

*An Appreciation
of Difference*

WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia

Edited by
Melinda Hinkson
and Jeremy Beckett



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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that this publication contains names and images of deceased persons, and culturally sensitive material. AIATSIS apologises for any distress this may cause.

Cover images: (front) WEH Stanner in his room at University House, Australian National University, c. 1958; (back, L-R) Major WEH Stanner, 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit, c. 1942, AWM, PO4393.001; Stanner at a campfire, Fitzmaurice River, c. 1958; Stanner during fieldwork in the Daly River region, c. 1932.

Foreword

Bill Stanner's extraordinary career took him from the bureaucracy to the academy. He had a distinguished career in the British colonial service, and briefly in the Australian department of external affairs. He reached the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Australian Army and commanded the North Australian Observer Unit during World War II. He was a foundation member of the Department of Anthropology at the Australian National University. Bill Stanner was also a central figure in the establishment of what would become the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, an organisation I am proud to currently chair, and was, in fact, the Institute's first executive member.

Stanner had been a tireless critic of the treatment of Aboriginal people since the 1930s, and of the policy of assimilation that dominated the state's relationship with Indigenous Australia from the 1940s. A result of the 1967 referendum was the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, a key body advising on new government policies in relation to Aboriginal people. The council rejected the policy of assimilation in favour of proper recognition of a unique Aboriginal identity, cultural expression, and land rights. Together with Nugget Coombs and Barrie Dexter as co-members, Stanner played a unique role in overseeing reform in Aboriginal Affairs.

However, after three decades of bipartisan support for a broad policy platform of choice that the council promoted, the last 10 years has seen processes of attrition, combativeness and outright hostility in Indigenous affairs. During its last term in office, the Howard government was emboldened to implement its true intentions in Indigenous affairs, having secured an unexpected majority in both the House of Representatives and

Contents

Foreword	iii
Illustrations	xi
Acknowledgments	xiii
Contributors	xv
 'Going more than half way to meet them': On the life and legacy of WEH Stanner <i>Jeremy Beckett and Melinda Hinkson</i>	 1
 PART 1. DIVERSE FIELDS	
1. 'A chance to be of some use to my country': Stanner during World War II <i>Geoffrey Gray</i>	27
2. Stanner and Makerere: On the 'insuperable' challenges of practical anthropology in post-war East Africa <i>Melinda Hinkson</i>	44
3. WEH Stanner and the foundation of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, 1959-1964 <i>John Mulvaney</i>	58
4. Stanner: Reluctant bureaucrat <i>Barrie Dexter</i>	76
 PART 2. IN PURSUIT OF TRANSCENDENT VALUE	
5. Frontier encounter: Stanner's Durmugam <i>Jeremy Beckett</i>	89
6. Journey to the source: In pursuit of Fitzmaurice rock art and the High Culture <i>Melinda Hinkson</i>	102
7. Stanner's veil: Transcendence and the limits of scientific inquiry <i>Peter Sutton</i>	115

8. 'Religion', 'magic', 'sign' and 'symbol' in Stanner's approach to Aboriginal religions	<i>Ian Keen</i>	126
9. 'Joyous maggots': The symbolism of Yolngu mortuary rituals	<i>Howard Morphy</i>	137
10. Indigenous songs as 'operational structures of transactional life': A study of song genres at Wadeye	<i>Alberto Furlan</i>	151
PART 3. LAND AND PEOPLE		
11. Stanner and Aboriginal land use: Ecology, economic change, and enclosing the commons	<i>Peter Sutton</i>	169
12. 'Too sociological'? Revisiting 'Aboriginal territorial organization'	<i>Nicolas Peterson</i>	185
13. Stanner, <i>Mfiritpuu</i> , and the Woodward Royal Commission	<i>Nancy Williams</i>	198
14. Counting the cost: Stanner and the Port Keats/Wadeye population	<i>John Taylor</i>	217
PART 4. A PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL		
15. WEH Stanner and the historians	<i>Ann Curthoys</i>	233
16. After the Dreaming: The Boyer lecturer as social critic	<i>Tim Rouse</i>	251
17. From 'After the Dreaming' to 'After land rights': WEH Stanner's legacy as Indigenous policy intellectual	<i>Jon Altman</i>	271
Index		283

Illustrations

Bill Stanner during fieldwork in the Port Keats region, c. 1950s.	page 6
Bill Stanner at the SAS 'Long Vigil' exercise, north Australia, 1977	15
Major William Edward Hanley Stanner, c. 1942	36
Stanner outside the British consulate, South Pacific, c. 1947-53	49
Some members of the National Conference on Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1961	68
Stanner at a meeting of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs and state ministers, Adelaide 1968	82
Durrnugan, Daly River region, c. 1950s.	95
Nym Bunduck, Providence Hill, c. 1954	109
<i>Djanba</i> dancing at Wadeye, c. 1950s	120
Stanner's wet season camp, Port Keats region, c. 1935	132
A <i>yingapungapu</i> ground sculpture, Yilpara, 2000	141
The maggot dancers, Yilpara, 2004	142
<i>Wangga</i> dancing, Port Keats, c. 1950s	161
Bill Stanner and Peter Sutton, c. 1979	177
Mairiwanda and Maringa men in dugout canoe, c. 1935	191
Aborigines who accompanied Stanner from Port Keats to Daly River, 1935	201
Men tilling gardens, Port Keats, c. 1950s	220
Launch of the first issue of <i>Aboriginal History</i> , Canberra 1978	242
Stanner in his room at the Australian National University, c. 1958	261
Aborigines who accompanied Stanner from Port Keats to Daly River, 1935	275

FIGURES

Figure 1. Counts and estimates of the Aboriginal population of Port Keats Mission/Wadeye/Thamarrurr, 1947 to 2003.	222
Figure 2. Aboriginal population of Port Keats and the Thamarrurr region by age and sex, 1956 and 2003.	225

TABLE

Table 1. Murrinh-patha age divisions.	226
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Acknowledgments

November 2005 marked the centenary of Bill Stanner's birth. To celebrate this occasion we organised a symposium *WEH Stanner: Anthropologist and Public Intellectual*, held over two days at the Australian National University, Canberra. We were drawn to do so on the basis of our different acquaintances with Stanner's work: Stanner had been Jeremy's PhD thesis supervisor at the ANU in the 1960s and sometime friend; Melinda never knew Stanner but came to know some of his unpublished materials while working as a research project officer at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in 2001, and subsequently as a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research between 2001 and 2003.

The symposium was attended by more than 100 scholars, Stanner's colleagues, family and friends, as well as descendants of Aboriginal men Stanner had worked with for more than four decades at Port Keats/Wadeye. Most of the chapters in this volume received their first public airing at that forum.

The symposium was sponsored by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian National University through the National Centre for Indigenous Studies, the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, the School of Archaeology and Anthropology, and University House.

Presentations were also made at the symposium by Graeme Ward, Mark Crocombe, Basil Dodd, the late Lawrence Kolumboort, Marcia Langton, Max Charlesworth and David Nash. For various reasons these presentations have not been included here. In developing the volume we invited Tim Rowse to contribute an essay on the Boyer Lectures, and Melinda Hinkson's chapter on Stanner's 1958 expedition to the Fitzmaurice region was written to fill what we felt were two important gaps in the coverage of Stanner's career.

For their roles in the book's production we thank the following: the contributors; Rhonda Black and the team at Aboriginal Studies Press; Mark MacLean and Frances Morphy; and two anonymous readers whose comments were helpful in the revision of the manuscript as a whole. We also thank ANU for its contribution of a publishing subsidy. For permission to produce images we thank ANU Archives, AIATSIS and the Australian War Memorial. For her enthusiastic support for the project overall we are particularly grateful to Mrs Patricia Stanner.

The contributors to the volume are mainly academics, including anthropologists, prehistorians and historians who either worked with or knew Stanner in various capacities. The reader will note that they broadly represent a particular demographic. Consequently only three are women, and — apart from Mick Dodson who wrote the book's foreword — none are Aboriginal, a fact that is regrettable but reflective of circumstances and the time that has passed since Stanner's death in 1981.

For younger generations of scholars Stanner is probably a remote and intriguing figure. We hope these essays that trace some of the key moments in his long and distinguished career and his contributions to Australian intellectual and public life will prove illuminating and occasionally provocative. The book's title is taken from Stanner's 1968 Boyer lectures, *After the Dreaming*. It is being published at a time when his notion of 'a great Australian silence' has perhaps been overcome by a great cacophony, one that Stanner would regard as often poorly culturally informed.

Melinda Hinkson and Jeremy Beckett
August 2008

Contributors

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Jeremy Beckett is an anthropologist with a particular interest in the place of Indigenous peoples in settler colonial society. He works among Aborigines in far-west New South Wales, and with Torres Strait Islanders in the Strait and in mainland Australia. Foremost among his many publications are *Torres Strait Islanders: custom and colonialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), and the edited collection *Past and present: the construction of Aboriginality* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994). As a graduate student, he had Bill Stanner as one of his supervisors. He is currently Emeritus Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Sydney University.

Ann Curthoys is Manning Clark Professor of History at the Australian National University and an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow. She has written about many aspects of Australian history, including Aboriginal-European relations; racially restrictive immigration policies; the Chinese in colonial Australia; journalism; television; and 'second wave' feminism. She also writes about historical theory and historical writing. Her books include *Freedom Ride: a Freedom Rider remembers* (Allen & Unwin, 2002), winner of the Stanner Prize, and, with John Docker, *Is history fiction?* (University of New South Wales Press, 2005). Her latest book, *Rights and redemption: history, law, and Indigenous people*, written with Ann Genovese and Alexander Reilly, will be published by UNSW Press in 2008.

Barrie Dexter, CBE, served from 1967 to 1976 with WEH Scanner and HC 'Nugget' Coombs as the Council for Aboriginal Affairs. During this time he established and served as director/secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Over the course of this career he has held many senior diplomatic posts, including positions in Lebanon, Cairo, Karachi, Washington DC. He served as high commissioner/ambassador in Gilana and Laos, Yugoslavia/Romania/Bulgaria and Canada. On his retirement Barrie contributed to the re-establishment of CARE Australia, becoming vice president and Australian representative on the board of CARE International until 1995.

Alberto Furlan graduated in Philosophy at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, Italy and completed postgraduate studies in anthropology at the University of Sydney. He lived and worked in Wadeye (2002–03) undertaking research on traditional and popular Aboriginal music. Other areas of research include Indigenous cosmology, performance, and continuity and change in Aboriginal society. He is currently employed as regional anthropologist by the Central Land Council in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory.

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Ian Keen studied anthropology at University College London and at the Australian National University. He has carried out research on kinship, social organisation and religion in north-east Arnhem Land, and on Aboriginal relations to land in several locations including the Alligator River region and McLaren Creek in the Northern Territory, and Gippsland in Victoria. His publications include *Knowledge and secrecy in an Aboriginal religion* (Clarendon Press, 1994), and *Aboriginal economy and society* (Oxford University Press, 2004). He lectured in anthropology at the University of Queensland and the Australian National University, where he is currently a visiting fellow.

Howard Morphy is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Research School of Humanities at the Australian National University. He has published widely in the anthropology of art, aesthetics, performance, museum anthropology, Aboriginal social organisation, the history of anthropology, visual anthropology and religion. His current focus is on the use of digital media in anthropological research and publication. His books include *Ancestral connections: art and an Aboriginal system of knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), *Rethinking visual anthropology* (Yale University Press, edited with Marcus Banks, 1997), *Aboriginal art* (Phaidon, 1998) and *Becoming art: exploring cross-cultural categories* (Berg 2007).

John Mulvaney was the first university-trained pre-historian to make Australia his subject. From 1971 until his retirement in 1985 he was professor in pre-history in the Faculty of Arts at the ANU, and his *Preliminary of Australia* has been published in three editions. He served 18 years on the executive of the (then) Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, including a term as chairman, and also on the Committee of Inquiry on Museums in 1974–75 which preceded the establishment of the National Museum of Australia.

Nicolas Peterson is Professor of Anthropology in the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University. His doctoral fieldwork focused on territorial organisation and ecology in Arnhem Land with self-supporting groups. Subsequently he has worked in central Australia on Warlpiri territorial organisation, ceremonial life and song cycles. As a result of his interest in territorial organisation he was appointed research officer to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights in 1973–74, and as a consequence has had a long involvement in preparing land and native title claims, including the test case for native title in the sea with Jeannie Devitt.

Tim Rowse is a Senior Research Fellow in the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. Researching his book *Obligated to be difficult* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) brought him into close contact with Scanner as a policy intellectual. Tim researches and teaches Australian Indigenous history, and he comments on current developments in Indigenous policy. His most recent book is *Divided nation? Indigenous affairs and the imagined public* (Melbourne University Press 2007, co-authored with Murray Goot).

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and linguist, he has worked with Aboriginal people since 1969. His books include *Art and land: Aboriginal sculptures of the Lake region* (with Philip Jones, South Australian Museum and Wakefield Press, 1986), *Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia* (George Braziller Publishers in association with the Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1988), and *Native title in Australia: an ethnographic perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). He is currently writing a book on Wik ceremonial sculptures of Cape York Peninsula.

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Nancy Williams is currently Honorary Reader in Anthropology, School of Social Science, University of Queensland. Her research with Yolngu clans in north-eastern Arnhem Land since 1969 has focused on land and sea tenure and resource management. Her book, *The Yolngu and their land: a system of land tenure and the fight for its recognition* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), is based on the Yolngu preparation for and participation in the Milirrpuu case. Nancy is also author of *Two laws: managing dispute in a contemporary Aboriginal community* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987).

'Going more than half way to meet them': On the life and legacy of WEH Stanner

JEREMY BECKETT AND MELINDA HINKSON

WEH Stanner is one of Australia's best known and most highly regarded anthropologists. He died in 1981, but more than a quarter of a century after his death his writings and ideas on Aboriginal culture and affairs continue to be cited by observers from a range of perspectives, both within and outside the academy. It seems there is still much in his work that commands attention and stimulates thought. This abiding interest in Stanner's work suggests that he had grasped something unresolved at the core of the encounter between Aborigines and those who came after, which even now remains at the heart of the debate over what it means to be Australian. This collection of essays reviews his intellectual legacy and a career that was variously significant: in the public domain there is his 1968 Boyer Lectures which alerted a wide audience to the situation of Australia's Aborigines, and there is his work with HC 'Nugget' Coombs and Barrie Dexter on the Council for Aboriginal Affairs; among anthropologists, there is his writings on Aboriginal religion, social organisation, and his expert witness in the first legal case on Aboriginal land rights. But Stanner's career is itself interesting because it reminds us of what it was like to have to make one's way in an Australia that was very much smaller and academically less developed than it is now, and moreover to have one's career plans interrupted by a world war. It is also interesting because Stanner was a particular kind of man, one whose qualities both contributed to — and perhaps also at times inhibited — his achievements.

Recalling his early career, Bill Stanner explained to Jeremy Beckett that when he went to the University of Sydney in 1928 it was something that few Australians did, and he felt it incumbent upon him to make a significant contribution to the life of a country that still numbered less than seven million people. How he was to do so was not immediately clear to him; had he simply been driven by material ambition he might have gone for one of

the professions, or persisted with the journalism by which he lived while he studied. He might have made a career in economics, the subject that first attracted him to the university. Instead he found anthropology, and in due course undertook field work with Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Yet, however intellectually satisfying writing for a small and relatively uninfluential discipline might have been, it virtually precluded any impact on public affairs, which he also wanted to make. Stanner's subsequent career was in effect a tussle between these two kinds of commitments. At several moments, a career on the conservative side of politics seemed a possibility. Instead he became an academic anthropologist at the Australian National University (ANU). Late in his career, though, he was to exert an informed influence in the rethinking of official policy on Aborigines. He was the first — and till now the only — anthropologist ever to be invited to deliver the Australian Broadcasting Service's annual Boyer Lectures. This gave him the opportunity to air his disquiet to an audience far wider than his university colleagues, and he made good use of it. *After the Dreaming*, delivered in a pleasant, rather cultivated voice, achieved a balance between plain words and eloquence that spoke to many. Writing for anthropologists, his style could be dense and difficult; writing for the general reader it flowed gracefully, illuminating each insight with a deft turn of phrase that was not quickly forgotten. Stanner's Boyer Lectures were reprinted seven times, and are still cited 40 years after they were delivered. Within their pages lies the clearest expression of Stanner's deep uneasiness about the past, present, and future place of Aborigines in Australian society. In tracing his working life through its stops and starts this concern is a key recurring theme, as is his passionate espousal of Aboriginal 'High Culture'.

In this introductory essay we have two aims. Firstly, we present a broadbrush account of Stanner's career, situating it in the events and currents of the years in which he lived.¹ The second part of this introduction briefly considers Stanner's legacy in terms of contemporary debates on Aboriginal policy and anthropology, themes which are then explored in more detail and greater particularity in the essays that follow.

A CAREER OF STOPS AND STARTS

William Edward Hanley Stanner was born in Parramatta, Sydney, in 1905. His father died when he was three, leaving the family in straitened circumstances. In his mid teens, like most of his generation, he left school to help support his family. He presently found work as a journalist but was restless and began to feel the need for further education, making time to study for the matriculation exam that would qualify him for university entrance. Somehow juggling his journalistic duties with attendance at university lectures, Stanner began studying economics at the University of Sydney in 1928. However,

his path was diverted to anthropology after hearing a dazzling lecture by the foundation professor, AR Radcliffe-Brown. Others have attested to the impact of 'RB' on undergraduates of the time: his elegance of mind and dress, his readiness to talk about just about anything, and seemingly 'give life meaning' (Ian Hogbin in Beckett 1989, p. 9). Forty years later, Stanner recalled the impression in the *Encyclopedia of the social sciences*:

A tall man with a distinguished air and presence, strikingly handsome and in his prime, he often captivated people as much by his charm, wit, and cultivation as by the appeal of his ideas. He was a particularly brilliant teacher who was so much the master of his subject, and of the arts of the rostrum and seminar, that he could expound the most difficult topics without notes or any outward hint of preparation. His writings gave the same impression (Stanner 1968, p. 286).

In later years, Radcliffe-Brown's students came to regard him more sceptically; Stanner, as this quotation suggests, retained a reverence for him, and in his writings often asked himself how 'RB' would have approached a problem, had it come his way.

Radcliffe-Brown left Sydney before Stanner graduated at the end of 1931, but he stayed long enough to fire the young man with a desire to work in Aboriginal Australia. However, it was Raymond Firth, the temporary head of the anthropology department, and later AP Elkin, the next professor, who supervised his research in the Northern Territory. After lengthy consideration, and advice from the American linguist, Gerhardt Laves, who had travelled through the region and reported the presence of 'unspoiled savages' (Barwick et al. 1985, p. 4), Stanner decided to make the Daly River the focus of his first field work. However, rather than the 'uncontaminated natives' he had been led to expect, Stanner was confronted with a social order in the process of profound transformation: colonial relations had restructured Aboriginal ways of life to an extent that those in the academy and government seemed unaware of. Stanner spent seven months in the Daly River region in 1932 and, after completing his Master of Arts thesis in April 1934, he headed north again, this time via western New South Wales and central Australia where he conducted surveys of Aboriginal groups for Elkin. He spent the wet season of 1934–35 in the Daly River region and accompanied the Catholic missionary Father Richard Docherry from Darwin to establish the new mission settlement at Port Kears.

Stanner's experience of the Territory in the 1930s established concerns that would preoccupy the last 25 years of his life. His direct observation of the plight of Aborigines on the urban fringes, particularly the Warumungu of Tennant Creek, both fired his imagination and disturbed his sense of social justice. His attention to this process gave him a heightened appreciation of

anthropology's need to theorise cultural transformation — the subject of his master's thesis and the problem with which in one form or another he would continue to grapple throughout his life. And finally, having spent an extended period of time in an area where settlers were struggling in a rough environment to make a livelihood in the face of drought and global depression — graphically described in 'Durmugam: a Nangiomeri', the subject of Jeremy Beckett's chapter — Stanner developed an appreciation of the complex challenges of development, and a critical base from which he would later approach developmental dilemmas in East Africa.

Back in Sydney, Stanner knew that if he wanted to continue as an anthropologist he would have to get a doctorate and, since Australian universities at that time awarded nothing higher than a master's degree, he would have to go England. Having completed his field work he arrived there in October 1936. While the prospect of working with Radcliffe-Brown at Oxford was appealing, the need to secure paid employment led Brown at Oxford was appealing, the need to secure paid employment led Stanner, along with other young Australians — such as Ian Hogbin, CWM Hart, Ralph Piddington and Phyllis Kaberry — to the London School of Economics (LSE) and the formidable Bronislaw Malinowski. Since the early years of the twentieth century the LSE had been the most innovative centre for anthropology, though Radcliffe-Brown had just taken up the chair at Oxford. Malinowski's seminars drew as many as 70 people, including colonial administrators and Indigenous intellectuals, notably Jomo Kenyatta, who would one day be the president of Kenya.

The seminars were stimulating but also challenging for a person unprepared for such an arena, let alone Malinowski's gratuitous sarcasm. While Stanner had a grudging respect for the man he had little liking for him, in contrast with his regard for the urbane Radcliffe-Brown. In later years he did not have much to say about the anthropology scene in London and his talk was more about the broader political ferment around the LSE and the dramatic events in Europe. As a student without private means it seems he had little time for socialising; while completing his doctorate in two years he supported himself financially through journalism and the research work that Raymond Firth put his way.² The only lasting friendship he made at the LSE was with Firth, who played a key role in securing each of the three academic posts Stanner held after completing his PhD. Firth, as well as overseeing Stanner's appointments in Africa, was an important connection for Stanner after the war, when almost all the anthropology jobs in Australasia seemed to be in his gift. While in London he also briefly worked for the Commonwealth Treasurer, RG Casey, and made the acquaintance of the Australian High Commissioner, Lord Bruce.³ He was invited by the Secretariat of the League of Nations to become a 'temporary collaborator' at the 1937 session — the purpose being to educate young people about the League.

By the end of the 1930s Malinowski's intellectual dominance of British anthropology was on the wane. Many of his students were beginning to reject his biologically based functionalism in favour of the structural functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown. Moreover, it was from research in Africa, rather than the Pacific, that the new ideas were emerging, notably from Evans-Pritchard, Fortes and Gluckman; even Malinowski had been looking at change in Africa. Meanwhile, prospects for research positions back in Australia were bleaker than ever. Thus in 1938 Stanner took up a post with an Oxford-based team and began field work in Kenya, investigating colonial governance and economic development, in which he could draw on his early training in economics. This research was prematurely terminated by the outbreak of war. Although spending only seven months in the field he still drafted a book-length manuscript based on his research among the Kamba. He returned to this writing after the war, but it remained unpublished.

Had war not broken out Stanner might perhaps have become an Africanist and followed a career in Britain. Instead he headed back to Australia and, although too old to enlist, looked for ways to contribute to the war effort. As Geoffrey Gray's chapter explains, these took a variety of forms. He was appointed adviser to successive ministers for the Army, Spender and Forde. He worked on issues of national morale, reviving his journalistic skills and making radio broadcasts, as well as writing submissions to government. With Japan's entry into the war northern Australia came under threat, and Stanner's bushcraft and organisational skills were suddenly in demand. He was enlisted to establish the North Australia Observer Unit, the 'Nackeroos' as they became known, of which he was then put in charge with the rank of major. His zest for the experience seems to have been fired by the stories of the military grandfather after whom he had been named, and he loved to talk about his time with the Nackeroos in later years.⁴ But after a little more than a year he was redeployed to the Army's Directorate of Research, which was a less happy experience. As Gray observes, Stanner was out of sympathy, politically and perhaps also personally, with his colleagues, and since their advice on colonial matters seemed to have the ear of the Labor government of the day, the more conservative Stanner found himself on the outer even after the war ended.⁵

Upon his demobilisation, Stanner worked for various agencies reporting on the reconstruction of the war-devastated Pacific colonies, and then in 1947 accepted an appointment as the foundation director of the East African Institute of Social Research. As Melinda Hinkson describes, Stanner was frustrated by various difficulties in this post, and with no time for his own research he finally gained a readership in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the newly established Australian National University.

Stanner arrived in Canberra in 1950. Siegfried Nadel, who took up the chair about the same time, was a brilliant mind, if somewhat arrogant and overbearing. Concerned to broaden the base of anthropology as it was studied at Australian universities during this period, Nadel insisted that his be a department of anthropology and sociology, and initially wanted to include psychology as well. However, apart from one study in social psychology by Ronald Penny, and one in the sociology of migration by Jean Martin, the research scholars and fellows worked mainly in New Guinea and India.

This regional focus reflected the original thinking about the appropriate scope of the department.⁶ Only Peter Worsley worked in Aboriginal Australia, and only then because he was refused permission to work in New Guinea. The New Guinea Highlands were particularly beckoning, with their recently contacted peoples still engaged in ceremonial exchange and periodic warfare. By comparison, Aboriginal Australia seemed to offer



Bill Stanner during fieldwork in the Port Keats region, c. 1950s. Photographer unknown, Stanner Collection, ALATSIS N861-3.

meagre anthropological rewards. A few years later, Mervyn Meggitt's verdict was that 'none of the Australian field work with which I am acquainted (and I include my own) has produced data on which can be based what I would take to be a valid structural functionalist analysis of Aboriginal society' (Sheils 1963, p. 216).

Stanner had not been involved in Aboriginal Australia since the 1930s. During the first half of the 1950s he made two brief visits back to the Murrinh-patha in north Australia, but it was not immediately apparent that he would give Aboriginal anthropology his undivided attention. Indeed, given that his readership in the Research School of Pacific Studies was in 'Comparative institutions' it is not surprising that Stanner was strongly encouraged to continue working in the Pacific, including taking on the role as Australian representative on the South Pacific Commission, which brought together the various colonial administrations. His writings of this period were mainly concerned with questions of colonial policy and development in Africa and the Pacific; his main publication was *South Seas in transition* (1953) which drew on his post-war reconstruction work in Fiji, Samoa and New Guinea.⁷ This would be the only book-length study Stanner would publish, apart from his collection of essays *White man got no Dreaming* (1979a). Finally in a secure academic position, Stanner was able to experiment with a variety of topics, some theoretical, others ethnographic, some of which he published, others he set aside. It was only from around 1954 that he began to focus wholeheartedly on Aboriginal matters.

By the 1950s, the anthropology of Aboriginal Australia was in a run-down state, with an air of antiquarianism about it that was no longer acceptable to a discipline that claimed to situate itself in the 'ethnographic present'. Radcliffe-Brown's students, Lloyd Warner, Kaberry, Piddington, Lauriston Sharp and Hart, were no longer in Australia. Of the four senior figures still in the country, Elkin was nearing retirement, Donald Thomson at Melbourne had no students and had little to do with other anthropologists, while TGH Strehlow at Adelaide was preoccupied with Arrente and little else. Ursula McConnell had never had a university appointment and worked in isolation, though still writing; she was to die in 1957. The only anthropologists actively engaged in field work in Australia were Elkin's students, Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Marie Reay and Mervyn Meggitt, and even they by the mid 1950s had chosen to do their doctoral work in the New Guinea Highlands.⁸

Formal in dress and manner — recalling his days with the military — and Anglicised in speech after his years in England, Stanner's political conservatism did not endear him to colleagues whose sympathies seemed to be predominantly on the left. He was, however, close to Nadel, with whom he shared a commitment to the development of anthropological theory. In

1955 Derek Freeman joined the department as a Research Fellow. He was to remain there for the rest of his career, as was Stanner, and while relations between them were initially cordial⁹ they became increasingly difficult, and at times hostile. At the beginning of 1956 Nadel died suddenly, and after Edmund Leach had been offered and declined his chair, Stanner and Freeman became the principal contenders, as well as alternate heads of school. The university delayed the decision over the chair for a year, and in June 1957 Stanner left for field work in Port Keats. Shortly after his departure the ANU offered the chair to John Barnes. Stanner felt he had been misled about the appointment,¹⁰ and although he returned briefly to Canberra in 1958 he spent considerable time over the next two years in the north. During this period he undertook what for a normally sedentary man in his fifties were two astonishingly strenuous expeditions into the Fitzmaurice River region of north Australia to locate and record the rock art of the area. The first of these journeys, as described by Melinda Hinkson, was both inspired by and fuelled his increasing fascination with Aboriginal religion (see also Jeremy Beckett's chapter on Durmugan).

Anthropology in the 1950s, particularly British anthropology, was uninterested in religion, except insofar as it could be reduced to social structure. Even Nadel was sceptical about the value of writing about religion. Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer religion* was to change all this, but when it first appeared in 1956 it too was received with some scepticism. Stanner's essays, which he began sketching in 1953, perplexed other anthropologists; they seemed not to be in dialogue with current anthropology, rather harking back to writers earlier in the century. However, the completion of the *Oceania* series and its publication *On Aboriginal Religion* (Stanner 1963), and as 'Religion, totemism, and symbolism' in 1965, did much to establish Stanner's professional reputation, although it remained for later generations to appreciate the extent of his achievement (see Luke 1975: 27, 28, 478, 479, 481; Keen 1986; Morphy 1988; Merlan 1989).

Meanwhile, Aboriginal studies were beginning to revive. Nancy Munm had arrived at ANU in late 1955, followed by Jeremy Beckett, and a little later Les Hiatt and Diane Barwick, all of whom undertook research in Aboriginal Australia. Stanner contributed significantly to this revival in another way, convening in 1961 the conference that would result in the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (later the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)). In this initiative he drew on his political connections, particularly with his old friend WC Wentworth. Yet, as John Mulvaney shows, the politics around the establishment of the institute were heated and Stanner's own conception of a research centre did not win out. After its establishment, he declined the principal's position and had relatively little involvement in its workings.

Stanner was finally made professor, being appointed to the second chair of anthropology in the research school in 1964.

After 1965 Stanner's interests returned to policy matters. He had already declared his dissatisfaction with Hasluck's assimilationism in an address to the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in 1958, and his dismay at its practical impact can only have been intensified on return visits to Port Keats. Perhaps sensing a change in a public so long indifferent to these matters, particularly following the 1967 referendum, he took the opportunity of an invitation to deliver the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Boyer Lectures in 1968. As Tim Rowse notes, he was the first Boyer lecturer to mention the Aboriginal question. Ann Curthoys considers the significance of Stanner's Boyer Lectures in the broader context of an emerging Aboriginal politics and Aboriginal history writing.

In 1967 prime minister Holt invited Stanner, along with 'Nugget' Coombs and Barrie Dexter, to form the Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA) and advise on national policy. Although with his friend Wentworth as minister the opportunities seemed promising, the Gorton and McMahon governments were less than amenable to the CAA's proposals. Dexter's chapter recalls nine difficult but ultimately productive years. Following the election of the Whitlam government and with the passage of land rights legislation for the Northern Territory in train, the CAA saw its work as having been done and voluntarily disbanded. Jon Altman considers Stanner's legacy as a public policy intellectual in light of recent events in Aboriginal affairs.

The demands of the council, combined with periodic duties as head of department at ANU until his retirement at the end of 1970, severely curtailed Stanner's scholarly output. His time was taken up with reports and submissions to government, and with lectures to lay audiences. Yet another challenge intruded in 1970 when he, along with Ronald Berndt, was called upon to be an expert witness in *Milirrpun and others versus Nabalco and the Commonwealth* — otherwise known as the *Gove Case* — discussed here by Nancy Williams. This sent Stanner back to the anthropological basics of 'local organization', but required him to transpose them into concepts lawyers could understand — something that neither he nor anyone else had thought of up to this point. He continued to worry over it as the case failed, but in due course land rights and later native title became a real possibility in the Northern Territory.

His occasional book reviews and brief notes throughout the 1970s indicate that Stanner was still reading and thinking. In his last years he returned to the question of Aboriginal culture, delivering lectures on religion at the University of Melbourne. Sadly, the Parkinson's disease that afflicted his last years affected his previously pleasant delivery, to the point where his words

could no longer be followed. Two years before he died he drafted chapters for a book on the Murrinh-patha, which he was unable to complete. It is appropriate that his last paper, published posthumously, was on Aboriginal humour, a neglected aspect of Aboriginal culture which had come to resonate with his own sense of fun (Stanmer 1982). Those who were able to penetrate Bill Stanmer's dignified public persona found a delightful companion: witty, amusing, able to enjoy a joke against himself, but at the same time serious and sensitive.

STANMER'S LEGACY

To speak of a Stanmer legacy is to highlight his two enduring commitments. As an anthropologist Stanmer pursued a proper understanding of what he termed the Aboriginal 'High Culture'. As a publicly engaged citizen he sought a more generous recognition of the Aboriginal presence in Australia.

In searching for a concept that might allow us to consider the nature of Stanmer's legacy as both anthropologist and critic in some holistic sense, the notion of transcendence has some cogency. This provides an orientation to Stanmer's work from a number of perspectives. At its simplest we can observe the capacity of his most popular writings to transcend the constraints of the time in which they were written, and to speak to concerns that remain just as pressing today as they were more than four decades ago. In this respect, while Stanmer was by no means the only Australian anthropologist of his generation, nor the most vocal, to contribute to public debate on the place of Aborigines in Australian society his work acquires new relevance in the present. The further applicability of aspects of Stanmer's work in the present is considered in Alberto Furián's adoption of Stanmer's notion of 'operational structures of transactional life' in the analysis of contemporary song genres at Wadeye, and in John Taylor's deployment of Stanmer's census data to reflect upon contemporary policy challenges posed by population growth in the same community. As we discuss below, the idea of transcendence takes on a more complex flavour when applied to Stanmer's writings on Aboriginal religion, with Sutton suggesting we interpret Stanmer's work in terms of a pursuit of a notion of transcendent value.

Yet in proposing transcendence as a concept with which to think about Stanmer's work we imply neither triumphalism nor a simplistic glorification of Stanmer's legacy. In evaluating Stanmer's contributions certain limitations are apparent. For example, Rowe contextualises Stanmer's Boyer Lectures in the wider intellectual tradition of that series and finds a certain hesitancy in Stanmer's approach to the problem of Aboriginal affairs. Stanmer was a critic of past and present government policy who demonstrated 'elegant dismay' rather than 'programmatic bluntness'. Similarly, Curthoys applies a

careful historian's lens to the question of the extent to which these lectures might be credited with breaking the 'great Australian silence' that Stanmer identified. Anthropologists Nicolas Peterson and Peter Sutton critically consider Stanmer's contribution to the anthropology of Aboriginal land tenure in light of recent political and theoretical developments.

Given the events of the past quarter century in Aboriginal affairs, Stanmer's death in 1981 seems a long time ago. In what follows we briefly consider aspects of his work with the CAA in light of recent debates in Indigenous policy.

STANMER AND THE POST-SELF-DETERMINATION PRESENT

The period of the Howard coalition government (1996–2007) was characterised by a significant shift in the symbolic politics of Indigenous affairs. In April 2004, after protracted and intensifying conflict between Indigenous leaders and the federal government (see Sanders 2005), prime minister Howard announced the dismantling of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIIC):

We believe very strongly that the experiment in separate representation, elected representation, for Indigenous people has been a failure. We will not replace ATSIIC with an alternative body. We will appoint a group of distinguished Indigenous people to advise the Government on a purely advisory basis in relation to aboriginal [sic] affairs. Programmes will be mainstreamed (Howard 2004).

Established by the Labor federal government in 1989, ATSIIC was the most recent and ambitious in a line of national Indigenous representative bodies through which Indigenous policy making in Australia was channelled from the early 1970s (see Coombs & Robinson 1996). These bodies, starting with the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (established in 1973), followed by the National Aboriginal Conference (1977–86), were intended as primary mediating structures between the federal government and Aboriginal communities. Developed under the broad policy umbrella of self-determination, each body was in turn charged with the task of representing Indigenous views in the policy-making arena. At some level their establishment might be seen as a response to growing demands by Indigenous people as well as the conclusion drawn by the CAA at the end of its life, that:

...the way forward was to recognise and support the right of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to increasingly control their own affairs and to share freely in negotiations to determine the pattern of their relationship to 'mainstream' society (Coombs & Robinson 1996, p. 7).

This is not the place to rehearse the political history of these representative bodies; suffice to say there has been sustained critique of the failure of all three to realise the goals they were set up to achieve. In retrospect each might be seen as a tangible manifestation of the highly ambiguous nature of self-determination as a policy approach within a liberal-democratic nation state.¹¹

In some sense self-determination — at least at the level of its articulated goals — might be understood as the culmination of a process that Stanner worked tirelessly in support of, most prominently in collaboration with his fellow members of the CAA. In considering Stanner's legacy in the present it thus seems important to ask why, when self-determination is being widely proclaimed as a failure, Stanner's words continue to command attention? How have his writings managed to transcend the terms of these debates?

In fact it would be misleading to see Stanner as having been an unqualified advocate for self-determination. Altman, in his chapter, explores Stanner's approach to land rights, development and welfare, and considers the applicability of these ideas in the present. He observes that while Stanner may have supported the 'mainstreaming' of Indigenous expenditure to ensure funding equality, he would have been deeply critical of a policy platform that failed to recognise difference. Rowse observes that Stanner's Boyer Lectures, while providing an insightful reflection on the history of Australia's regard for its Indigenous population, were circumspect on the question of possible future directions and certainly provided 'no manifesto for "self-determination"'. In his engagements with the Hasluckian vision of assimilation, the criticism that comes through is of an assimilation that was imposed on Aboriginal people against their will (see especially Stanner 1979b, 1969). His observations over four decades of failed development schemes in Africa, the Pacific and Aboriginal Australia convinced him time and again that any program of cultural redevelopment that was imposed rather than willingly entered into was doomed to fail. Yet, as a long-standing observer of the complex politics of Aboriginal Australia, Stanner was just as wary, if not sceptical, of the model of self-determination that was proffered by some as an autonomous, purely Aboriginal-driven project.

Rowse has shown that Stanner and his colleagues on the CAA remained opposed to 'the specialisation of bureaucratic responsibility for Indigenous affairs' (Rowse 2000, p. 29). Nor did the CAA propose self-determination or anything similar as a new driving policy concept. Stanner was aware of the very real differences in historical experience and likely aspirations between Aborigines of remote and settled Australia, with notions of leadership and broad representative structures beyond the highly localised being antithetical to Aboriginal social processes in many parts of the country (ibid., p. 31). Pan-Aboriginalist politics emerging from the metropolitan centres of

south-eastern Australia were rejected by those in the remote north. Stanner regarded the process of assimilation, or at least integration, as an ultimate and unavoidable outcome (ibid., pp. 28, 93). Where he parted company with the assimilationists was on the question of choice and the possibility that Aborigines might enter into unity with wider Australia while retaining pluralist forms of identity within that union (ibid., pp. 27, 91). In their *Report on visit to Yuendumu and Hooker Creek* in 1974, for example, the CAA recommended that:

...policy be directed to ensuring that Aborigines are not forced by economic and social pressures to accept a European style of life if they would prefer a simpler or more traditional style: i.e. that Aborigines be allowed and helped to adapt freely of their own requirements and circumstances such white Australian practices as they consider to be of value to them (Coombs & Stanner 1974, p. 3).

In their last policy statement before the election of the Whitlam government, the CAA argued it was crucial that there be 'programs designed to develop and strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal people to manage their own affairs' (quoted in Rowse 2000, p. 107). While still refusing to adopt the concept of self-determination, the substance of what the CAA was lobbying for is clear. The election of the Whitlam government in 1972 galvanised the new policy platform into existence both in name and through a series of major legislative programs.

Two and a half decades later, the election of the Howard government in 1996 brought to an end a broad bipartisan approach to Indigenous affairs under the banner of self-determination.¹² Howard's comments quoted above regarding the failure of this policy approach go partly to the widespread (although not entirely accurate) perception that few improvements were realised in statistical measures at the national level of Aboriginal wellbeing over that period (see Altman et al. 2005). On securing control of the Senate following the 2004 election Howard had the parliamentary mandate to abolish the ATSIC legislation.

Ensuing debates have given rise to a number of competing perspectives on the question of 'Where to now for Aboriginal affairs?' Recent writings by Aboriginal commentator Noel Pearson (see especially Pearson 2000), as well as numerous reformist observers, have called for new kinds of partnerships between Indigenous communities and private enterprise, for Aboriginal people to take responsibility for their own affairs, for privatisation of land, and for forms of cultural redevelopment that might orient remote-living Aboriginal individuals more effectively towards mainstream social participation. At the heart of this shift in the politics of Indigenous affairs lies a critique of prior forms of government support (Pearson's 'welfare poison',

or 'gannom economy'), and of non-market-based outstation living as unsustainable — with such places derided as 'cultural museums' by a former minister for Indigenous Affairs (Vanstone 2005).

Criticism of anthropologists for perpetuating the 'myths' of self-determination, and the idea that Aboriginal cultural forms thrived in the wake of the implementation of land rights legislation and other aspects of self-determination policy, has never been far from the centre of these debates (see for example Pearson 1987; Sandall 2001; Sutton 2001). Yet while anthropology in general has come under attack, Stanner's work seems exempt from such critical treatment. As long as five decades after some of his most noted essays were penned, Stanner's work continues to be cited widely and favourably in support of a range of perspectives, as a brief glance at three examples makes clear.

Ralph Folds' (2001) account of the Western Desert Pintupi's response to government policy draws heavily on Stanner's work. Quotes from various of the essays published in *White man got no Dreaming* preface most chapters of *Crossed purposes*, and the book's title is taken from Stanner's 1958 essay 'Continuity and change' (Stanner 1979b, p. 43). Folds' book is ultimately a story of why the Aboriginalisation of community governance is a misguided aim of policy making. He enlists Stanner's observations about the radical disjuncture between Aboriginal and European 'styles of life' in support of this argument.

In the opening sentence of his introduction to *Whiteflesh: on Keith Windschuttle's fabrication of Aboriginal history*, Robert Manne (2003, p. 1) suggests that Stanner delivered 'perhaps the most consequential lecture ever broadcast on the ABC'. Manne anchors his overview of the recent 'history wars' in a discussion of Stanner's notion of the 'great Australian silence', illustrating the abiding cogency of that concept in the present.

Likewise Noel Pearson sees Stanner as having articulated a set of timeless concerns. Pearson's 1993 Boyer Lecture on the post-Mabo political landscape of Australia was framed in terms of issues Stanner raised a quarter of a century earlier:

Today, more than ever, the series which Professor Stanner delivered for the ABC in 1968 makes compelling reading. His lectures articulate, illuminate and provide some guidance, with questions that will consume the people of this continent for as long as we need to consider them (Pearson 1994, p. 89).

Pearson clearly places Stanner outside the group of anthropologists he has more recently identified as a 'B-grade industry' responsible for the 'road-train crash' of native title.¹³ He enlists Stanner's words in support of his campaign to encourage Aboriginal communities to actively undertake forms of cultural redevelopment:



Bill Stanner and participants of the SAS 'Long Vigil' exercise, north Australia, July 1977. Photographer unknown, ANLA 225/11 73/3.

The social situation of many Aborigines will change with rapidity over the next decade. Many will die wealthy, in possession of money or other assets for which their traditional law provides no disposal procedure. There will be conflicts of interest between Aborigines which may be insoluble unless their own doctrine of what I have termed rights, duties, liabilities and immunities can be developed. The 'Aboriginal problem' thus goes beyond the 'retention of their traditional lifestyle': there is a problem of development as well as one of preservation' (Stanner quoted in Pearson 2003, pp. 7–8).

'Greed and conflict', argue Pearson, 'will continue to plague our people as long as we fail to confront Professor Stanner's prescient advice' (ibid., p. 8).

What is it in Stanner's writings that has secured him exceptional status in the history of debate over Australia's treatment of its original inhabitants? It may be paradoxical that his concentration on interpreting the limitations

of *present* policies rather than prescribing ways forward, his cautiousness, as well as a lack of resolution in his overall thesis regarding questions of cultural transformation leave considerable latitude for reading between the lines of Stanner's powerful prose — Folds can enlist Stanner in support of his 'crossed purposes' thesis, at the same time as Pearson mobilises his words in an antithetical perspective, calling for Aboriginal people to embrace forms of cultural redevelopment and take responsibility for their own affairs. It may well be that what Rowse characterises as Stanner's 'dubiosity' provides part of the key to understanding this phenomenon.

Yet as these three examples suggest, Stanner is widely regarded as having grasped something at the core of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations which remains unresolved, a key tension at the heart of debates over what it means to be Australian. Perhaps it is this that gained him a place as the only anthropologist listed in the July 2006 issue of *The Bulletin* as one of its '100 most influential Australians'. A conjunction of his deep regard for Aboriginal social principles, his suggestion that the comprehension of many of these lay beyond our grasp, and his identification of our arrogance in assuming that Aborigines would want to become 'like us' add up to a compelling mix. Stanner was committed to drawing to public attention the intellectual depths of Aboriginal worldviews, but without sentimentality. He could be a cool observer of Aboriginal social life, particularly when it came to the vexed question of what the future might hold; he was an unusual blend of anti-assimilationist when this meant the terms of engagement with wider Australia would be thrust upon Aboriginal people, yet a considered realist in recognising the limited scope of choice before them.

Beyond all of this lay an unusual gift for writing. Stanner is rightly regarded as one of the most evocative interpreters of Aboriginal life and cosmology because of his command, at moments poetic, of the English language. When writing for a general readership his prose was elegant, imaginative, compelling. His notion of 'the great Australian silence' and illumination of the Aboriginal Dreaming fired the imaginations of many. Students recall his propensity to proffer useful neologisms and secretaries lament that his revisions of their typed letters always contained more strange words than the first draft. Others were left to mull over such ideas that, for Aboriginal people, life 'was a joyous thing with maggots at the centre' (Stanner 1963, p. 37; see Morphy this volume). But Stanner struggled with his writing. Some of his academic works are convoluted, and his archive suggests he laboured hard over many of his texts, drafting, correcting and redrafting, with some well-worked pieces being set aside, never finding their way into print. He seems to have had the most trouble when he allowed his commitment to Radcliffe-Brown's ideas to get in the way of making a plain case. Stanner had of course been trained as a journalist and this background, combined with the idea Malinowski instilled in his students that the anthropologist must

weave an engaging account out of collected data, are likely to have been important influences. But Stanner also wrote poems, and his love of poetry would have contributed to his careful choice of a word and his keenness to create a literary impact. When Stanner is at his best, as in *After the Dreaming*, he can be read for the pleasure of his prose.

THE 'HIGH CULTURE'

Stanner's writing on the Aboriginal 'High Culture' was the work of his maturity. His first essay, 'The Dreaming' (Stanner 1956) is easy to read, but what followed was more considered and more penetrating. The series of essays that became the monograph *On Aboriginal religion* (Stanner 1963) have these qualities, but they make heavy demands on the reader. Stanner was developing his ideas as he went along, leaving some questions unresolved. He hoped to revise and restructure the essays but, as was too often the case, never did. Nevertheless, Sutton, Morphy and Keen have found these essays worth revisiting in their chapters here. 'Religion, totemism and symbolism', published two years after the monograph, is probably the most accessible of Stanner's writings on the High Culture, bringing together the main threads of his thinking in a survey of the field that remains a classic.

Stanner's approach to the High Culture has the same quality of transcendence that we have noted in his other work, though in a different way. He refused to reduce Aboriginal religion to a mere category of social science, the 'sociologism' of which in their different ways both Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud were guilty (Stanner 1965, p. 211). He perceived in much of the scientific writing on the subject, 'A desire to free study from emotion became a fear of emotion, and a drying out of sensibility' (ibid.). Against such 'drying out' he offers his understanding of the 'positive character' (ibid., p. 213) of Aboriginal religion in terms that are, if not theological, then broadly humanistic, resonating with contemporary Western sensibility without reducing it to Western ideas. To cite just a few of his perceptions, he refers to the Aborigines' 'religious confidence' and their 'magnification of life': 'They seemed either to have stopped short of, or gone beyond, a true quarrel with the terms of life'. Of the 'doctrine' of the Dream Time, he writes, 'two complementary emphases stood out... the fixation and instituting of things in an enduring form, and the simultaneous endowment of all things — including man, and his condition of life — with their good and/or bad properties' (ibid., pp. 214–5). This last is the theme of Morphy's chapter.

Stanner was in dialogue with Christian missionaries and theologians while he was writing, and part of his project in this paper, as in other writings, seems to have been to persuade them and other Australians that Aboriginal religion must be recognised as a High Culture. In this one respect, the essay might be said to date, today after a generation of religious relativism Australians

seem all too ready to recognise Indigenous 'spirituality' but, in the process, it has too often been appropriated by New Age belief or reduced to a shallow trope of 'indigenism', both devoid of the kinds of qualities that Stanner identified and celebrated.



The organisation of the essays that follow is designed primarily to chronicle important events in his career and signpost three main themes in Stanner's intellectual work.

Section one, 'Diverse fields' considers some discrete moments in Stanner's career: his contribution to the war effort (Gray), his short tenure as director of the East African Institute of Social Research (Hinkson), his involvement in the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Mulvaney) and the Council for Aboriginal Affairs (Dexter).

Section two 'In pursuit of transcendent value', contains essays dealing variously with Stanner's conceptualisation of Aboriginal social life and cosmology. The first two, by Beckett and Hinkson, sketch some of the broader social context in which Stanner was struggling to make anthropological sense of his ideas about Aboriginal lifeworlds and religion — Beckett via Stanner's biographical portrait of Durmugam and Hinkson through his pursuit of rock art in the Fitzmaurice region of north Australia. These two essays provide something of a 'real world' backdrop for the focused analyses of Stanner's challenging religious texts by Sutton and Keen. Morphy and Furlan mobilise aspects of Stanner's theoretical conceptualisations in the analysis of contemporary phenomena — Morphy attends to Yolngu mortuary rituals, Furlan to contemporary genres of song at Wadeye.

In Section three, 'Land and people', Sutton and Peterson critically evaluate Stanner's contribution to the anthropology of Aboriginal land tenure. Nancy Williams revisits the *Gove Case*, the first legal case where anthropological knowledge in general — and Stanner in particular — were called upon to translate the concepts of Aboriginal land tenure into the terms of legal argument. John Taylor draws on Stanner's data to build an historical account of dynamic population growth at Wadeye, and consider the associated challenges for present-day government. The final section, 'A public intellectual', evaluates Stanner's contribution to public understanding and Aboriginal policy development. Ann Curthoys looks at Stanner's influence on the writing of Australian history, Tim Rowe examines *After the Dreaming* within the wider tradition of the Boyer Lectures, and Jon Altman considers Stanner's legacy as a public policy intellectual.

CONCLUSION

The picture of Stanner's work that emerges from the preceding discussion is necessarily incomplete, shaped by the themes we have chosen to

address — a retrospective view of his working life as an Australian citizen and anthropologist, a brief re-reading of his interventions on policy in the present climate, and his concern with Aboriginal High Culture. The chapters that follow consider these themes in more detail and shine a light on other aspects of Stanner's career and writings. Taken together they do not add up to a comprehensive picture, but provide substantial material with which to think about the varied contributions of Australia's most influential anthropologist. As is always the case in biographical work, it is important to note that these essays reveal something of the interests and emphases of the writers — in some chapters the reader will encounter seemingly divergent portraits of Stanner. Read as a collection of essays, a multi-dimensional picture of Stanner's outlook emerges, yet we have not attempted to force interpretations or analyses where unanswered questions remain.

We have suggested that one cost of Stanner's diverse commitments was that much of his work remained unpublished. Uncompleted projects across diverse fields have, as one observer has noted, left many fragments, some of them sizeable, but no oeuvre.¹⁴ This also makes it difficult to fully evaluate his real achievements. Stanner's archive leaves the impression he intended to achieve much more, especially work of the kind that might influence public opinion: the 'big book on Aborigines' he referred to himself as writing over more than two decades was never completed. He was distressed in the last years of his life as Parkinson's disease took hold and writing became increasingly difficult. Yet, as the contents of this volume indicate, the work Stanner did complete, as well as the unpublished papers he left for others to read, continue to inspire committed and creative thinking. As seems appropriate, we'll let Stanner have the last word on this:

My concern for many years has been to try, whenever possible, to use direct Aboriginal testimony to illuminate their problems with us, not ours with them. My idea was to try and change our perspective in the belief that we might then find credible motives for going more than half way to meet them. I have heard this called 'the scholars' fantasy' but, in all the circumstances historical and contemporary, as I understand them, it seemed the best approach. It was, anyway, the thing I could do best because of the knowledge and experience I had gained from many years of friendly and rewarding association with Aborigines. It also let me express, through authentic material drawn from living people, a long-settled view that, in themselves, and as the bearers of unique and unrepeatable social forms and culture, they were and still are disvalued by our conventional European outlook; not just undervalued, but disvalued. And in a sense, it allowed me to try to repay a debt of obligation (Stanner 1979a, p. 340).

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Notes

1. For a more detailed account, we refer the reader to the introduction to the festschrift, *Metaphors of interpretation* (Barwick et al. 1985). Of the three editors of that volume, the late Diane Barwick was mainly responsible for the biographical account, cataloguing Stanner's papers, published and unpublished, as they were deposited in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies library, and providing a comprehensive bibliography of Stanner's unpublished as well as published work at the end of the volume.
2. While in London Stanner also continued to financially support his widowed mother, remitting money to Australia whenever possible. Stanner's widow recalls him telling her that he regretted these imperatives resulted in a poorer thesis and restricted time for reading. Phyllis Kaberry apparently told Stanner that his was regarded as the 'most original mind' in Malinowski's seminar. He ruefully thought, in retrospect, this was because it was not as well furnished with wide background reading (Mrs P Stanner, pers. comm., April 2007).
3. In 1933 Stanner had worked on the personal staff of Berram Stevens, the NSW Premier; this experience is likely to have laid the ground for his appointment as Casey's assistant.
4. Late in life he recalled 'Somehow the idea of being a good soldier to the Queen, which is the way Grandfather spoke of himself, remains for me the one accolade which I would never trade for another. Perhaps out of fashion now, but I think the chances are that it will seem important again' (unpublished manuscript nd, c. 1970s, held by Mrs P Stanner).
5. Writing to Stanner to congratulate him on his appointment to the second chair of anthropology of the ANU, Elkin wrote 'you have had an unnecessarily long wait — a delay not unconnected with machinations, which have had no relation with anthropology as an academic discipline' (letter held by Mrs P Stanner, dated 10 June 1964).
6. Writing to Stanner regarding the scope of Stanner's readership Firth observed, 'One would naturally expect that in a School of Pacific Studies, attention would be directed primarily to problems of Pacific interest, and any sphere must be available for work within this. But, as I explained, one expects the Department of Anthropology to serve the whole university, and that means that regional limits cannot be assigned with any stringency. I would regard study of Australian problems as falling quite reasonably within the Reader's scope, provided he does not restrict himself to them, but serves the Pacific too' (Firth papers, 12 August 1949).
7. Although the writing of *South Seas in transition* was primarily completed in London prior to his move to Canberra.
8. During the 1950s at Sydney, Mervyn Meggitt was the only graduate student working in central Australia, but Ruth Fink, Malcom Calley and James Bell were studying people known at that time as 'Mixed Bloods' in New South Wales.
9. In a letter responding to Nadel's concern that he could not trust Freeman to act as head of department during his absence, Stanner replied 'I don't think, by the way, that you need have doubts about leaving Freeman alone here. He is not anxious to stir for a couple of years, he says, and the more I see of him the more I think you made a good appointment. Very steady, cautious in judgment, and a pleasant colleague. I am sure you could leave things in his hands for six months or more' (letter held by Mrs P Stanner, dated 22 March 1955).
10. The vice-chancellor wrote to Stanner at Port Keats advising him that Barnes was being considered, and apologising for having taken this action during Stanner's absence after having advised him that no appointment 'would be made for some time'. He concluded, 'I must emphasise that no decision has been reached and your own ~~claims~~ ^{own} position is not being overlooked' (Item 200, Stanner file, ANU Archives, dated 28 June 1957, strikethrough in original).
11. For example, on ATSIIC see the contributions to Sullivan 1996 and the special issue of *Dialogue*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2004, 'The abolition of ATSIIC: silencing Indigenous voices'. ATSIIC was responsible for expenditure of approximately 50 per cent of the Indigenous affairs budget and was subject to widespread criticism for failing to deliver significant change to its constituents in a period when critical community dysfunctionality increasingly became a subject of public concern. Across the scholarly and Indigenous communities there remain conflicting views on the legacy of ATSIIC.
12. The Fraser government sought to differentiate its approach by using the term 'self-management' in place of 'self-determination'.
13. 'Native title's day in the sun is over' *The Age* 28 August 2002; see also Pearson 2003.
14. We thank an anonymous referee for this observation.