

# **‘We grew up this place’: Ernabella Mission**

**1937-1974**

**Carol Ann Pybus**

**B.A., M.A.**

**(University of South Australia)**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

June 2012

## **Statement of Authorship**

I, Carol Ann Pybus, hereby state that this thesis contains no material that has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed .....

Carol Pybus

## **Statement of Authority of Access**

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Signed .....

Carol Pybus

## **Statement of Ethical Conduct**

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

Signed .....

Carol Pybus

## **Abstract**

Since the 1960s revisionist Australian histories have sought to redress the perceived imbalance of earlier accounts. These histories have predominantly argued that invasion and dispossession typify contact between Aborigines and settler Australians. Concerning contact between missionaries and Aborigines, missionaries are held to be largely responsible not only for the dispossession of Aboriginal spirituality, but for the current dysfunction at many former mission sites. Furthermore, much scholarly work and commentary over the last three decades assumes a crude binarism in respect to Aboriginal religious beliefs and Christianity. Traditional, or classical Aboriginal belief systems and adherence to the Christian faith are held to be antithetical. Implicitly more than explicitly, but apparent nevertheless, is the accompanying understanding that Christian beliefs displace Aboriginality. Aborigines, therefore, are either spiritually traditional or Christian, not both. That is, to be authentically Aboriginal one cannot be Christian and vice versa. While revisionist studies have been useful in contesting earlier assessments of the mission era, they have become established as yet another orthodoxy.

Much evidence suggests that the interface between missions, Christianity and Aborigines is more nuanced than this new orthodoxy permits. Taking its cue from this evidence, this thesis investigates the premise that many Aboriginal people find Christianity important and that their belief in Christianity is a legitimate expression of Aboriginality. This thesis challenges the dominant reading of missionary impact through a case study of the contact between Presbyterian missionaries and Pitjantjatjara people at Ernabella Mission (1937 to 1974) in the far north-west of South Australia. A close reading of archival material from Ernabella and recollections of Pitjantjatjara people who associated with the mission reveal that

missionaries at Ernabella attempted to preserve tribal life through a policy of minimal intervention, that the presence of the mission and its policy allowed Pitjantjatjara people to remain connected to their country, and that Pitjantjatjara people exercised agency in their relationships with missionaries and in their engagement with Christianity. This research found that at Ernabella (and elsewhere) those who are Elders of the church are most often those also responsible for upholding traditional Law. The alleged boundaries, therefore, and dislocation between Aborigines and Christianity, are not so clearly defined. Throughout the mission era Aboriginal people expressed Christianity in myriad and innovative ways and have continued to do so in the post-mission era. Recognising this, studies of other missions may also find histories which contest the established position.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly I thank my supervisors, Dr Mitchell Rolls and Rev. Dr Bill Edwards. In particular, I thank Mitchell for his exemplary supervision which never flagged over eight long years and his encouragement and enthusiasm which kept me on track. He managed the roles of supervisor, academic colleague and friend with great professionalism. I am constantly in awe and inspired by his intellect and commitment to academic rigour. I cannot thank Bill enough for his warm welcomes in Adelaide and his generosity in sharing his extraordinary memories of his life's work as a missionary at Ernabella and elsewhere. Bill has been there from the outset providing valuable assistance, comment and information and kindly agreed to come on board as Research Supervisor in the latter years of candidature. It was Bill's work which was the initial inspiration for this thesis. I am also grateful to Bill for inviting me to the Salisbury Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Uniting Congress and for his interpreting which allowed me to meet and talk with some Ernabella people. I thank these people for their warm hospitality.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my academic colleagues Dr Terry Moore and Dr Kris Harman and fellow graduate research candidates at Riawunna for their collegiality and for not tiring of the years of discussion about missionaries. I am grateful to Riawunna and its staff for their administrative and other support throughout my candidature. I am particularly grateful for Emeritus Professor Basil Sansom's interest in this project and the pertinent comments over the years. In addition, I thank Associate Professor Anna Johnston from the School of English and Journalism and European Languages for her timely advice at different stages of my candidature. I am also grateful to the Centre for Colonialism and its Aftermath (CAIA) for giving me opportunities to present my work at conferences and seminars

and receive feedback. Phil Patman deserves a special mention for referring me to relevant references over the years and in particular, enthusiastically reading a draft of the whole thesis and providing valuable and encouraging comments. Thanks are due to the late Winifred Hilliard, a long serving missionary at Ernabella who wrote a history of Ernabella *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1976 and who shared her memories with me over a weekend in Hobart in 2007.

I extend my appreciation to the librarians at the Mitchell Library in Sydney, the National Library in Canberra and the State Library of South Australia for making available the material when I needed it. I am grateful to the Uniting Church Assembly Archivist, Christine Gordon, for granting permission to access the Presbyterian Church archives held in the Mitchell Library.

Finally my warmest and heartfelt thanks to my family—Denis for support and the preparation of delicious dinners over the years and Ceren and Jo, Sean, Ella and Jan for their ongoing interest in my work. Thanks are also due to my late friend Vicki Torr who gave me a copy of Winifred Hilliard's book *The People in Between*, many, many years ago which first awakened my interest in the extraordinary story of Ernabella Mission.

## Some Notes on Terminology

Anangu is a Pitjantjatjara word meaning ‘person’. It is used today by Aboriginal people in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands to refer to themselves. It can be regarded as a political descriptor which came into wider usage during the campaign in the 1970s leading to Land Rights in the APY Lands. For this reason Pitjantjatjara people are referred to as Anangu in the thesis from Chapter Six onwards.

## Abbreviations/Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEF	Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
APB	Aboriginal Protection Board
APBM	Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions
APY Lands	An <u>a</u> ngu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands
BOEMAR	Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
FCAATSI	Federation Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
NLA	National Library of Australia
ML	Mitchell Library
PCA	Presbyterian Church of Australia
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody



## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One</b>	Introduction: ‘There was to be no compulsion or imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom’	1
<b>Chapter Two</b>	Missions to Aborigines: ‘Places of Refuge or Concentration Centres?’	31
<b>Chapter Three</b>	From bush to mission: first contacts to 1937	72
<b>Chapter Four</b>	Ernabella 1937-1952: ‘Hunters become Herders’	112
<b>Chapter Five</b>	The evolution of a Christian community (1953-1961): ‘It had come to Pass’	164
<b>Chapter Six</b>	Ernabella after 1962: ‘Travellers along the Road’	220
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	Aboriginal and Christian: ‘Still we got Anangu way’	265
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	Conclusion	319
<b>Bibliography</b>		349

## List of Illustrations

<b>Figure 1</b>	Government and Mission Stations, South Australia	xi
<b>Figure 2</b>	Ernabella Mission in the late 1950s	xii
<b>Figure 3</b>	Ernabella School, children in line outside the school house, 1946	1
<b>Figure 4</b>	Missionaries and Aboriginal Residents, Ernabella, South Australia, ca. 1946	31
<b>Figure 5</b>	Two Children and a Woman with a Flock of Sheep in the Musgrave Ranges, South Australia, 1935	72
<b>Figure 6</b>	Woman working for a Dogger [dingo shooter], leading a Laden Camel, South Australia, ca. 1940	72
<b>Figure 7</b>	Worship and Industry to Fit the Environment that is Their Own	110
<b>Figure 8</b>	Rev. R. M. Trudinger Receives Candidates for Baptism	164
<b>Figure 9</b>	Outdoor School Class at Ernabella School, South Australia, 1946	220
<b>Figure 10</b>	Ernabella Schoolroom, 1963	220
<b>Figure 11</b>	Pitjantjatjara Elders Choir, 2009	265
<b>Figure 12</b>	Andy Tjilari (choir member) ‘Dancing Inma Ngintaka, the Giant Perentie Lizard, at Angatja, 1994’	265
<b>Figure 13</b>	Re-opening of the Ernabella Church, 6 April 2010	319

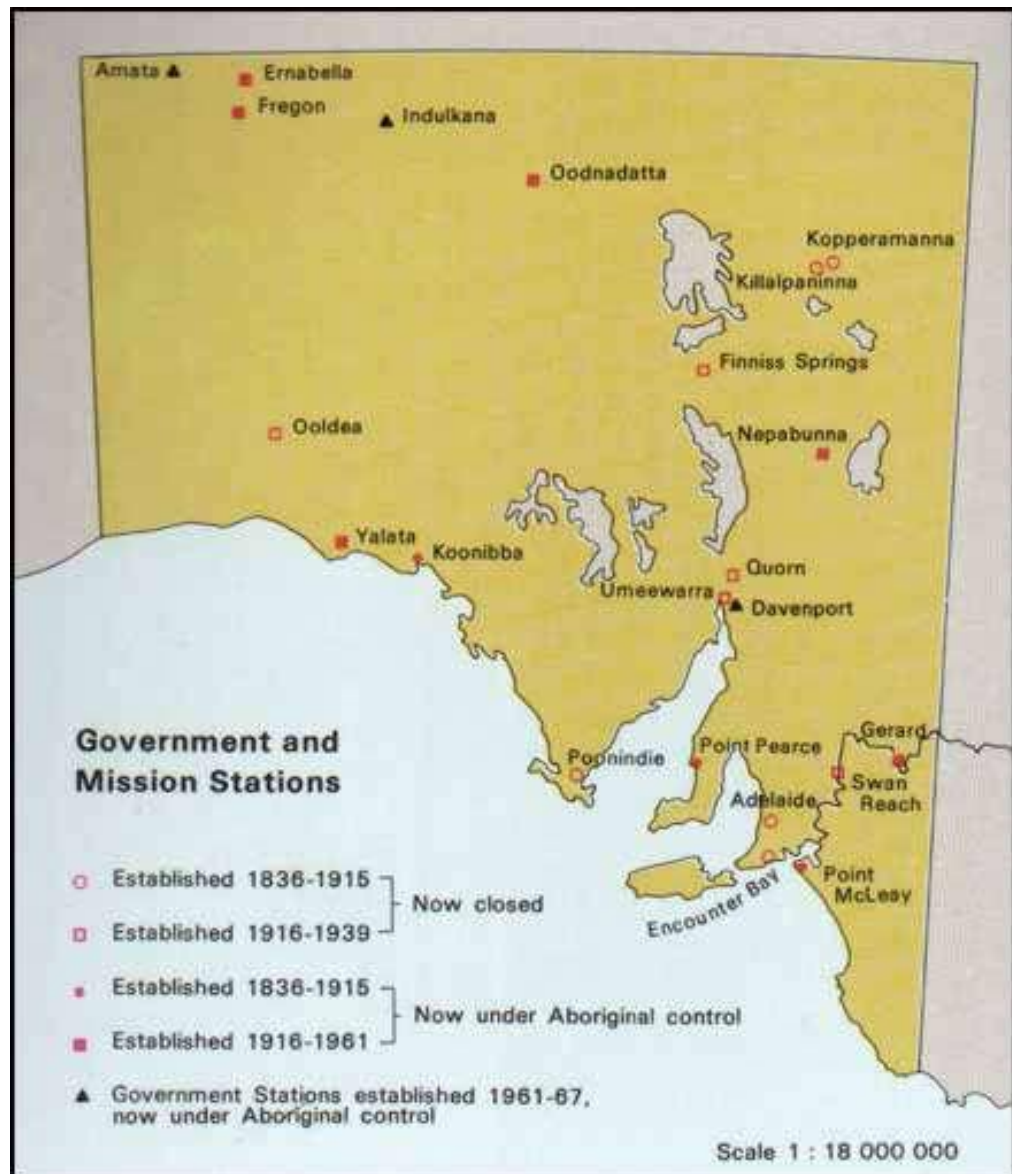


Figure 1

Government and Mission Stations in South Australia

<http://www.atlas.sa.gov.au/images/1settle19AborEuro2.jpg>



Figure 2

Ernabella in the late 1950s, looking south.

Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, Gillingham Printers, Underdale, SA, 2004, facing page 40.

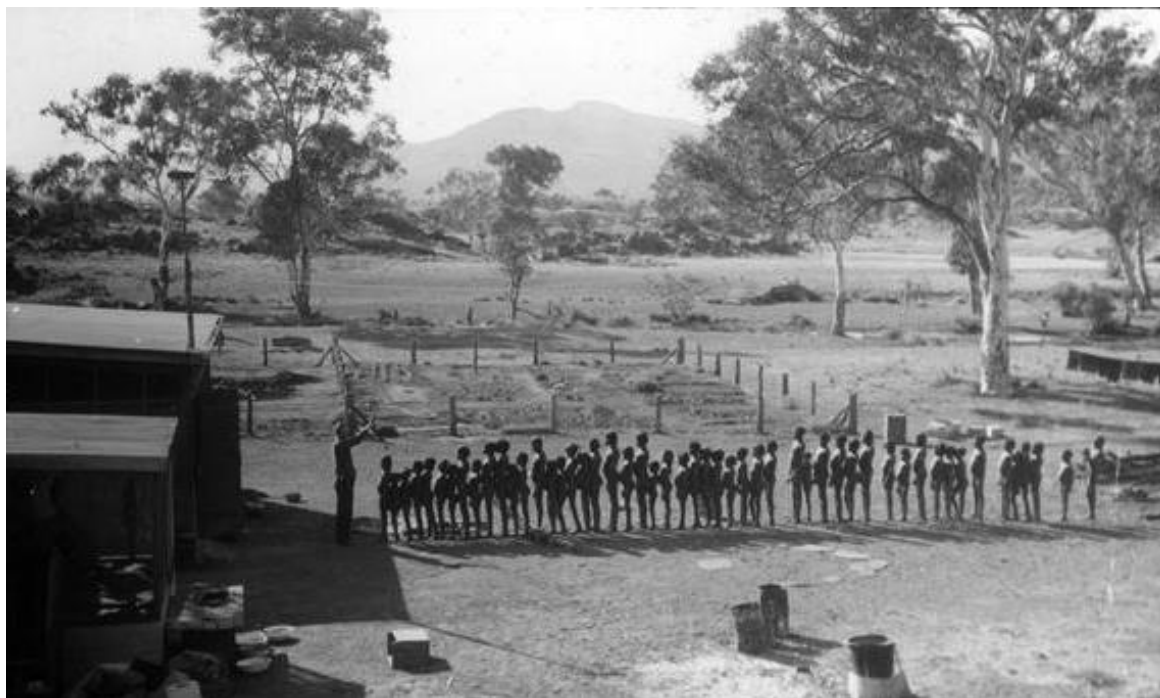


Figure 3  
Ernabella School, children in line outside the school house, South Australia, 1946.  
Duguid, C. < <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an23780725>>

## Chapter One: Introduction

**‘There was to be no compulsion or imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom’.<sup>1</sup>**

Since earliest colonial times the missionary experience has been a defining one for many Aboriginal people and significant in shaping relationships between Aborigines and settler Australians. Yet, at least outside theological circles, there have been few scholarly studies of this important contact.<sup>2</sup> According to Joel Robbins a reason for the dearth of studies analysing the important contact between Aborigines and missionaries and the

<sup>1</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1972, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, B., ‘Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Narratives on Melanesians’, *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2001, p. 37.

scholarly neglect of the phenomenon whereby Indigenous people claim to be Christian, is that Christianity has not been regarded as important for Aboriginal people.<sup>3</sup> In 1978 Bill Edwards challenged researchers to broaden their understanding of the impact of missionaries on Aboriginal societies and cultures. He pointed out that since the 1970s missionaries had increasingly come to be regarded as dispossessors of the spirituality of Aboriginal people and had become 'a convenient target for blame' in regards to contemporary problems experienced by Aboriginal communities.<sup>4</sup> By the 1960s there was an emerging scholarly discourse which questioned and criticised the nature of colonisation. Studies of Australian contact history formed part of this discourse and were shifting from the portrayal of settlement as relatively benign to that which argued that invasion and dispossession were more accurate descriptors. Central to this revision of colonial contact was a re-evaluation of Aboriginal agency. Aboriginal responses to colonisation were according to historian Henry Reynolds 'much more positive, creative and complex' than had previously been thought.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, despite the recognition of Aboriginal agency, where resistance models were soon privileged over those arguing a more creative, adaptive response to circumstance, revisionist contact histories by and large promulgated the critique of missionaries as cultural imperialists and arch dispossessors. Both implicitly and explicitly it is argued that as a result Aboriginal people somehow 'lost' their spirituality.

---

<sup>3</sup> Robbins, J., 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time and the Anthropology of Christianity', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 48, No. 1, February 2007, pp. 5-38.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture' *Interchange*, No 24, 1978, p. 195.

Bill Edwards was Superintendent of Ernabella Mission between 1958 and 1972 and minister for the Pitjantjatjara Uniting Church at Fregon and Amata until 1980. He continues to have a close association with Pitjantjatjara people. From 1981 to 1996 he taught in the Unaipon School at the University of South Australia where I was one of his students.

<sup>5</sup> Reynolds, H., *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006 [1981], p. 199.

There are two main dimensions to the above revisionist discourse. On the one hand it is argued that subjugation and cultural destruction characterised the encounter with missions. As the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) asserts, missions had ‘a deliberate policy of undermining and destroying [Aboriginal] spiritual and cultural beliefs ... [where] the supervisors and missionaries had all the power’.<sup>6</sup> The other argues that the impact was insignificant in terms of transforming belief systems and that conversion was generally resisted. Missionary narratives which reported ‘progress’ in evangelising, were regarded as little more than propaganda.<sup>7</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from these two competing but not necessarily antithetical analyses is that even though Aboriginal people resisted the imposition of Christianity they were not able to withstand it and loss of traditional culture occurred nevertheless.

Yet the lived reality of many Aboriginal people who today embrace multi-layered approaches to spiritual life contests this assessment. Religious pluralism is clearly demonstrated by the winner of the prestigious Blake Prize for Religious Art in 2007, Gija woman Shirley Purdie, who described her painting as representing her ‘two-way’ culture.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore across Australia Aboriginal people tell of ongoing relationships with former missionaries, of the respect which missionaries had for traditional culture and of the support provided by missionaries while Aboriginal people

---

<sup>6</sup> RCIADIC, National Report, Vol. 1, 1.4.3, *The Importance of History*, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> See Tonkinson’s assessment of the missionaries at Jigalong on the edge of the Gibson Desert in Western Australia, during his fieldwork in 1963. Tonkinson, R., ‘Reflections on a Failed Crusade’ in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 63. See also Kolig, who argues a similar case in the Kimberleys. Kolig, E., ‘Mission Not Accomplished’ in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA., 1988, pp. 376-96; Yengoyan, A., ‘Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia’ in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 233-58.

<sup>8</sup> Higson, R., ‘Kimberley Artist takes Blake Prize’, *The Australian*, 30 August 1993, p 7.

built their own communities.<sup>9</sup> Despite Edwards' challenge to scholars over three decades ago to interrogate more closely the impact of Christian missionising, and the voices of Aboriginal people who had direct experience of the mission times, the stereotypical image of missionaries as contributors to the dispossession of Aboriginal people and their cultures remains a powerful orthodoxy.

### **Literature review**

Carolyn Schwartz and Francoise Dussart pointed out as recently as 2010 that the experience of indigenous peoples' engagement with Christianity is still 'largely peripheral to the emerging subfield "the anthropology of Christianity"'.<sup>10</sup> However, there is a body of literature relating to the encounter between Aborigines and missionaries in Australia which can be categorised into three broad perspectives. These I have labelled pre-revisionist, revisionist and post-revisionist because revisionist perspectives have come to dominate current understandings. From the 1960s, studies of mission times attempted to revise what was regarded as the bias in earlier mission histories with a focus on the role of missionary work in the colonising process. The entry under 'Missions' in the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* describes missions as being akin to prisons where people could be controlled.<sup>11</sup>

### **Pre-revisionist**

---

<sup>9</sup> Minutjukur, M., 'Indigenous Politics: A Letter to Australians', *Australian Options*, Issue 47, Summer 2006, pp. 6-8, <[http://www.australian-options.org.au/issues/options\\_47/article\\_minutjukur.php](http://www.australian-options.org.au/issues/options_47/article_minutjukur.php)>, accessed 1 May 2007; Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, C. & Dussart, F., 'Christianity in Aboriginal Australia Revisited', in C. Schwartz & F. Dussart (eds.), *Engaging Christianity in Aboriginal Australia*, The Australian Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Horton, D. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS, Canberra, 1994, p. 706. While encyclopaedia entries by their nature tend to be generalised, in the absence of reference to specific missions, this has been read as representative of all missions.



Prior to the revisionist histories the encounter between missionaries and Aboriginal people was mostly contained in accounts from missionaries and their churches. The overriding theme in these accounts was that of missionaries as saviours. Uppermost in these versions of mission history is the single-minded belief that Christianity could improve the situation for Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, despite the assumption about the benefits Christianity would bring, as missionaries faced the daily reality of mission work their understandings about Aboriginal cultures came under challenge. The resulting ambivalences and tensions feature in missionary writing. As Paul Albrecht noted, Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg soon realised that Aboriginal people, far from having no religious beliefs were the most spiritual of people with every aspect of their lives centred around religion.<sup>12</sup> This recognition of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs by missionaries, albeit at the time considered inferior to Christianity, was not widely acknowledged or understood. That missionaries lived more intimately and continuously with Aboriginal societies than most meant that they were able to provide a unique record of daily life. In these records expressions of humanitarianism sit alongside paternalism. However, missing from denominational accounts was a critical reflection of the place of missionary work in the wider political and historical context of colonisation.

### **Revisionist**

Revisionist analyses turned their attention to indigenous religions as meriting study. These studies were underpinned by an essentialist understanding of culture which identified those Aborigines holding traditional beliefs as authentic, and those who claimed to be Christian as acculturated. Thus the focus of revisionist studies was on

---

<sup>12</sup> Albrecht, P., *Relhiperra: About Aborigines (Incorporating the Thoughts of a Reluctant Missionary)*, The Bennelong Society, January 1994, <<http://www.bennelong.com.au/books/pdf/Relhiperra.pdf>>, accessed 12 October 2011.

traditional aspects of indigenous religions, glossing over or leaving out entirely indigenous engagement with Christianity. As Douglas has noted, where Christianity was mentioned it was regarded as a ‘counter hegemonic product’ of colonisation.<sup>13</sup>

Anne Pattel-Gray’s 1998 text<sup>14</sup> illustrates what I argue has become the orthodoxy where missions and missionaries are regarded as complicit in colonisation or as Edwards has noted as the scapegoat for the contemporary dysfunction in former mission communities.<sup>15</sup> Pattel-Gray broadly condemns the church and missionaries for being complicit in the colonisation of Aboriginal people by acting as an agent for the state and providing the foundation for dispossession.<sup>16</sup>

### **Post-revisionist**

Countering the revisionist discourse, Kenelm Burridge’s 1991 study *In the Way* provides a reassessment of the complex relationship between indigenous religions worldwide and Christianity and provides an insight into the ambivalences inherent in the missionary enterprise.<sup>17</sup> One of the first scholarly texts dedicated to an analysis of the contact between missionaries and Aboriginal people in Australia is the 1988 volume edited by Deborah Bird Rose and Tony Swain which attempted to bring studies of Christianity *vis-a-vis* its relationship with Aborigines in from the margins as it were.<sup>18</sup> The contributors represent the diverse positions in the debate over the impact of missionaries on Aboriginal people and start from the standpoint that Christianity is significant and that it

---

<sup>13</sup> Douglas, B., ‘Encounters with the Enemy?’, 2001, p. 38; An example of this thinking can be found in the ground breaking study by Comaroff, J. & J., *Of Revelation and Revolution : Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture’, 1978, p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood*, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Burridge, K., *In the Way: A Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Swain, T. & Rose, D. B. (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988.

provides more than a veneer to the lives of Aboriginal people. The collection also demonstrates the vast variety of Aboriginal experiences to missionising throughout Australia and goes some way to dispelling the orthodox stereotype that Aborigines everywhere were at the mercy of a hegemonic missionary enterprise.

In 1990 John Harris first published his comprehensive study of the 200 year encounter between Aborigines and missionaries. This text in some ways reflects earlier denominational writing. That is, Harris regards it as the duty of the Church to assist Aboriginal people and starts from the premise that Aboriginal people were interested in Christianity. This study portrays missionaries in a more balanced way than many revisionist studies and acknowledges the mistakes and failures of missionaries alongside their compassion for the people they were attempting to evangelise. It also acknowledges that there could be points of connection between Christianity and traditional beliefs and documents the ways in which Aboriginal people ‘encountered the Christian faith and made it their own’.<sup>19</sup>

This was followed by another key text edited by Peggy Brock in 2005.<sup>20</sup> The contributors to Brock’s volume focus on the complexities of the contact between Christianity and communities which hold beliefs other than Christianity. Four chapters focus on the responses of Aboriginal people to the introduction of Christianity and contest the generalised perception that Aboriginal people were victims of the encounter.

Most recently a special edition of *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (2010) focuses on studies of Christianity in Aboriginal communities from an anthropological perspective. The editors argue that while there have been studies of indigenous peoples’

---

<sup>19</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1994, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Brock, P. (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, Boston, 2005.

encounter with Christianity the engagement of Aboriginal people in Australia with Christianity has been largely omitted. To redress this absence from the anthropological literature, the contributors examine the various ways in which Aboriginal people express Christianity and maintain traditional beliefs.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, there are studies which focus on individual missions from a range of denominations which demonstrate an agency other than resistance on the part of Aboriginal people.<sup>22</sup> Brock's study of three South Australian missions from different eras—Poonindie established in the mid nineteenth century, Koonibba at the end of the nineteenth century and Nepabunna in the 1930s show the initiative of Aboriginal people on these missions as they attempted to forge new communities and adapt to new circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

These studies provide a more nuanced understanding of the mission era than more broadly focussed revisionist studies and demonstrate that there was a vast diversity of practices deployed by missionaries. Furthermore, these studies unsettle the orthodox analysis of the outcome of contact between missionaries and Aboriginal people. One of the ways they do this is by showing how Christianity has been incorporated into, or exists alongside, traditional belief systems in creative ways.

---

<sup>21</sup> Schwartz, C. & Dussart, F. (eds.), 'Engaging Christianity in Aboriginal Australia', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010.

<sup>22</sup> See J. Harmsen's study of the Catholic Mission at Santa Teresa, *You Gave us the Dreaming*, Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 1995; Loos, N., *White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007; McIntosh, I., 'Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal Belief in the Christian God', *Oceania*, Vol. 67, No. 4, June 1997, pp. 273-88; Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution, USA, 1986; Austin-Broos, D., 'The Meaning of *Pepe*: God's Law and the Western Arrernte', *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, October 2003; de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu: White culture and Black Women's Law*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2005; Tonkinson, R., *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Fort Worth, 1991. Studies of missions in the earliest colonial times also point to Aboriginal people exercising agency in the encounter, for example see Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989; Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper & the Ruptured World*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, Vic., 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Brock, P., *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalization and Survival*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993.

## Ernabella Mission

This thesis will examine the contact between Pitjantjatjara people in the far north-west of South Australia<sup>24</sup> and the Presbyterian mission at Ernabella which operated from 1937 to 1974. It will interrogate a number of assumptions underpinning the orthodox discourse of such contact and the subsequent impact of missions on Aboriginal cultures and societies. The thesis does so through a close reading of the archival documents from Ernabella Mission.

The establishment of a mission at Ernabella appeared to be initially driven by humanitarian and practical, rather than evangelistic motives. In a letter to the Commissioner for Public Works in South Australia, Dr Charles Duguid expressed his concern for the dire situation of Aboriginal people in central Australia and wrote that the ‘only hope for natives on the Great Inland Reserve ... is to found a Christian mission station in the vicinity of the Musgrave Ranges’.<sup>25</sup> His campaign for the establishment of Ernabella Mission was underpinned by his belief that it was ‘a responsibility of the Christian community’.<sup>26</sup> Once the Mission had been established however, the aim of evangelism was articulated alongside the humanitarian and practical. The first Superintendent, Reverend Harry Taylor stated in his 1938 report from the Mission that their work was always underpinned by a broader and more important agenda, that is ‘to present Jesus to these people’ and in so doing it was hoped to ‘transform the meaning of their ancient customs’.<sup>27</sup> In 1949 these humanitarian, practical and evangelistic ideals

---

<sup>24</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>25</sup> Duguid to Hudd 14/8/1936, Papers of Charles Duguid MS 5068 Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>26</sup> Duguid, C., Letter to *Melbourne Herald*, 26/1/1940, np. PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502, Folder 3.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, H., Statement of Policy and Principles, 1938, p. 1. PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502, Folder 2.

still underpinned mission policy as noted in a Board of Missions publication which stated the three major aims of the Mission as ‘to keep the natives away from the type of white folk who would harm them’; to gradually prepare people ‘for the time when they must mix with civilisation’; and ‘most important of all’, ‘to teach these people about God and his Son’.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, as will become evident, it would be incorrect to read into mission policy the intent to destroy traditional Aboriginal belief structures so as to supplant them with an unmediated Christianity

In 1946, the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia compiled a report about Ernabella based on the visit of the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board the previous year. They stated that Aboriginal people at Ernabella ‘should be guided into the way of life which will give them their rightful place in this country which is their own’.<sup>29</sup> Such acknowledgement of Aboriginal ownership of country diverged from understandings about Aboriginal relationships to country at that time, and could be considered progressive. Furthermore, it can be argued that the presence of Ernabella Mission did indeed facilitate this relationship to country.

Ernabella Mission hoped to achieve its aims through example and respect for Aboriginal interests, and not authoritarian control, subjugation or imposition. To this end and reflecting Duguid’s original vision, Ernabella Mission was to be different to missions which had gone before. Here people should remain tribal and detribalisation was to be avoided for as long as possible. Duguid firmly believed that there should be ‘no compulsion or imposition of our way of life’ with ‘no deliberate interference with

---

<sup>28</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, *Friends from the Walkabout*, John Andrew & Co, Sydney, 1949, pp. 20-1.

<sup>29</sup> Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Brown, Prior, Anderson Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, 1946, p. 11. I assume that the reference to country made here is to the Ernabella area itself rather than the whole continent.

tribal custom'.<sup>30</sup> There is regular reference to this rationale throughout the mission correspondence and it underpinned policy throughout the mission period.

The process whereby Aboriginal people 'came in' to missions and settlements in the desert areas has been generally regarded as a coercive one in which Aboriginal people exercised little agency. Judy Birmingham's study of Killalpaninna Mission on the edge of the Simpson Desert in the Lake Eyre region presents a fresh perspective on this process. Her study shows that the local Dieri people used the mission as a resource to enhance traditional food gathering, which she describes as 'optimal foraging'.<sup>31</sup> I will argue that when this model is applied to the Ernabella situation it broadens our understanding of the reasons for, and the ways in which Pitjantjatjara people engaged with the mission, particularly in the early years. The work of Norman Tindale and Annette Hamilton which examine the social structure of Pitjantjatjara societies and the relationship to country is useful to this understanding by demonstrating the tradition of mobility and the flexible and dynamic use of country.<sup>32</sup> Jeremy Long and Richard

---

<sup>30</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, 1972, p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Birmingham, J., 'Resistance, Creolization or Optimal Foraging at Killalpaninna Mission, South Australia', in R. Torrence & A. Clarke (eds.), *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross-cultural Engagements in Oceania*, Routledge, London, 2000, pp. 360-405.

<sup>32</sup> Tindale, N. B., 'Tribal Boundaries in Aboriginal Australia' (1974), reproduced in Arthur B. & Morphy F. (eds.), *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia*, Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, NSW, 2005; Hamilton A., 'Descended From Father, Belonging to Country: Rights to Land in the Australian Western Desert', in E. Leacock & R. Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 85-108. In addition, early explorers such as Ernest Giles and later H.H. Finlayson who undertook expeditions into the central deserts have provided glimpses of the local people and their way of life prior to the establishment of the mission. See Giles, E., *Ernest Giles's Explorations, 1872-76*, South Australian Parliamentary Papers 1872-76, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000 [1876] and Finlayson H. H., *The Red Centre: Man and Beast in the Heart of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1936. The classic anthropological texts of the people of central Australia by provide information on religious practices and traditional cultures prior to contact with missionaries demonstrating that up until this time desert people were living in their country and engaged in a rich and dynamic cultural life. See Spencer, B. and Gillen, F.J., *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, Dover Publications, New York, 1968 [1899], *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1904 and *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1927.

Kimber provide pertinent accounts which demonstrate complexities in the process of ‘coming in’ from the deserts.<sup>33</sup>

The widespread assumption that missions and missionaries were agents of colonisation will also be examined. Lamin Sanneh’s work in Africa provides new insights which have relevance to the relationship between missionaries and colonisation in Australia. Sanneh presents a more sophisticated way of understanding this complex interaction by arguing that missionaries could be ambivalent to the colonial agenda and at times resisted the colonial imposition on the local people.

The understanding that indigenous cultures are unlikely to incorporate new ideas which present a challenge to underlying cultural structures will be interrogated. The finding by anthropologist Aram Yengoyan<sup>34</sup> that Christianity and Pitjantjatjara religious beliefs are incompatible is central to such an understanding. I present a counter argument<sup>35</sup> based on the understanding that cultures are fluid and dynamic and that like all people indigenous people hold multiple subjectivities. That is, they can be both Christian and Aboriginal. Terence Ranger has shown that indigenous peoples throughout the world can incorporate Christianity into their cultures in meaningful ways.<sup>36</sup> It will be argued that Christianity is of central importance in the lives of Pitjantjatjara people who were associated with the mission and that it has been and is integral to the identity

---

<sup>33</sup> Long, J., ‘Leaving the Desert: Actors and Sufferers in the Aboriginal Exodus from the Western Desert’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1989, pp. 9-44; Kimber, R., ‘Genocide or Not? The Situation in Central Australia’, *Genocide Perspectives*, No. 1, 1997, pp. 33-65.

<sup>34</sup> Yengoyan, A., ‘Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia’, in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1993.

<sup>35</sup> As does Bill Edwards in his critique of Yengoyan’s argument. See Edwards, B., ‘*Tjukurpa palya*—The Good Word: Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1993, pp. 129-53.

<sup>36</sup> Ranger, T., ‘The Concept of Culture Reviewed’, *Social Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 3, November 1997, pp. 55-71; Ranger, T., ‘Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, October 2003; Ranger, T., ‘Christianity and the First Peoples: Some Second Thoughts’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, Boston, 2005.



of Ernabella people who nevertheless remain strongly traditional. From this premise the agency exercised by Ernabella people throughout the mission years can be regarded not merely as resistance to dominant forces but as an adaptive response in its own right, thus contesting notions of an originary and authentic Aboriginality. Understandings about cultural identity which are useful to my argument are those proposed by James Clifford and Adam Kuper<sup>37</sup> who posit that all cultures are engaged in a continuous interpretation of the past, where traditions are constantly made afresh and are characterised by both continuity and modification. This process is clearly evident at Ernabella and is exemplified by Ernabella resident, Alec Minutjukur who told researcher Ute Eickelkamp that even before Ernabella Mission was established 'God was looking after us when we were living in the bush'.<sup>38</sup> Thus reconciling earlier traditions with those introduced by missionaries.

Finally, it will be argued that using the orthodox conversion model in order to determine whether people have successfully converted to Christianity is limiting and misses the complexities in the processes. This model proposes a complete rejection of past beliefs and practices to a radical and total acceptance of a new set of religious beliefs. Lewis Rambo's<sup>39</sup> model for conversion to Christianity, which regards conversion as a dynamic, incomplete and ongoing process will be applied to the Ernabella material to determine if it better reflects the ways in which Ernabella people have engaged with Christianity during the mission years.

---

<sup>37</sup> Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988; Kuper, A., *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*, Harvard University Press, London, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Minutjukur, A., 'Someone Caring for Us', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1993, p. 214.

## Studies of Ernabella

While there is no comprehensive history covering the entire period of Ernabella's operation as a mission, there are a number of studies which focus on particular aspects of Ernabella Mission. These include Ute Eickelkamp's 1999<sup>40</sup> historical study of the Ernabella craft room compiled from oral accounts, Diana James' 2009<sup>41</sup> study of the contemporary art movement in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands where there are now a number of art centres, and Jennifer Morton's<sup>42</sup> study of the famous Ernabella batik work which argues that batik design is regarded by the artists as an expression of their identity and not an inauthentic practice. Peter Brokensha's 1975<sup>43</sup> study focused on the material culture of people associated with the mission. Noel and Phyl Wallace<sup>44</sup> have written a general account of Pitjantjatjara people after the end of the mission era which as the title *Killing Me Softly* suggests, argues that dispossession marks this period for Pitjantjatjara people. However, while the authors do not attribute this perceived cultural destruction to the mission itself, it is implicit in their account. I argue that this text exemplifies the orthodox approach which situates Pitjantjatjara people as helpless victims of a hegemonic assault on their culture.

In addition to the above texts a number of academic papers focus on aspects of Ernabella Mission. Helen Payne<sup>45</sup> has examined the phenomenon of women's claims to traditional country in contemporary times. This has occurred through the innovative conduct of ceremonies in the vicinity of Ernabella rather than in the country where they

---

<sup>40</sup> Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> James, D., *Painting the Song: Kaltjiti Artists of the Sand Dune Country*, McCulloch & McCulloch Australian Art Books, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Morton, J., *Desert Voices: Pitjantjatjara Women's Art and Craft*, ProQuest, Edmonton, Alberta, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, Aboriginal Arts Board, Australian Council, Sydney, 1975.

<sup>44</sup> Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing Me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Payne, H., 'Residency and Ritual Rights', in J. C. Kassler & J. Stubington (eds.), *Problems and Solutions: Occasional Essays in Musicology Presented to Alice M. Moyle*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1984, pp. 264-78.

traditionally belonged. Heather Goodall<sup>46</sup> has analysed the atomic weapons testing in the central deserts during the 1950s in relation to Ernabella and raises interesting points about the function of memory. Rani Kerin<sup>47</sup> analyses the policy at Ernabella Mission which discouraged the wearing of clothing, particularly by school children. This diverged from what has been perceived as the standard mission practice which regarded the wearing of clothes as an integral step on the path to civilisation. This departure from accepted mission practice raises the possibility that other practices at Ernabella Mission also differed.

Philip Toyne and Daniel Vachon's text *Growing up the Country*<sup>48</sup> is an account of the political campaign culminating in the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* 1981. Edwards<sup>49</sup> has also written of this campaign and it is evident that Pitjantjatjara people were exercising agency by initiating and organising this campaign. The accounts of the campaign also demonstrate the close and trusting relationships which had developed between mission staff and Ernabella people in the years leading up to the end of the mission and which continued afterwards.

Missionary writing is one of the most important sources in understanding the unique approaches to missionising deployed at Ernabella. Alongside the imperative to introduce Christianity to Pitjantjatjara people missionary writing throughout the whole

---

<sup>46</sup> Goodall, H., 'Colonialism and Catastrophe: Contested Memories of Nuclear Testing and Measles Epidemics at Ernabella', in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds.), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Kerin, R., '“Natives Allowed to Remain Naked”: An Unorthodox Approach to Medical Work at Ernabella Mission', *Health and History*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2006, pp. 80-99.

<sup>48</sup> Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *Growing Up the Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, McPhee Gribble Publishers Pty Ltd, Fitzroy, Vic., 1984.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards, B., 'Pitjantjatjara Land Rights', in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, pp. 294-304; Edwards, W. H., 'The Church and Indigenous Land Rights: Pitjantjatjara Land Rights in Australia', in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, October, 1986, pp. 473-86; Edwards, B., 'Aboriginal Land Rights', in C. Mattingley & K. Hampton (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, pp. 78-87. Edwards played a significant role in the campaign by interpreting at meetings and general advocacy.

period reveals a respect for the people and their culture. As noted by Harris, Ernabella is known for its ‘culturally sensitive’ approach.<sup>50</sup> The Presbyterian Church archives held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney contain the writing of former missionaries in the form of correspondence and detailed reports about the mission for the Presbyterian Board of Missions and the Aboriginal Protection Board of South Australia. *Ernabella Newsletters* were published regularly between 1941 and 1957 to inform the wider church congregation of progress at the mission. The collection of Charles Duguid’s papers held in the National Library in Canberra also provides a useful resource in uncovering the Ernabella story. In addition, South Australian government sources in the form of annual Aboriginal Protection Board Reports, the various Acts which applied to Aboriginal people in South Australia and Parliamentary Debates in the South Australian parliament provide pertinent information.

In addition to the above archival material there are accounts written by missionaries who served at Ernabella. Bill Edwards, Superintendent from 1958 until 1972, has written widely both from an academic perspective and from a more personal reflective position. Edwards’ writing together with personal conversations, have added depth to the archival story of Ernabella.

J. R. B. Love’s 1936 text *Stone-Age Bushman of Today*<sup>51</sup> was written while at the Presbyterian mission Kunmunya before he served as Superintendent at Ernabella. The text is useful as it reveals Love’s attitudes towards Aboriginal religious beliefs which as is evident in his reports from Ernabella Mission, were developed at Kunmunya and went on to inform his work at Ernabella. William Stanner’s review of the text described it as ‘mission ideology’ but noted that it demonstrated a ‘willingness, unusual in a

---

<sup>50</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood*, 1994, p. 820.

<sup>51</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Stone-Age Bushmen of Today: Life and Adventure Among a Tribe of Savages in North Western Australia*, Blackie & Son Ltd, Glasgow, 1936.

missionary, to make concessions to some of the imperatives of native custom, even when these run counter to points of mission policy'.<sup>52</sup> Love's subsequent writing while Superintendent at Ernabella Mission reveals that he continued to support this approach. He did not regard Aboriginal traditions as necessarily impeding missionary work and this understanding guided mission policy throughout the mission period. This reflected Duguid's vision for the mission as noted in his two autobiographical volumes, published in 1963 and 1972.<sup>53</sup>

The series of letters written by Ruth Dawkins during 1949 when she worked as the nursing sister at the mission provide an anecdotal and human account of the day to day events she witnessed and participated in.<sup>54</sup> The letters speak of close and congenial relationships between staff and Aboriginal people associating with the mission. Winifred Hilliard began working as a Deaconess at Ernabella Mission in 1954 where she was in charge of the craft industry. She wrote *The People in Between* during her time there. She uses archival material filtered through her personal daily experiences together with anecdotal accounts and demonstrates that the Pitjantjatjara people who associated with the mission during her time there regarded Ernabella as their place.<sup>55</sup> Hilliard who retired in 1986 after thirty two years at Ernabella, told me in 2007 that she wrote about life at the mission as she 'saw it'. She confirmed that Duguid's initial vision was followed throughout the life of the mission.<sup>56</sup> This was also the perception of former Ernabella teacher Nancy Sheppard, who when interviewed at the opening of the restored Ernabella Church in 2010, was adamant that there was 'no coercion' on the people to

---

<sup>52</sup> Stanner, W.E.H., 'Review', *Folklore*, Vol. 48, No. 4 December 1937, p. 407.

<sup>53</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1963; Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, 1972.

<sup>54</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters: Extracts of Letters Written from "Ernabella" in the Musgrave Ranges 1949-1950*, Uniting Church of Australia, 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby, Adelaide, 1968.

<sup>56</sup> Winifred Hilliard, Pers. Comm., 11 May 2007.

settle at the mission or to become Christians.<sup>57</sup> Her memoir *Sojourn on Another Planet*, published in 2004, reflects on her time as a teacher at Ernabella and Fregon in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It provides insights into the daily life on the mission and later at the new settlement of Fregon. She conveys the overall sense that the maintenance of the mission was a shared project between staff and residents.<sup>58</sup>

### Reading texts

One of the challenges in researching this topic has been that most sources have been written by missionaries and it is difficult to tease out how Aboriginal people did regard the mission. Unfortunately many people who grew up at the mission are no longer alive and those who are, are now of advanced years. Oral stories and recorded statements from people who grew up at the mission and which have been translated from the local Pitjantjatjara all point to mission times at Ernabella as being good times. People express pride in Ernabella itself and their part in its development.

When using oral evidence I am mindful of how memory functions and its interpretive potential. There are many instances of Aboriginal people recalling the past as a golden age which give rise to questions as to whether this is a romanticised recollection or nostalgia for an imagined past.<sup>59</sup> A good example is provided by Frances and Howard Morphy's study of Ngalakan history in the Roper Valley area in Northern Australia. They found that in Ngalakan oral tradition there is a 'filtering of images of the past through a "Golden Age" of harmony in the relationship between the two groups to

---

<sup>57</sup> 'Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission', *Compass*, Television Program, ABC Television, Sydney, 22 April 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, Gillingham Printers, Underdale, SA, 2004.

<sup>59</sup> See McIntosh, I., 'Islam and Australia's Aborigines? A Perspective from North East Arnhem Land', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 20, No.1, June 1996, pp. 53-77; McGrath, A., 'Oral History and Writing about Aborigines', *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in the Cattle Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p. 176.

form a number of myths'.<sup>60</sup> Morphy and Morphy argue that a groups' oral history develops not necessarily from the historical record but from 'the changing view of themselves' and of 'their relationship to Europeans'.<sup>61</sup> There is the tendency to remember the past in relation to the present and where there is community dysfunction today, past times may more likely be recalled as a golden age. Makinti Minutjukur from Ernabella stated in 2008, that '[o]ur lives were much better 30 years ago'. People worked in the community garden, the bakery, the clinic, built houses, trained as health workers and so on. 'We had the responsibility of doing the jobs that made our community', which she notes that few people engage in today.<sup>62</sup>

That the past is interpreted through the present raises questions about the accuracy of recollections. This aspect will be discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis, through Goodall's<sup>63</sup> study of the role of memory in weapons testing in the central Australian deserts and its perceived impact on Ernabella itself. Such accounts necessitate a critical reading alongside archival records to determine points of correlation and consistency.

Anthropologist Basil Sansom has identified a feature of traditionally-oriented societies which may further complicate the manner in which the past is remembered. Sansom is referring here to mechanisms which limit historical recall only to one's grandparents' generation. This allows for events to be erased or included into a group's

---

<sup>60</sup> Morphy, H. & Morphy, F., 'The "Myths" of Ngalakan History: Ideology and Images of the Past in Northern Australia', *Man*, New series, Vol. 19, No. 3 September 1984, p. 459.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>62</sup> Minutjukur, M., 'An Open Letter to Jenny Macklin', 13 August 2008, <<http://newmatilda.com/tag/makinti-minutjukur>>, accessed 15 August 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Goodall, H., 'Colonialism and Catastrophe: Contested Memories of Nuclear Testing and Measles Epidemics at Ernabella' in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds.), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 63.

history so that they can come to be regarded as part of an unchanging tradition.<sup>64</sup> Alec Minutjukur's recollection, as mentioned above, that God was with the people prior to the arrival of missionaries and the establishment of Ernabella Mission, indicates that this process was being deployed here.<sup>65</sup>

What oral accounts do tell us is how people today interpret the past through contemporary sensibilities and situations and do not necessarily tell us what actually happened. Bain Attwood has demonstrated how historical events are constructed according to current circumstances in relation to the history of the separation of Aboriginal children from their families. Attwood argues that this history has been 'represented and re-presented' through 'a dialogical relationship between the present and the past' to form a 'stolen generations narrative'.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the limitations of oral accounts, it has been argued that 'missionary writing tells us little about the people being converted'. Douglas argues that missionary writing is 'riddled with ambivalences, ambiguities, and dissonances of voice'.<sup>67</sup> This is partly due to the audience for which this writing is intended and for its ultimate purpose. In the case of the *Ernabella Newsletters*, their purpose was to inform the wider Presbyterian congregation of the progress being made at Ernabella Mission in order to secure funding so that the mission could continue its work. While the intent of missionary writing must be kept in mind, reading it as Tonkinson did in his study of the

---

<sup>64</sup> Sansom, B., 'The Brief Reach of History and the Limitation of Recall in Traditional Aboriginal Societies and Cultures', *Oceania*, Vol. 76, No. 2, July 2006, pp. 155-61.

<sup>65</sup> Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Attwood, B., ' "Learning about the Truth": The Stolen Generations Narrative', in B. Attwood & F. Magowan (eds.), *Telling Stories*, Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest, NSW, 2001, p. 188.

<sup>67</sup> Douglas, B., 'Encounters with the Enemy?', 2001, p. 41.



community at Jigalong as biased and ‘plain lies’ is to discount a valuable source of information.<sup>68</sup>

However, despite this aspect of mission records Douglas argues that sources such as the *Ernabella Newsletters* and reports written by missionaries at Ernabella are valuable precisely because of their ‘coevality with indigenous pasts’ and they embody the ‘tenor, agendas and doings of other times’ and can complement later writing, ‘each category of text throwing cumulative critical light on the others’.<sup>69</sup> Douglas has proposed a useful model for reading archival mission material which results in a less ethnocentric and more critical analysis because it ‘decenters European authors and actors via a fundamental shift in the politics of reading crosscultural and colonial encounters’. In addition it demonstrates that colonisers, or in this case missionaries, were not as integral as they imagined in shaping the direction of the encounter, the practices employed and the outcomes.<sup>70</sup> In short, Douglas proposes that mission studies should follow ‘an integrated critique of text, contexts, discourses, language, authorship and audience’.<sup>71</sup> Following Douglas, the different sources from which information about Ernabella has been derived will be read alongside each other.

## Chapter structure

The thesis follows a chronological structure and is based around what I have identified as four significant periods in the history of contact between Pitjantjatjara people and missionaries. The first period covers contact and initial encounters with outsiders and

---

<sup>68</sup> Tonkinson, R., ‘Reflections on a Failed Crusade’ in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 63; see also Kolig, E., ‘Mission Not Accomplished’, 1988.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas, B., ‘Encounters with the Enemy?’ 2001, pp. 41-2.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

‘coming in’ to the mission. The second, the development of a settled community at Ernabella. The third period canvasses the time of the first baptisms, and the fourth, self-determination which marked the outstation movement, land rights and the end of the mission era. In each of these periods Ernabella mission challenges orthodox perceptions of missions and missionaries.

Because the assessment of the mission era is broadly polarised over whether it was beneficial or destructive for Aboriginal cultures and societies Chapter Two—Missions to Aborigines: ‘Places of Refuge or Concentration Centres?’<sup>72</sup>—will examine the main arguments underpinning this debate. The first argument favouring missionaries as saviours of Aboriginal people can be found in mission history prior to the 1970s written by the churches and missionaries themselves. These histories tended to celebrate the work of missionaries in ‘saving’ Aboriginal people and do provide valuable information of the day to day life on the missions. However, as mentioned earlier, they generally lack a critical reflection of their impact on Aboriginal societies and fail to take account of the wider historical and political contexts within which missions functioned. The second argument was embedded in the revisionist analyses which emerged from around the 1970s and subjected colonial institutions, including missions to scrutiny, finding them implicated in the dispossession of Aboriginal people. I argue that the revisionist analysis, while attempting to critically examine and contest earlier assessments of missionaries as saviours, has become an orthodoxy itself.

It can be argued that neither stance broadens our understanding of the impact of missions on Aboriginal people. Both fail to acknowledge that Aboriginal people can adopt Christianity without abandoning their traditional beliefs, or that Christianity can

---

<sup>72</sup> Strehlow, T. G. H., ‘Christian Missions: Places of Refuge or Concentration Centres?’, *The Strehlow Research Foundation*, Pamphlet No. 1, Vol. 1, December 1977, p. 1.

be an important facet of their identity as Indigenous people. Furthermore, they tend to silence and marginalise the stories Aboriginal people tell of mission times and gloss over the complexities and nuances in this important encounter.

In order to understand the process whereby people came to associate with the mission at Ernabella Chapter Three—‘From Bush to Mission: first contacts to 1937’—looks back to the period of earliest contacts in the Central and Western Deserts at the end of the nineteenth century to the establishment of Ernabella Mission in 1937. Prior to 1937 there had been sporadic contacts with exploratory and surveying parties and later more sustained contact with men who collected dingo scalps in the Central Reserve known as doggers, and pastoralists. Concern over the perceived threat posed by doggers to Aboriginal people in the Central Reserve was a driving force behind the campaign to establish a mission in the area to act as a buffer zone ‘between the Aborigines and the encroaching white man’.<sup>73</sup> I will argue that the relationships which developed between Aboriginal people and doggers and pastoralists were more complex than simply ones of exploitation and dispossession thus demonstrating that Aboriginal people were exercising agency in their dealings with these and other outsiders. While Aborigines and doggers are treated as distinct categories, the distinction is not so clear cut with some Aboriginal people themselves working as doggers.

An examination of the nature of desert societies adds another dimension to the orthodox understanding of the process of ‘coming in’. Migrations were common for people living in the deserts and were essential in order to cope with the exigencies of living in extremely arid regions with irregular rainfall. I will argue that ‘coming in’ to the mission can be regarded as a manifestation of the broad alliances to country and the

---

<sup>73</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, 1972, pp. 111, 115.

fluid occupation patterns which had characterised desert societies prior to contact with settlers and continue in contemporary times albeit adapted to accommodate changed circumstances. Rather than regarding ‘coming in’ as evidence of the collapse of desert societies, it can be argued that the process was culturally consistent with the long tradition of mobility. The orthodox notion that Aboriginal people were coerced or forced to come in to settlements and missions will be interrogated and tested with the archival data from Ernabella.

Chapter Four—‘Ernabella 1937-1952: “Hunters become Herders” ’—examines the early years of the mission culminating in the first baptisms and the opening of the permanent church in 1952 against the backdrop of the shift in government policy from protectionism to assimilation. During this period Superintendent Ron Trudinger noted that Ernabella Mission had come to be regarded as the ‘tribal home’<sup>74</sup> as people spent longer periods based at the mission and less time engaged in traditional hunting and gathering, although this continued on a regular basis albeit with less time spent in the bush. People associated with Ernabella were engaging in innovative processes to form new alliances to places around Ernabella itself. This fits Sarah Holcombe’s study of the development of a community at Mt Liebig.<sup>75</sup> Evidence indicates that this period was marked by the consolidation of a community with Pitjantjatjara people actively engaged in ‘grow[ing] up a community’.<sup>76</sup> It was certainly the case in a practical sense, with people engaged in building work at the mission, including the major task of the construction of the church from bricks made on site by the people.

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Holcombe, S., ‘The Sentimental Community: A Site of Belonging. A Case Study from Central Australia’, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2004, pp. 172-78.

<sup>76</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 18.

This chapter will argue that the methods by which Ernabella mission staff pursued their goal of evangelising, differed from conventional ways. Even though conversion and equipping people to survive modernity were primary aims of mission staff and the Presbyterian Board of Missions, there was at the same time a focus on the maintenance of tribal life. Generally adherence to traditional practices was regarded by missionaries as an impediment to conversion to Christianity. It will be argued that underpinning the methods used at Ernabella was the belief very early on that people could be both traditional people and Christian. However, missionary work at Ernabella also tended to be characterised by ambivalences. In 1952 it was noted that some traditional practices were indeed a ‘problem’ and were holding people back<sup>77</sup> but at the same time people were encouraged to spend time in their country and engage in tribal life.<sup>78</sup> Trudinger also indicated in the same year that successful evangelising required a ‘revolution in life for both individual and tribe’.<sup>79</sup>

Chapter Five—‘The evolution of a Christian community (1953-1961): “It had come to Pass” ’—covers the period from 1953 following the first baptisms to 1961 which saw the establishment of the settlements of Amata and Fregon to the west and south of Ernabella. Even though people were still ‘coming in’ from the bush well into the late 1950s, mostly in response to drought, this period marked a relatively settled time although people continued to follow seasonal cycles and participate in ceremonial activities. By now Ernabella had evolved into a self sufficient community with an emerging identity based around Ernabella itself. Ernabella had also become a productive place with people working in the sheep and craft industries and in various capacities around the mission.

---

<sup>77</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1952, ‘The Problem of the Primitive’, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1952, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1-2.

The government policy for Aboriginal people during this period continued to be assimilatory and advocated racial or cultural absorption. Mission policy at Ernabella diverged from the official policy and was more in line with A. P. Elkin's approach to assimilation which proposed that Aboriginal people could be prepared to take their place in the wider society through the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness.<sup>80</sup> During this period the mission actively encouraged the continuation of tribal life and this chapter will discuss the practices deployed by the mission to facilitate this. Yet as in the wider community there were contradictions and ambivalences in the approach to assimilation regarding people at Ernabella and this will be demonstrated by reference to Duguid's ideas for the future of "full-blood" and "half-caste" children, and in the policy regarding visitors to the mission.

Chapter Six—'Ernabella after 1962: "Travellers along the Road" '—and Chapter Seven—'Aboriginal and Christian: "Still we got Anangu way" '—discuss the last years of Ernabella Mission from 1962 to 1974 which by then had a population of between 300 and 400. In addition, four other centres were established around Ernabella during this period bringing the total population of the region to approximately 800. However at the same time the population was becoming more mobile again with people dispersing to smaller camps and spending more time in their country away from the larger centres. By the end of this period when administrative responsibility for Ernabella was transferred from the church to local councils, the Pitjantjatjara were very different people from those who had first moved to Ernabella in the late 1930s. In order to cope with the increasing contact with life outside the mission Pitjantjatjara people were developing

---

<sup>80</sup> See McGregor, R., 'Wards, Words and Citizens: A.P. Elkin and Paul Hasluck on Assimilation', *Oceania*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 1999, p. 243.

new structures, practices, relationships and so on, but nevertheless still derived from their unique cultural base.

A new policy for South Australian Aboriginal people, the *Aboriginal Affairs Act* 1962, was introduced at the start of this period and officially marked the end of the discriminatory protection and assimilation policies. However, exceptions were made for tribal Aboriginal people such as those at Ernabella where protection was to continue.<sup>81</sup> While the Act did away with the role of the Aboriginal Protection Board and the Protector the newly created position of Minister of Aboriginal Affairs retained some of the same powers. Nonetheless, a close reading of the Act and the Parliamentary debates on its introduction, suggests that the overall intent was that Aboriginal people would achieve the same living standards as the wider community without suffering cultural loss. In addition, Aboriginal people were free to choose their future, whether as tribal people or integrated, but not culturally assimilated, into the wider community.<sup>82</sup> While this was considered to be an innovative and enlightened approach which foreshadowed the self-determination policy during the late 1960s and 1970s, a similar approach had been followed at Ernabella Mission since its establishment in 1937. The Act was followed by two other pieces of relatively enlightened legislation, the *Aboriginal Lands Trust Act, 1966* and the *Prohibition of Discrimination Act, 1966*. In 1972 the *Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962* was repealed and Aboriginal policy moved from integration to self-determination.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> *Aboriginal Affairs Act* 1962 (SA), s 30(3), (5a), <[http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au/webclient/StreamGate?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1273024649685~853](http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1273024649685~853)>, accessed 3 June 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Dunstan, D., *Felicia: the Political Memoirs of Don Dunstan*, Macmillan Co of Australia Pty. Ltd., South Melbourne, 1981, p. 107.

<sup>83</sup> *Community Welfare Act 1972*, South Australian Statutes, Part1, pp. 372, 377.

Chapter Six—‘Ernabella after 1962: “Travellers along the Road” ’—will examine the responses by Pitjantjatjara people to the changing social, economic and political climate they were facing during the 1960s and early 1970s. Significant events for Ernabella people during this period included the outstation movement, the emergence of a political consciousness with the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Council in 1976 and the land rights campaign. All of these were facilitated by the particular approach employed by missionaries throughout the mission years. For example, the employment policy at Ernabella had from the outset aimed to facilitate independence and in this sense can be regarded as taking a self-determining approach. The very presence of the mission had in some ways prevented the cultural and economic dispossession of Pitjantjatjara people. Ernabella staff had from the earliest mission times encouraged people to spend time in their country and the outstation movement was optimistically perceived as further developing independence.

This chapter will show that Ernabella people did not regard themselves as victims because they lived at the mission, but identified with country in innovative ways as they adapted to more settled living. In addition, there is evidence of new alliances being forged leading to the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Council in 1976, a political organisation to pursue rights to land, which incorporated most Western Desert communities in South Australia. It will be argued that the strong campaign for Land Rights mounted by the Council was partly an outcome of the Ernabella Mission’s policy of encouraging cultural maintenance and continuing relationship to country. That the Council wanted missionaries to act as their advocate during the campaign demonstrates the close and respectful relationships which built up over the mission years between Pitjantjatjara people and mission staff.



Chapter Seven—‘Aboriginal and Christian: “Still we got Anangu way” ’—will examine how the changing circumstances during this period impacted on spiritual life. It is frequently assumed that where societies undergo change, religious beliefs must also change with a dilution, if not outright rejection of traditional spiritual and ritual life. However, it will be argued in this chapter that the outcomes of the mission era at Ernabella demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. At Ernabella people express their religious beliefs, both traditional and Christian, in complex and sometimes intersecting and overlapping ways. This contests the notion that indigenous beliefs and Christian beliefs are incompatible and that therefore Aboriginal people cannot be traditionally Aboriginal and Christian. Edwards has observed that despite the increasing impact of the wider society Ernabella people have maintained strong traditional beliefs.<sup>84</sup> From the earliest years of the mission, staff had considered this to be a possibility.<sup>85</sup> It can be argued that such an outcome is partly due to the approach taken by Ernabella missionaries. This goes to the heart of this thesis which contests the notion that missionaries suppressed and destroyed Aboriginal spirituality. It appears that Christianity added another dimension to the lives of people at the mission. Leaders of the Church were also senior Law people and they functioned as spiritual leaders in both domains. Christianity, together with traditional beliefs, continues to be a marker of contemporary Aboriginality for many Ernabella people today.

The complex and enduring religious identity of Ernabella people will be looked at through the remarkable story of the Ernabella Choir. It will be argued that the choir relates hymn singing to the land. That is, singing is an expression of their relationship to country as it was in traditional times before contact with the mission. While the genre

---

<sup>84</sup> Edwards, W.H., ‘Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality’, *Charles Strong Memorial Lecture*, July 2001, pp. 26-7.

<sup>85</sup> Love, J. R. B. *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 4.

has changed, the purpose is similar. The restoration of the Ernabella church in 2010, the continuing performances of the Ernabella choir and the regular attendances at the Salisbury Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress by Ernabella people visiting Adelaide, all point to the continuing importance of Christianity in the lives of Ernabella people today.

\* \* \* \*

This study is not upholding Ernabella as an exceptional mission and neither does it propose that Ernabella is representative of missions elsewhere.<sup>86</sup> Rather, mindful of Edwards' challenge, the main aim is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the mission era at Ernabella. Through this thesis it will be argued that the assessment of missionaries as dispossessors has become the orthodox understanding of the mission era generally but that it fails to account for the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal peoples' engagement with Christianity and the relationships which developed between missionaries and Aboriginal people. This discourse has tended to depict Aboriginal people as being without agency through marginalising Aboriginal voices where they diverge from the orthodoxy. Furthermore, a binary is created between authentically Aboriginal and Christian, thereby perpetuating the image of Aboriginal cultures as static, fragile, and locked in the past.

---

<sup>86</sup> It is interesting that despite Ernabella being regarded as at the benign end of the mission continuum, the community of Ernabella (Pukatja) today experiences similar social problems to other former missions where different approaches were deployed by missionaries.



Figure 4  
Missionaries and Aboriginal residents, Ernabella, South Australia, ca. 1946.  
<<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn485200>>

## Chapter Two

### Missions to Aborigines: ‘Places of Refuge or Concentration Centres?’<sup>1</sup>

Since earliest contact there have been over two hundred Christian missions to Aborigines in every state, across Australia. Even though some missions were short-lived, others lasted for well over one hundred years.<sup>2</sup> For many Aboriginal people

<sup>1</sup> Strehlow, T.G.H., ‘Christian Missions: Places of Refuge or Concentration Centres?’, *The Strehlow Research Foundation*, Pamphlet No. 1, Vol. 1, December 1977, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Horton, D. (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, Society and Culture*, Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 1994, pp. 1301-303. To place this in a wider context, Robert Kenny has pointed out that the nineteenth century ‘was one of the greatest periods of religious activity in the west’. See Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper & the Ruptured World*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, Vic., 2007, p. 46. And as Hilary Carey has observed, the mission era in Australia

contact with missions has been a significant and defining experience.<sup>3</sup> Encounters between Aboriginal people and missionaries are crucial to broadening our understanding of contact histories. In the context of the Western Desert where Ernabella Mission was situated, as Ian Duckham has pointed out, missionaries ‘educated, trained, employed, fed, housed and clothed’ Aboriginal people for fifty years.<sup>4</sup>

As aforementioned, missionising to Aborigines has generally been considered peripheral to mainstream academic studies. Apart from a cursory mention of missions in most contact histories, analysis of the encounter between Aboriginal people and missionaries is largely neglected. Nevertheless, as Lamin Sanneh has observed, this has not prevented ‘strong opinions of one sort or another’ being expressed about the impact of missions on indigenous peoples.<sup>5</sup> Where studies have focused on the encounter between Aborigines and missionaries in Australia they broadly fit within one of two established analytical frameworks.<sup>6</sup> The encounter is regarded as either beneficial, where missionaries are credited with saving Aboriginal people from the worst impacts of colonisation, or destructive, with missionaries found responsible for the destruction of Aboriginal spirituality and culture. As Ted Strehlow puts it, missions are regarded either as ‘[p]laces of refuge or concentration centres’.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter will analyse these frameworks and will argue that neither allows for people to be both Aboriginal and Christian. Underpinning both is an essentialist

---

occurred in ‘one of the last phases of a great worldwide enterprise’ to convert all of the world’s peoples to Christianity. See Carey, H., *Believing in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1996, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> Duckham, I., “‘At Times they Appear Dense, Unresponsive, even Hostile’: Evangelising Nomads in Western Australia’s Western Desert”, *Limina*, Vol. 12, 2006, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Sanneh, L., ‘Researching Mission History: Book Review’, *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 74, 1985, p. 282.

<sup>6</sup> Whilst in respect to a critical analysis for ease of discussion two broad or master narratives have been identified. However the critiques in each of these narratives are not necessarily uniform but they do fall within these two broad parameters.

<sup>7</sup> Strehlow, T.G.H., ‘Christian Missions’, 1977, p. 1.

understanding about the nature of cultures and contact between cultures. This assumes that each culture has a 'true essence' derived from an originary, 'pure' cultural form or as Patrick Sullivan puts it a 'zero point' marking the traditional form<sup>8</sup> and which is expressed in continuous and unchanging traditions.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, essentialist understandings also undermine the possibility that Aboriginal people exercised an agency other than resistance in their interaction with missionaries. The experiences of Aboriginal people such as Wally Dunn, who lived at Ernabella in the far north-west of South Australia through the mission period, fall outside the above analytical frameworks. Dunn maintains, '[s]till we got Anangu way ... We're interested in God's story. God and my history underneath, both—kutjara'.<sup>10</sup> Here at Ernabella there is evidence that after three decades of interaction with the Presbyterian mission, Pitjantjatjara culture remains strong alongside Christianity. Aboriginal people have made Christianity their own and at the same time have continued to practice and maintain traditional beliefs. Bill Edwards has argued that Pitjantjatjara culture 'is one of the most traditional' Aboriginal cultures in Australia today, and notes with some irony that this is *because* of the mission policy.<sup>11</sup> In an open letter to Australians in September 2006, another Ernabella resident, Makinti Minutjukur, wrote that 'we built our community, supported by the Presbyterian Board of Mission. The

---

<sup>8</sup> Sullivan, P., '[Searching for the Intercultural. Searching for the Culture](#)', *Oceania*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 2005, p.188.

<sup>9</sup> Fuss, D., *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, Routledge, New York, 1989, p. xi.

<sup>10</sup> Wally Dunn cited in U. Eickelkamp, (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 30. *kutjara* translates as two. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture', *Interchange*, No. 24, 1978, p. 202.

mission respected our culture and traditions'.<sup>12</sup> This indicates that the mission was a site where a community developed rather than where a community was destroyed. That is, as Edwards argues above, the mission at Ernabella facilitated the continuation of Pitjantjatjara culture rather than its destruction.

This chapter discusses an emerging and more critical analysis of the impact of the mission era. It finds evidence for cultural dynamism and religious pluralism, rather than a defended age-old static culture resistant to alien influence, and one that crumbles under its impact. It contests therefore, the dichotomy of Aboriginal *or* Christian and demonstrates how Aboriginal people have embraced Christianity.

### **Missionaries as saviours**

Up until the latter decades of the twentieth century, mission history was primarily comprised of narratives written by missionaries themselves and their churches. They were underpinned by the assumption that Christian faith is universally relevant and applicable to all people. Often written in a celebratory tone and not without self-interest, they focused on the activities of missionaries and their beneficial role in 'saving' Aboriginal people both physically and spiritually.<sup>13</sup> The notion that Christ belonged to, and could be understood by all of humanity, features strongly in church publications. In *Friends from the Walkabout*, an Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions 1949 publication, it is stated, 'Jesus Christ, Who came to earth for them as well as us, and Who wants to be their saviour too',<sup>14</sup> with 'them' referring to Aborigines.

---

<sup>12</sup> Minutjukur, M., 'Indigenous Politics: A Letter to Australians', *Australian Options*, Issue 47, Summer 2006, pp. 6-8, <[http://www.australian-options.org.au/issues/options\\_47/article\\_minutjukur.php](http://www.australian-options.org.au/issues/options_47/article_minutjukur.php)>, accessed 1 May 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, *Friends from the Walkabout*, John Andrew and Co, Sydney, 1949.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, *Friends from the Walkabout*, 1949, p. 21.

Because missionaries generally understood human origins in monotheist terms they recognised that Aboriginal people held some religious beliefs, albeit lacking the sophistication inherent in Christian beliefs. Early missionaries to Australia saw Aborigines, like Africans, as being descended from Noah's cursed son Ham whose religious beliefs had degenerated. Writing in the 1850s, Roderick Flanagan observed that this was due to their 'long and desolate wanderings' when they 'may have lost those fixed and definite ideas of the Creator', leaving open the possibility of a return to a civilised state.<sup>15</sup> Because Aborigines were originally God's creation, it was the task of the missionary to help them recover their lost beliefs. Missionaries, as Kenelm Burridge argues, believed that through hearing the Gospel, people 'may transcend culturally created division and come face to face with God'.<sup>16</sup> In the preface to his comprehensive survey of Australian missions, John Harris writes that missionising to Aboriginal people was a *duty* [my emphasis] of the church.<sup>17</sup> As A. P. Elkin has pointed out there was little doubt about what missionaries were expected to do: their 'task ... is to preach the Gospel to non-Christians'.<sup>18</sup> That is, at the very heart of Christianity lies a transforming project and the proselytising imperative to take the Gospel to those who have not heard it, to save individual souls and to establish churches in other lands. Yet global expansion made the task of missionaries more complicated and placed them in an invidious position: the development of local expressions of Christianity could undermine the

---

<sup>15</sup> Flanagan, R. J., *The Aborigines of Australia*, Edward F. Flanagan & George Robertson and Company, Sydney, 1888, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Burridge, K., *In the Way: A Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours*, UBC Press, Vancouver, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Harris, J. 1994 *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Elkin, A.P., 'Anthropology and Missionary Methods', *Morpeth Review*, Vol. 1, Nos. 7-10, 1930, p. 34.

faith's integrity by reaching a point where the locally developed religion ceased to be recognisably Christian.<sup>19</sup>

In their diaries and mission tracts early missionaries made their basic intent, to save Aborigines from their supposed savagery, clear. Such concerns preoccupied German Lutheran missionary Clamor Schurmann for the fifteen years he worked tirelessly to improve the material wellbeing of Aboriginal people displaced by the new settlement of Adelaide. He wrote in 1840 that 'superstitions' held by Aborigines were 'degrading'.<sup>20</sup> His motivation was 'to convey to the minds of the natives knowledge of the plainest and most simple truths of Christianity and to impress their hearts with the importance thereof'.<sup>21</sup>

The work of missionaries was underpinned by a firm belief (at least until the mid-twentieth century) in the inherent superiority of European culture and Christianity. Presbyterian missionary J. R. B. Love, in his generally sympathetic portrait of the Worora people of north-west Australia, wrote that the mission was established for 'the protection and uplift of the aboriginal (sic) people'.<sup>22</sup> The *Newsletters* from the Presbyterian Mission at Ernabella reported that 'all our activities on Ernabella have the one end in view, to win the Aborigines to Christ and his way of life' and so 'establish a christian community'.<sup>23</sup> Some Aboriginal people had also come to believe in the superiority of a Christian life. David Unaipon, a Nagarrindjeri man who evangelised to his people, believed that he had been saved by 'the coming of the Gospel'. He asserted

---

<sup>19</sup> Gray, R., *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, p. 172.

<sup>20</sup> Schurmann, E.A., *I'd Rather Dig Potatoes: Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Stoneage Bushmen of Today: Life and Adventure Among a Tribe of Savages in North Western Australia*, Blackie & Son Ltd, Glasgow, 1936, p. 64. Unlike much missionary writing of the time, Love's work included keen anthropological observations of the life of the Worora.

<sup>23</sup> See *Ernabella Newsletters*, 1934, 1952, 1953.



in 1912, that he had ‘been brought out of the darkness into the light, and from the power of Satan unto God’.<sup>24</sup> The Torres Strait Islanders, who are now mostly Christian, have an annual ‘Coming of the Light’ festival which celebrates the arrival of the London Missionary Society in the Torres Strait on 1 July 1871.<sup>25</sup>

For many missionaries the imperative to save Aborigines had a practical as well as a spiritual dimension, expressed in a commitment to improve the well-being of Aboriginal people. A central belief of Presbyterians, such as those at Ernabella Mission, is that Christians are required to express their faith in practical ways. That is their everyday lives have to emulate the life of Christ.<sup>26</sup> Saving apparently imperilled lives met this objective. As the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions wrote in 1949, ‘[t]he Aborigines needed friends to live with them and teach them so they would not die out ... Much more has been done for the Aborigines by missionaries, than by anybody else’.<sup>27</sup> Other churches too saw their mission work in practical terms. The Lutheran church in Australia has suggested that ‘without the efforts of the Lutherans and other Christian denominations, Aboriginal genocide would have been total, rather than partial’.<sup>28</sup> Concern over the possibility of extinction was also a priority for Benedictine missionaries at Kalumburu Mission in north-west Australia.<sup>29</sup> At Christmas 1939 it was reported in the Kalumburu mission diary that over the previous seven years there had

---

<sup>24</sup> Markus, A., *Governing Savages*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 2003, p. 180.

<sup>25</sup> Torres Strait Regional Authority, <<http://www.tsra.gov.au/the-torres-strait/events/coming-of-the-light.aspx>>, accessed 20 January 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Burke D & Hughes P.J., *The Presbyterians in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, *Friends from the Walkabout*, 1949, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Leske, E., *For Faith and Freedom: The Story of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Australia 1838-1996*, Openbook Publishers, Adelaide, 1996, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> The mission diaries reported that life in the bush was dangerous for Aboriginal people not just from encroaching European settlement, but from tribal fighting and raiding parties and the mission was seen as providing some protection. See Perez, E., *Kalumburu: The Benedictine Mission and the Aborigines 1908-1975*, Kalumburu Benedictine Mission, Wyndham, WA, 1977. But the question of whether the presence of the mission and settlers had exacerbated tribal violence is left unanswered.

been seventy deaths and only 16 births<sup>30</sup> and the mission implemented strategies to halt what was perceived as a 'race' of people on the path to extinction. The few children born on Kalumburu Mission were reared in the children's quarters and educated in the mission school where they could be managed by the missionaries. The subsequent marriages of these children in the 1950s produced an increase in the birth rate and by 1974 a balance had been reached in the population.<sup>31</sup>

There was a celebratory aspect to denominational histories and missionaries, particularly in remote areas, were portrayed as brave men (sic). In the foreword to the history of the Benedictine mission at Kalumburu, the work of the missionaries is described as a 'heroic endeavour'.<sup>32</sup> In a history of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia the Ernabella Mission is described as 'one of the most successful enterprises of the South Australian Presbyterian Church'.<sup>33</sup> As the *Ernabella Newsletter* of November 1941 reported 'much has been accomplished and much still to do'.<sup>34</sup>

Generally church mission histories fail to situate the missionary enterprise in the wider historical and political context within which missions operated, in particular, that of colonisation and the place of Aborigines in contemporary Australia. Because they were written from the perspective of the missionaries, the voices of the 'missionised' tend to be excluded.<sup>35</sup> Thus church histories served to reinforce stereotypes about both Aborigines and missionaries. While they provide valuable historical information about the missions and the issues missionaries were facing, they generally lack critical

---

<sup>30</sup> Perez, E., *Kalumburu*, 1977, p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> Perez, E., *Kalumburu*, 1977.

<sup>33</sup> Scrimgeour, R.J., *Some Scots Were Here: A History of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1986, p. 193.

<sup>34</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, November 1941.

<sup>35</sup> See Ivan Jordan's account of his work as a Baptist missionary at Lajamanu and Yuendumu from 1973 to 2003. Jordan, I., *Their Way: Towards an Indigenous Warlpiri Christianity*, Charles Darwin University Press, Darwin, 2003.

reflection in terms of the impact of missionary work on Aboriginal cultures and people. The belief that Christianity represented the only true knowledge and that adoption of Christianity would benefit Aboriginal people by preparing them for engagement with the wider Australian society overrode most other considerations. That is, from the perspective of the missionaries, the benefits of civilisation and the adoption of Christianity outweighed other concerns. This is particularly evident in mission reports to city-based congregations and church Boards on whom missionaries depended for funds. Failures, in terms of low conversion rates and saving people from the ravages of colonisation are glossed over in favour of the successes.

With the benefit of hindsight and today's sensitivities about the nature of missionary agendas, it is not difficult to contest the proposition that missionaries were saviours of Aborigines. It is easy to dismiss what appear to be the single-minded beliefs contained in church and missionary writing and mount the orthodox argument that missionaries were inflexible, racist and imperialistic. Yet church and missionary chronicles deserve a closer reading as missionaries lived with Aboriginal people and interacted more closely and for longer periods, than almost anyone else. In many cases they acquired a better understanding than their contemporaries of Aboriginal religions even though this understanding was influenced to a greater or lesser degree by their belief in the inherent superiority of Christianity.

Despite this, missionary work was characterised by ambivalence and tensions. While missionaries regarded Aborigines as benighted souls ripe for conversion, at the same time there was concern for fellow human beings who in many cases had come to be regarded as friends. Paternalism, humanitarianism and triumphalism intersected in complex ways throughout missionary and church writing.

## Missionaries as destroyers

The obverse analytical framework to the portrayal of missionaries as saviours, argues that contact with missionaries was destructive for indigenous cultures and societies. It was influenced by the revisionist contact historiography which emerged in the 1970s, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), and more latterly the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Report Bringing them Home (1997). In this body of work (histories and reports) missionary activity was subjected to increased and critical scrutiny. It represented a discursive change with the focus of studies shifting from missionary work itself to an evaluation of the impact of missionising on Aboriginal societies privileging cultural dispossession and generally failing to consider conversion to Christianity seriously.<sup>36</sup> It adopts a post-colonial position<sup>37</sup> which starts from the premise that missionising was an integral element in the colonising project. A provocative articulation of this approach is provided by Frantz Fanon<sup>38</sup> who regarded Christian missionaries as agents of 'white' colonisers engaged in entrenching 'foreign influences'. He wrote, '[t]he recession of yellow fever and the advance of evangelization form part of the same balance sheet', proposing that Christianity was as effective in eradicating the beliefs of the colonised as DDT was in

---

<sup>36</sup> See the important study of missionising in Africa by Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993; in Australia see de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu: White culture and Black Women's Law*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Definitions of the term post-colonial are wide ranging, but here I am referring to studies which critique earlier discourses such as Aboriginalism, which purport to represent the 'other'. These studies seek to recover subjugated knowledges which it is argued, have been subsumed in dominant discourses. However, in bringing subjugated knowledges to the fore, post-colonial studies can marginalise cultural forms which have been derived from the colonisers, for example, Christian beliefs. Thus, ironically, notions of a distinctive 'other' can be reinforced, reinstating a crude binary that many post-colonial scholars argued they were repudiating. As Attwood has noted, they can 'reproduce the very essentialism which mar(k) the totalising discourse of Aboriginalism' Attwood, B., 'Introduction', in J. Arnold & B. Attwood (eds.), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, Journal of Australian Studies, special edition No. 35, La Trobe Uni Press, Bundoora, Victoria, 1992, p. xii.

<sup>38</sup> Psychiatrist and critic of 'white' colonisation. Fanon, F., *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin, 1990, p. 32.

eradicating disease. A similar sentiment is also expressed more moderately with missionaries regarded as the lesser of 'two evils' but nonetheless still authoritarian and paternalistic.<sup>39</sup>

In aiming to critique and revise the perceived bias in denominational histories of missionary work the emergent discourse has become an orthodoxy itself. Whereas in some of these revisionist studies the impact of missionary work on Aboriginal people was considered marginal because as argued by historian Richard Broome in reference to missionary work in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Aboriginal people 'were perfectly satisfied with their own religion',<sup>40</sup> mostly the impact was regarded as significant. In this discourse missionaries are assessed as cultural imperialists, more damaging to Aboriginal cultures and societies than other colonists. Professor Colin Bourke, at the time Head of the Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies at the University of South Australia, argued in 1993 that missionaries were vandals of the worst kind because they sought the hearts and minds of Aboriginal people.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding Broome's assessment that Aborigines were resistant to missionaries because of their already pervading sense of religious satisfaction, he nevertheless ascribes to missionaries pernicious intent. Missionaries, he argues, tried to strike at the heart of Aboriginal culture, defeat it, and put Christianity and European customs in its place'.<sup>42</sup> Prominent anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt stated that missions in South Australia tried 'to stamp out indiscriminately all elements of aboriginal (sic)

---

<sup>39</sup> Ball, M., 'The lesser of two evils: Raukkan and Point Pearce 1890-1940', *Cabbages and Kings: Selected essays in history and Australian Studies*, Murray Park College of Advanced Education, Magill, SA., Vol. 20, 1992, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> See Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788-1980*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1982, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Images and Realities: Aboriginal Studies*, video recording, Open Learning, University of South Australia, 1993.

<sup>42</sup> Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians*, p. 119.

culture'.<sup>43</sup> Of the ethnographic work undertaken by missionaries which enhanced missionary understanding of Aboriginal cultures, Berndt and Berndt argue that this only served to 'undermine traditional Aboriginal beliefs' and made Aborigines more 'vulnerable to evangelization'. They noted further that missionaries were 'avowedly assimilationists' even though this may not have been their intent.<sup>44</sup> While these assessments may apply to the work of some missionaries, the lack of specificity in such broad generalisations generally impede rather than enhance our understanding of the mission impact on Aborigines.

Robert Tonkinson and Zohl de Ishtar have made similar assessments in relation to two specific missions, but also point out that Aboriginal religion has persisted. It can be argued that in these studies the orthodox analysis has dominated despite evidence to the contrary. Tonkinson has argued that the apostolic missionaries at Jigalong in the Western Desert regarded Aboriginal culture as 'the work of the devil' and thus their role was to destroy traditional beliefs.<sup>45</sup> He also writes that due to missionaries' ignorance of Aboriginal beliefs and their reluctance to 'interfere actively with Aboriginal rituals' at the time of his research in the 1960s, 'traditional religious life flourishes at Jigalong despite the missionary presence'.<sup>46</sup> In a chapter subtitled 'The Missionary Struggle for Indigenous Soul, Mind and Body' in Zohl de Ishtar's 2005 study of women's traditional Law at Wirrimanu (Balgo) it is claimed that 'the Pallottine effectively set about dismantling and destroying' the local culture.<sup>47</sup> Yet de Ishtar also states that 'elders held

---

<sup>43</sup> Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *From Black to White in South Australia* Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951, p. 189.

<sup>44</sup> Berndt, R. M. & Berndt, C. H., 'Body and Soul: More Than an Episode', in Tony Swain and Deborah Bird Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 47, 57.

<sup>45</sup> Tonkinson, R., *The Jigalong Mob*, 1974, p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu*, 2005, p. 124. Balgo was established as a Catholic mission in the south-west Kimberley region of Western Australia, around the same time as Ernabella Mission in the late 1930s.

firmly to their cultural heritage' and are the custodians of 'strong Law'.<sup>48</sup> While the latter statement testifies to the strength and resilience of Aboriginal culture at Wirrimanu, it contradicts the main thesis that missionaries were destroyers of Aboriginal culture. It is interesting that today's elders who hold strongly to the Law of their forebears grew up under the Mission regime. A question that de Ishtar could have pursued is why the young people who did not grow up under the influence of the Church, are the ones who are not interested in traditional Law?

The portrayal of missionaries as destroyers is not only expressed in written accounts but can be seen in other media. A painting by West Australian Aboriginal artist Julie Dowling, *Goodbye White Fella Religion* which hangs in the National Gallery of Victoria depicts Catholic missionaries on Bathurst Island in the 1920s. The curatorial explanation accompanying the painting describes the work as subversive and here it is useful to cite the curators' description of the painting:

[Tiwi] children with bodies marked by crosses emblematic of indoctrination in the tenets of the Christian faith are forcibly expelling 'white fella religion' personified by the figure of a robed cleric. The work alludes to the Bathurst Island mission, in particular, where Father Gsell outlawed customary ritual and marriage practices resulting in the silencing of culture.<sup>49</sup>

Rather than a subversive statement it can be argued that this conforms to the orthodoxy and tells a simplistic and partial story about the relationship between Tiwi people and the missionaries, and in particular, the perceived intervention in Tiwi polygynous marriage practices by the church. It also marginalises the experience of those Tiwi who

---

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> National Gallery of Victoria, Curatorial description accompanying painting *Goodbye White Fella Religion* by Julie Dowling, 2009.

did not expel ‘white fella religion’ and consider themselves to be Christian. Father Gsell’s autobiography and the study by anthropologists Charles Hart and Arnold Pilling demonstrate a more complex and nuanced story of the Bathurst Island mission, particularly in regards to its role in the complex system of betrothal of women from infancy through to old age, which underpinned Tiwi society, and the women’s request for change.<sup>50</sup>

Central to orthodox assessments is the tenet that Aboriginal people were forcibly removed to missions, an argument which lacks nuance and specificity and which appears repeatedly in key texts. Turning to the entry ‘Missions’ in *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* it states, ‘[t]o Aboriginal people the word means a place where many ... people were imprisoned ... [Missions] were first started as a means of controlling the original owners of the land’.<sup>51</sup> The often cited 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) found that,

Aboriginal people were swept up into reserves and missions where they were supervised as to every detail of their lives and there was a deliberate policy of undermining and destroying their spiritual and cultural beliefs... On the reserves and missions the supervisors and missionaries had all the power.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Gsell, F.X., *The Bishop with 150 Wives: Fifty Years as a Missionary*, London, 1955; Hart, C.W.M. & Pilling, A.R., *The Tiwi of North Australia*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1979. Hart & Pilling found during their fieldwork in the late 1920s and early 1950s, that Tiwi men’s ability to bestow women as a means of acquiring prestige still functioned albeit with additional ‘exchange’ partners, including Father Gsell and Japanese pearlers.

<sup>51</sup> Horton, D. (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, Society and Culture*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 1994, p. 706.

<sup>52</sup> Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, ‘The Importance of History’, *National Report*, Vol. 1 AGPS, Canberra, 1991, 1.4.3.



This generalised assessment continues to be made. Sarah Maddison writes of Aboriginal people being ‘cajoled and at times brutally relocated’ to missions where they were subjected to a ‘proselytising Christianity that denigrated Indigenous culture and spirituality.’ She argues that the ‘intent of these practices’ was ‘genocidal’.<sup>53</sup>

In addition it is argued that Christian missionaries were allies of the state who collaborated with governments in the dispossession of Aboriginal people and as Edwards has argued are held responsible for the socio-economic disadvantage which characterises many remote communities today.<sup>54</sup> Such notions underpin Anne Pattel-Gray’s study where she situates the blame for the current situation of Aboriginal people squarely at the feet of the church and missionaries. She writes that ‘the Australian church laid the groundwork for the Australian government’s oppression’ and argues that Christianity in Australia ‘was an immoral and unethical cover-up for the genocidal greed of the racist European colonial powers’.<sup>55</sup> In the Anglicare Social Justice Lecture held in Hobart on 22 August 2007 Tom Calma, the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner said that ‘cruel missionary managers’ denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people human rights. John Ah Kit, a member of the Northern Territory parliament said of the Federal Government’s intervention in the Northern Territory<sup>56</sup> that it was ‘winding the clock back to the missionary era’.<sup>57</sup> Pattel-Gray, Calma and Ah-Kit argue that missionaries collaborated with governments to

---

<sup>53</sup> Maddison, S., *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relations in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011, pp. 52-3.

<sup>54</sup> For example, see Loos, N., *White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007, p. 33; Edwards, W. H., ‘The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture’, 1978, pp.195-204.

<sup>55</sup> Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1998, pp. 132, 147.

<sup>56</sup> This refers to the response by the Federal Government to the report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse or the *Little Children are Sacred* report as it is known more widely.

<sup>57</sup> *News*, SBS Television, 10 August 2007.

disempower Aborigines. They make no distinction between individual missionaries, their denominations, their era or local situations. This perception of missionaries as colluding with the state in the marginalisation of indigenous people is not unique to Australia. As Native American writer Vine Deloria Jnr. asserted in his text subtitled *An Indian Manifesto* (first written in the 1960s), '[o]ne of the major problems of the Indian people of North America is the missionary'.<sup>58</sup>

The 'missionaries as destroyers' discourse is underpinned by romanticised images of pre-contact indigenous societies. Daisy Bates who camped at Ooldea in the southwest of South Australia from 1919 to 1935 to care for what she perceived to be the remnants of a 'dying race', staunchly believed in the ideal of the "noble savage" which held that Aboriginal culture should not be corrupted by the religious beliefs of western culture.<sup>59</sup> She had no time for missionary work and observed that 'missionaries never did any good'.<sup>60</sup> Yet as Philip Jones has pointed out, Bates was a staunch Christian and expressed admiration for the work of some missionaries.

A widely cited incident which provided grist to the mill for those arguing that missionaries were saviours *and* those arguing they were destroyers is the opening to public scrutiny of Manangananga Cave in 1930. This cave was a highly sacred and restricted Western Arrernte site near Hermannsburg Mission. In the missionaries as saviours discourse this event is held up as an example of missionaries saving Arrernte people through Christianity triumphing over pagan beliefs. For revisionist analyses which regard missionaries as destroyers, it is considered to be a clear example of the

---

<sup>58</sup> Deloria V., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, Avon Books, New York, 1988, p.101.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, P., *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2007, p. 285.

<sup>60</sup> Bates, D., *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, (ed.) I. White, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1985.

willful destruction of Aboriginal religious beliefs, where Arrernte elders were coerced into revealing their most powerful *tjurunga*.<sup>61</sup>

However, a different reading of the reasons for revealing the secrets of the cave is possible which indicates Arrernte agency, and voluntary strategic complicity, in the incident. Jones has argued that in the period leading up to the Manangananga Cave incident, the Arrernte evangelist, Moses Tjalkabota had been successful in persuading people to abandon ‘*tjurunga* worship’.<sup>62</sup> This was also a time of severe drought when there had been an influx of people to the mission, many of whom were sick and starving.<sup>63</sup> The decision to reveal the Manangananga *tjurunga* was made by Arrernte evangelists in consultation with the mission superintendent Pastor F. W. Albrecht and traditional owners.<sup>64</sup>

In the period after the cave opening traditional religion waned in the area and Arrernte people sold *tjurunga* to tourists, anthropologists and missionaries. In addition there had been a decision to ‘abandon the marriage-class system’. Strehlow was told by Arrernte people that the motivation for selling *tjurunga* was because Arrernte men wished to live a settled life and be free of religious obligations as they believed “white” men to be.<sup>65</sup> A related observation was made by William Stanner who witnessed an elderly tribal man burning sacred objects. He told Stanner that he was ‘killing his dreaming’ prior to moving from the bush to a more settled life. Stanner noted that this

---

<sup>61</sup> *tjurunga* are objects made from stone or wood and etched and incised with sacred icons which are believed to embody the essence and magical properties of particular Ancestral Beings, linking people to the Dreaming and their country. Viewing them is restricted to initiated men.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, P., ‘Namatjira: Traveller Between Two Worlds’, J. Hardy, J.V.S. Megaw & M.R. Megaw (eds.), *The Heritage of Namatjira: The Watercolourists of Central Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1992, p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> Hill, B., *Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession*, Knopf, Random House, Milson’s Point, NSW, 2002, p. 134.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136; Henson, B., *A Straight-out Man: F. W. Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne University Press, North Melbourne, 1992, p. 53.

<sup>65</sup> Hill, B., *Broken Song*, 2002, p. 590.

man was engaged in an ‘act of severance’ with the past and concluded that this must have happened ‘untold thousands of times which make up an unwritten chapter of our unexamined history’.<sup>66</sup> For senior Arrernte men the existence of sacred *tjurunga* storage sites such as Manangananga Cave meant that they were duty bound to maintain them which necessitated considerable travel and time away from Hermannsburg. The custodians of the *tjurunga* believed that serious consequences would follow if they neglected this duty.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps Arrernte people believed that survival was no longer possible in the bush and that from then on mission life was their future. The changes which occurred during this period appear to be the result of carefully considered decisions not only in response to changed circumstances but, as Jones argues, the decisions made by Arrernte actually facilitated change.<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to note that in the 1950s Manangananga Cave was again regarded as a restricted and sacred Western Arrernte site. Jones proposes that there may have been regret by the elders over their earlier decision to dispense with *tjurunga*. Christianity had not protected the community from sickness and some Arrernte blamed epidemics on the desacralisation of Manangananga.<sup>69</sup> The revival of ritual after a period of lapse is not unknown in Aboriginal societies and Kim Akerman has identified a renaissance of religious activity in the Kimberleys during the 1970s, when previously neglected rituals were practiced again in response to a number of changed circumstances.<sup>70</sup> While the situation at Hermannsburg in the 1950s was different to that of the Kimberley in the 1970s, it demonstrates that Aboriginal religious practices are adaptable and contingent.

---

<sup>66</sup> Stanner, W. E. H., *After the Dreaming: The 1968 Boyer Lectures*, ABC, Sydney, 1974, p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, P., ‘Namatjira: Traveller Between Two Worlds’, 1992, pp. 123-24.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>70</sup> Akerman, K., ‘The Renaissance of Aboriginal Law in the Kimberleys’, in R. M. & C. H. Berndt (eds.), *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and their Present*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 240.

The reinstating of the taboo at Mananganganga contests the idea that Aboriginal religious beliefs could be irrevocably banished by missionaries, even where missionaries were at their most zealous in undermining traditional religion as they were at Hermannsburg during this time. It also challenges the perception that Aboriginal religions were static and conservative and so fragile that they could be subsumed by Christianity. As Peggy Brock has pointed out in her reading of the Arrernte evangelist Moses Tjalkabota's life story, it is evident that changes in religious beliefs and practices often occurred from processes 'within indigenous societies, rather than an imposition from outside'.<sup>71</sup>

The 'missionaries as destroyers' discourse is persuasive and fits comfortably with revisionist accounts of other aspects of contact history. A conversation with the owner of an art gallery specialising in Aboriginal art about the 2007 Blake Religious Prize being won by a Gija woman, revealed the degree to which this discourse is so readily taken-for-granted. The gallery owner said that it was such a pity that Christianity had influenced and taken over Aboriginal culture.<sup>72</sup> In contesting the earlier assessment of missionaries as 'saviours', such a discourse is seen as a radical revision of how the encounter between Aborigines and missionaries is understood. Even though this approach is regarded as being liberal in its views it has become an influential orthodoxy in itself.

As noted earlier the assumption that missionaries were responsible for the destruction of Aboriginal cultures is grounded in essentialist understandings of cultures which regard them as discrete and unchanging entities. In essentialist thinking contact

---

<sup>71</sup> Brock, P., 'Setting the Record Straight: New Christians and Mission Christianity' in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, Boston, 2005, p. 125.

<sup>72</sup> Pers. Comm., 7 September 2007.

between cultures is limited to two possible outcomes.<sup>73</sup> Either acculturation occurs where the essence of the subordinate culture becomes ‘diluted’ or ‘lost’, or there is a syncretic process, whereby the two cultures coexist but jostle for dominance.

Anthropologists working in the early decades of the twentieth century, such as Donald Thomson, believed that Aboriginal cultures were so finely balanced that following contact with other cultures, ‘decay’ and ‘degradation’ ensued. For Thomson the only solution to cultural extinction was ‘absolute segregation’ on specially designated reserves.<sup>74</sup>

An essentialist model of culture makes a differentiation between the ‘authentic Aborigine’ and the ‘civilised European’ in what Attwood has termed a discourse of Aboriginalism. That is, ‘an epistemological and ontological distinction between “Them” and “Us” ’ is made, where features of Aboriginal societies are described in opposition to those of Western societies.<sup>75</sup> It is found incongruous when Aboriginal people hold onto what are regarded as traditional features yet express a desire for the trappings of modern life as a visitor to Amata noted in 1967.<sup>76</sup> Essentialist understandings about cultures are resistant to accommodating any form of acculturation, and perpetuate a dichotomy between cultural activities which are considered authentic and those which are tainted. Winifred Hilliard, who ran the Ernabella Craft Centre (now Ernabella Arts) at Ernabella

---

<sup>73</sup> Rolls, M., ‘The Meaningless of Aboriginal Cultures’, *Balay: Culture Law and Colonialism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Thomson, D., *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Vic., 2006, pp. 114, 118.

Thomson’s studies differed from the ethnocentrism of the earlier social evolutionists and his admiration for the sophistication of Aboriginal cultures is evident throughout his work. However, he still believed that Aboriginal societies were bound by tradition and thus could not modernise without ‘losing’ their culture.

<sup>75</sup> Attwood, B., ‘Introduction’, pp. i-xvi. 1992. See also Rolls, M., ‘The Meaningless of Aboriginal Cultures’, 2001, p. 9, for a discussion of how this thinking maintains binaries and ‘keeps the colonial subject alive’.

<sup>76</sup> Cooper, A., ‘A School for Tribal Aborigines’, *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, July 1, 1967, p. 31, GRG 52/31, State Archives of South Australia. Some Ernabella people moved to Amata after it was established by the Government in 1961.

Mission for twenty years, was told that the batiks, for which Ernabella is famous, were not traditional cultural expressions, but demonstrated acculturation and a loss of authenticity. Hilliard contests this perception and points out that the Ernabella artists did not see their work as lacking in authenticity.<sup>77</sup> Jennifer Morton in her study of the role which the production of batiks plays at Ernabella found that textile production is a 'dynamic, vital part of the contemporary culture', and that it functions as an important cultural identifier for Pitjantjatjara people.<sup>78</sup>

While Aram Yengoyan's argument that it was impossible for Pitjantjatjara people to convert to Christianity appears to contest the orthodox discourse that missionaries destroyed Aboriginal spirituality, it relies on similar essentialist understandings of culture. From his fieldwork among Pitjantjatjara people in the Western Desert from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, he concluded that despite decades of interaction with missionaries, they had had little or no impact on Aboriginal spirituality. He argues that mutual understanding is impossible because the logic underpinning the Pitjantjatjara spiritual world view and Christianity are so different. Yengoyan describes Pitjantjatjara spirituality as having many forces with physical referents, as oriented in the past, and with a collective kin-based focus. In comparison, Christianity has one supreme and transcendental force, is oriented towards the future and has an individual focus.<sup>79</sup> As well as these fundamental differences Yengoyan argues that the Pitjantjatjara world view is conservative and resistant to change. While this is a valid point and Aboriginal people do refer to timeless traditions arising from the past, this does not necessarily rule out the ability to simultaneously synthesise other beliefs.

---

<sup>77</sup> Pers. Comm., 11 May 2007.

<sup>78</sup> Morton, J., *Desert Voices: Pitjantjatjara Women's Art and Craft*, ProQuest, Edmonton, Alberta, 1997.

<sup>79</sup> Yengoyan, A., 'Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia' in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 248.

Underpinning Yengoyan's argument is the notion that Christian beliefs and local beliefs are unable to coexist, and if conversion to Christianity occurs traditional cultures collapse and conversely, where local religions are still practised, accommodation let alone, conversion has not occurred.<sup>80</sup> The outcomes of contact are limited to the 'weaker' culture either rejecting or being subsumed by the dominant culture. He concludes that people cannot be both Christian and authentically Aboriginal.

In other studies of missionary impact which are underpinned by essentialist understandings of culture, indigenous religious beliefs are categorised as traditional and Christian beliefs as acculturated. It is argued that it is impossible for Aboriginal people to adopt Christianity and maintain traditional beliefs because Christianity is culturally western and therefore 'alien' to Aboriginal cultures.<sup>81</sup> For those who perceive of missionaries as saviours, Aborigines who persist in holding traditional beliefs are not authentic Christians. For revisionists who see missionaries as destroyers, Aborigines who convert to Christianity have compromised their authentic Aboriginality.

### **Cultural dynamism**

Aboriginal cultures are widely believed to be bound by tradition and essentially conservative. For Pintupi people, as for most Aboriginal groups, the Dreaming accounts for everything. According to Fred Myers it has a 'central place in constituting their lived world'.<sup>82</sup> The Ancestral Beings formed the features of the landscape and laid down the rules for life in mythical times. In William Stanner's words, the Dreaming is 'a kind of

---

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*; see also Hume, L., 'The Dreaming in Contemporary Aboriginal Australia' in G. Harvey (ed.), *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, Continuum, London, 2000, p. 135.

<sup>82</sup> Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution, USA, 1986, p. 47.



logos or principle of order'.<sup>83</sup> In the revisionist assessment of the impact of missionaries the Dreaming is understood to be eternal, deriving from time immemorial, with an unchanging order in which human agency plays no part. Yet there is much evidence of cultural dynamism. Basil Sansom has shown how in the Darwin hinterland the Dreaming provides the foundation for all life but 'Dreamings irrupt into contemporary histories' in such a way as to 'turn the conditions of existence topsy-turvy'.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, as Howard Morphy has pointed out, in order to remain relevant, there is an imperative for Aboriginal religion to accommodate changes.<sup>85</sup>

Fred Myers describes an incident in 1974 where Pintupi men discovered a significant feature in the landscape which had hitherto been unknown. After debate as to its importance amongst the elders it was believed to form part of the Kangaroo Dreaming associated with that area.<sup>86</sup> Sansom found that adjustments to tradition occurred on a generational basis for most Aboriginal groups while at the same time giving the impression of unchanging tradition. Sansom has identified a number of social mechanisms which serve to 'mask memories' and allow for cultural dynamism. Firstly, for traditional Aboriginal societies historical recall is shallow, particularly so in the Western Desert where it is mostly limited to an individual's grandparents' generation. Secondly, there is a ban on using the names of the dead which also contributes to the brevity of cultural memory. However, this does not preclude the name being used in subsequent generations. Thirdly, the 'hearsay' rule precludes a person talking about an

---

<sup>83</sup> Stanner, W.E.H., *White Man Got no Dreaming*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1979, p. 24.

<sup>84</sup> Sansom, B., 'Irruptions of the Dreamings in Post-Colonial Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 72, No. 1, September 2001, pp. 1-32.

<sup>85</sup> Morphy, H., *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 1998, p. 72.

<sup>86</sup> Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country*, 1986, p. 64.

event with any authenticity unless they have witnessed it.<sup>87</sup> As Sansom argues, the ‘myth of eternal recurrence is maintained in the face of (and despite) actual historical change’.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to changes stemming from within societies, changes occurred in response to contact with other Aboriginal groups and with settler Australians. Anthropological work is demonstrating that strong and vibrant Aboriginal cultures have endured where new cultural forms are developed and others discarded in response to contact. As Terence Ranger argues, through contact, cultures are ‘largely a *mélange* of chosen or more adventitious borrowings’.<sup>89</sup> The boundaries between cultures are porous, fluid and unstable. According to James Clifford cultures are the outcome of ‘negotiated, present processes’.<sup>90</sup> That is, cultural tradition, rather than comprising a set of bounded, unchanging and inherited traits, is constructed in order to interpret and accommodate present circumstances through reference to the past. Ian McIntosh has demonstrated how Yolngu people of north-east Arnhem Land accommodated centuries of contact with Macassan traders and the later occupation of their country by Europeans without suffering cultural ‘decay’. Traditional conventions are deployed to make sense of the complex web of entanglements between Macassans and Yolngu which were a feature of the contact situation.<sup>91</sup> Ranger’s notion of cultures as a ‘*mélange*’ with new elements incorporated from elsewhere whilst other elements are discarded can be seen in the

---

<sup>87</sup> Sansom, B., ‘The Brief Reach of History and the Limitation of Recall in Traditional Aboriginal Societies and Cultures’, *Oceania*, Vol. 76, No. 2, July 2006, pp. 155-60.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>89</sup> Ranger, T., ‘The Concept of Culture Reviewed’, *Social Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 3, November 1997, pp. 55-71.

<sup>90</sup> Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture :Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988; see also Kuper, A., *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*, Harvard University Press, London, 1999.

<sup>91</sup> McIntosh, I., ‘Islam and Australia’s Aborigines? A Perspective from North East Arnhem Land’, *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 20, No.1, June 1996, pp. 53-77.

Arnhem Land Adjustment Movement at the end of 1957. Yolngu people on Elcho Island publicly displayed 'secret-sacred religious' objects for the first time, together with Christian icons. According to Berndt and Berndt this display served to put Yolgnu religious beliefs on an equal footing with Christianity.<sup>92</sup>

Understanding culture and tradition in this way means that cultures cannot be "lost" in the way that Thomson, as noted above, feared. Neither can the distinction between Christian and indigenous beliefs be so clearly defined. It also contests Yengoyan's assumption that Christianity and Pitjantjatjara religious beliefs are immutable. The findings by Sansom, Myers and McIntosh that there are cultural practices which allow for innovation unsettles the understanding that Aboriginal spiritual beliefs are so conservative and timeless that the incorporation of change is near impossible and that the introduction of Christianity by missionaries was able to irrevocably destroy traditional beliefs.

However, the perception of Aboriginal cultures as conservative and fragile and at risk of collapse when in contact with outsiders such as missionaries, has been persistent. Aboriginal people are rendered as victims rather than historical actors. This can be seen in the assessment of missions by the RCIADIC and in the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* as noted above, which assert that Aboriginal people 'were swept up' and imprisoned,<sup>93</sup> implying that Aboriginal people exercised no agency in moving from bush to mission. Ted Strehlow, who spent his early life at the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg, where his parents were missionaries, and who researched Arrernte

---

<sup>92</sup> Berndt, R. M. & Berndt, C. H., 'Body and Soul: More Than an Episode', 1988, p. 51.

<sup>93</sup> This can be also be seen in Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977; Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood*, 1998; Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *From Black to White in South Australia* Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951; Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *The World of the First Australians*, Landsdowne Press, Dee Why West, Australia, 1981.

culture throughout his life, found no evidence of missionaries forcing Aboriginal people to leave their homelands in central Australia, or confining them on missions.<sup>94</sup>

An argument that is central to revisionist accounts is that Christianity was the means by which colonisation was facilitated, if not actuated, with missionaries judged as ‘the most complete kind of colonialist’.<sup>95</sup> It is assumed that Christianity imposes western culture onto indigenous peoples. Sanneh points out that the missionary enterprise is seen as the ‘surrogate of western colonialism’ where missions joined forces with western colonialism ‘to destroy indigenous cultures’.<sup>96</sup> This connection was reiterated by prominent Aboriginal spokesperson, Pat Dodson, who in a lecture at the Broome campus of Notre Dame University on 21 August 2008, argued that the colonisers’ aim was for ‘the conquest of Aboriginal people in the pursuit of gospel, glory and God’.<sup>97</sup>

There were certainly aspects of the missionary enterprise which fitted with the colonial project and the imposition of western culture. By the time European nations were expanding their empires throughout the globe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Christianity had established its centre in Europe and had gained western features. Missionary theory and practices of the time were influenced by the belief not only in the superiority of European social, economic and political systems, but also the inevitability of the establishment of them throughout the world.<sup>98</sup> For many in the

---

<sup>94</sup> Strehlow, T.G.H., ‘Christian Missions’, 1977, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Peel, J.D.Y., *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Sanneh, L., *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Orbis Books, New York, 1989, p. 4; see also Ranger, T., ‘Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, October 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Dodson, P. in Rintoul, S., ‘Recognise and Protect Indigenous Cultures: Dodson’s Reform Call’, *The Weekend Australian*, 23-24 August 2008, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Warren, M., *The Missionary Movement from Britain in Modern History*, SCM Press Ltd, Bloomsbury St, London, 1965, p. 59.

British colonial office, Christianity and western civilisation were inseparable elements. Even though Christianity has been and continues to be a significant influence on western cultures, its origins lie not in the west but in Palestine where it developed as a racially-based sect.

However the relationship between colonisers and missionaries was more complex than simply one of collusion. While on occasions western colonial rule was welcomed by missionaries, colonial and missionary projects often diverged markedly in their aims for indigenous people. Underlying these aims were different perceptions about the humanity of indigenes. While missionaries saw indigenous people as lost souls to be saved by the Gospel, many colonisers believed them to be ‘savages’ who could not be Christianised or civilised. As Anna Haebich has remarked, such different perceptions often resulted in ‘uneasy’ relationships between missionaries and Australian governments.<sup>99</sup>

According to the *Ernabella Newsletters*, during the late mission period the mission at Ernabella was often at odds with miners, pastoralists and authorities. Because missions such as Ernabella were funded by subscriptions from members of the churches, they tended to operate independently rather than as allies of the state. As Elizabeth Elbourne has argued, missionaries working in colonised lands were often the strongest critics of the excesses of colonisation which caused suffering to indigenous people.<sup>100</sup> Often authorities saw missionaries as actually inciting resistance to colonisation. At Hermannsburg Mission, Joyleen Abbott tells of how the missionaries resisted

---

<sup>99</sup> Haebich, A., *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, WA, 2000, p. 349.

<sup>100</sup> Elbourne, E., *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2002.

government assimilatory aims and refused to allow the authorities to remove her from her family in the 1930s.<sup>101</sup>

Whereas a feature of colonisation in many places called for the replacement of local languages rather than their maintenance, missionaries translated the Bible into the vernacular and worked and taught in local languages. Sanneh argues that ‘the vernacular basis of Christian mission’ in Africa not only distinguished missionary work from the colonising project, but was in opposition to it.<sup>102</sup> This certainly appears to be the case at Ernabella mission where the policy from the outset was to maintain the local language, Pitjantjatjara, as the *lingua franca* of the mission.<sup>103</sup>

From earliest times Christianity has been a missionising and proselytising religion spreading beyond its Judaic roots.<sup>104</sup> Missionaries relied on local converts to spread the Gospel and in Australia indigenous converts were engaged in evangelising throughout the whole mission era.<sup>105</sup> Thus missionaries lost a degree of control as Christianity developed local expressions in local languages. As Sanneh points out, the

---

<sup>101</sup> Rintoul, S., *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1993, p. 109.

<sup>102</sup> Sanneh, L., ‘Researching Mission History’, 1985, p. 283.

<sup>103</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby, Adelaide, 1968, p. 94. However a study by David Trudinger in 2007 provides a more complex reading of the language policy and the intent behind the use of the vernacular at Ernabella during the 1940s. While overall the mission was committed to the maintenance of Pitjantjatjara, there was tension between the evangelical school teacher R. M. Trudinger who argued for a vernacular-only policy, and the more pragmatic mission superintendent Reverend J. R. B. Love who espoused a bilingual policy. It appears that the dominant belief behind Trudinger’s argument was that it would prove more efficient in saving souls, rather than as a resistance to colonisation. Whereas Love’s bilingual approach was aimed at both maintaining Pitjantjatjara and preparing Ernabella people for engagement with the wider society, which it could be argued in many ways facilitated the colonial project. The different views of Trudinger and Love reflected their different vision for the future of Ernabella and Pitjantjatjara people. See Trudinger, D., ‘The Language(s) of Love: JRB Love and Contesting Tongues at Ernabella Mission Station, 1940-46’, *Aboriginal History* Vol. 31, 2007, pp. 27-44.

<sup>104</sup> Saul, himself a diasporic Jew who became the Apostle Paul, after his vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.3) played a central role in initially spreading the Christian message beyond Jerusalem. Following the decision of the Council of elders and apostles that gentiles did not have to become Jews and obey Jewish Law in order to become Christians (Acts 15.6-11), Paul ministered to diasporic Jews and even Gentiles around the Mediterranean.

<sup>105</sup> See Brock, P., ‘Setting the Record Straight’, 2005, pp. 107-25; Brock, P., ‘New Christians as Evangelists’, in N. Etherington (ed.), *Mission and Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 132-52; Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming*, 2007; Loos, N., *White Christ, Black Cross*, 2007.

work of local evangelists in Africa challenged the colonial structures of power and also worked against goals of colonisation and assimilation.<sup>106</sup> Instead, elements of local beliefs were incorporated and local Christian identities developed. Isobel Hofmeyr has examined how the classic evangelical text by John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, originally published in 1678 in England, was transformed into an African Christian story through weaving together 'evangelical panoramas' and African landscapes and African characters.<sup>107</sup> As Burrridge points out, 'the Christian communities to be found in, say, Arctic Canada, the Kurdish hills, south India, Guatemala, Alabama, or in a Scottish, West African, or Melanesian village are generally acknowledged as Christian despite wide differences of cultural expression and theological bases'.<sup>108</sup> In Australia too there are outcomes which resemble those in Africa. The Christian Revival movements in northern Australia in the 1950s and 1980s indicate that Aboriginal people were exercising a degree of agency as to the pace of change and the forms it took. Here Yolngu claimed that they could communicate directly with God without the intervention of missionaries. Ian Keen argues that the aim behind these innovations was to achieve independence from the missionaries.<sup>109</sup>

It appears that in many cases as Christianity has become less influential in the colonising society, it has become more important in the culture of those who were colonised. As Hilary Carey has pointed out, Christianity 'is now the dominant belief

---

<sup>106</sup> Sanneh, L. 1985 'Researching Mission History, p. 283.

<sup>107</sup> Hofmeyr, I., 'Portable Landscapes: Thomas Mofolo and John Bunyan in the Broad and Narrow Way', in D. Trigger & G. Griffiths (eds.), *Disputed Territories: Land, Culture and Identity in Settler Societies*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 2003, p. 150.

<sup>108</sup> Burrridge, K., 'Aborigines and Christianity: An Overview', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 20.

<sup>109</sup> Keen, I., *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion: Yolngu of North East Arnhem Land*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 276-85.

system of Aboriginal Australians'.<sup>110</sup> Given there is such a wide variety of responses to Christianity it is difficult to sustain the argument that conversion to Christianity is synonymous with westernisation.

In reality, most missionaries neither unconditionally supported colonial rule nor opposed it. Missionaries for the most part guarded their operations against 'imperial intrusion' and maintained a detachment from colonial projects.<sup>111</sup> Missionaries saw themselves as agents who spread God's word, rather than as agents of colonisation. Despite this the argument that colonisation and Christianisation are closely allied and interdependent has become an entrenched orthodoxy.

Jane Samson proposes that analysis of missionary work in the academy has suffered from 'a hermeneutics of suspicion about Christianity in history' and denominational and theological interpretations of missionary work have been peripheral.<sup>112</sup> Mission historiography has been embedded in a discourse of colonial power dominated by Marxist interpretations which portray missionary work as aiding and abetting the spread of colonisation and capitalism. Using this model, conversion to Christianity by indigenous people can only be accommodated as a western, colonising imposition and one which threatens 'authentic' Aboriginal expressions of spirituality. The only position in this model for Aboriginal people is as victims of colonisation. That is, 'Christian subjectivities' can only be perceived as 'colonising subjectivities'.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Carey, H., *Believing in Australia*, 1996, p. 72; The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have reported that religious affiliation in the Australian population has declined from 90% in 1933 to 68% in 2001 with an increasing secularisation of society from 1970. According to the 2006 Census 64% of Indigenous people were affiliated with Christianity with 20% having no religious affiliation. This is comparable to the non-Indigenous population (67% and 19%) suggesting that Christianity is as important for Indigenous people as it is for non-Indigenous people. Only 1.1% of Indigenous people identified affiliation with an Aboriginal traditional religion. However, this would depend on how people define religion.

<sup>111</sup> Sanneh, L., 'Researching Mission History, 1985, p. 283.

<sup>112</sup> Samson, J., 'The Problem of Colonialism in the Western Historiography of Christian Missions', *Religious Studies and Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.



It is asserted that the only way to understand the reality for people living on missions is to read their stories filtered through the lens of colonisation. Where peoples' experiences do not fit the model and where people are exercising agency in converting to Christianity, their experience, if it is examined at all, is interpreted as an accommodation to the missionaries or as Comaroff and Comaroff have argued with reference to South Africa, people only converted to Christianity as an act of resistance to the colonisers.<sup>114</sup>

Steve Etherington who has worked as a pastor and teacher at Oenpelli for thirty years has proposed an explanation for the enduring nature of this discourse. He argues that there is a need by non-Aboriginal people to uphold an ideal of Aborigines as exemplars of a deeply spiritual life who can 'live out our spiritual fantasies for us'.<sup>115</sup> If they embrace Christianity they cannot do this.<sup>116</sup>

Where Christianity is understood solely as an aspect of western cultural domination, the experiences of indigenous people who have embraced Christianity are marginalised. While in any analysis of the encounter between indigenous people and missionaries the context of colonialism is critical, so too are peoples' experiences of the encounter. A focus on their experiences can open up new possibilities for understanding the myriad and complex ways in which indigenous people are expressing Christianity, both in Australia and elsewhere.

---

<sup>114</sup> Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J., *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 1993; see also Woolmington, J., 'The Civilisation/Christianise Debate and the Australian Aborigines', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 10, 1986, p. 90.

<sup>115</sup> Etherington, S., 'Coming Ready or Not! Aborigines are Heading for Town', Occasional paper, October, Bennelong Society, 2007, p. 8, <<http://www.bennelong.com.au/>>, accessed 11 October 2010.

<sup>116</sup> There are a number of texts which advocate recourse to Aboriginal Dreamings in order to fill the perceived void of western spirituality. For example, see Lawlor, R., *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1991. For a critique of Lawlor see Rolls, M., 'Robert Lawlor Tells a "White" Lie', *Journal of Australian Studies: Vision Splendid*, No. 66, 2000, pp. 211-18.

## Religious pluralism

There is an emerging body of more critical scholarship which deals with the complexities of the relationship between Christianity and indigenous peoples. These studies are informed by an understanding that Christianity, in whatever form, is of cultural importance to indigenous people and is a vital aspect of their world view. By forefronting cultural adaptation and religious pluralism they contest both the 'saviours' and 'destroyers' models and regard missions as sites where multifaceted relationships developed between missionaries and Aboriginal people who associated with missions.<sup>117</sup>

Attwood has shown that at Ramahyuck mission in Gippsland relationships of mutual dependence developed which over time changed the structure of the mission, Aborigines and missionaries themselves. There was a growing dependence on missions for the services they provided, but as with any social community, there was a complex mix of people being constrained by the mission but within these constraints, exercising agency.<sup>118</sup>

Missionaries at Ernabella reported that in the early years of the mission, Aboriginal people used it during times of scarcity, such as drought. In times of plenty, the mission did not see as many people. In December 1944, seven years after the establishment of the mission, Superintendent Love wrote that 'all of the people at

---

<sup>117</sup> Brock, P., *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalization and Survival*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993; Brock, P. (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, Boston, 2005; Austin-Broos, D., 'The Meaning of *Pepe*: God's Law and the Western Arrernte', *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, October 2003, pp. 311-28; Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1994; Swain, T. & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988; Schwartz, C. & Dussart, F. (eds.), *Engaging Christianity in Aboriginal Australia*, The Australian Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010; Cannell, F., *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006; Ranger, T., 'Christianity and Indigenous Peoples', 2003.

<sup>118</sup> Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, 1989.

Ernabella are nomadic and don't stay for long. Let them continue to be nomadic'.<sup>119</sup>

This is a very different attitude to that adopted by earlier missionaries such as those described by Attwood at Ramahyuck a hundred years before, who saw settled living, along with spatial and temporal ordering of the mission as the first step to Christianising. Judy Birmingham's archaeological research at the Killalpaninna Mission on the edge of the Simpson Desert in the Lake Eyre region demonstrates that the Dieri people employed similar practices forty or so years earlier than Ernabella. Birmingham refers to these practices as 'optimal foraging' where people used the mission to extend their traditional foraging practices by exploiting the resources provided by the mission. This was an adaptive strategy designed to 'minimize the expenditure of energy and reduce risk'.<sup>120</sup> Birmingham's model provides an alternative way of reading the data and countenances possibilities other than the perception that Aboriginal people moved to missions under coercion or duress.

A closer reading of missionary accounts starting from the basis that Aborigines were capable of and did exercise agency demonstrates the ways in which the orthodox perception has glossed over the nuances in encounters. The story of indigenous evangelists is a case in point. Their stories have been neglected as they have been perceived as being unduly influenced by missionaries and thus ended up 'between cultures'. Consequently they were of little interest to studies underpinned by essentialist understandings of cultures. The Western Arnernte man Moses Tjalkabota, is included in early missionary writings from Hermannsburg in Central Australia but is not seen as a

---

<sup>119</sup> Love, J. R. B., 'The Policy of Ernabella', *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Birmingham, J., 'Resistance, Creolization or Optimal Foraging at Killalpaninna Mission, South Australia' in R. Torrence & A. Clarke (eds.), *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross-cultural Engagements in Oceania*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 363.

significant figure in revisionist accounts.<sup>121</sup> Brock has pointed out that indigenous evangelists often occupied uncertain ‘insider-outsider’ positions. Sometimes they enjoyed increased status in their society, at other times they were marginalised.<sup>122</sup>

Nonetheless, as Robert Kenny has demonstrated in his account of evangelist Nathaniel Pepper in nineteenth-century Victoria, the adoption of Christianity ‘was not necessarily a capitulation to Europeaness’. There is no indication that Pepper, after his conversion, saw himself as less Aboriginal or no longer part of his community.<sup>123</sup>

Paul Albrecht was born and grew up at Ntaria where his father, Pastor F. W. Albrecht was a missionary. Paul Albrecht also worked as a missionary in central Australia for forty one years and in his reflections on his life’s work, he argues that Arrernte people made carefully considered decisions about cultural changes. He writes, they ‘kept all the customs and practices that they wanted to keep, and gave up only those they wanted to give up’. Arrernte told him that increase ceremonies were discontinued because they conflicted with Christian ideas, but the initiation of boys had to be continued because this practice was considered essential for socialising the younger generation, as well as being central to land title.<sup>124</sup> Here we see pragmatic decision making in response to new social situations. It contests notions that Aboriginal cultures were so finely balanced that a change in one aspect of traditional life would cause their culture to collapse. Albrecht points out that even though his father advised against the practice of initiation, ‘all boys at Hermannsburg (Ntaria) were regularly initiated’,

---

<sup>121</sup> Brock, P., ‘Setting the Record Straight’, 2005, p. 125.

<sup>122</sup> Brock, P., ‘New Christians as Evangelists’, 2005, p. 134.

<sup>123</sup> Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming*, 2007, p. 336.

<sup>124</sup> Albrecht, P., *Relhiperra: About Aborigines (Incorporating the Thoughts of a Reluctant Missionary)*, The Bennelong Society, January 2008, p. 102, <<http://www.bennelong.com.au/books/pdf/Relhiperra.pdf>>, accessed 12 October 2011.

including the sons of Christian Arrernte.<sup>125</sup> Edwards has pointed to a similar process of the evaluation of traditional practices made possible by the presence of Ernabella Mission. The practice of infanticide, necessitated by circumstances such as the birth of twins both of who could not be safely cared for in a mobile hunter-gatherer society living in marginal desert country, was abandoned and in 1962 it was reported that twins had been accepted for the first time.<sup>126</sup>

Today, Christianity is an important aspect of contemporary Aboriginality and while the adoption of Christianity has not been without tensions it appears that people are managing pluralism in dynamic and culturally satisfying ways. Affiliation with a Christian Church can comprise one aspect of a community's identity. Cape York Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson, talks of the 'layers of identity' expressed by Cape York people—as 'Bama' (Cape York Aboriginal Australian), Murri (Aboriginal person from Queensland), Aboriginal Australian, Lutheran with connections to Hermannsburg Mission (now Ntaria) and non-Aboriginal Lutherans in the Barossa Valley in South Australia.<sup>127</sup> For many Aboriginal people, embracing Christianity is integral to not only notions of identity and community, but as *markers* of identity. McIntosh has argued that identity for Yolngu of Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) is 'framed in part in terms of belief in the Christian God' and as well is based in 'their clan and family history'. Furthermore, Elcho Islanders assert that Christianity is a means by which they can control their future. Attempts by outsiders to undermine their Christian beliefs are seen as threatening their self-determination.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>126</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture', 1978, p. 200; Edwards, W., Annual Report 1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Pearson, N., 'Layers of Identity Bind our Nation', *The Australian*, 27 July 2006, p. 10.

<sup>128</sup> McIntosh, I., 'Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal Belief in the Christian God', *Oceania*, Vol. 67, No. 4, June 1997, pp. 279, 283.

Religious pluralism is articulated by Eastern Arrernte people from Santa Teresa who maintain that ‘Father of all/you gave us the Dreaming’<sup>129</sup> and the people from Ernabella who assert that God was looking after them when they lived in the bush prior to the establishment of the mission.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Arrernte women from Hermannsburg (Ntaria) showed Diane Austin-Broos the Jesus’ track where Jesus’ footprint, *imparja Jesuaka*, is visible as a mark on the bed of the Finke River near Ntaria. They say that this proves that Jesus passed through the area long before the Lutheran missionaries established Hermannsburg.<sup>131</sup> As Austin-Broos points out, there is no new knowledge in the Arrernte world view, things have always been there but had not been revealed and this enabled people to interpret Lutheran knowledge in terms of Arrernte Law.<sup>132</sup> With this understanding people at Ntaria (Hermannsburg) today are able to express their identity as Arrernte and Lutheran, that is ‘an identity embodied in two laws’.<sup>133</sup> It demonstrates the ways in which Arrernte have incorporated missionary knowledge.<sup>134</sup>

In Peter Willis’ study of a community living near Kununurra at the end of the 1960s he argues that in common with other remote missions where people remained on their land, ‘Aboriginal religion continued to be the foundation of their spiritual being, even for those who became Christians’.<sup>135</sup> Willis’ observation has relevance to the subject of this thesis, Ernabella Mission. Shirley Purdie, a Gija woman who won the 2007 Blake Prize for Religious Art for her painting *Stations of the Cross* juxtaposes the

---

<sup>129</sup> Harmsen, J., *You Gave us the Dreaming*, Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999.

<sup>131</sup> Austin-Broos, D., ‘Narratives of the Encounter at Ntaria’, *Oceania*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 1994, p. 142.

<sup>132</sup> Austin-Broos, D., ‘The Meaning of *Pepe*’, 2003.

<sup>133</sup> Austin-Broos, D., ‘Narratives of the Encounter at Ntaria’, 1994, p. 136.

<sup>134</sup> McIntosh, I., ‘Islam and Australia’s Aborigines?’, 1996; Sansom, B., ‘Irruptions of the Dreamings’, 2001; Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country*, 1986.

<sup>135</sup> Willis, P., ‘Riders in the Chariot: Aboriginal Conversion at Kununurra’, in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 308.

Christian story with traditional imagery. She said that it represents her culture which is ‘two-way’—the ‘*gardiya* (non-Aboriginal) story and Aboriginal way’.<sup>136</sup> The use of Tiwi woman Marjorie Liddy’s painting of her vision of the Holy Spirit, *Marjorie’s Bird*, as the main image for the 2008 Catholic World Youth Day in Sydney, demonstrates that indigenous expressions of Catholicism are important to the Catholic Church. It also is testament to the complexity of religious beliefs held by Tiwi people who grew up during the mission era. As Liddy points out, ‘[t]he Holy Spirit, the spirit of the land, it is the same’.<sup>137</sup>

The adoption of Christianity by Aboriginal people can lead to cultural enhancement rather than cultural loss. For Darby Jampijinpa Ross, an initiated Warlpiri elder and highly esteemed rainmaker, embracing Christianity early in his life did not cause him to renounce Warlpiri beliefs. He lived to be one hundred-years old (which he attributed to God) and the funeral ceremony to celebrate his long life combined Christian service with traditional ceremony.<sup>138</sup> In Campbell’s biography there is a photograph of Ross wearing a cross on a chain around his neck which he claimed ‘identified him as a Christian’ while being painted up for a traditional ceremony. As a rainmaker he strategically employed both Christian and traditional practices together to look after country.<sup>139</sup> Rather than blocking access to traditional life, ‘Christianity gave Darby another frame of reference for his life’.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Higson, R., ‘Kimberley Artist takes Blake Prize’, *The Australian*, 30 August 2007, p. 7.

<sup>137</sup> Robinson, N., ‘Cardinals to Wear Islander’s Holy Spirit Vision: Marjorie a Vatican VIP’, *The Australian*, 12 July 2008, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,24007170-5006790,00.html>>, accessed 6 September 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Campbell, L., *Darby : One Hundred Years of Life in a Changing Culture*, ABC, Warlpiri Media Association, Alice Springs, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

Like Jampijinpa Ross, Tony Tjamiwa, a senior Pitjantjatjara custodian of the *mala*<sup>141</sup> Dreaming, lived a life outside the constraints of cultural essentialism. To mark the death of such an important and respected elder in 2001 the Uluru climb was closed to tourists for the mourning period and a Christian funeral was held celebrating his life as a traditional man and an elder of the Uniting Church. Edwards, a longtime friend who participated in the funeral service, tells of a man who was able to navigate ‘two vastly contrasting worlds’ through deep understandings of both traditional culture and Christian faith. Tjamiwa grew up and worked at Ernabella Mission. He was among the first group to be baptised in 1958 and later became an Elder of the church. He acquired literacy in his language, Pitjantjatjara, and was initiated according to Pitjantjatjara traditions.<sup>142</sup> Edwards argues that Tjamiwa’s Christian faith ‘helped to prepare him for his traditional Aboriginal role at Uluru’.<sup>143</sup> Equally it may have facilitated his role as a broker between traditional matters and officialdom.

Cultural dynamism is evident in the life of Yolngu elder Gawirrin Gumana, a ‘celebrated bark painter, a Uniting Church minister, an inheritor of ancestral knowledge ... and ceremonial leader’.<sup>144</sup> His search for traditional knowledge has been a life-long process, despite as a young adult spending a decade away from his community. Nicholas Rothwell describes him as one of the ‘philosophers of culture contact’ who has negotiated a balance between Western and Yolngu worlds.<sup>145</sup> From his life experiences, Gawirrin says that he has ‘three angles now on life ... the Yolngu, the Western and then

---

<sup>141</sup> *Mala* translates as wallaby. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, p. 53.

<sup>142</sup> Edwards, W. H., *Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality*, Charles Strong Memorial Lecture, July 2001, University of Melbourne, 2001, p. 2-3.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>144</sup> Rothwell, N., *Another Country*, Black Inc., Melbourne, Vic., 2007, pp. 11-5.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.



there is God's'.<sup>146</sup> Here we see eminent Aborigines themselves separating their Christian faith from other western impacts.

## Conclusion

What is at issue here is that many analyses that have attempted to explain the impact of Christianity and missions on Aboriginal people are unsatisfactory in making sense of the lived realities of many Aborigines. They leave unanswered the processes by which Aborigines became and become Christians. The Eurocentric 'saviours' approach discounts monolithic elements of Christianity and the sometimes detrimental changes introduced by missionaries. Revisionist analyses which have become the orthodoxy seek to revise the 'saviours' approach and rethink the relationship between missionaries and Aboriginal people. Yet instead they have produced another totalising narrative which has reduced the missionary enterprise to 'a raced system of colonial control' and has positioned Aborigines as victims.<sup>147</sup> As Samson argues, rather than providing a critical re-evaluation, in reality they have 'disguised unexamined prescriptions and narrative constraints'.<sup>148</sup> The lives of Aboriginal people cited throughout this paper indicate that the adoption of Christianity has resulted in the addition rather than the loss of elements.<sup>149</sup> Christianity is one element among many which make up their repertoire of religious experience and identity. The orthodox narrative, embedded in a one dimensional model of colonial power, resists cultural dynamism and the notion that belief in Christianity is a legitimate expression of Aboriginality.

---

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>147</sup> Samson, J., 'The Problem of Colonialism in the Western Historiography of Christian Missions', *Religious Studies and Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>149</sup> Basil Sansom, Pers. Comm., 7 December 2007; see also Whitehouse, H., 'Appropriated and Monolithic Christianity in Melanesia', in F. Cannell (ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006, pp. 295-307; Hofmeyr, I., 'Studying Missionaries in a Post-national World', *African Studies*, Vol. 63, No.1, July 2004, pp. 119-29.

An aspect of missionary work which has been overlooked is that in purely practical terms, missions provided a 'safe haven' for many Aboriginal people on the frontiers and according to Charles Rowley, it was due largely to the efforts of the missions that the 'destruction of Aboriginal populations was eventually arrested'.<sup>150</sup> Marcia Langton has also argued that 'the death rates would have been much higher without the presence of missionaries'.<sup>151</sup> The presence of missions enabled people to maintain associations with country, which is crucial for land claims and Native Title. In addition, revisionist accounts have not provided satisfactory explanations for the current circumstances on former missions. The 2007 Wild and Anderson report and the 2008 Mullighan Report into the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in remote communities in the Northern Territory and on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia have made it clear that the situation has deteriorated in the thirty or so years since missions closed. Indeed, by focusing on the perceived collusion between missionaries and the state<sup>152</sup> other factors which may have contributed and are contributing to social breakdown are effectively quarantined from scrutiny. Peter Sutton argues that, 'the authoritarian and patriarchal regimes of most of the early Christian missions were, structurally and philosophically and entirely bizarre as this might sound, "culturally appropriate" in a way that recent liberalised and more chaotic regimes have not been'.<sup>153</sup> That is, mission regimes resonated in some fundamental ways with traditional social orders and mechanisms of control. This is being acknowledged belatedly by some Aboriginal leaders and represents the emergence of a significant shift

---

<sup>150</sup> Rowley, C., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1978.

<sup>151</sup> Langton, M., 'The "Word of God" and "the Work of the Devil"', in V. Thwaites (ed.), *Holy, Holy, Holy*, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2004, pp. 31.

<sup>152</sup> See Calma, T., Anglicare Social Justice Lecture, Hobart, 22 August 2007; Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood*, 1998; de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu*, 2005.

<sup>153</sup> Sutton, P., 'The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Policy in Australia Since the 1970s', *Anthropological Forum*, Vol.11, No. 2, 2001, p. 154.

in the assessment of the mission era. For instance, Lowitja O'Donoghue recently pointed out that Aborigines were better off when missionaries were managing communities.<sup>154</sup> Edwards' challenge of thirty years ago for a more rigorous assessment of the role of missionaries<sup>155</sup> is more pertinent than ever as it becomes increasingly evident that the revisionist analysis of missions and missionaries is inadequate.

Brock has argued that studies need to move beyond the 'easy dichotomies of colonized/colonizer, Christian/non-Christian'.<sup>156</sup> Not only are they reductionist but limit understanding of this significant and complex contact. Studies which start from different premises, such as where Christianity is regarded as important to Aboriginal people, where cultures are constituted and negotiated in relation to internal and external cultural forms, and where conversion to Christianity is understood as cultural enrichment rather than cultural loss, can broaden our understanding of the impact of the mission era on Aboriginal cultures and societies. This approach allows an analysis of the interplay of local interpretation and adaptation within the context of colonisation. As BurrIDGE argues it would allow for the recognition that contact between missionaries and Aboriginal people brought 'poisons' along 'with its nectar'.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Walker, J., 'Challenges to Churches and Next Generation. It's up to You: O'Donoghue'. *The Australian*, 28 May 2008, p. 8.

<sup>155</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture', 1978, pp. 195–204.

<sup>156</sup> Brock, P., 'Setting the Record Straight', 2005, p. 125.

<sup>157</sup> BurrIDGE, K., 'Aborigines and Christianity', 1988, p. 29.

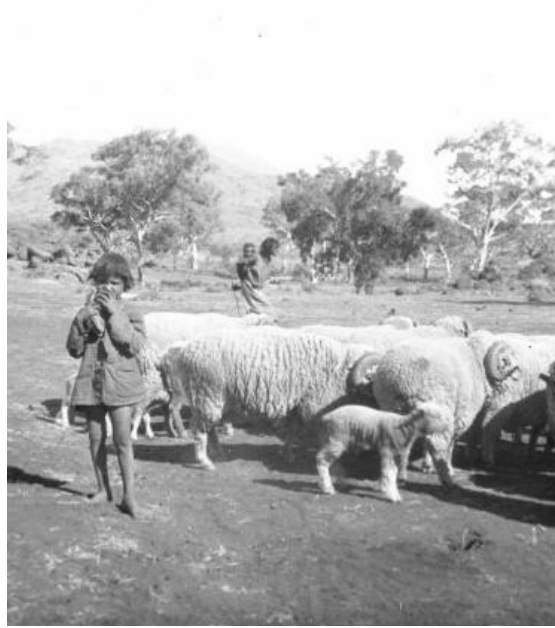


Figure 5

Two children and a woman with a flock of sheep in the Musgrave Ranges, South Australia, 1935, Duguid, C., <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4404241>>



Figure 6

Woman working for a dogger [dingo shooter], leading a laden camel, South Australia, ca. 1940, Duguid, C., <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4404660>>

### Chapter Three

#### From bush to mission: first contacts to 1937.

This chapter is concerned with the period from the late nineteenth century up to the establishment of the Presbyterian mission at Ernabella in the far north-west of South

Australia in 1937.<sup>1</sup> This period saw increasing contact between Aborigines and exploring parties, pastoralists and collectors of dingo scalps or doggers as they were known. Mission records state that one of the major reasons for the establishment of the mission was out of humanitarian concern about the perceived exploitative nature of the social and economic interaction between Aborigines, particularly Aboriginal women, and doggers. Nevertheless, it will be argued that there were aspects to these relationships which in some ways prepared Aboriginal people for their interaction with the mission. The process of ‘coming in’ to Ernabella Mission will be analysed to test the veracity of the orthodoxy which asserts that Aboriginal people were coerced, often against their will, from the bush onto missions. It can be argued that the coercion narrative obscures the nuances in what were complex processes for many Aboriginal people and moving to the mission can be regarded as more culturally consistent than the orthodoxy allows.

This period was marked by at best ambivalent and often contradictory thinking from a diverse range of disparate but sometimes intersecting voices about how best to provide for the future welfare of Aboriginal people in this remote area. At the end of the nineteenth century when contact was occurring on a more regular basis between Aborigines and outsiders in remote regions, understanding about Aboriginal societies was predominantly informed by evolutionary theories. These were based on the premise that Aborigines were exemplars of primitiveness at the earliest stage of human development, with no concept of territory or sense of ownership of land, no notion of social organisation, having only rudimentary material technology, and with only the most elementary and vague religious beliefs. Religious expression was used as an important gauge by nascent anthropologists to

---

<sup>1</sup> Between the 1930s and 1950s missions were established by a variety of denominations in and around the fringes of the Western Desert.

determine the degree of civilisation of a society.<sup>2</sup> Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, major contributors to early studies of Aboriginal cultures and societies, wrote that they could find nothing which resembled religious beliefs among Arrernte people in Central Australia.<sup>3</sup> The inevitable outcome of such primitiveness was “racial” extinction. As Spencer and Gillen wrote, ‘all that can be done is to gather the few remnants of the tribe into some mission station where the path to final extinction may be made as pleasant as possible’.<sup>4</sup>

However not everyone subscribed to the dominant discourse that Aborigines were at such a primitive stage of evolution that they were incapable of holding or acquiring religious beliefs. Since 1839 missionaries in south-eastern Australia had been observing that some Aboriginal societies believed in deities and there was debate about whether deities such as *Baiame* in the Wellington Valley, west of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, were products of missionary influence or were a component of traditional beliefs.<sup>5</sup> But either way, both scenarios challenged the innate inferiority argument. Early missionaries in South Australia, Clamor Schurmann and Christian Teichelmann, compiled a grammar of the language spoken around Adelaide in 1840 in order ‘to refute premature and unjust detractions

---

<sup>2</sup> See Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Macmillan, London, 1936 [1890], p. 234; Tylor, E. B., *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, J. Murray, London, 1891, p. 401.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer, B. & Gillen, F. J., *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, Dover Publications, New York, 1968 [1899]; Spencer, B. & Gillen, F. J., *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1904; Spencer, B. & Gillen, F. J., *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1927.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer, B. & Gillen, F. J., *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 18. However, as Howard Morphy has pointed out, while Spencer and Gillen’s texts are informed by social evolutionary thinking their correspondence reveals a more sophisticated understanding of Aboriginal cultures which actually contests evolutionary notions of primitiveness. According to Morphy, Spencer and Gillen admired Arrernte religion for its richness and complexity and their work paved the way for greater appreciation of Aboriginal cultures. See Morphy, H., ‘Gillen-Man of Science’, in J. Mulvaney, H. Morphy, & A. Petch (eds.), *‘My Dear Spencer’: The Letters of F. J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 36-7.

<sup>5</sup> Hiatt, L. R., *Arguments about Aborigines*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p.100.

concerning the mental capabilities of the Aborigines of Australia'.<sup>6</sup> Herbert Basedow, geologist and doctor, who had also served as Chief Medical Officer for South Australia and Chief Protector for the Commonwealth Government in the Northern Territory, was one of the few to record Aboriginal life in central Australia in the early twentieth century. In 1903 and 1926 he spent time in the Musgrave Ranges<sup>7</sup> and carefully documented his observations of Aboriginal societies and cultural practices. While he agreed that the demise of Aboriginal people was due to the impact of settler society, he departed from the prevailing evolutionary explanation that this was the inevitable outcome of the struggle between superior and inferior "races" and found that the major cause lay in diseases contracted from contact with settlers, such as tuberculosis and syphilis. Although he firmly believed in the superiority of Europeans, he also noted that Aborigines recognised a 'divine supremacy' and concluded that the notion Aborigines were 'without religious ideas and without religious ceremonies' was incorrect.<sup>8</sup>

### **Government voices**

The colony of South Australia established in 1836 was heralded as being different to the colonies of New South Wales and Western Australia in that, among other things, it would treat Aborigines humanely and Aboriginal rights, particularly to land, would be acknowledged. Officials were adamant that Aboriginal people in South Australia would not suffer the same dispossession as they had in other colonies. Charles Rowley has argued that '[i]n no Australian colony in the first decades was there so sincere and determined an attempt by authority to ensure that justice and law were

---

<sup>6</sup> Schurmann, E. A., *'I'd Rather Dig Potatoes': Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia, 1838-1853*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p. 214.

<sup>7</sup> Ernabella Mission was established at the eastern end of the Musgrave Ranges.

<sup>8</sup> Basedow, H., *The Australian Aboriginal*, F.W. Preece & Sons, Adelaide, 1925, p. 257.

established'.<sup>9</sup> He added that a combination of 'basic ethnocentricity and the best of intentions' characterised the beginnings of the colony. However, the humane aims expressed by the colonial government at the outset could not be sustained in the face of the taken for granted progress of colonisation and the realities of expansion, and before long race relations on the South Australian frontiers faced similar issues as those in the other colonies. By the time of the first European explorations into central Australia in the 1860s the South Australian government considered Aborigines to be on the verge of extinction.<sup>10</sup> Richard Kimber has estimated that between 1860 and 1895 in central Australia forty per cent of the Aboriginal population died from introduced diseases, tribal clashes and in violent conflicts with settlers.<sup>11</sup> As the Australian colonies moved towards federation in 1901, despite those who contested the notion that Aborigines were a doomed "race" due to their innate primitiveness, it was generally believed that Aboriginal people would have no place in the future nation. According to Russell McGregor, in the years leading up to federation, 'Aboriginal people barely registered in the planning'.<sup>12</sup>

By 1911 the South Australian government deemed it necessary to implement an 'Act to Make Provision for the better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal and Half-caste Inhabitants of the State of South Australia'.<sup>13</sup> The aim of the 1911 Aborigines Act was ostensibly to halt the perceived demise of Aboriginal people but like the Queensland Act of 1897 on which it was modelled, it gave authorities extraordinary powers to both protect and restrict. A Chief Protector became the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children in the state, and an Aborigines Department was

---

<sup>9</sup> Rowley, C.D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 1978, pp. 80, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Kimber, R., 'Genocide or Not? The Situation in Central Australia', *Genocide Perspectives*, No.1, 1997, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> McGregor, R., *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2011, p. xvii. For an analysis of the 'doomed race' notion see McGregor, R., *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South.

<sup>13</sup> Rowley, C.D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 1978, p. 218.



established to administer Aboriginal populations. Western Desert people living a tribal life in the far north-west of the state were regarded as of little significance administratively. However the protection legislation was seen as the means by which tribal Aboriginal people could be isolated from the harmful effects of contact with settler civilisation.

In 1920 the Commonwealth government, along with the governments of South Australia and Western Australia reserved for Aborigines 40 000 square miles of Crown Land incorporating land in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory which was deemed unsuitable for any other purpose. This was known as the Central Australian Reserve and was to be for the exclusive use of Aborigines whose country lay within the area. The South Australian section of the Central Reserve was gazetted in 1921 comprising 21 900 square miles and was known as the North-West Reserve.<sup>14</sup> The annual South Australian Chief Protector's Reports from 1921 to 1936 consistently reiterated the importance of the Aboriginal reserve to keep the tribal people in the north-west of the state isolated from encroaching 'white civilization' and to allow them to live in their 'primitive manner'. The two contradictory ideas being expressed about Aborigines were reflected in the expressed aims of the reserve. On the one hand, for those who held that "full blood" Aborigines were on the path to extinction, isolation on the reserve provided the means to "ease their passing". On the other hand, those who foresaw a future for Aborigines saw the reserve as allowing them a space where Aboriginal culture could be preserved and the population stabilised in order to prevent extinction.<sup>15</sup> In 1933 the Chief Protector visited the Musgrave Ranges and found 'the natives' living in 'almost natural conditions' and in 'good physical condition'. He commented that 'the

---

<sup>14</sup> Rowley, C. D., *The Remote Aborigines*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 1972, p. 181; *The Central Australian Aboriginal Reserves*, Government Printer, Western Australia, nd; Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 10 January 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, G., *A Cautious Silence*, 2007, p. 57.

longer they can be kept outside the influence of white civilization the better for their moral and physical welfare'.<sup>16</sup> Some scientists such as J. B. Cleland, Professor of Pathology at the University of Adelaide, saw the inherent benefits of the government's protection legislation for those wishing to study Aborigines.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, the notion of providing a secure place for Aboriginal people was a farce, as the reserve could be revoked at any time and the boundaries did not offer complete protection from outsiders as became evident later in the 1940s when the government established the Woomera rocket range. As Rowley commented, 'generally governments have been more keen to keep the Aboriginal in the distant reserve than to keep the prospector, dogger, or other entrepreneur out.'<sup>18</sup> Writing to the Adelaide newspaper *The Advertiser*, Charles Duguid, an Adelaide doctor, and at the time Moderator of the Adelaide Presbyterian Church and President of the Aborigines Protection League in Adelaide claimed that doggers have trespassed 'far into the aboriginal reserve with impunity, and have done so for years' with the growing number of half-caste children irrefutable evidence of this.<sup>19</sup>

With Aborigines supposedly isolated on the North-West Reserve minimal effort was required on the part of the government. Each annual Chief Protector's report up until 1936 recommended that there be no intervention, no expenditure was listed and the 1933 report stated that no rations had ever been supplied by the Department. In 1936 there was a departure from this policy when the Chief Protector first broached the idea that tribal Aborigines could be gradually exposed to outsiders, but only to those who were concerned for their welfare. In 1937, the year Ernabella

---

<sup>16</sup> Chief Protector of Aborigines Report, 1933 Aborigines Department, Adelaide, South Australia, <<http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?&pid=60416>>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Cleland, J. B., *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, 1946.

<sup>18</sup> Rowley, C.D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 1978, p. 250.

<sup>19</sup> Duguid at this time was leading the campaign to establish a Presbyterian mission at Ernabella. Duguid, C. 'Life in the Musgraves', *The Advertiser*, 28 July 1936, p. 20; see also Love, J.R.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, 1937.

Mission was established, those responsible for Aboriginal affairs in each state met to formulate policies. While welfare and protection were on the agenda, Aborigines were also seen as a threat to the Commonwealth government's nation building White Australia project. In particular, the growing "half-caste" population was of increasing concern to the authorities and became the major focus of the Aboriginal Protection Acts. In South Australia there had been a 24% population increase in those designated "half-caste" over seven years (from 1456 in 1929 to 1814 in 1936). In the same period it was estimated that there had been a 41% decline in the number of "full bloods" (from 2630 to 1543 of whom 1076 were still nomadic in 1936).<sup>20</sup> The often quoted comments of A. O. Neville, Chief Protector of Western Australia, demonstrate the general fear in the community and the significance attached to "race". He wrote '[a]re we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget there were ever any aborigines in Australia'?<sup>21</sup> For tribal people, such as those in the Western Desert, the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State authorities responsible for Aborigines supported the proposal 'to preserve as far as possible the uncivilized native in his normal tribal state by the establishment of inviolable reserves'.<sup>22</sup> J.W. Bleakley, Queensland's Chief Protector of Aborigines, reported on the conditions of Aboriginal people on the reserve in 1929 and recommended that areas of land should be excised within the reserve for missions and that missionaries should operate as the 'agents of government'.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Foxcroft, E. J.B., *Australian Native Policy: Its History, Especially in Victoria*, Melbourne University Press & Oxford University Press, Melbourne and London, 1941, p. 157.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Reynolds, H., *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History*, Viking, Ringwood, Vic., 2001, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> Neville, A. O., *Australia's Coloured Minority*, Currawong Publishing Co Pty Ltd., Sydney, 1947, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Rowley, C.D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 1978, p. 266.

## Missionary voices

As discussed in Chapter Two missionaries have been situated within the power structure of the state and depicted as agents of colonisation where their work overlapped with and supported that of governments.<sup>24</sup> While this argument has some credence given that missionaries were part of the colonising society, the reality is more complex.<sup>25</sup> As Peter Sherlock points out, missionaries may have been ‘actors on the frontiers of colonialism’ but this did not *ipso facto* make them ‘agents of colonialism’.<sup>26</sup> While generally missionaries were in little doubt about the superiority of Christianity and civilisation, some missionaries regarded colonisation as the occupation of land belonging to someone else and thus saw it as their duty to compensate Aboriginal people by bringing them the Gospel. Indeed as early as the 1830s missionaries were contesting the notion that Aborigines had no rights to land and according to John Harris missionaries were ‘outspoken supporters of land rights in the nineteenth century’ and have continued to be.<sup>27</sup>

Missionary attitudes towards Aborigines then could be described as ambivalent and particularly in the late nineteenth century concern and contempt for Aborigines often existed side by side.<sup>28</sup> Missionaries were often troubled by the situation of Aboriginal people and they displayed a complex mix of humanitarianism, paternalism and romanticism towards Aboriginal people. Some missionaries found themselves at odds with governmental and anthropological

<sup>24</sup> See de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu: White culture and Black Women's Law*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2005; McDonald, H., *Blood, Bones and Spirit: Aboriginal Christianity in an East Kimberley Town*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2002; Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977.

<sup>25</sup> See Samson, J., ‘The Problem of Colonialism in the Western Historiography of Christian Missions’, *Religious Studies and Theology*, Vol. 23 No. 4, 2004, pp. 3-25.  
Sanneh, L., *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Orbis Books, New York, 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Sherlock, P., ‘Missions, Colonialism and the Politics of Agency’, in A. Barry, J. Cruickshank, A. Brown-May & P. Grimshaw (eds.), *Evangelists of Empire?: Missionaries in Colonial History*, [online] University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre, Melbourne, 2008, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1994, pp. 339, 432, 833.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

perceptions of what was best for Aboriginal cultures and societies. There are indications that the relationship between missionaries, governments and those studying Aborigines was marked more by disagreement than consensus. Missionaries did not necessarily agree with the notion of the inevitable extinction of the “race” nor did they consider that contact with Europeans would automatically lead to dependence and degeneration. Missionaries saw their role as protecting and civilising Aboriginal people, and maintaining the social cohesion of societies. These roles often proved to be contradictory.

The complex mix of perceptions which characterise much missionary thinking of this time can be seen in the writing of the Presbyterian missionary J.R.B. Love.<sup>29</sup> In 1915 after two years fieldwork he reported to the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church that he had no doubts that Aborigines could be ‘uplifted’ to eventually take their place in the wider society. Love did not question the morality of colonisation as some earlier missionaries had, but expressed confidence that through careful management on isolated reserves and missions Aboriginal people could progress.<sup>30</sup> During his time as Superintendent of the mission at Kunmunya from 1927 to 1940, Love undertook serious linguistic studies and made keen anthropological observations of Worora societies in north-west Australia. In his text *The Stone-age Bushmen of Today* he describes the Worora as ‘primitive savages’, albeit with ‘rites akin to the most sacred observances of the Christian faith’.<sup>31</sup> Even any recognition of Aboriginal religious beliefs was unusual at this time when social

---

<sup>29</sup> Of particular relevance here is that he later became Superintendent at Ernabella mission from 1941 to 1945.

<sup>30</sup> Love, J.R.B., *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition as seen in Northern South Australia, the Northern Territory, North-west Australia and Western Queensland*, Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, 1915.

<sup>31</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Stone-age Bushmen of Today: Life and Adventure among a Tribe of Savages in North-western Australia*, Blackie & Son Ltd, London & Glasgow, 1936, p. 219. Such ambivalent and contradictory understandings of Western Desert spiritual beliefs were common at the time. Daisy Bates, who camped at Ooldea on the Nullarbor Plain in the 1920s and 1930s ostensibly to care for what were perceived as the dying remnants of the Aboriginal ‘race’ expressed similar views. See Bates, D., *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, I. White (ed.), National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1985, p. 218.

evolutionist thinking determined that primitive people had no religious beliefs.

Elsewhere in his account Love takes a more romanticist view and points out that the intent of the mission was not to ‘detribalize’ the people. To this end, mission residents were regularly sent ‘bush’ to keep contact with their tribal institutions’. In addition, clothes were not to be worn unless in Church or while working on the mission, foreshadowing the policy at Ernabella some years later. At the same time Love’s ultimate aim was clear—to ‘drive out the darkness of an evil tradition’ by ‘letting in a better light’.<sup>32</sup>

### **Public opinion**

Frontier societies held divergent attitudes towards Aborigines ranging from callous or indifferent to charitable and humane. Towards the end of the 1930s when Western Desert people were ‘coming in’ to the mission at Ernabella, social evolutionary arguments to the effect that the Aboriginal “race” was so primitive that it faced extinction, were coming under increasing challenge.<sup>33</sup> However, such notions were still dominant in the popular psyche and as Henry Reynolds has argued, until the 1940s the majority of the settler population believed that Aborigines were a ‘dying race’.<sup>34</sup> In 1934 in Alice Springs Duguid found little sympathy for Aboriginal people and the common attitude was that the sooner the “race” died out the better. Duguid also found this thinking among missionaries of the Australian Inland Mission, who ‘regarded the natives as unworthy of attention’.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32. When reading missionary texts it is important to be mindful that their writing was often intended to promote their work and raise funds from congregations at home. In this sense they may portray an overly optimistic view. In the Presbyterian Mission Board’s 1946 publication *Ernabella Revisited* its aim is stated clearly, to ‘again invite our friends to continue with us to complete the work of consolidation’, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Foxcroft, E. J.B., *Australian Native Policy*, 1941, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Reynolds, H., *An Indelible Stain?*, 2001, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, pp. 23-4.

Public opinion was informed by the popular writing of explorers and scientists who had made expeditions into the Western Deserts in the 1930s. Cecil Madigan, a geologist, made a number of exploratory trips into the area between 1927 and 1932. In his book *Central Australia* he assessed the situation of Aborigines as a tragedy.<sup>36</sup> He was in no doubt that settlers and Aborigines could not coexist as he believed that the ‘advance of a civilization ... is utterly beyond him [the Aborigine]’ and spelt doom for Aboriginal people. The only hope, he argued was ‘complete isolation’ for the tribal Aboriginal people of the remote centre. But he, like Elkin, believed that the lure of ‘white’ material goods would inevitably lead to their demise and absorption of the ‘remnants’ by ‘their dispossessors in another hundred years’.<sup>37</sup> Of Hermannsburg Mission Madigan wrote that everybody appeared happy and the Aborigines he met there were ‘the most intelligent’ he had seen.<sup>38</sup> However, he considered that the mission was only delaying the inevitable ‘passing of the black man’.<sup>39</sup> Hedley Finlayson, curator of mammals at the South Australian Museum, wrote *The Red Centre* in 1936 in which he demonstrates detailed knowledge of remote central Australia derived from a life time of study. He agreed with Madigan that for tribal Aborigines dependence on settlers brought degeneration and tragedy. His observations of Aboriginal people deviated from popular understandings and he pointed out that the simplicity of their material culture did not indicate primitiveness or lack of moral character. He described the tribal people he encountered during his expeditions as kind, generous, altruistic and fair, with a sense of humour and ‘love of song’. He too argued that the ‘solution’ for tribal Aborigines lay in the minimum of ‘interference with their ways of life’.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Madigan, C. T., *Central Australia*, Oxford University Press, London, 1936, p. 255.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>40</sup> Finlayson H. H., *The Red Centre*, 1936, pp. 88-95.

A proliferation of reports, such as the 1935 Commonwealth Board of Inquiry into the ill-treatment of Aborigines in Central Australia, and accounts from people who travelled through remote areas such as Duguid, publicised the conflicts occurring on remote frontiers between settlers, police and Aborigines and the declining population of ‘full bloods’. The irony did not escape Duguid who noted that in one particular incident where an Aboriginal man was shot and killed at Uluru, the perpetrator was a policeman who was also the Protector of Aborigines for that area. The increasing evidence of such atrocities provided a catalyst for humanitarian groups mainly in the southern cities to agitate for new policies to protect the welfare of Aborigines.<sup>41</sup>

### **Aboriginal voices**

There are few records of Aboriginal voices of this period but accounts from Aboriginal people who do remember life in the Musgrave Ranges before the establishment of Ernabella mission recall happy childhoods.<sup>42</sup> Nganyintja Ilyatjari, who was born in the 1920s, grew up surrounded by extended family living in a ‘traditional’ way. She described this as a time of intense learning.<sup>43</sup> After the mission was established her family was one of the first to move there and Nganyintja spent the rest of her long life living in her country. Clara Coulthard’s childhood in the 1930s differed to Nganyintja’s but her memories are also of a happy life spent travelling and prospecting for water with her Irish-Australian father and her extended family. She was also able to maintain connections to her mother’s and grandfather’s country. When her father became ill he left his family at Ernabella and on his death, the children were removed from their family and sent to Colebrook Home in

---

<sup>41</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> This is not to assume that individual voices are necessarily representative.

<sup>43</sup> Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, ‘Traditional Aboriginal Learning: How I Learned as a Pitjantjatjara Child’, in W. H. Edwards (ed.), *Traditional Aboriginal Society*, Macmillan Ed. Aus. Pty. Ltd, South Yarra, 1998, p. 17.



Quorn.<sup>44</sup> Pitjantjatjara elders Andy Tjilari and Jacky Tjupuru, talking to Bill Edwards in 1973, related their stories of first contact with doggers in the 1930s and told of their initial fear of horses and camels which they first thought were ‘evil spirits’. Jacky Tjupuru tells of his puzzlement when he first encountered sheep and how he mused that they must be some kind of echidna as this was the only thing he could relate them to. Andy Tjilari was intrigued by the ‘new’ ways and saw contact as a ‘time of learning’ from the white men.<sup>45</sup> Alec Minutjukur remembered that people were living a healthy and traditional life in the bush before the establishment of the mission and interestingly, he felt that God was ‘caring for us’.<sup>46</sup> Nura Rupert recalls stories from her parents who first saw white men at the Ernabella waterhole and who told of their fear because they thought that the white men had come to ‘catch’ them. Nonetheless she describes their life as happy and healthy.<sup>47</sup> Recollections of an Edenic traditional life however, need to be balanced with other records. According to Ronald and Catherine Berndt armed avenging expeditions to exact revenge for a death or as punishment for breaches of traditional Law were a feature of traditional life in the Western Deserts.<sup>48</sup> Pintupi people told Fred Myers that they were ‘always fighting when they were young’<sup>49</sup>. This indicates that conflict was a part of everyday life and that nostalgia may have had some influence on the above recollections of past times.

---

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Mellor, D. & Haebich, A. (eds.), *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2002, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Mattingley, C. & Hampton, K. (eds.), *Survival in our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, p. 8. Bill Edwards was the Superintendent of Ernabella Mission from 1958 to 1972.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and Their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>48</sup> Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *The World of the First Australians*, Landsdowne Press, Dee Why West, Australia, 1981, p. 356.

<sup>49</sup> Myers, F. R. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution, USA, 1986, p. 89.

## Early contacts

By all accounts people from the Musgrave Ranges area were relatively unaffected by settler occupation until the early decades of the twentieth century. Zoologists conducting surveys in the vicinity of the Ernabella waterhole between 1931 and 1935 noted that the local people managed their resources and facilitated their hunting with the judicious use of fire as they had done ‘systematically for untold generations and over enormous areas of country’.<sup>50</sup> Edwards argues that in this respect they were better off in relation to other Aboriginal groups because they were able to maintain close connections with their country.<sup>51</sup> While there had been exploring parties through the region from the late nineteenth century, most encounters had been fleeting. However desert people were not completely isolated and unaware of the outside world. European explorers travelling through the desert country in the latter decades of the nineteenth century noted that even in the most remote areas, Aboriginal people knew some English words and were making uses of some European implements such as knives and axes. There is also evidence that since the late nineteenth century desert populations had been moving towards settled areas.<sup>52</sup>

The construction of the Overland Telegraph Line between 1870 and 1872 brought settlers to the area and the telegraph stations along its route provided convenient bases for exploratory parties travelling into remote areas.<sup>53</sup> With access to the Western Deserts now a more viable proposition, mapping and scientific surveys, government patrols and expeditions searching for pastoral land, stock routes and minerals, as well as itinerant missionaries, ventured westwards.

---

<sup>50</sup> Finlayson H. H., *The Red Centre*, 1936, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards W. H., ‘Pitjantjatjara Land Rights’ in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, p. 303.

<sup>52</sup> Kimber, D., ‘Kapi! Contact Experiences in the Western Desert 1873-1984’, in P. Batty (ed.), *Colliding Worlds: First Contact in the Western Desert 1932-1984*, Museum Victoria and National Aboriginal Cultural Institute Tandanya, Vic., 2006, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1976, p. 36.

Little substantial information about the life of people in the Musgrave Ranges can be gleaned from the accounts of the early expeditioners to the area. One of the first references to Aboriginal people in the Musgrave Ranges is by Ernest Giles who traversed the region in 1873 and 1875 and is attributed with the “discovery” of what was to become the site of Ernabella mission some sixty years later. He named the area Glen Ferdinand and described it as a ‘delightful and fanciful region’ with a large watercourse and even though he encountered Aborigines on his travels, his account reveals little information about them. He described those few Aborigines he encountered as hostile and threatening to his party<sup>54</sup> and his use of the descriptor “savages” indicates that his understanding was informed by social evolutionary notions of primitiveness. For the most part it appears that people in the Western Deserts kept out of the way of exploring parties.

Surveys funded by universities, such as the Horn expedition in 1894, the first to gather scientific data in Central Australia, provided more useful information and raised interest in Aboriginal people living in the area. Frank Gillen, who managed the telegraph stations at Alice Springs and Charlotte Waters, together with scientist Baldwin Spencer were the first to visit the area with the aim of documenting Aboriginal culture. Their collaboration produced the major work about Arrernte people, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899). In the 1930s a number of university expeditions visited different areas of the deserts with the 1932 University of Adelaide anthropological expedition to Mt Liebig hailed as one of the most important. Encounters with Aborigines were not always as hostile as had been reported in earlier explorers’ accounts and sometimes contact was marked more by curiosity and bemusement than hostility and fear. Kimber was told by a Pintupi elder how they were highly amused at the experiments

---

<sup>54</sup> Giles, E., *Ernest Giles’s Explorations, 1872-76*, South Australian Parliamentary Papers 1872-76, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000 [1876], p. 119.

conducted by the scientists at Mt Liebig and did not find them in the least threatening.<sup>55</sup> There were also itinerant missionaries visiting the area in the 1920s such as the Evangelical missionaries Ernest and Euphemia Kramer who were committed to bringing God's word to desert people.<sup>56</sup> William Wade (who later established the Warburton mission in 1933), travelled through the Musgrave ranges in 1926 and 1929 and established friendly contacts with Pitjantjatjara people who referred to him as *Aliluyanya*.<sup>57</sup>

However most people were passing through rather than settling permanently and the region remained sparsely occupied by permanent settlers throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Ernestine Hill writing of her travels through central Australia in the 1930s estimated that at that time there were still only four "white" men living in the Musgrave Ranges and that Aboriginal groups were still living traditionally throughout the 1930s.<sup>58</sup> The 1921 census<sup>59</sup> showed the Western Desert to be virtually uninhabited and described it as arid 'sparselands' not at all suitable for pastoral enterprises.<sup>60</sup>

In an attempt to protect the growing pastoral industry in 1912 the South Australian government introduced bounty payments for dingo scalps. This encouraged incursions further into the Western Deserts by doggers keen to take advantage of what was perceived to be a lucrative opportunity. Ernestine Hill even

---

<sup>55</sup> Kimber, D., 'Kapi! Contact Experiences in the Western Desert 1873-1984', 2006, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Barry, A., ' "A Longing Desire in My Heart": Faith, Family and the Colonial Frontier in the Life of Euphemia Kramer, 1887-1971', in A. Barry, J. Cruickshank, A. Brown-May & P. Grimshaw (eds.), *Evangelists of Empire?: Missionaries in Colonial History*, [online] University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre, Melbourne, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> *Aliluyanya* translates as "Hallelujah". See Tjilari, A. 'Seeing an Aeroplane', translated by Edwards, B., nd. Andy Tjilari, a senior Pitjantjatjara Lawman and elder of the Pitjantjatjara Church recalls his first encounter with Wade's party and their camels and then an aeroplane; see also Williams, R. M., *A Song in the Desert*, Angus & Robertson, Pymble, NSW, 1998, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Hill, E., *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Imprint, Sydney, 1995, p. 293.

<sup>59</sup> Aboriginal people were not counted in the census until after 1967.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, G., 'The Frontiers of Settlement in Australia', *The Geographical Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 1926, pp. 2, 25.

described dogging as ‘the beginning of colonisation’ in the north-west of South Australia.<sup>61</sup>

Whether this was indeed the case,<sup>62</sup> contact between doggers and Aborigines differed from the earlier contact with exploratory and droving parties in that it was more intensive and sustained and saw the development of trading relationships. Doggers returned annually during the pupping season in August and September and according to Finlayson they relied on the skills of Aboriginal people to collect scalps which were then exchanged for rations and clothing.<sup>63</sup> Therefore doggers needed to maintain amicable alliances with local people and many formed relationships with Aboriginal women who were able to facilitate trading networks for the dogging trade.<sup>64</sup> However, in places, such as in the Warburton area in Western Australia older men recall violent behaviour by doggers towards Aboriginal people.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately doggers did not leave written records but there are oral stories of this period of contact. Pitjantjatjara elders from Ernabella told Bill Edwards in 1973 of their first meetings with doggers and how their families traded dingo scalps for tea and sugar.<sup>66</sup> Diana Young has noted that ‘large numbers’ of Aboriginal people were attracted to the doggers’ camps, ‘desirous of the goods they could get for dingo skins’ and in addition, groups of Aboriginal people travelled with the doggers.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Hill, E., ‘Dingo-Farming in the “Desert”’: New Australian Industry: Breeding Wild Dog for his Scalp’, *The Advertiser*, 28 March 1935, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* Ernestine Hill claimed that the dingo scalp business was so lucrative that in remote areas doggers were actually breeding dingoes for the trade, killing pups for their scalps and protecting the breeding females, but I have found no other evidence to corroborate this claim.

<sup>63</sup> Finlayson H. H., *The Red Centre*, 1936, pp. 143.

<sup>64</sup> Berndt, R. M. & Berndt C. H., *From Black to White in South Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951, pp. 173; See Figure 6.

<sup>65</sup> Mollenhaur, S., ‘Warburton Mission: A Brief History’, *Mission Time in Warburton: An Exhibition Exploring Aspects of the Warburton Mission History 1933-1973*, Tjulyuru Regional Arts Gallery, Warburton Arts Press, Warburton, 2002, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Mattingley, C and Hampton, K. (eds.), *Survival in our Own Land*, 1988, p. 8.

<sup>67</sup> Young, D., ‘Dingo Scalping and the Frontier Economy in the North-west of South Australia’, in I. Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, 2010, p. 93, <[http://epress.anu.edu.au/indig\\_participation/pdf/whole.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/indig_participation/pdf/whole.pdf)>, accessed 9 June 2011.

It is evident that the relationship between doggers and Aboriginal people in the Central Reserve was significant but as Rani Kerin has found there were varying perceptions about the nature of this relationship. On the one hand, the perception by those who disapproved of cohabitation between Aboriginal women and white men and the increasing numbers of “half-caste” children, was that the relationship was generally exploitative and destructive for Aboriginal people, both culturally and economically. In terms of cultural destruction this was expressed as a concern with maintaining the racial integrity of what were referred to in correspondence as the last ‘unspoilt natives’.<sup>68</sup> In an economic sense it was argued that doggers were able to acquire scalps for rations worth considerably less than the bounty.<sup>69</sup> Duguid’s concern about what he regarded as an exploitative relationship was the major factor in his campaign to establish the mission at Ernabella. In a letter to the Commissioner for Public Works in South Australia, he envisaged that a mission would control the ‘dogging problem’ and ‘eliminate the exploitation of the black woman’.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, there were those who regarded the relationship in a more favourable light and identified economic benefits for Aboriginal people. In his 1937 report on the Ernabella Mission, Reverend Love found that the ‘dogging business’ at that time was well organised and that the ‘rate of trade is probably fair as a mere business proposition’. However, his assessment of the economic relationship between the doggers and Aboriginal people was qualified with a strong recommendation that the Central Reserve should remain an area protected from ‘unauthorized intrusion’ in

---

<sup>68</sup> Kerin, R., ‘Dogging for a Living: Aborigines and “Undesirables” in South Australia’, in B. Attwood & T. Griffiths (eds.), *Frontier, Race, Nation: Henry Reynolds and Australian History*, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty. Ltd., North Melbourne, 2009, p. 151.

<sup>69</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963; Love, J.R.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, 1937.

<sup>70</sup> C. Duguid to Hon. H. S. Hudd, Commissioner for Public Works, 14 August 1936. Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

order to ‘save a splendid and interesting people’. To this end he advocated that Ernabella Mission should purchase dingo scalps directly from Aboriginal people.<sup>71</sup>

Kerin has argued that doggers were considered as ‘undesirables’ not so much because of the perceived exploitation and/or mistreatment of Aboriginal people particularly Aboriginal women, but mainly because they lived and worked closely with Aboriginal people.<sup>72</sup> A further complication to the status of doggers is that they were not always “white” men. The distinction between doggers and Aborigines is blurred as Aboriginal people themselves became doggers. In addition there were Afghan cameleers involved in trading scalps with Aborigines.<sup>73</sup> Tommy Dodd, who traded dingo scalps with Aboriginal people inside the reserve, had Pitjantjatjara, Afghan and European ancestry. He participated in ceremonial life on the reserve and had married three Aboriginal women. In later life he lived at Ernabella Mission and the government settlement at Amata. He was not just a dogger, but a Pitjantjatjara man, an interpreter, a translator for anthropologist Norman Tindale, a guide for patrol officers, an informant, a cameleer, and a stockman.<sup>74</sup>

The dogging trade in central Australia was in some ways a forerunner to the pastoral industry which brought more permanent settlers to the region. Doggers opened up remote areas including the Central Reserve where missionaries, anthropologists and pastoralists were to follow. In 1922 the South Australian government introduced a scheme whereby permits were granted in arid areas to search for permanent water suitable for pastoral development. If found, a lease was granted and some doggers were able to establish small sheep runs. One of the first leases granted was to Stan Ferguson, who by 1933 had established a sheep station on

---

<sup>71</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, 1937, pp. 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Kerin, R., ‘Dogging for a Living’, 2009, p. 156.

<sup>73</sup> Jones, P. & Kenny, A., *Australia’s Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland 1860s-1930s*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2007, p. 116.

<sup>74</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Dodd, Tommy (1890?-1975)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 14, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p.14.

500 square miles around the Ernabella waterhole, the delightful spot which Giles had named Glen Ferdinand sixty years earlier.<sup>75</sup> The dogging trade continued to operate from these sheep stations until the establishment of the Ernabella Mission. This spelled the end of the dogging industry for “white” men in the Musgrave Ranges as the mission became the direct receiver of dingo scalps from Aboriginal people and paid them the full government bounty. Aboriginal people found this preferable to the rations paid by doggers.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the consorting provision included as an amendment to the *South Australian Aborigines Act* in 1939<sup>77</sup> made it more difficult for doggers to maintain relationships with Aboriginal women who had been essential to the success of the dogging trade. For Aboriginal people, dogging continued to be an important economic activity up to the 1960s.<sup>78</sup>

Pastoral development was limited in the vicinity of Ernabella itself and was always marginal in the Musgraves compared to the large enterprises elsewhere. However, a number of pastoral stations were established on the edges of the Western Desert from the late 1880s in the more hospitable areas where desert people had traditionally sought refuge in times of severe drought. The presence of the stations provided extra incentives for people to go there and stay for periods.<sup>79</sup> With the establishment of pastoral runs in the 1930s to the north of the Musgrave Ranges relationships of interdependence developed between local Aboriginal people and pastoralists. In these arid areas pastoral enterprises were labour intensive because of their dependence on surface water (this was particularly so prior to the sinking of wells and bores). Flocks had to be moved every few weeks and each night the sheep had to be herded into safe enclosures. As well as being reliant on the labour provided by Aboriginal people, settlers were also reliant on local Aboriginal knowledge of the

---

<sup>75</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 80.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> *South Australian Aborigines Act 1934-1939*, Section 34 (a), p. 383.

<sup>78</sup> Young, D., ‘Dingo Scalping and the Frontier Economy in the North-west of South Australia’, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Kimber, D., ‘Kapi! Contact Experiences in the Western Desert 1873-1984’, 2006, pp. 5-6.



country pointing to a mutual dependence. Finlayson observed that Aboriginal ‘groups have attached themselves, more or less permanently, to each of the settlers’ with the women doing the shepherding and yarding to protect against dingoes and the men continuing to hunt.<sup>80</sup> He also paints an evocative image of ‘the more rural of the Biblical patriarchs’ on the move to new pastures. Leading the procession came the older children and women driving the sheep, followed by the adults with the horses, camels and donkeys with the camp equipment, next came the young men carrying their spears and then ‘bringing up the rear on a stocky pony, and shouting stentorian directions ... comes the solitary, bearded white man’. Finlayson argues that this suited the local people whose ‘nomad spirits rise gleefully’ on moving days.<sup>81</sup> Finlayson’s observations demonstrate that people here were attempting to accommodate the changes brought by the pastoral industry within their cultural framework.

Further to the south at Strangways Springs west of Lake Eyre, Alistair Paterson found a similar situation. The sheep station consisted of a head station and a large number of distant outstations where Aboriginal shepherds lived. He argued that in this sense employment ‘mimicked the nomadism and cyclical movement around landscape’ of a pre-contact Aboriginal subsistence economy.<sup>82</sup> It indicates that people were engaged in adapting to change and to a certain extent were living on both sides of the frontier. In addition, it problematises the notion of the frontier as a non-permeable boundary between settled and Aboriginal Australia.

Pastoralism played a significant role in the economy of Ernabella Mission from the outset and Aboriginal people worked as shepherds at outlying sheep camps. At the time of the purchase of the Ernabella lease in 1936 by the Presbyterian Church

---

<sup>80</sup> See Figure 5.

<sup>81</sup> Finlayson H. H., *The Red Centre*, 1936, pp. 137-39.

<sup>82</sup> Paterson, A., ‘Historical Interactions between Aborigines and European Pastoralists in Australia’s Drylands’, in M. Smith & P. Hesse (eds.), *23S: Archaeology and Environmental History of the Southern Deserts*, National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, ACT, 2005, p. 270.

it ran about 2000 sheep and goats.<sup>83</sup> In addition, throughout the mission era Aboriginal people from Ernabella worked seasonally on cattle stations to the east.<sup>84</sup> There is no doubt that the introduction of sheep and cattle grazing had considerable impact on Aboriginal cultures and particularly on foraging economies. However the evidence above demonstrates that in the desert areas contact with the pastoral industry was not simply one of conflict and dispossession or one which spelt doom for the survival of hunter-gatherer societies as Elkin has suggested.<sup>85</sup> On the contrary, as Tim Rowse has pointed out, the pastoral industry attracted many Aboriginal people and enabled them to maintain associations with country and transmit knowledge through the generations.<sup>86</sup> Finlayson does not provide an analysis of the reasons for this attraction, other than to propose that the regular availability of 'white man's "tucker"' made life easier for people.<sup>87</sup> Rowse has argued that by the 1890s rationing in Central Australia had become integral to managing relationships between Aborigines and others such as pastoralists, missionaries, scientists, doggers and other settlers and was a 'pervasive institution of Central Australian colonisation'.<sup>88</sup> Whether as Rowse has proposed the ration system operated as 'an instrument of command' to attract people to Ernabella Mission as it did at the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg to the north will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 2005, p. 96.

<sup>84</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-west of South Australia', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1992, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Elkin A. P., 'Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1951, p. 164.

<sup>86</sup> Rowse, T., 'Aborigines as Historical Actors: Evidence and Inference', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 87, 1986, p. 179.

<sup>87</sup> Finlayson, H. H., *The Red Centre*, 1936, p.137.

<sup>88</sup> Rowse, T., 'Aborigines as Historical Actors', 1986, p. 4. See also Brady, M., 'Leaving the Spinifex: The Impact of Rations, Missions and the Atomic Tests on the Southern Pitjantjatjara', *Records of the South Australian Museum*, Vol. 20, 1987, p.35-45.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44; Rowse has argued that the missionaries at Hermannsburg engaged in what he has called 'mercantile evangelism' where the distribution of rations was used strategically to establish Lutheran beliefs as the authoritative religion. Rationing served a number of goals which could facilitate evangelism—it isolated Arrernte from contact with settlers, avoided pauperising and imparted a

Evidence of accommodation and adaptation to pastoralism with relationships based on cooperation and interdependency in these desert areas contests Elkin's prediction of the complete and abrupt social change to Aboriginal societies which would ensue on contact with outsiders.<sup>90</sup> Rather, as Rowse points out the argument that Aboriginal societies and cultures were disintegrating was based on a misunderstanding of Western Desert cosmology where 'a disruption of tradition and identity was well nigh impossible' due to the 'unalterable charter' of the Dreaming which connected people to country throughout their whole life.<sup>91</sup>

### **Establishment of Mission**

The dogging trade called into question the supposedly protective purpose of the Central Reserve which had been gazetted in 1920 as increasing numbers of doggers continued to operate within the reserve itself.<sup>92</sup> There were growing concerns about the "moral" danger Aboriginal people in remote areas were exposed to. The 1938 Annual Report of the South Australian Chief Protector of Aboriginals stated that trespassing on the Central Reserve led to the 'immoral association of white men with the aboriginals' and posed a threat to 'the survival of the aboriginal as a pure race'.<sup>93</sup> T. G. H Strehlow<sup>94</sup> recommended that ration stations be set up within the reserve where Aborigines could trade dingo scalps. Ration depots would serve a number of purposes: to isolate tribal people in their country in line with government policy and at the same time, to protect Aborigines from contact with doggers and to halt

---

Christian work ethic. See Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 80.

<sup>90</sup> Elkin A. P., 'Reaction and Interaction', 1951, p. 164.

<sup>91</sup> Rowse, T., 'Aborigines as Historical Actors', 1986, p. 179.

<sup>92</sup> Rowley, C.D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 1978, pp. 306.

<sup>93</sup> Chief Protector of Aboriginals Annual Report, 1938, p. 1, Aboriginals Department, Adelaide, South Australia, <<http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?&pid=60416>>, accessed 15 January 2009.

<sup>94</sup> T. G. H. Strehlow is the son of Carl Strehlow the former Lutheran missionary at Hermannsburg.

detribalisation and the perceived “loss” of culture.<sup>95</sup> In 1935 Duguid had travelled to the Musgrave Ranges and was horrified to see that ‘nearly all white men ... were living with native women’.<sup>96</sup> He found Aboriginal people living in extremely impoverished conditions which contrasted with the ‘new look of health and happiness’ which he noted amongst residents of the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg to the north.<sup>97</sup> In 1936 he wrote to the Editor of the Adelaide newspaper, *The Advertiser*, pointing out that doggers ‘trespass far into the aboriginal reserve with impunity, and have done so for years’. He also brought the ‘half-caste problem’ in the north-west of the State to the attention of Adelaide readers which he attributed to the abandonment by the doggers of their children.<sup>98</sup> In his account of these times written three decades later, it is evident that Duguid believed that Aborigines had a future at a time when most considered them to be a “dying race” and recommended to the South Australian government that immediate steps must be taken to ‘save the last remaining intact tribe in the State, the people of the Musgrave Ranges’.<sup>99</sup> He urged the South Australian government and the Presbyterian Church to establish a mission at Ernabella at the eastern end of the Musgrave Ranges to act as a buffer zone between the North-West Reserve, where Aborigines were still living as hunter-gatherers, and the growing white settlements to the east. The aim of a buffer zone was to create a spatial distancing which would reduce interaction between Aborigines and settlers outside the mission. Duguid envisaged that the mission would act as a refuge where Aboriginal people could be both protected from the wider society and prepared for their ‘recognition as citizens of Australia’ and

---

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Rowley, C. D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 1978, p. 315.

<sup>96</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 29.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Duguid, C. ‘Life in the Musgraves’, *The Advertiser* 28 July 1936, p. 20. Although Hilliard has pointed out that not all doggers abandoned their children. See Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 82.

<sup>99</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 34.

inevitable assimilation.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, he believed that it was the duty of authorities to provide this space.<sup>101</sup> In addition, it was envisaged that a mission would halt the drift of people southwards and eastwards<sup>102</sup> and would solve the problem of incursions into the reserve by the doggers as the mission would pay the government bounty for dingo scalps thus putting the doggers out of business. Duguid invited R. M. Williams, who had been his guide through the Musgrave Ranges, to organise a committee to oversee the purchase of Ernabella Station.<sup>103</sup>

In 1936 both the Presbyterian Church and the government agreed to the purchase of the Ernabella lease of 500 square miles by the Presbyterian Church in order to establish a mission.<sup>104</sup> The Reverend Love, who had worked at the Presbyterian mission at Kunmunya and who was to become the Superintendent at Ernabella in 1941, was sent by the Presbyterian Board of Missions to report on the proposal.<sup>105</sup> He reported favourably on the site at Ernabella as suitable for mission work even though he expressed a preference for the mission to be within rather than outside the North-West Reserve.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the site was reasonably accessible, it had useful timber, wells which provided a reliable water supply, and an existing sheep venture which could be developed to allow the mission to be economically self sufficient and to provide employment and training for residents. Love was adamant

---

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>102</sup> Elkin A.P., 'Kinship in South Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1938, p. 203.

<sup>103</sup> Williams, R. M. & Ruhen, Olaf, *Beneath Whose Hand: The Autobiography of R. M. Williams*, The MacMillan Company, [1984] 2006, p. 66.

<sup>104</sup> Duguid also sought funds from the Smith of Dunesk Bequest that Mrs Henrietta Smith had left to the Free Church of Scotland for the benefit of Aboriginal people in South Australia. However, despite Mrs Smith consistently expressing her wishes that the money be to evangelise and educate Aboriginal people, it had been used exclusively by the Australian Inland Mission to minister to Scottish and other settlers in remote areas of the state. Duguid was informed in Alice Springs in 1934 that the 'Australian Inland Mission had no concern with "niggers"'. Duguid appealed to the Presbyterian Church of South Australia to use the bequest according to Mrs Smith's wishes and the church agreed that part of the bequest could be used to support Ernabella mission. See Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 24; See also Harris, J., *One Blood*, 1994, p. 368.

<sup>105</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 95.

<sup>106</sup> While he did not give his reasons for this, his suggestion that missionaries from Ernabella should patrol the reserve and oversee the welfare of people living there and his concern about the levels of incursions into the reserve without permission would imply that a site within the reserve would have facilitated this important protective and welfare role.

that tribal life should be maintained and evangelisation and education would occur ‘within the tribe’. He advocated that there must be a ‘sympathising with and understanding their own laws and customs (although not believing that all of the latter ought to be perpetuated)’,<sup>107</sup> a view which underpinned the whole period of the operation of Ernabella Mission. Satisfied with Love’s report, the Board of Missions appointed a station manager until the first Superintendent, the Reverend Taylor arrived in 1937.

In 1937 Duguid, with the benefit of hindsight and mindful of disasters which had befallen other Aboriginal groups believed that this mission would be different. As noted earlier, at Ernabella there ‘was to be no compulsion or imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom’.<sup>108</sup> Reflecting on her years at Ernabella, Winifred Hilliard, Deaconess at Ernabella for 32 years until her retirement in 1986, believes that Duguid’s vision did indeed inform mission policy and the work of missionaries throughout the entire mission period.<sup>109</sup>

One year after the establishment of the mission the 1938 Annual Report of the South Australian Aboriginal Protection Board complimented Ernabella mission and believed that it would achieve these aims. The Board expressed similar concerns to Duguid:

the influence of this (Ernabella) mission and the interest of its superintendent and staff in the survival of the aboriginal as a pure race will go a long way towards arresting the drift which has set in through the immoral association of white men with the aboriginals.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, 1937.

<sup>108</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1972, p. 115.

<sup>109</sup> Winifred Hilliard, Pers. Comm., 12 May 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Chief Protector of Aboriginals Annual Report, 1938, p. 1, Aboriginals Department, Adelaide, South Australia, <<http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?&pid=60416>>, accessed 15 January 2009.

And the 1939 report was equally positive, with the presence of the mission ‘expected to retard the detribalization of the natives’ and ensured that ‘the inevitable contact with civilization is made first of all with people whose moral character is above reproach’.<sup>111</sup> In 1946 Duguid reported for the Presbyterian Board of Missions that Ernabella was operating as he had envisioned, that is as ‘a “Buffer State” between the Reserve, the Home of the Aborigines and the outside world’.<sup>112</sup>

While the humanitarian aims for the establishment of the Ernabella Mission are well documented, it should also be noted that the Presbyterian Church negotiated with government authorities rather than the local Aboriginal people to define boundaries of the mission and to occupy and control the space. Whether Aboriginal people conceived of the aims of Ernabella Mission in the same way as the Presbyterian Church and the South Australian Aboriginal Protection Board is not clear, as the perceptions of people who associated with the mission in the early years were not recorded at the time. The question this poses is whether they came in to the mission because they saw it as integral to their physical and cultural survival and as providing a refuge where they could adapt at their own pace to contact with the encroaching outside world.

Some understanding of the ‘coming in’ process can be gained from the nature of Western Desert societies and their relationship with country. Furthermore, a consideration of the wider context of ‘coming in’ in relation to other missions which were established around the Western Deserts provides some insights into how the move to the Ernabella mission may have been perceived.

---

<sup>111</sup> Chief Protector of Aborigines Annual Report, 1939, p. 3, Aborigines Department, Adelaide, South Australia, <<http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?&pid=60416>>, accessed 15 January 2009.

<sup>112</sup> Duguid, C., *Ernabella Revisited*, Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1946, p. 11.

## Relationship to country

The widely accepted understanding of the 'coming in' process is partly based on the assumption that groups of Aborigines across the Western Desert and elsewhere occupied and were responsible for defined tribal territories which were fixed in time as well as space.<sup>113</sup> Using this model the move to missions on the edges of the Western Desert suggests that people had to move from their own country into another group's territory. In her history of the Ernabella Mission, Hilliard stated that the Yankunytjatjara people were the original occupiers of the area where the mission was established. She describes the people who associated with the mission in the early years as 'the Pitjantjatjaras of the Mann Ranges' further to the west.<sup>114</sup> Yet Norman Tindale found that Pitjantjatjara people had moved eastwards into the Ernabella area during the 1914-1915 drought and had stayed.<sup>115</sup> Similarly Fred Rose, in his 1962 study at Angas Downs station, found it difficult to identify specific groups with particular areas and concluded that Aboriginal people in the deserts 'appear to have been in a continuous state of migration' with common kinship terms and social structure.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> See Mountford, C.P., *Ayers Rock: Its People, their Beliefs and their Art*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965; Spencer, B. & Gillen, F. J., *The Arunta*, 1927; Strehlow, T. G. H., *Songs of Central Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971. Sutton, P. (ed.), *Country: Aboriginal Boundaries and Land Ownership in Australia*, Aboriginal History Monograph 3, Aboriginal History Inc., Canberra, 2005; Tindale, N. B., 'The Pitjandjara', in M.G. Bicchieri (ed.), *Hunters and Gatherers Today*, Waveland Press, Illinois, 1972, pp. 217-65. While Norman Tindale was able to map discrete territories based on dialects in order to determine membership of land holding groups in other parts of Australia, he acknowledged the difficulties in defining such dialectal boundaries within the Western Desert. See also Sansom, B., 'The Brief Reach of History and the Limitation of Recall in Traditional Aboriginal Societies and Cultures', *Oceania*, Vol. 76, No. 2, July 2006, p. 153. It has been suggested that this difficulty is due European contact and the subsequent movement of people, rather than the absence of firm boundaries, however as Annette Hamilton has pointed out pre-existing boundaries have been determined in other parts of Australia where dispossession occurred. See Hamilton, A., 'Descended from Father, Belonging to Country: Rights to Land in the Australian Western Desert', in E. Leacock & R. Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 94-8.

<sup>114</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 82.

<sup>115</sup> Tindale, N. B., 'The Pitjandjara', 1972, p. 228.

<sup>116</sup> Rose, F.G.G., *The Wind of Change in Central Australia: The Aborigines at Angas Downs 1962*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1965, p. 13.



Recent archaeological evidence from the Western Desert points to socially dynamic societies, with fluid occupation patterns going back at least a few thousand years and possibly much longer.<sup>117</sup> Mike Smith argues that there is evidence in the linguistic and genetic records of Western Desert societies which indicate that there was a series of rapid migrations of people who colonised the Western Deserts sometime in the later Holocene.<sup>118</sup> It also raises the possibility that these migrating populations replaced/displaced existing smaller desert populations. Pitjantjatjara people told Aram Yengoyan that ‘local groups were constantly in fluctuation through contracting and expanding’ throughout the region.<sup>119</sup> Smith has described this process as a ‘cultural pump’ operating in time with the cycles of drought when people would move to the outer regions or to permanent water sources in dry seasons and in the good seasons move back towards the centre.<sup>120</sup> Thus movements were not only out of deserts but also *into* deserts, according to prevailing conditions. As Peter Veth argues ‘flexibility in mobility patterns, including territorial abandonment’ has always been a feature of life not only in the Western Desert but for hunter-gatherer desert populations throughout the world.<sup>121</sup>

Mick McLean, a Wangkanguru man born in the soak country of the Simpson Desert and versed in considerable traditional knowledge, told Luise Hercus the story of his group leaving the desert in 1899-1900 ‘never to return’. While he did not know the reason for their move south to the Diamantina River, he believed that they were called south by a ritual leader for that country to the creek at Poonarunna which was

---

<sup>117</sup> Veth, P., ‘Cycles of Aridity and Human Mobility’, in P. Veth, M. Smith & P. Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples: Archaeological Perspectives*, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton, Vic., 2005, pp. 100-15.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, M.A., ‘Desert Archaeology, Linguistic Stratigraphy and the Spread of the Western Desert Language’, in P. Veth, M. Smith & P. Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples*, p. 229.

<sup>119</sup> Yengoyan, A. A., ‘Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization’ in Berndt, R.M. (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, UWA, Nedlands, WA., 1970, p. 84.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, M.A., ‘Western Desert Archaeology’, 2005, p. 235.

<sup>121</sup> Veth, P., ‘Cycles of Aridity and Human Mobility’, 2005, p. 113. See also Elkin A.P., ‘Kinship in South Australia’, 1938, p. 305.

in flood.<sup>122</sup> However, while there was a drought in central Australia, the Balcara soak where McLean's group had been living still had water, suggesting that the search for water was not the primary reason for the migration as there is no indication that they were forced to leave their country. While the area referred to in McLean's story is some distance from the Ernabella region it does raise the possibility that mobility in other areas of low and unpredictable rainfall was also a regular occurrence and similarly driven by complex and diverse factors. It highlights the difficulties in identifying particular groups with discrete territories over millennia.

Across the vast area of the Western Desert, people shared a common culture, a common language and the 'same broad mythology and religious view of life'.<sup>123</sup> Every aspect of life was determined by the *tjukurpa* or the Dreaming when Ancestral Beings created the features of their landscape and laid down the Law during their mythological travels. Some Pitjantjatjara ancestral journeys took the form of what Charles Mountford has called 'travelling myths' which could extend over hundreds of kilometres. The Seven Sisters or Pleiades Dreaming, traverses country from Warburton in the west, through the Rawlinson, Petermann, Mann and Musgrave Ranges to Arrernte country in the east. As Mountford points out, this meant that the story cycle was 'divided among the local groups through which the totemic hero had passed'.<sup>124</sup> People were thus connected politically, economically, socially and spiritually to a wider social grouping along the complex network of Dreaming tracks and were affiliated with not one but several Ancestors. Robert Layton writes that there was no evidence of physical hand over points where one group's responsibility for ancestral tracks ended and another's began as was the case for other groups in

---

<sup>122</sup> Hercus, L., 'Leaving the Simpson Desert', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>123</sup> Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *The World of the First Australians*, Landsdowne Press, Dee Why West, 1981, p. 35.

<sup>124</sup> Mountford, C.P., *Ayers Rock*, 1965, p. 20.

areas that were richer in resources.<sup>125</sup> As Fred Myers has argued, ‘the whole of the Western Desert population was a vast and interlocking network of persons who were themselves localized around a number of loosely defined areas’.<sup>126</sup> That is, Western Desert people are allied to country in complex and multifaceted ways based on shifting, negotiated and dynamic attachments which call into question the notion of discrete and bounded tribal territories in the Western Deserts.<sup>127</sup>

Fluid and contingent connections to country do not just exist in the past but are increasingly a feature of contemporary desert life. As Peter Woodforde notes even where people have adapted to more settled living such as at Oodnadatta, fluid alliances to country are still significant. He told Bruce Shaw, ‘I’m Aranda, I’m Pitjantjatjara, Antakarinja and all. I can go that way, Ernabella, Amata, Pitjantjatjara country. I can go to Alice Springs, Aranda country’.<sup>128</sup> The complicated, ‘“flexible” and permissive tenurial arrangements that gave each person rights of visitation and use in a suite of “countries” ’ as argued by Basil Sansom<sup>129</sup> can be seen in the 2002 dispute over where the great Western Desert artist, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri should be buried. His family wanted this to be Mt Allen where other relatives are buried (where he was subsequently buried), and which they considered to be his traditional country. Yet Clifford Possum stated clearly in his will that he wished to be buried on Napperby Downs Station where he was born which was not considered to be his traditional country by his family. While both sites are considered to be Anmatyerre country, and were used by Anmatyerre people, Clifford Possum

---

<sup>125</sup> Layton, R., ‘Ambilineal Descent and Traditional Pitjantjatjara Rights to Land’, in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, p. 19.

<sup>126</sup> Myers, F., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1986, p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> See Cane, S., *Pila Nguru: The Spinifex People*, Fremantle Art Centre Press, Fremantle, WA, 2002; Hamilton A., ‘Descended from Father, Belonging to Country’, 1982, pp. 85-108; Keen I., *Aboriginal Economy and Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Vic., 2004; Sansom B., ‘The Brief Reach of History and the Limitation of Recall’, 2006, pp. 150-172.

<sup>128</sup> Shaw, B., *Our Heart is the Land: Aboriginal Reminiscences from the Western Lake Eyre Basin*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1995, p. 31.

<sup>129</sup> Sansom, B., ‘The Brief Reach of History and the Limitation of Recall’, 2006, p. 152.

identified Napperby as his home country. It was here that his grandfather was born, it belonged to his father and was the site of his major Dreaming and his initiation.<sup>130</sup>

### **‘Coming in’ - leaving the desert**

Even a cursory glance at several different missions shows that the circumstances for each group who came in to missions were unique. Nonetheless it is possible to identify common threads in the ways in which Aboriginal people reacted to the establishment of missions. Warburton Mission to the west of Ernabella across the West Australian border was established in 1933 by William Wade. For the first three decades people continued to live in their country, periodically using the missions as a ‘central stopping place’ where medical care, food and clothing could be accessed.<sup>131</sup> It was not until the 1960s that people became more sedentary, staying at the mission for longer periods. Even then missionaries encouraged people to maintain connections to their country by providing transport and food supplies. At Nepabunna in the north Flinders Ranges in South Australia, the missionaries moved into an already functioning community of Adnyamathanha people who had engaged with the wider society for the past eighty years and yet still maintained a rigorous ceremonial life. The missionaries had little impact on this.<sup>132</sup> Peggy Brock has identified three factors which drew people to Koonibba Mission on the west coast of South Australia in the early twentieth century. As well as curiosity and reliable water during droughts it was a traditional meeting place which continued to be used for people travelling on to ceremonial sites. Koonibba was also seen as a refuge for people who had been disrupted by both the encroaching agricultural industry and by Western Desert

---

<sup>130</sup> ABC Radio, 15 July 2002.

<sup>131</sup> Brooks, D., ‘What Impact the Mission?’, *Mission Time in Warburton*, Tjulyuru Regional Arts Gallery, Warburton, WA, 2002, p. 78.

<sup>132</sup> Brock, P., ‘The Missionary Factor in Adnyamathanha History’, in T. Swain, & D.B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions at SACAE, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 277.

groups who had been migrating southwards at the end of the nineteenth century. In the later years of the mission's operation people moved onto the mission to escape the government policy of removing mixed descent children.<sup>133</sup>

As with the missions above, people from the Musgrave Ranges were exercising agency in their interactions with Ernabella Mission. There is no evidence that people were coerced onto the mission. Hilliard pointed out that once the first missionary, the Reverend Taylor arrived at Ernabella, 'there was no need to go out and lure the people into the Mission, they came' because they saw the missionaries as 'their friends and not their exploiters'.<sup>134</sup> In her history of the Ernabella art centre, Ute Eickelkamp recorded the life stories of Ernabella people which accord with Hilliard's account and with Duguid's aim for the mission. Wally Dunn who grew up at Ernabella Mission talked of people coming in from the west to 'grow up a community'.<sup>135</sup> Nura Rupert's parents and brother remembered their first meeting with Duguid and Walter McDougall,<sup>136</sup> and following them to Ernabella where 'Anangu'<sup>137</sup> helped [with] setting up the mission'.<sup>138</sup> Nganyintja Ilyatjari whose family was one of the first to move to Ernabella, saw the mission as providing care for people and a refuge from the 'evil white men' who were mistreating young Aboriginal women in the Central Reserve.<sup>139</sup>

In 1939 Duguid's medical patrol to the area reported that in the previous year severe drought had caused the death of many people in the Petermann and Mann

---

<sup>133</sup> Brock also notes that during the early years Koonibba was used like any other camp for people in the area, and it was separated 'physically and ideologically' from the mission proper, with 'minimal interference from the mission staff'. Brock, P., *Outback Ghettos*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 117, 67.

<sup>134</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 97.

<sup>135</sup> Cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories* 1999, p. 18.

<sup>136</sup> Acting Superintendent of Ernabella Mission from 1940-1941.

<sup>137</sup> Anangu means 'person'. Today it is used by Aboriginal people to identify speakers of the Western Desert language bloc. See Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, IAD Publishing, Alice Springs, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Cited in Mattingley, C & Hampton, K. (eds.), *Survival in our Own Land*, 1988, p. 255. Nganyintja's account was translated from Pitjantjatjara by Nancy Sheppard in 1972.

Ranges to the west of Ernabella. He found about one hundred and fifty people, including fifty children, were camped at Ernabella and that about five hundred people had visited the mission during the year. He observed that 'there is no doubt that Ernabella is regarded by the native as a haven of refuge' and was operating as the 'buffer zone' he had envisaged.<sup>140</sup> Patrol Officer T.G.H. Strehlow also reported favourably on Ernabella at this time.<sup>141</sup>

It would appear that initially at least, the mission was regarded as another resource to be used strategically, in the same way as doggers' camps and pastoral enterprises were used. Ernabella missionaries reported that people only used the mission during times of scarcity. In the early mission years this largely continued to be the case and mission staff encouraged people to remain as independent as possible. In December 1944, seven years after the mission was established, the Superintendent reported in the *Ernabella Newsletter* that 'all of the people at Ernabella are nomadic and don't stay for long. Let them continue to be nomadic'.<sup>142</sup> Judy Birmingham has described a similar practice at Killalpaninna Mission on the edge of the Simpson Desert as 'optimal foraging' where the Dieri people used the mission to extend their traditional foraging by exploiting the resources provided by the mission to 'minimize the expenditure of energy and reduce risk'.<sup>143</sup> In the May 1942 *Ernabella Newsletter* concern was expressed that children were being left at the mission while parents went on hunting trips. Missionaries disapproved of this practice as they believed that this threatened 'tribal solidarity' which they aimed to conserve rather than undermine.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Duguid, C., 'Ernabella Patrol', 1939, GRG 52/1939/52, State Archives of South Australia.

<sup>141</sup> Strehlow, T. G. H., 'Ernabella Mission Station, Musgrave Ranges', GRG 52/1939/52, State Archives of South Australia.

<sup>142</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December, 1944.

<sup>143</sup> Birmingham, J., 'Resistance, Creolization or Optimal Foraging at Killalpaninna Mission, South Australia', in R. Torrence & A. Clarke (eds.), *The Archaeology of Difference*, Routledge, London & New York, 2000, p. 363.

<sup>144</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1942, p. 4.

## Orthodoxy

The statement from the much cited Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) which argues that Aboriginal people were ‘swept up’ onto missions where their culture was destroyed, has come to represent the accepted Aboriginal experience of the shift from “traditional” life to a settled existence.<sup>145</sup> While this assessment does have some validity, overall it tends to mask rather than elucidate what were significant and complex processes which sometimes occurred over generations.<sup>146</sup> The RCIADIC implies that this was the experience for all Aboriginal people who moved to missions and reserves, that ‘coming in’ represented a complete and swift transition from the old to the new. Implicit in this interpretation is that Aboriginal people were victims rather than people with agency and it is assumed that Christianity displaced traditional spirituality. In cases where Aboriginal people appeared to move voluntarily to missions, it has generally been dismissed as some kind of imposed and misguided compromise rather than agency. William Stanner argued that in his observations in the Daly River area of the Northern

---

<sup>145</sup> Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, ‘The Importance of History’, *National Report*, Vol. 1, 1.4.3, AGPS, Canberra, 1991. This discourse can be seen in the following texts—Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977. Phyl & Noel Wallace (pp. 29-33, 73) talk of Pitjantjatjara people being ‘rounded up’ and ‘hunted off’, and of having experienced ‘more than hundred years of being driven, coerced, physically transported off his tribal territory, organised onto settlements and missions’ where they ‘succumbed to station or mission attractions’; Japanangka, Dick Leichleitner & Nathan, P., *Settle Down Country: A Community Report for the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress*, Kibble Books, Malmsbury, Vic., 1983. This text argues (p. 15) that desert people were ‘herded together onto sites chosen by Europeans’ and that people were ‘forced off’ their country to facilitate the assimilation policy and for Defence purposes (i.e. weapons testing); Bob Randall’s film *Kanyini* (2006) also tells a story of people being forced off their country and dispossessed of their land in central Australia; Burgoyne, I., *Mirning: We are the Whales: A Mirning-Kokatha Woman Recounts Life Before and After Dispossession*, Magabala Books, Broome, WA, 2000. Burgoyne who grew up on Koonibba mission on the west coast of South Australia, asserts that ‘throughout Australia the Aboriginal people were rounded up’ and that missionaries sought them out (p. 10).

<sup>146</sup> Richard Baker has cautioned that taking descriptions of how people came in to settlements literally can be problematic. He found that Yanyuwa people said that they had been ‘rounded up’ and ‘mustered up’. Baker points out that these expressions are derived from working on the cattle stations and are used in a metaphoric sense to explain moving from one place to another. They do not necessarily mean coercion as a literal reading implies. See Baker, R., ‘Coming In? The Yanyuwa as a Case Study in the Geography of Contact History’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1990, p. 34.

Territory during the 1930s, people took the easiest option and so were to blame for their “loss” of culture because they ‘cooperated in their own destruction by accepting a parasitic role’.<sup>147</sup>

In the desert regions there were two incidents in the early twentieth century which appear to support the ‘swept up’ discourse and have been taken as representative of the process of ‘coming in’. The first incident was the removal of Aboriginal people from the east-west railway line by the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) to the newly established United Aborigines Mission at Ooldea Soak in 1933. Desert people had been gathering at sidings and stations to trade artefacts with rail passengers. The APB considered that this encouraged ‘shiftless habits’ and furthermore it placed these people in moral danger. Authorities relocated the people from the rail line to the mission and provided Miss Lock, the missionary with rations in an attempt to keep people in the vicinity of the mission and discourage them from gathering at the rail line. Brady argues that as a result people became ‘psychologically addicted to European food’ and a ‘state of entrapment and dependency’ ensued.<sup>148</sup> The other incident which is widely believed to have caused people to be forcibly moved from their desert homelands is the establishment of a weapons testing programme at Emu and Maralinga in central Australia in the 1940s and 1950s. A case study of a small group of Martu women and children’s first contact with “white” people argues that the Weapons Research Establishment played a significant role in their detribalisation and that the weapons testing range was

---

<sup>147</sup> Stanner, W.E.H., *White Man got no Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1979, p. 5.

<sup>148</sup> Brady, M., ‘Leaving the Spinifex, 1987, p. 35. Brock argues that even though people around Ernabella prior to the establishment of the mission were accustomed to exchanging goods for rations through their interaction with doggers, visiting scientists and pastoralists, they still found it difficult to balance hunting and gathering for bush food which necessitated mobility, with accessing rations from the mission which demanded a more sedentary life. As the number of people gathering at Ernabella increased, it became harder to find bush foods in close proximity. See Brock, P., ‘Two-way Food: Bush Tucker and Whitefella’s Food’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 32, No.1, 2008 p. 19, and Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 5.



established knowing that it would cause disruption to people still living a traditional life. However, the government documents cited in this study state that the intent was to facilitate the continuing independence of desert people. Patrol Officers were employed not only to safeguard Aborigines and warn them away from areas during missile tests, but to encourage them to move back when it was safe to do so.<sup>149</sup> The government appeared to be extremely cautious and opposed to using coercion in moving people to missions and settlements against their wishes. This particular group of Martu continued to live in the desert until 1964 despite the attempts of the Patrol Officers to find them and warn them of missile firings. Eventually they were taken to Jigalong Mission despite wanting to stay in their country.

To extrapolate from these events that this was the experience of all Aboriginal people denies the complex and diverse motivations which led to 'coming in'. As Jeremy Long reminds us, 'dispossession and dispersal was not the experience of all Aboriginal groups' and does not adequately describe the experiences of Western Desert people.<sup>150</sup>

## Conclusion

Sherlock has pointed out that the role played by missionaries and missions in the 'coming in' process can be identified as being on a 'spectrum from persuasion to coercion'.<sup>151</sup> However, the coercion narrative has come to overwhelmingly represent 'the' experience of Aboriginal people leaving their country. Perhaps this narrative has achieved such prominence partly because as Rowse argues the 'coercion thesis' resonates with the moral sensibilities of those who are sympathetic to contemporary

---

<sup>149</sup> Davenport, S., & Yuwali, *Cleared Out: First Contact in the Western Desert*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>150</sup> Long worked for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as Deputy Secretary, as a patrol officer in the deserts and as Superintendent of Haasts Bluff. Long, J., 'Leaving the Desert: Actors and Sufferers in the Aboriginal Exodus from the Western Desert', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1989, p. 9.

<sup>151</sup> Sherlock, P., 'Missions, Colonialism and the Politics of Agency', 2008, p. 12.

Aboriginal claims and supports the enhanced recognition and awareness of Aboriginal rights over the last forty years.<sup>152</sup> Richard Baker found at Borroloola in the Northern Territory that people talk of being ‘rounded up’ but it reflects a retrospective perspective rather than the reality, where with the benefit of hindsight, people explain how they collectively arrived at their current circumstances.<sup>153</sup> While there were undoubtedly some instances of coercion there are many experiences which indicate otherwise and demonstrate that the process of ‘coming in’ was both ambivalent and gradual. According to Sherlock the degree of coercion Aboriginal people experienced ‘depended largely on competition for land and labour’<sup>154</sup> and at Ernabella Mission, there was not competition for either. There was a range of reasons desert people left their country and moved towards settled areas: social reasons and general cultural mobility, the economic consequences of drought, a sense of curiosity and interest in new goods. All of which indicate that people were exercising agency rather than being coerced.

It has also been proposed that during the 1930s ‘coming in’ was driven by the collapse of societies as a result of contact with outsiders. Rowse has called this the ‘disintegration hypothesis’.<sup>155</sup> However, desert societies had a dynamic and fluid relationship with their country and migrations were a feature of life in such marginal environments and did not indicate that societies were disintegrating. The move to missions could be seen as a continuation of a long tradition of mobility in response to change and one for which they already had cultural protocols in place. That is, ‘coming in’ initially was more culturally consistent than the extraordinary and catastrophic event that has been portrayed.

---

<sup>152</sup> Rowse, T., ‘Aborigines as Historical Actors’, 1986, p. 191.

<sup>153</sup> Baker, R., ‘Coming In?’, 1990, p. 35.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>155</sup> Rowse, T., ‘Aborigines as Historical Actors’, 1986, p. 183.

It could be argued that the creation of a buffer zone to facilitate Duguid's aim of mediation between Pitjantjatjara people and settlers was in some ways both beneficial and counterproductive. In hindsight, it can be seen that while a buffer zone created a safe space, it also established boundaries. Even though the intent may have been that such boundaries were to be temporary they became more entrenched over time, thus widening rather than closing the gap between people at the mission and the wider society. Even though initial moves to Ernabella Mission were not regarded as out of the ordinary for desert people, the demands of a settled life on the missions were. Pitjantjatjara people could not have foreseen the radical changes which were to occur over the next decades as people became increasingly reliant on the mission.

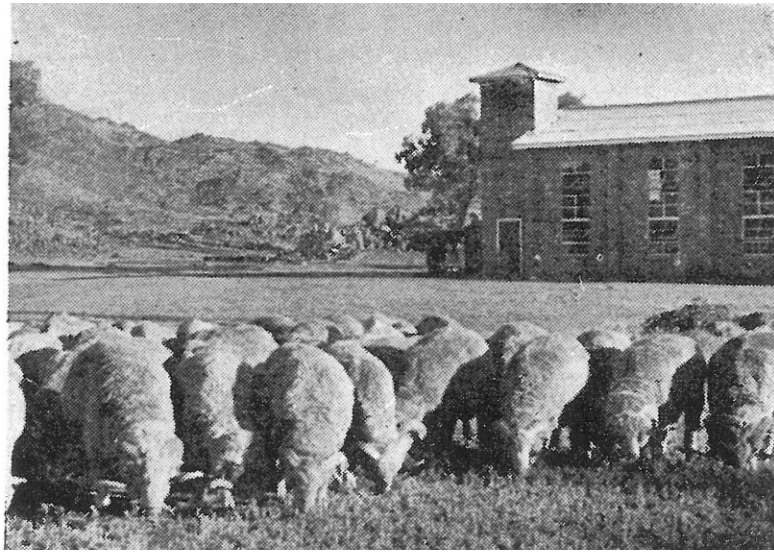


Figure 7  
Worship and Industry to Fit the Environment that is Their Own.  
*Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 1.

## Chapter Four

### **Ernabella 1937-1952: ‘Hunters become Herders’.<sup>1</sup>**

This chapter covers the years between 1937 when the Mission was established and 1952 when the first permanent Church building was opened and the first baptisms of Pitjantjatjara people occurred. These dates define significant moments in the history of Ernabella Mission. They mark the gradual formation and consolidation of Ernabella as a Pitjantjatjara community and the shift from a hunter-gatherer life to a more settled life as families came in from the deserts and made Ernabella their home.<sup>2</sup> Even as Pitjantjatjara people associated with Ernabella they continued to follow a mobile lifestyle as and when they were able. This indicates that they were engaged in innovative processes in order to

<sup>1</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> However, as Edwards has pointed out, while Ernabella became home in the sense of a site where services and goods could be accessed, their totemic site was still regarded as home in a traditional sense and was visited whenever possible. That is, Ernabella provided an additional notion of home. Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 17 January 2012.

make use of the mission as best they could. From the outset, the aim of the mission was that it would be different ‘from the ordinary idea of Missions’ and neither would it repeat the mistakes of other missions.<sup>3</sup> At the forefront of Dr Charles Duguid’s vision was ‘the conception of freedom’ and that Ernabella Mission would provide a place of safety for people who were ‘on the edge of civilisation’, a ‘buffer between the Aborigines and the encroaching white man’.<sup>4</sup> While the primary long term aim to evangelise Aboriginal people was shared with other missions, the methods commonly employed elsewhere were rejected or at least applied in ambivalent ways at Ernabella. The Ernabella mission narrative for this period shows that missionaries at Ernabella took a different approach in relation to the distribution of rations, clothing the people at the mission, and the ways in which local languages and traditional practices were regarded. Furthermore the hierarchical layout of a mission site with separate domains for missionaries and Aboriginal people and the separation of children from their families were not evident at Ernabella. It was regularly stated in mission reports and correspondence that underpinning Ernabella mission policy was respect for and as little interference in traditional life as possible and the practices deployed by the mission appeared to bear this out. In the last *Ernabella Newsletter* for this period at the end of 1952, Superintendent Ron Trudinger stated that ‘contact with the Mission and engagement in its activities are entirely voluntary’.<sup>5</sup> Richard Broome has noted that Ernabella is regarded as being at the more enlightened end of the spectrum<sup>6</sup> and according to Ronald and Catherine Berndt who were generally critical of missionary

---

<sup>3</sup> C. Duguid to Professor Gilbert Murray, 26 November 1938, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA).

<sup>4</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1972, pp. 111, 115.

<sup>5</sup> Trudinger, R. “It Came to Pass”, *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1982, p.117.

work, Ernabella was ‘consciously liberal’.<sup>7</sup> However, in the wider understanding Ernabella is located within the orthodox discourse as just another mission, but missionary work at Ernabella was more nuanced and ambivalent than the orthodoxy proposes.

The missionary narrative of this period is found in the *Ernabella Newsletters* and in diaries, correspondence and reports from the Mission. Between 1938 and 1957 the *Newsletters* were compiled from mission reports and published several times each year by the Presbyterian Church Board. Their aim was to report to Church members on the work being undertaken at Ernabella. They were inspired by Elkin’s advice that ‘the first task is to educate the members of the dominant race’ about the humanity of Aborigines in order to instill a sense of responsibility in the wider society for the future of Aboriginal people.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the *Newsletters*, the Aboriginal Protection Board of South Australia reported annually on Aboriginal matters in the State and on the progress of the missions. Overseeing developments on the Mission was Duguid who maintained a deep interest and kept a close eye on how his vision was being realised and throughout his life devoted considerable time and funds to the Mission.<sup>9</sup> Nganyintja Ilyatjari’s comment in 1984 that Duguid ‘really loved us, and cared about us, and was one of us’ attests to his commitment.<sup>10</sup> Duguid’s prolific and reflective writing provides a counterpoint to missionary report

---

<sup>7</sup> Berndt, R. M. & C. H., ‘Body and Soul: More than an Episode’ in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions at SACAE, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 55; See also Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1994, p. 820. Harris wrote that missionaries at Ernabella took ‘a particularly culturally-sensitive approach’; See also Jones, P., *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2007, p. 326.

<sup>8</sup> Love, J. R.B., ‘Is it Satisfactory?’, *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1945, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, NLA.

<sup>10</sup> Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, ‘Letter to Nancy Shepphard, March 1984’, translated by Nancy Shepphard, cited in C. Mattingley & K. Hampton (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, p.

### A ‘different’ mission

During the period which this chapter covers, the thinking about the future for tribal Aboriginal people such as those at Ernabella, was shifting from notions of a “doomed race” to the possibility of eventual absorption and then assimilation into the wider population.<sup>11</sup> There was an emerging appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and although not widespread, it did influence some missionaries to tolerate cultural practices which they had previously believed to be incompatible with evangelising.<sup>12</sup> In relation to the assimilatory approach, debate in missionary circles centred on the question of which came first—civilisation or Christianisation. While most considered that civilisation was a prerequisite for evangelisation,<sup>13</sup> the missionaries at Ernabella adopted a different approach. However, Ernabella Mission did share common themes with missionary endeavours elsewhere. Like other missionary enterprises Ernabella expressed the major reason for the Mission’s existence in terms of conversion, that is to ‘present Jesus to these people’ and as a ‘great opportunity ... to do a great work in this corner of God’s vineyard’.<sup>14</sup> The *Ernabella Newsletters* and *Annual Reports* throughout this period (1938

---

255. Nganyintja Ilyatjari was born and spent her first ten years or so in her father’s country in the Mann Ranges, moved to Ernabella in 1937 with her family and was one of the first students at the school.

<sup>11</sup> The 1937 Native Welfare Conference attended by State Aboriginal Protectors, decided that mixed ‘race’ children should be absorbed into the wider community, but not ‘full-bloods’ who were considered to be dying out and in need of protection until this occurred. At the 1951 (although these ideas had been developing over the last decade or so) Native Welfare Conference blood quantum was no longer a factor and absorption gave way to assimilation and was applied to all Aboriginal people. See Flood, J., *The Original Australians: Story of the Aboriginal People*, Allen & Unwin, Crow’s Nest, NSW, 2006, p. 224. In South Australia the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) Report for 1941 wrote that tribal Aborigines should be ‘protected from being tribalized’ and they should remain ‘self-supporting’ and isolated from Europeans. By the 1951, the ‘goal of ultimate citizenship’ was stated as the APB’s priority.

<sup>12</sup> Brock, P., ‘Nakedness and Clothing in Early Encounters Between Aboriginal People of Central Australia, Missionaries and Anthropologists’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol 8, no. 1, 2007, <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_colonialism\\_and\\_colonial\\_history/v008/8.1brock.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v008/8.1brock.html)>, accessed 9 August 2010.

<sup>13</sup> For example, at Mt Margaret mission in the Laverton region of Western Australia, Rodolphe Schenk believed that traditional life presented an impenetrable barrier to Christianising. See Duckham, I., ‘Visionary, Vassal or Vandal? Rod Schenk – Missionary: A Case Study in Western Desert Missions’, *Limina*, Vol. 6, 2000, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, H. L., *Statement of Policy and Principles*, 1938, pp.1, 3, Presbyterian Church of Australia (hereafter PCA), Mitchell Library (hereafter ML) MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

to 1952) reiterated this overriding aim: ‘all our activities on Ernabella have the one end in view—to win the Aborigines to Christ and His way of life’.<sup>15</sup> Another theme evident in the mission narrative and one shared by missionary work elsewhere is the sacrifice, courage and devotion of the missionaries in bringing the Gospel to the people, and the difficulty of this task given the acute shortage of resources. The sheer workload and the inability to take leave were major issues for mission staff everywhere.<sup>16</sup> The notion of missions as providing protection and a buffer from encroaching settler populations is also a common discourse and one noted throughout the Ernabella mission narrative. Ernabella’s policy on limiting visitors, as discussed further on, was central to the protection discourse.

Alongside these common themes others are evident in the Ernabella missionary records which point to a different approach to evangelizing, one underpinned by a respect and valuing of Pitjantjatjara traditions. Duguid had emphasised that mission practices must be based on the retention of ‘the best of their own [traditional] culture’.<sup>17</sup> In the *Ernabella Newsletter* of December 1943, it was stated that ‘to wreck the tribal life is to destroy self-respect and send the native to his doom’.<sup>18</sup> The importance placed on the maintenance of tribal life was demonstrated in the practices of the mission. The mission provided work for young initiates in the construction of windmills and wells which took them away from the mission. This was to allow for the isolation of young men during initiation as required under Pitjantjatjara Law.<sup>19</sup> The formation of a ‘Native Council’ of ten or twelve men ‘nominated by the tribespeople’ to assist and advise the

---

<sup>15</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘Ernabella, a Mission Station’, *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> The Rev. E.R. Gribble who worked in north Queensland wrote of this in his correspondence and his memoir. See Gribble, E.R., *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, 1930, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

<sup>17</sup> Duguid to Hudd (Commissioner for Public Works in South Australia), 14 August 1936, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>18</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1943, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> MacDougall, W., *Ernabella Mission Annual Report to June 30<sup>th</sup> 1945*, p.10, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.



missionaries in 1946<sup>20</sup> demonstrates another strategy to facilitate the maintenance of tribal integrity. Furthermore, the local language was to be the first language of the mission, the Gospel was to be taught 'in their own tongue',<sup>21</sup> the cohesiveness of families and independence were to be maintained so that children were still educated in tribal law and not isolated from it. The teacher Trudinger appeared to be quite relaxed that children attended the Mission school on average for four weeks per year.<sup>22</sup> It was considered more important that children were away from the Mission with their parents when game was plentiful. Trudinger reported that the children were all healthy and skilled in the 'lore of the bush'.<sup>23</sup> The aim of the school was to 'supplement the native tribal life' not replace it.<sup>24</sup>

While the maintenance of traditional life was a priority it was now seen as viable in the short term only and the ultimate aim of the missionary work at Ernabella, as stated by some missionaries early on was to 'transform the meaning of their ancient customs'.<sup>25</sup> By December 1948 the establishment of a 'Native Village on model lines' was mooted.<sup>26</sup> A settled village was generally regarded in missionary circles as the most advantageous spatial arrangement for evangelising.<sup>27</sup> In September 1950 Ernabella Mission reported that it was hoped that a 'self-respecting community with a Christian atmosphere' would become established.<sup>28</sup> This appeared to contradict the central aim of

---

<sup>20</sup> Trudinger, R. M., 'Native Council Appointed', *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1947, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1943, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Trudinger, R.M., *Report on the Ernabella Mission School*, June 1945, pp.1-5, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>24</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Mission: Report for Year Ending 30/6/1942*, p. 2, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, H. L., *Statement of Policy and Principles*, 1938, p. 1, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>26</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> This was evident at Ramahyuck Mission. See Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

<sup>28</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1950, p. 3.

maintaining tribal life which had underpinned mission policy from the outset. The September 1952 *Newsletter* carried the title *The Problem of the Primitive* with a story of how traditional beliefs about the causes of illness were problematic and had led to unrest. A child had died of tetanus and under tribal Law the family sought revenge from the person suspected of causing the death. It was implied that such beliefs were an impediment to the development of a Christian community.<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein, in December 1952, it was suggested that the traditional belief system was inadequate and prevented people from exercising a 'full life'.<sup>30</sup> So over this fifteen year period, perhaps partly driven by practical considerations, the initial ideal of non-interference in traditional life had gradually shifted to one where some intervention was considered necessary. A consequence was a certain ambivalence with both a valuing and devaluing of traditional ways. The ultimate goal to establish self-sufficient communities which allowed people to emerge from colonial domination with their self-respect intact, is mediated by what Justin Livingstone has described as an 'egoistic missionary fantasy' which satisfies a missionary vision for an 'ideal faith community', where the respect for traditional ways diminishes and traditional culture becomes expendable.<sup>31</sup>

The overall sense gained from Ernabella missionary writing is that generally missionaries did not hold romanticised views but were pragmatic and policies were developed in response to the practicalities of running a mission in a remote area, for training people to facilitate their eventual contact with the wider society, and for evangelising. Because Ernabella missionaries regarded traditional culture as the means to evangelising, even where romanticised views were expressed, such as in 1943 when

---

<sup>29</sup> Trudinger, R. M., 'Death of the Boy Yawi', *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1952, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Trudinger, R.M., 'His Plans Were Right', *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Livingstone, J., 'Ambivalent Imperialism: The Missionary Rhetoric of Robert Boyd', *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009, pp. 183-84.

Trudinger stated that it would be a tragedy to lose the “race”<sup>32</sup> and in 1944 when Love stated that Ernabella had a ‘special duty of trying to preserve the race from extinction’, it can be argued that pragmatism rather than romanticism is uppermost. Love was well aware of the two opposing views held by those who believed that Aborigines had a future—the assimilationist views of ‘those who wish to civilize the people as rapidly as possible’ and the romanticist view of ‘those who wish to see the primitive way of life preserved, the people kept unclothed, and living in their old way on their native foods’.<sup>33</sup> His aim was to steer a middle course between these two positions.

Missing from the Ernabella missionary narrative were themes common to other missions. There was no overt ‘save the children’ discourse underpinning missionary work at Ernabella. On the contrary as Trudinger observed, the children did not need saving. The notion that the perceived primitiveness of the people was an impediment to evangelising was rarely mentioned. Neither was the mission narrative underpinned by a celebratory discourse of evangelical success.

While Ernabella shared the eventual aim of other mission enterprises, what made Ernabella different was the markedly different way it pursued this goal. For example, the relationships forged by the missionaries with the people, the physical layout of the mission itself, the policy regarding clothing and rations, maintenance of culture and language, and training from the outset for eventual independence from the Mission. Although the conversion narrative was dominant throughout, alongside the firm belief in the missionary endeavour, the means to achieving this goal were underpinned by a

---

<sup>32</sup> Trudinger, R. M., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1943, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘The Policy of Ernabella’, *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 3. Rev J.R.B. Love was Superintendent at Ernabella from 1941 to 1945. He had previously been Superintendent at Kunmunya for thirteen years where he developed a deep interest in and respect for Worora culture and language.

particular understanding of tribal life and in addition a respect for the humanity of Pitjantjatjara people.

Until 1949 when the Reverend R.M. Trudinger took over as superintendent, there had been five superintendents.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the Reverend J. R. B. Love who stayed for four years, superintendents only stayed on average one to two years. With the exception of staff engaged in stock work who tended to stay longer and averaged five years, such a high turnover was also the case for other staff. Teaching and nursing staff, apart from Trudinger who started the school and taught there from 1940 to 1945, averaged one to two years.<sup>35</sup> Short term appointments are considered to be a problem for contemporary remote communities as they mitigate against establishing deep relationships so it can be assumed that this would also have been the case in the 1940s. Yet at Ernabella, despite the relatively short time spent by staff at the mission in the early years Winifred Hilliard reported that the Aboriginal people ‘learnt to know, love and trust’ the missionaries.<sup>36</sup> Hilliard told me in 2007 that she wished to be buried at Ernabella near the people she continued to regard as friends and family.<sup>37</sup> She is to be buried there on 17 March 2012 following her death at her home in Nowra, New South Wales on 2 January 2012.<sup>38</sup> The close and trusting relationship can also be clearly seen in the request from Ernabella people to Duguid in 1972 that on his death he be buried at Ernabella. He was regarded by the people as ‘one of us’. When he died in Adelaide in 1986 he was buried in the

---

<sup>34</sup> Superintendents Taylor, Ward, MacDougall, Love & Wright.

<sup>35</sup> Although this changed during the 1950s with staff remaining for considerable periods. For example, John Bennett spent twenty five years as sheep overseer. Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 17 January 2012. Winifred Hilliard coordinated the Ernabella Craft Centre (now Ernabella Arts) from 1954 to the end of the mission era in 1974. She continued to work for Ernabella Arts until 1986, in all a total of thirty two years of service to Ernabella. See Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1976, p. 241.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> Winifred Hilliard, Pers. Comm., 11 May 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 9 January 2012

Ernabella Cemetery.<sup>39</sup> A similar relationship between Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow and Western Arrernte people was clearly evident at Hermannsburg. For twenty eight years Strehlow had been their *ingkata*, 'the great rockplate' anchoring the mission site and on his death in 1922 there was a genuine outpouring of grief.<sup>40</sup> Long term commitments by missionaries were important to people living on missions.

The superintendents who served at Ernabella during this period were a diverse group who took different approaches to their work.<sup>41</sup> Reverend H. Taylor was the first and according to Hilliard even at the outset he was regarded by the local people as a friend and someone whom they could trust. 'There was no need to go out and lure the people into the Mission, they came', writes Hilliard.<sup>42</sup> All of the superintendents stated in their annual reports that relations were friendly, that Aborigines trusted them, and that missionaries enjoyed the 'goodwill' of the local people and a picture emerges of amicable relationships. Stories told by Ernabella residents of the mission times also tell of the development of close, trusting relationships and demonstrate that the missionary accounts were not merely grounded in self-interest or romanticised nostalgia. As Nganyintja Ilyatjari recollected in 1984, with the arrival of Duguid and the missionaries at Ernabella, a 'new life came into us that has not happened from any other white person'.<sup>43</sup> Communication was obviously enhanced by the policy which required all

---

<sup>39</sup> 'Duguid, Charles (1884-1986)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duguid-charles-12440>>, accessed 8 February 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Strehlow, T. G. H., *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1969, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Trudinger, D., 'The Language(s) of Love: JRB Love and Contesting Tongues at Ernabella Mission Station, 1940-46', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 31, 2007, pp. 27-44. Trudinger has argued that among Presbyterian missionaries there was a 'moderate-evangelical divide'. He proposes that at Ernabella, up to and including Love, missionaries were generally at the moderate and progressive end of this continuum in terms of carrying out missionary work, whereas Trudinger took a less progressive and more evangelical approach. David Trudinger is the son of the Superintendent Ron Trudinger and spent his early years at Ernabella Mission.

<sup>42</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 97.

<sup>43</sup> Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, 'Letter to Nancy Shepherd, March 1984', 1988, p. 255.

mission staff to learn the local language and staff were invited to ceremonies and gladly attended. As well they visited the camp where most Pitjantjatjara people stayed while at Ernabella on a daily basis, indicating high levels of interaction. The Nursing Sister during 1949, Ruth Dawkins, was struck by the friendliness of the people and enjoyed warm relationships particularly with the young girls and the children who would come home with her from the camp. She wrote often of children visiting her house and of ‘tucking’ them up for the night. During men’s ceremonies it was normal for women and children to camp in front of her house.<sup>44</sup> However, while the mission reports and *Newsletters* give an overriding sense of amicable relationships, there were less harmonious relationships also noted which indicates that these were not glossed. In 1939, Walter MacDougall reported that sheep killing by ‘natives was rife’ but from early 1940 the killings had ceased altogether.<sup>45</sup> Whether sheep were being killed for food or as an expression of hostility to the presence of the mission is not clear. By 1940 even though people were being better provisioned with food they were still providing most of their own meat through hunting, including introduced species such as rabbits. This indicates that the reason for the cessation of the killing of sheep was not merely because other food sources were available. Duguid suggested that this indicated an improvement in relationships and noted that the survival of the sheep ‘is entirely due to the fine understanding Mr. MacDougall has with the natives’ indicating that relationships had

---

<sup>44</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters: Extracts of Letters Written from “Ernabella” in the Musgrave [i.e. Musgrave] Ranges 1949-1950*, Uniting Church of Australia, 1994, pp. 11, 14-5. Dawkins wrote letters several times a week over the year to her future husband detailing daily life at Ernabella. These letters give a sense of shared and genuine relationships between mission staff and Aboriginal people.

<sup>45</sup> MacDougall, W. B., ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, p. 1, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

improved.<sup>46</sup> In 1947 it was reported ‘many difficulties must yet be overcome’,<sup>47</sup> indicating some conflict remained extant.

Visitors to the mission reiterated the close relationship in their reports and noted the shared goodwill at the mission where Pitjantjatjara people regarded mission staff as friends. In 1946, Cleland was ‘impressed by the happiness and well nourished appearance of the people’.<sup>48</sup> The numbers of Pitjantjatjara who were in contact with the mission steadily increased, despite it being a fluctuating population. In 1937 there were 190 people on Christmas Day and by 1944 it was estimated that between 500 and 1000 people were now in contact with the mission. Another visitor in 1943, Deaconess Harris, expressed surprise that people were at the mission even though the season was good and there was an abundance of bush food.<sup>49</sup>

The non-coercive policy on which Ernabella was founded was repeatedly mentioned in the annual reports and supported throughout these years by all superintendents. The aim of the mission remained consistent with this policy—to show by example ‘a better way of life’<sup>50</sup> and to respect the wishes of the local Aboriginal people to continue their tribal life. In 1944, Love cautioned in his annual report that while exercising pastoral care, to not do ‘too much to them’.<sup>51</sup> Missionaries did not just pay lip service to their respect for traditional Law but demonstrated this respect through mission practices.

---

<sup>46</sup> Duguid, C., *Ernabella Revisited*, Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1946, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, November, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Cleland, J. B., ‘Professor J. B. Cleland’s Report’, *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1946, p. 4. Cleland was a professor of anthropology at Adelaide University.

<sup>49</sup> Deaconess Harris, ‘A Visitors’ Impression of Mission Work at Ernabella’, *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> MacDougall, W. B., ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘The Policy of Ernabella’, *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 1.

The missionaries at Ernabella recognised that the mission was situated on Aboriginal land. As Love pointed out, the mission was ‘occupying part of their country’ even though he believed it was ‘for the benefit of all’.<sup>52</sup> This acknowledgement, unusual for its time must have shaped the relationship between Pitjantjatjara people and missionaries at Ernabella in quite different ways to that which developed on other missions. Love added that meals were offered to everyone on Sunday in recognition of this. Hilliard believed that an important aim of the mission was to ‘make amends for one hundred years of wrong and misunderstanding’.<sup>53</sup> In 1940 Duguid wrote to the Adelaide newspaper *The Advertiser* that a Department of Native Affairs should be established in order ‘to give the Aborigines their proper place in the economic structure of the country’.<sup>54</sup> Such recognition of Aboriginal prior ownership and of the need for reparation for dispossession was not widespread for at least another three decades.

### **Spatial layout of the mission and housing**

The arrangement of the physical space at Ernabella also differs from what was considered most effective for a mission to be successful. Right throughout the Pacific region the positioning of buildings and the use of space at mission sites has been regarded as integral to the work of missionaries and governments in transforming local people. Diane Langmore has described mission stations in Papua where houses for the missionaries were usually sited on a hill overlooking the ‘native village’.<sup>55</sup> In Australia, Bain Attwood’s study of the nineteenth-century Moravian Mission at Ramahyuck in

---

<sup>52</sup> Love, J.R.B. Ernabella Mission: Report for Year Ending 30/6/1942, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 97.

<sup>54</sup> Duguid, C., Letter to the Editor, *The Advertiser*, 1 March 1940, p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Langmore, D., ‘The Object Lesson of a Civilised, Christian Home’, in M. Jolly & M. Macintyre (eds.), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1989, pp. 19-44.



eastern Victoria draws on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault to show how the layout and the architecture of the buildings allowed missionaries to observe and so control the residents. At Ramahyuck the official buildings were situated on a rise behind a fence overlooking what resembled a ‘village green’ bordered by cottages for the Aboriginal residents. Attwood argues that this arrangement served two major purposes. Firstly, to discourage kin-based social arrangements through the construction of individual dwellings to house nuclear families, and secondly to encourage sedentary living by establishing clear boundaries between the mission site and the “wild” which lay outside the mission fence. Both were considered as central to realising the major aim of converting Aborigines into ‘men and women in their [missionary] own image’.<sup>56</sup>

Allied to this spatial arrangement was the use of dormitories to separate children from adults, a common practice used right through the nineteenth century and into the middle of the twentieth. Three examples, one from the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory at Roper River, one from Jigalong in the Gibson Desert, Western Australia, and the other from Mt Margaret in the Laverton region of Western Australia show how widespread this practice was. In the 1960s when Robert Tonkinson did his fieldwork at Jigalong Mission the separation of school age children from what missionaries perceived as the ‘evils of the way of life of the adults’ at Jigalong was still considered crucial to successful evangelising. There were separate dormitories for boys and girls situated at either end of the settlement. A plan of the settlement shows that the Aboriginal and missionary domains were also distinctly separate with the Aboriginal camp away from the main settlement. Tonkinson argues that the outcome of this spatial arrangement was that interaction between missionaries and residents was limited to

---

<sup>56</sup> Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, 1989, pp. 14, 8, 1.

formal exchanges. Missionaries were not invited to ceremonies as they were at Ernabella, and there is no evidence of ‘close friendships between missionaries and adult Aborigines’.<sup>57</sup> At Roper River Mission there was a fence around the children’s dormitories which parents were not permitted to cross. Angelique Edmonds points out that ‘the spatial demarcation employed was an element of great significance in the conversion project’.<sup>58</sup> According to Ian Duckham the United Aborigines Mission at Mt Margaret had a dormitory for children and a housing policy which was regarded as central to the progression of civilisation, where during the 1940s couples were encouraged to purchase their own cottage.<sup>59</sup>

However, there is no mention of this type of spatial arrangement at Ernabella Mission in the annual reports from 1937-1945 and neither is it mentioned in the observations from visitors, officials and missionaries during the 1940s. Love wrote to Duguid that he ‘strongly opposed’ the dormitory system as to separate children denied them a ‘tribal education’ and every effort should be made to encourage them to go ‘walkabout’ with their families.<sup>60</sup> As Hilliard pointed out, the dormitory system had ‘always been rejected at Ernabella’.<sup>61</sup>

Even though there is nothing in the missionary narrative to indicate that the mission site was segregated in the manner of other missions it is difficult to ascertain if this was the case. It could be that it did not rate a mention because the missionaries at

---

<sup>57</sup> Tonkinson, R., *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade*, Cummings Publishing Company, California, 1974, pp. 122, 27, 125. Jigalong Mission was established in 1948 by the Apostolic Church.

<sup>58</sup> Edmonds, A., ‘Sedentary Topography: The Impact of the Christian Mission Society’s ‘Civilising’ Agenda on the Spatial Structure of Life in the Roper Region of Northern Australia’, in I. Macfarlane & M. Hannah (eds.), *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, Aboriginal History Monograph 16, ANU E Press, 2007, p. 196.

<sup>59</sup> Duckham, I., ‘Visionary, Vassal or Vandal?’, 2000, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> Love to Duguid, 20 December 1940, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>61</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 168.

Ernabella took for granted the widely practised hierarchical “village” arrangement.<sup>62</sup>

However, other missions which were established in the Western Desert during the same period and for the same ameliorative purposes did refer to their co-option of architecture for civilising and evangelising. A more plausible explanation which fits with the observations of visitors and staff is that Ernabella missionaries simply did not regard the creation of an ordered and segregated space as a priority. In a letter to Duguid, Love stated that he at least had hoped for a ‘nice, neat’ and ‘orderly arrangement’ for the mission site bringing the administrative buildings together centrally. He expressed regret that the new house for the Wards had been built where the Church, the school, the hospital and dispensary should be. This meant that the Church, hospital and dispensary would have to be built towards the creek and the school would have to stay in its location ‘beyond the goat and ram yards’ away from ‘the life of the mission’.<sup>63</sup> But this appeared as a passing disappointment and does not indicate that the type of hierarchical arrangement used elsewhere was required at Ernabella.

A ‘Suggested Plan of Ernabella Mission Station’ in 1940<sup>64</sup> and a sketch by the teacher, Barbara Bills in 1947 of the preferred site for the new school,<sup>65</sup> shows the mission site as a random collection of buildings rather than a site carefully planned with the aim of civilising in mind. In this sense Ernabella provides a contrast to the appearance of missions such as Ramahyuck. A photograph of Ernabella in 1965 shows a similar arrangement in a semi-desert landscape with a broad open space bounded by the houses, the school and the creek.<sup>66</sup> There is no mention in the missionary narrative of boundary fences to spatially delineate mission from bush which was seen as imperative

---

<sup>62</sup> Although as discussed earlier the idea of a village was mooted in 1948.

<sup>63</sup> Love to Duguid, 7 March 1941, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Suggested Plan of Ernabella Mission Station’, 1940, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173.

<sup>65</sup> Bills to Coombes, 11 May 1947, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

<sup>66</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 112.

elsewhere. In the National Library of Australia collection of Duguid's photos of Ernabella from the 1940s the only visible fences are those around a garden.<sup>67</sup>

There appeared to be few buildings at all in the early years of the mission and it was regularly noted in correspondence and *Newsletters* that there was a desperate shortage of accommodation for staff and other buildings. By 1944 a new wool shed and a new school were desperately needed as well as a church.<sup>68</sup> Accommodation for mission staff was described by Hilliard as little more than small corrugated iron sheds and the Manse consisted of little more than 'three mud huts' joined by a roof.<sup>69</sup> Some staff lived for long periods in tents.<sup>70</sup> There was no school building until 1940 and lessons were held outside on desks made from old kerosene boxes. The first school building was rudimentary and described by Trudinger as having 'cement walls three feet high with fly wire up to the roof'.<sup>71</sup> On the few occasions when a new building was completed it was celebrated and reported in the *Newsletters* as a considerable achievement. In 1949 Dawkins wrote that Ernabella had expanded to four houses, a shearing shed, workshop and garage, a store, a cookhouse with an outdoor oven, and several small sheds.<sup>72</sup>

No housing at all was provided for Aborigines and they camped near the creek about a quarter of a mile from the houses. In wet weather they constructed 'wiltjas' out of mulga frames covered with spinifex branches and in dry weather just used windbreaks.<sup>73</sup> The camping sites were not randomly chosen but carefully selected by the

---

<sup>67</sup> See Figure 3. Duguid, C. <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an23780725>; <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4404383>; <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4401486>; <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4401469>>, accessed 17 December 2008.

<sup>68</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1944, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 132.

<sup>70</sup> Duguid, C., 1939, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>71</sup> Trudinger to Duguid, 29 February 1940, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>72</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 133; Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, p. 76.

men, with the young men's camp and young women's camp kept separate in accord with the 'big rule' for Pitjantjatjara people.<sup>74</sup> This indicates that the decision about where they camped away from the mission buildings was made by the Pitjantjatjara themselves. Despite the physical separation of living space missionaries and people who camped at the mission appeared to mix freely. David Trudinger has argued that 'a complex politics of hospitality operated on the mission site at Ernabella: the Indigenous people, as hosts of the land, welcomed missionaries to their land; while missionaries welcomed the Indigenous people across the *karu* [creek] into the mission compound'.<sup>75</sup> As discussed above, Love acknowledged in his 1942 Annual Report, that the mission was occupying Aboriginal land.<sup>76</sup>

However, not everyone was happy with the spatial arrangements. The General Secretary of the Board of Missions, the Reverend Coombes perceived a number of problems during his visit in October 1946 and raised the idea of segregated spaces where people could be supervised. He wrote:

when camped about the station, their proneness to destructiveness of tree life, their tendency to overrun everything and their readiness to meddle with property and equipment, necessitates the exercise of constant discipline.

Coombes attributed these problems to a breakdown in tribal authority and recommended that a number of rules should be instigated. He declared that people should only be at the mission when 'on business' and children should only play on the other side of the creek. He proposed that the shelter shed in the mission grounds could be used in rainy weather

---

<sup>74</sup> Nyaningu, P., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and Their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> Trudinger, David, 'The Language(s) of Love', 2007, p. 34.

<sup>76</sup> Love, J.R.B., Ernabella Mission: Report for Year Ending 30/6/1942, p. 2.

because it was in a position which enabled supervision. Should these rules be infringed, benefits would be withdrawn.<sup>77</sup> This approach appeared to be at odds with the overall mission policy and the problems noted by Coombes were not mentioned elsewhere. Neither is it clear whether the proposed rules were ever followed. The letters of Ruth Dawkins during 1949 give no suggestion that Ernabella had become segregated in this way.

According to Hilliard housing was not provided for Aborigines because it was considered to be unsuitable for people who had had little contact with 'the white way of life'<sup>78</sup> and in 1949 this policy was endorsed by a visiting anthropologist from Sydney University, Reverend Werner.<sup>79</sup> There is little record of what the people actually thought of these arrangements but the few recollections of these early days indicate that maintaining a traditional camp life was important and a preferred way of life.<sup>80</sup> Unlike elsewhere it was not proposed that Aborigines should abandon their nomadic lifestyle for a settled existence.<sup>81</sup> Instead at Ernabella people were encouraged to move throughout their country. As Alec Minutjukur said, 'we come and go, walk, we didn't stay here' [at the mission].<sup>82</sup> It could be argued that the separation of the camp and the mission settlement served the same purpose as on other missions, but the crucial difference here is that there is no indication that the organisation of space was for civilising purposes. Furthermore, the spatial arrangement is consistent with the mission's stated aim of non-interference in tribal life.

---

<sup>77</sup> Coombes Report on Ernabella Mission, October 1946, PCA ML MLK2778.

<sup>78</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 132.

<sup>79</sup> Werner, G., *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1949, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> See Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, 'Traditional Aboriginal Learning: How I Learned as a Pitjantjatjara Child', in W. H. Edwards (ed.), *Traditional Aboriginal Society*, Macmillan Ed. Aus. Pty. Ltd., South Yarra, 1998; Minutjukur, A., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 29.

<sup>81</sup> That is, apart from the mention of the development of a village in 1948.

<sup>82</sup> Minutjukur, A., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 17.

Even though there appeared to be no formal segregation of spaces and people at Ernabella itself, the policy on visitors was first mentioned by Love in his 1937 Report where he stated firmly that even scientists and missionaries should not have unrestricted access as they ‘influence the natives’.<sup>83</sup> Dawkins reported that the policy in 1949 was still to limit visitors and ‘prevent Aboriginal people from receiving excessive or undesirable intrusions’, and so permission to visit the mission had to be obtained from the Mission Board. Furthermore, while people were encouraged to continue traditional food gathering as much as practical, they were discouraged from going to neighbouring cattle stations ‘as tribal law breaks down on “white man’s property”’.<sup>84</sup> So in this sense there was an implicit separation of Ernabella people not from mission staff or the bush, but from European outsiders. The policy from the outset was that Ernabella would function as a buffer zone which would reduce interaction between Pitjantjatjara people and Europeans until such time as the Pitjantjatjara were ready to integrate with the wider society. This policy on visitors continued after 1952 when it received increasing criticism and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

However by the late 1940s people were becoming less nomadic and there was evidence of a shift in the housing policy as the mission responded to the changes. In April 1947 it was reported that there was in process a ‘gradual change-over from a nomadic to settled community life’.<sup>85</sup> Housing for people associated with the mission was mentioned for the first time in 1948, eleven years after the establishment of the mission. A revised programme was set out including the ‘gradual development of Ernabella Native Village on model lines’. This called for the construction of more

---

<sup>83</sup> Love, J. R. B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, August 1937, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, pp. 23, 27-9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1947, p. 1.

substantial dwellings by the residents in order to develop a 'self supporting, self respecting, healthy, industrious Native Community of a truly Christian' people.<sup>86</sup> By 1950 it was reported that with the acquisition of additional land near Ernabella more employment would be available for local people and a village could be established.<sup>87</sup> The completion of a Kitchen-Dining Hall in 1951 was considered to be a 'big step' in 'training them to eat ... at tables with normal eating utensils' and in providing better nutrition for mothers and babies.<sup>88</sup>

### **Shepherding**

As discussed in the previous chapter when the Ernabella mission site was purchased it was a working sheep station. Reports from the mission regularly mentioned the importance of the sheep industry for the mission in terms of income, training opportunities in sheep husbandry and employment. Aboriginal people throughout the country had a long history of working in the pastoral industry and as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century Aboriginal shepherds were employed by the Australian Agricultural Company in colonial New South Wales. Mark Hannah has shown how shepherding work was to a certain extent compatible with Aboriginal social structures.<sup>89</sup> At Ernabella, the sheep flock of about 2500 was divided into smaller flocks of 500 and shepherded by a family who camped at each well. The work was quite intensive in the days before fencing as the sheep had to be yarded each night. But it meant that people could live in their country which they and the mission considered to

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1950.

<sup>88</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 15 November 1951, p. 5, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(i).

<sup>89</sup> Hannah, M., 'Aboriginal Workers in the Australian Agricultural Company, 1824-1857', *Labour History*, No. 82, May 2002, p. 17.



be important as a means of maintaining tribal obligations. Further to this end shepherds worked for three months and were provisioned each week with rations from the mission.<sup>90</sup> After three months they were encouraged to go on 'walkabout' and the mission provided regular supplies to allow people to spend time in their country.<sup>91</sup> Shepherding was regarded as an ideal occupation in terms of transition to a more settled life and as preparation for the future. By 1943 it was reported by Love that shepherds were keen to learn all aspects of sheep husbandry and were developing competency in shearing. He wrote that shepherds see their work as 'a real co-operative fellowship with the white man'. In addition, Love saw shepherding as important in the spiritual development of the people and as a means to a deeper 'understanding of the great messages of Bible truth in Psalm 23 and John 10'.<sup>92</sup> A point also made by Bill Edwards who found that during his time at the mission, the parable of the Good Shepherd resonated with the people because of their work as shepherds.<sup>93</sup> By 1946 it was reported that Aboriginal shearers were being paid award wages<sup>94</sup> and by 1949 local people were given preference<sup>95</sup> indicating that they had developed high levels of competence in the industry. In the June 1951 *Newsletter* the heading reads 'Nomads Take to Industry'.<sup>96</sup>

## **Rationing**

The different approach to missionising at Ernabella is also evident in the policies towards rationing and clothing. Rations have been central to forging relationships between Aborigines and settlers throughout Australia from colonial times to the mid-

---

<sup>90</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Mission: Report for Year Ending 30/6/1942*, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> 'Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission', *Compass*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 22 April 2011.

<sup>94</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, October 1946, p. 15.

<sup>95</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1949, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1951, p. 1.

twentieth century, and even later in certain places such as Kalumburu in north-west Australia. Missions and rations have become synonymous with colonisation not only in scholarly work but in a range of texts from biographies/autobiographies to other genres of popular culture such as music. Archie Roach's 2002 song *Mission Ration Blues* is but one example. Flour, sugar and tea became staples in the diet of Aboriginal people on missions and government reserves. As Tim Rowse points out, in Central Australia 'regimes of rationing' were pervasive which left few families untouched.<sup>97</sup> From the late nineteenth century throughout remote areas of South Australia depots were established where pastoralists and police distributed rations.

By the time the first missionaries arrived at Ernabella in 1937 people of the Western Deserts had become accustomed to trading with "whitefellas" for rations which by then had had a significant impact on their lives. As Yankunytjatjara woman Mona Tur explains, it was to access rations being handed out at Oodnadatta that her extended family moved from the bush to the town when she was seven years old.<sup>98</sup> It can be argued that this prepared them to a certain extent for the mission's system of economic exchange.

From the outset Ernabella had a strict policy that rations were only provided as exchange for work or goods. This was ostensibly to prevent pauperisation and dependence, which was understood to impede progress towards citizenship.<sup>99</sup> But it was also to ensure that people maintained traditional food gathering skills and while this

---

<sup>97</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 3. Rowse has evaluated the understanding of those distributing the rations. See also Brock, P., 'Two-way Food: Bush Tucker and Whitefella's Food', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, March 2008, pp. 19-32. Brock has focused on the impact of rationing on the receivers.

<sup>98</sup> Tur, M., cited in D. Mellor & A. Haebich (eds.), *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> See Elkin, A. P., 'Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1951, pp. 164-86; Elkin, A. P., *The Australian Aborigines*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1974, p. 363.

appears to be a contradiction in terms of progression towards citizenship, at Ernabella tribal life was considered as the key to “advancement” and independence.

In the *Ernabella Newsletters* and in reports from patrols of the Musgrave Ranges and other visitors to the mission mention is made that substantial rations were issued to the old, the infirm and children who attended school. In 1944 it was reported that people were still living mainly on bush food because they preferred to do so, even though there was some interest in rations which could be bought with the proceeds of dingo scalps or earned by working at the mission. During times of drought such as that in 1944, rations were dispersed more widely according to need but were discontinued when conditions improved.<sup>100</sup> This policy was considered to be successful and remained largely unchanged throughout the early mission period. In 1946 W. R. Penhall, Secretary of the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board reported no signs of malnutrition at the mission or in the surrounding area and judged the policy to be working well. In the same report, J. B. Cleland from the University of Adelaide noted that the people had not become dependent or pauperised, they were not compelled to stay or work at the mission and ‘bush natives’ exchanged meat with the ‘Station natives’ for rations.<sup>101</sup> It was not until December 1948 that it was proposed that rations were to become more ‘dietetically balanced’ and extended to more people.<sup>102</sup>

A major question raised in the literature concerning the ration system overall is whether it was a coercive or humanitarian practice. That is, did governments, missionaries and pastoralists use rations as an instrument of control and management or

---

<sup>100</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> Penhall, W. R., ‘Mr. Penhall’s Message’, *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1946, p. 2; Cleland, J. B., ‘Professor J. B. Cleland’s Report’, *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 4. The past ten years were reflected on in this *Newsletter* and significant changes in the provision of services were proposed. In July 1949, Trudinger reported that children were to receive more cocoa and milk and fresh fruit. PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

were rations provided to meet the needs of Aboriginal people? Tim Rowse has argued that in Central Australia generally, rationing replaced ‘violence as a mode of government’.<sup>103</sup> There are certainly stories from other parts of Australia as well which support this analysis. Bruce Yunkaporta from Aurukun on Cape York recalls his father being induced to leave his children at the mission in exchange for rations of flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and blankets.<sup>104</sup> At its most coercive, the rationing system is described as ‘poison’ which undermined Aboriginal cultures and was a major factor in the disintegration of some Aboriginal societies and the subsequent *creation* of dependent and pauperised populations.<sup>105</sup> At the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg to the north of Ernabella, Rowse has argued that missionaries used a system of ‘mercantile evangelism’ which he described as ‘ethical rationing’ where the traditional work of the Western Arrernte was ‘commodified’. That is, “traditional” products such as those acquired from hunting-gathering, implements and artefacts, and dingo scalps were purchased in return for rations. This replaced the need for people to work on the mission in order to earn rations and satisfied the aim of missionaries that rewards had to be worked for. Through instilling the desire for goods, rationing could be used to facilitate the core business of the mission, that is, the making of converts.<sup>106</sup>

However, there is also evidence which demonstrates that the provision of rations was not necessarily an instrument of control but stemmed from more humanitarian

---

<sup>103</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 7.

<sup>104</sup> Yunkaporta, B., cited in Rintoul, S., ‘Under the Mission Bell’ in *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1993, p. 126.

<sup>105</sup> Mattingley, C. & Hampton, K. (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, 1988, pp. 20-1. Tim Rowse has pointed out the unintended outcomes of the gazetted of 40 000 square miles of Crown Land incorporating land in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory in 1920 as the Central Australian reserve and the establishment of ration depots as a protection policy. Ostensibly to prevent Aborigines from drifting to towns and inevitable pauperisation, in reality, Aborigines were cast as ‘subjects of an emerging welfare program’ that was problematic in progressing protection policies. Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 177.

<sup>106</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, pp. 80, 89.

sensibilities. From the outset the reasons for the establishment of the Ernabella Mission were expressed in humanitarian terms. As Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Australia, Duguid's proposals for the establishment of the mission were guided by a Christian sense of responsibility to be charitable to those in need.<sup>107</sup> Therefore Duguid argued that it was the duty of governments and churches to improve the conditions for Aboriginal people in order to facilitate their independence and 'recognition as citizens of Australia' and this sense of duty continued to inform the mission work at Ernabella through the early years.<sup>108</sup> At Ernabella in the years with which this chapter is concerned there is no sense that rations were used as they were at Hermannsburg Mission. On the contrary, in 1944 Love reported that at Ernabella there was to be no 'feeding them all in return for a show of conformity to religious teaching'.<sup>109</sup>

While Peggy Brock acknowledges that some missionaries provided rations out of humanitarian concern for dispossessed Aborigines, with the intent to 'supplement not replace traditional foods',<sup>110</sup> missionaries were still caught in the dilemma of how to provide food when it was needed without creating a dependent population. Missionaries at Ernabella were well aware of this dilemma. In Love's 1937 Report to the Presbyterian Mission Board he stressed that caution with regards to giving food had to be exercised when meeting with 'bush natives' lest it 'establish a wrong precedent'.<sup>111</sup> In the November 1941 *Ernabella Newsletter* it was stated that rations were provided 'so that no

---

<sup>107</sup> Following the teachings of Jesus, Christians have a duty to exercise compassion for all of humanity. In this way they express their love of God. The injunction to be charitable is found in the book of Luke in the New Testament. Luke 14:13-14— 'But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And thou shalt be blessed ...' and in the story of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37)

<sup>108</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1963, pp. 48, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Love, J.R.B. *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Brock, P., 'Two-way Food: Bush Tucker and Whitefella's Food', 2008, pp. 21.

<sup>111</sup> Love, R.J.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, August 1937, p. 8.

natives shall die of hunger nor thirst' but at the same time the importance of *preventing* dependence was stressed.<sup>112</sup>

Brock has argued that the rationing system was incompatible with the maintenance of highly mobile desert hunter-gatherer societies as it did not allow for opportunistic food gathering—rations had to be collected from a fixed point which required a degree of sedentarism, yet in order to supplement their diet with traditional foods, mobility was required.<sup>113</sup> Concerns that people associated with the Ernabella Mission should maintain a tribal life and hunting and gathering skills were expressed consistently throughout this time in mission accounts. From the outset it was stated that the 'Mission does not intend to limit the freedom of the people, nor to impair their skill in procuring their food in the bush'.<sup>114</sup> A visitor to the mission in 1943, the Reverend Owen who joined Superintendent Love on a patrol through the Musgrave Ranges, observed that the Ernabella people accompanying them made no distinction between rations and game, all food was shared according to kin obligations with those camped in the Musgrave Ranges. Owen concluded that the issuing of rations did not 'destroy or minimize the obligations of kinship', instead rations were used here within culturally consistent ways.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, people associated with Ernabella Mission were using rationing in ways which did not necessarily curtail their mobility.

---

<sup>112</sup> Love, J.R.B. *Ernabella Newsletter*, November 1941, p. 2.

<sup>113</sup> Brock, P., 'Two-way Food: Bush Tucker and Whitefella's Food', 2008, p. 20.

<sup>114</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, November 1941, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, J.E., *A Visitor's Diary: Ernabella Patrol*, Presbyterian Church of Australia, Board of Missions-Aborigines Department, Melbourne, 1943, p. 31. Rowse has questioned the notion that Aborigines had the same understanding of ration transactions as the providers. The principle of reciprocity was central to hunter-gatherer Aboriginal economies and social relations. See Keen, I., *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion: Yolngu of North East Arnhem Land*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 341; Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution, USA, 1986, p 170. That is, everything received has to be repaid creating a bond and interdependence between giver and receiver which links people in a web of obligations and rights and is inextricably linked to the Dreaming, Country and kin relationships. This relationship minimised risk and was particularly important for desert societies where foods could not generally be accumulated. However, Rowse concludes that there is little evidence to suggest that rations from

A rationing practice used at Ernabella described by Edwards complicates the perception that rations were used coercively to manage and evangelise people. Here missionaries provided rations so that people could maintain contact with their traditional country and culture. In July of each year Ernabella people would leave the mission for a few weeks to collect dingo scalps in their country. During this period missionaries would deliver rations to where people were camped and purchase any dingo scalps which had been collected.<sup>116</sup> Judy Birmingham's study as mentioned in the previous chapter has shown that the Dieri people engaged in 'optimal foraging' using the rations from the mission at Killalpaninna strategically.<sup>117</sup> Not all Aboriginal people in Central Australia therefore, were reduced to pauperisation and detribalisation in the immediate aftermath of the introduction of a 'rationing regime'. The strategic use of rations by Aborigines at Killalpaninna and the provision of rations by Ernabella missionaries to help people maintain their traditional associations with country, demonstrates alternative readings of the impact of rationing and the ability of Aborigines to exploit this impact.

It is difficult to determine conclusively whether the ration system operated in a coercive manner during this early period at Ernabella, but that it rated little mention in official and oral accounts indicates that the provision and receipt of rations did not assume the importance as a management tool that it did elsewhere. There were probably elements of coercion, as for example only children who attended school were given

---

missionaries and officials were regarded in the same light as traditional exchange. This is not to say that the sharing of rations as noted by Owen did not occur.

<sup>116</sup> Edwards, W.H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 30, No. 1, December 1992, p. 9. When Edwards' became Superintendent in 1958 he continued the mission practice of paying 18 shillings per scalp. The Government bounty at the time was £1 (20 shillings). The mission retained 2 shillings per scalp to cover losses, for example, scalps would spoil if not completely dried. Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 17 January 2012.

<sup>117</sup> Birmingham, J., 'Resistance, Creolization or Optimal Foraging at Killalpaninna Mission, South Australia', in R. Torrence & A. Clarke (eds.), *The Archaeology of Difference*, Routledge, London & New York, 2000, p. 363.

rations, but the reality lies somewhere in between. This is supported by oral accounts such as that of Nura Rupert who grew up at Ernabella and recalled that ‘the rations were small’, and there was preference for bush food anyway as the new food made them sick.<sup>118</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter Aboriginal people had participated in the dogging trade by exchanging dingo scalps for rations with doggers who were operating in the Central Reserve. After the mission became a receiver of scalps, Aborigines transferred their trade to the mission where they were better off because the mission paid the full government bounty (less 2 shillings to cover losses). This demonstrates that people recognised the new economy and its ability to work for them. So while rations impacted on their lives, they had not become entrapped by them or rendered passive in its strictures.

### **Clothing**

The missionary approach towards the wearing of clothes by Aborigines at Ernabella was another feature which marked the mission as different. Ernabella Mission did not regard the wearing of clothing as integral to evangelising. As Langmore has pointed out, the belief among Protestant missionaries that Christianising and civilising were bound together and one of the measures of civilisation was the wearing of clothes, was widespread throughout the Pacific in the nineteenth century.<sup>119</sup> One of the first tasks for missionary wives was to encourage the women to clothe themselves.<sup>120</sup> In Australia, John Harris has pointed out, that particularly for nineteenth-century missionaries, ‘the

---

<sup>118</sup> Rupert, N., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, pp. 7, 10.

<sup>119</sup> Langmore, D., ‘The Object Lesson of a Civilised, Christian Home’, 1989, p. 31.

<sup>120</sup> Grimshaw, P., ‘New England Missionary Wives, Hawaiian Women and “The Cult of True Womanhood”’, in M. Jolly & M. Macintyre (eds.), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1989, p. 89.



wearing of clothes was one of the most important expressions of what they considered a Christian way of life',<sup>121</sup> and as Rani Kerin has argued, nakedness was 'viewed as an affront to common decency'.<sup>122</sup> Clare Land's study, *Material Histories*, looking at missions and government reserves in Victoria in the early decades of the twentieth century through fabric samples held in the Museum Victoria collection, argues that the issuing of clothing had wider aims than evangelising. She concluded that clothing, as well as rations, were used coercively by the Aboriginal Protection Board as a means of 'erasing Aboriginality and inculcating white values such as settled life, individualism' and so on.<sup>123</sup> Consequently it has become an orthodoxy that missionaries have been directly responsible for the clothing of indigenous peoples by instilling notions of shame about nakedness.<sup>124</sup> As Berndt and Berndt wrote, 'clothing the naked' was a task of the utmost priority for missionaries which extended throughout the whole mission period<sup>125</sup> from earlier missions such as Ramahyuck, where missionaries clothed Aborigines in order to 'nurture modesty and abstinence' as prerequisites for conversion,<sup>126</sup> to later missions such as Hope Valley on Cape York and Mt Margaret in the Western Desert where clothing was mandatory for those working on the missions.<sup>127</sup> While the majority

---

<sup>121</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood*, 1994, p. 530.

<sup>122</sup> Kerin, R., '“Natives Allowed to Remain Naked”: An Unorthodox Approach to Medical Work at Ernabella Mission', *Health and History*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2006, p. 83.

<sup>123</sup> Land, C., *Material Histories*, Museum Victoria Australia, 2002,

<<http://museumvictoria.com.au/material/index.asp>>, accessed 1 September 2009.

<sup>124</sup> In a letter to the editor of *Oceania* in September 1942, Love contested the assessment by R. M. & C. H. Berndt that missionaries were responsible for teaching Aborigines that it was shameful to be naked. He cites examples of Aborigines who had had no prior contact with 'whites', who when meeting explorers donned clothing. He argued that 'the consciousness of nakedness before a higher being is as old as the book of Genesis'. The Berndts replied that they had observed this at Ooldea where men and women never went naked in front of missionaries and unclothed children were sent back by elders to the camp because elders believed that missionaries would not like to see the children without clothes. See 'Correspondence', *Oceania*, Vol. 13, No. 3, March 1943, pp. 282-83.

<sup>125</sup> Berndt, R. M. & C. H., 'Body and Soul: More than an Episode', 1988, p. 53.

<sup>126</sup> Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, 1989, p 20.

<sup>127</sup> See also Loos, N., 'Concern and Contempt: Church and Missionary Attitudes Towards Aborigines in North Queensland in the Nineteenth Century', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988,

still assumed that conversion to Christianity depended on changes to traditional practices, including the wearing of clothes, Brock has pointed out that by the late mission period a deeper understanding of Aboriginal cultures was emerging, and there were some who believed that survival depended on people remaining in their own country and maintaining rather than changing traditional ways.<sup>128</sup>

At Ernabella, mission policy, including the clothing policy, was driven by this newer appreciation of Aboriginal cultures. From the outset Duguid's vision for the mission at Ernabella was that there would be as little interference as possible in the tribal life of the people where it was hoped that 'pure-blooded individuals not yet degraded by contact with civilization' could be preserved.<sup>129</sup> During his campaign to have a mission established at Ernabella he wrote to the Commissioner for Public Works in South Australia, the Hon H. S. Hudd stating that 'the best of their own culture must be retained' and there should be no 'attempt to civilise and Christianise ... in one fell swoop'.<sup>130</sup> Ernabella policy went beyond just non-enforcement to actively discouraging the wearing of clothes in the early years. According to Hilliard 'the "school uniform" was the birthday suit' and the reasons for this were two fold—firstly for health purposes,<sup>131</sup> because the lack of facilities to wash and care for clothes would compromise peoples' health and secondly, out of respect for cultural traditions. At

---

p. 107; Stanton, J., 'Mt. Margaret: Missionaries and the Aftermath', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose, (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA., 1988, p. 293.

<sup>128</sup> Brock, P., 'Nakedness and Clothing', 2007.

<sup>129</sup> Duguid C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 36. This thinking is underpinned by an essentialist understanding of culture. See earlier discussion in Chapter Two.

<sup>130</sup> Duguid to Hudd, 14 August 1936, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>131</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 157. See Kerin, R., ' "Natives Allowed to Remain Naked" ', 2006, p.85, for further discussion of the health benefits of nakedness. Kerin has argued that the no-clothing policy was integral to the medical work of the mission as it was believed at this time that people were healthier without clothes. This belief was widespread at the time. Berndt & Berndt state that the wearing of clothes by those unused to them can make people more susceptible to illness – see Berndt, R. M. & C. H., *From Black to White in South Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951, p. 171.

Ernabella nakedness was seen as confirmation that Aborigines were not becoming detribalised rather than being regarded as synonymous with uncivilised savagery.

Duguid was deeply affected by the 'sad contrast' he observed on his trip through the area with Pastor Albrecht in 1936, between those who were clad in cast-off European clothing and those in their 'natural naked state'.<sup>132</sup> Visitors to the mission such as Lauri Sheard who accompanied Charles Mountford on his expedition in 1940, noted the difference between those clothed and those who were not. After rain, those wearing clothes were shivering and 'quite miserable for sometime after the rain ceased', the unclothed were 'beautifully clean and quite at ease sitting beside their fires'. He also observed that those who were unclothed retained far more dignity.<sup>133</sup> Another visitor who spent time at the mission in 1943, the Reverend J. E. Owen, devoted several pages of his diary to discussing the merits or otherwise of the 'no-clothing' rule and displayed an ambivalent attitude towards the policy. On the one hand, he noted the degradation of the 'poor dependent creatures about Oodnadatta, clothed in filthy rags' compared to the naked dignity of those at Ernabella. On the other hand, thirteen days later, while on patrol with Superintendent Love, he questioned the assumption that all traditional ways should continue. He asked why steel tools could not be given to make life easier and why should clothes not be issued to protect against the cold. He pointed out that this was no time for sentimentality as Aboriginal lives were 'close to tragedy'. He noted that a woman with a small child 'looked neither natural nor splendid as she trudged along with the weight of her year-old child' in the cold rain.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 47.

<sup>133</sup> Sheard, L., *An Australian Youth among Desert Aborigines: Journal of an Expedition among the Aborigines of Central Australia*, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1964, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, J.E., *A Visitor's Diary*, 1943, pp. 9, 35-36.

Such ambivalence towards the ‘no-clothing’ policy was evident among mission staff despite the mission policy. As early as 1941, Superintendent Love was questioning the wisdom of adhering to it so rigidly. He wrote in his journal on March 9 1941, that ‘the advocates of nakedness are not recognising the fact that the people will put on what rags they can get’ and was of the opinion that while the children should remain unclothed, the younger women should have ‘decent dresses’.<sup>135</sup> By 1944, Love wrote that young women are now demanding to wear clothes and that in order to stop people from drifting eastwards towards cattle stations where they were attracted by ‘white man’s clothing’, Ernabella must provide clothing.<sup>136</sup> In his 1945 School Report the teacher, Trudinger, saw it as an achievement that all children attended school unclothed and were ‘not ashamed of it’. He argued that the children remained healthier and perhaps he saw this as a measure of the success of the mission’s non-interference policy and evidence that Ernabella was different to other missions. As Brock noted, Trudinger<sup>137</sup> appeared to be the main supporter of this policy.

There are no reasons given by Aboriginal people themselves as to the desire for clothes but Brock has proposed a range of possible reasons—protection against the

---

<sup>135</sup> Love, J. R. B., ‘Journal of Mr. Love-1940-49’, 9/3/1941, PCA, MLK2778, AE/04.

<sup>136</sup> Love, J. R. B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Brock, P., ‘Nakedness and Clothing’, 2007. There were questions raised in the correspondence as to Trudinger’s reasons here in the light of him being cautioned by the Presbyterian Board of Missions. A letter dated the 23 March 1949 noted an investigation which found that he had been ‘culpably indiscreet in his relationship with native girls and young women’. While he continued as Superintendent, his ordination and induction were deferred—PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6 (iii). It is far from clear whether Trudinger’s alleged culpability stemmed from moral sensibilities held by the church at the time or from actual incidents. It is interesting that two years earlier, Trudinger supported Love’s 1944 position and wrote that goods including clothing were still inadequate at Ernabella and people were drifting away to where they could obtain them. In particular, the government settlement at Areyonga was seen as a considerable problem. The General Secretary of the Australian Board of Missions wrote to the Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory on the 26 November 1947 outlining Ernabella’s policy and explaining how Areyonga was impacting negatively on the work being done at Ernabella because it attracted Ernabella people by the provision of free food and ‘more abundant clothing’. There were fears that centres such as Areyonga would lead to tribal disintegration and would make Ernabella redundant. Trudinger to Coombes (General Secretary APBM), 20 February 1947; Coombes to F. H. Moy, 26 November 1947, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

weather, demonstration of their degree of ‘sophistication’ and distance from ‘bush’ people, and for modesty.<sup>138</sup> Duguid noted on his visit to Ernabella in 1946 that ‘most of the natives had some clothing’.<sup>139</sup> The preference for clothing was recognised in the correspondence between the Presbyterian Board of Missions and the Aboriginal Protection Board of South Australia during 1946 and 1947 which noted the ‘growing desire on the part of the people for more of the amenities of the white man’s civilization, particularly food and clothes’, the embarrassment of older school girls ‘in the presence of white folks’ and the fear that unless they were allowed to wear clothes they would leave school.<sup>140</sup> The Secretary of the Aboriginal Protection Board, admitted that while ‘some members of the Board are opposed to the practice of clothing aborigines (sic)’ he believed that ‘at least one garment should be worn’ by older school girls, the aged, the sick and those dependent on the mission.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the debate about the clothing policy, the rule that prevented school children from wearing clothes continued for some time. As Nura Rupert recalls as a schoolgirl in the 1950s, ‘we teenage boys and girls were naked’. Tjikalyi Tjapiya also remembers that clothes were not worn at school. She told Ute Eickelkamp that when they finished school ‘somebody made a dress for us’, and this was regarded as ‘special’, in recognition of being a *kungka* [young woman].<sup>142</sup> Images from David Moore’s collection of photographs in the National Library of Australia show the Ernabella school room in 1963 with all but one child naked, although Bill Edwards has noted that dresses

---

<sup>138</sup> Brock, P., ‘Nakedness and Clothing’, 2007. Edwards recalls being told by staff in 1958 that local girls had been influenced by others who had lived at Ooldea and had worn clothes there. Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 17 January 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Duguid, C., *Ernabella Revisited*, 1946, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Coombes to Penhall, 4 December 1946, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

<sup>141</sup> Penhall to Coombes, 15 May 1947, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

<sup>142</sup> Rupert, N., ‘White Man is Coming (Nura Rupert’s Story)’, cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 10; Tjapiya, Tjikalyi, ‘A Day in Mission Times’ cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 18.

for older girls were first issued in 1958.<sup>143</sup> The ‘no-clothing’ policy appeared to be applied more rigidly to children than to adults as the following example shows. On 24 April 1945 Superintendent Love wrote to the Presbyterian Board of Missions for permission to issue uniforms to the Brownie pack otherwise it would have to be discontinued. He wrote, ‘what will be the use of their winning badges if they have nowhere to wear them’, adding that wearing a Brownie uniform for one afternoon a week should not compromise the no-clothing rule.<sup>144</sup>

Even though Ernabella Mission displayed an enlightened approach to Aboriginal cultures, the 1940s discourse which assumed that Aboriginality was determined by genetic markers which therefore distinguished “half-castes” from “full-bloods”, was manifest in its practices. The ‘no-clothing’ rule did not apply to children of mixed parentage because the aims of preserving cultural integrity were not deemed relevant. Neither was it believed that these children benefited from the assumed health aspects of nakedness. “Half-caste” children were seen as evidence of the exploitation of Aboriginal women by “white” men and as discussed in the previous chapter this was an overriding concern for Duguid and the Aboriginal Protection Board. One of the motivations for establishing the mission was to put an end to what were considered exploitative relationships by creating a buffer zone between the Pitjantjatjara and “white” men who frequented the Central Reserve. In 1937 among the list of immediate needs for the station, Love had included ‘cottage homes for half-castes’.<sup>145</sup> Even though these were not built it appeared that there was some anticipation that they may be needed, considering the numbers of doggers who were cohabiting with Aboriginal women on the

---

<sup>143</sup> See Figure 10, Moore, D. 1963, <<http://nla.pic-an14066835-5>>, accessed 25 May 2009; Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards 17 January 2012.

<sup>144</sup> Love to Matthew, 24 April 1945, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502, Folder 4.

<sup>145</sup> Love, R.J.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, August 1937, p. 4.

Reserve. However it was assumed that this provision for “half-castes” would only be a temporary measure as Ernabella was considered to be a settlement for “full-blood” Aborigines where they could be protected until they were ready to be assimilated. In 1946 Professor Cleland from the University of Adelaide saw ‘a prospect of a happy, pure-blood native population being resident here for many years to come’.<sup>146</sup>

The arrival of “half-caste” children was monitored closely throughout the early years and their presence recorded carefully. In 1940 it was noted on the top of a letter that there were 14 “half-castes” in the vicinity of Ernabella<sup>147</sup> and MacDougall noted that there were seven “half-caste” children at the mission.<sup>148</sup> The distinction was obviously regarded as important by missionaries as an anecdote related by Love in 1943 demonstrates. The Love’s housegirl, Kaljaldji, described a brown hen sitting on eggs as an ‘Arpa Cussa’ or “half-caste”. When the eggs hatched into black chicks they were described as “full-bloods”.<sup>149</sup>

“Half-caste” children were considered to have different requirements. MacDougall noted that those of school age who were attending school ‘are given light work in the afternoon’, whereas “full-blood” children went back to the camp and family life.<sup>150</sup> When a five year old “half-caste” boy appeared at the mission in June 1947 an urgent telegram was sent from Superintendent Wright to Duguid for advice about where to send him. It was argued that Ernabella could not provide the suitable training which “half-castes” required and both the Aboriginal Protection Board and the Presbyterian Board of Missions replied promptly that he should be sent to the Umeewarra Children’s

---

<sup>146</sup> Cleland, J. B., ‘Professor J. B. Cleland’s Report’, 1946, p. 4.

<sup>147</sup> No author, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>148</sup> MacDougall W. B., ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, p. 3, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>149</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 3.

<sup>150</sup> MacDougall, W. B., ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, p. 3.

Home in Port Augusta. There was no mention of his family or his parents in this correspondence. In October of that year Superintendent Wright wrote to the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Missions, Reverend Coombes, about two other “half-caste” boys whose guardian and mother would perhaps only consent to the ‘little fellows being sent away’ when they were older, despite his attempts to persuade them that it would be best for the children.<sup>151</sup>

However, by 1949 there appeared to be an emerging shift in the thinking at Ernabella that “half-caste” children had different requirements. In a letter to Coombes, Trudinger wrote that while it was sometimes in the best interests of the child to send them away, in some cases it ‘would be unwise and cruel’ and there were three children currently at the mission ‘who fit into tribal life perfectly well ... if treated ... as tribal natives’.<sup>152</sup> But in 1954, there was a return to the idea that “half-caste” children had different needs which could not be met by the mission without discriminating against the other children. This was due to their perceived more rapid advancement along the path to assimilation and if they stayed at the mission they would be held back. The policy of sending “half-castes” away was reiterated by the Presbyterian Board of Missions.<sup>153</sup>

In her assessment of the clothing policy, Kerin has concluded that it is difficult to know whether it achieved its aims of promoting health and maintaining cultural integrity. As far as health benefits for children, there is little evidence either way. In regards to the policy’s contribution to respect for traditional lifestyle and the maintenance of cultural integrity, Kerin has pointed to the irony in its outcomes. The intent of the policy was to allow people at Ernabella to have some control over the path towards their inevitable contact with wider society. However, adherence to the ‘no-

---

<sup>151</sup> Wright to Coombes, 14 October 1947, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

<sup>152</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 28 October 1949, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

<sup>153</sup> Coombes to Trudinger, 23 February 1954, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504.



clothing' rule perhaps limited Aborigines who wanted to wear clothes, and so stalled progress towards this end, because it failed to acknowledge cultural dynamism.<sup>154</sup>

Brock too has concluded that despite it being obvious to missionaries that people desired clothing, they persisted in limiting the availability of clothes to those who worked at the mission partly out of the belief that it would lead to sexual misconduct.<sup>155</sup> And this was alluded to by Trudinger in his 1945 School Report where he commented on the excellent 'moral tone' of the unclothed students who mix freely but 'within natural decorous limits'.<sup>156</sup>

From my reading of the correspondence, the missionaries working at the mission appeared to have been more responsive to change. Assumptions underpinned by romanticised and idealised notions of unchanging tribal Aborigines, where becoming detribalised or of "mixed race" meant the end of Aboriginality, were dominant during this period and were certainly evident in Duguid's writing. But the clothing policy as it operated at the mission appeared to be more ambivalent and pragmatic with recognition of the changing desires of the people evident in missionary writing and reports. Observations that people were wearing clothing indicate that the people, to a certain degree, were making their own decisions. Love reported that often when clothes were requested they were in short supply due to 'war-time restrictions' suggesting that the availability of, or rather lack of, clothing may also have played a role in mission policy.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Kerin, R., ' "Natives Allowed Remain Naked"', 2006, p. 95.

<sup>155</sup> Brock, P., 'Nakedness and Clothing', 2007.

<sup>156</sup> Trudinger, R. M., 'Report on the Ernabella Mission School, June 1945, p. 1-5, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>157</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 1.

## Language and education

The language policy at Ernabella, while not unique was unusual in the Australian mission context<sup>158</sup> but was in keeping with Christianity as being a ‘translating religion’. As Wall has explained, central to Christianity and providing the foundation for salvation, is that first act of translation related to a specific time and place. That is, the Incarnation, when the “Word of God” was translated into the tangible human form of Jesus. A core Christian belief is that in order to have universal relevance, but at the same time to be culturally coherent, Christianity requires translations over and over in local contexts, developing local interpretations and local practices.<sup>159</sup> As Andrew Walls puts it, the “Word of God” has to be

made flesh again in other places and cultures as he is received there by faith ... That Word is to pass into all those distinctive ways of thought, those networks of kinship, those special ways of doing things ... [that gives the culture] its coherence, its identity ... Christ is to become actualized—to become flesh as it were—as distinctively ... as *appropriately*—as when he lived as a Palestinian Jew in the early first century.<sup>160</sup>

This was clearly understood by the superintendents at Ernabella in this early period and according to David Trudinger, Love in particular was a linguist and a ‘translator’ in this

---

<sup>158</sup> For example, Duckham points out that at Mt Margaret, missionary Schenk, finding it difficult to find local words for Christian concepts had by 1923 abandoned any thought of using the vernacular and English became the language for ‘teaching the Gospel’. See Duckham, I., ‘Visionary, Vassal or Vandal?’, 2000, p. 49.

<sup>159</sup> Walls, A., *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, p. 26. Walls (pp.18-9) has pointed out that the survival of Christianity has always *depended* on its translatability into diverse cultures. Initially it was the act of the Jewish Christians in the taking of Christianity to Gentiles outside Israel, and since then it has been continuing ‘cross-cultural diffusion’ which has ‘saved Christian faith for the world’.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 47, 50.

tradition.<sup>161</sup> The task of translation was considered to be an important aspect of missionary work at Ernabella. The first Superintendent, Rev. H. L. Taylor noted that ‘these people will give their own contribution to Christian thought and action’. In 1938 he expressed his frustration that although he saw translation work as ‘the first essential’ he felt hampered by lack of time and the availability of interpreters.<sup>162</sup> The methods used by school teacher Trudinger were also in keeping with local translatability. In 1940 Trudinger asserted that the development of literacy in the vernacular among the students was central to achieving the aim of introducing and gaining acceptance of the ‘Christian Gospel’.<sup>163</sup> Five years later, he reiterated this approach which was supported by the Presbyterian Board of Missions who ruled that Church services should be conducted in Pitjantjatjara:

much attention [was given to language as] the spiritual, being a deep sacred matter, of the inner mind and soul, is only apprehended through the native’s habitual thought medium. There is no divine premium on English. When belief in Christ and His Gospel ultimately comes, it will of course be felt and thought out and expressed in the native’s own language.<sup>164</sup>

Two years later, it was reported that a hymnal with fifty translated hymns was ready for printing and that the first translation of the Gospel of St Mark was completed.<sup>165</sup>

The Christian imperative to localise and indigenise, but at the same time to maintain a common Christian identity presents considerable tensions. According to Wall

---

<sup>161</sup> Trudinger, D., ‘The Language(s) of Love’, 2007, p. 2.

<sup>162</sup> Taylor, H.L., 1938 ‘Statement of Policy and Principles’, p. 1, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>163</sup> Trudinger’s Annual Report on the school in MacDougall, W. B. ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, p. 2, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>164</sup> Trudinger, R.M., ‘Report on the Ernabella Mission School’, June 1945, p. 2, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>165</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1947, p. 3; *Ernabella Newsletter*, November 1947.

when expressed in local languages the material can be interpreted in such a way that it is transformed and has ‘the potential actually to reshape and expand the Christian faith’.<sup>166</sup> While such tensions were played out in the debate over language policy in the school at Ernabella, there was an additional dilemma in relation to the focus on local translatability as the path to successful evangelisation.

In relation to the language policy at Ernabella, the years between 1940 and 1945 were marked by tension and disagreement between the two key mission staff, the Superintendent, Rev. J. R. B. Love and the school teacher, Ron Trudinger.<sup>167</sup> From Trudinger’s statements above it is evident that his approach was driven by the evangelical imperative which according to his son David Trudinger, had a ‘single-minded concentration on the conversion project’ which took precedence over all other considerations.<sup>168</sup> That is the use of the local language as the first language at the mission was seen as a measure of the degree to which their work would remain true to the translation requirement of Christianity and to the original non-interventionist aim of the mission. Trudinger believed that tribal integrity depended on respecting and maintaining the use of the vernacular, but resisted English literacy as it forced children to ‘think in a foreign language’. His evangelical aim is made clear in his report which stated that the mission should not be ‘making semi-civilized sophisticates’ but producing ‘the first fruits of the Gospel’.<sup>169</sup> On the other hand, Love, taking a more practical and perhaps secular approach, advocated a bilingual policy because he believed that restricting education to the vernacular would limit and disadvantage Ernabella people in

---

<sup>166</sup> Walls, A., 1996, *The Missionary Movement*, p 28-29.

<sup>167</sup> Trudinger, D., ‘The Language(s) of Love’, 2007, p. 40.

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30. This approach can be compared to Hermannsburg where according to Diane Austin-Broos literacy was taught for the purpose of the ‘practice of the liturgy’ rather than to develop skills for the future. See Austin-Broos, D., *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009, p. 89.

<sup>169</sup> Trudinger, R.M., ‘Report on the Ernabella Mission School’, June 1945, p. 1, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

the long term. He certainly supported the use of the vernacular language as a means to achieving the original non-interference aim of the mission and the maintenance of a strong tribal integrity. However, he also argued that literacy in English was essential to meet the ‘encroaching Westernism’.<sup>170</sup> He did not see Aborigines as a “dying race” but as people who would eventually live in the wider society. Therefore, he advocated that English be included in the school curriculum because he perceived that the children were ‘backward’ compared to other missions and without English instruction the school could not be justified. In 1944 some compromise was reached to this impasse when at the request of the Presbyterian Board of Missions, English was introduced as a second language and Pitjantjatjara was retained as the first language.<sup>171</sup>

The use of the vernacular was central to how the school was to be different to other mission schools. It was considered central to the whole missionising project and ‘integral to achieving mission aims’. As Trudinger has argued, the school was regarded by the Church as ‘the jewel in the Ernabella crown’.<sup>172</sup> In June 1940 the first school building was completed and although rudimentary it was an improvement to holding classes out in the open in the creek bed during the winter months. Although Trudinger reported that the curriculum differed from a ‘normal whites’ school it appeared to be reasonably ambitious considering that school was held in the mornings only. ‘Writing, reading and spelling, arithmetic, hygiene, drawing, singing, gardening, woodwork and sewing, geography and Nature Study’ were all taught in Pitjantjatjara with good progress being reported.<sup>173</sup> From an attendance of twenty five children in 1940, by 1943 there

---

<sup>170</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘The Policy of Ernabella, 1944’, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>172</sup> Trudinger D., ‘The Language(s) of Love’, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>173</sup> Trudinger’s Annual Report on the school in MacDougall, W. B. ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

were two hundred children enrolled with an average daily attendance of forty five.<sup>174</sup> In December 1943, Trudinger reported that interest in literacy had grown and now ‘old men who are head of the tribe are most interested in the paper talk’.<sup>175</sup> By 1945 the number of children literate in Pitjantjatjara had grown from thirty in 1941 to eighty. According to the mission narrative, by all accounts children appeared to be enthusiastic and eager to attend school. The story of the school contained in the mission records does not bear out the claim such as that made by Phyl and Noel Wallace that the school ‘contributed more to cultural destruction than any other introduced activity’.<sup>176</sup> In 1945 Trudinger noted ‘attitude to work commendable’<sup>177</sup> and in 1950 it was reported that this was ‘one of the happiest schools in Australia’.<sup>178</sup> Because there was no compulsion to attend, that there was increasing attendance bears this out. As Love pointed out, children attended ‘according to the wandering of the parents’.<sup>179</sup> Such irregular attendance was sanctioned by the mission as it indicated that tribal life was being maintained.<sup>180</sup> While not mentioned in the school reports, an interesting feature of the school was that the students played a part in the programme and in this sense it could be considered a collaborative project. As Nura Rupert pointed out, they first taught Trudinger the Pitjantjatjara language, ‘the children and young girls, constantly taught him’ and then he taught them how to write it.<sup>181</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943.

<sup>175</sup> Trudinger, R. M., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1943, p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic, 1977, p. 32.

<sup>177</sup> Trudinger, R.M., ‘Report on the Ernabella Mission School’, June 1945, p. 4, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>178</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1950, p. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘Report for the period from March 1<sup>st</sup> 1941 to June 30<sup>th</sup> 1941’, p. 1, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>180</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘Ernabella Mission: Report for Year Ending 30/6/1942’, p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> Rupert cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 11.

The school at Ernabella, when considered in the wider context of the provision of education for “full-blood” Aborigines at the time, can be seen as progressive. It was the only school in South Australia at the time where English was not the official language.<sup>182</sup> Both educators and Aboriginal Protection Boards considered the Ernabella School to be ‘An Educational Experiment’, the title of an article Trudinger wrote for *The Messenger* on 17 June 1942.<sup>183</sup> The outcomes presented challenges to assumptions about the educability of Aboriginal children.<sup>184</sup> An Education Department official observed in 1944 that Ernabella School demonstrated that ‘primitive nomads’ could be educated—they did not need to first become ‘anglicized’ and in addition, they were capable of achieving standard outcomes.<sup>185</sup> The school exercise book among Duguid’s papers in the National Library of Australia has pages of beautifully formed and neat writing, illustrated by carefully drawn and coloured figures. The only difference to work from other schools in this era was that the words were written in Pitjantjatjara.<sup>186</sup> Throughout this period of the mission, teachers regularly reported that the children were certainly not inferior to “white” children but varied likewise in their ability<sup>187</sup> and in 1943 Trudinger reported that they were generally ‘ahead of white children of the same age’.<sup>188</sup> In 1949, the teacher Mary Baird introduced a new teaching methodology, the Laubach method, which had been developed by missionary expert Dr Laubach to teach illiterates to read. In a letter to Coombes, the General Secretary of the Presbyterian

---

<sup>182</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, October 1944.

<sup>183</sup> Trudinger, R. M., ‘An Educational Experiment’, *The Messenger*, 17 June 1942.

<sup>184</sup> One interesting long term outcome which has been credited to the school is that it provided the foundation of the art movement for which Ernabella is famous today. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>185</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, October 1944.

<sup>186</sup> No author or date, Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

<sup>187</sup> Trudinger’s Annual Report on the school in MacDougall, W. B. ‘Report on Ernabella to 30/6/1940’, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>188</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1943.

Board of Missions in August of that year, she outlined the amazing success of students attaining Grade 3 level in three months.<sup>189</sup>

### **Evangelising**

Right through the period covered in this chapter the missionary narrative consistently adhered to the original aim that this mission was to be different in its approach to evangelising. There was the tension mentioned earlier between the methods used by the mission and others concerned about Aboriginal welfare who took the position that people should be civilised without delay. But Love was of the belief that a ‘nomadic hunter [could still be] a Christian’.<sup>190</sup> This belief diverged radically from understandings about cultures of that time which perceived cultures in essentialist terms, as derived from a ‘pure’ cultural form, with unchanging and identifiable features. Yet the ambivalence of Love’s understanding can be seen in the resolve to not interfere in traditional ways and to facilitate the maintenance of tribal life but at the same time believing that ‘a centre of Christian fellowship and service’ could be established at Ernabella.<sup>191</sup> Missionaries at Ernabella saw themselves as ‘interpreters’ and exemplars of the Christian life and they hoped that through their example Aboriginal people would come to accept Christ and ‘his way of life’.<sup>192</sup> It was regularly noted during the first decade that people had no ‘interest in the message of Christ’ even though they were attending services.<sup>193</sup> Love appeared to be quite relaxed about this and accepted that

---

<sup>189</sup> Baird to Coombes, 6 August 1949, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503.

<sup>190</sup> Love, J.R.B., ‘The Policy of Ernabella’, 1944, pp. 1, 3, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>191</sup> Love, J.R.B., Report on Ernabella Mission, 1937, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 1.

<sup>193</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1942, p. 3.



such change would be generational.<sup>194</sup> There were occasional reports of what were perceived to be evidence of progress in evangelising giving missionaries a glimmer of hope. In May 1943 Love reported on a burial ceremony where part of a spear was placed upright in the ground which he was told was to allow the spirit of the deceased to 'Go Jesus'. Those at the burial agreed to pray with Love and he hoped that they were coming to a Christian understanding of death.<sup>195</sup>

Eight years after the start of the mission, a reflective question was posed in the April 1945 *Newsletter*—'Is it Satisfactory?' It was noted that the task was increasingly challenged by the 'quickly changing conditions ... and the contrary influences which work upon the life of the natives'.<sup>196</sup> Circumstances had changed in Central Australia following the Second World War and the Guided Missile Testing Range project had 'opened up the inland'.<sup>197</sup> The idea of a change in economic activity was mooted in order for people to deal with inevitable contact. Love wrote that they will 'have to become producers as well as consumers'. On the whole, Love concluded that progress had been good and that people were being prepared for the future contact with the wider society and the eight years of missionary work had been worthwhile.<sup>198</sup> By 1947 it was noted that the 'people are seeking more civilized ways' and there was a gradual shift towards a more settled life.<sup>199</sup> But it was still noted in 1948 by a visiting anthropologist, R. C. Seegar, that 'tribal life [was] not being destroyed'.<sup>200</sup>

Ernabella despite its isolation however, was not immune to the harm caused to Aboriginal populations from introduced diseases. While the *Newsletters* reported that the

---

<sup>194</sup> Love, J.R.B., Ernabella Mission: Annual Report to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1945, p. 3, PCA, MLMSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>195</sup> Love, J.R.B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 3.

<sup>196</sup> Love, J.R.B., 'Is it Satisfactory?' *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1945, p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1945, p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1947, p. 1.

<sup>200</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1948, p. 4.

health of those at the mission and in the vicinity was generally healthy right through this period, in 1942 and 1943 there were the ‘inevitable’ epidemics of colds and influenza.<sup>201</sup> Tragedy in the form of a measles epidemic struck in April 1948, resulting in twenty three deaths and with 220 people so ill that they were unable to look after themselves. In discussions about the crisis the following year, the newly arrived nursing Sister, Ruth Dawkins wrote that it ‘sounded like the story of the Black Death’.<sup>202</sup>

In December 1948 the *Newsletter* reflected on the mission’s first decade. ‘The prime purpose ... remains unaltered—to build up a self-supporting, self-respecting, healthy, industrious, Native community of truly Christian people’ without compulsion or coercion.<sup>203</sup> In 1949 the Rev. G. Werner, a visiting anthropologist, praised the way in which Ernabella was administered and observed that he found a community in preparation for transition where the new will ‘eventually entirely displace the old’<sup>204</sup> which was in accord with understandings about culture contact of that time.<sup>205</sup>

Even by 1949, as Dawkins wrote, there were still no converts and no ‘pressure towards it’.<sup>206</sup> Missionaries did not perceive the slow progress towards evangelising as evidence of cultural backwardness or that Christianity was incompatible with traditional life.<sup>207</sup> It was not until 1950 that a celebratory trope in regards to evangelising appeared in the missionary narrative and Trudinger remarked on the keenness of the young people

---

<sup>201</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, February 1942, p. 3.

<sup>202</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, p. 4. Another measles epidemic in 1957 will be discussed in the next chapter. Heather Goodall has argued that the mission reports downplayed the mortality rate and that according to her research derived from oral histories ‘between one quarter and one third of the Anangu population at Ernabella and on the smaller properties died within a couple of weeks’. This raises the issue of the reliability of memory which is discussed in Chapter Five in relation to the nuclear testing programme. See Goodall, H., ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe: Contested Memories of Nuclear Testing and Measles Epidemics at Ernabella’, in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds.), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 63.

<sup>203</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 3.

<sup>204</sup> Werner, G., *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1949, p. 3.

<sup>205</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>206</sup> Dawkins R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>207</sup> The Lutherans at Hermannsburg believed this to be the case early on. See Austin-Brooks, D., *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*, 2009, p. 28.

for catechism lessons.<sup>208</sup> Thirty four young people attended a Summer Bible School during January 1951, for which over the previous five months they had saved the money to cover food. However, not all Pitjantjatjara people were as keen and there was some opposition. As Trudinger wrote, ‘some of the young Christians have come in for quite a bit of mild persecution—trying to burn their Gospels etc—but this is only to be expected. I expect even more opposition after they are baptised’.<sup>209</sup> Trudinger did not give any explanation for such opposition, but neither did he express surprise. In 1952 he reported ‘the first fruits of the 15 years of the mission’ had been realised and by September 1952 twenty one young people were ready for Baptism. On 9 November 1952 at 4.30 p.m. they were baptised in front of 400 people in the newly completed Church which had been dedicated that morning accompanied by hymns sung in Pitjantjatjara. ‘It came to pass on this day that Christianity had caught up with people who had remained unchanged for those 20 centuries’, the *Ernabella Newsletter* reported.<sup>210</sup>

The early 1950s were described as a ‘time of consolidation and expansion’ but still with traditional practices being maintained.<sup>211</sup> In 1951 Trudinger reported that most of the people went out into the Reserve and ‘contacted, for a big corroboree, a section of the Pitjantjatjara Tribe as yet untouched out there. These came in with the others at the end of August’.<sup>212</sup> In 1952 ‘walkabouts’ were still encouraged<sup>213</sup> and in the final

---

<sup>208</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 15 November 1950, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(ii). Although Trudinger also pointed out the difficulties with fitting in the lessons because of the young men’s absences from the station for fencing work or hunting.

<sup>209</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 17 January 1951, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(i).

<sup>210</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952.

<sup>211</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1950. The Hospital Report in January 1950 reported twins born to a mother who had recently arrived at Ernabella. But before the nursing Sister could get there, the mother had killed one—this was a necessity of tribal life on the relatively rare occasions when twins were born. This does indicate that in 1950 people were still engaged in traditional practices. Baird, R. M., PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>212</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 15 November 1951, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(i).

*Newsletter* for this period, Trudinger stated that ‘tribal sanctions have not been interfered with’, people were still living in camps, ‘bush skills’ had been maintained and ‘clothing has not been encouraged’. He maintained that all decisions were made by the people themselves.<sup>214</sup> This does indicate that Ernabella had remained true to its original aim of evangelising without intervening in traditional ways. But in March of that year, it was reported that changes would have to be made and successful evangelising would necessitate ‘revolution in life for both individual and tribe’. In addition, in order to survive in the modern world Ernabella people had to ‘quickly bridge the mighty cultural gap’. By the 1950s the South Australian Government’s Aboriginal policy was changing to one of assimilation indicating that there could be a change of direction for the mission.<sup>215</sup>

Most of the correspondence and reports for this period were written by the two longer serving Superintendents Love and Trudinger and despite their different approaches to evangelising (as discussed above) both wrote that the founding aim of the mission underpinned their work. While the writing of the more experienced missionary Love tended to question the practices of the mission, the younger Trudinger wrote less reflectively and with more certainty about his approach. But overall, in both men’s writing it was generally concluded that the values and practices of the mission were sound. The *Ernabella Newsletters* which have provided much of the information for this chapter were written for a specific audience and with a specific purpose in mind, that is to promote the work of the mission to the Church congregation in the cities. From April 1947 the *Newsletters* featured a photograph on each cover. Despite the mission policy to maintain tribal life, the images are somewhat ambivalent but do indicate that tribal life

---

<sup>213</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1952, p. 2.

<sup>214</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952.

<sup>215</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1952, pp. 1, 2.

represented the past and that the future would be different. There are images which promote the 'no-clothing' policy showing happy, attentive and eager schoolchildren, there is an image of 'Bush Folk' arriving at the mission in November 1947 which provides a contrast to images of groups of young Ernabella women tidily groomed and dressed and smiling for the camera. On the June 1951 *Ernabella Newsletter* the caption 'Leisure time in the sun at Ernabella' shows groups of mostly young people, clothed and socialising and chatting. It would be expected then that the reports from the mission would be dominated by the successful evangelising trope, and would omit their failures to achieve this in this early period. However, regular reports appeared about the lack of success, but these were qualified by the firm belief that this would eventuate sometime in the future if the proper foundations were laid. This appeared to satisfy the Presbyterian congregations and the Board of Missions.

### **Conclusion: An Emerging Community**

Despite, or perhaps because of the approach adopted at Ernabella by 1952 fifteen years after the establishment of the mission, Trudinger wrote that the mission was now regarded as the 'tribal home'.<sup>216</sup> Unfortunately there are few documented accounts from Pitjantjatjara people for this period and the *Newsletters* are notable for the absence of Aboriginal voices, so there is little which tells us what the people actually thought or how they perceived the mission. When people remember the mission times today they tend to regard the mission positively. Nyukana Baker told Eickelkamp that life at the mission 'used to be nice' with plenty of food. School was held in the mornings and in the afternoons they 'went out bush' on donkeys to catch rabbits and collect witchetty

---

<sup>216</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 4.

grubs.<sup>217</sup> Wally Dunn's statement that people arrived at Ernabella 'to start to grow up a community' implies not only a sense of ownership but agency in its development.<sup>218</sup> Hilliard also believed that 'Ernabella grew with its people' and she wrote that people who camped around the mission were engaged in the development of the settlement through the construction of buildings. They built the staff houses, school, dispensary, garage, and not only did they build the Church but also made the bricks.<sup>219</sup> Eickelkamp's research at Ernabella in the mid-1990s, supports this sense of agency and rejects the notion that there was a 'unidirectional imposition of values, ideas and practices'. She argues that she 'was never given the impression that Anangu perceive themselves as victims in the history of missionisation' and that 'there existed a genuinely shared sociality'.<sup>220</sup>

Since 1937 the first school children had grown to adulthood around Ernabella and comprised the group who were baptised in 1952 and other children had been born at Ernabella during this period. Medical assistance at births had been rejected but in 1951 despite opposition from older women, Nganyintja Ilyatjari's baby was the first to be delivered with the assistance of the Sister not in the clinic, but in the bedroom of the single women's staff house.<sup>221</sup> This would have had a wider impact as assistants at the birth of a child are circumscribed by kin relationships and obligations.

---

<sup>217</sup> Baker, N., 'Our Lives as Artists', cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 82. Baker is a leading Ernabella artist who was born at the mission in 1943 and has lived at Ernabella for most of her life. See also Imiyari (Yilpi) Adamson's painting *Ernabella Mission Days - Going On Holiday with Camels* at <[www.artitja.com.au](http://www.artitja.com.au)> which depicts happy times at Ernabella during the 1950s.

<sup>218</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 18.

<sup>219</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 132.

<sup>220</sup> Eickelkamp, U., 'Anapalku Walka—Ernabella Design', in L. Taylor (ed.), *Painting the Land Story*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1999, pp. 80, 94.

<sup>221</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 138. Edwards notes that Allison Elliott (the teacher at the time) has pointed out that Nganyintja's baby was not born in the clinic because it was considered to be unhygienic. Elliott notes that Nganyintja requested a fire beside her during the birth and staff 'made one on the lid of the old copper at the back, and carried it into the bedroom'. Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 17 January 2012. It is interesting that Nganyintja did not go to the hospital or remain at the camp for the birth

It can be argued that Ernabella fits Sarah Holcombe's definition of an emerging community where there are shared 'common and exclusive interests that rest on communal foundations'.<sup>222</sup> In her study of the development of Mount Liebig into a community for groups of desert people, Holcombe has shown how new forms of ritual, gaining authenticity by being derived from the old, were created. Through this process new places became constructed as significant and important and a 'local personhood' was formed.<sup>223</sup> There are hints in the missionary narrative that this innovative process was also occurring at Ernabella and surrounding areas. Even though people had access to their country further away, in 1949 *inmas*<sup>224</sup> were being held near the mission, to which mission staff were invited.<sup>225</sup> Nganyintja Ilyatjari says that the Seven Sisters ceremony was not performed by the women while they lived in the bush as in those days only men danced. She points out that the Seven Sisters ceremony began 'not even when we were at Ernabella, but at Amata' from the 1960s.<sup>226</sup> Wally Dunn's statement that '[w]e're interested in God's story. God and my history underneath, both—*kutjara*'<sup>227</sup> indicates innovative processes at work.<sup>228</sup> Given the flexibility and dynamism which was a characteristic of desert societies in order to accommodate new circumstances, as discussed in earlier chapters, this is unsurprising.

---

of her third child but went away and delivered her baby alone. According to Hilliard (p.189) she believed that she may have been having twins and was concerned that one would be killed by the 'native midwives'.

<sup>222</sup> Holcombe, S., 'The Sentimental Community: A Site of Belonging. A Case Study from Central Australia', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2004, p. 163.

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 172-78.

<sup>224</sup> *Inma* translates as ceremony, either traditional or a church service. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, IAD Publishing, Alice Springs, 1987, p. 18.

<sup>225</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters*, 1994, pp. 13-4.

<sup>226</sup> Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, 'Traditional Aboriginal Learning', 1998, p. 3.

<sup>227</sup> *Kutjara* translates as two. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, 1987, p. 45,

<sup>228</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 30.

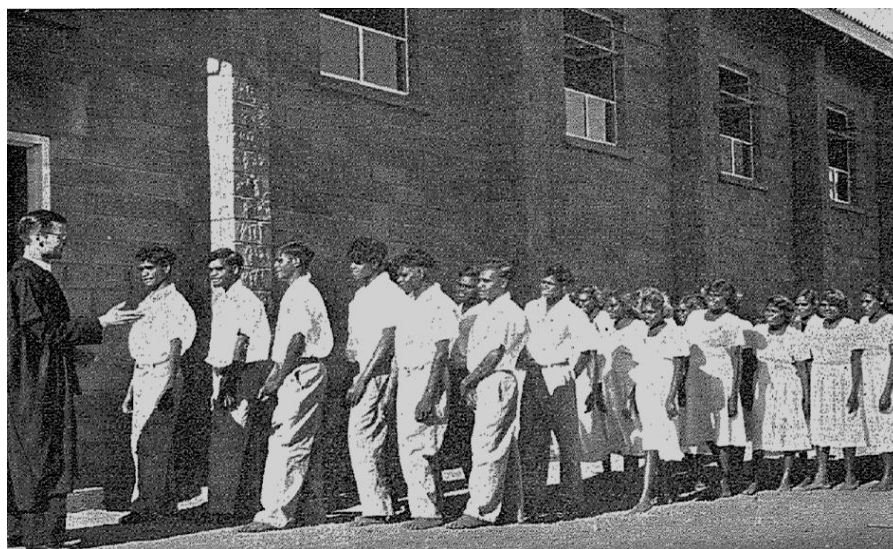


Figure 8  
Rev. R. M. Trudinger receives the candidates for Baptism  
*Ernabella Newsletter*, December, 1952, p. 2.

## Chapter Five

### **The evolution of a Christian community (1953-1961): ‘It had come to Pass’.<sup>1</sup>**

The previous chapter covered the period when Pitjantjatjara people were making the transition from a hunter-gatherer economy to an emerging settled life based around the mission. It argued that the mission policy at Ernabella was different to other comparable missions in its respect for local traditions and the mission practices which derived from this position. This chapter will examine the relatively settled period between 1953 and 1961, when a community became established at Ernabella with the coming together of different local groups from surrounding areas. After this period the Pitjantjatjara people again became more dispersed with the establishment

<sup>1</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 1.



of outstations and homelands in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> This chapter discusses the responses of the people to the new social, economic and religious order and their relationship with missionaries in order to determine the outcomes of the comparatively enlightened and liberal policies which continued to inform mission practices at Ernabella. While the presence of the mission caused changed circumstances for Pitjantjatjara people, at the same time mission policy attempted to maintain as much continuity with traditional life as possible.

As discussed in Chapter Two, studies of Aboriginal societies have been underpinned by the notion that Aboriginal cultures are so inflexible that any contact with outsiders results in a “loss” of culture. Since the 1960s this understanding has shifted to one which acknowledges that Aboriginal societies change and adapt and at the same time maintain cultural traditions from pre-contact times. However, according to Melinda Hinkson and Benjamin Smith, despite this understanding of change and continuity the persistence of earlier cultural elements still forms the major focus of studies.<sup>3</sup> Just as earlier studies, with their focus on perceived traditional elements perpetuated essentialist constructions of Aboriginal cultures as forever locked in the past, so too do studies where cultural continuity is privileged at the expense of change and adaptability. Mindful of Hinkson and Smith’s critique, change and continuity, when not perceived as antithetical, can provide a useful framework for this period of Ernabella history. By 1953, life for Pitjantjatjara people

---

<sup>2</sup> It was a different story for other Pitjantjatjara people. This time was anything but settled for southern people as they were moved out of the weapons testing areas in the Great Victorian Desert, relocated to the Lutheran Mission at Yalata in the south and prevented from travelling through their country. See Brady, M., ‘The Politics of Space and Mobility: Controlling the Ooldea/Yalata Aborigines, 1952-1982’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 23, 1999, pp. 1-14 & Goodall, H., ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe: Contested Memories of Nuclear Testing and Measles Epidemics at Ernabella’, in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds.), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 55-76.

<sup>3</sup> Hinkson, M. & Smith, B., ‘Introduction: Conceptual Moves towards an Intercultural Analysis’, *Oceania*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 2005, pp. 157-66.

had changed dramatically from pre-mission days although mediated through, and to a certain extent minimised by, the mission policy. Contact with the outside world was also limited and most interaction during the 1950s was with staff and the few visitors who were given permission to visit Ernabella. While mission practices during the 1950s continued to be underpinned by its original aims, Nancy Sheppard recalls that Charles Duguid's vision was under constant review, particularly in relation to clothing (as discussed in the last chapter), housing, and the care of the elderly.<sup>4</sup> As well as changes there were also continuities with the past, where the people 'were heavily immersed in their traditional cultural and social life'.<sup>5</sup>

The mission record does not appear to discuss whether the policy of non-interference extended to traditional methods of resolving conflict which could include severe forms of corporal punishment. Bill Edwards recalls that the mission generally regarded discipline for tribal matters as the people's business and did not intervene. He notes that traditional discipline was still ritualised in the 1950s and 1960s while he was mission Superintendent and that this generally limited the extent of injuries. Where retribution included spearing, Edwards recalls that to make the target visible in order to lessen the chance of serious injury or death, men would remove their trousers and 'fling them in the air'. After the conflict was settled, if necessary, all parties would go to together to the mission clinic for medical

---

<sup>4</sup> Sheppard arrived at Ernabella in 1955 to teach in the school. See Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, Gillingham Printers, Underdale, SA, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Goodall, H., 'Colonialism and Catastrophe', 1994, p. 58; Yengoyan, A., 'Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization', in Berndt, R.M (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, UWA, Nedlands, 1970, p.72; Brokensha's study of the material culture of Pitjantjatjara since the mission was established, adds to our understanding of how changes were accommodated. It also demonstrates agency on the part of the Pitjantjatjara and contests notions of cultural imposition from the mission. Brokensha argues that the processes by which Pitjantjatjara people consider the use of new material items, such as weapons, tools, building materials, are underpinned by 'traditionally based experience' and have remained unchanged from pre-mission times. Firstly, the items are carefully evaluated as to their usefulness or not, and secondly, because acceptance of a new element may involve a 'trade-off', its benefits need to be weighed against this. See Brokensha, P., 'The Pitjantjatjara: A Relevant Case Study of Continuity and Change', in B. Menary (ed.), *Aborigines and Schooling*, Adelaide College of the Arts, Adelaide, 1981, pp. 53-4.

assistance. Edwards and his wife Val, who had been the nursing sister at the mission before their marriage, do not recall matters ‘getting out of hand’.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, on occasions missionaries were called to the camp to assist with the settlement of a dispute and this appeared to be at the instigation of the people involved.<sup>7</sup> Any such intervention was more a matter of judgement than the implementation of a formal policy or rules.

### **Towards assimilation**

This chapter begins with an outline of the wider political context within which Ernabella operated between 1953 and 1961. During the 1950s, thinking about Aboriginal policy at a national level was moving towards a more defined, but not necessarily uniform, assimilatory approach. In June 1950 Paul Hasluck, then Minister for Territories reported to the House of Representatives that in order to halt what he perceived as the social degradation of Aboriginal societies the era of protection must end and the ‘nation must move to a new era in which the social advancement rather than the crude protection of the natives should be the objective’.<sup>8</sup> In 1951, the Commonwealth convened the Native Welfare Conference to frame policy for Aborigines in the post-war period. Assimilation in this context had long been understood to mean the biological absorption of one race—Aborigines—by another, whites. Such an understanding was one of the solutions proposed in the 1930s to the so-called ‘Aboriginal problem’. As Russell McGregor argues, this

---

<sup>6</sup> Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 16 May 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, Bill, ‘Ernabella Letters’, 22/10/1969, Originals held by Bill Edwards. Digitised copies held at Ara Irititja Project Archive, Netley, SA.

<sup>8</sup> Hasluck, P., Hansard, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 208, 8 June 1950, p. 3977. In the same speech Hasluck also praised missionaries for their work in providing welfare.

proposal had influential proponents.<sup>9</sup> Among them was Dr J. B. Cleland who was Deputy Chairman of the Aboriginal Protection Board of South Australia in the 1950s. Nevertheless, there was no mention of biological absorption in the Board's annual reports. Clearly by the 1950s such notions of genetic engineering were regarded with unease and ambivalence by authorities. During the 1950s and 1960s assimilation was framed in terms of cultural assimilation, as outlined in Hasluck's statement above, but as McGregor has pointed out, both the biological absorption approach of the 1930s and socio-cultural assimilation approach of the 1950s, have become 'merged into an assumed monolithic assimilationism' in current discourse.<sup>10</sup>

The ambivalence and inconsistencies in approaches to assimilation can be seen in relation to Ernabella Mission which had been ostensibly established to *prevent* biological absorption by providing a buffer zone. Cleland, even though a supporter of biological assimilation had visited Ernabella Mission in 1946 and reported the 'prospect of a happy, pure-blood native population ... for many years to come'.<sup>11</sup> Even though Ernabella missionaries and Duguid, who remained influential in mission affairs during this period, were opposed to biological absorption, genetic background still played a significant role in their thinking about assimilation. Duguid regarded assimilation as a means to equality and was adamant that 'Assimilation is not absorption'. Even with the shift in assimilatory ideas away from biological to cultural criteria in the 1950s, Duguid argued that 'separate cultural groups' could still be maintained.<sup>12</sup> He stated that no-one had the 'right to force them [Aborigines] to

---

<sup>9</sup> McGregor, R., 'Breed out the Colour': Reproductive Management for White Australia', *A Race for Place: Proceedings of the History & Sociology of Eugenics Conference*, University of Newcastle, April 2000, p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Cleland, J. B., *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, 1946.

<sup>12</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1963, pp. 185-86. Duguid was in agreement with A. P. Elkin's model of assimilation where 'cultural distinctiveness and diversity' could be maintained, but 'as means not ends'. See McGregor, R., 'Wards, Words and Citizens: A.P. Elkin and Paul Hasluck on Assimilation', *Oceania*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 1999, p. 250.

change, but as we have usurped their land and made their old life almost impossible it is incumbent on us to provide the means by which they can change to our ways if they wish'.<sup>13</sup> Rani Kerin's account of the experience of Sydney James Cook is useful to our understanding of Duguid's approach to assimilation and highlights the widely held tensions and uncertainties as to its meaning and its ultimate goals.<sup>14</sup> Sydney James Cook was described as a "full-blood" Aboriginal child from the west coast of South Australia who had supposedly been abandoned by his mother as an infant. He lived as part of the Duguid family in Adelaide and in 1944 attended a private school from the age of six until he was twelve. According to Kerin, Duguid, a staunch supporter of assimilation, was troubled by the presence of a "full-blood" Aboriginal boy in white society even though he appeared to confirm Duguid's belief that Aborigines were not intellectually inferior and that they were capable of taking their place in white society. However, the main problem for Duguid was that Cook as a "full-blood" had never been immersed or initiated into tribal culture. Duguid believed that children such as Cook needed to learn how to "be Aboriginal" before they could live successfully in the wider community. His model was Ernabella Mission where Aborigines were being prepared for assimilation through the maintenance rather than the relinquishment of tribal cohesion. Therefore Cook was sent to the Roper River Mission in the Northern Territory (Ernabella was considered, but it was only for tribal Aborigines and Cook had not lived tribally) where he could be with his 'own people', or so Duguid thought. As Kerin points out, this approach

---

<sup>13</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> Kerin, R., 'Sydney James Cook/Duguid and the Importance of "being Aboriginal"', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 29, 2005, pp. 46-63.

was motivated by Duguid's sophisticated understanding of Aboriginal cultures for the time, but in reality it was misguided. In this unusual interpretation, assimilation was to be achieved by moving an Aboriginal boy from an urban life in Adelaide into an Aboriginal society far from the city.<sup>15</sup> The mission plans for the future of the "half-caste" children at Ernabella also show how assimilatory ideas were underpinned by genetic criteria and in contrast to the above example, such children were to be moved *to* a "white" community. In their 1960 Report on Ernabella the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) posed the question as to whether there would be a 'true place' in the Ernabella community 'when they reach maturity' for the several young 'half-castes' who were at the mission. Or 'should they be removed now and educated and trained from childhood in a "white" community?''<sup>16</sup>

During the 1950s 'all persons descended from the original inhabitants' in South Australia were legally subject to the *Aborigines Act 1934-1939* (South Australia).<sup>17</sup> However, in the Annual Reports of the South Australian Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) between 1953 and 1959 the future for Aboriginal people in the state is expressed somewhat ambivalently. The 1953 Report stated that under the *Aborigines Act 1934-1939* (South Australia) citizenship rights, which included eligibility for Commonwealth pensions, could only be given if people applied for exemption from the Act.<sup>18</sup> Yet throughout this period according to the Annual Reports Aborigines had all of the same citizenship rights as everyone else, apart from

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46. Kerin (p. 62) has pointed out that Cook did not return to Adelaide but spent his life working on cattle stations in the Northern Territory.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 7, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504, Folder 7 (iv).

<sup>17</sup> Raynes, C., *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets: An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834-2000*, State Records of South Australia, Gepps Cross, 2002, pp. 150-51.

<sup>18</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1953, p. 4, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (hereafter AIATSIS).

consuming alcohol, as long as they had a fixed address. This could be a mission or a reserve and was applicable whether people were identified as “full-blood” or “half-caste”. In addition, the reports stated that people could vote in State and Commonwealth elections,<sup>19</sup> they were free to marry who they wished, they could move from place to place freely, were entitled to education in State schools and to award wages.

The 1953 APB Report, reflecting the general ambivalence, contradiction and tension in the approach to assimilation stated the importance of preparing ‘the younger generation’ ‘to be self-supporting citizens capable of making a valuable contribution to the economic welfare of the State’. The Board<sup>20</sup> declared that it was a ‘matter of great national importance’ to ‘build up the population’. In 1954 the stated aim of the Board was to facilitate the development of Aboriginal people in order that they could be ‘absorbed into the white community’.<sup>21</sup> This was differently expressed in 1956 as ‘to take their place in white communities’, perhaps to avoid the impression of biological absorption which was not generally expressed during this period by policy makers. The APB understood assimilation to be a progressive process and one which would enable Aboriginal people to live ‘normal lives as citizens of the State’.<sup>22</sup> It was acknowledged and repeatedly stressed throughout this period that the Board regarded Aboriginal people in South Australia as being at

---

<sup>19</sup> As early as 1944 Elkin noted that while South Australian Aborigines were not mentioned specifically in the Electoral Act because they were ‘British subjects’ they were entitled to vote as some did. A. P. Elkin, *Citizenship for the Aborigines*, Australasian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1944, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1953, p. 3, AIATSIS. Throughout this period it was estimated that the Aboriginal population in the State was increasing, although each report noted ‘a little over 5000’ with “full-bloods” comprising about half. The expenditure by the State increased from £44 584 in 1953 to £305 760 pounds in 1959, even though the population appeared to increase little.

<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1954, pp. 3-4, AIATSIS.

<sup>22</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1956, p. 4, AIATSIS.

different levels of progress and therefore assimilatory strategies were to be applied differently. The Board believed that for some Aborigines in the State, such as those living at Ernabella who they described as ‘primitive’ or ‘semi-primitive’, there should be no ‘attempts to assimilate the native population rapidly’<sup>23</sup> with the expectation that it could take ‘at least three or four generations’.<sup>24</sup> In the 1959 Report the Board defined assimilation as ultimately meaning ‘that the aborigine has reached the stage of development where he can be likened to or considered as similar to the balance of the community, or to those with whom they habitually associate in the general community’. It was also stipulated that people were to have a choice about whether they wished to ‘take their place in the white community’ because the Board was opposed to forced assimilation.<sup>25</sup> But nowhere was it mentioned in the Annual Reports that assimilation meant the right to the maintenance of a distinctive culture which had been central to Ernabella mission policy from the outset.

From the late 1950s, under the government’s assimilatory approach the more discriminatory sections of the Act were gradually repealed. In 1958, the consorting provision in the South Australian Police Offences Act which had prohibited relationships between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, at least officially if not in practice, was removed and in 1959 the Commonwealth government extended a range of Social Security benefits to those Aborigines who were not ‘nomadic’.<sup>26</sup> In 1962 the *Aboriginal Affairs Act* (South Australia) replaced the 1934-1939 Act. The Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) was replaced with the Aboriginal Affairs Board

---

<sup>23</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1958, p. 3, AIATSIS.

<sup>24</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1956, p. 3, AIATSIS.

<sup>25</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1959, p. 2, AIATSIS.

<sup>26</sup> However, according to Rowse, most of this money did not go to people living on settlements and missions but to the institution itself. Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 114.



and officially Aboriginal child welfare would now come under the same Social Welfare Act as all children.

In practical terms, the new assimilatory approach of the late 1950s and the early 1960s meant that reserves and missions, except in remote areas, would eventually be depopulated in order to facilitate the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the wider society. As Bill Edwards points out, remote settlements such as Ernabella were now considered as temporary training institutions until such time as Aboriginal people were ready to engage in the wider society and move to places where employment could be obtained.<sup>27</sup> This period saw the migration of Aboriginal people to Adelaide mostly from the reserves at Point Pearce and Point McLeay in the southern part of the state. This movement reached a peak by the mid 1960s before declining during the 1970s.<sup>28</sup> As Fay Gale and Joy Wundersitz point out, remote South Australia 'has contributed very little to Adelaide's population' with only 4.1% of the Adelaide Aboriginal population in 1980 born in northern areas of the state.<sup>29</sup>

The shift in policy had little immediate impact on Aboriginal people living in remote areas such as at Ernabella. As Charles Rowley has argued, at the time these areas remained in a colonial relationship with the State and were 'a forgotten backwater' in regards to enforcing Aboriginal policy.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, some impact of the policy changes did filter through to remote settlements. The Australian Presbyterian Mission Board (APBM) in their review of Ernabella Mission in 1960

---

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Church and Indigenous Land Rights: Pitjantjatjara Land Rights in Australia', *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, 1986 October, p. 479.

<sup>28</sup> Gale, F. & Wundersitz, J., *Adelaide Aborigines: A Case Study of Urban Life 1966-1981*, Development Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra, 1982, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 40-3.

<sup>30</sup> Rowley, C. D., *The Remote Aborigines*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1972, p. 13.

noted that Social Security pensions meant that there was increased money in the community which ‘enhance[d] tribal ability to meet special food needs among themselves’.<sup>31</sup> Thus, as will be discussed in more detail below, it was recommended that the practice of cooking and serving meals to workers in the dining hall at Ernabella should cease. The 1960 Aboriginal Protection Board Report questioned whether Commonwealth pensions were wise for the ‘nomadic, near primitive’ people at Ernabella. The report noted that pensions could be detrimental and act as a ‘barrier rather than an aid to assimilation’ ‘without concomitant responsibilities’ foreshadowing the situation fifty years later in some remote communities.<sup>32</sup>

To a certain degree the broader political context shaped missionary work, particularly as the assimilatory approach became dominant during the 1960s, and increasingly so as Aboriginal policy moved towards self-determination in the 1970s. If missions wanted to be subsidised by governments the political context could not be ignored and mission practices, for example, in education and training, had to meet the policy aims as the correspondence between the APBM and the APB revealed.

Assimilatory ideas were not new in Ernabella mission policy. The long term goal from the outset had been a practical one in ‘training for usefulness’,<sup>33</sup> that is, to prepare people for the eventual engagement with, but not absorption into the wider

---

31 Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM), ‘Ernabella Station Matters’, 1960, p. 1.

32 Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1960.

<sup>33</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, pp. 2-4. The first strategy for achieving this was to develop the same attitude towards work among Pitjantjatjara as that held by the wider community. This meant that only those who worked were remunerated, there was to be ‘continual teaching, preaching and militating against idleness’, the value and significance of work had to be reinforced, employment had to be provided for all so that the community could become self-reliant otherwise there was the danger that the community would ‘become parasitical’. The second strategy was to provide a variety of appropriate work and training with ‘sufficient and attractive remuneration’. A contract system with Workers’ Rules was found to be successful. The third strategy was ‘a handing over of responsibility’ and the development of ‘responsibility and independence’ through rewards for those in positions of supervision which suggests early attempts at an incipient form of self-determination.

society. Ernabella Mission diverged from the approach of the APB towards cultural assimilation and described it as ‘oversimplified and unrealistic’ due to the huge diversity of Aboriginal groups throughout Australia in terms of their engagement with the wider population.<sup>34</sup> The mission approach was to ‘work within the context of a community experiment’<sup>35</sup> and believed that successful assimilation could occur alongside the maintenance of a distinctive Aboriginal identity. The January 1957 *Ernabella Newsletter* was entitled ‘Highway to Assimilation’. The cover shows traditional men with their spears in a bush setting, with the caption, ‘as they were at the beginning of the Highway Journey’ suggesting the progressive nature of assimilation. It also suggests that Pitjantjatjara people were still engaged in traditional pursuits *as well as* progressing towards assimilation. Missionaries at Ernabella were critical of the widely held notion that assimilation was impossible for those living in traditionally-oriented societies because upon adolescence young Aborigines ‘regressed’ to traditional life and that all of the earlier training for assimilation was permanently undone.<sup>36</sup> The APBM Report of an inspection of Ernabella in 1958 wrote that the ‘Christian Gospel’ with a ‘regular course of instruction in the Bible’ was central to enabling Pitjantjatjara to ‘pass through the difficult period of assimilation’<sup>37</sup> while retaining cultural integrity. In many ways Ernabella was ahead of its time: when assimilation was first mooted in the 1930s as biological absorption, mission policy was to maintain racial purity; when assimilation was again discussed in the 1950s as cultural assimilation, the policy was

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>37</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, ML Box 2504.

one of cultural maintenance. In addition, even through the tensions inherent in assimilatory thinking, the mission shared Duguid's pragmatic understanding of assimilation as being an end to 'paternal control' where everyone could 'go together as citizens of the same country' with the choice of living and working in the wider society.<sup>38</sup>

### **Social changes**

During the early years outlined in the previous chapter, the mission was able to function as a protective buffer partly due to its remoteness and the absence of development in the area. The 1958 APBM report on Ernabella reminisced about the early years of Ernabella with 'primitive unspoiled people of a pre-stone age culture', and admitted that 'perhaps we were not willing that they should change', but by 1958 it was realised that 'change was inevitable'.<sup>39</sup> In the post-war period the situation in remote areas of Central Australia was changing rapidly as government and private enterprises brought an influx of workers to the area. Duguid noted that in 1946 the Commonwealth Government had taken 'control over a large tract of country to form a Rocket Range' within the Reserve and in 1956 more land was acquired at Maralinga for atomic testing.<sup>40</sup> From 1955 the Aboriginal Protection Board noted in their Annual Reports that permission was given to increasing numbers of people to enter the Reserve, including Mines Department geologists to survey for uranium, and prospectors for nickel. The construction of a graded road to facilitate mining operations was approved because the road was in an area 'where natives seldom congregate', as was the establishment of the Giles meteorological station by the

---

<sup>38</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 186.

<sup>39</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM), Report of Inspection of Ernabella, 1958, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1976, p. 2.

Weapons Research Establishment. Entry to the Reserve was conditional on there being 'no interference with the natives' or 'their water supplies'. All those seeking permission had to have health and character checks and abide by a number of conditions. The Board was satisfied that 'no harm has occurred to the aborigines therein' despite noting that 'some hundreds' 'still reside on this Reserve' and that there was 'constant traffic between Ernabella Mission and the Warburton Mission and other native tribes in Western Australia'.<sup>41</sup> Yet despite these assurances from the APB, Duguid believed otherwise. He pointed out that '[t]here can be no guarantee on human relationships in isolated places' and the buildings and roads interfere in 'the essential highway' through which Pitjantjatjara people travel. He concluded that these developments were destroying the 'tribal life of the aborigines in their home country' and 'have disturbed the balance with nature achieved by the aborigines of Australia over thousands of years'.<sup>42</sup> This indicates that Duguid strongly believed that the mission must continue to protect Aborigines and regulate contact with outsiders.

In addition to external changes, there were changes occurring at the mission which according to Ron Trudinger were driven by the people themselves. In 1953 he celebrated what he described as 'the flowering of a people when their time has come'. Their eagerness for change, he said, meant that 'the Mission is sometimes hard pressed to meet their total need'. At the same time as expressing surprise that the people themselves were desirous of changes, Trudinger shared the concerns of Duguid about the pace of change and the impact of the changing situation on the Central Reserve. Despite noting the eagerness for change, in the same *Newsletter*,

---

<sup>41</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1957, pp. 6, 7, AIATSIS.

<sup>42</sup> Duguid, C., *The Central Aborigines Reserve*, Presidential Address, 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1957, Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia, Incorporated, pp. 5-6.

Trudinger invoked the discourse of the conservatism of Aboriginal cultures where change could only be accommodated slowly—‘their ways and habits were as fixed in design as the gnarled corkwood of their glens or the contours of their rugged hills’.<sup>43</sup> Four years later in 1957, Trudinger acknowledged that ‘[w]e all know that the time has gone when we could consider leaving the natives just as they are’. He added that ‘the natives themselves would not have tolerated it’ ... they ‘will not live away from [white communities] any more’.<sup>44</sup> Winifred Hilliard agreed that the mission was never about preventing change by ‘holding the people back’ but was to regulate the rate of change in order that the people were prepared adequately ‘to be accepted socially ... on an equal footing’ by the wider society. As she wrote ‘[o]nly an ostrich could see a future for the Aborigines in a state of permanent segregation’.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, despite the many social changes which meant that people were spending less time in their country, anthropologist Aram Yengoyan found that even in the mid-1960s, kinship connections relating to ‘group membership and personal claims to different “countries” ’ were still relevant in peoples’ lives.<sup>46</sup>

While during this period there were increasing disruptions in the Central Reserve surrounding the mission, it was marked by more stability at Ernabella itself particularly in regards to staff with two long serving Superintendents, Trudinger from 1953 to 1957 and Bill Edwards from 1958 to 1972. As the 1963 Annual Report from the mission noted, this ‘growing length of service of the majority of staff

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 2. Stanner noted in 1958 that this applied throughout the country and that he did not know of any Aborigines ‘who want to return to the bush, even if their new circumstances are very miserable’. While people may not have wished to live a bush life this did not prevent them from wanting to return to their country and the outstation movement in the 1960s and 1970s attests to this. This is discussed in Chapter Six of the thesis. See Stanner, W.E.H., ‘Continuity and Change among the Aborigines (1958)’, in *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne, 2009, p. 153.

<sup>45</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 145.

<sup>46</sup> Yengoyan, A., ‘Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization’, 1970, p. 83.

members', which continued until the end of the mission times, facilitated an 'atmosphere on the station' of 'mutual respect and understanding' and 'general happiness and friendliness'.<sup>47</sup> The 1958 APBM inspection reported good relations between missionaries and Pitjantjatjara people who associated with the mission. The Report noted that male staff were invited to a 'Corroboree connected with Initiation' and 'children of both races' playing together in a spirit of 'natural friendliness'.<sup>48</sup> In her memoirs of her time at Ernabella, teacher Nancy Sheppard recalls the welcoming and friendly community on her arrival in 1955.<sup>49</sup> Susan Woenne has found, with reference to Docker River, but which could equally be applied to other desert settlements, that the important defining feature of relationships is not the particular agency which runs it or the rationale behind its establishment, but is the 'cumulative individual experience of both the type of personnel with which each kind of settlement is generally staffed and the range of specific services' which are provided.<sup>50</sup> That is, the personal relationships which develop between staff and residents are paramount.

In most mission reports it was noted that the people were in good health. It was generally believed that this was an outcome of the mission's founding principle which encouraged people to remain independent through the maintenance of traditional food gathering skills. The birth/death ratio gradually reversed after the devastating measles epidemic of 1948 and the APB Report of 1956 noted that for some years 'the birth rate at this Mission is approximately double the death rate'.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report, 1963, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>48</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p 5.

<sup>49</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Woenne, S. Todd, 'Old Country, New territory: Some Implications of the Settlement Process', in Berndt, R. M. (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the 1970s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1956, AIATSIS. The Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1952 noted that there had been eight deaths and sixteen births that year. Prior to this a concern had been raised by Duguid and the Mission Board that the birth rate was falling due to school girls staying at the mission for training rather than marrying and producing children; Duguid to Coombes 24 August 1950, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box

However, during April and May of 1957 Ernabella experienced another measles epidemic which according to Duguid 'had hit hard'. While both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children succumbed, the non-Aboriginal patients recovered but twenty four Aboriginal children and two adults died.<sup>52</sup> Duguid visited the mission in June 1957, noting that children and babies were underweight and suspected that malnutrition, caused by a lack of bush food, was a factor in the epidemic. Since the establishment of Ernabella traditional foods had provided most of the nutrition in the diet of the people, but there were now changed circumstances which were impacting on the ability of people to continue traditional food gathering. According to Duguid these included the expansion of cattle stations which reduced hunting and food gathering areas, a grasshopper plague in 1956, a drought in the first half of 1957, and after two decades bush food in the vicinity of Ernabella was severely depleted and less people were gathering bush tucker. This meant that the people had become increasingly dependent on the mission to supply all of their nutrients. Duguid analysed the meals served in the dining hall over six days and noted that there was an unequal distribution of food and it was 'only the working men who received enough meat in their stew'. The meals served to women and children were lacking in sufficient protein.<sup>53</sup>

The tragedy of the epidemic was noted outside the mission and there were doubts expressed about the cause of so many deaths. A newspaper article on 20 June 1957 wrote of the 'mystery deaths' at Ernabella. Subsequently on 5 December of that year, the Minister for Supply was asked in the House of Representatives to explain

---

2503, Folder 6 (iii); Coombes to Trudinger, 29 September 1950, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6 (iii).

<sup>52</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1977, p. 185.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 185.



firstly whether indeed a ‘mystery disease’ did cause the deaths and secondly, to investigate whether ‘radio-active fall-out from atom bomb tests’ at Maralinga was a factor. The Minister responded that even though an investigation was conducted by pathologists they did not disclose the causes, but nonetheless it was concluded that the deaths were caused by measles. The Minister assured the Federal Parliament that contamination could be ruled out as monitoring by the Atomic Weapons Test Safety Committee showed that fallout over Ernabella was negligible and unlikely to impact on health.<sup>54</sup>

The story of the British nuclear weapons testing which began at Emu Junction in 1953 and ended in 1957 at Maralinga, and the apparent disregard shown by the British scientists when it was pointed out by Patrol Officer Walter MacDougall (who had briefly served in various capacities at Ernabella, including Acting Superintendent during 1940-1941) that many Aboriginal people were using the area in question, has been well documented.<sup>55</sup> The impact on Ernabella which is pertinent for this study has been analysed by Heather Goodall who, in 1984, collected oral stories at Ernabella to present to the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Testing in Australia. She found that the nuclear testing and the causes of the measles epidemics of 1948 and 1957 had ‘become entangled in Anangu perceptions’.<sup>56</sup> Nura Rupert’s story recorded by Ute Eickelkamp in 1995 illustrates how embedded and enduring this particular interpretation of events is. It is not made

---

<sup>54</sup> ‘15 Mystery Deaths at Mission’, *The Advertiser*, 20 June 1957, <<http://naa12.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>>, accessed 25 November 2009.

<sup>55</sup> See Long, J., ‘Leaving the Desert: Actors and Sufferers in the Aboriginal Exodus from the Western Desert’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1989, pp. 9-44; Brady, M., ‘Leaving the Spinifex: The Impact of Rations, Missions, and the Atomic Tests on the Southern Pitjantjatjara’, *Records of the South Australian Museum*, Vol. 20, 1986, pp. 35-45; Brady, M., ‘The Politics of Space and Mobility: Controlling the Ooldea/Yalata Aborigines, 1952-1982’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 23, 1999, pp. 1-14; Palmer, K., ‘Dealing with the Legacy of the Past: Aborigines and Atomic Testing in South Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 14, 1990, pp. 197-207.

<sup>56</sup> Goodall, H., ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe’, 1994, p. 63.

clear whether Rupert is referring to the 1948 or the 1957 epidemic but what is clear is that these events caused terrible suffering for the whole community.<sup>57</sup> Rupert remembers that ‘they dropped the bomb on this side from Maralinga and severe measles broke out’. And from Emu ‘the smoke shifted towards Ernabella and covered the whole place like a cloud. We became very sick, measles broke out and we got chicken pox from the bomb ... That’s how it happened: the smoke covered Ernabella when it was tested at Emu and everyone got sick with flu, chicken pox, scabies—our skin was burning red ... A lot of people died ... They died from these measles and the bomb ... each day people were buried in the cemetery at Ernabella’.<sup>58</sup> A similar account was related to Mary Knights, the coordinator of Irrunytju Arts, in 2005 by Kuntjil Cooper, a senior Pitjantjatjara artist. She claimed while in the bush close to Ernabella with her family to have heard an explosion followed by a dust cloud which made them sick with diarrhea and burnt the soles of their feet, causing some to go blind and some deaths.<sup>59</sup>

A number of factors exacerbated this connection and it is not surprising that such associations were made by Ernabella people. These include the questions raised in Federal Parliament in 1957 about whether the epidemic was connected to nuclear testing indicating there were also doubts in the wider community at the time.<sup>60</sup> There was concern about the secrecy and negligence surrounding the testing programme, and the presence of Weapons Testing personnel at Ernabella during the measles

---

<sup>57</sup> It is unlikely that Rupert is describing the 1948 epidemic as she was at school during the early 1950s and she points out that she was a ‘working girl’ at the time of the epidemic. In addition, she mentions Mrs Bennett as assisting with the sick people. Mary Bennett (nee Baird) had arrived at Ernabella in 1949 to teach at the school.

<sup>58</sup> Rupert, N., ‘White Man is Coming (Nura Rupert’s Story)’, in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and Their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, pp. 14-5.

<sup>59</sup> Knights, M., *Irrunytju Arts*, Irrunytju Arts, Wingellina, 2006.

<sup>60</sup> It was noted that an article in the medical journal *The Lancet* made a ‘connection between measles with radioactive dosage’, <<http://naa12.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>>, accessed 25 November 2009.

outbreak of 1957 to ensure that people did not travel south to the Maralinga site. Furthermore, Walter McDougall in attempting to keep local people away from the test sites in 1957 told them that ‘malevolent spiritual forces were active in the south, and that the poison of the bombs was linked to the traditional “poison” of *mamu*’ which was particularly dangerous for Pitjantjatjara people, as measles was, and would cause ‘plague-like deaths’.<sup>61</sup>

While it was acknowledged by the Royal Commission that Yankunytjatjara people who lived to the south-east of Ernabella around Wallatina had been exposed to radioactive contamination in 1953, and which had contributed to long term health problems, there is no evidence that the epidemics at Ernabella in 1948<sup>62</sup> and 1957 were other than measles. Goodall observed that Ernabella and Wallatina accounts were structurally different and whereas Wallatina people began with the story of images of a black mist, details of which are consistent with the fallout from the explosions, Ernabella people started with the devastating images of the sickness and only mentioned in vague terms ‘strange things in the southern sky’ when pressed by interviewers. Goodall concluded that Wallatina and Ernabella people were ‘describing a different set of events’.<sup>63</sup>

Goodall’s research has implications for our understanding about the ‘social processes of remembering and forgetting’ and the assumptions which underpin research.<sup>64</sup> She points out that researchers during the 1980s tended to work within a colonial dispossession discourse and assumed a ‘hierarchy of tragedy’ where ‘the

---

<sup>61</sup> Goodall, H., ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe’, 1994, p. 70. *Mamu* translates as ‘harmful spirit being, spirit monster’. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, 1987, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> The *Ernabella Newsletter* in 1948 (no month noted) was in no doubt that the illness was measles and that it had spread from its outbreak in Alice Springs in January of that year.

<sup>63</sup> Goodall, H., ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe’, 1994, p. 65. See also Lester, Y., *Yami: the autobiography of Yami Lester*, IAD Publications, Alice Springs, 1993, pp. 174-83.

<sup>64</sup> Goodall, H., ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe’, 1994, p. 63.

effects of nuclear bombs must be more deadly, and certainly more dramatic, than a measles epidemic'.<sup>65</sup> Thus Ernabella stories of the devastating impact of measles, which as Hilliard pointed out in 1968 still 'spells fear',<sup>66</sup> were subsumed within the weapons testing narrative which was judged to be far more serious and worthy of attention by researchers.

### **Life on the Mission**

Births increased from thirteen in 1949 to twenty one in 1962 with twelve of these babies delivered in the hospital.<sup>67</sup> The population in 1962 was 420 and in 1964, 425.<sup>68</sup> During the 1950s the population regularly camping at the mission consisted of groups of people who engaged with the mission in different ways. According to Sheppard there were those who camped at the mission but lived independently, their time being occupied in traditional pursuits; there were pensioners who received rations; there were regular church goers; there were workers who were employed on three month contracts and there were workers who did not take a break between contracts and were becoming 'more or less permanent employees who were much depended on by the white staff'. There were also people arriving from the west to settle at Ernabella for the first time as the drought in the late 1950s drove them from their homelands.<sup>69</sup>

Nyukana Baker, one of Ernabella's leading artists, who was born in 1943,

---

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>66</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 140.

<sup>67</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, February 1956, p. 2; Edwards, W. Annual Report for Aborigines Department, 9 July 1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report for Aborigines Department, 9 July 1962; Edwards, W., Annual Report for Aborigines Department 1963.

<sup>69</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004, pp. 19, 11, 30.

remembers that life on the mission ‘used to be nice’.<sup>70</sup> Margaret Dagg, whose parents came to Ernabella from the west when she was a small child, also recalls the ‘Mission time [as] *wiru*’.<sup>71</sup> In her memoir, Sheppard has described the daily routine at the mission during the 1950s. A typical day would start with the bell announcing breakfast at 8 a.m. in the Dining Room for school children and those who were working, then morning prayers and daily announcements in the church at 8.30 a.m. and at 9 a.m. duties were allocated and people went off to their daily activities. These activities included working in the vegetable garden, the garage, the craft room, the clinic, at the school preparing the midday meal in the kitchen, and housekeeping for the staff. Women collected fleece which they would spin for the craft room, sitting together in the creek bed and using the same methods they had always used to spin hair and animal fur. Some people went to the cash store and others queued at the hospital. Overall, Sheppard’s description gives a sense of a productive and busy place.<sup>72</sup>

Under the mission policy in order to maintain traditional life, school continued to be held only in the mornings during this period so that children could join their parents and learn traditional skills in gathering bush food. Baker recalls as a child she would leave the camp in the morning for a shower, breakfast in the kitchen, before church and morning school. After lunch a group of girls would search for

---

<sup>70</sup> Baker, N., ‘Our Lives as Artists’, in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 82. Edwards recalls that Nyukana began working in the craft room in 1958 when she was fifteen and unlike other craftworkers who worked periodically elsewhere around the mission, Nyukana spent her whole working life there. Pers. Comm., Bill Edwards, 20 January 2012.

<sup>71</sup> *Wiru* translates as ‘nice, fine, lovely, beautiful’. See Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, 1987, p. 187. Dagg, M., ‘About Mission Times’, in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), 1999, *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004, p. 7; Bennett, M., ‘Early Days of Art/ Craft at Ernabella 1949-1954’, in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu: Work from the Past and the Present: A Celebration of Fifty Years of Ernabella Arts*, Ernabella Arts Inc., Ernabella, SA, 1998, p. 15. Mary Bennett (nee Baird) taught in the school from 1949 to 1951, and from 1952 until the arrival of Hilliard in 1954 supervised the craft room.

rabbits and witchetty grubs.<sup>73</sup> However, Sheppard commented that by this time ‘most preferred to hang around the compound, girls around the craft room perhaps babysitting, and boys around the working men in the gardens or at the garage, ever hopeful of a ride on a mission truck’.<sup>74</sup> As discussed earlier Duguid had noted a number of factors in 1957 which impacted on food gathering in the immediate vicinity of Ernabella, and suggests that fewer people were going into the bush to gather food in the afternoons.

People who camped at Ernabella during the 1950s still followed seasonal cycles as they had always done, albeit now determined by the exigencies of living at the mission. In 1952 Trudinger stated that the mission supported these ‘walkabouts’ because the people needed them ‘partly to satisfy their own hereditary urge’,<sup>75</sup> thus displaying the rather naive understanding which was common at this time. Edwards explained that after the shearing was finished in July, Ernabella families were joined by those who had been working on pastoral stations. For four to six weeks they went on a ‘holiday “walkabout”, travelling on foot, horses, donkeys and camels’ through their traditional country collecting dingo scalps for trade as they had been doing for decades.<sup>76</sup> Again at Christmas, people also travelled to their country but at this hotter time of year, their stays would be shorter. While people continued to engage with ceremonial life, by the 1950s most did not stay in their country for long periods.<sup>77</sup> These annual trips were encouraged by mission staff, who regarded them as integral

---

<sup>73</sup> Baker, N., ‘Our Lives as Artists’, 1999, p. 82.

<sup>74</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004, p. 7; Bennett, M., ‘Early Days of Art/ Craft at Ernabella 1949-1954’, 1998, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1952, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> See Imiyari Adamson’s painting *Ernabella Mission Days - Going On Holiday with Camels* at <[www.artitja.com.au](http://www.artitja.com.au)>

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 30, No. 1, December 1992, pp. 9-10. See also Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, Aboriginal Arts Board, Australian Council, Sydney, 1975, p. 11.

to a central aim of the mission which, as would already be clear, was to facilitate the maintenance of aspects of traditional life. Missionaries delivered foodstuffs to 'pre-arranged meeting places' in exchange for dingo scalps, thus enabling people to remain in their country. Sheppard recalls one such trip where they purchased dingo scalps and sold goods to the people who were camped at a place called Yulpartji, according to Sheppard a 'significant site in the Seven Sisters Dreaming'.<sup>78</sup>

Sheppard's photo of the mission in the late 1950s shows that the socio-spatial arrangement had changed little from the 1940s but with more substantial buildings, including a church, hospital and clinic, industrial school, school and cookhouse. The gardens around the houses had become established giving a sense of order and permanence. There is also marked on a plan of the compound a tennis court near the Manse and a swimming pool across the creek. There are still no visible fences except around the vegetable garden and no housing for Aboriginal people.<sup>79</sup> The APBM inspection in 1958 described the appearance of Ernabella as pleasant and striking, with an 'imposing array of buildings', well maintained and 'set in pleasant gardens'. They did comment on some untidiness however, as well as the considerable population of Aboriginal people. One area of concern and one which they appeared to suggest was connected to this sense of disorder was 'that not a few of the Aborigines seemed to want to camp about the Station instead of going to their own shelters'.<sup>80</sup> This indicates that the social interaction between mission staff and the people and the absence of segregated spaces as discussed in the previous chapter, had continued throughout this period.

---

<sup>78</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004, p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 5, facing page 40. See Figure 2.

<sup>80</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 3.

In what appeared to represent a shift in the thinking about the spatial organisation of the mission, the APBM recommended that ‘congregating on Mission precincts [by Aborigines] should be banned’ as it contributed to discipline and sanitation problems, disorderliness, and damage to equipment.<sup>81</sup> Towards the end of the 1950s discussion about the provision of housing for Aborigines was evident in church correspondence. In 1958 the APBM recommended that a ‘native village’ could be established near the mission site and also one further to the west,<sup>82</sup> if ‘there are any Aborigines who have developed to a standard where they could, at least with some success, reside in homes’.<sup>83</sup> In 1961 the APBM reported to the APB that they had identified some people who had ‘reached the stage of development where experimentation with housing on a modified scale, would be justified and desirable’. Such housing must be appropriate for ‘their current stage of advance’ and be able to be modified as they become ‘more house minded and conditioned.’<sup>84</sup> However, by 1963 there had been ‘little demand for housing’<sup>85</sup> which indicates that despite recommendations from the APBM, ultimately the decision regarding housing was not to be made by the APBM or the mission, but by Pitjantjatjara people themselves.

### **Economic changes**

From the outset the mission aimed to be economically self-sufficient and concerns about the mission’s economic future were regularly expressed in the missionary narrative. By 1958 the economic future was at a critical point and the APBM inspectors informed mission staff of the difficulties in ‘maintaining Ernabella’ as it

---

<sup>81</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> APBM Minutes 14-15 September 1960, p. 7, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2505.

<sup>84</sup> Coombes (Treasurer of Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions) to Secretary Aboriginal Protection Board, 17 March 1961, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, MLK 2772.

<sup>85</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report, 1963, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.



was ‘likely to cost the Board of Missions some thousands of pounds yearly’.<sup>86</sup> In addition, an overriding concern for mission staff was how to provide employment for the increasing numbers of people who wished to work.<sup>87</sup> As Hilliard pointed out, the remoteness of Ernabella, which had proved useful for the mission’s protective role, meant that employment opportunities were always going to be limited.<sup>88</sup>

In 1953 Trudinger wrote that the way forward was through connecting ‘Industry’ to ‘Worship’.<sup>89</sup> The sheep industry was central to the economy of the mission and for the employment of men and furthermore it was noted that ‘Ernabella’s financial stability depends on its sheep industry’. The importance of the industry spread beyond the economic sphere to the social and spiritual. A photograph of a flock of grazing sheep against a backdrop of the church with the ranges in the distance graced the cover of the *Ernabella Newsletter* in September 1953.<sup>90</sup> The same image was printed on the certificates given to individuals after baptism. Hilliard has argued that the Biblical ‘concept of the Good Shepherd was not strange to them’ as the sheep flocks were cared for by family groups.<sup>91</sup> The caption underneath the photograph on the *Newsletter* reads ‘Worship and Industry to Fit the Environment that is Their Own’. A section in this *Newsletter* entitled ‘Hunters become herders’, pointed out that ‘[n]atives continue to prove themselves faithful shepherds with true responsibility’. The industry at this time was described as growing and thriving and there was discussion about increasing the sheep flock to

---

<sup>86</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> The number of people employed at the mission had risen from ninety in 1950 to 155 in 1952. In 1957 it was reported that 150 were regularly employed but in January of that year, 240 people were employed. *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1952, p. 2; *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 147.

<sup>89</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> See Figure 7.

<sup>91</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 185.

5000.<sup>92</sup> In 1956 and 1957, after a record wool clip, the sheep industry was still considered to be the 'economic base of the mission'.<sup>93</sup>

By 1958 the APBM inspectors expressed some criticism of the sheep industry, in particular that the sheep spent too much of their feeding time in the yards and that the dust was affecting the quality of the wool. They also noted that the flock was down to 3000 sheep and recommended that it be increased as soon as possible to the maximum 'carrying capacity' which was somewhere between 6000 and 12000 depending on the season. The expansion of the sheep industry which provided most of the employment for men was essential to provide income for the mission as the APBM inspectors made it clear that the Mission Board could not continue to fund the mission at the current rate. There were concerns about falling wool prices and the possibility that the South Australian Government would reclaim the three leased blocks adjoining the mission if Ernabella did not develop the full 2000 square miles of their holding.<sup>94</sup>

To address the ongoing issue of employment for young men an Industrial School, built with a grant of £1325 from the APB, was opened in 1955 to provide both 'theoretical and practical' training.<sup>95</sup> Eight young men attended in the first year to learn technical skills in building, general maintenance and mechanics with the aim that this would prepare them for work both on the mission and outside and to pursue apprenticeships further afield in Adelaide. However, it was noted that regular attendance was a problem and that a contract system would be implemented the following year to overcome this. Still relationships between staff and students were

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, pp. 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, February 1956, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1953, p. 5, AIATSIS; Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 148.

described as ‘exceptionally good’ and it was expected that this well equipped industrial school would have a bright future.<sup>96</sup> But this was not to be and by 1958 it had to be closed due to the lack of teaching staff.

The APBM reported that industrial training was most important but cautioned that once training was completed the availability of employment was ‘dependent on the local economic potential’. The report pointed out that in central Australia ‘the pool of potential Aboriginal male employees is too large for the total area potential’ and suggested that having trained men who had no chance of gaining employment ‘could have serious consequences’.<sup>97</sup> What the consequences could be were not elaborated on, but it can be assumed that the APBM were concerned about the impact on the men themselves. As it was evident that the mission could not employ everyone, the APBM concluded that men would have to look for employment outside the mission. An apprenticeship scheme was proposed in which the Government would fund training and subsidise wages. The APBM saw the Government’s involvement in this scheme as nothing less than a ‘national obligation’<sup>98</sup> and it is possible to detect a sense of relief that this burden would be removed from the shoulders of the APBM.

By 1957 the progress made in training and work was described as encouraging. Local people were engaged in a variety of employment at the mission including teaching, the production of Pitjantjatjara texts for use in school and church, nursing, cooking and storekeeping, brickmaking and shearing. It was noted that all of the people employed were young and most significantly that they were Christians, confirming the association between ‘Industry’ and ‘Worship’ which Trudinger had

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, February 1956, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

articulated in 1953.<sup>99</sup> Supervision of workers appeared to be minimal and the mission policy stated that ‘responsibility and independence’ was paramount. Excessive supervision was considered to be counterproductive to this aim and even though in some cases this was a pragmatic decision due to lack of staff, nonetheless it was reported to be working well.<sup>100</sup> This approach of encouraging workers to be independent contrasted with the increased scrutiny, which many Aboriginal people elsewhere were subject to, under assimilatory regimes. In 1957 women were in charge of the dining hall and the store, which was reflected on with surprise by Trudinger, as it was thought that ‘for years [they] would always have to be under whites’. Likewise when the Nursing Sister was away for six weeks, Aboriginal nursing aides ran the hospital without supervision and the record 1956 sheep clip was completed by twenty men and one white supervisor who was also absent from the shed for a week.<sup>101</sup> In domestic work for mission staff, women would also work unsupervised as pointed out by Tjikalyi Tjapiya—‘White fella tjuta, they leave the house in the morning, go to work, and we look after that baby’ and clean the house.<sup>102</sup> The employment of increasing numbers of people who worked without supervision indicates that people were adapting to the changes of settled living. While this would have had an impact on the kin-based economy, which had sustained Pitjantjatjara people for thousands of years, this did not mean cultural “loss”, as the history of employment in the craft room demonstrates.

---

<sup>99</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, pp. 5-6.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> Tjapiya, Tjikalyi, ‘A Day in Mission Times’, in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 21.

The craft room provided an important source of employment for women. Its history has been well documented<sup>103</sup> and from its establishment in 1948 it has continued to operate to the present day, now as Ernabella Arts Inc. The art and craft industry forms an integral part of the Ernabella story. Its significance to understanding contact history is evident in the display of art from Ernabella in a wide variety of public venues. Two displays which I have recently seen come to mind. The comprehensive and rich exhibition covering the whole sixty years of art and craft production in the First Australians Gallery of the National Museum in Canberra, and the commissioned floor rugs featuring the Ernabella design by Pantjiti Tjiyanggu McKenzie on the first floor foyer of the State Library of South Australia in Adelaide. Art produced by Ernabella artists has been described as a response to the contact situation and a way of forging an identity in a colonial world.<sup>104</sup> The history of the craft room reflects the overall mission policy of non-coercion and non-interference<sup>105</sup> and mirrors the changing nature of the encounter and Pitjantjatjara responses to these changes. The art and craft industry evolved through a gradual and continual process in which the people themselves made decisions concerning production and direction, and changes were incorporated from both existing traditions and mission life.

The beginnings of the craft industry have been attributed to a Mrs. M. M. Bennett, an experienced craftswoman and teacher of Aboriginal children, who visited the mission for several weeks late in 1948. She observed the traditional spinning

---

<sup>103</sup> Eickelkamp, U., *Anapalaku Walka—Ernabella Design: A Women's Art Movement, Ernabella, South Australia*, in L. Taylor (ed.), *Painting the Land Story*, National Museum of Australia, 1999, pp. 77-94; Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999; Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976; Young, D., *Nyukana (Daisy) Baker: A Retrospective*, Jam Factory Contemporary Craft and Design, Adelaide, 2009; Partos, L. (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kkuwari Kutu*, 1998; Morton, J., *Desert Voices—Pitjantjatjara Women's Art and Craft*, ProQuest, Edmonton, Alberta, 1997.

<sup>104</sup> Eickelkamp, U. (ed.), *'Anapalaku Walka'*, 1999, pp. 77-94.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.

techniques used by the women to spin human hair and animal fur<sup>106</sup> and believed that fleece from the mission's sheep could be spun in the same way and used for craft work. She taught the younger women weaving techniques and provided looms. Initially four older women did the spinning and they were given 'an ounce of raw wool' each morning which they would spin while sitting in the dry creek bed. Once this was spun, they would spend the afternoons hunting bush food, including rabbits.<sup>107</sup> While the spinning technique was one that had always been used, the purpose for spinning had changed and instead of producing yarn for traditional items such as hair belts, it was now produced for the new activities of weaving, knitting and rug making by the craft workers. An unintended consequence of knitting was that initially the men did not appreciate the new purpose for the spun yarn and believed that it would be better put to a more traditional use. The craft room report of 1951 noted that there had been a 'very pleasing advance on 2 or 3 years ago when every girl began a jumper and either never finished it or if they did it was unravelled by the men and worn as a ceremonial decoration'.<sup>108</sup> The spinners now received payment for their work in the form of a 'small remuneration, three meals a day as well as a dress'. The number of spinners increased quickly to thirty and then to sixty.<sup>109</sup>

What had begun as 'a voluntary gathering,' in 1948<sup>110</sup> was providing regular employment for forty to fifty women by June 1950. Winifred Hilliard, who was to coordinate the craft room until her retirement in 1986, arrived in 1954 and the

---

<sup>106</sup> See Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, 1975, p. 54 and Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p.174 for detailed descriptions of the spindles and the method of spinning. Spindles rather than spinning wheels were still used in 1958.

<sup>107</sup> Bennett, M., 'Early Days of Art/Craft at Ernabella 1949-1954', 1998, p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> Trudinger, Mrs. J. S., Craftroom Report, January-May 1951, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>109</sup> Bennett, M., 'Early Days of Art/Craft at Ernabella 1949-1954', 1998, p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

marketing of the work gathered momentum. By 1955, 140 women were employed in spinning and weaving and it was reported that it had 'surpassed all previous years in numbers of workers and quality of work' and orders for craft work were coming in steadily.<sup>111</sup> A catalogue, *Ernabella Handcrafts*, lists the prices for floor rugs, woven knee rugs, blankets and scarves, hand painted designs on gift tags, cards and scarves, moccasins and artefacts.<sup>112</sup> These were the mainstay of the craft industry until the 1970s when the centre went in a new direction and batik production, for which Ernabella became well known, began.

It was expected that the craft room would be self supporting as well as providing a source of income for the mission, but as noted in the 1958 APBM inspectors' report the craft room was still a 'very heavy drain of deficits'.<sup>113</sup> However, the room played an important social role as well as an economic one, as groups of women worked together on rugs.<sup>114</sup> The aims of establishing the craft industry were twofold. Firstly, to provide employment for women and girls who had finished school.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, and less explicitly stated, is that Trudinger 'caught the vision of an industry employing all women, young and old, thus encouraging teenagers, mothers with children and babies and the older women to settle at the mission'.<sup>116</sup> This suggests a degree of subtle coercion during Trudinger's time towards the gradual development of a more settled life for the people. The observations of his father, Dr R. Trudinger, a medical missionary in the Sudan, could have had some influence on his thinking. Dr Trudinger had visited Ernabella in 1944

---

<sup>111</sup> Craft Centre Report 1955, p. 1, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>112</sup> *Ernabella Handcrafts*, nd., PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2505. This catalogue was probably produced in the early 1960s prior to the introduction of decimal currency in 1966 as the prices are listed in sterling but after men began producing artefacts for sale.

<sup>113</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Winifred Hilliard, Pers. Comm., 11 May 2007.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Bennett, M., 'Early Days of Art/Craft at Ernabella 1949-1954', 1998, p. 15.

and believed that the nomadic habits of Pitjantjatjara people presented a ‘missionary problem’, because evangelising was difficult where the mission ‘has no control whatever over their movements’.<sup>117</sup>

From the perspective of Pitjantjatjara people the development of the arts industry at Ernabella has been determined by the artists and they speak with pride of their work. As Nura Rupert, who went from school to work in the craft room, explains, ‘[w]e were really clever workers on the loom’ and ‘we made it our own way’.<sup>118</sup> This contests the assessment made by Noel and Phyl Wallace that weaving was so ‘alien’ to Pitjantjatjara people that they failed to master it.<sup>119</sup> For the artists the aim of the arts and craft industry had another dimension and according to Nyukana Baker it was, and is, to ‘keep our culture strong’ by documenting the *Tjukurpa* for young people and by telling ‘them *Tjukurpa* while we are painting’.<sup>120</sup>

An interesting example of response to changed circumstances and an instance of the expression of agency on the part of the artists is the distinctive style which has featured, and continues to feature, on art and craft items from Ernabella. As Diana Young has argued, the art and craft from Ernabella is about ‘creating a new life, not merely reflecting it’.<sup>121</sup> The artists interviewed by Ute Eickelkamp in the late 1990s were quite clear that the distinctive Ernabella style is a post-contact development which was not practised before mission times. The design is derived from those drawn by children in the school during the late 1940s and 1950s which were most

---

<sup>117</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, August 1944, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Rupert, Nura, ‘Interview’, in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu*, 1998, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977, p. 34.

<sup>120</sup> Baker, N., ‘Interview’, L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu*, 1998, p. 10. Baker started working in the craft room in 1963 at the age of twenty and has spent her whole life as an artist. She has exhibited widely and her work is in national and international collections. A retrospective of her work was held in 2009 at the Jam Factory in Adelaide, curated by Diana Young. *Tjukurpa* translates as the Dreaming. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, 1987, p. 145.

<sup>121</sup> Young, D., *Nyukana (Daisy) Baker: A Retrospective*, 2009, p. 7.



likely ‘inspired by the traditional storytelling and the accompanying *milpatjunanyi*<sup>122</sup> in which the girls drew symbols in the sand as they related stories to illustrate them’.<sup>123</sup> According to Eickelkamp, because Ernabella was not a significant place for Anangu pre-mission, ‘the school is seen as embodying the beginning of the place’.<sup>124</sup>

So the design, first appearing in the children’s drawings, is ‘closely linked to the institutional setting of the mission and its evolving infrastructure’, but at the same time with continuities from pre-mission times in the ‘distinct conventions for forming shapes and compositions’. The design is passed down through the generations, from ‘grandmother to granddaughter, mother to daughter, aunt to niece, big sister to younger sister’ in order to ‘keep the design tradition alive’. The art style is new but has been incorporated into traditional social frameworks, demonstrating both change and continuity. All artists have become known for their individual interpretation of the design which today is an ‘identifying marker, of a symbol or emblem that stands for Ernabella as a place with its own distinct history’.<sup>125</sup> The artists assert that ‘Ernabella owns the Design’.<sup>126</sup> In addition, according to the *Ernabella Arts* catalogue, the traditional spinning sticks used as the emblem for Ernabella art and crafts were chosen ‘because it was from the skill of the women as spinners that the whole handcraft industry was built’.<sup>127</sup>

Young has argued that even though the design can be read as a post-mission artefact, in some ways it also forms part of the tradition which artists use to conceal

---

<sup>122</sup> *milpatjunanyi* translates as ‘to play a girls’ story-telling game’. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, 1987, p. 61.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards, B., Pers. Comm., 20 January 2012; For further information of the origin of the children’s drawing see Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 159.

<sup>124</sup> Eickelkamp, U., ‘“Drawing” the Story Together: An Anthropologists Learning of Ernabella Women’s Art’, in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka irititja munu kuwari kutu*, 1998, p. 47.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, 1998, p. 45

<sup>126</sup> Eickelkamp, U., ‘Anapalaku Walka—Ernabella Design’, 1999, p. 94.

<sup>127</sup> *Ernabella Handcrafts*, nd.

<sup>128</sup> Young, D., *Nyukana (Daisy) Baker: A Retrospective*, 2009.

<sup>129</sup> Tjikalyi, Tjapiya, ‘Our Design’, in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 56.

their most sacred knowledge in their work. ‘The *walka* [design] is about what isn’t said, what isn’t there’.<sup>128</sup> However, the artists assert quite definitely that the designs have ‘no story (*Tjukurpa wiya*)’ and are ‘not a sacred one’ about the Dreaming ancestors, but come from ‘our mind and from our heart’.<sup>129</sup> Eickelkamp has pointed out that ‘co-ordination of continuity and innovation constitutes no paradox’.<sup>130</sup>

According to Hilliard there was a good deal of criticism about the art being produced at Ernabella because it was not ‘traditional’, but the designs and the style were wholly determined by the artists themselves.<sup>131</sup> Artist George Bell regarded Ernabella art in the 1950s as ‘the only living manifestation of a genuine folk art in Australia’ which ‘combines both the culture of the primitive artist and the European’.<sup>132</sup> Yet the hybrid nature of the art and craft from Ernabella has been generally regarded as something which has been tainted by contact. It has held an uneasy relationship with the art market which has had a long tradition of assessing Aboriginal art within a binary of traditional/authentic or non-traditional/inauthentic. As Jones has argued ‘hybrid objects’ such as those from Ernabella have been interpreted as indicating cultural “loss”. Not regarded as traditional they are viewed as evidence of the degeneration of Aboriginal cultures rather than ‘Aboriginal engagement with European culture’.<sup>133</sup> A similar argument is mounted about the adoption of Christianity. However, the art and craft industry at Ernabella tells a dynamic story of interaction between artists, school teachers, art advisers and

---

<sup>130</sup> Eickelkamp, U., ‘Anapalaku Walka—Ernabella Design’, 1999, p. 88.

<sup>131</sup> Winifred Hilliard, Pers. Comm., 11 May 2007.

<sup>132</sup> Bell to Rev V. W. Coombes (Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions), 2 June 1954, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2508, Folder 7(ii).

<sup>133</sup> Jones, P., *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 147. These settlements included Areyonga, Docker River, Yuendumu.

missionaries.

As discussed earlier the assimilationist approach gained momentum throughout the 1950s. Settlements in remote areas were now regarded as training institutions and according to the Northern Territory Administration were places ‘for natives in transit’ where Aboriginal people could learn to live ‘in a wider community than the tribe’.<sup>134</sup> Assimilation centred around notions of detribalisation with an emphasis on individual development and the ‘normal’ Australian family. In 1960 Ernabella did share some of the same aims as the Northern Territory training institutions in preparing the people for ‘ultimate participation in a European society’.<sup>135</sup> But where Ernabella’s approach differed was in the belief that accommodation had to be made towards the maintenance of tribal life as far as possible, rather than pursuing assimilation through an attempt to model ‘a new `Indigenous family’.<sup>136</sup>

### **Facilitating continuity with the past**

Throughout the 1950s in the face of changing circumstances and government policy together with the realisation that mission people could not remain isolated at Ernabella, the mission remained committed to the policy of non-interference in tribal life. Edwards prefers to describe the policy as one of ‘minimal interference’ in recognition that the mere presence of the mission constituted some interference.<sup>137</sup> Two examples which illustrate the aim to minimise disruption to tribal life are the establishment and the subsequent closing of the mission dining hall and the mission policy on visitors.

---

<sup>135</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 148.

<sup>137</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 16 May 2012.

The story of the establishment of the dining hall at the mission and the decision in 1960 to discontinue the practice of providing communal meals was regarded as a way to ‘enhance tribal ability’.<sup>138</sup> It also provides an interesting insight into how rationing operated at Ernabella during the 1950s. It was argued in the previous chapter that the impact of the rationing regime at Ernabella during the 1940s provides an alternative reading to the orthodox assessment which finds rationing a management tool. Even though the establishment of the dining hall appeared to follow what Tim Rowse has termed ‘communal feeding’,<sup>139</sup> the programme differed in several ways to other settlements in the region. In particular, the practice was relatively short-lived and even when it was operating, only certain categories of residents were provided with meals. It is difficult to find any particular overriding reason in the reports and correspondence as to why a dining hall was needed but it was noted in June 1950 that increasing numbers of young men preferred ‘more useful and remunerative work’ rather than hunting and therefore these workers would require meals. However, it was stressed that missionaries were not disregarding the important status of hunting which they ‘will always look upon ... as an honourable occupation’.<sup>140</sup> Hilliard has proposed that dining hall meals were instituted ‘partly to prevent non-workers from living off their working relatives’.<sup>141</sup> It had also been suggested two years earlier in 1948 that there was a need for ‘dietetically balanced food rationing for children and for a more liberal number of adults’. ‘Hygienic central food cooking and distribution for children, aged, and infirm and sick, and for single workers’ would achieve this end. At the same time, it was noted that the mission policy on rationing had always been ‘to

---

<sup>138</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 1.

<sup>139</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 152.

<sup>140</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1950, p. 2.

<sup>141</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 195.

encourage the able-bodied to earn what they receive' and to not produce 'rice Christians' and that this new arrangement would not breach this policy.<sup>142</sup> By 1952 the APB Report noted that 'the kitchen-dining unit recently erected is now in full use and as a result the native cooks are able to prepare and serve good meals under satisfactory conditions'.<sup>143</sup>

Rowse has described the implementation of 'communal feeding' as the 'bureaucratisation of rationing',<sup>144</sup> a culmination of decades of the rationing regime as it were. Communal feeding of all residents was a feature of each government settlement in the desert regions of Central Australia from 1958 to the early 1970s and according to Rowse this was in order to 'impose a certain order of eating' in regards to what, how much and when food was eaten, and also an attempt to 'displace the camp with the communal kitchen-dining room'.<sup>145</sup> Rowse lists the motivations behind the practice as a way of controlling the distribution of food; as a humanitarian act to ensure nutrition; to minimise wastage; and for training in 'normal' eating habits, at tables with cutlery and crockery.<sup>146</sup> Ernabella Mission was motivated by many of the same concerns but after a few years found that 'communal feeding' in the dining hall was not resolving them.

Rather than enhancing nutrition, Duguid found in 1957 that the meals themselves and the way they were distributed in the dining hall were actually a factor in malnutrition.<sup>147</sup> The economic use of supplies and in particular flour 'which is wastefully used in damper etc.', was certainly an issue of concern which the

---

<sup>142</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1948, p. 4; *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1950, p. 2.

<sup>143</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1952, p.5, AIATSIS.

<sup>144</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 152.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>147</sup> As aforementioned, Duguid believed that poor nutrition was a factor in the deaths of twenty four children and two adults during the 1957 measles epidemic. Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, 1972, p. 185.

establishment of the dining hall in 1952 had not resolved. The training in ‘civilised’ eating habits and manners as a means for progressing ‘towards assimilation’ was not being achieved either. The APBM stated that the environment was not considered conducive for teaching children ‘desirable lessons in food and eating habits’ which they required in order to ‘proceed toward assimilation’, and the children had to be taken outside where they ate sitting on the ground. While the APBM inspection of Ernabella in 1958 did not comment unfavourably on the dining hall, in May 1960 the APBM reported that the provision of meals to all workers had created unforeseen problems as it had undermined people’s independence, which was integral to the original aim of the mission. ‘What was a privilege has tended to become a right’, the report noted.<sup>148</sup> Hilliard, who was working there at the time, reflected on the practice of ‘community feeding’ and later wrote that ‘people who had been able to order their lives for countless generations were taken over and responsibility for their own welfare taken from them’.<sup>149</sup>

In 1960 the APBM recommended that instead of cooked meals a total cash payment should be made to all wage-earners’ in order to ‘restore the practice of family camp housekeeping’. But ‘[c]hildren’s meals [would] again be served in an orderly way in the Dining Hall’.<sup>150</sup> Edwards recalls that when he returned to the mission in 1961 after his furlough he implemented a system whereby people were provided with uncooked rations so that they could cook for their own families. The reasons for this were that dining hall meals required close supervision to ensure everyone received equitable quantities of meat. Edwards also believed that people would prefer their meat cooked over open fires rather than in the unappetising form

---

<sup>148</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 1. Edwards had discussed such changes to the dining arrangements with the APBM report prior to his going on furlough in 1960. Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 20 January 2012.

<sup>149</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 195.

<sup>150</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 1.

of the stews prepared in the dining hall. From July 1966 full cash payments of wages and Commonwealth Child Endowment were paid directly to the people at Ernabella instead of rations. This enabled people to purchase their family's food from the store. By 1969 Edwards noted that around \$500 was being paid in wages each Friday and a good portion of this money was being spent at the mission store.<sup>151</sup> Duguid found that Edwards scheme had very 'sensibly' solved the issues of 'wastage and unequal distribution' of food.<sup>152</sup> While 'communal feeding' continued until the 1970s on other settlements,<sup>153</sup> by 1961 it had been abandoned at Ernabella.

For hunter-gatherer kin economies food sharing and consumption were circumscribed by strict rules which reinforce clan cohesion. Who can eat what, when and where and with who are determined by kin relationships.<sup>154</sup> Rowse's assessment of the outcome of the provision of meals in settlement dining halls is useful in understanding why it was so damaging. He argues that this approach to providing food, 'more than any other rationing procedure imprinted on the act of giving the donor's assumption of superiority' and thus 'threatened to displace the older social meaning of food'. It operated in a transformative way to 'disassemble the traditional domestic group' and construct a 'normal' domestic structure.<sup>155</sup> That Ernabella stopped the practice for adults when it was realised that it was creating dependent people and undermining traditional ways, demonstrates that the original policy on

---

<sup>151</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 20 January 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, 1972, p. 185.

<sup>153</sup> This was not discontinued at Balgo mission until the mid 1970s. See Poirier, S., *A World of Relationships: Itineraries, Dreams and Events in the Australian Western Desert*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2005, p. 30. At Kalumburu it continued into the late 1970s—see Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1982, p. 108. A communal dining hall operated at Yuendumu until 1969—see Keys, C., 'The House and the Yupukarra, Yuendumu, 1946-1996', in P. Read (ed.), *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, pp. 118-29.

<sup>154</sup> See Myers, F., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington & Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1986, p. 75.

<sup>155</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, pp. 152-54.

which the mission was founded remained as an underlying principle on which to base practices.

The mission policy on visitors was coming under increasing scrutiny with the 'opening up' of Central Australia. Ernabella Mission and the APBM received ever increasing requests from a variety of people, including scholars, students, interested individuals, authors, photographers, and tourists, to visit the mission. Superintendent Trudinger expressed his concern to the Rev. V. W. Coombes the General Secretary of the APBM, in 1955 that there had been sixty people visiting Ernabella during the previous three months, which he considered to be 'excessive'.<sup>156</sup> The correspondence relating to visitors shows the APBM and the mission trying to maintain its function as a buffer zone for Pitjantjatjara people and justify its strict policy in the face of external pressures.

Coombes described the mission project at this time as 'a most delicate task' which was to 'temper Western contacts according to the developing capacity of these primitives to absorb them without destroying their community sanctions and integration'.<sup>157</sup> The 'interests of the natives must have priority', and be 'free from distractions which inevitably occur when outside investigators work among them', Coombes explained to Cleland when permission was refused for Professor J. B. Birdsell to visit in 1953.<sup>158</sup>

Permission to visit was granted most selectively and infrequently and only to certain categories of visitors and a mix of paternalism and humanitarianism is clearly evident in the responses. In 1947 Coombes wrote to Wright, the Acting Superintendent of Ernabella, regarding a request by an anthropologist to visit the

---

<sup>156</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 28 July 1955, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2507. It is presumed that these visitors fitted the category of appropriate visitors who would not interrupt the mission programme as they had been granted permission.

<sup>157</sup> Coombes to Trudinger, 19 December 1952, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2507.

<sup>158</sup> Coombes to Cleland, 20 February 1953, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2507.



mission, stating that it is this 'kind of contact which may cause our people to look upon themselves as exhibits'.<sup>159</sup> Coombes wrote to A. P. Elkin in 1950 explaining that as far as they were concerned, and in the interests of Pitjantjatjara people, 'the fewer of such visitors Ernabella has at present, the better'.<sup>160</sup> Those who had been refused included prominent scholars such as Ronald Rose in 1951, who had been recommended by A. P. Elkin, Joseph Birdsell in 1954, A. A. Abbie and John Barnes in 1958 (Barnes was given permission to stay for one night in 1964), an archaeological party in 1963, and Ken Maddock in 1964.<sup>161</sup> In the face of mounting criticism the APBM felt that it had to defend its adherence to this policy and contest the accusation that they 'had something to hide'. In 1963 the Board provided a comprehensive statement outlining its reasons. The first section listed the categories of people who could visit: immediate family of staff; missionaries from other stations; representatives of the APBM, the APB and police on official business; people who have something to contribute to station life and its programme; and Presbyterian church moderators. Six reasons were given for restricting visitors: in the interests of the people at the mission who were not exhibits to be examined and measured, but people undergoing change; the scarcity of firewood and water; the distraction for staff from their extremely busy work schedules; lack of accommodation; impact on resources such as petrol due to remoteness from supplies; and the current development programme meant that the mission could not spare any vehicles.<sup>162</sup>

The proposed visit of some Ernabella people to Adelaide during Queen

---

<sup>159</sup> Coombes to Wright, 25 November 1947, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(v).

<sup>160</sup> Coombes (General Secretary of the APBM) to Elkin, 4 October 1950, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2507.

<sup>161</sup> APBM correspondence 1954, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2508, Folder 7 (ii).

<sup>162</sup> Statement by General Secretary Stuckley, J. M., APBM 1963, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2508.

Elizabeth's tour of Australia in early 1954 may appear unrelated to Ernabella's policy regarding visitors, but the correspondence between Trudinger, Duguid, the Premier of South Australia and the APB illustrates how the policy of not presenting Pitjantjatjara people as exhibits extended beyond the mission. Trudinger wrote to Duguid in July 1953 suggesting that a 'representative band [about thirty] of our fine Christian young Aborigines' who could also 'function as a Choir', could be brought to Adelaide. He thought that it would be educative for both the young Ernabella people and the Adelaide 'folk down there who could see and hear them'. Duguid sent Trudinger's suggestion, with his personal endorsement to the Premier of South Australia requesting a reserved place on the Queen's route through Adelaide. Duguid also pointed out to the Premier that this would be a good opportunity to display the success and uniqueness of the programme at Ernabella. He wrote, '[i]n no other part of Australia visited by Her Majesty will she be able to see actual tribal aborigines who in sixteen years have developed to our standard of living from the native tribal state'.<sup>163</sup> This certainly sounds as though Anangu were to be put on display for the public gaze, but a few months later Duguid cautioned, 'the Board will have to be very firm on the extent to which the natives are to be escorted around'. 'All attempts to parade the aborigines must be eliminated'. Duguid also expressed concern about the inclusion in the selected party of thirty five of a 'part-aboriginal girl who is almost white'. This he argued was not a good idea as 'the party is being represented as tribal aborigines'.<sup>164</sup> Duguid did not make clear his reasons for concern but it fits with his idea that the path to assimilation for "part-Aborigines" and "full-bloods" (tribal people) were different because based on their genetic background they had

---

<sup>163</sup> Trudinger to Duguid, July 1953, SArchives File No 22, 'Royal Progress', printed in *recordSArchives*, Issue 20, March 2002, pp. 2-3.

<sup>164</sup> Duguid to Staff Council, 17 November 1953, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504, Folder 7 (ii).

different needs. That is, for individual “part-aboriginal” people the process to advance to what was perceived as the required level of civilisation was more seamless than for tribal people.<sup>165</sup> Duguid held different views to the widely held perception of the time that it was an impossible task for tribal people to assimilate successfully, but he argued that it was more difficult. His wish to ‘display’ Ernabella people in Adelaide stemmed from his genuine pride in the achievements of Ernabella Mission and to demonstrate to the wider community that tribal people could assimilate. Perhaps he believed that the presence of a “part-aboriginal” girl deflected attention away from the major achievement of Ernabella Mission.

From 1965 permission to visit was increasingly granted to a wider range of people, including photographers and scholars. For example, Yengoyan<sup>166</sup> was granted permission in 1966 and Noel Wallace<sup>167</sup> in 1967 as his wife, Phyl agreed to teach in the school.<sup>168</sup> At the same time as restrictions on visitors appeared to be relaxing at the mission itself, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) still ‘rigidly restricted’ entry to the Central Reserve to those whose work was of ‘National Importance’ or was in the direct interest of the Aboriginal population’.<sup>169</sup> Charles Rowley has argued that even though the restrictions had some merit in protecting against exploitation, by the late 1960s it was time to do away with such paternalism and allow Aboriginal people to ‘undertake the reception of visitors in their own

---

<sup>165</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 180.

<sup>166</sup> AIAS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies) to APBM, 1 June 1966, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2508.

<sup>167</sup> Presbyterian Church of Victoria to Stuckley (APBM), 14 March 1967, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2508.

<sup>168</sup> It is interesting that both Wallace and Yengoyan have written critically of missionary work at Ernabella. Wallace argues that the conservativeness of Aboriginal cultures leads to their collapse rather than adaptation to new circumstances on contact and Yengoyan reasons that the Pitjantjatjara spiritual world view and Christianity are so different that mutual understanding is impossible. See Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, 1977 and Yengoyan, A., ‘Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia’, in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1993.

<sup>169</sup> Department of Aboriginal Affairs to APBM, 24 August 1965, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2508.

way'. Furthermore, he pointed out that restricted access to reserves 'constitutes the hindrance to enterprise'.<sup>170</sup>

### **New settlements**

While Ernabella had undergone many changes since 1953 and had largely maintained its original vision by 1960 a number of circumstances had converged to create problems at the mission. According to Edwards these included overcrowding as more people adopted an increasingly sedentary life based at the mission; resources around the mission were becoming depleted; the lack of employment for men both at the mission and on nearby cattle stations meant that people were unable to purchase the 'introduced goods' they increasingly desired; close living for extended periods led to disputes between groups unaccustomed to such sustained contact; the social dynamics were changing as 'people from other areas gained power and status through work, education, the church and access to resources'.<sup>171</sup> The 1960 Survey of Ernabella's Pastoral Industry by the APBM noted that there were 'too many people concentrated on Ernabella' and that the people had expressed the desire for 'another Mission station to ease the congestion which they are finding to be a handicap'.<sup>172</sup> Subsequently the APBM wrote to the APB proposing that the overcrowding at Ernabella could be alleviated by decentralisation and that this would 'increase the potential for economic progress for the people towards an earned higher standard of living'.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>170</sup> Rowley, C. D., *The Remote Aborigines*, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic., 1972, pp. 110- 11.

<sup>171</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia', 1992, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Survey of Ernabella's Pastoral Industry, May 1960, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2505.

<sup>173</sup> Coombes (Treasurer of the APBM) to Bartlett (Secretary of the Aboriginal Protection Board), 9 June 1960, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2505.

During 1961 two settlements were established away from Ernabella. The first, opened in April of that year was the Government settlement of Amata, originally called Musgrave Park, about 140 kilometres west of Ernabella. Despite the more practical concerns expressed by the mission and the APBM about overcrowding at Ernabella which had put increased pressure on firewood and water supplies, according to Edwards, the primary motivation for the establishment of the Government settlement at Amata appeared to be in response to increasing demands to develop pastoral enterprises on the Central Reserve which were opposed by the Government. The settlement was positioned where it 'would enable control over entry into the Reserve'.<sup>174</sup> The Government assured the APBM that as long as the Board would provide for the 'medical, educational and cultural aspects' of those at the new settlement, 'no other Church will be invited to work in the area', ostensibly to ensure that there would be 'no spiritual confusion'.<sup>175</sup> Initially, six families who had connections to the country around Amata moved there and by 1962 the population had increased to 150 as relatives joined them. In 1968 the population had risen to 300.<sup>176</sup> Edwards has pointed out that one of the impacts of the establishment of Amata on the lives of Ernabella people was that it changed the annual 'holiday trips from Ernabella to the west' as now people stayed at Amata to visit relatives.<sup>177</sup>

Later in 1961 the APBM established Fregon as a mission outstation, sixty five kilometres south west of Ernabella, for a population of 100 people who 'associated with the sandhill country to the west and [to provide] training and

---

<sup>174</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia', 1992, pp. 13-4

<sup>175</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 6. This is a curious point made by the APBM considering their belief that Pitjantjatjara people had adapted to Christianity from a vastly different belief system without spiritual confusion.

<sup>176</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia', 1992, p. 14.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

employment in cattle work'. By the late 1970s the initial herd of 200 cattle had increased to 7000 and the population had grown to 250.<sup>178</sup> Nancy Sheppard, the teacher at Ernabella was transferred to Fregon and recollected that the outstation was never intended to develop into a community of that size but people moved there to join their kinfolk. She argues that the APBM demonstrated a lack of understanding of the cultural needs of the people both in selecting the site and assuming that the population could be limited to 100 people. The most notable aspect of Fregon for Sheppard was 'Anangu's natural assumption of responsibility for the community'.<sup>179</sup> These developments marked the beginning of decentralisation for Ernabella people as they began the move away from the mission which for many had been their home for the last two decades. Migrations back to their lands accelerated during the 1960s and 1970s as people formed homeland communities. This development will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

### **Changing religious identities**

For Pitjantjatjara people at Ernabella, the 1950s, as well as being times of change in economic and social spheres, were also times of changing ideologies in relation to religious identities. As Edwards has pointed out, 'as their material and social environments change ... their expressions of spirituality must inevitably reflect this'.<sup>180</sup> Even though Sylvia Poirier has noted that spiritual innovation is 'more frequent in Western Desert societies' than in others because of the 'flexibility of local group membership',<sup>181</sup> Aboriginal religious beliefs are relatively conservative

---

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>179</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>180</sup> Edwards, W. H., *Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality*, Charles Strong Memorial Trust Lecture, Queens's College, University of Melbourne, 2 July 2001, p. 26.

<sup>181</sup> Poirier, S., *A World of Relationships: Itineraries, Dreams and Events in the Australian Western Desert*, 2005, p. 243.

and while they are impacted on by economic and social spheres ideological changes may come more slowly. This is not to argue that changes do not occur in the spiritual realm but rather to make the point that they are not so immediate and not so obvious.

The interconnection of ‘personal, cultural, social, and religious dimensions’ was noted by Lewis Rambo in his study of religious conversion which is useful to our understanding of the changes to traditional beliefs at Ernabella.<sup>182</sup> Rambo points out that the context within which conversion takes place is important in shaping the outcomes.<sup>183</sup> As Noel Loos has argued, missions were isolated ‘village theocracies’<sup>184</sup> within the wider colonial context. In the case of Ernabella, during the 1950s a generation of people had grown up in a religious community with considerable exposure to Christianity, so it could be expected that Christian values would have had some significance in their lives and relationships. However, while continuities in traditional practices can be identified, it is more difficult during this period to identify the adoption of Christian practices.

The dedication of the Ernabella Church in November 1952 and the baptism of twenty young people indicate that this period marked a closer engagement with Christianity than previously. Trudinger reported in 1953 that the first infant had been baptised and between 200 and 300 people were attending church.<sup>185</sup> In addition, he noted that the ‘way of Christ is becoming the accepted way, the standard by which personal relationships and community problems ... are solved’.<sup>186</sup> Hilliard writes that

---

<sup>182</sup> Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1993, pp. 8-11.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>184</sup> Loos, N., *White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS, Canberra, 2007, p. 119.

<sup>185</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March, 1953, p. 4. This suggests an extremely high attendance rate as according to the 1953 APB of South Australia Annual Report, the daily population at Ernabella was between 100 and 300 people, although it was added that the population ‘is often considerably more’. See also Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Report to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1953, p. 6, AIATSIS.

<sup>186</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 6.

after those first baptisms, relatives of the young people requested ‘extra instruction’ which indicates that the young converts had been teaching their families. One of these converts, Nganyintja Ilyatjari, taught her husband Charlie while they were working at one of the isolated sheep camps.<sup>187</sup> Later they both became leaders of the Amata church.<sup>188</sup> In addition, it had been reported in 1950 that the Pitjantjatjara Gospel was being read in the bush and young men were holding their own services.<sup>189</sup>

In 1954 Hilliard noted that the first performance of the Christmas story accompanied by the Choir to ‘a capacity-filled church’, was ‘completely successful’, with the audience watching ‘in silence to the end’.<sup>190</sup> In the same year the *Ernabella Newsletter* reported that ‘native Christians’ invited missionaries to Saturday night prayer meetings in the camp.<sup>191</sup> On Sundays there were morning and afternoon services in the church and according to the APBM inspectors, Rev. G. Anderson and Rev. H. Bell, ‘a real spirit of reverence’ was displayed. ‘One of the men always assisted the leader of the morning devotions or at the Sunday services.’ On each Sunday afternoon one of the younger men preached the sermon and on Sunday evenings, Aborigines held ‘their own worship in the Camp’.<sup>192</sup> By 1960, there were sixty three adults on the Communion Roll, twenty infants had been baptised, forty four adults were attending Bible Class, twenty men led ‘public prayer’, the Ernabella

---

<sup>187</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 188.

<sup>188</sup> Edwards, B., ‘*Tjkurpa Palya*—The Good Word: Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p. 144.

<sup>189</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1950, p. 1.

<sup>190</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 186.

<sup>191</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, August 1954, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 5. Hilliard noted that a visitor to Ernabella in 1940, Lauri Sheard, reported that Trudinger conducted services in both Pitjantjatjara and English. Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 182.



hymnal had been printed, and prayer meetings were held regularly in the camp.<sup>193</sup> At the same time, the children were receiving religious teaching in the school<sup>194</sup> and Bible translation work had been undertaken for many years.<sup>195</sup>

It is clear that the people were actively engaged in a dynamic ‘process of integrating knowledge and experience’<sup>196</sup> and grappling with Christian concepts. However, the number of church attendees and baptisms do not tell us much about the ideological changes which were occurring as it is difficult to know what people were thinking or how, and to what degree, they were accepting Christianity when engaged in these activities. In order to make this assessment, more tangible evidence of what are regarded as indicators of conversion to Christianity, such as Christian marriage and burial practices are needed. However, there is little mention of changes to these practices in the missionary narrative for this period. As Edwards has pointed out, burial practices did not change until the early 1970s,<sup>197</sup> and even though there had been Christian marriages at other missions, for example, at Poonindie in the 1850s and at Ooldea in the 1940s,<sup>198</sup> there is no mention that this occurred at Ernabella. According to Aram Yengoyan during 1966-1967 86% of marriages were still traditional and adhered to correct kin relationships.<sup>199</sup> In a number of letters from Edwards to his parents during his time at the mission, he writes that fights broke out when traditional marriage arrangements were challenged by younger people.

---

<sup>193</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 8. The population was about 400 at this time. Annual Report for Aborigines Department 9/7/1962 PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>194</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 189.

<sup>195</sup> As early as 1945 the aim was that each family would have a copy of a translated Gospel. Trudinger, R., Report on the Ernabella Mission School, June 1945, p. 2, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>196</sup> Austin-Broos, D., ‘The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction’, in A. Buckser & S.D. Glazier (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Edwards, B., ‘*Tjkurpa Palya*’, 2005, p. 147.

<sup>198</sup> Mattingley, C. & Hampton, K. (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, pp. 148-49.

<sup>199</sup> Yengoyan, A., ‘Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization’, 1970, pp. 86-7.

Edwards notes that the mission ‘policy in this as in other matters has been to interfere with their customs as little as possible so that any change will be gradual and will come from them’.<sup>200</sup>

There is every indication that while people attended church they continued to maintain traditional ways. There is evidence in the missionary narrative that traditional ceremonies were still practised. In June 1951 it was reported that there had been an influx of people to Ernabella in the spring from the west and south-west for the Red Ochre ceremony, an important part of the ceremonial cycle for the initiation of young men. In the same *Newsletter* it was noted that thirty young people were preparing to take ‘their stand for Christ’.<sup>201</sup> Nine years later the APBM report noted that a ‘special corroboree ordeal ceremony’, shrouded in secrecy had been held, which ‘even Christian young men were obliged to pass’. The APBM report also noted that interest in traditional ritual appeared to be waning, but admitted that ‘[n]ative culture demands and claims are still quite compelling in many life situations’.<sup>202</sup> This demonstrates an interesting juxtaposition of traditional beliefs with Christianity which Diane Austin-Broos has described as a ‘passage, a “turning from and to” that is neither syncretism nor absolute breach’.<sup>203</sup>

As discussed earlier, missionaries at Ernabella held an enlightened approach to conversion in which traditional culture was generally respected and valued and where Aboriginal people were not expected to reject their practices. The description of the work of evangelising at Ernabella as being ‘a most delicate task’<sup>204</sup> does indicate a gentle and non-coercive approach. According to Edwards, Pitjantjatjara

---

<sup>200</sup> Edwards, Bill, ‘Ernabella Letters’, Originals held by Bill Edwards. Digitised copies held at Ara Irititja project Archive, Netley, SA, 13/5/1958; 1/12/1958; 16/4/1959.

<sup>201</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1951, pp. 1-2.

<sup>202</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 8.

<sup>203</sup> Austin-Broos, D., ‘The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction’, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>204</sup> Coombes to Trudinger, 19 December 1952, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2507.

people at Ernabella found in the Old Testament elements which resonated with their lives. They identified with the Israelites who also travelled through the deserts and searched for food and water in an inhospitable environment. Edwards noted that evangelising was not completely one-sided and he ‘learnt more about the Old Testament through [his] contact with Pitjantjatjara people than perhaps [he] learnt in theological college’.<sup>205</sup>

Rambo has argued that religious change hinges on the stability and strength of Indigenous cultures. Where the culture is more stable and intact, there are fewer converts.<sup>206</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, Yengoyan, who conducted his fieldwork at Ernabella and Amata in the mid-1960s, has proposed a different reason and argues that there were few signs of conversions as he found that the ‘socio-ceremonial’ structure had not been affected by Christianity.<sup>207</sup> He argued that this was because Pitjantjatjara people could not take up Christianity due to immutable differences between the two belief systems.<sup>208</sup> However, religious change is not as rude and straightforward as Yengoyan has argued. The evidence from Ernabella shows that traditional practices did continue often alongside Christian practices as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Rambo’s work on religious conversion is useful in attempting to understand changing religious identities at Ernabella. Rambo argues that conversion is a dynamic process, sometimes lasting a lifetime and suggests that it can be more aptly described as ‘converting’. In addition, he points out that there can be a wide diversity

---

<sup>205</sup> ‘Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission’, *Compass*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 22 April 2011.

<sup>206</sup> Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1993, p. 41.

<sup>207</sup> Yengoyan, A., ‘Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization’, 1970, p. 72.

<sup>208</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of Yengoyan’s argument. See also the following who both contest this argument—Edwards, B., ‘*Tjkurpa Palya*’, 2005, pp. 129-53 and Ranger, T., ‘Christianity and the First Peoples: Some Second Thoughts’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, pp. 15–32.

of motivations behind the conversion phenomena which are ‘complex, interactive and cumulative’ and can change throughout the stages of the process as people move towards a commitment to Christianity.<sup>209</sup> Rambo points out that in the earliest stages of the encounter between Indigenous people and missionaries, as was the situation at Ernabella in the 1940s when people had little knowledge of Christianity, a fluctuation between beliefs is typical and initial motivations may be due to the material benefits offered by the mission. Yengoyan proposes that church attendances by large numbers of the community were motivated by the love of ‘ritual and singing’, rather than an interest in Christianity *per se*.<sup>210</sup> Rambo’s model allows a different reading to that of Yengoyan and attendance at church can be regarded as part of the selective process which accompanies religious change.

The next stage in the process according to Rambo, and which is relevant to Ernabella in the 1950s, is characterised by increasing knowledge of Christianity. While religious practices may not necessarily change, reflection on the compatibility of elements of both belief systems occurs.<sup>211</sup> Conversion can be partial rather than total, with responses positioned along a continuum between resistance and outright rejection and complete acceptance.<sup>212</sup> At Ernabella there was some resistance from some Aborigines to the young people who were being prepared for Baptism in 1951. Trudinger commented that it was ‘mild persecution’ and ‘only to be expected’. Who the resistance came from and why is not recorded<sup>213</sup> but it does indicate that there was a diversity of opinion about Christianity in the community. The election of four

---

<sup>209</sup> Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1993, pp. xii, 65.

<sup>210</sup> Yengoyan, A., ‘Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions’, 1993, p. 243.

<sup>211</sup> Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1993, p. 100.

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 17 January 1951, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(i).

men as church leaders by church members in 1961<sup>214</sup> indicates that the adoption of Christian practices was subject to ongoing critical debate in the community. In Rambo's next stage, which can be applied to Ernabella in the 1960s and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, he argues that there is a more evident shift in religious identity where there is compromise and adjustment to traditional practices in line with Christian values.<sup>215</sup>

Rambo also notes that the particular theory of conversion held by missionaries determines outcomes in the conversion process<sup>216</sup> and as has been discussed earlier, Ernabella's approach was particularly enlightened. Potential converts were not expected to completely reject their traditional practices as missionaries did not see the two belief systems as necessarily mutually exclusive. Missionaries respected and valued Pitjantjatjara culture, coercion was used as little as possible and the practice of segregating children from their families was not practised at all. The outcome of this particular approach to conversion is illustrated in the following story of Tony Tjamiwa's life as told by Edwards who participated in Tjamiwa's funeral service in 2001. Tjamiwa moved with his family to Ernabella in 1937, attended the school and in 1961 became one of the elected leaders of the church at Ernabella. At the same time he maintained tribal Law and was held in such high regard as a traditional Law man that Uluru was closed to climbers for the period of mourning after his death. Edwards writes that Tjamiwa's 'life exhibited the positive qualities of spirit as understood within both Aboriginal and Christian traditions'.<sup>217</sup> Tjamiwa epitomised a person living with a multiplicity of identities. His story fits Austin-Broos notion that religious identities are 'constituted and

---

<sup>214</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 144.

<sup>215</sup> Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1993, p. 100.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>217</sup> Edwards, W. H., *Recovering Spirit*, 2001, p. 1.

reconstituted through social practice and the articulation of new forms of relatedness'.<sup>218</sup>

## Conclusion

Even though in the years between 1953 and 1961, the mission held to its underlying principle of non-coercion and non-interference in traditional life, it responded to external and internal pressures for change. There was a subtle shaping of social change mediated by the mission's particular interpretation of assimilation, in which some traditional ways could be preserved but others replaced. But there is also evidence which demonstrates that the people were actively engaged in these decisions about the types and rate of change and an identity was emerging which was based on Ernabella itself. A tangible example can be seen in the evolution of the unique art and craft production. The mission worked to establish an autonomous and self-sufficient community through the establishment of the dining hall, industrial training, the craft and sheep industries, and in plans for a settled village. Religious instruction, the ongoing translation of the scriptures and literacy in the vernacular were important projects but at the same time the mission was mindful of the importance of the maintenance of traditional beliefs in providing stability. Whether this followed Elkin's notion that continuity of traditional ways was useful as a means to an end is not clear.<sup>219</sup> There is certainly evidence of the continuation of traditional social networks and ritual life throughout this period. As Helmut Petri and Gisela Petri-Odermann found during their fieldwork in the Western Desert between 1954 and 1966, there was evidence of the continuation of traditional social networks and

---

<sup>218</sup> Austin-Broos, D., 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', 2003, p. 9.

<sup>219</sup> McGregor, R., 'Wards, Words and Citizens', 1999, p. 250.

ritual life which 'provides their lives with a sense of balance'.<sup>220</sup>

The situation within the mission was characterised by ambiguities and complexities, on the one hand it acted as an agent of change, and on the other hand was committed to continuity. But the mission, although influenced by external power structures, cannot be considered as an agent of the government or other secular authorities during this period. Government approaches to assimilation, from biological absorption to the later approach of cultural assimilation were opposed and pastoralist demands to encroach on the three adjoining blocks leased by the mission were resisted. Orthodox interpretations of missions in relation to implementing changes which finds their impact as either minimal and insignificant or maximal and absolute, are inadequate in relation to Ernabella Mission. The reality lies somewhere in between.

Fred Myers has shown how desert people incorporate new elements into their belief systems through a rigorous process of selection and rejection.<sup>221</sup> While Christianity did not displace Pitjantjatjara beliefs during this period, elements of Christianity were rejected or embraced in a dynamic process of change and continuity which had always characterised intellectual life for desert people. Even though this process of incorporation continued, regardless of the particular approach adopted by missions, Ernabella's moderate and relatively non-interventionist approach which perhaps during this period stemmed more from a humanitarian base than an anthropological understanding, was a sound one.

---

<sup>220</sup> Petri, H. & Petri-Odermann, G., 'Stability and Change: Present-day Historic Aspects Among Australian Aborigines', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, UWA, Nedlands, 1970, p. 250. See also Brokensha, P., 'The Pitjantjatjara: A Relevant Case Study of Continuity and Change', 1981, pp. 51-7.

<sup>221</sup> Myers, F., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, 1986.



Figure 9  
Outdoor school class at Ernabella School, South Australia, 1946  
Duguid, C., <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4404383>>



Figure 10  
Ernabella Schoolroom, 1963  
Moore, D., <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an14066835-5>>

## Chapter Six

### Ernabella after 1962: 'Travellers along the Road'<sup>1</sup>

The next two chapters will discuss the last years of the Ernabella mission covering the years between 1962 and 1974. This period brought considerable changes and culminated

<sup>1</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 4.



in the transfer of administrative control of the mission to the community under self-determination principles. This chapter will examine the ways in which the particular approach employed by Ernabella mission facilitated the outstation movement, the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Council in 1976 and the subsequent land rights campaign leading to the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* 1981. It will be argued that a consequence of the mission's focus on cultural maintenance, pursued through its approach to housing, employment and education, was that Ernabella was well placed to engage with the wider economy. Chapter Seven will look at the impact of missionising on the spiritual life of Ernabella people during this period and the subsequent enduring strong traditional religious identity at Ernabella.

The population at Ernabella throughout the 1960s averaged around 400 people and by 1970 had a staff of 18.<sup>2</sup> The population comprised generations with different histories—an older generation who had spent their early years as hunters and gatherers, a generation who had grown to adulthood at the mission attending school and working at the mission, and an emerging younger generation who had been born at the mission. At the start of the 1970s, Bill Edwards noted that the population in the region, although fluctuating could be divided approximately between five centres: 350 people at Ernabella; 200 at Fregon; 330 at Amata; 200 at Indulkana (excised from Granite Downs station); and 80 at Everard Park.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately there are no *Ernabella Newsletters* for this period as they ceased publication in January 1957. Between 1967 and 1969 editions of *Pitjantjatjara Tjukurpa*

---

<sup>2</sup> Annual Reports to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1963-1967, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506; Peterson, N., 'Aboriginal Involvement with the Australian Economy in the Central Reserve During the Winter of 1970', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the 1970s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, pp. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1992, p. 16.

were published at the mission and were shared with other communities such as Coober Pedy, Amata, Warburton, Alice Springs, Port Augusta, Areyonga and even as far away as Adelaide. These publications had an educative role and were mostly in Pitjantjatjara, with some English stories. They contained contributions from people about daily events and church activities at the mission, offered health information, and related traditional and Bible stories. A report in the July 1969 edition of *Pitjantjatjara Tjukurpa* describes the visitors to the mission in the first half of the year. The diverse group included a number from overseas including Joanasie Salamonie, described as ‘an Eskimo from Baffin Island’ who had ‘demonstrated his art of stone carving’, two academics from Prague with interests in vernacular education for gypsies and a visitor from the United States who had done missionary work with Native Americans. Succumbing to increased pressure and demand the mission policy on visitors as discussed in Chapter Five relaxed and the mission was expanding its horizons beyond the north-west of South Australia. The register of permits issued to visitors from the mid-1960s shows increasing numbers of people, particularly those involved in education, being granted access.<sup>4</sup>

The missionary narrative of daily life for this period is contained in the Annual Reports from the mission which were written to provide the Department of Aboriginal Affairs with factual information, rather than to inform the wider church membership of missionary activities as the *Ernabella Newsletters* had done. Consequently they adopted a less reflective and more official tone. From the reports it is evident that significant changes in everyday life were occurring during this period. One change which was considered noteworthy was that numbers of babies had been born in the mission hospital. In 1960 it was reported that all births except one had been in the hospital and in

---

<sup>4</sup> Visitors to Reserve – Register of Permits, 1965-1970, GRG 52 Serial 21, State Archives of South Australia.

1962, of the twenty one births, twelve were in the hospital and nine in the bush away from settlements. This would have altered the social dynamics because the birth of a child mandated roles and obligations for certain kin, which then continued throughout the child's life. Ronald and Catherine Berndt argue that traditional Aboriginal societies had always had a high infant mortality rate<sup>5</sup> and this continued to be the case in the early years at Ernabella. The nursing sister in 1949, Ruth Dawkins, noted that the death of newborns was not unusual in the camp during that year.<sup>6</sup> It is not made clear from the mission records why there was this shift to hospital births but it may have been seen by Anangu as a way to prevent infant mortalities. In November 1961 twins were born in the hospital and it was the first time on record that both twins born to a Pitjantjatjara mother had survived.<sup>7</sup> In a practical sense hunter-gatherer societies were unable to successfully rear twins and Ted Strehlow found that one baby 'was always "disposed of" after birth'. According to Strehlow the reason given was that only one baby could be the 'reincarnation of a totemic ancestor' and therefore the other must be 'the reincarnation of an evil spirit'.<sup>8</sup> The establishment of the mission provided an alternative to this practice.<sup>9</sup> The mission noted that this acceptance of twins 'marked a step in the development of the thinking of the people'.<sup>10</sup> Clearly people were demonstrating agency by making strategic decisions in relation to their use of the mission and adjusting their cultural practices accordingly.

---

<sup>5</sup> Berndt, R. M. & C. H., *The World of the First Australians*, Lansdowne Press, Dee Why West, Australia, 1981, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters: Extracts of Letters Written from "Ernabella" in the Musgrave Ranges, South Australia 1949-1950*, Uniting Church of Australia, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, B., Pers. Comm., 30 January, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Strehlow, T. G. H., Pamphlet No. 3, Vol. 1, [1978], cited in K. S. Strehlow, *The Operation of Fear in Traditional Aboriginal Society in Central Australia*, The Strehlow Research Foundation Inc., Prospect, SA, 1990, pp. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1976, p. 101 and Berndt, R. M. & C. H., *The World of the First Australians*, 1981, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Annual Reports to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1960-1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

### **Towards self-determination in South Australia**

From the early 1960s there was increasing and more visible activism nationally among Aboriginal people who were demanding inclusion as equal citizens together with recognition of their distinctive status *and* the maintenance of unique cultural identities. A referendum held in 1967 to amend discriminatory clauses in the Australian constitution resulted in an overwhelming majority ‘Yes’ vote and has been considered as beginning the shift away from an assimilatory discourse to that of self-determination. Charles Rowley attributed the success of the referendum to emerging public opinion that Aboriginal people had been the subject of neglect and that ‘something had been seriously wrong’.<sup>11</sup>

In South Australia there had been significant shifts in policies for Aborigines throughout the state prior to the referendum. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1962 the *Aboriginal Affairs Act* (South Australia) replaced the *Aborigines Act 1934-1939* (South Australia). The discussions in parliament prior to the passage of the new Act acknowledged governmental and individual responsibility for Aboriginal people which in some ways foreshadowed Prime Minister Paul Keating’s speech, in December 1992, at Redfern Park thirty years later. In his address to the South Australian parliament in support of the Act, Attorney-General C. D. Rowe, pointed out that Aborigines had been ‘dispossessed of hunting grounds and land’ and the ‘problem of assimilation is one that we have inflicted upon them’. He argued that the new Act was ‘a recognition of the fact that time marches on, and that circumstances and concepts change’. Furthermore, ‘it may well indicate the progress made over the years—progress in development toward normal standards of living by Aborigines, and progress, too, towards an enlightened

---

<sup>11</sup> Rowley, C. D., *Outcasts in White Australia*, Pelican Books, Sydney, 1972, p. 384.

public mind which has come to an awareness of our individual responsibilities towards Aborigines as our fellow citizens'.<sup>12</sup>

The 1962 Act created an Aboriginal Affairs Department, abolished the South Australian Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) and the role of Protector and appointed a Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to administer the Act. An Aboriginal Affairs Board comprised of seven members appointed by the Governor, was established to provide advice to the Minister 'on the operation of this Act'.<sup>13</sup> The preamble stated that its function was to 'repeal the Aborigines Act, 1934-1939, and to promote the welfare and advancement of Aborigines and of persons of Aboriginal blood in South Australia and for other purposes'.<sup>14</sup> The discriminatory elements inherent in Aboriginal policy which were perceived to be impediments to Aboriginal people attaining citizenship were to be removed and it was clearly stated that the Act 'abolishes all restrictions and restraints on Aborigines as citizens except for some primitive full-blood people in certain areas to be defined'.<sup>15</sup> Clauses relating to the consorting provision,<sup>16</sup> control over place of

---

<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, South Australia, Volume 2, Government Printer, SA, 1962, pp. 1721-722.

<sup>13</sup> *Aboriginal Affairs Act* 1962 (South Australia).

<[http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au/webclient/StreamGate?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1273024649685~853](http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1273024649685~853)>, accessed 5 May 2010.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, s. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1962, p. 1722; *Aboriginal Affairs Act*, 1962 (South Australia), s. 15(g).

<sup>16</sup> This provision was ostensibly to 'protect' Aboriginal women from non-Aboriginal men as was evident in Section 34 (a) of the *Aborigines Act 1934-1939* which stated 'Any male person, other than a [native], who, not being married to the female[native]

(a) habitually consorts with a female[native]; or

(b) keeps a female[native] as his mistress; or

(c) has carnal knowledge of a female [native], shall be guilty of an offence.'

However, this was extended beyond relationships between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men as the 1953 amendment to the Police Offences Act stated, it was an offence for a non-Aboriginal person to 'habitually consort' with an Aboriginal person. Even though this was impossible to police in practice and was applied selectively, it could be used punitively. It is another example of the ambivalence which characterised protection and assimilation approaches. It appears that the doggers in the central reserve who were cohabiting with Aboriginal women and who provided the impetus for Duguid's campaign to establish Ernabella were 'guilty of an offence'.

residence, and exclusion from towns, were repealed.<sup>17</sup> No longer could the government abolish Aboriginal reserves. There was a selective easing of alcohol restrictions at the Minister's discretion, and again there was an exception made for those who lived in 'primitive conditions' and who still required 'protection from the consumption of alcohol'.<sup>18</sup> The ultimate aim of the new Act was for all Aboriginal people to integrate 'into the general community'.

Officially this Act marked the end of the eras of control and protection but it made exceptions, based on the perceived stage of 'development' of Aboriginal groups with continuing protection to be provided for 'the more primitive' such as those at Ernabella Mission.<sup>19</sup> It also appeared that the assimilation approach which sought the disappearance of distinct Aboriginal cultures was officially over. The 1965 Aboriginal Welfare Conference expressed a new understanding of assimilation which sought not to destroy 'Aboriginal culture and customs' because these were now regarded as valuable to successful assimilation. The future for Aboriginal people was that they join the wider community 'with a pride in their own culture and achievements as a people'.<sup>20</sup>

The term integration was now used instead of assimilation, whereby Aborigines could be included in the nation as distinct cultural groups, with Aboriginality intact. But even though assimilation and integration appeared to differ in their perception of the value of Aboriginal cultures, the terms were often used interchangeably and as Russell McGregor has pointed out, in reality the distinction between them was often 'hazy' and 'illusory'. There were more commonalities than differences, with both terms containing

---

<sup>17</sup> While in opposition during the late 1950s, Don Dunstan had campaigned with Aboriginal people to remove the discriminatory legislation from the *Aborigines Act 1934-1939*. Dunstan was Minister for Social Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs from 1965 and became Premier in 1970. See Dunstan, D., *Felicia: The Political Memoirs of Don Dunstan*, Macmillan Co of Australia Pty Ltd., South Melbourne, 1981, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> *Aboriginal Affairs Act*, 1962 (South Australia), s. 30 (3) and (5) a.

<sup>19</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1962, p. 1842.

<sup>20</sup> Aboriginal Welfare Conference, 15 July 1965, GRG 52, Series 18, State Archives of South Australia.

‘multiple meanings’.<sup>21</sup> Even though ‘[i]ntegration was neither singular nor stable in its meaning ... its greater degree of specificity was one reason for its attractiveness’ at a time when assimilation was coming under increasing scrutiny.<sup>22</sup> McGregor has argued that the difference between the two lies more in the pace of change, with integration less tainted with the denial of Aboriginality and seen as an intermediate stage on the path to assimilation. It is difficult to know whether the policy makers in South Australia did indeed make the distinction between integration and assimilation as there is no explanation in the Act itself. Assimilation was raised as a positive aim with the intent to secure parity in living standards in the debate in parliament on its second reading. The successful assimilation of young migrants was provided as a model for the advancement of Aborigines—it was argued that Aborigines were ‘just as human as the migrants’ implying that to deny assistance towards assimilation for Aborigines was discriminatory.<sup>23</sup>

Overall the new Act did indicate some weakening of control over Aboriginal people as they no longer had to apply for exemption from the Act.<sup>24</sup> It pointed to a less oppressive and discriminatory approach towards the administration of Aboriginal policy. But it was still characterised by lingering paternalism, ambivalences and contradictions which had long been a feature of Aboriginal policy. Some of the former powers held by the APB had been retained. The Minister had the power to ‘manage and regulate the use of all reserves’, the Department could have access to Aboriginal property ‘at all

---

<sup>21</sup> McGregor, R., ‘Arguing about Assimilation’, in B. Attwood & T. Griffiths (eds.), *Frontier, Race, Nation: Henry Reynolds and Australian History*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2009, p. 286.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p.272.

<sup>23</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1962, p. 1767.

<sup>24</sup> In order to qualify for exemption from the South Australian *Aborigines Act* 1943-1939 Aboriginal people had to demonstrate that they were of good character and conduct and had attained an appropriate stage of development and intelligence as determined by authorities. Charles Rowley as pointed out that even though exemption ostensibly granted ‘citizen rights’, in reality, those exempted were ‘permanently on approval’ as exemption could be revoked. Rowley, C.D., *Outcasts in White Australia*, p. 47-8.

reasonable times' for the maintenance of 'discipline and good order', and could subject people to medical examinations and order people to receive treatment.<sup>25</sup> The Act also gave the Governor the power to 'refuse the entry of any Aboriginal or group of Aborigines into an institution' and also to keep people there if they were undergoing some form of training until they had completed it 'to the satisfaction of the Minister'.<sup>26</sup>

There was also a permit system to exclude non-residents from Aboriginal reserves which implies a continuing degree of protection and control. In addition, there was a Register of Aborigines which at first glance appeared to echo aspects of the Exemption application process. The Register was to be reviewed regularly by the Board and people who were deemed 'capable of accepting the full responsibilities of citizenship' were removed from the Register. It stated that they were considered to be no longer Aboriginal 'within the meaning of this Act'.<sup>27</sup> This has been widely read as denying people their Aboriginality, but again with no detail in the Act as to what this meant in practice it is difficult to know whether this was the intent. Because the overall debates in parliament on the introduction of the Act were expressed in integrationist terms it indicates that the intent was to encourage Aboriginal people to have pride in their culture and at the same time improve their living standards.<sup>28</sup> An alternative and less literal reading is possible—that is, that people who were removed from the Register were no longer in need of assistance provided under the Act because they were integrated into the wider community. It has been assumed that this meant that these people were denying their Aboriginality, but could equally mean that they were able to live in the wider community as Aboriginal people.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Aboriginal Affairs Act*, 1962, ss. 15, 40 and 25.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, s. 20.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, s. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1962, p. 1723.



Over the next decade, with the election of a reformist Labor Government in 1965 which was bent on reforming the ‘creaking and antiquated legislation’ of the past thirty three years of conservative government, there were more radical shifts in policy. Don Dunstan, who became Premier in 1967, recalled in his memoir that central to the policy adopted by the Labor Party was that Aboriginal people should have a choice about ‘whether to live in a tribal situation in reserve areas, in a group but de-tribalised, in a group in the general community, or as an Aborigine in the European community’.<sup>29</sup>

### **Towards self-determination at Ernabella.**

In the parliamentary debates over the introduction of the 1962 Act, the role of missionaries was recognised and acknowledged and it was noted that ‘little would have been done for these people’ without the dedication and hard work of missions.<sup>30</sup> In 1967 the mission division of the Australian Council of Churches announced that the aim of all missions was ‘to prepare people to eventually take over their own affairs’.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the Council was attempting to persuade governments ‘to award the Aborigines legal ownership of their reserves, including mineral rights and local self-government’.<sup>32</sup> The early 1970s saw the administrative control of missions transferred from the church to local Aboriginal community councils. At Ernabella, Bill Edwards the Superintendent was involved in the early stages of the process before being transferred to Mowanjum Mission in Western Australia in 1972 to oversee the change to community control there. In Edwards’ absence the acting Superintendents Neil McGarvie and Doug

---

<sup>29</sup> Dunstan, D., *Felicia*, 1981, p. 107. Dunstan was Attorney General and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs until 1967 when he became Premier. Labor lost government in 1968 but regained it in 1970.

<sup>30</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1962, p. 1767.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Aboriginal control of missions planned’, *The Advertiser*, 22 November 1967, GRG 52/31 State Archives of South Australia.

<sup>32</sup> Reverend F.G. Engel, *Australian Missionary Tidings*, Australian Council of Churches, November 1967, GRG 52/31, State Archives of South Australia.

Belcher oversaw the final stages of the changeover at Ernabella and Fregon which took place on 1 January 1974.<sup>33</sup> That Edwards was invited back in 1975 by the then self-managing community as Minister of the Pitjantjatjara Parish is testament to the high regard in which he was, and continues to be, held by Pitjantjatjara people.<sup>34</sup> This contests the orthodox assessment of missions as the ultimate colonisers and agents of government. Instead some missions at the outset envisaged self-determination and were at the forefront of its implementation.

Generally mission practices changed little under the new Act and as Edwards has pointed out, 'Pitjantjatjara people were unaware of the existence of the assimilation policy ... [and still] enjoyed the occupancy of their tribal land'.<sup>35</sup> The first annual report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board in 1963 noted that at Ernabella the Department had 'commenced a programme of education for assimilation', but at the same time 'nomadic habits' and 'adherence to tribal customs' were not discouraged by the mission demonstrating an integrationist rather than an assimilationist approach.<sup>36</sup> Economic assimilation to the extent possible given the remote location of Ernabella had been central to mission policy and in 1960 the APBM Report on Ernabella hinted at the possibility that 'some Aborigines ... [could] achieve independence as peasant pastoralists' foreshadowing the 1970s outstation and homelands movement.<sup>37</sup> But whilst supporting participation in the broader economy the mission was cautious about assimilation at a social level as it was believed that this would lead to the eventual

---

<sup>33</sup> See Edwards, B., 'Missiology and Australian Aboriginal Missions: A Personal Journey', *Christian Mission in the Public Square*, The 2008 AAMS and PACT Conference, 2-5 October, Canberra, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards returned to the area in 1976 and was based in Amata. Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, B., 'Pitjantjatjara Land Rights', in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, p. 298.

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1963, pp. 8, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 5, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504, Folder 7 (iv).

breakdown of traditional society and the possible extinction of Pitjantjatjara people as a distinct group.

Just prior to what appeared to be a move towards a self-determination approach by the Department, two relatively enlightened and progressive pieces of legislation had been enacted by the newly elected South Australian Labor government in 1966. The *Aboriginal Lands Trust Act* which Bain Attwood described as ‘path-breaking legislation’, established a Trust, based in Adelaide, to hold Crown and Aboriginal reserve lands for all Aboriginal people in the State.<sup>38</sup> Royalties from mining on the lands would be transferred to the Trust to be used for further developments.<sup>39</sup> According to Dunstan, the aim of the Aboriginal Lands Trust was to establish Aboriginal ownership of land as enjoyed by other indigenous populations internationally.<sup>40</sup> As Rowley has pointed out, the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs had been more liberal and ‘gone so much further than any other in the attempt to provide for Aboriginal property rights with the Aboriginal Lands Trust, and had clearly realised the need for autonomy’.<sup>41</sup> While the Lands Trust did not initially benefit Pitjantjatjara in the north-west of the state, and indeed local people expressed concern that their land would be held by ‘a group of trustees who were uninitiated, had “lost their law”’,<sup>42</sup> by translating the acknowledgement of prior occupation of land into practice, a basis was established on which to build later negotiations with the government for a more appropriate model for the transfer of land to the people. The other piece of legislation introduced in 1966

---

<sup>38</sup> Attwood, B., *Rights for Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2003, p. 269.

<sup>39</sup> Raynes, C., *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets: An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834-2000*, State Records of South Australia, Gepps Cross, 2002, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>41</sup> Rowley, C.D., *The Remote Aborigines*, Pelican Books, Sydney, 1972, p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> Dunstan, D., *Felicia*, 1981, p. 278.

was the *Prohibition of Discrimination Act*, nine years before the Commonwealth's *Racial Discrimination Act* (1975).

In 1972 the *Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962* (South Australia) was repealed and the new *Community Welfare Act 1972* (South Australia) was passed. The wording in Part V of this Act dealing with Aboriginal matters shows the change in policy direction from integration to self-determination. Now the aim was to 'promote, *in consultation and collaboration* with the Aboriginal people, the cultural, social and economic and political welfare and development of the Aboriginal people; and to encourage and assist the Aboriginal people to *preserve and develop* (my emphasis) their own languages, traditions and arts'. Most of the lingering references to protection for tribal people had disappeared, although the Minister still maintained control of Aboriginal reserves and officials were able to 'enter upon any pastoral lands for the purpose of inquiring into the welfare of any Aboriginal person'.<sup>43</sup> The more enlightened mission policy combined with the relatively progressive South Australian government policies meant that Ernabella was perhaps better placed than other missions and settlements to determine their own future.

Government policy impacted to a certain extent on daily life at Ernabella because the mission was involved in the administration of Commonwealth government pensions and child welfare for people who lived at Ernabella. However, by and large Ernabella still pursued its original vision throughout this period as discussed in Chapter Three. While elsewhere Aboriginal people were subjected to increased supervision in the pursuit of assimilation, at Ernabella the focus was on less supervision and the acceptance

---

<sup>43</sup> *Community Welfare Act 1972*, South Australian Statutes, 1972, Part 1, pp. 372, 377.

of more responsibility.<sup>44</sup> In the 1957 *Ernabella Newsletter*, it was stated that responsibility, independence and indigenous leadership were to be encouraged in employment and that there should be a 'handing over' of responsibility.<sup>45</sup> While the subject of preparing people for entry into the wider society was broached in the missionary narrative during the 1960s, this did not appear to entail the expectation that people would leave Ernabella and surrounding areas. The mission policy at Ernabella accorded with the National Missionary Council of Australia which in both 1959 and 1963 stated its support for 'Aboriginal ownership of existing reserves and other traditional land'.<sup>46</sup> By 1967 the Aboriginal Affairs Board was reporting that there had been progress towards self-determination, with meetings between Anangu from Ernabella and Department staff to discuss the mining of chrysoprase in the area<sup>47</sup> and in 1968 the inclusion of 'Aboriginal representatives' at staff meetings was noted.<sup>48</sup>

Even though the official government policy was one of assimilation, the approach followed at Ernabella Mission could be described more as integrationist or self-determining. From its beginnings Ernabella Mission had aimed to facilitate the maintenance of cultural practices from the past and at the same time prepare people for engagement with the wider economy. A visitor to Amata in 1967 wrote that the local people were making good use of the 'conveniences of the white man's life', noting that

---

<sup>44</sup> See the account of Santa Teresa Catholic Mission in central Australia, Harmsen, J., *You Gave us the Dreaming*, Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 1995; Sylvie Poirier's study of Balgo Hills Catholic Mission, Poirier, S., *A World of Relationships: Itineraries, Dreams and Events in the Australian Western Desert*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2005; Diane Austin-Broos' study of Hermannsburg, Austin-Broos, D., *Arrernte Past, Arrernte Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009; Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Edwards, B., 'Aboriginal Land Rights', in C. Mattingley, & K. Hampton (eds.), 1988, *Survival in Our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1967, p. 20. Chrysoprase is a gemstone used for jewellery and is suitable for carving.

<sup>48</sup> Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1968, p. 19.

she found it ‘remarkable’ that despite living what appeared to be a ‘sophisticated’ westernised life which had been influenced by Christianity, the people had ‘shown no desire to relinquish their own “primitive, simple” tribal life with its customs and sanctions’.<sup>49</sup> While this observation possibly reveals more about the understanding of culture contact which was dominant in the late 1960s, it does indicate that people had not “lost” their culture despite three decades of contact with Ernabella mission and that they had been active players in adapting to changed circumstances.<sup>50</sup>

Authorities generally regarded housing, employment and education as the instruments through which assimilation was progressed. An examination of the particular approaches adopted by Ernabella Mission in the provision of these services can reveal insights into how mission policy diverged from contemporary official policy.

## **Housing**

The provision and style of housing on missions and reserves has been seen by authorities as a means of effecting change in the lives of Aboriginal people. In the early years of colonisation, as Attwood has shown at Ramahyuck, housing was regarded as a prerequisite to civilise and Christianise.<sup>51</sup> From the middle of the twentieth century housing was seen as a means of training for eventual assimilation. More recently the provision of adequate housing is regarded as a measure of justice and human rights and as central to redressing disadvantage.

Images which appear to upset the sensibilities of the wider population more than anything else is that of Aborigines living in ‘humpies’ or substandard housing. During

---

<sup>49</sup> Cooper, A., ‘A School for Tribal Aborigines’, *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, July 1 1967, p. 31, GRG 52/31, State Archives of South Australia.

<sup>50</sup> See discussion about culture contact in Chapter Two, pp. 52-4.

<sup>51</sup> Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

the 1960s the plight of Aborigines living in poverty in fringe camps and in remote areas gained increasing media exposure. For example, the popular magazine *Life Australia*, published a generally sympathetic article entitled 'What Next for the Aborigine?' on 21 August 1967 just after the 1967 referendum. It featured full page images of the living conditions of a group of Aboriginal people who would appear to uninformed readers to be sitting idly at 'an Ernabella Mission outer camp' outside what were called 'gunyahs' rather than houses.<sup>52</sup> Conditions here were contrasted with the government settlement at Bagot in the Northern Territory where according to the article people were living in 'neat bungalows with good furnishings, including even electric clothes washers'.<sup>53</sup> As Helen Ross has argued, the provision of adequate housing was seen as a 'symbol of national caring and government performance'<sup>54</sup> and was based on the assumption that all Aboriginal people wanted to live in houses.

At Ernabella, the housing policy was expressed as a human rights issue and was less interventionist and less focused on achieving an assimilationist agenda. A 1963 discussion paper regarding housing at Presbyterian missions argued that the development of housing at the missions at Ernabella, Mowanjum and Weipa required 'urgent consideration' by the APBM in terms of 'principles to be followed, particularly in regard to equity'. It was pointed out that while no-one could predict what the future held for Aboriginal people on these missions, governments had been negligent in the provision of housing. It set out the following principles: that Aboriginal people had the same 'right to housing' as other Australians, as long as responsibility was exercised in payment of rents, loans and in maintaining the house; that because of the transitional

---

<sup>52</sup> This is not a word from any Western Desert language but became a generic 'Aboriginal' word used widely by non-Aborigines to describe traditional dwellings.

<sup>53</sup> Shirley, E., 'What Next for the Aborigine?', *Life Australia*, August 21 1967, pp. 32-6.

<sup>54</sup> Ross, H., 'Lifescape and Lived Experience', in P. Read (ed.), *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, p. 14.

situation of Aborigines on these missions, it was the duty of governments to provide extra assistance; that such assistance must be in a form which did not 'pauperise' but which 'encourages the person to greater industry'. Above all, the housing programme would be voluntary and developments would be discussed with Aborigines because it was considered 'intolerable for the Mission Superintendent for it to be otherwise'.

This contrasts with other places where it has been argued that the local people were not consulted about either the appropriateness or style of accommodation and that housing was more or less imposed.<sup>55</sup> Specific proposals for Ernabella were that the South Australian government would provide £200 for a 'small basic unit' as an initial development and Ernabella residents would contribute £50, with weekly rental contributions amounting to one fifth of their income. It was also proposed that an Aboriginal person would be 'trained as soon as possible to take over the collection and recording of Aboriginal house rates'.<sup>56</sup> However, there appeared to be some opposition among mission staff to the provision of housing 'with all amenities' at this time because it was believed that Ernabella people were not ready for this kind of accommodation. Winifred Hilliard questioned the 'wisdom' of the provision of housing at Fregon so soon after the establishment of the outstation in 1961 when the people were not 'familiar with many modern devices'.<sup>57</sup> This assumed that a staged approach to housing such as that employed at Yuendumu was more appropriate where between the 1950s and 1990s accommodation ranged from houses which comprised one room with an earthen floor and no amenities to those with extra rooms, flooring and a kitchen and some services.

---

<sup>55</sup> See for example, Keys, C., 'The House and the *Yupukarra*, Yuendumu, 1946-96', in P. Read (ed.), *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, pp. 118-29.

<sup>56</sup> Aboriginal Housing – Question of Equity: Proposals for Ernabella, Mowanjum and Weipa Stations, 16 September 1963, pp.1-3, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1616, MLK 2773, AE/52.

<sup>57</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 132.



There was some experimentation to find appropriate designs, most of which proved unsuitable.<sup>58</sup>

An interesting mix of tropes can be identified in the mission's approach to housing as expressed in the discussion paper about Ernabella housing. Self-determination and the encouragement of independence and responsibility is evident, coupled with the desire to avoid paternalism by consulting Aborigines about the developments; an expression of humanitarianism expressed as equitable treatment; a welfare and protection trope with a degree of intervention where houses would remain the property of the mission in order to 'facilitate supervision and inspection ... so necessary for welfare work at this stage'; an assimilation trope, where payments for services and maintenance were 'part of their training in responsibility and for assimilation'.<sup>59</sup> This demonstrates the multi-layered thinking about the future for Aboriginal people, replete with ambiguities and tensions. It also makes it problematic to identify a clear distinction between policies of protection, assimilation and self-determination.

In the 1963 Annual Report from Ernabella to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs it was noted that mudbrick housing had been offered to replace Spinifex *wiltjas* if men made some 'financial and labour contributions', but that there had been little demand. During 1964 three men had requested housing assistance and a housing project commenced using local labour and materials. In 1965 it was reported that 'a new style prototype Aboriginal cottage has been erected at Ernabella'.<sup>60</sup> Edwards notes that this was in response to complaints from some Ernabella people that even though houses had been built at Amata they had none.<sup>61</sup> By 1967 six houses were occupied.<sup>62</sup> Although it

---

<sup>58</sup> Keys, C., 'The House and the *Yupukarra*', 2000, p. 120.

<sup>59</sup> Aboriginal Housing—Question of Equity, pp. 1-3.

<sup>60</sup> Aboriginal Welfare Conference, 15 July 1965, GRG 52, Series 18, State Archives of South Australia.

<sup>61</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January 2012.

was noted that the six houses had been vacated in 1968 after a death which, in accordance with traditional practices, necessitated moving camp.<sup>63</sup>

At Amata in 1974, Peter Brokensha noted that at first glance the community resembled a 'European style town' with twelve 'white painted timber homes'. However, the white staff lived in these houses and Aborigines were still living in camps on the outskirts.<sup>64</sup> At this time, approximately one hundred people had moved away from Amata and were camping twelve miles away at Mintjara.<sup>65</sup> Noel Wallace noted that on his visit to Amata in 1974, Nganyintja Ilyatjari, a member of the Housing Council whom he described as the 'most forward-thinking person at Amata', had left her house and was camping with twenty or so families about one and a half kilometers from the town. She had lived in houses since 1968, but told Wallace that she 'was having a holiday' where she could feel the 'wind on her body' and be in close contact with relatives.<sup>66</sup> Wallace, with the benefit of hindsight appears to be suggesting that the need for housing such as that outlined in the 1963 discussion paper was really a "white" imposition and that even though Aboriginal people were interested initially in houses, their 'knowledge and experience' was limited and when the reality of living in houses was realised, they preferred to camp as they had always done.

While it is difficult to see how housing was imposed on people at Ernabella, particularly as the discussion paper made it clear that the scheme was to be voluntary and undertaken in consultation with Aboriginal people, there does appear to be some

---

<sup>62</sup> Annual Reports to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1963-1967, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>63</sup> Edenborough to Earle, 24 September 1970, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1616, MLK 2772.

<sup>64</sup> Although Edwards has recalled that a few 'small corrugated iron houses' had been built in the late 1960s. Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Brokensha, P., *Coming to Wisdom Slowly*, Peacock Publications, Norwood, SA, 2007, p. 109.

<sup>66</sup> Nganyintja Ilyatjari grew up at Ernabella and moved to Amata with her family in 1961. Wallace, N., 'Pitjantjatjara Decentralisation in North-west South Australia', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the 1970s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, p. 127.

credibility to the argument that by moving back to camps they were rejecting housing. In 1970 it was reported that people were still basically nomadic, so perhaps housing was not considered a priority at this time.<sup>67</sup> Isabel White found a similar reaction among southern Pitjantjatjara at Yalata in the 1970s, where most women told her that they preferred to live in traditional *wiltjas*. White argues that the women were rejecting Western values in regards to housing upkeep. In addition, they perceived Western housing to be limiting in terms of the maintenance of personal relationships which camp living allowed.<sup>68</sup> At Balgo Hills Catholic Mission, Sylvie Poirier found that even when government houses were built during the 1980s to replace camp shelters, they were not used in the expected European way but rather in a way which ‘reflects Aboriginal sociality’. They were mostly kept empty of furniture, verandas provided the main living area and cooking was done outside on open fires.<sup>69</sup>

### **Employment and transition to a cash economy**

It is evident from the mission correspondence and reports that Ernabella had always operated precariously in relation to finances. It was noted by the APBM in 1958 that the Board was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain Ernabella.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the financial support from the government, when compared to the total expenditure for Aborigines in South Australia, had been minimal. The total Aboriginal population in South Australia at the time was estimated to be 5000, with 2500 “full-bloods”. While 6% (300) of the Aboriginal population of South Australia was associated with Ernabella,

---

<sup>67</sup> Edenborough to Earle, 24 September 1970.

<sup>68</sup> White, I., ‘From Camp to Village: Some Problems of Adaptation’, in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the '70s*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1977, p. 104.

<sup>69</sup> Poirier, S., *A World of Relationships*, 2005, p. 39.

<sup>70</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, (APBM) Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504.

the mission received in the best year less than 3% of the total expenditure on Aborigines from the APB and in some years received nothing. In 1953 the APB reported that £44,586 had been spent on Aborigines in the last financial year, and out of this a grant of £1,325 was made to Ernabella for the building of the industrial school. The 1955 annual expenditure was £86,872 with no money allocated to Ernabella, in 1959 the APB spent £305,760 and again no money went to Ernabella.<sup>71</sup>

Transition to a cash economy was considered integral training for assimilation and as a precursor to eventually taking their place on an equal footing with the broader Australian citizenry.<sup>72</sup> While all Aboriginal people ‘except nomadic and primitive people’ had been entitled to a range of Commonwealth allowances and pensions (excluding unemployment benefits) since 1959 the assumption by authorities that tribal people were not ready to manage cash meant that the payments went directly to the mission or settlement itself to cover food and other expenses, with some ‘pocket money’ given to individuals. As Tim Rowse has pointed out, critics argued that such ‘rationed management’ constituted a continuation of paternalism and protection and impeded progress towards assimilation.<sup>73</sup>

Ernabella continued their policy of discouraging dependence but as noted in the previous chapter, providing employment at Ernabella for all who wanted to work, particularly for men, was an on-going problem. The craft room was able to provide employment for as many women as wanted to work there and employed on average one hundred women with production steadily increasing throughout this period.<sup>74</sup> The other major source of employment was the sheep industry which was central to the economy

---

<sup>71</sup> Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Reports 1953 to 1959, AIATSIS

<sup>72</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 112.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>74</sup> Annual Reports to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1961-1967, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

of Ernabella. In 1960 the APBM had recommended an expansion of the pastoral industry and estimated that Ernabella and as mentioned in Chapter Five, the three leased blocks could carry between 6000 and 12000 sheep.<sup>75</sup> It was also noted that more bores and wells were required. The establishment of Fregon in 1961 provided extra opportunities for employment particularly in the initial building stage. However, in this part of the country, life has always been determined by the unpredictable nature of rainfall and the drought noted in the Annual Reports from Ernabella during 1961 to 1963 prevented the recommended expansion and the sheep numbers declined during this period. It was noted in the 1963 report that the drought had also prevented the annual “walkabout” in August and people had stayed at Fregon. But by 1964 after good rainfall, the sheep flock was able to be increased to 4000 and the cattle to 380 and in 1967 the sheep and cattle were reported to be in good condition.

In 1964 fifty men and one hundred women were employed out of the population of 135 men and 120 women. They were employed in a variety of occupations. The men worked on maintenance and building projects around the mission and in the sheep industry, the women were employed in various occupations around the mission and in the craft room. Eighteen young men from Ernabella also worked at Snake Bay on Melville Island during 1964 on forestry projects.<sup>76</sup> In February 1966 and again in 1969, twenty three men and two women picked fruit at Barmera on the Murray River. By all accounts their employers were most satisfied with their work.<sup>77</sup> The Aboriginal Affairs Board reported in 1967 that there had been an extensive building programme at

---

<sup>75</sup> This was somewhat hopeful as rainfall in this part of the country is unreliable and the country is prone to severe drought which makes sheep grazing marginal. See Chapter Five, p. 187.

<sup>76</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January, 2012.

<sup>77</sup> Annual Report to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1966, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506; Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1969; Edwards, W.H., ‘Report on Ernabella Labour Export Project, 1965-1966’, in I. Sharp & C. Tatz (eds.), *Aborigines in the Economy*, Jacaranda Press, 1966.

Ernabella during the previous year which had provided employment for most of the men.<sup>78</sup> According to Nic Peterson's study in June 1970, forty nine men were employed, or only 36% of potential male workers. This included ten in the sheep industry, thirteen worked with the cattle, thirteen were engaged in building projects, five worked as gardeners, 'two as leading hands', one each as a baker and teacher, and four in artefact production. Of the ninety three women employed, most worked in the craft industry, apart from four working as shepherds, one each employed in the hospital and school, one as a baker and two as domestics. The employment figures for women were boosted by the inclusion of women who were engaged in spinning wool for 'piece rates' in the total number of women employed.<sup>79</sup> But the employment rate on the mission itself still amounted to less than half of the adult population.<sup>80</sup> In some ways, the employment policy at Ernabella during the 1960s can be assessed as self-determining rather than integrationist, as it was geared to facilitating independence. This can also be seen in relation to the Ernabella outstation Fregon which was expected to become a self-sufficient cattle enterprise.

From the outset, Ernabella mission had condemned the exploitation of Aboriginal people by doggers and pastoralists<sup>81</sup> and had attempted to pay people fairly for their work. As discussed in Chapter Four, while doggers paid Aboriginal people part of the government bounty for dingo scalps, Ernabella mission paid the full amount (less

---

<sup>78</sup> Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1967, p. 19.

<sup>79</sup> Peterson, N., 'Aboriginal Involvement with the Australian economy' 1977, p. 142.

<sup>80</sup> This is only approximate and as the population at the mission was characterised by fluctuations at this time, obtaining accurate figures is difficult. But nonetheless, it is evident that the mission could not provide employment for all adults.

<sup>81</sup> Aboriginal people had been engaged in stock work across northern South Australia as well as central and northern Australia throughout the twentieth century to such an extent that in 1957, Rupert Murdoch reported that Aborigines were 'essential' to the 'cattle industry'. See Mattingly, C. & Hampton, K. (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, p. 130; Lester, Y., *Yami: The Autobiography of Yami Lester*, IAD Publications, Alice Springs, 1993.

2 shillings to cover losses).<sup>82</sup> The mission constantly attempted to provide as much employment as possible, with the establishment of new projects to increase employment opportunities. In 1969 men were employed on contract to provide rabbits for market.<sup>83</sup> It was also reported that the mission's newly arrived youth worker was considering the viability of employing young men in 'rounding up wild horses' for market.<sup>84</sup>

As would be expected considering the financial position of the mission, wages for those employed by the mission were low. In September 1965, Charles Duguid, who continued to scrutinise the operation of Ernabella mission, received a letter from the APBM outlining the rates of pay for Ernabella workers which illustrates how people were paid using a combination of cash, rations and goods prior to 1966.<sup>85</sup> Shepherds (married couples employed part-time) received £5 cash, food and two issues of clothing per twelve weeks. In addition a bonus of between 30s and £2 was paid for good work. Mission workers averaged a total of £3 5s per week which was calculated as follows—£1 5s food allowance, clothing worth 8s, a blanket worth 2s, 15s in cash, and meat to the value of 15s. Workers away from the mission were paid £4 10s per week with extra rations and clothing. Those in charge of a boring team received £15 per bore (two to three weeks work). Spinners for the craft room received rations and a dress every six weeks for two ounces of spun wool and over two ounces were paid 6d per ounce. Weavers and painters received 7/6 per week plus rations and clothes. Pensioners were given £1 pocket money per week and the balance in food and services.

---

<sup>82</sup> Chapter Four, p. 138.

<sup>83</sup> Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1969.

<sup>84</sup> *Pitjantjatjara Tjukurpa*, No 12, July 1969.

<sup>85</sup> APBM to Duguid, 29 September 1965. Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Series 10, Subseries 1, NLA.

To give some perspective on Ernabella wages, in 1962 the basic wage in the Northern Territory was £14 14s for men and £10 10s 6d for women.<sup>86</sup> At the 1967 Aboriginal Welfare Conference it was decided that the ‘basic wage shall apply to all aboriginal reserves in South Australia with the *exception of the far north-west*’ (my emphasis). Rates of pay on north-west reserves in South Australia were to be \$18 for males and \$15 for females.<sup>87</sup> Hilliard has argued that because women and children were subsidised by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs during the 1960s when pensions were paid directly to them after community feeding ceased, higher wages were not needed. She pointed out that Ernabella workers received ‘a return adequate for their present need and some over’.<sup>88</sup> To a certain extent this is confirmed by Peterson’s study in 1970. From his calculations of the *per capita* income, derived from dividing the total fortnightly payments received at Ernabella by the total population Peterson argued that people at Ernabella ‘had substantial amounts of cash surplus to their subsistence needs’. However, he cautioned that income was not distributed evenly in the community and his calculations do not reveal the actual reality, but nonetheless there was surplus money in the community.<sup>89</sup> According to Hilliard, the cash store at Ernabella had been used as an unofficial bank where people could save money until the Commonwealth Bank established an agency at Ernabella in 1964 when several workers opened savings accounts.<sup>90</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that people were engaging with the economy in the same way as European workers. As Peterson has pointed out, Ernabella people engaged with the wider economy for ‘short term and specific ends’ and in

---

<sup>86</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 174.

<sup>87</sup> Aboriginal Welfare Conference of Commonwealth and State Officers, Volume 1, Parliament House, Perth 18-19 July 1967, GRG 52 Series 18, State Archives of South Australia. The currency changed in 1966 from the pound (£) to the dollar (\$). At this time award wages for pastoral workers was \$40 per week. See Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 175.

<sup>88</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 152.

<sup>89</sup> Peterson, N., ‘Aboriginal Involvement with the Australian economy’, 1977, p. 143.

<sup>90</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 153.



addition, to build up ‘capital in social relationships’, that is to meet their social obligations and the demands of relatives in accord with traditional values. This was regarded as more important than accruing savings and material items.<sup>91</sup>

In 1966 Ernabella Mission increased wages and workers now received full cash payments rather than a combination of cash and rations.<sup>92</sup> In 1967 the South Australian Aboriginal Affairs Board report noted that there had been some initial difficulties with the change to full cash payments, but that staff had provided assistance.<sup>93</sup> In addition, the 1967 Annual Report from Ernabella Mission noted that Child Endowment was being directly paid to mothers and parents who were responsible for feeding children. Initially parents resisted this and wanted the old system to continue where the mission received the payment and provided meals for the children. Their concern was that the money could be used for gambling or drinking rather than for its intended purpose.<sup>94</sup>

The Northern Territory administration also replaced rations with cash wages two years later with the direct payment of Commonwealth benefits and pensions to people on remote settlements and missions. But there were similar concerns to those expressed at Ernabella. As Rowse has pointed out while the introduction of a cash economy was perceived as the ‘fulfilment of “assimilationist” expectations’ in allowing people to directly provide for their families, there were unexpected consequences. In some communities Government money was regarded as being for the provision of ‘luxuries’ rather than on ‘necessities’ such as food. Consequently children’s health was affected with cases of malnutrition. There is no doubt that the transition to a cash economy was

---

<sup>91</sup> Peterson, N., ‘Aboriginal Involvement with the Australian economy’, 1977, p. 145.

<sup>92</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 20 January 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1967, p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> Annual Report to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1967, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506. This concern is still being expressed in many remote communities in 2010, forty three years later and a reason for the quarantining of welfare payments as a strategy of the Northern Territory Emergency Response in 2007.

marked by significant changes in peoples' lives, but in a number of settlements as Rowse has argued, it led to a 'climate of crisis' and 'plunged' many people into 'poverty'.<sup>95</sup> Diane Austin-Broos has noted that for people at Hermannsburg Mission, the move to a cash economy actually resulted in a move to welfare and 'marginalization in market society' which continues today with widespread unemployment.<sup>96</sup> Likewise at Ernabella, Edwards writing in 1992 argued that the introduction of social security has 'undermined much of the motivation to participate in regular employment'.<sup>97</sup>

Meanwhile the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) had been campaigning, in collaboration with the North Australian Workers' Union, for equal wages. The claim brought by the Union to include Aboriginal stockworkers under the pastoral workers award met with a degree of success in 1966 when the Arbitration and Conciliation Commission 'embraced the principle of equal wages'. However, its implementation was deferred until 1968 to appease employers who argued that to pay Aboriginal pastoral workers award rates would cause significant economic hardship. This sparked a number of strikes at several cattle stations in the Northern Territory, including the well-known Wave Hill 'walk-off'.<sup>98</sup> This case extended beyond workers in the pastoral industry and impacted on wages for Aboriginal workers on government settlements across the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Administration argued that award wages of \$40 per week could only be paid to six to ten percent of the workforce who were deemed to be skilled and competent workers, with another less skilled category to be paid less. Unskilled or 'slow' workers

---

<sup>95</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 183.

<sup>96</sup> Austin-Broos, D., *Arrernte Past, Arrernte Present*, 2009, p. 185.

<sup>97</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence', 1992, p. 31. The current social problems in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands have accelerated if anything since 1992 and have been the subject of government enquiries and considerable media attention. For example, see Mullighan, E. P., *Children on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands*, Commission of Inquiry Report, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Attwood, B., *Rights for Aborigines*, 2003, p. 186. In Chapter 7 of this text Attwood provides a detailed analysis of the equal wages case.

would receive \$7.20. It was decided that the decision over rates of pay would be left to the Superintendents on individual settlements.<sup>99</sup>

While the equal wages case was important and correct in removing discrimination, it proved to have unexpected outcomes. An Arabunna man who had been a stockworker on Anna Creek Station in South Australia during the 1950s believed that it left the old people who lived on the stations and those working in the pastoral industry in the north of South Australia more vulnerable and ultimately worse off.<sup>100</sup> He claimed that people were content with the system of being provided for by pastoralists which enabled them to live on stations with their families and that the honouring of this obligation was more important than receiving money.<sup>101</sup> Annette Hamilton found in her study of the cattle station at Everard Park south of Ernabella in the early 1970s, that the introduction of a cash economy, while improving material circumstances, had ‘created resentment and confusion among the older people’. The provision of rations and clothing was regarded as the fulfilment of the station manager’s obligation to care for them in accord with ‘Aboriginal ideas of reciprocal responsibility’.<sup>102</sup>

## Education

Nancy Sheppard pointed out that an area where government policies impacted more significantly on the mission’s operations was the school.<sup>103</sup> In 1963 the South Australian Education Department stated that the aim of the school at Ernabella was to provide ‘a

---

<sup>99</sup> Rowse, T., *White Flour, White Power*, 1998, p. 175.

<sup>100</sup> Pers. Comm., Marree, South Australia, 8 June 2010.

<sup>101</sup> The outcomes of the equal wages case which resulted in unemployment for many former stockworkers have been well documented and accord with this observation. See Attwood, B., *Rights for Aborigines*, 2003, Chapter Seven.

<sup>102</sup> Hamilton, A., ‘Coming and Going: Aboriginal Mobility in North-west South Australia, 1970-71, *Records of the South Australian Museum*, 20, 1987, p. 52.

<sup>103</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, Gillingham Printers, Underdale, SA, 2004, p. 61. Sheppard taught at Ernabella from 1955 until 1962 and at Fregon until 1963.

sound basic education to the entire group of people so that they will be able to meet the western civilization which is slowly engulfing even their remote part of the country without suffering social and moral disintegration' seen elsewhere.<sup>104</sup> Although at this time the school was subsidised by the Education Department in terms of partial payment of teachers and equipment, it was still under the control of the APBM which allowed it to retain a degree of independence and continue to pursue overall mission policy. The APBM stated in 1960 that one of the aims of the education programme at Ernabella was to 'prepare for ultimate participation in a European society' but at the same time to 'preserve pride in Aboriginal culture and heritage'. The curriculum reflected this aim by teaching in the vernacular with English taught orally as a 'foreign language' until students reached the age of nine. From then on the teaching of English literacy commenced with all teaching in English and following the South Australian Education Department syllabus. As well it was noted that 'corroboree singing' was permitted in school and the teacher 'takes an interest in camp affairs, occasionally visiting them when invited, [and] encourages respect for tribal traditions and elders'.<sup>105</sup> Yet there is also evidence of contradictions and a mix of assimilationist and integrationist thinking in the APBM report. It was stated that education at Ernabella was 'to superimpose the new on the old' and not 'wholly fill a vacuum', but two sentences earlier it had been stated in more explicit assimilationist terms that the aim was '[t]o inspire and motivate pupils to want to throw off the traditions and culture of their people's past and adopt a new way of

---

<sup>104</sup> Report on the Education of the Aborigines in South Australia, SA Public Schools Committees' Association Annual Conference of the Australian Council of Schools, Perth, WA, October 1963, GRG 52/22/4, State Archives of South Australia.

<sup>105</sup> This approach to education for Aboriginal children has similarities to 'two-way' schooling but preceded it by several decades. Stephen Harris' model of 'two-way' schooling was widely practised throughout Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory from the 1980s and was considered to be at the cutting edge of education. See Harris, S., *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990. However, more recently 'two-way' schooling has been subject to criticism in response to the poor outcomes from these schools.

life'. It was noted that this would require specialist teaching skills. The report also stated that the school must 'mould the attitude of the Native to European style society'.<sup>106</sup>

Sheppard has pointed out that mission staff held divergent views about 'how – and how quickly – the Pitjantjatjara should be moving towards integration'. This question was crucial to a number of decisions which teaching staff had to make. It impacted on the content of the curriculum in terms of whether the emphasis should be vocational or academic, and whether more capable students should be encouraged to complete secondary schooling in Adelaide.<sup>107</sup>

It appears that the Department did not want to assume control of the school because it would 'pose many problems'. Although not explicitly stated, there was the implication that because the children were 'tribalist full-bloods' and the methods used at Ernabella, in particular instruction in the vernacular, were not 'practical or desirable in most other parts of South Australia', the Department did not want to assume responsibility or set a precedent for what was regarded as a unique experiment which should be limited to Ernabella.<sup>108</sup> Edwards has pointed out that government authorities tended to regard the vernacular policy as an impediment to assimilation.<sup>109</sup> Even though the development of literature in the vernacular for the Ernabella school was considered to be a 'troubled, fragmented process' the vernacular programme used at Ernabella since the earliest days had laid the foundation for what Cliff Goddard found to be the 'considerable enthusiasm' shown by the people there in producing newsletters such as

---

<sup>106</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) Ernabella Station Matters, 1960, p. 5, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504, Folder 7 (iv).

<sup>107</sup> Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, 2004, p. 62. Some of these issues in relation to education in remote communities have still not been resolved today. See Pearson, N., *Radical Hope: Education and Equality in Australia*, Quarterly Essay No. 35, October 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Report on the Education of the Aborigines in South Australia, 1963. It was this unique experiment which brought the academics from Prague who were interested in implementing a similar programme for Gypsy/Romany children.

<sup>109</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January, 2012.

*Amataku Tjukurpa*, during the 1980s.<sup>110</sup> Goddard's conclusion from his analysis of these newsletters is that literacy in Pitjantjatjara is used eloquently for the 'interpersonal and social communication' which occurred orally in camp life but which was no longer possible under the changed circumstances of settlement life.<sup>111</sup> The issue of whether the school should be handed over to the Education Department was raised again in 1966 by the mission and in 1970 by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.<sup>112</sup> It became an Education Department school in 1971.<sup>113</sup> Even though the Education Department continued to support bilingual education, Goddard argues that this support was 'half-hearted' and it was not until the mid 1980s that a teacher-linguist was appointed.<sup>114</sup>

### **Community councils, the outstation movement and Land Rights**

The 1970s, with the adoption of self-determination rhetoric by policy makers,<sup>115</sup> marked the official end of the more obvious colonial and mission regime. This brought changes which impacted significantly on Ernabella people, in particular, the establishment of local councils to administer communities and the homelands/outstation movement and Land Rights.

Local community councils were established on the four main settlements in the area—Pukatja Community at Ernabella, Aparawatatja Community at Fregon, Iwantja Community at Indulkana and the Amata Community Council. In January 1974

---

<sup>110</sup> Goddard, C., 'Emergent Genres of Reportage and Advocacy in the Pitjantjatjara Print Media', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No. 2, 1990, p 31. Goddard had worked as a linguist at the Anangu Schools Resource Centre at Ernabella.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46. Although as Goddard pointed out there is some concern that vernacular education has come at the expense of English literacy. This debate was also occurring in the 1940s between Love and Trudinger. See discussion in Chapter Four, p 150-53.

<sup>112</sup> Annual Report to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1966, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506; Report of the Aboriginal Affairs Board, 1970.

<sup>113</sup> Edwards, B., 'Missiology and Australian Aboriginal Missions', 2008, p. 11.

<sup>114</sup> Goddard, C., 'Emergent Genres of Reportage and Advocacy', 1990, p. 28.

<sup>115</sup> See the *Community Welfare Act 1972*, South Australia, discussed earlier in this chapter.

administrative responsibility for Ernabella and Fregon was transferred from the church to these councils. Even though the councils requested that the mission remain involved in an advisory capacity, the communities were now ‘incorporated legal entities run by elected councils which employed their own staff and advisers’.<sup>116</sup> The government did not transfer control of the government settlements of Indulkana and Amata to the community councils until at least 1977.<sup>117</sup>

The second significant change was the homelands/outstation movement across remote regions of Australia which gathered momentum over the next three decades as Aboriginal people left established centres to form decentralised kin-based communities generally in country which held spiritual significance. This dispersal after decades of living based around settlements and missions indicated a continuity of the relationship to ancestral lands.<sup>118</sup> The move to outstations was facilitated by economic support from the Commonwealth Government for the development of homelands. As Edwards has noted, in 1976, \$10000 was provided by the government to each of the following outstations: Cave Hill, Kunamata, Lake Wilson and Iltunga.<sup>119</sup> Austin-Broos has pointed out the irony here in regards to former protectionist and assimilationist approaches in this new ‘state-sponsored return to tradition’.<sup>120</sup> In addition to government support, the more widespread availability of motor vehicles<sup>121</sup> and the ability to access water through bores

---

<sup>116</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Patterns of Aboriginal Residence’, 1992, p. 16; Edwards, B., ‘*Tjukurpa Palya*—The Good Word: Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p. 138. Pitjantjatjara elders also took charge of the church. The subsequent growth of church membership will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>117</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January 2012.

<sup>118</sup> People in Central Australia had continued to be mobile throughout the mission era and Hamilton has argued that the mobility patterns in the 1970s were actually derived from the mission and cattle station times which necessitated this kind of mobility to adjust to the economies of missions and cattle stations and for ‘social and economic survival’. See Hamilton, A., ‘Coming and Going’, 1987, p. 49.

<sup>119</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Patterns of Aboriginal Residence’, 1992, p. 20.

<sup>120</sup> Austin-Broos, D., *Arrernte Past, Arrernte Present*, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>121</sup> Young has argued that since the late 1960s motor vehicles have increasingly assumed a central role in the lives of Pitjantjatjara people and without motor vehicles, living on homelands would not be viable. Young, D., ‘The Life and Death of Cars: Private Vehicles on the Pitjantjatjara Lands, South Australia’, in

have also been factors which facilitated the move to homelands. Diana Young found that it is not unusual for a bore or rain water tank to be erected at a significant site with the provision of water sometimes taking precedence over the preservation of sacred sites.<sup>122</sup>

Throughout Australia the number of outstations increased from 165 in 1981 to between 400 and 500 in 1985 with 53 of these in South Australia.<sup>123</sup> As well, the population at each outstation increased. At the Pitjantjatjara outstation of Pipalyatjara, 220 kilometers west of Amata, the population increased from thirty three people in 1975<sup>124</sup> to between 150 and 200 people in 1980 with 82% of the population having lived there longer than two years.<sup>125</sup> Some Pitjantjatjara people who had moved to Amata and Fregon from Ernabella began to disperse to smaller camps in country where they had totemic connections. The first in the North West Reserve, Puta Puta, 193 kilometres west of Amata, was established in 1971 by a group of older people with totemic connections to the important *malu* (Kangaroo) Dreaming sites in the area who were concerned that these sites were under threat from mining activities. According to Brokensha by 1975 over 300 people had moved away from the larger settlements.<sup>126</sup>

Not everyone moved to homelands however and a significant population remained at

---

D. Miller (ed.), *Car Cultures*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. 36; A visitor to Amata in 1967 observed that 'many of the men want cars and make trips to Alice Springs to buy secondhand vehicles'. Cooper, A., 'A School for Tribal Aborigines', July 1 1967, p. 31.

<sup>122</sup> Young, D., 'Water as Country on the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands South Australia', *Worldviews*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2006, p. 245.

<sup>123</sup> Blanchard, C.A., *Return to Country: The Aboriginal Homelands Movement in Australia*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, AGPS, Canberra, 1987, pp. 18, 28. In 2010 there were more than 1000 outstations throughout the country. Kerins, S., 'The Future of Homelands/Outstations', Topical Issue No 1, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU, Canberra, 2010, p. 2. <<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/>>, accessed 18 March 2010. However a number of these outstations are used intermittently with only occasional occupation and others exist in name only. See Memmott, P. & Moran, M. 'Indigenous Settlements of Australia', Australian State of the Environment Second Technical Paper Series (Human Settlements), Series 2, Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2001. <<http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2001/publications/technical/indigenous/types.html>>, accessed 18 March 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, Aboriginal Arts Board, Australia Council, Sydney, 1975, p. 17. Brokensha undertook a case study at Pipalyatjara in 1975.

<sup>125</sup> Coombs, H.C., Brandl, M.M. & Snowdon, W.E., *A Certain Heritage*, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, Canberra, 1983, pp. 10, 235.

<sup>126</sup> Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, 1975, p. 13.



Ernabella, with some people returning to Ernabella from outstations while others continued to move away. Overall during this time populations were in a state of flux and even though accurate outstation population counts were difficult to obtain due to the mobility of populations, it is evident that Aboriginal people embraced this move with enthusiasm. Their determination to remain on outstations despite considerable hardships attests to the importance of returning to country.<sup>127</sup>

There were many reasons for returning to country. As well as the need to protect important sites against mining, there was the desire to escape the social problems of living in larger communities. Smaller communities were seen as places where parental authority over children could be reasserted and where children could be educated in traditional Law. It was hoped that these communities would provide a healthier and safer environment for them and their children through a return to traditional food gathering and hunting. It was hoped that the move to outstations would resolve internal politics which arose between those who were traditional owners of the settlement land and those considered 'guests'. Furthermore moving to outstations would assert ownership of their lands to support land claims.<sup>128</sup> However, above all, as Wallace has argued, the major reason for return to country is for the 'ritual and spiritual renewal' of culture.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, some of the ways in which people were now expressing their relationship to country had changed in response to the availability of motor vehicles and reliable water from bores and tanks. Young has pointed out that previously travel through this country with few permanent water sources was determined by the availability of water and people 'walked' the tracks between water sources which followed the travels of the

---

<sup>127</sup> Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, 1975, pp. 13-5.

<sup>128</sup> Blanchard, C.A., *Return to Country*, 1987, pp. 14-7. Wallace, N., 'Pitjantjatjara Decentralisation', 1977, pp. 128-29.

<sup>129</sup> Wallace, N., 'Pitjantjatjara Decentralisation', 1977, p. 130.

Ancestral Beings. Now that water could be easily transported people drove on roads to sites rather than along the old tracks between water sources.<sup>130</sup> This meant that Ancestral tracks were not being as regularly maintained as they had in the past. However, despite the changes a significant outcome of the homelands movement is that it facilitated the resurgence of ritual activity throughout the Western Desert. This will also be discussed in the next chapter.

Generally in the 1970s and 1980s there was optimism about the ability of the homelands movement to solve many problems for Aboriginal people. H. C. Coombs *et al* noted in 1983 that living on homelands ‘meets many of the social and spiritual needs’ of Aboriginal people. In exercising this choice they are ‘entitled to help in that task’ as compensation for ‘the damage European occupation has done to Aboriginal capacity to derive a livelihood from their native habitat’.<sup>131</sup> In 1987 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs reported favourably on the homelands movement as it presented ‘a clear statement by the Aboriginal people involved of the sort of future they wish for themselves and their children’. The Committee recommended increased commitment and assistance from the government to ensure that ‘the homelands movement has a strong future’. In addition it was believed that outstations would facilitate the achievement of ‘economic independence’ and ‘self-reliance’.<sup>132</sup> However this vision has not been realised and the limitations to living on outstations which were expressed rather casually at the time, such as the availability of employment and lack of access to services and necessities, have over the last three decades proved to be major impediments to the success of homeland communities. Appropriate housing was (and has continued to be) inadequate throughout the

---

<sup>130</sup> Young, D., ‘Water as Country’, 2006, p. 244.

<sup>131</sup> Coombs, H.C., Brandl, M.M. & Snowdon, W.E., *A Certain Heritage*, 1983, p. 221.

<sup>132</sup> Blanchard, C. A., *Return to Country*, 1987, pp. 257-59.

Pitjantjatjara homelands. In 1980, 90.8% of the population were still living in *wiltjas* even though housing was desired by residents.<sup>133</sup> Even though the South Australian Housing Trust had provided funds for buildings at outstations from 1983 to 1986, it could not meet demand. After nine years one community of five families had only one house with two bedrooms and a shed.<sup>134</sup> Hamilton in her study of the outstation camp at Everard Park identified the sheer practical difficulties of living in an outstation without adequate infrastructure and the huge amount of work for the few able bodied people in providing the basic necessities for everyone in the camp.<sup>135</sup> The lack of employment opportunities meant that generally people were welfare dependent or employed on Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). At Pipalyatjara in 1979, Coombs *et al* found that workers received about half the South Australian award rates for comparable work and the average male weekly earnings at the outstation was \$69 compared to \$223 for South Australia generally.<sup>136</sup> As Austin-Broos has argued, the hopes that the outstation movement would ‘resolve the clash between emplaced indigenous identity and market society’ were not realised.<sup>137</sup> An outcome of the homelands movement which has negatively impacted on the aim to be self-determining was the disruption to the education of children. Initially homelands did not have schools and even when schools were built, the fluctuating populations meant that schooling was erratic.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Coombs, H.C., Brandl, M.M. & Snowdon, W.E., *A Certain Heritage*, 1983, p. 247.

<sup>134</sup> Blanchard, C. A., *Return to Country*, 1987, p. 187.

<sup>135</sup> Hamilton, A., ‘Coming and Going’, 1987, p. 55.

<sup>136</sup> Coombs, H.C., Brandl, M.M. & Snowdon, W.E., *A Certain Heritage*, 1983, pp. 262, 242.

<sup>137</sup> Austin-Broos, D., *Arrernte Past, Arrernte Present*, 2009, p. 203. For recent discussion of this, see Sutton, P., *The Politics of Suffering*, University of Melbourne Press, Carlton, 2009; Rothwell, N., ‘And They Call it Failure to Thrive’, *The Weekend Australian*, 8-9 May 2010, p. 4; Pearson, N., *Up From the Mission*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2009.

<sup>138</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January 2012.

As discussed in previous chapters, Ernabella mission had always actively encouraged people who camped at Ernabella to also spend some time in their country. From the outset, families were employed as shepherds and camped away from the mission where they were provisioned weekly from the mission. According to Ernabella artists, Alison Curley, Kunmanara Brumby and Nura Ward, these old sheep camps are now used as outstations.<sup>139</sup> They are described by Edwards as ‘satellite communities’ and indicate the significant role that shepherding has had on contemporary identities as people have come to identify these places as home. They represent another variation of the outstation movement where during the 1980s, families who wished to move away from Ernabella settled, but who at the same time wanted to remain close enough to Ernabella to access services. Unlike the outstations further away from Ernabella, the criteria for selecting the sites were not necessarily predicated on traditional affiliations but were derived from a number of additional post-contact associations. Edwards has noted that three outstations were settled by the families of people who had been removed as children, but who had returned to live in the area ‘to reclaim their Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara heritage.’ Other outstations were occupied by people whose connections to country lay elsewhere. Here the major criterion appears to be their ‘long association’ with Ernabella, a place to which people had migrated from other areas over the mission years.<sup>140</sup> This is borne out by Helen Payne’s research in the 1970s at Ernabella which found that women who identified with country in the western Musgraves through their own and parents’ place of birth, had also acquired ritual rights to country close to Ernabella itself. These rights were due to them through their ‘long residence in the Pukatja [Ernabella] community and subsequent knowledge of the country’ gained

<sup>139</sup> Cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for stories: The Women from Ernabella and Their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 26.

<sup>140</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Patterns of Aboriginal Residence’, 1992, pp. 26-7.

through frequent visits. Payne found that in these cases residency regulates ‘the transmission and maintenance of women’s ritual rights and responsibilities’.<sup>141</sup> As Fred Myers found for Pintupi, another Western Desert group, having an ‘emotional attachment’ which was located ‘in personal experience’ was one of the ‘multiple pathways’ through which people identified with a place.<sup>142</sup>

This indicates additional ways of relating to land and a re-configuration of identity which had been evolving in response to mission life. Even before the arrival of missionaries at Ernabella, as Myers has noted for Western Desert societies social structures were flexible and there was a ‘negotiated’ quality to social life.<sup>143</sup> He found evidence indicating that populations in the Western Desert were characteristically unstable in relation to occupation of country, with ‘some emptying out [of areas] occurring, followed by new people moving into the vacated area and taking over responsibility for the country’.<sup>144</sup> Payne argued that in the case of Ernabella women, relocation had necessitated the negotiation ‘for rights to ritual material appropriate to their new place of residence’.<sup>145</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three the move to the mission was assisted by the flexibility and contingency inherent in group membership.

Life based around the mission led to a restructuring of social relationships and the development of an identity based on a shared history. Later the moving away to

---

<sup>141</sup> Payne, H., ‘Residency and Ritual Rights’, in J. C. Kasser & J. Stubington (eds.), *Problems and Solutions: Occasional Essays in Musicology Presented to Alice M. Moyle*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1984, p. 276. The claims made by women from Ernabella for rights to ceremonies in the western Musgraves were contested by other women who were living in this country (for example, at Amata), because it was argued that Ernabella women had not visited this country and therefore had not maintained it. However, Payne found that the Ernabella women’s claims to rituals for country around Ernabella were not contested.

<sup>142</sup> Myers, F., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1986, pp. 137-38.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159. In the 1930s, the Pintupi social classification system was changing to one which resembled that of their neighbours, the Warlpiri. Everyone in Pintupi society inherits one of eight subsection categories, which models relationships. It is argued that prior to the 1930s Pintupi used a four section system, but gradually adopted the eight-section system similar to that used by the Warlpiri.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>145</sup> Payne, H., ‘Residency and Ritual Rights’, 1984, p. 277.

Amata and Fregon and then to homelands resulted in a further restructuring and re-orienting of groups. Then the land rights movement throughout the 1970s demanded that the now widely dispersed Anangu<sup>146</sup> organise into a ‘*single political* unit to express common interest’ (my emphasis).<sup>147</sup> The fluid and contingent nature of Western Desert groups allowed people to invoke traditional alliances right across the north-west of South Australia and from Blackstone in Western Australia to Docker River in the Northern Territory. A ‘oneness with a focus on obtaining title to land’ led to the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Council at Amata in 1976, incorporating most Western Desert communities.<sup>148</sup> Thus indicating that a modern identity was being forged in response to the contemporary land rights movement. With new Council named as the Pitjantjatjara Council and with Pitjantjatjara having become the *lingua franca* it appears that the Pitjantjatjara had become the dominant group in the area.

The homelands movement was important in the emerging land rights campaign in Central Australia during the 1970s. The campaign mounted by Anangu leading to the enactment of the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* 1981, can partly be attributed to Ernabella Mission’s policy of cultural maintenance. The events leading up to the Land Rights legislation have been well documented<sup>149</sup> so the following discussion will focus on the relationship between the campaign and this policy of cultural maintenance.

---

<sup>146</sup> Anangu means ‘person’. Today it is used by people of the Western Desert language bloc in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands to refer to themselves. It can be regarded as a political descriptor which came into increasing usage during Land Rights claims. See Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, IAD Publishing, Alice Springs, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>147</sup> Vachon, D., ‘Political Consciousness and Land Rights among the Australian Western Desert People’, in E. Leacock & R. Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p. 482.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>149</sup> See Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *Growing Up the Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, McPhee Gribble Publishers Pty Ltd, Fitzroy, Victoria, 1984 and Edwards, B., ‘Pitjantjatjara Land Rights’, in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, pp. 294-304.

Land tenure did not concern the mission until the late 1960s because initially the mission had more pragmatic concerns in protecting people from contact with outsiders, as discussed earlier, by providing a buffer zone.<sup>150</sup> In the early 1960s, under assimilationist thinking, the South Australian government's policy was that all settlements would function as training sites. Once families had been settled in 'suitable centres near employment', settlements would be closed.<sup>151</sup> However, this is not necessarily how Anangu understood their future in relation to their country around Ernabella and in the north-west reserve, nor was it how the mission saw the future for Anangu.

Also discussed earlier, the recognition by the South Australian government of Aboriginal entitlement to land in the *Aboriginal Lands Trust Act*, 1966, provided a sound basis for Pitjantjatjara claims to lands in the north-west of the State. In the wider context during the 1960s there was an increasing awareness of the need for justice for Aboriginal people and Land Rights became a part of the public discourse. In addition, the passing of the Commonwealth government's *Northern Territory Land Rights Act* 1976 provided a sympathetic climate for the Pitjantjatjara claim.

Prominent amongst this growing support for land rights across Australia were the churches who became actively involved in land rights campaigns.<sup>152</sup> From the outset of the establishment of Ernabella mission, staff had understood the importance of the

---

<sup>150</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 95.

<sup>151</sup> 'South Australian Policy on Natives', *The Advertiser*, 1 March 1962, GRG 52/90, Vol. 7, State Archives of South Australia; Edwards, W. H., 'The Church and Indigenous Land Rights: Pitjantjatjara Land Rights in Australia', *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, October 1986, pp. 479-80.

<sup>152</sup> The churches' understanding of the relationship between Aborigines and their country had changed since the early colonial period when a settled life away from tribal lands was considered a prerequisite for civilising and Christianising. See Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, 1989; Edwards has pointed out that for younger mission staff who had been at university during the student activist years of the 1960s and 1970s political activism was at the forefront of their work compared to missionaries of his era who prioritised 'industry and work projects'. Pers. Comm., 30 January 2012.

relationship to country for Anangu and had encouraged and facilitated regular visits back to country. Furthermore, it was also acknowledged early on that the mission was ‘occupying part of their country’.<sup>153</sup> According to Philip Toyne and Daniel Vachon the church saw their involvement in terms of a ‘Christian humanism’.<sup>154</sup> As Edwards has noted, Christians must ‘act justly’ and ensure ‘that the long history of dispossession of land as has taken place in Australia should be reversed and traditional rights recognized’.<sup>155</sup> From the 1960s the Australian Council of Churches and the National Missionary Council of Australia had expressed their support for land rights and in particular, according to Edwards, the Presbyterian Church had intended to transfer the Ernabella leasehold titles to Anangu ‘at such time as they were organized to hold such titles’. Out of the relationships which had developed over close to four decades at Ernabella, Anangu looked to the church to act as advocates for their campaign. In Adelaide the church provided publicity and was actively engaged in lobbying. In the north-west former mission staff provided practical assistance and support.<sup>156</sup> From the outset of the campaign Edwards, amongst others, played an integral role as minute secretary and filled the challenging role of interpreter at the Pitjantjatjara Council meetings.<sup>157</sup>

The major factor which motivated Anangu claims to land was the increase in mining activity in the area during the 1970s. For the first time, as Edwards has pointed out, Anangu to their astonishment were made aware that the land was not theirs and that they needed to assert their claims to it. In the past Edwards has argued that Anangu had

---

<sup>153</sup> Love, J.R.B., Ernabella Mission: Report for Year Ending 30/6/1942, p. 2, PCA, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

<sup>154</sup> Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, 1984, p. 41.

<sup>155</sup> Edwards, W.H., ‘The Church and Indigenous Land Rights’, 1986, p. 485.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 481-83.

<sup>157</sup> Edwards, B., ‘Pitjantjatjara Land Rights’, 1983, p. 295.



always been able to adapt ‘to alien intrusions into this land to gain what benefits they could from the intruders’.<sup>158</sup> But this was different and mining exploration was considered a threat to important sites in ways which decades of pastoralism had not been. Even though Pitjantjatjara people had maintained a connection to their land throughout the mission years, the movement to homelands and enhanced mobility consolidated the relationship.

Edwards has assessed the Pitjantjatjara Council formed at the Amata meeting in 1976 as an organisation ‘in which traditional authority has been respected and through which they have been able to interact authoritatively with modern political and bureaucratic bodies’.<sup>159</sup> Anangu felt that the *Aboriginal Lands Trust Act*, 1966 which was established to hold land in trust for all Aborigines in South Australia was not able to look after their interests due to the different circumstances and histories of people in the north-west of the state. There were differences in attitudes towards sites between Anangu in the north-west represented by the Pitjantjatjara Council and Anangu from the southern Yalata community. Toyne and Vachon have pointed out how Yalata elders visiting sites of importance to them in the north had identified these sites to government officials, ostensibly to aid in their protection. However, northern Anangu believed that only men who had been through traditional Law could access these sites and that revealing them to outsiders would weaken their sacred power.<sup>160</sup>

A separate Pitjantjatjara Lands Trust was proposed by the Pitjantjatjara Council. The Pitjantjatjara land rights model called for ‘the ownership of all land by all the people’ which differed from the Northern Territory model of determining traditional

---

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 296-97.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>160</sup> Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, 1984, p. 47.

owners for specific areas of land.<sup>161</sup> Anangu saw themselves as one unified group in terms of ownership of their land—land to which there are communal rights and which is inalienable. However this is not to discount localised interests. Aram Yengoyan found that even though by the late 1960s social organisation had undergone considerable changes ‘personal claims to different “countries” [was] not fully dead’. This was demonstrated by the contested access to the chrysoprase mine site at Mt. Davies where localised interests came to the fore in determining who could access the site.<sup>162</sup> While there were difficulties with merging Anangu and Western concepts of land ownership to the satisfaction of both parties, after a persistent and complicated campaign with many compromises, Anangu received inalienable freehold title to 102,630 square kilometres of their land in 1981.<sup>163</sup> The success of the campaign was largely due to the determination and initiative of Anangu assisted by the personal involvement of the then Premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan, until his resignation in 1979, the support of Ernabella mission staff and the churches and other supporters in Adelaide. As Toyne and Vachon have pointed out, ‘[n]owhere else in Australia had an Aboriginal group organized itself over such a vast area and involved so many communities, linked by a common culture and language, to fight for the land and political power.’<sup>164</sup>

## Conclusion

With the outstation movement and the transfer of administrative responsibility for Ernabella from the church to the local council in the early 1970s, life changed

---

<sup>161</sup> Edwards, B., ‘Pitjantjatjara Land Rights’, 1983, p. 299.

<sup>162</sup> Yengoyan, A. A., ‘Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization’, in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, UWA, Nedlands, WA, 1970, p. 83.

<sup>163</sup> Edwards, B., ‘Aboriginal Land Rights’, 1988, p. 82. For other detailed discussion of the events leading up to this see Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, 1984 and Edwards, B., ‘Pitjantjatjara Land Rights’, 1983.

<sup>164</sup> Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, 1984, p.41.

considerably for Pitjantjatjara people. As Toyne and Vachon found during the land rights campaign, Anangu were ‘no longer the same people whom Duguid met in the Musgrave Ranges in the 1930s’. In the space of only fifty years or so, they were ‘developing new organizations and relationships to solve the problems of a new world’ but still from the base of their own religious and social order.<sup>165</sup> During the campaign there was an emerging awareness of the economic value of the land as people were increasingly embedded in a cash economy. As Vachon points out, central to an Anangu political consciousness was a ‘dual’ interest in land and the ‘legitimate control of access to the wealth of their land by pastoralist and mining interests’.<sup>166</sup> The spiritual connection to land is unable to be separated from economic and social aspects. As Vachon notes, ‘the demand for the protection of sacred sites’ has been accompanied by ‘the need for more land so that jobs will be made available’.<sup>167</sup>

The remarkable campaign initiated by Anangu leading to the 1981 land handover clearly demonstrated that they did not see themselves as victims and belies the assessment such as that made by Noel and Phyl Wallace that Anangu were ‘stripped of their ability of self-determination’ and ‘reacted ... with confusion, despair, withdrawal and, finally, apathetic dependence’.<sup>168</sup> It can be argued that the policy of Ernabella Mission which facilitated their continuing connection to country played some part in this. In addition, the presence of the mission had ensured that the land had been protected from resource developers and was still available to Anangu. Had the mission

---

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>166</sup> Vachon, D., ‘Political Consciousness and Land Rights’, 1982, p. 465.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 480, 485-86. Vachon points out that there is a danger in emphasising only the religious connection to land to the exclusion of economic issues. As Mundine and others have noted this approach perpetuates a ‘mythical noble savage’ and limits people to ‘museum pieces’. Mundine, W., ‘Indigenous Freedom’, Bennelong Society Conference 2005, *Remote Aboriginal Communities: Where Are the Jobs?* <<http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/conference2005/Mundine2005.php>>, accessed 20 June 2006.

<sup>168</sup> Wallace, P. & N., *Killing me Softly: the Destruction of a Heritage*, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1977, p. 15.

not been established, it is more than likely that the eastwards and southwards migrations of Western Desert people which were occurring in the early decades of the twentieth century as discussed in Chapter Three would have continued, leaving the population in the north-west of South Australia greatly reduced. There is a sense of irony that the mission and the work of the missionaries at Ernabella which according to the orthodox assessment were agents of colonisation, not only facilitated the transition to self-determination but prevented the dispossession which Aboriginal groups had suffered elsewhere.



Figure 11  
 Pitjantjatjara Elders Choir 2009  
<http://jameswaites.ilatech.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09elders-choir.jpg>



Figure 12  
 Andy Tjilari (choir member) 'dancing Inma Ngintaka, the Giant Perentie Lizard, at Angatja, 1994  
 James, D., *Painting the Song*. McCulloch & McCulloch, Australian Art Books, 2009, p. 81.

## Chapter Seven

### Aboriginal and Christian: 'Still we got Anangu way'.<sup>1</sup>

The previous chapter examined Anangu responses to the rapidly changing social and economic environments in which they were living from the 1960s. This chapter will

<sup>1</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 30.

discuss the impact on spiritual life<sup>2</sup> through a focus on Anangu evangelists, the evolution of the Pitjantjatjara Church and the Ernabella Choir. Noel Wallace believes that the period from the 1960s has ‘undoubtedly been the most critical in its effect on their spiritual and ritual life’ as Anangu have interacted increasingly outside the mission environment.<sup>3</sup> But as Bill Edwards has argued, despite the ever increasing influences from a ‘stridently pervasive Western mainstream culture’ Pitjantjatjara people have ‘retained a high level of continuity with traditional beliefs, practices and values’.<sup>4</sup> This clearly contests one of the major criticisms levelled at missionaries, that is, that they uniformly suppressed and eventually destroyed Aboriginal spirituality. This chapter proposes that the continuation and maintenance of traditional belief systems was facilitated partly by the relatively enlightened approach to missionising employed at Ernabella, but also by the ability of Pitjantjatjara people to incorporate alien material almost seamlessly into their existing corpus of beliefs.

### **Traditional beliefs and Christianity**

The ostensible dichotomy between traditional Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and Christianity<sup>5</sup> is so entrenched that both in the academy and in the wider population there is still a great deal of surprise expressed that Aboriginal people can be Christian and

---

<sup>2</sup> Ranger points out that the publication of the edited collection by T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, South Australia, 1988, began the re-assessment of the impact of missionaries on the social and economic life of Aboriginal people but did not deal so much with the impact on religious life. See Ranger, T., ‘Christianity and the First Peoples: Some Second Thoughts’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace, N., ‘Change in Spiritual and Ritual life in Pitjantjatjara (Bidjandjadjara) Society, 1966-1973’, in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the ‘70s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, p. 74. Wallace undertook research with Pitjantjatjara people from 1966 to 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards was Superintendent from 1958 to 1972. Edwards, W. H., ‘Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality’, *Charles Strong Memorial Lecture*, July 2001, pp. 26-7.

<sup>5</sup> See Yengoyan, A., ‘Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions’, 1993, pp. 233-57.

continue to hold and practice traditional beliefs. According to Stuart Hall, people in contexts such as this appear to ‘float ambiguously in some unstable, dangerous, hybrid zone of indeterminacy in-between’. By moving outside and between perceived cultural boundaries they unsettle the notion of stable and unique cultural identities.<sup>6</sup> Maurice O’Riordan, writing about Aboriginal art and in particular the work of Hector Burton who grew up at Ernabella Mission, argued that ‘Christianity would seem to be at complete odds with Aboriginal spirituality’.<sup>7</sup> Author Barry Hill, revisiting the Pitjantjatjara community of Mutitjulu for the opening of the new church expressed surprise that the service was a Christian one conducted by Tony Tjamiwa, a senior Pitjantjatjara custodian. Hill wondered whether his surprise was due to his ‘naivety’ in doubting that Christianity could be significant to traditional people at Mutitjulu, or because the ‘Park officials’ had failed ‘to mention this Christian aspect of the place’ on his previous visits?<sup>8</sup> Artist Rod Moss similarly found it confounding that the people he associated with over two decades in Alice Springs and who maintained such a strong traditional life, were also Christians.<sup>9</sup> That traditional beliefs would be maintained alongside the practice of Christianity would have been surprising too for the Presbyterian Church who expected that eventually Christianity would replace traditional beliefs and lifestyle.<sup>10</sup> While Winifred Hilliard respected and had empathy for traditional culture she believed that Ernabella people experienced a ‘confusion of beliefs, old and new’ which would eventually pass. She could not countenance that people at Ernabella

---

<sup>6</sup> Hall, S., ‘The Spectacle of the “Other”’, in S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, London, 2003, p. 236.

<sup>7</sup> O’Riordan, M., ‘50 of Australia’s Most Collectable Artists: Hector Burton’, *Australian Art Collector*, December 2010, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, B., *The Rock: Travelling to Uluru*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p. 256.

<sup>9</sup> Moss, R., *The Hard Light of Day: An Artist’s Story of Friendships in Arrernte Country*, UQP, St Lucia, 2010, pp. 130, 215.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 8, PCA ML MSS 1893 Add-on 1173, Box 2504.

could hold both belief systems simultaneously. She wrote, '[w]hen they have a new spiritual concept which does not bind them to one particular area, but to a world at large under the Lordship of one God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, they are free from the bonds of the past, free to move out, *should they so desire ...*'.<sup>11</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Two the notion that Christianity and indigenous religious beliefs were incompatible has long been argued not only by some missionaries and the wider populace but has also persisted in the academy. Furthermore there was a widespread belief among many of the earliest observers that Aborigines did not even hold religious beliefs.<sup>12</sup> This failure to assign to Aboriginal beliefs the status of religion has been described by Uniting Church Minister Djiniyini Gondarra as a type of 'spiritual genocide'.<sup>13</sup> As William Stanner has argued, up until the twentieth century at least, observers 'were genuinely unable to see, let alone credit ... that the Aborigines are a deeply religious people'.<sup>14</sup> Where religious beliefs were acknowledged, they were regarded within an evolutionary framework as being representative of a simpler and inferior stage in the development of religious thought and it was assumed, as did missionaries such as Hilliard, that they would eventually be replaced by a more evolved world religion such as Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> My emphasis. Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1976, p. 193.

<sup>12</sup> See Spencer, B. & Gillen, F., *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People*, Macmillan, London, 1927.

<sup>13</sup> Gondarra, D., 'Aboriginal Spirituality and the Gospel', in A. Pattel-Gray (ed.), *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, Harper Collins, Blackburn, Vic., 1996, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Stanner, W.E.H., 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism' in R. M. Berndt & C. H. Berndt (eds.), *Aboriginal Man in Australia: Essays in Honour of Emeritus Professor A. P. Elkin*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965, p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> In the United States and Canada, as noted by Shonle as early as 1924 observers were finding that indigenous peoples were not abandoning their religious beliefs at all but were "re-interpreting" Christianity through traditional understandings and fusing elements of both to form a hybrid religion. However, this kind of syncretism was not acknowledged in the academy in Australia until much later, even though some missionaries who worked closely with Aboriginal people were noticing this in the mid twentieth century. Shonle, R., 'The Christianising Process among *Preliterate Peoples*', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1924, pp. 261-80.



Jean Woolmington has pointed out that missionaries generally understood civilisation to be intrinsically linked to Christianity. There were two prevailing views—some believed that Aborigines had to be converted to Christianity before the process of civilising could proceed and others that civilisation was a prerequisite for Christian conversion.<sup>16</sup> The importance of civilisation to mission projects was expressed by Dr Ronald Trudinger<sup>17</sup> when visiting his son Ronald Trudinger at Ernabella in 1944. He reported that the nomadic population around the Ernabella Mission was ‘a missionary problem’ due to their ‘pronounced nomadic habits’ and the lack of control by mission staff over their movements, ‘combined with the almost complete segregation of youths from about 14 to 19, during the period of their initiation’.<sup>18</sup> These practices were thought to be incompatible with a civilised life.

Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* first published in English in 1915 drew on data from Australia and presented a shift in the understanding of indigenous religious expression. While retaining an evolutionary framework Durkheim’s theory diverged from his predecessors in that he acknowledged that indigenous peoples, even those he classified as “primitive”, did have religious beliefs. Religion, he argued, was a function of society and comprised ‘a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things ... which unite into one single moral community ... all those who adhere to them’. Because it was ‘the product of social causes’, and therefore ‘an eminently collective thing’ it expressed ‘collective realities’.<sup>19</sup> Society provided the

---

<sup>16</sup> Woolmington, J., ‘The Civilisation/Christianisation Debate and the Australian Aborigines’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1986, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Dr Trudinger had worked as a missionary in the Sudan and was drawing on his experience there.

<sup>18</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, August 1944, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1976 [1915], pp. 424, 47, 10.

basis or as Durkheim wrote, the ‘soul’ for religion<sup>20</sup> and the overriding function of religion was to provide social cohesion. That is, religion reflected the society. The assumption that religious beliefs are merely a consequence of society, means that if societies undergo fundamental change or upheaval as Aboriginal societies have, religious beliefs must also change.

While influential to understanding Aboriginal religions until the middle of the twentieth century evolutionary and reductionist theories no longer retain their erstwhile authority. But they do however, help explain the persistence of the notion that people cannot synthesise different belief systems and the subsequent conclusion that Aboriginal converts to Christianity cannot at the same time be traditionally Aboriginal. From the 1950s the work of Stanner<sup>21</sup> presented a challenge to both the evolutionary notion of the primitiveness of Aboriginal religions and to Durkheim’s reductionist approach. Stanner, in his study of Murinbata society made religion ‘the primary subject of study’<sup>22</sup> and argued that it had its own intrinsic value, and was not a merely an off-shoot of society itself.<sup>23</sup> As Stanner noted, ‘religion was not the mirage of the society and the society was not the consequence of the religion. Each pervaded the other within a larger process’.<sup>24</sup> Stanner’s work provided the basis for understanding Aboriginal religions as sophisticated and complex.

With more sophisticated understandings of Aboriginal religions different explanations were proposed to support the notion that Aboriginal religions and Christianity could not co-exist. Historian Richard Broome has written that Aborigines

---

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 419.

<sup>21</sup> Stanner is regarded as a key scholar on Aboriginal religions. See Keen, I., ‘Stanner on Aboriginal Religion’, in M. Charlesworth, Dussart, F. & H. Morphy (eds.), *Aboriginal Religions in Australia*, Ashgate Publishing Co., Aldershot, Hants, England, 2005, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> This is in the Daly River and Port Keats area in the Northern Territory. Stanner, W. E. H., *On Aboriginal Religion*, Oceania Monograph 36, University of Sydney, 1989, p. vi.

<sup>23</sup> Keen, I., ‘Stanner on Aboriginal Religion’, 2005, p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> Stanner, W. E. H., ‘Religion, Totemism and Symbolism’, 1965, p. 237.

generally rejected missionary teaching due to lack of interest because they found their own beliefs quite adequate. He argues that the 'Christian message was either confused or not accepted as it was intended'.<sup>25</sup> However earlier in the same text is the discussion of the Ngarrindjeri Christians who 'kept the church going' at Raukkan after the death of George Taplin in 1879, despite the disinterest of the new manager.<sup>26</sup> Broome's assumption that when Aboriginal people engage with Christianity they are confused, underestimates the agency being exercised by the Ngarrindjeri at Raukkan.

In a related argument anthropologist Aram Yengoyan attributes the lack of wide scale conversions to more than disinterest. He proposes that even though worldwide Christianity 'generally overwhelmed local cultures' this was not the case in Australia. He argues that for Aboriginal people, particularly for Pitjantjatjara people, conversion presented a 'virtual impossibility' because their spiritual world view and Christianity are mutually incomprehensible.<sup>27</sup> For Yengoyan, conversion to Christianity depends on a society having an individualised cash economy based on consumerism rather than a tribal economy. And conversely, conversion creates individuality which has to be sustained by a money economy.<sup>28</sup> Yengoyan asserts that this requirement for the development of an individual consciousness is the antithesis of the communal life which characterises Pitjantjatjara societies. In addition, Yengoyan argues that where conversion to Christianity occurs, it is 'mainly from necessity' such as that caused by 'economic

---

<sup>25</sup> Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians*, George Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1982, p. 113.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76. Raukkan was established in 1859 by the Aborigines' Friends' Association for the people of the Lake Alexandrina area, south of Adelaide.

<sup>27</sup> Yengoyan, A., 'Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions', 1993, p. 234. For a critique of Yengoyan's thesis see Edwards, B., 'Tjukurpa Palya—The Good Word: Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity', in Peggy Brock (ed.), *Indigenous People and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, pp. 129-52.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247.

deprivation or social dislocation'.<sup>29</sup> Max Charlesworth mounts a similar argument. He proposes that there are enormous difficulties 'with any attempt at genuine dialogue between Aboriginal religions and Christianity because each is embedded within hugely different socio-cultural contexts'.<sup>30</sup>

These assessments still influence popular understandings of the process by which indigenous people adopt Christianity. As Robert Kenny points out, the recognition of religion as integral to Aboriginal cultures has in some ways made it even more difficult to understand how Aboriginal people can retain traditional belief systems alongside Christianity. Because religion is situated at the very heart of a culture it is perceived that the process of conversion must cause extreme upheaval and disruption to the culture as a whole.<sup>31</sup> As Lewis Rambo notes, conversion is regarded as 'perplexing because religion is believed to be deeply rooted in family connections, cultural traditions, ingrained customs, and ideologies'.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the widespread perception that traditional beliefs could not be maintained alongside the practice of Christianity, whether due to lack of civilisation, disinterest or sheer impossibility, alternative views were being expressed. Individuals such as Reverend Love, who had long worked closely with Aboriginal people in remote areas, believed that 'civilisation' as expressed in a sedentary life, was not a pre-requisite

---

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 250. In some ways this argument follows Durkheim's reductionist thesis by regarding religion as being dependent on society.

<sup>30</sup> Charlesworth, M., 'Introduction' in M. Charlesworth, F. Dussart, & H. Morphy (eds.), *Aboriginal Religions in Australia*, Ashgate Publishing Co., Aldershot, Hants, England, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper & the Ruptured World*, Scribe Publications, Carlton North, 2007, p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> Rambo, L., 'Anthropology and the Study of Conversion', in A. Buckser & S. D. Gazier (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, p. 212.

to Christian conversion. As early as 1944 while Superintendent at Ernabella Mission he proposed that 'nomadic hunters' could also be Christian.<sup>33</sup>

In the *Ernabella Newsletters* and correspondence there are reports of outward signs of increasing interest in Christianity. In 1941<sup>34</sup> it was noted that the women's Bible class was well attended and by August 1942 that it was 'thriving'.<sup>35</sup> In February of that same year 350 people had attended church and the free supper.<sup>36</sup> People continued to attend church services and the average attendance in 1945 was 166.<sup>37</sup> In 1950 Ronald Trudinger noted the interest in catechism classes<sup>38</sup> and in 1951 reported that thirty four young people had attended a two-week Summer Bible School. He pointed out that they were 'so keen' that they had saved money throughout the year to pay for their food while attending the school.<sup>39</sup> In November 1952 the first Baptisms occurred with 400 people attending the service and twenty young people baptised.<sup>40</sup> By March 1953 "Native" men were giving the address in church and 200-300 people were regularly attending.<sup>41</sup> In 1955 there were ten baptisms and fifty people attending catechism classes.<sup>42</sup> While Edwards was Superintendent, Ernabella people were holding their own services when away from the mission<sup>43</sup> and the 1962 Annual Report from the mission noted that there was 'increasing Ministry' by Pitjantjatjara Christians.<sup>44</sup> The work of

---

<sup>33</sup> Love, J. R. B., *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 4. Love was Superintendent at Ernabella from 1941 to 1946.

<sup>34</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, November 1941.

<sup>35</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, August 1942, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, February, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, August 1945.

<sup>38</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 15 November, 1950, PCA, ML MSS 1893 Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(ii).

<sup>39</sup> Trudinger to Coombes, 17 January 1951, PCA, ML MSS 1893 Add-on 1173, Box 2503, Folder 6(i).

<sup>40</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1953, September 1953.

<sup>42</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, February 1956, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Edwards, B., 2005 '*Tjukurpa Palya*', pp. 144-46.

<sup>44</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report 1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

these local evangelists, as discussed further on, contests the notion that people at Ernabella were not interested in Christianity.

As the mission era drew to an end, Edwards reported that during the first half of 1969 there was excellent attendance at church and catechism classes and he believed that the 'spiritual work appeared to be at its highest point'.<sup>45</sup> Elders told Keith Coombes from the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions on his visit to Ernabella and Fregon at the end of August 1974 that 'continuing theological training should take place'.<sup>46</sup> As Ernabella resident Wally Dunn said in 1999, '[w]e're interested in God's story. God, and my history underneath, both—*kutjara*'.<sup>47</sup> While these reports from the mission could be read as missionary propaganda and an expression of what missionaries actually hoped for there is evidence which indicates otherwise. For the first four years of the mission there was no mention of this interest in Christianity in mission reports and correspondence. Even where church attendances suggested that people were expressing interest, reports from the mission appeared to be grounded in a more realistic understanding of the situation. For example, in 1942, even though it was noted that 350 people had attended church, it was regarded less as a desire to hear the 'Christian message' but rather an interest in attending a group meeting.<sup>48</sup>

## Conversion

---

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, W., Report on Church Life 1969, 17 December 1969, PCA ML MSS MLK 2763, Add-on 1616, Folder AE/12. It was also noted that two unexpected deaths in the community that year prevented more baptisms from occurring as people were required to move away from Ernabella and together with a resurgence of ritual activity and the availability of motor vehicles the year came to a disappointing end in regards to more baptisms, with little sense of achievement.

<sup>46</sup> Visit of Keith Coombes to Ernabella/Fregon from the 26<sup>th</sup> August to the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1974, PCA ML MSS MLK 2763, Add-on 1616, Folder AE/11.

<sup>47</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 30. *kutjara* translates as two. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, p. 45.

<sup>48</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May, 1942, p. 3.

The biblical understanding of “true” conversion to Christianity is based on Paul’s epiphany on the road to Damascus <sup>49</sup> where as described by theologian Richard Peace, there is a sudden turning away from a past life of ‘sin (darkness, disobedience, waywardness) to the way of Jesus (light, God, holiness)’.<sup>50</sup> According to this understanding, conversion is attributed to supernatural rather than human agency.<sup>51</sup> The role of missionaries then is to turn indigenous people away from traditional religions towards acceptance of Christianity as their sole belief. Where conversion is understood as a complete transformation, that is, a complete change in world view, it leaves little possibility of retaining former religious beliefs.

The ‘sudden epiphany’ model is not the only way to understand the process of conversion and for the most part this understanding does not hold for Aboriginal people. There is an emerging body of work which shows that the process is more nuanced and varied. Peter Wood notes, ‘[c]onversion to Christianity means different things to different peoples’.<sup>52</sup> That is, conversion can be a selective and extended process rather than one of complete transformation. As Rambo argues, ‘no conversion is total, complete and perfect’.<sup>53</sup> Affiliation with a new religion is not necessarily to the exclusion of former beliefs.

In Australia at least up until the 1930s it was generally believed that for Aboriginal people to undergo successful conversion there had to be a complete turning away from traditional beliefs. In the following decades A. P. Elkin, an ordained minister

---

<sup>49</sup> See Acts 9:3-6.

<sup>50</sup> Peace, R. V., ‘Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1, January 2004, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> A divine source makes culture irrelevant in some ways as conversion is outside individual agency. It can also contest the argument that conversion has been imposed on people. But at the same time it renders those converted as passive and without agency.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, P., ‘Afterword: Boundaries and Horizons’, in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, California, 1993, p. 305. This collection is an example of nuanced understandings of conversion.

<sup>53</sup> Rambo, L., ‘Anthropology and the Study of Conversion’, 2003, p. 214.

in the Anglican Church, along with a few others such as Love,<sup>54</sup> rejected the notion that there had to be ‘a total abandonment of indigenous culture’ or a renouncing of the old ways before conversion could occur. Rather they perceived the process as an ongoing one with a syncretic “adding to” or a “cultural blending”. For Elkin this related to his assimilation agenda.<sup>55</sup> Over time he did expect that Christianity would have to be incorporated into Aboriginal belief systems because he believed that it was crucial in facilitating the progress towards modernity.<sup>56</sup> Ernabella Mission followed Elkin’s thinking and conversion was regarded as the ‘ultimate sure basis for assimilation’ and as a way to ensure that people did not ‘just go under’ in the face of the ‘civilising process’.<sup>57</sup>

According to Rambo and as discussed in Chapter Five, conversion from one set of religious beliefs to another is a complex, multi-dimensional, on-going process and is better described as a ‘converting process’. Even though Rambo argues that this process is characterised by a range of experiences and outcomes, he proposes that within this range some general stages can be identified.<sup>58</sup> He argues that after a period new converts enter a ‘scrutinization’ stage, where traditional practices which conflict with Christian beliefs are interrogated.<sup>59</sup> This type of process is evident at Ernabella Mission where from the 1960s some old practices were rejected and new ones were adopted.

---

<sup>54</sup> Although this was still a minority view.

<sup>55</sup> Elkin believed that assimilation could occur as well as ‘the retention of Aboriginal identity and cultural distinctiveness’. Interestingly Elkin believed that Aborigines were better equipped to ‘progress’ towards assimilation where their social structure was intact and therefore he believed that remote Aborigines still living tribally would assimilate more successfully. This was opposite to the broader view of the time. However, he regarded cultural distinctiveness as only a means to an end, and this would disappear as people became more embedded in the wider society. See McGregor, R., ‘Wards, Words and Citizens: A.P. Elkin and Paul Hasluck on Assimilation’, *Oceania*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 1999, pp. 250-51.

<sup>56</sup> McGregor, R., ‘From Old Testament to New: A. P. Elkin on Christian Conversion and Cultural Assimilation’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 2001, pp. 41-5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Rambo, L., ‘Anthropology and the Study of Conversion’, 2003, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> See also Raymond Firth, ‘Conversion from Paganism to Christianity’, *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 14, May-June 1976, p. 5. Firth argues that new ceremonies are devised which are compatible with Christianity.



Rather than changes being imposed by missionaries they were introduced by Pitjantjatjara people themselves. In the 1970s burial practices were changing to suit the changing 'economic, social and political structures' demanded by a more settled life.<sup>60</sup> In 1972 at the traditional burial of a 5 year old girl who had tragically died during the meningitis outbreak Christian prayers were included.<sup>61</sup> Following a death, family members in accord with tradition, were obliged to leave the area for a considerable period. Because this particular family ran the bakery at Ernabella, such an obligation would have had economic consequences. After grappling with this dilemma, the people decided on a course of action which would satisfy traditional obligations *and* the changed economic circumstances by allowing the family to return to the bakery after the internal walls had been painted.<sup>62</sup> Earlier in 1961 twins were born in the mission hospital and for the first time both were allowed to survive.<sup>63</sup> As Ernabella people pointed out at the Salisbury Uniting Aboriginal Congress meeting on 2 June 2010, 'we put the bad things behind us'.<sup>64</sup> Yolngu Christians at Galiwin'ku provided a similar explanation to Robert Bos and pointed out that Christianity allowed them 'to see what is bad in [their]

---

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, B., *'Tjukurpa Palya'*, 2005, p. 148.

<sup>61</sup> McGarvie, N., Memo to Aboriginal Secretary APBM, 18 September 1972, PCA ML MLK 02775, Add-on 1616, Folder AE/8. A letter of sympathy to the parents from the APBM, stated that the inclusion of Christian elements in the burial was 'an opportunity to show that your faith in Jesus Christ does make a difference in how you look at death', J. Stuckey to Peter and Tjalara Nyaningu, 26 September 1972, PCA ML MLK 02775, Add-on 1616, Folder AE/8; Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 15 February 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, B., *'Tjukurpa Palya'*, 2005, p. 148.

<sup>63</sup> Annual Reports to Department of Aboriginal Affairs from Ernabella 1960-1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506. Prior to this as discussed in Chapter Six, infanticide was practised when twins or a sibling too close in age were born. See Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, pp. 101-102, 110; Strehlow, T. G. H., Pamphlet No. 3, Vol. 1, [1978], cited in K. S. Strehlow, *The Operation of Fear in Traditional Aboriginal Society in Central Australia*, The Strehlow Research Foundation Inc., Prospect, SA, 1990, pp. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Notes from meeting at Salisbury Aboriginal Congress Church, South Australia, 2 June 2010. The conversation was conducted in Pitjantjatjara with Bill Edwards interpreting.

culture and what is good ...'<sup>65</sup> That is, there is a sense that people were freed of some of the constraints of traditional culture.<sup>66</sup>

Rambo's stage of 'retroversion' can also be observed at Ernabella during the 1960s where after a couple of generations of Christianisation traditional practices which may have been dormant are re-evaluated as to their compatibility with Christianity. They are then re-introduced and a resurgence in ritual activity is evident. In the 1966 Annual Report from Ernabella Mission, it was noted that there had been an 'increase in corroboree movements in 1965-1966' which had impacted on church and school attendance. In 1971 in a letter to a friend, the Nursing Sister at Ernabella reported that just prior to Christmas 'a large number of men went to Amata settlement for Red Ochre ceremonies'.<sup>67</sup> The resurgence of 'Corroboree life' was facilitated by the increased mobility afforded by motor vehicles and government pensions.<sup>68</sup> This allowed people living on the fringes of the Western Desert to interact over a wider area leading to enhanced ritual life with Ernabella and Amata being two of the important centres. As discussed in Chapter Six such mobility had also facilitated the establishment of homelands and played a vital role in the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Council and the Land Rights campaign. The consequent enhancement of physical connection to country and a resurgence of ritual activity through the Western Desert were however not without changes. As Diana Young has argued, people were travelling more on roads rather than along the Ancestral tracks resulting in the neglect of some sites and changes to former rituals.

---

<sup>65</sup> Bos, R., 'The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land', 1988, p. 433.

<sup>66</sup> Sutton, P., 'The Trouble with Culture', in *The Politics of Suffering*, MUP, Carlton, Vic., 2009, pp. 63-86 ; this is not peculiar to Ernabella people and has been noted amongst other groups and to cite another example, Ian McIntosh was told by a Yolngu lay preacher that Christianity had freed Yolngu from a 'dark and brutal past'. See McIntosh, I., 'Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal belief in the Christian God', *Oceania*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 1997, p. 273.

<sup>67</sup> Nielsen, J., 4 January 1971, PCA ML MLK 02775, Add-on 1616, Folder AE/8.

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report 1966, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

While Wallace found changes to ceremonial activity between 1966 and 1973, he detected no decrease in the importance attached to rituals for Anangu. He noted an enhancement in the 'area of cultural exchange', particularly for 'man-making rituals'. In regards to the important travelling Red Ochre cycles which could take two or three decades to complete, Wallace argued that even though they were still regarded as highly significant the ritual area had shrunk and the ritual itself had become more localised to individual communities. He believed that the demands of living in a cash economy and compulsory schooling had resulted in a deterioration of the 'quality of ritual and degree of personal involvement' and did not believe that the resurgence would continue past the current generation of elders.<sup>69</sup> Increase in ritual activity has been found in other areas throughout Australia. Kim Akerman noted an increase in initiation ceremonies across the Kimberley area during the 1970s which he argued was facilitated by the 'spiritual revitalization of people living in the Northern Territory and Central Australia' on homelands.<sup>70</sup> Akerman regarded this renaissance as a 'dynamic process which emphasizes both the strength and the adaptability of traditionally-based Aboriginal religion' and unlike Wallace, believed that it is one which would likely continue.<sup>71</sup>

Despite Wallace's prediction that the resurgence in ritual activity would not be sustained, three decades later Edwards pointed out that '[traditional] ceremonies are still a central part of Pitjantjatjara life and all members of the society are expected to

---

<sup>69</sup> Wallace, N., 'Change in Spiritual and Ritual Life in Pitjantjatjara (Bidjandjadjara) Society, 1966-1973', 1977, p. 85. Noel Wallace and his wife, Phyl, first went to Ernabella in 1966 from their interest in the children's art at the mission. They then returned annually for the next twelve years and Phyl taught in the Ernabella School for three months at a time of teacher shortage. They received grants from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) between 1966 and 1973 to research Pitjantjatjara spiritual life. Their book *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977, advocates for the maintenance of traditional spiritual life and laments the loss of sacred sites.

<sup>70</sup> Akerman, K., 'The Renaissance of Aboriginal Law in the Kimberleys' in R. M. & C. H. Berndt (eds.), *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Present*, UWA Press, Nedlands, WA., 1979, p. 237.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 241.

participate in them'.<sup>72</sup> Peterson has found that during the 1990s, across the Western Desert there has been a 'growth of the initiation journey' both in the areas travelled and in the number of participants.<sup>73</sup> He argues that initiation ceremonies have replaced other ritual activities such as increase ceremonies<sup>74</sup> due to changing relationships with sites and the reduced availability of specialised knowledge held by senior men. Enmeshment in the broader economy and the availability of store purchased foodstuffs, has also impacted on ritual life, with practices waxing and waning according to perceived need. These initiation ceremonies have now become the focus of ritual activity.<sup>75</sup> While there have been changes to ritual activity, Peterson points out that by increasing the scope of initiation ceremonies, they now provide a 'wider regional sociality' and 'relatedness' and continue to fulfil the important role of 'biological and social reproduction', as initiation ceremonies have always done in the Western Desert.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the increased interest in traditional ceremonies did not indicate that Christianity had been rejected. This has been observed elsewhere as Raymond Firth noted in relation to Tikopia society where people believed in the power of traditional spiritual entities and 'recognised the traditional gods in attenuated rites' and attended church.<sup>77</sup> At Ernabella, the senior Law men involved in this renaissance<sup>78</sup> were also leaders of the church who continued to uphold their church responsibilities. That is, they were spiritual leaders for both Christianity and traditional religion.

---

<sup>72</sup> Edwards, B., '*Tjukurpa Palya*', 2005, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> Peterson, N., 'An Expanding Domain: Mobility and the Initiation Journey', *Oceania*, Vol. 70, No. 3, March 2000, p. 205.

<sup>74</sup> Increase ceremonies are performed at specific sites to ensure the ongoing maintenance of a particular species. See Berndt, R. M. & C. H., *The World of the First Australians*, Landsdowne Press, Dee Why West, Australia, 1981, p. 270.

<sup>75</sup> Peterson, N., 'An Expanding Domain', p. 213.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p.205.

<sup>77</sup> Firth, R., 'Conversion from Paganism to Christianity', 1976, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, these include Andy Tjilari, Hector Burton, Tony Tjamiwa.

An unexpected outcome of conversion has been outlined by Mendoza with regards to a hunter-gatherer people, the Western Toba from Argentina in South America. A mission was established in the area in 1930 by the South American Missionary Society. Western Toba Christians interviewed in the 1990s believed in the existence of a Christian God 'because the shamans have confirmed and validated' the presence by discovering a 'House of God' which only converted Christians can enter in the afterlife.<sup>79</sup> Some parallels can be drawn with Ernabella and other missions in Australia in the ways in which traditional religion has been validated through Christianity. Alberto Furlan has pointed out that Aboriginal people assert that they were 'Christians before the Christians came'. That is, Christianity was 'not simply imposed by the settlers' but was 'also generated from within the Indigenous cosmology'<sup>80</sup> and is regarded as 'a revelation of what has always been'.<sup>81</sup> As a Yolngu Christian Minister stated, '[b]efore the white man came, God revealed Himself, to show that He is God'.<sup>82</sup> Jesus' footprint, *imparja Jesuaka*, visible as a mark on the bed of the Finke River near Ntaria (Hermannsburg Mission) is regarded by Arrernte people as a sign that Jesus passed through the area long before the Lutheran missionaries established the mission.<sup>83</sup> This is similarly expressed by Ernabella resident Alec Minutjukur who with his family spent his childhood living a hunter-gatherer life on his traditional lands. He claims that 'God was looking after us

---

<sup>79</sup> Mendoza, M., 'Converted Christians, Shamans, and the House of God: The Reasons for Conversion Given by the Western Toba of the Argentine Chaco' in A. Buckser & S. D. Gazier (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, p. 203.

<sup>80</sup> Furlan, A., 'Indigenous Songs as "Operational Structures of Transactional Life": A Study of Indigenous Song Genres at Wadeye', in M. Hinkson & J. Beckett (eds.), *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2008, p. 155.

<sup>81</sup> Bos, R., 'The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land', 1988, p. 435.

<sup>82</sup> McIntosh, I., 'Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal Belief in the Christian God', 1997, p. 278.

<sup>83</sup> Austin-Broos, D., 'Narratives of the Encounter at Ntaria', *Oceania*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 1994, p. 142. See thesis Chapter Two.

when we were living in the bush' before the missionaries came.<sup>84</sup> Andy Tjilari, a senior custodian of the Law and traditional healer (*ngangkari*), was one of the first children to attend school at Ernabella. He also confirms the presence of the Christian God in his traditional country which is replete with Dreaming signs. He asserts that 'God gave us everything in the bush' and it was missionaries who made them aware of this.<sup>85</sup> In her research in the Western Desert, Young was told by Ernabella people that 'Christianity and *tjukurpa* [Dreaming] are "same thing" '. She argues that Christianity has been merged with the Dreaming and is situated in country through 'Christian Dreaming sites'.<sup>86</sup> This relationship between country and Christianity is evident in the performance of the Ernabella Choir and will be discussed further on. It is also expressed by Tony Tjamiwa who asserts that 'God is everywhere' and describes Uluru as being 'the soul of God'.<sup>87</sup> Wallace was told that the Spirit Ancestors must have been created by God because 'He made everything'.<sup>88</sup> When Wallace asked whether Pitjantjatjara people believed what missionaries were teaching them, he was told that they regarded Christianity as 'Whitefella Dreaming' and therefore it must be true.<sup>89</sup> In a recent articulation of this belief that God predated the Christian missionaries, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress recommended to the Uniting Church's triennial assembly that the notion that Indigenous people 'have understood God for thousands of

---

<sup>84</sup> Minutjukur, A., 'Living in the Bush: Puttingka Nyinanytja', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Notes from meeting at Salisbury Aboriginal Congress Church, South Australia, 2 June 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Young, D., 'Water as Country on the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands South Australia' *Worldviews*, Vol. 10, No.2, 2006, p. 256.

<sup>87</sup> Hill, B., *The Rock: Travelling to Uluru*, 1994, p. 258.

<sup>88</sup> Wallace, N., 'The Religion of the Aborigines of the Western Desert', in M. Charlesworth, D. Kimber & N. Wallace (eds.), *Ancestor Spirits: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Life and Spirituality*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, Victoria, 1990, p. 81.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76-7. Wallace argues that Pitjantjatjara have a fundamentalist view of religion stemming from the understanding that the Dreaming is regarded as literally true.

years' should be enshrined in the Preamble to its Constitution.<sup>90</sup> This demonstrates that traditional belief systems are sufficiently dynamic to incorporate new phenomena. In some ways traditional belief systems can actually facilitate change by providing logical explanations for new situations within traditional frameworks.

Peter Willis has pointed out that Aboriginal religions have the capacity to exchange and accommodate 'additional ceremonial sets' as part of the process of forming new alliances. Aboriginal societies which have converted to Christianity and retained traditional beliefs have done so by '*adding to*, rather than replacing, traditional religious practices'.<sup>91</sup> This point is made by Bos in regards to the Christian movement at Galiwin'ku where he argues that Christianity is a 'fulfilment, rather than a replacement, of traditional religion'. That is, new elements such as Christianity have been 'assigned to the Dreaming' so expanding the authority of the Dreaming.<sup>92</sup>

Wallace argues that this is how Pitjantjatjara people have been able to adjust to religious change without experiencing considerable upheaval. He argues that there was no syncretism between Christianity and Pitjantjatjara belief systems as in other parts of Australia, but rather Christian beliefs were considered to be additional to existing beliefs.<sup>93</sup> Wallace explains that Pitjantjatjara society had always had the capacity to take on other beliefs alongside their own. On occasions when groups met to hold ceremonies, people were exposed to the beliefs of different groups and so acquire 'that spirituality as

---

<sup>90</sup> This was subsequently adopted but not without dissent from some members. Christopher Pearson argued that the recognition that Indigenous people had a relationship with the Christian God prior to missionising was 'to water down the deposit of faith; a straying after "strange gods"'. Pearson, C., 'Questions Over God's Place in the Dreaming', *The Weekend Australian*, 25-26 July 2009, p. 26.

<sup>91</sup> Willis, P., 'Riders in the Chariot: Aboriginal Conversion to Christianity at Kununurra', in T. Swain and D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions at SACAE, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp.317-19.

<sup>92</sup> Bos, R., 'The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land', 1988, pp. 430-35.

<sup>93</sup> This differs from Young's assessment which proposes a 'confluence of meanings' and the inclusion of Christianity into the Dreaming. Young, D., 'Water as Country on the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands South Australia', 2006, p. 256.

part of their own', thus their 'life spirit (*kurunpa*) expands throughout their life' in order to accommodate new elements. In this way Wallace believes that Christianity became part of an expanded spirituality.<sup>94</sup> That Christianity added to the beliefs of Western Desert people rather than replacing them is also proposed by Dick Kimber who has long worked with Aboriginal people in central Australia.<sup>95</sup>

Coleman's concept of 'continuous conversion' is useful to our understanding of the process which occurred at Ernabella as it does not propose a complete turning away from one belief system to another. Coleman locates conversion within the broader social context where it comprises an 'ongoing process' with a 'blurring of the boundaries of identity between religious affiliations'.<sup>96</sup> In Aboriginal Australia conversion was perhaps not as obvious in instances as elsewhere, but it does not imply, as Yengoyan has argued that it did not occur. As Schwartz and Dussart argue, the whole subject of conversion requires rethinking.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps it makes more sense to describe the process in some instances as an imbrication and in others, a melding of faiths.

For many Aboriginal people across the country, belief in Christianity is an important part of their identity as indigenous people. As McIntosh found, for Yolngu at Elcho Island God is attributed with always being there and instructing people in 'how to make a Law'. Identity is 'framed in part in terms of belief in the Christian God'.<sup>98</sup> This articulation of identity at Galiwin'ku was also noted by Bos, who points out that the aim

---

<sup>94</sup> Wallace, N., 'The Religion of the Aborigines of the Western Desert' 1990, p. 57.

<sup>95</sup> Kimber, D., 'Aspects of Warlpiri and Pintupi Life' in M. Charlesworth, D. Kimber & N. Wallace (eds.), *Ancestor Spirits: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Life and Spirituality*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, Victoria, 1990, p. 30.

<sup>96</sup> Coleman, S., 'Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant Conversion', in A. Buckser & S. D. Galzer (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> Schwartz, C. & Dussart, F., 'Christianity in Aboriginal Australia Revisited', in C. Schwartz & F. Dussart (eds.), *Engaging Christianity in Aboriginal Australia*, The Australian Journal of Anthropology, vol. 21, issue 1, April 2010, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> McIntosh, I., 'Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal Belief in the Christian God', 1997, p. 279.



of the Christian movement which began in 1979 was to ‘affirm traditional culture’.<sup>99</sup>

According to Young this is so for Ernabella people where ‘their fluid constructions of identity’ have allowed aspects of Christianity to be incorporated.<sup>100</sup>

While Lynne Hume has argued that the ‘central importance of “place” and land to Aboriginal spirituality is just not present in Christianity’ and that Christianity is a ‘non-land-based belief’,<sup>101</sup> as discussed above there is evidence of a relationship between country and Christianity for Western Desert people where connection to place is a feature of both traditional religious beliefs *and* Christianity. As in the instance of Jesus’ footprint as a visible mark on the bed of the Finke River near Ntaria<sup>102</sup>, mentioned in Chapter Two, the connection is often explicit. David Trigger and Wendy Asche have found that for various Aboriginal groups in remote parts of Australia, ‘country’ is central to indigenous identity, and is imbued with ‘Christian spiritual significance’ as well as traditional significance. Traditional owners giving evidence in land claims talk ‘of the easy fit between spiritual beliefs about country and key elements of Christianity’.<sup>103</sup> Even though Yengoyan discounts that Christianity forms part of Pitjantjatjara identity today he does argue that Ernabella mission succeeded, albeit unintentionally, in ‘allowing the Pitjantjatjara sense of identity to flourish’.<sup>104</sup> As Wally Dunn from Ernabella notes above, Christianity is an integral element of his identity as a Pitjantjatjara man and Christianity is very much located in country.<sup>105</sup> Relationship to

---

<sup>99</sup> Bos, R. ‘The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land’, 1988, p. 433.

<sup>100</sup> Young, D., ‘Water as Country on the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands South Australia’, 2006, p. 256.

<sup>101</sup> Hume, L., ‘The Dreaming in Contemporary Aboriginal Australia’, in G. Harvey (ed.), *Indigenous Religions: A Comparison*, Cassell, London, 2000, pp. 135-37.

<sup>102</sup> Austin-Broos, D., ‘Narratives of the Encounter at Ntaria’, *Oceania*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 1994, p. 142.

<sup>103</sup> Trigger, D. & Asche, W., ‘Christianity, Cultural Change and the Negotiation of Rights in Land and Sea’, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010, p. 103.

<sup>104</sup> Yengoyan, A., ‘Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions’, 1993, p. 254.

<sup>105</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories*, 1999, p. 30.

country as central to Pitjantjatjara identity is expressed in complex ways both through traditional beliefs *and* through Christianity.

**Role of Anangu evangelists—Tony Tjamiwa, Nganyintja and Charlie Ilyatjari**

The role played by indigenous evangelists since the earliest mission times complicates the notion that once indigenous people convert to Christianity they are no longer traditional. Just as the identifiers doggers and Aborigines overlap rather than exist as discrete entities as discussed in Chapter Three so too the categories evangelists and Aborigines merge. According to Peggy Brock, ‘indigenous preachers’ were vital as cultural brokers who were able to communicate the ‘word’ through local cultural frameworks. However, Brock argues that Aboriginal evangelists occupied a rather uneasy position in their communities, being regarded at the same time ‘both as insiders and outsiders’. She points out that while they were able to acquire status in a material sense within mission society, their work often marginalised their social status within their own society.<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, without indigenous evangelists, not only in Australia but throughout the world, Christian missionaries would not have achieved anywhere near the level of influence in their undertakings. Yet according to Peggy Brock, missionaries in their reports mostly tended to ‘patronize’ the indigenous evangelists and their role was downplayed, particularly in Australia. Where the work of indigenous evangelists was acknowledged such as in the Pacific, it was with reservations about its efficacy. It was generally assumed that they only had a limited and partial understanding of Christianity and at the same time had “lost” their own culture.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Brock, P., ‘New Christians as Evangelists’ in N. Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 132-34.

<sup>107</sup> Brock, P., ‘Setting the Record Straight: New Christians and Mission Christianity’ in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p. 107.

Nathanael Pepper, a Wotjobaluk man from north-eastern Victoria was profoundly influenced by Moravian missionaries at Ebenezer in the mid-nineteenth century. By this time Aboriginal people in the area had experienced significant disruptions to their society through the loss of traditional land to settlers and severe population decline. The baptism of Pepper, regarded as the first mission convert to Christianity, was hailed as a ‘turning point’ in the Christianisation of Aboriginal people in Victoria. Kenny writes that after his baptism in 1860 he ‘became an evangelist immediately’ seeing Christianity as a way of making sense of the impact of colonisation on his people.<sup>108</sup>

One of the better known evangelists was Moses Tjalkabota of Hermannsburg Mission in central Australia who spent his adult life as an ‘itinerant evangelist’. Tjalkabota, a western Arrernte man was born in the late nineteenth century and spent his early years in his traditional country with his family as well as spending some time at Hermannsburg Mission where he was introduced to Christianity. Eventually he decided to remain at the mission permanently and was baptised. He rejected Arrernte religion, which still governed peoples’ lives across the area, believing that traditional beliefs had to be replaced with Christian beliefs, thus challenging the ‘religious authority’ of senior Law men. According to Brock, even though he rejected Arrernte religion, he still used Arrernte forms of communication in the account of his life’s work by grounding his narrative in place rather than in the conventional western notion of a chronological record. The places he travelled and camped form the framework for his narrative.<sup>109</sup>

David Unaipon was a contemporary of Moses Tjalkabota. He was born at Point McLeay Mission south of Adelaide in 1872 and attended the mission school. His father,

---

<sup>108</sup> Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming*, 2007, pp. 4, 225.

<sup>109</sup> Brock, P., ‘Setting the Record Straight: New Christians and Mission Christianity’, 2005, p. 118.

a Ngarrindjeri man, was the first indigenous evangelist to operate from Point McLeay and he travelled extensively throughout South Australia. Unaipon, who became famous for his many talents, was a committed Christian and like his father preached in ‘the forceful Bible-based style of the missionary evangelists who had influenced him’. Even though he supported the assimilation of Aboriginal people he valued traditional Aboriginality and published traditional stories.<sup>110</sup> The environment in which he grew up differed from that of Tjalkabota’s where traditional practices were still part of everyday life and perhaps this partly explains the different valuing of traditional culture by the two men. Unaipon’s belief in the importance of recording traditional practices could have been driven by his sense of their imminent demise in southern Australia.

Ian Duckham found that the several missions established in the mid-twentieth century in the Western Desert across the West Australian border, produced a number of local evangelists who played a significant role in the establishment of Christianity throughout the region by taking Christianity beyond the missions to desert people living away from the missions. During the 1950s at Cosmo Newbury Mission local people were actively engaged in evangelising the young children and the people living in the camp. At Warburton Ranges Mission Christian meetings were organised by local people. According to Duckham by the 1970s Aboriginal churches were functioning successfully at both places and by the 1980s Warburton Ranges provided the base for Aboriginal evangelists to move into other desert communities in Western Australia.<sup>111</sup> Friedrich Albrecht who became Superintendent of Hermannsburg Mission in 1926 after

---

<sup>110</sup> Unaipon was an inventor, scholar, researcher, political activist, and writer. In recognition of his life’s work, the University of South Australia has the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research and his image appears on the \$50 note. See Harris, J., ‘Unaipon, David (1872-1967)’, *Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, 2004, <<http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/adeb/u/unaipon-david-1872-1967/>>, accessed 6 January 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Duckham, I., ‘“At times they appear dense, unresponsive, even hostile”: Evangelising Nomads In Western Australia’s Western Desert’, *Limina*, Vol. 12, 2006, pp. 13-6.

Strehlow's death, shared Strehlow's belief that local evangelists were integral to the future of Christianity throughout the desert areas. While he personally ministered to cattle stations during the 1950s he felt that 'the real centre of cattle-station work was the Aboriginal evangelist'.<sup>112</sup> As Duckham argues Aboriginal Christians were actively engaged in determining their own futures.<sup>113</sup>

At Ernabella Mission and throughout the Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia, by 1953 Pitjantjatjara men were participating in church services and by 1974 Pitjantjatjara church Elders were 'exercising effective ministries in all of the communities'.<sup>114</sup> Neither did there appear to be any doubt by the Presbyterian Church about the crucial role local evangelists played in the early days of Ernabella. In the November 1943 edition of *The Presbyterian Banner*, it was noted that 'a Church that does not propagate itself dies'.<sup>115</sup> In 1958 after an inspection of Ernabella Mission, the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions (APBM) reported that they had discussed with staff 'the challenge for evangelists to go out – first as workmen on stations or elsewhere and there do the work of an evangelist' as it was important that the young Christians put the Gospel into practice by 'preaching the word' and 'bringing to others that which has enriched themselves'. It was also noted that one of the young men 'preached the sermon' on Sundays.<sup>116</sup> Edwards attributed the development of the church throughout Pitjantjatjara country in the 1960s and 1970s to the 'witness and teaching of Elders and others who having trained at Ernabella' and who were part of the outstation

---

<sup>112</sup> Henson, B., *A Straight-Out Man*, Melbourne University Press, North Melbourne, 1992, p. 14.

<sup>113</sup> Duckham, I., '“At times they appear dense, unresponsive, even hostile”, 2006, pp. 13-6.

<sup>114</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, March 1953, September 1953; Edwards, B., 'Missiology and Australian Aboriginal Missions: A Personal Journey', Australian Association for Mission Studies Conference, Canberra, 2-5 October 2008, p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> *The Presbyterian Banner*, Vol. XLVI, No. 11, 13.

<sup>116</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, (APBM) *Report of Inspection of Ernabella* by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, pp. 5-11, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504.

movement across the region.<sup>117</sup> He found that ‘Pitjantjatjara preachers were able to take these suggested ideas to a far greater deeper level than [he] imagined’ and were able to find relevance and cultural parallels in the Bible with traditional beliefs.<sup>118</sup>

According to Hilliard, ‘the actual responsibility of the teaching was mainly theirs’ with ‘original converts ... taking upon themselves the task of bringing about the interest and conversion of their relatives’.<sup>119</sup> While away from the mission ‘on walkabout’ and at sheep camps services were conducted on Sundays. ‘Prayer meetings were held weekly in the camp’ at Ernabella without the involvement or often even the knowledge of mission staff.<sup>120</sup> In the 1962 annual report to the Aborigines Department from the mission it was noted that at Easter 1961 four men had been elected by the Ernabella Christian population as church leaders and that these four men were now conducting services at Ernabella and Fregon and at stockcamps in the area. Mission staff saw the ‘increasing ministry by the native Christians’ as encouraging. It was also noted that this necessitated more Pitjantjatjara scripture materials.<sup>121</sup> In 1964 it was reported that the local Christian leadership had a stabilising effect with a reduction in conflict at Ernabella.<sup>122</sup> During 1967 seven men were ordained as Elders of the church.<sup>123</sup>

The notion raised above by Brock that indigenous church leaders held ambiguous and often marginal positions in their society does not appear to be the case for

---

<sup>117</sup> Edwards, B., ‘An Epic of the Ordinary: The Uniting Church in Australia and Aboriginal Missions’, Uniting Church in Australia National Conference, Sydney, 20-24 August 2008, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> Edwards, B., *Missiology and Australian Aboriginal Missions*, 2008, p. 10.

<sup>119</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 188.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>121</sup> Edwards, W. Annual Report for Aborigines Department, 9 July 1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>122</sup> Edwards, W. Annual Report for Aborigines Department 1964, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards, W. Annual Report for Aborigines Department 1967, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506. Bill Edwards has pointed out that the delay in acknowledging the elected church leaders as Elders was due to the mission being under the APBM rather than a Presbytery. Pers. Comm., 31 January, 2012.

Pitjantjatjara Christians. Two of these, Tony Tjamiwa and Nganyintja Ilyatjari attended school at Ernabella and were among the first group of people to be baptised at Ernabella in the 1950s.<sup>124</sup> Tjamiwa was born in the late 1920s in his traditional country and died in 2001. He worked at the mission, was a choir member and lay preacher and in 1966 became an Elder of the Church. He was also a senior custodian of the *mala* Dreaming and was involved in the negotiations that led to the eventual hand over of Uluru in 1985 at which he is portrayed performing a traditional dance.<sup>125</sup> At the invitation of the custodians of Uluru, Tjamiwa moved from Ernabella to the community at Mutitjulu to provide leadership for the community. He was involved in the management and interpretation of the Uluru National Park. The information authored by Tjamiwa on panels at the Cultural Centre informs visitors that the Park is being protected under Aboriginal Law, and that it is a place of ‘powerful Aboriginal law’ which demonstrates that ‘Aboriginal culture is strong and really important’.<sup>126</sup> There is no sense here that Tjamiwa’s traditional beliefs had been diminished by his conversion to Christianity. At the same time as fulfilling his role as a custodian for the site he was engaged in Christian evangelical work at Mutitjulu which he regarded as very important. Author Barry Hill attended the opening of the newly built church at which Tjamiwa delivered the sermon as he had done for the last few years, describing him as a ‘resonant preacher’.<sup>127</sup>

On his death, out of respect for his traditional status, the Uluru climb was closed to tourists for the period of mourning.<sup>128</sup> The multiple aspects to Tjamiwa’s identity were summarised by Edwards who participated in his funeral as ‘a man who knew his

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952.

<sup>125</sup> National Library of Australia, <[http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an\\_24341414](http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an_24341414)>, accessed 2 November 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Director of National Parks, *Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park: Knowledge Handbook*, 2010, <<http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/tourism/uluru/downloads/Culture%20Centre%20texts%20-%20Tjukurpa%20Piti.pdf>>,\_accessed 16 November 2010.

<sup>127</sup> Hill, B., *The Rock*, 1994, p. 257.

<sup>128</sup> Toohey, P., ‘Uluru Mourns the Loss of Visionary Elder’, *The Australian*, 14 May 2001, p. 2.

language, his land, his relationships and his obligations. He used this knowledge to maintain his culture, to illumine understanding of his Christian faith, to care for his land and his people and to share with others who visited Uluru'.<sup>129</sup>

Nganyintja Ilyatjari was described by Edwards in his obituary to her in the *Adelaide Advertiser* on 19 May 2007 as 'the outstanding Pitjantjatjara person of the 20th century contact period'. Like Tjamiwa she was born in the late 1920s in her traditional country and moved with her family to Ernabella Mission where her parents worked as shepherds. She achieved many firsts throughout her extraordinary life. She was one of the first children to become literate in Pitjantjatjara,<sup>130</sup> the first teacher-aide at the school, the first to have her baby with the assistance of the mission Sister despite opposition from the older women, and one of the first female Elders of the Pitjantjatjara Church. She became a strong leader and advocate for her people through periods of immense social change and in 1993 this was recognised with an Order of Australia award.<sup>131</sup> Nganyintja and her husband Charlie, who she herself had chosen as a partner rather than marrying the older man who had been chosen for her in accord with 'tribal custom',<sup>132</sup> worked as shepherds. While living at sheep camps she prepared Charlie for baptism, using notes sent weekly by the Superintendent of Ernabella.<sup>133</sup> In 1961 Nganyintja and her family moved to the newly established settlement at Amata where as Hilliard pointed out 'most of the spiritual work' was carried out by 'native leaders'.<sup>134</sup> At Amata, Nganyintja and Charlie provided spiritual leadership for the community,

---

<sup>129</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality', July 2001, p. 27.

<sup>130</sup> This stood her in good stead in 1943 when she was taken to Coober Pedy by her 'tribal' sister and not returned. She was able to write to Trudinger who was in Adelaide at the time about her situation. Trudinger came to her rescue and took her to stay with the Duguids in Adelaide before her return to her family at Ernabella. See Duguid, C., *Ernabella Newsletter*, 1943.

<sup>131</sup> Edwards, B., 'Aboriginal Leader Plays Pivotal Role', *The Advertiser*, 19 May 2007, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> Duguid, C., *Ernabella Newsletter*, 1943.

<sup>133</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, p. 190.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, p. 190.



preparing candidates for baptism and conducting church services. As well as providing Christian leadership Nganyintja and Charlie, concerned about social problems such as substance abuse in the larger Pitjantjatjara communities, established a homeland centre in Nganyintja's traditional country at Angatja in the late 1970s. Here they set up a rehabilitation programme for young substance abusers where they could learn cultural traditions and develop skills for work in the pastoral industry.

For Pitjantjatjara evangelists traditional culture was very important. Unlike Tjalkabota, they did not feel that being Christian meant that they had to reject traditional practices. On the contrary as mentioned earlier, the people who became elders of the church at Ernabella during the mission times were also senior Law people. It is evident that Nganyintja and Tjamiwa were integral members of their communities throughout their long lives. In addition to evangelising they provided leadership in traditional life and took responsibility for the social well being of their communities. They were highly respected people who remained grounded in traditional beliefs at the same time as providing Christian leadership. There is no sense that they were marginalised from their society as Brock noted was the case for other evangelists. On the contrary they were authority figures for both the *tjukurpa* (the Law/Dreaming) and Christianity.

### **Evolution of Pitjantjatjara Church**

Edwards notes that during the 1960s there was a steady growth in the churches at Ernabella, Amata and Fregon with services increasingly being conducted by Aboriginal people. In 1963 it was reported that there was a growing interest in understanding the Gospel throughout the area. Two men who accompanied patients travelling to Alice Springs for medical treatment were teaching people in the town as people wanted to hear

‘the Gospel in their own language’. Other Christians from Ernabella were going to other centres. Andy Tjilari went to Fregon ‘for a teaching mission’.<sup>135</sup> At Amata people were keen to build a new church<sup>136</sup> and at Indulkana<sup>137</sup> twenty three people underwent baptism in 1971. Because people in the region did not have the levels of education to undergo formal theological training, a six week course was provided for church Elders in Aurukun during 1974 which was attended by Andy Tjilari and Peter Nyangu. While the Elders had been ministering in their local communities, this training prepared them to for the authority to administer sacraments.<sup>138</sup> With the church transferring control to community councils in 1974, ‘the responsibility for oversight of church life in the area was left in the hands of the Church Elders’.<sup>139</sup> Edwards attributes their ability to undertake this responsibility to ‘Ernabella’s vernacular language policy and the Bible translation work’ during the mission era.<sup>140</sup>

In 1977 the Ernabella Church became part of the Uniting Church of Australia. At this time the Treasurer of the APBM argued that the ‘Uniting Church organisational structure’ should not be imposed as it was ‘undesirable to over-structure the Pitjantjatjara Church with Uniting Church Presbyteries and Synod meetings’. At the same time Ernabella Church elder Peter Nyangu advised the Treasurer of the Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations (BOEMAR) on his visit to the area in 1977 that they wanted to maintain a close relationship with the Board.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Edwards, W., ‘Report on Evangelism and Church Life at Ernabella, July-December 1963’, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 91 (132).

<sup>136</sup> ‘Treasurer’s Visit to Ernabella Area, 18-28 April 1977’, p. 7, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 67.

<sup>137</sup> Indulkana was established in 1968

<sup>138</sup> Edwards, W., ‘The Pitjantjatjara Church’, March 1979, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 67; Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 31 January, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Edwards, B., ‘*Tjukurpa Palya*’, 2005, pp. 137-38.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>141</sup> ‘Treasurer’s visit to Ernabella Area, 18-28 April 1977’, p. 7, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 67.

In 1978 three Elders who had been conducting services were ordained at Indulkana and Mimili. Edwards, now based at Amata, continued to train and support Elders across the 600 kilometer area until 1980.<sup>142</sup> By then Church populations had grown to 500 with thirty men and women ordained as Elders of the Church.<sup>143</sup> From the 1970s Anangu Christians formed connections with Aboriginal Christians from further afield, such as Western Australia and Arnhem Land and approximately 1000 Anangu attended Easter conventions held in cooperation with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship.<sup>144</sup> This demonstrates a continuation of the changing and evolving expression of Christianity and as Edwards has pointed out it also demonstrates 'that it was possible to be at the same time a Christian and an Aboriginal man or woman in the traditional sense'.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, as Edwards notes, Ernabella church leaders were also the 'upholders of the traditional ceremonies'.<sup>146</sup> Ernabella man Hector Burton exemplifies this as a choir member who sang at the 2004 Adelaide Festival of the Arts and an Elder of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress at Amata. He is also a respected artist whose work was included in the *Tjukurpa Pulkatjara* (Power of the Law) exhibition from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in Adelaide in 2010 and is described in the catalogue as a 'senior man of high degree'. The artists are said to 'represent the cultural foundations of Anangu and Yanangu society' who have

---

<sup>142</sup> Correspondence from J. Mein, Chartered Accountant to the Commission for World Mission in 1980 noted that Ernabella people were expressing concern about Edwards' departure and that the 'loss will be considerable' and it could cause 'a possible vacuum'. J. Mein to General Secretary, Commission for World Mission, 29 April 1980, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 68 (132).

<sup>143</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 139; Edwards, W. H & Clarke, B. A., 'From Missions to Aboriginal Churches: The Uniting Church in Australia and Aboriginal Missions', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA., 1988, p. 195.

<sup>144</sup> Edwards, W.H. & Clarke, B. A., 'From Missions to Aboriginal Churches', 1988, p. 195.

<sup>145</sup> Edwards, W., 'The Pitjantjatjara Church' March 1979, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 67.

<sup>146</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Australian Aborigines and the Gospel', *St Mark's Review*, No. 68, May 1972, Canberra, p. 8.

‘learned the orthodox, pre-contact Law, understand the world and the meaning of life in a truly traditional framework.’<sup>147</sup>

Ernabella resident Peter Nyangu was ordained Minister of the Pitjantjatjara Parish in 1983 after training at Nungalinga College in Darwin. From the mid 1980s Aboriginal Uniting Church ministries around the country joined the newly convened Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress which today oversees the ministry throughout the Pitjantjatjara lands. The National Administrator of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress, the Reverend Shayne Blackman, called the Ernabella Church ‘a beacon for hope across the region’. He attended the Ananguku Area Ministry Council meeting in June 2010 at Fregon and encouraged people to ‘tap into their spirituality and the traditional roots that sustained and gave Indigenous people the laws and skills for life’.<sup>148</sup> Ranger’s point that ‘Aboriginal Christians’ should be regarded as ‘critical culture brokers in a process of dynamic and creative imagining’<sup>149</sup> is supported by the role played by Anangu evangelists and the evolution of the Pitjantjatjara Church.

### **Mission choirs**

Even though the mission era ended over thirty five years ago its influence remains in contemporary life at Ernabella. A clear example can be seen in the Ernabella (now Pitjantjatjara) Choir which had its beginnings in the 1940s when the importance of singing for Pitjantjatjara people was recognised by the missionaries at Ernabella. The integral aspect of song for Pitjantjatjara people has been effectively captured by Edwards through his adaptation of Descartes famous adage to read ‘*canto ergo sum*, “I

---

<sup>147</sup> Tregenza, E., *Tjukurpa Pulkatjara: The Power of the Law*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, SA, 2010, pp. 62, 13.

<sup>148</sup> Blackman, S., *Message Stick*, The Magazine of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, Summer 2010, pp. 2, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Ranger, T., ‘Christianity and the First Peoples’, 2005, p. 21

sing therefore I am”<sup>150</sup> The continuing enjoyment and importance of choral singing is evident for Ernabella people today who either live in or are visiting Adelaide and who meet weekly at the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress Church in the northern suburb of Salisbury. At the meeting I attended on 2 June 2010 were several people who had been longstanding members of the choir. Together with Bill Edwards who had been their choirmaster at the mission from 1958 and who has continued his involvement since, they sang a number of hymns in Pitjantjatjara.

The centrality of music and singing to Aboriginal cultures throughout Australia has been well documented. In Ted Strehlow’s classic study of central Australian songs, he notes that there were songs for every eventuality, including injury, sickness health, songs as love charms and magic spells, for ancestors and for people who had died through violence, for increase ceremonies and weather control, as well as songs for warriors, mourning, initiation and to celebrate and invoke the power of ancestral beings.<sup>151</sup> As ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis argues, song forms the ‘main intellectual medium through which Aboriginal people conceptualize their world’.<sup>152</sup> For Yolngu people in the north of Australia, Keen found that ‘songs were words that the ancestors sang’ and were accorded the highest status.<sup>153</sup> Songs were used to transmit both secular and sacred knowledge, some only performed in closed ceremonies while others were performed openly. Strehlow has pointed out that songs were not ‘merely “literary” poems or “religious” texts’, but the ‘greatest treasure that they possessed’, the

---

<sup>150</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 150.

<sup>151</sup> Strehlow, T.G.H., *Songs of Central Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1971. See also Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *The World of the First Australians*, Lansdowne Press, Dee Why, NSW, 1981, pp. 369, 444.

<sup>152</sup> Ellis, C., *Aboriginal Music, Education for Living: Cross-cultural Experiences from South Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985, pp. 83-4. Ellis co-founded the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) at Adelaide University.

<sup>153</sup> Keen, I., *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion: Yolngu of North-East Arnhem Land*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 252.

learning of which was ‘the highest goal in life’, particularly for young men.<sup>154</sup> Thus the demonstration of musical ability is fundamental to the acquisition of power and status throughout a person’s life. There were songs for all of life’s ‘great occasions’ and thus songs formed an integral part of everyday as well as secular life.

Ellis found that music is central to a Pitjantjatjara world view and noted that for traditional communities ‘song is one of the most important vehicles of communication’ and thus ‘plays a significant role in the social behaviour of members’.<sup>155</sup> As Jill Stubington has noted, ‘Music does not simply reflect social organisation; it defines social organisation’.<sup>156</sup> Helen Payne’s study of the ways in which sites are claimed by Ernabella women demonstrates this socio-political aspect to musical performance. She argues that claims can be established to sites through musical performance even though the performer may not have any inherited rights to the site through the usual channels.<sup>157</sup>

For Christian missionaries in the twentieth century, song was regarded as ‘a universal necessity in worship’<sup>158</sup> and Western hymnody was introduced widely by missionaries throughout the whole mission era. Christian church music being central to their own lives, missionaries certainly encouraged the singing of hymns on missions. Music has been central to the spread of Christianity throughout the world and missionaries perceived hymns as a means through which theological ideas could be imparted. Music then was an integral element of daily life on missions for both missionaries and Aboriginal people. Fred Myers has noted recently that for Pintupi

---

<sup>154</sup> Strehlow, T.G.H., *Songs of Central Australia*, 1971, pp. 246, 243, 244.

<sup>155</sup> Ellis, C., *Aboriginal Music, Education for Living*, pp. 17, 5.

<sup>156</sup> Stubington, J., *Singing the Land: The Power of Performance in Aboriginal Life*, Currency House Inc., Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2007, p. 111.

<sup>157</sup> Payne, H., ‘Residency and Ritual Rights’, in J. C. Kassler & J. Stubington (eds.), *Problems and Solutions: Occasional Essays in Musicology Presented to Alice M. Moyle*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1984, pp. 264-78.

<sup>158</sup> Dickinson, E., *Music in the History of the Western Church*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1902, p. vii.

people in the Western Desert, hymn singing has formed the basis of 'Christian participation ... enjoyed even by those who did not formally become Christians,<sup>159</sup> indicating that Christian worship is not the only reason for the singing of hymns.

There is a long and widespread tradition of music making on Aboriginal missions and settlements across Australia throughout the whole mission era. These took eclectic forms and included choirs, brass bands and string orchestras. By the end of the 1800s many missions had brass bands such as Yarrabah and Palm Island in north Queensland and New Norcia in Western Australia which at one time also had a twenty piece string orchestra.<sup>160</sup> There was a tradition of bands touring and performing beyond the missions. During the 1940s and 1950s the Mt. Margaret Minstrel Band performed in the southern capital cities<sup>161</sup> and the north Queensland Monamona Mission's twenty piece brass band and choir took part in an Anzac Day parade in 1950.<sup>162</sup> Where mission budgets did not run to the purchase of instruments, gumleaf bands featured. Gumleaf 'practitioners' performed European hymns and spirituals at church services, as well as secular music.<sup>163</sup> It was reported that gumleaf playing occurred 'spontaneously' in churches in Adelaide, with Pastor Doug Nicholls and Yami Lester among the

---

<sup>159</sup> Myers, F., 'All Around Australia and Overseas: Christianity and Indigenous Identities in Central Australia 1988', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010, pp. 119, 115.

<sup>160</sup> Dunbar-Hall, P. & Gibson, C., *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places: Contemporary Aboriginal Music in Australia*, UNSW Press Ltd., Sydney, 2004, p. 42; Rose, J., 'Listening to History: Some Proposals for Reclaiming the Practice of Live Music', *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 18, 2008, p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> Ryan, R., 'And We Marched to the Tune of the Gumleaf Band ... But to Whose Tune Did We March?', in D. Crowdy (ed.), *Proceedings of the 2004 AISPM-ANZ Conference*, Melbourne 2004, Association for the Study of Popular Music, Australia New Zealand Branch, 2005, p. 25.

<sup>162</sup> Stubington, J., *Singing the Land*, 2007, p. 124.

<sup>163</sup> These were widespread at missions and settlements particularly along the south east coast of Australia. Ryan, R., 'And We Marched to the Tune of the Gumleaf Band', 2005, pp. 23-4.

performers.<sup>164</sup> The main repertoire of these choirs and bands consisted of hymns and spiritual songs.<sup>165</sup>

Choirs were established early in the life of missions. At Lake Condah<sup>166</sup> it was noted that in the early 1880s the choir went on a 'tour of the district' and raised £450 for the proposed church at the mission. Observers noted that they 'gained a reputation for their excellent singing' and that the 'singing was something to listen to'.<sup>167</sup> So too the choir at Point McLeay mission south of Adelaide was renowned for its singing in the late nineteenth century.<sup>168</sup>

Choirs which originally formed on missions throughout central Australia have continued to feature in the life of communities since the mission era ended in the 1970s. For some choir members choral singing has been an intergenerational activity. Gwen Inkamala's<sup>169</sup> grandparents sang in the choir at Hermannsburg mission. The ninety-member Ernabella Children's Choir was established in 2006 by the school principal after the school children were inspired by long standing choir member Gordon Ingkatji. With the involvement of former choir members the Children's Choir continues the tradition of choral singing which began at Ernabella mission in the 1940s.<sup>170</sup> The choir made the journey to Adelaide in September 2007 for the Primary Schools' Festival and they also performed at the Church of the Trinity Uniting Church in Clarence Park, joined by

<sup>164</sup> Schultz, C. cited in M. Breen (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music: Aboriginal Music*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989, p. 22.

<sup>165</sup> Ryan, R., 'And We Marched to the Tune of the Gumleaf Band', 2005, p. 36, 22. In the mid 1800s Lutherans at Hahndorf in South Australia had incorporated gum leaf playing into the 'sacred musical tradition'.

<sup>166</sup> Established as a mission in 1875 in south west Victoria.

<sup>167</sup> McVicker, O., Fenton, C. & Pizzey, S., 'A Church that Became a Site of Resistance and a Symbol of Hope', *Local-Global: Studies in Community Sustainability*, RMIT University, Melbourne, 2007, pp. 42-3.

<sup>168</sup> Breen, M. (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music: Aboriginal Music*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989, p. 31.

<sup>169</sup> Gwen Inkamala is a member of the choir in Hermannsburg which is now called the Ntaria Ladies Choir. Westwood, M., 'Religious Choirs a Constant across the Desert Generations', *The Australian*, 14 September 2007, <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/>>, accessed 4 May 2010.

<sup>170</sup> 'Ernabella Children's Choir', Lee, N., radio programme, ABC Radio, Alice Springs, 3 December 2008, <<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/12/03/2436979.htm/>>, accessed 26 March 2010.



members of the Ernabella Choir.<sup>171</sup> In December 2011 the Ernabella Children's Choir again journeyed to Adelaide participating in the Christmas celebrations in the city by performing Christmas Carols in Pitjantjatjara.<sup>172</sup> Choirs perform in their local communities, at local festivals and undertake tours to southern centres performing at some of the country's most prestigious venues such as the Sydney Opera House<sup>173</sup> and at festivals, such as the Adelaide Arts festival and the Melbourne Festival. In 2007 a number of central Australian choirs including the Ntaria Ladies Choir, the Ernabella Choir, the Mimili Gospel Singers and the Areyonga Choir performed at Desert Song during the Alice Springs Festival.<sup>174</sup> Choirs now produce recordings of their music which can be purchased over the internet. Throughout Australia it is evident that as well as singing being integral to traditional life for Aboriginal societies, it also became central to life on the missions, albeit with the addition of new styles, and has continued as an important feature of contemporary communities.

### **Ernabella Choir**

Hymn singing in the local language was first introduced at Ernabella mission to the children in the school by Ron Trudinger, the teacher who translated 'thirty to forty hymns in Pitjantjatjara'. He recognised that 'his cultural expression, - is provided for the native in the nightly "inma" or corroboree of song'. It is 'not just a pastime [as] it is for most Europeans' but a 'profound' element of their cultural life.<sup>175</sup> Such recognition at a

---

<sup>171</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 9 December 2007.

<sup>172</sup> ABC TV News, 18 December 2011.

<sup>173</sup> The Ntaria Ladies Choir performed the cantata 'Journey to Horseshoe Bend' in 2003. *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* written by T.G. H. Strehlow in 1969 (Angus & Robertson, Sydney) tells the story of his father's (Carl Strehlow, Superintendent of Hermannsburg Mission) death and demonstrates the strong Christian beliefs held by the Arrernte at Hermannsburg and their distress at the loss of Strehlow who they called *ingkata* (leader and teacher).

<sup>174</sup> Westwood, M., 'Religious Choirs a Constant across the Desert Generations', 2007.

<sup>175</sup> Trudinger, R. M., School Report, June 1945, p. 2-3, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2502.

time when the broader understanding of Aboriginal cultural expression was limited reflects Duguid's original vision for Ernabella that at this mission Aboriginal culture would be respected. Because the introduction of a hymn singing repertoire was underpinned by respect and appreciation for traditional musical forms and language it indicates that the intent was not to replace one musical form with another.

During the 1940s the singing of the school children was regularly praised by visitors.<sup>176</sup> As early as 1941, school teacher Ron Trudinger reported that students were singing hymns in Pitjantjatjara and proudly noted that the 'quality [of the singing] exceeds that of white children'.<sup>177</sup> In the 1945 school report, Trudinger wrote that two hours per week were dedicated to music, reading, written English and 'number processes', compared to one hour per week each for writing and spelling, composition, drawing, and oral English. The only subject given more time than music was the two and a half hours per week allocated for scripture. It was pointed out that music was 'the happiest and most delightful of all subjects' and the children continued to show great 'enthusiasm for singing'. Trudinger, in accord with sound teaching practice used their love of music 'to the utmost in the highest interests'.<sup>178</sup> While hymn singing was prominent in the lives of the school children with each day beginning with hymn singing, Hilliard noted that at the same time their 'own songs have continued to be encouraged and the children will sing either, with equal gusto'.<sup>179</sup> During her year nursing at the mission in 1949, Dawkins described the nightly camp fire 'sing songs' which she was regularly invited to attend.<sup>180</sup> Visitors to the mission regularly

---

<sup>176</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1949.

<sup>177</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, November 1941, p. 6. The school opened in 1939.

<sup>178</sup> Trudinger, R. M., School Report, June 1945, p. 3.

<sup>179</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between*, 1976, pp. 120, 159.

<sup>180</sup> Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters: Extracts of Letters Written from "Ernabella" in the Musgrave Ranges, South Australia 1949-1950*, Uniting Church of Australia, 1994.

commented on the singing of hymns. In 1944 it was noted that the children displayed ‘a natural aptitude’<sup>181</sup> and in 1949, the Rev. G. Werner, an anthropologist from Sydney University assessed the church choir as being ‘superior to other church choirs’.<sup>182</sup>

As with the scriptures, hymns were translated into the vernacular and by 1947 the translation work at the mission had produced the ‘first Pitjantjatjara Hymnal of some fifty hymns’. The most popular with the children and which they ‘delighted in singing ... in parts’, were Christmas Carols, ‘the First Nowell (sic)’ being a special favourite.<sup>183</sup> There was even experimentation with singing hymns in Aranda (sic) and one in English.<sup>184</sup> While Trudinger acknowledged the sheer enjoyment and enthusiasm for singing by Ernabella people, he made abundantly clear that his main purpose of introducing hymn singing was ‘chiefly as vehicles for the imparting of spiritual truths by the constant, congenial repetition involved’. He expressed the hope that hymns would ultimately become ‘expressions of inward conviction, and joy and worship’.<sup>185</sup>

In 1954 Superintendent Trudinger took the Ernabella Choir to Adelaide on its first tour during the visit of Queen Elizabeth. Young has noted that the choir members sold dingo scalps to raise the money for the trip.<sup>186</sup> Mayawara Minutjukur recalled the long journey on the back of the mission truck. The choir performed at various venues in Adelaide, including churches and the Adelaide Teachers’ College. Andy Tjilari, who was among the group who sang at the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress Church

---

<sup>181</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, August 1944, p. 4.

<sup>182</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, June 1949, p. 2.

<sup>183</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, April 1947, p. 3. Protestant churches everywhere had a musical tradition of replacing Latin with the vernacular as a more effective means of conveying Christianity to “ordinary” people. See Dickinson, E., *Music in the History of the Western Church*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1902, p. 225.

<sup>184</sup> Trudinger, R. M., School Report, June 1945 p. 3.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Young, D., ‘Dingo Scalping and the Frontier Economy in the North-west of South Australia’, in I. Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, 2010, p. 101, <[http://epress.anu.edu.au/indig\\_participation/pdf/whole.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/indig_participation/pdf/whole.pdf)>, accessed 9 June 2011.

meeting in Salisbury on 2 June 2010 remembered meeting the Queen during that tour.<sup>187</sup>

The choir has performed locally at Christmas and Easter pageants,<sup>188</sup> at events such as the opening of the John Flynn Church in Alice Springs in 1956 attended by the Duke of Edinburgh, and continues to participate in choir festivals in central Australia.

In 1958 Edwards took over the role of choirmaster. In March 1966, Edwards and twenty four members of the choir embarked on a tour of southern cities, including Adelaide, Melbourne and regional centres in Victoria and South Australia. It was highly successful with concerts booked out everywhere and reaching an overall audience of 10000 people.<sup>189</sup> Reports in the *Adelaide Advertiser* described how people were turned away.<sup>190</sup> The programme brochure billed the tour as a *Singing Walkabout*, thus tapping into traditional travels through country for the performance of song cycles associated with totemic ceremonies. As Edwards wrote in his reflection of the tour for *Walkabout Magazine*, the introduction of choral singing at the mission had added to the Pitjantjatjara ‘tradition of song’ and it was ‘[t]his talent [which] led to their “singing walkabout” ’.<sup>191</sup> They performed an eclectic repertoire, which clearly demonstrated this talent across an array of song styles ranging from a ‘Bach chorale, a Cornish carol, a Negro spiritual, and a Maori song. All except the last were sung in Pitjantjatjara’.<sup>192</sup> In the souvenir brochure, the music of the Ernabella Choir was described as ‘deeply felt singing of Christian music ... [with] rhythms effortlessly adopted by a people ... you

<sup>187</sup> Andy Tjilari, Pers. Comm., Adelaide, 2 June 2010.

<sup>188</sup> Outdoor performances were not without incident as Edwards wryly observed in a letter to his parents. One open air pageant was interrupted momentarily when ‘a small snake entered the ranks of the sopranos and the basses had to come to their aid and kill it’. Edwards, B., *Notes on the history of the Ernabella Choir made by Bill Edwards at the request of Gordon Ingkatji*, 2007.

<sup>189</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Singing Walkabout’, *Walkabout: Australia’s Way of Life Magazine*, Vol. 33, No. 6, June 1967, p. 19.

<sup>190</sup> *The Advertiser*, 18 March 1966. In this report it was considered newsworthy that the choir were ‘all full-blood’. This could be read as an example of the perception that ‘traditional’ people performing non-traditional music was incongruous.

<sup>191</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Singing Walkabout’, 1967, p. 17.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

will also hear age-old songs with unfamiliar rhythms of the Stone Age'. The songs were listed in the programme first in Pitjantjatjara, followed by their English translation. The programme was divided into two parts each featuring a distinct musical genre. In the first part a range of hymns were performed and the second part was billed as 'Corroboree Songs and Dances'. This included performances from the Honey Ant and Banded Ant-Eater Song Cycles, from the Seven Sisters Dreaming and a *pulapa*, (public ceremony) recently introduced to Ernabella from the north.<sup>193</sup> The performance ended with the hymn *Walkunila Pitaltji Pulka* (Hail Gladdening Light) and the then national anthem God Save the Queen.<sup>194</sup> The clear separation of musical forms indicates that there was little syncretism between the two. However, that the two forms were incorporated alongside each other and generally continue to be demonstrates that both genres are regarded as expressions of Ernabella identity.

Between 1969 and 1974 there was correspondence between BOEMAR and the mission requesting the production of new recordings of the choir as the original tapes were no longer available. It was agreed that a new recording 'would sell well' as there was interest by tourists for music with a 'Centralian flavour'. It was suggested that the new recording include 'corroboree or tribal music' with hymns in both English and Pitjantjatjara to give it a 'wider appeal'. It was also noted that the 'standard of singing would need to be improved' which is contrary to other perceptions about the high musical ability of the Ernabella Choir.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> This demonstrates that new songs and dances were added to the repertoire in innovative ways. See Wild, S.A., 'Recreating the *Jukurrpa*: Adaptation and Innovation of Songs and Ceremonies in Warlpiri Society', in M. Clunies Ross, T. Donaldson & S. A. Wild (eds.), *Songs of Aboriginal Australia*, Oceania Monograph, University of Sydney, 1987, pp. 109-13, for a discussion of the spread of the 'Jesus Purlapa' which forged links between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians.

<sup>194</sup> 'Singing Walkabout by Aboriginal Choir from Ernabella Mission, Souvenir Programme', Presbyterian Church of Australia, March 1966, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, AE/7, MLK 2774, Box 2507.

<sup>195</sup> Correspondence between Bill Edwards, BOEMAR, APBM, Aboriginal and Overseas Missions 1969-1974, PCA ML MSS MLK 02775, Add-On 1616 Folder AE/73. The hymn programme (12 hymns in

The continuation of the choir throughout the mission era was largely dependent on the musical interest and ability of the choirmasters, Trudinger and Edwards. The choir continued performing over the next decades and in 1979 toured Fiji singing in public places, churches and schools. Edwards noted that the cross-cultural exchange which occurred was a valuable experience for Ernabella people.<sup>196</sup> Radio and television programmes and recordings have been made of the choir and after Edwards left Ernabella at the end of the mission era the choir continued under the guidance of two local men, Gordon Inkatji and Brian Tjangala.<sup>197</sup>

In 2004 the choir was invited to perform a programme of hymns at the premiere of Peter Sculthorpe's *Requiem* at the Adelaide Town Hall during the Adelaide Festival of Arts where they were billed as a 'national living treasure'. The choir was conducted by Edwards who had been their choirmaster from 1958 until the end of the mission era. In 1966 Edwards had tried in vain to secure a place for the choir in the Festival programme during their '*Singing Walkabout*' tour. Instead they had performed in Adelaide independently. While the reason for their rejection in 1966 and acceptance in 2004 is not explicitly stated it would suggest a shift in the valuing of indigenous choirs from being regarded as mission influenced and therefore of compromised authenticity to the recognition of an art form which expressed both traditional and Christian influences. The 2004 performance of the choir was described by Sculthorpe as 'reconciliation in the concert hall'. The choir included two members who had performed in Adelaide during the Queens's visit in 1954 as well as several daughters of members of the original choir. For two generations of choir members, Mayawara Minutjukur and her daughter Makinti,

---

Pitjantjatjara) of the 1966 *Singing Walkabout* program was remastered in 2004 with all proceeds going to the choir. The 2004 CD has no 'corroboree' music.

<sup>196</sup> Edwards, W.H., 'Ankula Watjarira', *Message Stick*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 10 September 2004.

<sup>197</sup> Edwards, B., *Notes on the history of the Ernabella Choir*, 2007.

they were very proud to be performing at this event. Makinti said that singing in the choir ‘felt good because I learnt hymns in my own language. It still makes me proud. It’s our language. It all comes from Anangu hearts and voices’.<sup>198</sup> On this occasion the men wore red head bands to signify their status as senior custodians and Law men. A member of the original choir interviewed prior to the performances in Adelaide said that this was an emotional experience for choir members who were ‘really happy’ to be able to sing’.<sup>199</sup> One of the choir’s most recent public performances was at an important community event, the reopening of the restored and renovated Ernabella Church in March 2010 where they performed together with the Ernabella Children’s Choir.<sup>200</sup> Graham Kulyuru, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Community Minister at Ernabella (Pukatja) regarded the re-opening of the church as central for community cohesion and commented that the Pukatja community would be ‘reunited through the restoration’.<sup>201</sup>

### **Authenticity in musical expression**

As with other cultural practices an artificial boundary has been set up between musical forms deemed to be traditional and authentically indigenous, and those which have been influenced by introduced genres. Margaret Kartomi has noted that ‘musics of mixed Western and non-Western descent’ have been considered as ‘unworthy of attention’ by ethnomusicologists.<sup>202</sup> Parallels can be drawn between the manner in which choral hymn

---

<sup>198</sup> ‘A Photo Journal of the Pitjantjatjara Choir’s Historic Performance at the 2004 Adelaide Festival’, DeLys, S., *Message Stick*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 21 May 2004.

<sup>199</sup> ABC Radio National, 29 February 2004.

<sup>200</sup> Edwards, B., *Celebrating the History of Ernabella Mission and the Restoration and Re-opening of the Ernabella Uniting Church Building, Pukatja Community, South Australia*, 2010.

<sup>201</sup> ‘Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission’, *Compass*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 22 April 2011.

<sup>202</sup> Kartomi, M.J., ‘The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact: A Discussion of Terminology and Concepts’, *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, May 1981, p. 227.

singing has been regarded and the debate<sup>203</sup> about the authenticity of the *walka* design featured in Ernabella art. Similarly, the watercolour landscape paintings of country around Hermannsburg mission painted by Albert Namatjira in the 1930s to the 1950s were regarded as not authentically Aboriginal due to what was perceived as western influences. It was not until the 1980s that paintings produced in the Hermannsburg style came to be regarded as expressions of Aboriginality and relationship to country. As Hermannsburg painter, Jillian Namatjira explained, their landscape paintings depict significant country and are as culturally important as the ‘dot’ paintings—‘these hills have meaning and we have stories too, the landscape artists.’<sup>204</sup>

At the start of the 1987 Oceania Monograph *Songs of Aboriginal Australia*, which presents recent research into traditional music, it is acknowledged that there are musical genres other than traditional Aboriginal songs which ‘Aboriginal people have made their own since colonization’. However, it is also noted that the monograph does not include ‘those kinds of songs’ partly because none of the research to date had been undertaken by Aboriginal people. This implies that were Aboriginal people to determine the research, these newer, non-traditional genres may well be the focus of study. Even though it may not have been the authors’ intent, it could be argued that while the researchers have found non-traditional forms inauthentic, Aboriginal people may not.<sup>205</sup> As Stubington has argued, choirs along with other contemporary musical expression ‘remain Aboriginal’ in the ‘formation of performing groups, the underlying beliefs about music, the forms which are chosen and the musical structures which are produced.’<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> See discussion in Chapter Five, p. 195-96.

<sup>204</sup> Cited in French, A., *Seeing the Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira, 1902-1959*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002, p. 34. See also Morphy, H., *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 1999, pp. 269-79.

<sup>205</sup> Clunies Ross, M., ‘Research into Aboriginal Songs: The State of the Art’, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>206</sup> Stubington, J., *Singing the Land*, 2007, p. 124.



For example, in central Australia Berndt & Berndt have noted that the main feature of traditional music making was group singing and performance which is a feature of desert mission choirs where on occasion men and women sang together, on other occasions groups of men and women sang separately.<sup>207</sup> A feature of the Ernabella Choir's performance is the distinctive and local adaptation of hymn singing evident in 'the sharp high nasal tones of Pitjantjatjara tribal music'.<sup>208</sup> Similarly it was noted of another desert choir the Ntaria Ladies Choir (previously the Hermannsburg Choir which had its origins in mission church singing) that the introduced hymn repertoire was performed with 'the Aboriginal sound (based on the Arrernte language) ... at the core of this music'.<sup>209</sup>

There is a mix of traditional and introduced forms of performance with in some instances an overlapping of forms, indicating that the boundaries between them are not so clear cut. Fiona Magowan has pointed out the connection between traditional singing and hymn singing for Yolngu associated with Methodist missions in Arnhem Land. She argues that because traditionally 'singing was the medium for transmitting knowledge about ancestral law, so hymns were seen as part of the foundational expression of God's law'. Magowan concludes that for Yolngu, hymns enjoyed the potency and status usually ascribed to traditional song.<sup>210</sup> This was noted by Myers with reference to Pintupi people where hymns had been written by younger men in the hope that this would give them the senior power and status only accorded to older men.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Berndt, R.M. & C.H., *The World of the First Australians*, 1981, p. 369.

<sup>208</sup> Schultz, C. cited in M. Breen (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music*, 1989, p. 16.

<sup>209</sup> Ntaria Ladies Choir, *Inkat'irbirberintjaka*, <<http://www.abc.net.au/arts/adlib/stories/s904138.htm>>, accessed 30 July 2010.

<sup>210</sup> Magowan, F., 'Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity: Translocal Sentiments in Australian Aboriginal Christian Songs', *Identities*, Vol.14, No. 4, 2007, p. 469.

<sup>211</sup> Myers, F., 'All Around Australia and Overseas', 2010, p. 119.

As well as demonstrating that the boundary between traditional and introduced musical forms can be permeable, more recent studies such as these complicate the claim that '[e]verywhere in Oceania there has been a shrinking of repertoire' with the introduction of hymn singing by missionaries.<sup>212</sup> There is no doubt that hymn singing did have a significant influence on traditional music but whether this led to a diminution in traditional forms is not so clear. The evidence from Ernabella demonstrates that the performance of traditional forms continued strongly alongside the new genre, particularly during the almost four decades of the mission's operation. Gordon Inkatji, a member of the original Ernabella choir and respected traditional Pitjantjatjara man, pointed out that as well as learning hymns it was vital to keep traditional songs because 'they are like law' and there was no desire 'to put them aside'.<sup>213</sup>

It has been argued by ethnomusicologists that 'music is one of the most stable elements of culture', particularly where its authorship derives from spiritual sources as it does for Australian Aborigines through the Ancestral Beings.<sup>214</sup> But innovation can occur even in this most conservative of forms, albeit at a relatively slower pace. As Alan Merriam puts it, change is grounded in stability.<sup>215</sup> Ellis has pointed out that music 'must

---

<sup>212</sup> McLean, M., 'Towards a Typology of Musical Change: Missionaries and Adjustive Response in Oceania', *The World of Music*, No. 28, 1986, p. 33.

<sup>213</sup> Inkatji, G., 'Ankula Watjarira', 2004. Inkatji was admitted as a Fellow of the University of South Australia in 2005 for his long support of the university's indigenous education programmes. The citation noted his role as long term choir member, conductor and recently in generating a resurgence of interest in the choir. It was also pointed out that he had 'maintained his knowledge and responsibilities as a man of authority in Pitjantjatjara social and cultural life'.

See University of South Australia, *University Fellows*, 2005,

<[http://www.unisa.edu.au/unicouncil/honorary\\_awards/citations/fellows/Inkatji\\_citation.pdf](http://www.unisa.edu.au/unicouncil/honorary_awards/citations/fellows/Inkatji_citation.pdf)>, accessed 20 September 2010.

<sup>214</sup> Merriam, A. P., *The Anthropology of Music*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 1968, p. 304. See also, Knopoff, S., 'Juxtaposition of Ancestral and Contemporary Elements in the Performance of Yolngu Clan Songs', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 24, 1992, p. 138. Knopoff notes that in Australia this assumption was most firmly held to be the case for desert societies.

<sup>215</sup> Merriam, A. P., *The Anthropology of Music*, 1968, p. 303.

change to express the changing life situation of the musicians'.<sup>216</sup> For Aboriginal people the changed life circumstances on missions are reflected in the diversity of outcomes which indicate change yet at the same time continuity of traditional forms of music making.

Responses to contact in terms of musical traditions include, in respect to forms, merging, co-existence, syncretisation, accommodation, appropriation, absorption and compartmentalisation. In her study of the responses to the introduction of a Protestant hymnody by missionaries in Pacific Island societies, Amy Stillman has argued that hymnody remains a major influence on contemporary musical expression and has identified five broad responses: survival of traditional forms, coexistence of traditional and introduced, appropriation of introduced elements, new musical expressions, and absorption of traditional and introduced forms.<sup>217</sup> As Magowan has shown all of these elements can be found in Yolngu responses to the introduction of Christian music. Despite Yolngu holding traditional and Christian beliefs simultaneously and missionary's belief that hymn singing and traditional music were distinct and separate activities, Magowan argues that there is evidence of a fusion of musical expression. However, this merging has not occurred through happenstance but had been the subject of debate amongst Yolngu as to the degree of incorporation and the acceptance or rejection of elements.<sup>218</sup>

At Ernabella according to Edwards, Anangu responded to the introduction of Christianity by compartmentalising their belief systems and maintaining their separation (per. comm. June 2007). This can be seen in relation to musical expression where hymn

---

<sup>216</sup> Ellis, C., *Aboriginal Music, Education for Living*, 1985, p. 28. See also Wild, S.A., 'Recreating the *Jukurrpa*', 1987, p. 109.

<sup>217</sup> Stillman, A. K., 'Prelude to a Comparative Investigation of Protestant Hymnody in Polynesia', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 25, 1993, p. 93.

<sup>218</sup> Magowan, F., 'Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity', 2007, pp. 468-71.

singing and the traditional repertoire were presented as separate elements during the 1966 *Singing Walkabout* tour. Kartomi has described such ‘musical compartmentalisation’ as a response to learning one’s own cultural musical style at the same time as learning that of another with whom they are in contact during childhood. She draws similarities to the process of developing bilingualism where the two languages, or in this case musical styles, coexist but are kept ‘separately compartmentalized in their minds’.<sup>219</sup> That Ernabella children were learning to sing hymns in four part harmonies at school and at the same time participating ‘in the nightly “inma” or corroboree of song’ when they returned to the camp fits Kartomi’s model.<sup>220</sup>

Furthermore, Merriam has proposed that compartmentalisation may occur where the music of the groups in contact have little in common.<sup>221</sup> Where musical styles are more compatible, it is suggested that responses such as those outlined by Stillman above are more likely. Edwards has noted that ‘Aboriginal musical structures do not allow for such an easy convergence’ as the ‘form and the content’ is inextricably linked to the deeds of the Dreaming Ancestors.<sup>222</sup>

Additionally, Edwards argues that there was a tendency among Pitjantjatjara people to believe that Christian worship should follow the ways in which missionaries had practised it. This meant that innovation occurred more slowly with little melding of Christian worship and traditional ceremony.<sup>223</sup> Thus at Ernabella mission choral music

---

<sup>219</sup> Kartomi, M.J., ‘The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact, 1981, p. 237.

<sup>220</sup> Trudinger, R. M., School Report, June 1945. As discussed previously, it is evident that the school considered music an important part of the curriculum as two hours per week were allocated. Only Scripture was given more time at two and a half hours per week.

<sup>221</sup> Merriam, A. P., *The Anthropology of Music*, 1968, pp. 314-15.

<sup>222</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 146.

<sup>223</sup> Edwards, W., ‘The Pitjantjatjara Church’, March 1979, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872, Box 67.

adhered to western traditions but with the words translated into Pitjantjatjara and this form of musical expression has endured for Ernabella people.<sup>224</sup>

However, in 1971, Edwards noted the emergence of an innovation at Ernabella in which Christian Christmas stories in Pitjantjatjara were accompanied by ‘traditional’ instead of the usual Christian music. Most importantly this performance was only possible with the approval of ‘ritual leaders’.<sup>225</sup> In 1979 senior women at Mimili performed a Christian story ‘to the *maku* (witchetty grub) melody’.<sup>226</sup> This indicates experimentation with the merging and fusing of the traditional and introduced forms which had been compartmentalised in earlier times.<sup>227</sup> After four decades a Christian world view formed an integral part of Anangu culture. In relation to Merriam’s proposal above, it appears that the incorporation of two seemingly incompatible musical forms can occur as Magowan also found with Yolngu traditional styles and church music.

### **The contribution of the choir to the shaping of a mission identity**

As discussed earlier, hymn singing was regarded by missionaries as an important way of communicating the Gospel and it certainly played a significant part in the development of an Ernabella Christian identity. As Edwards has noted ‘Christian hymnody is very much part of contemporary Pitjantjatjara life’.<sup>228</sup> Leila Rankine who grew up at Point McLeay south of Adelaide, pointed out that hymn singing was ‘part of our cultural heritage’ and hymns were sung to mark important community events<sup>229</sup> just as in

---

<sup>224</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 146.

<sup>225</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>226</sup> Tunstill, G. citing Edwards, in M. Breen (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music: Aboriginal Music*, 1989, p. 19.

<sup>227</sup> This is not to say that the singing of translated hymns to western melodies ceased in favour of the new forms, rather they continue alongside other forms of musical expression.

<sup>228</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 147.

<sup>229</sup> Cited in M. Breen (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music: Aboriginal Music*, 1989, p. 17.

traditional times where there were ‘no important events in the life of the community’ which did ‘not have songs associated with them’.<sup>230</sup>

As ‘group identity was iterated’ in ceremony in traditional times<sup>231</sup> and reinforced and constructed through performance, Myers has argued that the ‘upsurge of Pintupi Christian activity’ was an expression of ‘their sense of revived identity’.<sup>232</sup> Magowan found for Yolngu people that traditional imperatives ‘persist through Christian worship styles and have influenced the composition and performance of Yolngu Christian music’.<sup>233</sup> This indicates that Christian ceremony was fulfilling a similar function to that of traditional rituals and to regard hymn singing as merely evidence of absolute conversion to Christianity and assimilation reinforces a dichotomy between Christian and Aboriginal.

The performances of the Ernabella choir can be seen as contributing to the construction of a group identity of Ernabella Christians and demonstrate that Christianity was not as alien to Aboriginality as has been assumed. The use of Pitjantjatjara language in choir performances is seen by members as an expression and demonstration to the wider community of their Aboriginality. As choir member Mayawara Minutjukur said on the occasion of their performance at the Adelaide Festival of Arts in 2004, ‘We are very proud of singing in our own language’.<sup>234</sup> Teresa Wilson, a member of the Areyonga Choir, explains how singing in the choir was an integral element of growing up at Areyonga. The choir ‘is an expression of both traditional culture and the more modern Christian influence from the missionary days in Central Australia’.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Ellis, C., *Aboriginal Music, Education for Living*, 1985, p. 137.

<sup>231</sup> Keen, I., *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion*, 1997, p. 181.

<sup>232</sup> Myers, F., ‘All Around Australia and Overseas’, 2010, p. 115.

<sup>233</sup> Magowan, F., ‘Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity’, 2007, p. 459.

<sup>234</sup> ‘A Photo Journal of the Pitjantjatjara Choir’s Historic Performance’, 21 May 2004.

<sup>235</sup> ‘Areyonga Choir’, Lee, N., radio programme, ABC Radio, Alice Springs, 17 September 2008,

At Warlungurru, a Pintupi outstation to the west of Alice Springs, Myers found in 1988 that ‘hymn singing was the primary social activity’ and was seen not only as a local expression of Christianity but also an expression of Warlungurru as a community’.<sup>236</sup> Furthermore through gospel singing, which Myers argues occupied the social space that traditional performance once had, people forged a group identity ‘as Pintupi, as residing at a place, and as part of a larger Christian world of people’.<sup>237</sup> Ernabella choir member Gordon Ingkatji refers to this wider relationship and pointed out that learning hymns enabled them to sing with other Christians.<sup>238</sup>

Marcia Langton has argued that Aboriginality is derived partly from historical circumstances<sup>239</sup> and for generations of Ernabella people the mission played a significant role in their history. As discussed above, identity for Aboriginal people is in part expressed through attachment to place and is articulated through music. Pitjantjatjara people renew their relationship to country through ‘dance and song’.<sup>240</sup> Through performance ‘places are remade and refashioned’.<sup>241</sup> It can be argued, as Myers found for Pintupi people, that this process can also occur through choral hymn singing. Furthermore, Magowan has argued, ‘the relationship of country to self and identity is central to translocal sentiments in Indigenous faith and worship’.<sup>242</sup> The translation of the hymns into Pitjantjatjara at Ernabella mission meant that hymns took on a local meaning through using the language of that place and so demonstrated a connection to

---

<<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/16/2365789.htm>>, accessed 13 August 2010.

<sup>236</sup> Myers, F., ‘All Around Australia and Overseas’, 2010, pp. 115, 117.

<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 116, 125.

<sup>238</sup> Ingkatji, G., ‘Ankula Watjarira’, 2004.

<sup>239</sup> Langton, M., ‘Well I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television ...’, Australian Film Commission, Sydney, 1993, p. 31.

<sup>240</sup> Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *Growing Up Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for Their Land*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 5-6.

<sup>241</sup> Dunbar-Hall, P. & Gibson, C., *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places*, 2004, p. 77.

<sup>242</sup> Magowan, F., ‘Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity’, 2007, p. 459.

country.<sup>243</sup> Diana James, who has worked with Pitjantjatjara people for twenty five years, evocatively describes them as ‘people who hear music when they see country’.<sup>244</sup>

This was evident in the 2004 televised story of the Ernabella Choir, *Ankula Watjarira*, which opens with scenes of the landscape surrounding Ernabella as the choir sings *Ilkaritjanyaya* (The Lord of Heaven Confess). The narrator, Gordon Ingkatji, introduces the programme by informing the viewer in Pitjantjatjara that: ‘This place is Anangu Land. This is Pitjantjatjara country in South Australia. This place has two names: the English name is Ernabella. The Pitjantjatjara name is Pukatja’.<sup>245</sup> A direct connection is made between the land and the choir. It is as if the choir is ‘singing the country’ as Pitjantjatjara people have always done. The genre is different but the purpose of singing is in some ways similar. As discussed earlier, Ernabella residents talk about God’s presence in the bush before the missionaries came. There is some association between hymn singing in praise of God and hymn singing as an expression of relationship to country. As Magowan has pointed out, ‘Indigenous Christians are not leaving their identities or their traditional expressions of emotion behind, but rather, sentiments of country are an integral part of emotion in Indigenous Christian worship across Australia’.<sup>246</sup> An Aboriginal member in the audience of the choir’s 2004 performance at the Festival of Arts in Adelaide, interviewed after the performance tells how she closed her eyes during the singing and saw the bush, the trees and the hills. For her the singing of the choir evoked country.<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> In pre-contact times languages of the Western Desert bloc were regional and related to particular places.  
<sup>244</sup> James, D., *Painting the Song: Kalitjiti artists of the Sand Dune Country*, McCulloch & McCulloch Australian Art Books, 2009, p. 11.

<sup>245</sup> Ingkatji, G., ‘Ankula Watjarira’, 2004.

<sup>246</sup> Magowan, F., ‘Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity, 2007, p. 479.

<sup>247</sup> ‘Ankula Watjarira’, 2004.



Choir singing did not necessarily have a negative impact on or result in the loss of traditional forms, rather, it added another dimension. Choral hymn singing fulfilled some of the same social, cultural and political functions as traditional performance, such as, connection to place, affirmation of spirituality and the transmission of knowledge to children. It is argued that as with other genres of contemporary Aboriginal music, 'it is geographical in many ways, both as a cultural practice linked to particular places, regions and community activities'.<sup>248</sup>

An outcome of the introduction of Christian church music by missionaries on Aboriginal music making can be seen in the mix of traditional and new forms of performance with in some instances an overlapping of forms.

### **Conclusion**

The Ernabella (now Pitjantjatjara) Choir has played a central role in the expression of Christianity for Anangu associated with the mission since the earliest days. Choir singing continues to play an important part of Aboriginal musical heritage which today has been passed down from elders just as traditional music has. While the choir was seen by the first choirmaster, Ron Trudinger, as important in evangelising, and a means to introduce the Gospel, its impact was broader than this. The story of the choir illustrates ways in which Anangu were able to practise both Christianity and traditional religious activities. One of the choir members at the Salisbury Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress meeting in June 2010, Andy Tjilari, is a church Elder, a senior traditional lawman, custodian and songman. He is also a *ngangkari*, a traditional healer, respected by both Anangu and Western medical practitioners for his healing powers. The week

---

<sup>248</sup> Dunbar-Hall, P. & Gibson, C., *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places*, 2004, p. 67.

following this meeting he was to attend an international traditional healers' conference in Canada. Another choir member present, Inawinytji Williamson, Tjilari's daughter, is a custodian of women's traditional law and renowned dancer and singer of *inma*.<sup>249</sup> In addition she is a gifted artist and has played a leading role in the Arts Centre (Kaltjiti) at Fregon. For Anangu referred to in this chapter growing up at the mission and singing in the choir has not devalued or destroyed traditional practices but instead their identity as Anangu has been strengthened.

The dichotomy between authentically Aboriginal and acculturated Christian remains a powerful orthodoxy. As Ranger has pointed out in his critique of Yengoyan's thesis, the 'changeless essentialism' on which it is based is damaging for Aboriginal people.<sup>250</sup> However, the stories of the Anangu evangelists, the evolution of the Pitjantjatjara Church and the Ernabella Choir unsettle this orthodoxy and demonstrate a more complex and less limiting articulation of identity. At Ernabella and elsewhere contemporary identities have been created through a dialogue between Christian faith and the Dreaming. Aboriginal people have embraced Christianity as a marker of Aboriginality and at the same time still hold strongly to traditional beliefs.

---

<sup>249</sup> *Inma* translates as traditional ceremony both sacred and open. Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, 1987, p. 18. Today it is also used to refer to church services.

<sup>250</sup> Ranger, T., 'Christianity and the First Peoples', 2005, p. 21.



Figure 13

Re-opening of the Ernabella Church, 6 April 2010.

Uniting Church SA, <<http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/covenanting-whats-new/864-re-opening-of-the-ernabella-church.html>>

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The impact of Christian missions on Aboriginal people and cultures has received much broad brushed criticism. The orthodox critique posits that missions and missionaries were agents of the colonising project and were complicit in the destruction of Aboriginal spirituality. Mostly ignored within this discourse are observations such as those of T. G. H. Strehlow's that 'missions were the only agency that held up the complete physical annihilation of the Aboriginal race in this country from the beginnings of white settlement till the time when more enlightened

Government policies were instituted in Australia'.<sup>1</sup> Even allowing for Strehlow's overstatement a consideration of such observations can reveal an aspect of contact history which has been largely overlooked, ignored, or downplayed. This thesis has examined the outcome of the encounter between Pitjantjatjara people and Presbyterian missionaries at Ernabella Mission through a close reading of the mission archival documents. There is no doubt that Ernabella Mission played a central role in changing the lives of Pitjantjatjara people not only in the religious sphere but in secular matters as well.

The evidence from Ernabella Mission gives rise to a number of questions which the thesis has sought to answer. Were Pitjantjatjara people forced or coerced to 'come in' to the mission as asserted by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC)? Did the move to the mission result in a complete irruption to traditional life? Did the mission, through its practices attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures, in particular their spiritual belief systems? Was there a close relationship between the colonising project and Ernabella Mission with the mission operating as an instrument of colonisation? Were people victims of domination? Was Christianity regarded by Pitjantjatjara people as a colonial imposition which was used to subjugate and undermine their traditional beliefs? What were the outcomes of the mission era for Pitjantjatjara people in terms of religious beliefs?

From the few recorded oral histories and the archival record it became evident that from the outset there was little evidence of overt coercion on Aboriginal people to move to the mission. During this time, while there was contact and some conflict with outsiders who ventured into the Central Reserve for the purposes of collecting dingo scalps or mineral exploration, for the most part the remoteness of the region and its undesirability for pastoral or other development meant that

---

<sup>1</sup> Strehlow, T. G. H., 'Assimilation Problems, the Aboriginal Viewpoint', University of Adelaide, 1961.

Aboriginal people in the area were able to continue to live in their country.

Furthermore there was little imperative for missionaries to coerce people to come into the mission compared to missions in more closely settled areas. Nevertheless, the presence of the mission with rations and a regular water supply did change daily life as the mission came to be regarded as an additional economic resource. In 1944 it was noted that people used the mission in times of drought but mostly ‘don’t stay for long’, indicating an opportunistic use of the mission.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the thesis has argued that Ernabella mission policy was respectful of Aboriginal people who associated with the mission and maintained a policy of not just non-interference in traditional culture but actively encouraged its continuation. As some Pitjantjatjara people began to work for the mission close relationships developed, but there is no suggestion that these were relationships of dependence or that people were constrained under an alien and dominant system. Traditional life continued to be central for people associated with the mission. Bill Edwards has noted that the small number of staff relative to the resident population resulted in Pitjantjatjara people taking community leadership roles and developing the necessary skills by working alongside staff.<sup>3</sup> Over time more people associated with the mission and remained for longer periods as children attended the mission school and numbers of people worked at the mission. Again there is no sense in the records that

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944.

<sup>3</sup> While as noted in Chapter Four, during the 1940s staff tended to stay on average for one or two years, after this staff generally remained at Ernabella Mission for long periods and so deep and lasting relationships of trust and respect were forged between staff and Pitjantjatjara people. Superintendent Ron Trudinger (1949-1957) had also been the school teacher at the mission since 1940 and the last Superintendent Bill Edwards (1958-1972) continued to serve as Minister for the Uniting Church Pitjantjatjara Parish for five years after that. During the mission era the number of staff relative to the residents was low. During Bill Edwards’ time at the mission there were seven staff and 400-500 Aboriginal people who associated with the mission. As noted in Chapter Four Duguid was referred to as *Tjilpi*, a respectful term for old man and at the request of Ernabella people in recognition ‘that he faithfully helped us’, was buried in the Ernabella Cemetery in 1986. Winifred Hilliard also is to be buried there on 17 March 2012 at her request to be near the people she regarded as her friends and family. The genuine warmth and closeness of the relationship was clearly evident in the *Compass* television programme, ‘Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission’, ABC Television, Sydney, 22 April 2011; Edwards, B., ‘Indigenous Australia and the Legacy of the Missions’, ABC Sunday Nights, 29 May 2011.

people were living under a repressive and authoritarian system. Neither is there evidence of resistance as there was on other missions.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this was because traditional practices and language were encouraged rather than banned.

Finally I have argued that Christianity was important to Ernabella people and with the transfer of the administration of the mission from the church to community organisations during the 1970s Aboriginal people embraced Christianity as a marker of contemporary Aboriginality. At Ernabella (now Pukatja) Christianity has continued to coexist alongside traditional Pitjantjatjara beliefs without obvious signs that people find this contradictory. That Christianity has continued to be important for Ernabella people in contemporary times contests the orthodoxy that missions were merely sites of incarceration and domination. Furthermore, it can be argued that ironically the presence of the mission at Ernabella, far from destroying traditional beliefs and practices, contributed to their enhancement.<sup>5</sup>

The outcomes at Ernabella demonstrate a complex model of culture contact where the vitality of religious life was maintained through periods of social change in the lives of Aboriginal people in Central Australia. Many standpoints which have underpinned studies of the encounter between Aborigines and missionaries are reductionist in the sense that indigenous cultures are regarded as enduring and resistant to change. One argument proposes that missionaries had a negligible impact on Aboriginal people because Aboriginal people simply had no interest in Christianity.<sup>6</sup> As Joel Robbins has argued, analyses have neglected to seriously study Christianity in 'exotic' societies because it has been regarded as marginal to

---

<sup>4</sup> Resistance to missionaries was evident at Doomadgee in north-western Queensland. See Trigger, D., *Whitefella Comin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture', *Interchange*, No. 24, 1978, pp. 200-02;

'Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission', 22 April 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788-1980*, 1982, p. 66.

indigenous world views.<sup>7</sup> That is, proselytising failed because Aboriginal people were satisfied with their own religions. Another approach argues that Aboriginal people could not convert to Christianity because Christianity has no relevance to Aboriginal religions due to their incommensurability. This argument proposes that because the very nature of the Dreaming is unchanging, it precluded any possibility of religious change.<sup>8</sup> While these discourses attempted to contest and subvert the orthodoxy about missionaries contained in earlier church histories, they have entrenched another orthodoxy. Overall, missionaries are cast as destroyers of culture and Aboriginal people are reduced to passive victims who exercised little agency or choice in converting to Christianity.

Although some scholars<sup>9</sup> over recent decades have given nuanced analyses of the impact of missionising on Aboriginal people, the orthodox discourse has persisted.<sup>10</sup> The evidence from Ernabella contests the assumptions underpinning this discourse. There was considerable opposition from missionaries to the encroachment of surveyors, miners and doggers into the Central reserve which put them at odds with the government of the time. Furthermore, the proposition that Christianity subsumed traditional beliefs fails to take into account that at Ernabella, and on many other former missions, senior traditional custodians are also elders of the church. At

---

<sup>7</sup> Robbins, J., 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time and the Anthropology of Christianity', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 48, No. 1, February 2007, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Hume, L., 'The Dreaming in Contemporary Aboriginal Australia', in G. Harvey (ed.), *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, Continuum, London, 2000, pp. 125-38. See also Yengoyan, A., 'Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia', in R. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 233-57.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Sansom, B., 'Irruptions of the Dreamings in Post-Colonial Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 72, No. 1, September 2001, pp. 1-32; Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution, USA, 1986; McIntosh, I., 'Islam and Australia's Aborigines?: A Perspective from North East Arnhem Land', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 20, No.1, June 1996, pp. 53-77; Brock, P., (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005; T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> The following are examples of such accounts, Bourke, C., *Images and Realities: Aboriginal Studies*, video recording, Open Learning, University of South Australia, 1993; de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2005; Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1998; Calma, T., Anglicare Social Justice Lecture, Hobart, 22 August 2007; Ah Kit, J. SBS News, 10 August 2007.

Ernabella people demonstrate multiple subjectivities and religious pluralism.<sup>11</sup> The argument that missionaries impeded the development of a contemporary Aboriginal identity and are responsible for the ills of contemporary Aboriginal societies is contested by the strong Anangu identity which underpinned the successful Land Rights campaign of the 1980s and which was facilitated by the presence of the Ernabella Mission. In addition there is a failure to analyse the phenomenon whereby those generations who have grown up since the missions were handed over to Aboriginal councils in the 1970s, are the ones who are often not interested in traditional ways.

During the period of the operation of Ernabella Mission there were major shifts in thinking about “race” and government policies ranged from protection through assimilation to self-determination at the end of the mission era. When Ernabella was established in 1937 government policies were moving towards assimilation. Ambivalent and contradictory thinking about Aborigines and their future was evident in public opinion, the academy, missionary narratives and government policies. The broader understanding about Aboriginal people living in remote areas continued to be consistent with social evolutionary theory which considered Aboriginal people as genetically inferior and thus on the path to extinction. Government policies for tribal people continued to be protectionist and isolationist with intervention in their lives kept to a minimum. As the Chief Protector of Aborigines in South Australia pointed out in 1936,

[i]n the north west, that is the large aboriginal reserve and the country contiguous to it, the aboriginals in South Australia are making their last stand as a body of pure-blooded individuals not yet degraded by contact with a civilization they cannot

---

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 290-93, 317-18.



assimilate, and understand, and it will be to the advantage of the aboriginal (sic) and the State to keep them as such for as long as possible.<sup>12</sup>

While government policy appeared to be shifting from a social evolutionary approach, it nonetheless entrenched the dichotomy between “traditional/tribal” and “non-traditional” by regarding each category as having different needs.

Church people generally did not subscribe to social evolutionary theory or the notion of a ‘doomed race’, rather they believed that all people were descended from a common human ancestor and unlike official policy of the time believed that Aborigines could with Christian instruction attain a civilised state. In the academy too during this period there was a shift away from thinking about Aborigines in social evolutionary terms as a “dying race”. Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University A. P. Elkin firmly believed that Aborigines could be assimilated and eventually attain citizenship which diverged from official policy of the time. Perhaps influenced by the fact that he was an ordained Anglican Minister in addition to his experience with Aborigines, he regarded missionaries as having a central role in the future of Aboriginal people. In his 1944 publication *Citizenship for the Aborigines* he argued that missionaries were crucial in preparing Aborigines for citizenship through the provision of training programmes and facilitating the space where people could make this transition at their own pace, which he added may take ‘several generations of training’.<sup>13</sup> He observed that the churches were taking a ‘new approach to missionary work’ based on the acknowledgement that Aborigines could develop socially and economically to take ‘their place without injury to themselves,

---

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, June 1936, cited in Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1963, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Elkin, A. P., *Citizenship for the Aborigines: A National Aboriginal Policy*, Australasian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1944, p. 76.

in our civilized communities'.<sup>14</sup> Yet while Elkin disagreed with the official stance that "full-bloods" could not be assimilated, he along with Charles Duguid<sup>15</sup> still believed that contact with civilisation would taint "full-blood" Aborigines.

Ernabella Mission fitted Elkin's 'new approach' to missionising in some ways but differed in others. The mission proposed as did Elkin, that successful assimilation required the maintenance rather than the abandonment of traditional cultures. The Reverend J.R.B. Love who became Superintendent of Ernabella in 1941 had seen no contradiction during his earlier time at Kunmunya Mission in the north-west of the continent in preserving tribal integrity and at the same time "uplifting" and protecting people. He adopted a similar approach at Ernabella.<sup>16</sup> Elkin saw the maintenance of traditional cultures as a means to assimilation believing that tribal people would be able to assimilate more effectively than 'detribalized "half-castes" '. This was because their traditional social structures were intact and this placed them in a better position to 'negotiate the process of "cultural blending" and social adaptation'.<sup>17</sup> Yet Elkin believed that in the long term 'the preservation of Aboriginal culture [was] impossible' and in this he diverged from the approach adopted at Ernabella.<sup>18</sup>

\* \* \* \*

From the outset Duguid envisaged that Pitjantjatjara people would be able to retain aspects of traditional culture. To this end Ernabella Mission would function as a 'buffer' zone, that is, a place of refuge where Pitjantjatjara people could adjust to the

---

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> Duguid is regarded as the founder of Ernabella and was a prominent member of the Presbyterian Church in Adelaide.

<sup>16</sup> Love, J.R.B., *The Stone-age Bushmen of Today*, Blackie & Son Ltd., London & Glasgow, 1936, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> McGregor, R., 'From Old Testament to New: A.P. Elkin on Christian Conversion and Cultural Assimilation', *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 2001, p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Elkin, A. P., *Citizenship for the Aborigines*, 1944, p. 37.

inevitable encroachment of civilisation. By the time the mission was established by the Presbyterian Church in 1937, Aboriginal people living in the surrounding areas of the Musgrave Ranges and the central desert region had experienced about seventy years or so of contact with the small, but increasing numbers of Europeans who ventured into the remote areas of the Central Reserve. However this contact had been mostly occasional rather than sustained over long periods.

It has been argued by Richard Kimber that in the last decades of the nineteenth century as many as forty percent of the population in this region died from disease and clashes with other tribes and settlers.<sup>19</sup> Winifred Hilliard also noted accounts of violent conflict over Aboriginal women between Pitjantjatjara people and “white” men passing through the reserve.<sup>20</sup> Other recollections of the now mostly old people who spent their early years living a hunter-gatherer life tell of fear, curiosity and interest in their encounters with outsiders. Peter Nyaningu, Ernabella elder and ordained Church minister, who grew up in the bush remembers when he was a young child hearing Gospel stories from the early missionaries. He said that people were interested and gathered to hear the missionaries’ stories.<sup>21</sup> Both fear and curiosity are evident in Jacky Tjupuru’s recollections of his first experience of a motor vehicle in the 1930s.<sup>22</sup> Overall in the early decades of the twentieth century people in the Musgrave Ranges had been able to continue their hunting and gathering lifestyle.

The introduction of a bounty payment on dingoes by the South Australian Government in 1912 brought men to remote areas of the Australian deserts who stayed for longer periods and returned seasonally with some, according to Kimber,

---

<sup>19</sup> Kimber, R. G., ‘Genocide or Not? The Situation in Central Australia’, *Genocide Perspectives*, No. 1, 1997, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, pp. 194-95.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission’, 22 April 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Tjupuru, J., ‘Mutuka Nyakuntja: The Seeing of a Motor Car’, translated by W. H. Edwards, University of South Australia, nd.

spending up to six months in the area.<sup>23</sup> Doggers as they were known came to rely heavily on Aboriginal people to collect dingo scalps. Trading partnerships developed and doggers often cohabited with Aboriginal women. While these relationships have generally been regarded as exploitative for Aboriginal people, and this perceived threat particularly to Aboriginal women was one of the major factors which motivated Duguid to campaign for the establishment of Ernabella Mission, such an assessment glosses over what were often complex interactions. Furthermore not all doggers were “white” men; some Aborigines worked as doggers in their own right.<sup>24</sup>

With the introduction of a scheme by the state government in 1922 to encourage pastoralism in the region leases were granted for sheep runs and interdependent relationships, which had earlier developed with the doggers, continued between Aborigines and pastoralists. By 1935 three men who collected dingo scalps had acquired pastoral leases to the south and west of the Ernabella lease.<sup>25</sup> The nomadic existence demanded by shepherding suited some Aboriginal families and in addition it allowed for a continuing association with country. These relationships, which speak of creative accommodations and adaptation to changing circumstances, contest the notion that incursions into the desert regions by pastoralists resulted only in conflict over resources.

The whole ‘coming in’ process which assumes a degree of coercion and lack of choice<sup>26</sup> is challenged by what is known of the early Ernabella years. While there were many different reasons for people making contact with the Ernabella Mission there is no sense in the missionary narrative or in the few oral recollections that

---

<sup>23</sup> Kimber, R. G., *The Man from Arltunga: Walter Smith, Australian Bushman*, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, SA, 1986, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Tommy Dodd of Pitjantjatjara, Afghan and European descent worked as a cameleer at Ernabella Mission and as a dogger. See Edwards, W. H. ‘Dodd, Tommy (1890? – 1975)’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <<http://adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140015b.htm>>, accessed 12 February 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Kerin, R., ‘Dogging for a Living: Aborigines and “Undesirables” in South Australia’, in B. Attwood & T. Griffiths (eds.), *Frontier, Race, Nation: Henry Reynolds and Australian History*, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty. Ltd., North Melbourne, 2009, p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> See Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), Vol. 1, 1.4.3, 1992.

people went to the mission other than through their own choice.<sup>27</sup> Rather, the mission was regarded as another resource, just as doggers' camps and pastoral enterprises had been earlier, and was used sporadically and opportunistically particularly in times of drought.<sup>28</sup> The perception that the move to the mission was undertaken as a last resort by a disintegrating culture with no other option, is contested by a closer reading of the mission narrative which indicates that the benefits of associating with the mission were carefully and strategically weighed up, partly driven by curiosity and interest together with the availability of resources.

The policy of Ernabella from the outset was that the peoples' way of life would not be interfered with. As Duguid argued there 'was to be no compulsion or imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom'.<sup>29</sup> A letter to the editor of *The Advertiser* from Duguid in 1940 noted that the mission was 'the true way to help the native in his own country' and has 'provided the means to attract the aborigines to their own country and to hold them'.<sup>30</sup> In the early years the presence of Ernabella Mission created changes for Pitjantjatjara people, at least for those who had direct contact with the mission, but also in some ways the mission mitigated those changes. It appears that Duguid's buffer zone vision had been partly effective in this regard and even for people associated with the mission, life still revolved around traditional social and cultural structures and practices with little contact with the world outside the deserts. Duguid also believed that the presence of the mission would stop the 'drift of myalls to the

---

<sup>27</sup> See Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, 'Traditional Aboriginal Learning: How I Learned as a Pitjantjatjara Child' in W. H. Edwards (ed.), *Traditional Aboriginal Society*, Macmillan Ed. Aus. Pty. Ltd, South Yarra, 1998, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944; See Birmingham, J., 'Resistance, Creolization or Optimal Foraging at Killalpaninna Mission, South Australia' in R. Torrence & A. Clarke (eds.), *The Archaeology of Difference*, Routledge, London & New York, 2000, p. 363. Birmingham found that resources at Killalpaninna Mission were used to extend peoples' 'foraging' range.

<sup>29</sup> Duguid, C., *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1972, p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> Duguid, C., Letter to the Editor, *The Advertiser*, 1 March 1940, p. 24. The term *myalls* was used to describe Aboriginal people who still lived a nomadic hunter-gatherer life.

white man's civilisation' and in the long term would allow Aborigines to take their 'proper place in the economic structure of the country'.<sup>31</sup> However, the creation of a buffer zone to mediate relationships between settlers and Pitjantjatjara people, also served to entrench boundaries between them. The ensuing isolation from the wider population suited the Chief Protector of South Australia's protection agenda. While Duguid did believe that Aboriginal people in this area should be protected, he diverged from government thinking in that he understood protection as a temporary measure and that ultimately tribal people would eventually have a future in the economic life of the country.

Although Duguid's vision was interpreted differently by Superintendents such as Love and Ron Trudinger, his central aim that involvement with the mission would be voluntary continued throughout the whole mission era. The approach to evangelising at Ernabella appeared to be the antithesis of what was widely regarded as crucial for successful transformation. There was no overt aim to foster a desire for Western style clothing and housing, rationing was not used to foster dependence on the mission, the local languages and traditional practices were not discouraged, children were not separated from their families and the socio-spatial setting of the mission was not designed to facilitate segregation between Aboriginal people and missionaries. On the contrary, the wearing of clothes was actively discouraged, even when people themselves wished to be clothed, they were encouraged to remain independent and maintain traditional bush skills, all of the mission staff were expected to learn Pitjantjatjara and schooling was bilingual and for the most part conducted in Pitjantjatjara.<sup>32</sup> When parents started leaving children at the mission while they travelled, this was strongly discouraged by the mission. Furthermore missionaries facilitated the continuing connection to traditional country by delivering

---

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> This long preceded the policy of bilingual/two way schooling introduced in the 1970s and 1980s.

rations to camp sites, in order that traditional lifestyles and practices could be maintained for as long as possible.

Visitors to the mission in the early years were restricted to those who could offer something tangible to its programme. This meant that anthropologists and other researchers were often excluded out of concern that the mission could become a site where 'traditional' people were put on public display. This selective policy on visitors was also in accord with the undertaking from the outset that the mission would operate as a protective barrier from the public gaze.

While it was reported regularly in the *Ernabella Newsletters* during the early years of Ernabella that there had been little success in evangelising, there was still the expectation amongst staff that this would eventuate sometime in the future. Missionaries saw their role as providing the foundation from which conversions could occur. Even though traditional life was actively encouraged, the images on the covers of the *Ernabella Newsletters* during the 1940s and early 1950s indicate that the mission believed that eventually people would choose to adopt western ways. A pivotal moment came in 1952 with the opening of the new church building and the first baptisms of the children who had attended the mission school since its earliest days.

While there are few Aboriginal accounts of this early mission period, there is a sense that Pitjantjatjara people were making their own decisions and demonstrating considerable agency<sup>33</sup> in determining the development of the Ernabella community. Perhaps the geographical location and isolation of Ernabella enabled people here to make choices other Aboriginal people were not able to make as they increasingly came under the gaze of Aboriginal Protection Boards, the Protection Acts and in the

---

<sup>33</sup> This is not to suggest that agency implies complete autonomy, rather the ability of people to make choices is ranged along a continuum. Freely exercising choice was not a characteristic of traditional desert societies which were strictly regulated by the Law.

1950s assimilatory strategies. As noted earlier by the South Australian Chief Protector in 1936, tribal people were believed to have different needs to other Aboriginal people requiring different policies. Wally Dunn has said that people went to Ernabella 'to start to grow up a community' which indicates that people were actively making decisions about their future. This future may have differed from their former life as hunters and gatherers but one where nevertheless they continued to determine its course.<sup>34</sup> According to Superintendent Trudinger by the early 1950s Ernabella was considered to be a 'tribal home'.<sup>35</sup> However, it is not clear whether people saw themselves as actually residents of the mission or rather that they were continuing to live as they had in the past albeit in the changed circumstances occasioned by the presence of the mission.

Nonetheless there is evidence that people themselves were initiating changes with the adoption of new ways of doing things and the discarding of some of the old ways. During the 1950s some women were giving birth aided by the mission nursing staff and this would have impacted on aspects of kin relationships. There is also evidence that rituals which had previously only been held in traditional country were now performed closer to Ernabella itself. This suggests a modification of some aspects of ritual life to accommodate new elements and as Sarah Holcombe found at Mount Liebig this innovation authenticated new sites.<sup>36</sup>

In 1953 missionaries expressed concern that they were not able to 'keep up with' or accommodate the changes desired by the people associating with Ernabella Mission.<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of the 1950s the APBM and Ernabella missionaries acknowledged the inevitability of change and that the mission could not remain a

---

<sup>34</sup> Dunn, W., cited in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1952, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Holcombe, S., 'The Sentimental Community: A Site of Belonging. A Case Study from Central Australia', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No.2, 2004, pp. 172-78.

<sup>37</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 1.



separate and protected environment where change was minimised for much longer.<sup>38</sup> This was not without some concern for the future of Pitjantjatjara people where for example, Duguid believed that increasing contact with outsiders would endanger tribal life.<sup>39</sup> The mission continued to act as a buffer zone and there was acknowledgment that the choice for engagement with the wider society was to be made by the people themselves.<sup>40</sup> While the founding goal of non-interference in traditional life continued to influence mission policy, in practice it was not without some direction. Religious instruction, the translation of the Scriptures and the acquisition of literacy in the vernacular were regarded by the mission as central programmes in preparing people for the changes they would inevitably face.

The consolidation of a distinct community identity based around the mission itself continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s and by the early 1960s the population associated with the mission was around 400 people. People were still arriving for the first time from remote areas, some people were living independently in the camp, others such as pensioners, school children and workers received rations. Another group had become permanent employees whose work was essential for the operation of the mission. It can be argued that in some ways the mission with its church and school provided the means for a wider and more integrated community than was possible under the earlier hunter-gatherer system.

Pitjantjatjara men ran the sheep enterprise at Ernabella Mission throughout the mission years and it was regarded as central to the mission economy. As cattle stations were established on the fringes of the deserts some men worked seasonally on the stations. In 1943 Superintendent Love noted the nexus between shepherding

---

<sup>38</sup> Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Report of Inspection of Ernabella by Rev. G. Anderson & Rev. H. M. Bell, September 1958, p. 7, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2504.

<sup>39</sup> Duguid, C., *The Central Aborigines Reserve*, Presidential Address, Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia, Incorporated, 21 October 1957, pp. 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1963, p. 186. This element of choice was also expressed by the Aboriginal Protection Board in its Annual Report to 30th June 1957, p. 2, AIATSIS.

and Christianity, writing that ‘to those shepherds will come readily an understanding of the great messages of Bible truth in Psalm 23 and John 10’.<sup>41</sup> Ten years later Superintendent Trudinger expressed a similar understanding of the integral connection between work and ‘worship’.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he argued that the success of any industry for Aboriginal people depended on its cultural familiarity and shepherding flocks of sheep was regarded as an activity which reflected a traditional nomadic lifestyle. The image printed on baptism certificates shows the Ernabella church with a flock of sheep in the foreground and in the distance the traditional country of the Musgrave Ranges, thereby alluding to a connection between work, worship and traditional life. The lack of employment for women led to the establishment in 1948 of what was to become the successful art and craft industry still operating today as Ernabella Arts. Women today speak of the development of this industry as being determined by them, particularly in relation to the type of crafts and the distinctive design for which Ernabella became well known. The craft industry was central to the development and expression of an Ernabella identity. That most workers at Ernabella worked under little supervision, particularly in the sheep industry and that they were actively engaged in determining the direction of, for example the craft room, indicates that the mission policy of non-interference after initial training was maintained throughout.

The missionary work during the 1950s and 1960s was noted in the missionary narrative as a ‘community experiment’ with assimilation *and* the continuation of traditional life the end goals.<sup>43</sup> Cultural maintenance continued to be a focus of mission policy and was not regarded as incompatible with or an impediment to assimilation. Yet there was some ambiguity in the mission understanding of

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, May 1943, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, September 1953, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 6.

assimilation, as there was in the wider community.<sup>44</sup> Even though Ernabella Mission had not subscribed to the view that Aborigines were on the path to biological extinction and that biological absorption was inevitable, distinctions were still drawn on the basis of genetic makeup. Duguid believed that genetic background determined the path to assimilation with “full-bloods” and “part-Aborigines” having different requirements.<sup>45</sup> When assimilation in cultural terms gained prominence over biological absorption in the 1950s the mission regarded cultural assimilation as ‘oversimplified and unrealistic’.<sup>46</sup>

Mission practices at Ernabella fostered the maintenance of tribal life in a number of ways. School was held only in the mornings ostensibly to enable children to join their families and learn bush skills. Not only did the mission encourage people to visit their country at least annually but it facilitated these visits through the delivery of supplies to camps.<sup>47</sup> For the first time in the early 1960s there was discussion about the provision of permanent housing at Ernabella in mission correspondence. Elsewhere housing people in permanent dwellings had been regarded as a crucial strategy to initially civilise and evangelise in the early years and then later as a means of training for assimilation.<sup>48</sup> Housing at Ernabella was discussed more as an equity issue and one to be decided by the people rather than as a means of progressing the government’s assimilatory agenda. To date there had been little interest expressed in permanent housing indicating that Ernabella people had been making their own decisions in this regard and that these decisions had been

---

<sup>44</sup> See McGregor, R., ‘From Old Testament to New’, 2001, pp. 39-67.

<sup>45</sup> Duguid, C., *No Dying Race*, 1963, p. 180.

<sup>46</sup> *Ernabella Newsletter*, January 1957, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia’ in *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 30, No. 1, December 1992, pp. 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> This was clearly evident at Yuendumu. See Keys, C., ‘The House and the *Yupukarra*, Yuendumu, 1946-1996’, in P. Read (ed.), *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, p.120.

respected by the mission. By 1967 only six houses were occupied but not on a permanent basis and even into the early 1970s people still preferred to camp.

The last decades of the Ernabella Mission were lived out within the wider context of growing Aboriginal activism for self-determination which focused on both citizenship rights and cultural maintenance and renewal. By 1962 the South Australian government had moved to recognise these demands. Discriminatory elements of its Aboriginal policy were removed, an Aboriginal Affairs Department was created and a Minister of Aboriginal Affairs was appointed, foreshadowing federal moves a decade later. Furthermore, the South Australian government stated that all Aboriginal people in the state would be able to exercise choice in how they wished to live and in 1966 the Aboriginal Lands Trust was established to facilitate the transfer of land to Aboriginal ownership.

During this time there was a shift to a cash economy on missions and settlements throughout Australia. Ernabella people now received payment for work in wages rather than a combination of wages and goods such as food and clothing and Commonwealth benefits were paid directly to parents rather than to the mission. It was reported that initially Aboriginal people at Ernabella objected to government payments going directly to families and wanted the mission to manage this money as they had in the past because it was feared that the money would not be used as intended. Mission staff were able to provide assistance to overcome the perceived difficulties indicating that a relationship of trust had developed between mission staff and Ernabella people. It is interesting to note that forty years later similar concerns are being expressed by people in remote communities in relation to welfare money. Generally there were widespread difficulties accompanying the introduction of a cash economy, and it can be argued that its legacy is evident in remote communities today.

Alongside the changing economy there were other major changes which impacted on the lives of Ernabella people. The establishment of the settlements of Fregon and Amata in 1961 marked the start of a more dispersed population after being concentrated at Ernabella for two decades or so, notwithstanding the substantial mobility people had continued to enjoy. During the early 1970s local councils were established in the four main settlements—Ernabella, Fregon, Indulkana and Amata—with the church transferring administrative responsibility to them. Following this the population became even more decentralised and mobile with further moves to smaller outstations made possible by government funds and the increasing availability of bore water and motor vehicles. These family-based outstations were not only established on peoples' traditional lands but at sites which had become significant to them such as old sheep camps where additional relationships to country had evolved through a shared history of association with Ernabella Mission.

With people now embedded in a cash economy land was regarded as an economic as well as a spiritual resource.<sup>49</sup> The Pitjantjatjara land rights campaign in the late 1970s saw the incorporation of most dispersed groups throughout the Western Desert (who now saw themselves as one group in relation to ownership of land but with localized interests as noted earlier) into the Pitjantjatjara Council. The campaign was supported by Ernabella Mission who at the peoples' request acted as advocates, and which culminated in the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act*, 1981. Younger mission staff who had been politicised through the 'student activism of the 60s-70s' played a significant role.<sup>50</sup> In addition, a Land rights Support Group had been established in Adelaide, churches of other denominations publicly stated their

---

<sup>49</sup> This is not to suggest that land was not regarded as an economic resource in pre-mission times, but that land was taking on a different economic value now that Aboriginal people were increasingly engaging with the cash economy.

<sup>50</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 30 January, 2012.

commitment to Land Rights and widespread support came from people of diverse backgrounds and political persuasion.<sup>51</sup> Overall the campaign's success was largely due to the initiatives of the people themselves and contests the notion that Pitjantjatjara people were victims whose culture had been destroyed by the missionaries.

The policy of Ernabella Mission which from the outset had encouraged and facilitated the ongoing relationship of Pitjantjatjara people with their traditional country stood people in good stead during this campaign. It can be argued that had the mission not been established, given the pattern of migration which people from the western Musgraves were following during the early decades of the twentieth century, there is the likelihood that people would not have been allowed or not able to stay in their traditional lands for the following four or five decades. Pursuing claims for land which demanded evidence of continuing connection with country would have been more difficult if people had left the Ernabella area. Furthermore, the presence of Ernabella mission and its policy in regards to rights to land protected the area from resource developers, who had the potential to alienate people from their land. As Edwards noted, Duguid observed in 1980 on the occasion of the meeting of the Pitjantjatjara Council with the Premier of South Australia that he had supported legislation to give Pitjantjatjara people rights to their land for '50 bloody years'.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout these changes traditional life was still central for Ernabella people. Anangu elder Kawaki Thompson reflecting on his involvement in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Land Rights campaign of the 1970s recently noted that at the end of the mission era '[w]e had good living. We were

---

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, B., 'Pitjantjatjara Land Rights', in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, p. 301-302; Edwards, W.H. 'The Church and Indigenous Land Rights: Pitjantjatjara Land Rights in Australia', *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, October, 1986, p. 484.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, B., 'Pitjantjatjara Land Rights' 1983, p. 302.

strong people, smart people, standing on our own feet.’ In addition, as Edwards argued in the late 1970s, ‘[t]he Pitjantjatjara area is one of the most traditional Aboriginal cultural areas in Australia, and I believe that this is attributable largely to the influence of the [Ernabella] mission policy and practices.’<sup>53</sup> But when Thompson compares what has happened in the decades since the end of the mission era he says that his ‘heart is crying’ at the decline of communities as ‘we are getting lower, weaker and weak’.<sup>54</sup>

Claims to Christianity by people who adhere strongly to traditional life have been regarded in anthropological studies with a degree of scepticism about the authenticity of their claims.<sup>55</sup> Robbins argues that this is in part a result of the assumptions underpinning anthropological theory, and in particular, the continuity model which posits that cultures resist ‘radical culture change’ or discontinuity in their belief systems. That is, in the face of contact the foundation of their world view changes very little and is therefore continuous with the past. It is assumed that conversion to Christianity entails a distinct rupture between the past and the present, and results in a before and after state which is marked by discontinuity and can be quantified with the numbers of converts. This perception presents difficulties for studies of conversion to Christianity by indigenous people. Jon Miller cautions against assessing the success of conversion through citing numbers of converts. He argues that this tells us little about ‘the not-specifically-religious and sometimes not not-specifically-intended effects that missions often had on indigenous social structures and on nonconverts’.<sup>56</sup> In addition, as Robbins points out, anthropologists

---

<sup>53</sup> Edwards, W. H., ‘The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture’, 1978, p. 202.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, K., cited in ‘Dreams and Dust’, *The Advertiser*, 12 November, 2011, <<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/ipad/dreams-and-dust/story-fn3o6wog-1226191494932>>, accessed 14 December 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Robbins, J., ‘Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture’, 2007, pp. 5-38.

<sup>56</sup> Miller, J., ‘Missions, Social Change, and Resistance to Authority: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Relative Autonomy of Religion’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 32, No.1, 1993, p. 32.

have not believed that traditionally-oriented people could be interested in Christianity and that any demonstrated interest is shallow and just a charade. That is, they are merely repeating uncritically what missionaries have told them.<sup>57</sup> This argument can be seen underpinning Yengoyan's proposition that being Christian *and* traditionally Pitjantjatjara is an impossibility partly because they perceive their universe as unchanging.<sup>58</sup> Even though this binary is contested by observations of missionaries who lived and worked with Aboriginal people over long periods,<sup>59</sup> and statements by Aboriginal people themselves it remains a powerful discourse.

Robbins' proposition that studies of the encounter between indigenous people and Christianity should start from the premise that Christianity can be culturally important to indigenous people is useful to understanding the evidence from Ernabella. Ernabella senior men such as Alec Minutjukur and Andy Tjilari believe that God was known to Pitjantjatjara people before the missionaries came.<sup>60</sup> By 1953 Pitjantjatjara men were giving the address at church services at Ernabella and holding services while away from the mission. In addition Ernabella Christians were working at the outstations during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>61</sup> At the same time there was evidence of enhanced ritual activity around Ernabella and Amata.<sup>62</sup> The post-mission years saw the evolution of the Pitjantjatjara Church. Also significant is the Ernabella Choir as discussed in Chapter Seven whose members were not only practising Christians but who engaged in a vibrant and dynamic traditional life throughout the mission era and beyond. The evidence blurs the boundaries between discreet categories of Aboriginal or Christian. The Christian people at Ernabella were not

<sup>57</sup> Robbins, J., 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture', 2007, pp. 9-11.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Two, p. 51 and Chapter Seven, p. 269 for a discussion of Yengoyan's position.

<sup>59</sup> As early as 1944 Superintendent Love believed that conversion to Christianity did not require the rejection of traditional practices and beliefs. *Ernabella Newsletter*, December 1944, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Minutjukur, A., 'Living in the Bush: Putting Nyinanytja', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 1; Notes from meeting at Salisbury Aboriginal Congress Church, South Australia, 2 June 2010. Tjilari spoke in Pitjantjatjara and was interpreted by Bill Edwards.

<sup>61</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report 1962, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, W., Annual Report 1966, PCA ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173, Box 2506.



marginal to their community rather they were central figures and leaders in both Christianity and the Law.

That Christianity is important to Aboriginal people and forms an integral part of their identity often alongside traditional life underpins this thesis. Evidence in the mission narrative demonstrates that people were interested in Christianity itself rather than for pragmatic reasons. In the 1950s there was considerable interest in catechism classes and a Summer Bible School, 200-300 people were regularly attending church and from 1952 there were Baptisms.<sup>63</sup> Rather than regarding Aboriginal people who are Christian as having lost their culture Christianity has been added to their culture, providing enrichment rather than loss. Starting from this position Christianity can be seen to be one element among many which make up their whole repertoire of religious experience and identity. When Ernabella people at the Salisbury Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress meeting in June 2010 were asked what it meant to be an Aboriginal Christian, the question appeared to be difficult to answer, as if they did not see a separation between Aboriginal and Christian.<sup>64</sup>

People's beliefs, including religious beliefs, are contingent on historical, political, social, cultural and economic circumstances and therefore Christianity is expressed in diverse forms throughout indigenous communities. Yolngu people of Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) regard Christianity as integral to traditional beliefs.<sup>65</sup> Robert Bos has argued that there is evidence that Christianity has been indigenised demonstrating 'remarkable continuities with traditional religion' yet at the same time

---

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 157.

<sup>64</sup> Notes from meeting at Salisbury Aboriginal Congress Church, South Australia, 2 June 2010.

<sup>65</sup> McIntosh, I., 'Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal belief in the Christian God', *Oceania*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 1997, pp. 273-89.

discontinuities with earlier mission Christianity.<sup>66</sup> On Groote Eylandt David Turner found that the traditional story of Nambirrirrma, an Ancestral Being, represents the story of Jesus. That is, Nambirrirrma is equivalent to Jesus.<sup>67</sup> Diane Austin-Broos has been told parallel Christian/Arnernte stories by Hermannsburg Christians where Christian creation stories relate to Ancestral Dreamings which she describes as a 'Christian story in the light of an Arnernte poetics'.<sup>68</sup>

Christianity has been reworked and redefined by Ernabella people as by other missionised groups. The kind of syncretism of traditional and Christian forms as described by McIntosh, Bos and Austin-Broos above for Yolngu, Groote Eylandt and Arnernte people is not so evident at Ernabella where people maintained a degree of separation between Christian and traditional beliefs.<sup>69</sup> This lack of syncretism between traditional beliefs and Christianity for Western Desert people has been noted by Noel Wallace who points out along with Kimber, that Christianity was considered additional to existing beliefs.<sup>70</sup> However, more recently Diana Young has argued that there is now some merging of Christianity and the *tjukurpa* in the landscape through 'Christian Dreaming sites'.<sup>71</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Seven the separation of Christian and traditional domains was evident in the Ernabella Choir's 1966 *Singing Walkabout* tour programme. There has been some resistance to using traditional music for Christian

---

<sup>66</sup> Bos, R., 'The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 422-37.

<sup>67</sup> Turner, D., 'The Incarnation of Nambirrirrma', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA., 1988, p. 478.

<sup>68</sup> Austin-Broos, D., *Arnernte Present, Arnernte Past*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 44-5.

<sup>69</sup> Bill Edwards, Pers. Comm., 4 June 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Wallace, N., 'The Religion of the Aborigines of the Western Desert', in M. Charlesworth, D. Kimber & N. Wallace (eds.), *Ancestor Spirits: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Life and Spirituality*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1990, p. 57; Kimber, D., 'Aspects of Warlpiri and Pintupi Life', in M. Charlesworth, D. Kimber & N. Wallace (eds.), *Ancestor Spirits: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Life and Spirituality*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1990, p. 30; This has also been found by anthropologist Basil Sansom for other Aboriginal groups (Pers. Comm., 7 December 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Young, D., 'Water as Country on the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands South Australia', *Worldviews*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2006, p. 256.

celebrations at Ernabella and it was not until the 1970s that innovations appeared with the setting of Christian stories to traditional melodies.<sup>72</sup> Despite this experimentation the performance of Christian hymns by Ernabella people today still generally adheres to the western choral tradition.<sup>73</sup> However Young's argument that the distinct domains of Christian and traditional may have become less clear cut over time appears to be evident in the opening scenes of the 2004 televised story of the Ernabella Choir, *Ankula Watjarira*, as discussed in Chapter Seven, where the relationship between the land and hymn singing by the choir is made clear.

Once the mission era ended Aboriginal interest in Christianity did not diminish but continued to grow and develop innovative forms. In various parts of the country a number of Aboriginal driven initiatives developed in the latter decades of the twentieth century such as the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF), the revival movement originating from Galiwin'ku, millenarian and nativistic cults and the holding of various Christian Conventions at remote communities. In the late 1960s there were moves by Aboriginal church leaders to establish a Christian fellowship of Aboriginal people where Aboriginal people could express their Christianity as was occurring within indigenous societies globally.<sup>74</sup> The AEF evolved during the late 1960s and early 1970s with the aim of influencing the churches to allow Aboriginal Christians 'to develop and express their firm calling as Christian leaders'.<sup>75</sup> According to John Harris, the formation of the AEF was driven by the perception among Aboriginal Christians that they were regarded by the

---

<sup>72</sup> Edwards, B., 'Tjukurpa Palya—The Good Word: Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity', in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p. 147.

<sup>73</sup> This was evident in the 2011 pre-Christmas performance of Christmas Carols in Adelaide by the Ernabella Children's Choir. While the Carols were sung in Pitjantjatjara the western tradition was still adhered to.

<sup>74</sup> Hart, M., *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, New Creation Publications Inc., SA, 1997, pp. 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1994, p. 670.

Christian community as 'second-class Christians'.<sup>76</sup> Here he is mainly referring to Aboriginal people living in urban situations as he points out that tribal people in remote areas who were Christian did not see themselves in this way. A national convention was held in 1970 at Port Augusta followed by regular conventions throughout the Pitjantjatjara Lands, including Ernabella and communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Pastor Bob Brown noted that conventions were the sites 'for Aboriginal expression of the Gospel'.<sup>77</sup> These conventions also allowed people to discuss other matters beside Christianity and in some ways paralleled the gatherings of former times before the establishment of missions when Aboriginal people met to conduct a range of business, demonstrating an incorporation of old ways into contemporary events. The conventions attracted large audiences and in 1978 1000 people attended the convention at Amata<sup>78</sup> and at the 1982 Easter convention held at Ernabella local evangelists confidently took the leading roles.<sup>79</sup>

In 1979 Galiwin'ku experienced a revivalist movement, or as Bos describes it, an 'exuberant Christian movement', and its influence spread to Warburton, the Kimberley and through the Western Australian goldfields.<sup>80</sup> At Galiwin'ku today Schwarz has found that Christianity is currently being expressed in revivalist and charismatic forms. These particular forms have enabled the maintenance rather than the rejection of kin structures at Galiwin'ku and at the same time have facilitated an increasing individualism. Carolyn Schwarz attributes Christianity at Galiwin'ku with 'reconfiguring Aboriginal notions of personhood and sociality' which has

---

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 663. The Christian conventions and AEF initially involved people from the eastern states living closer to the wider community.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, B., cited in M. Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued*, 1997, p. 5. Bob Brown was interviewed by Max Hart about the history of the AEF.

<sup>78</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, p. 141.

<sup>79</sup> Hart, M., *A Story of Fire, Continued*, 1997, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Bos, R., 'The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land', 1988, p. 426; Harris, J., *One Blood*, 1994, p. 871.

enabled both ‘continuity and rupture with the past’.<sup>81</sup> Here culture is expressed through the interaction of both continuity and discontinuity with the past. This contests the assumptions which have underpinned anthropological studies of conversion to Christianity as identified by Robbins, where any break with the past indicates the absence of any continuity with the past.<sup>82</sup> At Galiwin’ku a form of Christianity has been developed which is an effective adaptation to the demands of modern living and which demonstrates that Christianity does not necessarily undermine kin-based social structures.

Millenarian and nativistic cults have been identified in western and central Australia since 1963. The Jinimin (Jesus) prophetic cult which appeared to spread from Jigalong in Western Australia is regarded as both ‘a guardian and keeper of Aboriginal culture’. As long as Aboriginal people adhere to their traditional Law, it is believed that they will enjoy equal status with Europeans. Accompanying these cults was a resurgence and revitalisation of ceremonial life.<sup>83</sup> In 1963, a type of cargo cult was also identified at Angas Downs Station.<sup>84</sup> At Yarrabah in the 1980s visions of Christ started appearing to people in the community which saw the numbers of people identifying as Christian increase to include about one quarter of the community.<sup>85</sup>

These movements came at a time when there was increasing social dysfunction in remote communities, many of which had formerly been missions. It is

---

<sup>81</sup> Schwarz, C., ‘Carrying the Cross, Caring for Kin: The Everyday Life of Charismatic Christianity in Remote Australia’, *Oceania*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 2010, p. 59. Schwarz also points out that this has occurred because in remote communities people have been able to live outside the capitalist economy and have been somewhat protected by the welfare state. She argues that the development of this particular form of Aboriginalised Christianity developed in response to changes brought about by the self-determination era. Where people are embedded in the wider money economy, Schwarz argues that this form of Christianity may not be able to maintain such continuities with the past.

<sup>82</sup> Robbins, J., ‘Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture’, 2007, pp. 5-38.

<sup>83</sup> Petri, H. & Petri-Odermann, G., ‘A Nativistic and Millenarian Movement in North West Australia’, in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, p. 393.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>85</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood*, 1994, p. 875.

argued that people were searching for solutions and Christianity was regarded as ‘a way out’.<sup>86</sup> In addition, Harris has pointed out that with the end of mission control of communities, responsibility for Christian evangelising was now in the hands of Aboriginal people. Therefore such growth as evidenced in the revival movement could be expected.<sup>87</sup> However, as discussed in Chapter Seven, at Ernabella Aboriginal evangelists had been taking responsibility for spreading the Gospel and Christian instruction for decades during the mission era. This was noted by Max Hart who proposed that the successful organisation and running of the 1982 Easter Convention by Pitjantjatjara people was due to their long established ‘management in Christian meetings as well as in community affairs’ at Ernabella.<sup>88</sup> These newer expressions of Christianity have impacted on Ernabella people. Edwards has noted that during the 1980s there were new affirmations and re-affirmations of Christian faith. There has also been some tension between people who practice Christianity as they were taught at the mission and those who engage with the more recent charismatic forms.<sup>89</sup>

\* \* \* \*

This research has found that Ernabella, now Pukatja, remains a powerful place of memory, home and country and is important to contemporary Pitjantjatjara identity. The evidence from Ernabella contests the orthodox assessment that Aboriginal people were forced or coerced to ‘come in’ to the mission and that their culture was subsequently destroyed. At Ernabella it is evident that Pitjantjatjara people continue to express their culture in innovative ways. Ernabella people find the proposition that missionaries destroyed their spirituality as curious at least. That Christianity and the

---

<sup>86</sup> Hart, M., *A Story of Fire Continued*, 1997, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Harris, J., *One Blood*, 1994, p. 879.

<sup>88</sup> Hart, M., *A Story of Fire Continued*, 1997, p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> Edwards, B., *Tjukurpa Palya*, 2005, pp. 142-43.

mission times are intrinsically important rather than merely an imposition is demonstrated by the recent renovation and re-dedication of the Ernabella Mission Church which was instigated and driven by the Pukatja community itself.<sup>90</sup> The evidence does not support the notion that at Ernabella Aboriginal people were the passive victims of domination. Rather it demonstrates that the outcomes were far more complex. At Ernabella and elsewhere Aboriginal people express nostalgia and even gratitude towards missionaries. To regard this merely as people not recognising their own subjugation is untenable and patronising. Furthermore it has been acknowledged by some Aboriginal leaders faced with the extreme circumstances in some communities today that they were in fact functioning much better during the mission era and have requested that churches become involved in communities again.<sup>91</sup> Yet as discussed in Chapter Two missions continue to be described generically as places of imprisonment,<sup>92</sup> and as Edwards has noted missions and missionaries are used as the scapegoat for the current dysfunction in former mission communities.<sup>93</sup> The orthodoxy claims that missions closely supported the colonising agenda. While there were certainly external pressures on Ernabella Mission, the evidence does not support the notion that the mission was an agent of the colonising project. Rather, the mission mostly attempted to minimise and ameliorate the outcomes of colonisation. Historian Inga Clendinnen has argued that 'using stories as weapons' renders alternative stories silent, losing much in the process.<sup>94</sup> As Thompson noted above, Ernabella people expressed confidence that they were ready

---

<sup>90</sup> 'Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission', 22 April 2011; Nicholls, J., Paper Tracker Edition No 2, Uniting Care Wesley, Adelaide, August 2007.  
<[http://www.papertracker.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=50](http://www.papertracker.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=50)>, accessed 24 June 2011.

<sup>91</sup> O'Donoghue, Lowitja, in J. Walker, 'Challenges to Churches and Next Generation. It's Up to You: O'Donoghue'. *The Australian*, 28 May 2008, p. 8.

<sup>92</sup> Horton, D., (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History, Society and Culture*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, p. 706.

<sup>93</sup> Edwards, W. H., 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture', 1978, p. 195.

<sup>94</sup> Clendinnen, I., *The History Question: Who Owns the Past?* Quarterly Essay, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2006, p. 41.

to engage with the wider economy and at the same time had maintained traditional Law, yet this story is not widely known and has been marginalised by the orthodox assessment of missionary impact.

While not claiming exceptionalism for Ernabella Mission neither is it being argued that the findings from Ernabella can be extrapolated to all missions. However, the disparate experience of Aborigines across Australia casts into doubt the criticism that missions are uniquely responsible for contemporary community dysfunction.<sup>95</sup> From this study of Ernabella it is evident that encounters with missionaries were characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand contact heralded gradual changes and the beginning of a fundamental shift in life style for Aboriginal people, but on the other hand, some missions such as Ernabella evolved as places that afforded Aborigines considerable agency, an agency that fomented a fusion of beliefs to form a distinct identity. Closer readings of other mission narratives, which allow for the fact that Christianity is intrinsically important for many Aboriginal people<sup>96</sup> and an agentic response other than resistance, may also reveal outcomes which diverge from the orthodox discourse. The practice of Christianity and the forms it takes in the post-mission era is an evolving story and presents considerable scope for further research.

---

<sup>95</sup> This point has also been made by Peter Sutton in *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2009, p. 16-7. The reasons why Ernabella today experiences similar social and economic problems to other remote communities where the mission era was not as respectful is beyond the scope of this thesis and is deserving of a study in itself.

<sup>96</sup> In 2006 the majority (73%) of Indigenous people identified as Christian.



## **Bibliography**

### **Archival sources**

#### *National Library of Australia*

**Papers of Charles Duguid, MS 5068, Box 9, Series 10, Ernabella Mission, 1935-1964.**

Subseries 1, Correspondence 1935-1965.

Subseries 2, Diary, 1946, kept by Duguid at Ernabella.

Subseries 3, Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, *Ernabella Newsletters* 1941-1957.

#### *Mitchell Library*

**Presbyterian Church of Australia-Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations, Ernabella Mission, Boxes 2502-2513, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1173.**

Correspondence 1939-1946, Box 2502.

Ernabella Reports and Policy Statements 1938-1945, Box 2502.

Board Correspondence 1946-1951, Box 2503.

Correspondence 1953-1956, Box 2504.

Reports 1948-1960, Box 2504.

Woomera Rocket Range, Box 2505.

Miscellaneous Files on Ernabella, Box 2505-2508.

**Presbyterian Church of Australia, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1872.**

Treasurer's Visit to Ernabella – 1977, Box 67.

The Pitjantjatjara Church – 1979, Box 67.

Report – 1963, Box 91 (132).

**Presbyterian Church of Australia, Aboriginal-Ernabella, ML MSS 1893, Add-on 1616.**

## MLK 2763

Board Reports – 1969/77, Folder A/E 11.

Reports – Station – 1969/72; 1971/74, Folder A/E 12.

Government Matters – 1967/77, Folder A/E 13.

Finance – 1971, AE/2.

Finance – Child Endowment – 1966/71, Folder AE/21.

## MLK 2772

Aboriginal Housing – 1961/71; 1972/73, Folder AE/51.

## MLK 2773

Aboriginal Housing Equity – 1964/68, Folder AE/52.

## MLK 2774

Ernabella Church – 1970/75; 1976; 1977, Folder AE/7.

## MLK 2775

Church Choir – 1969/76, Folder AE/73.

Medical Hospital – 1964/71; 1972/76, Folder AE/8.

Correspondence between Bill Edwards, BOEMAR, APBM, Aboriginal and Overseas Missions, 1969-1974.

Correspondence, Folder AE/8.

## MLK2778

Community Paper/ News Sheet – 1977, Folder AE/04.

Ernabella Visit – 1946, Folder AE/04.

Journal of Mr. Love – 1940/49, Folder AE/04

*State Archives of South Australia*

Aboriginal Welfare Conference, 15 July 1965, GRG 52, Series 18, State Archives of South Australia.

Aboriginal Welfare Conference of Commonwealth and State Officers, Volume 1, Parliament House, Perth 18-19 July 1967, GRG 52 Series 18, State Archives of South Australia.

Duguid, C. 'Ernabella Patrol', 1939, GRG 52/1939/52, State Archives of South Australia.

Engel, Reverend F.G., *Australian Missionary Tidings*, November 1967, Australian Council of Churches, GRG 52/31, State Archives of South Australia.

Register of Permits - Visitors to Reserve, 1965-1970, GRG 52 Serial 21, State Archives of South Australia.

South Australian Public Schools Committees' Association Annual Conference of the Australian Council of Schools, Report on the Education of the Aborigines in South Australia, Perth, Western Australia, October 1963, GRG 52/22/4, State Archives of South Australia.

Strehlow, T. G. H., 'Ernabella Mission Station, Musgrave Ranges', 1939, GRG 52/1939/52, State Archives of South Australia.

Trudinger to Duguid, SArchives File No 22, 'Royal Progress', July 1953, reproduced in *recordSArchives*, Issue 20, March 2002, 2-3.

### **Presbyterian mission publications**

Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, *Friends from the Walkabout*, John Andrew & Co, Sydney, 1949.

Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Brown, Prior, Anderson Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, 1946.

Duguid, C., *Ernabella Revisited*, Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1946.

Love, J.R.B., *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition as seen in Northern South Australia, the Northern Territory, North-west Australia and Western Queensland*, Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, 1915.

Love, J.R.B., *Report on Ernabella Mission*, Brown, Prior, Anderson, Melbourne, 1937.

Owen, J.E., *A Visitor's Diary: Ernabella Patrol*, Presbyterian Church of Australia, Board of Missions-Aborigines Department, Melbourne, 1943.

Penhall, W. R., 'Mr. Penhall's Message', in *Ernabella After Eight Years*, Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Melbourne, 1946.

*Pitjantjatjara Tjukurpa*, No. 12, July 1969

*The Presbyterian Banner*, Vol. XLVI.

### **Government publications**

Aboriginal Protection Board Annual Reports, AIATSIS, Canberra, 1953- 1960.

Chief Protector of Aborigines Reports, Aborigines Department, Adelaide, South Australia, 1930, 1933, 1938-1959,

<<http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?&pid=60416>>, accessed 11 March 2010.

*The Central Australian Aboriginal Reserves*, Government Printer, Western Australia, nd.

### **Parliamentary publications**

Hasluck, P., Hansard, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 208, 8 June 1950, p. 3977.

Parliamentary Debates, 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, South Australia, Vol. 2, Government Printer, South Australia, 1962, pp. 1721-1722.

### **Acts**

*South Australian Aborigines Act 1934-1939.*

*Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962* (South Australia).

<[http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au/webclient/StreamGate?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1273024649685~853](http://asset0.aiatsis.gov.au/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1273024649685~853)>, accessed 3 June 2010.

*Community Welfare Act 1972*, South Australian Statutes, Part1.

### **Government reports and inquiries**

Mullighan, E. P., *Children on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands*  
Commission of Inquiry Report, 2008.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 'The Importance of History',  
*National Report*, Vol. 1, AGPS, Canberra, 1.4.3, 1991.

### **Newspaper and periodical sources**

*Life Australia*

*Melbourne Herald*

*Paper Tracker*, Uniting Care Wesley, Adelaide.

*The Adelaide Advertiser*

*The Adelaide Sunday Mail Magazine*

*The Messenger*

*The Weekend Australian*

*Walkabout: Australia's Way of Life Magazine*

### **Films, videos, television and radio programmes**

AhKit, J. *News*, SBS Television, Sydney, 10 August 2007.

'Areyonga Choir', Lee, N., radio programme, ABC Radio, Alice Springs, 17 September 2008, <<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/16/2365789.htm>>, accessed 13 August 2010.

‘Ernabella: No Ordinary Mission’, *Compass*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 22 April 2011.

‘Ernabella Children’s Choir’, Lee, N., radio programme, ABC Radio, Alice Springs, 3 December 2008, <<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/12/03/2436979.htm/>>, accessed 26 March 2010.

*Kanyini*, Randall, B., motion picture, 2006.

*Images and Realities: Aboriginal Studies*, video recording, Open Learning, University of South Australia, 1993.

‘A Photo Journal of the Pitjantjatjara Choir’s Historic performance at the 2004 Adelaide Festival’, DeLys, S., *Message Stick*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 21 May 2004.

‘Ankula Watjarira’, *Message Stick*, television programme, ABC Television, Sydney, 10 September 2004.

‘Ntaria Ladies Choir’, *Inkat’irbirberintjaka*, radio programme, ABC Radio <<http://www.abc.net.au/arts/adlib/stories/s904138.htm>>, accessed 30 July 2010.

### **Public lectures, exhibitions and visual images**

Calma, T., ‘40 years on: What does the “Yes” vote mean for Indigenous Australians?’, Anglicare Tasmania Social Justice Lecture, Hobart, 22 August 2007.

Moore, D. 1963, <<http://nla.pic-an14066835-5>>, accessed 25 May 2009.

National Gallery of Victoria, Curatorial description accompanying painting *Goodbye white fella religion* by Julie Dowling, 2009.

### Unpublished notes

Edwards, B., *Notes on the history of the Ernabella Choir made by Bill Edwards at the request of Gordon Ingkatji*, 2007.

### Published sources

Akerman, K., 'The Renaissance of Aboriginal Law in the Kimberleys', in R. M. & C. H. Berndt (eds.), *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and their Present*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, pp. 234-42.

Albrecht, P., *Relhiperra: About Aborigines (Incorporating the Thoughts of a Reluctant Missionary)*, The Bennelong Society, January 2008,  
<<http://www.bennelong.com.au/books/pdf/Relhiperra.pdf>>, accessed 12 October 2011.

Anderson, K. & Perrin, C., 'How Race became Everything: Australia and Polygenism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 5, 2008, pp. 962-90.

Attwood, B., *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.

Attwood, B., 'Introduction', in J. Arnold & B. Attwood (eds.), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, Journal of Australian Studies, Special Edition No. 35, La Trobe Uni Press, Bundoora, Victoria, 1992, pp. i-xvi.

Attwood, B., '“Learning about the Truth”: The Stolen Generations Narrative', in B. Attwood & F. Magowan (eds.), *Telling Stories*, Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest, NSW, 2001, p. 188.

Attwood, B. *Rights for Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest, NSW, 2003.

Austin-Broos, D., 'Narratives of the encounter at Ntaria', *Oceania*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 1994, pp. 131-50.

———‘The Meaning of *Pepe*: God’s Law and the Western Arrernte’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, October 1994, pp. 311-28.

——— ‘The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction’, in A. Buckser & S.D. Glazier (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, pp. 1-12.

———*Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009.

Baker, R., ‘Coming In? The Yanyuwa as a Case Study in the Geography of Contact History’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol.14, No.1, 1990, pp. 25-60.

Baker, N., ‘Interview’, in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu: Work from the Past and the Present: A Celebration of Fifty Years of Ernabella Arts*, Ernabella Arts Inc., Ernabella, South Australia, 1998, p 10.

——— ‘Our lives as Artists’, in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don’t Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 82.

Ball, M., ‘The Lesser of Two Evils: Raukkan and Point Pearce 1890-1940’, *Cabbages and Kings: Selected essays in History and Australian Studies*, Murray Park College of Advanced Education, Magill, SA., Vol. 20, 1992, pp. 36-45.

Barry, A., ‘ “A Longing Desire in My Heart”: Faith, Family and the Colonial Frontier in the Life of Euphemia Kramer, 1887-1971’, in Amanda Barry, Joanna Cruickshank, Andrew Brown-May & Patricia Grimshaw (eds.), *Evangelists of Empire?: Missionaries in Colonial History*, [online] University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre, Melbourne, 2008.

Basedow, H., *The Australian Aboriginal*, F.W. Preece & Sons, Adelaide, 1925.



Bates, D., *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, I. White (ed.), National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1985.

Bennett, M., 'Early Days of Art/ Craft at Ernabella 1949-1954', in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu: Work from the Past and the Present: A Celebration of Fifty Years of Ernabella Arts*, Ernabella Arts Inc., Ernabella, South Australia, 1998, pp. 15-20.

Berndt, R.M. & C.H., 'Correspondence', *Oceania*, Vol. 13, No. 3, March 1943, pp. 282-83.

——— *From Black to White in South Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951.

——— *The World of the First Australians*, Landsdowne Press, Dee Why West, Australia, 1981.

——— 'Body and Soul: More Than an Episode', in T. Swain and D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 45-59.

Birmingham, J., 'Resistance, Creolization or Optimal Foraging at Killalpaninna Mission, South Australia', in R. Torrence and A. Clarke (eds.), *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating Cross-cultural Engagements in Oceania*, Routledge, London, 2000, pp. 360-405.

Blackman, S., *Message Stick*, The Magazine of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, Summer, 2010.

Blanchard, C.A., *Return to Country: The Aboriginal Homelands Movement in Australia*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, AGPS, Canberra, 1987.

Bos, R., 'The Dreaming and Social Change in Arnhem Land' in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions at SACAE, Sturt Campus, Bedford Park, SA., 1988, pp. 422-37.

Brady, M., 'Leaving the Spinifex: The Impact of Rations, Missions and the Atomic Tests on the Southern Pitjantjatjara', *Records of the South Australian Museum*, Vol. 20, 1987, pp. 35-45.

—— 'The Politics of Space and Mobility: Controlling the Ooldea/Yalata Aborigines, 1952-1982', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 23, 1999, pp. 1-14.

Brock, P., 'The Missionary Factor in Adnyamathanha History', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions at SACAE, Bedford Park, SA., 1988, pp. 277-91.

—— *Outback Ghettos: A History of Aboriginal Institutionalisation and Survival*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993.

—— 'Setting the Record Straight: New Christians and Mission Christianity' in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, Boston, 2005, pp. 107-25.

—— 'New Christians as Evangelists' in N. Etherington (ed.), *Mission and Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 32-52.

—— 'Nakedness and Clothing in Early Encounters Between Aboriginal People of Central Australia, Missionaries and Anthropologists', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2007,

<[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_colonialism\\_and\\_colonial\\_history/v008/8.1brock.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v008/8.1brock.html)>, accessed 9 August 2010.

—— ‘Two-way Food: Bush Tucker and Whitefella’s Food’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2008, pp.19-32.

Brokensha, P., *The Pitjantjatjara and their Crafts*, Aboriginal Arts Board, Australian Council, Sydney, 1975.

—— ‘The Pitjantjatjara: A Relevant Case Study of Continuity and Change’, in B. Menary (ed.), *Aborigines and Schooling*, Adelaide College of the Arts, Adelaide, 1981, pp. 51-7.

—— *Coming to Wisdom Slowly*, Peacock Publications, Norwood, SA, 2007.

Brooks, D., ‘What Impact the Mission?’, *Mission Time in Warburton*, Tjulyuru Regional Arts Gallery, Warburton, WA, 2002.

Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788-1980*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1982.

Burger, R. J., *Our Aboriginal Missions*, Mission Publicity Series No. 1, c1940.

Burgoyne, I., *Mirning : We are the Whales: A Mirning-Kokatha Woman Recounts Life Before and After Dispossession*, Magabala Books, Broome, WA, 2000.

Burke D & Hughes P.J., *The Presbyterians in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1996.

Burridge, K., ‘Aborigines and Christianity: An Overview’, in T. Swain & D.B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 18-29.

—— *In the Way: a Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1991.

Campbell, L., [\*Darby: One Hundred Years of Life in a Changing Culture\*, ABC, Warlpiri Media Association, Alice Springs](#), 2006.

Cane, S., *Pila Ngura: The Spinifex People*, Fremantle Art Centre Press, Fremantle, 2002.

Cannell, F., *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006.

Carey, H., *Believing in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1996.

Charlesworth, M., 'Introduction' in M. Charlesworth, F. Dussart, & H. Morphy (eds.), *Aboriginal Religions in Australia*, Ashgate Publishing Co., Aldershot, Hants, England, 2005, pp. 1-28.

Clendinnen, I., *The History Question: Who Owns the Past?* Quarterly Essay, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2006.

Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988.

Clunies Ross, M., 'Research into Aboriginal Songs: The State of the Art', in M. Clunies Ross, T. Donaldson & S. A. Wild (eds.), *Songs of Aboriginal Australia*, Oceania Monograph, University of Sydney, 1987, pp. 1-11.

Coleman, S., 'Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant Conversion' in A. Buckser & S. D. Galzer (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, pp. 15-28.

Comaroff, J. & J., *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

Coombs, H.C., Brandl, M.M. & Snowdon, W.E., *A Certain Heritage*, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, Canberra, 1983.

Cowlishaw, G., 'Studying Aborigines: Changing Canons in Anthropology and History', in J. Arnold & B. Attwood (eds.), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, Journal of Australian Studies, Special Edition No. 35, La Trobe Uni Press, Bundoora, Victoria, 1992, pp. 20-31.

Dagg, M., 'About Mission Times', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and Their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p 17.

Davenport, S., Johnson, P. & Yuwali, *Cleared Out: First Contact in the Western Desert*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2005.

Dawkins, R., *Ernabella Letters: Extracts of Letters written from "Ernabella" in the Musgrave Ranges 1949-1950*, Uniting Church of Australia, 1994.

de Ishtar, Z., *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2005.

Deloria V., *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, Avon Books, New York, 1988.

Dickinson, E., *Music in the History of the Western Church*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1902.

Director of National Parks, *Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park: Knowledge Handbook*, 2010,

<<http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/tourism/uluru/downloads/Culture%20Centre%20texts%20-%20Tjukurpa%20Piti.pdf>>, accessed 16 November 2010.

Douglas, B., 'Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Narratives on Melanesians', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2001, pp. 37-64.

Duckham, I., 'Visionary, Vassal or Vandal? Rod Schenk – Missionary: A Case Study in Western Desert Missions', *Limina*, Vol. 6, 2000, pp. 41-56.

—— "“At Times they Appear Dense, Unresponsive, even Hostile”: Evangelising Nomads in Western Australia’s Western Desert', *Limina*, Vol. 12, 2006, pp. 9-20.

Duguid, C., *The Central Aborigines Reserve*, Presidential Address, 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1957, Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia, Incorporated, 1957.

——*No Dying Race*, Rigby Ltd., Adelaide, 1963.

——*Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1972.

Dunbar-Hall, P. & Gibson, C., *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places: Contemporary Aboriginal Music in Australia*, UNSW Press Ltd., Sydney, 2004.

Dunn, W., 'About Mission Times', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p 18.

Dunstan, D., *Felicia: The Political Memoirs of Don Dunstan*, Macmillan Co. of Australia Pty. Ltd., South Melbourne, 1981.

Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1976 [1915].

Edmonds, A., 'Sedentary Topography: The Impact of the Christian Mission Society's 'Civilising' Agenda on the Spatial Structure of Life in the Roper Region of Northern Australia', in I. Macfarlane & M. Hannah (eds.), *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, Aboriginal History Monograph 16, ANU E Press, 2007.

Edwards, W.H., 'Report on Ernabella Labour Export Project, 1965-1966', in I. Sharp & C. Tatz (eds.), *Aborigines in the Economy*, Jacaranda Press, 1966.

—— 'The Australian Aborigines and the Gospel', *St Mark's Review*, No. 68, Canberra, May 1972, pp.3-10.

—— 'The Gospel and Aboriginal Culture', *Interchange*, No. 24, 1978, pp. 195-204.

—— 'Pitjantjatjara Land Rights', in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, pp. 294-304.

—— 'The Church and Indigenous Land Rights: Pitjantjatjara Land Rights in Australia', *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, October, 1986, pp. 473-86.

—— 'Aboriginal Land Rights', in C. Mattingley & K. Hampton (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, pp. 78-87.

—— 'Patterns of Aboriginal Residence in the North-West of South Australia', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, Vol. 30, No. 1, December, 1992, pp. 2-32.

—— 'Dodd, Tommy (1890?-1975)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 14, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p. 14.

—— 'Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality', *Charles Strong Memorial Lecture*, July 2001, pp. 1-28.

—— ‘*Tjukurpa palya*—The Good Word: Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, pp. 129-153.

—— ‘Duguid, Charles (1884-1986)’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University,  
<<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duguid-charles-12440>>, accessed 8 February 2010.

—— ‘Dodd, Tommy (1890? – 1975)’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University,  
<<http://adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140015b.htm>>, accessed 12 February 2009.

—— ‘An Epic of the Ordinary: The Uniting Church in Australia and Aboriginal Missions’, Uniting Church in Australia Conference, Sydney, 20-24 August 2008, p. 8.

—— ‘Missiology and Australian Aboriginal Missions: A Personal Journey’, Australian Association for Mission Studies Conference, Canberra, 2-5 October 2008, p. 13.

—— *Celebrating the History of Ernabella Mission and the Restoration and Re-opening of the Ernabella Uniting Church Building, Pukatja Community, South Australia*, 2010.

Edwards, W. H & Clarke, B. A., ‘From Missions to Aboriginal Churches: The Uniting Church in Australia and Aboriginal Missions’, in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 185-200.

Eickelkamp, U., ‘“Drawing” the Story Together: An Anthropologists Learning of Ernabella Women’s Art’, in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu: Work from the Past and the Present: A Celebration of Fifty Years of Ernabella Arts*, Ernabella Arts Inc., Ernabella, SA, 1998, pp 45-8.



— *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999.

— 'Anapalku Walka—Ernabella Design', in Luke Taylor (ed.), *Painting the Land Story*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1999, pp. 77-94.

Elbourne, E., *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2002.

Elkin, A.P., 'Anthropology and Missionary Methods', *Morpeth Review*, Vol. 1, Nos. 7-10, 1930, pp. 34-7.

— 'Cult, Totemism & Mythology in Northern South Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1934, pp. 171-92.

— 'Kinship in South Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1938, pp. 196-234.

— *Citizenship for the Aborigines*, Australasian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1944.

— 'Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1951, pp. 164-86.

— *The Australian Aborigines*, Angus & Robertson Publishers, Sydney, 1974.

Ellis, C., *Aboriginal Music, Education for Living: Cross-cultural Experiences from South Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985.

Etherington, S., 'Coming Ready or Not! Aborigines are Heading for Town', Occasional Paper, October, Bennelong Society, 2007, <<http://www.bennelong.com.au/>>, accessed 11 October 2010.

Fanon, F., *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin, 1990.

Finlayson H. H., *The Red Centre : Man and Beast in the Heart of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1936.

Firth, Raymond, 'Conversion from Paganism to Christianity', *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 14, May-June, 1976, pp. 3-7.

Flanagan, R. J., *The Aborigines of Australia*, Edward F. Flanagan & George Robertson and Company, Sydney, 1888.

Flood, J., *The Original Australians: Story of the Aboriginal People*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2006.

Foxcroft, E. J.B., *Australian Native Policy: Its History, Especially in Victoria*, Melbourne University Press & Oxford University Press, Melbourne and London, 1941.

Frazer, J. G. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Macmillan, London, 1936 [1890].

French, A., *Seeing the Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira, 1902-1959*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002.

Furlan, A., 'Indigenous Songs as "Operational Structures of Transactional Life": A Study of Indigenous Song Genres at Wadeye', in M. Hinkson & J. Beckett (eds), *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2008, pp. 151-65.

Fuss, D., *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, Routledge, New York, 1989.

Gale, F. & Wundersitz, J., *Adelaide Aborigines: A Case Study of Urban Life 1966-1981*, Development Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra, 1982.

Giles, E., *Ernest Giles's Explorations, 1872-76, South Australian Parliamentary Papers 1872-76*, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000 [1876].

Goddard, C., *A Basic Pitjantjatjara/ Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary*, IAD Publishing, Alice Springs, 1987.

Goddard, C. 1990, 'Emergent Genres of Reportage and Advocacy in the Pitjantjatjara Print Media', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No. 2, pp. 27-47.

Gondarra, D., 'Aboriginal Spirituality and the Gospel', in A. Pattel-Gray (ed.), *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, Harper Collins, Blackburn, Vic., 1996, pp. 41-53.

Goodall, H., 'Colonialism and Catastrophe: Contested Memories of Nuclear Testing and Measles Epidemics at Ernabella', in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds.), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 55-76.

Gray, R., *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.

Gray, G., *A Cautious Silence: The Politics of Australian Anthropology*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007.

Gribble, E. R., *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1930.

Grimshaw, P., 'New England Missionary Wives, Hawaiian Women and "The Cult of True Womanhood"', in M. Jolly & M. Macintyre (eds.), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1989, pp. 84-94.

Gsell, F.X., *The Bishop with 150 Wives: Fifty Years as a Missionary*, London, 1955.

Haebich, A., *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, WA, 2000.

Hall, S., 'The Spectacle of the "Other"', in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, London, 2003.

Hamilton A., 'Descended from Father, Belonging to Country: Rights to Land in the Australian Western Desert', in E. Leacock & R. Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 85-108.

— 'Coming and Going: Aboriginal Mobility in North-west South Australia, 1970-71', *Records of the South Australian Museum*, Vol. 20, 1987, pp. 47-57.

Hannah, M., 'Aboriginal Workers in the Australian Agricultural Company, 1824-1857', *Labour History*, No. 82, May 2002, pp. 17-33.

Harmsen, J., *You Gave us the Dreaming*, Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 1995.

Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1994.

— 'Unaipon, David (1872-1967)' *Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, 2004, <<http://webjournals.alphacrucis.edu.au/journals/adeb/u/unaipon-david-1872-1967/>>, accessed 6 January 2010.

Harris, S., *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990.

Hart, C.W.M. & Pilling, A.R., *The Tiwi of North Australia*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1979.

Hart, M., *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, New Creation Publications Inc., SA, 1997.

Henson, B., *A Straight-out Man: F. W. Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne University Press, North Melbourne, 1992.

Hercus, L., 'Leaving the Simpson Desert', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1985, pp. 22-43.

Hiatt, L. R., *Arguments about Aborigines*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Hill, B., *The Rock: Travelling to Uluru*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994.

—*Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession*, Knopf, Random House, Milson's Point, NSW, 2002.

Hill, E., *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Imprint, Sydney, 1995.

Hilliard, W., *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella*, Seal Books, Rigby, Adelaide, 1968.

Hinkson, M., 'The Intercultural Challenge of Stanner's First Fieldwork', *Oceania*, Vol.75, No. 3, March-June 2005, pp. 195-208.

Hinkson, M. & Smith, B., 'Introduction: Conceptual Moves towards an Intercultural Analysis', *Oceania*, Vol. 75, No. 3, March-June 2005, pp. 157-166.

Hofmeyr, I., 'Portable Landscapes: Thomas Mofolo and John Bunyan in the Broad and Narrow Way', in D. Trigger & G. Griffiths (eds.), *Disputed Territories: Land, Culture*

*and Identity in Settler Societies*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 2003, pp. 131-54.

—— ‘Studying Missionaries in a Post-national World’, *African Studies*, Vol. 63, No.1, July 2004, pp. 119-29.

Holcombe, S., ‘The Sentimental Community: A Site of Belonging. A Case Study from Central Australia’, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol.15, No. 2, 2004, pp.163-84.

Horton, D. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS, Canberra, 1994.

Hume, L., ‘The Dreaming in Contemporary Aboriginal Australia’, in G. Harvey (ed.), *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, Continuum, London, 2000, pp. 125-38.

Ilyatjari, Nganyintja, ‘Letter to Nancy Shepherd, March 1984’, in C. Mattingley & K. Hampton (eds.), *Survival in Our Own Land*, translated by Nancy Shepherd, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988, p 255.

—— ‘Traditional Aboriginal Learning: How I Learned as a Pitjantjatjara Child’, in W. H. Edwards (ed.), *Traditional Aboriginal Society*, Macmillan Ed. Aus. Pty. Ltd, South Yarra, 1998.

James, D., *Painting the Song: Kaltjiti Artists of the Sand Dune Country*, McCulloch & McCulloch Australian Art Books, 2009.

Japanangka, Dick Leichleitner & Nathan, P., *Settle Down Country: A Community Report for the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress*, Kibble Books, Malmsbury, Vic., 1983.

Jones, P., 'Namatjira: Traveller between Two Worlds', in J. Hardy, J. V. S. Megaw & M. R. Megaw (eds.), *The Heritage of Namatjira: The Watercolourists of Central Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1992.

———*Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2007.

Jones, P. & Kenny, A., *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland 1860s-1930s*, Wakefield press, Kent Town, SA, 2007.

Jordan, I., *Their Way: Towards an Indigenous Warlpiri Christianity*, Charles Darwin University Press, Darwin, 2003.

Kartomi, M.J., 'The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact: A Discussion of Terminology and Concepts', *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, May 1981, pp. 227-49.

Keen, I., *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion: Yolngu of North East Arnhem Land*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

———*Aboriginal Economy and Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Vic., 2004.

——— 'Stanner on Aboriginal Religion' in M. Charlesworth, F. Dussart, & H. Morphy (eds.), *Aboriginal Religions in Australia*, Ashgate Publishing Co., Aldershot, Hants, England, 2005, pp.61-78.

Kenny, R., *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper & the Ruptured World*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, Vic., 2007.

Kerin, R., 'Sydney James Cook/Duguid and the Importance of "Being Aboriginal"', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 29, 2005, pp. 46-63.

—— ' "Natives Allowed to Remain Naked": An Unorthodox Approach to Medical Work at Ernabella Mission', *Health and History*, Vol. 8, No.1, 2006, pp. 80-99.

—— 'Dogging for a Living: Aborigines and "Undesirables" in South Australia', in B. Attwood & T. Griffiths (eds.), *Frontier, Race, Nation: Henry Reynolds and Australian History*, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty. Ltd., North Melbourne, 2009, pp. 136-56.

Kerins, S., 'The Future of Homelands/Outstations', Topical Issue No. 1, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU, Canberra, 2010, <<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/>>, accessed 18 March 2010.

Keys, C., 'The House and the Yupukarra, Yuendumu, 1946-1996', in P. Read (ed.), *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, pp. 118-29.

Kimber, R. G., *The Man from Arltunga: Walter Smith, Australian Bushman*, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, SA, 1986, p. 51.

Kimber, R. G., 'Genocide or Not? The Situation in Central Australia', *Genocide Perspectives*, No. 1, 1997, pp. 33-65.

Kimber, D., 'Aspects of Warlpiri and Pintupi Life' in M. Charlesworth, D. Kimber & N. Wallace (eds.), *Ancestor Spirits: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Life and Spirituality*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1990.



—— ‘Kapi! Contact Experiences in the Western Desert 1873-1984’, in P. Batty (ed.), *Colliding Worlds: First Contact in the Western Desert 1932-1984*, Museum Victoria and National Aboriginal Cultural Institute Tandanya, Vic., 2006, pp. 4-17.

Knights, M., *Irrunytju Arts*, Irrunytju Arts, Wingellina, 2006.

Knopoff, S., ‘Juxtaposition of Ancestral and Contemporary Elements in the Performance of Yolngu Clan Songs’, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 24, 1992, pp. 138-53.

Kolig, E. ‘Mission Not Accomplished’, in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 376-96.

Kuper, A., *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account*, Harvard University Press, London, 1999.

Land, C., *Material Histories*, Museum Victoria Australia, 2002,  
<<http://museumvictoria.com.au/material/index.asp>>, accessed 1 September 2009.

Langmore, D., ‘The Object Lesson of a Civilised, Christian Home’, in M. Jolly & M. Macintyre (eds.), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1989, pp. 19-44.

Langton, M., ‘Well I Heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television ...’: *An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things*, Australian Film Commission, Sydney, 1993.

Langton, M., ‘The “Word of God” and “Works of the Devil”’, in V. Thwaites (ed.), *Holy, Holy, Holy*, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2004, pp. 22-35.

Lawlor, R., *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1991.

Layton R., 'Ambilineal Descent and Traditional Pitjantjatjara Rights to Land', in N. Peterson & M. Langton (eds.), *Aborigines, Land and Land Rights*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, pp. 15-32.

Leske, E., *For Faith and Freedom: The Story of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Australia 1838-1996*, Openbook Publishers, Adelaide, 1996.

Lester. Y., *Yami: The Autobiography of Yami Lester*, IAD Publications, Alice Springs, 1993.

Livingstone, J., 'Ambivalent Imperialism: The Missionary Rhetoric of Robert Boyd', *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009, pp. 165-91.

Long, J., 'Leaving the Desert: Actors and Sufferers in the Aboriginal Exodus from the Western Desert' in *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1989, pp. 9-44.

Loos, N., 'Concern and Contempt: Church and Missionary Attitudes Towards Aborigines in North Queensland in the Nineteenth Century', in T. Swain, & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp.100-20.

———*White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007.

Love, J.R.B., *Stone-Age Bushmen of Today: Life and Adventure among a Tribe of Savages in North Western Australia*, Blackie & Son Ltd, Glasgow, 1936.

——— 'Correspondence', *Oceania*, Vol. 13, No. 3, March 1943, pp. 282-83

McDonald, H., *Blood, Bones and Spirit: Aboriginal Christianity in an East Kimberley Town*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2002.

McGrath, A., 'Oral History and Writing about Aborigines', *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in the Cattle Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987.

McGregor, R., *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1997.

—— 'Wards, Words and Citizens: A.P. Elkin and Paul Hasluck on Assimilation', *Oceania*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 1999, pp. 243-59.

—— 'Breed out the Colour': Reproductive Management for White Australia', *A Race for Place: Proceedings of the History & Sociology of Eugenics Conference*, University of Newcastle, April 2000.

—— 'From Old Testament to New: A. P. Elkin on Christian Conversion and Cultural Assimilation', *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 2001, pp. 39-67.

—— 'Arguing about Assimilation', in B. Attwood & T. Griffiths (eds.), *Frontier, Race, Nation: Henry Reynolds and Australian History*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2009, pp. 260-87.

—— *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2011

McIntosh, I., 'Islam and Australia's Aborigines? A Perspective from North East Arnhem Land', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 20, No.1, June 1996, pp. 53-77.

—— ‘Anthropology, Self-determination and Aboriginal Belief in the Christian God’, *Oceania*, Vol. 67, No. 4, June 1997, pp. 273-88.

McLean, M., ‘Towards a Typology of Musical Change: Missionaries and Adjustive Response in Oceania’, *The World of Music*, Vol. 28, 1986, pp. 29-42.

McVicker, O., Fenton, C. & Pizzey, S., ‘A Church that Became a Site of Resistance and a Symbol of Hope’, *Local-Global: Studies in Community Sustainability*, RMIT University, Melbourne, 2007, pp. 41-9.

Maddison, S., *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relations in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011.

Madigan, C. T., *Central Australia*, Oxford University Press, London, 1936.

Magowan, F., ‘Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity: Translocal Sentiments in Australian Aboriginal Christian Songs’, *Identities*, Vol.14, No.4, 2007, pp. 459-83.

Markus, A., *Governing Savages*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 2003.

Mellor, D. & Haebich, A. (eds.), *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2002.

Memmott, P. & Moran, M. ‘Indigenous Settlements of Australia’, Australian State of the Environment Second Technical Paper Series (Human Settlements), Series 2, Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2001,  
<http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2001/publications/technical/indigenous/types.html>,  
 accessed 18 March 2010.

Mendoza, M., ‘Converted Christians, Shamans, and the House of God: The Reasons for Conversion Given by the Western Toba of the Argentine Chaco’ in A. Buckser & S. D.

Gazier (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003, pp. 199-207.

Merriam, A. P., *The Anthropology of Music*, Northwestern University Press, USA, 1968.

Miller, J., 'Missions, Social Change, and Resistance to Authority: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Relative Autonomy of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 32, No.1, 1993, pp. 29-50.

Minutjukur, A., in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p 1.

Minutjukur, M., 'Indigenous Politics: A Letter to Australians', *Australian Options*, Issue 47, Summer 2006, pp. 6-8,  
<[http://www.australian-options.org.au/issues/options\\_47/article\\_minutjukur.php](http://www.australian-options.org.au/issues/options_47/article_minutjukur.php)>,  
accessed 1 May 2007.

— 'An Open Letter to Jenny Macklin', 13 August 2008,  
<<http://newmatilda.com/tag/makinti-minutjukur>>, accessed 15 August 2011.

Mollenhaur, S., 'Warburton Mission: A Brief History', in *Mission Time in Warburton: An exhibition Exploring Aspects of the Warburton Mission History 1933-1973*, Tjulyuru Regional Arts Gallery, Warburton Arts Press, Warburton, 2002, pp. 65-75.

Morphy, H. & Morphy, F., 'The "Myths" of Ngalakan History: Ideology and Images of the Past in Northern Australia', *Man*, New series, Vol. 19, No. 3, September, 1984, pp. 459-78.

Morphy, H., *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 1998.

— 'Gillen-Man of Science', in J. Mulvaney, H. Morphy, & A. Petch (eds.), *'My Dear Spencer': The Letters of F. J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 23-50.

Morton, J., *Desert Voices: Pitjantjatjara Women's Art and Craft*, ProQuest, Edmonton, Alberta, 1997.

Moss, R., *The Hard Light of Day: An Artist's Story of Friendships in Arrernte Country*, UQP, St Lucia, 2010.

Mountford, C.P., *Ayers Rock: Its People, their Beliefs and Their Art*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965.

Mundine, W., 'Indigenous Freedom', Bennelong Society Conference 2005, *Remote Aboriginal Communities: Where Are the Jobs?*, 2005,  
<<http://www.bennelong.com.au/conferences/conference2005/Mundine2005.php>>,  
accessed 20 June 2006.

Myers, F. R., *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Smithsonian Institution, USA, 1986.

— 'All Around Australia and Overseas: Christianity and Indigenous Identities in Central Australia 1988', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010, pp. 110-28.

Neville, A. O., *Australia's Coloured Minority*, Currawong Publishing Co Pty Ltd., Sydney, 1947.

Nyaningu, P., in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and Their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, p. 20.

O’Riordan, M., ‘50 of Australia’s Most Collectable Artists: Hector Burton’, *Australian Art Collector*, December 2010, p. 189.

Palmer, K., ‘Dealing with the Legacy of the Past: Aborigines and Atomic Testing in South Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 14, 1990, pp.197-207.

Paterson, A., ‘Historical Interactions between Aborigines and European Pastoralists in Australia’s Drylands’, in M. Smith & P. Hesse (eds.), *23S: Archaeology and Environmental History of the Southern Deserts*, National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, ACT, 2005, pp. 267-80.

Pattel-Gray, A., *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1998.

Payne, H., ‘Residency and Ritual Rights’, in J. C. Kassler & J. Stubington (eds.), *Problems and Solutions: Occasional Essays in Musicology Presented to Alice M. Moyle*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1984, pp. 264-78.

Peace, R. V., ‘Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 28, No.1, January 2004, pp. 8-14.

Pearson, N., *Radical Hope: Education and Equality in Australia*, Quarterly Essay No. 35, October, 2009.

—*Up From the Mission*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2009.

Peel, J.D.Y., *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003.

Perez, E., *Kalumburu: The Benedictine Mission and the Aborigines 1908-1975*, Kalumburu Benedictine Mission, Wyndham, WA, 1977.

Peterson, N., 'Aboriginal Involvement with the Australian Economy in the Central Reserve During the Winter of 1970', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the '70s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, pp. 136-46.

Peterson, N., 'An Expanding Domain: Mobility and the Initiation Journey', *Oceania*, Vol. 70, No. 3, March 2000, pp.205-18.

Petri, H. & Petri-Odermann, G., 'Stability and Change: Present-day Historic Aspects Among Australian Aborigines', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, UWA, Nedlands, 1970, pp. 249-76.

—— 'A Nativistic and Millenarian Movement in North West Australia', in T. Swain and D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, , The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 391-96.

Poirier, S., *A World of Relationships: Itineraries, Dreams and Events in the Australian Western Desert*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2005.

Rambo, L., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1993.

Rambo, L., 'Anthropology and the Study of Conversion', in A. Buckser & S. D. Gazier (eds.), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Oxford, 2003.

Ranger, T., 'The Concept of Culture Reviewed', *Social Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 3, November, 1997, pp. 55-71.



—— ‘Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, October 2003, pp. 255-71.

—— ‘Christianity and the First Peoples: Some Second Thoughts’, in P. Brock (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change*, Leiden: Brill, Boston, 2005, pp. 15-32.

Raynes, C., *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets: An Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia, 1834-2000*, State Records of South Australia, Gepps Cross, 2002.

Reynolds, H., *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History*, Viking, Ringwood, Victoria, 2001.

—— *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006 [1981].

Rintoul, S., *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1993.

Robbins, J., ‘Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time and the Anthropology of Christianity’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 48, No. 1, February 2007, pp. 5-38.

Rolls, M., ‘Robert Lawlor Tells a “White” Lie’, *Journal of Australian Studies: Vision Splendid*, No. 66, 2000, pp. 211-18.

Rolls, M., ‘The Meaningless of Aboriginal Cultures’, *Balayi: Culture Law and Colonialism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2001, pp. 7-20.

Rose, F.G.G., *The Wind of Change in Central Australia: The Aborigines at Angas Downs 1962*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1965.

Rose, J., 'Listening to History: Some Proposals for Reclaiming the Practice of Live Music', *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 18, 2008, pp. 9-16.

Ross, H., 'Lifescape and Lived Experience', in P. Read (ed.), *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000, pp. 3-14.

Rothwell, N., *Another Country*, Black Inc., Melbourne, Vic., 2007.

Rowley, C. D., *The Remote Aborigines*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1972.

———*Outcasts in White Australia*, Pelican Books, Sydney, 1972.

———*The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1978.

Rowse, T., 'Aborigines as Historical Actors: Evidence and Inference', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 87, 1986. pp. 176-98.

———*White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

Rupert, N., 'Interview', in L. Partos (ed.), *Warka Irititja munu Kuwari Kutu: Work from the Past and the Present: A Celebration of Fifty Years of Ernabella Arts*, Ernabella Arts Inc., Ernabella, SA, 1998, p. 7.

Rupert, N., 'White Man is Coming (Nura Rupert's Story)', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, pp. 7, 14-5.

Ryan, R., 'And We Marched to the Tune of the Gumleaf Band ... But to Whose Tune Did We March?', in D. Crowdy (ed.), *Proceedings of the 2004 AISPM-ANZ Conference*,

Melbourne 2004, Association for the Study of Popular Music, Australia New Zealand Branch, 2005, pp. 21-39.

Samson, J., 'The Problem of Colonialism in the Western Historiography of Christian Missions', *Religious Studies and Theology*, Vol. 23 No. 4, 2004, pp. 3-25.

Sanneh, L., 'Researching Mission History: Book Review', *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 74, 1985, pp. 282-87.

——— *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Orbis Books, New York, 1989.

Sansom, B., 'Irruptions of the Dreamings in Post-Colonial Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 72, No. 1, September 2001, pp. 1-32.

——— 'The Brief Reach of History and the Limitation of Recall in Traditional Aboriginal Societies and Cultures', *Oceania*, Vol. 76, No. 2, July 2006, pp. 150-72.

Schultz, C., cited in M. Breen (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music: Aboriginal Music*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989.

Schurmann, E.A., *I'd Rather Dig Potatoes: Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987.

Schwarz, C., 'Carrying the Cross, Caring for Kin: The Everyday Life of Charismatic Christianity in Remote Australia', *Oceania*, Vol. 80, No. 1, March 2010, pp. 58-77.

Schwartz, C. & Dussart, F., 'Christianity in Aboriginal Australia Revisited', in C. Schwartz & F. Dussart (eds.), *Engaging Christianity in Aboriginal Australia*, The Australian Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010, pp. 1-13.

Scrimgeour, R.J., *Some Scots Were Here: A History of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1986.

Shaw, B., *Our Heart is the Land: Aboriginal Reminiscences from the Western Lake Eyre Basin*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1995.

Sheard, L., *An Australian Youth Among Desert Aborigines: Journal of an Expedition Among the Aborigines of Central Australia*, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1964.

Sheppard, N., *Sojourn on Another Planet*, Gillingham Printers, Underdale, SA, 2004.

Sherlock, P., 'Missions, Colonialism and the Politics of Agency', in A. Barry, J. Cruickshank, A. Brown-May & P. Grimshaw (eds.), *Evangelists of Empire?: Missionaries in Colonial History*, [online] University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 13-22.

Shonle, R., 'The Christianising Process Among Preliterate Peoples', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1924, pp. 261-80.

Smith, M.A., 'Desert Archaeology, Linguistic Stratigraphy and the Spread of the Western Desert Language', in P. Veth, M. Smith & P. Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples: Archaeological Perspectives* Blackwell Publishing, Carlton, Vic., 2005, pp. 222-42.

Spencer, B. and Gillen, F.J. *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, Dover Publications, New York, 1968 [1899].

———*The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1904.

———*The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1927.

Stanner, W.E.H., 'Review', *Folklore*, Vol. 48, No. 4, December 1937, p. 407.

—— 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism', in R. M. Berndt & C. H. Berndt (eds.), *Aboriginal Man in Australia: Essays in Honour of Emeritus Professor A. P. Elkin*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965.

—— *After the Dreaming: The 1968 Boyer Lectures*, ABC, Sydney, 1974.

—— *White Man Got no Dreaming*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1979.

—— *On Aboriginal Religion*, Oceania Monograph 36, University of Sydney, 1989.

—— 'Continuity and Change Among the Aborigines (1958)', *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 146-71.

Stanton, J., 'Mt. Margaret: Missionaries and the Aftermath', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 292-307.

Stillman, A. K., 'Prelude to a Comparative Investigation of Protestant Hymnody in Polynesia', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 25, 1993, pp. 89-99.

Strehlow, T. G. H., 'Assimilation Problems, the Aboriginal Viewpoint', University of Adelaide, 1961.

—— *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1969.

—— *Songs of Central Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971.

—— 'Christian Missions: Places of Refuge or Concentration Centres?', *The Strehlow Research Foundation*, Pamphlet No. 1, Vol. 1, December 1977.

—cited in K. S. Strehlow, *The Operation of Fear in Traditional Aboriginal Society in Central Australia*, The Strehlow Research Foundation Inc., Prospect, SA, Pamphlet No. 3, Vol. 1, [1978]1990, pp. 3-7.

Stubington, J., *Singing the Land: The Power of Performance in Aboriginal Life*, Currency House Inc., Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2007.

Sullivan, P., '[Searching for the Intercultural, Searching for the Culture](#)', *Oceania*, Vol. 75 No. 3, 2005, pp. 183-94.

Sutton, P. (ed.), *Country: Aboriginal Boundaries and Land Ownership in Australia*. Aboriginal History Monograph 3, Aboriginal History Inc., 2005.

— 'The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Policy in Australia Since the 1970s', *Anthropological Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2001, pp. 125-73.

Sutton, P., *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2009.

Taylor, G., 'The Frontiers of Settlement in Australia' *The Geographical Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 1926, pp. 1-25.

Thomson, D., *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Vic., 2006.

Tindale N. B., 'The Pitjandjara', in M.G. Bicchieri (ed.), *Hunters and Gatherers Today*, Waveland Press, Illinois, 1972, pp. 217-65.

Tindale, N. B., 'Tribal Boundaries in Aboriginal Australia' reproduced in B. Arthur & F. Morphy (eds.), *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia*, 2005, Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd., NSW, 1974.

Tjapiya, Tjikalyi, 'A Day in Mission Times', in U. Eickelkamp (ed.), *Don't Ask for Stories: The Women from Ernabella and their Art*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, pp. 18, 21.

Tjupuru, J., 'Mutuka Nyakuntja: The Seeing of a Motor Car', translated by W. H. Edwards, University of South Australia, nd.

Tonkinson, R., *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade*, Cummings Publishing Company, Menlo Park, California, 1974.

Tonkinson, R., 'Reflections on a Failed Crusade', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 60-73.

Tonkinson, R., *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Fort Worth, 1991.

Torres Strait Regional Authority, <<http://www.tsra.gov.au/the-torres-strait/events/coming-of-the-light.aspx>>, accessed 20 January 2012.

Toyne, P. & Vachon, D., *Growing Up the Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for their Land*, McPhee Gribble Publishers Pty Ltd, Fitzroy, Victoria, 1984.

Tregenza, E., *Tjukurpa Pulkatjara: The Power of the Law*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, SA, 2010.

Trigger, D., *Whitefella Comin'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

Trigger, D. & Asche, W., 'Christianity, Cultural Change and the Negotiation of Rights in Land and Sea', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2010, pp. 90-109.

Trudinger, D., 'The Language(s) of Love: JRB Love and Contesting Tongues at Ernabella Mission Station, 1940-46', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 31, 2007, pp. 27-44.

Tur, M., cited in D. Mellor & A. Haebich (eds.), *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2002, p 7.

Turner, D., 'The Incarnation of Nambirrirrma' in T. Swain and D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 470-84.

Tylor, E. B., *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, J. Murray, London, 1891.

Vachon, D., 'Political Consciousness and Land Rights among the Australian Western Desert People', in E. Leacock & R. Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 461-90.

Veth, P., 'Cycles of Aridity and Human Mobility', in P. Veth, M. Smith & P. Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples: Archaeological Perspectives*, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton, Vic., 2005, pp. 100-15.

Wallace, N., 'Pitjantjatjara Decentralisation in North-west South Australia', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the '70s*, AIAS, Canberra, pp. 124-35.



——1977, 'Change in Spiritual and Ritual Life in Pitjantjatjara (Bidjandjadjara) Society, 1966-1973', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the '70s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, pp. 74-89.

Wallace, P. & Wallace, N., *Killing me Softly*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), West Melbourne, Vic., 1977.

Wallace, N., 'The Religion of the Aborigines of the Western Desert' in M. Charlesworth, D. Kimber & N. Wallace (eds.), *Ancestor Spirits: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Life and Spirituality*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1990.

Walls, A., *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996.

Warren, M., *The Missionary Movement from Britain in Modern History*, SCM Press Ltd, Bloomsbury St, London, 1965.

White, I. 'From Camp to Village: Some Problems of Adaptation', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and change: Australia in the '70s*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1977, pp. 100-05.

Whitehouse, H., 'Appropriated and Monolithic Christianity in Melanesia', in F. Cannell (ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006, pp. 295-307.

Wild, S.A., 'Recreating the *Jukurrpa*: Adaptation and Innovation of Songs and Ceremonies in Warlpiri Society', in Clunies Ross, M., Donaldson, T. & Wild, S. A. (eds.), *Songs of Aboriginal Australia*, Oceania Monograph, University of Sydney, 1987, pp. 97-115.

Williams, R. M., *A Song in the Desert*, Angus & Robertson, Pymble, NSW, 1998.

Williams, R. M. & Ruhen, Olaf, *Beneath Whose Hand: The Autobiography of R. M. Williams*, The MacMillan Company, [1984] 2006, p. 66.

Willis, P., 'Riders in the Chariot: Aboriginal Conversion at Kununurra', in T. Swain & D. B. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, SA, 1988, pp. 308-20.

Woenne, S. Todd, 'Old Country, New Territory: Some Implications of the Settlement Process', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the '70s*, AIAS, Canberra, 1977, pp. 54-64.

Wood, P., 'Afterword: Boundaries and Horizons', in R. W. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, California, 1993, pp. 305-22.

Woolmington J., 'The Civilisation/Christianise Debate and the Australian Aborigines', *Aboriginal History*, Vol.10, No.2, 1986, pp. 90-8.

Yengoyan, A. A., 'Demographic Factors in Pitjandjara Social Organization', in R. M. Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, UWA, Nedlands, WA, 1970, pp. 70-91.

—— 'Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia', in R. W. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity*, University of California Press, California, 1993, pp. 233-58.

Young, D., 'The Life and Death of Cars: Private Vehicles on the Pitjantjatjara Lands, South Australia' in D. Miller (ed.), *Car Cultures*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 35-57.

—— 'Water as Country on the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands South Australia', *Worldviews*, Vol.10, No. 2, 2006, pp. 239-58.

———*Nyukana (Daisy) Baker: A Retrospective*, Jam Factory Contemporary Craft and Design, Adelaide, 2009.

———‘Dingo Scalping and the Frontier Economy in the North-west of South Australia’, in I. Keen (ed.), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies*, 2010, <[http://epress.anu.edu.au/indig\\_participation/pdf/whole.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/indig_participation/pdf/whole.pdf)>, accessed 9 June 2011.

Yunkaporta, B., cited in S. Rintoul, ‘Under the Mission Bell’, *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1993, p. 126.