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A Study of A
MIXED - BLOOD ABORIGINAL MINORITY
in the
PASTORAL WEST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Dissertation
Presented for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
The Australian National University



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The Australian National University
Canberra.

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SYNOPSIS

A Study of a Mixed-Blood Aboriginal Community
in the
Pastoral West of New South Wales

by

J.R. Beckett

Thesis presented for the degree of M.A. at the
Australian National University.

Chapter I: Introduction.

A brief survey of anthropological work in N.S.W. Reason for the selection of the Western region. The field study.

Western N.S.W. is largely devoted to the pastoral industry, with the small townships acting as commercial and service centres for a large rural hinterland. A brief sketch of life in an 'outback' township. A few aborigines live in town, but the majority live near or on the edge of town, in camps or 'missions', generally at a standard far below that of whites.

The aborigines have relatively little face-to-face contact with whites, although they form an integral part of the labour force. However, a small minority, mostly town aborigines, enjoy a wide measure of acceptance. The aborigines a

a group remain unassimilated.

Chapter II: Natives and Settlers in Western N.S.W.

A brief account of the aboriginal peoples of the Far West, prior to white settlement. The process of pastoral expansion and the incorporation of the aborigines into the labour force. Race relations and miscegenation in the early period. The disintegration of the traditional life.

Chapter III: The Aborigine as a Citizen.

In most respects, the aborigine is an ordinary Australian citizen. However, the Aborigines Protection Act imposes certain controls and restrictions on him. The most important of these results in the exclusion of most aborigines from hotels. Government policy is to hasten the assimilation of aborigines into the white community. It has led to the establishment of special controlled aboriginal settlements situated away from white settlements.

Chapter IV: Aboriginal Administration.

1. Murrin Bridge: The Controlled Station. The manager is the dominant figure in the 'mission regime' and he demands formal recognition of his status. But the aborigines seek

evade his authority and follow their own inclinations, while enjoying the advantages of station life. However, there is no concerted opposition to the regime.

2. Wilcannia: The Reserve and the Camp. There is a small government settlement supervised by an aborigine and uncontrolled camp. The police are dominant figures in the Wilcannia regime, although supervision is less than at Murrumbidgee. There are numerous arrests for drunkenness. The supervisor's authority is weak and aborigines resent one of their own number in such a position. However, there is no opposition to the regime as such.

3. Town aborigines. These receive little attention from the authorities, and their way of life is generally not such as to merit it.

Conclusions. Only town aborigines have come near to adopting a white manner of life. The administration has had very limited success in preparing the aborigines for assimilation.

Chapter V: Migration and Settlement.

The aborigines of the Far West move about a good deal, but a few go outside the region. They generally settle on

where they have consanguineal kin living. Within these both economic and material considerations are most important in determining settlement.

Chapter VI: Marriage and the Family.

Sexual satisfaction can easily be found outside the bounds of marriage; women can obtain support for themselves and their children if they have no husband; men can always find a home. Nevertheless sooner or later almost everyone marries.

The norms of marriage are that spouses have exclusive sexual rights over one another; the man must provide for his wife and family and the women must keep house for them. Lapses are frequent and male drunkenness is a continual cause for contention. However divorce only takes place if lapses are continuous and blatant. Under these circumstances, children are, as a rule, more firmly attached to their mother than to their father.

Chapter VII: Ownership.

Among the aborigines there is generally very little stress on the accumulation of property. The principal forms of wealth are houses, food, clothes and money. Individual ownership of these things is recognized but kith and kin have the

right to use or share them, if they themselves are short. Owners, however, are less happy about giving their kith and kin access to money and more valuable possessions. Families who wish to raise their standards of living, generally tend to withdraw from the system altogether.

Chapter VIII: Getting a Living.

Women find little employment and work only rarely. They are almost all employed in the pastoral industry, mostly in the lower-paid, casual jobs. Their dilatoriness, unreliability and liking for long spells of idleness incline them more towards this sort of work. Estimate of average number of hours worked. Aboriginal rates of pay. Estimated average earnings.

There are a few small aboriginal enterprises.

Chapter IX: The Significance of Liquor in Aboriginal Life

A large number of men, though few women, drink heavily despite prohibition. It is the manifestation of white domination most openly resented and perhaps excessive drinking is a form of defiance. Perhaps it is a way of imitating whites. However, it is also an occasion for display and winning popularity among their fellows.

Chapter X: Black Australians, White Australians: Status and Interaction.

How far aborigines are admitted into white society depends at least in part, on the degree to which they conform to white norms. Under the most favourable circumstances they are accorded a wide measure of acceptance, on a footing of more or less equality. But few aborigines enjoy so much acceptance and many do not seem to be interested in associating with whites. Often, however, the occasion for preliminary contacts, from which more substantial relationships could be established, is lacking.

Chapter XI: Aboriginal Society.

Aborigines can find social and material security within a small, localized circle of kith and kin. However no large scale groups ever develop from such ties, organization is limited and there seems to be a resistance to any sort of original leadership.

There are few indications of a nascent aboriginal 'nationalism' or a widening of the 'aboriginal group' through participation in religious or political movements.

Conclusions.

The aboriginal and white way of life differ and offer

different satisfactions. Within certain limits the aborig can choose which they adopt; most find greater ease and security among their own people. However, the social and physical isolation in which aborigines live is an addition factor inhibiting assimilation.

This dissertation is based on field-work which I carried out in the Far West of New South Wales, during 1957-8, whilst holding a Goldsmiths' Company Post-Graduate Travelling Scholarship. I wish to record my thanks to the Goldsmiths' Company for making this study possible, and also to the Australian National University for much additional assistance.

I must also record my thanks to my supervisor, Dr. W.E.H. Stanner and to Professor A.P. Elkin, who advised me in the selection of a field for study. Thanks are also due to the Aborigines Welfare Board of New South Wales for permitting to work on their stations and reserves in the West, and to the A.W.B. officials Mr. G.C. Carlin, Mr. P. Walker and Mr. J. Quayle for their helpfulness and hospitality.

Out of respect for the many confidences which were entrusted to me and because an increasing number of aborigines are becoming literate, I have given all my aboriginal informants fictitious names. For similar reasons the stations and station owners cited in Chapter VIII have all been given fictitious names.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Around the turn of the century, a considerable body of information was collected on the traditional life of the aboriginal peoples of New South Wales by such writers as Howe Fison, R.H. Mathews and Radcliffe-Brown. Many of the people among whom they worked were even then only a remnant and the traditional systems were all showing signs of impending disintegration, if this had not already occurred. At that time it was generally supposed that the aborigines were a dying race; however, about the end of the first World War, the aboriginal population ceased to decline and presently began to increase as it continues to do. Contact with white settlers had resulted in widespread miscegenation and, for reasons that are best left to the biologist, those of mixed white and aboriginal parentage increased much more rapidly than the full-bloods, finally becoming the predominant element. They are sometimes referred to in the literature as the 'Mixed Bloods'; however, in the area where I worked the main distinction lay between persons of known aboriginal ancestry and those who were or claimed to be of European descent. Both

groups could distinguish 'half-castes', 'quarter-castes' and 'full-bloods' when necessary, but it was not usual to do so as a rule all persons of aboriginal descent were known as coons, abos, blackfellers or - the more polite term - the dark people. In this study I shall, for the sake of convenience, refer to them all as aborigines, and I shall not specify caste or colouring except where it has particular relevance.

After the first generation of anthropologists had done their work in New South Wales, attention shifted to the new peoples who were being contacted as white settlement penetrated into the remoter areas of the continent. Meanwhile, those groups in New South Wales which had not already been engulfed by white society were brought onto government settlements or came to live in or on the outskirts of towns maintained either by government hand-outs or by their own efforts as labourers.

It was in the nineteen-forties that Professor Elkin decided to launch a second series of studies among the aborigines of New South Wales. These achieved a number of objectives: firstly it was sometimes possible to increase often very inadequate knowledge of the traditional life of

these peoples;¹ secondly it was sometimes possible to find these systems still in the process of disintegration.² However, the third, and perhaps the more urgent objective, was to study the aborigines as a small, ethnic minority living at close quarters to the white population and dependent upon the latter for their livelihood. Contact with whites had provoked and, in some respects, forced radical changes in the aboriginal way of life and it seemed that certain features of the new aboriginal society could only be explained in terms of its relationship to the white society. For example in some areas there was found to be a form of social stratification, based partly on colour and partly on the adoption of European ways, with those most close to the white population at the top of the hierarchy.³ In other areas, disillusionment with white society had led to a reaffirmation of the value of the aboriginal group and either a revival of traditional forms or the appearance of new phenomena such as

1

See R.M. Berndt: 'Wuradjeri Magic' and 'Clever Men'. Oceania, Vols. XVII-XVIII.

2

See Marie Reay: 'Kinship Amongst Mixed-Blood Aborigines in N.S.W.' M.A. Thesis (Sydney), 1947.

3

See Marie Reay and Grace Sittlington: 'Class Status in a Mixed-Blood Community, Moree, N.S.W.' Oceania, Vol. XVIII. Also, Ruth Fink: 'Social Stratification - A Sequel to the Assimilation Process in a Part-Aboriginal Community.' M.A. Thesis (Sydney), 1955.

native christian churches and conventions.⁴ In view of the policy of assimilating the aborigines into white society which the Aborigines Welfare Board has been pursuing, it has also been desirable to investigate the conditions under which assimilation would be possible, and the problem of race relations in general.⁵

Although Ruth Fink returned to Brewarrina some ten years after Marie Reay's study, to record the changes that had taken place in the interim, the plan has usually been to send students to different parts of the state where aborigines are living. An almost complete coverage has now been achieved. Marie Reay has worked in the Central North and in the Riverina; M.J. Calley has carried out extensive research on the North Coast and J.H. Bell on the South Coast. Finally, the A.W.B. Welfare Officer, H. Felton is reported to be making a study in the Dubbo-Wellington region. Thus, when it was proposed that I should make a study of aborigines in New South Wales, the Far West remained the only part where work had not recently been done.

4

See Elkin: 'Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia.' *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, p. 177.

5

See Marie Reay: 'Colour Prejudice at Collarenebri'. *Aborigines Protector*, Vol. 2, 1947. Also, M.J. Calley: 'Race Relations of the North Coast of N.S.W.' *Oceania*, Vol. XXVI

The Field Study

At the instance of Professor Elkin, I went first to the government station at Murrin Bridge, situated on the Lachlan River, some ten miles from the township of Lake Cargelligo. Here lived more than 250 aborigines, and it was my intention to study both white and black in their relations with one another. I soon discovered that, for reasons which will become clear in the course of my account, relations between the two were extremely restricted. However, there were other settlements of aborigines in the region who lived in much closer proximity to whites and were reported to have much more interaction with them. When I decided to extend my study, I visited some of these settlements and endeavoured to compare conditions there with those at Murrin Bridge. There were additional reasons for this decision; some settlements, close to Murrin Bridge, held aloof while others, a considerable distance away, exchanged visits and news; I wanted to discover whether one could speak of an aboriginal group, embracing more than one settlement, and what sort of ties maintained this unity.

For these reasons, I chose to visit the town of Wilcannia, on the Darling River, where there was a Reserve, supervised by a local aborigine, and an uncontrolled camp,

both situated on the fringe of the town. I also worked briefly at Euabalong and Hillston, the former eight miles and the latter about sixty miles from Murrin Bridge, where aborigines were living in the body of the town.

I have visited every western N.S.W. township where aborigines are settled, except for Cobar, Balranald and Silvertown, whose aborigines have almost no contact with those among whom I was working. However, I made serious enquiries only in the centres noted above. Beginning in January, 1957 I stayed almost five months at Murrin Bridge, from where I made a week's visit to Hillston and a number of day visits to Euabalong. I then went to Wilcannia, where I stayed for several weeks. Finally, in January 1958, I made ~~two~~ brief return trips to Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia.

It was at Murrin Bridge that I made myself known to the aborigines. The station manager was kind enough to allow me to occupy a house where I could live in close proximity to them, and where I could receive visitors without interruption. However, in terms of Australian law, the aborigines are a delinquent people, and since I was manifestly different from the average white bushman and had the approval of the authorities, I was widely held to be a police spy. The notion persisted for several months and some adhered to it, till t

time I left; consequently, I was treated with a considerable reserve, which it took much time and energy to break down. However, once my reputation was made it preceded me to other settlements, and I was quickly able to meet the friends of friends of mine and establish a fruitful relationship. In Hillston I stayed with an aboriginal family, and in Wilcann I took many of my meals in aboriginal houses. My position was less happy in Euabalong: it was not possible for me to stay there, and since I had no vehicle of my own, it was possible for me to visit the township only occasionally, during the day, when the menfolk were at work. I had no introduction to any of the aborigines and since there was neither time nor opportunity to get to know them casually at work or recreation, I was obliged to approach them directly and make 'doorstep' interviews. Approaches of this sort are always of limited value, and, to make matters worse, some informants were resentful at being singled out as aborigines at all. My knowledge of the Euabalong situation is therefore very superficial and culled largely at second hand.

In fact, a great deal of my information had to be culled at second hand. The men worked on farms and sheep stations some distance from the settlements, where it was only rarely possible for me to follow them. Much that went on, as I had

said, was against the law and concealed from me. At Murrin Bridge it was some time before I was invited into the house where much of the life went on, and into some I was never invited at all. An aboriginal man has little to do with a woman, to whom he is not related, unless he is planning to have sexual intercourse with her, in which case he proceeds as discreetly as possible. Many younger women, and particularly adolescents, are, in fact, acutely shy, and even with older women I was not able to talk with the same ease and frankness that was possible with the men. My knowledge of women's affairs, then, is very much less full than my knowledge of men's affairs.

Against these difficulties was weighed one advantage. English has become the first language on all the stations where I worked, and it is rapidly becoming the only language. It is used in public and at home, so that I was able to understand what was said to me, as well as utterances that were not intended for my ears. I made an effort to acquire some knowledge of Wojaibon and Bagundji, the main languages spoken and was able to pick up stray remarks on occasions. Probably more important was the effect my use of a few words seemed to have on aborigines: those unaware of my knowledge were surprised at the novel experience of a white man speaking their

language, and they tended to regard me as one already intimately acquainted with their affairs.

A weakness of all the recent studies of aborigines in New South Wales, has been our ignorance of the white Australian society with which they are so closely involved. Oeser and Emery's study of Mallee town⁶ gives us some idea family life, the role of the school and political and race attitudes in a Victorian wheat growing area; Russel Ward has provided an invaluable background, with his history of pastoral workers in the nineteenth century;⁷ but we have no sociological data on the pastoral industry or rural life in the pastoral districts. I was aware of this lack before I began field work, and hoped to go some way towards remedying it. However, the fact that Lake Cargelligo was so largely unrelated to aboriginal life discouraged me from attempting what would, in fact, have been two separate studies. In Warrumbungle conditions were much more favourable for a study of the two groups in interaction, but there remained to me too little time to attempt anything so ambitious. Nevertheless

6

Oeser and Emery: 'Social Structure and Personality in a Rural Community'. 1954.

7

R. Ward: 'The Ethos of Australian Pastoral Workers in the Nineteenth Century'. A.N.U. Ph.D. Thesis.

I did, in both centres, endeavour to gain as clear a picture of local affairs, and of the pastoral industry as I could. I attended civic functions, interviewed municipal office holders (Lake Cargelligo has no town council), doctors, school teachers, clergymen, publicans, union officials and political party organizers. I visited clubs and hotels, and generally made the acquaintance of as many white bushmen as I could. I was permitted to place a questionnaire before children in the Murrin Bridge, Euabalong and Lake Cargelligo Public Schools, and to get essays written by children in the top class of the latter school. Unfortunately, it was not possible to follow these up with personal interviews, and Roman Catholic Schools declined to co-operate at all.

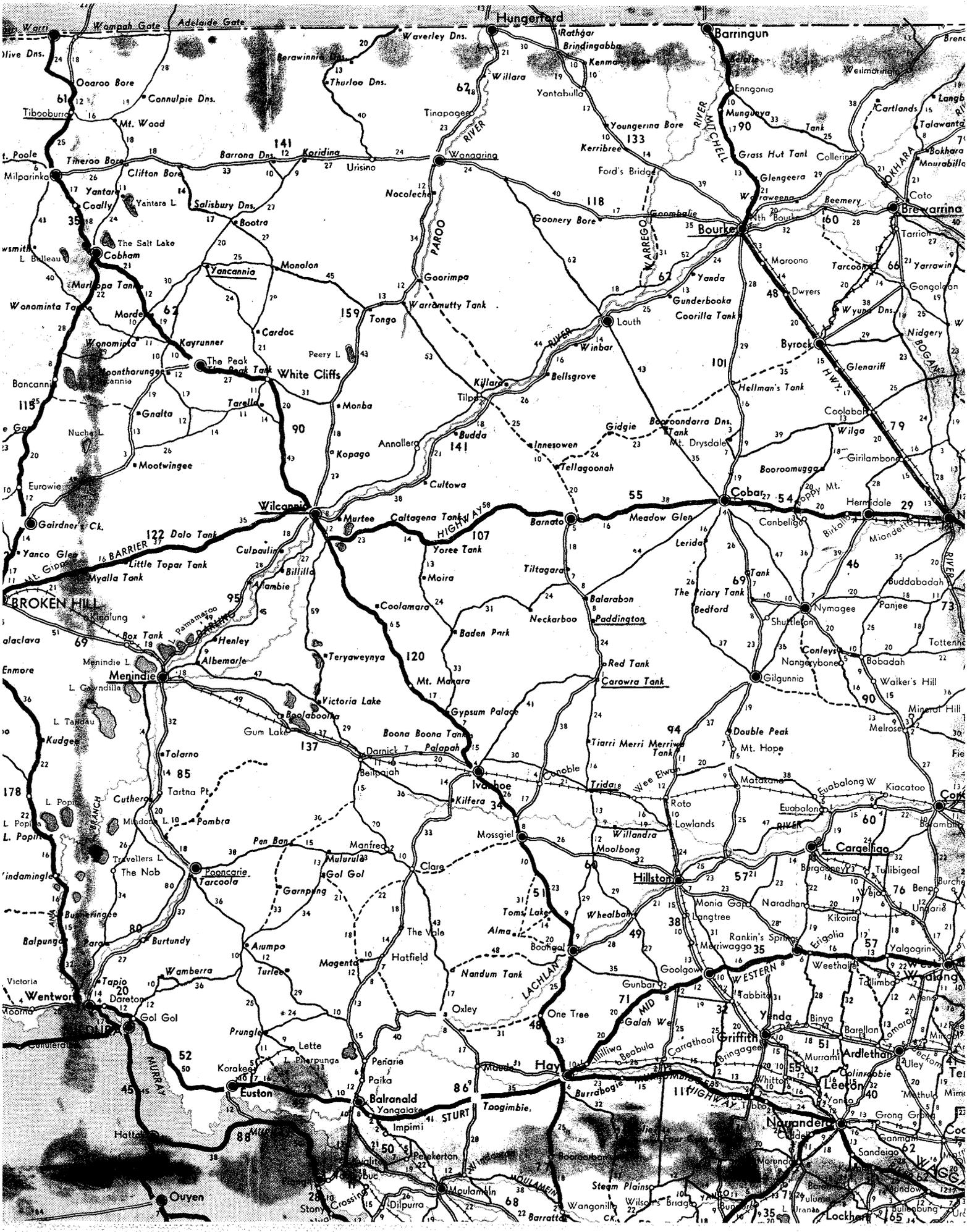
Enquiries of the sort outlined above were doubly necessary, because the Australian rural scene was completely unfamiliar to me. To discover town sizes, official wage rates, employment openings, what elements predominate in clubs and associations etc. is not hard; but other problems, for example the number of days worked by pastoral workers, and the hazardous testing of 'attitudes', can only be dealt with by systematic and laborious work. The two most important topics for this thesis, the pastoral economy and the treatment afforded to aborigines are, I think, presented with fair accuracy;

as for explaining the motivation behind this behaviour, and putting it in the wider context of 'backblocks' norms and values, I cannot do more than put out suggestions.

Western New South Wales

The Western Division of New South Wales, excepting the mining city of Broken Hill, is given over almost entirely to the pastoral industry. East and south of the Lachlan the wheat growing area begins, though not to the complete exclusion of sheep farming; and in the Riverina fruit^{growing}/is carried on. Small magnesite and copper mining enterprises are still carried on, but the once flourishing gold and opal mines have long ceased to yield.

The railways provide the main arteries of transport to the great centres of population and industry. Wentworth and Balranald are reached from the South; Hillston, Lake Cargelligo, Cobar and Bourke from the East, while the Broken Hill railway passes through Condobolin, Euabalong, Ivanhoe and Menindie. To the North and West of these railheads is a great area traversed by earth roads which become impassable in heavy rain. Mail cars running once or twice a week between centres of population, and perhaps a weekly air service to Sydney, provide the only public transport.



The townships (widely separated from one another) constitute small commercial and service centres for a vast, but sparsely populated, hinterland of sheep country. Among far-western townships, only Cobar, Bourke and Condobolin have a population exceeding 2,000; most have about 1,000 inhabitants, except for the three in the extreme north-west corner which together have less than 250.⁸

The great, company owned properties of the West were broken up, in the periods immediately before and after the first world war, and much smaller 'blocks' made available to ex-servicemen and others. During the depression, other properties returned to the ownership of the pastoral companies, but holdings are still very much smaller than they were formerly, and there are more small owners living in the area. Often the blocks are small enough for a family to work with the assistance of one or two hands. At the same time the automobile has lessened the isolation of the stations, and many graziers and 'block holders' manage to live in town.

Directly or indirectly almost all labourers are dependent on the pastoral industry. Girls prepared to endure the

8

All population figures taken from the 1954 Commonwealth Census.

isolation of and monotony of bush life can become station cooks. Otherwise there is the local hotel, the occasional situation in the small family store, the bank or Dalgetty's a few may become nurses or ward maids in the local hospital. Most marry young, and those intent on careers leave for the city.

In town, men may become shop assistants, slaughtermen and bakers, garage mechanics, builders and carpenters. For the rest there is bush work. The Australian pastoral industry has a strong tradition of casual, semi-nomadic labour;⁹ and this is at least partly explained by the seasonal or occasional character of much of pastoral work. A few hands may be employed round the homestead, or at least return there each night; a manager-foreman may be put in charge of a back station, and there will besides be boundary-riders living in isolated huts some distance from the homestead. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the shearers are the elite of pastoral workers. Probably organized by a shearing contractor who takes them on their annual run from North to South, as the season advances, they come with their retinue of rouseabouts, pressers, cooks etc. Unlike the latter, they work

⁹

See R. Ward: op. cit., p. 242.

a piece rate, and the competition between the 'gun shearers dispatching perhaps 200¹⁰ sheep in a day, is a matter for pride and excitement. But the big money earned is often enough squandered in heavy drinking, after the traditional manner of pastoral workers apart from or without families.

At various times in the year hands may be required for mustering, crutching, lamb marking, scrub cutting and the like; and if there are not enough regular employees, as is often the case, extra must be taken on. The many miles of fences that must be erected and maintained are generally put out to contract workers, who work independently, camping on their own. In the East droving is being replaced by motor transports, but in the West the drover, mounted on horseback is still to be seen. He too is an independent contractor, utilizing his own plant, recruiting his own assistants and cook.

Rabbiting remains a remunerative occupation, despite myxomatosis, and often engages shearers during the off season. Traps are the only equipment required besides a cart or car to bring the catch into the freezing works.

In the eastern part of our region, particularly round

10

At the time of writing the rate is around £8 per hundred

Lake Cargelligo, there are a number of small, mixed farms which keep sheep, cows and grow wheat. 'Cockies', as they are called, employ one or two farm hands, including, perhaps a tractor driver. However, farm work is considered hard and poorly paid; traditionally the cocky is a despised figure.¹ Ploughing may have to be preceded by clearing of roots and shrubs, work which is generally put out to contract.

Wage rates and working conditions for the pastoral industry have been fought for and negotiated by the Austral Workers' Union. It is almost the only union represented in the area, and almost all workers in the shearing shed, together with an unknown percentage of station hands are regular paid up members. There are local branches in each township and each shed elects its 'union rep'. The A.W.U. local is also the core of the Australian Labor Party in the region, except in Lake Cargelligo where a farming element overshadows the branch. However, political parties are not active except at election times. The region as a whole is overwhelmingly for the A.L.P.; however, the constituency in which Lake Cargelligo is included, returned a Liberal M.L.A. at the last election.

11

Ward: op. cit., pp. 465-7.

Most western townships look very much the same, although Wilcannia, in the days of its prosperity, erected a number of unusually impressive stone buildings. Shops, cafes, hotels and cinema stand on either side of the main street; behind are the private houses, a few built of brick, but the majority of weatherboard, some in a state of disrepair, but most well kept, with small gardens. Also in sidestreets are to be found the hospital, the schoolhouses, Public and Roman Catholic, and the churches, generally small, inconspicuous structures, although in Wilcannia Anglicans have a more imposing, stone church. Finally, right on the outskirts, the tennis courts, bowling green, and football field, of the town's sports associations.

The town population will include a small professional element: doctor, school teachers, bank managers, clergymen, chemist, etc. A number of farmers and graziers have their homes in town, driving out to their properties when necessary. The shops, garages and other small business are almost all locally owned. Finally, the majority of pastoral workers who are settled at all have their homes in the towns, rather than on the stations, although they may be absent from them

considerable periods. In addition to the settled population there will be a substantial number of drifters, semi-nomad labourers, looking for work, or spending their cheques on holiday between jobs. These lodge in the hotels or camps on the outskirts of town, spending most of their time lounging about the streets or in the bar. They are often a disorderly element in the town, apt to start drunken brawls, and there are occasionally criminals among them; for this reason they are regarded with some hostility by the townsfolk, and the police keep them under observation.

Lake Cargelligo includes a much larger non-labouring element than most towns, neighbouring Euabalong and Euabalong West, on the other hand, are almost entirely labouring settlements, dependent on Lake Cargelligo for some facilities. Generally, however, a western township is the only settlement for a considerable area of country, and all sections of the population live there.

Town life is very much the same, throughout the West. After childhood, the main division lies between the sexes. Many men work away from home; they assemble in the hotel to meet their friends, play football and cricket, or perhaps bowls, attend lodge and union meetings. From all these activities the women are in effect excluded. If they go i

the hotels it is to the Ladies Room; if they play bowls it is in the ladies' club or on the 'ladies' afternoon'. They have their own Countrywomen's Association premises, and, if they are church members there will be women's functions. Other church activities will be mixed, but only Roman Catholics¹² are good church goers. Catholic children have a cen in the Convent School, but thereafter there are few church functions catering for young people. The Methodists have youth clubs to which a small number of Protestants belong. Various organizations sponsor dances from time to time and these provide the best opportunity for mixing. The cafes not meeting places. Apart from a few farmers and professionals, few entertain at home.

Class divisions are not immediately discernible in the small western town. Men dress and speak very much alike, addressing each other by Christian-names. There are no exclusive clubs; although the bowls club would probably be rather expensive for a labourer, a number do join. However it is noticeable that in Lake Cargelligo and Wilcannia, graziers, farmers and professionals tend to gather in one particular hotel and talk mostly to each other. This element also tend to take the lead in the town's various associati

¹²

Roman Catholics constitute % of the western populatio

Cars are a favourite topic of conversation and provide a matter for competition. Clothing and jewelry are clearly of great interest among the women, and, I suspect, a means of displaying wealth. Women are, moreover, more restricted in their range of social contacts. However, one cannot, perhaps because the western towns are so small, speak of clear class divisions, such as have been described by Dr. Martin in eastern New South Wales.¹³

The Aborigines

Some aborigines are to be found living in almost every area of settlement in the Far West; however, the proportion of aborigines to whites was highest in the centres where I worked, being in Wilcannia, 200 to 640; in the Lake Cargelligo-Euabalong-Euabalong West area, 310 to 1,500; and in Histon, 50 to 970.¹⁴

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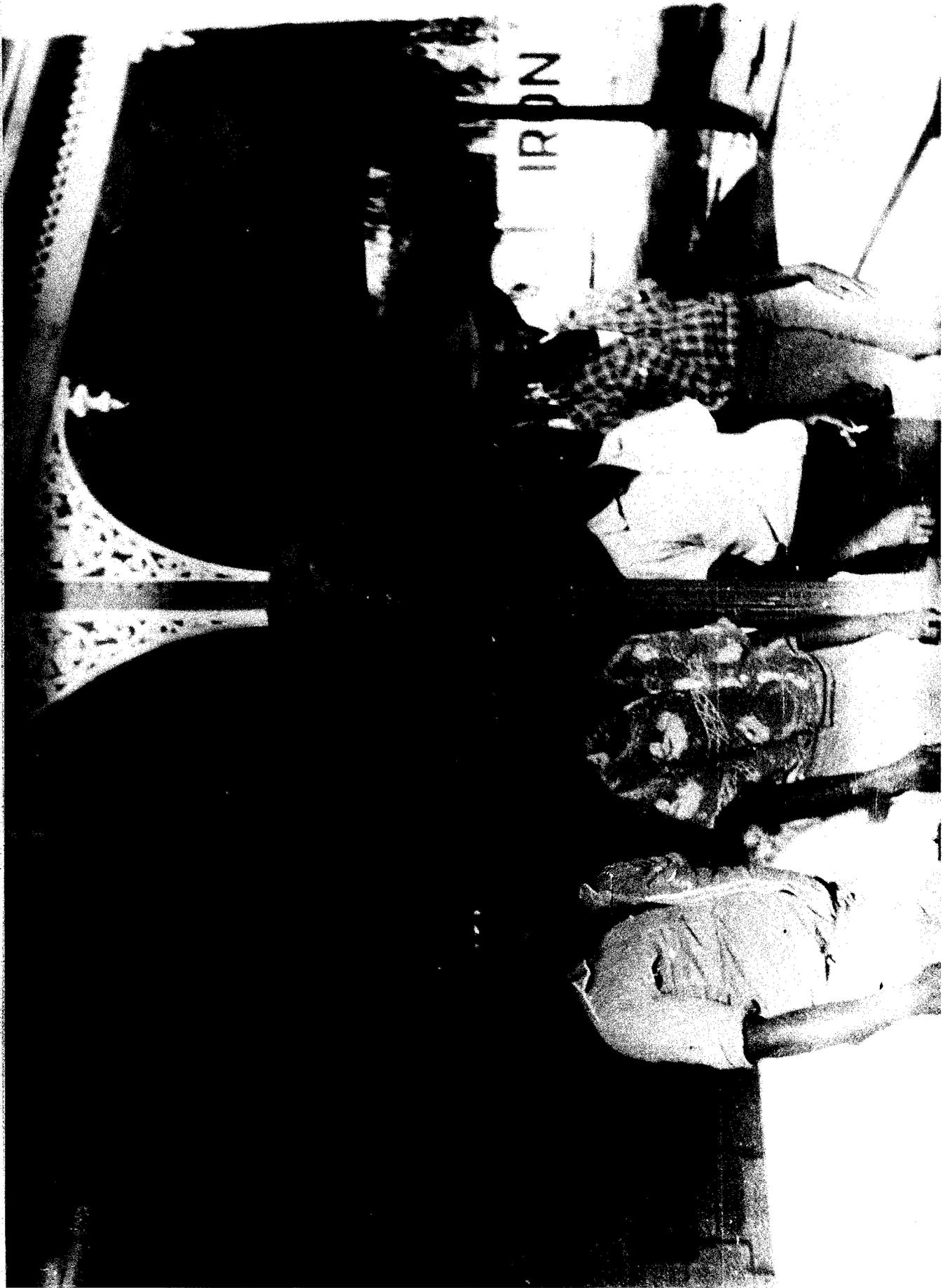
See 'Marriage, the Family and Class', by Jean I. Martin, in 'Marriage and the Family in Australia', ed. A.P. Elkin.

14

These figures are approximate. White population figures are obtainable in the 1954 Commonwealth Census; however, on full-blood aborigines are listed separately. The figures of aboriginal population given above are the results of my own census made in 1957. Bearing in mind that the figures are not strictly comparable and that aboriginal population fluctuates continually, I have let 'round numbers' suffice for present purposes.

The aborigines are often to be seen in town, immediately recognizable by their dark skins, but speaking English and dressed in a manner no different from whites, the men in normal clothes or the riding breeches, high-heeled boots and ten-gallon hats of the stockman, the women shabbily dressed but generally clean and tidy. The women are in town to do their shopping; the men simply lounge about or gather in the shade of some verandah to watch the passing scene. White men passing along the street greet aborigines they know and may stop for a brief chat before going on to join their friends in the hotel. Here one may find a few aborigines drinking together or with white acquaintances, but the law forbids most of them to enter hotels. However, some of those hanging about outside are hoping that a drink will be smuggled out to them; often one sees an aborigine drunk and reeling about the street, and now and again the police take one of them off to gaol.

When the aborigines have had enough of town they may call the taxi to take them home. A few live in town; for the rest 'home' is either a cluster of weatherboard cottages, built for them by the government and generally known as the 'Mission', or a series of crude wood and iron shacks, strung out along the river bank and called the 'Camp'. These will



always be some distance out of town. Here voices are raised and everyone wears his oldest and dirtiest clothes. Half-dressed toddlers play in the mud around the houses, ragged urchins rush in and out of the houses, play rounders or ride their ponies bareback around the settlement. Men stroll up and down, pausing to join some gossiping group or to watch someone tinkering with a rickety sulky or dilapidated car. The women may be indoors washing or cooking, or sitting on the house verandah enjoying a game of cards.

Some families fit out their homes more or less in European style, with drawing room suites, refrigerators, photographs on the mantelpiece and perhaps a car at the gate. But in many homes one will find nothing more than a few rickety bed-frames and a battered deal table. A few houses are painted and have small gardens around them, but many are dilapidated with windows broken and doors off their hinges. Most of the shanties are no more than shelters against sun and rain.

The existence of such settlements causes offence to the whites and embarrassment to the government who feel that they are anachronistic in a civilized and progressive country. It was for this reason that government settlements were built often some distance from white residential areas - and a

government official, generally white, placed in charge. Apart from protecting the fabric of the houses, it is his task to maintain order on the settlement and encourage the aborigines to conform more closely to white norms as regards living standards, health and hygiene, working habits, morality, education and so on. The aborigines are not obliged to live on these settlements, but wherever their living conditions are sub-standard they are liable to periodic inspections by welfare officers and police.

The law classes the aborigine in most respects as an ordinary citizen, imposing only a few minor disabilities on him. Of these the most important, in practice, is that which forbids him to have liquor, unless he has been awarded a Certificate of Exemption for good behaviour. It is effective in keeping him out of the hotel, but, like most liquor prohibitions, it encourages rather than prevents excessive drinking. Aborigines, particularly the men, are continually in trouble with the police for drunkenness, and this prevents them from getting exemption; but others who probably would get exemption do not bother to apply, and only a small minority go into the hotels.

Apart from a little hunting and fishing the aborigines have no independent sources of livelihood outside the white

Australian economy. Most of them are casual pastoral workers usually getting the same wage rates as whites but mostly in the unskilled, lower paid occupations. Certain difficulties stand in the way of their obtaining the better paid jobs, but these are by no means insurmountable; however, few aborigines show any great desire to change their conditions. The women can get little employment beyond occasional domestic work, but in any case their attendance is erratic and they generally regard breadwinning as a man's affair. Despite the larger number of children whom they must support, the earnings of most aboriginal men are lower than those of most whites. When they have earned enough for their immediate needs they prefer to spend their time in idleness; moreover, much of what they do earn goes on luxuries and extras, such as liquor and taxi rides.

When he works alongside whites or lives near them, the aborigine often strikes up an acquaintance with them, more or less on a footing of equality, which will be carried over into other spheres. He may drink with them in the hotel, if he is exempted - and this is a spur to obtain exemption, if he is not. - play football with them, belong to the same club as they do, and generally enjoy a wide measure of acceptance although they still do not invite him to their homes and we

not welcome him as a son- or brother-in-law. Whites norms regard aborigines as no-hopers because of their wretched manner of living, their drunkenness, fecklessness and reputed sexual laxity. When some aborigine does not fit this stereotype the fact is recognized and he receives a wider measure of acceptance; but most of the aborigines living on the 'Missions' or in the 'Camps' do fit or seem to fit the stereotype. These very often have very little face-to-face contact with whites, at work or on any other occasion; women and children suffer most from this isolation which may mean that they never see any whites other than government officials, doctor-shop-keepers, etc. Under these circumstances there is no opportunity for establishing the sort of relationships which could be carried over into other sorts of activity - unless a deliberate approach be made by one or the other group which generally neither is disposed to make.

Aborigines are inclined to move house from time to time but they seldom go where they do not have some kinsfolk or lifelong friends. Those who do not associate with whites move mainly within a circle of consanguineal and affinal kin and others with whom they are completely familiar. With their individuals they live in a state of interdependence, supporting one another in times of sickness or dearth, working an

playing together. Moreover, these services are not just a matter of kindness or charity, they are duties that one is expected to perform and is criticized if one does not perform. However, the system is only maintained by mutual consent and a continuing state of mutual dependence; if a family resolves to become independent and devote all its efforts to raising its living standards, regardless of the needs of its kith and kin, no one can stop it. Indeed, the aboriginal methods of social control are very weak and there is no mechanism for the settlement of disputes - except by inviting white officials to intervene. Aborigines, in their relations with one another, often fail to fulfill their duties and observe other's rights; nevertheless, the rules are observed with sufficient regularity for the system to continue in operation. The norms of aboriginal society - if we may call it such - differ from and in some respects conflict with those of white society. Thus the aboriginal way of life offers the aborigine a partial alternative and constitutes a counter-attraction to the white man's way of life.

Assimilation and the Plural Society

Discussing culture contact in South Africa, Professor Gluckman has insisted that "the Rand mines and the African

tribe which supplies their labour are both part of a single social field."¹⁵ He writes:

"If we conceive the tribal and urban areas to be one social field, we say that as soon as an African moves from a reserve to an urban area he is 'detrribalized' in the sense that he comes under White authority without his chief, he works in different ways, he associates with different types of individuals, etc. But he is still tribalized, for of course he does not cease to be influenced by tribal culture."¹⁶

One cannot speak strictly of the Far West in terms of 'tribal' and 'urban' because the traditional aboriginal society has completely disintegrated and because the regional economy is pastoral. Nevertheless, the Camp or Mission is clearly a part of the same social field as the nearby township and the surrounding stations. The aborigines are too small and too unimfluential a group to be able to impose any changes on the white society that engulfs them; on the contrary, it is they who have had to accommodate themselves to it, particularly in the economic and legal spheres. However this has not resulted in their complete assimilation into white society.

Elizabeth Colson has defined assimilation as -

"...the amalgamation of people derived from different groups into one social body, whose members appear in

¹⁵

Gluckman: 'Malinowski's Sociological Theories', 1949, p

¹⁶

Ibid., p. 13.

the same social organizations and where the group to which the different individuals originally belonged is not instrumental in defining their roles within these organizations."¹⁷

Broom and others, whose definition differs, in essentials, very little from this, make the useful additional point th

"This is not to say that assimilation is measured by some random distribution in the status and power hierarchy, except in the extreme long run, for this clearly would assume the eradication of historical differences in the introduction of groups into the society."¹⁸

Thus, we need not discuss here why aborigines from the pastoral West have not become wharf labourers or doctors; what is important is to discuss their place in pastoral society. Even here, however, the aborigines do not appear in all the same organizations as whites, and where they do appear the role is sometimes defined by the fact of their being aborigines.

From the preliminary outline it is already apparent that there is an aboriginal way of life which differs substantially from that of the local whites, although a small minority of aborigines live in a manner little different from the latter.

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Colson: 'The Makah Indians', 1953, p. 2.

¹⁸

Broom, Siegal, Vogt and Watson: 'Acculturation: An Exploratory Formulation.' American Anthropologist, Vol. 56, p. 988.

Like Colson's Makah Indians, there are principles or theories controlling aboriginal behaviour where it affects other aborigines which do not underly the behaviour of whites in comparable situations and which do not govern the aborigines their relations with whites.¹⁹ One can go further and say that some of these principles or theories dispose aborigines not to participate in certain activities promoted by whites or to participate in such a way as to differentiate themselves from whites similarly engaged.

We have seen that a measure of interaction between black and white is unavoidable, given the economic and political character of the pastoral West. Any further interaction will occur only insofar as black and white anticipate some advantage from it; in other words, it is very largely a matter of choice. Few whites show any interest in becoming involved in aboriginal affairs, and they are not always ready to allow aborigines to become involved in their own affairs. Generally the measure of acceptance which they are ready to accord aborigines depends on the degree to which the latter observe white norms and conventions. One can speak then of a minimum acceptance accorded to the aborigines who conform least to

¹⁹

C.f. Colson, op. cit., p. 280.

the demands of white society; and a maximum acceptance accorded to those who conform most closely. In the case of the latter one is able to see how far the white rejection of aborigines is based upon disapproval of their non-conformity and how far upon straight-forward race prejudice. It may be stated here that while a modicum of race prejudice does exist and perhaps predisposes whites to unsympathetic judgements, the variation between the maximum and minimum acceptance suggests that other considerations are at work. However, white society does not impose a uniform policy on its members; some whites are less prejudiced than others and some set less store by conformity to the norms of industry, sobriety, cleanliness, etc. than others.

The aboriginal and white Australian ways of life are each characterized by a set of differing and partly contrary norms and values. The aborigine is free to choose which he takes up. The white Australian way of life stresses the economic independence of a man and his family, the occupation of a proper house and the possession of at least those amenities and small elegancies that are normally to be found in white homes. The aboriginal way of life places no stress on acquisitions or the maintenance of a 'good home', but is based upon the interdependence of kith and kin. It orients the individual

towards a small circle of other aborigines with whom he is completely familiar and on whom he is dependent for social and economic security; so he is the less inclined to seek establish relationships in the unfamiliar and relatively unhelpful world of the white man - whom, in any case, his way of life probably antagonizes. On the other hand, the aborigine who has adopted the white man's way of life finds it difficult to pay for the goods he needs and at the same time meet the demands of his kith and kin; he is to this extent alienated from the latter, at the same time his way of life renders him much more acceptable to whites. Thus the aborigine who adopts the white man's way of life has a much greater chance of becoming assimilated into white society.

However, assimilation does not automatically follow; it must develop from some beginning, the establishment of friendships at work or some similar occasion. But some aborigines have little or no face-to-face contact with whites, and under these circumstances remain socially dependent on their own people; they may be weakened in their resolve to adopt the white way of life yielding to the economic demands that are placed upon them. Conversely, those aborigines who come face-to-face with whites are not only able to realize that degree of acceptance to which their way of life entitles them

but are under some inducement to modify their way of life still further so as to extend the range of the acceptance.

CHAPTER II

NATIVES AND SETTLERS IN WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

The aboriginal population of western New South Wales, as it was when the white man appeared, can be divided into three main cultural groups. (See Map)

1. The Wiradjeri, including the people called Neumba, who lived west of the Bogan, the Waljwan, living east of the Bogan, the Woiyaibon (also called Niemba) who roamed the swamps and creeks between Cobar, Ivanhoe and Euabalong, and finally the Wiradjeri, proper, who lived along the banks of the Lachlan and for a considerable distance to the south and east. A people called Barindji, located along the eastern bank of the lower Darling, are supposed to have belonged to this group; I, however, could discover no trace of them.

Capell regards these peoples as a linguistic sub-
(1) group. The social organization, which is peculiar to this part of Australia, has been outlined at least in part by Mathews, Radcliffe Brown and Elkin.⁽²⁾ The picture is incomplete and extremely confusing, but there seems nonetheless to have been a basic uniformity, and the names of the matrilinieties and sections are the same.

(1) A. Capell: 'A New Approach to Australian Linguistics' University of Sydney, 1956, p. 46.

(2) See Bibliography, Appendix 1, A.

In common with other tribes further east, ceremonial life revolved round the two supernatural beings, Baiami and Daramulan. Rites were performed on the bora or borba ground, and it was here that young men underwent tooth avulsion at initiation.

2. The Bangundji group seems to have extended the length of the Darling river from Wentworth to Bourke, and into the country to the North of Wilcannia, up the Paroo River, and as far as Broken Hill in the west. The peoples included in this group had a number of names; some of those recorded in early works such as Howitt are unknown even to my oldest informants. Those surviving include the Bagundji proper, belonging to the Darling river, the Barundj belonging to the Paroo, the Bāndjigēli belonging to the regions around White Cliffs, and the Wiljali belonging to the Broken Hill area. Dr. Wurm visited Wilcannia in 1957 and regards the languages of all these groups mentioned as essentially the same. Social organization, dividing society into two matrilineal moieties, seems also to be essentially the same, the moiety names Kilpara and Məgwara are common for the whole group. The accounts of initiation ceremonies in the literature are very cursory, so that I cannot be sure that the form described by my own informants from the White Cliffs area are the same as those carried out elsewhere. Tooth avulsion and the plucking of body hair were practised, but the ceremony had no connection with the Baiami and Daramulan cult, or, so far as I can discover, with any other deity.

Some of the north-western peoples, possibly the Wiljali and Bändjigali, had a more advanced ceremony called jama wilja which seems to have been a variant form of the South Australian wiljaru.

3. The Maliagaba, found in the extreme north-west corner of the state, around Tibooburra and to the West, shared some beliefs and forms with their southern neighbours. Linguistically, however, Wurm believes them to have more in common with the Dieri of north-eastern South Australia. Like the people of south-western Queensland and north-eastern South Australia, the Maliagaba practiced circumcision: the ceremony was called the milia and seems virtually identical with that practised by the Woigumara and Biraliba in south-western Queensland. All the peoples mentioned have the two matrilineal moieties, similar avoidance rules, though slightly varying kinship terminologies. They also trace descent, patrilineally, from a number of legendary heroes called mu who once travelled the country, naming hills and waterholes. This is a feature of the South Australian cultures, but it seems that the north-western Bagundji peoples may also have shared it, for the muras passed through their country.

To the south of the region, along the Murray were a number of peoples, including the Ita-Ita and Wimbu-Waimbu, whom little is known except that they had matrilineal moieties. A few of their descendants have come into the Far West region.

The settlement of the lower reaches of the Lachlan river began in the 1840's, and Hillston was founded in the 1850's. The lower Darling was also being settled in the 1850's, and Wilcannia was founded in 1864. In succeeding decades settlement pushed north and westward, Tibooburra and Milpariaka being established in the late 1870's. (3)

By 1890 the population of the western counties, roughly equivalent to the present Western Statistical Division, approached 30,000, even apart from the already large population of Broken Hill. (4)

The history of contact between the natives and white settlers is extremely scant, both in books and in the memory of their descendants. From the historical accounts of other areas, it seems that at first the aborigines tried killing the white man's stock, in compensation, perhaps, for the increasing usurpation of their resources. Occasionally they attacked small settlements of whites and murdered solitary shepherds. These actions brought terrible reprisals from the white man's guns, and sometimes poisoned flour was left out for the unwitting black. (5) For some unexplained reason, no aborigines could - or would - recount any tales of these massacres; Woiyaibon denied that any massacres had taken place though this seems unlikely.

(3) Information from local informants.

(4) See Commonwealth Census, 1891.

(5) See, for example, J. Henderson: "Excursions in New South Wales", London 1850. p. 141 - 149.

For the region to the north of the upper Darling, Bean recorded a number of accounts; he writes:

"It did not matter who was shot. Every blackfellow that was shot was considered a pest ... The law at this time could hang a man for killing a blackfellow. But there was nobody to enforce the law if the squatters did not take it into their own hands." (6)

The white man brought other scourges than the gun and the poisoned flour, in the form of epidemics and alcohol. Between them they must have taken a heavy toll of the aboriginal population. (7) Figure 1 shows the population figures for the West issued by the Aborigines Protection Board from its inception in 1883 to 1915, when it ceased to publish figures. Substantial fluctuations from year to year throw doubt on the accuracy of the figures (collected by local police), but they nonetheless indicate a steady decline throughout the period.

White settlement proceeded apace. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, hundreds rushed into the area to work the gold and opal deposits at Mt. Brown (near Milparinka), Tibooburra, White Cliffs, Lake Cargelligo, and disappeared again as the deposits cut out. Today Broken Hill remains the only mining centre in the area. More permanent were the sheep and cattle stations which came to cover the entire country and determine its whole character.

(6) C.E.W. Bean: 'Dreadnoughts of the Darling', originally written in 1911, p. 259 - 61.

(7) According to Bonney, about 1850 an epidemic attacked the Parkunji and Bungyarlee (i.e. Bagundji and probably Bendjigeli) tribes, killing almost one third. See Bonney, p. 3.

Figure 1

DECLINE IN ABORIGINAL POPULATION, 1883-1915
 showing decline of full-bloods in relation
 to total

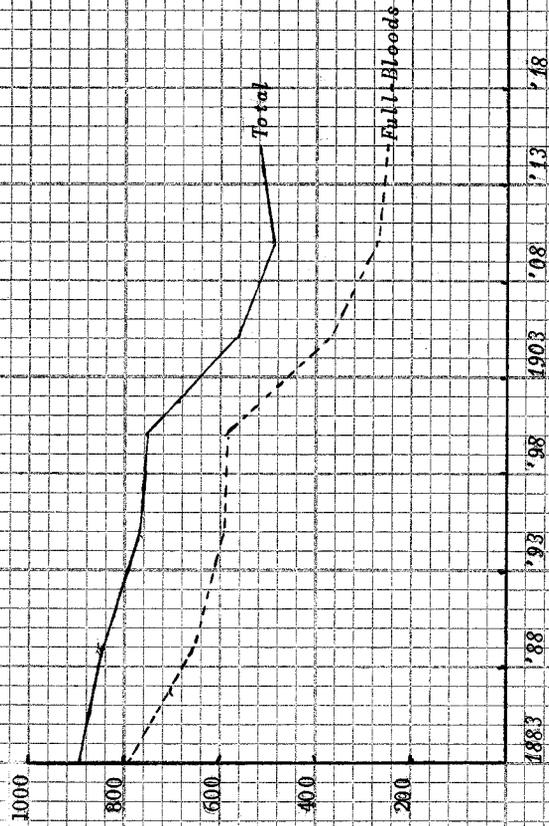


Figure 2

CHANGES IN AGE DISTRIBUTION
 OF ABORIGINAL POPULATION
 1883-1912

Year	0	19	20 - 39	40-59	60+
1883	22%		53%	18%	7%
1889	35%		36%	20%	9%
1912	49%		32%	16%	9%

Centres of aboriginal population in Western N.S.W. from which present figures have been compiled:
 COBAR, CONDOBOLIN, EUABALONG, LAKE CARGELLIGO, HILLSTON, IVANHOE, MOSSGIEL, PADDINGTON STATION,
 POONCALIRA, MENTNDEE, WILCANNIA, WANARRING, MILPARINKA, TIBOOBURRA.

In those days the holdings were extremely large and the stations more like small villages than the isolated homesteads of today. (8) And around these stations the aborigines came to camp, and to receive the government rations that the station owners were authorized to distribute among them. The name of Sir Sydney Kidman is affectionately remembered among the aborigines of today, as one who encouraged their forbears to camp on his many properties in the extreme north-west. He believed, so it is said, that they were lucky and brought rain, and once countermanded the order of a manager who proposed to evict them. Whatever the truth of these stories, it is certain that aborigines soon became of considerable value as workers in a labour hungry region. Even before they could speak English they were being employed as shepherds, and within a generation there were many excellent stockmen among them; stockmen, moreover, who knew every inch of the vast properties as no white man ever could.

However, there was no question of the aborigines being suddenly deprived of their traditional means of support and reduced to the status of paupers, until they had learned new skills. It was possible for the next 40 - 50 years to leave the station and roam the bush in freedom, living on wild foods, for months at a time. Even today, wild meat and fish is an important item on many aboriginal tables. But during the years when wild foods were becoming scarcer, the aborigine was acquiring a taste for the white man's goods:

(8) See C.E.W. Bean, 'On the Wool Track', 1911, Ch. IX.

metal tools, tea, sugar, flour, tobacco, blankets, clothes and, in many cases, liquor - all of which, even today, constitute the principal items of expenditure in many aboriginal budgets. The charms of these commodities, and the apparent ease with which they were acquired reduced the aborigines' interest in the chase and traditional technique so that by the turn of the century, if not before, the great majority of aboriginal men could be classified as pastoral workers. The women, for their part, had acquired a familiarity with white ways, through their work in the kitchens of the homesteads and country hotels. Both dressed in European clothes and are said to have spoken a fluent, fairly standard Australian English.

(10)
 Dr. Ward has given us a vivid picture of pastoral society in the nineteenth century and Dr. Bean (11) has provided a more impressionistic picture of things as they were in 1900. Away from the main transport routes (and the Adelaide-Broke Hill line was the only railway in the area laid before 1920) the laborious bullock and camel teams were the only means of carrying building materials and furniture to the station homesteads. At first living was rough, even for owners and managers; but at least they were permanently settled and were able, over the years, to establish permanent homes with a modicum of comforts. The workers, by contrast, had no station in any one place; indeed, they earned the name, the 'nomad

(9- See Report of Protector of Aborigines, 1883.

(10) Russel Ward: 'The Ethos of the Pastoral Worker in the 19th century.' A.N.U. Ph.D. Thesis 1956.

(11) C.E.W. Bean: op. cit.

tribe', by their continual migration from station to station. They were frequently unmarried and acquired no more property than their horses and what they carried with them. Not uncommonly, a great part of their earnings were squandered in marathon drinking bouts. Old bushmen recall how workers, setting out for town with substantial cheques got no further than the nearest roadside hotel. As late as 1911, it was possible for C.E.W. Bean to write -

"....a pitifully large number of (the) men of the Far West... who with their earnings of a few years could enable everyone of them buy their own houses in good country.. spent in recurrent fortnights the whole profits of the years between. The whole outcome of lifetimes of great work... was to earn for the hotel keeper quick profits, and for the great part of the workers one feverish fortnight per annum in some desolate village where it would be misery to lie dead."¹²

Ward suggests that this profligacy was encouraged by the custom of paying station workers in lump sums. A writer in the 'nineties stated that the residents of Wilcannia looked back with pride to the days "when station men were accustomed to throw a pound note on the counter in payment for a 'sho and never wait for the change, and if a handful of silver

¹²

Bean, 'On the Wool Track', p. 146 - 147

were dropped, one never stopped to pick it up."¹³

Those who were not working at the homestead lived in rough wood or iron huts, or camped in the open. The song, the 'Limejuice Tub', written in the eighteen-nineties, parodies the dismay of the English 'new chum' at the conditions in which he was expected to live:

We camp in huts without any door,
Sleep upon the dirty floor.
There's a pannikin of flour and a sheet of bark,
To wallop up a damper in the dark.¹⁴

The life of the white bushman was, in fact very little different in externals, from that of the aborigine! Faced with the hazards of bush life, moreover, some at least developed a respect for the aborigines' skill in these surroundings.

There seems to have been a certain zest for the hardships of bush life and a pride in the self-reliance that was necessary to endure them. Sometimes, perhaps, the comforts were disregarded, even when they were to be had.¹⁵ Even in:

¹³

'A Winter in Wilcannia', article in the Adelaide Post, exact date unknown.

¹⁴

Song collected by A.L. Lloyd.

¹⁵

Henderson (op. cit., pp. 272-3) wrote: (The Squatter) "... comes careless of his appearance and manners; nay he becomes heedless even of those comforts of life which are in his reach."



the townships, living seems often to have been rough and primitive - as for example, this description of Wilcannia in the 'nineties, reveals:

"The appearance of the town is spoilt by means of a large number of very inferior, small and temporary structures called cottages by courtesy, but in reality mere iron shells or huts.... I think the history of the town might be read in the heaps of beer and spirit bottles which are half buried in the sand all around the town.... The town council has never enforced the bye-law against the shooting of rubbish, evidently, for no householder dreams of any other custom than pitching their surplus tins and bottles as far as they can throw them from their own back doors

The aborigine was in no position to emulate the way of life of the station homestead and his whole cultural tradition was opposed to it. What he could do, did do and, in many instances, continues to do, was to model himself on his white work-mates. Like the latter, he bought nothing more permanent than horses and wagonette, and spent most of his earnings on food, tobacco, liquor and a modicum of clothing. Indeed the description of Wilcannia, quoted above, recalls nothing so much as an aboriginal 'humpy' settlement, of the present day!

16

Adelaide Post, op. cit.

White women have always been a minority in the West. Few endured the hardships of the bush, and many, when they married and established homes, endeavoured to maintain the comforts and refinements they had known from the closer settled areas. Aboriginal women, on the other hand, had such experience and shared, in stead, the nomadic and primitive habits of their menfolk (although few drank). Thus, while the 'nomad tribe' was declining as more and more white men married and settled in the townships, aboriginal families continued to wander about the country in wagonettes, or along the river bank, in the most temporary of shelters.

It is very hard to reconstruct any picture of race relations as they were in this early period. In some fields there was close contact between black and white; in others very little. Aborigines became workers, but no activity became their sole preserve: they were not segregated into any one occupation, inferior or otherwise. They could, perhaps have been excluded from the remunerative and prestigious work

17

Although the balance was fairly even in the towns, women were always in a minority in the rural areas of the West. Even according to the last Commonwealth Census (1954) women constitute less than 40% of the Western District population. In 1891 the percentage for the western counties (which excluded the municipalities) was less than 30%.

of the shearing sheds, but they were not. In 1911, C.E.W. Bean wrote:

".... the Australian worker of his own accord regularly recognizes his obligation to the blacks and drawing a firm distinction between him and other dark-skinned peoples. Shearers who will not work beside a Hindoo or American negro, will work readily with an Australian black or with a New Zealand Maori."¹⁸

Since the aborigine was to be a worker alongside whites, he must be admitted to pastoral workers' unions, if he was not to become a 'cheap labor' threat. So from the 'eighties and 'nineties, when the unions were being formed, aborigines were admitted to membership, although it was refused to Asiatics and a furious campaign was being waged to keep Asiatic labour out of the country.

The personal acceptance given aborigines seems to have varied somewhat; probably according to the personality of individuals involved. White workers recalled some muster camps where aborigines were kept apart from the whites; but at others there were no distinctions. In the early period white workers took their meals at the homestead while aborigines were given their's to eat on the wood-heap; but on some stations, at least, this practice was terminated by the

¹⁸

Bean, 'Dreadrougths of the Darling', p. 264.

turn of the century. One half-caste, receiving this treatment on a Queensland station, pointed out that this was not what he had been accustomed to in New South Wales, and that if he wasn't good enough to eat indoors he wasn't good enough to work on the station. He says he gained his point, but that many of the Queensland blacks would have been too shy to eat with the whites, had they been given the chance.

But probably the best indication of attitudes is the fact that at least two half-castes were made head-stockman before the first World War, and, as such, had white workers under them. Some whites objected to taking orders from an aborigine, but were told by the manager that if they didn't like it they could go; apparently they stayed. One aboriginal head-stockman claims that he led the men in a dispute over food, that ended with a 'walk out'. There were also a number of aboriginal head drovers, who occasionally employ whites.

Outside working hours, the groups were more likely to remain separate. Many blacks seem to have been shy before strange whites and if there was a large camp on the station they were more inclined to seek out kinsfolk and associate with them. Some whites were inclined to keep away from the camp; as one 84-year-old shearer put it -

"Keep clear of 'em. Say goodday to them; stop and have a talk; but keep away from them their camp."

But not everybody follows this advice: there are old people who even recall whites joining in their corroborees! But probably there was more association when the numbers of aborigines and whites were smaller. Aboriginal family groups who camped about on their own, sometimes included one or two whites among their number. Black and white drovers might drink together along the road. Fist-fights seem to have been common enough in those days, and were regarded as at least half a sporting matter. Aborigines were sometimes involved and according to some stories, ended the day swearing eternal friendship with their opponents, over a glass of rum. Other stories, however, speak of unfair means used to ensure the black man's defeat.

Aborigines could certainly achieve prestige in the eyes of white bushmen, particularly by their skill in horsemanship. A good rider and horsebreaker was considered a 'smart' man whether he was black or white; I have heard white bushmen recall with admiration the feats performed by aborigines more than 50 years ago. Aborigines seem also to have learned to play cricket and football, and were sometimes included in mixed teams from the various stations. Another bush

enthusiasm, which still persists in the far North-West, was displaying a knowledge of the country. Hours are spent in country hotels, simply enumerating the landmarks along stock route; and in this skill aborigines always excelled. Aboriginal bush skills excited some interest, and a few white men took a closer interest in aboriginal custom, one or two even learning the language.

A considerable number of white workers, and at least some managers and owners had sexual dealings with aboriginal women. Speaking of the 'nineties, one old Tibooburra resident said: "All the managers and jackaroos had two or three gins in those days; and if you looked cross-eyed at them you were sacked on the spot!" Given the absence of white women in isolated areas, and the accessibility of aborigine women, this was, perhaps, inevitable.

The song, 'My Old Bullock Dray' tells the sad story of the 'bullocky' who comes to town in search of a wife, but unable to persuade any girl to accompany him 'up the country'. In some versions (see, e.g., R. Ward, op. cit. p. 282) he returns to the aboriginal gins, who will always welcome him. In another version, still sung by aborigines, he resolves "go up to Queensland, and marry a black gin", and the last verse pictures him happily settled down "with piccaninnies

three". However, it seems generally to have been understood that miscegenation was only excusable because white women were not available. There were occasional mixed marriages but most of the liaisons seem to have been casual. Aborigines told me that a man might make his wife available to a white workmate, rather as, in the manner of the north-west peoples, he would to certain kinsmen. Perhaps, as one informant claimed, the aborigines were overawed by the 'white boss' and yielded to his demands. A native song from the Warrego records, without comment, how the white boss sends off the aboriginal man to work in a distant paddock, and he returns to the latter's wife! In other instances, it is clear, men simply prostituted their wives in order to induce their craving for rum. But there is no indication that the 'violation of their women' was taken very seriously by the aborigines; nor is it regarded with any great shame today. They tell a number of humorous tales on this topic: the best concerns the aborigine drover, entering the hotel with his white boss:

"The whitefeller asks him, 'What are you going to drink Jackie?'
 'Brandy, boss.'
 'That brandy's blackfeller's downfall.'
 'What you drink, boss?'
 'Oh, I'll drink gin.'
 'Gin, that's whitefeller's fallback!' "

A large half-caste population soon appeared, and eventually outnumbered the full bloods (see Figure 1). They were cared for by their aboriginal mothers and step-fathers, though often named after their white fathers. In some instances, the fathers wanted to take custody of their half-caste children, but the mothers were generally unwilling to give them up.

Relations with station owners and managers were generally more distant. These men often had many thousands of acres under their control, and were treated with respect by work black and white; unlike many modern employers most expected to be addressed as 'Mister'.¹⁹ Occasionally there was conflict. Aborigines have always kept large numbers of kangaroo dogs, which sometimes attack the sheep. The managers would from time to time descend on the camp and shoot all the dogs in sight, causing great distress, particularly to the women folk who regarded them as pets. But, at least within living memory, the 'boss' was never a tyrannical figure; old men called aboriginal workers being roused up with stock whips Queensland stations, but saw nothing of that sort in New South Wales. Employers never had very much power over the

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See, Bean: 'On the Wool Track', p.29

aborigine workers, because the latter were always quite fit and generally quite ready to move on to another station or take to the bush. In this respect they were at no disadvantage with white workers. Aborigines in the far North-West of the state, and on the Riverina were very much addicted to travel. A woman, born on the Warrego, had ranged up into Queensland and travelled the length of the Darling river; a Tibooburra family had wandered throughout the north-west, west, over the South Australian border, up into Queensland as far as Hungerford, and down the Darling to Wentworth. A Denilaquin trapper had worked from Ballarat to Thargomindah. (Strangely enough, the Wotjaibon people moved very little outside their own country, an orbit bounded by Cobar in the north, the Darling in the west, Hillston and Hay in the south and Euabalong in the east.)

It is clear that, whatever degree of contact there may have been between black and white, it was nonetheless sufficient for the aborigines to acquire, in a generation or so, a fluent and more or less standard English (which has since become fixed and now sounds quaintly old-fashioned) and an acquaintance with all locally practiced skills, cookery, sports, music, etc. What ^{was} the aborigines' status is hard to say. It seems that 'Jackies'' first steps in civilized wa

were often found comic. The 'Bulletins' and country newspapers around the turn of the century, often feature a figure no longer to be seen, the pidgin-speaking, half-simple but cunning blackfeller, who usually prefaces his remarks with "My word...!" But in at least one anecdote, he turns the tables on the newly arrived English aristocrat, who has to make fun of him. The stereotype seems to have disappeared from the minds of whites: most aborigines proceeded to a sophisticated understanding of white affairs, and there were at least a few whose sophistication made them the equals of the white bushman. However, the stereotype persists in the minds of aborigines, and they are anxious that they shall not be mistaken for 'Jackies'.

In the west, aborigines seem to have been admitted to Public Schools from their first establishment (although, at Hillston, aboriginal children were allotted a separate playground). However, up until twenty or thirty years ago, many aborigines lived in areas where there were no schools; the nomadic life was incompatible with regular schooling, and while the authorities made little attempt to enforce education on aboriginal parents, whether through fear or apathy, many did attempt to have their children taught. It should be added, however, that some individuals taught themselves to read, later on in life.

No Church Missions have ever been established in the West (although government settlements are generally called 'Missions'). An emissary of the United Aborigines Mission came to the Carowra Tank area, in 1904, but left a few months after. Since then, the attentions of the Churches have been restricted to school instruction and occasional religious services. Every aborigine family has at some time become affiliated to the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches, whether through baptism, the need for a legal marriage or some other chance circumstance. However, contact with either church has always been tenuous and intermittent.

The Aborigines' Protection Board (which became the Aborigines Welfare Board in 1940) was founded in 1882. So far as the West was concerned, the administration of its policies remained in the hands of local police, for many years. Essentially, this policy amounted to the maintenance of indigenes by the distribution of rations, and preventing the supply of liquor to aborigines. Until 1906 the policy applied only to full-bloods and it was believed that half castes "should not be allowed to grow into a pauper or quasi-gipsy class, but taught to be able and compelled to work for their own living, and thereby ultimately merge into the general

population".²⁰ The belief was somewhat naive, in view of the fact that most half-castes remained with their aborigine mothers and lived a life in no way different from their full-blooded half-brothers, and in 1912 it was even proposed (though never implemented) that half-caste children should be taken from their parents as soon as possible. "To allow children" - stated the Report for 1911 - "to remain on the Reserves, to grow up in comparative idleness, and in the midst of more or less vicious surroundings, would be, to the least, an injustice to the children themselves, and a positive menace to the State." The cry went unheeded and in 1918, the Aborigines Protection Act was amended to include under the term aborigines all persons of part aboriginal descent.

But this policy meant little to the aborigines of the West. There were few police, fewer lock-ups and too many roadside hotels. Drinking went on, more or less undisturbed, and aborigines had little trouble with the police, except the rare event of serious crime. However, the indigent element did receive rations from police and station owner

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Report of Protector of Aborigines 1882.

The second stage of A.P.B. policy was the setting as of land for aboriginal settlement, and the establishment stations under the control of white managers. In 1907(?)¹⁸⁸⁰ station was established at Darlington Point, to which some Hillston aborigines went. In 1926, a station was established at Carowra Tank - 54 miles from Ivanhoe:

"This became necessary because of the building of the Condobolin-Broken Hill line and the influx of a number of new settlers which deprived the aborigines of a great deal of their former freedom to roam and hunt over the big holdings and brought them in such closer contact with the white population that it seemed advisable to form a settlement where they could be concentrated and cared for."²¹

In 1934, water supplies failed and the people were moved to Menindie. To this new station, the aborigines living round Menindie and those down river at Pooncaira, were forced to come, although most drifted away again after a few years. In 1935 aborigines living in Tibooburra allowed themselves to be transported to Breewarrina station; but, here again, they did not remain long, but drifted westward to Bourke, Wanaaring and Wilcannia. The standard of housing at Menindie station was extremely primitive, and when, in 1945, new ideals of native welfare were abroad, a model station was planned for

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Report of the Aborigines Protection Board for 1926 (19

the inhabitants. A site on the Lachlan river was chosen near Lake Cargelligo, and in 1948 the Murrin Bridge Station was opened. Shortly after, a housing settlement, under the control of a part-time supervisor, was opened at Wilcannia. About the same time, a Welfare Officer was appointed to visit all aboriginal settlements in the area.

Life on a government station will be described in succeeding chapters. Essentially, policy has always been the same: to inculcate into aborigines the white Australian ideal of morality, industry and cleanliness.

We may distinguish two main phases in the adaptation of western New South Wales aborigines to the new conditions posed by white settlement. During the first phase, they for the most part camped on stations, and acquiring the skills of pastoral workers. During the second phase, they continued to be pastoral workers, but camped on government stations around the fringes of towns. A number of factors brought about this change. Firstly, the stations ceased to give government rations: indigents must henceforward collect their food from the police or government station managers. Secondly, the large land holdings of the earlier period were divided up, mostly after the first world war, into small blocks, which were too small to support a large aboriginal camp, and which

offered work for only a few. The great depression of the early 1930s threw a large percentage of aborigines out of work, and while some received the dole, many came onto the government stations to receive assistance. Aborigines living in sub-standard conditions were, in any case, under pressure from the authorities to move to controlled stations, and they were also under pressure to send their children to school. Except for a few aboriginal families who have settled in the towns, the aborigines of 1957 are still in the second phase and it is with this way of life that this thesis is mainly concerned.

The white settlement of the West meant the eventual end of the old aboriginal hunting and gathering life. It did not automatically mean the end of the social organization (or, at least, the more formal aspects of it), the ceremonial life or the language. Nevertheless, today each has virtually disintegrated. Although children know a few native words, no one under forty can maintain a conversation in the language of their forbears. At Carowra Tank, people began marrying 'wrong' after the first world war; elsewhere, the breakdown began even earlier, and Euabalong aborigines were said to have been marrying 'wrong' in the 1890s.

It is clear that many young people revolted against marriages arranged by the old people which sometimes gave young women to the old men. Previously the system was maintained by the threat of physical and supernatural punishment even when white dominance made the former impracticable, the latter held force, and a number of deaths at Carowra Tank as late as the '30s were interpreted as reprisals. Gradually however, the old sorcerers died and were not replaced;²² simultaneously the younger generation became sceptical of their powers. Today those few old people who still believe in the 'old rule', keep their disapproval to themselves. In a few instances, too, A.W.B. officials have supported 'wrong' marriages. Yet another disruptive factor was the arrival to the area of a number of women, whose moiety and section and consequently that of their children, was unknown.

The present-day mode of choosing spouses dispenses with the traditional categories, and is no longer administered by the old people; nevertheless, there is not complete licence. Consanguineal kin should not be, and, in practice, are not married. An old man, defending the traditional marriage :

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An old woman at Wilcannia and another at Condobolin are both said to be 'clever', but they claim to use their power for their own purposes, and are not interested in enforcing any public morality.

said "We'd be like dogs" if they did not exist. The rules he defended have been abandoned, but perhaps this basic attitude remains.

With the ceremonial life the breakdown was even more complete and, perhaps because it demanded more organization it occurred earlier. And yet, in certain respects, conditions remained favourable for its continuance: travel was, in fact, safer and easier than in the old days; food was more easily obtainable for a large number, and at least in some cases the government seems to have provided rations for the assalage. In the 1890s borba ceremonies brought together aborigines from the Lachlan to the Bogan, / ^{while} Aborigines of the far north-west, the south-western corner of Queensland and north-eastern South Australia came together for circumcision ceremonies. Ceremonial life at Euabalong and along the Darling seems to have ceased towards the end of the last century. The last successful borba was held by the Carrow Tank people in 1914, but by this time the form had atrophied and tooth avulsion was no longer practiced. A further ceremony was attempted in 1925, but one of the leading figures died, and the affair was abandoned. In the far north-west although ceremonial life had ceased by 1910, individuals were able to attend ceremonies in Queensland and South Australia.

until about 1925. Thereafter, initiated men had to content themselves with their memories; the uninitiated had little notion what they had lost. The former were able to find sufficient resemblance in Christianity to their own beliefs to accept the white man's religion; but, perhaps because neither Anglican nor Roman Catholic churches offered any opportunity for active participation, none became an enthusiastic church goer.

It is difficult, in retrospect, to explain the collapse. Many informants simply say, "The old people died out." And indeed, there has been a cataclysmic decline of population during the last 50 years, particularly in the north-west. For example, of the once flourishing Wiljali, 200 of whom camped on Polamacca Station, 50 years ago, I could discover less than a dozen survivors. Those who remain have been scattered, and the area incorporating south-west Queensland, north-east South Australia and north-west New South Wales now almost empty of aborigines. Moreover, A.P.B. figures show a disproportionately heavy decline among the older age groups, between 1883 and 1915 (see Figure II). Nevertheless a few remain, even today; there are six initiated men in north-west and seven at Murrin Bridge; they are men, more who continue to keep the secrets very close. But there is

air of defeat about them. "We haven't the power" was how old Wogjaibon explained their failure to carry the borba on. He meant the magical power of the real 'clever men'²³ who were the organizers of the ceremonies. Men who were 'a bi clever' lingered on; but the great ones, who were 'like go had died out by about 1914. "It was all goi, goi, goi!" exclaimed the old man sadly. Goi means white man, and the speaker seemed to be saying that the wonders of the clever people were beginning to seem a little hollow, when the resources of power were so patently in the hands of the white men. Perhaps, too, the clever men themselves began to lose confidence in their own powers. In succeeding years their claims were treated with increasing scepticism by the young generation. An old Pooncaira magician promised rain, but 'raising' no more than a dust storm, earned himself the name of 'Dust Storm Freddy'. Another was held down, and the 'greasy bag' with which he performed cures, and which was supposed to contain his familiar, opened and found to contain a mouse!

The young men were unwilling to submit themselves to old for initiation; several succeeded in evading the call, a way that would have been impossible in the old days.

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See R.M. Berndt: 'Wuradjeri Clever Men', Oceania, Vol.

Perhaps also they felt that it no longer constituted the way to men's affairs, and had become, in stead, a cul de Their aspirations impelled them towards the acquisition of knowledge and techniques for dealing with the white man and getting the goods he had. In this respect, the old were generally less well equipped than the young. The traditional system was one in which a clique of older people, principally men, dominated the rest, allocating to themselves many of the good things of life. With the arrival of the white man, the younger generation saw the opportunity for release from domination by their elder and it was along these lines that the disintegration of the old system proceeded. Moreover, in a world of change, the 'old people' appeared as ignorant and foolish 'Jacky-jackies', fit only to stop out in the bush and hunt with spears and boomerangs.

The 'Jackie' stereotype, the stigma of their savage ancestry, is something on which aborigines are extremely sensitive, even today young people hide their knowledge of their ancestral language, and complain that to hear the old people speak makes them feel 'shamed'. The mention of traditional words before white strangers, or the sound of traditional songs, reduces young people to embarrassed giggles. Corroboree steps are known to many, but are scarcely ever

executed. In a word, the old values are at a discount; "We're like white folks now!" is the claim, although it is only partially true in practice. Only the deep seated, non-rational fear of ghosts has been left intact over the years.

The European settlement of western New South Wales, brought about radical changes in the aboriginal way of life during the next two generations. Some of the changes were irresistible, given the white man's overwhelming force, and his determination to usurp the resources of the country; others were the result of the needs and values acquired by aborigines as a result of their encounter with a new culture. The 'new order' did allow the aborigines a considerable measure of freedom in the way their non-working lives could be conducted; in particular, ceremonial and kinship behaviour continued for some time and declined at least partly by aboriginal consent. Their lack of understanding of white ways and techniques inhibited certain sorts of interaction with whites and gave them the status of inept and somewhat comical learners. Nevertheless, whites and aborigines shared a sufficiently wide area of interaction for the latter to be able to acquire a considerable measure of understanding of the former. There seems to have been more contact with the white labouring element than with the managers and owners.

and it was the former that the aborigines used as a model changing their way of life. But this was to be expected since their economic status was similar to that of the white worker and they were culturally predisposed to adopt his way of life. Given the chance, it was possible for the aboriginal man to attain something approaching equality with his white mates. The shortage of labour in the remoter areas, the value of local natives on the vast, unmapped properties of the early period and the anxiety of white workers not to be undercut by cheap labour, all served to lay a solid economic foundation for this state of affairs. The possibility of becoming a 'smart man', etc. gave the aboriginal man other objectives than becoming eminent in his people's ceremonial life, though the two were not actually incompatible. But, partly through fear of half-known ordeals of initiation and partly as a revolt against the older generation, they neglected the traditional goals; being uninitiated, they did not place any value on the ceremonial life itself. Once ceremonial life had collapsed, the basis of traditional authority was destroyed also, and the only mechanism for bringing together and organizing large numbers of natives was gone. The way of life which the younger generation took up, although not without its satisfactions, provided them with no occa-

for large-scale gatherings, and few opportunities for exercising leadership. The authority of police, managers was recognized, but there was no foundation on which a new form of aboriginal authority could be built.

Chapter III

THE ABORIGINE AS A CITIZEN

The Aborigines' Protection Act

Among the inhabitants of New South Wales there is a number of persons of aboriginal or part-aboriginal descent. According to a recent survey¹ they number some 12,370, of whom 231 are 'full-bloods', 6,388 are 'half-castes' and 5,751 lesser castes.

In many respects these persons enjoy a legal status not different from that of other residents of the state: they have the franchise, both for state and federal elections, they are liable to the penalties and protection of the law, they pay taxes, receive free education and can claim Unemployment, Sickness and Maternity benefits, Child Endowment and, if not resident on a government reserve, Old Age Pensions. Minimum wage rates and legislation on working conditions apply to them, as to anyone else.

However, in other respects they are subject to special provisions in both state and federal law. According to the

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Report of Aborigines Welfare Board for the year ended June, 1956.

Commonwealth Defence Act, no aborigine is liable for military service, though, in fact, a small number of N.S.W. 'mixed-bloods' did serve in the last war and a few have done military training since. Commonwealth law also provides that aborigines living on government reserves may not receive pensions, although they may receive clothing, blankets and rations. Special provisions for aborigines in N.S.W. have been set out in the Aborigines Protection Act (1909-1943). Since 1918 the Act has applied to "any person of aborigine or part aborigine descent"². Exemption from the provisions of the Act may be granted by the Aborigines Welfare Board to anyone "who in the opinion of the board ought no longer to be subject to the provisions of this Act".³ Even then, the position of certificate holders is not entirely normal, for "the board may at any time cancel any certificate issued under this section".⁴ Moreover, the holding of the certificate does not disqualify any person of aboriginal descent from being nominated as an aboriginal member of the Board.

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Aborigines Protection Act, 3.

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Ibid. 18C.(1).

⁴

Ibid. 18C.(2).

According to the Act, aborigines not exempted are subject to special controls and protections. The Aborigines Welfare Board and its officials are charged with the supervision of certain provisions of the Act, including the administration of moneys set aside for aboriginal welfare and with carrying out certain provisions of the general law, with respect to aborigines.

The Aborigines Welfare Board consists of 11 members, the Chairman being the Under-Secretary of the Chief Secretary's Department; the remaining members being appointed by the Governor. ~~Other members shall be the Superintendent of Aboriginal Welfare, an officer of the Department of Public Instruction, and of the Department of Public Health; a senior member of the Police Force; an expert on anthropology and an expert on agriculture; two individuals appointed by the Minister.~~ Two aborigines (one of whom should be a full blood⁵ ^{are}) elected by ballot among persons of aboriginal descent in the State.

The Aborigines Welfare Board has under its control Reserves, areas of land reserved from sale or lease for the use of aborigines, and on a number of Reserves it has

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No nominations have ever been submitted for this seat.

provided housing. Unauthorised persons may be removed from the area, including undesirable aborigines. Conversely, a magistrate may, on application to the board, order an aborigine to take up residence on a reserve. A number of reserves are classed as stations (at present there are 16 being under the control of a manager and matron. On other reserves the residents may be under part-time supervision usually either from a school teacher on the reserve or a local police officer. Most settlements receive occasional visits from the local A.W.B. Welfare Officer. The regulations relating to reserves state that "every aborigine, whilst within a station or reserve, shall obey all reasonable instructions and commands of the manager or other responsible officer of the Board". In particular, gambling, firearms and liquor are forbidden. Livestock may not be kept without permission.⁶

The Board is empowered to invoke the Child Welfare Act and take charge of aboriginal children it considers neglected, placing them in homes or with foster parents. Wards of the Board may be placed in apprenticeship or suitable employment, and the Board may take custody of a

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The Act, op. cit. Regulations for the Conduct and Management of Stations and Reserves.

portion of the ward's wages.

~~The Board may order an aborigine to submit to a medical examination and may require him to remain in hospital for appropriate treatment.~~

The supply of liquor to aborigines is prohibited, and it is forbidden to bring liquor onto a Reserve. The ordinary laws relating to drunkenness and offences arising from drunkenness do, of course, apply to aborigines.

In their relations with whites aborigines are restricted and protected. No person, unless he be a policeman or Board official, or authorized by the Board, may enter an aboriginal reserve.⁷ Moreover, persons may be called upon to give reasons before a magistrate as to why they have been consorting with aborigines, and be convicted if their explanations are not satisfactory.⁸ The Board has the right to withdraw an aborigine from employment where it has "reason to believe that such aborigine is not receiving fair and proper treatment, and is not being paid a reasonable wage, or the board is of opinion that his moral or physical wellbeing is likely to be impaired by continuance in such employment...."⁹

⁷ The Act op. cit. 8 (1), (2).

⁸ Ibid. 10.

⁹ Ibid. 13 B.

In sum, all persons of known aboriginal descent in N.S.W. enjoy some degree of supervision which is not given to ordinary citizens, or which is normally given by other bodies. This will be most thoroughgoing when the aborigines do not hold exemption certificates, and most continuous when they are resident on stations. In fact, some 4,788 live on stations or reserves, while of the remaining 7,588 a minority live in sub-standard conditions on the outskirts of country towns, while the majority own or rent their own houses and live as ordinary members of the community.¹⁰

Aborigines and the Board

A Protector of Aborigines was first appointed in N.S.W. in 1881, and an Aboriginal Protection Board in 1883, though it had no statutory powers until 1903. The Board adopted its present title in 1943. As we have seen until 1918 it considered itself to be concerned only with the protection of the fast dwindling numbers of 'full-bloods'.

Essentially, the policy of the Board has remained the same. In the report for the year ending June, 1942,

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Report of the Aborigines Welfare Board for the year ended June, 1956.

it is set out as follows:

- a) To assimilate the aborigines, particularly those of lighter casts, into the general community.... To give assistance to deserving families to enable them to secure homes of their own.
- b) To inculcate in aborigines the habit of self-help.

In the report for the year ended June 1944, the policy is stated at greater length.

"In New South Wales the number of full-blood aborigine is comparatively small and even these few people have had close contact with white civilization. Obviously therefore, it is now too late to segregate them with a view to retaining their ancestral way of life, which involves their own culture and social organization. All people of aboriginal descent must be developed towards the goal of citizenship. Meanwhile their present clinging together in groups arises, in part, from an inheritance which marks them off from white Australians. Even light castes who can take their place efficiently in the general economic life and who live in towns and cities tend to dwell in neighbourhood groups. In this way alone they are assured of friendship in a community of interests in the midst of a somewhat cold world. This practice will be continued and should be respected until colour prejudice towards the aboriginal mixed-bloods has been eradicated from the rest of the population."

In furtherance of this policy the Board has been at some pains to advance the aborigines in the spheres of

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A third item was: "To develop the agricultural possibilities of aboriginal stations.... ~~To develop in the aborigines a pride of possession~~", but the agricultural side of Board policy has never really developed; certainly not in the area dealt with in this thesis.

hygiene, housing and morality. As regards housing, the Board has provided accommodation on some reserves, though it has not always been of the best, and has not always received proper care from the occupants. The report for the year ended June, 1951 states that a nominal rent will be charged for new houses "to awaken in the residents a sense of responsibility and a pride in their own houses", and adds that "payment of rent is a social obligation that still has to be learned by the majority". However, the report for the following year reveals that on some estates there had developed "an attitude of defiance and refusal to pay rent", which caused some concern to the Board "because of the psychological reaction it has caused in the reasoning of the defiant minority". The size of this element is revealed in the report for the year ended June 1956, which states that of the total £41,049 outstanding for rents, only £13,299 had been paid. However, until last year, the Board took no action against defaulters. It then threatened legal proceedings against individuals, who were clearly able to afford rent, if they did not pay several year's arrears. Proceedings were actually taken

against one man who continued to defy the order¹², and a more rigorous policy towards all tenants is promised for the future.

The Board has also been interested in aboriginal housing outside the reserves. Residence in town will, in the words of the report to June 1950, "provide better educational, medical, social and employment facilities, and hasten the achievement of assimilation". To this end money has been allocated for the purchase of sites and the erection of houses in towns; although there has been some local opposition to the admission of aborigines to white residential areas. In addition, the Board has been prepared to advance loans to aborigines wishing to purchase or erect their own homes. The report to June, 1956 states that advances totalling £7,900 have been made and that (in contrast to the rent situation) all recipients are meeting their obligations fully.

The policy of the Aborigines Welfare Board has been stated to be the assimilation of the aborigines. What is intended is fairly clear: firstly, to persuade the aborigi

¹²

See 'Dawn', July 1957 (Monthly magazine published by the A.W.B. for aboriginal readers and distributed free.)

to adopt at least the most important standards of contemporary white Australian living; and to correct those habits which are, by the same measure delinquent. In this way it is hoped to make them acceptable to the white communities with which they come in contact so that they will be admitted freely and without discrimination to the facilities available in the locality, and, eventually to white society. Secondly, it is intended that aborigines should be economically self supporting, in the manner of ordinary citizens, and should not be a burden on the State; thus the end of state subsidized settlements, special medical facilities and of the Board, itself, is envisaged. In furtherance of the first objective the Board has made particular efforts to raise the standards of housing, home-making, hygiene and education. Attempts have been made to correct drunkenness and what is considered sexual immorality. In selecting these features of aboriginal life to change, the Board has certainly selected the points which whites stress in justifying their rejection of aborigines; this is substantially the case in the areas where I have worked and is, if anything, more true of those areas of the North

Coast described by Malcolm Calley¹³. It is intended that aborigines should be made to work whenever work is to be found, and that some measures should be taken to prevent thriftlessness. The suppression of gambling and drinking works to this end, where it is effective. The Board may administer the wages earned by an aborigine, and usually does so in the case of State Wards, though rarely in any other instance.

Although the policy of the Board is to assimilate the aborigines into the white community, it nevertheless deems it necessary to control contact with whites, particularly those of an undesirable character. Few whites are allowed onto reserves and only for authorized purposes; even off the reserves the law against consorting with aborigines controls contact. Certainly it is generally true that the whites most likely to mix with aborigines are those whose standards are nearest to theirs, and are therefore least likely to set them a good example. Moreover, it is undoubtedly true that in the past, whites have exploited aborigines, particularly by giving the men liquor in return for being allowed sexual access to the women.

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Race Relations on the North Coast of New South Wales, Malcolm J.C. Calley. Oceania XXVII. No.3. March 1957. p. 190.

A minority of aborigines live on government station and reserves. Generally, these have been established when it was felt, the aborigines' living conditions required closest attention; but often the authorities have tried to bring them in from quite distant areas, and have brought together groups previously separate. In the past, aborigines have been under considerable pressure to move onto special settlements; however, the majority, today, are free to come and go as they please.

~~On a station there will be a manager, with an assistant, perhaps, and a matron. Where possible, the matron is a trained nurse. No special qualifications are specified for the post of manager, but many appointees have already had experience with native peoples elsewhere. They have come from many different walks of life; those with whom I have been acquainted include a former missionary, truck driver, policeman, public servant (from another branch), decorator, Pacific Islands administrator. Appointees are given no theoretical training. They are appointed directly to an assistant managership, from which, if they are considered suitable they may be promoted to a full managership. Welfare officers have generally had some previous experience as managers or assistants.~~

Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal education is the responsibility of the N.S.W. Department of Education, but its importance has been recognized by the A.W.B.

"It is obvious that in order to lead the aboriginal people to a proper understanding and appreciation of the mental processes involved in Australian civilization and life, an educational system in its various forms and degrees must be established. This education must extend beyond the mere formal primary school education and should involve technical, industrial, agricultural, secondary, and, perhaps ultimate professional education."¹⁴

In many parts of the state, particularly in the West, aborigine children have always attended the Public or Roman Catholic schools, so far as the roaming life of their parents permitted. Where there were large settlements, and particularly where the settlements were isolated, special aboriginal schools were established. Until 1940 these schools were the primary responsibility of the A.P.B., but a course of Instruction for aborigine schools had been in existence since 1916 (with subsequent revisions in 1938, 1939, 1940). Originally, the teacher was given the object of "assisting the boys to become capable farm or station labourers and the girls useful domestic servants", and there was a strong emphasis on the teaching of practical skills.

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A.W.B. Report to June, 1944.

(The children were also to be taught to "develop a love and reverence for the Creator" and instructive trips into the bush were recommended!)"¹⁵ This attitude lessened with each revision, and in the last it was stated that "some of the pupils with an admixture of white blood frequently exhibit an intelligence that permits them under good school conditions to proceed at the normal rate..."¹⁶ Following the publication of the 1952 Curriculum for Primary Schools, it was decided that "it would be better, both educationally and socially, to allow all aboriginal pupils in this state to follow the course laid down in the Curriculum for Primary Schools."¹⁷

During the year ended June 1949 the Department of Education approved the admission of aborigine children, including those living on reserves for whom separate facilities were provided, to Public Schools. In this connection, headmasters are instructed to refer for departmental decision applications for admission which they consider should be refused or deferred. This amounted, in fact, to official

¹⁵ N.S.W. Department of Education Course of Instruction for Aborigines' Schools. 3., 1916.

¹⁶ Ibid, preface to 1940 revision.

¹⁷ Letter (1/1057) C. McKinnon, Secretary, Research Section N.S.W. Department of Education.



support for aborigine children wishing to attend white schools, and a removal of the situation where headmasters had to make decisions in the face of local pressure.

Conclusions

The work of the A.P.B. and its successor the A.W.B. has been proceeding now for some 74 years, though the areas discussed in this thesis have been under close surveillance for a considerably shorter period. However, even where areas of origin have been under influence for the whole of this period the objective of assimilation has by no means been reached. It seems that there has been resistance to the process both from the aborigines themselves and from the white communities into which it is intended that they should become assimilated. The nature of the factors working against assimilation will become clearer as this thesis progresses; however, it will not be out of place to state some preliminary points.

Firstly, the very care which the A.W.B. and the police devote to all persons of apparent aboriginal descent serves to isolate them in their own minds, and in the minds of others, as persons requiring peculiar surveillance and protection. Perhaps this awareness carries with it the susp.

that they are a people less to be trusted than the whites however depressed or depraved the latter may be. Moreover the segregation of aborigines on reserves and government stations, generally some distance from white settlements demonstrates in a visible form the social isolation and peculiar status of the aborigine. The physical isolation moreover, drastically reduces outside contacts, particularly for old people, women and children, and generally necessitates the establishment of a station school attended by aborigines only.

In this respect, the A.W.B. is placed on the horns of a dilemma. By maintaining these isolated settlements it drastically reducing the opportunity for contact with whites that would provide a starting point for assimilation and stimulus to further acculturation. The establishment of large settlements, which has been Board policy, may also frighten white populations and encourage the formation of group stereotype for aborigines¹⁸; whereas a small population, living in closer proximity, facilitates judgements of individual merit.¹⁹ There is a further point; the concentration of a large population in one area, where there have

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See p. 259

before been no aborigines, means that there is unlikely to be sufficient work for all and that some will be obliged to go far afield to find it.²⁰ For 'Mission' aborigines, work is probably the most important milieu for getting to know whites;²¹ but if the place of work and home are widely separated, it means that they are deprived of an important point of contact with the local white community. On the other hand, it must be admitted that bringing the aborigines closer to town, also exposes them to more corrupting influences: it will be less easy to keep away white 'no-hope' elements, liquor will be more accessible and so on. Moreover, if the aborigines are going to carry on their lives in the old manner, they are likely to arouse the hostility of the white townsfolk.

Unless the aboriginal stations are to be made self-supporting units, there is no question of isolating the aborigines from all contact with whites. Hence, assimilation is the only solution to the 'aboriginal problem', as the Board recognizes. But isolating the aborigines on 'Mission' is simply marking time unless it can be proved that they are in some way being prepared for assimilation.

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See p. 194

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The Board provides and has provided for some 74 year substantial material assistance and care to aborigines, to save them from destitution and to give them an opportunity to order their lives in a manner approved by whites. But such a situation is essentially different from that enjoyed by all except a very few destitute white families, and has encouraged in many aborigines a parasitic attitude, an unwillingness to achieve by their own efforts what can be gained without any effort at all. The unwillingness to parents would seem to be a case in point. In other words, what from one point of view assists the advance of the aborigines towards an approved way of life, from another point of view impedes it. The result may be a liking for such features of white civilization as can be acquired without effort, and a disregard for what cannot, rather than stimulating the aborigines into taking over the whole body of white needs and pursuits.

Another factor acting against assimilation is the refusal of some whites to grant any sort of equality to aborigines, simply because they are aborigines or because of their colour. For example residential areas, schools, swimming baths and municipal premises have all, on occasions been closed to aborigines. Even where ways of living are

no different, such attitudes may persist wherever an individual is known to be of aboriginal descent.

Any study, then, of aborigines in N.S.W. must take these factors into account: 1. That aborigines enjoy a peculiar legal status and one of which they - and the workers are periodically reminded by the attentions of the authorities; 2. That they are under considerable pressure to change their way of living towards conformity with white Australian ideals; and 3. That if they live - voluntarily or of necessity - on aboriginal stations, they may be placed in considerable physical isolation from the outside world

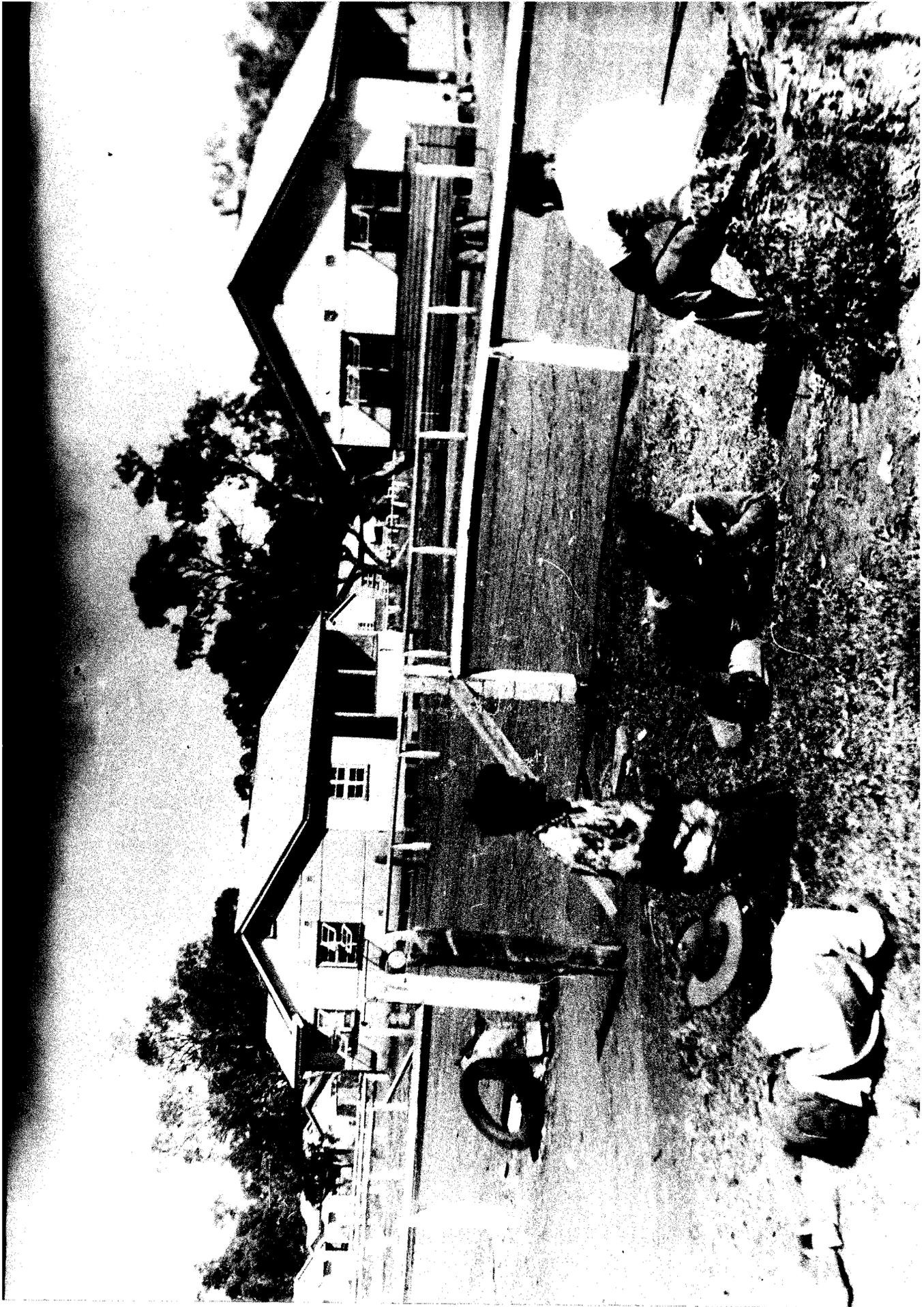
Chapter IV

ABORIGINAL ADMINISTRATION

The Controlled Station - Murrin Bridge

In 1948, the A.W.B. opened its new model station at Murrin Bridge. The settlement is situated in considerable isolation, a mile back from the main road and about ten miles from the nearest townships, Euabalong and Lake Carlisle. At first sight, it appears not unlike a small 'outback' village: the thirty-four, quite spacious weatherboard houses are laid out along two streets, with a handsome recreation hall and children's playground at one end, and a small church at the other; near the entrance are offices, the school house and the more imposing residences of the manager and headmaster. There are more than 250 aborigines living on the 'Mission', as it is called, and to care for them there is a full-time white manager, sometimes with a trainee assistant (though not during my stay), a matron, his wife, and three school teachers, one of whom is married. Also employed by the Board are three aboriginal handymen, whose job it is to keep the station in repair and carry out sanitary disposal.

The manager is the key power holder in the 'Mission' regime. The police have independent power but, in practice,



they work in co-operation with the manager and act largely on his suggestion. A word from him is generally enough to secure the arrest of any aborigine¹.

Serious offences against the law are few. In December 1957, five men received light sentences or fines for sheep stealing; in 1956 four received prison sentences on Carnal Knowledge charges and two for Petty Larceny. By far the most frequent offences are drunkenness and bringing liquor onto the Reserve. In fact it is not possible to hand every offender over to the police; it may not be possible to contact them and, in any case, they have no suitable transport for conveying the intoxicated to gaol. To take every offender to gaol in the station truck would leave the manager little time for anything else, and sensibly he reserves this treatment for those who are a nuisance. Others he may send to bed or run out of the station so that by the time they have walked home they have 'sobered up'. During the five months of my stay, twelve aborigines were convicted of liquor offences; eight got away with a night in the cells and a small fine and eight spent a week or more

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This is not meant to imply that the power has been abused in any way.

in gaol.²

Probably the Manager's most potent sanction is to expel aborigines from the settlement, depriving them of their home and cutting them off from relations and friends. Prior to my visit, two families were permanently excluded for continual drunkenness and disorderly behaviour. Nine men were excluded for a temporary period: five for continual idleness (alternative to preferring a vagrancy charge), three for assaulting their wives and one for general nuisance. Another sanction effective in the case of indigents is to refuse rations; it is a drastic measure and was only taken (for the space of one week) against an old man, who was continually drunk. However, it exists as a threat.

The isolation of Murrin Bridge makes it necessary for aborigines to use the telephone periodically, to call a taxi to take them to work, to order stores from town, to contact employers and so on. However, the only telephone is controlled by the manager and his permission must be sought before a call can be made. The manager's help must occasionally be sought in finding work or settling a dispute with

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White offenders in Lake Cargelligo were few. In the last nine months of 1956 there had been only 7 offences, and these committed by itinerant labourers. For Euabalong, see later section.

an employer. These are minor factors in themselves, but they contribute to the general state of dependency in which the aborigine finds himself.

The powers of the other station whites derive, in effect, from those of the manager. The matron inspects the houses once a fortnight and gives the women advice on medical matters when necessary. Most aborigines make some attempt to clean up their houses in anticipation of a visit and most are grateful for the medical advice and do their best to carry it out - although they are apt to cease treatment after the crisis is past and frequently fail to observe dosing or feeding routines. Serious failing in any of the spheres brings down a reprimand from the manager, but this seems to be rarely necessary. In one case, a woman failed to care for her baby as instructed and assumed a defiant attitude, when reprimanded; however, the baby became seriously ill and she was forced to swallow her pride and come for help. (She could have taken it into town, but probably had no money to pay for the trip.) Where a child has been grossly neglected by its parents, the manager can take it from them and have it adopted. Most women are aware that this can be done, but there has been no instance of it on Murrin Bridge so far as I could discover.

How effective are these authorities in carrying out the policy laid down for them by the Board? Stealing does not present a serious problem and need not concern us further; drinking, on the other hand, is rife: only a fraction of the breaches come to the manager's notice and there seems to be no way of stopping the supply of liquor. Short of indiscriminate raids on houses, it is difficult to see what more can be done. A more severe policy of gaoling offenders is possible, but the indications are that offenders alter their ways not at all after a sentence.³ Aborigines do not work overmuch,⁴ and more severe policy might perhaps be applied; but there is no certainty that once off the 'Mission' the men will work. Gambling is rife, but it is carried on well out of sight and only by 'snooping' would the manager be able to control it.

Only the handymen, who receive their wages from the manager, paid rent during 1957. However, as a result of the new rent policy the station's most prosperous aborigine received a demand for eight years' arrears, with the threat that others would follow. Some houses are apt to get dirt;

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See Chapter IX

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See Chapter VIII

between inspections, and the depredations of large swarms of children and occasional brawls have produced a steady deterioration of many, which the occupants do nothing to repair. No more than eight ~~of them~~ could be described as well-kept and improved. However, it must be borne in mind that almost all the aborigines previously lived in tin shanties or, at best, the small, earth-floor iron huts provided for them on the Menindee station. Three of the better housewives were brought up at the Board's Girls' Home and two came from a more progressive region.

There seems to be a considerable amount of extra-marital sexual intercourse, some of it with minors, but clearly, the management can do little to check it. Where an unmarried girl has a baby, the manager makes it his business to find out who the father was, but it is frequently difficult to prove paternity and girls are generally unwilling to take a paternity order against the man.⁵ Many couples live together without being formally married. In the past it has been the policy to persuade them to legalize the relationship; but there is no proof that it renders the relationship any more stable.⁶ The intervention of the

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See p. 144

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See p. 134

manager saves women from the worst of their husbands' violence in any quarrel and when family supplies run low he will force the men out to work or give rations where they have defaulted. Occasionally, too, he is called on to settle domestic quarrels. All this has important, but not altogether calculated effects on family life.⁷

Schoolteachers have the usual powers over the children while they are in school, and corporal punishment is administered from time to time. In addition, they insist that the children should come to school clean and decently dressed, sending them home again if they do not. This seems to have the required result. Living so close to their original homes, it is easy for the headmaster to enquire after any children not attending school, and truancy seems to be rare. However, in affairs in which the school is not closely concerned, the headmaster generally consults the manager, and when some children were caught stealing it was the manager who administered a beating.

School policy seems fairly successful, although most children revert to a ragged and ill-kempt appearance during the holidays. But the attitude to education seems to be very largely passive. There have been no startling academi

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See Chap. VI

achievements, and with one exception children have been withdrawn as soon as they reached fifteen. Only three parents had academic ambitions for their children and the rest anticipated that their children would do jobs where education was not required. Beyond the three 'Rs', they saw no use in education. School sports and 'Open Days' are attended by very few and an attempt to form a Parent-Teacher association proved a failure. The children are said to be responsive in their early years, but interest flags after the age of twelve; and my own interviews suggested that the older boys are already thinking in terms of becoming men and doing the things which men do - none of which have any connection with education.

Station whites, in general, and the manager, in particular, then, have a considerable influence on many aspects of aboriginal life and are definitely powers to be reckoned with. They also live in a manner that marks them off from the aborigines: their houses are larger and better cared for, they have cars of recent model, they dress well and in town they are to be seen associating more with the commercial and farming elements than with labourers. In their relations with aborigines they maintain a considera-

social distance. The latter are rarely admitted into their houses, in their trips to town in the station truck, aborigines must ride on the back while whites must sit in the cab; there is no informal visiting and few informal conversations. Moreover, the whites expect to be addressed as 'Mister' or 'Missus' or, at least as 'Boss', and will correct aborigines who fail to do so. The precise reasons for maintaining this distance are hard to gauge. Perhaps it is simply a matter of social superiority. However, the manager may feel that his extensive powers both oblige him and entitle him to maintain this distance; for the other station whites not to do so would be to admit themselves on a lower social scale than the manager. There is a further point: managers have an anomalous status in 'backblocks' society, and a certain sense of insecurity may make them want to demonstrate the superordinate nature of their relationship with the aborigines.

The independence and egalitarianism of the white Australian, particularly the bushman, is celebrated, nor does his treatment of the aboriginal worker altogether conflict with the latter ideal. For example, 'mate' or christian names are usual modes of address between them,

even when the white man is an employer.⁹ The 'Mission' regime, then, is a complete anachronism in 'backblocks' society, both as regards the supervised nature of aboriginal life and the social superiority which station whites assume. Most mature aboriginal males have had sufficient contact with white work-mates to realize this contrast and one or two who have enjoyed considerable acceptance among whites come close to challenging this superiority. However, women and more particularly, children, are very much isolated from outside contacts and station officials are almost the only whites with whom they have regular relations. When a group of aborigine boys, aged about 12, found some white fishermen camping on the river bank, they were astonished and not a little delighted to discover whites who were "as dirty as us", used bad language and made no attempt to preserve social distance. However, the tendency is for 'Mission' children and youths to model their relations with strange whites on those they have already had with station whites and, indeed, the shyness and subservient manner of 'Mission' people is notorious among the more sophisticated town aborigines.

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For a discussion of relations with white workers and employers, see Chapter X

The 'Mission' regime would be intolerable to most whites, as it is to many aborigines; but, except for a few State Wards, the residents are free to depart and live independently if they wish. What, then, induces them to accept it and how do they adapt themselves to it?

There can be no straight forward answer to the first question, for a number of factors seem to be involved. Firstly, more than 85% of the population over the age of twenty have lived most of their lives on a government station; they have grown up with the regime and are therefore less likely to be outraged by the power and manner of white authority. Secondly, about half of the adult population have lived most of their lives together¹⁰ and are closely interrelated; as will become clear in later chapters, the familiar circle of kinsfolk and friends constitutes an important source of personal and economic security. Significantly, the most unstable residents were predominantly those who had fewest kinship ties among the stable core of Mission dwellers and most kin scattered about elsewhere. Thirdly, in most areas of the West, there is a serious housing shortage; moreover, aborigines are probably considered

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See Chapter V.

undesirable tenants and rarely have sufficient money to buy a house. The alternatives are tin humpies without running water or sanitary facilities. However, the 'Mission' provides excellent housing, which has hitherto been free, running water, sanitary disposal, a free and accessible medical service and schooling. More than one fifth of the Murrin Bridge population is indigent; most of these would be able to draw pensions or receive rations off the 'Mission' but probably with free housing etc. and clothes and ration as well as Endowment for their children they are better off where they are.

Most of these points were raised by aborigines whom I questioned on the matter, though some stressed one point and some another. The facilities provided on the station were appreciated by at least some of the aborigines; indeed the more independent element regarded these as no less than their right and complained if they were not made available. For example, there was great indignation because the Matron did not get up in the middle of the night to attend to what was, in fact, a minor ailment. One woman, on hearing that rent was to be charged for the houses, announced that she would pay no rent until her house had been put in proper repair! The independent element were mostly those who had

had experience of living off the 'Mission', but few gave any serious indication of wanting to leave. A few have left and the aborigines living in neighbouring towns say that they would not live on the 'Mission'. Some pensioners prefer having money that they can spend as they wish to being given rations; others criticize the constant borrowing that goes on,¹¹ and the idle and awkward ways of 'Mission' people. However, it needs to be said that most of these individuals have few ties with 'Mission' folk and more in the localities where they live.

The two crucial features of aboriginal status in the 'Mission' regime are subordination and inferiority to the white officials. Three courses are open to the aborigine. He can accept his status and enjoy the benefits that go with it. He can try to avoid those situations where his status becomes manifest. Or he can challenge the regime either overtly or covertly. In practice, his response is a mixture of all three.

The fact that he undertakes to live on a station at all, involves a measure of acceptance, but rarely any tacit undertaking to obey all the rules. The drinkers, the car-

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See Chapter VII

players, the sheep stealers and the rest all hope to escape detection, but every so often they are caught and their status becomes manifest in a manner that is unpleasant and humiliating. However, there is the compensating factor that the able bodied men, who are most likely to clash with the authorities, spend much time working off the 'Mission'. A partial solution to the problem is to obtain an Exemption Certificate which permits drinking, but so far only three have done so. Excessive drinking has become institutionalized in aboriginal life and many would be unwilling to modify their habits sufficiently to be granted a certificate. Moreover, they are accustomed to drinking with their aboriginal friends, and to enter a hotel alone and drink among strangers would be little pleasure. Finally, the manager has made it known that he expects exempted aborigines to report, and some at least prefer to get their liquor illegally and have their houses free!

There are a few individuals who live so quiet a life that they have no encounter with the station whites for months at a time; but for men leading an active life and for women with young children, such a degree of avoidance would be grossly inconvenient, nor do they attempt it. The less violent encounters, asking to use the telephone, seeking

advice, applying for medical treatment and so on, while they require a formal acknowledgement of white status, at least not involve any sharp unpleasantness or humiliation. And, while the shyer folk are apt to stutter and avert their faces in the presence of station whites, the majority seem relatively at ease. A few aborigines who are well used to being with whites come close to challenging white superiority: while serving the prescribed modes of address, they nonetheless speak 'man to man'. Other aborigines attempt this, but so clumsily that the whites take it for 'familiarity' and administer a sharp rebuff.

The fact that the manager uses his discretion in awarding punishments encourages the belief that he can be talked in or out of a decision and that some individuals have a 'pull' with him. The arrival of a new manager in 1958 led the boat elements to test his reactions to different sorts of treatment. The police, on the contrary, are regarded as quite inflexible: once in their hands the aborigines attempt no further argument and always plead guilty. Since, then, the manager's resolution is to some degree flexible and since it is he who decides whether one will be handed over to the police or not, it is clearly advantageous to speak him fair and make a show of accepting his superior status.

There are occasions when individual aborigines try to use the management in their private quarrels by getting their adversary into trouble. Understandably, women seek

protection if their husbands become violent, but some are inclined to run to the manager as soon as their men become drunk or an ordinary domestic quarrel breaks out. Altogether there were fourteen instances, during my stay, in which women came to the manager for help. On one occasion, a youth, having been worsted in a drunken brawl, rushed to the manager and had the whole party, including himself, taken to gaol. As a rule, people do not do this sort of thing: there is a strong feeling against 'pimping to the manager' (i.e. carrying tales), and women who are constantly 'running up to the manager' and getting their husbands 'pinned in', are liable to come in for criticism, particularly from the men. However, there are no effective sanctions to prevent these occasional betrayals.

Opposition to the 'Mission' regime is mostly of the concealed type. The aborigines continue to gamble and drink and fornicate, hoping that they will not be found out. Scandalous stories are circulated which are intended to show that station whites are 'no better than us'. But organized opposition is completely lacking and individual opposition seems to arise in response to particular manifestations of the regime rather than the regime as such. Basically, I believe, the regime is accepted, though some managers are

considered 'better' than others. However, there have been no campaigns to effect the removal of unpopular managers, such as have occurred in other regions. When, early in 1945, the manager of Murrin Bridge was replaced, there was some dissatisfaction with the new matron, and a few discussed whether it would be possible to 'vote back' the previous incumbents; however, nothing further was done.

In 1946, William Ferguson, an aboriginal member of the A.W.B. visited Menindee station, and on the basis of his enquiries laid certain charges against the white manager. A commission was held, but the individuals who, Ferguson claimed, were his main informants, denied all knowledge concerning the allegations. I am not suggesting that the allegations were true or that the commission was anything but right in clearing the manager's name; but one is tempted to believe that Ferguson's witnesses did make the accusations he alleged but lacked the courage to repeat them in public.

An aborigine, Jack Wilson, who described the preceding events to me, himself experienced a similar 'let down'. A meeting was to be held at which Board representatives would explain policy, and a group of aborigines decided to protest at the way police burst into their houses without warning. Wilson agreed to ask the first question, with the under-

standing that the others would back him up. He did so, receiving a somewhat sharp retort; whereupon the others kept quiet. "I'll never get caught like that, again!" was Wilson's comment.

These facts suggest either that the aborigines regard the manager's authority as virtually unchallengeable (except on particular, minor issues), or that they have no desire to challenge it. Whichever it be, one can describe the aboriginal response to bids of this sort as apathetic. Their attitude to the other forms of political representation open to them is equally apathetic. No one in the locality has ever stood for election to the Board; no one knows the name of the present representative, who comes from another region and has never visited Murrin Bridge; few have any idea of how aborigines are appointed to the Board. At State and Federal election times, a polling booth has been erected on the station: I understand that the majority have voted for the Labour Party "because it's the working man's party"; but a number asked the manager's advice on which way they should vote, although he declined to give it. At all events, there seems to be no notion of utilizing parties or votes, to make their voices heard or alter government policy.

Most of the aborigines live on Murrin Bridge station because they derive some positive advantage from it. In return they must accept a considerable amount of interference in their lives and a socially inferior status. The subordination to the 'Mission' regime means not only a peculiar relationship with the white authorities but also peculiar relationships with one another as a result of the intervention or potential intervention of those authorities. With more or less of reluctance, the regime is accepted and no attempt is made to challenge it. However, some attempt is made to modify its workings and to manipulate it to personal advantage.

It is not easy to assess the contribution of the regime in speeding the aborigines towards assimilation. No doubt the good housing, medical attention and hygienic facilities are beneficial; no doubt the children derive benefits from regular schooling which will show more clearly in future generations; but there is no clear indication that the living standards, which the Board has been imposing on the aborigines, have become aboriginal values. Moreover, the relations that the younger generations have with station whites are not calculated to equip them for encounters with whites in the outside world.

The Reserve and the Camp - Wilcannia.

The town of Wilcannia is situated along the west bank of the Darling river. It is the permanent home of more than 800 people, including some 200 aborigines¹²; and a point of call for numerous itinerant workers who stay in the hotels or unroll their swags on the river bank. The aboriginal Reserve lies across the bridge on the opposite side of the river to the town. Aborigines camped here for many years, and in 1948 the A.W.B. built a settlement for them. They originally proposed to establish it on the edge of the town, itself, but local opposition was encountered and the fourteen weatherboard cottages were finally erected on the old Reserve. These are not sufficient to house the whole population and many preferred not to live on the 'Mission' thus a number continued to live in tin 'humpies' scattered along the river bank. The heavy floods of 1956 forced them to evacuate their 'humpies' and many built new homes on the common land, fringing the town itself, ~~in~~ which they did not vacate when the floods subsided. The camp is still in existence, the huts scattered about among the scrub, at

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This assumes that half and lesser caste aborigines have been included, as they should be, in the general population figure. Full-bloods, listed separately, number about thirty.



100-200 yards distance from one another. Shortly after the erection of the settlement a small Roman Catholic school was erected and a home for two nuns who were to teach there. The school is used on Sundays as a church. The provision of segregated schooling was the decision of the local church authorities: the two nuns have had previous experience of aboriginal work, and the project is in accordance with local Roman Catholic views that the aborigines should be given special treatment and kept out of town as much as possible.

An Aboriginal Reserve in N.S.W. is generally administered on behalf of the A.W.B. by non-resident police, as a part of their general duties; the settlement in Wilcannia, however, is under the control of a part-time Supervisor. The first incumbent was a white man who lived in town and seems to have concerned himself mainly with the collection of rent. His successor is a local aborigine, Frank Quinn, who lives, with his family, on the settlement and works as a garage mechanic in town. However, his powers do not extend to the camp and, for a number of reasons, even on the settlement they are subsidiary to those of the police.

The police, then, play the key role in the Wilcannia regime. They have their own truck in which they regularly

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See p.

patrol camp and settlement, arresting offenders on the spot. Not without justice, they anticipate that there will be trouble among the aborigines, and they seem to keep the latter under a stricter surveillance than the white population. Many more aboriginal offenders fall into the hands of the police in Wilcannia than is the case at Murrin Bridge. I was unable to get precise information from the police authorities, but aboriginal offences are said to exceed white offences by about two to one; moreover, a proportion of the latter are committed by itinerant labourers, not local residents. Aboriginal offences are all minor: there have been a few Carnal Knowledge convictions, though none recently, and in the six months preceding January 31st, 1958, there were six convictions for vagrancy, three for assaulting a police officer and three for petty theft. In addition to these come an endless succession of conviction for drunken and disorderly behaviour and similar offences committed while under the influence of drink. I have no precise figures for these, but the number is very large. Thirty or more aborigines most of whom are men could be described as 'heavy drinkers' and most of these find themselves in gaol at some time - a few as many as ten times - during the year. The more serious offences bring prison

sentences lasting several months; drunkenness brings, in order of seriousness, four, ten or twenty days, with the alternative of £2, £5 or £10 fines which, however, aborigines generally lack the money to pay. Not surprisingly, aborigines dislike being kept in gaol; one of their songs complains:

"Twenty days hard labour, Oh Brother that's just
fine!
No sweets, no sugar in your tea; no smokes to
ease your mind.
You're sleeping on an old floor mat, the concret
for your bed;
You feel your belly pinching and you wish that
you were dead."

They also complain that they receive rough handling from the police. It is, of course, impossible to prove such an allegation; but a retired police sergeant, who had done duty in the West, told me: "You've got to show them (i.e. the aborigines) you're boss - even if it means hitting th

The issue of rations is at the discretion of the police although they may take advice from the supervisor; they are generally consulted by the Board before Certificates of Exemption are granted and keep an eye on the holders to see that the privileges are not being abused. In two instances they have suspended the exemption for a cautionary period. These powers render the aborigines involved, dependent on

youths sprang to push it out and the most constant gaol b: in Wilcannia readily accompanied them on a shooting expedition. One cannot, then, speak of a resistance to the police either active or passive; aborigines fulfill more or less the role assigned to them, except when they are drunk although, this does not stop them abusing the police in private.

Aborigines, of course, avoid the police as much as they can and hope not to be caught when they are breaking the law; but they do not stop breaking the law. Drunkenness continues unabated and imprisonment seems to provide no deterrent: indeed I have seen men drunk within half an hour of leaving gaol! Moreover, there seems to be no way of stopping the supply of liquor.

The most effective way of avoiding conflict with the police is to obtain exemption. Apart from four pensioners who use their certificates to obtain liquor, four men have obtained certificates solely for this purpose. These are men who have established some sort of friendship with whites with whom they associate in the hotel; others, who would probably be granted certificates, but who have little to do with whites, have not applied. Others, again, would like 'tickets', but are too often drunk.

The formal powers of the supervisor are very much the same as those wielded by the Murrin Bridge manager; in the Wilcannia situation, however, he counts for very much less. There are three principal reasons for this. Firstly, as we have seen, the police play a very much more active role, vis a vis the aborigines; and the supervisor, in exercising his own powers, works in close cooperation with them. Secondly, the powers he wields are less effective; and thirdly, as a local aborigine he exercises his authority with less confidence and arouses a peculiar sort of resistance among the other aborigines.

The supervisor's powers are confined to the settlement; indeed he almost never visits the camp. He can expel undesirables and has actually removed three families, but the sanction is less forceful than at Murrin Bridge since they can take up residence in the camp, less than a mile away, and maintain relations with their fellow aborigines, very much as before. Similarly, an attempt to forbid gambling simply means that the 'school' shifts to the camp, where it is not legally forbidden.

The supervisor's main responsibility is the care of the houses themselves, and he has the power to evict bad tenants and those who refuse to pay rent. In fact, about one third

of the rent owing is collected (presumably, policy will become stricter in the near future) and perhaps half of the houses are in a good state of repair, the remainder having suffered a steady deterioration that it has perhaps been difficult to check at any one point. Occupants of five houses have made definite improvements, but they have all had close contact with whites at some stage in their lives and would probably have made the improvements without official encouragement.

The supervisor notifies the police if there is a disturbance on the settlement, he makes recommendations to them and to the Board concerning such matters as vagrancy, paternity orders, neglected children, the award of rations and exemption certificates, and so on; but he rarely acts independently and the more important decisions are left for the Welfare Officer on one of his brief visits. Again, he does not employ the sanctions against drunkenness, short of arrest, that are used on Murrin Bridge; partly, perhaps, because his authority would not be sufficiently accepted by the aborigines. He has a telephone, but with the settlement less than a mile from town it is not the vital amenity that it is at Murrin Bridge. He is ready to assist in disputes between employers, but is rarely consulted. He has no medical services under his control.

Formally speaking, Quinn enjoys good relations with white townsfolk. His employer is the local mayor and he is occasionally asked to attend council meetings when aboriginal matters are being discussed; he has been elected secretary of the town football club; he is on cordial terms with the police. But with none of these, nor with any others is he on regular visiting terms. In his daily life, he lives as an aborigine; making no attempt to maintain any social distance: his house is open to callers at any time, neighbours may come and borrow stores, he is addressed by his christian name. Quinn is very much the marginal man; regarded by the town whites as an aborigine, but, despite his lack of pretensions, regarded by the aborigines as a renegade. At the same time he has few favours to dispense so that there is little inducement to curry favour with him.

Accepting his authority seems to be more irksome to aborigines than the more inferior and subordinate status they would have to accept from a white official. It is plainly said that there should be a white man in charge, that he ought not to be "bossing his own people". He is also accused of favouring his own relations, although he is not immune to criticism from this quarter either.

The older men do not have much to do with Quinn, and his plans for erecting fences, raising flood dykes, planting trees and so on, have often failed for lack of support. The younger generation are more amenable and have cooperated in forming a football team and a concert party, though there are signs of dissension in the latter.

A climax was reached when, in January 1958, he advised the police to charge four youths with vagrancy. They had not worked for some months previously, but they protested that they had not been warned and it happened that at this time little work was to be found. Quinn's action provoked a storm of indignation. Two men not related to the victim (but one of whom was rumoured to want Quinn's job for himself) called a meeting to which aborigines from both sides of the river were invited: Quinn should be told that he was 'not wanted on this Mission'. Few came from the camp for the meeting and talking was confined to Quinn and the two men. Inevitably, no conclusion was reached, but Quinn, instead of relying on his authority and standing by his actions agreed to refer the matter to the Welfare Officer. And there, for the present, the matter rests.

Immediately after the dispute the mother and brothers of the boys implicated left the settlement for the camp.



They were not the first to have done so and others stated that they would not live on the 'Mission' because Quinn was in charge. However, these were not the only reasons stated for not living there. The most common complaint is that the settlement houses are built too close together. Actually, they are no closer than in most city suburbs, but the situation of the humpies indicates that Wilcannia aborigines like to live as much as 100-200 yards away from one another.¹⁴ Others complained that the 'Mission' was too noisy and that there were too many fights. Two men stated that they would 'ashamed' to admit to whites that they lived on the 'Mission' and one man confessed that he simply wasn't used to living in a house. Those living in the camp, then, are a mixture of dissidents, those who like to live independently and those who like to live quietly and privately. There is not, in any case, accommodation for everyone on the settlement, but sometimes houses there remain unoccupied.

The teaching nuns have the usual powers over the children in school, but they have to contend with a very high rate of absenteeism. Aborigine homes are too scattered and the nuns too infirm to be able to check regularly on absentees, and the supervisor is away working during the day. Nor do the

¹⁴

See p.

parish priest, police and education authorities seem able to bring sufficient pressure on parents to discipline their children. The parents are apathetic, but, in any case are often unaware that their children are playing truant. Under these circumstances, education must be ineffective and there are no sports which would give the children the inducement of quick satisfactions in school. But, in any case, parents and children anticipate that the latter will do work for which no education is required, and the one outstanding pupil of recent years refused the chance to go to High School. Children from three Protestant families go to the town Public School. They attend regularly, and their academic and sporting records are said to be good - but, it should be added, they come from the more progressive aboriginal families.

Comparing the Wilcannia regime with that operating at Murrin Bridge is difficult because there are so many additional factors to be taken into account. Life comes closer to the white Australian pattern in that there is no man wielding arbitrary powers, intervening in a wide range of aboriginal activities and exacting a formal acceptance of social superiority. Few of the Wilcannia aborigines have lived for any time on a controlled station, and, when some

of their number visited Murrin Bridge, their confidence in the presence of white officials was in marked contrast to shy and servile manner of the local inhabitants. Particularly those from the camp live a largely independent existence and have acquired an air appropriate to it.

No one has any notion of influencing aboriginal politics on a state or national level - although some expressed a hope that I might be able to effect the lifting of the liquor restrictions! Only Quinn has ever thought of standing for election to the A.W.B. and no one else even knows the name of the sitting member. Interest in politics is negligible; indeed only six have troubled to place their names on the electoral register. Many find the settlement regime intolerable because one of their own number has been placed in charge, however they are free to leave it and also feel sufficient confidence to challenge his authority. By contrast the power of the police is inescapable - short of leaving Wilcannia and the familiar circle of kith and kin - and it is regarded as virtually unassailable. But it is the minority of heavy drinkers that the police encounter most regularly; with the rest of the aborigines they have dealings only occasionally, and far from there being any concerted opposition, the womenfolk sometimes seek to have th

men taken in charge just as they do at Murrin Bridge.

The Board's most positive contribution towards raising the living standards of the Wilcannia aborigines has been establishment of the housing settlement, which has enabled certain families who appreciate good housing to live in white Australian style - as well as providing shelter for some families who do not. However, as we have seen, the quality of housing is for many not a major consideration deciding where to live. The absence of a full time manager and matron has almost certainly meant lower standards of hygiene, child care and education.

Town Aborigines - Euabalong and Hillston

A few aboriginal families are to be found in or around every town in western N.S.W. Euabalong, a township of some 262 persons, lying nine miles from Murrin Bridge, includes ten families. From here, two families have gone to live in the larger township of Lake Cargelligo and three to the small village clustered around Euabalong West siding. Sixty miles from Lake Cargelligo, on the lower Lachlan River, is Hillston, a town of some 1,200 people, and here there are ten aborigine or part-aborigine families.

The Aborigines Protection Act applies to these aborigines as much as to any others; however, they are not under any regular surveillance from A.W.B. officials. A fare Officer passes through at rare intervals but visits one Hillston family. In Euabalong he was bluntly told "the Board does nothing for us, and we want nothing to do with it." But in neither locality are their living conditions such as to warrant his attention. As far as the Act goes it is only with regard to liquor prohibitions that these people are aborigines. Euabalong West has no hotel and at the Lake Cargelligo aborigines have exemption certificates. In Euabalong, I was told, it was decided when a number of aborigines returned from the war to admit everyone to the hotel; however, one by one they abused their privileges and were excluded. The publican, a man of considerable influence in the township, believes that aborigines cannot 'hold the liquor'; nevertheless, three men have obtained exemption and a number of light-castes are allowed to 'pass'. Clashes with the police are rare. During the twelve months preceding 1957 eight aborigines were charged with drunkenness and one for another minor offence. During the same period, twelve whites had been charged with drunkenness and two with related offences, together with three charges of theft and three

driving offences.

Many aborigines drink heavily, but they do so quietly and discretely. And, perhaps because he is on friendly terms with them, the constable does not go out of his way to interfere with them.

In Hillston, encounters with the police are even more restricted. Only three men lack exemption, but of these two have no interest in drinking; the third drinks heavily and finds himself in gaol now and then, but he does not seem to be subject to close surveillance.

The majority of families in all these centres live in proper houses, some rented and others owned; one man is buying a house for himself. There has been no assistance from the Board in obtaining housing. Attendances at the local Public Schools seem to be satisfactory and academic performances of average standard - in an area where the general level is not high. However one aboriginal boy from Euabal has gone on to High School.

None of these aborigines have any desire to move onto 'Mission'; indeed their independence is a matter for pride and they consider Mission people to be backward, ignorant and idle. Most of them have made a reasonable successful adjustment to town life, and seem quite confident in the company

whites. However, the majority, in choosing to remain in town are also choosing to remain in the locality where they were brought up and among the friends and relations they know known all their lives.

Conclusions

The aborigine is free to live as a dependent on a government station or independently in or around one of the small townships of the West. If he chooses the former he is committing himself to accept a considerable degree of official interference in his affairs; but a certain amount is likely in any case. Just how much there will be depends on how far the authorities feel it is required and what authorities are available to carry it out. Where there are no A.W.B. officials, the police take over some of their functions, but generally confine themselves to the most outstanding matters such as the issue of rations, neglected children, exemption certificates and so on, as well, of course, as dealing with law-breakers. The aborigines in Hillston and Euabalong receive very little surveillance because they are not thought to require it and because the authorities are mainly taken up with more urgent matters elsewhere. The Wilcannia aborigines on the other hand re-

less attention than those at Murrin Bridge, although they are probably no less in need of it, because there are no full-time officials in the locality.

The character of the administrative regime depends v much on who is running it. In Murrin Bridge there is a w manager, surrounded by other whites with largely subsidia authority, on whom the aborigines are dependent for a who range of benefits, and who wields considerable power. By calling police to deal with offenders only at his own discretion, he has virtually reduced them to adjuncts of his own authority. In Wilcannia it is almost the reverse situation: there is little dependence on the Board appointee, none in the case of camp-dwellers, and he relies on the p or superior Board officials for support in much of what h does.

The law forbidding the supply of liquor to aborigine virtually ineffective, so that the authorities have to de with a great deal of drunkenness. Perhaps they are unusually strict in the case of aborigines, to compensate f their failure to stop the supply, but many of the offence for which aborigines are convicted come well within the t of the ordinary liquor laws to which whites are equally subject. Liquor is the major bone of contention between

authorities and the aborigines, but essentially the latter are treated no different from other white offenders; when they behave themselves quietly - and particularly when they have exemption - the police leave them very much to themselves. However, among some aborigines, drunkenness is virtually expected behaviour and drinking in the hotel among strangers is not an acceptable substitute for the all-aborigine drinking party.

In the matter of drunkenness and living standards, generally, it is the conflicting values of the white and a original groups which set their members at loggerheads. Stated baldly, if the aborigines conform to white Australian standards they are left alone; if they do not, they are harried by the authorities, and, in situations of open conflict, defeated and humiliated.

It would be misleading to speak of the aborigines in each locality having chosen to live under a particular regime. As we shall see in the next chapter, aborigines often prefer some locality because it is the locus of a group of kinsfolk and friends, because of its work possibilities and, sometimes because of some facility which it provides - free housing, wild meat, medical care and so on. These are the major considerations in life and the indications are that the

aborigines accept the local regime fatalistically. Even town aborigines reject the 'Mission' way of life, not so much because they dislike supervision but because they do not approve of the type of aborigines who live there, and the isolated situation. One might add that, in most cases, the 'Mission' blacks were not their 'people' (i.e. kinsfolk) either. Only in Wilcannia can one reject the regime of controlled settlement without cutting oneself off from kin and kin; but even here other considerations come into play, the appreciation or lack of appreciation of good housing, desire to live in privacy and so on.

The regime itself is never challenged and there is no resistance, either active or passive. The exclusion from hotels is the only matter even discussed. Particular officials and particular measures may be opposed, though mostly on the individual level; but the complaint is: So-and-so is a bad manager, or has acted unfairly in such-and-such an instance - not - there should be no manager, or they have right to do that. The case of Quinn is hard to evaluate, since it involves so many different factors. The matter will be taken up later, but I shall suggest here that aborigines are prepared to accept leadership and domination from whites which they are not prepared to accept from aborigines.

As regards the success of aboriginal administration, little remains to be said. Close supervision brings certain improvements in health, child care, education, etc. but there is little indication that many aborigines have yet adopted these values as part of their own way of life. The most progressive families are almost invariably those who have absorbed them independently, in the company of non-official whites. Even in the matter of housing, there are many who set independence, privacy, and proximity to friends and relations higher than good housing. However, the Board has never carried out any really determined propaganda programme to hasten the adoption of a more 'progressive' way of life. The monthly magazine 'Dawn' goes some way in this direction and is certainly read by the literate half of the population, but the more forceful media of the film, the poster, etc. have not been mobilized. Moreover, there is no attempt to organize recreation and education for adolescents at what is supposed to be the most impressionable period of their lives. Finally, there has been no attempt to involve the aborigines even minimally in the running of their affairs on a station or reserve level; representation on the Board by one aborigine is quite ineffectual since no aborigine is known throughout the state before election, and even after

he has no contact with many of the people he is supposed represent. Thus they feel themselves in the grip of a machine over which they have no control.

Chapter V

MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

Around the turn of the century, there were more than one hundred aborigines¹ camped along the lower Darling, mainly at Pooncaira and Menindee and about 130 along the Lachlan, principally at Condobolin, Euabalong and Hillsto. Nearly three hundred lived in the arid regions to the north west of Wilcannia and along the Paroo; and back from the Lachlan, around Trida and Mossgiel more than a hundred roamed the country, while smaller groups were camped on Keewong and Marfield Stations. More aborigines seem to have been camped about Cobar, but I have no information on the whereabouts they seem, in any case, to have had no links with those already listed.

We may briefly summarize the subsequent fate of these groups:

1. Pooncaira-Menindee. The people were compelled to join the government station at Menindee, when it was formed in 1934. By this time their numbers had about halved. A few remained on the station and moved with it to Murrin Bridge and a few others remained at Menindee, but the majority had already drifted up river to Wilcannia.

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These figures are taken from the 1899 report of the A.F.

2. Lachlan River. A number of Euabalong blacks moved to Condobolin, others joined the Darlington Point government station when it was formed in 190?; here, also, went most of the Hillston blacks. When the station was broken up in the 1920s the inhabitants scattered throughout the Riverina and only a few found their way back to the river.
3. The Paroo and far North-West. The region has been heavily depopulated of both white and black; among the aborigines mortality had been very high. In 1935, destitution among the aborigines, water shortage (and possibly unhappy relations with the local whites) caused the A.P.B. to move all the aborigines in Tibooburra to the Brewarrina station. However, the experiment was not a success and many moved back west to Bourke, Wanaaring and Wilcannia.
4. Trida. In 1924, the A.P.B. established a government station at Carowra Tank, where most of the local aborigines settled. Ten years later the water supply failed and the station was transferred to Menindee, and finally moved to Murrin Bridge in 1948.
5. Keewong and Marfield. The Keewong group scattered early and its members have travelled extensively about the region, ever since. The Marfield families were persuaded to move to Carowra Tank, but many of them died and only three descendants survive.

In Tables I and II, I analyse the migration and settlement of aborigines in the Far West of N.S.W. I have only included married persons because many single aborigines wander about continually, without being definitely attached to any locality; married persons are not, of course, immutably attached to any one place, but most have established a home with some degree of permanency. I am unable, in

TABLE I : PRESENT - DAY ABORIGINAL SETTLEMENTS IN
WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES : ORIGINS OF INHABITANTS.

	Murrin Bridge	Wilcannia	Hillston	Euabalong	Menindee
Carowra Tank, Menindee & Murrin Bridge	45	6	1	5	2
Marfield & Keewong Stns.	9	5	-	1	1
Hillston & Darlington Pt.	13	-	18	3	-
Euabalong	3	-	-	20	-
Condobolin	3	-	-	2	1
Balranald & Denilaquin	5	-	-	-	1
Pooncaira, Menindee & Darling R.	12	30	-	-	5
Wilcannia	1	20	-	-	-
Paroo R. & Far N.W.	-	15	-	-	-
Other parts	1	4	1	-	-
TOTAL	92	80	20	31	10

Places of Origin

TABLE II : MIGRATION OF ABORIGINES FROM MAIN CENTRES OF
ABORIGINAL POPULATION IN WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES.

	Places of Origin						
	Wilcannia	Carowra Tank & Menindee	Murrin Bridge	Marfield & Keewong	Pooncaira	Darling River	Euabalong
Murrin Bridge:	1	30	15	5	6	1	2
Wilcannia:	20	2	2	4	17	20	-
Menindee:	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
Mildura & Wentworth:	-	2	-	1	2	-	-
Hillston:	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Euabalong:	-	-	3	2	-	-	20
Condobolin:	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Gilgandra & Dubbo:	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Griffith:	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
Sheep Stations:	-	7	-	2	2	-	-
Sydney:	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
TOTAL :	21	42	20	15	29	21	36

Place of Migration



Table II, to give a complete account of the population from the far North-west and Paroo: there are undoubtedly a considerable number around Bourke and Angonia, neither of which was I able to visit, and some may have wandered even further afield. The same goes for Hillston, an unknown number of whose inhabitants are now living in the Riverina, at Condobolin and further east. 'Place of Origin', as used in these tables, means the place where an aborigine grew up; since Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge have been settled for comparatively short periods, those whose places of origin ~~they are~~ are comparatively young. Those originating from Menindee are listed separately from those originating from Menindee station, which is grouped with Carowra Tank.

Two trends can be discerned from these tables. Firstly, a tendency for people to remain with their group of origin: thus, 57% of the Euabalong aborigines, 59% of those from Pooncaira and no less than 71% of those from Carowra Tank and Menindee station. The Keewong and Menindee groups are more scattered. Those from Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia have maintained almost complete cohesion, but they are all relatively young and may yet migrate elsewhere. Secondly, of those who have moved out of the main group, few have moved out of the Far Western region and then only into the Riverina

area. Euabalong is different from the other groups in this respect standing as it does, on the eastern fringe of region, most of its ties lie eastwards or south into the Riverina, but a few have moved as far as Sydney.

To these facts it must be added that few even travel outside the Far Western region - again with the exception of Euabalong, and also the far North-west people who have travelled around south-western Queensland. But, to my knowledge, only three of the Carowra, Menindee Station and Murrin Bridge people have ever visited a state capital²; no one from Pooncaira or Menindee has done so and only four of those originating in the far North-west. Most aborigines, in fact, express the fear that they would get lost in a big city, and complain that a city the size of Broken Hill, which about half of them have visited, is too noisy! Only nine men, throughout the region, have had the broadening experience of military service, and of these only two served abroad.

There are a number of factors which make it relatively easy for aborigines to move about throughout the Far West region. Firstly, with the exception of Broken Hill, the entire area is given over to the pastoral industry, so that

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The Board has given a number of children sea-side holidays at La Perouse and ^{they} have been shown round Sydney.

working experience acquired in Hillston can equally well be employed in Tibooburra or Bourke. Also, the casual character of so much pastoral work and a very strong tradition of migratory labour, do little to tie aborigines to one locality - although it is said to be easier to get work if one is known to the employer. Secondly, wherever aborigines have kinsfolk or friends they can be reasonably certain of hospitality, even if they are penniless. Thirdly, aborigines are generally little burdened with material goods and so moving about is a less extensive undertaking than it would be for many whites. Whole families may shift camp, carrying few goods beyond blankets and cooking utensils; indeed, families of a generation ago chose to be on the move, for much of the time, carrying their belongings with them in a wagonette.

There are a number of positive inducements to travel. In a few instances aborigines have been expelled from a controlled station and forced to move on. The social tabu on marriage with kinsfolk³ encourages young people to look to other settlements where there are more eligible spouses, with whom, once they have married, they may settle. Many, particularly of the younger generation, value 'getting out and

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See p. Briefly, kinship is traced bi-laterally, as far as one's grandparents or great-grandparents, but rarely further.

seeing a bit of the world' for its own sake and as a way of finding variety in a life which is drab and monotonous. Finally, another locality may prove to provide better economic opportunities. In such a case, married men make a reconnaissance and on the next trip bring up their families to the 'new base', perhaps spreading the news to other potential migrants, as well.

Apart from the block movements of government stations I have record of nineteen families and twenty-five individuals moving from one settlement to another. But, perhaps, surveying these movements over a longer period, one may sometimes speak of group migration: the movement from Pooncaira and Menindee, up-river to Wilcannia, seems to have had this character.

We may gain some insight into the role which kinship has played in settlement by examining the histories of thirty-nine sets of two or more siblings, including twenty-one who have at least one parent living. Twenty-six of the thirty-nine sets have split up, so that some siblings are living on one settlement and some on another, though not in any regular manner that would indicate a definite rule of residence. However, only twelve out of seventy-six men (16.2%) live on a settlement where they have no sibling

Intermarriage between members of distinct groups has probably whereas those most settled generally have few kin elsewhere.

'Loose' have kin scattered about in a number of localities; may add that the majority of the families who are most 'foot-

have at least some kinsfolk. As a corollary to this, one area. In fact the overwhelming majority settle where they mobility but that most of it takes place within a restricted From this we can see that there is quite a high rate of

gone furthest afield, to Mildura and Griffith. living in the locality - these are the aborigines who have where affines only are living and five have no kin or affines who have kinsfolk somewhere, actually live on a settlement a parent, are living near parents-in-law. Three of those eleven women and three of the fourteen men, living away from to be visiting at least once during the year). Five of the parents and children are widely separated, there is likely can visit their parents regularly; (but, in any case, unless same settlement live in neighbouring Euabalong, where they so forced to live away from her parents, and three from the with them. One woman was expelled from Murrin Bridge, and alive, 62% and 76% respectively, live on the same settlement thirty-seven men and forty-eight women with a parent still present, and of the ~~rest~~, one has a parent present. Of

been the principal determining factor in the situation. Liaisons are contracted during the course of a visit (or, in the case of the Menindee government station, during the few years when the aborigines from the lower Darling and the Carowra Tank aborigines lived on the same settlement); one spouse then settles more or less permanently with the other's people, but provides a place where his or her kin can come on a visit and be sure of a welcome. ~~There~~ Quite often, these visitors utilize the opportunity to establish a liaison of their own. The taboo on marriage with kinsfolk is an added inducement to look to other settlements for spouses.

Referring back to the tribal map, it is interesting to note that a large number of aborigines are now settled away from their ancestors' country; nor are visits made to see the old camping grounds. However, except in the far Northwest, the traditional religion did not place great emphasis on the sacredness of particular sites.

One of the most spectacular voluntary movements has been that of the lower Darling aborigines up-river to Wilcannia. When they were forced onto the government station in 1934, the West was still in the grip of depression and they were probably glad of the greater security of 'Mission' life. The outbreak of war brought better opportunities for

employment, and in the years that followed, all but four of them left the station, and most moved up to Wilcannia.⁴ It is not easy to establish the reasons for a migration that happened fifteen or more years ago: there is no ground for thinking that there was friction between them and the Carowra blacks, indeed there had been mutual visiting and some inter-marriage prior to the merger. A few seem to have been disturbed by the number of deaths which occurred on the station at that time. However, the most usual explanation is that work prospects were better around Wilcannia and that the less sophisticated Carowra blacks would accept very low wages and so undercut the rest. Around Wilcannia, by contrast, there were very few aborigines.

About the time that the move up-river was taking place, the aborigines from the far North-west were also trickling down to Wilcannia, some of them coming via Brewarrina. Again the aborigines say that their reason was economic: there were too many aborigines in the East, for all to get work and employers preferred to hire aborigines they already knew; hence, the strangers moved back west to places like Wanaaring, White Cliffs, Wilcannia and Tibooburra, where there were few aborigines and employers knew them.

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A number came on to Murrin Bridge at a later date.

Forty-seven of the married adults now living on Murrin Bridge at some point made the decision to settle, either there or on the Menindee station. From thirty-nine of these I obtained some explanation for the move (some gave several reasons which are listed separately below). In some cases, whole families moved together.

Five came onto the station as dependents on the Board, and to receive rations. Fifteen (members of seven nuclear families) came for the housing facilities. Five men and four women moved in from places where they were largely isolated, in order to be near relations, two men and one woman acceding to the other spouse's request, though they had no kin of their own on the settlement. Seven men explained that while on a visit they had become interested in a girl and stayed with her in her parents' home. Work is not particularly plentiful round Murrin Bridge and the majority have to travel considerable distances to find it; however, three families came onto the settlement because their menfolk had found work in the vicinity. Five families came in from sheep stations so that their children could attend the school.

In fact, of course, the reasons for a decision to move house are seldom single. For example, one Darling River man

has lived in many localities; while staying at Carowra Tank, he met his wife and lived with her there for a while. Later they moved to Mildura where he obtained a good job as a slaughterman. However, he was drinking heavily, so that the family was always hard up, and he began to think he would be better off working on a station away from town. Finally, his wife's mother became seriously ill and they came back to Murrin Bridge. Again, a family were living in Hillston: they had no more than a tent to live in, and the husband drank heavily and worked very little. Finally, the police discovered them in serious straits and persuaded them that they would be better off at Murrin Bridge.

But, no doubt, also, the general advantages and disadvantages of 'Mission' life - the free facilities, the existence of a large aboriginal population where a little food can always be borrowed, the isolation from town, the regime and so on - are given some consideration before a move is made. How careful a consideration is hard to say: sometimes the decision to settle somewhere seems to be taken on the spur of the moment, indeed a number of men stated that it did not matter to them where they lived, an attitude that is understandable if it is remembered that they spend long periods away, working.

We have seen that the character of the pastoral industry is such as to permit aborigines to move about over a considerable area where they can obtain employment, although there may be some localities where the market is saturated and work would be difficult to find. However, the area where employment is possible extends much further than the field of migration, and the great majority of aborigines confine their movements to localities where they have at least some kin. There is a strong tendency to remain in the same locality as one's parents and with at least some one of one's siblings, but in the majority of cases, sibling sets split up: one cannot, then, speak of localized unilineal kin groups; rather, each settlement includes for the majority of the inhabitants, a circle of miscellaneous kin and affines, together with a number of other persons, probably well-known though unrelated. As we shall see, apart from the parent-child relationship, there are few special kinship roles, only a general obligation for kinsfolk to be hospitable and generous, so that the absence of a mother's brother or a sister from the settlement does not cause any dislocation of the social system. Nevertheless, the presence of at least some relatives ensures a basic social and economic security.

But the majority have kinsfolk in more than one settlement and so can find such a security circle in a number of localities. In a majority of cases, aborigines choose to remain with their group of origin, although the group itself may shift its locus, as the lower Darling and Carowra Tank people have done. But quite a large minority have chosen to move to another locality where kinsfolk are living. The reasons for these moves have been various: economic considerations have been important, particularly in the formation of the Wilcannia settlement; the facilities provided by the Board have been important factors in the formation of the Murrin Bridge settlement. However, other factors, such as the liking for change and the search for eligible spouses also play their part.

The majority of those living in each centre seem content to remain where they are. "This is home" or "I like to stay where I'm known" or "We follow the Mission" are characteristic ways of expressing this attitude. However, there is a substantial minority, particularly among the younger generation, who can at least envisage migration to some other locality - though generally not outside the Far West region. Further migration, on a mass scale or individually, is theoretically possible and indeed there are

movements from one settlement to another all the time. What seems unlikely is that there will be any movement outside the Far West, or any break up of the large settlements at present existing. So far, even the economically more independent families remain socially dependent on a circle of kin.

Chapter VI

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

The nuclear or elementary family exists as a distinct social entity among the aborigines of the Far West. It consists of a man and woman who are married, that is to say regularly cohabit together, and her children, of whom he need not be the genitor, provided that he assumes some sort of paternal role in relation to them. About half of the married couples in the area have been through a religious or legal ceremony, regularizing marriage, mostly as a result of pressure from the white authorities. In ideal terms spouses have exclusive sexual rights over one another; it is the man's duty to provide for the maintenance of his wife and children and it is the woman's duty to keep house and look after him and the children. Practice, as we shall see, often falls short of precept, despite pressure from the aboriginal society and the white authorities, and there is a point beyond which non-performance of marital duties causes the complete break-down of the relationship. There is no evidence ~~for the belief~~ that legal marriages are any the less liable to breakdown than informal marriages.

In marriage, man and wife can find ~~legitimate~~ sexual satisfaction; a woman receives economic support for herself and her children and makes a home for the latter and her husband. But each of these can be found severally outside the bonds of marriage. Casual love affairs are numerous; the government or kinsfolk will provide economic support for those who are indigent; anyone can find a home with some relative or other.

Of course, sexual relations are not completely uninhibited. Where there is any official control the authorities try to limit them to persons legally married; but such a policy is quite impracticable, and almost the only time when they take action is when a minor becomes pregnant. It is then that Carnal Knowledge charges are preferred - if the offenders can be discovered. But aboriginal society is not without its controls. The old rules regulating sexual relations have fallen largely into abeyance; aborigines say, "we marry who we like, now" but modify it by stating the rule "we don't marry relations." By "relations" is meant consanguineal kin who are recognized to be such.¹ There is no

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Kinship terms are normally confined to these persons; English terms are used, but 'uncle' and 'auntie' are used loosely to address relatives older than the speaker.

definite rule to regulate the tracing of descent, but in practice it rarely goes back further than three generations. Within these bounds, everyone will know who his 'people' are, and generally they will be a considerable number, since families are large (see Table IV); children may not be aware of the exact links, relating them to others, on the other hand, old people often have enough genealogical knowledge to account for everyone in the area. The present rule forbids not only first cross-cousins to marry, as in the traditional system, but second cousins also.

The aborigines are aware that they differ from whites in forbidding cousin marriage. No explanations or justifications are offered. People simply say "I wouldn't do it because I've been told" or "we don't do it"; even young people exclaim "we couldn't do that, we'd get shot!" Some people thought that the children of too close a union might be sickly, but the view was not expressed until I suggested it.² One man envisaged the break-down of the system because "We'll be relations soon." But it was generally supposed that they would look further afield for spouses when it became necessary.

2

Dr Reay writes that this rationalization was commonly made by aborigines in northern N.S.W. See her M.A. Thesis Ch.II.

This is what has been happening: the young, unmarried men and women make frequent visits to other settlements, frequently finding a spouse or at least a lover there; the migrations which brought together different groups of aborigines have worked to the same end. In fact, of 119 marriages, in the area, involving one or more aborigines, 89, or 74.8% have been with aborigines from a different local group or with whites. Thus, mobility has saved the system from strains to which it would otherwise have been subject.

There are occasional breaches. Incest with close kin is said to have occurred only four times during the last twenty years; but only one of these cases is undisputed, and then the culprits left the district as soon as they were discovered. No one has tried to establish such a liaison as a permanent marriage. To have sexual relations with a more distant relative is a less serious matter, but it is impossible to be more precise because the border-line between eligible and ineligible spouses is not explicitly defined, and because there seem to have been few cases against which public reaction could be tested. Very recently a youth has begun an affair with his mother's-mother's-sister's-daughter's-daughter, which has been much discussed; however, I did not

hear their relatedness proposed as a reason for stopping them.

Apart from these rules relating to incest there are no effective social controls on sexual relations. There is a vague feeling that extra-marital intercourse is morally wrong: people carrying on an affair try - generally unsuccessfully - to escape attention; once discovered the news will be bruited about the settlement and in due course will be known in other settlements as well. In adultery cases the kinsfolk of the cuckold may be indignant, and a wife sometimes tries to arouse public opinion by shouting her husband's infidelities down the street after him; but there is no question of general ostracism of illicit lovers, indeed their affair will never be mentioned to their faces, except, perhaps in a quarrel. Although people may be outraged by particular affairs, extra-marital affairs are not, as such, condemned; in fact, almost everyone is involved in them from time to time. Gossip is frequently malicious but rarely censorious!

Parents generally make some effort to prevent their young daughters from sneaking out at night with boys; but their efforts are rarely effective, for most girls become pregnant before they reach twenty - a few before they are

fifteen. There were five 'unmarried Mothers' in Wilcannia, at the time of my visit, and six at Murrin Bridge; however, many more have subsequently married, for to give birth to an illegitimate child brings no social disgrace and is no bar to subsequent marriage.

Older women, divorcees or widows, have no watchful parents and are free to entertain lovers at home, very much as they wish. They are the most easily accessible and a number of young men are to be found having affairs with women ten or more years older than themselves. There is an additional advantage with such a woman: since she most probably has several children already, the management is less likely to try to inflict her lover with the financial responsibility for the whole family.

It is not hard, then, for aborigines to find sexual satisfaction outside the bonds of marriage. However, for men, this licence is normally only possible with the aboriginal group. Because of white prejudice and also because there is little opportunity, sexual relations with white girls are rarely possible. Aboriginal women, on the other hand, are, by tradition, accessible to the unattached, itinerant labourers of the 'outback' regions. However, the woman's status in such a relationship is a degraded one, of which

the aborigines are becoming increasingly aware and which many now decline to accept. When a car-load of whites arrived at Murrin Bridge, one night, in search of women, the menfolk were aroused and quickly put them to flight. Another man who was endeavouring to get girls to act as prostitutes was promptly reported to the management.

Women who have had illegitimate children or who have been separated from their husbands seldom want for support. The authorities sometimes try to persuade the man involved, to fulfill his responsibilities, but usually this is ineffective. In the case of illegitimate children, a man who does not want to take responsibility can simply deny that the child is his, and, indeed, some girls are so promiscuous that they are not, themselves, sure who the father is. In other cases, the father is already a married man with a large family to support; and in other cases, again, the woman simply does not want to marry him. Men who have left their wives and families recognize no obligation towards them; a maintenance order could be enforced, but the father is probably without the cash to pay at the time, and putting him in prison does not help his family.

A girl with one or two children can always find a home with a parent or close relative who will be ready to support

her; but in most cases the authorities will be prepared to register her as indigent and provide her with rations. These are adequate, if not luxurious, and there will be the Child Endowment money (5/- for the first child and 10/- for each succeeding child) and probably occasional presents from relatives, so that she will not be entirely without money of her own. A man, for his part, can always find a home with a kinsman or kinswoman, where he can get his meals cooked and his clothes washed. Thus life is at least tolerable for those unmarried.

In fact, young men or 'poddies', as they are called, find single life very pleasurable and are not usually inclined to rush into marriage. Some like to ramble about the countryside, working and moving on, visiting this and that settlement, staying with whoever will take them in, finding a sexual partner now and again, drinking and fighting. Others prefer a lazier, less adventurous life, lounging about the settlement, riding horses, running errands, cadging meals, working as little as possible and spending what they do earn on drink. Whether these 'poddies' have their affairs with young girls or older married women, the tendency is to avoid responsibility. But, like the white bushman, they tend not "to represent themselves as personally interested in any

although they can travel about, they are virtually tied to the settlement, where life presents few excitements beyond the gambling school, and gossiping and housework occupies most of their time. On the average, the aboriginal woman has the additional burden of a child by the time she is twenty, though at least one third have had a child while still in their teens.⁴ Perhaps because they find life tedious, perhaps because they are short of pocket money, perhaps because when the whole emphasis in women's life is on home and family, they feel inferior to the married women⁵, the girls show an unconcealed eagerness to get a boy and settle down. Unlike the boys, they are quickly on the dance floor and are not too shy to send notes asking to be taken to the cinema. An older woman summed up the adolescent scene very aptly when she said: "The girls spend all their time looking for a boy and a cigarette and the boys spend all their time looking for a bottle!"

However, as can be seen from Table III, almost everyone marries sooner or later, though the boys rather later in life than the girls. There are a few older men who have never married: there is no obvious explanation for this unless it

4

This excludes still-births and infant mortalities.

5

Calley tells me this is the case on the North Coast.

TABLE III.

THE ABORIGINAL POPULATION OF MURRIN BRIDGE AND WILCANNIA, GROUPED ACCORDING TO AGE AND SEX. NUMBER 'EVER MARRIED' ALSO INDICATED.

AGE :	MURRIN BRIDGE:				WILCANNIA:				Total %	
	Men	Ever Married	Women	Ever Married	Men	Ever Married	Women	Ever Married		
1-9:	48	-	41	-	30	-	28	-	58	27.6
10-19:	29	-	26	2	19	-	23	4	42	20.0
20-29	18	10	13	9	22	11	20	14	42	20.0
30-39	17	15	20	18	10	9	11	11	21	10.0
40-49	5	4	6	5	12	10	13	13	25	11.9
50-59	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	11	5.2
60-69	7	7	3	3	5	3	1	1	6	2.8
70 -	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	5	2.4.
	133		117		107		103		210	99.9

be that they are rather shy and, in one or two cases, perhaps a little simple. Generally, when he marries, a husband is four or five years older than his wife, though occasionally it is more, and in one case, a wife was sixteen years older than her husband.

Since a form of legal marriage is so irregularly employed, we can speak of aboriginal marriage commencing with regular cohabitation, when the parties make no attempt to conceal the fact from the public eye. It is principally the couple, themselves, who make the decision to marry. When it is said "We marry who we like, now" what is meant is that marriages are no longer arranged as they were in the old days, and the old men no longer get the young girls. Some parents have succeeded in persuading their children not to marry spouses of whom they disapproved; but a number of children have gone their own way, and normally the parents do not interfere, although it is the custom for a girl to ask her parents' permission before marrying.

I was able to discover no important criteria on which a spouse was chosen. Girls say that they want a good worker who doesn't drink, but the man they marry very often falls short of these requirements. Boys most frequently mention beauty as the grounds for their preferences. A light skin is

preferred - "beautiful, just like a white gin!" was how one youth described his sweetheart; but many marry girls who are very dark. In any case, there is not the acute colour consciousness that Ruth Fink has described in Brewarrina. Most aborigines marry persons of about the same colouring as themselves, but in some marriages, one spouse is considerably darker than the other. It may be that colour consciousness has been increasing in recent years; in Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia a large proportion of the unmarried men are full-bloods or very dark, but most of them are under thirty, so one cannot be certain that they will not marry later. In Euabalong and Hillston, where there is more marriage of aboriginal women with white men, one might expect men of dark complexion to find difficulty in finding a spouse, but in fact there is no one of marriagable age, who is darker than a southern Spaniard or Sicilian.

What finally decides a man to 'settle down' is not clear. Perhaps single life begins to pall; perhaps married status carries with it a certain dignity of maturity, and married men certainly take care to mark themselves off from the 'poddies'. Where a woman already has a home of her own, marriage begins when the man takes up residence with her; where she lives with relations, he may visit her more or less

openly, while still lodging somewhere else, until she becomes pregnant. If he continues to 'go with her' after this, the decision is tantamount to assuming the role of husband and father, and he will probably take up residence in the same house. More rarely married life begins without the woman becoming pregnant, and in one or two instances the couple preceded co-habitation with the announcement of their 'engagement'.

But, if men are often irresponsible, they are nonetheless fond of children. Youths are often to be seen dandling children on their knees or carrying them about, and it is a common saying that 'children make a home'. This remains true even when the children have been conceived by some other man: "he loved me just the same" said one half-caste man, speaking of his aboriginal step-father. Certainly, no attempt is made to limit the size of families, although the aborigines know of European contraceptive methods and can obtain devices locally; consequently, aboriginal families are generally large. (See Table IV).

A mother with one or two children can live with a parent, a sibling or in-laws, and her husband will lodge there too, when he comes home from work. In some cases, the hosts provide most of the economic support, while the husband

provides little more than pocket money. But when there are three or four children the economic burden on the hosts will be too heavy, particularly if they have children of their own, and probably the house will have become uncomfortably crowded. At this point a new household is established which, while still involved in borrowing and lending with other households, is in most cases essentially self-supporting. From now on, its main source of income lies outside the aboriginal community.

Table IV

Average surviving issue of aboriginal women on Murrin Bridge station, to June 1957, according to age of mother; compared with 'Average issue of wives' in Australian extra-metropolitan areas, according 1947 Census.

Age of Mother	No. of ab. women	Average surviving issue	Average issue of Wives (Australia)
15-19	3	1	.37 - .54
20-24	1	3	.66 -1.21
25-29	6	4.8	1.36 -1.94
30-34	7	5.1	2.26
35-39	5	6.8	2.68
40-44	1	7	2.97
45-49	2	8.5	3.22
50-54	2	7.5	3.48
over 55	5	5.2	3.48 -4.30

Where the age groupings of the Census have been smaller than my own, I have given the highest and lowest averages in the series.

Every mother receives Endowment for her children; apart from this, indigent families subsist on pensions, or, more usually, government rations, while the other families rely for their main income on their wage earning members. Very few married women and not many unmarried girls work, so effectively it is the husband and perhaps an unmarried son who provide the great part of the family income. But the income comes in monetary form and it can be put to a number of alternative uses, some of which are exclusively male. Since, then, the men have initial control over the greater part of the family income, there is likely to be a good deal of wrangling over how it is spent.

Aboriginal expenditure ranges over quite a wide range of articles: in some cases, probably, it differs little from whites of the same income group; however, a glance about a typical aboriginal home and one is immediately aware that little is spent on permanent goods. Furnishing is at a minimum, and what there is, is of the roughest quality. Most people have one good suit of clothes, but no one has a large wardrobe. A number of men have motor-vehicles for use in their work, but very few of these are worth more than £100. The greater part of the income goes on ephemeral goods. Food is probably the largest single item of expenditure, but

liquor, gambling and taxi fares also account for sizeable sums of money.

Both men and women take taxi rides from time to time, and generally they do not regard it as an extravagance; around Murrin Bridge, indeed, its use is understandable since the 'Mission' is so far from town and from the railway station at Euabalong West. Many, however, prefer to call the taxi and pay the £3 fare to town and back, rather than wait a day or so until the station truck runs into town. In Wilcannia, where no aboriginal house is more than two miles from town, the taxi is constantly in use, even by able-bodied men who could easily walk to distance. Occasionally, very substantial sums are spent. One man spent £25 out of a £100 pay cheque on a taxi from Cobar to Murrin Bridge, while another spent even more, hiring the air-taxi to take him from Tibooburra to Wilcannia. This spending is regarded as grossly extravagant by most whites, but it must be taken into account that public transport is very irregular in the 'outback' areas, and that the trip from Tibooburra to Wilcannia by road might well have taken three or four days.

Both men and women gamble at cards, but with the women it is a ruling passion, perhaps because they hope to augment their personal incomes. Certainly most play in the hope

that, some afternoon, a 'run of luck' will bring them a spectacular win. As one old lady explained: "With gambling your money comes back and you can buy tucker. But with drink, nothing back." There is a grain of truth in her argument; for example, her daughter, after playing almost continuously for eighteen hours, had won about £25: she then went to the store and paid her grocery bill, returning with what remained - perhaps £8 - to the gambling school. Women may lose as much as £5 in an afternoon, but the form of poker most commonly played is entirely a game of chance, so that, in the long run, players probably end up more or less even. At all events, it is rarely suggested that women let the family go short by their gambling.

A few women are inclined to drink, but it is essentially a man's business; indeed, as we shall see in Chapter IX, it is a very important feature of male life. Twenty-one out of thirty family men at Murrin Bridge and twenty out of thirty-five at Wilcannia are heavy drinkers. Only one man in Hillston and three in Euabalong do so. Of course, one cannot define 'heavy drinker' at all precisely. No one drank continuously; rather were there recurring bouts of excessive drunkenness at the end of each spell of work - much as the

old-time pastoral worker 'blew his cheque'.⁶ A man with a pay-cheque of £50 or so, may spend as much as £8-£10 on liquor; and his wife must get the housekeeping money before the 'bender' begins, for once under way, it may not stop until all the money is spent. Lest he change his mind and demand the money back, she will probably go straight into town and place it in the store.

Almost every married man recognizes the obligation to provide for his family, but the amount of housekeeping money that he actually makes over varies considerably. "I've battled for my kids!" one Billy Wilson confided to me; but the truth was that he worked very rarely and spent most of what he did earn on liquor, leaving his wife to 'battle' on the Child Endowment and what she could cadge from neighbours. Few women could give any estimate of what it cost them to keep the home going, becoming very vague as soon as one began to talk in terms of more than a few weeks. The estimated weekly budgets set out in Table V give some impression of the situation. The item Family Maintenance is the sum estimated to remain after other commitments have been met, covering food, clothing and such medical expenses as are paid, for

⁶

The white bushman was, of course, usually unmarried and came into town only at rare intervals.

TABLE V.

ESTIMATED WEEKLY BUDGETS OF FIVE MURRIN BRIDGE FAMILIES, JANUARY--JUNE, 1957.

Family:	1	2	3	4	5
Family Income:					
Average Earnings:	£5	£4.10	£13	£11.5	£13.16
Child Endowment:	£2.15	£2.15	£3.5	£3.5	£2.5
Other Sources:	c.5/- from wife's mother	-	from son c.15/-	-	-
Expenditure:					
House Rent:	-	-	-	-	£7/6
Car Hire-Purchase Payments:	-	-	£2	-	£2
Man's exp. liquor tobacco, etc.	£1.10	£1.5	£2	£2	£1
Family Maintenance:	£6.10	£6	£13	£11.5	£12

man, wife and dependent children. Men working away from home will, of course, administer their share separately. Family here includes only those who are dependent on the breadwinner; older offspring living away from home are excluded.

The table tends to exaggerate the depressed condition of these families by leaving out of account the fish they get from the rivers, occasional supplies of wild meat and, in one or two cases, sheep stolen from neighbouring farms. In the case of families one and two, allowance must also be made for the stores they manage to cadge from neighbours.

Of all the aborigines in the Far West, no more than half-a-dozen had an average weekly wage much above £13,⁷ and the average family income in Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge was probably about £11 a week. Family Maintenance in Hillston and Euabalong, where men worked more regularly and drank less, was probably several pounds above this average.

Aboriginal standards of living are not high, but if the breadwinner works little and/or is a heavy drinker, food is likely to run short from time to time. Not themselves drinking, women are often enraged to see the menfolk squandering so much money on liquor, in a way that brings no benefit to

7

For a fuller analysis of aboriginal earnings, see p. 207

the rest of the family. A drunkard about the place is no companion; more likely he is a nuisance, apt, at any moment to turn quarrelsome. A song, composed by two Wilcannia girls, expresses the women's point of view very clearly.

....There's Mum and Dad, it makes me sad,
To hear them row night and day.
Dad never gives Mum anything,
When he gets his pay.

He stays down town, all day long
And half the night as well;
When he comes home, tries to get in bed,
She pushes him out on his head.

He starts to row with his silly rot,
And then she makes him trot:
She picks up a shovel or a broom -
He takes off for the woods.

When we look around for the old fellow,
We can't find the Sly Old Fox;
But when we're in bed, laying down,
We hear someone call out "Dear!"

"Don't 'Dear' me!" says the wife in fear,
"You go your own way now,
"I gave you a chance, but you threw it away,
"So I'm finished with you now."

He talks her over and they are right,
For another day.
He says he'll buy an engine⁸:
But it never turns out that way.

8

"...an engine...", i.e. a mechanical post-hole digger used in fencing.

He'll rush for the pub, like a dry mug,
 "Only for ten minutes."
 When we see him in an hour,
 His nose is smelling the air.

He flies around, like a young man,
 Thinks he's got no wife.
 He was in gaol for a month,⁹
 That was his wife's orders.

But now he's in bed, he's right again:
 That's Stan the Sly Old Fox.

Women expect to be allowed housekeeping money, at least sufficient to clothe and feed the family; but correspondingly, they are expected to spend the money on the family and work to provide meals, wash clothes and look after the children. Aboriginal standards are not, perhaps, very high in these matters and most women do their duty according to their lights; but occasionally one falls far short of what is expected. This is most likely to happen when she drinks. The family then starts to disintegrate: if the children are not left with some relative, they will wander about half-clothed, taking their meals wherever they can, until the authorities are advised and take charge of them. Aborigines are genuinely shocked by such neglect, and there are very few women who would abandon their children altogether. One whose child had

9

Stan's wife complained to the police about his drinking, and had his Exemption Certificate confiscated for a month.

been taken away from her continued to show a pathetic interest in its welfare.

Sexual jealousy is another potent source of conflict between man and wife: something to which both men and women are prone, although with men it takes a more violent form. A man has only to be seen talking to a woman, not his relative, for an affair to be suspected and rumours to fly about. Jealousy, itself, is a common topic for gossip, some of it humorous. A group of women were laughing at the way a newly married girl followed her husband about: "She won't even let him go to the toilet on his own!" Men are often genuinely afraid of their wives' tempers.

"Jack Wilson was going out hunting in his truck. He met us on the way and promised us a bit of meat. But when he was coming back he had old Maggie (his wife) with him and she wouldn't let him stop. He told us about it after. "I'd like to ask you in for a drink of tea," he said, "but I daren't do it."

At night some women follow their men around the settlement, to see what they are doing, and the latter complain ruefully - "A man can't leave it (i.e. his penis) at home when he goes out!"

The song quoted on page suggests that the "fancy girls" will "take all your money, slip around with your best

pals." However, most men spend protracted periods in the bush where they are unable to keep a watch on the women. Thus they fall an easy prey to jealousies and occasionally, when they get home, there will be some 'well wisher' to sow the seeds of suspicion. But the suspicions are by no means always unfounded; indeed, there seems to be a good deal of adultery; for example, during my five month's stay at Murrin Bridge there were eight instances which were common knowledge. As has already been pointed out, there are no public sanctions against adultery and indeed the matter is not taken to be very serious, although the cuckold and his close kin are likely to be genuinely angry.

Disagreements over money, drunkenness and suspected infidelities serve to maintain an undercurrent of resentment in many families, which every so often bursts into open quarreling, most frequently when the man is drunk. Women, particularly older women, are well able to hold their own in argument and some go further and burn their husband's clothes. But a man fired with wine is not likely to be restrained in argument and quickly turns to violence. I know of only one instance in which a woman's relations went to her help; generally no one interferes, and she must take advantage of a lull in hostilities to send for the manager or the police.

Table VI

The number of aborigines divorced as a proportion of those ever married in four western N.S.W. localities.

	Euabalong	Murrin Bridge	Wilcannia	Hillston
Number ever married:	27	90	92	15
Number divorced:	7	17	19	0
Divorcees as a percentage of those married:	25.9	18.8	20.6	0

occurred while my study was in progress. In one case, both man and wife drank heavily; when intoxicated he would reproach her with a past infidelity, a brawl would ensue ending in both of them being taken to gaol. A reconciliation was effected as soon as they recovered, but presently the squabble would be repeated until finally they decided to part and she returned to her former lover. In another instance, a woman took a lover while her husband was away, and the latter, hearing the news, did not return home. The same happened in another case, except that the husband was a heavy drinker and returned to reproach his wife, until the manager

persuaded him to leave the settlement. The fourth case, involving the Grant family, deserves more detailed description.

Ted Grant arrived home unexpectedly and was just in time to see a young man, Artie Ryan, making his escape through the window. Suspecting adultery, Ted questioned his wife, but receiving a flat denial he let the matter drop. A few nights later, after the Christmas dance, Mrs Grant saw Ted going off with a widow woman, Mrs Smith and he did not return home all night. The following week he came home very drunk and accused her of adultery with Artie Ryan, she reminded him of his affair with Mrs Smith and a brawl ensued. The manager was called and he drove Ted off the station. The next day Ted returned and both he and his wife went severally to state their cases before the manager, who, seeing fault on both sides, endeavoured to reconcile them. However, that night Ted got drunk again and another brawl followed in which he blacked her eye. This time she fled the station, going to her brothers in Euabalong, and, when Ted followed her there, took refuge at the police station. After this he returned to his job in Condobolin, vowing never to return, while she, for her part, resolved to have no more to do with him, adding to the list of her grievances that he had never given her enough housekeeping money. Shortly after, the manager agreed to allow rations for herself and the children, and she commenced regular, if furtive sexual relations with Artie. Four months later, Ted returned, once again drunk, and tried to effect a half drunken reconciliation; but Mrs Grant would have none of it, and when the manager had been called, he left "for the last time".

The case has a number of interesting features. Firstly, the detection of adultery did not immediately determine either to separate; indeed, Mrs Grant emphasized to me that she had stayed with Ted several days after his affair with Mrs Smith - and that in fact, this was only the latest of a whole series

of similar lapses. It was the quarrel itself, with the frightening violence attending it, that made up her mind: he had been a bad husband to her, and she would be happier and more secure living on government rations. By the time Tom's heart had softened and he came back, she had adapted herself to the new way of life and had taken a lover of her own choice. What is important here is that a woman, if she is dissatisfied with her husband and lives on a government station, can dismiss him in the knowledge that the government will maintain her and her children. There will not be much cash for her to spend as she fancies, but if her husband has been a bad provider, this will be no great change. Moreover, she will be free to take and dismiss lovers as she pleases. Her affair with Artie remained furtive probably because he was unwilling to take responsibility for the five children (although the latest was said to be his) but also because she felt more secure on rations and feared that the manager would discontinue them if he found out. In Wilcannia rations are not often given out and the pattern of marriage breakdown is different. Of seven female divorcees, three had eloped with other men, two had been deserted and found themselves new husbands, one had moved to Murrin Bridge and was living

on rations, and one had found work on a sheep station.

Ideally, marriage gives each spouse exclusive sexual rights over the other, and imposes on the man the duty to provide for wife and children, and on the woman to keep house and care for the children. Together, these constitute the sine qua non of the marriage relationship, in that complete disregard of any one is likely to cause a disintegration. Nevertheless there can be occasional lapses without a breakdown being inevitable. In practice a certain latitude is permitted, even expected.

Given that a man is obliged to be absent from home for long periods and there are no effective social controls on adultery, infidelity and a good deal of jealousy and suspicion is inevitable. Men, left to themselves, would punish their wives with a beating and perhaps by withdrawing support for a while. However, official interference renders this impossible.

There is a sharp contrast between the things which are valued in women's life and the things valued in men's life. From early adolescence, women's life centres around the home; after a brief period of comparative irresponsibility, they settle down to having and bringing up large numbers of

children and keeping house for whoever lives there. Gambling and adultery are not strongly condemned, for they interfere little with these duties, but drunkenness and downright neglect of home and children are definitely considered wrong. Men, on the other hand, set out in adolescence on a life that is often almost completely irresponsible and selfish, and although they marry later on and have a genuine regard for their family, most remain preoccupied with exclusively male affairs, notably the drinking, which I discuss in Chapter IX. Since the man is the principal breadwinner, he has virtual control over the family income, and since it comes mainly in monetary form (except in the case of indigents) which can be spent in numerous ways, he has the opportunity to divert it from the family to his own selfish uses. Pressure from the authorities and in the home is not completely effective in preventing this.

A drunken man disrupts home life and his ability to deal with its stresses and strains is likely to be impaired. Since, then, it is possible for a woman to maintain home and children without a breadwinner it is not surprising that he is regarded as a figure of secondary importance in the family.

This becomes clear when one examines the relationship between parents and children. When man and wife separate,

the children almost invariably remain with their mother. Indeed, men are in no position to look after children, especially if they are bush workers. Where the mother has died, the children may be taken over by a female relative of either parent, or by the authorities.

But even when the parents remain together, the influence of the mother on her children is generally stronger and more pervasive than that of the father. In fact, he may be at home very little: Murrin Bridge family men, during the first five months of 1957, spent an average of only 44 days out of 154 on the station.¹⁰ Women, on the other hand, left their families almost never, unless it was to be confined. Families may join their menfolk in the bush for brief periods, and three families lived permanently on sheep stations; but generally the necessity of sending children to school, and, I think, preference for the greater comforts and companionship of settlement life, brings them back.

Aborigines like children. Fathers are often to be seen carrying toddlers in their arms as they wander about the settlement, and few come home from work without sweets and small luxuries for the children. 'Dad' is a model of what

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This figure excludes the 3 station handymen and 3 indigents, who are home on most days.

boys expect to become, when they start to think about growing up; and to accompany him on a trip into the bush is a great treat. But a brief acquaintance with aboriginal children reveals that interest and anxiety centre on what there is going to be for the next meal, rather than the prospect of a visit to the cinema, a feed of ice cream or the dream of owning a bicycle. Typical was the 13-year old boy who, having earned a few pounds during the school holidays, gave it all to his mother 'to buy clothes and tucker'.

Children soon know if the cupboard is empty; very likely, they will know if it is because father has not sent any money. If he is at home, they will also see if he is squandering money on drink. Although drunkenness is no novelty to children, and they do not regard it as bringing disgrace on the family, they are nonetheless disturbed by the squabbles and brawls that so often accompany it. Children tend to take their mother's part, and I heard several express relief when their father was taken off to prison. The mother cares for them when they are sick; she buys the food and begs and borrows when supplies run short. She spends relatively little on selfish pleasures. Moreover, her shortcomings as a wife - her jealousies and infidelities, do not impinge very much the life of the children.

But if a child's relationship with its mother is more intimate and dependent, it nevertheless involves conflict. All women attempt to discipline their children, though some are weak and some are strict. Men likewise discipline their children, particularly the boys; but, perhaps because they spend so much time away, and because they are 'on holiday' when they are home, they present a more indulgent aspect. When the boys are older and working for them, they are stricter, and I have seen some severe thrashings administered. 11

In the questionnaire I gave to Murrin Bridge School Children I asked: "Who punishes you when you do something wrong at home?" The answers are set out in Table VIIa and compared with those from Euabalong and Lake Cargelligo School children.

Table VIIa

"Who punishes you when you do something wrong at home?"
Answers from children of 3 Public Primary Schools.

Locality	Proportion Answering:			Total
	Mother	Both Parents	Father	
Murrin Bridge	.54 (13)	.29 (7)	.17 (4)	(24)
Euabalong	.13 (2)	.33 (5)	.53 (8)	(15)
Lake Cargelligo	.28 (13)	.48 (22)	.24 (11)	(46)

The contrast between Murrin Bridge and the others is striking.

Most of the Lake Cargelligo children come from farming and

11

For this reason, most youths prefer not to work with their fathers.

commercial homes, where the father will be home for much of the time; the Euabalong children all came from working class homes, but their fathers found work sufficiently close for them to return home frequently (all the aboriginal children here also answered 'father'). Informal questioning at Wilcannia suggested that their answers would come closer to the Murrin Bridge proportions.

The predominating influence of the mother is widely recognized. Children's answers to the question "Who is the most important person in a home?" are set out in Table VIIb.

Table VIIb.

"Who is the most important person in a home?" Answers from children of three Public Primary Schools.

Locality	Proportion Answering:			Total
	Mother	Both Parents	Father	
Murrin Bridge	.63 (17)	.18 (5)	.18 (5)	(27)
Euabalong	.25 (4)	.50 (8)	.25 (4)	(16)
Lake Cargelligo	.04 (2)	.48 (22)	.48 (22)	(48)

Once again, Murrin Bridge results stand in sharp contrast to the others. The five fathers specified here as 'most important' were, none of them, heavy drinkers; two lived permanently at home; and two had the highest incomes on the station. Three out of five aboriginal children in Euabalong

answered 'father', and in each case the man in question was a regular worker and not a heavy drinker.

"It's the mother brings the kid into the world. The man doesn't have nothing to do with it. The mother's the only one. But there's some young fellers never bother to help their mothers."

So spoke Granny M., an indomitable old woman and mother of fifteen children, two of which she had delivered herself, unaided. It is a view, I think, shared by most women; but by many men too. The most hardened 'metho' drinker can be reduced to a state of maudlin sentimentality when he thinks about his 'poor old mother'. 'Some young fellers' did not care for their mothers, but the majority did. One woman said of her son: "He gives me everything he earns, and if he tells his father off, Stan's got nothing more to say." Some mothers openly favour their sons at their husbands' expense: one allowed her grown-up sons to remain home in idleness for months at a time, on the money that her husband earned, until the latter declared he would work no more. Even when they have married and moved away, the bond does not break. Old women like Granny M. spend their lives travelling about to visit their children's families. Even in old age, when men resigned themselves with bitterness to the neglect of the younger men, and are, in stead, reduced to wheedling a little

charity from them; women are more than ever loud and imperious in their demands for attention and support.

The factors which render marriage unstable also serve to make the link between fathers and children weak, while leaving that between mothers and children strong. The long absences, the drinking, the intermittent spells of poverty all serve to weaken the father's position in the family. Even if he leaves the family, or is replaced by another man, the life of the children will not be radically altered. The death or departure of the mother means a much more radical change; perhaps even the break-up of the family, with some of the children being taken away by the authorities. Even if it means moving to the home of another relative, there will be important adjustments to make.

But even when the child has ceased to be dependent on its mother there remains a strong sentiment of regard and a feeling of obligation towards her, which is not felt towards the father.

Chapter VII

OWNERSHIP

Malinowski has written:

"Ownership, giving this word its broadest sense, is the relation, often very complex, between an object and the social community in which it is found.... Ownership has naturally in every type of native society, a different specific meaning, as in each type, custom and tradition attach a different set of functions, rites and privileges to the word. Moreover, the social range of those who enjoy these privileges varies. Between pure individual ownership and collectivism, there is a whole scale of intermediate blendings and combinations."¹

Among the aborigines of the Far West, housing, money, food and clothes are the most important forms of wealth, with only a minority owning valuable items of furniture, cars and so on. Except when he is working out in the bush, every aborigine lives in a house of some sort. In two localities the government has established settlements; occasionally, town houses are to be bought or rented, and a few people erect their own cottages. There is a housing shortage in most western towns: the smallest weatherboard cottage will cost about £2,000 - perhaps £1,500 if one

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B. Malinowski, 'Argonauts of the Western Pacific', 1922, pp. 116-7.

erects it oneself, and rents will be around £3-£5 per week. However, few aborigines are inclined or able to expend so much money, and in any case there is probably a prejudice against aboriginal tenants. Some aborigines are to be found occupying proper houses in every western town, except Wilcannia; in Hillston and Euabalong a majority of them do so. The remainder of the aboriginal population live either on government settlements or in 'humpies', simple, flimsy structures of iron, wood and tin, usually erected on waste land where no rent need be paid. The quality of these 'humpies' varies considerably: some are built out of green wood and scrap iron, others are more substantial and two quite spacious huts were sold recently for £40.

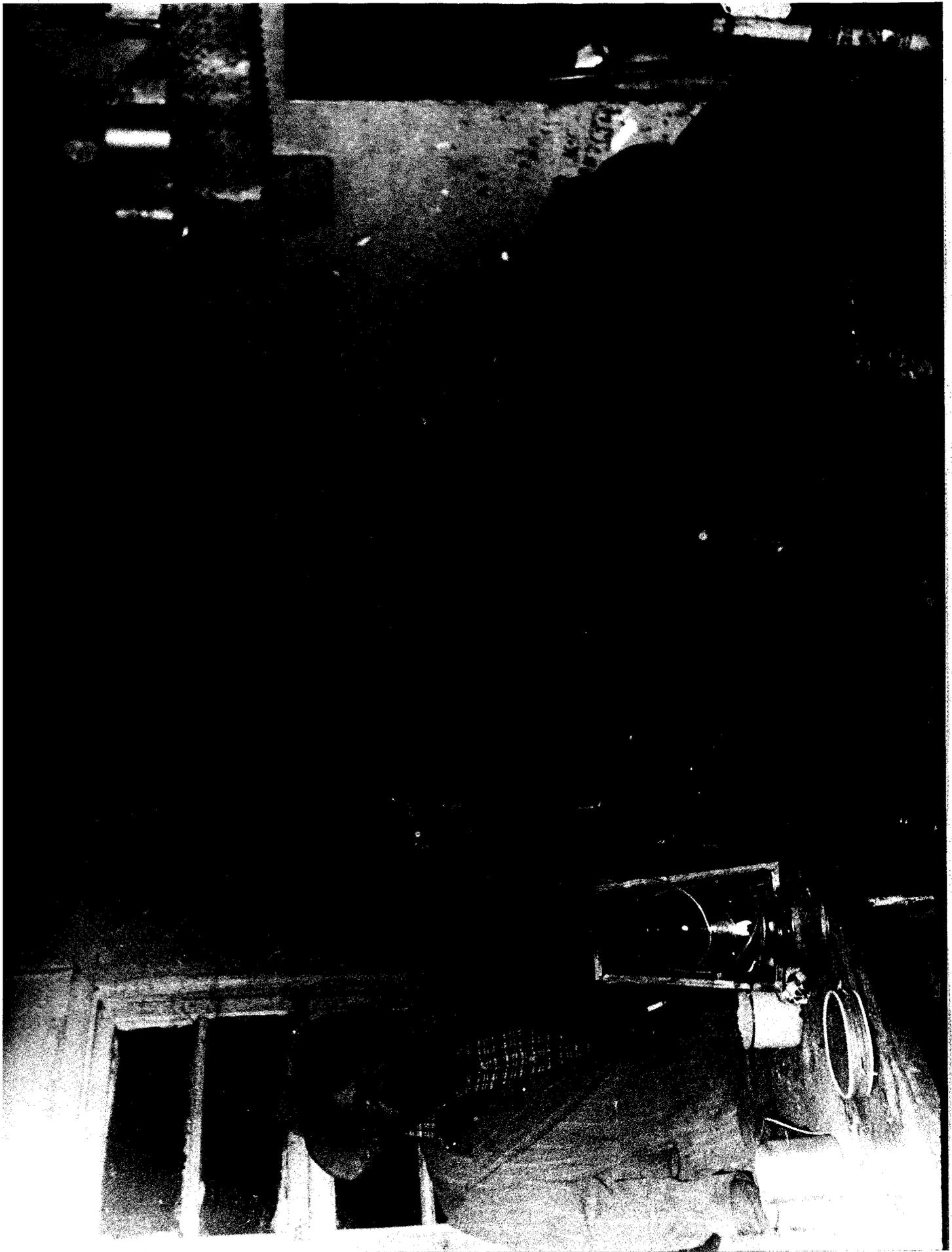
Generally, the most is made of the space available, to accommodate a large number of occupants. In the three- and four-roomed houses on Murrin Bridge station, beds are crowded into every room and onto the verandahs too.² The average number of occupants to a house on Murrin Bridge is eight, in the rather smaller houses on the Wilcannia settlement, seven. Town houses vary greatly in size: one of the smallest in Euabalong has five occupants, the largest in Hillston

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The verandah is commonly used for sleeping in hot weather, in ~~most~~ western townships.

holds eleven. 'Humpies' vary similarly: in Wilcannia the average number is 5.6, ranging from two to nine.

A house - or 'humpy' - is home for those who regularly stay there, a place where one sleeps, eats, gets one's clothes washed, keeps one's property, et cetera. A place where married couples cohabit and bring up their children. It is also a place where visitors are received and guests entertained. A modicum of care is given to the most humble shanty and, if nothing else, the patch of earth around, where the children play and the women sit, will be swept clean of rubbish. But the degree of elegance varies enormously: some homes boast no more than a few rickety bed frames and oil drums for seats; others have bedroom and drawing room suites, refrigerators and washing machines; some have cultivated attractive gardens while other houses are surrounded only by bare earth. But home is no show place; if it is no more than a ramshackle, unfurnished shack no aborigine is likely to sneer. White people would probably disapprove but they are not likely to call anyway. Those who live in more elegant style are certainly proud to have 'got together a good home', but the extra amenities are appreciated for their own sake; there is no reason to believe that they are a means of demonstrating equality with whites,



nor a mere emulation of white ways. There is no 'best parlour'. Jack Wilson, the most prosperous aborigine on Murrin Bridge has bought himself a £100 bedroom suite; however, being kept in the bedroom, no one ever sees it, nor does he attempt to show it off, so that the casual caller will see only the rough old furniture of the living room. The same goes for motor vehicles which in white society are often a source of prestige.³

As we have seen, housekeeping on a government settlement is subject to interference from the authorities; but, short of gross overcrowding, there is no control over who lives in any house. A nuclear family or part-family (i.e. one parent with his or her children) is to be found in every house, but as one can see from Table VIII the majority of households, except in Euabalong, include other families, part-families or individuals. Moreover, almost every inmate is related, affinally or consaguineally, to the others. Kinship, in fact, seems to be the main basis for household recruitment. As one can see from Table VIII, there seems to be a preference for close kin, but there is no indication of

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Outstanding items of property are listed in the appendix.

TABLE VIII RECRUITMENT OF ABORIGINAL HOUSEHOLDS IN FOUR LOCALITIES OF WESTERN N.S.W.

	Murrin Bdg.	Wilcannia	Hillston	Euabalong
One family or part-family only :	11	11	3	7
" " " and lodgers :	11	6	2	-
More than one family or part-family :	12	7	2	3
More than one family or part-family and lodgers :	-	2	-	-
TOTAL :	34	26	7	10

Closest tie linking two families or part-families sharing the same house :

F and m - S :
 F and m - d :
 B - sis :
 B - B :
 sis - sis :
 Wsdsd/S - mSis :
 Bd - FB :

Closest tie linking lodgers and to host family or part family :

d :
 s :
 ds :
 sis or female cousin
 B or male cousin
 None :

3	7	1	1
4	6	2	1
2	1	-	-
-	-	-	-
3	1	-	-
1	1	-	-
-	1	-	-
3	-	1	-
2	-	1	-
4	2	1	1
3	3	-	1
6	2	-	1

any more specific rules of co-residence. The traditional avoidances have faded to the point where many men live with their sisters or mothers-in-law without evoking any comment.

So far as I have been able to discover, household composition remains relatively stable. Even marriage does not mean the establishment of a new household. Newly married couples generally start life together in the house of a parent or older sibling, and it is only when there are a number of children and the house is becoming overcrowded - even by aboriginal standards - that a new household will be set up. Occasionally, no doubt, friction or an open quarrel causes a household to split up, but I heard of no such instances.

Everyone belongs to some household or other; there are no solitaries, and at Murrin Bridge youths refused to live in separate bachelors' quarters, preferring to lodge with a relative.⁴ However, common membership of a household does not imply equal rights: rather one may speak of principal householders and lodgers who are there by the former's consent. A family or part-family, or occasionally several

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This preference is thoroughly untraditional. In the olden-time camp, young men lived together, at some distance from the rest.

families or part-families build, rent, buy or are allocated a house, which becomes their home. There will be other individuals and families also in need of a place to live and these will ask their kinsfolk for lodging. The householder is not bound to give shelter under all circumstances: the house may already be too full or the parties may be personally incompatible; nevertheless, in practice, it is not often refused. Occasionally a quarrel causes a host to evict a lodger or a lodger to walk out. For example, a woman evicted her nephew when she quarreled with the woman who was his paramour. It is difficult to be precise about rights to lodging - or any other rights in aboriginal society - since there is no formulated code of behaviour and no system of organized sanctions; one can only speak of an approximate set of expectations that such-and-such will be done, supported by the diffuse sanction of public opinion - which, however, some are prepared to brave out. It is expected, then, that kin will provide lodging, if practicable and if domestic relations would not be completely upset, thereby. If the lodger behaves unreasonably, his hosts have the right to evict him and nobody is likely to censure them for doing so.

(At Murrin Bridge, women have sometimes succeeded in putting their own husbands out of the house. If a man

attempts to return to a home where he is not wanted, and makes a scene - particularly if he is drunk - the manager will be called to remove him. Naturally, since a woman remains permanently on a station and has children to look after, she will be left in possession of the home, while the man leaves the station or seeks accommodation elsewhere. However, this 'right' is only binding because of the sanctions that the manager wields; aborigines say: "she threw him out" and there will be at least some who sympathize with the man and censure the woman. At Wilcannia, where there is very much less official interference in domestic matters, it is often the woman who leaves home.)

Lodgers are perfectly aware of their status, although this is not a term used to denote it. They do not say: "That is my house!", but "Mrs. Smith feeds me," or "I stop at Johnnie's". A house is generally indicated by reference to the principal male and/or female living there, that person being generally the mother or father of the family predominating in the house, who plays the greatest part in household affairs, in terms of breadwinning, housekeeping or simply strong personality. Where there are several families living more or less in equality, either may be specified according to whom the speaker has in mind at the time. The

old, who have ceased active participation in household affairs, are not usually mentioned.

Lodgers are generally expected to make some contribution towards the running of the homes - making over part of their wages, running errands, getting firewood, or, in the case of girls, cooking and washing. But the contribution need not necessarily be strictly equivalent to what the lodger consumes. One Wilcannia woman kept open house for all the young men about the place, simply because she enjoyed the company, and although she got very little help. Others are a little more calculating: some women keep young girls in the house to do the work and leave themselves with more time for card-playing and gossip; Jack Wilson provided board, in lieu of wages, for several young men who worked for him.

Membership of a household involves the right to come and go as one pleases, to whatever food is available, to use most of the minor property about the place, to care if one is sick, and, if one is a man, to have one's clothes washed from time to time. Sometimes the hosts do not fulfill their duties as they should: one woman left the house where she had been living because, she alleged, they ate her government rations and spent all the money they had on liquor. It was common gossip in Murrin Bridge, that Jack Wilson took all the best

food for himself and left only the scraps for his lodgers.

However, persons, particularly kinsfolk, living outside the house, enjoy many of the same rights. Most houses are open to visitors at all times, and through many there is a steady, day-and-night traffic, who enter and leave without ceremony. Characteristically, at Murrin Bridge, the fences which divided the back yards of each house, have nearly all been broken down so that the shortest cut between houses can be taken. Although people normally eat at home, callers expect to be offered 'a feed' if they are present while a meal is being served and they are generally not disappointed. With this goes an endless succession of borrowing and lending - of food, clothes and miscellaneous articles from axes to spring-carts. I found it impossible to gather precise information on this practice: informants were always rather vague on the matter, suggesting, I think, that no great thought was given to it. Kin are not the only ones who come a-borrowing, but it is sometimes complained that they are the most insistent and that they become indignant if their demands cannot be satisfied. No pound-for-pound reciprocity is observed, but probably in the long run a near balance is achieved, for most households recognize a duty to lend to those from whom they have previously borrowed. However,

there are some prosperous households which give away more than they ever borrow, some poorer households who borrow more than they ever lend. There is little of patronage about this: people, particularly relations, are very ready to help one another. "Poor old Len, he's got nothing: you like to give him a hand." One or two families take advantage of the system to work very little and to spend what they do get on liquor. These 'bludgers' are recognized and they suffer some sharp rebuffs: one man has earned himself the name, the 'Great Australian Bite'. Nevertheless, with a little persistence, they get most of what they want; softhearted housewives excuse their generosity by saying that they "don't like to see the little children go short".

The system is recognized to have certain disadvantages - principally that any sort of accumulation is impossible. But the majority do not regard this very seriously. They excuse themselves with such remarks as "You can't say no" or "You don't like to knock them back", implying that they are not prepared to face the criticism that a refusal would evoke. However, householders may hide away delicacies if visitors come by, to avoid the embarrassment of refusing to share it. One man explained that he never brought in too big a load of fire wood: "If they see it there, they all come in for a

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stick or two, and you like to be in with the boys...." At the same time, the system is seen to have many advantages. Given the spasmodic working habits of most aborigines, the irregular flow of money into the home and the periodic bouts of profligacy, most families find themselves from time to time short of supplies. The difficulty in getting from Murrin Bridge to the stores in town also makes occasional shortages likely. In such a situation, the system of 'banking' one's present excess goods against future shortages, by lending them out, has obvious advantages. As one man put it: "There's one thing about the Mission: you'll never starve. You can always get a bit of flour and sugar somewhere."

But, just as there are circumstances under which it is justifiable to refuse shelter, so there is a limit beyond which it is justifiable to refuse demands on goods. This limit relates to reciprocity, the scarcity of the good and the degree to which the holder wants to retain it for his own immediate use. However, this threshold is very ill-defined, both because 'rights' are never tested in any judicial machinery, and because they are never explicitly and unequivocally stated in any formal code. It may be significant that it is with regard to non-traditional goods that there is most ambiguity. At all events, some situations are

open to individual interpretation and where there is a differing conception of what can rightly be demanded conflict is likely.

A good is recognized to have an owner, in the sense that it may not be taken from him without his consent. A man who takes another's axe without his consent is branded a thief; no one sits down at his neighbour's table, uninvited.⁵ However, if aboriginal attitudes to property can be summed up in a single maxim, it is that no man should have a surplus of goods while another is going short. With regard to food this rule is quite closely observed; but more than a certain amount of food can never be consumed at one time, and the donor is confident that what has been given away can be recouped from some quarter, later on. So, even if there are 'bludgers' who never reciprocate, aborigines are ready to be indulgent. But with more expensive articles, the attitude changes. For example, Jack Wilson lent his cousin Billy Wilson a suit of clothes to wear into town; however, when Billy went on wearing the clothes around the 'Mission' for several days after, and showed no inclination

⁵ C.f. Firth: "Primitive Polynesian Economy", 1939. p.268

to return them, a quarrel ensued. One might add that Billy worked very little and spent what he did earn on liquor, so that there was little hope that he would ever have anything to lend to Jack. Horses and cars are lent only cautiously, to trusted individuals; and horses, although sometimes given as a present to close kin, are normally sold. The problem is posed most sharply in the matter of money, which aborigines are notoriously quick to borrow and slow to return. A few are ready to hand out money to close kinsfolk who have no money of their own, apparently content to have done their duty; but, as we have seen, some husbands are loth to give their wives even the housekeeping money. Money can be spent in many exciting ways, particularly drinking, gambling and taxi rides, which there is little inducement to postpone by lending the money out - even if one were certain of recouping it. But there is normally very little cash about the settlement; a debtor must be caught as soon as he has changed his cheque or it will all be spent. Spending one's cash is much more fun than paying one's debts! There is a further point, liquor is a relatively scarce commodity: getting it and 'shouting for the boys' is an important source of prestige among the men, and many like to keep back their money for this purpose. With money, then, and the more costly goods

the property rights of individuals are likely to be exclusive. The maxim breaks down partly because it is no longer possible to define a 'surplus' with regard to money or a motor car. Moreover, to lend out a car, a good suit of clothes or a few pounds brings no assurance that they can be recouped when required.

It is not easy to maintain a 'good home' if there are a constant stream of visitors tramping through the house, bringing in mud and dust, wearing out the furniture and trampling over garden plots. Moreover, a household whose members are bringing in regular wages and who do not fritter them away on luxuries, is a sitting target for all the 'bludgers' and paupers of the locality. There are a number of households who manage to buy their refrigerators and suits of clothes, and at the same time keep open house and meet the requests for small loans. However, particularly in Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge, it is unusual to have these goods and those who do have them are suspected of having acquired them at the expense of others - by exploiting employees, or denying help to kith and kin. The more 'progressive' aborigines realize that by giving indiscriminate hospitality and lending to all comers they are limiting their spending on more durable articles and some, at least, resent this. One



Euabalong housewife dismissed out of hand the system operating on Murrin Bridge 'Mission': "Too many bludgers! They just walk into your home and help themselves. I'd have a notice on the door, saying no callers!" But, in fact, unless one is living away from other aborigines, or among people equally independent, it is very difficult to contract out of the system. Social contacts with other aborigines become fewer, and less warm and friendly; people will call one 'flash' or 'stuck up'. A good home is acquired by giving shelter only to very close kin, by keeping visitors out, by hard work, by not lending to the neighbours and not 'shouting drinks for the boys'. There are not many ready to steer so lonely a course; those few who do, spend their leisure time in and about the home, seeming to find in it a compensation for the narrower social life that their new tastes have imposed on them. There is a further deterrent: in cutting oneself off from the circle of borrowing and lending, one is depriving oneself of an important source of economic security. A regular income must be assured to avoid the humiliation of going 'cap in hand' to neighbours to whom one has previously refused to lend. For this very reason, several such men came to me when they were in need of a loan. To assert one's economic independence is to run against the

grain of aboriginal society, and, in fact, 'going it alone' virtually amounts to a withdrawal from the group. It is small wonder, then, that so few succeed in doing it, although a number make half-hearted attempts, and that many of those who do are married to ~~whites~~ and want, in any case, to be dissociated from the aboriginal group.⁶

Elkin has written of the traditional aboriginal way of life: "...goods are to use or to give away or to exchange (mostly ceremonially); food is obtained to eat and to share according to rules..."⁷ Ceremonial life has disappeared and the 'rules' have become blurred, but for the majority of aborigines in the far West these attitudes persist. Each one belongs to a security circle of kith and kin among whom present surpluses of food and minor property are 'banked' against a future shortage. The system is maintained because of the security it provides and the threat of ostracism against those who do not participate, but also because solidarity with friends and, more particularly with kin is one of the basic dogma of aboriginal society. Providing lodging for kinsfolk is simply a more intense and regular practice

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This is particularly the case in Euabalong.

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Elkin: "Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia." *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 56. p. 165.

of this same sharing - although the question of personal compatibility is also involved. Of a similar situation, Professor Firth has written: "...the primitive or peasant makes his property play a dual role; it has to do social as well as economic work."⁸

However, when it comes to money and the more valuable and scarce articles, the system of sharing breaks down. Moreover, it is hard to remain in the system and at the same time get together a 'good home'; and so it is that a minority contract out, to live independently after the manner of white people.

⁸ Firth, op. cit., p. 197.

Chapter VIII

GETTING A LIVING

The effect of the European settlement of the West was that the aborigines came in from their hunting and gathering grounds to camp about the homesteads and to live, more or less as paupers, on government hand-outs. But during this period they were learning to become stockmen and station workers, while their women were being taken into the white men's kitchens. Cheap aboriginal labour was indeed to be valued, particularly in the labour hungry regions of the extreme north-west. By the time the government restricted its issue of rations to indigents only, and the aborigines had come to live on reserves or on the edges of towns, they had become as well adapted to pastoral work as white men. Moreover, because the unions regarded cheap labour as a threat to their white members, aborigines soon became entitled to equal rights in the industry. They did not at once abandon the chase; up to a generation ago there were some who would periodically take to the bush, to live for a while on wild meat. Emu, kangaroo, possum, goanna, etc., are still eaten, and everyone enjoys the excellent fish that abound in the rivers. But the younger generation has acquired few of the

traditional hunting skills, and in any case, no one would dream of reverting to the old life, even were it ~~is~~ possible.¹ The needs for tobacco, liquor, clothes, tea, flour, sugar and the like are stronger than those for wild meat; and, to satisfy them, the aborigines must earn money.

No aborigines have reached an educational standard that would qualify them for professional work; few have acquired the capital necessary to establish themselves with small properties, and the one ex-serviceman to be granted a block of land, soon sold it and squandered the money.

The range of employment open to the worker in western New South Wales has been outlined in the introduction; even with a certain amount of travelling, the choice is not very wide. The occupations which aborigines have taken up are listed in Table IX.

There are no formal restrictions on aborigines working in any occupation. For example, membership of the Australian Workers' Union and its predecessor, the Shearers' Union, has always been open to aborigines, although Asiatics are excluded.² Certain employers will not hire aboriginal workers,

1

Nor, as one might expect, is rabbit trapping a popular occupation.

2

See Constitution & General Rules of the Australian Workers' Union 1954-5, 6; p. 8.

TABLE IX. OCCUPATIONS OF ABORIGINES IN FOUR DISTRICTS OF WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES. June 1957.

	Murrin Bdg	Euabal'	Hillston	Wilcannia
MEN :				
Fencer	18	-	-	13
Station Hand	11	10	-	12
Boundary Rider	5	-	-	2
Drover	-	-	-	4
Overseer-Foreman	2	-	-	-
Govt. Stn. Handyman	3	-	-	-
Dept. of Main Rds. employee	-	1	1	2
Railway Fetter	1	2	1	1
Municipal Employee	-	-	-	1
Shearer	0	2	5	3
Sawmill Worker	2	-	-	1
Woodcutter	-	-	-	1
Mechanic	-	1	-	1
Sanitary Carter	-	-	-	1
Odd Jobs Man	1	-	-	1
Farm Worker	4	1	1	1
TOTAL :	49	17	8	44
%age of Pastoral Workers :	76.5	70.5	62.5	77.2
%age of Permanent Jobs held :	24.4	32.3	37.5	18.1
WOMEN :				
Station Cook	2	1	-	-
Cafe/Hotel Worker	-	3	1	3
Domestic Worker	2	-	-	2
Hospital Maid	-	1	-	1
Nurse	-	2	-	-
Shop Assistant	-	-	1	-
Domestic Assistants on Govt. Stn.	3	-	-	-
TOTAL	7	7	2	6

but the aversion is personal and by no means universal. The Matron of the Wilcannia hospital declined to have aborigines in the wards, on the ground that they were too dirty; but at Lake Cargelligo there were several aboriginal ward maids and two trainee nurses. Shop employment is not easily found; the few large concerns hiring assistants have a wide choice of white girls with whom, on grounds of manner and education, aboriginal girls would find it hard to compete. But in hotels and cafes there is no objection to their preparing or serving the food.

However, aboriginal working habits are such as to incline them towards certain occupations and to make them undesirable employees in certain sorts of work. Of course, all aborigines are not uniform in this respect, and indeed most of those at Hillston and Euabalong, as well as a small minority elsewhere, come closer to the white norm. Briefly, most aborigines reveal a preference for the pastoral industry, a preference for casual work alternated by extended periods of idleness, dilatoriness, relatively low monetary expectations and what is either shyness or apathy in the matter of approaching and dealing with white employers.

Of course, the majority of aborigines have to accept pastoral work unless they are prepared to move out of the

region. Nevertheless, it is the aboriginal metier par excellence and there is no one who has not at some time been drover, shearer, fencer or station hand. It is work with which they have a lifetime's experience; they are confident of their ability to do it and, indeed, believe themselves to be peculiarly suited for it. One 13 year old boy expressed, with striking candour, what I believe is a quite widely held view: "We're not as brainy as whitefellers, but we're tougher and we get on better in the bush."

The aspirations which Murrin Bridge children revealed in the questionnaire, are shown in Table X and compared with those of children in the Euabalong and Lake Cargelligo Public Schools. Aboriginal boys from Murrin Bridge had no ambitions outside the pastoral industry, nor did parents have any other ambitions for their children. Moreover, as can be seen from Table XI, they regarded pastoral work as "best". These attitudes are in sharp contrast to those of the white children. (At Euabalong the only aboriginal boy wanted to work on the roads, like his father.)

A very large proportion of pastoral work (just how much we do not know) is seasonal or occasional, so that some aborigines will have to be casual workers, whether they like it or not. Moreover, some of the sheep stations are so

TABLE X.

"WHAT JOB WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU GROW UP?" ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN BY CHILDREN IN THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WESTERN N.S.W. 1957.

	Murrin Bridge	Euabalong	Lake Cargelligo
BOYS :			
Farmer	1		10
Shearer	2		-
Drover	2		-
Station Hand	1		1
Fence r	10		-
Dept. of Main Rds. Empl	-	1	1
Truck/Tractor Driver	-	1	1
Engine Driver	-	-	1
Shop Assistant	-	-	1
Pilbt	-	-	1
Engineer	-	1	1
Teacher	-	1	1
Flying Doctor	-	1	1
Bank Manager	-	-	1
GIRLS :			
Domestic Worker	5		-
Hotel Worker	-	1	-
Baker	-	1	-
Dressmaker/Hairdresser	-	1	1
Shop Assistant	2	2	7
Nurse	1	3	8
Teacher	-	1	5

TABLE XI.

"WHICH JOB IS BEST ?" GRADING OF NINE MALE OCCUPATIONS BY PUBLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN THREE DISTRICTS OF WESTERN N.S.W. 1957.

	Murrin	Bridge	Euabalong	Lake Cargelligo
Boys:				
1	Shearer	Farmer	Farmer	Farmer
2	Drover	Rlwy. Engine Driver	Rlwy. Engine Driver	Doctor
3	Fencer	Baker	Baker	Shearer
4	Farmer	Drover	Drover	Baker
5	Rlwy. Engine Driver	Shearer/Doctor	Shearer/Doctor	Drover
6	Doctor	-	-	Rlwy. Engine Driver
7	Baker	Boxer	Boxer	Shop Assistant
8	Shop Assistant	Fencer	Fencer	Fencer
9	Boxer	Shop Assistant	Shop Assistant	Boxer
Girls :				
1	Doctor	Doctor/Baker	Doctor/Baker	Doctor
2	Shop Assistant	-	-	Farmer
3	Baker	Farmer/Shop Asst.	Farmer/Shop Asst.	Shop Assistant
4	Boxer	-	-	Baker
5	Railway Engine Dr.	Rlwy. Engine Driver	Rlwy. Engine Driver	Shearer
6	Farmer	Shearer	Shearer	Railway Engine Driver
7	Boxer	Drover/Fencer	Drover/Fencer	Fencer
8	-	-	-	Drover
9	-	Boxer	Boxer	Boxer

Note : Aboriginal girls did not complete the grading.

distant that it may be impossible for a man to return home every week-end; hence, it is usual to stay out for weeks or even months at a time, until a job is completed, and then return for several weeks holiday. Euabalong has virtually become the labour reservoir for the very large Yambul Station, which is near enough for the men to return home every week-end. Few Lake Cargelligo workers, other than shearers, go more than forty miles away to their work. However, Murrin Bridge is less happily placed. The establishment of the government station meant that nearly fifty working men were suddenly brought into the area, without there being any accompanying rise in the demand for labour. Hence, the majority of them have to return a hundred or more miles westwards to the stations where they formerly found work, and from which they can return only occasionally.

But even when regular jobs are to be found in the locality, many aborigines - particularly those from Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia - find the regular working week irksome; and not a few have been dismissed for absenteeism, after a short time. Aboriginal dilatoriness is notorious among employers. Workers go home for a weekend and fail to return until Tuesday or Wednesday - or not at all! A family illness, the hangover from a drinking spree or some other petty distraction

has kept them back; and, indeed, for those who work far from home, able to get back only occasionally, there is an understandable temptation to linger. But it is not unjust to say that the aborigine has little sense of urgency and readily procrastinates, although once at work he may do well enough. The men, themselves, admit that, while 'on the Mission' they never seem to "get around to doing anything." The disinclination to routine and discipline was well expressed by a man who had chosen to camp out on a fencing job, in preference to a regular station hand's job where he would be living at the homestead. "You work when you want. And none of this getting up in the cold and hanging around to be taken off to your work."

Men whose work keeps them for long periods away in the bush are, once they get home, very apt to linger, until their money runs out and their wives' reproaches - or, perhaps, the manager - drive them out again. And, indeed, a holiday at home on the settlement, with one's family and friends, living in easy idleness, is one of the pleasures of aboriginal life. Men will say, "I don't work all the time, like some people do." Leisure is something for which they are ready to forego the money they could otherwise be earning. Youths, in particular, are content to spend long periods - sometimes

several months - of idleness, without money; and, since they have no family responsibilities, little pressure is put on them to work. I have seen employers come onto the settlements, looking for workers and being coolly refused by youths who had not worked for months.

Many aborigines reveal a quite feckless attitude in the matter of work. Little effort is made to go out and look for work and some quite literally wait for it to come to them. Men at Murrin Bridge rely on the manager to find a job for them or wait until some more enterprising comrade has obtained a contract. 'Mission' youths are particularly inclined to do this, at least partly because they are shy before strangers and prefer not to have anything to do with them. By placing themselves under the wing of some older man, they are insulated from new contacts and work under conditions that demand the minimum of adaptation and initiative. Some old men, almost as shy as the youths, have established a more or less permanent arrangement with an employer: they camp on his property, receiving a few rations and working when required; they are paid very little, but are free to come and go, and enjoy besides a certain security. But there is a widespread tendency to return to the places where one has been employed before: men say that they prefer to go

where they are known, and this is an additional reason why so many Murrin Bridge aborigines return west to the old sheep stations where they and their parents have always worked.

This fecklessness and lack of adaptability in the matter of employment, renders aborigines very slow to take up new and more remunerative opportunities. In fact, the more backward element are generally receiving the minimum wage, if they are not actually underpaid; and because of their personal dependence on the employer, they are in a weak position for bargaining. But in any case monetary expectations are generally low. One man explained that he was really no better off earning high wages since he only got drunk and ended up in gaol. The disinclination to acquire property beyond what is necessary for immediate needs, means that the demand for money as against leisure, social security, home life and so on, is lower than among white workers.

As one might expect, many aborigines spend long periods in idleness, particularly those at Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia. In Table XII I estimate the average number of days worked by twenty-five Murrin Bridge men, during the first five months of 1957, a period of relatively full employment. The total number of days during this period was 154, but accepting the five-day-week standard and allowing for public

holidays, there were 110 working days. However, some bush workers, particularly those on contracts, work without a break. I selected these men because I was in a position to watch their movements fairly closely and was on good terms with them or their relations.

Table XII

Average Number of Days Worked by 25 Murrin Bridge Aboriginal Men - January 1st, 1957 to June 3rd, 1957
(154 days).

	Number of Men	Number of Days Worked		
		Average	Maximum	Minimum
Single Men	11	66.8	110	35
Married Men	14	85.5	110	40
Total	25	77.3	110	35

There is a small amount of work available outside the pastoral industry: most of it is regular and yields wages around the State basic of £13.7 per week. There are aborigines employed as railway fettlers, but at least as many again have tired of the routine and have either resigned or been dismissed. The Department of Main Roads offers a small number of jobs in each locality, to which a number of

aborigines have been attracted, and in most towns a few jobs as sanitary carters, wood cutters, street sweepers etc. are to be had. There have been only two aborigines who followed any skilled occupation: Quinn, who acquired a mechanic's trade in the army and earned about £17.10 per week, and another man who as foreman in a Condobolin saw mill earned a substantial though varying wage. However, even though these men observed the working week with fair regularity, they generally grew restless after a year or so and transferred to some other occupation.

We have already seen that the three handymen's jobs on Murrin Bridge station are prized by a number of men, largely because they are conveniently close to home. This also makes it easier to keep to a weekly routine; however, a number of men have been dismissed for continual drunkenness.

Around Murrin Bridge, a few mixed farms employ one or two aborigines as general labourers at about £2.10 per day. But, like their white brethren, most aborigine workers look down on farm work, complaining that it is too arduous; those that take it are generally rather simple folk.

I have suggested that shearing is the most prestigious form of pastoral work, as well as the most remunerative. But it is not easy to acquire the skill necessary before one is

worth hiring. Generally, a man starts as a 'rouseabout', picking up the wool, and trying his hand at shearing during the 'smoko' break, when the shearers are resting. But even rouseabouting is a well paid job, bringing £18 a week, while a shearer probably averages £7-£8 a day (the rate is £7.12.3, or £9.10.4 per 100, according to the types of sheep³), so that there is considerable competition to get into the sheds. Most of the aborigine shearers I know have been brought into the sheds by their fathers, but of the younger generation only three are learning the trade. Of course, shearing is not everybody's work: it demands considerable stamina and, according to some, a particular build of body. But aboriginal children, while stating in the questionnaire that shearing was the "best" sort of work, did not expect to do it themselves. In fact, most of the young men have never been inside a shearing shed, and, whether through shyness or fecklessness, make no attempt to do so. Many older men protest that shearing is too hard and difficult for them; while white shearers, for their part, say that aborigines are too spasmodic, slackening off as soon as they have made a few pounds, although they will admit that there are exceptions.

³

See, Australian Worker, 4/9/57.

There is a further point: a great deal of drinking goes on in the sheds, and in this matter aborigines are notorious. One man, formerly a 'gun' shearer, has caused so much trouble and become so unreliable, because of his drunkenness, that few contractors will now hire him. With such a reputation, it is not surprising that shearing contractors are unwilling to hire aborigines, unless they are already known.

Droving work is still to be found in the country to the north-west of Wilcannia. A head drover gets £60 per thousand sheep, per week, from which he will have to pay on or two assistants about £15 and provide their food. He must also have his droving plant - a wagonette, camping gear and equipment for penning in the sheep each night - together with horses, costing, in all, perhaps £300. There have been aboriginal head drovers in the past, but few today seem able to accumulate enough money to buy the plant. Many, moreover, complain that the work takes them too far from home and relations.

The other forms of pastoral work, fencing, boundary riding, mustering and the various tasks that the station hand will be expected to do, demand little skill beyond an ability to ride a horse or tinker with the engine of a truck. There is little specialization, and a man who has done one of these

has probably turned his hand to the others too, at some time. Much of the work is casual, and the pay is not high: during the first half of 1957 the basic wage was £14.10.0 for those covered by the State Award, and £13.7.0 according to the Federal Award.⁴ Most aborigines take on this sort of work from time to time; and some, like those at Euabalong, are employed permanently on the one station. The larger stations provide married quarters for their regular workers, but it is difficult for the children to get schooling there and aboriginal women generally dislike being away from their relations for too long. Thus, most aborigines are apt to leave after a month or two, and employers prefer to put them onto casual or contract work.

There is a more or less continuous need for fencing work: erecting new fences and replacing of old ones, destroyed by rabbits, bush fires or the rotting of the wooden posts. If there is no machinery the work can be very arduous; but it has the advantage of permitting one to work as and when

4

Employers who are members of the Graziers' Association are bound by the State agreement. But it is hard to discover just who are members and who are not. (Personal communication from A.W.U. Organizer, Donaldson). If only for convenience sake, I assume that the employers of aborigines were bound by the lower award. Enquiry indicated that this was the rate normally paid.

one pleases. Like scrub-clearing and tank-sinking, it is put out to contract so that the employer is not concerned at what rate the work proceeds. Three Wilcannia aborigines worked for white contractors, who seemed to be imposing a fairly rigid routine; the rest worked with aboriginal contractors, who understood and adjusted their routine to suit aboriginal working habits.

There are other reasons why contract work is more attractive to aborigines. The contractor has the task of approaching and negotiating with the white employer, but once this has been done he is left to himself until the completed work is inspected. For his workers there need be no contact with the white employer at all. The contractor, himself, may be a kinsman of theirs; at all events, he will be someone with whom they will be absolutely familiar.

Aborigines are entitled to the same wages as white workers: the State and Federal wage legislation and arbitration court awards apply to them, as they do anyone else. As government employees and in the shearing sheds, which are subject to strict union surveillance, they will be sure of getting their due. In other sorts of work, where there is little or no union surveillance, there is a greater chance of their being underpaid, while contract work is subject to



Aboriginal fencers at work

no agreements or laws whatever.

It is difficult to discover just how much workers are being paid. Sometimes they are aware that it is too little, but are ashamed to admit it; in which case their employers will be even more evasive. Other workers pretend to be underpaid, to protect themselves from importunate relations and friends.⁵ In any case, with the confusion caused by two distinct awards (State and Federal) covering the same occupations, it is difficult to establish just what a man's due really is.

Large, company-owned stations, of which there are a number in the West, are most likely to pay their workers, black or white, the full award rate if only because their affairs are more public. However, there are a number of smaller privately owned stations and farms whose dealings are less clearly above board. Of Goona Station, in particular, I heard too many complaints from both white and black workers, not to believe that there was a certain amount of exploitation.

In the early period, aboriginal workers were paid only in rations and blankets. Gradually they came to demand and

⁵ One man who had long played such a part arrived one day, to everyone's astonishment, with a £800 truck.

to get money. But often they were quite unaware of what they were entitled to. One aborigine recalled how an employer had paid his workers with big handfuls of silver, to create an illusion of opulence. Even today there are a few who can be gulled in this sort of way: two old men of my acquaintance were getting no more than £5 a week with their keep. Timms, the owner of Goona, was credited with the practice of promising his men one sum and writing the cheque for less - a trick which his victims did not discover until they went to change it!

The more acute aborigines are well aware of the way in which unscrupulous employers regard them. "Jacky" is a nickname for the aborigine little used by whites nowadays, but well remembered by the aborigines and hated for its associations with the gullible, 'ignorant blackfeller' of early years. "None of that Jacky stuff for me!" exclaimed Jack Wilson after extracting the terms he wanted for a fencing contract. The latter-day Jacky is despised by his own, more sophisticated brethren. Garry W. had, by his own account, been 'robbed' by Timms, but his guileless brother Gussie still continued to work on Goona. Garry's reply when, some months later, Timms asked him to drive a herd of rams, was a much repeated saying around the settlement - "Garry won't

shift your bloody rams, but Gussie might!" (Garry was also celebrated for having called another employer a 'mongrel bastard'; but not every aborigine is so outspoken.)

What is remarkable, however, is that aboriginal contractors like Jack Wilson grossly underpay their own workers, particularly the younger ones, who may get as little as £1 a day. There is no question of any informal aborigine trade union; men are indignant if they, themselves, are exploited; but they are not particularly concerned if someone else gets the same treatment. "Garry won't shift your bloody rams; but Gussie might!"

Nor do most men make much effort to defend themselves from unscrupulous employers. For example, few knew exactly how much the station hands' award was, although most knew it was about £13. Shearers were, if only by necessity, union members; but the remainder knew little about the A.W.U. and showed very little interest in it. There are men who are quite content providing they can go home, after a spell of work, with £20 or £30 in their pockets, regardless of how long they have worked. Those who are attached to a place of work for non-economic reasons - attachment to the place, familiarity with the employer, or whatever they be - are in a weak bargaining position. On Goona station there are no

proper living quarters, work is only available intermittently and, since Timms is often away, workers may wait several weeks before getting their pay. However, the 'regulars' are all related to one another, they are allowed to camp around the station, and there are always a few pounds to be made. So when another group of aborigines, brought in for crutching, planned a walk-out because they were being underpaid, the Goona 'regulars' declined to join them.

Some aborigines earned above the basic wage; others were paid below it. But for the sake of convenience I shall assume that all were in receipt of the basic £2.14.0 per day. Then, taking the average number of days worked during my five months' stay at Murrin Bridge (see Table XII,) I estimate an average income of £180.12.0 for unmarried men, and £230.16.0 for married men; or, in weekly terms, £8.4.0 and £10.10.0 respectively. Probably the estimate for unmarried men is too high. (The government station handymen are excluded from the estimate; they are paid regularly each week.) How these figures compare with the other centres of population, one can only guess. From superficial observation, I should say that Wilcannia was little different from Murrin Bridge, but that Euabalong and Hillston aborigines worked more regularly and enjoyed incomes correspondingly higher.

Except at Wilcannia, the contribution of women to the family income is negligible. Few work, and most of those that do are very erratic in their attendances. In any case, women are paid very little - often only £1 a day.

When one takes into account the large aboriginal families, it is clear that their per capita income is much below that of whites. Nevertheless, many men prefer to enjoy their leisure rather than augment their income; and, as we have seen, considerable proportions of that income are spent on luxuries such as liquor and taxi-rides. In other words, their standards, with regard to clothes, food, furniture, housing, etc., are lower than their incomes would permit.

To live in the style of white Australians, these aborigines would have to work more regularly and, in some instances, to see that they were adequately paid. There are no formal barriers preventing them from taking this path, although there are certain discouragements, and one may say that, if they have not done so it has been largely their own choice, for the circumstances of those who have taken it have not been greatly different from their brethren.

The aborigines, in adjusting themselves to the encroaching white Australian economy, have done so not only as individuals; there have been a number of enterprises involving

small groups, each with its rudimentary leadership. On two occasions a store has been operated at Murrin Bridge and, both at Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia, fencing and clearing gangs are continually being formed.

Neither store was particularly successful. ~~Ray~~ Quinn, now supervisor at Wilcannia, had come to live at Murrin Bridge in 1948. He decided to open a store and rented an empty house on the station. Stock - groceries, tinned goods, sweets, soft drinks, etc. - he arranged to take from local tradesmen, at a discount of 15-28%, and it was then transported free on the station truck. ~~Quinn did particularly well on soft drinks and sweets. He was also secretary of the Football Club, and organised dances which drew aborigines from as far as Condohelin. For these he provided refreshments and took substantial profits. On groceries he would extend up to £2 credit, more if the men were out working. Later he was able to buy a truck and provide a taxi service, at a price well below that run from town.~~

In this enterprise, Quinn was assisted by his wife and, spasmodically, by her nieces and female cousins. Her father's brother also helped at weekends, and conducted the dances.

The store made enough money to 'keep' Quinn, his wife and two children, and he was able to buy the £80 truck. However, the income was only £8 a week and when, after nine months, he was offered a job, tractor driving at £3 a day, he accepted and closed the store. He was disappointed at the store's lack of success, which he attributed largely to the poor support it received from the people of Murrin Bridge. He complained that they came to him for credit, but when they had cash, spent it in town; in the same way, they only used his taxi when they were 'broke'. Quinn closed his books with £80 of bad debts.

The sharp eyes of Jack Wilson had been on the concern for some time, and he readily took over from Quinn, with his wife's nephew as his main assistant. But Wilson, though very acute in his dealings with people, has no notions of system and kept no books. His purchase of stock was such that he was obliged to sell above the price for which it could be bought in town. He extended credit recklessly to men who have not even yet honoured their debts. And, to make matters worse, he gambled: of course, with the contents of the till in his pocket, he was a sitting target for card sharpers. Wilson, in fact, received much the same treatment as Quinn, without having the same prudence to deal with it. Although

he does not admit to so much, it is said that he closed the store having lost £200-£300!

A fencing contractor makes his bargain with the employer; thereafter the work is his responsibility. He picks his team, organizes the work, places the camp and buys the stores. Fencing can be done by a man, working on his own; more usually two or three work together; occasionally there are more. Among the aborigines, teams were of two types: either two or three men work~~d~~ together and share~~d~~ the price, or the man who had taken up the contract paid his men on a fixed rate, keeping the balance for himself.

Kinship appears to be an important factor in the recruitment of any working party. In the nine that I recorded at Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia, involving thirty-nine men in all, only eight men were not related to the organizer. Of these thirty-one, nine were his affines and the remainder his consanguineal kin. The groups are not particularly stable; often they last for the one contract job only. Sometimes it is a quarrel that causes a gang to break up, but generally it is some incidental occurrence which separates them, and they part on good terms, to collaborate again at some later date, perhaps.

After his failure with the store, Jack Wilson returned to fencing - at a time when graziers were ploughing back some of the fruits of several good years. Wilson worked hard and employed a number of youths whom he paid very little. Presently he established a more or less permanent association with Mannie Malone, an excellent worker, aged about 30. Business prospered, and after two years Jack had made himself the owner of a £900 utility truck; two years later he had bought himself a mechanical post-hole digger and saw, costing over £400.

Wilson is understandably proud of the truck and the machine, and he is every ready to demonstrate them to anyone showing interest. They are most useful in his work; but they are, in addition, tangible proofs of his ability to succeed in his economic enterprises. These will prove to white employers that he is no Jacky!

Wilson prides himself on his ability to handle employers and strike a good bargain with them. He spends a good deal of time associating and negotiating with them. Helped, perhaps, by his light skin, he approaches them man-to-man, slips quickly into christian names and accompanies them into the hotels (although he has, in fact, no certificate). But his confident manner is still very much self-

conscious and assumed: he is apt to 'protest too much' and each phase of the negotiations is discussed afterwards in laborious detail. To satisfy himself that he is not accepting too low a price, he will go to the manager and to the school master, from whom he is acquiring the rudiments of arithmetic and geometry. In the same way, he was glad to get me to draft and type business letters for him.

Wilson's ability to handle whites is outstanding; but his ability to control his own people is no less. Malone, in particular, is a great asset to him, someone whom he can leave in charge of the work while he is away and who probably does more of the physical labouring than he does himself. Malone's reputation as a worker is good among white employers, and he could easily get contracts on his own account. Indeed, a number of farmers have already attempted to wean him away from Wilson, no doubt with the hope of getting cheaper rates. The latter has been aware of this pressure on Malone, and anticipating a certain restlessness, sometimes offers him a share in the contracts on which they are working. To stabilize the relationship still further, he tried to persuade Manny to marry his daughter; in this, however, he failed, for the former's affections are engaged elsewhere. But Malone is bound to Wilson for other reasons. Firstly,

he is a shy man, unconfident in his relations with whites; secondly he is a heavy drinker, with the result that he has been unable to 'hold down' regular jobs, and will never be able to save sufficient to buy a truck or fencing machinery. Wilson provides the very real service of getting the contracts, providing transport to and from work and lightening the work with his mechanical aids. Moreover, aware of the erratic habits of his workers, he adjusts his schedule to suit them. Unlike white employers, he does not mind waiting a day or two until their money is spent and the liquor drunk!

Wilson has been nick-named the Chief; the title was given him in irony, but by his own workers it is used at least half seriously. Malone uses it too, though in the more familiar form Chiefy; but Wilson, a little uneasy perhaps, at this - for aborigines - abnormal ranking, uses the same style in replying.

Other, most regular members of the team are Billy Wilson, Jack's cousin aged about 40, two young cousins whom he boards at his house, and a mildly mentally deficient man. His sons work with him from time to time, but they prefer to work on their own account.

I spent five days in Wilson's camp, while he was burning off a 100-acre paddock, and was able to observe his team of

nine in action. Wilson on this occasion cooked, organized the camp, dealt with the farmer, directed work and lent a hand in between times. Malone did such overseeing as was necessary, sometimes chivvying the younger workers and giving a few directions. ~~It was winter and work did not begin until eight o'clock when the sun was up, though it then continued, with meal breaks, until sundown at six o'clock.~~

~~There was a clear division in the camp between the older men, with whom I was included, the three youths - poddies, as they are called - and two boys, one fifteen and the other thirteen. The men slept by the fire with a wind-break behind them, where they could discuss affairs privately, particularly the performance of the others. The poddies and the two boys slept in a tent a few yards away. At meal times the older men were served first and, if any delicacies were available, it was they who had them. With the company gathered around the fire, Wilson would take the opportunity to deliver a pep-talk; and conversation in general was dominated by the older element, with the youths speaking very little. The two boys were treated with some indulgence, they were not expected to work as hard as the rest, but they were under the control of their fathers, and Wilson's son received a fearsome thrashing during the week.~~

~~When it came to payment, the differences in the group were reflected even more sharply.~~ For the 4½ days' work Wilson received £120, out of which he paid for wages, food and transport. Malone received £15, Billy Wilson £9.10.0. Two poddies received £5.10.0, and the third, who lived with Wilson, only £1.10.0 in cash. Wilson's son received only a few shillings for sweets, and the other boy was bought a shirt and trousers. The mental deficient's mother was given £4. Supposing £65 to be the total cost of the enterprise, Wilson was left with £55 for himself.

Wilson's profits were not always so high, but his income must have averaged around £20 a week for the period. On a number of occasions, too, Wilson had more contracts than he could personally cope with, and he was farming them out to other teams, keeping back a commission for himself. But his activities are unlikely to expand much beyond their present limits, for they are the object of a very severe criticism among his fellow aborigines, and his workers are subject to a considerable pressure from without to leave him. They are forever being told that Wilson is 'robbing' them for his own advantage. Before I left, one of his young cousins had been persuaded to leave him, on the just ground that he had never been given any money. Wilson is apt to think that if he

gives these poddies a few clothes and their board he has done enough, arguing that if they get money it is only squandered on liquor. His argument may be correct, but it only holds so long as the youths are prepared to accept it too. To give them bed and board is not necessarily enough; for, as one man remarked in discussing the matter, "You can pick up a feed anywhere". Wilson is liked and admired by the two youths regularly working for him; they enjoy the trips into the bush, if only as a change from settlement life; they enjoy using the machine. But if these enthusiasms fade, there is little to keep them in his service.

But even Malone, who is well enough paid, feels the same pressure urging him to leave Wilson. The hostility of the other aborigines is aroused, not only because the latter underpays his men, but because he does so well from their work, and is patently so much more successful than anyone else. "He doesn't work in, he just walks around like a bloody boss!" was how one man put it. I suspect that jealousy plays a large part in the hostility towards Wilson. A twelve-year-old boy revealed just this attitude when he said, with remarkable frankness, "People don't like Jack, he's always getting things". But there is the added resentment of the way in which Wilson has set himself up, over others - this is

why he is called the Chief. It is the same sort of resentment that Quinn aroused when he became Supervisor in Wilcannia, and which some of the 'flash' aborigines of Euabalong arouse by their superior ways.

Wilson is disappointed by the way his efforts go unpraised and unsupported, when in fact he believes he is setting an example that others should be following.

What is striking is that some of Wilson's severest critics are ready to work on Goona station, where they are probably underpaid and where, if they cared to look at the matter in this way, Mr Timms is doing very well out of their labour. ~~However, Goona offers them an easy security. Only aborigines work there, and it is a group of kin who do so most regularly.~~

We may distinguish four types of aboriginal workers:

1. Weekly workers for white employers; wages being more or less fixed according to the nature of the job. Most of these are working sufficiently close to home to be able to return there each weekend, if not each night.

2. Casual workers, such as shearers, some station hands, etc., working for white employers or contractors; rates of pay being more or less fixed according to the nature of the job. This work often involves travelling some



distance from home, and men return home less frequently but usually for longer periods.

3. Contractors who negotiate prices with white employers, and organize their own teams. Their rhythm of work is usually similar to that of 2.

4. Workers for aboriginal employers, on very variable rates of pay, or for part shares in the contract price. They have no direct contact with white employers. Their rhythm of work is tied to that of 3.

Classifying the aboriginal workers in the four settlements, we have the following distribution:

Class of Worker	Murrin Bridge		Wilcannia		Euabalong		Hillston	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	11	22.4	10	22.7	15	88.2	2	25
2	20	40.8	24	54.5	2	11.7	6	75
3	4	8.1	4	9.0	-	-	-	-
4	14	28.6	6	13.6	-	-	-	-
Total:	49	99.9	44	99.8	17	99.9	8	100

These figures must be taken as approximates; particularly at Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia, there is a considerable movement between categories 2 and 4.

Because their traditional hunting and gathering existence is no longer possible and because they have acquired new needs which can only be satisfied through the medium of money, the aborigines of the Far West have made a radical accommodation to the white Australian economy, becoming an integral part of the labour force. Active accommodation has been made mainly by the men, although, as we have seen, the women's life has been radically affected by such factors as absentee work. Essentially, the accommodation has been a matter of individuals coming to terms with white enterprises; however, some seem less able to do this than others and it is under these circumstances that middle-men like Wilson have come to the fore. Their work groups provide an easy entry into the white economy with the minimum of adaptation on the part of the workers. Once again, kinship and economics are closely bound up with one another, in these groups; but rights and duties are very ill-defined and they are consequently extremely unstable. Moreover, there is a clear resistance to any developing aboriginal leadership, in this as in other spheres. It seems probable that as aborigines become more self-reliant in the matter of employment these groups will go out of existence; one can see little need for

3.

them among the more 'progressive' aborigines of Hillston and Euabalong.

The aborigines constitute a largely homogeneous body of unskilled, casual pastoral workers. Classes 2, 3 and 4 in the table are all seasonal or occasional, and, in fact, many of those listed under 1 are only held for short periods. Thus, except at Euabalong, casual workers are very much in the majority; and only at Hillston is this irregularity in work compensated to any extent by the high wages of the shearing shed. The working habits of most aborigines are partly to blame for their preponderance in casual work, but the character of the industry itself, and the official policy of concentrating large number of aborigines in one place, must also be taken into account.

There are a considerable number of whites also engaged in seasonal and occasional occupations, but it is certain that they constitute a much higher proportion of the total white working population than is the case with the aborigines. Moreover, the latter are much less involved in the more remunerative casual occupations. Fencing, clearing and the like are not their exclusive preserve, but ~~such work is not highly regarded~~, as Table XI reveals, whites do not regard such work highly.

There is little likelihood that this pattern will change. It is, for example, improbable that new industries will be brought into the area, and the aborigines show few signs of moving into other areas - such as wheat farming and fruit growing areas, certainly not the urban centres - in search of different sorts of work. An increased desire for goods may stimulate them to work more regularly - if the work can be found. But few at Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia show any signs of this, although most of the people at Hillston and Euabalong have already made changes along these lines.

In the event of a recession the aborigines would be particularly vulnerable, because of their almost exclusive dependence on the one industry and because they have few skills, little experience and no contacts that would enable them to move smoothly and quickly into other industries. Moreover, regular employees would very probably be given preference over the casual and unreliable aboriginal worker.

Chapter IX

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LIQUOR IN ABORIGINAL LIFE

Wherever Australian aborigines have come into contact with the ordinary white population, they have quickly acquired a taste for liquor - often to the point of excess. It is, indeed, impossible for anyone who has lived anywhere near an aboriginal settlement not to be aware of the fact. But although few writers have failed to note its existence and to make some mention of the disruptive effects it has in other spheres of life little thought has been given to discovering what significance the aborigines themselves give to drinking and drunkenness. So far as western New South Wales is concerned,¹ it is not enough to regard this sort of behaviour as merely a social aberration or a symptom of spiritual emptiness; among aboriginal men it has become institutionalized; it is a central value in their lives, to which they will adhere in the teeth of strong pressure. It is necessary, then, to know just how it is conducted, who is involved, at what time and, so far as is possible for the anthropologist, what are the reasons for its continuance.

1

Most of the data on which this chapter is based, was collected in Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge.

As we have seen, the law forbids the supply of liquor to aborigines, but while it is effective in keeping most non-exempted aborigines out of the hotels, it is totally ineffective in preventing them from getting liquor surreptitiously. Sometimes whites will buy the liquor for them, either as an act of friendship or for money; sometimes it is the exempted aborigines who 'cart the grog'; but most usually police patrolling is lax enough for it to be obtainable around the back of the hotel. In fact, nearly every man who has money to spend, drinks at least once in a while, and many women can be persuaded to take a glass of beer occasionally. Of the fifty males at Murrin Bridge, aged fifteen and over, thirty were acutely intoxicated several times during my stay; the same is true of thirty-two out of sixty Wilcannia males in the same age group. By contrast only five women at Wilcannia and two at Murrin Bridge drank heavily.

It is generally the acutely intoxicated who are arrested by the police, but, as we have seen, this acts as no deterrent, and aborigines may be drunk again within half an hour of leaving gaol. A policeman told me how an aborigine being chased by two constables, drank his bottle of wine as he ran and having drained it stopped and faced them, saying, "Alright, now you can take me!" Arrest, in fact, seems to be

accepted fatalistically as the price one pays for drinking. The 'Wilcannia Song', quoted earlier, describes the hardships of "twenty days hard labour" but affirms the singer's resolve to get drunk again as soon as he gets his cheque, even if it does mean another spell in gaol.

If the aborigines' drinking habits were more moderate there would be far fewer arrests, many more Exemption Certificates and, indeed, the law relating to liquor might be repealed altogether.² However, the aborigines almost invariably choose the stronger liquors such as fortified wine, rum or even methylated spirits, and drink them very rapidly. They argue that since they are running a risk in buying liquor, they had better buy something concentrated and easily concealed, rather than beer which would have to be bought in bulk to produce the same stimulating effect. Once bought, the bottle is never safe until it is emptied, so, particularly if it is to be drunk in town, behind a fence, perhaps, or under some hedge, it is gulped down as quickly as possible, of course producing acute intoxication. If, the aborigines protest, they were allowed into hotels, they would drink beer at the normal rate, as whites do.

2

The A.W.B. have been considering this possibility for some time.

There is clearly some force in this argument, particularly if the aborigine is anxious to conform to white drinking conventions and has not yet become used to the 'hard liquor'. But the older, more hardened drinkers clearly prefer wine and rum. It is said that when, for a brief period, a few years ago, the hotels in Euabalong and Wilcannia were opened to aborigines, their drunken and disorderly behaviour became quite intolerable. In fact, it is sometimes possible to get liquor in bulk, but the aborigines then buy a dozen bottles of wine not a dozen bottles of beer! Wine and rum are referred to as the 'good stuff' as distinct from beer. Even when drinking is carried on quite free from the fear of interruption, large quantities are still gulped down with ostentatious abandon. Outstanding performers are said to be able to swallow half a bottle of overproof rum without pausing! In fact, the unavoidable impression one gets is that the aborigines drink in order to get drunk, and that this is why they prefer the 'good stuff'. A cynical little ditty proclaims -

Beer is all froth and bubble,
 Whisky will make you moan,
 Plonk³ is another name for trouble,
 But the denjenje is out on its own!

3

'Plonk' - Australian army slang for fortified wine, reputedly a corruption of the French 'blanc'.

Dənjenjə is the word used for methylated spirits (it is a Bagundji word, literally meaning guts).

The return from a spell of work in the bush is the occasion for a drinking spree. For the few weekly workers, it may be a Saturday night affair, but most stay out for weeks or even months at a time and return with substantial pay cheques. In Wilcannia as soon as anyone comes into town, a little cluster of aborigines will gather around the hotel, waiting for the 'grog' to be smuggled out. The morning after a party of workers has arrived back on Murrin Bridge, one can see little knots of men furtively planning ~~the~~ expedition to town where the liquor will be bought. Perhaps the man with the cheque will join forces with the owner of a car, or £3 will be laid out on a taxi to town and back. One party spent £15 on an evening's trip by taxi from Wilcannia to Menindee and back, the car being loaded with a supply of drink at each end.

Since drinking is still a furtive business, I was not able to keep a close check on all that was spent on liquor. One man, more extravagant than most, but also earning more, came home every four or five weeks and never with less than a dozen bottles of wine in the boot of the taxi. Taking into account the taxi fare, he probably spent an average of £2 per week out of his £13.10.0 wage.

A dozen bottles provide an evening's entertainment for a man and two or three friends: enough to set them singing, quarrelling and reeling to bed. Friends and relations drop by, in the hope of cadging a drink. Perhaps supplies run out and one of the poddies, bound to be hanging about, is sent to town for more.

Sometimes enough is bought for one or two men only; the bottles are hidden until needed, then emptied hastily lest someone else should ask for a share. Others prefer, as a song puts it, to "turn on the liquor, for the young ones and the old". Such hosts are likely to get two sorts of visitor: men who are without money for the moment, but who will return hospitality in due course; and the 'bludgers'. These include old men, who are past working and therefore have no money, and 'poddies' who have no money because they do very little work. How the bludgers are treated depends on the host: kinsfolk, particularly if they are old, will be tolerated; poddies may be sent on errands to earn the few mouthfuls they are given.

Men who 'throw a party' clearly enjoy being the centre of attention for the evening. One such has been dubbed the 'Mayor of Murrin Bridge' because of his apparent craving for public recognition and his readiness to take a hand in every-

one's affairs. The more he drinks the more he boasts - but the faster the wine flows. On one celebrated occasion, two youths called round to see him knowing that he had just brought home a case of liquor. They had kept a few mouthfuls of wine at the bottom of a bottle, and presented this to him. The 'Mayor' was affected: he turned to his wife and said, "There, Mabel, you see: these boys think a lot of me!" And true to form, regaled them with a full bottle of his own. The ruse had worked!

Some bludgers trade on the timidity of others, by undertaking to get the liquor for them, in return for a share. Others simply cultivate a thick skin, standing around, until the wine has mollified the host into a more generous state of mind. The 'Great Australian Bite', mentioned earlier, is a master of this technique! Now and again someone tries to steal a bottle, and then one can expect a fight.

The poddies generally hold parties on their own, from which the older men keep themselves aloof. The pattern of drinking is different too. Young men work relatively little and are often grossly underpaid, so that the large party, sponsored by one individual is rarely possible. Instead, groups gather in the scrub, each man with a bottle or two, and as supplies run short they start to fight over what

remains. But, in any case, adolescent drinking involves a good deal of exhibitionism: poddies stagger about even more unsteadily than they need and fights are accompanied by challenges and insults, audible from one end of the settlement to another.

The spirit in which these adventures are embarked upon is well captured by the song, 'Cut a Rug', which is known to every small boy both in Wilcannia where it was composed and at Murrin Bridge too.

Here's a song my boys, make you jump for joy,
And it's sung by Youngie Doug;
The people all say it'll go a long way,
They call it 'Cut a Rug'.

Up at Bree'⁴ they call it a 'Spree',
In Bourke it's 'Jitterbug',
But further down, in Wilcannia town,
They call it 'Cut a Rug'.

The boys and me, we was having a spree,
In the mallee last Saturday night,
We was doing fine, drinking beer and wine,
Everything was going alright.

We sang a song as we joked along,
Till one bloke mentioned fight:
And the people all said that we went off our head,
'Cause we rung the mallee that night.

There was old Hunter Bert, he was awfully hurt,
The old boy, he was half dead,
His hands they shook, and he looked so crook,⁵
Laying back there in his bed.

4

Bree' - Breewarina.

5

'Crook' i.e. ill.

I said, "Be a sport, won't you have a snort?"
 I filled up his little brown mug.
 The first drink he had, his eyes got red:
 He flew out and cut a rug.

There's young Jimalow, the boy we all know,
 They say he's just doing fine.
 He was down the town, he was slipping around,
 With a chaff bag full of wine.

He borrowed a sub and headed straight for the pub,
 That boy he ain't no mug.
 And very soon he had all us coon,
 In the mallee cutting a rug.

When you're sick and sore and you crave for more,
 And your money's all run out,
 Don't stick around, take a stroll down town,
 And do a little bit of foxing about.

It aint no dice till you got the price,
 Then you give your mate a tug:
 You'll be smiling again, as you walk down the lane,
 Because you're going to cut a rug!

The attitude of the singer and, indeed, of the people he is singing about, is wry, cynical but exuberant withall. Drinking must not be thought of simply in terms of consuming the liquor and suffering the effects. The whole business of getting the liquor, running the police blockade, the air of importance and mystery the owner of a bottle assumes - all these are an important part of the activity, celebrated in song and anecdote and discussed in an elaborate set of slang words and catch phrases. Dougie Young has drawn on the everyday speech of his people to describe in a varied and idiomatic

style the business of drinking - "...we rung the mallee...", "...one bloke mentioned fight...", "slipping around", "foxing about", "borrowed a sub", "get the price" and so on. The expression "cut a rug" itself, is not used much in everyday speech; nevertheless it expresses more exactly than any other how the aborigines conceive the drinking. Summing up the various aboriginal attempts to interpret it one may say that 'cutting a rug' corresponds to our 'letting off steam', 'breaking out', 'cutting a dash'.

The recurrent bouts of wild drinking recall the 'benders' of the white itinerant labourers, described in Chapter II. 'Blowing one's cheque', the fights, the spirit of mateship are all there; "Turning on the liquor for the young ones and the old", corresponds to the bush custom of 'shouting for the bar'. Indeed, it is hard not to believe that the aborigines have modelled themselves on their white brethren.

However this be, the 'bender' has become institutionalized in the life of the aboriginal man; it is a 'standardized mode of social behaviour'.⁶ Boys of twelve or thirteen, feeling themselves on the verge of manhood, start to talk about getting 'full' and going to prison; when their fathers bring wine

6

S.F. Nadel: 'Foundations of Social Anthropology', p. 108.

home they will beg for 'just a sip' although drink is thought bad for children. It is not hard to see the ostentatious drinking of the poddies as an assertion of adult status - although, in fact, demonstrating their adolescent status. But in view of the strong opposition to drinking, both from the authorities and from the womenfolk, why is it maintained at all?

Ruth Fink has stated that in Brewarrina the heaviest drinkers include men who are skilled workers but who are still classed by whites with the other 'no-hoper' aborigines.⁷ In the Far West, however, as we shall see in the next chapter, a considerable degree of acceptance from white society is possible for men of this type. Fink's hypothesis seems to be that such men seek escape from the harsh fact of white rejection in drunkenness. Whether this sort of psychological explanation is adequate is open to debate, but in any case, so far as the West is concerned, it covers only one dimension of the problem.

There has, perhaps, been too great a tendency to regard drunkenness as a physiological rather than a social phenomenon. The Berndts, for example, writing about drunkenness among the detribalized aborigines of South Australia,

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Ruth Fink, p. 103.

say that for certain reasons -

"The question of liquor restrictions... has assumed an importance out of all proportion to its intrinsic significance..."⁸

By 'intrinsic significance' the Berndts presumably mean that the aborigines are denied access to alcoholic refreshment, and that under 'normal' circumstances this would not be any great privation. But anthropology teaches us that the 'intrinsic significance' of food, sex, clothing and the like is only a part of the total significance which they are given in any culture.

One can also see drinking as a valued social activity among all the others in which aborigines engage, and as a means of asserting and maintaining status vis a vis both the aboriginal group and white society.

We have already noted in Chapter II and elsewhere that the aborigine is anxious not to be regarded as a 'Jacky'. Can we perhaps see his drinking as the conscious adoption of an element of the white man's culture, as a means of demonstrating his evolue status? There are parallels of this in other societies: Ballandier, for example, describes how town-natives in French Equatorial Africa affect European items

8

R.M. and C. Berndt, ~~_____~~ "From Black to White in South Australia." 1951, p. 275.

of dress, fountain pens and the like, to the same end.⁹ But most aborigines have not tried to adopt the white man's way of life in toto: their approach has been selective and in such matters as home making they differ sharply from the whites. Even if drinking is an assertion of evolue status, we have still to explain why it should be selected rather than any other activity. Moreover, if this is the activity to be selected, a closer conformity to white conventions would permit a much closer imitation of whites at their very side in the hotel bar.

Where one group is effectively excluded from participation in the life of another group, it sometimes attempts to reproduce that activity - with varying degrees of faithfulness - as a form of vicarious participation in that life. This, for example is the interpretation placed on the Kalela Dances¹⁰ in British East Africa, where Africans take on the titles and some of the more obvious mannerisms of white officials. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, a number of aborigines do really participate in white activities, including drinking and, if the remainder of aborigines were so

9

Ballandier: 'Sociologie des Brazzavilles Noirs', p.

10

P.C. Mitchell: 'The Kalela Dance'. Rhodes Livingston Papers, No. 27, 1956.

anxious to participate, one would expect them make the necessary sacrifices, in terms of modifying their behaviour to conform with white standards. We have seen, in fact, that many aborigines prefer to remain in the familiar company of other aborigines rather than face the unfamiliar and more exacting society of whites.

Far from rendering themselves more acceptable to whites, the aborigines, by their drunkenness, scandalize the more respectable sections of white society. They are well aware of this. Another verse of the 'Cut a Rug' song comments -

"The people in town just run us down;
They say we live on wine and beer.
But if they'd stop and think, if we didn't drink,
There'd be no fun around here."

The tone of this outburst is less a reproach to the white group for lack of understanding than a defiant assertion of the values of the aboriginal group. The Berndts too, have emphasized the theme of defiance in the drinking habits of detribalized aborigines along the Murray. Their argument is, in effect, that the liquor restrictions are the most irksome and frequently recurring manifestations of the aborigines' subordinate status, and that the issue has come to symbolize the whole range of frustrations and humiliations they suffer

at the hands of the whites.¹¹ The Berndts' informants argued that "People wouldn't drink so much if they were allowed to do it when they felt like it."¹² In western New South Wales too, aborigines constantly stress the injustice of the liquor restrictions; it is the one aspect of white administration against which they continually complain, and, regarding me as one who might be able to improve their conditions, the matter was constantly being raised. One Euabalong man discussing the award of Exemption Certificates, complained "a blackfeller's got to be twice as good as a whitefeller before he gets one!"

However, this does not explain why the right to consume liquor freely is regarded as so vital a part of aboriginal emancipation. Moreover, we have already seen that the brief period during which aborigines were admitted to hotels did not moderate their drinking habits appreciably. It might be argued that they had not yet acclimatized themselves to the new freedom, but there are many Certificate holders who remain heavy drinkers after several years of freedom.

¹¹

R.M. and C. Berndt, p. 275. op.cit.

¹²

Ibid., p. 219.

In criticizing these various hypotheses, my intention has been not to dismiss them altogether but to suggest that they are not adequate by themselves. For, from the preceding account, it has been clear that drinking has an important role in the relations aborigines have with one another. While demanding only the very minimum of organization and intellectual resources it facilitates more intense social relations and provides individuals with the opportunity to enjoy the limelight for a brief moment. Moreover, since it is a form of behaviour characteristic of adult men, it is seized upon by adolescents as a means of asserting their adult status.

'Turning on the liquor' for one's friends is, like generosity with food, firewood, clothes and so on, a means of 'keeping in with the boys'. A man playing host for the night enjoys a brief period of popularity, although the next night may see some other man in his place. Only adolescents and indigents lack the money to provide these entertainments; they are reduced to being 'hangers-on' if they try to participate at all, and their status is correspondingly low, compared to that of able-bodied men. Those who can afford to buy liquor but choose not to spend their money this way, seem to spend most of their leisure time at home with their

families and have relatively little to do with their neighbours.

The traditional life of the aborigines was varied, principally in its rich ceremonial life, and it offered moments of excitement and opportunities for individuals to distinguish themselves among their fellows. The life that has replaced it, is, by comparison, drab and monotonous, and social organization is so weak that a new recreational life has not been developed. The women seem to find their main satisfactions in life among their families; a grandmother is loved and esteemed among her numerous offspring and among other women too, particularly if she has attended them in childbirth.¹³ A man who is devoting his energies to building up 'a good home' for his family, also has his place there. However, as we have seen, most aboriginal men have a position of secondary importance in the family, and those who are most remiss in their duties as providers become almost superfluous in the home life.

Work is regarded by most men simply as a means of getting money; a good worker is not especially esteemed by his fellows. The freedom of life in the bush is appreciated for a while,

¹³

In recent years women have all gone to hospital to be confined.

but most men find it monotonous after a few weeks. But on the settlements there are few organized recreations. Dances are only organized with difficulty and many men seem either to be bored with such activities or too shy to venture onto the dance floor. In any case, dances are amusements only and (except for the Master of Ceremonies) not a means of winning admiration and popularity. The same goes for football: Quinn was responsible for organizing a team at Murrin Bridge, but as soon as he left it collapsed, and the one he now runs at Wilcannia would probably do the same. Quinn also organized a concert party which afforded the young people the opportunity to distinguish themselves as artists. Even if dissension causes the party to break up, as seems likely, singing constitutes a means of winning popularity and admiration among the Wilcannia people, and as such is an alternative to drinking. Unfortunately, at Murrin Bridge this activity has been little developed: the only accomplished musician is too shy to perform unless he is drunk, and recently sold his instrument for half what he paid for it, spending the money on drink.

Many families have wireless sets and there is a cinema in every country town. Women and children find pleasure in these entertainments, but men have little interest in them,

perhaps because they offer no opportunity for active participation.

So, for whatever reasons, drinking is of paramount importance in the men's life, as a source of excitement, as a means of 'cutting a dash' and winning popularity, as a break in the drab monotony of life on an 'outback' aboriginal settlement. A spree is something to look forward to and something to remember and talk about afterwards. As the song says -

"...if we didn't drink, there'd be no fun around here."

Chapter X

BLACK AUSTRALIANS, WHITE AUSTRALIANS: STATUS AND INTERACTION

Aborigines in the Far West of New South Wales have become vitally involved in the activities of their white Australian neighbours and have, in the process, made extensive accommodation in their way of life. They all come into contact with whites, but the degree and type of contact vary from individual to individual and from locality to locality, according to the way in which those involved see their interests to lie and as objective circumstances permit. Broom and others have written that, in a situation of culture contact,

"...no culture presents its full face to the other, and to the facade that is presented cross-culturally meanings are attached which may have little or no relation to their intra-cultural significance."¹

However, it is on the basis of its perception of the other that each group resolves on a particular type and degree of interaction with it; moreover, the interaction resulting may be so limited that, instead of extending mutual understanding

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Broom et al. 'Acculturation: An Exploratory Formulation', American Anthropologist, Vol. 56, p. 983.

it maintains the stereotypes according to which they interpret one another's actions. In some relationships interaction is strictly limited to the business in hand and never extends beyond; in others there is the opportunity for establishing a series of relationships, as when men who meet at work adjourn to the hotel afterwards for a drink and a chat, or introduce one another to their families. In situations where two previously separate groups have come into contact, relationships of the latter type have a very important function as bridges² between the two groups, by means of which the members of each become more intimately involved in one another's affairs.

In the present chapter I shall try to indicate in what way and how far aborigines and whites choose to interact with one another, what considerations are involved and how far this choice is facilitated or inhibited by external factors. Clearly, in a discussion of this sort, it will be important to discover what are the bridge relationships. Finally, it is necessary to establish what status aborigines and whites have in relation to one another and how far it varies according to individual characteristics and abilities.

²

I am indebted to Professor Broom for this useful term.

When we speak of relationships between aborigine and white we are concerned only with those where each is aware of the other's ethnic difference. Most often colour is the distinguishing characteristic; however, there are some individuals of aboriginal descent who are so light skinned as to be indistinguishable.³ Of these, a number have succeeded in 'passing' and have, to all intents, become whites; others however, continue to associate with their darker brethren and identify themselves with the aboriginal group by their manner of life. Others again do not associate with their darker brethren and live more or less in white style, but are known, for some reason, to be of aboriginal descent; these individuals stand on the very margins of the two groups and provide a crucial test of race attitudes.

We have seen in an earlier section that the aborigine, particularly the 'Mission' aborigine is singled out by the law for special supervision and is subordinated to the officials appointed for this purpose. We have also seen that the relationships with these individuals are so limited that they do not function as a bridge between white and black; I have already discussed them at some length and will not refer to them

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See, for example, Plate 5.

again. But in relation to the ordinary white population the aborigines do not have an unequivocally subordinate or inferior status. Black and white workers often do the same work for the same money, they are alike voters, they use the same shops, the same public transport. There are no peculiarly aboriginal occupations and none of the grosser forms of discrimination such as operate in South Africa. They are never employers and rarely overseers; but, a few aborigines have been appointed foreman or head stockman, and as such placed over white workers. Nevertheless, in their relations with whites aboriginal status is to some extent peculiar and there remain certain spheres of activity in which they and the whites remain separate.

The egalitarian tradition of the Australian 'outback' is celebrated, but its scope and limitations have never been explored. It would seem that the aborigine stands on its very margin, part in, and part out of it: a fellow bushman, a work mate, a union member - but also one of an ethnic group with a distinctive and somewhat disreputable way of life.⁴

This ambivalence is manifest in the forms of behaviour which are prescribed when white and aborigine meet. In the

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The discrepancy between national ideal and local practice, recalls the theme of Myrdal's 'American Dilemma'.

more rigidly stratified societies persons of differing status make formal acknowledgement of this fact by adopting a prescribed etiquette whenever they meet. Nadel has called such behaviour diacritical⁵; it may involve particular forms of speech or postures, observance of precedence or the donning of badges or uniforms. Between aborigines and whites such diacritical forms are largely lacking. Each has derogatory terms for the other - coons, boongs, niggers for the aborigines, 'dirty gabas'⁶ for the whites, but these are used only in open conflict. Jacky was formerly a common nickname for aborigines and today one sometimes hears them called snowy or creamy. These terms are used mostly by employers, when they do not know the aborigine's name, and are resented by aborigines. However, used jocularly between friends they may cause no offence. I heard one white man greet an aboriginal acquaintance with a "Hello, you black bastard!"; in a context of hostility this would have been a fighting matter, but it was clearly meant as a joke and provoked nothing more than the horse-play customary on such occasions. Nevertheless, it is most usual and is considered preferable for white and aborigine

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See Nadel: 'Foundations of Social Anthropology', 1952, p.67.

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Gaba, a Wiradjeri word for white man or woman.

to address one another as mate or by christian names and this may be the rule, even with employers. It is not customary for a man to address a woman by her first name unless they are very well acquainted: she is usually addressed as Missus Smith and he, in return will probably be addressed as Mister Brown; here again aborigines are included in this practice. Women address one another as Miss or Missus Smith until they are well acquainted when they employ first names; this again is the rule between aboriginal and white women, though I recorded only six instances where the stage of first-names had been reached. A woman working for a woman employer addresses her as Miss or Missus and is called by her first name in return; here again, this rule also operates in the case of aborigines.

The egalitarian tradition is at its strongest, perhaps, among the pastoral workers, and aborigines have long been admitted to their ranks, as workers earning the same wages and as union members. The Rural Workers' Accommodation Act of 1926, framed at least partly as a result of Union representation, while providing for "separate accommodation where a worker is a Pacific Islander or of an African or Asiatic Race" makes no such discrimination in the case of aborigines. White workers may say that aborigines are erratic workers and some-

times 'bludgers'; however, aborigines are a part of bush life and are basically accepted. This attitude was displayed very clearly in an anecdote which I heard a man tell a group of friends in a Wilcannia bar. It concerned a 'new chum' who had come from the city to sample life in the bush. Rigged out in riding breeches, boots and spurs (though he had never sat on a horse) and a ten-gallon hat, he quickly showed himself unable to take the hardships of the life. He found the ground too hard to sleep on, complained about the mosquitoes and so on. Finally, on arriving at the station where he was to work he found that he was expected to share a room with an aborigine. This was too much for him and having stayed up all night he returned to the city the next morning. The audience found this story most entertaining; to them the bush offered a whole way of life; the hardships, the hazards and the diverse types of people with whom they must associate - all these were challenges which they were proud to have taken up. The new chum's pitiful inadequacy in facing these challenges, despite his cowboy rig-out, made him a figure of fun.

Having made the acquaintance of aborigines at work, whites do not object to meeting them in their sports clubs, unions and hotels. Several aborigines have, on occasion, been elected 'Union Rep' in the shearing sheds and the present

secretary of the Wilcannia Football Club is an aborigine. Those aborigines allowed into hotels are often to be seen drinking or playing cards with white acquaintances. But, as we have seen, the majority of the aborigines are excluded from hotels, and as such from the men's principal meeting place. The law leaves the unexempted aborigine outside the door through which every white eighteen-year-old has the undisputed right to pass. Of course, those aborigines who conduct themselves in a proper manner will be granted exemption; but we have seen that the majority either do not qualify or do not apply for it. This restriction acts as a visible expression of the aborigine's peculiar, under-privileged status and this is emphasized still further by the way many aborigines hang round the doors of the hotels begging whites in servile, wheedling tones to smuggle them out a bottle. Such behaviour sickens many whites, for obsequiousness is as much an offence to egalitarianism as arrogance. They justify the exclusion on the grounds that aborigines are constitutionally unable to 'carry their liquor', a notion that the extreme drunkenness of many aborigines serves to support. Other whites, however, who are less critical of drunkenness, have sympathy for their aboriginal friends and believing that they are not having a 'fair go' get liquor for them.

Contacts between aboriginal and white workers constitute what is probably the most important bridge between the two groups. Aboriginal workers may get on well with their white employers and, at least in some cases, they have been boarded at the homestead and have taken their meals with the family. However, the employer-worker relationship does not usually extend into other fields. As I have already suggested, while the graziers, farmers, businessmen and local professions may not form an upper class, they do form a somewhat exclusive clique, congregating in certain hotels and clubs, which are expensive to join. Among such people cars and elegant homes seem to provide symbols of prestige and popular topics of conversation; people in the lower income groups will thus have relatively little in common with them; aborigines, with their negative emphasis on possessions, even less.

Aborigines and whites very rarely visit one another's homes. Many whites would regard a 'humpy' with aversion as dirty and primitive and they realize that the authorities look upon anyone visiting a government settlement with suspicion. But visiting is infrequent even when the aborigine lives in a house in town. There is no strict convention excluding aborigines from a white home. If an aborigine does, for some reason, call at the house of a white acquaintance he will

probably be asked in and treated courteously; however, this does not seem to happen very often. Whites told me that there was very little visiting even between white households, but women who were neighbours had the habit of 'dropping in on' one another for chats and cups of tea. There are relatively few aboriginal women who have white neighbours, but even where they do there does not seem to be very much visiting. I made no special study of the attitudes of white women, but I have the impression that they are far more selective in the company they keep than their menfolk, and adhere, at least verbally, to higher standards of living and morality. If this is correct then they will also be far quicker to condemn and to ostracize aborigines. There is a further possibility. Aboriginal women are, at least by repute, sexually promiscuous; white women, living in a community which condemns such behaviour - at least in others - cannot be so accommodating and may fear that aboriginal women will become their sexual rivals.

There is a widespread feeling against mixed marriages but, as we can see from Table XIII, they occur not infrequently and evoke no sanctions stronger than ostracism. There is no outcry against any "mongrelization of the Australian race" which was how the 'Australian Worker' (organ of the A.W.U.) en-

visaged the consequences of Asian immigration. Aboriginal and white boys and girls are not kept strictly apart. Parents in Wilcannia, for example, did not object to their children dancing with aboriginal children at school dances, although they were a little anxious lest some permanent attachment should develop. Those few aborigines who attended local dances often found white partners.

The whites most likely to marry aborigines are those who are least vulnerable to the opposition and censure of their fellows: those who are already outcasts or who are, for some other reason, isolated from the white community. The itinerant bush worker is an example of this type. Few women live so isolated and independent of a local community, and being in a minority in the white population, they have a wide choice of husbands who, in conventional terms, will be more eligible than aborigines. Thus, there are many more marriages between white men and aboriginal women, than between aboriginal men and white women.

Mixed marriages will be most likely where the discrepancy between the white and aboriginal way of life is least - as in Hillston and Euabalong. Mixed marriages are also more likely where the aborigine is not too dark: of the eighteen married to whites, seven as so light in colouring that their origin is almost unrecognizable

unrecognizable and four more are no darker than a southern Spaniard. One Euabalong woman forbade her daughter to marry a half-caste man, declaring that she didn't want "blacks in the family", but in fact her other daughter was already married to a man of known aboriginal descent!

Under the most favourable circumstances, the white married to an aborigine is a respectable citizen and will be able to extract some sort of acceptance from his or her white friends. A farmer's wife told me how a friend of the family had married an aborigine: "We didn't like it at first," she said, "but we got used to the idea." (Unfortunately, the marriage broke up some years ago, and I was not able to investigate it further.)

The reader will already know from earlier sections that while the aborigines in Hillston and Euabalong live in the white residential area, those at Murrin Bridge and Wilcannia live apart from the white population. In Table XIII I try to indicate more precisely the extent to which aborigines are involved in face-to-face relations with whites, which do not place them in a subordinate position. Interest is particularly directed towards those relations likely to act as a bridge between black and white. I have already suggested that the relation between co-workers is probably the most important of

FOOTING OF EQUALITY : THE NUMBER OF ABORIGINES INVOLVED IN EACH LOCALITY.

	Murrin Bridge	Wilcannia	Euabalong	Hillston
men				
women				

Aborigines Marrying Whites : - - - 4 3 5 1 5

Aborigines Marrying Aborigines : 36 36 42 42 15 15 4 4

% of Aborigines Marrying Whites : 0% 4.5% 21.1% 42.8%

Aborigines Working alongside Whites : 19 2 27 1 17 4 8 1

Total of Aborigines Workers : 47 7 44 6 17 7 8 2

% of Aborigines working alongside Whites : 48.2% 56% 87.9% 90%

Aboriginal Men Admitted to Hotels : 4 7 9 4

Total of Abo. Men 56 58 19 9

% admitted to Hotels : 7.1% 12.0% 42.9% 44.4%

No. of Abo. Men in Local Football Club : - 10 7 -

No. of Abos. in other Clubs, Churches & Associations : - 2 6 2 3 2 4

these, and it is interesting to note that the men of Murrin Bridge who concentrate most in occupations where they do not meet whites, also have least to do with them in other spheres of activity.

Murrin Bridge is extremely isolated from the surrounding white community. Situated some ten miles from the nearest town and without any regular transport, most aborigines get into town very rarely and then only for a few hours. The isolation is particularly acute for women who are prevented from obtaining day-work, and for the children who, educated on the 'Mission' almost never see whites other than Board officials and school staff. It is, then, scarcely surprising that the children and many of the women are acutely shy with strangers and that, when the young people leave school and are expected to go out to work, they are very loth to do so or put themselves under the protecting wing of some older relative.

Sooner or later, men have to go out to work on their own account and by the time they are middle-aged most have acquired at least a modicum of ease in the company of whites. Men like Wilson have gone far in this direction; however, others take such employment as fencing and boundary riding, which involves only a minimum of contact with whites, and these amount to more than half of the working population. ^X

X

C.f. Broom and Shevky: "Mexicans in the United States." Sociology & Social Research, Vol 36., p.153.

In relation to the locality around Murrin Bridge the aborigines are even more isolated than appears from Table XIII since, for reasons that have already been stated, the majority of male workers are obliged to go far afield to get work. Thus, the starting off point for establishing acquaintanceships with local white workers is lacking, acquaintanceships that could give them an entree into the town's associations and clubs. This failure to make the initial contacts is illustrated very clearly in the following account.

Anzac Day is one of the main festivals in the Lake Cargelligo year: there is a parade, a church service and thereafter the town is given over to drinking and the 'two-up' games which become legal on this one day.

Cobar Brown, a 'Digger' from the first World War and perhaps the only aborigine to have been taken prisoner, normally works around Hillston, but happened to be home on holidays on this day. He hired a car to take him into town, but having joined in the parade and attended the memorial service, he found himself at a loose end. He did not wish to become involved with the three or four aborigines in town, who were intent upon getting drunk, but since he knew no one in town and there were no R.S.L. premises, he had no means of meeting 'old comrades'. Eventually, after whiling away a few hours at a 'two up' game he returned disconsolately home, recalling how he had enjoyed the previous year's Anzac Day among friends in the Hillston ex-servicemen's club.

However, it must be emphasized that most of the Murrin Bridge aborigines do not seek out white society. For example, when a gang of decorators came to work on the 'Mission' school,

Hawkins, who has spent long periods working with whites, was the only one to approach them. Relations between them became very cordial and after the gang left, a rendezvous was made and kept to drink together in town. (Hawkins has an Exemption Certificate.)

The peculiar isolation of the Murrin Bridge aborigines in the locality also serves to emphasize the disreputable side of their life. Since so many work out of the neighbourhood, whites do not know whether they are working or not and sometimes exaggerate aboriginal laziness. However, when the aborigines are on holiday they come to town where they get drunk and loaf about all day. It is the worst element among the aborigines who spend most time in town, hanging about, trying to cadge money from passers-by, begging whites to get liquor for them and, in one or two cases soliciting for a prostitute. Two aboriginal girls who worked in town became notorious for their promiscuity until the Board removed them. The depredations that aboriginal sheep stealing and their innumerable kangaroo dogs make on the flocks of local farmers and graziers, also serve to emphasize the role of the aborigine as a public nuisance.

It is scarcely surprising, then, if the white townpeople do not go out of their way to associate with the aborigines.

In any case, a large part of the population belong to the higher income group.⁷ But no concerted attempt has been made to effect segregation. Aborigines may sit where they like in the cinema, go freely into shops and get haircuts at the barber's (though in fact most get their hair cut on the 'Mission'). Until recently, the hospital remained unsegregated. However, the Hospital Board has decided that the new obstetric ward will be segregated. Apparently this measure was decided upon because white women complained at being placed to aborigine women, with whom they had "nothing in common."

It is clear that the people of Lake Cargelligo, particularly the women and children know almost nothing about the aborigines. Essays written by Public School children did not present the aborigines as dirty, drunken or idle, but apart from the fact that the latter wore clothes, lived in houses and spoke English, little was known. The dominant attitude seemed to be that the aborigines were the government's concern; and some children believed that the government supported them altogether -

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Lake Cargelligo school children of the fifth and sixth grades, who answered the questionnaire, came from thirty-four families: of these, twenty-one belonged to the upper-income group, being farmers, graziers, businessmen etcetera.

"...they don't have to hunt for their food and don't have to build homes nor make their clothes; they are all supplied by the government."

Very few envisaged that the aborigines would ever become a part of the local community.

The aborigines living in Euabalong and Lake Cargelligo are much more integrated into local affairs. Most of the men in Euabalong work on neighbouring Yambul station and all work in the neighbourhood. However, the situation is complicated by the considerable number (just how many I could never be sure) who have 'passed', or who are attempting to 'pass', and therefore take up a hyper-critical attitude towards their darker brethren as a means of emphasizing their separateness. These individuals' living standards compare well with those of the white townsfolk and to the casual observer they are accepted as whites: several have married white spouses and the publican does not insist that they have Exemption Certificates before he will serve them. I was unable to investigate their position fully, however, their exaggerated avoidance of darker aborigines suggests a basic insecurity with regard to their white status. Concerning avowed aborigines, local whites had a number of criticisms to make: they were drunken, dirty and too slow to pay debts; but if there were exceptions to this rule they were usually conceded. One half-caste woman had a

particularly good name and the local policeman assured me that if she baked a cake for the Parents' and Citizens' Association street stall, he would as soon buy it as any other.

Basically, these aborigines are regarded as part of the local community, in a way that Murrin Bridge aborigines are not. For example, a subscription was raised to help to send an aboriginal boy to High School and when a well respected aborigine man died almost the whole population, including the publican, policeman, storekeeper and manager of Yambul, attended the funeral.

The mother of one of the two families in Lake Cargelligo, said she had no complaints against the local townsfolk: "If you're of good character, you get on alright." She had almost no social contacts outside the family, but her two sons found white drinking companions in the hotel and white girls ready to dance with them. When their home was burned down, the town's New Year dance was held for their benefit⁸ and accommodation was found for them at the back of the baker's shop. Most of the aborigines in Euabalong and Lake Cargelligo have lived in the locality all their lives and have never encountered hospital segregation until recently, when it was provoked

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Collections for all sorts of local good causes are constantly being made in Lake Cargelligo.

by the arrival of a much more backward type of aborigine into the district. Even so, two local aborigine girls are employed in the hospital as wardmaids and one is a trainee nurse.

The situation in Hillston is very similar. Some families live on the edge of town and keep very much to themselves; others live nearer the centre and participate more in the life. Two men have been elected to the Soldiers' and Citizens' Club, and it was here that Cobar Brown was made welcome. Cobar has no Exemption Certificate, but when the local policeman insisted that no more drinks should be served to the aborigine, he was told to keep quiet or go! Four of the six whites married to aborigines come originally from other areas and seem to associate mainly with the aborigines. Those belonging to Hillston did not seem to have brought their wives into a wide circle of white friends and relations, but I was unable to gauge the situation at all precisely.

Wilcannia presents yet another sort of situation. Here we have more than two hundred aborigines living in very sub-standard conditions close around the edge of town. It is clear that the more 'respectable' among the town's citizens regard the aborigines as a threat to their living standards and to the town's good name. On the latter point there is some sensitivity, for Wilcannia is known as one of the

roughest towns in the West. Apart from its settled population it is the centre for the itinerant labourers who work on the surrounding properties, though providing them with little entertainment outside the hotel; it is also the place to which men come whom the police have 'run out of' Broken Hill. Drunkenness, fights and occasional robbery with violence keep the police busy and the large gaol well filled; to this disorderliness the aborigines make their contribution. Those whites who have established elegant homes are also annoyed by the proximity of the neglected, ramshackle aboriginal homes. "They'll pull this town back to what it was before!" complained one man sadly; and recalling the description of Wilcannia in the 'nineties, quoted on page , one can understand what he meant.

For the same reasons, Wilcannia is the one town in the Far West to operate what is, in fact, residential segregation. This local policy became explicit in 1948, when the A.W.B. proposed to establish its new settlement on the outskirts of the town. Local opposition was immediately aroused, and a delegation headed by the Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy made representations to the government that the settlement should be built on the other bank of the river, as it finally was. Townspeople, including the mayor himself, stated that

they would not object if only the more respectable families settled in town, but they feared that these would in their turn attract all the disorderly and disreputable elements, among the aborigines.

The Roman Catholic authorities in the locality believe that the aborigines are not yet fit to be brought into close contact with whites and should be kept in isolation. This, it seems was behind their demand for residential segregation and also behind their establishment of a special school on the Reserve.⁹ Since the majority of aboriginal families are Roman Catholics, this amounts to educational segregation; however, children from Protestant families are free to attend the Public School and I never heard that Wilcannia citizens had raised any objection.

Aborigine patients and employees are only allowed in special wards in the Wilcannia hospital. This is the policy of the local Hospital Board and it is supported by the matron, although both emphasize that the aborigines are fully entitled to equal attention. The grounds for this policy are that the aborigines are malodorous and dirty - notions which, if untrue, are suggested by the sub-standard living conditions under

9

This was the view expressed by the present priest in charge of the school; however, the priest in charge when the school was established has been transferred.

which most of them live, though perhaps also by their coloured skins.¹⁰ For the same reason, town epidemics are often said to originate with the aborigines. However, where the standards of living of certain families do not tally with this stereotype, the fact is admitted by those who have noticed it (but these are the minority who come sufficiently close to the settlement to find out.)

It is clear that many of the Wilcannia townsfolk strongly disapprove of the aborigines, camped so close to their homes, and would be glad to see them go. However, the same goes for the more disreputable white element who drift through the town. Indeed the Wilcannia situation recalls that described in Kylie Tennant's semi-documentary novel, Tiburón, where the people of a Riverina town try to disperse the white drifters and wasters who are camped in the neighbourhood.

However, a man like Quinn, while having few friends among the white population, nonetheless enjoys a position of some prominence in town affairs. Because of his official position as supervisor of the Reserve, he is sometimes asked to attend meetings of the town council; he is a returned soldier and has a typically Australian pride in the matter; he is secretary of the football club and, incidentally, a talent scout for

¹⁰

C.F. Macrone: "Race Relations in South Africa".

two important outside teams.

The aborigines admitted to the hotel also seem to be accepted well enough; however, the majority of the aborigines have very little to do with whites. Aborigines and whites who are acquainted, greet one another on the street and most have been into a white home at some time or other although no one makes regular visits. But there seems to be no place or occasion for aborigines and whites to meet; even football does not provide this facility, since white players leave the field as soon as the game is over and repair to the hotel, where aboriginal players may not go. Neither has inter-marriage provided a bridge between the two groups. Two of the whites married to aborigines are virtually outcasts and the other two spend most of their time on a property, situated some distance from town. But it must be confessed that most aborigines have little to say to strangers, and among themselves most of their conversation concerns aboriginal affairs which would be of little interest to whites. Horsemanship, which was once a bond between white and black, is now virtually a dying art; nor do aborigines know the country as well as they once did, and the old hunting skills are forgotten as something belonging to a shameful past. It is not surprising, then, that old bushmen say that the younger generation of

aborigines are not the 'smart men' their fathers were. However, when, last year, Quinn organized a concert in which aboriginal artists played guitars and sang popular hillbilly songs, many of the townsfolk were surprised but also appreciative; artists found themselves greeted on the street by whites who had previously ignored them and soon after they were asked to put on a concert for local charity. If the party continues in existence, it may well become a permanent and popular feature of Wilcannia life.

There are relatively few regulations, either local or statewide, that unequivocally discriminate against aborigines. Even from irksome liquor restrictions exemption can be obtained. Under the most favourable circumstances and with a close conformity to white conventions, aborigines, and more particularly the men, can win from whites, and more particularly white men, acceptance in a considerable number of fields; though this will probably be easier for isolated individuals than large numbers. Probably a few doors will long remain closed to them, but if assimilation has not yet been achieved, the aborigines in Euabalong and Hillston have internalized a great many of the 'cultural skills' necessary to enable them 'to move freely in the larger social order' and the whites, for their part, have given them access to many of 'those parts

of the order for which they have the cultural prerequisites'¹¹
 By contrast, it is the failure of the aborigines in Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge to conform to white standards that makes them so unacceptable to their white neighbours. Most aborigines are aware of white criticism; that they do not 'mend their ways' suggests that white acceptance is not of paramount importance to them. So they continue to 'cut a rug' regardless of whether the 'people in town run them down', and in Wilcannia often prefer to live in a 'humpy' when a proper house would be available on the settlement.

That whites are ready to admit that there are some 'good families' among the aborigines, to whom their criticisms do not apply and to offer these individuals a wider range of acceptance, suggests that their criticisms are genuinely conceived and not merely rationalizations of racial prejudices. Moreover, despite the isolation in which many aborigines live, it must be confessed that the whites' perception of their way of life is largely accurate if somewhat unsympathetic.

It is a notable feature of pastoral society that so many aborigines can be vitally involved in it while yet having few encounters with the white population. This means that there is often no occasion where members of the two groups can

 11

See Broom et al., op. cit. p. 987.

strike up an acquaintanceship likely to lead to more permanent relationships being established. For these to come together would require a deliberate approach on the part of one or the other. Given the low regard in which the aborigine is held, it is a rare white who will go out of his way to make contact. The aborigines, for their part, whether out of shyness or lack of inclination, are scarcely more energetic in seeking out white society.

Chapter XI

ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

For seventy years or more the aborigines of western New South Wales have been living in close contact with white settlers and during this time their traditional way of life has disintegrated almost completely. Some have come to live very much as the local white population do; the rest differ from the latter but are yet very much more like them than they are like their ancestors. The encroaching white economic system and the native administration policy have effected the most radical changes in aboriginal life. The establishment of government stations has affected settlement and the relations that aborigines have with the local white population; 'Mission' dwellers live under the eye of a manager who intervenes in many spheres of their lives. Wage labour is necessary to make a living and to satisfy wants for European goods, but it usually involves long absences with consequent effects on domestic and social life. The fact that economic dealings are conducted through the medium of money has radically altered and introduced new stresses and strains in the relations between aborigines - between kinsfolk and even between husband and wife.

Aborigines are vitally involved in many of the activities of pastoral society and certain of the affairs of the state and country in which they live. Many of the roles they are called upon to play are identical with those played by whites, in similar circumstances: they are voters, property owners, wage earners, union members, consumers, and so on. But other roles which they are called upon to play, vis a vis other aborigines differ quantitatively and sometimes qualitatively from those played by whites. Since whites are often so much involved in aboriginal affairs it may be difficult and perhaps somewhat artificial to abstract the 'purely aboriginal' from a complex of interaction patterns. For example, the husband-wife relationship, which among town aborigines is essentially dyadic, among 'Mission' aborigines becomes triadic insofar as the authorities become involved. Nevertheless, if we are to speak of aboriginal society, it must be as the summation of aboriginal roles or persons;¹ and, as we shall see, a substantial and significant area of aboriginal activity occurs within its bounds.

There are three sets of roles in which everyone is involved: those arising within the nuclear family - husband and

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See Nadel: 'Foundations of Social Anthropology', 1953, pp. 95-96.

wife, parents and children; those arising among a wider circle of affinal and cognatic kin, outside the nuclear family; thirdly those arising among a circle of persons who, if not related, have at least been acquainted with one another for all or most of their lives.

I have already discussed at some length the rights and obligations one has as a member of a family; they are relatively well defined and sanctioned by public opinion as well as by the white authorities. The rights and duties one has in respect of one's kinsfolk are, by contrast, ill-defined and less strongly sanctioned. There are no special kinship roles such as existed in the traditional system; the only differentiation is between near and distant kin, but it operates very irregularly. Kin should help and cooperate with one another, lending goods and clothes, providing shelter, helping one another to get work - all in the confidence that these services will be reciprocated in the future, not necessarily by the present recipient but by someone. Of course, there is little active cooperation between kin living on different settlements, but visiting is frequent and then the visitors will expect hospitality. Public opinion will condemn anyone who continually refuses help to his kin, but it is the self-regulatory factor which is more effective; that is to say,

people look after their kin because they may later need help, themselves. Nevertheless, some more independent families refuse to recognize their obligations outside a circle of close kin.

Old acquaintances often behave towards one another as though they were kin, but the rights and duties are less certain and depend more on individual recognition of obligation. It is not easy to draw a sharp distinction between the two, particularly since there is so little formal recognition of these rights and duties. A man may help a distant kinsman but on questioning deny that he does this because the other is a kinsman. However, an analysis of households, work groups and the more ephemeral gossip groups, drinking parties and gambling schools, usually reveals a core of kinsfolk together with a few old acquaintances; only occasionally is an outsider to be found among them. Men and women who have few or no close kin on a settlement and who have lived there for only a few years, live a comparatively isolated existence and people though liking them well enough, nevertheless tend to ignore them. Conversely, those with the most kin on the settlement and who have a life-long acquaintance with many of its inhabitants, also move in the widest social circle. Probably the most widely respected old woman on Murrin Bridge station

was related consanguineally or affinally to thirty-seven of the hundred-and-five adults on the station (and this including persons of her own and descending generations only).

The traditional system divided society into matrilineal moieties, exogamous groups made up of a number of matri-clans and having disciplinary and ceremonial functions. It was possible for a complete stranger to appear and having declared to which matri-clan he belonged, have his position in the social system exactly defined. The dogma that all persons who belonged to such-and-such a matri-clan shared a common descent, and therefore a common status, permitted the assimilation of any stranger and rendered the system, in theory at least, infinitely extensible. The present kinship system is not extensible in this way. Descent is only traced genealogically, and not normally above the second or third ascending generation. For any individual, then, society is divided into a comparatively small set of cognatic kin and a much larger set of non-kin among whom he will at some stage establish affinal links. Kin groups of a bilateral type are called kindreds concerning which, Murdock has this to say:

"The most distinctive structural fact about the kindred is that, save through accident it can never be the same for any two individuals with the exception of own siblings...

Since kindreds interlace and overlap, they do not and cannot form discrete or separate segments of the entire

society. Neither a tribe nor a community can be subdivided into constituent kindreds....

One result of this peculiarity is that the kindred, though it serves adequately to define the jural rights of an individual, can rarely act as a collectivity."²

Very few aborigines live anywhere where they have no close kin or old acquaintance. A settlement where these are to be found means personal and material security. The reactions of one's fellows are largely predictable; they are acquainted with the most intimate details of one's life and there is neither the necessity nor, indeed, the possibility of 'keeping up appearances' before them. In an aboriginal settlement one can always be sure of getting food, shelter and clothes. The group of kin and friends from whom one gets or can expect to get this sort of help and comfort, we may call the security circle.³ Kinsfolk and friends living on other settlements are potential members of this circle in that their help could be mobilized if one desired. However, the circle never co-operates as a group, and indeed, its members never come together except, perhaps, at one's funeral. It is generally large so that, while one might fear to alienate

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I am indebted to Dr. Lawrence for this term; he coined it to describe a situation among the Garia of New Guinea, which has certain structural similarities with the situation described here.

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G.P.Murdock: 'Social Structure', 1949, pp.60-1.

public sympathy, a quarrel with a particular individual or family is not a serious threat to one's security, since quarrels usually involve only those immediately concerned with, perhaps, their immediate kin. Similarly, if two members of one's circle quarrel, one is not normally expected to commit oneself one way or the other. Thus, A and C may quarrel but B continue to be a close associate of both.

Life is not entirely restricted to a circle of kin. Firstly, in any group activity, although everyone may be related to the organizer, they may not all be related to each other. Secondly, children are brought together in school and seem to establish friendship without regard to relatedness. Finally, adolescents have to look for sexual partners and spouses outside the kinship circle.

The elementary family is the most stable unit in aboriginal society, though the mother-child relationship is the more stable element in it than the husband-wife, father-child relationship. Above this level, the household is the only institutionalized group which functions at all regularly. The 'Mission' is an administrative unit with the relationship between manager and aborigine clearly defined and its norms enforced by managerial and police powers. However, in terms of aboriginal society it can scarcely be regarded as an institu-

tionalized group.

Everyone's private affairs are common knowledge on the settlement and often on neighbouring settlements as well; anyone who has disgraced or made a fool of himself will be very much aware that the public eye is upon him and will be forever straining to catch the critical or derisive comments that are surely being made just out of earshot. However, his detractors, ready enough to sneer and malign him behind his back, are nevertheless unwilling to cast the first stone: few do not have something in their past of which they would prefer not to be reminded, and of which they assuredly would be reminded if they openly attacked someone else. Thus, while everyone enjoys the pleasures of backbiting, and an offender is well aware that his actions are being discussed, open conflict is normally avoided and his face is saved. There are, then, no organized social sanctions; social control on the level of the local group is correspondingly weak, only operating when the offender himself secretly admits that he has done something wrong or foolish. Incest, theft, and - among women - neglect of one's children are the most generally recognized offences.

There are no activities which involve the whole population of an aboriginal settlement, and there are very few which

are even conducted in its name. At Murrin Bridge a football team did flourish briefly under Quinn's leadership, but it disintegrated as soon as he left. Dances are only organized with the greatest difficulty: four were held during my five month's stay and of these only one was well attended, while another drew almost no support. It is difficult to find a musician ready to play and the owner of an instrument ready to lend it; the dancers are extremely shy and at a large Christmas dance it took half-an-hour before the Mayor, who was acting as Master of Ceremonies, could draw sixteen couples onto the floor for a set-dance. In Wilcannia, Quinn has organized another All-Black football team, but almost single-handed; when he wished to resign the secretary-ship, no one else would come forward to assume his responsibilities. He has also organized a concert party to collect money for a children's playground on the reserve; this enjoyed a brief success but the artists complained that they were not paid for their performance and whispered that Quinn had kept the takings for himself. A similar lack of 'community spirit' was revealed when Quinn tried to organize the erection of a low dyke around the settlement against the imminent threat of flood; he was finally obliged to erect it himself, with the help of a few kinsmen.

In Euabalong and Hillston there is even less of group-consciousness. Except at weddings and funerals, there are no large gatherings of aborigines; many go out of their way to avoid them. Indeed there are some aborigines, and not only those trying to 'pass', who have little or nothing to do with what they consider the more disreputable element. Several went so far as to assert that they got on better with whites than with their own people, among whom there was too much backbiting.

In these centres, there is no basis for aboriginal leadership outside a fairly limited circle of kin; however, its weakness among the Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge aborigines demands closer enquiry. Of course, one can always find instances of ad hoc leadership: someone proposes a trip to town to get liquor, a woman suggests a game of cards or a fishing expedition, someone strumming a guitar starts an informal concert. But this is leadership in its most elementary form: if one had not proposed some activity today, another would have done so tomorrow and with equal effect, few are involved and organization amounts to little more than making the initial suggestion. No pattern of leadership develops in this way, since any number of individuals can and do initiate activity without having outstanding influence or ability.



I have already said that a number of older women achieve a high place in the regard of their children and grandchildren, sometimes, too, among other women by their generosity as neighbours and their skill as midwives. These matriarchs can be outspoken, domineering formidable old women, ruling their households, demanding help from their children and grandchildren and forming opinions among a wide circle of women. But women's life is very largely bounded by the home and there seems to be no larger-scale activity in which they might figure as leaders. For men other forms of leadership are possible: the leader of a fencing or droving team, the organizer of a football team or the Master of Ceremonies at a dance. But a work group seldom involves more than two or three underlings who will most probably be sons or nephews of the leader; where the men are of much the same age, the relationship is more a partnership. In organizing dances and football, leadership is more a matter of 'setting the ball rolling' than maintaining order. When the 'Mayor' conducted a dance, he did no more than announce the next piece and urge couples onto the floor - not always successfully. When he attempted anything more ambitious, he was as often as not ignored and it was often difficult to hear his voice above the general hubub. Quite typically, when, half-way through

the evening, he decided that the floor needed sweeping, he was obliged to do it himself! In the same way, Quinn was successful in organizing the team, so far as arranging matches, obtaining transport and raising funds was concerned; there were always a few men around who would be ready to play, if only for the pleasure of a bus ride, but one could never be sure whether a player would be available when wanted and it was impossible to stop them coming onto the field drunk and wearing out their uniforms round the 'Mission'.

However, the unpopularity and ridicule to which existing leaders are exposed and the unreadiness of others to come forward and take charge of existing organizations, suggests that there is a prejudice against leaders as such. It is true that, in becoming supervisor for the A.W.B., Quinn has joined the side of white authority, but it is not thought, as it well might be, that he is a more lenient and sympathetic supervisor than a white man is likely to be; on the contrary, it is said that a white man would be preferable. Even Quinn's attempts to organize genuine community ventures have been received with suspicious scepticism. Jack Wilson certainly exploits his workers, but no one stops to think that some white employers do the same and that he may compensate for this by being a generous neighbour and very ready to place

his truck at the disposal of anyone wanting transport.

A typical example of the suspicion in which aborigines in authority are held, occurred in Condobolin shortly before my arrival in the West. A football match between Murrin Bridge and Condobolin aborigines had been arranged and one of the latter appointed as referee. He made a number of decisions against Murrin Bridge and the rumour began to circulate that he had been bribed by the other side. When he made yet another decision against Murrin Bridge a fight broke out in which players and spectators became involved!

The problem of leadership must be seen in the general context of aboriginal life. From childhood the aborigine learns to think primarily in terms of the kin group clustered about him. Kin are the people he learns to help and favour first, before considering others; he may not think of the community welfare at all. Thus, when someone like Quinn sets himself up as a community leader, the aborigine is immediately suspicious and accuses him, as Quinn was accused, of favouring his relations.⁴ (In fact the major breach, described in

⁴ The situation recalls Frankenberg's Welsh border village, where it was customary to place outsiders in the leadership of recreational organizations in order that local people should not be "forced to make decisions which reveal their personal divided loyalties and also reveal social divisions in the village." R. Frankenberg: 'Village on the Border', 1957, p. 152.

chapter three, involved Quinn's affinal and cognatic kin.) However, we have seen that, even between kin, rights and duties are very ill-defined and only supported by the weak sanctions of public opinion; there are constant disputes and allegations of sharp practice and deceit: a contractor has not paid his men, a suit has been borrowed and not returned, gambling debts have not been paid, a bottle of wine has been stolen, a wife or husband has been unfaithful. Since there is no mechanism for settling disputes - unless by fighting - there remains a constant undercurrent of suspicion and resentment for wrongs, real or imagined. Men like Wilson and Quinn come in for their share of this resentment and suspicion, and are therefore the less to be trusted as leaders.

Coser, in his study of social conflict, writes:

"Social systems provide for specific institutions which serve to drain off hostile and aggressive sentiments. These safety valve institutions help to maintain the system by preventing otherwise probable conflict or by reducing its disruptive effects. They provide substitute objects upon which to displace hostile sentiments, as well as a means of abreaction."⁵

Among the aborigines, violent clashes occur periodically with the white authorities. However, the latter always win; indeed

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Lewis Coser: 'The Functions of Social Conflict', 1956, p. 48.

the aborigines feel themselves quite helpless in their hands, and to attempt resistance would only bring further trouble on their heads. One is tempted to believe that the aborigines displace the sentiments of hostility and aggression, generated in their clashes with the whites, onto their own group. This is clearly seen when an aborigine is arrested, for his first action is often to betray his associates. The aborigine who attempts to imitate the whites is a particularly tempting target, for while embodying some of the offending features of the latter he is much more vulnerable. Thus Quinn drew upon himself not only the hostility inevitable for any supervisor but some of the aggression and hostility generated in conflict with the white authorities. Wilson's fault is to exploit his workers as the worst white employers do and to prosper visibly as his fellow aborigines do not. Indeed, recalling such remarks as "we aren't as brainy as white folk", one is tempted to believe that aborigines regard leadership as the province of the white man and divert the resentment generated in this relationship onto aborigines who pretend to the same role. My own work has proved too superficial to argue this hypothesis with any degree of force, but it would repay closer research.

The aborigines are, of course, well aware of their ethnic identity which marks them off from whites and in some senses

places them in opposition to whites. They know that the whites invaded the country and killed some of their forebears. However, so far as one can judge, these facts have been accepted and cease to have any real force in aboriginal thinking. For example, aborigines will often say that the whites "took our land" but the remark is more a rhetorical assertion of opposition than a serious assertion of rights.⁶ Aborigines regard themselves as pastoral workers; no one would wish to revert to the old hunting life and few if any have the ambition to become land-owners.⁷ Marie Reay reports a Gippsland song in which the white man is imagined giving back the country to the aborigines, but, remarks the singer, "Jacky don't want it now!"⁸ One or two thought that the government

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One amusing account described how an old Condobolin woman had returned home just in time to see a white man leading her horse away to the pound: "You f---ing bastard," she shouted, "You took our f---ing land and now you're going to take our f---ing horses!" The white man is said to have let the horse go, forthwith, and made good his escape.

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Reference has already been made to an aboriginal veteran of the first World War who sold the block of land granted him under an ex-servicemen's resettlement scheme, after a few months of possession and drank the proceeds. Throughout the West, one Euabalong man is the only aborigine to have acquired a land holding.

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See Reay: 'Native Thought in New South Wales', Oceania, Vol. XX, p. 98.

stations and the supply of rations were provided in compensation for the loss of the land, but clearly most had given the matter very little thought.

One might expect a number of atrocity stories from the early days of contact, such as were collected by Marie Reay in the Central North.⁹ However, although the old people were aware that massacres had taken place, I am reasonably certain that they had no more specific tales to transmit to their descendants.

The old people are a little inclined to fantasy weaving when they recall the powers of their forebears. Fred Biggs, the last custodian of the old law on Murrin Bridge, assured me that the clever men - the magicians - could have stopped the whites from landing in Australia, had they wished. He also claimed that one magician, angered at the way a white station owner had killed the people's dogs, sent a 'poison gas' which killed off half the inhabitants of Cobar.¹⁰ However, when one asks what became of these clever men, one is often told that they used their arts to kill each other. Thus the blame for the disappearance of the old rule is placed on the aboriginal group, not on the white invaders.

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Reay, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

¹⁰ It may be that some epidemic inspired this belief; unfortunately I have been unable to pursue this line of enquiry.

These tales are in any case dismissed as mere fantasy by the younger generation, but there are more credible figures who might, with a little romantic retouching, become 'resistance heroes'. For example, one might select the Governor brothers, two aborigines who murdered a white family in the early years of the century. According to contemporary reports, Jimmy Governor was driven to the murder by the constant taunts hurled at himself and his white wife.¹¹ After the crime, the three aborigines involved took to the bush and lived as bush-rangers until they were caught. One Balranald man whom I met had romanticized Jimmy Governor into an aboriginal martyr, and claimed that the farmer who had shot Joe Governor while he was asleep and who died shortly after was punished by God for the treacherous killing. But other aborigines who had heard the story retold it simply in circumstantial terms, without any additional interpretation of the facts; there was no attempt to portray the Governors as protagonists in any battle between white and black.

One Murrin Bridge man seemed unusually aware of the discrimination practiced against aborigines, even in towns such as Bourke where he had never been, and he confided to me that

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Sydney 'Evening News', November 23rd, 1900.



the Japanese or the Russians would "give the dark people a better go". The Japs nearly won the last war, he remarked, but the Russians were sure to win next time. But, here again, I never heard these views from anyone else. Most expressed a conventional if rather faint interest in the Queen and in the questionnaire 88% of the Murrin Bridge school-children specified Japs, Germans or Russians as the 'people always trying to do us harm'.¹²

The aborigines of the West have never shown the least interest in political agitation. Movements like the Aborigines Progressive Association, championing the rights of aborigines throughout Australia, which have flourished sporadically in the eastern part of the state, have never interested the West. Even though William Ferguson, a leading figure in these movements, was personally known to some of the Murrin Bridge people, they gave him no support, but, as we have seen, failed him when he relied upon them. Within the bounds considered legitimate by the authorities, they have never shown any interest in being represented on the A.W.B. Even the genuine resentment that the aboriginal man feels against the

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Of course, school instruction, together with the cinema, may have been responsible for these attitudes, but it would not seem that parental influence has countered them.

liquor restrictions and which provides the most common expression of opposition to whites, has produced no organized campaign. Drinking may amount to a defiance of white domination, but at best it engages only a handful of men.

Indeed, if the aborigines of the West recognize a common origin and condition with other aborigines, elsewhere, their sense of ethnic solidarity goes no further than this. The bush aborigine, the Jacky-Jacky, is a figure of fun and a source of embarrassment (he is, of course, never encountered in the flesh); the detribalized aborigine from some other part of N.S.W. is received in a manner, friendly but tempered with suspicion. Indeed it is clear that the aborigine's world is restricted to his own settlement and perhaps the one or two neighbouring settlements, where he has kinsfolk. He has probably never gone to see what happens in other parts, nor is he concerned to find out. In the last chapter, I suggested that many aborigines, particularly those in Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge, are largely preoccupied with the affairs of their own restricted social circle and find little in common with the whites whom they meet; but this is equally true with regard to aboriginal strangers.

Professor Elkin has written:

"...when the part-Aborigines (in N.S.W.) began about twenty years ago to realize their position as a periphery group, and to blame the Government for it, only a few made any effort to realize the citizenship which was legally their's. Instead, they strengthened their group solidarity over against the general community by an attempt to 'return to the mat'. Rituals were revived, kinship customs acknowledged and tribal language (pure or debased) used among themselves. A little later they began to hold, and still hold religious conventions. ...they are occasions on which large numbers were massed together for a week or two in good old aboriginal fashion: - eating, sleeping, singing and being harangued. So they experience their unity and separateness as a group."

Elkin continues:

"...the trend all over Australia is towards this solidarity of groups of Aboriginal descent, constituting in aggregate a minority group distributed in lesser groups throughout the continent. It is social not political in significance. It is a result of race relations; of European and Aboriginal miscegenation, and of prejudice towards the offspring on the part of the former, so that a new 'race', a temporary biological and social group is being evolved."¹³

The aborigines of the Far West are well aware of their position as a peripheral group, although they have raised no great clamour against the Government. However, there have been no indications that a 'return to the mat' is impending; nor is there any sign of the development of religious enthusiasms. We have seen, in fact, that the sense of solidarity with

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Elkin: Cyclostyled paper on culture contact in the South Pacific and Australia, 1957, pp. 7-8.

aborigines in other parts is very weak, and there is no reason to believe that it has been extended over the last fifty years. A number of reasons for this suggest themselves. Firstly, the pattern described by Elkin has been most apparent on the North Coast, where white prejudice seems to be stronger than in the Far West and where aborigines were recently evicted from areas where they had been making a living.¹⁴ Secondly, mobility seems to be much higher in the former area, so that the aborigines are more regularly encountering strangers of their own colour. The Far West, as we have seen is relatively isolated from the rest of the state. Thirdly, the way to a 'return to the mat' is blocked by the attitude of mixed contempt and embarrassment towards the old ways; while few if any evangelists have visited the settlements and attitudes to religion range from indifference to scepticism. We have seen that there are a few who think in terms of aboriginal rights and opposition between the two groups; but there are others who view with scepticism and suspicion attempts to lead in community ventures; there is no indication that strangers would be any better received.

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Elkin: 'Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia.' *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, p. 177.

It is extremely hard to set the bounds of aboriginal society if we are to adopt Nadel's definition of a society as the 'relatively widest effective group', having in mind the 'range of its corporate functions and the nature and general relevance of these activities.'¹⁵ For town aborigines, the society would scarcely extend beyond the household and a small circle of kin; for the Wilcannia and Murrin Bridge people, the settlement is probably the most convenient unit to select, although we have seen how weakly it is organized. However, there is continual migration between settlements, together with visiting, inter-marriage and the exchange of news; moreover, a newcomer can immediately find a place in the local group if he has kin there. Some individuals - say at Murrin Bridge - have ties with kin in Wilcannia while others have no ties with Wilcannia but some with Hillston; but we have seen in Chapter V that few if any aborigines originating in the Far West have wandered farther afield than Bourke, Griffith or Condobolin, and not many have gone so far. We have also seen that aborigines rarely travel where they do not have at least some kin or friends living. Thus, the world in which most aborigines move is effectively delimited; perhaps it is

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Nadel, op. cit., p. 187.

better, here, to waive Nadel's more rigorous definition, and call this the aboriginal society, bearing in mind that it is not precisely the same for each aborigine.

CONCLUSIONS

The policy of the Aborigines Welfare Board is to assist aborigines in becoming full members of white society. In the Far West a few have come near to this goal; they are mostly town dwellers who have little to do with other aborigines outside the family circle. Others like Quinn and Wilson associate extensively with whites, while yet fulfilling their obligations to a wide circle of kith and kin. The majority, however, show no sign of becoming assimilated. The contacts they have with whites are largely impersonal, often ephemeral and limited very much to the business in hand. Thus, an aborigine may help to erect a fence for a white employer without ever seeing him, and often the only contact aboriginal women have with whites is across the shop counter. The more intimate and permanent relationships of their lives, such as arise in the home and in recreation, are maintained exclusively with other aborigines, and they seek to establish themselves in the regard of their fellows rather than of white people. Moreover, their membership of an ethnically and culturally distinct group is often instrumental in defining their relations with and status among whites. This is not just a matter of white prejudice - we have seen that many

whites are ready to take aborigines as they find them - but that aborigines may participate in white society as members of an aboriginal group. A man works to keep his family at a level of comfort considered adequate by his fellows, to have sufficient surplus to be able to satisfy the demands of kith and kin, and to be able to 'shout' a drink for his mates; having provided for these needs, he stops work and enjoys a period of leisure. This means that he is usually a casual worker and acquires a reputation for laziness, fecklessness and drunkenness among those whites who stress providence, industry and sobriety as virtues and who consider a higher standard of living desirable.

White prejudice against aborigines no doubt plays a part in keeping the two groups so much apart, but we have seen that many aborigines make no effort to become more intimate with whites or to make the changes in their way of life which, they know, would make them more acceptable to the latter. White settlement obliged them to make radical accommodations to the new situation, but once this had been accomplished a modus vivendi was arrived at which left the aborigines even yet with a measure of social and cultural autonomy.¹⁶ Of

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Situations of this sort have been termed stabilized pluralism. See Broom et al., op. cit., p. 990.

course, the aborigines are under some pressure, both from the authorities and from local whites, to conform still further to white norms of conduct. Those few who are anxious to make themselves acceptable to whites will yield to this pressure; however, the majority are not very concerned to do this. They can resist the pressure without suffering unduly; moreover, white society suffers no great inconvenience by their refusal. They have been able to make a selective ¹⁷ approach to white culture; nor can their way of life be understood simply in terms of reaction to the impingeing white society. It has too often been supposed that because the aborigines discarded their traditional social system, they have therefore placed all things aboriginal at a discount and yearn only to become white men. But it is clear that aboriginal society is not maintained only by white exclusiveness; it offers its members positive satisfactions, not all of which are to be found in white society, and constitutes to some degree an alternative to the latter.

Living on an aboriginal settlement, one is assured of material and social security; the people one encounters are familiar and their reactions are largely predictable; at the same time, they do not demand that one lives at too high a standard or observes too strict a moral code. To enter white

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J.W.Eaton: Controlled Acculturation: A Survival of the Hutterites. American Sociological Review. 17.

society one must become economically independent - with all that involves in terms of sacrifice of leisure, absence from home, denial of luxuries, and so on - one must observe a stricter moral code (or appear to do so) and maintain a higher standard of living; moreover, one must learn to deal with strangers whose reactions are often unpredictable and whose attitudes towards aborigines may be hostile. Thus, there may be social as well as material advantages in living on a government station which together outweigh the annoyances of official surveillance and control.

The physical isolation of some aboriginal settlements only widens the gap between white and black, and the fact that aborigines appear to be a socially as well as ethnically distinct group encourages the creation of stereotypes which may prejudice whites against them. In isolation aboriginal society equips its members for the more rudimentary roles they will have to play in white society: it teaches them English, the skills required for obtaining employment, the basic conventions, the ability to dissemble in the presence of officials and so on. But they can only learn to play the more complex roles in the company of whites, by a process of trial and error.

For the aborigines who live in small groups in the body of some town and associate with whites at school, on the football field, at work and perhaps in the bar of the hotel, the prospects of assimilation are good. For the aborigines living in large camps and on isolated government stations, the prospect is not so hopeful. Individuals may still succeed in bridging the gap between white and black, but the majority of the younger generation show no sign of being very different from their fathers. Given the high birth rate, we are promised a serious problem for the future.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX II

INVENTORY OF ABORIGINAL
PROPERTY

Estimates of value are approximate. Items worth less than
£20 are not listed.

House- hold:	House	Furnit- ure	Refriger- ator	Miscell- aneous	Cars	Horses
<u>Murrin Bridge</u>						
1	-	£40	-	-	£450	-
2	-	£110	-	£400(1)	£900	1
3	-	-	-	-	-	1
4	-	£30	-	-	-	1
5	-	-	-	-	-	2
6	-	-	-	-	-	3
7	-	-	-	£100	£100	-
8	-	£40	-	-	-	-
9	-	£70	-	-	£200	-
10	-	£50	-	-	-	-
11	-	£70	-	-	£130	3
12	-	-	-	-	-	3
13	-	-	-	-	£100	3
14	-	£50	-	-	£150	-
15	-	£80	-	-	£600	1
16	-	£40	-	-	-	-
17	-	-	-	-	-	6

17 other families with no items worth more than £20. Most have wireless sets, though not necessarily in working order.

(1) A Mechanical post-hole digger.

Hillston

1	£,1,500	£150	-	-	-	1
2	-	£80	£100	-	-	-
3	£40	-	£100	-	-	3
4	£2,000	£150	£100	£120(2)	-	-

3 other households had no items worth more than £20, and two homes were not visited.

(2) A washing machine. The father of this family is white.

Euabalong.

1	-	£600	£60	-	£1,000	-
2	-	£100	£100	£100(3)	-	-

Household:	House	Furniture	Refrigerator	Miscellaneous	Cars	Horses
33	£20	£30	£40	-	-	1
4	-	£60	-	-	£80	-
5	-	£60	-	-	£150	-

2 otherx households had no items worth more than £20 and 7 were not visited.

(3) A washing machine.

Wilcannia

1	-	£30	£40	-	-	-
2	£40(4)	£40	£100	-	£250	-
3	-	£50	£80	-	£100	-
4	-	£50	£60	-	£70	-
5	-	£50	-	-	-	-
6	£20(4)	£60	£100	-	£150	-
7	£40	-	-	-	£100	4
8	£40	£30	£100	-	£150	-
9	£50	£30	-	-	£150	-
10	£30	£25	-	-	£60	-
11	£40	-	-	-	-	-

15 other households had no items worth more than £20. One mixed household not visited.

(4) These are improvements to government houses.