

From Homo Sacer to Subaltern: Becoming Aboriginal Online

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Abstract

I came late to university studies after a childhood of persecution and incarceration that left me suffering symptoms of ‘anomie’, and with serious health problems. As a young man, my father had left his Kamilaroi country as a political ‘speech fighter’,¹ an Aboriginal activist. As a member of the Communist party Dad fought for better wages and conditions for all workers; in Canberra he was known as a Communist. He lived during the McCarthy era, and his politics soon saw him rise to a prominent leadership role in the Union movement. This brought persecution for his children, and we learned to fight to protect ourselves and our crippled brother.

After my father’s death in the early 1960s, my brother and I – still children – were incarcerated. Later, as a building worker, I also gravitated towards Unions and, owing to my militancy, I was finally blacklisted out of the Building and Construction industry. Scarred by my life experiences and now with serious health problems, I entered university to study. Because of my personal history, and because of my identity as part of the Aboriginal diaspora, I began by studying law, where I learned of Aboriginal people’s extraordinary uptake of social media.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous Australians lived in well-constructed houses, planted crops and had a system of communication known as ‘message sticks.’ Post invasion, Indigenous people have adapted every conceivable technological change to preserve culture and language, the latest of which is social media, the topic of this thesis. Based on interviews with Aboriginal users of social media, and against a backdrop of the history of invasion and its impacts, this thesis examines how and why Indigenous people are using Facebook, and the opportunities and risks it offers for our futures.

¹ Workers of the World Unite, Communist Manifesto. A worker prepared to use his fists to fight for what they believed in.

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The University of Canberra Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative (UC CIRI), a great initiative by the university of Canberra that provides Indigenous students and researchers

opportunities they otherwise might not receive. CIRI broadened my horizons, funding me to conduct research in Melbourne, Sydney, and internationally in Taiwan and New Zealand, which otherwise I would never have been able to afford.

My wife Alison, when the tears flowed, sickness, ill health and trips to hospitals and family matters intervened throughout this journey, when frustrations piled high, she would say: “Come you, can do it”, never doubting that I could. Often, we went without to complete the PhD journey, and always showing love and loyalty, she never complained.

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Finally, as a child I was placed in ‘Other Activities’ (A.O. classes) at primary school and was told I would never amount to anything. Throughout the intervening years they were probably right, but education is a great leveller. A chance came late in my life, a chance that set me on the course to try and help others, as Chef Day, AKA the Big Bopper, had done for me all those years earlier at Mount Penang Boys Institution. Hopefully I too can make a difference in someone’s life.

To my brother Barry, sister Veronica, father Joe and mum Nora, all deceased – Mum died on the 23rd of February 2015. My mother sat through all weathers on railway stations to see my brother and me on alternate months; she never gave up on us while we were institutionalised as children. I wish she could be here to see me walk across that stage. This one’s for you, Mum, along with Alison my wife, and my three brothers and sister still living. I walk across the stage the first of my family to enter university.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Aboriginal people who fought and died for, and against, the flags of Great Britain and Australia, particularly the 50 Aboriginal trackers who sailed on the ship *Euryalus* on the orders of Prime Minister Edmund Barton in response to a request from the head of the colonial forces, Lord Kitchener. A letter penned by Barton was sent to Kitchener, announcing the trackers' pending arrival to fight in the Boer War. Historians argue that these Aboriginal trackers may not have been enlisted in the colonial forces. What is known: The Immigration Restriction Act – which commenced operation in 1901 – would have prohibited their return to Australia. At that time Aboriginal people, including police trackers, had to have permits to move anywhere in Australia and would have had to pay their own fare to return. It is not known if they ever returned.² There is anecdotal evidence that the descendants of at least one of the trackers are living in South Africa.³

² See Elise Pianegonda, 2014.

³ See SBS News, 2014.

Introduction: Culture, Technology and Social Media

Australian social media users are some of the most active in the world; the Social Media Statistics for January 2018 showed an average of 15 million active Facebook users, and the same number of YouTube visitors per month – that is, some 60% of the country’s population are regularly using these media (Cowling, 1 February 2018). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have even higher participation rates, with figures of 68% participating on Facebook. This dissertation aims to explore the background to this high use of social media through participant observation and fieldwork and to explain the risks and opportunities social media offers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The particular site observed is Facebook, a social media application and community that, in the second quarter of 2020, has 2.7 billion members worldwide (Clement, 2020). I explored and examined Aboriginal Australians’ use of Facebook, including the most prominent of these: ‘*Aboriginal*’; ‘*Wiradjuri – Our Mob*’; and ‘*Find My Aboriginal Family in Australia*’. I consider the construction of principles, the rationality, rigour and other social dimensions associated with social media/Facebook (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 224), along with the topography of the field, how positions are attained in the field, and how different forms of capital are achieved on such sites by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 312). I also considered how change is brought about in the field, what mechanisms are utilised for change to occur, how these changes take effect, and what challenges exist to the consecration of the status quo (Webb, 2018). My fieldwork included participant observation through membership of these sites, and also the interviewing of both Aboriginal experts and Facebook members.

The dissertation follows Aboriginal epistemology, and so I use history and story: to explain the background to the topic (the stories of pre- and post-colonisation); to tell the personal stories of my father and myself, Kamilaroi men living in Canberra, in the ACT; and in the form of excerpts from Facebook and other Internet sites on the topics being discussed. In this way, the dissertation aims to combine social and archival research with non-traditional research, including creative expression in the form of life writing, video, and images from personal and public archives.

In this introduction, I offer a brief overview of this community, explain the focus of and reason for my research topic, outline key publications on Aboriginal use of social media, and explain my research methodology. The next chapter develops my methodology; and the third contains

my father's and my own stories, positioning myself in the topic as a participant as well as a researcher. The fourth chapter discusses the postcolonial positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people first as "homo sacer" and then as "subaltern", and what this means for human rights and cultural traditions. To do this I outline some key historical moments that exemplify the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture and its values. In the fifth chapter, I focus on the resulting problem, which is what Aboriginal identity means now, both on and offline. Finally, I discuss how social media, and particularly Facebook, despite all the problems of power and disputation, can provide a way to rebuild Australian Aboriginal identity and position us to reclaim sovereignty.

Background and context

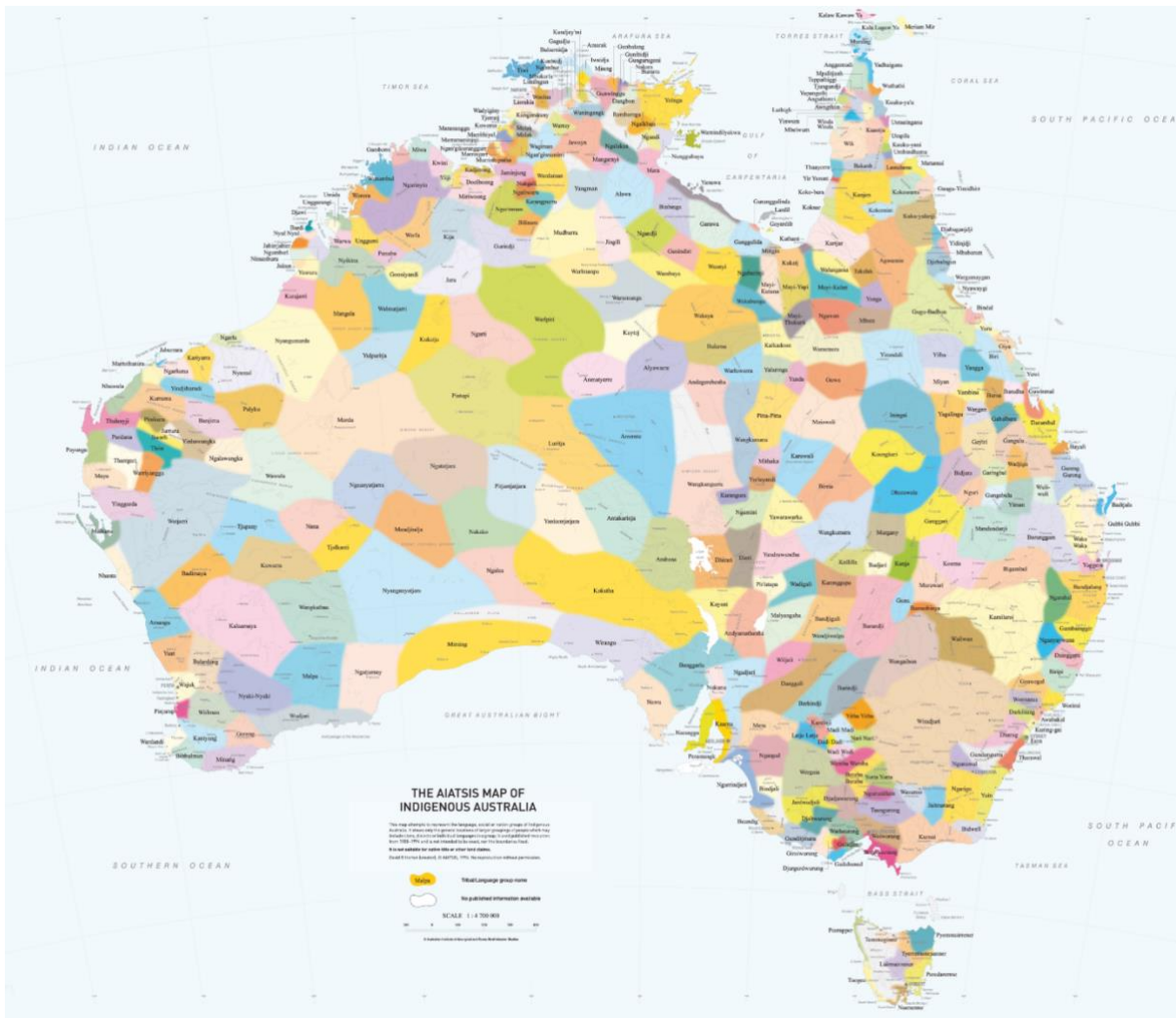
In 2017 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 30 June 2016) reported a population of 798,400 or 3.3 per cent of Australia's people are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ninety-five per cent of this group are Aboriginal, and five per cent are Torres Strait Islanders. One in ten of these people speaks an Indigenous language – one of the 150 languages that remain post-colonisation.

At the time of European settlement, every part of Australia was occupied by an Aboriginal nation. The map below:

is an attempt to represent all the language, tribal or nation groups of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups were included on the map based on the published resources available between 1988 and 1994 which determine the cultural, language and trade boundaries and relationships between groups. (AIATSIS, n.d.)⁴

As a result of colonisation and the policies of dispersal, many of these Aboriginal nations no longer exist. When these nations went, so did their languages.

⁴ AIATSIS, Map of Indigenous Australia, n.d., <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>



Map by David R Horton, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS & Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996

Today two cohorts of Aboriginal people remain. The first cohort, those living in remote and very remote locations, comprises some 23% of all Aboriginal people. The members of this cohort are considered by many non-Aboriginal Australians to be the *real* Aborigines, the essentialist prototype; they are usually darker in complexion, and follow a tribal way of life, with some of them continuing to practice tribal mores and customs, and use skin names for marriage rites, and many of them having begun ceremonial initiation rites at an early age.

The second cohort make-up the Aboriginal diaspora, those who live in towns and major cities. In 1996, they comprised 73% of the Aboriginal population, and this had risen to 79% by 2018 (ABS, 17 October 2018). These people are generally of lighter skin colour than their remote

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Wiradjuri News
January 5 at 10:02pm · 🌐

Condobolin mission. Taken around the 1950s, Truly great photo from the [mission](#) days.



👍❤️👏 262 109 Comments 96 Shares

Wiradjuri News is with Tracey Lee Newman.
January 16, 2013 at 10:21am · 🌐

A pic sent in from Rita.Thanks.MS She writes " Here is an old pic of [Condobolin mission](#) cheers Rita Gilbert"



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January 6 at 12:00pm · 🌐


To understand the present, we need to know the truth of the past. For all the ['mission'](#) kids out there.


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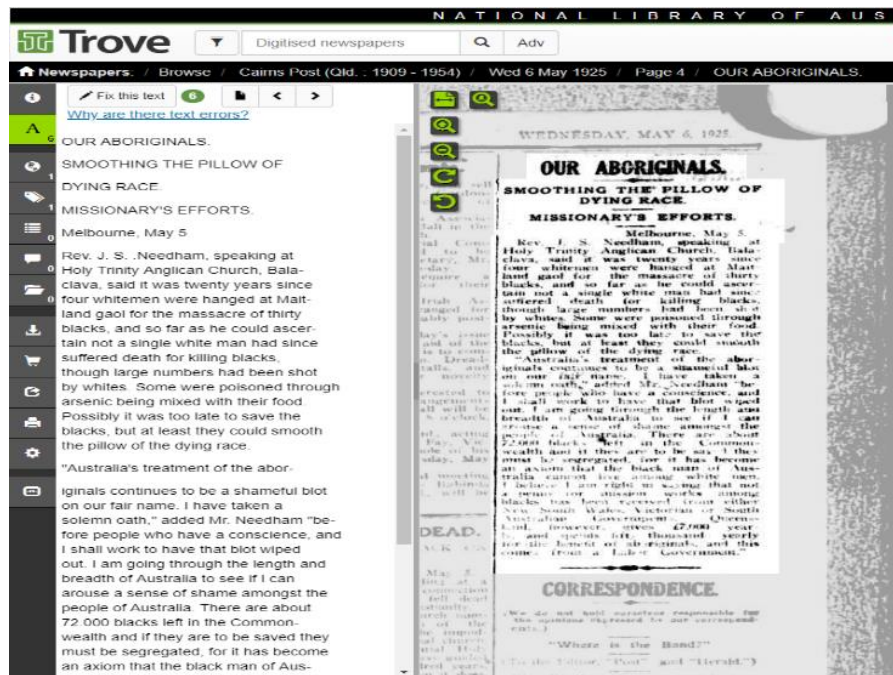
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cousins, no longer follow a traditional way of life, nor do they live on their forefathers' traditional country. In some cases, they are the descendants of Aboriginal people who were left to their own devices by the colonising forces, who tended to live on the edges of towns, and thus were given the name 'fringe dwellers'. In most cases, those people or their ancestors were forcibly removed from their traditional country and placed on mission stations or land reserves set aside for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal missions, stations operated by various church denominations, were instituted across Australia for Aboriginals removed from their land. In New South Wales there were ten missions operating from 1824 to 1923 (Brock, 1995); AIATSIS 2019). These missions and reserves controlled the lives of Aboriginal people and prevented them from speaking their language or practising their culture and religion, schooling in Christian values and preparing them for menial types of work for their white masters. They were not secure places though: Aboriginal elder Chris Sloan, a former mission resident at Condobolin in New South Wales, recalls her mother telling her and her brothers and sisters to hide when the police turned up at the mission looking for children. She also recalls Aboriginal people on the mission banding together to support each other through those times.

Professor Gary Foley, an Australian Aboriginal Gumbaynggir activist, academic, writer and actor, writes that Aboriginal people were placed in concentration camps as part of a process called "Smooth the Dying Pillow", a policy "based on the assumption that what was left of the Aboriginal population would eventually die out" (Foley, 1999, p. 78). Foley continues, writing about the aftermath of the Aborigines Protection

Act of 1909, an Act that, in essence, “established the first Australian concentration camp to



provide a place for the doomed race to die off” (ibid.). These policies were instituted under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act 1909–1969. All colonies had versions of this: for example, Victoria in 1869 gave authorities different powers to ‘protect’, in missionary stations

managed by officials appointed by the Protection Board. Education was provided that readied Aboriginal people for the workforce. The stations were strictly controlled to the point of who could and who could not leave (Byrne & Nugent, 2004, p. 79).



During and after that period, government practices led to what we now know as the “Stolen Generations”: people forcibly removed from their parents, country and community, largely enculturated into white ways of being, and taught little or nothing of their own culture. Most were forbidden to speak traditional languages, and many of those languages have been lost.

Section 3 of 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report, 'The Consequences of Removal', includes the stories of many people who are part of those generations (Australia & Wilkie, 1997). One woman's story reads:

Most of us girls were thinking white in the head but were feeling black inside. We weren't black or white. We were a very lonely, lost and sad displaced group of people. We were taught to think and act like a white person, but we didn't know how to think and act like an Aboriginal. We didn't know anything about our culture.

We were completely brainwashed to think only like a white person. When they went to mix in white society, they found they were not accepted [because] they were Aboriginal. When they went and mixed with Aborigines, some found they couldn't identify with them either, because they had too much white ways in them. So that they were neither black nor white. They were simply a lost generation of children. I know. I was one of them.

Confidential submission 617, New South Wales: woman removed at 8 years with her 3 sisters in the 1940s; placed in Cootamundra Girls Home.

Many people will never be able to come to terms with what they were denied, and some have never been able to locate their families. Now they or their children are among the people today who are attempting to reconnect with culture, using social media because it has helped some members of this community to locate their lost families and rebuild their connections.⁵

There is minimal contact between the two cohorts, except through family connections. However, both cohorts have high rates of participation in social media, especially when compared to other Australians. An object of my research was to determine why Aboriginal people are such prolific users of social media; whether social media helps people to reconnect with their Aboriginal history and culture; and why Aboriginal people are learning the mannerisms, speech acts and cultural mores in the attempt to be accepted as Indigenous Australians. My particular focus is the diaspora because many of them are only now learning of their Aboriginality. More broadly, my interests are my culture, and why Aboriginal people are subaltern in our own country. As such, I will address the record of colonisation, and then show how the mastery and use of all forms of media, more particularly social media, has been

⁵ I am thankful that though I was institutionalized as a child, I knew where my family lived, and that I could return to them. My mother has now passed on, but would recall how she would take several trains, sleeping on railway stations at night, to see my brother or me (we were separated, purposefully located in different institutions, and this policy of separation, initiated by the Child Welfare Department, continues in juvenile detention centres). She could only visit each of us on alternate months: the money could never stretch to two visits a month, and there were five other kids at home to care for and feed.

a tool for the preservation or restoration of community, culture and language. I draw on the body of research conducted by previous scholars, as well as interviews with key respondents, and in addition I offer my own story and that of my father and grandfather as case studies for cultural loss, and to explain the transmission of culture, and suggest ways to resist the impact of anomie and alienation. First, though, I explain what motivated me to conduct this research, which came out of the eight years I was a panel member of the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court (GCSC).

Indigenous Courts

Indigenous courts – also called Murri courts, Koori courts or Nunga courts (Marchetti & Daly, 2004) – have been implemented around Australia, with the exception of Tasmania, and are designed to be culturally appropriate and permit open exchanges of information between the party's prosecution and defence. A stipulation of Circle sentencing in all Indigenous Courts is that the offender must plead guilty to the charges before they can enter the process. When I was 57 years old, I studied law at university, using my personal experience and then my training to address the criminalisation of Aboriginal people, and worked in Indigenous Courts in an attempt to prevent anything like my experience happening to other children.

The GCSC is part of the Canberra Magistrates Court, and part of my role was to interview Aboriginal offenders who had asked to appear before the GCSC to assess the suitability of the candidate to proceed to a second interview before the panel members. In 2012 I was asked to visit the Andrew Maconochie Centre, a prison in Canberra, to interview an offender who had been placed on remand, and who had asked to be sentenced before Aboriginal elders. The offender was a man in his late thirties who presented with no pronounced Aboriginal features and was light-skinned. He behaved unusually, in a manner I described as 'Strange Estrangement'⁶ because it reminded me of what Biocca (1997) describes, in his explanation of self-presence, the battle that rages between the virtual and the real body for control of the addict's mind. Joe (not his real name) appeared to be alienated, listless, fatigued and distracted. His appearance and behaviours showed all the tell-tale signs of an addict, but I understood that his addiction was not to drugs, but to the virtual world. Joe told me that he spent a great deal of time on the Internet and that this had caused a breakdown of relations between himself, and his partner and children. He preferred to stay in his computer room, eating his meals there, and

⁶ I am borrowing the phrase from Clifford Geertz's (1994) discussion of Charles Taylor's philosophy where he explains the limits of human science and the struggle to fit self-understandings and experience to empirical knowledge.

sleeping there instead of in his bedroom. It was this that had caused the separation from his partner and children, and he told me he was impatient to be released, not to return to his family, but return to the Internet. He never did disclose what he was doing online (and I suspect he was embarrassed about it), but it presented as an addiction.

I assumed that he had been using the Internet for illegal purposes – hacking into security systems or selling stolen merchandise online – but subsequent research has revealed that there may be other reasons for his behaviour. One possibility is a condition that Moreno, Jelenchick & Christakis (2013) name “Internet Addiction Disorder” (IAD) – now more commonly termed *problematic Internet use* (PIU) – a condition that stems from overuse of the Internet. Kuss & Griffiths (2012) show there is a link between internet addiction and the sorts of behaviour Joe



The screenshot shows a social media feed with several items:

- Video game addiction is officially considered a mental disorder, WHO says**
The World Health Organization, or WHO, made video game addiction an official disorder in which recurrent gaming causes...
finance.yahoo.com
May 29 · 1,578 shares
- Video game addiction is a mental health disorder, World Health Organization says**
The WHO calls gaming addiction "a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behavior" so severe it "takes precedence over...
nbcnews.com
May 29 · 5,812 shares
- Video Gaming Addiction Support Group**
Group · 151 members · 9 posts a week
+ Join
If you find yourself searching for games on the internet to look up, going on YouTube to look at gaming footage or anything like that,...
- Gaming Addiction**
Group · 663 members · 2 posts a month
+ Join
Buy and Sell · Everything gaming related, buy, sell & trade!! Get posting ppl..
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Page · 3.1K follow this · Gaming Video Creator
15 hrs · Gaming Addiction was live — playing Assassin's Creed Odyssey.

presented during our interview. The Andrew Maconochie Centre does not make computers or phones available to prisoners, and it seemed likely to me that the three weeks he had spent on remand caused him to experience withdrawal symptoms, suffering because he was estranged from his computer.⁷ I am aware that there are both young⁸ and old people who use the Internet to sate addictions or other needs, and though I cannot conclusively say that Joe was a gamer, online gaming addictions are becoming a problem around the world. The media produce stories of, for example, online gamers resorting to wearing nappies to avoid missing any online gaming action. Then in 2018

I came across a news item from the National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health, dealing with an article written by Mark Zastrow and titled: “Is video game addiction really an addiction?” It opens with the statement: “Adding video gaming to the list of recognized behavioural addictions could help millions in need. It could also pathologize normal behaviour and create a new stigma” (Zastrow, 2017, p. 4268). Zastrow’s analysis shows there is mounting

⁷ At that time I had not heard of this condition, but it is both well-known and relatively common (see Wolfe, 2018).

⁸ Under federal law, 10 is considered a child for the purposes of responsibility, and 18 is considered adult for the purposes of criminal responsibility.

neurological evidence that video games may act like traditional substance abuse, but also notes that many commentators remain unconvinced that gaming can constitute an addiction.

Despite this, games like *League of Legends* and *World of Warcraft* have become categorised as a serious adolescent public health issue, with governments forced to establish treatment facilities, especially in China and South Korea. Research indicates that the adverse effects of teens' "addiction" to the games are not just time lost studying or socialising with their peers, but also depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Whether there is a cause-and-effect relationship remains unclear.

Another possible cause for Joe's behaviour is anomie: a condition of instability resulting from a breakdown of social equilibrium and, with that, social standards and values. This seemed likely to me since I too suffered from anomie when I was young. Later, when I attended university, I read Emile Durkheim's treatise on suicide (1979/1897), and his findings that anomic suicide is the product of a breakdown in behavioural standards. Once a person has become anomic, Durkheim argues, "society is not sufficient for an individual" (1979, p. 241): common values and meanings no longer seem valid, and this results in new values and meaning that exist outside the behavioural norm. Durkheim argued that society produces this condition in many of its members and that it results in a psychological state characterised by a sense of futility, lack of purpose, and emotional emptiness and despair. Striving to achieve is considered useless because the sufferer has no sense that there is an accepted definition of what is desirable.

Social media

I began this research project, therefore, acknowledging the levels of anomie among Aboriginal Australians, to investigate the role of social media in the lives of people who are prone to this disposition. Indigenous Australians' use of social media has received little research attention. The leading theorist in the field is Professor Bronwyn Carlson, an Aboriginal woman and, as she explains, an avid user of social media (Carlson, 2013). Carlson's work is seminal in this area; she has conducted two international symposia covered by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, has written extensively in peer-reviewed journals, newspaper and online articles, and has been funded twice by the Australian Research Council to conduct research into the topic. Given this is an under-researched area, there is a paucity of literature and theorists in the field, and so I rely on Professor Bronwyn Carlson's corpus of work as the foundation for a literature review on the topic of Indigenous Australians' use of social media.

There are arguments that social media may offer a new sense of society for those who otherwise feel excluded. This is the view offered by Luke Pearson,⁹ founder of the IndigenousX phenomenon, who discusses the value of social media for Indigenous people:

The impacts of social media on national conversations about Indigenous affairs have been revolutionary in the past decade. They have provided opportunities for Indigenous people to counter the deficit discourse that plagues our media and our institutions. ... It [social media] has provided individuals, communities and organisations with the means to engage directly with other Australians on their own terms, for better or worse. (Pearson, 2017)

Others who identify the importance of social media to Aboriginal Australians are Bronwyn Carlson (formerly Lumby)¹⁰ and Ryan Frazer. With Frazer, she completed a major research project, *Social media mob: Being Indigenous online* (2018) and reported on it in an article for *The Conversation* (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). Here they point to the advantages of social media for Aboriginal people, particularly “for both seeking and providing help, in areas such as employment, legal services, education, wellbeing and, perhaps most urgently, for those at risk of self-harm and suicide”. They note that racism continues online, with abuse, mockery and derogatory remarks; and they note to the tendency for users to engage in lateral violence, the effect of racism has become so enculturated in the Aboriginal psyche that it will be discussed later in this thesis as it problematises Aboriginal relations within the community as well as on social media. But Aboriginal people have found that social media provides a weapon against racism, Carlson finds, and notes that “Indigenous social media users are adept at speaking back to racism on social media” (Carlson, 2019).

Another important and influential source of information about Aboriginality is *Creative Spirits*, an online magazine that is a resource for teachers and students, providing information for and about Aboriginal people. Under the ‘Media’ section, the magazine published an article titled “Aboriginal use of social media” (Korff, 2014–2019), that draws together various research papers on the topic to describe Aboriginal people’s use of social media. In the ‘Selected Statistics’ section, the article shows some startling statistics of the participation rates for

⁹ Luke Pearson is a Gamilaroi man and the founder of @IndigenousX (<https://indigenoux.com.au/>) — a platform for Indigenous people to share their knowledge, opinions and experiences. Luke is also the digital producer for ABC RN’s Indigenous Unit.

¹⁰ Professor Carlson is an Aboriginal woman who was born on and lives on D’harawal Country in NSW, Australia. She is a scholar with a national and international reputation in the field of Indigenous Studies. She has vast teaching and curriculum development experience and has published in scholarly journals, nationally and internationally. Professor Carlson maintains a strong connection between Indigenous Studies pedagogy and research. She is the founding and managing editor of the *Journal of Global Indigeneity*.

Aboriginal people who use Facebook daily: 42% of those in remote locations; 61% in rural locations; and 68% in urban locations (while only 42% of all Australians log on each day). The article also cites a literature review on the topic by Emma Rice et al (2016), which found that the literature overwhelmingly reports that young Aboriginal people have “a sense of fearlessness and control” in their online participation (2016, p. 3) and that social media is very important in health, wellbeing, education, community, and in breaking down some of the social barriers faced by Aboriginal people.

It is worth noting that in 2014, when the statistics were compiled, many of the remote locations were not yet connected to the Internet, so in many cases, especially for people living in rural and remote areas, social media is likely to be accessed through mobile technology. Rice et al highlight the importance of connectivity, writing that “Although the living situations and other factors of Indigenous youth differ widely across Australia, even those who lack food and clothing may still have their own Smartphone” (2016, p. 4). So, while most of the literature includes a caution about the use of social media, and its capacity to extend racist abuse into the virtual world and enable lateral violence, overall it points to the value of social media for Aboriginal people, as a way of reconnecting with family and culture. Interestingly, Carlson said on @IndigenousX, Indigenous Australians are using social media in unique ways: that while social media appears to be losing younger people as their parents try to “friend” their own children on sites such as Facebook (Kiss, 2013), for Aboriginal people social media is a place to connect with your elders; to connect between generations; to connect with culture; and to connect with other Indigenous peoples globally. I asked one of the people I interviewed about his experience:

From a professional side, I use Twitter. That’s my professional platform, and what piques my interest around that is the network that you build, the community that you build with other people who have a like mind or like-spirited people around political advocacy, health advocacy. I like it because you can get connected to your professional area, internationally, like I connect up with nurses and midwives in other countries. I like it because you can share research. It’s a great place to look for resources. But on a personal level, I don’t use Twitter ... I use Facebook as a way of keeping connected with family information.

Another person in my study was a bit more cautious about the value of social media, but she still makes use of it, because of family connections:

I've got a Facebook account. I would never have thought of it, apart from one day my kids said to me they were connected to one of my nephews who moved away from home when he was a young boy. I hadn't seen my eldest brother's son. I hadn't had any contact with any of them. He had his own family, and all of that. I do have family all over Australia; I find social media is a way of communicating with them. But I'm old school, I guess; being a mature age person I prefer to talk to people face to face or on the phone, if I can't talk to them face-to-face. Or, like with my son, communicating using FaceTime.

Message-stick to Satellite

While there is a popular view that Aboriginal Australians lived a nomadic existence, there is growing evidence to the contrary. Other than guns, Australian Aboriginal people possessed much of the technology and knowledge that was known in eighteenth-century Europe. They tilled the soil, planted crops, built dams, used nets to fish, built fish traps and lived in well-constructed houses (Department of the Environment and Energy, 2004). Much of this knowledge of this history has been expunged, forgotten, lost or hidden, largely because there was no written language in traditional culture, but people were still able to communicate across the vast expanse of the continent, and information has been found in archives and repositories around Australia, such as AIATSIS and the National Library in Canberra (Higgins, 2017).

There is a long history of communication media in Australia. Language is not only a means to communicate, but it's also an essential part of the culture, a vital ingredient essential to community and identity. Without language, there is difficulty passing on stories, cultural knowledge, traditions, medicine and cuisine. Perhaps Lauren Johnson said it best:

Humans know a lot about the world, but it's not all written down. It's encoded in the world's languages and most have never been recorded. Each one contains a world of local knowledge, neatly packaged and effortlessly transmitted through speech from one generation to the next. When a language dies, we lose that culture's playbook for how to thrive in the world – everything from local plant knowledge to unique ontologies and ways of being. (Johnson, 2016)

Pre-colonisation, probably the best-known communications device was the message stick.



22 MAY, 2014 - 00:42 DWWTY

Aboriginal message sticks and an ancient system of communication

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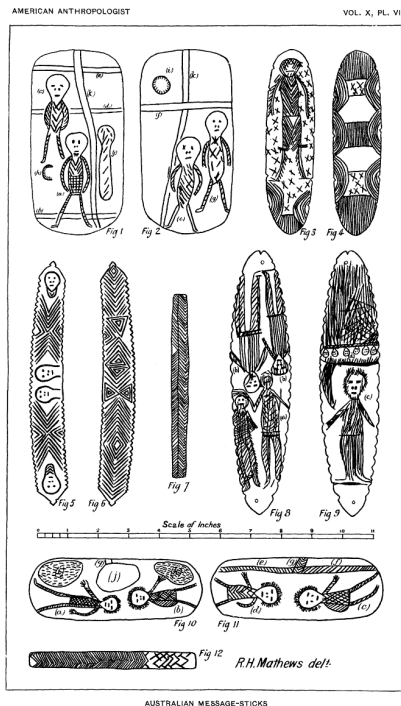
Throughout Australia, it is said that there are over 200 Aboriginal languages and 600 dialects, but apparently no writing system for recording the spoken word. How then were messages transmitted between different indigenous groups across the massive landmass of Australia? The solution was found in 'message sticks', an ancient form of communication that has been used for tens of thousands of years, and is still in use today in some parts of Australia.

Though there is no record of what the Aboriginal people called these sticks, the system has been given various names, including “talking-sticks”, “black fellows’ letters”, and “stick-letters” (Mathews, 1897, p. 288).

These sticks were handmade, occasionally of marked pieces of bone but usually made of wood that is lightweight and easy to carry. Mathews writes that these sticks varied in length from an inch and a half (3.8 cm) to eighteen inches (45.7 cm) or more, and describes them as:

in some cases, flat pieces of wood ornamented more or less by carving, and were often painted a bright colour; in other instances, they are merely a rounded piece of wood or rod cut from the branch of a tree or sapling; while a still more primitive kind is made of bark. (1897, p. 288)

The markings on the message sticks, he continues, are quite variable, including everything from a blank piece of wood to rough outlines of human figures, but they are usually marked with “notches, dots, strokes, curves, and also with triangular, quadrilateral, zigzag devices” (p. 288), sometimes decorated with down. Mathews claims that he was “forced to the conclusion that ‘stick-letters’ as a means of conveying information from one tribe to another at distance has been considerably overrated and misunderstood” (p. 288). He suggests that the sticks offered symbolic representations and that the markings inscribed on them serve as aids to memory, and to denote that both the message stick and the bearer are genuine (p. 289). These message sticks also served a social and a political role, because as well as drawing peoples together, there was agreement among all communities that the message-bearer should be afforded safe passage when travelling through territories to their destination: an obvious sign of diplomatic immunity.



Mathews sketched a sample of message stick types used by Aboriginal people in New South Wales and Queensland in the following river areas: Culgoa, Narran Cudnappa, Bokhara, Cuttaburra, Birie, Mungalalah, Clark, and Basalt. He also described various types of message sticks; for example, a corroboree stick, sickness stick, or one for festive gatherings all differ in appearance. But all would nevertheless be recognised by the people inhabiting the tract of country in which they were used. Mathews' account does not explain how Aboriginal tribes from various locations across the country could communicate effectively with a tribe who spoke a different language. This would suggest a foundation language known to all tribes, or at least some form of

semiotics—such as sign language.

Stuart Hall, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), explains that signing is the beginning of language:

In language, we use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to others our concepts, ideas and feelings. ... Eventually, all people evolve shared meanings, assigning words to objects, images, people and things: words are essential to help explain abstractions, and eventually connecting words develop to assist in explaining concepts, notions and ideas (Hall, 1997, pp. 1, 5).

Samuel Gason (1874), a mounted police Constable Second Class in the South Australian Police, was perhaps the first non-Aboriginal person to witness gesture, or sign language, on the Australian continent. Signing is well established among the women of the Warumungu Aboriginal tribe of the Northern Territory around Tennant Creek and Alice Springs (Spencer & Gillen, 1899). They can conduct a totally silent conversation using complex hand gestures and signs.¹¹ Sign language is not unique to the Warumungu; many Aboriginal tribes have had, or

¹¹ An example of sign language is shown at 'Marumpu Wangka! Kukatja Hand Talk', ICTV Play 2019, <https://ictv.com.au/video/item/2905>

continue to possess, messaging ability. Strehlow described 290 signs used by the Aranda people (Strehlow, 1978, p. 1915, cited in Kendon, p. 49) to convey 454 different meanings.

The use of manual gestures (signs) for communication has been recorded in many parts of Australia, and in very early reports (Howitt, 1890, 1904; Roth, 1897; Spencer & Gillen, 1899). Divale and Zipin (1977) and Kendon (1980, p. 5) claim that signing language may have first developed in Australia to facilitate hunting. In 1985, Meggitt described witnessing Warlpiri men making use of sign language in personal communications; and earlier, in 1954, he had observed them using sign language to communicate silently while hunting. Many tribal people, like the Arunta, have retained signing because it assists them to hunt in total silence, an important consideration to avoid alerting the prey animal (Kendon, 1988, p. 93).

Gason and others posited that sign language was associated with mourning, and hence part of speech taboo (Gason, 1874, p. 35; Meggitt, 1954 [1962]). This is confirmed in other early reports (Spencer & Gillen, 1899), which described how the women of the Warumungu of Western Australia and Northern Territory used a complex sign language when mourning the death of a husband or other male relatives. The mores around death and ghosts are important, because the mentioning of a deceased person's name, or even a similar sounding name, could potentially resurrect the ghost of that person. Using signing would have helped people avoid saying the deceased person's name thereby helping protect the tribe from potential problems.



Marumpu Wangka! Kukatja Hand Talk
From ABC Open: "Anyone who has ever lived in a remote Aboriginal..."
Kurdji 1.0 - saving young indigen...
May 9, 2017 · 2.2K Views



Chris Garner
Owner at Cross Cultural Training Australia
Mar 13, 2016 · I love Aboriginal body language. I love how whole conversations can happen at a distance and without causing any embarrassment by being loud...this clip from Black Comedy shows it brilliantly
39 · 5 Comments · 4.7K Shares



CBC Indigenous
Page · 231K like this · Media/News Company
Jul 7, 2018 · This couple has developed a new sign language in Oneida. Read more: <http://www.cbc.ca/1.4735045>
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Other uses of sign language are more pragmatic: in tribal communities, for example, it would be an advantage to be able to communicate discreetly, or quietly, with certain people or family, particularly in an open public campsite

Any type of language in Aboriginal communities is worth attention because Aboriginal languages are for the most part either endangered or extinct.¹²

¹² I recall my elder sister asking our father to teach her our Gamilaroi language. He said: "Who are you going to speak to? Soon there will be nobody to speak to." We were confused: because we were children, we didn't know the real reason for his refusal, not knowing that, in the past, if Aboriginal people were heard speaking their language or practicing culture, there were penalties.

At the time of European invasion in 1788, approximately 250 Indigenous language groups covered the continent of Australia. Today less than 120 remain and most are at risk of being



lost as Elders pass away. Aboriginal people were forbidden to speak their “lingo”¹³ (or languages) and were severely punished for doing so. Aboriginal parents realised if they spoke their language their children would also be punished, and within a few generations, Aboriginal languages had largely disappeared.

There were those like my grandfather who could speak his language but refused; whether it was because he was ashamed or not, he never spoke it outside in the community. A similar situation existed in Canada where people were punished if they spoke their language. Verna St Denis (2007, p. 1072) used the term “slaying” of Aboriginal languages to denote what happened in that country. As in Canada, Aboriginal Australians did not lose

their languages it was shamed, beaten, and tortured out of them.

Professor Ghil’ad Zuckermann, chair of Linguistics and Endangered Languages at the University of Adelaide, writes, “of approximately 330 known Aboriginal languages, today only 13 (4%) are alive and kicking, that is spoken natively, as a mother tongue, by the community children” (Zuckermann, 2015, p. 4). This means we are on the verge of a catastrophic loss of language and culture. According to linguist Kenneth Hale, “When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It’s like dropping a bomb on a museum, the Louvre” (cited in *The Economist*, 1 November 2001); and on the cover of Andrew Dalby’s 2003 book is written: “a language dies every two weeks: what are we going to do about it?”

Zuckermann wonders why others do not share this sense of crisis about the loss of language. He laments: “The survival of the Tasmanian Devil is important, but what about the survival of the Palawa languages of Tasmania? Why do people not give money for languages but do give monies to the zoo?” (in Goldsworthy, 2014). Zuckermann and others struggle to save languages,

¹³ See Arrawarra Language Fact Sheet 18 (2009), http://www.arrawarraculture.com.au/fact_sheets/pdfs/18_Language.pdf

with some success. The Barnjarla language, for example, had died out by the 1960s, but in 1844 a Lutheran missionary had compiled a Barnjarla dictionary. Zuckermann – who holds the opinion that it is the traditional owners who should determine whether or not their language should be saved – determined that the language could be saved if people from that nation thought it worthwhile. He contacted the Barnjarla Council in 2012, and five members of the Council came to see him in Adelaide. Addressing them he said:

I have this kind of idea. Not a dream but a possible dream. Your beautiful language is no longer spoken, and I have this idea maybe it is possible to reclaim it. They listened carefully, and then, to my great surprise and my great happiness, they told me, “We have been waiting for you for 50 years”. (in Goldsworthy, 2014)

The Arunta, like the approximately 500 other Australian Aboriginal tribes, have learned to master the technologies of the colonist, and have adapted to unimaginable technological change: far from the ‘information overload’ terminology popularised by Alvin Toffler’s *Future Shock* (1970), they have adapted technology to serve their personal as well as cultural needs.

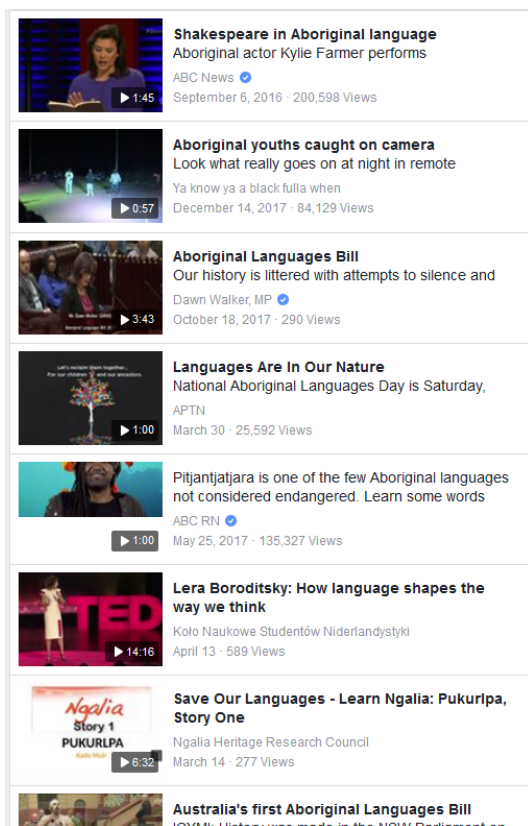
Technology in the bush

As the Internet is a relatively new phenomenon in remote regions, there is a paucity of literature in relation to how rural and remote Aboriginal people are using the Internet. The corpus of available information deals with the roll-out of ITCs to these locations, and the effects on those using the technology. Much of this material comes in the form of government and other reports, such as the Regional Telecommunications Review (RTR) in 2011–2012 into mobile communications. This review found that communication technology was the most important issue for remote and rural Australians. Other reports have been commissioned by the Australian Government along with a small number of reports around the uptake of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). Together, they indicate the need for these communications services and provide information as to how Aboriginal people are using computers and mobile services. This section examines this corpus of material in relation to the take-up.

Ginsburg described two tropes of the phenomenon that drives technological change, summarising them as the “Faustian” and the “global village” (Ginsburg, 1991). The Faustian

contract model is articulated on Frankfurt School perspectives,¹⁴ which hold that traditional culture is good and authentic, but if it connects with more contemporary technology, it will be irreversibly polluted. This trope views Indigenous people as frozen in time and tradition, unable to accommodate ‘progress’. By contrast, the McLuhan treatise of 1964 presents a vision of communication technologies heralding an open sense of community under the trope of the global village.

Both tropes seem to be at work in Aboriginal communities. Some Aboriginal elders argue that this technology is destroying their culture (Michaels, 1986), and Eve Fesl, speaking about satellite television, described it as “cultural nerve gas”, referring to the fact that if satellite



television were broadcast only in English, many Aboriginal Australian languages and cultural-linguistic norms would be lost forever (Fesl, 1985, p. 14). Rosemarie Kuptana described something similar when speaking about the effects of “Southern” television on Native Canadian languages, saying it would be like a neutron bomb, in that it kills the people and leaves the buildings standing (Brisebois, 1983, p. 107). Others, however, argue that ICTs are providing tools for the maintenance of language and culture, and consequently enhances Aboriginal culture (Van Der Meer, Smith & Pang, 2015; Margolis, 2017). The experience of the people at Wangkatjungka on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert is one of fighting to be left alone, while still holding onto the

conveniences of the new technologies and utilities (Stein, 2015). But the diaspora, a much larger group, they are thankful for technologies that enable them to reconnect with their lost culture. Although McPhail (1987) warns of the risk of “electronic colonialism”, for them, what culture was taken away by television is now returning by social media, and they have found a way to connect with culture. Whatever the perspective, high above the Indigenous village a satellite orbits, beaming postmodernity, changing the situation forever.

¹⁴ The Frankfurt School was a school of social theory and philosophy associated in part with the Institute for Social Research of the Goethe University Frankfurt.

Technology has not always been available to people living in Outback Australia but when it has been available, Aboriginal people have been quick to adopt it. Anthropologist Inga Kral reported the outcomes of an ethnographic case study, researching youth who were participants in non-formal community-based programs in remote regions of Australia, in her paper “Plugged in: Remote Australian Indigenous Youth and Digital Culture” (2010). Kral makes the point that Indigenous youth are now part of global culture and that this is a very new practice in Indigenous communities. Until recently, Aboriginal people in some remote locations had no communications apart from two-way radio; and prior to that, the Elders lived a pre-contact nomadic existence. Now, Kral argues, there has been a generational shift. It is the younger generation who mediate between the old cultural ways and the new digital technologies, which include music production, digital community archiving and digital culture. As one of my interviewees says: “I think Aboriginal people have just taken to the digital platforms like that and I think it connects with their creative DNA ... a genetic lean towards visual, towards the art, towards the tactile. That’s why you see kids pick it up like that – because they know how to do it”.

In the few years since Kral’s study, ICTs have arrived in many remote locations, and Aboriginal people in these remote locations across Australia are coming to terms with technology. The uptake of digital technology by youth in rural and remote communities is part of a continuation and tradition of media production that has been evolving from the early 1980s. Kral discusses this with reference to Indigenous people’s early contact with open-air cinema in remote and regional towns in the 1930s, and the rapid adoption of videocassette recorders (VCR) by Indigenous people in remote communities during the 1970s. Long before television (TV) came to remote locations, Indigenous people had begun to experiment with analogue VCR in the production of video films. By 1983 in the Northern Territory almost all extended families had a VCR recorder (Michaels, 1986).

The Indigenous broadcasting services were instituted under the Australian Government policy of self-determination in the 1970s and by 1972 the first Indigenous community-produced radio program aired on 5UV in Adelaide. In 1980 the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) began transmission. CAAMA has as its mandate the promotion of Aboriginal culture, language, dance and music generating economic benefits while providing training and employment. This was the first Australian funded remote Aboriginal radio station, and in addition, it also produced film and music. It was established by two Aboriginal people, John Macumba and Freda Glyn, in association with Phillip Batty. The objective was to take

Aboriginal voices to the world and to ensure Aboriginal people could take ownership and control of their own media. Media as an institution is a powerful cultural resource, enlisted by the dominant culture to win consent for particular ideologies (Gramsci, 1988). But Indigenous media represent community cultural resources which have the potential not only to contribute to community management but also to operate counter-hegemonically, as the history of its use in Australia makes clear.

During the 1980s the federal government adopted satellite broadcasting for remote and regional Australia, raising the ire of Indigenous people as there was little negotiation with remote communities. The problem for Aboriginal people was that the broadcast language was in English, a second, third or fourth language for Aboriginal people in remote locations, denying access to many in these communities. During the 1980s, broadcast facilities in remote locations of Australia were rare, and as a result, at least two Aboriginal communities adopted low-cost videoconferencing and radio services. Aboriginal people began experimenting with these technologies at Yuendumu and Ernabella. Eric Michaels, the author of *The Aboriginal Invention of Television*, assisted the local Warlpiri community at Yuendumu to set up a pirate television station, demonstrating that Indigenous Australians could produce their own style and forms of television more suited to Aboriginal people (Downing, 2011). Over a two-year period, more than fifty tapes were produced, covering traditional culturally important topics, such as traditional dance sporting events and a memorial video of the massacre of Warlpiri people by whites. Aboriginal people were taking control of television production and making this media available to their communities. It started with films for the local school. By April 1985, the Warlpiri Media Association (WMA) had established their own low power television station using a home-brew¹⁵ transmitter – displaying the inventiveness` of the local Aboriginal people. These home-brew setups received signals from the state broadcast television channel, the ABC, in addition to their own locally produced tapes.

The Federal Government instituted a series of regional inquiries, and minor concessions were made allowing for locally-produced culturally appropriate programming to be aired. There were four remote Commercial Television Services (RCTS); this became Imparja (an Arrernte word meaning “footprints”), which began broadcasting from Alice Springs in Central Australia in 1988. Warlpiri Media began experiments in local television and radio production, and in April 1985 established the first Aboriginal TV station in Australia. Warlpiri Media Association (now

¹⁵ Something manufactured at home from spare parts rather than purchased from a factory outlet.

PAW Media and Communications) has become well known across Australia for the award-winning *Bush Mechanics* documentary, screened on ABC and internationally (ABC, 2001). *The Bush Mechanics* in each episode relates the stories of a ragtag group of young Aboriginal men from the Warlpiri community Yuendumu and how they battle continuing problems in each episode: everything from catching a car thief, to getting a nephew out of jail, or travelling thousands of kilometres to gather seashells for a rainmaking ceremony, all the time battling the elements in clapped-out barely drivable cars that require inventive – almost unbelievable – techniques to keep them chugging along.

Aboriginal people were mastering the technology, but there were concerns about the loss of language and culture. This was the motivation for the setting up of unlicensed ‘pirate’ TV stations at Yuendumu and Ernabella (in the north-east of South Australia). Warlpiri Media and Ernabella video, and later Pitjantjatjara/Yanjunytjatjara Media, commenced operations as unlicensed pirate stations using low-power transmissions. This occurred between 1982 and 1986. The Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association was established in 1989, providing satellite coverage across the Top End of Australia (Deger, 2006).

Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) came into existence in 1987, under the Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs. BRACS equipped remote communities with technology for radio and video transmission (Kral, 2010). This initiative was in response to perceived threats that Aboriginal people would lose language and culture when AUSSAT was launched (Deger, 2006, pp. 3–4). BRACS was launched to give coverage to a hundred and three remote locations, and it expanded the viewing choices for people living in these locations beyond mainstream TV.

Irrunytju Media was established at Wingellina in Western Australia in 1992 as one of the later BRACS initiatives. Initially, it was supported by Ernabella Video and TV. Ittunytju was renamed Ngaanyatjarra Media, and it supported 14 BRACS communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and south-east Western Australia. Ngaanyatjarra Media become responsible for the training and promoting Aboriginal language, culture, music and stories through video, radio and multimedia production and broadcasting. In 2001 Warlpiri Media launched the PAW (Pintubi Anmatyerr, Warlpiri) radio network linking communities across north-west central Australia (Hinkson, 2004). Because of this history, even the most remote Indigenous people aged 45 and younger have grown up listening to the radio and watching television.

In 2001–02 television broadcasts were mostly live football matches, organised by Pitjantjara/Yankunytjatjara Media and broadcast from Alice Springs. By 2004 access had increased, with digital technology spreading to 150 communities. Between eight and twelve hours of community production were beamed out each week by ICTV. Aboriginal languages were catered for, with eighty per cent of coverage. ICTV was taken off the air in 2007 to be replaced by National Indigenous Television (NITV). NITV was predominately English-language television, and as many remote people have difficulties understanding English, they are now being denied the benefit of ICTV in remote communities (Rennie & Featherstone, 2008).

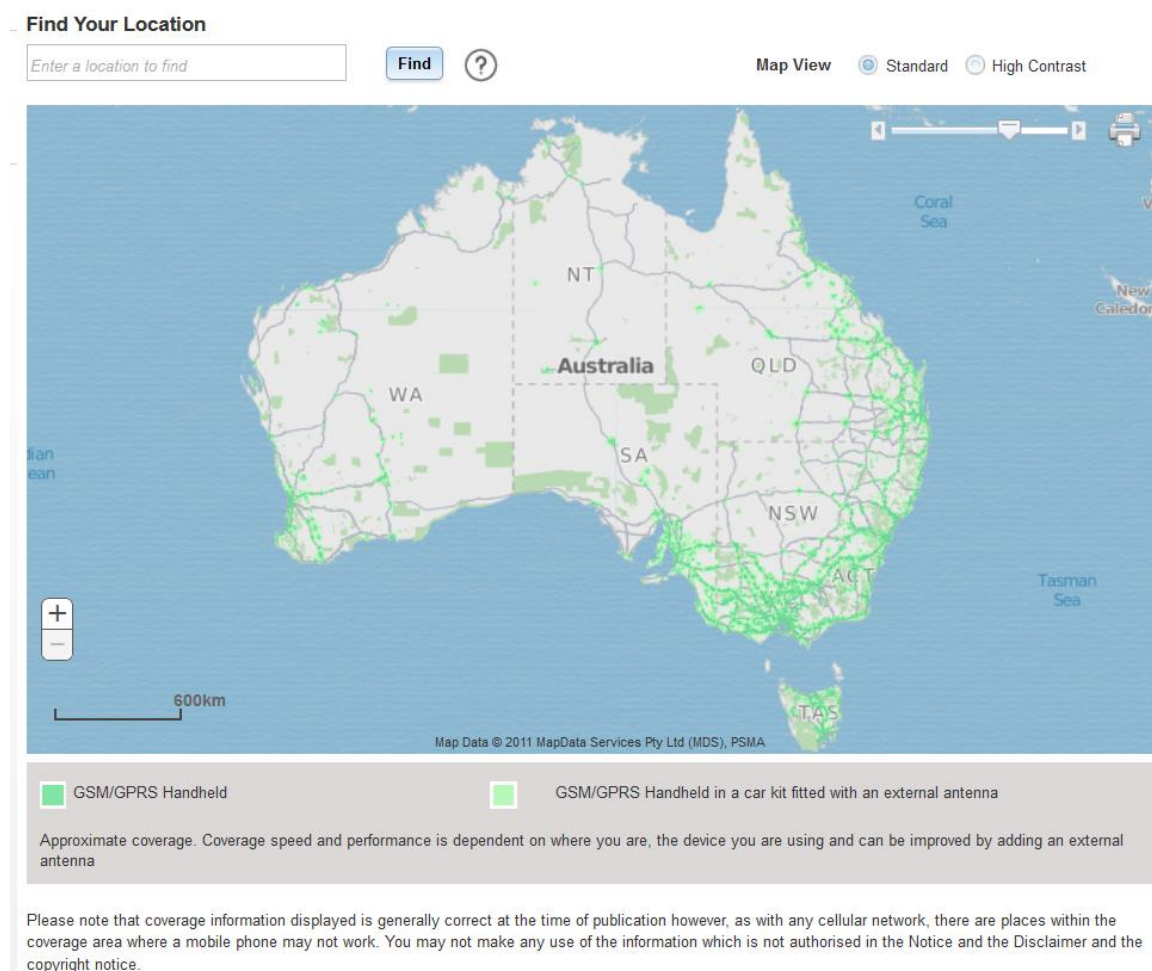
In the earlier days of BRACS, and following a name change from BRACS to ICTV, people took ownership of their own stories and narratives, distributing them through communities. It was a time when Aboriginal people were being exposed to Western media and at the same time, were creating their own media. It was a model that is non-market media production, built on local production and catering to local Indigenous culture and language. This was an important part of identity-building for Aboriginal people in these communities, and it continues today where those using the technologies of ICTs are trying to continue and safeguard culture and language. The narratives are authentic lived experiences of Australia's Aboriginal people.

Over recent years digital communications technologies have been rolled out to the more remote places in Australia. With improved broadband, the digital divide is closing gradually. Aboriginal people in these remote locations have mastered radio and video as these have become digitalised, and now the new ICTs – perhaps more particularly smartphones – appear to be the new technology of choice (ARC Centre of Excellence, 2011). Initially, the very slow dial-up connection speeds were a major inhibiting factor for Internet take-up. But with the advent of satellite technology, young Aboriginal people have started to become engrossed in the technology, particularly digital smartphones. Where there is mobile coverage, young Aboriginal people have quickly adopted SMS text messaging, Bluetooth, converting video files, and uploading instant action videos and photos. Even where there is limited coverage, smartphones are a 'must-have' item – they have become an important accessory as they provide music, videos and the opportunity to take Facies (or selfies) (Kral, 2008, p. 4), and they are also affordable, especially to the many people who opt for prepaid contracts (Callinan, 2014).

According to Kral, there has been an explosion in digital use among remote Indigenous youth, which can be attributed to two main factors: the uptake of digital media in out-of-hours schooling; and the increase of small affordable digital technologies such as MP3 players, iPods

and digital cameras. However, the smartphone has made the iPod, MP3 players and digital cameras obsolete, as the smartphone has all these functions built into the one unit (Smartphone, 2019). What is evident from Kral's discussion paper is that Aboriginal people have adopted new technologies and mastered them, when and where they have become available.

Kral found that Aboriginal young people were using SMS text messaging in their own languages and English, adapting symbols in their own language and English. It appears the use of SMS texting in what Kral describes as "insidership" is the beginnings of cultural group identity. This will only increase, as nationally there has been a massive increase in 4G networks by the two main suppliers Telstra and Optus, who together have acquired ninety per cent coverage of the population nationally. Telstra holds significantly more of the spectrum in non-metropolitan areas than do its competitors. However, there are still significant areas where there is no coverage, as the map below illustrates:



Radio and TV presented a challenge to language and culture that Aboriginal people met by building pirate radio stations with local language contents. The introduction of the internet is significantly more problematic, in that Aboriginal people communicating with people in the rest of Australia will be forced to use English, and the loss of Aboriginal languages will possibly accelerate. In this context, cultural keepers confront the possibility of cultural genocide, an apocalyptic eschatological demise of the original culture as it is usurped by the more dominant culture. Another and major contributor to cultural demise is television. Television is usually controlled by the dominant culture in the language of that culture. It is all-pervasive, affecting what we see, and shaping how we think and how we act in relation to all sorts of stimuli.

However, a contrary argument has been advanced by Steven Mizrach (1999). Writing on the new electronic frontier, and technological and cultural change on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservations, he claimed that the dying Lakota language was beginning to revive as various educators strived to give the language a permanent written and electronic form. Oral traditions and oral histories that were almost lost were now being recorded on video and stored for the future. Currently in Australia in many locations native languages are being lost for example, Mithaka from south-west Queensland, Dalabon from Arnhem Land, Warumungu of Tennant Creek and Ngarridjeri from Southern South Australia. According to Australian National University (ANU) researchers, there is the threat of further Indigenous languages becoming endangered; this has become a motivating factor in a program to retain ten of these endangered languages in their teaching programs.

Digital difference

As noted above, there are two groups of Aboriginal people living in Australia: those who live in remote locations, and those who live in urban Australia. Educational specialist Mark Prensky (2001) terms the first group ‘digital immigrants’: while they were born after 1980, they were born in the more remote parts of Australia, where they have not been able to enjoy access to computer technologies until more recent years. This, however, is now happening with the roll-out of broadband internet into these remote locations. They have taken to the technology enthusiastically; the favoured device is the ubiquitous smartphone, which provides access to social media, more particularly Facebook, and offers cheap access to communications. The tyranny of distance is no longer the problem it had been. In some of these remote locations the nearest town may be hundreds of kilometres away; but with the advent of cheap affordable communications comes the “information revolution”, a core element of late modernity

(Bauman, 2000). Members of this group text and communicate in their own languages, which the urban cohort generally are not able to do; therefore, they are able to enrich community and culture through their use of social media.

But with new technologies come new problems. Young Aboriginals were keen for change, and as these changes arrived so too did the need for them (Rennie et al., 2016). Remote communities have now become reliant on ICTs for education, income, health and various government and other services. Like their Aboriginal cousins in urban Australia, they are compelled to learn these technologies: for example, they are required to conduct transactions with e-government portals: they must use Social Security portals or be cut from welfare, and online Job Search Agencies and E-banking are all required. These services are pervasive: all-controlling but necessary. Consequently, their lives are increasingly controlled by governments, and Aboriginals in remote Australia are now part of the global culture. Some communities are pulling themselves apart and breaking down; their elders have lost or are losing authority, and many issues never seen or experienced before are stressing these communities, including cyberbullying, breaches to cultural protocols and the breakdown of family groups (AHRC [Australian Human Rights Commission], 2011a; Kral, 2014; Vaarzon-Morel, 2014).

There are clear problems with technical knowledge. This is equally the case in urban Australia: indeed, the NSW Government initiated a computer learning program for older Aboriginal people in Redfern, Sydney: a program being run by young Aboriginals and conducted by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. In remote areas this has led to problems: the elders become reliant on the young for advice on banking and e-government transactions, but unfortunately, the young are only marginally more knowledgeable.

It also presents problems of abuse and inappropriate behaviour. Young people are being exposed to cyber safety issues, including online scamming, which is often the result of the sharing of devices leading to insecure banking. This has led to people avoiding online banking and failing to report with Centrelink accounts, which in turn leads to compliance issues with Centrelink. It can also cause problems that result in the breaking of cultural bonds, as when one person makes use of another's social media account, or by transferring the credit on someone else's phone to their own phone.

Other inappropriate behaviours include what is termed, in Aboriginal speak, 'noodz' or 'top shots', where people – mainly women – expose the top half of their bodies; or the use of abusive trash talk and texting on media platforms like AirG and Divas Chat; or the use of photographs

that threaten important cultural protocols – such as showing images of the dead or speaking the name of a person who has passed on; or the use of media where activities like online dating and flirting – often with people who are of the wrong moiety or skin group (“wrong way relationships”) – take place. Such behaviours can leave people in financial hardship, exacerbate pre-existing tensions, and lead to inter-family conflict, real-life fights and aggression, and even to exclusion from the community (Rennie & Yunkaporta, 2018). Some Elders warn of the breakdown and possible loss of culture and are concerned that their young people may be exploited by conmen and fraudsters (ICAN, 2014). The Australian Government seems to agree and has instituted two separate inquiries into cyber-safety for both young and senior Aboriginal Australians, in response to claims of cyberbullying, threats of online suicide, cyber grooming for sexual purposes, and criminal activities. These inquiries are centred on threats facing remote Aboriginal communities where the Internet has only recently arrived, and do not include Aboriginal people in urban or suburban Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

Unlike the remote cohort, the urban cohort is comprised of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have grown up with computer technology, as most Australian cities had, by the mid-1990s, acquired Internet services (Clarke, 2004). This Prensky calls ‘digital natives’: those who have grown up comfortable with the use of computer technology. The majority of urban Aboriginals have never lived on their forefather’s country, never experienced a traditional way of life, and cannot understand Aboriginal traditional culture. They lack community, and the vast majority do not have a traditional language but are confined to the invaders’ hegemonic language, English. As one of my respondents said:

Our elders will never understand how hard it is to grow up in this day and age. Things are so much different from how they used to be. They’ll never understand how depressing it is to be a part of this generation. It has been proven that our generation is the one that screwed up the most. Technology took over. We live most of our lives staring at our phone screens. Romance died. Whatever happened to dinner dates and flowers for your girl? Now it’s just McDonald’s, a bottle of Vodka and then you lose your virginity on a park to some guy you met two hours ago, who will probably never even talk to you again after he’s done with you. Most guys are embarrassed to say they love their girlfriends in front of their boys because to be a “real man” these days you have to have at least three side chicks and had an STD at some point to earn your “Lad” status. Girls forgot how important it is to have respect for themselves. They would rather admit to having sex with three guys in one night than being seen running to catch the bus. Nudes spread across the

internet for the whole world to see. And the female population has been led to believe that you're not beautiful unless you have that contour kit from the new Urban Decay range or that dress that Kim Kardashian posted a picture on Instagram wearing. Jobs have become harder to find. Taxes are rising. The cost of living keeps going up. Loyalty ceased to exist. "Friends" will stab you in the back just to have a bit of banter with someone who dislikes you. People are no longer judged by their personality but by what they post on their Facebook page. You're not considered popular unless you have 100+ likes on your profile picture. Kids are having kids. Self-harm has become some kind of sick fashion. Taking drugs has become socially acceptable. Nowadays someone will stab you in the street over a chicken wing. And the only way to prove that you're a tough guy is to wear a full tracksuit and sell weed to your "mandem" [*sic*]. We are living in the most screwed up generation of people to have ever walked the earth. So, when your parents ask you "why are you so depressed all the time?", "Why do you smoke so much weed?" or "why are you always up all night?" Just tell them what its really like to be alive in a time like this. We can't sleep because we can't stop thinking about the fact that we have to live the rest of our lives in this sick and twisted deformity which we call "Society". We never asked for this life. (personal communication, 27 July 2018)

These are the enculturated, the colonised. The Aboriginal diaspora, deracinated, forcibly removed: they are the Stolen Generations, their offspring alienated and marginalised, suffering morbidity and mortality rates far worse than non-Indigenous Australians, dying younger, and continuing to experience third world chronic health issues that have been corrected in most first world countries (AIHW [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare], 2014). Levels of anomie, mental health issues, incarceration and recidivism are among the highest in the world. Alcoholism and substance abuse have become endemic, along with violence and unemployment. Many are escaping into the virtual world to learn of their culture and find community, and their identities are then shaped in a reflective process. This is the virtual world where you can be Aboriginal, even if only for just a few minutes: a place of confirmation or not – depending on the gatekeepers – as identity is contested on these sites.

Since former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations, there has been a significant increase in the number of people identifying as Aboriginal. In some areas the figures are astounding. For example, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has had a 33.86 per cent increase in the five-year period to 2011. Victoria had the second-largest increase at 26.04 per cent; in all other states, the figures were lower but are still significant by comparison

with pre-Apology figures (GenerationOne, 2012). Some of these newly identifying people could be Aboriginal people who are determined to be reunited with their culture, and eager to be accepted into an Aboriginal community, albeit only, or initially, virtual.

For Australian Aboriginal people, colonisation has come at some considerable toll: loss of language, culture, identity, loss of community, cultural knowledge and importantly the loss of their country. Australian Aboriginal people have a deep spiritual connection to the country, not easily understood by those who came and saw the land as something to be owned or possessed. For Aboriginal people, the land is a living matrix within which we are immersed; we are part of the land, it provides and nourishes, there is a totemic relationship with the land, and so spiritually and religiously we are connected.

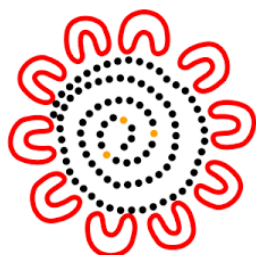
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes of “strategic essentialism” that it occurs when, even if there are strong differences between minority groups, they will set aside their differences to present a strong (essentialised) identity (Spivak, 1985). This has been the case for many Aboriginal Australians, identifying with each other as a result of the hegemonic practices of the state which, through forced relocations and removal of children, effectively melded the many nations of Aboriginal people together. As a result, Aboriginal people have taken the strategic essentialist approach of *we are stronger combined*, setting aside differences, and this emerges in the domain of Aboriginal social media. Our ancestors gave us lore, and we are connected to our laws by (paternal and maternal) linkage through clan and language groups. In the Dreaming, the ancestors travelled across the country, creating the landscape, the animals and the laws under which human society was to live. These are the songlines that criss-cross the country (Cairns & Harney, 2004). Then Aboriginal people were forced to leave our country or face the prospect of punishment: imprisonment or death. Our forebears were unable to practice culture on the country, but our culture, spirituality, moieties and dance are constructed around the country, as are the Dreaming stories. As Aboriginal people we had no form of writing, we could only carry our memories and stories with us and relate them through “yarning”. This is the foundation for my research, and in the next chapter I explain it, and discuss my use of this mode of research.

Chapter 2: Research methodology and contexts

Aboriginal epistemology

This dissertation explores the issues raised by the impacts of colonisation, and the affordances of digital technologies. To do this I employ an Australian Aboriginal epistemological framework to explore Aboriginal history and culture as it is discussed on social media. I have drawn on theories from Agamben, Bourdieu and Spivak, along with other theorists, engaged on Aboriginal Facebook sites through participant observation, and interviewed users of those sites as well as specialists on the topic. In this chapter I set out the research methodology and method I have used in this project – a mixed method, drawing heavily on Aboriginal ways of knowing, and also drawing on Western research methods, particularly cyber-ethnography. Throughout the thesis, the narratives are those of a number of individuals sharing their own stories in similar lived contexts.

Western-inspired knowledge-seeking paradigms are a cause of trepidation for Aboriginal people. As with other ‘First Peoples’, Australian Aborigines have been significantly over-researched (Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 2012), but the research has predominantly been one-sided – researchers have seldom shared knowledge with the communities they investigated, and often it “has perpetuated ongoing racism and colonialism, as well as failing to value Indigenous thinking and worldviews” (Waller, 2018, p. 228). What I required was an ameliorating approach that is respectful, and privileges both participant and researcher. Because of this, I rely on yarning as a methodological foundation for the work. Yarning is a millennia-old mode of knowledge transmission that has been used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since creation, in a process some Indigenous people describe as “telling stories” (Wingard & Lester, 2001). From an Australian Aboriginal people’s perspective, it is culturally appropriate: it privileges the narrative and makes sense of the issues, and it is a respectful way of engagement between people. Yarning often ambles off theme; but that is the nature of yarning – often the yarn will meander into matters not pertinent to the researcher’s study, but it provides full and rich disclosures because it allows a “holistic understanding of the interviewee’s perspectives and experiences” (Berry, 1999).



To be involved in the yarn sets certain obligations on the invited participant, as there are rules to follow: yarning is not a simple exchange of pleasantries, but rather an Indigenous cultural practice that is presently

being theorised as a way of knowledge transmission. It should include the usual Aboriginal introductions, thanks for participating, asking “What mob are you from? Who are you related to?” Traditionally, the yarn takes place in a circle of participants: this image is of Aboriginal people symbolically represented in a circle. Yarning is a largely horizontal social activity, and one that shares power among those present: in a yarning circle, people get a chance to speak fully and without interruption, and the outcomes of the process are mutually owned by all involved. It also encourages deep conversation and deep listening, or *dadirri* (Waller, 2018).

There are several different types of yarning processes (Kvale, 1996) that operate on different levels: social, academic, artistic, political, professional, religious and/or therapeutic. The ‘social yarn’ is an informal yarn, which may meander, allowing anyone in the yarn to introduce different topics, which may include gossip, news, humour, advice; this type of yarn is where trust is built between the parties. The collaborative yarn is more structured: it is usually between two people (but can include others) who want to collaborate on projects, share information, design new concepts, or generally discuss the research project. An even more structured yarn is the in-depth (or semi-structured) research interview, where the purpose is to garner information through participant stories. This yarn is still relaxed and interactive, but it has a purpose from beginning to the end. Yarning, for a researcher, aims to learn from the participant, but in an unfettered way; it should not be forced, and nor should it become overly invasive of the participant’s privacy except when conducting “therapeutic yarning” interviews. This is perhaps the most difficult, as it usually entails personal research questions and storytelling that can be intensely personal, traumatic and emotional. The researcher becomes a listener at this time, supporting the participant through the story, helping to make sense or confirm the story.

Collaborative yarning was selected as the research method to be used in this study because it allows the participant to become more than just an informant: to become a co-researcher in the project. Participant and researcher are fellow travellers; both have different lived experiences to share; and the knowledge passes both ways. The yarn is dialogical and reciprocal process. It can also lead to new discoveries, and having the participant join the research as a collaborator privileges the participant in new discoveries and contributions to the research. When a collaborator understands the objectives of the research, they can offer suggestions and possible solutions to research question and problems. For participants in the collaboration yarn, the conclusion of the interview does not mean the end of collaboration. The collaborator can still engage with the researcher as a contributor long after the interviews.

As a method, yarning has gained acceptance in Australia and overseas. It was used in Botswana in 2002 by Bridget Ng'andu, who researched HIV/AIDS through a case study that used yarning as a conversational method, gathering stories about policy and process from community workers. Yarning allowed the participants to relax, allowing in-depth conversations around the research topic, and this provided both parties with a mutually negotiated and contextually based interview (Ng'andu, 2004). Another to use yarning as a research method was Dawn Bessarab (1996) in an interpretive study conducted across two sites in Western Australia: one in regional Broome, and the other in urban Perth. The study explored the gendered experiences of women and men growing up in their families and engaged an Indigenous methodology (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Oxenham, 2000; Rigney, 1997; Smith, 2012) in the design of the research project (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). In particular, it took an Indigenous standpoint from a black woman's perspective (Foley, 2002; Rigney 1997), using yarning as an Indigenous research method, in semi-structured in-depth interviews, to gather information from the participants about their lived experience.

As well as yarning, I use contemporary academic techniques that fit within a qualitative interpretive method. This method employs various types of interview and other qualitative ethnographic techniques: in-depth unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and narrative research (Kellehear, 1993). According to some scholars (see Spradley, 1979; Ober, 2017), these all follow the principles of the yarn by involving storytelling, respectful engagement and human-to-human interaction, but Mark Rose strongly argues against conflating yarning with qualitative research. He calls this “hegemonic drift”, and describes it as an “apologetic” comparison, whereby western methodology or epistemology are the “anchor points”, and Indigenous epistemology or methodology are valued only where they can be offered as analogues of the western model (Rose, 2018).

In this thesis, Aboriginal voices are positioned and empowered to speak with equal authority alongside western theorists. It is for this reason that I have interviewed my fellow Aboriginal Elders – not simply to analyse their contributions with the aid of western theory, but also as voices contributing to and challenging the evolutionary trajectory of Australian culture. As well, I have included images captured from social media, and comments made by individuals on Facebook or in other digital forms, including those that are not peer-reviewed such as Creative Spirits, IndigenousX, or *Koori Mail*. All of these provide access to the thinking and understandings – the epistemologies – of contemporary Aboriginal people. I am hoping to bring Aboriginal voices into the room, not only so that they may have a voice but also so that they

might transform the way knowledge is created and decisions made, giving power to the yarning circle.

Mapping the field

The object of the research is to map Aboriginal Australians' use of social media through a case study of Australian Aboriginal Facebook sites. My research aimed to identify the principles, rationality, values, practices and other social dimensions associated with what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992, p. 224) describe as “cultural field”.

“Field” is a metaphor used by Bourdieu to explain various forms of activity that take place in a conceptual space, a social context, or a space of human activity, organised according to “systems of relations” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 82) in which individuals and organisations focused on a similar domain of practice compete for position and capital. It is thus a site for the work of power and can be deployed to understand the operations of various social sites, including government, business, law, art, sport, and other sections of society. I characterise social media as a cultural field, because it is characterised by distinct cultural practices, and analysis – of Facebook in general and selected Australian Aboriginal Facebook sites in particular – shows the conditions of access to the field, how positions are attained within the field, what forms of capital are available and sought, and how these different forms of capital are acquired (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312).

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework seems well fitted to understanding individuals and groups in both western culture and indigenous culture; it was largely generated through his work with the Kabyle of Algeria. His concepts offer useful tools to discuss social actions in China or France, or even Dreaming stories, and to help consider the question of what makes us humans, and what it means to possess human subjectivity: questions freighted with theoretical baggage. One response is that “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism” (Sartre, 1996, p. 30); the opposing view is that humans are neither self-forming individuals, or merely a part of the living universe, but are social and historical beings, formed through their contexts (Heidegger, 2000). The struggle in European academia between the existentialists and the anti-humanists is part of the developing of understandings that might offer answers to these questions.

Bourdieu's position is somewhere between the two perspectives: that humans are both subjective individuals, and the product of their historical and social contexts. *Habitus* is a key term he uses here: it references the concept that people are not “natural” selves, but become

selves through what he describes as “incorporated history”: how an individual’s predispositions, along with the history of their personal experiences and the choices they make in life, and the cultural rules and principles in which they live, shape their identity. This means that an individual is not a unitary self, but a collection of selves that are socialised in various fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 108–09). One of my interviewees, “Papa”, describes this in ways that draw on his “western” education and his understanding of Aboriginal identity and being:

Stuart Hall talks about identity as always in motion.¹⁶ He says rather than think of identity as fixed, think of it as in production, like a film that’s in production. He calls it *becoming*. And you never ever arrive at who are you. So too with being Aboriginal. We were born into a world that as, Butler says, is already mapped, already known.¹⁷ So in this world we then have to learn how to become Aboriginal. Now this is what’s happening online, they’re learning ... you’re stating that people online are learning how to become Aboriginal by lurking, by sitting there observing. This is a natural part of any identity in production, or anything that you want to do and what you want to learn. You’d observe first. But there’s something else that’s going on online: it’s unreal or it’s an imagined reality that’s there. If you’re trying to define Aboriginality, you can’t argue definitively that anything is essentially Aboriginal or not Aboriginal. So Aboriginality becomes this fluid thing, it’s very hard to touch. It’s almost like what we tried to describe once in looking at wisdom. You can see its effect, you can see the wind blowing; you could see what happens to the trees when the wind blows through; but you can’t see the wind. Identity is a bit like that, it’s like fluid, fluidity.

In my observations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tend to internalise their thinking and acting in certain ways around the dominant group, and since habitus is accumulated through life experiences, and many Aboriginal people have been culturally conditioned as to their difference under the hegemony of the state, and often have experienced racist attacks, there is a disposition to act aloof around the dominant (white) community. Aboriginal people are consciously aware of their habitus, constantly reflecting on what it is to live within a subjugated environment often hostile to them. For over two hundred years, Aboriginal Australians have known themselves as the “other” because that is how they were treated by the invader. Aboriginal Australians have been enculturated to the lower social

¹⁶ This is a reference to Stuart Hall’s research into cultural identity. See Hall, 1996, p. 4.

¹⁷ See Butler, 1990.

orders, which raises the issue of what Bourdieu calls “doxa”, an important element in the structuring of an individual’s habitus. Doxa is where “the natural social world appears self-evident” and is axiomatically accepted:

the fact is that when we see with our own eyes people living in poor conditions – such as existed, when I was a young scholar, among ... the workers in factories – it is clear that they are prepared to accept much more than we would have believed ... They put up with a great deal, and this is what I mean by doxa – that there are many things people accept without knowing. (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1994, p. 268)

Aboriginal people throughout Australia daily exhibit lower expectations, and of “put up with a great deal” in a way that matches Bourdieu’s sense of doxa. This was evident in the 2013 documentary film *Utopia*, written and produced by John Pilger and directed by Pilger and Allen Lowry, about Aboriginal people in Australia. When questioned about their living conditions and the squalor they lived in, the vast majority of people Pilger interviewed for the documentary seemed to have accepted these conditions without further thought – they had never known a different situation.

Another term Bourdieu uses is “agent”, and by this he means that people are socialised not in one field, but in many, and that they will act differently when their situation changes and when they move across different fields. This view is supported by the argument advanced by social psychologist Erving Goffman (1959) that the presentation of the self is a communicative act, conceived and interpreted by others, with sender and receiver continually negotiating in response to each other’s interpretations (see also Biocca, 1997; Lee, 2004; Schlenker, 1980; Walther, 1996). Sherry Turkle (1995) writes similarly that, when creating virtual identities online, authors and respondents engage in a reflective process mediated by convener and audience response (Tajfel, Turner et al., 1979). For example, a person will act differently in church from how he acts at the footy because his habitus provides him with the capacity to adjust his self-presentation in order to navigate each field, and other people in those fields will interpret him as behaving either appropriately for the local context, or inappropriately (Bourdieu, 1980). For many Aboriginal people social media represents a chance to be or become Aboriginal. As many have never lived as Aboriginal people, they do not know how to be Aboriginal, but the virtual world allows them the opportunity, every time they log on, to present one or more virtual identities within this virtual community. This has mixed values: as one interviewee says:

I think there's advantages and disadvantages to a virtual online community. I think the advantage is that you can connect up with more than one people at the same time; and it traverses distances, so geographical distances are not a problem in virtual online communities. But the other side of that, which I always worry about, is that too much sitting on virtual online communities decreases your skills in face-to-face engagement with another person. Let's face it, there are people behind those avatars, and I just don't think it's healthy that you develop in such a way that you can't even talk to a face-to-face person or can't interact. This is the whole sense of being human.

Other of the interviewees offer very similar views; for instance:

Romeo: I often think that a virtual online community is something that Indigenous people have control of, if you like, or ownership of the space. For example, IndigenousX is a really good example of that. IndigenousX, the Twitter handle. Only Aboriginal people have that Twitter handle every week and only Aboriginal people tweet from that every week. I think that's carving out a space.

WA: What about Facebook, though?

Romeo: That's interesting. Are they an Indigenous space? Probably. I suppose it's a virtual online community.

WA: That's problematic on a couple of grounds though, isn't it? One of those is, how do you know you're talking to an Aboriginal?

Romeo: You don't. Unless you meet someone face-to-face, you don't know. I had this dilemma in my own social media because I've got about 890-odd Facebook friends, and I've met probably 200 of those people. [laughter]

WA: An Aboriginal academic asked the question; can community recognition occur online?

Romeo: That's really interesting. This is only my view, but I don't think so. Because I have to eyeball someone. But maybe that's changing, Wayne. When someone sends me a [Facebook] friend request now, I'll go through their friends list and see how many mutual friends and who are they.

WA: You're suspicious?

Romeo: Yeah, always. I'll go through the list and see if there's any of my credible friends. If they're friends with them, I'll accept, but if they're not, I won't. Okay,

we are creating a virtual Aboriginal community – that’s what we’re doing. We’re saying, “Okay, you’re in”. Because I make a decision – you know that person, that person, that person, and you’re connected to that person, that person; but you’ve probably never met them face-to-face and I haven’t either.

WA: A big leap of faith, isn’t it?

Romeo: It is. I think it is.

Social media is helping to create the “virtual self” or, interchangeably, the “technoself” (Luppicini, 2012): the ability to customise their own virtual identity, continually changing and remodelling it to enhance the perceptions others may have of them. But they have to operate both online and offline, in virtual and in “real world” communities, which means they need to become familiar with the rules, the behaviours and the modes of engagement in each, if they are to build successful senses of self: or what Bourdieu calls “capital”.

For Bourdieu, the power associated with field manifests in various forms of capital that are specific to a field, and these forms of capital are possessed by some and sought by others within the field. Bourdieu identifies several forms of capital beyond the economic (financial) form (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992):

- *Cultural capital* (access to privileged materials, skills and knowledge) includes embodied forms, such as beliefs and dispositions, and objectified forms such as cultural artefacts, pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments and knowledge.
- *Social capital* (community affiliations and contacts): personal and/or institutional social networks. Social capital is accrued through and dependent on the size and social efficacy of the actual networks one is associated with, and how these can be mobilised: who one knows, and whether or not those people or organisations are economically, culturally and symbolically important within the field (Bourdieu, 1986).
- *Symbolic capital* (prestige and honour) accumulates from social obligations that are themselves embedded with the opportunities for prestige. Symbolic capital is generally field-specific (what is prestigious in one field will not necessarily have any value in another field).

These forms of capital can interact with each other and each has the potential to be exchanged for or converted into other forms of capital; for example, educational qualifications comprise

a mode of cultural capital that can deliver economic returns; cultural capital can become symbolic capital, when an individual's skills are recognised (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social network sites connect people with others; friends, family, strangers, and other social ties. It gives the ordinary user the potential to influence other users, well beyond their means in their everyday lives, and thus the potential to build social capital within that community. On Facebook social capital is derived from the number of friends and contacts one has, because these ties help maintain and build social resources. Particularly salient for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is its capacity to connect the large extended families, as well as clans and tribes; language groups; various sporting and other community organisations; NGOs; social groups; and political parties:

WA: As a user of Aboriginal social media, what are your particulars are of interest?

For example, is activism important to you, or talking to other people?

Whiskey: Talking to other people, family and friends.

WA: Is it all about that?

Whiskey: It's mainly about that. For instance, Chris from the New Matilda site, I follow him. So yeah, it's reading about Aboriginal things as well.

“Papa” too sees several values in being connected online:

I'm interested in seeing what other Aboriginal people are talking about. So, I go to specific sites, either subject areas or topic areas. I'm really interested in Aboriginal politics, black fella politics: when a young bloke walks across the country to come to Parliament House, you know that kind of stuff. I really like to keep up with that stuff. I do like the sense that when I'm online with other people, other Aboriginal people, there's no distance, like it's there in real time. I like that.

Like most of my interviewees, they make it clear that social media use is largely about family and broader connections, but also about being connected to ideas, activity and movements. Like any social space – or field – users need to be aware of where they are in relation to others in the field, and aware of how to engage with them in order to achieve their own goals or interests. For Bourdieu, this can be classified under the broad term of “capital”.

Capital gained is the result of successful competition within fields, and because of Bourdieu's description of fields as sites of competition and capital, he can be viewed as to be constructing the human subject as highly competitive and acting to advantage themselves. It makes no sense, in these terms, for a person to act, consciously, in such a way as to destroy all their wealth, lose

all their friends, become a pariah ... or completely destroy themselves. And yet people do. Indigenous suicide, for example, which is a serious problem, is not easy to explain using Bourdieu's model of field and habitus in a simplistic model, and nor is the problem of addiction sensibly reducible in terms. The issue is, though, that because human beings are not unitary, and because they operate in a number of fields, across a number of different forms of logic, and for very different sets of interest, what is in fact self-harming behaviour may be unavoidable: particularly in cases involving trauma.

In the next chapter I discuss the construction of my own habitus, and how – as a consequence of my childhood experiences – I became politicised and racialised, becoming first a unionised worker, then a trade union official, and later still an “academic Kamilaroi”. As a result of my research, I have acquired other identities – as agents do in the computer-mediated online world, a mediated environment where we are changed (Biocca, 1997; Lee, 2004; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Minsky, 1980; Sheridan, 1992) – and my research into this world adds to understandings of its impact on, and for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Conducting the study

This approach fits the model of cyber-ethnography, a qualitative method that is based on traditional ethnography, and is located within the interpretive research paradigm. Like the traditional form, it is designed to study a group of people, obtaining research data from the field, to learn about their culture and mores in an in-depth way. In traditional ethnography, a study will observe interactions between individuals who are co-located. In cyber-ethnography, the researcher employs computer-mediated technologies to achieve the same outcome, but the members of the community may be physically very widely distributed. The electronic mediation extends the possibilities for interactions between participants and between the community and the researcher.

In each case, the researcher observes the group in their own settings, normally spending significant amounts of time within the group, attending social events, and participating in rituals and customs: this helps in gaining political and social understandings of the group. The British anthropologist, Sir Edward Evans (E.E.) Evans-Pritchard, claimed that anthropological research was not an exact science, but closer to the humanities, and a discipline where the researcher should place themselves in the position of those being researched, experiencing life as they do (Evans-Pritchard, 1950). This is also a basis for ethnographic research; but a problem

with this is that in most circumstances the ethnographer will be foreign to the group and this can influence the objectivity of the study. The researcher's own thought processes, customs and terminologies introduce pre-existing biases – observer bias (Galibert, 2004) – which can influence the study, and measures, such as triangulation of research, and reflexive practice, must be adopted to minimise these outcomes.

An important aspect of cyber-ethnography is participant observation, which has a long history, commencing in the first half of the twentieth century (see Evans-Pritchard, 1950; Mead, 1928). For cyber-ethnographers, participant observation allows the opportunity to observe the community for extended periods of time without interfering with the group or changing the group's patterns of behaviour. Such 'invisible' participation is termed lurking, and though it provides insights into the behaviours of individuals, such covert behaviour has ethical considerations, as it does in the physical world.

For this project, my research was approved by the University Canberra Human Ethics committee. I notified all the conveners on those Aboriginal websites where research is to be carried out, and received their permission to conduct the research and observe their members. I also undertook not to display online any posts concerning the research study, to ensure the privacy and the anonymity of those participating.

My intention, at the start of the project, was to select members of designated Aboriginal-only Facebook sites to participate in the research. Criteria for those selected were to be those whose presence on the Facebook sites showed forthright views, political, activism, and attention to matters concerning Aboriginality. I also wanted to recruit people who appear to use Aboriginal English in a very overt manner. In addition, I intended to interview Aboriginal-only site conveners, and also Aboriginal elders who do not use computers. Social yarning formed the basis for my initial contact with participants, where I could set them at ease and explain the reason for the research study. I would then make overtures as to whether the participant would consider joining as a participant or working in collaboration on the research project.

Under the initial research design, I intended to use Skype to interview participants online, and record the conversations. I chose Skype because it offers the opportunity to conduct synchronous inexpensive online interviews across the world. As a research tool, Skype offers numerous advantages:

- 1) it is free to download and use;
- 2) it is geographically limitless;

- 3) it is simple to install and user-friendly;
- 4) it has instant messaging facilities that include data collection, which enables the sharing of information among participants, and
- 5) it has simple-to-use video and audio tools.

Other benefits include audio recording from computer to computer, or computer to telephone conversations. As in face-to-face non-virtual interviewing situations, the researcher has visual contact with the participant, which is important for body language cues, so that the researcher can alter the interview to suit the needs of their participant.

But a problem immediately emerged: owing to the nature of social media, most participants knew me only through social media and, according to those I interviewed, it is difficult to build relationships and trust when people are known to each other only through online meetings. The majority chose not to be interviewed via Skype, even though it was made clear the interviews were to be conducted anonymously; perhaps, from their point of view, it seemed better to say nothing rather than be exposed.

Some volunteered to write their answers to the questions. It became clear subsequently when interviewing these people, most were reluctant to take a position on issues such as fake Aboriginal identities, not wishing to take the part of arbitrators on questions of morality or in effect becoming, according to them, gatekeepers themselves. Two respondents did write their answers, but the answers were more in-line with yes or no answers and offered little toward the research so were considered unsuitable for inclusion in this thesis.

An example is shown in this exchange I had with JR, a person I have been communicating with online with for some years, over which time I have witnessed the progress of this person over that time. He seldom makes contact with others online and when he does, it is to endorse what has been written by someone else:

WA: As you probably know I am an academic at the University of Canberra and would be interested to see if you would participate in an interview online using Skype. It's in relation to my PhD which looks at 'Becoming Aboriginal Online'. I have written 10 questions that you can read prior to making any decisions.

JR: Happy to have a look, can't see why not. I'd have to change my computer settings for a bit as the internet camera is fully disabled usually.

WA: Yeah, no obligation it's about how Aboriginal people are using the internet. I will get the questions and send them to you later today as I am flat out doing something with a dead-line. Best mate.

JR: Thumbs up sign

WA: Didn't get this sorted yesterday as I was under some pressure to get some submissions completed. Have a look and see what you think and get back to me. Best to think the question over carefully for a day or two as these questions concern how you see others act online. There is no rush to do the interview.

JR: Thumbs up sign

JR: After some thought I have decided I don't want to do anything via skype. I am happy to answer these ten questions in writing. The one about avatars I am unsure about as I have photo as my profile picture. I have used an image of balga (grass tree) resin at one point. So, if that is an avatar, I have used one. Even then if anyone was keen, they could've looked up my other profile pictures, all except that one are of myself. These photos are always public. In some ways I have done the exact opposite of hiding behind a picture, on the 26th of this year I changed my profile picture to one of myself at the river in ochre. Invasion day, it seemed like the right thing to do. I am not perhaps a very good example of an Aboriginal online anyway, as I am of very mixed background. I can pass as white anytime I want to. My Mum is a School teacher, my English skills are pretty good, my accent is pretty standard aussie. For the police here as an example I am treated as white most times, unless in company with Noonygar (the local mob) brothers, then all of a sudden, I am Aboriginal. Strange but true. Anyway, let me know if you want my answers in writing.

The research finally involved interviews with 25 Aboriginal people who are, or have been, daily users of social media. Selection criteria were that the participants have confirmation of Aboriginal identity; and that they are academically trained. This was to address the need for the participants to be skilled in discerning the cultural mores and subtleties associated with Aboriginal culture, and also to ensure that they are trained in objective and critical thinking. Of those recruited to the project, some are Aboriginal elders, and a majority are enrolled in or have completed PhDs, with some attaining positions of seniority within the academy. In later chapters I quote them verbatim in some detail, using the FAA phonetic alphabet to distinguish

them from each other without revealing their identity, and honouring the logic of collaborative yarning whereby they are my collaborators, and not merely informants.

Field, power and capital

As noted, my interest in this research is to understand the role of social media – particularly Facebook – in constructing identity and recovering culture, and particularly why Australian Aboriginal people are motivated to join Aboriginal-only websites in such large numbers. Some of the reasons given in previous studies of non-Aboriginal people using Facebook is that young people are keen to keep strong ties with friends, or to strengthen ties with new acquaintances, but not necessarily to meet new friends online (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Each of the participants in my collaborative yarning made the claim that Aboriginal people are trying to find community, despite (in some cases) facing challenges with telecommunication access and social disadvantage. A study by Rice, Haynes, Royce and Thompson (2016) concluded that Indigenous young people were experiencing both positive and negative impacts of social media. Positive impacts are found in content sharing platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, providing young Indigenous people the opportunity to exhibit their identities online, by sharing stories, videos and being part of Indigenous groups. This helps reaffirm their identities and build community (Edmonds et al., 2012). Negative impacts are associated with experiences of being bullied or exploited online or facing racist abuse in the virtual world.



Racism is always an issue for Aboriginal Australians, and Bronwyn Carlson identifies this when she speaks about Aboriginal people online. She speaks about the abuse Aboriginal people face, saying that some she has spoken to feel overwhelmed and anxious when they face racist comments, and some reported that they regulate their own comments online so as not to attract racist remarks. While it is true that Facebook allows the potential for creative interaction between agents even in situations where

it is difficult to maintain offline interaction, threats and accusations may also happen online (Fraser & Dutta, 2008a). A study by Carlson and Fredricks (2018) reported that more than 80% of those they interviewed openly identified as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander on social media, but 50% said that sometimes they chose not to identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander for fear of attracting racist or violent responses, and over 80% said they had seen such abuse online. The report noted that the “most common example was the doubting of people’s Aboriginal identity and the use of memes depicting Indigenous people in a derogatory manner, often in the guise of a joke” (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). In this respect, I would add, another sort of abuse online is lateral violence, with Aboriginal people inflicting lateral violence on other Aboriginal people.

The traditional ways of protesting discrimination and violence, such as street marches and sit-ins, have never really gained traction, as the media in Australia is undoubtedly biased towards Aboriginal people (McCallum & Waller, 2017a). Carlson’s and others’ research suggests that many Aboriginal people turn to social media for social activism. This seems counter-intuitive, because the digital domain means we are all now living under a super-charged version of what the eighteenth-century philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, conceived of as an effective and non-violence prison system: the Panopticon. This design is based on the prisoner being constantly in a position to be surveilled by the central prison tower, but never knowing if there was somebody within view, and therefore internalising the authority – effectively, self-policing. Michel Foucault (1979) wrote critically on the Panopticon, pointing out that it was not motivated by the welfare of the prisoner, but about making the prison (and other institutions) work more efficiently. Had Bentham and Foucault survived to the present, they would have been astounded to see this the panopticon expand radically, to what Mathiesen calls the “synopticon” (1997; 2004). Bentham’s central watch tower has been superseded by computers and smart devices, and we are constantly being watched or, more importantly, we believe we are being watched; and we have become largely oblivious to this constant surveillance. Car parks, banks, city centres, supermarkets, even our smartphones, even the television has the potential for surveillance (Vaughan-Nichols, 2017), either by advertisers, or by government or other hackers. Indeed, we learned from WikiLeaks (which was dubbed “Vault 7”) that the CIA created malware to target iPhones, android devices and smart TVs, allowing them to spy on and listen to users (Whigham, 2017).

Despite being under this constant gaze, people have found that social media provides Australian Aboriginals a way to express themselves and their resistance to discrimination, and

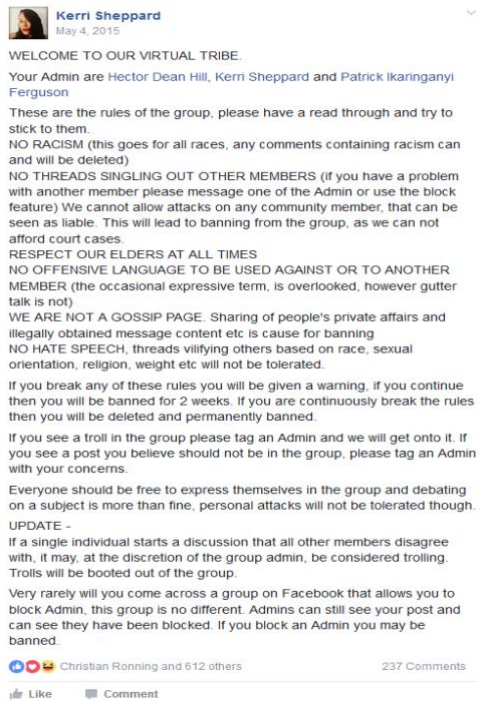
certainly I see a great deal of consciousness-raising and political activism on Facebook postings.

The three Facebook sites I used for the fieldwork are the most prominent Aboriginal-only sites: *Aboriginal*; *Wiradjuri–Our Mob*; and *Find My Aboriginal Family in Australia*. On all of them, membership is large (up to 30,000 members on one site) and growing rapidly. In each case, as they are Aboriginal-only sites, a stipulation joining the website is that a new member must be of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Later in the dissertation I discuss some problems associated with who is authorised to determine who is or who is not Aboriginal; online, there is virtually no way administrators can determine with any real accuracy who is or who is not Aboriginal. The only way that this may be possible is if other members on the website have knowledge of the potential new member and can speak for them (but this depends on the new member providing a photograph of themselves, and using their correct name). The policing of any website relies on the truthfulness of the new prospective member; this has been the cause of infiltrations of particular types of users known as *trolls*, which has become problematic across social media, and therefore also on Aboriginal-only sites. The use of avatars is also quite common. An interviewee responded to my question about the use of avatars by saying:

My avatar is just my own personal photograph. ... There have been times where I've used an avatar on Facebook. It was a demonstration of support for a cause, or a demonstration of where I'm at personally around my social and my emotional ... We used to wear political badges. I think now, on social media, that political badge has become digital, so everybody puts something on, that digital badge, standing with the cause.

This person is a mature political activist; for others, less familiar with public expression or less confident about their identity, the use of an avatar can create an opportunity to remain anonymous while constructing the virtual self, and being accepted by the online community. Colonisation and forced removal have changed how Aboriginal people physically present: it is not unusual for Aboriginal people to have blonde hair and blue eyes – an obvious obstacle for someone claiming Aboriginality – and so both anonymity and self-exploration continue until such time as the user is confident to expose themselves more fully to others online.

As in any community situation, there are risks in self-disclosure, but the virtual community has additional risks because what is written down is public, or potentially public as “Zulu” points out:



I think social media has changed me. In the past, I would be quite happy to say some frank and fearless things in a room and ask people to maintain Chatham House Rules.¹⁸ With the days of social media now, people can easily record what you say, slice and dice it, take it totally out of context, no matter what if it’s your voice saying it then you’ve said it.

Another of my interviewees begins by explaining his interest in using social media, but offers a note of caution:

Romeo: What I go online for? Okay, there’s a few things. Social media is a big thing for me. I use social media a bit. That’s Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest,

LinkedIn ...; Twitter is usually just for news items and that sort of stuff. Push out news items, something to do with Aboriginal things; it’s informing people, letting them know that this is happening or that’s happening; that sort of thing.

WA: Do you take a position on social issues?

Romeo: I try not to, because of my position. It’s really difficult when you’ve got a senior position because what I’ve learned is that you’ve got to be really careful what you do. Otherwise, in the future that might ...

WA: Come back and haunt you.

Romeo: Yes. Produce challenges for you. There are some things I do push the point about. I push the facts ... it’s a fact that 53 per cent of Indigenous students will start a degree and never finish. It’s a fact. We know that. We know that that’s a fact. Federal government has changed the funding model. It’s a fact, so the university is going to have to do something different.

¹⁸ A meeting may be reported by those present, but the source of that information may not be explicitly or implicitly identified.

While “Romeo” has to speak as someone responsible for his institution, others express the need to be careful about what they say online because of the possible discursive violence they might experience:

WA: Have you ever come across any Trojan types of plots where people attack Aboriginal people?

Charlie: I haven’t personally. But I think that’s because I probably haven’t been risky enough. I say “risky”, but I just mean fully outright going, “You’re an idiot”. I haven’t been aggressive in the online space to get a barrage of shit back.

So there are ways to use social media productively, but this interviewee is not alone in expressing the need for caution, because there are risks, both online and offline, for misperformances. On the Aboriginal-only sites I researched, all behaviours, rules and etiquette are controlled by the site ‘administrators’ – as they are on any site. It is the administrators who control the conduct on a website, and they have complete control: users must accept the administrator’s conditions to remain on the site. Usually the conditions and etiquette for the site are posted at the head of the memes on the website where the visitor can read the conditions. Administrators have the power to remove or accept users, either because they do not meet the rules of the website, or for apparently arbitrary reasons – since administrators are not required to provide reasons to a user, and there are no lines of appeal for these decisions.

This administrative control can accrue into various forms of capital: the capacity to control or modify the discourse and behaviours on these websites, and to assert power and influence far beyond what they would be able to do in the everyday. But social media can offer all its users the power to influence: as Foucault (2003, p. 98) asserts, individuals are the vehicles of power; they hold the authority to experience it and they also transfer power. So they are not just objects undergoing power but also users exercising power. Both logistically and physically, prior to the advent of computer technology it was difficult to maintain contact with such large numbers of people on a daily basis. Now, every time a user logs on, that user has the potential to access (potentially) thousands of other users, and the power to influence through social media is immense. The 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama, which has been termed the “Facebook election” (Fraser & Dutta, 2008b) is an example of such influence: Obama created an online network site, my.barkobama.com, and successfully recruited thousands of campaign volunteers from across America.

But because all discourse is moderated by the site administrators or conveners, they operate as gatekeepers. This is very visible on Aboriginal-only sites, where the administrators and conveners often intercede in cultural matters concerning Aboriginal people, and where some users express strong opinions in order to control what can or cannot be said. Gatekeepers are self-appointed cultural police officers, who determine what is acceptable online, and what is to be rejected. Well before social media existed, German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1984) discussed what is now a consequence of such control: the ‘Spiral of Silence’ theory. The Spiral of Silence relies on individuals’ perceptions of current public opinion – and most people have the ability to judge the current trends in social debate – and their fear of being isolated themselves if they express a divergent opinion to the status quo. For Aboriginal-only Facebook sites, this also means the loss of opportunity to be accepted by others as Aboriginal. Consequently, new users will usually begin by reading messages written by other people, and not participate until such time as they understand what is acceptable on the site, and what is not.

On one of the Aboriginal sites I use, there are three administrators. One, whom I shall call ‘Alice’, is the chief administrator. She is a businesswoman operating a retail vintage boutique shop, and names the high school where she was educated. The second, whom I shall call ‘Bill’, has not provided details as to his work or education, but the third, whom I call ‘Clive’, names his high school and college, and also lists his skills. As primary administrator, ‘Alice’ would have provided her personal details to the Facebook organisation to open and conduct the website. Both ‘Clive’ and ‘Bill’ perform in a subordinate role, seldom intervening in disputes, but allowing ‘Alice’ to lead. Both primary and secondary administrators gain various forms of capital by their controlling roles on the website. They hold symbolic capital due to their position and status on the site, particularly if they have a reputation for competence, and an image of respectability. They often help determine what political position is taken on the website, they control the learning and education of the members on site, they can influence culture, tastes and consumption patterns, and they often intervene in disputes between users: it is their responsibility to remove troublesome users or trolls. Because they influence and control the discourse conducted on the site, including the information education and flow of knowledge, they can also possess cultural capital, and they gain social capital by being part of the online community. Additionally, they potentially gain economic capital by controlling advertising and marketing throughout the site. In the site under consideration, ‘Alice’ often tests the market via the Aboriginal-only website, selling online to other users as well as

promoting her retail outlet directly, and thus translating her social, cultural and symbolic capital into economic capital.

Without the support of users on these websites, however, administrators hold little or no capital above that of other ordinary users. As the virtual membership increases, so does status, influence, and capital. This is heightened by the fact that the majority of content on collaborative websites is created by a minority of users. Earlier studies (see Nielsen, 2006) estimated that about 90% of a website's members act as lurkers; that is, they do not post to the website (Bishop, 2007; Dennen, 2008): they observe but do not contribute; while a further 9% are content editors, leaving just 1% who post on a regular basis; this is often described as the 90–9–1 (or the 1%) principle. Nielsen's 2006 study of Usenet newsgroups showed that of more than 2 million messages posted to Usenet, 27% were from users who had only ever posted once. The most active users, who contributed 25% of all postings, were from a group of just 3% of the total, and over 50% of all edits were done by only 0.7% of the users. Charles Arthur, former technology editor for the *Guardian*, notes in a widely cited article (Arthur, 2006) that "it's early days yet", and more recent studies show different patterns of use (see Lewis et al., 2019), with much higher activity levels from the whole membership; however, it is still accurate to assert that more people are lurking than are producing or editing content, and that the bigger the group, the more power can be claimed by the administrators.

Willie Ermine, a researcher and member of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan, writes that "Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown ... Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self" (1995, p. 108). Working from this perspective, in the next chapter, I turn to the biography and memoir, locating my research in the lives and experiences of my grandfather, my father, and myself.

Chapter 3: My Voice

Introduction

This is my story – a personal narrative. I am Aboriginal, and I survived twentieth-century Australia. This story explains how gradually I became conscious of my Aboriginality. I am Kamilaroi and I also respond to Gamilaroi. The Kamilaroi nation is one of the largest in Australia, a separate sovereign nation. My country covers a large area, extending from New South Wales to Southern Queensland. The Kamilaroi were considered fierce warriors, and if necessary, we were prepared to resort to payback when and where it was required. We have different cultural norms and mores to other tribal groups, different from our neighbours the Wiradjuri, Wailwan, Bigambul, Ngaral, Muruwan, Kooma, Bigambul, Ngarabal, Ngayaywana, Birpi and Geawegal.

In 1948 I was born on the land of Ngunnawal people, in the nation's capital Canberra. In that year anyone born in Australia would be considered an Australian citizen, and no longer a British subject, as had been the case previously. Prior to Federation in 1901, Aboriginals held no citizenship status, but between 1901 and 1962 they were considered British subjects, and as such had the right to vote provided, they were over 21 years of age, in each state or territory where the right to vote had been mandated. The United Nations General Assembly at Paris on 10 December 1948 had mandated these rights before the rest of the world. Australia could hardly be a signatory and have the original people denied the vote in their own country. Article 2 sets this out:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or another opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or another status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.¹⁹

While the United Nations and the British Colonial Office saw Aboriginals as equals, British expatriates and Australians did not: the state of Queensland denied Indigenous people the right to vote when it gained self-government in 1859; similarly, Western Australia denied

¹⁹ The full record of General Assembly Resolution 217 A is available at [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/217\(III\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/217(III))

Indigenous people the vote when it gained self-government in 1890. Thus, for the 48 years between 1901 and 1949, Aboriginal people were considered as virtual people, since Section 25 provided the states with the right to ban people from voting based on their status as a race. In 1962 the Commonwealth extended the right to vote to all Indigenous Australians. A strongly held myth in Australia is that the 1967 referendum gave Aboriginal Australians citizenship rights and the right to vote; this is not correct. These rights were first awarded via the Commonwealth Electoral Act of 1949, when those who were ex-servicemen were enrolled to vote in state elections.²⁰ In 1962, all Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people were given the right to vote in federal elections – the first time Indigenous Australians would be entitled to vote as Australian citizens – provided they were able to vote in state elections; so unlike my forebears, when I attained voting age I would be entitled to vote.

But patterns of exclusion have remained unchanged all these years later: Section 51(26) of the Constitution still gives Parliament power to pass laws that discriminate against people on the basis of their race and, as Castan (2011) writes, Parliament has only ever used the races power in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Provision as to races disqualified from voting

Section 25: For the purposes of the above section, states; if by the law of any State all persons of any race are disqualified from voting at elections for the more numerous House of the Parliament of the State, then, in reckoning the number of the people of the State or of the Commonwealth, persons of that race resident in that State shall not be counted.

Section 51: The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have the power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to [...] the people of any race, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.

My father grew up a non-citizen, and more, because official identification of Aboriginal people was then defined by the colour of the person's skin, he was deemed too white to be black and

²⁰ The census of 1967 afforded two changes to the Federal Constitution. First, that Indigenous Australians would be counted in the national census; second, that the Federal Government was given powers to make laws for Indigenous Australians. These are known as the "race powers". Prior to 1967, section 51(26) of the Australian Constitution, the "race powers" gave the Federal Government the power to make laws in relation to "the people of any race, other than the Aboriginal race in any state, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws". Effectively the referendum removed the words "other than the Aboriginal people in any state" – giving the Federal Government the power to make laws in relation to indigenous people (Behrendt, 2017).

too black to be white. He was therefore one of the many people who were deemed “too Aboriginal” to live in towns, but not Aboriginal enough to live on reserves (Doukakis, 2006, p. 14). This was formalised under the Aborigines Protection Act 1909, the aim of which, according to historian Peter Read, was to drive as many Aboriginal people as possible into the white community. However, the white community objected to having Aboriginal people living nearby or attending the schools (Read, 2006). My father and grandfather, like other Aboriginal people who were not ‘sufficiently’ black, they, therefore, were placed in a virtual world, neither black nor white,²¹ with restricted access to friends and relatives living on the missions, and unwelcome in the towns. The result was that my father’s education was seriously limited: because he was considered a half-caste, and therefore not allowed to stay on the Reserve, he was unable to gain an education on an Aboriginal Reserve (Beresford, Partington & Gower, 2012, p. 45), even though this would have been somewhat spartan (education was designed to prepare the students to become labourers or house servants). In town, he was at times excluded from school, because in 1902, under the “Exclusion on Demand” policy (Beresford, Partington & Gower, 2012, p. 45), the parents of white children had the legal right to refuse Aboriginal children’s attendance at the same schools as their children (Broome, 2002). Still, over time he managed to educate himself, and up until his death, he was a prolific reader.

This had been his history when, in 1962, the Commonwealth Electoral Act was passed, and my father’s name appeared on the electoral roll. He had previously voted in state elections prior to 1962, but he died in 1962, the same year that Aboriginal people received the vote. My father was a member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), and he supported the CPA as they were the only party that supported Aboriginal Australians. He was a staunch unionist and believed in the struggle for equality and human rights for all. He campaigned to have the same rights as all other Australians, often saying: “This is my country. I would rather die fighting on my feet rather than lie down and have them march over me.”

My father was unhappy that restrictive laws remained for Aboriginal people and wondered why these laws were not changed, as we were apparently equal. Until his death, he argued for a treaty similar to the Treaty of Waitangi, and believed Aboriginal people have the right to self-determination. He argued for fertile land to be handed back to Aboriginal people so that we might become independent, and for the right to self-government of the various independent

²¹ Today the same applies between those in the far north of Australia and those in the rest of the country, with those in the north describing the rest as “yellafellas”: Aboriginal people whitened by assimilation into the rest of society. See the Information Folio “Appropriate Terminology, Indigenous Australian Peoples”, at https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/10043/appropriate_indigenous_terminology.pdf

Aboriginal states and nations. These were the professed tenets of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), and my father joined the CPA because they supported Aboriginal peoples' struggle for civil and political equality and supported Aboriginal demands for self-determination and communal rights to land and culture (Parker, 2009). He also became what was known as a speech-fighter; a speaker and fighter who was often drawn into discussions and was willing to fight to support his views. Free-speech fights were connected to the Industrial Workers of the World's attempts to gain awareness of labour issues through street meetings, which often ended in violence from vigilantes and anti-labour groups. Prior to joining the CPA, Joe had supported the Industrial Workers of the World, commonly referred to as the Wobblies, and a major reason he moved to Canberra was that, as an Aboriginal person, he was prohibited from entering hotels in NSW where he could espouse Communist ideals and speak for Aboriginal rights.

Our grandfather was apparently a man of wisdom, a man who had traditional Kamilaroi cultural knowledge. My siblings and I never knew our grandfather as he had died before any of us were born. He had seen many things in his 85 years; he could speak the Gamilaraay language; he knew things about the white people and Western culture, like the massacres of Aboriginal people from around the district. Grandfather also knew secret Kamilaroi business because he was an initiated man. This was as important to him as political action was to my father, who knew people would never change a system that benefited only them. Grandfather lived through perilous times for Aboriginal people, and because of this he urged my father to leave Kamilaroi country. He was aware that my father was gaining a reputation as a speech-fighter: he was a soapbox orator who at times would be challenged to fight by hecklers, and he was beginning to draw the attention of the police and other authorities because of his political views.

But Father was determined to change the political system, and the way Aboriginal people were treated. He was prepared to stand by his conviction in a literal sense (to fight, as he often did) if and when required. My father always said to us kids, speaking of our grandfather, that he had often said to Joe, "There will be a bullet with your name on it. Stay here, and it is only a matter of time." His father warned him of the dangers of espousing the Communist Party's views and especially espousing equality for Aboriginals. But my father believed in fighting for human rights.

My father was lucky to gain a job working as fireman-engine-driver during the Second World War, due to the shortage of manpower. He had worked his way up from a stoker (a person who tends the furnace on a steamship or steam train) with the New South Wales Railway – one of

the very few places where Aboriginal people were afforded wage justice in those times. This was the beginning of his connection with the Federated Engine Drivers and Fireman's Association (FED&FA). After my grandfather's death, my father left his mother and moved to Canberra, arriving there just as McCarthyism was taking hold in America and, in Australia, Communist hysteria was on the rise (Barnes, 2013).



Royal Canberra Hospital on Acton Peninsula 1948

My elder brother became part of the Dreaming in 1946, as did I in 1948.²² We were conceived in the railway cottages adjacent to the Causeway, near the suburb of Kingston in Canberra, and brought into the world at the old Canberra Community Hospital. We thus entered a world already mapped, conceived of, and controlled by others, hailed to a position that we would not be able to change. We would remain outside

society (Butler, 1997) because we were anathema to those around us, and quickly learned we did not belong.

As a Communist, my father became involved in the 1951 referendum campaign in which Robert Gordon Menzies, the then-Prime Minister of Australia and leader of the Liberal Party, tried unsuccessfully to have the Communist Party of Australia banned. Later my father was involved in the 1952 "Oust Menzies" campaign. This campaign consisted of militants and left-wing unions and activists from all over Australia who converged on the old Parliament House in the attempt to have Menzies resign (Fitzgerald, 2017).

²² The term "Dreaming" is used within the Aboriginal culture as a connection to one's set of beliefs or spirituality; and is unique to each of our specific nations.



Old Parliament House, 1953: a year after the “Oust Menzies” campaign.

The 1950s period of Australia’s history became known as the “Reds under the Bed” period (Ison, 2008). As secretary of the FED&FA and a member of the CPA, much of my father’s unpaid work took place outside his normal working hours, where he was a boiler attendant at the original Canberra Community Hospital and worked shift work.



B. A. Santamaria

Australian journalist

Bartholomew Augustine Santamaria, usually known as B. A. Santamaria, was an Australian Roman Catholic anti-Communist political activist and journalist. He was a guiding influence in the founding of the Democratic Labor Party. [Wikipedia](#)

Born: 14 August 1915, Melbourne

Died: 25 February 1998, Kew Vic

Siblings: Joseph Santamaria

Education: St Kevin’s College, Melbourne, University of Melbourne

Organizations founded: National Civic Council, Australian Family Association

A chief opponent to my father’s views was B. A. Santamaria, founder of the ultra-conservative National Civic Council, an Australian Christian lobby group that published a weekly magazine and later a television broadcast that laboured hard on the evils of communism. Santamaria was a Catholic, with strong connections to the Church through Archbishop Daniel Mannix. He promoted his views through magazines like the *Catholic Worker* which he co-founded, pressing his strong conservative Catholic values,

including opposition to feminism, abortion, and same-sex marriage, along with the integrity of human life. B.A. Santamaria’s beliefs and my fathers were ideologically opposed, both

politically and socially. Santamaria was instrumental in forming a group known as The Movement, founded in the 1940s with the avowed purpose of combating the influence and infiltration of the Communist Party into trade unions. Their policies were copied from the Labour Fronts of the former fascist regimes of Italy and Germany (Sharkey, 1961). The Movement and the later National Civic Council had links with the original Democratic Labor Party (DLP) – a breakaway group from the Australian Labor Party. There were many ideological grounds in dispute between these two groups. Of major importance was the fact Santamaria was behind five powerful unions leaving the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU): the Australian Iron Workers Union, Australian Workers Union, the Federated Clerks Union and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners Union.

A point of annoyance for my father was that the five breakaway unions, known as the Grouper Unions, could hold the ideals of ordinary workers to ransom. As a block they held enormous power, keeping the Labor Party out of the federal office for years. Despite this, and despite breaking away from the ACTU, they continued to have a place in the ACT Trades and Labour Council. In an attempt to combat people like Santamaria, our father conducted a broadcast on the local radio station every Sunday evening, on behalf of the CPA.²³ This was his attempt to battle the employer-controlled mass media. Ordinary people became enculturated to the point where they believed that they had something to fear from the union movement, so my father battled the Santamarias and shock jocks, the chosen ones who pushed the capitalist line.

My father continued working in his job and organising as union secretary in a volunteer capacity until his death in 1962, when the Trades and Labour Council set up an appeal for our family. Many of those contributors, I believe, were his political enemies, and it appeared hypocritical to me for them to contribute to an appeal for our family as they hated all that our father stood for.

²³ Radio 2CA was the first station to broadcast a Communist Party official when Lance Sharkey was interviewed (Ryan, 1984).

Labour Council Calls Rush Meeting On Hostel Dispute

A stop-work meeting for all unionists in Canberra has been called at the Trades Hall at 7.45 a.m. to-day, to discuss the hostel dispute involving the Allied Liquor Trades Union.

The A.L.T. Trades and Labour Council decided on this course last night, after rejecting three amendments that pledged support for present and future action of the union, but would not have resulted in immediate action.

The Liquor Trades Union has called a meeting of all its members at the Trades Hall for 10.30 a.m. following a direction yesterday by the A.L.T. Council. Union Commissioner, Mr. G. A. Finlay, is to return to work. (See story, page 8).

The Labour Council motion, moved by J. Applebee (F.E.A.D. P.A.) and seconded by Mr. E. H. Debnig (F.E.D.A.) called for stop-work meetings to be held at 7.45 a.m. this morning and for all unionists to assemble at the Trades Hall at 7.45 a.m.

Where unionists could not attend, they had delegates elected at job meetings to represent them at the Trades Hall.

Such union secretaries con-

sidered it would be impracticable to contact their members, and have arranged meetings at the Trades Hall later in the morning.

The motion was carried by 25 votes to 18, after counts were repeated for each of the amendments.

Mr. E. Curran, a former secretary, suggested that constitutionally the only way was to place the matter in the hands of the dispute committee, as more than one union was likely to be involved.

At a meeting of the Allied Liquor Trades Union early yesterday, it was decided to send the advice of the "Garden" class (midwives).

Mr. Curran moved an amendment on these lines, adding that union secretaries should meet to-morrow to consider calling stop-work meetings with recommendations for a mass meeting at Capitol Hill on Saturday evening.

The amendment was defeated.

REPORTING TO THE MEETING, Mr. McVeigh said the position was a challenge to the trade union movement on the right to strike. Workers were being attacked through the conditions of the hostel. Advantage was being taken of the cost of living and the shortage of jobs.

He described a threat by the Department of the Interior to sack the men as "the lowest form of strike-breaking practised in Canberra in my time."

In an attack on the Conciliation Commissioner, Mr. Applebee said "Mr. Finlay made no bones on whose side he was in this dispute."

Mr. Finlay had challenged the right to strike, a fundamental cornerstone of trade unionism in Australia.

"It was let this go in Canberra the trade union movement as a completely unqualified instrument," Mr. Applebee stated.

Supporting Mr. Applebee, Mr. Debnig said conference with the department resulted only in loss, provision of equipment, and the production of plans that never materialised.

Speakers opposing immediate action claimed certain unions did not have local autonomy, and could not sack their members by the time the meeting was to

be called. They urged that action be planned deliberately after the decision of the Allied Liquor Trades Union was made at 10.30 a.m. to-day.

Mr. Kevin Miller (Federation) said the motion was premature. Mr. Curran said the dispute committee would have the authority of Canberra workers; to register Council's disapproval and signal, but as workers would go on strike without a meeting.

Mr. Finlay (F.E.D.P.A.) challenged Mr. J. Sullivan (Federation) on the matter of management preparing meals for hostel guests during the strike. These staff were members of the Christ's Union, he said.

Mr. Sullivan said there would not have been a strike had secretaries of unions likely to be involved been notified.

He said he came from Wagga to the meeting after reading a Press report.

"The Federated Clerks' Union is second to none in its loyalty to this Council," he stated.

Canberra Times story, found in the NLA's Trove collection, reporting on a dispute in which my father played a major part. The newspaper is 70 years old, and as such is fragile, and the reproduction flawed, but it speaks to the impact of the Labour Council and my father's role in this movement.

My story

Until my father's death, my mother was the secretary of the Allied Liquor Trades Union. This was a voluntary, unpaid position. After his death, Mother gave away her voluntary work to care for us kids. Sometime later she was approached by ASIO. The reason ASIO was interested in her was her knowledge and connections in the union movement, particularly the identities of people in the CPA. She declined the offer. As a family, we were struggling, but she refused to sell out her principles for money.

It was about this time I really became aware of my Aboriginal heritage. I knew my father's people were Kamilaroi. We had visited my grandfather's land, and I knew my Kamilaroi country, flat dry as it was; when there, I became whole with my country. It seemed as though even the galahs welcomed me at Carroll, 20 kilometres east of Gunnedah, and I knew I belonged.



Growing up I learned of my grandfather, a man with an adopted surname. He was of the Liverpool Plains and the Namoi River. Initially I learned from my father, and later by research, that Kamilaroi people had lived in a relatively sophisticated society prior to European invasion. It was a life not reliant on the vagaries of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle: there is evidence of mosaic burning on the Liverpool Plains to

encourage new growth of grass and herbage for animals, and our people used the practice of stacking grass seed for future winnowing and harvesting. As Bruce Pascoe, author of *Dark Emu* argues, these were quite common practices for Aboriginal people in many locations around Australia.²⁴

When visiting my grandmother with our family I learned from my father of the Kamilaroi people and learned of the legendary warrior chief, Cumbo Gunnerah – the “Red Chief”, leader of the Gunn-e-darr people of the Kamilaroi tribe. The town of Gunnedah derives its name from the tribe. I learned that this great warrior chief was buried near a tree that had been cut down prior to 1865 (Idriess, 1953). In *The Red Chief*, Idriess observes that all that remained of this tree was a huge box tree stump, which stood about twelve feet high (or 3.6575 metres), intricately carved from top to bottom with totemic symbols carved with a stone tomahawk. The tree was well known in the township of Gunnedah and was called the “black fellows’ tree.”

During the 1960s the Gunnedah Historical Society erected a sign to mark the burial site of the Red Chief. A sign stands on the footpath near the corner of Abbott and Little Conadilly Streets in Gunnedah, where a sculpture designed by Dennis Adams in consultation with the local Aboriginal people and the New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service was erected. Chief Gunnerah was buried in an upright sitting position, befitting an Aboriginal man of such great importance. The tree behind his gravesite (which is no longer in place) was carved with totemic designs in his honour. Many such carved trees have been cut down and burned by

²⁴ I learned the Kamilaroi are a patriarchal society who followed a totemic system. Marriage was strictly controlled; for men and for women there were four groups: for men, Ipai, Kumbo, Murri, and Kubbi, and for women, Ipatha, Butha, Matha and Kubbitha. These correspond to the emu, bandicoot, black snake and kangaroo.

farmers in the clearing of the land, and perhaps as an act of what Reynolds calls dispersal of the Aborigines (Reynolds, 1984).

It is thought that the Red Chief, Cumbo Gunnerah, died during the 1700s. Stories of his bravery and many achievements have been handed down from generation to generation. It was through this passing on of knowledge, through oral storytelling, that I learned of the Red Chief. His burial place was treated with great respect; however, some two centuries later, European settlers desecrated his gravesite digging up the remains, sending them along with part of the tree to the Australian Museum in Sydney. As a kid, I could not understand why other Australians' chests were not filled with pride, as mine was. Then I learned of the desecration of the gravesite: "Despair is reinforced every day an Aboriginal person has to argue for his/her pride in the past, for his determination to honour the achievements of the ancestors" (Pascoe, 2014).

Growing up in Canberra, I tried to learn of the Ngunnawal people and their culture, as at that time I knew little of my own Kamilaroi people. My family often spoke of the Kamilaroi people, but nobody knew of the local Ngunnawal people. To my knowledge, there were virtually no Ngunnawal people living in Canberra during the 1950s. Most Aboriginal people in the Canberra area were at either Brungle Mission Station,²⁵ or at Yass Aboriginal Reserve, more generally known as "Hollywood Aboriginal Mission". It was difficult to gain information until more recently when historical societies and conversations with local identities revealed more.

As a child, even though it was not my country, I felt pride when I learned of Queen Nellie Hamilton, an Aboriginal woman who was a special guest at the opening of the Tharwa Bridge in 1895 near today's Canberra. Queen Nellie Hamilton was born at Ginninderra, which is now wholly encompassed by the city of Canberra (Hall School Museum and Heritage Centre, 2020). By now I was learning of my culture, marvelling at how Baiame the Creation Spirit created the rivers Molonglo, Queanbeyan, Cotter and the Murrumbidgee. I explored the rivers and mountain ranges, the Brindabella mountains including Aggie and Mount Ginini Bimberi; and sacred sites such as Mount Ainslie and Black Mountain.²⁶ I learned this from my father, and it was later confirmed by the local Ngunnawal people when I became involved in local Aboriginal activities. At school I was careful not to mention Baiame as I had made that mistake on one occasion and was given six hits from a ruler. "Schools serve the same social functions

²⁵ Established in 1888 by the Aborigines Protection Board, Brungle Mission sits at the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, 20 km from the town of Tumut and 15 km from the town of Gundagai.

²⁶ The latter mountains are culturally significant to the Ngunnawal people as Canberra derives its name from the cleavage between a woman's breasts, signified by these two mountains (Hayne, 2016).

as prisons and mental institutions – to define, classify, control, and regulate people” (Foucault, 1979, p. 228).

Growing up on the other side of the street was verdant bush, uninterrupted all the way to the Cotter Dam. We kids would often go to sit on the Devil’s Seat on Rocky Knob near Red Hill and see, far in the distance, our home, long before suburbia intervened. I would not meet a Ngunnawal person, the traditional owners of this land, until my 20s. But as Gillian Cowlishaw (1987) has said, colour is not a true indicator of Aboriginality.

Throughout the Cold War period, we children ran the gauntlet at school, being taunted by other children and castigated by the nuns for our father’s political views. As a young child, I had no idea what a Communist was. We quickly learned, however, it was something despised, and we offspring were blamed for our father’s political views. My elder brother developed muscular dystrophy – a rare childhood disease. As the disease progressed, my sister and I were forced to fight to protect our brother as the schoolyard bullies (one in particular) would push our brother over for their own amusement. We asked the nuns for help but received none. Back then I felt totally helpless; I was no use, me being two years younger than my brother and my sister two years older. We tried to fend them off, but usually we would end up with bruises and bloody noses. My sister was frail, and these were boys her age or older. She would often be bashed and knocked about, but it never stopped her defending our brother.

We were on our own. We knew we were paying the price for our father’s political views. But I will always remember how I felt when I couldn’t protect my brother. It was painful; I could do nothing. At the early onset of muscular dystrophy, he was forced to walk on his toes. If he was pushed, he would lose his balance and fall, and he would not be able to regain his feet. My sister or I would put our arms under his from behind and struggle to get him to his feet, only to have someone push him over again. As the disease progressed, he was eventually consigned to a wheelchair.

When he was just seventeen years of age, I found him dead one cold winter morning. This horrid paralysing disease had taken my brother’s life. I tried everything to bring him back: mouth-to-mouth, pressing down on his chest; but nothing worked. He had suffocated to death as the muscles controlling his lungs had stopped working. The British group, The Hollies, released a song called “He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother”; it always brings tears to my eyes. My brother had a terrible life of pain and torment but never had a bad word for anyone, even those

who tormented him. I loved my brother and still think of him, how life might have been different if he had lived.

To protect my brother, I had learned to fight, as when we went to the one o'clock pictures at the Capital picture theatre there was usually some kid who would pick on him or call us Commos. The Catholic Church under Archbishop Mannix and orchestrated by B. A. Santamaria with their weekly broadcast against Communism must have blinded their reasoning: we were kids; what could we do? Our father eventually learned of our treatment at school and had us moved to the local public school, but Paul Kelly's song "Special Treatment" rings so true for my schooling: whether at public school or Catholic school, we received the same treatment.



On reflection, the anti-Communist hysteria of those times was to blame. The Korean War (June 1950 – July 1953) had not long concluded; the "Domino Theory" coined by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower had just come into vogue and was spoken of constantly; and the Communist Yellow Peril was used constantly as a scare

tactic to induce people to vote conservatively. At each election, there at the top of the map of Australia were these yellow arrows pointing down into the heart of the country. It is a little wonder that, in those days of hysteria, people were constantly reminded of the domino theory, the "yellow peril" coming closer to Australia; and the "Cold War", the "Commies", and fear of the atomic bomb were daily occurrences urged on by the media.

My father's radio broadcasts were a cause of great stress for us kids. Each Monday morning, we would face a barrage from the nuns, and later from the teachers at the public school, for whatever our father had spoken about on the radio the previous night. In those days the choice was either the ABC radio or 2CA; there was no television. By this time, my younger brother and I had begun to fight with other kids over my father's politics. The canings continued in public school, but I no longer cared about education or schooling.

With hindsight I know I was becoming anomic. I cared little about anyone apart from my family; I no longer cared even about myself. I became insular, I was nervous and fidgety. This

developed into a nervous tic, which resulted in my wearing my clothes out by rubbing the cloth together between my fingers till my fingers bled. I would also pick at cuts or scabs to see them bleed.

Today I know these symptoms as *anomie*. Emile Durkheim used the term “anomie” to describe the breakdown of social bonds between an individual and society. The condition is caused by others within society degrading or racialising people by treating them differently. The person begins to feel estranged from society, not able to fit in. Durkheim describes the condition as “derangement”, and as an “insatiable will”, which often plays out in the person trying to achieve parity with others by committing crimes, to accumulate possessions but also because it brings instant rewards. Some of this is about self-gratification: you feel better when you take from somebody else; their hurt is your pleasure.

Finally, in Durkheim’s terms, it becomes the “malady of the infinite”, desire without limitations, because desire cannot be fulfilled: it can only increase. People begin to consider themselves worth less than others in society, when they experience racism. Some become angry and frustrated; others withdraw into themselves. Listless non-compliance is another feature of this malaise because often they believe their ideas and ambitions are worthless: that they will never be realised. They begin to believe it is not worth the effort: that they will never succeed but other people will get whatever it is they are trying to achieve. This is the time a person begins to believe they are worthless, and suicide may become a solution of last resort. People suffering anomie often self-harm, some attempting suicide several times before they are successful (Gerber & Macionis, 2010, p. 97). This is happening daily for some Aboriginal people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recorded that, in 2015, there were 152 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Australians deaths as a result of suicide, or 25.5 deaths per 100,000, compared to 12.5 per 100,000 for non-Indigenous (ABS, 2015).

The condition of anomie came to me when I was still a child, after my father died and when we were living in poverty. Mum received the widow’s pension which, by any standard, was a paltry sum of money. I recall her often responding to a request for something by saying that it will have to wait till Endowment Day²⁷. With five kids under sixteen and one who had special needs, even with two other kids now working, it was hard. On five shillings per week for the first child under 16 years and 10 shillings per week for the second and additional children, we literally lived fortnight to fortnight.

²⁷ That is, Child Endowment, a Social Security payment for people caring for children, 1912–2008.

I began to look for those kids who taunted and teased us. One kid, in particular, was a sadistic bully. He was four years older than me and two years older than my brother. He happened to walk past our house one afternoon, and I summoned up the courage to confront him. He was self-assured, cocky, believing he would account for me, a kid four years younger than himself, after the altercation he would not bother my brother again. What he didn't know was I had been receiving boxing lessons from my father, who was an accomplished boxer. A few years after this, that same kid confronted me in a fish and chip shop and said, "Would you like to try it now?" At the time I was about 18, not long out of Mount Penang and full of hate. I hadn't forgotten this bloke or his treatment of my brother, and I had not seen him for the years in between, but he hadn't changed. It did not go well for him. I had been fighting regularly in the ring, at various venues around NSW and at times at the Police Boys Club in Turner, a suburb of Canberra, because it was one way of getting rid of my anger. Eventually fighting would get me in trouble, though, because unfortunately many fights were outside the ring. In boxing parlance, he could work inside or out, and he had built a reputation for his fighting ability prior to his arrival in Canberra. My uncles and family connections told us he would have his older half-brother bandage his hands, then fight someone five miles out of town at an appointed spot. This usually occurred on a Sunday morning, mostly ending as it did in those years by having a cold beer that had been brought along by each combatant.

My father had the habit of wearing white clothes when he was young; possibly to draw attention to his dark skin. He was proud to be Aboriginal though his skin was lighter than most. It became the cause of a dispute between him and a professional boxer who was a former Lightweight Champion of Australia²⁸. Apparently, he took a dislike to my father wearing all white and chipped²⁹ him for doing so. My father never took a backward step from anyone and said he would wear what he liked. That remark escalated into an offer to go out to an appointed spot on Sunday morning, and the altercation was settled when my father was punched in the throat: the punch bought the fight to a close. But the altercation became the foundation for a firm friendship between two very strong Koori³⁰ unionists. This man was a lifelong member of the Sydney Branch of the Waterside Workers Union, a very staunch³¹ left-wing union, while my father was the secretary of the Federated Engine Drivers and Fireman's Association of

²⁸ "Hassen Knocks out Kemp" (20 September 1949) *Cairns Post*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Hassen#cite_note-5-1

²⁹ Colloquial language for someone taking an exception to something another person has done.

³⁰ Koori: an Aborigine from Victoria or New South Wales.

³¹ Very loyal and committed in attitude.

Australasia, which was also a hard-left union. They would meet whenever this man came to Canberra, as he often did for the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia.

In March 1949, the Australian Government set up the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), and given my father's membership in the Communist Party, we as a family were followed by ASIO agents wherever we went and were under surveillance even when we were alone at home. This night and day surveillance became a source of amusement for my father – a game of catch-me-if-you-can. One of the things the ASIO officers did regularly was hide in the paddock directly opposite our home in the long grass. We watched them come and go via the paddock opposite. They would come through the laneway in the centre of Bremer Street. Crouching down, they would skirt around a slight hill and come down directly opposite our home. They would return the same way as they entered. One cold dark winter evening, Dad asked a family relation, who was staying with us at the time, to hop on his pushbike and ride down to Manuka and buy something for tea. He also asked him to wear the army overcoat Dad usually wore; which no doubt would give the impression that it was my father riding away from home. Meantime my father slipped out the back door, down the backyard, and jumped the fence, heading off down the laneway. It was quite funny in some respects, as these people were entrusted with Australia's security and there was a certain element of Keystone Cops about it.

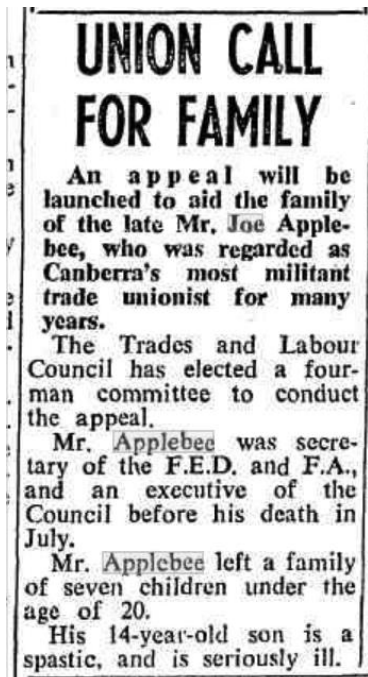
Scroogles Newsagency at Manuka was where the *Tribune* – the Communist Party magazine – and other undesirable reading materials were sold. One had to know where to look though, as the *Tribune* was well concealed, hidden down behind other paraphernalia at the very back of the shop. That was where my father bought the *Tribune*, and it was also the shop Bob Menzies' chauffeur frequented on behalf of Menzies, buying the *Tribune* magazine because this is how Menzies kept abreast, and learned, of the various occurrences in the Communist Party. It was bizarre having our father and Menzies' chauffeur acknowledge each other, each knowing who the other was.

Throughout my childhood, particularly during the earlier years, Cold War events made our lives as children almost unbearable, and incidents like the 1954 Petrov affair that heightened Cold War tensions only made this worse.³² My father was shocked and disillusioned with the Communist Party over the 4 November 1956 invasion of Hungary (Trueman, 2015), and he

³² Vladimir Petrov, third secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Canberra, was considered a supporter of Soviet security chief Lavrentiy Beria. After the arrest of Beria, Petrov defected to Australia, fearing that if he were to return to the Soviet Union he would be purged (Museum of Australian Democracy, 2017).

immediately resigned from the Party. Lamenting at the time, Joe said: "Soviet tanks on the streets of Budapest, where next?"

Years later I researched my father through the National Archives in Canberra and was astonished to learn how much information ASIO had accumulated on him. One incident I read about was when a delegation of Japanese Communists was visiting Canberra. My mother was



given the task of meeting the delegation at the Canberra railway station, and ASIO had learned of this and sent spies to observe. It was interesting to learn of what took place in the discussion between my mother and members of the delegation, as the ASIO observer recorded word for word every exchange between the parties. Reading such documents over thirty years later, it became even more apparent how seriously the family was monitored, including the children. Was it because we lived so near the Russian embassy? Our street adjoined Canberra Avenue, which is where the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Australia was at the time and is still located. We were never spying; and anyway it was common knowledge that ASIO was located above the funeral parlour, next to Service Station garage, across the street from the

Embassy.

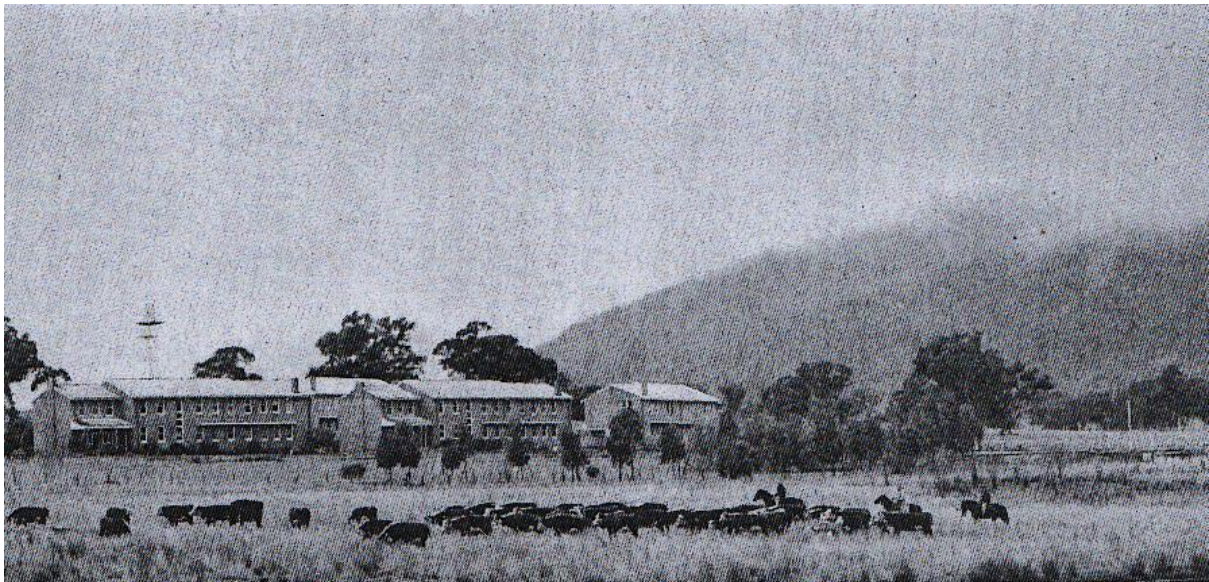
Being spied upon was later to influence my political views. I was an Australian Aboriginal, a person who had been criminalised as a child for doing nothing wrong. My life had been changed dramatically by wrongful incarceration. I had a record that would follow me for the rest of my life, so I could never live a normal life. I had been castigated for being Aboriginal and I would pay for it dearly, and also for my father's beliefs.

In 1962 my father died, and his death had a profound effect on the family. My younger brother and I had no one to control us so eventually we found trouble; nothing serious, but enough to draw attention. We rarely saw Mum: she had two jobs, working night and day with little help, and what little money there was never seemed enough to pay the bills. My brother and I began to resent authority: we were Aboriginal; those in authority over us didn't like us, and we didn't like them. For my brother and me, it just became easier to wag school, preferring instead to walk the rivers and mountains.

Mum begged us to go to school, but we were tired of feeling like aliens and tired of being treated differently. Mr Kedwell, the truant officer, told my brother and me that he would see



us locked up if we continued to wag school.³³ And shortly after my father's death, my brother and I were both institutionalised. I was classified at Yasmar in Sydney then sent to St Helier, Muswellbrook, and my younger brother was sent to Mittagong Boys Home. Ironically, the same laws that had prohibited my father from attending school saw my younger brother and I committed to juvenile institutions for contravening the provisions of the Child Welfare Act 1939.



Muswellbrook Training School for Delinquent Boys. The photograph was taken in 1966 after I had left.

³³ I later met Kedwell again, at Mount Penang Training School for Boys, at Gosford in NSW, where he was second in charge of the institution.

Child Welfare Act 1939

Replaced the *Child Welfare Act 1923*.

Definitions

Neglected child – definition expanded to include a child who is destitute, whose parents are unfit to retain the child or who without lawful excuse does not attend school regularly.

While institutionalised, I met many other Koori and Kamilaroi kids. The Aboriginal kids' stories were very similar – institutionalised for petty crimes; or really, just for being Aboriginal. Many of them had been institutionalised since birth, made Wards of the State. I began to realise that we Aboriginals were treated very differently by the rest of society, and to feel the injustice of why we were being singled out for special treatment.

Of St Helen's I mainly remember the painful chilblains on my hands and feet from being forced to work up to my neck in muck and grease just like porridge, in the grease traps. This task involved removing the grease and sludge from the traps each morning. A grease trap is a plumbing device designed to intercept most greases and solids before they enter a wastewater system. These contraptions are usually located outside, directly below the sink of the kitchen to trap the grease. They are concrete pits about three metres long by a metre wide, and about two metres deep with a ladder to climb down. This was a filthy dirty job; no amount of showering could remove the sense of being unclean. Throughout winter it was warmer in the grease trap but bitterly cold on the hands and feet once out, hence the chilblains. At that time, I was in Paterson Cottage; later I was moved to Glendon Cottage but still doing the same job.

It was while at Glendon Cottage that, along with three other kids seated at the meal table, I witnessed a child who was about to throw up ask for permission to leave the table. The wife of the housemaster refused this child permission. Not unsurprisingly he vomited all over the table. The housemistress was furious; she gave the kid a tablespoon and forced him to eat the vomit from the table. All those at the table had vomit on our clothes, but we were not allowed to leave the table. We later learned he had contracted hepatitis and was taken to hospital, seriously ill.

I was embittered by my experiences, loathing authority, I determined if the authorities and the police wanted bad, "I will give them bad". I became an angry Aboriginal man, for as Cunneen (2008) wrote in one study for the National Enquiry into Racist Violence, it was found that over 80 per cent of Aboriginal juveniles in detention centres in New South Wales Queensland and Western Australia alleged that they'd been assaulted by police on at least one occasion.

My own experiences with the police were no different. I have experienced the reception biff on a number of occasions, and on one occasion run the gauntlet of police batons when released from the paddy wagon under the Canberra watch-house. At this time in my life, I had become the problematic young Aboriginal person that I regularly saw 50-odd years later, at the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court where for eight years I was a panel member. Resisting authority became normal for me. Eventually, I was sentenced again; this time to Mount Penang, a place with a fearful reputation. I travelled from Albion Street Detention Centre by train with a warden's hand firmly grasping my belt from the back, forcing me to walk like my brother once had, up on tiptoes. This is a clever ploy: you are unable to run if your feet are barely touching the ground, and if the warden lifted you up by the belt, you'd fall face-forward to the ground. He demonstrated this when he first made contact with me, and I got the message.



BOYS' SHELTER, CHILDREN'S COURT, SYDNEY

Like others before and since, I saw things at Mount Penang Training School for Boys that many who went there were thankful to survive. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse takes seventeen volumes and many thousands of pages to address the

ways in which institutions, including those like Mount Penang, have abused and exploited children.³⁴

Mount Penang Training School for Boys, or Mt Penang Training Centre,³⁵ was established by the Child Welfare Department in 1946 at Kariong, near Gosford, replacing the old Gosford Training School. Like other children, I was transferred to Mount Penang from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). It was a reformatory for boys who had been convicted of offences or had been difficult to manage in other Child Welfare Department institutions. Mount Penang was predominantly for older boys, aged 14 to 16 years of age.

In 1959 it held 380 boys, but it was not uncommon to see young men 18 and over completing their sentence. The normal situation was that a child would be institutionalised for a general term: this was usually seven and a half months to three years, but if you behaved correctly you would probably be released after 12 months.

In the 1950s Mount Penang was divided into the main institution, which had dormitory-style accommodation, and the Privilege Cottage, which had separate bedrooms, dining and recreation rooms. The site reused the buildings of the former Gosford Training Home. I progressed through all levels, including Privilege Cottage, before I was released.



Mt Penang

³⁴ A summary of the report's recommendations is available at ABC Online, 15 December 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-15/royal-commission-recommendations-you-should-know-about/9262758>

³⁵ It was officially renamed the Mount Penang Detention Centre in 1988.



2 Company, where I spent over a year; to the right is 4 Company

In the 1950s and through 1960s there was large-scale landscaping of Mount Penang, with the boys carrying out stonemasonry and land clearing. When I arrived the grounds of the institution had been extensively landscaped, including the removal of a sizeable hill. Stone won in the process had been used to face the terraces

and build walls and rock gardens, and this work too was carried out by the inmates, under strict



supervision. Every child who attended Mount Penang worked on these projects. When I arrived at Mount Penang, I along with others worked on the removal of the remainder of the hill. It was made into a sports playing field. The work on the removal of the hill and subsequent works was given the name PC digging and was carried out every Saturday morning. Boys

would be lined up left to right, with either a shovel or a mattock and would remove anything that was obstructing them, including trees. Here a former inmate talks about PC digging.

Every Saturday morning there would be two or three hours of 'crow shooting' or 'PC digging' where we would have to dig the fields. When I first got there I didn't understand what the others meant. They said, 'On Saturday you'll get your gun and go crow shooting'. The 'gun' was your shovel. It was all very well-regimented and there were rows and rows of us boys digging. There was a total turning over of the whole field by shovel. You bent over and did not straighten up until the end of a line of boys, only to go over to the other end to start all over again.⁶⁴

(Excerpt from Rubie, 2003)

All work at Penang was done manually. When the hill was completed in 1962, the boys were then put to work in what became known as the rock pile. Sandstone was dug out of the cliffs, shaped with a hammer and scutch comb, and used around the institution. All work was conducted in silence; and it was hard physical work, with many boys collapsing from exhaustion or heat stroke.



An ordinary day at Mount Penang. This is not PC digging, which was where inmates formed lines, one with a mattock and the next with a shovel, working right to left nonstop for up to three hours.

The day was totally regimented, with nine cigarette breaks throughout the day and evening. Each day commenced with a 6 a.m. rollcall. The screw³⁶ would blow a whistle and everybody would immediately alight from their bed and stand at attention at the foot of the bed. Failure to do so would immediately earn a loss of points from the screw, and this could result in dropping a whole section, with a loss of privileges.

There were some lighter sides to the place. One evening a screw with the nickname ‘Superman’ had run out of matches to light up the company for the last cigarette. He said to the company,

³⁶ “Screw” as a term for a prison guard is based on the fact that “screw” was originally slang for “key”. One of the most important functions of a prison guard, or turnkey, is to see that prisoners are locked up at the appropriate times – and that involves turning the screw.

“Now if I were to leave my cigarette on the table and if I were to look away for a moment and after a time turn around and the cigarette was alight, the Company will smoke tonight.” Risking all for the Company, a renowned sly-smoker³⁷ called Snotty H. quietly crept to the table and lit the cigarette. Superman said, “Ah the cigarette is a-glow; the company will smoke tonight – even you, Snotty.” Superman knew there was no denying Snotty H.: he was the best sly

Conduct and work points		
Conduct and work points are awarded to all inmates daily in accordance with the following scale:-		
Morning routine (bed, prayers, physical)	4 points	Awarded by morning Company Officer.
Early Morning conduct	3 points	Awarded by officer in charge of party.
Morning work and conduct	6 points	Awarded by afternoon Company Officer.
Afternoon work and conduct	6 points	Awarded by Company Officer or the officer in charge of night party.
Evening routine (marching, prayers)	3 points	
Evening conduct	3 points	
Maximum	25 points	

A boy in hospital, at the shelter, or on leave receives maximum points for the period away from the Institution.³⁸

smoker in the Institution and had been a State Ward since birth. The entire time I was at Mount Penang, Snotty was placed in 6 Section, the Section with the fewest privileges,

including no smoking. He didn't care; he had spent most of his life in institutions and was fully institutionalised. Snotty would later kill another inmate in Long Bay Gaol and be sentenced to life.

There were six sections in each company: the higher the section, the greater the privileges – for instance, in Sections 5 and 6 there were no smoking privileges. Each person was given 25 points a day: to remain where you were you could not afford to lose points; to move to a higher section, you had to gain points; but the slightest infraction would cost points. It was difficult to maintain position, let alone gain a higher position. Each Sunday night you would be informed of how you had gone the previous week. Privileges were awarded to the company on the basis of the good behaviour of all participants so that if one person's behaviour was not adequate, all inmates within the company would suffer. The system induced boys to inform on other boys, and the downside to this was that those who doxed the other kids in, and those whose misbehaving had let down the company, would be severely beaten by other inmates. I witnessed this on many occasions, and the screws would also turn a blind eye to it. It was clear this was a purposeful strategy, well thought out by the authorities. It meant that retribution and policing were conducted by other inmates, and in addition, the biggest physical inmates – called Store Boys – were used to control other boys.

I had the misfortune of meeting the Store Boys on my first day at Mount Penang. I had arrived by train and was driven to Mount Penang; then upon arrival I was ushered into the Store by the

³⁷ A sly-smoker is a person who smokes illegally.

Store Boys. I was asked to hand over my tobacco – which, in the language of institutions, is called “grouse”. “Hand over your grouse!” a Store Boy said. I refused, resulting in an altercation with the Store Boys. I held my own for a time, but I was bashed and kicked by the three Store Boys and then ‘paraded’ for starting a fight. After that, I was physically tortured through a process called holystoning.



From right to left: 4 Company then 2 Company. It is just possible to make out store boys in the doorway to the deck.

Holystoning is where a person squats on their knees with a piece of sandstone measuring between 450 mm x 300 x 200 deep, and it entails moving the block from side to side across the wooden boards for up to three hours. After just a few minutes my knees were bleeding. It would be weeks before my knees healed; each night they would weep enough to cause the sheets to stick to them.

I remember the deck as being very smooth because of the holystoning. I have scars on my knees from having to do it. My knees used to bleed and the officers would throw cold water over them when I finished to wash the blood off. It was freezing. Holystoning was usually done very early in the morning or late afternoon.

There were three cells down back which were used for solitary confinement. You were given a mattress and two blankets but when it rained you couldn't lie down because the rain would come in, so you had to stand up all the time. For twenty-four hours you were given just bread and water with about three per cent milk. The sparrows used to come in and pick at the bread. I don't remember any caning of boys. If you were unprivileged, you only got half a meal.¹²³

(Excerpt from Rubie, 2003; this is Edward Donaldson, inmate 1949–50).

I was in and out of the pound all the time. I kept pretty fit so it didn't affect me too much being in there, but all you got was a small cup of milk and one knocker off the bread to eat at each mealtime. If you were in for more than twenty-four hours, you got one meal, so you knew it was a long time between each piece of bread, especially during the night.

I'd get my milk and I'd drink it, and then you had to hand the cup back because you weren't allowed to have the cup. And I got this one knocker and held it in the palm of my hand and I would just stare at it and I would eat it real slow, bit by bit, picking a tiny bit off it at a time, and nibble it very slowly so that it would last as long as possible ... I didn't mind being in the pound because I could talk if I wanted to and just rest or do push ups. But there was no mattress or bed to sit on, just the floor.

With the holystone there were two different positions they'd give you. One was where you'd get on your knees and push the stone from right to left and back again continually, and then the other one was where you would crouch down and push it forwards and backwards over and over. And there was also 'holy off', where the officer would mark the deck with chalk in two places and you had to carry the stone from one marked place, off the deck and back again, to the next marked place. I did that a lot too.

(Excerpt from Rubie, 2003; this is Charles Ruffins, who was at Mount Penang on three occasions, from the age of fourteen. He was there in 1958, 1959 and 1961 when I was there but I do not recall him.)

The institution was run like a ship: in fact, prior to the original Gosford Farm Home being established in 1913 it accepted boys from the Brush Farm Reformatory, and the training vessel “Siobraon” is the NSS Vernon on Sydney Harbour. Note the washing hanging between the masts.



NSS Vernon; Bicentennial Copy Project, State Library of New South Wales

Inmates who did not comply with the hard-physical regime or who committed offences within Mount Penang were sent to Tamworth Boys Home, which was opened in 1948. Tamworth has been called by inmates the “Finishing school for killers”, as many of the boys sent there became

violent criminals, many having committed multiple murders. This was due, it is argued in an ABC report, to the violence inflicted upon them while at Tamworth Boys Home (Thompson, 2011).



Boys line up at the Institution for Boys, Tamworth.

Mount Penang, like other institutions in New South Wales, had paedophile rings working within the institutions. It was widely known that screws were taking boys from Yasmar and Albion Street in Sydney), to be prostituted at “The Wall” at Darlinghurst, or Castello’s brothel at King’s Cross. Both Yasmar and Albion Street shelters were where boys were classified for placement in the Child Welfare System (Rylko, 2016).

Paedophiles were at every institution I attended, and along with the harsh brutal regime of physical work and regulations, it was one of the reasons boys tried to escape from Mount Penang and other institutions (see the report *Forgotten Australians*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004). The predatory behaviour of paedophile screws appeared to be tolerated by other screws. The screws were not the only ones preying on the young and vulnerable; older boys in the institutions also forced younger ones into sexual acts.

Boys would often self-harm in an endeavour to escape Mount Penang. One method was to use crushed glass, often from a lightbulb, which was swallowed with bread or toothpaste surrounding the glass. Other boys swallowed razor blades and safety pins, tensioned so that they would spring open once the stomach acid burnt the tip off the pin. Others would slash their wrists: the boy in the bed next to mine cut his wrist, sprinkling me with droplets of blood

as I slept. He did not die, and he was back on the ward the next day, in 6 Section: dropped to the lowest Section, after a pointless exercise in futility. Those who were successful would only have a few days away from the mountain and would be soon back; the nightmare starting all over again for them, from 6 Section.

For all the bad experiences, I recall one that had the opposite effect on me. After working on the rock pile for about three months I was assigned the position of ward-boy. The duties entailed cleaning 2 Company dormitory; a task usually completed by noon. A warder would collect each ward-boy from the various companies and march us off to the mess, where jobs would be assigned, washing dishes, cleaning cutlery and mopping floors. Some boys were selected by the chef to work in the kitchen, and I was selected on several occasions. Eventually, I was given a job in the kitchen, stirring stock pots using a large paddle fashioned from a floorboard.

One of the methods of control employed in institutions like Mount Penang was to keep the inmates hungry: both to maintain control of the inmates and as a source of entertainment for the screws, who watched the daily fights between inmates over food. While I was working in the kitchen, some boys who worked in the main garden knocked on the window, beckoning me to hand out a tray of plum duff that had been earmarked for the piggery. With great hesitation, I handed it out; the boys were found eating the plum duff; and when questioned, they revealed where they had received it and from whom.

I was 'paraded' to the Deck, where the head screw, Chooky Fowler, sentenced me to three days in the 'boob': a prison cell, 3m x 3m, with one barred window and a solid steel door with a small opening to push food through. It was extremely cold in winter, the time I was ensconced there, and for warmth, there was only a single-size Government Issue blanket. For meals, there were none, you were provided with a tin mug of milk and a crust of stale bread once a day. Often the store boys would spit in the milk, so invariably you only ate the crust of bread.

Upon release, I was "bounced" down to 6 Section from 1 section, which meant a serious loss of privileges. More importantly, I lost my job in the kitchen; I returned to blistered hands, and the pangs of hunger, for the next three months. Like always, I dreamed of home, of my adopted country, working in a daze, sledgehammer and scutch comb breaking out selected rock for some wall somewhere. By this time, I was totally resigned to seeing my time out on the rock pile. Basically, I'd given up hope.

But gradually I rose through the Sections, 6 through to 1. One Sunday evening, I was ordered to appear before the head screw, Chooky Fowler, and to my astonishment, he told me I would be woken at 4:30 am in the morning and be ready for work in the kitchen. Next morning, I was awoken by the night duty screw and told to report to the kitchen. There was nobody to escort me out of 2 Company. I could have just walked off; I couldn't believe it. When I arrived at the kitchen, 'the big Bopper' (the nickname for Chef Day) tossed me the Officers cook's blue apron and said, "start making the toast; you're Officers cook".

I was in shock; this had never happened before. There was a succession line through various jobs: the vegetable peeling room, stock pots stirring, boys cook, and then finally Officers cook. There were many boys ahead of me in the succession line, including a friend who at that time was boys cook.



Landscape Gardening at Mount Penang

I was told to make the toast, which was made on top of the hot stove under hinged stove insulator pads. Many things go through your mind when something like this happens, particularly in an institution where violent things can happen to those who don't abide by the crim codes, so naturally, I was apprehensive. Bopper motioned

towards a bench that I knew was occupied by the chef and the officers cook during mealtimes. Was I being set up? How would the other blokes handle me coming in and going straight to the top position?

It was normal for the Officers cook to prepare the meals for the chef and all the screws at Mount Penang. On this occasion, Chef Day prepared two meals: his and mine. I sat and ate the meal that Chef Day had prepared, bacon and eggs – something inmates never had, but constantly dreamed of instead of the moosh we received.³⁸ The Bopper, a giant of a man – 6 feet 7 inches in the old scale, or 200.66 centimetres – clothed in all white chef clothes with an apron that came down to his knees, sat on a stool with his legs on the rung of the bench fixed to the wall,

³⁸ In prison slang moosh is the slops one might feed to a pig.

and leaned forward, reading a novel. He slowly drew from his pocket a soft leather pouch of Capstan Fine Cut tobacco, the yellow packet showing from the inside of the leather pouch, squashed the rolled cigarette into his cigarette holder and returned to the book he was reading. Then, using his elbow, he nudged the tobacco towards me, all without a word. His gaze never left the book. It had been over a year since I'd enjoyed a proper cigarette. Like all inmates, I had been smoking "boob weed",³⁹ vile untreated tobacco that burned all the way down your throat into your lungs, but it was prison currency, the source of life-and-death struggles in institutions like Mount Penang. Fearing to push the issue, I rolled a "racehorse" (a thin cigarette), appreciatively. This was my introduction to a bloke who rarely spoke, a man out of place in Mount Penang.

After I had left Mount Penang, I saw a movie that reminded me of the Bopper: the person was Will Sampson, "the Chief" in the film *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The Chief is a deaf-mute and never speaks in the film until Jack Nicholson, playing Randle McMurphy, offers him a piece of Juicy Fruit chewing gum. The Chief says the words "juicy fruit" and to McMurphy's astonishment he realises the Chief can speak. The film took me back to Mount Penang. The Chief was a native American, a man who, just like the Bopper, rarely spoke.⁴⁰

The Bopper had a lasting effect on me, but it would be years before I could help someone as he helped me. What he did convinced me, years later, to try to help other Aboriginal people on the Circle Court. Brutal places like Mount Penang usually breed hatred and loathing in those forced to endure it, and rather than creating docile compliant children; they actually create monsters. Eventually, I was released in a second-hand poorly fitting suit and tie. Looking back, I have never felt such relief; that place was a nightmare.

During the months I worked the kitchen, I had reached Privilege Cottage. This was where extra privileges were awarded: a single bed in a single room; much better food and clothes; they could walk around unescorted, and also gain extra food and tobacco for guard duties. On reflection, I equate them to the Kapos in the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War, who like the Store Boys gained special privileges by bashing and terrorising other inmates.

Privilege Cottage boys also took trips to films in Gosford every month, acting as security against other kids escaping. These excursions were awarded to the company that won the

³⁹ Prison issue tobacco, effectively the leftover droppings off the floor of some cigarette company.

⁴⁰ The movie was from the book written by Ken Kesey in 1962: coincidentally, the same year I was on the mountain.

monthly company march, which was conducted every four weeks. This was something the screws took great pride in; it was their chance to be cock-of-the-walk among the other screws. I guarantee those kids would walk away with any marching contest against anyone. Perfectly aligned, they marched in single file, three rows wide, and turned left or right into line as required, and all that could be heard was one single step, perfectly in tune. While I was there, 2 Company won the march thirteen times, under a respected screw nicknamed 'Porto'.

While at Mount Penang I met other Aboriginal boys, who seemed to be able to handle the adversity better than non-Aboriginals. No Aboriginal kids tried to escape while I was at Mount Penang, nor did any of us self-harm. We somehow sucked up the authority's hatred of us, as if it was normal. I realise now that we had been enculturated into an abnormal way of being, and that we were anomic. Most Aboriginals I met knew little about their Aboriginality, but we all knew we were there because we were Aboriginal. I realised then why my father had entered the union movement and the Communist Party. It was his way of having people see all people as equals – particularly the oppressed, like Aboriginal people. Later I too tried to change things through the union movement. Like my father, I learned that capitalism controlled everything, particularly through the media, influencing every person's waking moment. In my time, and in my father's, workers organised on the shop floor. Those days are gone; unions have become corporatised, and their leadership is little different from the employer's. Deals are conducted without shop floor participation and mostly behind closed doors. The days of union organisers dealing with a few heckling grubs⁴¹ – which was our experience – have gone. Today some unions have been infiltrated by bikies and criminals. In other cases, unions have all but denied the rank and file membership participation, rarely consulting the members. Most union officials do not come from the rank and file; they are university educated and will never see a workshop floor, and members are now resorting to social media to have their views expressed.

Overview and Reflections

Today many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are discussing their experiences of having survived places like Mount Penang and Tamworth. In more recent years, like others who experienced these places, we have begun to gravitate to online sites where we can write of our

⁴¹ A 'grub' is a fellow worker who undermines union objectives and is often in the pay of employers. In recent years employers have reversed the 'grub tag', in an attempt to claim that it is the union officials that are the grubs.

experiences. This can be therapeutic, but on some days, I cannot read or hear of these places, for the trauma it causes me.

In 2004 the Australian public received a rare glimpse of the nightmares many will always remember when the Federal Government handed down a Senate Committee Report titled *Forgotten Australians*. This report was the culmination of a 17-month investigation into Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children. During that investigation, the Community Affairs References Committee compiled volumes of evidence from the victims of institutionalised abuse. On 30 August 2004, Senator Jan McLucas, who chaired the inquiry, choked back tears at a press conference when she spoke of the harrowing tales of abuse suffered by children in care from the 1920s to the 1970s. Unfortunately, the veil of secrecy that enveloped Tamworth Institution for Boys remained intact, and Senator Lucas and her committee never heard the stories of Keith Higgins, Neddy Smith, James Finch, Harry Swanson, Archie McCafferty, Billy Munday, or Peter Schneidas. Some of these kids slept next to me in 2 Company at Mount Penang. All became mass murderers or killers, tempered and hardened by the experiences of these institutions. Their stories are consigned to a shameful history that remains buried in the dark recesses of our minds, and Tamworth Institution for Boys remains the monster of a bygone era. It was a monster that brutalised and emotionally scarred the children in its care, and one the NSW Child Welfare Department cloaked in secrecy. The end-products of that institutional process continue to occupy Australian prison cells and mental institutions today, while the brutal childminders employed to oversee the process escaped detection and possible legal retribution and retired to lead productive lives as respected members of society (Parker, 2009).

Many of those boys today are old men and, like me, they search the Internet for other survivors. I was embittered, hateful to the point where, but for good fortune, I may have entered prison for life, like many other Aboriginals who are doing life in prison, one lagging⁴² at a time. My academic learning has given me the confidence to tell my story. Had I not perhaps, I would have been one of those who went on to murder and maim other human beings.

Today the balance is shifting, and this is largely because of social media. It has shifted the balance; it is providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to express their views. Social media has also allowed Aboriginal people to learn about their culture, something generally denied in many Australian schools. Why were we forcefully removed from land and culture? – we now

⁴² Prison sentence.

know why. I believe this is the reason for the higher than average uptake of social media by Aboriginal people, and because Aboriginal people are now finding voice, they can express their pride in their culture, and discuss and learn more about culture. Aboriginal people are decolonising themselves.

Chapter 4: Cultural contexts and concepts

Homo sacer

Prior to the landing of the First Fleet, Aboriginal people had for millennia been following their traditional patterns of life. But with the arrival of the British, they were immediately reduced to the condition that Giorgio Agamben calls “homo sacer” (Agamben, 1998). The Latin *homo sacer* means either “the sacred man [or woman]” or the “accursed man [or woman]”,⁴³ depending on the context. For Agamben, it meant the latter – accursed – though both were archaic elements of Roman law. Anyone identified as “sacred” was also “set outside human jurisdiction” (p. 54), meaning they may be killed by anybody, with legal and moral impunity, but may not be sacrificed in a religious ritual:


The sacred man (sic) is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that “if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide”. This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred. (Agamben, 1998, p. 71)

For the first century or more after the invasion, this was the case for Aboriginal Australians. Australia’s third Governor, Governor King, made a proclamation on 1 May 1801 that Aborigines near Parramatta, Georges River and Prospect could be shot on sight (Kohen, 2005). Technically, in law, Indigenous people were Wards of the Crown – which is a condition of infantilisation – and colonists at times considered the colonised as human beings and at other times as fauna. But Aboriginal people were often called animals in colonial discourse, especially when posing a threat to livestock. An example of how Aboriginal people were considered at the level of *zoë* or bare life – “life in general” (Agamben, 1998, p. 66), as opposed to human life – can be gleaned from the Joseph Berryman incident of 18 December 1832. Berryman was an overseer at Murramarang, a land acquisition near Bawley Point, Sydney, and there he shot dead four Aboriginal Australians for spearing cattle. Two of the dead were an elderly couple, another was a pregnant woman (Hamon, 1994, pp. 9–11). Another example was of the Fraser family; first, they baited Christmas puddings with strychnine, killing an unknown number of the Yeeman tribe (Elder, 1998; Reid, 1982), then nine months later, with their employees, they shot dead twelve members of the Yeeman tribe for spearing cattle. Aboriginals

⁴³ While “homo” translates as “man”, the principle of “homo sacer” was applied without respect to gender.

Pete Lyons Sr.
Dr. Mengle understudy, at Hanson Medical Centre

Feb 7 · 🌐 · ...OF THIS RACIST WHOSE FAMILY OPENLY ADMIT TO KILLING THOUSANDS OF ABORIGINES:




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2 Comments

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Jan 27, 2018 · 🌐 · "...through murder". Fraser continued killing Aborigines randomly wherever he found them. He shot an Aboriginal jockey at the racetrack in Taroom. After two Aborigines accused of being involved in the massacre were found not guilty he shot both dead as they left the...



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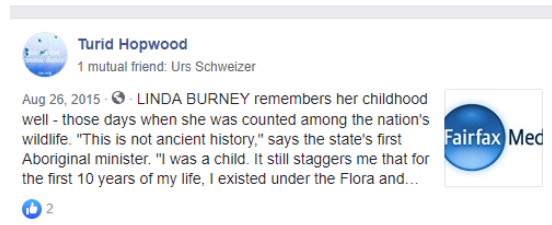
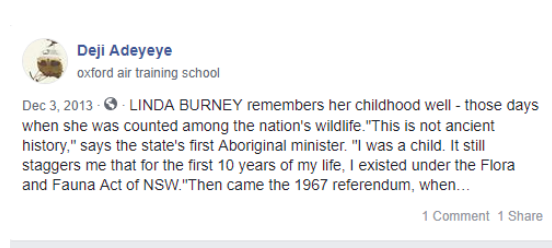


then attacked and killed the Fraser family and their employees as payback, and this escalated into a full-blown massacre over the period 1857–1858. Hundreds of Yeeman people were killed in retaliation, at Hornet Bank station on 27 October 1857. Then in March 1858, William Fraser returned from a business trip to find his parents and siblings had been killed, and he began a campaign to exterminate the Yeeman tribe; he alone was responsible for killing 100 members, and sympathetic squatters and police contributed to hundreds of further killings. For this Fraser was raised to the status of folk hero across Queensland (Elder, 1998; Reid, 1982).

History records such killings continuing unabated, with the last recorded massacre occurring at a cattle station near Coniston in the Northern Territory. One survivor of the Coniston massacre, Gwoya Jungarai lives on forever on the iconic Australian postage stamp, his name anglicised to “One Pound Jimmy.”

Given such incidents, people might be forgiven for believing that Aboriginal people were formally considered at the level of bare life – flora and fauna. The first Indigenous member of NSW Parliament, Linda Burney, is one who fell into this fallacy when she said, “For the first 10 years of my life, like all Indigenous people at that time, I was not a citizen of this country. We existed under the Flora and Fauna Act of New South Wales” (in *New Matilda*, 4 November 2008). She might be wrong about the technicalities of the law – there never was such a law – but her thoughts are a telling observation: she and other Aboriginals believed both that they were seen as animals, and that the governments endorsed it.

Certainly, when colonists spoke of shooting Aboriginals “like dogs”, this simile reveals not only a desire to reduce Indigenous people to the condition of animals but also a tacit recognition of their humanity. Otherwise, why would the killing require justification? In the early years of



colonisation, this slaughter was sometimes associated with a declared *state of war* and therefore lawful. But, as yet another example of colonial disavowal, in European International Law dating from the Treaty of Westphalia, a state of war can only exist between *sovereign powers*. Indigenous people were at the same time positioned as tribes outside British sovereignty, upon whom war could be declared, and as Wards of the Crown.

The condition of homo sacer, socio-psychologically speaking, concerns a figure in a liminal space (Lévi-Strauss, 1963): a colonised

body – the Aboriginal body – standing in a ‘doorway’, between two spaces. For the colonist, the Aboriginal body is situated as a mirror of his or her own body, one through which the colonist confronts the otherness of the Australian “wilderness” in such a way as to mediate his or her own feelings of alienation and estrangement, primarily by means of *abjection* (Kristeva, 1982). The Indigenous body, as homo sacer, thereby becomes the site of the colonial subject’s formal rejection of the violence of the colonial project in which he or she is active or at least complicit (see Memmi, 1974). This is a situation involving psychic processes of exteriorisation and projection on the colonist’s part: for colonisation is unconscionable if the colonised are recognised as sovereign human subjects.

The guilt associated with killing another human being is minimised in the case of the homo sacer, whose body is, in the colonial imagination, objectionable, savage and dirty ... a threatening figure. But the body of homo sacer is also, like the land itself, an object of desire – a desire that cannot be accepted if the Indigenous person remains a human being just like the coloniser. Hence Ann McGrath writes of Aboriginal workers in the Northern Territory during 1911–1939 as ‘Spinifex Fairies’.⁴⁴ For:

⁴⁴ ‘Spinifex fairies’ and ‘black velvet’ were also terms white men used to describe Aboriginal women, colloquial language that sexualised and exoticised these women for use by white men (McGrath, 1980, p. 8).

It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships. From now on, he [the coloniser] lives his life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquillity. (Memmi, 1974)

This indicates how Aboriginal people were formed in the colonial imagination, which was for the most part as homo sacer, that which occupies a liminal space between the “human” and the “animal”, and is located there through the colonist’s disavowal of his or her own desire. For the colonist, the subjecthood of the Aboriginal had to be reduced to homo sacer: infantilised, colonised, eradicated, deracinated, “bred out,” or “eased” towards death. As Vincent Lesina said in Queensland parliament in 1901, “The law of evolution says that the nigger shall disappear in the onward progress to the white man ... There is really no hope at all” (cited in Ranzijn, McConnochie & McNicholas, 2009, p. 182).

The homo sacer is also an object of *disavowal*: simultaneously recognised and denied. As Memmi explains:

What he [the coloniser] is actually renouncing is part of himself, and what he slowly becomes as soon as he accepts life in a colony. He participates in and benefits from those privileges which he half-heartedly denounces. Does he receive less favourable treatment than his fellow citizens? Doesn’t he enjoy the same facilities for travel? How could he help to figure, unconsciously, that he can afford a car, a refrigerator, perhaps a house? How can he go about freeing himself of this halo of prestige which crowns him and at which he would like to take offence? (Memmi, 1974)

The violence of the colonial project is thus projected onto the body of the colonised, for it is the “bestial” savagery of the coloniser that marks the Aboriginal body in the colonial imagination, and so justifies the killing of the homo sacer. In the end, through this work of ideology, it is almost made to seem as if killing people and stealing their land is an act of self-defence, as (in some sense) indeed it is. The abjection of Aboriginal bodies is an action in self-defence of the coloniser’s idea of him or herself as “civilised”; an idea that is threatened by his or her participation in the violence of the colonial project.

The record of genocide

Before the invasion, Aboriginal people enjoyed a condition of original sovereignty. For these people, their life came from the land itself, and they were tied to the land by means of a

symbolic order – something that was not portable. This symbolic order was reproduced by means of languages inscribed directly on bodies in initiation rites or in body painting coded to social roles. It was reproduced by means of totems and moieties derived from kinship, by organising the social in connection to the real conditions of the country (cycle of seasons, the movement of animals and the lives of plants); in an advanced system of astrology; and by means of petroglyph and songlines. It was reproduced too through traditional ownership rights over stories, art motifs, dance moves and songs. In fact, it was a multiplicity of code systems all speaking in support of each other. The people, living in over 250 language groups, 800 dialects and at least 400 tribes, did not owe allegiance to any king or chief (AIATSIS, 2019). Instead, power-sharing strategies mediated interpersonal relationships with the tribe, and sophisticated political strategies rooted in the sacred relation of each tribe with their own country retarded intertribal warfare. In other words, each tribe was a sovereign nation.

Now, criminalised and incarcerated, Indigenous Australians suffer health conditions worse than some Third World Nations, according to the United Nations (Sharp & Arup, 2009). The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still lags behind non-Indigenous people by ten years, writes President of the Australian Medical Association Dr Brian Owler, who claims that in some areas the gap is 20 years (in Rollins, 2016, p. 10). When handing down the Closing the Gap report on February 2018, former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said progress had not been made in areas such as life expectancy; but in fact, Australian Government statistics (ABS, 29 November 2018) showed it had declined.

This is nothing new, but the full extent of the history of colonisation has not found its way into Australia's education system. As Mark Twain wrote, "The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice" (Twain, 1901, p. 392). Political commentator and journalist Stan Grant spoke on the ABC Breakfast Show about what he names as "the great silence" (Grant, 2017), and calls for inaccuracies in Indigenous history to end: starting with correcting an inscription on a statue of Captain James Cook that says the English explorer discovered Australia (Balogh & Kelly, 2017). Like many Aboriginal people, Grant sees Australia's post-invasion history as a fabrication. Still, most Australians should know that British settlement was violent, from the first contact at Botany Bay on 29 April 1770 when Lieutenant James Cook encountered two Aboriginal men. The men opposed Cook's attempted landing on the shore, making it clear that the British were not welcome: shouting and throwing stones, they

attempted to drive them off. In response, Cook shot one man, and later wrote of the encounter in his Journal.⁴⁵

I thought that they beckon'd [*sic*]to us to come ashore but in this we were mistaken for as soon as we put the boat in they again came to oppose us, upon which I fired a musket – between the two which had no other effect than to make them retire back where bundles of their darts lay and one of them took up a stone and threw at us which caused my firing a second Musquet load with small shott and although' some of the shott struck the man yet it had no other – effect than to make him lay hold of a Shield or target to defend himself. Emmediatly [*sic*]after this we landed which we had no sooner done than they throw'd [*sic*] two darts at us this obliged me to fire a third shott soon after which they both made off, but not in such haste but what we might have taken one ...

Certainly, the men's resistance had no effect on what was to come. On 13 May 1787, the First Fleet of eleven ships sailed for Australia under the command of Governor Arthur Phillip. Life for Aboriginal Australians was about to change dramatically and forever. Captain Arthur Phillip's instructions were explicit:

You are to endeavour by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.⁴⁶

But from the perspective of Aboriginal people, the invaders appeared as ghosts or demons, a cause of fear and trepidation; with good reason. Early on, the white people began to disperse through the country, bringing the colonists into direct confrontation with the natives. This began a fight for survival, as the land then, as now, had such significance for the original people. Palyku woman Ambelin Kwaymullina explains:

For Aboriginal peoples, country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human – all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self. (Kwaymullina, 2005)

⁴⁵ See the entry for 29 April 1770 in the National Library of Australia's digital version of Cook's Journal, from Manuscript 1 page 228. <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17700429.html>

⁴⁶ Governor Phillips' Instructions, 25 April 1787, Page 14 of the manuscript held in the Historical Records of Australia. See https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/nsw2_doc_1787.pdf

The Aboriginal tribes located around the colony soon realised that these people were here to stay. Those near the colony were soon decimated by the presence of the colonists. There were several reasons for this: their land had been forcibly taken from them, leaving them nowhere to go; and they were not able to move away, this would mean encroachment onto another nation or tribes land, which would likely incur payback. So those dispossessed were forced to stay around the colony as fringe-dwellers. Then came the smallpox outbreak, which had a catastrophic effect, decimating all the original people around the settlement for hundreds of kilometres. Thousands died, those who survived were in a weakened condition, unable to resist the invader (Dowling, 1997; National Museum of Australia, 2019).

Unable to resist the effects of the smallpox epidemic the Aboriginal people soon fell away. Whether the outbreak was the result of biological warfare, one cannot say with authority, but it



is not beyond possibility that the smallpox plague was introduced, as in other ways biological and more direct warfare were directed at the Aboriginals – including the use of bread baited with poison. W.H. Sutton, a pastoralist in the Bathurst region and a member of parliament, wrote about the Bathurst massacre and described the deliberate poisoning: “Poisoned dampers had been

left purposely exposed in shepherd’s huts in order to tempt the blacks to steal and eat. They did eat, and died in horrible agony. No wonder reprisals took place” (Sutton, 1838, p. 3).

In many ways, then, the colonising forces introduced political and military practices previously unknown in this region. For over 65,000 years, disputes had been settled primarily by lawmen. They are known by various words that have roughly the same meaning across different Aboriginal languages; for example, Kurdaitcha, Cadiche and Carradhy all refer to the featherfoot of traditional lore. As I am discussing the Eora people here, I use the term “Carradhy”, which is the Eora term for “feather-foot” or “clever-man” (Spencer & Gillen, 1899).⁴⁷ The Carradhy wore specially designed shoes that left no trace, and they moved silently across the land, leaving no trail. The wearing of these shoes is how the name *feather foot* came into being: they were crafted from human hair, bird feathers, then bound together with congealed blood (Brock, 2007). They do not resemble normal shoes: they are more like a feather

⁴⁷ The term “featherfoot” comes from the special shoes these lawmen wore (Hawkins, 15 October 2013).

mat with a hole in the centre allowing the foot to enter (Spencer & Gillen, 1899, pp. 476–80). Women and children were not permitted to see these shoes, as this was taboo.



Carradhy were men of high degree, and steeped in lore, having studied for years going through successive level initiations, practising sorcery, and honing their skills (Elkin, 1945). Effectively, along with other roles, they were highly trained assassins: Aboriginal people under traditional lore were prohibited from killing anything of the same totemic relationship as themselves (Spencer & Gillen, 1899), but the role of the Carradhy was to correct any *wrong way lore*, which often meant killing (Kohen, 2018). The Carradhy were also trained in healing powers, magic, sorcery, and

bone pointing, and as men of high degree and high training, they were often sought out for their counsel (Hawkins, 2013). Once a sentence was decided in council, it was their role to carry it into effect, because the powers they possessed would set things spiritually in balance (Elkin, 1945). But before correcting wrongs, there were special ceremonies to be performed. One of these was the dislocation ceremony, which entails a stone being heated in a fire until hot, and then placed on the underside of the small toe. Once the toe is suitably softened, the toe joint is jerked out, dislocating the joint so that, when tracking the offender, no footprints would be visible (Elkin, 1945; Spencer & Gillen, 1899). All Carradhy and Kurdaitcha men have this same dislocation of the small toe, and this is the reason there is a small hole on one side of the *intathurta* (feather shoes) (Spencer & Gillen, 1899, p. 478). In the biography written of Pemulwuy, it was suggested that he was a clever-man because he had a clubbed left foot, but this could be accounted for by the dislocation ceremony (Kohen, 2005).

Organised war as practised by Europeans was not practiced among Aboriginal people because the ordinary warrior, not knowing the moieties of their enemy, could not risk killing them. Therefore, only the Carradhy were tasked with payback, the traditional way of settling disputes.⁴⁸ Now, with the arrival of the colonising forces, Aboriginal people faced the British,

⁴⁸ Payback was not the only option; at times political solutions were sought to avoid a possible ongoing cycle of payback; and there are suggestions of more organised conflict. Also, an ordinary warrior was permitted after consultation with (I hesitate to use the words Elders, as it was those who had undergone more initiations who actually made important decisions) to exact revenge. See R.M. & C.H. Berndt, 1964.

one of the world's most successful proponents of war, and payback was to prove totally inadequate.

The first to face the invader were the Carradhy, because of where the British landed; and the first of them was Carradhy Pemulwuy. Pemulwuy and his small band of Carradhy warriors fought through 'payback', the traditional law/lore that payback could only be perpetrated against those individuals who had killed or harmed Aboriginal people. What Pemulwuy and others who followed him found was that the invader did not fight in a traditional style of payback. While the Carradhy only killed in response to a crime, the invader was prepared to kill up to ten Aboriginals in reprisal for every British person killed by the Carradhy. This was beyond reason for the Aboriginal people, who had never experienced the type of war being waged against them.



Pemulwuy fought against the British for twelve years. In December 1790 he speared John McIntyre, Governor Phillip's gamekeeper, and McIntyre later died from his wounds (Warren, 2014). Pemulwuy continued to harass the settlements with guerrilla-style warfare, harassing the settlers and resisting their advances. In 1792 he began raiding the settlers for food and personal items, at Prospect, Toongabbie, Georges River, Parramatta, Brickfield Hill and the Hawkesbury River. Finally, Governor King offered a reward to anyone, including those convicts that had joined the natives, to murder him, and about 1 June 1802 Pemulwuy was supposedly shot dead by Henry Hacking. According to George Sutter, his head was cut off and sent to England

(Kohen, 1993). Pemulwuy is remembered by many Aboriginal people as a resistance fighter, a war hero, one of the many Aboriginal war heroes who were to die in the frontier wars (Wilmott, 1987).


Unlike Bennelong and Yemmerrawanne, Pemulwuy refused to fraternise with the enemy. Though Bennelong and Yemmerrawanne had initially been kidnapped, after both escaped, they returned to travel to England with Phillip on the *Atlantic* in 1792. Bennelong's form of appeasement failed to stop the advances, and the struggle over land continued unabated.

A further example of struggle and resistance comes from colonial Victoria. In 1839, a group of Tasmanian Aboriginals were brought to Melbourne by the newly appointed Protector of Aborigines, George Robinson. Two of the group of sixteen, Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, had worked for Robinson as translators and guides during his time in Tasmania, and after travelling to Melbourne, worked for him again.

Links See All


Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner - City of Melbourne
 Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner's story reveals key aspects of Aboriginal history in Melbourne.
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Emelia Caruana THE PEOPLE POWER MESSAGE

Jan 20, 2018 · ... Trugemanna, Trugannini, Trucanini, Trucaninny and Lalla Rooke Maulboyheenner aka Robert Smallboy, Jemmy, Timmy, Tinney Jimmy, Robert of Ben Lomond and Bob. - nationalunitygovernment.org



They also travelled with him through regional Victoria and in particular to the western district, where they would have seen evidence of frontier violence. After this, the two young men, and three women – one of whom was Truganini – stole two guns and commenced a guerrilla war, fighting a six-week campaign in the Dandenongs and on the Mornington Peninsula. They burned stations, destroyed property, and caused a number of settlers to retreat to the city. Before being captured they had wounded several people and killed two men, for which they were tried for murder. At trial, the women were acquitted, but the two men were found guilty of murder and hanged; their bodies are buried

under Queen Victoria Market (Edmonds, 2010, p. 152).

The Aboriginal people could not understand the mass killings, and the use of biological weapons to take and occupy the land – land the invaders had no spiritual connection with. With the loss of so many, and given the severe damage caused to their society, it was clear that this could not continue. Windradyne, known in the Bathurst war as “Saturday”, was likely a Kurdaitcha [“clever man”]; he soon determined that European war was beyond the Wiradjuri people’s capacity, and made the decision to sue for peace. He assembled his people and set out across the mountains to Parramatta 200 kilometres away, where they attended a feast held in December 1824. Wearing his straw hat affixed with a label with the word “PEACE” strategically placed alongside an olive branch, he and his attending warriors attracted much interest as Colonel Arthur, writing in *The Sydney Gazette*, writes:

What contributed to give peculiar interest to the scene was the circumstance of the noted Saturday, the Bathurst chief, being at the head of his tribe. He is one of the finest looking natives we have seen in this part of the country. He is not particularly tall, but

is much stouter and more proportionably limbed than the majority of his countrymen; which, combined with a noble looking countenance, and piercing eye, are calculated to impress the beholder with other than disagreeable feelings towards a character who has been so much dreaded by the Bathurst settler. (Arthur, 1824)

It was obvious Windradyne had been influenced by Europeans in his bid to sue for peace; otherwise, he would not know the word ‘peace’ or the symbolism of the olive branch (Arthur, 1824). Governor Brisbane pardoned Windradyne and reported the matter to his superior, Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, in a communique which, read in part:

I am most happy to have it in my power to report to Your Lordship that Saturday, their great and most warlike Chieftain has been with me to receive his pardon and that He, with most of His Tribe, attended the annual conference. (Langton, 2008, p. 41)

Windradyne’s suing for peace made no difference to the killings, which continued across the continent; but at the same time, a different kind of political identity was emerging for some Aboriginals: that of the subaltern.

Subaltern

Subaltern effectively means subordinate; in British military terms, a subaltern is a junior officer below the rank of captain – for example an ensign or lieutenant. But the idea of subalterneity was theorised by Antonio Gramsci, who used the word “subaltern” to denote the proletariat when writing his treatise on Marxist philosophy from behind prison walls (Gramsci, 1996). By using that term, he hid the political importance of his work from prison warders, and this enabled his revolutionary manuscripts to pass the censor and leave the prison. The subaltern class, for Gramsci, is a social group displaced and excluded from the social and economic institutions of society, denied a political voice, and suffering under hegemony (Bates, 1975).

When Gayatri Spivak (1985) came to speak about the condition of tribal women in India, she resorted to the vocabulary of Gramsci. For her, the tribal women of India were not “junior officers” in the British meaning of the term, but rather in Gramsci’s sense: those at the very bottom of society, doubly “othered” as both tribal and female. Spivak points out that these women had no access whatsoever to political discourse or official modes of knowledge; they were economically alienated and culturally othered in society; and even within their own tribes, they were disempowered by the patriarchy. The subaltern “cannot speak” because she lacks the requisite cultural capital. Moreover, even if she does speak – particularly to a researcher – she

remains othered because her words are only the *object* of study. The subaltern does not speak for themselves; their words are transformed into data and then interpreted by others. As such, subalterns always speak from outside official modes of knowledge; their words are translated, infantilised and made amenable to paternalistic understanding. Not only are they ostracised from the corridors of power; when they do speak, they are neither acknowledged nor understood, as is still the case for Indigenous Australians today.

An example is seen in the situation of Indigenous medicine, which is based on Dreaming, while modern Australian medicine is based on the bio-medical model. If an Indigenous healer were to prescribe a course of treatment, such treatment would be ignored by the medical authorities, while anthropologists might study the prescription as evidence of ancient, irrational beliefs. If the traditional cure did work, it would be interpreted as chance. Indigenous medicine is a way of knowing that is infantilised and turned into an object of study, not a position of authority. The point here is not that scientific medicine does not work or that traditional medicine is just as effective but that good quality healthcare might be provided by less paternalistic means (as was the original mission of the Aboriginal Medical Service, an organisation commanded by Aboriginal people to give better access to good quality healthcare for Aboriginal people).

More pertinently, as subaltern, Aboriginal voices were, and still are, marginalised by colonial power structures and its processes. This includes the study of Aboriginal culture by anthropologists and other researchers, who rarely use a Yarning Circle where Aboriginal voices would be heard, in full, without interruption. Instead, they apply epistemically violent western interpretation of Indigenous voices to maintain power over them.

Gorget

From the earliest days of colonisation, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait people collaborated with the invaders, in the process attaining what I describe as the station of “gorget”. The gorget



was originally a steel or leather collar worn in mediaeval times to protect the throat in combat (Norris, 1999). Over time it became a military adornment, no longer required for battle but purely ornamental, and it moved from the throat down to the chest. Throughout the colonial era, the colonising forces often gave these gorgets to the kings or

chiefs of indigenous peoples in Africa, India, New Zealand and North America to win their

support for the colonial enterprise (Troy, 1993; Holand, 1928; Blegen & Heilbron, 1928, 285–87; Unknown, 1832). In Australia, where there were no chiefs or kings, the British found prominent Indigenous initiated men they considered amenable, more pliable than others, and then with pomp and ceremony presented these men with a gorget, inscribed with their name and the word “king” (Troy, 1993; National Museum of Australia, 2019).



Alphonse Pellion (attrib), ‘Sauvages de la Nouvelle Galles Du Sud’ [Tara et Peroal], watercolour, 1819

This effectively made them a type of subaltern, lifting them out of the order of homo sacer, but in the process disrupting the pre-contact symbolic order, and harnessing a sector of the local community in the service of the colonial project. The gorget was thus a weapon aimed at Indigenous culture that fragmented communities, overturned Aboriginal law, and caused systems of cultural reproduction to break down. The ‘gorget class’ were subordinate to the

colonisers and supported their efforts by acting as overseers, translators, trackers and policemen. During the times when the gorget was awarded, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people were still being killed as *homo sacer*, and the gorget would no doubt have afforded some protection; in addition, the wearer of a gorget was considered a person who could be controlled, and would likely provide little or no trouble to the authorities. But though they received some safety, and some modicum of status in payment for their cooperation, they were still robbed of the power of political sovereignty or meaningful speech.



Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales, c1826, by Augustus Earle, oil on canvas, 68.5 x 50.5cm, courtesy the Rex Nan Kivell collection, National Library of Australia, NK1118.

The gorget could take many forms: not only a king plate, but it might also be clothing; it might be simply a string of beads. Often it was a uniform or part of a uniform (Karskens, 2011) – and for those men who were dressed only in coat or jacket this had the double effect of suggesting that the ‘gorget’ had importance to the invader, while at the same time ensuring they presented as people of lowly status, in

ill-fitting garments. The lines below are the third verse of a poem attributed to Baptist Minister and temperance advocate John Saunders, who links the jackets, alcohol, and fighting to the degeneration of the original people:

Now we see the end, these sans-culottes⁴⁹
 Decked with white man’s cast-off coats
 Display their love in blows
 One Gin with rum is stupefied
 The second sups the infernal tide
 Till basest passion glows.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The sans-culottes (‘without trousers’) were the common people of the lower classes in late 18th-century France, a great many of whom became militant partisans of the French Revolution in response to their poor quality of life under the Ancien Régime.

⁵⁰ Saunders, Rev John (attrib) c1838, poem accompanying ‘Real Life in Sydney’, lithograph, with letterbook 1834–1847, Mitchell Library, Sydney.



▲ Jimmy Clements at the opening of the federal parliament in Canberra in 1927. Photograph: Sam Hood/Collection of the State Library of New South Wales

Two old blackfellas, Jimmy Clements and John Noble, made a big effort to turn up for the opening of the provisional parliament house in Canberra nine decades ago.

The gorget is, therefore, a signifier (a “mark”) placed upon the body of an Indigenous person by the colonist(s) with the aim of separating that person out from the Aboriginal community, and liberating that person from traditional laws. In some cases, it seems, “gorgets” felt freed from tradition and felt confident in violating even the most sacred customs, ignoring customary duties, drinking to excess, and even committing acts of murder and rape (often alongside

their white “masters”). John Batman, for example, used armed Aboriginals from the Sydney region, such as the men known as Pigeon and Tommy, to hunt, capture and kill other Indigenous Tasmanians (Batman, 1830). Another who used the native police to kill was William Henry Willshire, who touted for and received the position of officer in charge of the newly formed Native Police. Willshire considered himself well qualified, having earlier killed four Aborigines on his first punitive expedition in August 1884. Before the end of his first year



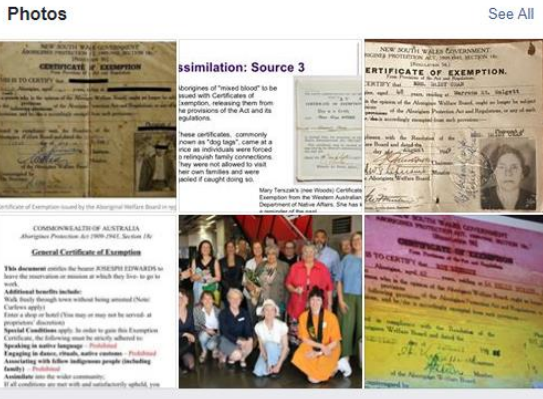
Native Police, Rockhampton, 1864

in the position, he had killed more than a dozen Aboriginals. So that he and Mounted Constable Erwein Wurmbrand could be more effective, they moved to Heavitree Gap in 1886, where their killing escapades incensed the Lutheran Missionaries. Willshire, it is reported, “believed strongly in the policy of ‘dispersing the native’, which [according to his superior Inspector Foelsch] meant shooting them” (Flinders Ranges Research, 2019).

Graeme Mitchell
Western Sydney University

Jan 27, 2018 · 🌐 · EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE: There is an Exemption Certificate doing the rounds on Facebook. Several posts have either questioned its validity or have declared in a fraud or bogus to make the 'White' handling of Aborigines look worse than it really was. A check on the Internet will reveal dozens of ACTUAL certificates - some NSW State and...

1 Comment



Angie Manton · Aboriginal

Jun 13, 2017 · 📄 · Exemption certificate protection act 1909-1943 section 18c my daddy had this so I thought I'd share it will you all 😊😊😊😊😊😊

109

57 Comments



Mary Terszak's (nee Woods) Certificate of Exemption from the Western Australian Department of Native Affairs. She has kept it as a reminder of the past.

By the time the first Australian Parliament House was being opened, in 1927, the last group of people 'condescendingly' awarded the gorget were elderly. In the centre of this photograph is Jimmy Clements, the last known Darumal, who (like others) suffered the indignity of being dubbed King Billy. Note, though, he is not wearing a gorget. Jimmy Clements was then about 80 years old and had trudged eighty miles on foot to the opening of the provisional parliament house in Canberra (Daley, 2015). By that time the gorget had run its course: Aboriginal people had realised it was simply a worthless trinket and of no intrinsic value, and it had reached the end of its political usefulness.

By the 1940s, the gorget had given way to the exemption certificate, and ordinary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who applied for these certificates were required to renounce their cultural heritage. The certificate allowed certain rights which were afforded only to the coloniser, including the right to move freely in town and to enter a public bar and buy a drink. It also enabled them to enrol to vote, attend a school, and be exempted from the restrictions of state protection laws. These certificates were not easily obtained and could be revoked at any time (National Museum of Australia, 2019). Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait people were forbidden these same rights, so in a sense, the certificate of exemption became a new form of gorget.


Time has seen the gorget come full circle. These days the equivalent of the gorget is seen in those who ingratiate themselves with the continuing

colonial power. Whereas in the past the gorget was only a faux, today it lives on via its fake symbolism, providing political office, social position and economic capital for those who would wear it; and it remains the plaything of the coloniser. To wear the gorget today is to risk cultural alienation and be devalued by other Aboriginal people in the interest of gaining economic and political capital. It points to internalised racism, which involves a “conscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy”: where white people are consistently ranked above those of colour (Johnson, 2008). Those who wear the gorget in contemporary society place little or no value in their inherited traditional culture. Instead, they hunger for the perceived benefits of the imposed culture.


The History Wars




The meaning of all that followed the First Fleet’s arrival in January 1788 continues to be in contention, and the ongoing tensions about the date of the Australia Day celebrations make this clear. For Aboriginal people, this is the day they lost sovereignty, and so Indigenous Australians call 26 January Invasion Day, and on that day, they mourn the loss of many thousands of lives, exterminated as a result of the British invasion. For some non-Aboriginal people, the events since 1788 have been portrayed as a minor impost on the Aboriginal people, but this ignores the genocide, organised massacres, poisoning, and biological warfare that covered the whole continent (Tatz, 1999).

So, whether through ignorance, lack of education or racism, much of the rest of Australia consider 26 January a day of celebration, but increasingly there are people who consider the celebration of 26 January a cause for deep division within Australia. In 1968, Australian anthropologist Professor W.E.H. “Bill” Stanner placed Australia’s colonial history under the microscope in a Boyer Lecture series titled “After the Dreaming”. One lecture was titled “The Great Australian Silence” (Stanner, 1969: pp. 192–248), and here Stanner asserted that Australia’s history had been deliberately recorded to omit “several hundred thousand Aboriginal people that had lived and died between 1788 and 1938 ... [who were but] ...negative facts of history and in no way consequential for the modern period” (Stanner, 1969, p. 214). Since then, and gradually, some people have come to the conclusion that it is important to change the date of Australia Day from 26 January, so as to acknowledge the product of colonial history, and help heal the nation.

The Conversation 
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Aug 3, 2018 · ...WEH Stanner coined the phrase 'the great Australian silence'. How far have we come since?






   188

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Situation Theatre
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Mar 5 · ... 1968 Boyer lectures, lamented the "great Australian silence" in our white settlement narrative. Stanner declared: "It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as...






  13

7 Shares

Michael David Searle
Works at UTS: University of Technology Sydney

Apr 21 · ...first nations people's until we address the "Great Australian Silence". It is a culture of intentional disremembering of the planned and deliberate acts of ethnic cleansing and massacres that occurred during colonial encounters. To change this culture requires the strength...







  6

1 Comment

Julie Grint shared LNP - The Great Australian Mistake's post
2 mutual friends: Jen Webb and Russell Darroch · Russell Darroch was tagged...

Apr 30 · * ALP AHEAD IN MARGINAL SEATS- (percentage is indicated if known); 5 seats are needed to win government. Please add any more results that you know of! See also Ladbroke's graph in comments below. Last update -3...



   6

3 Comments 9 Shares

So contested is the issue that a whole discourse has developed to define the divisions between the ideologies. The terms for the competing views of Australian history – “Black Armband” (the negative view) and “Three Cheers” (the positive view) – were coined by Geoffrey Blainey and discussed in his 1993 Sir John Latham Memorial lecture. In a later publication he explained this further:

... my generation was reared on the Three Cheers view of history. This patriotic view of our past had a long run. It saw Australian history as largely a success. While the convict era was a source of shame or unease, nearly everything that came after was believed to be pretty good. There is a rival view, which I call the Black Armband view of history. In recent years it has assailed the optimistic view of history. ... The

multicultural folk busily preached their message that until they arrived much of Australian history was a disgrace. The past treatment of Aborigines, of Chinese, of Kanakas, of non-British migrants, of women, the very old, the very young, and the poor was singled out, sometimes legitimately, sometimes not ... The Black Armband view of history might well represent the swing of the pendulum from a position that had been too favourable, too self-congratulatory, to an opposite extreme that is even more unreal and decidedly jaundiced. (Blainey, 1999)

The struggle between these two views is often called “The History Wars”, a name that comes from the title of a book by Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark (2003). At the launch of the book, former Prime Minister Paul Keating took the opportunity to criticise conservative views of Australian history and those holding those views. Another former Prime Minister, John

Howard, is an ardent proponent of the “three cheers” view of Australia’s history, has said that he does not believe genocide was practised against Indigenous Australians.⁵¹

Some of the voices in the History Wars debate are Geoffrey Blainey, Stuart Macintyre, Robert Manne, Henry Reynolds, Lyndall Ryan, Cassandra Pybus, and Keith Windschuttle (see Manne, 2001; Reynolds, 2006; Ryan, 2018; Windschuttle, 2002). Windschuttle is a chief protagonist of the *white blindfold* or *three cheers* view of Australian history (Windschuttle, 2009). The debate was heightened by his response to the National Museum of Australia’s exhibit, the Bells Falls Gorge exhibit, which offers a view of an alleged massacre alongside other views and contemporary documents and displays of weapons relating to the colonial conflict around Bathurst in 1824. This exhibit was strongly criticised by Windschuttle, who denies genocide, and insists that the museum erred in its content (Attwood, 2006).

The school system has not helped: Kevin Donnelly, the co-chair of the Review of the National Curriculum, told interviewers for *The Australian* that “the pendulum in the curriculum, certainly in history, has moved too far towards the ... black-armband view and we don’t have a proper balance in recognising the positives and benefits of Western culture and Western civilisation” (in Balogh & Kelly, 2017, p. 1). Ken Wiltshire, who co-chaired the Review, offered the view that:

The problem with the curriculum is too much choice ... That means kids can sometimes miss out on seminal moments. ... The whole of history should be compulsory. If you’re not teaching the whole thing ... you’re not going to get a complete picture of the interaction between white and indigenous culture. (in Balogh & Kelly, 2017, p. 1)

The history of colonisation continues to be hotly debated. But regardless of any individual’s views, the historical records document the occasions when Indigenous people were hunted down and murdered in orchestrated massacres.

These started very early: four months after landing, on 1 May 1788, some articles were stolen from within the settlement; an Aboriginal was knifed to death by a convict, and retribution and payback from Aboriginal people came in the form of two convicts speared to death. By October 1788, Captain Phillips’ policy of amity had come to an end. Some Aboriginals threw spears at a convict to frighten him off. This action bought reprisals when Philip set off with a party into

⁵¹ Howard maintains that there was no genocide against Aboriginal people, and expresses this in a video published on the *Guardian* website 22 September 2014; see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/sep/22/john-howard-stolen-generation-genocide-aboriginal-indigenous-video>

the bush firing off a shot to compel the Blacks to stay away from the settlement (Lippman, 1999, p. 4).

The collage consists of five social media posts:

- Dylan Adams** (Mar 9): A post with a blue header and a profile picture of three people. The text reads: "This is not a black arm-band view of history... it's simply our history. We must acknowledge both the good and bad deeds done by those who came before us. It is the only way to prevent such atrocities in the future. It is also the only way to heal our nation's relationship with our First...". To the right is a small image of a cartoon character with a speech bubble that says "DON'T TEACH US MASSACRES IN SCHOOL NOW THAT WE KNOW THE GARDIAN OP". Below the text is a blue heart icon and the number "2".
- Black Arm Band** (Page): A profile picture of a woman's face. The text says "Page · 5K like this · Musician/Band" and "Celebrating the past and revolutionising the future of Indigenous Australian through music!". There is a blue heart icon and the word "Like".
- Sharing Culture: Healing Historical Trauma** (Page): A profile picture of a landscape. The text says "Page · 1.3K like this · Community · Samia Goudie liked this post". Below is a post from Mar 31, 2014: "...blame or a 'black arm band' view of history but honestly facing up to the mistakes of the past and acknowledging our shared history and shared future. The National Apology was an important step in recognition, healing and reconciliation. In his Sydney Peace Prize...". To the right is a profile picture of a man with glasses. Below the text is a blue heart icon and "6 Shares".
- Kerrie Doyle Peita shared Extinction Rebellion Australia's post** (Friend): A profile picture of a person. The text says "Friend · 7 mutual friends". Below is a post from Jul 29, 2012: "...of the fittest' it's not true anyway'; the black arm band view of history, they deserved it for blah blah blah - so, if you're gonna be a pillock - don't bother commenting (this means you - you know who i mean!!)". To the right is a small image of a group of people. Below the text is a blue heart icon and "1 Share".
- David Laing** (Rock 'N' Roll High School): A profile picture of a cartoon character. The text says "Rock 'N' Roll High School". Below is a post from Aug 24, 2018: "...it off as a 'black arm band' view of". To the right is a small image of a person's face.

Clearly, the invaders were here to stay, and they were prepared to use all means to take the land in an endeavour that was not negotiable.

Soon, therefore, the official amity was replaced with avarice and rapacity. The battle for control of the land had begun, it was always an uneven battle, the musket against the spear - there was only ever going to be one outcome. Eventually came the complete subjugation and hegemony of the original people. Before Governor Phillip's term had ended, the breakdown of Aboriginal culture had begun. Some Aboriginal people were already living among the invader, as their land had been confiscated by the invader. The loss of their land brought about hunger and starvation (Stanner, 1977). Those Aboriginals

who came to stay among the settlers were unwelcome guests, the first fringe dwellers, and this brought about a change from an uneasy truce to one of scorn and dislike for the original people.

The indifference and disregard shown them are little different to that shown to Aboriginal people today. As the invaders encroached ever further into tribal lands, those Aboriginals whose land it was were forced to retreat further back onto their neighbours' land. All the while the Aboriginal people ceded nothing; but every weapon available to the invader was employed against the original people, even the unseen biological weapons of war.

There are those who consider the colonisation of Australia an act of genocide, violence inflicted with forethought and malice on the Indigenous people that occupied the lands, in order to achieve particular ends. British anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis noted that "Imperial genocide" has two main motivations: first, "to clear lands that invading settlers wished to

occupy”, and then act of clearing the territories of the original inhabitants” and then “to seize and coerce labour” (Maybury-Lewis, 2002, p. 45, 47).

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Aboriginal History
March 18 · 🌐

See Kristyn Harman's essay on this remarkable find in the latest Aboriginal History Vol 41.



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Aboriginal History
January 22 · 🌐

Aboriginal History contributor (in Vol 41, 2017) Kristyn Harman writes of the Tasmanian genocide



Showing results for **aboriginal treated with amity**
Search instead for **aboriginal treated with amnity**

Australian Conservative Capitalist
January 22 at 9:52am · 🌐

...Captain Phillip was instructed by the government in London to **treat the natives "with amity and kindness"** and he did. No Aborigines were shot; no platoon of Marines fixed their bayoneted or loaded the...

People now "identify" as "Indigenous" and their children have European - mostly Brit - ancestry to a greater or lesser extent. I only had a DNA test done that shows I am 100% English, 100% Scandinavian and 1% Aboriginal. The absurdity in this line of identity politics, I am a "white" by virtue of the fact that one of my ancestors married and Aboriginal 6 generations ago.

There is no reason to change Australia Day

46 13 Comments 14 Shares

Benalla Kids from 40's to 70's Lorraine Crawford.
February 10 at 2:04pm · 🌐

...There was no "invasion". Captain Phillip was instructed by the government in London to **treat the natives "with amity and kindness"** and he did. No Aborigines were shot; no platoon of Marines fixed their...

16

Sovereign Union
January 22 · 🌐

Like Page ...

Just what we needed ... The Australian to publish Abbott's views on Invasion Day with a cartoon inferring the white man puts his hand out and we refuse their wonderful hospitality ...

'There are 364 other days of the year when we can wear a black armband and strive to overcome our national failures. For instance, I expect again to spend a week this year trying to come to grips with the challenges facing remote indigenous Australians ...'

Article Transcript

All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?" asks the John Cleese character in the classic film Life of Brian. It's worth asking the same question of the British settlement of Australia at the same time as we acknowledge the dispossession of the original inhabitants.

Sure, not everything's perfect in contemporary Australia; and it's possible that Aboriginal life could have continued for some time without modernity bursting upon it, had governor Arthur Phillip not raised the Union flag and

Raphael Lemkin (2012) coined the term genocide (also known as ethnocide), arguing that various European colonial powers, namely the Spanish and British empires, did this when establishing colonies. According to Lemkin genocide is a two-stage process; the first is the destruction of the Indigenous population's way of life; in the second stage, the newcomers impose their way of life on the Indigenous group (Forge, 2012, p. 77; Moses, 2004, p. 27).

In 1789 there was an outbreak of smallpox recorded amongst the Aboriginal tribe hinting at the use of biological weapons. The journal of marine captain Watkins Tench indicates that the First Fleet was carrying bottles of smallpox. It might be argued that these were to be used as biological weapons to attack the natives. Why else would Watkins Tench have such an insidious dangerous cargo? If kept at room temperatures the smallpox virus can last for years. A massive outbreak of smallpox may have killed as much as 90% of the Aboriginal population in and around the settlement. Further afield, the epidemic may have killed as much as three-

quarters of those between the Hawkesbury River and Port Hacking. It is unknown how many Aboriginal people were killed at Jarvis Bay and west of the Blue Mountains (Warren, 2014). Massacres in the main took the form of shootings, but on other occasions, less humane methods were used.

One method was to use mounted horsemen to stampede Aboriginal men women and children to their deaths over a precipice: this was carried out against the Dharawal people at Cataract Gorge (Kohen, 1993), and at Cape Grim (Clements, 2014). There are also accounts of colonists supplying Aboriginal people food laced with arsenic (Behrendt, 2012, p. 274).

 **Vala Mere Tinal** shared a post.
April 13 at 11:30am · 🌐

Also author of "[Convincing Ground](#): Learning to fall in love with your country"

Close Pine Gap's Post
Friends, the guest storyteller at the Frontier Wars Camp will be Bruce Pascoe,...

Meg Will liked this post

 **Richard J Frankland**
September 29, 2016 at 4:05pm · 🌐

...My family and I are going to go to the [Convincing ground](#) car park at Allestree (just down from Uniting Church camp road) on Monday 3rd of October night at about 6:30pm, to light a candle to remember an...

👍👎👏 Meg Will and 361 others 72 Comments 40 Shares

 **Chris McMahon**
November 23, 2015 at 3:32am · 🌐

...USA boots on the [ground](#) They want our kids to go where they will be killed and be led to commit war crimes Daesh are assholes Their main war is this: to [convince](#) other Sunnis to become assholes and jo...

👍 16 5 Comments 1 Share

Jen Webb liked this post

 **Naeem Bangash** is with **RH Arshad**.
December 11, 2017 at 4:21pm · 🌐


...We also thank all those friends and supporters in Australia who made it through their unceasing efforts to [convince](#) the migration regime in this regard. I hope in near future gaining back our freedom a...

 +4

👍👎👏 Jen Webb and 576 others 115 Comments 91 Shares

 **Carolyn Minchin** shared a post.
18 hours ago · 🌐

Igor Krnetić's Post
Process-based CBT workshop. Historical moment for psychotherapy: Steven...

 January 22 · 🌐

I have no time for the guilt industry associated with aboriginal history in Australia but it does bother me that so few people know the smallpox story. I shared it in a comment on an earlier post but I thought it deserved it's own post.

Smallpox was deliberately included in the medical inventory sent with the First Fleet. It was in the form of dried infected scabs. This was not unusual because dried infected scabs were used for inoculation in the event of outbreaks. The technique was well understood at the time even if detailed knowledge of germs was not. Several of the marines in the First Fleet also had experience using it as a weapon against natives in North America. The scabs would be rubbed on blankets that were then gifted to the natives.

Not only do the records show that smallpox scabs were in the First Fleet inventory but the medical records also indicate nobody on the vessels had the infection during the journey. Given the length of the journey this rules out the possibility that the infection came accidentally from somebody on the First Fleet.

The two theories for the indigenous outbreak (which occurred in 1789 not long after the First Fleet had arrived) is either deliberate infection using First Fleet medical supplies or overland infection via Indonesian fisherman in the north.


All things considered I think the most likely scenario is that somebody in the First Fleet, with or without official sanction, decided to knowingly unleash a devastating biological weapon. One that would kill 70 to 90% of the native population and devastate their society in the process. And if it was done deliberately it would also have been done knowingly. It would be correctly called a genocidal act.

Watkin Tench was a marine in the First Fleet who kept a journal that was later published. He was rather favourably disposed towards the natives and keen to understand them. Of the smallpox outbreak he wrote with some dread that the outbreak may have been caused by the colony. So the idea that this was caused by the colony is not some modern theory.

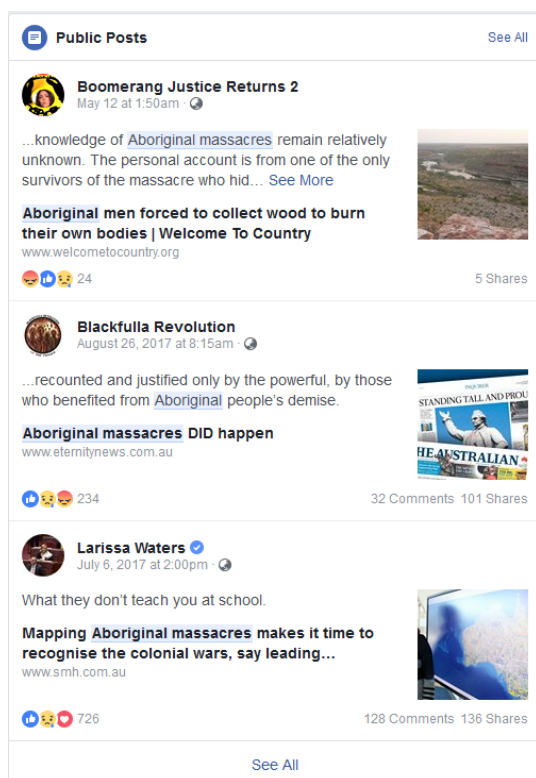
25 Reactions 59 Comments

👍 Like ➦ Share

👍👎👏 25

 **Tim Quilty** In my mind this is the particular black armband of Australian history. Pretty much everything else can be written off as the inevitable collision of modernity with the ancient.
But the deliberate spreading of smallpox was genocide pure and

The rape and treatment of Aboriginal women is rarely mentioned by historians, but it was a common practice, as Aboriginal women were seen only as objects to be raped, humiliated, objectified, and denigrated by white men. An example of this humiliation is how Aboriginal women were referred to: as “black gin”, “lubra”, “native belle”, “sable siren”, “spinifex fairy” or “black velvet”; though there were people who supported Aboriginal women (Conor, 2016).



The invaders believed it was their legitimate right to murder the men and denigrate, abuse and rape Indigenous women. Not all white men behaved in this way; many were decent and respectful of Aboriginal men, women and children (Pascoe, 2007), and some Aboriginal women experienced long-lasting, loving and caring relationships with white men (Robertson, Demosthenous & Demosthenous, 2005). But like all wars, rape, murder and slavery were common, atrocities of all types were carried out, the invasion of Australia was brutal, and every imaginable atrocity was carried into effect.

The cost to Aboriginal people was horrific, and the terror palpable as Aboriginal people learned of others who had experienced these atrocities. The women faced unwanted pregnancies, spiritual abuse, physical and mental trauma, and some never recovered (Robertson, Demosthenous & Demosthenous, 2005). These women often had husbands and were mothers to children. The strain caused by these rapes and unwanted pregnancies would often be too much for families, causing the breakdown of relations.

An excerpt from the Journal of Francis Tuckfield, Wesleyan missionary (1837), speaks of the genocidal treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

In less than twenty years we have nearly swept them off the face of the earth. We have shot them down like dogs. In the guise of friendship, we have issued corrosive sublimate⁵² in their damper and consigned whole tribes to the agonies of an excruciating death. We have made them drunkards and infected them with diseases which have rotted the bones of adults and made such few children as are born amongst them a sorrow and a torture from the very instant of their birth. We have made them outcasts in their own land and are rapidly consigning them to entire annihilation.

The massacres continued from the 1780s right through to the late 1920s. The Waterloo Creek massacre also known as Slaughterhouse Creek massacre, was where some of my own people,

⁵² Corrosive sublimate: Mercuric Chloride a white poisonous soluble crystalline sublimate.

the Kamilaroi, were killed, with official figures ranging between 8 and 50 killed (Grey, 2008). The number of frontier massacres is far too numerous to list here (but see Macfarlane & Hannah, 2007). The last recorded massacre was the Coniston massacre, spread over the period 7 August to 18 October 1928. It was also the last “officially sanctioned” massacre, and was led by Mounted Constable Murray.

When Murray was being questioned at the trial of Arkirkra and Padygar for the murder of Fred Brooks, Justice Mallen asked about the massacre:

“Was it really necessary to shoot to kill in every case? Could you not have occasionally shot to wound?”

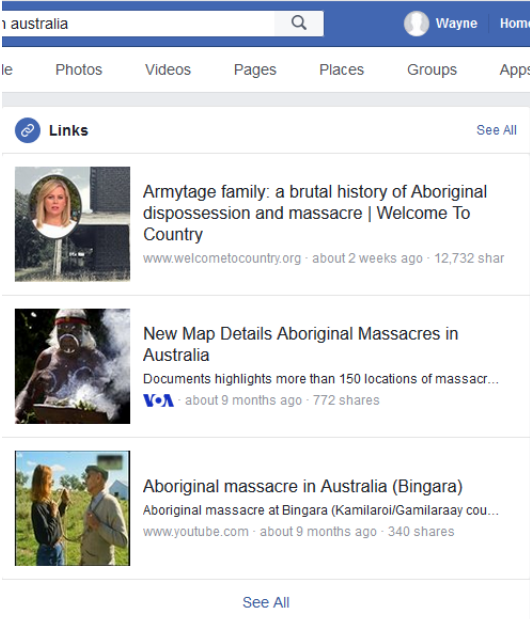
Constable Murray replied: “*No, your honour, what is the use of a wounded black fellow hundreds of miles from civilisation?*”

Justice Mallen continued: “How many did you kill?”

Murray: “*17 your honour.*”

Justice Mallen: “You mean you mowed them down wholesale!” (Elder, 1998, p. 94).

Peter Ellingsen writes that Jean Herbert, whose great-uncle was involved in the massacres, says, “The aim is not to dispense blame or black armbands ... We want to let the spirits rest in peace” (Ellingsen, 2003). Aboriginal people argue it would be different if it had been Herbert’s relations who were summarily executed.

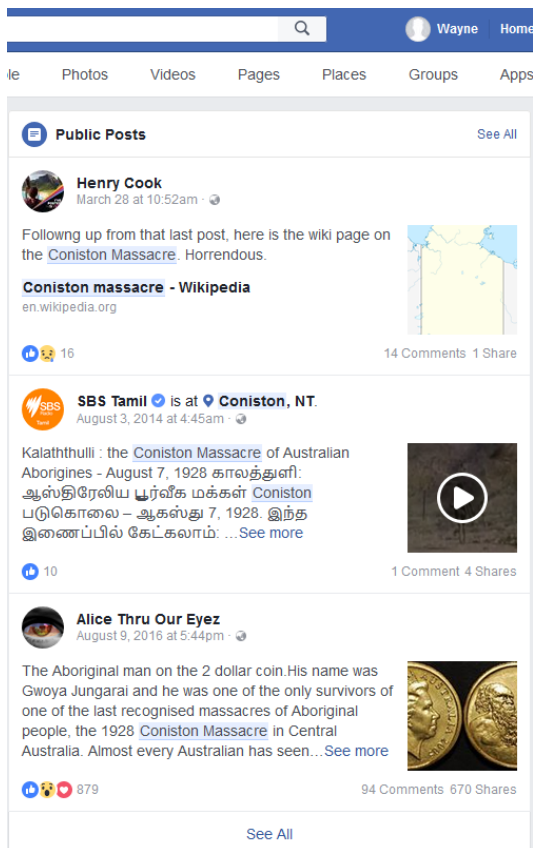


The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook search results page for the keyword "australia". The page is viewed from a user named "Wayne". The search results are categorized under "Links" and include three items:

- Armytage family: a brutal history of Aboriginal dispossession and massacre | Welcome To Country** (www.welcometocountry.org) - about 2 weeks ago - 12,732 shares
- New Map Details Aboriginal Massacres in Australia** (Documents highlights more than 150 locations of massacr...) - about 9 months ago - 772 shares
- Aboriginal massacre in Australia (Bingara)** (Aboriginal massacre at Bingara (Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay cou...) - www.youtube.com) - about 9 months ago - 340 shares

Testifying later before a Board of Inquiry, Murray said he did not have time to count the number of dead because he was too busy. What riles Aboriginal people is that the figures quoted by Murray were simply not true; but no matter the number, Murray walked away free. An *Age* article of 23 September 2003 recounts the meeting of Jean Herbert, a descendent of Japangka, one of the key characters in the account of the massacre, and Murray’s descendent, Lisa Dale-Hallet (Ellingsen, 2003). Herbert, who has worked on oral histories of the massacre, is reported as saying that over a

hundred people were killed, and Dale-Hallet that it was up to a hundred killed. Bill Wilson and



Justin O'Brien quote Aboriginal bushman Walter Smith saying that more than 200 were killed, and lay missionary Annie Lock reported seventy (Wilson & O'Brien, 2003, p. 75). Even the chief proponent of the "three cheers" view of Australian history, Keith Windshuttle, accepts that at least 52 Aboriginal people were slaughtered at Coniston (Ellingsen, 2003).

Historians dispute the claim that only 31 people were killed, and calculate that at least 60, and as many as 110 Aboriginal men, women and children were killed. The Walpiri, Anmatyerre, and Kaytetye peoples believe that hundreds died, with upwards of 170 people killed only between 14 August and 18 October 1928 (Cribbin, 1984). For we Aboriginal people, it is disturbing that the courts

officially sanctioned the murder of innocent Aboriginal men, women, children and babies: the babies dispatched with the blunt side of a tomahawk (Ellingsen, 2003).

These massacres were done with a purpose: to terrorise Aboriginal people off their land. Despite the long-held view that Aboriginal people lived in lean-tos the evidence now suggests they lived in well-constructed houses. Once the occupants had been removed, most of these homes were used to build the squatters' homes (Pascoe, 2007, p. 45). Pascoe describes in *Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with your Country* that identical tactics were used by colonists in America against the Indians. Aboriginal people feared for their lives and those of their families and, ultimately, they were convinced by the ongoing massacres that these people were here to stay, and that they were prepared to use any tactics to achieve that end. They were reluctant to show any form of resistance, knowing that doing so could result in death. They knew they were expendable; their lives did not count; they were merely in the way. To settle any doubts as to whether the Frontier Wars were a fact in Australia's violent history, one need only read an example from the *Launceston Advertiser* of 1831 by a person calling themselves the 'Correspondent', signing himself "J.E.", which is cited in an "Inside Story" excerpt of Henry Reynolds' *Forgotten War*. The 'Correspondent' wrote:

We are at war with them: they look upon us enemies – as invaders – as their oppressors and persecutors – they resist our invasion. They have never been subdued; therefore, they are not rebellious subjects, but an injured nation, defending in their own way, their rightful possessions, which have been torn from them by force. (in Reynolds, 2013a)

More recently, Henry Reynolds makes a salient point when he says: “If there was no war, then thousands of Aborigines were murdered in a century-long, continent-wide crime wave tolerated by the government” (in Clark, 2018).



The debate over the number of Indigenous people killed in colonial violence is a matter still argued, with some claiming figures as low as 20,000 and some (e.g. Henry Reynolds) claiming figures as high as 30,000 Aboriginals and up to 5,000 Europeans killed. These figures, while horrific, pale into insignificance when compared to research conducted by University of Queensland researchers Robert Ørsted-Jensen and Raymond Evans (2014), who calculate that in Queensland alone the death toll may have exceeded 60,000 Indigenous people.

As a consequence of the Frontier Wars, Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from the country, with most resettled on reserves, on land specifically set aside for Aboriginal people. These were not managed by the governments or

officials, and they became what Professor Germaine Greer described as “concentration camps”. She reflects, “They have been jerked from pillar to post ... they’ve ended up in one concentration camp after another” (in news.com.au, 2009).

As noted earlier, many of these reserves were Aboriginal missions, instituted across Australia, and one possible reason for the breakdown of Aboriginal culture may be attributable to the Christianisation by the missionaries. Aboriginal people were schooled in Christian values and warned to forget their own languages and culture, this in preparation for menial types of work for their white masters.

By the late 1800s, Aboriginal children were being stolen away from their mothers and family under systematic removal practices implemented across the states. For example, the Victorian Aborigines Protection Act 1869 gave unfettered power to the Protection Board to make laws for the care and custody and education of Aboriginal children (Boucher, 2015). These laws also allowed for the removal of children who were neglected by their parents to missions, industrial reform schools or stations.

Colonisation has had many negative consequences. One of the most profound has been the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Most Aboriginal families have experienced the removal of children or displacement of entire families into missions, reserves or other institutions. (Dudgeon & Hervonen, 2014).

Looking to the future

Today, many of us without language and culture know only that we are Aboriginal. For me, that is enough: it is a political statement that we continue to exist as a people. My Kamilaroi culture remains; I continue to learn and teach others. But what it means to be Aboriginal is, for many people, unclear. I noted in Chapter One that I worked on the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court. I regularly asked Aboriginal people about their Aboriginality: how they were Aboriginal; how they would describe anything that they did that was Aboriginal. Most could not respond, and what this taught me was that the majority of Aboriginal offenders appearing before the courts have had their culture denied to them. Given this, eventually, I no longer asked these questions, as it had become an embarrassment for all concerned.

The current research suggests that social media may fill this gap in knowledge, for many Aboriginal people, and that as a virtual tribe, more educated Aboriginals online can mentor the more newly identified; interviewee “Quebec” suggests this, in the following exchange:

WA: Bronwyn Carlson posed this question, “Can you become Aboriginal online?” You know about that?

Quebec: No, I haven’t heard it.

WA: This is important to me because I'm seeing a lot of people who have, or have had, no Aboriginal culture who are learning to be Aboriginal online. Now they're calling this becoming Aboriginal online. You know what I mean? A lot of people are anomic they've been removed from country, so they know very little about their culture. But it's like a community online and people are learning how to be. For some people, it's their way of being. You know what I mean? I don't have a problem with it. I don't know what you think, but I'd like to test it.

Quebec: There are people who have come to their Aboriginality later, or who have always known they're Aboriginal but have never really experienced Aboriginal culture as an Aboriginal person. I'm of the belief that if you are 30 and then you get to know your culture, you go back to being zero. It's your birthright to know what it means to be Aboriginal, but you've got to be really careful how you portray yourself and how you actually express your identity. Because if someone's now 35, and they identified at 30, they're really only five years old in terms of development of their culture. Would we trust a five-year-old with anything? I really do think that we as a community need to learn how to manage those people and also bring them in and explain to them how to be careful. Because it's really dangerous. You're setting that person up to fail, if you continue to support that person in a way that actually assumes that they know everything that those of us do who have known since birth.

WA: That's where, like I said to you before, cultural gatekeepers come in. A lot of them will just rule that person out of order because they don't present proper.

Quebec: Yeah, I have had some young ones who have come to their Aboriginality later, and they need gentle advice on how to present, actually because a lot of them get burned. The other issue that I have is what we get with governments or universities who, if someone identifies as Aboriginal later in life, they actually don't know how to engage appropriately. They don't understand a whole range of things that they would know if they were experienced ... one of the things that I like when you go for interview panels is if you've got Aboriginal people on the interview panel, and they start asking questions about your engagement in community. That subtle weeding out. Those kind of questions like, *Who's your mob? Where are you from? You're not sure who your mob is? Fair enough.*

I think that that it's a birthright to know and understand; it is really challenging for people who are Aboriginal but have come to their identity later. I think it's like going through your teenage years, when you're really awkward, and you don't really get shit. You hope that if they've got support and guidance that they will actually make good decision.

But today, globally, traditional Aboriginal culture is at risk of extinction. As "Charlie" says:

When you boil it all down and when you look at the structural problems, then you can only see that this is an assimilationist or a continuation of *assimilate or we'll kill you off*. No one gives a fuck that people might be hurting themselves. No one gives a fuck that people are still dying at ... I said to someone at work the other day, "I should be able to access my super at the age of 55, because I'm going to die 10 to 20 years before you".

A hybrid culture is replacing the traditional culture, and Aboriginal people around the world are rightly concerned about this. Some in remote locations – mostly the young – are rapidly being enculturated into whiteness, as were the original Aboriginal diaspora. The knowledge of medicines, customs and traditional lore died out in urban Australia long ago. That knowledge is still available in remote locations but will likely be lost if measures are not taken. But traditional knowledge, that which ought to be maintained, is being replaced either by a mainstreaming of the Aboriginal community, or by a laterally violent "fundamentalism" which has evolved to replace cultural tradition. This fundamentalism is a concoction, a hybridity made up of the many Aboriginal nations of people that occupied this country. It is not Aboriginal; it is the result of colonialism and the result of denying language and culture that is reactionist fundamentalism. As Verna St. Denis says:

Ironically, cultural revitalization can be seen to unwittingly encourage a form of cultural fundamentalism that leads to an informal but nonetheless daunting cultural hierarchy, that encourages notions of authenticity among Aboriginal people. (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1069)

There is evidence of this happening in Australia, particularly when it comes to the issue of sharing scarce resources, and it can be witnessed on social media, as I will discuss in the next chapter. But there is also evidence of rebuilding culture in, and for, the twenty-first century community:

Tango: I think for some Aboriginal people, their sense of identity has been eroded. Whether that be from government intervention or not, it has slowly been chipped away at, and some people are trying to claw back at what little they have and encourage it to grow. This is not a bad thing. I was talking to an older, respected Aboriginal woman a while back who said we have to get over this legitimacy argument, as in fifty years or so the colour and pigmentation of our skin may be gone, so in the end it doesn't matter. Black is black, and it's on the inside. And if you need to go online to find that because a number of issues prevent you from doing it in the wider community, then so be it.

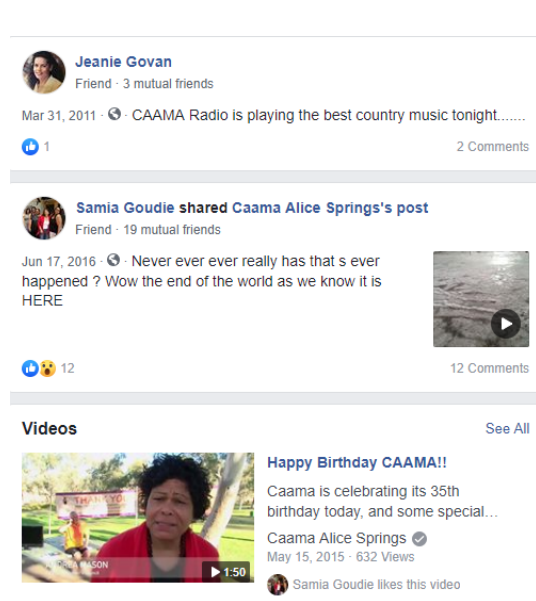
Chapter 5: Cultural Identity, Gatekeeping and Social Action

Introduction

In this chapter I begin with a discussion of the impact of mass media's representations of Aboriginal Australians, and its role in generating discourses of deficit. I then highlight the role of social media, and particularly Facebook, in countering those representations, and filling the void of the traditional community: becoming the "virtual tribe" for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. As well as providing such a home, it also offers a place where people can learn about Aboriginal issues, learn about being Aboriginal, and test whether they are accepted as Aboriginal. Here people can share community thinking on current issues, and can discuss and debate every conceivable subject. In this way it provides Indigenous Australians the opportunity to claim a voice, and use it to represent themselves. While much of this is positive, there are problems associated with the virtual tribe, including the impact of lateral violence, the uncertainty about who can identify and speak for Aboriginal Australians, and the role of online gatekeepers in controlling the discourse.

Mainstream media and public representation

Long before the introduction of the Internet, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in Australia were aware of the importance of using the media. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media



Association (CAAMA), which came into being in 1980, allowed traditional Aboriginal people to hear their own voices transmitted across the airwaves. Because of this, CAAMA provided much more than news information and music to the Central Desert communities. It also gave them hope and inspiration, because prior to it being established, most representations came through the mouths and pens of white people: priests, police and government officials, speaking for and about Aboriginal people. The introduction of CAAMA broadcasts helped Aboriginal people change the

paradigm: building and constructing their own identities and shaping their communities. This was the beginning of a public Aboriginal voice.

Yet, as powerful as CAAMA was, because it was broadcast via a local network it only reached outback communities. Other media networks soon went national, leading to information about Australia's Aboriginal people spreading across the country and presenting representations that were both biased and unchallenged. The effect was to diminish the voice of Aboriginal people in the media, so that prior to the Internet, Indigenous Australians had little voice in the public sphere. They were represented only through official knowledge via government sources such as the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, or the Australian Bureau of Statistics, through policy implementation, and via mass media reports.

Government and media reporting on Indigenous people has therefore been, for most Australians, the only way in which Indigenous people are 'known'; and this means that to be Aboriginal has meant to be vulnerable to the epistemic violence of "white" modes of knowledge. The information contained in official representations of and about Indigenous people has rarely been challenged, which has left the general public with negative views on and opinions of Indigenous peoples.

This has been the case from the beginning of invasion, colonisation and settlement. Fogarty et al (2018, p. 2) write:


Historically, colonial ideology based in the race paradigm adhered to constructed "truths" about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that were underpinned by notions of deficiency, and had very little to do with how they saw themselves,

and this continues in much the same form today. We are continually ignored by government and media institutions that could effect change. For example, Fforde et al (2013, p. 165) describe the Northern Territory Emergency Response ("the Intervention") and the "Closing the Gap" programs as two government policies that were implemented for the explicit reason of improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians, but were based extensively on stories of community deficit and the 'need to protect the children'. A recent study by Bonita Mason, Chris Thomson, Dawn Bennett and Michelle Johnston (2018) exposes the symbolic violence perpetrated within the field of journalism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait people. It shows how those higher up the chain of command intervened in the production of positive stories about the West Australian Noongar Aboriginal people and how, after the editors had done their work, the stories that were published reflected badly on both the journalists and the Noongar


people. Other studies too show conclusively that Australia’s mainstream media does not portray Indigenous people in a positive light, but only add to the discourses of deficit (see e.g. McCallum & Waller, 2017b).

“Discourse of deficit” is the term given to the use of language, ways of speaking, and construction of narratives that position individuals or groups as lacking certain capacities and therefore also lacking certain freedoms, rights and opportunities. This is often based on the


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cultural, ethnic, religious and other background features of individuals, with researchers observing discourse deficit being applied to vulnerable social groups, children, people living with health conditions or disabilities, the elderly, and especially people of colour, and Indigenous peoples. of that individual or group (see Candlin & Crichton, 2011). Pierre Bourdieu explains this in his analyses of the social field, which show that the success of an individual’s life trajectory is bound up in the amount of capital (of various forms – social, economic, educational, symbolic, cultural) they possess (Bourdieu, 1986). This is very evident when considering Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, who continue to be negatively reflected with relation to health, education, and social

standing: discourses of deficit remain embedded, perpetual and ongoing, with racism inevitably also ongoing and ever-present.

The media is responsible for major aspects of this deficit reportage, and as opinion leaders have shaped the default discourses about Aboriginality (Fogarty et al., 2018). It may be argued that this also generates much of the internalised racism experienced by Indigenous Australians, as it is through this the news media that most Australians collect their daily news. Although trust in the mass media is overall quite low, people have higher levels of trust in the news sources they regularly use (Newman, Levy & Nielsen, 2015, pp. 57–58), which means they are likely to believe most of what they read, and this can affect their sense of their own value and that of their fellow Aboriginals. Sociologist Karen Pyke advanced the argument that racism becomes “internalized due to racial oppression” (Pyke, 2010, p. 551–72), and Rita Kohli, R.N. Johnson

and L.H. Perez described internalised racism as a “conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above People of Color” (Kohli et al., 2006, p. 183). This may manifest in other ways; for example, believing the negative racial stereotypes, and believing that white cultural standards are better than their own (Campon & Carter, 2015). An example of this sort of behaviour was described during one of my research conversations:

Quebec: I was down at a conference and I spoke about social media and health; it was at a women’s forum, so it was mainstream, but they got me and a couple of other Aboriginal people. The woman speaking after me said, “I don’t agree with the last speaker”. Whatever, fine ... Then she went on to tell us that ... she came to her Aboriginality late.

She kept using words like “grassroots”, but in that really condescending way that makes the assumption that those of us who have an education or have money -- when I talk about money, I’m flush but I’m not broke – aren’t really Aboriginal.

She’s an Aboriginal woman who’s identifying, who’s actually talking about Aboriginal people, but you’re only Aboriginal if you fit all the negative stereotypes and the disadvantages. I ended up speaking to her later, and she said to me, “How do you know if you’re speaking to the community online?” I’m like, “What do you mean by *community*?” And she said, “You know, *community*”. I’m like, “Do you mean grassroots? Like those poor blackfellas that you were referring to up there? Because we know”, I said, “we know when someone’s read about how to be Aboriginal in a book. Trust me, we know.” I had to ring a friend of mine who works at the university she was at, and said, “Tell her to pull her head in because she’s making us blackfellas look bad, because if she does it then it’s okay for non-Aboriginal people to talk about us in deficit.”

Deficit discourse and internalised racism are serious problems for many reasons: it manifests in poor health outcomes (see Mouzon & McLean, 2016; Bryant, 2011; Poupart, 2003), and it is destructive within communities, leading to Aboriginal people engaging in acts of lateral violence. As Frankland and Lewis discussed in a 2011 presentation to staff of the Social Justice unit at the Australian Human Rights Commission, Frankland and Lewis, lateral violence is part of the bedevilling problem of internalised racism in Aboriginal communities:

This year I am addressing the relationships within our own communities in my Social Justice and Native Title Reports.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face many challenges and sadly some of the divisive and damaging harms come from within our own communities. Ask any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and they will tell you stories of the backstabbing, bullying and even physical violence perpetrated by community members against each other. When we already have so many of the odds stacked against us, it is tragic to see us inflict such destruction on ourselves.

This was extended in the 2011 Native Title Report, which has an entire chapter on lateral violence in native title (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2011).

Lateral violence is generally caused by powerful forces oppressing certain groups, and the oppressed then feeling powerless to fight back against those forces. While lateral violence may take the form of hitting back at society (which is a possible cause for the high crime and incarceration rates in Aboriginal Australia), unfortunately it usually presents in displays of anger against other Aboriginal people, or in suicide. In her autobiography, American political activist *Angela Davis* describes her own experience of lateral violence as an African American child in Birmingham, Alabama:

The children fought over nothing – over being bumped, over having toes stepped on, over being called a name, over being the target of real or imagined gossip. They fought over everything – split shoes, and cement yards, thin coats and meal-less days. They fought the meanness of Birmingham while they sliced the air with knives and punched black faces because they could not reach white ones. (Davis, 1974, p. 94)

And for “Lima”, moving away from her community was the start of her experience of such abuse:

I copped a lot of lateral violence when I first moved here, for my skin colour. It started in Bundaberg. When I was growing up, I had no idea what my skin colour looked like. And then it was the shock of my life when I moved to Bundaberg, and people started treating me different, both black and white fellas.

For Aboriginal Australians, the “oppressor” is usually a powerful state instrumentality such as the police, or another government organisation like the Departments of Housing, Education, Health, or – one that is most difficult for Indigenous people to engage with – the Department

of Social Services. It can also be an Aboriginal organisation tasked with providing much-needed services, like an Aboriginal Land Council. When, as is often the case, these organisations are underfunded, this creates distrust in those dispensing the services or commodities. It can also happen that the Aboriginal members of these organisations take on the values, beliefs and tactics of the oppressor, and imitate their power displays. For some Aboriginal people, it seems that (for example) the Aboriginal Land Council becomes all-powerful, determining who will receive services and who will not, and later in this chapter I extend this discussion.

The question of who counts as Aboriginal is also an ongoing feature in both general and internalised racism and lateral violence. Anita Heiss wrote about this in the opening to her book, *Am I Black Enough For You?* (2012), saying “I’m Aboriginal. I’m just not the Aboriginal person a lot of people want or expect me to be”. The abstract for her book reads:

After years of stereotyping Aboriginal Australians as either settlement dwellers or rioters in Redfern, the Australian media have discovered a new crime to charge them with: being too “fair-skinned” to be an Australian Aboriginal. (in Heiss, 2012)

All Together Now
September 28, 2011 at 11:55am · 🌐

...the nine courageous **Aboriginal** people who won this important racial discrimination case (and here's what the law says...

Andrew Bolt loses racial vilification case
www.theaustralian.com.au

15 · 4 Comments 1 Share

Stephen Fulford shared a post
February 15 at 5:46pm · West Kempsey, NSW · 🌐

...Not only were they a stolen generation but they **lost** THEIR country as well. Want to start a class action any body????????? who's ancestors were brought here by force?????

Dallas Beaufort's Post
'Stolen Generations' victim culture comes at a cost **Andrew Bolt**, Herald Sun...

4

Stand Up For Australia- Melbourne
February 18, 2017 at 7:23am · 🌐

God Bless you **Andrew Bolt**, expose the LIAR BILL Shorten on Tuesday gave a deceitful speech that will hurt **Aboriginal** children. The Labor leader... See More

Shorten's poison threatens us all
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Australian Welfare News
March 5, 2017 at 8:30pm · 🌐

...conciliated by the Australian Human Rights Commission. The **Andrew Bolt**, Bill Leak, and QUT cases may have dominated the news cycle... See More

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www.huffingtonpost.com.au

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Part of the background to the book is a court case involving *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt. In 2009 he targeted Heiss in a racist attack he mounted on a blog post titled “White is the new black” (Bolt, 2009). He named her, along with fourteen others: authors Tara June Winch and Kim Scott; academics Larissa Behrendt, Mark Rose, Mick Dodson and Wayne Atkinson; activists and politicians Pat Eatock, Lianne Enoch and Michael Mansell; commissioners Geoff Clark, Lowtija O’Donohue and Graham Atkinson; and media identities Daniel Browning and Casey Donovan. All are relatively fair; all are Aboriginal people who chose – as is their right – to identify as Aboriginal.

Bolt accused them all of being “not really Aboriginal”, and identifying only for personal gain, pursuing a long-held belief by some Australians that

the “real Aborigines” only live in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, are dark in colour, wear few clothes and have initiation marks on their bodies. Andrew Bolt was successfully sued in the Federal Court, which found that Bolt had breached the Racial Discrimination Act, awarded damages against Bolt and called on the *Herald Sun* to print an apology. But despite the court’s decision, many people felt that real damage had been done to all Indigenous people, not just those named in Bolt’s article and in the court action, as it further polarised opinions in Australia and raised the level of racism toward Aboriginal people under the pretext of an attack on free speech. The Bolt matter became something of a political watershed for Aboriginal people. Bolt had attempted to take Australia back to the past, where Australians had experimented with eugenics in the attempt to “breed out” the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were having none of it, and organised and protested on social media. They found that social media helped them, as never before, to organise against this type of racism.

While both internalised racism and lateral violence are present on social media, the ability to speak back in a relatively safe space, to find ways to refuse the colonising social norms, might explain why Indigenous Australians are such prolific users of Facebook. “Quebec” says:

For me, it’s about Aboriginal voices. It’s that connection. It’s that understanding. There’s so many things. In terms of understanding, there’s implied knowledge, implicit knowledge, so I don’t have to explain basic shit to people, because they get it, so we can have genuine, robust, deep conversations rather than superficial level of education. But also, for me, it is the level of connection and also the safety, to some degree. The safe places. Because you put yourself out there in social media, and ... sometimes does weigh you down ... Sometimes our own mob does it to us too, which is hard, but at least in Aboriginal learning sites you know you’re safer.

“Charlie” similarly finds that such sites offer:

a sense of community. Like, it’s a safe space. You don’t have to deal with some fuckwit using the word Aborigines, or not without a hilarious joke behind it. You don’t have to educate people. I think on Aboriginal sites, as with Aboriginal communities, there can be some tensions and different opinions in that community too, but fundamentally, you don’t have to educate people around genocide or policies.

Many Aboriginal people take advantage of that robust, but safer space, and go online to learn of Aboriginal culture, or to make contributions to that learning, detailing the history of

colonisation and communication through posts and memes. Aboriginal people have been using Facebook and forms of social media to educate themselves about Australia's colonial history, learn more about their own history, to trace lost families, and become activists for change. "India" responded to my question by saying:

For me it was education. I joined a Facebook group specifically for the Wiradjuri people of New South Wales, so we can discuss culture, discuss our totems, discuss Aboriginal stuff that's restricted. You don't have to prove that you're Wiradjuri to join it, but it's mainly Wiradjuri people discussing culture and how we identify.

"Bravo" also reports using Facebook for conversation with likeminded people:

I mostly use it just to discuss; like talk with other people. We can create Facebook chat rooms, so we get the messages across. I mostly have been using it doing this career trackers internship [which is an Indigenous-run internship program]. So we'll communicate, a lot of us interns, through a group chat room on Facebook. I'm actually not a member, or really aware of any Aboriginal websites per se. But as an Indigenous user, the majority of my peers and people I talk to are other Indigenous users.

"Mike" insisted she only uses Facebook to talk to family, but as the conversation unfolded it became clear that she talks to her family about political matters, and she also posts more generally about the work she is doing on wellbeing. I responded: "Now you're starting to see you are an activist", and got the response: "I am. I am an activist. I'm an activist for good health".

Like other interviewees, "Sierra" begins by describing social media as connecting with family, and talking with others: "It's connecting with more mob, especially with my family being everywhere in Australia". But as the discussion unfolds, it becomes clear that she also uses it, extensively, for political activism; she discloses that she is a coordinator for an Australia-wide organisation involved in climate change activism and political campaigning, and that Facebook is a space for connection with others in the organisation.

So, for many Aboriginal people, social media is the new academy where trained people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, find each other, build community, and discuss different views of Australia's history. This is community, insists "Whiskey": "Communities are made up of people who interact. I do think that an online community can be as much of a community as a community not online". And, having taken the opportunity to have a political voice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have become vociferous: they are finding their own voice,

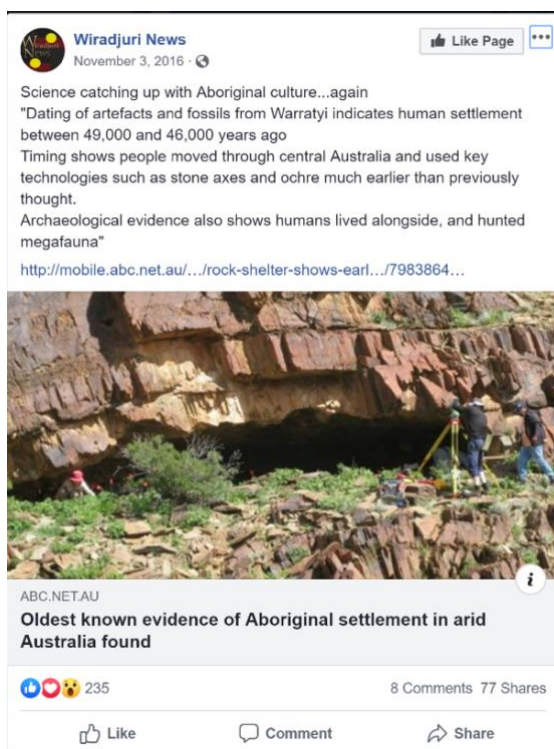
and are trying to establish Aboriginal people's place in an Australian history from which they have largely been excluded.

A learning place

In the previous chapter I touched on the history of invasion and colonisation, the massacres, and the removal of people from country and community. The official story of settlement mostly excludes these realities, with terra nullius still being employed to deny or render invisible the actual circumstances of the invasion, and the resistance put up by Aboriginal people from two centuries ago and more. Now contemporary Aboriginal people are using social media to learn about the invasion, and about how we continue to survive. They are learning about Aboriginal resistance fighters like Pemulwuy, Mosquito, Windradyne, Yagan, Jandamarra, or Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner. All of them were branded 'criminals' by the colonialist invader, but in fact they were freedom fighters, fighting for their country. In several states, there has been public recognition of the fact that Aboriginal people fought and died for their country. In Victoria, artists Brook Andrew and Trent Walter erected a memorial to Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner (ACCA, n.d.); and the Yagan Memorial Park in Swan Valley, Western Australia honours that warrior (Monuments Australia, 2019). In 2005 Badtjala artist Fiona Foley installed "Witnessing to Silence", a memorial to ninety-four massacre sites in Queensland, in front of the Brisbane magistrates court (Helmrich, 2010, pp. 16–17); in 2008 the Myall Creek Memorial was installed on the site of that massacre (Department of Environment & Energy, 2019); and in Buderim, Queensland, there is now a Frontier Wars installation in the Memorial Garden, honouring lawman and resistance leader Dundalli and all who died resisting, between 1788–1940s (Australian Frontier Conflicts, 2019). Fiona Foley (2018) lists a number of memorials, in the form of artworks as well as community installations, made by Aboriginal people to remember this history. That list includes many of her own exhibitions and installations, as well as other people's, such as Djon Mundine's 1987 *The Aboriginal Memorial*, 200 hollow log coffins located at the entry to the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), which 'commemorates all the indigenous people who, since 1788, have lost their lives defending their land' (NGA, 2019).

Aboriginal people were very aware of this history: long before the development of memorials and the historical revision that is now occurring, they contested much of the official record of Australian history. Activist and academic Gary Foley early on saw the value of social media, and built The Koori History Website to provide information to Aboriginals desirous of learning

their culture and about Aboriginal history, archiving documents containing important Aboriginal knowledge, and providing resources for political engagement; and others followed. Now online authors are giving voice to a different colonial past, contest the Three Cheers view of Australia's past, and pointing instead to a genocidal history made evident in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report. They find, and read, books like *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788* by Bruce Elder (1988);⁵³ *Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country* (2007) and *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (2018) by Bruce Pascoe;⁵⁴ the *Forgotten War* by Henry Reynolds (2013b);⁵⁵ as well as many others.



News of archaeological findings are also widely circulated on Facebook and other social media sites. Recent discoveries of more than 10,000 artefacts include 1,500 stone tools at Madjedbebe, Mirrarr Country in Northern Arnhem land (Clarkson et al., 2017). These stone tools reveal elaborate technology, and show that Aboriginal people in Australia were collecting and processing plant foods at least 65,000 years ago, and this is the earliest evidence of seed grinding and pigment processing, and the use of edge-ground hatchet in the world.

These artefacts range in age between 46,000 and 49,000 years, and this pushes back the dates of the development of technology such as bone needles (38,000–40,000 years), wooden-handled stone tools (24,000 years) and the use of gypsum (33,000–40,000 years). There is also evidence from these sites that Aboriginal people were living alongside megafauna around 45,000–50,000 years ago, with the discovery of *Dripotodon* bones, and eggs from a giant bird, in the Warraty Rock Shelter (Australian Museum, 2019).

⁵³ This book compiles the record of the massacres of Aboriginal people that are discussed in other publications, showing the scale of the massacres.

⁵⁴ Both Pascoe's books address the silences in Australian history and culture, *Convincing Ground* looking at the formation of Australian identity, and *Dark Emu* rejecting the story of Aboriginals as being all hunter-gatherers, and providing evidence of the extent of agriculture and organised production pre-colonisation.

⁵⁵ *Forgotten War* offers a new history of the 'settlement' of this continent, providing evidence-based accounts of the wars fought from 1788 on.

Another important discovery was Lady Mungo in 1968 and Mungo Man in 1974 by archaeologist Jim Bowler which revolutionised our understanding of the antiquity of Aboriginal civilisation in Australia (see Bowler & Thorne, 1976). Mungo Man was dated at 40,000 years; Mungo Lady was initially dated at 26,000 years but that was extended to 42,000 years after further testing.

There are many other sites of antiquity that range back, from many thousands of years to a mere 400 years pre-European invasion. These discoveries are important to Aboriginal people and are widely shared online.

The screenshot shows a Facebook feed with the following posts:

- Out of Africa** (Movie): 238K likes. The Official Universal Studios Entertainment Facebook Page.
- Public Posts** section:
- The Vintage News** (May 23 at 7:11am): "The 'Recent [Out of Africa](#) Theory' remains at the core of most consensus models tackling human origins and migrations, but in the background, a series..."
- HISTORY** (September 24, 2016 at 5:08am): "Researchers conducting the first-ever genomic study of indigenous Australians have found evidence of a single 'out of Africa' migration for modern..."
- Yahoo! مكتوب** (July 20, 2017 at 11:31pm): "The discovery suggests **Aboriginal** people have been in Australia for 65,000 years."

The screenshot shows a Facebook post by **Graham Mumbulla-Binnalong** in the **Aboriginal Australian Family Genealogy** group, dated April 24, Sydney, NSW.

Reasons why I have created this Aboriginal Australian Genealogy Group that I was Kicked out of the Aboriginal Genealogy NSW group because I have posted up an Aboriginal Australian family branches originated from African family roots and that is the facts.

There are a minority group of Aboriginal Australian people that do not like Black African origins nor they do not like the black brothers and sisters from Africa because they cannot admits of the hurtful truth that Aboriginal family trees originated from the African family roots.

This group is about Aboriginal members to research their family history in Australia and worldwide include human history. I will be a firm administrator of this group and Aboriginal members must respect each other and no arguments please. This is about the truth that Aboriginal members wanting to research their family trees, that has been lost due to the British oppression in the past, and willing to learn to go back to 80,000-65,000 years when Ancestors arrived in Australia and Papua from Africa.

I hope we are together to learn about our Aboriginal Australian history rather than learning from some group that do not want to learn about the truth.

Lets begin and thank you.

The post has 3 likes and 1 comment.

Below the post, there is a shared post from **NSW Genealogy** (August 17, 2016): "If you have Aboriginal ancestry, or even if you suspect that you do, here is where you need to go."

At the bottom, there is a link to **AIATSIS Collections** (August 15, 2016): "It's Family History Month. We can help you to research your Indigenous family history. Our collections have information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, communities and places. Our Family History Unit can help you to find information in other collections across Australia." with the URL <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/finding-your-family>.

Not all the discussions about history are evidence-based. For example, there are Aboriginal Australians who debate the Out of Africa theory, believing instead that we have always been here on the continent of Australia, while others strongly dispute this, focusing instead on the

fact that Aboriginals have been living here for at least 65,000 years, and are part of an ancient culture (Dorey, 2019).

Nor are all the online engagements without contestation. One important area of dispute is the act of placing photos of the deceased on Facebook, or the practice on Facebook of ‘memorialising’ accounts of deceased persons, which means that photos of the deceased remain publicly visible on the site. This can cause great angst for tribal people from more remote locations, causing genuine concerns around cultural mores, and distressing some Aboriginal families, particularly families of the deceased. But there are Aboriginal people – such as the members of one remote South Australian community – who suggest that Facebook “Sorry Pages” could be an alternate way for a friend or family member to send their condolences (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). The advent of social media technology has been a blessing for some, and a cultural horror for others. As Quebec says:

I’m glad that I did not grow up with social media as a teen. But at the same time, for Aboriginal people, we’re using it as a way of promoting our views where mainstream media has excluded us or only included media darlings.

People say it’s an echo chamber, but I really do think that for those that know nothing about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture, it really does show them a whole range of different voices. For me, that’s actually really important because Aboriginal people are heterogeneous, like any other group.

You don’t have a bunch of white fellas all agreeing, you’re not going to have a bunch of blackfellas ... I actually think that the disagreements, as long as they’re not personal, are really important for people to see because there’s not a one black view on anything. It’s shades of gray. I think that it’s changing us, but it’s also changing society.

Cultural gatekeeping

While Facebook has provided very positive opportunities for community building, many postings speak to the tensions in Aboriginal communities. One of the serious sites of tension is about who is allowed to speak, and what they are allowed to say:

Papa: I was on one site and I was talking about some pretty radical stuff around education. When I started on that, they started saying, ‘oh you’re a f**king weirdo’, you know, and shut me out. Whoever was running that site, the

moderator, click, cut out man. I couldn't access it no more. Because my ideas were, what, radically mad, or radically bad? They're quite sad those people who say that I can't access Aboriginal sites because I'm no longer Aboriginal, because they didn't like about what I was saying.

WA: Everything seems to be guarded, doesn't it?

Papa: Well it's all controlled Wayne, isn't it? You know, like it's controlled through who says you can speak, and through protocols; protocols are made up every day and yet somehow they've got those Aboriginal protocols stuck somewhere back in the past. And Aboriginal people are buying into it too, without even thinking about it.

"Karlie" too expressed concerns about this, but noted that some protocols need to be followed – including protocols about who is permitted to speak, in various situations:

WA: Gatekeepers are people who're the ones who will tell you, no that's not Aboriginal, this is Aboriginal and that's not. There's a problem in that because there's about 400 different groups, so what might be right for you won't be right for someone else. Gatekeepers online are often the ones who are dictating what's correct for Aboriginal people. Do you see that as an issue?

Karlie: I do. I don't believe in [gatekeepers making blanket rules], because only a person from the area that they're talking about can comment on it. They should; and anyone else should not. That would be like someone coming into my community and having a say about what's happening there. My black sister-in-law once commented on our land claim, and my brother just said, you *have no right to say anything in this*, you know.

Another concern is about who can be recognised as Aboriginal, and who is excluded. There are, on some Facebook sites and in everyday life, Aboriginal people who claim the right to say that certain people are not Aboriginal, even though they meet all the classificatory requirement of the identification test. I refer to this as "gatekeeping" – or, more specifically in Aboriginal communities, "cultural gatekeeping". This covers many facets, including cyberbullying, racism, and anything the gatekeeper considers does not fit in the context of Aboriginal culture. "Tango" responds:

Who gets to determine Aboriginality is a huge concern and probably always will be. I believe that if you derive some validation from being in an online Aboriginal

community then it can only be a good thing. Whether you are considered Aboriginal outside of that community is determined by the values you share and the investment you give to that community.

Essentially it is a catch-all to empower the gatekeeper over the person who is being questioned, and it is often a type of essentialism, promoted to insist how Aboriginal people should speak and behave and how they should look: much like Andrew Bolt's attacks on "not real Aborigines" discussed above.

It is the cause of a sense of betrayal for those people excluded, particularly when their apparent lack of connection is the result of them having been removed from their families under the "Stolen Generations" practices. It is in fact lateral violence – from Aboriginal people, toward other Aboriginal people, and it often occurs on social media, and is often resisted by other users of those sites. "Victor" is someone who resists social media gatekeepers when they make essentialising judgments about what it means to be Aboriginal:

WA: There's many that think that because they have suffered, they are the only real Aboriginals. We have groups that set themselves up as gatekeepers saying, "You're Aboriginal. You are not." What I say to them is, "Well, who are you?"

Victor: Yeah. That's right. [laughs] I totally would say exactly the same thing. Like I said before, it's a personal journey; nobody has the right to question who you are. If a person wants to know who they are and has an interest in learning about that ... It's like me wanting to learn about my German heritage. Somebody might say, "Well ...": they wouldn't think I'm German by looking at me. [Note: Victor presents as a dark-skinned Torres Strait Islander]

Although there is lateral violence on Facebook, there is also resistance to abuse, with many users fighting back. "Romeo" discusses such an incident, where Jessica Mauboy, an Aboriginal woman who has found international success as a singer and actor, was being attacked in a Facebook conversation:

I'll tell you what happened. I was on this website. Jessica Mauboy was going to sing the national anthem and (name deleted) said, "Well, I'm not going to even stand up for it." There was this political discussion online about that. One woman, trying to be Aboriginal, started with gutter talk: "I'm going to flog you. She's just disgusting" – that sort of talk about Jessica, without even knowing her. A lot of Aboriginal people are very disgusted with her. I just wrote on there and said, "You know what, Jessica

Mauboy is a really gracious young lady. When she comes back to Darwin, she goes and sees her mum. She says hello to people. That's her community. When you're disgracing her in this forum, you're disgracing yourself by how you represent Aboriginal people being this something. I don't want to be involved in your forum. I'm going". I got rid of them, but I told them what I thought – "You just disgust me". It does give me power in some ways. ... How dare they write such disparaging comments like that? Who are they? These people, "gammon" black,⁵⁶ the angry activist black that hates every black body.

So, when gatekeepers start abusing or chastising someone – in this example, Jessica Mauboy – other people on the site will take sides; some will come to the aid of those under attack, but others will add to the attack, presumably as a way of supporting the gatekeeper. Note that Romeo described the woman who started the debate as "*trying to be Aboriginal ...*" This is a common experience online: it seems that people who are not Aboriginal, or who are learning to become Aboriginal, are often ones being aggressive, presumably because they think this is an Aboriginal trait.

The history of the invasion and colonisation of Australia, the removal of people from country, and the stealing of children from their families means that there are many people now who cannot easily confirm if they have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. While media – radio, television, and journalism – have been important factors in the ongoing struggle for identity, the Internet has thrown up some never-before-seen possibilities, as well as raising new problems and tensions. One issue is that the many explorations into social media have led to people who have never been part of a community being able to construct Aboriginal identities. Another issue is the question of who has the right to speak – is it only the traditional owners, or can any Aboriginal person speak in another's country when using social media? And alongside that is the question: who is speaking? – because avatars can be used to conceal the identity of the speaker.⁵⁷ This can be to avoid lateral violence. "Zulu" says:

I do have an avatar. I like using avatars because it removes some of the initial judgments people may have, because people look at you and they go "You're too black", or "You're too white", "You're too short," or "You're too fat" ... I just think it's a way of

⁵⁶ gammon or gammin in Aboriginal colloquial language means illogical or silly.

⁵⁷ Often photos and avatars are used to give the impression that the person posting is Aboriginal, when they may not be. Some situations use the Aboriginal flag as an avatar. Others have their page festooned with Aboriginal regalia, suggesting that the page owner is at the very least supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people or is in fact of one or both ethnicities.

people expressing themselves in a different way, particularly with the fact that this is a virtual world, and we are members of the virtual tribe.

“Charlie” too discussed the importance of preserving her identity:

Charlie: Before my current image that I use on Facebook, my avatar was only of this part against the wall. That was a deliberate use, because I didn’t want people to see my face in case I had to encounter them in life. Or I just wanted a barrier of safety, I suppose, between the real and the online. Of course, now I’ve got my face there.

WA: Do you feel confident about showing your face right now?

Charlie: Yes. But I’ve got to tell you, I often think about – at least once every three months – about changing it back, so that I’m not recognisable.

“Quebec”, on the other hand, warns about the possibility of trolls hiding behind avatars, and says:

what I do is I actually don’t engage. If you don’t have anything positive to say or if you have an avatar and you look suspect, I will just ignore you. If you troll me, I will block you. I have no shame in blocking people.

Such questions and problems are seen in the context of frequent reports that people who are not Aboriginal are attempting to be accepted as Aboriginal, arguably in order to claim services or assistance programs that have been made available to Indigenous people: to gain medical treatment under the Closing the Gap program; to win scholarships and programs designed to assist Aboriginal students; to obtain confirmation for Aboriginal-identified positions. Here “Sierra” discusses this:

Sierra: There is also that other possibility, that ugly dark side, that they may be there to now try and take what, in some people’s minds, might appear to be some benefit. Aboriginal housing for example. See these so-called cars, all this money we’re supposed to have from Government. You don’t pay a bill; Government will pay your bills for you. Nowhere is this true.

WA: It’s not true, is it?

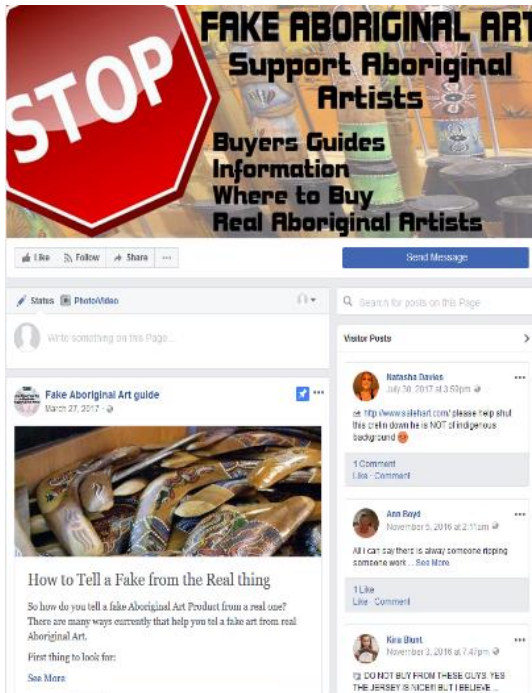
Sierra: No, there’s a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation going around about what it means to be Aboriginal.

Bronwyn Carlson responds to claims of non-Aboriginals making false identity claims in her book *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* (Carlson, 2016a), and also in a short article for IndigenousX. She describes the argument “that there are masses of people fraudulently claiming to be Aboriginal for all the perceived ‘benefits’” (Carlson 2016b) as media sensationalising. There is a lot of evidence of art and (some) literature being fraudulently marketed as ‘Aboriginal’, undertaken for personal gain, whether in search of economic capital, or symbolic capital. One example is the artist Elizabeth Durack, who built an impressive career from the 1920s to her death in 2000, and who won various awards for her work. But in the 1990s she began exhibiting paintings signed with the name Eddie Burrup who, it later emerged, was Durack’s alter ego. Art specialist Ted Snell writes, “it was clearly fraudulent for a non-Indigenous woman to create a false identity for a fictional artist and to present the artworks he was purported to have painted to an Indigenous only exhibition (Snell, 2009, p. 85). While she did not steal Indigenous designs, this action did provoke outrage within some Aboriginal quarters. Snell points out:

Artists throughout history have adopted pseudonyms of the opposite sex to tease or taunt their viewers or readers and to gain new insights from taking on a different persona, but with Durack’s knowledge of Aboriginal society it seems incredible she didn’t realize the added insult to Indigenous people attached to her adoption of a male persona. (Snell, 2009, p. 87)

When Aboriginal curator Djon Mundine learned that Durack had been impersonating Eddie Burrup he was furious. Mundine equated Durack’s impersonation with Kerry Packer (a world-renowned leading businessman at that time) impersonating Mahatma Gandhi (in Nicklin, 1997, p. 22).

Impersonation of Aboriginal visual artists has a long history in Australia, as does ‘carpetbagging’, a pejorative term used to describe unscrupulous practices – in this case to exploit vulnerable Aboriginal artists. In June 2007 a Senate enquiry reported into the Indigenous visual arts and crafts sector, and recommended increased funding for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to monitor the industry and to conduct educational programs for the community on buying Indigenous art ethically, in an attempt to cut out the carpetbagger who often takes advantage of Aboriginal poverty in remote settlements (Dow, 2007).



Senate enquiries have made little difference; in 2016 Indigenous artists stopped sending fabric designs overseas for printing, as they discovered their work was being copied without permission and reproduced for sale, denying Aboriginal people their intellectual property rights and any income from those sales (Miller, 2005).⁵⁸ These forgeries are so ubiquitous across Australian souvenir shops that the genuine artists are suffering serious effects on their livelihood. Aboriginal artists also complain there is no respect for the cultural traditions that inspire these designs. Many of the didgeridoos and boomerangs made in Bali

are not even made with Australian timbers many of the fake copies are made of bamboo (Elton-Pym, 2016). Also, for the Aboriginal people of remote Australia, forgery is more than material theft. All Aboriginal designs have inalienable dimensions for Aboriginal artists; it is their identity and their Dreaming stories.

There is less evidence of individuals fraudulently seeking identity, but it does happen, as “Foxtrot” claims:

Foxtrot: It’s awful. Yet, I’ve also seen examples the other way around where...I’ve got to tell a bit beyond it to get to it, but one of my sons and daughters, this was quite some years ago, but the high school they were going to, anyway, apparently couldn’t find a decent black fellow to head the Aboriginal liaison role. So they put this woman in it.

The kids were quite happy with her. She was really trying to advocate for them, so let that go. Then I went up to visit my nan at the hospital. She had a knee replacement. Then the kids pointed out this teacher to me who was in the bed opposite her. She had had something done too. They tell me, “This is the liaison officer “. I said, “Righto.”

⁵⁸ There are many legal and scholarly publications on this; two recent examples are Hufnagel & Chappell (2017), and Elsdon (2019). The issue is also frequently in the news; see, for example, “Fake Aboriginal Art Bill boomerangs Back into Parliament”, on NITV (2017).

I met her and I'd already been told that they couldn't find an Aboriginal person to fill the position, so I introduced myself. I was talking to her and I said, "What interests you so much about Aboriginal people? The kids seem quite happy, that's good on you."

She said, "I've always just been fascinated by Aboriginal people and I always wanted to try and do something to help, so I'll have this role until ..." This is what she said to me, "I'll just have this role until an Aboriginal person applies for it and then I'll step aside."

Then she became friends with, through her job, became friends with two of the people at the Lands Council. They've been punted now but imagine my surprise when at the next meeting when she comes up and claimed and got voted through. I thought, that's corrupt as it goes. She had told me to my face that ...

WA: She wasn't Aboriginal.

Foxtrot: ... she was not Aboriginal. All of a sudden after hanging out with these two, she is.

WA: What a sneaky ... Trying to get credit through them ... You should've said something. Why didn't you?

Foxtrot: I did.

WA: It still got through?

Foxtrot: It still got through. "Oh, no, I've only just found out through tracing my family tree."

The role of Aboriginal Land Councils came up in many of my research conversations, because of their role of in accepting or rejecting people's rights to claim Aboriginal identity. "Foxtrot" again describes what she has witnessed as a board member of a local land council:

Foxtrot: I was just talking the other day about our Land Council, and the resolutions that got passed through there. I'm worried that there's going to be no Aboriginal people left, as far as membership goes. Just their practices that, for your new fellas coming through ...

WA: Trying to claim Aboriginality?

Foxtrot: ...to prove that they're Aboriginal. Part of the thing at the meeting – and those meetings, they're well attended, because you've got to attend. You only have four meetings a year, and you've got to attend two of those, to keep your membership. They're really well attended."

WA: What sort of numbers of people?

Foxtrot: Probably 150.

WA: That many?

Foxtrot: Yeah. You can't get a seat. Only the old ones get to sit down.

WA: That's a lot, isn't it?

Foxtrot: You've got to stand there, and they rabbit on for hours.

WA: People arc up at these things?

Foxtrot: All the time. And it's always the same thing.

WA: What, about claiming Aboriginality?

Foxtrot: They arc up about that, but more than that, it's about money and housing. They're the two big things that get everybody fired up, over whose family jumped the queue and all those kinds of things that go on. I reckon, mostly, you get these people you can see that they're just so nervous, and I really just don't get why the mob's not responding to that, not being kinder. They've got to stand up and they've got to say that they're able to demonstrate, or they could show through their birth certificate, family tree, whatever who they're connected to. Now, we know that that's often a problem in our community.

WA: For heaps of people, it is.

Foxtrot: It's easy for me because half of them were removed, so there's governmental records about a whole bunch. That's always been easy for me. I'm very comfortable. They know who I am, so I'm very comfortable there. I just feel sorry for these people coming in and they might've only just found out through a connection they're trying to explore and understand their culture and history.

WA: There's a lot of that online, where people are trying to make connections.

Foxtrot: Yep. Then the membership still has to say that, and the membership decides if they're Aboriginal or not.

WA: What does that look like to you when you see that? Is that like a power game or what?

Foxtrot: Completely. If anyone in that room has had a beef with that person before, they vote, No and try and influence everybody else to vote No. "That fellow's not ...", "This woman is not ..."

WA: That's bad.

Foxtrot: It's horrible. People leave in tears all the time. There's a group of four of us that somehow, we've assumed this role of following these people out and making sure they're all right and they don't commit suicide or something.

WA: That affects them that much?

Foxtrot: It's horrible. It's horrible. They just bawl their eyes out. We're saying to them, "Don't worry, just come back to the meeting"

WA: That's so scary.

Foxtrot: Yeah, they're publicly humiliated.

WA: Some of these people, what do they look? Do they look Aboriginal?

Foxtrot: Yeah. And some of them have actually got proof."

WA: Yeah? Like what?

Foxtrot: Government paperwork saying that the grandmother was removed, and she was placed on this mission and this is where their mother was born.

WA: They still won't let them?

Foxtrot: They still just go, "No, you've never walked in my shoes. You're not a black fellow." We're doing the government's work for them because at the end of the day, there'll be no black fellows left to fund. There will be no need for Land Councils because there won't be enough people.

Gatekeepers are as problematic for Aboriginal people in communities as they are online. As **Foxtrot** says: "They just go, 'You've never walked in my shoes. You're not a black fellow!'" Unfortunately, this has become, in the minds of some, how Aboriginality is determined: a

person must have suffered to be Aboriginal. What drives these episodes, and what lies behind this intimidation, is the fear of missing out on housing, scholarships and a range of other services; this is poverty-driven. But a number of my interviewees did express concern about how to know whether someone online is actually Aboriginal or not. “Quebec” recommends a light touch:

WA: An Aboriginal academic said lots of Aboriginal people online appear to overuse words like *deadly*, *brother*, *sister*, etc. Do you see that as anything, or as a bad or a good thing?

Quebec: This is a non-Aboriginal academic?

WA: No.

Quebec: An Aboriginal academic?

WA: Yeah.

Quebec: “appear to overuse”. I would question at what point is something overused, and what would be a limitation. I didn’t realise there was a limit on the words we can use. My background’s linguistics, so it’s language and the use of language. Use is really important, and when people are using those words, it’s actually a show of solidarity, and it actually shows that we’re the same. That’s really important, so I would challenge that particular researcher and say that that’s actually inappropriate, and that they don’t understand sociolinguistics and the use of language. What it does is, it says, “I’m safe. You’re safe. We’re together. We’re connected.”

“Quebec” is not alone in this view: “Sierra” acknowledges, about the overuse of marked “Aboriginal” words: “Yeah, they do seem fake with it, but with some, once you actually meet them in person, they still use the same words over and over. So it’s up to the person; a lot of people are more comfortable with using those words than others.” “Charlie” takes a similar position:

WA: What does it mean to you? Not just the word “deadly” but all the rest: “brother”, “sister”, “uncle”; what does all that mean to you?

Charlie: I think it’s about that safe space. We want to embrace the positive stuff. Equally, outside of our safe community, we’re going to encounter people who make ... I don’t know, there’s a whole bunch of things in there. Also when we’re

using “brother” and “sister”, we’ve got a whole other different worldview, like family, or interconnectedness, and white folks don’t really get that.

For “Tango”, it is simply not an issue; “I see some language used but usually it says more about the person using it and their insecurities to their own culture than anything else. We need to stop worrying about whether we ‘appear’ to be black – we just are.”

“Kilo” is not concerned about this “overuse”, but does point out the importance of identifying others:

Kilo: I don’t think there’s that sense of overuse at all; I think this goes back to that sense of belonging for people. To be able to be feel united and to be a part of the group. Yeah, I think people also do feel the need to use those words, to have that sense of belonging. I use *deadly* all the time. I think everybody would be wondering what’s wrong with me if I didn’t use the word *deadly*.

WA: I suppose it’s how you use these things; because I have met people that are trying to be Aboriginal who really use it like to excess.

Kilo: For me, what I do is that as soon as somebody says they’re Aboriginal I actually check out their site. Now if somebody hasn’t got the flag on it or some black fellas on it or whatever, you know what I mean, you know that they’re not a part of the group. So I’m always wary with those kind of people. But even with my friends who make friend request, because I’m in the public arena, I actually click on to see who am I expecting: I look at their site and I look at the pictures.

And “Bravo” had a different perspective again; on whether such terms are overused, he said:

In some cases, maybe yes and no. In my experience, I’m from Western Australia, so we use a lot of our own language. So when I’m talking to family members or friends from back in Perth and WA, we don’t use so much like *deadly* or *brother*. I think they’re old kind of words. We’re now starting to use words like *dardi*, our own traditional language.

[Cultural identity and cultural gatekeeping](#)

The people I interviewed for this research all argued that racism and internalised racism are ongoing issues for Indigenous Australians, and that it is often about who “counts” as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. Aboriginal people suffer in various ways when

kinship and identity are called into question.⁵⁹ Aboriginal people have a term for those who do not identify with the community, or attend functions or social events but who still want to gain any possible benefits: “Johnny come lately” or “tick-a-box” Aboriginals. An article in *The Australian* reported on this, quoting the chairman of Tasmania’s Aboriginal Land Council, Clyde Mansell: “Every day we encounter the impacts of people claiming to be Aboriginal; there’s so many tick-a-box and wannabe people out there” (Denham, 2015). This was strongly disputed by other Tasmanian Aborigines, but the debate between the two groups shows the tensions around who can call themselves Aboriginal, and how to determine who has that right. As Mansell says, “The real question of who’s in and who’s out is going to be the most important issue facing our community” (Denham, 2015).

In 2012, SBS TV presented an episode of *Insight* (7 August, episode 19) that exemplifies the lateral violence in Aboriginal communities around various issues that affect them. Some Aboriginal people on the program were attacking those of a lighter skin because they appeared white but had all the necessary paperwork to prove their Aboriginal heritage. Many of these people identify as Aboriginal: they are comfortable living as Aboriginal, and do not feel the need to use the term “Aboriginal by descent”, an either-or position. The program degenerated to such an extent that those lighter skinned Aboriginals considered it too hostile to continue to take part in the program as they were under attack.

Often fair-skinned Aboriginals are members of the Stolen Generations, or their descendants. The removal of children from their parents had the objective of “breeding out” the colour and making Aboriginal people appear like Europeans, but also had that agenda of “breeding out” the culture of Aboriginality. In a large number of cases, the colour has been successfully bred out of Aboriginal people, but the culture is less easily put aside. Nonetheless, colour is often used as a weapon; I discussed earlier Andrew Bolt’s attack on fair-skinned Aboriginal people. Anita Heiss’ *Am I black enough for you?* (2012) is an example of speaking back to this attitude, and the topic was aired again in 2018 when *The Feed* presented an episode titled “Black Enough: Living As A Fair-Skinned Indigenous Person” (Butorac, 2018). Colour is as not a true indicator of Aboriginality; Cowlshaw writes, “Skin colour hovers as a companion of identification, but darkness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion for belonging to the category Aboriginal” (Cowlshaw, 2004, p. 13); colour cannot be relied on to determine a person’s Aboriginality, as even in the same families there are variations of colour.

⁵⁹ J Presser, Submission G183, 3 October 2002 Australian Law Reform Commission.

In 2014 SBS TV conducted a survey that asked members of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Facebook page about their views on self-identification. These were some of the responses they recorded:

About 60 years ago, Aboriginal people were forced to carry exemption certificates. Remember FORCED if they wanted to go anywhere, work other places ... Now the Australian government has tricked us again, NOW you have to have certificate to prove you are Aboriginal ... Oh yes, I know the argument of non-Aboriginals trying to be Aboriginals. But isn't it funny, how after all the marches and fight to free the Aboriginal, so they would be treated as Humans and have same rights as white fella ... we're back to having to carry a paper ... boy oh boy who got done ... sorry if I offend but I find it ironic. ... Why would people want to identify in a system that abuses them for statistical gain? ... If only we had a group who could help teach the culture to those who are disconnected from their culture ancestry ... Wow, we could help so many ... I grew up in children's homes, didn't get culture except a little that I remembered before my dad died ... Had to learn as an adult. My heart bleeds for those lost descendants who have lost their culture ... Gee the Government wins with the old integration policy ... breed the black out ... I often wonder how large our Aboriginal population would be if "those lost could be found". (Giakoumelos, 2014)

The one thing this last respondent wishes to see for those disconnected from culture is what is actually happening around them on social media.⁶⁰ There are many issues associated with identity, as that brief survey indicates. But though colour is often used (by both racists and cultural gatekeepers) as a signifier for determining Aboriginality, it is not a useful indication of someone's culture: still, skin colour is a significant factor in racist attacks, and lighter skin is often used by cultural gatekeepers to bring into question someone's identity. Several of my interviewees give example of this from their experience:

Foxtrot: I've always been fair, but growing up in the community I can understand if someone was fair and they found out about Aboriginality later in their life, I could understand if that were an issue for them. The only thing that's at all challenging for me is going off-country, going away from home where people don't automatically recognise you and know who you are. I feel that gap ...

⁶⁰ His or her life experiences mirror my own, as discussed in Chapter 3; but as an adult I became involved in the criminal courts to divert people out of the criminal system, and as a trained Aboriginal academic, I am attempting to teach Aboriginal history to others.

WA: If you go somewhere else, you don't think you present as Aboriginal?

Foxtrot: I don't know if people just say it ... I might be at a meeting or a conference or something and I'll say, "Oh, well you know, as an Aboriginal woman we blah, blah, blah." They go, "I thought you might have been [Aboriginal]". I'm thinking, "Are you just saying that? Like, you don't know?" [laughs] I don't give two bits for what other people think, to be honest."

WA: It is what it is.

Foxtrot: There's people in my family fairer than me. There's a lot of people darker than me. It sounds horrible, but I know as a kid sometimes when some of my cousins were coping with it, [she is referring here to racism] sometimes I'd be secretly grateful for being a bit fairer.

For "Hotel", this has been less of a problem:

Hotel: Well, to some people I'm fair. But I've never copped gatekeeping online because there's no question who my mob is. My family knew where I come from, and I grew up in the community, so I'm lucky like that. I know who I am.

WA: So, you are lucky. A lot of people don't have that, and I think that's what's caused a lot of violence.

"Zulu" describes skin colour being an issue, particularly for her being recognised as Aboriginal:

... I received a lot of flaming on social media. I was being harassed and stalked by a number of people. People were questioning my Aboriginality because of my fair skin. They found one of my cousins who absolutely loathes that his family has got Aboriginal descent. His mother wrote to me and said *you shouldn't be talking about the taint of the tar brush it's not something you should be*. It is usually those that are lighter skinned and choose to identify that are attacked in cultural gatekeeping attacks.

Many of those who are lighter skinned and identifying without real proof, are the children of Stolen Generations. My research indicates that many of them are on websites and social media, tracking family histories, and that this is a powerful motivating force for participating online. Whole generations of Aboriginal people were taken from their families, many would never locate their loved ones again. Because they have little information about their genealogy, and because the archives are so unreliable, they are using the Internet to search for information to

establish historical family connections (Overington, 2012a). An interviewee, “India”, explains how and why she uses social media.

WA: What attracted you to Aboriginal only sites? A sense of community, belonging, or something else?

India: For me it was education. I joined a Facebook group specifically for the Wiradjuri people of New South Wales, so we can discuss culture, discuss our totems, discuss Aboriginal stuff that’s restricted. You don’t have to prove that you’re Wiradjuri to join it, but it’s mainly Wiradjuri people discussing culture and how we identify, and it attracted me because of the social contacts and given that, like many of us, my father was Stolen Generation and my grandma on my dad’s side was Stolen Generation. It’s allowed me to learn more and actually find proof that I was Indigenous. That I *am* Indigenous; not was, *am* Indigenous.

In traditional culture, identity was based on the kinship that operated among the 500 nations across the land (Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2006). Kinship includes moiety, totem, and skin name. Moiety (which comes from the Latin word ‘medius’, then the Old French ‘moite’, and finally the Middle English ‘moiety’ for ‘middle’) is the name for way of understanding the universe as a system that includes people, animals, and everything in the environment, split into two mirrored halves, which must be kept in balance (Behrendt, 2012). People of the same moiety are forbidden to marry because they are considered siblings, but they have responsibilities to support each other (McConvell et al, 2018). Totems are attributed to the nation, the clan (people who share a language), the family, and also the individual; and each individual is responsible for the care of their own totem, in ways that ensure balance is maintained. The third level is skin name, which locates an individual within a nation, a family, and their generation. Each nation has a set of skin names which are used sequentially, and signals the responsibility of each person to the other’s in that nation, clan and family (McConvell et al, 2018). In Aboriginal communities today, most traditional cultural ways are no longer being practised, which means the confirmation of identity has to be managed in different – legal, and bureaucratic – ways.

There is a great deal of tension about being and becoming Aboriginal. This is a highly contested space where identity is community owned and protected. Proving one’s Aboriginality is a personal choice and does not require a letter of confirmation. However, if you were to request Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander specific services such as:

1. grants (e.g. Indigenous housing loans, research and study grants)
2. university courses (with specific positions for Indigenous students)
3. Centrelink and housing assistance (Indigenous-specific)
4. employment (Indigenous-identified positions) or
5. school programs for indigenous students

then you would require a certificate of confirmation. All Aboriginal people, no matter the colour of their skin or features, provided they wish to be confirmed as Aboriginal by the state for the purposes of government-funded services must sign and document their details in the Confirmation of Identity – Verification for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people form (RA010). For successful confirmation, they need to satisfy the definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, which is based on three forms of proof (Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1981):

- being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent;
- identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; and
- is accepted by the community within which the person lives or formally lived.

But it is no easy matter to present these three proofs. An Indigenous organisation will invariably ask *How are you Aboriginal?; Who are your people?*, and ask you to return to where you think your people originated in order to find family connections in the area. It has been my experience as a board member on an Aboriginal organisation to see despair in the eyes of the expectant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person when told they will have to return to where they believe their ancestors came from, and try and trace their history. The family may have left the area some generations previous; and if you are the son, daughter or grandchild of an ancestor who lived in a certain location, then you may never be able to make that all-important connection. Invariably generations have past, people have died, and memories have faded, and the process can be highly problematic for someone not skilled in genealogical research. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies provides information for people trying to locate their ancestors, and doing one's family history through births, deaths and marriage certificates may help locate long-lost relatives (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2019). This is not necessarily sufficient, however, as many Aboriginal births were never recorded, or records may have been lost. Something that offers hope in the absence of official records is that many Aboriginal communities have strong oral

not able to have their identity confirmed, due to no fault of their own. I think we're going to have to resolve that as Aboriginal communities and I think at the moment, I feel that a lot of our mob are so protective of their patch that we further discriminate against the most vulnerable people within our community. They're usually the ones that have not had a huge connection to culture.

Clyde Mansell, like many Aboriginal leaders, agrees with Quebec that this is a problem, but he argues that proof of Aboriginal ancestry alone may not be sufficient, and his proposal is a new test of "continual connection" with the Aboriginal community. He does acknowledge that there are circumstances where people could not have maintained connection with the community – members of the Stolen Generations, for example – and offers "to assess the reason for a lack of participation in community" (Denholm, 2015), but he does not offer any solutions as to how those many thousands of Aboriginals might be accepted back into community.

There is strong resistance to Mansell's position, and Rodney Dillon, former Torres Strait Islander Commission member, recommends instead that DNA testing be used to confirm Aboriginal identity. Certainly blood testing is an often-touted solution to a vexing problem, but it is unlikely to be effective. I am taking the liberty of quoting quite extensively from a chapter in the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) document reporting on genetic testing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Chapter 36 of this report, titled "Kinship and Identity", specifically addresses the issue of genetic testing and the protection of genetic material and information in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In its early pages it quotes Commissioner Elliott Johnston QC's comments in the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, about the problems of asserting identity:

Declaring this or that individual person Aboriginal or not Aboriginal has been a political act, prompted often enough by administrative convenience or economic advantage, such as access to land or the control of cheap labour. (Johnston, in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 913)

The report writers acknowledge that due to the history of colonisation and assimilation, official efforts to determine Aboriginality touches on a very sensitive subject, and in particular comment on the need to prove descent, given the history of colonisation that brought about the lack of documentary evidence. Documentary evidence is often vague, incomplete, lost, or does not exist. Even today, in some remote locations, many Aboriginal people's births are not registered: a recent research publication shows that, in Western Australia, nearly one in five

Aboriginal children aged less than 16 years old are unregistered person (Gibberd, Simpson & Eades, 2016).

Such difficulties explain why Rodney Dillon is in favour of genetic testing as a method of proving one's ancestry, but there are real doubts about how effective this would be. First, as the report writers point out, the Human Genome Project has shown that "any two human beings are 99.9% identical genetically" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 922). Forensic scientist John Presser, in a submission to the Commission, advised that DNA can inform the presence of Aboriginal heritage only if there is an unbroken female lineage; if there is no Aboriginality sequence, all that can be said is there is no direct female line of descent, and therefore the result is inconclusive (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 927). The report also quotes a 2002 study by Elliott and Brodwin which reads:

The problem is that mapping Y chromosome and mitochondrial DNA polymorphisms will trace only two genetic lines on a family tree in which branches double with each preceding generation. For example, Y chromosome tracing will connect a man to his father but not to his mother, and it will connect him to only one of his four grandparents: his paternal grandfather ... Continue back in this manner for 14 generations and the man will still be connected to only one ancestor in that generation. The test will not connect him to any of the other 16,383 ancestors in that generation to which he is also related in equal measure. (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 927)

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies (AIATSIS) strongly argued against genetic testing for the establishment of Aboriginality, writing in their submission for the ALRC Report that:

Pure scientific analysis of genetic identity cannot take stock of the effects of colonisation and past governmental policies. For example, a history of inter-marriage has resulted in large populations of Indigenous people of mixed descent, ie Indigenous and non-indigenous ancestry. Such ancestry generates extreme social and cultural complexity that has not been raised in this paper.

The inherent right (also contained in international conventions) to determine one's own cultural identity will be seriously eroded by a reliance upon a scientific method that has no capacity to consider cultural and social changes ...

Genetic testing provides no 'pure' point of reference for Aboriginal identity, especially given the history of colonisation in Australia. Scientists cannot now recover the control

data that establishes the set of Indigenous genetic traits at contact. This raises the question of why Indigenous peoples have been singled out for particular attention for genetic testing? (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 928)

The Queensland government's submission supports this:

Caution should be given against the use of genetic tests as a primary tool of evidence and application should be limited, particularly given that it has only been in the last few years that any serious attempt has been made to collect tissue samples on a regular and systematic basis. It will always be difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to trace their ancestry, in a physical sense, to some long distant ancestor. (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 928)

And, agreeing with the Queensland government, the Human Genetics Society of Australia submitted that, in the absence of archival genetic material, genetic testing might support the contention of common ancestry, but would not prove it definitively.

Overall, respondents to this Commission argued that a biological test for Aboriginality is inappropriate, inaccurate, and deeply insensitive, and that it ignores the social and familial forms in Aboriginal culture that are different from western social and familial forms. Moreover, as AIATSIS suggested, the use of genetic testing could be seen as a return to outmoded and offensive legal classifications of Aboriginality based on "strains of blood", such as the classification of people as being of "half", "quarter" or "one-eighth" Aboriginal descent and, "As has been demonstrated in the past, these methods for determining Indigenous identity are destructive, assimilationist and divisive" (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 929).

Academics Loretta de Plevitz and Larry Croft, in their submission, summarised the four major barriers to proving Aboriginality by means of genetics:

Firstly, there is no such thing as a genetically differentiated 'race': we are all one species. Secondly ... if race is defined by cultural and genetic context, then there are difficulties in proving membership of the 'Aboriginal race' as on this definition there were hundreds of Aboriginal races pre-1788. Thirdly, looking at the polymorphisms in an individual's DNA shows us who they are related to. But this just defers the problem of whether those people related to the claimant are Aboriginal or not. Fourthly, who could the claimant's genetic inheritance be tested against? It would be necessary to construct DNA reference groups based on 'pure blood' Aboriginal people covering all geographic groups in Australia. If by chance one of the reference DNA groups was very

similar to the claimant's then we can show descent ... as the Australian Aboriginal population is so genetically diverse, there would need to be a large reference set of people for all genetically distinct groups ... Where there has been the wholesale extermination of entire groups of people, claimants attempting to prove their Aboriginality may not be related to any of the reference groups because there is no longer a reference group for them. (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, pp. 929–30)

Concern also was expressed in consultations that if genetic kinship testing were used in this context, even on a voluntary basis, this might lead to undue pressure being placed on persons to 'prove' affirmatively their descent through testing. Such pressure might come from government departments or other service providers, or perhaps from people within their own communities. The imperative to submit to genetic testing runs contrary to ethical principles, including the principles of autonomy, informed consent and the individual's 'right not to know'. Further, any requirement that a person must prove his or her descent through genetic testing in order to access goods, services or other facilities may contravene the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth).

De Plevitz and Croft conclude by pointing to the inequity of requiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to prove their identity through genetic testing:

Other disadvantaged groups such as the poor, the uneducated or the disabled do not have such requirements of proof to access benefits ... Aboriginal people will walk away from such humiliation rather than face legal questioning on their identity. (in Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 930)

At the conclusion of the enquiry, the Inquiry considered that under no circumstances should any person be required to undergo genetic testing to establish their Aboriginal descent; and strongly asserted that "that matters of Aboriginal identity are primarily for Aboriginal communities to determine" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 931).

This leaves open the question of how Aboriginal communities can determine who can identify, and for the purposes of my research, it is of particular reference to the social media community. There are some Aboriginal organisations online who offer to confirm the identity of anyone who claims to be Aboriginal, provided they send \$99 with the relevant information; and, as one of my interviewees says: "For \$99! [laughs] That's how much they're selling Aboriginality for!"



... “India” expanded on this:

To me that’s just a disgrace to our culture. It’s nullifying, it’s making Terra Nullius real. It’s basically saying that our culture means nothing, all our culture means is money: that’s all they’re saying. And sure, I could have just gone to this site and grabbed a \$99 certificate and said, *oh hey uncle look, guess what*. But no. There are a lot of younger people like me: my dad was adopted at age two and he died when I was three, so I had no way of tracing my Aboriginality. If it wasn’t for the online Wiradjuri community, I would not have known. I only knew vaguely [about her heritage] because my mother said that Dad had mentioned Aboriginality a few times. But it never really occurred to me to actually trace it, until – I think it was about two or three years ago now – I was shocked when I saw a

photo of my granddad, who was from the Cowra area when the breakout happened. He’s actually Asian-Aboriginal. And when I saw this photo it spurred me on to find *me*. Because I’d never felt like I belonged anywhere. And yet, when I was with my Aboriginal brothers and sisters, I always felt at home even when I didn’t know that I was Indigenous. I always felt like I belonged. I felt like they accepted me for who I was.

During my research conversations, comments about identity brought a range of answers. “Lima” responds to questions around culture and verification of Aboriginality.

Lima: I think a lot of people use Facebook. They use it to try to get their Aboriginality verified. So, I think we’ve got to be careful with any kind of media.

WA: Yeah, because it starts to seem to me that some feel social media is the way of finding people ... like, a lot of people go there who, are you know, of male and female Aboriginal, there’s no question about that, but there are lots of who aren’t who are trying to learn to be Aboriginal.

Lima: I totally agree. And I always say to people, and I actually put it on my Facebook, “be careful what you’re giving away”.

WA: That’s what I reckon too.

Lima: Actually the girls are giving away their culture, and they’re giving away their stories. They’re actually allowing people to take their stories and to use them to verify their Aboriginality.

“Juliette” also recommends caution about identity being confirmed online:

WA: What comes to mind when you hear your virtual online community? What does that mean to you?

Juliette: I’m really suspicious of it. I mean look, I know that we don’t have communities any more. I understand that, a lot of the time, you know. But virtual communities I think have sort of left it open for a lot of people to just jump on board, and I’m really suspicious of it. Unless I’ve met that person, I know some who they’re trying to con.

Because of these problems, the majority of my interviewees felt that face-to-face engagement is the only real way to confirm identity. “Karlie” makes this very clear:

I think a lot of them are trying to find where they belong. But I think being online is the wrong way of doing that. I don’t believe that, and that’s because also a lot of people have you know come in, jumping on these land claims. There’s a protocol to entering an Aboriginal community. You would follow those, you don’t go jumping straight onto things. And anyone having a story can go onto Facebook and jump into a community event. That don’t mean nothing.

But “Lima” takes a more nuanced position:

Lima: I think that’s the only solution, you have to go back to where you came from. And I understand people get removed, but if you do that work to reconnect with your mob, people will accept you. I have seen that happen.

WA: I have too. On the other hand, I’ve seen the other.

Lima: Yeah, well I’ve also seen people so traumatised they’ve rejected their own. So that’s true.

WA: See the problems there? So this then becomes, then you're actually pushing the barrow for them white fellas, is because inevitably this will only get worse. I think it will.

Lima: Surely the argument can be made, it's all about culture? So when I'm here, I'm operating in a white world, and I have my professional way of speaking, but when I'm back home, and I'm comfortable, my accent comes out, I go back to talking the way my mob always talks. But I have to do it even more, to make my family feel comfortable ...

Mainly it is the cultural gatekeepers who claim the right to say who can be considered part of the community. Bronwyn Carlson gives an interesting anecdote about this, relating that while she was at a conference presenting a paper on social networking sites, she was approached by a woman who asked whether she would join a Facebook site dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars, and which discussed mainly Indigenous topics. A stipulation for a new member joining the site was the confirmation of one's Aboriginality by two existing members. This was duly complied with and Carlson was then asked to pose a question to the group. The question she posted was in relation to her research interests around Aboriginal identity. She asked, "Can community recognition of someone's Aboriginality come from an online community?" Here is her description of the discussion that followed:

One respondent stated, "Community Recognition is just that!!!", implying that there is only one form of community – and that is offline. I responded that my question had emerged in the course of my research and was not a personal assertion but intended as an idea for consideration and discussion. Responses immediately shifted from my posed question to vitriolic demands for my authentication – in particular for documented evidence of my Aboriginality. I responded that I did have a Confirmation of Aboriginality. I was then asked for further corroboration: was I a member of an Aboriginal Lands Council? I replied affirmatively. Another respondent claimed I was "NOT Aboriginal" and made mention of knowing my workplace and where they could find me. Finally, I was informed I would be removed from the group as my identity was under question. The response was followed by, "And for the record community recognition in cyberspace please, nothing can replace the real thing". (Carlson, 2013, p. 157)

There are many stories about cultural gatekeepers claiming the right to afford or withdraw

Jarrold Parter
June 8, 2016 at 12:25pm · 🌐

Thank F!CK Too many gammin [Johnny come lately](#) mob out there! Best article I've read in a while!!

Indigenous land council says people falsely claiming being Aboriginal
www.dailymail.co.uk

👍👎👏 19

2 Shares

Astrid Poes
June 14, 2012 at 11:26am · 🌐

Hate it when fellows drain the [aboriginal mob](#) your only [johnny come lately](#) you just want stuff for free or cheap users

Clayton Simpson Pitt
March 18 at 4:36pm · 🌐

Message to all the [Johnny Come Lately](#) Born again 'Aboriginals'... Just decided you're Aboriginal & got yourself one of those deadly certificates? Apply for that uni scholarship, you'll get it. You look...

👍👎👏 117

22 Comments 57 Shares

recognition of Aboriginal identity; what is interesting is that these gatekeepers are likely to be Aboriginal people, but because they are so intimidating, it is rare that anyone asks the bully if they have confirmation of their own Aboriginality. Certainly, these people are unelected and self-appointed, and the indicators are that they are using various methods of social intimidation, enlisting others to support their objective or intimidate others attempting to become Aboriginal. I suggest that much of the lateral violence in Aboriginal communities online and offline is caused by a lack of job opportunities, overcrowded housing, racism

and despair. It is possible that the cultural gatekeepers are driven by “Fear of missing out” (FOMO) (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan & Gladwell, 2013), and jealously guard against newly recognised Aboriginals and others who, they may fear, are gaining access to the limited funding provided by Indigenous-specific programs:

WA: Pretty common thing, for Aboriginal people to support each other, in that way.

I’ve noticed a lot of that myself. People will flock to you if you’ve had a bad experience, something like that. I think that’s just the way we are.

Foxtrot: There are less tearing people down. Aboriginal-only sites, there’s a couple of them, but black politics jump out there too, sometimes. People start competing against one another, and I think, “Not quite sure what the prize is that you’re fighting over.”

WA: Sometimes I don’t get it, you know? What a lot of that is, I call gatekeeping. Putting other Aboriginal people down, which I really have a problem with. We’ve got enough people putting us down anyway. I just don’t get that really. I think that’s learnt behaviour. That’s what I think it is.

But despite this, Aboriginal-only sites are often very supportive, especially in the face of racism. For “Tango”, it is for “Belonging, and a strengthening of my identity”.

My fieldwork in the form of yarning interviews and participant observation, along with the archival research I have conducted, seems to confirm that while Facebook has some serious problems – cultural gatekeepers, trolling, and racism – it is still delivering very important benefits. It is the virtual tribe, and the virtual school, and its ability to connect people at all levels and from all geographic locations is central to its popularity with the community. But I also suggest that Facebook’s role as a place for political discussion, debate and dissension is very significant, especially given that Aboriginal people are largely excluded from governmental politics in Australia. In the final chapter I discuss the role of social media in politics, and what this means for self-representation as well as political representation.

Chapter 6: Social Media and the Politics of Representation

Introduction

Across the chapters of this dissertation, I have outlined the history of oppression, exclusion, violence, and genocide that has characterised the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people since 1788. Because of these inequities, Indigenous Australians cry out for sovereignty, and continue to seek it, but they remain socially positioned at the lowest levels of society: without voice, economically disadvantaged, with shorter life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, poorer health and lower levels of education and employment (Australians Together, 2019). They are not sovereign, they do not elect their own government, and are forced to participate in a parliamentary system they have no way of influencing. These political circumstances are due wholly to the size of the voting constituency: Indigenous Australians represent less than three per cent of the population.

Yet a new kind of Indigenous sovereignty is emerging, rooted in the remains of deracinated

The image shows a vertical scroll of four Facebook posts. The first post is from Kerri Sheppard, an Aboriginal user, dated Jan 16, 2018, asking for a poll on whether Warren Mundine, Anthony Dillon, Jacinta Price, and Bess Price are Aboriginal leaders. The second post is from Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, shared on Aug 14, 2018, featuring a video of Bill Nicholson's racist comments about Jacinta Price. The third post is from Jacinta Price, dated Jan 29, 2018, discussing Warren Mundine's views on 26th January. The fourth post is from Warren Mundine for Gilmore, dated Oct 1, 2017, mentioning Bess and Jacinta Price in Alice Springs.

original sovereignties, and informed by the traumatic history of that deracination and diaspora, the torture and the terror. This emergent sovereignty has no predetermined destination; it is a process of becoming, without ordained telos. Now we are confronted by questions as to how to negotiate this becoming. There is no unified approach within the Aboriginal community. Some, the victims of diaspora who are seeking their roots, want to become Aboriginal online. Others seek to speak with cultural authority; which can be helpful or harmful to those seeking to become Aboriginal or reinvent their Aboriginality. The harmful element comes from those people who seem prepared to cast aside their cultural inheritance, disavow their roots, spurn their traditions and deny their culture. Like those who wore the gorget

before them, they are often spurned by their own people and, to use Bourdieu's terms, they hold no capital except that of economic capital afforded them by the dominant culture.

But becoming Aboriginal online is fraught with difficulties, and my interviewees did not come to consensus on whether it is feasible:

Karlie: I'm really suspicious of it. I mean look, I know that we don't have communities any more. I understand that. But virtual communities I think are sort of left it open for a lot of people to just jump on the board and I'm really suspicious of it. Unless I've met that person, I know who they are.

Charlie: I think, in terms of legitimising identity, online is not the space for it. I think that there's always going to be people who want to get onboard. But at the moment, I think, there's still enough offline mechanisms ... I think I prefer the real ... The power of being in a space with other humans, the connectedness is more powerful.

Zulu: An online community or a virtual community is one that doesn't actually have country that you can sit on, but it does have space that you own, or participate in or have sovereignty in. I think it's a really important part of the world. I think we have to find community online because a lot of us don't actually live in the community that our ancestors came from. Some of us don't know who our communities are and that's a tragedy. I feel for them. If you can find belonging on an online community, it legitimises your sense of belonging and that makes you more empowered. That then gives you the opportunity of being a really good advocate for our people.

In this chapter, and relying on conversations with my interviewees as well as other research, I trace some of the ways in which Aboriginal people seek representation, both within their own community, and in the broader Australian polity, and identify how social media is being used to political effect.

Social media and truth

Media as an institution is a powerful cultural resource which, says philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1988), is enlisted by the dominant culture to win consent for particular ideologies. However, in the right circumstances it can also be enlisted by the dominated culture to generate actions and build support. This is not easy though: recent research by Cecilia Jaques, Mine Islar and Gavin Lord confirms that social media is not very effective at communicating true facts, but it is very good at spreading “post-truth” stories: “there is general recognition that experiences mediated by ideology are connected to and make use of emotions” (2019, p. 3). The issue is that ideology works best when it draws on the emotions, encouraging people to

identify with whatever “truth” is being offered, and what this does is appear to encourage social and political engagement, but actually “serves to maintain existing power relations” (ibid.). The powerful systems of the world quickly learned that social media is where hearts and minds can be won or lost, and Donald Trump is conducting the first Twitter-based presidency of the United States using this media and what it allows in terms of engaging people emotionally so that they do not interrogate the meaning of what he says.

It also works at a local and personal level; here “Lima” describes the presence of what she calls “keyboard cowboys” on Facebook – people who are using the site to promote their personal interests, and pressing emotional “buttons” rather than engaging in fact-based discussions:

Lima: So okay, my mob right, there’s been a lot of fights going on, because Native Title has caused the biggest lot of bullshit, and a lot of people are attacking each other: *who’s your mob* and *where are you from?* I’m like, *you’re our cousins, you dickheads*. Like, really?

WA: That’s a big issue in Western Australia though.

Lima: It’s just disgusting, and that’s part of the reason I’m not on Facebook now because I really can’t stand them. If people start that stuff, I unfriend them.

WA: Lots of people do.

Lima: I can see how [Facebook] is good when one of my young cousins is doing well, I love sending them messages of support; and when I was worried about [name withheld], I could get in touch with her and say *are you okay?* But there’s the bad side too, of politicking bullshit. This is why I have nothing to do with Native Title. A couple of my cousins keep trying to push me onto it. I won’t, I’ll have nothing to do with it.

WA: What is it – is it the political infighting?

Lima: It’s infighting. I know native title has been really good for some mobs, but because we’re all cattle country, all the families were split up, and we’re three in one mob: Wuilli Wuilli, Wakka Wakka, and Gooreng Gooreng. When the property owners got told by the state government they actually had to start paying their Aboriginal workers, what they did was, one night they coordinated, and they kicked everyone off the same night. This was after the referendum, 1970ish. Mum remembers getting woken up in the middle of the night by her parents. Here they

are with ten kids, plus nieces and nephews they're taking care of. They could only take what they could carry: my grandfather had my mother on his back, they're walking in the middle of a storm, Mum's crying, and she had no idea what the fuck was going on. And every crossroads they come to, there, was another family from that property over there, and this was a big, big spread. So they all end up on the fringes in this one town, and we were all mixed in. So that's why I'm Wuilli Wuilli but I always say Wakka Wakka, Gooreng Gooreng, because that's my grandmother and my great-grandmother. Before I left home, you were just a [redacted] Murri. It was never about whether you were Wuilli Wuilli, Wakka Wakka, Goreng Goreng. And now native title, it's split us all.

The truth of history, and the reality of present-day relations, is being obscured by “keyboard cowboys” whose real concern is to ensure their own interests are looked after, rather than caring for a broader community. The effect is that the individual or group who intimidates others into silence, or who convinces them through emotional appeals, will win, regardless of the rights or wrongs of the situation. When it comes to state and federal government, the one who “wins” is likely to be the one who is put into a winning position by the dominant structures.

Aboriginals without voice

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was a culmination of the Whitlam Government pledge. When they came to power in 1972, the Whitlam Government had promised better representation for Aboriginal people. By 1973 the Whitlam government had set in place the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) which remained in operation until March 1990 when ATSIC came into being with Lois (Lowitja) O'Donoghue, ATSIC's first Chairperson (Pratt & Bennett, 2004). For the first time, Aboriginal people were able to advise the government on Indigenous affairs and policy.

ATSIC's abolishment in 2005 by the John Howard-led Coalition Federal Government left Aboriginal and Torres Strait people without real representation and post-ATSIC, governments of both political persuasions began to seek out Aboriginals to use as representative of all Aboriginal people.

Samia Goudie
Friend · 19 mutual friends

Aug 26, 2009 · ABORIGINAL organisations will elect their own leader for the body that succeeds ATSIC, and will give candidates ethics tests and insist on equal male and female representation to avoid the problems that sank its predecessor. – theage.com.au

1 Comment

Samia Goudie
Friend · 19 mutual friends

Aug 28, 2009 · MEMBERS of a new national representative indigenous body would be subject to unprecedented probity checks to avoid the corruption problems that besieged ATSIC, under a blueprint handed to the Rudd government yesterday by Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma. – ...

Margaret Saunders · Aboriginal

Sep 29, 2018 · ... to the point of not even knowing what ATSIC stood for and of course she went on about the funds being given to help our people. If you get a chance have a listen. The other three panel members were much more appropriate. This discussion came about due to the media release earlier this week about...

43 65 Comments

Symbolically this harks back to the days of the brass gorget of colonial Australia: both sides of politics carefully selecting a small number of compliant Aboriginals – even to the extent of luring them away from each other’s political party – despite the fact that they had never been endorsed or elected by any Aboriginal people. Various Australian governments have used these people to give the impression that they are representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: the government website for the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council, for example, says

that “The Council will see governments work together with Indigenous leaders to put Indigenous peoples at the center of decision making” (National Indigenous Australians Agency, n.d.). But though they are of Aboriginal descent, Aboriginal people did not elect them to speak on their behalf, and many of those serving on Advisory Boards and Councils are

unknown to the majority of Aboriginal people.

Bill Bashford
July 5, 2018 ·

With only 7.5% of the ACT Aboriginal people voting at the ATSIEB election who do they actually represent. The creation of “Aboriginal Gods”, a monopoly in regards to who advisors the ACT Gov’s needs has been played out at the National level numerous times before and only divide & fail us.

“We will decide who the Aboriginal Leaders are, and the manner in which they lead” Seriously the ACT Gov are still decades behind and can’t even learn from the National Leaders before then that have failed with creating “Aboriginal Gods”.

There is a Monopoly gravy train happening in the ACT right now and the ACT Aboriginal community a losing out and falling further behind as a result.



THEAIMN.COM
Gravy train charlatans - The AIM Network
When Chris Sarra announced his resignation as co-chair of the Prime

3 Comments

It is a similar issue when Aboriginal people are nominated to stand for parliament: Aboriginal people in Australia’s electorates make up a tiny minority, and are vastly outnumbered by non-Aboriginals. The Aboriginals nominated by both the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party are invariably elected not by Aboriginal people, but by the numerically superior numbers of non-Aboriginals. This leaves Aboriginal people not only without true representation, but with people who may hold views that are opposed to the goals of Indigenous people. In any case, these people do not

have a mandate to speak on behalf of, or represent, Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples.

Aboriginal people appointed in this way include Warren Mundine, Noel Pearson, Jacinta Price, and Adam Giles; and Facebook posting show anger and resentment, in many cases, toward these “representatives”. In some cases, other high-profile Aboriginal people speak out against them. Warren Mundine, for example, is a Gumbainggir man, and was the Australian Labor Party national president in 2006–07 but quit the Party when he was overlooked for selection



for the vacant Senate seat. Tony Abbott, former Prime Minister of the Coalition Government, later appointed him to the position of chairman of the Australian government Indigenous Advisory Council, and he acted in this capacity until Malcolm Turnbull dissolved the Council. Following the party room demise of Malcolm Turnbull and the election of Scott Morrison to the Prime Ministership, Mundine was confirmed as the candidate for Gilmore, despite this going against the wishes of the Liberal Party in the Gilmore electorate (Macmillan & Gothe-Snape, 2019). While Mundine has quite a long career in politics, it could be argued that his usefulness to either party has rested purely on the fact that he is Aboriginal. On social media Aboriginal people write about

their dislike of Mundine and what they see as his ingratiating himself to political agendas.

Some years ago, Professor Gary Foley, an Aboriginal Gumbainggir man and long-time hard-line Aboriginal activist, made his views of his cousin public. In an article in *Tracker*⁶¹ titled “Warren Mundine: The White Sheep of the Family?” Foley wrote scathingly:

It would seem at the present time that the former National President of the ALP, Mr Warren Mundine, has momentarily eclipsed the Cape York Crusader Noel Pearson as the *Aboriginal Man of the Moment*.

⁶¹ *Tracker* was an Aboriginal magazine operated by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. The magazine was closed after a front-page attack on then Prime Minister Tony Abbott in the October issue in 2013. Then NSW Indigenous Affairs Minister Victor Dominello objected to NSW ALC, Chairman Craig Cromelin, and Deputy Chair Roy Ah-See.

Whilst Mr Mundine may lack the intellectual firepower of Noel Pearson, he has nevertheless elbowed his way to the front of the pack with his dazzling late-life conversion to the cause of all things Tony Abbott. Mundine’s strategic realignment to become best buddies with Abbott at the beginning of the 2013 federal election campaign may have been a surprise to some, but only those who have not been taking notice of Mundine’s mundane comments on Aboriginal matters over the past few decades. (Foley, 2013)

Foley offers this forceful account of Mundine’s political career because, he says, “I believe that it is important for Aboriginal people to subject Aboriginal leaders in positions of power and influence to a level of scrutiny that a biased and ignorant mainstream media often fails to” (Foley, 2013). He extends this critical eye to Noel Pearson, who among other positions was founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, and previously legal advisor to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Foley has hosted the “Noel Pearson Dossier” on his website, kooariweb.org., and this includes documents by Pearson as well as media reports about Pearson from 1996 to 2018. Foley writes that:

This comprehensive collection of Pearson writings and media coverage in the two indexes below are intended to enable students to develop their own understanding and analysis of his influential status and the ideas that underpin his political stance. (Foley, n.d.)

Jacinta Price is the daughter of Bess Price, a former Country Liberal Party member and a former

Guardian of the Nation
Page · 5.8K like this · Community

May 9 · 🌐 · ...year a picture of Country Liberal Jacinta Price drinking from a coconut with the caption, "it's not every day you see a coconut drinking from a coconut." Calling someone a "coconut" is considered a racial slur used to accuse dark-skinned people of acting white. Mr Hanna...

108 26 Comments 46 Shares

Hazel Emery ▸ Aboriginal

Mar 23 · 🌐 · Senior coconut Jacinta price is saying claims of racism in the nt cyclone evacuation is disinformation, I'm banned from her page can anyone deal with her?
<https://www.facebook.com/JacintaPriceCLPCandidateForLingiari/>

28 25 Comments

Deej Lawsan ▸ Aboriginal

Jan 21 · 🌐 · FUCK this coconut Price make me wild! Basically saying colonisation was a good thing! Please comment on the original post and spread some sense and education into the heart of this lost coconut soul. ...

11 22 Comments 1 Share

Minister of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, and herself a member of the Alice Springs Council, a member of the Country Liberal Party, and a candidate for the seat of Ligiari. Professor Marcia Langton writes of her political affiliations:

“the average pundit would not be aware that the majority of this person’s social media followers are the rabid racists who claim to support a pro-Aboriginal cause by backing the aspirant’s bizarre political agenda” (Langton, 2019).

Councillor Jacinta Nampijinpa Price

Phone: 0400 417 794

Email: jacintanampijinpa@gmail.com

Councillor Jacinta Nampijinpa Price is a Warlpiri/Celtic woman who has grown up in Alice Springs.

Councillor Price has performed various professional roles within the Arts including Assistant Curator at the Araluen Galleries, Assistant Curator at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, and Project Manager at Desart. She has worked as a Cross Cultural Consultant for the past 17 years.

Councillor Price has co-produced and performed as part of the indigenous children's television program Yamba's Playtime for seven years. She is currently the co-founder and director of Yangapi Productions, which produces the popular children's TV series.

Councillor Price is passionate about improving the lives of indigenous children, addressing tough issues such as domestic violence and helping build a unified community.



Price has been heavily criticised by some Aboriginal people on social media, where she has been described as a “coconut”, a disparaging term for anyone of colour who is considered to have sold out to those of the (white) political right of politics. The symbolism of the coconut – brown on the outside but white on the inside – means the person claims to be doing their best for Aboriginal people but is really a fifth columnist. A small proportion of the Aboriginal community are conflicted about Jacinta and her mother Bess Price: they see positive elements, because both of them are Aboriginal women prepared to have a say; but they are also conflicted by what these politicians espouse.

“Charlie”, one of those interviewed for this thesis, responds to a question about the Prices:

Charlie: One of the things I saw recently on social media was, there’s kind of a political situation where the daughter of someone who used to be in government has now got her own kind of power platform in that she’s now in Council in the same region. Well, the mother already was a little bit controversial. Aboriginal woman, blah, blah, blah. The daughter now is taking on all of those, I’ll say, challenging and controversial political views. Their views to me are completely full of hypocrisy. It’s a shame. I’m not in agreement with their political stance, but I’ve always respected that they’re Aboriginal women getting into places, so that young Aboriginal girls go, *I’m allowed to be in that space, too*, and I think that’s rad.

WA: That’s something to be commended anyway.

Charlie: Political stance aside, there is often hypocrisy in some of the platforms that are taken. What happened just recently is that someone in an online space in Facebook-land took it upon themselves to create a page dedicated to going, “This

person doesn't represent us". It's a "This person doesn't represent all Aboriginal people" page. On that page they're trawling through old social media interactions, posting them up and going, "What a hypocrite". Shit like this and calling stuff out.

Jacinta's mother, Bess Price, is an Aboriginal woman and a former Minister for Community Services in the Adam Giles Northern Territory Government. Giles is the first Indigenous head of government, though there is (unfounded) conjecture as to his Aboriginal heritage.⁶² Giles was defeated in a coup at the 2015 party leadership ballot and subsequently found employment with Gina Rinehart, daughter of Lang Hancock who is infamous for his racist comments. His entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* includes that:

He opposed any recognition of land rights and believed that sacred sites should not receive consideration if they stood in the way of development. During a television interview in Queensland in 1981, he caused outrage by advocating the sterilisation of people of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry. (Davies, 2016)

After Giles severed his employment with Hancock Prospecting, he joined Sky News, but fell

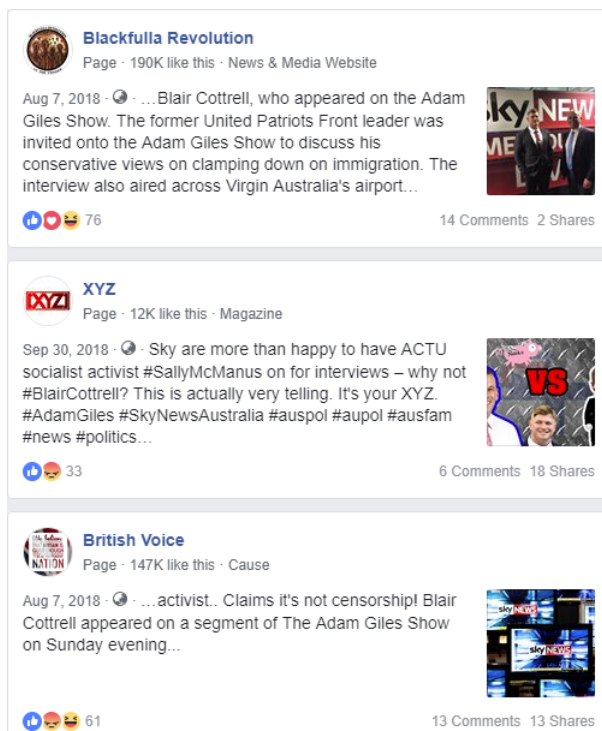


foul of public standards when he conducted "a matey interview" (Watkins, 2018) with Blair Cottrell, former leader of far-right The United Patriots Front (UPF), and bearer of a list of criminal convictions, which include arson, stalking, making threats to kill, inciting contempt against Muslims and breaching intervention orders. Certain television media in Australia appear exempt

from any control, as the program *Media Watch* has demonstrated⁶³. This is particularly true of those like Sky News and the Murdoch press, which give extensive coverage to the political far-right, and whose presenters regularly racialise and ridicule Muslims and Aboriginal people, contravening Section 18 of the Racial Discrimination Act (yet rarely is action ever taken).

⁶² Giles had claimed his grandmother, Lois Romer, was an Aboriginal woman, but she told *The Australian* that her grandson was "talking rubbish", denied that was "born in the Pilliga scrub" of northern NSW, and said she "has never regarded herself as Aboriginal". Despite this, the journalist continues, "Mr Giles's Aboriginality is not in dispute. His mother, Jan, is white and his father, Bob Romer, was an Aboriginal man who was killed in a building site accident in 1988" (Guilliatt, 14 September 2013).

⁶³ *Media Watch*, currently hosted by Paul Barry, is the ABC's forum for media critique, analysis and comment. See <https://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/>.



These examples demonstrate that “representatives” chosen by non-Indigenous governments neither speak for, represent or were selected by the Aboriginal community. Because of Australia’s two-party system, there is a dichotomous choice Liberal and National Coalition or Labor. The former prior has a long history of slashing funds to and closing Aboriginal organisations, and in consequence more Aboriginals direct their vote to the Labor Party. Chris Graham wrote, following the 2013 election that gave government to Tony Abbott, that, excepting the Northern Territory, Labor attracted 71 per

cent of votes in identifiably Aboriginal communities. For Graham, this is because the Labor Party has at times been much more considerate of Aboriginal people’s wants and needs than has the Coalition (Graham, 2013). Much as Australian governments have consistently appointed non-representative representatives of the Aboriginal community, for that election the Coalition government ran the line that Tony Abbott would be the “Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs”. But, as Graham points out, “One problem: no-one, including within the media, ever stopped to ask Aboriginal people if they actually wanted a “Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs”, and in particular whether or not they wanted Abbott”. He continues, “Aboriginal people want self-determination, and every step Australia takes – from an Abbott hand-picked council to constitutional recognition within a document designed to deny Aboriginal sovereignty – is a step further from where Aboriginal people want to be” (Graham, 2013).

Examples of biased media reportage abound. Mark Latham, one-time leader of the Labor Party, was for some time a Sky News commentator who, like Adam Giles, interviewed known far-right nationalists, and used racism and vilification for effect – including calling for Aboriginal people to have their identity confirmed by DNA tests. After he was elected to the NSW Parliament, one journalist questioned whether Latham believed in “DNA testing and whether it was a genuinely held belief or more political hokum from an increasingly weird party” (Latimore, 2019).

John Wentong ▸ Aboriginal
March 12 at 11:33 AM · 🌐

...["There is no genetic test for Aboriginality, all that \[genetic\] testing ever does is compare your genes sequences with a sample, with someone... See More](#)

One Nation wants Aboriginal people to 'prove' ancestry with DNA tests
www.sbs.com.au

👍👎👏 63 116 Comments 1 Share

Junella Scott A survey has tested that the majority of white people are not pure of their blood they claim to be either. SO THESE TWO TWITS SHOULD GO STICK THEIR DNA TESTING DEVICE UP THEIR OWN HOLES...[See More](#)

Lyndsey Fuller ▸ Aboriginal
March 11 at 11:42 AM · 🌐

Australians claiming to be Aboriginal could face DNA test
www.dailymail.co.uk

👍👎👏 205 250 Comments 1 Share

Maureen Daley Trust the 'Government' to pick up on this one so Quickly its all about the money .Mark Latham is a Goose another one that has no Respect for Women. Came close to physically lashing out at Julia Gillard[See More](#)

Jodie McBride ▸ Aboriginal
March 11 at 1:01 PM · 🌐

Look in the comments.... Make ya sick Thoughts on this anyway ppl ... [See More](#)

Australians claiming to be Aboriginal could face DNA test
www.dailymail.co.uk

👍👎👏 69 127 Comments

Sharlene Gladman This is a joke. I have Aboriginal blood and I Mr. Latham I make no claim. I didn't think you needed this kind of proof next thing we will have to prove where our other ancestors were and who is going to be...[See More](#)

Daniel Cunningham ▸ Aboriginal
Nov 13, 2018 · 🌐 · Blair Cottrell is now claiming the government pays for our houses! We work just as hard as the rest of society and, if we decide to own a house are perfectly capable of buying/renting our own houses. This kind of stuff makes me wild 😡😡😡👎 Why do they think...

👍👎👏 167 179 Comments 1 Share

Clementine Ford ✓
Page · 189K like this · Writer

Jun 27, 2018 · 🌐 · ...of law enforcement here to treat Cottrell and his kind. A swift condemnation of Victoria Police's response to Cottrell's targeted harassment of Dandyman needs to be made, and it needs to be addressed immediately. Cottrell himself feels so emboldened by his...

👍👎👏 3.1K 473 Comments 439 Shares

Tess Ryan
Friend · 17 mutual friends

Jan 15, 2018 · 🌐 · Can we stop putting Blair Cottrell on the telly? – pedestrian.tv

👍👎👏 1

Sam Crozier ▸ Australian Greens politics, news and discussion
Dec 30, 2018 · 🌐 · "Of course Blair Cottrell had been a racist, sexist, homophobic dickhead for decades before he realised it in grade three." -- Richard O'Brien (channeling Yogi Berra ^_^) #Blahisms

👍👎👏 69 50 Comments 5 Shares

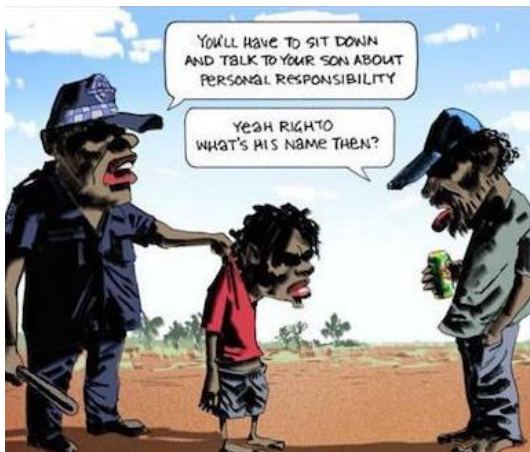
These same media personalities, and the groups that they represent, have the support of right-wing politicians who argue that Australia's Racial Discrimination Act 1975, section 18C, prohibits their right to free speech. What is not being considered is the great dangers associated with allowing people to perpetrate racist vilification. An example of this problem is the mass killing of Muslim people in New Zealand, in 2019, by an Australian who had been using social media to troll and otherwise attack Muslims and people of difference. In Australia, social media is an area that has never been policed by the authorities. Far-right groups have been trolling and using intimidation in the attempt to silence people who hold different values. What draws many Aboriginal people to social media is to learn of their culture and the history of colonialism in Australia as there are Indigenous academics and others prepared to write on current issues and on Aboriginal history: a subject that is little taught in schools and universities. What members of the extreme far-right groups are prone to do is use threats and

“shitposting”⁶⁴ to silence and intimidate writers who are posting about Australia’s history, or showing interest. “Foxtrot” comments on this:

Foxtrot: I stay away from sites like Aussie pride sites because I get really riled up.

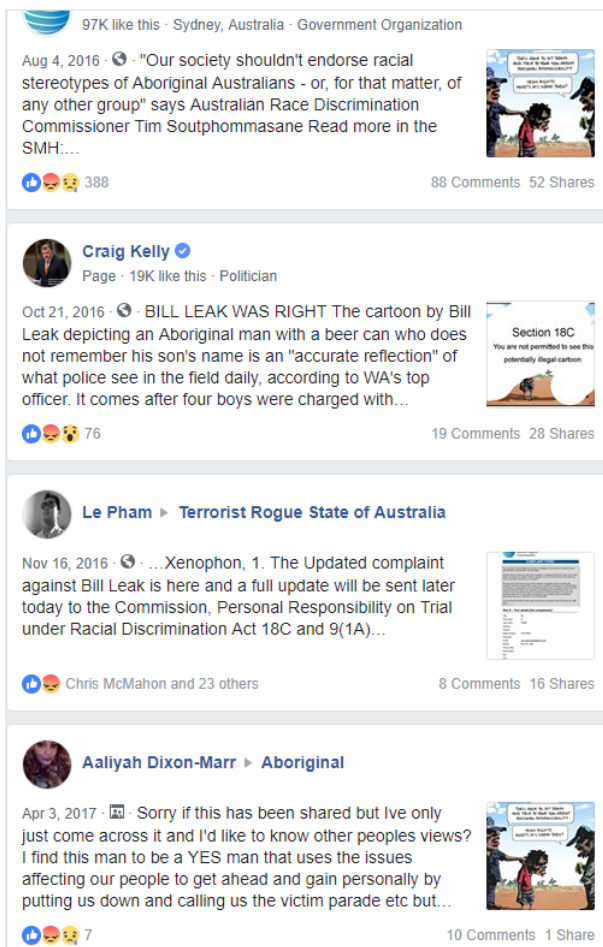
WA: Give me an example ...

Foxtrot: If there’s a black fella on who says something, then they just pounce on him. Of course, you’ve got to go in to bat, and so I just avoid them like the plague now.



The racialisation of Aboriginal people is a continuing problem, and it is exemplified in the Bill Leak cartoon published in the *Australian* newspaper on 4 August 2016, as an apparent commentary on the treatment of Aboriginal children in the Don Dale detention centre in the Northern Territory. The cartoon deeply offended Aboriginal people, and was widely condemned in the Australian

community. There were over 700 complaints lodged with the Australian Press Council,⁶⁵ and Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion also condemned the cartoon (Johnston, 2016). I consider this newspaper cartoon little different from extremist shitposting on social media, as it seems likely to intimidate Aboriginal people, and likely to discourage people only recently



⁶⁴ “Shitposting” is the term used for attacks on social media that use hate-filled derogatory remarks, often framed as irony, to cause disruption and distress (McEwan, 2017).

⁶⁵ The Press Council later ruled that the cartoon had not breached press standards.

claiming their Aboriginality to proceed with their confirmation. One of those interviewed, “Quebec”, had this to say in relation to the Bill Leak cartoon:

Quebec: Bill Leak was an absolute (cxxt) to the men. Sorry ... he got me going. I was furious. I was sitting around at the table with a bunch of Aboriginal people who are part of my PhD and I saw it. We just stopped and talked about it, because it was that outrageous.

WA: I saw it the same way. It was just like the lowest thing.

Quebec: Just punching people while they’re down. Actually, shifting the blame from government, who are meant to protect children, to the parents who, for a range of reasons might be having their own struggles, which then means that their children end up not doing as well as what they could. Aboriginal people care even when it doesn’t appear that we do, and that’s something that pisses me off. People have their own shit going on in their lives for a whole range of reasons, but they always care about kids. The whole community does ... I actually cancelled my subscription to the *Australian*.

WA: Great.

Quebec: You know what? Sometimes you’ve got to know the devil. I would rate their stuff, but I actually called them, cancelled it, and specifically said, “I want it noted in my file I am cancelling my subscription because of that cartoon”. I think I tweeted that.

Another to take exception to the Bill Leak cartoon was “Hotel”, who had this to say:

Hotel: Where would that fit in terms of, or where does freedom of speech fit or not fit, in this?

WA: Well the laws are very clear about this. If you say or do something that has outcomes, legal outcomes, or cause somebody’s death, then you are responsible. Doesn’t matter if it’s about freedom of speech. If something you say can cause somebody to commit suicide, then you are responsible. There are laws around slander, there are laws around these issues.

Hotel: All right, let me take you just one step further; you might have known the essay on freedom of speech. It is just one further question around those rights – or seeming rights. In some ways, it runs towards what you’d understand to be called


gatekeepers. Where does the Bill Leak cartoon fit in this? Now, that was brought up in Government. Both houses of Government argued this, saying that it was freedom of speech that Bill Leak had. If people suicided over that, vulnerable people suicided over that, who could they charge? Who would be charged?

WA: Bill Leak’s cartoon contravened section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. A complaint was registered with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) but it was later dropped. The president of the AHRC Gillian Triggs revealed that twice the Commission had written to Leak giving him the opportunity to assert that he had drawn the cartoon in good faith. Leak never responded to the Commission.

Onnisown Matt Malone ▸ Aboriginal
May 2 at 5:50 PM · 📍
Briggs buying a advertisement billboard to troll Pauline Hanson lol 😂😂😂
👍👎❤️ 72 4 Comments

Kerri Sheppard ▸ Aboriginal
September 12, 2015 at 9:05 PM · 📍
It has come to my attention that Ryan Sanders, Darren Daly and Jessica Lockwood are fake troll accounts, therefore they will be deleted and banned from this group. It seems some people like to come in...
👍 205 59 Comments

Amanda Wilson shame u have to waste precious time with this nonsense, but thankyou for doing so xxx, hate trolls x

Sharon Schneider ▸ Aboriginal
May 10, 2018 at 6:02 PM · 📍
Admin can you block this racist troll!!!!

Jamie Barlow
👍 2 4 Comments

Gindarella Angel What happened and where is he trolling you?

Brett Sprague ▸ Aboriginal
September 6, 2017 at 5:22 PM · 📍
Anyone know this Jason Quick fellow? Is he crazy or is he trolling Hanson??:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4850634/Indigenous-One-Nation-candidate-opposes-welfare-crackdown.html>

👍👎 11 21 Comments

Kerri Sheppard ▸ Aboriginal
January 9, 2015 at 3:46 PM · 📍

The legislation as written provides: Section 18D of the Racial Discrimination Act specifies a publication “done in reasonably good faith” is a defence against a racial discrimination complaint under section 18C. There are those on the conservative side of politics and in the media that have been attempting to have Section 18C scrapped claiming that the defences are inadequate (Karp, 2017). Unfortunately, racism presents in many forms; the type for which Bill Leak was responsible remains a problem as it gives society the notion that it is okay to attack Aboriginal people, particularly when no action is taken. A recent research article argues that “one of the most persistent aspects of today’s discourse regarding racism in Australia is the very denial of its existence” (Markwick, Ansari, Clinch & McNeil, 2019). The authors make this point as part of their article into the effects of

racism on individual and community health and remind readers that “A large and growing body of evidence consistently implicates racism as a key determinant of the health of Indigenous Australians”. While their own research focuses on Victorian Aboriginal health and the experience of racism, they are clear about this fact that the same issues are present right across Australia.

Markwick et al summarise their findings as showing that “Indigenous adults were 7 times more likely to experience racism than non-Indigenous adults who were born in Australia to Australian-born parents who only spoke English at home”, and the three categories of Aboriginal people most subject to racism were males, younger people, and those living in metropolitan areas. But they also point out that racism is very difficult to measure so “reducing it to a single-item question cannot capture its complexity”, and that “Indigenous people view racism as a more diverse and complex phenomenon than non-Indigenous people”. A culturally sensitive survey designed by Paradies and Cunningham (2008), when applied in Victoria, showed that 97% of Aboriginal participants of the project reported having experienced racism, and since there are well-evidenced implications of racism for poorer mental and physical health, this is a significant problem.



My research conversations showed that racism is still something Aboriginal and Torres Strait people deal with on a daily basis. In the conduct of the interviews, there were many discussions about racism, both offline and online. “Foxtrot”, discussing racism online, said “Sometimes, people talk about racism they’ve experienced, and they get a lot of support around it, which I think’s really important.” On these sites, and despite the problems of gatekeeping, power games and trolling that I discuss in previous chapters, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people inform and protect each other, and exchange information with others, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

But without formal political representation, Aboriginal people find it difficult to argue for political sovereignty, or even formal recognition. The implementation of the United Nations

Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is something successive Australian Governments have failed to honour, even though Australia is a signatory to the UN convention.

For one of my interviewees, “Lima”, this is an area of concern:

WA: There have been lots of issues that have caused Aboriginal activists to protest on and offline. Are there any particular areas that motivate you?

Lima: Oh well as I said, it’s all of them. I’ve just got into the blue now about Uluru being closed ... [Lima is protesting the fact that only the affirmative vote for the inclusion into the constitution was funded, while the no vote was not funded.]

WA: Yeah, that’s a bad one that.

Lima: So that’s one of the big ones for me at the moment. But mine is the treaty; we want a treaty. I believe in land rights, human rights and, you know, social justice for Aboriginal people.

Social media for Aboriginal and Torres Strait people has been adopted as the medium where they are voicing their opinions about politics, about the lack of representation, and about ways to reclaim culture, country and community in the twenty-first century. As “Tango” says:

we have commonalities so when you see it you are naturally drawn to being around similar people. But in other ways we are all just like any other group of like-minded people sharing the same interests. I think an online community itself tends to be more concentrated than an offline one – which means heightened states, values, opinions. Offline I don’t think communities’ gel with as many people in the same way.

Conclusion / summary

The conclusion to the thesis is presented here and also in the form of a short vodcast that summarises the research outcomes from the thesis: *From Homo Sacer to Subaltern: Becoming Aboriginal Online*. It describes what takes place on Aboriginal social media, and meanings that can be extracted from the findings. The aim is both to record the final chapter of the thesis, and to make my findings available to potential users. In keeping with what takes place on social media, this summary of findings will be uploaded to the online locations where the information was sourced: Aboriginal Facebook sites. The purpose is to inform discussion on and about Aboriginal cultural, history, and political aspirations, and how these might be resurrected and maintained and taught in schools and universities into the future. This, so that people can learn about, and learn to respect, Indigenous culture.

It is important to begin at the beginning, recognising that in Australia's Indigenous past, communal decision-making was obeyed, and cultural mores, folkways, taboos were respected and followed. But since colonisation and the forced diaspora of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people off their land and into the cities and towns of Australia, the practice has been to ignore these mores, and the truth of Australian history where it relates to Aboriginal people. The massacres, the poisonings, and the use of biological weapons, as well as the concentration camps – the Reserves and Missions – where overseers strictly enforced rigid unswaying governance, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples were forbidden to speak their languages and practice culture, where it was mandatory to seek permission to come and go: all this has been largely concealed, hidden from public knowledge. As an Aboriginal man, I am daily reminded of the ignorance of the general population about the history and culture of our people. But social media has filled a role in teaching people about their own history, and many are now learning about Australia's colonial past by participating in social media sites.

Lurking and learning

My research indicates that there are significant numbers of people lurking online on Aboriginal sites, and while research shows that 'lurkers' in general very rarely post messages, comments or memes, Aboriginal users of social media, my own research suggests, choose to lurk for reasons specific to the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people on the sites where I undertook participant observation were, in the majority of cases, trying to reconnect with their culture and

connect with other Aboriginal people in the virtual community: they are, in effect, ‘lurking to learn’ (Dennen, 2007). Many are attempting to build their own Aboriginal identity and be accepted by other Aboriginal people online and out in the communities. They spend time reading the memes of others to learn the cultural mores and folkways of Aboriginal people, and the behaviours needed in the performance of their Aboriginality. In addition, they learn the importance of speaking in terms and ways used by those online, commonly known as ‘Aboriginal English’.

This ‘lurking to learn’ is associated with a revitalisation of Aboriginal culture, as in the past those people would not have had the opportunity to learn from other Aboriginal people, because they would not have been accepted as Aboriginal, and hence lacked the requisite speech acts and performativity to be accepted as Aboriginal. They now lurk until such time as they are confident they know enough to be accepted by other Aboriginal people. Learning about Aboriginal history and culture has politicised some of those online; many challenge racism head-on and call it out where they see it. It is therefore understood that the online community is much more than a place of passive positioning; it is also a site of active actions and human-interactions.

Identity and acceptance

But being accepted online or in community can be very problematic, and at times Aboriginal social media is a place of lateral violence. One reason for this, my research indicates, revolves around the lack of adequate government funding to Aboriginal organisations. This places strain on those in need of government assistance, because there is not enough to go around, and in effect it pits Aboriginal people against each other in competition for vital services such as housing and other government provision. The fewer the people competing for funding, the greater the chances of receiving funding.

The importance of how one presents as Aboriginal cannot be underestimated because gaining identity is often a matter of being accepted by the (often self-appointed) cultural gatekeepers in the online virtual community. There are also historical barriers in place to becoming recognised as Aboriginal, though an increasing number of people are self-identifying. The number of people identifying as Aboriginal spiked at an all-time high after former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made the apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, and in addition, social media has given people the tools to identify to the online Aboriginal community. Many

of these people, I posit, are likely to be part of the Aboriginal diaspora who wish to rejoin the Aboriginal community. Their ancestors would likely have been forcibly removed from their traditional country and forbidden by the coloniser from practicing their culture and language, which led to a loss of culture. Now these people are learning how to undertake the right sort of ‘performance’ (Goffman, 1959) of Aboriginality. Some people resort to using Aboriginal avatars, such as the Aboriginal flag, as a way of being accepted by those online. Others use their own images, and one example of identifying-as-performance is JR, whom I discussed earlier in this thesis. On the 26th of January 2014, JR posted a photograph of himself. He was dressed only in a loin cloth, and had painted himself with ochre just as traditional Aborigines do. In this guise he presented himself to the online community for acceptance as Aboriginal (and he was accepted by the online community at that moment). Such performances signal to others online that the person is either Aboriginal or is an Aboriginal sympathiser. This will usually gain some form of acceptance from the online Aboriginal community, at least in the short term.

Sometimes, however, posting memes as an Aboriginal can draw negative responses. Aboriginals online often draw the attention of the extreme far-right groups such as United Patriots Front (UPF), a well-known group whose members troll most Aboriginal sites. A favourite ruse or stratagem used by these trolls is to manoeuvre individuals to expose themselves as Aboriginal, and they are then ‘shitposted’ by trolls in the endeavour to hijack the online discourse.

[Sovereignty and political representation](#)

Another prominent aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander discussion on social media is the struggle for political sovereignty and the right to self-determination. This thesis determined that there are many Aboriginal people on social media who object strenuously to political parties foisting unmandated Aboriginal people on them as their representatives. That is, Aboriginals who are elected not by Aboriginal people, but by the 97 per cent of non-Aboriginal Australians. Political parties in Australia have recruited what I describe as Quislings⁶⁶, in the attempt to foster the appearance that these Aboriginals are representative of, and have received a political mandate from, Aboriginal people. Most Australian electors would be unaware of this, possibly thinking that these ‘gorgets’ are elected by Aboriginal people, but

⁶⁶ Vidkun Quisling was a Norwegian military officer and politician who nominally headed the government of Norway during Nazi German occupation of Norway during World War II. He was executed by firing squad.

none of them have been through a process of nomination by Aboriginal people, and therefore have never received any mandate from Aboriginal people to represent them at any level of government – state or federal.

These Aboriginals act in a similar role to the gorgets of Australia's colonial past, where king plates were used by the British to position certain Aboriginals above the Aboriginal community; their station was that of subaltern over the rest – the homo sacer. Cajoled into representing the interests of the coloniser over their own people, they destroyed order and process within their own communities. The scheme was designed to destroy Indigenous systems of governance, and break down cultural lores/laws and systems of order and governance that might threaten the invaders' objectives. It is having a similar effect today, among those who would ingratiate themselves for political office and the power and prestige associated with that office.

My fieldwork and archival research found that participants on social media display a marked anxiety around the lack of Aboriginal political representation. Many Aboriginal people online bemoan the presence of those who are unelected by Aboriginal people, but attempt to pass themselves off as representing the interests of Aboriginal people. In fact, they represent only the interests of the particular political party that has endorsed them, and do not represent the political objectives of their own people. One site conducted an online poll on the issue of unelected Aboriginals claiming to represent Aboriginal people. It attracted over 10,000 responses, and the vast majority argued that these individuals were not elected by and hold no mandate from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to represent them.

In order to combat these unelected 'gorgets', a participant of my research spoke of the possibility of Indigenous candidates being selected from their own communities, right around Australia. Those candidates elected in this way would attend a meeting once every three years at the Old Parliament House in Canberra. The suggestion was that these delegates might form a caucus of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait delegates attending, and elect certain of their number to represent the interests of Indigenous Australians federally as Senate candidates. The reasoning is that if candidates were elected to the Senate, they may be able to influence how Australia is run politically, and in this way Indigenous Australians would have some form of direct representation.

It is also not beyond the realms of possibility that ordinary non-Indigenous Australians might just support an Indigenous political party. One need only recall the 'Walk for Reconciliation'

in 2000, across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, to see that there is support for improving the social, political and living standards of Indigenous Australians. The National Museum records that:

About 250,000 people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, made their way across the famous Sydney landmark in a continuous stream that lasted nearly six hours. It was the largest political demonstration ever held in Australia.⁶⁷

For some years the Senate has been the site of political bartering, as each of the two major political parties vie for the support of senators for control of the senate. At different times there have been small political parties or independents holding the balance of power in the senate. If elected to the Senate, Indigenous candidates may be able to barter for better outcomes for Indigenous people. But it is important to note that the possibility of a future Indigenous political party, and the impact of social media more generally, raise questions about never-before-experienced situations; questions that future research could usefully address.

Social media, cultural norms, and future identities

Some sections of both mainstream and social media have little regard for Indigenous culture. Often it is the result of uninformed people unknowingly breaking cultural taboos because they have never been made aware of their cultural importance and their maintenance. This focuses attention on the importance of teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait culture and languages in schools and universities.

One example is of reports and postings about death; the failure to recognise cultural norms in this area remains a cause of pain and angst for some in the more remote parts of Australia, where deep and abiding mores of culture are still observed. Another example of important cultural matters potentially threatened by technology is, *who has the 'right to speak on country'*. In traditional Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural lore, only those on their traditional country have the right to speak. After the arrival of the coloniser, the forced diaspora of Indigenous Australians off country effectively denied those who had been moved the right to speak. The advent of communications media and more recently social media has changed the paradigm; technology outstrips traditional law/lore, and now anyone can speak on another's country. Adding to the potential quandary is the question of those who, like myself, are 'the diaspora'. On returning to country, such people may think that they are entitled to speak, as they are now in 'their country' and it is their inheritance. This sets in place an obvious

⁶⁷ NMA (2020, June 10) Defining Moments: Walk for Reconciliation. <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/walk-for-reconciliation>

dichotomy for those who have never left, and raises important questions for debate. It also means that any proposal for an Indigenous party would have to consider how to organise so that candidates from the various areas of Australia would be true representatives, and would have the legal and moral right to speak on country as elected candidates for that locality.

As Australia is a signatory to the 'Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), mandated by the United Nations, Indigenous people have the rights of cultural expression, identity, language, employment, health, education and ownership to cultural and ceremonial expression. The Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, all affirm the fundamental importance of the right of self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. My research has found that these issues are vitally important to Indigenous Australians who use social media, and that Facebook, in particular, has become a platform for social and political reform, and for social change. The next step is to find a way to implement changes in response to the urgent calls for the Australian Government to abide by all these covenants.

Speaking on Country

Attached to this thesis is a short film, "Speaking on Country". I wanted to reflect on the practice in Aboriginal Australia that only those people who live on their traditional country have the right to speak on that country. This is a long-held convention shared among each of Australia's Aboriginal nations. Technology long ago circumvented this convention; now any Aboriginal person can speak or write using the technologies of the day on anyone's else's country; and in a sense no conventions are broken, as the tradition refers to bodily speaking on country. But it is still maintained out of respect for each of the nations.

But what of those who no longer live on their traditional country: for example, those of the Aboriginal diaspora, those removed from their traditional country. If they are born and raised on foreign land, do they have entitlement to speak on their adopted land? Or are they still traditional owners of the land from which they were removed? These questions often occupy the thinking of the diaspora of Aboriginal people. As one of the diaspora, a Kamilaroi man living on Ngunnawal country, I returned to my own homeland to speak on my traditional country on the film attached to this thesis.

I travelled through a land I did not remember. As a child I remembered a different place, one that held stories and childhood fears, like the Pilliga Scrub, rugged bushland where the yowies roamed, where Min Min lights flickered on the horizon wandering about. Childhood stories remain indelible, but that country was not the place I remembered. I passed through hectares of freshly ploughed land where wheat, sorghum, barley, maize, cotton and sunflower fields were ready for planting – in all directions, to the horizons. This was not the Pilliga I remembered, no Min Min lights were there now. The spirit of the land that held my identity and imagination had vanished. A new world had replaced the old – *old Kamilaroi deferred*, to use Stuart Hall’s analogy.

Early childhood stories and memories had not prepared me for the death of my history of country and my belonging. Arriving in Gunnedah I searched the streets for Aboriginal people, but saw none. Drizzling rain accompanied me the last few kilometres into the birth town of my father. Through the light rain I walked to find a dining place to eat my first meal back in Gunnedah in 60 years. I was confronted by a virtual white-out of the place. Apart from four Aboriginal men wearing bowls T-shirts with Aboriginal motifs, the town was a stranger to me. My compatriot and I glanced at the Aboriginals playing bowls in the rain, but passed without speaking to them as they were too involved in the whiteman’s competition to acknowledge our presence in any way. This was not how I remembered it to be in my childhood days. I remembered many the streets alive with many Kamilaroi people, and their busy hum made all appear seen, at least. Even the stranger was welcomed with a look, a tip of the hat or a “Hello”. That was my father’s homeland. But now, this emptying of friendship and of black faces and voices of Aboriginal people was an unwelcome feeling, one I was not prepared for. I felt completely alien.

On the second day, we visited three shops to buy Aboriginal ‘clap sticks’ but no one in those shops we visited understood what clap sticks were. Even the lone Aboriginal Local Land Council employee, further away down the street, didn’t know what clap sticks were. I turned to my compatriot and asked “Perhaps clap sticks are called something else here?” At the Local Aboriginal Land Council we were treated civilly, but we both felt we didn’t belong to this town or place. And this after I had told the employee, “This is where my family came from!” Indignant, I walked away from the Land Council, not knowing which way to turn for any comfort.

Today none of my family remains in the area. The short time we were in Gunnedah, we searched for Aboriginal and Kamilaroi signage and representation on town buildings, in the public places and parks, but only noticed three signs in the town depicting anything to do with Aboriginal people. Apart from the fading sign above the front entrance of the George Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council, the town appeared to have emptied most evidence of an Aboriginal presence.

We both felt alienated from Grandfather's land, and the filming became something of an urgency. We finally located some clap sticks made by one of the local Aboriginal men. In our rush the clap sticks were not used, as by then the film had become something that had to be shot in haste. We both felt unwelcome. The film reflects this; the low sound quality caused by passing cars, and even the wind, as well as the interruptions from off camera, all seem to be preventing me from speaking here.

I feel that I have no connection to that country, though it was my grandfather's country. Nearing Ngunnawal country on the drive home I felt relief, comfortable, relaxed; I was coming home. I have lost my country due to the diaspora, but now I have found a new country with the Ngunnawal people on Ngunnawal land.

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