Language and the Mission

Talking and Translating on Groote Eylandt 1943-1973

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Declaration

Except where due reference has been made, this thesis is my own original and sole-authored work.

Laura Rademaker
Readers of this thesis are warned that it contains names and images of people who are deceased.
Abstract

This thesis examines the ways missionary encounters with indigenous languages challenged or contributed to processes of colonisation – an issue that is contested by historians and anthropologists alike. Missionaries all over the world have faced the challenge of sharing their Word with another culture, another language. The thesis grapples with the question of whether the imperatives of translation resulted in cooperative relationships with local people or whether the determination to translate made indigenous languages and cultures vulnerable to ‘colonisation’ by the missionary ‘expert’. That is, did missionaries turn indigenous languages themselves into instruments of colonisation?

In the case of Christian missions to Aboriginal people in Australia, the Australian languages have, so far, received little attention from historians. In redressing this, the thesis discusses Australia’s Aboriginal mission history to the context of broad international debate about the colonising nature of missionary engagement with indigenous languages. It does this by investigating the relatively recent case of the Church Missionary Society missions to the Anindilyakwa people of Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory from 1943 to 1973.

The thesis argues that the mission was a site of diverse engagements, strategic resistance, adaptation and negotiation on behalf of Anindilyakwa people and missionaries. Missionaries used language both to assure themselves of their own ascendency and to coax Anindilyakwa people to listen to their teachings. Yet the missionaries’ dependence on interpreters meant that their power was always limited, their message mediated, and their teachings translated. Furthermore, ideas and practices were transmitted or translated across cultures in ways that were not always expected or harmonious. Differences in language and in cultures of orality and literacy, as well as the possibilities of translation, allowed Anindilyakwa people to selectively embrace missionary teachings and practices, incorporating them into their own cultures in diverse ways. Missionaries, likewise, found themselves unexpectedly transformed as they were increasingly immersed in Anindilyakwa language, culture and society. The thesis concludes that translation was simultaneously a site of colonisation and an opportunity for indigenous agency and challenges to colonisation. Aboriginal agency was not limited to collaboration or resistance. Rather, Anindilyakwa people engaged with missionaries and their Word in diverse ways, some supporting
missionaries, others reacting, resisting or disengaging, and still others translating and reinterpreting missionary imports for themselves.

The thesis explores themes of translation of language and culture; texts and literacies; missionary linguistic projects; and of songs in translation across cultures. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from anthropology, linguistics, missiology and musicology. It uses language as a lens to engage with broader histories of assimilation, indigenous modernities, cultural engagement and survival, of race and identity in twentieth-century Australia. It also sheds light on a broader story of colonisation, revealing the struggle to speak Aboriginal languages as a pivotal part of the struggle for Aboriginal land and identities.
Acknowledgements

There are so many generous people who have contributed to this work.

Firstly, I thank the Anindilyakwa people of Groote Eylandt. Thank you for allowing me to come to your country and delve into your stories. I still have much more to learn and hope to continue listening to what you have to teach me.

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I thank the Anindilyakwa Land Council for supporting my research. In particular, Ben Hall and Judy Lalara assisted me with their specialist knowledge on the anthropological front. Nancy Lalara and Grant Burgoyne have been keen to help me develop my cultural understanding and provide practical assistance to me while on the island.

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My work has been enriched immensely through oral histories. I thank all of my oral history participants for their willingness to share such personal stories with me. I have been constantly impressed by people’s generosity with their emotions and time, and their concern for my research.

Finally I thank my husband, Phil, who is likely looking forward to no longer being a PhD-spouse. He is a great blessing to me.
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# Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ABM</td>
<td>Australian Board of Missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIATSIS</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHP</td>
<td>Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMA</td>
<td>Church Missionary Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS SA</td>
<td>CMS Records Adelaide (South Australia &amp; Northern Territory Branch)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEAT</td>
<td>Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>Mitchell Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOM</td>
<td>Methodist Overseas Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAA</td>
<td>National Archives of Australia</td>
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<td>NLA</td>
<td>National Library of Australia</td>
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<td>NTAS</td>
<td>Northern Territory Archive Service</td>
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<td>NTRS</td>
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<td>RAAF</td>
<td>Royal Australian Air Force</td>
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Introduction

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:9, King James Version.

Ena ayaka eningarakburakba-kiya ngakwurra-langwa nara-wiya a-kirukwularrina aduwaba ngakwurra-langa ena ayakwa ... Ena Amurnduwurrariya amamurukwa-murra akina na-ngekburakjungwunuma ngakwurra-langwi-yada, angalyi-yada akwa warnumalyi-yada ngarraki-dirrburakinama.

These words of ours are from the old days before we were born ... The words come from our ceremonies to teach us about places and relationships.

Gula Lalara¹

So the old man, Gula Lalara, nicknamed the ‘professor’ of Groote Eylandt, explained the deep value of Anindilyakwa words. The words come from the old days, containing the secrets of his country, ceremony and kin.

In the history of Aboriginal Australia, the use of languages has been loaded with cultural, spiritual and political meanings for Aboriginal people and missionaries alike. From the 1940s to the early 1970s, a doctrine of assimilation dominated white discourses of Aboriginality and concerted efforts to aid what was believed to be the inevitable fading away of Aboriginal cultures and with them,

Aboriginal languages. This period, however, can also be understood as an era of innovation and cultural engagement, particularly at the missions.

This thesis looks at the interactions between Anindilyakwa people of the Groote Eylandt archipelago and missionaries of the Church Missionary Society of Australia (CMS), with a particular focus on language. It is a fine-grain exploration of how language shaped the encounters between Aboriginal people and missionaries and how each used language to influence, evade or engage with the other. I focus on the period between 1943 and 1973. That is, from the establishment of Angurugu Mission to the beginning of the Commonwealth Government’s self-determination policy and introduction of formal bilingual education for select Aboriginal schools (beginning with, among others, Angurugu School). Language presents an opportunity to delve into issues of identity, into the meanings of texts and cultures in translation and into competing claims to name, own and control. In doing so, I touch on histories of assimilation, indigenous modernities, cultural engagement and survival, of race and identity in twentieth-century Australia. I argue that the mission was a site of strategic resistance, adaptation and negotiation on behalf of Anindilyakwa speakers and English-speaking missionaries. The missionary programme always required accommodation, translation and reinterpretation in light of the actions of local people. These processes of translation and reinterpretation were multidirectional and fluid as English and Anindilyakwa speakers alike were transformed (or ‘translated’) and ‘reinterpreted’ the other in unexpected ways and with unintended consequences.

Whereas others have studied the history of Australian languages from a linguistic perspective, I adopt a socio-cultural approach. William McGregor’s book *Encountering Aboriginal languages*, for example, provides a detailed overview of the history of linguistic work and thought in Australia as well as histories of work in particular regions. Yet it is written primarily with linguistic concerns in mind: development of field work techniques and advancements in linguistic knowledge. Instead, I use language to understand social relationships. I make use of Pierre Bourdieu’s model of ‘language economies’ whereby linguistic exchanges occur within relationships of power in an economy of ‘unequal distribution of linguistic capital’. Constant competition for the legitimacy

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and value of one language over others is part of the negotiations among various social groups who possess authority in these languages. According to this approach, the struggles and negotiations over uses of English and Aboriginal languages will also shed light on the broader struggles of colonisation in Australia.

The rise of some languages to prominence and the fading of others to extinction are constants in the history of languages. Some would ask then, why worry about the relative strength or even the passing of languages? But today, languages are dying out faster than ever before, currently one language every two weeks. In Australia, of the 250 or so languages spoken at the time of British colonisation, only thirteen still have strong speaking communities. One of these is Anindilyakwa. A major killer in this global epidemic is, as linguist Nick Evans pointed out, the belief that ‘everything wise and important can be, and has been, said in English.’ Likewise linguist Anna Wierzbicka criticised the implicit message in the presumption of English. That is, the message that English-speakers are ‘the most advanced state of human society.’ She wrote that monolingual English speakers are ‘imprisoned in English’ and unduly limited in their capacity for creative thought. Despite the benefits of bilingualism and a long-established consensus among linguists that children who learn to read their own language first will achieve higher results in English literacy, bilingual education for Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory presently seems a political impossibility. The myth of the universal utility of English, its normality and sufficiency is deeply ingrained in Australia.

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5 Nicholas Evans, Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xviii.
6 Anindilyakwa has approximately 1,600 full speakers (i.e. people who are ‘able to express almost everything in the language’) from all age groups. Doug Marmion, Kazuko Obata, and Jakelin Troy, Community, Identity, Wellbeing: The Report of the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey (Canberra: AIATSIS, 2014), xii, 15–16.
7 Evans, Dying Words, xxii.
9 Ibid, 6–7, 185, 192.
But for many Australians for whom English is not a first language, monolingualism is neither normal nor desirable. Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land societies are highly multilingual and enriched by their languages. It is normal to speak two, three, four or more languages. This is partly due to marriage laws. Arnhem Land people marry outside their own clan; this normally means someone who speaks a different language.\textsuperscript{9} Judy Lalara, an Anindilyakwa woman, explained to me in her oral history how she switches languages according to her relationships.

I speak Nunggubuyu from the Numbulwar area. I speak Anindilyakwa, I speak Nunggubuyu language. I used to talk in Kriol, but when I'm with white, when I'm with you or with [an anthropologist] I speak English. Because when I'm at home I speak both language, Nunggubuyu and Anindilyakwa. Because my grandmother's son's a Nunggubuyu speaker.\textsuperscript{12}

Language, for Aboriginal people, not only reflects family relationships, but also indicates how one is related to the land.\textsuperscript{13} Each language is connected to particular country because it is the language of the mythic creative beings who brought the landscape into formation. Language is embedded in the earth. In Anindilyakwa song and story, the language was carried to the island, long ago by Yandarrnga and his sons – now rock formations - on his journey from the mainland to where he now sits as Central Hill on Groote Eylandt. A Wuramarba man gave the anthropologist, David Turner, the story:

\begin{center}
\textit{Jagina nireberga Aburgmadja jaugularjwa mandja anaja Bickerton ...}
\textit{Nanjeregagäna naburerañna bija ëbina gambira wanidjuwa waniabarayba agubuda nemamberugwa ... Nelegenemana magada lanjwa, nelegenana ge, ge, ge ...}
\textit{Jingura nenjwiljaqa, jingura ënna ajauugwa jaugularjwa nepadjidjuwa ënna ...}
\end{center}

That Central Hill, he came out of the water at our country Bickerton ... He was drying himself but he sank down in the mud, so he dropped some of his sons (as rocks) ... Yandarrnga went on from the sea, he went on and on ...

Anindilyakwa language, the sons took

\textsuperscript{9} Evans, Dying Words, 9.
\textsuperscript{10} Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December 2012.
\textsuperscript{11} Evans, Dying Words, 6.
‘Djui’ najāma aragba nelegana. ‘Djui’ againa Agaguljuwa. Nijama aragba Nejābidjuwa nijamindjama da da da ...
Jagina nejāgberagagadjuywa, jagina aragba jagina jināberaga billabonga amaguljamuda … Ṣawa bina da.

From an Aboriginal perspective, land and language are inseparable; they were formed together. By recognising the language of the country, therefore, one also recognises the speakers of the language as owning and belonging to the land. Given the primacy of language to Aboriginal systems of belonging and land-ownership, the struggle for land upon colonisation also involves the struggle for the survival of Aboriginal languages. That the demise of so many Australian languages and the survival of others has received little attention from historians could indicate a presumption that Australia is and was always going to be an English speaking land. Through examining the history of one Aboriginal language — Anindilyakwa — on its encounter with English, I challenge assumptions of the normality and universal utility of English as well as its status as the language of this land.

Like the Anindilyakwa story of Yandarrnga, missionaries also told a story about language and place. It was an ancient story, translated into English, stemming from Near Eastern oral tradition. ‘And the whole earth was of one language’, it begins. The people at Babel, attempted to build a tower to heaven, saying ‘let us make us a name’. For their pride, they were scattered across the face of the earth, speaking all kinds of languages. Oneness and the right to name humanity were reserved for God alone.

The Babel story encapsulates many of the tensions and complexities within the missionaries’ project. Babel is a story about universal visions of advancement. The people at Shinar, through

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15 Evans, *Dying Words*, 8–9.
16 Genesis 11:3–9.
technological superiority, were constructing a name for themselves, building a monolingual empire, perhaps not unlike a vision of a monocultural English-speaking Australia. According to anthropologists Jean and John Comaroffs, the devastating impact of missionaries on indigenous people was a hegemonic dynamic of missions which would take from indigenous people the ability to imagine the world could be otherwise. Evangelical Christianity pursues a universalist vision: to bring all people under one God as one family with one Spirit. As historian Elizabeth Prevost explains, missionaries were caught between Christian constructions of universalism and an imperial project of ‘othering,’ that is, of scripting difference for colonised peoples. Their Babel story could be understood to condemn such otherness and diversity as accursed. Whether the tower is best understood as the globalisation of Christendom, nationalism, modernity or empire, it was a construction that envisaged the whole earth incorporated in a single project.

Yet, Aboriginal people have not always embraced the universals missionaries offered. Fiona Magowan has shown how indigenous societies have responded to their encounters with Christianity in ways which both embrace and resist universalising tendencies. Likewise, Heather McDonald questioned whether the Christian universalising project in East Kimberly was achievable because Aboriginal traditions connect people to land in a way that is local and particular. Babel could be re-built on Australian soil easily.

In writing this history of language negotiations and translations, I too use language. As Alan Atkinson points out, historians ‘participate in the market of language.’ Like the missionaries, I also participate in a national culture of English literary which can silence those who do not have access. Moreover, I am using written English to convey my history. History is shared through common language, and by using written English I communicate with a particular language community – you English readers – as opposed to any other language community. Although I

include Anindilyakwa passages, I cannot tell an Anindilyakwa story, and to some extent I exclude non-English readers by telling the story in this way. Furthermore, my history of language engagements will be lopsided since I myself am a member of the community of English speakers and writers. My writing risks perpetuating the very colonising ideologies I hope to uncover; that is, the assumption that English must be the language of the public discourse, of authority and of the intellect. I hope this will not be the case. Academic history writing has limitations and its use of language to communicate to only a select audience is one such limit. But academic history is not the only form of history, and I hope my work will be of interest to Anindilyakwa speakers; it will be theirs to translate, assess and reinterpret in their own language according to their own historical practices.

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Figure 1 Location of Groote Eylandt

Figure 2 Groote Eylandt Archipelago

The Groote Eylandt archipelago sits around 40km east of the Arnhem Land coast on the western side of the Gulf of Carpentaria (about 630km east of Darwin). The archipelago consists of over one hundred islands, of which Groote Eylandt is the largest (2,260km²), followed by Bickerton Island (210km²), which sits between Groote Eylandt and the mainland. Groote Eylandt's landscape is made up of dune fields, coastal plains, sand plains and a central sandstone plateau. Its rivers and billabongs teem with fish, crabs, prawns and turtles. Its ducks, geese and wallabies make for good food, as do its yams and fruits: the bush mango, custard finger, bush fig, berries, passionfruits and peaches. The island's climate is tropical. The monsoon comes in December and lasts until April or March when the 'dry' returns.

The archipelago is the country of fourteen Aboriginal patrilineal clans divided into two moieties (halves) of seven clans, each with their own territories. The moiety system regulates marriage; one may only marry someone of the opposite moiety (on Groote Eylandt there are no sections or subsections). Unlike other Aboriginal language groups, the Anindilyakwa moieties have no names. In English, they are 'Moiety One' and 'Moiety Two', which correspond to the Yolngu moieties Yirritja and Dhuwa respectively. Anindilyakwa people simply refer to their own moiety as yirrenikaburra ('we-moiety-fellows') and the other as wurrenikaburra ('they-moiety-fellows'): 'us' and 'them'. The fourteen clans speak Anindilyakwa, though technically the language belongs to the Wanindilyakwa clan (the Mamarika and Amagula families). The Bickerton Island clans are bilingual. They speak Wubuy, a language from the mainland, but have learned Anindilyakwa and

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35 Frederick G. G. Rose, Classification of Kin, Age Structure, and Marriage amongst the Groote Eylandt Aborigines: A Study in Method and a Theory of Australian Kinship (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960), 65; Worsley, Knowledges, 32.
37 Julie Anne Waddy, Classification of Plants & Animals from a Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Point of View, vol. 1 (Darwin: Australian National University, 1988), 49; Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 221.
live, for extended periods, on Groote Eylandt. The clans are linked by ceremony and a common kinship and marriage system.

Though I refer to 'clans', this concept is a European construction. From an Anindilyakwa perspective, society is based, first of all on songs and songlines. That is, the songs and journeys of creative beings (also called 'totems') over the landscape long ago (also called the 'Dreamtime'). These beings created the spiritual identities of people belonging to those places and determine their relationships with other people. The people who share a common spiritual identity, connected to the same songs, places and creative beings make up what Europeans would consider a 'clan'.

Groote Eylandt people do not have a name for themselves as a whole. Since I write about language – language negotiations and language communities – I refer to people groups in terms of language. I use 'Anindilyakwa speakers' or 'Anindilyakwa people' to refer to all fourteen clans of the archipelago which speak Anindilyakwa. I often refer to Anindilyakwa people by (one of) their first names rather than by surname. Surnames were introduced by missionaries in the 1960s in order to satisfy the administrative requirements of the Commonwealth Government's Welfare Branch. The clans chose names connected to the creative beings and songlines. 'Lalara', for example, means 'dangerous snakes' and was chosen because of the king brown snake who travelled around Lalara country on the mainland in the Creation Period. Not only are these surnames anachronistic when used for people before 1960, but since surnames follow clan lines, surnames are not useful for identifying individuals of the same clan.

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29 Ibid; Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 10.
Anindilyakwa is a fascinating language. Incredibly grammatically complex, in 1942 linguist Arthur Capell described it as 'by far the most complicated [language] in north Australia, perhaps in the whole of Australia.' Later, anthropologist Peter Worsley called it 'ferociously difficult,' 'one of the worst languages in Australia to learn' and linguist Robert Dixon suggested it is 'perhaps the most difficult of all Australian languages.' Most indigenous Australian languages are Pama-Nyungan languages (including Yolngu, Arandic, Karnic, Nyungar), sharing a related words for 'man' ('pama' and 'nyunga' each mean 'man'), but Anindilyakwa is one of a few non-Pama-Nyungan Australian languages. These non-Pama-Nyungan languages make Northern Australia the most linguistically complex and diverse region of the continent. Like other non-Pama-Nyungan languages, Anindilyakwa is a prefixing and head-marking language. It was long believed to be a language isolate, that is, having no demonstrable relationship with other languages (like more famous language isolates such as Basque or Korean), but only recently linguists have claimed it is actually part of the ‘Greater Gunwinyguan’ family of Arnhem Land. Linguist Marie-Elaine van Egmond has shown that Anindilyakwa shares a common ancestor with Wubuy and Ngandi and has numerous similarities with these languages.

Whereas in English, the order of words in a sentence is very important to its meaning, Anindilyakwa, like most Aboriginal languages, has a free word order. Where Anindilyakwa has four distinctions for number (singular, dual, trial and plural), English has only two: singular and plural. Anindilyakwa has much fewer vowel sounds than English, but many more consonants (English has 24 consonant sounds, whereas Anindilyakwa has 32). This means that an English
speaker may not be able to distinguish the subtle differences between Anindilyakwa sounds. Some Anindilyakwa consonants are present in English, such as ‘ng’ (as in ‘sing’ in English) but unlike in English, occur at the beginning of words, so English speakers may struggle even with ‘simple’ Anindilyakwa words such as ‘ngarnda’, meaning ‘mummy’. Nearly every Anindilyakwa word ends in the vowel ‘a’, giving the language a beautiful lilting sound, a softness which makes the words wonderfully singable.

I came to this subject as a result of my growing interest in the role of missions in the colonisation of Australia. As a child, I was immersed in evangelical Anglicanism in Sydney and heard a lot about missionaries. My own church had sent families to France and Cambodia with the CMS and we heard of their fortunes and misfortunes weekly. Every morning their smiles greeted me from the kitchen; my parents, like many other families, had attached their photos to the fridge door to remind us to pray for our missionaries.

My sunny childhood view of missionary work, however, increasingly came under question as I reached maturity in post-Christian Australia. I learned of colonialism and dispossession. I noticed the absence of women or of indigenous evangelists in epic missionary tales and wondered what they were doing or thinking. And so, my personal confusion grew into an ongoing interest in the complex ways the missionary project has been entangled in imperial and national projects. Missionaries, it has been claimed, were colonisation’s ‘foot soldiers’. Australian historian Bain Attwood called the missionary movement ‘a second onslaught’ of European conquest, describing missionaries as ‘agents of European “civilisation”’ who sought to remake Aboriginal people in their own image. Noel Loos commented that missionaries ‘did less harm than any other group of colonists’, but nonetheless numbered them among the colonists. How were missionaries involved in processes of colonisation? Should we understand them as active agents of dispossession, or were they merely complicit, with their attempts at philanthropy achieving mixed results? Whose ‘side’ were they on, and is ‘sides’ even a useful category for understanding these relationships? I approach this thesis as a non-indigenous woman who remains a practising

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Christian and can sympathise with missionaries in many ways. I do not think missionaries were simply irrational or malevolent. Instead, I am curious about their thinking. In some ways, missionaries were noble people: unlike the ‘misfits’ and ‘mercenaries’, missionaries went north, determined to save souls, heal disease and teach the ignorant. Yet this benign appearance also allowed them to exercise immense power over Aboriginal lives, making them accomplices of colonisation.

The CMS emerged out of the evangelical revivals in late eighteenth-century England.\(^4^8\) Then known as the ‘Eclectic Society’, it first discussed launching overseas missions in 1786, in particular the prospect of ‘planting and promulgating the Gospel in Botany Bay.’ Australia became a potential mission field even before there was a colony of New South Wales. In 1799 they established their ‘Society for Missions to Africa and the East,’ which later became the CMS.\(^4^9\)

Through the nineteenth century, the CMS established missions across the Empire. Despite the original intent to evangelise Botany Bay, its work in Australia was limited during the nineteenth century. It operated only briefly in the 1830s at the Wellington Valley Mission. In 1892 Church Missionary Associations (CMA) were established in New South Wales and Victoria, both independent of the ‘Parent Society’. These sent Australian missionaries around the world and operated Aboriginal missions in Victoria and later Arnhem Land.\(^5^0\) In 1916 the Associations came together forming CMS Australia. The CMS distinguished itself from the other Anglican mission organisation in Australia, the Australian Board of Missions (ABM). The CMS was governed by lay people, not the church establishment unlike the ABM. The CMS was also a Low Church evangelical society unlike the High Church ABM. Although CMS Australia remained autonomous, the Australians considered themselves ‘a true heir to the Society of the 19\(^{th}\) Century,’ sharing the heritage and evangelicalism of the Parent Society in England.\(^5^1\)

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\(^{4^8}\) Ibid. p.1


Figure 3 Northern Territory CMS Missions

The CMS began sustained efforts to evangelise Australian Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in 1908 when the Victorian CMA established the Roper River Mission (now Ngukurr). In 1914, the Commonwealth Government divided the Northern Territory into 'spheres of influence', giving permission for various Christian denominations to operate within these areas in return for providing 'welfare' and keeping Aboriginal people away from major towns. This allowed the CMS to establish further missions, beginning with Groote Eylandt's 'half caste' mission on the Emerald River in 1921, Oenpelli in 1925, Angurugu Mission in 1943 and Rose River Mission (now Numbulwar) in 1952. When trepanger Fred Gray established Umbakumba Native Settlement on the north side of Groote Eylandt in 1938, the CMS and Gray were cooperative, at first. But it did not take long for the CMS to make designs to acquire it from him and consolidate their influence on the island. They eventually did so and established Umbakumba Mission in 1958.

In the two hundred years of missionaries' contact with Aboriginal Australians, missionaries' approaches to languages have been ambiguous and at times contradictory. On the one hand missionaries directly contributed to the loss of Aboriginal languages through placing children in dormitories, schools and the separation of families. On the other hand, as John Harris has argued, language is the aspect of indigenous cultures which missionaries most embraced, and showed a greater concern for languages than other colonisers, due to their concern to communicate 'to the heart'.

Compared to work overseas, however, missionary linguistics projects in Australia were limited in scope. The overarching goal of Protestant missionary linguistics has been translation of the entire Bible. This was only accomplished in an Aboriginal language as recently as 2007 (in Kriol), indicating how little attention missionaries gave to Aboriginal languages compared to other parts.
of the world. By 1946, for example, the British and Foreign Bible Society had translated the Bible into 30 Pacific languages. Efforts began in 1824 when the London Missionary Society missionary, Lancelot Threlkeld began learning the Awabakal language of the Lake Macquarie region and, with his Aboriginal co-translator Biraban, completed a translated Gospel of Luke. CMS missionary William Watson also translated parts of John’s gospel into Wiradjuri in the 1830s. A number of Lutherans in South Australia translated portions of scripture in the nineteenth century. Carl Strehlow and J.G. Reuther completed their 1897 Dieri New Testament. Despite the growing scale of Aboriginal missions in the early twentieth century, only relatively few missionaries translated portions of scriptures. Several had intended to do so, but factors such as the large number of Aboriginal languages, local language politics and relocation of people from their homelands meant that often English became the lingua franca. The lack of missionary interest in Australian languages in the nineteenth and early twentieth century largely reflects the ‘imagined destiny’ of Aboriginal people: that is, extinction. What was the point of translating scripture if no ears remained to hear it?

By the 1940s, it became more widely acknowledged by English-speaking Australia that Aboriginal people were not in fact doomed to extinction. This development, however, did not produce a surge in linguistic activity. It was not the people who would die out but their cultures, and with them, their languages: a cultural, rather than biological ‘absorption’. In 1956, T.G.H. Strehlow published the New Testament in Arrente with a team of Aboriginal co-translators. Bob Love and others at Ernabella also advanced translation into Pitjantjatjara. Yet as late as 1964, linguist and CMS supporter Arthur Capell talked of the ‘tremendous amount of recording’ of languages which needed to be done so that the information about Aboriginal cultures ‘may be handed down to

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55 Foreword by Peter Jensen in Peter Carroll and Steven James Etherington, eds., One Land, One Saviour: Seeing Aboriginal Lives Transformed by Christ (Sydney: Church Missionary Society Australia, 2008), vii.
56 Commonwealth Council of the British and Foreign Bible Society, ‘World Wide Work,’ 1946, Northern Territory Archive Service (hereafter NTAS) Northern Territory Record Series (hereafter NTRS) NTRS 38, Records Relating to Warruwi, Box 3, Correspondence 1943-44.
58 Harris, One Blood, 836.
generations who will see them only as darker members of a European culture. Linguistic work was largely considered a matter of recording for posterity, English was supposedly the language of the future.

In recent years, historians, anthropologists and missiologists have turned to missionary linguistic projects as a lens through which to understand the complexities of mission encounters. Missionary linguistic projects reflect the multifaceted interactions at missions, where indigenous people taught missionaries their languages; missionaries’ sacred texts were translated; and indigenous evangelists propagated and reinterpreted these texts. Yet the degree to which missionary encounters with indigenous languages have contributed to or challenged processes of colonisation is contested. In 1988, Vicente Rafael described the ‘uneasy relationship between translation and conversion’ in the Spanish colonisation of the Philippines. He found translation of religious texts simultaneously instituted and subverted colonial rule, both consolidating colonisers’ hierarchies and authorities while also validating local reinterpretations of the text.

Similarly, in 1989 Louise Burkhart argued the Nahuas of sixteenth-century Mexico preserved their own identity, adapting to the ‘slippery earth’ of the colony through a distinctly Nahua interpretation of Christianity in translation.

But an alternative interpretation rejected suggestions of such precarious missionary power. In their 1991 study of colonial South Africa, anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, depicted the ‘long conversation’ between missionaries and the Southern Tswana whereby missionaries pursued a project of the ‘colonisation of consciousness’ of the Southern Tswana. The Comaroffs understood that colonisation occurs not only through military or economic force but also though gaining ‘control over the practices through which would-be subjects produce and reproduce the bases of their existence.’ For them, the impact of colonialism was in the ‘long battle for the possession of salient signs and symbols.’ It was a struggle to change the way the Southern Tswana

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64 Ibid, 1:5.
think in order to incorporate them into the culture of European capitalism and Western modernity. That is, colonisation entails a struggle to control meaning, the way people represent themselves and their understandings of the world.

Missionaries were, to the Comaroffs, the ‘foot soldiers of British colonialism’ who ‘sought to change the hearts and minds, the signs and practices of the Southern Tswana.’ For missionaries, mastering the language of the Southern Tswana was ‘a primary objective, the key to the civilising mission.’ The Comaroffs called the process of developing an orthography and translating the Bible ‘colonisation of language’ because missionaries used the Southern Tswana’s own symbols and language to penetrate the culture and to re-make it from inside in their own image. Though few Southern Tswana converted to Christianity in the way the missionaries understood conversion, the missionaries succeeded in introducing a ‘hegemonic worldview’ of rationalised modern civilisation.

On the other hand, other scholars have argued that though Christianity was brought to Africa by Europeans, it was mediated by African languages and therefore assimilated into African cultures. Although some missionaries sought to dismantle indigenous cultures, Lamin Sanneh described missionary use of vernacular languages as a ‘tacit surrender to indigenous primacy.’ Similarly, Paul Landau emphasised the agency of indigenous converts who ‘heard many different kinds of messages’ and propagated an African Christianity. Missiologist Andrew Walls argued that the Christian message was ‘set loose in Africa’ and came into ‘creative and critical encounter with

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66 Ibid, 1:44.
67 Ibid, 1:xxi.
71 Ibid, 17.
African life." The Comaroffs subsequently dismissed these critiques as a 'species of neo-revisionism which denies that Africans were ever victims of colonialism.'

A number of scholars have proposed a middle ground in this discussion. Rachael Gilmour suggested these 'polarised perceptions of colonial linguistics' reveal that language has been used to assert control but is also present in 'the intimate relations of communication and interplay of authority.' Like the Comaroffs, Derek Peterson saw missionary linguists' dictionaries — the 'reduction' of indigenous languages to writing — as implements of colonisation. Nonetheless, he found evidence of indigenous voices and concerns embedded in these texts. Peterson rejected the notion of a colonisation of African consciousness, proposing instead a model of reconstruction of both Christianity and African tradition coming out of the 'power-laden dialogue' of colonialism. Missionary discourses were 'inflected with multiple and often contradictory meanings as they were translated' and therefore 'inherently hybrid'. Similarly, Elizabeth Elbourne argued that African converts 'took up Christianity and transformed it from within,' sometimes even using Christianity to 'combat colonialism'. This is because texts and stories – especially when translated – have the capacity to be constantly re-interpreted. She argued that the Comaroffs 'silenced the voices for Christian converts who interpreted what they heard.' Elbourne also questioned the capacity of missionaries and of Christianity to convey a unified message.

Though missionaries envisaged their faith as a 'coherent, rationalising, globalising system that taught one universal truth', in reality, 'Christianity was out of control, unorthodox and an available

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78 Ibid, 165.
subject for reinterpretation according to the needs of its interlocutors.' She presented a history of cultural entanglement, of fluidity of meaning and complex relationships between coloniser and colonised.

Pacific histories emphasising indigenous reinterpretation of Christian texts have also contributed to the debate. Helen Gardner, for example, concluded that the Biblical text gained new meanings in translation in the Aneityumese community of Vanuatu. Yet these new understandings were also connected to the heritage of the missionaries. Likewise, Tony Ballantyne criticised the 'fatal impact' model of Pacific history, arguing that the Maori people 'co-opted missionary teaching.' According to Ballantyne, the introduction of literacy and a translated Maori Bible fostered Maori activism and critiques of colonisation.

My contribution to this discussion on the colonising nature of missionary linguistics is to look beyond Africa and the Pacific to Australia where missionariy linguistics was also present, but on a smaller scale and largely a more recent development. As debate continues in other parts of the world, in Australia there has been relative quiet on the history of missionary linguistics. As Hilary Carey notes, thus far, missionary linguistics has been 'almost entirely neglected' as an historical source on cultural exchanges in Australia. Harris, Peter Carroll, Steve Etherington and Lynette Oates have shed light on the history of Australia's missionary linguistics from evangelical perspectives. Robert Kenny has painted a picture of negotiation and reinterpretation of Christian texts at nineteenth-century missions without downplaying the terrible 'rupture' caused by the colonisers. Similarly, anthropologist Dianne Austin-Broos concluded that Western Arrernte people 'reimagined the Christian message' on their encounter with Lutheran missionaries.

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85 Carey, "Death, God and Linguistics," 177.
86 Harris, We Wish We'd Done More; Harris, One Blood. Carroll and Etherington, One Land, One Saviour. Lynette F. Oates, Against the Wind : Wycliffe Bible Translators Australia in Action (Lavington: G. Van Brummelen, published in cooperation with Wycliffe Bible Translators Australia, 2005).
Christian concepts became embedded in Western Arrernte language, to the extent that the missionary experience produced a ‘Western Arrernte Christian vernacular.’ Carey engaged in debates around the colonising nature of missionary linguistics in her work on Threlkeld. She revealed the complex, even contradictory relationships between missionary linguists and indigenous people. I also build on a wealth of literature on how the interplay between Australia’s assimilation policies and Christianity affected Aboriginal people in twentieth-century Australia. This includes the works of David Trudinger, Sitarani Kerin, Anna Haebich, Tim Rowse, Russel McGregor and Noel Loos.

These works have produced valuable insights into the interplay between language, power and culture in the mission context in parts of Australia. Yet the missionary experience across Aboriginal Australia was not uniform. Missionary organisations had different personalities, teachings and access to resources, just as Aboriginal groups had their own cultures, politics and resources which they brought to the missionary encounter. Aboriginal engagement with and resistance to missionary projects and teachings differ across the continent. At the same time, history on a small scale like this can illuminate wider patterns and general truths. The Groote Eylandt archipelago makes a useful case study for a language history. Unlike most other missions, a single language – Anindilyakwa – was spoken by Aboriginal people (though Wubuy and Kriol were also present to a lesser extent). This meant that English was less likely to become a *lingua franca* and Anindilyakwa was more likely to retain its legitimacy. The contained nature of an island community is also useful for understanding interactions among missionaries and

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Aboriginal people; the relationship was likely to be more intense than in other places. The concentrated nature of the language politics of Groote Eylandt brings into sharp focus patterns of negotiations over language which occurred at missions across the continent and in the Australian nation more generally.

A number of scholars have examined Groote Eylandt's mission history before me. In particular, associates of the CMS itself have produced numerous histories and biographies. These largely praise the CMS's accomplishments, although some also express regret: 'We wish we'd done more' being the title of Harris' edited collection. Similarly, Bernard Gabbott's thesis on the CMS and Methodist Overseas Mission (MOM) argues the societies' evangelical principles were unfortunately 'hijacked' by the state because the organisations lacked theological leadership. James Ingoldsby's thesis provides a useful overview of CMS's early history in Arnhem Land. Archaeologist Anne Clarke framed Groote Eylandt's history as a process of negotiation between Aboriginal people and outsiders. While Australia's mission history, including the Groote Eylandt missions, have been considered from various angles, considerable space for investigation remains, particularly with regards to histories of language and translation. With others' work in mind, therefore, I turn to the case of Groote Eylandt and its languages.


97 Clarke, "Time, Tradition and Transformation," 150.
A number of factors make this thesis a fresh contribution to Australia's mission history. First is the interdisciplinary nature of my approach. I make use of insights from the disciplines of anthropology, linguistics, theology and ethno-musicology. This is, in part, a product of my fieldwork experience. Though the academy is divided into its various branches of knowledge, Aboriginal cultures are more likely to see connections between ways of knowing that academics presume are separate. Aboriginal people told me of their songs and stories, showing how these were necessary to understand their past. As Caroline Wurramara explained, ‘songs are like history books to us. When people lose their knowledge they can listen to the songs and learn it again.’8 Hence, musical, anthropological and linguistic data is integral to my work. A number of scholars of Aboriginal history before me have also found interdisciplinarity to be a more fruitful way of approaching Aboriginal pasts.99

Secondly, I take care avoid a 'dualistic clash between cultures' model of missions.100 Of course hagiographic accounts of missionaries to 'heathen' peoples can overlook the complexities of lived experience of the past. Yet post-colonial histories can also portray the world as if it were divided into only two types of people: colonisers and colonised.101 Over-dependence on binaries — whether of coloniser and colonised; Aboriginal religion and Christianity; evangelists and evangelised — can limit subjectivity of indigenous people to either victims or resisters (rather than as agents in history) and overlook the variety and complexity of relationships and exchanges.102 While these binaries can be useful categories for analysis, I draw out the intricacies of the mission encounter, how boundaries and identities were not fixed but fluid. Of course, Aboriginal people and missionaries at the mission existed in highly unequal relationships. I seek,

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8 ‘Clan Songs Tell History,’ Ayakwa, Anindilyakwa Land Council, Issue 8, April/May 2012.
99 See, for example, Margo Neale and Martin Thomas, eds., Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011).
100 Elbourne, Blood Ground, 18; Carol Ann Pybus, “We Grew up This Place’: Ernabella Mission 1937-1974” (PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2012), iv.
therefore, to explore how people negotiated changing and power-laden relationships without downplaying the construction of binary oppositions and the devastating impact of colonisation.

Subsequently, I endeavour to avoid caricaturing Christianity as a monolith or missionaries and Anindilyakwa speakers as homogenous groups. Minoru Hokari described a ‘third generation of Aboriginal historiography’ which is characterised by its interest in ‘complex cultural and social interactions’ and ‘multiple voices from plural historical agents.’ I am interested in the pluralities and complexities of the missionary encounter. Indeed, my exploration of translation necessitates this approach since translation increases the possibilities for reinterpretation and plurality. Elbourne points out the paradox whereby evangelical Protestants expected that the Bible’s divine truths would generate a single interpretation but, in practice, the Biblical narratives allow several interpretations. This is not surprising given the Bible itself — with its four Gospels — includes a plurality of voices. In light of Elbourne’s insight, I am careful not to presume uniformities. Rather, I seek to draw out the differences across Groote Eylandt clans, the mission boards and the practices of missionaries in the field, showing how such differences produced a cacophony of voices and interests at Angurugu.

Furthermore, I explore the meanings of translation and interpretation (or mistranslation and reinterpretation) in their fullest senses to shed light on the complex relationships between language, meaning and identities in the cross-cultural context of the mission. Saurabh Dube used the concept of ‘vernacular translation’ to explore the Christianities created by colonised peoples. He describes the ‘non-certified procedures of translation’ initiated among Indian Christians in the wake of Western missionaries’ evangelisation and translation. Vernacular translation, for him, is not only the linguistic rendering of texts from one language to another but equally refers to the processes of transmutation of categories and concepts. Indian converts, he writes, ‘participated in the making of a vernacular and colonial Christianity.’ Austin-Broos also used the concept of

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103 Shoemaker, Clearing a Path, x.
105 Hokari, Gurindji Journey, 248.
106 Elbourne, Blood Ground, 18.
‘translation’ to interrogate the new and diverse meanings not only of missionary texts and words, but missionary practices, objects, songs and teachings when transplanted into a Western Arrernte context. Through this broad approach to translation, centring on but not limited to translation in its linguistic sense, I draw attention to the ways in which both missionaries and Anindilyakwa speakers selectively appropriated elements of the others’ cultures and traditions, and adapted to one another in dynamic relationships of translation, conversion and reinterpretation.

Secular academia has not always known quite how to approach religion or religious conversion. Hokari argued for the inclusion of the supernatural and spiritual in our histories for the sake of opening up new avenues for dialogue in a plural world. As Elbourne and others insist, instead of explaining religion away through material factors, historians of mission must take belief seriously as a source of missionary inspiration and work to understand religious experience and theological ideas in context. The spiritual world profoundly shaped the experiences and motivations of both Anindilyakwa speakers and, naturally, missionaries. Since religion mattered them, I also seek to take it seriously, though not uncritically. Ethically, it is important for me to recognise the spiritual realities of other people’s lives, even where I do not experience these as realities for myself. Carolyn Schwarz and Francoise Dussart point out that Aboriginal Australia has largely been sidelined in studies of Christianity and conversion. Yet Aboriginal people have engaged with Christianity in various ways, sometimes embracing it as their own, though not necessarily converting in ways that involve a rejection of Aboriginal traditions and spiritual insights. I view conversion, therefore, as a complex, dynamic and ongoing process.

For non-indigenous historians like me, writing Aboriginal history presents numerous ethical concerns. Linda Tuhiwai Smith has shown how ‘researching’ indigenous people has been a tool of

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108 Austin-Broos, “Translating Christianity.”
110 Hokari, Gurindji Journey, 258.
colonisation as non-indigenous people claim to speak for indigenous cultures. "4 Aboriginal people are among the most researched people on earth and many are rightly fed up with researchers who take and offer nothing in return."5 How can I, a non-indigenous person, challenge the racial hierarchies of the past without perpetuating inequality by silencing Aboriginal voices? Ann McGrath has helpfully pointed out that while Aboriginal history can be a site of exploitation and privilege, it is also an opportunity for cultural exchange, sharing of power, learning and growth of understanding."6 Tuhiiwai Smith suggests numerous ‘decolonised’ methodologies for indigenous projects, including an approach that ‘celebrates survival’ of indigenous people, cultures and languages. This thesis falls within this approach. More than celebrating cultural survival, however, it is also acknowledges indigenous diversity, innovation and adaptation."7 In light of these ethical concerns, I conducted research on Groote Eylandt with the permission of the Anindilyakwa Land Council, working closely with its anthropologist and the Traditional Owners. As a non-indigenous person, I cannot speak for Aboriginal people. At the same time, it has been important to incorporate Aboriginal voices and perspectives into my work, which I do largely through oral histories."8

My research has drawn on a number of mostly missionary but also government archives. This includes extensive collection of CMS records held by the Northern Territory Archive Service and the Mitchell Library. I also used CMS archives held by the CMS New South Wales Branch office in Sydney and the CMS South Australia and Northern Territory Branch office in Adelaide. These include diaries, station journals, meeting minutes and personal correspondence. I also made use of archival material held by the National Archives of Australia in Canberra and Darwin, the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the National Library of Australia.

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"8 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 34.
The missionaries knew I was coming. They preserved their records for me, or at least for some future historian. The superintendent recorded in the Station Journal, for instance, events that 'will always be remembered'. He expected that as a result of his record-keeping, his experiences would go down in Angurugu's history.9 According to the CMS in the 1960s, history is fundamentally a narrative of Christian expansion, so missionaries are the 'history-makers'.10 They therefore made provisions for the writing of their history. The CMS Federal Council's minutes include resolutions in the 1960s to 'collect and record valuable historical material associated with the Society.'11 It is important to remember the extent to which I rely on records that the missionaries themselves wanted me to read. Historians of missions can risk reconstituting inequalities of the past and perpetuating silences imposed on indigenous peoples by missions through their exclusive dependence on the mission archive.12 To mitigate this, I look for evidence of 'hybridity' embedded in mission texts, finding in them evidences of negotiation with Aboriginal people.13 I also turn to oral history with both indigenous and non-indigenous participants to sharpen my interpretation of the mission archive and to contest non-indigenous narratives where necessary.14

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9 Extracts from the Journal for May 1952, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.
12 Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race, 10.
Figure 4 St Andrew's Anglican Church Angurugu, 2012
Source: Photograph author's own.

Figure 5 The Old School, Angurugu, 2012
Source: Photograph author's own.
Most of my oral history interviews on Groote Eylandt were conducted in 2012 and 2013. I visited the island six times over the year, staying in Angurugu for two weeks at a time. I would have stayed longer (especially because I hoped to learn more Anindilyakwa), but longer term accommodation was not available. I was able to make day trips to Umbakumba and spent a week at Numbulwar, but was otherwise based in Angurugu, spending my time either at the Aged Care Centre or Linguistics Centre. At first, very few people would speak to me, but each time I returned to the island the relationships grew stronger, more people took an interest in my project, more people encouraged me and shared their memories.

As much as possible, I encouraged Anindilyakwa people to determine the context and nature of our interviews. They chose the location. They decided who would be present. Often, the two oldest male traditional owners – Jabani Lalara and Murabuda Wurramarba – would meet with me together. They are from opposite moieties. One would listen and check what the other told, often confirming important details or correcting the story. These two gave me the ‘official’ history of Angurugu, the story they want outsiders to hear (they told me other things too, but this was always ‘off the record’).

When I spoke with women we met at the beach, around town or in the linguistics centre. Normally it was just us two, but sometimes I met with a group so that those who were shy or whose English was not strong could tell their story with the aid of an interpreter. Asking too many questions is rude in Anindilyakwa culture and can make people feel uncomfortable, so I brought photos with me to stimulate conversation. Historian Maria Nugent describes the need to adjust interviewing styles and questions so that interviews are more culturally meaningful for participants. Anindilyakwa people were generally reluctant to talk about themselves or their opinions and only began to do so after multiple meetings. They preferred to talk about family, place and travels, so this is what we discussed.

These interviews with Anindilyakwa people were almost entirely different to those with former missionaries. Most of the missionaries had retired to south eastern Australian cities or to Darwin.

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Many were really only semi-retired; they were still busily working for their churches, still on a mission. They so readily shared their stories that I usually began simply by asking 'so how did you become a missionary?' and we were off. They were practised at telling their stories for churches in their furloughs and still do so now in their retirement. Many also saw our interviews as an opportunity to correct what they see as a negative image of the missions spun by academics.

Anindilyakwa people rarely invited me into their house, but missionaries always did, even insisting that I stay in their homes while I visited. Missionaries prepared themselves for the interview, often digging out the family photo album and home videos in the days leading up to the interview. With Anindilyakwa people, we would meet what seemed to me spontaneously, according to more Aboriginal conceptions of time — ‘maybe sometime after lunch’ — provided that nothing more urgent came up. I gave Anindilyakwa people a sitting fee in recognition of their knowledge and their time. Many are used to being thanked monetarily for sharing their knowledge and are constantly required in meetings with government officials, anthropologists and Land Council representatives. Yet another meeting with a white person, can be a burden for them. This payment would not have been appropriate for former missionaries who considered me their guest. There are vast differences, therefore, in the nature of the information I received from former missionaries and Anindilyakwa people. Instead of trying to force uniformity onto the interviews by, for instance, asking identical questions to all participants, the best approach, in my mind, is to acknowledge the differences between people and relationships and the contexts in which the interviews occurred, to seek to understand them and interpret their stories accordingly.

The oral histories I undertook were in the form of conversations and, as such, I am as much a part of them as the participants. Part of the interviewing process involved forming relationships with my informants, many of whom earned my deep respect. I welcomed questions from participants about my own life and background; it was only fair that they should know with whom they spoke.

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They trusted me with their stories, and for that, I feel a sense of obligation towards them. These relationships also shape my writing as I believe they should.

There is also a selection bias at work in my process of interviewing: those who showed the greatest interest in sharing their memories with me were also those who had a more positive mission experience. On Groote Eylandt, those most eager to assist me, most used to dealing with researchers, who are most articulate in English are also those who were trained for leadership and given special privileges by missionaries. Who I am determined who would speak with me and how they spoke. Anindilyakwa women told me that if I were I white man, they would not have spoken with me for shame. These biases must be taken into account in interpreting the oral histories. I also needed to be aware of the Anindilyakwa cultural tendency to say 'yes' and to tell me what is imagined I might want to hear. It was more likely that I receive positive reports of missionaries and Christianity because of who I am. In light of this, I tried, wherever possible, to ask open questions. Nonetheless, it is important to keep Anindilyakwa perceptions of me (including my age, ethnicity, gender, religion and language), in mind and to consider how my interviewees might give answers that would facilitate a positive relationship between us, according to Anindilyakwa cultural preferences. Someone else would probably have received different answers.

Oral histories tell about the present as well as about the past. They are the past interpreted through the present. Both the Anindilyakwa elders and, to a lesser extent the missionaries, remember the mission times with nostalgia. Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, for example, grew up at Angurugu and is now an Anglican minister. ‘In that time it was really good,’ she told me. A number of Anindilyakwa people remain angry at how the missionaries treated their old people. Still, the majority remember the mission fondly. They were ‘the good old days,’ hard but good. Unlike now when interventions and policies come and go with election cycles, there was a certain predictability to mission life; at least you knew whom you were dealing with. Given what they

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130 Eades, Aboriginal Ways of Using English, 176.
131 Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
have seen and experienced since then, it is easy to see why they might look back on the mission as better days, though perhaps they did not feel so contented at the time. I will return to the issue of nostalgia in oral histories through the thesis. Put simply, however, my approach is simply to acknowledge oral history for what it is: a conversation between researcher and participants reflecting on the past, in light of all that has happened since and of who we are today.

The structure of this thesis is both chronological and thematic, focusing on major issues in mission life as well as on periods of change. I begin with the establishment of Angurugu Mission and the processes of negotiation and translation involved in creating a multilingual, multicultural mission community. I go on to consider the early career of missionary teacher Judith Stokes and her long struggle with the CMS establishment to pursue linguistic work. The debates around language shed light on opposing visions among missionaries for Aboriginal identity and Australian nationhood. My third and fourth chapters are, respectively, a close examination of the use of spoken and written English on Groote Eylandt. I find that Anindilyakwa people selectively adopted English speech and writing for the benefits it could provide, but that they also maintained the language ‘barrier’ to preserve independence from the missionaries. The fifth chapter turns to the changing mission context of the 1960s, particularly the opening of the manganese mine and Australia’s changing attitudes towards missionary work. I argue that, in the face of these changes, the CMS needed to reinvent itself and found, in linguistics, an opportunity to do so. The following chapter considers the ideological underpinnings of the new mission attitude to Anindilyakwa language. I consider discourses of Aboriginality, authenticity and sincerity which accompanied the embrace of the ‘heart language’. The final chapter focuses on the mission’s songs in linguistic and cultural translation. Using insights from the disciplines of anthropology and ethnomusicology, the chapter explores how Anindilyakwa people used song to engage with and reimagine Christianity in their own unexpected ways, rather than in ways that missionaries might have encouraged.

At Babel, so the story goes, universalisms were frustrated and humanity given over to the endless task of translation. In such a world, how could Anindilyakwa people and missionaries understand each other? Furthermore, when missionaries came with universal visions for Anindilyakwa people and their country, would Anindilyakwa people find ways to make names for themselves? Whose language — if anyone’s —would prevail as the language of belonging in the land?
Chapter One - Beginnings: They named this place ‘Angurrkwa’ so the white fella could pronounce it


These are Jabani Lalara’s words. He is telling the story of the formation of Angurugu Mission in 1943. That was in 2012 when he told it for primary children at Angurugu School. His words were translated into English and paraphrased by the women of Groote Eylandt Linguistics for the benefit of us English speakers.

CMS and the local people did a lot of talking and they used the older half-caste kids to translate Anindilyakwa to English and vice versa to decide to look for a better place to live.
The men that went on the search were from four tribes, one from Wurrmarra, Wurraramara, Lalara and some men from the Murrungun tribe and Bill Hodge.¹

The men stopped at Angurrkwa, the mouth of the river, and discussed if this was to be the place. No, when the Yinungkwura (North West Wind) blows, the water becomes salty, so they continued up to Mungwardinamanja.

Because it was so difficult for the white fella to say that name, they took the name from the river mouth. Mungwardinamanja is where they’re going to stay. So they had to change the name from Mungwardinamanja to Angurrkwa so the white fella could pronounce it. The old men took the river mouth’s name Angurrkwa.

After that they went back to Emerald River and told the people about the new place that they found which is now ‘Angurugu.’²

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) also taught the story of the mission’s beginnings to children through its newspaper, *Australian Round World*, in 1944.

**UNGOORAKU**

The mission station is situated on the Emerald River – now it is going to be moved to a new site about 8 miles away on the Ungooraku River. All the ‘old men’ of the tribe were consulted about it and one conference with them ended at twenty past twelve at night. The native name for the new mission station is Nawadinamadja which means: ‘The place of falling waters’ – there are two very nice waterfalls at the spot ... At Ungooraku there’s to be a church and school a dispensary and mission homes – and the native people are to be encouraged to form a village nearby, to build their own little homes and have garden flats around them.³

In other CMS publications, missionaries reported that they considered ‘the necessity not to infringe tribal areas’ so held two ‘Big Talks’ with the ‘tribal leaders.’ The site recommended by

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¹ They were Old Charlie Wurrmarra, Old Banjo Lalara, Old Bill Wurraramara and Maradjuwi Murrungun.
³ ‘Ungooraku’ *Australian Round World*, 1 March, 1944, 6.
Anindilyakwa people ‘needed confirmation after proper surveying.’ The final decision for the mission location came from white experts.4

I found the two versions of the story surprising. Of course, some differences are expected. There are differences of form and provenance: Jabani spoke of events witnessed by his father, Old Banjo Lalara, and passed down orally to him whereas The Australian Round World was written only months after the events either by a missionary or editor using written reports. Jabani elaborated on the journeys his old people took over the Groote Eylandt landscape, telling the story as one of creation, kin and country. The CMS, however, was concerned with projects and plans: the new site, its location, its prospects. The CMS accounts fail to mention that the ‘white fella’ could not pronounce the name of the site. Nor did CMS accounts explain the changing of names from Mungwardinamanka (or ‘Nawadinamadja’) to Angurrkwa (‘Ungooraku’). As we might expect, the missionaries felt no need to justify their naming and re-naming the landscape. The CMS does, however, take care to mention the ‘Big Talks’, insisting that the ‘old men’ were ‘consulted’ at length. Our post-colonial assumptions about missionaries forcibly establishing themselves on indigenous people’s land are rendered somewhat more complicated.

Jabani’s account is surprising, especially for those of us used to ‘fatal impact’ models of missionary history. Whereas in the CMS accounts, Aboriginal people were merely ‘consulted’, according to Jabani, they led the whole expedition. Moreover, the ‘white fellas’ had particular weaknesses (in this case linguistic) which required accommodation. In Jabani’s story, Anindilyakwa and Nunggubuyu people chose the site of the mission, using their knowledge of the wind and river to guide the floundering missionaries to an appropriate place. The old men were from four clans, two clans from each of the two moieties, such that the jungai (those of one’s mother’s country clan who function as ‘boss’) could oversee procedures. The three clans from Bickerton Island and the other, Murrungun, from the mainland decided together where they would establish the mission. None of the clans were indigenous to Groote Eylandt itself (though the Lalara clan has country on Groote Eylandt), the significance of which I will discuss later. According to Jabani, at the establishment of the mission, Anindilyakwa and Nunggubuyu people sanctioned its construction,

4H.M. Arrowsmith and Charys E. Begbie, These Australians (Sydney: The Church Missionary Society of Australia and Tasmania, 1948), 73.
its location, asserted their ownership of the mission and the continuance of their clan identities and practices for decision making in the new mission context. They ‘translated’ the CMS initiative to establish a new mission into their own worldview and social structures.

They chose Mungwardinamanja to be the site, but they decided to call it ‘Angurrrkwa’. From the very beginning, according to Jabani, Angurugu was founded on accommodation and negotiation between the missionaries and Anindilyakwa people. Anindilyakwa people translated themselves for the benefit of the missionary, to facilitate a productive relationship with the missionaries. When the white fella could not pronounce ‘Mungwardinamanja’, ‘Angurrkwa’ would suffice. Perhaps the old men were simply exasperated at the missionaries’ clumsy pronunciation and poor memory for Anindilyakwa words. Willingness to compromise on this, however, indicates their ability to negotiate change and incorporate these new missionaries into their world. When I asked him later what the old people thought of this name change, he insisted they were in full control: ‘all the people, the people there were responsible for it.’ Later, ‘Angurrkwa’ morphed into ‘Angurugu’ as the name became further anglicised. Eventually the missionaries forgot that it ever was Mungwardinamanja, thinking that ‘Angurugu’ was an Anindilyakwa name.

Both sides tell stories of negotiation. Both mention translation. Interestingly, both present themselves as the dominant party and the party which, out of respect, made concessions for the other.

But how could both parties present themselves as the dominant negotiators in the genesis of Angurugu? Obviously both accounts attempt to portray their own people in a positive light. Moreover, there is reason to think that nostalgia for more stable mission times of the past may have crept into Anindilyakwa memory, particularly for leading men like Jabani whom missionaries respected. But perhaps the emphasis both stories place on concessions also reflects complex negotiations and interactions that took place in the early mission years. Significantly, both accounts mention language as a key factor shaping negotiations and insist that translation was necessary for both the Anindilyakwa and English speakers to make progress. How, then, are we to understand these stories?

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5 Jabani Lalara, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2012.
In this chapter, I explore the mission's origins with a view to understanding the negotiations that occurred. In what sense was the encounter a 'long conversation' which involved listening, interpreting and responding? I examine the ways in which Angurugu Mission in its early years was a translational project, both literally and metaphorically, for both missionaries and Anindilyakwa people. First I look to the long Anindilyakwa tradition of engaging with other cultures. Then, I turn to the missionaries' intentions to, as scripture says, 'translate' Aboriginal people 'into the Kingdom', and how this developed into ambitions to convert them into Christian citizens. I also consider ways Anindilyakwa incorporated the foreigners' designs into their society and reinterpreted the mission into Aboriginal society and ways of operating. Finally, I focus on the people upon whom any cooperation between missionaries and Anindilyakwa people depended: the interpreters. Who were the interpreters? What did they have to gain and to lose? And how did they negotiate their position as intermediaries in the fragile mission community? Throughout my analysis I consider how language shaped interactions between the English and Anindilyakwa speakers. Although the 'long conversation' was dominated by missionaries, I seek to tune into Anindilyakwa voices in the conversation.

Anindilyakwa speakers have been translating and interpreting language and culture for centuries. They traded with people from the mainland, exchanging their spears for red ochre, quartzite knives and spearheads. Nunggubuyu people (literally 'people who speak Wubuy') also live on Groote Eylandt, having come before the mission times, bringing their own ceremonies and songs from the mainland. The Blaur song cycle on Groote Eylandt, for example, comes from the mainland and was passed on to Anindilyakwa speakers from Ritharrngu people via Nunggubuyu and Bickerton Island people. Wubuy speakers traded with Anindilyakwa speakers, intermarried with them and sang with them in ceremony. Wubuy has some grammatical similarities to Anindilyakwa and both are quite distinct from other Australian languages. Their vocabulary is very different; they are mutually unintelligible. Some Nunggubuyu people returned to the

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6 Colossians 1:13, King James Version.
7 Clarke, "Winds of Change," 64–65.
8 'Nunggubuyu' is a contraction of 'nung' meaning 'person' and 'Wubuy'. Victoria Katherine Burbank, "Expressions of Anger and Aggression in an Australian Aboriginal Community" (PhD Thesis, Rutgers University, 1980), 2.
9 Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 94.
10 Clarke, "Winds of Change," 22.
11 Colin Yallop, Australian Aboriginal Languages (A. Deutsch, 1982), 40.
mainland when their own mission, Numbulwar, was established by the CMS in 1953. Others chose to stay. Many come and go between the two.

Though residing primarily in their own country, at times the Anindilyakwa clans entered the territory of neighbouring clans in search of food, water and for ceremony. Before Europeans came, the Warnung clan of the eastern coast of Groote Eylandt died out, so Warindilyaugwa people moved in to 'look after' the country. The Lalara clan, originally from Armadadi on the mainland, migrated to Bickerton Island for spiritual reasons, bringing the Mardaryin Ceremony with them. Around the same time, probably sometime in the nineteenth century, there was a famine. So the Wurabadelumba and Bara families (the Warnungwadarbalangwa clan) left their country on Bickerton Island and settled in Jaragba country on Groote Eylandt. The Jaragba clan allowed them to stay. But relationships between the Groote Eylandt and Bickerton clans were not always amicable. During the mission years, the old men remembered fighting between Bickerton and Groote clans. Patrol Officers reported an earlier time when the Bickerton Island camp was a 'battleground' and a 'fortress-type habitat.' Some suggested that the rivalry between Bickerton and Groote Eylandt clans was triggered by the Makassan traders. Anthropologist, Norman Tindale, for example, reported that illicit Makassan relationships with Anindilyakwa women had led to strict seclusion of women from men, especially from the men of other clans.

The Makassans journeyed to the island on the annual north westerly Bara winds. They came to harvest trepang (sea slugs), trading with Anindilyakwa speakers since at least the late 1700s. Historian Campbell Macknight dates the beginnings of Makassan trepanging industry on the coast of Arnhem Land to around 1780, though archaeologist Anne Clarke dates the Makassan campsites

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12 Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 11.
15 Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 6,8.
16 Ibid, 14–15.
on Groote Eylandt at around 800 years of age. They came in fleets of up to 60 vessels with crews of 30, remaining for the wet season and returning on the southeasterly Mamarika winds.

Makassan crews were multicultural and multilingual. Most were Makassarese speakers from Makassar in Sulawesi but crew members also came from Borneo, Timor, Java, New Guinea and other parts of North Australia. The crews spoke Malay Creole, a language based upon Sumatran and Malay languages with a strong Portuguese influence. Some Anindilyakwa speakers travelled widely with the Makassans on their journeys and sojourned in Makassar for years at a time.

Tindale came across some of these Anindilyakwa seafarers on his visit to the island in 1925.

Several old men of the Ingura [Anindilyakwa] tribe, as youths, made voyages with the Malays, principally of Macassar ... and are familiar with the language of Macassar, with sometimes a smattering of other languages such as Bugi and Malay... One very old Bartalumba man, Yambukwa by name ... told us of woolly haired Papuans, of Timor Laut, Macassar, Ke, Aru, Banda and many other places which I could not recognise by his names or descriptions.

For over a century at the least, Anindilyakwa speakers interacted with South East Asian languages and cultures through the Makassans. The Makassans brought Islam to the region and there is evidence of Islamic influence in North Eastern Arnhem Land song cycles. Anindilyakwa people traded for fish hooks, glass, cloth, tobacco, rice and alcohol. They worked for the Makassans, shelling and trepanging. Some Anindilyakwa women formed relationships with the visiting

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37 Macknight, "Studying Trepangers."


25 Tindale, Natives of Groote Eylandt and of the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, 66.
crews and had children with them. Anindilyakwa crewmembers learned Malay Creole. Others learned Makassan Pidgin, a lingua franca across North Australia. Anindilyakwa speakers incorporated Makassan words into their language; jurra (from surat, meaning ‘paper’), dambakwa (tobacco), waja (sugar), djara (from djarung, meaning ‘needle’). The linguist, Nick Evans identified 35 Makassan loan words in Anindilyakwa, but this was by no means all. Names of places and ancestral beings also reflect the engagement with the Makassans: Badelumba, the North West Bluff on Groote Eylandt and also the name of the family of that place (Wurrabadalamba) is derived from Makassarese batu lompoa, meaning ‘large stone’. Likewise, Anindilyakwa people told me that Umbakumba is ‘not the proper name for that place, Umbakumba is a Makassan word. It comes from the Malay ‘ombak-ombak’, meaning ‘lapping of waves’.

The Makassan visits ended abruptly. The South Australian Government had begun charging the fishing boats exorbitant rates for licences in the 1880s and, in 1906, ceased issuing licenses to Makassans altogether. The Makassans did not come in the wet of 1906-1907.

The Japanese also came and went from the island. Sometimes they caused trouble. According to Murabuda Wurraramarra, ‘Japanese used to be muck around with black woman, and they used to fight.’ Generally, though, relations between the Japanese and Anindilyakwa people were positive. Murabuda Wurraramarra remembered the Japanese from his childhood and told me how they formed productive relationships.

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28 Geneticists have recently found that Machado-Joseph Disease on Groote Eylandt was not brought to the island from Portugal via the Macassans but is a much older genetic mutation than the Portuguese strain and originated in Asia 6,000 years ago. Bing-Wen Soong, “Mutational Origin of Machado-Joseph Disease in the Australian Aboriginal Communities of Groote Eylandt and Yirrkala,” Archives of Neurology 69, no. 6 (2012): 1.


30 Stokes, J., ‘Macassan Words which have come into Anindilyakwa’, Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (hereafter AIATSIS) MS 3518, Groote Eylandt Collection, Box 4, Folder 25; Macknight, “Macassans and Aborigines,” 295.


33 Mudabuda Wurraramarra, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2012.

34 Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages,” 52.


36 Murabuda Wurraramarra, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2012.
They used to be working and just pretending diver and working with the Aborigine people, they're just working because they spoken by broken English those Japanese. And they're working for the Japanese ... and they pay for rice or whatever they got. Good people, Japanese.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the missionaries came, and they were different. The CMS missionaries were also 'translators', though not in the same way as Anindilyakwa people had been in the past. The missionaries' Bible taught them God 'hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son'²⁰; 'translation' at conversion was how evangelicals understood their Christian identity. They brought this offer of 'translation' into the 'kingdom' for others. They wanted not simply to interact and negotiate with Anindilyakwa people, but to change and convert them. This is where a story of the negotiation and struggle for the Anindilyakwa language and culture's continuing legitimacy begins. Unlike the Makassans and Japanese, CMS missionaries settled on the island, bringing English, a new culture and new religion with them, intending to implant them permanently.

The CMS was one of numerous Christian missionary organisations that hoped to evangelise Aboriginal people in North Australia. In the early twentieth century, the Anglican Church in Australia in was divided into High and Low, with the High Church Anglo-Catholics constituting the majority of dioceses and Low Church Evangelicals dominating in a few large and wealthy dioceses, most notably Sydney. The two factions had their own missionary organisations: the ABM and CMS respectively.²⁰ The ABM operated in Cape York and the CMS in Arnhem Land. Although some prominent Anglicans (such as Arthur Capel and Archbishop Howard Mowll) supported both societies, generally the mission organisations had distinct support bases and partner churches.²⁰ Relations among the factions soured particularly in the 1940s when the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Bathurst introduced a supplement – the 'Red Book' – to the Book of Common Prayer in 1942.
Evangelical leaders in Sydney objected, alleging that the Bishop was guilty of heresy.\textsuperscript{41} Arnhem Land fell into what was then the Diocese of Carpentaria, an Anglo-Catholic diocese and so CMS relations with its Bishop were fraught.

The CMS’s near neighbour in Arnhem Land, the Methodist Overseas Mission (MOM), was similar to the CMS as it too was evangelical. The MOM established its first mission at Goulburn Island in 1916 and expanded to Croker Island, Milingimbi, Elcho Island and Yirrkala. The Methodists were more moderate than the CMS and more open to Aboriginal cultures and practices (to the extent that they faced accusations from governments of being too sensitive to Aboriginal traditions).\textsuperscript{42} This was perhaps because whereas the CMS constantly sought to maintain its evangelical Protestant variety of Anglicanism, the Methodists were freer to experiment without fear of tumbling into Catholicism. In the 1920s and 1930s, the MOM was shaped by the exceptional personality and leadership of Milingimbi superintendent Theodore Webb.\textsuperscript{43} Webb learned Gupapuyngu and made efforts to understand Yolngu cultures.\textsuperscript{44}

Relations between the CMS and MOM were generally positive.\textsuperscript{45} They were largely content to work within their own territorial spheres of influence, with the MOM in North Eastern Arnhem Land and the CMS in the southeast (and west with Oenpelli Mission). There were disputes over the boundaries of their work. The CMS suspected the Methodists had deliberately cut them off from further expansion, believing that ‘they went to Yirrkala to prevent us from going further North.’\textsuperscript{46} The CMS long intended to expand into the Caledon Bay area (the famous 1933 ‘Peace Expedition’ was, in part, an attempt to secure the CMS’s place in the region) which it was eventually forced to


\textsuperscript{42} Ronald Murray Berndt, \textit{An Adjustment Movement in Arnhem Land: Northern Territory of Australia} (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2004), 29.

\textsuperscript{43} Howard Morphy, “Mutual Conversion? The Methodist Church and the Yolnu, with Particular Reference to Yirrkala,” \textit{Humanities Research} 7, no. 1 (2005): 44.


\textsuperscript{46} J.B. Montgomerie to R. Warren, 7 March 1955, NTAS NTRS 871, Box 12, Correspondence.
cede to the MOM.47 While the societies had much in common in terms of their evangelical faith, they competed for control of Aboriginal land and influence over Aboriginal people.

The CMS’s first exploratory expedition to Groote Eylandt was in 1916. They were not welcome. One missionary remembered how Anindilyakwa people ‘often told us to go.’48 The missionaries explored the island, taking turn to rename its features after their friends and relatives.49 Hubert Warren quite literally made his mark on the island when he renamed Yandarrnga (Central Hill) ‘Mt Ellie’, in honour of his wife. He carved her name into the rock, ‘spoiling the axe but improving the rock.’50 His carved letters implied that the hill had no name before his arrival and that he was simply naming it. So began their endeavour to improve, transform, rename and translate Groote Eylandt into something they could understand.

The missionaries agreed on the Emerald River at Yadigba as the location for a ‘half caste mission’ and in August 1921 commenced construction of their mission.51 The Emerald River Mission was not a mission for Anindilyakwa people but for children of mixed racial descent who had been taken from all over the Northern Territory. The nearby CMS Roper River Mission was becoming unviable. Termites were destroying the garden, the soil was barren.52 Government policy was to forcibly remove ‘half caste’ children from Aboriginal camps, and the mission accepted children who had been taken from their families into its care. By 1917, so many ‘half caste’ children lived at the Roper River mission that the majority of its children were ‘half caste.’53 Groote Eylandt’s climate is more temperate, its soil more fertile. The CMS, therefore, proposed to transfer the whole Roper River Mission population to Groote Eylandt, beginning with the ‘half castes’.54 Granting the CMS its request, the Secretary of the Department of Home and Territories made the whole of

48 AJ Dyer, ‘Description of First Party to Start Groote Eylandt in 1921,’ NTAS NTRS 693, Box 1, Item 7.
50 Hubert Warren to Ellie Warren, 8 December 1916, ML DOC 1970.
51 Cole, Groote Eylandt Pioneer, 38.
53 Letter dated 25 May 1917, NAA A659 1943/1/70.
54 Seafild Deuchar, 18 March 1920, NAA A659 1943/1/70.
Groote Eylandt an Aboriginal Reserve in 1920, with a portion on the west coast on the Emerald River to be the site of the 'half caste' mission.

The 'half caste' children spoke various languages, so English became the *lingua franca* of the mission, with the children speaking Kriol among themselves. For some children, Kriol was their first language. Gerry Blitner, who was taken to the Island as a child, remembered that his mother was fluent in three Aboriginal languages, but he wasn’t allowed to speak Aboriginal languages in the Emerald River mission.55

Figure 6 'Girl Guides - Guard of Honour - Groote Eylandt'
Source: NAA A263 ALBUM, 54a, Album of anthropological photographs - Aboriginal Inquiry
Central and North Australia - J.W. Bleakley.

Figure 7 'Halfcaste inmates - Groote Eylandt Mission - Reverend H E Warren, 1928'
Source: NAA A263 ALBUM, 51a, Album of anthropological photographs - Aboriginal Inquiry
Central and North Australia - J.W. Bleakley.
As the superintendent reported, the 'half castes' lived in 'complete segregation from the blacks.'\(^{56}\) One of the children, Connie Bush, remembered 'the mission was fenced and we weren’t allowed to speak to one Aboriginal there.'\(^{57}\) Though missionaries restricted the children's movement and forbade them from mingling with Anindilyakwa people, the children established friendships with the islanders and began to learn Anindilyakwa.\(^{58}\) Missionaries also made contact with Anindilyakwa people, but their intentions were limited mainly to humanitarian and evangelistic work. Reports from 1927 indicate that Anindilyakwa people were visiting regularly to trade with missionaries and to get medical treatment. From around 1932, Anindilyakwa people moved into camps around the mission.\(^{59}\) Missionaries reported in 1934 that the 'Bickerton Island tribe' was 'said to be merging with the Groote Eylandt tribe.'\(^{60}\) This was perhaps the Lalara clan, which came over to Groote Eylandt around this time.\(^{61}\) Most of those who settled by the mission were from the Bickerton Island clans. Some Anindilyakwa children, including the 'professor', Gula Lalara, attended the school and began learning to speak English. In fact, as a child he also featured in a CMS magazine for children, *Australian Round World*, in a series titled 'Groote Eylandt Imps.' He was a missionary favourite from a young age.\(^{62}\)

Another imp story – Hurrah!! The imps are our old friends now, and we are getting to love each one in turn. Well, we’re ready to hear about NAGLABENNA [Gula] ...Your first impression on looking at this boy would be his gentleness. He has long, spindly legs as most natives have (this is caused by much walking), and perfect grace is his bearing. His eyes are bright and kindly, and his manners almost faultless. Unlike most black boys, he rarely ill-treats boys younger than himself.\(^{63}\)

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58 S. Port, 'Regulations for Village people,' NTRS 868, Box 1 Mission Policy and Regulations.
60 ‘Report on Groote Eylandt Mission, Inspected 4-6\(^{th}\) September, 1934,’ NAA A659 1943/1/70.
63 W Leathbridge, 'The Groote Eylandt Imps.' *Australian Round World*, 1 April, 1938, 8-9.
The missionaries were not the only English-speakers with interests on the island. Little Lagoon, on the northeastern side of the island, is a protected expanse of water, perfect for seaplanes. The Shell Company saw it as a suitable location for a service point for Qantas flying boats and in 1937 proposed establishing a base there. The National Missionary Council strongly opposed the proposal to operate on an Aboriginal Reserve, stating that the ‘Welfare of Aboriginals should be first concern.’ Nonetheless, construction of the base began in 1938 on land excised from the reserve. In 1938, the English trepanger Lred Gray established what would develop into his Native Settlement at Umbakumba, an old Makassan trepanging camp, to manage the Anindilyakwa people who constructed the base. He did so in response to the CMS’s request, as the mission did not have the staff to do so themselves. According to Mamarika clan stories, two old Anindilyakwa men wanted ‘Fred Gray to stay here and settle down to make a settlement ... Those men, they say “yes.”’

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64 J.W. Burton to T. Paterson, 30 June 1937, NAA A431 1948/226 Establishment of a Flying Boat Base in the Gulf of Carpentaria (Groote Eylandt).
66 Aborigines Committee Minutes, 14 February, 1945, ML MSS 6040/4a.
67 Edith Mamarika, oral history interview with author, 8 September, 2012.
Figure 8 'Construction of Flying Boat Base, 1938'

Source: Northern Territory Library, John Oxley Library Collection, PHO171/0105
Figure 9 ‘Groote Eylandt Reserve, Mission and Flying Boat Base’

Source: NAA F1 1950/657 Application for Lease of Groote Eylandt Flying Boat Base C Nevil and K Bell.
But Gray did not leave his camp once the base was completed. Furthermore, the initial understanding with CMS was that the flying boat workers would not be allowed to enter the Reserve. But in 1939, the Bishop of Carpentaria suggested boat base staff should be allowed to enter the Reserve ‘for recreational purposes.’ The Bishop also expressed his view that ‘Mr Gray was doing excellent work’ and so should remain at Umbakumba. The Administrator of the Northern Territory took the Bishop’s advice, though it infuriated the CMS. The CMS was ostensibly concerned about Gray’s suitability as a superintendent. But perhaps more threatening to the CMS was the existence of an alternative settlement and influence on Anindilyakwa people and an alternative representative of ‘civilisation’.

Meanwhile, terrible reports of the ‘half caste’ Emerald River mission in the 1930s reached government officials. They heard that children were roped together and made to haul logs like cattle; girls wore only hessian bags for dresses, causing blisters and rashes as they worked the garden in the hot sun; children were punished in wooden stocks and isolation cells; almost half the older children suffered from leprosy, having become so susceptible because they were malnourished, living on almost rice and bread alone. The missionaries used chains, according to Connie Bush, ‘that used to be tied around a post ... and that would be wound around the girl’s leg ... so they wouldn't move.’ In 1942, Patrol Officer Bill Harney compared Gray’s Umbakumba Native Settlement with the Emerald River Mission.

I certainly was disappointed when I saw this Mission Station. Years ago, from 1922 to 1930, it had a large garden and numerous buildings etc., also pumps. To-day it is in the process of decay, no water system ... The garden is overgrown with grass and compared with the one man unsubsidised settlement at Grey’s, the place is a complete failure ... I would certainly recommend Grey’s Native Settlement as the future welfare centre of the Groote Eylandt.

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68 H.S. Poll to C.I.A. Abbott, 13 August 1939, NAA A431 1948/226.
69 C.E. Cook to the Robert Weddell Administrator of the Northern Territory, 17 November, 1933, NAA A659 1943/1/70; C.E. Cook to the Robert Weddell Administrator of the Northern Territory, 17 January, 1934, NAA A659 1943/1/70
70 Connie Bush, oral history interview with Mickey Dewar, 1987 in Dewar, The "Black War" in Arnhem Land, 34.
Gray was an embarrassment to the CMS, which urgently needed to improve if it was to maintain its position on the island. Eventually, so many Anindilyakwa people participated in the mission economy, working for the mission, attending school or receiving rations and aid, that it became apparent to the CMS that it could no longer keep the ‘half caste’ children separate from them. What was needed was a second mission on the island, a fresh start, exclusively for Anindilyakwa people themselves. The CMS Federal Council resolved to ‘transfer the Aboriginal station to a new site ... ten miles distant’ from the Emerald River mission according to its ‘principle of the segregation of the Aboriginal from Half Caste work.’ This new mission, ‘Anoraku’ (Angurugu) would first be established as ‘part of a larger scheme for the future extension of this work to the mainland.’ Angurugu Mission would serve to gather Anindilyakwa people in one place such that ‘the rest of the island’ could be ‘adapted for the Half Caste scheme.’ The CMS’s intention was that the ‘whole island’ would be converted into a cattle station as ‘part of the half caste activity’. Although the expedition narrated by Jabani may well have depended upon Anindilyakwa leadership, negotiation and concessions to CMS missionaries, these negotiations occurred within a highly unequal context. It is unclear whether the ‘old men’ knew of the CMS intention to restrict them to a small corner of the island. Perhaps if they had known they would not have been so cooperative.

The Second World War disrupted the plan. After Japanese forces bombed Darwin the ‘half caste’ children were evacuated to Mulgoa in New South Wales, leaving only a skeleton mission team at Emerald River Mission. Anindilyakwa people remained. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) took over the Flying Boat Base and stationed its personnel only a kilometre away from the mission. The RAAF depended on Anindilyakwa labour and Anindilyakwa people acquired new skills. They cleared the runway for the RAAF and built the roads from the Mission to the RAAF

74 ‘Minutes of the meeting of the Federal Council 15-17 October 1946,’ ML MSS 6040/1a.
75 ‘Minutes of the meeting of the Aborigines Committee, 7 February 1945,’ ML MSS 6040/4a Committee for Aborigines Minutes 1942-1945.
78 Ibid, 250.
base to the Flying Boat Base. The CMS received the 7½ pennies Anindilyakwa people earned per hour, whereas the Anindilyakwa people themselves received rations of food and tobacco.78 The war brought a sudden incursion of modernity to Groote Eylandt. Anindilyakwa people came into contact with new technologies, medicines, weapons, modes of transport on a greater scale than ever before.79 Anindilyakwa people were drawn into the international conflict; Groote Eylandt could no longer be viewed as a secluded outpost, isolated from 'civilisation', modernity or white Australia. The Flying Boat Base and then the RAAF base apparently proved that the coming of English speaking 'civilisation' to Groote Eylandt was inevitable.

Figure 10 'RAAF Advanced Operational Base'

Source: Northern Territory Library, Watts Collection, PHO 0250/0046
Yet for Anindilyakwa people, it was not their war. They were in the middle of resolving their own ongoing disputes between clans. Nor were they surprised that another people might want to claim the land. Murabuda explained to me:

And we didn't care about the war too. Because the people we just been fighting from the west Groote Eylandt, north east of Groote Eylandt, south east of Groote Eylandt, they're fighting a white man fight and we fighting that black man fight.80

[When the war came] we didn't frightened because Aborigine, Aborigine people they just fighting too, and just the white and the white, we didn't care about it! ... And the war has been stop. And they got some of them Australian made a big bomb in the Japanese area, really danger bomb you know ... But Japanese are good people, but I don't know what they're fighting for Australia. Maybe Australia is the richest.81

During the war, white visions of Australian nationhood, and subsequently Aboriginal people, shifted. Noah Riseman argues that the war was a 'disruption' of assimilation for Anindilyakwa people.82 I see it, however, as a period of change towards assimilationist thinking. The CMS's initial intention to run an Aboriginal mission at Angurugu, segregated from the 'half caste' mission, was based on a doctrine that 'half castes' could be assimilated into the Australian nation but 'full bloods' could not. Through the 1940s, however, this assumption came under challenge. Aboriginal people demonstrated their abilities to white authorities as many, including those on Groote Eylandt, assisted Australian forces.83 As Russell McGregor has shown, during the war, racialised views of nationhood began to dissolve, and with them theories of biological absorption of Aboriginal people.84

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80 Murabuda Wurramarrba, oral history interview with author, 4 September 2012.
81 Murabuda Wurramarrba, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2012.
82 Riseman, "Disrupting Assimilation."
83 Rowse, White Flour, White Power.
84 McGregor, Indifferent Inclusion, 14, 17.
In the 1940s, the CMS understood it faced a choice about how it would approach its missionary activities. Would Anindilyakwa people be 'saved' by assimilation into Australian citizenship and the 'modern' world, or by segregation from it? As one CMS missionary, Bob Palmer, explained:

If we went as nomadic missionaries to a nomadic people translating the Christian faith into terms of the daily life of a stone age nomad there would, for one thing, not be a less expensive missionary enterprise in the world ... But this isn't the stone age and the fact is that the aboriginal has found out that it's the 20th Century and he is determined to have a 20th Century culture at any price – even though, unbeknown to him, that price may be his own extinction. To prevent that we simply have to step in and give him our culture in such a way that he becomes a national asset instead of a national liability and in such a way that he becomes not only a terrestrial asset but a celestial one too.85

Both options involved a 'translation' of sorts. The first was to 'translate the Christian faith into terms of Aboriginal daily life' by becoming nomadic, sharing in Aboriginal life and culture. Going as 'nomadic missionaries' was not as far-fetched as it may sound. Anthropologist Donald Thomson had lived with Yolngu people and in 1936 advocated 'acceptance of the nomadic habits' of Aboriginal people. For him, preservation of Aboriginal cultures and even the survival of Aboriginal peoples depended upon 'absolute segregation' from white society.86 Missionaries must therefore submit to Aboriginal patterns of life. He suggested that missionaries should be 'prepared to visit the people in their own country and not to gather them about a station.'87 Thompson's view had some traction among missionaries. Webb also concluded in 1936 that it would be 'in the best interests of the Aborigines' to 'live with them in their camps.'88 In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the CMS had advocated introducing Christianity in such a way that Aboriginal people would maintain a separate cultural identity. In 1939, the CMS stated that 'the CMS as far as Groote Eylandt is concerned is not out to civilise the natives ...We want Groote people to ... be preserved as a people

87 Donald Thompson, Interim General Report of Preliminary Expedition to Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia, 1935-1936 (Department of the Interior, April 1936), 45.
88 Arch Grant and Thomas Theodor Webb, Aliens in Arnhem Land (Dee Why: Frontier Pub., 1995), 64.
in whom God can delight.' Likewise, as late as 1940, its newsletter declared that ‘the CMS is not out to “Europeanise” the Aborigines ... We want the Aborigines to take Christ into their camp.’

But Palmer considered this option – segregation and the possibility of ‘nomadic missionaries’ - hopelessly inadequate and fundamentally neglectful because he believed Aboriginal people wanted to become part of what he termed ‘the 20th Century’. The second option for the CMS, therefore, was ‘to step in’ and make Aboriginal people ‘a national asset ... [and] not only a terrestrial asset but a celestial one too.’ Missionaries would be the bridge; they would integrate Aboriginal people from ‘the Stone Age’ into the Australian nation. Missionaries established themselves as translators, not of their Christian faith, making it comprehensible in an Aboriginal context, but of Aboriginal people themselves, making them assets for the Australian nation.

This view was advocated by the prominent anthropologist and Anglican priest, A.P. Elkin. In 1944, just after the establishment of Angurugu, A.P. Elkin published *Citizenship for the Aborigines*, affirming the necessity of gradual change so that Aboriginal people could ‘make progress towards civilisation and citizenship’. The missionary was not to demolish Aboriginal cultures but to identify the acceptable, ‘translatable’ aspects of Aboriginal culture, converting these into Christian practices so that Aboriginal people could operate as modern Christians and Australian citizen.

Elkin’s plans for Aboriginal people proved very appealing to the CMS, as they also did to policymakers in Canberra. The popularity of Elkin’s vision over Thompson’s, as argued by Geoffrey Gray, lay in its promise that Aboriginal people ‘could be made modern and incorporated into the nation.’ Elkin appeared optimistic as he advocated citizenship rights for Aboriginal people. It appealed to white Australia’s visions of itself as modern, civilised and successful.

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87 The Church Missionary Society throws as Searchlight on the Aborigines’ *The Open Door* January 1940, 10.
90 Geoffrey Gray “A deep-seated aversion or a prudish disapproval: Relations with Elkin” Bruce Rigsby and Nicola Peterson, *Donald Thomson: The Man and Scholar* (Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia with support from Museum Victoria, 2005), 93.
Aboriginal people became Australian citizens in 1948 according to the 1948 Nationality and Citizenship Act (along with all other Australians). Yet their formal legal status did not enable them to exercise their rights as citizens. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people were deemed wards of the state, and so deprived of the normal rights of citizens (including the right to vote, freedom of movement, even to marry whom they chose). In 1949 the right to vote in federal elections was extended only to those Aboriginal people who had served in the armed forces. It was only in 1962 that all Aboriginal people were permitted to vote in Territory and Federal elections and in 1967 that they were included in the national census for determining the number of voters in an electorate. In the 1940s, Aboriginal people were ‘citizens’ largely in name only. Before they could enjoy their rights as citizens, white Australia insisted, Aboriginal people must adopt citizenly behaviours, proving their capacity to exercise such rights.

The only real alternative to Elkin’s assimilation, as most white Australians understood it, was segregation. Christian missionary organisations were at the forefront of opposition to such policies. Since it became obvious in the 1930s and 1940s that Aboriginal people were not doomed to extinction, assimilation offered a way forward without resorting to racial segregation. Assimilation meant a reconsideration of race-based notions of nationhood and put forward civic qualities as a foundation for national unity in a modern Australia. Policymakers began to believe that not only ‘half-castes’ could belong in the Australian nation, but ‘full blooded’ Aboriginal people as well, so long as they conformed to civic ideals.

The CMS authorities embraced assimilation policies and looked to Elkin for direction. ‘Assimilation’ had many meanings and multiple interpretations even among missionaries within the CMS. One CMS publication explained it in seemingly benign terms: simply ‘black and white ...

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96 McGregor, Indifferent Inclusion, 83.
98 THE Future of the Australian Aborigines. Presidential address delivered to Section F (anthropology) of the 29th Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, at Sydney, 22nd August 1952 in ibid, 55.
living together as neighbours." The CMS's first policy constitution in 1944 (for which the CMS sought Elkin's advice and approval) defined assimilation as the set of processes by which Aboriginal people would come to function as equal citizens on white terms in white society. The Society moved away from theories of genetic or racial hierarchies (stating that 'the explanation for the retarded development of the Aborigines' was due to 'their isolation from the rest of mankind ... and not in the absence of inherent qualities'). The problem, in their view, was that 'too rapid a contact with European civilisation' caused Aboriginal disadvantage. The solution, inspired by Elkin, was therefore a period of 'development' in a location 'segregated from undesirable influences and contacts' where missionaries could work in evangelism, education, medicine, industry and agriculture. Through this, the CMS envisaged that Aboriginal people would one day 'take their place in the general Australian life ... in our civilised communities.'

Christian education would supposedly enable Aboriginal people to develop the inner fortitude to meet the coming 'civilisation' without being corrupted by it. This is why the CMS was more concerned with the realisation of civic behaviour — a functional citizenship — than granting rights. The task was to make citizens, not merely grant citizenship, as rights without citizenly capabilities would be a 'legal fiction'.

One of Elkin's favoured metaphors was the progression of the Old Testament to the New; just as Christianity reinterpreted and 'completed' the religion of ancient Israel, so he proposed building upon Aboriginal cultures, reinterpreting them to suit Australian citizenship and Christianity. In the same spirit, the CMS constitution explained in 1944:

> Natives shall not be cut off from their own tribal life, but rather the Missionaries shall aim at the far more difficult task of helping these natives to build up the Kingdom of

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99 J.B. Montgomerie, 'That they might have life and have it more Abundantly: A Christian Study of the Aborigines,' CMS League of Youth, 1958, NTAS NTRS 1105 Publications Featuring Arnhem Land Missions, Box 1, Booklets.

100 Constitution and Policy, May 1944. ML MSS 6040/6 Secretary for Aborigines General Files, Church missionary Society Aborigines Committee – Constitution and Policy May 1944 and August 1962.

101 A.L. Ethel 'The Problem of assimilation' A paper read to a Public Meeting at the Methodist Church, Darwin, on Wednesday 28th November 1953, by A.L. Ethell, Ex-assistant district Officer...Superintendent of the Moore River Native Settlement in Western Australia,' NTAS NTRS 56, Box 3, Assimilation; McGregor, Indifferent Inclusion, 88.

God on the basis of their old tribal organisations and customs, where these are not opposed to Christianity ... Any worthwhile elements in tribal life tending to social cohesion, discipline and moral uplift shall be preserved as a foundation upon which the ethical principles and wholesome truths of the Gospel are to be built.\textsuperscript{103}

The CMS's assimilation vision meant converting or translating aspects of Aboriginal cultures so that they could operate within a Christian framework. Moreover, Palmer's statement of converting Aboriginal people into both 'national assets' and 'celestial assets' indicates how Aboriginal cultures, they hoped, would ultimately serve the Australian nation.\textsuperscript{104} The missionary was not to demolish Aboriginal cultures but to identify the 'translatable' aspects of Aboriginal culture, modernising and converting these into Christian practices so that Aboriginal people could operate as evangelical Christians and Australian citizens.

Though they spoke of 'assimilation', the missionaries were not, in fact, representative of English speaking Australia. Though most Australians claimed membership in one of the Christian denominations, in 1947 only 35% of Australians claimed to be 'regular churchgoers'.\textsuperscript{105} In 1947 the Anglican Church in Australia published \textit{Towards the Conversion of Australasia}, a comprehensive report on 'the decline in churchgoing' and 'collapse in moral standards' among white Australians.\textsuperscript{106} Missionaries did not seek assimilation into mainstream white Australia, a society they saw as corrupted by alcohol, tobacco, licentiousness and gambling. They distanced themselves from it. The coming of this 'civilisation', in their minds, threatened to destroy Aboriginal people.

\textsuperscript{103} Constitution and Policy, May 1944, ML MSS 6040/6.

\textsuperscript{104} Anindilyakwa people already had their own celestial identities. The Mamarika and Amagula families share Orion, Venus and the sun as their totems. The moon (\textit{yimawira}) is shared by all Anindilyakwa families, they all call him \textit{Nimirarrka}. Velma J. Leeding, \textit{Groote Eylandt Genealogies: Warnimamalya Warnimikirra Ani-Langwa Ayangkidarrba (personal Indigenous Names for This Island)} (Batchelor: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2002), 370–372; William Palmer, 'An Account of the Missionary Work in N Australia' 1949, ML MS 6040/39.


Aboriginal people were, rather, to be assimilated into an idealised citizenship, based on evangelical norms. Missionaries sought not assimilation into white Australia but, in Bain Atwood's words, 'to make Aboriginal people in their own image.' In their minds, the ideal citizen would be evangelical and it was through Christian teaching, moral improvement and training that Aboriginal people would outlast the temptations of modern 'civilisation'. As the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney argued in 1945, 'the best way for every child to become the best citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia is to be taught that he is citizen of the Kingdom of God.' An ideal and useful citizen of the Commonwealth was, for evangelicals, a member of the Kingdom of God. In fact, assimilation was such an ideal that it had heavenly overtones. As one CMS publication put it, in the 'Heavenly country' all will be 'assimilated' as a realisation of equality according to Christian ideals. CMS Secretary for Aborigines, J.B. Montgomerie, explained in 1958:

> We have to get rid of the 'white-race' superiority feeling. Think of the Aborigine as one for whom Christ died, just as He did for white people. One day believers will all live together in a Heavenly Home. There will not be separate dwelling places for black and white, or any other colour. We will all be thoroughly 'assimilated' then, citizens of the Heavenly country, and one in Christ Jesus. It should be so now.

Assimilation emerged in the 1940s as the only viable policy if white Australia was to realise its vision of an anti-racist, civilised and Christian society. For the CMS, the virtue of assimilation became such that they could not help but imagine assimilation in heaven itself.

Missionaries also constructed themselves as interpreters or mediators between Anindilyakwa speakers and the world. Palmer further explained the CMS's objectives in relation to Aboriginal people:

> Since the aim of our work is to develop a citizenship of the north for the Aborigine perhaps now is a good time to ... act as a guide and liaison officer between the native and the outside world.

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109 J.B. Montgomerie, 'That they might have life,' 1958, NTRS 1105.
The CMS would communicate with governments and other external parties, interpreting Anindilyakwa people's wishes and interests for outsiders so as to 'protect' Aboriginal people. They saw no conflict of interest between their mediating role and their self-appointed role as translators of Aboriginal cultures into Australian citizenship and evangelicalism.

By constructing themselves as mediators between Aboriginal people and a dangerous outside world, missionaries disguised their own participation in colonisation. Historian Susan Thorne points out the often ambiguous and complex relationship missionaries have had in the empire. Missionaries' presence 'disrupted the cultural unity on which white supremacy depended', and 'exposed exploitation and abuse of colonised peoples.' Missionaries have often considered themselves to be in opposition to the empire surrounding them, determined to 'put Empire in its place.' The CMS often constructed itself as paying reparation on behalf of white Australia for the injustices of colonisation. The white man had a 'debt of sympathy and help,' wrote the CMS newspaper, and this 'debt we owe to our Australian Aborigines still remains unpaid.' The Federal Secretary explained missionary obligations in terms of land rights: 'we have a responsibility to our Aboriginal stations ... because the people there are natives of this land we enjoy – it is their land!'

Paradoxically, missionary visions of making 'reparation' through accepting Aboriginal people as citizens presumed that Aboriginal land was now in fact Australian soil, owned by the nation. Though the CMS's strategies of constructing itself as 'benign' mediator and as repaying the debt owed for colonisation implicitly critiqued colonisation, they also masked their presence as colonisers and continued their attempts to translate Aboriginal people into their vision of Australian citizens. The missionaries constructed themselves as preparing Aboriginal people for the coming colonisers, as mediating between Aboriginal people and colonisers and even as paying reparation for colonisation. Yet CMS's concern that Anindilyakwa people be prepared for citizenship betrays their colonising intent; their ambitions were directed at realising Groote Eylandt and its people as part of a modern united Australian nation.

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1 Susan Thorne "Religion and Empire at Home" Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 145.
2 Porter, Religion Versus Empire?, 330.
3 'Aboriginal Sunday – January 30th; Open Door, January, 1944; 'What of the Aborigines' Open Door, January, 1944.
4 R.J. Hewett 'New Year Message from Our Federal Secretary' Open Door, January 1950.
Over the course of the decade, assimilationist thinking became doctrine. The absence of the 'half-caste' children meant that Anindilyakwa speakers had the CMS's full attention on Groote Eylandt. Yet, for most of the decade, the expectation was still that the 'half castes' would return to Groote Eylandt from Mulgoa, a system of racial segregation established, and missionaries would integrate the 'half castes' into the Australian polity and provide humanitarian assistance to 'full bloods'. In 1946, however, 'a party of walkabout Natives' destroyed the Emerald River station, burning it down. Perhaps they knew of the CMS intention to devote their island to 'half caste' work. Since there was now no accommodation for the 'half caste' mission, the CMS considered sending the children elsewhere but found no suitable place. Enthusiasm for 'half caste' projects was dwindling.

Then in 1947, after a conversation with the Bishop of Carpentaria, the Administrator of the Northern Territory came to the opinion that the CMS was 'not, in effect, a true missionary society' (likely because it was not managed by the Anglican church but was a lay organisation) and recommended that 'half-castes of the Church of England faith be handed over to the ABM.' The children were subsequently transferred to the care of the ABM and sent to St Mary's Hostel in Alice Springs in 1949. 'Half-caste' work no longer had a place in CMS operations; assimilation for Aborigines became the policy.

As these changes were occurring, Anindilyakwa people were building Angurugu Mission, largely unaware of the new CMS doctrine which would have them assimilated. It 'became a hub of activity' as Anindilyakwa people laid foundations for buildings, cleared the bush and planted gardens. Jabani Lalara described the work which occurred in his childhood.

In 1943 then they begin, start to clear away the whole area where they’re going to build the mission. So they said, ‘we’re going to start building.’ And everybody had a job: cut timbers, milling the Cyprus tree, or sometime other trees, cut it down for houses. The number 1 missionary’s [house] and number 2 missionary’s [house] and church. They were built in the same year.

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18 Arrowsmith and Begbie, These Australians, 74.
Figure 11 Angurugu Construction

Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.

Figure 12 Construction of No. 1 and No. 2 Missionary House

Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
Anindilyakwa people viewed (or have come to view) the construction of the mission as an Anindilyakwa project. Anindilyakwa people incorporated the foreign CMS designs into their own social fabric, taking ownership of the mission. Everybody had a job; it was everybody's mission. Hokari found that the way that Aboriginal people considered stockwork meaningful work, calling it 'no shame job', in part explains how nostalgia for a 'golden age' on cattle stations can operate simultaneously with memories of harsh conditions and mistreatment by white stockmen. Even in contexts of exploitation, they were not simply victims, but active agents. Likewise, the old people at Angurugu today feel that they had some ownership over the construction of Angurugu and that they did a good job. This was made clear to me when Jabani expressed his resentment that Anindilyakwa labour and hospitality on their island were never acknowledged by the CMS.

Even though this old people came here to do this job, great job ... even though in those days people used to work, missionary and the government people, you know, and for our people what they've done, they never think of give them reward. They should have reward for that, for finding this place to give 'em to the missionary.

Jabani also told me the story of how St Andrew's Church came to rest at its site at the centre of the mission.

That man [Dick Harris] was standing here, about here, and the old man [Old Bill] was standing here with the wheelbarrow, the wheelbarrow. And he said, ‘we’re going to find a place for a church.’ And he said, ‘Yeah? Well where?’ And the old fella, he said, ‘well I’ve got a stone here. If I throw that stone, if we see that stone where it’s gonna landed, that’s where the church, we’re gonna build church.’ So that man, Dick Harris, he threw the stone from here to there. And that stone, it's landed there. ‘We’re gonna build that church there.’ ‘Oh, that’s good.’

Though this story does not feature in CMS records, I heard it repeatedly from the old people on Groote Eylandt. It is important. For the CMS, the superintendent Dick Harris simply chose a site

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121 Jabani Lalara, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2012.
for a church and oversaw its construction. The story shows, however, that the church was built with Anindilyakwa consent. More than this, the site was not determined by the missionary. Rather, it was the ‘old fella’s’ stone, belonging to the island, which settled on a site for the church. The story of the church's foundation mirrors, almost, the story of old Yandarrnga who cast off rocks which then became the landmarks of the island. While Yandarrnga’s stones spread Anindilyakwa words across the country, this stone spread a different ‘Word’. Jabani’s story shows how the new Angurugu church was woven into the stories about Groote Eylandt. These newcomers and their actions were ‘translated’ into Anindilyakwa stories and worldview, featuring Anindilyakwa people and symbols.

Historian Gwenda Baker argues that European accounts have generally overlooked or omitted the negotiations that occurred between missionaries and Aboriginal people. Nonetheless, she also considers that oral Aboriginal stories may now view the past through rose-tinted glasses, ‘bringing order and control to a chaotic story.’ Given the continuing dissatisfaction with current governments, there is now even nostalgia for ‘mission days’. Though this seems to be the case, I am hesitant to dismiss Anindilyakwa understandings of the past, especially those which may serve as a corrective to stories that privilege missionary agency. Hokari argues strongly that instead of ‘the academic politeness of “we respect your story as ‘memory’ or ‘myth’,” historians must recognise Aboriginal historical knowledge if we are to avoid reproducing a knowledge and power relationship that silences Aboriginal voices. It is possible that over time, Anindilyakwa historical memory evolved, crediting Anindilyakwa people with greater agency and control. It is probable, however, that in 1943, Anindilyakwa people already interpreted events differently to Europeans, translating as they went, asserting their agency in ways missionaries may not have perceived.

Though Anindilyakwa people cooperated with the missionaries for their own reasons, a burgeoning assimilation doctrine meant missionaries would increasingly dominate the ‘long conversation’ with Anindilyakwa people at Angurugu. Assimilation entailed the conversion of Anindilyakwa culture in a more total way than the previous humanitarian mission. At the new

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125 Hokari, Gurindji Journey, 252.
mission, Anindilyakwa people worked for rations: tea, sugar, rice, flour. Anindilyakwa people came and went, but, little by little, most eventually settled either by the mission or at Umbakumba. The CMS missions worked towards assimilation for Anindilyakwa people through practical measures: training people in agriculture, carpentry and domestic work. They matched Aboriginal 'house-girls' to missionaries' wives, requiring them to cook and clean, iron and wash. Other women worked in the school, as cooks or in the garden growing fresh produce for the town. Men also worked at school, in the timber mill or as builders, mechanics, pearlers or agriculturalists. Church was compulsory: it was 'no pray no tucker', as the saying went. Rations were contingent on church attendance.12 Though the rations fostered dependence on missionaries, even these are remembered with nostalgia by some older people, as Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr explained:

Everything was free not with money. People never been getting money yet, only just little bit ration. Fish, vegetable, sugar, flour, milk, tobacco. That old man [Dick Harris] used to give them rations ... It was good. But now, because money, it's hard now. Today is very hard. Before it was easy, it was good ... Work and get ration.127

The missionaries brought children into dormitories (especially girls), marching them to and from the school and the church so they could receive their Christian education. From July 1942, Child Endowment payments were available by the Commonwealth Government for children in institutions, so the CMS began receiving ten shillings per week per child in its care. This was in addition to its annual government subsidy of £725.128 The dormitory, therefore, became more than simply a means of educating children; it was a fundraiser.129 The Child Endowment system encouraged constant supervision of Aboriginal people. For example, when women and children 'went walkabout' during holidays in the dry season, the mission lost its Child Endowment payments. Missionary women, therefore, began 'camping trips' to ensure continual contact with

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127 Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
128 Minutes of the Aborigines Committee of CMS held 9 September 1942, ML MSS 6040/4a Committee for Aborigines Minutes 1942-1945; E.W.P. Chinnery, ‘Subsidies to Mission for Work among the Aboriginals in the Northern Territory,’ 25 March 1942, NAA Fi 1944/193 Part 1, Northern Territory Mission Stations - Policy, Subsidies, etc.
129 The Methodist Overseas Mission was originally ineligible for Child Endowment payments for its refusal to use dormitories. F.H. Rowe, 31 October 1941, NAA A432 1941/976 Paying of child endowment to Aborigines.
The dormitory was also a means of bringing whole families into prolonged contact with the mission. If children were kept there, relatives would not be far away.

The dormitory was also central to implementing a program of marriage reform, locking girls away from potential husbands. Anindilyakwa society operated with a system of wife exchange and polygyny. The marriage system – how ‘to keep the lines straight’ – was confirmed to Anindilyakwa people by the mythic figure of Nambirrirrma on Bickerton Island, long ago. The preference is for men to marry women of the same clan as their grandfather’s. Marriage is thus a re-creation in the present of marriages two generations earlier. Ideally, men of the same clan and generation exchanged women from their own clan for those of another from the opposite moiety. The man who married the eldest of classificatory sisters should take the other ‘sisters’ as co-wives. There may be numerous women in the right relationship for a man to marry, so negotiations would be made by senior relatives of the potential marriage partners. Men were only eligible to marry from their late twenties, so older men would have numerous wives, whereas young men would be single. But when a man died, his wives would be passed on to his brother (a system similar to the levirate marriage of the Old Testament). Girls would typically marry a man much older than themselves, but eventually, when their husbands died, they would be passed to a younger man. Nonetheless, in a system where young men would be single for an extended period, relationships were unstable. Wives frequently changed hands. ‘Wife stealing’, as missionaries called it, was in anthropologist Peter Worlsey’s words, ‘a national sport’. Men competed to acquire and retain wives and women, also, found ways to gain a more desirable husband.

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130 For Committee re Dulcie Levitt, ML MSS 6040/36 Resigned Missionary Files, Levitt Dulcie Carmen.
131 G.R. Harris to J.W. Ferrier, 20 January 1943, quoted in ‘My story, Dick Harris,’ NTAS NTRS 964, Box 1, item 11, Autobiography of Dick Harris.
132 Turner, Afterlife Before Genesis, 85–86.
133 Ibid; See also Rose, Classification of Kin, Age Structure, and Marriage amongst the Groote Eylandt Aborigines, 17.
135 Ibid, 47.
136 Worsley, Knowledges, 36.
137 Ibid.
138 Turner, Afterlife Before Genesis, 86.
139 Worsley, Knowledges, 40.
The missionaries could not abide this system. Girls would be married before completing school. Fighting would break out over the ‘theft’ of wives. From the establishment of Angurugu, ‘control of polygamy and “child-wifery”’ was high on missionaries’ agenda. The retiring chaplain from the Emerald River mission, Len Harris, advised the incoming superintendent, Dick Harris, that Anindilyakwa marriage regulations were ‘remarkably elastic’ and prone to exploitation by older men. He was ‘against a gaol system of dormitory’ but nonetheless acknowledged that ‘a happy well-run dormitory could be a distinct advantage.’ Dick Harris, however, made plans to combat polygamy more actively.

Harris began a program of ‘detaching’ wives and distributing them to younger men, installing himself as the broker of women. This project won the support of younger men, who gained wives before their time. It created an alliance between missionaries and the youth, but alienated older men. Harris recorded in the Station Journal on 30 April 1944 that ‘six men agreed to surrender one “wife” each to be married to single men in proper “line.”’ Harris had some understanding of and respect for the importance of marrying ‘straight’. ‘Surrendering’ women was, if possible, to be voluntary. Yet, in 1945, Harris recorded that when Quartpot left the mission as a witness in a trial, his wives went with him. ‘It was thought an opportune time to detach some women from him’, wrote Harris, ‘so Native affairs detained him on the mainland and we sent two prospective husbands across to bring the women home.’ Missionaries failed to appreciate the nuances of the marriage system, presuming girls were simply ‘promised’ rather than involved in a complex system of exchange which must be replicated in following generations. Five women were given up without an exchange occurring. The disruption of the kinship system rippled through all Anindilyakwa relationships; if a man married his classificatory ‘daughter’, for example, were her brothers now ‘brothers-in-law’ or still his ‘sons’? Were her sisters now eligible for his brother?

Moreover, some polygamy was allowed to continue as Harris did not ‘detach’ older women who

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140 L.J. Harris ‘A statement for the guidance of Mr GR Harris,’ NTAS NTRS 868.
141 ‘My story, Dick Harris’ NTAS NTRS 964, Box 1, item 11, Autobiography of Dick Harris.
143 September, 1945, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.
144 Turner, Transformation and Tradition, 40.
145 Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 52.
146 Worsley, Knowledges, 46–47.
would become ‘widows’, creating a double-standard in the eyes of some Anindilyakwa men. The ramifications of the disruption caused by this redistribution continued for decades.\textsuperscript{148}

Anindilyakwa assertions of agency increasingly occurred in a context of unequal power. Missionaries used violence and fear of exile to compel Anindilyakwa people to respect their authority and assert that Groote Eylandt was under the English speakers’ legal system. In 1946, a man called Killa Killa was speared and killed in a fight. In response, Harris and Constable Mannion arrested twenty-three Anindilyakwa men at once, sending them to Roper Bar and charging them with ‘fighting on mission Reserve.’\textsuperscript{149} Twenty one were found guilty and sentenced to ‘seven days’ hard labour.’ On completing their sentence, they were not permitted to return home because ‘the native who had speared and killed one member of the tribe was still at large.’ Their continued exile was justified on the grounds that it meant the Police Constable had ‘his work made easier.’\textsuperscript{150}

The men finally returned in December, it being made clear to them that they no longer had authority to remain on their own land. Interestingly, Harris advised the CMS committee that ‘no chains had been used on them.’\textsuperscript{151} Though CMS records never mention the use of chains on Aboriginal people, Harris’ need to clarify that chains were not used in this instance is revealing. Oral histories with Anindilyakwa speakers confirm that, at this time, missionaries chained men to the trees beside the church before sending them away for trial and punishment.\textsuperscript{152} Nostalgia only stretches so far; some things about the missionaries are not forgotten.

Yet missionary dominance on Groote Eylandt was never absolute. They were never the only channel through which Anindilyakwa people could engage with modernity. After Fred Gray’s Umbakumba Settlement received such favourable reports compared to the mission, bureaucrats saw no reason to exclude him from also receiving the Child Endowment.\textsuperscript{153} The CMS wanted him gone. In February 1945, they offered to purchase his station for £1,250, requesting that he leave the

\textsuperscript{148} G.R. Harris to J.W. Ferrier, 21 January 1943, quoted in ‘My story, Dick Harris’ NTAS NTRS 964, Box 1, item1, Autobiography of Dick Harris.

\textsuperscript{149} ‘Committee for Aborigines Minutes,’ 26 June, 1946, ML MSS 6040/4a Committee for Aborigines Minutes 1945-1950.

\textsuperscript{150} ‘Committee for Aborigines Minutes,’ 14 August, 1946, ML MSS 6040/4a.

\textsuperscript{151} ‘Committee for Aborigines Minutes,’ 28 January, 1947, ML MSS 6040/4a.

\textsuperscript{152} Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December 2012.

\textsuperscript{153} H. Banenger, ‘Natives on Groote Eylandt,’ 27 September, 1943, NAA A453 1951/536.
island.\textsuperscript{154} Gray refused. With the end of the war in 1945, the air base closed. Though Umbakumba lost its market for its products, Gray continued on.\textsuperscript{155} The Administrator of the Northern Territory made Gray ‘caretaker’ of the base in 1946.\textsuperscript{156} From a government perspective, the presence of another settlement on the island could be a positive influence on the CMS, providing some healthy competition.\textsuperscript{157} As in other parts of the world, competition between colonisers accelerated the process of colonisation. For Anindilyakwa people, the competition between the settlements expressed and exacerbated the existing rivalry between the Bickerton and Groote Eylandt clans. Generally, the Bickerton clans settled with the missionaries and the Groote Eylandt clans at Umbakumba with Gray. Anindilyakwa people increasingly identified themselves with the different types of English-speakers as ‘the mission mob’ and ‘the Umbakumba mob’, and, over time, the two settlements deepened the distinctions between clans.\textsuperscript{158} The tension between Umbakumba and the mission was not only a dispute among English-speakers, it was also an Anindilyakwa dispute.

Disputes over wives were a key source of tension between the two settlements. Like the mission, Gray was also implementing a system of marriage reform, buying and redistributing women. At first, the missionaries and Gray cooperated in ‘rounding up Natives’ who resisted their reforms.\textsuperscript{159} But in 1943, according to Gray, ‘Mr Harris came up from the Mission with about forty-five men’ to conduct a trial by spear-throwing at Umbakumba to resolve a dispute over women.\textsuperscript{160} Later CMS complained that Gray came to their Emerald Station ‘heavily armed himself and with a party of natives armed with spears’ to take girls for men at Umbakumba.\textsuperscript{161} A man at Umbakumba had apparently given his six-year-old daughter, Kakaga, as a wife to a man at the mission, going back on what Gray understood as an agreement to wait until the girl reached puberty. Missionaries

\begin{footnotes}
\item[154] Committee for Aborigines Minutes, 21 February 1945, ML MSS 6040/4a Committee for Aborigines Minutes 1942-1945.
\item[159] F.H. Gray, ‘Statement on my activities as Honorary Protector of Aboriginals in regards to Aboriginal MANDAWARR and Aboriginal Kulpaja,’ 9 April, 1944, AIATSIS MS 2451 Fred Gray Collection, Box 6.
\item[160] F.H. Gray, 1 June, 1943, AIATSIS MS 2451 Fred Gray Collection, Box 6.
\item[161] H.M. Arrowsmith, 1 February, 1944, NAA A453 1951/356.
\end{footnotes}
interpreted Gray's party as an attempt to take Kakaga by force.\textsuperscript{163} Gray and missionaries also differed over whether 'escaped' wives from Umbakumba should be allowed to remain at Angurugu.\textsuperscript{163} Gray and Harris became entangled in the very Anindilyakwa politics which they sought to dismantle, using women to assert their dominance over both Anindilyakwa men and over each other as 'civilisers'. Meanwhile, the movement of Anindilyakwa people between settlements unnerved missionaries; it was clear that if the mission failed to serve the interests of Anindilyakwa people, they could equally turn to Umbakumba.

Not all CMS missionaries were antagonistic towards Gray. Missionary nurse Elizabeth Taylor, wrote to the Director of Native Affairs in 1945 defending Gray: 'He is a man greatly loved and respected by Natives ... yet he is ... persecuted by CMS.'\textsuperscript{164} Missionary Philip Taylor offered to be Umbakumba's chaplain in 1946.\textsuperscript{165} Yet in 1947 CMS began asserting to government the necessity of it having 'full control of the whole island'.\textsuperscript{166} Gray must go. They offered him £1,500 for the station in 1948.\textsuperscript{167} Still he did not leave. Gray remained a thorn in their side, hanging on at Umbakumba until 1957, when the Department of Territories eventually compelled him to leave (and provided £8,000 in compensation).\textsuperscript{168} For the CMS, its missionaries were the only legitimate representatives of Christian civilisation on the island.

Despite the missionary use of force, force alone could not hold the fragile mission community together. Furthermore, the nature of their mission – to transform Anindilyakwa people into Christian citizens – precluded the use of force alone. Anindilyakwa people must be convinced of the missionary message. This required language, not violence. The newly established community was culturally and linguistically diverse. Anindilyakwa people spoke both Anindilyakwa and Wubuy and some spoke still more Aboriginal languages. Kriol was also a part of Angurugu's

\textsuperscript{163} F.H. Gray, 'Statement on my activities as Honorary Protector of Aboriginals,' 9 April 1944, AIATSIS MS 2451, Box 6.
\textsuperscript{164} Committee for Aborigines Minutes 3 February, 1944, ML MSS 6040/4 Committee for Aborigines Minutes 1942-1945.
\textsuperscript{165} Keith Cole, \textit{Fred Gray of Umbakumba: The Story of Frederick Harold Gray, the Founder of the Umbakumba Aboriginal Settlement on Groote Eylandt} (Bendigo: Keith Cole Publications, 1984), 90.
\textsuperscript{166} Elizabeth Taylor, 6 April, 1945, NAA A453 1951/536.
\textsuperscript{167} F.H. Gray, 13 June 1946, NAA A453 1951/536.
\textsuperscript{168} Minutes of the meeting of the Federal Council 27-29 May, 1947, ML MSS 6040/1a.
\textsuperscript{169} Committee for Aborigines Minutes 8 December, 1948, ML MSS 6040/4 Committee for Aborigines Minutes 1945-1950.
linguistic culture as some of the ‘half castes’ remained or returned to the island as adults to work on the Angurugu building project. While the missionaries themselves spoke Standard Australian English, there was diversity even among them according to their background and education.

The missionaries envisaged a racial and linguistic hierarchy for Angurugu, with white English speakers situated above ‘half caste’ Kriol speakers who directed, at the bottom, the ‘full blood’ speakers of Aboriginal languages. Gerry Blitner, one of the ‘half castes’, worked first for the RAAF, and then later building Angurugu. He remembered being put in charge of the Anindilyakwa workers as foreman, sharpening the saws and judging the quality of the timber. Towards the end of the war, the CMS sent five additional ‘half caste boys’ back to the island to work under Blitner. Missionaries blamed Blitner and other ‘half caste’ workers for the spread of Kriol among Anindilyakwa speakers. Murabuda remembered the ‘half caste’ workers spoke ‘half English’, ‘half Kriol’ and that Anindilyakwa speakers learned Kriol from them. The CMS encouraged the ‘elimination of pidgin [sic] English’ among ‘half castes’ in order that ‘there may be no feeling of separation from whites on that basis. Deviations from Standard Australian English were to be ‘eliminated’ in the name of equality. That is, non-standard Englishes and Kriol were, to missionaries, a mark of inferiority.

Pierre Bourdieu’s model of language economies is a useful framework for understanding the negotiations that occurred at the multilingual mission. Bourdieu describes linguistic competencies as a kind of capital, valuable within linguistic marketplaces. Linguistic competencies maintain their value where social conditions uphold the status associated with this or that kind of speech. But this process is a struggle; authorities ‘compete ... to impose the legitimate mode of expression ... the legitimate language and its value. At Angurugu, a multilingual community, it was not clear in which language influence and authority lay. The

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70 Thomas, Martin. Gerald Blitner interviewed by Martin Thomas.
71 Aborigines Committee Minutes, 18 April, 1945. ML MSS 6040/44.
73 Murabuda Wurramarrba, oral history interview with author, 4 September 2012.
75 Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 57.
76 Ibid, 58.
elimination of Kriol would consolidate the value of Standard Australian English at Angurugu, bringing Angurugu's language economy into closer conformity to that of white Australia. The missionaries' attempt to create a racial and linguistic hierarchy, however, was frustrated within a language economy where Standard Australian English was not always the language of prestige, influence or power. For example, missionaries depended on Kriol speakers' knowledge of Anindilyakwa. The 'half castes' became key leaders and negotiators for their language competencies, as Jabani Lalara explained:

> When they moved from Emerald they were here, all that children that'd been taken away from Ngukurr area ... And they were helping. Helping. They used to work with the white staff. They used to work with the traditional with the aboriginal people. Translation and all that. They worked together. They would speak English and translation went on, you know.177

A number of Anindilyakwa people soon became proficient in English, having already learned some through their connection with the Emerald River mission. Missionaries became dependent on Anindilyakwa speakers as interpreters for their success as evangelists as well as for the more mundane day-to-day running of the mission community. Judy Lalara's father, Gula Lalara, was one of these interpreters. 'He works in-between white and black', she said.178

Missionary sources name the interpreters. The same sets of names recur over the years. They were usually men in their teens or early twenties. A visiting linguist, Mary Moody, mentioned her informants in 1950 were 'Gula, Nabilyiya [Nabilya] and Nangwara'.179 The teachers and interpreters in the boys' school in 1952 were also Nabilya Lalara, Gula Lalara, Punch Lalara and Murabuda Wurrumarra.180 Likewise, 'Gula, Nabilija [Nabilya], Murabuda and Galima' served as interpreters for the chaplain at the 'camp services'.181 As boys, these men had featured in missionary publications about the Emerald River mission; they had associated closely with the missionaries

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177 Jabani Lalara & Murabuda Wurrumarra, oral history interview with author, 12 June, 2012
since childhood. As young men and interpreters, missionaries praised them and gave them special privileges. They featured in missionaries’ prayer letters and accompanied the chaplain on evangelistic travel.

Many of these young men were brothers. Gula, Punch, Galima and Nabilya were Lalara men, sons of Old Banjo Lalara. They also shared a particular connection to the land. Angurugu sits on Maminamandja country. But when the Lalara family came over to Groote Eylandt, the Maminyamandja gave the land to Numulyarrgariya Lalara, the father of Old Banjo Lalara. The two clans share a spiritual affinity: they sing the same songs, but on different tunes. Though it was widely accepted during the mission years that the Maminyamandja clan made an agreement with Numulyarrgariya, there was disagreement on the details of the extent of the land given to the Lalara. Some Maminyamandja living at Umbakumba even denied that the land was ever given to the Lalara. To accommodate multiple clans, Angurugu itself became considered a kind of ‘neutral zone’. So while the land functions as ‘neutral’, it is also Lalara, but deep down it remains Maminyamandja. Perhaps the Lalara men, especially the eldest son Gula, felt a special obligation to ensure smooth relationships between missionaries and Anindilyakwa people at Angurugu as part of their responsibility for the land and to uphold their claim to it. Their status as Lalara men, sons of Old Banjo, on Lalara land meant that they could appeal to other families to cooperate. As Baker observed from missionary accounts of Yolngu people, interpreters functioned to give the missionaries legitimacy and support. Though missionaries themselves may not have been aware of the significance of the clan identities of these Lalara men, perhaps the support of these Lalara interpreters gave missionaries legitimacy in the eyes of other clans.

These men were also among the first to engage with the missionaries’ religion. In 1944, according to Harris, Gulpia ‘gave his life to the Lord.’

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183 Turner, Return to Eden, 263.
186 G.R. Harris, ‘Groote Eylandt Station, February 1944,’ NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.
‘dedicate his life to Christ’ in 1945. Gula, Nandjiwara and Nabilya were among the first to be baptised in 1949 and then confirmed in 1952. Historians have debated whether indigenous converts in mission contexts converted for pragmatic reasons – in order to win missionary favour and privileges - or because they found the missionaries' gospel (or at least their interpretation of it) intrinsically attractive. The possibility that they chose Christianity because it enriched their spiritual life should not be discounted. Yet I find the dichotomy between religious and secular motivations unhelpful where a dynamic combination of both pragmatic and spiritual attractions is likely. There is no reason to separate the ‘secular’ and ‘spiritual’ as it is unlikely Anindilyakwa people would have made this distinction. Judy Lalara, told me that Gula ‘wanted to learn more about the missionary’ he was ‘learning the new things’. Learning new spirituality, becoming literate and gaining new skills were attractive to young men. The new religion, it seems, offered potential spiritual, social and material benefits.

Christian faith, responsibility and fluency in English went hand in hand, at least in missionaries' eyes. In 1952, the superintendent assessed Nabilya, about 20 years old, as a man with ‘intellectual capabilities above the average and ... a fine steady character ... willing, conscientious and responsible in any work he is given.’ Likewise, Nandjiwara, also 20 years old, was said to have ‘a good understanding of English’, ‘a happy personality’ and ‘is trustworthy and reliable.’ Gula Lalara was ‘a very steady and reliable worker’ and had ‘a good understanding of the Christian life.’ Missionaries rewarded interpreters with responsibility and privilege, shoring up their continued cooperation and asserting a privileged place for English in Angurugu's language economy. On Gulpia's conversion, he was subsequently given oversight of the women working in

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87 Cole, Groote Eylandt Mission, 50.
89 Brian Standley “Conversion to Christianity; the Colonisation of the Mind?”Christopher Partridge and Helen Reid, Finding And Losing Faith: Studies in Conversion (Paternoster Press, 2006), 155.
91 Heather McDonald, for example, explains that ‘for Aboriginal people...the ancestral realm is not separate from ‘politics’ or ‘economics’ or any other sphere of life.’ Heather McDonald, Blood, Bones and Spirit: Aboriginal Christianity in an East Kimberley Town (Melbourne University Publishing, 2001), 8.
92 Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December, 2012.
93 Kevin Hoffman to J.B. Montgomerie, 1952. ML MSS 6040/6, Aborigines General 1940s-1950s & 1960s.
94 Kevin Hoffman to J.B. Montgomerie, 1952. ML MSS 6040/6.
95 Kevin Hoffman to J.B. Montgomerie, 21 May, 1953 ML MSS 6040/6, Aborigines General 1940s-1950s & 1960s.
the garden." He was given the title of 'Head Boy' and put in charge of the dormitory girls. In 1950, Gula Lalara was also given responsibility for the 'little boys' in their gardening. If missionaries looked for evidence of success, they quickly found it in these men.

In return, the young men managed their relatives. Gula, for example, was so trusted he became the missionaries' detective. The need for such a position reflects the instability of the mission community; missionaries were not entirely in control. As his daughter Rhoda Lalara explained to me:

> When people [missionaries] needed help, they went to see [Gula]. During the night someone went up and called around the house. They had seen somebody walking or maybe breaking into one of the houses. They went to see the footprint and they couldn't recognise the footprint so they went up to my father and 'can you recognise this footprint?' 'Yes it belong maybe from Wurramurra clan.' And he just told them which tribe they were.

At the same time, other Anindilyakwa people resented the missionaries, particularly older people. Judy Lalara remembered how the old people at Angurugu resented their loss of authority.

>[The old people] didn't like the way the missionaries were telling them to do, you know. Missionary were the bossy ones, that what I heard stories, but they used to tell them what to do and they used to punish them, long time ... So it was too hard in those days when the missionary were here.

As a result, interpreters sometimes faced hostility from relatives. Peggy Brock has noted how 'new Christians' put themselves in 'an ambiguous relationship to their own communities.' Anindilyakwa people who interpreted in the school in the early 1950s had the unenviable role of

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G.R. Harris, 'Groote Eylandt Station, February 1944'. NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.

Gordon Sweeney, 14 July 1953, NAA F1 1949/460 Church Missionary Society Groote Eylandt.


Rhoda Lalara, oral history interview with author, 23 April, 2012

Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December, 2012.

disciplining the children, often with corporal punishment, which distressed their families. The young interpreters were obliged not only to their old people and relatives, but to missionaries who provided them with new knowledge and influence. The old people and missionaries competed to influence and retain the loyalty of these young people, realising that the bilingual youth held a pivotal position in the community. Judy Lalara remembers how other relatives criticised her father for his cooperation with missionaries.

My grandmother, my father’s mother, she used to say to her son, ‘why do you keep going to those missionary? They don’t belong to us, they came from another world.’ That’s what she used to say to my father. And my father saying back to her, ‘they’re missionaries, they’re here to bring the story about Jesus.’ That’s what he used to tell my grandmother. My grandmother was a whiny old lady. Whenever she saw missionary going up towards my father, she’d just get up and walk away, you know. She didn’t like the missionary because one of my father’s brother, her other son, they treated him real bad, they chained him around at the church. That’s why she hated missionary, my grandmother didn’t like the missionary.

Despite his mother’s appeals, Gula continued his work, for the time being. The CMS hoped that these young English-speaking converts would grow in influence under the missionaries’ guidance. The CMS Secretary for Aborigines explained that since ‘the Holy Spirit has spoken ... in a foreign tongue’ (English) to some men, these ones could now ‘preach the Word of God to their own people.’ He envisaged that the young English-speaking men would become the missionaries’ allies and agents of evangelism in the camp. Anthropologist Rosemary O’Donnell, looking at the CMS Roper River Mission, argued that evangelism was ‘the primary way through which [new Christians] honoured their obligations to missionaries.’ The young interpreters, likewise, honoured missionaries by managing their relatives’ discontent as well as actively evangelising.

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203 Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December, 2012.
204 J.B. Montgomerie ‘That they might have life,’ 1958, NTRS 1105.
them. As the young converts grew in influence, the CMS would also drive a wedge between young and old in Anindilyakwa society by inverting traditional structures of authority and knowledge.

Missionaries did not admit, or perhaps they were unaware of, the extent to which they depended on the support of the young interpreters. Gula Lalara, for example, spoke on behalf of the missionaries in Anindilyakwa when his relatives were angry, even protecting missionaries from assault. Judy Lalara explained to me:

> When the missionaries were in trouble from other Aborigine men he used to talk for them too, missionary he used to protect them ... [Telling people] not to hate those missionaries because they're here to show us the new things ...

> He used to protect the white people from Aborigine men. Because some didn't like white people coming over to Groote Eylandt ... He was protecting the missionary people every night. He has to go round and check them that they were safe, that not any people would harm them.\(^{206}\)

For men like Gula, befriending and assisting the missionaries as an interpreter was both a way to benefit from missionaries, but also to mitigate the effects of their presence. Though interested in the ‘modern’ world brought by the missionaries, they were also concerned to protect his people and country. At times he was frustrated and disappointed by the missionaries. Nonetheless, Gula saw the future in cooperation with missionaries. The missionaries may have been oblivious, but Gula's daughter insisted that he also ensured that missionaries did not interfere too much with his land, ceremony, culture and family. ‘He wanted to work at to protect the two worlds’, she said, to engage with the missionaries’ culture but not be subsumed by it.\(^{207}\) His knowledge of languages enabled him to stand in the pivotal position between Anindilyakwa and English speakers and negotiate for his and his family's interests. In so doing, he continued a long Anindilyakwa tradition of engagement and selective adoption, a ‘vernacularisation’ of aspects of other cultures. Thus, the intimacies between missionaries and interpreters was, in Ballantyne's words, ‘strategic’

\(^{206}\) Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December, 2012.

\(^{207}\) Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 11 December, 2012.
for both; friendship across language and culture could be used to influence and to manage others’ presence.\footnote{Tony Ballantyne, “Strategic Intimacies: Knowledge and Colonization in Southern New Zealand,” \textit{Journal of New Zealand Studies}, no. 14 (2013): 16.}

Angurugu, in its early years, therefore, was a translating community. Its very name — ‘Angurugu’ — was the product of translation and accommodation, compromise and change. It was a community dependent on interpreters who walked the middle ground between missionaries and other Aboriginal people, holding the fragile community together. Aboriginal people found ways to negotiate, to manage the mission, to incorporate it into their lives. They reasserted their continuing authority and connection to country in ways missionaries perhaps failed to understand. But the negotiations occurred in an unequal power relationship. Anindilyakwa people were not fully informed about the mission’s purpose or the potential consequences of the missionary presence.

Nonetheless, in the early years of the mission, the relationships were not as unequal as they later came to be. Unable to speak the language and far from their home and family, missionaries depended on the goodwill and cooperation of a core group of Anindilyakwa speakers. The missionary dependence on interpreters meant that the mission was unstable. Missionaries relied on the very people they hoped to change and convert to faithfully translate their messages. As we have seen, though the interpreters had much to gain from missionaries, they also had reservations about missionary impositions on their culture and lives. Though the young men who worked as interpreters willingly cooperated with missionaries at this stage, in later chapters, I show that they increasingly refused to acquiesce to missionary demands as they grew older.

As Anindilyakwa people cut the timber and built the mission houses and church, a new CMS doctrine on race and citizenship was developing. Whereas the four ‘old men’ who led the CMS to the site at Angurugu would have expected a humanitarian mission, what they eventually received from the CMS was an assimilation project, an effort to translate their culture and convert their children into Christian citizens of the Australian nation. Perhaps, if they had known, they would never have built the mission at all. This new doctrine – assimilation – would shape the uses of languages throughout the mission years. In 1946, when assimilation was in its infancy, CMS policy
for 'half caste' education was the ‘teaching of good English and the elimination of pidjin [sic]’. When it came to ‘Native Education’, however, they were incredibly open to Aboriginal languages and advocated bilingual education, stating that ‘elementary education on all stations ought to be given in the local vernacular.’ As assimilation took root, the mission’s openness to Aboriginal languages began to diminish. From a missionary perspective, English would do away with dependence on interpreters, eradicate the instability of constant negotiation and allow a missionary voice to dominate. English, they increasingly argued, was necessary for all Aboriginal people as a pillar of Australian citizenship. As I shall explore in coming chapters, to be a fully functioning citizen, for them, demanded fluency and literacy in English.

Yet Anindilyakwa people had their own stories about language and belonging. Anthropologist, Peter Worsley, who visited Groote Eylandt in 1953, recorded this story:

Originally a Makassan ship and a European ship came from the south to Groote Eylandt, stopping at Golambadjja on the east coast, where the spirit of a Makassan is still said to live in a cave. As they went towards Bickerton Island, they stopped at various places in Dalimbo, at Umbakumba, and in Djaragba and Badalumba, and asked the people in the Makassan tongue ‘what people are you?’

The natives, not understanding these words, merely repeated them, an incident in the myth that evokes roars of laughter. At Bickerton Island, they repaired the Makassan ship, and made it very long so that it would sail quickly; the European ship needed no repairs. The Makassan ship proved to be too long, however, and a portion was therefore cut off; this still remains at Bickerton Island at Bandubanduwa.

The ship then went on to Melville Island (near Darwin) ...There the people knew the Makassan language well, and the Makassans stopped and made a huge fire that was blown by the N.W. wind all over the mainland and over Groote, so that the people turned black. Before that they were white or like half-castes. The smoke covered everything like a fog, and the Melville Islanders, being right amongst the thickest
smoke, became particularly black. Other tribes on the edges of the smoke-cloud were not so strongly blackened.\textsuperscript{201}

As Turner understood the story, it is a story of unity being replaced by plurality.\textsuperscript{212} The Makassans’ smoke distinguished racial groups — Aboriginal people, Europeans and Makassan — turning those with the closest contact with the foreigners darker than the others.\textsuperscript{213} Anindilyakwa people differed from all others, due to language. They could not understand the foreigners; therefore their island and their language are distinct. Anindilyakwa, therefore, is embedded in the land, in its songs and stories. It is a marker of belonging to people and country. Gula Lalara spoke of an intimate connection between Anindilyakwa, its speakers and singers, and the islands.

Anindilyakwa, sung by the ancestors as they travelled over the island, is rooted in the landscape of Groote Eylandt.\textsuperscript{214} English could never simply replace Anindilyakwa for Groote Eylandt and its people. English, the language of the ‘modern’ world and Australian citizenship, can say little about ceremonies, places and kin.

For all the interpreting, translating and negotiation that occurred at the mission, there was an underlying tension. For Anindilyakwa people, the Anindilyakwa language was irreplaceable. Groote Eylandt’s songs, stories and ceremonies belonged in Anindilyakwa from ‘the old days’ and Anindilyakwa belonged in the mouths of its people. Many Anindilyakwa people were interested in learning from the missionaries, but also worked to ‘protect the two worlds’ and maintaining a separateness. For missionaries, presenting Aboriginal people to English-speaking Australia as fluent, literate English speakers became a crucial component of their task of transforming Aboriginal people into citizens. For them, English was necessary if Groote Eylandt was to realise itself as Australian soil, belonging to a united modern Australia. The mission years under assimilation policy, therefore, were characterised by ongoing negotiations and unanswered questions. Whose vision for the island and its language would prevail?

\textsuperscript{212} Turner, Return to Eden, 202.
\textsuperscript{213} David H. Turner, Life before Genesis, a Conclusion: An Understanding of the Significance of Australian Aboriginal Culture (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), 77.
\textsuperscript{214} Gula Lalara in Groote Eylandt Linguistics, Eningarribira-Langwa Jumra, preface.
Chapter Two - Judith Stokes and the translation mission

In 1952, a young woman from Adelaide arrived as a missionary at Angurugu and made it her life’s ambition to translate the Bible into Anindilyakwa. Her name was Judith Stokes. This might sound insignificant. For over a century, the Protestant missionary movement had championed Bible translation, believing that by putting the Word of God into the vernacular it would be conveyed into the hearts of the people.

But, as her colleagues remembered, the CMS ‘thought dear Judith was a bit of a pain in the neck because she kept pushing.’ Stokes was not the first CMS missionary to take an interest in translating Aboriginal languages. Lesser known is Nell Harris, the wife of Dick Harris, whose Gunwinggu translation of the Gospel of Mark was published in 1942. There was also chaplain Len Harris, who translated the books of Mark and James into Wubuy in 1945. The CMS praised its two translators but was non-committal about actually resourcing and facilitating their work. Before Nell Harris’ Gunwinggu scriptures were published, the CMS relocated her husband to Groote Eylandt. It would be sixteen years until she could return to Oenpelli (Gunbalanya) where Gunwinggu is spoken. Len Harris resigned in 1945 but in 1958 offered to return to the Northern Territory to spend six months a year as a linguist. The CMS thought this an odd idea, preferring not to have a linguist at all, rather than a part-time worker.

Single women missionaries had their own distinct experiences of missions. Like Stokes, most Australian missionaries were single women. Numerous historians have demonstrated how mission work presented conservative women with opportunities outside of marriage. They

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1 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
2 Harris, We Wish We’d Done More.
3 Ibid, 131.
4 Stephen Harris, The Field Has Its Flowers: Nell Harris (Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 1998), 75.
5 L.J Harris to Ferrier, Secretary for Aborigines, 27 November, 1945. ML 6040/32 Secretary for Aborigines Missionary Files. Harris the Rev L.; Aborigines Committee 16th October, 1958. CMS SA, Box 19, Aborigines Committee Minutes 1958.
6 Aborigines Committee 16th October, 1958. CMS SA, Box 19, Aborigines Committee Minutes 1965-1968.
implicitly challenged conservative feminine norms through their independence and childlessness to such an extent that Elizabeth Prevost suggests calling this movement ‘missionary feminism’. Margaret Allen has revealed that single women missionaries were often well-educated, independent career-women. As Patricia Grimshaw explains, they were professionals. Gwenda Baker found that women’s lower status on Aboriginal missions, compared to male missionaries, actually presented an opportunity to form more intimate relationships with Aboriginal women than was possible for men. Women’s contributions as professional missionary linguists, however, have yet to be explored in depth. Stokes was not the only single missionary woman urging her society to support her work in linguistics. At Millingimbi Methodist Mission, Beulah Lowe was also pursuing a similar course. Yet Stokes is exceptional because, unlike the MOM, the CMS took over a decade to recognise her concerns. Given the paucity of Australian missionary linguistics, it is surprising that, with no experience of missionary work or knowledge of Aboriginal people, Stokes would set out to learn Anindilyakwa in 1952.

By looking at the experiences of Judith Stokes and her concerns for language, I shed light on the tensions embedded in the Aboriginal mission project in mid-twentieth-century Australia. That is, between assimilation and vernacular translation. Two visions of mission work operated at the Aboriginal mission: one of modernisation and incorporation into the Australian nation, the other of multi-lingual, multi-cultural global evangelicalism. Both visions arise out of evangelical narratives of a long history of translation and dissemination of the Bible, yet they conceptualise Aboriginal people’s place in relation to this narrative in different ways. Tensions over linguistics shed light on the tensions within Australian evangelical communities between their international mission and their commitment to what they envisaged as an anti-racist policy of welcoming Aboriginal people into full Australian citizenship. How could missionaries negotiate their faith and practice?
and tradition in light of national visions for Aboriginal people? Were Aboriginal missions somehow different?

Twentieth-century evangelicals had a great story about their vernacular Bible. The story of the translation and propagation of their book over the centuries, triumphant despite the opposition of popes, kings and bishops, was a powerful narrative. Religious historian Peter Thuesen described the growth of a ‘Bible history genre’ in the late nineteenth century with titles such as *How the Bible Came to Us, Our Own English Bible* and *Our English Bible*. I found tracts titled *This Bible of Ours and How it Came to Us* in the CMS archives held by the Northern Territory Archive Service. The Bible narrative genre was sparked by developments in Biblical, textual and historical criticism and the release of a more ‘precise’ Bible in the 1880s, the Revised Version. With further text-critical discoveries in Biblical studies, liberal scholars began an additional retranslation project in 1937: the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952. In the face of these changes and challenges, provenance of the sacred text became a story which evangelicals learned and remembered.

The story begins with the New Testament, written not in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, nor the prestigious Attic Greek, but Koine, a common *lingua franca* around the Mediterranean. The earliest Christians translated to maximise access to their message. Then, so the story goes, it was necessary to make an accurate Latin translation, but when Jerome translated it into Latin in 382 he was called a heretic. According to evangelical publications, the English language itself was destined to become a language for the Bible. When Anglo-Saxons began speaking English, a ‘new Bible language’ was born. Wycliffe translated the Bible into English in 1382 and this work ‘became the foundation of England’s future greatness’, wrote another evangelical historian. According to the evangelical Bible translator Eugene Nida, writing in 1952, Wycliffe’s translation ‘transformed’


18 Ibid, 312.
English society which had been ‘enslaved’ by the aristocracy and church. The vernacular Bible was, for evangelicals, the source of social change and future national greatness.

The narrative of translation was also one of Protestant triumph over Catholicism. Protestantism began with translation. The reinvention of the printing press sparked an explosion of translation. Martin Luther completed his vernacular German New Testament in 1522, announcing that it was the vernacular language that conveyed the Word of God. Luther’s followers harboured the fugitive, William Tyndale, smuggling his English New Testaments across the Channel. As Helen Gardner observed, for British Christians the importance of translating the scriptures was ‘sharpened by the memory of their martyred forefathers’ who burned at the stake for the use of their English Bible.

The story was one of modernity, of progress and of Englishness. The 1611 King James Bible, produced by Royal Committee (‘the wise men of the realm’), established the legitimacy and authority of the English language in English Christianity. The King James Bible became, along with the Book of Common Prayer, the definitive text for Anglicans, a rallying point, both in terms of its use of English and its interpretation of the faith. The vernacular became an article of faith for the Church of England; the church must use ‘such a Tongue as the people understandeth.’ Thuesen observed the ethnocentric character of Bible translation narratives which portray the English ‘race’ as a people of the Book. How the Bible Came to Us declared that ‘England has passed through many periods of stress and storm’ including ‘Romish domination’ but ‘amid all the storm and strife, the English Bible has been the real strength of the English people.

According to evangelical narratives, the Protestant missionary movement was the heir to this translating tradition. In 1804, the same band of activist evangelicals who had established the Church Missionary Society also established the British and Foreign Bible Society. The Society

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10 Eugene Albert Nida, God’s Word in Man’s Language (Harper, 1952), 84–85.
11 Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, 11.
12 Minor-Bryant, This Bible of Ours and How It Came to Us (C.R. Gibson, 1937).
14 Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, 11.
15 Minor-Bryant, This Bible of Ours and How It Came to Us (C.R. Gibson, 1937).
16 Ostler, Empires of the Word, 743.
17 Article XXIV of The Articles of Religion, London 1562.
18 Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, 35.
19 Herne, How the Bible Came to Us, vi.
sought to make Bibles cheap, available and understandable in as many languages as possible. The Bible and The Anglo-Saxon People described the propagation of vernacular Bibles through the Bible Society as the task of English-speaking peoples. Throughout the nineteenth century, English-speaking ‘missionary heroes’ scrambled to translate scripture into indigenous languages with seemingly super-human ability. The triumphant march of the translated Bible, was, according to evangelical narratives, unstoppable.

Australian evangelical missionaries in the mid twentieth century were steeped in the tradition of the vernacular Bible and continued to revere missionary translators. CMS texts reaffirmed the primacy of this narrative in world history; in fact the CMS asserted that history itself was ultimately the story of Christian mission and the dissemination of the Bible. In 1950, the CMS newspaper reported on the progress of Australian Bible translators in Africa. The evangelical newspaper The Australian Church Record recounted the triumphs of William Tyndale, as ‘scholar, translator, martyr’. CMS stories of missionary accomplishment invariably highlighted a great linguist. In 1939, the CMS Open Door newsletter featured William Carey’s ‘covenant’ for India, including the principle ‘to labour unceasingly in Biblical translation.’ Likewise, the CMS taught that evangelism was only possible in Canada when ‘God put it into James Evan’s heart to write the Bible in the Indian tongue.’ Alexander Mackay made ‘full use of his knowledge of Swahili, to translate the Bible’ in the 1870s. Wherever missionaries went, according to the CMS, they translated the Bible, because ‘the way in which a life can be established in the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is by enabling that soul to read the Bible.’ They believed the translated Word had the

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34 Stuart Barton Babbage ‘William Tyndale,’ *Australian Church Record*, 21 August 1952, 7.
36 Gordon Smees, ‘Missionary S.S. Lesson,’ *Open Door*, 1 August, 1938.
37 Gordon Smees, ‘Missionary S.S. Lesson,’ *Open Door*, 1 February, 1939.
power to transform and convert the hearts of its hearers.\textsuperscript{38} For CMS missionaries, therefore, Bible translation was the foundation of missionary evangelism.

Evangelical narratives of the expansion and translation of the Bible typically finished, in true evangelical style, with a call to action. Nida called upon Christians to ‘carry on the noble tradition of the early missionary pioneers’, because the Bible ‘must be translated, published, distributed and read in all languages of the earth.’\textsuperscript{39} Stephen Neill concluded, ‘a third of the people in the world, perhaps, have not yet heard the name of Jesus Christ ...There is plenty still to be done.’\textsuperscript{40} This Bible of Ours (1937) finished, ‘if the Bible is to be a help to the people of any land, it must be put into their own language so they can read it ...The work must go on.’\textsuperscript{41} The ‘priceless gift’ of a translated Bible would ‘brighten human life’ and transform societies, because the translation of the Bible, evangelicals claimed, led to ‘translation into living deeds.’\textsuperscript{42} This had happened, they believed, for England and English speakers and would happen for others. The story’s climax was always painted as sometime in the future, inviting the hearers to continue the story, to be the next chapter.

Stokes hoped to answer the call. She was born in Adelaide on 30 June 1924. She applied to the CMS to be a missionary in 1949, aged 24. She had a particular avenue of work in mind. On her first application to CMS South Australia she was clear in her ambition: ‘translation and literary work appeal to me. Especially in Iran.’\textsuperscript{43}

Stokes had reason to consider herself an ideal candidate and to expect that the CMS would quickly commission her as a budding linguist. She held an honours degree in European languages from the University of Adelaide. She was baptised and confirmed into the Anglican Church; ‘soundly brought up in a well-known Church and Christian home’ and born into a missionary family. With regard to her ‘calling’, she had felt destined to missionary work since childhood and in terms of evangelical doctrinal orthodoxy, her convictions could not be faulted. The Candidates’ Committee praised her as ‘very acceptable to the CMS from all points of view.’ She seemed ‘full of balance and

\textsuperscript{39} Nida, \textit{God’s Word in Man’s Language}, 107, 177.
\textsuperscript{41} Minor-Bryant, \textit{This Bible of Ours and How It Came to Us}.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid; Paterson Smyth, \textit{How We Got Our Bible}, 139; Hunting, \textit{The Story of Our Bible}, 363.
common sense. They were ‘impressed by Judith’s obvious earnestness’ and ‘the fact that she has for a long time desired to be a missionary and could not think of being anything else.’ She would have written to them sooner to commence training, but she had good reason to delay; she had been caring for her dying mother. It seemed now a missionary career was meant to be.

At first, there was no problem with her linguistic ambitions per se, but the CMS officials believed it unwise to commence immediately in linguistics, thinking it best for her first to live in Iran and gain experience. During that time ‘she must occupy herself in some way.’ Nursing was ‘out of the question’ so they directed her to the other profession available to women missionaries: teaching. The CMS South Australian Secretary, Irene Jeffreys, notified Stokes that she had been accepted as a candidate in training, that Stokes would become a teacher, and that she had enrolled Stokes in a graduate teaching course in Melbourne for 1950.

Stokes hated teaching and made no secret of it. She learned teaching on the job. Living away from family and working full-time for the first time, Stokes taught unfamiliar subjects (mathematics), as well as studying her missionary training subjects in the evenings. By May, Jeffreys was concerned about Stokes’ health and requested that her hours be reduced and that she no longer be required to teach arithmetic at such a high level. By June, when it was found that Stokes was physically healthy, she changed her tune; ‘there will be many things on the missionary field which a missionary must be prepared to do and endure whether she likes it or not ... She must prove that she can stick it out now.’ After a few months, Stokes began to seem less like an ideal candidate. The criticism was hard. She was ‘rather apathetic in the classroom’, ‘a slow worker...[who] takes infinite pains so that undue time is taken for all that she does.’ They worried that she was ‘a very small personality’ who might not ‘grow big enough’ for teaching.

Stokes suffered some kind of breakdown, perhaps anxiety or depression. She said she felt ‘tied up into knots inside’ and ‘fighty [sic] all the time’. For the CMS Candidates Committee, the talk of her

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49 Mercer House to Irene Jeffreys, 27 June, 1950, CMS SA.
as ‘full of balance’ evaporated. They feared she would develop long-term mental illness, and muttered ‘schizophrenia’. They sent her to a psychiatrist and quickly put her on the train back to Adelaide in July 1950.

But her missionary hopes did not die with what came to be referred to as her ‘awkward experience in Melbourne’. With her sisters nearby and returning to her usual part-time tutoring and church duties, she regained her health. The following year, a visiting missionary from Iran, Betty Gurney, offered her a position at a school for blind children in Isfahan. This was not the linguistic role Stokes had desired, but it was missionary work. Gurney sold it to Jeffreys as a chance of redemption for Stokes; an opportunity for ‘spiritual and mental recovering’ after her first failure. ‘I know she is muddle-headed’, she wrote, but ‘I never met anyone with a deeper unselfishness.’ By August 1951, the General Secretary of CMS NSW, Clive Kerle, had applied for Judith’s visa to Iran and Judith booked her passage for November.

Yet her ‘awkward episode’ could not be forgotten. The advice of three Sydney doctors was that ‘the background of potential psychosis’ made Stokes unsuitable for Iran. Moreover, they considered Stokes unfit for work anywhere in Asia, but suitable for an African field. Africans’ characters were supposedly more suitable to Stokes’ ‘absence of selfish assertion’ compared to the ‘competitive turmoil’ in Asia. ‘No to Persia. Yes to Africa’ was the CMS Federal Secretary’s ruling. Feeling that they could not act against doctors’ wishes, those in Iran turned her down.

It looked as if her ‘calling’ may not be realised until Stokes heard that the Aborigines Committee of the CMS was desperate for teachers. She wrote to the Aborigines Secretary, J.B. Montgomerie in 1951:

> In view of the fact that the door is shut concerning my candidature with the society as a missionary in Persia, I am now writing to make an application ... to be a school

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51 Agnes Williams to Irene Jeffreys, 11 July 1950, CMS SA.
teacher on Groote Eylandt ... I am hoping it may be possible for me to attend the School for Linguistics at Berwick, Victoria.58

Montgomerie eagerly accepted the offer. He was aware of Stokes' continuing interest in translation and informed the superintendent, 'she has a desire to do Language work, in addition to her ordinary vocation.'59 He assured Stokes that although 'language translation will naturally occupy' her thinking, 'one more experienced' would conduct this work and that 'as the School work is so essential ... full time must be given to the school.' 'The [language] study work will be fitted in', he wrote, 'at times convenient to yourself.'60 Linguistics was to be a free-time hobby. Phyl Billingshurst, Stokes' friend remembers her saying that she was 'absolutely devastated' she could not go as a linguist.61 So, in May 1952, with no teaching qualifications, Stokes arrived at Angurugu, still hoping to be a translator.

The 'more experienced' linguist was Mary Moody, a postgraduate student from Sydney University who had studied under A.P. Elkin. She was based at Angurugu to study Anindilyakwa for her Master's thesis. Moody married a missionary who was also working at Angurugu, and the newlyweds were absent honeymooning when Stokes arrived. From the beginning, Stokes was so eager to begin language study that she could hardly wait the couple of months for Mary to return.

We are looking forward to more systematic language study when Mary arrives. So far we have found it very difficult to make time for it ... We have been learning as many words and phrases mainly connected with school work as we could after taking them down from Danabana ... We are longing to be able to speak the language as it seems such a vital step in the work up here, especially amongst the children ... We look ahead to the time when these people have His Word in their own language.62

58 Judith Stokes to J.B. Montgomerie, 14 December, 1951, ML MSS 604/203, Miss Stokes.
59 J.B. Montgomerie to Kevin Hoffman, 24 April, 1952, NTAS NTRS 871, Box 12, Correspondence.
60 J.B. Montgomerie to Judith Stokes 24 April, 1952, ML MSS 6040/203, Stokes Miss Judith.
61 Personal communication with author, Phyl Billingshurst, 12 November, 2012.
62 Judith Stokes, 11 July 1952, MLMSS 6040/303, Miss Stokes.
Five months later, however, Mary's new husband was found drowned in the Angurugu River. He had epilepsy. Mary returned south for a period, with plans to return to Angurugu as a linguist, but never did.  

Stokes became anxious again. It was her first Christmas away from home, her first wet season and the humidity in her leaky bark hut (no electricity, no fans) was oppressive. The superintendent wrote to Montgomerie, concerned that Stokes and Norma Farley (another recently arrived missionary) were showing 'signs of distress'. Montgomerie was more exasperated than supportive; 'their lot is no different from literally thousands of others in various Mission fields ... it is not as if these two girls are reaching the end of their term and are completely worn out. They have not even been twelve months.' He had little hope for Stokes continuing as a missionary; 'generally, these frictions are the beginning of the end.' By this time Stokes understood that her teaching responsibilities meant that she had little free time. Her colleague, Moody, had recently departed after a shocking death. There was no longer a linguist on Groote Eylandt, nor did the CMS have plans to recruit one. It is likely that Stokes was beginning to suspect that any CMS interest in Anindilyakwa would be deferred indefinitely.

In this context, Stokes taught at the school and learned Anindilyakwa in her free time. After a year, she established rudimentary language lessons with Gula Lalara and Mangalala Wurramara, held once a week for other mission staff. In staff meetings she raised the matter of language, insisting that staff needed more practice than her weekly classes alone. She managed to convince some staff that a full time linguist was needed. By 1954 Stokes was preaching in Anindilyakwa at weekday church services, the only missionary to do so. She gradually built up a dictionary, writing words on slips of paper she stored in a shoebox. 'I used to talk about the need for translation whenever CMS secretaries and others visited us, but we were always short of teachers',

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63 Moody remarried and went with her new husband as missionary linguists to South East Asia.
64 Farley, Groote Eylandt, 71.
65 J.B. Montogmerie to Kevin Hoffman, 21 January 1953, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 8, Correspondence 1950-1955.
67 Kevin Hoffman, 'Minutes of Staff Meeting, November 6th 1953,' NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1.
69 Julie Waddy, 16 May, 1996, CMS SA, Box 42, Judith Stokes Australian Award OAM 1997.
she later said. On her 1955 furlough she completed her Diploma of Education. Then, in 1958 she requested to postpone her second furlough so that she could meet with visiting linguist Arthur Capell on Groote Eylandt. By the time of Capell's visit, Stokes had translated a number of Bible stories, prepared primers and exercises, and written a phrase book with an accompanying audio tape.

Due to a brief period of sufficient teaching staff, the Angurugu missionary staff opted to 'release' her from the classroom to study Anindilyakwa full time for a year from August 1959. Armed with a battery-operated recorder, she recorded stories from the old people and put gospel stories and songs on tape. She published a local newspaper containing news, prayers, events and translated Bible stories. Her aim was to foster a literary culture, especially for reading scripture, as she wrote in the newspaper:

Would you like to learn to read in your own language? I hope you will be able to read the story on this page. Those who can read English can try reading it to the old people. In this way, Christians who have been to school can share stories from the Bible with those who have never been able to go to school.

In September 1959, the Assistant Director of Welfare Branch visited Angurugu and discovered that Stokes was not in the classroom. The missionaries had not considered that diverting Stokes to linguistic work would disqualify her from receiving the government subsidy for teachers and was shocked when the money was cut off. Montgomerie attempted to convince the Director of Welfare, Harry Giese, that Stokes' linguistic work would contribute to education, explaining the benefits of bilingual education and that Stokes' general presence contributed to the 'preparation

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71 John Mercer to J.B Montgomerie, 4 September, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, 1958-1960 General.
72 Aborigines Committee Minutes, 11 September, 1958, CMS SA, Box 19, Aborigines Committee Minutes 1965-1968, also sundries back to 1934.
74 'ANINDILYAUGWA AGARRAGABRA', April, 1959, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 2 Literacy Materials, Folder 9 Anindilyaugwa Agarragara.
75 'ANINDILYAUGWA AGARRAGABRA', April, 1959, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 2, Folder 9.
76 H.C. Giese to J.B. Montgomerie, 8 December, 1969, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 12, Operational Subsidies.
77 J.B. Montgomerie to G.R. Harris, 18 December, 1959, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 12, Operational Subsidies; Edna Louis to G.R. Harris, 4 February, 1960, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 12, Operational Subsidies.
of girls for assimilation through instruction in ways of living.'\textsuperscript{78} This proved fruitless. In August, Stokes returned to the classroom and was again attracting government funds for the CMS.

Stokes resisted being sent back to school teaching and ensured Montgomerie knew her reluctance.\textsuperscript{79} There was no lack of staff: a new teacher was on the way to the island. Furthermore, she believed that perhaps there could be other sources of income for the CMS other than a government subsidy. Maybe there was a generous donor, or perhaps she could organise a special appeal. She had likely heard that an anonymous donor had offered the CMS £600 to fund linguistic work in Australia back in 1954, but that the offer had never been taken up.\textsuperscript{80} Maybe her church in Adelaide could sponsor her. Failing this, she was willing even to take a pay cut, offering to repay CMS for her Diploma of Education fees (essentially working for free) or to receive a smaller salary. She would consider anything and made it clear that she considered linguistics far more important than teaching.\textsuperscript{81} Stokes had no success.

Still she persisted. In 1962, she contracted hepatitis which was, to her, an 'opportunity'; a fortnight of rest from the classroom allowed her to complete her translation of the Morning Prayer Service.\textsuperscript{82} That year, she pointed out in her article published in the CMS magazine that the twenty-fourth article of the Church of England called it 'plainly repugnant to the Word of God' to fail to conduct church services in the vernacular. To her, this principle was fundamental to the whole 'missionary commission and motive in North Australia.'\textsuperscript{83} The implication of her position is clear: failure to translate for Aboriginal people compromised the core values of the faith.

Why did Stokes face such reluctance, even resistance, to her linguistic ambitions from the CMS, an organisation apparently committed to evangelical protestant visions of missionary work? Stokes' linguistic mission did not fit neatly into the CMS's plans for Aboriginal people. Although the CMS was an eager supporter of linguistic work and Bible translation overseas, it explicitly stated that work in North Australia was fundamentally different to that overseas. The CMS Secretary for Aborigines explained in 1954 that 'we know that Aboriginal missions are different from others'...
because they are 'more industrialised'. That is, they focused on training.⁸⁴ The Regional Secretary for Aborigines in 1961 contrasted North Australia to 'normal' missionary fields.⁸⁵ In 1962 the CMS Federal Secretary explained that it was 'hard to correctly relate our work in the North to the normal working of the Society overseas' because the 'large social programme' in North Australia was unlike anything else.⁸⁶ In 1962, Jeffreys explained that 'overseas fields must have priority if CMS is to keep solely to its evangelist aims', contrasting evangelism overseas with 'the govt's assimilation policy' in Australia.⁸⁷

The differences included the perceived difficulties of Aboriginal cultures, particularly nomadic life. Missionary Alf Wilson explained that 'it was useless to make comparisons with overseas work' because there 'you have settled communities to start with'.⁸⁸ Perce Leske explained that the 'peculiarity' of Aboriginal missions had to do with leaving nomadic culture.⁸⁹ Others missionaries called Aboriginal people 'stone Age'.⁹⁰ The CMS Federal Secretary in 1955 articulated the difference between North Australia and Africa in terms of the spread of civilisation.

> We have the great privilege of bringing civilisation to these people in a Christian setting. It was not so in Africa and the work of missionaries there has been made harder because of it.⁹¹

He imagined that in Africa, 'civilisation' was introduced by others colonists: government officials, traders, pastoralists and the like, leaving missionaries to concentrate on evangelism. In North Australia, however, the missionary enjoyed inviolable reserves so had the 'privilege' of not only introducing Christianity but of introducing 'civilisation'. The CMS was 'leading [Aboriginal people] from [their] old tribal, nomadic life to 20th century civilisation.'⁹² Aboriginal people were

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⁸⁴ J.B. Montgomerie to S.R. Warren, 6 December, 1954, NTAS NTRS 871, Box 12, Correspondence.
⁸⁶ G.H Fletcher, 'Answers to Questionnaire,' 17 February, 1961, CMS SA Box 19, CMS Aborigines Commission.
⁸⁸ Alf Wilson, 'Aborigines' 18 January, 1961, CMS SA, Box 38, Aborigines
⁸⁹ Perce Leske, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2011.
⁹¹ G. Fletcher quoted in K. Hoffman 'Minutes of Staff Meeting' 26 August, 1955, NTRS 868, Box 10, Staff Meetings 1955-1959.
to 'leap from the Stone Age to the Space Age.' In 1962 the Secretary for Aborigines explained Aboriginal work in terms of modernisation: Aboriginal people were 'passing over a bridge' from 'nomadic primitivism' to 'industrialised sophistication'. The missionary task in North Australia was not merely to evangelise, but to introduce the 'modern world' to Aboriginal people.

The distinctions between Aboriginal missions and others overseas cast doubt in the minds of many as to whether Aboriginal missions were 'real' missions and their staff 'real' missionaries. Missionary Wilma Taylor explained to me that Australian churchgoers were unsure if North Australia was a real mission field because it was not so evangelistic.

There was a certain section of people who thought, 'oh, but you're not really a missionary because you haven't been overseas.' We used to say 'we've been over to Groote Eylandt, that's overseas.' We weren't able to give, sort of, lists of how many people were converted during our ministry and all that sort of thing. I mean up North it was a very slow process.

There was even a suspicion among the missionaries in North Australia themselves that the best candidates went overseas, and that those who worked with Aboriginal people were not 'real' missionaries. Missionaries Jenny Green and Jim Taylor both explained to me:

We came across a bad feeling among ex-CMS people that if you were considered smart you went to Africa or one of the other countries and if you were considered a 'problem' you went to work with the Aborigines ... The people that experienced it felt that it was against them, sort of that they were below standard.

They used to reckon in those days, this was 1958-9, that if they'd accepted you as a missionary and they didn't know what to do with you well they'd send you up to the Territory. Me, thinking I was the bee's knees, thought I'd be going to Africa or

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53 Church Missionary Society of Australia, Decade, 20.
54 George Pearson, Memorandum, May, 1962, ML MS 6040/6, General Files, Aborigines Policy Committee of Inquiry.
55 Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
56 Jenny Green, oral history Interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
something like that, but no, they'd made a glorious mistake and sent me up to the Territory!\footnote{Jim Taylor, oral history Interview with author, 1 July, 2012.}

The CMS Aborigines Committee also contributed to the perception that missionaries in North Australia were of a lower quality. Unlike overseas fields, it appears they did not consider higher education of any value for work in North Australia. One missionary cynically commented in 1948 that his colleague was ‘ignorant and uneducated, but anyone with an education is not wanted up here ... what is wanted is a knowledge of hard work irrespective of brains.’\footnote{Note, ML MSS 6040/33, Box 28 Resigned Missionary Files, Hodge, Samuel John George.} Another recommended the same missionary for Groote Eylandt for his lack of education.

We must never expect too much of him, for he has not the background. His general knowledge is extremely retarded, but he makes up for the lack of culture, by his faithfulness on the mission station ... It is this type of man who will help us to develop the north and hold it for CMS.\footnote{Note, ML MSS 6040/33, Box 28, Hodge.}

The work of development and integration in North Australia was so distinct that some CMS officials seriously doubted that the CMS, a supposedly ‘overseas mission' society should operate in North Australia.\footnote{Jack Dain, ‘Memorandum for CMS Committee of Enquiry on the Society’s Work in North Australia,’ 1 May, 1964, ML MS 6040/6, Aborigines Policy Committee of Inquiry.} Did Aboriginal missions really have a place in the CMS’s agenda of global evangelism?

Of course, CMS officials answered ‘yes’. The apparent tensions between global evangelism through vernacular translation of the gospel and the preparation of Aboriginal people for Australian citizenship were overcome by understanding assimilation as the process by which Aboriginal people would share in a British evangelical heritage. North Australian mission was, to the CMS, part of a story of ‘rapid integration into the general Australian community.’\footnote{E.W. Stockton, ‘Answers to Aborigines Commission Questionnaire,’ 26 January, 1961, CMS SA, Box 19.} For example, in 1959 the National Missionary Council of Australia also painted Aboriginal missions as modernising projects, transferring people from ‘the stone age’ to white Australian society.
Transition from stone-age primitive nomadism to twentieth century westernism is probably the hardest challenge ... The brown man's destiny is to throw in his lot with the white man.\textsuperscript{102}

Eventually this modernising mission would supposedly incorporate Aboriginal people into English-speaking Australian society with a shared British, Anglican, heritage. 'It is for the white man to welcome the coloured man into his society, into his Churches, into his national heritage, so that both may share it together,' declared Capell in 1962.\textsuperscript{103} CMS Aborigines Secretary George Pearson in 1962 likewise contrasted international missionary approaches and those in North Australia, arguing that they must differ because Aboriginal missions aimed at 'rapid integration into or assimilation into the general Australian community.'\textsuperscript{104}

Linguistic work and Bible translation, however, would indicate that Aboriginal people remained separate to English-speaking Australia. When in 1964 the matter arose of whether the English King James Bible was appropriate for Aboriginal people, a CMS Committee of Enquiry was alarmed that 'very few Aboriginal Christians read their Bible every day.' This did not lead them to translate the Bible into a vernacular as would occur overseas, but only to lament the 'low standard of reading.' In fact, it was 'an achievement', they boasted; 'folk on our missions are better equipped to read the English Bible than those on some of the missions in the Centre.'\textsuperscript{105} Evangelicals' historical imaginings with the translated Bible, printing press and spread of mission education was equally, to the CMS, a story of modernisation, culminating in British 'civilisation'. To translate the Bible into an Aboriginal language would, according to this vision, be a step backwards; Australia already had a vernacular Bible, thanks to the 'heroes of the faith'. The CMS UK General Secretary, therefore, explained in 1950, 'there can be no future development of the Aborigine from a stone age man into a twentieth century citizen unless he can learn some English.'\textsuperscript{106} For Aboriginal

\textsuperscript{102} C. Kerle & R.A. Hickin, 'Aborigines and Tomorrow – The Churches Speak with One Vote,' 1959, CMS SA, Box 19, North Australia home & General.

\textsuperscript{103} Arthur Capell, 'The Aborigine...Yesterday and Tomorrow,' \textit{Open Door} July 1962, 11.

\textsuperscript{104} G.A. Pearson, 'Statement by the Regional Secretary – the Groote Eylandt Problem,' 7 June, 1962, NTAS NTRS 873 Correspondence, Box 16, Chaplain's Conferences 1957-1962.

\textsuperscript{105} 'Summary of replies to Questionnaire to Chaplains,' 3 August, 1961, CMS SA Box 19, CMS Aborigines Commission.

people, English education would be the main means of sharing the ‘vernacular’ Bible because Aboriginal people were to be full members of the English-speaking Australian nation.

Returning to Judith Stokes, it seems she refused to acknowledge that Aboriginal missions were ‘different’. In light of the prevailing discourses among CMS officials around missionary work with Aboriginal people, how could Judith Stokes hold such a different vision? Why did she long to learn the language?

Stokes’ missionary colleagues remember her tenacity, her determination to become a missionary linguist. One commented that given ‘great frustration in having to wait many years ... most people would have resigned long before.’ Angurugu chaplain David Woodbridge explained to me in his oral history that ‘we had Judith Stokes there, battling away with translating ... She had to battle her way into it.’ Another wrote about her experience at length.

Often she was not understood and at times her cries for help ignored ... Judith therefore battled against great odds as she pioneered the language work. She had no one who realised what she was facing except SIL [Summer Institute of Linguistics]. We had no experts so unless Judith clamoured to be able to get assistance and kept up the demands she saw no recognition of needs she had. There really wasn’t anyone who appreciated her situation ... She made pleas for time, help, assistance, but often only ended in frustration. She never gave up and worked exceedingly long hours.

These comments were made in 1997 and perhaps reflect the CMS’s later change in policy to prioritise Bible translation; if Stokes is remembered as an extraordinary ‘pioneer’, then other ‘ordinary’ missionaries could hardly be expected to have such foresight. Yet the question of why Stokes was so doggedly determined to pursue translation when her colleagues were ambivalent remains.

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108 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
It was partly personality. Wilma Taylor described her as ‘very persistent’, ‘very dogged’ in her language work.\textsuperscript{110} Billingshurst described her as ‘always very focused’.\textsuperscript{111} Missionary Lance Tremlett commented that ‘she was a fairly intense person.’\textsuperscript{112} She was a perfectionist, typically so engrossed in her work that she tended to be absent minded about other things, ‘dithery.’\textsuperscript{113} With things she considered important, such as the linguistic work, she showed incredible attention to detail.\textsuperscript{114} Some of her determination, no doubt, stemmed from her love of languages. Bible translation offered an opportunity to pursue this passion. Yet from an evangelical perspective, her talent and passion for language could be understood as gifts from God to be used for missionary purposes; her love for language could be further evidence of the divine imperative of translation. Stokes was deeply spiritual and her convictions nourished her and allowed her to remain optimistic. ‘I would not have lasted the distance,’ she wrote on her retirement, ‘if I didn’t know that God is able to do more than we ask or think.’\textsuperscript{115}

It is possible also that she felt the need to prove herself a ‘real’ missionary after her first rejection. Stokes, with her Honours degree in European languages, had been sent to the North along with missionaries with ‘retarded general knowledge’ and ‘lack of culture’. Perhaps, after her rejection from Iran, she felt the need to prove that she was a missionary equal to any other in the world and that North Australia was just as much a mission field as China, India or Iran. Her belief that she had been called to be a missionary linguist shaped her perspective on Aboriginal missions; they could not be so different to those overseas because she had been called to be a ‘real’ missionary and that always meant translating the Bible.

That Stokes had ‘for a long time desired to be a missionary and could not think of being anything else’ is unsurprising given her upbringing.\textsuperscript{116} Stokes had been associated with the CMS her whole life. Her mother was a CMS member.\textsuperscript{117} Her older sister Evelyn had been a speaker at CMS’s annual Summer School and later ‘gave up a lucrative position as an accountant’ to be CMS SA’s Lay

\textsuperscript{110} Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
\textsuperscript{111} Personal communication with author, Phyl Billingshurst, 12 November, 2012.
\textsuperscript{112} Lance Tremlett, oral history interview with author, 18 November, 2011.
\textsuperscript{113} Gwen Tremlett, oral history interview with author, 18 November, 2011.
\textsuperscript{114} Earl Hughes, oral history interview with author, 22 October, 2011.
\textsuperscript{117} Judith Stokes, ‘Questions for Candidates,’ CMS SA.
Two of Stokes’ aunts had served as CMS missionaries in China. Her uncle, also a CMS missionary, taught theology at Nankin (Nanjing) Theological College evacuating only months before the Japanese invasion in 1938. The CMS connection went back generations. Her grandfather, Rev F.H. Stokes was an Anglican minister who worked in the Bishop's Home Mission Society. He was grandson of another Anglican clergyman who organised meetings for the CMS in Kent. Judith's father, Edward Stokes, was not a clergyman himself, but was also well travelled and educated. Like so many missionaries, he was a teacher, educated at the University of Adelaide and Magdalen College, Oxford, and taught at schools in England, across India and finally was principal of Queens College in North Adelaide. Like many other young evangelical women in the early twentieth century, Stokes felt part of a global evangelical community, connected through missions.

Furthermore, on her departure to North Australia Stokes already understood herself as contributing to an international community of missions and so was less likely to consider her new work with Aboriginal people different to other missionary work. Judith herself was Secretary of the CMS SA League of Youth. The League of Youth proved particularly appealing to young evangelical women and effective in preparing them for missionary careers. Unlike ordained ministry within the churches, the League had no official restrictions on women’s activities and accorded them equal status at all levels. Canadian historian Ruth Compton Brower argues that, in the early twentieth century, evangelicals developed an increasing consciousness of a world of interlinked Christian believers, an ‘imagined community’ of global dimensions. For example, the CMS newspaper declared that ‘our Parish is the whole world.’ Australian Sunday School children
learned to identify with Christian children overseas. Through reading mission journals and attending Summer Schools, even those who stayed at home developed a consciousness of an international evangelical network. Women like Stokes participated in a global community as women increasingly visited missionaries in the field or travelled to other missions on their furloughs and then conveyed their experiences of ‘world Christendom’ to those at home.

Stokes’ close associations with the international missionary movement made her aware of both evangelical translating traditions and of new developments in Bible translation. The CMS encouraged youth with ‘keen missionary interest’ to read histories of missions and missionary biographies. Stokes’ regular reading was largely evangelical publications: ‘missionary books, biography, travel ... Inter Varsity Magazine & the Open Door.’ Billingshurst remembers that a missionary linguist from Africa came to speak at a CMS League of Youth camp. Stokes, only a teenager at the time, told her friend that this was ‘what she wanted to do: work with languages.’ In the early twentieth century, evangelicals across the world invested new energy into translating their scriptures. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) was founded by William Cameron Townsend in 1935. This organisation is dedicated to recruiting and training missionaries, especially for Bible translation, creating professional missionary linguists. This innovation in missionary linguistics in the United States also had ramifications in Australia as the SIL began short training courses in Melbourne from 1950. On her first application to work in North Australia in December 1951, Stokes requested to attend the new SIL course. Stokes was aware of recent developments in missionary linguistics and eager to participate.

She was a woman with a mission. Stokes was already convinced of her divine vocation to be a missionary linguist before she departed for Angurugu to be a teacher. It was not that Stokes

128 Compton Brouwer, “Canadian Protestant Overseas Missions to the Mid-Twentieth Century: American Influences, Interwar Changes, Long-Term Legacies,” 300.
129 “What are you reading?” *Open Door*, April 1963, 1.
130 Judith Stokes, ‘Questions for Candidates,’ CMS SA.
131 Personal communication with Phyl Billingshurst, 12 November, 2012.
132 The Australian branch is now the Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL).
134 Judith Stokes to J.B. Montgomerie 14/12/1951 ML MSS6040/203 Miss Stokes
rejected the narrative of modernisation for Aboriginal people; she was simply more invested a vision of evangelical expansion to all cultures and languages through translation. Stokes had always dreamed of going to the ends of the earth, but due to circumstances beyond her control, she did not leave Australia. When Stokes found herself unexpectedly placed on a North Australian mission, it seems that she did not re-adjust her linguistic ambitions for the new circumstances, but persisted, as if she had been sent to Africa or Asia. It is not clear why she felt this calling so strongly. Did she doubt herself at times? Perhaps. Unlike others in the CMS she envisaged missions to North Australia as part of the evangelical story of going out into the world and incorporating new languages into a global evangelical community. Stokes understood the English language to be another vernacular, albeit one that played a privileged role in the history of evangelicalism. Many languages — Anindilyakwa included — were still awaiting their redemption when they too, like English, would become vehicles to express divine truth and allow their speakers to truly become members in the global evangelical fellowship. Stokes presumed the need to translate the Bible, allowing the vernacular Bible to transform Aboriginal society as she understood it to have transformed English speaking society. She held the experience of English-speaking evangelicals as normative for all peoples.

The CMS did not reject the evangelical story of the vernacular Bible; they were committed to it in other places. However, translating the Bible was something English speaking evangelicals did for the 'other' culture, the 'other' country. The CMS board, however, worked to transform Aboriginal people from the 'other' into 'us', part of a united, 'modern' Australian civilisation. The CMS was confused about the status of its Aboriginal missions. Were they even real missions? But as believers in racial equality, they saw no other way to build their nation, a conclusion that was a crucial shaper of Aboriginal experiences of Christian missions. By insisting on her linguistic vocation, Stokes unwittingly threatened this vision.
Chapter Three - The word of mouth: the sounds of language

Listen [obey] to this word I am speaking to you
Do you understand that word I am telling you in your ear?
Put it in
But don’t let it go right through and fly away
But put it inside there still
Let it stay inside your mind and ears.

By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:
For this people’s heart is waxed gross,
and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed.

Matthew 13:14-16, King James Version.

For both Anindilyakwa people and evangelical missionaries, listening mattered. One must have ‘ears to hear’ and keep what is heard inside the mind and ears. In Anindilyakwa culture, to learn the deeper things, one must listen patiently, persistently. Gula Lalara told Judith Stokes how he

1 Judith Stokes, Discourse analysis of text ‘Mother’s advice to Daughter’ told by Derama and relating to AIATSIS Archive Tape 33704-no. 13. 1971, AIATSIS MS 3518 Groote Eylandt Collection, Box 5, Folder 39.
learned to sing. It was not by practising but according to Anindilyakwa tradition, by listening, over and over.

Ki-ngayingena-manja emba k-akakirumaka
jungwuna-manja, ningkene-ka adinumba-wiya k-
angmakuwalama k-engkirrajama ... K-
engkirrajama ningkene, nara enjirrikajuma...
“Ningki-yamarrkama ningkene ningk-
akirumaduma?” yama kwureya ngayu-wa. Ngaya
ningena ning-akakirumaduma ningena-bu ning-
angmakwulumuma ningi-yamama adinub-
wiya, ningena ning-angmakululuma
nunbwarrka-manja ngawada. Nara kini-lalika
nungwarrka-da. Ningene-ka ningi-yama, ning-
angmakwuluma, ning-engkirrenuma emeba nu-
mebinuma.

Missionaries understood their spirituality in auditory terms. Christianity grew out of an ancient Hebrew oral tradition; the Word of God was spoken and heard. As Walter Ong pointed out, the Christian tradition always represents God as ‘speaking’, not writing. Missionaries also believed in ‘callings’. For Christians, ‘faith cometh by hearing.’ Most missionaries I interviewed told me of their ‘calling’ experience to the mission field. ‘I had a very strong call from God to work with Aboriginal people’, one told me. Another ‘felt that God was calling me to work amongst Aboriginal people.’ Another ‘sensed God calling me to be a missionary.’

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1. ‘Clan Song Discourse (Emba-langwa)’ Recorded by J Stokes, Speaker: Gula. 1 September, 1992. AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 10, Folder 4a.
4. Romans 10:17, King James Version.
project in North Australia was, to the CMS, an answer to a call. The CMS had been ‘called to bring these Aboriginal communities to the knowledge of God.” Most importantly, they came to announce a ‘call’ to Aboriginal people. A.P. Elkin explained, ‘the call to all peoples is the same – to fulfil their destiny as members of the one Kingdom of God.” When missionaries came to Groote Eylandt, they came with their English words and with their ‘Word’, a message or ‘call’ for Anindilyakwa speakers. The missionaries’ objective was to convince Anindilyakwa speakers to listen and answer.

Historians have generally prioritised the visual and written word over sounds and the spoken word. In recent decades, however, we have been ‘overcoming our deafness’ and rediscovering an auditory past.” The composer, Murray Schafer developed the concept of the ‘soundscape’, the ever-present sounds of life, in *The Tuning of the World* (1977). Historian Alain Corbin argued that the sound of bells is a window into the local identities and experiences of townsfolk in post-revolutionary France. Joy Damousi argues that by hearing past societies as well as seeing them we gain a richer perspective on the complexity of life in the past. Sound has also been a way of asserting identities and agency for oppressed people. In light of the spiritual and social significance of listening for Anindilyakwa speakers and missionaries alike, in this chapter, I turn to the Angurugu soundscape, particularly the sound of spoken language.

I examine the Angurugu soundscape through the lens of various ‘spheres’: the church, the camp, the school, and the mission space. Joshua Fishman popularised domain theory in sociolinguistics. Domains are social contexts in multilingual communities which determine ‘who speaks what language to whom.” Anna de Fina argued furthermore that language choice in bilingual

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10 A.P. Elkin, ‘Missionary Policy for Primitive Peoples,’ ML MSS 6040/21 Box 16, Aborigines Secretary.
community domains is a means of constructing and asserting social identities. A number of historians and social scientists have likewise put forward the hypothesis that missionaries divided life on missions into spheres that marked boundaries of norms of behaviour. Space and time were managed at missions, establishing spheres of life and distinguishing ‘civilisation’ from ‘the wild’ according to a civilising and Christianising agenda. Most notably, Attwood examined the divisions of space and time at the Ramahyuk mission. He painted the mission as a disciplinary institution, controlling and examining Aboriginal lives, as missionaries sought to ‘make Aborigines in their own image.’ Educationalist Stephen Harris also divided mission life into two spheres ‘balanda’ (white people) and ‘Yolngu’, each with different norms of behaviour. Baker argued that Milingimbi mission existed in two spheres: the mission space where missionaries dictated how Yolngu would live, and the space beyond the mission where ‘the organisation of time and space was in the hands of the Aboriginal population.’ On the other hand, Joy Sandefur examined the history of Ngukurr (Roper River Mission) and argued that Aboriginal people used the mission space to maintain their cultures, blurring the boundaries imagined by missionaries. There is a risk, therefore, of believing missionaries’ own rhetoric and their constructed boundaries of ‘civilisation’ and ‘primitivism’ which may not have been so clear-cut.

In this chapter, I test whether and how spoken language was used to construct spheres of mission life. I seek to understand how the sound of languages proclaimed the ordering of the mission and the extent to which it served missionaries’ agendas. I argue that the missionaries went to great lengths to court Anindilyakwa ears, using language to assert the supremacy of their teaching over what they envisaged as the teachings of the camp. They constructed the spheres of church and camp as being in competition, with proxy contests occurring through language in the spaces of school and missionary surrounds. I also examine the way Anindilyakwa people used spoken language to challenge missionary authority and assert the value of their own languages in the

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19 Stephen Harris and Joy Kinslow-Harris, *Culture and Learning: Tradition and Education in North-East Arnhem Land* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1984).
21 Sandefur, “The Aboriginalisation of the Church at Ngukurr,” 49.
mission's language economy. Although missionaries attempted to establish their own language – English – as the language of authority, the legitimate language was always contested, as English, Anindilyakwa, Kriol and Aboriginal Englishes pervaded the various spheres of the mission community. I ask, therefore, did the construction of various spheres of life and speech allow missionaries to achieve their goal of forming willing listeners who heard the call? Were missionaries compelled to listen themselves? Or were there only deaf ears?

23 Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 69.
Figure 13 ‘Groote Eylandt Mission Station Plan of Layout, Church Missionary Society Young People’s Union,’ 195[?]

Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
For missionaries, the church was the heart of mission life. It lay at the geographical centre of the mission with all roads emanating out from it. The location was designed as a 'sign to everybody that the things of God are central and take place in all that we do here on this mission.'

It was here that the missionaries most clearly articulated their gospel and broadcast their message. The missionaries understood preaching as core to their very identity and purpose in life. For them, to be a missionary was to be a preacher.

Church was compulsory for the first decade of the mission. The missionaries enforced attendance by distributing Sunday rations only to those who sat through the service. Services were conducted almost entirely in English, as a number of missionaries saw the church as a means of teaching English. To the missionaries, if people heard their message often enough and loudly enough they would eventually listen. In 1951 the chaplain reported his evangelistic method as 'constant preaching of the Word of God.' There were morning services every weekday, which all children attended; the Sunday Service; evening 'Camp Services' or 'fellowship services'; as well as prayer meetings, Bible study meetings, Baptism and Confirmation classes on weeknights. Only on Saturdays were the preachers silent.

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24 'Tom and Betty Visit Groote Eylandt,' *Australian Round World*, 1 October, 1949, 9.
25 Lois Reid, 22 September, 1967, CMS SA, Box 21, 1967 Letters etc.
28 Sandefur, "The Aboriginalisation of the Church at Ngukurr," 75.
Figure 14 ‘Rix Warren & John Mildenhall, Angurugu Bible Class. 1951/52’
Source: Slides of Groote Eylandt. Miscellaneous, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu

Figure 15 ‘Angurugu Church 1951/52’
In the initial years of the mission, it seemed Anindilyakwa people were listening. In 1944, only months after preaching began at Angurugu, eight Anindilyakwa people made "decisions for Christ." But as the years went by, missionaries no longer enjoyed such responses to their message. In 1962, the chaplain Ben Moore confessed that attendance at church services was so poor that "there is the possibility of men living on a CMS station within 400 yards of the church, never hearing the Gospel." They searched for strategies that might attract interest: films, tapes, records, puppet shows, flannelgraph presentations, pictures. In 1951, the missionaries organised for Nabilya Lalara to record Christian messages in Anindilyakwa on records, hoping that the sound of Anindilyakwa and new technology would catch people's attention.

Ganungarbiya gerredarrenga! Wängirradya
God nilyanjmanduguna nambilyamerra anubina
mandya. Wängirradya änelajura ayaugura.
Men and women! Listen God is indeed true/honest. He lives in Heaven. Listen to his word.

'Listen! Listen!' was his (scripted) message. One chaplain's strategy was simply volume: 'I talk loud enough to be heard in Darwin.' Later that year, he reported his excitement that Jabani and Nalagaiyowa were willing to lead 'a Bible Study-come-English lessons-music-games.' He wrote with anticipation of results; 'far more will be "hooked".' In 1965, a chaplain hoped that tape-recordings with Christian stories and illustrations would induce 'even the toughest' Anindilyakwa people to listen. He reported excitedly that the old people now 'wanted to hear.' Even a cyclone in 1967 was cause for celebration. After people's flimsy homes were washed away, they camped in the church, thereby coming within earshot of the preacher. 'I let them stay at the back of the building ... Some of them have shown no interest in the things of God and so in this unusual way...

31 'Groote Eylandt April,' 1944, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.
33 Nabilia Lalara, 'The Two Roads,' 1951, Transcribed by Judith Stokes, MS 3518, Box 1, folder 2a, Gramophone records gospel recordings.
came within sound of the Gospel’, explained the chaplain. His primary concern was that they would hear, if only he could make them listen.

Just beyond the mission was the ‘camp’, later called the ‘village’. Missionaries believed they competed with an alternative voice on Groote Eylandt, that is, the message of the camp and the old people. Camp people had only intermittent contact with missionaries and missionaries generally had limited knowledge of camp life. They rarely visited and it seems they felt unwelcome or out of place. There was an unspoken rule that missionaries did not frequent the camp. One mentioned that she was told ‘not to go down to the village at night time’ even though in her experience it was ‘perfectly ok’. This norm could have been out of respect for privacy, fears for safety or it could have been because their visit may be mistaken as an endorsement of camp life. A 1958 CMS publication explained that ‘it is hard for the Christian Aborigine to turn away from the old way of life.’ This was because ‘the old people who have not accepted Christ still teach the old way.’ According to the superintendent in 1962, the ‘teaching of Christianity still battles against strong adherence to old customs.’

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37 Although food would more likely come via a relative who worked for rations and later wages at the mission, since the missionaries held to the policy that the one who does not work does not eat.
39 Arthur Capell, ‘Problems of Education in North Australia,’ 1965, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 1c.
40 Jenny Green, oral history interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
41 J.B. Montgomerie ‘That they might have life,’ 1958, NTRS 1105.
Figure 16 'Old men 1951/52'


Figure 17 'People in Village'

Missionaries could hear the sound of the camp from their houses and interpreted them as signs of otherness. Historian Bruce Smith revealed likewise how the ‘whoops and hollers’ of country folk, Irish ‘hubbub’ and Native American ‘chanting’ sounded sinister and disturbing to the educated ears of early modern England. In the USA in the 1920s, as Karin Bijsterveld found, noise indicated ‘conflict ... rudeness, wildness, primitiveness, irrationality.’ In the same way, to the CMS missionaries, the camp sounded foreign, brutal and chaotic; everything that the mission hoped not to be. The distinct sounds of languages marked where the mission ended and the bush began; there was no English in the bush. One missionary both loved and feared the sounds of the camp and described its music, the sound of the didjeridu, at length. The sounds of the language spoken emanating from camp proved to her that it was untamed and other, ‘harsh’ and ‘strange’.

Moreover, in her mind, language’s primary use in the camp was to express abuse or terror; she recalled ‘loud argumentative voices...the cries of frightened children. There are angry cries of others who are trying to sleep.’ This was not the mission; the sounds erupting from the camp made this clear.

Ceremonial wailing sounds of ritual mourning unsettled the missionaries. CMS publications described the sounds to churchgoers: ‘for people who do not believe, death is a fearful thing ... the Aborigine will wail loudly when someone dies and cut themselves.’ In contrast to the sound erupting from the mourners was the ‘quietness’ of the Christian convert. That Old Banjo Lalara’s funeral in 1965 ‘had little of the wailing’ common in previous years was, to missionaries, ‘a real cause for thanksgiving.’ CMS contrasted the ‘hopeless wailing’ with the ‘quiet trust’ of the Anindilyakwa convert Widjari on the death of her husband. She had ‘settled down’ as a school teacher and ‘come to know the power of the Lord Jesus.’ They saw in her quietness and

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47 J.B. Montgomerie ‘That they might have life,’ 1958, NTRS 1105.
domesticity the evidence of a clear distinction between the ‘civilised’ Christian mission and pagan camp life. Nevertheless, the mission needed the contrasting sounds of the camp to continue to justify its continued presence. The sound was evidence of the need for further evangelism and civilising, and so boundaries between camp and mission were maintained.

Despite their unfamiliarity and discomfort with the sound of Anindilyakwa, on the rare occasions missionaries did enter the camp, they avoided English. In the ‘camp services’, even when performing apparently Western Christian activities, Anindilyakwa was allowed to dominate. These services were usually led by an Anindilyakwa speaker, or at least run with the assistance of an Aboriginal interpreter. Missionaries saw themselves as reaching out to camp people, operating on camp terms. By avoiding English at the camp, they also pronounced that the camp was beyond the mission; it was, to them, not yet civilised.

Likewise, by maintaining their own languages in this space, Aboriginal people asserted that the camp was outside missionary influence. For the few missionaries who wished to learn Aboriginal languages, visits to the camp were the only way to immerse oneself. After hours of teaching in the English-only classroom, Stokes would visit the camp. Only there would people reply to her in Anindilyakwa, whereas if the exchange had taken place within the mission she found it would be in English. Only by venturing beyond the mission to the camp could she convince people that she wanted to use and hear Anindilyakwa. Visiting the camp, Stokes placed herself under Aboriginal elders and sought to operate on their terms, in their space. Rhoda Lalara remembered how confusing this was to her as a child. She distinguished missionaries and Aboriginal people according to speech, not colour, but Stokes confounded these categories:

\[
I \text{ used to think, ‘how come she knows this language?’ } \ldots I \text{ was thinking to myself, maybe her mother was an Aboriginal, that’s why she knows our language. But, } nara
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[no], it was those older people, older women and men used to show her how to speak in our language.\textsuperscript{53}

By leaving the mission space and speaking Anindilyakwa, Stokes disrupted the boundaries that regulated mission life, blurring the speech-based categories of missionary and camp person. Stokes, however, was the only missionary at this time who ever reached near-fluency so did not significantly disrupt the language politics at the mission. Nonetheless, the boundary between camp and mission was more fluid than some missionary reports would suggest.

\textsuperscript{53} Rhoda Lalara, oral history interview, 23 April, 2012.
Figure 18 Angurugu School Students 195[?]
Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.

Figure 19 Angurugu School
Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
The school was a strategic space for the CMS where the use of language (English), they hoped, would attune children's ears to listen to their teachings. The school was also the sphere of mission life most strongly influenced by government. The Commonwealth introduced a provisional syllabus for Aboriginal schools in 1950 and provided the CMS with much-needed subsidies for teaching staff. According to the Commonwealth, school was the primary means of achieving assimilation. It was to be the 'integral part' of the mission. In 1955, the Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck flew into Angurugu, explaining to missionaries how the 'problems aborigines faced' could be 'overcome by education'. Missionaries understood and accepted this agenda, with one explaining that schools were to 'speed up the process' of introducing Aboriginal people to 'the acceptable general Australian lifestyle.'

Commonwealth policy was that all instruction must be in English. Speaking 'good' English, conforming to a national standard, was understood as necessary for effective citizenship. As a concession, 'native languages' could be used with pre-school groups, but education would be exclusively in English from age six onwards. Not only was learning English essential but English was to dominate all aspects of school life. As the new syllabus insisted:

> It cannot be too strongly emphasised that instruction in "English" will not be confined to formal lessons in language. Every part of the curriculum and almost every lesson should be partly directed towards the acquisition of skill in the use and comprehension of English.

Bizarrely, the Commonwealth promoted this English-only policy despite acknowledging 'psychological and philosophical arguments in favour of beginning instruction in the vernacular ...
and despite a considerable amount of scientific evidence. The first reason given for rejecting the scientific consensus was the great number of Aboriginal languages. The second was that Aboriginal languages were 'limited in vocabulary' and 'adapted to the thought content of the culture of which they are a part' and thus 'of limited value as a medium through which to explain the "European" way of life.' Aboriginal languages were presumed to hinder the development of 'civilised' thinking as it was believed they lacked a suitable vocabulary. 'The policy of assimilation demands a lingua franca as soon as possible ... that lingua franca must be English', was the Commonwealth's conclusion. They chose English without even a pretence of its educational merits — whether it helped students in their learning and literacy — but on the grounds of assimilation into the English-speaking nation.

The Commonwealth Office of Education planned for what it called the 'substitution' of Aboriginal languages with English. The concept was explained to missionary societies as comparable to the substitution of Christianity for Aboriginal beliefs. English, they believed, would hasten both assimilation and conversion.

There is a need everywhere for a planned, vigorous and maintained drive for English. Substitution of a new language for the old is not likely to disrupt the traditional social structure of the people any more than the substitution of Christian religion for their old religion and superstitions. In fact the former might assist the latter process.

Policymakers considered Aboriginal languages not merely a distraction but counterproductive in education. As late as 1969, Welfare Branch presumed that 'remedial work' might be necessary due to the 'inhibitory influences' of 'bilingualism in education'. Such a negative attitude to bilingualism persisted in Australia, despite linguist Edward Sapir's advice twenty years earlier that bilingualism in fact assists critical thinking. Aboriginal languages were actively discouraged.

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Welfare Branch required teachers in mission schools to report whether, how often and for what reason they used Aboriginal words. Linguist and CMS board member Arthur Capell lamented in 1964 that the Commonwealth was not even ‘paying lip service to the vernacular’ but was ‘definitely and actively opposed to the vernacular.’ ‘It seems clear’, he continued, ‘that government policy looks forward to the loss of Aboriginal languages, so that the Aborigines may be “assimilated.”’

From the 1950s, children in Angurugu School received ‘constant drill’ in oral English. The children found it difficult. Teachers commented on their shyness and ‘natural tendency to withdraw.’ Pupil records from the 1950s and 60s reveal that girls in particular were consistently ‘too quiet.’ Teachers’ comments included: ‘too quiet’; ‘shy, quiet’; ‘quiet, finds work hard’; ‘shyness hinders cooperation. Slow’; ‘quiet, shy, waits to be prompted, clings to mother if possible’; ‘quiet & unobtrusive, sometimes seems to be backward. Very quiet’; ‘Rhoda’s silence should not be taken for lack of intelligence.’ This shyness could be for cultural reasons: gender norms, kinship avoidance rules (children were often in class with those they would traditionally avoid) and aversion to direct questions. It also could be because the children were uncomfortable speaking English. Head Teacher, Ted Egan found it necessary to adjust his teaching style, stating that the Anindilyakwa children’s ‘refusal to be “told” anything rules out “chalk-talk” teaching.’ The children simply would not cooperate. Perhaps the ‘shyness’ also was their means of rejecting of the English-only policy. Nonetheless, the school continued to pursue its aim that all children ‘speak up’ in English.

Some of those children, however, have positive memories of speaking English in school. Judy Lalara spoke fondly of her favourite missionary teacher (Mavis Ough) because she taught her to speak English well.

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69 Report cards, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 17, Pupil Record Cards.
71 Scott, Weapons of the Weak, 29.
She teach me how to speak English and write in English. She was the one that teach me how to speak good English. So I was the best student for her, in my class I was the best student from her. Sometimes I used to go out after school I used to go visit her, talk about the times, you know, the days of things been changing and seeing the new things coming in and you know.\textsuperscript{72}

Since most children were 'shy' in the English drills, a more successful method for teaching the children English was in song, both nursery rhymes and religious songs.\textsuperscript{73} Missionaries were vaguely aware that the children did not understand the songs sung in English, but hoped that the lyrics would become ingrained so that when their proficiency in English caught up with their singing ability, they would understand the Christian message.\textsuperscript{74} Children at Angurugu learned dozens of choruses at school and in Sunday school in the 1950s. Gumbuli Wurraramara remembered singing as part of the school's routine.

> When we used to went to school, we used to line up ... And then we used to pray and sing. When we used to go in the room, we used to sing this special song, like, I remember one song, we used to pray in the morning. 'We pray in the morning, we pray at noon, whisper a prayer in the evening. And keep your heart in tune.'\textsuperscript{75}

Not all missionaries supported the English policy. Teachers were among the most eager missionaries to use Aboriginal languages, as seems to have been a trend across a number of Aboriginal missions.\textsuperscript{76} A common refrain in the mission staff minutes in the 1950s was the 'dilemma' over language in the classroom. The children apparently concentrated better with Anindilyakwa, but this was not mission or government policy so the matter remained unresolved.\textsuperscript{77} Teachers were the most entangled in an Anindilyakwa-speaking world and perhaps, through their daily interactions, Anindilyakwa-speaking children and parents convinced the mission teachers that using their language would be the best approach. Though these teachers did

\textsuperscript{72} Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 11 December, 2012.

\textsuperscript{73} Lesly Lyon, 'Mugs, Toothbrushes and "Frere Jaques" at school at Umbakumba,' \textit{Open Door}, July 1962, 23.

\textsuperscript{74} 'Extract from Miss Villier's letter to CMS i8/11/46,' ML MSS 6040/6 Aborigines General, H. Villiers personal.

\textsuperscript{75} Seiffert, \textit{Gumbuli of Ngukurr}, 58.

\textsuperscript{76} For example, Beulah Lowe and Milingimbi mission and Nancy Sheppard at Ernabella were early adopters of Aboriginal languages in the school context under assimilation policy.

\textsuperscript{77} 'Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 26 August, 1955, NTAS NTBS 868, Box 10, Staff Meetings 55-59.
not reject the importance of winning children to Christian teaching, they doubted whether excluding Anindilyakwa from their classroom served this goal. Nonetheless, the mission teachers felt strong pressure to promote English according to what they called ‘the Welfare Department’s rules’.\textsuperscript{78}

On the other hand, the Sydney-based CMS Aborigines Secretary, J.B. Montgomerie, paid lip service to the value of Aboriginal languages and acknowledged that Anindilyakwa people ‘would appreciate it’. Yet when missionaries suggested more use of Anindilyakwa, his answer was always that ‘the Department’, the ‘Director of Native Affairs’ or the ‘government’ prevented it.\textsuperscript{79} Given his missions were perpetually under-staffed, it seems Montgomerie found the government policy provided welcome relief: at least his missionaries would not have to take on language study as well. Furthermore, his belief that the old people in the camp would undermine missionaries’ teaching ‘because the young can understand them better,’ indicates that for him, teaching English to children was a means of winning children’s loyalty at the expense of their relatives in the camp.\textsuperscript{80} I suspect, therefore, Montgomerie’s unwillingness to challenge the Commonwealth’s English policy contrary to educational advice was largely due to English’s strategic role in alienating the youth from the camp sphere.

Despite the ‘rules’, Anindilyakwa was always present in Angurugu School. The CMS’s inability to staff its schools fully presented an opportunity to Anindilyakwa speakers. A number of Anindilyakwa individuals pursued roles as teachers, so there were always Anindilyakwa teaching assistants who interpreted for the children. The main recorded use of Aboriginal languages in the classroom in the 1950s and 1960s was discipline. Stokes used Anindilyakwa to warn the children when they misbehaved. As Rhoda Lalara explained to me:

\begin{quote}
When we used to get silly, she said ‘\textit{nara n’awilyamba}’ ‘don’t fight.’ When we used to get silly, you know, ‘\textit{nara aruwariya eningaba nungguwa}’ ‘you stay good and don’t be bad.’ When she was in the classroom, she used to speak Anindilyakwa.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{78} John Brook to the Head Teachers of CMS Aboriginal Missions, 5 May, 1965, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 1c.

\textsuperscript{79} ‘Minutes of Staff Meeting,’ 22 April, 1955, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 10, Staff Meetings 55-59; ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 11 July, 1947, ML MSS 6040/4 CMS Aborigines Committee Minutes 1945-1950.

\textsuperscript{80} J.B. Montgomerie ‘That they might have life,’ 1958, NTRS 1105.

\textsuperscript{81} Rhoda Lalara, oral history interview with author, 23 April, 2012.
Since missionary teachers were not fluent in Anindilyakwa, they depended on Aboriginal teaching assistants, especially when children misbehaved. The teaching assistants had responsibility for disciplining the children, often with corporal punishment. For this, they faced hostility from their relatives in the camp who opposed the mission's disciplinary measures. Some interpreters even quit the school due to the 'upset in the camp' caused by their actions, putting the demands of their family above the missionaries. Nancy Lalara told me how her father, Gula, used to give out 'five lashes on your legs'. 'I hated that because my dad did it', she said. It was even more unsettling because traditionally, an Anindilyakwa child's aunts or uncles are responsible for discipline, not her own parents. She thought perhaps he was more loyal to the mission than he was to her.

Although Aboriginal languages were present in the classroom, their connection with discipline meant that were used in a way that stirred up conflict in Aboriginal families and communities but strengthened the power of the school. English was associated with good behaviour but Anindilyakwa meant punishment.

School children also actively made efforts to speak their language even when separated from the old people. As Nancy Lalara remembered:

> We spoke our language ... Our language was maintained, when we were sort of hung around amongst one another. But when we went to the church to congregate and the young women wanted to say, to talk after church to their parents or anything, all we did was go to church and then we went our separate ways. We only saw grandparents come up maybe sometimes on the weekend.

Despite government standards and CMS intentions, the school was not a sphere apart from camp life where English reigned. Rather, social relationships across the school and camp were intertwined due to missionary dependence on Anindilyakwa for classroom management.

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84 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April, 2012.
85 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 29 April 2012.
In the space outside the school and the church, language and power were contested. For missionaries, this was also a pivotal space where their language, they hoped, would encourage Anindilyakwa submission and win Anindilyakwa people to their message. Superintendents asserted their dominance over Anindilyakwa people through sound and language. Dick Harris' booming voice made people listen. As missionary Barry Butler remembered, Harris was 'very firm and strict but very fair ... The Aboriginal people I think respected him, even though he spoke strongly and maybe slapped one or two of them.'

For Butler, Harris was respected despite strong speech and 'slaps'. However, when I discussed Harris with two senior men at Angurugu, they insisted that the 'strong words' and strict discipline were reason to respect the superintendent.

[Jabani Lalara]: Dick Harris ... He was a great man. He was a carpenter, all sorts.
[Interviewer]: Was he a hard man also?
[Jabani]: Oh, hard man!
[Murabuda Wurraramarra]: Hard man bin givin us understanding.
[Jabani]: Very strong.
[Murabuda]: Very strong word, ay. When you speak very soft that he can't take it. Hard language. Hard things and make you really make right in your life and heart and mind. That's the way we learn, Aborigine people, in the beginning when the white man came to this island.

Perhaps Jabani saw a connection between the strong words of Harris the carpenter and of the Christ whom Harris preached. To Murabuda, the missionary's authority to speak on matters of 'life and heart and mind' was connected to the strength of his words. Perhaps the men accepted the missionaries' use of language to assert authority as legitimate. Historian Ann McGrath, for example, found that Aboriginal men in the cattle industry demanded 'strong' bosses who were firm, but fair. Some would suggest that missionaries' authoritarian regimes may have been 'culturally appropriate' in ways that more recent chaotic government programmes have not. Perhaps the older men believe such discipline is lacking today so remember Harris' strong speech

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86 Barry Butler, oral history interview with author, 5 October, 2012.
87 Murabuda Wurraramarra and Jabani Lalara, oral history interview author, 4 September, 2012.
88 McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, 96.
with respect. On the other hand, in painting a positive image of Harris' authoritarianism, perhaps the old men were appealing to what they imagined were my own values, what they thought I wanted to hear. Given the apparent success of this use of language, Harris and subsequent superintendents cultivated their reputation as the 'strong man' of the mission through the sound of their voices.

For the superintendents, any indication that their voice might not convey authority over Anindilyakwa speakers was threatening, as occurred in 1958 when the missionary agriculturalist Dulcie Levitt was assaulted. Exile from the mission had been the standard punishment for minor crimes. Major crimes, however, warranted exile to Darwin and prosecution. The chaplain suspected some men were deliberately offending, challenging his authority in the mission space, since they wanted to experience Darwin. It is telling that, for some, gaol in Darwin might have been more attractive than the mission environment. The 'natives' attitude' was 'it doesn't matter much what I say to the missionary or what I do, the only punishment I get is to be taken to Darwin (and after all that's what I want).' The Chief Welfare Officer, Ted Evans, invented a solution. They would send offenders somewhere where they could not speak their own language. Montgomerie was relieved.

By sending these chaps to Hooker's Creek, it is a real punishment, [Evans] says, because they speak an entirely different language, without any possibility of making each other understand what they are saying ... The Welfare Branch officers are up to all the tricks now, and they are not playing into their hands in any way. Punishment now means punishment.

Hooker Creek (now Lajamanu) was a government settlement for Aboriginal people on the edge of the Tanami Desert, approximately 800km away from both Groote Eylandt and Darwin. By sending men there, CMS and Welfare Branch used language to assert their authority over the mission space. They also demonstrated their awareness of the connections between language and landscape; an effective exile must be both linguistic and geographic. Not only were the

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95 S.R. Warren to J.B. Montgomerie, 10 February, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Staff Personal.
96 S.R. Warren to J.B. Montgomerie, 25 February, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Office Mail.
97 J.B. Montgomerie to S.R. Warren, 7 March, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Office Mail.
Anindilyakwa men isolated from the camp and mission community, but they were stripped of the ability to communicate. Still the Anindilyakwa men resisted. The men ‘made two attempts to get back to the north by walking across what is virtually spinifex desert country. On both occasions they almost perished.’93 The eventual result, however, was gratifying to both the CMS and Welfare.

They were accordingly transferred to Beswick Creek where they are awaiting transport back to Groote Eylandt via Roper River. I might add the disposition of Monkey and Nangamalya has, if anything, deteriorated. They are very sullen and unresponsive.94

The CMS and Welfare Branch finally silenced the Anindilyakwa men. Assuming the place of God at Babel, CMS punished the men by confusing their languages. The CMS asserted its authority over Anindilyakwa speakers by controlling their access not only to land, but to language.

Despite such displays of power through language from superintendents, the mission space remained contested. Unlike in the school, which was governed by an explicitly assimilationist curriculum, the mission space had no such clear framework for how assimilation would be achieved or how language would be used. Missionary chaplain David Woodbridge explained to me that missionaries mostly improvised within a general framework of evangelism and assimilation.95

Around the mission the use of language was more fluid than at church and school as policy and practice were experimental. One missionary, Lois Reid, described the sounds of many languages spoken in the mission sphere:

[One hears] the sound of friendly voices chatting in one’s own language. The sound of equally friendly voices trying to say exactly what they want to say in often hesitant English. The harsh sound of a strange language that requires all your powers of concentration to comprehend the full meaning of what is said.96

These sounds were not without emotional resonance for her. They were friendly or harsh according to the degree to which she could understand. The sound of Anindilyakwa unsettled her.

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93 E.C. Evans to J.B. Montgomerie, 20 June, 1958. NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Office Mail.
94 E.C. Evans to J.B. Montgomerie, 20 June, 1958. NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Office Mail.
95 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 October, 2011.
It suggested that this was not her country and that some things were beyond her understanding. Language was certainly not always under missionary control or used according to missionaries’ hopes.

When speaking with each other, Anindilyakwa speakers continued to speak their own languages even within the mission. The boundary of the mission and the camp was not so clear. Continuing to speak this way was an assertion that the mission was not owned nor even controlled by missionaries. It remained Anindilyakwa country. Speaking Anindilyakwa could be a way of escaping the missionary ‘gaze’; of communicating freely within the mission without missionary interference. The language barrier meant that the CMS missions could never become totalising institutions. For example, when supervision of the girls’ dormitory was taken from Gulpia Lalara and given to Stokes and Farley, the missionaries struggled to make the girls ‘settle down’ and reported a new ‘tendency towards disrespect’. This, they believed, was due to their ignorance of Anindilyakwa. When Stokes became increasingly competent in Anindilyakwa, not all Anindilyakwa speakers welcomed her fluency. Some treated her with suspicion or even disapproval; she upset the established pattern of relationships at the mission. Aboriginal people maintained their own sphere of operation within the mission through language. Missionaries were reminded daily that, despite any strict work regime or external discipline they imposed, they remained foreigners, outside the domain of Aboriginal communication, never properly aware of what people were thinking or feeling.

Missionaries used English with each other, hoping that Aboriginal people would pick it up. The missionaries had some success; one Anindilyakwa woman explained to me that she and her peers learnt English, not from the school, but by listening to missionaries. Most missionaries argued that since Aboriginal people supposedly possessed greater linguistic talent, it was simpler for them to learn English.

Insisting that Aboriginal people should learn English naturally appealed to missionaries for practical reasons. It also reinforced a hierarchy of their own construction that established

99 Kathleen Mamarika, oral history Interview with author, 5 September, 2012.
themselves as experts and Aboriginal people forever as learners. This same missionary liked the ‘friendly’ sounds of ‘hesitant’ English. For her, Aboriginal people were less threatening when restricted by a foreign language and when speaking to her on her terms. Furthermore, if the mission operated in a language in which the missionaries would always feel most competent, missionaries could feel secure that they really did have an obligation to teach and correct Aboriginal people in all spheres of life. English functioned, for some missionaries, to confirm to themselves their belief in their superior knowledge and of Anindilyakwa peoples’ need to listen to missionaries. This missionary conceded that Aboriginal people would miss the ‘subtleties’ of communication in English. To her this was no great loss, as she never expected Aboriginal people to need to understand subtleties. The English language, therefore, was a means by which some missionaries confirmed to themselves their belief in their own sophistication, civilisation and superior knowledge.

Anindilyakwa speakers could not be forced to learn English. Though missionaries could speak and teach English, English would only become the dominant and legitimate language of the island if Anindilyakwa speakers recognised it as such. Many did not. Furthermore, for most daily tasks, fluency in standard Australian English was unnecessary; it depended on Aboriginal people’s desire to master English and to their exposure to English as to whether they became fluent. They learned English according to the degree to which it served their interests and to which they had opportunity to learn. Various degrees of English competency could be used to control one’s engagement with the mission and achieve the desired benefits from missionaries. Rosemary O’Donnell, for example, points out that Aboriginal people at the CMS missions would ‘talk Christian’ in order to win missionaries’ favour, gain access to food and secure peaceful relations.

Missionaries praised Aboriginal people who mastered Standard Australian English. It indicated that the mission was functioning successfully, assimilating people into the broader English-speaking white Australia. Those people who had the best grasp of English and worked as interpreters gained higher positions in the school, the church and the courts. These privileges acted as incentives to learn English, but they also required becoming more committed to the mission sphere of life and affected their relationship with older people who could not speak

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English. Anindilyakwa speakers made different decisions over the degree to which they would engage with the English-speaking world. Perhaps some Aboriginal people resolved to learn as little as possible as a means of escaping missionary authority and teaching. It is likely that some refused to comprehend commands given in English when they were unwilling to follow them as a way of evading the missionaries. Sometimes it was preferable not to ‘have ears to hear’ what missionaries had to say.

More threatening to missionaries than Anindilyakwa was the sound of Aboriginal Englishes and Kriol in the mission space. Kriol and Aboriginal Englishes blurred the distinction between camp and mission, neither belonging to Aboriginal tradition (in missionaries’ minds) nor English-speaking ‘civilisation’. The original 1944 CMS policy was to ‘discourage’ what was they called ‘pidgin English’. Later, in 1964, the CMS rearticulated its policy that ‘fluency and familiarity with English, as the language of Australia, must be aimed at for all the people and corrupted forms of English should be discouraged.’ It was, to the CMS, a matter of belonging to the nation. By eschewing Kriol, CMS distinguished itself from other white people in the contact zone of North Australia such as those in the pearling or cattle industry. Fred Gray, for example, was known to speak ‘pidgin’ at Umbakumba. But ‘we use English (not pidgin!)’ explained missionary in 1965. Australian academics held an overwhelmingly negative view of Aboriginal Englishes, pidgin and Kriol. It was ‘broken and corrupt jargon’, ‘lingual bastardisation’, ‘perverted and mangled ...

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104 ‘Constitution and Policy,’ May 1944, ML MSS 6040/6.
107 Callon Moore to I. Jeffreys, May 1965, CMS SA Box 38, Aborigines.
108 It is difficult to know from the sources whether the ‘pidgin’ missionaries referred to is Kriol, a form of Aboriginal English, or a pidgin. Up to the late sixties little scholarly attention was given to any English-based language spoken by Aboriginal people. Kriol was first standardised by the evangelical mission organisation, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, from the 1970s. To confuse matters further, Kriol speakers have in the past referred to their language as variously as ‘pidgin’, ‘pidgin English’, ‘Roper pidgin’ or even ‘lingo’, ‘pidgin lingo’ or simply ‘language.’ I use the term ‘Aboriginal Englishes’ as a broad term to include instances where the language spoken was unclear. See J. W Harris, *Northern Territory Pidgins and the Origin of Kriol* (Australian National University Press, 1986); J. Sandefur, “Kriol of North Australia; A Language Coming of Age,” *Work Papers of SILAAB: Series A* 10 (1986); Susan Kaldor & Ian G Malcolm “Aboriginal English; An Overview” Suzanne Romaine, *Language In Australia* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); Peter Mühlhäuser, “History of Research into Australian Pidgins and Creoles,” in *Encountering Aboriginal Languages: Studies in the History of Australian Linguistics*, ed. William McGregor, Pacific Linguistics 591 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008).
ridiculous gibberish'. Others called it ‘bastardised English’. Elkin declared ‘Pidgin English is quite unsatisfactory. Blacks can learn good English.’ If Aboriginal people were to become ‘civilised’ citizens, only Standard Australian English would do. The presence of other Englishes challenged visions of Australia as a ‘civilised’ and ‘modern’ nation. Furthermore, it challenged missionaries’ conception of their civilising influence and their binaries of civilised and wild spaces.

The missionaries reacted to the presence of Aboriginal Englishes, resolving to uphold ‘good’ English in the mission space. Damousi has argued how, in 1950s Australia, speech and eloquence was ‘a distinctive marker of social and class status and an indicator of national identity.’ The need for ‘good speech’ was considered self-evident. Many Australians were uneasy about their accent, feeling the weight of the cultural cringe. For Australians’ respectability in the world, it was necessary to speak English well. Likewise, missionaries felt the need to model good English to those they were training to become citizens. CMS policymakers instructed teachers in 1954 to teach ‘correct English’. Missionaries themselves were made to monitor their speech, understanding that it fell short of the legitimate English possessed by those in authority over them. CMS officials, for example, noted when missionary candidates made ‘grammatical errors in speech.’ In 1956, the Angurugu staff resolved that they should all ‘watch their grammar more carefully’ and ‘use better English when speaking to the people.’ As Crowley points out, ‘Standard English’ erases the evidence of the birthplace and origins of the speaker, pointing towards a generic citizenship. Insisting on ‘good’ English was a means of distancing Anindilyakwa people from their ties to their country and replacing them with ties to the nation as well as of disciplining missionaries themselves.

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107 Harris, "Language Contact, Pidgins and the Emergence of Kriol in the Northern Territory," 6.
111 George William Turner and Joyce Beifrage, Good Australian English and Good New Zealand English (Reed Education, 1972), 196.
112 Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 52.
113 ‘Statement on Development,’ April, 1954. NTAS NTRS 868, Box 1, Mission policy and regulations.
114 H.G.S. Begbie to C. Kerle, 6 February, 1950, ML MSS 6039/40 Hughes, Earl J.
115 ‘Minutes of Staff Meeting,’ 10 August, 1956. NTAS NTRS 868, Box 10, Staff Meetings 55-59.
Despite their resolutions to uphold standards of English and grammar, missionaries were compelled to adjust their expectations and attune their ear to Aboriginal Englishes. As Jenny Green remembered:

The other thing we needed to learn originally was anglicised, Aboriginal words, English I suppose, like 'plower' for 'flour'. 'Tilip', 'plower' and 'juka', they were the three things that people would come to the shop to buy ... Flour, sugar, tea-leaf. When they said 'tilip' you've got no idea what they said ...

They put an 'a' on the end of everything. English words with an 'a' on the end. Like I was Mrs Greena, Bill was Mr Greena and everything was 'a', 'a'.

Not only were missionaries compelled to learn to understand Aboriginal Englishes, they even reverted to Aboriginal Englishes or Kriol themselves, deliberately or inadvertently. As much as missionaries asserted the legitimacy of Standard Australian English, competency in Kriol and pidgin was of greater value in Angurugu's language economy. Missionaries were compelled to tacitly confirm the legitimacy of non-standard Englishes at Angurugu if they were to communicate effectively. David Woodbridge, the mission chaplain, earned the nickname 'Kriol Boy' from Aboriginal people since he openly conversed in Kriol with Anindilyakwa speakers. Missionaries had referred to grown Aboriginal men as 'boys', but here the missionary was infantilised as the Kriol speaker. In his oral history, superintendent Jim Taylor very quickly began using Aboriginal English, suggesting that Aboriginal English was second nature to him.

I said to him, 'you know what Nambadj, this is silly business, this chuckin spears at each other, proper silly business.'

In light of such transgressions, staff were directed to teach 'their people the proper names of things so they can ask for what they want properly.' There would be no more tolerance of requests for 'tilip' and 'plower' at the shop. The Angurugu staff reminded each other in meetings

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117 Jenny Green, oral history interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
119 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
120 Jim Taylor, oral history interview with author, 1 July, 2012.
121 'Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 12 October, 1964, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
that 'when pidgin English is used to the people they very quickly do the same ... the use of good English is imperative when speaking to Aboriginal people.' Missionaries presumed that Aboriginal people would follow missionaries' lead. What seems more likely, however, is that missionaries (perhaps subconsciously) imitated Aboriginal speech and spoke Aboriginal Englishes or Kriol.

Missionaries adjusted not only to Anindilyakwa speech, but also to Anindilyakwa silences. Prolonged silence was an Anindilyakwa norm for communication. In Aboriginal conversations, silence is not an indicator of communication breakdown but of a desire to think or enjoy the presence of others. Green, found that to her own discomfort, she had to submit to Anindilyakwa norms for speech and silence if she was to communicate.

Another thing that's important about Aboriginal language is that silence is golden ... Europeans don't like silence, we've got to fill it with noise, and yet, if you sit quietly and you don't say a word, it's amazing what starts to happen. And I found that a lot with Gayangwa and a lot of women who used to come to my house for a cup of tea. What do we say next? What am I going to talk about? What have they come for?

It is possible that Anindilyakwa people refused to communicate quickly with missionaries as a means of resisting missionary dominance and norms for communication. Historian Mark Smith found, for example, that African American slaves used silence to resist slaveholders; their silence was feared by slaveholders. Some missionaries did not endure such uncomfortable silences, filling them with talk and noise, eager to keep conversation moving. This could also be a way of avoiding waiting and listening, effectively silencing Aboriginal voices. Furthermore, through silences, Anindilyakwa speakers could evade missionaries who did not take the time to wait in silence. Even the superintendent, Jim Taylor, could not make Anindilyakwa speakers talk. He distinctly remembered how uncomfortable it was to sit in silence but discovered that he could perhaps learn from Anindilyakwa silence.

122 'Minutes of Staff Meeting,’ 2 May, 1964, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
124 Jenny Green, oral history interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
The temptation white people have when they sit down with someone else is to start a conversation, so I said something like, how are you? There was a short response, “all right”, but no one took the conversation any further. They had not been talking when I arrived and I don’t think they saw any need to start talking just because I had arrived. So silence prevailed ... In simply sitting in this silent company I became aware of a mutual camaraderie and comfort in the silent presence of others, a presence not experienced when conversation is the forced order of the day. It was comfortable, meaningful, without any expectation and above all it was quiet, peaceful and restful.156

Through submitting to Anindilyakwa uses of language and silence, Taylor found that perhaps the ‘civilised’ norms he was introducing were sometimes inadequate.

For missionaries, it was not only the content of their speech – their use of grammar or Aboriginal Englishes – which was concerning, but the way that they spoke. Their speech was to be civilised and self-controlled, unlike the presumed uncontrolled shouting and wailing of the camp. Only through modelling such Christian speech would they maintain the respect of Anindilyakwa speakers and cause them to listen to their Christian message. Yet missionaries’ own strict ideals for civilised speech also presented an opportunity to Anindilyakwa people to outmanoeuvre missionaries when missionaries’ own standards proved impossible to meet.

Missionaries would not tolerate swearing. One missionary family in 1958 was known for suppressing ‘the swearing habits’ of their own and others’ children with ‘the strap’.157 Aboriginal societies across Australia also have strict norms regulating swearing. Swearing can be used to resolve conflicts, to elicit fights or to punish. Yet it is also often prohibited in the presence of certain relatives.158 Aboriginal ‘joking relationships’ – where rude jokes and swearing are sanctioned – operate according to kinship relationships and regulations. With other relatives,
such behaviour is prohibited. Swearing was also strictly regulated in Anindilyakwa society. Jabani Larara explained that swearing is 'a shameful thing in hurting big ceremony man. We're not allowed. Even the girls doesn't swear in front of his [sic] brother.' "We never swear in front of the old people or mother", Murabuda Wurrumarrba explained to me. The missionaries were aware of Anindilyakwa swearing taboos. This created further pressure among missionaries to conform to an idealised model of proper English speech. If they were found swearing or shouting inappropriately or uncontrollably, Anindilyakwa people would have reason to ignore the missionary message.

Missionaries paid close attention to each other’s speech. Their tropical houses forfeited privacy for ventilation. 'The Mission House had only partitions between the rooms and every conversation could be heard', reported visiting officials. Missionaries lived with constant auditory monitoring of each other. It was an impossible standard. On one occasion in 1958, a missionary nurse, Joy Pascoe, broke down, swore and shouted. Her colleagues reported her language to CMS officials, like witnesses to a crime.

Joy rushed into her room in the house near the Dormitory, and screamed at some of the people and Dormitory girls... [She] appeared to lose all control of herself... She screamed at the people, ‘GO away, I hate you, go away, I hate you!’

The sister had blown up and had been swearing badly at the hospital ... She called all the people (natives) who were in sight ‘Devils', and said a couple of times ‘There is no God!' and was swearing quite a lot.

I saw Joy really lose her temper. She deliberately spilled medicines all over the floor and swore a number of times; stamped around the hospital and unfortunately within the hearing of some of the people ... Today ... she began to swear and shout at the

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121 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 29 April, 2012.
122 Jabani Lalara, oral history interview with author, 4 September, 2012.
123 Murabuda Wurrumarrba, oral history interview with author, 4 September, 2012.
125 Norma Farley to J.B. Montgomery, 10 March, 1958, ML MS 6040/39 Resigned Missionary Files, Pascoe Joy Hazel.
126 Keith Hart to J.B. Montgomery, 8 March, 1958, ML MS 6040/39 Resigned Missionary Files, Pascoe Joy Hazel.
people and stamped around her room – banging at things almost to the point of becoming mentally deranged.136

Pascoe resigned soon after the incidents. It seems she was under immense stress and had little support from her colleagues. Most missionaries neglected to mention Pascoe’s hearing impairment. Pascoe was an outsider among other missionaries because of her deafness. She could not participate in polite conversation. She felt excluded by the inaccessibility of missionary norms of speech and sound; ‘she quite often didn’t bother to follow the light hearted chatter ... yet not following it made her feel out of things and she became very moody and depressed.’137 ‘Light hearted chatter’ was evidently an important activity for the single missionary women, a way to relax and support one another as well as modelling ‘civilised’ speech practices for Anindilyakwa people. Yet Pascoe could not participate.

Missionaries distanced themselves from Pascoe’s troubling swearing and shouting by reporting her offences to CMS officials in detail. As a number of historians have shown, gossip and scandal such as these assert social standards and discipline community members to conform to these standards.138 As Kirsten McKenzie points out, gossip is not just about transgression of social boundaries, but the cultivation of the norms themselves.139 The detailed reports of Pascoe’s breakdown are indicative of the missionaries’ desire to cultivate a standard for themselves as models of self-controlled speech. By asserting that Pascoe had transgressed a social boundary, missionaries reasserted their identity as speakers of ‘good’ English in the contested mission space.

It seems missionaries’ main concern about Pascoe’s breakdown was that it occurred within earshot of Anindilyakwa people.140 Since Anindilyakwa people heard, they could also gossip about Pascoe. Gossip can be a weapon for the relatively powerless against the powerful in systems that deny them other forms of agency.141 Gossip also reveals contradictions, double standards,
hypocrisy. Missionaries were therefore deeply concerned about Anindilyakwa gossip. The superintendent, for example, believed that lack of 'proper supervision' in the mission sphere meant not 'much work gets done and it also allows people again to gossip, which in turn leads to strife and fighting.' Some of this gossip was directed at other Anindilyakwa speakers, some against missionaries. Taylor intended the work regime in the mission sphere to silence gossip, but even this could not suppress Anindilyakwa talk.

The Anindilyakwa girls gained the most enjoyment from the Pascoe episode. 'The girls could see and hear it all' and 'mimicked her so realistically that Leila ... thought it was Joy again', Farley reported. Michael Taussig has explored the ways imitation assumes power of the original. Mimicry was the girls' way of seizing missionary power. At the same time, however, mimicry has been, for Europeans, a sign of primitiveness. So the girls confirmed to missionaries their own 'uncivilised', even 'devilish', state through an act of resistance. The girls did not need a missionary to experience a personal breakdown to find material for gossip about missionaries' inappropriate language. They manufactured their own situations. Missionaries were especially vulnerable due to their ignorance of Anindilyakwa. Even little children could outmanoeuvre and undermine a missionary through speech. Nancy Lalara remembered feeding the most hated schoolteacher swear words as a kind of payback.

We hated her ... Every time we told her something and told her it meant something else, she'd go to the older people and pronounce it in a way that they could understand and they could ask the people that we hung out with 'what did she say that missionary woman' then my cousin or my sister would say to my auntie or mother 'she said this' and it's a swear word ... It was a swear word we that were telling them it means 'a dog' or 'hello' or something like that. But then sometimes it was a

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142 White, Speaking with Vampires, 60.
143 James Taylor to George Pearson, 8 April 1962, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1959-1964.
144 Norma Farley to J.B. Montgomerie, 10 March, 1958, ML MS 6040/39.
146 Ibid, 96.
147 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April, 2012.
serious one, like your private parts, which is a really shameful thing for a white person to understand.148

Perhaps Pascoe was also the victim of the girls' pranks. 'These people are past master at playing on weakness', wrote one superintendent, commenting on Anindilyakwa speakers' tendency to 'stir up problems' and 'provoke trouble' to make missionaries lose their tempers.149 The dormitory girls 'mimicked her so realistically', that it is clear that they found the incident entertaining.150 Missionaries were eager for Anindilyakwa speakers to imitate their speech and listen to their message, but now they imitated missionaries only in jest. The missionary fear of the girls exposed a deep insecurity in the contested mission sphere; the missionary display of good speech and the façade of control were so thin that even schoolchildren could challenge it.

Though many missionaries saw the mission sphere as a contest between the teachings of church and camp, oral histories reveal that not all Anindilyakwa people recognised the contest as valid. Anindilyakwa people understood missionaries' attempts to construct a dichotomy of camp and church, but many did not accept this binary. As Murabuda Wurramarba explained, 'we learn both way'.151 To Murabuda, it was not a genuine or necessary contest but one manufactured by missionaries. As the old men today look back on mission days, the important division they remember was not church teaching versus the camp but the binary of law and lawlessness; of listening to elders and hubris. Murabuda explained that in mission times, Anindilyakwa people listened to both the teaching of the camp and the church sphere, but do so no longer.

Now you can't see the young men sitting like us ... The drugs, whatever, you know, things. They lost the way ... But we learn from in the beginning when the missionary come. We just got a real foundation in life, strong. After that we bin go through the our culture, our ceremony, is to come that way. And those two just work together, missionary law, gospel song or gospel story and those things.152

148 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April, 2012.
150 Norma Farley to J.B.Montgomerie, 10 March, 1958. ML MS 6040/39.
151 Murabuda Wurramarba, oral history interview with author, 4 September, 2012.
152 Murabuda Wurramarba, oral history interview with author, 4 September 2012.
Murabuda’s memory of mission times could be more shaped by the frustration of his old age – the way Angurugu is today – than how it was in his youth. Nonetheless, his memories suggest that the division missionaries tried to create between listening to the church or the camp did not resonate with Anindilyakwa people. Moreover, missionaries’ constructed boundaries of mission life were constantly challenged and transgressed, even by missionaries themselves, lending credence to Murabuda’s insistence that the division was stronger in the minds of missionaries than in his experience.

Mission life was divided into spheres — the camp, the school, the church, the mission space — each with their own language norms. From the missionary perspective, the use of language in these spheres would direct Anindilyakwa away from the teaching of the camp and encourage them to submit to the teaching of the church. Furthermore, the existence of distinct spheres, especially the camp and mission dichotomy, reassured missionaries that there was no need for them to listen to Anindilyakwa people. The spheres of speech and sound reinforced a message that Anindilyakwa culture was harsh, strange and wild. The missionaries worked within a system and a set of spheres of life that made listening closely to Anindilyakwa people difficult, if not impossible. Some did listen. Most, however, were more concerned with getting their message across; preaching at Anindilyakwa people, rather than conversing with them. From an Aboriginal perspective, these spheres could be used to manage their engagement with the mission and keep culture and language strong. They managed Angurugu’s language economy, they listened just enough and learned enough English according to their interests. Language functioned for missionaries and Anindilyakwa speakers as a useful means for constructing different spheres of life and identities.

Yet these spheres were subject to change, the boundaries were fluid. Through consideration of language, the missions emerge as contested spaces where various missionaries and various Aboriginal people pursued sometimes competing interests. There was no agreement among Aboriginal people or missionaries as to how language would be used when and where. Some missionaries subverted the mission structure by learning Anindilyakwa, listening to the old people and visiting the camp. Others spoke Aboriginal Englishes and Kriol in the supposedly ‘civilised’ mission space. Missionaries found they needed to compromise, alter their expectations and adjust
to Anindilyakwa norms of speech and sound. Anindilyakwa speakers did not conform to missionary spheres; they continued to use Anindilyakwa and Aboriginal Englishes in all contexts in resistance to missionaries. The missionaries' dichotomy between civilised mission and the bush was difficult to maintain and was constantly challenged by both missionaries and Anindilyakwa speakers. As superintendent Jim Taylor commented in 1969, 'our veneer of civilisation runs very thin at times.'

By the 1960s, it seemed to many missionaries that Anindilyakwa speakers simply were not listening to their message. Perhaps they were too fixed to their expectations of contestation to perceive or listen to Anindilyakwa moves towards plurality or synthesis. One missionary commented in 1969 that although Anindilyakwa men had heard the missionaries preach, few understood Christianity and most were not listening.

I'm personally inclined to feel that Christianity has been fully understood by very, very few of the people here...The notions my scripture class (of senior boys) have of God are pathetic, especially when one considers the amount of teaching they had in scripture (all in English) alone. Some staff having been here longer and seen more, would disagree, but my own impressions are that, even as I can skim a flat stone across a still, dark pool, so has our Christian teaching gone; across the surface, leaving ripples, but failing to sink in.

They had heard the message, more often than many English-speakers, but it had not 'stayed inside their ears.' Did they have ears to hear? The situation became so dire that in 1973 Irene Jeffreys commented that 'I think we need again to reassess our role, purpose and responsibilities ... in Arnhem Land, where we have been preaching the Gospel for the past 20-60 years.' Perhaps Anindilyakwa people would never listen and it was time to leave, she mused.

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Chapter Four - The written word of English

The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life

2 Corinthians, 3:6, King James Version

The aboriginal is a dud as far as [reading] is concerned. You see he can't see that it is useful. After all being able to read Melbourne newspapers won't help him to catch his bandicoot, nor will it appear his fish for him.

Fred Gray, 1938.

Language without script has unsettled literate Europeans for centuries. The Western imagination has long thought it something distinctly savage. According to seventeenth-century English cleric Samuel Purchas, God had divided humanity into two halves: the 'sociable and religious' and the 'brutish, savage, barbarous'. The distinction between them was those who wrote and those who did not. Nineteenth-century missionaries regarded writing as necessary for coherent religious knowledge. A society that did not write must hold little knowledge of any worth. Anthropologists and historians likewise used an 'orality' or 'literacy' dichotomy, drawing a line between 'modern civilisations' and 'pre-modern societies' based on writing. As recently as 1982, literature professor

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2 Michael Harbsmeier, Writing and the Other: Travellers' Literacy, or towards an Archaeology of orality in Schousboe, K. & Larsen, MT (eds.) Literacy and Society (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1989), 200.


4 Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race, 92.

and historian Walter Ong wrote that ‘orality is not an ideal’, arguing that although oral societies value their traditions, when introduced to writing they inevitably ‘want to achieve literacy as soon as possible.’ Similarly, in 1987 social anthropologist, Jack Goody that writing ‘underpins civilisation’ because the permanence of written forms (unlike the fluidity of oral traditions) permits cognitive development and critical thought.

In many places where missionaries introduced the written word, indigenous people eagerly adopted literacy. As Tony Ballantyne has shown, in New Zealand, Maori embraced writing as a tool for recasting indigenous identity in an environment of rapid changes. Michael Stevens describes a ‘Maori modernity’ which included English literacies as a modern resource for indigenous people. Writing in English had strategic, practical benefits in terms of negotiation with colonisers and books and newspapers also offered new types of entertainment and enjoyment.

Yet, for other peoples, literacy was not an ideal. Penny Van Toorn argued that when Aboriginal people in colonial Australia first encountered writing, it came entangled in colonisers’ ideologies of literacy and civilisation and that this context shaped Aboriginal peoples’ varied engagement with writing. Mindy Morgan found that for many Native American communities, English literacy and the institutional power of colonisers were likewise inextricably linked. The use of documents as mechanisms of control in the context of unequal power relationships shaped how indigenous people perceived the use and purpose of literacies. Writing could become laden with cultural meanings associated with colonisers and was not always readily reconciled with indigenous

Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 8; Daniel Lord Smail, On Deep History and the Brain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 35.


Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race, 146.

Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race, 146.


Van Toorn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 13.


Ibid, 11.
identities. Native Americans did use writing in various ways, but not all were eager to become writers themselves.

These complex symbolic meanings of writing in cross-cultural contexts of uneven power relationships complicate visions of the universal appeal of literacy. I also find that the ways Anindilyakwa people used texts challenges both binaries of orality and literacy and visions of literacy's universal appeal. The ability to read was fundamental for CMS missionaries to practice their faith. For them, English literacy was a mark of civility, necessary to function as 'full' Australian citizens and members of their Church of England. They saw instilling their English literacy as indicative of their success as civilisers and evangelists as well as a means of empowering Aboriginal people as equal citizens and disciples. At the same time, however, missionaries used English-language documents to regulate and disempower Anindilyakwa people. Despite missionary encouragement to do so, many Anindilyakwa speakers never became literate in English. Why? Is it possible that they chose not to learn? Through these questions, I shed light on the Anindilyakwa challenge to missionary presumptions about the universal utility of their English literacy.

Throughout the mission period, a number of Anindilyakwa people embraced English literacies as a new means of accessing knowledge and power, seeing literacies as opportunities for themselves and their children. Even then, Anindilyakwa speakers used literacies in ways missionaries did not foresee. As literary scholar Stephanie Newell has argued, colonial reading cultures were not a 'knock out punch' to existing indigenous literacies and interpretive practices. Furthermore, whereas Van Toorn found that Aboriginal people 'wove back and forth between oral and literate institutions', I find that on Groote Eylandt, the division of orality and literacy was not so clear; Anindilyakwa people used writing in ways that simultaneously upheld oral systems of knowledge. As Michele Grossan has argued, the durability of orality in indigenous societies, despite exposure to literary cultures, challenges the Western binary of orality and literacy, civilisation and savagery, as well as Western narratives of modernity. Anindilyakwa people did

14 Ibid.
16 Van Toorn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 140.
not reject literacy, but used written texts in diverse, oral and more Aboriginal ways, sometimes even—to the missionaries’ surprise—to subvert the ‘Christian civilisation’ offered by missionaries. These varied engagements with literacies also reflected mixed responses to the Christian religion, Australian citizenship and modernity.

Long before European writing came to Groote Eylandt, Anindilyakwa people encoded meaning in images. Senior people used message sticks to communicate from afar, often for announcing a ceremony. The notches and pictures on message sticks are mnemonic devices, guaranteeing the messenger can pass on the message over a long journey. The markings on the stick also confirm the genuineness of the message and the authority of the messenger. The message stick tradition continued into the twentieth century in new ways for new purposes. For example, in 1951, Patrol officer Gordon Sweeney reported the use of message sticks in Eastern Arnhem Land as invoices. Circular markings signified the money desired and other marks represented the groups to be paid. Message sticks can also operate as ‘love letters’. John Mathew reported in 1886 that young men living near the Mary River Queensland sent pieces of wood with encoded carvings to girls they desired.

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Figure 20 ‘Message Sticks’

Source: Duclie Levitt’s Slides Groote Eylandt, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
Anidilyakwa people also have their own artistic traditions. Groote Eylandters have been painting on rock for millennia. In Aboriginal art, levels of meaning are encoded in paintings. Everything is meaningful. As Peter Sutton explains, ‘idle doodling, or the making of meaningless marks, is alien.’ Paintings are not merely representations of ancestral beings but are manifestations of ancestral beings. Hence, signs in paintings contain and channel spiritual power, related to ceremonies and associated with particular clans and their lands. Once someone has learned to read a language with an alphabetic script, its written texts are open to read and interpret. Not so for Aboriginal art. Unlike writing, Aboriginal art cannot be ‘read’ by strangers. Even those with some knowledge of symbols and stories represented in art cannot ‘read’ its deeper layers of meaning unless granted access by senior people. The messages are secret, impossible to decode on their own, open only to those who have a legitimate right to know.

When missionaries came to Groote Eylandt, they used English script firstly in the hope of keeping things under control. The most important sphere of the mission, the church, was dominated by writing. Westerners often presumed writing was reliable because the content could not change. The Bible itself concludes with condemnation of those who dare tamper with the written record. For missionaries, written language enforced the authority of their message and guarded against deviations from it. The written text, even when read aloud, is alienated from the speaker. It is not the speaker’s own words; the speaker becomes merely a ‘vessel’ of a disembodied message.

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24 Sutton, Dreamings, 13.
26 Sutton, Dreamings, 61.
29 Ibid, 27.
30 Revelation 22:19-20, King James Version: 'For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.'
message's origin beyond the speaker transmitted through a book was evidence to missionaries of its timelessness and hinted at its divine origins.

Writing was also a tool of self-regulation. By limiting the church service to readings from a page, missionaries ensured its content was authorised. They attributed great powers to writing. It was potentially dangerous, potentially corrupting. The staff minutes record in 1955 that after 'lengthy discussion' on 'the Golden Bells hymn book as to its suitability' the staff would consider 'the merits of another suggested hymn book, The Church Hymnal for the Christian Year.' They decided not to distribute this new one until it had been 'studied'.31 Given the power they attributed to the written word, they scrutinised texts, especially those to be admitted into their church sphere. Though fiction was in high demand among missionaries, they took the matter of which books the CMS office sent up for them very seriously. In 1960 one missionary commented 'we need some form of relaxation.' Bishop Kerle suggested 'lighter reading be sent up' but Montgomerie, the Aborigines Secretary, said he had done so but 'they were not able to censor them in the office before sending them North' and missionaries who had received such books regarded them as 'only fit to be burned.'32 Missionaries insisted their reading be censored, perhaps as a demonstration of their own suitability of for the mission field, perhaps for their own spiritual edification, or perhaps as an example to Aboriginal people whose reading would also be censored. If no suitable material could be found, they could always read more of the Bible.

Missionaries were also writers. They often spent Saturdays attending to correspondence and writing reports.33 As literary scholar Anna Johnston has pointed out, with diaries and reports, letters and memoirs, newspapers and grammars, Protestant missionaries were 'characterised by authorship as much as by daring deeds in foreign lands.'34 Their writing, they believed, pointed to their authority, their self-discipline and their civilisation as well as to the significance of their work (which would, they believed, be of interest to future generations). The CMS missionaries wrote almost everything down. Their records extend from formal reports to the more trivial: the minutes of the Angurugu table-tennis club and social club. Each diligently wrote monthly reports for the

31 Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 8 December, 1955, ML MSS 6040/7, Box 2, Groote Eylandt General 1953-1963.
32 Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 27 July, 1960, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 4, Correspondence out 1960.
33 See, for example, the Angurugu station journal. NTAS NTRS 704, Box 1, ANG Journal 1 Dec 1953 – 31 Mar 1957.
34 Anna Johnston, Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860 (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.
Aborigines Committee in Sydney. They kept statistics on school attendance and grades; pawpaw, banana, pineapple and peanut produce; injuries and hospital treatments; births, deaths and marriages. They also wrote regular prayer circulars to their local CMS branches with news and ‘prayer and praise points’. Superintendents kept a daily journal as well as preparing biannual and annual reports.

Written reporting served a CMS bureaucracy and enabled centralised control of the missions in Sydney. Through insisting on regular updates, statistics and reports, Montgomerie gained intimate knowledge of Angurugu. David Woodbridge remembered that the Aborigines Committee was ‘really hands on’ and Montgomerie ‘was the one who drove it, he was the boss’. Missionaries demonstrated their loyalty by taking care to report to him. He scolded missionaries for making decisions without deferring to him or for neglecting to provide regular updates. In January 1950, for example, a whooping cough epidemic caused such chaos among staff that they overlooked reporting to Montgomerie. His first concern, it seems, was not the sixteen Aboriginal deaths, but that he had not been informed. Written reporting enabled the structuring of the mission in a carefully managed hierarchy from the Aborigines Secretary Montgomerie, down to superintendents, missionaries and, at bottom, Aboriginal people.

Keeping up-to-date records of all Anindilyakwa people was also necessary to satisfy government agencies, which provided the financial support. Paul Hasluck, the Minister for Territories, devised the Welfare Ordinance of 1953 which required a full list of ‘wards’, such that nearly all the Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory were registered. The ‘Mission Roll’ was constantly in need of attention. The mission also depended financially on Child Endowment Payments, which

35 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
36 Eleven people died in December 1949 in the whooping cough epidemic at Angurugu at the same time as a measles epidemic had ‘overrun’ Umbakumba. Among them was Danabana’s baby, Martha, who had been fathered by a missionary. ‘Almost all the children and people on the station [were] in hospital most of the month...there were only ten or fifteen working instead of the usual hundred or so.’ The superintendent, Kevin Hoffman was occupied issuing food and medicine, leaving the administrative work to Brian Short which explains why telegraphs to the Aborigines Secretary were overlooked. Brian Short, ‘Groote Eylandt Mission Report for December 1949,’ NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.
37 J.B. Montgomerie to Brian Short, 9 January, 1950, NTAS NTRS 871, Box 12, Correspondence.
it 'managed' on behalf of Anindilyakwa mothers, so accurate records of the numbers of eligible children were imperative (of course this 'management' system also worked to minimise Aboriginal autonomy, as Aboriginal mothers had little opportunity to ensure they received value for their money or to consent to expenditure decisions made on their behalf). As occurred at many missions and reserves, non-English speakers found that the use of English documents monitored nearly all aspects of their lives.40

Although writing was intended by CMS and governments as an instrument of control, it was often ineffective. Rather than delivering the clarity and decisiveness to authorities it promised, English-language records were often a source of confusion and contention. The number of children at Angurugu was often in doubt, since many were under the care of their aunties or 'other mothers' (according to Anindilyakwa family norms), making miscounts highly likely.41 Missionary and government systems for recording family relationships, which presumed Western biological conceptions of family, 'motherhood' and 'fatherhood', proved inadequate.42

There were further problems with roll books. In 1958 the chaplain Earl Hughes, complained about 'adamant "linguists"', particularly the Rose River Mission superintendent John Mercer, whose approach to recording Aboriginal names Hughes called the 'that's what I think it is' method.43 Mercer retaliated:

[Hughes] has being going thru all the names on the roll and seeks after a few short months in the work to change the work of years ... He is very prone to error, has had no linguistic training basically and will change his mind about a lot of things ... The people smile at me and say he gets things nearly right but not quite ... I said for him to call the people what he liked but to be sure not to alter the rolls otherwise there will be strife.44

40 Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 45.
41 Dulcie Levitt Memoirs, provided by Julie Rudder (née Waddy).
43 Earl Hughes to J.B. Montgomerie, 13 March, 1958, ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Hughes Earl J.
44 John Mercer to J.B. Montgomerie, 21 March, 1958, ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Hughes Earl J.
Standardised spelling for Aboriginal names was a recurring dilemma. Missionary Callon Moore explained her approach to spelling names for census lists in 1968.

I think that names should be written in such a form that the ordinary Australian can pronounce them reasonably correctly (though there is such a thing as learning by usage even with our own names). So I am including alternative names as pronounced, as nearly as I can, though sorely perplexed where the pronunciation varies with the individual aborigine when it comes to vowels (just as it does amongst us!).

Missionaries struggled to capture the reality of Anindilyakwa lives in their records. Aboriginal people were, to her, still not ‘ordinary Australians’ until their lives conformed to her European systems of knowledge and record-keeping. Her attempt to present people as ‘ordinary Australians’ was an attempt to present Aboriginal people as citizens, if only on paper. But missionaries’ reports and spellings could not convey the reality of Anindilyakwa life. That they could not agree on spellings for names and that the Anindilyakwa vowels just would not fit into the Roman alphabet, indicates that their faith in writing to convey reality was misplaced. Similarly, Anindilyakwa family life, where children have numerous ‘mothers’ and ‘aunties’ and ‘uncles’ who share the responsibilities to ‘grow them up’, could not be reduced into the schema for Child Endowment payments without difficulty. The missionary and government frameworks were the wrong size and shape. Writing proved to be ambiguous, inadequate and particular to the missionary culture rather than a universal authority on the world. Rather than ordering Aboriginal lives according to missionary expectations, attempts at representing them in writing only exposed to missionaries how Aboriginal people continued to uphold their own systems of family life and naming.

As Morgan found on Indian Reserves in the USA, non-English speaking indigenous people invented ways of exploiting the English-language bureaucratic systems that attempted to control them. Angurugu superintendent, Jim Taylor told me of brothers who shared a single position working at the BHP mine. They took turns doing their shift, possibly claiming to be the same man,

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45 The dispute between Mercer and Hughes foreshadowed a later, more divisive dispute between Stokes and another linguist, Velma Leeding, over Anindilyakwa orthography. They disagreed for decades.
46 Callon Moore to A. Cambell, 3 October, 1968, NTAS NTRS 869, Box 1, Aboriginal Matters – Mrs Callon Moore.
47 Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 63.
so that none of them had to work full time.\textsuperscript{48} Perhaps Anindilyakwa speakers knew the difficulty English speakers had in writing their names and were happy for the confusion to persist if it meant the possibility of extra rations or fewer working hours. According to Johnston, writing and recording gave colonisers the impression of civil control, a 'fantasy of knowledge', but imperial rule existed more clearly on paper than in reality.\textsuperscript{49} Likewise, the detailed records kept by missionaries present an image of missionary dominance in Angurugu, yet the impression given by the archive does not necessarily reflect the experiences of Anindilyakwa people, who could at times evade missionaries.

Not only was writing flawed as an instrument of control in the cross-cultural encounter, but writing also undermined missionaries themselves. Though reporting to Montgomerie was intended to ensure the smooth-running of the mission, it became a source of division and disappointment. Letter writing was missionaries' primary means of communication beyond the island (only the superintendent had unfettered access to radio). Missionary work was more than a job; most saw it as their life's work, their passion and vocation. There was also the added pressure from their families and home churches (which had donated funds and prayed for the cause) that they would succeed in the field. A government official explained in 1949 that missionaries' 'living standard is not just mere frugality but abject poverty, unable to save they have no sense of security, complete frustration resulting in the number of cases of nervous disorder.'\textsuperscript{50} In this situation, letters became an avenue to vent their frustration and strengthen their position, sometimes at others' expense. In the previous chapter, I discussed letters written regarding Joy Pascoe's anxiety. Hers was not an isolated case. The majority of letters of complaint from fellow missionaries were penned in a tumultuous period in the late 1950s. They were cutting:

\begin{quote}
Many's the time they have both floored us with their rudeness and contempt for work ... Often Ruth turns up her nose at the midday meal – hates dugong and turtle and general attitude is sickening for one supposed to be a Christian. She wants to be placed in a famine area for a while she might appreciate the good food God gives ...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} Jim Taylor, oral history interview with author, 1 July, 2012.

\textsuperscript{49} Thomas Richards, \textit{The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire} (Verso, 1993), 3.

\textsuperscript{50} L. Dodd to Government Secretary, 8 March, 1949, A431 1951/560.
We've sacrificed all – time, money, enjoyment, the lot for God and this work. I've yet to see these others here do the same.53

Sister Levy at times has no control over her temper, and is tactless to a point beyond nastiness when in a temper, that it is impossible to keep the staff united while Miss Levy is here.54

Missionaries were aware of each other's complaints and wrote counter attacks to protect their interests and those of their friends.

We feel very upset to hear that you have received unfavourable reports and criticisms of Kevin by letter. We don't know the details of the criticism, but we want you to realise that, even if another member of the staff has been critical, we think very highly of Kevin and of his leadership.53

The problem with letters was they could be intercepted. One had the misfortune of 'discovering' another missionary's letter complaining about his leadership. He sent a retaliatory letter.

I have just been going thru my office mail envelope and came to a letter... and thinking it to be a monthly report read it and I'm amazed at some of the content ... It is sickening to read ... If there are complaints ... magnified faults and don't take into account their own which I have not attempted to mention to you.54

Montgomerie fostered a culture of written complaints in his monitoring of the mission. He requested updates on missionaries’ behaviour from those he knew were already antagonistic.55 At times, he responded sympathetically to missionaries' complaints, even joining them in attacking staff. 'Now about [X] and her jealousy. Isn't it tragic!' he wrote to Hughes about another missionary’s wife.56 He assured missionaries that his negative personal comments about others

51 [Name withheld] to J.B. Montgomerie, 21 March, 1958, ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Hughes Earl J.
52 [Name withheld] to C. Kerle, 9 October, 1961, ML MSS 6040/36 Resigned Missionary Files, Levy, Joan.
54 [Name withheld] to J.B. Montgomerie, 21 March, 1958. ML MSS 6040/33.
56 J.B. Montgomerie to Earl Hughes, 30 January, 1958. ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Hughes Earl J.
were not 'ammunition' but simply 'information' to help 'in the overall administration of the mission.'\textsuperscript{57} It is doubtful that those concerned would have agreed.

Unlike speech, which occurs as an event—an encounter shared between speaker and listener—writing is disembodied, disconnected from the original author and can be re-contextualised and reinterpreted, without reference to the author's intentions. Although writing can be an instrument of authority, it is also risky. In 1960, when the newly arrived chaplain, Jim Taylor, was appointed Acting Superintendent over the older and more experienced Arthur Howell (Howell was appointed Works Supervisor), Howell and Taylor disagreed on the division of their responsibilities and Angurugu was in disarray.\textsuperscript{58} A poorly written letter from Dick Harris was the source of the confusion. Taylor read it as simply 'a pep talk' to Howell, but Howell believed it gave him 'oversight over all the mission.'\textsuperscript{59} Both Taylor and Howell appealed to the letter to justify themselves. The episode was extremely disruptive and led to Howell's resignation.

Many Anindilyakwa people were angered by Taylor's appointment, believing that he was too young to be their 'boss'. They had an existing working relationship with Howell, but Taylor was unknown. To Anindilyakwa people, perhaps it seemed that writing encouraged self-interested interpretations. Writing, it seems, fostered dishonesty as its disconnectedness from the speaker meant it could be twisted to suit personal needs. Hokari recounted how Old Jimmy, a Gurindji elder, complained that 'paper'—European laws and letters—could be changed, reinterpreted, thrown away. His Aboriginal law is in the earth which 'never change ... (law) still there.'\textsuperscript{60} Old Jimmy's word challenges Goody's thesis of the permanence and subsequent superiority of written literacies. Whereas writing is 'just paper'—subject to editing, reinterpretation, damage or loss—Aboriginal oral traditions literally have a solid foundation: land.\textsuperscript{61} Though writing was, to missionaries, a symbol of their control over Anindilyakwa people, to Anindilyakwa people,

\textsuperscript{57} J.B. Montgomerie to G.R. Harris, 7 January, 1959, ML MSS 6040/39 Resigned Missionary Files, Pavy, Trevor & Edith.
\textsuperscript{58} Taylor was only 28 years old.
\textsuperscript{59} Jim Taylor to Dick Harris, 28 September, 1960, ML MSS 6040/33 Box 28 Resigned missionary files, Howell, Arthur G. and Alice I.
\textsuperscript{60} Minoru Hokari, Cross-Culturalizing History: Journey to the Gurindji Way of Historical Practice, 2001, 96.
missionary literacy could also seem an unreliable and weak instrument and in many ways inferior to their existing oralities.

Writing had other meanings for missionaries, apart from control. To evangelical missionaries, literacy was the foundation of both their religion and their civilisation. Protestantism has its origins in the genesis of a Western literary culture in the sixteenth century and the distribution of the printed Bible. Personal knowledge of scripture was considered the avenue to truth and salvation, so Protestants took care to study the pages closely.\(^{64}\) As Joseph Errington explains, for Protestants, 'the gift of faith went with the gift of literacy.'\(^{65}\) Over the twentieth century, as evangelicals faced challenges from liberal theologies, evangelicals increasingly emphasised their Biblicism over and above their more pietistic traditions. As leading evangelical theologian John Stott declared in 1977, 'we evangelicals are Bible people.'\(^{64}\) Evangelicals were particularly devoted to the Bible, finding 'all spiritual truth' within its pages.\(^{65}\) They constantly quoted and alluded to it as they sought to lead 'biblical' lives and honoured it in nearly all their communal activities – Bible study, church, fellowship meetings – as well as in their daily private devotional practice.\(^{66}\) The Bible was, to them, supreme authority in life and faith.\(^{67}\)

CMS missionaries likewise proclaimed themselves a 'people of a Book, and that Book the Bible.'\(^{68}\) The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England confirmed in writing the doctrines of their faith in the Book of Common Prayer. This Prayer Book also taught them to pray that they might 'mark, learn and inwardly digest' the scriptures.\(^{69}\) As conservative evangelicals, CMS missionaries clung to these writings as second only to the Bible. To them, to be Christian was to read. As the CMS newsletter explained:

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\(^{64}\) David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 4.

\(^{65}\) Ibid, 12.


\(^{67}\) Derek Tidball, Who Are the Evangelicals?: Tracing the Roots of the Modern Movements (Marshall Pickering, 1994), 79.

\(^{68}\) Oliver Allision, 'That they may have Life,' Open Door, 1 May, 1950.

\(^{69}\) The Collect for The Second Sunday in Advent.
Every Christian should be a reader; that is a principle which the first missionaries laid down and subsequent missionaries have endeavoured to put into practice ... Today in many countries, a convert may not be baptised until he can read ... a Christian should be able to read the Scripture for himself."

The spiritual life of the missionaries depended on texts and they were used to deferring to books as their authorities. They practiced the 'Quiet Time' (daily private reading of scripture and prayer), 'Bible Study' (group discussion of biblical passages) and Sunday Services (using the Prayer Book, Hymn Book and Bible). So dependent was their social and spiritual life on literacy that missionary Norma Farley commented in 1962 that she found it difficult to form friendships with Anindilyakwa people who could not read the Bible. The predominance of written language in their religious practice functioned as a way of collectively identifying with churches beyond the mission in space and time, as other Anglicans around the globe read the same words. Reading the Bible aloud has been a means for families and communities to assert identities within a Christian framework. When they read they were no longer isolated but connected with their churches at home and with an international Anglican fellowship. The language of the church was not the language missionaries used in conversation, but the antiquated English of the Authorised Bible and their hymns. The language had the effect of constructing the church sphere as separate to other, more mundane activities of life. This language pointed to the church's timelessness and solemnity.

It also pointed to its Englishness. The King James Bible was, for English-speaking Christians, a 'masterpiece of English literature' and the English language itself a vessel crafted by God for the task of conveying his message in this form. Postcolonial Biblical scholar, Rasiah Sugirtharajah writes that this Bible 'came to the colonies as the Englishman's book - a landmark text in the history of the English people.' Though the CMS missionaries gathered on Aboriginal land in North Australia, they created a small patch of English Christianity when they read the language of their Bibles and Prayer Book.

70 'What are you Reading', Open Door, April 1963, 1.
Literacy was also a symbol of citizenship. Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Joy Damousi has shown, literacy (particularly in English) became a key marker of being ‘civilised’. With the growth of democratic ideals in the nineteenth century the perception that potential voters must be educated became ever more pressing. The citizen of a democracy must be an informed participant in debates, so literacy was essential. Not only should citizens be literate, but they must be literate in English. As Morgan has shown, English speakers considered their language the only language fully capable of expressing the ideals of a democratic nation. Well into the twentieth century, therefore, illiteracy was cited as reason to exclude American blacks from franchise. In Australia, public school reformers would fashion a ‘mass culture for the nation state’ through achieving universal literacy; schools were creating literate citizens for the nation.

In mid-twentieth-century Australia, English speaking policymakers and missionaries alike considered English literacy essential for Australian citizenship. The Director of the Commonwealth Office of Education, R.C. Mills wrote in 1949 that reading was a necessary skill for Aboriginal children if they were to become fully functioning citizens and participants in modernity. They must be equipped for ‘newspapers, public notices and documents with which they will have to cope’ in order to participate in national discussions. Methodist missionary, Arthur Ellemor wrote in 1956 that ‘full citizenship’ of Aboriginal people depended on literacy to be ‘meaningful’. Likewise, Montgomerie wrote in 1958 that Aboriginal people could not function as citizens without English literacy; ‘they cannot vote at an election for parliament because they cannot read or write.’ Establishing English literacy among Anindilyakwa speakers, therefore, was a core mission objective. So fundamental was literacy to citizenship that many missionaries did not consider illiterate Anindilyakwa people as functioning citizens, even after citizenship rights.

75 Damousi, Colonial Voices, 2.
78 Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 86.
79 Heater, Citizenship, 175.
82 Arthur F. Ellemor, Can the Aboriginal Be Assimilated? (Sydney: Methodist Overseas Mission, 1956), 11.
83 J.B. Montgomerie, ‘That they might have life,’ 1958, NTRS 1105.
were formally granted. For example, when I asked Wilma Taylor about the implications of full citizenship for Aboriginal people, she referred to the 1967 referendum, commenting that although the constitutional change was necessary, including Aboriginal people in the census burdened literate missionaries.

[It] meant that they were counted in the census, which was a good thing, so they weren't just the forgotten people. But then we had to do the census, which was a killer, because a lot of them couldn't do the census themselves.84

In the early years of the school it seems Anindilyakwa people were eager for their children to achieve English literacy. Harris reported in 1945 that on his wife's arrival to Angurugu people immediately asked 'are the children having school to-day?' because they were 'anxious that their children learn to read and write.'85 Some parents resisted sending their children to school, though even these children eventually made it onto the school roll.86 In the 1940s, children learned to read by reading the Bible. Gumbuli Wurraramara explained, ‘before anything else. Before I could read. Read Bible and Psalms’, suggesting that perhaps the children were memorising rather than reading.87 By 1952, teachers reported using the ‘word, sentence, look and say method’ of teaching reading and focussed on writing words on the blackboard for younger children. The children worked through the ‘First Australian’s First Readers’ series, produced by the Presbyterian Church for Aboriginal mission schools.88 The series aimed to introduce Aboriginal children to books and the title, ‘First Australians’, reflects the expectation that, through English literacy, the children would realise their status as Australian citizens without losing an Aboriginal identity. They proved very popular and the CMS teachers even produced their own sequel, illustrated by Gula Lalara.89

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84 Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
85 G.R. Harris, 5 March, 1945, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.
87 Seiffert, Gumbuli of Ngukurr, 58.
Figure 21 The First Australians' First Book

Source: Geraldine MacKenzie and Roma Thompson, The First Australian’s First Book, Marcie Muir

Collection of Australian Children’s Books. (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1951)
The Commonwealth English syllabus for Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory, devised in 1950, consisted of *The Bush Book* series produced by the Commonwealth Office of Education. These taught assimilationist messages — education and employment — and included *Nari and Minala Go to School*, followed by *Nari and Minala Go to Work.* In 1953, the Angurugu teachers introduced the 'Bush Books' into the school.

Figure 22 Nari and Minala Go to Work


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In addition to learning to read English, in the 1950s, the CMS school aimed for children ‘to write simple English correctly, with special regard to letter writing.’

Nancy Lalara, who attended the Angurugu School in the 1950s, told of how the school operated with few resources:

We learned without no books, no crayons, no pencils, just with chalk and blackboards and dusters. That’s how we learnt to write our sentences that they wrote up there.

And we wrote our own stories. We were writing them on the blackboard.

In 1952, teachers gave the older children books for writing English words and definitions, like a personal dictionary. Children also copied Bible verses and decorated them with drawings. Teachers drilled the children in dictation, which the teachers said was ‘much enjoyed.’ Nancy Lalara developed a love of reading; ‘I used to like reading Enid Blyton books, climb up on the mango tree, get away from my little sisters’ hassling.’ Rhoda Lalara (one of Nancy’s younger sisters) also explained that she loved going to school and writing stories.

Only the time that I missed out on going to school was when I was sick ... I really wanted to learn more. I did a lot of exercises like doing arithmetic, writing stories. On the weekend when we used to go out and came back to school on the Monday ‘Can you write a story about what you used to do on the weekend?’ and we used to do it.

The children wrote well. In 1966, after a school excursion to Darwin, Angurugu School principal, Ted Egan reported that ‘Darwin people expressed amazement at the standard of letter writing (“I only wish my kids could write as well as that” was heard many times) achieved by the Groote Eylandt children.’ The children’s writing was a visual performance producing tangible evidence

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94 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April, 2012.
98 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 29 April, 2012.
99 Rhoda Lalara, oral history interview with author, 23 April, 2012.
of their progress towards citizenship. Janet Farnell taught at Angurugu in the early 1970s after it became a government school. She was in awe of the standard of writing of children schooled during the mission period.

You should see their books ... from that time. You look at them and go 'oh my god!' Beautifully ruled up and the penmanship was just beautiful. And you're thinking 'woah, how did they do this?' And it was, I guess, a much more disciplined approach and a belief in what they were doing and that it was right.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{101} Janet Farnell (née Supple), oral history interview with author, 20 May 2012.
Figure 23 School students

Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.

Figure 24 Angurugu Classroom, New School Building 196[?]

Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
The missionaries also hoped to socialise adult Anindilyakwa people into a culture of English literacy. From the earliest days of the mission, Harris used ‘mail boys’, men who walked across the island to exchange letters with Umbakumba and the RAAF base. In 1945, as his wife Nell was teaching their son to read, she also taught her ‘house girl’, Gudjiba. Eventually she lent her a book, ‘she brought it back eventually, very dirty, but could read it all.’ Her husband, Gula Lalara ‘is a reader and helps her’, she wrote. Gudjiba’s eagerness convinced her of the need for more reading material. ‘I have never allowed natives to take away Primers to their camp or hut before, but I believe the children, who are really anxious to read, would learn much from these primers if we had them to give.’ The virtue of reading, for missionaries, surpassed other concerns about regulating mission space and of dirtiness and civilised cleanliness. A book was better read than clean. Later, missionaries combined Christian instruction with literacy lessons, gathering women together to read Bible passages aloud in turn. In 1952, Gulpia was the first adult to begin formal reading lessons.

With the establishment of the school, missionaries encouraged adult Anindilyakwa speakers to become teaching assistants to help manage the classroom, but also to improve their English literacy. A number of Anindilyakwa people took up positions. The teaching assistant, Danabana, was encouraged to use a writing book to practice writing. Danabana also read storybooks to the girls in the mornings and Nabilya read for the boys. Yet the system of encouraging adults to practice reading and writing through employing them as teaching assistants was short-lived. When the Senior Education Officer of the Commonwealth Office for Education visited Angurugu in September 1952, he recommended ‘very limited use of Aborigines as teachers in the school’

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because it apparently compromised children's ability to learn English. By January 1953, only three Anindilyakwa teaching assistants remained in the school: Wudjari, Gula and Nabilya.

Through the 1960s, missionaries continued to encourage Anindilyakwa people to use writing at work and participate in the CMS's extensive documentation of mission life. In 1963 the missionary builder, R.B. Dent, praised 'men like Ken':

[Ken] wanted me to write out the names of the men so that he could learn to write them out in the paybook. I found myself a little amused at his earnestness when he said how much he enjoyed 'thinking' ---- and he wanted to get some more practice!!

Ken, it seemed, enjoyed the mental challenge of learning to write. In 1965, Dent encouraged Nandjiwarra to 'keep a daily dairy and write monthly reports.' Spelling was to Nandjiwarra a 'heavy job', yet he usually persisted. From September 1965, Nandjiwarra was Welfare Officer of the island and wrote monthly reports for the Aborigines Committee. In encouraging Anindilyakwa people to use writing as part of their daily work, missionaries hoped to extend modernity into Anindilyakwa lives through their practices of literacy. The possibility of scrutinising a written record, they believed, would encourage people to work harder or to make modernising adjustments to increase efficiency. They hoped that Anindilyakwa people would learn to attribute authority to the written word and value written records as objective accounts.

Many Anindilyakwa people valued English literacy and embraced the values missionaries attached to writing. Numerous parents saw benefits in literacy. Some sent their children to continue their education in English in Alyangula, the mining town. Judy Lalara was one such child.

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My father [Gula Lalara] wanted me to learn more and my mother, they wanted me to learn more you know, because I was good at English and spelling and things like that.\(^\text{13}\)

Some even wanted their children to go south for higher education and then return to Angurugu. Lauchlan McIntosh, a BHP engineer, remembered men telling him in the late 1960s they wanted their children to go to Adelaide for school and ‘come back with a good education like you have.’\(^\text{14}\) Eagerness for children to become literate in English did not necessarily represent submission to a missionary or Commonwealth Government agenda. Learning to write had many benefits. Writing could be an embrace of the modernity: new skills and new opportunities. A number used letter writing to communicate with family who were away in Darwin.\(^\text{15}\) The ability to adjust to such linguistic change was rooted in rich multilingual traditions that predated European contact.\(^\text{16}\)

Moreover, people across North Australia had long used encoded objects such as the message stick to announce ceremonies. In light of many Anindilyakwa speakers’ familiarity with cross-cultural communication, fluency in other languages — Wubuy, Yolngu Matha, Kriol, Malay Pigin — and experience with written texts via the Makassans, it is little wonder many were ready to experiment with new modes of communication.

In 1973, Jambana Lalara ‘mentioned the desire to be able to read and write more’ as he was increasingly required to negotiate with BHP and government officials.\(^\text{17}\) Martin Nakata sheds further light on the potential value of English literacies for indigenous peoples. For him, calls for English literacy were about ‘working out what the language of “white” people and their institutions do that keeps us at a disadvantage.’\(^\text{18}\) Indigenous practices of English literacies would enable his people to ‘appropriate a better position for ourselves – to cut better deals for ourselves and our traditional heritage.’\(^\text{19}\) Although certain methods of introducing literacy — child separation and school systems — have also been used to eradicate indigenous language and

\(^{13}\) Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 11 December, 2012

\(^{14}\) Lauchlan McIntosh, oral history interview with author, 29 March 2013.


\(^{16}\) Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 18–19.


\(^{19}\) Ibid, 169.
culture, English literacies have also presented opportunities to indigenous people. Native American leaders in the late nineteenth century, for example, called for schools and opportunities for their children to learn English so that they could deal more effectively with government agencies. English literacies could be a route to survival and greater independence rather than assimilation; Jambana recognised this potential.

Anindilyakwa people also used literacies to foster positive, mutually productive relationships with missionaries. Jabani Lalara appealed to the missionary expectations of repentance letter writing. Writing enabled him to reconcile himself to the missionary chaplain in 1963 and regain missionaries' trust without the shame associated with an apology in person.

A splendid letter came from Paul Jaboni [sic] Lalara ... He writes 'I think back to my life before, for what God had done for me. I was shamed of myself so God speak to me in my heart to write this letter. I was lot thinking of you all brothers and sisters in Christ. I was lost am I was found again.'

Anthropologist Rosemary O'Donnell found at the CMS mission at Ngukurr, Aboriginal people learned to 'talk Christian way' to maintain cohesive, constructive relations with missionaries. In this case, Jabani had learned not only to talk, but to 'write Christian way'. This kind of language could move missionaries to action, and Jabani was a master of it. The missionaries also recorded a conversion story about Jabani. Stokes included a piece in the Angurugu newspaper titled, 'My Story by Djabani' in February 1961.

If anyone likes to read this story about what I have done in the old time, first I didn't know the Lord Jesus. I didn't read the Bible because I didn't know anything about it. Then from that Time I went to school and learnt lessons there. Then I learnt about the Lord Jesus, the word in the Bible and some other things. I didn't learn yet the big words from the Bible but I like to learn more about the Book.

Then I thought about myself, to follow Jesus and I went to Mr Warren. Mr Warren questioned me there and he said to me, 'You really want to follow Jesus?' And I said,

120 Morgan, *The Bearer of This Letter*, 18–19.
'Yes.' And again he said to me, ‘You’re really putting Jesus in your heart?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ And he said ‘Good, see you again.’

Jabani's article is an ‘entangled’ text, produced by engagement between two cultures. Stokes would have edited Jabani’s story in preparation for its publication, though it does seem to be largely his. His story fits within a genre of evangelical conversion stories, common in missionary publications. Perhaps he had read other conversion stories before and so learned how to communicate in this genre. It reflects the deep connection of English literacy and Christian conversion at Angurugu; he needed to learn about the ‘Book’ to ‘follow Jesus’. Anthropologist Diane Austin-Broos found that for Arrernte people, ‘pepe’ (paper), has come to mean Lutheran liturgy, buildings, prayers and everything else associated with missionary religion. Lutheranism was paper. Similarly, to Jabani, the ‘Book’ symbolised Christianity itself. He felt he would ‘like to learn more about the Book’ and was open to learning new things from the missionaries. In doing so, he demonstrated his appreciation for missionaries’ teachings and a willingness to work with the missionaries, engaging with their stories and symbols.

Though missionaries expected literacy would inevitably lead to conversion and participation in Christian citizenship, literacy unexpectedly empowered some Anindilyakwa people to ultimately reject missionary ideals. Nancy Lalara is a gifted teacher and keen reader. She told of how her high opinion of missionaries changed in the late 1960s as she read widely. She was ‘really into Christianity’ in her youth. By reading, she discovered Christian history and concluded that, contrary to what missionaries had taught her, Anglicans were no better than Catholics or Methodists. She began to understand the history of colonisation in Australia and to question the missionary project and Australia’s involvement in wars. Her education enabled her to judge the missionaries' sacred text in light of her own experience and broader knowledge. I asked what changed for her. She replied:

123 ‘My Story by Djabani,’ Anindilyaugwa Agarragarra, Februray, 1961, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 2, Folder 9.
124 Van Toorn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 54.
126 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April, 2012.
127 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 29 April, 2012.
Just getting older and reading, thinking. Reading about what happened to my people in all of them days and about those wars around the world, how someone can go and destroy someone else’s country just because you hate that country. We do that amongst ourselves. I changed. I changed because of the way that when things, looking at it in the Bible version of the way that everything was pure ... But the more that I grew up with that way, that wasn’t a better life. Reading the Bible twenty times a day, saying thank you for our food when we had it on the table. Other things, reality, sort of crept into me about ‘that wasn’t like that in the Bible’, ‘how come it’s like this?’

Literacy alone could not transform Anindilyakwa people like Nancy into the Christian citizens envisaged by missionaries. It could actually turn people away from the faith.

Where missionary faith was not rejected, Anindilyakwa people found in English literacies a means to question missionary behaviour. Since missionaries appealed to the higher authority of the text, literate Anindilyakwa people could appeal to missionaries’ own texts as a shared moral framework. For many indigenous people, the Bible has provided a religious foundation and ideology for the politics of reform and an inspiration for narratives of salvation. In 1969 Nandjiwarra Amagula addressed the CMS Summer School conference and used literacy – his reading of the Biblical commandments - against the CMS:

We have missionaries working among us, teaching the Gospel and helping us live a better life. Teaching us the Gospel, teaching us Ten Commandments. Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal. Lots of our missionaries been working up north never been doing the right thing with the people. They are preaching the Gospel saying ‘repent of your sins’ but those missionaries are doing the wrong thing themselves behind aborigines’ back. Themselves who was running around with aborigine women taking them off in the darkness.

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19 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April, 2012.
21 Van Toorn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 23.
31 Nandjiwarra Amagula, ‘The Advancement of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory the Aboriginal Opinions,’ no date, NTAS NTRS 686, Box 1, Aboriginal Customs.
Nandjiwarra’s comments were scandalous and, though the CMS attempted to suppress the story, it was picked up by the national news. For missionaries, literacy was so bound up in their visions of Christianity and civilisation that when used in ways that contradicted their work, they were puzzled or angered. Missionaries rejected Aboriginal writing, even punishing writers, whose writing did not conform to their hopes. At Angurugu, dormitory girls used writing to contact their promised husbands or sweethearts, undermining missionary attempts to abolish child marriage and polygyny. In 1961 the punishment for a dormitory girl discovered ‘writing letters or giving presents’ to a young man was ‘the strap’ and to be ‘made to go back to the village.’\footnote{132} The girls embraced English literacies, but used writing to undermine the very citizenly behaviours that missionaries hoped it would instil. Men discovered writing ‘sweetheart talk’ letters faced exile from the island. Unfortunately for one man in 1961, his ‘sweetheart’ rejected his advances and handed his love letter over to the missionaries.\footnote{133} He was subsequently banished from the island and then (for other reasons) imprisoned in Darwin.\footnote{134} But the rumour circulated on Groote Eylandt that, in his brother’s words, he ‘been sent away by counsel for two years punishmen hes in ploce station now [sic] simply because of ‘one letter he write a letter ... no other thing just for one letter [sic].’\footnote{135} Although this was not entirely the case, Anindilyakwa people came to believe that unauthorised letter writing was a terrible offence to the missionaries. Despite this belief, the ‘sweetheart’ letters continued to be written; Anindilyakwa people insisted on using writing for their own purposes as an act of resistance.\footnote{136} Missionaries were uneasy with these unexpected consequences of Anindilyakwa literacies which they had sought to foster.

Literacy could also be used against missionaries through petitioning. Morgan calls indigenous petitioning ‘a strategically important form of resistance’ as a way of turning English documents against the authorities.\footnote{137} Through writing, indigenous people could get their complaints ‘on the
Written documents were an opportunity for indigenous voices to infiltrate the archives (although the preservation of their writing was by no means guaranteed). In 1960, a number of Anindilyakwa people wrote letters petitioning the Secretary for Aborigines to uninstall the new superintendent, Jim Taylor, and give the superintendency responsibilities to Arthur Howell.

Dear Mr Montgomerie. Just a few words from us and to you saying that all the people doesn’t want Mr Taylor because we have find out that he is no good. All ready we don’t want him to be our boss put somebode as man please not young boy please. A lik mr Harris and Mr Howell a big man got lots of under-standing and knows for people more about this place.

So I am tell to do something for us pleas if you dont well he is looking for a belting from the peopl here in this mission ...

Every body wants mr Howell when we had a meet last month because he is the only older man here in this mission and he knows more lots then other so wee all wont him and Mr Taylor can be our minister but we don’t want him to be the boss he macks it to hard for the people and macks lots of mistak too and that what people don’t want we want a good mission not rubish please so thse will be more letters asking for your helpe.

May God bless and keep you all ways and tell wee meet in haven

Letter from all the people
At Groote Eylandt

Dear

Mr Montcomerie how you getting on there I hop you all right we got news to tell you from this mission because this mission getting head [sic] for the people and We want help from you because of this new boss. We don’t want mr Taylor to run this mission because is to head for the people. all right for church. And we want Mr howell to run

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198 Van Torn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 135.
199 ‘All the people at Groote Eylandt’ to J.B. Montgomerie, no date. ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Howell Arthur G & Alice I.
this mission but people don't like Mr Taylor to run this mission. We want only one boss in this mission people don't like two boss in this mission to-day. And please take what we saying all people in this mission men and women and old people don't like Mr Taylor... we want only one boss in this mission not two or three boss. Good by Mr Montcomerie May God Bless and Keep you from anything.

Lettre from CMS ABORigines people.  

Dare MR motgomerie I hope you all right there we have got news to tell you about the new Boes We having an hard time with him. People not happy with him ... He does all the things that people doesn't like him. man and woman want help from you because MR Taylor getting hard for people we want Mr Howell run him this mission people like him to Boes people not happy about Mr Taylor and man and woman like to be Mr Howell Boes we like him ... may God blease you and with you allways this letter from aBorigines Native.  

Dear Sir  

October 19.60  

Just are few lines to let you know that all the people here doesn't want Mr Taylor to be boss here at Groote. We all want Mr Howell to be the boss here. We want Mr Taylor for the Church only and not be the boss. So will you please do somthing about it please Sir. When he became the boss here he began to change things aroun. And people doesn't like the way he doing things here.  

So pleases Sir, will you make Mr Howell be our boss here please Sir.  

I'm writing this letter, for the sake of the people here at Groote Mission.  

I close at that for now Sir.  

May our God bless you all there in your office.  

From all the people at Groote  

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140 'CMS Aborigines' to J.B. Montgomerie, no date. ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Howell Arthur G & Alice I.  
141 'Aborigines Native' to J.B. Montgomerie, no date. ML MSS 6040/33 Resigned Missionary Files, Howell Arthur G & Alice I.  
142 'All the people at Groote' to J.B. Montgomerie, October, 1960, ML MSS 6040/33.
In writing these petitions, Anindilyakwa speakers acted as the modern 'literate citizens' the CMS was training them to become. Ravi de Costa points out how indigenous petitioners have often appealed to a transcendent moral order under which their relationships with authorities take on new forms. Petitions reflect the moral worlds in which their claims could be considered legitimate, situating both the petitioner and authority in a shared moral order. Anindilyakwa people, for example, acknowledged their mutual interest in the quality of the mission ('we want a good mission not rubbish [sic] please') and the legitimacy of the office of superintendent. They implicitly acknowledged writing as the appropriate means to appeal decisions. In fact, they did so in direct imitation of missionaries. Only a year previously, Farley had circulated a petition 'signed by all the single women on staff calling for Montgomerie to retain the previous superintendent. Through petitioning, Anindilyakwa speakers, like missionaries, participated in the literate, English speaking culture of white Australia.

Yet, unsurprisingly, the CMS did not welcome these petitions as evidence of 'progress' towards Christian citizenship. Instead, the CMS Aborigines committee doubted their authenticity. They consulted their most experienced missionary, Harris, regarding the letters. It was inconceivable to Harris that Anindilyakwa speakers would so boldly threaten violence. This objection is questionable since Anindilyakwa people had used violence against missionaries on numerous past occasions, including against superintendents. Harris inferred that the letters were prompted by Howell: 'the crying shame is that Arthur Howell should adopt such an attitude towards Jim ... Arthur's conduct is not Christian and is not “cricket”.' His final justification for concluding that the letters were concocted or encouraged by Howell was that they were anonymous; 'I myself received letters from the men at Groote but these were signed by Nandjiwarra, Nandua and The Single Men.' Historian Jessica Horton has shown the importance of gender considerations in

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144 Ibid; Van Toorn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 169.
145 For a discussion of Aboriginal stockworkers' demands for a 'good', 'strong' boss, see McGrath, Born in the Cattle, 96.
147 S.R. Warren to J.B. Montgomerie, 'Re Assault on Dulcie Levitt,' 10 February, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Staff Personal; 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 12 December, 1957, ML MSS 6040/5.
148 G.R. Harris to J.B. Montgomerie, 3 November, 1960, ML MSS 6040/33 Box 28, Resigned Missionary Files, Howell, Arthur G & Alice I.
understanding Aboriginal petitioning. Perhaps, in this instance, anonymity was intended to
disguise the gender or kinship ties of the petitioners. Nonetheless, since the baptised young men
(whom the missionaries had long entrusted with leadership positions) had signed letters by name
in the past, Harris' assumption was that all members of the Angurugu community would be willing
and able to do likewise.

Delegitimising indigenous petitions and silencing indigenous claims by questioning their
authorship has been a common strategy of paternalistic authorities. Some activists, such as
Arthur Fernando, were dismissed as not really aboriginal. Others were brushed aside on claims
that Aboriginal people could never understand what it was they signed. The CMS had not always
discounted Aboriginal petitions. In 1934 a 'splendidly-emphatically worded petition from the black
and half-caste people at the Roper Station, numbering in all nearly 200' calling for the mission to
remain open was warmly received. Missionaries' role in eliciting those signatures went
unquestioned, but of course, such a request is exactly what the CMS hoped Aboriginal people
would come to desire. In this case on Groote Eylandt, Aboriginal people challenged the Board's
assumptions. It is not clear whether or how Howell may have been involved in the letters from
Anindilyakwa speakers to Montgomerie. For the CMS, the question was, how could a Christian
mission have produced such unorthodox and subversive letters? How could 'civilised' writers
threaten such violence? Rather than exploring the ambiguities of the mission and acknowledging
the possible failures of the CMS that these questions might suggest, it was simpler to dismiss the
letters. Missionaries were uncomfortable with the Anindilyakwa cultures of modernity and
literacy developing on Groote Eylandt. Though the CMS hoped to create writers, only a particular
kind of writing was welcomed or expected.

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150 Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 44; Van Toorn, Writing Never Arrives Naked, 135. Saliha Belmessous, “The Problem
of Indigenous Claim Making in Colonial History,” in Native Claims: Indigenous Law Against Empire, 1500-1920, ed. Salia
67.
153 'Roper River Mission Report,' February, 1934, MI. MSS 6040/7 Committee for Aborigines, Roper River Mission
Committee Minute Book, 1933-1937.
The Anindilyakwa petitions also stand in stark contrast to the famous Yolngu 'Bark Petition', written only three years later in 1963. As Jennifer Clark explains, while recognising the authority of governments and churches, the Yolngu of Yirrkala Methodist Overseas Mission positioned themselves as another authority whose voice deserved to be heard.\textsuperscript{154} They wrote firstly in their Yolngu Matha language and condescended to provide an English translation. The 'Bark Petition' asserted to white Australia that Aboriginal cultures also have things of value.\textsuperscript{155} In contrast, the Anindilyakwa authors were submissive (apart from the threat of 'belting') and did not overtly assert their cultural knowledge (though their request upheld the Anindilyakwa culture of respect for older people). Perhaps they considered it was useless, even counterproductive, to assert their knowledge or authority to the CMS's Aborigines Committee. Part of this difference can be put down to the differing approaches of missionary societies (particularly the strong paternalism of the CMS) and individual missionaries to Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Methodist missionary, Edgar Wells was, to Yolngu elders, 'the first missionary to show us how to stand on our own feet and talk properly to white people and to think for ourselves' though he was later dismissed by his society for doing so.\textsuperscript{156}

For Anindilyakwa speakers, the rejection of these letters could only confirm that the English literary culture of the missionaries did not deliver the benefits it promised. When participating as modern citizens and submitting their opinions on matters that concerned them, their writing was questioned and rejected as inauthentic. Oral communication cannot have its authorship rejected and be dismissed in this way. To some Anindilyakwa people it would have seemed that learning to read and write would never be rewarded unless they fully embraced the missionary culture to the same extent as the 'single men', that is the younger generation who formed alliances with missionaries. They would need to adopt, not only English literacy but the broader culture and practices of the missionaries' literacy. Many were not willing to do so.

Just as the missionaries experienced a scarcity of reading material, Anindilyakwa speakers were similarly restricted. Fred Gray observed in the 1930s that literacy did not interest many

\textsuperscript{154} Jennifer Clark, \textit{Aborigines & Activism: Race, Aborigines & the Coming of the Sixties to Australia} (Pearson Deutschland GmbH, 2008), 94.


\textsuperscript{156} Clark, \textit{Aborigines & Activism}, 118.
Anindilyakwa people, who had no interest in ‘reading Melbourne newspapers.’\textsuperscript{657} In 1960, the Acting Head Teacher at Angurugu, David Fry, ran Adult Education reading classes, although ‘those interested are small in number.’ He averaged twelve pupils. The lack of interest, in his mind, was due to a lack of appropriate literature. ‘There is practically nothing in the way of simple Christian books at an adult level.’\textsuperscript{658} ‘Why learn English when there’s nothing to read?’ questioned the CMS in 1963 – they were aware of the lack of suitable material. Their solution was ‘to produce booklets in simple English dealing with Bible topics, doctrine and ethics as well as portions of scripture.’\textsuperscript{659} Secular reading was scarcer still. As late as the 1970s, there was ‘no news’ available on the island apart from the Northern Territory News, which came to ‘two or three days late.’\textsuperscript{660} Naturally, in this context, Hollywood films proved a more attractive entertainment to many than reading. The English literature available on Groote Eylandt largely did not speak to Anindilyakwa interests or aspirations.

Subsequently, people were not always interested in learning to read. The school teachers reported that their adult Bible reading classes only included ‘those who can already read, those unable to read not wishing to learn.’\textsuperscript{661} Some showed an interest in literate religion, but did not, or could not, conform to missionaries’ expectations. Farley noted that ‘quite a number of Aborigines, mostly women’ purchased personal Bible study materials, but she found in 1972 that ‘only very few seem to read them.’ ‘Very few of the Aborigines Christians [sic] here have persevered with the S.U. [Scripture Union] notes’, Farley commented the following year, so she focused on individuals, ‘helping’ Danabana read the notes daily ‘while there is an interest’; she expected interest to wane.\textsuperscript{662} Buying the materials impressed the missionaries, but the women still did not practice literate evangelical Christianity as missionaries hoped. Despite constant missionary efforts to

\begin{footnotes}
657 Fred Gray quoted by Frederick Rose, First Manuscript draft of the first part of book ‘Carpentaria Ripples’, 126, NLA MS 2481.
660 Lauchlan McIntosh, oral history interview with author, 29 March 2013.
\end{footnotes}
encourage reading, as late as the 1980s Judith Stokes complained, ‘reading is still not a normal Aboriginal occupation!’\footnote{Judith Stokes, ‘Prayer Letter,’ January 1986, ML MSS 6040/94, Communications Officer.}

Though English literacy was problematic for Anindilyakwa speakers due to its associations with colonising control, Christianity and ‘civilisation’ (and a corresponding diminution of Anindilyakwa identity), some developed new and specifically Anindilyakwa literate practices. Oral and literate cultures need not be mutually exclusive.\footnote{Denis Donoghue, “Orality, Literacy, and Their Discontents,” New Literary History 27, no. 1 (1996): 151. Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 3.} On Groote Eylandt, for example, by the 1970s, Anindilyakwa parents were eager for Stokes, to ‘write down the Aboriginal name’ and its meaning for their babies.\footnote{Rhoda Lalara, oral history interview with author, 23 April, 2012; ‘Linguistic Duties Angurugu,’ June, 1978, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 4, Folder 17b.} Parents were concerned that names be written down ‘correctly’, and thus in some respects adopted the missionaries’ belief that writing can accurately convey reality. Yet the Anindilyakwa parents also used the missionaries’ record keeping culture to uphold their own oral naming traditions. It is rare for Anindilyakwa people to use each other’s names in conversation, especially their most important names (people have many names, some secret). Anindilyakwa names come from their clan songs. Names are attributes of creative beings, associated with particular places of the being’s journey along its song line.\footnote{Turner, Return to Eden, 49.} Names, therefore, have spiritual implications, linking individuals to country, to kin and to their songs. Names are so important and carry such spiritual power that to speak them lightly is disrespectful. In some relationships (brother/sister), speaking each other’s names is prohibited.\footnote{N.D. Lalara and Burgoyne, “Alyangmandukuna Alawudawurra,” 19.} Names of deceased people are also taboo for extended periods of time. Generally Anindilyakwa people prefer to use kinship terms, nicknames or to speak of ‘that old fella’ or ‘her mother’. By recording names in Stokes’ book, Anindilyakwa people could uphold their own oral practices around naming (or not naming), while also ensuring the names were kept safe.

Anindilyakwa people incorporated literacies into their own framework of knowledge. In 1969, when anthropologist David Turner set out to do field work on the island, missionaries were wary. But Nandjiwarra Amagula ensured Turner could stay in Angurugu because he wanted Turner to...
Anindilyakwa people were willing to use writing as a form of validation, if done in the right way, by the right person. The book or 'Bible' Turner produced from his research recorded various clan territories and songlines in print and, inadvertently, played into an ongoing Anindilyakwa territorial dispute. When Turner returned to the island years later, he found Warnaya used the book to justify his claim to land, saying that Turner 'asked the old people and wrote it down.' Anindilyakwa speakers appealed to the written word as an authoritative record of what the old people said. Yet this is not to say that Anindilyakwa speakers gave writing the same authority that English speakers did or that alternative knowledge systems were abolished. Existing methods of resolving disputes were disrupted, but not overturned. According to Anindilyakwa methods of interpretation, writing was contestable. Turner noted that if his book had not suited Wanaiya’s claim, the remark would be simply ‘what could a white man know about our ways?’ Contrary to Goody’s thesis regarding the permanence of writing and thus its effect on cognition, Anindilyakwa people here integrated literacies into their existing cultures. Writing complemented orality by providing access to the words of the old people who had passed away, but it did not replace oral systems of knowledge or authority.

Even for the many Anindilyakwa people who did not embrace the English literary culture of the missionaries, books were recognised as meaningful objects. Although writing may not have proved a meaningful site of cross-cultural engagement, the book as a ritual and symbolic object could communicate shared meanings. Although missionaries believed their faith and practice rested on the written word, theirs was perhaps not as entirely literate a culture as they believed. As Alan Atkinson has shown, even in ‘literate’ society, patterns of orality exist. For evangelicals, the Bible was used in non-literate symbolic ways — not as text but as object — to affirm a Christian identity. Placing a hand on a Bible confirmed the solemnity of an oath. The tradition of keeping a family Bible, with names and significant dates inscribed in the inside, pointed to a faith in family unity and continuity within a Christian framework; it was a tangible symbol of faith in divine providence across generations. Even the feel of the fine paper pages or elaborate lettering

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pointed to the family Bible's elevated status. The book, in Christian tradition, is also a symbol of God's omniscience, of authority, of truth, of judgement and of finality. The punishment for sin was to be 'blotted out' of God's book and, on the 'last day', the 'books shall be opened.'

Anindilyakwa people observed these symbolic meanings of books from a young age. For example, Farley used the threat of writing down names to discipline children.

[I] said, 'Be quiet or I'll write your names in my book' and I wondered 'what will I do then?' Names would not go in my book for nothing! So I said, 'you know what will happen if I write your names in my book don't you?' and they said 'yes', and were quiet. The threat of the book was all that was needed.

The children and Farley accepted the book as a shared symbol of authority, finality, even judgement and threat of punishment. Farley could only use the book to silence Aboriginal voices because of a shared understanding of the symbolic meaning of books. Writing was also used in this way against adults. One missionary suggested 'that the names of people with dirty houses be written on the notice board.' For him, writing would be an instrument of public humiliation and shaming. Levitt objected, saying she 'felt it was a negative attitude.' The council compromised; the names of both the people with the dirtiest and cleanest houses would be publicly displayed.

Anindilyakwa people also observed how the presence of books (hymnbooks or prayer books) was necessary for missionaries' ceremonial life to be valid and so used the missionaries' own symbolic object to assert themselves and negotiate with missionaries. Nangwarra, for example, used the Bible as a symbolic object to reconcile himself to the missionaries in 1959. When speaking to the superintendent about 'his past life', Nangwarra placed his Bible between himself and the superintendent. The missionaries interpreted this symbolic gesture as Nangwarra's suggestion that 'God was his witness and that he had put the trouble out of his life.' Likewise, at Umbakumba Mission in 1965, though the children could not read, they asked for hymnbooks at Evening Prayer.

174 Exodus 32; Revelation 20:12-15.
175 Farley Groote Eylandt, 30.
'In walked Simon (age 6) by himself, wrote Farley, 'and said in perfect English, “Please may I have a paper (hymn-book)?”' Farley was delighted. She overlooked that in the boy's 'perfect English', he had called the hymnbook 'a paper'. His desire for paper objects was sufficient to please her.

Farley also reported an old woman who treated her Bible as a sacred object. 'She can't read and understands only a little English, but the Bible is very precious to her.' Farley' interpreted the woman's attachment to the book as the woman's way of reminding herself 'of a strong God whom she loves and trusts.' By protecting her Bible, the old woman communicated to Farley a respect of the missionaries' spirituality according to oral practices and symbols, even if she did not participate in the same literary culture or mode of Christianity Farley sought to propagate.

Occasionally missionaries experimented with allowing Anindilyakwa speakers to speak in the church, without the controlling guidance of writing. But, to their surprise, a number of Aboriginal people rejected these moves. At Roper River, for example, James Japanma, though he was nearly blind and had memorised the text, felt it was important to hold the prayer book when evangelising. As missionary, Perce Leske remembered:

James was a very good lay preacher, knew just about everything, the prayer book off by heart. He'd put on his glasses and hold the book. It didn't matter if he'd hold the book upside down, it's just that's what you did, you'd hold the book ... He could read, but his sight wasn't too good. He didn't worry that the book was upside down.180

Similarly, in 1975, Aringari Wurramara claimed he could not pray in church if the prayer was not written down, he wanted the prayer written down for him to read, just like the chaplain.181 Seeing that missionaries used texts as a symbol of authority, Aringari did likewise. The Anindilyakwa evangelists claimed equal status as the missionaries through the use of missionaries' own ritual symbolic objects: books.182 Anindilyakwa people took hold of the book's symbolic meanings, using practices associated with the book and writing to assert their own authorities to missionaries.

180 Perce Leske, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2011.
181 'Transcript of interview with Lois Reid,' 30 April, 1975, CMS SA, Box 42, Judith Stokes, Miss Lois Reid '64-'75.
English literacy was not universally appealing to Anindilyakwa speakers. In the context of the mission, writing took on symbolic meanings, which complicated Anindilyakwa responses to writing. Some were eager to read and write in English in an enthusiasm to participate in modernity and to assert their interests in the face of missionary and government bureaucracies. Others were reluctant.

For missionaries, English literacy was a foundation of civilisation and Christian practice and they promoted literacy for Anindilyakwa people. Yet missionaries were uneasy with the very Anindilyakwa literacies that arose from the mission encounter. Anindilyakwa people used literacies in diverse ways, to assert their own interests and to claim power. They did so in ways missionaries did not expect and sometimes could not accept. Some used literacy to question the missionary project. Some used it to uphold Anindilyakwa traditions. The new Anindilyakwa literacies at Angurugu were, nonetheless, embedded in Anindilyakwa cultures and priorities. Writing did not overturn Anindilyakwa oral traditions, as Western scholars and missionaries might predict, but complemented them. These Anindilyakwa literacies confounded the missionaries' binaries of literacy and orality, civilisation and savagery, modernity and traditionalism. The growth of distinct Anindilyakwa modernities and writing practices was unsettling for missionaries as they could no longer have such faith in English literacy as the seed of Christian civilisation. Literacy was out of their control.

For some Anindilyakwa people, who did not always accept or welcome the missionaries' agenda, becoming literate in English was complicated. Learning to write could represent a concession they were not willing to make. After observing the symbolic meanings of literacy — its association with the missionaries' religion and 'civilisation' — as well as the weaknesses of written communication as opposed to oral communication, the lack of interesting reading material, and missionaries' own disapproval of Anindilyakwa writing, it seems that many Anindilyakwa people became disillusioned and disengaged from missionaries' literacy culture. They concluded that English literacy was not worth the effort. For some, failing to learn to read may have been a subtle act of resistance. When, by the 1960s, Anindilyakwa people did not take up English literacy *en masse*, missionaries hoped that another approach would entice them to read: Anindilyakwa in print.
Chapter Five - Change, politics and language in the 1960s

Things were different in my days, but now it’s, it’s just that I’m wondering where the past have [sic] gone. I’m wondering where the past is. Where did it land?

Judy Lalara¹

We are living in the centre of the drama in the change of attitude to our work and to the Aborigines. There is a political change and a social change ... We must stand still and ask what God is seeking to tell us, what does he want us to do?

Jim Taylor²

In the 1950s and early 1960s it was still common for English speakers to dismiss Aboriginal languages as not ‘real’ languages and the study of them not ‘real’ work.³ Missionary linguist Beulah Lowe was told in the 1950s that ‘it would be no trouble at all to learn an Aboriginal language’ because ‘they have very few words’ and ‘no real language at all.’⁴ Linguist Robert Dixon remembered being asked in 1963, ‘you mean the Aborigines really have a language? I thought it was just a few grunts and groans!’ When Dixon explained he was writing the grammar of an Aboriginal language he was told ‘that should be pretty easy!’ because ‘everyone knows they haven’t got any grammar.’⁵ Likewise, CMS missionary Earl Hughes explained that ‘language work didn’t go

¹ Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 11 December, 2012.
² ‘Minutes of Staff Meeting,’ 3 July, 1965, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
³ Earl Hughes, oral history interview with author, 22 October 2011.
down very well with some of the missionaries. They said to me “oh, language work’s not real work.”

The CMS knew better than to call Aboriginal languages ‘grunts and groans’. It was always CMS policy that, where possible, missionaries endeavour to learn Aboriginal languages. Yet their practice throughout the 1950s reflects the misconception that this was easily done. When Judith Stokes enquired about the possibility of linguistic study at Angurugu in 1952, J.B. Montgomerie informed her that it could ‘be fitted in ... at times convenient to yourself.” Likewise, when missionary Brian Short proposed the establishment of a language school for missionaries at Angurugu, Montgomerie responded that since each mission had a staff member who had attended the eleven-week Summer Institute of Linguistics summer school (including Short, Moody, Stokes and Farley), ‘these representatives could assist other members of the staff at their particular station.’ Montgomerie presumed that after only minimal linguistic training, those missionaries could, in their spare time, both learn Anindilyakwa and teach it to others. In 1961 Farley wrote to Montgomerie suggesting that Stokes again be given the opportunity to leave teaching and study language on a full time basis as she had in 1960. He responded by suggesting Stokes be relieved of her dormitory responsibilities so that she would be ‘enabled to spend free time on linguistics.” A little bit of time after school would be sufficient.

In 1967, however, CMS employed Stokes as a full-time missionary linguist, teaching Aboriginal languages to staff, vernacular literacy to Aboriginal people and translating Christian texts. The CMS no longer saw language as a free-time hobby for a minority of missionaries but suddenly began investing considerable time and resources into linguistics.

Continuing the story of Stokes, in this chapter I look to the socio-political reasons for the change in language policies. I also note the absence of Anindilyakwa involvement and consultation regarding the changes. The CMS mission was being challenged on all sides: its funding and recruitment base was diminishing at the same time as its Aboriginal labour force was opting to work elsewhere (the Broken Hill Pty Ltd. mine up the road). The increasing demands of both

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6 Earl Hughes, oral history interview with author, 22 October 2011.
7 J B Montgomerie to Judith Stokes, 24 April, 1952. ML MSS 604/203 Miss Stokes.
8 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 7 May 1952. ML MSS 6040/5 CMS Aborigines Committee Minutes 1950-1962.
9 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 12 October 1961. ML MSS 6040/5.
governments and Anindilyakwa people further jeopardised mission budgets. The CMS had always planned to hand Angurugu over to Anindilyakwa speakers (although this was expected to be some time in the distant future), but handing over control to the Government or Anglican Church was unthinkable. Since the ‘industrial mission’ model of the 1950s was no longer viable, the CMS looked to reinvent itself, to find new ways of maintaining its influence in North Australia. Linguistics was a core component of this reinvention.

In this chapter, I also examine the progress of the linguistic work as it unfolded in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Whereas in the 1950s, many presumed Anindilyakwa was easy, by the late 1960s missionaries found it was hard. Most thought it too hard. Turning again to Bourdieu’s model of the language economies of competing linguistic competencies, I find that the changing language economy resulting from the new linguistic program ruptured the existing power-laden relationships of the mission.¹⁰ Missionaries, Anindilyakwa speakers, interpreters and linguists renegotiated their relationships with each other as their language competencies rose or fell in value in the mission context.¹¹ Language study made many uncomfortable. It raised questions about the status and role of missionaries. It raised questions about who had the right to linguistic knowledge. Despite the protestations of many, however, the CMS had little choice but to pursue this language work if it were to maintain its evangelical influence on Groote Eylandt.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 35.
¹¹ Ibid, 67.
Figure 25 'Mission Staff April 1962'

Source: Joan Smedley slides 1961/1963, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu
The CMS’s North Australian missions had long had difficulty in recruiting missionaries. Most candidates preferred to go overseas. Montgomerie died suddenly in 1961 and was replaced by George Pearson. Pearson faced staff shortages so severe they threatened the viability of the missions and forced the CMS to reconsider its core activities. The CMS appealed in its newsletters: ‘WANTED IMMEDIATELY — twenty-two men and women prepared to serve God in Arnhem Land.’\(^3\) In 1962, the girls’ dormitory at Angurugu was finally closed due to ‘shortage of staff.’\(^3\) The Angurugu school was so short-staffed in 1963 that older children were required to leave before completing their education.\(^4\) Three teachers taught 160 primary children. In 1963, government inspectors visited the school and found the ‘standard very low academically’ and that the contribution of Anindilyakwa teaching assistants was ‘very limited’. Their advice was that ‘properly qualified teachers must be used’ or else the government would fill the CMS’s shortfall with a secular staff.\(^5\) The shortage was temporarily relieved with the arrival of two CMS teachers in May 1964.\(^6\)

Missionaries who went to Arnhem Land typically did not last long. In 1964, the CMS Federal Secretary, Jack Dain, did an audit of staff turnover for North Australia for the 1950s. He found that of 170 people sent north in the 1950s, only 64 were still missionaries in 1960. By 1964, only 28 of the 64 remained. The average length of service was four and a half years (compared to sixteen years for an overseas missionary). The ‘wastage, lack of continuity and in some cases disillusionment’, according to Dain, also hindered recruitment of new missionaries.\(^7\)

In 1963, Broken Hill Pty Ltd. (BHP) announced it would begin operations on Groote Eylandt. The Groote Eylandt Mining Company, a subsidiary of BHP, was formed to exploit the island’s vast manganese deposits through open cut mining. The CMS took out the prospecting rights to the island and negotiated with BHP to hand over the rights in return for royalties paid to the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust Fund (GEAT). By 1970, GEAT had received $270,000 in royalties. The

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\(^1\) ‘Wanted Immediately’ *Open Door*, July 1962, 5.
\(^3\) James Taylor to Canon G.Pearson, 8 July, 1962, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1959-1964.
\(^5\) James Taylor to Canon George Pearson, 17 July, 1963, NTAS 868, Box 13, Education.
\(^7\) J.A. Dain, ‘Memorandum for CMS Committee of Enquiry on the Society's work in North Australia,’ 1 May 1964, 6040/6, Aborigines Policy Committee of Inquiry.
CMS is very proud of its role in negotiating the agreement on behalf of Anindilyakwa people. 'BHP wanted to pay us £15,000 and write it off, you see', explained the superintendent, Jim Taylor. The Board of the trust was formed of elected members from both Angurugu and Umbakumba as well as the CMS superintendents of each mission, Harry Giese, the Director of Welfare Branch and the CMS Field Superintendent. Taylor explained his view, however, that 'we didn't have any voting rights at all, we were just there as advisors. All the power of the committee was in those Aboriginal people.'

Figure 26 'Looking over mine area, 1976'
Source: Keith Cole Slides, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.

Figure 27 'An Islander receives instruction in the handling of a bulldozer from the Broken Hill Proprietary Limited engineer on Groote Eylandt 1965'
Source: NAA A1200 L51655, Mining – General.
Anindilyakwa people had mixed feelings about BHP. Some supported the mine. According to CMS sources, 'the Aborigines showed unreserved approval of the project.' Yet it is doubtful they could have foreseen what mining would entail or whether they were given any opportunity to object since the ‘attitude of the Aborigines’ towards the proposed mine was sought only after CMS had reached an agreement with BHP over royalties. Judy Lalara told me, 'I didn’t like the GEMCO men. After all what they did to our land, that make our old people sad.' Yulgi Nunngumadjbarr blamed the mine for exacerbating divisions; ‘when this mine started they were fighting, for the money, the royalty money.’ In 1969 Nandjiwarra Amagula voiced his complaint to an audience of CMS supporters that the presence of BHP employees on the island was disruptive.

Mining company is a very good thing, but bringing a lot of damage with the people. Now, white man can do what they like in our reserves, especially the women. White man can do what they like, taking women from our reserve and making babies. They can do what they like! In the olden days you find one person playing around with his daughter or other man’s wife, he will be speared straight out. In this part of the Northern Territory, they can do what they want. Why is that? Because you proud or because you white? You are better than us?

To Nandjiwarra, the presence of white men and their lawless behaviour undermined not only the Anindilyakwa marriage system but Aboriginal authority to administer justice on their land. But the CMS welcomed the mine as a gift from heaven. Taylor called the arrival of BHP ‘one of the big answers to our prayers’. Jack Langford, the CMS Field Superintendent for North Australia described the mine’s commencement as ‘the highlight of the year’, and Farley said ‘we have prayed for an industry for so long, how can we reject this opportunity now that our prayers are being answered?’

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19 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 13 Feburary, 1964, ML MSS 6040/5.
20 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 13 June 1963, ML MSS 6040/5.
22 Yulgi Nunngumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
23 Nandjiwarra Amagula, ‘The Advancement of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory; the Aboriginal Opinions’, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 1, Aboriginal Customs.
24 Jim Taylor, oral history interview with author, 1July 2012.
Soon after the arrival of BHP, the CMS began paying its Aboriginal workers wages rather than rations. Yet as BHP expanded its operation, more Anindilyakwa men — India, Jambana, Gula, Nandjiwarru, Dubbo — left their work at the mission for the higher award wages offered by BHP. CMS missionaries increasingly found themselves training men who then left to work for BHP. The missionary builder R.B. Dent complained in 1964, that his most experienced workers were gone. By 1965, 26 men had left the mission to work for BHP. ‘At first I was very happy that men like Nandjiwarru and Dubbo should have chosen to work for BHP,’ wrote Dent, but when some returned from BHP, he was saddened because despite putting in ‘many hours and much effort’ they had ‘forgotten almost everything’ learned at the mission. The mission used the money it was no longer paying in wages to increase the wages of those who remained at Angurugu in an attempt to keep some men at the mission (to ‘give good men more incentive to apply themselves to the discipline of learning a trade’). But they could not compete with BHP. Although the CMS was supportive of the mine for its contribution to assimilation and provision of jobs, it also threatened the viability of the mission.

At the same time, missionaries felt the world changing around them. Taylor described a ‘drama’ that was underway. As they worked in North Australia, the churches and society down south were changing. After the high of the 1959 Billy Graham Crusades, the 1960s proved a disappointing time for evangelicals. There was a sense of crisis with many predicting the end of institutional religion as they knew it. Historian Roger Thompson called the 1960s the beginning of Australia’s transformation into a ‘post-Christian society’. Callum Brown argues that the secularisation of the 1960s was more than simply ‘failing churches’, it was a cultural revolution as men and women

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32 ‘Minutes of Staff Meeting,’ 3 July, 1965, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
33 Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia*, 182.
ceased to construct their sense of self in terms of Christianity.\textsuperscript{36} Hugh McLeod found that in the 1960s, a combination of cultural and social factors meant that most people in Western societies no longer assumed they lived in a 'Christian country', and described their nations in terms of 'secular society' instead.\textsuperscript{37} In the 1950s, all Christian denominations in Australia had experienced growth in memberships, Sunday school enrolments and enrolments in theological colleges. But in the early 1960s there were signs of decline.\textsuperscript{38} Donations to churches and missions fell. In the Anglican diocese of Melbourne, donations peaked in 1963.\textsuperscript{39} Sunday school enrolments plummeted: 49,000 in Melbourne's Anglican churches in 1960, to 32,000 in 1970 then only 15,000 in 1975. Youth organisations such as the Young Anglican Fellowships collapsed altogether by the 1970s. Whereas in the 1950s churches experienced a shortage of clergy due to the demands of massive growth in membership, in the 1960s, clergy and candidates for ordination were resigning, disillusioned.\textsuperscript{40} Dain was convinced that CMS's financial situation was 'part of a common pattern of financial stringency in missionary and Church circles' across Australia.\textsuperscript{41} Missions could no longer enjoy the support they presumed in the 1950s. More significantly, though, visions of Australia as a Christian country were fading.

The Anglican Church in particular changed drastically in the 1960s. Australian Anglicans had long felt a close connection to England. Until the 1970s, most of their clergy were born and educated in England.\textsuperscript{42} The monarch was 'Supreme Governor of the Church', 'Defender of the Faith' and Australian Anglicans were proud that the monarch was a member of their own denomination.\textsuperscript{43} As Brian Fletcher has shown, the Anglican Church helped sustain values derived from Britain in Australian culture. The Anglican Church was 'unique' because it 'endowed empire, monarchy and race with a religious sanction'.\textsuperscript{44} But in 1962, the Anglican Church in Australia cut ties with the

\textsuperscript{37} Hugh McLeod, \textit{The Religious Crisis of the 1960s} (Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 263.
\textsuperscript{39} Hilliard, "The Religious Crisis of the 1960s," 219–220.
\textsuperscript{41} 'Memo by retiring Federal Secretary,' July, 1965, ML MSS 6040/1a.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 222.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 226.
Church in England through a new constitution.45 For years, the Sydney Diocese, (to which most members of the CMS Aborigines Committee belonged) opposed the new national constitution, preferring to maintain the nexus with the Church of England in order to uphold what they called the 'fundamentals' of the faith.46 They considered their faith an English faith. In the 1960s, however, the church embraced a more distinctly Australian identity, through a new Australian hymn book and Australian Prayer Book and changing its name to 'Church of England in Australia' (and again in 1966 to 'Anglican Church in Australia').47 The Anglican Church increasingly shed its English flavour in favour of Australian multiculturalism. For the missions, this meant their nexus of Anglican faith, British Empire, English language and Australian citizenship no longer held together so tightly. Anglicanism meant something other than an English heritage. What were missionaries doing, then, introducing an English way of life to Aboriginal people?

Attitudes to Aboriginal policy were also changing. James Curran and Stuart Ward found that in the 1960s, along with a shedding of Australia's British identity, came a new incorporation of Aboriginal cultures into the nation's heritage as something distinctly Australian.48 Increasingly, non-indigenous Australians recognised that Aboriginal cultures could be an asset. Whereas in the 1950s, assimilation was endorsed by governments and most anthropologists alike, in the 1960s, the Federal Government's assimilation policy for Aboriginal people was increasingly rejected by academics and activists.49 Aboriginal people themselves increasingly and more publicly protested the injustices they had faced.50 The 1963 Yolngu Bark Petition famously challenged the Methodists Overseas Mission and Commonwealth Government's presumption that mining was good for Aboriginal people since it would encourage assimilation; it suggested that for Yolngu people, assimilation was not a priority.51 In the 1960s, Aboriginal people built networks and planned

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51 Clark, Aborigines & Activism, 99.
campaigns, expressing their own voice and political demands. Even churches — including leaders in the Methodist Overseas Mission and the Australian Council of Churches — increasingly began arguing for Aboriginal rights to land and culture. The CMS’s longstanding policy of industrial training of Aboriginal people ‘to lead them towards effective citizenship in the Commonwealth ... as members of the Kingdom of God’ could no longer be taken for granted as being in the best interests of Aboriginal people. Given these changes in Australian society, the churches and attitudes towards assimilation, missions increasingly needed to justify their presence and actions in the Northern Territory.

As BHP commenced its work in 1963, the CMS commissioned a committee of enquiry to examine its position and viability in North Australia. The terms of reference were to recommend whether CMS should ‘continue its work as at present’ or to ‘hand over the work to the government (wholly or partially).’ The committee received submissions from superintendents, retired missionaries and CMS branches. CMS Field Superintendent Jack Langford saw two options for the CMS: to pursue assimilation with new vigour, or to focus exclusively on ‘spiritual’ work. Yet he saw neither option as really viable. CMS could not afford to pursue the ‘social welfare programme’ without considerably more financial support from governments, but downscaling to ‘spiritual work’ alone would risk being placed under Diocesan control which, he believed, would mean ‘a much tighter control and an eventual disappearing of the evangelical influence.’

The Committee of Enquiry was not so pessimistic. On the contrary, it recommended continuing the industrial mission work, only with even more zeal. It noted ‘withdrawal at this stage would be an irresponsible action’ and ‘industrial mission is a legitimate aspect of the Church’s mission.’ The rationale was in terms of assimilationist thinking; ‘the church must stand with the aborigines in the present period of rapid social change, when their swift emergence from primitive life into our hard-boiled society presents them with many perils.’ The CMS would continue to ‘prepare’ Anindilyakwa people to meet the coming dangers of ‘civilisation’. There was no recommendation

54 Ibid, 247.
58 J.E. Langford, ‘Memo from Field Superintendent,’ 1964, ML MSS 6040/6, Aborigines Policy Committee of Inquiry.
at this stage to pursue linguistics or translation, only the 'study and application of modern methods of promoting literacy.' English literacy remained central to their assimilating and Christianising program.

Yet when the CMS's Federal Council received the Committee of Enquiry's report, it resolved the direct opposite: to downscale and re-focus the work. Rather than continuing the 'industrial' work, the CMS's resources 'should be concentrated on the pastoral, evangelistic and educational work.' For the Federal Council, 'the demands of assimilation require that the civil administration be gradually assimilated to the common pattern of the Australian life.' For the Federal Council, refusal to hand over administration of the mission to the Government and Anglican Church would be akin to racial segregation because it would mean Aboriginal people would remain excluded from these national institutions.

The 1964 Committee of Enquiry's report, therefore, did not calm missionary anxieties about the future of the CMS missions in the Northern Territory. Those at Angurugu worried that, given the CMS's inability to staff the mission, the Aborigines Committee would hand over sections of the mission work to Welfare Branch, which would operate with a secular staff and undermine their Christian teaching. Meanwhile, Angurugu continued to dwindle in terms of workforce and funds. By 1966, BHP employed 35 Anindilyakwa men. 'Our workforce is so reduced that we have to think seriously about what we can and can't do', wrote Taylor. He saw the mission's function shrinking into little more than supplying a labour force for the mine.

Meanwhile, the Aboriginal leaders in Angurugu were becoming increasingly assertive. In the early 1960s, the CMS had established 'station councils' with Aboriginal councillors for each of its missions in an attempt to include Aboriginal people in decision making for the mission. At Angurugu, the superintendent established the Station Council in 1961. The Station Council was to be 'under the chairmanship of the station superintendent and consisting of all staff members and

57 'Report by Special Committee of Enquiry,' ML MSS 6040/6.
58 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 11 September, 1964, ML MSS 6040/5.
59 'Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 12 October, 1964, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
60 James Taylor to J. Langford, 1 April 1966, NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 2, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1965-1969.
61 'Angurugu Mission,' NAA F1 1962/1863 W.B. Church Missionary Society - Groote Eylandt Mission - Policy and Development
a proportion of aboriginal members. Missionaries outnumbered Aboriginal councillors and a missionary would always have the chair. Items on the agenda reflect missionary concerns; they discussed 'civic affairs' and 'matters pertaining to the administration, development and good conduct of the place.' The minutes reveal that the Anindilyakwa members rarely spoke at these meetings, or if they did, their contribution was not recorded in the minutes. Missionary John Mercer commented that 'station council representation for abos is still something “imposed” on them'; it was a missionary institution with missionary objectives, not a space for dialogue.

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64 Station Council Minutes, NTAS NTRS 1098 Box 3, Groote Eylandt/Angurugu Station Council Minutes 1963-1976.
Figure 28 'Station Council Election Angurugu 1967'

Source: Dulcie Levitt Slides, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
Anindilyakwa men who worked for BHP began to insist, through their Station Councillors, that the Child Endowment be paid directly to Aboriginal mothers, rather than to the CMS. Perhaps they discovered that wives of their white colleagues received the payment directly or that changes to the payment system were already underway at Roper River Mission. This would drastically reduce the mission's income. At Station Council meetings, Nandjiwarra Amagula raised the concerns of 'some of the people in the village' who 'would like to have the Child Endowment money and look after their own children.' Taylor felt this was impossible because the Child Endowment made up nearly half the mission's income. Moreover, the Anindilyakwa women, he claimed, preferred the system to remain as it was. The next time the matter arose Taylor simply hoped the men would not push the point. He invited the men to discuss the matter at a Station Council meeting but when it came to whether to go to the meeting or whether to stay at the camp and have their comforts (they work for BHP), they preferred their comforts and subsequently the matter was dropped.

But Taylor could not ignore the CMS's own changing position on the matter. In 1966, the superintendent at the CMS Roper River Mission restructured the mission's finances so that pensions, subsidies and Child Endowment payments went directly to Aboriginal people. The CMS Field Council in Darwin called the change a 'pioneering venture' and expressed its appreciation. Taylor raised his concerns. If this system were implemented at Angurugu, would the old people understand that 'they would have to buy their food, pay for rent and services and handle everything themselves?' Others on the council outvoted Taylor and agreed in principle that all government social services payments on CMS missions should be paid directly to Aboriginal people by July 1967. It was not clear how the Angurugu Mission could survive without this income.

Under these stresses, the CMS's hold on its North Australian missions began to give way. Umbakumba Mission was the first to go. The CMS had acquired it from Fred Gray in 1958, but by 1965 it could no longer staff the mission so handed it over to the Welfare Branch to manage.

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68 'Field Council Meeting Minutes,' 4-6 August, 1966, ML MSS 6040/5a.
Rumours circulated that CMS was ‘pulling out of the North.’ In March 1968, the CMS pleaded with the government for an increase in subsidies because the loss of the Child Endowment payment crippled the mission financially. Government aid was not forthcoming, so the CMS was forced to hand administration of Roper River Mission to Welfare Branch in October 1968, retaining only its ‘spiritual ministry.’

Throughout these changes, neither the CMS nor the Commonwealth sought Aboriginal people's views. The three single women, Stokes, Farley and Levitt (nicknamed the ‘triumvirate’ by other missionaries), who had been the longest standing missionaries at Angurugu, wrote to the Secretary for Aborigines protesting the possibility of the handover of Angurugu to Welfare. They believed the decision was not CMS's to make.

The principle of consulting the people is of paramount importance and must not be overlooked. Aboriginal people are adults and should be treated like adults and not like children, they should be consulted in any matters affecting their welfare, this particularly applies to any decision to hand over e.g. a secret ballot should be conducted before matters affecting the people as a whole be decided ... It has always been CMS policy that we eventually hand over to the people, and we should not hand over to anyone else.

Other missionaries were angered that this seemed to have occurred at Roper River. The Roper River Chaplain criticised the handover process: ‘the Aborigines themselves were not consulted ... at the time of the “handover” neither the Welfare Branch nor the Society had the confidence of the people.' In light of such complaints, Stanley Giltrap, the Aborigines Secretary, explained the CMS's ideal approach for future reference. It was to stay until asked to leave.

Wherever CMS has started to build a church and work, like here in North Australia, it has always said it would stay in that work and try to help the people do the same work with them (training and encouraging to take on work and become leaders in the

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70 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 21 March, 1968, ML MSS 6040/5.
71 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
73 ‘Report from the Chaplain at Roper River to the Field Council of the CMS in Darwin,’ August 1969, ML MSS 6040/5a.
work), until the people say, 'Alright, finished, go away.' The CMS has never wanted to say, 'Now we will go', but instead will stay until the people say, 'Your job is finished, you go, we take over.'

It is unclear, however, whether Aboriginal people were ever informed that they might have the option of saying 'go, we take over' or how they might communicate that desire. Stokes' argument that the CMS should only hand the administration of missions over to Aboriginal people presumes that missionaries are the only group of English-speakers who could legitimately hold authority over Aboriginal people. Even as the CMS was increasingly handing over its activities to government, Stokes and others assumed the CMS must maintain its influence in North Australia in some form or another until some unspecified time when they were unambiguously asked to leave. Until then, they would find ways to stay.

Linguistic work became one such way. Changes in the CMS's approach to languages came about, little by little, after John Brook was appointed Secretary for Aborigines in 1964. The recent establishment of the Australian branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in 1961 and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies in 1964 gave impetus to linguistic research across Australia. The 1964 Watts-Gallacher Report advocated bilingual education in the Northern Territory, though the authors believed such a programme would not actually be viable. Given the uncertainty of CMS's future in the Northern Territory, Brook was willing to listen to Stokes and others' insistence on the importance of language. In 1965, he wrote to his teachers advocating bilingual education. In September 1965, linguist and member of the CMS's Aborigines Committee, Arthur Capell, presented a report recommending the appointment of linguists on missions who would establish vernacular education in the early years of school and use the vernacular in church. Capell had produced numerous reports along similar lines since the 1940s. Yet with the changing circumstances of the CMS and Brook's openness to new approaches, Capell's recommendations were at last accepted by the Aborigines Committee, which made plans made for their

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74 'Field Council Meeting,' 9-11 August, 1972, ML MSS 6040/53.
75 The CMS is still operating in the Northern Territory.
77 Devlin, "Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory and the Continuing Debate over Its Effectiveness and Value," 4.
Whereas in 1964 the Federal Council had recommended concentrating exclusively on ‘pastoral, evangelistic and educational work’, by 1966 its new narrow focus also included ‘social and linguistic work.’ This seemed good news for Stokes, who believed she might soon become a full-time linguist, but Brook planned to hire a consultant linguist from SIL (Joy Kinslow) and leave Stokes in the school. On hearing this news, she wrote, ‘my heart descended to my boots.’

According to Stokes, however, ‘the Lord wasn’t working in that direction.’ She continued to view linguistic work as a divine calling. In September 1965, CMS agreed to hand over Angurugu School to Welfare Branch, relieving the long-term shortage of teachers. Ted Egan became the new principal, replacing Stokes. CMS began investigating options, at last, for Stokes to become a linguist. Capell convinced Harry Giese that the employment of linguists at missions could be valuable, provided they focused on education, not evangelism. Giese then agreed that the administration would provide a subsidy for a linguist. For Stokes, ‘the door to linguistics blew open’ when CMS wrote to Welfare Branch asking if Stokes could receive a subsidy for linguistics. They told her to wait just one more year in the school. Finally, in 1967 — the same year that Australia voted ‘yes for Aborigines’ in the referendum — Stokes commenced as a full time linguist on a government subsidy. Eighteen years after applying to be a linguist and translate the Bible in Iran, Stokes wrote home, ‘prayer has been answered in my eventual release from teaching to free me for full time linguistic work.’

Still, Angurugu faced the prospect of a government takeover. In 1967, as Stokes began her linguistic work in an official capacity, Langford announced that a handover of the remaining missions to government was inevitable. It was time to ‘face facts’ and plan for the time ‘when we are forced to

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78 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 16 September, 1965, ML MSS 6040/5.
79 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 11 September, 1964, ML MSS 6040/5; ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 15 September, 1966, ML MSS 6040/5.
83 Egan, Sitdown Up North, 218.
84 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 20 October, 1965, ML MSS 6040/5.
85 J. Brooks to Giese, November 1965, ML MSS 6040/203 Miss Stokes.
hand over more of our missions.' His proposals included considering ways to ensure that the CMS is able to 'retain [its] evangelical influence' over mission churches. This influence could be maintained, he believed, if CMS missionaries remained at the missions as public servants or 'church workers'.

Missionaries' responses were mixed. Some felt they 'should remain on the Mission until forced to hand over to the Government or ... to the people themselves', whereas others felt 'the people did not need missionaries' and believed they should 'hand over to the Welfare Branch and either become a Christian welfare worker or be missionaries elsewhere.' The staff debated whether they could fulfil their missionary vocation as employees of Welfare Branch. Taylor wanted to 'carry on as if we are staying even if we might have to close the next day.' Farley wanted to focus on areas which would 'give more responsibility to the people, e.g. working towards having the Scriptures in Anindilyaugwa and try to establish the Town Council.' Schatz thought there was 'no reason why more Welfare Staff should not be sent to missions', and suggested that Christians be encouraged to seek employment with Welfare. Thorpe rejected a handover; 'we want to set up a Christian standard for the running of a community ... The last thing the Staff wants to do is to hand over to Welfare.' Levitt argued that Angurugu 'is in a strategic position as far as Evangelism was concerned, and it would be wrong to walk out.' Ashbury wanted to 'ask the Government to take over the running of the hospital' since it was 'no longer a spearhead for evangelism.' Taylor disagreed, saying Ashbury 'underestimated the spiritual work being done at the hospital.'

Whereas the missionaries could not agree on whether or how to hand over to government, they did agree that 'spiritual' work was the most important aspect of their work and that, whatever happened, it was imperative to maintain their 'spiritual influence' in some form.

Moreover, the CMS believed chaplains could not secure this 'spiritual influence.' As a Low Church evangelical society, the CMS was wary of bishops. The Bishop of Carpentaria was increasingly asserting his influence in the region. In 1965 he indicated that at the Australian Board of Missions within his diocese 'he alone had the right to appoint or dismiss members of staff.' He made it clear to the CMS Aborigines Committee that 'he would prefer to license all missionaries' and that

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87 J. Langford, 'Memo to all Superintendents,' 14 March, 1967, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 4, General.
88 'Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 3 June, 1967, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
89 'Minutes of Staff Meeting,' 10 June, 1967, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 18, Staff Meeting Minute Book 1963-1969.
chaplains should make their application to him, not the CMS.\(^{93}\) The CMS Aborigines Committee resisted, stating that ‘it was more concerned about the continuance of the ministry to the Aborigines than in merely maintaining a vested interest in the work.’\(^{94}\) By ‘continuance of the ministry’, they meant a specifically evangelical ministry. Not long after, in 1968, the creation of the Diocese of the Northern Territory further jeopardised the CMS’s ability to appoint its own evangelical chaplains.

In 1969, the Angurugu Mission staff again sat down and discussed their objectives in light of the influx of non-CMS staff in the school, the new diocese and the likelihood of a total government takeover. They resolved to maintain an evangelical presence through becoming experts in Anindilyakwa language and culture and promoting Aboriginal leadership in the local church.\(^{95}\) Stokes’ linguistic work became strategically important for the CMS. She provided a way to stay at Angurugu, to keep involved with the community and, most importantly, to maintain a spiritual ministry as she translated the Bible.

As linguist, Stokes embarked on a program of teaching Anindilyakwa speakers to read their own language. This program, the CMS believed, would have social, educational and spiritual benefits for Anindilyakwa speakers. CMS linguists presumed Aboriginal people found ‘psychological security’ in their languages that could ‘help them cope with the pressures and tensions of the rapidly changing pattern of life.’\(^{96}\) The ‘ultimate goal’ of vernacular literacy was, of course, to enable Anindilyakwa speakers to read the Bible in their own language.\(^{97}\)

Stokes invested considerable energy into convincing Anindilyakwa people to learn to read Anindilyakwa. ‘We are encouraging people by every means possible’, she wrote.\(^{98}\) One strategy was to scatter literacy material around the mission, at the hospital, hall and library, to pique people’s interest in vernacular reading.\(^{99}\) At one stage Stokes taught ‘5 men of varying ability learning to

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\(^{93}\) ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 3 February, 1965, ML MSS 6040/5.

\(^{94}\) ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 20 October, 1965, ML MSS 6040/5.

\(^{95}\) ‘Report on and Recommendations from the Linguists’ Conference Held in Darwin July 12-16, 1976,’ CMS SA/NT, Box 41, P & B Leske.


read and write.' They showed 'much keenness'. Murabuda and Aringari also expressed interest in learning to read in Anindilyakwa in 1969. Stokes praised Nancy Lalara as she had learned to 'read with good expression'. After only two weeks Nangeringa read a Bible story at a weekday service 'confidently and well'. 'He was delighted at the discovery that he could read his own language,' Stokes wrote. Aringari was also 'keen and capable.' Murabuda was eager, but could not always make it to classes. Najirilila was 'keen' and 'made good progress.' A number of Anindilyakwa women remember how they appreciated learning to read Anindilyakwa. Judy Lalara explained that it helped with her reading in English and that she found reading easy. 'It's just good for learning ... Better way for recognise what it says or what it tells ... It was good learning English and language, both. I was good at it.' Rhoda Lalara also wished to learn and so approached Stokes and those working in linguistics.

I wanted to write in our language. I know how to speak, but just learn how to write it down in our language. That's how I ended up asking them if I could work with them and they said 'ok.' Then I started working with the young women.

As linguist, Stokes was dependent on Anindilyakwa cooperation. She could only work at their pace. She was thankful for Danabana, a woman who 'helped me and others with language work and has a good deal of practice in reading her language.' She reported who and how often people would come to work with her, acknowledging her dependence on them: 'Nanindjuraba has helped on six occasions ... Gayangwa helped me once and Danabana nine times.' She praised her informants. Aringari Wurramara was 'very easy to work with' and 'absolutely "with it".' When Gula Lalara returned to work with her it was a 'miracle'; 'I can't imagine anyone else being able to help ... as he has done.' Through the 1970s, Stokes and Aringari translated passages together,

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57 Stokes handwritten memo, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 4, folder 17b.  
62 Rhoda Lalara, oral history interview with author, 23 April, 2012.  
then the text would be checked by Murabuda. ‘It is always encouraging when Murabuda explains, “it’s all clear”, Stokes wrote. Her work was always subjected to Anindilyakwa examination.

But not all Anindilyakwa people supported or prioritised Stokes work. Stokes complained that some were too busy to work with her, but perhaps they were actually simply not interested. Anindilyakwa people had the power to obstruct her work. Missionary Lois Reid remembered how Anindilyakwa people could not only reject but actively hinder Stokes’ work. It only required a few to dissent since, if she did not have the cooperation of all Anindilyakwa clans, her work would be of limited usefulness as it would be unlikely to be accepted by the whole community.

Those who did cooperate with Stokes were not blind to her evangelistic agenda. They found their own uses for linguistics. Penny Van Toorn found that Aboriginal people in other areas took the literacy skills intended to ‘civilise’ them and assimilated writing into ‘indigenous perceptions of its nature and usefulness.’ This also occurred on Groote Eylandt. Those who identified as Christian were generally most eager to learn to read in their own languages and work on Bible-translation projects. For Christian people, the translation of scripture placed them on a more equal footing to the missionary as they too could be interpreters of the sacred text. For those who did not adopt Christianity, Stokes’ expertise could be used for other purposes such as recording songs and stories in new media of print and tape.

Despite early enthusiasm, progress soon slowed. In 1970, Stokes coordinated a group of women who helped those who had not learned to read English to read Anindilyakwa. ‘Several of the women undertook to help to teach others’, she wrote. ‘The project started with enthusiasm’ but enthusiasm dwindled because ‘the women who are the “teachers” have not seen that consistence and perseverance is necessary ... to maintain an interest.’ In 1970, Stokes had three regular pupils: Didjidi, Bayema and Darugwabanja. Didjidi was ‘keen to read’ but often ‘lasted about five minutes before family demands whisked her away.’ Bayema and Darugwabanja began learning together.

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and made progress, but Bayema was injured so went to Darwin. To guarantee that lessons would happen, in 1971 Stokes became more proactive and started going to her pupils every morning. Stokes repeatedly asked churches in the South to ‘pray for enthusiasm’ among Anindilyakwa speakers to learn to read their language. She constantly asked her supporters to ‘pray for increasing interest in learning to read’, ‘pray ... for interest in reading,’ pray they would develop a ‘real interest ... to translate familiar but only half understood English into meaningful Anindilyaugwa.’ Yet for a number of Anindilyakwa people this interest never developed. By the late 1970s, Stokes faced criticism that ‘no Aborigine at Angurugu is fluent in writing and all but four or five have never written in Anindilyakwa.’ In the mid-1980s Stokes confessed that ‘unfortunately' even Aringari, who was by this stage the Anglican minister at Angurugu, ‘has never wanted to learn to read in Anindilyakwa himself.’

The experience of Numbulwar mission sheds light on the situation at Angurugu. The Numbulwar linguist-chaplain, Earl Hughes, resigned in 1971 to be a missionary linguist elsewhere. He was not convinced that sufficient Nunggubuyu people wanted the Bible translated to justify ‘the tremendous effort needed.’

It’s little encouragement to see only a handful really interested from a tribe small in number to begin with. Very few Aborigines are really interested in their own language as far as reading it or having things printed in it are concerned – except for their Hymn & Chorus book. Perhaps it’s time to make the change and work on another language somewhere else.
Likewise, at Angurugu it seems that although a few Anindilyakwa speakers were interested in learning to read their language, this interest was largely limited to hymnbooks.

This process of representing an indigenous language in writing touches on issues of cultural authority and knowledge. Mindy Morgan found that some Gros Ventre speakers in the USA resisted representing their language in writing because, for them, unlike the English brought by colonisers, their language was a purely oral language. It would not be the same language if written; it would become like English. For many native communities, she explains 'English, writing and institutional power were inextricably linked.' Colonial linguists dislocated oral languages from the mouths and ears of their speakers and stored it in their grammars and dictionaries. Moreover, when a language is represented in writing, its speakers can lose authority on how their language is used and represented, forfeiting that authority to 'experts.' Resistance to indigenous language literacy can, therefore, be understood as resistance to forces of assimilation and of attempts to 'standardise' indigenous people along with their languages.

According to the Comaroffs and others, much of the colonising power of missionary linguistics was bound up in the ‘reduction’ of indigenous languages to writing, a systematic Western code. Joseph Errington calls colonial linguists' work to ‘reduce’ oral languages to writing an ‘act of symbolic violence’. Jane Sampson calls it 'linguistic colonialism.' By ‘reducing’ the languages, linguists claimed to capture the empirical reality of languages in European letters and symbols without reference to language as embodied talk. Missionaries themselves controlled the representation of this aspect of Aboriginal culture. They reified it, presenting it as an unchanging objective fact on a page — a grammar and a dictionary — removing it from the mouths of Anindilyakwa speakers and cementing it in the dictionary. Stokes understood her work in terms of

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120 Morgan, The Bearer of This Letter, 4.
122 Ibid, 5.
123 Ibid, 2.
124 Ibid, 5.
125 Errington, Linguistics in a Colonial World, viii.
'reducing' Anindilyakwa. Likewise, Montgomerie described missionaries' work to 'break into the languages of the various tribes and to reduce them to alphabet, dictionary and grammar.' Missionaries worked to order and define Aboriginal languages and produced a representation of the language back to their speakers.

Through developing an orthography for Anindilyakwa, Stokes recreated Anindilyakwa in the likeness of European languages. It now had Latin letters, it read left to right, it could be understood in a Western framework. As Gilmor found at African missions, the dream of a uniform orthography was an aspect of the dream of 'unification of languages ... and ultimately unification of Africa under Christianity.' The dream lived on in Australia in 1973 when SIL linguists published a paper advocating a 'uniform orthography for Australian Aboriginal languages.' Standardising Aboriginal languages would facilitate educators and Bible translators across the nation. Reducing and standardising Anindilyakwa, therefore, was part of an attempt to recast Anindilyakwa in Christian terms (print) for Christian purposes.

There is some evidence that Anindilyakwa speakers, likewise, felt the CMS's linguistic programmes were an unwelcome interference. Former missionary Jenny Green's impression was that the linguists 'owned' the language and 'didn't like sharing it.' Perhaps some Anindilyakwa speakers interpreted Stokes' eagerness to study their language as a take-over of their cultural knowledge. The vernacular literacy program would 'reduce' Anindilyakwa speakers, in some ways, to students of their own language, subject to correction by linguists who had 'reduced' their language to print. It could be considered a means of silencing Anindilyakwa voices, rendering them awkward and hesitant as they struggled to read and write 'correctly' in their own language. When I asked Jabani Lalara if he wanted to learn to read Anindilyakwa, he said no. 'I didn't want to learn Anindilyakwa, because I could speak Anindilyakwa.' From his perspective, it was already his language and it was a spoken language; a missionary had no place in teaching it to him.

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19 J.B. Montgomerie, 'CMS Work in Arnhem Land,' Australian Church Record, 24 January 1953, 8.
20 Gilmour, Grammars of Colonialism, 139.
22 Jenny Green, oral history interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
23 Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 52.
Despite the attempt to 'reduce' Anindilyakwa, Anindilyakwa was not easily reduced or standardised. It was as if the language itself resisted. Instead of seeing their culture represented back to them by the colonisers, Anindilyakwa speakers saw English speakers struggle to 'master' a language that refused to be tamed. In 1972, Stokes was assisted by a consultant from SIL, Velma Leeding. Their work produced a significant change in Anindilyakwa orthography. Where Stokes had used 'e', Leeding instructed her to use 'i' or 'u', insisting Anindilyakwa had only four vowels not five. 'Au' was also dropped and replaced with simply 'a'. Stokes 'took a lot of persuading' but made changes accordingly. To make things worse for Stokes ('losing a vowel is a traumatic enough experience'), in the following year there were additional changes to the alphabet, rendering Stokes' hymn books, primers and library books obsolete. This was the beginning of a long orthography dispute between Stokes and Leeding that was not resolved until 1989. In the 1960s and 1970s it could not be said that Stokes 'reduced' the language to writing: the fluctuating vowels meant there was no universal Anindilyakwa orthography. The dream of 'reducing' the language to a uniform system suitable for English-speakers' typewriters and recognised by Anindilyakwa speakers remained out of reach. The linguists could not establish themselves as the experts of the language; Anindilyakwa remained an oral language since a definitive script was not established at this time.

The other aspect of linguistic work was teaching the mission staff to speak and read Anindilyakwa. CMS linguists considered language-learning equivalent to cultural respect, explaining that 'when English-speaking people make an effort to learn their languages they are indicating that they recognise their culture.' Moreover, they believed that 'any attempt on the part of the Europeans to learn the local language' would 'help Aboriginal self-esteem.' In addition, the CMS assumed that learning language would give mission staff a greater spiritual influence on Aboriginal people. Stokes divided the staff into language classes held once a week. For most, the single hour was all the time they could set aside, so 'progress was very limited.' Nonetheless, Stokes reported that 'those who come are interested and language learning has received a new impetus.' As the year

135 Lois Reid to Carnaby, 16 February 1973, CMS SA Box 38, North Australia.
137 Julie Waddy to Roger Ridley, 16 May, 1996, CMS SA Box 42, Judith Stokes Australian Award OAM.
progressed, it was difficult to find a time that suited everyone: teachers went away in school holidays; the shop needed to remain open; people were busy.\textsuperscript{339}

Missionaries had varied experiences of learning Anindilyakwa. Some had great success. Julie Rudder remembered unexpectedly discovering that she had a talent for language.

I was able to do some every day and I very quickly caught up to the second class.

Within a matter of weeks ... I'd gone beyond what the second class was doing and was just kind of out on my own under Judith. I realised that I had a certain ability in learning the language ... I taught myself to see black and talk Anindilyakwa, not to speak English ... There was virtually no one else who was able to do that, because Anindilyakwa was so much harder than the Yolngu languages.\textsuperscript{140}

Brian and Kathy Massey wrote to their home church of how, through language, they cultivated friendly relationships with Anindilyakwa speakers.

Would you believe it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We have just finished our first language exam and the first twelve lessons and can actually be understood by the aboriginal people when we ‘try it out’ on them. Praise the Lord with us ------ It has required much discipline of time and loads of patience, (good for us anyway) but oh the thrill of seeing that smile (and sometimes laugh) of their recognition break out on the faces of our friends as they hear us speak THEIR LANGUAGE. It seems so often us teaching them something, but now theirs is the thrill as we grapple with something unique to them.\textsuperscript{141}

Others had different experiences. I asked Taylor if he undertook language lessons. He laughed and replied ‘half a dozen, it got me exactly nowhere, I felt that I didn’t have any attributes in that direction and anyway, they could talk English just as well as I could.’\textsuperscript{142} Teacher Janet Farnell had a similar experience:

\textsuperscript{140} Julie Rudder, oral history interview with author, 7 January, 2012.
\textsuperscript{141} Brian & Kathy Massey, ‘Prayer letter,’ July, 1972, CMS SA/NT Box 38, North Australia.
\textsuperscript{142} Jim Taylor, oral history interview with author, 1 July, 2012.
They did run language classes ... and I dutifully went along. I had enough trouble learning French! ... I just couldn’t get my head around it at all. Oh, you pick up a few basic things that you could say.143

Missionaries were not typically highly educated, many had never learned a foreign language (unlike Anindilyakwa speakers who often know multiple languages), most were already over-worked and Anindilyakwa is very different to any European language. Some made a real effort to learn and were frustrated at how little time they could set aside for language study.144 Others faced logistical barriers: the demands of caring for young children, balancing work and study or the structure of the classes. Wilma Taylor said that she ‘would have been good at the language’ but that in language classes ‘we had to work in pairs’ and she and her ex-husband were a poor match. ‘In tests I’d be getting in the 90s and he’d be getting in the 50s. That was very awkward ... so I pulled out.’145

Some found the lessons aided relationships with Anindilyakwa people. One reported that the classes ‘create a real bond between ourselves and those with whom we work.’146 For others, however, endeavouring to learn meant risking that the missionary would be the failure. When Kathy and Brian Massey wrote about their joy learning Anindilyakwa, they were newly arrived missionaries with no existing relationships with (or over) Anindilyakwa people.147 For those who had lived at the mission for years, submitting as pupil to Anindilyakwa speakers was an inversion of how they had become used to relating with Anindilyakwa people. The missions’ language economy and subsequent power relationships were shifting. For many missionaries their own ignorance, slowness and confusion — all the things English-speaking society typically accused Aboriginal people of — would be exposed in language lessons. This worried some missionaries to the extent that they were anxious when rumours circulated of compulsory language lessons with exams in the style of the Methodists.148 Missionaries’ language competency, therefore, was strictly confidential. Their instructor recorded that ‘this group finds it very hard’ and ‘please pray for

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143 Janet Farnell, oral history interview with author, 20 May, 2012.
145 Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
147 Brian & Kathy Massey, ‘Prayer letter,’ July 1972. CMS SA/NT.
148 Judith Stokes to Earl Hughes and Peter Carroll, 6 January, 1970, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 2.
Lance and language, but not in print. Missionaries feared Aboriginal people would laugh at their broken attempts at language, and they did. The linguists reminded the missionaries ‘one should laugh along at one’s own mistakes’, but this did not always come naturally to missionaries who had become used being the one who ‘know best’. The humbling experience of submitting to learn another’s language was, to some, too confronting. Many simply gave up.

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149 ‘Angurugu Community Library Report,’ June, 1973, CMS SA, Box 42, Miss Lois Reid ’64-’75.
Figure 29 Judith Stokes and Gula Lalara, no date.

Source: Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
Anindilyakwa people themselves also determined whether missionaries persisted with language study. Some were eager for missionaries to learn. Gula Lalara's contribution to Stokes' language was essential to their operation.\textsuperscript{151} Murabuda Wurrumarrba remembered missionary Dulcie Levitt fondly for her strongly accented Anindilyakwa ('but we didn't worry about it'). Learning Anindilyakwa was a step towards friendship.

'Hello diyabarrka [big sister]', we said, 'hello sister', we used to say. 'Nenikumarnjarrka [little brother]', 'hello little brother', she said. Was a good woman, you know ... A little bit of funny, but she was speaking with the language.\textsuperscript{152}

For some Anindilyakwa speakers, it seems that insisting English-speakers learn Anindilyakwa was not simply a matter of facilitating communication (they could already speak English) but was a means of asserting themselves and their knowledge. In 1970 the church councils of Angurugu and Umbakumba insisted that 'you white people fail to understand us — you must get to know us better. You must learn our language.'\textsuperscript{153} The anthropologist David Turner reported that in 1969 that 'Wanaiya [Warnaya] ... refused to talk to me until I could do so on Anindilyagwa. Then, when I had finally reached the requisite fluency and did agree to talk, he immediately switched to near perfect English.'\textsuperscript{154} Likewise, Turner's wife Ruth found that Anindilyakwa women would not speak to her until she could communicate in Anindilyakwa.\textsuperscript{155} Stokes' linguistic program presented an opportunity for some Anindilyakwa speakers to further assert the legitimacy of their own language as the language of Angurugu, compelling English speakers to submit to Anindilyakwa preferences.\textsuperscript{156}

Not all Anindilyakwa speakers wanted missionaries to speak their language. Missionary Lance Tremlett, for example, explained that he was told it was better to speak English.

I started to go to language classes and one of the Aboriginal men ... he said to me

'what are you doing learning Anindilyakwa and spending all your time doing that? We

\textsuperscript{152} Murabuda Wurrumarrba, oral history interview with author, 10 December, 2012.
\textsuperscript{154} Turner, Return to Eden, 21.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 79.
\textsuperscript{156} Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 58.
want you to talk to us in English and not to try because you’ll never be able to explain it as well in Anindilyakwa as what you do in English, and we need to be able to learn to talk to you in English so that we can talk to government people. I don’t see any need for you to be learning language.’ I still went to language classes, but I didn’t get very far ...That was Aringari Wurramara who said that to me.\textsuperscript{157}

Aringari Wurramara was a leading man in the church, highly competent in English. For him, English competence enabled him to play the role of mediator and interpreter. If missionaries ‘explain it in English’ he would understand and continue to ‘explain it’ to others. Yet if the Anindilyakwa language were to come to dominate, the mediating role would dissolve and English literacy would lose its value. Those who had engaged more deeply with the missionaries’ culture of English literacy, therefore, could have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.\textsuperscript{158} In the struggle over the new shape of the language economy at Angurugu and the legitimacy of English and Anindilyakwa in various mission spheres, Anindilyakwa people adopted varying positions, often in accordance to their own language competencies and relationships.\textsuperscript{159}

Jim Taylor likewise ‘never got the sense’ that Anindilyakwa speakers wanted him to learn their language.\textsuperscript{160} Wilma Taylor also remembered a strong reaction against the language lessons.

They were a bit taken aback when we started learning the language because we would know their secrets, they said ... I think they felt threatened that we were going to learn their language, I mean in bulk, not just one or two people, but there were a lot us learning it at the time.\textsuperscript{161}

For those who had carefully used language to evade missionaries, the linguistics program was also unsettling. It risked eroding the value of Anindilyakwa as a means of avoiding and outsmarting English speakers. Thus, although the linguistics program was endorsed by and in fact depended on Anindilyakwa speakers (particularly a core group of women), it faced greatest resistance from both those who had close relationships with missionaries and those who had avoided

\textsuperscript{157} Lance Tremlett, oral history interview with author, 18 November, 2011.
\textsuperscript{158} Bourdieu, \textit{Language and Symbolic Power}, 56.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, 67.
\textsuperscript{160} Jim Taylor, oral history interview with author, 1 July, 2012.
\textsuperscript{161} Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
missionaries. These groups, in various ways, had worked the existing language economy to their advantage and had a stake in its perpetuation.

Given these obstacles and the mixed support of Anindilyakwa speakers themselves in the language learning experiment, there were also ‘varying opinions’ among the CMS and Welfare staff over language learning. Stokes believed that the ‘chief obstacles’ were ‘lack of incentive and lack of a sense of urgency’; staff did not prioritise it as she had hoped. Stokes requested that the Aborigines Committee pray for ‘staff to recognise their priorities in language learning’. The CMS chaplains noted ‘a big gap between the desire of the Society that missionaries learn the language and the fulfilment of this desire’, which they attributed to a general attitude of ‘learn it if possible’. One complained that the ‘severest criticism’ of language learning came from ‘from fellow Missionaries who expressed the opinion that such language work was a waste of time.’ Again in 1970, Stokes reported ‘quite opposite views’ among staff (both Welfare and CMS). Some welfare teachers do not see any point at all in the use of the vernacular, but at least, ‘the majority of the staff see the desirability.’ Anindilyakwa informants were constantly taken away from Stokes for other tasks because other staff on the mission did not consider language work an important use of their time. The ‘general opinion’ of staff, according to Stokes, was that ‘language learning should only be considered for permanent staff ... it should only be “compulsory” for certain people.’

In the face of the staff’s resistance and apprehensiveness, Stokes softened her approach. By 1970 she gave up ‘trying to encourage all and sundry’ and only taught staff who were interested. She would give special attention to those who needed to spend time with people in the village, nurses and, ideally, the superintendent. For the rest of the staff she recommended only ‘a minimum selection of every day phrases.’ Even with these concessions the staff continued to frustrate her.

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104 ‘Minutes of Chaplain’s Conference, Groote, June ’69’ ML MSS 6040/6, Conferences General.
105 Harris, We Wish We’d Done More, 147.
106 Judith Stokes to Earl Hughes and Peter Carroll, 6 January, 1970, AIATSIS MS 3518.
108 Judith Stokes to Earl Hughes and Peter Carroll, 6 January, 1970, AIATSIS MS 3518.
In the mid-1970s, Stokes recorded her problems as linguist. The staff who wanted to learn were ‘hindered by lack of time and/or compulsion’, the superintendent lacked ‘real interest and consequent encouragement to others’ and missionaries generally still held the view that ‘lang work is the linguist’s hobby & doesn’t ... take priority.’ She also had difficulties finding Anindilyakwa speakers who could take time to assist her. Women were ‘inevitably distracted by chn [sic]’, many were ‘shy’, others were too busy or ‘not the sort to put their minds to it.’

Stokes also blamed her troubles on Anindilyakwa itself and ‘difficulties inherent in this language.’ She had spent years working to convince CMS authorities that the language was difficult and that she could not simply learn it in her free time. With her installation as linguist came the recognition from the CMS and missionaries that the language was in fact complex. Missionaries then blamed their troubles on the Anindilyakwa language itself. Although a board installed in the church displayed the Lord’s Prayer in Anindilyakwa, Jim Taylor explained, ‘I could never say it, it was just atrocious.’ Woodbridge remembered the ‘big long words, it was really hard.’ Wilma Taylor reported how impressed and horrified she was that Stokes had prepared ‘nine foolsap pages of the verb “to go”’. ‘One of the words in the creed was about 26 letters long’, she remembered, ‘it was like saying your alphabet all together.’ Johnston found that nineteenth-century missionaries’ realisation that Polynesian languages were in fact complex and sophisticated brought a ‘crisis in European self-confidence.’ These languages were complex, subtle and expressive like English and so challenged missionary distinctions between themselves and ‘heathen’ societies. At Groote Eylandt, missionaries realised that Anindilyakwa is, in many ways, more complex than their own English language. CMS missionaries for years called it ‘the world’s hardest language.’ It was, to them, an impossible language.

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659 Judith Stokes, handwritten note, no date, AIATIS MS 3518, Box 4, Folder 17b.
660 Judith Stokes, handwritten note, no date, AIATIS MS 3518.
661 Jim Taylor, oral History interview with author, 1 July, 2012.
662 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
663 Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
664 Jane Samson argues, however, that the preconception that Pacific languages were simple originated with William Bligh rather than the missionaries themselves. Johnston, Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860, 130; Samson, “Translation Teams,” 100.
Moreover, missionaries judged Anindilyakwa to be the cause of some Anindilyakwa speakers' reluctance to become literate in their own language. In his history of nineteenth-century protestant missions in China, Eric Rainders found that some missionaries considered the Chinese language a 'curse' upon the Chinese, a 'snare of the devil' and a barrier to Western knowledge and logic. They blamed illiteracy on a supposedly intractable language. Likewise, missionaries in North Australia believed Anindilyakwa to be exceptionally difficult and a burden to its speakers becoming literate. Stokes commented in 1965 that 'it is not easy for [Anindilyakwa speakers] to learn to read' because 'the long words many of which look alike' led to 'wild guesses' from new readers. The language — not the introduced Latin script — was at fault. In 1973 Stokes was hurriedly preparing a bilingual programme, using the Gudschinsky method of teaching reading in the vernacular to school teachers, but found that 'the long words in Anindilyagwa required some adjustment and delayed the production of the first few vital lessons.' Anindilyakwa words were to blame. Sarah Gudchinsky herself, according to Stokes, 'found it hard to believe that we could have such long words which are not compounds.' Anindilyakwa was considered an exceptional case, almost unreadable.

Yet there is also evidence that Anindilyakwa is, in fact, not as impossible to learn as missionaries felt it to be. Wubuy speakers, for example, learn it with relative ease (though their language has recently been found to be related). Wubuy speaker Yulgi Nunngumadjbarr told me 'it's easy, easy to learn!' before insisting that I 'get a tape' and learn more myself. Green reported that it was the attitude of missionary linguists that created a barrier to learning. She felt that Stokes liked to be the 'expert' and made little effort to make the language accessible to ordinary missionaries. 'The linguists worked very hard' but they 'didn’t like sharing it.' She remembered Stokes correcting her Anindilyakwa in public, saying ‘no no no! You don’t say that.’ She thought to herself, 'I don’t think

177 Ibid.
178 Judith Stokes to John Brook, 14 November, 1965, AIATSIS AIATIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 1b.
181 Yulgi Nunggumanadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
I'm going to learn this language.' Later, when Green learned some more grammar, she was 'gobsmacked' when she 'found out it was so easy.'

The mysteries of Anindilyakwa were not as elusive as linguists would have others believe. Perhaps Stokes simply found it difficult to teach people with no linguistic training. It seems, however, after so many years of arguing that Anindilyakwa was more than 'grunts and groans', Stokes could not conceive of it becoming easy. Even in the 1970s, she suspected other missionaries considered her work just a 'hobby'. Linguistic work had become a core component of the CMS strategy to maintain its influence in the North, but if learning Anindilyakwa was easy and could be done by anyone, then the linguists' presence might no longer be essential. Although notions of the impossible complexity of Anindilyakwa served to secure the linguist's position at Angurugu, they also undermined the language programme by deterring English speakers. Despite all the language lessons, linguists and linguistic material, Anindilyakwa remained a mysterious language, out of reach of the ordinary English speaker. Linguists' expert knowledge also silenced other missionaries' Anindilyakwa. By rendering missionaries hesitant and discouraged, the linguists, ironically perhaps, ensured that missionaries would always prefer speaking English.

Prior to the 1960s, the CMS had not been interested in linguistics. As the industrial work was no longer viable, the CMS needed to evolve if it were to maintain its evangelical presence. Linguistic work and literacy training was a key strategy in that evolution. There is little evidence suggesting that the new language policies originated in the demands of Anindilyakwa speakers or even on consultation with Anindilyakwa speakers.

Missionaries and Anindilyakwa people had mixed reactions to this new emphasis on linguistics. Though the changing language economy was welcomed by some, both Anindilyakwa speakers and missionaries resisted the linguistics program for the way it inverted established relationships of power. Some Anindilyakwa people endeavoured to learn their language in print, but a literary Anindilyakwa culture did not become the norm, as much as Stokes prayed that it would. Many missionaries were uncomfortable about their new vulnerability before Anindilyakwa speakers,

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82 Jenny Green, oral history interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
83 Judith Stokes, handwritten note, no date, AIATIS MS 3518.
just as some Anindilyakwa speakers were uncomfortable that they might lose their language to missionary 'experts'. Language promised missionaries knowledge of the 'Anindilyakwa mind', an instrument to penetrate Anindilyakwa hearts, but as I shall examine in the following chapter, Anindilyakwa people used linguistics for their own ends.
Chapter Six - Authenticity, the ‘heart language’ and missionary linguistics

Arumuruma ayagwa enindilyagwa againa nara  You girls, single boys, young boys
นะบุราฬัญจูมา  แกระท่า
Didiyara agwa gurravurrumuguma agwa  and children don't follow
กูรริมูรุงูมูรุงูมูมา  กูรริ-
Gurrenyarlyiyla guwudda  important Anindilyakwa words
Agina ayagwa waga arungurungawa lajwa  That speech wise men use is
different
Wurraguruma lajwa what meaning  For those who know the meaning
Aginya dagina
Agina bina ηαwα.  That's all.

Gula Lalara¹

In our glimpse at the ‘nature’ of the aborigines we gradually become aware that there is an obscured side. The mind of the Aboriginal is turned away from us into the shadows. What is going on inside his skull during this continuous process of change?

Paul Hasluck²

If missionary reports are to be believed, Angurugu Mission was full of ‘cuppa-tea Christians’ in the 1960s. The missionaries called Anindilyakwa speakers ‘cuppa tea Christians’, suspecting they were

¹ Discourse analysis of text 'Mixed Marriages' told by Gula and relating to AIATSIS Archive Tape 3372b-no. 4, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 5, Folder 46.
² 'The Future of the Australian Aborigines. Presidential address delivered to Section F (anthropology) of the 29th Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, at Sydney, 22nd August 1952 in Hasluck, Native Welfare in Australia, 53.
simply mimicking missionaries, telling them what they wanted to hear for a cuppa. The CMS ambitiously aimed for 'the evangelisation of the world' and on paper they apparently had success on Groote Eylandt; after establishing the mission in 1943, a generation later in 1971 they had baptised 70% of the adult population. Nonetheless, 'many "Christians"' seemed 'non-practising', their faith was 'not very evident' as far as missionaries were concerned. Why did these missionaries doubt their converts? It had to do in part with the longstanding association of Aboriginality and insincerity in English speakers' imaginations and with the Aboriginal use of English, the 'white fella' language.

Mirroring the missionary concern to find 'authentic' converts was white Australia's simultaneous concern to find 'authentic' Aboriginal people. Anthropologist Jeremy Beckett wrote of a 'medley of voices, black and white' each offering and contesting a construction of 'Aboriginality.' Eric Michaels likewise described the white fascination with an imagined Aboriginal authenticity which is disconnected from Aboriginal people's own values and traditions. Mick Dodson outlined colonising cultures' 'preoccupation' with 'labelling Aborigines and Aboriginality' along with white Australia's 'manipulation of authentic Aboriginality' according its colonising interests.

This chapter explores the connection, in the eyes of missionaries, between Aboriginal languages and a supposedly 'authentic' Aboriginal identity. I find that the movement for missionary linguistics and use of Aboriginal languages in church in the 1960s was based on an assumption that Aboriginal people could not be themselves when speaking English. They were most 'authentic' when speaking their own 'heart languages.' Though faith in the power of the 'heart language' had long been a feature of Protestant missions, after lying dormant, the doctrine of the 'heart language' came the fore in CMS North Australia missions only in the 1960s. I examine the ideological shifts of the 1960s which re-cast Aboriginal languages as 'heart languages' and the key

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3 Much like the so-called 'rice Christians' of other parts of the world.
to conversion to Christianity. By learning and engaging with languages, missionaries expected to harness what we now call ‘Aboriginality’ for their mission project. Through mastering the language, they hoped to know the ‘Aboriginal mind’ and thereby perceive who, if any, among their flock were sincerely Christian. Competence in Anindilyakwa, they believed, would allow them to speak directly to Aboriginal hearts.

I also engage with the Comaroff’s theory of missionary linguistics as a ‘colonisation of consciousness’ by the appropriation of indigenous symbols and concepts. Was missionary linguistics on Groote Eylandt an attempt at the colonisation of Anindilyakwa consciousness?

Hilary Carey points out how many post-colonial churches continue to defend the work of missionaries and have a deep respect for the founding clergy of their churches. This is also the case among older Anindilyakwa speakers who, despite holding strong reservations about some aspects of the mission, are generally nostalgic about the mission days and hold missionaries in high regard. Is this the fruit of a colonised consciousness? Were Anindilyakwa people robbed of the ability to critique the very assumptions underpinning the missionary project? Or did Anindilyakwa people reinterpret the translated message and forge their own understandings?

By the 1960s, missionaries increasingly sensed that Aboriginal people had not taken their gospel to heart. Whereas CMS missionaries in East Africa witnessed Christian revivals, those in North Australia had a very different experience. As early as 1952, missionary Len Harris concluded that many Aboriginal people ‘profess Christianity for the benefits that might ensue on the mission.’ According to linguist and CMS member Arthur Capell in 1959, missions to Aboriginal people across Australia had achieved only a ‘paucity of converts.’ ‘Obviously something is wrong with the approach’ he warned. In 1964, Field Superintendent Jack Langford considered ‘the spiritual side’ of the mission’s work ‘disappointing’, and lamented that ‘results seem to be negligible ... There is little evidence of any real “break through” and ... not much sign of an Indigenous Church.’

Missionaries had long been aware of the possibility of Anindilyakwa couples feigning conversion in order to benefit from missionaries. In 1954, the chaplain, for example, took care to give ‘much

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11 L.J. Harris, ‘The Bible Society and the Aborigines,’ Australian Church Record, 24 January 1952, 2.
13 J.E. Langford ‘Memo from Field Superintendent,’ 1965 ML MSS 6040/6, Aborigines Policy Committee of Inquiry
teaching' to be 'sure of the sincerity of all concerned' when baptising children lest some couples baptise their children out of wrong motives. By the 1960s, missionaries were increasingly anxious that perhaps very few Anindilyakwa people had ever converted.

Evidence of 'backsliding' abounded. Just as churches in southern Australia grappled with the social changes of the 1960s, so the missions in the north experienced a decline in their authority over their flocks. Instances of polygamy, which the missionaries were supposed to have eradicated, persisted. Polygamy was, to the missionaries, 'evidence of a reversionary movement towards pagan tribalism.' In 1957 and 1958 a number of missionaries were assaulted when attempting to prevent men taking second wives. Shockingly, for missionaries, even an older single woman missionary, Dulcie Levitt, was 'punched in the face' in an argument about women in 1958. Nabilya Lalara, who had recently returned from Maningrida (a Welfare Branch Aboriginal settlement on the north coast of Arnhem Land) was spreading reports that Welfare Branch permitted polygamy there. Most Anindilyakwa people were already aware that at Yirrkala, a nearby mission, monogamy had not been imposed on those who had not converted. Welfare sent their Patrol Officer, Ted Egan, to the island in an attempt to calm the situation. According to Egan, the polygamy problem had its roots in Dick Harris' redistribution of wives at the establishment of Angurugu in the 1940s.

A generation of younger men received wives before they would have in the old 'pagan' days. But inevitably the time came when some of the same younger men began to say, 'An important chap like me should now have my second, third, perhaps fourth wife.' 'Oh, no,' say the missionaries.

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14 Aborigines Committee Minutes, 25 November 1954, 6040/5.
16 S.R. Warren to J.B. Montgomerie, 10 February, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Staff Personal; 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 12 December, 1957, ML MSS 6040/5; 4 December, 1957, NTAS NTRS 704, Box 1, ANG. Journal 1 APR 1957 to 1 JUNE 1961.
17 S.R. Warren to J.B. Montgomerie, 10 February, 1958, NTAS NTRS 868, Box 6, Staff Personal; 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 12 December, 1957, ML MSS 6040/5.
Despite the recommendations of Welfare Branch's Research Officer on the matter, the CMS refused to soften its stance against polygamy on the grounds that monogamy was 'Australian law' and necessary for 'rapid integration or assimilation into the general Australian community.' Nonetheless, polygamy continued through the 1960s in what could be considered subtle resistance to missionary authority. The anthropologist David Turner, visiting in 1969, found 36% of Bickerton Island men were polygamists. Furthermore, a number of men were publicly monogamous to 'create an impression for the missionaries,' but practised a covert polygamy. Even Gula Lalara, who had been among the first to be baptised in 1949 and was the missionaries' trusted mediator, interpreter and teacher in the school, took a second wife (then a third and a fourth) in the 1960s. Meanwhile, a number of women, seemed more interested in pursuing BHP employees from the new mine than Christian monogamy.

People skipped church. The chaplain commented that some so-called 'Christians' had 'never partaken at Holy Communion.' In 1966 the chaplain had explained that unlike others, Nandjiwarra Amagula was not a mere 'Sunday Christian' but a sincere convert. Nandjiwarra had also been baptised in 1949. But then, even he stopped attending church. By 1970, the superintendent called him 'one of our former Christian leaders' who 'now never comes to Church.' Through the 1960s there was a revival of interest in Anindilyakwa ceremony, led by Nandjiwarra, sometimes with 'almost non-stop' dancing every night. Taylor requested in 1967 that the 'corroboree mob' keep away from the village. They agreed, but nonetheless, were soon dancing in the village again, keeping the music going 'all night.' Rather than banning ceremonies, missionaries attempted to regulate them. Anindilyakwa men were encouraged to ask the superintendent for permission to hold ceremonies so that they did not interfere with the work

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20 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 7 June, 1962, NTAS NTRS 873, Box 16, Chaplain's Conferences 1957-1962.
23 Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 48.
timetable. In 1971, missionary Bob Gibbes described what he called the ‘diverse interests competing for the souls of the people.’ There was the ‘open air service’ of singing. There the were gamblers, and a hundred yards away from the service, there was a large group ‘gathered around aboriginal dancers, singers and instrument players.’ By 1970 it was ‘dancing fever.’ The ‘almost continual dancing ... effected to a great degree the numbers coming to church.’ The chaplain reported ‘many “Christians” here who seem to be non-practicing.’ The superintendent had doubts about the mission’s effectiveness; ‘one cannot help but wonder how much of an impact the message of Jesus has had upon the lives of these people,’ he wrote, ‘certainly Satan is having a good go at the moment.’ The chaplain suspected that the members of the church were not truly converted; their loyalty was to ceremony not Christianity.

Given the ‘backsliding,’ missionaries doubted the sincerity of any Aboriginal Christian. During an apparent Christian revival in 1968, the chaplain reported that ‘it is difficult to know how deep is the repentance of the many who are now coming to Church.’ Likewise, at Umbakumba the chaplain believed that there were only ‘perhaps half a dozen’ Aboriginal people in the church who he considered ‘trustworthy in a general way.’ Were any so-called Anindilyakwa Christians sincere converts? The prevalence of ‘backsliding’, paradoxically, led missionaries to both doubt their effectiveness and to confirm to themselves that the continued existence of the mission and further evangelism were necessary. But the missionaries wondered if they would ever know the sheep from the goats, the Christians from the heathen.

At this point it is tempting to ask, ‘were the missionaries correct?’ Were Aboriginal people feigning faith in the 1960s? Or perhaps they were genuinely ‘falling away’, rejecting what was a sincere

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Christianity. Perhaps we should understand the so-called 'backsliding' as subtle acts of resistance against the mission regime. As we shall see, there is evidence that for some, such acts were a kind of resistance, but also evidence that what missionaries interpreted as 'backsliding' according to their conception of conversion, Anindilyakwa people intended as reinterpretations of Christianity or as a synthesis of traditions. That is, neither simply collaboration with white power nor merely resistance to it, but a complex engagement with missionaries' teaching, albeit in a context of unequal power.

Incidentally, the notion of the inauthentic 'cuppa tea Christian' hinges on a European conception of religion as personal, private and apart from community practice. As Talal Asad put it, Western religion (especially Protestant) can be 'expressed as belief statements' and 'practiced in one's spare time.' The missionaries' accusation that Aboriginal Christianity was mere outward conformity presumed that religion is primarily a personal phenomenon, fundamentally about belief and sentiment rather than embodied community practice. This distinction might make little sense from Aboriginal perspectives where spirituality is embodied and pervades all aspects of life.

Whereas missionaries disparaged Aboriginal converts as merely opportunistic seekers of a cuppa, perhaps this charge seemed strange to Aboriginal people for whom the spiritual world was always connected with daily practice and material realities.

From the beginning of their long dialogue with Groote Eylandt people, English speakers doubted the sincerity of their interlocutors. Europeans long considered mimicry a feature of primitive people due to their supposedly keener senses of perception than the 'civilised.' Likewise, fakery, either child-like imitativeness or more sinister deceitfulness, has long been associated with savagery by whites. Captain George Wilkins, after his visit to Groote Eylandt in 1925 reported the 'natives of the Northern Territory' have an outstanding 'ability to give misleading statements' so

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38 Scott, Weapons of the Weak, 29.
40 Taussig, Mimesis and Alterity, 81–86, 96.
that 'an investigator without a knowledge of the native language and its dialects is not likely to
gather much useful information.' He claimed Aboriginal people were masters of evasion.

The early CMS missionaries on the island could never tell if Anindilyakwa speakers deliberately
deceived them. Missionary Les Perriman told a story of an apparently innocent error in
translation, when attempting to translate the song ‘Jesus loves me’ into Anindilyakwa. With his
finger pointing to his chest, ‘how do you say “me”? “me?”‘ the amateur missionary linguist used
exaggerated gestures to try to get his question across. They gave him the word for ‘chest hair’ and,
so the missionary sang for them ‘Jesus loves my chest hair.’ Were the Anindilyakwa speakers
sincere when they said ‘chest-hair’? Or were they having a go at him? It is hard to tell. Johnston
points out how, throughout the history of the British missionary movement, English-speaking
evangelists worried that their native informants were misleading them, laughing at them. In the
Australian context, it would not have helped that direct eye contact is frequently avoided in
Aboriginal interactions, whereas for Westerners this can signal evasion or dishonesty. As
discussed in an earlier chapter, even the dormitory girls gave missionaries swear words, telling
them they meant ‘dog’ or ‘hello.’ Perriman never let on whether he thought Anindilyakwa
speakers were mocking him, though perhaps the missionary fear of indigenous people feigning
sincerity might have been well-founded in this case.

Later, Frank Setzler, a member of the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem
Land was convinced that their informants from the mission, Banjo Lalara and Old Charlie
concocted the names of rock formations ‘in order to get their tobacco.’ When it came to
language, indigenous people’s knowledge and expertise put them in a position of power over their
English-speaking pupils. English speakers could be made to feel uneasy by the inversion of the
hierarchy they usually presumed. Gerry Blitner worked as a guide and interpreter for the
expedition and, in his oral history, remembered Quartpot and Banjo confess, ‘this is not really a

42 Sir George Hubert Wilkins, Undiscovered Australia: Being an Account of an Expedition to Tropical Australia to Collect
44 Johnston, Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860, 132.
45 Eades, Aboriginal Ways of Using English, 102.
46 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April 2012.
47 Diary of Frank M Setzler Australia, 8 June 1948, Vol 1 New York to Groote Eylandt, 112. NLA MS 5230 Frank Maryl
Setzler Papers.
story ... This white man is interfering. He's asking more and more.' Charles Mountford, who led the 1948 expedition, had been asking about secret things associated with ceremonies that he had no right to know. Anthropologist Fredrick Rose also concluded that 'an Aborigine...will give some reply in order to please the questioner.' The suspicion that 'Aborigines just make up a story to please [anthropologists]' was so common that in 1947 A. P. Elkin specifically refuted the assumption. At the same time as asserting that Aboriginal people are not deliberately deceptive, Elkin also noted that 'their fundamental aim is to satisfy the questioner, to tell him what they think he wants to be told.'

Ray Specht, the Scientific Expedition's botanist, wondered if Anindilyakwa people could communicate without words. He reported that 'telepathy seemed to be a part of the culture' since, mysteriously, Anindilyakwa people at Umbakumba knew the precise time of the death of a relation at Angurugu on the other side of the island. Elkin also wrote that Aboriginal people practiced some form of telepathy. The association of Anindilyakwa speakers with telepathy, giving them the ability to outwit English speakers, persisted into the 1970s. Police Officer Horace Prew recorded that 'this phenomena [sic] [telepathy] is very developed in Aboriginal peoples.' On one occasion, he drove to Umbakumba to give Old Malgari a lift. 'How did you know I was coming for you?' Malgari pointed at his head and laughed. 'Ah, I bin know and savvy that you bin thinking alonga me in your head.' Some 'telepathy' was probably Anindilyakwa sign language: so subtle, they tell me that 'you wouldn't even know' if there were a conversation occurring around you. It is likely his ability to read the landscape and discern events from afar also helped (these skills, too, have been deemed mystical and magical at times by white observers). Could Anindilyakwa

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49 Rose, Classification of Kin, Age Structure, and Marriage amongst the Groote Eylandt Aborigines, 24.
51 Ibid, 176.
52 Experiences with the Aborigines of Arnhem Land, Ray Specht, botanist, ecologist, ethno-botonist (Letters April to October, 1948), NLA MS Acc 09.040 Raymond Specht Papers.
55 Grant Burgoyne with Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April 2012.
56 Worsley, Knowledges, 18.
speakers communicate without words? Could they read minds? Anindilyakwa communication was mysterious to English speaking visitors to the island.

Anindilyakwa people could be disingenuous too, according to missionaries, saying 'yes' when they meant 'no.' Linguist Diane Eades has shown how an apparently simple 'yes' is fraught in cross-cultural situations.  

Mission superintendent Taylor was frustrated after requesting that 'the Corroboree mob' dance elsewhere. 'They have not kept their word' he complained. Another missionary believed that it was useless to reason with Anindilyakwa speakers since they never kept their word; 'if you talk to them, they will probably say, “Yes, yes,” and do nothing.' According to missionary Norma Farley in 1969, missionaries often got nothing but 'politeness' from Anindilyakwa speakers who say 'yes' even when 'enthusiasm is lacking.' This 'gratuitous concurrence' is cultural 'yessing', an Anindilyakwa way of easing social situations, expressing one's social amenability and avoiding potential conflict. It is a common feature of Aboriginal Englishes.

In English, the intention of the speaker is implied in the future tense. In Anindilyakwa, however, no such intention is implied. A statement about the future does not intend to guarantee that the action will take place. Linguist Velma Leeding calls this the 'potential mood' rather than 'future tense.' Similarly, in Aboriginal Englishes, statements about future actions do not commit the speaker to carry out the future action. They are only predictions. In Standard Australian English, statements such as 'I'll be there tomorrow' would require an apology or excuse if the speaker failed to be there.

The 'gratuitous concurrence', according to Elkin, was a strategy of appeasement to white authorities in response to the inequalities of colonisation. Yet when I spoke with Nancy Lalara, she considered it a better mode of interaction, not merely a colonised response. As she and her

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non-indigenous husband Grant Burgoyne explained to me, the gratuitous concurrence can promote honesty and thus facilitate positive relationships.

[Grant Burgoyne]: If you go into a meeting and Aboriginal people say ‘yes’ to you, go with the assumption that it’s a gratuitous ‘yes’ and it’s a pleasant surprise if it’s not.

[Nancy Lalara]: We don’t worry if they never turned up. Later they might come along and say, ‘sorry I didn’t come, I was too lazy.’

[Interviewer]: And that’s okay.

[Grant Burgoyne]: And with a white person you’d make up some bloody complete fabrication or just keep avoiding them.

[Nancy Lalara]: Or leave the island for a while!65

‘Yes’ on Groote Eylandt, therefore, does not function the same way as it does in English speaking societies. Historian Eric Reinders found that missionaries in China similarly misinterpreted Chinese courtesy as ‘polite lies’, a culture of falseness and deception.66 For some missionaries an Anindilyakwa ‘yes yes’ was also simply dishonest; for others, a ‘polite lie’ was a sign that the missionaries themselves had failed to convert Anindilyakwa speakers to lives of honesty and sincerity.

Such insincerity, missionaries presumed, also pervaded Anindilyakwa spirituality. The early missionary Alfred Dyer recorded the supposed confession of an Aboriginal man that sorcery was just as the missionary suspected: ‘a useful bogie to frighten the women and children to keep them in camp at night.’67 Another missionary joked that the ‘witchdoctor ... had been singing us to death all night. Strange to say, we were alive in the morning.’68 To him, it was fakery, unmasked by his rational, enlightened approach. So common was this belief that Elkin laboured to convince the public that Aboriginal clever men were not ‘imposters’, ‘scamps’ or ‘charlatans’ but men of high

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65 Grant Burgoyne & Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April 2012.
67 Letter Written to my wife en route to Thursday Island, October 1933, ML MSS 2545, Alfred Dyer Diary, Book 3 Peace Trip.
degree. CMS publications in the 1950s continued to describe a ceremony man as 'a fake, a rogue, a liar and a troublemaker.' The Aboriginal belief in 'magic and sorcery... makes them frightened... they are always imagining they have some enemy who is going to hurt them.' Aboriginal people were, according to the CMS, slaves to their own deceptive and manipulative spiritual beliefs.

The supposed insincerity of Aboriginal people was a particular concern for the missionaries because, as evangelical Protestants, they believed worship must always be heartfelt. Evangelicalism itself originated as a protest movement against 'superficial', nominal Christianity. One was not born a Christian; you must be 'born again.' Historians Jane Haggis and Margaret Allen found that according to missionary texts, therefore, expressions of 'appropriate emotion' were always enabled by conversion. Evangelicals were especially against what they considered ritualism, particularly in the form of Catholicism. For them, it was useless merely attending church, reciting the prayers, unless these were accompanied by a heartfelt faith and right emotions. Without these, Christianity was merely 'empty ritual.'

'Sincerity, they believed, was contingent on clear language. Language, to them, was useful vehicle for truth, but also, when used to excess, a potentially dangerous distraction from it and barrier to understanding.' So, the CMS Aborigines Committee in 1964 explained that 'the aborigines' spiritual growth' would depend on 'comprehension of the Scriptures.' According to evangelical tradition, faith was not purely rational; it must be experienced emotionally to be sincere (hence John Wesley's emphasis on 'heart religion'), but these emotions needed a rational foundation of comprehension and propositional understanding. Among many objections to Catholicism, evangelicals believed that Catholics, due to their use of Latin in the Mass, had no inner spiritual

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70 'Calling the Wizard of Oz, Roper,' *Open Door*, April, 1959.
71 J.B. Montgomerie, 'That they might have life,' 1958, NTRS 1105.
74 Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 89.
75 Ibid, 78.
76 Ibid, 66.
77 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 27 October, 1964, ML MSS 6040/5.
life (or, if they did, it was ignorant superstition). Latin 'only mystified its hearers.' Catholic prayer was not prayer but 'recitation', a 'meaningless Latin liturgy.' But they knew Christ taught 'when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do.' In nineteenth-century England, anti-ritualism became a defining feature of evangelicalism. The CMS missionaries instilled the same anti-Catholic, anti-ritualism sentiment among Anindilyakwa children, as Nancy Lalara remembered:

We hated the Catholics. I don't know why. Maybe because we were told that Catholic sucks or something. The Catholic wasn't part of the real Christian thing. That was the way that people spoke in them days, about their churches.

Anindilyakwa people, missionaries believed, were particularly prone to nominalism and ritualism. Norman Tindale visited Groote Eylandt in 1921-1922 with CMS missionaries as guides. He recorded a circumcision ceremony as consisting of 'frequent chants (apparently wordless). On observing a funeral he likewise described 'in the camp chants, which apparently are meaningless, accompanied by drone-pipe music and throwing-stick clapping are kept up for several hours.' Aboriginal ceremony was, to him, meaningless repetition, empty sounds. This had also been the view of E.C. Stirling on Baldwin Spencer's expedition to Central Australia in 1894. He wrote that 'the natives are quite unable to assign any meaning to the words of these and other chants.' Likewise, a 1958 CMS publication described Aboriginal ceremony as meaningless ritual. 'They sing to everything, but it is more like chanting, with a lot of repetition. Some songs have meaning, but magic songs are just so many magic words.' Arnhem Land songs often have multiple and ambiguous meanings. The words used in songs were not words of ordinary language and singers

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79 Nida, God's Word in Man's Language, 83.
80 Ibid, 42.
81 Matthew 6:7-8, King James Version.
83 Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 29 April 2012
84 Norman Barnett Tindale, Natives of Groote Eylandt and of the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria (Hassell Press, 1925), 61.
85 Ibid, 68.
86 Tindale, Natives of Groote Eylandt and of the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, 74.
88 J.B. Montgomerie, 'That they might have life,' 1958, NTRS 1105.
refer only obliquely to the song subject. The depths of the many layers of mystery in song meanings are open only to the few who have legitimate access to this knowledge; to young listeners, the songs can make little sense. But the missionaries found the same flaws in Aboriginal spirituality that they also found in Catholicism and believed they had rejected in the Reformation: meaningless noise, hollow repetition, empty ritual. Missionaries believed they were facing an uphill battle if they were to introduce an authentic faith to this apparently duplicitous culture. Were ‘converts’ simply acting according to their supposed Anindilyakwa nature, telling missionaries what they wanted to hear?

The explanation for the apparent ‘backsliding’ of the 1960s was obvious to many missionaries: Christianity had not been made sufficiently ‘meaningful’ to Aboriginal people. Beulah Lowe, an evangelical missionary at Milingimbi explained in 1968 that missionaries to Aboriginal people must ‘guard against worship becoming a mere repetition of meaningless words instead of a vital contact with God.’ Likewise, Stokes prayed that Aboriginal people would sing hymns ‘meaningfully.’ Another missionary commented that Anindilyakwa speakers did ‘not grasp the depth and fullness of meaning of the Gospel message.’ According to Woodbridge, the key was being ‘meaningful’ but it was a near-impossible task without the vernacular:

The problem of communication still looms large. How to make the ‘faith’ meaningful to Aboriginal people, encourage and stimulate initiative on the part of Aboriginal Christians and at the same time avoid paternalism and retain the sympathy of the European Christians, this is part of the problem. We know that the answer lies in part along the road of understanding the language and culture.

84 Ibid, 31.
Missionaries worried that, by their use of English, their church services had become like the ‘meaningless’ Latin mass of the Catholics or the ‘magic chanting’ of Aboriginal songs. Many were alert to the fact that Anindilyakwa speakers could not readily understand the antiquated English of the Book of Common Prayer; missionaries found it hard enough themselves. They worried that they were at risk of promoting ritualism and insincerity. Missionary Lois Reid was brought up Baptist, so was perhaps more willing than others to criticise Anglican liturgy. She admitted missionaries themselves were unmoved in their confessions of wrongdoing; how could they expect anything else from their Aboriginal disciples?

I feel the language of the communion service tedious, how much more an illiterate who speaks little or no English let alone 15th or 16th century English. To say Sunday by Sunday ‘We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness...’ has become to me a mere repetition of words. What it does to the Aborigine who only has a vague idea of what it is all about, and indeed some don’t even have that, it would not even hazard a guess.\(^6\)

Oral history interviews indicate that most Anindilyakwa speakers did not fully understand church services, even those who knew English or had memorised the hymns did not always grasp their meaning. It was all ‘mumbo jumbo’, Nancy Lalara told me.\(^7\) Perhaps she was aware of the irony that she, an indigenous woman, found missionary religion all ‘mumbo jumbo.’ The term originates in Mungo Park’s early nineteenth-century description of an African character ‘employed by the Pagan natives in keeping their women in subjection.’ ‘Mumbo Jumbo’ was, according to Park, a figure who ceremonially rebuked wayward women in a pantomime where ‘Mumbo’ was usually the woman’s own husband in disguise.\(^8\) Another missionary remembered listening to the old women singing old hymns. She believed ‘their interpretation of what it was saying was basically meaningless.’\(^9\) The missionaries risked an inversion of their own categories for enlightened

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\(^6\) Lois Reid, who made these comments, had a Baptist background and converted to Anglicanism to become a CMS missionary. Lois Reid, ‘Prayer letter, Easter 1970,’ CMS SA Box 42, Lois Reid 66-70.

\(^7\) Nancy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 28 April 2012.


\(^9\) Julie Rudder, oral history interview with author, 7 January, 2012.
authentic worship; they were the ones introducing pantomime — ‘mumbo jumbo’ — to the heathen.

Through the late 1950s and increasing with the ‘backsliding’ in the 1960s, missionaries found in Aboriginal languages a scapegoat for their failures and the hope for their future success. According to Capell, the apparent failure of the missions to convert Aboriginal people was due to missionaries’ ‘incomprehensible refusal to learn Australian languages.’ Earl Hughes reported his discovery of the spiritual potential of Wubuy when, after a few weeks’ preaching in English to ‘blank and uncomprehending looks,’ he used Wubuy which resulted in ‘much better understanding of the Gospel.’ From 1957 he made ‘more and more use of Nungkubuyu [sic]’ and, according to him, this ‘was the main means through which God spoke to the hearts of many of the Aboriginal people at Numbulwar.’ Likewise Stokes lobbied the Aborigines Secretary in 1965 arguing that the value of using vernacular language has ‘proved itself and borne fruit in the spiritual lives of the people’ at Numbulwar. Barry Butler explained in 1965 that he was ‘firmly convinced’ that the ‘general lack of spiritual success’ was due to ‘the failure to communicate in their own languages.’ Norma Farley did not admit evangelistic failure, but still advocated Bible translation arguing it would produce still more conversions; ‘if the Lord has been pleased to bless these people without the Bible in their tongue how much more could He pour out His Spirit upon them if they could feed on the Living Bread of the Scriptures in the language they have always known?’ Over this period, the view of Capell, Stokes and Hughes became the dominant ideology of the CMS missionaries.

Hypotheses of linguistic relativity and the inseparability of language and thought are notoriously difficult to prove. According to linguist Nick Evans, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity has ‘unfinished business’, perhaps only to be resolved by experimental methods of

100 Capell, "Interpreting Christianity to Australian Aborigines," 148.
103 Judith Stokes to John Brook, 14 November, 1965, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3 Judith Stokes, Folder 2.
psychology." Yet missionaries were largely convinced that language was a route to the mind of a culture. More and more CMS missionaries resolved that they would gain control of the Anindilyakwa language. Missionaries wrote of ‘tackling seriously the language’ and of ‘tackling it in [God’s] strength.’ One explained that Anindilyakwa is ‘a very hard nut to crack’ but that Stokes would get it ‘cracked right open.’ Missionaries would ‘master the tribal language’ and ‘break the language barrier.’ They would be ‘scientifically prepared’ at the Wycliffe School of Linguistics to ‘break into the language.’ The Aborigines Committee also wrote of ‘breaking into a new language’ and requested the new chaplain ‘make an effort to break into the language of the people at Groote.’ Scripture taught them that God’s Word is a sword, that it cuts people’s hearts, that it is all-seeing and all-knowing. Missionaries believed that knowledge of Anindilyakwa would give their gospel message this same power. In her history of linguistics in colonial South Africa, Gilmour argues that missionary linguistics was ‘indivisible’ from the study of ‘the Zulu mind’ and of the work of the mission. CMS rhetoric from the 1950s was likewise that language would ‘reach the heart’ of the people, ‘get into the soul’, ‘get into the hearts’, ‘get to the thought and soul of the people.’ Aboriginal hearts and minds, it seemed, were their last frontier, unreach ed territory. The missionaries would break in through mastering the language.

Capell’s 1965 report on Aboriginal languages was the immediate catalyst for Stokes’ release from the school classroom to full-time linguistics and clearly articulates the new CMS thinking. Capell began using the language of indigenous rights.
It is true that every people has a right to its own language. It is still more true that the more important a matter is to a person the more necessary it is that it be conveyed to him in his own language. Nowhere is this more important than in religion. Religion can never be fully at home in the hearts of the people until it comes to them in the language in which they dream, and finds expression in the mother tongue. The translation of at least parts of the Bible and the conduct of worship in their own language dare not be denied them ... It is suggested therefore that the time has come to secure this right to the people, for it is at the same time a necessity for efficient penetration to their hearts ... It is essential to go beyond such statements of policy and establish special programmes on each station to secure the fullest and most advantageous of this chief instrument both for the entry of the Word into the individual heart and also for the educational advancement of the people."

The CMS began to argue that the use of Aboriginal languages as more than simply a concession to Aboriginal people or as an expression of sympathy, but as an Aboriginal right. Yet this ‘right’ did not extend to cultural self-determination. Instead, Aboriginal people had only the ‘right’ to be enabled to convert to Christianity according to evangelical conceptions of conversion. Capell considered language to be an essential quality of Aboriginal people; an unchanging presence of their thoughts and dreams. CMS, therefore, would pursue linguistic study in order to ‘efficiently penetrate’ Aboriginal hearts. Ironically, in seeking to change Aboriginal people into authentic believers, the CMS came to assert that Aboriginal people were impervious to change, at least in regard to language.

In a manoeuvre that resonates with what the Comaroffs would later theorise as a ‘colonisation of consciousness’, CMS missionaries explicitly connected facility in Anindilyakwa with gaining power over Anindilyakwa speakers. Isabel Hofmeyr found a missionary ideology of language by which ‘texts are empowered to seize and convert those they encounter’; for missionaries, the translated text was to powerfully effect conversions. Of course, missionaries believed the gospel they offered would be a source of joy and hope. Still, their rhetoric of ‘getting into the thought and

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8 A. Capell, ‘Problems of Education in North Australia,’ 1965, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 2.
soul' also reflects their urge to control Aboriginal people through Aboriginal languages. 'There is no power like the word of God in a people's own tongue,' wrote Hughes. They used rhetoric of penetrating swords, evoking images of violence. Language would ensure 'efficient penetration to their hearts.' The vernacular was to be the 'chief instrument...for the entry of the Word into the individual heart.' As Kenneth Pike of the evangelical Summer Institute of Linguistics put it, 'even the Sword of the Spirit, though it still cuts deeply, seems to have a dull edge unless it is wielded in the language in which a man was born.' The 'sword' of the Word cut deeper when sharpened by missionaries as they cast it in the mother tongue. This rhetoric was not new. It had existed in Christian missionary thinking for centuries. Nonetheless, the idea that through the vernacular, missionaries could reach indigenous hearts was taken up with new zeal by the CMS missionaries in 1960s Australia. Languages were, according to the CMS Aborigines Secretary, 'a pathway to their friendship and a highway to their soul.' Missionaries hoped that knowledge of Anindilyakwa would allow them to gaze into people's hearts and enter their very soul.

The missionaries also considered using 'simple' English in church services, though they ultimately rejected this option. The concept was to translate the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible into contemporary English as an interim measure. This would ensure Aboriginal people's full comprehension without requiring missionaries to learn Anindilyakwa, the development of an Anindilyakwa orthography or teaching vernacular literacy. In 1954 Butler recommended 'simplification of the wording of the Prayer Book Services for the benefit of Natives' and later translated portions of the services into 'simple English', though, they retained strong elements of their 1662 flavour ('Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults'). Other missionaries were concerned that the push to Anindilyakwa would hinder assimilation. One called it 'retrograde' to use Aboriginal languages. For him, Aboriginal languages had 'no future', so were

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121 E. Hughes, in 'Summary of Replies to Questionnaire to Chaplains,' 3 August, 1961, CMS SA, Box 19. CMS Aborigines Commission.
122 Capell, A. 'Problems of Education in North Australia,' 1965, AIATSIS MS 3518.
126 'Aborigines Committee Minutes,' 8 October, 1954, ML MSS 6040/5.
127 'Portions of Morning and Evening Prayer in Simple English with other prayers,' NTAS NTRS 1345, Simple English Services.
simply a distraction. He considered the argument that the vernacular was necessary was insulting to Aboriginal people; it denied that Aboriginal people have 'just as much ability & brains' as the missionary. The arguments indicate that, for some missionaries, English fluency continued to function as a marker of modernisation, intelligence and civilisation.

Yet, the value of the vernacular had become to most missionaries more than a matter of simply ensuring comprehension of their message; the mother tongue was somehow more spiritually suitable. Ironically, perhaps, in their eagerness to translate, missionaries failed to remember that the New Testament itself was first written in an ancient lingua franca, Koine Greek, which was nobody's mother tongue. In 1956 Earl Hughes stated that 'the need for the things of God to be in the people's own language is just as great as ever' because English was 'inadequate in reaching them for the Lord.' Likewise Butler explained in 1965 that although English might be 'natural in a Government policy of Assimilation', 'nothing can be the medium of truth to a man's mind better than his own tongue' [original bold]. According to Stokes in 1965, 'no foreign language can ever speak to the heart like one's own mother tongue.' Farley also was 'convinced more than ever of the futility of trying to teach the people ... in English' even though she acknowledged they were 'educated in our language and culture' and could understand English. By 1976, the CMS linguists stated that 'English could not be used effectively to evangelise, in prayer or in worship.' Only the vernacular could convey spiritual truths.

Only the 'heart language', would do because the mother tongue became to missionaries a matter of authenticity. By encouraging Anindilyakwa people to worship in English in the past they had encouraged them — even forced them — to be insincere, merely mimicking missionaries' English religion. But when they spoke their own language, they were truly themselves. Anthropologist Courtney Handman explains that the 'ultimate goal' of twentieth-century missionary linguistics

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132 'Meet the Missionaries, MISS JUDITH STOKES,' *Telescope*, October, 1965.
has been for ‘Christianity to seem as indigenous as the local language.’

The mother tongue would supposedly enable indigenous people to feel that the church was truly ‘theirs’, seamlessly making Christianity part of indigenous cultures. Anicka Fast likewise found that missionaries dismissed any alternative conceptions of the church that did not depend on mother-tongue worship as ‘insufficiently indigenous.’

Ironically, whereas missionaries had previously distrusted Anindilyakwa culture and religion, believing it fostered insincerity, now they found in the Anindilyakwa language the foundation for an authentic Anindilyakwa Christianity.

This shift in missionary views of Aboriginal language and Aboriginality over the 1960s reflects a general shift in visions of Australian identity. As Russell McGregor has shown, white Australians’ visions for Aboriginal people have mirrored their visions for the Australian nation and national identity. In the 1960s white Australians began to ‘cautiously endorse the weaving of an Aboriginal theme into the national fabric.’

‘Our Aborigines’ and their diverse cultures and heritage increasingly became a source of national pride, but ‘Aboriginality’ was still expected to serve the interests of the nation and its need for heritage and a unique identity. When missionaries equated Aboriginal languages with authentic Aboriginality, they likewise essentialised Aboriginal identities in a way that served the colonising culture. That is, missionaries created a vision of authentic Aboriginality which, they believed, would aid evangelical conversion and recreate Aboriginal people in their own image.

The missionary language ideology of the mother tongue as the ‘heart language’ was by no means universal. Anindilyakwa speakers had their own views of language. Language is vital to Anindilyakwa identities, though not in the ways the missionaries imagined were universal. Aboriginal people do not necessarily identify with the language spoken in childhood, which English speakers call the ‘mother tongue.’ Rather, one’s language is inherited through the father. It

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137 Ibid, 163.


139 Ibid, 119.


is the father tongue. The father language gives one the authority to travel in ancestral lands because language and country are spiritually linked.\(^\text{142}\) The father language might not be the language one speaks most fluently nor the only language one is identified with (monolingualism is not the norm). The mother language is also important, as is the language of one’s mother’s mother’s clan. Hence, Wubuy is also important for many Anindilyakwa speakers. Since language relationships reflect kinship relationships, language is a way of relating to kin, of showing respect and acknowledging their country. Moreover, the European vision of language and nation does not correspond well to Anindilyakwa speakers’ lives on Groote Eylandt. On Groote Eylandt, clan identity is more important than language identity. Groote Eylandters understand themselves in terms of song lines from which they derive clan groups, extended families, connected through various relationships, rather than a single Anindilyakwa nation or language group as Europeans might.\(^\text{143}\) The European notion of the mother tongue underpinning national and cultural identity is foreign.

Most significantly, for Anindilyakwa speakers, ‘important’ language is a means of concealing deep meanings, of speaking about things which only ‘wise men’ will perceive. The missionaries thought that using ‘ordinary’ Anindilyakwa would communicate deep spiritual truths to the heart. But for Anindilyakwa speakers, ‘important Anindilyakwa words’ are ‘different’, only to be understood by those who know the meaning. Language, for Anindilyakwa speakers as in many Aboriginal languages, is a means not for broadcasting spiritual knowledge, but concealing it.\(^\text{144}\) Gula Lalara emphasised the way his language operated – through diversity and secrecy – when Stokes recorded his speech, paradoxically attempting to make it clear for linguistic analysis:

\begin{align*}
\text{Agina ayagwa waga arungurungawa laywa} & \quad \text{That speech wise men use is different} \\
\text{Wurrpaguruma laywa what meaning} & \quad \text{For those who know the meaning.} \\
\text{agiyadagina} & \quad \text{145}
\end{align*}

\(^\text{142}\) Evans, Dying Words, 8.
\(^\text{143}\) Turner, Return to Eden, 55; Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 12 December, 2012.
\(^\text{144}\) See Ian Keen, Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion (Clarendon Press, 1994), 275.
\(^\text{145}\) Discourse analysis of text ‘Mixed Marriages’ told by Gula and relating to AIATSIS Archive Tape 3372b-no. 4, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 5, Folder 46.
To the missionaries' great frustration, many Anindilyakwa speakers were ambivalent about the use of their language in church. From the very beginnings of the new approaches to language, missionaries struggled to enthuse Anindilyakwa church leaders to abandon English in church activities.\(^{146}\) The chaplain wished that Anindilyakwa men would 'take responsibility for giving the message in Anindilyaugwa' instead of being pushed by him.\(^{147}\) When he suggested more use of Anindilyakwa at Morning Prayer services, 'there was almost a growl that it should be kept just as it was.'\(^{148}\) In 1970 Stokes found that Anindilyakwa speakers were reluctant to remove English from church; 'English... cannot be replaced without a struggle.'\(^{149}\) When, later that year, Anindilyakwa church leaders voted on the issue of language for church, no one voted for exclusively Anindilyakwa; all wanted both languages.

This was not simply a difficult transition period. The reluctance to abandon English in church continued for decades; as late as 1987 Stokes was still struggling to convince Anindilyakwa speakers to cast English off. 'The English habit in church,' as she called it, was 'hard to overcome.'\(^{150}\) Anindilyakwa churchgoers themselves did not always see the need to make church more 'aboriginal' or 'meaningful' as missionaries did.

According to Stokes, the Anindilyakwa preference for English was due to a speakers' desire to accommodate non-Anindilyakwa speakers. They 'want English speakers' but don't realise 'they don't understand the English themselves.'\(^{151}\) Stokes had long suspected that Anindilyakwa speakers preferred to 'use English which we all understand.'\(^{152}\) Fast examined a similar ongoing disagreement between missionaries and indigenous people in Burkina Faso. Africans preferred to use a lingua franca to accommodate the largest number of people.\(^{153}\) Perhaps Anindilyakwa speakers also were reluctant to alienate missionaries in the church, preferring it to be a site of collaboration across cultures. On the other hand, for some, there was a desire to keep their

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147 Ben Moore, 'For Information, Thanksgiving and Prayer,' February, 1966, NTAS NTRS 1101 Box 258, Mission Reports and Station Council Minutes Umbakumba.
151 Judith Stokes to J.B. Montgomerie, 4 May, 1960, ML MSS 6020/203 Miss Stokes.
language separate from the church and Christianity and maintain autonomy in Anindilyakwa-language matters without meddling missionaries. As Nanggaringa explained in a recording made by Judith Stokes, there should be no mixing of languages.

When these white missionaries ask us that today
when we speak today,
when we tell other Aborigines about our Father in Heaven
some of us Aborigines speak we mix English and our language.
The old women and old men don’t understand those words of ours
But if we only speak our language they’ll understand.
Those white people when you and I speak in our Änindilyaugwa they want just Änindilyaugwa us to speak just Änindilyaugwa.
But if you speak English, just speak English.
But these white people of ours today want us to speak to other Aborigines in our language.
But we will speak in our Änindilyaugwa
Not mix English and Änindilyaugwa
That is bad.54

54 "Use of language' told by Nanggaringa Tape a6.2, 'AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 1, folder 1a.
Speaking in his own language, Nanggaringa asserted that the missionaries were diluting his language. When missionaries insisted Aboriginal people use Anindilyakwa to speak about missionary religion ('our Father in Heaven'), Anindilyakwa became mixed with the missionaries' language so the old people could not understand. 'We will speak our Anindilyakwa,' he concluded, using the separation of language to assert Andilyakwa authority on religious matters.

Other missionaries blamed Anindilyakwa speakers' failure to embrace their language at church on Anindilyakwa conservatism.\textsuperscript{155} The chaplain, David Woodbridge, reported with some frustration in 1970:

\begin{quote}
The strong preference was shown for English. This shows the conservatism of these people. (i.e. the Prayer Book was in 1662 English when we first received it ... and that is how it should stay!!!).\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

In his oral history, Woodbridge explained his belief that the reluctance to alter the service was due to Aboriginal conservatism, originating in oral traditions.

\begin{quote}
[Aboriginal people] respected the Gospel, the Bible as it was taught by the missionaries. That was it. Move away from it and you were in trouble. Maybe it wasn't all that thought out, they just knew, 'this is it, these people brought the Bible to us, so this is what we have. If it's not there, it can't be right.' ... At one stage I tried to introduce a simple English service to Roper. It was just Morning Prayer in a simple, simple English, not Kriol. And [Elizabeth] wouldn't have it. 'This is not the service the missionaries brought us.' 1662 is what they brought! And she wouldn't have a bar of it ... They are an oral society, all their stories, they come that way. So don't change it, even if it is archaic English and you don't speak English anyway.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

Missionary Perce Leske also remembered a similar incident when asking Gumbuli Wurramarba about his choice of Prayer Book.

\textsuperscript{155} 'Summary of Replies to Questionnaire to Chaplains,' 3 August, 1961, CMS SA Box 19.
\textsuperscript{157} David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
I asked [Gumbuli] ‘which book do you use, do you use the new Prayer Book.’ He said, ‘you can use that, but we use the proper book’, the old one. Anything that they’d been introduced to from the beginning, that was always right because in Aboriginal society being an oral tradition, everything had to be word perfect and nothing could be changed.\textsuperscript{158}

It seems missionaries were unaware of the irony of labelling ‘conservative’ Aboriginal people who had, in the space of a generation or two, integrated a new religion into their lives and were now asserting how they would practise it. The average tenure of a missionary was only four years so they could be forgiven for overlooking the considerable innovations and changes made by Anindilyakwa people over the previous thirty years. Blaming Aboriginal oral cultures for Anindilyakwa speakers’ unwillingness to give up the old Prayer Book reflects a missionary misunderstanding of oral tradition. Anindilyakwa oral tradition does not involve memorising songs word for word, passing them down through the ages, as if it were simply a poor substitute for writing or reading from a hymnbook. Instead, there is considerable scope for flexibility and innovation on the part of singers to introduce their own flavour to songs.\textsuperscript{159}

Likewise, the view in Aboriginal cultures that the world has an underlying stability creates opportunities for accommodation and innovation through finding continuities. As John Rudder explains, in Yolngu cultures, where change is observed it is ‘considered in terms of transformation of the outward expression of an unchanging identity.’\textsuperscript{160} Rudder found the presupposition of changelessness underpinned Yolngu responses to change.\textsuperscript{161} Austin-Broos found that Western Arrernte people used a strategy of finding continuities to manage changes brought by their engagement with Lutheran missionaries. The Western Arrernte ‘employed an indigenous poetics to connect the present with the past.’\textsuperscript{162} Through constructing the missionaries’ faith in terms of ‘law’, the Western Arrernte found commonality between the two social orders and an underlying continuity which permitted innovation.\textsuperscript{163} Turner found that on Groote Eylandt there had been

\textsuperscript{158} Perce Leske, oral history interview with author, 10 December 2011.
\textsuperscript{159} Turner, \textit{Genesis Regained}, 43.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, vi.
\textsuperscript{162} Austin-Broos, \textit{Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past}, 21–22.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 264.
considerable changes in Aboriginal thought and activity since the arrival of the missionaries. Nonetheless, he found that Anindilyakwa systems for negotiating change remained. For example, where many people at Angurugu had accepted belief in the Bible, they did not do so on the same grounds as missionaries (divine inspiration) but on the grounds of the sanctity of the past. As Turner explained, ‘what the old White men in the Bible seemed just as credible to certain people as what the old Aboriginal men had to say.’ Innovation was guided by an underlying changelessness; in this case the authority of the ‘old people’ long ago. Where missionaries saw conservatism, therefore, Anindilyakwa people were incorporating new things into their traditions through finding commonality and continuity. Anindilyakwa people’s insistence on the old Prayer Book and the continued use of archaic English, therefore, does not reflect an innate conservatism, but a desire to innovate and integrate new ideas through finding continuities with their own traditions.

For the missionaries, the Aboriginal unwillingness to adopt the new services thrust upon them by a later generation of missionaries was due to the essential ritualism and traditionalism of Aboriginal oral cultures. Oral traditions left Aboriginal people slow to change and innovate, they believed. The missionaries’ comments echo missionary comments found by Reinders about the Chinese. Chinese culture was ‘lacking imagination ... stagnant, mechanical and repetitive.’ The culture of repetition and ritual, according to missionaries, prevented Aboriginal people from seeing the value of change and using language they understood. Missionaries thought they were finally offering Aboriginal people the opportunity for a ‘vital’ and ‘authentic’ faith, one which reached Aboriginal hearts and minds through the ‘heart language.’ Ironically, as they understood it, the conservatism of Aboriginal cultures prevented Aboriginal people adopting the ‘authentic’ and ‘cultural’ worship now offered.

The centrality of indigenous people themselves in processes of translation casts doubt on the Comaroffs’ theory of ‘colonising consciousness.’ Missionaries could never be free of their dependence on native speakers in translation. Historian Joseph Errington, for example, found

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165 Ibid, 188.
167 Gilmour, *Grammars of Colonialism*, 60.
that the Spanish missionaries also used linguistics to ‘appropriate [indigenous] speech’ in order to ‘give a language back to its own speakers as the medium of Christian discourse.’\textsuperscript{68} They transformed the meanings in the languages and imbued them with their own symbolism to fit them for Christianity. They attempted to bring indigenous words ‘into closer alignment of God’s word’ and thus transform indigenous thought.\textsuperscript{69}

Yet the missionary linguistic project turned out to be more difficult than the monks had anticipated. Rather than displacing indigenous meanings, they created a kind of syncretism.\textsuperscript{70} SIL linguist, Kenneth Pike, who had taught Stokes and Farley at the SIL summer schools in the 1950s, explicitly recommended that missionary linguists attempt to imbue indigenous words with Christian concepts. Pike recommended that translators ‘choose the closest pagan equivalent’ to whichever word they would translate and ‘trust the Spirit to build it into a Christian concept.’\textsuperscript{71} Yet even Pike acknowledged the translator is powerless to effect the acceptance of the new meaning in the speech community. As much as the CMS would wish to portray Stokes as an ‘expert’, a ‘master’ in the language, she was dependent on informants or Aboriginal co-translators. Stokes’ early translation method was to explain Biblical concepts in English to Anindilyakwa translators who then gave the concept back to her in Anindilyakwa.\textsuperscript{72} Stokes herself was alarmed that CMS officials might consider her an expert. In 1966, on hearing a rumour she was to be based in Darwin, she responded angrily, ‘does CMS think incidentally that I already know Anindilyaugwa thoroughly? I may know more than anyone else – but I will need to do a lot of research!’\textsuperscript{73} As Rachel Gilmour found, colonial linguists were dependent on dialogue with native speakers who taught, advised and interpreted. Though linguists may have sought to ‘mitigate or manage’ the presence of native speakers, they could never erase their influence.\textsuperscript{74}

Anindilyakwa people themselves controlled whether translations would be acceptable. For example, the most difficult, but the most important translation for missionaries, was finding a word for the divine, for ‘God’, in a ‘heathen’ language. Missionaries took care not to ‘take the name

\textsuperscript{58} Errington, Linguistics in a Colonial World, 29.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 40.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Pike, With Heart and Mind, 129.
\textsuperscript{72} Julie Rudder, oral history interview with author, 7 January, 2012.
\textsuperscript{73} Judith Stokes to John Brook, 15 January, 1966, ML MSS 6040/203 Miss Stokes.
\textsuperscript{74} Gilmour, Grammars of Colonialism, 3.
of the Lord thy God in vain.’ In some missionary contexts, it was necessary to demonstrate that indigenous peoples had a concept of the divine as this would prove to their detractors that indigenous peoples were fully human and could be converted to Christianity. For example, the early Presbyterian missionary William Ridley defined the Kamilaroi word Baiame as ‘God,’ describing the figure as a ‘Maker’ or ‘Supreme Being.’ In Central Australia, missionary Carl Strehlow and anthropologist Baldwin Spencer clashed over the translation of the Western Arrernte word altyerre. Strehlow translated it ‘God’, Spencer called it ‘the dream times.’ Yet using existing words to describe the spiritual realm risked confusing Christian doctrine with pagan ideas. The Jesuits in sixteenth-century China used ‘Shangti’ for God. This identified the Christian God with the Confucian Most-High (Shangti), offending non-Christian Chinese intellectuals. Errington has argued sixteenth-century friars in Mexico chose the Nahuatl word tlacatecolot for el diablo, a choice which ‘produced a distinct new kind of discourse’, a kind of syncretism because tlacatecolot had existing meanings the missionaries never anticipated. Most missionaries, therefore, chose to import a loan-word, rather than risk the identification of the Christian god with a foreign deity. This also carried some risk. The unfortunate Jesuit missionaries in Japan in the sixteenth century unwittingly alliterated their Dios to the Japanese Daiusu, but Daiusu was heard as ‘Great Lie’ (dai usō) by the Japanese. Priests were met on the street by the Japanese youth who ridiculed them, shouting ‘Deos, Deos, Deos!’ When it came to God, rather than ‘colonise’ an Anindilyakwa word, the CMS introduced the word ‘god’ into Anindilyakwa. Stokes’ songs and Bible translations used the English word, ‘God.’ Perhaps this was due to the disdain the CMS had for Aboriginal ceremony; no word could be ‘redeemed’ and used to refer to God. Yet despite missionary debates over naming God, the decision was ultimately made by indigenous converts. Sanneh found that Zulu converts rejected both the

175 Nineteenth century anthropologists came to think of Baiami as an omniscient, sky dwelling god. This understanding was rebutted by R.H.Mathews in 1907 who stated that Aboriginal people had no concept of an ‘All Father’ as such. Martin Thomas, The Many Worlds of R.H. Mathews: In Search of an Australian Anthropologist (Allen & Unwin, 2012), 236, 273.
178 Errington, Linguistics in a Colonial World, 40.
179 Kim, Strange Names of God, 1.
180 Ibid, 85.
Anglican missionaries' *uDio* (imported from Latin *Deus*) and the Methodists' *ujehova* and began using their own word, *uNkulunkulu*. Eventually, missionaries from all denominations were compelled to adopt the Zulu word, even though it meant revising all their translations.¹⁸⁰

Likewise, the CMS's choice of 'god' was overturned by Anindilyakwa speakers themselves. Sometime in the 1970s, Anindilyakwa speakers began referring to God as *Neningikarrawara* which means 'Him belonging to above.'¹⁸¹ 'Above' was where missionaries located heaven. But the mythic figure, Nambirrirrma, also came from above, coming fown on from a cloud on the rain to Bickerton Island where he established the marriage laws for the people of the island. Some people suggested he came from God. Perhaps the name 'belonging to above' was chosen due to an association of God with Nambirrirrma, the law-giver from above.¹⁸² God was now imagined geographically, in relation to the landscape and sky. In naming, Anindilyakwa speakers asserted themselves as able to name the divine in the own language. God became Anindilyakwa — exactly what the missionaries had hoped for — but this occurred despite the missionaries' own translation decisions. Anindilyakwa speakers found their own words for Christian beliefs and missionary linguists had to re-write their translations accordingly. In the following chapter I explore the ways translation produced unexpected reinterpretations of missionary teaching along Anindilyakwa lines and how it sheds light on what missionaries perceived as 'cuppa tea' Christianity.

Many missionaries in the 1960s were conflicted about what it meant to be Aboriginal. Aboriginal cultures could, to them, mean disingenuousness, insincerity, untrustworthiness. Aboriginal converts were likely mere 'cuppa tea Christians.' Throughout the 1960s, however, missionary conceptions of Aboriginal cultures developed as they became convinced that the 'heart language' was essential for authentic worship. Capturing the power of 'Aboriginality' through Aboriginal language was increasingly the key to true conversion. Missionaries therefore turned to linguistics to 'penetrate' the elusive Aboriginal minds and hearts and to know for sure if conversions were

¹⁸¹ Julie Waddy, 'How Does God fit in? Developing Translations of *Logos* and other words in John’s Gospel in Anindilyakwa,' unpublished manuscript.
genuine. Yet Anindilyakwa people managed the missionary enterprise to ‘penetrate their hearts’ by selectively engaging in missionary linguistic projects.

Although missionaries may have aimed at what could be called a ‘colonisation of consciousness’ through language, their dependence on Anindilyakwa cooperation made this impossible. If missionary linguistics was ‘a tool for invasion ... of the minds’, it was at best a blunt instrument at Angurugu.84 The missionary linguistic project on Groote Eylandt was fraught with difficulties and obstructions. Perhaps if the mission had produced more translated texts and taught more Anindilyakwa to read them they would have succeeded in implanting their evangelicalism in Groote Eylandt. But this project depended on substantial Anindilyakwa cooperation and enthusiasm for use of their language in the church that was not forthcoming.

Nonetheless, Anindilyakwa engagements with the missionary linguistic projects cannot be flattened out to simple resistance against missionary power. To presume this is to join with missionaries in assuming that any Anindilyakwa participation in English-speaking missionary Christianity was inevitably insincere (only ‘cuppa tea Christianity’) based on a similar essentialist vision of Aboriginality.85 Despite the expectations of today’s West that indigenous conversions were only ‘mimicry’ or ‘false consciousness,’ indigenous people have embraced missionaries’ Christianity in their own ways.86 On Groote Eylandt, the Anindilyakwa refusal to abandon English in the church suggests that for some Anindilyakwa speakers, Christian worship in English had become meaningful, albeit perhaps in different ways to missionaries’ own experiences. A translation was underway.

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84 Nabanita Sengupta, “British Imperialism and the Politics of Translation: Texts From, and from Beyond, the Empire,” Translation Today 2, no. 1 (2005): 182.
85 Pybus, “We Grew up This Place,” 30.
Music and language are twins. Like speech, music is ‘organised sound.’ It shares sentences, phrases and punctuation. It uses recurring symbols — tonality, cadence, chords — such that it comes close to communicating concepts. In the Western tradition, music and language have long been thought to share a profound connection. The Enlightenment philosopher and composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau mused that song and speech emerged together at the birth of human society.

The first discourses were the first songs; the periodic and measured recurrences of rhythm, the melodious inflections of accents cause poetry and music to be born along with language; or rather, all this was nothing but language itself in those happy climates and those happy times.

Song, like spoken language, is ephemeral. Until the arrival of mechanised recording, it existed only for the moment in performance as sound in time. Unlike words or notes on a page, songs are events. Unlike other forms of writing which can fulfil their purpose in print, songs notated in books exist to be realised in oral form, to be vocalised. In song, literacy is the servant of orality.

Singing is also an embodied practice, an experience. The experiential aspect of songs, their evanescence and their ability to evoke mood and memory makes them powerful influencers of thought and identity. Songs create formative experiences that instil beliefs and values and identities. As Victor Zuckerkandl observed, songs presuppose and create relationships of affinity.

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People do not gather together to speak, since the spoken word presupposes the 'other', that is, the person to whom speech is addressed. The sung word, however, quickly becomes an expression of togetherness and a natural expression of a group. Historian Kristin Dutcher Mann, therefore, called music 'a language with potent communicative powers.' Like language, music can transmit history and culture, communicate within and between groups and reinforce social identities. Many cultures attribute power – both spiritual and social – to song. In Aboriginal cultures this is especially so.

The power of music to forge identities begs the questions of whether or how indigenous people maintained their identities in the face of influential missionary musical traditions. As Jean and John Comarroff explain, missionaries fostered hymn singing in the hope that 'sung creeds would imprint themselves on reluctant hearts.' For the Comaroffs, song was an 'indirect' means of reaching their target; through constant repetition, Christian songs would become 'imperceptibly written on the minds of the people.' Mann examined music as an instrument for evangelism in colonial New Spain and argued that music fulfilled many functions of the mission, far beyond simply attracting indigenous people and teaching doctrine. The repetition of songs helped establish social control over the indigenous population. Although music was intended as an instrument of control, she argues that a 'rich, syncretic musical culture' evolved from selectively borrowed instruments and melodies and movements, even among those who ultimately rejected the mission and its faith.

In Australia, scholars have found that, on encountering missionaries, Aboriginal people made Christian music their own, transforming it in order to assert Aboriginal identities. For example, globalised forms of Christian worship have become a new avenue to express Yolngu relationship

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9 Ibid, 13.
14 Ibid, 3.
to country and ritual senses of identity. At Ernabella, Christian hymns became an expression of connection to country and of an Ernabella Christian Aboriginal identity. Likewise, Christian hymns learned in mission times at Hope Vale have become central to the formation of Christian Aboriginal identities in the face of the loss of traditional knowledge. Aboriginal people formed 'gumleaf bands' and toured across New South Wales and Victoria in the inter-war period. The 'gumleaf bands' together with Aboriginal choirs played hymns and mission tunes, but brought their own interpretations to the genre. As Ngarrindjeri woman Leila Rankine explained, her people accepted mission hymns 'as part of [their] cultural heritage.'

While the role of Christian songs for asserting Aboriginal Christian and mission identities is well established, the other ways in which Aboriginal people engaged with mission music are not well understood. If songs established and reasserted Aboriginal identities, did they also deny others? What about the identities of those who did not embrace the church or the missionaries' Christianity; what did the songs mean to them? When the Catholic mission at Port Keats (now Wadeye) was established in 1935, Aboriginal people modified their ceremonial singing traditions to promote social cohesion in the new mission context. How, then, did the encounter with the mission and its songs on Groote Eylandt shape other Aboriginal songs, those outside the church and missionary Christianity? Was singing a site of resistance in the face of missionary attempts to control, or was it a space for adaption, accommodation and even exchange?

In this chapter, I turn to the language and translation of song in the mission encounter. Music provided an opportunity to encounter the other, creating a space of shared experience for the
Angurugu community, despite its cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. In the 1960s, missionaries' songs were translated in Anindilyakwa at an increasingly rapid pace. Some Anindilyakwa people even embraced the missionary song culture to the point of becoming hymn-writers themselves. But Anindilyakwa people also upheld their own ritual identities in song and used song to assert their independence from missionaries. Although missionaries attempted to 'aboriginalise' hymns in the 1960s and early 1970s, Anindilyakwa people resisted these moves. At the same time, however, Anindilyakwa people were engaging with missionary teaching and incorporating new themes into their own singing traditions. I find that the mission's musical cultures together with the translation of languages, created opportunities for Anindilyakwa people to find connections between missionaries traditions and their own. Through exploring the songs of the mission, I demonstrate that Anindilyakwa people engaged with the missionaries' traditions in complex, diverse and unexpected ways.

When Europeans arrived on Groote Eylandt, they noticed the music. In 1921, anthropologist Norman Tindale witnessed the 'usual nightly performance' of the yiraka (didjeridu). Tindale claimed the camp could not sleep without the sound of the yiraka, which continued unceasing through the night. Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr remembered as a child listening to, 'didjeridu, clapping sticks, singing in the night. Old men used to sing all night.' In her visits in the early 1960s, musicologist Alice Moyle was impressed by the diversity of music she heard in Angurugu. There were Christian choruses from the camp service, the 'strumming of triads on a cheap guitar' and even Indonesian pop picked up on a short-wave transistor radio. Indigenous Anindilyakwa music, however, dominated camp life. The sound of men singing and the accompanying didjeridu continued through the night into the early hours of the morning.

Anindilyakwa people sing for pleasure, they sing to their children, they sing to teach and learn, and they sing for ceremony. Songs are central to Aboriginal cultures. Musicologist Catherine Ellis called music 'the main intellectual medium through which Aboriginal people conceptualise their

23 Tindale, Natives of Groote Eylandt and of the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, 68.
24 Ibid, 92.
25 Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
Nancy Lalara explained; ‘nothing can match the power of the Songs for Ceremonial people.’ As Anindilyakwa people insisted, to understand Anindilyakwa culture, one must first understand the place of songs.

Each clan has its own songs (emeba), though from an Anindilyakwa perspective it would probably be more accurate to say that it is the songs that have the clans. These songs are sung for entertainment through the night, but they also have deep spiritual significance. The emeba are songs sung by the creative beings as they travelled over the landscape, imbuing the land with form and meaning, and leaving something of themselves behind. What they left in the land eventually established the spiritual identities of the people who ‘incarnated’ these places. Aboriginal songs recount the activities of their creative beings: hawk, stingray, shovel-nose shark, parrot. People belong to the land from which their ‘song line’ emanates; that is, the place where the being began its journey. By referring to the creative beings and places they visited, the songs assert clan affiliation and territory. Songs are so important to clan identity that, to find out what clan a person belongs to, one could ask, in Anindilyakwa, ‘what is your song (emeba)?’ Song lines, not clans, are also the primary way of determining relationships between people. To understand how the various families are interrelated one must ask not who has married whom, or who lives where, but who sings together in ceremony. Songs connect land and family and are intimately linked to all areas and practices of life.

When somebody dies, the emeba are sung. For Anindilyakwa people, when the body dies, the spirit returns to what Turner called the ‘other side’ after travelling pathways over the landscape. The songs sung during mortuary rituals carry the spirit of the deceased on a journey through his or her country, following the paths of creative beings and describing their activities in the landscape.

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\(^{28}\) Catherine J. Ellis, *Aboriginal Music, Education for Living: Cross-Cultural Experiences from South Australia* (University of Queensland Press, 1985), 84.

\(^{29}\) N.D. Lalara and Burgoyne, “Alyangmandukuna Alawudawurra,” 43.


\(^{31}\) Worsley, *Knowledges*, 118.

\(^{32}\) Turner, *Genesis Regained*, 52.


\(^{34}\) Waddy, *Classification of Plants & Animals*, 1228.

\(^{35}\) Turner, *Return to Eden*, 68.


as they travel.\textsuperscript{38} The spirit of the deceased will encounter various mythic beings on the journey. Through singing, the songmen accompany the spirit. They travel through important places, tracing the geography around the island, naming the places in the songs as they follow the songlines of creative beings.\textsuperscript{39} Beginning at the place where the body was buried (or, in pre-European times, the platform on which the body was placed), the spirit goes on to a special 'Big Name' place on the coast in his or her country. Then, the mourners sing the spirit out into the ocean, swimming through the water to Amburrgba (North-East Island) and then to Wuragwuga, which Turner calls a 'kind of gateway' to Braulgwa (also called Deludula in Anindilyakwa), somewhere under the sea beyond North East Island.\textsuperscript{40} The songs are forms of amawurrena: a deep spiritual power or spirituality, which allows the singers to 'carry' a place around them as they sing.\textsuperscript{41} Though amawurrena is inside all created things, it can only be truly grasped while singing.\textsuperscript{42} This was the word missionaries used to refer to the Holy Spirit.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 47.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 33.
\textsuperscript{41} Turner, \textit{Return to Eden}, 236.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 171.
Figure 30 'Men in funeral dance for Quartpot, 1968'

Source: Dulcie Levitt Slides, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.

Figure 31 'Men in funeral dance for Quartpot'

Source: Dulcie Levitt Slides, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
Songs are not composed or invented as westerners would understand the compositional process. Anindilyakwa music is a manifestation of the original songs of creation which are re-enacted in performance.\textsuperscript{45} Singers ‘find’ the songs, ‘discover’ them, pick them up and follow them.\textsuperscript{44} Ethnomusicologist Sally Treloyn explains that in Northern Kimberly song, ‘creation in the ancestral past is inseparable from creativity in the present’ because when songs are created, they are both guided by and create meaning around ancestral acts.\textsuperscript{45} Some Aboriginal peoples of North Australia receive songs through esoteric experiences with spirits or from spirits (‘ghosts’) in dreams, such that the voice of the spirit gives power to the song.\textsuperscript{46} Turner explains that Anindilyakwa singers ‘dream up’ tunes of their own, take elements from a father or grandfather’s tune and ‘twist it in’ to make a new creation song, so the song is not new but reimagined and rediscovered.\textsuperscript{47} Stokes recorded Gula Lalara’s Anindilyakwa description of how an \textit{emeba} singer will find the words by ‘following’ the songlines in his mind. He stressed that it was not as easy as she might think.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Nara emeba ena ng-angkarrauma nungkawa-wa. Kumebinama ningkakina akweyekayema, mena emikirra nara angkarruma ngalabakiya-ba. Ningkakina k-angmakwulalama, wulkwa k-engkirrajama mibina-langwiya mamurukwa, ebina-langwiya angalya kilikaja-mulangwiya, ebina-langwiya angalya kilawurradina-mulangwiya, ebina-manja angalya kalyungkwena-murrumanja ... Ene-ka eyukuiya warka kirri-yaminama-na? Meme-ka mangma nungkawa-
\end{quote}

These \textit{emeba} don’t come running to you! You have to sing the \textit{akweyekema} [tune], because the words don’t come by themselves. You’ll have to sit thinking about nothing else except the track where it comes from, which country you’ll be passing through and how far you have to go ... You think it’s easy, don’t you? Your head will ache when you try to work it all out.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Turner, \textit{Genesis Regained}, 43.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Turner, \textit{Return to Eden}, 236.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Garde, “The Language of Kun-Horrk in Western Arnhem Land,” 86; Allan Marett, “Ghostly Voices: Some Observations on Song-Creation, Ceremony and Being in NW Australia,” \textit{Oceania} 71, no. 1 (2000): 18; Marett et al., \textit{For the Sake of a Song}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Turner, \textit{Genesis Regained}, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Gula Lalara recorded by Judith Stokes ‘Clan song discourse (emeba-langwa),’ 8 September, 1992, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 10, Folder 4a.
\end{itemize}
Since the tunes follow the tracks of creative beings, the _emeba_ are not open to anyone to sing and understand. Only those connected to the song line of the creative beings and initiated into secret knowledge had a right to sing these songs. Restrictions on singing must be carefully observed. Aboriginal songs are owned. They are owned by individuals who 'found' or composed them and they are also owned by clan groups (or, more correctly, the _emeba_ own the clans). As Gula explained:


_The akwulyungkwa emeba [mortuary songs] aren't for fooling around with ..._ When I sang this type of singing, for my part I was scared, I can tell you. I might have sung the ones belonging to the Warnindilyakwa clan. I might have sung the ones belonging to the Wurrarrabba, or the Warnungwamakajirrkba or the Wurraramara clan.

_But other Anindilyakwa songs are also enjoyable, sometimes even joking. For example, in 1964, Moyle recorded Barrenggwa singing his father's song about a drunken sailor from the time when Makassans still visited the island._

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40 Tamsin Donaldson, Translating Oral Literature: Aboriginal Song Texts (Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History, 1979), 75; Marett et al., For the Sake of a Song, 25.

59 Gula Lalara 'Clan song discourse,' 8 September, 1992, AIATSIS MS 3518.
Manjirruwa malya
Ningembungembunumba ningembungembunuma
ningembungembunumba
Nilyangburrukwuna ...
Nirribiyejungwa
Ningembungenbenumba
Ningembena angwurra
Ningembungembunumba
Ningembena juba
Ningembungembunumba
Numurndakbaja
Ningembungembunumba
Nengkarrkilyilya
Ningembungembunumba
Nikikiurruwanja
Ningembungembunumba
Nandya nabanda
Ningembungembunumba
Namburra Bumara.

He swam to the open sea in the East wind
He went on swimming
His turban fell over his head ... He couldn't see clearly through the water
He was still swimming
He was swimming carrying the soap
He was smelling of soap
He was smelling of soap
He was still smelling of soap
The Makassan man was looking around
He sat down at Bumara.51

Aboriginal people have learned each others' songs for centuries. Some Groote Eylandt ceremonial songs are not indigenous but were brought to the island by mainland clans.52 The Blaur song cycle, for example, comes from deep in the mainland and was passed to Groote Eylandt via the Nunggubuyu and Bickerton Island people.53 It could even be argued that these mainlanders were a type of 'missionary' as they came to share their spiritual ceremonies with Anindilyakwa speakers.54

51 'Makassar Man (nenungumakaja),' AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 10, Folder 4a. See also, Macknight, The Voyage to Marege', 91.
52 Moyle, "Bara and Mamariga Songs on Groote Eylandt," 21.
53 Turner, Tradition and Transformation, 94.
The Makassans also brought their songs, introducing an Islamic flavour to Arnhem Land music. The surveyor, George Goyder, became aware of the transmission of songs across the Northern Territory, when setting up camp in Port Darwin for the first time in 1869, to his amazement, the Larrakia people sang, in English, 'John Brown's Body' (first performed in 1861). The song had journeyed around the world. Larrakia people had learned it from Woolna people who had picked it up from white settlers from the Adelaide River. In 1952, anthropologist Peter Worsley found that Anindilyakwa people had created their own adaptation of 'John Brown's Body', singing about various groups who visited their island. It went, 'Wanamalja, Wurabaianda, Djabani, Malei', meaning 'Anindilyakwa, Europeans, Japanese, Malay.' Anindilyakwa people had a well-established tradition of learning, adapting and incorporating new songs into their repertoire and continued to do so with the establishment of the mission.

The missionaries were singers too. Apart from singing at Sunday services and the weekday morning services, they also gathered for evening sessions exclusively for singing. In the early 1950s, missionaries met in the church every weeknight for choruses. In 1955, at a staff meeting, they opted to reduce the singing to allow more time for prayer meetings. But they still sang on at least two nights a week.

For evangelicals, their 'Word' dwelt with them in their songs. They sang to celebrate, to teach, to comfort, to build solidarity and to praise their god. Christianity, from its beginnings, has been a singing faith. According to historian David Hempton, the most distinctive characteristic of the first evangelical revival was its transmission by means of hymns. The renowned evangelical hymnwriter, John Wesley, explained that his Collection of Hymns contained 'all the most important truths of our most holy religion.' Many of these continued to be sung in the twentieth century,
including by the CMS missionaries. According to Judith Raftery, hymns, rather than sermons or Bible studies, have had the greatest theological influence on most Christians.\footnote{Raftery, \textit{Singing the Faith}, 52.} For this reason, evangelicals (including the CMS missionaries in North Australia) took the selection of hymnbooks very seriously, debating the strengths and weakness of various collections.\footnote{D.W.B Robinson & N.S. Pollard, ‘The Anglican Hymn Book,’ \textit{Australian Church Record}, 23 September, 1965, 2; ‘Staff Meeting Minutes,’ 8 December, 1955, ML MSS 6040/7, Box 2, Groote Eylandt General 1953-1963.}

The experience of hymn singing is also a means of transmitting community experience, values and history from one generation to another. Hymn singers form an imagined community, connected with other singers of the same song in and across time and space. Hymns provide a way for individuals to express their faith as a community and to express belonging.\footnote{Clark, “Songs My Mother Taught Me: Hymns as Transmitters of Faith,” 100.} The missionaries sang the same hymns from the same books as Anglicans in England and around the globe.\footnote{Fletcher, “Anglicanism and Nationalism in Australia, 1901–1962,” 217–8.}

Hymns were transmitted from earlier generations and so an evangelical and Anglican identity was passed down through songs.\footnote{Clark, “Songs My Mother Taught Me: Hymns as Transmitters of Faith,” 99.} The missionaries learned their hymns in childhood and cherished them for the memories they evoked.\footnote{Raftery, \textit{Singing the Faith}, 12.} Stokes even attributed her decision to become a missionary and her ability to persevere at Angurugu to a chorus she learned as a teenager.\footnote{Clark, “Songs My Mother Taught Me: Hymns as Transmitters of Faith,” 103.} The old hymns evoke the past and generations of earlier singers, bringing them into the present and creating the sense of a timeless community.\footnote{Judith Stokes ‘Times have changed’ \textit{Checkpoint}, August 1989.}

From the first arrival of the missionaries in the 1920s, interactions with Anindilyakwa people were easiest through song. The ‘shared language’ of singing presented an opportunity for the mission community; songs created a space where missionaries and Anindilyakwa people could share experiences, despite differences of languages and cultures. Missionaries and Anindilyakwa people heard each other’s songs and listened with some curiosity. There were many similarities between the missionaries’ songs and Anindilyakwa songs: the belief in song as an instrument of spiritual power; the use of song to express identity down through the generations. Missionaries’ songs were a welcome addition to Anindilyakwa musical life bringing shared joy and entertainment. Music
created a context where Anindilyakwa people and missionaries could relate as friends. When the mission acquired a piano in 1966, Lois Reid wrote how it enriched Angurugu's social life as missionaries and Anindilyakwa people entertained one another with their musical talents. One played hymns, another jazz, another scales, Myingarrawa was apparently learning to play 'Do-Re-Mi' from *The Sound of Music* on the piano, to missionaries' delight.71

Many Anindilyakwa people embraced hymn singing in English. They began holding their own hymn singing sessions in the village in the evenings and asked if they could use the church building for this purpose in 1959. The missionaries were overjoyed that their musical culture had caught on.72 One missionary commented on 'their great love of song', 'accuracy of note' and 'great ability to memorise both words and tunes.'73 The children liked the Sunday school songs and sang them around the mission for fun.74 Anthropologist, Fiona Magowan, points out the dissonance between other missionary methods of teaching – sermons and scriptures with an emphasis on doctrine – and the emotionally intense Aboriginal forms of teaching through song and dance.75 Whereas preaching at Aboriginal people may have been culturally foreign, the singing of hymns went some way to bridge this cultural gulf in pedagogy.

Yet significant differences between Aboriginal and Western evangelical singing cultures make it unlikely that missionaries' hymns would resonate with Aboriginal people on a deep level. For example, evangelical song was almost identical in each re-singing. Singing was a repetition of a prior event, singing, word for word, just as they believed their sacred text was copied and transmitted, unchanging through the ages. The unchanging tune and words through the use of hymnbooks meant the whole congregation could sing in unison as one. Anindilyakwa song, however, is characterised by improvisation and flexibility, demonstrating the skill of the songman and tailoring the song to the circumstances of that particular singing. Every performance was a new manifestation of the song, bringing new features to light. In *emeba* word order and word form are not fixed.76 Insertion and deletion of material is common. In fact, Arnhem Land songs are

71 Lois Reid to Mackay, 10 April, 1966, CMS SA Box 42, Lois Reid 66-70.
74 Janet Farnell, oral history interview with author, 20 May, 2012.
constructed in a way to encourage personal innovation, so long as the 'flavour' of the theme remains present.77 In Anindilyakwa songs, the relationship between words and melody is not fixed. The words can change from one performance to the next, but the song is still considered 'the same.'78

Furthermore, in evangelical song melody is subordinate to lyrics. This reflects a theological commitment to the power of the meaningful word over the meaningless note.79 The Word is paramount. Evangelicals believed that, long ago, the universe was spoken into form: 'In the beginning was the word.'80 Wesley, therefore, urged hymn singers to sing the exact words, to sing heartily and spiritually, but also modestly so as not to be 'carried away' by the sound.81 ‘Complicated music,' he said, might 'corrupt' its singers who could be caught up in the sound.82 The melody must not distract from the message. In Anindilyakwa song, however, the melodic contour of the song traces the pathways of the creative beings. Anindilyakwa people understood the land as sung into form as the creative beings travelled. Melody is supreme because of its connectedness to the landscape. The words serve as vehicles for the melody so must sound right on the melody and conform to the requirements of melody.83 For this reason, when singing emeba, it is permitted to insert or remove syllables from Anindilyakwa words or even to change the vowels of words, obscuring the meaning, but retaining the tune.

Likewise, whereas the spiritual power of evangelical song was in its ability to convey a message – 'Yes Jesus loves me!' was a spiritual truth even an infant could grasp – the power of Anindilyakwa song was in its secret deeper meaning. Aboriginal songs use special forms of language. In the Northern Kimberly, songs can be sung 'half way;' that is, blending words from various languages or pronouncing words differently and in ways connect with the language of the spiritual world.84

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77 Ibid, 47.
78 Moyle, "Bara and Mamariga Songs on Groote Eylandt," 20.
79 Turner, Genesis Regained, 47.
80 John 1:1, King James Version.
81 Hempton, Methodism, 70-1.
82 Mack, Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment, 42.
83 Turner, Genesis Regained, 47.
84 Treloyn, "Songs That Pull," 43, 58.
Songs of the Daly Region of the Northern Territory are sung in the language of the dead, a grammatically complex older language which differs from everyday speech.  

The Anindilyakwa emeba use special language and have obscure, ambiguous meanings. As mentioned above, the words can be altered to fit the needs of the melody. Listeners are not expected to understand every word.  

Emeba rarely mention the name of the creative being concerned. The mystery is deliberate. Obscurity is a technique to separate listeners according to their understanding and to control the dissemination of secret and powerful knowledge.  

As Turner explains, 'what separates the men from the boys, the women from the girls and the men from women is knowing what Song is really being sung.'  

Songmen test new initiates to see if they really understand. The ability to mask the meaning of the songs of his country from the old men and women in other lands, and even from those of his own, is a mark of an accomplished songman. There is no expectation on the part of listeners that they will understand the meaning of songs or that songs should be in a language they know.  

Music also confers status because traditional knowledge is encoded in song. Exclusion from knowledge of song meanings is traditionally along gender lines. On Groote Eylandt, traditionally only the men sing and dance. Evangelical song, on the other hand, claimed universality; they could be sung and understood by anyone anywhere.  

Yet these very differences between Aboriginal songs and Western singing traditions may also have contributed to the welcome given to missionary music. From an Aboriginal perspective, it may be possible to sing Christian songs without necessarily applying the same meanings as the missionaries expected, or even understanding the words. As Anindilyakwa people were used to singing in languages which are not always understood, language did not prevent missionaries' songs from quickly becoming popular, even when sung in English. Perhaps the songs were a way

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86 Maret et al., For the Sake of a Song, 25, 65.  
88 Turner, Genesis Regained, 52.  
89 Keen, Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion, 21.  
90 Turner, Genesis Regained, 52.  
91 Ibid.  
92 Donaldson, Translating Oral Literature, 75.  
93 Stubington and Moyle, Singing the Land, 25.  
of embracing modernity and the new; of incorporating new things into their cultures without necessarily ascribing to Christian beliefs. Like Anindilyakwa emeba, Christian songs taught spiritual truths. Unlike emeba, however, these songs were open to everyone, even little children. At Angurugu, women were more involved in the church and more eager to sing than the men. Wilma Taylor remembered that 'there was always more women than men involved ... They've [sic] the ones that have got the faith.'

According to Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, who at the time of her interview was the Anglican minister in Angurugu, 'there's a lot of woman in the church' but the men, 'they've got the ceremony and they've got that sort of thing.' Church and its songs proved particularly attractive to women, but men had ceremony and its songs. At some missions, the openness of Christian knowledge to women and children led some men to consider that Christianity may not be as powerful as ancestral law.

To many women and children at Angurugu, however, it held great appeal; they too could sing.

For some missionaries, it was not sufficient that songs were sung and enjoyed. From her arrival in 1952, Judith Stokes was exasperated by the prevalence of poorly understood English songs. She used the Anindilyakwa love of singing to further her case for linguistic research in the 1960s. She believed it important to demonstrate that, unlike the emeba, Christian songs should be comprehensible to all. The mass appeal of Christian songs was, to her, a major concern. 'There is a danger', she wrote in 1962, 'that they do not understand all they sing.' In my own oral histories, I noticed how songs had altered. The Sunday School favourite, 'Bringing in the sheaves,' was for Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, 'Bringing in the sheep' (the 'v' and 's' sounds were particularly hard for speakers of Aboriginal languages to pronounce). Stokes noted how readily songs spread. She realised Aboriginal people were circulating Christian songs, but was alarmed that the songs would lose their evangelical content if missionaries did not intervene.

I remember trying to get the words of a new chorus they had picked up from the boys, who had picked it up from the boatmen, who had learned it at Roper River. Their version didn't seem to make much sense and I tried to work it out, eventually arriving

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94 Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
95 Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
96 Magowan, Melodies of Mourning, 164.
97 Judith Stokes, 'To Testify' Open Door, October 1962, 10.
98 Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
at what I thought it must be. Unfortunately – and understandably – the children were quite content to sing it whether it made sense or not.99

Christian choruses, she feared, would become like another ‘tribal song’, which most Anindilyakwa people could not understand. Stokes believed that through translation missionaries could control their content and harness the existing cultures of song transmission to effect conversions. Thus, the ‘simple teaching’ of translated hymns and choruses would ‘reach everyone from the old people to the little children.’100

Stokes began with Christmas carols, expanding the Anindilyakwa repertoire every year. In 1956 she translated two Christmas songs into Anindilyakwa.101 In 1958 the children sang a number of Stokes’ hymns and choruses in Anindilyakwa.102 By 1959, Stokes had translated a whole nativity play for the Christmas service.103 Stokes’ co-translator, Danabana, translated hymns on her own, completing ‘When I survey the wondrous Cross’ in Anindilyakwa while Stokes was on furlough. By 1962 the mission had a substantial and growing collection of Christian hymns and choruses translated into Anindilyakwa.104 By 1966, the missionaries were selling hymnbooks in Anindilyakwa in Angurugu and Umbakumba for 15 cents.105

Missionaries saw the translated songs as a great success. According to a number of missionaries, translated songs paved the way for the CMS’s eventual support of linguistic work in the late 1960s. Earl Hughes explained to me that when Anindilyakwa and Nunggubuyu people began ‘singing with gusto’, previously sceptical missionaries were convinced of the evangelistic potential of linguistic work.106 Singing from hymnbooks wove literacy into the oral practice of singing, creating an incentive to read while upholding oral expressions and ways of learning familiar to Anindilyakwa people. According to the Angurugu chaplain David Woodbridge, translated songs

100 Judith Stokes, ‘To Testify,’ 10.
106 Earl Hughes, oral history interview with author, 22 October 2011.
were the leading cause of interest in the vernacular literacy. More than that, they were the best way to promote vernacular literacy because of the incentive of being able to read the hymnbook.\footnote{David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.}

Yet Hughes noted in the early 1970s that 'very few Aborigines are really interested in their own language as far as reading it or having things printed in it are concerned – except for their Hymn & Chorus book.'\footnote{Earl Hughes to Stanley Giltrap, 27 September, 1971, ML MSS 6040/126, Mr & Mrs Earl J Hughes. See also Earl Hughes to Judith Stokes, 3 November, 1973, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 2.}

As Isabel Hofmeyr found in colonial South Africa, indigenous people 'customised' their literacy requirements. Some, she found, 'simply wanted to learn the new oral forms of hymns and prayers' whereas others wanted to learn the entire catechism. What did not occur, she argues, is a demolition of the existing oral culture.\footnote{Hofmeyr, "Jonah and the Swallowing Monster," 640.}

At Angurugu (and Numbulwar) it seems that Aboriginal people found the written form of their language most useful in the context of church songs, where orality and literacy were intertwined in the hymnbook. In other areas of life, however, they preferred to use their language in oral form.

Stokes learned her method for translating hymns from the Milingimbi mission linguist, Beulah Lowe, who had also been trained by SIL. The process was to read a line of the song and discuss its meaning with an Anindilyakwa co-translator, brainstorming related words and concepts in Anindilyakwa. Then she took the Anindilyakwa words and, experimenting with various combinations, fitted them back to the European tune.\footnote{J. Stokes, handwritten notes on "Hymn Writing in Aboriginal Languages," Marion M. Cowan, Marjorie E. Davis. Summer Institute of Linguistics. Glendale 5, California, 1959, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Files (held at Groote Eylandt Linguistics, Angurugu).}

The simple melodies imposed limitations on the possible words that could be used, so that the resulting translated song could have vastly different meanings to the original in English. A very simple chorus ‘This is the Day’, remained much the same in Anindilyakwa to in English (the English itself is a translation from the original psalm in Hebrew), though the syllables might be difficult to fit to the tune:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Anindilyakwa</th>
<th>Back Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the day</td>
<td>Mema mamawurra</td>
<td>This day/sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the Lord has made</td>
<td>Ngumanekburrakama God</td>
<td>Made by God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will rejoice</td>
<td>Narriyekiyerra,</td>
<td>We will rejoice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And be glad in it.  

**Akuwerikityelyingma jungwuna.**  
And be glad in it.  

Others had only subtle differences. ‘Yes Jesus Loves Me’ translated into Anindilyakwa now asserted that ‘Jesus loves you’ and the closing line, ‘the Bible tells me so’ became, in Anindilyakwa ‘the book tells me’, or even ‘the paper tells me’ since ‘jurra’ (‘dyurra’) can refer to any paper objects.

Yes, Jesus loves me  
**Yawa, Jesus nilyålyimina nayuwa,**  
Yes, Jesus loves me,

Yes, Jesus loves me,  
**Yawa, Jesus nilyålyimina nunguwa,**  
Yes, Jesus loves you,

Yes, Jesus loves me,  
**Yawa, Jesus nilyålyimina nayuwa,**  
Yes Jesus loves me,

The Bible tells me so.  
**Dyurra gumagina.**  
The Book/Paper tells me.  

The new Anindilyakwa version placed emphasis on the authority of the written word over oral word, rather than emphasising the authority of the Bible in particular as does the English. Moreover, literacy was directed at reading the Bible, since once again, the ‘Book’ symbolised the Bible.

For more complex hymns, the meaning in Anindilyakwa changed dramatically. For example, Danabana and Stokes’ translation of Isaac Watt’s 1701 hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*:

*When I survey the wondrous cross*  
**Agina mandy' äga namabalina mandya**  
On that cross,

*On which the Prince of Glory died,*  
**Nidywnunnumerra Nagina.**  
He died,

*My richest gain I count but loss*  
**Nagurrelaywa Bungawa nidyuwuna**  
Our Lord died

*And pour contempt on all my pride ...*  
**Awurrariya laywa ...**  
Because of sin ...

‘Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all,’ became in Anindilyakwa simply ‘I shall go to Him and ask Him to take away my sins.’ ‘Did e’er such love and sorrow meet?’ was reduced to ‘nailed on the uplifted cross.’ The pious language and emotive imagery were lost.

Anindilyakwa *emeba* are full of subtly, allusion and metaphor. It is hard to imagine the

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112 ‘*Anindilyaugwa Hymns with English translation,*’ AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 1, Folder 6.

113 ‘*Ämäba & English,*’ AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 1, Folder 6.
Anindilyakwa songmen developing an appreciation for evangelical hymns when stripped back to such simple concepts in translation. Generally, missionaries had shown little concern for the aesthetics of their translated hymns. In China, for example, missionaries admitted their translated songs ‘sound very poor’ but this was of little consequence because ‘it is not the words nor the form, but the heart that is required.’ Conveying the meaning was more important than aesthetic considerations, or considerations of the sophisticated thought of indigenous singers. For Stokes, it was difficult enough to fit long Anindilyakwa words to simple European hymn melodies, let alone retain metaphor, subtlety or imagery.

In some places, translated hymns have been used by missionaries to attack indigenous beliefs. Muriel Reigersberg argues, for example, that at the Cape Bedford Lutheran mission the ‘translation’ of German hymns into Gugu Yimithirr discredited and ridiculed traditional ceremony. Though Stokes did not intend to ridicule, her translations spoke directly more to missionary concerns than the original hymn. In particular, they addressed the missionary concern that Anindilyakwa people followed evil spirits. For example, the song ‘Tell me the Story of Jesus’ (Anindilyakwa by Aringari Wurramara and Stokes) changed dramatically in translation:

Fasting alone in the desert
Tell of the days that are past,
How for our sins He was tempted,
Yet was triumphant at last.
Tell of the years of His labour,
Tell of the sorrow He bore;
He was despised and afflicted,
Homeless, rejected and poor.

Naguwawura nambilya manja,
Satan nänü-guderrgama.
Agäna nara gen-äŋirräna,
Näninga nambilyemerra.
Nu-warduwardanuma ṣawaw
Nuŋwñingba laŋwa warga,
Agña na-wara ḁnua
Ānelarjwa wagemamalya.

While he was alone
Satan tempted Him.
But he did not listen,
He did not sin.
He kept on doing
His Father’s work,
But His own people
Rejected Him.

The Anindilyakwa version more explicitly mentioned temptations from spirits (rather than general temptation as in the original) and inserted Satan. It stressed the need for obedience to

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16 Reigersberg, “Choral Singing and the Construction of Australian Aboriginal Identities.”
17 ‘Āmāba & English,’ AIATSIS MS 3518; ‘Anindilyaugwa Hymns with English translation,’ AIATSIS MS 3518.
Christian teaching over loyalty to kin ('his own people rejected him'). Partly this was a product of removing the passive voice of the English original.\(^8\) Strangely, it omitted references to place – the desert – which may have been of more interest to Aboriginal singers. It also omitted references to Jesus’ poverty and homelessness; perhaps these were not traits missionaries wished Anindilyakwa people to imitate.

The chorus ‘\(Änän' aŋalya ànîŋaba'\) ('This good world') appears simple in its English form, merely listing all the things God made.

\[
\begin{align*}
Änän' aŋalya ànîŋaba & \quad \text{God made this good world.} \\
Nagina God neŋjaŋberaga, & \quad \text{He made it long, long ago.} \\
Aragbawiya neŋjaŋberaga, Aragbawiya. & \end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Äŋubina iya aŋalya, & \quad \text{Heaven and earth,} \\
Magada iya augwụŋwa, Ayụụbụmeda laŋwa & \quad \text{Sea and fresh water,} \\
ànîŋaba, Ne-ŋjaŋberagama. & \quad \text{He made everything good.} \\
Wurruwaɗa iya wurrajija, & \quad \text{Dogs, birds,} \\
Yinụŋwuŋwaŋba merriya, & \quad \text{Bush animals,} \\
Denunjulaŋwa iya augwalya Ayugwaya. & \quad \text{Dugong and little fish.} \\
Yimawura iya mamawura, & \quad \text{Moon, sun and stars,} \\
Dagelyigarrịja, & \quad \text{Who made them?} \\
Aŋaberra narre-ŋjaŋberagama? & \quad \text{You know – it was God ...}^{19} \\
Neŋgānīŋma, God ... &
\end{align*}
\]

For Anindilyakwa speakers, however, the song has implications for clan identity. Fresh water (\(augwụŋwa\)) is connected to the Warningwangkwirrakba clan (the Wurramara family). Dogs

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\(^9\) ‘Anindilyakwa Hymns with English translation,’ AIATSIS MS 3518.
belong to the Warnindilyakwa and Warningwamakwila clans, as do the sun and stars. The dugong is Warningwadarrbilangwa, and fire Warningwawirraikba. All Groote Eylandt clans are implicated in this song since the moon, (yimawura) is called numirarrka (grandfather) by all. In emba singing, strict restrictions according to clan identities regulate who may sing about which beings, and only initiated men may sing. Now the whole church was singing openly about all these things, without any attempts to obscure direct references through metaphor or allusion. Stokes may not have foreseen these meanings when translating. On the other hand, perhaps she did understand and nonetheless sought to assert the supremacy of the Christian God over the Anindilyakwa spiritual world and clan relationships.

In 1960, Stokes reported a 'new and thrilling development': the composition of hymns and choruses in Anindilyakwa by Anindilyakwa speakers themselves. She told the story of the first Anindilyakwa hymn in 1961 in the CMS newspaper: 'Danabana announced that she had written a hymn ... She assured me that some of the long words weren't written the right way ... It was the first time I had seen a serious attempt to write in Anindilyaugwa.' By 1962 Stokes reported the 'growing collection of Anindilyakwa hymns'. According to Stokes, the fact that some of these songs were written by Danabana 'greatly increases their value.' For Stokes, Anindilyakwa people's composition of hymns was the highlight of her career. She called it a 'thrill when Aborigines started composing their own Christian songs.' Stokes hoped to encourage Aboriginal creativity. Nonetheless, that creativity would operate within the mission's Christian agenda; Stokes continued to check and edit songs to ensure their orthodox content.

Eventually Aboriginal women were writing what Stokes called 'streams of new songs' for the Angurugu church. The dominance of women in the early hymn writing movement is significant. As in other places, mission singing presented women with an opportunity to challenge the patriarchy in their own lives through singing in public. Moyle had tried in vain to coax

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120 Leeding, Groote Eylandt Genealogies, 369–380.
121 'Translation Work on Groote Eylandt,' CMS News August 1960, 2.
123 Judith Stokes, 'To Testify,' 9.
125 Judith Stokes, 'Times have changed,' Checkpoint, August 1989.
127 Mann, The Power of Song, 5.
Anindilyakwa women to sing for her, but they would not, not even one of their lullabies. But, in the first recorded song sung or composed by any Anindilyakwa woman, Danabana asserted her voice: ‘God hears us.’

Danabana’s song is beautifully crafted. The second half mirrors the first: ‘God ... loves us’/ ‘God hears us’; ‘Don’t forget him’/‘He does not forget us’; and finally a reference connecting people to place ‘He went back alive to heaven’/‘Ask Him to stay within you.’ Her song upheld the missionaries’ theological framework. Through song, Danabana herself became a missionary evangelist as her song implored others to ‘Ask God’ into their hearts. This evangelism through song harnessed existing Aboriginal traditions of orality and song exchange. Danabana also asserted herself and her people. Unlike government bureaucracies and missionary officials, ‘God hears us ...

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129 Ibid.
130 ‘Anindilyakwa Hymns with English translation,’ AIATSIS MS 3518.
he does not forget us.' It was an assertion of the equality of Anindilyakwa people. It was also an appeal that the white man's god would not overlook Aboriginal people. Furthermore, it functions as a subtle indictment of those who would not listen to her and her people, indicating that such behaviour was sub-Christian. Danabana used Christian song as a framework to assert Anindilyakwa identities in new ways.

Anindilyakwa people had their own distinct conception of hymn composition. Like emeba, their hymns were not 'invented' or 'created', but 'found' and 'discovered', sometimes in dreams. Christian songs were distinct to the emeba and not discovered in precisely the same way. Peter Gundu from Numbulwar explained to me in his oral history that 'they were making up their own songs not like ours, dream ways or our culture ways, not like that.' Nonetheless, the missionaries encountered difficulties as they took charge of the editing process, refining the songs, making them more suitable according to missionary expectations. Missionary Lance Tremlett recounted this in his oral history:

Some people when they wrote songs, they didn't like you touching them or changing them because they thought they're the words the Holy Spirit gave them. That was a problem with some of the songs in the earlier stages.

The word missionaries used to translate 'Holy Spirit' in Anindilyakwa was 'amawurrena'. That is the same word as the spirit (or spirituality) which is encountered when singing emeba, and which became incarnate as the man, Nambirrirmma, at Bickerton Island (somewhat like Christ). Emeba songs are understood to be forms of amawurrena, which are found and re-enacted afresh in singing. When Anindilyakwa Christians insisted that the Holy Spirit gave them their songs, not only did they use existing Anindilyakwa frameworks for song-writing (presuming that songs are 'found' rather than 'composed') but they also continued existing Anindilyakwa cosmology. Their spiritual songs continued to be understood as connected to amawurrena, known in English as 'the Holy Spirit.' Whereas the missionary presumed that Anindilyakwa Christians believed the Holy Spirit 'gave' them the words, it is possible that they understood their songs as not simply inspired

132 Peter Gundu, oral history interview with author, 5 June, 2013.
133 Lance Tremlett, oral history interview with author, 18 November, 2011.
134 Turner, Return to Eden, 224–226.
135 Ibid, 236.
by, but somehow a form of, the Holy Spirit/amawurrena — and therefore not open to correction. Anindilyakwa people innovated as they selectively incorporated aspects of the missionary tradition, while reforming and maintaining elements of their own traditions. Magowan argues that indigenous people across Australia have adapted and transformed their music in response to the colonial encounter, ‘strategically manoeuvring’ their performances to accommodate their own circumstances.¹⁵⁶ These Anindilyakwa hymns are hybrid responses to colonisation — Christian, while at the same time thoroughly Anindilyakwa and adapted to the circumstances of mission.

Despite the possibilities of translation and reinterpretation of cosmological concepts involved in the Anindilyakwa composition of Christian hymns, for many Anindilyakwa people, Christian songs could never match the emeba. Nancy Lalara (Gula’s eldest daughter) remembered her de-conversion from Christianity in the 1960s. For her, it was about songs. As she explained in 2009, she found no Christian substitute — not even hymns composed by her own sisters — for the emeba.

What I couldn’t understand, and it was a thought that was with me all the time, and remains with me all the time, nagging away, ‘why were my father’s and grandfather’s beliefs and songs Evil and theirs, not just good, but pure?’... I was already defined by my father’s Songs. I sang them in my head to put me to sleep at night; after I’d said my prayers. I tried to make the prayers mean something, but they weren’t really a part of me ... And when I needed real comfort I turned to my father’s Songs not the Bible.¹³⁷

Though Christian songs took on Anindilyakwa forms and meanings, they could never be confused with the emeba and, for some people, could never match the emeba in terms of personal significance.

Given the general success of Anindilyakwa-language hymns, missionaries began a campaign to make hymns still more ‘authentic’ and ‘Aboriginal’ by using Aboriginal instruments such as the yiraka (didjeridu) and alyingba (clap-sticks). In 1959, Arthur Capell recommended adapting ‘incidents of the Bible’ to ‘the corroboree type of aboriginal ceremonial ... an aboriginal “songman”

¹³⁷ N.D. Lalara and Burgoyne, “Alyangmandukuna Alawudawurra,” 43.
could work out a dance that to his mind would express the theme suggested by the missionary. He explained to CMS missionaries that 'corroboree was not wrong in principle' because 'the Christian Church has its "corroborees" also', calling daily services, Baptism and the Eucharist examples of 'Christian corroborees.' Hughes, therefore, first tried an 'experiment in using tapping-sticks for keeping time for the singing' in November 1959 at Numbulwar. Lowe argued that missionaries must 'present Christ in as meaningful a way as possible, in as Aboriginal a way as possible.' This meant considering the use of 'didjeridoo, clap sticks and Aboriginal tunes.' Stokes prayed in 1970, therefore, that her translated hymns would be replaced by 'indigenous hymns'.

Again in 1972 she prayed 'for the development of an indigenous hymnology' implying that hymns composed by Aboriginal people were not yet fully indigenous; they must also use traditional musical forms.

There was an element of control in attempts to 'aboriginalise' the church through music. As the CMS official Irene Jefferys wrote, 'Aboriginal people should develop their own form of worship in accordance with [their] own culture.' Still, she argued it would be 'better' if this were done under the CMS's 'cooperation and guidance.' She pointed to the situation in Africa where churches which 'sought to express themselves in a much more African way' went on to become completely independent. If the CMS itself were to guide moves to Aboriginalise the church services, it could maintain its influence over Aboriginal churches. Her attitude reflects an awareness of the possibility of 'vernacular Christianities', where translated texts and Christian practices took on new meanings in new cultural contexts. As the Comaroffs point out, missionaries co-opted aspects of indigenous cultures in order for their faith to remain 'meaningful' to new converts. This 'assault' had as its object to engage indigenous people 'in a web of symbolic and material transactions that would bind them ever more securely to the colonising culture.' By guiding and

139 Capell, "Interpreting Christianity to Australian Aborigines," 10.
137 Ibid, 11.
149 Beulah Lowe, 'The Development of Indigenous Leadership within the Church,' 197[?], NTAS NTRS 781, Box 127, Free to Decide and other Papers.
even by driving the Aboriginalisation of the church at Angurugu, the CMS could hope that Christianity would remain under its influence and never fully subject to reinterpretation along indigenous lines. The missionaries could thereby remain the authority on Christian practices and even establish themselves as authorities on Aboriginal cultures.

Some missionaries considered such a missionary-led ‘aboriginalisation’ of church problematic. Barry Butler, the chaplain at Ngukurr, believed missionaries lacked the cultural knowledge (but interestingly, not the authority) to make such innovations, as he commented in 1961:

> From time to time we have considered the possibility of incorporating genuine ‘aboriginal’ features into the service and in a church building ... Such a subject as ‘Christian corroborees’ has been discussed. The whole matter seems to me to pose many problems and to presuppose such a detailed accurate anthropological knowledge that it has been above our heads so to speak.¹⁴⁶

Butler saw that missionaries, in their ignorance, risked manufacturing a nonsensical ceremony. He was aware that there were many layers of meaning of symbolism in Aboriginal ceremony to which missionaries had no access. Worse, through creating ‘Christian corroborees’, missionaries might mistakenly endorse Aboriginal practices which, from a missionary perspective, were irreconcilable with Christianity.

But Aboriginal people did not conform to missionary expectations for their music. Aboriginal people set limits on how their traditions would be translated into Christianity. Chaplain David Woodbridge remembered the response to his suggestion of using dijeridu in church.

> On Groote Eylandt it was absolutely taboo ... They would say, ‘no this is a ceremonial instrument, we play this at corroboree, we don’t play it in God’s house, no, no, no, no.’ In my innocence once I thought, ‘it would be good if we had a didjeridu play in the church, perhaps we could make up some Christian songs to sing to it.’ So I went down to the guy who was really the chief didjeridu man, he was one of the really good players and obviously involved. So I said to him, ‘Lawrence, why don’t we,’ he was a Christian, or he said he was, ‘why don’t we compose some Christian songs so we can

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¹⁴⁶ 'Summary of Replies to Questionnaire to Chaplains,' 3 August, 1961, CMS SA Box 19, CMS Aborigines Commission.
sing them with didjeridu and clap-sticks?’ He looked at me aghast... He was very, very polite, but more or less nothing ever happened, because that’s not what you do.\textsuperscript{147} According to Butler in 1961, missionaries suggested introducing Aboriginal musical forms, ‘a didjeridoo in the service or tapping sticks,’ but these were rejected as ‘not proper’.\textsuperscript{148} Julie Rudder also reported that she found it difficult to find a Christian man who was prepared to play the didjeridu.\textsuperscript{149} Missionaries also suggested putting Christian words to traditional Aboriginal melodies. Butler had no success at Roper River in the 1960s.

The Aborigines here are very conservative. We have suggested that some of them try to put hymns to native tunes or that they make up hymns or choruses in what native languages are spoken but there has not been any response.\textsuperscript{150}

On Groote Eylandt in the early 1970s there were some instances of using Christian lyrics to traditional Anindilyakwa melodies. In the early 1970s, a Warnungwadarrbulangwa (Bara family) tune was given Christian lyrics, but since the Bara family continued to own the tune (only they could sing it), it was never appropriate for church.\textsuperscript{151} In 1987, Ross Wurrawilya, Millie Mamarika and Colleen Mamarika wrote the hymn ‘Jesus ni-yengbinuma nakina ayakwa’ to a traditional Mamarika tune.\textsuperscript{152} Still, the practice remained rare. Aboriginal engagement with Christian music, therefore, was different on Groote Eylandt to other places. At Ernabella, Anangu people performed Christian songs to their own existing melodies.\textsuperscript{153} In 1978, Warlpiri Christians performed an ‘Easter corroboree’ featuring traditional song series, dancing and designs.\textsuperscript{154} Similarly, Yolngu people incorporated didjeridu, clap sticks and traditional melodies into the church, creating a ‘special’ church didjeridu and even cementing a clap stick into the wall of the church at Galiwinku.\textsuperscript{155} Anindilyakwa people, it seems, were concerned to maintain Christianity and

\textsuperscript{147} David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
\textsuperscript{148} ‘Summary of replies to Questionnaire to Chaplains,’ 3 August 1961’, CMS SA.
\textsuperscript{149} Julie Rudder, oral history interview with author, 7 January, 2012.
\textsuperscript{150} ‘Summary of replies to Questionnaire to Chaplains,’ 3 August, 1961, CMS SA.
\textsuperscript{151} Gwen Tremlett, oral history interview with author, 18 November, 2011.
\textsuperscript{152} Julie Rudder personal communication.
\textsuperscript{153} Pybus, “We Grew up This Place,” 333; Breen, Our Place, Our Music, 19.
\textsuperscript{154} Breen, Our Place, Our Music, 18.
\textsuperscript{155} Rudder, “Yolnu [i.e. Yolngu] Cosmology,” 210–211.
ceremonial life as distinct from each other and did so through rejecting moves in the 1960s and 1970s to incorporate ceremonial instruments or melodies in the church.

Perhaps this was due to an internalisation of generations of missionaries' teaching that church and ceremony were opposed to one another, even in competition. In the 1950s, the missionaries had hoped their singing sessions would provide sufficient 'evening entertainment to distract [Aboriginal people's] attention from the camp life of corroborees etc.' To occupy children in the evenings, keeping them away from the camp, the mission staff took turns to run 'chorus singing' in the church from Monday to Thursday nights to teach new choruses and revise old hymns. As Nancy Lalara explained, she learned from missionaries that her father's and grandfathers' songs were 'evil', but missionaries' songs were 'pure'.

On the other hand, perhaps Anindilyakwa people actively preserved separate spheres for church and ceremony in order to maintain their own authority in ceremonial matters, without missionaries' meddling. As Magowan explains, in Arnhem Land ritual contexts, didjeridu accompaniments are 'inalienable expressions of ancestral identity'. The songs and rhythms cannot be made openly available since they 'were laid down in the ancestral past.'

Anindilyakwa actions can be understood in light of recent events at another Arnhem Land mission. Yolngu people at Elcho Island Mission faced similar pressures to Anindilyakwa people. In what came to be known as the 1957 Adjustment Movement, a number of leaders decided to publicly reveal some (not all) sacred ancestral objects (rangga) to missionaries, women and children alike, by displaying them in a 'memorial' outside the church. Furthermore, they placed a Christian cross atop of the central rangga. Anthropologist Ronald Berndt was first to document the events. He considered it an 'attempt to integrate the “traditional” Aboriginal world with the outside world.' The Yolgnu leaders, he said, were finding ways to place 'a positive value on

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156 'Evangelism: Ideal Method of Approach', Oenpelli, 3 September, 1940, ML MSS 6040/7, Box 2, General Mission Station Reports 1927-1943.
158 N.D. Lalara and Burgoyne, “Alyangmandukuna Alawudawurra,” 43.
traditional life’ as well as to take ‘advantage of what is offered by Europeans.’ The public display of the rangga was intended to unite all Yolngu together, to demonstrate that traditional religion must be understood differently and openly from now on and to assert the value of Yolngu traditions. Magowan described the Adjustment Movement as a ‘gift’ to the missionary superintendent and a ‘payment’ for European knowledge. Yolngu leaders were also ‘educating the missionaries about their religious belief system’ while showing their understanding of Christian beliefs. Howard Morphy understood it as an assertion of an exchange of ‘perceptions of value’ whereby Yolngu asked for acceptance of their culture in return for acceptance of certain European values. Finally, anthropologist Ian McIntosh, after new conversations with Yolngu leader David Burrumarra, concluded that the adjustment movement was intended as ‘a springboard for community revitalisation’ based on a fresh interpretation of the existing Yolngu Birrinydjji mythology. For Burrumarra, the Adjustment Movement marked the end of an older policy of separation and disharmony between Yolngu and Europeans. It was a statement of ‘reconciliatory intent.’

For some Yolngu, however, the adjustment was scandalous. Burrumarra and the others faced opposition from the beginning, and were prevented from bringing out more rangga. The women at Elcho Mission were terrified. Some fled to Milingimbi or to the mainland, spreading news of what had occurred across Arnhem Land. When they returned, they refused to look at the rangga. Berndt recorded the response of Yolngu at Yirrkala: ‘as soon as the marein (sacred objects) were shown the people went mad ... As soon as we heard this word, this new custom, all of us at Yirrkala were very worried – and we still are.’

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159 Ibid, 94.
160 Ibid, 66.
163 Magowan, Melodies of Mourning, 159.
165 Morphy, Now You Understand, 112.
167 Ibid, 158.
168 Berndt, An Adjustment Movement in Arnhem Land, 43.
Furthermore, missionaries did not seem to appreciate the gravity the revelation of the *rangga* as a reconciliatory action. The Methodist missionaries on Elcho Island were comparatively open to Yolngu cultures and yet interpreted the Adjustment Movement as a victory for Christianity through the demystification of the *rangga*. They called it an answer to prayer. Morphy concluded that the Yolngu leaders' actions were interpreted by missionaries (and even some other Yolngu) as desacrilisation of the *rangga*.

What, then, could Anindilyakwa people gain by opening up their *emeba* to be sung in the church? Perhaps Anindilyakwa people did not even hold out the hope that their missionaries might understand the significance of the *emeba* and so would not risk their displacement. On hearing of events at Elcho Island Mission, Anindilyakwa people likely resolved to manage the missionaries differently. Subsequently, their sacred instruments and melodies were not allowed to fall into missionary hands. Meanwhile, there were other new instruments such as guitars and keyboards which presented an opportunity to Anindilyakwa people for new musical expression and creativity while preserving the sanctity of the *yiraka* in its ritual context. Through maintaining distinctions of ceremony and church, Anindilyakwa people resisted what the Comaroffs call the 'web of symbolic and material transactions' which would bind them to the colonising culture.

The resistance to missionaries' attempts to bring the *emeba* and *yiraka* into the church sphere, however, did not mean that Anindilyakwa people were uninterested in innovation. On the contrary, they selectively translated elements of missionary teaching, weaving aspects of Christian belief into the *emeba*. The Biblical text, filtered through an English tradition, took on new meanings and implications when translated into Anindilyakwa and placed in the context of Groote Eylandt. Missionaries could never control the interpretation of their translated texts.

Anthropologist David Turner, for example, found the Mardayin ceremony was 'replete with Christian symbols, including a reference to "Old Testament Law" and is managed by "Bishops and

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171 McIntosh, "Personal Names and the Negotiation of Change," 143.
Priests." In particular, Christ's teaching on the 'narrow way' was reinterpreted in translation and incorporated into the *emeba*. In English, the verse reads:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.  

Inspired by this text, John Bunyan created his hero, Christian, in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) who found the Wicket Gate on his journey to the 'Celestial City'. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a seminal text of evangelicalism and used extensively in both home and foreign missions as a 'shadow' Bible through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Missionaries at Angurugu showed films based on *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the 1950s. The chaplain believed that since the story was based on a 'dream' it would be particularly resonant for Aboriginal people who believed in a 'Dreamtime'. The Christian mission organisation 'Gospel Recordings' supplied the CMS with texts for indigenous evangelists to translate and record. The messages were Biblically based, but also mediated through the evangelical tradition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In 1951, Nabilya recorded various texts from Gospel Recordings for Angurugu. Stokes later transcribed his recording and re-translated it back into English to uncover what he had preached.

The Two Ways


Men and women! Listen God is indeed true/honest. He lives in Heaven. Listen to his Word. God says there are two roads. One goes above, one descends.

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176 Turner, *Return to Eden*, 238. This was similar to the ways Aboriginal people had incorporated references to Allah, the Makassans' god, into their ceremonies in earlier years. Ian McIntosh et al., "Islam and Australia's Aborigines," *Aboriginal Religions in Australia: An Anthology Of Recent Writings*, 2005, 312–313.

177 Matthew 7:13-14, King James Version.


180 Kevin Hoffman 'Extracts from the Journal for May 1952,' NTAS NTRS 1098, Box 1, Groote Eylandt Mission Reports 1939-1954.


182 'Full set of Gospel Stories provided by Gospel Recordings in 1951,' AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 1, Folder 2a.

183 Gramophone Records Gospel Recordings, English,' AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 1, Folder 2a.
One is good, one is bad. One is Jesus’ road, the other is the devil’s road. Jesus’ road goes above, that is a good road. Those who go on this are happy. They have thrown away their sins – Jesus has thrown them away. The devil’s road goes below. Those who go on that road won’t go to Heaven. They will cry in the fire for ever.\footnote{\textsuperscript{15}}

The theme of the ‘two roads’ was common in other Anindilyakwa language texts. Stokes’ early Anindilyakwa prayers, for example, mention God’s ‘good road’.

\begin{verbatim}
Evening Prayer

Nuywänuywa abalgaya aŋubina mandya,
yirriyäŋbina nuŋguwawa mänä nenge-
lyäŋyämbina baba yirruwa. Nara alegaŋjuma
nuŋguwawa yirruwawa, emba yirredederra-
gina wurragina laŋwa. Nara alegaŋjuma
nuŋguwa gänbirra, agäna ambilya yirruwa
mandya arŋgababemerra. Awiyäbäna
yirrelüŋuwa andenda. Yirremunguardäna
arrawa. Yirrenuŋaŋbidyina nuŋgułuŋwa

Evening Prayer

Our father above heaven in
we talk to you because you
love because us. Don’t let come
evil spirit to us but protect us
harm from. Don’t go
you so, then but stay us
with all the time. Enter
to our heart. Cleanse us
within. Show us your
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{14} ‘Gramophone Records Gospel Recordings, Anindilyaugwa,’ AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 1, Folder 2a.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{15} ‘Gramophone Records Gospel Recordings, English,’ AIATSIS MS 3518.}
The repeated use of the ‘road’ metaphor in Anindilyakwa language missionary teaching spoke to Anindilyakwa understandings of the intersecting spiritual and geographical worlds. *Mamarugwa*, translated as ‘road’, is also the word for the ‘road’ the spirit travels across the landscape through its country after death. When anthropologists discussed beliefs about the afterlife with Anindilyakwa elders, they found that, for some, the message of the ‘two roads’ had taken root in Anindilyakwa cosmology. Yet this was not in ways missionaries might have expected but according to Anindilyakwa beliefs in the journeys of creative beings across the Groote Eylandt landscape. Peter Worsley’s 1954 thesis mentions that although the old people would go to Braulgwa after death, many believed that the young would go to heaven instead. When Turner visited Angurugu in 1969, he found songmen singing dead people’s spirits along a new *mamarugwa* (road), not to Braulgwa but to heaven. Turner spoke with a leading songman, Warnaya, who had been doing this since his brother’s death in the mid-1950s as well as Gula Lalara, who also led the innovation.

Warnaya explained that since the Bible taught that when people die their spirits go to ‘a place in the sky’ or to ‘a place called Hell’ but the ancestors taught that all people go to Braulgwa, he had concluded that the ancestors were unaware that there were two destinations. Moreover, since the ancestors had no knowledge of God or Jesus (inhabitants of heaven), Braulgwa must be the place the missionaries called ‘hell’. In the past, ‘the ancestors had taken the spirits there by mistake, to a bad place, because they did not know of the existence of this good place.’

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86 ‘Dunguiung Gwayinga,’ NTAS NTRS 1106, Box 1, Stokes Exercise Book.
place', instead of singing the spirit to Amburrgba (North-East Island), spirits must be sung up Yangdarrnga (Central Hill) and, from there, up into the sky. The songman explained:

When you sing the song, it's like closing your eyes and imagining you are going along through the places. First I take the dead person's spirit with me to Heaven. Then I and all the other spirits come back together into this world. When I get here I have to take all the spirits back again. I let them go as far as I want, then I come back myself.'91

Warnaya informed Turner that he had reached his conclusions based on a picture the missionaries had shown him.

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91 Ibid, 148.
Figure 32 The 2 Ways

This poster, or ones like it, were used at a number of Aboriginal missions to promote the benefits of conversion and display the frightening consequences of rejecting missionary teachings. The missionaries’ poster, though based loosely on the Biblical text, is strongly influenced by *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. It features the Wicket Gate, the evangelist pointing the way and the burdened pilgrim whose heavy load falls away upon reaching the cross: all images derived from Bunyan. It reflects a Christianity translated for English-speaking evangelicals. When placed in the Anindilyakwa context, however, the Biblical text, mediated through translated teachings in Anindilyakwa and the missionaries’ image of *The 2 Ways*, took on new meanings.

For Warnaya, the hill at the end of the ‘good road’ to heaven as seen in the poster was clearly Central Hill, Yandarrnga. On the ‘New Road’, instead of encountering mythical beings as on the old road, the dead person’s spirit would arrive at a large wooden cross before beginning the ascent. Although the ‘new road’ led a different way to a different destination, mortuary rituals associated with the ‘new road’ were otherwise the same as along the ‘old road’. Not all Anindilyakwa people welcomed the innovations made by songmen at Angurugu. The songmen at Umbakumba kept following the ‘old road’. Nangmenara, also a leading songman, told Turner ‘they make up a new road – they sing up Jandarrnga [Central Hill] to heaven – that’s not right’. Some songmen compromised by singing ‘two ways’, that is, singing a spirit to heaven when the leading Songman requested it and to Braulgwa when he did not. In his Anindilyakwa version of *The Two Ways*, Nabilya explained ‘Jesus nelegadyamerra änelaywa mandyaw mamarugwa nuygunwawa’ (‘Jesus goes on his road with you’). What did this mean? Did he Jesus accompany the spirit of the deceased along with the songman and ancestors on its journey? Turner attributed the belief in the ‘new road’ to a literal interpretation of the missionaries’ picture of ‘The 2 Ways.’ Yet I consider it a more complex engagement with the missionaries’ teaching and an example of the way Christianity in translation was, in Elbourne’s words, ‘out of control’.

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194 Ibid, 149.
Minoru Hokari found that for the Gurindji people, to ‘follow the right way’ had both a moral and spatial dimension.198 “The right way”, he explained, ‘includes a geographical Dreaming track as well as ethical behaviour.”95 It had to do with the songlines of creative beings and journeys across the landscape. The ‘right way’ was not an abstract concept of moral living but actually a way of travelling and being in country. For example, Anindilyakwa people will sing upon entering certain countries or visiting certain places to apologise for disturbing the spirit of the place.200 Morality and geography are intertwined.

When missionaries and Anindilyakwa people spoke of going God’s ‘good road’, Anindilyakwa people understood the ‘right way’ had both geographical and moral dimensions. Over the years, Angurugu’s mission Christianity had developed a spatial dimension. The mission was Christian space and, for some Anindilyakwa people, missionary Christianity was rooted in place, that is, in the physical surrounds of the mission. Christianity had made the Jewish hope of rest in the Promised Land a universal hope for all people in all places. As occurred in other mission contexts, Aboriginal people made this universal hope local and particular again.201 God’s country became a geographical reality on Groote Eylandt. In the early days of the mission the punishment for ‘misconduct’ was to be ‘sent off’ by the superintendent for a period of months.202 Those discovered ‘fighting’ were sent on ‘punishment walkabout.’203 In the 1960s the punishment for ‘abducting girls’ from the dormitory was also to be ‘exiled in punishment.’204 The mission’s punishment mirrored ancient Israel’s exile to Babylon, with Angurugu as the Promised Land. Jenny Green remembered the old men telling girls in the late 1960s, ‘if you want to play up, you go and live in Darwin. This is a mission, you behave yourself here!’ She told me that Anindilyakwa Christianity ‘was tied to the fact that you lived on a mission, you were a Christian, if you didn’t want to, you lived in a town and did whatever you want and then you came back.’205 Likewise, Yulgi Nunggumadjbarr saw Darwin as a source of sickness and wrongdoing, telling me, ‘they go to Darwin, they drink, they smoke, they

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198 Hokari, Gurindji Journey, 118.
199 Ibid, 120.
200 Turner, Return to Eden, 142.
201 McDonald, “Universalising the Particular?,” 51; Austin-Broos, Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past, 78.
202 16 October, 1946, NTAS NTRS 704, Box 1, Ang Journal September 1946-April 1948.
204 ‘Aborigines Committee Minutes,’ 4 June, 1962, NTAS NTRS 873, Box 16, Chaplain’s Conferences 1957-1962.
205 Jenny Green, oral history interview with author, 23 August, 2012.
do a lot of things and all that sickness came.' Darwin represented a ‘lawless’ space beyond the Christian mission environment. Occasionally, Anindilyakwa Christians would confess to the chaplain ‘things in Darwin,’ ‘wrong-doing while in Darwin,’ and be reconciled to the mission community when returning to Groote Eylandt. Whereas for the missionaries, place was neutral (their universalist Christianity held the same morality for all places), Anindilyakwa people had a keen sense of relationship with country and understood law to be embedded in geography, both land and sea. Thus the missionaries’ spatial punishment – exile – communicated for some Anindilyakwa people, a particular relationship to and right way of living in the mission space.

The translated message of the roads opened up new interpretative opportunities and new readings for Anindilyakwa people. Singing the spirits across their country, to Central Hill and up to heaven meant imbuing the landscape of Groote Eylandt with Christian meanings. The Christian heaven was mapped into the land by the Angurugu songmen, translating missionary Christianity in unexpected ways. Austin-Broos describes religious conversion not merely as a journey but as quest for habitus which involved ‘continual embedding in forms of social practice and belief.’ Conversion is more than ‘travel,’ it involves ‘an encultured being arriving at a particular place.’ For some Anindilyakwa people, this passage involved converting a geography into a landscape with Christian significances. The encultured journey entailed a reconceptualisation of the land itself.

At least one missionary (Stokes) was aware that songmen were singing people’s spirits up to heaven. When a Christian woman died in 1972, three male relatives, Bayima, Abadjura and Narragidjarra sang ‘Christian words for the customary music.’ Stokes recorded the event and the music.

They sang several different clan totem tunes, improvising words relating to her spirit’s journey to Heaven instead of to Berralgwa [Braulgwa], the traditional place of

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206 Yulg Nunggumadjbarr, oral history interview with author, 9 September, 2012.
208 Turner, Return to Eden, 128.
departed spirits. This singing cannot be repeated, but Bayima recorded it and although no Europeans were present at the time I was able to copy it, and later Narragadjarra went through the tape with me. From time to time I have talked to Bayima about using Aboriginal music for hymns, and this could be the opening we are hoping for.\textsuperscript{310}

It seems Stokes was not concerned that the singing might amount to syncretism. As an evangelical she could be expected to reject suggestions that people might enter heaven through songs, rather through faith alone. Perhaps she hoped singers merely sang about the journey to heaven rather than actually effecting it. Perhaps she saw the practice of singing spirits over the landscape to heaven as a step towards what would eventually become a more orthodox Christianity. In her concern to encourage an 'authentically' Anindilyakwa Christianity (underpinning her desire to see similar songs used in church), perhaps she did not consider how different such a Christianity was to her own or question whether it even was Christianity. On the other hand, perhaps Anindilyakwa Christianities had changed her own understandings of faith, leading her to understand the world in new ways.

Songs were both a central component of Anindilyakwa cosmology and culture and a prominent feature of missionaries' religious practice. The embodied practice of singing created opportunities to build shared meanings and experiences in the cross-cultural mission community. It could be said that music was the context where missionaries experienced their greatest success. Perhaps this has to do with the importance of song for Anindilyakwa people. Even then, Anindilyakwa people set limits on missionaries' musical projects; their emeba would not be 'colonised' for the church. Instead, the translation of songs became a means for Anindilyakwa people to appropriate and reinterpret missionary faith and ideas for themselves, to find new meanings and create Anindilyakwa Christianities. Missionaries' songs took on new and unexpected meanings when endowed with Anindilyakwa words, and Anindilyakwa people found that missionaries' words had resonances with their own songs and beliefs.

In light of these Anindilyakwa innovations, how should we view the ‘backsliding’ which so unsettled missionaries? For some, it was likely an assertion of their own culture in deliberate resistance to the missionary regime. For example, around the same time as Nandjiwarra Amagula reinvigorated ceremony and stopped attending church, he also spoke out publicly against missionaries.\textsuperscript{211} Perhaps some were only what missionaries would call ‘cuppa tea’ Christians. For others, however, their ‘backsliding’ may have been an attempt (possibly with increasing assertiveness and confidence) to reconcile new and existing spiritual teachings in a changing world in ways missionaries did not understand. For example, polygamy was not always a rejection of Christianity. In another example of Anindilyakwa people using to what they had learned from missionaries to reinvent missionary teaching, Turner found that those who practiced polygamy found support for their traditional system from the Bible; ‘King Solomon who was a man of God had many wives,’ one explained.\textsuperscript{212} These men appropriated the Bible for themselves, reading it in ways which affirmed Anindilyakwa marriage. As Sugirtharajah explained, colonised and coloniser alike have found way to produce a Bible in their own image.\textsuperscript{213} Moreover, as Murabuda Wurramarba explained, although missionaries dismissed his ceremony as ‘backsliding’, according to his interpretation of the faith, ceremony perfectly complimented the gospel.

They didn’t let us have the ceremony, missionary. ‘Don’t worship other god’, they say. But we got the strong law in our ceremony too ... But we learn from in the beginning when the missionary come. We just got a real foundation in life, strong. After that we bin go through the our culture [sic], our ceremony, is to come that way. And those two just work together, Missionary Law, gospel song or gospel story and those things.\textsuperscript{214}

Anindilyakwa people engaged with the missionary faith in complex and diverse ways, sometimes resisting it, but sometimes also reinterpreting it. Although missionaries called Anindilyakwa speakers ‘cuppa tea’ Christians, dismissing their Christian practice as inauthentic, Anindilyakwa people selectively embraced and translated Christianity into their own world in ways meaningful

\textsuperscript{211} ‘Outlook for Aborigines Debated: Respect is a Starting Point,’ \textit{Canberra Times}, 13 February, 1969.
\textsuperscript{212} Turner, \textit{Tradition and Transformation}, 189.
\textsuperscript{213} Sugirtharajah, \textit{The Bible and Empire}, 2.
\textsuperscript{214} Murabuda Wurmarba, oral history interview with author, 4 September, 2012.
to them. Anindilyakwa people used song to engage with and reimagine Christianity in their own ways, rather than in ways which missionaries might have encouraged. Missionaries, instead, found themselves compelled to accommodate Anindilyakwa preferences for Christian worship. Anindilyakwa people found translation permitted sweeping reinterpretations of the missionaries’ stories and traditions according to their existing intellectual and ceremonial traditions. This included incorporating their vision of Christian teaching into their own sacred songs, the *emeba*, as they saw fit. It could be said that many did convert, particularly when they imbued the landscape of Groote Eylandt with Christian meanings, connecting the island with a Christian heaven. Yet this conversion was not in ways missionaries expected or understood. Where the message was translated, they reinterpreted the missionaries’ gospel in unexpected ways, finding the road to heaven in their country and claiming the right to name God for themselves, in their own tongue.
Conclusions

God gave us this land. God gave us the power and the thought to move from the Tower of Babel to 297 languages on Australia's soil.

Gerry Blitner.¹

In 1951, Nabilya Lalara translated and recorded the biblical story of Babel in Anindilyakwa for the missionaries to play on their gramophone. In his version, there was no tower, no city. Instead of the tower reaching to heaven and a vain attempt to 'make us a name,' the great sin in Nabilya's telling was the decision to 'stay in one place' and 'talk one language.'² The sedentary, monolingual people of Nabilya's Babel story were losing the ability to listen.

Awilyabamerra ayaugwa wurragina They spoke one language. They
näyäŋbinemerra. Näyäma, 'Awilyabamerra ayalara
aragba agambilyada!' Adrruŋwana mandya
ägbelgurrariya nuwambilywa wurragina. God
dederrenda biya nänerrengga. “Awilyabamerra
ayaugwa näyäŋbinamerra, na?” niyäma “Nara
äŋiriganjuma nyuuwawa, nara
ayaugwärribiganjuma ayaugwa,” niyäma,
“Gederrendamerra niyäna gamendarrugu
warruguradyinamerra ayaugwa.” Aragba
aginamerrada wagamamalya näyäŋbäyina
They lived on a big plain. God
descended and saw. 'They're
talking one language, are they?' He
said, 'they won't listen to me, they
won't remember [my] word,' He
said. 'I shall go down and change
[their] words!' From that time
people spoke different languages.

They spread out in all directions.⁴

¹ Thomas, Martin. Gerald Blitner interviewed by Martin Thomas.
² Genesis 11, King James Version
³ Nabilia Lalara 'Creation to Christ,' 1951. AIATSIS MS 3518.
Though Nabilya told the story differently to the missionaries, his message of the importance of listening and understanding is deeply Biblical: ‘Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?’ asked Jesus in the New Testament.\(^3\) Although he told the missionaries’ story afresh, Nabilya had been listening.

At the same time, this rendition of the story also reflects more Aboriginal values. He depicts monolingualism as stubborn ignorance. Those who are mature, who really understand, will know many languages and will know the country. Perhaps in Nabilya’s Babel lies a critique of monolingual white Australia. Perhaps it was the English speakers who, long ago, were punished and made to ‘spread out in all directions.’ Perhaps this is why they had left England in the first place and scattered themselves all over Australia, even Groote Eylandt. They had spread out across the earth, restless, unable to listen, with no connection between their words and land.\(^6\) Do not become like them, he warned Anindilyakwa speakers. Keep listening, keep connected to your own country, or you will lose your words. Perhaps Nabilya also recognised this sentiment of the god of his story, ‘they won’t listen to me ... [so] I shall go down and change their words!’ The missionaries, like gods, had wielded the authority to exile people who did not listen to them and attempted to change their language. I wonder if the missionaries, on reading Nabilya’s message, empathised with God or the people in the story. I expect some saw themselves as God.

As occurred when Nabilya’s re-read Bable, Anindilyakwa people selectively embraced missionary teachings, to various degrees and in diverse ways, unintended by missionaries. The CMS principle was that missionaries could not ‘enter into or support’ ceremony, calling it ‘in direct opposition to

\(^3\) *Ibid.*

Original English: ‘They all spoke one language. They said let us make one big camp and stay at it. They camped on a big plain. God came down and saw them and said, “They are all speaking one language. They will become proud in their own eyes and they will not listen to me. They will not keep my law. I will go down and make their languages different.” So after that the people spoke different languages and they were scattered abroad.’ *Gospel Stories provided by Gospel Recordings*, MS 3518, Box 1, Folder 2a.

\(^5\) Mark 8:3, King James Version.

the Gospel [original emphasis]’ even into the 1970s. Yet Anindilyakwa Christians continued to recognise the validity of ceremony and came to their own conclusions about the relationship between ceremony and church. When Michael Gumbuli Wurramara was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1973, the ordination service had strong ceremonial overtones. In the words of missionary chaplain, David Woodbridge, ‘the men from Groote ... danced [Gumbuli] from the ceremony ground to the church ... They released him from that somehow ... so that he would not have to be involved anymore.’ This event was not a denial of ceremony’s spiritual validity as missionaries might hope. Rather, through being ‘danced’ to the church Gumbuli acknowledged the reality of his ceremony as a spiritual force and identifier even though he felt he could no longer participate.

Meanwhile, other Anindilyakwa people asserted that ceremony could be understood in a Christian framework; ‘might be God did give us these ceremonies a long time ago’ suggested one Aboriginal Christian to the missionaries in 1968. As Murabuda Wurrumarrba proposed in his oral history, perhaps deep down, ceremony and the Bible are the same.

And this ceremony, we just been go through with that ceremony. We don’t want to go on swear. We don’t want to go be speaking to another woman. You know, all that. It’s the rules. You know. Things been going on beside the missionary, you know ... They explain us ... ‘Thou shalt not kill’ and ‘Thou shalt not swear’, the missionary they say ... Exactly the same our ceremony too. Same law. And we learn, we learn both way.”

Whereas missionaries had taught that ceremony was ‘in direct opposition to the Gospel,’ Murabuda found connections and continuities which missionaries did not anticipate. He interpreted the Ten Commandments as affirming the continuing validity of Anindilyakwa ceremony. This Anindilyakwa Christianity was reimagined according to Anindilyakwa values and in continuity with an Anindilyakwa past.

8 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
9 Barry Butler to Jim Taylor, 29 March, 1968, NTAS NTRS 863, Box 16, General Church Letters.
10 Murabuda Wurrumarrba, oral history interview with author, 4 September, 2012.
By the late 1960s, Anindilyakwa people increasingly asserted the value of their traditional spiritual practices even to missionaries. They insisted that missionaries 'study and understand Aboriginal laws and cultures.' They also urged missionaries to recognise their ceremony as legitimate. A number of Christian converts requested that missionaries attend ceremony, even though they no longer participated themselves, as Lance Tremlett remembered in his oral history:

The Mardayin ceremony was on Groote Eylandt and one of the Aboriginal lay readers said to me, 'oh, you should go Lance.' And I said, well I'll go if you can come too and you can explain everything to me. 'Oh no,' he said, 'I can't go because I'm a Christian.' And I said 'Why can I go? Because I'm a Christian.' And he said, 'you will never understand ... so I can't go, but you can go.'

Woodbridge also remembered how Christian converts wanted him to recognise the value of ceremony.

There was a lot of angst on the part of Aboriginal Christians, men, who were wanting to sort this out in their own head. 'This isn't wrong, these ceremonies that we conduct.' And so they invited all the chaplains ... to attend a very sacred ceremony. We didn't know what to do, so we went. And they showed us all this stuff. Goodness me! I'm not supposed to tell you about this, it's a men's thing. But there were objects, huge images that they resurrected from the bush, there was all sorts of stuff going on and there was dancing. It was a law corroboree and it went on for a long time, several days. And we, I suppose, had the privilege of being there as spectators. They didn't expect us to agree with it or to have anything to do with it, but they just wanted us to see that what they were doing wasn't evil. It was pagan, but it wasn't evil.

By inviting missionaries, even converts asserted the continuing validity and significance of ceremony. Nabanita Sengupta, found that Indians supported the translation of their classic texts into English in order to 'earn approbation' from their colonisers but also to 'dislodge the Western

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13 'Minutes of Rose River Conference,' 9 September, 1969, NTAS NTRS 871, Box 2, Town Council Minutes 1967-1971
14 Lance Tremlett, oral history interview with author, 18 November, 2011.
15 David Woodbridge, oral history interview with author, 17 September, 2011.
notion of its superiority.” When Yolnu displayed their sacred objects to missionaries in 1957, they asserted that Europeans were not the only ones with valuable cultural knowledge; their own culture was rich in value. Similarly, the Anindilyakwa converts sought to win the missionaries’ respect for their ceremonies – proving they were not ‘evil’ – and to undercut the missionaries’ assumption that Christianity was the only religion with such depth of meaning and symbolism. They had some success; after what he had seen Woodbridge could not call ceremony ‘evil’. To my surprise, the old men at Angurugu also showed me a DVD of a Mardayin ceremony held a couple of years earlier. ‘Are you sure you want me to see this?’ ‘Yawa [yes].’ He wanted me to know too.

Howard Morphy described a ‘mutual conversion’ which occurred when Methodist missionaries encountered Yolngu people. Morphy found that the Methodist missionaries’ early openness to religious dialogue on encountering Yolngu beliefs produced a ‘syncretic dialogue’ of religious accommodation and ‘integration’ of Yolngu and Christian religious forms. While it would be going too far to call the missionary response to Anindilyakwa ceremony and Christianity a ‘conversion’, as Morphy does for Yolngu missions, there was degree of reciprocity at Angurugu. Missionaries’ growing linguistic awareness also contributed to this unexpected ‘mutual conversion.’ Missionaries’ translation programmes necessitated what Errington calls the ‘double paradox of translation and conversion.’ On the one hand, missionaries hoped to determine the acceptable and unacceptable aspects of pagan lives and cultures. On the other hand, to acquire the language they needed to engage fully with the lives and cultures associated with those languages. Missionaries’ commitment to acquiring fluency in vernacular languages compelled them to submit, to some extent, to indigenous ways of viewing the world. Through their acquisition of cultural knowledge, they could find themselves accommodating or even accepting practises they had once sought to unravel. Stokes’ linguistic work brought her into a deeper

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16 Sengupta, “British Imperialism and the Politics of Translation,” 188.
17 Morphy, Now You Understand, 114.
18 Morphy, “Mutual Conversion?,” 41.
19 Ibid, 47.
20 Errington, Linguistics in a Colonial World, 96.
knowledge of Anindilyakwa song and ceremony than she ever intended. The more missionaries undertook to learn Anindilyakwa, the more they perceived the riches and complexities of the language and the more the aggressive rhetoric of 'penetrating' or 'reaching' into the hearts softened and was abandoned. Whereas some missionaries had desired to 'colonise consciousness' as the Comaroffs put it, the reality of learning the language and the depths of Anindilyakwa spirituality that became evident as a consequence caused some missionaries to realise that such a project was impossible. Still, at the end of Stokes' career in 1989 she remained suspicious of Anindilyakwa ceremony. Her work, she explained, required 'full time participation in the community ... apart from involvement in secret ceremonial life' 23 There was dialogue between traditions, though missionaries never placed Anindilyakwa traditions on an equal footing to their own.

Instead of 'penetrating Anindilyakwa hearts' in order to change them, some missionaries themselves were changed. Immersion in Anindilyakwa language had unintended consequences for missionaries. Stokes' faith was imbued with new meanings on her engagement with Anindilyakwa people and language. For example, in 1960 Stokes re-worked Capell's original translation of the Lord's Prayer. Anindilyakwa traditions and meanings cause her to reconsider the prayer she had always known. She thought Capel's translation of 'give us today our daily bread' might 'sound a bit greedy' in Anindilyakwa. It read 'give me every day our food' whereas Anindilyakwa speakers would expect the food to be shared. In Stokes' translation 'hallowed be thy name' became 'help us to speak well of your name', giving the prayer a new emphasis on speaking honour, not shame, and on the importance of names in showing respect. 'Lead us not into temptation' became 'make us strong against sin (or evil), and guard us or protect us from sin (or evil)'. 24 Her version of the prayer had Anindilyakwa meanings not obvious in the original English version. It asks for power and protection in the face of evil powers (since 'sin' and 'evil' are the same word) rather than deliverance from moral failure as it does in English. The Lord's Prayer in Anindilyakwa has distinctly Anindilyakwa meanings; it also held new meanings for Stokes.

24 Judith Stokes to J.B. Montgomerie, 4 May, 1960, ML MSS 6020/203, Miss Stokes.
Dulcie Levitt and Julie Rudder (née Waddy) came to unexpected appreciation of Anindilyakwa knowledge. Levitt began at Angurugu as the missionary agriculturalist — intending to teach Aboriginal people how to make use of the land — but her exposure to Anindilyakwa knowledge of the environment led her to work with Anindilyakwa women to compose an encyclopedia of their knowledge for their children. She recorded dozens of Anindilyakwa remedies and medicines, bush plants and their uses. Continuing Levitt’s work, Rudder recorded Anindilyakwa systems for classifying plants and animals, including data on Anindilyakwa stories, place names and language. She called Anindilyakwa classification a ‘complex system which deserves to be recognised.’ At first she said she ‘had no sense’ of the spiritual significance of the names she collected, ‘I was just asking from a white person’s perspective.’ Yet later she developed an appreciation for Anindilyakwa cosmology. Worsley later praised Rudder’s work as ‘so authoritative ... [that] I always draw on her research rather than my own’ and described Levitt as the ‘pioneer of Groote Eylandt biological research.’ Before their encounter with Anindilyakwa people, these missionaries may not have considered such research relevant to missionary activity. Yet it is evident that they came to view the world from more Anindilyakwa perspectives, appreciating connections between the land, the spiritual world and people’s lives and therefore reaching the view that knowledge of the earth was essential for missionaries.

Just as the Anindilyakwa language and landscape re-shaped the missionaries, so did the Anindilyakwa songs. At the same time as evangelical songs were being translated into Anindilyakwa, Judith Stokes was also translating the *emeba* into English. In May 1962, musicologist Alice Moyle came from Sydney University, returning five times between 1962 and 1969. She worked with Gula and Stokes to record and translate *emeba*, including some recorded by the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition. Gula Lalara, Nabilya Lalara and Jock Wurragwagwa were their main songmen. The project has been of great value to Anindilyakwa people today, now that there are fewer songmen.

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35 Levitt, *Plants and People*.
36 Waddy, *Classification of Plants & Animals*, 1188.
38 Worsley, *Knowledges*, 4, 22.
The song project had various benefits for the CMS. Stokes and Moyle believed they were doing a service to Anindilyakwa people. They intended to communicate respect, recognising the artistic and intellectual merit of the *emeba*. The recording and translation of Anindilyakwa *emeba* was an opportunity to promote the work of the CMS to the Australian general public. By producing English translations of songs, Stokes was able to present a positive image of Anindilyakwa people. The songs showed that Anindilyakwa people had their own rich cultural heritage, which would, they hoped, generate a greater public interest in Aboriginal mission work. The transcription and translation of the *emeba*, Stokes hoped, would encourage a literary culture among Anindilyakwa speakers as the Anindilyakwa transcriptions of the *emeba* were used as literacy aids in adult vernacular education.\(^{29}\)

Though the songs were intended as enticements for Anindilyakwa people to learn to read, it was missionaries who developed an appreciation for the *emeba*. Missionary Lois Reid grew to love the nightly sound of the *yiraka* and *alyingba* (clap sticks), though she did not understand it.\(^{30}\) Stokes was obviously fascinated by the songs and the language. Rudder also worked on the song project and developed a passion for the intricacies of the *emeba*. She holds the songmen in the highest regard. She spoke with me in awe of the beauty and complexity of Anindilyakwa songs. Gula was ‘just absolutely amazing’ at wordplay and poetry in song. She spoke of ‘unravelling’ the meanings of songs with Gula, discovering in a song apparently about the oyster catcher hidden meanings about traditional burial platforms, complete with allusions to fluids from the deceased’s body dripping down. It was ‘mind-boggling,’ she said.\(^{31}\) Rudder’s growing appreciation of Anindilyakwa thought even shaped the way she understood her own spiritual life. She came to articulate her own Christian faith to me in terms of Aboriginal secret ceremony business.

With ceremony knowledge, there’s levels of meanings, so with paintings and songs there’s layers of meaning, and so it goes deeper and deeper inside ... From a Christian...

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\(^{30}\) Lois Reid, letter dated 30 March, 1969, CMS SA, Box 42, Lois Reid 66-70.

\(^{31}\) Julie Rudder, oral history interview with author, 7 January, 2012.
perspective, if you've really grasped hold of what a relationship with the Lord means, it goes deep inside. And not just another layer, but deep. 32

The song exchange was never equal, nor could it be due to the closed nature of Aboriginal knowledge, yet it did represent a willingness to engage with Anindilyakwa cultures. The translation of *emeba* into English was never given the same value by Stokes as the translation of Christian songs and scripture into Anindilyakwa. The song project with Moyle took far longer than Stokes hoped. Butler wrote to her reiterating the need to prioritise Bible translation. 33 Stokes herself later said she felt ‘guilty’ spending so much time on translating songs for Moyle, even though she saw linguistic and anthropological value in the work. 34 Though translation occurred in both directions, missionaries never incorporated influences of the *emeba* into their own singing. Nor could they – the *emeba* are owned by Anindilyakwa people who continued to assert their authority in this domain. Despite these limitations, the evangelical recognition of the value of the *emeba* represents a selective embrace by missionaries of aspects of Anindilyakwa culture.

Instead of a colonisation of ‘consciousness’, the mission was a site of dialogue, of cross-cultural flows, as Anindilyakwa speakers and missionaries appropriated and translated the ideas and symbols of the other. Of course the exchange occurred within a context of inequality; it was the missionaries who attempted the colonisation of Anindilyakwa hearts and minds, not the other way around. Missionaries did not face the same pressure to change as Anindilyakwa people. Still, the missionaries themselves did not emerge unchanged or unchallenged from the encounter. Thus distinct Angurugu Christianities emerged as missionaries and Anindilyakwa people reinterpreted their faiths in light of the cross-cultural, translating context of the mission. The missionaries who went to Angurugu and sat down with Anindilyakwa speakers returned south with a different Christianity to that with which they left home. No one emerged from the mission encounter unchanged. The translation and reinterpretation of symbols and meaning at Angurugu occurred in a multitude of ways; it was fluid, unplanned, unexpected.

33 Barry Butler to Judith Stokes, 10 January, 1983, ML MSS 6040/203 Stokes, Miss Judith.
Figure 33 'Rev Giltrap, Barnabas and Gumbli at Gumbuli’s ordination Roper River'

Source: Dulcie Levitt Slides, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.

Figure 34 'Bishop Mason, Rev P. Taylor, Gumbuli, Rev Stanley Giltrap, Rev Barry Butler, Rev Bob Gibbs'

Source: Dulcie Levitt Slides, Groote Eylandt Linguistics Collection, Angurugu.
I finish this history in 1973, a year of change for the missions. The Anglican Church ordained its first Aboriginal priest in the Northern Territory, Michael Gumbuli Wurramara, a Groote Eylandter. The ‘spiritual ministry’ in church was no longer the domain of white missionaries alone. In the Federal election of December 1972, a Labor government came to power for the first time in 23 years. The new Whitlam government dismantled the Welfare Branch, which Harry Giese had built up over decades, and replaced it with a Department of Aboriginal Affairs. It introduced a new policy framework for Aboriginal people: assimilation was gone and a policy of ‘self-determination’ came in. Anindilyakwa was officially allowed into the Angurugu classroom. Kim Beazley Sr, the new Minister for Education, suggested bilingual education for Aboriginal schools to the Prime Minister one afternoon in December 1972. Whitlam announced the new policy at 5pm on the evening news. The new bilingual programme came in a hurry. Stokes was overjoyed, at first.

Having thought and said that children should learn to read in vernacular before English, for years, I naturally rejoiced in the new government’s change of policy, little knowing the extent of the headaches in store.

Angurugu was chosen to be among the initial schools to implement the scheme because it was better prepared than other communities. In January 1973, the Field Superintendent wrote to the CMS linguists informing them of the new policy for their schools. He was worried that policymakers had no idea of the preparation and training that would be necessary for the programme to succeed.

Stokes was anxious. The Angurugu school teachers were ‘pessimistic’ as they were unsure they had enough Anindilyakwa speaking teaching assistants for the programme to work. Once again, Anindilyakwa people themselves were not consulted. At Angurugu, there were very few Anindilyakwa teachers in the school at this time, meaning that most work fell to Nancy Lalara while Stokes attempted to produce lessons in a form that might interest potential teaching

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35 Seiffert, Gumbuli of Ngukurr.
36 Donovan, At the Other End of Australia, 238.
39 Perce Leske to Peter Carroll, Kathy Warren & Judith Stokes, 15 January, 1973, AIATSIS MS 3518, Box 3, Folder 2
assistants in the bilingual programme. Stokes prayed ‘for guidance re implementation of Government policy that the scheme may not be jeopardised by rushing into it.’ Angurugu School was operating bilingually by June 1973, by which stage Stokes’ expectations for the programme were low.

The children seem to enjoy their lessons, but they have had a bad start for various reasons. The fact that Nancy has had no opportunity to get used to the new alphabet before teaching it does not help. Perhaps it would not be exaggerating to say that the project is expected to fail before it starts.

Stokes’ prayer for the bilingual programme, it seems, was not answered. The vernacular education which Stokes and Capell had advocated for years was introduced far too quickly. The bilingual programme was suspended in Angurugu in 1976 due to a shortage of teaching assistants, high staff turnover, lack of resources and an undissolved dispute between linguists over Anindilyakwa orthography.

Stokes remained at Angurugu as linguist until her retirement in 1989. Wilma Taylor helped care for Stokes in Adelaide when she developed Alzheimer’s in her old age. Taylor told me how the Anindilyakwa language was so dear to Stokes that it was one of the last things she lost.

Even in later life when she was not quite with it and there were a couple of the Aboriginal ladies down here to see Judy, she was sort of with it, but not quite, and answering direct questions. But then the two ladies said something in Anindilyakwa and Judy responded in the language. They were overjoyed. And then they tried to get her to do it again, but it was a reflex action and she couldn’t do it again. It just happened. So that’s how much the language was in her.

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43 Wilma Taylor, oral history interview with author, 8 December, 2011.
Stokes died in June 2003. At her funeral service in Adelaide they sang in Anindilyakwa two hymns she had translated into Anindilyakwa. This was Stokes' request.44

Gula Lalara, the 'professor' of the island, never returned to Christianity, though he continued to work closely with Stokes and Rudder. He was known for his long white beard, his three wives, his drinking, but mostly his wisdom, knowledge and skill as an exceptional songman.45 Despite the inequalities and tensions of the mission context, missionaries and Anindilyakwa people found established reciprocal and even intimate relationships. Some became friends. Judy Lalara, for example, told me how her father, Gula, gave her the name Judith, after Judith Stokes.46 Her love of his language had earned his respect. Gula died an old man in 2005. First the missionary, Rudder, spoke at his funeral at St Andrews Church in Angurugu. Then the songmen sang his spirit over the island and the sea, through his country, on the emeba songs.

Missionaries all over the world faced the challenge of sharing their Word with another culture, another language. The imperative of translation meant that missionaries always relied on a degree of cooperation with local people and local hospitality. This dynamic has meant that the encounters between missionaries and indigenous people are avenues for historians to understand the complex relationships, even intimacies, of colonisation and empire. Yet the missionary determination to translate has also meant that indigenous languages and cultures might become vulnerable to 'colonisation' by the missionary 'expert' who, through translation, turned indigenous languages themselves into instruments of colonisation. That is, translation could enable what the Comaroffs called, the 'colonisation of the mind.'

This thesis has brought the debates regarding colonisation through translation to the Australian context in the recent past: the history of Christian missions and assimilation policy for Aboriginal people. I have found that missionaries used language both to assure themselves of their own ascendancy and to coax Anindilyakwa people to listen to their teachings. My examination of language has demonstrated that missionaries could wield language – both their English language, literacies and texts as well as Anindilyakwa in print – as instruments to reshape Aboriginal people

44 Charles Stokes, 'Sharing her gift for languages,' Australian Geographic, 2003, CMS SA Box 42, Judith Stokes Australian Award OAM.
45 Turner, Return to Eden, 19, 167.
46 Judy Lalara, oral history interview with author, 11 December, 2012.
into their vision of Christian citizens. Yet the missionaries' dependence on interpreters, teachers and informants meant that their power was always limited, their message mediated, and their teachings translated. Furthermore, the missionaries were not a homogenous group but held diverse visions of the missionary vocation in the Australian context. They were compelled to negotiate and sometimes struggle with the mission's organisational hierarchy. The mission environment, therefore, was less ordered or controlled than the CMS might would have liked to believe.

While some missionaries may have envisaged what could be called a 'colonisation' of the Anindilyakwa mind, Anindilyakwa people constantly subverted missionary intentions and reinterpreted the Word according to their own diverse needs and interests. Many Anindilyakwa people embraced English, missionary litercies and Christian songs, finding opportunities for innovation and engagement with modernity. Some resisted attempts by missionary 'experts' to 'colonise' their language; others engaged with missionary language projects for their own ends. Anindilyakwa people found ways to keep their secrets, to maintain separateness from the missionaries and to disengage from missionary projects where necessary. At the same time, differences in language and practices of orality and literacy, as well as possibilities of translation, allowed Anindilyakwa people to selectively embrace missionary teachings. Throughout their dialogue, Anindilyakwa people selectively incorporated and reinterpreted what the missionaries brought and taught, making it their own, and not necessarily in ways missionaries expected or understood. Missionaries, too, found themselves transformed or 'translated' in unexpected ways as they were increasingly immersed in Anindilyakwa language, culture and society. The translation and reinterpretation of symbols and meaning on Groote Eylandt was fluid, unplanned, unanticipated.

The Groote Eylandt case is, in many ways, unusual among studies of missionaries and language. This is because missionary linguistics on Groote Eylandt never succeeded in generating a culture of vernacular literacy on a large scale for various reasons, including the ambivalence and resistance of Anindilyakwa speakers themselves. Bible translation was minimal, conversions were, in the end, few; the mission could be judged a failure. Yet I have found evidence that Anindilyakwa people persistently engaged with the missionaries regarding both material and
spiritual matters. The imperative of translation between languages — and the subsequent opportunities for mistranslation and reinterpretation — created a space for much of this engagement. The Anindilyakwa case demonstrates how considerations of language present historians with vital insights into the relationships at missions, even where, from a missionary perspective, language projects had limited success.

In conclusion, on Groote Eylandt, translation was simultaneously a site of colonisation and an opportunity for indigenous agency and challenges to colonisation. The mission's colonising processes as well as Aboriginal initiatives occurred simultaneously in dynamic and overlapping ways. The controlling nature of the mission institutions cannot be denied. The dormitory, the school, the church, the work regime, the rations — as well as subtler instruments such as English language documents and missionaries' Standard Australian English — were all mechanisms to hold Anindilyakwa people under missionary authority. Even these impositions, however, had uneven impacts on Anindilyakwa people, as they responded in various ways to the mission encounter.

Yet the Groote Eylandt case demonstrates that historians should be sceptical of missionaries' claims which might suggest a 'colonisation of consciousness' took place. Whereas some (though not all) missionaries envisaged such a process in their assimilatory ambitions, they were perhaps unaware of the extent to which Aboriginal people guided and influenced missionary agendas and practices (other missionaries were profoundly aware of their dependence on Aboriginal cooperation). Ironically, as missionaries worked to mould Aboriginal people in their own image, Anindilyakwa people were already interacting with the missions' teachings and practices in ways missionaries did not recognise. Aboriginal agency was not limited to collaboration or resistance. Rather, Anindilyakwa people engaged with missionaries and their Word in diverse ways, some supporting missionaries, others reacting, resisting or disengaging, and still others translating and reinterpreting missionary imports for an Anindilyakwa world.

My conclusions have broad implications for Australian Aboriginal history. I have demonstrated that Aboriginal languages are an important factor for historians to consider in Australian history. I also expose language as a site of colonisation as well as resistance. The negotiations and tensions surrounding language at Groote Eylandt challenge us English-speakers and our presumptions of
Australia as an English-speaking land. The history of the Groote Eylandt missions sheds light on a broader story of Australia's colonisation, showing how the struggle to speak Aboriginal languages has been a pivotal part of the struggle to retain Aboriginal land and identities as well as to negotiate new circumstances.

In the Babel myth, the divine scattering of humanity gave rise to languages belonging to every place and people. I have found that portraying missionaries as simply builders of Babel or colonisers of consciousness can obscure their own unsettledness. Missionaries were often confused, speaking the wrong languages in foreign places. They were dependent on mediators and interpreters, often unable to convince indigenous peoples to cooperate, sometimes wondering if God were still with them. Missionaries scattered themselves across earth, as if trying to pick up the pieces after the Babel scattering, hoping to coax the whole Earth to listen, to speak their 'language', and believe their 'Word.' Like restless wanderers, the missionaries to Groote Eylandt travelled to a distant island, trying to induce the inhabitants to become 'sedentary' like them. In some ways English speaking missionaries were more like the wanderers than the builders of their Babel story.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, indigenous people have found ways of asserting particularity, uniqueness and identity - especially attachment to place and kin affiliations – through reinterpreted, reimagined, indigenous Christianities. On Groote Eylandt, Gerry Blither found in the Babel story evidence of divine provision of Aboriginal land and languages, a reading which contested colonisation and its installation of English as the language of the land. Against missionary expectations, Aboriginal people of the Groote Eylandt archipelago found ways to make their own names for themselves, asserting their identities and separateness as they negotiated change. Perhaps, for Groote Eylandt's story, it is best to understand missionaries and Anindilyakwa people as both builders of Babel and wanderers from it: each with missions or projects; each trying to make a name, an identity, for themselves but doing so in a contested place, a confusing, plural and translating world.

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