I don't have to prove nothing to them [the government],' says Aunty Joan. Prioritising heading out bush over claiming the right to country through formal mechanisms expresses this refusal to prove anything to the state.

'We have all forgotten,' Patrick Sullivan (1995:101) observes, that what the term 'claimants' refers to is 'claimants to registration of existing title'. Instead, as Sullivan says (ibid.), native title claimants 'have been reduced to claimants for a land grant,' a position Indigenous people find 'immensely demeaning'. Smith and Morphy also note (2007b:6), 'to enter into a native title claim, no matter what reservations are voiced by the claimants, is to submit to the state's authority over the contemporary existence of Indigenous property rights'. Aunty Joan Mob have refused to accept this submissive role, as it confers on Aboriginal people a passivity that is anathema, especially, to Aunty Joan, whose restlessness and energy always lay tightly coiled, ready to spring into action.

Rockhole Recovery then is an iteration of Aunty Joan Mob's efforts to maintain an ongoing relationship to their country — to spend time with it and maintain a physical presence on it — without submitting to the state's authority by having to 'claim' their right to do so. Instead they do so, *and are conscious of doing so*, with flagrant disregard for legal processes that originate from the federal government and which seek to make a determination around a contention taken to be self-evident. That is, firstly, that Aboriginal people own the land. Secondly, and more controversially, that they are *the*

Aboriginal people who can claim legitimate ownership over the land. Related to this first critique is the second assertion of a superior mode of stating and enjoying this relationship to country: an embodied mode rather than a bureaucratic one.

The second assertion: the significance of a sensory corporeality to Rockhole Recovery

The native title lawyer David Ritter (2009:26) comments wryly, ‘more than one native title lawyer has the dispiriting experience of convincing people to stay in town when they would rather be hunting and fishing, in order to prove their traditional relationship to the land’. Aunty Joan Mob are well aware of this paradox and work it to their own end. On days that the native title representative committee and community members gathered for day-long, indoor meetings, Aunty Joan was *especially* keen to head out bush on spontaneous day-trips. And so too was Rockhole Recovery, although much more carefully planned in advance, part of a tactical assertion of a relationship with country that was realised by being on, spending time with, and working on, country — a practice intended to highlight the contradiction between those who, it was alleged, would claim a relationship to country by ‘reading about it in a book,’ attending meetings or by ‘doing dot paintings in the hall’.

Native title involves articulating a relationship with land through formal legal mechanisms, authored by the Australian state, and involves putting that relationship into words on paper as the first step in making a claim. By contrast, Rockhole Recovery involves putting the relationship with country into action. Rockhole trips can feel shambolic, haphazard, and crazy at times, however underlined they are by passionate commitments. However I argue that these characteristics should not be regarded as deficiencies that impede the experience of rockhole trips, they are positive attributes of the trips. They are borne of Aunty Joan Mob’s resourcefulness, ingenuity and creativity. Furthermore they speak to the nature of Aunty Joan Mob members’ relationships to their country — country they are familiar with and comfortable in, as well as determined to visit and spend time on despite resource constraints.

Most crucially, rockhole trips involve participants getting filthy. Wearing only thin rubber gloves, they plunge hands into thick, foul-smelling, gloopy sludge at the bottom of rockholes, in order to tug out sticks, whole bones and old feathers. Sweeping stubborn

red sand off the edges of a rock-face, participants become gritty, dried out and coated in fine red particles, which cling to arm and leg hairs and smudge limbs in dirt brown hues. Aunty Joan Mob assert that *this* is precisely what having a living, ongoing relationship with country entails.

At a 'de-briefing meeting' following the March 2008 trip some greenies said that they would have valued, in effect, more *talking* about the issue of mining: they wanted the political framework around the trips to be better explained, made more explicit and to be presented to them in words. It was clear however that Aunty Joan wanted greenies to experience *being* on country. One greenie suggested, 'Maybe a half-day meeting, before the trip?' 'Half day!' Aunty Joan jumped in, 'half an hour'. This suggestion notwithstanding the alliance between greenies and Aunty Joan Mob is an effective one precisely because greenies are also habituated to disorder, improvised methods, resourcefulness, running late and getting dirty.

Aunty Joan obsessively and deliberately makes use of scraps (see de Certeau 1984:28), avidly collecting discarded glass and plastic bottles and aluminum cans to cash in through the South Australian container deposit scheme. She receives 10 cents per deposit, and once made 400 dollars on a single drop-off. Known spots where Anangu have been drinking discretely in the scrub can yield a significant haul of empty bottles and crumpled cans. Uncle Gary has crafted steel pickets into claws with which to go razor fishing on the mudflats. Greenies had, at some point, collected Iluka sample bags made out of thick, filmy plastic. We staple-gunned these to the bottom of the verandah at Rhiannon's house, fashioning a barrier to stop snakes slithering onto the verandah from under the house, as greenies slept outside the night before a rockhole trip. Resourcefulness may be endemic to isolated and rural areas, and is also attributable to historical and ongoing experiences of poverty. There are certainly echoes here of former times. Out at the mission, pannikins (mugs) were made out of old sweetened condensed milk tins. Today, shredded paper is used to make dense paper bricks, which are burnt in winter, especially by elderly people who cannot collect firewood. But Aunty Joan was intent on making a more significant point by her committed resourcefulness: she stressed that she saw herself as 'the bottle-o woman,' who would fill her car with fuel bought out of the proceeds of recycling, rather than accept mining royalties. Greenies then happily aligned themselves with Aunty Joan Mob, not just because of shared beliefs, but because this mode of living resonated. For example, some of the greenies involved in rockhole trips

are surreptitious foragers of discarded, but perfectly good food out of supermarket bins. Aunty Joan relishes the fact that she once shared such a 'dumpstered' meal with greenies.

Some closer description of the process of organising and executing Rockhole Recovery is necessary at this point. The first rockhole trip took place in March 2006. I interviewed one greenie, Clare, who went along on this first and most chaotic trip. Clare told me:

There was a total sense of danger. Yeah, it was pretty intense. We were all out there, and Aunty [Joan] was really stressed out. It was just her and then ten greenies. And I've since come to see that Aunty [Joan] gets stressed out anyway, with those sorts of trips, but I think she was extra stressed out 'cause it was just her having responsibility for all of us who were clueless out there. So there was this total sense of danger the whole time — we were freaked out about scorpions and snakes and wild dogs ... when we were out at [a powerful women's site] which was the furthest away site, it was all just really charged, I guess, 'cause we knew we were at this most sacred of all the sites and it was clearly a really significant place.

Aunty Joan found some fresh camel tracks and concluded a large young male camel was tracking a female with a baby:

So she was like, 'He'll be totally aggressive. These camels can kill you, they'll attack you.' So we had to park the cars in a circle all around the fire and all sleep within this circle of cars. She was like, 'Everyone be on the lookout all the time. Be prepared to make a run for the cars.' And also freaking out about the wild dogs. She was like, 'If you need to do a wee, just do one right next to [where you are camped]'... People stayed up on watch all night. It was full-on.

Clare and I agreed that Aunty Joan has relaxed into her role as host over the years, and bears less responsibility as the lone guardian of numerous 'clueless' innocents now that her family is also heavily involved in Rockhole Recovery. Since 2006 a handful of greenies have forged long-term and close relationships with Aunty Joan Mob: these greenies help organise Rockhole Recovery, publicising the dates and details to their networks, and keeping Aunty Joan informed of any emails they receive from potential participants. They arrive for rockhole trips with three, four or five 4WD carloads jammed full of people and a trailer loaded with bulk organic foods, donated by a

supporter in Adelaide. Other greenies hear about upcoming trips through friends or on interest-based email lists that they subscribe to. They come along for 'the experience' or 'the adventure,' perhaps only once. They willingly volunteer for cooking duties, help pack and unpack cars, put up and take down tents and, of course, clean out rockholes, but they are more passive participants in the trips overall.

Aunty Joan plans Rockhole Recovery itineraries in advance, and sets the departure date at least a month ahead of time. The itineraries themselves are liable to change up to the day before setting off, but the departure dates remain fixed. An itinerary usually involves a day of travel to the first site then a second day of work cleaning the rockhole. The third day might be spent travelling to another site, and the fourth day cleaning it. Another site might be visited on the following day, after travelling for the morning, and then be cleaned that afternoon or on the morning of the sixth day. Or the sixth day is spent packing up camp and slowly heading back into town. Alternatively, the convoy might travel a short distance from one rockhole and down to Paint Lakes to spend the sixth night, before heading back into town on the seventh day.

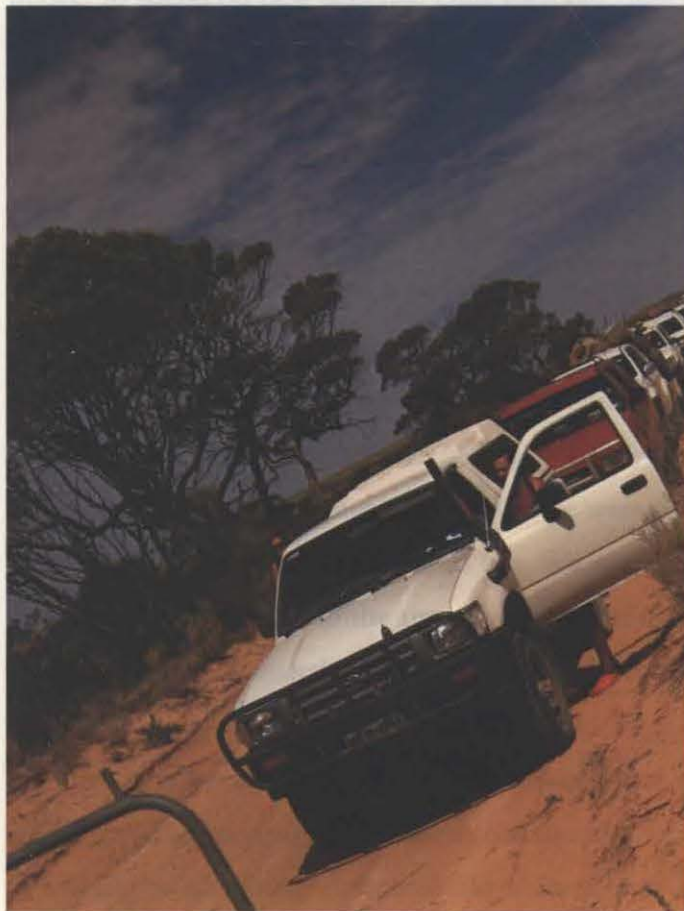


Figure 12: Rockhole Recovery convoy

In March 2009 I was involved in helping Aunty Joan and Rhiannon organise the upcoming trip, handling the email correspondence with greenies. In the few weeks leading up to the trip I formed a habit of dropping my baby Ned off at the Minya Bunhhi childcare centre for a few hours each morning before driving to the farm, having a cup of tea and looking over the list of things to do, which Aunty Joan had printed in biro and kept in her spiral-bound notebook. There was always something new to be added, usually thought of as we looked over the existing list and slowly worked our way through it. Often we repaired damaged equipment. One day we realised both that new batteries were needed for all the lanterns and torches and that some of the lanterns needed replacing, as they'd been smashed beyond repair. It took us several days to work through a seemingly simple, single task as we: figured out exactly which lanterns to buy as replacements; compared the prices of camping gear in various stores, weighing this up against everyone's feelings and extended commentary about each of the local personalities employed in each of the stores; agreed how much of an extremely limited budget to spend on new lanterns. Only then did Aunty Joan, Uncle Gary, Rhi and I make a time to meet up together 'in town' for the express purpose of purchasing two lanterns and several packets of batteries. The organisation of rockhole trips was always characterised by fluidity and spontaneity on the one hand and endless delays in realising even simple seeming tasks, because of toing and froing, lengthy discussions and ruminations.

In March 2009 we held several 'working-bees' out at the farm, sorting through camping and kitchen gear stored on the verandah accumulating a thick layer of dust since the last rockhole trip. We worked in the boiling hot sun, Uncle Gary sitting on the side of the trailer, carefully sifting through the rubble we were hurling into it, picking out useful bits and pieces to be hoarded for future use. We sent half a trailer-load of ripped, trashed, dust-encrusted junk off to the tip, as well as sorting through all that remained: stacking the swags onto old metal bed frames, piling all the jumbled tent outers, poles and pegs together to be gone through 'another day,' organising boxes of kitchen gear — tin plates, tin mugs, cutlery and huge cast-iron cooking pots which rattled around sturdy metal chests, and sweeping clean and then folding tarps. Black beetles scuttled out from under everything as we dragged around old shelves, and tackled the swags, sifting our way through mis-matched camping accretions. Ned, who was by this stage one, plunged his

fat little hand into corners thick with spider webs before pouring a bottle of water over himself and then crawling, drenched, through a layer of soft dust.

Consumed by these organisational tasks in the busy weeks leading up to Rockhole Recovery, Aunty Joan was totally in her element. She would sit at the kitchen table with her glasses on, pouring over the 'to do' list as well as the list of participants, organising 'bums on seats,' allocating people to cars, thinking through the mix of personalities and possible tensions, leaving space for gear, ensuring there were enough confident drivers and enough reliable vehicles to take those people who had expressed an interest, and hassling Aunty Joan Mob members to commit to coming, if they were prevaricating or were still in the process of sorting out their other claims on their time — namely work and school. There were always last minute additions and cancellations, on the part of greenies and Aunty Joan Mob members. And there were always, always problems with cars.

Rockhole Recovery departures were generally delayed for a minimum of 4 hours. Among the 'reasons' recorded in my fieldnotes for us running late were: innumerable 'runs' into town to pick up last minute supplies at the supermarket, such as drinking cups for babies or medications; two greenies driving a 200 kilometre round trip down to Streaky Bay to drop off assorted dogs at a kennel — once arriving at the pound they found no one there, so had to put the dogs into their kennels and secure them themselves; the complicated task of deciding which eskies would hold what cold-stuffs and many attempts at repacking meat and cheeses so as to keep it all cool; Aunty Vera disappearing altogether and none of us being able to reach her by phone — she was to surface hours later with very little explanation of where she had been; I was commissioned to head into town to drop off a pot of soup to someone; last minute repairs to car fridge cables, car engines, radiators, a trailer and the back door to our car, which was busted and had a slide-bolt pop-riveted to it to keep it closed; repacking bags to squeeze them into small spaces; the making of stove-top pots of espresso coffees for the greenies and cups of teas for Aunty Joan Mob members as the waiting dragged on; filling 20 litre water drums from the farm's rainwater tank and then stacking these into the trailer and tying them down; checking and re-checking the fuel capacity of all the cars travelling and then working out how many jerry cans to fill with diesel and how many with petrol, then taking a whiff of the assorted cans in order to ascertain which can had previously been filled with which, then heading into town to fill these jerry cans. Once

the collected greenies realised that we are not about to leave then, increasingly, they decided too to drive into town from the farm and pick up take-away cappuccinos from the pizza shop, or remembered that they needed to go to the post office or to Centrelink or to run an errand. In this way the delays accumulated. In March 2008 food had be located, unpacked, then the remainers repacked, in order to make lunch for the 25 people gathered around the yard, most of who lay on rolled-up swags in the sun or sat in the shade of the verandah talking and smoking rolled cigarettes.

Greenies always *wanted* to be of use, but mostly hovered at the edges of activity waiting to be allocating a task, while those who had had an active role in organising the trip rushed around purposefully. Greenies were enthusiastic about the opportunity to contribute, quickly forming a human chain that stretched from the yard to the verandah one morning, as we unpacked the trailer load of organic vegies in foam boxes when it arrived from Adelaide. Similarly, out bush, as camp was being packed up, some people hovered while others worked. There were always bodies kneeling on the ground rolling bedding tightly into swags, and letting tents down, their billowing, cloud-like form collapsing before they were stuffed back into bags. The kitchen was packed away: compost dug into the ground, foldout tables' legs were kicked-in, cardboard boxes burnt on the morning kitchen fire. And still some people drifted around camp asking, 'What can I do?' while others kicked a soccer ball through the scrub.

After departure it could take anywhere between two and a half to six hours to travel an 80-100 kilometre distance. After crossing the dog fence, car tyre pressures were released for driving on the sand and sometimes nervous greenies asked Uncle Gary and male members of Aunty Joan Mob some advice as to how to 4WD up the steep dunes. 'Give it to er,' was what Uncle Gary told Shane on our first rockhole trip in March 2008. He also sometimes replied, 'Stick it to er', or 'Gun it'. In all cases he meant, 'Put the car in a low 4WD gear and give the accelerator your all.' It sometimes took three or four attempts for inexperienced 4WD drivers, or for the cars pulling heavy trailers to make it over the steepest dunes. A whole lot of glass bottles were once smashed through the back of our car, and often our bums lifted clear off our seats and into the air while we came flying over the dunes.

Along the way the convoy frequently stopped: for flat tyres; because things fell off the trailer; because the trailer itself fell off the tow ball of the car; because the pop-riveted

slide-bolt affixed to our back door rattled off and we had to tie our car together with a piece of rope from thereon in; and for travelling mothers to breastfeed their little babies.

Social researcher Catherine (Robinson 2009) writes beautifully about the seeing, tasting, touching, smelling and listening involved as she conducted long-term fieldwork with Sydney's homeless. In this chapter I want to convey that part of what Rockhole Recovery asserts and demonstrates is that a whole-of-body experience — seeing, tasting, touching, smelling and listening — is integral to Aunty Joan Mob's way of experiencing and expressing their relationship with their country. I draw inspiration for Robinson's writing in evoking, especially, the tasting, touching, smelling and listening involved in Rockhole Recovery.

The taste of rockhole trips involves mouths thick and tongues slow with thirst, slaked sometimes with warm, sweet fizzy lemonade. Rockhole trips tasted to me like greasy, slippery eggs for breakfast, and buttery soft white toast cooked on the fire and absorbing the sweetish scent and taste of smoke and burning chip-dry mallee stumps. For others, it tasted of tender wild meats and juicy, fatty kangaroo tails. On one occasion we ran so low on drinking water we decided to forgo washing dishes, travelling with smeared dinner plates from the previous night stacked messily into the back of one car, and eating fried eggs for breakfast simply using toast as plates. Aunty Joan and Uncle Gary beeted back into town with empty drums bouncing around their trailer and returned in the evening with the trailer weighed down with containers heavy and deliciously full of clear rainwater.

The touch of rockhole trips is dry skin and scaly limbs, sunburned peeled noses and jeans stiff with dried sweat and dust, sticking tight to legs, which ached from the days of car travel and nights sleeping in the swag. The men grew stubble, becoming prickly and then hairy. Rock-faces were warm and smooth under foot and beneath supine bodies resting in the sun. The thick sludge at the bottom of a rockhole squelched between fingers. This mud smelt rich, pungent and earthy, sometimes foul. A decaying emu and wild dog once seemed to us partially suspended in flight, the dog pursuing the bird into a pool and them drowning as they struggled. The scene and memory of the pursuit was partially frozen, but their flesh slowly disintegrated into the foamy greenish, blackish water. On human bodies, acrid sweaty smells mixed with the strong, beach-y fragrance of sunscreen. Decomposing food stunk out the camp kitchen, a whole eskie full of uncooked meat

once went off, discovered too late, while bread frequently grew mould and lettuces sweated in foam boxes.

Night fell quickly out bush. The heat evaporated, the sun sliding behind the low tree line and the scrub suddenly suffused with rich, sticky colours — buttery yellow, then sienna, rust and sometimes a lurid fluoro pink. The trees became stark, black outlines before merging with the night and compelling us to retract to the fire. This was the time for listening as sounds carried and could be picked out clearly: the tinkling of cutlery and the clinking of metal plates as dinner was prepared, the bird calls in the mallee scrub, the cracking of wood as the fire consumed twigs and branches. Frogs sometimes started up their low growls in the rock pools. In the still early mornings sounds were also distinct and separate: someone's thongs slapping against their soles as they moved about making tea, a steady stream of piss expelled behind the bushes rimming camp.

Third assertion: the country lies submerged rather than lost.

In Ceduna, as I have mentioned, Aboriginal people involved with native title state that rockholes are not threatened by exploration out the back because mining companies' exploration parties are required to give each rockhole a 200 metre buffer. Aunty Joan Mob members counter this by pointing out that the outer edge of each rockhole is difficult to determine, as sand has blown across these sites over the years. Indeed some rockholes that exist in older people's memories can no longer be found at all. In August 2008 I accompanied Aunty Joan on a fruitless and arduous search for one such rockhole, it is impossible to know if the site has since disappeared or if we picked our way carefully across the wrong tract of country.

In September 2008 Aunty Joan decided to begin rehabilitating a partly submerged rockhole, partly for its own sake but also to illustrate a more powerful, general point not specific to this particular site. That is, the country that sustained and was sustained by 'the old ways' is still there, it lies submerged rather than lost. Over the course of Aunty Joan's life she has seen this particular rockhole shrink. She says she has watched a line of trees come 'marching' down the hill and start encroaching on the rock-face.

This particular Rockhole Recovery was unusually large as it coincided with school holidays and was funded by a grant scheme dedicated to keeping Indigenous culture

'strong'. While unease was expressed about accepting funding from 'government,' it made it possible for poorer family members to participate in a rockhole trip. Aunty Joan Mob outnumbered greenies and our 13-car convoy carried around 60 people in total, about 40 members of Aunty Joan Mob, including kids, and 20 greenies.

Aunty Joan set participants the task of uncovering the edges of this small, partially obscured rock-face. This was intended to unsettle the confidence with which the clamaint group declared rockhole sites identifiable and protected. A ute loaded with shovels, brooms and kids in the tray trundled down the track from camp to the rockhole. The kids quickly set to work scooping the dirt out of what appeared to be shallow pools, but this is only because they were so filled in, they have since proved much deeper. The rehabilitation involved heavy, hard work because the red sand was so compacted. At first the greenies picked onion weed, pulled out by tugging near the roots, and then heaping it floppy into a pile. Then a few of us started work on the edges of the rockface, scrapping and digging away the layers of dirt, trying to trace its contours.

With brooms, trowels, shovels and even the jagged plastic remains of a broken bucket, trip participants scraped away layers of fine, red-brown dirt. Heavy mounds accumulated on tarps, which were spread out at the rockhole's edge. A team of four men repeatedly carried a side of the heavy tarp each, dumped the dirt into a ute before a load of dirt was driven a short distance from the site. The men joked about being council workers as they leaned on shovels waiting for the tarps to be refilled. On another occasion, Aunty Joan paused her sweeping of this site and shook her head, feigning exasperation, 'Housework!' In September 2008, two long afternoons and then a full day, from sun up to sun down, were spent digging out the rockhole, gradually seeing a shallow pool emerge and the rock-face spread and take form. This immensely satisfying process, some three and a half years later, is still underway.

It is time to explore more explicitly the crucial part played by greenies in the story of Rockhole Recovery.

Greenies as vital interlocutors

In the remainder of this chapter I again adjust the lens, bringing into focus the urban-based Rockhole Recovery participants or 'greenies' that originally sat at the centre of this

study, and who have since slipped out of view. While local actors and local social conditions have assumed the foreground, greenies are vital interlocutors in Aunty Joan Mob's struggle for self-definition. This struggle is necessarily dialogical. Aunty Joan Mob seek to take back and dictate the terms on which they are understood, asking others to recognise them on these terms in order to stabilise and cement these terms as more valid than imposed terms. And so on rockhole trips greenies learned, then reproduced, that they travelled through Kokatha country with Kokatha traditional owners, learning Kokatha words for things and helping in the maintenance of Kokatha cultural sites, often remaining unaware that this formulation is hotly contested in Ceduna. The quest for self-definition however can only ever be partly realised, as greenies often only allow this encounter with Aboriginal subjects to confirm what it is they already 'know,' along the way discarding, or reworking, aspects of the encounter that prove incommensurate with preexisting understandings. Here I examine the ways in which greenies merge Aboriginal subjects with the Aboriginal as object, and make the first resemble the latter.

A former Rockhole Recovery enthusiast, Roderick, who is now, by his own admission, 'jaded', urged me to 'sink the boot' into greenies. Roderick has become disillusioned with greenies (but not with Aunty Joan Mob) for their 'unthinking' endorsement, indeed adoption, of Aunty Joan Mob's directives, perspective and enemies, even when greenies have very little understanding of the broader social context out of which these emerge. Roderick's bitching is reminiscent of Eric Michaels' (1997:45-48) acerbic commentary on the terms of engagement that structured the non-Aboriginal left's role in the 1988 Aboriginal protest organised to coincide with Bicentenary celebrations. Perceiving that subservience and self-flagellation were demanded of, and even welcomed by, the non-Aboriginal left, Michaels noted (1997:47), 'The rule seems to be not merely that one never criticizes a black; one never even discusses Aboriginal politics any more.' What I understand Roderick to be saying is that the atmosphere of veneration that he perceives to envelop the encounter between Aunty Joan Mob and greenies obstructs the possibility for collaboration between equals, 'genuine' friendship and intimacy — the very thing greenies' displays of exaggerated 'respect' and habits of over-identification are meant to ensure.

And so, again, I find myself acutely conscious of the fact that both parties may construe my interpretation of the greenie-Aunty Joan Mob relationship as hurtful and as some kind of betrayal. I understand greenies as honourable people with 'fundamentally decent

impulses' towards 'the victims of domination and exploitation' as Gerald Sider and Kirk Dombrowski (2001:xi) put it. But as Sider and Dombrowski (ibid.) point out, the seemingly homogenous, more uniformly oppressed Indigenous social worlds that sustained earlier, more innocent commitments, have crumbled.

I reiterate that I am seen, in Ceduna, as a greenie myself and that I see myself, more or less, as a greenie. This brief discussion thus involves investigating the workings of a familiar *habitus*. I believe that greenies such as myself must face up to the highly differentiated circumstances of contemporary Indigenous people. This involves facing the fact that our heartfelt commitment to 'the Aboriginal struggle' and greenies' stated desire to act in 'support of Aboriginal people' in reality entails a commitment to *particular* Aboriginal struggles and to act in support of particular Aboriginal people. This frequently involves pitting our/themselves, not just against mining companies, and/or the state, but against other Aboriginal people. It is time to abandon the language and framework that casts Aboriginal politics in these binary terms.

A useful, albeit very general, social/stylistic distinction can be made between two types of greenies attracted to rockhole trips. The first are best described as 'ferals,' a discernable category of people, usually aged between 20 and 35, who move frequently around Australia. Journalist Anna Krien (2010:27), writing about Tasmanian forest blockades, prefers the moniker 'ratbags,' an affectionate term of self-description. In the most extreme cases, notes Krien (ibid.), ratbags live 'as if the apocalypse has already happened [with] no future plans or engagements'. Ferals wear second-hand, misshapen, floppy clothes: parkas, beanies, army pants, peaked hats and sunnies purchased for 20 cents off the front counter of a country op-shop somewhere.⁶⁹ They prefer dark and/or earthy colours such as black, brown, reds, oranges and olive greens but might also accessorise with leopard print, hot pinks and studded silver belts. They hand-stitch screen-printed patches on to the backs of jackets: these patches are cute, decorative, or express political and environmental messages. Some ferals have toughened bare feet, lanky brown sun-kissed limbs and wear their hair in bleached or hennaed dreadlocks, which hang from their heads like thick matted ropes.

The second 'type' of Rockhole Recovery participant is the tertiary-educated white 'progressives,' who are either formally employed within environmental organisations or

⁶⁹ I know this because that is how I source most of my own sunglasses.

work in other community, education or social justice-oriented fields. The progressives who have participated in Rockhole Recovery range in age from university students in their early 20s to retired teachers in their mid-60s. Out bush, progressives might wear sensible walking shoes, shirts and ‘sun-smart,’ wide-brimmed hats.

This distinction best serves as a description of two different modes of life or ways of being, rather than between types of people. Many greenies have done, or more accurately, have been both of these things at various times of their lives; some see themselves firmly belonging, in terms of their aesthetic preferences and social connections, to the first world, even though they are no longer as mobile as they once were, have found employment within the second realm and have cut off their dreadlocks. Aunty Joan holds great faith in ferals, whose mobility, capacity for spontaneity and commitment to direct action she admires. Aunty Joan intuitively it is ferals who will be the ones to support her in the event of a long-term blockade, if another mine were to be proposed out the back, especially one that threatened a rockhole. A burgeoning field of Australian anthropological literature dealing with white helping professionals working to ‘improve’ Aboriginal lives (Lea 2008), white ‘anti-racists’ (Kowal 2006a; 2006b; 2008; 2010a) and hippies (Henry 2012) has directed my own attention to greenies.

Earlier in this chapter I introduced Clare who has had an involvement in rockhole trips since 2006. At the outset, Clare told me, she was seeking to establish ‘meaningful relationships’ with Aboriginal people. Crucially, she perceives that time is necessary for the relationship to become a relationship between people who actually know each other, rather than just an encounter with an object, a representative of Aboriginality. Of her first meeting with Aunty Joan, Clare says, ‘She was a crack up. Within five minutes of meeting her ... she was like, “Do you want to see the wombats?”’ Aunty Joan opened the boot of her car to reveal two dead wombats. Aunty Joan has a keen sense of her own difference and her inherent interest to outsiders: eating wombat was regarded as normal in Ceduna among Nungas and to a lesser degree whitefellas, but she knew it would be a novelty to Clare. Clare continued, ‘She’s very easy to like, incredibly open to engaging with people from different backgrounds ... just crossing that divide that’s so often there.’ Clare is from an upper middle-class background and has lived out her adult life in an inner city, progressive social-cultural milieu. Clare is cognisant of some kind of ‘divide’ that separates her world from the world she entered into at the invitation of Aunty Joan Mob. She once joked to me that she spent eighty per cent of her time in Ceduna

thinking, 'What the fuck am I doing here?' Furthermore she was convinced that most of the Aboriginal people she knew in Ceduna were wondering the same thing about her.

What then is the nature of this divide? Clare reflected that her sense of being out of place was not so much to do with racialised difference, with being a white woman 'visiting Aboriginal Australia' (Muecke 1999), but a difference produced by divergent life experiences. More than a sense that she did not know Aunty Joan Mob she was conscious of the fact that *she* was 'out of context' and that the Ceduna Nungas she was trying to get close to were also struggling to come to understand her. She told me:

I can tell they think I'm a complete weirdo 'cause I'm 29 and I'm not married with five kids. And I'm sure they must just go, 'Why are they [the greenies] here? Why are they studying us?' Of course that must be weird. [I'm] coming to their world so I'm coming to terms with that, but they don't really know where I've come from ... I'm so out of context here. I probably don't make any sense in this context. They probably don't have a way to conceive of my world. That's more class, and just regional Australia versus the city. ... I mean, I'm sure a lot of those things I'd definitely be feeling ... hanging out in the kitchen of a white Ceduna family.

Clare's intellectual and political interests compelled her to welcome 'an opportunity to spend time with a traditional owner' (Aunty Joan). Her own 'trajectory in social space' (Bourdieu 2003:283) had taken her into the lives of Aboriginal others. She would most likely have felt just as out of place 'hanging out in the kitchen of a white Ceduna family' but the route that would have taken her into that kitchen is less easy to imagine. At university Clare developed a specific interest in global Indigenous studies, first coming on a rockhole trip with an acute awareness that she had could have reached her mid-20s, growing up in Australia, 'and not really know any Aboriginal people'.

Clare then often felt out of place in Ceduna, yet was determined to forge a relationship with Aunty Joan Mob members. She reflected that, as with all friendships, the relationships became more rewarding and less contrived as time went on. Crucially for my purposes, this involved members of Aunty Joan Mob becoming *less* generically 'Aboriginal'. She observed that it took time before she could perceive, 'Oh that's Aunty [Joan], that's [Jo Jo]...' rather than 'that's what Aboriginal people do and feel'.

Offering their principled support to Aboriginal political struggles was usually one of a number of commitments held by greenies. Other commitments commonly included conservation, of course, but also not eating meat for environmental reasons or not eating meat for ethical reasons. Hanging out with Aunty Joan Mob could prove challenging for greenies, merely on the basis of a seemingly prosaic difference, such as being vegetarian.

Many greenies made much of the fact that in the past they too were vegetarian but since they made contact with Aunty Joan Mob and other desert-based Aboriginal activists, they have fully embraced eating kangaroo, wombat and other wild meats. Performing desires for and an appreciation of meat indicated to other greenies that contact with the Aboriginal other was a powerful experience, which they had embraced so thoroughly as to have been transformed at a fundamental level of their being — their bodies coming to relish and crave the fatty, greasy taste of *malu wipu* (kangaroo tails) and the lean meat of wombat, cooked in the ground oven for hours. In the following case, a vegetarian greenie named Gretta looked for a way to reconcile her vegetarianism with her wish to immerse herself in the lifeworld of Aunty Joan Mob.

One night mid-way through the September 2008 rockhole trip two carloads of hunters went out, piling most of the young men and boys as well as a couple of greenies into the back of the 4WDs. They left at dusk and returned after 10pm. It was a hot night and as the hunters cruised slowly back in to camp we were baking damper to have with honey for our dessert, talking by the fire and keeping an eye out for scorpions scuttling along the dry ground. The hunters brought back two wombats, a rabbit and an echidna. A vegetarian greenie returned from the hunting trip ashen-faced and silent. 'You shot an echidna?!' I asked him, one horrified vegetarian to another. A Nunga teenager, Bryn, then climbed out of the car holding a blanket with the echidna curled up in it, handing it to me gently, telling me that he wanted to show it to his young cousins in the morning before letting it go. While it was sitting in my lap it began to uncurl, poking nose and feet out of a spiky ball.

But Gretta had not overheard my conversation with Bryn, who put the echidna to bed in a box with a blanket. She sat quietly by the fire, but was clearly agitated and later that night convinced Shane and Clare to help her stage an escape. She tipped the box over so that it looked like the echidna had fought its way out, releasing it into the night. The next morning Aunty Joan and Bryn went looking for it, wanting to show it to the kids in camp before letting it go. Gretta's hand in its disappearance was kept quiet.

For Gretta the echidna became the focus of what I believe are commonly shared anxieties. Greenies have an exaggerated interest in Aboriginal cultural practices, which includes hunting. But this interest can prove incommensurate with deeply-held beliefs and arduous to sustain in the face of lived realities. The echidna's staged escape involved Gretta effecting an effacement of her own intimately held beliefs as she did not approach nor ask Bryn or Aunty Joan what they planned to do with the echidna, despite her distress. Instead she went to great lengths to act in secret. But her beliefs were sublimated only to a degree, and she was intent on saving the echidna's life, having projected on to Aunty Joan Mob what she assumed they would do, as unchanged generic Aboriginal hunters and gatherers. In fact their cultural traditions are not fixed, and in this case are influenced by this family group's own interest in conservation issues. Aunty Joan has explained, 'Echidnas are still eaten but very rarely. ... They're way too hard too find, we're worried that they're getting extinct.'

The other arena of dense expectations and dissonances was in understandings, not of the Aboriginal cultural past, but the Aboriginal experience of the colonial past. Progressives in particular took an avid interest in talk about the past. Life on Koonibba was a frequent theme of fireside yarns late at night, but Aunty Joan Mob often referenced twentieth century historical events in ways that disturbed greenies' understandings of the more recent historical past. The dissonance principally centred on Aunty Joan's generations' descriptions of the end of the mission in 1963 and the era of policy reform. Within Australian historiography, South Australia is cited as having instituted liberal reforms earlier than other Australian states (Brock 1995:232). However, as indicated in chapter three, when Aunty Joan and her sisters return to this moment they tend to describe it in terms of devastation: the pretty gates of the mission were torn down, the missionaries left and 'government took over,' 'drinking rights' came in. The confluence of these factors brought about a sudden, chaotic end to a whole world and the Koonibba community dispersed. The people from Koonibba lost their 'hunting spirits,' says Aunty Joan, and increasingly became dependent on government (see Pearson 2009). However, progressives struggled to appreciate this, accompanied as it was on one occasion with the lamentation that 'they should have kept up with the assimilation'. In left liberal discourse assimilation refers to suppression of Aboriginal culture and is thus an exemplary past evil, but to Aunty Joan's generation it refers to an emerging emphasis in the 1950s and early 1960s on education, training and life-skills. This interpretation of events was always met with a tense, polite silence on the part of greenies. Other details of life, such as

complaints of missionaries' attempts to ban the speaking of Aboriginal languages, were much more eagerly received.

'Tell me something: do you feel guilty?' Aunty Joan asked a group of greenies who were sitting by the fire after dinner one night. There was a pause and then a rush of talking, 'not guilty ... but responsible ... guilt's not the right word ...'. Then, a woman aged in her late 40s, with an imposing personality and loud voice said clearly and firmly, 'I don't feel guilty. But I am aware that my privilege, as a white person, comes about as a result of your disempowerment.' Aunty Joan was seated right next to this speaker and looked at her vaguely alarmed and uncomfortable. Another greenie said, softly, 'Not guilty, but ashamed, I want to do something... .' Aunty Joan cut us all off, saying, 'You know I wouldn't be here if my great-great-grandfather hadn't jumped ship at Eucla: he was a white man, he was Irish.'

By showing she was *also* one of us, Aunty Joan was challenging greenies to think differently about the colonial past, unsettling their investment in the binary categories that structured their thinking about the history of Aboriginal oppression. Greenies however found a way to restore their own understanding of the past and of the unequal relations between Aboriginal and Settler Australians, at this challenging juncture that actually invited us to enrich our understanding. In effect, the invitation was refused. 'Well the Irish have a long history of fighting oppression!' said a greenie happily, and indeed Aunty Joan agreed, 'What were they thinking? Crossing Irish with Kokatha!' In my fieldnotes I evinced disappointment, writing, 'Everyone laughs, but the point being made has been lost.'

Very generally, greenies are attached to the following causal narrative: that a history of oppression has produced both contemporary Indigenous people with their unequal circumstances, and contemporary non-Indigenous people, including themselves, and their 'privileged' circumstances. They want to do something about this situation and change it. As part of this process they are committed to learning about and from Indigenous people and issues. However, there is a degree of self-deception at work: the desire to learn implies a desire to change, but masks the extent to which some greenies are committed only to learning what they already know. In this moment Aunty Joan threw us a challenge, seeking to complicate both the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal binary and the sense that she is burdened by the past. The past is not something she struggles to move on from but something that made her who she is, a being, after all, that we

greenies are drawn to. Greenies reabsorbed this information, quickly and seamlessly, into a preexisting teleology. Aunty Joan was once again firmly located on the side of the oppressed, descended from the Irish, who were recast in this moment (contra Noel (Ignatiev 2009)) as not quite white. In such exchanges I sensed that Aunty Joan tired of her subject position as an Aboriginal person being equated with 'being oppressed,' experiencing this role as itself a burden to bear. But when she sought to free herself from it, well-meaning greenies held her there.

Greenies, especially ferals, tend to pick up and start using both Kokatha words and Aboriginal English with remarkable rapidity. They throw in words like 'inni,' 'cuz,' 'bruz,' 'fella,' and phrases such as 'rubbish country' and 'true?' Their mastery of this high-speed process of imitation /simulation is primarily geared towards generating symbolic capital in relation to other greenies. In all-greenie company one greenie, who had lived in Ceduna a mere 12 months, joked as he proposed we drive a short distance rather than walk it, 'You can take the lad out of Ceduna ...'

But how do Aunty Joan Mob members respond to these kinds of expressions? A teenager told me that she couldn't believe the way greenies 'even began to talk like Nungas!' She was totally amazed to come across a group of white people who seemed to not only like and appreciate Aboriginal people, but even seemed to want to become Aboriginal. Other members of Aunty Joan Mob resented these acts of appropriation. They saw only a white practice of stealing, with an ignoble lineage and with which they were overly familiar: dispossession, stolen children, then here the casual taking up of much more than a few scraps of language, but an Aboriginal mode of being.

Some greenies were very conscious of the appropriation critique, studiously *avoiding* any of these kinds of practices, seeing that to adopt or affect Nunga-ness themselves was highly inappropriate. In fact, they believed that in an encounter with Aboriginal people it was necessary to retain a heightened consciousness of the fact of a fundamental difference between being 'privileged' and being oppressed, rather than represent themselves as fluid and as being able to become, very quickly, more like the oppressed.

These issues of appropriation and also romanticisation have attracted much comment in Australia for some time now. Debates largely revolve around the construction of authentic, essentially spiritual and primordial versions of Aboriginality (eg Grossman and Cuthbert 1998). The issue at hand is more complex still. An unspoken condition of the

contact, and certainly the closeness with Aunty Joan Mob that greenies enjoyed was that it precluded contact/ closeness with other Nungas in Ceduna. It was *these* Aboriginal people, who were pro-mining or were simply 'native title people,' who greenies objectified as 'sell outs', following Aunty Joan Mob's lead. Romanticising the authentic Aboriginal way of being has received more attention than its necessary corollary: objectifying the inauthentic Aboriginal way of being.

This dilemma affected only a small group of greenies, who have spent enough time with Aunty Joan Mob to grasp the broader picture surrounding Rockhole Recovery. This was the case both for Clare, because of her long-term involvement and Bobby, who spent six months in Ceduna, and who I introduced in chapter four. They were both unsettled by their perception that in order to achieve closeness with Aunty Joan Mob they were required to keep at a distance and objectify, in discourse, other Aboriginal people in Ceduna. In reality, their sensitivity may have heightened their perception of this conflict. I found that when I came into contact with a range of Nungas and whitefellas in Ceduna, especially through my work at Minya Bunhhi, Aunty Joan Mob were not fazed by my casual contact with people they had their own problems with.

For both Clare and Bobby however this perception increasingly alienated them from other greenies, but not from Aunty Joan Mob. Bobby especially expressed deep cynicism about greenies' willingness to treat Aunty Joan's enemies 'like these mysterious other Aboriginal people,' about whom they showed little curiosity, despite their keen interest in 'Aboriginal issues' and 'Aboriginal culture'. Clare put it this way:

There's not a right and a wrong way to be Aboriginal, or to be more Aboriginal or less Aboriginal, you know? But greenies seemed to be saying, "This is the real, proper way to be Aboriginal, and these [other Aboriginal] people have sold out."

Bobby greatly valued his connection with Aunty Joan Mob, enthusing to me that he 'really, really fucking liked them' but was also vitally interested in the contradiction between what he had previously believed about 'other Aboriginal people' and what he experienced when he got to know some of these people. Bobby was affronted by greenies' apparent disinterest in these other Aboriginal people. He told me:

[Greenies] didn't know them, didn't have anything to do with them. But there was all this stuff about 'they were this' and 'they were that'. ... They

never meet any other Aboriginal people. It's almost like it doesn't matter to them. ... Anyway, I was meeting these people as soon as I got here, and I was like, Fuck! They were really interesting, inspired people who were just as charismatic [as Aunty Joan Mob members]... They struck me all the same way as the mob we know struck me. You know: interesting and lively and charismatic and engaged and benevolent and radical. They struck me in all the same ways. The language they used was the fucking same, 'We're fighting for our people'. ... this one [Nunga] I became close to talked about how she was always 'fighting for her people' but she worked in child protection. She considered that to be fighting for her people. Being 'big, strong community people' ... That was fighting for their people, which is effectively the same as Aunty [Joan] you know.

Conclusion

Rockhole trips are a vehicle for both an expression of Aunty Joan Mob's rejection of the native title process, and for symbolisation. Aunty Joan Mob set out in dust-coated cars on epic bush trips, entering their country along conservation park access tracks prohibited for public use. They establish camps and sink wombat carcasses into hot coals. Rockhole trip participants start the sludge pump and get to work cleaning rockholes with brooms and shovels. Through all of these acts, by inserting their bodies into a contested space, Aunty Joan Mob lay claim to country by possessing it, being in it and expressing their relationship to it. Moreover, rockhole trips advance Aunty Joan Mob's struggle for self-definition as they recast and enact the following: that they are Kokatha people, living out their vitally alive and embodied relationship with Kokatha country.

This enactment is taken up by greenies, vital interlocutors who affirm and reproduce the narrative authored by Aunty Joan Mob. Greenies however have their own narratives about authentic and corrupted ways of being Aboriginal. Thus Aboriginal people are forced, again, to chart a course between being as subject and being as object.

Chapter seven. Being in the bush: pleasure, fear and survival

Introduction

'Did you see that eagle?' Aunty Joan asks after we stop the cars and climb out. A dignified bird of prey with stiff, chocolate-brown feathers gripped a desolate branch. Aunty Joan relished retelling her sighting, saying the eagle looked down its beak at her with a haughty expression, before turning its head slowly and taking flight. Her imitation of its arrogance is effective: she lowers her eyes, takes a sharp breath in and then puffs out her nostrils.

Out the back, beyond the dog fence, Aunty Joan Mob make contact with awe-inspiring country. Here eagles hover, suspended high in the taut, perfect blue sky. At night dingoes send up a plaintive howl. In this chapter I examine more closely Aunty Joan Mob's experience of, and the meanings they attribute to, being out bush. Out the back acts as both a repository for personal memories, and imaginings of a primordial Aboriginal past. These imaginings and a grasp of their substance, as I have argued, have assumed ever more significance in the native title era. However this chapter shifts attention from the demand that Aboriginal people cast themselves in the state's terms, and the pitfalls and problems involved in doing so. Instead I consider here Aunty Joan Mob's own avid interest in the primordial Aboriginal past. Critiques of essentialism and notions such as 'repressive authenticity' (Wolfe 1999:209-210) fail to adequately account for the ways some Aboriginal people self-consciously fashion their Aboriginality in essentialist terms.

In this chapter I argue that being in the bush stimulated exciting and liberated self-imaginings on the part of Aunty Joan Mob, a phenomena I interpret in light of what it tells us about the contemporary predicament of Nungas living in a small, highly racialised country town. Being on country, I argue, involves entering a psychic space beyond, and recalling a temporality before, white society. This is part of what gives the experience of being in the bush its profundity and power. Thus my focus shifts from actions

undertaken primarily in reference to other Aboriginal people, in the context of an intra-Aboriginal dispute, to further explore local black-white relations.

Barry Morris (1989:142), in commenting on Dhan-gadi conceptions of the old 'black fellas' ways argued, 'Although this involves ordering the past from the present, it is not merely an imaginary projection into the past.' Morris' (ibid.) interpretation of this process precisely fits Aunty Joan Mob, 'The Dhan-gadi present an image of themselves which they themselves have produced, but which none the less necessitates coming to grips with both their past and their present situation.' In Ceduna, white hegemony remains a complex yet persistent social fact, structuring even the racial intimacies that characterise Ceduna's history and present. Out bush, Nungas seize the possibility to reimagine and invert the established racial hierarchy. Here Nungas are assumed, both by themselves and the greenies, to belong more fully, rightly and deeply. The bush recognises Aboriginal people, greeting them and communicating with them through subtle, supranatural signs such as the strange behaviour of birds. Where a sense of white entitlement pervades Ceduna, out the back it is Nungas who assume an authoritative presence, inverting the racialised social order.

It should now be clear that Aunty Joan Mob's struggle is an effort to create, dwell in and relish an imagined space beyond native title. Rockhole Recovery is central to their effort to forge, shape and inhabit that space. More than that too, the bush also provides an escape from the pressures of town life, and the white gaze. Not only does it recognise, affirm and soothe Nungas, the bush is seen to have the power to redeem, heal and make them whole. However respect for the 'old ways,' and the power of life-sustaining ceremonies can also make some Nungas nervous about the bush. The bush acts as a repository for latent powers, which are only partially understood today: there is, of course, no way of totally escaping the historical and social conditions that shape all contemporary social actors. Aunty Joan Mob members do not live out everyday lives in which events are determined, in very specific ways, by the old laws, transcendental powers and ancestral spirits. Understanding and belonging to the bush thus involves understanding that some things now lie beyond human knowing and reach. Non-human beings and forces reign in the bush, just as the aloof and majestic eagle looks down its hooked beak proudly, surveying the human presence beneath it. These non-human beings and forces are held at a respectful distance. Fear, or awe, of the bush enhances rather than detracts from its pleasures. Furthermore the relationship the possession of

cultural knowledge, and opposition to mining is by no means clear-cut. Knowing the bush and the mythical meanings associated with particular sites could form the basis of an opposition to mining, and those Aboriginal people in Ceduna who embrace mining are criticised for not adequately knowing and understanding the country, and therefore not knowing what they were losing. However *not* knowing the bush can also form the basis of being uneasy at least about the idea of mining: if it isn't known what is out there, and what it all means, then how can one definitively know that it doesn't matter to interfere with it?

In this chapter I analyse the ways that Aunty Joan Mob mix pleasure with fear out the back, experiencing the bush as both 'relaxing' and dangerous. I also turn my attention in this chapter to the question of survival, noting Aunty Joan Mob's keen interest in traditional bush foods, and the emphasis placed on Aboriginal people's ability to survive independent of white foodstuffs. This material was collected as I assisted in the production of a small book documenting Aunty Joan Mob's bush food knowledge. Thus in this chapter I sketch the bush as both an imaginary space and a material place where Aboriginal autonomy, specifically Aboriginal people's ability to survive, independent of white foodstuffs, but also autonomous of and in defiance of white institutions, ideologies and ideas, is conjured up and savoured. In short, being in the bush opens up a window on to another way of being, and suggests that it lies within grasp.

Reified relations: Aboriginal connections to country

Judith Butler has considered the uses feminists have made of an imaginary 'origin': a pre-patriarchal past that proved the contingency and historical specificity of gender hierarchy. Butler observed (2006:48), 'although the turn to a pre-patriarchal state of culture was intended to expose the self-reification of patriarchy, that pre-patriarchal scheme has proven to be a different sort of reification'. That is, pre-patriarchal states have come to be naturalised as a proper, purer and stable state of being, and as existing somehow outside of historical and social processes. In much the same way, imaginings and reconstructions of pre-colonial Indigenous societies have also seen reified constructions installed in public consciousness. However these too served and continue to serve political and ideological purposes. Michael Dodson (2003:40) argues strongly for

Aboriginal people's 'right to draw on all aspects of our Aboriginality,' including images of the primordial past. The past, Dodson says (2003:41), 'is a source of freedom'.

Central to this reified construction has been the notion of an intrinsic and spiritual link that is supposed to exist between Aboriginal people and their traditional country; the subject of this chapter then is burdened with seemingly self-evident and over-determined assumptions about the content and basis of Aboriginal people's connection to their traditional country. It is necessary to clear some conceptual ground. Aboriginal people across Australia are popularly and homogeneously defined by their 'unique relationship to the land' and this relationship is traced back to its imaginary origin in the pre-colonial past. Aboriginality is consistently invoked in suburban, corporate and mass cultural settings with reference to bush-y leitmotifs, such as kangaroos and natural features of the landscape. These symbols, produced by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal actors, denote Aboriginality even where they seem incongruous with the reality of Aboriginal people's daily lives. Many greenies endorse an understanding of the Aboriginal-country relation as essential and transhistorical in nature, as primarily spiritual, and as having an ancient source. The promise of contact with Aunty Joan Mob, who have sustained a strong link with their country, is often the very thing that draws greenies to the experience of Rockhole Recovery — Aboriginal people are both expected to be deeply attached to their traditional countries as well as being excessively praised and valued for fulfilling this expectation. All this is not to say that Aunty Joan mob do *not* see the land as sentient, for example, as numerous anthropologists have described (eg Bell 1984; Povinelli 1993; Rose 1996). But this attributed sentience has a very general quality. Its meaning cannot be explained, primarily, with reference to pre-contact understandings of country, as if in the present these understandings assume a weaker, more generalised and lesser form. Instead my discussion denaturalises the relationship between the bush and Aboriginal people.⁷⁰ I read the relationship between the bush and contemporary Aboriginal people in light from the everyday experiences of Nungas living in a small country town and attempting, as Morris (1989:142) put it, 'to come to grips with their ... present day situation'.

Gillian Cowlishaw (2010; 2011; 2012) has recently explored the constitution, circulation and effect of a highly valued and reified version of Aboriginal culture. More specifically,

⁷⁰ But in doing so I do not employ an ideologically inflected brand of 'realism' that seeks to expose the connection between Aboriginal people and the land as a romantic fallacy (eg Sandall 2001).

she has explored what the desire for ‘Aboriginal Culture’ — on the part of concerned/interested white citizenry and the state — has meant for suburban Aboriginal people. In the context of a Western Sydney reconciliation group, Cowlshaw wrote of local Aboriginal elders’ efforts to live up to extravagant expectations:

Fragments of ‘Indigenous knowledge’, such as referring to totemic symbols or tribal affiliations, provided convincing enough evidence of the presence of esoteric culture. That is, these old people did their best to hint at having the iconography, the language and ceremonial practices that were desired, and their efforts were accepted gratefully [by white reconciliation group members]. (Cowlshaw 2010:218)

Cowlshaw (2010:219) identifies a major disjuncture between this interest in, and reverence for, a domain of reified abstractions that are taken to represent traditional culture, on the one hand, and a reluctance to engage with the Aboriginal milieu and culture as an everyday ‘way of living the social,’ on the other. A major feature of this disjunctive relationship lies in the fact that the realm of reified culture is constituted by land-based knowledge, practices, symbols and meanings, and that these Aboriginal people are long-term suburban residents. The point that interests me however is Cowlshaw’s (2010:221) view that ‘a good deal of what is exhibited or performed in the western suburbs as Aboriginal Culture does not emerge from autonomous Indigenous community activity,’ but is instead elicited by institutions of the state. The desires and demands of outsiders ‘may become the desires of insiders’ (Cowlshaw 2011:171). This formulation is inadequate for my purposes.

Before I outline my own interpretation of an equivalent process I note the vastly different local contexts we describe: these go a long way to explaining our different perspectives. In Cowlshaw’s (2011:172) case the ‘mythopocia’ she analysed takes heightened forms in suburban conditions, where the ‘culture that is being evoked bears a strange and awkward relationship to the lives of local Aboriginal people’. Here, Aboriginal people’s responses to others’ desires are not always positive and include cynicism, amusement, embarrassment and bewilderment. In Ceduna, however, there is a pervasive sense that powerful forces, quite literally, surround the small town: they are present out the back but they are evidenced from the vantage point of town too — stormy skies, suddenly rough seas, gritty, swirling orange winds, are all laden with potential: the potential that is, to mean *something*. These phenomena might in fact

emanate from the roughshod temporary camps of Anangu, located beside the dirt roads that lead out of town. These primordial forces are seen to continue to exert their influence on daily events: supernatural phenomena and the skills of culturally knowledgeable men and women are respected and feared. Most Ceduna whitefellas know nothing of any of this; while many Nungas regard whitefellas' all too typical ignorance with some satisfaction — condemned as they are to live with limited means to understand, explain and sometimes even notice significance occurrences — other Nungas resent the fact that whitefellas have failed to acknowledge that they live in the midst of so much 'culture'. This is one example of the ways Nungas and whitefellas continue to live, in some regards, in separate discursive domains, while so many other aspects of their life experiences are shared.

The question arising from Cowlshaw's discussion is this: is Aunty Joan Mob's desire to 'be in the bush,' and the valorisation of the importance of being in the bush — as the most direct way of accessing, living and realising the essential aspect of what it means to be Aboriginal — a desire that can be explained by the taking up the imaginings/expectations of more powerful others, and internalising them as the desires of the self? This thesis is on the one hand at pains to sketch the importance of ever changing national and public registers of value and the demands, especially, of the native title claims process, arguing that Aboriginality is characterised by a radical instability over time. On the other hand, I firmly believe Aunty Joan Mob should not be cast as *only* responsive to the interests, desires and demands of outsiders and institutions. This implies a passivity that prevents me from apprehending Aunty Joan Mob's experience of this process on their own terms.

I encountered a passionate, positive, conscious and self-directed interest in pre-contact Aboriginal cultural traditions, on the part of some Aboriginal people, that was striking and demands critical attention. I was often completely left out of conversations about aspects of the pre-contact past and traditional cultural knowledge — sometimes referred to as 'the real stuff' — about the rockholes. This became especially clear to me over the course of a particular trip. I was frequently welcomed out bush, of course, as a greenie but for more practical reasons too. Aunty Joan was excessively grateful when I agreed to head out with my family on a four day long trip in June 2008: she did not want to head out 'without any young ones' she kept saying (that is, of my generation, rather than children). She thanked us for coming as I insisted, 'The privilege is mine.' 'This one's on

the Nuns!’ she told me, referring to a small grant for cultural activities she had secured from a progressive Catholic organisation and which was used for fuel and provisions: we carried boxes of cheap, unbranded black and gold sweet biscuits and eskies filled with tofu and tempeh.⁷¹ Aunty Joan and Uncle Gary had a flat tyre before crossing the dog fence, and we earned our keep as Shane changed it quickly: no one else present was fit and/or slender enough to undertake the task. Our party of nine included two cousins who wished to learn more of their cultural traditions: this, it transpired, was the purpose of our trip. These two had missed out on this part of their lives for different reasons — one had married a racist, violent man and had come back to her family after decades of estrangement to begin what was described as a process of healing. The other had dedicated a successful professional life to work in Aboriginal affairs. They went bush to learn from Aunty Joan. I was not privy to their many discussions involving creation stories and cultural practices and certainly did not wish to intrude. Aunty Joan did not make a big deal of excluding me from these conversations, nor did she apologise: this simply was something that Aunty Joan Mob members were absorbed in doing *together* and for their own purposes.

Not all Ceduna Nungas are as interested in land-based cultural traditions as Aunty Joan Mob members are. In fact other Nungas explicitly reject the association between bushiness and contemporary Aboriginality. Two Nunga women, with whom I had developed tentative friendships in town, joked one day about being ‘made’ to go bush by their elders. ‘They’ll make you get your *mimis* (breasts) out,’ one of them, a spirited, funny and fair-skinned woman who was about ten years older than the other, teased. My younger friend looked aghast and clutched her chest. The first woman recalled that this had happened to her, while she was travelling with a group of senior women. She told us, ‘I said, “Nah, I’m not gettin my white *mimis* out in the cold. I’m goin back to the hotel to have a spa.”’ Despite this disinterest and discomfort, it is difficult to imagine any Ceduna Nungas taking up a position ‘against culture’ in the way Dombrowski (2001) describes (see also Ono 2012).

⁷¹ These are both fermented soy products, popular among vegetarians as a source of protein. Aunty Joan Mob members were always stocking up on tofu and tempeh for two reasons: it was often heavily discounted in the Ceduna supermarket, as it approached its use-by date and had few buyers. Also, greenies, including myself, were often vegetarian, and the women in Aunty Joan Mob tended to worry about our protein intake, as life without meat was very hard to imagine. I was always touched by the volume of tofu and tempeh that seemed to accompany me everywhere out bush — as well as daunted.

I found myself habitually deferring to Aunty Joan Mob's superior knowledge of their country while I was out bush, naturalising understandings that, on an intellectual level, I assume to be acquired. On one trip I travelled with Aunty Laurel, who, I well knew, had only recently begun travelling out bush. Still I asked, 'Are we almost there?' and, the next day, 'Where are we?' Both times she answered mildly, 'Wouldn't have a clue dear.' She was totally accepting of her neophyte status in relation to the knowledge displayed by Aunty Joan, and there was no suggestion that this delegitimised her Aboriginality.

Travelling out the back with Aunty Joan Mob was the singularly defining and most pleasurable feature of my fieldwork. It often involved heading out with just three, even two, vehicles (including my own) and as few as six of us sitting around the campfire 'relaxing' each evening. It is significant in itself that I regarded these experiences as *defining* of my time in Ceduna, when actually *most* of my time was spent hanging around town. Being in the bush was outside of ordinary everyday routines, yet it was weighted by Aunty Joan Mob as being a true, powerful and proper Aboriginal experience: this was what Aunty Joan, in particular, wanted to show outsiders and visitors to her country (see also Babidge 2010:1). In my enthusiasm for these experiences, I perhaps reproduced the evaluation I want to examine more critically here.

Survival and sustenance: bush foods and the Aboriginal body

Aunty Joan sometimes framed her anti-mining stance and determination to protect her country from development by stating, 'What little bit of land we've got left out the back — that shows you there's bush tucker here — we need to keep.' She also often says, 'The grannies [grandchildren] need to learn how to survive out here.'⁷² Here I analyse the importance accorded to the knowledge, and eating, of bush foods.

I draw heavily throughout this chapter on Andrew Lattas' (1993) forceful critique of Australian intellectuals' perspectives on essentialism. Lattas was commenting on the constructivist turn taken in Aboriginal studies in the late 1980s, which signaled an important shift away from taken-for-granted notions of Aboriginality as an unproblematic category, based on biological descent and/or as bearers of distinctive cultural differences, to explorations of the ways in which Aboriginality, like all forms of

⁷² Reciprocal kin terms are used here, as they are in other Aboriginal communities.

identity, is 'the product of human imagination' (Beckett 1988a:2). Lattas, however, identified a certain tendency within the constructivist turn, criticising a number of Australian intellectuals who cautioned against or rejected outright Aboriginal 'essentialism' — that is Aboriginal people drawing on and identifying with the image of a primordial land and body — as a legitimate, 'productive' basis for individual subjectivities or political consciousness.⁷³ Lattas interprets this 'critique of essentialism' to operate as another means by which hegemony is maintained over a colonised population. As Foucault identifies (eg 2008), bodies of specialised knowledge operate to define and discipline others. In this case, Lattas (1993:245) says he witnessed white, Aboriginal Studies specialists attempt to police, delimit and adjudicate as to the 'best' definitions of Aboriginality, intervening with confidence, 'in the narratives which people employ to formulate themselves'. He continues:

An enormous amount of intellectual energy is currently directed at establishing Aboriginality as something that is invented through European involvement. What is often ignored is the sense of autonomy from the control of the 'Other' conferred by images of the past and by images of primordiality and indeed the necessity to have an image of the past if one is to have a sense of ownership of oneself. (Lattas 1993:247)

It is this 'sense of autonomy' that resonates most strongly with Aunty Joan Mob's keen interest in, involved interactions with and use of the primordial past as constitutive of contemporary Aboriginality, and of the relishing of an irreducible, powerful, exciting difference. Part of what being in the bush represents is the possibility of imagining one's (re)entry into a time and space in which it was, and Aunty Joan insists still is, possible to survive without white society and, more specifically and demonstrably, white foodstuffs. I interpret this as an interest in the possibility for some kind of Aboriginal autonomy, as much ontological as economic. Independence is an imagined ideal, and its practical impossibility is everywhere evidenced, acknowledged and accepted — Aboriginal and white lives are of course interdependent. But out bush lies a realm of self-imaginings and exploration, not future plans or concrete aspirations. Collecting and eating bush foods allows for people to experience, and literally embody a sense of autochthonous

⁷³ Lattas (1993:251) was particularly interested in the writer Mudrooroo's attempts to 'create new imaginary mythologies' for Aboriginal people. I note that Indigenous cultural theorist Philip Morrissey (2003:52), has criticised Mudrooroo for promulgating an exclusionary 'rhetoric of Aboriginality'.

otherness, and autonomy. According to Lattas, the political implications of this interest in independence and autonomy are to some outsiders disturbing. I am drawn to Lattas' (1993:260) perception of the 'fear of essentialism as a fear of difference and a fear of subordinate others producing and claiming some essential autonomous otherness'.

Aunty Joan reflects:

Usually the ocean is full of food during the summer months. So that's what the old people used to do. They go out [inland] for winter, go back out bush wintertime, come down summertime.

There's a smorgasbord out there when the tide's out. You get your fish that gets trapped in the shallow water, like flounder for instance. You've got cockles, periwinkles, razor fish, scallops, mussels, cockles, abalone, the crabs. It's just all there. So if anybody starves around this place here, they're either ignorant or they're lazy, because the food is there.

On one level Aunty Joan values the intimate knowledge of 'living off the land' held by the old people, and seeks to retain this. On another 'starving' can be understood as a metaphor for a form of deprivation she fears enduring, not of the physical body, but of the Aboriginal social body. Bush foods nourish the social body because they feed it with images of riches connected to, and reminders of, the experience of an independent, self-sufficient Aboriginal selfhood and a whole way of being Aboriginal. Aunty Joan luxuriates in these images of plenty, enjoyed by Aboriginal people in times past.

There is no sense, however, in which Aunty Joan Mob see it that being-in-this-difference — the enjoining of their contemporary Aboriginal way of being with the primordial — raises questions about the legitimacy and authenticity of ways of being Aboriginal in the present. Dichotomous notions of tradition/modernity simply do not make much sense. All of us belong to the present. Aboriginal people are, of course, the coevals of contemporary white people. Germaine Greer has lamented:

Everywhere in Australia bush tucker has become harder and harder to find; the valiant women who take their children bush have to resist their constant whinging for hamburgers and Coke. (Greer 2008:93)

These kinds of simplistic binaries — between courageous, yet defeated, tradition-oriented elders and debased, pathetic moderns — recur in Australian public discourse. In

my experience it was entirely likely that a coherent and distinctly Aboriginal experience involved drinking a can of Coke while hunting *gulda* (sleepy lizard).



Figure 13: Gulda

Indeed, the recordings done as part of our bush food project have produced sprawling, discontinuous and multi-layered transcripts. In one, a football match featuring Port Adelaide plays at full ball on a battery-operated radio, nursed on an elderly woman's knee a short distance from where we cooked *gulda* on the fire. The teenagers and younger kids pass around a can of Coke ('here, hold this') while taking turns knocking *gulda* heads against the tow ball of parked 4WDs, until the lizards went limp. We stuffed them with paper towel, as Aunty

Joan declared herself 'too lazy' to find blue bush.

Rhiannon questioned Aunty Joan over the course of our recording sessions about the tradition/modern dichotomy. Rhi asked Aunty Joan to respond to cynical comments made about Nungas using guns and cars on hunting expeditions (see also Gibson 2008:293). Aunty Joan shrugged these off easily, stating:

[Whitefellas] always liked saving their traditions, so why can't we share their traditions? I mean, they brought 'em here, and Nungas are smart enough to work out, 'This is a good thing, we'll do it.' ... Same with the rabbits, you know, when they brought 'em over. The Nungas weren't backward in using that as a source of bush tucker.

Rhiannon agreed, 'Yeah, we don't go in horse and carts, us white people.' Aunty Joan replied, 'No. Or *tjina* [by foot]. No, we've got cars that get us places a lot quicker, so why

not?' Aunty Joan included a section in the bush foods book entitled 'Ring-ins'. She describes eating rabbit, the box thorn berries (now regarded as a noxious weed), walga (wild bush tomatoes), and camel.

The bush is credited with *already* nourishing and ensuring the survival of Aunty Joan's generation *as Aboriginal people*. As I have shown, Aunty Joan, her sisters and other fair-skinned mission kids remember heading out into the bush north of Koonibba Mission, eating galahs, birds' eggs, *guldas*, and even wild cat in order to escape 'welfare'. The very survival of their Aboriginal identities depended on familiarity with the bush; their ability to 'live off the land' for days at a time is seen as fundamental to them having escaped the fate 'government' would have had them meet. Aunty Joan Mob see it that those Aboriginal people who were removed as children were 'lost'. That is, from the point of view of those who remained, their relatives were always searching for them (and in many cases eventually found them). But they were also 'lost' to the world of kin relations, knowledge of their cultural traditions, and a relationship with the country of their ancestors. The bush is seen as a hospitable place that is credited with protecting, sheltering and nourishing fair-skinned mission kids, ensuring that they maintained their ability to locate themselves within the local Aboriginal world.

While the bush behind Koonibba is the place where Aunty Joan's generation hid from welfare, and the very survival of their Aboriginal selves depended on this patch of bush, Aunty Joan insists that this was also an opportunity, 'During those trips too we learnt a lot; we had to survive in the bush.' Profound and disturbing ironies are at work here: forces aimed at the destruction of a particular way of being Aboriginal enabled the consolidation of a strong Aboriginal identity, expressed in terms of a connection with land-based knowledge and culture. The method of Aunty Joan's escape from the long reach of 'Welfare,' at this time of her life, forms the basis for her familiarity with and felt attachment to the bush in the present moment. Furthermore, these childhood experiences of managing to stay on the mission laid the foundations for a confidence in her Aboriginality. Bush foods enabled both her survival, but also the sustenance of her Aboriginality.

Today, Aunty Joan Mob members make pronouncements about the validity of people's Aboriginality based on their knowledge of and the historical depth of their attachment to the land. That is, other local Aboriginal people are questioned and devalued if they are seen to have a superficial attachment to local places. While there is a degree of sympathy

for those who were removed and returned to their families later in life, any of these Nungas' attempts to speak knowledgably about their traditional country are scorned. Aunty Joan's Aboriginality was once cast as malleable by state discourses committed to its disassembling, and Herculean community efforts had to be undertaken to protect it. It has now acquired immutable and respected qualities, because of a childhood spent 'going bush,' partly in order to escape Welfare.

The more general and everyday procuring of bush foods to supplement rations was also a strong theme of reminiscences about Koonibba. While feeding families whose basic rations were inadequate was a necessity, again this process nourished the social body. Aunty Joan constructs a historical narrative in which the move off the mission and into town, a move that gathered momentum in the 1950s, precipitated a loss of traditional food knowledge, which was linked to westernisation and a loss of 'culture'.

When the people started coming, moving into town they were pretty well in town. They don't go out much at all. It was left up to, more or less, the Mission mob. Coz I suppose when they moved to town, they were getting educated and whatever in the western system. Then they wouldn't have gone out for *gulda*.

'Wonder what the rich people are doing?' The bush as 'relaxing'

Bound up in the construction of the bush as 'relaxing' was the perception that being out the back provided a means to escape the scrutiny, stresses and pressures associated with town life. Here I present images of escape, therapy, the fusing of bodies with country, and conviviality.

Aunty Joan mulled over a possible caption for a large-format image of the vast and sparkling salt bed, Googs Lake, which was to feature in an exhibition of photos of the landscapes traversed over the course of Rockhole Recovery, mounted and organised by greenies in order to raise funds for future rockhole trips. She settled on, 'When we sit here we say, "Wonder what the rich people are doing now?"' Googs Lake, as well as Paint Lakes, are two sites regarded as especially accessible, restorative and peaceful places to spend a night camping, or have a fire and picnic on a day trip.

I first went to Paint Lakes on Melbourne Cup Day, 2006. Six of us — three members of Aunty Joan Mob and three greenies — picnicked there, listening to the radio and rueing the bad bets we'd placed earlier in town. Paint Lakes is a wide oval clay-pan, sticky under foot. Driving there, I always find myself involuntarily ducking and weaving, in an effort to avoid the low, overhanging branches, sticks, and strips of bark that come swiping, flapping and thrashing at the car. On rockhole trips this same track has claimed a set of roof racks, a 4WD snorkel and my own car's rear window, which was smashed to smithereens when Aunty Joan's sister, who had temporarily borrowed it, swerved to avoid one branch and another one came through the window from the opposite direction. The narrow, twisting strip of a track drops down a steep incline to arrive at the edges of a sweep of bare ground, rimmed with stunted mallee. The sky blazes above the open area. Out on the lakebed patches of grey, white, the purple of bruises, a golden yellow, and rich brown swirl together. For the 'old people' this was a source of ochre and most probably a place for gatherings and ceremonies — less is known about the meanings associated with this site than others I visited with Aunty Joan Mob.

Many simple picnics were enjoyed on the Paint Lakes shoreline: it was an easy two hour drive from town, and a day trip was often called for if people were stressed and needed to unwind. These picnics involved setting to work as soon as we arrived to build a small fire, perhaps to grill a fish or bake potatoes in foil. Once, we cooked a snapper slowly in buried coals. We waited for it for hours but agreed it was 'a beautiful feed,' the steaming white flesh falling off the bones. Tea was drunk from a thermos, and more made in the billy, while we sat on a chequered picnic rug, on logs, or in foldout camping chairs. Commentary usually centred on how 'relaxing' it was to be somewhere quiet and still, to enjoy a fire and a hot cup of tea. 'Every day feels like Sunday out here,' mused Uncle Gary once, but time itself was not forgotten: watches were not worn but some members of Aunty Joan Mob checked mobile phones to see if diabetic medicine was needed.

In the documentary film *Keeper* (Russell 2010) Aunty Joan is shown taking her then 13-year-old granddaughter to Paint Lakes. The teenager digs up some ochre, wielding a heavy shovel in thongs. Then, she sits on the lake edge with her Nana and rubs the gold-flecked dirt into her skin. Aunty Joan does this as it makes the skin soft; the golden grains, she says, have relaxing qualities. 'Kind of like foundation?' the granddaughter asks. And then, applying it to her cheeks, 'Does this suit my complexion?' Aunty Joan grunts her assent as the two of them rub themselves, rhythmically, happily, with the

earth. These scenes echo memories of Aunty Joan's grandmother, who is said to have spent hours sitting patiently chipping mica off the face of the Koonibba Rockhole.

At Paint Lakes we were encouraged to literally absorb the calming, healing and relaxing properties of the bush. We crumbled golden dirt between fingers, massaging it into shins, forearms, our necks and cheeks. And at rockholes, Nunga women who were in need of healing from abuse and damage were encouraged to lie in the grooves and hollows of rocks in the sun, in order to soak up the positive energies that lay latent in the country itself. Draped on warm rocks — eyes closed, bodies soft — they were understood, I think, to be melding their contemporary Aboriginal selves with an ancient Aboriginal corporeality and land. Their sense of self had, in various ways, been attacked, belittled or diminished through their experience of being in the contemporary world: in this moment it was enlarged and enriched as it fused with the Aboriginal past. Judy Atkinson (2002:204-205) has also stressed the therapeutic potential from identifying with, contacting and/or relating to an Aboriginality of this kind.

The day trips devoted to relaxation and leisure often culminated in picking bush medicine — stuffing garbage bags with strong-smelling, spindly leaves. Bush medicine has itself inherently relaxing qualities and can be used to aid massage, as well as for chest congestion, aches and pains. Aunty Vera told me that one afternoon she was driving back into town after picking bush medicine and felt herself become drowsy: She realised the smell of the plants in the confined space were making her relaxed and sleepy.

Bags were often filled for others who had been unable to make it bush that day: one of us greenies would collect 'bush med' for some of the elderly women of Aunty Joan mother's generation, for example. Aunty Joan Mob members make bush medicine by boiling the plants down in a base, traditionally goanna fat was used but today it's most often margarine. The mixture congeals to form a thick yellow paste or may be bottled as a greener, runnier liquid, depending on the maker. 'Bush med' is for sale in the Ceduna craft shop and the Cultural Centre but also, via the relationship with greenies, in shops stocking 'eco-friendly' products in Melbourne. The *task* of filling the bags out bush is therapeutic too, says Aunty Joan:

When you're actually picking, there's a group of you, you're picking the bush medicine, you're yarning away. It's like a social thing. ... So what people don't realise is just how much they're talking to each other while they're

doing it. So it's sort of like a therapy, I guess. And they talk about anything and everything.

In town Aunty Joan Mob watched, and were watched by, other people. This involved being 'being dissected under white eyes' (Fanon 1967:116) and also constantly negotiating the wariness and hostility that marked many intra-Aboriginal relationships. But out bush it was the kind, wise and attentive ancestors whose eyes were understood to be omnipresent, their presence manifesting throughout their purview. Close attention was paid to the evening's frog calls or the movements of a strangely friendly bird, who hopped about close-by, confident and seemingly familiar. Out bush the atmosphere of others' scrutiny lifts, and the presence of Aunty Joan mob is legitimated though an entirely different system of signs, this one intelligible only to Nungas.

Before stepping on to a rockhole, Aunty Joan would instruct everyone present to choose a small stone, and then toss it gently on to the rock-face as we called out to the old people letting them know we were not intruders. Visitors who were coming out on country for the first time were encouraged to introduce themselves, stating their name, (provided they did not feel too self-conscious talking out loud to the spirit world, as some greenies tended to be). Aunty Joan's own greetings were always friendly and casual in tone.

Aunty Joan consistently emphasised the naturalness of her own affinity with the bush. She had fashioned the following story, which she told to me on a trip I made to Ceduna in June 2010. An experienced 4WD enthusiast had heard about Aunty Joan and the rockhole trips, eventually finding her phone number and making contact. Over the course of their phone conversation he asked, 'What map do you use?' She replied, 'I don't use a map.' Far from relating this exchange at the naïve white outsider's expense, Aunty Joan explained that he then said quickly, 'Honestly the stupidest things come out of my mouth sometimes' and they both laughed. Their laughter points to a mutual validation of Aunty Joan's instinctual form of belonging, which contrasted with his abstracted method of apprehending unfamiliar terrain. 'Of course an Aboriginal elder does not use a map out on her own country!' his self-deprecating laughter said. And indeed, Aunty Joan Mob careened around what I first saw as a maze of dirt roads and tangled, barely discernible tracks, skillfully reading the signs of human and animal activity as they went. These confident, joyous spatial practices created the bush as familiar; Aunty

Joan liked to say that she knew it ‘inside out,’ and wondered if she’d been born already knowing it.

Sitting by the fire in the evening was also conducive to relaxed, and usually hilarious, story-telling sessions. A volley of stories would pour forth, most of them involving minor illegalities, or at least human foibles, and featuring characters on the margins of life.

- A man (all characters were named in the original telling of the story) wanted cigarettes. He said, ‘I’m going out for ciggies’ and came back hours later, nonchalant. Everyone wondered where he’d been. Nowhere was open in Ceduna, so out he’d driven to Nundroo to buy a packet of cigarettes: that’s a 300 kilometre return trip for *buyu*.
- Two girls decided to sleep in their broken down car, they ‘crashed out’ and woke in the morning to find it had been jacked up and all four tyres stolen, without them stirring.
- Some ‘Yalata Nungas’ pushed their car down to the Yalata turn-off and waited for sympathetic whitefellas to tow them to the nearest garage, which was also where the nearest ‘grog shop’ was. Here they filled the boot with grog, then prevailed upon other whitefellas to tow their car back to Yalata. ‘Well that car actually had no engine!’
- Two men were out fishing, and their fishing boat went down because of a ‘freak wave’. Their bodies were trapped inside and their families desperately wanted to bury the bodies. The best ‘abalone swiper’ in Australia went down to get the bodies, even when the police refused to. It was ‘that abalone poacher’ who gave grief-stricken families ‘what they wanted’.

In these stories, innovation, ingenuity, resourcefulness and generosity were celebrated, and as well the fickleness of life ruminated on. Many stories praised people who might otherwise have been understood by the moralising middle-class as undesirable, dodgy or as criminals. Crooked country cops, for example, who warned people when and where they were likely to be booked for drink driving, were talked about with enthusiasm.

Yet amidst these experiences of pleasure and fulfillment out bush, which have both an affective and corporeal aspect, a sense of unease tugged. My fieldnotes record idle conversations over buttery potatoes, the horoscopes being read out loud, hot water from

the billy topping up cups of tea drunk out of oversized pannikins. But I also noted another thread: of constant commentary, warnings, worries and stories, all of which underscored that the bush was as harsh as it was kind, and that it should be regarded as unforgiving, powerful and dangerous. These presences and portents, which I turn to now, are quite different emotions from anxieties underlying town life.

particular spot was to dig up a traditional water source, a plant called *jergoo jergoo*, which grew in thick clumps on the edge of the scrub. *Jergoo jergoo*, Auntie Joan, explained, when

Where dogs reign: the bush as dangerous

'Where did you learn about that one Aunt?' I asked, as we took close-up shots for 'We're scared of our own country!' Auntie Joan commented on my first trip to Ceduna, as we camped behind the dunes on the wild coast, and she discouraged me from swimming because of the sharks. These fears of familiar territory found their apotheosis in warnings about wild dogs and dingoes out bush.⁷⁴ Out the back, as I have explained, lies northwest of a stretch of the dingo-proof fence erected to protect farmlands from bushlands, in order to prevent attacks on stock. Heading out bush usually involved entering Yumburra Conservation Park through an access gate, prohibited from public use and which bore the warnings pictured in Figure 14.



Figure 14: Access gate, through the dog fence

⁷⁴ A motley breed of wild, mongrel dogs were said to run with the native dingoes. One of the stories told about these dogs was that Alsatians (then called German Shepherds) were 'let go' across the region, which was home to many German settlers, as a response to local anti-German sentiment during World War One. I once saw a jet-black dog, which otherwise looked very similar to a dingo, in broad daylight on the Nullabor Plain.

On numerous occasions we found the electric current that surged through the ‘dog fence’ was also, for some strange reason, running through the gate: Aunty Joan, who always led the way, quickly pulled the loop of the lock over its neck, incurring an electric shock as she did so. We always stopped for the first of many ‘smokos’ (cigarette breaks) here, pulling over just after entering the gate. The other reason for stopping in this particular spot was to dig up a traditional water source, a plant called *jungoo jungoo*, which grew in thick clumps on the edge of the scrub. *Jungoo jungoo*, Aunty Joan, explained, when we were working on the bush foods book, is ‘all part of the water supply in the desert’. ‘Where did you learn about that one Aunt?’ I asked, as we took close-up shots for inclusion in the book. ‘From the old people.’ Aunty Joan would wander around, *buyu* in one hand looking for *jungoo jungoo* and checking to see what kind of movement, of machinery and people, had recently occurred through this entrance to the park. The gate’s warning sign referred to the fact that local farmers set lethal steel-jawed traps around the perimeter of the fence, on the conservation park side, as an additional precaution to stop any animals that were attempting to get through the fence/gate at this point: we would sometimes find dead dingoes or wild dogs in the traps. This made Aunty Joan ‘wild’. She firmly believed that once we were out the back we crossed over into a realm where dogs, rather than humans, have the more legitimate claim to reign. The farmers have their land, she reasons: the clearing of the scrub in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is accepted as an historical fact ‘that’s all done, over and done with now’. The fact that farmers had so thoroughly usurped, subdued and domesticated these large tracts of territory only underlines the importance of the point that the dogs must have the integrity of *their* domain respected: this was where dogs run. At the same time she was vigilant, almost obsessive, in her warnings about the danger these animals posed.

As previously outlined, on my first rockhole trip, I travelled with my ten-week-old baby. Aunty Joan watched me like a crow, insisting my family camp close to the fire. When Shane and I went to unroll our swag she shook her head laughing mysteriously and threateningly, ‘Oh no, oh no. You won’t be sleeping there.’ She seemed grimly satisfied in revealing to me how vulnerable tiny Ned would have been to attack, if he were allowed to sleep out in the open.⁷⁵ On all rockhole trips and camping trips out the back

⁷⁵ Indeed in 1980 a dingo did take nine-week-old baby Azaria Chamberlain from a tent in central Australia. The Chamberlain family were camped at Uluru, then Ayres Rock, when a dingo snatched Azaria from the tent where she was sleeping. Her body was never found. Just two weeks before Azaria’s death the rock’s chief ranger reported to his superiors that he was worried about the increasing confidence of the local

the parents and small children present are allocated a tent, and forbidden to sleep on the ground in swags. On this first trip I could not even escape to 'dig a hole' (take a crap). I deliberately waited until I noticed that Aunty Joan was preoccupied before sneaking off with the shovel but after I had been gone for a few minutes Aunty Joan had the whole camp calling out my name, and fanning out across the sandy campground in search of me. She had sensed, she later told me, that something was watching me, and her relief when I reappeared was palpable.

Dogs, Aunty Joan was adamant, could smell a lactating mother. Indeed after camping on a cold mid-winter night at Googs Lake we woke to find several fresh sets of dog prints, one set of prints as big as a human hand, outside the tent where I had slept and breastfed throughout the night. Three dogs had circled the perimeter of the tent, before leaving camp without taking much interest in anything else. This fear quickly seeped into me. Another night we were camping nearby a rockhole, and I was walking Ned to sleep in the stroller along a dark track: the hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I had to force myself to put one heavy foot after the other. The thick black night seemed like some kind of force pushing against me. My movements tense and slow, I was compelled to turn back to camp and sit down at the fire. Aunty Joan seized on my description of the ill-feeling that flooded through me, affirming that my fears were well-founded.

Stories and warnings about dogs would often segue into more specific stories about camping out bush with the old people, who were always quick to 'growl' (hush) crying babies in camp. From these stories, other stories about the old ways of being would flow. The fear of dingoes then opened a window on to another mode of existence and another time: that of the old people and the lives of mobile hunter-gatherers. The presence of dogs stimulated Aunty Joan Mob to evoke the minutia of traditional, pre-contact times when Aboriginal people's whole lives were lived out bush. Aunty Joan Mob relished being able to access and conjure up images of this time and their ancestors, who inhabited it.

dingo pack, warning that 'a dingo is well able to take advantage of any laxity on the part of a prey species and, of course, children and babies can be considered possible prey' (Bryson 2012:6). The fact that Lindy Chamberlain was prosecuted for, and found guilty of, the murder of her baby daughter defies imagination. The investigation into Azaria's disappearance, the Chamberlains' trial and the media's reporting of it constitute, says Australian writer John Bryson (2012:13), 'a vast, stupendous fraud'. Lindy Chamberlain's conviction was quashed in 1988. While this all served as a chilling reference point for me, it barely interested Aunty Joan who was far more concerned to pass on what she had been taught about dingoes and infants from the 'old people'.

In the late evening, at around 10 or perhaps 11pm, on the April 2012 rockhole trip, a magnificent, multilayered dingo howl seemed to encircle our camp. The chorus was distant but the sound also seemed to surround us, as the camp lay quiet under the stars and the fire burnt low. 'Why do dingoes howl?' asks Deborah Rose (2006:77).⁷⁶ 'According to people who know them well, dingos howl with grief,' she replies (ibid.). But also:

Their primary motivations are to locate and communicate with other members of the group, and to announce their presence to other groups. They howl in harmonies that increase the sound of their voices, and they tell each other who and where they are. (ibid.)

Aunty Joan Mob discussed the dingoes howl the next morning, as eggs were fried for breakfast. It was understood that on this night, the dingoes howled in order to communicate with each in announcing *our* presence, out bush: our entry into their domain. Aunty Joan Mob's presence, and that of their guests, had been noticed and knowledge of it shared. Our presence was neither resented nor welcomed, as far as I could tell. But there was an implicit assumption, amongst these speculations, in which the dingoes were assumed to *know* the particular humans whom they howled of: Aunty Joan Mob belonged out here, they were familiar, indeed, relatively frequent, visitors rather than strangers. The dingoes howled on our first night out bush, but we did not hear them again: this confirmed the agreed-upon interpretation: they had already noted, and shared information of our presence.

Talk of dingoes then, and the ways in which dingoes were understood to talk about Aunty Joan Mob, signified relations of familiarity, even though fear and respect was borne of this familiarity. Wild dogs seemed to me to be of a different order of creature, as these were alien, hybrid entities. But in terms of the fear of dogs Aunty Joan mob consistently expressed, I could see no distinction between them, both were referred to by the same name ('dogs') and wild dogs were said to run with dingoes, in the same pack.

Dogs were respected bosses of a wild world that was the permanent home of Aunty Joan Mob's antecedents, but remained other to the contemporary Aboriginal experience. And

⁷⁶ Rose (2006:76) develops an analysis of the contemporary will-to-destruction, exemplified by the killing and defiling of wild dogs by graziers near Canberra. Rose contrasts a scene of cruelty and dominance (ten dogs strung from a tree) with the place of the dingo in Yarralin cosmology, as a generator of human life.

so this fear mixed complicated pleasures: it was thrilling and exciting to know of, and enter, a realm that lay beyond the agricultural districts, where traditional countries and all the meanings bound up in them had been sublimated to modern desires, where the land had been made productive and had fallen quiet, and from which dogs were barred.

While the fear of dogs was both pervasive and suggestive, other fears came into focus out bush. On the September 2008 rockhole trip greenies decided to spend a morning walking about five kilometres, along the track, from the rockhole where we were camped and down to Paint Lakes. Some of the teenage Nunga boys walked with us, but no adult members of Aunty Joan Mob evinced a desire to walk. Greenies, on the other hand, strongly associate being in the bush with walking, both to keep healthy by exercising, and for the purpose of immersing themselves in their surrounds, noting carefully the way the bush changes, identifying plants and birds, experiencing and appreciating its sounds and smells.⁷⁷

Greenies are physically fitter, on the whole, than Aunty Joan Mob members. Aunty Joan asked me anxiously, as we were all filling water bottles for our walk and lathering on sunscreen, 'Are those old ladies coming?' I had no idea who she meant. Eventually I realised she meant three bushwalking enthusiasts aged, I am guessing, in their late-40s. Aunty Joan's niece ribbed her, 'They're fitter than you Aunt.' Aunty Joan was not amused, 'I'm not walking, that's the point.' Aunty Joan shifted her worries on to the heat. We were trying to get going before 8am, but didn't leave until 9. Aunty Joan circled amongst us warning, 'You're walking into killer heat out there,' and also, 'That's killer country.'

Before we left camp Aunty Joan listed everyone walking. With her glasses perched on the end of her nose, pencil in hand, she assembled us, produced her checklist, ticking us off one by one then counting heads. She ordered us to stick together, not to let anyone fall behind, and to all wait if someone needed a toilet stop. Finally she told us she'd send a car down the track to check on us if it heated up. As we set off a greenie commented, 'I have a feeling it won't be very long before we hear a car.' Aunty Joan's instructions

⁷⁷ Chris Healy (2008:185, 189, 194-195) has produced a nuanced analysis of whitefella walking practices along the Lurijarri Heritage Trail in the Kimberley. Healy categorises these as: 'aesthetic leisure,' which stressed the experience of 'communion with the land to manage the stress of modernity'; 'mimetic primitivism,' in which young men ripped off their shirts and 'rushed to answer the call of the wild'; and 'allo-fascination,' a mode which placed Aboriginality at the centre of the experience of the trail so that the land travelled only became significant through the stories the walk's Aboriginal guides told about it.

quickly fell by the wayside, greenies moving at their own pace, chatting in small groups, and diving off the track and into the bush for a piss on their own then catching up. We spread right out along the track and trudged through the hot morning.

My family was bringing up the rear, and made it as far as another small rockhole before a car came up behind us. I jumped in to the car and we made our way slowly along the track, checking on everyone: most people were happy to keep walking and eventually made it to the lakebed.

Clare had stayed back at camp when the walkers set off and followed later in the car. She told me that back at camp Aunty Joan Mob members were evidently agitated, fretting about the greenies walking through Kokatha country without guidance or protection. Ostensibly, greenies are vitally interested in and sensitive to the spiritual potency of the places Aunty Joan Mob share with us. But on this occasion we failed to appreciate that powerful beings and forces inhabit the bush, and that we had no means of recognising or understanding these. To wander through the bush unaccompanied, for several hours, made the people who were responsible for our safety extremely concerned. Greenies equate *driving* through the bush with being distant and alienated from it.⁷⁸ They complain about spending 'too much time in the car' over the course of Rockhole Recovery and seek to bridge that distance by moving through the country and 'connecting' with it. For Aunty Joan Mob, it seemed to me, driving involves maintaining a stance of respectful distance and remove.

This was not the end of it however. At Paint Lakes we sat down in patchy shade waiting for more vehicles to arrive to carry our whole group back to camp. After a ute-full of

⁷⁸ Tess Lea notes (2008:167) that in remote Aboriginal communities both visitors and residents will expend considerable effort heaving themselves in and out of 4WD vehicles in order to drive a mere 50 metres. Driving short distances was characteristic of Ceduna life too. My partner found employment in the South Australian public service and related in amazement one evening the extensive process of booking a work car, picking up the keys, signing the car out and then back in — all to drive to a meeting that was a five or perhaps ten minute walk away. There are, I think, two things expressed via the walking / driving distinction. Firstly, driving provides a crucial scopic vantage point, from which to take in a broad sweep of the social landscape. Cruising to look for a park might involve passing a number of key locations, noting the whereabouts of parked cars and assessing very quickly who is around and doing what, who is sitting down on the street with whom, who is standing on a corner nuisance style etc. Secondly, driving is prized as autonomy, either one drives or one walks and is ultimately dependent on lifts. The very poorest walk around town, thus driving expresses a social distinction. When greenies visit, Aunty Joan Mob frequently teased them for their habit of walking from one end of town to the other. One Nunga friend performed the distinction between greenies/Nungas one day in Port Augusta, for the benefit of Rhi and I, circling the supermarket's carpark like a shark, insisting that he could not bear to walk even a few metres.

Kokatha men arrived with spades a few greenies went out on to the lakebed with them; the Kokatha men pointing out and helping dig up different colours of clay. Months later some members of Aunty Joan Mob were still trying to establish why it was that a bout of gastro passed through the camp in the following days. They were certain it had something to do with the morning of the walk, when a group of greenies moved through the country for hours unaccompanied, while greenies assumed that it was to do with the combination of an unusually large camp, the pit toilet, and communal food preparation. One theory put forth (but eventually disproved) was a fear that when the first walkers arrived at Paint Lakes they had perhaps disturbed the ochre and even painted it on inappropriately. I knew that no particular ritual or gravity was attached to *being* at Paint Lakes, or to looking at the ochre. However, throughout this tense period of speculation, I realised that it was important to be in the presence of someone who belonged to the country. While greenies walked through the bush in order to 'bond' with it, in this case our presence in that country had produced only a profound sense of discord, highlighting that we were strangers in this country.

Whitefellas' relationships with the bush

None of what I have explored above is to say that Ceduna whitefellas do not also have their own relationships with the bush. We often encountered groups of local white campers and day-trippers out the back. Aunty Joan would usually approach these groups to give tips as to good spots to camp, or to share information about the state of roads and tracks. Uncle Gary told me he had always loved the bush. As a teenager, 'we [a group of white mates] used to go out bush, we weren't interested in town at all, every chance we got ... we went away'. Uncle Gary went out the back, 'beyond the dog fence ... as far back as we could, sort of munch around roads with the old land rover'. 'We used to call it bush bashing, now we call it body bashing,' he liked to joke.

Megan Poore's (2001) unpublished PhD thesis about Ceduna whitefellas makes much of local whitefellas' relationships with the landscape. Poore summarises:

Love for the landscape and fear of it do not necessarily cancel each other out; in fact Ceduna people live with this paradox every day, and much of the survival ethic as disseminated in town depends on it — we must survive in a hostile environment which we fear, but we also love this hostile environment. (Poore 2001:205)

Poore shows that newcomers to Ceduna are guided to reshape their views of the landscape. At first, they might see the surrounding landscape as 'ugly, inhospitable, bleak, even intolerable and unknowable' (Poore 2001:230). They are initiated into a process of reinterpretation, with the hope that they will come to 'appreciate the power and grandeur of the land,' eventually come to extol its qualities as 'splendid, beautiful, magnificent, perhaps a little forbidding ... certainly enigmatic' (ibid.).

On my first rockhole trip we paused at a monument to two whitefellas who had forged a road through the scrub. In 1973 the Denton family began clearing a road through sandhills and the mallee and spinifex scrub north of their farmhouse using only a conventional, two-wheel drive utility and a tractor equipped with a front-end loader blade (Poore 2001:196). A bulldozer was used where the sandhills got too steep. 'After three years and with the support of locals in the form of fuel and supplies, the road was finished' (Poore 2001:197). The now deceased 'Goog' Denton and his son Dinger (also deceased) are remembered by way of simple stone monuments, into which are pressed mementos: handprints, stone artefacts, a photo, the key to Goog's bulldozer and a

Carlton Draught beer can. The plaque, pictured in Figure 15, commemorates the pushing of Googs Road from Lone Oak to Mount Fink.



Figure 15: Memorial to Goog

A second plaque is dedicated to Goog's son Dinger, who died at the age of 27. Aunty Joan encouraged greenies to respect the association between Goog and his 'beloved outback'. She had been distinctly unimpressed by local Nunga agitation, some years earlier, to change the name of Googs Lake to its Indigenous nomenclature. Goog loved the bush, she believed, and had made it possible for others to experience this particular place. It was not his racialised identity that should be considered; it was the life he lived and his actions. The Dentons, she told me, used to keep a visitors' book at their farm for people to fill in as they were heading out or back from camping at the lake. They often camped by the lake themselves and returned home with other campers' rubbish. The Kokatha name for it, Aunty Joan thought, had been lost, so why not honour someone who had a love of the bush? From Aunty Joan's confident perspective whitefella relationships with the bush were no threat to her own sense of possessing and belonging to her country.

Conclusion

Being in the bush affords Aunty Joan Mob members access to a powerful sense of what it means to be Aboriginal, linking them with a way of being that predates white society. Images and imaginings of the past conjured up a liberating ‘sense of autonomy from the control of the “Other”’ (Lattas 1993:247). Being out the back involves throwing off the white gaze and freeing oneself, temporarily, from the strictures and scrutiny of life in town. Identifying, collecting and eating bush foods, listening to the wild dogs howl in harmony, watching closely and interpreting the birds that seemed to hop about at the edges of a picnic rug in an overly familiar manner all opened up a window on to another way of being, and suggests that it lies within grasp.

Chapter four, which was set entirely in town, closed with the image of a tattoo I spied in the gym. Underneath a full-colour etching of the Aboriginal flag, lettering proclaimed, ‘*Coz I’m free...*’ It seemed to me that Aunty Joan Mob members grasped at some form of freedom out bush, and that they closed in on it by being in a space that is understood as fundamentally Aboriginal. As Aunty Laurel mused while we were driving out the back, in a statement characteristically understated and expansive all at once, ‘I like the bush. I’d just like to live out here somewhere. If I won the lottery I could build a house with glass all around. I’d be wild and free.’

Conclusion

As I was in the final stages of writing this thesis, Marcia Langton delivered the 2012 Boyer Lectures, which were broadcast on ABC Radio.⁷⁹ Langton argues that the mining industry offers many remote and regional Aboriginal populations ‘a significant source of employment and contracting opportunities, as an alternative to the welfare transfers’ upon which they currently depend. The right to negotiate provisions of the Native Title Act, explained Langton, have established a vehicle for the economic empowerment of remote and regional-living Aboriginal people.

The manifold benefits offered by the mining boom were also the theme of Langton’s address delivered in the less than salubrious Ceduna Memorial Hall, in late February 2009. Langton was speaking alongside Warren Mundine at an event called ‘The Nungas Talking Forum’. I provide a fairly fulsome account of the event here, in order to briefly introduce a diverse range of Aboriginal people, who exist in the same place, at the same time. At this critical juncture, I am conscious of not wanting to employ a representational sleight of hand that I believe would make me complicit in ‘refus[ing] the complexity of the actual life-worlds in which indigenous people live’ (Povinelli 2006:157).

Walking down Ceduna’s dusty main street a little bit early for the Forum, I found it buzzing with people. A Nunga woman, whom I vaguely recognised, walked in front of me, sucking on ciggies in her Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service tee-shirt and calling out to people on the other side of the street. Aunty Joan called out ‘Oi’ in response and crossed the road to greet the both of us. Someone else walked past, with a plain black tee-shirt neatly tucked into his black jeans, and closely cropped silver hair. Aunty Joan asked him if he was ‘coming in to this talk,’ muttering, ‘They’re going to tell everyone to get jobs in the mines.’ He replied, ‘Well that’s it [Joany]! I’ve been working out west: fly in, fly out. You should see the Nungas working out there in the mines, heaps of Nungas!’ He continued, ‘Then you come back here [to Ceduna], people are on CDEP

⁷⁹ Full transcripts are available at www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures [Last accessed December 21, 2012].

[Community Development Employment Program], haven't done anything for two weeks, it's bullshit.' They seemed to me to be talking at crossed purposes but they gripped each other's hands tight — they were cousins. We continued towards the event venue.

Aunty Joan was wearing a tee-shirt acquired through her years of contact with greenies. As I have shown, greenie-Aboriginal relations can at times be rich, human and friendly, and not merely instrumental and superficial, as Langton would have us believe. Langton's lacerating critique of environmentalism accords, in some respects, with my criticisms of greenies' attempts to adjudicate the binary of authentic or contaminated ways of being Aboriginal. However, this thesis has demonstrated that Langton's hope that Aboriginal expressions of anti-mining sentiment can be simply explained away by revealing that greenies are manipulating 'disaffected' Aboriginal people is far off the mark. Within this ethnography, I have showed that Aunty Joan Mob initiated contact with greenies, inviting them to play a critical role in their struggle, and that the part they play is carefully scripted for them.

On the particular day in question, Aunty Joan's tee-shirt, deliberately chosen, was emblazoned with, 'No Uranium, No Weapons, No Waste.' White stickers were available upon entry: these designated space for a name and also bore a 'from' field. Aunty Joan wrote her sticker with a flourish and slapped it proudly to her chest. 'Joan. From: Ceduna.' We headed in and piled our plates high with a 'free feed': cakes, sandwiches and fruit.

After giving a formulaic sounding Welcome to Country, a local man relaxed into a long, rambling account of his 'hard knock' life, growing up on Koonibba Mission and working around the district as a shearer. This scenario makes sense in light of what I have established about life on the mission throughout the twentieth century. This man told the 'young kids' present that they have 'heaps of opportunities' that he didn't have. I was interested in the historical content of his talk, but behind him a young Nunga woman who worked at Centrelink and was a co-organiser of the event paced impatiently, her high heels clicking against the wooden floors. Then, a Yalata fella also gave a Welcome To Country. At least I assumed he did — he spoke briefly and quietly in Pitjanjatjara and didn't preface his Welcome. No process of translation took place after he spoke, his words were simply allowed to make more sense to some in the room than they did to others.

Marcia Langton took the microphone. She told us she had spent years advising mining companies about how to employ Aboriginal staff and how to keep them. Aboriginal people, she argued, as in the Boyer Lectures, are a permanent part of remote, isolated populations and they become long term, permanent staff at mines providing they are appropriately trained and enjoy their work. Langton stated that things can change very quickly at the local community level — home ownership and car ownership rates go up, health outcomes and school attendance improves, domestic violence rates go down. Her central focus was on prejudicial attitudes within the mining workforce, stressing that these need to be shifted:

I run cross-cultural training. Not of the usual kind— ‘Aboriginal people are the original custodians, they’ve been here for 40,000 years ...’ or whatever. I get down and dirty, I ask the difficult questions, get behind the fears, work through the problem.

There were no questions for Langton. The event organisers referred to Langton as ‘the professor’ throughout proceedings; even Aunty Joan, so rarely over-awed, seemed subdued in her powerful presence.

It was while Warren Mundine spoke that an older man from Yalata fell fast asleep. He snored gently at first and then, sitting bolt upright in his chair with his bare feet planted on the floor, threw his head back, at a right angle to his neck, with his mouth wide open and his chin, slack, falling towards his chest. He snored so loudly that it became increasingly difficult to concentrate on anything but the guttural undertow in the room; soon the whole audience was suppressing laughter and had turned the angle of their bodies and their attention to the snoring man and the organisers’ dilemma. Eventually, the organisers woke him and escorted him out.

Mundine finished and again there were no questions. Langton stood up and said she would ask something that she ‘bets lots of people want to ask’. She paused before wondering, ‘If I get a job, will I lose my culture?’ The atmosphere shifted, perceptibly. The room fell quiet. People were listening, intently. Langton was commanding. She went further, suggesting that ‘these sorts of forums’ were generally geared towards *avoiding* questions of this kind. The organising group, particularly, seemed alert and energised. They stopped eating and left their pens idle, leant forward in their chairs, focussing on the speech. Langton said her answer to this question would be, ‘Maintaining your culture,

maintaining who you are, that's up to you to do. Having a job doesn't take your culture away.'

Aunty Joan had had enough: she filled her bag with free Centrelink bios and Abstudy notepads, swiping them dramatically and deliberately before streaming out. Soon after this, the afternoon wrapped up and I turned to Aunty Joan's daughter and asked what she thought of Langton. She told me, 'Oh, she was alright, but she was too easy-going. ... I would be like, "You HAVE to get a job!"' I burst out laughing, and told her this was the first time I'd heard Marcia Langton described as 'easy-going'.

I also left in a hurry. Aunty Joan had taken one of her sons, Freddy, with her. Her car needed a piece of wire manually connected between the starter motor and battery before she could get it going. In true Aunty Joan style, she made do with the material scraps at hand, but she couldn't turn the engine off after it was running. Freddy had cruised with her to the post office but they were coming back and I was to give him a lift home, as he lived just near me and had temporarily lost his licence because of unpaid fines. Freddy is one of Aunty Joan's closest political allies and fiercely anti-mining. But when he climbed out of her car and into my 4WD he seemed unaffected by the afternoon's proceedings, casually checking with me to see if I had helped myself to the free notepads and pens.

On the phone the next day though Aunty Joan was agitated:

You know what I wish I'd said? When she [Langton] got up smart way and said that about culture? I should have said, 'Working in a mine would mean the death of everything I believe in.'

Aboriginal scenes are, of course, complex and highly differentiated. Aboriginal people approach the question of mining in a range of ways. On one level this thesis has documented the ongoing political opposition to mineral exploration and mining, on the part of a small Aboriginal group in Ceduna. I own that their opposition renders them a marginal grouping, but one does not need to express a popular opinion to be saying something of profound and urgent relevance, and of broader interest. The more significant point arising from the account provided above, and this thesis as a whole, is that that Aboriginal people approach the question of what it means to be Aboriginal in a range of ways. Aunty Joan and her cousin, who had returned from the mines out west, disagreed on the level of ideology, but gripped hands tight when they met in the street, stressing their abiding relatedness. A man from Yalata performed a 'welcome to country'

in Pitjanjatjara, a language that most of the Nungas at the event do not speak. He seemed entirely unperturbed that he spoke to an audience who could not hope to understand his soft words. While many attendees at the Forum were riveted, another fell into a deep, uninhibited sleep. Where Marcia Langton sees the possibility for a better Aboriginal future, Aunty Joan sees only the portents of an end: of a way of being that ties being Aboriginal with a responsibility to take care of country, and an insistence that the economic value placed on resources is incommensurate with country's value to her. Mining itself, she has said on other occasions, would mean the death of everything she believes in. If Langton's words touched Aunty Joan's heart, they only left it cold.

This thesis takes as its subject a small group of passionate, articulate Aboriginal people, who are as much possessed of political consciousness as they are bearers of a culturally distinct culture. Aunty Joan Mob hold out against the vision of mining as a route towards economic empowerment. While Rockhole Recovery expresses this opposition to mining, I have been at pains to demonstrate that it cannot be fully understood without seeing that, on another level entirely, Rockhole Recovery both expresses *and* constitutes a response to Aunty Joan Mob's disillusionment with the native title claims process. Aunty Joan Mob struggle, not just against mining interests, but against the native title claims process and the demands it places on Aboriginal actors.

Aunty Joan Mob's experience of native title has been of an alien thing, imposed on them by the state, and of something that has *resulted in their dispossession*, as they are told that they are apparently not the rightful owners of country they have always regarded as their own. The contest between Wirangu- and Kokatha-identifying Nungas has engulfed local relations. In this thesis I have elaborated on the 'everyday effects' of native title, because it seems to me that detailed accounts of this kind are largely missing from the public record. I have stressed that the state has set in train processes, which have resulted in much destruction. But the state is not simply a 'force for destruction,' it also creates. The scenario I describe has seen certain forms of consciousness and subjectivity 'drawn forth' (Weiner 2006:18). More specifically still, in the realm of native title the state 'seeks out and generates iconic differences ... attempting to make these newly differentiated groups into clearly bounded units' (Correy et al 2011:50). New possibilities for reviving tribal identities now exist in Ceduna. Aunty Joan Mob also refuse these offers.

The title of this thesis refers primarily to Aunty Joan Mob's creative powers. I celebrate Rockhole Recovery as an inspired and generative form of political action. And so on a

deeper level still, this thesis has shown a particular group of Aboriginal people charting a course through a world that accosts and cajoles them at every turn. I refer again to the radical instability of Aboriginality, an overburdened identity category. The Aboriginal people I know in Ceduna find themselves living out lives in which they must constantly negotiate their own relationships with images of Aboriginality. Thus they also struggle for self-definition, seeking to return to themselves an understanding of their history and present, in their own terms.

Appendix

Contextualising the presence of Pitjanjatjara-speaking Anangu in Ceduna

An engaging summary of the Ooldea, Yalata and Oak Valley experience is provided in the community-produced book *Maralinga. The Anangu Story* (Yalata and Oak Valley Communities 2012). Most historical discussions of the region begin with the 1912-1917 construction of the Trans-Australian railway line, running between Port Augusta and Perth. Ooldea Siding, established in 1917, was a tenuous outpost established near Ooldea Soak, a permanent water source among sandhills, which lay on the southern ‘edge of a waterless stretch of the Great Victoria Desert’ (Brady 1999:2). Aboriginal groups of the western desert bloc had been visiting the soak for centuries (ibid.). They were increasingly attracted to the siding as news spread about the availability of new food and tobacco at fettler camps and depots along the line.

Between 1919-1935, Daisy Bates shared her own food supplies, administered medical aid and documented the social life, language and mythology of those with whom she camped at Ooldea (Reece 2007). Bates was extremely antagonistic to the idea of a mission, and made no attempt to Christianise her companions (Brady and Palmer 1988:237). In 1933, the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) established a small settlement at Ooldea and made a concerted attempt to disrupt cultural practices such as mortuary rituals and male initiation (Brady and Palmer 1988:238-240). Relations between Bates and the UAM missionary Annie Lock were strained and Bates left the area shortly after this (Brady and Palmer 1988:238).

Ronald and Catherine Berndt (1942) conducted fieldwork at Ooldea in the early 1940s and described a strong ceremonial life. Extensive mobility characterised the Ooldea scene — both during the time of Bates and the UAM. ‘These people were travelers of great distances over harsh country,’ wrote Maggie Brady (1999:2). ‘The walking routes to Ooldea from the north and northwest were dotted with rockholes, many of which could

be dry on occasion' (ibid.). The Ooldea population fluctuated enormously, with new groups coming out of the spinifex country throughout the 1940s.

Then in 1947 the Long Range Weapons Organisation (LRWO) employed Walter MacDougall as a Native Patrol Officer, nominally to safeguard Aboriginal interests from 'contact or encroachment' by the newly established rocket range, which was a diagonal corridor that stretched between Woomera and Broome (Gray 1991). In 1952, MacDougall, concerned about continued Aboriginal movement through the rocket range, recommended closure of the Ooldea Mission, and the transfer of its population south to Yalata, a pastoral property acquired by the South Australian government (Brady 1999:5). In the end, the mission's abrupt closure was precipitated by a split between the federal and state branches of the UAM, and was sudden. Chaotic scenes unfolded and it seems MacDougall played a key role in coercing Pitjantjatjara people, who wished to travel north to Ernabella, to instead head south to Yalata (McClelland 1985 166-168). At Yalata, the Koonibba missionaries set up a Lutheran mission (Eckermann 2010:223-230). The Pitjantjatjara were then effectively alienated from their country, as MacDougall ordered rations to be cut to all northbound travellers from Yalata (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:90)

From 1953-63 Britain conducted a series of 12 full-scale nuclear weapons tests and a series of 'minor trials' in the South Australian desert. The first tests carried out on the Australian mainland were at Emu Fields, 280 kilometres north of Coober Pedy but due to difficult access and limited water sources, the testing site was moved southwest in 1954 (Shepard 1995:157). The permanent site, dubbed the 'Maralinga Range', was serviced by the Trans-Australian Railway Line; those Aboriginal people now living at Yalata were barred from entering the Range.

Kingsley Palmer's research, conducted at Yalata during the 1980s, makes for heart-breaking reading. Palmer coined the term the 'Maralinga Lock-out'. The southern Pitjantjatjara / Maralinga Tjarutja people (as they became known) were estranged from their land, which they knew was subjected to violent and long-term damage. Palmer (1990:199) found people worrying and crying for country. 'The Yalata people felt a huge sense of loss as a result of not being able to access their own country' (Palmer 1999:53). They compared the grey dusty limestone country of the Nullabor fringes unfavourably with the red spinifex desert they had been forced to leave (Palmer 1999:54).

In 1984 the Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act granted freehold title to 76 420 square kilometres of land (Mattingley and Hampton 2008:85), and from 1985 the community began moving back to 'into their home country' (Yalata and Oak Valley Communities 2012:60): Oak Valley was established over 400 kilometres north of Yalata. It is notable that the *historical* experience became enshrined in a new group title (the Maralinga Tjarutja) and formed the basis of people's entitlement to have their land returned: this contrasts markedly with the native title regime's demand for ahistorical group titles and people-country relations.

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