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‘You took our children’: Aboriginal autobiographical narratives of separation in New South Wales, 1977–1997

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This thesis is all my own work

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Abstract

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families emerged from a 30-year history of articulation and publication of autobiographical accounts of separation in a variety of discursive contexts. I explore a small fragment of this history through a case study of individual and community-initiated autobiographical projects that bear witness to separation in New South Wales. Three of the texts centre on individuals: Jimmie Barker, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* (1977), Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared* (1977) and Monica Clare, *Karobran* (1978). Two of the texts, the *Lost Children* (1989) and *In the Best Interest of the Child?* (1997), are collections that emerged from Link-Up (NSW) community, a grass-roots organisation dedicated to reuniting separated people with their families, communities and Aboriginal heritage. The five texts negotiate a range of discursive and generic contexts including anthropology, autobiography, fiction, oral history and judicial testimony. The thesis explores separation discourse, paying particular attention to the contexts in which the narratives were enunciated and to the engagement of the authors with non-Aboriginal interlocutors and editors. The last chapter includes personal reflections on my own participation as an editor in the production of *In the Best Interest of the Child?*
Acknowledgments

I dedicate the thesis to my parents. In many ways I was drawn to the issue of separation because of my parents: because they adopted me, because they migrated to isolation the US north to escape the racism of the south, because they desperately wanted to be human rather than ‘Negroes’. They were very proud that I was working on a PhD, unfortunately they both died before it could be completed. Secondly, I want to acknowledge and thank Carol Kendall and Lola McNaughton, who worked at Link-Up (NSW) during the National Inquiry, and who were incredibly generous in sharing their experiences of separation and racism. I am also deeply grateful to all of the other members of the Link-Up community, especially Barry Duroux, Barbara Nicholls, Anne Pratten, Mary Kondek, Jean Carter, Bruce Clayton, Nancy de Vries and Joy Williams. Many thanks also for the support of those at The Australian University who have offered invaluable support and criticism of various drafts, especially Rosanne Kennedy, Peter Read, Jill Matthews and Ann Curthoys. I would like to express my appreciation of Jack and Jean Horner for allowing me to view the manuscript of Monica Clare and the staff at State Records of New South Wales, the Mitchell Library and the National Library of Australia. Last but certainly not least, I am grateful for the support of family and friends who have put up with my obsession and preoccupation with this writing, and for the support of the National Archives of Australia which allowed me to take leave at crucial times.
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Aboriginal writing, scholarship, research are all taking on the feel of Holocaust Studies. We write to understand, we read to understand, we carry out research to try to understand the terrible, inexplicable past.

Marcia Langton
Marcia Langton responds, p. 1.

They showed beyond a reasonable doubt that the Holocaust was a window, rather than a picture on the wall. Looking through that window, one can catch a rare glimpse of many things otherwise invisible. And the things one can see are of the utmost importance not just for the perpetrators, victims and witnesses of the crime, but for all those who are alive today and hope to be alive tomorrow. What I saw through this window I did not find at all pleasing. The more depressing the view, however, the more I was convinced that if one refused to look through the window, it would be at one's peril.

Zygmunt Bauman
Modernity and the Holocaust, p. ix.
Introduction: ‘Nothing but...hypocrisy’

In May 1997 the issue of the Stolen Generations catapulted into Australian consciousness with the release of Bringing Them Home, the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. Major newspapers carried front page headings such as: ‘No action on stolen children’, 1 ‘Stolen children must be paid’, 2 ‘I’m sorry, PM tells Aborigines’, 3 ‘Howard’s “deep sorrow”’, 4 ‘PM’s apology draws protest’, 5 or ‘Parliament: no apology’. 6 Nightly television coverage offered both news and feature stories on separation. Newspaper letters to the editor focused on reader response to separation, both positive and negative. 7 Many non-Aboriginal Australians were deeply disturbed by the evidence, both eyewitness and archival, that their governments and religious institutions had promulgated and implemented a systematic policy of taking Aboriginal children from their parents. Others, were unmoved and resented the ‘special’ focus on separated Aboriginal children or, following Minister for Aboriginal Affairs John Herron’s lead, believed that Aboriginal people had benefited from separation. 8 Some realised they had unwittingly participated in separation, unaware that the Aboriginal child they fostered or adopted, taught or tormented in school, nursed or employed, most probably had been separated under these policies. Others asked themselves why they hadn’t known about separation.

How could we have not known?

Anna Haebich points out in Broken Circles, that information about separation had circulated in public discourse from at least the 1920s, so perhaps the more pertinent

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7 For example, The Australian, 24–25 May 1997 ran two letters on p. 20 under a 36pt banner ‘We have a moral obligation to apologise’ that surrounded a third letter under an 18pt banner ‘Will we grieve for our other forgotten children’.
8 The Weekend Australian quoted Senator Herron saying ‘What we must recognise is that a lot of people have benefited by that (policy of removal), p. 1 with follow-on on p. 3, 5–6 October 1996.
question should be ‘how can we claim not to have known?’. In New South Wales – the geographical focus of this thesis – there are traces of public discourse on separation from the early 1800s. A newspaper interview with an adult Aboriginal, Andrew, who had been separated from his family and raised by First Fleet colonists, survives from 1814. Other early nineteenth century reports indicate Aboriginal people avoiding contact with European government and missionary representatives out of fear of losing their children. In the early years of the twentieth century, when special legislation enabling the ‘protection of aborigines’ – including the removal of Aboriginal children – was passed, Aboriginal parents petitioned their parliamentary representatives to oppose the legislation. Throughout the twentieth century, Aboriginal and European individuals recorded in the archived correspondence of the NSW Aborigines Protection/Welfare Board opposed and sought to intervene in these policies. Aboriginal activists resisted and morally condemned the government’s invasion of Aboriginal family life. In 1926, for example, Aboriginal activist Fred Maynard represented the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board’s removal of Aboriginal girls as ‘nothing but downright hypocrisy’. He argued that although the Board claimed to be saving Aboriginal girls from the ‘evil influences’ of Aboriginal reserves, in fact it isolated the girls on pastoral stations where they were vulnerable to sexual exploitation by white employers.

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10 Andrew was interviewed about why he had decided to return to the ‘bush’ to seek a bride. Andrew’s interview is discussed at greater length in chapter 3. From J Brook and JL Kohen, The Parramatta Native Institution and the Black Town: A History, NSW University Press, Kensington, 1991, p. 56 quoting the Sydney Gazette, 1 January 1814, Historian JJ Fletcher mentions a boy named Andrew found in the bush in 1788 after his mother had died of smallpox; a boy named James, adopted in 1790 after his parents were shot; and a boy named Tristen, orphaned at age four and adopted by the Reverend Samuel Marsden in 1795. JJ Fletcher, Clean, Clad and Courteous: A History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales, NSW, Sydney, 1989, p. 14ff.

11 An 1814 issue of the Sydney Gazette reported that at the first feast given by Macquarie to recruit students for Shelley’s project, the Aboriginals who attended told the Governor that more distant tribes did not attend because they were afraid they would be ‘forcibly deprived of their children’. (Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 66, citing the Sydney Gazette 31 December 1814.) The Illustrated History of Methodism (published in 1904), reported that a man named Yarramundi said in 1818 that he was fearful of ‘men dressed in black’ who came to take children for the [Parramatta] Institution. (J. Colwell, Illustrated History of Methodism, 1904, p. 171, quoted in Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 70.)

12 The Board minutes of 13 June 1912 indicate a letter of complaint from HD Morton, MLA on behalf of Aboriginal parents at Burnt Bridge; the minutes of 20 June 1912 indicate another letter from Morton on behalf of Aboriginal parents at the Rollands Plains reserve. Minutes of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board held at State Archives New South Wales.


14 The quotations are from a letter from Maynard to the mother of an Aboriginal girl who had been sent to Sydney to have the child fathered by a white man on the property where she worked. The
From the mid-1970s, activism towards achieving an Aboriginal child placement principle in substitute care was continuous. Also the 1970s saw Aboriginal autobiographies begin to be recorded, published and circulated, including autobiographies of adults who had been separated as children. Margaret Tucker’s autobiography, *If Everyone Cared* (1977), became the basis of a film, *Lousy Little Sixpence*. The best selling and most widely read Aboriginal autobiography, Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, concerned three generations of separation. From the 1980s, academics published accounts that drew on both archival and oral sources to document the histories of separation. In the early 1990s, the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody pointed to correlations between separation, incarceration and death in custody. A documentary film, *Who Killed Malcolm Smith?*, investigated the contribution of separation policies to Smith’s subsequent death in custody. But it was not until 1997, with the publication of a book, "..."
Bringing Them Home, that separation gained widespread public attention as a significant injustice or wrong inflicted on Aboriginal people.

Centering separation testimony

In 1997, the testimony of Aboriginal people affected by separation was a significant source of information as separation emerged into mainstream consciousness. Mass media accounts included numerous feature articles on individuals and families. Bringing Them Home also offered extensive extracts from the testimony of the 535 Aboriginal witnesses. In its evidence-gathering phase, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioners responsible for the Inquiry were specifically and particularly committed to providing a safe and respectful forum where Aboriginal Australians could bear witness to their experiences of separation. The Inquiry took advice from an Indigenous Advisory Council, it provided counselling support to witnesses both during and after the Inquiry, it enabled witnesses to give evidence about their personal experiences in confidential sessions with the Commission, and it protected the identities of these witnesses.

As a quasi-judicial body with the function of ensuring the protection of human rights, the National Inquiry provided a specific discursive context for the articulation, publication, circulation, reception and interpretation of autobiographical accounts of separation - a discursive context that was highly successful in bringing the issue of separation home to mainstream Australians. But the Inquiry emerged from a 30-year history of articulation and publication of autobiographical accounts of separation in a variety of discursive contexts. It is a small fragment of this history, that I explore in this thesis through a case study of five autobiographical texts that bear witness to separation in New South Wales.

I limit this study to one jurisdiction because although there are many similarities among the different geographical and temporal locations of separation, there are also many differences. The colonial and post-federation discursive and institutional practices which shaped Aboriginal lives in New South Wales and other southeastern states, are significantly different from those shaping the lives of Aboriginal people in states and territories that were later and not so closely 'settled'. For example, the oft-stated generalisation that assimilation policy 'began' in the late 1930s after the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State

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24 HREOC, Bringing Them Home, pp. 18–21.
Aboriginal Authorities in 1937,\(^{25}\) is inaccurate in the New South Wales context where an explicit policy to ‘merge’ Aboriginals took legal effect in 1909. Similarly, the generalisation that separation targeted so-called ‘half-caste’ children has a significantly different meaning in New South Wales, where by 1904 the enumerated population of Aboriginal children comprised 2,236 ‘half-castes’ and only 813 ‘full-bloods’,\(^ {26}\) than in the north and west where people of mixed descent comprised a relatively small percentage of the Aboriginal population.

This study focuses on five autobiographical separation texts published in New South Wales between 1977 and 1997. Three of the texts centre on individuals, Jimmie Barker, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* (1977), Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared* (1977) and Monica Clare, *Karobran* (1978), two of the texts are collections, the *Lost Children* (1989) and *In the Best Interest of the Child* (1997).\(^ {27}\) The five texts negotiate a range of discursive contexts: anthropology, autobiography, fiction, oral history and judicial testimony. The majority of the authors are Aboriginal women (17 of 28). Of the five texts, two are collections that emerged from the Link-Up (NSW) community,\(^ {28}\) a grass-roots organisation dedicated to reuniting separated people with their families, communities and Aboriginal heritage.\(^ {29}\) Thus the thesis explores separation discourse across a 30-year period through both individual and community-initiated autobiographical projects. While it would be fruitful to compare the discourse on separation emerging from the Link-Up community with that emerging from other separation communities in other parts of Australia (and in other Indigenous communities overseas), this is beyond the scope of this study.

**Background to the project**

When I began the project in 1994 very few non-Indigenous Australians had heard about the policies of removing Aboriginal children from their families. My own first experience of the issue of separation, however, occurred in 1991. At that time I was a relatively new migrant to Australia (I arrived in 1989). I was not a citizen. I

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\(^{26}\) ABP Annual Report 1904, NSWPP 1906, p. 835. It is important to remember that the Aborigines Protection Board’s census probably did not account for all of the Aboriginal people in New South Wales and was skewed towards Aboriginals living on Board stations and reserves or in the environs of NSW country towns. Additionally, the Board’s inconsistent definitions of ‘half-caste’ and who should be counted as an Aboriginal affected the accuracy of its census statistics.


\(^{28}\) Link-Up (NSW) is the legal name of the organisation, hereafter I will refer to it as Link-Up.

\(^{29}\) Link-Up and Wilson, In the Best Interest, pp. 2–9.
did not identify as ‘Australian’, but as ‘African-American’. I had brought with me a worldview in which I felt solidarity with Aboriginals as other ‘blacks’ who, like my people, had been dominated and subjugated by British ‘whites’ in their 500-year project of colonising and exploiting most of the ‘red’, ‘brown’ and ‘black’ peoples on the earth. In addition, I did then and do now, identify as ‘feminist’, or more particularly ‘black feminist’.

In the first months of living in Australia I was acutely aware of an almost total absence of black faces and black bodies in the masses of people rushing past me in the streets, shops and subways. Furthermore, the black people I saw in the media were more likely to be African-American actors, sports figures, musicians and even politicians, than Australian blacks. The media representation of Aboriginal people that seemed to be recycled endlessly was an image of women and children sitting on red earth in front of a tin humpy waving flies out of their eyes, usually with an Anglo voice-over commenting on the ‘Aboriginal problem’.

When I moved to rural New South Wales I began to see Aboriginal persons on the streets of country towns but, significantly, never working in local businesses. I began to see their images in the country newspapers that I worked for. I also began to hear, in the back room where we assembled the papers, in the shops, at barbeques and other social occasions, the depths of white Australian antagonism towards Aboriginals. Land rights was the most prominent issue in many rural white folks’ minds – fear that their backyards or paddocks were going to be taken from them. ‘Dole bludging’ was the second complaint: ‘They live off of our welfare’ was a common refrain.

The racism itself didn’t surprise me much; I expect (some) white people to be overtly racist towards the rest of us. What did shock me was that they thought I was white too. I was treated first and foremost as a ‘Yank’, subjected to endless diatribes on US imperialism. But my co-workers fully expected me to join into racist jokes and racist fears. Although I am relatively fair-skinned, I certainly do not look ‘white’. I also made a point of identifying myself as ‘African-American’ rather than plain (and implicitly white) American. I was endlessly astonished that even knowing this, white Australians fully expected me to be socially ‘white’ and to join with them in racist expression. Thus in experiencing race as a significant classificatory scheme of everyday life, ‘white’ was defined as everyone who is not Aboriginal. To be (potentially?) ‘white’ meant to be regularly recruited to participate or collaborate in overt expressions of racism, especially towards Aboriginals.


However, in rural areas, in some contexts and depending on how I dressed or styled my hair, my body can be taken for Aboriginal. Particularly in liquor stores, but in other shops as well, I am sometimes approached with that particular suspicious contempt that racism invites in people who are ‘white’. But as soon as I speak, my accent instantly relocates me as a ‘Yank’. I see shock and then shame flit across the face of the offending person as they realise their error and recognise they have treated a ‘customer’ (and as a Yank a potentially rich tourist at that) like an ‘Aboriginal’. They suddenly become extremely polite, friendly and helpful – even obsequious. I feel a swirl of emotions: rage at their arrogance and hypocrisy, relief that I do not have to suffer their contempt on a daily basis, despair that Aboriginals do, and fear that they have the power to decide whether I am to be taken as human or subhuman. It is a reminder of the contingency of my own racial position. It is also a symptom of the contingency of racial objectification in western countries at the turn of the 21st century. 32 Although overt racism has mostly gone ‘underground’, at any moment a ‘brown’ or ‘black’ body can become a signifier of ‘nigger’ – a not quite human who whites can treat with contempt, suspicion and aggression.

It was not until I joined a feminist refuge collective that I actually met and interacted with Aboriginals. Aboriginal women were both members of the collective and refuge workers. While they were friendly, they also treated me as a ‘white person’. Jamaican sociologist Myrna Tonkinson describes this position as a ‘black whitefella’. 33 That is, that no matter where you come from, how dark your skin colour, or how oppressed your people might be ‘over there’, ‘over here’ in Australia if you are not Aboriginal you share the privileges of living as an honorary white and these derive directly from Aboriginal colonisation and dispossession.

I was told by white collective members that the refuge had a fraught relationship with the local Aboriginal community. Aboriginal women did not want to use the refuge unless there were Aboriginal workers, however, Aboriginal workers were hard to ‘keep’ (that is, they were rarely allowed to pass across the boundary separating probationary from permanent workers), thus turnover was high. In the year I was a member of the collective we had two major disputes over employing Aboriginal women. In both cases the collective was racially polarised; the white women had the decision-making majority; the white workers set the workplace standards Aboriginal women were expected to meet; the Aboriginal women were refused permanent positions because white co-workers evaluated their work unsatisfactory; the Aboriginal women said the refuge was racist; and in both cases

the white women appealed to ‘sisterhood’ and the need for women to join together in the larger project of challenging men’s violence against women.34

What I was most conscious of, however, was that sometimes I almost literally didn’t understand what the women were saying because I didn’t understand how these particular disputes, carried on through these particular conversations and practices, were fragments of the ongoing 200-year dispute between Aboriginal peoples and white colonisers. This was especially the case around the issue of separation. I heard the Aboriginal women accuse the white women of ‘taking away our children’. It was obvious from their vehemence and bitterness that this issue had profound historical resonance. However, I had not heard the history of Aboriginal child removal nor, apparently, had the other non-Aboriginal women. The accusations fell on deaf ears.

**Structures of injustice**

In retrospect, I would argue that ‘you took our children’ was a code for a complex analysis of the history and ongoing effects of colonisation. Deborah Bird Rose has argued that the Aboriginal people she worked with in the Northern Territory use the phrase ‘Captain Cook’ to signify the totality of invasion:

> When people speak of invasion they often speak of Captain Cook, using that one figure to encompass a large set of people, processes and regulations.35

Rose argues further that the point of the Captain Cook stories told, for example, by Hobbles Danayarri, is not to record the factual minutiae of historical events. Rather it is to represent the structure of colonial relationships.

Hobbles Danayarri identifies Captain Cook as the key figure of invasion. Although his account is at odds with Western knowledge of Captain Cook’s journeys, the more interesting point is that this difference is irrelevant. Invasion did happen, people did get shot, they did have their lands stolen. Varying accounts of Captain Cook only matter to those determined not to listen. Hobbles’ purpose is primarily to tell us about the structure of relationships between Aborigines and Europeans...[H]e and other Victoria River historians speak of particular events in order to demonstrate the structure of injustice under which they lived.36

Analogously, speaking of ‘taking the children away’ or ‘stealing the children’ signifies a complex range of people, processes and regulations that structure a

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34 For a more complete description of this conflict see Tikka Jan Wilson, ‘Feminism and institutionalised racism’, *Feminist Review*, no. 52, Spring, 1996, pp. 1–26.
different but related set of injustices to Aboriginal people. Captain Cook signifies the range of practices through which the violent appropriation of Aboriginal land was accomplished. Taking or stealing the children signifies the 200-year attack on the Aboriginal family in order to assimilate Aboriginal people into white society by breaking the transmission of culture from the older generation to the next. Injustice is the key term. It is not simply that these things happened and have had and continue to have devastating effects on the lives of Aboriginal peoples, it is that the behaviour of European invaders is judged to be wrong, unjust, or outside the law. Furthermore, it is a declaration by the speaker that these wrongs shape Aboriginal-white relationships, both past and present, and that those relationships can only be put right when Europeans acknowledge the wrongs and act in a way that will restore a proper moral order.

To return to the story of the women’s refuge, ‘you took our children’ can be understood as a (failed) attempt to place the employment dispute into a wider framework of injustice in which European women, as women, had been significant participants. Within that framework a range of wrongs that inflicted profound harm on Aboriginal peoples is brought to bear on the current social interaction. Furthermore, ‘taking the children’ signifies the entire project of assimilation in which white people judged Aboriginauls to be ‘savages’ that needed to be ‘civilised’. It is an attempt to contextualise the micro-relationships between these particular individuals within the macro-relationships of the structure of injustice of ‘you took our children’. It signifies a calling to account for the wrongs enabled by mythology of white superiority – including the refusal by white workers to retain Aboriginal workers at the refuge.

**Moral community and apology**

Over the ten years since this incident at the women’s refuge, public discourse on separation has undergone significant change. In 2001 it is unlikely that ‘you took our children’ would draw a blank in non-Aboriginal addressees. The moral meaning of both ‘Captain Cook’ and ‘you took our children’, however, is highly contested. Significantly, since the National Inquiry, three issues, have generated the lion’s share of controversy – whether removed children should be referred to as the ‘Stolen Generations’, whether the Prime Minister should extend an official apology to Aboriginal people on behalf of the nation and whether separation constitutes genocide. In all three issues, what precisely is at stake is the moral significance of ‘you took our children’ as a code that demands acknowledgment of and responsibility for the wrongs committed against Aboriginal people.

Public debate on the apology preceded the tabling of the *Bringing Them Home* report. Although the report was submitted on 5 April 1997 to the newly elected Liberal-National coalition government led by Prime Minister John Howard, it was not released until late May during the National Reconciliation Council Conference. The conference was a major milestone in the reconciliation process that had been
set in motion in 1991 to develop grass-roots reconciliation strategies by 2001, the nation’s centenary of federation. Held on the 30th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, the Reconciliation Conference commemorated the referendum as a significant turning point in Aboriginal struggle for social justice. Symbolically it reminded Australians that only 30 years earlier, Aboriginal people were excluded from many basic rights of citizenship and that an overwhelming majority of non-Aboriginal voters in 1967 supported the vision of a nation where racist inequality and inequity would no longer be tolerated.\(^{37}\)

The conference was represented in the press as an appropriate forum for the Prime Minister to take the initiative on the issue of Aboriginal child removal and extend a formal national apology. However, the government’s prior record on acknowledgment of past injustice to Aboriginal peoples had been poor. It had been highly critical of the High Court’s Wik decision which affirmed the continuance of native title on Crown land subject to pastoral leases and the Prime Minister had appeared to offer tacit support for the One Nation Party leader’s overt expression of racism against Aboriginals and Asians on behalf of ‘ordinary’ and implicitly white Australians.\(^{38}\) The Prime Minister had also openly denigrated revisionist histories as ‘black armband’.\(^{39}\)

The Prime Minister delivered the opening address of the Conference on 26 May 1997. Although he extended a somewhat reserved expression of personal ‘regret’,\(^{40}\) Howard’s performance contrasted with the heartfelt apologies given by the leaders of the Opposition Labor Party and the Democrats. When speaking to the conference about his position on Wik, television coverage captured the Prime Minister literally shouting at the audience, banging clenched fists on the podium, neck muscles strained and face red. Although some boo-ed and jeered, hundreds (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) ‘voiced’ their response by standing silently, backs turned to Howard’s harangue. Not only did Prime Minister Howard not apologise, he used the conference forum as a platform to attack the ‘black armband’ view of history and to refuse to accept guilt or blame for the past. He said:

> In facing the realities of the past, however, we must not join those who would portray Australia’s history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism. Such a portrayal is a gross distortion and it deliberately neglects the overall story of great Australian achievement that is there, is our history to be told and such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of

\(^{37}\) Historians Andrew Markus and Bain Attwood argue that the 1967 Referendum had more discursive effect than legal effect, but agree that for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians it signified a desire and hope for change. See Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus in collaboration with Dale Edwards and Kath Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum, Or When Aborigines Didn’t Get the Vote*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Islander Studies, 1997.

\(^{38}\) Markus, Race: John Howard, p. 93.


\(^{40}\) *The Australian*, Tuesday 27 May 1997, p. 4, edited text of Mr Howard’s speech.
Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved, although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its history. Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control.41

The characterisation of the treatment of Aboriginal people as a ‘blemish’ (or ‘flaw in the perfection of’)42 ‘the overall story of great Australian achievement’ minimises or trivialises the significance of what happened to Aboriginal people in colonisation as opposed to what happened to white people in colonisation. This description also works to show an utter lack of empathy for or identification with experiences of harm or suffering as a result of colonisation broadly or separation more specifically. The speech specifically distanced Howard from so-called ‘black armband’ accounts of history. Although Howard advocated ‘acknowledgment’ of the blemishes, he refused moral accountability which he characterised as ‘guilt’ or ‘blame’. As moral philosopher Raimond Gaita remarked, white Australians should not be surprised if Aboriginal Australians interpreted the Prime Minister’s view of Australian history ‘as merely the further expression of the fact that they have always been, and continue to be, only partially perceptible to the moral faculties of most Australians’ (emphasis added).43

Racism and moral community

Historically, the judgment that wrongs to Aboriginal people are relatively insignificant has been justified or legitimated on the basis of racial difference – a key logic underwriting the injustices of colonialism. Through the operations of racist exclusion, Aboriginal people have been denied moral community with white people. In Racist Culture, philosopher David Theo Goldberg argues that within modern European cultures ‘the concept of race has served, and silently continues to serve, as a boundary constraint upon the applicability of moral principle’.44 Race, he continues, ‘constitut[es] racial others outside the scope of morality’.45 Thus, a white person committing a wrong (for example murder or rape) against an Aboriginal person was judged differently from an Aboriginal person committing the same wrong against a white person. The white person was only negligibly accountable; the Aboriginal person was hyper-accountable – whole tribes of Aboriginals were put to death for the killing of one white man.46

41 The Australian, Tuesday 27 May 1997, p. 4, edited text of Mr Howard’s speech.
45 Goldberg, Racist Culture, p. 35.
46 For an detailed account of massacre of Aboriginal people in southeastern Australia see Ian Clark, Scars in the Landscape: A Register of Massacre Sites in Western Victoria 1803–1859, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1995; note also the continuing debate on historian Keith Windschuttle’s assertion that Aboriginal massacres are a fabrication of black armband historians. See Raymond
As a corollary to this, white people believed (or said they believed) that Aboriginal people, as 'savages', did not experience harm or wrong with the same depth of feeling as 'civilised' whites. Whites believed that the murder of family members would not have the same effects on Aboriginal people as it did on whites. Taking away an Aboriginal child from her mother would not have the same effect on either the Aboriginal child or mother as it would have on a white child or mother. Aboriginal people were not perceived to cherish, love and grieve in the same way that whites did. As moral philosopher Raimond Gaita puts it:

Racism of the kind connected with skin colour is best characterised as an incapacity on the part of racists to see that anything could go deep in the lives of their victims. For such racists, it is literally unintelligible that parenthood or sexuality, for example, could mean to ‘them’ — the victims of racial denigration — what it does to ‘us’...  

Western Australian Aborigines Protector James Isdell in the early 1900s gives us a disturbingly forthright example of the view that Aboriginal mothers did not grieve for or even remember their children with the same depth as European mothers. He said:

I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.  

Thus, white people are permitted to do things to Aboriginal people that would be defined as ‘wrong’ if done to white people; white people are invited to believe that Aboriginal people do not experience the wrong as harm with the same depth of feeling as that of whites; and white people are not morally accountable for wrongs committed against Aboriginal people in the same way that they are morally accountable for wrongs committed against other whites.

This is not to say that race is the only factor in differential constructions of moral accountability. Class, gender, age, religion, ethnic group, incarceration as a result of psychiatric or criminal adjudications, and sexuality are all factors, on their own or in combination with race and with each other, that determine differential social constructions of moral community and accountability. It is also not to say that all white people take up the invitation to exclude Aboriginal people from moral community. The historical record, however, indicates that a good many have and continue to do so.

A comparison of the response to the 1996 Port Arthur murders with the response to Bringing Them Home demonstrates how Aboriginal people continue to be excluded


from moral community with ‘White’ Australia. In April 1996, the massacre at Port Arthur, Tasmania was widely described in the media as the ‘worst mass murder in Australian history’. Prime Minister Howard introduced a bill to the House of Representatives two days later expressing shock, extending sympathy, urging cooperative response. He said:

It is impossible not to feel a sense of great emotion about something such as this. There can be few things in life more innocent than a pleasant Sunday afternoon in a remote, isolated area of this country. To think that violence of this magnitude could be visited upon such innocent behaviour…is something quite shocking in its dimension...

Most of all I extend the deep sympathy of the government and of all Australians to those countless people, both here and around the world, who have been left bereaved by this event.

Or the MP for Lyons (Tasmania), Mr Adams:

Nothing could have prepared our community for such an event. Tasmania is a quiet, peaceful and picturesque island and its population, along with thousands of tourists, spend a lot of time enjoying the history and the ambience of our heritage places on weekends and holidays.

These representations of the Port Arthur killings foreground the moral reprehensibility of murderous attacks on innocent tourists. But they erase the history of Aboriginal massacre that disrupted the equally innocent lives of Aboriginal people enjoying a pleasant afternoon on the quiet, peaceful and picturesque island of Tasmania before the coming of white convicts and their keepers. It is not that the Port Arthur shootings were not horrific; they were. But they were by no means unique in the Tasmanian history that Port Arthur tourists ‘enjoyed’. What was unique, however, was that the victims were white people. These representations refuse (or forget) to locate the killing of Aboriginal people within the same moral framework as the killing of white people. They fail to recognise that Aboriginal people were also innocent, law abiding people going about daily lives that were suddenly and horrifically disrupted by the incomprehensible and lawless behaviour of white strangers. Such representations fail to fully include Aboriginal people within what Benedict Anderson calls the ‘imaginary community’ of the Australian nation.

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49 See also Anne Pattel-Gray’s comparison of John Howard’s response to the apology offered by Japan’s Prime Minister for the Japanese atrocities during WWII and his own failure to apologise to Australian Indigenous people. Anne Pattel-Gray, ‘The hard truth: white secrets, black realities’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 30, 1999, p. 264.
51 Hansard, 30 April 1996, p. 27.
Negotiating moral community: *Bringing Them Home* in an international context

Although the examples discussed above indicate a continuing failure to fully recognise the wrongs endured by Aboriginal Australians, Australia is nevertheless part of a growing international trend in negotiating and making/accepting restitution for histories of gross injustice. Critic Gillian Whitlock argues that the report on the Stolen Generations testimonies emerged just months after the Report of the Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples was released in Canada and during the time when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was hearing evidence in South Africa. In *The Guilt of Nations*, cultural theorist Elazar Barkan explores a global trend in restitution for historical injustices. He undertakes a comparative analysis of a number of case studies of restitution negotiation, both successful and unsuccessful. The analysis includes German and (more recently) Swiss reparations to the Jews; the United States, Australian and New Zealand negotiations with Indigenous peoples; the US government apology and reparation to Japanese Americans interned during WWII; Japan’s struggle with acknowledgment of the harms inflicted on ‘comfort women’ during WWII; the US acknowledgment of but failure to negotiate reparations for the enslavement of African-Americans. The chapter on Australia, includes the Stolen Generations, native title, the return of artefacts and remains and the control of intellectual property, as sites of restitution negotiation with Indigenous Australians.

Barkan’s argument is that since WWII, the concept of restitution has changed from a payment imposed by the victors upon the losers (as in the aftermath of WWI) to a negotiated settlement initiated by victims in structurally subordinate political locations on the basis of shared moral values. Barkan notes that one of the most striking features of these negotiations is the willingness of perpetrators (or their descendants) to engage in restitution and reconciliation dialogue with victims (or their descendants). He theorises that as historical narratives become increasingly democratised, history ‘from below’ has exposed the victors to a view of themselves that includes ‘immoral acts, suffering, and oppression’ – perceptions that sit uncomfortably with identities constructed within modern liberal democratic frameworks.

African-American author bell hooks makes a similar point in her analysis of white subjectivity in the US context. She argues that white Americans mostly believe themselves to be good, honest, decent people. They therefore imagine that African-Americans also see and represent white Americans in the same way and are surprised or shocked to discover that black Americans experience and represent

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whiteness as sites of terror, torture and power.\textsuperscript{57} Similarly, Aboriginal representations of ordinary suburban Australians as a presence in Aboriginal lives that terrorises, wounds, hurts and tortures, surprises or shocks many white Australians. As Australian historian Tim Rowse remarked of separation narratives, for non-Aboriginals: ‘It requires some effort to see the “normal” non-Aboriginal family as the consummate site of Aboriginal confinement’.\textsuperscript{58}

Once such counter-representations gain broad circulation and acceptance, Barkan argues, perpetrators ‘hope to purge their own history of guilt and legitimize their current position’ through a negotiated construction of a shared history and, I would argue, a shared moral community in which both groups acknowledge the other’s worth as human beings.

The novelty of the urge to amend past injustices is that it addresses history through an effort to build an interpretation of the past that both parties can share... This interaction between perpetrator and victim is a new form of political negotiation that enables the rewriting of memory and historical identity in ways that both can share... [It is] the recognition by both winner and loser of their intertwined histories and equal worth as human beings.\textsuperscript{59}

In effect, the process Barkan describes is a negotiated construction of imagined community that includes both winners and losers with a common narrative that acknowledges and respects the histories of both groups. The representation of history and acknowledgment of the victims’ history, including apology, on the part of the perpetrator is a significant aspect of the negotiated exchange.

An apology doesn’t mean the dispute is resolved, but it is in most cases a first step, part of the process of negotiation but not the satisfactory end result... At the very minimum these apologies lead to a reformulated historical understanding that itself is a form of restitution and become a factor in contemporary politics and humanitarian actions.\textsuperscript{60}

Barkan points out, however, that the desire for moral atonement is balanced by pragmatic concerns and, in historical contexts where the moral benefit to the dominant party does not outweigh other costs, such negotiations will stall or fail. The discussion of restitution for slavery in the United States has not progressed beyond initial conversations and representations. The case for restitution for slavery fails because it is too hard, too complex, involves too many people, would involve a colossal sum of money and has limited support among both perpetrators and

\textsuperscript{59} Barkan, \textit{Guilt of Nations}, p. 321.
\textsuperscript{60} Barkan, \textit{Guilt of Nations}, p. xxix.
victims despite unanimous recognition that slavery was morally wrong. The case for restitution to 'comfort women' has so far failed to be resolved because, despite expressions of regret and apology, the Japanese have continued to represent themselves as victims rather than perpetrators in WWII. Furthermore, although estimates of the numbers of women involved are in the tens of thousands, the social costs for many victims of coming forward with their 'stories' are too high.

In all of these contexts, however, the articulation, circulation and reception of the histories of the victims is a critical condition of possibility of restitution negotiation. Negotiations between victims and perpetrators, Barkan argues, are shaped in part by the stories each group is able to persuade the international public is a reliable narrative.

In each of the case studies he undertakes, Barkan traces how the movement for recognition of injustice gained momentum both within the victims' group and within the wider society. Effectively he traces the emergence of subordinate discourse into mainstream discourse through personal narratives, journalistic reports, commissions of inquiry, parliamentary or congressional debate, etc. – that is, through a series of fragmented and discontinuous conversations between the two parties in a variety of discursive locations. As philosopher Michel Foucault has shown us, each discursive location constrains who can speak, what can and cannot be said, how it may be publicised or circulated, its authority, the truth effects and power effects of speaking, and the subjectivities of the participating interlocutors as well as those of observers in the case of public or published accounts.

**Bringing Them Home as a discursive site of moral negotiation**

It is no accident that *Bringing Them Home* has brought the issue of wrongs committed against Aboriginal people to the national agenda and attracted international attention. To rephrase a remark by critic Gillian Whitlock, there are 'specific postcolonial conditions of production and reception' that explain the success of *Bringing Them Home* 'here and now'. This report sits at the convergence of a number of historical processes, including the larger international negotiation processes explored by Barkan. Significantly, the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, was the first Australian inquiry – the first official discursive context – in which Aboriginal people participated as officials. Two of the three human rights commissioners hearing testimony in each jurisdiction were Aboriginal. Additionally, the Inquiry received advice throughout its existence from an

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61 Barkan, Guilt of Nations, Ch. 12.
62 Barkan, Guilt of Nations, Ch. 3.
63 Barkan, Guilt of Nations, p. 333.
65 Gillian Whitlock, Second person, p. 208.
One significant outcome of this, is that the Inquiry made the decision to focus the Inquiry’s work on providing a safe forum for Aboriginal people to speak their stories, as opposed to a forum where predominantly white officials, experts and lawyers dominate proceedings and dominate discursive production. Similarly, the report specifically sought to represent the witnesses testimony verbatim for the historical record. As critic John Frow argues, through its strategy of listening to and reporting the testimony of the witnesses the Commission ‘attempted an enactment of discursive justice’. 67

Second, the Inquiry was located within the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission of the Commonwealth government. It drew on and cited an international discourse of fundamental human rights which included international conventions against genocide, racism, children and Indigenous peoples – all conventions that Australia was a party to, all conventions that aim to protect people from abuses by their governments. 68 Related to this is the Commission’s process as a quasi-judicial body that takes testimony in ways modelled on that of courts and makes findings of truth. Thus the report derived significant authority from its location within an international human rights and legal discursive framework.

Third, the Inquiry was part of the discursive field that centres individual autobiographical accounts, particularly those bearing witness to traumatic events, and more particularly those bearing witness to traumatic experience in childhood. 69 Accounts of survivors of rape, sexual harassment and childhood sexual abuse, as well as popular media productions such as ‘Oprah’, that feature other traumatic autobiographical narratives created a discursive context that made the narratives of separation easily recognisable, understandable and, more cynically, commodifiable. 70 Separation narratives drew on and contributed to a discourse in which the abuse of children by otherwise ‘normal’, respectable adults does not strain the bounds of credibility.

Fourth, and related to the third point, the Inquiry dealt with personal issues with which everyone has some familiarity: ‘home’, families, childhood, loss of children, loss of parents, isolation and vulnerability in childhood, grief. On a more specific
level, on hearing separation narratives, many people realised that they had witnessed or even participated in separation policy unwittingly. The narratives offered explanations or interpretations of events that had been unremarkable at the time of occurrence – the Aboriginal children from the orphanage who played in the hockey competitions, the Aboriginal girl adopted or fostered by the white families down the block, the one Aboriginal boy in a white school who everyone picked on, the succession of black maids who worked for Aunt Katherine. For some it explained family secrets and family stories, and raised questions about family genealogies. The possible multiple meanings of the title of the report underline its potential relevance to the personal lives of many Australians: bringing the children back to their Aboriginal homes, but also how the children were brought to and treated by non-Aboriginal homes or Homes. Significantly, because most urban non-Aboriginal Australians do not meet Aboriginal people in the course of their daily lives and do not have Aboriginal friends, these narratives may have been the first ‘personal’, albeit mediated, contact with Aboriginal people. So in a sense, the report also brought Aboriginal people and Aboriginal history into the homes of non-Aboriginal people.

*Bringing Them Home* has affected the way many non-Indigenous Australians narrate the history of ‘settlement’, conceive of Aboriginal–white relations and understand their own location within Australia’s past and present. As literary critic Jo Robertson has argued in her reading of Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, separation narratives force non-Aboriginals ‘to reconstruct and to rewrite their own autobiography in the light of what the text makes them realise about themselves’. 71 Similarly, author Drusilla Modjeska found herself unable to address a 1997 literary awards dinner without acknowledging the profound effect of *Bringing Them Home* on her ‘reality’: ‘I am sure I am not the only one to have had the sensation of waking up to find myself in an Australia I barely recognise. Or, rather, more to the point, in an Australia I would rather not recognise’. 72 *Bringing Them Home*’s success at moral persuasion is evident in the thousands of signatures in Sorry Books, participation in Sorry Day commemorations and the support of the Corroboree 2000 march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The convergence of historical factors, I think, positioned *Bringing Them Home* uniquely as a site of pressing the claim of moral accountability and demanding a recognition of the structures of injustice, both the macro-level institutional and legislative injustices and the micro-level everyday life injustices. It was able, in Barkan’s formulation, to make a case both domestically and internationally that the narratives of injustice articulated by the victims of separation policies and practices were credible and required at least the consideration of moral redress.

72 Cited in Whitlock, *In the second person*. 
It is within the post-\textit{Bringing Them Home} discursive context that it now makes sense to look back at the discursive contexts in which first-person accounts of separation were articulated before 1997. As Penny van Toorn acknowledges, these accounts paved the way for mainstream recognition and acceptance of the Inquiry.\footnote{van Toorn, \textit{Tactical history}, p. 260.}

We can explore questions such as: Who spoke? Who listened? What discursive frameworks were available to enable these conversations and negotiations to take place? How did Aboriginal autobiographers frame their experiences? How did they argue the case against injustice? What effects did non-Aboriginal interlocutors, editors and publishers have on Aboriginal separation discourse? Would the autobiographers have located themselves within what we might now call a category of ‘separation autobiographies’?

\textbf{Race and racism}

Race, as it intersects with class, gender and age, is a primary analytical category of this thesis. Throughout this chapter I have referred to groups of persons using racial descriptors. I located myself in the Australian context on the basis of race. My account of the conflict of the refuge stated that the Aboriginal women referred to the white women as ‘racist’. I have discussed race as moral boundary which legitimates differential moral accountability and thereby underwrites and legitimises structures of injustice and the perpetration of wrongs against Aboriginal people. It is a matter of scholarly debate precisely when race became ‘all’ to quote Benjamin Disraeli’s memorable phrase,\footnote{In the mid-nineteenth century, Conservative politician Benjamin Disraeli declared that ‘race is all’ (cited in Goldberg, \textit{Racist Culture}, p. 6).} but there is no doubt that with nearly 300 years of colonisation and 200 years of slavery under their belts, Europeans thought themselves and their civilisation superior to the variously coloured peoples they had subjugated by 1788 and viewed Aboriginal people as inferior racial others.\footnote{See Goldberg, \textit{Racist Culture}; and the prologue of Russell McGregor, \textit{Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939}, Melbourne University Press, 1997 for a discussion of how First Fleet officers represented New South Wales Aboriginals.}

For Aboriginal people, however, race (as opposed to racism) has not necessarily been a key organising principle of social relations. Bain Attwood, among others, has pointed out that before 1788 there were no ‘Aboriginal’ people,\footnote{Bain Attwood, \textit{The Making of the Aborigines}, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989.} but rather 200 plus particular language and kin groups.\footnote{Anthropologist Norman Tindale’s book and map, \textit{Aboriginal Tribes of Australia}, identified some 250 distinct language groups, see \url{www.foundingdocs.gov.au/places/index.htm} (August 2001) for a reproduction of Tindale’s map; Norman Tindale, \textit{Aboriginal Tribes of Australia: Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits, and Proper Names}, ANU Press, Canberra, 1974.} The notion of Aboriginality emerged in the context of colonial relations where Indigenous peoples were identified under the sign of ‘natives’ or ‘Aborigines’. But, unlike the terms ‘indigenous’ and ‘aboriginal’ which have been adopted, capitalised and otherwise transformed by Australia’s first peoples into terms of positive self-identification, race has only sometimes and in some contexts become a source of Aboriginal self-identification.
Although Aboriginal people do refer to themselves as ‘blacks’ or ‘blackfellas’, slogans like ‘black power’ and ‘black is beautiful’ have gained little currency here. This is in marked contrast to the US historical context where African-Americans define themselves specifically and explicitly as a racial group, as ‘black’ people and see race as a positive organising principle as well as the principle on which racism is founded.

In centring racism as a category of analysis in this thesis, it is with the explicit intention of foregrounding race a discursive tool of European colonising projects. In foregrounding race, I also foreground the discursive and historical terrain that, as an African-American, I share with Aboriginal Australians. That is, what is most familiar to me in what is going on here is that the racism I observe and experience here has many similarities with the racism I experience there. I acknowledge, however, that race most definitely is not everything for Indigenous Australians and that the oppressions arising from their dispossession as Indigenous people, the significance of appropriation of land, the effects of continuing live to within a country that used be Indigenous controlled but is now controlled by invaders is radically different from the enslavement to which my people have been subjected. Whereas here colonisation occurs at the intersection of racism towards black peoples and occupation of Indigenous lands, in the United States there are separate but interrelated histories of racism towards black peoples and ‘red’ Indigenous peoples.

Theorising race

Race, I understand to be a socially constructed historical category that has no natural referent; nevertheless as a social fact (in the Durkheimian sense), it is ‘real’ in its effects. Variously referred to as ‘the native race’, a ‘savage race’, a ‘childlike race’, a ‘dying race’, in comparison to whites, Aboriginals have been constructed as a lesser, worse, inferior or subordinate race. In Australian Race Relations, historian Andrew Markus describes the logic of racial categorisation in terms of a list of superior/inferior binary oppositions.

1. white/Aboriginal
2. human/subhuman, animal
3. civilised/barbarian, savage
4. rational/instinctive, emotional
5. clean/polluted, dirty
6. believer/unbeliever, heathen
7. adult/child
8. man/woman.

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79 Markus, Australian Race Relations, p. 7.
And, I would add, future/past.

The adult, white, bourgeois, (heterosexual), male is the central point of reference for all of these oppositions; and it is in relation to him that all others are defined. Also centred, on the negative side of the opposition, is the adult Aboriginal man who, in relation to the white man is located as feminine and/or childlike. Significantly for the analysis of separation discourse, within this framework a person who is both adult and Aboriginal is conceptually impossible.

While the logic of binary opposition structures direct comparison of Aboriginal–white racial difference, at the same time European Enlightenment discourse understood racial difference as a continuum progressing from savagery to civilisation, with the corollary that peoples in a state of ‘nature’ or ‘savagery’ could be elevated towards ‘civilisation’. Although this view was superseded by the social Darwinist notion of the survival of the fittest which predicted and justified the ‘passing’ of ‘the aborigine’, the notion that the British should supervise and tutor the subject races of colonies also persisted. The 1937 British parliament’s Select Committee on Aborigines expressed the civilising mission as follows:

> It is not to be doubted that this country has been invested with wealth and power, with arts and knowledge, with the sway of distant lands and the mastery of restless waters for some great purpose in the government of the world. Can we suppose otherwise that it is our office to carry civilization and humanity, peace and good government, and above all the knowledge of the true God, to the uttermost ends of the earth?

In this extract the signifiers of the superiority of British civilisation are its wealth, power, arts and knowledge. The attributes of civilisation, however, that the Committee desires to carry to the uttermost ends of the earth are humanity, peace, good government and the Christian religion. As in the extract of bell hooks quoted in chapter 1, whiteness is imagined as benevolence. The extract describes the British as (passively) ‘invested’ with wealth, power and colonial dominions—a representation that erases the violent seizure of land and bodies that underpinned Britain’s colonial enterprise.

In the readings of Aboriginal autobiography that follow, all of the authors use racial terminology as descriptors of the people who inhabit their representations and deploy race as an explanatory framework for making sense of their experiences. I argue that in different ways and from within different discursive locations each of the authors seeks to challenge the white supremacy that shaped their lives. Furthermore, central to their arguments is the subversion of the binary opposition

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80 McGregor, Imagined Destinies, p. 3.
82 Goldberg, Racist Culture, p. 35.
civilised/savage. This is a long-standing discursive battle with fragments of previous discursive skirmishes remaining from the late 1920s.

In 1927, for example, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) sent a petition to the New South Wales premier containing a number of demands: the dissolution of the Aborigines Protection Board, a ‘share’ of ‘our country’, self-management and an end to the ‘invasion’ of Aboriginal families. Not surprisingly, the Board refused these demands, declaring the petition’s proposals ‘impracticable’. Aboriginal activist and AAPA founder Fred Maynard attacked the Board’s response, denouncing its underlying premise of white superiority.

I wish to make it perfectly clear on behalf of our people, that we accept no condition of inferiority as compared with European people. Two distinct civilizations are represented by the respective races... That the European people by the arts of war destroyed our more ancient civilization is freely admitted, and that by their vices and diseases our people have been decimated is also patent, but neither of these facts are evidence of superiority. Quite the contrary is the case. 84

Maynard’s analysis explicitly challenges prevailing European views of the ‘respective races’. He refuses to accept European technology as evidence of superior civilisation and demands recognition of Aboriginal civilisation. Moreover, he questions whether Europeans are, in fact, entitled to call themselves civilised by drawing attention to their spreading of ‘vice and diseases’ (turning the usual description of Aboriginals as the source of vice and disease on its head), and questioning whether conquering a people with inferior military technology should be a sign of civilisation.

In the analysis that follows, I centre the savage/civilised binary as an underlying logic of racism that each autobiography challenges according to the discursive tools available to that author. I argue that personal testimonies bearing witness to the lived experience of separation undermine the savage/civilised opposition through representations of Aboriginal subjects with complex human interiority and otherwise respectable white subjects engaged in brutal behaviour towards Aboriginal children. This is not to say that the narratives represent all Aboriginal people as ‘good’ and all whites as ‘bad’. To the contrary, the narratives represent both Aboriginals and whites displaying a wide range of human behaviours that, nevertheless, challenge the notion that by virtue of being white and respectable people were also ‘civilised’.

Racial terminology

Last but not least is the vexed question of racial terminology. It is inevitable that a study dealing with the history of a racialised discourse is going to use problematic terminology. In this work the primary terminological pair is white/Aboriginal.

84 Fred Maynard cited in Goodall, Invasion to Embassy, p. 164.
Since the thesis focuses on New South Wales Indigenous people, I use the term Aboriginal/s. In some cases, however, it is appropriate to include both mainland Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. In this case I use the term Indigenous. White refers to all people of European descent regardless of ethnic background (as opposed to people from Europe which includes various black and Asian peoples). Although the British took the lead throughout the British empire in locating themselves at the top of the racial hierarchy and, in the Australian context excluded other ‘darker’ southern Europeans, nevertheless the notion that Europeans or white people were superior to non-white people was pan-European. Thus when referring to the wider culture of Australian white people, I use the terms European or British as appropriate. At times however, I use the term non-Aboriginal or non-Indigenous to be inclusive of non-white non-Indigenous people. I use ‘black’ in opposition to white to refer to the wider group of black peoples – Aboriginals, Melanesians, Africans and people who are part of the African diaspora as a result of European trade in African slaves. All of this terminology is problematic and inevitably tends to confuse the structures of racial location with the individuals whose lives are shaped by racialised opportunities and exclusions.

In the Australian colonial context the racial continuum has a subcontinuum represented in the vocabulary of ‘caste’ – a hierarchical typology which correlates body colour, genealogical heritage figured in terms of ‘blood’ and level of or propensity towards civilisation. Ranging from the ‘pure’ Aboriginal (‘full-blood) at the bottom, through various precisely defined ‘admixtures’ (‘half-caste’, ‘quarter-caste’ or ‘quadroon’, ‘eighth-caste’ or ‘octrooian’) to the pure European at the top of the hierarchy. The terminology itself figures caste as a progression towards greater whiteness and marks the remaining degree of racial ‘impurity’. Although purporting to be a scientific genealogical taxonomy that charted the Aboriginality of an individual’s ancestors (half = parents, quarter = grandparents, eighth = great grandparents), in practice determinations of caste were made on the basis of skin colour (hence the terms ‘lighter caste’ and ‘nearly white’). Siblings with identical racial genealogy were classified in different castes.

Caste terminology proliferates in official texts up to the 1970s and it is impossible to analyse this literature without this offensive vocabulary. I use these terms when necessary within quotation marks. I use the term ‘of mixed descent’ if I need to specify an Aboriginal person’s ancestry.

Outline of the thesis

As I stated towards the beginning of this introduction, this thesis is a case study of five texts that comprise autobiographical accounts of separation in New South Wales. The aim of the analysis is to explore Aboriginal representations of separation across time and in a variety of discursive contexts, focusing on the particular ways separation is represented as a moral wrong. The autobiographical accounts I explore recount separations that occurred between 1917 and the 1980s.
The accounts were articulated between 1969 and 1996, and published between 1977 and 1996.

Chapters two and three provide theoretical and historical contextualisation. In chapter two I locate the articulation of separation autobiographies within a larger context of Aboriginal writing and counterdiscourse that emerged in the 1970s. Here I also explore the form of first-person autobiographical or testimonial account and look at the implications of this form for readers. Lastly, this chapter surveys the critical literature on Aboriginal separation autobiography thus locating this thesis within an academic context. Chapter three aims to provide historical contextualisation of the development of official discourse, policy and practice of separation in New South Wales up to the passing of the 1915 amendment of the *Aborigines Protection Act*. This amendment extended the powers of the Aborigines Protection Board over Aboriginal children significantly beyond the power of the State Children’s Relief Board vis-à-vis white children. Both Margaret Tucker (*If Everyone Cared*) and Jimmie Barker (*The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*) were separated from their families within a few years of the passage of this amendment.

The next three chapters examine texts that comprise the autobiographical narratives of a single author. Chapter four looks at *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*. It explores a representation of separation that is centred in the masculine world of rural work and that came into being through negotiation with an interlocutor and editor located in the discursive context of anthropology. Chapter five looks at Margaret Tucker’s *If Everyone Cared*, which represents the specifically gendered separation of Aboriginal girls who were sent first to the Cootamundra Home and then to domestic service in suburban Sydney. Margaret Tucker’s narrative is partly shaped by her participation in the Moral Re-Armament movement as well as the arguments being developed in the mid-1970s in support of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. Chapter six turns to Monica Clare’s *Karobran* which is the only fictional text I consider in the thesis. A significant section of the analysis examines the editorial framing of the novel as autobiography rather than fiction, and the implications of this for the authority of the text. Clare was among the first authors to represent separation as ‘losing’ and ‘finding’ an identity as Aboriginal. In retrospect, *Karobran* is the first ‘coming home’ narratives.

Chapters seven and eight look at two edited collections from the Link-Up (NSW) community. Chapter seven considers *The Lost Children*. It emerged in the midst of debate on the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in New South Wales and was grounded in an analysis of the emotional and psychological requirements of children, and the failure of white people to provide these to Aboriginal children. *The Lost Children* was compiled by two editors, oral historian Peter Read and Stolen Generations activist Coral Edwards, both co-founders of Link-Up. Chapter 8 looks at the second Link-Up collection, *In the Best Interest of the Child*. This collection emerged in response to the National Inquiry and, in keeping with the quasi-judicial context of the Inquiry, deploys the discourse of human rights,
genocide and trauma to argue a case against separation. As in the other texts, I look at the influence on the text of non-Aboriginal interlocutors and editors – in this case myself. This chapter concludes the thesis with some personal reflections on the process of working with Aboriginal authors to create texts for broader publication and distribution and it raises questions that emerge from comparisons of separation with the Holocaust.
‘I would swear white editorial intervention had desecrated the text’: critical considerations for reading Stolen Generations narratives

In the previous chapter I argued that Bringing Them Home emerged at the intersection of a number of larger discursive formations that enabled its widespread effects on the Australian public. I suggested that in the wake of Bringing Them Home one can now look back at the report’s genealogical antecedents, that is at texts that previously were categorised as ‘Aboriginal autobiography’ or ‘Aboriginal women’s autobiography’ but can now be drawn together as ‘separation autobiography’. Further, I suggested that we might now explore the specific and historically contingent discursive contexts in which earlier separation autobiographical accounts were enunciated and published. The aim of this chapter is to locate the analysis of separation autobiographical narratives undertaken in this thesis within the larger context of critical approaches to Aboriginal autobiography. First, I sketch a brief overview of the history of published Aboriginal writing. Second, I consider the issue of text as testimony and narrator as witness. Third, I look at the problems of subversion and recuperation in relation to the discursive context of production, publication and commodification.

Aboriginal writing since the 1960s

The history of Aboriginal autobiography circulating as ‘autobiography’ is quite short. Until the 1960s, Aboriginal Australians were positioned as objects of academic, official and artistic scrutiny. Dominant culture experts descended on Aboriginal communities, inspected their homes, observed their behaviour, shot photographs and films, interrogated informants, made audio tapes, collected artefacts and then produced accounts which purported to tell the truth of Aboriginal life and experience. Similarly, Aboriginal lives were under intensive scrutiny by the various police and welfare workers who populated Aboriginal administrations and recorded extensive individual dossiers.¹ The 22,000 case files created by the

¹ Elliot Johnston, QC, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report, AGPS, Canberra, 1991. In the introduction to the report, Johnston said: ‘Aboriginal people have a unique history of being ordered, controlled and monitored by the State. For each individual there are files maintained by agents of the State; schools, community welfare, probation and parole and, finally, coroners’ files document each life to a degree that few non-Aboriginal peoples would be recorded’, p. xv.
Aborigines Protection Board (held by State Archives New South Wales) and the 250,000 names in the Commonwealth records indexed by the National Archives of Australia’s Bringing Them Home indexing project attest to the diligence of this surveillance.²

These non-Indigenous accounts were authenticated as knowledge in the discursive contexts in which their authors operated and, in the Foucauldian sense, were part of the knowledge/power nexus in which Aboriginal people have negotiated their lives as subjects of colonialism.³ Although researchers, primarily anthropologists, collected numerous autobiographical accounts from Aboriginal informants, for the most part these accounts were refined into what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls ‘thin description’ – that is highly theorised analyses of Aboriginal societies that were abstracted from the ‘thick descriptions’ informants produced about their own lives.⁴ From the mid-1970s, oral historians began to research in Aboriginal communities producing histories that were more transparent in their use of Aboriginal accounts and included extensive extracts.⁵

This is not to say, however, that Aboriginal people were passive and had no effects on the production of academic literatures. On the contrary, there is evidence that Aboriginal ‘informants’ have used and continue to use white academics as a means of publishing and publicising their histories and worldviews. Canadian critic Christine Watson, for example, writes that the Aboriginal women she interviewed in researching her PhD thesis were clearly pleased that, through her writing, their words would reach a broad international audience.⁶ Or, as I will discuss more fully in chapter 4, in her introduction to The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker, Janet Mathews writes that she originally approached Jimmie Barker as an informant on Aboriginal language, but that he subsequently converted her into the amanuensis of his autobiography.⁷ Not a few of the introductions to Aboriginal autobiography contain stories of how the non-Indigenous editor was recruited, usually on a volunteer basis, to assist with the autobiographical project. Terry Fox, for example, wrote: ‘I felt greatly honoured when Eileen Morgan asked me to help her with her

⁵ Here I am particularly referring to the work of Peter Read and Heather Goodall in New South Wales. Both conducted extensive interviews in New South Wales Aboriginal communities in the late 1970s, both were politically committed to relaying (to use Christine Watson’s term) Aboriginal knowledges to non-Indigenous readers, both made extensive use of quotation. I think it is arguable that Aboriginal informants used Read and Goodall as a means of publicising Aboriginal historical narratives. See: Read, A History of the Wiradjuri; Goodall, A History of Aboriginal Communities.
⁶ Christine Watson, “‘Believe me’: acts of witnessing in Aboriginal women’s autobiographical narratives’, Journal of Australian Studies, no. 64, 2000, p. 150.
⁷ Barker, Two Worlds, p. xi.
book..." In a similar vein, in her Foreword to Della Walker's autobiography, Tina Coutts described herself as 'the pen in her hand'. As critic Penny van Toorn points out, in respect of viewing capitalism as necessarily a corrupting influence on passive Indigenous people, it is also the case that 'they may in fact be availing themselves of new opportunities to perpetuate their cultural traditions, strengthen their social institutions, preserve and disseminate their historical knowledge, and further their political agendas'.

Nevertheless, the circulation of Aboriginal writing under Aboriginal authorship got off to a slow start in the Depression years. David Unaipon is generally credited with being the first published Aboriginal writer, although Aboriginal journalism was published continually from the 1880s through to the present. Unaipon's mythological stories, political analyses and autobiography were published between 1929 and 1945. The publication of other Aboriginal writing for mainstream readership, however, did not gain momentum until the 1960s with the publication of the first collection of poetry, *We Are Going* by Kath Walker/Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1964); the first novel, *Wildcat Falling* by Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo (1965); and the first performance of a play, *The Cherry Pickers* by Kevin Gilbert (1971).

As the mainstream appetite and market for Aboriginal writing grew, the number of Aboriginal publications increased exponentially during the 1970s, with autobiographies comprising a significant proportion of these works. Three of the works considered here, Margaret Tucker's *If Everyone Cared*, Jimmie Barker's *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* and Monica Clare's *Karobran* were published in the 1977-78 period. The increased activity of the Commonwealth government in Aboriginal affairs from 1972 had a significant positive effect on Aboriginal writing, particularly the creation of the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1973 to provide Commonwealth funding to Aboriginal artists. The First Aboriginal Writers

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11 See Michael Rose (ed.), *For the Record: 160 years of Aboriginal Print Journalism*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996, for history, discussion and republication of Aboriginal journalism from the 1830s.
13 Shoemaker, *Black Words*.
conference was held in Perth in 1983, its proceedings published as *Aboriginal Writing Today* (1985).\(^{15}\)

The 1980s saw the publishing of Aboriginal writing greatly expand and the founding of two Aboriginal publishers, Black Books in Sydney (1986) and Magabala Books in Broome (1988).\(^{16}\) Also in the 1980s, critics of Aboriginal writing began to generate articles and monographs. The first book-length treatment was Adam Shoemaker’s *Black Words, White Page* in 1989, closely followed by Mudrooroo’s *Writing from the Fringe* in 1990.\(^{17}\) Feminist critic Joy Hooton’s 1990 book, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women*, included a chapter on Aboriginal women’s autobiography.\(^{18}\) Aboriginal autobiographical writing began to emerge in new collaborative and collective forms in the 1980s such as Rita and Jackie Huggins (*Auntie Rita*), Shirley Smith and Bobbi Sykes (*Mum Shirl*), and Patsy Cohen and Margaret Somerville (*Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*).\(^{19}\) The Link-Up (NSW) community published its first collection of narratives of separation, *The Lost Children*, in 1989.

By the end of the 1990s, the number of Aboriginal books in print was in the hundreds, including a significant number of publications emerging from community-based projects.\(^{20}\) The first National Indigenous Women Writer’s conference took place in Brisbane in 1993, from which emerged a ‘Tiddas Manifesto’.\(^{21}\) Aboriginal women have accounted for the majority of published autobiographical accounts and these, in turn, have attracted the attention of feminist critics.\(^{22}\) Sally Morgan’s autobiographical narrative, *My Place* (1987), is probably

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the best known, most widely read and harshly criticised text written by an Aboriginal author.23

Despite this significant expansion in Aboriginal publication from 1964, as Bruce McGuiness pointed out at the First Aboriginal Writers Conference, these publications are only the tip of the iceberg of Aboriginal thinking as recorded in writing – most Aboriginal writing has been produced in the context of government employment and lies buried in government files and archives.24

‘Tellin’ it straight’: referentiality, credibility and the author as witness

Critical attention to Aboriginal literature, including Aboriginal autobiography, has consistently drawn attention to the engagement of Aboriginal authors with political, historical and social concerns as manifest in the historical realism and referentiality of representation. Adam Shoemaker, for example, argued that Aboriginal creative writing was highly realistic and overtly historical and political.25 He elaborated that Aboriginal creative writing demonstrates a number of political aims including: writing an Aboriginal history that will correct the inaccuracies of white histories; enabling Aboriginal pride by telling the stories of resistance and the heroic actions of Aboriginal men and women; holding up a mirror to Europeans to see their


25 Shoemaker, Black Words, p. 132.
violence, brutality and authoritarianism; celebrating Aboriginal survival; and portraying Aboriginal life realistically.26

Aboriginal critic, Mudrooroo argued that Aboriginal authors ‘have a White Australian readership firmly in mind when they write, and it is their aim to get across to as many people as possible the Aboriginal predicament in Australia’.27 Robert Ariss, looking at Aboriginal writing as discourse, makes the same point: ‘Aboriginal discourse firstly locates its identity in its historicity. Its discursive task is to deconstruct European representations and to re-present Australian history as Aboriginal history, history from the perspective of the oppressed’.28 Joy Hooton begins her analysis of Aboriginal women’s autobiographical narratives of childhood with an invocation of WEH Stanner’s reference to Australian history as a ‘cult of forgetfulness’ and his call for what she characterises as ‘a different kind of history, based on the experiences of Aboriginal people’. She then argues that:

No document has a greater chance of challenging the cult of forgetfulness than a black woman’s autobiography.29

Aboriginal authors also support the critical assessment of Aboriginal writing as historical truth. Activist and academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson, for example, relies on autobiographical writing to construct a history of Aboriginal women in a chapter titled ‘Tellin’ it straight: self-presentation within Indigenous women’s life writings’.30

Autobiography: witnessing and testimonio

Thinking about Aboriginal autobiography as history, foregrounds the specific location of the author/narrator as an eyewitness to history. Emmanuel Nelson, for example, argued that Aboriginal autobiographies serve as moral statements by bearing witness to the truths of individual lives. Moreover, their documentary nature and ethnographic realism also enable them to serve as versions of oppositional history, for autobiographies are not only recorded recollections, but are also ‘modes of interrogating history’.31

26 Shoemaker, Black Words, pp. 128, 129, 137, 139, 196, 246; see also Chris Weedon, Culture, Race and Identity.
30 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000, chapter 1.
Looking specifically at separation autobiographies, Christine Watson argued that the autobiographical form enables the author to take the position of a witness, that is, to make the ‘claim of personal involvement as the basis for the authority which justifies both the telling of the narrative and the legitimisation of the content.’ 32

Some Aboriginal autobiographers make declarations at the outset of their narratives that position themselves as witnesses. Ruby Langford, for example, begins her autobiography, Don’t Take Your Love to Town, with: ‘I started this book on 23 May 1984. It is a true life story of an Aboriginal woman’s struggle to raise a family of nine children in a society divided between black and white culture in Australia.’ 33 Similarly, Eileen Morgan begins The Calling of the Spirits as if putting herself under oath: ‘I am Eileen May Morgan and this is the story of my family and the culture of the Aboriginal people at Wallaga Lake where I grew up’. 34 Critic Rosanne Kennedy remarks that Sally Morgan’s grandmother, Daisy Corunna also begins her life narrative in My Place by stating her full name as if in court. 35

The location of the author/narrator as witness to the truth of a subjugated history has been most thoroughly explored in the context of the literary genre of testimonio, and more than a few critics have argued that testimonio is a useful analytical tool in readings of Aboriginal autobiography. 36 One of the key texts of the testimonio genre is I Rigoberto Menchú, the autobiography of a Guatemalan Indigenous woman. 37 That the history of the colonial oppression of her people and her own life story bear a striking similarity to the histories and lives of Australian Indigenous peoples lends support to the use of testimonio as an analytical framework in the Australian context.

Testimonio, Spanish for testimony, draws its meaning from both juridical and Christian discourse. Testimony is etymologically derived from the same root as testicle, and reflects early judicial practice where men would swear to be telling the truth on pain of castration. For Christians, bearing witness or testifying to one’s faith, had the similarly dire implication of martyrdom in the early Christian era. In current usage, witnesses are called to court to speak the truth – to give testimony under oath to what they personally saw or heard. Thus, by definition, the eye or ear witness was physically present at the scene, their body an indexical trace of the history they speak. 38

32 Watson, Believe me, p.144.
33 Langford, Don’t Take Your Love, p. v.
34 Morgan, Calling of the Spirits, p. xvi.
35 See Kennedy, Narrator as Witness, p. 240.
36 See for example: Kennedy, Narrator as Witness, pp. 237–39; Dalziell, Shameful Autobiographies, pp. 129–33; Watson, Believe me, p. 145.
John Beverley, a US critic, was one of the first metropolitan proponents of teaching *testimonio* in North American university classrooms. He is frequently cited in the literature on *testimonio*. He defines *testimonio* as:

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or significant life experience...

In *testimonio*...it is the intention of the narrator that is paramount. The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself. The position of the reader in *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom...

Moreover, *testimonio* is concerned not so much with the life of a ‘problematic hero’...as with a problematic collective social situation in which the narrator lives. The situation of the narrator in *testimonio* is one that must be representative of a social class or group. 39

Like *testimonio* Aboriginal autobiographies are explicitly created to bear witness to the harms of a specific historical situation of oppression in order to change them. Also like *testimonios*, many Aboriginal autobiographers take a representative position that their life history is also the history of their people. Beverley, for example, quotes the opening lines of *I Rigoberto Menchú* to illustrate this point: ‘My name is Rigoberta Menchu. I’m 23 years old. This is my testimony...I’d like to stress that it’s not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people’. 40 Compare this with Helen Dakin’s extract from *Marnie Kennedy’s*, *Born a Half-Caste*, to illustrate the same point with reference to Aboriginal autobiography: ‘This is my story and it is the story of many Australian Aborigines...This story is true. It did happen and I was part of it’. 41 Anne Brewster argues that Aboriginal women’s autobiographies are not ‘I’ stories, but ‘we’ stories. 42

One of the differences between ‘we’ as opposed to ‘I’ stories is the absence of personal detail that readers otherwise would expect to find in non-testimonial autobiography. The absence of personal information in Aboriginal autobiography has been noticed by several critics. Joy Hooton, for example, remarked on the absence of personal information about marriage and children in Margaret Tucker’s

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40 Beverley, *Testimonio*, p. 96.
41 Helen Dakin, *Gaining Strength Through Story Telling: Autobiography in Contemporary Aboriginal Literature*, unpublished manuscript held in the AIATSIS manuscript collection, 1989, p. 16.
autobiography. Hooton attributes this to cultural difference – Aboriginal emphasis on extended rather than nuclear family. 43 Helen Dakin, however, explained a similar observation with the notion that Aboriginal autobiographical writing represents ‘public Aboriginal knowledge’ as opposed to what is private to them as individuals. 44 In an interview with Sally Morgan, critic Dennis Haskell asked Morgan about the absence of detail about Morgan’s marriage and family life. Morgan replied that she ‘couldn’t see any point in putting in more personal details unless they reflected directly on what I was trying to examine’. 45

Morgan’s explanation points to an understanding of her authorial role as more akin to that of historian or, as Rosanne Kennedy describes it, as a ‘prosecutor’ rather than a witness. 46 The emphasis here shifts from the role of innocent or transparent recounting of facts and events, to the role of construction and interpretation of facts and events into histories, arguments or cases. In an article in the Australian Association of Oral History Journal, historian Heather Goodall recalls that she began oral history research on Aboriginal history ‘looking for information about events rather than for broader interpretations’. 47 She argues, however, that this treats Aboriginal speakers as innocent speakers of literal fact and is patronising because it

portrays Aborigines as simple or childlike’ as if they have not ‘made decisions or choices or had any of the experiences which mould and create recollections and judgments of one’s own experience. 48

Similarly, Rosanne Kennedy argues against Bain Attwood’s characterisation of Stolen Generation testimony as ‘simplistic histories of colonialism in Australia’ pointing out that this limits the witness’s role to the production of raw evidence.

In viewing testimony as evidence to be interpreted by the historian, he undermines the witness’s position as a valuable interpreter of events. His essay can be read allegorically as a story about the declining status of academic history as the guardian of ‘truth’ of the past. His essay raises a number of significant issues, not only for history as an academic discipline, but for our understanding of the discourse of history in Australian public life. These issues include how we conceive of history, who owns the past and who can speak as an authority on the significance of the past. 49

43 Hooten, Stories of Herself, p. 331.
44 Dakin, Gaining strength, p. 16.
45 Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell, ‘Interview with Sally Morgan’, Whose Place? A Study of Sally Morgan’s My Place, Angus and Robertson, Pymble, 1992, p. 5.
46 Rosanne Kennedy, Narrator as Witness, p. 255.
47 Goodall, Politics of information control, p. 20.
Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose, whose *Hidden Histories* I cited in chapter 1 points to the same issue in choosing the term ‘historians’ to name the people who, before the mid-1980s, would have been called ‘informants’. Speaking of her personal history of engagement with the Yaralin Aboriginal community, she says:

Right from the start people told me stories about the past, linking those stories to the present in order to show the continuities that have made their lives so difficult. Victoria River Downs...and Humbert River people are blessed with a number of gifted historians; their words predominate in this book. 50

While the question of interpretation and referentiality can, as conservative characterisations of Stolen Generation testimony as ‘false memory’ attest, 51 be theoretical sites of undermining marginalised accounts of the past, critical readings also point to a shifting or unstable position of the narrator of testimonial autobiography that slides between historian, witness, prosecutor and autobiographer. Representations of the past are necessarily both selective and interpretive but, nevertheless, a condition of possibility of credibility of testimony is the location of the narrator as witness. As critic Shoshona Felman argues, bearing witness is a speech act that commits the speaker to taking responsibility for the truth of the occurrence and it can only be performed by the eye or ear witness. 52 What is interesting is how narrator/witnesses negotiate the particular historical contexts in which they bear witness to their lives.

**The witness/interlocutor relationship**

The other aspect of the *testimonio* genre which is particularly relevant to an analysis of Aboriginal autobiography more broadly and separation testimonies in particular is the intended reader response — the notion that the aim of the *testimonio* is to incite dominant culture readers to moral engagement with the situation of oppression and take action to change it. Beverley says that the aim of *testimonio* is to get readers to identify with the speaker ‘by engaging their sense of ethics and justice — with a popular cause normally distant, not to say alien, from their immediate experience’. 53

While *testimonio* provides a useful analytical framework for analysing the author/reader dynamics of separation autobiographical narratives, there are problems with importing it from the Americas context. Beverley, writing as a US
critic reading texts produced in Latin America, theorises the reader in the position of jury, adjudicating on the crimes committed in another (colonial) context. In the Australian context, the non-Indigenous and more particularly the white reader has to look at his or her own position vis-à-vis the narrative. Jo Robertson, for example, argues that *My Place* forces white readers and critics to ‘make a discovery about themselves, about the similarity or difference of their political position from that of Sally Morgan’.  

Rosamund Dalziell, more strongly, argues that the white Australian reader is ‘implicate[d]…in some form of moral deficiency’. Critic Gillian Whitlock makes a similar point, arguing that although the comparisons between separation testimonies and holocaust testimony lead to useful insights, her location as an Australian reader/witness in relation to separation testimony is altogether different from her location vis-à-vis holocaust testimonies. In the latter case, she argues, one can always blame the Nazi – ‘who is not like us’ – for the atrocities. But for the white reader of Stolen Generations testimonies, ‘the narratee is called upon to witness her own complicity in the loss and suffering which is finally spoken’.

A number of critics have explored the moral interaction or exchange between the author/witness and reader of Stolen Generations testimonies. The most novel approach is that of Rosamund Dalziell who theorised a transference of shame between author and reader. In her study, *Shameful Autobiographies*, Dalziell argues that shame is a central theme in Australian autobiography. In ‘Racist shame’, the chapter on Aboriginal autobiography (which mostly uses examples of people who were separated), she argues that Aboriginal autobiographies include many representations of racist shaming – that is representations of whites engaged in racist behaviour that humiliates or otherwise abuses the Aboriginal author. She argues that for white readers, however, it is shameful to read about people like themselves engaged in such wrong behaviour. Thus the shame is transferred through ‘counter-shaming’ from the author to the reader.

Racism, which originally shames the victims, has increasingly become a source of shame for the dominant culture. The autobiographies I will refer to, most of which were published between 1975 and 1988, disclose complex dynamics of shaming and counter-shaming.

Other critics point to a transference of the function of witnessing where the reader bears witness to the witness. Gillian Whitlock, for example, elaborates a role for

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54 Robertson, Black text, white reader, p. 48.

55 Dalziell, Shameful Autobiography, p. 132. I don’t understand Dalziell’s identification of the witness as the accused. More properly it should be the ‘plaintiff’, however, perhaps she is indicating the tendency for dominant discourse to recuperate subjugated discourse by blaming the victim. See Alcoff and Gray, Survivor discourse, pp. 260–90.

56 Whitlock, Second person, p. 209.


58 In addition to the authors discussed below, see also Sacha Gibbons, ‘Writing through trauma: Ruby Langford’s *My Bundjalung People*’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 63, 2000, pp 64–70. Gibbons is concerned with theorising the work of Aboriginal traumatic testimony in healing. She
the addressee or ‘second person’ in terms of an exchange in which the second person also becomes a witness.

In the case of the Stolen Generations testimonies, a narrative exchange occurs through which non-Indigenous Australians are called upon to be ‘witnesses to the self’ as well as witnesses to the trauma of the stolen children. By being a witness to the self she specifically points to the testimonies’ demand that white Australians bear witness to racism and to themselves as raced persons.

For many readers, in particular those who wish to make an ethical response, these testimonies produce a revelation of a racial identity which has previously been unmarked.

Christine Watson also analyses the moral engagement of the reader in terms of a transference of the witnessing function. Her notion of transference, however, does not involve the sense of self-scrutiny raised by Whitlock. She points out that speaking about the horrors of separation in the context of the 1996 National Inquiry, followed a long history of not being heard or believed. Her work explores the issues around the ‘request to be believed’ that arises in Aboriginal women’s autobiography and how the claim of witnessing implicates the reader/critic in the witnessing process. She maps out a complex understanding of witnessing that includes analysis of the author as witness, the community as witness, the reader as witness and the critic as witness. She argues that both the author as eyewitness and the community as ‘vocal assemblage’ authenticate the truth values of testimonial autobiography. Drawing on Paulo Freire’s notion of the ‘relay function’ or the ‘transference of political awareness from author to reader to society’ Watson argues that:

The legacy invoked by acts of witnessing depends upon the existence of a reading subject who, it is assumed, will read and engage with the narrative and, therefore, be implicated by the text to carry the responsibility that witnessing entails.

positions the reader of Langford’s text as ‘a witness to a process by which traumatic material is constructed into social narrative and memory’ (p. 65) and argues that the reader/listener’s acceptance of the truth of the traumatic testimony is an essential aspect of the healing process (p. 69).

59 Whitlock, Second Person, p. 199.
60 Whitlock, Second Person, p. 199.
61 John Frow argues that one of the wrongs of separation was precisely ignoring, disbelieving or punishing earlier attempts to bear witness to abuse. Frow, Stolen Time.
62 Rosanne Kennedy refers to this witness of the witness as the ‘identifying witness’. Sally Morgan, she argues, takes this position in relation to the testimonies of her mother and grandmother. See Kennedy, Narrator as Witness, p. 251ff.
63 Watson, Believe me, p. 148.
One of the responsibilities Watson refers to, and she argues that critics in particular should shoulder it, is that of passing on the narrative so that it becomes embedded in mainstream discourse.\(^{64}\)

Reminding us that not all interlocutors are white, Rosanne Kennedy uses the notion of the reader/listener as witness to characterise Sally Morgan's position in relation to the separation testimonies of her mother and grandmother as the 'identifying witness'.\(^{65}\)

Morgan's story of the development of her race consciousness is not significant because it tells us about her own unique identity; it is important because it enables her to take up the position of witness to her mother and grandmother. She does not witness from an uninvested position. Rather, she is the identifying witness; her act of witnessing to her kin is bound up with claims about her own identity.\(^{66}\)

Aboriginal writing (especially autobiography) also specifically and explicitly addresses Aboriginal readers. Alison Ravenscroft argues in her article on working with Rita and Jackie Huggins on *Auntie Rita*, Rita Huggins' autobiography, that there was a generational difference between Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins address to readers. Whereas Rita Huggins positioned herself as telling her life story to people within her community that she knew; Jackie Huggins was far more conscious of also addressing white readers who were strangers.\(^{67}\) The authors of many Aboriginal narratives indicate that part of the aim of making their life story public is so that young and future generations of Aboriginal young people will know about the history of their people, their communities and their families. Eileen Morgan, for example, says 'In a way I am very lucky to be gifted to write down the past and the history of our culture which can be passed on to the younger generation'.\(^{68}\) Doris Pilkington – Nugi Garimara, dedicates her book to: 'all of my mother’s and auntie’s children and their descendants for inspiration, encouragement and determination'.\(^{69}\) In some separation autobiographical testimonies, there is also an explicit aim of telling Aboriginal people who have not grown up in white families or white institutions what that experience was like.\(^{70}\) These texts may be read as intending to locate Aboriginal readers as identifying witnesses, with the aim of extending and enriching the reader's sense of Aboriginality and sense of relationship to the narrator/witness as another Aboriginal person.

\(^{64}\) Watson, Believe Me, p. 149. Note that as I pointed to above, Watson experienced her interactions with Aboriginal informants as an expectation that she would take up the relay function.

\(^{65}\) Kennedy, Narrator as Witness, p. 251.

\(^{66}\) Kennedy, Narrator as Witness, p. 252.


\(^{68}\) Morgan, Calling of the Spirits, p. xvi.

\(^{69}\) Pilkington, Rabbit-Proof Fence, p. v.

\(^{70}\) See for example Sally Morgan's introduction to *The Lost Children*, or Link-Up and Wilson, In the Best Interest, 'Rejection by our people', p. 40.
While Watson’s notion of the responsibility to circulate Stolen Generation accounts makes sense in light of an aim of creating a narrative of history and sense of moral community that is inclusive of Indigenous people, it may have unintended consequences. As Sue Stanton points out in her article, ‘Time for truth: speaking the unspeakable – genocide and apartheid in the “lucky” country’, Indigenous people may be re-traumatised by encounters with separation accounts.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders the stories are re-lived each time we have to hear of, or read these stories, whether they be in the form of reports, on film, or discussed nightly on television. We live those stories every day of our lives.\(^{71}\)

Furthermore, as Marcia Langton implies, it may be profoundly unethical for non-Indigenous academics and other ‘wordsmiths’ to engage in ‘relays’ that exploit Stolen Generations trauma.

Aboriginal writing, scholarship, research are all taking the feel of Holocaust Studies. We write to understand, we read to understand, we carry out research to try to understand the terrible, inexplicable past...[W]hile some of us Aborigines cannot find the words, there is an army of respectable, reliable, properly qualified wordsmiths who write about this corpse that is still lying in the middle of the room.\(^{72}\)

\textit{‘I would swear white editorial intervention had desecrated the text’}

Although the aim of Aboriginal writers, including autobiographical narrators, may be to confront dominant group readers with an authentic representation of the historical situation of their people in order to incite improvement in that situation, the means of publication are invariably in the hands of the dominant group.\(^{73}\) Insofar as Indigenous authors want to reach non-Aboriginal readers and intervene in the hegemonic discourses that structure the injustices of their lives, these authors depend on non-Indigenous circuits of literary commodification. This issue is usually represented as editorial intervention that disrupts and assimilates the text’s Indigenous authenticity and recuperates its subversive potential. Editorial

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\(^{73}\) For Indigenous authors, this relationship may be mediated by Indigenous owned and managed publishing houses such Magabala Books, which in turn deal with non-Indigenous structures of distribution, cataloguing, shelf allocation, marketing, reviewing, ‘adopting’ for classroom texts, etc. As Mary Ann Hughes points out, however, Magabala Books relied (in 1998) on non-Indigenous editors and other publishing professionals. (See Mary Ann Hughes, ‘An issue of authenticity: editing texts by Aboriginal authors’, \textit{Southerly}, vol. 58, no. 2, 1998, p. 49.)
intervention has been foregrounded in many critical studies of Indigenous writing, particularly Indigenous autobiographies.

The first Aboriginal writers conference, held in Perth in 1983, identified editorial intervention as a major issue facing Aboriginal writers. Bruce McGuiness and Denis Walker also identified non-Aboriginal control of the means of publication as a major problem for Aboriginal writers.

We maintain that unless Aboriginal people control the content, the publishing, the ultimate presentation of the article, then it is not Aboriginal; that it ceases to be Aboriginal when it is interfered with, when it is tampered with by non-Aboriginal people who exist outside of the spectrum of Aboriginal life, of Aboriginal culture within Australia. 74

Mudrooroo has written extensively on the issue of achieving authenticity in the face of the cleaning-up and sterilising of texts by white editors. 75 This, he argued, is particularly problematic for many autobiographical texts, which are spoken by Aboriginal people and tape recorded and then transcribed (and perhaps translated), compiled and edited into written form by white editors. He argued against even using the term ‘autobiography’ (self-life-writing) in favour of the term ‘life stories’ to refer to Aboriginal first-person narratives. 76 Feminist critic Anne Brewster also calls attention to the problem of editorial intervention by refusing the term autobiography in favour of ‘autobiographical narrative’. 77 Carole Boyce Davies has also looked at the problems of re-enacting dominant/subordinate subject positions in collaborative life story writing. She particularly points to editor’s tendencies to succumb to what she calls the ‘ordering imperative’. 78

Critic Mary Ann Hughes has pointed to and argued against the overwhelming use of perceived degrees of editorial intervention as an indicator of authenticity and therefore value of autobiographical texts. Sally Morgan’s My Place and Ruby Langford’s Don’t Take Your Love to Town, Hughes argues, were both condemned for their apparent adoption of ‘white’ generic forms by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous critics. The title of this section is drawn from Aboriginal author Jackie Huggins’ assessment of My Place:

74 McGuiness and Walker, Politics, p. 44.
76 Johnson [Mudrooroo], White forms, p. 24.
77 Brewster, Aboriginal Women’s Autobiography, p. 8.
Overall there is little which indicates the writing and story of an Aboriginal. I would swear white editorial intervention has desecrated the text.  

Non-Indigenous critics Eric Michaels, Bain Attwood and Steven Meucke have also attacked both the text and the author as inauthentic. Steven Muecke has been similarly critical of Glenys Ward’s *Wandering Girl*. Michaels, Attwood and Meucke have all questioned the authenticity of Aboriginal texts that follow European generic conventions. Additionally, Attwood and Meucke have pointed to differences between Morgan’s portion of the text and that of her grandmother and great uncle. Judging the elders’ texts to be more authentic, this critical move re-ensacts racist evaluations of (more) ‘traditional’ Aboriginals as the ‘real Aborigines’.

Arguing against an essentialist construction of Indigeneity in binary opposition to whiteness, Hughes advocates an approach that investigates the negotiated contingency of Aboriginality at particular moments in time. She discusses at length Colin Johnson’s negotiations with his editor and patron, Mary Durack, during the publication of *Wild Cat Falling* in the mid-1960s. Hughes argues that although Mudrooroo as critic later rejects his first novel as flawed, it may be more interesting to look at the historical contingency of texts, authenticity and Aboriginality. The effects of historical contingency are particularly visible in the pre- and post-*Bringing Them Home* reading strategies available for reading *My Place*. As Rosanne Kennedy argues:

> When *My Place* was first published it could not be read as a testimonio because non-indigenous Australians did not know enough about the treatment of Aborigines in Australian society to read Morgan’s story as representative… We can now read the text as a representative story – of children who have been removed, or parents who have had their children taken, of people who have been denied knowledge of Aboriginal culture.

It is not only non-Indigenous Australians who have been educated about the effects of separation. Although the government practice of separating Aboriginal children had long been a site of political and individual resistance in Aboriginal communities, as Link-Up founder Coral Edwards puts it, the story of taking the children away ended when the train pulled out of the station or the car drove around

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79 Jackie Huggins quoted in Mary Ann Hughes, *Authenticity*, p. 53.
80 Steven Meucke, ‘Aboriginal literature and the repressive hypothesis’, *Southerly*, no. 4, 1988; see also Sonja Kurtzer, ‘*Wandering Girl*: who defines “authenticity” in Aboriginal literature?’, *Southerly*, vol. 58, no. 2, 1998.
the bend.\textsuperscript{83} The story of what happened to these children subsequently was lost and the ongoing intergenerational effects of separation were unknown the Aboriginal communities that were left behind. It is only post-	extit{Bringing Them Home}, that Aboriginal critics of My Place such as Jackie Huggins, Isabel Tarago and Mudrooroo could have the possibility of viewing Aboriginal identities that were forged in the isolation of fostering, adoption, institutionalisation and even ‘passing’ as representative of a particular Aboriginal experience of colonisation.\textsuperscript{84}

**Negotiating patron discourses**

Penny van Toom has argued that minority texts can only gain the attention of majority readers through what she refers to as ‘patron discourses’ that ‘trap’ minority texts into the speaking positions made available through dominant discourses.

The minority speaker who reaches a wide audience has jumped out of the frying pan only to land in the fire, as it were, breaking out of the role of the mute, named object only to be confined to the role of the circumscribed speaking subject.\textsuperscript{85}

She points to a number of ‘signs of patronage’— that is the ways that publishers authorise Indigenous texts throughout the framing and packaging for the non-Indigenous market. These signs include editorial style, choice of genre, accompanying photographs or illustrations, advertising blurbs, introductory prefaces, explanatory notes and even the quality of the paper and typography chosen by the designer.\textsuperscript{86} All of these elements function semiotically to invest meaning and, hopefully from the publisher’s perspective, promote the desirability of the product and increase its sales.

In her analysis of the success of 	extit{Bringing Them Home} in capturing public attention, van Toom highlights its contradictions. She partly attributes public demand to the titillation and voyeurism generated by sensationalised reports of abuse, cruelty and depravity, the use of the gothic language familiar to viewers of TV soaps in headlines like ‘Stolen lives’, ‘Secrets and lies’ and ‘Haunted by history’, as well as to the high political drama surrounding the apology.\textsuperscript{87} But she also points to the personal and emotional nature of the testimonial form of Aboriginal life stories as a

\textsuperscript{83} Edwards and Read, Lost Children, p. xix.
\textsuperscript{86} van Toom, Patron Discourse, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{87} van Toom, Tactical history, p. 259.
recognisable and desirable commodity. Although, in her analysis, media commodification of Stolen Generations testimony unethically capitalised on the public appetite for voyeurism, van Toorn cautions against simplistic assumptions about the evils of commodity capitalism. Rather she advocates an analysis that will tease out the tensions in how commodification both serves and undermines Aboriginal aims of making Aboriginal history an integral part of Australia’s history.

Bruce McGuiness and Denis Walker described Aboriginal people as ‘actors’ who are able to take up appropriate parts in whatever (white) scenes they find themselves. Analogously, they argued that Aboriginal writers are able to adopt various styles of writing.

When Aboriginal people write they write in a style. They’re able to adopt various styles of writing so that what they really want to write about is there. It’s hidden. It’s contained within their writing, if one can go through the subterfuge, the camouflage that they use when they’re writing.

Mexican-American critic Genaro Padilla also used the metaphor of camouflage in his argument that marginalised speakers may use dominant discourses for oppositional messages.

Ideologically subordinate speech...actually constitutes multiaddressed utterance in which pragmatic appeasement reads at one surface of language while anger and opposition read at other, and often within the same, surfaces.

Feminist theorists Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray highlighted the problem of recuperation in their analysis of incest survivor speech on TV talk shows. While they acknowledge and support the potential of survivor speech to challenge the relations of power through which incest is enabled – especially silence – they also point to techniques of commodification that make survivor speech more consumable but simultaneously recuperate its subversive edge and transform it into a new form of subordination. In particular they point to the format many talk shows adopt of presenting an expert (usually a psychologist) to interpret survivor speech for the audience, thus re-locating the survivor in the subordinate role of ‘client’ or ‘patient’. Their analysis raises the very problematic location of speaking about traumatic abuse – the witness has both to convincingly show or tell the symptoms of the damage to satisfy public desire for the gory detail while simultaneously presenting the self as a credible witness. Gillian Whitlock raises the same problem in her analysis of the slave narrative of Mary Prince – Prince faced

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88 van Toorn, Tactical history, p. 260.
89 McGuiness and Walker, Politics, p. 47.
91 Alcoff and Gray, Survivor discourse.
the contradictory task of bearing witness to the depravity of slavery from the speaking location of respectable and therefore credible woman.  

For Stolen Generations speakers, another site of the tension between subversive speaking and recuperation is the peculiar slippage between the adult narrator and the child victim — a slippage in the context of the interracial autobiographical contract invites white addressees to locate Aboriginal speakers in the historically comfortable position of the child. Adoption activists have pointed to the same problem in speaking as ‘an adopted child’. The person speaking is, of course, an adult who was adopted as a child, but the adoption triangle (adopter parents, biological parents and adopted child) holds the adopted person in the location of ‘child’ in relation to the parental ‘adults’.  

The awkwardness of language that distinguishes between the adult speaker and the child victim — ‘adults who were separated as children’ — discourages such constructions. The representations of the Stolen Generations in the media indicate the prevalence of this slippage. For example, the headline reporting on Link-Up member Nancy de Vries’s address to the NSW Parliament read: ‘My anguish: MPs hear story of a stolen child’.  

Disturbingly, critic Cath Ellis argues that the reason Stolen Generation testimonies are accessible to white readers is that they are first and foremost perceived to be about childhood and child abuse and only secondarily about ‘race’.  

Brigitta Olubas and Lisa Greenwall condemn Carmel Bird’s editorial framing of The Stolen Children arguing that she locates readers in a maternal subject position that takes pleasure in the experience of intense loss and locates witnesses in an unending childhood.  

Through the specific affect of Bird’s text the role of listener is abnegated and the position of the white mother reinvigorated through the editorial pleasure of memory. In this way the text’s affect works as a form of imaginative capture, re-figuring the teller of the stories for all time as children.

Joy Hooten in her analysis of Aboriginal childhoods through Aboriginal women’s autobiography also had trouble distinguishing between the adult narrator and the child represented in the autobiography. Overall Hooten’s readings of Aboriginal

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93 As adoption activist Betty Jean Lifton puts it: ‘There has been very little research on adopted adults. Perhaps this lack reflects society’s difficulty in thinking of the Adoptee as someone who actually grows up’. Betty Jean Lifton, Lost & Found: The Adoption Experience, Harper & Row, New York, 1988, p. 63.
95 Cath Ellis, ‘A strange case of double vision’, Overland, 158, Autumn 2000, pp. 75–76.
women's autobiographies are intended to celebrate Aboriginal strength while condemning white racism. Her text uses strong rhetoric to describe the impact of whites on Aboriginal women's childhoods: threat, fear, inscrutable silent power, humiliation, imprisonment, terrifying, violent. At the outset of her analysis she foregrounds the significance of the reversal of the gaze and identifies puzzlement or bewilderment as a significant aspect of Aboriginal women's gaze:

Unlike anthropological studies which endeavour to 'explain' the Aborigines to us, these texts indirectly compel the reader to 'explain' the white culture, to perceive it through the puzzled eyes of the excluded and neglected outsider.  

However, Hooton elides the gaze of the narrated child with the gaze of adult narrator. For example, Elsie Roughsie is quoted saying that she 'today, I still just can't understand why it all meant... to be so tough with us' [ellipsis in original]. Hooton cites this as an instance of continuing bewilderment. I would read this as the author's rhetorical strategy to call attention to the hypocrisy of 'protection'. This is not to say that the adult Roughsey did not continue to judge white behaviour as inexplicably illogical, but the bewilderment of a child is significantly different from an adult's perception of contradiction. Similarly, Hooton interprets Marnie Kennedy's description of colonial appropriation: '...with their noses to the ground and their arses in the air they hunted and destroyed everything in their path' as bewildering:

Marnie Kennedy's words reflect a common response to the white culture, which to Aboriginal eyes appears to reflect an alien, bewildering value system.  

To characterise Kennedy's caustic canine metaphor as bewilderment erases the adult Kennedy's astute analysis and reversal of human/not human binary that has underwritten racist domination. Instead, Hooton's analysis, re-enacts the location of Aboriginals in an endless childhood.

Like Hooton, critics Brian Dribble and Margaret Macintyre also refer to Aboriginal writing as an experience for the white reader of being perceived through Aboriginal eyes, but they figure the Aboriginal gaze as 'expert' readers of white culture. Discussing Jack Davis' play No Sugar, they argue that:

[The characters] also demonstrate that they have all along been expert readers of the hidden or not so hidden messages concealed in white rhetoric. One of the discomforts No Sugar entails for its white audience as

97 Hooton, Stories of Herself, p. 313.
98 Hooton, Stories of Herself, p. 326.
99 Hooton, Stories of Herself, p. 324.
well as for some of the characters in the play is that knowledge of having been very thoroughly seen through.\textsuperscript{100}

Hooton’s elision of the representation of childhood with the adult narrator is unintended – since her aim is to foreground Aboriginal women’s survival against overwhelmingly oppressive childhoods. However, it highlights the recuperative power of dominant discourse and the contradictions inherent in the success of separation in capturing the attention of so many white Australians. It may be that precisely because separation focuses on Aboriginal childhoods it enables the elision of separated children with ‘childlike Aborigine’ to produce a familiar dominant subject position for the white reader.

Negotiating with editors

In 1983 Mudrooroo pointed to editorial intervention, especially intervention that transforms spoken vernacular Aboriginal English into mainstream (proper) English, as a recuperative intervention,\textsuperscript{101} critics, however, cannot assume that editorial transformation necessarily subverts the intentions of the author/speaker. As William McGregor points out, not all Aboriginal authors want their speaking to be represented in writing as Aboriginal English. The writing of Aboriginal sounding phrases, he argues, may function as an ‘index of difference’ and it may be that Aboriginal speakers want to ‘level differences from whites, to represent their non-otherness’.\textsuperscript{102} Tina Cotts says of her collaboration with Della Walker that:

Della wished that her Aboriginal English be transformed into Standard English. I felt reluctant to do this as I believed that some of the uniqueness of the story would be lost. However, I can now see that she was right.\textsuperscript{103}

Despite this possibility, many editors and non-Aboriginal collaborators on Aboriginal texts contribute the preface or foreword to autobiographical texts which mostly claim to have tried to remain as true to the voice of the author as possible (a position editors take with any author, but with different political implications if the author is Indigenous). For example, Jill Finnane who collaborated with Connie Nungulla McDonald on \textit{When You Grow Up} states that: ‘Throughout the process we were careful to ensure that the final decision about what to put in, how to

\textsuperscript{100} Dribble and Macintyre, Looking at them looking at us, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{102} William McGregor, ‘Writing Aboriginal: oral literature in print’, \textit{Meridian}, vol. 8, no. 1, 1989, p. 49; In 1997 Mudrooroo made a similar point in his discussion of white editor Margaret Somerville’s convincing Aboriginal author Patsy Cohen to make her text more ‘oral’. He notes that while he prefers the retention of orality in written text, he respects Cohen’s desire to make the text more writerly and objects to Somerville’s insistence on keeping Cohen’s voice more ‘Aboriginal’.
\textsuperscript{103} Walker and Coutts, \textit{Me and You}. 
express it and how to arrange it was always Connie's'.

From the beginning, Eileen had insisted that it was most important that the book should be in her own words and that they should be put together in the way she would use them, with her own natural rhythm. Others—especially Tamsin Donaldson, our project office at AIATSIS—likewise suggested how important it was that this be done.

Helping Eileen Morgan to write her book has not always been easy. She is a strong-minded woman and we clashed on a number of occasions.

These examples indicate that it is impossible to decide in advance what constitutes 'invasive' editorial intervention. Each author will have particular ideas about how they would like to represent their voice, and this will be contingent on the specific discursive contexts in which and the specific discursive aims for which they create autobiographical narratives. And, as Gillian Whitlock points out and the introductions to autobiographical texts affirm, editors and authors are increasingly working together to develop the strategies that will direct readers.

Behind-the-scenes editorial intervention may take a number of forms, ranging from re- or ghost-writing to copy editing focused on spelling, grammar, punctuation and consistency. Margaret McDonell analysed her role as the editor of Ruth Hegarty's *Is That You Ruthie?*, the 1998 Unaipon Award winner. She points to the role of the editor as a developer of a manuscript (especially with first-time authors) and the ‘political and racial tensions’ that affect the editor and make even small editorial tasks such as deciding how to standardise capitalisation, meaningful. For narratives that begin as recorded oral accounts, each stage in the production process—elicitation, transcription, translation, and editing—mediates the text and has ‘theoretical, ideological and practical considerations’.

While the voice of most editors or collaborators is contained within the front matter, some also occur within the body of the text. Margaret Somerville has written at length about her collaborative process with Patsy Cohen in the publication of *Ingeleba and the Five Black Matriarchs* as has Aboriginal activist Jackie Huggins of her collaboration with her mother on her mother’s

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105 Morgan, *Calling of the Spirits*. Note: AIATSIS = Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
107 Margaret McDonell and Gillian Whitlock, ‘Editing Ruthie: the work in theory and practice’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 64, 2000, p. 139; see also Jennifer Jones, ‘Yesterday’s words: the editing of Monica Clare’s Karobram’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 64, 2000, pp. 128–34. I discuss this article in chapter 6.
autobiography, *Auntie Rita*. Both of these books include the collaborator’s comments within the body of the text. It is more common, however, for collections to include editorial comments as a bridge between sections or to frame particular contributions. Both of the collections I analyse in later chapters, *The Lost Children* and *In the Best Interest of the Child*, include internal editorial framing.

Cath Ellis, in her analysis of *The Stolen Children: Their Stories*, edited by Carmel Bird, is highly critical of the editor’s voice within the text, especially her instructions on how to read the testimonies. The testimonies are drawn from the *Bringing Them Home* report and are meant, Bird asserts, to offer mainstream Australian readers a less daunting way of reading the narratives than the context of the 700-page report. Ellis, however, argues that Bird’s editorial intervention is too directive of readers because it ‘consistently and insistently introduces, concludes and often interrupts the stories’. As Gillian Whitlock points out, however, all such autobiographical acts arise from a historical context with specific discursive constraints.

She argues further, drawing on Phillipe Lejeune’s notion of the autobiographical pact, that the discursive context of Stolen Generation autobiographical testimonies can be understood as an ‘interracial autobiographical contract’ within which texts ‘manoeuvre’ their readers with culturally appropriate presentations of ‘truth’ and direct them carefully towards preferred responses. Fundamental to the contract, Whitlock argues, is that interlocutors are ‘made aware of their own racial identity [and] their own implication in the politics of race’.

Whitlock’s reading of the slave *History* of Mary Prince, Sonja Kurtzer’s readings of Glenyse Ward’s *Wandering Girl* and Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, and Claudine Raynaud’s reading of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on the Road* are examples of criticism that develops nuanced readings of the autobiographical subject’s negotiations of editorial and other discursive constraints of the interracial autobiographical contract. Kurtzer argues that Ward and Morgan developed

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111 Cath Ellis, Double vision, p. 78.
textual strategies to deliver what otherwise might have been an unpalatable narrative. While this move may be seen as recuperative by other Aboriginal people, it may also be understood as a pragmatic negotiation of the perceived discursive constraints in which the text emerged.

When the author speaks to a ‘white’ audience he/she is constrained to speak in terms that the audience recognises as ‘authentic’ and must also construct a story that will not threaten. A non-threatening story may then, however, raise issues of ‘authenticity for the indigenous community.\(^{114}\)

Raynaud’s exploration of the editor’s interventions in Hurston’s voice reminds explicitly of the point implicit in Kurtzer’s analysis – that narrators negotiate with both internalised and externalised discursive constraints.\(^{115}\) In her analysis of the differences between Hurston’s manuscript and the published text, Raynaud found that Hurston appeared to have ‘anticipated her editor’s demands. In effect the autobiographical text enter[ed] into a dialogue with its own assumptions’.\(^{116}\)

Lastly, Whitlock’s reading of Mary Prince’s *History* is particularly useful for the readings I will undertake in this thesis, both for its methodology and its exploration of the specific issues of publishing narratives of racial oppression to white readers. Prince’s narrative was originally published in 1831 by Anti-Slavery Society activist Thomas Pringle. Like many Aboriginal narratives, the author used a white amanuensis to write the narrative as she spoke it. Like many Stolen Generations narratives, the text was supplemented by an array of ‘marginalia’ to authorise and explain the text to readers. Like many nineteenth-century women’s texts, Prince’s autobiography was exhumed by Moira Ferguson for release in a collection of women’s autobiography in 1987, with another introduction designed to guide late-twentieth century feminist readers through the text. Through reading the marginalia in conjunction with the autobiographical narrative, Whitlock explores the complex and intimate intersubjective relations between the author, the amanuensis, the editors and the reading public in the specific historical and discursive contexts of the 1830s and 1980s as they negotiated racialised constructions such as the civilised English, respectable English womanhood, the depraved slaveholder, the slave, the credible witness. Whitlock argues that:

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Muted voices and editorial constraints in *Dust Tracks on the Road*, in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds), *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1992, pp. 34–64.

\(^{114}\) Kurtzer, Authenticity, p. 27.

\(^{115}\) Mudrooroo’s reflections on his negotiations of the editorial process as young author in the 1960s evidence considerable shame that he had internalised Durack’s notions of good writing. (See Hughes, Authenticity, pp. 49–52.)

\(^{116}\) Raynaud, *Dust Tracks*, p. 38.
A grasp of the micropolitics and historical circumstances of writing are vital to understanding what women can and will say, how they can make account of themselves.\textsuperscript{117}

Conclusion

In looking at the critical literature on Aboriginal writing generally and autobiography more particularly, the understanding emerges that Aboriginal representation is directed towards negotiating a relationship with a non-Indigenous reader in respect of referents outside the text – that is, what it is like to live as Aboriginal within the context of colonial domination. Many critics have compared Aboriginal autobiography to Latin American \textit{testimonio}, arguing that the text is narrated not only from the first person, but from a testimonial or witnessing first person who is representative of his or her larger group. This quasi-juridical authorial location simultaneously vouches for the truth of the representation and signals or invites a moral or ethical relationship between the author/narrator, the referent and the reader. The text becomes a ‘frontier’ or a ‘contact zone’ where subjects enmeshed in racialised colonial relations can negotiate changes in those relationships. Through the mediated but nevertheless personal relationship created by the autobiographical/testimonio form, the text aims to engage the empathy and ethical engagement of non-Indigenous readers, an engagement many critics understand as a transfer of witnessing. At the same time, the text may engage other Indigenous readers as identifying witnesses.

Engaging with a wider public through publication, however, requires access to the means of publication which, whether commercial or specialty, are under non-Indigenous control. Indigenous writers have identified assimilationist editorial constraints as barriers to publishing. Frequently, this has been understood in an essentialist framework of contaminating the authenticity of the text and in turn authorising criticism as policing authentic Aboriginality. More recently, the discursive context of production, including editing, marginalia and other signs of patronage, commodification, but also the historically contingent discursive strategies available for articulating autobiography/testimony, have been theorised as a site of negotiation of the colonial relations of speaking and listening. The interracial author/publisher/reader interaction is a particular and specialised discursive context in which subjectivities are negotiated. In reading Indigenous autobiography at this point in the history of Indigenous colonisation, it is essential to problematise and foreground the context of production. The aim, however, should not be to adjudicate the authenticity of the author or the text, but rather to analyse the particularities of the context and the author’s negotiations with it in specific historical moments.

\textsuperscript{117} Whitlock, Intimate Empire, p. 16.
Chapter three aims to provide historical contextualisation of the development of the official discourse, policy and practice of separation in New South Wales up to the passing of the 1915 amendment of the Aborigines Protection Act. This amendment extended the powers of the Aborigines Protection Board vis-à-vis Aboriginal children significantly beyond the power enabled by the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act in respect of non-Aboriginal children. I examine the parliamentary debates of both the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Bill (which enabled the state to take white children into custody) and the Aborigines Protection Bill and its amendment to explore the similarities and differences in the logics of the two laws. Jimmie Barker (The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker – Chapter 4) and Margaret Tucker (If Everyone Cared – Chapter 5) were separated from their families shortly after the amendment became law.

The civilising mission in the early nineteenth century antipodes

The separation of Aboriginal children from their families began in the earliest days of colonisation. By 1789 several Aboriginal children had been taken into white households to be ‘civilised’. The civilising project, however, also encompassed adult Aboriginals. The commentary generated in the colony on the project of civilising Bennelong (memorialised in Bennelong Point, the site of the Sydney Opera House) is a useful starting point for analysing the logic of separation.

Bennelong

Bennelong’s vexed relationship with Europeans began with capture – he was one of two men captured on order of Governor Phillip so that the colonists could learn something about the language and culture of the local people. Although he escaped, he subsequently chose to frequent the European encampment at Sydney Cove and was wined and dined by the colonial leaders, taught English language, manners and dress and, in 1793, taken to England. When he returned to New South Wales in 1797, Bennelong moved between his tribe and the European settlement until his...
death in 1813. The following extract from his obituary is an example of early nineteenth century antipodean civilising mission discourse.

The principal officers of Government had for many years endeavoured, by the kindest of usage, to wean him from his original habits and draw him into a relish for civilised life; but every effort was in vain exerted...His propensity to drunkenness was inordinate; and when in that state he was insolent, menacing and overbearing. In fact, he was a thorough savage, not to be warped from the form and character that nature gave him by all the efforts that mankind could use.

The representation is made meaningful by oppositions between human and animal; adult and child; civilised and savage. The use of the word ‘wean’ connotes a child and in equating ‘his original habits’ with the mother’s breast, the culture of Aboriginal people is biologised and aligned with nature. This opposition is repeated in the last line, where Bennelong’s ‘form and character’ are attributed to nature, and positioned in opposition to ‘mankind’ (civilisation). Any blame for the colonists’ failure to ‘civilise’ him is located in his essentially savage (violent) nature which (re)emerges when he drinks and forgets his ‘place’. The text represents Europeans as both ‘kind’ and persevering in a seemingly thankless task. The emotional tone of the text is shocked, angry and frustrated that Bennelong refused to ‘relish’ ‘civilised life’ and did not meet white expectations that he would recognise the superiority of their way of life.

Andrew: the first stolen child narrative in 1814

It was newsworthy in 1814 that Andrew (found in the bush in 1788) had decided to return to the bush to marry. Interviewed by the Sydney Gazette, he was asked why, after being raised by a European family and getting employment as a sailor, he wanted to return to the bush to marry. He replied:

Will you keep me company, or will any white man or woman keep me company? White women will marry white men, but no white woman will have me; then why wish me to keep away from my own people, when no other will look upon me?

Here Andrew refers to the construction of ‘civilising’ as the expectation that a ‘civilised’ Aboriginal person will demonstrate whiteness by ‘keeping away’ from

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2 This history of Bennelong taken from John Kenny, Bennelong: First Notable Aboriginal, Royal Australian Historical Society and Bank of New South Wales, Sydney, 1973. The book was commissioned to commemorate Bennelong at the time of the opening of the Sydney Opera House which is located on Bennelong Point.

3 Quoted in Kenny, Bennelong, p. 64.

4 Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, quoting the Sydney Gazette, 1 January 1814; Bennelong had died just a year earlier and had been a source of profound confusion to the British colonists who had offered him all the gifts of civilisation, but despite having travelled to England he ‘reverted’ to ‘savagery’ (see Kenny, Bennelong).
other Aboriginals. His account also represents the specifically gendered whiteness of white women who were to guard the sexual borders of racial apartheid and maintain racial purity. At the same time he exposes the fundamental contradiction of the civilising mission: precisely because whiteness was defined in terms of racial apartheid, to be a good ‘white’ Andrew was not supposed to associate with other Aboriginals; yet good white women should not even consider marriage with an Aboriginal man, including Andrew who, despite being socialised as white was still seen by whites (and himself) to be ‘Aboriginal’. It is what critic John Frow describes as an intentional ‘social death’ that (mostly) is not followed by ‘social rebirth’.

Institutionalised separation

Institutionalised separation was first proposed in 1814 when London Missionary Society missionary William Shelley asked Governor Macquarie to fund the Parramatta Native Institution. He wrote:

Sir,

...Notwithstanding the prejudices that many have against the probability of success in Civilising the Natives of New South Wales, yet, if we consider that human nature is the same in every Clime...I know it has been alleged that men have been Carried to England, lived in civilized Society during a long space, and on their return relapsed into their former habits and Society, but it must be acknowledged that they learned no means of supporting themselves in their improved habits, nor Could they make themselves respectable in their new Society. They were generally despised, especially by European females; ... No European Woman would marry a Native, unless some abandoned profligate. The same may be said of Native Women received for a time among Europeans...[emphasis in original].

Responding to the perceived failure of previous experience with both Bennelong and Andrew, Shelley’s extract refers to two types of separation. First, the ‘relapse’ of Bennelong into his ‘former Society’, namely visiting and associating with his Aboriginal family and community is taken as a sign of the failure of the civilising project. Success, on the other hand, would have been signified by Bennelong shunning Aboriginals. That is, maintaining his social ‘whiteness’ required emulating European sensibilities in respect of socialising with Aboriginals. Second, Shelley’s extract indicates the centrality of respectable European women in maintaining sexual boundaries between Aboriginals and whites. For ‘Native women received for a time among Europeans’, emulating the respectable white women’s despising of ‘Native’ men is taken as a sign of social whiteness. At the same time,

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5 John Frow, Stolen time', p. 358.
6 Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, pp. 55–56.
among European women, respectable women are distinguished from ‘profligate’ women on the basis of willingness to have sexual relations with Aboriginal men.

Shelly continued:

In order to their improvement and civilization, let there be a Public Establishment Containing one Set of Apartments for boys, and another Separate Set for Girls; let them be taught reading, writing or religious instruction, the Boys, manual labour, agriculture, mechanical arts, etc., the Girls, sewing, knitting, spinning, or such useful employments as are suitable for them; let them be married at a Suitable age, and settle with steady religious Persons over them from the very beginning to see that they Continued their employment...and who had Skill sufficient to encourage and Stimulate them by proper Motives to exertion.

Andrew Armitage, a historian of settler colony assimilation projects, argues that the model for Aboriginal institutions was similar to English Poor Law institutions. Others have noted that Aboriginal institutions were an instance of the development of disciplinary institutions traced by Foucault, characterised by surveillance and discipline. Shelley’s vision of his institution was premised on the notion that white people could provide ‘improvement and civilization’ to Aboriginals. Specifically, they could ‘improve’ Aboriginal children by teaching them properly gendered useful employments. Further, once the children became adults and married one another, the whites could continue their tutelary role by ‘encouraging’ and ‘stimulating’ them. Shelley imagined that whites would undertake institutional supervision of Aboriginal people throughout the latter’s lives. Although the native institution was premised on general rejection of Aboriginals by respectable whites, missionaries were located in a special liminal zone of proximate but dominant contact.

Shelley desired to populate his institution, in the first instance, with Aboriginal children that had been separated from their parents. He said:

The chief difficulty appeared to me to be the Separation of the Children from their Parents, but I am informed that in many Cases this could be easily done.

Shelley also devised regulations to ensure separation would be maintained:

That no Child after having been admitted into the Institution, shall be permitted to leave it, or be taken away by any Person whatever, (whatever

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7 Armitage, Aboriginal Assimilation, p. 4.
9 Brook and Kohen, Parramatta,
Parents or other relatives) until such time as the Boys shall have attained the age of sixteen years, and the Girls fourteen years, at which ages they shall be respectively discharged.\textsuperscript{10}

The instillation of civilisation in Aboriginal children required, in Shelley’s imaginary, total separation from Aboriginal adults. Children were to be held by force, parents or other relatives were not to be allowed to take them away. Throughout Shelley’s representation of the civilising project, separating was simultaneously a technology and an indicator of civilisation.

Shelley’s institution was funded by Governor Macquarie and operated from 1814 to 1821; but it was not successful in attracting or keeping children. Despite great feasts thrown to entice parents to hand over their children, local Aboriginals began to avoid both the government and the missionaires, fearing their children would be taken away.\textsuperscript{11} The colonial government also captured children for the institution, but they speedily escaped.\textsuperscript{12}

**Separation and the ‘anti-civilising’ properties of Aboriginals**

Separation surfaced again in public debate in late the 1830s, a period of significant activity throughout the British Empire on the ‘native question’. The Anti-Slavery movement turned its attention to humanising the treatment of Indigenous peoples in the British colonies, forming the Aborigines Protection Society in 1835 (a branch opened in Sydney in 1838).\textsuperscript{13} This thinking informed Governor Gipps’s 1838 decision to prosecute 12 white men for the murder of at least 28 Aboriginal men, women and children in what is known as the Myall Creek Massacre.\textsuperscript{14} Within the racist structure of settler society, defining the killings as ‘murder’ classified Aboriginals with whites within the category ‘human’. Other colonists, however, represented Aboriginals as animals. In 1835, for example, Reverend William Yate said: ‘I have heard again and again people say that they were nothing better than dogs, and that it was no more harm to shoot them than it would be to shoot a dog.

\\textsuperscript{10} Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{11} An 1814 issue of the *Sydney Gazette* reported that at the first feast given by Macquarie to recruit students for Shelley’s project, the Aboriginals who attended told the Governor that more distant tribes did not attend because they were afraid they would be ‘forcibly deprived of their children’ (Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 66 citing the *Sydney Gazette* 31 December 1814.)
\textsuperscript{12} In April 1816, Macquarie ordered a punitive expedition to be launched against Aboriginals in the western part of the colony who had mounted armed resistance to European occupation of their land. The soldiers were instructed to also capture 12 Aboriginal children for the Native Institution (Brook and Kohen, p. 22). For various reasons the mission failed, including the efforts of the two Aboriginal trackers to warn people. No Aboriginals were punished and only two children were captured, Nalour and Doors. Both children escaped within two months (Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 69).
\textsuperscript{14} RHW Reece, ‘Myall Creek Massacre’ in David Horton (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 1994, p. 746.
when he barked at you’.\textsuperscript{15} A correspondent to the \textit{Colonist}, opposing an ‘Aboriginal Mission’ described Aboriginals as ‘the most degenerate, despicable, and brutal race of beings’ and said they were ‘cannibals’ and were ‘notorious for anti-civilising propensities’.\textsuperscript{16} This last attribution of ‘anti-civilising properties’ almost defies understanding, yet I think it gets to the heart of the nexus between the civilising mission and separation. It is the concept of ‘anti-type’ listed in the discussion of racial binary opposites in Chapter 1.\textsuperscript{17} Anti-type has properties akin to anti-matter: by its very nature it will destroy its opposite when brought into proximity or contact.

**Separation and work**

Throughout the 1840s there was ongoing debate in the NSW Legislative Council on how to encourage immigration to the colony to meet a perceived rural labour shortage. The transportation of convicts was opposed in many quarters, and alternatives included the encouragement of free settler immigration, the importation of Indian ‘coolies’ as indentured labourers and the utilisation of Aboriginals. One grazier informed a Legislative Council Inquiry in 1841 that the only way Aboriginals could be made into reliable workers was to ‘get the child from the parents, and teach them to work from their infancy’.\textsuperscript{18} Here the author constructs white/Aboriginal; worker/non-worker; useful/useless as binary oppositions, with the separation of Aboriginal children from their parents as the only means of transforming Aboriginals into workers.

**Separation and education**

The government started to collect census data on Aboriginals in 1843. Commissioners of Crown Lands were asked: the number of Aboriginals in each Commissioner’s district, whether they were permanent or temporary residents, what changes they had observed in Aboriginal social conditions, about schools and speculation on Aboriginal future prospects. John Lambie, Commissioner of Crown Lands for Maneroo, reported that he thought parents on the south coast (between Moruya and Twofold Bay) wanted their children to learn to read and write but, he said:

\begin{quote}
at the same time, they have an insuperable dislike to parting with them, if they are to be excluded from occasionally seeing them. If schools were
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Quoted in Marcus, Australian Race Relations, p. 50.
\item Miller, Koori: Will to Win, pp. 58--59 extract from Sydney \textit{Herald}, 19 September 1838.
\item That discussion drew on Andrew Markus, Australian Race Relations.
\item Tumut grazier G Shelley, New South Wales Votes and Proceedings (NSWV&P) 1841, Committee on Immigration, p. 46. The replies to the circular with regard to the current use and potential of Aboriginal labour were highly varied. Some said that they regularly employed Aboriginals and they were as good as white men at most things and better at some; others said that Aboriginals were poor workers. All agreed that Aboriginal workers did not like to settle permanently in one place but needed to be free to move when they wanted to.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
established in the District in the first instance, I have no doubt the children would be permitted to attend them, provided the parents and friends were sometimes allowed to visit them, and the dislike of parting with their offspring, on the part of the parents, most probably would gradually wear off, when the children might be removed to some general establishment, and finally separated from the tribes. 19

Lambie equated ‘school’ for Aboriginal children with separation from their parents; the notion of educating Aboriginal children that continued to live in ‘tribes’ with their parents made no sense in the racial logic through which Lambie imagined his world.

In 1849 a Select Committee report on the Aborigines and Protectorate to the Legislative Council concluded that the Protectorate had not only failed but had in fact harmed Aboriginal people. Separation, however, was advanced as a project that might produce positive results. Chairman JFL Foster reported that Aboriginal children had proved to be ‘educable’ in particular cases, but that ‘the total separation of the parents from the children seems to be essential to the success of any plan, and your Committee believe that to effect this object compulsory measures would be required’. 20 Thus education of Aboriginal children continued to be imagined as separation.

Separation and caste

The 1838 NSW Parliamentary Committee on the Aborigines Question heard testimony from William Shelley’s wife, Elizabeth. She said that she:

found [the Native Institution students’] dispositions and their capacity for learning to vary very much. Some of them read and write well, and understood arithmetic to a certain extent; but I always found the half-caste children quicker and more tractable than the blacks. 21

Shelley’s correlation of caste with intelligence and tractability foreshadows subsequent targeting of ‘half-caste’ children for the civilising mission. 22

In 1845 the Select Committee on Aborigines again sought census information on Aboriginals, but this time explicitly asked if there were ‘half-castes’ in the district and if so, did they live ‘in the manner of Aborigines’ and did whites ‘amalgamate or form families with them’. 23 One of the respondents, Crown Commissioner RG

20 NSWV&P 1849, p. 419.
21 Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 87; from Report from the Committee on the Aboriginal Question, 1838 NSWV&P, pp. 54–55.
22 A Russian observer had noted that the children in the Institution were predominantly ‘half-caste’ (Brook and Kohen, Parramatta, p. 86, quoting AP Shabel’sky).
23 NSWV&P 1845, p. 964.
Massy of M'Leay River reported 'half-castes' in his district and advocated the separation of 'half-caste' children 'to reclaim them from the wild and barbarous mode of life which, in the natural course of events, would be their fate'. 24 He said there would be no trouble getting mothers to give them up because he thought there was a 'natural repugnance'. 25 Here whiteness is silently constructed as human and civilised in opposition to Aboriginals as 'wild and barbarous'. Racial difference is figured as 'natural repugnance'. Whether or not Aboriginal mothers felt repugnance towards their mixed race children, this representation is consistent with European desires for racial segregation. Figuring separating as 'reclaiming' the child may connote a sense of prior ownership thus pointing silently to white paternity.

Discourse on separation to the 1850s

What I have tried to show through an analysis of these textual fragments is that in the early colonial period, up to about 1850, civilising mission discourse grappled with methods or technologies of producing 'useful' and appropriately gendered 'white' subjects from Aboriginals. This transformation was imagined to depend on the physical separation of Aboriginal children from their parents, relatives and culture. Despite the undoubted historical existence of Aboriginal persons who moved fluently between the two cultures, it seems to have been logically impossible for the white colonists to imagine educated, useful Aboriginal subjects who lived in Aboriginal ('tribal') communities. Colonial discourse represented a world that was ordered in terms of racialised apartheid. Although whiteness was constructed as superior, it also seemed vulnerable to contact with or proximity to Aboriginality.

Government separation projects

From 1850 to the early 1880s neither London, nor the colonial government, nor the missionaries displayed much interest in Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Rather, 'dispersion' (the euphemism for murder) continued quietly and underground. Aboriginal people continued to make their way as best they could within the interstices of white colonisation, combining 'bush' skills and 'camp' life with various types of employment in rural industries. 26 In the 1880s the issue of assimilation or 'merger' again became an issue of public debate when the colonial government began to take responsibility for 'protecting' Aboriginals. 27

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24 NSWV&P 1845, p. 967.
25 NSWV&P 1845, p. 967.
26 There is a substantial body of literature on the participation of Aboriginal people in the European economy as workers. See for example, Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), _Aboriginal Workers_, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney, 1995; Read, History of the Wiradjuri; Morris, Domesticating Resistance; Miller, Koorie: A Will to Win; Henry Reynolds, _With the White People: The Crucial Role of Aborigines in the Exploration and Development of Australia_, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic, 1990.
27 Read, History of the Wiradjuri p. 54.
Board for the Protection of Aborigines was established in 1883. Over the next fifteen years the Board took over the administration of Maloga and Warangesda missions and gazetted other stations and reserves. Historian Peter Read argues that reserves and stations were the subject of a three-way struggle for the definition of their use: Aboriginal people saw them as safe stopping places in a semi-migratory way of life; white towns people saw them as places where Aboriginal people should be removed to, out of sight and out of the way, but close enough to procure casual workers or sexual services; the governments saw them as permanent residential settlements where Aboriginal people would learn to adopt a Europeanised lifestyle.

One of the first actions taken by the Board was to conduct a census. Its 1883–84 Annual Report recorded a total of 9,031 Aboriginal persons of which 1,618 were identified as ‘full-blood’ children and 1,311 as ‘half-caste’ children. This report indicated a desire for statutory authority to act in loco parentis with respect to both Aboriginal adults and children; to control all property provided to Aboriginal people; to intervene in all agreements with whites; to impose penalties on whites ‘harbouring’ Aboriginals without the Board’s permission; and to authorise exemption from the Board’s authority. The report also advocated the establishment of ‘Homes’ (meaning supervised settlements somewhat similar to missions) for Aboriginal adults and children. In its first report the Board mapped out a discursive terrain where all persons of Aboriginal descent were represented as children requiring the Board’s supervision and tutelage — a vision very similar to that of Shelley’s Native Institution. In the second Annual Report, however, the Board began to focus specifically on the training and separation of ‘half-caste’ girls. The report said: ‘The half-caste girls especially deserve consideration. If trained to industrious and civilised habits they would readily find employment in domestic service. The males can always obtain work’. Thus racial difference figured as civilisation is more problematic in the feminine domestic sphere.

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28 Read, History of the Wiradjuri, p. 56, citing NSW Votes and Proceedings, 1883/III, 937–941; see also Historical Records of Australia. Series I. vol. VIII on the purposes of the 1883 Board as reported by the NSW Select Committee on Aborigines (1981).
30 Read, History of the Wiradjuri, chapter 2.
31 Aborigines Protection Board (APB) Annual Report 1883–84, NSWV&P 1885, vol. 11, p. 939. As I indicated at the outset of the thesis, these caste terms are currently considered by Aboriginal people to be extremely derogatory and racist. Although it is annoying, I will mark the terms with quotation marks as a continual reminder of their fictional and constructed status.
34 Heather Goodall, History of Aboriginal Communities, chapter 3, pp. 132–52. Goodall argues that the underlying desire was to control Aboriginal female fertility and thereby limit Aboriginal population growth.
Population panic and child removal at the turn of the twentieth century

In ‘Assimilation begins in the home’, historian Heather Goodall argues against the tendency of academics of Aboriginal history to approach the legislation, policies and practices that affected Aboriginal people in isolation from those affecting non-Aboriginals. Rather, she argues, Aboriginal policies were usually hand-me-downs, made over from other state agencies to fit, however poorly, the particular needs of ‘Aboriginal’ directed administration...but the overall approach of such policies remained deeply embedded within the wider social and political goals of the state.36

In this article she argues that the control of Aboriginal women’s (and girls’) sexuality and reproduction was the focus of the early years of implementation of the policies of separating Aboriginal children from their families, and locates this focus in the context of wider concerns about racial hygiene and the decline and degeneration of the white population.37 Indeed, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Board’s annual reports increasingly referred to a desire for the authority to take Aboriginal children from their families and this desire emerged in a wider context of philanthropic activism to take neglected and destitute white children away from their families. Thus, my discussion of the legislation enabling the removal of Aboriginal children from their families begins with a discussion of the broader concerns about the white population and the legislation that enabled the removal of white children from their families.

Snapshot: 1901

At the turn of the century in Australia generally and in New South Wales in particular, there was great concern and controversy over managing the population and fostering the conditions for creating a white British nation.38 The composition of the population was debated in the context of four distinct but inter-related social issues: the migration of Asians and other non-whites; the declining birth rate among white Australians; the production of criminal or pauper classes among poor whites; and, in southeastern Australia, the increasing population of ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal people.

36 Heather Goodall, ‘Assimilation begins in the home’: the State and Aboriginal women’s work as mothers in New South Wales, 1900s to 1960s’, in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds), Aboriginal Workers, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney, 1995, p. 77.
In 1896 the NSW parliament had passed the Coloured Races Restriction Bill. With Federation in 1901, the ‘problem’ of non-white migration was transferred to the Commonwealth and, in its first year the new parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act which was specifically aimed at preventing Asian and other non-European migration to Australia. The white population of New South Wales had grown exponentially from about 400,000 in 1860 to 1,600,000 in 1900. Over the same 40-year period, the number of Aboriginal people had declined drastically to only 7,000 by 1904. The Asian population in New South Wales was about 10,000 of which about one-third lived in Sydney. Yet between 1891 and 1911 the white birth rate, calculated as the average size of the completed white family, fell from 7.03 to 5.25. In Australia generally and in New South Wales in particular, this statistical fact together with relatively high (white) infant mortality rates became the ground of social panic and fears of ‘race deterioration’ in the early years after Federation. In 1903 New South Wales Premier Sir John See appointed a Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate which he justified on racial grounds. At a public meeting in Newtown, See said that he believed that the Inquiry ‘would be productive of great good, and would prevent the deterioration of our race and the demoralization of our young people’. The Commission’s report laid the blame for the declining birth rate and the resultant national degeneracy on the selfishness of white middle class women. Australia’s gendered response to its declining white birth rate made it the white woman’s duty to the nation to maintain a respectable

39 Evans et al., 1901, p. 50ff; Markus, Race Relations, pp. 112–118.
41 APB Annual Report 1904, New South Wales Parliamentary Papers (NSWPP) 1906, p. 835. Note that census data on Aboriginal people is notoriously unreliable.
42 Marcus, Australian Race Relations, p. 70.
44 Shirley Fitzgerald notes that the public outcry against high infant mortality rates in New South Wales, especially Sydney, began in the 1870s. The portrait Fitzgerald draws of the impoverished back lanes of Sydney, where landlords built rows of cheap two-room sheds where five to ten families might share one over-flowing water closet while their more affluent neighbour’s cesspools drained downhill into the lane, makes it more of a wonder that infants survived than that they died. (Shirley Fitzgerald, Rising Damp: Sydney 1870–90, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987.
45 Other Western nations were experiencing similar trends in decreasing birth rates, which demographers now call the ‘demographic transition’, a term which refers to change in a population’s structure with ‘modernisation’ and increasing wealth, material comfort, urbanisation and industrialisation. The ‘earlier’ population structure is characterised by high infant mortality rates, relatively short life spans, and where many children are considered to be an asset as workers in family agricultural enterprises. The transition occurs when infant mortality rates begin to decrease, children are not needed to work in agriculture, and parents prefer to have smaller families (see David Lucas and Paul Meyer, Beginning Population Studies, National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1994, p. 22). Demographic transition theory is implicated in modernisation theories which transform empirical observations of industrialising Europe and its settler colonies into natural laws of progress.
46 Hicks, Sin and Scandal, 1978, p. 4 quoting a speech given by See at the Oddfellows Lodge.
47 Hicks, Sin and Scandal, 1978; Browne, Empty Cradle, p. 24.
home and reproduce the race. As Howe and Swain put it: 'White babies were a national asset, motherhood a national service'.

Poverty was also a significant social issue at the turn of the century, particularly in the urban areas. A dramatic increase in the number of those seeking relief greatly exceeded the capacities of the various charitable institutions, particularly in respect of an increasing number of abandoned and orphaned children. To address these problems, unionists sought solutions in changes in the relations between workers and capital; feminists sought changes in the status of women through suffrage, increased economic independence, and increased responsibility of husbands in marriage; temperance and other social purity activists sought solutions in prohibition of vice; and philanthropists sought a larger role for the state in child and social welfare. The *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act* was an initiative of the latter.

The removal of (white) children to state custody

The removal and institutionalisation of destitute (white) children began to take shape in New South Wales with the establishment of the Society for Destitute Children in 1852 which was empowered to receive such children from magistrates. During the 1860s the state established reform and industrial schools for apprehended children. From about the mid-1800s, two opposing views of how to raise children separated from their parents developed in philanthropic circles. Reformers in Europe and the United States campaigned against large disciplinary institutions they dubbed 'barracks' after the military-like discipline to which the

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50 In her study of living conditions in Sydney between 1870 and 1890, historian Shirley Fitzgerald argues that, contrary to popular mythology and immigrant-enticing propaganda, the colony of New South Wales was not a (white) worker's paradise. Rather, cyclical unemployment, poor housing and urban infrastructure, a substantial gap between skilled and unskilled wages, a trend towards increasing deskilling as mechanisation replaced artisans, and the studied neglect of metropolitan Sydney by New South Wales parliamentarians whose economic interests lay with primary production and distribution, created a steady deterioration in the living conditions of the working poor, particularly widowed, deserted or cyclically deserted women (Fitzgerald, *Rising Damp*, 1987).


52 Mathews, Good and Mad Women, pp. 79–82.

53 Garton, *Out of Luck*.

54 Garton, Out of Luck, 1990, p. 60.

children were subjected. Instead, they argued, children should be boarded-out to families. In addition to horrifying abuses reported in large institutions, the disciplinary regime was thought to produce adults who did not know how to live in families, did not take initiative, and did not make good citizens. Rather, reformers argued, children needed ‘the civilising influences of “proper” mothers.’

In 1873 a NSW Royal Commission on Charities concluded that ‘the barracks bred barrack children’ and argued in favour of the boarding-out system (foster care in today’s usage). As a result, the State Children Relief Board was established to board-out any ‘state child’ living in a state institution. In 1896 the State Children Relief Act was amended so that children could be boarded-out to their own mothers (if white, deserted or widowed, ie respectably single), although the Board remained the child’s legal guardian. Thus, in New South Wales, from the late nineteenth century, the notion that (respectable) families, including respectable single mothers, provided the best environment for child rearing was firmly entrenched in state law, policy and practice. The corollary – that women’s role was in the home rearing her children – was also reinforced through the boarding-out allowance paid to mothers (as opposed to provisions that would enable women to be effective breadwinners). That boarding-out was significantly cheaper than institutionalisation was undoubtedly a significant factor.

In 1902, a Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council for the government by BR Wise, backed by upper class philanthropists, that would define a new category of person – the neglected child. This child, the government argued, should be ‘protected’ by being taken into state custody because his (or her) parents failed to provide adequate parenting and therefore produced ‘criminals’ instead of ‘citizens and voters’. The government’s representation of the problem relied on a binary

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57 Garton, Out of Luck, 1990, p. 91.
58 Garton, Out of Luck, 1990, p. 81, quoting the Public Charities Royal Commission; Dickey, No Charity, p. 61.
59 The non-possessive ‘Children’ in State Children Relief Board is not a typographical error, although many people refer to it as the State Children’s Relief Board because it feels more grammatical. Dickey, No Charity, p. 62.
60 Dickey, No Charity, p. 63.
61 See Mathews, Good and Mad Women, p. 87ff, ‘the core of the ideal of the good woman was mothering’.
62 The impetus for the Bill came from CK Mackellar, member of the Legislative Council (MLC), prominent philanthropic activist, president of the SCRB and author of numerous popular pamphlets and academic articles deploying the new discourses of statistics, eugenics and population management. Although Mackellar did not actually introduce the Bill, both he and Arthur Renwick, another prominent philanthropist and former president of the SCRB, were mentioned by Attorney-General RB Wise who was responsible for moving the Bill through the Legislative Council. Both Mackellar and Renwick were active in the Council debates.
63 Wise, New South Wales Parliamentary Debates (NSWPD), 1902, pp. 3354, 3355.
opposition between the citizen/voter and the criminal, and mapped out a process whereby vagrancy and neglect ‘cultivated’ demoralisation and crime. Although the Bill applied to all children, the ‘criminal’ was mostly imagined as male.

[The crimes of men have their origin commonly in the vagrancy of childhood; and certainly our prison statistics and the prison records of other states and of other countries bear most vivid testimony to this truth that the neglected child takes a terrible revenge upon society when he grows into an habitual criminal.]

In its first draft the Bill identified as ‘neglected’ children who: ‘wandered’ or had no ‘settled place of abode’; children living in brothels or associating with prostitutes, vagrants, thieves, drunkards or someone known to the police to be of ‘bad repute’; a female child who solicits, behaves indecently, or ‘wanders at night’ in a public place; or a child without means of subsistence, or without guardians.

Middle class supporters of the Bill advocated a society where children should not live, work or even play in city streets, the open air or public places. Rather, children were supposed to be out of sight in the private, feminine, domestic realm of the home. The family was held to be the best environment for raising children: ‘If you want to get the best results you must have the nearest possible approach to family life’. A proper home was a stationary or ‘settled abode’ rather than ‘wandering’ and it was populated with respectable, law abiding, employed, married, monogamous adults. Although the Bill mostly addressed problem boys, female children who worked as prostitutes, or were otherwise ‘indecent’, were singled out as the ‘greatest curse and reproach to this city’. In the Council there was general support for the Bill. The primary source of controversy was how to insure that male breadwinners did not abscond secure in the knowledge that the state would provide for his children or that mothers did not claim to be ‘deserted’ when in fact they were colluding with their husbands to get undeserved support from the state.

The Bill attracted significant public outcry. It was seen as a ‘threat’ to people’s homes and a violent attack on citizenship and the family. When the Bill moved to the Assembly, Opposition leader, Joseph Carruthers, took up the voice of the critics with vehemence. Deploying the discourse of rights, he declared that the state should not intervene in the ‘divine rights of parentage’ except in the case of ‘criminality’ of the parents in line with historical precedent of restricting state power to seizing bodies only in the case of criminality, insanity or abject destitution.

64 Wise, NSWPD, 1902, p. 3355.
65 Wise, NSWPD, 1902, pp. 3360–62.
66 Wise, NSWPD, 1902, pp. 3358.
68 Fegan, NSWPD, 1903, pp. 2386, 2387.
[This Bill is] one of the gravest pieces of legislation which can be placed before the parliament of any country. Legislation dealing with children ought to be approached with the greatest caution, especially when we attempt, by such legislation, to interfere with the divine right of parentage, and when we are going to make the state take upon itself the obligations which parents neglect, or which the state assumes that they neglect... There may be a few cases where parents so utterly neglect their children as to become criminal in their disregard of them; and, of course, in those cases, the state may well step in to the advantage of the community and the children themselves. But any extension of that obligation which the state has hitherto undertaken should be very carefully safeguarded [emphasis added].

The government subsequently reformulated the Bill in response to Opposition and popular criticism. John Fegan, speaking for the government, admitted that 'the Bill might act detrimentally to respectable people who were poor, and against whom no other charge could be made' and acknowledged that 'we have no right to make poverty a crime'. This acknowledgment pinpointed the underlying problem of the legislation – to correctly distinguish between respectable poverty and neglect, given that from the point of view of a (middle class) observer, there was little or no visible difference. Although there was substantial agreement on all sides of the Assembly that there were situations where children were 'neglected' and therefore the state should intervene, members fundamentally disagreed on what external signs indicated 'true' neglect. In a good deal of the subsequent debate members sought, through statistical and other expert accounts, anecdotes, autobiographical narratives and hypotheticals, to wrestle with this issue.

In its final form the Bill created a new mode of intervention in the private lives of white citizens, it also affirmed the sanctity of the white family and the principle of non-intervention unless the child or the parent behaved criminally. The Bill established a special judicial apparatus (the children's court), and institutionalised a hierarchical apparatus of substitute care. Boarding-out with a family was believed to be best practice for children who were 'innocent' (ie neglected); an array of institutional situations was ranked according to increasing discipline for children identified in terms of increasing 'viciousness'. At the same time, magistrates were to ensure that parents were genuinely neglectful rather than manipulating the system to take advantage of the state.

69 Carruthers, NSWPD, 1903, p. 2387.
70 Fegan, NSWPD, 1903, pp. 2871, 2872.
71 Carruthers, NSWPD, 1903, p. 2389. Much of this discussion arose in the context of trying to decide the economic role of children in working poor families: Wade, 1903, p. 2896; Carruthers, 1903, p. 2886; Edden, 1903, p. 2893; Storey, 1903, p. 2882.
72 Wade, NSWPD, 1905, p. 613.
73 Wade, NSWPD, 1905, p. 613.
A context for the Aborigines Protection Act

As a context in which the Aborigines Protection Act would be debated four years later, the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act set a number of precedents which would be modified to suit Aboriginal administration. First, the Act granted the state the statutory authority to pursue its interest in population control and the production of good citizens through the removal of children from their families. Second, it defined a set of behaviours and circumstances that were unacceptable for proper childrearing and therefore constituted neglect. These included sexual activity outside married, heterosexual relationships, wandering or lack of a fixed abode, and association with a range of criminal or other persons 'known to the police'. Third, it institutionalised a hierarchy of best practice child rearing for the creation of good citizens. Ideally a child would be raised in two-parent family with a male breadwinner and full-time mother; but respectable and innocently single mothers were also supported by the state. Substitute care ranged from boarding-out; through cottage homes with married caretakers; to the least desirable 'barracks' style institutions for children who were criminal or otherwise problematic. In all of these formulations of childcare, the gendered roles of men as breadwinners and women as childcarers were naturalised and reinforced by the state. With the increase of the state apparatus, however, some women were able to convert the maternal role into work in the newly emerging field of social work, homefinders and matrons.74 Other women participated as foster mothers.

'Race' or racial difference was not an explicit issue in the debates of this Bill. This does not mean, however, that the representations produced during the debate were not racialised. Rather, the Bill specifically pertained to the white racial majority which occupied the unmarked social categories of 'child', 'citizen', 'family', etc.75 Aboriginals were mentioned only once in a speech supporting the Bill. Prefiguring today's arguments against differential treatment of Aboriginals, Robert Scobie, a member of the Aborigines Protection Board, argued in favour of the Bill on the grounds that it was wrong that the state was providing food to destitute Aboriginals but not to whites:

We have throughout New South Wales the children of the aborigines, getting food from the state, while the children of white men are starving.76

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76 Scobie, NSWPD, 1905, p. 675. Similar to those who make that argument today, Scobie was not acknowledging the various forms of relief available to white citizens, through the SCRB, the Colonial Secretary's office, various private and sectarian charities, and through the old age pension.
This suggests that Scobie took it for granted that the Bill was intended to apply to whites, and that Aboriginals, located in another sphere of the state apparatus were totally outside its scope.

The Bill, however, was racially marked in other ways as well. The designation of the modes of life that were deemed neglectful – wandering, without fixed abode, living out-of-doors – were characteristic of Aboriginal life at the turn of the century. The distinction between ‘town’ and ‘camp’ was a marker of the distinction between whites and Aboriginals. According to the logic of the Bill, white children who lived like Aboriginals could be charged with neglect. Lastly, the Bill’s focus on female sexual behaviour as a determinant of neglect also had serious racial implications insofar as white colonists generally believed Aboriginal women to be sexually promiscuous.

The removal of Aboriginal children to state custody

Throughout the 1890s the Board had slowly created a statewide network of Aboriginal reserves and stations, supplied relief to the aged and infirm, induced parents to send their children to school by providing rations and clothing, and arranged apprenticeships. By 1904 after 20 years of ‘protection’, the Aboriginal population had plummeted by nearly 25 per cent from 9,000 in 1883 to 6,910 in 1904.78 It is hard to imagine the devastation of such drastic levels of mortality in such a short period of time. Aboriginal children comprised a large proportion of the total (one-third or 2,300), of which ‘full-blood’ children numbered only 813 while ‘half-caste’ children numbered 2,236. Only 612 people (less than 10 per cent of the total) lived on the seven managed stations,79 there are no data on the number of Aboriginals living outside the purview of white enumeration.

In 1907 the Board’s Annual Report began to articulate a specific policy aim in respect of the category ‘half-caste’ child. It said:

One of the most important questions the Board have to face is a large number of half-caste and other children (some of whom are almost white) at the various stations and camps. Under present conditions, though much has been done for some of them as regards primary education and also (on the Board’s stations) training the girls for domestic duties, they are, to a large

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77 For discussions of white representations of Aboriginal women as promiscuous see, Goodall, Assimilation begins in the home, pp. 78–81; Mary Ann Jebb and Anna Haebich, ‘Across the great divide: gender relations on Australia frontiers’, in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Sydney, 1992, p. 30; Pattel-Gray, The hard truth, pp. 260–1.
78 ABP Annual Report 1904, NSWPP 1906, p. 835. It is important to note that there is no way to verify the accuracy of the Board’s statistics and they are likely to be highly unreliable. It collected statistics by sending out requests for ‘returns’ from station managers and local police.
79 ABP Annual Report 1904, NSWPP 1906, p. 841. The stations in 1904 were: Brewarrina (average daily population of 92.6), Brungle (91.3), Cumeragunga (26.8), Grafton Home (58.3), Runnymede Home (65), Wallaga Lake (144) and Warangesda (no census).
extent, growing up in idleness, and under the influence of ill-regulated parents. An attempt will be made to solve what is undoubtedly a difficult problem. Returns are being obtained from the various superintendents of police throughout the State, furnishing full information regarding the children at the stations and camps, up to the age of 18 years, and the Board will endeavour, without unduly interfering with parental control, to evolve some scheme for training these children to proper spheres of usefulness, instead of allowing them to become an encumbrance on the State.  

There are significant similarities but also significant differences between this representation and the representations of street children in the debates of the *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act*, passed three years previously. In both cases childhood idleness is imagined to produce negative future consequences for the whole society. The trajectory of idle white children seems to have been more dire (the production of criminals) than that of Aboriginal children (an encumbrance on the state). In both cases, the preferred future is represented in terms of 'usefulness'. In both cases, the parents are the cause of the child's idleness. The behaviour of white parents, however, was represented in terms of criminality or immorality, whereas Aboriginal parents were merely 'ill-regulated'. The most significant difference between the two representations is the mode of identifying particular individuals for intervention. For white children, the behaviour or location of the body attracts the gaze of the state; for Aboriginal children it is the Aboriginality of the body.

### Debating the Aborigines Protection Bill, 1909

The Aborigines Protection Bill defined the category of persons called 'aborigines' (spelt with a lower case 'a') as:

> any full-blooded aboriginal native of Australia, and any person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood who applies for or is receipt of rations or aid from the board or is residing on a reserve.

Colonial Secretary Wood, MLA Bega, introduced the Bill into the House on 18 November 1909. He said he 'understood' that members on 'either side' regarded the Bill as 'non-contentious'. There were no speeches in reply.

Although the committee stage in the Assembly was also quite brief, there was some substantive disagreement over several clauses. Niels Nielsen of Yass objected to the

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80 APB Annual Report 1907, NSWPP 1908, p. 625.
81 Note: 'aborigines' with lower case 'a' signifies the legal category defined by the Aborigines Protection Act, as opposed to the more general usage of the term to refer to persons of Aboriginal descent.
83 Wood, NSWPD 1909, p. 4493.
potential of the legislation to be wrongly applied to Aboriginal persons who lived like whites. He said:

he wanted to be quite sure that aborigines, or the descendants of aborigines, who elected to lead the life of white men, and to go out working for their living, should be quite independent of the board. He did not want to see the board interfere with a man who wanted to lead an ordinary decent life — a half-caste, for instance, who wanted to lead the life of a white man — a man who had nothing to do with the aborigines’ camp, who did not associate with aborigines to any extent, but who went out shearing, droving, and doing all sorts of bush work.\textsuperscript{84}

The social map that emerges from Nielson’s representation of the ‘ordinary white man’ leading a ‘decent life’ was specifically a rural worker engaged in the occupations of shearing, droving and other bush work. This man is assumed to be someone who should not be ‘interfered with’ by the Board, and by extension a ‘half-caste’ man living like an ordinary white man also should not be interfered with. Thus while some Aboriginal blood plus, welfare, plus residence equals ‘aborigine’ in the definition clause of the Bill; half white blood, plus living like a white man equals not an ‘aborigine’ in Nielson’s logic. In addition to blood ‘admixture’ and employment status, Nielson placed another exigency on the Aboriginal man living like a white man: that he did not live in an Aboriginal camp or associate with Aboriginals ‘to any extent’. Apparently some or a little association was acceptable, but there was a limit past which too much association would return the man to the status of ‘aborigine’. As in earlier representations, one of the signifiers of whiteness was the desire for racial separation. Aboriginals living as a whites were expected to reproduce racial segregation. Here, as in the debate of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Bill, there is concern about misrecognition: in this case the misrecognition of physical Aboriginality as social Aboriginality.

The Board sought an amendment to the Bill that would have significantly increased its power to take control of Aboriginal children. In defence of the amendment, Robert Donaldson explained the Board’s position as follows:

\begin{quote}
[T]he object of the board in seeking these new powers was to give them control of the children, primarily over orphans or neglected children, so that they could take them away from the evil influences of the camps and board them out in approved homes, or move them to industrial homes. We had just passed clause 9, which gave complete power to remove all undesirables, black or white, from the camps. That was a power they did not possess at present. The camps were overrun by men almost white, who defied the board, and they were a bad example for the children. They went shearing, spent all their money in gambling, came back to the camp, and lived on the rations of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{84} Nielsen, NSWPD 1909, p. 4542.
the old people and the children. They would be kept out in the most drastic manner. 85

There are several significant points. First, the depiction of Aboriginal communities (the Board’s stations and reserves) as ‘camps’ and as ‘evil influences’ makes them comparable to spaces (like the brothel) that the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act deemed categorically unfit for raising children. Second, there are no representations of Aboriginal mothers, parents and families. Rather the ‘camp’ seems to be populated with old people, unattached men and children. Third, there is a peculiar confusion in the stated reasons for separation. On the one hand Donaldson specified ‘orphans or neglected children’ which suggests specific children with parent problems. However, he also expressed the desire take them away from the ‘evil influences of the camp’, which suggests a more global problem that would apply to all children living within the space of the camp.

In the Council, Edmond Fosbury, Superintendent of Police and former member of the APB began his remarks by providing an overview of the Board’s long-term project of caste-based assimilation grounded in the ‘dying race’ theory. He said he had gone back to old census records and found that the number of ‘pure blood aborigines’ had decreased from 7,000 to 2,000 since 1884 and on this basis predicted that the Board’s work would require

a decreasing expenditure, because the object of the board, no doubt, is, and always has been, that these people who are living on the reserves that have been made for the aborigines, who are half-castes, quadroons, or even octoroons, should merge as soon as possible into the general community. 86

Fosbury also acknowledged Aboriginal resistance to the Board’s plan. Like Nielsen, he differentiated between Aboriginals who were ‘respectable hardworking men’ and those who were not. Unlike Nielsen he located some of the hard workers on the reserves in a description that worked to undermine Donaldson’s representation of Aboriginal reserves as ‘evil influences’. Fosbury said:

There is no question about it that many of the people who are now living on the valuable reserves that have been granted are respectable hardworking men, and to my knowledge a good many of them, strange to say, are total abstainers. But there are a number of intruders who come on these camps and they will not remove, and there is a feeling of affinity, almost of affection, which exists between the aborigines of a tribe which prevents them from parting from any one of their blood, even if they are only quadroons. 87

Strikingly different from Donaldson’s representations, Fosbury acknowledged Aboriginal family relationships and the agency of Aboriginal residents in allowing

85 Donaldson, NSWPD 1909, p. 4550.
86 Fosbury, NSWPD 1909, p. 4654.
87 Fosbury, NSWPD 1909, p. 4655.
‘intruders’ to stay. At the same time, however, Fosbury expressed his own inability to understand how family could take precedence over colour among Aboriginals such that a darker person could feel affinity with or even affection for ‘only quadroons’. Fosbury inhabited a racially segregated social geography where it was hard to understand why Aboriginal people did not construct the same social meanings of ‘caste’ as did whites. Fosbury’s speech was followed by the Bill’s approval without amendment.

The *Aborigines Protection Act* defined a category of persons called ‘aborigines’ and authorised state intervention into their lives. The Act enabled the Board to *inter alia*: ‘provide for the custody, maintenance, and education of the children of aborigines’, to ‘manage and regulate the use of reserves’, to ‘exercise general supervision and care over all matters affecting the interests and welfare of aborigines’, to ‘remove from a reserve any aborigines who is guilty of any misconduct, or who, in the opinion of the board should be earning a living away from such reserve’. 88

The definition of ‘aborigine’ relied on a combination of race and behaviour: ‘blood’ which was detectable by appearance combined with a welfare relationship with the Board or residence on land controlled by the Board. Significantly, the Act defined a new social meaning for the land set aside as Aboriginal reserves. Historians Peter Read and Heather Goodall have both documented the establishment, in the early half of this century, of many independent and thriving Aboriginal communities on land gazetted as Aboriginal reserves. 89 Furthermore, according to Goodall, reserve residents understood this land to be always already theirs. Gazetting as an ‘aboriginal reserve’ was understood to be official recognition of Aboriginal land demands which in turn reflected traditional ownership. 90 The definition of ‘aborigine’ in the 1909 Bill, however, redefined living on a reserve as a dependent status and the land itself as an institutional space under the ownership and control of the Board.

Under section 7 of the Act the Board gained the power to arrange apprenticeships under the *Apprentices Act* for the child of any ‘aborigine’ or the neglected child of any person with ‘an admixture of aboriginal blood in his veins’. That act, however, required the consent of both the parent and the child, and in any case, an apprenticed child was not under the full control and custody of the board. The Board also gained authority over neglected Aboriginal children, but the finding of neglect was the prerogative of a magistrate under the *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act*.

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89 Read, History of the Wiradjuri; Goodall, Invasion to Embassy.
90 See Goodall, Invasion, for discussion of Aboriginal understandings of the meaning of reserved land see pp. 84–87; p. 98ff; and especially pp. 102–103; for discussion of the resumption of reserve lands by the Board see chapter 11, ‘Dispossessions’, p. 125ff.
In the parliamentary debates of the Bill, racial notions of blood and caste were used by members on all sides as taken for granted terminology for conveying meaning about Aboriginal people. The Act formalised racial classification schemes as the basis for differential treatment of ‘aborigines’: with ‘full-bloods’ subject to the full range of ‘protection’ measures and ‘lighter caste’ men and children subject to exclusion from spaces designated for ‘aborigines’ and forcible transfer into the white space of the ‘wider community’. Commonly assigned on the basis of body colour, the spatial distribution of Aboriginal people by caste cut through and fragmented Aboriginal families. An underlying geography of racial apartheid was so taken for granted that even sympathetic men like Edmond Fosbury could not understand the ‘feeling of affinity’ Aboriginals had for ‘only quadroons’.

The government represented ‘aborigines’ as an undifferentiated group under the impersonal but racially charged sign ‘camp’ – a space of ‘evil influence’, thereby erasing Aboriginal families, mothers, fathers, grandparents from the discursive field. Other members challenged this with representations of Aboriginal individuals living on reserves and stations as ‘respectable hardworking men’.

As in the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act, there was concern that the Aborigines Protection Act was too broad and would misrecognise some individuals as ‘aborigines’ who in fact were living the ‘ordinary decent life...of a white man’. In the mix of body and behavioural attributes that differentiated between an ‘aborigine’ and a man living ‘like a white man’, too much association with ‘aborigines’ was a key factor. Living ‘like a white man’ meant living within geographical areas or social areas designated as ‘white’. Respectable, hardworking Aboriginals living in Aboriginal geographical and social space continued to be ‘aborigines’. Thus the possibility of social whiteness was contingent on separation from social Aboriginalness, for both Aboriginal adults and children.

After the Act

Within a year of the Act’s passage, the Board’s annual reports began to show frustration with the Act. Aboriginal parents and children refused to participate in the apprenticeship scheme and the Board could not force them.91 The Board continued to view Aboriginal communities as unfit places to raise children:

For the past years it has been recognised that the various aborigines reserves throughout the state, – and indeed the Board’s stations, – are far from being suitable places in which to bring up young children. With such an environment it can hardly be expected that they will acquire those habits of cleanliness, obedience, and morality which are so necessary if they are to become useful members of the community. Some of the children are almost white, and if it were not that they are resident on an aborigines’ reserve could hardly be distinguished from European children...It must admitted

that one and all must be contaminated by the vicious surroundings in which they find themselves, and though some who have been sent out to homes by the Board, show every promise, these can only be regarded as exceptions. The Board recognised that the only chance these children have is to be taken away from their present environment...Under the Act the Board have no power to deal with this question in the drastic manner which it no doubt deserves, but they intend to take the earliest opportunity of bringing all orphan and neglected children into the proposed Home, and demonstrating what they earnestly hope can be done...having once left the aboriginal reserves they should never be allowed to return to them permanently.92

This extract shows an intensification in the representation of Board's project which was spearheaded by the particular obsession of Board member Robert Donaldson. First, it specifies Aboriginal difference in terms of 'cleanliness, obedience and morality' as opposed to 'idle' and 'ill-regulated' two years previously. Second. it now identifies a category of children who are 'nearly white', no longer referring to them as 'half-caste'. Racialising the children as 'nearly white...who could hardly be distinguished from European children' makes the parents racially other from their own children. From the point of view of the white speaker, these are 'our' children who are in a place where they are being 'contaminated' by 'vicious surroundings'. Once they are removed from this place, racial order is restored. As in earlier representations, there is no mention of parents or families; these are erased by the spatial terms 'surroundings', 'reserves', 'environment'.

In the 1911 Annual Report the campaign to gain more power over Aboriginal children continued to build.

Of these children a number are half-caste, quadroon and octoroon, and are increasing with alarming rapidity. To allow these children to remain on reserves to grow up in comparative idleness, and in the midst of more or less vicious surroundings, would be, to say the least, an injustice to the children themselves and a positive menace to the State...[W]ile not unduly interfering with the relationship between parent and child, to see that they are properly trained to spheres of future usefulness, and once away from the reserves not to allow them to return except, perhaps, in the case of those who have parents, on an occasional visit...it is essential that they should be removed at as early an age as possible.93

In comparison with the report for the previous year, the approach here is less inflammatory and seems to respond to anticipated objections. An additional problem has been added to the 'case' for separation: the 'alarming' rate of population increase of the specifically identified castes ('half-caste', 'quadroon' and 'octoroon') who are now figured as a 'menace to the State' (adopting the

93 The Act came into effect 1 June 1910 and the Regulations the following week on 8 June; 1910 APB Annual Report 1911, NSWPP 1912, p. 718.
language of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Bill debate). Leaving the children on the reserves is figured as ‘injustice’ and separation in terms of utility – the Board’s aim is to train the children for ‘future usefulness’. Anticipating objection, here the Board recognises the ‘relationship between parent and child’ and even allows for occasional visits. However, separation is to begin at as early an age as possible.

Between 1910 and 1912, the Board’s minutes record the approval of many applications and assignment of particular children to apprenticeships. The minutes also show the Board asking the police or the State Children Relief Board (SCRB) to ‘take action’ against various children under the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act. The minutes also record girls being sent to homes for unwed mothers in Sydney and infants transferred to the Bomaderry Home in Berry. In 1912 the Board opened the Cootamundra Home for Aboriginal Girls and appointed a ‘Homefinder’ who inspected stations and compiled lists of children to be removed or apprenticed. A visit to Burra Bee Dee and Brungle stations in October 1912, for example, resulted in nine girls being removed to Cootamundra. Altogether in the years 1910 and 1912 the minutes indicate an intention to remove approximately 150 children, mostly from the Board’s stations. The child population of the stations in 1911 was reported at 763 children, meaning that about one in five was targeted for removal.

The minutes also record ongoing refusals to comply with the Board’s separation plan and protests against it. During the same period, 1910 to 1912, the Board’s minutes record Aboriginal parents refusal to have their children ‘trained’ or ‘apprenticed’ in Warangesda, Grafton, Wallaga Lake, Wellington, Terry Hie

94 The minutes of 6 October 1910 indicate the Board asking the SCRB to take control of four children from Brewarrina; and in 1912 the Board initiated a conference with the SCRB to formalise relations (Minutes, 9 March 1912).
95 Minutes of the APB 15 February 1912, 22 February 1912, 25 April 1912, 30 May 1912, 31 October, 24 November 1912.
96 Berry (south of Nowra) run by the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM), Minutes of the APB 1 December 1910, 8 December 1910, 2 February 1910.
97 Minutes of the APB 24 October 1912.
98 APB Annual Report 1911, Station census returns, NSWPP 1912, p. 726. The numbers of Aboriginal children removed from their families can only be estimated. The state’s records are incomplete and inaccurate, the definition of who was ‘Aboriginal’ is shifting, some children were taken informally or just disappeared, children were also taken by non-government organisations and no records were kept. Peter Read estimates that 5,600 children were removed between 1883 and 1969 (800 of those between 1915 and 1926 (Read 1981); Heather Goodall estimates about 2,400 children were removed between 1916 and 1936 (Goodall 1983, p. 135); and Andrew Armitage estimates rates of removal at about 200 to 400 per 1000 up to the 1960s (1995, p. 205). See Link-Up and Wilson 1996, p. 29ff and Read 1981 for discussions of the problems with calculating how many Aboriginal children were removed from their families.
99 Heather Goodall’s chapter ‘Prenticed out for sixpence a week’ argues that the so-called ‘apprenticeship’ of Aboriginal young people should not be viewed as a genuine apprenticeship. In practice, Aboriginal young people were exploited as cheap labour who worked long hours, in isolated conditions and, frequently, were denied access to decent accommodation, food, or clothing. Additionally, Aboriginal girls were subject to sexual abuse and exploitation. Goodall, History of
In June 1912 the residents of Burnt Bridge and Rollands Plains stations complained to their local MLA, Mr HD Morton. It was against this background of Aboriginal resistance that the Board’s Annual Reports increasingly reported a desire for a ‘drastic’ solution enabling total control over Aboriginal children. An amendment to the Act was tabled in parliament in 1915.

**Debate of the 1915 amendment of the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909***

Like the debate of the *Aborigines Protection Act*, the amendment debate was brief. Frederick Flowers, Vice-President of the Executive Council, introduced the Bill, describing it as ‘of some importance from the standpoint of the administration of the board, though possibly not of very great importance so far as the general public are concerned’. He said:

> As an illustration of how things are going, there are to-day five half-castes for every two full-bloods... The whole object of the board was to put things into train on lines that would eventually lead to the camps being depleted of their population, and finally the closing of the reserves and camps altogether. The camps and reserves should be made to work out their own salvations, and thus a continually increasing charge upon the state would disappear, and a grave scandal and responsibility on the Government cease. But this could never be achieved until the children were removed from the low surroundings of the camps, and placed in a position where they would be sought after for healthy occupations. In that way the children would be saved and the camps abolished. The taking of the children would, of course, be limited to the camps alone. The mothers kept control of them very well until they are about 14 years of age, but after that the bad influences and surroundings prevailed, and the children commenced to have children, and so the thing went on year after year with the result that the half-caste and white population was increasing. The whole fact was that children at the camps never had a ghost of a chance to keep respectable.

While there are continuities with arguments for separation presented in the Board’s Annual Reports, the Board’s case to parliament was argued on the grounds of population and expenditure. Here, the long-term aim of the Board is to close camps and reserves, thus reducing the ‘charge upon the state’. However, although the


100 Minutes of the APB, 21 and 28 July and 1 September 1910.
101 APB Minutes 15 September 1910.
102 Minutes of the APB, 19 January 1911.
103 Minutes of the APB, 24 October 1912.
104 Minutes of the APB, 31 October and 5 December 1912.
105 Minutes of the APB, 13 July 1912.
106 Flowers, NSWP 1914, p. 1353.
107 Flowers, NSWP 1914, p. 1353.
‘You took our children’

‘full-bloods’ (obligingly) were dying out, the ‘half-caste’ populations of the reserves were increasing and, in turn, increasing expenditure. The cause of this ‘scandal’, was the ‘low surroundings’ and ‘bad influences’ of the camps and the inability of Aboriginal mothers to keep their daughters ‘respectable’ beyond the age of 14. The result was the rapid increase of the reserves’ ‘half-caste and white population’ unless the children were removed. The subtext to this narrative is Aboriginal women’s imagined promiscuity and miscegenation, signified by the fact that the new generations are increasingly ‘half-caste’ and ‘white’. Thus, as Heather Goodall points out, the Board is specifically intent on controlling Aboriginal girls reaching puberty to prevent further reproduction.108 The implication of the representation is that there are no families on Aboriginal reserves, only Aboriginal mothers and their daughters – Aboriginal husbands and fathers have been entirely erased. The possibility that ‘half-caste’ or ‘white’ children were born within respectable Aboriginal families is foreclosed.

The representation of Aboriginal reproduction as miscegenous, illegitimate and immoral enables the construction of the Board’s problem in terms of a discourse of rescuing or removing female children from sites of immoral sexuality as per the definition of brothels and opium dens as sites of neglect in the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act. Part of this work is done through the use of the term ‘camp’ to describe Aboriginal settlements on the Board’s reserves and stations. ‘Camp’ accomplishes a great deal of ideological work. First, it signifies a particular mode of human habitation which is out-of-doors, in nature, non-stationary, and materially insubstantial. Meaning is constructed through opposition to signifiers of white living arrangements like town, township, city, village, house, all of which were indoors, fixed and materially substantial. In the white social order, children were supposed have a ‘fixed abode’ or were liable to be charged with neglect. Thus in the European imaginary the Aboriginal camp was in direct opposition to European domesticity. Insofar as camping was acceptable as a mode of habitation for Europeans it was for men only (drovers or boundary riders), temporary (while building a house in the bush) or recreational. That the term ‘camp’ also referred to cattle, as in ‘cattle camped at the creek’, adds additional connotations that ally Aboriginal people with animals in opposition to white/humans.

The second, and I think more important, ideological function of the term ‘camp’ was its representation of human relationships. The ‘camp’ was also a term for a human collectivity. Using it worked to erase the more specific human relationships of mother, father, child, grandmother, husband, wife, cousin, grandfather, aunt, uncle, through which both Aboriginal and European familial and other social relationships were constituted. Instead, camp substituted for Aboriginal persons and

108 Goodall found that girls 12 years of age or older accounted for 54 per cent of the Board’s removals of Aboriginal children to 1928, whereas boys of the same age accounted for only 14 per cent of removals. Goodall concludes that the Board followed through on its stated policy of removing girls near puberty. Goodall, History of Aboriginal Communities, p. 137.
erased the various relationships they had with one another. The term connotes undifferentiated and disorganised social arrangements. Children in this imaginary were not being removed from persons, ‘families’, or ‘parents’; they were being removed from places ‘camps’.

Returning to the debate of the Bill, Flowers also supported the government’s argument in favour of the Bill with an account of the Board’s frustration with trying to operate under the terms of the *Aborigines Protection Act*. Under the Act the Board could apprentice children, but only with the consent of child and the parents. He described proceedings under the *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act* as ‘cumbersome and ineffective’ because:

> under the law these children cannot legally be called neglected children, though, at the same time, the parental influence is of such a nature that they practically are neglected...the difficulty in proving neglect where children are fairly clothed and fed is insurmountable. 109

The solution to the ‘difficulty’ was the grant of what Flowers described as ‘extraordinary powers’. He said

> I want members to clearly understand that in the Bill we are practically going to remove from the parents in the camp their parental responsibility, and place it wholly in the hands of the board. 110

In the debates of white child removal the government viewed taking children into state custody as a last resort undertaken if the state could not force the parents to meet their responsibilities to their children. Here, the problem is that the Board could not get children away from Aboriginal parents who both wanted to keep their children and who, the magistrates found, according to the standards applicable to white parents, were not neglectful.

The only other speech in the Council was made by Edmund Fosbury. Like his speech supporting the 1909 *Aborigines Protection Act*, his representations of Aboriginal people worked to undermine those of Flowers. After saying that he supported the amendment, he criticised Flowers saying

> I do not think the hon. member has been quite fair to these aboriginal settlements in regard to what he has said about the immoral associations of aboriginal camp life and so on. 111

He then urged members to visit the Board’s institutions where they would find schools and farming. He did, however, characterise the reserves as ‘public institutions’ where inmates were ‘kept in a state of tutelage’ which, in his view, was

110 Flowers, NSWPD 1914, p. 1355.
111 Fosbury, NSWPD 1914, p. 1355.
inappropriate for a ‘half-caste or a quadroon’ who ‘ought to be working as an
ordinary citizen in the community’. Fosbury then offered a different justification
for the amendment. He said

I know the great difficulties there will be in withdrawing children from this
so-called camp life. There is very fervent and strong affection between the
parents and relations and these half-caste and other children – an affection
quite as strong as that which exists amongst any of the white population.
These aborigines, therefore, would strongly object to their children being
taken away from their homes where they have small cottages, and were they
live just the same as other citizens. They do not think that their children ought
to be forced away from them. There is only one proper way to do the thing.
The board must have authority...

Fosbury articulated a representation of Aboriginal life on reserves that was similar
to the life of rural whites – they lived in homes and small cottages ‘like other
citizens’. His use of the phrase ‘so-called camp’ flagged his criticism of the
government’s ideological deployment of the term. Furthermore, he represented
Aboriginals as people (‘parents’ and ‘children’) who had the same human
relationships as whites (‘fervent and strong affection’) and strongly objected to
their children ‘being taken away from their homes’. Nevertheless, Fosbury’s vision
of the future (‘these full-blooded aborigines are rapidly dying out, and there will be
no occasion for these camps or reserves in future’)
114 led him to support the Bill’s
expedience in ‘doing the thing’ which he seemed unable to name.

There was no discussion in committee and the Bill was passed without amendment
or vote to the Assembly.

The Colonial Secretary (the minister overseeing the Aborigines Protection Board),
John Cann was in charge of getting the Bill through the Assembly. His opening
remarks were as forthright as Flowers with respect to the powers sought: ‘Without
dilating on the matter in detail, practically the entire principle involved is to place
the board in loco parentis’. He was interrupted by Patrick McGarry at this point
who interjected: ‘To steal the child away from the parents!’ Cann continued,
producing an argument almost identical to Flowers which ended with the following
‘dying race’ narrative:

If we give the board the powers I am seeking to bestow under this amending
Bill these half-caste children will be given a chance to better themselves, and
instead of the Government being called upon to maintain stations all over the
state for the protection of the aboriginals, the aboriginals will soon become a

112 Fosbury, NSWPD 1914, p. 1355.
113 Fosbury, NSWPD 1914, p. 1355.
114 Fosbury, NSWPD 1914, p. 1356.
115 Cann, NSWPD 1915, p. 1951.
negligible quantity and the young people will merge in to the present civilization and become worthy citizens.\textsuperscript{117}

As in the narratives underpinning the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act, the government’s aim was to create worthy (white) citizens for the future. Whereas the earlier legislation feared the production of ‘criminals’, this legislation feared the reproduction of ‘aboriginals’, thus ‘citizen’ and ‘aborigine’, and ‘civilisation’ and ‘station’ work as binary opposites.

The debate in the Assembly was wide-ranging with some members highly critical of whites in general, and the Board and the proposed Bill in particular. Members legitimated their positions in terms of widely divergent and conflicting representations of Aboriginal people. Thus the debate can be read, in part, as a struggle over the interpretation of the history of Aboriginal–white relations. Taken as a whole, the debate mapped a complex local and international racial geography. McGarry and Robert Scobie were the amendment’s strongest critics. Both articulated a historical narrative which located the removal of Aboriginal children in the context of the conquest of Aboriginal land.

McGarry argued that ‘in the interests of civilisation, we have over-run their country and taken away their domain. We now propose to perpetrate further acts of cruelty upon them by separating the children from the parents.’\textsuperscript{118} Similarly, Scobie claimed that ‘[this Bill] means nothing more nor less than the absolute despoiling of the black people of this country of their progeny after we have taken their lands. I can speak feelingly on this subject. I have been a member of the Aborigines Protection Board since 1901’.\textsuperscript{119} In addition, both McGarry and Scobie analysed the removal of Aboriginal children as an exercise in procuring cheap rural labour for squatters. Scobie called the amendment ‘the reintroduction of state slavery’;\textsuperscript{120} McGarry predicted that ‘we are going to hand these children to merciless, grasping, cruel people, who are looking for cheap labour’.\textsuperscript{121}

Both men called attention to the benefits of the amendment to whites, contesting the government’s representation of its benefits to Aboriginal children. Furthermore, the use of language like ‘over-run’, ‘perpetrate’, ‘slavery’, ‘despoil’, ‘merciless’, ‘grasping’, ‘cruel’, represented whites as the site of immorality rather than Aboriginals.

A number of members produced quite specific representations of Aboriginals which, whether the speaker was for or against the amendment, worked to subvert the government’s representation of Aboriginal reserves and stations as sites of child neglect. Reginald Black, for example, narrated the story of his attempt to prevent

\textsuperscript{117} Cann, NSWPD 1915, p. 1951.
\textsuperscript{118} McGarry, NSWPD 1915, p. 1953.
\textsuperscript{119} Scobie, NSWPD 1915, p. 1963.
\textsuperscript{120} Scobie, NSWPD 1915, p. 1963.
\textsuperscript{121} McGarry, NSWPD 1915, p. 1954.
the Board from taking a woman’s children away. He described the mother as ‘a very respectable woman, who washes for a living in order to support herself, her children, and an aged mother, who is blind’. Black also said that at Port Stephens he saw ‘a blackfellows’ fishing camp. [And he] found that the blackfellows were well respected by the people in the neighbourhood, and that they made a good living’. John Storey, who supported the amendment, argued that,

In some places I found that they were not all huddled together, but their houses were fenced off, and in many cases there were gardens in front of them that were a credit to the women living in the houses. If white people go to these places and knock down the fences and ill-treat the aborigines, neither the Government nor the Board can be held responsible for that, but those who do it.

Furthermore, he said he understood the legislation would not be directed at all Aboriginals, but only those particular individuals who were neglectful. Again describing a station, he said, ‘the women were clean, careful, and in every sense well domesticated. It is quite wrong to say that people of that type would be interfered with’. Aborigines Protection Board member, Robert Scobie deployed a similar representational strategy in his vehement opposition to the amendment. He said

I decline to be a party to perpetuating outrages which I saw committed at the Warangesda station. A woman came to me with a baby and two other children. The children were as clean and tidily dressed as those of any white woman. With flashing eyes and speaking in good English the woman asked me if I thought I would like her children to be taken away from her. She added, ‘Do you think I have not the same feeling as a white woman? If you put my children into an institution to learn a trade I shall leave the mission station altogether’... The aborigines are an intelligent body of people and know what is due to them... At Darlington Point I have heard an aborigine, who was highly educated, explaining in the best of English how the aborigines were being plundered of their rations, robbed of their lands, and reduced to the position of slaves... you cannot expect them to calmly submit to an order to take from them their girl or boy in order to place them in a Government institution.

In all of these speeches, Aboriginal people are represented as ‘respectable’ according to white notions of respectability. The women are homemakers, they dress well, their homes are clean, their gardens tidy, and they love their children;

the men are hardworking, make good livings, speak English well, and are intelligent analysts of the social order. Furthermore, they are represented as particular individuals with feelings and thoughts, they are not an undifferentiated mass labelled ‘the camp’. All of these representations worked to challenge a unified construction of ‘aborigines’ as intrinsically neglectful parents. However, unlike the debate on the removal of white children, only two speakers actually voted against the Bill. It passed 31–3 and from 1915 onwards the Board was empowered to remove the children of any ‘aborigine’, that is the child of a so-called ‘full-blood’ or the child of any person of Aboriginal descent living on a reserve or station or in receipt of rations.

**The effects of the Act**

Aboriginal lives were deeply affected by the Aborigines Protection Board, but this is not to say that the Board controlled their lives. In addition to ongoing Aboriginal resistance, the Board was chronically underfunded, dependent on staff who were mostly poorly trained and inadequate, and caught between its own assimilationist project and rural whites’ desire to exclude Aboriginals from white social space (except when wanted for work or sex).

In 1916 a Register of Wards was started to record the details of removed children. In the 12-year period from 1916 to 1928, 800 children were taken from their families and sent to the Bomaderry Home in Berry, the training home at Cootamundra and to ‘apprenticeships’ on farms or Sydney suburban homes. As Heather Goodall argues, the term ‘apprenticeship’ was deceptive – Aboriginal children received little or no training but worked long, hard hours receiving little or no wages, and frequently inadequate food, clothing and shelter. Inarna Walden called it slavery.

The Board also began to deem children ‘white’ and then enlist the support of the State Children Relief Board (SCRB) to remove them. For example, in July 1915 the Board declared 46 Aboriginal children to be ‘not Aboriginal’ and transferred them to the SCRB. These children would have been boarded-out to white families or sent to white institutions. The Board’s minutes indicate that fair-skinned Aboriginal children were systematically redefined as ‘white’ and transferred to the responsibility of the SCRB or its successor after 1923, the Child Welfare Department. By changing the racial category of the child, the Board was able to

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128 Goodall, *History of Aboriginal Communities*, chapter 3.
instigate the separation of many more children than it could have provided ‘care’ for.

Quadroonity: further racialisation of Aboriginal families

In 1918 the Board initiated a further amendment to change the definition of ‘aborigine’ in the Act to explicitly exclude ‘quadroons’ and ‘octoroos’ from spaces designated for ‘aborigines’. Debate on the Bill was polarised with Sir Joseph Carruthers opposing it on the grounds that Aboriginal families mostly had people of varying ‘castes’ and that the effect of the Bill would be to split up families, especially in the case where children were lighter than their parents. 131 LF Heydon who supported the Bill argued that on the contrary, it was cruel to subject someone who was ‘seven-eighths white person’ to association with the blacks. He demanded: ‘Would it not degrade any people to give them a home in a blacks’ camp; to herd with full-bloods and half-castes and breed with them?’ 132 The Bill was passed. Peter Read points out that in the minds of both the Board and the legislators Aboriginal genealogy invariably progressed through three generations from ‘full-blood’ to ‘half-caste’ to ‘quadroon’. The notion that people might marry ‘backwards’ to someone ‘darker’ was not entertained. 133 Heydon’s naturalisation of racial segregation relied on the connotations of ‘herd’ and ‘breed’ to locate Aboriginal people as less than human.

Race is everything: white separation/black separation

The differences between the debates of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act and the 1915 amendment of the Aborigines Protection Act are striking and they show us the difference race has made in a child’s chances of remaining with his or her parents.

In both debates the creation of the nation and its population are underlying rationales for the state taking over parental responsibilities for childrearing. In the case of white children the creation of useful (white) citizens is foregrounded. In the context of parallel debates on the decreasing white birth rate, white children were viewed as valuable raw material for the nation’s future. In the debate of the 1915 amendment of the Aborigines Protection Act, population reduction was the key problem. The government wanted to stop Aboriginal physical and social reproduction. Therefore, as Heather Goodall has pointed out, it focused most particularly on the removal of Aboriginal girls at puberty in order to control their sexuality, prevent reproduction and population growth in Aboriginal communities. 134 The Board’s panic about the strength of Aboriginal reproduction complements panic in the wider society at that time about the decreasing white

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131 Link-Up (NSW) and Wilson citing NSWPD 9 October 1917, p. 1561.
132 Link-Up (NSW) and Wilson citing NSWPD 18 October 1917, p. 1793.
134 Goodall, Assimilation.
birth rate. Both panics expressed fear that non-white populations would overwhelm the white population.

In the discursive terrain of white child removal certain categories of person are assumed to exist: respectable white families with mothers and fathers who, in the normal course of events, raise their children to become useful citizens. In opposition to these are families and parents who are criminally neglectful of their children. In contrast, in the debates of the *Aborigines Protection Act*, the very existence of respectable Aboriginal families was contested. In the government’s representations, Aboriginal families were erased from the discursive field. Along with them went the logical possibility of respectable Aboriginal parents who provided good care for their children.

The government overwhelmingly referred to Aboriginal people in terms of collective impersonal nouns: the camp, the reserve, the environment. The ‘camp’, functions much as the urban ‘street’ in the earlier debate. It connoted a specifically Aboriginal space deemed unfit for the rearing of children. Like the ‘street’ it was out-of-doors, mobile as opposed to fixed and more or less ‘public’ as opposed to the private domestic sphere of the respectable white family. In the debate and the Board’s minutes between 1909 and 1915, Aboriginal stations, reserves and ‘camps’ were represented in terms of idleness, contamination, immorality, viciousness and menace.

The debates were based on a presumption that the children are ‘half-castes’ as a result of unmarried miscegenous sexual relations with white men. The only Aboriginal parent imagined by the government was a single mother who was presumed to be promiscuous and ineffectual in protecting her daughter’s ‘respectability’. The representation of Aboriginal adults as a childlike race requiring tutelage themselves foreclosed the possibility of Aboriginal parents teaching their children to grow into useful adults. Instead of an opposition between neglectful Aboriginal parents and respectable Aboriginal parents, the opposition is between Aboriginal camps and respectable white parents. Thus the logic of the transfer of children between fit and unfit persons, necessarily means a transfer from Aboriginals to whites. Although the government’s position prevailed, it was not hegemonic. Police Superintendent Fosbury and a number of other members called attention to the respectable, hardworking Aboriginal individuals they knew.

Another striking difference between the two debates is differential protection of families through procedures for child removal. In the former, neglect was embedded in the discourse of criminality and the law. Specific criminal behaviours constituting neglect were defined which would justify state intervention into the ‘sanctity’ of the family. Given the potential overlap between poverty and criminal neglect, procedural safeguards to protect poor families from misidentification were put in place. This is not to say that poor families were protected, but the lawmakers thought this was the correct approach. In the case of Aboriginal child removal, the procedural safeguards instituted for white child removal were found ‘cumbersome’.
Instead, the 1915 amendment exempted Aboriginal child removal from judicial oversight and appeal.

Race and racial difference played a key role in the construction of justification for Aboriginal child removal. The Board was especially troubled by children it designated ‘white’ or ‘nearly white’ who, by living with their Aboriginal relatives, were disturbing the order of racialised space. Their removal was imagined as rescue – they had to be saved from Aboriginal social space and moved to white social space to restore the racial order. Neither the Board nor the MPs wanted an ongoing population of Aboriginal people (meaning people who were of Aboriginal descent and lived ‘like Aboriginals’ as opposed to ‘like whites’). Radical Aboriginal difference, figured as ‘full-bloods’, was acceptable because they were ‘dying out’ and there was a foreseeable future when their ‘camps’ would disappear. People who were of ‘lesser caste’ than ‘full-blood’, however, had to merge into the wider (white) community. As in the previous hundred years of debate on how to civilise Aboriginals, the answer was to take their children as young as possible and keep them separate from parental influence.

**Living under the Aborigines Protection Act**

With this historical background to the legislation enabling the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, I turn to the autobiographical narratives of Jimmie Barker (chapter 4) and Margaret Tucker (chapter 5). Both were born at the beginning of the twentieth century, just as the NSW Aborigines Protection Board was consolidating its power. Both were removed from their families as adolescents and sent to ‘apprenticeships’ which were in line with the Board’s gendered regime. Jimmie Barker was sent directly from Brewarrina Aboriginal station where he lived with his mother to work on a remote pastoral station. Margaret Tucker was sent first for ‘training’ at the Cootamundra Training Home to learn domestic service. She was subsequently sent to work in Sydney. Although both narratives represent the complex interactions of people, bureaucracies and legislation that comprised the injustice of ‘you took our children away’, they do this in specifically gendered ways that emerge from the specific histories of their families’ and communities’ relationships with white colonisation and their specific locations in the early 1970s vis-à-vis particular white interlocutors.
I begin the analysis of separation autobiographies with The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker, published in 1977. Barker was born at the beginning of the twentieth century in northwestern New South Wales, near the Queensland border. As a child he lived in the predominantly Aboriginal social spaces of his mother’s people on the fringes of white pastoral properties. When Barker was 11 years old, his mother moved to Brewarrina, an Aboriginal station managed by the Board, where Jimmie and his younger brother could attend a segregated Aboriginal school. As a young teenager, a few months shy of his 15th birthday, Barker, like many other Aboriginal children was sent to a remote pastoral station where he worked as a virtual slave for four years. Although Barker managed to gain the approval and respect of his employer and was offered a decent wage to continue working when the ‘apprenticeship’ ended, Barker refused and returned to look after his mother at Brewarrina. He ended up spending the next 21 years working as the station handyman. He explained this decision in retrospect in terms of racism:

It was not possible for an Aboriginal to have any ambition or to make much progress in the world. My wish was for a little security and freedom from trouble with white people.

Although the text is a full-length life history of Barker from birth to death, I focus only on its representation of his childhood to the time he left his apprenticeship. This portion of his life story accounts for 110 of the 200-page narrative.

Of all the texts discussed in this thesis, the authoring of The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker is the most problematic. Although Barker died in 1972, he had been tape recording memories of his life, language and culture since 1968. From these 160 hours of tapes, his interlocutor, amanuensis and editor, Janet Mathews, posthumously compiled the autobiographical text. Although authorship in the sense of ownership of

2 TWJB, p. 121.
3 The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies has a collection of nearly 50 audio cassettes containing Jimmie Barker’s recollections of Muruwari word lists, songs, ways of living in the bush, and shorter and longer narratives of his life. The tapes have been transcribed and are held in manuscript series. The autobiographical material is mostly contained in PMS 100, 101, 102 and 103
knowledge should be attributed to Barker, authorship in the sense of creating a text was a collaborative process in which Barker had no role in approving the transcription, selection, assemblage and editorial transformations of his spoken text. The title of the book signals that it his life story ‘as told to Janet Mathews’, but authorship is usually cited to her.4

Critic Arnold Krupat developed a distinction between what he called ‘Indian autobiographies’ and autobiographies of Native Americans which is useful for thinking about The Two Worlds.5 The former he argues, is collaborative production with a white person who creates a ‘text’ from oral accounts that may have been recorded years earlier for an anthropological, historical or sociological project with entirely different aims from ‘autobiography’.

Indian autobiographies are collaborative efforts, jointly produced by some white who translates, transcribes, compiles, edits, interprets, polishes, and ultimately determines the form of the text in writing, and by an Indian who is its subject and whose life becomes the content of the ‘autobiography’ whose title may bear his name.6

In contrast, Krupat defines autobiographies of Native Americans as those which, although collaboratively produced given the ownership of the means of publication by non-Indigenous Americans, the text ‘originates’ with an author who is bilingual and bicultural and is fully involved in the production process. Although, Jimmie Barker’s subject position more clearly resembles the Native American, the production process of his text is closer to that of the ‘Indian autobiography’.

Creating The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker

The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker arose from the collaboration between Barker and linguist Janet Mathews. Mathews worked for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, now Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, AIATSIS) collecting recordings of Aboriginal songs and languages. According to her account in the Preface, Mathews’ initial research for the Institute focused on Aboriginal music, but this had expanded to an interest in languages. At first she travelled extensively in southern New South Wales gathering tape recordings of vocabularies and traditional songs. In 1968, she shifted her geographic focus to northwestern New South Wales and went to Brewarrina, a small town 130 kilometres east of Bourke, seeking Muruwari speakers. She was directed by the police to Jimmie Barker.

Mathews’ interest in Aboriginal music emerged from her career as a classical pianist. According to a brief autobiographical note Mathews wrote for Con Viva, the

4 The bibliography of Morris, Domesticating Resistance, for example lists it under Mathews.
5 Note that Krupat’s use of the term ‘Indian’ signifies the colonial relations of objectification.
newsletter of her alma mater the Sydney Conservatory of Music, Mathews was born in 1914 and spent her childhood in Wollongong, NSW. She attended boarding schools in Pymble and Mittagong before studying at the Conservatory in the early 1930s. On reaching age 21, she travelled in Europe and settled in Paris for about a year performing piano recitals. She returned to Australia in 1936 and married FM Mathews, an engineer working for Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd. Except for the first five years of her marriage, Mathews was an active performer and music teacher until she retired in 1966. At that time she agreed to make recordings of Aboriginal music at the urging of WC Wentworth, founder and chair of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Council.⁷

Although Mathews made recordings of Aboriginal informants all over New South Wales, only her sessions with Jimmie Barker turned into an extended personal relationship. Barker recorded some 110 hours of tape on his own and about 50 hours together with Matthews, either at his home in Brewarrina or hers in Sydney. Throughout the four-year project they had ongoing correspondence, in which Matthews elicited further information, explanation and elaboration.

Janet Mathews’ introduction indicates that at the beginning of their recording project, Mathews positioned Barker as an anthropological informant. Barker, however, asserted his own agenda and shifted his subject location from linguistic informant to autobiographical subject. At their first meeting beside the river in Brewarrina where he was camping, Mathews’ impression of Barker was somewhat indifferent:

Jimmie Barker, who was then aged sixty-eight, was shy but quite willing to co-operate. We recorded for some time, but his linguistic ability seemed disappointing. He spoke some Muruwari but was slow in answering questions, and the recording was not a great success.⁸

Mathews response reminds of us Mudrooroo’s analysis of Aboriginal self-censorship when faced with a white person’s tape recorder:

When an Aboriginal person is suddenly confronted by a white person with a tape recorder, it is only natural for a self-censorship to come into play. The Aboriginal person conscious of his or her subordinate position is extremely careful to tell the white person what she or he expects to hear. The Aboriginal person suddenly becomes tongue-tied, suddenly hesitates as two hundred years of oppression weighs on his or her shoulders. He or she remembers the time when to open one’s mouth, to speak the truth could and often did mean death.⁹

⁷ All of the information in this paragraph is drawn from Con Viva, vol. 1, no. 2, Summer 1987. A short article of Mathews’ reminiscences, entitled ‘A lifetime of music’, is on pages 6–8. The style of the article is very informal and appears to be what Mathews sent as there is little sign of editorial intervention. The article ends with a short book review of The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker.
⁸ TWJB, p. x.
⁹ Johnson [Mudrooroo], Captured discourse, p. 29.
Although Mathews judged his linguistic ability as ‘disappointing’, her curiosity was piqued when Barker told her that he had bought a tape recorder to record an English-Muruwari dictionary and asked her for help with the cost of the tapes: ‘It had cost him fifty dollars, a large sum for him, which showed that he had a real interest in his language...on consideration, there seemed something very interesting about Jimmie Barker’.  

Barker’s description of their first meeting, which is in the collection of transcripts held by AIATSIS, was different.  

Just before J.M. arrived in Brewarrina I had bought my small recorder and had intended to record some of the Murawari words I remembered on it. This was just going to be vocabulary and I wanted it to be a Muruwari-English dictionary. Before I bought the recorder I knew this project would cost a lot of money as tapes are so expensive...One day a policeman came to our part of Brewarrina, he was looking for Bert and wanted him to sign some papers or something. Bert carts the wood for them. The constable asked me my name and I told him. Then he said: ‘Have you met Mrs. Mathews?’ I said: ‘No, who is she?’ He said: ‘She is a lady that is recording languages and she had mentioned that she would like to see you.’ I didn’t know what to say to this, but then I told him that was all finished. I grumbled that it was no use these people coming around they always seemed to be sent to me. I told him it was no use them just coming for an hour or two and recording a few Aboriginal words, then they go away and record a little of another language somewhere else and get it all mixed up. I told him I couldn’t be bothered. He said: ‘Oh well, if she comes around tell her what you can, just a few words or something.’ Once again I told him I couldn’t be bothered.  

Barker’s version of his meeting with Mathews makes it clear that initially he was not interested in working with a white academic on his linguistic project of creating a Muruwari dictionary. It also indicates that he had previously been cast in the role of anthropological or linguist informant and that he questioned academics’ competence and viewed academic projects with suspicion. Nevertheless, as Mathew’s account shows, he viewed her as a means of gaining access to audiotapes and was willing to trade his knowledge for tapes.  

Mathews subsequently arranged for the Institute to provide Barker with tapes and began to correspond with him. She found that:

10 TWJB, p. x
11 In the published version this account is reduced to Barker’s recalling that the policeman informed him about Mathews and his reply that he was not interested and spoke no Muruwari. Mathews confirms in a footnote that the policeman conveyed this information to her (TWJB, p. 173). It is placed discontinuously with the rest of the explanation ‘how this text came in to being’, and therefore does not comment or reflect on Mathews’ version of their meeting.
12 AIATSIS, PMS 103, pp. 2–3, recorded 30 January 1972 (at the end of Barker’s recording and very near the end of his life – thus a reflection on the four-year relationship with Mathews from a point when he was clearly much more comfortable with her).
he wrote good letters... and his knowledge of the Muruwari language [was] very much better than I had expected. When he could record in his own way and at a speed adjusted to his thoughts, the result was excellent13.

In these subsequent interactions Mathews revised her initial evaluation of Barker and decided he was a good informant — that is, he had the desired knowledge and could communicate it effectively to the anthropologist both in writing and on tape.

But Mathews found that Barker pushed the boundaries of his assigned speaking position. Although he followed her instructions, he had his own methods and pursued his own thoughts which she characterised as ‘digressions’. He recorded not only the asked for word lists and sentences but, as thinking and speaking in his childhood language evoked childhood memories, he also recorded an autobiographical narrative:14

He followed written lists or suggestions but also had his own method of recording. His original intention had been to record vocabulary only, but in his childhood he had spoken Muruwari constantly, and his memory of the language became clearer. With some persuasion and more lists from me he started constructing sentences... In early tapes it had been interesting to note how he digressed from the language and spoke about Muruwari customs or beliefs.

Soon I received several tapes on which he had recorded a brief description of his life.15

Mathews ends her introduction with an endorsement and authentication of both the process of producing the text and of Barker as an informant. She acknowledged that The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker was constructed posthumously from the hours of tapes Barker had recorded, but she affirms her compilation as authentic and endorses Barker as a credible, impartial witness telling the truth.

Transcribing [the] tapes and sorting out the tribal material and various subjects was a difficult task; I have endeavoured to place them in their correct sequence. The resulting book is written in the form of an autobiography, and I shall try to tell the story of Jimmie Barker in the way he told it to me. His method of expression was descriptive; he did not exaggerate, and would only comment if he believed he was correct... His recording represented countless hours of work, as he did careful preparation before speaking into the

13 TWJB, p. xi. This gives us some insight into the problems facing Aboriginal informants in contexts driven by the needs and expectations of white researchers. Barker’s abilities only became apparent to Mathews when he was in a discursive context where he could take charge of what was said and how it was said.
14 Peter Read interviewed Janet Mathews in the 1980s and she recalled being pressured by AIAS to confine Barker’s recordings to what she was funded to do — collect recordings of language and music. Presumably between the early 1970s when the tape recording was done and 1977 when the book was published by AIAS, the Institute had come to recognise the value of Barker’s autobiography. (Personal communication Peter Read.)
15 TWJB, p. xi.
microphone... He had the ability to stand apart from the Aborigines and analyse their past and present problems.\textsuperscript{16}

Heather Goodall might interpret Barker's method of expression somewhat differently. She foregrounds the long history of Aboriginal accounts being met with denial and denigrations of Aboriginal truthfulness, leading to an over simplification of recollections to make them understandable to hostile or indifferent listeners.\textsuperscript{17}

However, she argues, by the same token:

once people had decided to record their memories, this history of opposition has often generated a fastidiousness about detail and accuracy, with people determined to record all of the story they have been trying to put for so long, to demonstrate their total reliability by producing detail after corroborative detail.\textsuperscript{18}

Interestingly, Barker's (unpublished) reflection on the recording process mirrors that of Mathews. He grounds her value to him firstly in her economic usefulness in enabling him to realise his project of recording his language. Taking the role of critic of his self-representation, he notes the difference between the narrative of his life and the life itself.

I am glad I met Mrs. Mathews. It has cost me nothing, I have the recorder and all the tapes I need and felt I would like to help you in every way. I have hoped that I might make this Murawai language into something that people might use one day. I have also recorded a little about myself, I seem to have only recorded the good part and not the bad part. My life story is not fully recorded, but there are parts of the 'life of Jimmie' and quite a lot of the language has been done.\textsuperscript{19}

Barker’s choice to narrate the ‘good parts’ and keep the ‘bad parts’ secret was influenced both by his specific relationship with his interlocutor – a respectable, middle aged, white woman from Sydney – as well as more general discursive constraints and other unknown factors such as desire not to shame himself or others.

\textbf{Editorial presence: the marginalia}

The visual presentation of \textit{The Two Worlds} is simple and low budget but eye-catching. The cover is divided into quadrants; the upper two occupy one third of the vertical space, the lower two occupy the remaining two-thirds. They form a checkerboard pattern of bright green and white. The title, ‘The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker’, is in the upper left corner in reverse type on a bright green background. To its right is the text ‘The life of an Australian Aboriginal 1900–1972 as told to Janet Mathews’.

\textsuperscript{16} TWJB, pp. xii, xiii.
\textsuperscript{17} Goodall, Information control, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{18} Goodall, Information control, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{19} AIATSIS, PMS 102, p. 3.
Below on the left is a stylised footprint in black on a white background; on the right the mirror image in white on a green background. Both the title and the design resonate with the theme of the ‘half-caste’ caught between two worlds that would be familiar to many readers from the work of Xavier Herbert. It also calls into play the essentialist popular and anthropological discourse that constructed a radical difference between the worlds of the ‘traditional Aborigine’ and ‘modern man’.

The background of the back cover is bright green. It has three blocks of critical comment from The Australian, The Bulletin and The Age. Significantly, however, there is no academic commentary, indicating that the cover addresses a popular readership. The first commentary, at the top of the layout space characterises the book as a moving personal account of the vicious and thoughtless acculturation process imposed on Australian Aboriginals by white society.

This is exemplary of what Gillian Whitlock calls the ‘interracial contract’. It alerts white readers that they will be emotionally and personally moved, and that they will be called upon as white people to take a moral position on racism. The second and third reviews reinforces this message, calling the book ‘haunting’, ‘unforgettable’, ‘humane’.

The critical commentary is followed by a publisher’s abstract that summarises Barker’s life, and locates the text within a battler’s genre of struggle and survival: ‘It was the start of years of suffering and struggle but Jimmie survived these turbulent years’. The use of Barker’s first name with its diminutive ‘ie’ ending, both on the back cover and in text in Janet Mathews’ voice, works both to make Barker personal and familiar, but also, I think, locates him in the position of a child and inferior. The last part of the publisher’s blurb is an extract from Barker’s narrative. It explains the meaning of the title to the reader, in terms of an opposition between traditional (backwards) and modern (advanced):

...I might have modern views in many ways, but there is another line of thought that draws me backwards. I feel that I am living between two worlds...

Of all the texts discussed in this thesis, The Two Worlds has the most extensive array of marginal supplementation. Janet Mathews’ authorship is indicated by the first two sections of the front matter. The book is dedicated to ‘my grandson and Jimmie’s friend’ and the acknowledgments are also clearly in her voice. The Preface, attributed to Mathews, I have already discussed in the previous section.

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20 The first edition used the colours white, goldenrod and brown.
21 Xavier Herbert, Capricornia, Angus & Robertson, 1938.
The life of an Australian Aboriginal
1900-1972

as told to
Janet Mathews

REVISED EDITION 1988

Jimmie Barker spent his early years listening to the stories and songs of his people, the Muruwari of north-western New South Wales. This time in his life came to an abrupt ending when Jimmie, his mother, his brother and many of their friends and relatives were forcibly removed to the government reserve. It was the start of years of suffering and struggle but Jimmie survived these turbulent years. In this book he describes both of his worlds:

I still feel that some part of me is closely linked with my heritage. I might have modern views in many ways, but there is another line of thought that draws me backwards. I feel that I am living between two worlds ...
Throughout the body of the text occasional footnotes cross-reference other recordings held at the Institute or explain terms to the reader. The footnotes remind the reader that this text is guaranteed by the work of a scholar and that the accuracy of its information can be checked in the relevant source material. As Gillian Whitlock observes of Pringle, the editor of Mary Prince's *History*, Mathews 'remains on the borders of the page, a *sotto voce* presence throughout [Jimmie Barker's] first-person narration'.

The book was first published in 1977 and then revised and reprinted in 1988. The back matter of the 1988 edition comprises a section called 'Postscript 1975', a section called 'Postscript 1988' and an appendix called 'The Aboriginal station at Brewarrina'. The 1975 postscript recounts information gleaned from a 1975 interview with Barker's sons, Jack and Roy. Unlike their father's words, the children's speech is not first-person and not verbatim. Rather, it is paraphrased and reported to the reader by Mathews. The children's accounts function to validate the extreme hardship and poverty of Aboriginal life on Brewarrina mission. Furthermore, their ongoing struggles with various health problems and the premature death of one son are testaments to the life-long effects of malnutrition, poor housing, non-existent sanitation, poor water supply, inadequate clothing, and lack of medical attention. While their father's account repeatedly emphasised the family's meagre but sustainable resources, the ill health of his children reveals a substandard level of existence with survival enabled by the efforts of hardworking, frugal and scrupulously clean parents. This narrative supplements and supports the content of their father's text. The sons' accounts of their own lives confirm the continuation of the brutality of station managers, the utter lack of schooling, the harsh treatment young Aboriginal workers received from employers, and the lack of opportunities for Aboriginal men. The sons' accounts work to make their father's account more representative by showing repetition in the subsequent generation.

The second 1988 postscript is a tribute to Barker's contribution to his people. It is written in the celebratory language of the bicentennial. It tells readers about the Aboriginal Cultural Museum in Brewarrina where Mathews' recordings of Barker singing Muruwari songs will be played. It celebrates Aboriginal people, their culture, their accomplishments, their work in preserving and restoring traditional culture. It also celebrates the work of academics such as Mathews' grandfather-in-law, RH Mathews and one of the other Institute linguists who worked on the Muruwari material. It is a peculiar text that is poorly written and poorly edited. Although I refer to Mathews' work as 'editorial' throughout this chapter, this postscript indicates that her writing was thoroughly edited before publication.

Lastly, the reader comes to the appendix. Here we are given a wealth of archival evidence corroborating the truth of Barker's narrative. First there are extracts from NSW official documents pertaining to Brewarrina station from the Board's minutes

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23 Whitlock, Intimate Empire, p. 16.
and from the transcripts of a 1937 inquiry into the management of Aboriginal stations. These extracts include specific mentions of Barker, who worked as the handyman of Brewarrina from 1921 to 1942. He is universally represented as ‘hardworking’, ‘absolutely reliable’, ‘the best sort’, etc. These records work with Barker’s text in complex ways. On the one hand, the Board’s yearly reports of improvements and progress construct a representation of station life lauding white beneficence in the mission to ‘uplift the natives’. But its position in the text after Barker and his children works to make the reader interpret these reports as hypocritical and self-serving. At the same time, the official praise of Barker by the Board reinforces his credibility and criticism. Which is to say that in case the white reader might disbelieve Barker’s self-representation as a hard worker who for the most part sought to get along with station managers, Matthews has supplied a standard, authentic historical source to support his claim.

Writing style

The style of The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker intends to re-present the informal, spoken style of the tapes. It begins:

I was born on 28 July 1900 at Cunnamulla, in south-western Queensland. We left there soon afterwards and I have no recollection of the place. My father was German and his name was Bocher, but this had been changed to Barker before I was born... I can just remember the ramshackle house, the old-time windmill by the spring, the buggies and horse-yards, and also little Billy as he lay in his basket under the verandah. 24

The narrative is in the first person. It is familiar without being cosy. It addresses the reader directly, and the English is what I would call ‘grammatical everyday language’. The sentences are generally short, the vocabulary educated, and the punctuation divides each sentence into a number of short clauses which gives the feeling of spoken language. As Mathews noted, the style tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, although Barker’s voice is sometimes reflective and interpretive. The truthfulness of the narrative is reinforced by Barker’s qualifications that his narrative relies on what he can ‘recollect’ or ‘just remember’.

Interestingly, the verisimilitude of the text was a point raised in a 1977 review of the book and then refuted in Mathews’ response to the review. The 15 October 1977 edition of The Bulletin carried a review by Geoffrey Dutton. Dutton describes it as:

The first book written from within the half-world of a government settlement for Aborigines, by a man with an extraordinarily assured style and vocabulary. Self-taught from dictionaries and encyclopaedias, Jimmie Barker tells his life on to the tape so vividly that his harsh and happy days by the

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faraway northern rivers, the Culgoa and the Barwon, are closer to us than cornflakes and Holdens.  

A month later *The Bulletin* published the following response from Mathews in which she claimed almost total responsibility for the authorial voice:

The review of my book... gave me great pleasure. He stressed some points that I consider very important. But maybe Mr Dutton should have one of his points clarified. I am afraid that dear old Jimmie did not write one word of it, and the ‘extraordinarily assured style and vocabulary’ must be mine, I suppose. Jimmie said to me many times: ‘Grammar gets me beat, you’ll try to make it sound as if I can talk proper, won’t ye?’ When sifting through the many tapes of language and his own story, I did my best to express his thoughts and ideas as he would have wished it. He had educated himself amazingly, but not sufficiently to write this book.

Consider, however, the following comparison of an extracts from the book with the corresponding transcription I made from Barker’s tape.

Mother and Aunt Clara both married white men. I never met my Uncle Jimmie Ellis. He lived at Longreach, and died before I was born. My only memories of Aunt Clara were childhood ones. However, I knew Uncle Jack better, as he came to live with us for a while in 1940. Later he moved to Goodooga, and he died in Brewarrina in 1950. Uncle Jack had not learnt to speak Muruwari very well, although he could understand easily.

Compare this with my transcription of the corresponding recording:

Mother and Aunt Clara, they both married white people. And, I never saw my Uncle Jimmie Ellis because he always lived around about Longreach and those places. I think that’s where he died. He died before I was born, and I never ever saw him. I saw Aunt Clara a couple of times about 19-6, and 19-9 was the last time I saw her, but they went way up into Queensland and around Winton and those places and I never saw them again. But old Uncle Jack, he came down from Cunnamulla in the 40s, he lived with us for awhile and then he went to Goodooga and came back and died here in 1950. Old Uncle Jack he couldn’t, well he could speak a little of the Muruwari, but he could understand it. But being the youngest he didn’t learn it although you couldn’t put one over him if you were speaking, he knew what you were talking about and he could use quite a few words. (my transcription, ‘uhs’ and

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27 TWJB, p. 2.
28 To represent the pronunciation nineteen six, nineteen nine, not nineteen o six, nineteen o nine.
‘ums’ omitted, but otherwise as faithful as possible to Barker’s spoken language.)

The transcription is hardly ungrammatical as Mathews seemed to suggest in her reply to Dutton. Nor is his vocabulary ‘uneducated’. Barker’s spoken language is very clearly articulated, using ‘standard English’ pronunciations. He mostly does not drop sounds like ‘ing’ nor does he say ‘ye’ rather than ‘you’ as Mathews seemed to indicate in her response to Dutton. His speaking voice is measured and deliberate, conveying the impression of a person who is thoughtful and precise in his thinking. Although Mathews essentially rewrote Barker’s spoken text, the majority of Mathews’ editorial work on this passage was to omit detail, condense the narrative and remove colloquial expressions such as ‘old Uncle Jack’, ‘put one over on him’, ‘and those places’. I think that her editorial work recreates a reasonable approximation of the experience of listening to Barker, the more formal vocabulary and sentence structure substituting for his deliberate and dignified mode of oral delivery. Given that he apparently asked her to transform his speech into standard English and, as McGregor pointed out, ‘to level the differences with whites’, her editorial work may have created the narrator Barker would have wished for. I disagree with her negative assessment of his authorial contribution and her positioning herself as ‘the author’. In this and various other fragments of text I have compared to the original tape recordings, both the style and content of The Two Worlds are reasonable approximations of the tapes. While I would not argue that the book is written in his ‘authentic’ voice, it is not Janet Mathews’ voice either.

As Mathews stated in her Bulletin reply, the book comprises fragments of Barker’s spoken and transcribed narrative, extracted from their original context and resequenced to approximate a chronologically structured autobiography. While the content of each written fragment is relatively faithful to the corresponding spoken version, Mathews had absolute authorial control over the selection of material included in the written text. From the 160 hours of Barker’s audiotapes, many life stories could potentially be created. Mathews has chosen to tell the story of a life lived with gentle dignity, quietly observant of and angry about the injustices meted out to Aboriginal people. Although this is probably not inaccurate, Barker was more of an activist than the book indicates and more critical of white people and less naïve than The Two Worlds’ portrayal.

The original transcribed material includes the following description of Barker’s participation in the development of what, in 1937, would become the Aborigines Progressive Association (that organised the 1938 Day of Mourning).

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29 Tape A2302, from collection of Janet Mathews, Mathews_J35, Jimmie Barker tells about his life, AIATSIS Library, Canberra.
30 McGregor, Writing Aboriginal, p. 49.
The handyman from Angledool was now at our Mission, and we started discussing our worries about the way the dark people were treated. We wondered if we could start some sort of Aborigine’s Progress Association. Bert and I were joined by another with the same ideas. Jack was the type who could speak well and easily about most subjects. He was about my age. We founded this Association, but it was hard to do much. After all, we were inside the compound, as it was known. We were also under a manager and assistant manager. We felt we might be able to encourage the people, perhaps we did, but we could not say much at our meeting against the managers or the methods of the Board. There was usually the occasional man who would sneak off and tell the manager what we had said, then this would land us in trouble. We had to abandon this idea.  

Mathews completely omits this aspect of Barker’s life. Possibly she did not want white readers to associate Barker with ‘radicals’. She wanted to present Barker as a quiet dignified man who had suffered almost in silence for 60 years. Mathews perhaps created what she expected or wanted to hear or what she thought readers expected or wanted to hear. Heather Goodall’s description of her expectations when she began to do oral history with New South Wales Aboriginals in the early 1970s may be broadly representative of those of other sympathetic whites at that time:

I was expecting to hear about Aborigines as long suffering victims, rebelling where possible but mostly unable to alter the course of their oppression’.  

The portrayal of Barker as fundamentally silent and submissive also works to cast Mathews in the active role of ‘discovering’ him and giving him a voice. Knowing that Barker was actively critical of the Board and involved in Aboriginal efforts to remove the Board provides us with a different context for understanding his desire to speak out about his life as an Aboriginal man. It lends support to the notion that he was using Mathews to pursue his project as much as Mathews used him to pursue hers.

A second area of selective representation is in Mathews omission of Barker’s numerous descriptions of fist fights he had with young white men in the period shortly after his apprenticeship ends. Although they are a significant explanation of Barker’s decision to live on the mission, they also portray a violent and angry aspect of his character that, with the emergence of black power in the late 1960s and the controversy surrounding Charles Perkins, may have frightened white readers.

In the transcripts Barker describes several incidents of violence with white men in public places. In all cases the white man provoked the violence. For example a white man on the same work crew as Barker accused Barker of stealing his cigarettes. Barker ends the account:

33 Goodall, Politics of information control, p. 18.
Then he came over and made a swing at me. At that time I was fairly strong and I happened to catch him with a right to the solar plexus and down he went. After a while he got up without saying anything. Then I showed him my packet of cigarettes and told him this had been given to me by the boss. The others were telling him to shake hands and forget the matter, they were also telling me to shake hands. The fellow came across, but I was not prepared to shake hands with someone like that. I have always had to put up with quite a lot of this sort of thing.  

A third area of misrepresentation is in the choice of voice. Throughout the book Barker's voice locates him in the subject position of the naive eyewitness. Although of course he selects the people and events he bears witness to and offers occasional reflection and commentary, mostly he is located as an informant presenting the reader with 'raw' memories; it will be for anthropologists, historians and other experts to 'cook' Barker's memories into more theorised metanarrative. However, in one recording session in the last year of his life, Barker took up the position of the reflecting historian. This voice is significantly different from the voice we read in *The Two Worlds*:

As the white men moved inland over the mountains many of the Aborigines were shot or massacred. As these invaders took up land the Aborigines were pushed farther and farther from the areas they knew. They were then just scavengers, trying to exist. Where they went they were met by hostile white people, they were not hostile. The white man took the water holes from the natives, big companies had large holdings of land and greatly increased stock. the native was robbed of his hunting grounds, ceremonial grounds and normal way of life. There was no law preventing the white people shooting them and this was happening to them frequently...

These camps were places of misery. White men could take their women at any time. Eventually the government marked out certain areas along the river banks and called them Aboriginal Reserves...Early in this century they put on a different type of manager. I know a couple who were boundary riders, others may have been store-keepers. They were not educated men but had just applied for these jobs. Most of them were dictators and very few were good in any way.

This voice is highly critical of whites as the perpetrators of various types of crime against Aboriginals, including theft, murder and rape. This is a history of Australian 'settlement' that was only being voiced publicly by radical Aboriginals in the late 1960s, although we can assume it circulated within Aboriginal communities from the time of invasion. Mathews' decision to omit this voice of Jimmie Barker made the text less confronting to white readers, it also served to maintain Barker in the less powerful

34 AIATSIS, PMS 101, p. 4.
role of the informing witness rather than the role of prosecutor.\textsuperscript{36} Despite these editorial recuperations, \textit{The Two Worlds} was a confronting autobiography that challenged dominant representations of both Aboriginal and white people.

**Challenging dominant discourse**

\textit{The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker} was recorded in the late sixties and early seventies, and compiled and edited over the five years from 1972 to 1977. This period saw rapid change in the status of Aboriginal people, both in New South Wales and nationally. Barker began his recording just after the 1967 referendum when a majority of white Australians voted to change the constitution to enable the Commonwealth (as opposed to the states) to have jurisdiction over Aboriginals and to count Aboriginals in the national census (also a state function until the referendum). Although legally these changes were relatively minor,\textsuperscript{37} they symbolised what many hoped/believed would be a new era when Aboriginal people would be granted full human and civil status within the white majority. It was also a period of worldwide shifts in racialised power relations with the decolonisation of European empires and the struggle for civil rights in the United States.

At the same time, Aboriginal discourse was becoming more radicalised with activism on land rights, nationalism and self-determination. Despite the symbolic promise of the referendum, in the years immediately following it (the time when Barker was recording his tapes), Commonwealth policy in Aboriginal affairs remained basically unchanged. It was not until the Whitlam government in 1972, that the Commonwealth began to intervene and promote what I would call a program of assimilationist self-determination. At the state level, after 60 years of struggle, NSW Aboriginals finally came out from under the ‘Act’ and the supervision of the Board, with the repeal of the \textit{Aborigines Welfare Act} in 1969.

The narrative of Barker’s life covers the historical period beginning in 1900 when New South Wales was still a colony. As I argued in Chapter 3, the early 1900s saw the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (APB) manoeuvring to create itself as a statutory body with legal authority over Aboriginals – a goal it achieved in 1909. Barker was apprenticed at age 15 in 1915, the same year an amendment to the \textit{Aborigines Protection Act} granted the Board virtually unfettered power over Aboriginal children. Barker was employed as a handyman on Brewarrina Aboriginal Station between 1921 and 1942, a period that included Aboriginal resistance in the late 1930s, a 1937 inquiry (prorogued with no findings), the 1938 Day of Mourning and the 1939–40 reconstitution of the APB as the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB). Significantly, he worked under the APB station manager (Brain) who was the focus of Aboriginal allegations of brutality, corruption, sexual assault, drunkenness and overall incompetence in the 1939 Public Service inquiry into the Board. After leaving the

\textsuperscript{36} For an interesting analysis of the racial implications of editorial manipulation of voice, see Raynaud, Claudine, Rubbing a paragraph, pp. 34–64.

\textsuperscript{37} See Bain Attwood et al., The 1967 Referendum.
station in 1942, Barker worked at a hotel and then the Brewarrina hospital from 1946 to 1963. Barker lived exclusively in rural New South Wales – in an area of the state where the majority voted against the 1967 referendum. And, for most of his adult life he lived on or near an Aboriginal station.

About half of the book’s 193-page narrative describes Barker’s childhood (including his memories of Aboriginal customs and beliefs). The narrative divides his childhood into four distinct social/emotional/spatial contexts: an exclusively Aboriginal context camping on Aboriginal reserves, a mixed but predominantly Aboriginal context on Milroy station, a white-dominated context on Brewarrina Aboriginal station, and an exclusively white context during his apprenticeship. Barker’s movement through these spaces was predicated on his mother’s marginalised and vulnerable position as an Aboriginal woman who had been married to and abandoned by a white man, and left to raise their children as best she could. At first, in the early part of the twentieth century and while her children were small, she was able to return to her mother’s people and live in Aboriginal camps (reserves) on the margins of white occupation. Although Barker refers to occasional rations, from a child’s perspective the camp was an Aboriginal social context that was only occasionally affected by whites. The camp dissolved however, when one of the elders died and Barker’s mother (along with many others from the camp) moved to a nearby station. Mrs Barker took a job as a housekeeper there. Although the white economy structured daily life, Aboriginal community continued to flourish in the station’s ‘camp’.

By the time Barker was 11, however, the Board had begun to consolidate its influence on Aboriginal lives, and single Aboriginal women were both targeted by and vulnerable to coercion to live on the Board’s Aboriginal stations. Barker believed that his mother was told to move to the station so that her young sons could attend the school. In keeping with the Board’s project of assimilating young ‘half-caste’ children to white society, Barker was subsequently sent to work on a distant station where he would be disciplined into the rural working class, while at the same time providing government-subsidised cheap labour to white farmers.

As I argued in chapter 3, one of the major ideological premises of the Board’s acquisition of power over Aboriginals (and of the assimilationist project more generally), was that Aboriginal parents were unfit to raise their children to be ‘good citizens’ of civilised white society. In particular, Aboriginal mothers were represented as single mothers who had illicit sexual relations with white men (as evidenced by their ‘half-caste’ children) and were therefore unfit mothers who created further generations of idle, unproductive, dependent ‘aborigines’ who were a burden to white society.

Barker’s narrative refutes this. He represents his mother as a hardworking woman whose poverty was a direct result of her white husband’s desertion. His representation of his extended family and community of Mundiwa in northwest New South Wales

focuses on their fundamental human dignity, despite the material hardships of their lives. As a young child (and throughout the narrative), he represents himself as someone who wants to be involved in the exchange of knowledge, who preferred listening to the stories of the old people to playing with his peers.

When we arrived at Mundiwa there were only two families living there, both in old shacks on the riverbank…Gradually more people came to live there, most of them very old and speaking in Muruwari. This was the last remnant of a large tribe…As time passed I became very fond of these old people, and it was from them that I learnt more of the Muruwari language…I loved visiting them and listening to their stories of the early days: mythical stories of birds, animals and constellations. There were some children at the camp but I seldom played with them, as being with the older people appealed to me more.39

…There had never been any fights at this camp; the people sang together and had some corroborees, and every day they seemed happy…For many years after we left I dreamed of returning to Mundiwa, but it was fifty years before I saw it again…I wandered through the old familiar places and thought of the time when all was laughter where now it was so silent. It was hard to restrain the tears when those memories returned.40

Although these extracts may be nostalgic rewriting of childhood, the ideological stakes suggest an additional reading. In the Board’s view, Barker should have been grateful to have been rescued from the Aboriginal camps of his early childhood, grateful that the Board had given him the chance to make something of himself. Barker’s narrative, however, represents his time in the camps as a time of safety, learning, community, interpersonal respect and human dignity.

At the next stage, on Milroy station, Barker’s narrative represents Aboriginal life as a continuation of the independent camps, but with exposure to the technological artefacts of white society. Barker describes an ebb and flow of people between the station and other camps, and a continuation of his education by Aboriginal elders, especially Maria and Hippai, in Aboriginal knowledges.

I spent many days and nights with Hippai and Maria, either camping or staying with them in their hut. They would light a fire in the bush near the hut; we would cook our meal and then sit near the fire for hours. They would both sing and dance corroboree dances, and I love listening to their stories.41

The whites on the station are represented as fair and caring. ['Mother worked at the homestead and Mrs Armstrong was very good to her'.42] Although the stations in

39 TWJB, p. 4.
40 TWJB, p. 22.
41 TWJB, p. 36.
42 TWJB, p. 2.
western New South Wales clearly derived enormous economic benefit from cheap Aboriginal labour, they also provided a means of livelihood within the European economy that did not utterly disrupt Aboriginal life. For Barker, Milroy was also the place where he began to develop an interest in technology, an interest that was significant in his construction of himself as person who yearned for knowledge – both Aboriginal and white.

The blacksmith’s shop interested me, and I often helped with odd jobs...He allowed me to use any of the tools, and I worked on various mechanical ideas there or in my own little workshop...I also did small jobs for the men on the station, including elementary repair work which involved soldering. Some people paid me and others said that I was just a silly kid with stupid ideas. It never worried me if people thought little of me, I just loved helping in any possible way and working on my own dreams and plans.43

The move to the Aborigines Protection Board’s Brewarrina Station in 1911 (when Barker was 11, two years after the Aborigines Protection Act 1909 was passed) is represented as a rupture. Here Barker locates his first exposure to the harshness and brutality of racism, thus constructing a distinction between the white people he had encountered at Milroy and the white supremacists who worked for the Board. Nevertheless, his reflections on the attitude of the station managers indicate that the adult Barker experienced racist contempt and exclusion as hegemonic. He identifies the experience of his first day at school as a defining moment of his childhood – a moment when he learned the meaning of race and his place in a racist social order.

It was on this day that I learned how unacceptable Aborigines are to other people. The manager told us straight out that we were just nothing. He continued at some length telling us that we were the lowest type of humanity living today. He said that it was not much use trying to teach us and that he wanted to make it clear that it was a complete waste of time. I had never before encountered the cruelty and brutality which surrounded us here, and it was a shock to find that this could occur...During my first lessons from these men [the manager and the assistant who was a ‘manager-preacher’] I learnt that as I was black, or partly coloured, there was no place in Australia for me. I learnt that anyone of my colour would always be an outcast and different from the white person. It gave me the firm idea that an Aboriginal, even if he was only slightly coloured, was mentally and physically inferior to all others...As I was less than twelve years old it was impossible to disbelieve men of authority who were much older. I tried to stop their remarks bothering me too much, but it was hard to adjust to being treated with such cruelty and contempt.44

43 TWJB, p. 41.
44 TWJB, pp.56–57.
Barker then goes on to describe the education he received on the station. His mother had been forced to move from a reasonably good life at Milroy to the inadequate living conditions of the APB station specifically because attendance at a segregated and substandard Aboriginal 'school' was compulsory. Instead of encountering the 'civilisation' the Board's minutes purported to offer, he was exposed to racialised humiliation and intimidation.

Although we had to remain in the classroom all day, Mr Foster only came in for the occasional half-hour and the rest of the day we were just left to occupy ourselves...Mr Keogh used a heavy length of bush timber as a cane when we were in school. Outside he always used the stockwhip. He was unmerciful to both boys and girls, sometimes he would lift a child off its feet by the ear. One girls' ear was so badly injured that she had to be sent to hospital. Our ears were boxed as well, and we had many other unpleasant punishments. There were quite a number of backward children, and they were the ones to suffer most. I had my share of the cane for errors in my work, but not the severe thrashings that some of the others had...Those two men were really tough, and most of their successors were the same...those incidents have left their mark on me.

What happened in the classroom was sadistic violence. Because Barker was an exceptional student who spent a good deal of his free time teaching himself to read and write, he was only beaten occasionally. He was forced, however, to bear witness to the abuse of his classmates – an experience which clearly had a profound and lifelong effect on him. Barker's narrative challenges the notion that 'education' in anything but subservience was offered by the Board. It gives white readers a glimpse into the violent 'half-life' of Aboriginal stations.

The final scene of his narrative of childhood, addresses the particular gendered form of apprenticeship of Aboriginal boys. It continues the work of drawing white readers into a consciousness of race and towards a personal experience of the operations and effects of racism.

In Barker's description of his apprenticeship, he first represents himself (as throughout his childhood) as an eager student, keen for knowledge and excited by the opportunity to learn engineering. Reflecting back, he is amazed that, despite his experience of education at Brewarrina, he believed the manager's expression of concern for his individual aptitudes.

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45 Barker says, describing his mother telling him that they were going to move to the Brewarrina mission, 'it was not until I was a little older that I learnt that this move was compulsory for us, as the authorities were forcing all Aborigines who lived on stations or in the bush to move into reserves near towns if they had children of school age. This law brought a lot of unhappiness and hardship to many Aborigines, especially the full-bloods, as their whole way of life had to change' (TWJB, p. 51). See Fletcher, Clean, Clad and Courteous.

46 TWJB, pp. 57–58.
In March [1915] there were new developments in my life. Mr Evans, the manager, told me that he had found an excellent job for me. He said I ought to be apprenticed and have the opportunity to learn all about machinery and electricity. In fact I could gain some knowledge of engineering, and he had made the arrangements with great care knowing my preference for this type of work...I believed him and was overjoyed at the prospect of learning about these things...When I look back I cannot imagine how I was stupid enough to believe all he said and to suddenly feel that the world had changed into such a wonderful place.\textsuperscript{47}

The reality of his so-called apprenticeship was unrelenting work and almost total social isolation by people who gave him accommodation in the barn with (other) livestock.

I found myself in a very large room. It was packed with chaff bags, which were stacked against the walls; there were many seed boxes, and some horses were feeding. There was something that resembled a bed, so I sat down on it and wondered about the type of work they were going to expect me to do. There did not appear to be any machinery and it seemed an odd place to be commencing my engineering career.\textsuperscript{48}

Far from being an apprenticeship, Barker's life was tantamount to slavery. Interestingly, and contrary to the Board's stated project, Barker was forced to do what he perceived as feminine work.

My work was constant: washing up, fixing fires, scrubbing and polishing floors, peeling potatoes, chopping wood and numerous other dreary jobs...In that first year I can remember having only two Sunday afternoons off.\textsuperscript{49}

Although the station owner and his wife treated Barker as less than human, this treatment of Aboriginals was not universal. The intervention of the owner's daughter-in-law made his life of isolation, drudgery, petty unkindness and outright cruelty, more bearable.

I shall always remember her; she treated me as a human and made it quite clear that the others should give me more consideration. In a very short time she disposed of my old tin mug, plates and shoddy cutlery. She insisted that I should use the same china and cutlery as everyone else...During the year I had been on the property there had always been unkindness, which was sometimes close to cruelty. No one had ever spoken a friendly word to me and I was very miserable when living in that atmosphere. Mrs Bob Lindsay's understanding helped me through the remaining years.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} TWJB, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{48} TWJB, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{49} TWJB, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{50} TWJB, p. 97.
Over the four years he spent on this property, he moved from the women’s realm of domestic work to the masculine sphere of boundary riding, stock work, odd jobs and carpentry. Throughout this period, however, his boss continued to be abusive.

A new house was to be built, and I cut and carted all the wooden blocks required. The carting was done in a horse-drawn wagon and involved a trip of forty miles each way. The boss and I had many rows on those trips. His nastiness was frequently unbearable.51

Barker’s design and construction of a gauzed meat-shop, however, led to a significant improvement in his status. The fact that he was a creative and responsible worker, however, only gained him the status of human being that any white worker would take for granted. By any standards this family benefited handsomely from their ‘apprentice’.

The result of this work [the meat shop] was an improvement in the attitude of the boss and his wife to me. I was allowed more freedom and could eat the same food as they did. Most of the plans for my work were my own and they allowed me to go about it in my own way.52

In Barker’s assessment, he only gained fully human status as a man in his boss’s eyes after a confrontation where Barker’s temper snapped and he countered violence with violence. The incident occurred when the boss suddenly came into the meat-shop where Barker was cutting meat and, surprised, dropped a chop on the floor. Without asking for an explanation, the boss shouted at him and picked up the chop and threw it at Barker’s face, the sharp bone causing a wound.53

Before I could explain he had picked them up and thrown them in my face. I still have the scar near my nose which was made by the bone as it entered my flesh...I just opened the door and tried to go outside to escape from him. He pushed my shoulders and kicked me. On the floor was a large piece of cypress wood, and I picked that up and went for him. He took to his heels and I chased him right through the house... 54

Barker then went to the nearby home of his ally, the boss’s daughter-in-law, who dressed his wounds and encouraged him to stand up to the ‘old bully’.55 The boss later brought Barker back to the homestead and told him to eat his tea. Here the full implications of the absolute power of white employers became manifest in Barker’s fearful imagination.

When I went into the kitchen I noticed that the table was set for me. This had never happened before. I sat for a while just thinking. Queer thoughts came

51 TWJB, p. 103.
52 TWJB, p. 104.
53 TWJB, p. 104.
54 TWJB, p. 104.
55 TWJB, p. 105.
into my mind: could this food be poisoned? Two years earlier the boss had been annoyed with me and had said: ‘I could put some strychnine in your tea’. These words came back into my mind, and as I sat at the table I did not dare touch anything. 56

As in earlier changes in status, eating arrangements more closely approximating those of whites symbolise Barker’s promotion. Summoned to the sitting room, much to Barker’s surprise, the boss apologised to him. All of a sudden, the stunned Barker was offered a cigar and told he was to become a ‘friend’ and perhaps manager of the station. All he had to do was forget the years of humiliation and bullying he had endured.

‘You have always been a good boy and have done your work well during your time here. I want you to forget all that has happened between us; you and I are going to be friends from now on.’ 57

Barker said that he was treated well from this point on and ended his apprenticeship on his own terms. The boss asked him to stay longer on white man’s wages, but Barker wanted to escape from the place he viewed as a prison and return to the station to see his mother. 58 His boss may have been confused or angered by this rejection, perhaps viewing Barker as ungrateful.

Moral negotiation with the reader

This book is among the first published autobiographical critiques of the NSW government’s treatment of Aboriginals that recounts the experience of separation. I read Barker’s narrative as an attempt to describe Aboriginal life to the sympathetic post-referendum urban middle class white public (of which Mathews was a prime representative). In particular he wanted whites to understand what life was like under the Act. At the same time, the narrative memorialises the lives of the elders Barker knew during his childhood whose lives and knowledges had all but disappeared before the onslaught of assimilation. Barker and Mathews were aligned on the project of wanting to record and preserve the language, songs and cultural knowledges of Barker’s people. Out of this mutual interest, and within the discursive constraints of anthropological discourse, the negotiation of the autobiographical project arose.

The narrative is structured chronologically and covers Barker’s life from birth to death. Childhood to age 20 takes up half of the narrative of a 72-year life. The representation of childhood accomplishes much of the moral argument of the text. With Barker the reader moves from an easily recognisable familial milieu (albeit with

56 TWJB, p.105.
57 TWJB, p. 105.
58 TWJB, p. 108. I have decided not to discuss Barker’s representation of falling in love with and marriage proposal to the white domestic servant, Jean, who also worked for Barker’s employer. Her death from the flu during a visit to her family in Melbourne was also a significant factor in his decision to leave.
striking cultural differences) into an increasingly hostile and savage social context, as Barker moves from Aboriginal ‘camp’ life to life under the *Aborigines Protection Act*. For Barker, like most Aboriginal boys, life under the Act meant being sent away from his family to work at a so-called ‘apprenticeship’. Barker did not object to separation from his family (although he missed them intensely) or to the prospect of apprenticeship where he would learn engineering; rather the wrong in Barker’s narrative is the Board’s deception and contempt in seeing Barker as a lesser form of human being fit only for menial labour. The wrong is also the Board’s hypocrisy in forcing Aboriginal families into its control with the aim of ‘civilising’ and educating, but in fact employing mostly ignorant, brutal, racist managers who understood their mission to be to teach Aboriginal children their ‘place’ as abject outsiders to white society.

The narrative works by representing Barker first and foremost as an eager student and hard worker who educated himself and made productive and innovative contributions to every work project. It is a masculine representation that foregrounds Barker’s life as a worker and his engagement with technology. Barker wanted to engage fully with white society, he wanted to assimilate, he respected but wanted to leave the ‘old ways’ behind. Although it is about ‘work’, it does not draw on labour movement discourse; rather it represents work as a site of fundamental human dignity. The narrative exposes the racist blindness that prevented many of the whites around him from seeing Barker’s value and developing his potential. Instead, his extraordinary abilities are relegated to the function of utterly reliable handyman. Lurking behind the narrative is the unspoken certainty that if James Barker had been a white man, he would have been extremely successful at whatever aspect of engineering, science, linguistics, history or business he chose pursue within the masculine world of work and production. Instead Barker’s aim in life was ‘a little security and freedom from trouble with white people’.

The representation of Barker as a gentleman who is reliable, dependable and (mostly) non-confrontational is essential to the authority of the narrative. His voice is refined and soft-spoken; he is a reliable eye-witness who describes what happened. Any commentary is understated and frequently ironic – the narrative gently guides the reader to the correct moral judgment with comments like ‘It seemed an odd place to be commencing my engineering career’. The narrative mostly avoids lurid or sensational detail in favour of a summary that leaves the specifics to the reader’s imagination, for example ‘there had always been unkindness, which was sometimes close to cruelty’. This, however, makes specific representation of cruelty all the more credible. The authority of the narrative voice, however, is liberally supplemented with corroboration and character witnesses that attest to his reliability. As Gillian Whitlock observed in her analysis of the negotiation of the presentation of Mary Prince as a witness to slavery, the problem is to speak of degradation and violence while maintaining ‘vocal propriety’.

59 Whitlock, Intimate Empire, p. 21.
The evidence in the archived transcripts suggests that Mathews repressed the voice of Barker the radical historian as well as his representations of himself as a young man who would readily take to his fists to assert his dignity or as an activist organising against the Board. Edited during the highly polarised debate surrounding Charles Perkins and the release of the more angry and confrontational autobiography, *A Bastard Like Me*, Mathews may have wanted to distance Barker's narrative persona from Perkins' 'bastard'. At the same time we know that Barker also censored his representation, only talking about the 'good times'.

Although predominant, Barker's narrative continually draws attention to the fact that racist abuse was not inevitable, rather, he highlights the particular instances when white people treated him with respect and kindness. These included Mr and Mrs Danvers, former managers of Brewarrina station, Mrs Bob Lindsay, the wife of the manager of the sheep station where Barker was apprenticed, the matron at the hospital who fired a young white domestic who refused to serve tea to black patients, the white friend who went to the manager of a hotel to insist that Barker be allowed to eat a meal in peace without racist harassment from other white diners. All of these counter examples work to highlight the availability of ethical responses to racism.
'The real us': Margaret Tucker's *If Everyone Cared*

Margaret Tucker’s *If Everyone Cared*, published in 1977, is probably the best known of all the separation testimonies discussed in this thesis. As of June 2001 it had been through nine reprints and has sold some 20,000 copies.\(^1\) Unlike the other texts I look at, *If Everyone Cared* has been the focus of critical attention, both as Aboriginal women’s autobiography and as Aboriginal autobiography.\(^2\) I argued in the last chapter that Jimmie Barker’s autobiography did not make a moral argument against separation as such, but rather against the hypocrisy of pretending that sending Aboriginal children as cheap labour was ‘apprenticeship’. I also argued that Barker’s text represented the specifically gendered experience of Aboriginal boys at the turn of the century. In contrast, Margaret Tucker’s autobiography explicitly targets the practice of separation as a key site of moral engagement for the reader. Her narrative represents the specifically gendered experience of Aboriginal girls.

Born in 1904, Margaret Tucker grew up in southwestern New South Wales on the Murray River near Deniliquin. Although this is the same time period as Jimmie Barker’s childhood, the occupation of Aboriginal country occurred much earlier in southwestern New South Wales than in the northwest, and their lives were more embroiled with those of whites. Tucker spent her childhood mostly at the Moonacullah Aboriginal settlement. Her family also spent time at Cummeragunja, Maloga and Warangesda and travelled to visit her father’s relatives at Brungle Station near Gundagi. With her sister and another girl, she was seized by police at Moonacullah in 1917 and taken to the Cootamundra Training Home. After two years of ‘training’, at age 15, she was separated from her sister and sent out to domestic service in Sydney where she would remain for six years. After enduring more than two years of horrific treatment at the hands of her first employer, she was subsequently transferred to work for another family in Sydney and, after running away, to a rural household. When finally released from service to go home for her uncle’s funeral, Margaret Tucker spent a few months in Barham, but then moved to Melbourne where she lived most of her adult life.

Although her autobiography ranges across the period from the very early 1900s to the 1970s, nearly half of the 205-page book is devoted to her childhood to age thirteen. The remaining half of the book is evenly divided between the nine years

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\(^1\) Telephone conversation with Tom Ramsey, Grosvener Books, Melbourne, 4 June 2001.

\(^2\) Dakin, Gaining Strength; Dalziell, Shameful Autobiographies; Hooton, Stories of Herself.
spent in domestic service and the remainder of her life. This last period is sketchy and thinly described compared to the rich detail of the first two sections. It is a narrative focused on the author’s childhood and youth, not her adult years. This is to say, that insofar as If Everyone Cared is a political or moral project aimed at improving conditions for Aboriginals, Margaret Tucker foregrounds her early years as most significant and effective for advancing her project. The only part of her adult life that is represented in any detail is her involvement with the Moral Re-Armament (MRA) movement – also significant to the project of writing her autobiography.

Although the book proceeds chronologically through the stages of Margaret Tucker’s life, the narrative is not a linear account of what happened. Instead, significant periods or themes serve as a focus around which recollections cluster. The narrative joins between recollections are words like ‘once’, ‘sometimes’, ‘another’ or ‘later’ rather than ‘and then’. There are very few precise dates, although the naming of periods like the Depression or ‘after the war’ (WWII) provides some temporal orientation.

Unlike Jimmie Barker whose autobiographical narrative was tape recorded and then transformed into writing by Janet Mathews, Margaret Tucker wrote her autobiography herself. The original handwritten manuscript is held at the National Library of Australia. It is written with a variety of pens on a variety of types of paper – some letter paper, some pages torn from a B5 exercise book, some miscellaneous sheets of pink paper. Her handwriting is quite small and the lines are close together to get the most writing on each page. On larger letter paper that is thin, she frequently wrote one direction on one side and then at right angles on the other.

The folios of the manuscript have not been top numbered, but some sequences were numbered as they were written – usually four to eight pages at a time. From the changes in paper, pens and internal numbering, it appears that Margaret Tucker wrote her autobiography in 1500 to 2500 word sessions. It is impossible to tell whether the folios are assembled in the National Library’s folders in the same order in which she wrote them, since she only occasionally dated her writing sessions. The first folios of the manuscript correspond to the first pages of the book, and the narrative flow of the manuscript approximates the narrative flow of the book, progressing through the three major stages in her life: childhood, institutionalisation and apprenticeship, and then adulthood.

Editorial intervention: comparing the manuscript with the book

The printed books appears to have followed the overall structure of Margaret Tucker’s handwritten manuscript. Maintaining roughly the same sequence, two or more of Margaret Tucker’s sections were compiled into chapters. Margaret Tucker

3 MS 8704, National Library of Australia (NLA), Manuscript Collection, Canberra.
wrote her sections in one continuous block of writing. In the book these are broken into paragraphs. Some of the passages in the book follow the manuscript word for word, others were heavily edited. There were at least three stages of editing. Some of the manuscript pages have written editorial corrections — reworking sentences, punctuation, etc, in what looks to be the typist’s handwriting. It is impossible to tell whether this level of editing was negotiated with the author as part of the process of typing. Among the handwritten pages are a few typed pages with Margaret Tucker’s handwritten notes in the margin. This seems to indicate that she read each typed page and made additions and corrections as needed. The last type of editorial intervention was at the publisher. Since the manuscript held at the National Library primarily comprises the handwritten folios (as opposed to the typed manuscript submitted to the publisher), it is impossible to tell which editor did which work. I assume that Margaret Tucker was given page proofs by the publisher and had the opportunity to check these and correct them.

Overall it appears that both the typist and the publisher’s editor, Lesley Zuber, tried to maintain Margaret Tucker’s voice and style while at the same time transforming or translating her written composition into ‘proper’ white English. While acknowledging the publisher’s pressure to produce a book that conforms to (white) professional standards, as discussed in Chapter 2, Margaret Tucker may also have wanted to present herself in ‘standard’ as opposed to ‘Aboriginal’ English.

Some passages in the book were extensively reworked. For example, the following extract is from the book at pages 29–30.

There was carelessness, thoughtlessness and unkindness in the administration of Aboriginal affairs in those days, which is a great blot on the history of Australia. We seemed to be just like guinea pigs — for experimental purposes. The government I suppose did not know what to do with us.

The missionaries were very kind, when you think that life for them was pretty tough too. One thing is certain. Our race should never have been allowed to dwindle, either through disease or through exploitation. When one is called half-caste, one feels very bitter. But I believe this story of mine may help both our dark youths of today and white people too, to see the real causes of the ‘so-called’ Aboriginal problem. It may help both sides to understand each other better.

4 Most of the manuscript pages have a diagonal line drawn across the text which appears to be the typist’s indication that the page was typed. A few pages also have corrections marked up in the same pen as the strike-through line. It appears that the typist, Miss Jean Hughes, made these editorial corrections before typing.

The corresponding section in the manuscript reads as follows:

The mass killing then – unintentionally, never the less Thoughtlessness. and yes unkindness in administrations in those days. We were then a blot – a big dirty Blot on an uncaring sort of administration. I don’t Blame any one. Really – yes blame is there – [this phrase is inserted above the line] – those days we seemed to be just Guinea Pigs, being experimented on or Governments were trying I guess what to do those days and we were happy in spite of starvation & Aborigines – Camps or Settlements. Missionaries were great battlers & also living was pretty tough for them – but one – thing I know. Our Race should never have dwindled & both individually & in colour, not that any colour is the most important issue – people are; and when one is called names such as Half Breeds and such while I am not so bitter about [her strikethrough] and many are not bitter about it, so I feel this story of mine may help – not only our dark youths of to day, also Whites, to see the ‘Real us’ – Human feelings of Aborigine’s • even now • mostly we are not – understood, not even by some of our wonderful White friends. 6

First, these extracts show the general faithfulness of the book to the manuscript. Both extracts contain the ideas of carelessness and thoughtlessness in administration, using Aboriginals as guinea pigs, missionaries living tough, name calling as embittering, and hope that her autobiography will help both Aboriginal youths and whites.

The extracts also show the types of transformations imposed by the copy editing (punctuation and capitalisation). Margaret Tucker used dashes and bullet points to mark pauses or phrases in the flow of a thought and capitalisation for emphasis on significant words such as ‘White’, ‘Real’, ‘Human’. As Margaret McDonell points out in her analysis of her process in editing Is That You Ruthie?, capitalisation confers signification that should be considered in decisions on style. 7 In the book, however, the dashes and bullet points are mostly transformed to commas or full stops and the use of capitalisation is minimised. Thus:

So I feel this story of mine may help – not only our dark youths of to day, also Whites, to see the ‘Real us’ – Human feelings of Aborigine’s • even now • mostly we are not – understood, not even by some of our wonderful White friends.

Becomes:

But I believe this story of mine may help both our dark youths of today and white people too, to see the real causes of the ‘so-called’ Aboriginal problem.

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6 NLA, MS 8704, B5 sheets, 12th folio from the top, heading at the top ‘Granny Aggie’.
7 McDonell and Whitlock, Editing Ruthie, p. 139.
The latter is much shorter, smoother and simpler. Although easier to read, it has sacrificed the complexity of Tucker’s representation and transformed her analysis from feeling to thinking. Margaret Tucker’s manuscript says ‘I feel this story of mine…’ not ‘I believe this story of mine…’. Perhaps this reflects a conscious or unconscious desire on the part of one of the editors to shift Margaret Tucker’s text from the subordinate native/feminine/emotional side of the binary opposition to the white/masculine/thinking thus lending it the authority of rational thought.

A similar shift occurs at the end of the passage. Margaret Tucker expressed the aim of her text as wanting readers to understand Aboriginal feelings (the ‘Real us’ the ‘human feelings’), but this was rendered into understanding ‘the causes of the so-called Aboriginal problem’. The latter focuses on an impersonal intellectual construct rather than ‘human feelings’. In doing so it erases the author’s analysis that one site of Aboriginal oppression is white failure to recognise Aboriginals as human beings with human feelings and that part of her aim was to educate whites to perceive Aboriginal people as human. She said she wanted to enable readers to look behind and beyond surface appearances to the emotional depths of the ‘Real us’.

In addition, the edited version omits two instances of self-reflection on her current feelings about what has happened to Aboriginal people. The text ‘I don’t blame any one. Really – yes blame is there’ was deleted by the editor. In the manuscript, the phrase ‘yes blame is there’ is inserted above the line as a second thought, a self-correction for wanting to present herself as having overcome blame. Although Margaret Tucker’s ongoing struggle with herself to follow Christian ideals comes through in the printed version of the book, it represented as overcoming hatred and bitterness rather than blame. Hatred and bitterness are internal states that may be less confronting to white readers than blame which is an accusation and judgement of whites. I suspect that her struggle with her feelings was particularly important during this particular writing session which dealt with emotionally troubling issues. Here she recalled and reflected on her people as a ‘dying race’ who were rapidly becoming more and more white in appearance and who, as individuals suffered derogatory name calling because of their mixed race bodies. The passage ‘while I am not so bitter about [her strikethrough] and many are not bitter about it, so I feel this story of mine may help’ traces her struggle. At the end of the passage she brings herself to focus on why she is writing her autobiography – to promote reconciliation. With the strikethrough she shifts away from her own personal bitterness to more general ‘many are not bitter’. This could be interpreted as a decision to take a more representative speaking position that includes herself in the many (as in testimonio). Alternatively, it could be, as Kennedy points out in relation to Daisy Corunna’s testimony in My Place, ‘the opposite of lying is not “telling the truth” but remaining silent’. Tucker’s shift to ‘many who are not bitter’ allows for the possibility that she is not among the many.

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8 Kennedy, Narrator as witness, p. 241.
The edited version also deleted Margaret Tucker’s address specifically to sympathetic whites, who no matter how ‘wonderful’, do not understand Aboriginal feelings and substitutes a monolithic category ‘white people’. Instead of explicitly challenging ‘friends’ – that is, whites who already identify themselves as allies of Aboriginal people and who may think they understand Aboriginal people – the text seems to address an undifferentiated mass of all whites.

There are other significant deletions in the manuscript. The edited text dilutes Margaret Tucker’s sharp criticism of white administration by deleting the phrase ‘Mass killing’ altogether, leaving ‘carelessness, thoughtlessness and unkindness’. Similarly, Margaret Tucker’s very emotional ‘We were then a blot – a big dirty Blot on an uncaring sort of administration’ is diluted and simplified by the translation ‘a great blot on the history of Australia’. Margaret Tucker’s expression is more nuanced than the edited version. It contains the multiple meanings that Aboriginal people were perceived to be ‘blots’ by whites, that Aboriginal people knew themselves to be perceived to be ‘blots’, and that sometimes they internalised the perception of themselves as ‘blots’. This is complex reflection on the workings of racism is transformed into ‘the uncaring administration was a “blot”’. Margaret Tucker’s emphasis in ‘a big dirty Blot’ carries an emotional bitterness of seeing one’s self through the eyes of the oppressor as a ‘dirty’ Other, that the translation erases altogether.

Based on my own comparison of the two versions, I would argue that book is moderately faithful to the manuscript and does reproduce the flavour of her style and voice. Nevertheless, as I have shown in the discussion above, editorial intervention altered the nuances, connotations and complexity of the original manuscript in the direction of easier reading and palatability to white readers. From the internal struggle recorded in the manuscript extract, we can guess that Margaret Tucker wanted to be pragmatic in trying to assess the best way to communicate to achieve her aim of reconciliation. Although we can assume that Margaret Tucker read and approved the editing of her manuscript and that she was satisfied with its overall representation of her narrative, she may also have deferred to the suggestions or opinions of the publisher’s editor. We can also see that a close comparative reading reveals the editing as an act of translation in which the ambiguity expressed through layers of meaning in the original were lost.

Patron discourse: framing and corroborating the narrative

Unlike The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker and Karobran (next chapter), If Everyone Cared has remarkably little framing. In addition to Margaret Tucker’s text (which includes a dedication and acknowledgments), the book has a very short (300 word) foreword by Kim Beazley Sr and the back cover text. Margaret Tucker met Mr Beazley, through the Moral Rearmament movement, and the foreword is embedded in this discourse. The Moral Rearmament (MRA) movement was founded by Frank Buchman in the 1930s as western nations were arming for war; Buchman called
instead for ‘moral and spiritual rearmament’. Drawing on a Christian ecumenical philosophy, MRA advocates social change through personal change. Its practice focuses on the reconciliation of individuals located on opposite sides of major historical conflicts through speaking about harms suffered and acknowledgment of responsibility and apology. The aim is to create a world that is ‘hate free’, ‘greed free’ and ‘fear free’.

**Character reference: foreword**

As in *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*, the foreword functions as a character reference for Margaret Tucker. Her text is given authority by the patronage (to use Penny van Toorn’s term) of a high status white man – Kim Beazley Sr, MP from Western Australia and then Leader of the Opposition Labor Party. The foreword does not explicitly vouch for the truth of the narrative, rather it vouches for the witness, for the integrity of the author’s motivation and, by implication, the truth of what she says. Beazley asserts that Margaret Tucker has attained a ‘dignity’ that is ‘beyond oppression, misrepresentation, flattery, the desire for approval, and beyond malice’. As Shari Benstock points out in her analysis of marginalia as ambivalence towards the speaker, the text and the readers, Beazley seems to be profoundly ambivalent towards all three. His foreword anticipates that the text could be read as misrepresentation, flattery, desire for approval or maliciousness. This unusual combination of terms does rather accurately address the seeming contradictions in the narrative’s representation of white people – at points white people are described with almost gushing fondness, at others they are the focus of vivid, harsh representations of cruelty and brutality. As we will see below, Mr Beazley is not the only reader troubled by the text’s inconsistent (I prefer complex) representation of white people.

Drawing directly on MRA values, Beazley refers to Margaret Tucker’s ‘refusal to hate when people are hateful’ and, above all her religious faith – her literal belief in the Bible and the ‘ascent of humanity through contact with that Spirit’. The foreword authenticates Tucker as a sincerely religious person and her book an expression of this ‘philosophy’. Although centring Christianity, Beazley’s foreword asserts an ecumenical approach to religion that recognises and affirms Aboriginal spirituality. Beazley also explicitly foregrounds Tucker’s Aboriginality by using her Aboriginal name, Lilardia.

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10 A brief history of MRA.
13 IEC, p. 9.
14 IEC, pp. 9–10.
Popular appeal: back cover blurb

The other written framing material is the publisher’s back cover blurb. Like the foreword, the back cover blurb highlights Margaret Tucker’s Aboriginality by referring to her by her Aboriginal name, Lilardia. Three and half of the blurb’s four paragraphs give the reader a brief summary of the ‘story’. The remainder of the third paragraph first provides a character reference for Margaret Tucker as ‘a true Christian’ and a ‘true Australian’. Second, it establishes the terms of the interracial contract by reassuring white readers that the author’s aim is conciliatory: she hopes that ‘Australians, black and white, will live together in harmony’. The last paragraph offers a brief review of the book that tells potential readers what to expect. It is represented as ‘a simple tale of humour and sadness, adventure and legend. It is, incidentally, of great historical importance’. This last sentence, seemingly an afterthought, wants to draw attention to the serious purpose of the autobiography, without undermining its popular appeal: ‘It will appeal as the story of a brave, dedicated woman and her struggle...towards the achievement of recognition for herself and her people’. The back cover blurb adopts some of the critical notions about Aboriginal literature discussed in chapter 2 (eg, its truth, historicity, political intent, and representativeness). But it sells the book as a good read in the recognisable genre of Aussie battler adventure.

Corroboration: beyond the narrative

The autobiographical text is supplemented and corroborated by an extensive collection of black and white photos that are interspersed with the text. The 205-page book contains 44 photos on 16 folios split into 11 separate inserts at 16-page intervals. The publishing decision to take the more costly production method of interspersing the photographs rather than concentrating them in one or two sections is an indication of the photographs’ importance. The photographs are printed on high-gloss paper while the rest of the text has a matt surface. Emerging from the press in separate print runs, the process of collating the photographic sections into the text sections is labour intensive and therefore increases printing costs and reduces the profit margin.

Also, as Penny van Toom pointed out, printing decisions such as paper and typography lend authority to the text. In this case, the papers used are both relatively high quality, as opposed to paperback ‘pulp’, signifying a difference between this book and mere fictional entertainment. The seriousness of the book is also signified by the cover design. It features a posed colour portrait that expresses venerable dignity. Margaret Tucker looks both battle worn and visionary – she gazes slightly up and to the right, in an unfocused manner that suggests looking simultaneously inward and toward the future. The cover typography is decorative

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15 Photographic sections occur after pages 16, 32, 48, 64, 80, 96, 112, 128, 144, 160 and 176. Presumably the book was printed in 16-page signatures (sections) and the photographic sections were collated between each signature. It is more common to bunch photographs together and collate only two to four sections into the text.

16 Van Toorn, Patron discourse, p. 103.
but conservative and the layout a simple placement of text centred over the photo. The design connotes straightforward simplicity. There is no ‘hype’ no ‘drama’ no striking visual effects.

Black and white photographs from four sources are used to supplement the text: Margaret Tucker’s personal collection; the National Library of Australia collection; the personal collection of Hubert Day, a former resident of Moonacullah; and photographs taken for the book by Dennis Mayor of Margaret Tucker’s journey back to Moonacullah in 1975. Together, these photographs work to authenticate both the past and present, providing visual corroboration of the history represented in *If Everyone Cared*. Strikingly, only 8 of the 44 photographs are of Margaret Tucker or her family. The rest are of places and people within her immediate or extended community. None of the personal photographs are casual family snapshots – all are posed and composed by a professional photographer. Thus the photographs of her family serve to show readers what Margaret Tucker and significant family members look like; but the formality of the images holds us at a respectful distance. The selection of personal photographs reinforces the reading of the autobiography as *testimonio* (as I discussed in Chapter 2). It is ‘personal’ only insofar as it serves the author’s pedagogic and political purposes – *If Everyone Cared* is not intended to be a complete life story of the author.

Aims for the text

There are several points in *If Everyone Cared* when Tucker articulates her reasons for writing and her aims for the book. First, I think it is significant that the book begins with a journey back to the places where she grew up and particularly to the cemeteries where the old people are buried. This evokes their presence in her text and honours them in her remembering. She says that her ‘heart aches’ realising that many of the graves are ‘unseen and their names forgotten’. And that further, ‘I feel that soon our ancestors won’t even be a memory’. That she writes under the sign of Aboriginal people as a ‘dying race’, becomes clear in the next paragraph: ‘As the tears rolled down my cheeks, I remembered my old mother, the last remaining of her tribe the Ulupna, of the Murray River district’. Thus, her first commitment in writing her memories is to record something of the lives of the old people. I can hardly imagine what it would be like to live within a society that constructs your people in terms of a discourse of extinction, or the burden in old age of feeling that you must record your memories or quite literally the history of your people will utterly be forgotten.

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17 Interestingly only Margaret Tucker’s mother, sisters, daughter and grandchild are represented photographically. Both Tucker and her daughter, Mollie Dyer are represented in wedding photographs, in both cases it is a posed image of the bride only. Husbands and fathers are noticeably absent from these visual representations as they are from the text.
18 IEC, p. 12.
19 IEC, p. 12.
At the age of thirteen Margaret Tucker — Lilardia — left school. Left school? Was snatched from school, by the police! Taken forcibly from her part-Aboriginal parents to be trained as a domestic servant.

Lilardia was born in 1904 on an Aboriginal settlement on the New South Wales-Victoria border. Her memories of her early years are the happiest part of her story. There was no government assistance then, but there was freedom to enjoy a carefree childhood: swimming and fishing in the rivers and lakes, going walkabout with her old uncle and aunt in their buggy, listening to the legends and learning the lore of the tribal elders, being taught by the kindly missionaries.

All this came to an abrupt end when Lilardia was sent to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls. The horror of the training, the cruelty of her first employer in Sydney, the loneliness, homesickness and heartache she felt are related without sentimentality, malice or self pity.

Throughout a life span from Mission to MBE, Lilardia's religious beliefs have sustained her in her times of trouble: poverty, racism, a broken marriage, the sometimes hopeless task of helping her own people. She is a true Christian and a true Australian, not only in her race, but in her heartfelt love and concern for her country and in her hope that one day all she has worked for will come to pass: that all Australians, black and white, will live together in harmony.

This is a simple tale of humour and sadness, adventure and legend. It is, incidentally, of great historical importance. But it will appeal as the story of a brave, dedicated woman and her struggle through a life of hardship towards the achievement of recognition for herself and her people.

Margaret Tucker's story features in the TV mini-series 'Women of the Sun' and the documentary 'Lousy Little Sixpence' screened by ABC TV.


BLACK BOOKS $15.95
Within the honouring and remembering of the older people is the desire to save this history for upcoming generations, to teach Aboriginal youth about the conditions their elders faced. In the extract I quoted above in the discussion of editorial intervention, Margaret Tucker explicitly states that she hopes her story will help Aboriginal youth.

A third aim of the narrative is to educate white people and in particular whites who are activists in Aboriginal social justice campaigns or involved with Aboriginal affairs and administration.

The lack of care and lack of understanding of our people in those years from my childhood upwards - some call it paternalistic, but it was less than that. There is still paternalism amongst our administrators. Please forgive me, but I write with a view to helping the thinking of those who are administrators.20

The historical context of writing

Although Margaret Tucker’s childhood was roughly coincident with Jimmie Barker’s (she was born four years after he was), she lived longer and wrote her autobiography in a significantly different discursive environment. Part of the difference can be attributed to time. Jimmie Barker wrote in the late 1960s and very early 1970s. Although the 1967 referendum signalled a desire for change, very little actually did change in Aboriginal affairs until the Whitlam government was elected in 1972.21 By 1975–76, when Tucker drafted her manuscript, a number of significant Aboriginal organisations had been established, including the first Aboriginal Medical Service (1971), Aboriginal Legal Service (1973) and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs.22 All of these organisations were developing and publishing Aboriginal community perspectives on a variety of issues.

Geographic location also made a difference. Barker wrote from Brewarrina in rural northwestern New South Wales; Tucker from metropolitan Melbourne. Additionally, the activist milieu of Melbourne, where Tucker lived, drew from the Cummeragunja community that had a long and distinguished history of Aboriginal activism. In 1887 the Cummeragunja people had petitioned the NSW Governor for adequate land; in the 1930s the Australian Aboriginal League, an organisation comprising Cummeragunja people living in Melbourne, was formed and challenged the NSW Aborigines Protection Board; and from 1937 to 1939 Cummeragunja residents organised a strike (which Margaret Tucker supported from Melbourne)

20 IEC, p. 203.
21 Attwood et al., The 1967 Referendum, ch. 7.
against the Board’s poor management and violent control. Margaret Tucker’s extended family included a good many well known Aboriginal activists, among them her uncle William Cooper and her cousin Jack Patten.

Equally significant in understanding the context in which Margaret Tucker wrote her autobiography is the fact that her daughter, Molly Dyer, was the first director of the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency and was active in the Victorian campaign for the Aboriginal child placement principle. Thus Tucker spoke from within a political community that had developed an analysis of separation as wrong and harmful to Aboriginal young people.

Lastly, Margaret Tucker wrote from the discursive community of the Moral Re-Armament movement. As she describes in the later chapters of her book, MRA had a well developed practice of speaking the personal in order to effect political change. It organised massive and expensive conferences where victims of injustice or oppression could speak about their lives to perpetrators to engage them in understanding the wrong and the harm of their actions. Margaret Tucker had spent eight months at MRA’s conference site in Macinac Island, Canada, listening to the life histories of other oppressed peoples and telling her own story. Thus, If Everyone Cared was well rehearsed and polished. It was the product of numerous conversations with numerous interlocutors, both white and Aboriginal. She knew what aspects of her autobiography were effective moral negotiators with white interlocutors. She also knew what white people didn’t know – she knew their prejudices, their assumptions, their beliefs and their ignorance.

Tucker’s narrative style is complex and effective. The text alternates between description, dramatisation and introspection. The use of dialogue to re-enact her memories makes them come alive for the reader as if at a play. At the same time we are allowed to engage with the narrator personally through her reflections on her interior thoughts and feelings. She is an adept storyteller who is able to draw on a depth of emotional connection with her past that kept the narrative personal, human and moving. I quoted Sue Stanton in chapter 2 saying the Aboriginal people continued to relive the pain of separation. It bears repeating here:

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders the stories are re-lived each time we have to hear of, or read these stories, whether they be in the form of reports, on film, or discussed nightly on television. We live those stories every day of our lives.

24 Cooper was one the petitioners to the Governor in 1887; Patton was one of the organisers of the 1938 Day of Mourning.
26 Stanton, Time for truth.
Reading Margaret Tucker’s autobiography, knowing that this was one of many tellings, makes me think that the reliving also happens in the retelling.

**Challenging dominant discourse**

Margaret Tucker’s autobiography represents a specifically gendered experience of separation located in the feminine domestic sphere of the girls training home and domestic service in white households. Whereas Barker’s underlying critique revolves around a discourse of fairness and equality in the masculine world of work and technology, Tucker’s critique is centred in a discourse of morality – ‘what is right as opposed to what is wrong’ and, as Joy Hooton pointed out, human relatedness. Like Barker, Margaret Tucker challenges racism and subverts white stereotypes of Aboriginal communities by portraying the many ways that Aboriginal adults cared for, nurtured and educated children. Her representation of a well-to-do suburban Sydney woman as the perpetrator of an endless stream of shaming and shameful ‘hate crimes’ against her young domestic servant, draws attention to the fallacy of the administrative assumption that respectable white femininity was a guarantee of civilising influences and enacts what Dalziell calls ‘counter-shaming’ of white readers. Her nuanced examination of the emotional and moral impact of isolation in a white suburb challenges white mythology of Aboriginal people as less human than themselves.

**Challenging stereotypes of Aboriginal families and communities**

*If Everyone Cared* devotes a significant proportion of the narrative to recollection and re-presentation of early childhood – 87 of 205 pages recount Margaret Tucker’s life before separation from her family. Margaret Tucker’s mother, Theresa Clements was among the Aboriginal people enticed by Rev. Daniel Matthews to Maloga Mission in the 1870s and 1880s. In her memoirs, Theresa Clements recalls her first contact with Matthews as frightening:

> Oh, I remember as if it was yesterday! Mr. Matthews came. My brother and sister and I ran and hid near the bank of the river. ‘White man going to take us away,’ people said. We were terrified... We didn’t want to go, but soon we found that our mother and grandmother were coming.

Margaret Clements’ account also shows that in southwestern New South Wales there was a history of missionary capture of children before the Aborigines Protection Board adopted the same practice.

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27 IEC, p. xx.
28 Hooton, Stories of Herself, p. 315.
29 For shaming and shameful see Dalziell, Shameful Autobiographies.
30 Dalziell, Shameful Autobiographies, p. 114.
Maloga mission was taken over by the Aborigines Protection Board in 1893 and, rebelling against the strict Christian discipline imposed by Rev. Matthews, a substantial proportion of the community moved to Cummeragunja about three miles away. Contrary to stereotypes, Margaret Clements’ father (Margaret Tucker’s grandfather), George Middleton, was a farmer who bought and worked his own land about a mile from Cummeragunja, and accumulated enough money to leave his daughters ‘several thousands’ when he died. Also contrary to stereotypes expressed as late as the 1940s by AP Elkin, Margaret Tucker describes her grandfather, her aunt and her mother as deeply Christian. However, she emphasises the continuities and similarities between the traditional beliefs of her people and Christianity. Recalling a time when she was among a group of children who were listening to the old stories of Nkuppa Taylor and scolded by the missionary for forgetting to go to Church, Margaret Tucker relates Nkuppa Taylor’s defence of the children with obvious approval.

We all jumped up guiltily, but dear old Nkuppa said half in the language and half in English, ‘Do you know we had the Good Spirit a long time before you white people came here?’

Margaret Tucker’s early childhood was lived under the influence of missionaries at Moonacullah and the Aborigines Protection Board at Cummeragunja. Life at the settlement was hard (for both missionaries and Aboriginals), food was scarce and shelter rough – ‘a mud brick hut partitioned off to make sleeping quarters. A bark roof, lined inside with hessian, the walls papered with old newspapers...Although our huts were small, with earthen floors, they were kept clean’. Families were large and extended, food and other goods were shared among extended kin groups, and even with passing swagmen.

Contrary to the APB’s representation of Aboriginal adults as either ineffective or bad parents, If Everyone Cared represents a community in which children were

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33 Clements, Maloga, p. 4.
35 IEC, p. 16.
36 AP Elkin was an anthropologist with a chair at Sydney University. He was also a member of the Aborigines Welfare Board from 1940 to 1969. In 1944 he wrote: The mixed blood people, however, have been in the unfortunate position of possessing no social life worth the name. Dotted about in small groups on Reserves and Settlements, on the outskirts, or in towns, they have not shared in the general community, nor have they any traditional or spontaneous life of their own...In some cases they seek to return to the former life and in others to work out a version of Christianity for themselves or to follow some simple form of it and so gain solace. It is pathetic...In the meantime, the almost a-moral type of life that many of the mixed bloods live can be attributed to the absence of moral or spiritual purpose and sanction. AP Elkin, 1944, cited in Read, History of the Wiradjuri, p. 198.
37 IEC, pp. 14, 16, 122.
38 IEC, p. 58.
39 Both of her sisters were born at Cummeragunja, but most of Margaret Tucker’s narrative is located at Moonacullah. IEC, p. 17.
40 IEC, p. 13.
nurtured and protected by respectable and responsible adults in the face of extreme poverty. Some aspects of the childhood Margaret Tucker describes will be instantly recognisable to any Australian reader: swimming and playing in the bush under the supervision of adults worried about sunstroke, river currents, snakes, and strangers, games of cricket with dad when he’s home from shearing, getting in trouble, going to school, bathing and hair washing, and delight when mothers made wonderful food emerge magically from the oven.

Wonders were worked with old-fashioned three-legged ovens: tarts, cakes, a roast would miraculously come to light.

At the same time, Margaret Tucker describes a specifically Aboriginal childhood that will be unfamiliar to white readers: impoverished adults struggling to provide food for their children on traditional lands occupied by a ‘superior race’ using traditional skills to extract what little food survived in the wake of white fencing and farming, fearful adults alert to hide their children from police who may take them away, sad adults telling traditional stories and speaking traditional languages from the times before white people, and taking the children travelling around the country to learn about its special places and histories, care within an extended family and community where relationships are defined not only by family/marriage connection, but also by connections to tribe and country.

I can remember going on walkabout as a child. White people would call it a holiday. However, a walkabout was a useful holiday. My people did not go walkabout at random. They went to pastures that were not new to them. They knew when these pastures would be flourishing with fresh growth since they had last been there...They belonged to us – no other tribe would trespass on them. We were wary of Aborigines from other tribes, and watched their customs with suspicion.

Margaret Tucker describes her mother as a highly skilled and educated. She was a sought after domestic worker and midwife and had been an assistant teacher at

42 IEC, p. 21.
43 IEC, p. 78.
44 IEC, p. 22.
45 IEC, p. 28.
46 IEC, p. 19.
47 IEC, p. 23.
48 IEC, pp. 57, 79.
49 IEC, p. 22.
51 IEC, pp. 33ff.
52 IEC, p. 20.
53 IEC, pp. 44ff.
54 IEC, pp. 40ff.
55 IEC, p. 40.
56 IEC, pp. 89, 91.
57 IEC, pp. 63ff.
As if anticipating a white interlocutor’s questions about ‘immorality’ in Aboriginal ‘camps’, Margaret Tucker states that at Brungle there were circles of adults that gambled.

My mother would tell us not to go near these groups, but one day curiosity got the better of me. I found they were not doing anything exciting, only playing cards, with some money and tobacco in front of them. They were experts at playing two-up. The whole time I was there, I did not remember seeing anyone drunk. 59

Similarly, Margaret Tucker argues against the stereotype of Aboriginal single mothers, recalling the wedding celebrations that would follow an unwed pregnancy. 60

That her mother’s children were well cared for Margaret Tucker argues, was even recognised by Aborigines Protection Board officials when they inspected the family at Brungle station.

We were made to wash and brush up. The Aborigines Protection Board members were coming. I can remember how pleased and proud Mother and Father were to hear them say what lovely little girls they had, how nicely kept, everything so scrupulously clean; could the two older girls go for training in that beautiful training school at Cootamundra, where they would be well cared for and trained to be domestics and earn a living?…Mother told them that while it sounded all right, she felt that the neglected children with no parents needed to be cared for, not our family, who were happy. 61

Throughout the first six chapters of her autobiography, Margaret Tucker builds a case against white stereotypes of Aboriginal families and communities as unfit places for rearing children. It is not a nostalgic recollection of an untroubled past, it a representation of Aboriginal community as a place of respect and dignity, where Aboriginal people treated one another as fellow human beings. In the following five chapters she builds a case against separation, vividly representing the horrific effects of this policy on both mothers who lost their children and the children who were sent to live among white people, where they were no longer seen to be fully human.

In the custody of the APB

That separation is a central theme of the representation of childhood in If Everyone Cared, is evident in the foreshadowing of Margaret Tucker’s capture. In the chapter 1 she describes women bolting into the river to hide children. 62 In chapter 6, Tucker

58 IEC, p. 25.
59 IEC, p. 76.
60 IEC, p. 85.
61 IEC, p. 81.
62 IEC, p. 20.
addresses the reader pedagogically, instructing us about the history and effects of separation. She says that as a child she noticed and was disturbed by the absence of adolescent children at Brungle, describes overhearing her grandmother speak about the Board’s policy of taking children, and tells the reader that Aboriginal children were disciplined with the threat of being taken to the Home. Then, following her family’s close call with APB inspectors (described above) she tells the reader the effects of separation.

My auntie had been taken from her grandmother and many parents did not see their children for years. Some of the children died fretting for home. Home was their people.

Margaret Tucker begins her account of life in APB custody with an amazingly vivid re-presentation of being taken by the police from Moonacullah that centres her mother’s anguish and the children’s fear that the policeman would shoot their mother.

As we hung onto our mother she said fiercely, ‘These are my children and they are not going away with you.’

The policeman, who no doubt was doing his duty, patted his handcuffs, which were in a leather case on his belt, and which May and I thought was a revolver.

‘Margaret Clements,’ he said, ‘I’ll have to use this if you do not let us take these children now.’

Thinking that policeman would shoot Mother, because she was trying to stop him, we screamed, ‘We’ll go with him Mum, we’ll go’...

However, the policeman must have had a heart, because he allowed my mother to come in the car with us as far as Deniliqu...Then the policeman sprang another shock. He said he had to go to the hospital to pick up Geraldine, who was to be taken as well. The horror on my mother’s face and her heart broken cry!...

All my mother could say was, ‘Oh, no, not my Baby, please let me have her. I will look after her.’

In the event, Margaret Tucker’s younger sister had left hospital that morning and could not be taken that day. When told of this, Margaret Tucker says her mother ‘[T]ook that policeman’s hand and kissed it and said, ‘Thank you, thank you.’ Margaret Tucker tells the reader that later she was told of the trauma inflicted on her mother by losing her children. Tucker skilfully weaves the accounts of her

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63 IEC, p. 81.
64 IEC, p. 82.
uncle and aunt into the present of her own account. Her use of dialogue makes the narrative come to life.

I heard years later how after watching us go out of her life, she wandered away from the police station...[and] off the road to rest in the long grass under a tree. That is where old Uncle and Aunt found her the next day...They found our mother still moaning and crying. They heard the sounds and thought it was an animal in pain...Mother was half demented and ill...She was not interested in anything for weeks and wouldn't let Geraldine out of her sight. She slowly got better, but I believe for months after, at the sight of policeman's white helmet coming round the bend of the river, she would grab her little girl and escape into the bush, as did all the Aboriginal people who had children.65

Thus 'protection' by the Board is initiated by violence, under the authority of the police. There was no charge, no finding of neglect, no process of adjudication, no opportunity for her mother to show that her children were well provided for – just arrest, incarceration, and the inflicting of an immense amount of human suffering. And here Margaret Tucker foregrounds her argument that Aboriginal people are human just like whites through her description of Mr Hill, the settlement manager.

Mr Hill was in a situation he had never experienced before, He did not take into account that Aboriginal hearts could break down with despair and helplessness, the same as any other human hearts.66

White indifference to Aboriginal suffering continued at the Cootamundra Home. Margaret Tucker's account of her experience at Cootamundra, like Jimmie Barker's account of 'education' at Brewarrina Station school, exposes the hypocrisy of the Board and its employees. Margaret Tucker received little or no domestic training, but rather was beaten by the woman who was supposed to be teaching her cooking because she didn't already know how to cook.

Beatrice Buggs and I got belted up that first time [in the kitchen] for not remembering things such as essence of vanilla, and essence of this and that. It was the first time we had been introduced to the bewildering array of canisters and tins in cupboards in that kitchen. I remember my mate Beatrice's bleeding lips and bruised cheeks. She was slightly bigger than I was. I cowed in the corner terrified as I watched Miss Wood wield a good-sized piece of firewood, her face red and awful looking.67

Women's domestic space and racially specific domestic knowledges become sites of violence towards Aboriginal girls. Firewood is wielded by an enraged white woman as a weapon against the girls she is paid to teach and care for. These are

65 IEC, p. 94.
66 IEC, p. 91.
67 IEC, p. 100.
harsh images of white womanhood that should have been shocking to readers in the late 1970s.

Several years later Margaret Tucker was sent to an ‘apprenticeship’. Like Jimmie Barker, she arrived with little or no idea of how white people lived and little or no idea of how to work for them. As Heather Goodall points out, the term ‘apprenticeship’ was only rhetorical. In fact Aboriginal children were sent out as cheap labour. Employers expected to extract work, not to provide training. Thus the children were set up to fail. ‘Apprenticeship’ for Aboriginal girls was domestic service in white homes under white women.

Margaret Tucker’s representation of her first employer focuses on her experiences of exclusion, deprivation, violence and hatred. She was poorly clothed, badly fed and physically and emotionally abused – in a word neglected. Exclusion is figured spatially in terms of internal and external domestic space. Margaret Tucker’s recollections describe the yard, the swings, the chook pen and the shed as the areas she inhabited. She was often cold because she was poorly clothed and without shoes.

Winters and summers came and went. I was always scantily dressed in a thin blouse and skirt and underneath a hessian sugar-bag singlet that Mrs Smith made; I had no other underclothing and my legs and feet were bare. In winter the cold was unbearable. I would wait for the first streak of sun... On frosty mornings I would sit in the shed, and cover myself with a bag.

We know that she must have been inside sometimes because she recounts sneaking a cup of tea for herself as she made tea for the husband and wife; but mostly locates herself outside the house. Her exclusion from the inside is also expressed in her account of ‘breaking in’ to the house to look for her mother’s letter when Mrs Smith had gone out and locked Margaret out of the house. The letter was symbolic of Tucker’s extreme isolation. Mrs Smith withheld Margaret’s mother’s letters, controlled Margaret’s access to pens and paper, and read and censored her letters before posting them.

Oh God, how I prayed for that letter [from her mother] and hungered for news of home, which seemed as far away as another planet. It was like a disease... I couldn’t even write home because I depended on her for a

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68 Goodall, Assimilation.
70 IEC, p. 114.
72 IEC, p. 113.
73 IEC, pp. 112–114.
stamped envelope and writing paper... She would read every word of the letter I wrote before it was posted.74

Margaret Tucker’s overwhelming experience of deprivation in the Smith household is also represented in terms of starvation figured as emptiness. Her account is permeated by memories of desperate attempts to get more food in the face of her employer’s constant surveillance and cruelty whenever she caught Margaret ‘sneaking’ extra food. ‘I was constantly empty and always thinking about how I could get food from the pantry.’75 She ‘pinched’ jam from the pantry and hid it under the house,76 she took duck eggs and cooked them in the yard,77 she asked the children to get seconds of their morning tea to share with her.78 In one case, she was given money by Mrs Smith’s brother-in-law and spent it on cake which she hid in a hedge. However, Mrs Smith had seen this from the window and took the cake away and fed it to the chooks, but they refused to eat it. Margaret Tucker comments:

Those fowls just picked casually at a piece of cake here and there and then walked away. The truth dawned on me some time later. They were better fed than I. Then without a word, she marched out of the fowl yard, leaving me standing there. When she was out of sight I hunted the chooks away and picked up some of the bigger pieces... At Moonacullah, no matter how hungry we were, we did not pick things off the ground and eat them. I wondered why she disliked me so. I had got so used to her calling me a ‘wretched black’, not realising I was one.79

Much of Margaret Tucker’s recollection of the abuse she was subjected to during her years at the Smith household is understated. For example, we know that Mrs Smith regularly abused Margaret with racist name calling – ‘my blackfellow cunning’80 or ‘wretched black’81 – but the events are not described. We also know that Mrs Smith threatened to have her sent to the Parramatta girls reformatory.82 And we know that Mrs Smith regularly engaged in sexual humiliation of Margaret, but this too is mentioned not described.

She would take great delight in making me strip, and then she would turn the hose on me in front of the men working next door. Fortunately I never had any insults from them. I just wanted to die, nothing mattered any more.83

74 IEC, pp. 112–113.
75 IEC, p. 112.
76 IEC, p. 114.
77 IEC, p. 117.
78 IEC, p. 112.
79 IEC, p. 117.
80 IEC, p. 113.
81 IEC, p. 117.
82 IEC, p. 132.
83 IEC, p. 124.
Although understated, we know this passage is significant. It is the counterpoint to the remembrance of herself as human following a visit from her mother, and the recollection that precedes her description of the emotional state leading up to a suicide attempt by taking rat poison. Here Margaret Tucker treads the fine line discussed in earlier chapters of speaking about degradation and violence while maintaining ‘vocal propriety’.\(^84\)

As Rosamund Dalziell argues, recollection of being shamed can be transformed into counter-shaming, because it is the behaviour of the Mrs Smiths that is shameful, not the behaviour of the Aboriginal children.\(^85\) Thus If Everyone Cared, in bearing witness to the deprivation and humiliation Margaret Tucker endured, should evoke shame in many white readers. Dalziell’s analysis, however, seems to imply that it is in the retrospective telling and listening that the counter-shaming happens. That is, she seems to assume that these behaviours would not have been shameful to white people at the time. Margaret Tucker’s account, however, represents Mrs Smith as acutely aware of the her behaviour as wrong. Her treatment of Margaret always improved when her parents\(^86\) or her brother-in-law\(^87\) visited, as it did when she prepared for the visit of Margaret’s mother.

I will never forget that day my mother came. My mistress went out of her way to be nice to her and to me too. I had been given decent clothes the day before, the excuse being that I had to have the others washed. I still had my winceyette skirt and print blouse, but for the first time in a long while I was told to put on my boots instead of going around barefooted.\(^88\)

Mrs Smith’s husband also worried that the neighbours would hear Margaret’s screaming when his wife was beating her, and begged his wife to ‘get her to stop’.\(^89\) The awareness of wrongness increases the moral deficiency of her employer. It was not the case that everybody treated blacks this way, and that her employers were therefore ‘innocently’ complying with prevailing social morays. Rather, Tucker represents them as knowing their behaviour was wrong.

Although Margaret Tucker clearly does not wish her book to be read as an indictment of white people in general – there are many representations of good, decent, honest whites who are kind, helpful and respectful of Aboriginal people – it is an indictment of a system that looked at ‘colour not character’. Blinded by the apparent class and race based respectability of the Mrs Smiths, Board administrators enabled and colluded in the abuse of Aboriginal children. Her

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84 Whitlock, Intimate Empire, p. 21.
85 Dalziell, Shameful Autobiographies, p. 114.
86 IEC, p. 111.
87 IEC, p. 115.
88 IEC, p. 121.
89 IEC, p. 120.
mother’s complaints to the Board that Margaret was being mistreated were ignored. 90

**Moral authority and moral engagement**

As I mentioned in the discussion of the foreword, Margaret Tucker’s representations of white people range from gushing gratitude to embittered condemnation. Like Kim Beazley Sr, critic Helen Dakin is disturbed by Margaret Tucker’s inconsistency. Preferring the consistently critical representations and angry voice of Marnie Kennedy’s autobiography, *Born a Half-Caste*, Dakin interprets Margaret Tucker’s more complex and contradictory representations as fearful.

In both *Wandering Girl* and *If Everyone Cared*, and in other books such as *Through My Eyes*, there is a degree of ambivalence, or unwillingness to offend, that can leave the reader confused, and which avoids the moral certainty of Marnie Kennedy and Robert Bropho. One of the most obviously ambivalent of these writers is Margaret Tucker... Tucker goes to great lengths to avoid confrontation even in the most extreme circumstances, finding ways to forgive the policemen who take her to the Home and the white employer who is cruel to her... Like Ella Simon, she considers reconciliation of races to be all-important and unrelated to the social condition... Perhaps, like the formidably secretive Nan in *My Place*, her attitudes are influenced by the institutionalised fear of white authorities that afflicted their generation, leading to the constant emphasis on being conciliatory. 91

I think there is some support for this position, at various times Margaret Tucker represents herself as extremely fearful of white responses to her as an Aboriginal person. She recounts, for example, an incident in the 1950s or 1960s, well after she had become an activist in Aboriginal rights and, on many occasions had been received socially by wealthy white people, when she anticipated being asked to eat in the kitchen instead of with the other guests.

I got into a turmoil – I was so worried for them, taking an Aborigine on such a visit... I had only been in such places as a maid before... I wondered to myself which part of the house the kitchen was in, and thought I would probably be eating there. 92

Dakin also finds Margaret Tucker’s critical remembering of her own behaviour that she considers wrong to be disturbing, preferring the uncompromising and consistent approach of Robert Bropho.

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90 IEC, p. 121.
91 Dakin, Gaining strength, pp. 13, 14.
92 IEC, p. 196.
The uncertainty of her attitude leads to some strange paragraphs full of contradictory sentences that do not seem to settle her attitude one way or another. Thus, when her employer hides her letter from her mother, Margaret is forced to break in to the house when she is out in order to find it:

My blackfellow cunning as she used to call it came to the surface. I wondered how I could get into that house to search for the letter...I achieved my first and only housebreaking and entering. I am puzzled still about who helped me, God or the Devil. I firmly believe it wasn't the Devil. 93

Margaret Tucker’s concept of ‘what is right as distinct from what is wrong’ (Introduction) is constantly under threat because she seems almost, but not quite, convinced that her own peccadilloes are far outweighed by the treatment she and her people have suffered. She does not dare to make the kind of unqualified accusation Robert Bropho makes in acknowledging the weaknesses and problems of his own community: ‘You’d get bad habits in Aboriginal people but the bad habits really come from the white man in the beginning’. 94

I would argue that while Bropho’s account is what Geertz would call a ‘thin description’, a conclusion, Margaret Tucker offers the reader a ‘thick description’, a highly nuanced account of the complex inner landscape of one Aboriginal girl who descended into behaviour she judged to be ‘bad’. 95 I find Margaret Tucker’s representation to be a profound challenge to racist representation of Aboriginals and whites. In If Everyone Cared we have a well-to-do middle class otherwise respectable white woman who is represented as a bad moral influence.

Margaret Tucker’s description of life at the Smith household has numerous instances of this self-criticism that doubles as scathing criticism of the white adults who were delegated by the Board to ‘civilise’ her but whose level of civilisation was far beneath that of Margaret Tucker’s Aboriginal community.

I feel awful when I think of those days and the thieving I was practising. God seemed far away, as did my mother, father, aunt and uncle and sisters— in fact all my people. 96

Margaret Tucker’s representation of herself as a complex human being who agonises, even 50 years later, over the feeling of being corrupted by Mrs Smith challenges stereotypes that Aboriginal people are less human than whites. While we might be tempted like Dakin into thinking that Margaret Tucker’s commitment to

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93 IEC, p. 113.
95 Geertz, Local Knowledge.
96 IEC, p. 114.
Christian notions of forgiveness, reconciliation and refusal to hate Mrs Smith are signs of ongoing fear and institutionalised oppression, Margaret Tucker frames them as an ongoing commitment to Aboriginal spirituality and to notions of what is right and what is wrong handed down to her by her mother and the elders of her community.

This book is dedicated to my mother, Theresa Clements, who gave me a grounding in what is right as distinct from what is wrong. Many of the old people had this.\(^7\)

I can fight that old snake of hate and bitterness when he rears his head. That fight does bring peace of mind. I will not forget the dignity and kindliness of our old people, how they shared what they had with any human being, white or dark.\(^8\)

Thus her identity as a member of her Aboriginal community is embedded in a sense of herself as a moral person. Margaret Tucker’s description of her ‘apprenticeship’ at Margaret ‘Smith’s’ suburban home does more work in the autobiography than representing white cruelty and neglect. It is a highly nuanced account of a child, used to living in a moral universe where adults have high moral standards, having to learn to survive in a social environment where morality does not constrain racist behaviour. Margaret Tucker had grown up in a moral universe that did not prepare her for the savagery of Mrs Smith. While there had always been a discourse of Aboriginal people being ‘degraded’ by contact with whites, the whites in question were presumed to be criminal and/or lower class white men. *If Everyone Cared* rewrites this narrative of degradation – the whites in question here are matrons in institutions charged with the care of Aboriginal children and nice white ladies in middle class suburbs. The Aborigines Protection Board instituted an apparatus for transferring Aboriginal children from ‘bad’ Aboriginal mothers to ‘good’ white maternal substitutes. Tucker bears witness to the fallacy of this racist presumption.

**Conclusions: ‘I want to be a human being’\(^9\)**

I think the autobiographies of Margaret Tucker and Jimmie Barker can be read together as specifically gendered representatives of a particular historical moment in what became ‘separation narratives’. Both authors are elders whom the texts portray as meeting racism with the non-violence, humanity and dignity of Gandhi or Martin Luther King. Whereas Barker is positioned (mostly) as a naïve witness, Tucker is both witness and teacher who actively instructs her readers on the history

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\(^7\) IEC, Dedication, p. 5.

\(^8\) IEC, p. 150.

\(^9\) This is the title of an interview with Aboriginal activist Chicka Dixon on the eve of the 1967 referendum vote. In answer to the question of why he wanted a ‘Yes’ vote, he said: ‘But for most Aborigines it is basically and most importantly a matter of seeing white Australians finally, after 179 years, affirming at last that they believe we are human beings’. Quote in Attwood et al., *The 1967 Referendum*, p. 115, from the *Sun Herald*, 21 May 1967.
and effects of racism. Both texts are embedded in a liberal political approach that seeks human equality for Aboriginal people and point to the failure of whites to perceive Aboriginal people as individuals with particular qualities in the same way that white people are perceived as individuals with particular qualities. Barker’s narrative presents him as the ideal masculine subject of the assimilation project – an eager student and responsible worker – who was nevertheless kept in a position of menial labour as a result of racism. Tucker’s narrative locates her as a highly moral and caring person who grew up in a family that no magistrate would have found neglectful, but racism enabled the Board to violently remove her to both institutional and suburban feminine spaces where white women were abusive rather than nurturing. In both cases, white adults believed that Aboriginal people were sub-human and therefore treated the children like domestic animals. In both cases, the location of the children beyond the pale of moral community enabled the whites to be neglectful and abusive without fear of intervention. In many ways these narratives parallel the arguments of anti-slavery advocates – they imply that racism not only subjects black people to degradation, it also degrades white people. Also like slave narratives, Barker and Tucker bear witness to racism from within the intimate domestic spaces of white homes and farms, revealing behaviours that the perpetrators fully expected to get away with – who would believe an Aboriginal witness?
Fictional testimonio?: Genre trouble in *Karobran*

With Monica Clare’s *Karobran* this thesis moves into an entirely new context from the narratives of Jimmie Barker and Margaret Tucker. First, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* and *If Everyone Cared* are autobiographical – the narrator of these texts is also the protagonist of the narrative and the narrative engages in the autobiographical pact of representing the true life experiences of the author. *Karobran* is a novel. Monica Clare, the author did not intend the text to represent her true life story although she did intend it to be representative of Aboriginal experience. However, as I discuss below, the marginalia that supplement the text attempt to convince the reader of the historicity of the novel and to manoeuvre us into reading it as autobiography. Mostly, critics have read *Karobran* as Clare’s life story, but have found its ‘authenticity’ problematic and attributed this to editorial intervention.

Second, there are significant differences in the historical context of the separations described by Barker, Tucker and Clare. Whereas both Barker and Tucker represent early childhoods lived in the early years of the twentieth century, the childhood represented in *Karobran* is of the next generation; it is a Depression childhood. Whereas Barker and Tucker were taken into the control of the Aborigines Protection Board, the children described in *Karobran* were taken by the (white) Child Welfare Department. Although both Barker and Isabelle, the protagonist of *Karobran*, lost one white parent as young children, the intersection of race and gender created significantly different possible means of survival for Barker’s mother than for Isabelle’s father. Whereas Barker and Tucker grew up in Aboriginal families and communities and were separated from their families as adolescents, Isabelle was removed at the age of seven and grew up among whites. Whereas both Barker and Tucker juxtapose their sense of positive Aboriginal identity against the racist stereotypes they encountered living among whites, Isabelle’s sense of her Aboriginality was shaped almost entirely in intersubjective relationship to the racist antagonism of whites, at least until her early adulthood. *Karobran* is a story of separation as loss of Aboriginal identity and a quest to
rediscover that identity as an adult – it is the first representation of what, ten years later would be called ‘the journey home’.¹

**Context of publication**

Like Margaret Tucker, Monica Clare wrote rather than spoke her text. Like Jimmie Barker, it was published posthumously, so the author did not participate in the editing and did not confer final approval on the text. Clare’s nearest relative, her husband Les Clare, acted in that role on her behalf and holds the copyright. Barker’s sons, Roy and Jack filled that role for Jimmie Barker, however, as Aboriginal men they were able to authenticate their father’s experiences of racism in a way that Les Clare as a white man could not perform for Monica Clare. Unlike Barker and Tucker, we do not know precisely when *Karobran* was created, although an interview with her friend and fellow activist Fred Moore indicates it was in her last years of life.² At least some of the text emerged from complex negotiations with white interlocutors in a women’s creative writing class. According to Jack Homer, *Karobran*’s editor, Clare had taken a creative writing class in the late 1960s and worked on and revised *Karobran* until she was satisfied with the text.³ We know that the manuscript was drafted by 1972, because Clare presented it to the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines (FCAA) that year.⁴ The Society of Women Writers applied for and received a grant of $500 from the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1973 for Clare to prepare the manuscript for publication. Unfortunately, Monica Clare suddenly died in 1973 at the young age of 49 and was unable to take up her grant.

Over the next four years Jack Horner (an activist in FCAA and biographer of Aboriginal activist William Ferguson) and Mona Brand (Society of Women Writers) took on the thankless task of bringing the incomplete manuscript to publication.⁵ It was published in 1978 by a very small and marginal publishing house, Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited, that was founded to publish books that more commercial publishers refused. Although it has not received wide distribution, *Karobran* was reprinted in 1983, 1985 and 1987. As Jennifer Jones points out in her analysis of the effects of social discourse on the authenticity of *Karobran*’s Aboriginal political analysis, both Horner and Brand were active socialists.⁶

¹ Link-Up (NSW) began to figure reconnection as a journey home in the early 1980s (see undated brochure published by Link-Up in the early 1980s, ISBN 0 646 2310 X); the same theme is echoed in the title *Bringing Them Home*.
³ Personal communication, Jack Horner, 12 June 2001, Canberra.
⁴ Later FCAATSI – Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
⁶ Jones, *Reading Karobran*, p. 68.
Many critics have argued that the editorial interventions in *Karobran* are clumsy and detract from rather than enhance the text. Jones argues that as the first novel by an Aboriginal woman, *Karobran* should have had an ongoing readership, but in fact the text is obscure and largely forgotten. She attributes this in part to critical attention that has largely focused on editorial intervention, particularly disapproval of its social realist style, and this has diverted ‘attention from other features that mark the importance of the book’.

Adam Shoemaker’s *Black Words White Page* (1989, the first book-length critical treatment of Aboriginal literature), for example, did not mention Clare’s book at all. Published a year later, Mudrooroo’s *Writing from the Fringe* (1990) acknowledged *Karobran* as the second novel written by an Aboriginal author (after his own *Wildcat Falling*). But he called attention to the ‘heavy’ framing of the text by the extended front matter and judged it to be ‘heavily compromised’ by the editing.

The second novel to be written by an Aborigine, though only published in 1978, is *Karobran*, by Monica Clare. It too is assumed to be autobiographical, though written in the third person and with a main character named Isabelle. The narrative is straightforward in a realistic mode and is framed by a publisher’s note, foreword, preface and introduction – which seems very heavy for a slim volume of ninety-five pages. The text itself has been heavily compromised by the editing of Jack Horner and others. This may account for the social realist tone of the finished product, though at least such motifs as the land as refuge, the problem of alcohol, institutionalisation, the basic structural opposition between Black and White are allowed to stand...The style of the edited product is bland, and it would be interesting to compare it with the original manuscript.

As the front matter directs, Mudrooroo reads Clare’s novel as ‘autobiographical’ and highlights specific Aboriginal political issues that it addresses. In the revised edition of *Writing from the Fringe* retitled *Indigenous Literature of Australia* (1997), however, Mudrooroo’s analysis of *Karobran* had become almost incomprehensibly ambivalent. In a chapter called ‘Tiddas’ writing’ he said:

*Karobran* (1978) is said to be the first novel, or rather biographical text, written by an Indigenous woman, Monica Clare. Instead of a separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies, this urban Koori lived out her life within mainstream Australia and allied to the trade union

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8 Jones, Yesterday’s words, p. 128.
9 Jones, *Reading Karobran*.
10 Jones, Yesterday’s words, p. 129.
movement. After her death, the text was edited by her white friends, Jack Horner and Mona Brand, with, as they claim, sensitivity to the author’s style and content.\textsuperscript{12}

Here Mudrooroo seems unsure whether to read \textit{Karobran} as a novel or not, and suggests we view the text as ‘biographical’ as opposed to ‘autobiographical’. This raises uneasy questions about the relationship between the author and her fictional character. Although, in this assessment he does not claim the text was ‘compromised’ by the editing, his sarcastic construction ‘with, as they claim, sensitivity’ implies a lack of sensitivity in the editing. Lastly, the middle sentence of the three-sentence critique seems to shift abruptly from an analysis of the text to a comment on the author and her Aboriginal authenticity. Mudrooroo suggests or implies that it is problematic that she lived her life within mainstream Australia rather than within a separate Indigenous society; and that Aboriginal writing should be about separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous society. But his position is unclear. Significantly, the 1997 assessment withdraws the earlier assertion that \textit{Karobran} addresses significant Indigenous issues. This leaves it a text seemingly bereft of all value. As Jones argued, at least for Mudrooroo, the book fell into obscurity.

In contrast, in her 1990 book on Australian women’s autobiography, \textit{Stories of Herself When Young}, feminist critic Joy Hooton reads \textit{Karobran} as an exemplary representation of Aboriginal childhood fractured by multiple separations.\textsuperscript{13} Hooton comments, however, that \textit{Karobran} shows signs of ‘editorial interference’.\textsuperscript{14}

In her article titled ‘Yesterday’s words: the editing of Monica Clare’s \textit{Karobran}’, Jennifer Jones argues that Karobran has been unfairly criticised and forgotten precisely because the editorial intervention is acknowledged rather than invisible as is customary – that is the editor’s honesty has invited critics to focus on editorial intervention rather than other aspects of the text. She argues, citing Mudrooroo, Hooton and others, that these critics have presumed that the editing negatively affected the writing without comparing it to the original manuscript. On the basis of undertaking such a comparison, Jones concludes that while in some cases the editing did alter Clare’s meaning, in others it improved readability and ‘heightened’ the political impact. The charge that the unevenness in style was introduced by Horner, Jones argues, is unfounded; the unevenness is in the original.\textsuperscript{15} Jones does, however, point to the deletion of overtly emotional or sentimental passages, arguing that these editorial interventions disrupt the symbolic integrity of the text.\textsuperscript{16}

In a conversation with Jack Horner in June 2001, he told me (as he had told Jennifer Jones in 1998) that he and Brand had made a specific editorial decision to

\textsuperscript{12} Mudrooroo, \textit{Indigenous Literature}, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{13} Hooton, \textit{Stories of Herself}, pp. 322–23.
\textsuperscript{14} Hooton, \textit{Stories of Herself}, p. 332.
\textsuperscript{15} Jones, \textit{Yesterday’s words}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{16} Jones, \textit{Yesterday’s words}, p. 133.
remove excess 'sentimentality'. As he spoke about the work on the book, it became clear (and this is borne out in his introduction) that he thought *Karobran* was autobiographical. Thus editorial decisions were made with a view to tightening the autobiographical narrative rather than enhancing the novel's plot, characterisation or imagery.

In my own comparison of the manuscript with the book, I found remarkably little editorial intervention. Although as Jones asserts, literally thousands of corrections were marked up, most of these were punctuation of dialogue: adding quotation marks around direct speech and beginning new paragraph when a new speaker began. There were also spelling and grammatical corrections and, occasionally, changes in the order of phrases within a sentence. The most significant stylistic change introduced was the reduction of spelling that attempts to replicate working class spoken vernacular. While the published text uses constructions like ‘Did yer git a job?’ somewhat selectively, Clare’s manuscript represents nearly all dialogue in this fashion. Lastly, as Jones argued, the editing minimised sentimentality.

Overall, I would argue, the editing was reasonably sensitive and restrained. The published version of *Karobran* is remarkably similar to her original text and, as Jones pointed out, the unevenness is in the original. It is unfortunate, however, that all of this work was (necessarily) undertaken without consultation with Clare. The edited version is not the result of collaboration and negotiation between author and editor, but rather an imposition of ‘corrections’ on the text. It is not so much that the editors changed the text, as that they did not have the opportunity to assist Clare to make her text the best writing that she could produce.

Jones also raises the issue of the effects of socialist discourse on the authenticity of the text. Although she is not making claims about essentialist notions of the Aboriginality of the text, she is concerned to argue that the Aboriginal issues were not overtaken by socialist or communist discursive agendas. Rather, she asserts, socialism as a political philosophy and socialist realism as a genre are all deployed to make possible a discussion of Aboriginal rights...It is in the development of these Aboriginal political concerns that *Karobran* engages with the socialist realist textual practices.

Jones concludes that the author used the tools of socialist realism to pursue her own, specifically Aboriginal, agenda: ‘Monica Clare strategically adopted and

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18 Clare’s manuscript is held at the National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection, MS9503.
19 As Margaret McDonell points out in her analysis of working with Ruth Hegarty on *Is That You Ruthie?*, first books may need a fairly long collaborative process where an editor can work with an author to draw out and refine the manuscript. Clare’s death pre-empted this process and leaves us with what is effectively a copy-edited draft. (See McDonell and Whitlock, *Ruthie*.)
20 Jones, *Reading Karobran*, p. 69.
adapted white political frames to suit Aboriginal political purposes'. Furthermore, Jones argues, critical assumptions about the editors created a ‘critical template’ that ignored both the cultural sensitivity of the editors as activists in the Aboriginal rights movement and the author’s adaptation of available tools for the Aboriginal cause. 

Jones’ assessment highlights the historical contingency (or perhaps, dependence) of Aboriginal publications on the author’s engagement with non-Aboriginal people who are engaged with Aboriginal issues and both the means and the desire to publicise those issues to other non-Indigenous people. Barker’s text, for example, most probably would not have come into being but for his chance encounter with Janet Mathews. Similarly, Margaret Tucker’s autobiography was facilitated and deeply influenced by her unexpected invitation to attend the Moral Re-Armament Conference in Canada. Like Margaret Tucker, Monica Clare was actively involved in Aboriginal rights organisations at the time of writing *Karobran*. She was also married to an organiser with the South Coast Trades and Labour Council and had been a campaign organiser for an ALP candidate in Sydney. Like the other texts *Karobran* demonstrates the effects of the author’s interactions with interlocutors located in the specific discursive community of labor activism.

**Manoeuvring readers**

Mudrooroo correctly points out that *Karobran* is heavily framed by marginalia. These include: a publisher’s back cover blurb and publisher’s note, foreword, acknowledgments, preface and introduction which, in Whitlock’s term ‘manoeuvre’ the reader towards the desired reading. The subtitle, ‘The Story of an Aboriginal Girl’, is the first instance of editorial direction. Clare’s manuscript was simply titled ‘Karobran’, but the editors or publisher added a subtitle that would clearly identify the book as an Aboriginal life story and, if readers are white, signal their entry into an ‘interracial pact’.

The cover design is plain and comprises typography on a bright red background, with the word ‘Karobran’ overprinted in a percentage tint to form a pattern. The book uses white bond paper and a simple page layout – no headers and the page number is in the centre of the foot of the page. All of these ‘no frills’ production features signify a non-commercial or alternative publisher on a shoe-string budget.

The back cover blurb is three short paragraphs comprising four sentences. The first sentence tells us it is the first novel written by an Aboriginal woman, published five years after her death. The second and third that it is a ‘unique’ and ‘epochal’ novel because it is about the ‘lives and sufferings of all black women’ and that it is authentic because Faith Bandier ‘wept when she read it’. The last sentence

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21 Jones, Reading *Karobran*, p. 70.
22 Jones, Reading *Karobran*, p. 70.
23 Jones, Reading *Karobran*, p. 67.
"You took our children"

Figure 3 – Front and back covers of Karobran
recommends the book to the reader by telling us that two prominent women have contributed to the front matter. Interestingly, editor Jack Horner doesn’t get a mention.

Mona Brand, well know for her work with Aborigines, contributes a foreword, and Faith Bandler, herself an author and long time worker for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, a preface.24

The front matter comprises fifteen pages. First, lest readers think that ‘Karobran’ is the name of the Aboriginal girl whose story you are about to read, the publisher’s note (which is the first section of the front matter) explains that ‘Karobran’ means ‘together’ or ‘togetherness’. This was drawn from Clare’s own (but omitted) introduction to her manuscript. The publisher’s note then argues that togetherness is what Monica Clare:

believed in, and hoped for, and it was the way the Aborigines lived, and the way white people did not live and did not understand.25

Thus readers are instructed that our entry into the interracial autobiographical contract will be guided by Clare’s aim of achieving togetherness.

The foreword is unsigned, but we know from the back cover text that it was written by Mona Brand of the Society of Women Writers. Brand explains that although Karobran is a novel, it is closely based on Clare’s life. She also informs the reader that the book was edited posthumously with ‘a determination to retain all the atmosphere and flavour of the author’s original writing style’. Thus, the foreword instructs us to read it as autobiography – a self-written life story where editorial intervention was deliberately minimised to maintain authenticity. Brand identifies Jack Horner as the editor, and herself as contributing ‘minor help in revision’.26 Jack Horner, however, informed me that he and Brand had agreed on some editorial ground rules and then divided up the manuscript between them. So it would seem that Brand had a more significant role than she admitted. Jennifer Jones has helpfully excavated the 1977 Sydney Society of Women Writers newsletter which indicated that Brand refused to complete the book’s editing because she was afraid it would not have ‘the authentic ring of a part-Aboriginal woman torn between two cultures’.27 Although Brand was ‘outed’ in the back cover blurb, unlike Bandler and Horner, she did not sign her contribution to the front matter. This may be an expression of her ambivalence towards editing the novel after Clare’s death.28 Interestingly, her gloss on the text rehearses the trope of the ‘half-caste caught between two cultures’. In fact, far from being caught between two cultures,

24 *Karobran*, back cover.
25 *Karobran*, back cover.
26 *Karobran*, p. viii.
28 Jack Horner told me that he and Brand discussed the editorial approach and then each took a copy of the manuscript to edit. Personal communication, Jack Horner, 12 June 2001.
Karobran is precisely about trying to rediscover an Aboriginal culture that she had lost.

Next are acknowledgments, written by ‘the editors’, namely Jack Horner and Mona Brand. In addition to the usual thanks to funding bodies and people who enabled production, they especially thank Les Clare, Monica Clare’s husband, both for approving the book and for clarifying ‘puzzling’ details. This acknowledgment simultaneously alerts us to the possibility of factual problems and reassures us that they were clarified by someone we can trust to know the truth. The clarification of factual issues, however, is only relevant if the editor believes the text is autobiography rather than fiction.

Following the acknowledgments is the preface, written by well known activist Faith Bandler. She provides the major affirmation of authenticity of the novel as a political work that seeks to realistically represent Aboriginal life. Taking up a testimonial position herself, she informs us that when Clare brought the novel to FCAATSI in 1972, Clare had told the Council that the novel was representative. Bandler quotes Clare as having said: ‘It was like this for most of us. That’s how it was, and that’s how it is, for Aboriginal kids’.29 Bandler then affirms the novel’s historicity:

The uncertainty, humiliation and degradation endured by Black Australians in and out of the work force are clearly portrayed in Isabelle’s life. Furthermore, the struggles of the Blacks to keep their families united epitomizes the whole sad history of Black and White relationships in Australia.30

In addition to authenticating the book as Aboriginal literature, Bandler also draws attention to its specific focus on the lives of Black women, its concern with the issues facing Aboriginal people as workers (particularly during the Depression) and the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal families.

The last section of the front matter is the Introduction written by the editor, Jack Horner. In a concise three pages, Horner offers a detailed biography of Monica Clare that, once we have read Karobran, we will realise is nearly identical with the life of Isabelle, the novel’s protagonist. Although the comparison of the biography and the novel is mostly implicit, Horner does tell us specifically that the two Homes described in the novel are the Yasmor Home in Haberfield and one at Redmyre Road in Sydney. The biography, however, supplies information that the novel does not, thus indicating divergences between the novel and the author’s life. In particular, Horner points out, Isabelle’s story moves from work during World War II directly to interest in labour union activism and Aboriginal activism. Clare’s life took a very difficult detour through a rough marriage and divorce in which she lost custody of her daughter. Horner comments that Clare ‘chose to forget’ these painful

29 Karobran, p. ix.
30 Karobran, p. ix.
events and ‘none of it appears in Karobran’.\textsuperscript{31} It is highly unlikely that Clare forgot the loss of her daughter. Since Karobran was a novel, not autobiography, she was under no generic compulsion to ‘remember’ them to the reader. However, Horner’s desire to clarify the differences between the lives of the novel’s protagonist and the author seems to be an effort both to verify the historicity of the novel while at the same time confessing the differences so as not to be caught out. By implication, the remainder of the novel is virtually autobiographical. Horner also informs us that Clare married a second time to labour activist Les Clare and moved with him to Wollongong where she became an Aboriginal activist. The novel ends just as Clare is becoming romantically interested in a labour activist and politically interested in Aboriginal oppression. From Horner’s biography we are led to presume that Isabelle’s Bill was Clare’s Les.

Horner’s biography ends with a personal description of Clare that resembles an obituary and serves to legitimate her as an activist and authentic witness for her people.

She was slightly built, with a very independent style and direct talk and manner, and was full of life. She had strong principles about race and labor politics and honesty and rebellion shone so clearly in her nature that she won many friends, both black and white.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus before we begin reading the ‘novel’ we have a ‘true biography’ in our minds with which we cannot help but compare the story of Isabelle as it unfolds – and indeed the resemblance is striking.

The struggle over the genre of Karobran is significant, or perhaps symptomatic. The author called it a novel, the editors try to make it autobiography, Faith Bandler viewed it as testimonio and Mudrooroo called it biography. It is possible to view the author’s choice of genre as a symptom of separation. Because she was taken into welfare custody at such a young age, and because she seems to have permanently lost connection with both her father and her brother, she effectively lost her early childhood. She never had Aboriginal family to remember her life with, to reconstruct her history, to re-present her pre-Welfare childhood to her. Perhaps because welfare custody created such a total rupture in these relationships, she literally had to reinvent herself, to assemble a fictional life narrative based on her own and also other similar lives that she heard about in her many conversations about child separation in Aboriginal communities.

**Historical context**

Karobran tells the story of the childhood and young adult years of Isabelle Herbert, who was removed from her Aboriginal father about a year after the death of her

\textsuperscript{31} Karobran, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{32} Karobran, p. xiii.
white mother. The novel is set in northcentral–northwestern New South Wales and opens in the midst of the Depression when Isabelle is seven years old (Clare was seven in 1931).

Although the Depression’s impact was most severe in metropolitan areas, competition for work in rural areas and the exodus of many men from the cities to the bush to look for work meant that Aboriginal workers were disproportionately unemployed. As the Depression deepened, Aboriginal families which had lived independently of the Aborigines Protection Board were forced to move to its reserves and stations because Aboriginal men were denied access to rations and other relief available to white men and had to collect relief from the Board. Thus the childhoods of both Isabelle and Clare were lived within a historical period when macroeconomic conditions were forcing Aboriginal people into greater dependence on and surveillance by the Aborigines Protection Board and when options for resistance to the Board and independent living were extremely curtailed.

Like Clare, Isabelle was born into a mixed marriage where her father was Aboriginal and her mother white. The intersections of race and gender in such a marriage would have had profound implications. First, the woman would have encountered extreme hostility from many whites – her willing participation in a miscegenous relationship would have been viewed by many as immoral and a betrayal of her race. In the novel, Isabelle’s mother had been disowned by her parents, as many white parents, shamed by their daughter’s breach of racial propriety, would have done. This affected not only the mother, however, but meant that her children were also cut off from their extended maternal family relationships. While historically, the vast majority of Australian white families have ignored their Aboriginal relations – Jimmie Barker’s father also cut his ties with Barker’s mother and his children with her – most children of mixed race relationships had Aboriginal mothers. Unlike white mothers with mixed race children, Aboriginal mothers could and did live within extended kin networks on reserves or stations – the paternalistic Aborigines Protection Board specifically aimed to ‘protect’ Aboriginal women and children.

Except during the Depression, able-bodied Aboriginal men were expected to be self-supporting and were excluded from living on the Board’s reserves and stations. Unlike Margaret Tucker’s father, it is highly unlikely that a man in (the fictional) Dave Herbert’s position could have left his wife and children to live among his extended family. Because of her race, his wife would have been excluded from the Board’s reserves and stations, and because of their ‘caste’, his children would have been removed by the Board – particularly the son who looked white. In addition, the type of work available to Aboriginal men was intermittent, even for men like Dave Herbert and Bill Clements (Margaret Tucker’s father) who

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33 Read, History of the Wiradjuri, p. 171.
34 Karobran, p. 5.
35 The Board’s records are filled with references to ‘expulsion’ of able-bodied men.
were highly skilled shearers. While shearers made a good living, they had to travel great distances to find work — Margaret Tucker rarely saw her father. An Aboriginal single father travelling with children, however, not only subjected them to a very harsh physical existence, it also brought them into direct conflict with state regulations on proper child rearing practices — children were supposed to have a fixed abode so that they could attend state schools. The Depression exacerbated what at any period would have been a very difficult life. Thus the economic and social constraints on the life of an Aboriginal single father with fair skinned children were likely to have been insurmountable — there literally was no place within the social order for them to exist and it was all but inevitable that the children of a man in this position would be taken by the state.

The other historical factor shaping both the narrative and the life of the author, making it significantly different from the lives and narratives of Jimmie Barker and Margaret Tucker, was being taken into the custody of the Child Welfare Department (CWD) rather than the Aborigines Protection Board. Unlike the Aborigines Protection Board which placed children either in institutions or in ‘apprenticeships’, the CWD ran an active program of foster placements which aimed, if possible, to keep siblings together. It is likely that if a brother and sister like Karobran’s Isabelle and Morris, where one was obviously of Aboriginal appearance and the other ‘nearly white’, had been taken away from their father by the APB, the darker girl would have been sent to Cootamundra; the ‘nearly white’ boy would have been deemed white and transferred to the CWD where he would have been placed in foster care. The likely consequence of this for the girl (Isabelle) would have been a much different sense of herself as Aboriginal in the context of the other Aboriginal girls at the home. At the same time she would have been even more alienated from her family as the Board would have prevented contact with her ‘white’ brother. Her brother, on the other hand, probably would have passed into white society altogether, assuming his body continued to appear ‘nearly white’. In either case the children would have lost contact with their parents, both the APB and the CWD actively discouraged contact with parents.

Whereas Barker and Tucker were released from the Board’s custody into the contracted labour market of the Depression, Isabelle was released into the briefly expanded labour market of WWII, a time when employment was more open for

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36 *If Everyone Cared*, pp. 18–19.
37 A generation later, a similar fate would befall Ruby Langford Ginibi’s father (although her mother was Aboriginal). Although his life was overshadowed by his efforts to evade the Aborigines Protection Board, economic and social conditions were significantly different in the 1940s when work was more available to Aboriginal men while many white men were away fighting WWII. See Langford, *Don’t Take Your Love*; and Read, *History of the Wiradjuri*, p. 219ff.
38 Interestingly, another area where the novel differs from Monica Clare’s ‘real’ life, is treatment of colour. According to Jack Horner, Monica Clare née Mona Matilda McGowan was the fair skinned child, her younger brother, Daniel McGowan was the darker child. The novel represents Isabelle’s younger brother, Morris, as blond and blue-eyed, yet when he leaves CWD custody he returns first to their foster parents’ farm and then begins a roving existence with Aboriginal friends. This scenario is far more likely if he were the darker child and visibly Aboriginal.
Aboriginals than probably any other in the past century. As was the case for white women, however, Aboriginal people were forced out of jobs when white servicemen returned to reclaim ‘their’ jobs. 39

**Reading Karobran**

Like *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker* and *If Everyone Cared*, *Karobran* represents childhood in three periods: before the welfare, with the welfare, and after the welfare. Unlike the other two books, *Karobran* is almost exclusively a novel about race – the effects of racism on the life of Isabelle and her family. All of the major forward movements of the narrative invoke racism, and each of the major turning points in Isabelle’s life has to do with an awakening of race consciousness. While Barker and Tucker also speak about the effects of racism on their lives, they also speak about a rich Aboriginal life lived under the shadow but outside the continual observation and control of white people.

*Karobran* begins with the death in childbirth of Isabelle’s mother, Bessie. Isabelle’s mother is represented as very white – very fair, very blonde, very pretty and very wilful. An only child, she had been disowned when she decided to marry an Aboriginal shearer and her parents had moved ‘back to the city’ leaving their daughter to deal with her choice on her own. Just before her death, Dave had brought Bessie to the home of Mrs Brown, and it is through her that Bessie is described.

‘You know, Dave, you mustn’t blame yourself for what’s happened, ’cause she was strong willed, and I know her like I know me own. She’d ha’ wanted to move about with you like she done. Her family disowned her when she first went off with you’. 40

Thus the first impact of racism on Isabelle is the utter loss of the maternal family. And when she dies, she disappears from the narrative. The novel never represents Isabelle remembering her mother, remembering the things they did together, remembering her mother’s stories of her own childhood or parents. Rather, except for one mention by her father, it is as if Isabelle’s mother had never existed. Her death represents an absolute rupture in Isabelle’s memory and her mother is a site of almost total absence. Later on, as an adult, in contrast to her search for her father and brother, Isabelle makes no effort to locate her maternal relatives. Thus the novel quite explicitly constructs Isabelle as an Aboriginal child whose sense of self as a part of a family reaches only towards the Aboriginal side of her family.

The second effect of racism is the lack of employment options available to Aboriginal men. Thus, marrying an Aboriginal man meant that in order to be with her husband, Isabelle’s mother had to travel the shearing circuit with her husband

40 *Karobran*, p. 5.
and two children. The physical harshness of this life for a pregnant woman is blamed for her and her baby’s deaths. With the death of his wife, Isabelle’s father, Dave Herbert, is faced with the impossible task of finding work and taking care of his children. The novel follows their trek across the dry expanses of northwestern New South Wales in search of work and foregrounds how Dave’s race determines his access to employment and the treatment of his family. His access to work was contingent on whether or not it was work wanted by white men. For example, he picked up work with a bullock train on the road, but:

Dave did not know whether he would be able to keep his job, he had to wait and see if there was a white man who wanted work.  

At least for the short term, however, Isabelle and her brother are looked after by Mrs Casey, the bullock train’s cook. During that period of relative safety, Isabelle also experiences life in a ‘blacks camp’ and the racial apartheid that determines who can and cannot inhabit this space. Isabelle and Morris play with other black children during the day, but one day the blond, blue-eyed Morris is violently removed from the camp by a white man.

The next day, Isabelle again took Morris back to the place where they had been with the children the night before. They were all having a good time, when they heard a man sing out:

‘Get that white kid out of the blacks’ camp!’

A tall white man appeared, waving his arms about in the air, but no one took any notice of him. Then he took hold of Morris...

‘I ain’t standin’ fer no white kids being in the blacks’ camp,’ said the man.

But by this time, Dave had caught up to them, and took Morris from the man; and as he held his son close to him, he turned to make sure where his daughter was safe, and added, ‘He’s got a right to be there, both me kids do. They’re coloured too.’

Here, as in the official documents of the Aborigines Protection Board discussed in Chapter 3, white people want to enforce racial apartheid that cuts through Aboriginal families on the basis of body appearance. This passage foreshadows Morris’s whiteness as a difference that ultimately will split both children from their father.

Throughout the period when Isabelle and Morris live with their father, he is represented as caring, concerned, gentle and loving. For example:

\[41 \text{Karobran, p. 12.} \]
\[42 \text{Karobran, p. 13.}\]
When Dave opened the door, he was shocked to find his daughter standing there, sobbing uncontrollably. Straight-away he bent down and cradled her into his arms and returned with her to the kitchen, where he sat down and rocked her back and forth, trying to stop her tears.  

Shortly after the incident in the ‘blacks camp’ Morris falls ill with pneumonia and has to be taken to hospital. Although he recovers, the doctor tells Dave that Morris ‘can’t go sleeping out like you and the girl’.  

Thus whiteness is signified by a need for a particular type of shelter and, conversely, darkness with the ability to camp out. This alignment is heightened by Isabelle’s association of the hospital steps with the verandah of the farmhouse where her mother died.  

Isabelle sat down on the steps. It was not long before she began to remember the last time she had sat on steps just like these, and she felt helpless as she said out loud, ‘He’s just gotta get better, he’s got to!’  

After Morris’s release, Dave sets off again to search for work. At the first station both his race and his children are held against him. ‘We don’t have blacks workin’ for us, let alone kids’. The narrator comments that this refusal made Dave feel ‘too defeated even to reply’, not only at not getting work but because the journey to the station had been so hard on his son’s fragile health.  

The next stop in their journey is at another ‘blacks camp’. This is represented as a safe haven – they are well fed, there are children to play with and women who look after them.  

One day, Dave and his children were lucky. Wandering along not knowing what to do, they ran into a black’s camp and were welcomed to a feast of porcupine and emu. Isabelle and Morris had other children to talk to and play with. The women there cared for them both, while some of the older men took Dave aside, and talked to him.  

Although the men of the camp offer to keep Dave’s children while he continues to look for work, he is afraid to leave them because he doesn’t know if Morris will be able to survive their outdoor life. Instead he carries on looking for work where he can keep his children with him. Fatefully, he accepts the offer of a white shearer, Tom Wall, and his wife, to look after the children at their homestead – a decision that would be the family’s undoing.  

Tom Wall is described as a violent drunkard, who batters his wife and is deeply racist – eaten up with resentment that Dave Herbert was the better shearer. ‘Beat me at shearing, would he? There ain’t no white man that could do that, and I ain’t
standin’ fer a black doin’ it either’. His offer to keep the children was totally malicious – in fact he worked them as slaves and treated them like animals, using his stockwhip to control them. His first action after their father leaves is to push Isabelle’s face into the ground, gleefully asserting his white male superiority.

Looking sideways, Isabelle saw that Tom was ready to kick them, but instead he pushed her face in the dirt with his foot. He laughed loudly, and then walked to pick up his shovel.

Through him Clare represents the violence of racism: Aboriginals cannot be better than whites at anything, they are meant to serve whites, they are like animals and do not hurt: ‘They’re only niggers, an’ they was made to work fer us whites’ or ‘Sick me bloody eye, yer can’t ‘urt blacks!’

Some months later, Dave finally manages to rescue his children while Wall is off on a drunken binge. It transpires that Dave had been back several times and given Wall money for their upkeep, but had been driven off by Wall’s whip and gun. When Dave threatens to report Wall to the ‘sergeant’, Mrs Wall convinces him not to, reminding him that his word as a black man will not carry against Wall’s as a white man: ‘Tom’ll halfkill me now when ‘e find out they’re gone, an’ I ain’t got nothin’ inside me to fight him any more! Besides, Dave, do ya really think they’ll believe your word aginst Tom’s?’

The family escapes and have a brief but peaceful interlude at a station not far from Wall’s place where the children are looked after by a white woman called ‘Ma’, the station’s cook. This ends disastrously, with Tom Wall reporting the children to the welfare authorities who take the children into custody while Dave is working at the far end of the property. The children are held by the sergeant and his wife at the police station until Dave returns. Although Dave is told by the welfare officer that they are taking his children whether he likes it or not, he tries to reassure his children that their lives will be better in the city where they will get some ‘schoolin’, which their mother would have wanted. Thus Clare figures their separation as a move across racially defined social space – from Isabelle’s father’s world of camping and living rough, to her mother’s world of cities and schools.

As in many separation narratives, the transition between worlds is marked by a long and confusing train trip, arrival at a forbidding institution, and the humiliation of being stripped and subjected to a ritualised and frequently violent cleansing. The first act of whites taking custody of Aboriginal children is to scrub off the dirt – a symbol of the desire to scrub out the colour and, symbolically, their race.

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48 *Karobran*, p. 25.
49 *Karobran*, p. 22.
50 *Karobran*, pp. 25 and 24.
51 *Karobran*, p. 27.
‘Come along!’ Nurse said sharply to the older girl. ‘Get those rags off them, and burn them at once.’

Then she looked down her nose at the two naked figures standing in front of her, and without a sound she made signs for them to climb the steps into the bath. She told the older girl to scrub them hard with the brush, while she stood stiffly by and watched them with disgust.\textsuperscript{52}

Whiteness in the institution is represented as rigidly disciplinarian – meals are eaten under strict silence, the meal begins with the word ‘start’ and ends with the word ‘finish’ and no child dares to ask for more.\textsuperscript{53}

At mealtime the two children would be seated in the same dining room, but talking was forbidden and no one dared to ask for more than was put in front of them; and when the nurse who was always seated at a table near the door said, ‘Start!’ or ‘Finish!’ everyone obeyed immediately.\textsuperscript{54}

After a mercifully short stay at this institution, the sister and brother are sent together to a foster placement on a small farm run by a brother and sister, whom they call ‘Aunt’ and ‘Uncle’. This is one of the happiest times of Isabelle’s life. She and her brother are together and they are well loved and well cared for. Isabelle’s happiness is symbolised by her relatedness to a rock that was clearly used by the Aboriginal people who lived on that country before white appropriation. Both the beginning and end of their stay with the Manburys are figured in terms of the rock.

Above the vegetable garden Isabelle found a flat rock with a big hole in the middle of it, which still held water from the last rains. As she stood on top of it, she found that she could see for miles and miles, everywhere, almost to the top of the big mountain behind her.

She was reluctant to leave.

The two adults smile at each other when they saw the happiness in Isabelle’s face.

‘Do you like that rock?’ asked Uncle.

‘Oh yes!’ replied Isabelle. ‘I can see everything from up here, and when I look down, I can see myself in the water.’\textsuperscript{55}

Significantly, the rock enables her to have vision, both outward and of herself. Thus with the rock she is located on the earth, and feels a sense of happiness and belonging that enables her to see her own face. According to Jack Horner, this rock

\textsuperscript{52} Karobran, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{53} Karobran, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{54} Karobran, pp. 34–35.
\textsuperscript{55} Karobran, p. 38.
is located at Mangrove Creek and shows the marks of Aboriginal use for axe-sharpening or food-grinding.56

The rock is invoked again when Isabelle and Morris are transferred back to Sydney as Isabelle reaches adolescence. The morning after she finds out that she and Morris will be separated from Aunt and Uncle, Isabelle goes to her rock and inscribes every detail of the land in her memory.

The next morning, as the sun came up, Isabelle was standing on her rock looking over the land that had become so very much a part of her self and her brother...Now her legs were shaking, and she was again on the verge of tears at the beauty of it. She sat down on the rock, and stared at her own reflection in the water hole. Suddenly her brother quietly sat down beside her.

The contentment of this time with these foster parents, also derived, as Isabelle realises in retrospect, from the fact that her race did not matter.57

With the inexorable exigencies of child rearing by bureaucratic management, the children are abruptly moved from ‘Aunt’ and ‘Uncle’ to the city. At her new city school, Isabelle comes face-to-face with white racism as the target of racist abuse and exclusion: the children in her class wanted ‘nothing to do with her’ and she was blamed and punished whenever anything ‘went wrong’.58

In all the years that she had lived with her Aunt and Uncle, Isabelle could not remember anyone ever making even the slightest mention that her skin was a different colour. But now some of these children were paying attention to it.59

Feeling racially isolated, Isabelle begins to withdraw and even tries not to be seen with her brother in order to protect him from being hurt. At one point the other children wrote ‘Your Black’ on her school case and later surrounded and taunted her and Morris, shouting ‘State kids, black kids! You’ve got no father and mother’.60 But it was Isabelle who was publicly humiliated in front of a school assembly for hitting out at her tormentors with her school case.61 Thus white adults are represented as colluding with white children in the humiliation of Aboriginal children.

Although this racist exclusion led Isabelle to ‘show them’ by excelling in her school work, her success hardly got a mention nor did her high marks keep her in school. As soon as she reached the age when she could be put to work, she was sent

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56 Karobran, p. xii.
57 Karobran, p. 47.
58 Karobran, p. 47.
59 Karobran, p. 47.
60 Karobran, p. 48.
61 Karobran, p. 48.
to her first domestic service job. Thus Clare makes the point that no matter how well Aboriginal children achieved in school, they were still sent to menial jobs.

Altogether Isabelle had a number of employers between the ages of 14 and 18, the narrative is rather thin here focusing mostly on Isabelle’s frustrated attempts to keep in contact with her brother. The most significant event during this period of domestic service was the reappearance of her father. In a most unusual scene of multiple mistaken identities, Isabelle meets her first cousin, Dave Herbert, who has the same name as her father.

One morning, Matron walked into the staff dining room as Isabelle was finishing cleaning there, and quietly told her that her brother was waiting to see her on the verandah... In her excitement to see her brother Morris, whom she was quite sure it must be, Isabelle broke an important rule by running down the hall. But when she opened the front door, she saw the back view of a black haired young man not much older than herself. As he turned around he smiled, and it was then that Isabelle saw his perfect set of white teeth, his almost black face. 62

Isabelle edged backwards frightened, declaring to the Matron that he was not her brother. He then introduced himself as ‘Dave Herbert’.

Isabelle now found herself staring at this stranger with utter disbelief. As she still stared at him without saying a word, she began to remember another Dave Herbert, her own Dad, and although there had been times over the years when they had not seen each other, her memory of him had for a short time dimmed but never once had she ever forgotten him or the colour of his skin, nor the love that Morris and she had shared with their Dad so long ago. 63

The two young people then talked and it transpired that this Dave was her father’s brother’s son – her first cousin, named after his uncle. But also, Isabelle’s uncle (her father’s brother and her cousin’s father) had died about the same time as her mother, and when her father’s sister-in-law had heard that he was sick after losing his children, she found him and nursed him back to health. They had subsequently formed a relationship so that Isabelle’s cousin was also her step-brother. More importantly though, her cousin Dave told her that her father and his mother had gone to the welfare to try to get Isabelle and Morris back, but they had been refused. 64

Like many other separation narratives, Clare describes a parent made literally ill by the loss of his children, the parent’s repeated attempts to have the children returned, the government’s refusal to return children to Aboriginal parents once they have

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62 Karobran, p. 51.
63 Karobran, pp. 51–52.
64 Karobran, p. 52.
been separated and the withholding of information from both parents and children in order to sever the bonds between them. The theme of welfare interference in family relationships is heightened in this section by Isabelle’s cousin’s failure to see Morris because the welfare just happened to move him to another institution on the same day Dave had arranged to go see him. Although Dave had promised to write to Isabelle, she never received a letter, but then she too was moved to a new domestic job. In the end, this glimmer of reconnection with her family came to nought – Isabelle never heard from Dave again. But this visit rekindles her memories of her father and signals the beginning of her consciousness of the value of her Aboriginality.

Not long after Dave’s visit and just before her discharge from state custody, Isabelle went to the Head Office to demand information about her father and brother and the reasons her father had been prevented from visiting her. The Officer’s response offers readers a representation of racist notions of caste, uplift and gratitude.

The Officer slowly shook his head when Isabelle asked him the questions. He said he thought that there must have been some good reason why they had been taken from their Dad by that Department. Usually there was another Department that handled coloured children, but he himself did not know much about this. Possibly the Officer who took them might have had some doubt as to how much Aboriginal she and Morris had in them. Smiling at Isabelle, he told her how lucky she and her brother had been under this Department...

Playing along, Isabelle was dutifully grateful, but still demanded information about her relatives. Reluctantly, the welfare officer gave her Morris’s address, but although she was to hear about Morris from time to time, at the end of the novel she is still has not seen him again. As in the symmetry of Isabelle’s foster placement with the Mansburys that begins and ends with the rock, Isabelle’s period of life as a state ward is bracketed by her relationship with her father. Although she will not act on it for some time, her confrontation with the welfare officer foreshadows the waning influence of enforced separation, and her returning recollection of her Aboriginality. In a subsequent and final conversation with the same welfare officer, he tried to dissuade her from looking for her father, this time projecting white desire for racial segregation onto Aboriginals.

In confidence, he advised her to think very hard before ‘gallivanting off to the bush’ in search of her Dad and his new family, because as he gently said, ‘You are only part Aboriginal and in other words, a half-caste; and you might find that you may not be acceptable to all of your father’s people.’

65 Karobran, p. 57.
66 Karobran, p. 59.
But, the narrator asserts, ‘he had not swayed Isabelle’s mind in the slightest’. 67

Isabelle’s discharge from state custody takes us into the third stage of the novel, young adulthood and coming of age as an Aboriginal activist. During the last third of the novel, the main theme, as in the first part of the book, is the effects of racism in the workplace. We follow Isabelle through a succession of jobs punctuated by racist taunting, ostracism and dismissals. When she is off work for a month with appendicitis, her coworkers (all women) accuse her of going ‘walkabout’, refuse to work with her, and utterly ignore her when she gets some solder in her eye. 68

She loses another job in a restaurant because one of the customers, again a young woman, demands that the Greek owner (Joe) fire her because she is ‘half-caste’, ‘black’; because people like her ‘should not even be allowed in the cities, at least not where people can see them’; because she would ‘put them off their food’. 69

Although Joe defended Isabelle, making the young woman even more angry, he succumbed to her threat and let Isabelle go. Finding another job proved impossible. Over and over she was told, ‘We don’t employ blacks’. 70

Isabelle’s continuing experiences of racist exclusion in the workforce cause her to reflect on her own views about racism in Australia, figured in terms of an encounter with an African-American serviceman. She recalls asking the soldier why he would step off the footpath when passing a white person and being told that in the United States, black people weren’t allowed to walk on the footpath with whites. She then replied that it wasn’t like that in Australia. As her experience of being Aboriginal and trying to find work in Sydney deepens, however, she comes to the realisation that things weren’t so different after all.

Then she began to think over some of the terrible things that the woman had said that day to Joe about her Dad’s people and their colour; and she twisted her lips as she began to realise that this country was in many ways really no better in its attitudes to its black people, than the country of the visiting serviceman she had spoken to, a long time ago. There must be a way, Isabelle thought, for her to get to see some of Dad’s people, so that she could talk to them and find out why these things were happening to them. 71

This marks a turning point in Isabelle’s consciousness of racism. Importantly, she realises that she needs to speak with other Aboriginal people in order to understand it. After this, however, she begins to notice that she has hardly seen any other Aboriginals in Sydney and that she doesn’t know where to go to meet with them. She also begins to reflect on some of the political analysis she has heard at union

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67 Karobran, p. 59.
68 Karobran, p. 63–64.
69 Karobran, p. 67.
70 Karobran, p. 69.
71 Karobran, p. 69.
organising meetings and to think the situation of Aboriginal people as analogous to that of workers.

As she continues, unsuccessfully, to look for work, one day she passes Joe’s. Solicitous and apologetic, Joe invites her in for a meal. As she eats, she begins to listen in on the conversation in the next booth between two white men who were in the war together, one older and a factory worker, the other a union organiser. Isabelle’s interest is so obvious that they invite her to join them and, for the first time, she begins to understand and engage with the union’s political analysis. But part of her acceptance of their political perspective is contingent on the fact that they accept her ‘regardless of her skin colour’.

The last chapter, just seventeen pages, follows the development of Isabelle’s reconnection with Aboriginal people. At a union meeting she attends with Tom and Bill, she listens to a speech about the treatment of Aboriginals and slides down in her chair, overcome. The narrator comments that it was not ‘shame’ but ‘fear’ that ‘she should not be listening to this man’. She realises that although the white man speaking was sympathetic, a Dark man should have been ‘telling the white people what his people wanted’. From this point onwards, the narrator comments, she begins to ‘feel alive’ as she becomes friends with Tom and his wife Jean and begins to date Bill. As Christmas draws near, for the first time in her life, not only is she not alone and lonely, but she has Christmas offers from both Bill and Tom. She decides, however, to visit the Manburys.

That visit is the beginning of her journey home. The first step in her journey is being introduced to Aboriginal people living at a mission near the Manburys. Here she begins to learn about how Aboriginal people live and about the interference of government in their lives.

She met all the other people who were living there [on the mission], and they would sit down and talk to her for hours. They tried to explain to her the difference between the ‘Child Welfare’ she had been put under, and the ‘Aboriginal welfare’ that controlled their lives and their children.

From this point onwards Isabelle visits many Aboriginal missions on a quest to find her father and her brother and to find out more about her father’s people. Throughout this section Clare expounds on the conditions of Aboriginal lives, drawing on Isabelle’s experiences on missions and doing seasonal work: exclusion from white public spaces, including churches and pubs; inadequate pensions; child removal; horrific housing; no water or sanitation; discriminatory wage rates; exploitation of Aboriginal land and desecration of ‘Sacred Grounds’. Isabelle also begins to rewrite her childhood in light of this new knowledge.

72 Karobran, p. 79.
73 Karobran, p. 80.
74 Karobran, p. 83.
By going from one of her Father's people to another, Isabelle received the education of a lifetime, because she had only remembered the good times she had had with him. Camping along the river banks and moving on had been fun to her then, but she was now learning all the reasons why they had to do these things, and she did not like it at all.\textsuperscript{75}

She also witnesses a white station manager, Mr Ball, intimidating a young child and her mother because the child was not in school. The scene was symbolically linked to her own abuse as a child through the rhyming of Mr Ball and Mr Wall, the man who had enslaved Isabelle and her brother.\textsuperscript{76} When Isabelle tries to intervene and protect the child, she is thrown off the station.

As the book draws to its conclusion, Isabelle's (and Monica Clare's) political vision begins to be articulated – a vision, like Margaret Tucker's, which stresses going beyond hatred toward reconciliation with whites, if not this generation then in the coming ones.

When the Aboriginal people eventually made up their minds to do something about these conditions, there would be sincere white people like Bill who would work with them.

No one could be expected to keep sitting back and let this happen to them. If not for themselves, then they would do it for their children, because Isabelle had long ago learnt that the children of the Aborigines were the most precious people in their lives. She felt too that it could be this younger generation that would reduce some of the justified hatred of white people. This hatred made it very hard for genuine white people to even get close to the Aborigines' way of thinking about things. Isabelle knew in her own heart that some day this must happen; and she hoped that when it did, Aborigines would take their rightful place and become a part of society, working for a better way of life for all people in this country.\textsuperscript{77}

The resolution of the novel takes place at a beautiful reserve on the coast where Isabelle is recognised as her father's daughter. The moment of recognition is figured as a mystical meeting of kindred bodies.

\begin{itemize}
\item She felt a hand gently touch her on the shoulder, and she heard a voice say, 'You Dave's girl, sister?'
\item Isabelle looked up and found herself staring into the smiling face of a very elderly tall thin man, who stretched his hand to help her to her feet.
\item But Isabelle could not take her eyes from the hand that was extended towards her. As she took hold of it, the hand seemed to speak to her, like
\end{itemize}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Karobran, p. 89.
\item Karobran, p. 88–89.
\item Karobran, p. 89–90.
\end{enumerate}
in music or a dance...this hand that she held seemed to be welcoming her in some special kind of way.\textsuperscript{78}  

The man had known her father as a child and remembered Isabelle’s mother and had even seen Isabelle as baby. Through him Isabelle regained an embodied connection with her own history. Her father and her brother are evoked in her conversation with the elderly man as he tells her that he heard her father had gone ‘up north’ seeking work, but it was even more restricted up there for Aboriginals than in New South Wales. Isabelle remembers that her brother had also gone north.

In the last scene of the book, Clare represents a moment of Aboriginal people becoming political. The people of the reserve are all gathered together. A young man is the catalyst, but first he seeks and receives the approval of the oldest man in the group. The young man speaks, outlining the struggle his life has been under the rule of whites, but calling for an end to hatred and a joining together with the whites who are friends.\textsuperscript{79}

Hearing these words and the cheers that follow, Isabelle begins to cry. She is simultaneously heartbroken that she may never see her father again, and enheartened that ‘her Dad and his people would live on in Aborigines like the young man who had spoken that day’. The facilitator of her own internal reconciliation, however, is another elderly gentleman who, like her father, comforts and protects her. The book ends with the following paragraphs:

She found that she was looking into the face of a very concerned elderly black gentleman, and as he put his arm around her shoulders with understanding and protection, he drew her head gently to his shoulder. Isabelle glanced towards the sky for one long loving moment. For the first time ever, she sensed the comforting closeness of her Dad and Mum together as it flowed deeply inside her body and eased the ache she had carried in her own heart for so many years.\textsuperscript{80}

The elderly gentlemen’s gestures of holding her and letting her rest her head on his shoulder are evocative of earlier descriptions of her father. It is interesting that her comforter is a stranger rather than the man who had known her father – it is a reunion with her people, not just her specific family. Her ‘long, loving’ glance at the sky, lends a spiritual presence to the moment. Finally, the expression of the reconciliation of her Dad and Mum, seems to be figured in terms of blood – ‘it flowed deeply inside her body’.

Overall the ending of the book is bittersweet. Isabelle’s personal life is still fractured by the effects of separation. She still does not know where her father and brother are, and realises that she may never see her father again. However, through

\textsuperscript{78} Karobran, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{79} Karobran, pp. 93–94.
\textsuperscript{80} Karobran, p. 94.
the acknowledgment and protection of the two older Aboriginal men, she regains her father spiritually and she regains the safety of her lost childhood. She becomes reconciled with her past, and reconciled with the embodied racial duality of her heritage. At the same time, the young Aboriginal man’s speech which stressed going beyond hate and towards engaged activism with white people, opens up the possibility of a future that Isabelle could embrace.

Conclusions

In reading and rereading Karobran I have found it difficult to resist the instructions given in the front matter to interpret it as autobiography. Given its many parallels with the known biography of Monica Clare, it is certainly reasonable to view Karobran as autobiographical, but the autobiographer is constrained by the referentiality and historicity of the text in a way that the novelist is not. Both The Two Lives of Jimmie Barker and If Everyone Cared are permeated with a sense of the author’s historicity – that their lives and more importantly their memories of their elders were historically significant as a record of their families and communities. Although separation from their families as adolescents was a violent and traumatising disruption of their lives, it was not a rupture in which the past almost literally was erased. However much critics argue about the constructedness and fictionality of autobiography, the presumption is that there is a past to reinterpret and represent through the project of memory.

The rupture in Monica Clare’s life (as for many Aboriginal people who were taken as young children), robbed her of a narrative of the past that would enable her to make sense of her embodied existence as Aboriginal people. That is, separation created a total disjuncture between a visibly Aboriginal body that white racism continually denigrated and an Aboriginal social history of family and community that would enable a counter-narrative of that body. Monica Clare, like many separated Aboriginals, literally had to reinvent herself as an adult in order to account for an Aboriginality that among white people was either erased or centred. Had she lived longer (in 1981 when Link-Up was founded she would have been 57; in 1997 when the National Inquiry took place she would have been 73) she would have been able to write into an entirely different discursive and historical context that would value her life memories and her struggle to reconnect with her Aboriginality. As it was, Monica Clare wrote into a discursive context where ‘autobiography’ was a speaking position occupied by people like Jimmie Barker and Margaret Tucker; by elders whose memories (among other things) could address interlocutors within the discourse of anthropological preservation of the past of a ‘dying race’ and could address a more general curiosity about ‘how Aborigines really lived’. The extensive marginalia that frame her text attempt to resolve some of these problems and authenticate Clare’s speaking position as Aboriginal and representative.
Monica Clare’s autobiography, had she tried to write it, could engage with none of these discourses. Hers was an isolated and fragmented narrative that answered no questions about how ‘Aborigines lived’. In writing a novel, Clare could begin to analyse the problematics of an amputated autobiography and begin to represent and narrate a reasonably coherent history of an Aboriginal person that somewhat resembled herself. Foreshadowing the discourse that emerged in Link-Up (NSW) just eight years after her death, Clare represented (re)discovery of and (re)connection with her Aboriginality as both political and spiritual. Her ‘coming home’, like those of many others, was figured as a healing of an internal wound to the heart. Unlike many Link-Up narratives, however, Clare represents her healing in terms of a reconciliation between her two racialised selves figured as blood – the flow of her mother and father within her body. Also unlike many Link-Up reunion accounts, Karobran lacks the contradictions and uncertainties – perhaps, because Clare’s reunion is imaginary rather than ‘real life’.

As in the other two narratives, white readers are given multiple and complex representations of the ways that white people negotiate racism. White women are allowed the most variation in Karobran’s representation, ranging from the assertive mothering of Mrs Brown, Mrs Casey and Miss Manbury, to the ineffective caring of Mrs Wall, the strictness of Matron, and the abusiveness of female co-workers and patrons of the restaurant where Isabelle works. Aboriginal men are all gentle and otherwise loving father or brother figures – Isabelle’s father, her brother Morris, her cousin/step-brother Dave, and an elder who knew her father and symbolically represents her reunion with her father’s people. White men, however, throughout the book are represented as a site of angry and sometimes violent control, except for the not-quite white ‘Joe’ the Greek. Interestingly, Aboriginal women are only mentioned twice.
This chapter shifts from the narrative of one person's life to a collection of short narratives that were specifically elicited to represent the experience of separation. It also moves from narratives that negotiated with non-Aboriginal interlocutors and patron discourses to narratives that emerged from Link-Up (NSW), an Aboriginal community organisation. Published in 1989, more than a decade after Barker, Tucker and Clare, *The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken from Their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggle to Find Their Natural Parents*, brings to public view the knowledge, analysis and experience of Link-Up.¹ *The Lost Children* tells a collective narrative of separation and the journey home refracted through perspectives of thirteen witnesses.

Link-Up was founded in 1981 by Coral Edwards and Peter Read. It aimed to assist children like Isabelle Herbert of Karobran to find their relatives and to make sense of and heal from the psychological effects of separation. It began as an interracial collaboration that emerged at the intersection of the projects of two individuals – one Aboriginal, one white. Coral Edwards had been separated from her family at Tingha in 1950 and placed at the Cootamundra Girls Home for Aboriginal Girls as an infant. Peter Read was a white historian researching a PhD thesis on the history of the Wiradjuri people. Edwards and Read both worked as Link-Up counsellors, facilitating reunions and assisting separated people to reconnect with Aboriginality. Combining history with personal experience enabled them to develop a complex politics of the personal – subjectivity is precisely identified as a key site of colonisation.

**Historical context of publication**

During the twelve years between the publication of Barker, Tucker and Clare, and *The Lost Children*, the discursive and political context of New South Wales had undergone radical change. From the mid-1970s, Aboriginal organisations began to work towards self-determination in placement decisions affecting Aboriginal families. At the same time, mainstream agencies such as the NSW Child Welfare

¹ Coral Edwards and Peter Read (eds), *The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken from Their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggle to Find Their Natural Parents*, Doubleday, Sydney, 1989; hereafter LC.
Department which had ‘inherited’ the Aboriginal children in the custody of the Aborigines Protection Board prior to its dissolution in 1969, became concerned about the over-representation of Aboriginal children in substitute care. A 1981 study found that, although representing only 1 per cent of the population, NSW Aboriginal children accounted for 11.7 per cent of the children in Homes and 15.7 per cent of children in correctional institutions.

A 1979 study of non-government care found that 7.8 per cent of the children in NSW substitute care were Aboriginal; and, while 1 in 788 white children was in care, for Aboriginal children the chance of being in substitute care was 1 in 151. The Aboriginal Children’s Research Project was funded in the late 1970s to ‘reduce the high numbers of Aboriginal children living in non-Aboriginal care and to prevent Aboriginal children being removed from their families and communities’. It produced a number of reports analysing the existing system, and consulted with Aboriginal communities on making recommendations for future policy development.

At the same time, adoption law reform was under consideration in response to protest by both ‘relinquishing mothers’ and adults who were adopted as children. Both pointed to the negative emotional and psychological effects of permanent separation and advocated change in adoption law to enable reunion once the adopted child reached adulthood. Three Australian Conferences on Adoption were held in 1976, 1978 and 1982. Delegates from Aboriginal child care services addressed white social workers and argued that the needs of Aboriginal children were significantly different from those of white children.

At the first Australian Conference on Adoption (February 1976), the Workshop on Aboriginal Community and Adoption presented a report based on wide ranging pre-conference consultations with Aboriginal communities (especially in states or territories unable to send representatives to the conference). Affirming the premise

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2 Milne, Aboriginal Children in Substitute Care, p. 12.
3 Graeme Gregory and NJ Smith, Particular Care: The Report of the National Survey of Non-Government Children’s Home and Foster Care (Including Homes for Physically and Intellectually Handicapped Children), Children’s Bureau of Australia, Sydney, 1979, p. 66. Note that children who are wards of the state may be placed in non-government substitute care.
4 Quoted from the Appendix of Read, Stolen Generations, p. 21.
7 Elizabeth Sommerlad (ed.), Homes for Blacks, Report of the Workshop on Aboriginal Community and Adoption. First Australian Conference on Adoption, Sydney, February, 1976 (unpublished), held in the collection of Child Welfare Department papers at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur.
of child welfare decision-making that placement should be ‘in the best interest of
the child’, the report argued that current practice across Australia was unresponsive
to the needs of Aboriginal children, particularly their need to learn how to live in a
racist society.

Any Aboriginal child growing up in Australian society today will be
confronted by racism. His best weapons against entrenched prejudice are a
pride in his Aboriginal identity and cultural heritage, and strong support
from other members of the Aboriginal community... We believe that white
families are unable to provide such a supportive environment. We
therefore call for an end to the placement of Aboriginal children with
white families by white adoption officers. We assert that placement of
Aboriginal children (whether for adoption or foster care) should be the
sole prerogative of the Aboriginal people. Only they are in a position to
determine what is in the best interests of the Aboriginal child. Criteria
relating to material possessions and wealth are no substitute for love, pride
in the Aboriginal identity, and relationships with other Aborigines in the
black community [underlining in original].

Additionally, the report drew attention to white Australians’ ongoing adherence to
and confusion by the discourse of caste. It argued that in practice, a young person
who is visibly Aboriginal or known to be Aboriginal, is going to be treated
(differently) as Aboriginal, is going to identify as Aboriginal and therefore is
Aboriginal.

The major point which whites fail to grasp is that in a racist society an
individual is either white or black. One cannot be part black, part
white... The position taken by Aborigines on this issue is therefore that any
child of Aboriginal parentage, no matter what his physical appearance or
his degree of Aboriginality is an Aborigine.

Notably absent from the paper’s analysis was a reference to a history of separation
as part of a deliberate policy of assimilation. These early arguments were drawn
from the US model developed by African-Americans who did not have a (recent)
history of forced assimilation.

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8 Sommerlad, Homes for Blacks, p. 3
9 Sommerlad, Homes for Blacks, p. 19. See also the judgment in F v Langshaw, Family Law
Reports, 8 Fam LR, 1983, pp. 883–948. Here the Aboriginal grandparents of the child contested a
NSW Family and Child Services decision to adopt the child to white parents. The judgment
thoroughly canvassed the literature on inter-racial adoption. The judge rejected arguments that the
child should not be adopted to whites, but found in favour of the grandparents on the grounds that
the child would be better off within the family. It contains a section at p. 847 where the judge
struggles with the notion of mixed race.
10 The title of the report of the Aboriginal working group, ‘Homes for blacks’, was drawn from a
Black American project in Detroit that created a Homes for Blacks children’s agency. Sommerlad,
Appendix 1.
Mollie Dyer (Margaret Tucker’s daughter) delivered a paper to the Australian Foster Care Conference – IYC in September 1979 titled ‘The Aboriginal child in foster care’.¹¹ She argued that Aboriginal children placed in non-Aboriginal foster care developed low self-esteem and had ‘very negative feelings about themselves’. She advocated a reconceptualisation of child welfare decision-making that valued Aboriginal perspectives, included Aboriginal people in decision-making and worked towards keeping Aboriginal children in Aboriginal families.¹²

A 1980 publication entitled ‘Report to the Aboriginal Children’s Research Project on the Demography of Penrith/St Mary’s and Aboriginal Child Welfare’ contained a section on adoption with a similar analysis to that of the Workshop Report. It particularly highlighted the identity issues arising in adolescence for Aboriginal children and the high breakdown rates in foster and adoption placements to white families in the early teenage years. It argued that white families could not love and accept an Aboriginal child for ‘what he is’, and that Aboriginal families were rejected as carers because (mostly) they could not meet (white) requirements for good health, marriage, accommodation, financial security and inability to have their own children.¹³

Also in 1980, historian Peter Read wrote the pamphlet, The Stolen Generations, for the Family and Children’s Services Agency.¹⁴ The pamphlet argued that the separation of Aboriginal children was a deliberate government policy aiming to eliminate the Aboriginal population of New South Wales through the removal and assimilation of children. This 21-page pamphlet, arising out of Read’s research in the Aborigines Protection Board archives and oral history research in Wiradjuri communities, shifted the debate of the Aboriginal child placement principle into a new discursive arena. It foregrounded the socialisation of Aboriginal children as an ongoing site of struggle between white and Aboriginal adults for the elimination or survival of Aboriginal people as Aboriginals. It argued that not only was it not seen to be in the best interests of Aboriginal children as individuals to be prevented from developing a strong, positive Aboriginal identity, but that the loss and disappearance of Aboriginal identity was precisely the aim of the previous 70 years of New South Wales government policy. From the early 1980s, historians started to recognise separation as a specific technology of assimilationist policy.¹⁵

Lastly, by the time The Lost Children was published in 1989, broader public awareness on Aboriginal issues had been, if not raised, at least alerted to ongoing Aboriginal dispossession. Public debate during the bicentennial in 1988 on whether

¹² See also Christine Watson, Aboriginal Children and the Care of the State in Victoria, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra, 1976, unpublished paper.
¹⁴ Read, Stolen Generations.
¹⁵ See also Read, History of the Wiradjuri; Goodall, History of Aboriginal Communities; Chisholm, Black Children: White Welfare?; Aboriginal Children’s Research Project, Survival of the Aboriginal Family.
to represent Captain Cook as settlement or invasion is indicative of the negotiation of Australian historiography. As Andrew Markus argues, however, the 1980s were also a time when conservative historians such as Geoffrey Blainey were developing strategies for countering revisionist histories. 16

Thus the discursive arena into which The Lost Children was both enunciated and circulated was radically different from that facing Barker, Tucker and Clare in the late 1960s to mid-1970s. Although autobiographies and other cultural products enabled Aboriginal people to articulate counter-discourse on separation, circulation and acceptance of these discourses was limited to the specialised discursive communities of Aboriginal history and Aboriginal child welfare. That the most common response to Bringing Them Home in 1997 was ‘I never knew about this’, shows that neither separation autobiographies nor collections like The Lost Children had much impact on mainstream knowledge.

The publication process

The Lost Children fits into the category of collaborative autobiographical narrative that Carole Boyce Davies calls the ‘collective life story’ which is a ‘multi-articulated text’. Drawing on an analysis of collections of women’s narratives, she says:

These narratives can be read as individual stories (corresponding more in length to the short story), or they can be read collectively as one story refracted through multiple lives, lives that share a common experience. 17

Davies points to the problematic nature of the role of the editor in collective life stories, noting the significance of trust in the elicitation stage and possibility of appropriation in the process of transforming recorded narratives into written text.

According to co-editor and oral historian Peter Read, the idea for creating The Lost Children emerged from conversations between himself and Coral Edwards. 18 The idea was well received by other Link-Up members, some of whom decided to participate in the project. The thirteen ‘stories’ were collected as oral history interviews, with both Read and Edwards conducting each interview. Read commented that although he and Edwards were mostly familiar with each person’s experience of separation and reunion, they were surprised that a number of people spoke of abuse for the first time during the interview sessions. In hindsight, he speculated that the context of speaking for a book that would enable the speaker to get their story ‘on the record’ seemed to invite testimonial bearing witness – a speaking position that had not emerged (for those speakers) in the private discursive spaces of either counselling sessions or Link-Up community gatherings.

16 Markus, Race: John Howard, p. 54ff.
17 Davies, Collaboration, p. 4.
18 Interview with Peter Read, 19 June 2001. All subsequent references to Peter Read in this section refer to this interview.
In the transcription process, Read said he sought to maintain the voice and speaking style of each contributor, in his rendering of spoken English into written form. I was able to listen to one of the tapes and compare the spoken and written versions. Although, the written version was rigorously faithful to the original, no transcription could adequately translate the richness of the inflections of the speaker’s voice. Pauses for reflection, to deal with emotions, to add suspense or emphasis, to mark irony cannot be transferred to a transcript. Nor can a transcription convey hearing the speaker smile in recounting one recollection, or drifting off into thought in some others. Similarly, this speaker used various kinds of emphasis on words or phrases, often accompanied by repetition to emphasise points that were important. Although the transcription often maintained the repetition, commas, full stops and semi-colons are inadequate indicators of the rhythm of speech. To try to represent this particular narrative in writing, one would need to transcribe it as a musical score. The narrator’s voice also had a quality of resonance that signified a sense of authority that is absent from the written text. Lastly, the conversion of speech to writing erased various clues indicative of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. These are indicated by tone of voice, turn-taking, time allowed for answering, level of empathy expressed in ‘hms’ and other verbal markers of attention. The questioning was uninvasive and open-ended. The interviewers clearly already knew the ‘story’ and sometimes asked a leading question. Overall, the experience of listening to the tape was infinitely richer than the experience of reading the text; the medium of speaking was multidimensional in a way that text cannot approach.

The interviews were not edited into seamless coherent narratives – rather they are fragmentary and often include the interview questions. This editorial decision heightens the sense of the authenticity and fidelity of the transcriptions. The interview form gives the reader the impression that we are reading exactly what was spoken. This is further enforced by the retention of slang and abbreviations or shortened forms with explanatory interpolations in square brackets for readers less familiar with the material – for example ‘Lapa [La Perouse]’. Printouts of the transcriptions were made and given to each speaker to read and revise. Some of the participants approved the transcription, others asked for revisions, particularly the deletion of material that was too personal for publication. One speaker, as Edwards mentioned in the introduction, rewrote his text to make it less speakerly and more writerly. The editors fully respected all revisions.

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19 For reasons of privacy I cannot provide evidence of comparing the two versions – the text as written is the only text approved for publication. I can only provide a description of my experience of listening.
20 LC, p. 56.
21 LC, p. xxv. This reminds us of McGregor’s point that Aboriginal people may want to be represented as textual equals to whites. In this case the contributor wanted the text to be speakerly rather than writerly.
Finding a publisher for the book was facilitated by Read who had working with commissioning editor Anne Pender on a previous book with ANU Press. Pender had since moved to Doubleday and Read approached her about publishing the manuscript, titled at that time ‘The Stolen Children’. I interviewed Pender about her recollections of publishing The Lost Children. She said that she was very positive about the manuscript, as were the other members of Doubleday’s publishing committee. There was disagreement, however, on the level of editorial treatment. Some felt that the narratives were unclear and hard to follow, and therefore needed a high level of editorial intervention. However, on the grounds that oral history should be authentic rather than polished, Pender obtained approval to undertake only proofreading and minor copy editing, and to retain the occasional profanity.

The most controversial aspect of the production was the title – both at Doubleday and within Link-Up. In both groups some people (including Coral Edwards) felt that ‘Stolen Children’ was too aggressive and might be offensive to some white readers. After negotiation, all agreed to The Lost Children. The ponderous subtitle, ‘Thirteen Australians taken from their Aboriginal families tell of the struggle to find their natural parents’, was imposed by the publisher. Peter Read did not recall whether he and Coral Edwards were consulted about it, but it was not part of the manuscript.

As a discursive context of eliciting and editing oral narratives, The Lost Children raises a number of issues. In some ways the narratives were facilitated performances, elicited and directed by questioning that was based on prior knowledge of the ‘stories’. The fact that Read and Edwards were surprised by ‘new’ material supports this interpretation. Like Janet Mathews’ collaboration with Jimmie Barker, Read approached The Lost Children from within the discursive constraints of his academic discipline. He did all of the work of transforming the

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23 Doubleday is a US-based publisher which, according to Pender, for a brief period during the 1980s was investing significantly in its Australian subsidiary, including publishing local content. Although The Lost Children normally would have been a difficult book to get into ‘trade’ publishing, the late 1980s was a brief window of opportunity. Doubleday had done no other publishing on Aboriginal issues and had only a few Australian history titles. No doubt the focus on Aboriginal issues during the 1988 bicentennial celebrations was a factor as was the commercial success of Sally Morgan’s My Place in 1987.
24 Telephone interview with Anne Pender, 5 August 2001.
25 Although Pender had previous knowledge of the Stolen Generations from her work with Read, the other Doubleday editors were unaware of the history of separation and were shocked and moved by the narratives.
26 At the time, and more so in retrospect, that decision is both Pender’s and Read’s major regret about the book. Both told me that they had preferred the stronger title, but had accepted the pragmatic decision to be less confrontational. A recent study by Peter Pierce titled The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety (Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1999) convincingly demonstrates that losing children has been a social and literary theme throughout Australia’s history. As a device for commodification, Doubleday editors’ advocacy of The Lost Children title is supported by Pierce’s argument.
oral narratives into text and organised the publishing. Unlike previous oral history projects, where informant extracts function as evidence for the historical argument, this project centres the speakers and relegates the academic voice to the margin. The decision that both he and Coral Edwards would conduct all of the interviews in some ways enacted relations of speaking that mirrored the book’s intended readership. Having two people and a tape recorder also may have reinforced the idea that the tapes were for public consumption, preventing the interviews from getting too cosy. At the same time, Edwards’ presence would have aimed at making interviewees more comfortable. All of the contributors had absolute right of excision or revision of their texts. As a stolen person, Edwards shared the collective narrative – it was her story as well – but it was not included in the book. Interestingly, Davies points out that similarly located editors rarely include their own story in the collection; she reads this as a re-installation of relations of dominance. Overall, I think the production process indicated a significant shift towards Aboriginal community control of the means of publication.

**Framing the narratives: reading the marginalia**

Like Barker and Clare, *The Lost Children* has significant extra-textual framing to authorise, contextualise and point to preferred readings of the autobiographical narratives. The cover design is more commercial than the other three books, comprising a slightly skewed sepia snapshot of an Aboriginal mother with four young children. One of the children is highlighted by a diamond of colour printed in blue ink rather than sepia. We immediately assume that this signifies his imminent removal from his family. The typography of the title is relatively simple using a drop shadow effect. The sepia-toned snapshot does most of the work – telling us that the book is about Aboriginal people, about the past, about families or children, and it is documentary. The subtitle reinforces this message. Interestingly, the subtitle represents the narrators as ‘Australians’ and introduces Aboriginality in reference to their families – a unconscious enactment of assimilation to create ‘Australians’ by separating people from families identified as ‘Aboriginal’. The subtitle’s representation of the ‘plot’ of the narratives as ‘struggle to find their natural parents’ locates *The Lost Children* within the genre of adoption narratives that were also being published in the 1980s. This interpretation erases the fact that a third of narratives in the book represent separations enacted within birth families.

The back cover has seven paragraphs comprising four sections. It leads with an excerpt from one of the thirteen stories – a vivid account of the violent seizure of a child. This is followed by an unmarked excerpt from Peter Read’s introduction explaining that 100,000 Aboriginal people may not know their families and

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27 See for example Read, One Hundred Years War.
28 LC, p. xxv; and interview with Peter Read.
29 Davies, Collaboration, p. 13.
'I just remember coming home from school and Mum was at the door, and there was this car on the road outside. There was this white woman standing there and I can hear Mum saying, "Can't you give me time to get the kids ready?" And she said "No, they've got to go now." We were whisked away really quickly and there was only Mum there. We were never told why we were taken.' Jean Carter

In Australia today there may be 100,000 people of Aboriginal descent who do not know their families or communities. They are the 'stolen generations'—people who grew up in institutions or in white families, knowing nothing of their Aboriginal history and culture.

The Lost Children is a powerful and disturbing oral history in which thirteen people describe their early memories of being removed from their parents, of institutions and foster families. In compelling first-hand accounts we learn of their agonising search for their families, their feelings before the first reunion, the problems of trying to love and become part of two families and of their struggle to recapture their Aboriginality.

Coral Edwards is the founding co-ordinator of Link-Up (NSW) in Canberra, an organisation which has helped reunite the people featured in The Lost Children with their natural families. Coral met her family for the first time when she was 30 years of age, having been removed from them as a baby.

Peter Read is a Research Fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra, a former Link-Up worker and the author of Down There With Me on the Coora Mission and A Hundred Years War.

'We have to find a way of living together in this country, and that will only come when our hearts, minds and wills are set towards reconciliation... For those with time to read and patience to listen, I commend this book.' Sally Morgan

'At long last the historians of Australia are beginning to look at Australian history through the eyes of the Aborigines... Coral Edwards and Peter Read have collected the stories of the victims in one of the most tragic moments in our history since 1788. This story is a message for our times.' Manning Clark
therefore implying that the thirteen narratives represent a much larger group.\textsuperscript{30} Next is a publisher’s blurb succinctly describing the book’s content, followed by two short biographical notes on the editors. Lastly, in bold type, are recommendations by two well known authors. Sally Morgan represents the book in terms of reconciliation discourse, urging readers to ‘take the time to read and patience to listen’. Manning Clark represents the book as history from below, a ‘message’ from the ‘victims’ of one of the ‘tragic moments’ in Australian history. Morgan affirms the book’s Aboriginal authenticity; Clark its historical authority.

The text is supplemented by 30 family photographs, all of the ‘snapshot’ variety. It also has reproductions of significant documents such as Joy Williams’ Certificate of Application to Lutanda Home\textsuperscript{31} or the Aborigines Protection Board’s Committal Notice for Paul Berendt’s mother.\textsuperscript{32} The images are of mostly poor quality and are positioned with the text narrated by that person. The poor production value of the impages reinforces the sense of documenting ‘real life’. They also make the text more personal – as if you are listening to someone’s life story while leafing through the family photo album. Lastly, the text is supplemented by four poems written by the contributors. The poetry works at a number of levels. First, with the photographs, it enhances or confirms the feeling of The Lost Children as a community project. The textual collage creates a feeling of informality that is common in community publications and unusual in official publications. Additionally, the poems offer the reader non-prose interpretation or insight into separation.

Front matter

The front matter has four sections. First, a sobering dedication that locates these texts of ‘going home’ in a larger context of those who have endured permanent separation. It evokes a heartbreaking image that signifies the enormity of the human costs to those left behind and to those who remained lost or stolen. It also is a sign of respect to Aboriginal elders.

This book is dedicated to all our Old People who never saw their children again and to all our children who never came home.\textsuperscript{33}

Next a four-line poem, written by one of the contributors, speaks of yearning for healing, and of a self fractured and denigrated by racism – to become ‘complete’, ‘whole’, ‘Black and Beautiful’. These four short lines answer the implicit question ‘What do separated people want?’ – a question which may hover in the background

\textsuperscript{30} Read pointed out to me that this figure is misused here and elsewhere to imply that he means 100,000 people were taken. In fact his research is inconclusive on the numbers taken, but this represents an upper limit on how many people in Australia could be of Aboriginal descent but have lost the knowledge of their ancestry.

\textsuperscript{31} LC, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{32} LC, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{33} LC, p. ii.
for readers who cannot understand why a ‘good home’, with loving parents and material comfort was not enough.

The poem sits on a left-hand page opposite a one-page foreword by Sally Morgan. First and foremost, Morgan authorises *The Lost Children* by virtue of her own status as the most well known and successful Aboriginal author. Second, she aligns the narratives in *The Lost Children* with the story of her own family and that of thousands of other Aboriginal families – ‘The story of my own family is not unique. It is echoed thousands of times over the length and breadth of Australia’, thus affirming *The Lost Children’s* representativeness. Third, she corroborates the truth of these narratives in opposition to 200 hundred years of ‘silence and lies’ and asserts the significance of the stories to both tellers and listeners. Her address to readers is threateningly direct:

> In the telling we assert the validity of our own experiences and we call the silence of two hundred years a lie. And it is important for you, the listener, because like it or not, we are part of you.\(^{34}\)

While we might read the we/you subject positions as we Aboriginals/you whites, Morgan is also addressing other Aboriginals who were critical of people, like herself, who began finding and claiming Aboriginality in the 1980s.

Lastly, Morgan’s introduction offers a complex concept of reconciliation which is inclusive of its common usage (Aboriginal/white reconciliation) but also, for the thirteen narrators in the book, reconciliation with ‘their past, themselves, their families and the Aboriginal community at large’. The notion of reconciling with ‘the Aboriginal community at large’ supports the interpretation I advanced above that the we/you split includes we/separated Aboriginals, you/other Aboriginals and whites. Morgan concludes with an exhortation to take the time and have the patience to engage with the book. Here she figures reconciliation as a spiritual and emotional process.

> Reconciliation brings wholeness and peace, but the process itself is painful, angry and frustrating. Reconciliation takes time and patience. For those with the time to read and the patience to listen, I commend this book.\(^{35}\)

In summary, the first three sections of the front matter locate us in a highly charged and emotional context. We have been called to acknowledge thousands of Aboriginals outside of the text and our attention has been drawn to the human costs in emotional suffering that separation policies represent. We are located in a politics of the personal where the structure of injustice is articulated in terms of emotional, psychological and spiritual harms.

\(^{34}\) LC, p. vii.
\(^{35}\) LC, p. vii.
The two-part Introduction is the last framing section and provides an explicit interpretive context for the thirteen narratives. It is an exposition of Link-Up community discourse that has both historical/political analysis and personal/emotional analysis. The first section, running from pages ix to xvii was written by Peter Read. Most of this section is an historical overview, making a similar argument to The Stolen Generations. It alerts the reader to the magnitude of separation and its pervasiveness both geographically and temporally – some of the contributors were born in the 1950s and 1960s. Importantly, it locates separation within the discursive framework of white superiority and the civilising mission. It provides extracts from official sources and argues that separation was explicitly intended to assimilate the children into white society, to permanently sever their relationships with their families and, ultimately, to bring about the elimination of Aboriginal people as a separate and distinct people. It describes the various forms of separation, including institutionalisation, fostering and adoption, pointing out that growing up in loving white families also had profoundly negative effects on Aboriginal children because of the pervasive racism of Australian society.\textsuperscript{36}

Some parents loved their adoptive children as passionately as parents can... It seems that, while being loved as a child can help to make a better balanced adult, it does not make it any easier to become an Aboriginal adult. Nor did a loving upbringing ensure that the adult would be shielded from ‘coon’ or ‘boong’. White society made very few concessions to black children raised among the whites.\textsuperscript{37}

It then introduces the work of Link-Up. Referring to the legal fiction upon which adoption is based – that the child’s original identity no longer exists – Read argues that Aboriginal identity cannot be erased by a legal fiction.\textsuperscript{38}

\[ \text{A} \] n Aboriginal identity can never be said to be lost while people know the simple fact that they are descended from an Aboriginal parent or grandparent. It was this realisation which brought Link-Up into existence and which sustains it today. After nine years of reunions, two things are clear: that large numbers of separated Aborigines want to find their real identity, and that an Aboriginal identity is recoverable.\textsuperscript{39}

Read ends his section with a rhetorical gesture towards an imaginary world of possible pasts and possible presents where the writing The Lost Children would not have been necessary.

\textsuperscript{36} This argument is discussed earlier in the context of the Aboriginal child placement principle.
\textsuperscript{37} LC, p. xvi.
\textsuperscript{38} The technical term for the adoption legal fiction, filius nullius (no one’s son) has interesting parallels with Australia’s colonising legal fiction, terra nullius (no one’s land). In both cases the discursive fiction produced a worldview which had horrific effects on those living under the sign of ‘nullius’, but neither Aboriginals nor the natural parents of adoptees could be disappeared.
\textsuperscript{39} LC, pp. xvi–xvii.
If Europeans one hundred years ago had accepted the right of Aboriginal parents to raise their children as they wished, and if, today, they realised that there is still no real equality for Aboriginal people in this country, this book would not have been necessary. Instead, another one hundred thousand people would be identifying as Aboriginal citizens of Australia. If Europeans one hundred years ago had accepted the right of Aboriginal parents to raise their children as they wished, and if, today, they realised that there is still no real equality for Aboriginal people in this country, this book would not have been necessary. Instead, another one hundred thousand people would be identifying as Aboriginal citizens of Australia.40

This is an unusual conjunction of ideas. While I suspect that many of the white readers of the book would already be converted to the notion that there ‘is no real equality’, I wonder whether for them the possibility of 100,000 more Aboriginal citizens in Australia is necessarily desirable? Or does it challenge readers to look at their own beliefs about assimilation and control of Australia’s Aboriginal population?

The second part of the Introduction is authored by Coral Edwards. It has three subsections under the headings: ‘Link-Up’, ‘Coming Home’ and ‘The Text’. This part of the introduction is more informal than Read’s and, in comparison, we immediately become aware that, although not dry and devoid of emotions, Read’s section was scholarly and writerly. Edward’s section is speakerly, and written almost entirely in the first person plural as either ‘we/Link-Up’, ‘we/the editors’ or ‘we/Aboriginals’ (although she does use the first person singular at times as well). In contrast, Read’s writing was totally in the third person academic style of argument/evidence. Edwards also directly addresses the reader as ‘you’, where you refers mostly to a separated person – thus positioning all readers, at least momentarily, in the subject position of an Aboriginal person separated from their family. In reading her text, one cannot help but imagine one’s self in this position. At the same time, there is an intimacy in Edwards’ address that makes a non-Aboriginal, non-separated reader feel in the wrong place – the feeling that this conversation isn’t really meant for us decentres non-Aboriginal people as the presumed most significant reader.

Edwards begins with a history and description of Link-Up’s work, told through taking the reader through two typical cases, a mother seeking an adopted out daughter and a son, fostered during childhood, seeking his mother. The next section, ‘Coming Home’, discusses the approach of the book – the decision to represent separation from the point of view of the children – as a complement to narratives circulating in Aboriginal communities among the people left behind. This gently flags, I think, that a significant aim of the book is to educate Aboriginal communities.

The experience of many Aboriginal families ended when their child was taken away...as the truck or welfare car disappeared around the bend...There’s a vast emptiness there. We thought it important to record

40 LC, p. xvii.
the experiences of those children, to find out what sort of things they went through, and how separation affected them.\(^1\)

Edwards also tells us that they wanted to represent the range of different experiences of separation – institutionalisation, fostering, adoption – and its impact across generations. Some are searching for their families and identities because their grandmothers were separated. But, she argues, whatever the form of the separation, the after-effects are similar.

It makes no difference how you were removed. I don’t believe it matters in the long run whether children were removed forcibly or were adopted or fostered, because by the time they come to Link-Up, they are all suffering the same, or very similar after-effects. They have all lost the same kinds of things.\(^2\)

The loss Edwards identifies is the experience of Aboriginality as shameful – loss of pride.

...at school a lot of children were called names and had no come-back for it. Feeling ashamed, they gradually withdrew and denied their Aboriginality. All their experiences reinforced the idea that they were something to be ashamed of. Every Aboriginal person who had been raised by white people has known that to a greater or lesser degree.\(^3\)

She also foregrounds the loss of personal history.

One important loss is their history. I don’t mean a history in the wide sense, but a sense of knowing who they are. They missed out on all the family bonding, all the childhood experiences that bind people together. They missed out on all the stories and the funny things that have happened.\(^4\)

Lastly, Edwards talks about ‘the journey home’ – the physical journey home to family, the internal journey home to an Aboriginal self.

When you go home, you are setting out on two journeys. First is the physical journey which is sitting in a car and driving to meet long-lost relatives. The second journey may take a lot longer. By coming home you’re not just coming home to your family, you’re finally coming home to yourself, to the self that is your birthright.\(^5\)

Edwards maps the internal journey as an internal struggle against the subjectivity of whiteness that was instilled in separated Aboriginal people. Using her own

\(^{1}\) LC, p. xix.
\(^{2}\) LC, p. xx.
\(^{3}\) LC, p. xx.
\(^{4}\) LC, p. xxi.
\(^{5}\) LC, p. xxiv.
experience as an example, Edwards describes one aspect of internalised whiteness as being the fear of Aboriginals.

Do you ever arrive? Some people say not, I think yes. Of course you’ll still have some bad moments, experiences in your life that overcome you when you least expect them. For me there is always a fear of Aborigines, instilled as a child, which could suddenly come up and take me over... Those fears are hard to get rid of.\(^\text{46}\)

At other points in her introduction she refers to seeing Aboriginal ways of living through white eyes and judging the material aspects of some Aboriginal lives that did not conform to white middle class lifestyles.\(^\text{47}\) Conversely, part of becoming an Aboriginal subject is beginning to see white people and white society through Aboriginal eyes.

Some people get to the stage where they actually reject their white family because they feel that’s what they have to do now that they’re Aboriginal. Others find that it’s very hard to talk to their white friends because they can’t comprehend what they’ve just been through and are going through.\(^\text{48}\)

Although most of Edwards’ introduction seems to address the separated Aboriginal person for whom The Lost Children may be their first contact with their own separation, she also directly addresses white readers and specifies what kind of response she would like: not guilt, but understanding and responsibility.

The idea is not just to read this book, put it down and say, ‘My God, that’s awful, I feel so guilty.’ We’d like people to understand what one race did to another, basically what human beings did to others. It’s too easy to say, ‘We have no connection with what happened 200 years ago, why should we feel responsible?’ For this didn’t happen 200 years ago; these people are alive now...

In this book we have presented the facts; these things happened. It is now up to white people to accept them. But there is no point whipping themselves and not taking the next step, for once they can accept the facts, they can begin to help. We’d like them to try to understand and then to ask themselves: ‘What attitudes do we have, what attitudes can we change which are negative towards Aborigines? What can we do to change things in ourselves?’\(^\text{49}\)

Interestingly, it is only in her address to whites that Edwards found it is necessary to affirm the truth – the facticity – of the narratives.

\(^{46}\) LC, p. xxiv.  
\(^{47}\) LC, p. xx.  
\(^{48}\) LC, p. xxii.  
\(^{49}\) LC, p. xxiii.
The division of labour between the two editors in writing the introduction – white historian Peter Read and Aboriginal separation activist Coral Edwards – was also racialised: Read focused on white people, Edwards on Aboriginals. Read’s section of the introduction summarised and analysed what white people did and how they represented their actions, drawing on official documents as authoritative evidence. Read had developed this analysis of separation through the conjunction of reading archival material and conducting oral history interviews with Aboriginal people. Precisely because of Read’s status as a white academic, he was granted access to the Board’s archives, including the highly personal case files of the children removed by the Board. That is, it was precisely Read’s white privilege that enabled him to gain access to official information that Aboriginal people would have been denied. The racialised production, control and circulation of information ensured that representations about Aboriginals generated by white professionals would be available to other white professionals. At the same time, the interpretation of these documents as a systemic practice of assimilation was enabled by Read’s immersion in Aboriginal knowledges and Aboriginal histories gained through hours of conversation with Wiradjuri people, both formal oral histories and the informal talk that inevitably surrounds recording sessions.

Conversely, it was precisely Coral Edwards’ location as an Aboriginal woman who had been separated from her family that enabled her to reach out to other separated Aboriginal people and begin to talk about their experiences and discover the commonalities. Edwards’ 1981 film, *It’s a Long Road Back*, documents one of these early conversations between women who had been taken by the Board and institutionalised at Cootamundra. Their conversation widened to Aboriginal men, often brothers who had been institutionalised at Kinchela. As Link-Up began to gain momentum, as their brochures began to circulate, Aboriginal people from a variety of other separation contexts wanting to reconnect with families began to emerge. The analysis of separation outlined in Coral Edwards’ part of the introduction focuses on the diversity of material circumstances and the commonalities of the emotional/psychological experience of loss: loss of personal history and family, and loss of positive self-identity as an Aboriginal person. In this context each editor’s preference for the title of the book opens to another interpretation. Whereas ‘Stolen children’ foregrounds the actions of whites, ‘Lost children’ foregrounds the experience of Aboriginals.

The introduction itself enacts a journey from a past dominated by white discourse, white representations, white modes of knowledge, to a present and future of Aboriginal self-representation, discourses and knowledges. Read’s use of historical discourse has the connotative effect of locating separation in the past, despite the

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fact that the historical narrative reaches into the very recent past, the 1950s and 1960s. Edwards on the other hand speaks of the present and the future, calling attention to the continuity between the past and the present – the present effects of separations in the recent or not so recent past. But she also evokes a future where Aboriginal subjects have regained authority and speak for and about themselves. Conversely, in this future white people will listen and seek to change themselves, not to ‘rush off to help some Aboriginal organisation’.

The collaboration between Edwards and Read models the possibility of cooperation between whites and Aboriginals working towards social justice. Each editor contributed to Link-Up community discourse from the perspective of their own specifically racialised positions. Read’s historical analysis of separation as a systematic policy and practice of eliminating Aboriginality was invaluable in enabling the shift of Edwards’ analysis of the emotional experiences of separation from the personal to the political. This in turn enabled Link-Up community members to make sense of and revise their personal histories to political histories where, crucially, their parents were no longer to blame for their removal, and their own angry and painful responses to separation made sense in light of the pervasive racism in which they were immersed. At the same time their feelings of isolation and difference from other Aboriginals could be seen as the specifically intended outcome of separation policy, not as a personal failing. That is, they were caught up in larger historical processes of Aboriginal oppression where the battle ground was their subjectivity as and their connectedness to other Aboriginal people.

The ordering imperative

The Lost Children has an unusual structure. The book is divided into three sections: Growing Up, Homecomings and Reflections. Each narrative is sliced into these three segments and in each section the narratives appear in the same order. This structure directs the reader to engage with the book section by section, however, it is also possible to read against the grain and re-assemble each narrative as a continuous whole. Carole Boyce Davies points to what she calls the ‘ordering imperative’ – that is, the desire of the editor of a collection of collaboratively produced narratives to impose a colonial or patriarchal discursive structure on the narratives. The organisation of the book using what Peter Read called a community ‘master narrative’ could be attributed to an academic ordering imperative. He said, however, that it emerged from ways of thinking about separation that had been developing within Link-Up; that the structure facilitated Link-Up’s aim of moving away from the notion that separation meant institutionalisation. It was a way, of simultaneously emphasising both the commonalities and the particularities of separation experiences.

52 In fact, two of the narratives from The Lost Children were re-assembled and reproduced in In the Best Interest of the Child.
Growing Up

*The Lost Children* carefully guides the reader through multiple modes of separation. It begins with the narrative of Jean Carter. She is the only contributor with clear recollections of life before being taken away. Carter’s memories of her childhood before separation are fragmentary: a song, sitting by the fire listening to her father tell stories, moving to La Perouse, starting school. Her memories of her family are equally fragmented:

> I remember Chicka, one of my older brothers, and my eldest brother, Sago... I don’t remember Sally very much, my sister, but I [by this time] remember Ruthie and Andy. Andy I was more close to, because we were going to school. 54

She is also the only narrator with a memory of being taken away – an extract of her recollection is the first paragraph on the back cover.

> I just remember coming home and Mum was at the door, and there was this car on the road outside. There was this white woman standing there, and I can hear mum saying, ‘Can’t you give me time to get the kids ready?’ And she said, ‘No, they’ve got to go now’, something like that. One minute we was comin’ home to the house, and the next instant we was in the car and gone. 55

Her recollection of departure from her Aboriginal world highlights her mother’s ineffectual pleading to at least be allowed one final act of mothering. This is juxtaposed with the white woman’s callous indifference. Her representation of arrival in the world of whites is represented by that omnipresent ritual of purification and disinfection, the bath.

> Next thing I remember we were in this place, it was a shelter sort of thing, and this big bath, huge bath, in the middle of the room, and all the smell of disinfectant, getting me hair cut, and getting this really scalding hot bath. 56

More than any other narrative in *The Lost Children*, Jean Carter’s life story is similar to that told by Margaret Tucker. 57 Her narrative may be familiar to white readers; and will undoubtedly be familiar to Aboriginal readers. By setting a context in which every other text will read (assuming linear reading), it authorises narratives that deviate from this widely accepted narrative of separation as a violent seizure from a distraught and helpless Aboriginal mother followed by institutionalisation.

54 LC, p. 3.
55 LC, pp. 4–5.
56 LC, p. 5.
57 Jean Carter was Secretary of the Aborigines Progress Association, was active in the County Women’s Association, the Family Planning Association, was the Director of the Jilimi Centre for Aboriginal women and received an award for services to the community from the Warragal Aboriginal Association in Sydney. LC, pp. 160, 162, 163.
The second narrative is that of Stan Bowden. Here, staying with the form of separation as removal to an institution, we are shifted from the feminine institutional world of Cootamundra to the masculine world of the Kinchela Boys Home. The emotional tone of the two narratives is radically different. The overall impression in reading the text is that the interviewer is having a difficult time eliciting a narrative and that Bowden is uncomfortable talking about his experiences. His narrative of childhood is very short, just six short paragraphs. The text is supplemented with two snapshots: Bowden at age 12 and of the Kinchela Boys Home in the mid-1950s.

Bowden’s earliest memory was the trip from Bomaderry infants home to Kinchela with another boy who Bowden describes as confined in ‘leg irons’, figuring his institutionalisation as imprisonment. His description of the daily routine at Kinchela ends with an unspoken recollection that again points to violence.

*We had tea roundabout five, then you’d go to bed and that. You had to lean up near your bed and say your prayers. Went to bed. There is a lot of things you can’t talk about to anybody else. I can’t even put it to words… [ellipsis in original].*

The conjunction of unspeakable memories and bedtime suggests ongoing trauma resulting from sexual abuse. I read the ellipsis as indicating a pause while Bowden dealt with the emotions raised by the recollection.

He remembered only one manager, a man who treated him ‘different’ by allowing Bowden into his home to look after his children when he went out at night. He remembered three mates, one his brother. And he remembered that while at Kinchela he knew about one other brother and sister, but did not find out about his other siblings until he left the Home. His description of his knowledge of his family invokes a feeling of living in a fog where finding out that his brother was in the Home was almost accidental.

*I didn’t know about other brothers and sisters till after I left the Home. Alec came up a couple of times to visit – he was in before my time. Cecil was in there, and he was there when I left…Somebody mentioned that he was my brother, and Cecil mentioned Alex, and sister Flo.*

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58 Bomaderry was run by the Aborigines Inland Mission. It received Aboriginal infants from the Aborigines Protection/Welfare Board and provided substitute care until the children were old enough to be transferred to either the Cootamundra Home if they were girls or to Kinchela if they were boys. Bomaderry is located near Berry on the south coast of New South Wales.

59 LC, p. 12.

60 Allegations of sexual abuse and other brutalities at Kinchela were raised more than once, but the Board did not take action to protect the children in its care (Read, History of the Wiradjuri, pp. 160–1).

61 LC, p. 13.

The narrative of Stan Bowden is more sinister than that of Jean Carter expressed in narrative itself being essentially unspoken. We sense a deadening of emotions and fundamental deprivation of human contact. When Bowden left Kinchela, the manager told him that he didn’t need to go home because his father was dead. Years later Bowden discovered this was a lie.

The third narrative, Pauline McLeod’s, takes us away from institutionalisation into an equally frightening world of foster care. There is no story of removal because McLeod was taken from her family at age two. She was fostered two years later to a white migrant family after the mother, ‘Muda’, had made a pact with God to help Aboriginal children if she survived a serious illness. The interview moves immediately into a discussion of the Schmidt’s views on Aboriginal people. 63

What did your foster parents think about Koories?

Very similar to most white people, which is: Aboriginals are drunk, they don’t work hard, they go walkabout, they never seem to achieve much... We weren’t never to be like that: we were different. We were the lucky ones chosen to help our people. That’s why we had been given the opportunity to live with them. [We were told this] all the time. 64

The Schmidts were engaged in a private civilising mission where the child is specifically and repeatedly interpellated as ‘Aboriginal’ but told she is ‘special’ not like the others, better than the others, raised to help ‘them’ and ‘lucky’ to have the opportunity to live with white people. Although McLeod experienced this as hurtful, she describes herself as being afraid she would lose another family and therefore would ‘always do whatever they’d say’. 65 Thus, the flip side of ‘lucky’ was threat of removal; her fear was deliberately incited. At one point she describes getting into trouble and feeling so frightened that she shot herself.

I was scared witless that I as going to be removed. It was actually said that if I didn’t tell the truth I would be removed or taken away. Out of fear, I had taken a gun and shot myself. ‘Cause I didn’t want to go into a Home. 66

Given her adoption at age four, it is unlikely that she remembered the Homes. Rather, along with the litany of ‘lucky’ there must have been recurring threats to send the children back to the Homes if they did not behave. McLeod’s emotional dependence on the Schmidts was deepened by their (false) representations of her birth family as people who had abused her and did not love her. 67

63 Schmidt is not the real name of the family.
64 LC, pp. 14–15.
65 LC, p. 15.
66 LC, p. 18.
67 McLeod found out just how false they were when, working for the Department of Youth and Community Services, she was able to get and read her own file. Here the reason for removal from her parents was given as ‘parents having no fixed abode’ – that is they were indigent. At the same time, McLeod needed to account for severe scarring on her body, scarring the Schmidts attributed to
I was told that they’d abused me, and that because of that abuse I was taken away, and that if they really cared or really loved us, they would have contacted us.\textsuperscript{68}

Mr Schmidt, however, sexually abused Sally, another adopted child, whom McLeod shared a room with. He also attempted it with McLeod while his wife was in hospital. Until this interview, McLeod had kept it secret. ‘Can’t tell anyone. Never did. Never did. First time ever.’\textsuperscript{69}

Whereas both Jean Carter and Stan Bowden fit the separation equals institutionalisation model, Pauline McLeod’s narrative begins the work of expanding this understanding, of showing that growing up with white people was not privileged and showing the continuities between the forms of separation. Her white foster parents demanded absolute loyalty, threatened exclusion and promoted her subjectification as a ‘special’ Aboriginal, who was not like those others. Whiteness manifests through constructing Aboriginals as ‘they’ rather than ‘we’; her birth family as ‘they’ and her white family as ‘we’. In McLeod’s narrative we have moved squarely into analysis of the technologies of assimilation through the internal colonisation of Aboriginal children within the private domestic spaces of white Australia.

From McLeod’s narrative, \textit{The Lost Children} continues to deepen and broaden the representation of separation. The next two narratives depict separation enacted by the person’s birth family. The two narratives are short fragments of life stories and work together to create a complex representation of families fractured internally by racist apartheid and shame. Both narratives develop an argument on the intergenerational effects of separation. Both had Aboriginal grandparents whose Aboriginal knowledges were lost to subsequent generations either through racist shame and secrecy (Sharon Carpenter) or through disconnection as a result of institutionalisation (Paul Cremen).

Atkinson and Chapman, one fostered, one adopted, and both very young at the time of the interview, take us to another context – seemingly normal, reasonably caring white families where being surrounded by whiteness and not knowing who they were that creates a sense of dis-ease. Atkinson, for example, said:

\begin{quote}
My foster parents didn’t let me watch TV or anything that had anything Aboriginal, really tried to hide me from my culture. They were racist, and they didn’t like anyone who didn’t have money or a good job, or weren’t in the upper class of society. They thought, or the way I think they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{68} LC, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{69} LC, p. 17.
thought, was that: ‘She’s our little Aboriginal girl and she’s our daughter and she’s going to be brought up our way.’ 70

These narratives support the argument against placing Aboriginal children with white families because the very fact of racial difference in a racist and racially polarised society creates an unbearable emotional load for the child.

From Atkinson and Chapman, ‘Growing Up’ returns to two narratives of institutionalisation. Alicia Adams was sent first to the Bombaderry infants home and then to Cootamundra at adolescence. Joy Williams grew up in Homes run by the Brethern in suburban Sydney. ‘Growing Up’ then moves to the narratives of Paul Behrendt, Rick McLeod and Jeanette Sinclair. Berendt and Sinclair were both born in racially mixed marriages. They both grew up with their white father and experienced silence about and denigration of their Aboriginality within their families.

Rick McLeod, Pauline McLeod’s brother, was also fostered and his narrative represents a specifically masculine relationship between foster father and son. We also see a fostering context where the child was literally surrounded by relatives, but was deliberately kept ignorant of these relationships.

The last narrative in ‘Growing Up’ is the story of Nancy De Vries. Longer, more detailed and better developed than any of the other narratives, hers is a fitting ending to the section. De Vries is the oldest of the thirteen contributors and was taken away from her mother as an infant in the 1930s. Like Karobran’s Isabelle and Morris Herbert, she was fair and put in the custody of the (white) Child Welfare Department rather than the Aborigines Protection Board. But she did not comply with the program – she describes herself as ‘a rebel’. Her narrative recounts a life of continual upheaval and transfer from one part of the child welfare system to another. Her first foster placement lasted until she was five, then she was moved to a woman in Marrickville, returned to the Bidura Depot, placed with a woman in Chatswood, returned to Bidura, placed with a family in Bankstown, returned to Bidura, placed with a woman in Strathsfield, sent to Cootamundra, sent to the Moonacullah Mission, returned to the Strathsfield woman, committed to the Parramatta Reformatory and lastly committed to the Bloomfield Mental Hospital. It is difficult to imagine a more disrupted childhood. De Vries’ narrative represents a child who refuses to submit, refused to be silent and therefore cannot be ‘placed’ by the system.

Internal colonisation and social death

Each of the narratives in ‘Growing Up’ bears witness to the multitude of ways that Australian society works to ‘merge’ Aboriginals through subjectification as white people. I have already discussed Pauline McLeod’s experience of differentiation from other Aboriginals through being told she was ‘special’. Alicia Adams’

70 LC, p. 33.
narrative is, in many ways, the most disturbing in the collection. Adams seems to be an innocent and trusting person — absorbing the views of those she loved without question. Her uncensored representations of the racism she internalised in the Home show its pervasive effects. Adams was removed from her parents to Bomaderry at the age of fourteen months. Her memories of growing up at Bomaderry which she refers to several times as a ‘Christian Home’ are ‘happy’. Going to school was also good, and she recalls having ‘so many white friends’. The only negative memories of that time were being given sandwiches wrapped in newspaper (the writing bled onto the bread) and crying because they went barefoot to school in the winter.

Although she said she ‘loved’ the Matron, her transfer to Cootamundra was difficult for her because it was not a Christian Home. The most disturbing representation of her time at Cootamundra is her recollection of meeting but racially rejecting her younger sister Sally.

This little girl Sally, she was there and she [staff member, Mrs Healey] said, ‘That’s your sister there,’ and I said, ‘No way, she’s not! Because she’s real dark. I said, ‘She’s not my sister.’

I never ever knew I had a mother or a father. I just thought Mum [Matron Barker] was my mum you know, my white mum and I thought all the ladies were my real aunties, because they were all white and I really loved them you know, each one of them...

I was looking at my sister Sally and thought, ‘Dear, she’s really black’, and you know, I was really confused. I looked at my skin, and I thought, ‘I look brown like them too’, but I said, ‘Oh no, I’m white, Mum brought me up...’

The interviewer asks her why she wanted to be white. She replies that it was not so much wanting to be white, as assuming she was white.

Well I never thought about it that way, I just thought I was white, I never even thought about it you know, why the others were ...ah...brown. I don’t like the word black, so I call them brown you know. I was very much ashamed. I used to wear long-sleeve jumpers...because I didn’t want anyone to notice my skin [first two ellipses in original].

Adams also recalled experiencing extreme fear and revulsion when Aboriginals came to the Bomaderry Home. One time a ‘real black’, ‘jet black’ man came to visit and when Adams saw him looking at her, she recalls she began

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71 LC, p. 46.
72 LC, p. 46.
screaming her head off you know, because I was scared of Aborigines... I had a dream about this man and I was really terrified, because we never knew. Our parents never came to visit the children, not one.  

Although one can imagine a child failing to note the difference of her colour and fear of someone she perceived to be radically physically different, her intense shame at being Aboriginal indicates that Aboriginalness had a culturally constructed negative meaning for her. Along with the belief that she was white, Adams had internalised the racist perceptions of Aboriginals, showing us the malignance of whiteness on children’s subjectivities – both white children and black children. For the white child, however, it remains a hatred of the Other; for the black child it becomes hatred of the Self. Adams’ narrative enables us to more fully appreciate the power of immersion in the racism that permeated the everyday life of Australian whites.

Jean Carter described a similar alienation from her family. Her most vivid recollection of her time at Cootamundra was a visit from her mother – a visit that symbolised Carter increasingly being ‘taken over’ (to use Coral Edwards’ term) by whiteness.

Mum did come up and see us once, and she was camped over in the cemetery. She wasn’t offered any room there, wasn’t welcome, she was allowed to stay [only] during the day, and I remember another girl whose mother came and sorta came up the next day. Just something like, ‘Oh, your mother shouldn’t be sleeping round in a cemetery’, something like that. That sort made me feel real... ashamed of Mum, but still a bit cranky with her for saying it. But then it made me think, ‘Oh, maybe Mum shouldn’t be sleeping in a cemetery’.

I remember Mum came, she had this big bag of ribbons, these lovely hankies all ironed and that, stacks and stacks of hankies and ribbons, all washed and ironed. I remember running down the road when I saw her coming, she was right down the end of the drive. And when I got to her I propped, you know. I was running and crying, I was running towards her. And when I got near her I propped, you know. Sort of stopped. Froze or whatever. I said, ‘Mum, you’ve been drinking.’ She said, ‘No baby, I haven’t.’

I was a cruel kid, I was. That’s what I find it hard to forgive meself for saying those sort of things...  

After this Carter recalls that she had been aware of her mother drinking before they were taken. The interviewer then asks her if she had been told her mother drank, but Carter only vaguely remembers being told things about her family. She did  

73 LC, p. 47.  
74 LC, p. 8.
remember that Cootamundra was vehemently against drinking and that she made a pledge not to ever drink when she was fourteen.

There are a number of significant points in this recollection. First, the narrative reveals the disciplinary power (in the Foucauldian sense) of the resubjectification program at Cootamundra—Carter was literally stopped in her tracks by white discourse that constructed her view of her mother as 'a drinker' and therefore 'bad', someone to stay away from. The image of her running towards and then freezing is an apt representation of the development of the self-surveillance that produces a docile body. Second, the narrative shows that other Aboriginal children participated in policing whiteness—'your mother shouldn’t sleep in cemeteries'. The image of her mother camping in a cemetery is a poignant metaphor for the place of Aboriginal parents in the Aborigines Protection Board's regime. Third, the gifts her mother brought—ribbons and hankies carefully washed, ironed and folded—were symbols of female cleanliness and decoration that Carter's mother knew the matrons would approve. Fourth, Carter's narrative voices ongoing self-judgement for having been taken over by white discourse in verbal and physical rejection of her mother who (Carter realised with hindsight) had been camping in the freezing cold because the institution excluded her. Her mother died while Carter was in Cootamundra and this was her memory of their last meeting. As in Margaret Tucker's autobiography, Carter represents the influence of white people as moral degradation.

Like his younger sister Pauline, Rick was sent to foster care. He recalls the family as basically distant. 'They weren’t the sort of people you could sit down and have a chat with'. The father he recalls as 'a bit of a racist'.

I remember there used to be a lot on TV about the Aboriginals living in missions and stuff, and they’d just show the shanties, and he’d say, ‘Look at these people, they don’t get off their arses and help themselves.’ Things like that. That probably reflected on me all those years, and then all of a sudden finding out.76

He found out he was Aboriginal when his foster father decided to prevent Rick from meeting his uncle.

It just came straight out of the blue. We were working on the farm, I was walking up to the farmhouse and I just happened to look down the gully and this bloke, he was very dark...‘He was your uncle. He wanted to meet you.’...And I thought it in your best interests that he shouldn’t meet you.’

76 LC, p. 61.
That was the end of it. The dark guy went away. Then other things fell into place. But it was never ever said that I was Aboriginal [ellipsis added].

Rick knew he was not their child, but his foster parents instructed him to use their name at school. He found out he was Aboriginal from a school counsellor who told him his real name and that he was fostered. Then he realised that all along he’d been going to school surrounded by his relatives.

Rick McLeod’s narrative represents a childhood marked by distance and lack of affection. His foster mother and sisters are absent from his representation – his primary relationship seems to have been with the foster father and that seems to have centred around work. His foster father was overtly racist and worked successfully at keeping Rick separated from the Aboriginal family that was all around him.

Among Nancy De Vries’ numerous carers, Mrs Webster was her most enduring ‘placement’. De Vries describes her as a Christian, ‘narrow minded’ and ‘uncompromising’. Their relationship was fraught, oscillating between love and hate, gentleness and cruelty. Mrs Webster’s emotional and physical violence drove De Vries to poison herself but, she said, ‘nothing happened’. In her unhappiness De Vries began to run away at night and to search for her mother. De Vries recalled that Mrs Webster would take her to La Perouse to look down on Aboriginal people – instructing her in the white gaze.

I knew I was Aboriginal. I would see Aboriginal people and Mrs Webster would say, ‘Look at them, look at them, aren’t they dirty, aren’t they awful’. They didn’t look too bad to me, and they’d be looking at me, they knew that I didn’t belong to this woman. She’d take me down to Yarra Bay beach [La Perouse] and say, ‘Look at them, all dirty, all drunk.’...I wanted to run up to them and say, ‘Do you know my Ruby, my mother?’

Like the Christian family that Pauline McLeod lived with, Mrs Webster was on a personal civilising mission to convert Nancy to a racist subjectivity of whiteness that would despise Aboriginal people as Mrs Webster did. The contradiction that this would mean Nancy and Pauline would have to hate themselves as well doesn’t seem to have occurred to these foster parents.

Racism pervaded the daily lives of these childhoods and disrupted a coherent and positive sense of self. White birth parents, white foster and adopting parents, white institutional employees, teachers, doctors, and people on the street taught these children that, in the words of a welfare officer writing in De Vries case file, ‘Aborigines’ were ‘a despised race’. All experienced shame and humiliation from

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77 LC, p. 61.
78 LC, p. 84.
79 LC, p. 88.
the inescapable fact of their racialised bodies, a shame expressed most visibly in Alicia Adams’ attempt to cover her ‘browness’ with long sleeves.

Many of the white adults represented in these narratives went out of their way to isolate their Aboriginal dependents from other Aboriginal people, both physically and psychologically. Pauline McLeod was told her parents abused her; Rick McLeod that it was in his ‘best interests’ not to meet his uncle; Alicia Adams was made or allowed to believe that her white caretakers were her birth parents; Nancy De Vries was specifically taken across Sydney to La Perouse to be taught that Aborigines were dirty and drunken; and, most tragically, Stan Bowden was told an outright lie that his father had died. For children who grew up in the white sides of their birth families, the message was equally racist. Aboriginal relatives were disappeared from the family tree.

Yet by their very actions of denigrating Aboriginality, all of these white adults in fact created or produced Aboriginal subjectivities – albeit negative ones – that yearned to connect with and find out about their Aboriginal family.

Decolonisation – going home

As in ‘Growing Up’, the ‘Homecomings’ and ‘Reflections’ sections of *The Lost Children* begin with the narrative of Jean Carter and move through each speaker in the same order as in ‘Growing Up’. They slowly build a complex multi-dimensional picture of the many ways that separated people negotiate the process of reconnecting with family and building a positive sense of Aboriginal identity to challenge the internalised negative stereotypes.

Challenging stereotypes

One significant theme that recurs in the narratives is overcoming or challenging the effects of being taught to look at Aboriginal people through ‘white eyes’. This is most clearly represented in the recollections of Alicia Adams, who seemed unaware that her feelings were an expression of the racism she had absorbed from the ‘Christian Home’.

Adams’ mother, who was incarcerated in the Stockton Mental Hospital, made the first contact when Alicia was seventeen years old. The meeting was fraught with Alicia’s fear and denial. Adams’ recollection contrasts her elder brother’s anger towards their mother with her own feelings of gratitude.

So he was really furious, and I think he still resents her a bit. [I don’t blame her] because I wouldn’t be here today. I’m glad, I wouldn’t be a missionary. I could be in the gutter, I could be a drunkard. I was real glad I was put there in the Home.80

80 LC, p. 130.
Her fantasy that she could have been a ‘drunkard’ in the ‘gutter’ rehearses stereotypes of Aboriginals and the discourse of being ‘saved’ by white people from becoming Aboriginal. In the next paragraph, however, she represents having changed her attitude towards Aboriginal people in terms of religious conversion. We can infer that all of her visits to Aboriginal communities, both before and after conversion, are in the pursuit of her missionary work.

I used to criticise them, and when I used to go and visit them I used to hate eating off their plates and drinking out of their cups, I used to really say things when they were drunk. I don’t know, the Lord turned me around, and then five people died through the week, the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘I want you to go out among your own people.’ I said, ‘No, Lord, why me? Can’t you pick on somebody else?’ He said, ‘No, I want you to go out and love them like I do.’ So my attitude towards my people just turned around, and now I can visit them and eat off their plates and it doesn’t worry me. I really love my people now.81

Adams has been inhabited by a white Christian subjectivity that locates Aboriginal people as targets of missionary activity and as ‘dirty’ and ‘drunk’. Adams also went (with Jean Carter) to meet her aunt and extended family. Her first perception of her cousins was constructed through whiteness: ‘I’ve never seen them so dark, and I thought, ‘Oh dear, are these really my people? I don’t think they’re my cousins.’82

Although Alicia Adams is the most striking example of an internalised white gaze, Paul Cremen’s narrative has some similar moments in his recollection of his first ‘critical’ impressions of Murrin Bridge, a former Aborigines Welfare Board station.

When we first got there, the first thing that impresses you is all the houses are similar. There’s all the kids running about everywhere... We were taking a critical look, I suppose, because when you go somewhere new you always pick out things that stick in your mind. You see a few broken windows or a few screen doors broken in, this sort of thing: ‘What sort of a place is this?’83

The things he ‘picked out’, however, are predetermined by the countless media representations of Aboriginal people living in shacks and other forms of poor accommodation with kids all around. His evaluation of his perception as critical is a sign of the development of his Aboriginality as an awareness of his internalised racism.

Joy Williams, noted the same emergence of stereotypes in her return to Erambie at Cowra. Learning that her family was from the Cowra ‘mission’ triggered white conditioned judgments:

81 LC, pp. 130-31.
82 LC, p. 132.
83 LC, p. 111.
Even the name sounded right: Cowra. But then you said ‘mission’, and gawd, that bloody done it. All my image of me as ‘I’m from a mission.’ That’s all I needed. Gawd!

I remember when I was in the Home and I was taken out on a Sunday School picnic to Lapa [La Perouse] and all the young boys were diving into the ocean for money and that. And I said, ‘How could they do such a thing? I’m glad I’m not one of the, oh dear.’ Jesus Christ! Of course, and I mean we do things much better! Well we wouldn’t even consider doing things like that! I mean, with my past with the coppers and all the rest of it, I wasn’t any better than anybody else. And yet I thought I was.  

Williams’ acute awareness of the effects of her indoctrination with whiteness is foregrounded in her enactment of an internal dialogue that comically mimics white voices: ‘we do things much better’. At the same time, this memory almost groans with the shame of being overtaken as a child by the white view of Aboriginals. At the same time she cynically puts herself in her ‘place’ by reflecting on her ‘past with the coppers’ – a reflection that also draws on stereotypes of Aboriginals.

She is again interpellated into whiteness on her trip to the mission, conveyed with cynical humour: ‘In the drive into the mission I was still looking around. Couldn’t see any kids or nothing, so that’s one bubble burst’.  

Social death

The next theme I want to take up is the representation of the contributors’ alienation from other Aboriginal people because they were deprived of basic information about themselves that is essential for engaging in Aboriginal sociality.

Jeannette Sinclair felt dislocated and out of place with other Aboriginal students because she couldn’t say who her family was and where she was from. Sinclair recalled her first class at Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe. She was feeling isolated because (she later found out) the other students thought she was the teacher and (naturally) kept their distance.

And they were talking about their family and where they come from and that really upset me. I can remember that. Like, a lump in the throat job. I thought I was going to cry...they were all yapping, saying, like, ‘What’s your name?’ ‘Oh I’m your cousin.’ ‘I’m bla bla’s son.’ And every bastard there was related! I was thinking to myself, ‘I’m the only odd bastard out.’ I know nobody, I can’t tell nothing.  

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84 LC, p. 56. Note that I have included this extract in the Homecoming recollections. In fact these are the last paragraphs of Williams’ Growing Up narrative, anticipating her return to Cowra. I think this passage refers to her homecoming should have been at the beginning of that section.  
85 LC, p. 135.  
86 LC, p. 145.
Finally they did talk to her, realised she wasn’t the teacher and asked her family name to begin to locate her socially. Recalling that she didn’t ‘know how the system worked’, Sinclair gave her ex-husband’s name, which drew the response that no one knew a ‘blackfeller named Mannix’. So she told them her mother’s name.

And one of the women who’d been staring at me, making me feel very uncomfortable, she said, ‘I thought I recognised you; you gotta be one of my cousin’s kids. What’s your mother’s name?’ I said, ‘Doreen.’ And she said, ‘Yes, she’s my cousin.’ It just fell into place like that.87

The social mapping of people according to family and place is one of the most profound differences between white and Aboriginal cultures. Cutting Aboriginal children off from this knowledge, through physical and social separation, works to keep them separate from other Aboriginal people as adults – they are socially in limbo, unable to participate fully in Aboriginal sociality.

Stan Bowden’s narrative reflects on the profound effects lack of family knowledge can have. Bowden recalls that when he left Kinchela Home, he was told to pass for white:

the manager at the time said to me, that I’d pass as a white man, not to mix with any blacks, and that me mother and father were dead.88

Although seemingly non sequitur, a key component of passing for white was not associating with blacks. Telling Bowden the lie that his father was dead, was probably intended to ensure that the primary motivation for ‘mixing with blacks’ was removed. Bowden became a merchant seaman, but when he was in Sydney, he drank in Redfern. He describes his life as plagued by questions without answers, answers he desperately needed in order to take his place in Aboriginal community.

I couldn’t figure out how everyone else talked about their families, and different ones would ask where I was from. I didn’t know. Where I was really from. It bugged me a lot, and I was hitting the grog a lot on the ships. Who I was related to, who I was and all this. Everwhere I went, the first thing Koories would say to me was, ‘Where do you come from?’89

But, through mixing with people in Redfern, he did find out more about his family and learned, eventually, that his father was still alive.

And when I found me father, I couldn’t talk to him, ‘cause I didn’t know what to talk about. I’d sorta gone over to see him, and planned to go back again and have a talk, but I found out that he died, and I just went back to the funeral. That hurt me a lot, ‘cause after leaving Kinchela, when they

87 LC, p. 145.
88 LC, p. 99.
89 LC, p. 100.
told me that he was dead – and then finding out that he was alive, all this time I could have gone up and found out a few things, but it was too late then.90

Nor could he get information from his brothers and sisters who had also ‘been through the Homes’.

There was something missing, but I just couldn’t...I’d met them all but I couldn’t talk to them about anything. ‘Cause they wouldn’t talk about anything. I found out that they’d all been through the Homes too. And they wouldn’t talk about it. Couldn’t or wouldn’t. I don’t know what it really was.91

Throughout this ten-year period of his life, Bowden describes himself travelling back and forth between relatives in Griffith and Condobolin, wanting to reconnect with his family, but feeling continually frustrated with his siblings’ silence and sinking deeper and deeper into alcoholism. Pinning his hopes on his youngest sister whom he had not met, he travelled farther afield. Eventually realising that the alcoholism was going to kill him, he joined a detox program and, through a niece, heard about Link-Up.

Bowden’s narrative shows the careless and probably unintended cruelty of the white people who ran the Board’s Homes. From the position of assuming that living white is best for Stan Bowden, it becomes possible to tell a child that his parents are dead in order to intervene in that child’s desire to reconnect with them. The manager probably would not have imagined Stan Bowden to be human enough to experience this lie as profound betrayal and to have worried himself almost to death about not knowing who his people were and where he came from. Conversely, knowing that he came from Cowra gave him a sense of location that had been totally missing before.

Koories come up and say, ‘Where you from?’ I feel good because I know I was born in Cowra, and me mother and father are buried in Cowra. I feel like I come from Cowra. I don’t have to go back drunk now, I can talk sense.92

Jean Carter asserts that the lack of knowledge about her family was what she most missed out on because of separation, ‘knowing where I fitted in my family’.93 She attributes the alcoholism and deaths of her brothers (who were also taken away) to the loss of a sense of family.

The importance Aboriginal people place on the family, it’s the first and foremost thing. When you’re stripped of that, I reckon you maybe don’t

90 LC, p. 101.
92 LC, p. 169.
93 LC, p. 159.
care, lose all your... It’s sorta like a shame thing, eh. I guess they [her brothers] went through a lot of that. And feeling really powerless, and what could they do. And they drank, and died really early. They all died in their forties, all the boys except Sago.94

Danger and lack

The final theme I want to discuss is the contributors’ feelings of danger and lack. Margaret Tucker and Jimmie Barker represented their lives in Aboriginal communities before being separated as times of feeling loved, cared for and valued. Both Karobran and the narratives of homecoming in The Lost Children represent their reconnections with Aboriginal communities after separation in similar terms.

Pauline McLeod’s homecoming narrative uncovers a lie about love – the lie told by her foster parents that her birth parents had abused her and did not love her.

It was great to see Mum. She was very special. I was scared because I didn’t know what would happen. They were so nice, so kind. They accepted me for what I was. It was beautiful. And I really did feel I didn’t have to fight for love. I was home. It was one of the most relieving feelings I ever had. I felt comfortable with them, I really did, and I knew that none of them would ever attempt to do anything that would hurt me. That they wouldn’t make fun of me or think I was stupid or a fool.95

From this recollection, as in a foreground/background trompe l’oeil, the reverse image of her feelings with her white family emerges as well: not being accepted, not feeling comfortable, fighting for love, being deliberately hurt and made fun of, made to feel stupid or foolish. From the sense of safety in her representation of her Aboriginal family, we can appreciate her sense of fear and threat from her foster family.

Sherry Atkinson’s recollection of meeting her father foregrounds love, protection and safety as well – feelings we can then infer she did not experience with her white foster family.

Dad couldn’t stop touching me, gripping me so hard on my hands. For that moment I just felt like that little girl again. Felt really protected and ‘I’m home’. My Dad, my blood, these are all the nights that I cried and screamed over, it’s here, for real, and nothing can hurt me any more. I thought, nobody can do anything to me any more.96

Coming home is not necessarily to parents and immediate family. For Joy Williams, getting to know her mother was a tense, conflicted and fundamentally unsatisfying experience. ‘Home’, she discovered, was Cowra. Here she experienced

94 LC, p. 161.
95 LC, p. 109.
96 LC, p. 119.
a profound sense of acceptance and love from her extended family, particularly with her great aunt Val. 97

Oh God, and then Val. Sometimes I think she waited for me to come home... And her face. That's when I started feeling not ugly no more. It was like I crawled into that house and I walked out. 98

Williams' metaphor of crawling in, less than human, without pride, feeling ugly, and walking out is striking. She describes an inner transformation from the caricature of the less than human self made available to Aboriginal children by whites, to a full person who sees herself positively reflected in valued Others.

Stan Bowden achieved 'home' – the feeling of being valued – with the Link-Up community. He describes an entirely new sense of himself as smart and valuable after going to his first Link-Up community meeting – a sense of self that childhood at Kinchela, the betrayal of the manager, and the silence of his family had totally taken away from him.

The next meeting at Jervis Bay, that's when I really felt that I wasn't what I'd though I was – not the full quid. There was a lot of other people goin' through exactly what I'd been goin' through, but I'd never been able to talk to anyone about it... I wasn't stupid, it was just all the stuff that was going on inside me that was makin' me feel that way... I don't feel like I don't know anything about anything. I know I don't really know that much, but I feel that what I can say can help somebody else. 99

Nancy De Vries summarises the issue of lack of love, safety and value for Aboriginal children in white homes near the end of her Reflection on the last page of the narratives:

I don’t give a stuff what anybody says, one of the biggest tragedies in this life is for someone to grow up totally without love. As a child, growing up without anybody ever opening their arms to them and saying, ‘Don’t cry,’ I never had the luxury, and the majority of us never had the luxury. [Instead] they make you feel in debt to them for giving you a good white home. Load of bullshit. 100

Conclusions

The Lost Children represents a different mode of collaboration and representation of the injustice of separation. Whereas the three earlier narratives emerged from a limited collaboration of author/editor/publisher, The Lost Children emerged from a

97 This is in contrast both to her childhood but also to her relationship with her birth mother, which was fraught with pain.
98 LC, p. 134.
100 LC, p. 195.
complex collaboration between two editors, thirteen contributors, Link-Up membership and Board, and a commercial publisher. As a collection of narratives bearing witness to separations across a 40-year time period and in a range of contexts, it aims to expand understanding of the complexity of 'You took our children'. Its three-part structure built around a 'community master narrative' manoeuvres the reader to focus on the broader pattern of separation rather than individual lives. At the same time, the mode of transcription that retains the speakerly expression of each contributor and the inclusion of interview questions, create an intensely personal and realistic narrative that addresses the reader directly. In the same way that the camera locates a film viewer within the 'scene' behind the camera, the inclusion of questions locates the reader on the other side of the tape recorder as an interlocutor. The inclusion of questions also makes the elicitation process more transparent. Emerging from the discursive context of a community-based Aboriginal self-help organisation, *The Lost Children* enuicated a specific politics of the personal that focused on subjectivity as a site of colonial domination and self-healing figured as 'the journey home' as a mode of resistance. It absolutely revised the trope of 'caught between two worlds' which is embedded in the passive logic of the inevitability of historical progress and the social Darwinist notion of the 'dying race'. Instead, 'caught between two worlds' is represented as an explicit assimilationist project of a racist culture that promoted the 'social death' of the children as Aboriginals by any means necessary. *The Lost Children* is also a significant departure from the three earlier texts in its address to readers. Barker, Tucker and Clare address white readers to engage them in moral accountability for the harms inflicted on Aboriginal people and address Aboriginal people as 'identified witnesses'. *The Lost Children* takes a similar position vis-à-vis white people, but has a split address to Aboriginal readers. Some Aboriginal readers, especially those who have endured separation, are addressed as identifying witnesses; however, Aboriginal people who had refused to recognise separated people as 'authentic' Aboriginals are challenged to revise and expand their understanding of Aboriginality and dispossession.
'You took our children': reading *In the Best Interest of the Child*

In this last chapter I compare *In the Best Interest of the Child? Stolen Children: Aboriginal Pain/White Shame*, published in 1997 with *The Lost Children*. Like *The Lost Children, In the Best Interest* emerged from the Link-Up (NSW) community. Also like *The Lost Children*, it was created by means of a complex collaborative process between Link-Up members and an academic— in this case myself. I began this thesis reflecting on the success of *Bringing Them Home* in bringing the issue of the injustice of separation before the Australian public and engaging Australians in many walks of life in negotiating the moral meaning of separation. I also raised some aspects of the discursive context of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families that may have enabled Aboriginal testimony to be given and received. I introduced the subsequent chapters as a genealogical exploration of previous first-person representations of separation. In this chapter I return to the National Inquiry and one of the other publications that emerged from its discursive context— *In the Best Interest of the Child?*— which began as the submission of Link-Up (NSW). The submission was revised for publication and launched in May 1997, at approximately the same time as *Bringing Them Home*. Although it raises many of the same issues and arguments found in *The Lost Children*, the discursive context in which it was embedded was significantly different from that of *The Lost Children* and its ways of analysing and articulating separation are therefore different. As Bruce McGuiness pointed out at the first Aboriginal writers conference in 1983, most Aboriginal writing and thinking lies buried in government documents.¹ Many Aboriginal organisations contributed to the Inquiry and were quoted in *Bringing Them Home*. Very few of these reports, however, were published and circulated publicly in their own right.

**Discursive context**

In the eight years between the publication of *The Lost Children* and *In the Best Interest*, separation had become more central in analyses of Aboriginal dispossession. Section 87 of the NSW *Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987* incorporated the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.² Over the ten years

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¹ McGuiness and Walker, Politics of Aboriginal literature, p. 46.
following the Act's passage, mainstream child welfare and social workers had been mandated to accept the idea that Aboriginality was of positive value to an Aboriginal child and that every effort should be made to keep Aboriginal children within the extended family or community. By 1996, the New South Wales Family and Community Services Department employed Aboriginal case workers and, in principle although not necessarily in practice, it followed the guidelines of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. Thus the argument that separation from Aboriginal family, community and culture has negative consequences for Aboriginal children had become integrated into mainstream welfare thinking. At the same time, academic analysis of child welfare history and policy was increasingly including the specific policies of separating Aboriginal children from their families. Robert Van Krieken's *Children and the State*, for example, was published in 1991. It is a Foucauldian analysis that argues against a theory of power that represents child welfare history as increasing and monolithic state control over working class families. He proposes instead a model supporting a range of positions for working class families' interactions with and resistances to the state. However, he points to state intervention in Aboriginal families as a coercive mode of control.

For Aboriginal families and children, however, the story is different, as we cannot speak of a similar convergence of views on how social progress would best be achieved, or an overlapping of value systems...Children were removed almost entirely against the will of their parents, to be brought up in white families and apprenticed to white employers. Unlike white children who came into the state's control, far greater care was take to ensure that they never saw their parents or family again...In their case state intervention did bring about a radical and wholly unwanted change in family relationships.3

Jan Mason's feminist collection, *Child Welfare Policy: Critical Australian Perspectives* was published in 1993. A contribution providing an overview of NSW child welfare policy includes a section under the heading 'Child protection policy as the vehicle of racism'.4 The collection also includes a contribution by Stephanie Gilbert titled 'The effects of colonisation on Aboriginal families: issues and strategies for child welfare policies'.5 Gilbert represented separation as 'cultural genocide' and referred to separated children as 'stolen children'.6 Nevertheless, other papers in the collection did not specifically address Aboriginal child welfare. Jan Kociumbas' *Australian Childhood: A History*, published in 1997 but researched during in the early to mid-1990s, begins with an analysis of separation in the

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6 Gilbert, Effects of colonisation, p. 41.
earliest years of invasion and includes a section under the heading ‘Scrutiny and separation of Aboriginal children’. All of these academic works cite Peter Read’s *The Stolen Generations* among the sources for their analysis of Aboriginal separation. In Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe’s 1993 study of adoption, *Single Mothers and Their Children*, however, all of the mothers and children are white. Thus the issue of Aboriginal separation was slowly adopted by mainstream academic analyses of child separation.

In the early 1990s separation was identified as a significant factor in the high rate of Aboriginal deaths in custody. Of the 99 cases investigated by the Commission, 43 had been removed as children from their families. The summary report for the southeast region drew attention to extensive linkages between separation and the likelihood of going to prison, which in turn increased the likelihood of dying in custody. Commissioner Wootten wrote:

11.7.6 The Interim Report flagged ‘The impact of earlier programs of separation of families, forced relocation and institutionalization’ as a significant underlying issue. It is clear from the number of cases examined by the Royal Commission, in which child separation was a feature, that the legacy of child removal has had a distinct role to play in institutionalization and consequent juvenile offending.

In particular, the findings on the death of Malcolm Charles Smith focused on his long and fundamentally flawed custody as a ward of the State of New South Wales and the almost inevitability of his subsequent adult incarceration. Immediately prior to 5 May 1965, the other date from which Malcolm’s story may be commenced, he was a happy, healthy and free eleven year old, albeit grubby, living in a humpy, and truant from a school made unattractive by racial prejudice and irrelevance to his life. He was taken away from his family by police, cut off from his family, whom he did not see again until he was 19, and sent to Kempsey, over 1500 kilometres away on the coast, beyond the boundaries of their accessible world. When he finally rediscovered them at the age of 19, it was too late for him to start a normal life...His death is part of the abiding legacy of the appalling treatment of Aboriginals that went on well into the second half of this century...

The death of Smith was subsequently publicised in the documentary film, *Who Killed Malcolm Smith?* Aired on public television, the film argued that white

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8 Swain and Howe, *Single Mothers*.
9 Gilbert, *Effects of colonisation*, p. 44.
12 Wootten, Malcolm Charles Smith.
society killed Malcolm Smith through the racism that kept the family impoverished, through racist application of child welfare laws that enabled welfare workers to send Smith to the Kinchela Home for stealing a bicycle, and through the racist practices at the Home that taught him he was worthless.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, as a result of the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, separation was increasingly coming to be seen as an underlying cause for other significant issues troubling Aboriginal communities.

Also in the early 1990s there was an increasing focus on Aboriginal mental health. Following the National Aboriginal Mental Health Conference in 1993,\textsuperscript{15} a National Consultancy team was funded to research Aboriginal mental health and propose a strategy for addressing its findings. The team consulted widely with Aboriginal community and health workers throughout Australia. It also consulted with mainstream mental health services involved with Aboriginal clients. In 1995, its report \textit{`Ways Forward': National Consultancy Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health}, like the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, identified separation as an underlying factor in its findings.

The removal of children from their families, the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their continuing social and economic disadvantage have contributed to widespread mental health problems. However, mental health services rarely deal with the underlying grief and emotional distress experienced by Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{16}

The report focused on trauma and grief as key issues in Aboriginal mental health. It developed a political analysis of mental health that located trauma and grief as outcomes of colonial dispossession rather than failure on the part of Aboriginal individuals.

One of the most significant and frequent problems identified by Aboriginal people was `trauma and grief'. The impact on their health and mental health and well-being was seen to be extensive. The impact of trauma and grief relates to the history of invasion, the ongoing impact of colonisation, loss of land and culture, high rates of premature mortality, high levels of incarceration, high levels of family separations, particularly those consequent upon the forced separation of children and parents, and also Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.\textsuperscript{17}

In \textit{Ways Forward}, separation was seen as a core form of Aboriginal dispossession. The discourse of mental health enabled the reframing of other issues affecting Aboriginal communities such as high rates of suicide, substance abuse and family

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Who Killed Malcolm Smith?}.
\textsuperscript{17} Swan and Raphael, \textit{Ways Forward}, part 1, p. 41.
breakdowns in terms of ongoing and long-term symptoms arising from colonisation trauma. This discursively located Aboriginal mental health issues as arising from normal human responses to an overwhelming array of violent dispossessions, which in turn fundamentally challenged racist constructions of Aboriginal people as unfeeling and not quite human.\(^\text{18}\) It also challenged policy that focused exclusively on material aspects of Aboriginal disadvantage such as housing, employment, education and health of the body, advocating a holistic approach that recognised the psychological and spiritual dimensions of well-being.\(^\text{19}\)

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s a growing academic literature on the history of separation emerged across Australia.\(^\text{20}\) Anna Haebich’s history of Aboriginal administration in Western Australia, *For Their Own Good*, included material on separation and was published in 1988;\(^\text{21}\) Barbara Cummings study of the separation of three generations of her family, *Take This Child*, was published in 1990;\(^\text{22}\) and Tony Austin’s study on separation in the Northern Territory, *I Can Picture the Old Home So Clearly*, was published in 1993.\(^\text{23}\) Aboriginal community groups were also undertaking research and publishing reports on separation. Gungibil Jindibah Centre in New South Wales, published *Learning From the Past* in 1994;\(^\text{24}\) and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia published its study on separation in Western Australia in 1995.\(^\text{25}\)

Additionally, international linkages were being developed. The International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples was in 1993 and Aboriginal Australians participated in United Nations forums with Indigenous peoples worldwide. The acceptance of separation as a significant issue by the Commonwealth government was voiced in a speech by Prime Minister Paul Keating in Redfern on 10 December 1992 marking the launch of the year. He said:

> It begins, I think, with that act of recognition.
> Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.
> We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.
> We brought the diseases. The alcohol.
> We committed the murders.
> We took the children from their mothers...\(^\text{26}\)

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\(^{18}\) The definition of trauma in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual is an experience ‘outside the range’ of normal experience; conversely responses such as post-traumatic stress disorders are normal human responses to abnormal experiences. See Laura S Brown, ‘Not outside the range: one feminist perspective on psychic trauma’, in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Explorations in Memory*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1995, pp. 100–112.

\(^{19}\) Swan and Raphael, *Ways Forward*, part 1, pp. 1–3.

\(^{20}\) See Haebich, Broken Circles for a comprehensive history of the lead-up to the National Inquiry.

\(^{21}\) Haebich, *For Their Own Good*.

\(^{22}\) Cummings, *Take This Child*.

\(^{23}\) Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home So Clearly*.

\(^{24}\) Gunjil Jindibah Centre, *Learning from the Past*.

\(^{25}\) Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (Inc.), *Telling Our Story*.

A significant Commonwealth project marking the International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples was the ‘Between Two Worlds’ exhibition of the Australian Archives. The exhibition, comprising archival documents, photographs and oral history accounts of separation in the Northern Territory, travelled throughout Australia. Its stated objective was conciliatory:

One of the main objectives of Between Two Worlds is to contribute to the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. By providing an opportunity for all Australians to learn about what happened in the past, we hope to increase their understanding of the issues affecting Aboriginal Australians today. Our aim is not to condemn those responsible for the removal of Aboriginal children, but to explain how and why a practice which today seems so brutal could once have been acceptable to a majority of white Australians.

In 1995, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand*, the first comparative study of assimilation practice and separation was published. It is a comprehensive study of the histories and effects of separation policies and practices on First Nations children in the three countries. Author Andrew Armitage points to similarities in the Canadian and Australian experiences, and differences between these two countries and New Zealand. Armitage introduces the study with a discussion of the definition of genocide in the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide which includes the ‘forcible transfer of children’ to another group. Amitage argues that:

Prior to the holocaust and other Nazi extermination policies, the term ‘genocide’ did not exist; however, the action of Britain and the settler governments in Australia and Canada clearly demonstrate that the practice of genocide did [emphasis in original].

Thus, throughout the period between 1989 when *The Lost Children* was published and the National Inquiry, the issue of separation was increasingly moving to the centre of discursive contexts where academics, activists, policy-makers and politicians negotiated explanations of and solutions to Aboriginal dispossession and disadvantage.

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27 The Commonwealth of Australia administered the Northern Territory from 1911 to 1978; consequently the Australian Archives (now National Archives Australia) which has custody of Commonwealth records has a massive collection of case files and other records pertaining to separation policy and practice in the Northern Territory. See Rowena MacDonald, *Australian Archives*, *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the Removal of Aboriginal Children of Part Descent in the Northern Territory*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 1995.
28 MacDonald, Between Two Worlds, p. x.
29 Armitage, Aboriginal Assimilation.
30 Armitage, Aboriginal Assimilation, p. 6.
31 Armitage, Aboriginal Assimilation, p. 6.
The discursive context of articulating *In the Best Interest*: the National Inquiry

The first Going Home conference was held in Darwin in October 1994, bringing together Aboriginal people from across Australia who had been affected by separation policies. Among other things the conference called for the federal government to undertake a nationwide inquiry into the policies and practices of separation. Responding to Aboriginal demands, in 1995, Attorney-General Michael Lavarch instructed the Commonwealth Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) to undertake a National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. The terms of reference of the Inquiry were:

(a) to trace the past laws, practices and policies...and the effects of those laws, practices and policies;

(b) examine the adequacy of and the need for any changes in current laws, practices and policies relating to service and procedures currently available to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were affected by the separation...;

(c) examine the principles relevant to determining the justification for compensation...; and

(d) examine current laws, practices and policies with respect to the placement and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children...  

Link-Up (NSW) was among the organisations that had advocated for the Inquiry and Link-Up members served on its Aboriginal Advisory Panel.

HREOC is a quasi-judicial body. The Inquiry’s head, Sir Ronald Wilson, was a former High Court Justice; Commissioner Pat Dodson a lawyer. Although the work of HREOC aims to be less formal than a court inquiry, it nevertheless mimics many features of legal procedure. The Commissioner hearing a case is assisted by someone in the role of ‘counsel assisting’. Its quasi-judicial procedures, its concern with laws and the third term of reference concerning compensation, located the Inquiry within a discourse of crime and justice. All of us working on the submission shared an assumption that the Inquiry was an opportunity to get the evidence of the crimes and harms of separation onto the official record.

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33 *Bringing Them Home*, p. ix.
34 Check HREOC website for description of its procedures.
35 This information is based on my own experience of HREOC inquiries both during the Inquiry on the Separation and a human rights hearing I attended as representative of the Canberra Domestic Violence Service in 1997.
The submission was written by committee: a Link-Up team comprising Jean Carter, Barry Duroux, Lawrence Gilbert, Carol Kendall, Lola McNaughton, Annie Pratten and Peter Read. Carol Kendall and Lola McNaughton, however, were the project managers. I was employed by Link-Up to write the historical section and to compile and copy edit the rest of the material. At the time, I was doing research in the New South Wales Archives on the Aborigines Protection Board records for this thesis and Peter Read was one of my thesis advisers.\textsuperscript{36} He recommended me to Link-Up as someone reasonably familiar with the history and a professional editor.

I met Lola McNaughton in the NSW Archives, where we were both doing research, so that she could ‘check me out’; and check me out she did! Carole Boyce Davies has argued that trust is critical in collaborative life narrative projects and frequently can be developed if the outsider’s subject position shares commonalities with contributors.\textsuperscript{37} In this case the fact that I was African-American and therefore understood the operations of racism and the fact that I was adopted and therefore had some personal experience with separation were significant in being accepted by Link-Up as a collaborator on the project. As editor Alison Ravenscroft has pointed out in her reflections of working with Rita and Jackie Huggins on \textit{Auntie Rita},\textsuperscript{38} being invited into and developing close personal relationships with the authors was a fundamental (and deeply rewarding) aspect of working together on the project.\textsuperscript{39} While most of the Link-Up members I met were welcoming and accepting, there was some opposition to a non-Aboriginal person preparing the submission. It was a sign of my privileged position as a PhD student on a scholarship that, unlike the Aboriginal writers approached, I could devote two months to the project at short notice.

\textbf{Editorial intervention}

When I joined the project, the content of the submission had already been outlined. Lola McNaughton and Carol Kendall had just completed months of community consultation, both to inform Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales about the National Inquiry and to find out what the communities wanted in the submission. Thus, unlike \textit{The Lost Children} which primarily represented the Link-Up community, \textit{In the Best Interest} represented a much broader constituency of New South Wales Aboriginals. This reflects a significant change in the discourse

\textsuperscript{36} I had originally wanted to pursue oral history research on women’s specific experiences of separation and contacted several women, including Lola McNaughton. Lola politely but firmly told me that she was absolutely not interested in doing any interviews because she was tired of academics using Aboriginal people as informants. I had anyway been uncomfortable with doing research ‘on’ Aboriginal people for exactly the reasons she listed – I did not want to turn the investigatory gaze of the expert and locate ‘them’ as objects of study. I took her rebuff as a sign that it was time to shift the focus of my study to official discourse, and plunged into the NSW Archives, albeit with some regret because I also wanted to foreground Aboriginal analysis of separation.

\textsuperscript{37} Davies, Collaboration, p. 8ff.


\textsuperscript{39} I was often amazed by the generosity of Link-Up members in making sure that I was offered ongoing emotional support in dealing with such painful and traumatic life narratives.
on separation circulating in Aboriginal communities, probably as a result of the
Deaths in Custody findings and the mental health report, but also Link-Up's
facilitation of reconnections with family and community and the work of separated
people within Aboriginal community organisations had informed many more
people in the communities about the effects of separation.

I was assigned the task of writing the historical background and any other argument
or summary text. Since I had literally just completed months of intensive work
reading the NSW Aborigines Protection Board records, I offered to add this
research to the history rather than rely on secondary sources. Everyone agreed to
that. Lola McNaughton and Carol Kendall were to prepare individual testimonies,
including all elicitation and transcription. They also carried out additional archival
research. Aside from spelling and minor punctuation, there was no editing
whatsoever of a contributor's written testimony. It would stand exactly as they had
presented it. Once typed, the testimonies were reviewed and approved by their
contributors; a few of the contributors made substantial revisions.

The process followed for writing the non-testimony sections of the submission was
highly collaborative. During the two-month period of drafting, I worked in
Canberra and Carol Kendall and Lola McNaughton worked in Sydney. We talked
on the telephone daily - sometimes many times a day. As they discovered material
or thought of significant points to include in the submission, they would either
dictate or fax the new material to me. In some instances they had already decided
where to insert the new material; in others, we would discuss and weigh up various
options. Other members of the editorial committee also contributed to content,
including sending me documentation, speeches, newspaper clippings and other
relevant material. When I had completed a first draft of the historical section, it was
scrutinised and edited by the submission committee. Although the committee was
mostly satisfied with the first draft I presented of the history of separation polices
and practices in New South Wales, there were a number of corrections to
arguments, inflections, nuances and conclusions.

The introduction, the recommendations and conclusions were workshopped by the
committee plus other community members, Peter Read and myself at an
emotionally intense weekend retreat in the Blue Mountains. What a process!
Amongst the tears and laughter of many people talking about their lives and telling
their stories, important points were debated and positions decided by consensus.
Because of the nature of the workshop, although tape recording might have been
useful - many important insights and ideas happened in odd moments rather than
the more formal sessions. From my notes I drafted the remaining text of the
submission and sent it to the committee for approval. I consulted heavily with Lola
McNaughton and Carol Kendall during this phase of the project as I worked on
clarifying and refining the text. I frequently read paragraphs to both of them over
the telephone, and together we would focus in on exactly what needed to be said.

Link-Up subsequently decided to publish the submission as a book so that it could
be circulated more broadly, especially in schools. The submission had been written
to address the terms of reference of the Inquiry and used a stultifyingly bureaucratic style and structure. Part I of the submission was an Executive Summary that summarised Link-Up’s position on each term of reference. Parts II and III of the submission addressed the first term of reference – the law, policies and practices of separation and their effects. Part II of the submission outlined the history of the law, policies and practices. Part III of the submission addressed the effects. All of the testimonies of people affected by separation were in this section. Part IV of the submission addressed services to people affected by separation; Part V, compensation; Part VI, current child placement laws (two testimonies were included in this section). Although individual paragraphs were not numbered, the submission’s first and second-level headings were numbered.

For the book, Link-Up wanted a more informal style that people would want to sit down and read. Again the submission committee was the decision-making body. This time my role was editorial/production. Figure 5 shows a copy of the notes I made on the contents page of the submission during the first book committee meeting. The notes indicate some of the preliminary ideas for re-arranging the submission, some are contradictory as new ideas superseded old ones during the course of the meeting. Some of the revised chapter titles were suggested at this point: ‘Part II: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s’ became ‘Lost in the system: 1970s–1990s’; ‘Part IV: Services addressing the needs of Aboriginals affected by separation’, ‘Part V: Redressing the balance: compensation’ and ‘Part VI: Current laws, practices and policies of Aboriginal child placement’ were merged into a chapter to be called ‘Enough is enough: the way forward’. The committee also decided to remove the testimonies from ‘Part III: Bearing witness to the effects of genocidal State policies’ and interweave them with the chapters on the history of separation laws, policies and practices (Part IID, IIE, IIF). As in earlier work, the restructuring was highly collaborative. We all made suggestions and worked on clarifying and refining each other’s ideas. In addition to rearranging and rewriting some of the text, the committee wanted to add poetry and artwork of Link-Up members, some of whom had contributed testimonies, others had not. These additions would enable wider Link-Up participation and appeal to different readerships. As in *The Lost Children*, Peter Read, secured the publisher. Lastly, the committee emphasised the need to ensure that the text was written in the first person plural – as is indicated by my note in the upper and lower left-hand corners of the first page of submission contents.

With these directions and notes, I implemented the reorganisation of the text for the committee to review. As in the earlier phase of the project, Carol Kendall and Lola McNaughton sought contributions from Link-Up members. One woman and her husband decided to contribute testimonies they had been unable to prepare for the submission. The other significant addition to the book is the narrative of Carol Kendall about her work with Sister Girl, a woman separated from her mother in the Northern Territory. Because Sister Girl’s separation fell under the jurisdiction of

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40 In reproducing these notes I covered any names with white-out.
Figure 5 – Suggested changes to the submission for the production of the book version of In the Best Interest of the Child?, as noted on the contents pages of the submission
Part III: The Effects of Separation: our lived experiences
Introduction
Part IIIA. Summary of findings and conclusions
Universal rights and fundamental freedoms
A cruel and inhuman social experiment
Effects on identity
Part IIIB. Surely life wasn’t meant to be this painful: summary of findings
Part IIIC. Bearing witness to the effects of genocidal state policies
Aboriginal mothers who were separated from their children
Seven forms of separation
We lost our mothers' love
We were left behind
We called ourselves Maori
An inherited sadness
Surely life isn’t meant to be this painful
They owe us a life—we were all-prisoners
Terra nullius
My adopted child went home
My mother always wanted a little Koori baby

Enough is enough: the way forward

Part IV: Services addressing the needs of Aboriginals affected by separation
Introduction
Summary of findings, principles and recommendations
Part IVA. Link-Up's work and experience with current services
Part IVB. Findings on existing mental health facilities for Aboriginals
Part IVC. Principles guiding recommendations
Part IVD. Recommendations

Part V: Redressing the balance: compensation
Introduction
Part VA. International principles and recommendations in respect of compensation for gross violations of human rights
Part VB. Principles guiding recommendations on compensation
Part VC. General recommendations
Part VD. Monetary compensation

Part VI: Current laws, practices and policies of Aboriginal child placement
Part VIA. Findings and recommendations
Findings
Recommendations
Part VIB. Evidence
Aboriginal foster parents: no more damaged parcels
Magistrates still not applying Section 87 in their decisions

References
Attachments
Newspaper articles from AWB files
Memos from AWB files
the Northern Territory, rather than New South Wales, this narrative could not be included in the submission to the Inquiry. Link-Up's work, however, is not limited to New South Wales Aboriginals (although they are its primary client base). The exclusion of this narrative from the submission foregrounds one of the many ways that white geographical divisions limit and control Aboriginal perspectives.

I also did the page layout for the book and prepared page proofs for the committee. These were read and revised in several rounds and given to a proofreader and to Peter Read, for final reading. The corrections introduced at this stage were minor. The proofreader focused on spelling and formatting errors; Peter Read on errors of historical fact, place name spelling and so forth.

Reflecting on the issue of editorial intervention as a site of recuperation of Aboriginal texts, the production process of In the Best Interest was, I think, a successful collaboration of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal project participants. The Link-Up committee acted not only on behalf of Link-Up, but also sought to represent the views and aims of Aboriginal communities with whom they had consulted. All of us were implicated in the discursive context of the Inquiry and constrained by its terms of reference. Although the book pushed against those constraints through the introduction of a testimony relevant to a separation outside the jurisdiction of New South Wales and included other forms of expression, the book was nevertheless profoundly shaped by its quasi-judicial context of enunciation. My location as an employee of Link-Up enabled the committee to selectively use whatever knowledges and skills they found relevant. Although the portions of text that I wrote emerged from my own non-Aboriginal subject location, they were nevertheless seen to be useful to Link-Up's aim of articulating its representation of separation.

Framing the text: visual design

The committee told me what kind of design format they wanted for the text, specifying A4 pages with reasonably large type that would be easy for older people to read, and a lot of white space on the page. I submitted several trial designs and we had extensive discussions about the connotations of different type fonts. Both Lola McNaughton and Carol Kendall specifically wanted fonts that were easy to read, and expressed directness and simplicity without being childlike. Rather the typography needed to connote dignity. The process of negotiating the racial politics of typography was fascinating. Once we had settled on the design basics, I prepared a mock-up and, after further discussion we agreed on the final design.

The cover artwork is dominated by a painting from the perspective of a lookout in the Blue Mountains. It is a special place to many Link-Up members. The caption on the back cover tells readers of its significance:

Front cover painting: A Place of Tranquility by Mary Kondek, a Link-Up community member. It is at Kings Tableland in the Blue Mountains near
the Link-Up office where many go to find peace, spiritual connection and to feel the force and presence of the Old People.\textsuperscript{41}

The painting works as a visual honouring of the land, of the Old People and, significantly to Link-Up members, of Aboriginal birth mothers. The artist Mary Kondek, is Carol Kendall’s birth mother. It was significant to everyone that the painting expressed an honouring of Aboriginal birth mothers, and that the book begins with her perspective. Notably absent from all discussions of the cover were considerations of the design’s ability to attract a reader. Although the committee wanted the book to be attractive and professional, commodification and marketing appeal were nearly irrelevant. The image was the most significant element of the cover design – the text is relatively small and plain so as not to detract from the image. Although I experimented with a number of more ‘jazzy’ fonts and layouts, the committee preferred a low-key presentation of the text – an approach also taken by the cover design of \textit{Bringing Them Home}.

While the image of the painting was cropped for the front cover (to accommodate a portrait presentation of a landscape original), the painting appears in full in the centre of the back cover. The back cover text is also minimal. It needed to tell potential readers what the book was about and it needed that staple of publishing publicity, recommendation by an authority. John Nader, the HREOC commissioner for the Northern Territory was impressed with the Link-Up submission and is quoted on the back cover.

\textbf{Negotiating the title}

The subtitle of the book was the subject of long debate and refinement. ‘\textit{In the Best Interest of the Child}?’ is an ironic comment on this paramount principle in white child welfare placement decision-making. The committee also wanted the words ‘stolen children’ in the title and wanted text that would express the argument of the book. We brainstormed the title for hours before coming up with Aboriginal pain/White shame as the key issue – the profound hurt caused by the shameful practice of child removal. It is an instruction to white readers that they should be ashamed of what has been done in the name of whiteness. It also alerts readers that this text is going to be counter-shaming – the white practices that ignored the best interests of Aboriginal children are going to be made highly and uncomfortably visible. The book intends to do precisely what Rosamund Dalziell argues – to transfer the shame and humiliation endured by Aboriginal children to white readers.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} IBI, back cover.

\textsuperscript{42} Dalziell, Shameful Autobiographies.
In the Best Interest of the Child?

Stolen children: Aboriginal pain/White shame

Link-Up (NSW) and Tikka Jan Wilson

Figure 6 – Front and back covers of in the Best Interest of the Child?
In the best interest of the child?

Separating Aboriginal children from family and community began as soon as Europeans set foot on our land.

The belief that it is in the best interest of Aboriginal children to be removed from Aboriginal culture and assimilated into White culture has justified the systematic disruption of Aboriginal families.

This book grew out of the submission of Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation to the 1996 Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families.

It traces the history of removing Aboriginal children in New South Wales and contains testimonies of Aboriginals whose lives have been profoundly, painfully altered by separation.

"In the Best Interest of the Child? is the best report of this genre I have seen in 34 years of legal practice."

John Nader, RFD, QC
Former Judge of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, Hearing Commissioner, HREOC

Front cover painting: A Place of Tranquility by Mary Kondak, a Link-Up community member. It is at Kings Tableland in the Blue Mountains near the Link-Up office where many go to find peace, spiritual connection and to feel the force and presence of the Old People.
Front matter

Like the other texts I have discussed, *In the Best Interest* has a good deal of framing material. Unlike the texts produced in the 1970s, the text is self-authorising. Every part of the front matter expresses an Aboriginal perspective and works to broaden and deepen the context of reading the book, including the only whitefella voice — Paul Keating. It also begins the process of manoeuvring non-Aboriginal readers into an Aboriginal worldview. The copyright page, for example, is normally a taken-for-granted assignment of rights to the author and is written by the publisher. The copyright notice of *In the Best Interest* includes an analysis of the politics of copyright written in the first-person plural:

Life histories, artwork and poetry are reproduced with the permission of their owners. Since colonisation our art, images, music, knowledge and wisdom have been taken, used and reproduced by non-Aboriginals without our permission. We protest against this ongoing theft of our religious, cultural and intellectual property.

At the foot of the copyright page are the notes on the authors: a short notice about the work of Link-Up directed to Aboriginal people who may have been separated letting them know how to contact Link-Up, and a short note on me. The committee felt it was important that Aboriginal readers know my political location in relation to the text, namely that although I am not Aboriginal, I am also not a white person; that I was adopted; and that I was writing a PhD on separation supervised by Peter Read, who was well-known and respected. That I was writing a PhD locates me as an academic — a location with mixed implications. It is a possible indicator of legitimacy for white readers, but a location of appropriation for many Aboriginal readers.

After the contents, is a dedication. While it is similar to the dedication in *The Lost Children* in being dedicated to 'our Elders' and to 'all our children who never came home' (both texts use the same phrases), there is an additional dedication to 'our parents' who 'suffered terribly' and 'continue to blame themselves for losing us'. While the 'our' in the first part of the dedication could be a broadly based Aboriginal 'we', the 'our' in the second part of the dedication specifically refers to a 'we' separated Aboriginals.

The acknowledgments, like the copyright, do specific analytical work in the text as opposed to only acknowledging people or organisations that contributed time or funding. First, it acknowledges the emotional work of those participating in the submission/book — it acknowledges that their participation 'opened up old wounds to bear witness to the cruelty of child removal policies'. Second, it shifts the

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43 *The Lost Children* is also self-authorising in the sense that the front matter is written by Link-Up. But there is a distinction between the voices of editor Peter Read and Coral Edwards in the front matter and the first-person accounts in the body of the book.

44 *IBI*, p. iv.

45 *IBI*, p. vii.
understanding of the word acknowledgment, from acknowledgment by the authors to acknowledgment by the readers. It instructs readers in the ‘wider community’ that the people acknowledged in the first paragraph, who have opened their wounds to create the text, expect or hope for an acknowledgment by readers of ‘the immense effort and courage the survival and recovery continue to require’. Third, the book acknowledges the participation of the Aboriginal communities who participated in the community forums where Link-Up asked for advice on preparing the submission. Fourth, the book acknowledges the people who did not contribute to the book, but whose experiences are nevertheless significant. As we get to the end of the acknowledgments, we find the other people whose assistance made the book possible.

The foreword is written by Janaka Wiradjuri. It is an intensely personal foreword, written in the first person, and interweaving personal experience with analysis. The introduction tells the reader that the subject matter of the book is disturbing – it is about emotional, physical, and spiritual abuse and battery. It also manoeuvres readers by example into an emotional response to the text – ‘I cried for all the children’. In addition, however, she says that:

We were all held as physical and emotional hostages by the Aboriginal Protection and Welfare Boards with the permission of the New South Wales government.

The connotations of the word ‘hostage’ in this passage characterise the government’s actions as criminal – the interracial contract previewed here suggests an indictment of white behaviour.

Next the front matter moves to a section explaining the use and meaning of particular words. The terminology section works to invite readers further into the particular worldview of the text, through defining some of the vocabulary used. It begins with an analysis of the political significance of words and of the inadequacy of words to express the experiences of trauma. It argues that words are tools of colonisation, that English is the language of the coloniser. It highlights the ideological work of words like ‘settlement’ in erasing the violence of colonisation. Then it discusses the particular usage in the book of the words ‘Aboriginal’, the opposition ‘Aboriginal/White’ as opposed to ‘Aboriginal/European’ or ‘Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal’. It also explains to readers unfamiliar with the language community of Link-Up, the meanings of ‘belonging place’, ‘home’ and ‘journey home’ and ‘tribe’.

Next a list of abbreviations followed by the only white voice in the front matter – an extract from a speech by Prime Minister Paul Keating at Redfern in 1992 in which he admitted white responsibility for ‘the dispossessing’, ‘diseases’, ‘alcohol’, ‘murders’, ‘discrimination’, ‘exclusion’, and taking ‘the children away from their

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46 IBI, p. ix.
47 IBI, p. ix.
mothers'. Significantly the extract ends with: ‘It was our ignorance and prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things done to us’. For Aboriginal readers, this admission may be a heartening reminder that it is possible for white people to listen and understand. For white readers, Keating’s speech is meant to function as a model of the type of response Link-Up would like to engender in white readers – recognition and responsibility that ‘the problem starts with non-Aboriginal Australians’.

Last, there is a poem by Pauline McLeod, a contributor to The Lost Children, written in 1989. It represents separation as ‘agony’, ‘falsehood’, ‘lies’, ‘pain’, ‘years stolen’. Its last two stanzas represent the ongoing struggle of people who survived separation. As in The Lost Children, a poem in the front matter answers the question ‘what do separated people want?’

But to let them win, would be a sin.
To give up would be a crime.
I must search on. I must fight on.
To find what is rightfully mine.

To find my heritage; My family.
My Home and Identity.
To find the person who was lost to me.
Me...The Aborigine.

The front matter of In the Best Interest is a complex collection of voices that introduces the reader into the complex world of Link-Up’s analysis of separation. We see that it is multi-voiced and takes multiple forms. We see an attention to the details of the conditions of publication. We see attention to the effects of language. We are offered an acknowledgment that both gives acknowledgment to contributors and demands acknowledgment from readers, and we are given an example of appropriate white readership.

**Structuring the text**

The book is 242 pages comprising a mixture of voices that deploy a variety of tactics to argue the case against separation. In the Best Interest of the Child? is organised in seven chapters plus references. The first chapter is an introduction and overview of Link-Up’s work and of the National Inquiry. The second chapter provides an overview. It begins with a discussion of the number of people affected by separation, then moves to a summary of key points on separation, including Link-Up’s position that separation constituted genocide under the definition of the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide. The chapter outlines a list of 18 specific harms suffered as a result of separation, including intergenerational effects and then
discusses the specific principles of international human rights law that were contravened by the practices of separation, citing the UN Convention on Genocide, the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Convention, and the Draft Declaration on Indigenous Rights.\(^{51}\)

The next three chapters trace the history of separation from 1788 to 1996. Chapter 6 looks at the ongoing effects of separation and the last chapter outlines the ‘way forward’ – Link-Up’s recommendations to the Inquiry. The predominant voice of the text is Link-Up’s first-personal plural which frames, introduces, interprets, presents findings and recommendations – in short it maps the discursive terrain of the text.

Also in the Link-Up voice is a section towards the end of the book (page 172ff) called ‘The effects of separation on identity’. Its subheadings comprise: personal identity, family identity, cultural identity, community identity, adopted identity, institutional identity and going home. This section was the result of a brainstorming session with about 20 Link-Up members and includes 70 entries. Among these are:

...wondering, ‘what did I do to deserve this?’
...feeling ‘no one looks like me’
...being afraid to have relationships with Aboriginals: they might be your relatives
...living with lies
...being a number not a name
...fantasising about your ‘real’ parents
...opening old family wounds – you may be the wound
...being a stranger to your own family
...‘you’re not really Aboriginal, you’re just jumping on the bandwagon’
...never really being accepted as an elder\(^{52}\)

At the time the list was created, the contributors felt that it expressed the range and diversity of identity effects. In comparison with *The Lost Children* which focused on unease and discomfort with other Aboriginal people, as the last two examples above indicate, the sections on community identity and cultural identity are also critical of community rejection of and hostility towards separated people who are trying to return.

Embedded within the body of the text are 15 first-person testimonies that bear witness to a range of separation circumstances and effects – a more diverse range than in *The Lost Children*. Nine were contributed by women; five describe childhoods in institutions; two childhoods in foster care; two childhoods in adoptive families; one describes the difficulties of working with the NSW Department of Community Services as an Aboriginal family providing foster care; one describes a battle to retain custody of a child in the extended family; one describes growing up

\(^{51}\) IBI, pp. 44–46.
\(^{52}\) IBI, pp. 172–75.
in a family that ‘passed’ as Maori; one describes seeing his cousins removed and being the ones left behind; one describes the intergenerational effects of growing up with a father who was separated; and two were contributed by non-Aboriginal family members – the adoptive parents of a separated child and the husband of a woman struggling with ongoing depression as an effect of her separation.\(^{53}\) Two of the testimonies were recorded and transcribed, two were reprinted from *The Lost Children* (and therefore were originally recorded and transcribed); the rest were written.

In addition there are 19 poems and a colour insert of artwork in chapter 4. There are also reproductions of forms and records from some contributor’s case files, and reproductions of newspaper clippings. Three of the chapters are dominated by a narrative history into which first-person testimonies are interwoven. The historical text is well footnoted, relying on the authority of this academic convention and extended extracts from government documents provide ‘evidence’ to support the argument. Reflecting the juridical discursive context of the Inquiry, the style of the historical sections resembles the factual section of a law brief – the facts are proven and used to support a particular attribution of culpability.

One of the most interesting departures from the format of *The Lost Children* was the decision to make all of the personal testimonies anonymous. Some of the contributors did not want their testimonies to become public knowledge. Link-Up wanted its submission to be public and therefore decided that none of the contributors would be named. Despite this, some people still decided not to participate in the submission, but to make personal confidential submissions to the Inquiry. Thus, like *Bringing Them Home*, *In the Best Interest* has the anomaly of anonymous eye witness testimony; it is both intensely personal, yet disconnected from a particular named individual. The decision not to name people also meant that, unlike *The Lost Children*, snapshots were not included in the text. All of the poetry and artwork, however, is attributed to named individuals.

The last striking structural difference between *The Lost Children* and *In the Best Interest* is that the language in the headings and other framing text resonates with connotations of genocide, slavery and deliberate criminality. Like most of the text in Link-Up’s voice, these headings were developed and refined collectively – some suggested by Carol Kendall or Lola McNaughton, some by me. For example:

- How could they have done this to us? (p. 47)
- Aboriginal resistance met by threats and coercion (p. 53)
- Aiming for genocide (p. 57)
- Separation: the permanent solution (p. 61)
- A continuing vision of genocide (p. 69)
- On the auction block (p. 77)

\(^{53}\) Note: some witnesses experienced both foster and institutional care, therefore the list does not total to 15.
They owe us a life – we were all prisoners (p. 108)
Systematic attack on identity (p. 171)

Comparing *In the Best Interest* testimonies with *The Lost Children* testimonies

In addition to the points made above about the broader range of perspectives offered in *In the Best Interest*, the other major differences are in the use of the voice of the ‘prosecuting witness’; the use of the discourse of trauma’ and bearing witness to ongoing irreparable damage to the lives of survivors of separation.

The prosecuting witness

One of the most interesting formal differences between the two texts is the migration of the voices of both Link-Up and the historian from the front matter to the main body of the text. In *The Lost Children*, the testimonies comprised the body of the text, the historian (Peter Read) and Link-Up (represented by Coral Edwards) provided readers with an analytic framework for interpreting the testimonies and pointed towards a preferred reading strategy. The use of the first-person was mostly confined to Coral Edwards’ section of the introduction, although many of the contributors spoke from time to time in that voice. In the discursive context of the National Inquiry, Link-Up was interpellated (in the Althusserian sense), as a collective or first-person plural witness by calling for submissions from both individuals and organisations. Thus Link-Up testified on its own behalf and the quasi-judicial context of the Inquiry provided a legitimate opportunity to articulate and prove the injustices, wrongs, harms and crimes of separation. Thus Link-Up’s first-person plural voice combines the subject location of a prosecutor building a case against separation and a collective witness bearing witness to its effects.

Chapter 2, for example, is titled ‘Elimination of Aboriginals’. The chapter begins with an outline of available statistical data on the number of Aboriginal people affected by separation. This is followed by an argument that separation was/is genocidal, citing and explaining the definition of genocide in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1947). The final section of the chapter is a list of 15 wrongs inflicted by separation. This section is enunciated in the first-person plural under the heading ‘Our lives were not what they should have been’. Each of the wrongs begins with a vision of how life should have been, followed by a statement explaining the wrong. The first two wrongs are ‘Regimentation and cruelty’ and ‘Sexual abuse and assault’.

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54 IBI, p. 32.
Regimentation and cruelty

As Aboriginal children, we had the love, affection and protection of our parents, extended families and Aboriginal communities. We were removed and instead we often received indifference, regimentation, cruelty and abuse from institutional workers or non-Aboriginal foster or adopting families.

Sexual assault and abuse

We had the love, affection and protection of our parents, extended families and Aboriginal communities. We were removed and were sent to non-Aboriginal families and institutions where we were sexually assaulted and abused, and where the adults around us denied or ignored that the abuse was occurring.55

Substituting ‘they’ for ‘we’, the rhetorical strategy of these extracts is reminiscent of the closing statement of a prosecutor. The first-person plural, however, has the effect of simultaneously bearing witness to the harm and prosecuting the crime. That sexual assault and abuse is second on the list highlights the submission’s focus on harm and crime. The third harm is ‘Loss of identity’. While the analysis of identity loss is virtually the same as in The Lost Children, the language in which it is expressed emphasises criminality signified in words such as systemic, deliberate, forcible, and trauma.

The structure of In the Best Interest also migrated the historian into the body of text. As I said above, I was employed by Link-Up to prepare the submission. Among other things this involved two distinct writing functions. I wrote down the arguments and points that the committee wanted the submission to make and compiled them as directed by the committee – that is, Link-Up authored the content, I composed it into written form. I also wrote up the results of my research in the New South Wales archives. In this case I created both the content and the composition and followed a typical academic format of argument supported by evidence that was referenced by footnotes. While for the most part this differentiation of enunciation is reflected in the third person. As part of Link-Up’s editing/revision process, we introduced paragraphs in the first-person plural at key points in this text. This transferred ownership and voice from ‘the historian’ to Link-Up. This effected a merging of the voice of the historian with the voice of the witness. For example, in the extract below the introduction to a major section is in the first-person plural, but the text subsequently reverts to the third person in its exposition of the history.

55 IBI, p. 39.
Multiple and interlocking practices of separation: 1943–1969

Throughout the post-war period, the State used many different tactics to interfere with the social relationships of New South Wales Aboriginals. Separating us from our family, our friends, our communities was an obsession for these officials.

Some Aboriginals ‘exempt’ from the Act

The 1943 amendment extended the AWB’s methods of separation. It enabled the Board to issue ‘exemption certificates’ which ‘deemed’ an Aboriginal person to be not Aboriginal, and therefore exempt from the Aborigines Protection Act. 56

Although this switch of voice is infrequent, it is powerful. I would argue that although the maintenance of the ‘objective’ third-person subject position can tolerate an occasional digression to an authorial ‘I’, a switch of voice to a collective ‘we’ takes possession of the entire historical narrative.

Eye-witnesses to trauma

Trauma is a key discourse through which harm is articulated in In the Best Interest. As I argued above, the 1995 National Consultancy Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health identified grief and trauma as the two most significant mental health issues facing Aboriginal communities, and identified separation as a key underlying cause of both grief and trauma. Additionally, trauma is judicially recognised as a harm to a person’s psychological, emotional or mental well-being. Thus within the juridical discursive context of the Inquiry, the concept of trauma was readily available as a means of expressing harm. As in The Lost Children, first-person eye-witness testimony is the fundamental evidence of the case against separation, despite there being more pages of first-person plural testimony than first-person singular testimony. Unlike the context of elicitation in The Lost Children, within the quasi-judicial context of the Inquiry, the implied question to these witnesses contributing to In the Best Interest is not ‘tell us about separation’, it is ‘tell us how you have been harmed by separation’. Each testimony appears under a title followed by a short note that locates the witness and, in some cases, highlights the harm. For example:

Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly...

This woman was adopted by and grew up in a non-Aboriginal family in the 1950s and 1960s. Her Aboriginality was denied and her sense of self systematically undermined by the everyday racism of White Australians. 57

In hindsight, it is interesting that the information we selected included gender, mode of separation and time period, in addition to manoeuvring the reader to get

56 IBI, p. 88.
57 IBI, p. 125.
the ‘point’ of the testimony. The criticism of Carmel Bird’s editorial intervention raises the question of too much direction. On the other hand, as Gillian Whitlock argues we were fearful that the readers would be ‘unreliable’.

One of the major sections of *In the Best Interest* is ‘Separation and mental health’ and under it, a subsection headed ‘A burden of trauma’. Like many of the contributors to *In the Best Interest*, and unlike the majority of contributors to *The Lost Children*, this narrator bears witness to her traumatic symptoms of harm.

There has been a lot of suicidal feelings for me in all this or as a result of this. It’s a bit of a chicken-and-egg if you know what I mean. This depression, to use Western White medical terms, is characterised by lack of identity and ‘dissociation’ – what I’ve called amnesia. This has been, and continues to be like a curse which pervades my life...

Another woman said: ‘Between the late-fifties to the mid-seventies I spent numerous time in various hospitals in all three states suffering from severe bouts of depression.’ Although *The Lost Children* made the connection between depression, alcoholism and early death and separation, *In the Best Interest* foregrounds and provides evidence in first-person testimony that separation trauma has caused serious, ongoing and long-term mental health issues. Both of these witnesses are fluent in medico/psychological discourse, a silent testimony to their ongoing relationship with mental health diagnostics and treatment.

Trauma arising from sexual abuse is also foregrounded in *In the Best Interest*. The woman I cited just above with bouts of depression described the Catholic orphanage where she grew up as place where sexual abuse was pervasive.

I was to be a target for abuse on almost a daily basis (in different ways) by various people in my childhood and honestly, at that time, believed that this was normal, no better or worse than others.

Four other testimonies in *In the Best Interest* describe childhood sexual abuse. The testimony of a contributor incarcerated in Long Bay Gaol also bears witness to the ongoing traumatic effects of childhood separation. Under the heading ‘Surely life isn’t meant to be so painful…’, his testimony represented his life as continuous incarceration and interpreted his own behaviour in terms of believing that institutional discipline was ‘normal’. At the end of the extract, he refers to the ‘wounds’ and ‘psychological damage’ of separation.

58 Whitlock, Second person, p. 208.
59 In *The Lost Children* Pauline McLeod describes herself as ‘hitting rock bottom’ and feeling suicidal. From within the context of a relatively successful reunion with her Aboriginal family, however, she looks forward to achieving a sense of ‘peace’ (LC, p. 170–71).
60 IBI, p. 127.
61 IBI, p. 203.
Since being taken, firstly through my foster family I’ve been made to believe that simple things like asking to go to the toilet, go next door or wanting to do anything is a privilege not a right. You are made to look at things through another’s eyes and more or less not allowed to make your own mind up or conclusions about things. The boys Home was just a part of life as there was still a lack of love and understanding there! The wanting to be heard or given encouragement.

I joined the army for three and a half years at the end of 1985. It seemed just a part of life as still had the sense of obeying and being ordered and I found it much easier than the others! I adopted to gaol just as easily, still being told what to do and when to do it. It’s been so hard adjusting to what others call a normal lifestyle…

I’d like not only for people to accept that the removal of children was wrong, but somehow try and repair the wounds and the psychological damage done to us and the aftermath.  

Throughout *In the Best Interest*, both testimonies and framing text deploy the mental health discourse of psychological trauma. It is significant that trauma is the only available concept for relating past harm to current psychological suffering and the only psychological harm that is recognisable by the judicial system. The discourse of trauma, however, entails a relatively high level of risk. First, as Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray have pointed out, speaking out about trauma may invite expert interpretation and analysis by psychologists thus placing witnesses in the subordinate role of patient. Second, an admission of traumatisations may create the grounds for challenging the witness’s reliability. One of the critiques emerging in the Stolen Generations debate is the accusation that some of the witnesses are suffering from ‘false memory syndrome’.  

**Going home?**

A final striking difference between the first-person testimonies in *The Lost Children* and those in *In the Best Interest* is in relation to the journey home. The majority of contributors in the former book recount a reasonably positive experience of coming home, whether to their birth families, their community, or to Link-Up. Of the 15 contributors to *In the Best Interest*, six recount horrendously painful homecomings that are a continuing expression of their fundamental disconnection and trauma. For example, the nuns who raised one of the women told...

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63 IBI, p. 150.
64 Alcoff and Gray, Survivor discourse.
65 Kennedy, Stolen Generations Testimony.
66 Some recount negative homecomings to family, but supplemented by positive homecomings to communities or to Link-Up. Each narrative has a sense of non-completion or lack of struggle, but at least a taste of well-being, a hint of a fractured self in process of reassembly. It is a fundamentally optimistic ‘master community narrative’. 
her that her mother was dead. Subsequently, she discovered her mother was in fact alive but, her mother then died four months after their first and only meeting.

She is dead, I only got to see her for two and a half hours in this lifetime. I don’t feel lucky, I feel a sadness and emptiness that I find that every time I try to talk about this it feel that another knife has been driven into my heart.\textsuperscript{67}

Another man, incarcerated in Long Bay Gaol, and who is the second separated generation in his family and whose sister’s children are becoming a third generation, spoke of the difficulties he found in communicating with his family:

It’s very difficult to talk about anything with my family because of the enormous amount of damage done. Each one of us can’t seem to help one another because we’re unable to let our own pain out and deal with it…\textsuperscript{68}

Lastly, a woman who was adopted first recounts her adopting family utterly denying her Aboriginality and then discovering that her birth family ‘passed’ as Indian and wanted nothing to do with her. She says:

There has been a lot of isolation and denial around my Aboriginality and identity, as if my soul has been cut up – gently, slowly...and anonymously...over a long period of time. As if it lies shattered in complete isolation...\textsuperscript{69}

Although all of these contributors speak of gaining strength, acceptance and community from Link-Up and other separated people, there is an overall sense of ongoing devastation, ongoing trauma that, nothing can ever, ever repair. One contributor said: ‘Nothing and no one can repair the spiritual, emotional and cultural bond that was severed...’\textsuperscript{70}; another: ‘They think they don’t owe us anything – they owe us a lot, they owe us a life’.\textsuperscript{71}

**Conclusion: ‘You took our children’**

I began this thesis with a consideration of ‘You took our children’ as a signifier of a structure of injustice that includes a range of people, institutions and practices. I also argued that racism serves to enable white people to believe that Aboriginal victims of racist abuse and exclusion do not experience either harm or wrong as deeply as white people would. In this chapter I have shown how *In the Best Interest of the Child?* arose from an historical context in which separation was increasingly becoming an integrated aspect of the analysis of Aboriginal dispossession and disadvantage. By the mid-1990s, ‘You took our children’ had come to encompass

\textsuperscript{67} IB\textsuperscript{1}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{68} IB\textsuperscript{1}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{69} IB\textsuperscript{1}, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{70} IB\textsuperscript{1}, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{71} IB\textsuperscript{1}, p. 115.
much more than the specific policies and practices of separation; it also provided an explanation for some of the issues that have plagued Aboriginal communities. In particular, separation trauma was able to partially explain some of the underlying causes of Aboriginal deaths in custody and some of the ongoing mental health issues that seemed to keep Aboriginal communities locked in the grip of despair and self-harm which, in turn, undermined many of the programs that addressed material manifestations of disadvantage. I have also shown that the discursive context of the Inquiry enabled and invited particular modes of expression and argument. Although there are significant continuities between the two Link-Up books, *In the Best Interest* is permeated not so much by a sense of lost (or stolen) identity, as of identities and lifetimes ravaged by trauma; it drew far more attention to the ongoing lifetime and intergenerational effects of separation. Furthermore, embedded in the juridical discursive context of the Inquiry, rather than the self-help and counselling context of *The Lost Children, In the Best Interest* used the discourse of international human rights to indict white Australia for its treatment of Aboriginal children and their families.

Reflecting on my role in the writing and production of *In the Best Interest* in light of the discussion of editorial intervention in previous chapters, two issues seem significant. First, Link-Up was constrained in its choice of writers/editors. Probably the ideal situation would have been for Carol Kendall or Lola McNaughton to have had the time to draft the submission. Like most community-based services, however, Link-Up has been under-resourced and under-staffed. Carrying out the day-to-day work of Link-Up’s involvement with the Inquiry, including consultation with HREOC, organising counselling support for people giving testimony, and ongoing public relations work with the media and other interested groups, took enormous time and energy. The fact that I was in the privileged location of being a PhD student enabled me to devote all of my time to the project in a focused way that would have been impossible for Link-Up workers.

Second, my approach to working with Link-Up was shaped by criticism of non-Aboriginal editorial intervention. While an editor’s role in relation to any author is to support and enable the writing project, I was especially conscious of the assimilationist potential of my ‘professional’ judgements. At the same time, Link-Up sometimes asked for my response as a non-Indigenous person as they negotiated the difficult task of creating a submission that was equally credible to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers. Like the other testimonial projects I have discussed in this thesis, conversation with me as a non-Aboriginal interlocutor was one of many rehearsals of the text’s future performances with non-Aboriginal readers. I hope my responses were useful as a barometer of the intelligibility of particular arguments and modes of expression to non-Aboriginal readers. Although I was conscious of trying to listen and re-present what I heard as faithfully as possible, inevitably what I was able to hear was shaped and filtered by my own
experiences as a non-Aboriginal non-Australian, African-American, adopted person. Although I believe that the text is (mostly) what the Link-Up committee wanted it to be, there are, of course, an infinite number of possible other texts that could have been created with other editor/interlocutors in other (equally complex) subject locations.

Like many people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who worked on submissions or heard testimony to the Inquiry, I was deeply affected by the testimonies I heard and the personal relationships I formed with Link-Up community members. The theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 on the transference of the witnessing function fits or explains my own lived experience of listening to and reading separation testimonies. I continue to have a powerful sense of being a witness to a terrible crime and I continue to feel morally obligated to try to assist in the process of negotiating a just recognition and resolution of this and other manifestations of colonial power relations.

Although it may be possible to be motivated to engage in an ethical response to separation through an abstract recognition of the wrongs, I think that first-person narratives – ideally in embodied relationship – are an essential aspect of breaking down racist barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, especially those who inherit the racialised subjectivity of whiteness. In different ways and through different discursive vehicles all of the autobiographical narratives I have discussed (potentially) enable non-Aboriginal readers to have a personal, albeit mediated, experience of Aboriginal people as human beings with the full range of feelings and thoughts that white people have – feelings of right and wrong, justice and injustice, gratitude and anger, love and grief, aspiration and disappointment, hope and despair. Given the demographics of the Australian population, autobiography and other mediated representations may be the only 'personal' contact many non-Indigenous people will have with Indigenous people. Taking up a testimonial speaking position enables Aboriginal narrators to undermine the racist binary opposition between 'savage' and 'civilised' that underpins what Marcia Langton described as 'the taboo on permitting any decency towards Aboriginal people in Australia'. The narratives offer eye-witness evidence that representing Aboriginal people as 'not quite human' is wrong, both factually and morally. This is not to say, however, that the narratives argue that Aboriginal people are identical to white people, and that Aboriginal ways of being are the same as European ways of being. Rather, the narratives assert that Aboriginal people are entitled to the same moral considerations as white people. Although as Cath Ellis argues, it may be that many white readers frame the (im)morality of the narratives in terms of behaviour that is unacceptable for adults towards children, the narratives represent these behaviours as specifically and intentionally racist. It seems to me that a reader would have to work to ignore the narrators' foregrounding of the significance of racism in the workings of separation.

Langton, Marcia Langton responds.
Separation narratives bear witness to the microlevel operations of racism. Each of the narratives shows us precisely how racism works in everyday Australian life—its technologies, its excuses, its expressions and its effects. In particular they show us precisely how exclusion from moral community is carried out. From the unique perspective of people who were subjected to deliberate ‘de-Aboriginalisation’ and ‘white-ification’, the contributors to the five texts I have examined make whiteness visible by drawing attention to how it is performed and articulated through the specificities of class and gender by ordinary white Australians in their homes and communities. The demand recounted by many separated people that they share or adopt racist denigration of or condescension towards ‘Aborigines’ shows us how (some) whitenesses are socially constructed in opposition to Aboriginality (and, conversely, as Marcia Langton points out, how Aboriginalities are created intersubjectively in relation to whitenesses). At the same time, they show us that the cost of dehumanising others is the dehumanisation of the self. The narratives are not essentialist in their approach to racism—they do not argue that people who are white are necessarily racist. Quite the reverse, all of the longer narratives and many of the shorter narratives include representations of people who are white and do not engage in racism. Racism is represented as pervasive but not all encompassing, suggesting that individual white people can and do make the choice to resist racism.

‘The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’

In this last section of the thesis I want to reflect on the use of the term genocide in In the Best Interest. African-American writer Audre Lorde argued in the 1970s that the language of the conqueror is a fundamental barrier to resisting oppressions. The criticism of editorial intervention as ‘desecration’ of a text emerges from a similar perception of the power of discourse to recuperate the subversive potential of subordinate counter-discourse. Throughout this study I have highlighted the historical contingency of the enunciation of Aboriginal representations of separation since the early 1970s using a variety of discursive tools. I would like to end with some thoughts on the use of the discursive tools made available through international human rights discourse, particularly the application of the term genocide to the laws, policies and practices of separation. It is an issue that has disturbed me for some time.

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73 As far as I know there are no studies of the social construction of specifically Australian everyday whiteness comparable to Ruth Frankenberg’s anthropological study of women’s whitenesses in the United States. See Ruth Frankenberg, White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993.

74 Marcia Langton, ‘Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television’: an essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things, Australian Film Commission, Sydney, 1993.

As a starting point, it is crucial that, as non-Aboriginal people, we listen to and respect Aboriginal analysis of the history of colonisation. That is, like Deborah Bird Rose, whose work *Hidden Histories* I quoted in Chapter 1, we must acknowledge the interpretive work of Aboriginal historians, including community historians like Link-Up, in creating meaningful representations of the past using the discursive tools at their disposal in specific historical contexts. The most significant question may not be whether or not separation fits the legal definition of genocide or falls within the scope of the historical precedent of the Holocaust, but rather what insights into Aboriginal analysis of the structure of injustice of separation does the use of the term genocide offer? That is, what truth might the term genocide express about the harms and wrongs of separation? What truths might it fail to express?

It seems to me that the term genocide accurately captures Aboriginal experience of European desire for Aboriginal disappearance from New South Wales. The language of 'eliminating the populations of Aboriginal camps' used in the NSW parliamentary debates I quoted in Chapter 3 supports an interpretation of genocidal intent. Furthermore, the representation of 'Aborigines' as a 'dying race' (which has permeated European representations of southeastern Aboriginal people) and the legal fiction of *terra nullius* indicate a wider discourse of European desire for and imagination of a White Australian landscape devoid of Aboriginal presence. Furthermore, the NSW Aborigines Protection Board's policy on separation was developed at an historical moment of panic over the decline of the white birth rate and, with the formation of the new nation, a vision of Australia's future as a white man's nation. The laws enabling the separation of both Aboriginal and white children from their families were means to the end of controlling the population and to eradicate undesirable elements – criminals, prostitutes, vagrants, degenerates and 'Aborigines'.

The term genocide also captures Aboriginal historical experience of Europeans as murderous – memories of massacres and poisonings continue to circulate within Aboriginal communities, Keith Windschuttle's campaign of denial notwithstanding. Jimmie Barker's narrative recounted his employer's threat to poison him if he rebelled against white authority, thus drawing on and reinforcing tacit knowledge of prior poisonings of Aboriginals in New South Wales. Aboriginal people have experienced Europeans as life threatening in other ways – through withholding access to food, water, land, employment and other means of subsistence, including on government-run stations and institutions and, as Margaret Tucker recounted, in the midst of suburban affluence. Aboriginal use of the term genocide captures a significant aspect of the history of colonisation – the experience of the many European expressions of the desire that Aboriginal people did not exist.

Inga Clendinnen has argued against understanding separation as cultural genocide on the grounds that taking 'the murder out of genocide is to render it vacuous'.

Certainly, the concept of genocide fundamentally refers to killing people – its
cognates homicide, regicide, patricide all refer to murder, each term specifying a particular social relationship between the murderer and the victim. Moreover, the term genocide as a crime against humanity came into being in the wake of the systematic murder of Jews (and others) by Nazi Germany. It is therefore irrevocably associated with the Holocaust which, in turn, makes comparative analysis unavoidable. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families did not aim to bring about physical death, but rather, as John Frow argues, it sought the ‘social death’ of the children as Aboriginals without offering the chance of ‘social rebirth’ in white society.\footnote{Frow, Politics of stolen time, p. 358.} Thus, using an active rather than passive voice, we could think of separation as social murder directed against a people who, like the Jews, were constructed by the majority as a ‘despised race’.

Countering Clendinnen, Raimond Gaita argues that, in his view, at some times and places the separation of Aboriginal children from their families did constitute the crime of genocide as defined under the UN Convention on Genocide. More interestingly, however, he argues that looking closely at separation,

> one will also conclude, perhaps with a shock, that they [Aboriginal people] suffered crimes worse than genocide.\footnote{Gaita, Why the impatience?, p. 27.}

Although Gaita does not explain what worse crimes he means, I think this assessment is correct. Genocide fails to grasp the violence of separation in the same way that ‘murder’ cannot adequately represent the violence of ‘torture’. At the microlevel, separation more closely resembles the crime of torture where the aim is to keep the victim alive while nevertheless killing them socially (or psychologically, or spiritually) and bending them to the will of torturer. In a 1993 paper, Link-Up outreach worker Carol Kendall described separation as sadism.

> A sadist could not have devised a better system. First, abruptly, without explanation and without preparation, remove a young child from the parents and other people who for the first 9 months (in the case of adopted babies) or 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 years of life have loved and cared for him or her and formed the basis of all significant relationships, sense of self and identity. Second, isolate the now totally confused and traumatised child either in an institution where he or she becomes just a number, or in a family of total strangers who look and act differently from what the child is used to. Third, deliberately and systematically condition the child, now utterly dependent on European strangers for physical and emotional care (survival), to despise Aboriginality and Aboriginals and to respect and emulate Europeans, and if the child is fair enough and young enough – to think of themselves as Europeans.\footnote{Carol Kendall, History, Present and Future Issues Affecting Aboriginal Adults Who Were Removed as Children from their Families under the NSW Protection Act, 1883–1969, Paper}
We do not yet have a language to signify the crime of separation – a complex structure of injustice that realised a deeply embedded culture of genocidal desire for *terra nullius* through a systematic effort to destroy the many relationships with others that make human life worth living. Separation deliberately sought to break the bonds of love between family members, the sense of belonging to and being valued by a community, the sense of belonging to a land and a history, a sense of hope for the future, a feeling of pride in accomplishment, in short the many connections of the human spirit to other people. Aboriginal activist Kevin Gilbert has come closest to adequate describing this social murder as ‘rape of the soul’. In its signification of a magnitude of suffering and horror perpetrated against an entire people, the historical example of the Final Solution and the international human rights term ‘genocide’ evoke the experience of separation as mass social murder perpetrated by the State with the willing cooperation of the majority of white citizens. Genocide, however, does not, address the particularities of Indigenous histories, either in Australia or elsewhere. There is yet no tool in the master’s tool box that adequately represents the enormity of ‘you took our children’.

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Presented at the Fourth National Conference for Contemporary Issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1993 (quoted in *In the Best Interest*, p. 171).

80 Cited by Peter Read in the epigraph of Rape of the Soul.
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